No popular movement is ever started with the predetermined aims. Every movement is like a trickle in the initial stage which changes into a stream and ultimately takes the shape of a river. The nature and the process of the movement too determine its aims.

The Babbar Akali movement had originated when the Gurdwara Reform movement was passing through a crucial stage. It was an offshoot of the Akali movement.\(^1\) The Akali Dal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee were following the policy of passive resistance under the influence of Gandhi ji. The Panjab Government covertly supported the Mahants and that led to the bloody massacre at Nankana Sahib on February 20, 1921. The aim of the Gurdwara Reform movement was the ouster of the depraved Mahants in a pacific and non-violent manner. But the militants among the Akalis were disillusioned with it. They stood for avenging the Nankana tragedy. This was an embryonic stage of the Babbar Akali movement. The aim of the group was to eliminate all those who were trying to torpedo the Gurdwara Reform movement. At this stage

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they aimed to murder the toadies and procure the weapons so that the antagonists might be dealt with effectively.\textsuperscript{2} Subsequently, S. Kishan Singh Gargaj and others conspired to murder Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, Baba Kartar Singh Bedi, Mahant Basant Dass of Manak, Mahant Dewa Dass of Nankana, Messrs C.W. King and J.W. Bowring as they were supposed to be obstructing the movement for the reform of the Gurdwaras.\textsuperscript{3}

According to a C.I.D. report, the militants aimed at creating a rising in the Patiala state, seeking the Bolshevik's help and inciting rebellion on the Frontier. They were also trying to foment trouble in the central Panjab, to procure weapons and to murder the enemies of the Khalsa Panth.\textsuperscript{4}

In pursuance of this plot, Master Mota Singh crossed the Frontier. The militants also collected arms and ammunition and made attempts to murder the Mahant of Manak and Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia. They were planning to murder Mr. C.W. Bowring, Superintendent of Police, Lahore, when they were arrested. The arrest of the two of the conspirators at Lahore foiled their plan and their scheme fell like a house of cards. Then started the Akali conspiracy case in which 25 persons were implicated, out of whom 5 absconded, 6 became approvers, one died and 13 were tried. Out of the accused sent for trial

\textsuperscript{2} Paper Book, Babbar Akali Conspiracy Case, p.40.

\textsuperscript{3} Babbar Akali case, Judgement, 1925, p.2.

\textsuperscript{4} Home-Political, File No.268/1922, p.6.
three were sentenced to 5 years each, while others were acquitted.

The prominent members of this group were Master Mota Singh of Patara and Kishan Singh 'Gargaj' of Birring. Master Mota Singh had left India in the second week of June, 1921 and Kishan Singh Gargaj also became fugitive from justice with the intention of forming a Chakarvati Jatha with the following aims:

(i) to move about freely in the country and spread hatred against the government,

(ii) to terrorise the loyalists and supporters of the government so that they might refrain from giving information about the movement and the activities of the Jatha,

(iii) to stir up the peasantry and to seduce army, especially the Sikh portion of it,

(iv) to collect money and procure weapons, and

(v) to stage a revolution on lines similar to the mutiny of 1857.

5. The Akali, Lahore, 13 June, 1922, Also vide Home-Political, File No.268/1922, p.7.


Kishan Singh Gargaj was the moving spirit of this breakaway group from the Akali Party. He evaded arrest and whipped up campaign against the British rule. His first speech at Mastuana in June, 1921 clearly unfolded his plan of armed insurrection. He exhorted the audience to wield the sword. Since then, he carried on a virulent campaign against the government. In November, 1921, the Chakarvarti Jatha was formed to achieve these aims. The Chakarvartis used the Akali and Congress stages and supported those movements as well. They extended a helping hand to the Akalis in capturing Kiratpur Gurdwara on 13th January, 1922, though the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee disapproved forcible capture. The cause of the Sikh Gurdwaras remained ever dear to them. At the time of Guru Ka Bagh morcha they offered all the possible help. Though their means were not appreciated by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee yet they carried on their activities to help the Gurdwara Reform Movement. It was on March 17, 1922 at Sangowal diwan that they felt the audacity of the toadies and decided to remove their fear by acting boldly and adopt the following measures:

