Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), during the sixteenth century, had attained a distinct identity and individuality by the time of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). It was an organic growth — developing round the Guru, the Word of the Guru and the abode of the Guru. The Sikhs made every conceivable sacrifice to assert their existence and guard the honour of their tripodal structure. The long-drawn out struggle of the Sikhs during the 18th century made them masters of the land where many a time they were declared out-laws. In Ranjit Singh, the longing for political supremacy, nurtured by the Dal Khalsa in the 18th century, fructified. He endeavoured to set up a Panjabi state, called Sarkar Khalsa, which, however, could not last long. Whereas the Sikh rule brought wealth to the historic Sikh shrines, called, Gurdwaras, as a result of big land endowments, it also changed the life-style of the Sikh

2. The Proclamations of the Governors of Lahore, Khan Bahadur Zakarya Khan (1726-45) and Muin-ul-Mulk, popularly known as Mir Mannu (1748-53) concisely illustrate this.
priests. The introduction of rites and rituals, ceremonial and demonstrative practices had put the hands of the clock back and this, thoroughly, brain-washed the Sikh ruling class. Ranjit Singh's death on June 27, 1839 created a big void. The British who had been moving calculatingly and strategically towards the Panjab, conquered and annexed it on March 29, 1849.

The anarchy preceding the annexation and the bloody wars had stifled the will of the Sikhs and they failed to resist the annexation of their kingdom. It was Bhai Maharaj Singh who carried on the struggle single-handed. He planned to take away Maharaja Dalip Singh from Lahore Fort and start the freedom struggle in the Bist Jullundur Doab in his name. But he was caught unaware in an enclosure near Adampur on the basis of information given by a Muslim informer to Mr. Vansittart, the then, Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur, leading to his deportation to Singapore where he died on July 7, 1856. The defeat of the Sikhs was catastrophic. They lost not only

the home but also the desire of resistance.'\(^7\) As a result, the people of the Panjab could not contribute significantly to the uprising of 1857. A few of the Sikh soldiers along with a Sikh Brigadier were, no doubt, hanged at Amritsar.\(^8\) At Kopar, Bhai Mohar Singh proclaimed Khalsa Raj; at Sialkot, Panjabi Police raised a banner of revolt and even its surrounding villages did not lag behind.\(^9\)

The consequences of the loss of sovereignty were multi-dimensional and the socio-religious structure received a severe set-back. The defeated Khalsa lost vigilance of its sacred shrines.\(^10\) The Mahants started ignoring the tenets and practices, characteristic of Sikhism. The number of Sikh votaries had also fallen off. A large number of Hindus who had adopted the symbols and practices of the Khalsa, deserted in thousands like rats forsaking the sinking ship. The Sikh citadel was under heavy fire from the British missionaries as well as from the Brahminical Hinduism. It was not surprising, therefore,

\(^7\) Manchester Guardian, July 31, 1856, Quoted in Malik, Salabuddin, The Panjab and the Indian Mutiny (an article contributed to the Journal of Indian History, Indian Independence Silver Jubilee Number, August, 1972, p.350.

\(^8\) Mahar Singh, Documents Relating to Bhai Maharaj Singh, op.cit., p.XXX.


\(^10\) Sahni, Ruchi Ram, Struggle for Reform in Sikh Shrines, op.cit., p.6.
that Lord Dalhousie and Sir George Russel Clerk visualised the disappearance of the Sikhs with the close of nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, the Sikhs were enmeshed in forces which threatened their existence and their decline seemed visible. Political defeat brought religious decadence in its wake.

