

## GURDWARA MOVEMENT: 1920-25

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### ABSTRACT

The Akali Sikhs Movement in early twentieth century which started as purely religious movement for the reforms of Sikh's Holy Shrines, the Sikh religious historical Gurdwaras, soon attained a political character and became part and parcel of India's freedom struggle. Akali movement variously known as Sikh Gurdwara Reform Movement and sometime called Gurdwara agitations. Akali Movement described how Sikh Community started a long struggle in the early of the twentieth century for the liberation of their Gurdwaras and holy places. The Sikh campaign supported especially from the rural masses, took the form for a peaceful agitation. It was religious gathering for the protest of Sikhs to assert their right to manage their sacred places. Finally the Government had to bow in front of popular pressure and allow the Sikhs to take over the guardianship of their Gurdwaras. Gurudwara act passed in 1925 which made the S.G.P.C a representative body of Sikhs, custodian of all important Sikh holy places.

**KEYWORDS:** Gurdwara Movement, Akali, Agitation, Morcha Policy, Religious and S.G.P.C

### INTRODUCTION

In the early of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Akali Sikhs started a campaign against the Mahants to take over the religious shrines. Akalies started morcha policy to take over the Gurdwaras, some steps for this purpose were, Guru ka Bagh Morcha, Sikhs cut down the woods around the Guru ka Bagh Gurdwara for Guru ka langar police arrested the Akalies at the complain of mahant a care taker at Guru ka Bagh. Mahant complained the Government that the Gurdwara's land was his own property. The incident of Gurdwara Guru Ka Bag was a painful event in the history of Sikhism. Morcha Panja Sahib was aftermath of Gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh when Sikh Jathas want to gave the food to the prisoners of Guru Ka Bagh who took to the Attuck Fort by train, near Hassan Abdal Akali Jathas tried to stop the train. For this purpose many people lay before the train and lost their lives. Another big event was accrued in the history Gurdwara Jaitho morcha at Nabha State during the Akhand Path at Gangasar Gurdwara Jaitho. This time again the authorities arrested and tortured the Sikh Community, it was worst when police fired on non-violent Akali Sikhs during the Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib at Jaito, Police wanted to disperse Akalies. Akalies non-violent throughout the agitation and completed the Akhand path at Jatio which made the Akalies more famous among the people. Gurdwara Reform Movement was at the peak during the Jaito Morcha. During the Gurdwaras Reform struggle, Akali Sikhs learnt the technique of non-violence from Gandhi which was very effective during the campaign and they succeeded to achieve their goal. Gurdwara Reform Movement is very significant in three ways firstly Gurdwara Movement created sense of confidence and courage among the Indians that the British could be forced to meet their genuine demands through a non-violent mass movement; secondly it brought near Akali Dal and Congress leadership to each other, which giving a great motivation to the freedom movement in Punjab and thirdly the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal provided the institutional and organizational structure to respond the ambitions of

the newly organized Sikh masses, and the process to acted as the training ground for the emerging Sikh Community. Gurdwara Reform Movement of their five year struggle from 1920-25 the S.G.P.C. and the Shrimoni Akali Dal were not only able to exile the Udasi Mahants also obtained the control over all the important Sikh Gurdwaras through a peaceful agitation. They also to strengthen the forces of nationalism in Province of Punjab by expelling the Mahants, Government appointed these Mahants as managers in Sikh Shrines and other vested interests in the Sikh Community. Over three hundred large and small Sikh Gurdwaras were liberated by the Shrimoni Akali Dals. After the Gurdwara Act S.G.P.C also controlled the Gurdwaras and collect the large amount of these Gurdwaras, it increased the religious respect of the Committee among the Sikh Community. At the end of the struggle for Gurdwara Reforms Gurdwara Perbhandak Committee was very famous all over the India and became the popular party of Sikh Community. The Akali agitation came to an end after passing the Gurdwara Act 1925 and release of Akali leaders. On the other side Government were taken some positive stepsto reassure the Sikh Community. Akali gave new direction to the Sikhs Community.

### **THE PLACE OF GURDWARAS IN SIKHISM**

Sikh Shrines which are called Gurdwars in Sikhism. They are also called Dharmsals. Gurdwaras play a vital role in Sikh religion. The first few Gurdwaras were established by Guru Nanak ji who was the founder of the Sikh faith and created a new society. He gave a new spirit of life to their people. Guru Nanak visited throughout the country and preached the name of God. Where he went he set up a worship place. Guru Nanak gave the utmost important to the Sangat in Sikh religion. Guru Nanak set up an assembly of women and men called Sangat who built the shrines. People gather in these shrines and sing hymens together. Firstly shrines provided the place of meeting where they discuss many religious issues secondly celebrated many occasions with great devotion here.<sup>i</sup> After Guru Nanak other Gurus and some Sikh political leaders also established new Gurdwaras in Sikhism. Gurdwaras are the source of new sprite of hope and create a unity among the Sikh community. Gurdwaras show the practical performance of the teaching of Baba Guru Nanak Ji. Gurdwaras are the center of Sikh religion which shows the unity and no class, creed conflict among the Sikhs. Gurdwaras not only convey the message of Gurus also a place where people discuss many general issues and discuss different welfare matters of the Sikh community. <sup>ii</sup>The first Guru Nanak Dev had laid great stress on Sangat in Sikh religion. He had laid stress on sangat by pangat due to Sikhs gather in Gurdwaras not only in the morning also gathered in the evening. They also eat together after the prayers<sup>iii</sup>. In Sikh history Gurdwaras are as symbols of panthic unity. In Sikhism Guru Granth Sahib regarded as the spiritual guide and the Khalsa as the corporal symbol of the Guru.

