X

IMPACT OF THE MOVEMENT

As already stated, no movement is a total failure. Either the movement undergoes a metamorphosis or its prominent actors join such other movements which help them realise their objectives. The same is true of the Babbar Akali Movement. Though the movement was short-lived, yet its impact is legendary. It left a deep imprint not only on the contemporary politics but also on the successive movements. The effect of the movement has permeated into the political, social and literary climate of this region in recent times.

Its impact on Sikh politics is of far-reaching consequences and has come to stay. It was the sacrifice of the Babbar Akalis on the altar of freedom that compelled the British Government to come to terms with the Shiromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1923 and 1925. In November 1922 Guru Ka Bagh Morcha was over but the problem had not been solved yet, because there were 5600 Sikhs in the jails and the Government was in a fix what to do. Mr. Dunnet, D.C. Amritsar was very much worried, so he contacted some professors of Khalsa College, Amritsar including S. Miranjan Singh, &. Teja Singh and Bawa Harkishan Singh. He said, "I am faced with a serious problem, you know, the Babbar Akalis - they are danger to you, they are danger to us. If you come out with fairly strong denunciation in your interest,"
denunciation of the Babbar Akalis, it will help the Government to find out way for releasing 5000 prisoners." The round-about denunciation of the Babbar Akalis and exhortation to the Babbars to come round to the right path on April 24, 1923 by the S.G.P.C. cleared the impasse. ¹ Next day the Government released 5000 prisoners. While it took stern measures against the Babbar Akalis, it freed all other Akali prisoners. Ostensibly it was done in appreciation of their efforts to restore Hindu-Muslim amity in Amritsar but actually it was used as a device to extricate itself from the difficult situation which the Government faced at that time. The Babbar Akali movement was a challenge to the Panjab Government. Its activities increased the bargaining power of the S.G.P.C. vis-a-vis the Panjab Government. As most of the radical Akalis were in jails, the moderate S.G.P.C. leadership was persuaded to pass resolutions, condemning the Babbar Akalis. This gave a green signal to the Government and it went ahead with its programme of executing 6 Babbar Akalis and sentencing others for long terms of imprisonment.² The Akali Dal and the S.G.P.C. had


² The Babbar Sher, June 28, 1929. Also vide Home Department, File No. 130/1930, p. 12.
also been declared unlawful but the moderates arrived at some compromise with the Government. The conditional release was not acceptable to some of the Sikhs in jails including Baba Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh, S. Teja Singh Samundari and C. Sohan Singh Josh. They wanted that all the prisoners including the Babbar Akalis be released. This truncated compromise also led to the internecine struggle within the Akali party. The radicals blamed Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh party for the Babbar plight and ultimately they came to control the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal, ousting the moderates.

The role of the Babbar movement was sincerely appreciated by the Sikhs in foreign lands. They considered it as an extension of the Ghadr movement and contributed open-heartedly for the welfare of the Babbar families. In May, 1926 Giani Harnam Singh of Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, issued a poster announcing an Akhad Path from May 21-23, 1926 in memory of the Babbar Akalis eulogising their exploits and expressing sympathy with their families and collecting subscriptions for their relief. De Patrie gave an extract of the poster which highlighted the atrocities of the bureaucracy on the Babbar Akalis. A letter of Giani Harnam Singh of May 23, 1926, praised Bhai

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4. Ibid., p.10.
Kishan Singh in approbious terms, whereas Samund Singh of the Khalsa Diwan Victoria (British Columbia), condemned bureaucracy for its repression of the Babbar Akalis in a letter written on April 15, 1926. The Secretary of the Pacific coast Khalsa Diwan Stockton, Ajmer Singh also delivered a warning to the toadies in a resolution. The Babbar sacrifices according to them, were for the national cause. The Sikhs, in America, sent Rs. 37,000 for the relief of the Babbar families. The movement had influenced the Sikhs everywhere, transcending national frontiers. It gave many uneasy moments to the C.I.D. and the government of Panjab. Three letters by Giani Haran Singh were addressed to Baba Gurdit Singh of Komagata Maru fame, the 'Desh Sewak' and the 'Babbar Sher'. These were, however, intercepted by the C.I.D. in August, 1926. The activities of the Khalsa Diwan Society Victoria (British Columbia) and the Canadian Doaba Press Society, were considered the beginning of the 'new Babbar Akali Cult'.

