

Sep 15, 2025

Mayor Adena Ishii
City of Berkeley
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

Dear Mayor Ishii and Honorable Council Members,

Re: The Unjust and wrongful naming of Kala Bagai Way

I write on behalf of numerous South Asian American community members to express serious concerns regarding the 2020 renaming of the Shattuck Avenue stretch between Center Street and University Avenue as Kala Bagai Way. It appears that little research had been conducted into the background of the Bagai family prior to changing the street name. This omission resulted in a highly visible downtown street being named after the wife of Vaishno Das Bagai, a British colonial spy during World War I, who sabotaged a movement to free India from British colonial rule.

Records reveal that Vaishno Das Bagai had infiltrated the Ghadar Movement (also referred to as the Indian Revolutionary Party) a South Asian American movement headquartered in San Francisco, CA, aimed at achieving independence for India from British colonial rule. He was responsible for helping to disrupt the Ghadar Movement, and his work ultimately resulted in the trial and execution of numerous South Asian American immigrants fighting for India's freedom from British rule. Research further reveals that there is no historic evidence to support the claim that Kala Bagai was a South Asian American pioneer, that she made any notable contributions to society, or that the Bagais were "driven out"¹ from Berkeley as she has claimed. In fact, public records disclose that the Bagais lived in Berkeley for over two years. Kala Bagai denied that her husband was an English spy in later interviews, contrary to archival evidence and public records, yet she benefited from the proceeds of her husband's work as a colonial informer.

¹ 1 Bagai, R. (2022, August 4). Opinion: Berkeley might name a street after Kala Bagai. This is her story. Berkeleyside. <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2020/03/12/opinion-berkeley-might-name-a-street-after-kala-bagai-this-is-her-story>

The question we must ask is: when creating public commemorations, whom do we celebrate? Activists such as civil rights leaders, who have contributed to social improvements and wellbeing, or those who have supported colonizers and acts of colonization?

The naming of Kala Bagai Way contradicts the City of Berkeley's strong democratic ethos and its Strategic Plan Objective to "champion and demonstrate social and racial equity." It celebrates colonialism and the machinery of colonization, while overlooking the true working-class pioneers from our South Asian American Community who arrived in America with little in their pockets, decades before the Bagais.

Below I will describe, in some detail, the true story of the Bagai family, based on publicly available archival materials and information. My intent is to use sound references to dispel myths about the Bagai family and make my case that the City of Berkeley must undo this great injustice to our community and rename Kala Bagai Way.

A brief history of the Ghadar Movement on the Pacific Coast

The Ghadar Movement was born out of the realization by Indian-born immigrants to North America that they were not only the victims of colonial oppression in their homeland, but also of racism and exclusion here and in other countries. The majority of these pioneers were Sikhs, though the community also included Hindus and Muslims. Despite their diverse religious identities, they were all indiscriminately labeled "Hindu" by prejudiced Americans—a term used not as a descriptor, but as a racial slur, erasing their distinct cultures and faiths in a demeaning and derogatory manner. These pioneers came to North America in search of opportunity and freedom, only to be met with exclusionary acts and racial discrimination. A well-known incident was one in which various white working-class men attacked the Bellingham East Indian millworker community on September 4, 1907. According to the *Bellingham Reveille*, "The Hindu riots were orchestrated with the intention of forcibly removing Indian workers from the town and instilling fear in them to prevent them from competing with white workers in the mills."² To combat the Hindu immigration "problem," both the U.S. and Canada passed several laws to hinder immigration from South Asia. The U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Act, also known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, intended to exclude

² The Bellingham Reveille (Bellingham, Wash.), September 5, 1907. "Mob Raids Hindus and Drives Them From City."

such “undesirables.”³ In 1908, Canada implemented the “continuous journey” law that barred immigrants who did not travel directly from their home country to Canada.⁴

Unlike the Bagai family, thousands of South Asian American pioneers were victims of discrimination, racism, and exclusion in the United States and Canada, long before Bagais arrived. They banded together to fight for equality in North America and for the freedom of those who were unable to defend themselves under British rule in India. Thanks to their hard work and persistence, they were able to nurture the cause and spur the formation of the Ghadar Party in Astoria, Oregon. Shortly afterward, the party established its headquarters in San Francisco. The party began to publish a powerful weekly paper called *The Hindustan Ghadar* (Indian Revolt) to propagate the cause of Indian independence. The British Colonial government, alarmed at the sudden popularity of the Ghadar Movement, conspired to infiltrate the party and began to monitor its activities with the help of spies such as Vaishno Das Bagai.

Why the Bagai family came to San Francisco

Vaishno Das Bagai came to San Francisco with his wife, Kala, and their three sons in 1915, bringing with them \$25,000 in gold,⁵ an unprecedented sum at the time. Prior to arriving in the Bay Area, Bagai had enlisted as a paid informant with the British government.

In his book *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904-1924*, Richard J. Popplewell detailed Vaishno Das Bagai’s infiltration of the Ghadar Party as an informant for the British Consulate in San Francisco.⁶ A letter regarding Bagai’s services, sent on Jan 24, 1917 from Carnegie Ross, British Consul in San Francisco, to the Viceroy and Governor of India, reports that

³ The University of Texas at Austin Department of History. 2020. “Immigration Act of 1917 (Barred Zone Act)—Immigration History.” Immigration History. February 1, 2020.
<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/1917-barred-zone-act/>

⁴ “Continuous Journey Regulation, 1908 | Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.” n.d.
<https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/continuous-journey-regulation-1908>

⁵ Russell Nauman, “Vault #9: The Restaurant | Angel Island Immigration Station—San Francisco,” AIISF, May 28, 2024. <https://www.aiisf.org/vault/restaurant>

⁶ Popplewell, Richard J. *Intelligence and Imperial Defence: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire 1904-1924*. London: Frank Cass, 1995; pp 246–247.