### **CARE TAKER OF THE SIKH SHRINES**

During the downfall period of Mughals main Sikh Shrines under the Udasi Mahants which had not long hairs. These Mahants look after the Gurdwaras. British set up canals system throughout the West Punjab, which had fertile the soil. Due to this canal system the income of the land of Gurdwaras increased so much. During the period of Raja Ranjit Singh, he was built and rebuilt Gurdwaras a large property and land included with these Gurdwaras. A large income of these Gurdwaras was in the hands of Mahants, which considered themselves the masters of these lands. Most of the Mahants were greedy after increased income of the major Sikh Shrines. A major part of Gurdwaras income in their hands so they decreased amount for Gurdwaras affairs. The corrupt Mahants started wrong activities in Gurdwaras, they reaped devoted women who came there for religious affairs. They also did much wrong deed in sacred places. They started put idols in Gurdwaras, they also put some idols in Darbar Sahib but in 1905 Singh Sabah was succeed to remove the idols

from Darbar Sahib. These things made the Sikh Community against the Mahant and they feel to liberate their Gurdwaras from these Mahants. They started campaign for this purpose throughout the Punjab.<sup>iv</sup>

### **AKALI WAVE PRODUCE IN SIKHS**

Last quarter of the eighteenth century Sikh misaldars had set their quarter at Amritsar near to Darbar Sahib. Akalis were divided into groups, first a small group which controlled the Akal Takht and second a large group of idlers which dominated the Darbar Sahib. The first group of Akalis had supremacy over Sikh Sardars. The second group was jealous from the intellectuals and tried to establish their supremacy on Sardars. Sardar drove them away from Amritsar. But when Shah Zaman attacked on Punjab second group of Akalis returned to Amritsar in large number for the protection of Hari Mander. Now Sardars began to respect them<sup>v</sup>. Again early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Mahants used the income and donations of the Gurdwaras for their own purposes not for religious purposes. Some Mahants had permitted smoking in sacred places, engaged dancing girls and some had placed idols in the Gurdwaras. Sikhs had made request to the Government to investigate the situation but nothing was done by the Government. The Sikhs had fed up with the management of the Gurdwaras. Sikhs had started a campaign in 1907 and demand the Government to replace the management of the Golden Temple but the Government has no step even after more than a decade in this direction.<sup>vi</sup> When the non-co-operation was prevailed throughout the country in the meantime introduced the organization to better express the Tat Khalsa objectives. These were Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and political associate Shiromani Akali Dal. Both organizations were founded in 1920. They started their campaign in alliance with Gandhi and Congress Party. The objective of the campaign was got back the Gurdwaras from Mahants which controlled it.<sup>vii</sup> Gurdwara Prabhak Committee consisted of 175 members. Sunder Singh Majithia, Harbans Singh of Attari, and Bhai Jodh Singh were elected as a president vice-president and secretary respectively. They also organized the semi-military corps of volunteers. The Akali Dal was raised and trained the Sikhs to taking over the Gurdwaras from the Mahants. Sikhs started a paper in Gurmukhi known as Akali. Due to the pressure of Sikhs Mahants started frequently to control over the property of Gurdwaras and also controlled the lands related to the Gurdwaras. A violence produced at Tarn Taran Gurdwara in result two Akalis were killed and many injured in this incident.<sup>viii</sup> When the Akalis were struggling to take control of their Gurdwarashile Hindus had supported these non kesadhari Sikhs (Mahants). Sikhs more aggressive, in Punjab Legislative Mahtab Singh said in his speech in 1921, he said that the Sikhs do not wish to remain in Hinduism, why should the Hindus seek forced the Sikhs to do this. What benefit can Hindus obtain by keeping on Sikhs in their community? Why not let them go? Some Hindu leaders tried to retrieve the situation, Raja Narindra Nath said "I look upon Sikhism as higher as Hinduism" another Hindu leader Gokhl Chand said that they flesh as our flesh and the bones of our bones. But it was too late.<sup>ix</sup> Akali Dal movement for taking control of the Gurdwaras had already been taking steps to liberate the historic Gurdwaras. This was a peaceful movement but at some places where the Mahants were resisted a trouble arosed. A bloody clash at Tarn Tran but after that Akali controlled over the Gurdwara.

