

## CHAPTER IX

# SIKHS UNDER BRITISH RULE (1849-1947)

### Sikhs Pacified by the British 1850-1872

After the annexation of the Sikh empire, the British demobilized the Sikh army by putting over eight thousand Sikhs in jails in the very first year. Most of the Sikh forts were demolished. Sikhs were disarmed and over forty thousand Sikh soldiers were dismissed who went back to their homes to take up the traditional occupation of agriculture, but some of the best Sikh forces were retained in service. A Punjab force was set up consisting exclusively of Sikhs, particularly Sikh jats excluding the weaker sections so as to divide the Sikhs. The *Jagirs* of the Sikh chiefs who had not participated in the Sikh wars against the British were confirmed so as to create a loyal Sikh section towards the British and intensify the divide between the Sikhs, while the *jagirs* of the hostile Sikh chiefs were confiscated or reduced. Some prominent Sikh warriors were sent out of Punjab to face sedition trials. At the same time the British took steps to pacify the Sikhs generally. The British Governor General Lord Dalhousie recorded in 1849 to warn the British government :

"Hatred of Sikhs against the Britishers exceeds the national and religious animosity of Sikhs against Afghans."

The British took the Sikhs as a wounded lion and knew that a wounded lion is very dangerous. They were also in the know about the ups and downs in Sikh history in the struggle against the Mughals and Afghans. National re-unification and reorganization of the Sikhs in order to challenge British rule in the near future was a fear uppermost in the minds of the British. They could also predict that if the Sikhs came into direct conflict with them again, their stay in India may not be prolonged. They knew that they could take over the Sikh state only with the help of conspiracies and betrayals by insincere elements in the Sikh state. So the British planned to pacify the Sikhs and heal their wounds by honouring their religious feelings, their vocations, their life and sense of dignity.

The British were in a difficult situation as to how to deal with the Sikhs. One view was to have a hostile attitude towards the Sikhs by setting up army rule in Punjab

and not allowing them to reunite and have the management of the Sikh gurdwaras under their control through the Mahants who were ever ready to play into their hands to make their offices hereditary. The other view was against such a hostile attitude and rather to set up a civil administration in Punjab, not to interfere in Sikh religious affairs and rather to pacify the Sikhs and help them to settle in vocations of their choice which were mostly army and agriculture. But on the other hand the Punjab Governor wrote to the Viceroy of India on August 8, 1881 to keep the managements of Sikh gurdwaras under their control :

"I think it would be politically dangerous to allow the management of Sikh temples to fall into the hands of committee emancipated from government control and I trust your Excellency will assist to pass such an order in the case as will enable to continue the system which has worked out successfully for more than thirty years."

It predicts the thinking of the first category views that they had been consistently using a hostile attitude in trying to deal with the Sikhs. The British government took a half way course and put it into practice from the very beginning. Neither was there total army rule nor total civil rule; they encouraged Sikh adversaries including the Mahants against the Sikhs, but if the Sikhs display determination to come into conflict with the British, then they were to yield so as not to be in direct confrontation with the Sikhs.

The British appointed a board to look into the administration of Punjab at the very start. It consisted of Henry Lawrence (army and political), his brother John Lawrence (Revenue) and Charles Manson (Law and Justice), Henry was a known opponent of British machinations and bitter over the way the Punjab and the Sikh state had been annexed on the false pretext of a local rebellion and had even sent in his resignation over this matter which had not been accepted by the Governor General and he was rather made the President of the Board. The Sikhs had an affinity towards him for having resisted the annexation of the Sikh state. Also he had prevailed over the commander in chief of the British army Charles Napier who wanted military dictatorship in Punjab and instead he got civilian rule established. Sikhs were recruited into the Army by amending the rules; so they could not only remain baptized Sikhs but also it was ensured that Sikh soldiers must retain the Sikh code of conduct. Large tracts of lands with irrigation facilities were made available to Sikhs to keep them busy in Agriculture.

To honour Sikh religious sentiments and to satisfy the martial spirit of the Sikhs as to their avocation of army service, the British government made amendments in the rules of recruitment to the army, making baptised Sikhs, observing the Sikh code of conduct, and possessing the five Sikh emblems to be eligible to join the army. The regulations and rules provided :

"The pool of religious pledges of Sikh fraternity should on no account be interfered with. The Sikh

should be permitted to wear his beard and the hair of his head gathered up as enjoined by his religion. Any invasion however slight of these obligations would be construed into a desire to subvert his faith, lead to evil consequences and naturally inspire general distrust and alarm. Even those who have assumed the outward conventional characteristics of Sikhs should not be permitted after entering the British army to drop them."

(SC 38 of 28.2.1951)

The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie gave his consent to these regulations and remarked :

"Soon after I entered Punjab during the present march, I heard that Sikhs had been enlisted but that in compliance I presume with existing regulations they had been required to cut their beards-an act to which no real Sikh can submit, or if he for a time submits to it for necessity, it is impossible that he can do so without the deepest discontent. No true Sikh will submit to it and the intelligence that such a regulation is enforced rapidly spreading among other Sikh corps in the service may produce alarm or at least restlessness which is much to be deprecated. This point therefore should at once be set at rest."

(SC 39 of 28.2.1951)

It was recorded by the British in the very next year :

"Sikh soldiers proved their fighting quality and loyalty in the Anglo-Burmese war of 1852 and two years later against the nomad tribe on the North West frontier."

(Baird, *Private Letters of Marquess of Dalhousie*, pp. 200, 321)

In the mutiny of 1857 the British realized that it was the Sikh soldiers who played such a great role in curbing the mutiny. The Sikhs were acknowledged for their brave role in suppressing the mutiny. It was recorded in the secret correspondence of the British :

"The Sikhs were raised at a most crucial season, when other recruiting grounds were in the hands of the mutineers or in a state of rebellion. They were called on to save the empire and have fulfilled their mission and we all owe our warmest thanks to that bold and sagacious policy which called them into the field and which I am sure will also devise means for keeping them under command for future."

(SC 2 of 29.10.1958)

Ultimately the Sikhs formed over thirty percent of the Indian army in British India, though their population was less than two percent. The Sikhs accomplished so much feats of bravery and commitment that they made a name for themselves for their courage; on the battlefield during the World Wars to achieve victories, while maintaining their moral ethics. The British set up separate Sikh Battalions with Gurdwaras in all the cantonments and ensured their observance of the Sikh code of conduct. The turbaned Sikh soldiers and officers in their distinct Sikh appearance and identity could be visible from far off. The British were thus successful in avoiding

conflict with the Sikhs by allowing the Sikhs to take up vocations of their choice namely the army, and giving due regards to their religious sentiments and dignity. In fact the Sikhs were in no mood to be in armed conflict with British due to the intense rivalries of the sons of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, of all the Sikh chiefs, and the betrayals of Sikh commanders and ministers in conspiracy with British officers to defeat Sikh army.

The Britishers took all pains to satisfy the Sikhs as to their main vocation of agriculture. Canals were constructed to take the river waters to the lands mostly occupied by the Sikhs to advance the prospects of agriculture. The desert lands to the west of Punjab were made cultivable by being irrigated by canals and were allotted to Sikhs residing in eastern Punjab on nominal prices so as to keep them busy and occupied and content in their agricultural vocation. The Sikhs particularly the Sikh jats who were involved in agriculture were made the owners of big tracts of land with the facility of irrigation from canal waters. The area specifically selected for Sikhs was huge and vast tract of land known as 'Nilibar' irrigated by the Chenab Canal. The Sikh farmers from the districts of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Ferozepur and adjoining areas were given these lands, giving them a sense of becoming big farm owners. The small land holders were allotted 14 to 16 acres of land, without any payment. The middle land holders were allotted 100 to 150 acres of land at the nominal price of less than ten per acre. The big land holders were allotted 150 to 500 acres of land at a price of less than twenty rupees per acre. The Sikh farmers known for their sense of hard labour made their farms cultivable, capable of producing surplus agricultural produce. The Sikhs thus became the most prosperous peasantry of India, most of them were jat Sikhs.

The canals constructed were Upper Bari Doab, from river Ravi and lower Bari Doab as well from that River; the upper Chenab canal from Chenab river. The Shahpur Thal desert was irrigated by the canals taken from river Jhelum in upper Jhelum canal. These irrigation projects covered entire lands which were previously deserts and made them fit for agriculture from the Chenab river, 427 miles of Canal were taken and 2280 miles of distributor channels, while 12,000 miles of the water course were taken. These channels irrigated 2.25 million acres of land. It was at the cost of twenty six million rupees, the yearly value of the crop yielded over seventy-eight million rupees which was earned mostly by the Sikh farmers. The prosperity of Sikhs and other Punjabis is well exhibited by the report of the financial commissioner of Punjab :

"Cultivation has now become more careful, comfortable and commodious houses have been built. All villages have now a good well, many of these have a mosque or a dharamsala and a rest house; the growth of good shading trees is remarkable both in the villages and fields. Many villages are a pattern of cleanliness and comfort and the people evidently take pride in them and their imposing houses of brick and mortar. There are of course, some exceptions among 1,00,000 colonies, but the general impression is one of good prosperity, comfort and content from which a feeling of gratitude to Government for the extraordinary benefits, its colonization scheme has conferred on these fortunate individuals in the short space of fifteen years is not absent."

