

The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: Formative Period, Struggle for Legislation, and Consolidation (c.1847 – c.1947)

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The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was legally recognized in 1925 as the central representative body of the Sikhs. However, it had come into operation in 1920 as the epitome of the eighteenth-century doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. This paper traces the formative period of the SGPC to the first half of colonial rule and the foundational role of the Lahore Singh Sabha. It then focuses on the goal of securing a law for the management of the historic Gurdwaras. During 1921-25, each major confrontation (*morcha*) with the government brought the SGPC a step closer to the realization of its goal. However, the Sikh Gurdwaras Act (1925) met the expectations of the SGPC partially. The 'Afterward' (1926-c.1947) discusses how the SGPC expanded its concerns and broke out of the constraints imposed under this Act through successive amendments. By 1947, it had consolidated its position as the representative body and mouthpiece of the Sikhs not only for their religious beliefs and practices and the ideals of social equality and service (*seva*), but also for their political and constitutional interests. The number of Gurdwaras affiliated with the SGPC increased from 241 in 1925 to 761 before Partition. This paper throws light also on the changing equation between the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal, differences between the Akali movement and the Gandhian non-cooperation, and the working of colonial administration in the Punjab.

A century has passed since the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) became a statutory body. The power and authority conferred upon it by the Sikh Gurdwaras Act VIII of 1925 was never exercised by Ranjit Singh (1790-1839), or the British administrators after him. As a representative body of the Sikhs, the SGPC exercised control over the Darbar Sahib along with other historic Gurdwaras, and resolved all issues of Sikh beliefs and practices in the light of the Sikh tradition,

with Guru Granth Sahib at its core. This veritable integration of the ideas of Guru Granth and Guru Panth had a long formative period.

The vesting of Guruship in the *Granth Sahib* and the collectivity of the Sikhs (Panth) by Guru Gobind Singh crystallized as the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth in the course of the eighteenth century. After the establishment of Sikh rule in the last quarter of the century, the individual rulers themselves claimed to act on behalf of the Panth, though Guru Panth was never rejected in theory. The doctrine of Guru Granth led to the emergence of a large number of Gurdwaras, supported by grants from the new rulers and the local communities. As the heir to this tradition, Ranjit Singh upheld the idea of Guru Panth, and actively supported the idea of Guru Granth by giving generous revenue-grants to the Gurdwaras. He also exercised general control over the important Gurdwaras associated with the Gurus and eminent Sikhs. The Harmandir (Darbar) Sahib at Amritsar which was renovated and gold-plated by him, received his maximum attention and resources. The idea of the *Granth* as the Guru and the Gurdwara as its abode was well-entrenched before the end of Ranjit Singh's reign.¹ As J.S. Grewal puts it, the inception of British rule prepared 'the ground for the revival of the idea of Guru Panth'. Furthermore:

The aspiration and demand to manage the affairs of the Golden Temple and other historic Gurdwaras were rooted in the idea that the representatives of the Sikh Panth alone had the authority and the right to manage their religious institutions.²

The Formative Period

Early Decades of Colonial Control

Ever since the virtual inception of their rule in the Punjab after the Anglo-Sikh war (1845-46), the British had been quite clear that to control the Sikhs it was politic to control their premier Gurdwara, the Darbar Sahib. In December 1846, the treaty at Bhyrowal imposed on the young Maharaja Dalip Singh gave 'full authority' to the British Resident to 'direct and control' the working of 'every department' of the now protected state.³ In 1847, the Resident started taking interest in the offerings and *jagirs* of the Golden Temple, though Lehna Singh Majithia was asked to continue managing its affairs.⁴ In early 1848, when Lehna Singh went out of the Punjab for pilgrimage, Jodh Singh, an *adalati* (judicial officer) was

appointed in his place. After Jodh Singh's alacrity in supporting the British during the Anglo-Sikh war of 1848-49, he was made an Extra Assistant Commissioner, with the effective charge of the Darbar Sahib as its 'Sarbrah' (manager).⁵ The British controlled the affairs of the Darbar Sahib through the Sarbrah for ten years from 1849 to 1859.⁶

After the rule of the East India Company was replaced by that of the British Crown, its direct involvement in a religious institution was not considered desirable.⁷ The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, Frederic Cooper, was asked to work out arrangements to covertly regulate the future management of the Harmandir Sahib. Under his indirect supervision, a conclave of a cross-section of Sikhs, supposedly representing the Sikh Panth, was convened at Amritsar in September 1859. The indirect control of the government was ensured through an agreed document called *Dastur al-Amal* (Rules of Practice) of 1859.⁸ Significantly, in the preamble to this document the fourth Guru Ram Das (who founded the town of Ramdaspur and dug the tank) was recognized as the sole proprietor of this sacred institution in perpetuity, with no other person having any title to proprietorship. The whole body of the Khalsa was his 'novitiate' or '*chela*'.⁹ Thus, the right of the collective body of the Khalsa was unequivocally recognized.

On the ground, however, Jodh Singh continued as the Sarbrah with full internal freedom for appointment, dismissal and settlement of disputes among the *granthis*, *pujaris*, *ragis*, *rababis*, and a host of other functionaries and servants.¹⁰ Jodh Singh functioned in this position till his retirement in 1862, to be succeeded by Mangal Singh Ramgarhia. A committee was formed in 1864 to assist Mangal Singh who put up an inscription in the Darbar Sahib complex lauding his own services and expressing loyalty to the Queen. On his death in 1879, Man Singh was made the Sarbrah. The Punjab Administration continued to maintain 'control' over the Darbar Sahib through the Sarbrah to the utter disregard of the Act XX of 1863 (Religious Endowment Act).¹¹ In 1881, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab warned the Governor General Ripon that if the control of the Gurdwara was given to a committee which was not in control of the government, it could have dangerous consequences. Therefore, it was advisable to continue with the same arrangement which was there for the last thirty years. The Governor General concurred that the Sarbrah should be effectively given the full power.¹²

Thus, for reasons of political expediency, provincial administration retained overall control over the Golden Temple, without any

involvement in its proper management. This led to deterioration in its day-to-day affairs, and turned it into 'a static institution'. Its patronage by the state in the previous regime had dried up. Its employees were disgruntled over their shares in the offerings and their distribution. The Sarbrah was never asked by the Administration to render accounts, and there was suspicion of misappropriation by him, or his accountant (*munshi*). Signs of neglect were evident also in the mosaics of the Harmandir.¹³ Worse still, an un-Sikh practice like idol worship had crept in. The idols had been brought into the complex sometime in the late 1870s. The archival records mention that in January 1878, the then Sarbrah, Mangal Singh, had admonished the Brahmans for worshipping idols within the precincts of the Darbar Sahib, because it was a practice contrary to the 'old custom'. His order said that Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji alone could be worshipped in Sri Darbar Sahib Ji.¹⁴ The practice, however, continued.

The Sikh Resurgence

By the 1870s, a new kind of Sikh leadership under the aegis of what came to be known later as the Singh Sabha movement was emerging. Its first association called the Sri Guru Singh Sabha was formed at Amritsar in 1873. The immediate reason was to stop four Sikh boys of Amritsar Mission School from converting to Christianity.¹⁵ The larger objective of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha was to propagate the true Sikh religion and promote the Punjabi language and Sikh education while refraining from criticising the government.¹⁶ The Amritsar Sabha was dominated by the aristocrats like Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia, Raja Bikram Singh of Faridkot, and (Baba) Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak (*guru-ansh*), who claimed a special position as a *guru*.

The attitude of Khem Singh Bedi was found objectionable by those Sikhs who focused on equality obliterating differences based on caste and class. They considered themselves representing the Sikh Panth and inheritors of the Sikh tradition, its ideals and institutions. To voice their concerns, they formed another Singh Sabha at Lahore in 1879. The Lahore Sabha had a vocal presence of the emergent middle-class professionals and publicists like Gurmukh Singh, Jawahar Singh Kapoor, and Giani Ditt Singh. Aristocrats like Sardar Attar Singh of Bhadaur and Kanwar Bikrama Singh of Kapurthala also supported them. More Singh Sabhas followed, subscribing formally to the objectives of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, but devising their own programs and claiming to speak on behalf

of the entire Sikh Panth. To effect coordination among the Sabhas, a Khalsa Diwan was formed at Amritsar in April 1883. Gurmukh Singh was made its secretary, but its elitist office-bearers were not particular about the Sikh tenets and Khalsa identity. When differences arose over the reformist agenda of the Lahore Singh Sabha, another Khalsa Diwan was established in April 1886 at Lahore with 30 Sabhas affiliated to it. Gurmukh Singh was made its secretary. Only three *sabhas* remained affiliated to the Amritsar Diwan. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly 150 Singh Sabhas were in existence,¹⁷ and it is likely that most of them were inclined towards the Lahore Khalsa Diwan.

Ideologically, the Lahore Singh Sabha upheld the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. They insisted that the Gurdwaras belonged to the Panth and underscored distinctiveness of Sikh identity. They were strongly opposed to gurudom or personal Guruship, idol worship, caste system, and Brahmanical rituals, towards all of which the Amritsar group had an accommodating attitude and was looking for ways to stall the activities of the Lahore Diwan.¹⁸ The ideological differences between the Amritsar and Lahore groups were reflected in their attitude towards the state of affairs in the Harmandir.

In April 1886, Gurmukh Singh started the monthly Gurmukhi paper, the *Sudharak*. Its second issue dwelt on the malpractices current in the Harmandir Sahib, also drawing attention to idol worship on its premises. Through a lecture given to the Sikhs in one of its *bungas* (buildings) he carried his criticism right into the Darbar Sahib complex. He also opposed the undue precedence given to Khem Singh Bedi before Guru Granth Sahib. In retaliation, the leaders of the Amritsar group passed two resolutions against Gurmukh Singh in 1886, and inspired the '*pujaris, granthis and nambardars*' of the Darbar Sahib to have a *hukamnama* issued from the Akal Takht on 18 March 1887, excommunicating Gurmukh Singh for his ideas and activities. The 26 out of its 28 signatories included practically everyone associated with the Harmandir in a recognized capacity, including the Sarbrah. The remaining two signatories happened to be Sardar Kahn Singh Majithia, an aristocrat (*rais*) who was a member of the Amritsar Diwan, and the *granthi* of the Tarn Taran Gurdwara which was affiliated to the Harmandir.¹⁹ It may be of interest to know that Gurmukh Singh's excommunication was formally revoked over a century later through a *hukamnama*, dated 25 September 1995, issued from the Akal Takht which expressed regret over the treatment meted out to him for his self-less service to Guru Panth.²⁰

Significantly, Gurmukh Singh's excommunication was done with the concurrence of the government. As stated by Colonel T. Lang, Commissioner of the Lahore Division in a confidential official communication in August 1889, it was a 'political necessity' to control the Golden Temple through an officially appointed 'sensible and strong manager'. Lang erroneously maintained that, 'Sikhism is and has always been centred in the "Darbar Sahib", and any *sabha* [Lahore group] not connected with "Darbar Sahib" must be "schismatic".' Compared to the Sikh elites of the Amritsar Sabha supporting the current management of the Golden Temple, its detractors, according to Lang, were 'very small people', and their association was a 'weakly up-start, body of no account', but could prove 'dangerous' later on. This remained the dominant view among the British officials in the Punjab until the end of world war I.²¹

To Gurmukh Singh's satisfaction and that of his close associates – Jawahar Singh, Mayya Singh and Giani Ditt Singh – the *Khalsa Akhbar*, a Punjabi weekly, issued under the aegis of the Khalsa Diwan, Lahore on 13 June 1886 became a powerful mouthpiece of their concerns. Giani Ditt Singh took over as its editor in June 1887 and effectively steered it till his death in September 1901.²² The paper upheld the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth and gives a clear rationale for the control and management of the Gurdwaras by the Singh reformers as the representatives of the Panth. The *Khalsa Akhbar* began by exposing the deterioration in the Darbar Sahib complex. Expressing discontent over its management, the weekly doubted the wisdom and fairness of the committee appointed by the government for the selection of a suitable person as the *granthi*. The committee was actually a 'coterie of sycophants' (*satbachnian di mandli*). In the same issue, there is a mention of the Sarbrah refusing to render accounts of the income and expenditure and the *pujaris* taking him to the court. Apparently, the government paid no heed. The paper gives a hint of embezzlement, with the eloquent question, 'how could there be unaccountability in the Harmandir, the veritable house of God?'²³ The presence of un-Sikh elements in the premier Sikh institution was the result of the control exercised over its management by the non-Sikhs, maintained the *Khalsa Akhbar*. It exhorted the Khalsa to wake up to the fact that the composition of the committee, with a Hindu idol-worshipper, Raja Harbans Singh, as its member and the Christian Deputy Commissioner as its president, was not only expressly against the doctrine of Guru Panth, but also the government legislation of 1863.²⁴

As a result of the relentless attacks of the paper, the large cushion (*gadela*) of Khem Singh Bedi was removed from the Harmandir. He used to sit next to Guru Granth Sahib to receive personal homage and distribute charms. The paper called him a 'fake *guru*', and regarded his conduct as violating the Khalsa principle of equality.²⁵ Because of the strong objections of the paper, a proposal to place the idols of the ten Gurus at the entrance of the Darbar Sahib had to be dropped.²⁶ The *Khalsa Akhbar* drew attention to the attendants (*sevadars*) displaying the pictures of the incarnations (*avtars*) of Vishnu, thereby promoting human worship (*manas-puja*).²⁷ The paper complained that in the precincts of the Darbar Sahib, the Brahmans and other 'learned persons' encouraged exposition (*katha*) of the *Bhagwat Puran*, rather than that of Guru Granth Sahib.²⁸ The presence of a number of 'Brahmans', with cow-dung smeared on their bodies and ash in their hair, was disrespectful to the Darbar Sahib.²⁹

The *Khalsa Akhbar* expressed a serious concern over the issue of idols in the Harmandir Sahib which, as feared by its editor, was well on its way to becoming an idol temple (*butmandar*), a place of worship of Kali and Bhairon. Giani Ditt Singh emphasized that idol worship was criticized in Guru Granth Sahib and that the practice was against its express teachings. The paper lamented: 'These days idol worship is rampant in Sri Darbar Sahib; the idols made of stone, clay, copper and brass are scrubbed with sand and bathed in the sacred water of the holy tank (*amrit*).'³⁰ In 1897, a letter to the editor pointed out that in the Darbar Sahib complex there is a room with a painting on its front wall depicting the Goddess and Guru Gobind Singh: 'The Goddess stands on golden sandals and she has many hands - ten or perhaps twenty. One of the hands is stretched out and in this she holds a *khanda* (double-edged sword). Guru Gobind Singh stands barefoot in front, with his hands folded.' The correspondent looked upon this situation as a mark of deterioration. It may be added that later, in 1899, in a separate work, Giani Ditt Singh examined the Sikh literature at length and concluded that there was no evidence to prove that the tenth Guru worshipped the Goddess and received the *khanda* from her.³¹

J.C. Oman, who was interested in the sacred place of the Sikhs, paid more than one visit to the Darbar Sahib.³² He says that inside the complex signs of neglect were quite visible. The open space in front of the Akal Bunga was used for various purposes, including the slaughtering of goats on the Dusehra day. A Brahman was sitting in this open space with his Shastras, interpreting them to a small knot of women and children. A couple of *yogis* smeared with ash sat on the cold pavement, seemingly rapt

in contemplation. On the north side of the tank, a Brahman was worshipping tiny images of Ganesh and Krishna. At the north-east corner of the tank there was a *lingam* (an iconic symbol of Shiva) set upon a substantial brick and marble platform. On the eastern side was a little temple sacred to the Goddess. There, one Brahman was engaged in worship, with a *saligram* (a black stone symbolic of Vishnu) before him and a picture of the temple of Badrinarain; the other was adoring a *saligram* with loud blasts of a conch.³³

Some Sarbrahs did take notice of the idols in and outside the Darbar Sahib precincts. However, despite Mangal Singh Ramgarhia's admonition in 1878 to the Brahmans referred to above, external support enabled them to bring the idols back. This practice was questioned more than once by another Sarbrah, Colonel Jawala Singh. In 1899, the Brahmans had to acknowledge in writing that the Darbar Sahib belonged to Guru Ram Das and that the Sarbrah could remove them whenever he wanted. But there was no change on the ground.³⁴ This reinforced the necessity of Panthic control over the Harmandir Sahib and the other religious institutions of the Sikhs.