### **GURDWARA BABE-DI-BER**

The first Sikh Gurdwara to be reformed through an agitation was Babe-Di-Ber at Sialkot. The Udasi Mahant Hamam Singh who was the care taker of Gurdwara Babe-Di-Ber died. His widow with her minor son had appointed as successor at the Gurdwara of Sialkot. The guardianship of this Gurdwara was handed to Ganda Singh by Honorary Magistrate. The wave of resentment among the Sikh Community was produced throughout the Punjab against the

Government for this action. Singh Sabhas sent various telegrams to the Governor Punjab for conveying their protest against this action. So the guardian of the Gurdwara however decided to ignore all the popular opposition and approved the transformation in favor of the son of Mahant Hamam Singh. The Sikh reformers reacted on it by filing a civil suit in court of the District Judge, who ordered the petitioners to pay a court fee of 50,000 rupees by 30 August, 1920. The Sikh reformers could not collect huge amount of the court so the complaint of Sikh reformers was rejected. After failed to achieve their objectives Sikhs started peaceful agitation. The Sikhs Community organized themselves and also formed a Khalsa Sewak Jatha for starting a campaign to reform the Gurdwaras in the city. According to the new program of action they started weekly and latter daily services in the Gurdwara, but the care taker Ganda' Singh placed many hurdles in the way of Sikh reformers but at least they succeeded in taking over the control of Gurdwara and starting again the system of free langar in Gurdwara, had been stopped by the Udasi Mahant. Sikhs held a big elected Committee of 13 members who control the Gurdwara affairs but in the mean while at Golden Temple the Akal Takhat introduced some new reforms and diverted the attention of Sikh reformers and shifted their struggle from small town to headquarters of Sikhs at Amritsar.<sup>x</sup>

### **NANKANA MASSACRE**

In February 1921 a tragedy occurred as a result of the lawlessness of Sikhs at Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib. This shrine built was on birth place of Guru Nanak Ji. The tragedy occurred due of Udasi Mahants, a sect that after the death of Guru Nanak was adopting by his son Siri Chand Ji. Narayn Das Mahant was afraid of the attack upon the Gurdwara so he applied the authorities for protection. Government refused to interfere directly in religious matters. Mahant engaged pathans and other guards for the protection of shrine. A Sikh troop came from Lyallpur to Nankana Sahib to control over the Shrine.<sup>xi</sup> The Nankana massacre at Nankana Sahib was known as Saka Nankana Sahib in history. Sikh started a peaceful campaign to take back the Gurdwaras from the Hindu Mahant. The bloodshed of the innocent Sikhs by the Hindu Mahants with the blessing of British Government was such a turning point in the Sikh history that caused rebirth the Khalsa, to regain their identity as a separate from the Hindus. This bloodshed happening when Sikh started Gurdwara reform movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to free their sacred places from the Hindu Mahants. During the Ranjit Singh period he reconstructed many Gurdwaras not only reconstructed had also attached handsome landed properties with many of Gurdwaras. These places have also attracted amount in the form of nazranas. These properties and income made the Mahants corrupt, who was the care taker of the Gurdwaras so they used the money for their own purposes. Gurdwara Janam Asthan was under the management of a Mahant Narayan Das in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was corrupt man and with the premises many foul activities were doing in the Gurdwara. Sikhs protest against the Narayan Das. The Shiromany Gurdwara committee made several efforts to meet the Mahant to bring about peaceful settlement to the issues and transfer the management of the Gurdwaras to the Sikhs. But the Mahant refused to give back the Gurdwara and planned to use the force against the Sikhs so the Mahant collected the guns, pistols and other arms to succeed his plan. When the Sikhs had came to know about this plan made by the Mahant in the name of security. Kartar Singh himself started a campaign against the corrupt Mahant and also organized the Sikhs for a movement to bring reforms into the Gurdwaras<sup>xii</sup>. When the Sikhs came to know the conspiracy they offered the Mahant for the peaceful settlement of the issue instead of the fight but he refused. They decided to free the Gurdwara from the Hindu Mahant Narayn Das on 20 february a Sikh Shaheedi Jathas started their campaign. Two hundred unarmed and peaceful men under the leader ship of Bhai Lachman Singh and Bhai Dalip Singh. When they reached the Gurdwara Naryan Das ordered their men to kill all of them. They used weapons; guns fired and killed the Sikh troops. Bhai Lachman Singh who was wounded with a gunshot was tied to a Jand tree and burnt

alive. It was a worst act by the mahant.<sup>xiii</sup>

## GURDWARA TURUN TARUN

Gurdwara Turun Tarun has great important in Sikh history due of morcha policy to liberate the Sikh Gurdwaras from Udasi Mahants. In 1921 Government policy changed and trouble started in the region. A Gurdwara in District Amritsar Trun Tarun when a group of Sikhs came to discuss the matter of management of Gurdwara with care taker of the Gurdwara Trun Tarun was assaulted. A revolt started here between Akali Sikhs and Mahants two Sikhs were killed and round about seventeen injured by the mahants. Government favored the Mahants so instead of punishing the mahant police started to arrest the Sikh Akalies who were against the mahants. Most of the Akalies went to jail. This thing made the Sikh Community more aggressive and against the Government.<sup>xiv</sup>