In this hour of lassitude in the Sikh faith, a challenge came from Baba Dyal (1783-1854), a founder of the Nirankari Sect. He opposed idol worship and preached marriage reform. His tradition was elaborated by the Kukas under Baba Ram Singh. He denounced the influence of the Brahmans and Muslim Fakirs on the Sikhs and vehemently condemned the Sodhis and Bedis who got themselves worshipped. The Kukas soon moved towards more militant reforms. On Baisakhi day, in 1857, Baba Ram Singh administered 'Pahul' to the Sikhs in his village, Bhaini, and created 22 centres in different parts of the country. The Commissioner of Amula Division in his report to the Panjab Government on September 11, 1866 stated that "sooner or later Kukas will take recourse to arms against us. A martial nation which is at pains to regain its lost freedom will naturally realise that political freedom is the natural sequel to religious revival". The British smelt a rat in this religious and social

13. Bhaini, a village in the district of Ludhiana, has been the headquarter of the Kukas.
movement and took no time to suppress it ruthlessly.

In 1871 the Kukas held a conference at Khote and some recalcitrant Kuka leaders, despite Baba Ram Singh's exhortations, attacked the butchers at Amritsar on June 14, 1871 and at Raikot on 15th July, 1871. Baba Ram Singh was held responsible for this outrage and his movements were restricted. But the Kuka intransigency could not be stemmed. Again some zealots attacked Malerkotla on January 15, 1872 and killed Kotwal Ahmedkhan and 7 sepoys. Sixty eight Kukas were captured near the village Rar, 49 of whom were blown up with guns on January 17 under the orders of Mr. L.Cowan, Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, while one boy was slaughtered to pieces. Next day the remaining 16 were got blown up by the orders of T.D. Forsythe, Commissioner, Ambala Division. Only 2 Kuka women were spared. Baba Ram Singh was deported to Rangoon where he died on 29th November, 1884.

Despite these movements, the discrimination against the Sikhs of lower castes continued and Brahminical Hinduism entrenched itself in the Sikh shrines. Nonetheless groundwork for the Sikh resurgence had been prepared.

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14. Khote is a village in District Faridkot, now. It was, then, in Ferozepur District.
The emergence of the Singh Sabha movement was the next notable development which created socio-cultural awareness and religious awakening among the Sikhs. The proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries culminating in the proclaimed intention of four Sikh pupils namely Aya Singh, Attar Singh, Sadhu Singh and Santokh Singh of the Amritsar Mission School, of renouncing their faith in favour of Christianity in 1873 as well as the anti-Sikh speeches of Hindu propagandists like Pandit Sharda Ram Phillauri inside the limits of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar sent a wave of shock among the Sikhs. It was under these disquieting circumstances that the first Singh Sabha was founded at Amritsar on October 1, 1873. It was duly registered under the name of Sri Guru Singh Sabha, vide Act XXI of 1860. The Sabha stood for the love of religion among the Sikhs, advocated the propagation of Sikhism and Panjabi and scrupulously avoided and evaded political issues. Its important members were Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, Baba Khes Singh Bedi of Kullar and Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala. Giani Gian Singh was its Secretary. But it soon fell a prey to dissensions due to the conservative ideology of some of its leading members.

The Lahore Singh Sabha was founded on November 2, 1879. Its leading lights were Bhai Jawahar Singh, Bhai Dit Singh and Bhai Maiya Singh. This Sabha fought on two fronts. It raised its voice against the conservative Sikh leaders on the one hand and on the other hand it countered the activities of the Christian missionaries as well as the onslaught of the Arya Samajists. In its two-fold programme it gave a crushing blow to the gurudom and caste system as well. The number of the Sabhas rose to 120 in 1899. The rapid increase in the number of Singh Sabhas led to the founding of the General Sabha at Amritsar in 1880 which developed into Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, on April 11, 1883. But this body too, from its very inception, was torn by internal dissensions, and the tussle for supremacy between the Amritsar and the Lahore parties wrecked it. This led to the formation of an independent Khalsa Diwan at Lahore in 1886. The leaders of the Lahore Diwan were progressive where as the Amritsar Diwan was the stronghold of the conservative elements — mainly the aristocrats and Mahants. The latter failed to appreciate the wind that was blowing to restore Sikhism to its pristine glory. Nonetheless during this period, the Sikhs were able to co-operate despite mutual acrimony and dissensions and established Khalsa College, Amritsar on March 5, 1892.