10. Ibid., p.7.
11. Partap Singh, Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar, op.cit.p.135
1. to deliver warning to the toadies (2) to chop off their ears and noses if they failed to heed warning and (3) to arm themselves.\textsuperscript{13}

They had to revise their objectives after the incident at Sundh where Sunder Singh Makhususpuri and Arjan Singh Sundh were arrested and Kishan Singh Gargaj narrowly escaped on May 11, 1922.\textsuperscript{14}

The Chakarvarti Jatha headed by S. Kishan Singh created an awakening in the Jullundur area whereas the Jatha of S. Karam Singh of Daulatpur was active in Bochiarpur. In August, 1922 both these jathas were merged and the Babbar Akali Jatha was launched in its meeting at Rajoval in the hermitage of Sant Thakar Singh.\textsuperscript{15} The Babbar Akali jatha carried on a relentless programme and was able to incite hatred against the government. Its success made the government more cautious and the police more vigilant. Heavy rewards were offered by the government to arrest Kishan Singh, Karam Singh of Daulatpur and others. This, once again, compelled them to revise their objectives. In their meeting held at Jassowal on December 25, 1922, they decided to follow a programme of murdering the toadies. This decision was approved by the

\begin{itemize}
\item [13.] Makhususpuri, Sunder Singh, \textit{Babbar Akali Lehar}, op.cit., p.68.
\item [14.] Ibid., p.72.
\item [15.] Gurbachan Singh, \textit{Babbar Akali}, op.cit., p.18.
\item [16.] Makhususpuri, Sunder Singh, \textit{Babbar Akali Lehar}, op.cit., p.96.
\end{itemize}
Working Committee on December 30-31, 1922 at Jassowal. The following decisions were taken:

1) The working committee alone was competent to decide when and by whom a particular toady was to be murdered. No member was to initiate any action arbitrarily.

2) In case a member comes across a toady, per chance, he should be murdered.

3) No valuables of the toadies were to be removed without the prior instructions of the working committee and the same be handed over to the working committee intact so that the amount might be used to purchase arms and meet the expenses of the 'Babar Akali Doaba'.

4) Neither the children of the toadies nor their women folk be touched during an operation against them.

5) Only those will be enrolled as members of the Babbar Akali jatha who perform their duty by giving up all other engagements on the call of the working committee.

6) The decision of chopping of the noses and ears was replaced by immediate and instant murder.

7) Every murder would be announced in the name of two or three Babbars in a special leaflet.

8) While the Babbars were forbidden to loot innocent persons, the property of the government, toadies and
notorious money lenders was considered legitimate for the cause.\(^{17}\)

Kishan Singh Gargaj had steered the party clear of the murderous assaults. But after his arrest on February 26, 1923, the Babbars resorted to indiscriminate murders. Their object was to expel the British rulers by violent means\(^ {18}\) and they aimed to implement their revolutionary plan by collecting arms and stirring the army and the peasantry. They followed the Machiavellian principles and believed in the dictum: "Where there is hope only in arms, those arms are holy".\(^ {19}\) They staked everything for the realisation of their aim of serving the country and the Khalsa Panth. The money looted in dacoities was never used for personal ends.\(^ {20}\) They aimed at the expulsion of the British from India because they stood for the service of the country as well as the Panth.\(^ {21}\) The arrest of the leading Babbars irked them and they embarked upon the course of murders. They were conscious of the fact that their struggle was of a vaster magnitude. Their aim was not simply to wrest the Gurdwaras from the Mahants but also to liberate the country from the alien rulers.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp.98-99. Also vide C.F. Isemonger's evidence in *The Babbar Akali Conspiracy*, *Quoted in the Civil and Military Gazette*, October, 31, 1923.

\(^{18}\) *The Khoj Darpan*, Amritsar, January 1922, p.104.

\(^{19}\) Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Translated by George Bell) San Francisco, June 1925, p.185.