## KEY AFFAIRS OF DARBAR SAHIB

In 1919 the issue of Golden Temple's management was raised because Sikh Community not satisfy with the management of Gurdwara but the appointment of Surbarah in 1920 calm the agitation so, temporary settled the matter. During the year 1920 a movement started in Sikh Community to build the wall of Rekarb Gunj Gurdwara at Delhi. A jatha of Akalis took the control of the Langer khana in Golden Temple at Amritsar. In November a group of 175 members from different areas was formed a Committee to manage the all Sikh Gurdwaras according to their religious rituals and ceremonies. According to the mahants these jathas used force against them and also established armed forces to took the charge of Gurdwaras.<sup>xv</sup> At the time when Nankana massacre accrued Sikhs suffered it in the meanwhile Government gave another shock to the Sikh Community. The keys of the treasury of Golden Temple, Amritsar government were taken forcibly in hands. The Akali committee which managed the Gurdwara Golden Temple affairs and other Gurdwaras had been controlling the keys of treasury over a year<sup>xvi</sup>. The manager of the Golden temple Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, was also holding the keys of the tosh khana of Golden Temple. When Sardar handover the keys to the new elected president of the Gurdwara Perbhandek committee Baba Kharak Singh as he went to give the keys to Baba Kharak Singh in the meanwhile Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar immediately sent an assistant Commissioner to collect the keys of treasury of the Golden Temple from him. Akali agitation started which famous as "chabian da morcha" during this agitation thousands of Akalis were arrested.<sup>xvii</sup> Police also arrested the president of Gurdwara Perbhandek Committee Kharak Singh, Secretary Mahtab Singh and Master Tara Singh. They were sent to jail for six months. This issue also discussed in the legislative Council Sir Fazal-e-Husain said in his speech in November 1920 Akali Jathas seized the Gurdwara Punja Sahib at Hassan Abdal. In December Akalis seized Sacha Soda Gurdwara of District Sheikhpura. In January 1921 Sikhs seized the Gurdwara Chola in the village of Amritsar and latter Akalies proceeeded at Tarn Trun there was bloodshed as a result of a riot. Same incident had happened at Babe di Ber District Sailkot and in Gojra Gurdwara District Lyallpur and Gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh. After these incidents shows that need a Legislative Council to settle down all the matters. Government realizing all the problems and has decided to move the Legislative Council and appoint the Committee who examine the questions and prepare a Legislation as may be necessary to meet the existing situation. Council moved a resolution by Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh: this Council move a resolution to local Government to appoint a committee for inquiry of the whole situation.<sup>xviii</sup> Once again Governor stopped it and he offered the keys back to the Akalis, but the committee refused to accept the keys Sikh leaders and also handed back the keys of the Golden Temple to Sardar Kharak Singh but the Committee insisted that the Government releas the Sikhs those were arrested in the matter

of keys. January 1922 released all the even acknowledged that the Committee was actually the representative of large section of Sikhs opinion related to Gurdwara reforms. Now Government had understood the situation enough even some cases showed sympathy with the even those who carrying the kirpan or wearing the black turbans. Black turban was the badge of the Akali party which showed their sorrow and pain over the fate of their community. Sikhs also organized the Sikh reformers. But the attitude of the local district bureaucracy did not change. Sikhs were arrested continuously semi military organization which called Akali Dal. Many retired soldiers joined it and gave up their pensions to the organization which was practiced only for passive resistance.<sup>xix</sup> During the agitation activities of keys affair press highlighted the issue in Punjab particularly in pro Akali newspapers very strong react on this issue Panth sewak wrote about the Golden Temple keys affair ‘what right has a government to interfere in the affairs of Sikh Gurdwaras?’ Akali also described their anxiety in these words “on the one side government has taken away the keys of the Golden Temple and the other side bureaucracy has crossed the record to tell a lie”. Press criticized the official action in various part of the province. A report from the C.I.D. official “many jathas from different parts of the Province reached to Amritsar. A meeting was held in Akali Bagh to protest against the action of Deputy Commissioner. Violent speeches delivered by the Akalies” another meeting held by the Gurdwara Perbhandak Committee in which decided not to allow the newly appointed official by the government to interfere in keys affairs in any way. A protesting meeting was held at Lahore, in November 1921 criticized the Government actions and warned against retaining their seats. Different protesting meetings held in different cities like Gujranwala, Gujar Khan and some other cities. It was decided in these meetings to illumine the Golden Temple and other Sikh Shrines on the occasion of Guru Nanak’s birthday. The non-co-operation movement was more prevailed in the province due to of Sikh leaders especially Dan Singh and Jaswant Singh was much adopted the movement so the Government ordered to arrest these leaders. Police arrested the leaders when they were addressing to a Sikh Diwan at Ajnala on November 26, 1921. When Akalies heard this news reached the Ajnala and continued the proceedings of the Diwan. The S.G.P.C. passed a resolution called the Sikhs hold the religious Diwan everywhere to explain the facts about the keys affair of Golden Temple. The Committee further advised the Sikhs to arrange a strike on the arrival of Prince Wales. Sikh soldiers and all the Sikh prisoners refused to attend the function ceremony in the honor of Prince. The boycott move by the Akali leaders frightened the Government and they decided to cancel the visit of the Prince. In the meantime many Sikh leaders were arrested, the situation tenses when the arrested Sikh leaders refused to put up any defense on the appeal that they were non-cooperators, they were convicted and awarded with punishment. Government arrested the main Akali leaders and sent them to different sentences. After this the popularity of the movement increased throughout the province. According to the C.I.D. official report “agitation had spread very fast throughout the ruler areas of the province especially Lahore and Amritsar”.<sup>xx</sup>

## **GURDWARA GURU KA BAGH MORCHA**

In August 1922 another horrible incident accrued at Guru Ka Bagh in Sikh history. Guru ka Bagh mean the garden of the Guru, the small sites of the Gurdwara was built in the memory of Guru Arjan. This Gurdwara is situated twelve miles away from Amritsar District. Controversy about the management of the Guru ka Bagh came to know when a meeting held by the Akali committee in the shrine. The purpose of the meeting was to press the mahant for the reforms in the shrine. An agreement was near to pass between the committee and the mahant of the Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh. Sunder Das a Hindu mahant was the care taker of Guru Ka Bagh. In March 1921 Sunder Das revolted against the agreement. He occupied the office of the management committee and destroyed all the records. Six months later in the absence of Sunder