The Singh Sabha movement played its historic role by exposing the evils which had crept into the social and

religious life of the Sikhs. It reclaimed Sikhism from "a state of utter ossification and inertia and articulated the inner urge of Sikhism for reform and gave it a decisive direction". It not only checked the relapse of the Sikhs into Hinduism, but also retaliated by carrying proselytising activities into the Hindu camp. A large number of the Hindus were baptised and the Sikh population which was 17,06,165 in 1881 rose to 21,02,896 in 1901 and never dwindled again. Thus the Singh Sabha movement proved to be the elan vital in the regeneration of the Sikh society.

The body which undertook several functions of the Singh Sabha was formed in 1902 and was called Chief Khalsa Divan. It paved the way for national revival by its impact on society, education and religion. Though it toed the line of the rulers, yet it always tried to bring the Sikh grievances to their notice. The contribution of the Chief Khalsa Divan cannot be underestimated. It spearheaded the movement to open colleges and schools throughout the State. The Sikh Education Conference was its annual feature since 1908 and it was able to add every year one High School. The Khalsa Tract Society brought out literature

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of good merit. The polemic variety of the tracts furthered the cause of the Sikh religion by attacking its virulent opponents. During this period, Sikhism showed signs of new stirring. The Sikhs were now coming under the spell of the Neo-Sikhs who were insisting on separation from Hinduism and advocated mass reclamation of low-caste Sikh converts to Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also demanded reform of the gurdwaras. The Mahants of the Sikh shrines showed scanty respect for distinct symbol or theology. They treated these places as their private property retaining the idols of Hindu gods, goddesses, paramours and their pornographic postures. The situation warranted drastic reform but the Chief Khalsa Diwan failed to take a strong stand. Even then the Mahants considered this body too progressive where as to the Neo-Sikhs it was too conservative and equivocating on key issues and hence was unable to lead the Sikhs. Nonetheless the movement proved fatal to the continued existence of the orthodox Sikhs observing Hindu practices and rituals. In 1905 the idols were removed from the precincts of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. A movement of religious revival was evident as a sort of defence mechanism against the onslaught of the external pressure. The


Government of India though admired the Sikhs for their bravery and religion and helped the Sikhs in their struggle by making the observance of the Khalsa tradition compulsory for the Sikh soldiers and civil servants. Yet it dreaded the prospects of Tat-Khalsa Party (Neo-Sikhs) ever obtaining the possession of the Golden Temple. Even the bonafides of moderates and loyalists like Bhai Vir Singh, Sardar Tirlochan Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia were suspected. It felt that the Neo-Sikh Party was suffering from a "wind in the head". Thus the imaginary fear led the Panjab Government to support the Mahants. The shift from tacit approval of the Sikh reformers, to active support for their opponents set the stage for intense conflict. However, when the circumstances took a dramatic turn in 1921, the British found themselves facing not the moderate Chief Khalsa Diwan, but the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and its militant auxiliary, the Akali Dal.

When the Sikhs were thus surging with life and were impatient at the socio-religious phenomenon, on economic front they were not less unhappy. The Panjab Government introduced a

29. Rahul Singh, Khushwant Singh's View of India, Bombay, 1974, p.94
31. Barrier, N.C., The Sikhs and Their Sacred Literature, op.cit., p.XIV.
bill which affected the newly colonised lands, opened by the canals. This circumvented the rights of the peasants as well as provided for higher rates of assessment in Rawalpindi District and higher water rates on Bari Doab canals. This led to a grave discontent among the Jat Sikhs and made the Panjab a fertile soil for revolutionary seed. The nationalist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh made the peasantry politically conscious. The meetings were held at Lahore, Rawalpindi, Amritsar and Lyallpur. The soul-stirring song 'Pagri Sambhal O Jatta, Pagri Sambhal Oea', composed by Banke Dyal, pitched the movement firmly.