The study of the aims of this movement can be viewed properly only if literature of the Babbar is also taken into account. No doubt, much of that was proscribed and was not easily available. However, the residual obtainable literature is enough to give us a peep into their aims. The Home-Political series of the record at the National Archives of India, statements of the prosecution witnesses who were mainly hirelings and quislings; the government officials and the approvers focus our attention only on a part of the story and to rely entirely on them would be detrimental to the interests of both, history as well as the truth.

A perusal of the literature in the pages of the Gargaj Akali¹, the Akali-Te-Pardesi, the Babbar Akali Doaba and the Kirti demonstrate the aims of the brave Akalis. The writings of Master Mota Singh, S. Kishan Singh Gargaj, S. Karam Singh of Daulatpur, S. Hari Singh Khanda, Arjan Singh Sach, Banta Singh, Waryam Singh, Dhanna Singh, Nand Singh and many others bring into limelight the aims for which they laid down their lives. Master Mota Singh strove to awaken the masses and keeping this end in view, he absconded. He went to Afghanistan and the Frontier 'to study the political affairs and conditions there'. ²²

He advocated the election of the poor peasants and labourers for the Congress and the Akali organisations. This was a pointer in the direction in which his mind was working. Though the religious and political aims were immediately emphasized yet under the indirect influence of the Bolsheviks, he gave his thoughts to the economic emancipation as well. It was significant that he lashed mercilessly at the feudal aristocracy as well as the institutions of private property.

Kishan Singh Gargaj, who was the Chief Architect of the Babbar Akali movement enunciated the aims of the movement in his poems and letters very clearly. When he left army, he was an advocate of passive resistance like the Congress and the Sikh League. His poems published in various issues of the Gargaj Akali supported this contention. He alluded to the martial nature of the Sikhs and suggested to the British rulers that it was in their interest to hand over the reins of the state which they had grabbed very unscrupulously. He also exhorted the Sikhs to fight for the vindication of their religion and national honour and called upon them to go to the scaffold.

23. The Akali, Lahore, June 3, 1922.
27. Ibid., February 28, 1922.
but never to seek forgiveness. The liberation of the Gurdwaras was to be their avowed object and duty to look after their religious places was their inalienable and sacred birth right. The historical events depicting the prowess of the Sikh heroes were recalled to develop and create strong antipathy against the British Raj. The pulling out of the 'keshas' of the Sikhs by the police during the Guru Ka Bagh morcha was galling and they urged the Sikhs to take up the gauntlet. To the Babbar Akalis, the reform of the Gurdwaras was not a secluded issue. It was a part of the freedom struggle. Sucha Singh, Editor of the Punjab Darpan, was near the truth when he wrote, "If the Sikhs are obliged to resort to the passive resistance, they will do so not for the sake of Swaraj but for the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The reason was summed up by Sardar Fardul Singh Caveesher, when he wrote, "The Sikh knows that if his religion is safe, he can certainly regain the lost liberty of his country. A sikh wants to fight his country's battles from the vantage ground of his religion."

28. Ibid., April 14, 1922.
29. Ibid., April 21, 1922.
30. The Gargaj Akali, Amritsar, April 20, 1922.
not surprising that Kishan Singh Gargaj asked the Indians to take courage as the Swaraj was near. He also wanted freedom for the Khalsa Panth so that 'Dharma' and 'Truth' are preached without any control or inhibition. He was very sore at the honours doled out to the traitors and toadies by the rulers. His appeal to the Maharaja of Patiala to aware of the underhand activities of his Prime Minister, Sir Daya Kishan Kaul, was not merely a poetic effusion, but was rather based on the stark realities. The later events proved him right. Perhaps he was aware of the manoeuvres of Sir Daya Kishan Kaul to win over certain militants for the British masters.