Das, an Akali jatha came to the Shrine and noticed the Gurdwara management was in troubled.<sup>xxi</sup> August 1922 Akalis cut down the trees around the Gurdwara as used as fuel for the preparation of Guru-ka-langar. Sundar Das the Hindu mahant complained against the Akalis to the district authorities he claimed that they theft the woods from his property. A local magistrate rule that the mahant were legally the care taker of the shrine unless evicted through civil court. Police arrested the Akalies who cut down the trees. After few weeks, a large number of Akalies cut down the trees under the instructions from Gurdwara Parbhandk Committee. Sunder Das complained again to the district police and Akalies were arrested were who involved in it. Punjab Government ordered the police of Guru ka Bagh to protect the mahant and their property. The Government act made the akalies more aggressive; despite presence of police again attempts were made to cut down the trees from the lands of shrine, Police took action and arrested a large number of Akalies<sup>xxii</sup>. According to an official report 'in the year of 1922 the condition of lawlessness prevailed throughout the province 5000 people were arrested who were connected to the Guru ka Bagah affair. Population of the jails increased the average of the people in prisons over the last five years.' The brutality and inhumanity prevailed at Guru ka Bagh, nonviolent and peaceful group of the Akalies were sent to the jail. They started their campaign peacefully even at Amritsar and now Guru ka Bagh campaign. Report of the Congress Guru Ka Bagh Inquiry Committee, appointed a sub Committee the members of the sub Committee Messrs. S. Shrinvasa Iyengar, Chairperson, M.R. Jayakar, Barrister-at Law, Moulana Muhammad Taqi, Wakil of Delhi, J.M. Sen Gupta, Barrester-at Law and Mr. S.E. Stokes with prof. Ruchi Ram Shani as the Secretary to enquire the whole matter Guru Ka Bagh and submitted their report to the All India Congress Committee. Committee met different witnesses and collected the evidences. According to the Committee opinion Government was anxious to crush the agitation of the Akalies on political level. Government persisted in their argument that they were justified in dispersing the Sikh troops because they were doing illegal deed so under criminal procedure Code section 127 and 128 it was moral duty to investigate briefly the situation for any civilized Government. It is a criminal act for such a deed. According to the many witnesses police was used Lathies to beat the Akalies very harshly. Committee collects evidences from some responsible Zamindars, and other responsible persons from the civil society who gave the evidence to the Committee. According to the section 127 and 128 gathering of any four or five people who create disturbance of public peace disperse them. Committee said in its report, a large number of witnesses have assisted us with their views about the incident; according to them 9 August 1922 to 24 August 1922 police resorted to arrest the peaceful Akalies at Guru ka Bagh and sent to the jails. It is clear to us that Akalis had no attention to lose or damage to any person when they cut the woods. Akalis were non-violent whole the incident when they beaten by the police marched and singing Sat Sri Akal and Wahe Guru ki fateh. Hospitals were filled with the Akalies injured people, doctor Pertab a witness says during the fifteen days of beating he saw most of the Akalies were beating most barbarous way.<sup>xxiii</sup> Government during the debates Ganpat Rai said in his speech, Government should work for the welfares of Sikhs as well as for the Mahants. Maulvi Muharram Ali said in his speech, Sir I like to ask a question if the Bill pass S.G.P.C does not allow the board of Commissioners to take possession of the Gurdwara because S.G.P.C are opposing this Bill what remedy has been proposed in such a case. When the S.G.P.C does not possession in Gurdwaras and arrests will be restarted as before. Mian Fazl-i-Husain said, the people opposed the Bill so I feel to make a speech once again. There are 26 sections in this Bill now discussion on the section of 25.<sup>xxiv</sup> Negotiation between Punjab Government Sikh legislative members had made slow progress but July 1922 an agreement had been reached on basic principles on which Gurdwara bill was formed. Initial draft of bill was related to the Sikh Gurdwara and Shrine bill 1921 which selected by the Committee.

Due to some crucial modifications Sikh legislators disagreed to accept the bill. The board of the commissioners was to take the temporary charge of all the disputed shrines and also start an inquiry to find the origin and history of the shrines to settle down the matter. Initially board made a Committee whose three members one from the reformers, second a Sahajdhari Sikh and third a British officer member. The Sikh legislative members refused to accept the inquiry and temporary management. Sikhs could not accept the interference of the others in Sikh religious affairs.