The students of the Khalsa College at Amritsar staged a hostile demonstration at the farewell visit of the outgoing Lieutenant Governor, Sir Charles Rivas. The disaffection infiltrated into the ranks of the army as well. The Punjab Government of Sir Densil Ibbetson saw in these happenings an incipient rebellion. The authorities were alarmed as the agitation was mainly confined to the districts of Sikh predominance. Though many leaders were arrested and S. Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were deported to Burma yet the movement could not be stamped out till

35. Home-Political Department, File No.154-155/1909.
the Viceroy of India, Lord Minto, vetoed the bill. This agitation, for the first time, shattered the myth of the Sikh loyalty.

The agrarian agitation had brought the economic issue to the fore. It was a warning to the Punjab Government but it took no steps to remove the causes of unrest and ameliorate the lot of the Panjabis. Some of the hard-pressed and enterprising Panjabis, mostly the Sikhs, decided to emigrate in search of better opportunities leaving others behind, to keep the flame of revolution burning. 36

The influx of the Punjabis to Canada and the U.S.A., started in the first decade of the 19th century. The number of Indians in Canada in 1901 was 2312 and in the U.S.A., according to Brunt was 6313. It increased to 30,000 in both the countries. This increase in numbers whipped up anti-Indian feelings and the Indian became victim of discrimination. Even the Governments of Great Britain and India did not listen to their memorials, representations and requests. This convinced them that only free people could command respect and their wrath, thus, fell rightly on the foreign rulers in India. They started simultaneously a struggle against the Immigration Act and thus it became a struggle against the colonial rule. Since

most of the immigrants were the Sikhs, the earliest organisations were established to build Gurdwaras which soon came up in Vancouver, Victoria and other cities. It is not surprising, therefore, that work against the British Imperialism was started in these countries mainly by the granthis i.e. scripture-readers in the Sikh Gurdwaras. Subsequently, the Indians in the U.S.A. formed Hindustan Association of the Pacific Coast at Portland. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, G.D.Kumar and Pandit Kanshi Ram were elected President, General Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Lala Hardyal was called from California. A weekly called the Ghadr was brought out and the Ghadr Party was organised on revolutionary lines. This party planned to wage guerilla warfare in India and resolved to establish a Republic in Kashmir by 1925.

But the Komagata Maru incident and the outbreak of the World War I compelled them to change their programme. Komagata Maru was a ship chartered on 20th March 1914 by Baba Gurdit Singh

38. Satya, M.Ray, "Panjabi Heroic Tradition", op.cit., p.34.
of village Farhali, to satisfy the condition of the Canadian Privy Council Order No. 920. There were 376 passengers in it including 346 Sikhs. It started for Canada on 23rd May 1914, but the ship was not allowed entry and was compelled to leave Canadian waters on 23rd July, 1914, after a long struggle. The ship was directed to go straight to Calcutta where it arrived on 26th September, 1914. The police insisted that the passengers should board the train bound for the Panjab. Only 50 men and two children boarded the train while others defied the police. In the combat, 19 were killed, 203 were arrested and 32 absconded. Baba Gurdit Singh was one of those who escaped the police net. There was a sharp reaction against this high-handedness. It gave a powerful stimulus to the Ghadr movement. It was in these circumstances that the Ghadr party leaders decided to go to India; consequently the first batch of the Ghadrites left San Francisco in August, 1914. Ram Chandra said, "Your duty is clear. Go to India.

43. It is a big, flourishing village, on the Harike - Amritsar road, near Tarntaran.
44. It envisaged that the immigrants must come by continuous journey and on through ticket from the country of their birth or citizenship.
45. Hira Singh, Marian Kaur Ithasik Yadai, Jullundur, 1955, p.93. According to him the number of the passengers was 360 only.
46. Sahensara, G.S., Ghadr Party Da Ithas, op.cit., p.130.
stir up rebellion in every corner of India.