An important reason for the continuing presence of idols in the Harmandir was that some self-interested but influential Sikhs, represented by Khem Singh Bedi and the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan, were indifferent to the 'true Sikh tenets'. To educate them Kahn Singh Nabha, an erudite Sikh published his *Hum Hindu Nahin* in 1898.³⁵ Writing in response to the assertion that the Sikhs were a sect of Hindus, the author argues that on the basis of their principles (*usool*), the Sikhs constituted the 'third (*teesar*) Panth, distinct from both Hindus and Muslims'. In the light of Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh literature, and the Khalsa principles together representing the early Sikh tradition, he rejects gods and goddesses, incarnations, and idol worship, among others.³⁶ It may be added that the publication of this work was regarded as a 'classic statement of Sikh identity'. It came to be regarded as 'the most influential Sikh publications of the early decades of the twentieth century'. To call it a polemical work is 'to miss its real significance'.³⁷

Significantly, Kahn Singh had been the tutor of Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha who, unlike his father Maharaja Hira Singh, was inclined towards the Singh reformers of the Lahore Singh Sabha.³⁸ As an enlightened prince and devout Sikh, Ripudaman Singh became seriously interested in the removal of idols from the Darbar Sahib. He had noticed their presence during his visit to the Harmandir Sahib on the Diwali of

1904. On 30 March 1905, he wrote a letter to the Lieutenant Governor, that he had found idols in the inner and outer circumambulatory paths (*parkarma*) of the Golden Temple; the Sikhs are not idol worshippers and that Guru Granth Sahib strongly prohibits idolatry. As the Sarbrah was quite 'ignorant' of the Sikh religion, Ripudaman Singh requested the Lieutenant Governor to take 'some permanent steps' to ensure that a Sikh 'possessing force of character' was appointed to 'this most sacred and responsible post'.³⁹

The matter was referred to the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar who confirmed the presence of idols, and who also added that the idols had been there for 'at least 20 years', with support of the wealthy Sanatanist Hindus who had encouraged the Brahmans to resist the Sarbrah's orders. The Commissioner of Lahore division stated in his reply to the Lieutenant Governor that the worship of idols was hardly a matter in which government could interfere; if the Sikhs felt strongly that these idols should be removed, they could bring pressure on the manager to remove them. Finally, on 1 May 1905, Arur Singh, the manager, was obliged to order the Brahmans not to bring idols to the Harmandir Sahib, because the practice was 'opposed to the principles of the Gurdwara'. After some resistance, the Brahmans agreed on 7 May that they would not bring their idols in future without his permission. On 16 May, Ripudaman Singh wrote to the Deputy Commissioner thanking him for putting an end to 'this most shameful practice' at 'the Holy of the Holiest of Sikh shrines'. Significantly, the then Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar is on record that the Golden Temple was 'a Sikh temple' and property 'of the Sikhs as a whole'. The subsequent enquiries made by the British administrators also confirmed that the only mode of worship allowed in the Darbar Sahib until after the inception of their rule was one in accordance with Guru Granth Sahib.⁴⁰ The question, therefore, was why should the government insist on retaining control over a Sikh institution?

Growing Awareness and Discontent of the Singh Reformers

A significant change was taking place in the regional and pan Indian context which encouraged the regional press to become more vocal. Discontent against the Viceroy Curzon's measures was mounting. Swadeshi movement was gaining ground in Bengal and the Punjab, and agrarian unrest was growing in the Punjab.⁴¹ An increasing number of the Singh Sabha reformers began expressing concern about the dismal conditions in Gurdwaras. Their misuse was thoroughly exposed,

especially loose living of the *mahants* and misappropriation of the Gurdwara property. In the middle of 1906, the *Khalsa Advocate* and the *Panjab* of Amritsar strongly urged that it was necessary to change the administration of the Darbar Sahib and other Gurdwaras to remove their patent evils. They wanted the Sarbrah of the Golden Temple to be elected by the Panth and not selected by the government. The local committees, for example at the Nankana Sahib, Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot and Punjab Sahib, began putting pressure on the managers (*mahants*) to reform, sometimes even resorting to litigation, to acquire control over their Gurdwaras. The *Panjab* informed on 15 October 1906 that the Gurdwaras in the sub-regions of the Majha and Malwa were being converted into private houses by the incumbent Udasis and other *sadhus*. In May 1907, the *Panjab* urged the formation of a Gurdwara Sambhaal (management) committee. Some other papers, like the *Khalsa Samachar* and the *Khalsa Sevak*, were also articulate about mismanagement in the Darbar Sahib.⁴²

The monthly *Khalsa Sevak*, for example, drew attention to corruption in the preparation and distribution of the sacred food (*karah prasad*) at the Darbar Sahib. The use of equal quantities of the three ingredients (*tribhauri*) - floor, sugar and ghee - as enjoined by the eighteenth century *Rahitnamas*, was being ignored for long. The traditional jaggery had been replaced by the imported white sugar, and its huge quantities were being misappropriated.⁴³ The unfortunate incident on the Baisakhi of 1909 in which a venerable woman preacher, Mai Ram Kaur, was beaten up by the *pujaris*, occurred after she exposed the corrupt practices related to the *karah prasad*.⁴⁴ The paper also talks about absence of audit in accounts, *kirtan* (hymn singing) in popular tunes, and discontinuation of *katha* (exposition) in the Darbar Sahib, besides the dilapidated condition of its buildings.⁴⁵ Significantly, more than a decade before the apex body of the Sikhs was created, the *Khalsa Sevak* thus anticipated its character and functions:

The 'Shiromani Diwan' should be entrusted with the management (*prabandh*) of the affairs of the Panth; it should have a regular office (*pakka daftar*); its missionaries (*updeshak*) should be going to different places to preach; it should have regular income and expenditure; it should deal with the larger affairs (*vadde kumm*) of the Panth; and it should remain busy in the service of the Panth all through the year.⁴⁶

Under pressure from the reformers and the Sikh press, the Chief Khalsa Diwan passed a resolution asking the government that the rules governing the management of the Golden Temple be so changed as to allow the Panth the right to appoint its manager and other officials. There was speculation in the press about the replacement of Arur Singh by a Sarbrah appointed by the Panth, but nothing came out of this. It is not surprising that when the agrarian and urban unrest in the Punjab was at its peak in May 1907, as 'the representative of Sri Darbar Sahibji', the Sarbrah of the Golden Temple denounced these 'undesirable movements'. Reminding his 'race' of the benefits of British rule, he said that he and his followers were 'the loyal and faithful subjects to our just and impartial British Government'.⁴⁷

In 1910, Hira Singh Dard, a devout Sikh and a primary school teacher in the Bar (Chenab colony area), visited the Darbar Sahib on Diwali. He felt deeply concerned about the sad state of affairs there. He noticed that there was a lot of litter in the circumambulatory path. Priests and beggars crowded the banks of the sacred tank. A ten or twelve-years old boy was in attendance on Guru Granth Sahib. He was actually 'Bhai' Fateh Singh, the 'Head Granthi', who had been installed by the government in this position on hereditary basis. The *pujaris* of the Harmandir were as crafty as the proverbial thugs of Benares, writes Dard in his memoirs. The *pujaris* and *ragis* were greedy and cared nothing for the *sangat*. Dard noticed that a person stealing away a large quantity of *karah parsad* was caught by two Sikhs who brought this matter before Mai Ram Kaur, the influential preacher and reformer, referred to earlier. While addressing a *diwan* in the Malwai Bunga, she dwelt on this malpractice and exhorted the *sangat* to wake up 'about the sad state of affairs in our Gurdwaras', because the government would pay 'no heed'. When Mai Ram Kaur led a *jatha* reciting *shabads* to have *darshan* of the Darbar Sahib, she and her *jatha* were beaten up with *lathis* in front of the Harmandir, and she herself was seriously hurt. In fact, tension between the *pujaris* and the reformers had been building for quite some time. The *pujaris* quickly lodged a complaint at the nearby police station that Mai Ram Kaur and her Singh Sabha associates had come to rob the Guru's *golak* (cash box containing offerings). They were taken to the police station. Even Dard, who later went to the police station out of curiosity, was accused of being an accomplice by one of the *granthis*, and arrested along with 20-25 more Sikhs from the city, half of whom had not even gone to the *parkarma*! This farcical situation convinced Hira Singh that the government was at the

back of the *pujaris* who took pains to keep the local police and officials satisfied.⁴⁸

The demolition of the wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj in Delhi gave a powerful expression to the simmering discontent against the government's control over the Darbar Sahib and other Gurdwaras and their dismal state of affairs. After the shifting of the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, the imperial complex was being planned close to the area where the small historic Gurdwara was located enclosed by a hexagonal stone wall. A straight road from the north-east corner of the Gurdwara to the Viceregal palace was planned by demolishing this wall and replacing it with a quadrangular iron railing. A part of the Gurdwara estate had been purchased from the *mahant*, and the enclosing wall – 78 feet in the north and 322 feet in the east – was demolished in May 1913. The news took some months to reach the Punjab and galvanize the devout Sikhs. They viewed demolition of the wall as an act of sacrilege; every brick of the wall was sacred to them. Gurdwara Rakabganj marked the place where the beheaded body of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur was cremated.⁴⁹

The Singh reformers regarded demolition as the result of the government's insensitivity and control, combined with the complicity and greed of the *mahant* and the marked illegality of his action – the very issues they had been exercised about. There was a wave of protests all over the province, and a number of telegrams, petitions and memoranda were sent to the Viceroy, Lieutenant Governor of the province, and the Chief Commissioner of Delhi and others. The Sikhs living outside India also sent telegrams. After the eyewitness accounts of the demolished wall began to be published, as for instance by Harchand Singh, a *rais* of Lyallpur, a number of *diwans* were held at different places in Punjab, protesting against the government action and demanding rebuilding of the wall at its expense.⁵⁰

Disenchantment with the government and the moderate Sikh leadership of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was evident. In the Sikh Educational Conference held at Jalandhar from 10 to 12 April 1914, Harchand Singh of Lyallpur, supported by Teja Singh Samundari and others from the Bar, urged that a strong resolution should be passed against the official action; it should underscore that the demolished wall be reconstructed at the earliest. Not only was this resolution not allowed, Harchand Singh and his associates were obliged by the organizers to leave the venue lest it should embarrass the government.⁵¹ Significantly, however, on 13 April

1914, that is on the Baisakhi day, the *Panthic* conference organized by Bhai Randhir Singh (who later joined the Ghadarites) at Patti (district Amritsar) turned out to be perhaps the largest and most representative gathering of the Sikhs till then. A resolution was unanimously passed to launch a strong agitation against the desecration of the historic Gurdwara at Delhi. Bhai Randhir Singh announced that he would himself go with a *shahidi jatha* (a group of potential martyrs, prepared to sacrifice their life) to have the wall restored.⁵² The growing anger and impatience of the reformers became evident in a conference convened at Lahore on 31 May 1914, on the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan. The action of the British and stance of the Chief Khalsa Diwan were vehemently condemned in a resolution. This was followed by a number of meetings at different places, and 'this movement became more effective than that of 1907', recalled Dard.⁵³

This was the culmination of a series of appeals, petitions, litigation, and newspaper editorials over reform and Panthic control of the Gurdwaras since the 1880s. By this time, there probably was no doubt left in the minds of the reformers that the real problem lay with government control. It also became clear that instead of questioning the government, or forcefully demanding *status quo ante* at the Gurdwara Rakabganj, the Chief Khalsa Diwan left things to official pleasure. In fact, the Diwan was quite prepared to accept an iron railing in place of the wall.⁵⁴ Soon afterwards, the outbreak of the war created an environment in which anti-government outbursts were not considered desirable. The government too assured the Sikh leaders that their demands would be taken up after the war.

World War I and its Aftermath

During the war years (1914-18), however, the Sikh papers continued to state that the Gurdwaras belonged to the Panth, and also exposed the corruption and mismanagement in the Darbar Sahib. In retaliation, its *granthi*, Partap Singh, went to the extent of claiming that the Gurdwaras were the property of *granthis*, and not of the Sikh Panth.⁵⁵ Some Singh Sabhas persisted in their efforts to pressurize the *mahants* to stop misuse of the Gurdwara property. The reformers were often ineffective against the general hostility of the local administration, indifference of the Punjab Government, exorbitant costs of the legal remedy, and complexity of the legal system, which was mostly tilted in favor of the *mahants*.⁵⁶ At the same time, the Singh Sabhas persisted in invoking the doctrine of Guru Panth

and taking collective decisions (*gurmatas*) against local Gurdwara managements.⁵⁷

There was a significant change in the political scenario in the post-war period. The year 1919 proved to be a watershed in dispelling the attitudes of trust and loyalty towards the government, especially on the part of the Sikh peasants and soldiers. Apart from economic distress and demobilization, the Punjab was affected most in British India by the Rowlatt Satyagraha, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, and the Martial Law. What angered the Sikhs most was that during the Martial Law (April-June 1919), at the instance of the government, the Sarbrah of the Golden Temple, Arur Singh, along with some well-placed moderate Sikhs, presented a robe of honor (*siropa*) to General Dyer who had ordered firing at the unarmed people in the Jallianwala Bagh, and even initiated him as a 'Sikh'.⁵⁸

In this backdrop, the Sikh League, the newly established political organization of the Sikhs, held its first session on 27-28 December 1919 at Amritsar, alongside that of the Indian National Congress. The leadership of the Sikh League consisted mostly of the middle-class Sikhs who had become impatient with the abject loyalty of the Chief Khalsa Diwan.⁵⁹

The first truly political newspaper of the Sikhs, the daily *Akali*, was announced from Lahore on 21 May 1920, the day of Guru Arjan's martyrdom.⁶⁰ Before its launch, Hira Singh Dard was asked by Master Sundar Singh Lyallpuri to leave his job to join the Managing Committee and the Editorial Board of the *Akali*. Mangal Singh Gill resigned from Tehsildarship to join the *Akali* as its editor. Sardul Singh Caveeshar's People's Press printed the newspaper. They were expected initially to work without remuneration.⁶¹

The name *Akali* was chosen in honor of the intrepid Akali Phula Singh who appeared to symbolize fearlessness, bravery and sacrifice during the reign of Ranjit Singh. Hira Singh contributed a poem called '*Aa gia pher Akali je*' (the Akali has come again) to its first issue. He regretted that the Sikh nation (*qaum*) was being openly sold by the Sikhs hankering after *jagirs* and service under the government. With the coming of the *Akali* none would dare to take over their [Khalsa] College or Darbar Sahib. The *Akali* would project the message of universal brotherhood, reject the differences of 'color', the difference between the rich and the poor, and eradicate selfishness from national life. Every child would sing, 'we belong to India, and India belongs to us'.⁶²

The immediate objectives of the *Akali*, however, were as under: (i) to put an end to the management of Gurdwaras by *mahants* and the Sarbrahs and to bring them under the management of Sikh *sangats*; (ii) to wrest the Khalsa College from official control and to place it under pure Sikh management; (iii) to get the wall of the Gurdwara Rakabganj, which had been demolished by the government, reconstructed; (iv) to create political and national awakening among the Sikh people and to encourage them to participate wholeheartedly in the common struggle for freedom; (v) and to establish a democratic organization of the Sikhs as an alternative to the Chief Khalsa Diwan, because the Sikh masses were highly dissatisfied with its predominantly nominated character and pro-government stance.⁶³ The easiest for the government to agree to in 1920 was to hand over control of the Khalsa College (held since 1907) to the 'moderate' Sikhs.

It may, however, be recalled that the demolition of the Gurdwara Rakabganj wall had caused considerable indignation among Sikhs before the outbreak of the war, and that Bhai Randhir Singh had announced that he would take a group of potential martyrs to Delhi to rebuild the wall if it is not restored. After the war, despite its assurance, the government did nothing to restore the wall. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, a journalist closely associated with the Maharaja of Nabha and the printing of the *Akali*, published a letter in the *Akali* in June or July 1920 to the following effect: As the Guru has said, 'We should perform all our tasks with our own hands' (*aapni hathi aapna aape hi kaaj savariye*). The Sikhs should be prepared, if necessary, to offer their heads to build the wall of the sacred Gurdwara associated with the king of martyrs, Guru Tegh Bahadur. For this holy task 100 brave Sikhs were needed. These volunteers should take the vow in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib before sending their names. When the number reached 100, a meeting would be held and the government would be asked to restore the wall within a stipulated time. Otherwise, the band of potential martyrs (*shahidi jatha*) would go to Delhi to rebuild the wall at the peril of their lives.⁶⁴

The response was tremendous. Within a month or so, over a thousand names were received by the *Akali*. This ensured that the government would not be able to stand in their way. It was announced in the *Akali* that a meeting of the *shahidi jatha* would be held in October 1920 at the time of the second annual conference of the Central Sikh League. In the meeting of the *shahidi jatha* it was resolved to send a notice to the government to build the wall in its original form in about a couple of weeks. The eyes of

the government now opened to the probability of bloodshed close to the Viceregal palace and in front of the secretariat in the imperial capital. Within a week the government restored the demolished wall. The Sikhs saw it as their first victory.⁶⁵ As Grewal puts it, 'what all the requests, deputations, telegrams, and resolutions had not been able to achieve in six years was achieved in a few days by organized strength of the Sikh people and their will to make sacrifice'.⁶⁶ Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha too is believed to have quietly played a role in its restoration.⁶⁷

In fact, the new mood and determination became evident in October 1920 in the resolution of the case of the historic Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber at Sialkot, associated with Guru Nanak. Its trajectory since the inception of colonial rule mirrors the process by which the control of the local *sangat* gradually got eroded to be replaced by that of the priests. Despite protests and petitions from the *sangat* for over two decades, the increasing mismanagement of the Gurdwara and neglect of its long established *langar* continued to be whitewashed by the local administration. After the death of the *mahant* in September 1918, the Singh Sabha (renamed Khalsa Diwan) of Sialkot petitioned to the Deputy Commissioner to appoint a committee for management of the Gurdwara. On the other hand, the widow of the deceased appointed Ganda Singh, an apostate from Sikhism, as the manager of the Gurdwara during the minority of her son. Mutation was done in the minor's favor.⁶⁸

The civil suit filed by the *sangat* of Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber was rejected because of their inability to pay the hefty court fee. When the law failed them the Sikhs of Sialkot formed a Khalsa Sevak Jatha for reform of the local Gurdwaras. At Babe-di-Ber they began to hold weekly and then daily service. Ganda Singh hired scores of ruffians (*gundas*) to threaten the devotees and disrupt the *kirtan*. Meanwhile, the Akalis Amar Singh Jhabbal and Jaswant Singh Jhabbal, came to Sialkot with their associates. Their speeches won public sympathy and the local Hindus and Muslims too began to support the reformers. Warrants were issued against the volunteers of the Khalsa Sevak Jatha, but they were ready to go to jail rather than offer defence, or pay surety. When the District Magistrate ordered that no obstruction should be offered to Ganda Singh, Sikhs began to come to Sialkot from all sides. The Gurdwara was taken over in the name of the Panth and its *langar* was reopened. On 5 October, a *divan* was held and a committee of 13 members was elected for the control and management of the Gurdwara. C.M. King, by now the Divisional Commissioner, came to Sialkot on the day following and told the

representatives of the Sikhs that the government would not interfere in their religious matters. However, it would keep the income from the Gurdwara lands as a 'trust' until the 'two parties' settled the matter. The implied parity between the Panth and the usurpers was partisan, and left scope for government interference. This order also ensured that the income of the Gurdwara could not be used by the committee in a manner prejudicial to the government.⁶⁹ In much of its detail, thus, the case of the Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber at Sialkot evinced the highhandedness of the *mahants*, complicity of the government, inefficacy of the legal recourse, determined but passive resistance of the Singh reformers, and the increasing involvement of the devout Sikh men and women at the peril of their lives and liberties. In short, it anticipated the later developments.