## **BABBAR AKALI**

When the Sikh Community struggle for to control over the Sikh Shrines, Sikh made the Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee and Akali Dal who struggled for the Gurdwara reforms in the meantime a group of Sikhs who inspired by the Akali agitation and started a movement against the Government. Before they start a movement, they were all in the British army but Jallianwala massacre and martial law events made them against the Government so they resigned from the job. After the Nankana massacre they were selected as Akalis, but during the morcha policy they did not like the police torcher non-violently so they started a new movement against the Government later it known as Babbar Akali<sup>xxv</sup>. Police behavior at Guru Ka Bagh produced some underground terrorist movements. Most of the terrorists came from Ghadr party; two most famous terrorists were Kishen Singh Bidang and Master Mota Singh known as Babbar Akali. They sent their agents to the North West Frontier province and Indian states. The purpose to took the soldiers from the army and train them to fight against the Government.<sup>xxvi</sup> Babbar Akali Jathas were threating violent against those who against their movement and also doing cyclostyle activities against Government. Babbar Akalies belong to Doaba, all Doaba were famous for terrorist activities. Government tried to disperse their movement but when police attacked on never found them. Special terrorist police with the help of local authorities took steps against the Babbar Akalies.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Babbar Akali movement was very active from 1922-1923. Many Government officials and supporters were singled out and killed. The Encounters took place with the police during some rare feats of brave and self-sacrifice by Babbar Akalies. The Government treated with firmness and eagerness. April 1923, Babbar Akali Jatha was declared an unlawful organization under the Criminal Law Act of 1908. Cavalry and infantry units were established and stationed in sensitive areas, with the help of magistrates on duty. Military and special police created a force to seize Babbars during sheltering themselves in the Sivalik hills. After every two weeks propaganda fliers were dropped from the airplanes, the purpose to strengthening the morale of the loyalist Akalis.<sup>xxviii</sup> The violence period of Bubbar Akalies was short but intense, in a few months they done terrorist activities in Jallundur and Hoshiarpur. In 1923 a violence wave was spent, and many Babbars had been caught by the police 62 Babbars put up for trial. 22 Babbars were turned to witnesses for the Government. During the trial six men including the Kishen Singh Bidang were condemned to death and other were sent to prison. Government policy for Akalies was more hardened. Akalies were more aggressive for control the Gurdwaras. Police attitude became harsher for the Akali prisoners.<sup>xxix</sup>

## **SAKA PUNJA SAHIB**

After the incident of Guru ka Bagh, when Akalis cut the trees for Guru ka langer around the Guru ka Bagh Shrine. For this act Sikh Akalies were arrested in large numbers and sent them to the jails. After 15 September arrestings were closed and Government decided to send these prisoners to other cities jails. A train who took the prisoners of Guru Ka Bagh from Amritsar to Attock on 29 October 1922, the train had to pass near the Hasan Abdal following morning. The Sikh Community of Panja Sahib decided to serve a meal to the Akali prisoners but, when Sikhs reached the railway station with food, they came to know by the station master that the train was not stopped here. They appealed that trains had been

stopped at other places for the prisoners to be fed there. But it was not possible so the two who were leading the Sikh Sangat, Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh decided when the whistle of train heard that the train approaching sat crosslegged in the middle of the track. Many others, Sikh men and women, followed them. The train-driver saw them suddenly slowed down the train tried to stop the train but before it stopped had run over eleven of the Sikhs who laid down the railway track. They were died including to Bhai Pratap Singh and Bhai Karam Singh, that day. The dead bodies of these leaders were taken to Rawalpindi where they were burnt on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1922. They were remembered as martyr's three-day religious fair to be held in their memory at Panja Sahib from 30 October to 1<sup>st</sup> November every year. This is also known as Saka Panja Sahib.<sup>xxx</sup>

### **BHAI PHERU MORCHA**

A series of campaigns started in the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century for the reformation of their holy Shrines. In Lahore district near Bhai Pheru in the memory of Bhai Pheru (1640-1706), a devote leader during the time of Guru Har Rai. It was an important shrine for Sikhs, have 2, 750 acres of land the management of this shrine in the hands of Mahant Kishan Das. S.G.P.C a representative of the Sikh Community had taken over management of some major shrines, mahants who were the care taker of the Sikh Shrines had started voluntarily handing over Shrines to the Gurdwara Parbhandk Committee Kishan Das who was the care taker of Bhai Pheru Gurdwara transferred the control of the Gurdwara to the Committee. But after some time he denied for the agreement which signed with Committee and add petitioned to Government for Shrine and the lands returned to him. Police arrested the manager Jagat Singhand eleven other members of the Committee. Deputy Commissioner of Lahore was in favor of the Committee, the representative of the Gurdwara Committee arrived to take charge from Kishan Das brother of Narain Das care taker of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib. Mahantcomplaint police that the Akalis were forcibly taking control of his property. Police arrested Akalis from the Bhai Pheru Gurdwara January 1924. Government gave the temporary charge to the Pala Ram tenant of Kishan Das, of the Shrine and land. Akalis Sikhs launched a morcha in Bhai Pheru. Akali Sikhs started marching to Bhai Pheru from different parts of the district.<sup>xxxi</sup> During the campaign at Bhai Pheru Government discussions continued with the Sikh member of Legislative Council. A sub Committee of five members organized by the S.G.P.C these private discussions with Government were not ended until the end of April 1925.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### **NABHA STATE AND JAITO MORCHA**

