The Babbar Akali Movement forms a very important part of the history of the Panjab as well as of the Sikhs. It has, generally, been ignored up to now and has not received due attention and appreciation from historians and research scholars. Wherever an attempt has been made to take up this subject, the treatment is inadequate, inaccurate and perfunctory. Facts about its genesis, organisational set-up, working and impact are scantily known. Its aims and achievements have not been comprehended even by the close associates and contemporaries who were actively involved in it. The Babbars, in their own memoirs, seem to have over-emphasised the role of one or the other participant. At best, their approach has been subjective and they have succeeded only in throwing lime-light on that part and period of the movement which pertained mostly to their own locale and field of operation.

In this regard S. Gurbachan Singh’s ‘Babbar Akali’, S. Sunder Singh Makhsuspuri’s ‘Babbar Akali Lehar’, S. Labh Singh Jassowal’s ‘Sankhep Tawarikh Babbar Akali’ and ‘Sikhan Dian Pamisal Gurbanian’ (Bahaduri-i-Sikhan) (Mss.), S. Buta Singh’s ‘Babbar Akali Tehrik’ (Mss.) and S. Milkha Singh Mijjar’s ‘Babbar Akali Sangarsh’ (Mss.) reveal to us the lop-sided views of the authors and the glaring contradictions and
inaccuracies in the narration of facts.

There is a lot of confusion about the name of the place where the Babbar Akali Jatha was launched. There is also no unanimity about the names of the office-bearers of the Jatha. Even the genesis of the movement is shrouded in contradictions.

The acquaintance of the scholars with the movement, too, lacks in-depth study. This may be due to the paucity of the material available to them since most of the literature, published during the third and fourth decades of this century, was proscribed by the then Government. No doubt, some attempts have already been made to appraise the Babbar Akali movement but no exclusive, thorough and first-hand study has been attempted so far. It has been touched upon either at a tangent or only one or the other of its aspects has been dilated upon.

Too much reliance on official records, too, has circumvented the utility of some of these works, because without referring to the literature in which the Babbers unfolded their mind and enunciated their objectives and means, no research, worth the name, could be conducted. Surprisingly enough, the research scholars have left the works of the contemporaries, mostly, untapped. One could not expect Dr. Mohinder Singh in 'The Akali Movement' or Dr. Kamlesh Mohan
in 'The Militant Nationalism in the Panjab (1919-1935)' to give a detailed account of the movement as it formed only a part of their study. But the glaring inaccuracies in the crucial dates, names and places pertaining to the movement have further marred the value of their works.

Dr. Mohinder Singh in 'The Akali Movement' maintains that the XIII Sikh Education Conference was held from March 19 to 21, 1921 at Hoshiarpur (p.114). The conference, however, actually took place from March 25 to 27, 1921. He also mentions that it was Karam Singh of Daulatpur who recited the poem, "Khanda Pakro Shero akha Babbar Vangar" (p.117) at Mastuana, at the time of Haiman fair, in June 1921, whereas it was Kishan Singh Gargaj who attended the fair and delivered a speech bordering on militancy, advocating the use of force to liberate the Gurdwaras from the clutches of the Mahants.

Moreover, the place where the Babbar Jatha was launched, has not been correctly mentioned by both the scholars. Dr. Kamlesh Mohan in 'The Militant Nationalism in the Panjab, (1919 to 1935)', has not paid much attention to the correctness of the dates, persons and places. The dates mentioning the arrests of Master Mota Singh and of Kishen Singh Gargaj are wrong. No date has been given as to when Bishan Singh, Zaildar of Rani Thua, was murdered.
The birth place of Bachan Singh has been shown in Jullundur District, whereas his native place Loha Khera is near Longowal, District Sangrur (see map iii).

No doubt, this movement was confined to one part of the pre-Independence Panjab, its duration was short and it was crushed by the bureaucracy with an iron hand. Even then, the research scholars should not have failed to sift the grain from the chaff. Its role in the Gurdwara Reform Movement, surprisingly, has not been properly brought into limelight. The work of the movement in preparing grassroot-level workers for the Akali Dal as well as building a base for the Indian National Congress by the Chakarvartis and Babbar Akalis during their itineraries has not received proper attention. Significantly, the movement was the first of its kind during the recent period and was the true inheritor of the militancy that formed the core of the 18th century Sikh Movement. In the history of the Panjab its religio-political character marks it as a liberation movement. The nature of the movement, its role and impact have also not received the due consideration, which it legitimately demanded. Perhaps, all this happened as no serious effort was made to unearth and make use of the primary sources available in Panjabi language.

A sincere effort has been made, in this study, to bring to light facts concerning the Movement by unearthing the relevant material from the files of Panjabi Magazines, Journals and Newspapers pertaining to the Babbar Akali Movement,
which hitherto had remained almost unnoticed and untapped. The letters of Kishan Singh Gargaj and the poems of main leaders of the movement, shedding floodlight on the aims and ideology of the movement have been used critically and analytically for the first time. This source material has helped me to set right some of the wrongly held notions about its nature, aims and achievements. Its link with other contemporary and near-contemporary movements has also been discussed. I have tried to discuss afresh, the nature of its link with the Ghadr Movement as well as the Akali Movement. Its similarity with the Ghadr movement is very thin, whereas its dissimilarity with the Akali movement is very superficial. It was also quite different from the other militant movements in the sense that it derived inspiration from religion. The leaders of the Babbar Akali movement left their hearths and homes at a time when the Gurdwara Reform movement was passing through a crisis. Their patience was exhausted and they wielded the sword to settle their scores with the enemies of the Panth. The might of the British made them realise that the Gurdwaras could be liberated only if the country was liberated. So, they included the emancipation of the country among their objectives. This awareness changed the complexion of the Babbar Akali movement; it played a queer role in the history and provided a vitalising force to the Akali movement as well as the Indian National Movement. I have tried to bring all these factors into a proper perspective and have thus attempted to weave all strands afresh to make it an integrated account stating its origin.
development as well as the circumstances of the fissling out of the movement.

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( Gurcharan Singh )