Bagai, a trusted confidant of Ghadar leader Ram Chandra during their time in India, was given the responsibility of managing the finances of the Ghadar Party.⁷

In San Francisco, Bagai worked closely with the British Consulate, spying on the activities of the Ghadar Movement in California under the guise of being a committed member of Ghadar Party. On July 8, 1917, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported, “Federal grand jury indicted 105 persons [Ghadar members as well as German operatives] for plotting here a rebellion in India.”⁸ During a police raid of the Ghadar headquarters in San Francisco, all staff members were arrested. However, Vaishno Das Bagai, a close friend of Ram Chandra and the finance manager of the Ghadar Party, was never charged or mentioned by the prosecution during the Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial, which took place from November 20, 1917 to April 24, 1918. Bagai escaped prosecution, having provided assistance to two prominent British intelligence officers—Norman Thwaites and Robert Nathan—who collaborated with Carnegie Ross and played instrumental roles in aiding the U.S. Bureau of Investigation (BOI) during the trial. Operating under the alias “Alleyne Ireland,” Thwaites passed along key intelligence from informant Bagai, exposing Ghadar Party internal activities and finance details. Nathan, using the alias “Hale” and drawing on his experience as a retired Indian Police officer, was seated beside U.S. Attorney John Preston throughout the trial, offering strategic insights and confidential reports (compiled by Thwaites).⁹ Vaishno Das Bagai played an instrumental role in helping the British crush the Ghadar Movement by identifying party finances, leadership roles, and various party activity details which were used in¹⁰ the trial that led to the conviction of 29 individuals. Among those found guilty were 14 Indian nationals who were sentenced to lengthy periods of incarceration.¹¹ These convictions ultimately broke the back of the Ghadar Movement’s dream of freeing India from British rule, delaying the inevitable by forty years.

After Bagai had established intelligence operations between the British Consulate in San Francisco and the Ghadar Party for several years, Ram Chandra allegedly

⁷ Letter from Carnegie Ross to the Viceroy regarding Bagai’s service to the British Government, 24 Jan 1916. PRO FO115/2067, no. 23 (U.K. National Archives)

⁸ *San Francisco Examiner*, July 8, 1917. “S.F. Plot Suspects Indicted in Droves.”

⁹ Matthew Erin Plowman (2013) The British intelligence station in San Francisco during the First World War, *Journal of Intelligence History*, 12:1, 1-20, DOI: 10.1080/16161262.2013.755016

¹⁰ National Archives, Special Agent-in-Charge Don S. Rathbun, BOI Report ‘In re: US v. Crowley et al., Neutrality Investigation,’ 14 March 1916, San Francisco, 1, Box No. 20, RG 118, NA–PSR.

¹¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, April 24, 1918. “All but One Guilty in Hindu Plot.”

discovered Bagai's ties to British intelligence and publicly called him out as an "*English Spy*." Bagai defended himself by stating that he had been tasked by Ram Chandra himself to carry out this intelligence work.¹² Records (see attached documentation) of written communications among British Imperial officials, preserved in the U.K. National Archives, reference Bagai as an esteemed spy working for the British Raj.

Claims passed down in the Bagai family

Despite the known allegations that Vaishno Das Bagai was a British spy, Kala Bagai, her son Ram Bagai, and granddaughter Rani Bagai maintained that Bagai was a "true patriot" of India's freedom and a member of the revolutionary Ghadar Party in San Francisco. This is perhaps natural, as kin often harbor bias and a desire to present their ancestors in a favorable light—even if this is not historically correct. Unfortunately, the naming of Kala Bagai Way in Berkeley is not based on historic research or archival records, but on the Bagai descendants' version of the story. In their campaign to rename the street after Kala Bagai, Berkeley activists used a recording made by Kala, in which she explains (at 0:38.22 min.) why people believed that Bagai was a British spy:

*Some people were... not only mean but jealous because we had the money and they said Mr. Bagai was a spy, English spy. He was getting the money from English people, but it was not so...*¹³

In a biographical account of Vaishno Das Bagai, Kala's son, Ram Bagai, also rejected the allegation made by Ram Chandra that Vaishno Das Bagai was a British spy, dismissing it as mere rumor. Ram goes on to say that his father was used as a "tool in the hands of his so-called friend Pt. Ram Chandra."¹⁴ Rani Bagai has consistently portrayed her grandfather in online articles and videos as an Indian patriot who was deeply passionate about India's fight for freedom. Again, it is entirely natural for kin to harbor such biases. One notable example is a video interview showcased on South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), in which she is heard stating:

RB 2:09 So when my grandparents arrived... You know, my grandfather's, I think, main wish in coming here was to work for India's independence and to join the Ghadar party to help fight for India's freedom. That was something my grandfather very strongly believed in and wanted, and he felt frustrated. As a

¹² Bagai, Ram. "Biography of Vaishno Das Bagai." South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), September 18, 2016. <https://www.saada.org/item/20130513-2741>

¹³ South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). "Oral History Interview With Kala Bagai Chandra," August 19, 2013. <https://www.saada.org/item/20130716-2997>

¹⁴ Bagai, Ram. "Biography of Vaishno Das Bagai." South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), September 18, 2016. <https://www.saada.org/item/20130513-2741>

young man he was, you know, pursued by the British and, you know, he was kind of a rabble rouser, kind of militant, and he didn't feel he could do anything from India where, you know, he's constantly being oppressed. There was no free speech at that time, or freedom. And he thought in the United States, "I can do that. I can do what I can't do in India."¹⁵

On what basis was Kala Bagai Way named?

The campaign that led to the decision to name a street in downtown Berkeley was based solely on a narrative crafted utilizing materials donated by Kala Bagai's granddaughter to the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA). Scholars specializing in the history of South Asian immigrants in America during the early 1900s were not consulted. Publicly available archival data was neither consulted nor referenced. The Bagai family's claims were not fact-checked before they were promulgated.

My personal research on the Bagai family

My research has revealed that Vaishno Das Bagai came to San Francisco on a paid assignment from British Officer J.R. Adam, Secretary of the Inspector General of Police at Peshawar.¹⁶ Bagai was well known among high-ranking British Intelligence officers in India for his prior informant work in India before coming to San Francisco.¹⁷ See attached copies of original documents, received from the U. K. National Archives and the U. S. National Archives, as well as a secondary source in Richard J. Popplewell's book, *Intelligence and Imperial Defense: British Intelligence and the Defense of the Indian Empire 1904-1924*.