Formation of the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal

Take over of the Akal Takht

A catalytic event later in October speeded up things for the Sikh reformers. A religious body called the Khalsa Biradari (brotherhood) in Amritsar had been admitting people of all castes and the outcastes, into the fold of Sikhism. It also advocated entry of the outcaste Sikhs into the Gurdwaras and the taking of sacred food from them. Since 1907, if not earlier, it received active support from the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the faculty and students of the Khalsa College, among others. Its *jathas* travelled to different parts of the Punjab initiating socially low persons into the Khalsa fold. Eventually, the Khalsa Biradari decided to go to the Harmandir Sahib to demand their right to equality in worship. On 12 October 1920, a few low-caste men were baptized and brought in a huge procession to the Darbar Sahib.⁷⁰ The *pujaris* refused to receive their offering and to perform prayer (*Ardas*) for them. At the suggestion of the congregation (*sangat*), Guru Granth Sahib was opened for guidance (*vaak*). It read that God 'sends grace even to those who have no merit, and takes from them the true Guru's service, which is most noble, as it turns our hearts to the love of God'. These words of Guru Amar Das had a deep impact. The priests agreed to offer prayers and to accept the sacred food from the hands of the newly-converted Sikhs. The elated party then moved towards the Akal Takht. Its priests fled from their posts. They did not come even when the Sarbrah, Sundar Singh Ramgarhia, called them.⁷¹ At the suggestion of Kartar Singh Jhabbar, Teja Singh Bhuchar agreed to serve as the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, and 25 volunteers of the Central

Majha Diwan came forth to render service at the Akal Takht. The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, who had been watching the developments, formed a provisional committee of nine Sikhs – eight reformers and the Sarbrah – to manage the affairs of the Golden Temple till a permanent committee was formed.⁷² The charge of day to day activity at the Akal Takht was entrusted to the Central Majha Khalsa Diwan.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee

The direct action of the reformers was logically followed by a *hukamnama* from the Akal Takht, dated 13 October 1920. It announced that to elect a representative committee of the Sikh Panth for the management of the Darbar Sahib, and 'all' other Gurdwaras, a great gathering of the Sikh Panth would be held in front of the Akal Takht Sahib on 15 November 1920 at 9 am. For this purpose, all the Sikh Takhts, Gurdwaras, Khalsa bodies, Sikh units in the British army and the state forces should elect their delegates. They should be from amongst the baptised Sikhs who observe the daily discipline and keep the five Ks, and contribute one-tenth of their income (*dasvandh*). The *hukamnama* then spelt out the number of delegates from each category, including the Nihang *jathas*. Every delegate was required to be duly certified by the body he represented. Finally, a note at the end of this document said that efforts were being made to inform the Sikhs everywhere, within and outside the country.⁷³

In its tone, content and language, this *hukamnama* was in marked contrast with the *hukamnama* of 18 March 1887 mentioned before, which had aimed at the preservation of the *status quo* in the interest of the government and its protégés. The *hukamnama* of 13 October 1920 exuded a new confidence and evinced a general keenness to break out of the old mould. It was a forward-looking document, historically placed at the beginning of a significant change. It was no coincidence that in its second session held on 19-20 October, the Central Sikh League passed a resolution in favor of non-cooperation.⁷⁴ Only a month earlier, in September 1920, the Indian National Congress had approved the program of non-cooperation at the instance of Gandhi.⁷⁵

To stall the initiative taken through the *hukamnama*, two days before the proposed meeting of the Sikh Panth on 15-16 November, the government hastened to appoint a managing committee of 36 members with the help of the Maharaja of Patiala. This committee was to look after the Golden Temple and the other affiliated Gurdwaras like those of Tarn Taran and the Nankana Sahib. However, in the general meeting held as

scheduled, a committee of 175 members was formed which tactically included the 36 members of the committee earlier appointed by the government. Its President and Manager, respectively Harbans Singh Atari and Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, carried on the administration till 12 December 1920 when the inaugural meeting of the new body, called the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), was held after scrutinizing the credentials of each member by a committee of five (*panj-piaras*). Sunder Singh Majithia was elected President of the SGPC, with Harbans Singh Atari as Vice-President and Sunder Singh Ramgarhia as Secretary. This apparently was a transitional measure, because Majithia's self-seeking stance could not be acceptable for long.⁷⁶

Early in 1921, a sub-committee framed fresh rules (*dastur-al amal*) of the Harmandir Sahib, replacing those of 1859, and drafted the constitution of the SGPC. Now four-fifths of the 175 members would be elected, and the remaining one-fifth would be nominated by the elected members. The electorate consisted of Sikh men and women in Punjab districts and states, who were not less than 21 years in age, and who observed the Sikh way of life (*rahit*), and paid a fee of four *annas* (a coin equal to one sixteenth of a rupee). Registered on 30 April 1921, the SGPC held its first election under its constitution in July. In August, one-fifth of the members were nominated according to its constitution. On the 27th of August, the following office bearers were elected: President: Kharak Singh; Vice-President: Sunder Singh Ramgarhia; Secretary: Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh who happened to be the Deputy President of the Punjab Legislative Council under the Act of 1919. The new SGPC was a strong body which would not easily fall in line with the government. The SGPC functioned through an elected Executive Committee of 31 members who in turn formed a Working Committee of 7 members, besides the local committees for the Harmandir Sahib and the Tarn Taran and Nankana Sahib Gurdwaras.⁷⁷ For all practical purposes, thus, an elected Sikh body for the management of the historic Gurdwaras had come into existence, albeit at the sufferance of the government. Its legal recognition was still a long way off.

The Akali Jathas

The SGPC's instruments for securing control of the Gurdwaras were the Akali *jathas* coordinated by the Shiromani Akali Dal which was formed on 14 December 1920. According to a Confidential Memorandum of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of 22 February 1922, the 'Akalis'

first made their appearance in the middle of 1920, carrying large *kirpans* and donning dark-blue or black turbans.⁷⁸ Evidently, the observation of the British officialdom regarding 'the sudden appearance of a hitherto dormant passion for gurdwaras reform',⁷⁹ overlooks the persistent efforts of the Singh reformers, often referred to as the 'Tat Khalsa'. They were concerned with the Gurdwaras as the Sikh sacred places which were the property and responsibility of the Sikh Panth. Moreover, the Sikh groups like the Panch Khalsa Diwan and Central Majha Diwan who were determined to suffer hardships for their Gurdwaras, had emerged much before the word 'Akali' appeared on the title page of the newspaper *Akali* in May 1920, and its call subsequently for volunteers to rebuild the wall of the Gurdwara Rakabganj.⁸⁰

The term 'Akali' signified 'high and noble', and someone prepared to make sacrifice for a righteous cause. The conduct of the members of the Central Majha Diwan entrusted with the management of the Akal Takht on 12 October referred to earlier, earned the appreciative epithet 'Akali' for them. This *jatha* under Teja Singh Bhuchar was among the first three such groups to be affiliated to the Shiromani Akali Dal. The other two were the Bar Akali Jatha and the Malwa Khalsa Diwan of Dhuri. In December itself the Akali Jatha Khara Sauda Bar was formed and affiliated. Kartar Singh Jhabbar was chosen as its leader (*jathedar*). The epithet 'Akali' gradually came to be used for all those Sikh individuals and groups who actively supported Panthic control and reform of Gurdwaras, and who were prepared to suffer for the cause.⁸¹ The SGPC insisted on the enlistment of the Sikhs with good character who subscribed to orthodox Sikhism. It may be added that initially the SGPC had to make efforts to tighten the organization and discipline the Akali *jathas*.

After a year, the number of leading Akali *jathas* with membership ranging from 500 to 3000 is reported to be ten. Some of their well-known leaders were Teja Singh Bhuchar, Amar Singh Jhabbal, Piara Singh Langheri, and Kartar Singh Jhabbar.⁸² The estimated number of the Akali volunteers was said to be 25000 or even more. Their ranks were composed of the agriculturists, village artisans and menials, and even educated professionals and traders coming from different caste backgrounds. Much to the government's dismay, there were ex-army men, ex-Ghadarites and the other returned emigrants among them.⁸³ There were no restrictions on the women joining the Akali *jathas*. The government report notices women 'becoming Akalans in increasing numbers', though they mostly

did 'platform speaking and Akali propaganda'.⁸⁴ Significantly, however, they took initiation of the double-edged sword, carried *kirpans*, many with children in their arms, and even took to tying turbans, especially in the Akali *jathas* of the Amritsar, Lahore, Ludhiana, and Ambala districts and the Nabha state.⁸⁵

The Confidential Memorandum yields fascinating insights also into the organization of the Akali *jathas* which linked the Shiromani Akali Dal with the smallest sub *jatha* in a village, with a membership of five. Their enlistment appears to have received impetus in special drives in the wake of the government resistance to the SGPC demand for Gurdwara legislation, or in phases of repression. The apex Akali Dal had a President, a Secretary and an Executive Committee. Its office maintained registers of subordinate *jathas* and deputed them on 'national (*qaumi*) work' under advice from the SGPC. On such occasions, the daily maintenance of the Akali volunteer was paid by the SGPC, while the free rations generally came from the Sikh villagers and religious institutions. Thus, in a way, a large part of the Sikh community got involved directly or indirectly.⁸⁶ The government report reluctantly admits to the mushrooming of *jathas* over the year, and frequency of 'direct action' to gain control over the Gurdwaras, and the Akali movement gaining in vitality'.⁸⁷

Taran Taran, Nankana Sahib and Exploratory Legislation

The Modus Operandi

The 'minimum' demand or the objective of the SGPC, in the words of its Secretary, was:

A Law that would provide for a central, representative and elected body of the Sikhs as the trustee of all historical Gurdwaras, i.e., those connected with the memory of any Sikh Guru, martyr, saint or historical personage. These Gurdwaras are mentioned in authentic Sikh books.

The Secretary also hoped that 'when the main problem of the historical Gurdwaras is solved, there will be no difficulty in improving the condition of other religious institutions'.⁸⁸

The SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal functioned in unison. Subscribing to the doctrine of Guru Panth, they asserted that all historical Gurdwaras belonged to the Sikh Panth and, therefore, the incumbent *mahants* were its servants. Accordingly, only the men of good character could be allowed to remain in charge of a Gurdwara. They were required to maintain regular accounts of the income and expenditure of the Gurdwara and report to the SGPC through the elected local committee. The Akali *jathas* provided the link between the Gurdwaras and the SGPC. Early in 1921, a pattern became evident. The priests of some Gurdwaras, like those of Sheikhupura, Khadur Sahib, Chohla Sahib and Babeksar, willingly signed agreements that they would work under a committee affiliated to the SGPC. Lists of the immovable properties of the Gurdwaras were made out and the *mahants* were required to undertake not to alienate any part of these properties. They would be paid generous salary or maintenance. Furthermore, they could continue only if their conduct remained satisfactory. In situations where the notorious *mahants* tried to resist, the Akalis used 'calm' persuasion and local pressure, and generally succeeded in ousting them, as in the case of Gurdwaras Ker Sahib, Machhike, Naurangabad and Guru-ka-Bagh. The *mahant* refusing to be subject to these conditions, was replaced by his disciple (*chela*) or aide. Reports of the dealings with the *mahants* were sent daily to the SGPC by the Akali Jathedars. Those who went to take over a Gurdwara without authorization from the SGPC, were called off.⁸⁹ It may be relevant to note that in its meeting of 13 December 1920, the SGPC resolved that,

Any *jatha* or *sabha* interested in reforming the management of a Gurdwara in whatever way, must first consult the SGPC and act in the manner suggested by it. Otherwise the Committee would not be responsible for their actions.⁹⁰

The non-violent confrontation of the Akalis with the *mahants* supported and encouraged as they were by the government, came to be called a *morcha* (lit. a battlefront, and commonly an agitation in a political movement). Although the SGPC eventually succeeded in gaining control of 241 Gurdwaras, its endeavors to take over half a dozen well-known institutions of the Sikhs are generally termed *morchas*. Much has been written on these, but what is often overlooked is that *morchas* successively reinforced the position of the SGPC as the representative central body of the Sikhs, and brought it a step closer to its goal of obtaining legislation

for the control of Gurdwaras. In fact, *morchas* and the government response regarding legislation dovetailed, and should be seen in interrelationships. The changing historical context also had a bearing on the attitudes of the government and the SGPC in this prolonged tussle which went on till 1925.

Tarn Taran Gurdwara

The historic Gurdwaras of Nankana Sahib and Tarn Taran going back to the times of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan, were nominally overseen by the manager of the Harmandir Sahib. Both the Gurdwaras had become notorious for their financial mis-management, lawlessness, and unholy and morally deplorable practices.⁹¹ In the meeting of the SGPC held at the Akal Takht on 24 January 1921, when someone narrated the sorry state of affairs at the Gurdwara Tarn Taran, it was immediately decided by a *gurmata* to reform it by 'direct action'. The SGPC tried to dissuade the Akali Jathedars but they refused to be deterred because the *Ardas* to this effect had been offered.⁹² It may be pointed out that the general practice was that once the *Ardas* was performed the Akalis did not hold back.

Fortunately, the eye-witness account of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, who was a highly respected resident of Tarn Taran, throws valuable light not only on local happenings, but also on several larger aspects of the movement. Most of the time he was present within the precincts of the Gurdwara. He says that early in the morning of 26 January 1921, the Akali *jatha* under Teja Singh Bhuchar and Kartar Singh Jhabbar reached Tarn Taran with 40 volunteers. They faced considerable verbal hostility and resistance from about 70-80 *pujaris* and their henchmen. In the words of Bhai Mohan Singh, the Darbar Sahib was like a shop (*hatti*) to them which they treated as their personal property.⁹³ Meanwhile, in view of the resistance of the *pujaris* and *granthis* and collection of weapons and hooligans by them, several respectable people from the town and Amritsar came to persuade the *pujaris* that it was in their best interests to accept the conditions offered by the Jathedar that:

- i) The *granthi* and *pujari* Singhs of the Darbar Sahib Tarn Taran should undertake to subject themselves to the rules of the SGPC for the reform of Gurdwaras.
- ii) For the present, they should agree to accept the guidance of the provisional committee constituted by the local *gur-sangat* (collectivity of believers).

- iii) They should remove the causes of complaint by the local *gursangat*, and not give them further cause for complaint.
- iv) Salaries should be paid to the staff of the Gurdwara.
- v) Five *granthis* should be selected for attendance upon Guru Granth Sahib.

All other decisions were left to the Central Committee, that is the SGPC.⁹⁴

The *granthis* and *pujaris* asked for time till the next morning to deliberate over the propositions. It was getting dark while the reformers waited patiently, anxiously being watched by the local *sangat*. Meanwhile, hoping that the better sense would prevail, the Jathedar Bhuchar asked Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid to prepare a fair draft of the undertaking to be given by the *pujaris*. The latter had barely opened his shop, 15-20 steps away from the Darbar Sahib, when he heard sounds of grenades and mayhem from inside. He rushed to find out that the waiting Akalis were being attacked by battle axes, iron-shods, and other crude weapons. What was remarkable was that in that darkness (the gas lamp had been blown off), the Akalis were shouting and reminding one another that none should lift his hand without the orders of the Jathedar, or that they should 'die rather than kill' (*marna hai maarna nahin*). On hearing the calls of the wounded, the Jathedar then shouted: 'Do not kill. Take hold of yourself, wrest the weapons (*kuhaade, chhavian*), and come out'.⁹⁵ It may, however, be noted that earlier in the day, when faced with the hostile and aggressive *pujaris*, the Jathedar had asked the Akali volunteers to remain steadfast in their faith (*sidak*) and maintain calm (*shanti*).

Seventeen Akalis were injured and hospitalized. Two of them later succumbed to their injuries, giving the first martyrs to the Akali movement. They were Hazara Singh and Hukam Singh in whose memory *akhand path* (unbroken reading of Guru Granth Sahib) and *langar* (community kitchen) were organized twice on a large scale at Tarn Taran, and people came from far and near, says Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid.⁹⁶ Thus, the takeover of the Gurdwara at Tarn Taran gives an idea of the rotten state of affairs in a historic Gurdwara overlooked and abetted by the government, *modus operandi* of the Akalis and the SGPC and the underlying ideology.

Such contentious situations exposed the inefficacy of the government and obliged it to consider a legal remedy, particularly to protect the 'established rights' of the existing incumbents vis-à-vis the reformers. In its communique of 8 February 1921, it expressed readiness to bring a law

in the new Legislative Council (under the Act of 1919) which was due to meet on the 23rd. This intention was reiterated on the 16th with the addition that a committee of enquiry may be appointed to look into the existing management, and devise ways to settle disputes and regulate control of Gurdwaras.⁹⁷ Thus, the takeover of the Tarn Taran Gurdwara became the basis of the exploratory legislation which was expedited by the tragedy at the Nankana Sahib.