The Babbar Akali Movement had terrified the government officials to such an extent that they went on arresting even

7. Loc. Cit.
the innocent Akalis, much later, even after the fissing out of the movement. C.I.D. shadowed even Bhai Partap Singh, Balwant Singh, Giani Ram Singh Judge, Ram Singh Jauhar and many others. It appeared that the tale-carriers had created scare of the rebirth of the Babbar Akali movement.¹⁰

It also had its impact on all the radical groups and revolutionaries of the later period. It led to the intensification of the revolutionary activities in the Panjab. The Babbar ideals of selflessness, patriotism and rare heroic sacrifices influenced Bhagat Singh as well. His companion Shiv Verma had recorded that Bhagat Singh always grew emotional while he narrated the saga of the Babbars. It gave him a severe shock when he found that people were celebrating Holi on the 27th February, 1926 with frolic and fun - the day when six Babbar were sent to the gallows. He chided his countrymen for their sheer ignorance and callous indifference. He eulogised the Babbar Akalis in his article - "Blood Stains on the day of Holf- in the Milap, published from Kanpur on March 15, 1926. He spoke highly of their organisation and modus operandi. He himself was, in fact, a product of the Babbar movement.¹¹ It may be futile to understand his revolutionary activities without considering the impact of the Babbar Akali movement upon him. Gulab Singh, himself a revolutionary of note, remarked that the immortal spirit

¹⁰. The Panjab Darpan, Amritsar, August 20, 1927.
lofty idealism and exuberant enthusiasm of the Babbar Akalis had overwhelmingly left an imprint on the patriots and the movement doubtlessly produced the prince among them: Bhagat Singh.\(^\text{12}\)

The failure of the movement taught a lesson to the later revolutionaries. The murders of the toadies had so much claimed the attention of the Babbar Akalis that it put them off the track. Bhagat Singh and his comrades, therefore, rightly aimed at the British rather than at the toadies. The impact of the movement was manifest in the native states as well. The role of the Babbar Akali movement in the genesis of the Rastri Parja Mandal has also been acknowledged.\(^\text{13}\) Again, an offshoot of the Babbar Akali movement sprouted in the Malwa due to the efforts of Babu Santa Singh. Though it failed to make much headway, yet it influenced Kartar Singh of Jaspalon and Mann Singh of Barri who further influenced Kartar Singh of Chhiniwal and others. Even Udham Singh of Sunam is said to have come into their contact. Their meetings often took place in Bugra, Ghelote, Kudhani and Sekha.\(^\text{14}\) Kartar Singh of Jaspalon and Mann Singh of Barri tried to launch the movement.

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in the cis-futlej states. Though their efforts proved abortive, yet their impact on Kartar Singh of Chhiniwal and others was very consequential. They avenged Guru Ka Bagh atrocities by murdering S.G.M. Beaty at his farm in Chatha Sekhwan, near Sunam, in 1940.15

Udham Singh, too, was inflamed by the Babbar heroism. It exercised enormous spell on various other groups, too. One such group was, 'Yug Paltau Dal', organised by Amar Singh Tegh, Arjan Singh Gargaj and Sant Inder Singh of Murari, with its headquarters at Singh Bels, Amritsar.16 According to Amar Singh Tegh, they were at Sri Nagar when Udham came out of jail after undergoing 5 years' term of imprisonment and met them in Kashmir in the guise of a mendicant. It was there on May 17,1932 that a programme to murder O'Dwyer was chalked out.17 The fire of revenge burnt within him. He left for England. It was there that he shot Sir, Michael O'Dwyer dead in Caxton Hall, London on March 13,1940,18 and thus he displayed the Babbar determination to exterminate the enemies of his religion and the country.