Next clash came between Government and Akalies in Nabha State. Maharaja Nabha was deposed and exiled by the Government due to of many reasons. When he had taken the charge refused to invite the British in inauguration ceremony. Many incidents occurred in that year, when he had taken the charge including personal discourtesy by the Governor towards him<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Maharaja was highly educated man and also a member of imperial council, stood against the Government. He was a religious reformer and had great devotion with Sikh Gurus. He had open relation with Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee and Akalies.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The Mahraja of Nabha State Ripudaman Singh had a soft corner for the Akali agitation, this thing made the Government against him and inquiry of Mahraja started which conducted by Justice Steward. This news shocked and anguished the Akalies, sent a telegram to Viceroy demanding for set up an inquiry Committee for investigation that the Mahraja Ripudaman Singh forced for exiled by the authorities<sup>xxxv</sup>. Shrimoni Gurdwara Committee challenged the Government action against Mahraja of Nabha and asked to publish the whole truth. According to the treaties between British Government and Phulkian states, Government has no power to depose any Sikh Mahraja.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Some

moderate members of Committee opposed the Nabha issue; they felt that it was a political issue not a religious so we should not take questions about Maharaja's restoration. According to these members if they support the Maharaja Government must injure the feelings of the Sikhs. But in the general meeting of the Committee decided to support the Maharaja and continued the agitation till he was restored. Indian National Congress also supported the Akalies in Nabha issue. Congress also passed a resolution in favor of Akalies agitation. Government against the Akali leadership and issued a notification on October 1923 according to shrimoni Akali Dal and other Jathas organized by the Akalies were declared unlawful associations. After the notification all the members of S.G.P.C. were arrested in Nabha and charged of treason against the princely state.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Sikhs started protest against the Government and Akalis started Akhand Path in Gurdwara Jitao ke. Troops of Sikhs reached Jitao ke from different districts to Nabha State so that they participate in protest against Government.<sup>xxxviii</sup> During the Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib at Jitao in Nabha State police interrupted the Sikhs and arrested most of the Sikhs. Administrator of Nabha State decided to use force against the Sikh troops coming to Nabha. In 1924 when a Jatha of 500 Akalies arrived to Nabha authorities were asked to open fired on to disperse the Akalies.<sup>xxxix</sup> A troop of 500 Akali Jatha lay down their lives at Gurdwara Gangasar. A final sermon Akhand Path again started by Akal Takht Government again tortured the non-violent Jathas but Jathas insisted to complete the Akhand Path. The condition was very miserable horrors at Jato Gurdwara, but the moral of the Akalies was very high during the Akhand Path even they complete the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>xl</sup>

## GURDWARA ACT 1925

The objectives of the Sikh Gurdwara Reform Movement, the first aim of the movement all the Sikh Gurdwaras in which Sikh interested should be controlled by the S.G.P.C a representative body of Sikh Community. Secondly the worship and other religious activities in these Shrines should be returned to its original and pure form. In Gurdwaras all rituals should be according to the teaching of Sikh Guru Granth Sahib. Thirdly all the income of these Gurdwaras should be used for the betterment of Sikh Community like charity and educational purposes. Fourthly all the functions in these religious institutes should be controlled by the Panth committee of Sikhs. Gurdwara Movement has no attentions to interfere in any other non-Sikh worship place. Gurdwara Movement has no attention to interfere in political matters.<sup>xli</sup> A controversy continued from last three years for the construction and maintenance of Sikhs Holy buildings. Gurdwara Reform Movement is the burning topics in these days in newspapers, especially in Sikh Community. The General Secretary of Singh Sabha of Amritsar given his speech in the light of Gurdwara Act 1925: The management of historical Sikh Gurdwaras Punjab, Haryana Himachal and Chandigarh is now under the S.G.P.C. according to the Gurdwara Act 1925.<sup>xlii</sup> Sikh Gurdwara Bill was passed in July 1925. The Council gave a great importance to Gurdwara Bill and passed by the Legislative Council without a single divided. Council Committee changes and improvements were made in the Gurdwara Bill. Legislative Council gave more importance to Gurdwara Bill and the selected Committee consumed three days for discussion on Gurdwara Bill.<sup>xliii</sup> According to the Sikh Gurdwara Act, Sikh used the Gurdwaras as public place of worship. All those places which established in the memories of Sikh martyrs, Saints and a historical person Sikh used as a public place of worship. Before this Act, properties dedicated or gifted to any Gurdwara, profit or income of these properties partly divided among them. During the year 1945 Kartar Singh suggested an amendment to dissolve the local Gurdwara Committee and handing over to the General Gurdwara Perbandk Committee.<sup>xliiv</sup>

