Chapter 6

POLITICAL ARTICULATION

In this chapter, the endeavor has been to provide a connected account of the growth in the political awareness of the Sikh community from the mid-nineteenth to the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first details the expression of political aspirations of the Sikhs from the mid to the late nineteenth century. The second section deals with twentieth century Sikh political expression and the third section talks of the effect of overseas movements of the Indians on the Sikh politics of the Punjab and the formation of the Central Sikh League. The fourth section gives an overview of the milestones in the development of the political system based on separate representation and elections and the position of the Sikhs in this new political situation.

I

Political activity of the Sikhs did not come to an end with the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. The political aspirations of the Sikhs were first signified by Bhai Maharaj Singh. Henry Lawrence, the Resident at Lahore, referred to him as ‘the first man who raised the standard of rebellion beyond the confines of Multan in 1848, and the only leader of note who did not lay down his arms to Sir Walter Gilbert at Rawaplindi’.\(^1\) Bhai Maharaj Singh planned a general insurrection against the British in 1849. Until he was arrested in December 1849, the Punjab remained in considerable turmoil and the British tried their utmost to arrest him.

The attitude of the Sikh community and its leadership after the uprising of 1857-1858 was one of ambivalence. The Sikh aristocracy and the Sikh priestly class owed their position to the British and therefore, expressed their loyalty by
turning their backs on any happening that could threaten their position. They
counted the leadership, what there was of it, of the Sikh public and, therefore,
their attitude of the Sikh public too was one of indifference or hostility.

The Namdhari Movement in the 1860's was the next expression of political
aspirations of the Sikhs in the Punjab. Baba Ram Singh did not accept the British
rule and its institutions. He instructed his followers not to join the service of the
British Government. Send their children to government schools or use Courts of
Law, foreign goods and the Government Postal Services. He suggested that the
Sikhs should make parallel arrangements for the above services. Though Ram
Singh had been kept under watch for many years, the British Government had
not been able to clearly regard him a threat to their rule. Conflicting reports had
been received on his aims. According to some informants he was merely a
reformer while others specified his attempts at establishing a basics
administrative system. That the Namdharis were overtly hostile to British rule in
the Punjab could be discerned from Baba Ram Singh's rejection of all British
institutions and advice to his followers to make their own arrangements. The
alarm was sounded in June 1863 when at a Diwan held at village Khote in
Ferozepur District, the Kukas were seen openly preaching against the British and
predicting that the Kukas would soon rule and demand only a fifth of the produce
from the farmers. In addition to the above propaganda, a version of Sau Sakhi
which was being attributed to Guru Gobind Singh was in circulation. It predicted
the end of British rule amidst bloodshed and the establishment of the rule of a
carpenter named Ram Singh. In spite of this some historians view the Kukas as
only a reform movement with no political ambition. It is also insisted that the
Kukas were just an example of the typical millenarian movement in the Punjab.
The above evidence, the action taken by Cowan in 1872 of blowing off the
arrested Kukas from mouths of guns, and the subsequent deportation of Baba
Ram Singh from the Punjab can be taken to suggest that the Kuka threat was
considered significant enough by the British to make an example for future political dissenters. This action was supported by the Anglo-Indian press except for the *Friend of India*. The loyalist attitude of the Singh Sabha was reflected in their memorandum submitted to the Lieutenant-Governor commending Cowan’s action.

The next episode to have political undertones was that of the projected return of Maharaja Dalip Singh to the Punjab in the 1880’s. This was viewed by the British as a greater threat to Sikh loyalties and initially a large portion of the police and intelligence network was put to work gathering information. The British feared other sources of authority who could challenge the legitimacy of British rule in the Punjab and Dalip Singh represented the traditional authority within the Punjab, a rallying point for Sikhs. Early in 1878, in his letter to Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State, Dalip Singh accused the Indian Government of ‘dereliction of duty’. He held that he had been unjustly dethroned and his kingdom annexed by the British. According to Dalip Singh, the Revolt of Multan, which was the cause of his loss of kingdom, had taken place after he had been placed under the guardianship of the Indian Government and was, thus, the responsibility of the British. The British were committed to keep him on the throne till he was sixteen years of age. The Indian Government instead of taking prompt action to stem the revolt of Multan, sent no European troops to put an end to the revolt. Disillusioned with the British Government and convinced of the prophecies foretelling him to be the Eleventh Guru, Dalip Singh decided in March 1886 to quit England and come to India. He also declared his intention of abandoning Christianity and embracing Sikhism. Meanwhile amidst rumours of the return of the Maharajah to India, the Abstracts of Political Intelligence, dated 20 March and 4 April 1886 reported ‘anxious enquiries’ being made about Duleep Singh and speculation about powers that were to be conferred on him. The Sikhs according to the report were ‘elated’. The Hindus, says the report, ‘pray that Duleep Singh
and the Sikhs never come into power again, but are of the opinion that the Nihangs and Kukas may be foolish enough to join in any demonstration got up in his favour.' Hope was said to be expressed by one Jamiat Rai that Dalip Singh would be placed in power before long as a ruler. Mention was made of a secret understanding with the Russians.8

