XI

**THE SUMMING-UP**

Chapter-wise Sketch of the Babbar Akali Movement

The Babbar Akali Movement was the outcome of the Akali Movement and was directed towards the attainment of India's Independence. It was the by-product of the cumulative effect of the anger of the Sikhs against the British administration. The way in which the Panjab had been snatched from the Sikhs, the Kuka Sikhs were suppressed, Sardar Ajit Singh was deported, inhuman treatment was meted out to the passengers of Kama Gate Maru and the British interfered in the religious affairs of the Sikhs by helping the Mahants and thus blockaded the Gurdwara Reform Movement, was agitating the minds of the Sikhs (Ch.I).

The Nankana tragedy and the atrocities perpetrated during the Guru Ka Beegh morcha on the non-violent Sikhs, aroused the ire of the Sikhs, in particular of those belonging to the Bist Jullundur Doab who came out openly to punish those who, they believed, stood in the way of the Gurdwara Reform movement (Ch.II).

Their aims and objectives were clear and specific. In the beginning, they stood for the liberation of the gurdwaras from the control of the Mahants. They first formed Chakarvarti Jathas and propagated their views among the people.
When the toadies made it difficult for them to operate among the people, they launched the Babbar Akali Jatha in August 1922, brought out Babbar Akali Doaba leaflet and included the elimination of the toadies among their objectives (Ch.III).

They stood for the liberation of the Gurdwaras and the country. To achieve this they resorted to violence and the "reform" or "elimination" of the toadies became their watchword. The peaceful propaganda activities and passive resistance were abandoned in favour of purposeful action which could elicit immediate attention of the authorities (Ch. IV).

In order to implement it, they toured the Doab villages, held divans and delivered fiery speeches in the conferences and awakened the masses. But the toadies became a constant source of danger. As a result, they merged their roving groups into BABBAR JATHA to chastise the toadies effectively (Ch. V).

The Babbar Akalis planned to tackle the toadies first. The first in the series was the assassination of Zalldar Bishan Singh of Fani Thua (Ranipur Kamboan) to be followed by the murders of Dewan (Singh) of Hayatpur on February 13, 1923; Buta (Singh) Lambardar of Nagal Shamaan on February 11, 1923; Labh Singh, C.I.D. Head constable of Garh Shankar on March 19, 1923 and Lambardar Hasara Singh of Behbalpur on
March 27, 1923; Subedar Genda Singh of Ghurial was murdered on 17 April, 1923. Lambardar and Sufedposh Ralla of Kaulgarh and his brother Dittu were killed in their village on May 20, 1923. Another notable murder of this period was that of Patwari Ata Mohammed of Mandahaur on June 6, 1923. According to the official record, the number of murders, during the movement amounted to 147 (Ch. VI).

The government, too, tried to nip the movement in the bud by arresting their leading light, Master Mota Singh on June 16, 1922 and other luminaries like Master Dalip Singh of Gossal, Secretary of the Babbar Akali Jatha and Karam Singh Jhingar and Havildar Kishan Singh, the Prima Donna of the Babbar Akali movement. The arrest of weaklings like Assa Singh of Phakrudi, on March 1, 1923 and that of Amar Singh of Kot Barre Khan on March 26, 1923 enabled the police to make a dent in the Babbar citadel and they obtained many important clues from them. Many villages were raided on March 23, 1923 and on the basis of those raids, arrests of the Babbar Akalis and their sympathisers were started on April 22, 1923 under the direct control of Sheikh Abdul Asia, Special Superintendent of Police (C.I.D.), Punjab, who was made the overall incharge to deal with the situation created by the BABBAR AKALI MOVEMENT. Rewards were proclaimed on April 25 and August 8, 1923, on the lines of the proclamation of November 30, 1922 for the
apprehension of the Babbar Akalis. As a result, many a weakling turned traitor and played in the hands of the bureaucracy to knock the movement out of its bottom.

Babu Banta Singh, the then Secretary was got arrested by his confident Sant Kartar Singh on June 20, 1923 at Tapa railway station from the railway compartment of the train going from Barnala to Bhatinda.