Nankana Sahib Gurdwara

The dismal state of affairs at Nankana Sahib elicited serious concern of the SGPC. In its meeting of the 24th January 1921, it had resolved to give one last chance to Mahant Narain Das of Gurdwara Janam Asthan, the most important of the several Gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib. The SGPC proposed to organize a big Panthic *diwan* there on 4-6 March to exert public pressure on the *mahant* to reform. A printed open notice was issued for all classes of Sikhs to come to the *diwan*. The *mahant*, however, was determined not to yield to the SGPC. He started building up support from amongst his fellow *mahants* and the conservative and aristocratic Sikhs like Baba Kartar Singh Bedi, a son of Baba Khem Singh Bedi.⁹⁸ Kartar Singh had already taken a deputation of the *mahants* to the Divisional Commission of Lahore, C.M. King for the protection of 'established rights' over the Gurdwaras. In a letter, subsequently, King had assured him that 'any person who attempts to eject forcibly any Mahant or other persons holding rights in a shrine is liable to punishment under the criminal law'.⁹⁹

Emboldened, thus, by the support of the Administration, Mahant Narain Das had been collecting weapons and taking mercenaries and outlaws into his service. He was planning to eliminate the SGPC leaders by inviting them for talks within the Gurdwara Janam Asthan, sometime during 4-6 March. He felt sure that the government would later give credence to his plea that he was attacked by the Akalis and that he felt obliged to act in self-defense. Meanwhile, early on 20 February, he got the information that a *jatha* under Lachhman Singh of Dharowal was approaching the Gurdwara. There is some difference of opinion with regard to the purpose of the *jatha*. Assuming that the SGPC would not allow them to act, Jhabbar and Dharowalia along with some Akali *jathedars* had secretly planned to thwart the *mahant* by taking over Gurdwara Janam Ashtan.¹⁰⁰ However, some SGPC leaders, including Master Tara Singh, got to know of it and prevailed upon Jhabbar to drop the idea for now and also inform Lachhman Singh.¹⁰¹ The alternative

view is based on the evidence tendered in the court later on that Lachhman Singh and his associates were actually on their way to Chak No. 96 Shankar Sarihn where they had to organize *langar* at the time of a large political *diwan*, to be held on the 23rd. Since their train was at 11:00 am, Lachhman Singh and his associates meanwhile decided to offer prayers at the Gurdwara Janam Asthan.¹⁰²

The *mahant*, at any rate, decided to put to use the preparations intended at the time of the *diwan* on 4-6 March. Lachhman Singh and party, who had got the message not to proceed, chose to at least pay obeisance at the Gurdwara, because an *Ardas* to this effect had already been performed. As soon as they entered, the newly installed iron gate (with holes in it) was shut behind them. They had barely sat in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib and started singing the morning hymn, when the *mahant's* men attacked them viciously, and then burnt them after spraying kerosene. The killing spree went on from 7:30 in the morning to 4:30 in the afternoon. Its information was sent out by six telegrams. The number of those killed according to the government was 130, but it was 195 (plus 5 injured) by other accounts. Some Sikhs were killed outside too.¹⁰³

It is generally believed that the British officers of the area were in the know of the arrangements being made by Mahant Narain Das for the past month and a half to deal with the Akalis who were expected to come for the 'reform' of Gurdwara Janam Asthan. Josh categorically says that Commissioner King and Deputy Commissioner Curry deliberately allowed the massacre to take place, and that they were a party to this conspiracy (*sazish*).¹⁰⁴ This cold-blooded massacre sent shock waves all over. Kartar Singh Jhabbar reached on the day following with 2200 Akalis and took care of the bodies. The local administration had to arrest the perpetrators of violence and formally hand over the management of Gurdwara Janam Asthan to a nine-member committee headed by Harbans Singh Atari, a moderate Sikh, with Sunder Singh Ramgarhia as its Vice-President. The *mahants* of the remaining Gurdwaras in Nankana Sahib surrendered to the SGPC on their own. Several national leaders expressed their horror and sympathies. The program for 4-6 March was postponed to 5 April and a *shahidi diwan* was held at Nankana Sahib on 3 March in which Gandhi also spoke.

However, Gandhi's interest was equally, if not more, in persuading the Sikhs not to cooperate with the government in the court cases against the *mahant* and his accomplices. It may be recalled that the Congress had

formally adopted the program of non-cooperation in December 1920. Gandhi maintained that nothing should be said to the *mahants* until 'our own' government is formed which he hoped would be within a year. He also disapproved of the formation of the Akali *jathas* and takeover of the Gurdwaras for which he recommended arbitration instead. Gandhi's message to the Sikhs on the day following said that 'the murderers are our own people and therefore we should pardon them'.¹⁰⁵ Although he clarified his position later on, Gandhi's stance and suggestions were not appreciated generally by the Sikhs as evident from some newspapers, including the *Tribune* (6 March 1921), the *Khalsa Samachar* (10 March 1921, p. 2) and the *Akali* (12 March 1921, p.3). As a whole, his general attitude and suggestions were considered not in the interest of the Sikhs.¹⁰⁶

The government, at any rate, could not be sympathetic to the cause of the reformers. It encouraged those *mahants* who had voluntarily surrendered to the SGPC to report against the Akali volunteers sent to take charge. Old cases were dug up, and the so-called disputed shrines began to be attached. Serious charges as those of forcible possession and dacoity were brought against the Akali Jathedars Teja Singh Bhuchar and Kartar Singh Jhabbar, and several others. Sardul Singh Caveeshar was also arrested. They were summarily tried and sentenced to varying terms.¹⁰⁷ Such arrests provided another contentious issue for ensuing confrontation with the government. The SGPC insisted on the release of Sikh prisoners as a precondition for all subsequent negotiations with the government.

Exploratory Legislation

The enormity of the Nankana tragedy was nonetheless a blot on the provincial government. It felt obliged to elicit the views of the Sikhs regarding legislation for their Gurdwaras. The SGPC convened a large representative meeting at the Akal Takht on 20 March 1921, and passed several resolutions with particular emphasis on the release of Sikh prisoners and formulation of a law for the control of Gurdwaras, giving 10 April as the deadline to effect these. The SGPC also appointed a sanding committee of 11 Sikhs to work out the details with the government.¹⁰⁸ But the government disregarded the SGPC demand, ignored its standing committee, intensified arrests, and introduced the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill on 5 April 1921 when the SGPC was holding a *diwan* to remember the Nankana martyrs.

The Bill was sorely disappointing in several ways. There was no mention of the SGPC, let alone its recognition as the representative central body of the Sikhs. As a 'temporary and emergent measure', the Bill provided for four commissioners, out of whom three were Sikhs, one to be nominated by the government and two by the Sikh members of the Legislative Council. A non-Sikh, rather European, was to be the fourth commissioner and President. The commissioners were to enquire into the past practices and the rights enjoyed by the *mahants* and others associated with a disputed Gurdwara and make arrangement for service. The disputed institution was required to also pay their remuneration, which would entail an enormous burden.¹⁰⁹ The inclination of the government to retain control, favor the *mahants*, and make the SGPC redundant was patent. The SGPC met on 11 April and declared the Gurdwara Bill entirely unsatisfactory: It had degraded the Sikh Panth, the only legitimate master of the Gurdwaras, and refused to treat the SGPC as its representative.¹¹⁰ Many *mahants* felt encouraged to disregard their undertakings to the SGPC which renewed its efforts to enlist Akalis. The meeting of the Legislative Council scheduled to be held on 9 May to consider the Bill was postponed by the government, obliging the SGPC finally to take to non-cooperation.

The SGPC on Passive Resistance and Non-Cooperation

In the meeting of the SGPC held at the Akal Takht on 10-11 May 1921, the excesses of the government with regard to the Gurdwaras, *kirpans*, black turbans, and miscarriage of justice were cited. Thereafter, it was resolved to safeguard religious freedom (*dharmic azadi*) by resorting to passive resistance (*chup taakra*) and non-cooperation (*na-milvartan*) as spelt out below:

- i) The SGPC should try to retain control of Gurdwaras through passive resistance.
- ii) To ensure the management of the remaining historic Gurdwaras according to the rules (*niyam*) of the Guru Panth and through passive resistance and non-cooperation; it should enlist Akalis and collect funds.
- iii) For the success of Guru Panth, the reading (*path*) of Guru Granth Sahib and prayers be held in the Gurdwaras under the management of the Panth.
- iv) To propagate *swadeshi* (*sudeshi*).

- v) To boycott consumption of liquor.
- vi) To form *panchayats* for resolving disputes. It was emphasized through another resolution on that day that Guru Panth only wishes to exercise its traditional right regarding the appointment, dismissal and transfer of its servants (*sevaks*) in its Gurdwaras.¹¹¹

Significantly, unlike the Gandhian non-cooperation, there was no suggestion for boycott of courts, schools and titles. Also, through an earlier resolution, dated 11 April 1921, the SGPC had advised the Sikhs in civil, police, and military departments that they should not as yet resign from their jobs.¹¹²

As noted earlier, under the revised and regular constitution of the SGPC, elections were held all over the Punjab in July 1921. Its new members were clearly in favor of its program. Under its President, 'Baba' Kharak Singh, the SGPC confirmed the non-cooperation resolution of 11 May and appealed for 5000 Sikh volunteers for joining its struggle for reform. There was also an appeal to the Sikh members to resign from the government councils which, however, was not followed, with the exception of Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh, the Deputy President of the Punjab Legislative Council. Through another resolution, the SGPC expressed its deep appreciation for the sacrifices made by the Sikhs who served jail sentences for religious freedom and reform of Gurdwaras.¹¹³

Evidently, the SGPC stuck to the main issue of the reform and control of Gurdwaras. Its objective was limited and can be called 'constructive', as distinct from political, though it was construed as political by the government. Meanwhile, when the dormant Gurdwara Bill was brought in the Council in September, it was opposed by both the Sikh and Hindu Councillors, the latter because they were sympathetic to the *mahants*. The Bill was withdrawn and eventually dropped in November.¹¹⁴ The government, however, had released the Sikh prisoners (arrested post-Nankana Sahib) in September. The SGPC also postponed consideration of the boycott of the visit of Prince of Wales to November. But, suddenly, 'by a strange freak of unwisdom', the government 'raised a storm of indignation... by snatching away the keys of the Golden Temple'.¹¹⁵

The Golden Temple, Guru-Ka-Bagh and the Gurdwaras Act (1922)

The Keys Affair

The first confrontation between the SGPC and the government has been termed the 'Keys Affair' in contemporary accounts.¹¹⁶ After the democratically elected SGPC was in place at the end of August 1921, its members strongly felt that the keys of the treasury (*tosha-khana*) of the Golden Temple should be with the new President of the SGPC, Kharak Singh. However, the keys were with Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, who had succeeded Arur Singh as the Sarbrah of the Golden Temple. Though an appointee of the government, he subsequently held various positions under the SGPC, as the manager of the Golden Temple, and Secretary and Vice-President of the apex body itself. All along, the keys remained with him. On the other hand, the government had conveyed on different occasions that it had nothing to do with the Golden Temple.¹¹⁷ The SGPC, therefore, decided to end this anomalous situation by asking Sunder Singh Ramgarhia to hand over the keys to its President. Instead, the Deputy Commissioner sent an officer and a police force to the residence of Sunder Singh on 7 November and had the keys collected. This signalled 'the beginning of the first battle', says Master Tara Singh in his memoirs.¹¹⁸

The SGPC deeply resented the high-handed action of the Administration which went back on its earlier announcement of 20 April 1921 that it was withdrawing 'Government interference in the management of the Golden Temple.'¹¹⁹ It now sent a new Sarbrah with the keys which meant continuation of the old arrangement. The keys and the Sarbrah were turned back by the SGPC. In a series of resolutions passed on 11 November 1921, the SGPC spelt out its strategy of protest:¹²⁰

- i) There should be a complete boycott and shutting of shops (*hartal*) when the Prince of Wales lands on Indian soil:
 - a) wherever he goes, the local Khalsa should observe *hartal* (shut shops),
 - b) not participate in any ceremony or program,
 - c) nor make any special arrangements on his visits to any Sikh institution.
- ii) The SGPC will not ask for the keys which should be returned unconditionally to its President or the Secretary.

- iii) Generally, two hundred Akalis, or as many the Executive Committee considers necessary in time of need, should be kept in the Harmandir Sahib.
- iv) If the government or anyone on its behalf, comes to take control, should not be allowed to open locks. The volunteers should resort to *satyagraha* and get arrested, being preferably 'dragged out' of the Harmandir.

As Master Tara Singh puts it, the SGPC created 'a flood of *diwans* and lectures'.¹²¹ The government eventually began organizing its own '*diwans*', but did not allow the SGPC members to speak. When they held their own *diwans*, the Seditious Meetings Act was applied to them. Among 198 persons arrested and convicted were three successive Presidents, four successive Secretaries, and the members of the Executive Committee of the SGPC.¹²² Meanwhile, on 7 November, the SGPC resolved that religious *diwans* should be held in all the districts, especially Amritsar, Lahore, Sheikhpura, and Delhi to educate people regarding the implications of the taking away of the keys of the Golden Temple. It was also resolved that on the martyrdom day of Guru Tegh Bahadur on 4 December, the Sikhs should organize *diwans*, read Guru Granth Sahib and offer prayers for the destruction of the perpetrators of oppression over their faith. Another resolution sought the release of Pandit Dina Nath (a local Congress leader) and the Sikhs arrested on 26 November at Ajnala. On 6 December, it was resolved that no Sikh should enter into any agreement with the government until the release of the arrested persons.¹²³ The *diwans* were extended to the villages as well.¹²⁴

When all its efforts and arguments failed, the government tried to use the descendants of the Sikh Gurus (*gurbans*) against the SGPC, but in the Gurbans Conference held on 1 January 1922, its Executive Committee opposed its pro-government President who had to resign, and resolved to support the SGPC as 'an elected representative body of the Sikh Panth for the management and control of the Darbar Sahib and connected Gurdwaras'. Significantly, expressing 'full confidence in the SGPC', the Gurbans Executive Committee added that the government 'should not interfere in the Sikh religious affairs'.¹²⁵ The unequivocal support of the conservative elements for the SGPC not only enhanced its prestige, it also made the government realize the untenability of its position and futility of further repression. On 11 January 1922, it was suddenly announced in the Legislative Council that the Sikh prisoners would be released

unconditionally. The Deputy Commissioner came to the office of the SGPC to discuss the modalities for handing over the keys. The government released 150 prisoners but not Pandit Dina Nath yet, though it had agreed to release him.¹²⁶

There was a grand reception of the freed Akalis at the Amritsar Railway Station. They moved in a mile-long procession singing hymns. They were followed by the Akali women 'thousands in number, all wearing *kirpans* and moving four-deep in regular detachments'. They were also singing hymns. This was followed by the carriage of the profusely garlanded SGPC leaders. At the Akal Takht, a clerk of the court handed over the bunch of 53 keys in a red velvet pouch to the President of the SGPC, Sardar Kharak Singh, who received it with the permission of the congregation, and with tears in his eyes. And, he was not the only one in tears, so says Teja Singh who was probably present on that occasion.¹²⁷ It was a historic moment for the SGPC and the Sikhs at large which was described by Gandhi as the 'first decisive battle for India's freedom won'.¹²⁸

The most significant outcome of the 'Keys Affair' was that apart from the Sikh people of all classes and the Congress, the government felt obliged to recognize the SGPC as the apex representative body of the Sikhs in religious matters, and also ensured the freedom of *kirpan*.¹²⁹ However, after the sudden withdrawal of non-cooperation on 6 February 1922 by Gandhi, the provincial government considered the Sikhs to be weak now, and unleashed a wave of repression against the Akalis.¹³⁰ While the government avoided alienating the *mahants*, it kept up the stance of considering the Gurdwaras Bill. On 28 March, it wrote to the SGPC to join the deliberations on 5 April.

In its reply on 30 March, the SGPC refused to do so and listed several instances of official high-handedness against the peaceful Sikh men and women, let alone the Akalis. In its view, it was breach of faith by the government when it penalized the ordinary Sikhs for wearing the *kirpan* and black turban and helped some *mahants* to take back the Gurdwaras.¹³¹ The SGPC also expressed its disillusionment over the light punishments given by the High Court in its judgment of 3 March (mentioned earlier) in the Nankana Sahib case and the indifferent attitude of the government towards disrespect of Sikh scripture and symbols.¹³² Therefore, the SGPC appealed to all Sikhs, including those in the Council, to have nothing to do with the Bill while the 'aggressive policy' of the government lasted.