Conclusion and Next Steps

It is evident that the civic bodies involved in the street naming project failed to research crucial aspects of Kala Bagai's story before making the decision to name the street after her in an attempt to represent South Asian American social justice. Perhaps Vaishno Das Bagai's past was masked on purpose, but it was not brought up in the street

¹⁵ McNish, Emily. "Rani Bagai on 'Vaishno Das Bagai.'" South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), December 30, 2021. <https://www.saada.org/item/20130821-3099>

¹⁶ Letter from Carnegie Ross to the Viceroy regarding Bagai's service to the British Government, 24 Jan 1916. PRO FO115/2067, no. 23 (U.K. National Archives)

¹⁷ U.K. National Archives, FO 371/3065 (52534) This document details how Ridout and Petire considered Bagai (an Indian informant to British Intelligence) for infiltrating the German embassy at Peking, since he had done so well up to then.

naming process. Moreover, I urge you, as the Mayor and Council Members of the City of Berkeley, to conduct a thorough review of the historic context and implications of the Kala Bagai Way naming, which makes a mockery of the suffering endured by generations of descendants of South Asian American pioneers.

In conclusion, stories shape identity and legacy, so they must be told truthfully. When relying on inherited narratives, we have a responsibility to verify facts and honor historical accuracy. The narrative surrounding Kala Bagai overlooks the real struggles of early South Asian pioneers—especially the Ghadarites—who endured racial discrimination, exclusion, and colonial oppression. Naming Kala Bagai Way dishonors local freedom fighters like Kartar Kaur Dhillon and Kartar Singh Sarabha, shifting public memory away from those who truly made sacrifices to fight colonial injustices. Legacies deserve truth—not the glorification of colonial complicity.

We seek to work with the City of Berkeley to remedy this painful and glaring oversight. We ought to stand together for the rights of the ignored and those truly deserving of recognition. Let us celebrate the true freedom fighters (The Ghadarites) of South Asian origin by renaming the Kala Bagai Way. We suggest names honoring those who actively supported anti-colonial resistance like Kartar Kaur Dhillon or Kartar Singh Sarabha (Local Activists who were lifelong Ghadar Party members), or the Ghadar Party itself.

Thank you for reading this letter.

Sincerely,

Prabhjot Singh



Sikh American Community Historian

Website: www.sikhpioneers.net

Email: pjsinghonline@gmail.com

Phone: 510.629.1230

name DEEPA SINGH BANSAL

Deepa Singh BANSAL

Signature

Current Address: 1000
10000 Longway Avenue, CA
Email: _____

Phone: 767-123-4567

name ASIF NAWAZ

Asif Nawaz

Signature

Education: University of Texas
Occupation: Party Secretary
Address: 2345 1st St
Email: ASIFNAWAZ@GMAIL.COM

Phone: 66-887-1234

This letter was signed by 30 community leaders.
Their signatures have been blurred for
confidentiality.

name Jaspreet Singh Khosla

Jaspreet Singh Khosla

Signature

name EXCELLENCE KALIA

Excelle Kalia

Signature

www.TheRealKalaBagaiStory.org

name Jaspreet Singh Khosla 5400 York Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA
Phone: 415-332-1234

name _____
Phone: _____

name Arjun Singh

Arjun Singh

Signature

name Parvinder Singh

Parvinder Singh

Signature

Address: 10000 Longway Avenue, CA
Email: ASIFNAWAZ@GMAIL.COM

Address: 10000 Longway Avenue, CA
Email: _____

Phone: 415-332-1234

Phone: 415-332-1234

	Petition To Rename Kala Bagai Way	
	Source Document List	
Source Type	Title	Page
Primay	Confidential Dispatch: Carnegie Ross on the Employment of Vaishno Das Bagai as a British Informant	1-4
Primay	British intelligence officers admired Mr. Bagai's work for them as British Spy.	5-7
Primay	Bagai Identified as Informant No. One	8-10
Primay	Official Correspondence from H. Wheeler to Corngee Ross Regarding Intelligence Provided by V.D. Bagai	11-13
Primay	V.D. Bagai's Report Cited in SF Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial Proceedings	14-15
Primay	Bhagwan Singh's Diary: The 1610 Edith St, Berkeley Purchase	16-17
Primay	The 1610 Edith St, Berkeley Purchase by Bagai Using Misappropriated Ghadar Party Funds	18-21
Primay	1810 Tood St, Berkeley 1917-1918: V. D. Bagai World War I Draft Registration Card	22-24
Secondary	British Historian Uncovers Bagai's Secret Role as Informant for the Empire	25-28
Primay	Lisjan/Ohlone Chair Corrina Gould Rescinded Her Support for Naming Kala Bagai Way	29-30
Secondary	The Real Kala Bagai Story Website Public Education	31

Confidential Dispatch: Carnegie Ross on the Employment of Vaishno Das Bagai as a British Informant

Description: . Copy Letter from Carnegie Ross (San Francisco British Consulate) to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India regarding Bagai's service to the British Government. Before coming here, Bagai offered his services as a paid informant to the British government. He have been employed in India under Mr. J.R. Adam, Secretary of the Inspector General of Police at Peshawar. He offered his Services (as British Informant) to Carnegie Roos and stated he was an "intimate friend of Ram Chandra".

Source: U.K. National Archives 24 Jan 1916. PRO FO115/2067, no. 23

for Embassy, Washington.
 Consul-General, New York.
 Dominion Immigration Agt
 Vancouver.

San Francisco, Cal.

January 24th 1916

Sir:

With reference to my despatches of the 31st December and 24th January containing information from V. D. Bagai, I have to say that this man called on me on the 22nd instant, and after giving me the information contained in my memorandum of this date, he informed me that he was anxious to be definitely retained for Government service.