D. Petrie notes in his memorandum that hopes ran high in a large section of the Sikhs who anticipated their rule being established in the Punjab again with the return of Dalip Singh. A village in the Lahore District refused to pay its land revenue, saying that tribute was due only to their King, who was shortly to arrive in India.9

As in the case of the Kukas, almost the entire local leadership in the Punjab supported the British in the case of Dalip Singh. The lambardars, zaildars, jagirdars and the leading rulers of the Princely States supported the government and believed that they could prosper only under British patronage than under Sikh rule. In 1887, Dalip Singh declared himself to be the 'sovereign' of the Sikh 'nation' and asked his fellowmen to rise against the British. But they called him a false pretender and proclaimed that they would die for their sovereign, and would never accept Dalip Singh as their ruler.10

However, not all Sikhs were totally loyal to the British. As Petrie puts it, 'the Sikhs have all along had among their ranks a leavening of disaffected and even actively disloyal persons'. We can include the Kukas, the followers of Baba Ram Singh, the village in Lahore district and the 'elated' Sikhs that 'made enquiries' about Dalip Singh and the 'Nihangs' in this category.11

Bhagat Lakshman Singh in his autobiography alludes to 'how the Sikh community felt the wrong done to them in the forced return from Aden of their beloved Emperor. And the memory of this grave injustice will, I dare say, rankle long in the breasts of all in whose veins runs the Sikh blood'. The Bhaga: noted,
however, that Baba Khem Singh Bedi, one of the most influential members of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, was against the visit of the Maharaja to the Punjab and on one occasion, offered to place all resources at the disposal of the government to suppress any rising that might result from the visit of Maharaja Dalip Singh. At another place he mentions that Bhai Jawahar Singh was actively opposed to the return of the Maharaja to the Punjab in 1886 owing to his enthusiastic loyalty to the British Government.12

We can, therefore, presume the existence of a considerable section of the Sikh population that desired the return of the Maharaja to the Punjab and perhaps the return of Sikh rule. At the same time there were among the Sikhs, Singh Sabhaites, who felt insecure at the projected return and were anxious to let the British know that they opposed it and remained loyal to the Raj. The politics of the Sikhs at this time was loyalist.

The pro-British stance of the Sikhs gained a larger number of converts from among the Sikh community by the late nineteenth century. By this time the British rule and its institutions had been consolidated to a large extent and the Namdhari episode of Malerkotla as well as the uprisings of 1857 had further strengthened their position in the province. The Sikhs by the early twentieth century were gradually becoming aware of the political nature of their quest for identity though in an entirely different setting.

The British in their turn had begun to see the Sikhs as a subject people but ones that had till recently had been a power to contend with. In the early years of colonial rule the British relationship with the Sikhs fluctuated and the government was more ambivalent towards the Sikhs because of their recent political prominence although they had been reassured by the Sikh role in the uprising of 1857. The Punjab Mutiny Report contains the basic assessment: ‘As regards the Sikhs, one decade only has passed since they were the dominant power in the Punjab. They are a highly military race. Their prejudices are
comparatively few. But their religion constitutes a strong bond of union: though depressed by political disaster, it still has vitality, and a power of expansion through the admission of new converts. It might revive in a moment through any change in the circumstances, and spread far and wide. Again the memory of the Khalsa, or Sikh commonwealth, may sleep, but is not dead.\textsuperscript{13} Due to their continued militancy the Sikhs were appreciated as military recruits but suspicion and worry about them as a potential threat remained alive. The rulers took the Sikhs very seriously yet tried to avoid their being seen as either favoured or distrusted.\textsuperscript{14}

However, in the 1850's the decline of the ruling class of Ranjit Singh was thought to be inevitable by the British. Their concern was to 'render their decadence gradual' by allowing them pensions, or part of their jagirs. All the jagirdars thought to have been loyal to the British got pensions or part of their jagirs and with the uprising of 1857 more were added to this number and began to be looked at as 'natural leaders' of the society. Nearly half of the Sikh aristocratic families survived into the twentieth century, readjusting themselves to the new situation. Many of them played a leading role in socio-religious reform and constitutional politics.\textsuperscript{15} A new political system was evolved by the British by borrowing ideas and structures from the earlier regime and transferring new doctrines and institutions that gave Punjab politics a particular cast. The British followed a deliberate policy to foster an acceptance of British rule by the use of indigenous institutions and developed support groups among the Sikhs and ruled over Punjab with appreciable help from those associated with former regimes.\textsuperscript{16} They were involved in the processes of government as honorary magistrates, zaildars and extra-assistant commissioners. The British also maintained a symbolic world of public honouring and honours not unlike that present in Ranjit Singh's time.\textsuperscript{17}
Another important aspect of this policy was to wed leading Sikhs and Sikh religious men to the British by the continuation of patterns of material support which had been established at the time of Ranjit Singh. Control of the Golden Temple played a central role in the process. So did the continuation of other colonial practices such as employment of many Sikhs as soldiers and baptismal requirements for army recruits.18