Since the government repression continued unabated, the SGPC felt obliged to declare on 16 July 1922 that:

In view of the attitude of the government over the past year, there is no hope left for the reform of Gurdwaras.... The only recourse left to us is to take the service and management of Gurdwaras in our own hands.... Thus, the General Committee feels constrained to authorize the Executive Committee to do the needful whenever it considers it necessary to bring a Gurdwara under the management of the Panth.¹³³

On 31 July, assuming that it had crushed the Akalis, the government announced in the Council that it had 'abandoned' the Gurdwara Legislation. However, Master Tara Singh thought that the efforts of the government to break the power of the SGPC actually made it stronger. The 'foolishness' of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, J.M. Dunnette led to the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha*.¹³⁴

The Guru-Ka-Bagh

The Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha* has been called 'the highest watermark of the Akali movement'.¹³⁵ Situated at a distance of about 12 miles from Amritsar, the Guru-ka-Bagh had two Gurdwaras, dedicated respectively to Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. Adjacent to the latter Gurdwara was the *mahant's* residence adjoining which was a small garden and about 7 acres of unarable land with a grove of *kikar* (*acacia*) trees. On 31 January 1921, Mahant Sunder Das, had been persuaded by the Akalis to work under a local committee on behalf of the SGPC. After the Nankana tragedy the *mahant* went back to his old ways. The SGPC took the management in its own hands in August 1921. The plot of land which was a property of the Gurdwara became the ostensible cause of dispute in August 1922, that is a year later. The attendants (*sevadars*) on behalf of the SGPC used to cut dry wood for the *langar* from the adjoining plot and store it. Suddenly, on 8 August, five *sevadars* were arrested by Beaty, the Additional Superintendent of Police, Amritsar. On the day following, they were tried summarily, convicted, fined and imprisoned for six months. The charge was theft of a dry *kikar* tree (as fuel for *langar*) from the land of the *mahant*. Interestingly, a complaint to this effect was subsequently procured from Mahant Sunder Das by the Deputy Commissioner

Dunnette, whereas the plot of land was already entered in the local records as the property of the Gurdwara!¹³⁶

The official challenge was spiritedly met by the SGPC and the Akalis who deemed it an attack on their religious right. Ruchi Ram Sahni, a close observer of this 'campaign of repression', dwells at length on the effective leadership, efficient organization and outreach of the SGPC, despite the successive arrests of its top leadership and strict blockade by the government. He underlines the religious fervor and the steadfast adherence of the Akali *jathas* to the vow of non-violence taken at the Akal Takht, their merciless beating by the police, and the sympathy and material and medical support of all sections of local people for the Akalis. Boy scouts helped with the ambulances made of lorries. Women supported the Akali *jathas* by providing water and refreshments, and by nursing their injuries in the three makeshift but efficiently managed hospitals of the SGPC by volunteer doctors from within and outside Punjab. Women were also present in large numbers among the onlookers, with compassion writ on their faces. Several national leaders of different shades and journalists of regional and national papers came to witness the non-violent passive resistance of the Akalis at the Guru-ka-Bagh who successively faced forced dispersal, arrests, merciless beatings, and arrests again. This went on for three months.¹³⁷

Significantly, one out of three agitators had been in the British Indian Army, according to C.F. Andrews, the Anglican missionary and educationist who visited the scene and sent appreciative reports about the *morcha*, calling it 'a new lesson in moral warfare'.¹³⁸ The government felt unnerved when two *jathas* entirely composed of the military pensioners came in November. A retired government engineer and philanthropist, Sir Ganga Ram, was persuaded to take the '*mahant's* land' on lease and allow the Akalis to cut wood for the Gurdwara. The SGPC maintained that the *mahant* had 'no right to lease the land' which was done to get the government 'out of an awkward position'. The SGPC Communique of 18 November stated that 5605 Sikhs courted arrest in this *morcha*, while 1500 Akalis were subjected to beating.¹³⁹

Master Tara Singh, who was jailed in the course of this *morcha*, recalled that it electrified the country which had been passing through despondency after the withdrawal of non-cooperation. People were amazed over the resistance of the SGPC and resilience of the Akalis.¹⁴⁰ As Grewal puts it, 'never before or after were the Sikhs in such a high spirit as now'.¹⁴¹ Master Tara Singh also observes that with the exception of a

few loyalists, the entire Sikh Panth was one with the Akalis. Furthermore, 'the order of the Shiromani Committee was followed like the Guru's order'¹⁴²

The Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Act (1922)

When the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha* was at its peak, the government introduced the Gurdwaras Bill in the Legislative Council on 7 November 1922. The new Bill was as ill-timed as the April Bill was from the view point of the SGPC which first wanted the resolution of the Guru-ka-Bagh issue and the release of the arrested Sikhs. However, the government went ahead with the Bill because of its propaganda value and the hope that it would appease the Sikhs in the army. Despite the opposition of a cross-section of the Councillors, including the Sikhs, the Bill was rushed through with official support, making it the first Act on the Sikh Gurdwaras.

This Act provided for three Sikh commissioners, one each nominated by the government, Sikh Councillors, and the SGPC. Their term was two or four years and they would collect materials regarding the disputed shrines. There was provision for local committees. Thus, it was intended to be a temporary measure and the control remained with the government. Decentralization was inbuilt and also a potential for accommodation of the *mahants*.¹⁴³ At the same time, this Act gave statutory recognition to the SGPC as a representative body of the Sikhs. But it did not satisfy the SGPC. In its general meeting on 9-10 January 1923, it appealed to all Sikhs not to associate with the Gurdwaras Act which was actually an effort to destroy Gurdwara reform. Its acceptance would be tantamount to selling the religious and fundamental rights of the Panth.¹⁴⁴

Eventually, the government felt obliged to release the Akali prisoners to emphasize their distinction from the militant Babbar Akalis. The ostensible grounds were the help extended by 1600 Sikhs during the Hindu-Muslim riots in Amritsar in April 1923.¹⁴⁵

Jaito and Negotiations for Legislation

Between March and May 1923, most of the arrested members of the SGPC and the Akali Dal had been released and the prestige of the SGPC was at its height. It decided to take up the long pending task of the cleaning of the sacred tank (*kar-seva*) of the Harmandir. On 17 June, people from far and near, men and women of all classes, came to participate. Master Tara Singh

recalled that he had neither seen nor known in history of such a huge gathering with such religious fervor.¹⁴⁶ However, the objective with which the SGPC was formed had only been partially realized. The two previous confrontations with the government had not yielded any satisfactory result in terms of Gurdwara legislation. A yet another confrontation took place at Jaito in the princely state of Nabha.

The Jaito Morcha (1923-25)

The occasion was provided by the removal of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha 'under duress' on 8 July 1923.¹⁴⁷ He was a devout Sikh and a highly respected Sikh ruler, and as noted earlier, had been instrumental in the removal of idols from the Darbar Sahib in 1905. He had been supporting Panthic activities and nationalist causes. His stance of independence in his dealings with the government was an exception among the Indian rulers.¹⁴⁸ On the day following, the Shiromani Akali Dal issued a communique demanding the Maharaja's restoration, and fixed 29 July as the day of prayer for this purpose. Bare-foot marches in protest were fixed for 9 September, termed as the Nabha Day. The SGPC, however, moved somewhat cautiously and first issued a communique on 10 July that abdication was forced; then, through a telegram on 2 August appealed to the Viceroy for an independent enquiry. When there was no response, on 5 August the SGPC authorized its Executive Committee to peacefully pursue the matter using all legitimate means.¹⁴⁹

The government had in fact been hoping to teach a lesson to the Akalis by forcing a show down in Nabha. The administration of the state was placed under a former Chief Secretary of the Punjab, Wilson-Johnston, with full backing from the Viceroy and the Punjab Government. He could use force with ease within the territory of the state, and away largely from the critical gaze of the political leaders and press of British India. Political meetings (*diwans*) within the Nabha territory were prohibited, but the local Akalis continued to hold meetings to protest against their Maharaja's ouster, even appealing to the SGPC for help. A procession taken out on 25 August 1923 at Jaito in the Nabha territory was followed by a *diwan* at the local Gurdwara Gangsar. On its third day, the *diwan* passed resolutions in support of the Maharaja and against the state police. This led to several arrests and the *diwan* was extended indefinitely, until the state forces left the place.¹⁵⁰

In this backdrop, on 4 September, the Executive Committee of the SGPC took charge of the agitation at Jaito. The Nabha Day was solemnly

observed all over the Punjab on 9 September. This synchronized with the publication of the *Truth About Nabha* to which a reference has been made earlier. So far the emphasis was on the unjust removal of the Maharaja to undermine 'the Sikh Panthic organization... essential for the Religious Reform movement'.¹⁵¹

How did it get transformed into an unprecedented religious protest? On 11 September, a *jatha* of 110 Akalis left for Jaito after taking the pledge of remaining peaceful. On 14 September, another *jatha* of 102 volunteers reached Jaito. While they organized a *diwan* outside Gurdwara Gangsar and gave speeches for the restoration of the Maharaja, the *akhand path* (continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib) was held inside the Gurdwara. The state police under the Assistant Administrator of Nabha, Gurdial Singh, came there and arrested 30 leading Akalis from outside and as many from within the Gurdwara, along with the reader of the scripture (*pathi*) who was 'dragged away'.¹⁵²

The disruption of the *akhandpath* was unmistakably a religious issue which helped the SGPC chart its course more effectively. In its general meeting on 29 September, the SGPC condemned this sacrilege strongly and resolved to take it as a challenge to the Sikh Panth from the Government of India (princely states were under the control of the Viceroy). The SGPC decided to 'use all legitimate and peaceful means' for restoring the honor of Guru Granth Sahib and safeguarding the rights of the Sikhs.¹⁵³ The strongly worded decisions of the SGPC indicated that the mood was upbeat and the resolve was strong.

On 12 October 1923, the government declared the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal as 'unlawful associations' and arrested their leaders. Significantly, the SGPC had been anticipating this for some time. Moreover, its experience of the two previous *morchas* had prepared it for such an eventuality. In its general meeting of 6 August 1923, it had resolved that in the likely event of their arrest, the members or office-bearers should choose their substitutes beforehand. A later resolution of 4 November 1923 reinforced continuity of policy as well, saying that in such situations, the new incumbents would continue on the footsteps of the arrested members.¹⁵⁴

In fact, since 15 September, the *jathas* of 25 men had been going daily on foot from the Akal Takht to Jaito. This went on for about seven months. In September itself, Jawaharlal Nehru came to Nabha with two of his Congress colleagues, A.T. Gidwani and K. Santanam, to witness the unique resistance of the Akalis, and the Congressmen were arrested by the

Nabha authorities, though released after some time.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, the Administrator of Nabha, Wilson-Johnston, tried to crush and demoralize the Akalis after they reached the outskirts of Jairo. 'They were subjected to brutal assaults, merciless beatings, and fatal starvation, besides being exposed to freezing cold at night'.¹⁵⁶ In the summer months they were made to stand on the burning sand. Many were sent away to the desolate Nabha territories some 200-300 miles away, with no means to return. Vaid Amar Singh 'Tegh', then a young Akali volunteer, who survived the inhuman treatment in jail, provides an inside view of the makeshift jails of Nabha. His account also appends long lists of those Sikhs who either died in these jails, or were exiled.¹⁵⁷ It may be added that several committed people like 'Tegh' and his associates chose to return to Jaito because their vow taken before the Akal Takht had not yet been fulfilled.

In early 1924, there was a significant change in the stance and strategy of the SGPC. When the police came to arrest its members from the Akal Takht on 7 January, the SGPC first completed the meeting and duly authorized the Executive Committee to find ways of fulfilling the vow of the Sikh Panth to hold 101 *akhand paths* at Jaito as atonement. By another resolution, the Executive Committee was instructed to continue with the program chalked out by its predecessors now in jail.¹⁵⁸

The Executive Committee decided to send a large group of martyrs (*shahidi jatha*) to Jaito on 21 February, that is on the third anniversary of the taking over of Nankana Sahib albeit at a huge cost. On 9 February, a *jatha* of 500 volunteers was sent off by the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, exhorting them to remain non-violent and peaceful in pursuing their goal of re-establishing the right of freedom of worship. Passing through the British territory, the *jatha* was cheered and feted. Close to Jaito, it was joined by big crowds, also including some journalists and members of the Congress. The government, on the other hand, expected violence and gave full backing to Wilson-Johnston to open fire if attacked. The eye-witnesses confirmed that the *jatha* remained completely non-violent and no one was carrying a firearm. But it was fired upon twice, causing 300 casualties, with 70 to 150 persons dead, according to the SGPC communique. The government arrested, tried and convicted the leaders of this so-called attack. However, there is sufficient non-partisan eye-witness evidence about the 'peaceful conduct' of the *jatha*.¹⁵⁹

The *shahidi jathas* continued to be sent well into 1925, despite the express disapproval of Gandhi and the reservations of some members of the SGPC. Giani Pratap Singh, who was an eye-witness and also a

participant, lists 17 *shahidi jathas* between February 1924 and July 1925. They generally started from the Akal Takht (two from the Gurdwara Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur) and had 500 members. The *jatha* carried Guru Granth Sahib in a palanquin, accompanied by the *nishan sahib* (Sikh flag) and a band. The *jatha* walked on foot and its route was carefully charted out by the SGPC. Some *jathas* were made to take a long detour, and were even split into two groups which covered different areas and converged later. On the way, they did *prachar* (propagation) and *amrit sanchar* (initiation as the Khalsa). They received enthusiastic response from a cross-section of people in urban and rural areas who provided food and facilities for stay. Sometimes, their steady march in disciplined columns of four was marred by the obstructions and problems created by the loyalists and petty government functionaries. There were instances of clashes, arrests, and at one place even poisoning of food to be served to the *jatha*. Sometimes, the government informers joined a *jatha* to undermine its leaders later on. On reaching Jaito, the *jatha* was arrested, beaten up, tried, convicted, and often sent to the Nabha jungles. In between, came some special small *jathas* from the SGPC, Bengal, and Vancouver (Canada). The *jathas* from Shanghai and Hong Kong reached Jaito after an understanding between the government and the SGPC had been arrived at regarding the Gurdwaras Act.¹⁶⁰

Negotiations for Gurdwaras Legislation

After the first *shahidi jatha*, active thinking about legislation as the only solution had started at several levels. In less than a week, on 25 February 1924, the Legislative Assembly recommended to the Governor General to have the 'causes of discontent' among the Sikhs looked into by a specially appointed committee.¹⁶¹ The government was also feeling concerned about the Sikh element in the army getting restive. Even some members of the bureaucracy favored legislation. A British civilian writing under the pseudonym of 'Komma' had already recommended that the government should isolate the extremists among the Sikh reformers by appeasing the moderates through a law to meet their reasonable demands.¹⁶² On their part, the Sikh leaders too were becoming anxious about maintaining the momentum of their movement and enthusiasm of the people. Thus, both sides seemed to be keen on a dignified way out of the impasse.

Sir William Birdwood, the Commander-in-Chief, was entrusted with the task of arriving at an amicable solution of the issue of Gurdwara legislation on the assumption that he had a good rapport with the Sikhs as

soldiers. It may be recalled that the idea of a Central Board had been conceded in the first Gurdwaras Act (1922). Now, from the view point of the SGPC, essentially three issues required attention before paving the way for legislation: i) resumption of and completion of 101 *akhand paths* at Jaito, ii) restoration of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, and iii) release of all prisoners and withdrawal of cases against them.¹⁶³

As the Home Member in the Viceroy's Council, Sir Malcolm Hailey facilitated negotiations with the Sikh leaders both inside and outside the jails, taking help from the Sikh members of the Punjab Council. Professor Jodh Singh, a moderate and strong advocate of good relations between the Sikhs and the government, probably rendered maximum help in persuading the Akali leaders who had been staunch supporters of the Maharaja's restoration. They were now willing to separate this issue from legislation if 101 *akhand paths* could be completed unconditionally. However, they insisted on the release of Sikh prisoners and also of those on trial. As mentioned earlier, this had been a sensitive issue with the SGPC since the beginning of its movement for the control of historic Gurdwaras. The SGPC maintained that its volunteers had throughout been non-violent, whereas Birdwood accepted the government enquiry which claimed that the first *shahidi jatha* was armed, and that it fired first. Hence, for him, there was no question of releasing the prisoners whom he called 'criminals'. The SGPC regarded this attitude as against its honor and dignity, and communicated this by its letter of 18 May. As evident from the confidential correspondence related to the Birdwood negotiations, there were mental reservations and suspicions on both sides.¹⁶⁴ The Birdwood negotiations ceased in May, but were officially closed on 3 June by Hailey, now the new Governor of the Punjab. However, these negotiations did indicate 'the lines along which a settlement could be explored'.¹⁶⁵

Towards the Gurdwaras Act

When Hailey took over, the *shahidi jathas* were still going to Jaito, and two *jathas* were in jail. He was a shrewd and strong administrator. He began by repression of the Sikhs sympathetic to the SGPC, and their maltreatment in jails. His idea was to tire out the SGPC. He encouraged the moderate Sikhs to neutralize the hardliners, and persuaded the Hindus and Muslims to move away from the SGPC. To separate the religious issue from the political (that of restoration of the Maharaja) and to weaken the SGPC, he organized reform (*sudhar*) committees of loyalists at district

level, and a central Sudhar Committee at the provincial level at Amritsar. He encouraged the loyalists to openly oppose the SGPC and even asked the provincial committee to come up with a Gurdwara Bill. In fact, on 20 October 1924, a 100-member group of the Sudhar Committee was facilitated to go to Jaito, start the *akhand path* with a fanfare, and return after three days.¹⁶⁶

Notwithstanding his strong dislike for the SGPC, Hailey had to drop his rigidity. The nationalist leaders of all India stature, like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Chitranjan Das, and Saifuddin Kitchlew came forward to help the Sikh cause. Malaviya was prepared to introduce an All India Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council, and he even considered introducing one in the provincial council in consultation with the SGPC and with the support of Hindu members. Some ground had been prepared also by 7 Akali leaders in the Lahore Fort Jail who wrote to open negotiations.¹⁶⁷ Fresh negotiations with the Akalis started on 29 November 1924. A committee of 5 Sikh Councillors (Narain Singh Pleader, Tara Singh Moga, Gurbakhsh Singh Pleader, Mangal Singh Mankotshera, and Professor Jodh Singh) was to conduct negotiations. They had participated also in the Birdwood negotiations. Professor Jodh Singh again played an important role in mediating between the Sikh leaders both inside and outside the jail and the government. Since the Akali leaders in jail could not come to an agreement, 24 (actually 25, but Master Tara Singh did not sign) of them wrote to authorize the Secretary of the SGPC to act as deemed appropriate.¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the draft of the Gurdwaras Bill was prepared in October-November, discussed in November-December, and published in January 1925. Hailey had been keen on decentralization but gave in, because the SGPC insisted on centralization. However, he refused to change the name of the Central Board to that of the SGPC. Eventually, Professor Jodh Singh's plea worked that it would in the long run be easier for the new body to simply take over the assets of the present SGPC. The government finally agreed that the name could be changed by the new elected body, with three-fifths majority.¹⁶⁹

On 27 April 1925, the general meeting of the SGPC at the Akal Takht broadly supported the Bill and noted that it met many of its requirements for the reform of Gurdwaras. Some of its specific suggestions were: i) the Akal Takht and Gurdwara Kesgarh (Anandpur Sahib) should be under the management of the SGPC, ii) both women and men should have the right to vote in Gurdwara elections, and iii) the income of the Gurdwaras should

be spent on religious, educational, and charitable purposes.¹⁷⁰ In other words, the draft stood approved by the SGPC.