Regarding the above, I beg to submit the following statement: Mr. Bagai called on me on the 19th October and told me he had been employed in India, under Mr. J. R. Adam, Secretary of the Inspector General of Police at Peshawar, and offered me to give me any information he could regarding Indian activities in San Francisco, explaining that he was an intimate friend of Ram Chandra.

With the object of obtaining information regarding the veracity and standing of Bagai, I wrote to the Inspector General of Police at Peshawar. I have since heard from him in a letter dated December 8th. It appears that I somewhat misunderstood the object of Mr. Bagai's visit to me which was to fulfil a promise made by him to Mr. Adam to supply him with information in return for a grant of 700 rupees, given by Mr. Adam to Bagai before he left India.

I am desirous of correcting any misapprehension which might have occurred through my mis-understanding of Bagai's motive in coming to see me. It appears to me that if he

Excellency,
 Lord Hardinge, C.M.S.I., C.M.I.E.
 etc. etc.
 Viceroy and Governor-General of India,

DELHI.

(2)

he can be depended upon, his information is very valuable. He says that if it is not found convenient to give him a monthly retainer, it is his intention to leave San Francisco and go to England and settle down there. I told him that I would refer the matter to Your Excellency, but that he could not expect to get a reply within three months, and he has decided to remain here at least for that period. Apparently he has mentioned to Mr. Adam, a monthly salary of \$100 Gold, equal to about £20. This represents the local salary of a first class commercial employee. In return for this, he suggested he would spend one half of the day in my office and the other half where he is at present working as a clerk at a salary of about \$80 per month. His usefulness as an informant would be very much lessened if he were to be directly attached to the Consulate, but as the work he proposes to do is rather unpleasant, he might not care to undertake it for less than the amount he mentions.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient

humble servant,

(Signed) A. CARNEGIE ROSS

H. B. M. Consul-General.

For Embassy, Washington.
 consul-General, New York.
 Dominton Immigration agt Vancouver

San Francisco, Cal.
 January 24th 1916

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I am desirous of correcting any misapprehension which might have occurred through my mis-understanding of Bagai's motive in coming to see me. It appears to me that if he can be depended upon, his information is very valuable. He says that if it is not found convenient to give him a monthly retainer, it is his intention to leave San Francisco and go to England and settle down there. I told him that I would refer the matter to Your Excellency, but that he could not expect to get a reply within three months, and he has decided to remain here at least for that period. Apparently he has mentioned to Mr. Adam, a monthly salary of \$100 Gold, equal to about £20. This represents the local salary of a first class commercial employee. In return for this, he suggested he would spend one half of the day in my office and the other half where he is at present working as a clerk at a salary of about \$80 per month. His usefulness as an informant would be, very much lessened if he were to be directly attached to the Consulate, but as the work he proposes to do is rather unpleasant, he might not care to undertake it for less than the amount he mentions.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,
 Your obedient
 humble servant,
 (Signed) A. CARNEGIE ROSS
 H. B. M. Consul-General.

British intelligence officers admired Mr. Bagai's work for them as British Spy.

Description: High ranking British Officials Ridout and Petire considered Bagai (an Indian informant to British Intelligence) for infiltrating the German embassy at Peking, since he had done so well up to then.

Source: U.K. National Archives, FO 371/3065 (52534)

Rec'd Mar 9
1115

SECRET

From : G.O.C. Singapore.
To : D.M.I.

52534

MAP 12 1917

6th March, 1917

1236. My 1178. January 23rd.

Mission to China. Have discussed matter with PETRIE who urges that difficulties with reference to KOTHAVAL are great and broaches subject of a bought agent of which I understand he knows possible ones. PETRIE favours getting in closer touch if possible. Alternatively he suggests the

employment of V. D. BAGAI who has done so well up to date.

I would urge that if scheme is to be carried out, it should be controlled by a single person, not a bureau. If India agree P. would be best. C.G.S. telegraphs on March 3rd that after discussion with all concerned, K. included, he considers War Office objections are very weighty and should prevail.

I agree, Admiral concurs.

Copies to :- M.I.1

Foreign Office
India Office
Colonial Office
D. I. D.

M. I. 5. g.

M. I. 1. c.

M. I. 3. c. 2

~~M. I. 9.~~

Major J. A. Walling

M. I. 1.

From : G.O.C. Singapore.
To : D.M.I.

6th March, 1917

1236. My 1178. January 23rd.

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Foreign Office
India Office
Colonial Office
Copies to 1- M.I.1 - did not match any documents.

www.TheRealKalaBagaiStory.org

Bagai Identified as Informant No. One

Description : The document details that someone close to Ram Chandra (Four (4)) was suspected of being a British spy, and this suspicion "may refer to One (1)", who is identified as Vaishno Das Bagai.

Source: U.K. National Archives, FO 371/2787 (254)

www.TheRealKalaBagaiStory.org

San Francisco, Cal.

MEMORANDUM.

March 23, 1916

The informant mentioned in my memorandum of March 10 reports that:

Four(4) has recently had a letter from Har Dyal written from Constantinople, and that Four(4) is constantly in touch with Har Dyal through the German officials in Switzerland.

Seven(7) again said that as long as Four(4) was here they could not expect any further aid from the German Consul as the Consul wished to know how every dollar was spent and Four(4) only reported verbally and had nothing to show on paper. Seven(7) stated that some-one close to Four(4) was suspected of being a British spy, and also others here associated with the party. (This may refer to One (1))

Seven(7) now stated that there were several people now being instructed in the making of bombs, but the informant was unable to find out anything about this. Seven(7) is very cautious even among his brothers and sisters. The informant thinks he is not in any way implicated in the bomb scheme, but knows who the people are and where they are made.

BRITISH CONSULATE-GENERAL.

THE VICEROY OF INDIA,
DELHI.

1 = Veishno Das Bagai
4 = Ram Chandra
7 = Ishwar Chandra.

M.C.

45. *Am. Agt.*
H. B. M. Consulate-General
San Francisco.

13th May, 1916.