Anup Singh of Mamp, also betrayed E. Karam Singh of Daulatpur, the then President of the Babbar Akali Jatha on September 1, 1923 at Babeli, leading to his death along with Uday Singh of Ramgarh Jhuggian, Bishan Singh of Mangat and Mohinder Singh of Pindori Ganga Singh. Similarly Dalipa of Dhamian was arrested on 12th October, 1923 at Mian Chanman railway station (District Montgomery) due to the betrayal of Jawala Singh of Zian. Dhanna Singh of Behbalpur, too, fell a victim to the machinations of Jawala Singh on October 25, 1923. The remanent members of the Babbar Akali Jatha were Banta Singh of Dhamian, Jawala Singh of Fatehpur Kothi and Waryam Singh of Dhugga and a handful of others. Jagat Singh of Munder informed the police that Banta Singh, Jawala Singh and Waryam Singh were staying in his house at Munder. They were besieged on December 12, 1923 at Munder. Waryam Singh alone could escape. He, however, was killed on April 8, 1924 with the connivance of his relatives in an encounter with the police in Lyallpur District.
Those who were arrested were committed to the Sessions. The Main Babbar case and Supplementary case I (known as Trial No.II) included 91 Babbars who were sent for the trial. Three of them died during the trial, while others were convicted out of whom six were hanged on February 27, 1926. In the Babbar Supplementary case II (Trial No.3) again 6 Babbars were sent to the gallows on February 27, 1927 (Ch. VII).

The Babbar activities did not however, come to an end in spite of such deterrent punishments and executions. The Babbars killed many traitors and toadies during the thirties and forties with a vengeance. They included Bala Singh of Zian, Karam Singh of Mannanhana and Anup Singh of Manko. They also murdered the notorious Akali baiter S.G.M. Beaty in 1940 to avenge the atrocities committed by him during the Guru Ka Bagh morcha. The efforts of Sardar Harbans Singh of Sirhala, leading to the organisation of the Jug-Paltau-Dal in order to realise the dreams of the Babbars, were the last in the series (Ch.VIII).

Despite those gigantic efforts and sacrifices, the movement, as ill-luck would have it, failed to achieve its laudable objectives. It failed because it was not masterly planned nor was it faultlessly executed. It suffered from many snags. It remained regional throughout and could make headway only in the Doab. Only a very limited number of people in
the Panjab exhibited any genuine sympathy and open support for it. The reasons were quite obvious. The non-Sikh population altogether kept aloof. Out of the Sikhs their main organizations like Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Shiromani Akali Dal and the Central Sikh League did not extend their open support to it. Even the army, which brought forward no fewer than 54 soldiers to promote its objectives, failed to act as a body. No doubt, sporadic efforts and individual sacrifice created much terror and lent the tempo to the freedom struggle, but that alone was not sufficient.

In order to project it as a forceful and successful movement, cool-headed planning, complete secrecy, through and masterly implementation of the programme were the need of the hour. The Babbars were no doubt, a dedicated and devoted group of men, and proceeded to execute their programme without getting any active and open support from their compatriots. They lived on an emotional plane and executed their plans likewise. They planned to overthrow the British Government in India by the use of arms which they did not possess to any significant extent. The unlimited resources of the then mightiest empire in the world foretold the failure of the isolated efforts and single-handed struggle of the Babbar Akalis (Ch.IX).
But success is not the sole criterion for the appraisal of a movement. The main issue is not the victory but the fight, the essential is not to have won but to have fought well. The spirit that inspires and sustains a movement is an important factor that brings out its character and strength. The strength of the Babbar Akali movement lay in kindling the spark and revivifying the will to liberate the country. The ideology of the Babbaras and their selflessness made such an impact on the minds of the countrymen that it became a legend in its own time. Nearly all the revolutionaries in the thirties and forties got direct inspiration from them. The murders of the toadies at the hands of the revolutionaries was the legacy of this movement. Sir, Michael O'Dwyer was shot to death and Mr. S.G.K. Beaty was murdered during this period, and it demonstrated that the cause for which the Babbaras fought and died, was not forgotten.

