PREFACE

The present study, “Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee: Working and Achievements (1925-1984)” has been undertaken on the advice of my esteemed teachers, Professor Dr. Dalbir Singh Dhillon and Professor Dr. Jaspal Kaur Dhanju- formerly Heads Department of History. We are fully aware that Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhik Committee (hereafter SGPC) came into being as a statutory religious body of the Sikhs. This body was constituted in the midst of the Gurdwara reform movement, of course, having strong political moorings at the close of the second decade of the 20th century. It represented the Sikhs who constituted the third segment, of course very important one, of the society in the province of Punjab during the period under review. Initially this institution was constituted for the avowed objective of superintendence as well as the control of the Sikh Gurdwaras (religious institutions of the Sikh community). Earlier these had been under the domination of Mahants, who were the loyalists to the British.

We know it well that the SGPC was constituted on November 15, 1920 A.D. By this time, the condition of the Gurdwaras was quite deplorable, as they had lost religious sanctity due to the corrupt and selfish Mahants, as they were interested in only in their own well being. The Sikhs never wanted their religious institutions to be governed by such elements that were neither sincere nor devoted to the Sikh community and their religion. Therefore, the formation of this body soon gathered importance and became quite prominent among the Sikhs. Though apparently a religious body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhik Committee since its birth has been articulating the socio-religious, cultural, economic as well as the political interests of the
Sikhs, because these features of the society can not be divorced from each other. Not merely some of its office bearers and members have been politicians of accomplished and high repute but many of the veteran Sikh political leaders have also been taking keen interest in its affairs and activities related to various walks of life of the Sikh community. Being the supreme custodian of the Sikh Gurdwaras, the SGPC enjoys enormous power and prestige in the State of Punjab, particularly among the Sikh Community and also others in general. Doubtlessly, at present it is considered as the ‘mini-Parliament’ of the Sikhs.

The SGPC has always remained secular and liberal in its character and approach as well as thinking. It has never hesitated to take stern action against such elements which have tried to harm the interests of the Sikhs, their religion and identity. It has established Sikhs missionary institutions for the training of its preachers. It also runs professional schools and Colleges, numerous workshops, hospitals and dispensaries. It has worked a lot for the emancipation of the women of Sikh community in particular and others in general in Punjab.

Looking to the significance of the existence of this body the present study has proved meaningful and of great worth, if we keep in mind the recent crises related to the identity of the Sikhs. Its working, contribution and achievements have given some definite direction to solve the present problems of socio-religious as well as of politico-economic significance. Moreover, the present work carries special importance, because no serious work so far has been done on the emergence and working of the SGPC in totality, though references to its works and activities can be traced out in some writings related to the Akali Party. Of course, about its formation and initial activities some details are available in its own publications but its contribution and
achievements in the socio-religious, cultural, educational, politico-economic life of the Sikh community in particular and others in general have not been studied analytically so far. More over the SGPC has not kept itself confined to the issues related to the state of Punjab and the Sikh community; rather it feels concerned with all those issues which affect the prosperity and peace of the country.

Not much historical work has appeared on the twentieth century Sikh politics and institutions. Dr. Kailash Gulati’s *'Akalis Past and Present'* (1974) is the first serious study of Akalis up to 1974 which shows how with inauguration of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, they had become a force to reckon in Punjab. They found a strong base in Sikh peasantry and transcended their religious limitations but it was only before the 1937 elections that Akali Dal became a political party in the authentic sense of the term, which was whole heartedly supported by the SGPC in its work and programme. The other important works include Teja Singh’s *Gurdwara Reform and Sikh Awakening* (1922); Ruchi Ram Sahni’s *Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines* (1965); Sohan Singh Josh’s *Akali Morchian da Itihas* and Mohinder Singh’s *The Akali Movement* (1978). All the works based on primary sources emphasize the anti-imperialistic character of the Sikh struggle. As a prominent communist worker Josh sees the struggle from inside but naturally his work is characterized by his own biases and preferences because of his ideological propensities. Dr. Mohinder Singh by using large hitherto unpublished papers, particularly of Sir Malcolm Hailey has a sound grasp of his material and offers a Marxist interpretation in particular situation such as in his explanation of the class character of the Movement, though the tenor of his argument is anything but Marxist.

The present study is largely based only on evidences given in the primary and contemporary sources related to the present study. Special
mention may be made of the proceedings of the general meetings of the SGPC which have been intensively used in the writing of the present thesis.

During the course of present research work, I have visited National Archive of India, Janpath, New Delhi where I could get large number of primary source material related to the present topic. Home political Record files; Proceedings related to the Punjab Legislative and Assembly Debates; Reports on the Native Newspapers and some individual biographies in the reference section of these prestigious institutions have been consulted and objectively used. I also visited Nehru Memorial Museum Library Teen Murti, New Delhi. There private correspondence of the British officials in the form of micro films has been consulted. I have also consulted in the reference section of this library some transcripts prepared on the basis of the interviews taken by some scholars of the freedom fighters who were directly or indirectly related to the movements of the Sikhs, particularly during the reform movement of the Gurdwaras. In Punjab I have visited various libraries such as library Sikh Studies of Khalsa College; Library SGPC; Library G.N.D.U Sri Amritsar; Desh Bhagat Yadgar Library Jallandhar; Dwarka Dass Library Madhya Marg, Chandigarh; Library Punjab University, Chandigarh; Central Library, Patiala and Bhai Mohan Singh Library (various sections like Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Dr. Ganda Singh, etc.), Punjabi University, Patiala. In these libraries I could get number of vernacular Newspapers, Magazines, Journals, books, etc. which throw ample light on the activities and works of the SGPC. A list of these vernacular papers, Journals etc are given in the bibliography of the present work. Even several leaders have been interviewed and their statements as well as versions have been properly utilized. It is equally
important to state that these sources have been studied keeping in view strictly the research methodology of our discipline.

For the treatment of the present subject in the systematic way the thesis has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one furnishes a brief introduction to the condition of the Sikhs during the first quarter of the 20th century and is intended to serve as a background. It also deals with the factors which led to the formation of the SGPC and the resources and institutional framework as well as the organization of its different bodies like the Executive Committee, Gurdwara Management Board, and the Gurdwara Judicial Commission. The second chapter deals with the relations between the British Government and the body in question up to the period of 1947. An attempt has also been made to examine its relation analytically with the Shiromani Akali Dal and also its role in the creation of Punjabi Suba in 1966. Its relations with the Punjab and Central Government's and its attitude towards the political and economic demands of the Sikhs up to 1984 have also been studied analytically. In the third chapter, an effort has been made to explore and examine critically the work done by the SGPC in the socio-economic field especially to awaken and uplift the Sikhs’ so that they could demand and fight for their just rights and position in the society from 1925 to 1984. Chapter fourth deals with efforts made by the SGPC to spread education within the state and outside the state in order to uplift the community and make the Sikhs equal to the other individuals of different communities in the country. Chapter five deals with some significant constructive works undertaken by the SGPC for the welfare of the Sikhs in particular and the state of Punjab in general. This chapter clearly shows that the SGPC has not been confined only to the Sikhs; rather it took keen interest in the affairs of the country. For instance, the work done by this body in the rehabilitation of the refugees soon after
the partition of the country and then in the Indo-Chinese War in 1962 and then in two Indo-Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971 is of great value and worth. This goes to its credit, though being a religious body of the one segment of the society in the Punjab, yet it has taken interest in the betterment and uplift of the larger issues as well. The last chapter analyses the work and achievements of the SGPC in general.

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