But the Government of India was vigilant. It was able to intern 2500 in the villages and sent 400 to jails out of 3000 who came back in 1914-15. However, some important revolutionaries managed to escape. They later on, organised themselves to stage an uprising and make strenuous efforts to develop contacts and establish links with the Indian soldiers at Mian Mir and Ferozepur. They fixed 21st February, 1915 for the uprising but the whole plan was foiled as C.I.D. entered inner circle by planting Kirpal Singh who leaked the information. Though they changed the date of uprising to 19th February, yet the damage could not be undone. The police took action in time and arrested seven of the revolutionaries and disarmed the 23rd Cavalry at Mian Mir, Ferozepur, Sialkot and Rawalpindi. The carelessness and the complacency of the Ghadrites led to the collapse of the movement.

When the Ghadrites were anxious to take advantage of the difficulties of the British imperialists, a large section of the Indians was anxious to win the British goodwill.

50. Prominent among them were S. Kartar Singh Sarabha, Jagat Ram, Kanhi Ram, Prithvi Singh, Dr. Mathura Singh, Gurwak Singh Lalton, Bhai Midhan Singh, S. Harman Singh and Bhai Bhagat Singh nee Gomha Singh of Kachar Bhannah.
51. O'Dwyer, Sir, Michael, India As I Knew It, op. cit., p. 200.
52. Sahensara, G.S., Ghadr Party Da Ithas, op. cit., p. 195.
53. Ibid., p. 221.
by co-operating with them in their war-efforts. The Sikhs, in the Panjab, out did all others. Their number in the services rose to 100,000 by the end of the war, while in 1915 it was about 35,000 only. But, they were soon to muzzle their hands. When the war ended, their woes increased due to the demobilisation. Thus the economic distress added to the political unrest.

The world-wide unrest which followed the war affected, to a marked degree, a country which had rendered great services to the empire in the hour of its peril. At such a psychological moment, the Government of India passed the Rowlatt Bills, which intended to perpetuate the suspension of ordinary law safeguarding the rights and liberties of the people. It left them at the tender mercies of the executive or rather the police even in times of peace, exactly as in critical days of war. The Rowlatt Bills sought to curtail the liberty of the people. It provided for speedy trial of offences by a Special Court, which could meet in Camera and take into consideration evidence not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act. There was no place for "Dalil, vakil and apil". There was a wave of indignation against these "Lawless laws". Only one of the two bills, Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, 1919, could be passed on March 18, 1919. Mahatma Gandhi started an agitation. He resorted to Satyagraha on March 20, 1919.

54. Leigh M.S., The Punjab and the War, Lahore, 1922, p. 44.
and made a fervent appeal to observe hartal for a day. The date originally fixed was 30th March, 1919, but was changed to 6th April. There was a strike in Amritsar on April 6 and throughout the Panjab on April 10, 1919. Dr. Satya Pal and Dr. Saif-ud-din, Kitchlew, the leaders who were guiding the movement in the Panjab, were arrested on 11th April, from their homes in Amritsar and removed to the Dharamsala Jail. The show of power did not deter the people of the city. On April 13, 1919, a meeting was held in the Jallianwala Bagh despite prohibitory orders. General Dyer marched a platoon of Infantry to the Bagh. Without issuing any warning he ordered the troops to open fire upon a defenceless crowd of 10 thousand strong. He kept on his merciless fusillade for ten consecutive minutes. When he ordered the firing to be stopped, 337 men, 41 boys and one seven-week-old baby had already fallen a prey to his fury. His callousness and ruthlessness turned a protest meeting into a National Tragedy. Perhaps, he did it purposely to strike terror into the whole of the Punjab. The event was described "Without parallel in the modern history of the British Empire, a monstrous event, an event which stood in singular and sinister isolation". The heroic stand of the people of

59. Valentine, Chrol, The Indian unrest, New Delhi, 1979, pp.177-78.
60. Majumdar, R.C., Struggle for Freedom, op.cit., p.309.
Amritsar against the awful might of the British was epoch-making.\textsuperscript{61} Gandhiji rightly remarked on October 20, 1920 in his speech at Lahore that "India rose through Jallianwala Bagh."\textsuperscript{62} In the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the Sikhs, who lost life, formed at least one third of the whole.\textsuperscript{63} The Congress and other national parties lauded and honoured the martyr of the Jallianwala Bagh.