*(Civil and Military Gazette, May 26, 1909)*

The first attempt to erect a cotton mill in the Punjab was made in March 1883 when citizens of Lahore met under the chairmanship of Raja Harbans Singh to consider the matter. (Reported in *The Tribune*, March 18, 1883)

It shows that in addition to the development of lands for agriculture, cotton mills were also being set up. Posts for Sikhs were reserved in the Army and in the civil services as well to be filled exclusively by baptized Sikhs, the Khalsa. It was also a step to recognize Sikh religious sentiments and to keep the Sikhs satisfied, by the British government. Such steps taken by the British government resulted in the increase of Sikhs substantially. The Sikh jats had now become superior to the Brahmins and other castes, because of their being the land owners of the entire village lands and thus being more prosperous. Now others had become dependant upon them, when previously Brahmins were considered to be superior. There was no thought of conflict between Sikhs and the Britishers; instead their co-operation increased. The British with their experience and tactics won over the minds of the Sikhs tactfully.

The British also paid attention to the construction of roads in Punjab to satisfy the people that they were interested and were committed to the overall development of the state. The G.T. road from Peshawar to Delhi was reopened and hundreds of bridges on it were repaired. In the administration report of 1850 and 1851, of two years after the annexation of Punjab, it was stated in para 346 :

"1349 miles of roads have been cleared and constructed while 853 miles are under construction; 2487 miles have been traced and 5272 miles surveyed, all exclusively of minor cross and branch roads."

The British administration provided a more systematic and accountable civil administration. Punjab was divided into 7 divisions or commissionerships which was further divided into districts (of which there were 25 in the province) a five tiered administration was set up. Next to the board were the commissioners of the seven divisions. Below the commissioners were the Deputy and Assistant Commissioners and below them extra Assistant Commissioner, a cadre specially constituted to provide jobs for such natives as might have filled offices of trust under the Darbar. The lowest grade of gazetted officers was the tehsildar whose civil powers extended to deciding cases up to the value of Rupees 300.

For internal security, ten regiments – five cavalry and fifty infantry, were raised. Some of the Darbar's soldiers were absorbed in these regiments. A military police force consisting of 8000 men, largely Punjabi Mussalmans, was raised. The foot constabulary was meant to guard treasuries and goals, the mounted police to petrol highways. A secret intelligence services (*Khufia*) police comprised of informers and detectives (*Jasus*) was attached to the police to keep the government in touch with the political temper of the people. Village watchmen-*Chaunkidars* continued to be employed by the villagers but were expected to keep the police informed of the movements of strangers.

(Khushwant Singh, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. II, p. 90)

## Time for Sikh Awakening

British government continued taking a keen interest in Sikh affairs. In 1859 it drafted the rules and regulations for the administration of Harimandar Sahib known as 'Dastur-al-Amal' whereby a manager was to be appointed who was to be guided by a council of nine baptized Sikhs. The sole proprietorship of all Gurdwaras was to be in the Guru, while the claim to management was to vest in Sikh Panth. But the authority of the Government to appoint a manager could never be acceptable to the Sikhs. For some time, the Government appointed the managers of its choice, to be exploited to its advantage but ultimately yielded to the Sikhs and Harimandar Sahib came in to the exclusive management of the Sikhs. Similarly the British administration, initially helped the Mahants to keep them under its obligation, but yielded to the Sikhs when they exhibited their determination to oust them at any cost, thus to avoid confrontation with the Sikhs, and ultimately enacting the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 to vest the management of Sikh Gurdwaras with the Sikhs directly. Time for Sikh awakening to its real tenets had now arrived.

The Mahants and managers of Sikh historical Gurdwaras had become so anti-Sikh under the patronage of the British administration and Brahmanical agents that they even dared to issue a *Hukamnama*, from Takhat Hazur Sahib, Nanded that Sikhs should not give co-operation to the Singh Sabha movement. This was done on the pretext that the Singh Sabha was baptizing muslims of lower castes and women. Even though *Hukamnama* from Akal Takhat had already been issued in 1879 that Sikhs should join the Singh Sabha movement which was aimed at bringing the desired reformation and restoration to the original form of Sikhism. There can be no objection to the baptizing of any person who is willing to join the Sikh religion, irrespective of the religion, caste or sex one belongs to.

On March 18, 1887 a *Hukamnama* was also issued from Akal Takhat, Amritsar against Prof. Gurmukh Singh, the main spirit behind Lahore Singh Sabha for getting baptized the muslims and low castes in Singh Sabha Gurdwaras in violation of the basic thought of Sikh religion and the earlier *Hukamnama* of Akal Takhat. Such anti Sikh actions were obviously beyond the toleration of Sikhs.

## Activism of Anti-Sikh Elements

Brahmanical cult was anti-Sikh from the very start, as they had a fear psychosis as to the danger to their false sense of superiority and exploitation of the innocent masses by the Divine teachings of Sikh Religion. They were thus interested in introducing the same Hindu myths, superstitions, gods and incarnations into the Sikh religion which had all been rejected by the Sikh Gurus. Most of the converts to the Sikh religion were from Hinduism. Arya Samaj and other fundamentalist Hindu groups were also active in misrepresenting Sikh religion to be a part of Hinduism and the Sikhs to be a sect of the Hindus. Swami Daya Nand, Arya Samaj leader, came to Punjab

to propagate it and attracted some Sikh leaders with his novel plan that Arya Samaj, like the Sikhs also condemned Idol-worship, caste and creed distinctions and Brahminical domination. But he was committed to Vedantic ideology and its superiority giving a secondary place to the *Guru Granth Sahib* and had even made adverse remarks against the Sikh Gurus. So all the Sikhs turned against him. He had to leave Punjab without fulfilling his mission. Some Sikh scholars negated the propaganda that the Sikhs were a sect of the Hindus. Kahan Singh Nabha wrote a book — *Hum Hindu Nahin* "Hum (Sikhs) are not Hindus". So this propaganda proved counter productive.

*Nirankaris, Radhaswamis and Namdharis* were some other groups whose heads were called as 'Satguru' with false notions though they mostly referred to the Sikh scriptures and their divine teachings to be supreme. But in Sikhism there can be no recognition to such Gurus wherein only the ten Sikh Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib* are the only Gurus. They caused some confusion in a few Sikhs initially but the Sikhs ultimately rejected them as non-Sikh groups, as in Sikh religion no one is permitted to call himself as Guru and there can be no scope for any such groups. The government agencies tried to exploit them to mislead the Sikhs but the Sikhs faced the challenge with determination to successfully reject such groups to be a part of Sikhism. Baba Ram Singh was misrepresented to be the *Namdhari Guru*, though throughout his life, he remained a devoted and humble Sikh following the Sikh code of conduct strictly and preaching the *Guru Granth Sahib* to be the perpetual Sikh Guru, while attempting to regain Sikh rule. The anti Sikh forces were behind these groups to provide them all the hidden support to misrepresent Sikhs and Sikh religion. The Sikhs thus had to face this challenge and which they did.

Sikhs also had to face another challenge from Christian Missionaries who had become active in Punjab after its annexation by the British, and had the government patronage. They started their missionary schools in which prayers were held in the name of Jesus Christ and the preaching of Christianity was imparted to students. Their *modus operandi* was to lure the people with financial assistance and to serve mankind with the aim of conversions to their religion. Their first encounter with the Sikhs took place at Amritsar where they persuaded four Sikh students to embrace Christianity. This was exposed with the timely action of the Sikhs and the missionaries could not succeed. The Christian Missionaries got the message that they would not be permitted to operate within the Sikh populace; with no objection to their missionary spirit to serve mankind. They abandoned their plans of conversions as far as the Sikhs were concerned, realizing the determination and devotion of the Sikhs towards their religion. The British government had already decided not to interfere in the religious affairs of the Sikhs in order to avoid direct confrontation with them. It had amended the army rules to allow baptized Sikhs as they had felt the commitment of Sikhs to their code of conduct.

A confidential report on the development in Sikh politics (1900-1911) by D. Setrie, Assistant Director Criminal Intelligence, government of India dated 11 August,

1911 (National Archives Delhi) depicts the hostility of the Brahmanical cult and fundamentalist Hindus against Sikhs :

"Hinduism has always been hostile to Sikhism whose Gurus peacefully and successfully attacked the principles of caste which is the foundation on which the whole fabric of Brahmanism has been reared. The activities of Hindus have therefore been constantly directed to the undermining of Sikhism; both by preventing the children of Sikh fathers from taking *Pahul* and by reducing the professed Sikhs from their allegiance to their faith. Hinduism has strangled Buddhism, once a formidable rival to it and it has already made serious in-roads into the domain of Sikhism."

Sikhs were thus to face this challenge.