S. Kishan Singh Gargaj was a staunch follower of Master Mota Singh. His arrest on 16th June, 1922 shocked him. He bemoaned the traitors who betrayed their heroes for a farthing. He was fully conscious of the fact that his arrest would certainly take the Akalis away from their destination of controlling their Curdwaras and getting such a bill passed which would give them full liberty in religious affairs. The Panjab Government passed a Curdvara Bill in

33. The Gargaj Akali, Amritsar, April 28, 1922.
34. Ibid, April 30, 1922.
35. Ibid, May 12, 1922.
36. Ibid, June 3, 1922.
37. The Gargaj Akali, Amritsar, July 10, 1922.
1922 but the Sikhs ignored it. S. Kishan Singh Gargaj alluded to it when he wrote that the Sikhs had no faith in the Government and they were ready for civil disobedience. These references showed that the militants had no programme to commit murders and dacoities. Kishan Singh, in a letter, rebutted the charge of murders and dacoities because he considered them against the principles of Sikhism.40

Though he advocated a hard line and openly threatened the toadies in his speeches and in the poems and Editorials of the Babbar Akali Doaba, yet he never took part in any violent action. His thoughts swerved gradually to the necessity of reforming the toadies who stood in the way of the Akali movement as the cause of the Panth was dear to him. When Pritam Singh, a disciple of Sant Mit Singh of Gurdwara Kishan Pura, complained against the duplicating of the Babbar Akali Doaba in the Gurdwara, Jathedar Kishan Singh is said to have admonished him and told him that the Gurdwara belonged to the Panth: he was doing work for the Panth and it was not for him to impede and obstruct him. In one of the poems printed in the Babbar Akali Doaba at Kishan Pura, he also suggested in unequivocal terms to the Sikhs to

38. The Sikh Gurdwaras and shrines Bill was introduced in the Panjab Legislative Council on April 5, 1921 for the first time. It was introduced again on November 7, 1922. Finally, it was introduced and passed on July 7, 1925.


40. Ibid., July 31, 1922.
They resorted to the programme of murdering the toadies, when the situation became very critical and the toadies began to play with fire.

The poems which reflected the aims of the Babbar Akalis, were produced from a diary of the Babbars by the Crown Counsel, Mr. Pittman in the Court of Mr. L.A. Bull, Special Magistrate, Lahore. These poems exhorted the compatriots to kill the tyrants by wielding the sword and giving up the timid attitude of calling the British Government their ‘ma-bap. The country men were called upon to act unitedly so that the country be liberated.

41. Paper Book Babbar Akali Conspiracy, p.615.
42. Vide the Akali, Lahore, December 9, 1923.

The following extract highlights the aims of the Babbars:

मैन मंदिर कर के खारो फारे,
गेल पुर्मन दिचहते जरा सारे.

They wrote:

**Meman Handian Kar Ke Kharo Fara,**
**Geli Dusman di Chhati Jaro Sare.**

Vide the Akali, Lahore, December 9, 1923.
The fifteen issues of the 'Babbar Akali Doaba' also acquainted the people with their aims and objectives. These issues contained the poems and articles of Jathedar Kishan Singh Carga, S. Karam Singh of Daulatpur, Sunder Singh, Arjan Singh 'Sach' of Kharaudi, Hari Singh 'Chanda' of Chela, Labh Singh of Jassowal and Sarta Singh 'Nidharak' as well as the resolutions and Declarations of the Babbar Akalis. Through the pages of the 'Babbar Akali Doaba' they exhorted the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to unite so that the traitors be extirpated. S. Kishan Singh in "Khande da geet" not only praised the Congress leaders like C.R. Dass, Dr. Saif-ud-din Kitchlew and M.K. Gandhi and Akali leaders like Baba Kharak Singh, Sunder Singh Lyallpuri, Sardul Singh Cavesher and others but also urged them to wield the sword.43

In the pages of the 'Babbar Akali', the Babbar stalwarts advocated the necessity of the violent means. Karam Singh of Daulatpur made it clear that the Babbar Akalis had abandoned passive resistance and decided to pounce upon, maim and mangle the toadies to pieces as if they were quails.44 He also appealed to the Khalsa Panth to take the sword so that the 'Feringhes' be expelled from the country.45

44. Ibid., pp.37-38, Also vide Labh Singh, Jassowal, Sankhen Ithas Babbar Akali, Phagwara, 1962, p.66.
In one of the issues of the Babbar Akali Doaba the Khalsa Panth was asked to read the signs of the time and sing songs of liberty. Addressing the Khalsa nation, the issue reads:

"If you refuse to be awakened, the English will devour you. Without a violent struggle India will not be free. Non-violence has stirred the masses, but violence alone will bring the final victory." ⁴⁶