On 7 May 1925, the Bill was presented to the Punjab Legislative Council by Tara Singh, the Councillor from Moga, and was unanimously passed on 7 July in a specially convened session of the Council at Shimla. It was supported by Hindu members on Malaviya's advice and Muslim members at the government's behest. After the assent of the Governor General, it became law on 29 July, and came into force with the Gazette Notification on 1 November as the Sikh Gurdwaras Act VIII of 1925.

Already, through the intercession of the Sikh Councillors, the Nabha Administrator had allowed a special *jatha* to start the *akhand path* at Jaito on 21 July 1925, and also released most of the prisoners from various jails of Nabha. More *jathas* arrived and, together, they completed 101 *akhand paths* on 6 August.¹⁷¹ Thus, was set right the crux of the Jaito issue: 'invasion' of 'the right of free congregation and free worship'.¹⁷²

The Gurdwara Elections

In the elections held on 18 June 1926 under the Gurdwaras Act, the Akali Party (formed by the so-called extremist elements who had been opposed to conditional release from jail), won 85 seats against 26 going to the moderate Sikhs led by Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh who was among the 23 Akali prisoners who had given an undertaking to secure release from jail.¹⁷³ On 4 September, the Akali Party had Mangal Singh elected as the President to oversee the addition of the nominated members under the Act. Finally, on 13 September, Malcolm Hailey felt obliged to withdraw the government order of 12 October 1923 which had declared the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal as 'unlawful associations'.¹⁷⁴

The Board held its first regular meeting on 2 October 1926, and elected its office-bearers: 'Baba' Kharak Singh (in jail) as President and Master Tara Singh (who came in as a nominated member) as Vice-President. The latter now presided over the meeting in place of Kharak Singh. Through a unanimous resolution, the Board renamed itself as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). At the start, however, the Board had passed a condolence resolution over the untimely death of Teja Singh Samundari (a veteran leader and also the President of the SGPC during the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha*) in the Lahore Fort Jail on 18 July 1926. The third resolution related to the release of the Sikh prisoners and compensation for losses incurred by the Sikhs in the course of the movement for the reform of their Gurdwaras. Another resolution related

to the abiding concerns of the SGPC with the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script. The SGPC had been using it for its office work and publications, and it now demanded that Punjabi should be the medium of instructions in government schools. On the day following, the elections to the local committees of the major Gurdwaras were held, and most of their presidents too were elected from the Akali Party.¹⁷⁵ Thus concluded the movement for the reform and control of Gurdwaras. Historically and ideologically, however, its roots went deeper than the formation of the SGPC and the emergence of the Akali *jathas*.

In Retrospect

The Movement

The SGPC secured control of 241 historic Gurdwaras under the Act of 1925.¹⁷⁶ This legislation was wrested from the government at a huge human and material cost. According to one estimate, 400 persons lost their life, 2000 were wounded, and 30,000 were arrested. Fines and forfeiture of pensions and *jagirs* of retired soldiers amounted to 1,500,000 rupees.¹⁷⁷ The Sikhs in government service were also penalized and their losses and those of the pro-Akali papers, their editors and printers, too were immense.¹⁷⁸ The largest number of those who suffered came from rural areas. A British officer calls the 'Akali campaign essentially a rural movement'.¹⁷⁹ The SGPC, however, came to be acknowledged as the representative body of the Sikhs of all classes and categories: the loyalists and the rebels, conservatives and the radicals, the rich and the poor, urban and the rural, educated and the uneducated, and the men and women of all classes.

The prolonged agitation of the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal and the eventual realization of their goal of the Gurdwaras legislation eroded the prestige and fear of the government. The handling of the sensitive issues like the reform of the Nankana Sahib Gurdwara and the keys of the Golden Temple, and the disruption of the *akhand path* at Jaito, besides a seemingly trivial matter like chopping of a dry *kikar* tree from the Guru-ka-Bagh reflect ignorance, insensitivity and brashness of the British officers on the spot. Its Confidential Memorandum indicates that the Punjab Government was unable to understand the ideology that motivated the Sikhs.¹⁸⁰ Master Tara Singh and Sohan Singh Josh think that but for the 'foolishness', especially of King, Curry, Dunnette, Beaty, and Wilson-Johnston, the Gurdwara issue could have been resolved sooner.¹⁸¹

The exceptional organization and planning of the SGPC leaders during the *morchas*, their dissemination of news, and continuity of action despite arrests, were grudgingly considered 'remarkable' by all. In their functioning, the Sikhs are said to have followed 'the methods of Europeans'. During the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha*, their office was 'at work almost all day and night'.¹⁸² The Akali *jathas* at the village, *zail*, *tehsil* and district levels were coordinated by the Shiromani Akali Dal which acted under the overall guidance and control of the SGPC.¹⁸³ While using on foot marches of the *jathas* to a great tactical advantage, the SGPC made effective use also of the new means of transportation and communication like the road and rail network, motors, lorries, newspapers, printing press, and the telegraph. This movement elicited appreciative responses from all over India and also across the seas. For some years, it remained the only symbol of active resistance against colonial rule at the provincial and all India level. In fact, the Akali resistance was a 'unique' phenomenon in Indian history, and in some aspects also in world history, according to Ruchi Ram Sahni.

It may be noted that thousands of Sikh women came out of their homes to participate in the Akali movement in different ways. Some offered their names even for the *shahidi jatha* announced for the Gurdwara Rakabganj; hundreds participated in the *kar-seva* of the sacred tank at Amritsar; and 'thousands' attended religious *diwans*, joined protest meetings, addressed gatherings, passed resolutions, and sang hymns as members of the procession taken out at the end of the Keys *morcha*. They helped the Akali volunteers at the time of the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha* by providing water, food, and compassionate care. They provided food and care also to those going to Jaito. On all occasions, they were present in large numbers among the sympathetic onlookers. Some of them even composed heroic poetry. Thus, before the passage of the Gurdwaras Act, they had entered Sikh public life in a conspicuous way. Much against the wishes of the bureaucracy, the Sikh women were the first in India to get both the right to vote and to stand for the Gurdwara elections.

It is generally overlooked that the predecessors of the Akalis and the SGPC were the Lahore Singh Sabha (1879) and the Lahore Khalsa Diwan (1886) which upheld the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth, and effectively raised the issue of the mismanagement of the Harmandir Sahib. At that time, the British believed that controlling the premier religious institution of the Sikhs would be helpful in controlling the community of believers. The initial efforts of the Lahore group were

therefore directed at the purge of the un-Sikh elements and corruption from the Darbar Sahib, which gradually extended to the other Gurdwaras associated with the Gurus and the martyrs, and finally to the ouster of the *mahants*. The number of the Sikhs becoming aware of the unholy state of affairs in their Gurdwaras was growing steadily through the 1890s to the 1910s. The newspapers like the *Khalsa Akhbar* and the *Panth Sevak* added to their awareness and gave voice to their concerns. The demolition of the wall of the Gurdwara Rakabganj provoked widespread protests in 1914. The process of freeing the Gurdwara Babe-di-Ber at Sialkot reflects the general pattern of the efforts made by the local people in conjunction with the reformers (later called the Akalis), culminating in the takeover of the Gurdwara in October 1918, notwithstanding the obstructions created by the local administration. In fact, Babe-di-Ber bridged the early and later phases of the Panthic concern for improving the functioning and management of the Gurdwaras.

In May 1920, the paper *Akali* summed up the expanding concerns of the Sikhs and their deepening disillusionment with the government in the post-world war I context. Significantly, the paper also suggested an immediate course of action. The *Akali* was later subsumed by the *Akali te Pardesi* edited by Master Tara Singh, which continued to educate and guide the Sikhs in the course of their struggle.¹⁸⁴ When it became clear that the government and its judicial system were supporting and even encouraging the *mahants* and *pujaris* to defy the advocates of reform, the latter took over the Akal Takht and then the Harmandir Sahib, and formed the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal. When it became evident that the government was not keen on providing legal recognition to the SGPC as a central representative body of the Sikhs for managing their historic Gurdwaras, the SGPC joined the non-cooperation movement of the Congress. Thus, the movement for religious reform seemed to acquire political undertones.

Ideological Underpinnings

Ideologically, however, there were significant differences between the two movements which are best reflected in the correspondence between Gandhi and the Secretary of the SGPC in March-April 1924, that is in the backdrop of the *shahidi jathas* going to Jaito. In his letter dated 4 March, Gandhi suggested that instead of a large body of men, only 'one or at the most two men' may be deputed to assert the right to hold the *akhand path*, because non-violence necessitated 'not the slightest show of force'. In his

view, it is an act of 'passive violence' if the *jatha* disobeys the order to leave the boundary of Nabha state and presents 'a solid living wall to the state soldiery'. Gandhi recommended 'meek suffering' which he said was 'bound to melt the strongest heart'.¹⁸⁵

In his reply, dated 20 April, the Secretary, however, was categorical that the movement led by the SGPC was 'purely religious' and '*satyagraha*' for it was 'non-violent suffering'. The preference of the SGPC was for small *jathas* but in case of Jaito, the SGPC felt compelled to send large *shahidi jathas* because the government was totally unresponsive to the *jathas* of 25 sent daily for over six months. Here, the religious rights of free congregation and free worship had been violated which indeed was a grave matter. Because the fight was for 'the most precious right of religious liberty', passive resistance required greater suffering. The Secretary explained that the *jathas* are to endure suffering cheerfully and prayerfully, without retaliation, knowing that it may result in 'imprisonment, fines, beating or death'. In fact, increase in the number of sufferers is to make 'our intense suffering *vaster*', because they represent the institution of *sangat* in Sikhism, which is more than a congregation. It is believed to be 'the Guru incorporate' from the time of Guru Nanak onwards.¹⁸⁶ That passive resistance of the non-violent Akali *jathas* was essentially different from Gandhi's idea of 'a non-violent *satyagraha*', is put succinctly by Grewal:

The Sikhs had been compelled to adopt the way of suffering taught by their Gurus. Their idea was to disobey certain official orders pertaining to the gurdwaras and, thus, to invite suffering on themselves, remaining perfectly non-violent.¹⁸⁷

In fact, the two movements were on different wave lengths. This is evident also from the Secretary's response to Gandhi's accusation that in violation of the program of non-cooperation the Sikh leaders were having recourse to courts. The Secretary clarified that the SGPC had 'never adopted any resolution of the boycott of courts', and that it had gone to courts when 'advisable' and only in defence. Rather, 'our very demand for a Gurdwara law shows that if such a law is given to us we must use the courts'. At any rate, many of the SGPC leaders and 'thousands of other Akalis' did not offer any defence when put in jails.¹⁸⁸ Significantly, rooted as it was in Sikh history and ideology, their

movement continued for nearly 3½ years after the withdrawal of non-cooperation.

The spirit of self-sacrifice evinced by the Sikhs is traced back to the well-known composition of Guru Nanak: 'If you aspire to play the game of love, enter my lane with your head on the palm of your hand. Unhesitatingly, give your head if you set your foot on the path'.¹⁸⁹ Continuing on this path, Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur deliberately and fearlessly chose martyrdom for upholding their convictions. At the time of the creation of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh's call for sacrifice for righteousness, love and truth was a continuation of this tradition. The eighteenth-century history of the Sikhs is studded with the names of well-known martyrs for faith and righteousness, beginning with the sons of the tenth Guru (Sahibzadas), 'Forty Mukte', Banda Singh and his over 700 companions, and the individuals like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh and many others. In the words of Grewal, several features of Sikh ideology 'converge on the ideal of sacrificing one's life for upholding the tradition promulgated by Guru Nanak'.¹⁹⁰

Turning to the Akali movement, it is not surprising to find the fearlessness, passive resistance and self-sacrifice integral to the Sikh ideology coming to the fore under a regime hostile to the sanctity of the Gurdwaras (Guru Granth) and to the right of the collectivity to manage these (Guru Panth). The Akalis had prayers on their lips when they received *lathi* blows of the police and inhuman treatment of the jailors without retaliation. C.F. Andrews unequivocally attributed their capacity for self-sacrifice to 'their religion', which was 'an act of sacrifice to God', and which to them was 'a real martyrdom'.¹⁹¹ It was due to the pull of their religious ideology that many Sikh ex-army men were drawn to the Akali movement at the peril of their lives, liberties, and pensions.¹⁹²

This movement for Gurdwaras legislation effectively integrated Guru Granth Sahib and the *Ardas* with *akhand path*, *sangat*, religious *diwans*, *kirtan*, *langar*, *seva*, *kar-seva*, *kirpan* and the turban. The martyrdom day of Guru Arjan in 1914 and 1920 and that of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1922 were used to motivate and mobilize people. Religious symbolism, thus, united the Sikhs, gave them moral strength, and enabled them to bond with the Sikhs outside. The deep emotional involvement of the Akalis in particular and the Sikhs in general is evident also from a surge of religious and heroic Punjabi poetry, invoking Sikh religion and history, and their tradition of martyrdom. Such poetry became a regular

feature of the Gurmukhi papers in those days. Stirring poems were recited before a *jatha* started from the Akal Takht.¹⁹³ All along, the underlying assumption was of the distinctiveness of Sikh faith and of the identity based on it which, incidentally, many contemporaries like Gandhi could not understand.¹⁹⁴

The Afterward (1926-47)

The Act of 1925 turned out to be essentially a compromise which put several kinds of constraints on the SGPC. The SGPC had to get the anomalies removed through successive amendments which were capped by the Gurdwara Amendment Act XI of 1944. It may be added that Master Tara Singh remained the most prominent leaders of the SGPC during the two decades since 1926.¹⁹⁵

The structure provided by the Act of 1925 created a central body called the Board (henceforth the SGPC), a Tribunal called the Judicial Commission, and local committees for the control and management of the Gurdwaras for a term of 3 years. The SGPC had a President, a Vice-President, and an Executive Committee. In addition to 150 members (120 of whom were elected), the ex-officio members included the Head Granthi of the Darbar Sahib and the Jathedars of the Akal Takht Sahib, Takht Kesgarh Sahib, Takht Patna Sahib, and Takht Hazur Sahib, Nanded. The Sikh states nominated 12 members, and 14 members were residents of India. The Tribunal was the second agency of control with three members. Its President was a Judge of the High Court, and it was to function as a regular court to decide whether or not a particular Gurdwara was a 'Sikh Gurdwara'. Locally, the Gurdwaras were to be administered by committees, with the nominee of the SGPC on each committee, and placed directly under the President of the SGPC. The committee of every notified Gurdwara was expected to pay about one-tenth of its income, called *dasvandh*, to the SGPC.¹⁹⁶

In its early years, the SGPC faced several challenges related to the Gurdwaras, their names, revenue estates, vested interests, and above all, the definition of a 'Sikh'. Through a set of amendments in 1930 some of these problems were taken care of. Thus, a Sikh had to affirm that he believed in Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus, and in no other religion. Among other things, the Amendment of 1938 provided for defraying the

expenses of the Judicial Commission by the provincial government and the SGPC in the proportion of one-third and two-third, respectively.¹⁹⁷

The SGPC constituted special committees/sub-committees for religious propagation (*dharam parchar*), determination of traditional practices (*rahureet*), and for advice (*salah*) in religious matters from time to time. The Dharmak Salahkar Committee constituted in 1934 had 16 sittings from February 1934 to March 1946, and gave crucial advice on all issues related to the Sikh beliefs and practices, which got incorporated in the final version of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* published by the SGPC after Independence.¹⁹⁸

A significant feature of the working of the SGPC was the increasing importance given to the Jathedar of the Akal Takht without making any amendment in the Act. Like the other Jathedars, he was an ex-officio member of the SGPC, but in Sikh imagination he was a representative of the entire Panth. Gradually, the SGPC exalted his status and importance. In 1928 it was decided that since the Akal Takht and the Harmandir Sahib had much work in common, the latter's committee may serve as the sub-committee of the Akal Takht for general supervision. Rules for the management of the Akal Takht were framed. In 1932, the salary of the Jathedar was fixed at rupees 75 per month. At that time, Gurmukh Singh Musafir was the Jathedar. He resigned from his position but served without pay for the remaining months of his tenure. Subsequently, it was clarified that payment of salary did not involve any reflection on the position of the Jathedar. However, all other things being equal, a person who was prepared to work without salary was preferable. On 21 February 1939, Bhai Mohan Singh Nagoke was appointed as the Jathedar of the Akal Takht on a regular basis. The word used is '*pakka*' Jathedar.¹⁹⁹ The Akal Takht issued the edicts and *hukamnamas* drafted by the SGPC.