MAY 17 1916

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit herewith enclosed copy
of a despatch (No. 120) which has been addressed to
His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,

on the subject of Informant No. 1, who desires to be
paid a monthly salary for his services.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble Servant,

Abasuegu Ross

H. M. Consul-General.

His Excellency,

The Right Honourable

Sir Cecil Spring Rice, G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G.,

etc., etc., etc.,

H.B.M. Ambassador

at Washington.

Official Correspondence from H. Wheeler to Corngee Ross Regarding Intelligence Provided by V.D. Bagai

Description : Letter from H. Wheeler, Secretary to the Government of India, to British Consul-General Corngee Ross in San Francisco, Acknowledging Receipt of Information Supplied by V.D. Bagai

Source: U.K. National Archives, FO 371/2787 (84-85)

SECRET.

No. 1138

84

From

The Hon'ble Mr. H. Wheeler, C.S.I., C.I.E.,
Secretary to the Government of India.

To

His Britannic Majesty's Consul-General,
S A N F R A N C I S C O.

Department,
(Political)

Delhi, the 31st March, 1916.

Sir,

I am directed to acknowledge with thanks the

despatches dated 24th January 1916
despatch, dated 25th January 1916
despatch, dated 31st January, 1916.

receipt of your
despatches cited on
the margin to the

address of His Excellency the Viceroy, regarding
certain information supplied to you by one

V. D. Bagai.

2. As regards the latter's offer to place his services at the disposal of Government, I am to observe that Bagai is evidently in confidence of Ram Chandra and therefore is in a position to give most valuable information although he seems somewhat addicted to talk too freely of his employment as a Government Agent and to place an exaggerated value on the information he has actually given so far. The Government of India are not however at present in a position to employ Bagai themselves either directly or indirectly. It is hoped, however, that you may be

able to devise some method of utilising and remunerating the services which he is obviously able to render provided he is discreet, willing and reasonable.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) H. Wheeler,

Secretary to the Government of India.

V.D. Bagai's Report Cited in SF Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial Proceedings

Description: Norman Thwaites as 'Ireland' revived the stagnant American investigation of the Indo–German–Irish conspiracies with new information from informer Bagai. Bagai helped the British intelligence officer by revealing financial assets that Ram Chandra had entrusted him to conceal. By revealing these concealed resources, Bagai provided the British with tangible proof of funds that were separate from the Ghadar Party's official fund. This information was then used as evidence in the Hindu–German Conspiracy Trial, likely to demonstrate Ram Chandra's financial dealings or to establish connections relevant to the conspiracy charges.

Source: National Archives, Special Agent-in-Charge Don S. Rathbun, BOI Report 'In re: US v. Crowley et al., Neutrality Investigation,' 14 March 1916, San Francisco, 1, Box No. 20, RG 118, NA–PSR.

REPORT MADE BY: <u>Don S. Rathbun</u>	PLACE WHERE MADE: <u>San Francisco</u>	DATE WHEN MADE: <u>Mar. 14, 1916</u>	PERIOD FOR WHICH MADE: <u>Mar. 10, 1916</u>
TITLE OF CASE AND OFFENSE CHARGED OR NATURE OF MATTER UNDER INVESTIGATION: <u>IN RE: U. S. VS. C. C. CROWLEY, et al. Neutrality Matter.</u>			
STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS, EVIDENCE COLLECTED, NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED, PLACES VISITED, ETC.: <u>At San Francisco, Calif.</u> <u>Received information from Mr. Ireland last night that a</u> <u>Hindu named Vaishno Das Bagai has an account in the Union Trust</u> <u>Company of San Francisco of approximately \$5000 and another account</u> <u>in the Savings Union Bank & Trust Company of San Francisco of</u> <u>approximately \$4000, which moneys are as a matter of fact the</u> <u>property or trust funds of Bham Chandra, a Hindu who is editor of</u> <u>"The Hindustan Gadar", and who is carrying on the work which Har</u> <u>Dyal formerly carried on in San Francisco. According to Mr. Ireland's</u> <u>information the above mentioned funds are kept in the name of</u> <u>Bagai so that they cannot be traced into the hands of Chandra, but</u> <u>Bagai procures portions of these funds and turns them over to Chandra</u> <u>whenever the latter wishes.</u> <u>Agent today called at the above banks for the purpose of</u> <u>verifying this information. Was advised by the Union Trust Company</u> <u>that they would furnish no information without a subpoena. Mr. Day</u> <u>of the Savings Union Bank & Trust Company made an examination of the</u> <u>records of this bank and advised Agent that Bagai has a savings</u> <u>account of approximately \$4000, but that it appears to be an accu-</u> <u>mulating account and does not show any material withdrawals.</u>			
COPY OF THIS REPORT FURNISHED TO: <u>U. S. Atty. S. F.</u>			

67-577

-4-

Bhagwan Singh's Diary: The 1610 Edith St, Berkeley Purchase

Description : Excerpt and translation of Bhagwan Singh's Diary about the property at 1610 Edith Street in Berkeley—acquired using Ghadar Party funds by Vaishno Das Bagai (Discovered from Alameda County Assessors's Office)

Source : Dr. Sidhu, Gurdev Singh & Singh, Surinderpal Gadri Baba Bhai Bhagwan Singh Pritam 2013 Chandigarh: Unitstar, 2013; pp 267,

Monday, 1st January 1917.

The rules of the Ghadr party the framing of which was resolved in the meeting of 24th November and which were to be passed on 6th December but were hung up on account of the mischief making of Pandit Ram Chandra, were taken up today and with the exception of one which related to the administration of oath, were passed almost entirely in this original form. Ram Chand saw this scene with his own eyes and left (the meeting). Though a few of the ignorant but mischievous inmates of the Ashram put many obstacles in the way, but 22 persons passed them all. Good deal of discussion also took place about accounts which Ram Chandra did not wish to render. At last on being forced he agreed to render it to Bishan Singh and Harish Chandra. But he has not shown it all.