Again, it was the Babbar impact on the youngmen which propelled them to do away with the toadies and approvers. No movement exercised its spell in a like manner, on the contemporay youth. It is creditible that during the thirties many a traitor

15. Nahar Singh, Azadi Dian Lehren, op.cit.,p.339, writes that Beaty was murdered in 1937-38. But Sarwan Singh Bir, the Noka, June,1975, Mansa,p.27 gives the correct date of his murder as May 27,1940.
17. Loc.cit. Here Amar Singh has mentioned Dyer which is due to confusion. In fact, it was Sir,Michael O'Dyer.
was put to death. If ever a movement haunted the toadies, the Babbar Akali Movement was one. The Babbar heroism left a deep trail and some youngmen took upon themselves the task of avenging the Babbar deaths brought about by the traitors. In this series the murder of Bala Singh of Zian took place on December 8, 1933. He had fled from Vancouver after murdering and betraying his compatriots and co-religionists. Hari Singh of Sundh, Sant Inder Singh of Murari, and Isher Singh of Jandoli murdered him. The case was registered against Hari Singh, Isher Singh and Bakhshish Singh of Chabbewal but due to insufficient evidence, the accused were acquitted. Anup Singh of Namke, who played treachery at Babai on September 1, 1933 was also shot dead in his house alongwith his son by Gurdit Singh of Mandial, Kartar Singh of Chak Bagarian and Ujjaggar Singh of Pannahli on June 21, 1936. A meeting at Anandpur Sahib was held in March, 1936 in which Bhagat Singh of Lyallpur, Kartar Singh of Chak Bagarian, Ujjaggar Singh of Pannahli, Isher Singh of Jandoli, Sant Inder Singh of Murari and Mehar Singh Musafir of Kotli

19. Gargaj, Arjan Singh, Do Pair Ghat Turna, Delhi, n.d., p. 26
Lehal took part. Ujjagar Singh was asked to perform the deed and he along with two others killed Anup Singh. The three were sentenced to death, but Ujjagar Singh was acquitted on appeal in the High Court. Kartar Singh of Chak Bagrian and Gurdit Singh were hanged on September 10, 1938.

Karam Singh of Mannanhana was an accomplice of Jawala Singh of Zian, who got arrested Dhanna Singh of Behabalpur on October 25, 1923. He was killed by Bachint Singh of Dhandoli and Ajaib Singh of Dakha—two fugitives from the Kapurthala regiment. They murdered him on March 25, 1940. He was murdered near the limits of village Kangraur and his dead body was thrown into a rivulet. They also killed Mula Singh of Plahi who tried to get them arrested. Bachint Singh was, later on, arrested due to the complicity of his wife and her uncle from Pindori Ganga Singh. Ajaib Singh could not be arrested. He avenged his friend's death by murdering his friend's treacherous wife Sibo and her uncle. Later on, he was also killed in an encounter with the police.

Another notorious toady Sikandar of Mehatpur was killed by the Babbars in 1942.

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26. Ibid., p.118.
It was again the Babbar impact which impelled Harbans Singh Sirhala to organise "Yug Paltao Dal" in late thirties. This group attempted to murder Mela Singh Pujari of Kiratpur but killed his servant instead. Harbans Singh along with Nirmal Singh of Sarinh and Baba Ganda Singh were betrayed by Tara Singh of Pangota on January 10, 1943, and were got arrested from the High School of Jassma Rai. They were tried and as a result Harbans Singh Sirhala was hanged in Ludhiana Jail on April 3, 1944 while others were acquitted. Ralia Singh of Lishkot Manko, responsible for the death of Waryam Singh of Dugga, and Tara Singh of Pangota were also among the toadies who were killed during this period. Besides, Ajit Singh of Dhadda and Jamadar Gurdit Singh of Burro Barrian were also despatched likewise.

The impact of the Babbar Akali movement is manifest on Sikh politics even today. The Sikhs have always rallied round those who followed the path shown by the Tenth Guru.