The Babbaras rightly considered that an unjust political order could be fought against effectively only by the revolutionary means. They did not see any incompatibility to the use of force to strike terror in the minds of the British officers and their Indian supporters. No doubt, the Sikh religion puts more emphasis on forgiveness and self-abasement but that is an ideal and everything is not permeated with the ideal in life. Even Guru Gobind Singh had advocated the use of force and the Babbaras, like true disciples of the Guru,
re enacted his deeds. They firmly held the view that the cruel must be dealt with an iron hand and the toadies must be taught a lesson. Doubtlessly, their struggle was based on moral premises. When there was only "a choice between cowardice and violence", they followed the violent course and died for the cause of the Sikh religion and the country. Their movement was, characteristically, a Sikh Movement in its ideology, logistics and operation. Wherever the Sikhs either felt let down or were convinced of the inequity and injustice, their hand went to the hilt. The movement drew inspiration from the past and also inspired the future events. It became a model for the Post-Independence movements such as Naxalite upsurge in the Panjab in the sixties and the neo-revival of the Sikhs during the seventies and eighties. The struggle spearheaded by Damdami Taksal and the Babbar Khalsa has close resemblance to the Babbar Akali movement and quite interestingly has assumed the same religio-political complexion (Ch. X).

This resume, inevitably, leads us to certain conclusions. The pertinent question arises: Why do such violent movements arise? The answer is quite clear: The urge for emancipation is natural. The rulers, intoxicated with power, prefer to ignore even the genuine aspirations of their subjects and try to suppress them ruthlessly. The coercive methods lead to a situation where confrontation and retaliation become inevitable. If the government resorts to dialogue
instead, much violence can be avoided. Any government worth the name must take steps to redress the genuine grievances. Otherwise, very critical and inflammable situation arises if the government adopts a procrastinating attitude or shows antipathy. In the case of the Babbar Akalis, it was Nankana carnage which gave a severe jolt to the sincere Akalis. In the beginning, the Akalis stood for reformation in the management of the Gurdwaras. The failure of the government to understand the Sikh point of view and the promptness to help the Mahants inflamed the situation. What followed was merely its repercussion.

Secondly, no amount of repression can decimate the longing for freedom. That Babbars could challenge the might of the rulers in this unequal struggle, though for a short period, was characteristic of their dauntless courage and firm determination. They embarked upon the dangerous course, without caring for the consequences. To them, human existence had no meaning and they quite certainly, were aware that the road to freedom lay over the corpses of the patriots. Nothing is achieved without sacrifices.

Thirdly, it brings in bold relief that when fired with an ideal, human beings have an amazing capacity to bear untold sufferings. Only those who are capable of limitless sacrifices are capable of rising to limitless heights.

Fourthly, it brings out the truth that nothing is meaningless. The Babbar Akali movement, in its brief phase,
has left a lesson for posterity. The Babbar heroes had posed such a grim challenge to the government that the government was left with no alternative but to come to terms with the Akalis. It is needless to say that this movement added to the strength of the Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and thus increased their bargaining power.

Fifthly, the movement has yet another lesson which should not be lost sight of. Whenever there is a split, the antagonists take advantage of it and try to break the bone of the movement. This creates a catastrophic situation and the protagonists and proponents fail to fully realise their objectives.

Lastly, the controversy over means is only an exercise in futility. The number of deaths of those Akalis who followed the policy of passive resistance was not less than those of the Babbar Akalis. Violence is a part of human survival and existence and its utility had been recognised. The dangerous situation arises only when it becomes the sole arbiter of human destiny. Its expedient application cannot be under-estimated. It was the death-defying courage and selfless sacrifices of the Babbar Akalis which helped the Akali Dal and the Indian National Congress to strengthen their ranks and realise their aims to a large extent. Their struggle did help bring the
goal of freedom nearer. Thus their contribution to the struggle for freedom has been unique and memorable and hence should find a place of pride not only in the annals of the Panjab but also that of the entire sub-continent of India.