Tuesday - 2nd January 1917

Was engaged in other work up to 12 o'clock. Saw Ram Singh and then went to Berkeley to Bagai. After talking about many things with Bagai and Sebgal I saw the Societys' house at No. 1610 Edith St., which the Pandit had got registered in his (or his own) name. After taking meal at their place returned home at 9. P.M.

Wednesday, Jan: 3 1917.

Went to the Ashram at about 10 o'clock. There is nothing particular worth mentioning. Talked with Santokh Singh (or Santokh Singh etc) up to 11:30 P.M. Yes, today took the Amer:

The 1610 Edith St, Berkeley Purchase by Bagai Using Misappropriated Ghadar Party Funds

Source : Alameda County Assessor's Office. Deed to 1610 Edit St, Berkely. March 8, 1917 Digital Database: Reel.

Description : Between August 1916 and March 1917, Vaishno Das Bagai exploited his trusted position within the Ghadar Party to divert revolutionary funds—donated by Indian immigrants fighting for India's liberation—into his personal bank accounts. Rather than securing these funds for party operations, Bagai collaborated with party leader Ram Chandra to hide financial traces that could implicate Chandra himself. This maneuver is verified in a diary (see attached previous document) entry by then-Ghadar Party President Bhagwan Singh Gyanee, who unknowingly visited what he believed to be a movement-owned house on January 2, 1917

Timeline of Property Transactions Involving Misappropriated Ghadar Party Funds

- August 7, 1916 – Vaishno Das Bagai acquires the property at 1610 Edith Street, Berkeley, using funds diverted from the Ghadar Party's revolutionary treasury.
- March 7, 1917 – Amid growing internal scrutiny, Bagai transfers the property to Ghadar Party President Bhagwan Singh Gyanee.
- March 8, 1917 – The property is formally deeded to the Pacific Coast Hindustani Association, restoring rightful ownership to the movement and its members.

W. H. WATKINS, ET AL,
TO
V. D. BAGAI,

THIS INDENTURE, Made this Seventh day of August A. D., 1918;
BETWEEN W. H. Watkins and his wife, Mary A. Watkins, of
the City + Berkeley, County of Alameda, State of California,
the parties of the first part, and V. D. Bagai, of

the City and County of San Francisco, State of California, the party of the second part

WITNESSETH: That the said parties of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Ten (10) Dollars + - of the United States of America, to them in hand paid by the said party of the second part the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged do by these presents grant bargain sell, convey and confirm unto the said party of the second part and to his heirs and assigns forever, all that certain lot piece or parcel of land situate lying and being in the City of Berkeley, County of Alameda, State of California and bounded and particularly described as follows to wit:

BEGINNING at a point on the western line of Edith Street, distant thereon northerly one hundred twenty-one (121) feet eight (8) inches from the point of intersection thereof with the northern line of Lincoln Street, as said streets are shown on the map hereinafter referred to, and running thence northerly along said line of Edith Street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches thence westerly parallel to said line of Lincoln Street one hundred (100) feet, thence southerly parallel to said line of Edith Street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches, and thence easterly parallel to the said line of Lincoln Street one hundred (100) feet to the point of beginning.

BEING the northern thirty-three (33) feet, four (4) inches of Lot No 4 in block lettered "B" as said lot and block are delineated and so designated upon that certain map entitled "Map of the Edith Tract, Berkeley,

Calif., March 1890", filed April 18, 1890, in Liber 8 of Maps, page 21, in the office of the County Recorder of the said County of Alameda.

TOGETHER with all and singular the tenements hereditaments and appurtenances thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining and the reversion and reversions remainder and remainders, rents issues and profits thereof.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD all and singular the said premises, together with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said parties of the first part have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written.

Signed Sealed and Delivered in
the presence of W. P. Woolsey,

W. H. Watkins, (SEAL)
Mary A. Watkins, (SEAL)

STATE OF CALIFORNIA (as
COUNTY OF ALAMEDA, (

On this 10th day of August in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and sixteen before me, WALTER P. WOOLSEY, A Notary Public in and for said County and State, residing therein, duly commissioned and sworn personally appeared W. H. Watkins and Mary A. Watkins, his wife, known to me to be the persons described in and whose names are subscribed to the within instrument and they acknowledged to me that they executed the same.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal, at my office in the Town of Berkeley, County and State aforesaid, the day and the year in this certificate first above written.

Walter P. Woolsey, NOTARY PUBLIC

(NOTARIAL SEAL) in and for said County of Alameda, State of California
U. S. Int Rev stamp \$ 1. cancelled F. H. T. 8-10-15

RECORDED AT REQUEST OF OAKLAND TITLE INSURANCE AND GUARANTY COMPANY AUG-14-1918, at 11 min past 11 A. M.

Q-59531, 1.30

D. D. A. H. 1.30

E. M. Bacon
COUNTY RECORDER

V.D. BAGAI

TO

B. SINGH

This Indenture, made the Seventh day of March one thousand nine hundred and Seventeen,

Between V.D. Bagai the party of the first part, and Bhagwan Singh the party of the second part,

Witnesseth, That the said party of the first part in consideration of the sum of Ten (\$10.00) Dollars gold coin of the United States of America to him in hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged does by these presents grant, bargain and sell unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns forever, all that certain lot, piece or parcel of land situate in the City of Berkeley County of Alameda, State of California, and bounded and described as follows, to wit:

Beginning at a point on the western line of Edith street distant thereon northerly one hundred twenty-one (121) feet eight (8) inches from the point of intersection thereof with the northerly line of Lincoln street running thence northerly along said line of Edith street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches thence westerly parallel with said line of Lincoln street one hundred (100) feet thence southerly parallel with said line of Edith street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches and thence easterly parallel with said line of Lincoln street one hundred (100) feet to the point of beginning.

Being the northern thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches of lot number 4 block B. as laid down and delineated upon that certain map entitled "Map of Edith Tract Berkeley Cal. March 1890" filed April 18, 1890 in Book 18 of Maps page 21 in the office of the County Recorder of Alameda County State of California.

Together with the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereto belonging or appertaining and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof.