## PRISONERS OF THE AKALI MOVEMENT

In 1922 S.G.P.C. started its agitation to control the Gurdwara Guru-ka-Bagh, when a troop of Akalis marched from Golden Temple towards the Guru-ka Bagh were arrested by the Government. Police used lathis and physical violence. Sikh stood there and allowed the police to beaten them until they fell unconscious. Many Muslim and Hindu leaders like Swami Shradhanand and Hakim Ajmal Khan united again for the Sikh cause and made speeches at Guru ka Bagh.<sup>xlv</sup> Amrisar Trun Tarun when a group of Sikhs came to discuss the matter of management of Gurdwara with care taker of the Gurdwara Trun Tarun was assaulted. Two Sikhs were killed and round about seventeen injured by the mahants. Instead of punishing the mahants police started to arrest the Sikh Akalies who were against the mahants. Most of the Akalies went to jail.<sup>xlvi</sup> During the campaign at golden Temple Police arrested the president of Gurdwara Perbhandek Committee Kharak Singh, Secretary Mahtab Singh and Master Tara Singh. They were sent to jail for six months. Once again Governor stopped it and he offered the keys back to the Akalis, but the committee refused to accept the keys Sikh leaders and also handed back the keys of the Golden Temple to Sardar Kharak Singh but the Committee insisted that the Government will release the Sikhs those were arrested in the matter of keys.<sup>xlvii</sup> In Nabha State Sikhs start protesting against the Government and Akalis started Akhand Path in Gurdwara Jitao ke. Troops of Sikhs reached Jitao ke from different districts to Nabha State so that they participated in protest against Government.<sup>xlviii</sup> During the Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib at Jitao in Nabha State police interrupted the Sikhs and arrested most of the Sikhs. Administrator of Nabha State decided to use force against the Sikh troops coming to Nabha. In 1924 when a Jatha of 500 Akalies arrived Nabha authorities opened fire to disperse the Akalies.<sup>xlix</sup> Urging the resolution to release the Akali prisoners was moved in Punjab Legislative Council passed the resolution with a strong support of both Hindus and Muslims. Government official admitted that during the Hindu Muslim riot in 1923 many Akalies helped the Government to maintain the situation due to of these services Governor ordered to release 1000 Akalies who were arrested in 1922 at Guru ka Bagh.<sup>1</sup> During the five year Akali agitation 30,000 men and women went to jail 400 people were killed and 2000 wounded. Seven hundred villagers were terminated from their posts. An underground terrorist organization was known as Babbar Akalis, who was inspired by the Akali agitation and Ghader Party. During the three years period 1921-1923 Babbar Akalies did many terrorist acts against Government. In 1924 ninety-one Babbar Akalies were arrested and charges of conspiracy overthrow the Government and charges of murder and robbery in military stores. Included five leaders fifty-four were sentenced to death. Eleven were transported for life thirty eight people were sentenced to various imprisonments from three to seven years and the remaining thirty four were released.<sup>li</sup> During the discussion on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1925 in Legislative Council Sardar Gurbakhsh Sing said, "no doubt a major problem is going to be solve but the trouble will be set at rest, it will be resolved only when Government release the Sikh prisoners unconditionally and withdrawal of pending trial, remove all restriction on the pilgrims to Jaito, freeing of kripan from all restrictions".<sup>lii</sup> After the settlements Government has not yet released the Gurdwara prisoners Congress Party raised the issue, in its opinion that there will be no proper settlement of Gurdwara Act until the prisoners are unconditionally released.

The case of the Akali leaders had been dragging on before court of a special magistrate first at Amritsar and later at Lahore Fort for three years at last came to an end. Punjab Government decided to withdraw all the prosecutions against the remaining Akali under trial prisoners. Now the Central Gurdwara Board for which the Sikh Gurdwara Act provided has been constituted. This announcement was made by the counsel for Akali leaders before the special magistrate in 1926. At last a long chapter of the struggle end between Akalies, Mahants and Government reform for Sikh Gurdwaras. The news of

the withdrawal of the prosecutions, Akali leaders were filled with great joy and said that their struggle with Government was happily ended and the management of the Gurdwaras was in hands of Sikhs. Forty-four Akali leaders were released on this day Sardar Kharak Singh whom Akalies regarded as their Jathedar or foremost leader.<sup>liii</sup> According to the Act control of most Gurdwaras in hands of Sikhs, but Governor clear that only those who withdrawn their old deeds would free. A group of Akalies led by Mehtab Singh agreed to cooperate with Government were released. A large number of Sikhs included Baba kHarak Singh and Master Tara Singh refused for conditional released. But after few months later they all were released unconditionally and condemned Mehtab Singh's party out of the S.G.P.C.<sup>liv</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Gurdwara Reform Movement is very significant in three ways firstly Gurdwara Movement created sense of confidence and courage amongst the Indians that the British could be forced to meet their genuine demands through a non-violent mass movement; secondly it brought near Akali Dal and Congress leadership to each other, which giving a great motivation to the freedom movement in Punjab and thirdly the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal provided the institutional and organizational structure to respond the ambitions of the newly organized Sikh masses, and the process to acted as the training ground for the emerging Sikh Community. Gurdwara Reform Movement of their five year struggle from 1920-25 the S.G.P.C. and the Shrimoni Akali Dal were not only able to exile the Udasi Mahants also obtained the control over all the important Sikh Gurdwaras through a peaceful agitation. They faced the pains, sorrows with great courage during the whole campaign. They were arrested during the agitation at different historical Sikh places like Gurdwara Nankanka Sahib a turning point in Akali movement, Key affairs of Golden Temple, Gurdwara Guru ka Bagh, Gurdwara Punja Sahib, Gurdwara Bhai Phero and Gurdwara Gangasar Jaito in Nabah State, but had not lost their courage and hope during the whole agitation. They also strengthened the forces of nationalism in Province of Punjab by expelling the Mahants, Government appointed these Mahants as managers in Sikh Shrines and other vested interests in the Sikh community. Over three hundred large and small Sikh Gurdwaras were liberated by the Shrimoni Akali Dals. After the Gurdwara Act S.G.P.C. also controlled the Gurdwaras directly and collected the large amount of nazranas and the income of jagire, attached with the Gurdwaras. It increased the religious respect of the Committee among the Sikh Community. At the end of the struggle for Gurdwara Reforms Gurdwara Perbhandak Committee was very famous all over the India and became the popular party of Sikh Community.

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