The emergence of the Western-style of political system in the Punjab reflected both traditional and modern elements. The previous ‘ruling class’ of local and regional men of prominence through their control of land, access to shrines and patronage by the British continued to be viewed as legitimate leaders. At the same time the legacies of the past tended to encourage communal tendencies in the religious communities of the Punjab. Inter-communal differences were understood and affected public life and under British rule these legacies became accentuated and influenced political roles.19 The British became the source of decisions about resources and access to power. This encouraged the need to form associations, the development of improved communications and in general the search for effective means of focusing opinion and mobilizing support. This in turn led to the competition among the communities, agitation among the emerging urban elites and new forms of political organization.20

The Singh Sabha organization represented such an organization among the Sikhs though its declared aims were all religious. The formal aims of the Singh Sabha were to arouse love of religion among the Sikhs, propagate the true Sikh religion, print books on the greatness and truth of Sikh religion, propagate the word of the Gurus, publish periodicals to further the Panjabi language and Sikh education, interest the highly placed Englishmen and ensure their association with, the educational programme of the Sikhs, not to speak against any other religion, and not to discuss any matters relating to government. The
association also aimed at cultivating loyalty to the Crown. The individuals who opposed Sikhism, who had been excluded from the holy spots, who had been associated with other religions or who had broken Sikh laws were excluded from the Sabha. They could join the Sabha by repenting and paying a fine.  

The Amritsar Singh Sabha, formed in 1873 under the leadership of the traditional leaders such as Bhais, gianis and aristocrats, supported the expansion of education among the Sikhs and tried to defend the community against proselytization by Muslims and Christians. On the central issue of identity, Baba Khem Singh Bedi was content to view the Sikhs as the reformist element within Hinduism. The Lahore Singh Sabha, formed in 1879, was led by the professional and middle class Sikhs involved in education or journalism such as Gurmukh Singh and Jawahar Singh and so-called lower caste Sikhs such as Ditt Singh. These men asserted Sikh distinct identity and attacked popular customs, such as respect for caste and Hindu influence in ceremonies and shrines. Politics and religious revitalization were frequently inseparable in the last decades of the century. These reform oriented organizations, which included the Arya Samaj and the Muslim _anjumans_, re-evaluated their traditions in the light of contemporary demands and thereby focused the attention of co-religionists upon issues and strategies. Unlike the others at least one group of the Sikhs addressed a special problem, that of trying to define and promulgate a sense of identity and separate consciousness at a time when a limited awareness of it existed. Bhai Kahn Singh was one of the first to declare in 1898 that distinct Sikh identity, made the Sikhs a political community.

Amidst the clearly emerging political concerns were the Singh Sabhas had their avowed objective to remain apolitical. The pro-establishment stance of the Singh Sabhas was demonstrated in the Kuka episode in the early 1870's, and the issue of Maharaja Dalip Singh in the late 1880's. The Singh Sabhas at this time were mainly struggling with the issue of the distinct identity of the Sikhs and
staving off the attacks by the Arya-Samaj to assimilate the Sikhs within the fold of Hinduism. The Singh Sabhas clearly identified themselves with the government of the day. A need was felt for a political body when concerns of religion acquired a political hue. The question of the control of the Gurdwaras was to be resolved. Even the question of the formal recognition of Sikh identity was pending as Dyal Singh Majithia’s will was being questioned in British courts. It was at this time that the traditional tactics of representing needs and relying totally on British aid were questioned. The need for co-ordination among the Singh Sabhas brought into existence the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. It was the first organization of the Sikhs to have as its objective, among other things, the protection of the political interests of the Sikh community.24

II

In the early twentieth century the relationship of mutual dependence and goodwill between the government and Sikh leadership in the form of leading Sikh gentry, the custodians of important Sikh Gurdwaras and the Chief Khalsa Diwan worked remarkably well. The Sikh politicians largely accepted the structure of British administration and assumed the benevolent and paternalistic government. The distribution of government patronage, demands for the development of education in the Sikh script of gurmukhi and other such issues affecting the community sporadically brought petitions and memorandums to the government for redress. However, such petitions were couched in respectful terms and constantly stressed the humility and passionate loyalty of the petitioners. Beneath the surface, the Anglo-Sikh relations began to shift during the first two decades of the twentieth century.25

The control of the Harmandir was one such issue that brought a change in the British Sikh relations. It was seen as central to the political influence of the
British over the Sikh community. The British sought to cosset and control the Sikhs through the Golden Temple and its functionaries. By 1904 the Singh Sabha had begun to ask for the control of the Gurdwaras. The issue of the worship of idols in the parkrama of the Golden Temple and the presence of Brahmans on the Har Ki Pauri brought the issue of control of the Harmandir Sahib into Sikh focus. Tikka Ripudaman Singh was one of the first to complain about idol worship in the Gurdwara and demanded that ‘some orthodox Sikhs possessing force of character’ ought to be appointed to the post of the sarbarah. The issue of the idols escalated into a widespread agitation for the control of the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras. Among those Sikhs who wanted control of the Golden Temple were also the Raja of Jind and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha.