In the Babbar Akali's issue of 19th November, 1923, the Sikhs were asked to give up military service under the British Government. The paper wrote: "If you still fight the Pathans for the sake of the English, I doubt, if you are a Sikh." ⁴⁷

The Kanuni diary recovered from Babu Santa Singh further threw light on the aims of the Babbar Akalis and their real enemies, against whom they were fighting. The English were branded as the leech that had sucked the blood of the Khalsa. The Sikh Panth was asked to shake off lethargy and vindicate the honour of their faith. ⁴⁸

The Babbars were sore at the attitude of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee which was obstructing the work of the Babbar Akalis by withdrawing "sewaka". Though they resorted to stray murders in the beginning but they thought of entering into conflict with the English in the end to avenge

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the repression that was then being practised.  

The aims of the movement had been specifically highlighted in one of the poems written by Dhanna Singh. The Babbars came in the field fully armed because they were sick of the atrocities of the government. They were bent on settling the scores with the enemies. They hit the traitors hard and were not afraid of the dacoits even. They aimed at liberating the country. They chose the arduous path of reforming the toadies. All those, who stood in their way, were to be murdered. They were determined to expel the foreigners, kill the traitors, the toadies and the friends of the enemy and other wicked fellows. All this was to be done to achieve one purpose i.e. the freedom of the country.

49. Loc. cit.


Babbar Akalian Da Dasan hal ji,
Kar Ke Khial Suno, Nau Nihal ji,
Gori Government Hathon Ak ke,
Aa Gae maidan Vich teg Chak ke,
Dusmanan Nun hath aapne Vakhaung,
Hind Nun Asad Babbar Karaunge,
Phirde Jholichukan da Sudhar Karde,
Dakuan Kolon Nahin Mool Darde;
Mar Mar Goli Chhatian nun Parde,
Jholichuk jihre Baithe Vich aarde
Jinhe Desh Ghati Janan ton Makaunge,
Hind nun Asad Babbar Karaunge.
Babbar Kehande Hind Vichon Gore Kadne,
Mittar Vi Dushmanan de Nahin Chhadne,

f.n.contd..
The Babbar Akalis were following the maxim of 'striking at the roots so that branches might wither away off themselves! Rightly or wrongly, they believed the toadies to be the pillars of the bureaucracy. To them the toadies were as dangerous as the foreign rulers. They were part of the government machinery. To create terror among the British rulers and to compel them to leave the country, they resorted to coup de main on the toadies. Banta Singh of Dhamian in one of his poems made it clear that the Babbar had launched 'a fight to finish' operation against the toadies. He wrote that they had put their hands on the trigger by the order of the Almighty. Their purpose was the extermination of the toadies and to hurl defiance at the foreign rulers. The toadies had been called 'bastards' whom no body could save from nemesis.

50 cont-

Karna Asad Hindustan Nun,
Nehin Rehan dena Kisa Beihan Nun,
Viche Mar dena Jihare Sanan Hataun e,
Hind Nun Asad Babbar Karauneg.

54. Loc.cit.
55. Babbar Cooni, Sanfrancisco, June, 1925, p.5.

The poem, illustrative of the determination of the Babbars, is reproduced below:

उँध जैज नौके फिर फिर आजा मुंड , आमें जु ड़ निकल भेज रै जात सिंधी ।
केले पुंज ढाके जाहि स्मिर बढ़ि , केले गुरुं । जैज गुरुं जैज गुरुं ।
उँध निकालता हुड़ आ में नींदें । भेज रै जात सिंधी ।
भेज जैज नौके फिर फिर आजा मुंड , आमें जु ड़ निकल भेज रै जात सिंधी ।
केले पुंज ढाके जाहि स्मिर बढ़ि , केले गुरुं । जैज गुरुं जैज गुरुं जैज गुरुं ।
उँध निकालता हुड़ आ में नींदें ।
Asra Singh of Phakrudl, a prominent Babbar Akali, who, later on, turned approver also admitted that their aim was to expel the monkey-faced foreigners and murder them as they were responsible for their economic ills.\(^{56}\)

Khan Sahib, Mir Fazal Imam, D.S.P., C.I.D., Panjab, P.W.\(^{474}\) stated that their ultimate object was to subvert the British rule in India. The Sikh religion was also used as a means of inciting the people against the government. The object of the organisation was to malign the government by fair or foul means and intimidating the loyalists so that they might withdraw their support to the government\(^ {57}\) and refrain from supplying information against the party.