To Have and to Hold, the said premises together with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns forever.

In Witness Whereof, the said party of the first part has hereunto set his hand the day and year first above written.

Signed, and executed)
in the presence of +)

V.D. Bagai

State of California)
City and County of)
San Francisco)

ss. On this 7th day of March in the year One thousand nine hundred and Seventeen before me, W.W. Healey a Notary Public, in and for the said City and County residing therein, duly commissioned and sworn, personally appeared V.D. Bagai known to me to be the person described in whose name is subscribed to and who executed the within instrument and he acknowledged to me that he executed the same.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal at my office in said City and County of San Francisco, the day and year in this certificate first above written.

W.W. Healey Notary Public.

(Notarial Seal) In and for the said City and County of San Francisco, State of California. My commission expires August 28th 1917.
Recorded at the request of Timothy Healy Mar 12 1917 at 43 min past 9 A.M.

E-9615 1.20

1.20

W.W. Healey
County Recorder.

B. SINGH
TO
PACIFIC COAST HINDUSTANI ASSN.

This Indenture, made the Eighth day of March one thousand and nine hundred and Seventeen,

Between Bhagwan Singh the party of the first part, and Pacific Coast Hindustani Association the party of the second part.

Witnesseth, That the said party of the first part, in consideration of the sum of Ten (\$10.00) dollars of the United States of America to him in hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged does by these presents grant, bargain and sell unto the said party of the second part and to its heirs and assigns forever, all that certain lot, piece or parcel of land situate in the City of Berkeley County of Alameda, State of California and bounded and described as follows, to wit:

Beginning at a point on the western line of Edith street distant thereon northerly one hundred twenty-one (121) feet eight (8) inches from the point of intersection thereof with the northerly line of Lincoln street running thence northerly along said line of Edith street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches thence westerly parallel with said line of Lincoln street one hundred (100) feet thence southerly parallel with said line of Edith street thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches and thence easterly parallel with said line of Lincoln street one hundred (100) feet to the point of beginning.

Being the northern thirty-three (33) feet four (4) inches of lot number 4 block B. as laid down and delineated upon that certain map entitled "Map of Edith Tract Berkeley Cal. March 1890" filed April 18, 1890 in Book 18 of Maps page 21 in the office of the County Recorder of Alameda County State of California.

Together with the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereunto belonging or appertaining and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders rents issues and profits thereof.

To Have and to Hold the said premises together with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, and to its heirs and assigns forever.

In Witness Whereof, the said party of the first part has hereunto set his hand the day and year first above written.

Signed and executed in the presence of +)

Bhagwan Singh

State of California)
City and County of)
San Francisco)

ss. On this 8th day of March in the year one thousand nine hundred

and Seventeen, before me, W.W. Healey a Notary Public, in and for the said City and County residing therein, duly commissioned and sworn, personally appeared Bhagwan Singh known to me to be the person described in whose name is subscribed to and who executed the within instrument and he acknowledged to me that he executed the same.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal at my office in said City and County of San Francisco, the day and year in this certificate first above written.

W.W. Healey Notary Public.
(Notarial Seal) In and for the said City and County of San Francisco, State of California. My commission expires August 28th 1917.

Recorded at the request of Timothy Healy Mar 12 1917 at 44 min past 9 A.M.

R-9614 1.20

W. W. Healey
County Recorder.

1810 Tood St, Berkeley 1917-1918: V. D. Bagai World War I Draft Registration Card

Description: During World War I all men between the ages of 21 and 31. It is important to note that not all of the men who registered for the draft actually served in the military. This Registration card proves that Bagai lived in Berkeley on Todd St. Furthermore, it is also noted on the card that Bagai has a wife and three children.

Source : "United States, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918",
FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KZVC-73L> : Thu Jul 24 12:18:42 UTC 2025), Entry for Vaishno Dae Bagai, from 1917 to 1918.

Form 1

REGISTRATION CARD 148 | No. 31

345

Age, in yrs.

26

Name in full

Vaishno Llae Bagai

(Given name)

(Family name)

Home address

1820 Todd

Berkeley Cal.

(No.)

(Street)

(City)

(State)

Date of birth

Oct.

16

1891

(Month)

(Day)

(Year)

Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your

intention (specify which)?

Declarant

Where were you born?

Peshwar

India

(Town)

(State)

(Nation)

If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

Declarant

What is your present trade, occupation, or office?

Commission Merchant

By whom employed?

Owns business

Where employed?

24 California St. S.F.

Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for

support (specify which)?

Wife + 3 children

Married or single (which)?

Married

Race (specify which)?

Indica

What military service have you had? Rank

None

branch

years

Nation or State

Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?

Family dependent.

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

V. D. Bagai

(Signature of Registrant)

If person is of African descent, tear off this corner

41-3. A

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

- 1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Medium Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Medium
- 2 Color of eyes? Brown Color of hair? Black Bald? No
- 3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Louise St. Rodgers
(Signature of registrar)

Precinct 9

City or County Berkeley

State Cal.

June 5 1917
(Date of registration)

Local Board for Div. No. 1
City of Berkeley, State of Cal.
3004 Telegraph Ave.
Berkeley, Calif.

British Historian Uncovers Bagai's Secret Role as Informant for the Empire

Description: Copy of pages 246-247 (Chapter 10) from the book Intelligence and imperial defence by Popplewell, Richard J. (Richard James). Popplewell details Vaishno Das Bagai's infiltration of the Gadar Party as an informant for the British Consulate in San Francisco.

Source: Intelligence and imperial defence by Popplewell, Richard J. (Richard James)
August 1, 1995: 1995 ISBN ISBN 9780714642277 Published by Routledge

Intelligence and Imperial Defence



Petition To Rename Kala Bagai Way

**British
Intelligence and
the Defence of the
Indian Empire
1904–1924**

**Richard J.
Popplewell**

INTELLIGENCE AND IMPERIAL DEFENCE

numbers – particularly in the Far East. The real anxiety which the existence of the Ghadr Party in America caused the Government of India is shown by the latter's readiness to deploy some of its best officers against it in 1917 and 1918.

