CONCLUSION

The Great War caused, in one form or the other, immense excitement among the people of the Punjab. The public leaders and the government, in order to achieve their conflicting ends, made the best use of the situation so created. They endeavoured hard to exploit that excitement first to make themselves stronger than ever before and then to overpower one another.

In the Punjab both the rural and the urban population had been affected by the war comparatively more than anywhere else in India because the Punjab had been made to contribute more than any other province to augment the British war efforts. There, interest in the war and the issues involved into it had been roused to a greater pitch both by the public leaders as well as the government.

The ideas floated by the war caught the imagination of the Punjabis. The war had come to be regarded by them more and more clearly as a struggle between liberty and despotism, a struggle for the right of all people to rule their own destinies. Attention was repeatedly called to the fact that in Europe Britain was fighting on the side of liberty, and it was urged that Britain could not deny to the people of the Punjab that for which she was herself fighting in Europe, and particularly in the fight in which she had been helped by Punjab's blood and treasure. The revolution in Russia had been interpreted by the people of the Punjab as a triumph of liberty over despotism and had given impetus
to Punjabis' political aspirations. The speeches of English and American statesmen proclaiming the necessity for destroying German militarism, and for conceding the right of self-determination to the nations had made a profound effect upon the political opinion in the Punjab and had contributed to give new dimensions and force to the demand for self-government.

An important feature of the Punjab politics under the impact of the war was the Hindu-Muslim concordat. That was to a great extent due to anti-Turkish policy of the British Government and Turkey's joining the war against Britain. For some time before the start of the war Punjabi Muslims had regarded the attitude of Great Britain and some other European powers towards Turkey with grave suspicion, and once Britain had declared war on Turkey, they started looking with apprehension to the future of the last great Islamic power. The capture of Baghdad later caused great unrest among the Muslims in the Punjab towns. This unrest gave a great fillip to the Pan-Islamic movement which by now was indistinguishable from Pan-Turkishism and secured in their ranks many adherents who successfully used their influence to rouse the religious susceptibilities of the excitable Muslim masses of the Punjab. The unrest among the Muslims in the Punjab had increased with every passing day and reached its height when after the defeat of 1918, the Turkish Empire seemed to be on the verge of a sure dismemberment. The pro-Turkish feelings, thus, compelled the Muslims to make a common cause with the nationalist Hindus in running down the British prestige in India.
Economic disturbances caused by the war gave great strength to the political discontent. They in fact were full of dangerous potentialities for the simple reason that they affected the classes normally with no active interest in politics, and provided those nationalists who had persistently been preaching the doctrine that foreign government was at the root of all evils in India with an additional weapon. Even the ignorant and the most conservative laymen were now prone to believe the nationalist propaganda that it was an alien government which was responsible for the then poverty of India. It had indulged in over-taxation but failed to develop industries in the country. They also believed the nationalist propaganda when it further insisted that the country was continuing to be impoverished by the government, because of the continuous annual drain of wealth from India and that the high prices of necessaries were the result of governmental action and that grain was being exported from starving India by the government to feed Englishmen at cheaper rates.

The policy of the Indian Government had itself contributed substantially to generating political passions. The government had aroused high hopes and expectations of the people but it soon started giving the impression that it had no intention of fulfilling the promises it was making. The logical consequence of this was that the Indians started suffering from greater and greater frustration and were soon full of anger. It was inevitable that after some time of the start of the war, Indians would begin agitating for political concessions. The echoes of that agitation were soon
audible in the Punjab which brought about a big transformation in the mood of the Punjabis. The policies of the Government of the Punjab helped that transformation. Whereas other provincial governments had allowed peoples' anger to express itself to some extent through the press or the platform, the Punjab Government kept choked down all expressions of people's feelings for four-and-a-half years. The result was that although on the surface it looked as if the Punjab was unruffled by political crises-crosses of the time, yet a strong current of agitation had been surging all the while under the surface.

This surging current remained underground during the war but threatened to burst out in a flood soon after the war. The expectations of the people had gone high; their excitement had reached a frenzied pitch; the war was over and strangely enough what the government had promised was not forthcoming. The little that was sought to be given was being made to appear by the government as more than what the Indians should have expected and the same was being exhibited as a forcible extortion by the leaders of India. The situation was ripe for a clash.

As soon as the war came to a successful end, circumstances changed all at once in favour of government and against the political agitators. The government officials, feeling that the hour of peril was over and the necessity of placating the political agitators no longer was there, tried to brow-beat the people by the use of force. That made the radical politicians extremely frustrated. Their struggle had not delivered the goods so far and now they were feeling
that the future was bleak. Their opportunity of applying pressure-tactic no longer operated. But they could ill afford to slacken their efforts. They chose to face the situation boldly. That was the only way in which they could retain the confidence of the masses and keep the movement they had begun and led so far alive. The alternative to that they knew was to let the government come to the top.

The termination of the war had, thus, made the government ready to use force and the nationalists out to further strengthen their hold on the masses. The Punjabis' excitement far from subsiding had rather increased many fold. That excitement derived its strength as much from the faith the Punjabis had then reposed in their political strength as from the leadership that had infused in them that strength. The socio-economic consequences of the war helped the leaders maintain their hold over the Punjub masses.

To the British administrators, this was a challenge which they sought to meet with merciless repression. They felt that with the war anxieties over, they could easily do it now. Under their advice, the government thought of doing it in a big way. The government had come round to the opinion that small palliatives and peaceful methods would prove ineffective.

As a preliminary step in that direction it passed the Rowlatt Act in the teeth of public agitation against it. On their part the public leaders recognised the gravity
of the hour and decided to give a befitting reply to the government. Both the sides were soon found busy making full use of the exciting atmosphere then prevailing all over the province.

The people of the Punjab became very vociferous and led the country in organising protest meetings against the Act. O'Dwyer who was anxiously waiting for such an opportunity cleverly provoked the peaceful agitators into violence, and having dubbed the agitation an open rebellion hastened to enforce the Martial Law. For two months the Punjabis were subjected to unspeakable atrocities under that Martial Law and a reign of terror was let loose with a view "to produce a wide-spread moral effect". In the opinion of O'Dwyer, that was a necessary preliminary to bestowing on the Punjabis any kind of political reform—big or small; then alone it would be looked upon as a boon bestowed upon them by the benign government.

In this attempt designed by O'Dwyer and the other British bureaucrats of his way of thinking the British received a temporary success but at a heavy price. It generated so much hatred in the hearts of the Punjabis against the Britshers that it sparked off a national movement which set ablaze the entire country within a year of its initiation.