29. Sarhadi, Kartar Singh, Singh Sabha Da Mahan Parupkari Te Sunehri Ithas, Yamana Nagar, 1947, p.474.
The Babbar Akalis were more sanguine in the defence of the Sikh symbols, Sikh shrines and Sikh honour than the Akalis and thus have, since then, inspired the Sikh masses. When ever the Sikhs felt inequity, injustice and oppression, instant appeal to the Babbar *modus operandi* had brought fresh adherence. The nostalgic attachment to the memories of the Babbar exploits has always played an important role in shaping the Sikh consciousness.

The Babbar Akalis used religious fervour for deliberate political action. They created an awakening and it provided the elan vital to the revolutionary political activities. During the British rule, it turned the Panjab into the second most important centre of anti-British activities. It provided a perpetual source of inspiration for future efforts by inching the patriots forward towards the goal of freedom. In the post-independence era the Naxalite upsurge also drew heavily upon the Babbar ethos and psyche. The mood of open confrontation of the Sikhs, first with pseudo-religious organisations like Hiran-karis during the seventies, culminating in a clash and then leading to confrontation with the Panjab Government, is reminiscent of the Babbar spirit. The Hiran-karis are neither Sikhs nor Hindus though the majority of them are Keshadharis. Their belief in gurudom, mis-interpretation of the holy scriptures and the condemnation of the Sikh rituals resulted in Hiran-kari-Sikh confrontation. They clashed

with the followers of the Damdami Taksal\textsuperscript{32} in Gurdaspur District and the bloodiest clash took place at Amritsar on April 13, 1978 on the Baisakhi day in which 13 Sikhs were killed. The subsequent acquittal of the culprits and the Panjab Government's refusal to challenge the acquittals in the court lit the powder keg. The Sikh response was on the Babbar Akali lines. Indeed, the terrorist activity has been the standard Sikh response to the denial of justice.\textsuperscript{33}

The indiscriminate arrest of the Sikhs of the Damdami Taksal created a situation which compelled them to launch a \textit{morchha}. The \textit{morchha} started by the head of the Damdami Taksal on July 19, 1982\textsuperscript{34} was subsequently adopted by the Akali Dal when it launched "Dharam Yudh - morcha" on 4th August, 1982.\textsuperscript{35} The genesis, execution and course of the present \textit{morchha} are analogous to the Gurdwara Reform movement of the twenties and militant streak bears remarkable resemblance with the Babbar Akali movement.

The impact of the Babbar Akali movement on the present

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\item[Taksal] means mint where coins are minted. Damdami Taksal means a place where Sikhs are taught to lead life on the ideal Sikh model. Its origin is traced to the activities of Bhai Mani Singh at Damdama, District Bhatinda which guided the Sikhs to lead life in an ideal Sikh way.

\item[Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay, April 10, 1983, p.13.]
\item[Kaumt Rajniti, Ludhiana, June 1983, p.47.]
\item[The Allt English, Jullundur, 4-10 June, 1983.]
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neo-revival of Sikhism is evident. The Sikh leaders and masses seem to have learnt a lesson from the Babbar Akali movement which could not attain its objective as the government was successful in creating a rift between the two wings of the Sikhs leading to the decimation of the Babbar Akalis. But the seal with which the Sikhs have responded to the call of the extremists now is an indication that the Sikhs are facing the onslaught unitedly and with singleness of purpose.

The present struggle is a search for Sikh identity—political as well as religious and the contribution of the extremists who draw sustenance from the Babbar Akali movement cannot be under-estimated.

The Babbar Akali movement has left its deep imprint on the Sikh politics. The Babbar sacrifices for the cause of religion, spurred on the Sikhs to undergo sufferings smilingly and carry on the relentless campaign against those who were out to undermine the foundations of their faith. Last of all, it demonstrated the value of the struggle for survival to shake off the lassitude of the masses. It is not without purpose that numerous references have been made to the Babbar Akalis to settle scores with enemies of the faith and bring the rulers to reason in their speeches in divans held at Manji Sahib, Amritsar.  