Throughout 1915 the Indian authorities showed no inclination to improve their sources of information in America. While the officers of MI1c paid much attention to the affairs of Indians on the east coast after the beginning of 1916, there is no evidence that they were concerned with the doings of the Ghadr Party in California. The burden of controlling the Indians there fell upon the British consular authorities and upon the Canadian government.

It was not until March 1915 that the Foreign Office instructed the consular officers at San Francisco, Portland, New York, Chicago, Manila and Honolulu to report direct to the Government of India, to the Washington Embassy and to the Dominion Immigration Agent at Vancouver on the activities of Indian extremists. It thereby formalized a makeshift intelligence network which already existed. The most important elements in the scheme were Consul-General Ross at San Francisco and Consul-General Harrington at Manila. Ross had the assistance of the network of informers set up by Hopkinson. At the end of October 1915 this network received a very important addition in the person of a Parsi emigrant to the United States, Vishnu Das Bagai, who had been a friend of Ram Chandra in India. Before he left for the USA, the Inspector-General of Police of the North-West Frontier Province had given him Rs.700 in return for any information which came his way about the revolutionary party. For this reason he came to see Ross on his arrival in America. Ross trusted Bagai and set him to work among the Ghadr Party, where Ram Chandra entrusted him with the supervision of the party's finances.

In January 1916 Bagai informed Ross that he wanted to enter government service on a monthly salary of £20, in default of which he would emigrate to England.⁴⁸ Ross had no secret service funds at his disposal and referred Bagai's suggestion to the Government of India. In May 1916 the Home Department replied that they were unable to employ Bagai, but hoped that Ross would do so. They said that Bagai seemed 'somewhat addicted to talk too freely of his employment as a government agent . . .'. Ross did not accept this decision and wrote that it was 'unwise to lose connection altogether with a man . . . who has already established himself in the confidence of the agitators, as it would certainly take a long time for another man to get so far into the

confidence of [Ram Chandra]' as Bagai then was.⁴⁹ Ross felt that he was receiving too little assistance in the surveillance of the Ghadr Party for which he was responsible. He wrote at the end of 1915 that he had 'no means of ascertaining, with any amount of accuracy, the real sympathies of British Indians . . .'⁵⁰ The Government of India was still extremely reluctant to risk being compromised in America. The need for good intelligence was subordinated to overriding diplomatic considerations. It was essential that pro-German propagandists should not be able to point to the 'oppressive arm' of the Empire on American soil. None the less Bagai continued to provide Ross with regular reports and, by 1917, was perhaps the most esteemed secret agent of the Indian empire.⁵¹

After the death of Hopkinson in October 1914 Ross had no personal contact with the Canadian authorities for some time. This was not because the Canadians were reluctant to take on again the liability of watching the Indians, but because they had no one qualified to do so. Hopkinson was replaced as Dominion Immigration Inspector by an officer named A.L. Jolliffe who, unlike Hopkinson, did not venture out of British Columbia.⁵² The Canadians finally found the best replacement for Hopkinson in his old chief in the Vancouver Immigration Department, Malcolm Reid. When Hopkinson was alive Reid's knowledge of Indian affairs had been defective, but he soon remedied this. It seems that he began to concentrate on intelligence work. An MI1c report from early 1916 referred to the important work which he had done in this field.⁵³

Another important factor explains the reluctance of the Government of India to set up intelligence operations in the USA in the first two years of the war. While agents could give warning of enemy schemes, there was nothing they could do to prevent plotting on American soil. Hopkinson himself had only been able to notify the Government of India of the movements of returning revolutionaries, and had not stopped them arming themselves. At the end of 1915 the American Department of the Foreign Office wrote that there was little chance of prosecuting Indian extremists in the USA for two reasons: the state of US law; and the attitude of the administration.⁵⁴ The Foreign Office believed that the evidence of crimes committed in India at the instigation of the San Francisco Ghadr Party rested solely on the word of the Government of India, which would not satisfy the American government, which would have to justify its action before 'a somewhat hostile public opinion'.⁵⁵ On the Pacific coast British

Lisjan/Ohlone Chair Corrina Gould Responds to New Research on Kala Bagai Way Naming

Description: Corrina Gould's response upon reviewing publicly available archival research about Kala Bagai's story provided by PJ Singh. Corrina expressed appreciation for receiving the research on the Bagai family, noted that she was previously unaware of this history before being asked to support the street name change, and clarified that decisions regarding signage ultimately rest with the City of Berkeley.

Source: Gould, Corrina. Email to PJ (Prabhjot) Singh. 18 Jul. 2014.

Note: *Corrina granted permission to include her email. Other organizers involved in the Kala Bagai Way Naming, when contacted, expressed that they were unaware of the newly surfaced research regarding Kala Bagai Way.*

Berkeley Street naming

1 message

Corrina Gould <corrinagould@gmail.com>
To: pjsinghonline@gmail.com
Cc: STLT Office <info@rematriatetheland.org>

Thu, Jul 18, 2024 at 1:37 PM

Dear PJ,

Thank you so much for sending me this letter and research about the Baigai family history. I of course did not have any of this information, prior to being asked to support the name change. I'm not sure what you are asking me to do, ultimately, it is the City of Berkeley that makes the decisions and pays for the signage.

Uni' (respectfully)

Corrina

www.TheRealKalaBagaiStory.org

The Real Kala Bagai Story Website Public Education

Description: The website argues that Kala Bagai Way in Berkeley honors the wife of Vaishno Das Bagai, a man it claims was a British informant who betrayed the Ghadar Movement—India's early 20th-century anti-colonial revolutionaries. It presents archival evidence to challenge the Bagai family narrative (used in naming street Kala Bagai Way) of the Bagai family's legacy and calls for a reevaluation of historical memory and civic honors.

Source: Mistaken Honor: Kala Bagai Way - The Real Story of British Spy Betrayal :

[www.TheRealKalaBagaiStory.org](http://therealkalabagaistory.org)

URL: <http://therealkalabagaistory.org>