In 1906, the Khalsa Advocate and the Punjab of Amritsar began to ask for an alteration of the rules governing the Gurdwaras and that the Panth should have the right to appoint the sarbarah. It was also argued that the jagirs and other property attached to the Golden Temple belonged to the Panth and was not the personal property of the sarbrah. They also asked for the restoration of the old committee of 1859. In 1907 the demand for the formation of a committee for the control of Gurdwaras was raised. The news of the alienation of the land of the Gurdwara Rikabganj by the mahant of the Gurdwara and the consequent demolition of the wall of the Gurdwara by the government spread to the Punjab and was protested by a spate of telegrams, petitions and memoranda addressed to the Viceroy, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, and the Commander-in-Chief. Sikhs living in Burma, China, Hongkong and the United States sent telegrams asking for the reconstruction of the wall. A pamphlet was written on the eye-witness account of the Gurdwara and its demolished wall concluding that the Sikh public disapproved of the railing being put up and that the religious sentiments of the Sikhs would be hurt if it was done. Public participation and protest by the Sikhs was demonstrated by the series of diwans held at Lyallpur,
Lahore, Shimla, Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar protesting against the demolition and the reconstruction of the wall at government expense.29

The Sikh collaborators of the raj like Raja Sir Daljit Singh were contacted by the government to resolve the issue. Sunder Singh Majithia, the secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan issued a pamphlet explaining the whole issue and supporting the government. This support by the Chief Khalsa Diwan was protested against by the Sikhs who held protest meetings in Lahore, Patti, Ropar, Gojra, Khanna and Bhasaur.30 Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha proposed to finance the trip of Master Tara Singh to present the case of the Rikabganj wall before the British Parliament and the people. In March 1914, a monthly magazine, the Sikh Review was launched, from Delhi under the patronage of Bhai Arjan Singh Bagrian, a friend of the Maharaja of Nabha. Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar was appointed its editor. When the movement was beginning to gain support in rural areas, the First World War broke out weakening the agitation. The Gurdwaras were finally handed over to the Sikhs in 1925 after a long agitation while the wall of Rikabganj Gurdwara was rebuilt by the government in 1920.31 This was done when on the appeal of Sardul Singh for 100 martyrs, 700 responses came and they declared their intention to either construct the wall or lay down their lives in the process.

Related to the issue of the control of the Gurdwaras was that of Gurdwara reform. The introduction of canal irrigation under the British had greatly increased the income from the grants provided to the Golden Temple by the Sikh rulers. Cases of misappropriation of Gurdwara funds came to the fore but no action was taken by the British Government as it realized the political importance of keeping the Golden Temple under its control. The misuse of funds was not the only problem, the mahants had begun to convert the landed property of these Gurdwaras into their personal possessions.32 Three reasons were responsible for this state of affairs. One was the British legal system, which did not differentiate
'possession' as servants of the public for carrying out charitable and religious services connected to the Gurdwara; another was that the early Singh Sabha leadership had comprised many people who were direct beneficiaries of this state of affairs and, therefore, no real effort was made to clean up things. The third reason was the British policy which dictated that the control of the Golden Temple was to be maintained in all circumstances and, therefore, the British refused to dismantle the system of management of the Golden Temple under sarbrahs.33

The sarbrah system not only corrupted the mahants in charge of Gurdwaras as they were not accountable or answerable to the public but was also responsible for the distortion of the Sikh religion and its practices by the mahants. They began to introduce personalized rites and ceremonies contrary to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus; to increase incomes and attract Hindu worshippers, they installed images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in Gurdwara premises. Enormous increases in income radically corrupted the class in charge of the Gurdwaras. Gurdwara premises began to be misused and cases of gambling, drinking, robbery and theft were reported. They 'began to live a life of luxury and dissipation verging on depravity'. The immoral activities of these priests were exposed by the Sikh press. Periodicals such as the Khalsa Samachar and the Khalsa Advocate protested against their activities, but when they did not mend their behavior, began to ask for their removal.34

In 1905 Tikka Ripudaman Singh wrote to the Lieutenant governor saying that the worship of idols in the Golden Temple ought to be stopped as the Granth Sahib strongly prohibited idolatory. Before the government could intervene, the sarbrah, Sardar Arur Singh on May 1, 1905 issued orders prohibiting the Brahmans from sitting on the parkarma with the idols for worship and also prohibited them from washing their clothes in the tank, besides spitting and rinsing their mouth in it. They however could bathe, do puja and apply tilak. In
response to Arur Singh's order the Sanatan Dharm Hindus objected, declaring through an ishtiar that Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus were Hindus. The Brahmans returned with the idols on 6 May though previously they had complied with the sarbrah's order. The matter was reported to the police by the manager and another order was issued by the manager on 7 May and was finally complied with thereafter.  