While upholding the egalitarian ideology of the Gurus, the SGPC suggested ways to reinforce it through the *hukamnamas*. It laid emphasis on free access to water from the village well, and that all should be treated equal for participation in the *sangat* and the *langar*. The *hukamnama* exhorted that the untouchables converted to the Sikh faith should be treated as brothers. The SGPC also decided to form a sub-committee to financially help the Sikhs from a low-caste background.²⁰⁰

The SGPC clarified what did it mean to be a Sahajdhari Sikh, a Nihang Singh, and a Kesdhari Singh. Their definitions highlighted their unity in diversity even when the Kesdhari Singhs constituted the mainstream.²⁰¹ Their religious norms and way of life were spelt out in the *Sikh Rahit*

Maryada document which was first brought out by the SGPC in April 1931,²⁰² reissued in 1936, and amended and enlarged in the light of the recommendations of the Rahureet and Dharmak Salahkar Committees.²⁰³ The norms of religious beliefs and practices worked out by the SGPC have been discussed elsewhere by the present author.²⁰⁴ Among other things, they include the definition of a Sikh and his daily religious discipline, ethical obligations, and desirable conduct and worship in a Gurdwara, including *kirtan*, besides preparation and distribution of the *karah prasad* and *langar*. Also incorporated are the Sikh rites related to birth, marriage and death, and the procedure for initiation of the double-edged sword. Stress is laid on social equality, and service (*seva*) and welfare of others (*par-upkar*); punishments for transgressions (*tankhah*) are explained; and the scope of the *gurmata* is spelt out. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* document unequivocally supports the religious equality of the women and the low castes. As a whole, it integrates the doctrinal, religious, ethical and social aspects in a Sikh's personal and corporate life centred on the Gurdwara, with Guru Granth Sahib as its core.²⁰⁵

The SGPC continued to lay stress on the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. In its resolution of 7 March 1942, it reiterated that there could be no personal Guru after Guru Gobind Singh, and that the Panth as the Guru could not go against the letter and the spirit of Guru Granth Sahib. In other words, Guru Panth was subordinate to Guru Granth. Together, the two doctrines distinguished the Sikhs from others.²⁰⁶

In answer to queries, the SGPC clearly resolved that the *Dasam Granth* was not the Guru or a scripture. It was not to be opened like Guru Granth Sahib, or to be read out before an audience. However, it should be shown due veneration, and for personal knowledge, reflection and research one could read it, and even perform its concluding ceremony (*bhog*). It was also suggested how to identify Guru Gobind Singh's compositions in the *Dasam Granth*, but its *akhand path* should not be performed.²⁰⁷

In the first few years, the SGPC had to take up certain problematic issues which happened to expand its sphere of action and add to its prestige. After due examination, it passed a resolution in 1928 to excommunicate Babu Teja Singh of Bhasaur and his wife Bibi Niranjan Kaur from the Sikh Panth, respectively for making some changes in the Sikh *Ardas* and for printing extracts from Gurbani and the *Dasam Granth* in a Gurmukhi course being taught by the latter.²⁰⁸ The SGPC felt concerned also about the jail term of Seva Singh Thikriwala, a prominent Akali leader who had been among those jailed during 1923-26, and also

the 'hero' of the Praja Mandal (States Peoples) movement. He was a subject of Patiala and was jailed again and again by its Maharaja and given a harsh and inhuman treatment. Despite the repeated efforts of the SGPC, he was not released. Subsequent to his death after a long hunger strike, the SGPC arrived at an understanding with the Maharaja of Patiala for releasing the remaining political prisoners.²⁰⁹ The Gurdwara Shahidganj at Lahore presented a yet another challenge. It was included in the schedule of 241 Sikh Gurdwaras entrusted to the SGPC in the Act of 1925. However, in the changing political climate in the Punjab in the 1930s, and under encouragement from the pro-Muslim Unionist Party, the local Muslims began claiming this land as their own. The firm stand and action of the SGPC with Master Tara Singh as its President, made its historical and legal claim on this Gurdwara clear to all.²¹⁰

The problems experienced by the SGPC in its day to day functioning over the past years were addressed by the Sikh Gurdwaras Amendment Act XI of 1944 which became operational in February 1945. It was considered 'revolutionary' because it conferred very wide powers on the SGPC. Its term along with that of the local committees was extended from 3 to 5 years. There were changes also in the provisions for reservation for the Mazhabi, Kabir Panthi and Ramdasia Sikhs and co-option of the Sikhs from outside Punjab. The functions and obligations of the office-bearers and members of the SGPC increased immensely. This Amendment defined an 'Amritdhari Sikh' who took the initiation of the double-edged sword, and the apostate ('*patit*') for the first time. The Act introduced many significant changes also in the working and administration of Gurdwaras. It gave the SGPC real control over the funds of the local committees which could no longer refuse the payment of *dasvandh*. The SGPC got even a higher proportion of the income of some leading Gurdwaras. It now had resources and powers to spend on a larger scale not only on missionary work but also on social, economic, and educational projects.²¹¹ It may be added that the number of Gurdwaras under the control of the SGPC had increased from 241 in November 1925 to 761 in August 1947, which, however, reduced to 583 after Partition.²¹²

All along, the SGPC felt compelled to respond to the changing political context, especially where the Sikhs could be affected adversely. Through successive resolutions, it expressed concern about the Communal Award of 1932 which gave permanent statutory majority to Muslims in the Punjab, and which got incorporated in the Act of 1935. The SGPC felt even more exercised over the Pakistan Resolution of the Muslim

League at Lahore in March 1940.²¹³ In 1942, the SGPC spiritedly led the Sikh opposition to the 'Pakistan idea' through the demand for a 'Sikh Suba' (also called 'Azad Punjab') in which actually no community had a majority and the Sikhs held the balance.²¹⁴ Eventually, on 9 March 1946, the SGPC came up with the demand for a 'Sikh State' to counter Pakistan. It declared the Sikhs to be a 'separate nation in themselves'. In view of the 'revolutionary changes in the offing', a state of their own was said to be essential for the protection of the religious places, culture, customs, self-respect, freedom, and progress of the Sikhs in future.²¹⁵

It may be noted that at that time, Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke was the President of the SGPC, while Giani Kartar Singh was the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Till March 1944, when Master Tara Singh took voluntary retirement for some time, he had been the President of both the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal and had also led the latter to victory in the SGPC elections in February 1944.²¹⁶ However, the growing ascendancy of the pro-Congress Nagoke group in the Akali circles was becoming evident even to the Punjab Governor Bertrand Glancy and he made references to it in his fortnightly reports to the Governor General.²¹⁷ The Nagoke group remained in control of the SGPC virtually for about a decade from 1944 to 1954, seeing the SGPC through Partition and the early years of the Congress rule in the Punjab.²¹⁸ However, in the six Gurdwaras elections held until Independence, the Shiromani Akali Dal had secured majority in the SGPC.

On the whole, during the first two decades of the SGPC as a statutory body, it worked in unison with the Shiromani Akali Dal. Even when they had overlapping membership and leadership, the two organizations were formally separate. Basically, the Shiromani Akali Dal functioned as a political party which participated in electoral politics vis-à-vis the other Sikh groups and political parties. However, the concerns of the SGPC turned out to be much wider. The Gurdwaras legislation gave it recognition, resources and flexibility. Apart from the management and control of the Gurdwaras, it standardized the Sikh religious beliefs and practices and accommodated the Nihangs and the Sahajdharis within the norms. It laid particular stress on social equality. Thus, the widening concerns of the SGPC went far beyond the formal purposes of the Act of 1925. The SGPC responded constructively to religious, social, and constitutional issues and even political developments, all of which consolidated its position as the representative body of the Sikhs. Above

all, it emerged as the guardian of their distinct religious identity and common concerns as a community.

NOTES

1. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'The Sikh Sacred Space from Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh', *Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2023, pp. 43-69.
2. J.S. Grewal, *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, p. 227.
3. Joseph Davey Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of Sutlej*, New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2002 [1849], pp. 437-42.
4. Lehna Singh Majithia was a leading Sardar at Lahore. For detail, Lepel Griffin et al, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 2010 [1909], vol. I, pp. 419, 422.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 97-98.
6. National Archives of India (NAI), Home Department, Public Branch Consultations, nos. 65-71.
7. Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 clearly stated that the Government of India would not interfere with the religion of any community.
8. The important Sikh Sardars, heads of localities (*panches*), leading merchants and traders, together with all the officiants (*pujaris*) and other officers of the Darbar Sahib complex were invited. Ian J. Kerr, 'The British and the Administration of the Golden Temple in 1859', *Panjab Past and Present*, vol. X, pt. II, No.2, October 1976, pp.312-14; 317-321.
9. *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 317. *Idem.*, 'British relationships with the Golden Temple, 1849-90', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review (IESHR)*, 1984, vol. 21, no. 2, p.141.
10. Lepel Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, vol. II, p. 98; NAI, Home Department, Public Branch Consultations, nos. 65-71, 'Memorandum on the Sikh Temple', para 8.
11. Kerr, 'British relationships with the Golden Temple, 1849-90', p. 145. This Act required powers and responsibilities for the

management of religious institutions to be transferred to the government-appointed self-perpetuating trustees who would be liable to be sued for mismanagement or neglect of duty.

12. Ibid., pp. 147-49.
13. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 237-38, 240-42.
14. Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh (PSA), Home Confidential 1905, No. 668/ 12.
15. The names of the boys were Attar Singh, Sadhu Singh, Aya Singh, and Santokh Singh. Jagjit Singh, *Singh Sabha Lahir* (Punjabi), Tarn Taran, 1944, p. 11-12. Jagjit Singh was a son of Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, an associate of Bhai Ditt Singh.
16. Ibid., pp. 13-14. For a free English rendering of the objectives of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, see, N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs and their Literature: A Guide to Tracts, Books and Periodicals, 1849-1919*, Delhi: Manohar, 1970, pp. xxiv-xxv.
17. I am thankful to my doctoral student Ms Sandeep Kaur for preparing a list of 140 Singh Sabhas on the basis of the *Khalsa Akhbar* till 1901. For factual information on the Singh Sabhas and Khalsa Diwans, Jagjit Singh, *Singh Sabha Lahir*, pp. 11- 33; Teja Singh, 'The Singh Sabha Movement', in *Essays in Sikhism*, Lahore: Sikh University Press, 1944, pp. 129-47. Grewal, *The Sikhs*, pp. 268-70.
18. Jagjit Singh, *Singh Sabha Lahir*, pp. 25-26. Grewal, *The Sikhs*, pp. 270-75. See also, Hira Singh Dard, 'Sikh Sudharak Lahiran', in *Bahumule Itihasik Lekh* (Punjabi), ed. Karam Singh Historian, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2017 [first published in 1930], p. 215.
19. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, *Singh Sabha Lahir da Dhura: Professor Gurmukh Singh* (Punjabi), Chandigarh, n.d., pp. 43-47. For the text of the *hukamnama*, dated 18 March 1887, Roop Singh, *Hukamname Aadesh Sandesh: Sri Akal Takht Sahib (1606 AD to December 2011 AD)* (Punjabi), Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2012, pp. 71-72.
20. For its text see, Jagjit Singh, *Singh Sabha Lahir*, pp. 34-35. Also see, Roop Singh, *Hukamname Aadesh Sandesh*, pp. 72n 2, 155-56.
21. Quoted in Ian J. Kerr, 'Troublesome Relationships and a Fundamental Continuity with Particular Reference to the Period 1849-1919', in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, eds. Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 154, 160-61.

22. It may be added that the *Khalsa Akhbar* remained out of circulation from October 1889 to 30 April 1893 because of lack of funds, following a court case by Khem Singh Bedi. Raja (later Maharaja) Hira Singh of Nabha appreciated the work of Bhai Gurmukh Singh and supported the newspaper financially. The newspaper functioned sporadically till 1905. Jagjit Singh, *Singh Sabha Lahir*, p. 31.
23. *Khalsa Akhbar*, Lahore, 20 November 1886 pp. 2-3.
24. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 1 January 1887, pp. 3-5.
25. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 16 April 1887 pp. 3-7; 27 May 1887, pp. 1, 4-6.
26. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 27 January, 1887.
27. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 31 November 1888, p. 1.
28. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 21 August 1893, p. 2.
29. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 2 October 1893, p. 5.
30. *Khalsa Akhbar*, 20 November, 1893, p. 1.
31. Bhai Ditt Singh Giani, *Durga Prabodh*, Lahore, Khalsa Press, 1899.
32. John Campbell Oman was a Professor in the Government College, Lahore for twenty years from 1877 to 1897. Oman served as the Principal of the Khalsa College, Amritsar from 10 May 1898 to 15 August 1899. For more detail, see, *A History of Government College, Lahore, 1864-1914*, ed. H.L.O Garrett, Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1914, pp. 34, 89. *A History of the Khalsa College, Amritsar*, ed. Ganda Singh, Amritsar, 1949, pp. 37-41.
33. John Campbell Oman, *Cults, Customs and Superstitions of India*, London:1908, pp. 108-13. The *Akhbar-i-Am* reported on 10 April 1900 that the Shivling was removed from the Darbar Sahib and, earlier, the image of the Goddess was also treated in a similar way. Kristina Myrvold, *Sikh News in India, 1864-1924: Cultural Reports on Vernacular Newspapers of Punjab, Religious Places, Practices and Relations*, vol. II, Leiden: Brill, 2025, pp. 660-61.
34. Punjab State Archives (PSA), Home Confidential 1905, No. 668/12.
35. [Kahan Singh Nabha], *Hum Hindu Nahin Arthat Hindu-Musalman Adikon Se Bhinn Khalsa Hai*. Written in the form of a dialogue between a Hindu and a Sikh, this small book is addressed to both the Sanatani Hindus and the so-called Sanatani Sikhs.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-34, 50-53.
37. The fifth edition of Bhai Kahn Singh's work came out in 1920, and the SGPC published its reprint in 1981. Since then, several reprints of *Hum Hindu Nahin* have been published. Between 1992 and 2023,

- the Singh Brothers, Amritsar brought out sixteen reprints. Between 2006 and 2023, five editions of its English translation too have been published by the Singh Brothers. For its analysis and discussion in the contemporary and academic context, see J.S. Grewal, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 275-97.
38. For Ripudaman Singh's social ideas and political stance, see J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *A Political Biography of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha (1883-1942): Paramountcy, Patriotism, and the Panth*, New Delhi: Oxford, 2018, pp. 39-43.
 39. For Tikka Ripudaman Singh's correspondence with the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab see, PSA, Chandigarh, Home Department (Confidential), nos. 668/12.
 40. Ibid. The bulky file at the Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh on the matter of idols also contains copies of Arur Singh's order, Ripudaman Singh's letter, and the correspondence of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar.
 41. For some detail, Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India:1885-1947*, Madras: Macmillan, 1985 [1983], pp. 105-29; Satya M. Ray, *Legislative Politics and the Freedom Struggle in the Punjab 1897-1947*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1984, pp. 12-29.
 42. Teja Singh, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, Jullundur: Desh Sewak Book Agency, 1922, pp. 92-93.
 43. *Khalsa Sevak*, January 1905, p. 1; December 1906, pp. 17-18.
 44. *Khalsa Sevak*, May 1909, p. 40.
 45. *Khalsa Sevak*, October 1906, pp.13-16; November 1906, p.10; February 1909, p. 21.
 46. *Khalsa Sevak*, December 1906, pp. 11-12.
 47. Quoted in Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1987 [1986], p. 51.
 48. Hira Singh Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan* (Punjabi), Jalandhar: Dhanpat Rai and Sons, 1960 [1955], pp. 57-62.
 49. For some detail, Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan*, pp. 138-50. Harjot Singh [Oberoi], 'From Gurdwara Rikabganj to the Viceregal Palace: A Study of Religious Protest', *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. XIV pt.1, 1980, pp. 186-87.
 50. Kirpal Singh Dardi, *Akali Lahir da Sanchalak: Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri* (Punjabi), Ludhiana: Shahid Udham Singh Prakashan,

- 1991, pp. 40-48. Myrvold, *Sikh News in India, 1864-1924*, vol. II, pp. 1026-30.
51. Dardi, *Master Sundr Singh Lyallpuri*, pp.41-42. Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan*, pp. 138-50. Munsha Singh 'Dukhi', *Jiwan Bhai Sahib Mohan Singh Ji Vaid*, Delhi: Navyug, 1989, p. 252. Sohan Singh Josh, *Akali Morchian Da Itihas* (Punjabi), Delhi: Navyug, 1972, pp. 20-22.
52. Bhai Randhir Singh, *Jail Chitthian* (Punjabi), Ludhiana: Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh Trust, 2010 [1938], Appendix 1, pp. 465-75. *Lahore Conspiracy Cases I and II (Ghadar Movement: Original Documents)*, vol. I, eds. Malwinder Singh Waraich and Harinder Singh, Chandigarh: Unistar, 2008, Appendix XXIII, pp. 522-24.
53. Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadan*, p. 145.
54. The *Tribune* reported on 2 May 1914 that nearly all the Singh Sabhas had passed resolutions protesting against the demolition of the wall of the Gurdwara Rakabganj. However, the Chief Khalsa Diwan passed a resolution in support of the government in a meeting (attended by 150 major supporters of the Diwan) in the Town hall, Amritsar on 3 May 1914. The Diwan intentionally did not give tickets to the representatives of various Singh Sabhas. The audience nevertheless expressed its disapproval of selling the Gurdwara land to the government. There was great uproar and confusion in the Town Hall. Despite all this, the Khalsa Diwan did manage to pass the resolution. This was criticised in several newspapers. On 17 July 1914, the *Khalsa Akhbar* in Urdu (its proprietor was Harchand Singh *rais* of Lyallpur) stated that the Sikhs possess sufficient power not to be silenced by the *communique* issued by the Chief Commissioner of Delhi regarding the Gurdwara Rakabganj. The newspaper further announced that a 'big public meeting' will be held at Amritsar to prove that majority of the Sikhs do not approve of the Chief Commissioner's *communique*, and disagree with the opinions expressed by the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The *Khalsa Akhbar* maintained that the authorities had no right to interfere in their religion. Myrvold, *Sikh News in India, 1864-1924*, vol. II, pp. 1030-39, 1047-48.
55. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 9 June 1917. Dardi, *Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri*, pp. 45-46.
56. For some detail of the efforts in these years to change the management of the Gurdwaras in the Punjab and also in Assam,