## Singh Sabha Movement (1873 to 1920)

### — Sikh Awareness

In 1873 AD, the Sikhs started a movement for Sikh education and Sikh religious reforms known as "Singh Sabha movement". It was to preach the real tenets, the doctrines and the principles and religious practices of the Sikh religion to be strictly followed by the Sikhs. It was to curtail Brahmanical infiltration in Sikh religious places and the spread of Christianity among Sikhs besides setting up of educational institutions, Sikh schools and colleges for Sikh students for their general studies as well as to enable them to live the Sikh way of life. It was also to set up Sikh newspapers and journals which would give the Sikh point of view against the misrepresentations propagated against Sikh religion. It was also done to set up Gurdwaras and to take practical steps to educate and awaken the Sikhs towards correct perspectives. The Sikhs having been peacefully settled in their respective vocations, found the time to give attention to these matters. Even during Sikh rule no such steps could be taken in these matters as the Sikhs remained occupied with the conflicts and battles to establish the Sikh Empire.

Singh Sabha Gurdwaras were set up throughout Punjab, which was the need of the day. Effective steps were taken to set up Sikh schools and colleges in which the teachings of Sikh religion were to be imparted to the students from the very beginning in their childhood. The first Khalsa High school was set up at Gujranwala in 1889 and thereafter Khalsa schools were set up in every important town. Guru Nanak Khalsa College was set up and the foundation stone of it was laid down by Sant Attar Singh who took keen interest in Sikh educational institutions at Mastuana. Later on, a very prestigious Khalsa College was set up at Amritsar in 1892 and likewise, many more institutions also at other places. Sant Teja Singh also did a lot in the field of Sikh education. He himself had achieved distinctions at Oxford University London, and at Harvard University in America.

Effective steps were taken by the Sikhs to promote the Punjabi language in gurmukhi, was published in 1854. The Punjabi Printing Press was set up for the

publication of Sikh literature, journals and newspapers. In 1880 gurmukhi Akhar and vidyak Punjabi were started, while in 1885, *Khalsa Akhar*, in 1886 *Rasala Sadharak* and *Khalsa Gazette* were added. In 1884, Khalsa Tract Society was set up at Amritsar under the driving force of Bhai Kaur Singh and Bhai Vir Singh to preach Sikh religion. The famous tract of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, the eminent Sikh scholar, *Ham Hindu Nahin* was published in 1899. Giani Ditt Singh and other Sikh scholars silenced the Arya Samajists and the Brahmanical cult bringing forth a separate Sikh identity based on the correct analysis of the distinctive features of Sikh religion as separate and independent revealed religion and not a part of Hinduism.

## Khalsa Diwans

In 1883 Khalsa Diwan was formed with the aim to educate the Sikh youth as to the Sikh way of life and the Sikh code of conduct to be strictly observed by the Sikhs and to organize the Sikh educational institutions. Three types of Sikh leaders came to the fore. First were the hawks led by persons like Thakur Singh Sandhawalia, who were opposed to any co-operation with the British government, second were the moderates led by Kanwar Bikramjit Singh Kapurthala and Bhai Gurumukh Singh who were in favour of cooperation with the British government and third were the Bedis and Sodhis led by Baba Khem Singh Bedi who were desirous of their own superiority, because they belonged to the same clan as the Sikh Gurus.

Due to the difference of ideologies of the leaders of the Khalsa Diwan, two Khalsa Diwans were formed. One was called Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar while the other as Khalsa Diwan Lahore. They operated in their own ways but their aims were the same to educate the Sikh masses and to awaken them to the reality of the Sikh religion.

In 1902, the chief Khalsa Diwan was formed to accommodate all the Sikh leaders and coordinate their activities. Its founder President was Arjan Singh Bagarianwala; while its secretary was Sunder Singh Majithia. The Chief Khalsa Diwan attended to the plans for Sikh educational schemes methodically. The annual educational conferences were also organized. It laid the foundation for Khalsa College Amritsar in 1890 on a vast tract of land with a magnificent architectural construction. Other Sikh colleges and schools were also set up by it.

In 1918 Sikh education committee was formed by the Chief Khalsa Diwan to effectively deal with the Sikh educational affairs. It certainly goes to the credit of the Singh Sabha movement of the Sikh organizations which made the Sikhs conscious as to their education and religion and not to be misled by their adversaries.

In 1905, Sikhs got the idols from the Parkarma of Harimandar Sahib removed. These had been placed by the Mahants under the instigation of the Brahmanical agents though idol worship was totally prohibited in the Sikh religion. Anti Sikh activities in Gurdwaras were exposed and would no more be tolerated. The Sikhs gave clear message to the Mahants that henceforth Gurdwaras would function strictly in accordance with the Sikh religious doctrines and practices.

## Separate Sikh Identity Recognitions

In 1909, Anand Marriage Act 1909 was enacted to legalise the Sikh marriage conducted by Anand Karaj ceremony which Sikhs used to perform from the days of the Sikh Gurus but had no legal sanction. This act acknowledged the separate Sikh identity and personal law. Hindu personal laws were not applicable to Sikhs as not being a part of Hinduism. In October 1908, Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha had introduced the Anand Karaj bill in the legislative council which was passed in 1909 and became law.

In 1914, Khalsa Gurdwara Committee Delhi was formed which took over the management of Delhi Gurdwaras under its control.

In 1914, wearing of kirpan was allowed to Sikhs in Punjab; it being one of the Sikh articles of faith by exempting it from the purview of Arms Act. In 1917, kirpan was allowed by the government of India to Sikhs throughout India. In 1920, wearing of kirpan was allowed to Sikh army personnel.

To establish the separate Sikh identity, King Abdur Rehman of Afghanistan issued the order in 1905 against Hindus prohibiting the keeping of idols in Gurdwara at Kabul holding that Guru Nanak was against idol worship and the Hindus had no connection with Sikh gurdwaras, as Sikhs were not concerned with Hindu temples.

## Separate representation of Sikhs conceded

In 1918, the British government accepted the Sikh demand of separate representation in the 'Montague Chemsford report' on Indian constitutional reforms conceding the separate identity of Sikhs, being not part of Hindus.

## Gurdwara Rakab Ganj wall reconstructed by Government (1920)

In 1911, capital of India had shifted to Delhi from Calcutta. In 1912, the British government purchased portion of land of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj for building the residence of the Viceroy of Delhi, which adjoins the building of Indian Parliament. In 1914, some portion of the outer wall of that gurdwara was demolished by the agitation against it. In 1920, the government of India yielded to the Sikhs and reconstructed the wall and did not touch it again ensuring that no such encroachment on Sikh religious land would ever be made by the government. The Gurdwara land is still under occupation of the Gurdwara management.

## Management of Khalsa College Amritsar given to Sikhs

In November 1920, the management of Khalsa College Amritsar was handed over to the Sikhs by the government as the Sikhs had given the ultimatum to the government to hand over the management of the college exclusively to Sikhs by November 5, 1920. Sunder Singh Majithia became the President while Harbans Singh Attari the secretary of Khalsa college managing committee.

## Misuse of Mahants as Gurdwara Managers

British government misused the Mahants as Gurdwara managers for its political strategy. They were not committed to the Sikhs and were desirous of prolonging their hold on Sikh Gurdwaras, as they could easily be made government stooges for exploitation. However, the British government yielded to the Sikhs when they realized the resentment of the Sikhs to such hostile activities, in order to avoid conflict with the Sikhs.

## Akal Takhat *Hukamnama* Against Kamagatamaru Sikhs-1915

In 1915, the British government got a *Hukamnama* issued from Akal Takhat, Amritsar against Baba Gurdit Singh and other Sikhs of Kamagatamaru Ship that they were not Sikhs because of their peaceful movement to oust the British from India. This was done with the mischievous design to discourage the Sikhs from taking active part in Indian independence movement. It was resented by the Sikhs who were ensured that such an act will not be repeated in future.

## *Saropa* to General O' Dyer in Harimandar Sahib-1919

In 1919, the British government got a *Saropa* (Robe of honour) presented to General O' Dyer in Harimandar Sahib, who was responsible for massacring hundreds of innocent unarmed persons, most of them Sikhs on Baisakhi day of that year at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. The motive of this was to show that Sikhs were against the Indian Independence movement, though the Sikhs were already active in that movement. They had shown their utter resentment and decided to oust the Mahants and such Gurdwara management, acting as stooges of government without any further delay.

## Sikhs Determined to oust Mahants from Gurdwaras

Sikhs now became determined to liberate their Gurdwaras from Mahants at the cost of any sacrifice, in order to eliminate such outside influence in Gurdwaras. The Singh Sabha movement had awakened the Sikhs to strictly adhere to the Sikh code of conduct and the setting of Sikh Gurdwaras and Sikh educational institutions to be managed directly by them with honesty of purpose. The Sikhs started a very effective movement for this purpose, known as 'Akali Movement'.

## Akali Movement 1920-1925

### Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee formed - 1920

On November 15, 1920, a gathering of Sikhs took place at Akal Takhat Amritsar and decided to take over the management of all the Sikh Gurdwaras by ousting the

Mahants without any further delay. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was elected by the Sikhs themselves for the management of the Sikh gurdwaras. A committee of thirty six eminent Sikhs under the Presidentship of Bhai Harbans Attari was formed to take immediate effective steps in this respect. A general committee of one hundred and seventy five Sikhs was also formed with S. Sundar Singh Majithia as its Chairman. The meeting of this committee was held at Akal Takhat, Amritsar on December 12, 1920. Its office bearers were elected. Its constitution was drafted.

### Executive Committee of SGPC Elected-1921

On August 27, 1921, the meeting of the general body of SGPC was held at Akal Takhat, Amritsar. Executive committee of thirty one Sikhs was elected out of them. Baba Kharak Singh, the veteran Sikh leader, was elected President of SGPC.