The issue however continued to be debated in the press for almost a year. Memorials were sent to the Lieutenant Governor. Some were for the removal of idols and others against it. The Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Quetta, the Sikhs of Rawalpindi and the Hindu community of Shikarpur appreciated the action while Seth Radha Krishan of Amritsar presented a petition signed by 13,000 Hindus and Sikhs of Amritsar disapproving the action and stating that it was 'not in accordance of the great majority of the Sikhs'. Among the princely states, Raja Hira Singh of Nabha was against the removal of the idols while Raja Ranbir Singh of Jind and Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha approved of the action.  

Much of the political efforts of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in the first decade of the twentieth century were defensive. The Diwan and the Singh Sabhas generally pursued policies that would further delineate Sikh boundaries and remove any lingering Hindu influence. Their pressure and negotiations paved the way for the removal of idols from the Golden Temple in 1905. Attacks from the Arya Samaj persisted and the heightened sensitivity to external attack and the cry of 'Sikhism in danger' complicated the Diwan's strategy of winning patronage and benefits from the government while at the same time maintaining the loyal image of the Sikh community. The disturbances of 1907 accentuated the Diwan's problems.  

The issue that flared up in 1907 was of the Punjab Colonization of Land Bill and the Bari Doab Canal rates. The Colonization Bill introduced among other things, inheritance by primogeniture, legalized the fine system and established
retroactive conditions concerning sanitation, tree planting and construction. An increase of water rates by 50 per cent in the Bari Doab was also mooted at the same time. The discontent already simmering in the colonies due to the extra-legal fine system, corruption of lower officials and the tight rein under which the cultivators were held by officials, led to an outburst in 1907.\textsuperscript{38} The Punjab Government's efforts to retain effective control of the Colony and run it like a model farm were not appreciated by the colonists.

There were apprehensions that the Punjabi agriculturists as individuals and as soldiers had moved towards rebellion. The central Punjab was the recruiting ground for more than a third of the Indian Army, the majority of whom were Sikhs. The protest was, however, principally rural. The Chenab zamindars and their sympathizers organized mass demonstrations. The unrest spread over the central districts of the Punjab. The leading families of central districts who had relatives in the colonies or aspired to a future grant also joined the protests. Also affected was the Indian Army and the ex-government servants. The educated Punjabis living in the colony, headed the agitation, not urban politicians. Though deported to Burma due to this unrest, Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were late entrants into the protests. The government came down with a heavy hand on public meetings, suppressed newspapers, carried out mass arrests and political trials. In order to appease the agitators the British Government withdrew the rural legislation and gave the canal colonists, proprietary rights and freedom from Canal Officers that they demanded.\textsuperscript{39}

Denzil Ibbetson had observed with some concern that 'if the loyalty of the Jat Sikhs of the Punjab is ever materially shaken, the danger will be greater than any which could possibly arise in Bengal'. The Sikh peasantry participated in this agitation in larger numbers than the Muslim or Hindu peasants in proportion to their numbers. Also a part of the agitation were Sikh sepoys who were observed
at meetings held by Ajit Singh. A Sikh barrister was one of the principal accused in the Rawalpindi riots case.40

The agitation of 1907 showed the percolation of political awareness to the grassroot level of the Sikh peasantry. A contemporary notes that the isolation from the centers of political agitation was the main reason why the Sikh peasants had so far refrained from politics. However, a steadily widening circle of political agitation in the towns, the spread of education and political awareness through the Press, in addition to the excesses by the Punjab Government were responsible for the politicization of the Sikh peasantry. These peasants in turn were in constant touch with their brethren in the Central Punjab which further widened the area of political influence.41

Though the Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Diwan had little to do with the agitation of 1907, several Singh Sabhas and the Diwans criticized British policy towards the canal colonies and revenue rates. The Khalsa Advocate joined in by congratulating the cultivators who by 'constitutional agitation' had brought the government to see its folly. The Amritsar Singh Sabha however urged the Sikhs to be cautious and when the Sikhs were called disloyal in certain rural meetings, were of the view that a wedge was being driven between the Sikhs and the British by the enemies of Sikhism. The Chief Khalsa Diwan was instrumental in arranging several meetings between the government and the Singh Sabha in which the British measures of conciliation were applauded and the Sikhs were warned to avoid being seen as seditious.42

The next encounter of the Sikhs with the British was over the Anand Marriage Bill. In order to clearly differentiate the Sikh ceremonies from that of the Hindus the Anand marriage had been propagated by the Singh Sabha as the Sikh ceremony of marriage. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also approved of the simple marriage ceremony. The Bill was introduced in the Legislative Council by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha. While the bill was being discussed the Diwan
mobilized the largest mass demonstrations ever seen in the Punjab. Regiments, Singh Sabhas outside India, large meetings in most districts—all produced memorials validating the Chief Khalsa Diwan claim that the Sikhs as a community supported the measure. Though the British had not been very enthusiastic to begin with, the Sikh show of unity assured the Bill’s passage. This was proclaimed as the benefit of British rule.43

