"Modern Sikh History" writes Lt.-Col. Birdwood in his book 'A Continent Experiments', "is centred round the Akali Party."

True; modern Sikh history is but an integral part of modern Punjab, in which the Akalis have played a very important role. It is in this context of modern Punjab that we can study the Akali Party's achievements and failures. Very few books appear to have been written specifically on the Akalis. There are no doubt references to them in the works of Birdwood, Penderel Moon (Divide and Quit); and Allen Johnson Campbell (Mission with Mountbatten), but little or no systematic treatment is found anywhere regarding the political activities of the Akali Party. Khushwant Singh, Dr. Ganda Singh, Harbans Singh Uppal and Dr. Gokul Chand Narang in his 1960 edition of 'The Transformation of Sikhism', have no doubt given brief accounts of the Akali Party in their scholarly presentations of the history of the Sikhs. But a fuller account remains to be given of a party which is still playing an important role in Indian politics and which produced parliamentarians like the late Sardar Baldev Singh, the first Defence Minister of free India; Sardar Swaran Singh, the present Defence Minister; Sardar Hukam Singh, former Speaker of the Lok Sabha and now Governor of Rajasthan; Sardar Ujjal Singh, Governor of Madras; and the late Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, former Chief Minister of the Punjab.
In writing my thesis 'The Origin and Development of Akali Party in the Punjab up to 1947', I have been inspired by a desire to do justice to the party's historical role in modern Punjab.

Writing a thesis on contemporary subject is, I feel, a risky proposition. Full and critical account of the origin, progress and development of a close but epoch-making political event is always a delicate and difficult task; for the secret, and sometimes silent, origin of such a movement is often shrouded in the mazes of imperfect records and conflicting reports; while jealously and spite on the one hand, no less than suspicion and distrust on the other, leading to misrepresentations and exaggerations, serve not a little to obscure the vision and warp the judgment of contemporary minds.

Divergent reports which I gathered from newspapers and periodicals have not been altogether free from doubt and contradictions. The available books on the topic were still more obscure and defective in their accounts. Much of the material could not be brought to India at Partition in 1947, and unfortunately, neither the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee nor the head office of the Akali Party located at Amritsar is in possession of official or authentic documents. Moreover the National Archives denied me the privilege of looking into the relevant papers which might have cleared much of the cloud from many a mystery.* However, I have endeavoured, even in the absence of important books, to exploit the available material scattered in newspapers in the Punjab,
especially The Tribune of Lahore now at Ambala Cantt; the Akali Patrika of Lahore, available in irregular form in the Santokh Singh Hall at Amritsar, and books published in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. Interviews with leaders who actively participated in the movement and the manuscripts and letters preserved by them have helped me immensely in making this project comprehensive. For this I am grateful to the late Baba Ashurak Singh, the late Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon, Master Tara Singh, Sardar Mangal Singh, Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, Giani Kartar Singh, Sardar Ujjal Singh and the late Lala Duni Chand Ambalvi.

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Kailash Chander Gulati

* Vide National Archives of India’s letter No. F. 5-121/64-R-2, dated June 24, 1964.