### Shiromani Akali Dal formed-1920

On December 14, 1920, The Sikhs formed Shiromani Akali Dal with Sarmukh Singh Jhabal as its President to help the SGPC with the implementation of its decisions. Akali Dal became the political representative body of Sikhs, which did its work in an effective manner. The Sikhs thus organized themselves well.

Gurdwaras were thus taken over by Sikhs under their management ousting the Mahants.

### Sikhs took over Sialkot Gurdwara-1920

A dispute had taken place at Sialkot Gurdwara between the Sikhs and the Mahant of that gurdwara. On October 5, 1920 a big gathering of Sikhs was held there and they decided to occupy the Gurdwara and oust the Mahant from there. Initially the British administration helped the Mahant but when the Sikhs occupied the Gurdwara, the British Commissioner came there on that very evening and announced that the British government had no intention to interfere in the religious affairs of the Sikhs and the Sikhs may manage the Gurdwara as they desire. The Mahant ran away and the Gurdwara came under the direct management of the Sikhs.

### Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takhat taken over

In October 1920, the Sikhs held a meeting at Jallianwala Bagh, just near Harimandar Sahib Amritsar. They decided to take over Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takhat and to oust the Mahants on that very day. Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar along with twenty five Sikhs was deputed to take over Harimandar Sahib and Akal Takhat. The jatha of these brave Sikhs went to Harimandar Sahib and ousted the Mahants and took over the Management of both these centres of Sikh religion.

The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, invited Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar and some other Sikh bodies and informed them about the orders of the Governor that as the Sikhs have taken control of Harimandar Sahib complex, the government would not interfere in the matter; it being the religious affair of the Sikhs as the government has revised its policy, to now have no interest in the management of Gurdwaras. He formally handed over the possession of the Harimandar Sahib complex to them. It was a great victory for the Sikhs. On the next day on October 15, 1920, it was so announced in the congregation at Akal Takhat to call a meeting of the Sikhs to elect gurdwaras management committee on November 15, 1920. Thousands of Sikhs attended the meeting wherein SGPC was established. A *Hukamnama* from Akal Takhat was issued prescribing the qualification of the members of SGPC. Every member should be a practising Sikh, a baptized Sikh possessing the five Sikh emblems and not committing any of the violations (*Kuraihat*) and contributing *Daswandh*. Such 175 members were nominated.

A convention of Sikh league took place at Lahore, which was in co-operation with Indian National congress on October 19, 1920. MK Gandhi while stressing for the non-co-operation resolution against the British advised the Sikhs :

"I understand that some Sikh young men were taking possession of Gurdwaras. It was unjust to turn out Mahants by force. Rather they should do congress work."

Sikhs rejected his advice to be anti Sikh and so he could not impose his confidence in Sikhs for over a decade, though later on, he sent a telegraphic message to Sikhs that Sikhs have won the battle against the British, bringing first victory against them in India. Dr. Kitchlu, a top congress leader contradicted Gandhi :

"The measure of success which the Hindus had achieved thus far through Congress in 35 years and the Muslims through Muslim League in 25 years, the Khalsa ji has done in 5 months.

Sikhs were determined to oust the Mahants which they did alone, without any outside help within five years.

## Gurdwara Tarn Taran taken over by Sikhs 1921

On January 24, 1921, a congregation of Sikhs was held at Akal Takht Amritsar. A woman stood up and narrated the misconduct of a Mahant of Gurdwara Tarn Taran that he had misbehaved with her daughter when she had gone to visit the Gurdwara. The Sikhs got enraged and decided to oust the Mahant immediately and took over the Gurdwara. On the next day, Jathedar Teja Singh Bhucher led the Jatha of forty Sikhs to Gurdwara Tarn Taran and took over its management after a fight between the Sikhs and stooges of the Mahant. Two Sikhs were killed and several injured, but the Sikhs ousted the Mahant and took over the management of the gurdwara on January 26, 1921. The Mahant ran away. A committee of 15 Sikhs was formed to manage the gurdwara.

## Gurdwara Nankana Sahib taken over–Mahant Narain Dass ousted 1921

SGPC decided to oust Mahant Narain Dass from the historic Gurdwara Nankana Sahib – the birth place of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism. The Mahant had hired criminals armed with fire arms and deadly weapons to guard the gurdwara and challenged the Sikhs. On February 22, 1921, Bhai Lachhman Singh led a Jatha of 200 Sikhs to liberate the gurdwara. After offering prayers, the SGPC leaders sent a message to Bhai Lachhman Singh to wait for a day for other Sikh Jathas when they knew about the hired criminals of the Mahant. But he refused to wait for a day even, as the *Ardas* has been performed and as such their *Jatha* would enter the gurdwara without any interruption, come what may; such was the commitment to *ardas* – prayer by the Sikhs.

### Sikh Jatha Attacked by Hired Criminals of the Mahant

The Sikh Jatha of Bhai Lachhman Singh entered Gurdwara Nankana Sahib. The Sikhs were attacked from all the sides by the hired assassins. Bhai Lachhman Singh was martyred when he was sitting by the *Guru Granth Sahib* inside the gurdwara hall. Several Sikhs were shot at and even burnt alive by spreading Kerosene oil on them for which preparations had already been made by the Mahant. One hundred and thirty Sikhs of that Jatha got martyrdom. Thousands of Sikhs reached gurdwara next day which had been locked by the British administration with 150 personnel of Army.

### Keys of Gurdwara given to Sikhs

The British administration realized determination of the Sikhs to take over the gurdwara on that very day. Keys of the gurdwara were handed over to SGPC representatives by the British administration in order to have their own management and the Sikhs took over it by ousting the Mahant.

### Mahant Narain Dass and other Culprits Arrested

The administration arrested Mahant Narain Dass and his hired assassins. They were prosecuted for the heinous crimes committed by them and sentenced. Some of them were sentenced to death, while some were imprisoned for life by the session court. The British Government gave the impression that they did not intend to interfere in the religious affairs of the Sikhs and the management of their gurdwaras by them directly.

### Gurdwara Panja Sahib Taken Over on November 18, 1920

Gurdwara Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal is a historic gurdwara in the memory of Guru Nanak. Here the Guru humbled the arrogant Muslim faqir Wali Kandhari by

holding the rock, pushed by the faqir towards the Guru, with his hand. The rock still contains the impression of the hand of the great Guru and the fountain of water is still gushing. All this came into being to provide water to Mardana when the faqir refused water to him from his tank. That tank immediately became dry. This gurdwara was also under the occupation of the Mahant. In accordance with the decision of SGPC Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar led the Sikh jatha to oust the Mahant. The Sikhs had exhibited that they would remain peaceful to every extent and suffer the martyrdom to liberate their gurdwaras. The Sikhs had to make sacrifices and ultimately the Mahant was ousted and the management of gurdwara was taken over by the Sikhs. The British administration initially helped the mahant, but yielded to the Sikhs realizing their firm determination.

### Keys of Harimandar Sahib Tosha Khana taken by SGPC 1921-22

The keys of Harimandar Sahib Tosha Khana had been taken by Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar from Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, who was in possession of those keys. On November 7, 1921, SGPC decided that these keys should be taken over from the Deputy Commissioner by Baba Kharak Singh, president SGPC. The Deputy Commissioner refused to hand over the keys. The government appointed a custodian of Harimandar Sahib and arrested the main leaders of Akali Dal and SGPC. The Sikhs started *Morcha* – agitation, against it. The government yielded to the Sikhs. On January 17, 1922 Kharak Singh and all other sikh leaders were released. The keys were handed over to Baba Kharak Singh by the representative of the Deputy Commissioner personally in the Sikh congregation that very evening, assuring them that the British government did not want to interfere in the management of gurdwaras by Sikhs.

### Mahatma Gandhi congratulated Sikhs on this Victory

Mahatma Gandhi, leader of Indian National Congress, leading the Indian independence movement against the British, telegraphically congratulated the Sikhs over this victory stating that the first struggle of independence against the British had been won over by the Sikhs.

### Liberation of Gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh-1922

On August 23, 1921, SGPC sent Jatha of Sikhs to liberate gurdwara Guru Ka Bagh – a historical gurdwara in the memory of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Teg Bahadur – by ousting the Mahant Sunder Dass, and it got the possession of the gurdwara from the Mahant.

### Sikhs arrested on complaint of Mahant

The Mahant got the Sikhs arrested from the gurdwara by filing a false complaint

of having committed theft of cutting the trees from the gurdwara land for *langar*. The police seized the gurdwara and prohibited the *langar* material to reach the gurdwara. The Sikhs were also lathi charged by the police in gurdwara.

### Sikhs started Morcha from Akal Takhat

On August 29, 1922, a big gathering of Sikhs was held at Akal Takhat and decided to start a peaceful agitation Morcha against the high handedness of the police to help the Mahant at Guru ka Bagh. Daily Sikh jathas would go to get themselves arrested. The Sikhs remained peaceful despite the rude behaviour of the police and their use of tortures on them. They had exhibited that Sikhs could also remain peaceful and as well as defeating the armed forces with excellent heroism on the battlefield.