No wonder, when the Sikhs immediately afterwards started a movement against the Mahants which ultimately became a struggle against the British interference in the Gurdwara affairs, the leaders of all the major parties, sincerely helped the Sikhs. The Sikh masses, who until now looked to Singh Sabha and Chief Khalsa Diwan, formed the Central Sikh League under Gandhi's inspiration. This body was opposed to the Chief Khalsa Diwan's toadyism to the British.\textsuperscript{64} After seven decades, the Sikhs who were, by and large, not anti-government, were now on the other side of the fence. The English were called "snakes" by them.\textsuperscript{65}

The reason for this conflict lay in the Panjab Government's attitude towards the control of the Gurdwaras. The Gurdwaras

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Raja Ram, \textit{The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre}, Chandigarh, 1969, p.142.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Teja Singh, \textit{Gurdwara Reform Movement and Sikh Awakening}, Jullundur, 1922, p.79.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Khushwant Singh, \textit{A History of the Sikhs}, Vol.II, op.cit., p.167.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} S. Rattan Singh Di Garj, Quoted in W. & T. Gustafson, \textit{Sources on Punjab History}, Delhi, 1975, p.74.
\end{itemize}
belonged to the Sikh Community and the Mahants were simply the custodians. They had now begun to assert proprietary rights and, in fact, were becoming priest-proprietors.

The distinction of possession as owners and possession as custodians for carrying out the religious and charitable services was ignored. The Mahants began to exercise personal rights in the endowments and the resultant accumulation of wealth led to the deterioration of their character. These men were becoming unacceptable to the community. Their baptism and five symbols became a mere anomaly.\(^66\) They had degenerated and were a handmaid of the rulers. They had degraded their venerated position. The British never wanted the Sikhs to be the masters of their Gurdwaras. A letter, written by Lieutenant R.E. Eagerton, to the Viceroy, Lord Ripon on 8th August, 1881 showed them in their true colours. He wrote, "I think it would be politically dangerous to allow the management of the Sikh temples to fall into the hands of a committee emancipated from government control."\(^67\) As such the Mahants under the government thumb failed to become the honest interpreters of the wishes of the Panth. They issued a commandment from the Akal Takhat in 1915 and condemned the Kowagata Mary Sikhs.\(^68\) Akal Takhat

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66. Teja Singh, Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening, p.34.


the seat of National Will and power, was now a mere altar where offerings were made. Again in 1919, the community felt deeply insulted, when Rur Singh, the custodian of the Golden Temple, offered a Saropa to Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of the Panjab. General Dyer was also offered a Kirpan (Sword of Honour) and it was quoted in the British Parliament by Lord Finlay that he had been made a Sikh. This showed how the government-appointed Sarbrah and the Mahants had degenerated and disgraced themselves in the eyes of the Sikhs by their role as sycophants of the British.

The way in which the Government of India acquired the land attached to the Gurdwara Rikabgarh, Delhi and the meek stand taken by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, had already infuriated the Neo-Sikhs. The Sikh militancy, thus aroused, reached new heights when the first world war ended. They were now dead-set on capturing the Gurdwaras which had been turned by the Mahants into brothels and cesspools of their nefarious activities and where neither a man's honour nor a woman's virtue was safe.

The newly formed Sikh League was also adopting a radical posture. It demanded that Darbar Sahib, Amritsar be placed in the hands of a representative body of the Sikhs, but the Government procrastinated.