The British intelligence officer, David Petrie, thought of the neo-Sikhs in 1911 as the source of disaffection among the Sikhs. These neo-Sikhs were equated by him with the Tat Khalsa or the Singh reformers. The activities even of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and its leading light, Sunder Singh Majithia, appeared to him to be potentially subversive.44 One of the issues taken up by the Tat Khalsa around 1914 was that of the ban on carrying the Kirpan. This was regarded as official intervention in the internal affairs of the Panth. The Sikh reformists launched kirpan morcha when the cases of harassment and humiliation of those Sikhs who wore the Kirpan were regularly reported in the Sikh press. In many cases, the Sikhs were arrested and imprisoned. In some cases, the Sikh soldiers were dismissed with fines on account of their refusal to stop wearing the kirpan. The British disallowed any kirpan longer than nine inches, closed down the manufactory where longer ones were made, and arrested any one wearing one exceeding the legal dimensions. The Tat Khalsa rationalization was that only a Singh could determine what dimensions his kirpan should have.45

The Sikh organizations passed resolutions and the Sikh periodicals published these resolutions along with the articles and editorial notes pleading with the government to exempt the sword from the purview of the Arms Act, 1858. The outbreak of World War I and the Ghadar Movement pressurized the Government into issuance of a notification in 1914 exempting the kirpan from restrictions. The Sikhs were allowed to carry or possess kirpans, but only in the provinces of the Punjab, Delhi and U.P. The reformists continued to ask for it's
exemption throughout British India. Later the government conceded this demand too.46

With growing awareness about the religious taboos among the Sikhs, the demand for opening the jhatka slaughter houses in the towns and villages was taken up. The Sikh reformer's put forward the plea, that eating jhatka meat had been their established custom and was essential for the Sikhs who were engaged in the exercise of wielding the weapons. The Khalsa Advocate stated ‘Sikhs are by nature a military race and consequently, the bulk of them are meat-eating. We have pointed out that for a Sikh to use halal meat is an act of apostasy. The authorities then wish that the Sikhs should either become out and out vegetarians, or degenerate into apostates by resorting to halal meat.’ The Punjab Government viewed the jhatka morcha ‘partly in a genuine desire to conform more strictly to undoubted tenets of the Sikh religion and partly in a factious effort to aggravate racial and religious differences’. This policy resulted in the local officials exercising their authority in the manner that wherever the Sikhs could not build up strong pressure, the officials did not concede their demand. The jhatka issue therefore, remained alive till the beginning of the Gurdwara Reform movement.47

The case of the turban was also taken up. The Government was persuaded to permit the Sikh students to wear a turban instead of putting on a cap while appearing in the medical examination competition and this facility was extended to the Sikh prisoners in jails who were permitted to retain their religious emblems and allowed to keep their turbans. The Sikh reformers laid emphasis on the daily use of turbans by the Sikhs of all ages especially while attending the religious discourses or any functions being held in the presence of Guru Granth. Wearing a turban was stated as essential as to keep the other Sikh symbols.48

The period from 1849 to 1919 is usually seen as that of a positive relationship between the Sikhs and the British but it can be seen that by 1914
clear lines had been drawn in Sikh politics between those Sikhs who continued to maintain a pro-British stance and these included the members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan who were supposed to be looking after the political interests of the Sikhs, and those Sikhs, mainly the Singh Sabhaite or the Tat Khalsa who were no longer ready to compromise on Sikh interests and began to protest for changes in British policy towards the Sikhs.

III

In 1912 David Petrie had ‘sufficient evidence available to prove that a spirit of anti-British disaffection is commonly prevalent among the Sikhs in Canada’. Indeed the Executive Committee of the Sikh temple at Vancouver had resolved in October 1909 that ‘No member of the Executive Committee of the Sikh Temple should wear any kind of medals, buttons, uniforms or insignia which may signify that the position of the party wearing the article is nothing but of a slave to the British supremacy’. The resentment that thousands of Indians felt against the blind racial prejudice of their white neighbours was transferred to the colonial rulers of India. A meeting was held between the United India League and the Khalsa Diwan Society where it was decided to send a delegation to meet the Colonial Secretary and the Governor General of India to present the case of Indian emigrants against the legal disabilities and statutory discrimination they were suffering at the hands of the states and the federal government in Canada. Lord Hardinge expressed his inability to meet the committee while the Colonial Secretary in London refused to meet them. They were however well received by the press in the Punjab.