### Government Yielded to Sikhs

In that peaceful agitation, the arrest of 5605 Sikhs took place. The government yielded to the Sikhs on November 7, 1922 and released all the arrested persons ensuring that Sikhs could manage their gurdwaras as they liked.

### Sikhs took over Gurdwara and ousted Mahant

The gurdwara and its land was occupied by the Sikhs, bringing it under their management. The Mahant was ousted who ran away.

### Jaitu Morcha won by Sikhs 1923-24

— Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha dislodged

British govt. dislodged Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha on July 9, 1923, who was a supporter of the Sikh movement spreading over in those days.

### Sacrilege of *Guru Granth Sahib* at Jaitu.

On August 29, 1923, sacrilege of *Guru Granth Sahib* was committed by some government officials, which infuriated the Sikhs. It was done at Jaitu, which was in the territory of Nabha State.

### Sikhs started Morcha against Government

The Sikhs started the Morcha – peaceful agitation on September 14, 1923. Several Sikhs were arrested. There was interference in the performance of Akhand Path of the *Guru Granth Sahib* by some government officials as well. SGPC decided on September 15, 1923 that jathas of 25 Sikhs be daily sent to Jaitu from Akal Takhat.

## Sikh Administrator ex-communicated

Gurdial Singh, administrator of Nabha state was ex-communicated by Akal Takhat from Sikh panth for sacrilege towards the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

## Government declared SGPC and Akali Dal Unlawful

The British government made full efforts to curb this agitation of Sikhs. It went to the extent of declaring both the SGPC and the Akali Dal to be unlawful on October 13, 1923. The leaders of these parties were arrested. Some were prosecuted and convicted and got sentenced to death and exiled for life. This further enraged the Sikhs and made them more determined to defeat the government and support the Sikh Morcha.

## 500 Shahidi Jatha sent from Akal Takhat

On February 9, 1924, a Jatha of 500 Sikhs, called the Shahidi jatha of 'martyrs' was sent from Akal Takhat with the direction that every Sikh would remain peaceful inspite of government provocations and high handedness. Ten thousand Sikhs more joined this jatha at Bargari near Jaitu. Dr. Kitchlu and Gidwani, the leaders of Indian National Congress and Mr. Jimand of the *New Times of America* also accompanied the Sikh Jatha, which proceeded to gurdwara Tibbi Sahib, Jaitu reciting the Divine hymns of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

## Government announced prohibitory orders; used Machine guns

The Jatha reached the gurdwara outside the precincts of Jaitu. The British administrator of Nabha announced the prohibitory orders, not to proceed further. The police fired machine gun shots, whereby several members of the jatha were injured and killed, but despite this, the Sikhs did not stop and reached gurdwara Tibbi Sahib. Twelve Sikhs were killed while fifty got injured in the police firing. Several Sikhs were arrested and prosecuted but Sikhs could not be terrified. Government failed to stop the Sikhs from reaching the gurdwara, in spite of all its excesses.

The Jathas kept coming to Jaitu continuously. In spite of all the atrocities and threats of the Government sixteen such jathas continuously reached Jaitu. The Morcha was so spread over that even the shahidi Sikh jathas came to Jaitu from outside Punjab and even from overseas like Canada, Hong-Kong and other countries. It had become a point of prestige for the Sikhs to defeat the British Government so that it may not think of coming into conflict with Sikhs again. No Sikh arrested could be persuaded by the government to surrender in spite of its efforts in that regard. More than 200 Sikhs died in jails and hundreds suffered the tortures and died in jails. But the Sikhs remained in high spirits. Sikhs won over the Morcha and the British Government had to yield and to accept their demands to have control over their gurdwaras.

MK Gandhi, who had been advising the Sikhs not to oust the Mahants from gurdwaras forcefully, now issued the statement :

"first battle for Indian freedom had been won by Sikhs."  
(Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of Sikhs*, p. 149)

CF Andrews, a British and close associate of MK Gandhi remarked :

"A new heroism learnt through suffering has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world by Sikhs. It reminded me of the shadow of the cross – To me the spirit of Christ is visible in the peaceful Sikh agitators."  
(*Manchester Guardian*, February 15, 1924)

Madan Mohan Malviya, the eminent congress leader, remarked :

"If Hindus desire to achieve freedom for them and their country, then it is essential and imperative for them to convert at least one of their sons as a Sikh in each and every family."  
(Dr. Gopal Singh, *A History of the Sikh People*, p. 657)

## British Government Yielded to Sikhs to enact Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925

The British government yielded to the Sikhs as it used to yield earlier after testing the determination of the Sikhs. But this time the agitation had been prolonged with more sufferings and bitterness. The British were finding it hard to pacify the Sikhs. They released all the arrested Sikhs and declared the enactment of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act for the statutory management of the gurdwaras directly by the Sikhs through their elected representatives. The British government assured the Sikhs that they would never interfere in their religious affairs and neither would they ever come into such a conflict with the Sikhs. Thus the British again tactfully pacified the Sikhs to avoid any future conflict with them. The Sikhs got their long standing demand accepted to get the enactment of management of their gurdwaras directly by them through their own elected representatives under a statute after having ousted the Mahants from all the gurdwaras.

## Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925

The British Government enacted the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. It came into effect on November 1, 1925. According to the provisions of this Act :

- i) All historical Sikh gurdwaras were to be under the direct control of SGPC.
- ii) Other gurdwaras, specified therein were to be under the local management committees to be elected under the supervision of SGPC.
- iii) SGPC was to be elected by all the Sikh voters and it was to elect its office bearer for one year.

Originally the management committee was named as Control Board, but on October 2, 1926 its name was changed to SGPC – Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in accordance with the wishes of Sikhs by amendment.

The first election of SGPC was held on June 18, 1926 and its first meeting was held on September 4, 1926. The office bearers and executive committee were elected on October 2, 1926. Baba Kharak Singh, was elected the President, while Master Tara Singh as Vice President of the first SGPC.

The new SGPC took over the management of Sikh gurdwaras on November 11, 1926 from the previous SGPC which had been formed by the Sikhs themselves. The Sikhs successfully achieved their aim to get the management of Sikh gurdwaras directly under them through their elected representatives under a piece of legislation.

A Sikh judicial commission was provided in the Sikh Gurdwara Act to decide the disputes *inter-se* as to the religious matters arising out of the implementation of the matters relating to the provision of Sikh Gurdwara Act, ousting the jurisdiction of civil courts.

It is to the great credit of Sikhs and Sikh leaders to have suffered supreme sacrifices and adversities in selfless service to the Sikh cause to achieve their aim and to bring the Sikh gurdwaras under the management of Sikhs themselves. The British government yielded to Sikhs to enact Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 after over forty thousand Sikhs courted arrests, five hundred Sikhs martyred and twenty thousand Sikhs were injured, besides the withdrawals of *Jagirs* and Pensions, confiscation of properties and imposition of fines etc. of hundreds of thousands of Sikhs. In spite of all these excesses upon Sikhs they kept the movement peaceful in totality, exhibiting that Sikhs, who showed exemplary courage on the battlefields, could also initiate and maintain a peaceful movement of this kind all the while maintaining high moral and ethical values.

The names of Sikhs and Sikh leaders needed to be recorded on the golden pages of Sikh history for having ousted the Mahants and taking gurdwaras under the direct management of Sikhs by making supreme sacrifices in the process. Kartar Singh Jhabbar with his jatha was always in the forefront. Bhai Lachhman Singh set the example never to desist from *Ardas* but opting to be martyred along with the jatha. Sunder Singh Majithia, Harbans Singh Attari, Mehtab Singh, Kharak Singh, Master Tara Singh, Prof Jodh Singh, Teja Singh Samundri and several other educated Sikhs remained determined to make this movement a success. In fact, it is due to the sense of devotion to the Sikh cause and commitment to the Sikh code of conduct, that all the Sikhs were ready to suffer any sacrifice in this movement and therefore, they deserve all to be praised and appreciated by coming generations.

Under Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925, to become voter for SGPC, a Sikh has to make the declaration :

"I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh; that I believe in *Guru Granth Sahib*, that I believe in the ten Sikh Gurus, that I have no other religion, I am not *patit*."

A Sikh who becomes *patit* (apostate) by committing any violation of 5 K's as Do's or 4 *kuraihats* as don't's of Sikhism, automatically is disqualified to be a voter as he is deemed to have been excommunicated from the Sikh Panth till re-entry by re-initiation, i.e. taking Amrit, after seeking apology from the congregation. The so called '*Sehajdhari Sikhs*, having no entity in Sikhism had not been given any right to vote. There is no mention of such a word which is outside the Sikhs dictionary. The Sikh Gurdwara Act had mentioned in its provisions only the word Sikh which obviously means, one who has been initiated in the prescribed procedure and strictly adheres to the Sikh code of conduct. All the members of SGPC were such Sikhs commonly called *Amritdhari* as there was no other category in Sikhs. It has been so settled in the debates on gurdwara bill.