There are many who study history not merely as a warning reminder of man's follies and crimes, but also as an encouraging remembrance of generative souls; the past ceases to be a depressing chamber of horrors. While studying the Babbar Akali movement one comes across nightmarish events in which the Babbars demonstrated the meaninglessness of human existence. The question of violence versus non-violence becomes irrelevant at such a juncture. The movement is a constant pointer to those who stand for just order, that they must be ever ready to sacrifice their all. The impact of the movement has become evident in the recurring growth of the militant groups such as Yug Paltao Dal, the Naxalites, the Dal Khalsa and the Babbar Khalsa and their concomitant sacrificial squads. Besides the Akali Dal, there are splinter groups which, no wonder, bear testimony to the legacy of the Babbar Akali Movement. One such group is the Babbar Khalsa — an extremist group of recklessly militant Sikhs. Violence is its credendum. 'Bullets will continue to fly, the guilty will get their deserts', (Goli Chaldi Bahegi, dusht sodhey jaanse) is its credo. In its pamphlets, it exhorts the Sikhs to prepare themselves to fight the "government tyranny and to throw away the yoke of slavery". This group owned responsibility for 35 murders of the Mirankaris, since 1981.

38. The Probe, Delhi, November, 1983.
Another group deeply imbued with the Babbar ideology is Dal Khalsa. It stands for a relentless struggle against the government. The government proclaimed award for the arrest of their leaders but they warned the informers that they would be dealt with, on the lines of the Babbar Akalis. This shows that the Babbar Akali movement has always enthralled the Sikh psyche.

This study is bound to remain incomplete without a perusal of its impact on Panjabi literature. This movement produced a rich galaxy of poets which put new life in the struggle. The poems written by Jathedar Kishan Singh Gargaj (in the Panch,1 the Gargaj Akali2 and the Babbar Akali Doaba3 Banta Singh Sewak4, Waryam Singh of Dhugga and Dhanna Singh of Behbalpur5 Santa Singh6 and Nand Singh of Ghurial7 are fine pieces of selfless patriotic fervour. The Babbar heroism has

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41. The Panch, Lahore, December 7, 1921.
42. The Gargaj Akali, Amritsar, February 28, April 17, June 26 and July 31, 1922.
43. The Babbar Akali Doaba, September 9, 1922.
45. The Babbar Com, San Francisco, June, 1925, p. 5.
47. The Gurmat Missionary, Delhi, April 1982, pp. 20-21.
also added to the richness of Panjabi folk literature. The folk song about Banta Singh is cited:

Banta Singh Babbar Dhamian Da,
Lak Banh ke Nadi Tar Jave. 48
(Unique Babbar Banta Singh Dhamian will seem,
Girding up his waist and crossing the stream)

During the second half of this century, the influence of the Babbar Akali Movement on literature has become more vivid. In this regard, Harsharan Singh, Gursharan Singh and Gurdial Singh Phul have dramatised the Babbar Sagas of heroic patriotism with precision, force and imagination. 49 Tarlok Singh's attempt 50 in the field of fiction is the first of its kind. The poetry of seventies and eighties also bears clear imprint of this movement. The poetry of protest, anguish and revolt was only a rehearsal of the Babbar sentiments and a legacy of Babbar genre of poetry. Dr. Gursharan Singh 51 had put new life into the dry bones of history and Avtar Jandialvi 52 in his poem succinctly points to the historic role of the movement when he calls it another step connecting Baan to Chakaur:


49. Harsharan Singh, Parde, Delhi, 1969; Gursharan Singh, Sis Tali Te, Amritsar; and Phul, Gurdial Singh, Choo Aie Mahin Sukha, Amritsar, 1982, support this contention.


52. The Preet Lari, Preet Nagar, August, 1980.
You may be a rebel or a fugitive,
Let me participate in your funeral congregation,
Some one has to show the way,
By getting his joints dissected;
Some one has to play heroic deed,
Of linking the fort of Chamkaur
To the blood-stained currents of Baen.

Thus, the impact of the Babbar Akali movement on
Sikh-politics, Indian freedom Movement as well as on life
and literature has been very significant. The movement has
become a part of the history of our country.