The challenge to the Mahants came from the Khalsa 'Biradari' of Amritsar which led the 'low caste converts' to the Golden Temple on October 12, 1920. The priests resisted their admission and even refused to accept Karah Parsad. It was only after the consultation of the Holy Book that the priests agreed to offer prayers and accepted food from the hands of the newlyconverted Sikhs. The order from the Holy Book was: "He receives the lowly into grace and puts them in the path of righteous one". This had deep effect on the priests as well as the congregation. Then they moved to the Akal Takht but the priests there slipped away leaving the Guru Granth Sahib unattended. Bhai Kartar Singh Thab and Teja Singh Bhuchar appointed a committee of 25 Sikhs for the management of Shri Akal Takhat.

Thus the pujaris ousted themselves as they did not come back even when Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, the Government-appointed sarbrah contacted them. Consequently, Teja Singh Bhuchar was

75. Partap Singh, Gurdvara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lahar, Amritsar, 1965, p.84.
appointed the first Jathedar of Sri Akal Takhat. There was no plan for the struggle that so miraculously developed into the Gurdwara Reform Movement. On October 13, Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar appointed a committee of 9 persons for the control of the Golden Temple. It was then that the Sikhs planned to form a Central organisation of their own for the management of the Golden Temple, Akal Takhat and other Gurdwaras. This move unnerved the Panjab Government. Under such circumstances, Master Mota Singh, after much discussion and deliberations, got issued a mandate from the Akal Takhat. An assembly of the Panth to control and govern the Sikh shrine was, thus, summoned. The Government, with the assistance of the Maharaja of Patiala, constituted a committee of 36 Sikhs with the motive of foiling their attempt. The Akali leadership did not allow the strategy to succeed and formed a larger organisation of 175 members which included 36 Sikhs nominated by the Government. This committee was proclaimed the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee on November 15, 1920.

78. Ibid., p. 72-74.
80. Partap Singh, Gurdwara Sudhar, Arthat Akali Lehar, op. cit., p. 89. Gustafson, (4th Ed.), Sources on Panjab History, Delhi, 1975, p. 1427 is not correct in ascribing 1921, as the year when S.G.P.C. was formed.
The leadership consisting of S. Sunder Singh Majithia, E. Harbans Singh Atari and S. Sunder Singh Bamgarhia was mainly loyal though genuinely interested in the reform programme of the Sikh shrines. Its first meeting took place on 12th December, 1920 and a committee of "5 Beloved ones" was appointed to draw up the mode, manner and method of the management and rituals to be followed in the Gurdwaras.\(^{31}\)

The formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee provided a focal point for the movement for the reformation of Sikh religious institutions.\(^{32}\)

During this period the Sikh League which had its start with the ultra-loyalist President Sardar Bahadur Gajjan Singh on December 27, 1919, at Amritsar, came to be controlled by the nationalists. It passed a resolution of non-cooperation with the government, under the influence of Gandhi Ji, at its Lahore session on October 20, 1920, despite the opposition of S. Teja Singh Bhuchar, Sardar Amar Singh of Lyall Gazette and Bhai Jodh Singh. The resolution was warmly advocated and upheld by Master Mota Singh, Sardar Sardul Singh Caveshar, Sardar Marchand Singh Lyallpur, Sardar Teja Singh Samandri, Sardar Amar Singh and Sardar Garmukh Singh Jhabal. The Ghadrite veterans too advocated the conjunction with the mainstream of the national


\(^{32}\) Harbans Singh, The Heritage of the Sikhs, Delhi, 1983, p.27C.
Already the "Akali" brought out by Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri and Giani Hira Singh Dard and others on May 21, 1920 was playing the role of the precursor of the Akali Movement, and in its first issue had outlined its programme advocating Panthic control over the Gurdwaras; Khalsa College, Amritsar and repairing of the demolished wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj, Delhi. The Sikh alignment with national mainstream made the Government anxious and it tried to arrive at some compromise with the Sikhs. The demolished wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj was got built before December 1, 1920 and Khalsa College was handed over to a college committee before 5th November, 1920. Though the British compromised when confronted with threats of violence, yet the relations once scarred were not repaired again. The Sikhs were awakened to a renewed sense of separate political identity based on religion and it eventually brought the Sikhs into conflict with the British. The Sikhs were firm in their endeavour to liberate the gurdwaras from the control of the Mahants, to them the liberation of Gurdwaras was as important as the Khilafat Movement was to Mohammedans. 'Swaraj' to them included in its concept the liberation of the Gurdwaras as well. Unfortunately, the