Raja Narindra Nath, stated on the first gurdwara bill that "the *Guru Granth Sahib* is nothing more nor less than the higher teachings of Vedas and Upanishads in popular language and Sikhs are Hindus." (PLCD, April 5, 1921, p. 539)

It was replied to by Mehtab Singh, Barister at Law :

"I, for one say that if the Sikhs do not wish to remain in the fold of Hinduism, why should the Hindus seek to force them to do so ? What benefits can they obtain by keeping an unwilling people as partners in their community ? Why not let them go ? That Sir, is at the bottom of the whole excitement. The Hindus say we will manage your affairs for you as your gurdwaras are partly yours and partly ours. We say that we wish to manage our own affairs and look after our own gurdwaras and are determined to do so."

(PLCD, April 8, 1921, p. 583)

Dr. Gopal Chand Narang stated :

"Sikhs are flesh of our flesh and love of our love."

(PLCD, July 6, 1925, p. 1214)

After the debate on this issue it had been finally settled that only Sikhs who are not *patits* come under the definition of 'Sikh' and only they can be voters for SGPC. This statutory dictum was followed without any further controversy as laid down in the provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. At the time of the formation of SGPC by Sikhs in 1920, it was decided at Akal Takhat that only *Amritdhari* Sikhs could become the members of SGPC. Guru Gobind Singh the tenth Sikh Guru, had made the Sikh initiation of *Amrit* (*Pahul* of double-edged sword) to be mandatory for all the Sikhs. But it was only in 1959 that political fraud was played in the legislation by the amendment of Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925 by introducing the word *Sehajdhari* in it to become a voter. It was the mischief of the Congress to attempt taking SGPC from the control of the Akali Dal by fraudulent means to enroll non-Sikhs as voters for SGPC, though in Sikhism there is no class of Sikhs as *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. Either one is a Sikh or not, The Central government is stated to have repealed that amendment now in 2003 at the repeated requests of SGPC. Better to be late that never !

## Sikhs Active involvement in politics (1926-1947)

### Akali Dal – Sikh political party

After the management of Sikh gurdwaras having been taken over by Sikhs under Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925 through SGPC, a statutory representative elected institution by Sikhs – the aim of the gurdwaras reform movement – stood achieved. The religious functions, preaching of Sikhism and the management of historical Sikh gurdwaras, was now under the domain of SGPC. The Sikh educational institutions aimed at by Singh Sabha movement had been set up and the local Sikh population was seized of this matter to set up Sikh schools and colleges in their areas for the education of their younger generation. Akali Dal was now to devote its time and energy to the Sikh political affairs as the political representative party of Sikhs. It was to be a hard time for the political leaders of the Sikhs as communal conflict had already started and there was Hindu-Muslim tension and there was the struggle for Indian independence from British rule. The rights of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs the – three main religious groups – were to be settled at the time the British Quit India.

The Sikhs before 1926 were not very active in politics. From 1920-1925 they remained occupied in the Akali movement to oust the Mahants from gurdwaras and to get direct control over their religious places. Prior to this they remained busy in the renaissance and self awakening of their religion which had been diluted by the Mahants under the patronage of the Brahmanical cult and the British administration. Then there was the Singh Sabha movement to set up gurdwaras and educational institutions throughout Punjab besides the publication of Sikh journals, tracts, newspapers and other literature to educate all of the Sikhs. The elective legislative bodies were brought into existence by the British in 1909 for the active participation of Indians and that too with limited powers. Chief Khalsa Dewan took part initially in Sikhs political affairs which had spearheaded the Singh Sabha movement. Mainly the rich educated Sikhs with big estates were prominent in the nominated or elective bodies to start with.

The Punjab Legislative Council was set up in 1897. The first six members of the Punjab Council were well known persons of caliber who had good relations with the British administration : Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi, Bhagat Singh, a chief secretary of Kapurthala state; Sir Ranbir Singh, Partap Singh Ahluwalia, Yuvraj Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and Arjan Singh of Bagrian. They had been nominated by the Governor General council.

Minto Morley Reforms, 1909 had introduced the election process to the legislature for the first time. Muslims had pressed for separate electorates. Chief Khalsa Dewan followed them to ask for separate electorates for Sikhs. The British government only conceded to Muslim demand and not of the Sikhs. However more nominations were made by Lt. Governor Punjab to Sikh quota by Sunder Singh Majithia as representative of Chief Khalsa Dewan, Gurbakhsh Singh Bedi and Gajjan Singh, a lawyer of Ludhiana.

In 1919, Govt. of India Act was introduced. Congress and Muslim League entered into a pact called "Lucknow pact" and at Lucknow meeting they drafted an agreement conceding the demand of separate electorates. Sikhs were not invited there. Chief Khalsa Diwan sent a memorandum to the Lt. Governor that they would not accept any constitution which did not provide adequate representation to Sikhs in the legislative and administrative wings with due regard to their status before the annexation of Punjab, claiming 1/3rd share in all these institutions. In 1917, Secretary of state, Montague visited India and a delegation of Sikhs met him to press their claim. The Montague Chelsford report was issued in 1918 accepting the claim of the Sikhs and extending the system to Sikhs which had been adopted for Muslims.

In the provisions of Govt. of India Act 1919, Sikhs were not given the 33% share claimed by them but their share was fixed, to be 15 seats out of 93 in Punjab Legislative Council to be elected by Sikhs; 3 out of 145 in the Central Assembly; one, out of 60, in the Council of States. Chief Khalsa Diwan sent four member delegation to London to demand more Sikh share. The Sikh representation in Punjab was increased by two only and nothing more. In 1920 Sunder Singh Majithia, representative of Chief Khalsa Diwan was nominated to Governor's executive council while Jogindra Singh to the council of states. From 1926 onwards Akali Dal dominated the Sikh politics.

The Sikh leaders of Akali Dal were at a disadvantage as in comparison to the congress leaders. They lacked the political skills and experience and educational qualification, which led to their exploitation by congress leaders in crucial and critical times. The congress leaders were also not totally above communal considerations, though working under the garb of secularism. One aspect was optimistic that Sikhs on the whole, followed Sikh leaders, having confidence in them as they had spearheaded successfully the gurdwara reforms movement with sacrifices and selflessness.

Congress leaders, MK Gandhi and others, knew well that Sikhs were under the command of Akali leadership and that the Congress could have no base in Punjab without the co-operation and support of the Sikhs. So they planned to win over the Akali leaders to get the Sikh support for their party and Indian Independence movement. Two main issues had cropped up, to be relevant for Sikh support. One was the legislature representation of Sikhs as Muslims had already been fighting for their effective representation. The other was the National flag issue, which contained three colours white, green and red but red was changed to saffron by the Congress in 1931 symbolising the religious colours of Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Sikh leaders wanted insertion of Kesri colour symbolizing the Sikhs religion. Both these controversial issues were not solved by congress leaders as these manifested the separate Sikh identity which congress leaders, particularly MK Gandhi, did not want to concede and was openly advocating the Sikhs to be a part of Hinduism. Congress leaders could not annoy the Sikhs as their support was very crucial; so they tried to prolong these issues by appointing committees and commissions on one pretext or the

other. However Sikhs involved themselves in the Indian Independence movement, as they stood for the freedom of India from the British empire.

### Simon Commission boycotted by Akalis–1927

On November 8, 1927, Simon Commission was announced by British government to review the working of reforms. Simon Commission visited Lahore on October 30, 1928. Akalis boycotted it, following the boycott by the congress. However on 24.1.1928 Raghbir Singh of Raja Sansi formed the Central Sikh Association, which presented the Sikh case before the Simon Commission. Sikhs got no relief from the Commission.

### Moti Lal Nehru report rejected by Sikhs – 1928

Sikhs advocated complete abolition of separate communal representation throughout the country or to give them adequate representation on the same lines as was to be given to Muslims. The committee headed by Moti Lal Nehru recommended the abolition of communal representation in Punjab only to avoid Sikh separate representation on the same hidden agenda that Sikhs would then not be termed as part of Hindus. The communal approach of these Hindu Congress leaders tried to tag the Sikhs with the Hindus intentionally and not conceding to their separate identity. At All Parties Conference; Sikhs rejected Nehru report outrightly.

### Sikh leaders walked out of Calcutta conference – 1928

On December 28, 1928, All Parties Conference was held at Calcutta. At that conference Mehtab Singh, Sikh leader moved an amendment that "communalism should not be formed as basis of future policy of India in any shape or form." Dr. Ansari, President of the Conference, ruled out this amendment. Sikh leaders walked out of that conference.

### Gandhi's efforts to pacify the Sikhs – 1929

Congress leaders realized that Sikh sentiments had been aroused against Congress. The Muslim league had already disassociated itself from the Congress, feeling that Congress leaders were communal and starting from MK Gandhi were also Hindu fundamentalists and so Muslim interests were not safe with them. So, Congress leaders planned to win over the Sikh leaders at any cost, though not to concede any issue of substance as far as possible. In that strategy Gandhi gave the statement that, "Personally I think we have not done full justice to the Sikhs," without elaborating that how he would now ensure the full justice to them. In February 1929, he went to attend a Sikh conference at Karachi and told them to be patient and not to lose faith in the congress." In October, 1929, he sent a special messenger to Lyalpur to attend conference of Sikhs with the message to Sikhs that "the issue of Sikh

representation was not closed but open for discussion and consideration." It did not prove any success as Baba Kharak Singh announced the boycott of congress session by Sikhs which was to be held at Lahore in December 1929.