- Bengal, Bihar and the United Provinces, see Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 95-110, 173-74.
57. Significantly, all collective decisions and resolutions of this period were termed *gurmata*s. For the emergence of the ideas of the Guru Panth and the *gurmata*, see Karamjit K. Malhotra, *The Eighteenth Century in Sikh History: Political Resurgence, Religious and Social Life and Cultural Articulation*, New Delhi: Oxford, 2016, pp. 104-10. Cf. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 115-16.
 58. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 148-49. There was a clamour for Arur Singh's resignation. 'Thousands of ladies also held meetings and passed resolutions'. Arur Singh resigned finally, but he was knighted soon afterwards!
 59. Dardi, *Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri*, p. 53. Sukhmani Bal Riar, *The Politics and History of the Central Sikh League (1919- 1929)*, Chandigarh: Unistar Books, 2006, pp. 13, 15. According to the author, the decision to establish the Sikh League was taken on 30 March 1919 at the Bradlaugh Hall, Lahore, but it was not taken note of in the exceptional circumstances of the time.
 60. Narinder Singh Kapoor, *Punjabi Patarkari Da Vikas (Punjabi)*, Patiala: Language Department Punjab, 1988, pp. 144-46. Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan*, p. 120. Dardi, *Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri*, p. 47.
 61. Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan*, pp. 124-28.
 62. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-35.
 63. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
 64. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
 65. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
 66. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh in Indian History*, p. 89.
 67. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 84.
 68. *Ibid.*, pp.121-31 for detail.
 69. Josh, *Akali Morchian Da Itihas*, pp. 32-33. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 132-36.
 70. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir (Punjabi)*, Amritsar: Khalsa Brothers, 1983 [1951], pp. 93-94.
 71. For a description of the happenings at the Darbar Sahib, see Narain Singh, *Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, Patiala, 1967 [1949], pp. 61-63.
 72. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-68. Significantly, soon after taking over the Akal Takht on the 12th of October, a *hukamnama* had been issued to declare that those Sikhs of the *Komagata Maru* who had resisted the British at the

- Budge Budge harbour in Calcutta were 'true' Sikhs, not Arur Singh who had earlier got a *hukamnana* issued to say that they were not Sikhs. Roop Singh, *Hukamname, Aadesh, Sandesh*, p.72 and n.
73. Roop Singh, *Hukamname, Aadesh, Sandesh*, p. 71.
 74. Riar, *Central Sikh League*, p. 197. See also, Dard, *Merian Kujh Itihasak Yaadaan*, pp. 148-49. Josh, *Akali Morchian Da Itihas*, p. 197.
 75. S.L. Malhotra, *Gandhi and the Punjab*, Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1970, pp. 104-5.
 76. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 165-68. Cf. Narain Singh, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, pp. 73-74.
 77. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 168-70. Arrangements were made to oversee the working of some other Gurdwaras also through their local committees. The paid employees of the SGPC included an assistant secretary, an engineer and an inspector. Its expenses were to be met out of the affiliated Gurdwaras contributing one-tenth of their income
 78. 'The Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee 1921-22' (A Confidential Memorandum), prepared by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Punjab Government dated 22 February 1922, reproduced in *Punjab Past and Present*, vol. I. pts. I-II, 1967 (cited hereafter as Confidential Memorandum), pp. 279-80.
 79. Confidential Memorandum, p. 256.
 80. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 94.
 81. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 446-47.
 82. Confidential Memorandum, pp. 287-89.
 83. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
 84. *Ibid.*, pp. 281, 285. However, Jhabbar recounts a tall Sikh girl of the Malwai Jatha actually beating the Nihangs who were refusing to vacate the Akal Takht. Narain Singh, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, p. 76.
 85. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 460-61.
 86. Confidential Memorandum, p. 290. It may be added that the sources of the Shiromani Akali Dal's income too were donations from public and contribution of one-tenth part of every *jatha's* income. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 448.
 87. Confidential Memorandum, p. 280.
 88. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, ed. Ganda Singh, Amritsar: SGPC, 1965, Document no.29, p. 63.

89. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 181-96. Initially, some enthusiastic Jathedars like Teja Singh Bhuchar and Kartar Singh Jhabbar tried to act on their own, but they gradually began acting according to the directions of the SGPC. Narain Singh, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, p. 109.
90. *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee: Mahattavpuran Matey ate Faisle (1920-2024)* (Punjabi), comp. and eds. Paramvir Singh and Ravinderpal Singh, Patiala: Baikunth Publications, 2024 (cited hereafter as *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*), p. 1.
91. For the long lists of the undesirable activities and practices at the Tarn Taran and Nankana Sahib Gurdwaras see, respectively, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, *Aduti Saka* (Punjabi), Tarn Taran: published by the author, 1921, pp. 7-9; Idem., *Bhayanak Saka* (Punjabi), Tarn Taran, 1921, pp. 5-6.
92. Narain Singh, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, p. 97.
93. Vaid, *Aduti Saka*, pp. 3, 7.
94. Ibid., p. 10.
95. Ibid., p. 15.
96. Ibid., pp. 22-24. Teja Singh observes that this was the 'first bloodshed in the cause of Gurdwara Reform, and fitly in the temple of Guru Arjan who was the first martyr in the Sikh history'. *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 206.
97. Surjit Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1993, pp. 49-50.
98. Vaid, *Bhayanak Saka*, pp. 8-10.
99. In his letter, dated probably around 18 December 1920, Commissioner King gave some other helpful suggestions for the safety and security of the erring *mahants*. Reproduced in Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement*, Delhi: Macmillan, 1978, Appendix I, p. 195.
100. Narain Singh, *Kartar Singh Jhabbar*, pp. 108-14.
101. (Master) Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, Amritsar: Sikh Religious Book Society, nd, pp. 52-55.
102. Gurtej Singh Thikriwala, *Saka Shri Nankana Sahib: Samkali Akhbaran di Zubani* (Punjabi), Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2022, pp. 67-71, 83-84.
103. Vaid, *Bhayanak Saka*, pp. 10-13. Cf. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 229-30.
104. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 93-99.

105. Quoted in Ruchi Ram Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, ed. Ganda Singh, Amritsar: SGPC, nd, p. 83. Cf. Gandhi's letter of 9 March 1924 reproduced in the *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 28, p. 56.
106. Gurtej Singh Thikriwala, *Saka Shri Nankana Sahib*, pp. 97-98, 101-3. The author thinks that because of joining non-cooperation, the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal remained indifferent to the court proceedings against the *mahant* and his men. By contrast, the *mahant* was helped to engage costly private lawyers. The capital punishment awarded to him by the Sessions Court was changed to life imprisonment by the High Court on 3 March 1922. The *mahant* was released after ten years or earlier, and was freely roaming around to the anger and dismay of people. Subsequently, he was taken away to Dehra Dun under police escort, presumably to be settled there. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-64.
107. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 273-83.
108. *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 2-3.
109. Kashmir Singh, *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1989, pp. 139-40.
110. *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, p. 3.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
114. Kashmir Singh, *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, p. 141.
115. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 341.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 342, for example.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 343-47.
118. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 47.
119. Quoted in Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 346-47.
120. *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 6-7.
121. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 57.
122. Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, p. 69.
123. *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 7-8.
124. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 58.
125. Quoted in Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p. 361.
126. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-63.
127. *Ibid.*, pp. 363-64.

128. This was communicated by Gandhi in a telegram to Sardar Kharak Singh, President of the SGPC. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 10, p. 11.
129. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 368, 384.
130. For detail: *Ibid.*, pp. 369-83, 386-92; Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 151-61.
131. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 10-11.
132. Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, pp. 385-86.
133. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, p. 11.
134. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, pp. 60, 61.
135. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 111.
136. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 157.
137. Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, pp. 105-49. See also, 'Report of the Congress Guru-ka-Bagh Enquiry Committee', in *Guru Ka Bagh*, eds. Gurdev Singh Sidhu and Harish Jain, Mohali-Chandigarh: Unistar, nd, pp. v-vii, 3-33.
138. Quoted in Teja Singh, *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, p.430. For extracts from the reports of C.F. Andrews, also see 'Guru ka Bagh: An Eye-witness Account', reproduced in Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, pp. 176-83; G.A. Sundaram, *Guru Ka Bagh Satyagraha*, Madras, 1923, pp. 49-58. Sundaram represented the *Independent of Allahabad*.
139. SGPC Communique nos. 292 and 297, quoted in Sahni, *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines*, pp.148-49.
140. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 64.
141. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 103.
142. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 66.
143. For detail, Kashmir Singh, *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, pp. 143-45.
144. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 12-13.
145. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 29, p. 62. See also, Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, p. 64.
146. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, pp. 66, 67, 68.
147. For the context and the background of the Maharaja's removal, see J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *A Political Biography of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha*, New Delhi: Oxford, 2018, pp. 140-59.
148. Teja Singh, *Truth About Nabha*, Amritsar: SGPC, 1923, pp. 39-72.
149. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, p. 15.

150. Grewal and Banga, *Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha*, p.165. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, p. 320.
151. *Truth About Nabha*, p. 1 (Foreword).
152. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 271. Cf. Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement*, pp. 69-70, 172-73, n. 59.
153. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, pp. 16-17.
154. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 19.
155. Jawaharlal, Santanam and Gidwani were released with the efforts of Moti Lal Nehru. For detail, Grewal and Banga, *Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha*, pp. 181-87.
156. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
157. Vaid Amar Singh 'Tegh', *Nabhe di Khuni Kar Khas* (Punjabi), ed. Simranjit Kaur, Barnala: Ustat Publication, 2024 [1955], pp. 32-47, 49-52, 56-58, 88-111 et passim.
158. SGPC: *Matey ate Faisle*, p. 20. It may be added that by then the SGPC had felt constrained to start another *morcha* at Gurdwara Sangat Sahib, Bhai Pheru, Lahore. The SGPC had taken note of its dismal state of affairs in September 1921: *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, p. 6. After the Guru-ka-Bagh *morcha*, its *mahant* accepted the control of the SGPC, but in the course of the Jaito *morcha*, he recanted and filed a suit against the SGPC on the charge of occupying the Gurdwara land. The police intervened in favor of the *mahant*. The SGPC felt obliged to start a *morcha* on 5 January 1924. Five or six batches of 4 Akalis each were sent daily to collect vegetables and wood from the land of the Gurdwara which belonged to the SGPC. By 10 September 1925, 6372 men had been arrested. The Secretary of the SGPC felt constrained to call off this *morcha* on 20 September because a local hooligan was killed for sodomizing a boy. The SGPC upheld the decision and expressed regret over this death because every volunteer in this movement had pledged to remain peaceful. *Ibid.*, p. 12. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 388-90. Also, Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, pp. 356-58.
159. Grewal and Banga, *Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha*, pp. 169-70.
160. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, pp. 404-81.
161. India Office Records (microfilm, NAI), R/1/1/1727.
162. Komma, 'The Sikh Situation in the Punjab (1907-1922)' (*Fortnightly Review*, London, September 1923), Reproduced in the *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. XII, pt. II, 1978, p. 438.
163. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 311.

164. Ibid., pp. 320-47. See also, *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document nos. 33-67, pp. xix-xxi, 69-129.
165. Kashmir Singh, *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, p. 147.
166. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 391-97. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, pp. 470-71.
167. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 69, pp. 131-33.
168. Ibid., Document no. 74, p. 136; nos. 76-78, pp. 138-44.
169. Ibid., Document nos. 79-80, pp. 144-46.
170. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, p. 502.
171. Ibid., pp. 504-5.
172. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 29, pp. 58-59. Also see 'In Retrospect' below.
173. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 450. Satwinder Singh Dhillon, *SGPC Elections and the Sikh Politics*, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2009, pp. 62-63.
174. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 448.
175. Ibid., pp. 451-54, 456.
176. Surjeet Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, p. 142.
177. This was communicated by Mangal Singh, President of the Central Sikh League to Gandhi. Quoted in Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 139.
178. Cf. Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Movement*, pp. 137, 184 n.1.
179. Confidential Memorandum, p. 298. In other words, the Akali movement was distinct from that led by the Congress.
180. Ibid., p. 299. The official attitude towards the SGPC's claim to control the 'Sikh Shrines' is underlined by John Maynard, member of the Governor's Council, who says that 'these demands involved the confiscation, without enquiry of all existing rights, and could never have been accepted either by Government or by the Legislative Council'. 'The Sikh Problem in the Punjab, 1920-23' (*Contemporary Review*, vol. 124, Sept. 1923, pp. 292-303), reproduced in *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. XI, pts. I-II, p. 136.
181. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, pp. 62-63; Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, p. 125.
182. Respectively, Sahni, *Struggle for Reforms in Sikh Shrines*, pp. 85-90, 91-93; Sundaram, *Guru Ka Bagh Satyagrah*, pp. 67-68.
183. K.N. Pannikar, quoted in Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 133. However, in the initial years, the tendency to work on their own or

- assert themselves was evident in some *jathas* who gradually fell in line with the apex body. Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, pp. 157-59, 335. Cf. Tara Singh, *Meri Yaad*, pp.59-61,67.
184. Kapoor, *Punjabi Patarkari Da Vikas*, pp. 141-80.
 185. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document nos. 23-27, pp. 45-55. Incidentally, Gandhi asked the SGPC to review the whole situation, and take the help of 'a third party' to negotiate with the authorities. He even offered to stay in the Punjab 'in order to guide the movement'.
 186. *Ibid.*, Document no. 29, pp. 56-69.
 187. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 126.
 188. *Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, Document no. 29, pp. 60-61.
 189. J.S. Grewal, 'Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition', in *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 2007, p. 261. The original on p. 1412 of Guru Granth Sahib (standard pagination) reads as under:
Jau tau prem khelan ka chao, Sir dhar tali gali meri ao.
It marag paer dharijae, Sir dijae kan na kijae.
 190. Grewal, 'Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition', p. 263.
 191. Quoted in Sundaram, *Guru Ka Bagh Satyagrah*, pp. 58-59, 69.
 192. Gurdev Singh Sidhu, ed., *Directory: Akali Lahir (1921-25) Vich Shamal Sabka Sainik* (Punjabi), Patiala: Punjabi University, 2016, pp. 344-70. This valuable compilation gives district wise lists of the ex-army men who participated in the Akali movement during 1921-25.
 193. Josh, *Akali Morchian da Itihas*, pp. 458-66; Giani Pratap Singh, *Gurdwara Sudhar arthat Akali Lahir*, pp. 374, 376, 391, 406, 448-50, 453-54 et passim. See also, Darshan Singh Awara, *Bijli di Kadak* (Punjabi), eds. Rai Jasbir Singh and Balwinder Singh Jaura Singha, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2019 [1924]. For a versified rendering of different facets of the movement up to the Keys *morcha* by a contemporary, see Giani Kartar Singh Klas Walia, *Akali Lahir No.1 arthat Sudhar Khalsa* (Punjabi), Amritsar: SGPC, 2021 [2009].
 194. Throughout his life, Gandhi 'never really discarded his notion that Sikhism was a part of Hinduism and the Sikhs were a part of the Hindu social order'. Grewal, *Master Tara Singh*, p. 145.
 195. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-69. Dhillon, *SGPC Elections*, pp. 62-71. For 11 years Master Tara Singh was the President of the SGPC. As Vice-

- President too he led the SGPC during Baba Kharak Singh's absence in jail.
196. Surjeet Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, pp. 126-44.
 197. *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 164.
 198. Among the advisory committee members were Professor Teja Singh, Principal Jodh Singh, Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke, Bhai Labh Singh, Professor Ganga Singh, Professor Sahib Singh, Bhai Dharmanand Singh, and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha. Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee ['Kameti'] Da Panjah Sala Itihas (1926-1976)*, Amritsar: SGPC, 2003 [1972], p. 102. This work has compiled the decisions and resolutions of the SGPC.
 199. Ashok, *SGPC: Panjah Sala Itihas*, pp. 51, 81, 84-85, 108-9, 112, 177.
 200. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65, 71, 103-4.
 201. Kirpal Singh, ed. *Panthic Matey*, Chandigarh: 2002, p. 18.
 202. *Gurdwara Gazette*, April 1931 (No. 3).
 203. *SGPC: Matey ate Faisle*, p. 164.
 204. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Sikh Religious Practices: Norms and Texts', *Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies*, vol. 31: 1 & 2, pp. 67-95.
 205. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
 206. Ashok, *SGPC: Panjah Sala Itihas*, pp. 212-13.
 207. Kirpal Singh, *Panthic Matey*, pp. 12, 16, 17, 21.
 208. Ashok, *SGPC: Panjah Sala Itihas*, pp. 72, 76-77, 79-81.
 209. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-28, 141, 142-43.
 210. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-58.
 211. Sujeet Singh Gandhi, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, pp. 205-12.
 212. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
 213. Ashok, *SGPC: Panjah Sala Itihas*, p. 205.
 214. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.
 215. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.
 216. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.
 217. Lionel Carter, comp. & ed., *Punjab Politics, 1 January 1944-3 March 1947: Last Years of the Ministries: Governors' Fortnightly Reports and other Key Documents*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2006, pp. 79, 108, 110, 116.
 218. Dhillon, *SGPC Elections*, pp. 70-82.