The aims of the Babbar Akali movement were specified by Rai Sahib Lala Bhagat Ram, assessor in the following words: "They tried to create disaffection against the government with the object of raising a rebellion, turning the British out of India and establishing the Sikh Raj in the province and Swaraj in India. This was the ideal or objective which they placed before the public. They wanted the public to believe that the British Government was tyrannical; it had been the cause of Nankana Tragedy, had taken away the


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p.842.
keys of the Golden Temple at Amritsar and obstructed their efforts to take possession of and manage their Gurdwaras.\textsuperscript{58}

Though the assessor had, by and large, correctly assessed the aims of the Babbar Akali movement yet the nostalgic references to the Sikh history by them misled him to believe that the Babbars were endeavouring to establish a Sikh \textit{kal}. What they aimed at, was the freedom to control their religious shrines. When they found that the government stood in their way, they worked for the liberation of the country as that would automatically emancipate the Gurdwaras. The struggle that ensued took a violent turn due to the nefarious activities of the loyalists and the toadies. Even the learned Judge agreed that the aim of the movement was to bring revolution in the beginning and it did not include the programme of murdering the toadies.\textsuperscript{59} Mr. J.K.M. Tapp, Additional Sessions Judge, who heard the Babbar case, also dwelt upon their aims. He brought out their objectives clearly when he delivered the judgement. He wrote that the Babbars had advised the Hindus, Mohamedans and Sikhs to unite and organise insurrection, wield the sword, behead the tyrants, burn and plunder police stations and treasuries and blow up the railway lines. The regiments

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.1072.

\textsuperscript{59} Babbar Akali Case Judgement, p.138.
were also invited to join and plunder the magazines. Thus the perusal of the available Babbar literature, Babbar Akali cases, statements of the Babbars, approvers and the prosecution witnesses, crystalises the following aims and objects:

(1) They aimed at liberating their country from the foreign clutches.

(2) They wanted not only the Reform of the gurdwaras but also their control. They followed the footsteps of Guru Gobind Singh and did not do any thing against the cardinal principles of the Sikh religion. I included avenging atrocities committed in the various Sikh shrines.

(3) They wanted to achieve these cherished aims by collecting weapons.

(4) They aimed at murdering the toadies as the latter had helped the foreign rulers.

(5) They advocated unity among the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims.

Thus their aims were not different from those of the Indian National Congress, the Sikh league and the Akalis.

60. Ibid., p.60.
61. The Akali Te Pardesi, March 6,1925.
The difference lay in their means. They advocated with conviction the use of violent means whereas other parties followed non-violent non-cooperation with blind-folded loyalty. The aims and approach of the Babbar Akalis may be summed up in the words of Bawa Harkishan Singh: 'Babbar Akalis' was a group of Akalis who were in open violent revolt against the British—Babbar Akalis and we were poles apart. We were followers of non-violence. We had a very restricted aim and that was reform and possession of the Gurdwaras. They wanted to turn out the British from India. Thus the movement was anti-imperialist, nationalistic and militant in its aims.

A resume of the Babbar Akali movement clearly brings out the ups and downs of the changing situation, compelling them to change their objectives and shift their stand in accordance with the need of the hour. To start with, they stood for the reformation of the Gurdwaras in a non-violent manner. The repressive policy of the Panjab Government in support of the Mahants against the Akalis worked up their anger and in their propaganda tours they asked the people to revolt. When the informers and the British stooges posed a danger to them, they staked their all for their "Sudhar" — an euphemism for


64. *Babbar Akali case Judgement*, p.132.
the extermination and liquidation of the jholichucks. They were, perhaps, convinced that non-violence would do them no good. Only violence would assist the establishment of a free government which was their ultimate aim. 66