### Congress leaders met Akali leaders and gave assurances to Sikhs – December 1929

On December 27, 1929, on the eve of the Annual Congress and Akali Dal convention at Lahore, Indian National Congress leaders MK Gandhi, Moti Lal Nehru, Dr. Ansari along with some others went to Baba Kharak Singh and held discussion with Akali leaders, besides him, Master Tara Singh, Mehtab Singh and others. Gandhi told Akali leaders that their demands as to the rejection of Moti Lal Nehru report and against dominion status have been accepted by the congress. Assurance was also given to the Sikh leaders that congress would never accept any constitution which would be unacceptable to Sikhs, thereby, giving freedom to Sikhs to decide their political status and insert any provisions in the constitution to their liking on to their autonomous state a constitutional power as to shape these matters was to be in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. It was also ensured that a formal resolution would be passed at the congress session. The resolution in this regard was actually passed on December 29, 1929 at the annual session of the congress at Lahore.

(A.L. Bannerjee, *Indian Constitution Documents*, Vol, II)

### Congress session a poor show at Lahore 1929

Akali Dal also held its conference at Lahore in the days of the congress session. On its eve, a procession was taken out by the Sikhs with Baba Kharak Singh, President Akali Dal, seated on an elephant in which over half a million Sikhs (500,000) participated. The Sikhs had exhibited their solidarity with Akali Dal. On the other hand the congress session was a poor show, though all its national leaders had come to participate in it. Even, *Times of London* took notice of it and reported the Akali Dal conference :

"A most impressive spectacle of human congregation, that put the congress show in shame and shadow."

### Baba Kharak Singh Authorized to Continue Negotiation 1929

The Sikh conference authorized Baba Kharak Singh to constitute a committee for the continuation of the negotiations with congress. However Master Tara Singh, issued a statement on his own congratulating the congress resolution particularly Gandhi, for it and hoped that overall support of Sikhs for congress in future, which obviously lacked political wisdom and shrewdness on his part as it weakened the negotiation aspect.

## Contradictory stands of Baba Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh, 1930

Master Tara Singh got the participation of the Sikhs in large numbers on the January 26, 1930, Independence Day celebrations and later on in the civil disobedience movement of the congress. He was taken into the 'war council' set up by Punjab congress. Master Tara Singh was also made the dictator of the civil disobedience movement after the arrest of Dr. Kitchlu. He was elected to All India Congress Committee. He offered 5000 Akali volunteers to participate in the freedom movement under the Akali Dal Flag. On the other hand Baba Kharak Singh, President Akali Dal had a stiff stand. He refused to co-operate with the congress unless Sikh Kesri colour was included in the National Flag. He even went to the extent of submitting his resignation if Akali Dal did not refuse to fight under the congress flag which did not include Sikh colour. Master Tara Singh replaced Baba Kharak Singh as President Akali Dal to the relief and jubilation of congress leaders, who found Baba Kharak Singh, a difficult nut to crack. Master Tara Singh ensured the co-operation of Sikhs to congress on empty assurances without yielding any substance. If Master Tara Singh had shown toughness like Baba Kharak Singh, the congress leaders would have yielded to Sikh demands but at a crucial and critical stage, he did not put up a fight to the net congress leaders.

Master Tara Singh admitted his differences with Baba Kharak Singh and criticized him in his autobiography at page 111, that :

"After the Nehru report (1928) was rejected by the Sikhs and was not accepted by the British either, the congress also withdrew it next year and passed the resolution that no constitution would be acceptable to congress which would not satisfy the Muslims, Sikhs and other minorities." This satisfied us but Baba Kharak Singh was no longer for co-operation with congress unless the Sikh colour was added to the congress flag. When this was done he objected that yellow nor ochre was the Sikh colour. And such objections went on multiplying till he resigned both offices."

However, later on, after the freedom of India in 1951, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Prime Minister praised Baba Kharak Singh saying that :

"I do not see anybody in the country today who can be compared in courage, bravery and truthfulness with Baba Kharak Singh."

## MK Gandhi's Assurance to Sikhs at Gurdwara Sahib-1931

On Feb. 26, 1931 MK Gandhi visited Gurdwara Sis Ganj Delhi and assured the Sikhs in presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* :

"I venture to suggest that the non-violence creed of the congress is the surest guarantee of its good faith and our Sikh friends have no reason to fear betrayal at its hands. For the moment it did so, the congress would not only seal its own doom but that of the country too. Moreover the Sikhs

are a brave people. They know how to safeguard their rights by the exercise of arms if it should ever come to that. Let God be the witness of the bond that binds me and the congress with you."  
(*Young India*, 19.3.1931)

The congress betrayed all the assurances given to Sikhs. Gandhi had been assassinated in 1948. So it is conjectural as to how Gandhi would have reacted to this betrayal.

### Round table conferences 1931-32 : Sikhs did not participate

The British held the Round Table Conference with Indian leaders in 1931-32 for the discussion of the question of Indian Freedom and other matters in controversy. Sikhs did not participate in the first RTC. As sole representative of congress, Master Tara Singh presented the 17 demands charter of Sikhs to MK Gandhi and wanted him to represent the Sikhs too. What a political immaturity on the part of Master Tara Singh ! He should have attended the conference himself to put forth the Sikh point of view or have deputed some other capable and competent Akali leader for that purpose. The obvious consequence was that the Sikh case went unrepresented. The Irony is that Gandhi was a known critic of Sikh separate identity and always openly propagated that Sikhs are part of Hindus. Still he was authorized to represent the Sikh case. Interestingly MK Gandhi addressed the second RTC on the issue of separate electorate for depressed classes :

"We do not want on our register and on our census untouchables as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity. So may Mohammadans, so may Europeans. I do not mind untouchables if they so desire being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that but I can not possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in villages."

(C.W. Vol 58, p. 192)

No doubt, Bhupinder Singh Maharaja of Patiala, Sampuran Singh and Ujjal Singh as invitees of the Viceroy attended the first and second Round Table Conference at London, but they could not represent the Sikhs in reality because their main political representative party, the Akali Dal, did not send its leaders to attend these conferences under the influence of congress party. The congress wanted an assurance to attend the first Round Table Conference to frame the dominion constitution of India instead of any other discussions which the British Government was not ready for. So it decided its non participation in the conference, which was followed by the Akali Dal working in alliance with the congress. In its 1929 Lahore annual session, congress passed a resolution for complete independence instead of dominion status. The Simon Commission in its report in May 1930 had suggested a federal constitution with two houses of the legislature at the centre and autonomy for provinces and Princely states, but not wide powers for the central Govt. As to the Sikhs, it provided some assurance that :

"It would be unfair that Mohammadans should retain the very considerable weightage, they now enjoy in six provinces and that there should be at the same time be imposed in face of Hindu and Sikh opposition, a definite muslim majority in the Punjab and in Bengal, unalterable by any appeal to the electorate."

(Simon Commission report Indian statutory commission report)

The purpose of the first Round Table Conference was to discuss the Simon commission report by the British with Indian leaders. The principle of separate electorate was accepted in this conference due to the total rejection of joint electorate by the Muslim representatives.

On March 5, 1931, 'Gandhi-Irwin pact' was signed, due to some understanding between MK Gandhi and Lord Irvin, whereby the congress leaders were set free from jails and the congress withdrew its resistance movement, thereby paving the way for the congress leader MK Gandhi to attend second Round Table Conference at London. Akali Dal still kept it unrepresented at this conference. However this conference could yield no result as no compromise could be arrived at on the most complex issue of the communal representation. Gandhi was not agreeable to separate electorate while Jinnah was adamant about it, rejecting the joint electorates to never be acceptable to muslims. Ujjal Singh and Sampuran Singh though not representing the Akali Dal and being the invitees of Viceroy only, demanded 30% representation for Sikhs in Punjab, while 5% at the centre with at least one Sikh as cabinet minister. But no settlement could be arrived at on this crucial issue. The second Round Table Conference thus proved to be a total failure for the purpose for which it was convened. The British Prime Minister himself gave the award on communal representation yielding the separate electorates to all the minorities on April 16, 1932. Muslims were given 33<sup>1/3</sup>% representation at the centre, with 86 out of 175 seats in Punjab. Sikhs were given only 33 seats out of 175 in Punjab; 3 out of 50 in NWFP; 6 out of 250 in federal legislative assembly; 4 out of 150 in council of states, which was totally inadequate for Sikhs.

No Sikh representative attended third RTC. Sikhs naturally achieved nothing in these conferences, not even getting their presence felt.

### Sikhs Rejected Communal Award-1932

On August 16, 1932 Sikhs rejected the Communal Award as 51 percent reservation was provided to Muslims in Punjab while only 19 percent to Sikhs. Sikhs organized Akali Shahidi Dal with 100,000 volunteers to spearhead the agitation against the award. However nothing substantial was achieved by Akalis with such a hollow slogan.

### Govt. of India Act 1935

British Government enacted Govt. of India Act, 1935 to constitute the legislative

assemblies and to elect their representatives by Indian voters and to form their governments. It was with the purpose of involving Indians in such a limited democratic process to provide semi-Independence and democratic rights to Indians to participate in such political activities.