84. Miranjan Singh, Principal, Mera Jivan Vikas, Delhi, 1970,p.75.
Mahants on the instigation of the government officials defied the Sikhs. Such a situation could not be tolerated indefinitely.\footnote{86}

It was on 14th December, 1920 that the Shiromani Akali Dal was forced to assist the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee. Fardar Sarmukh Singh Jhabalia was its first President.\footnote{87}

It was to train men for taking over the Gurdwaras from the recalcitrant Mahants. The Akali Dal sent Jathas to different Gurdwaras, captured and handed them over to the Shiromani Gurdwaras Parbandhak Committee. By this time the Gurdwaras of Babe Di Ber, Sialkot, Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh, Peshawar, Panja Sahib, Sacha Sauda, Khadur Sahib, Thas Sahib, Kira Sahib and Chohla Sahib passed into the hands of the Sikhs. All this happened peacefully; but the Akali zealots had their baptism of fire at Tarn Taran on January 25, 1921, where two Akalis fell victim to the priestly aggression.\footnote{88} It was only a prelude to what happened on February 70, 1921 at Nankana Sahib in which 130 persons were killed.\footnote{89} This tragedy marked the watershed in the Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh-British relations. The Sikhs now realised that they could oust the Mahants only if the government was compelled to withdraw its support to the latter.

\footnote{86}{The Akali Te Pardesi, Amritsar, October 22, 1922.}
\footnote{87}{Josh Sohan Singh, Akali Morchian De Ithas, op. cit., p. 51.}
\footnote{88}{Giani Partap Singh, Gurudwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehbar, op. cit., p. 96.}
\footnote{89}{Gurbax Singh Jhabalia, Sahidi Jiwan, Nankana Sahib, 1938, p. 573 gives a list of 86 Sikhs killed at Nankana. The Government report conceded 130 as killed, vide P.L.C.D. 304. Also see Punjab Govt. Communique of Feb. 27, 1921, quoted in the Civil and Military Gazette, Oct., 23, 1921. Kartar Singh Jhabba, Saka Nankana Te Durge Gurdwarian de Kabze Lajn de Balkat (MSE) p. 112, gives the number of killed as 150, vide Panch February 23, 1921 it was about 200.}
On February 21, 1921 Bhai Kartar Singh Jhabbar with a Jutha of 22CC entered the Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Shri Nankana Sahib defying Deputy Commissioner's orders. The show of force at this time retrieved the Sikh prestige. The Commissioner of Lahore, Mr. C.W. King yielded and asked Bhai Kartar Singh Jhabbar and Sardar Mehtab Singh to form a committee of seven members which immediately took control of the Gurdwara under the Presidentship of Sh. Harbans Singh Atari, a moderate Chief Khalsa Diwan leader.

The Banka tragedy had drawn the line. The Panjab Government was on the side of the Mahaits where as the Sikhs masses and the Akali leadership drew sustenance from the national forces. The Government, calculatingly, followed a new policy. It tried to suppress the extremists and weaken the Akali agitation by offering many baits. Such circumstances led to a long struggle known as the Akali movement, which in turn prepared the ground for the genesis of a violent movement consisting of those Akalis who were militant and non-cooperators. It came to be known as the Babbar Akali Movement.

91. Sardar Harbans Singh Atari was the grandson of Sardar Sham Singh Atari, veteran of the battle of Sabhraon, fought on February 10, 1926.