Before they returned a new association, the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast was formed and was given the popular name of the Ghadar Party in its very first weekly the Ghadar. The Urdu and Gurmukhi editions of the Ghadar began to circulate among the Indian settlers in three continents. It advocated an armed revolution to throw out the British. Through its regular
features, Angrezi Raj Ka Kacha Chitha and Ankhon Ki Gawahi, it highlighted the destructive consequences of British exploitation in India. For the first six months, the Ghadar carried out extensive anti-British propaganda and was also forwarded to India when in May 1914 the Japanese steamer the Komagata Maru reached Vancouver with 376 emigrants. Except for 21 Punjabi Muslims, practically all passengers were Sikhs. The press in the Punjab pleaded the right of these passengers to land in Canada and warned about serious consequences if they were returned.52

The entry of the Sikh on the Komagata Maru into Canada became a tense legal issue which resulted in their being turned back. The steamer was on high seas when the war broke out in 1914. None of the passengers was allowed to disembark before Calcutta where at Budge Budge, the passengers refused to be shipped straight to the Punjab and eighteen of them were killed when the troops opened fire. The first batch of Ghadarites had already left America. Batches of Ghadarites began to return to India. The Komagata Maru appeared to merge into the revolutionary programme of the Ghadar Party.53

The war was looked upon as an ideal opportunity to take advantage of the British by starting a rebellion. The Government of India armed with the 'Ingress into India Ordinance, 1914' intercepted over 3,000 such people at Calcutta and Ludhiana, 190 were interred and more than 700 restricted to their villages. The Ghadharites message of revolution mostly invited ridicule. The Ghadarites were considered crazy and the Chief Khalsa Diwan issued a call for institution of Akhand Paths to pray for British Victory.54

The Diwan leaders considered the Ghadarites as fallen Sikhs who had fallen into the hands of the agitators and brought disgrace to the community. Committees were constituted to help the government track down these criminals. The only important convert to the Ghadarite agenda was Randhir Singh of Narangwal. Generally as Michael O'Dwyer recorded, the Ghadarites were
regarded with indifference. The Ghadharites established contact with Rash Behari Bose and other revolutionaries. February 21 and later February 19 were fixed as dates for the uprising. Both these dates were known to the British, who disarmed the affected regiments and court-martialed and executed suspects. Of the 57 conspirators convicted only 21 were not returned immigrants. This shows how little support the Ghadarites got from the public of the Punjab. The common people of the Punjab ‘had the common sense to believe that a handful of badly organized adventurist could not topple the British Government’. 

Michael O’Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, gave credit for the failure of the Ghadarites ‘to the members of Sikh Committees’ which were constituted by the Chief Khalsa Diwan and village notables. In the Punjab at this time were the landed aristocracy and zaildars and sufaidposhes who were at the service of the British. The Sikh Gurdwaras were controlled by Government appointed mahants. So much so that event he widespread fury over the Jallianwala Bagh massacre did not deter the sarbrah of the Golden Temple from honouring General Dyer with a siropa.

The Komagata Maru episode, as also the Ghadarites did not make the expected waves in Punjab society, yet they did not sink without a trace either. These incidents had a radicalizing influence on Singh Sabha reformers who realized the futility of the Chief Khalsa Diwan’s way of doing politics. It was also realized that the British Government was not ready to take any steps to bring about a change in the prejudicial treatment of Sikh immigrants to Canada. The massacre at Budge Budge in 1914 further heated up things. The Manager of the Golden Temple was increasingly criticized for toeing the British line. The Lahore Singh Sabha condemned the Manager. The Chief Khalsa Diwan also received flak for its silence on the Budge Budge affair.

The attitude of the Chief Khalsa Diwan on these issues and issues of the constitutional development of the country after the war resulted in the more
radical and younger reformers breaking away. The two important developments
during the war on the future constitutional arrangement that had a bearing on the
inauguration of the Central Sikh League were interconnected. The first of them
was the rapprochement between the Indian National Congress and the All India
Muslim League beginning to take place as early as 1913 but reaching its
culmination in the Lucknow Pact of 25 December 1916. The second was the
announcement of the goal of the British policy on the future of the Indian
Constitutional development. These were some of the issues that led to the final
break in the Chief Khalsa Diwan in December 1919 and the formation of the
Central Sikh League, that became the left wing of the Shiromani Gurdwara
Prabandhak Committee.

IV

By the end of the nineteenth century, the politics of numbers was gaining ground
in the Punjab. There was little representation on the basis of people’s will in
legislative or executive bodies. Numbers were, however, equated with
employment opportunities under the Government and changes in numbers were
viewed with concern. Competition between the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh
communities received a boost as did communal politics.\textsuperscript{57} Within the Sikh
community too there was a difference of opinion over political strategy. Sikhs with
pro-British leanings supported ‘constitutional methods’. The Indian Councils Act
of 1861 was made operative in the Punjab only in the last decade of the
nineteenth century with all nine members of the provincial council to be
ominated by the Lieutenant Governor. The Act of 1892 ‘gave recognition to the
principle of communal representation in disguised form’, further accentuating
differences between the communities.\textsuperscript{58} The non-official members of the
Provincial Councils were to be nominated by certain local bodies such as
Universities, District Boards and Municipalities.\textsuperscript{59} This act ensured the rise of
such political awareness amongst the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities,
would help them gain entry into the Provincial Council based on what standing their community had on District Boards and Municipalities.

An important role therefore was played by the British Government and its policies in engendering a political consciousness amongst the Sikhs. Also the colonial officials in their bid to introduce a measure of democratic institutions in Indian politics, without relinquishing the reins of power, tended to encourage communal demands in principle. Therefore, amidst a general expression of loyalty to the British Government by the reformers, we find requests for separate representation for the Sikhs in municipalities, local boards, the provincial council and the imperial legislature. In their pursuit of a policy of ensuring ‘a communal balance on the basis of population’, the British introduced the system of separate electorates and in general encouraged communal deputations, memorials and petitions.60

The need for a workable Sikh political strategy was accentuated when in the first and second decades of the twentieth century the idea of Hindu Muslim separation was given constitutional and political recognition in the Punjab as in the rest of the country. The Muslim League was founded in 1906 and made the demand for separate electorates in 1908. The Muslims made up 54.85 per cent of the population of the Punjab. Not willing to be left behind in the race for greater representation for their community the Punjab Hindu Sabha was set up at Lahore in December 1906. They were 33.46 per cent of the population of the Punjab. The Sikh activists too tried to form a political ‘Central Association of the Sikhs’. Due to internal differences and the fact that the Chief Khalsa Diwan’s position would be compromised, no association was brought into being. The Sikhs formed 13 per cent of the total population of the Punjab.61

The Morley-Minto Reforms were implemented by the Indian Councils Act, 1909. This Act provided for the first time, for separate representation of the Muslim community and also gave them weightage to offset the Hindu
preponderance. This Act also made the local self-Government bodies, i.e., the Municipal Committees and the District Boards, the electorates for Legislative Councils. In the rural constituencies for the district boards, the Muslims, dominated and in the urban constituencies, that is, for municipal committees the Hindus were in majority.

The Government of India Act 1909 conceded the right of separate electorates to the Muslims. The Chief Khalsa Diwan asked for the same concessions for the Sikhs being a minority community and asked to be represented separately on all Government and semi-Government bodies – educational institutions, Municipal Committees, District Boards and the Provincial and Imperial Councils. The Lieutenant Governor, Punjab too supported these demands and wrote to the Viceroy but nothing was done. Under the Act of 1909, the Provincial Council was enlarged with provisions for eight elected members. For nearly a decade only one Sikh made it to the Council. Due to the policies of the British and their minority status in the Punjab the Sikhs could find representation only through nominated members like Pratap Singh Ahluwalia, Daljit Singh of Kapurthala, Baba Gurbaksh Singh Bedi, Sunder Singh Majithia and Gajjan Singh Grewal, respectively.

In the meantime, the Sikhs were finding out that without weightage they could not get any representation when elections were held and therefore, their voice could not be heard by anyone in a position of authority and power. The elections held under the Act of 1909 for the Provincial Legislative Council, resulted in all three seats going to the Muslims, while in 1912 out of the twelve seats, one went to the Sikhs, four went to the Muslims and one to a Hindu. In 1916, out of the eleven seats, five went to the Hindus, five to the Muslims and one to a European. The demand for separate electorates for the Sikh community began to be voiced in various Sikh forums. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, in the Sikh Review in 1915 and the Khalsa Advocate, in 1917 expressed the need for
separate electorates and an organization of the Sikhs to defend ‘their communal rights or political interests’.64

The Lucknow Pact of 1916 between the Muslim League and the Congress brought home to the Sikhs that they were losing their hold on gaining any ground in electoral politics, thus, leaving them virtually without any representation in elected bodies and therefore, in their community’s future. This pact ensured separate electorates for Muslims in every province and weightage in those in which they formed a minority.65 No such safeguards were made for the Sikhs and the Congress which had claimed to represent all Indians seemed to have become a mouthpiece of Hindu interests only.

Soon after the Lucknow Pact, Sunder Singh Majithia wrote to the Lieutenant Governor asking for a share in excess of their proportion for the Sikhs in the Councils and administration keeping in view their importance, their status before annexation the Punjab, their present stake in the country and their services to the British empire. In November 1917, a deputation of the Sikhs met Chelmsford, the Governor General, to plead for separate electorates and weightage for the Sikhs on the basis of their unique position. The Montford Report noted that the Sikhs had remained unrepresented in spite of their services to the empire and it was recommended that the same system as that for Muslims be adopted for the Sikhs. In September 1918, representation of the entire Sikh community under the initiative of the Chief Khalsa Diwan prepared a memorandum to impress upon the Government that the principle in the Montford Report be carried out. However, the proposal of 30 per cent share for the Sikhs in the Provincial Council was not acceptable to its Hindu and Muslim members. On a strong recommendation from the Punjab Government, the Franchise Committee conceded ‘a separate electoral role and separate constituencies for the Sikhs.’ In terms of weightage, however, the Sikhs got merely half of what they had demanded, ten out of fifty-eight seats and not 30 per cent.66
absence of any political organization like the Muslim League among the Sikhs was felt keenly by the Sikh community. It became one of the reasons for the formation of the Central Sikh League, the first political party of the Sikhs.

NOTES


18. Ibid., pp. 158, 159.


22. Ibid., p. 25.


30. Ibid., pp. 189,190.


36. Ibid., pp. 50, 51.


39. Ibid., p. 444-76.


43. Ibid., pp. 181,182.

46. Ibid., p.65
47. Ibid. pp. 65,66
48. Ibid., p 66