## Gandhi and Ambedkar Rift over Depressed classes and Separate Electorate-1936

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, leader of depressed classes—the untouchables, considered to be the lowest in Hindu society, was for a separate electorate for them so that they may have their own political say, while Gandhi a conservative Hindu, vehemently opposed it in favour of a joint electorate, for which he had already advocated at the second Round Table Conference going to the extent of saying that if untouchables want a separate electorate status, they may convert to Islam or Christianity, which he thought they would never do so because of their religious and cultural distinctions and contradictions. Gandhi had not advised them to convert to Sikhism which could be possible and rather he openly embarrassed the Sikh religion. Dr. Ambedkar found no other alternative for the depressed classes than to embrace Sikh religion, wherein there was no distinction of caste and creed and every one enjoyed equal status, as otherwise they would perpetually suffer in Hindu society as untouchables.

## Dr. Ambedkar Planned to Embrace Sikhism

After consultations and deliberations with Sikh leaders Dr. Ambedkar made it publicly known that he along with over five millions of untouchables would embrace Sikhs religion. Sikhs set up a press at Bombay for publication of its paper *Janta* and established Khalsa college at Bombay for imparting higher education to the new converts. Hindu Maha Sabha leaders did not oppose it as they thought it to be the lesser evil than of their conversion to the semitic religions – Islam or Christianity. However, the so called secular leader MK Gandhi could never tolerate it, though it had no concern with the independence movement of his Congress party.

## MK Gandhi's Staunch Opposition to Ambedkar's Move 1936

Gandhi raised a hue and cry against Dr. Ambedkar's move to embrace Sikh religion himself and by his followers to raise their status as equals and not to remain untouchables. He termed this move to be a dangerous move as he could never envisage the depressed classes to be out of the Hindu domination. He addressed a letter to his friend Jugal Kishore Birla, dated September 7, 1936, who had welcomed this move along with other Hindu leaders :

"Today I will only say that to me Sikhism is a part of Hinduism but the situation is different from the legal point of view. Dr. Ambedkar wants a change of religion. If becoming a Sikh amounts to

conversion, then this kind of conversion on the part of Harijans is dangerous. If you can persuade the Sikhs to accept that Sikhism is a part of Hinduism and if you can make them give up the separate electorate, then I will have no objection to 'Harijans' calling themselves Ramanujis or Sikhs"

(C.W., Vol 63, p. 267)

In his article in the *Harijan* of September 19, 1936 Gandhi wrote :

"Dr. Ambedkar does not regard Sikhs as Hindus. He definitely wants a change of faith. If Sikhs were Hindus that would not matter. Since Sikhs consider themselves to be a separate religion and have separate electorate, no one could be a party to the proposal put forth by Dr. Ambedkar and Moonje."

(C.W., Vol. 63, p. 294)

## Gandhi's conversation with Sujan Singh

Master Tara Singh sent Master Sujan Singh, General Secretary All India Sikh Mission to MK Gandhi to personally talk to him to dissuade him from opposition to Ambedkar's move to embrace Sikh religion. The conversation as reported between them depicts that Gandhi was firm in his stand and rather avoided calls on such a crucial matter. The conduct of Gandhi in opposing Dr. Ambedkar's move to embrace Sikhism, establishes him to be a more Hindu fundamentalist and extremely communal than the so called fundamentally Hindu communal leaders, though he had the garb of secularism, being the leader of the Nationalist Congress Party. It was not his concern as a leader of Indian Freedom movement to meddle into the affairs of a person or class of persons to be embracing or following one religion or the other, whatsoever. Not only this, MK Gandhi even went to the extent of 'fast unto death' to get the Government notification that untouchables were Hindus and would be entitled to special concessions only if they remained within Hindu fold and not otherwise, sealing their future emancipation from Manu Samritis dictum that denouncement of caste system would pollute dharma itself, by frustrating the move of Dr. Ambedkar. The same is the plight of the so called untouchables, though more than half a century has passed over and is to remain so till they are in the Hindu fold—a caste and creed ridden society. Sikh leaders also did not play their cards well. It is a reflection on them and their capability and sincerity to the cause for their failure to convert Dr. Ambedkar and his followers to Sikh religion.

## 1937 Punjab Assembly Elections

Akali Dal under the leadership of Master Tara Singh contested the 1937 Punjab assembly elections in co-operation with the Congress Party and agreed that Akali members of legislature would form part of congress legislative party and be regulated by its discipline as well because of the close contacts of master Tara Singh with the congress leaders. Though it could not be in Sikh interest as Congress leaders like MK Gandhi did not even tolerate the separate Sikh identity and were rather playing the

game of exploiting Sikhs against the Muslims. Khalsa National Party under the leaders of Chief Khalsa Diwan, therefore, came into formation under the leadership of Sir Sunder Singh Majithia and Sir Joginder Singh, which was also backed by Baba Kharak Singh and Giani Sher Singh of Central Akali Dal, staunch opponents of Master Tara Singh. Khalsa National Party got 14 seats as against Akalis who could get only 10 seats, while the socialists only one. Unionist Party under leadership of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan formed Government in Punjab in coalition with Khalsa National Party including its leader Sunder Singh Majithia in the cabinet. On October 15, 1937, Unionist Muslims joined Muslim League under Sikander Jinah party.

### Akali Dal-Congress Rift 1940

Declaration of war in 1939 brought the rift between Akali and Congress out in the open as their strategies and line of action were not in conformity on this crucial issue. Akali Dal formulated Khalsa Defence League with Yadvindra Singh Maharaja of Patitola as its head, while Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh Akali leaders as its members, to support the British in the war. Mahatma Gandhi in his article in his journal *Harijan*, dated November 15, 1939 devised separate Sikh entity and declared the assurances given to Sikhs by Congress in 1929 as no more binding. However Jawahar Lal Nehru in double talk gave assurances to Sikhs that Congress would never ignore the Sikh interests. Gandhi in his article 'Sikhs and Sword' published in *Harijan* dated September 29, 1940 went to the extent of stating that "Sikhs were unsuitable to remain in the Congress and his letter of August 16, 1940 would apply to the entire Sikh community if they accept Master Tara Singh as their undisputed leader" at the same time contradicting his previous statement as to 1929 Lahore Resolution that as "his commitment to it was a sacred trust for him." In his letter of April 16, 1940 Gandhi had written to Master Tara Singh :

"As I told you, in my opinion, you have nothing in common with the congress nor the congress with you. You believe in the rule of sword, the congress does not. Your civil disobedience is purely a branch of violence. I am quite clear in my mind that being in the congress, you weaken your community and weaken the congress. You have to be either fully nationalist or frankly communal and therefore dependent upon the British or other foreign power."

(*The Sikhs in History*, by Sangat Singh at p. 176)

On 12.9.1940, Master Tara Singh submitted his resignation from the Congress. The Congress leaders dubbed the Sikhs as Anti-National for supporting the British in war efforts. Thus there was rift and break down of relations between Akali and Congress.

### Pakistan Resolution by Muslim league-1940

In march 1940, Muslim league passed the resolution for the formation of their

own independent and sovereign country Pakistan, declaring that the interests of Muslims are not safe in Hindu dominated India. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a barrister of Bombay led their movement for the creation of Pakistan.

### **Punjab Premier asserted Provinces to be free and Autonomous-1941**

In March 1941, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Premier of Punjab asserted in the Punjab legislative Assembly that :

"Muslims fear that if the provinces are not free and autonomous, there would always be a danger of undue and unwarranted interference from the centre which will be dominated by Hindus."

Muslims declared the Hindu Congress leaders to be communal and not to share power with them.

### **Sikandar – Baldev Singh pact 1942**

Baldev Singh, Akali leader, formed a separate Akali group in Punjab Assembly in March 1942, including some Khalsa National Party members and independents. The Unionist turned Muslim league of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Punjab Premier, was also supporting the British in the war. On 15.6.1942 Sikandar Hayat Khan and Akali legislative entered into pact known as 'Sikandar-Baldev Singh pact', under which Baldev Singh joined the 'Punjab Cabinet', thus Akalis sharing power with Unionist Muslim league party. Akalis breaking ties with congress, Quit India movement of congress made no headway in Punjab, because of the Akali and Congress rift.

### **Sir Stafford Cripps's visit to Punjab-1942**

In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, representative of the British Government visited Punjab, hinting at the possibility of creation of Pakistan and Division of Punjab. The Sikh leaders met him in a delegation and he assured them of British concern for the protection of Sikh rights and to seek iron clad guarantees as the British would be helpless if the successor government decided to ignore its treaty obligations after independence. But the Sikh leaders gave no attention to their aspect and relied upon the empty assurances of the congress leaders without the firm binding guarantees, to which they refused to implement just after independence. The utterances of Gandhi were anti Sikhs, but still Sikh leaders, particularly Master Tara Singh relied upon him and his lieutenants without getting any solid iron clad guarantee.

### **C.R. Formula rejected by Sikhs-1944**

C. RajGopalachayra, a top congress leader put forth his formula of July 10, 1944 advocating a plebiscite wherever Muslim population was in majority after the termination of the war to decide the formation of a sovereign Muslim separate state,

in return for the Muslim league's co-operation for the formation of a provisional interim government for the transitional period. It also suggested transfer of population on voluntary basis. It had the approval of MK Gandhi and other congress leaders. This formula was rejected by Sikhs to be against the Sikh interests as it obviously accepted the formation of Pakistan and division of Punjab. The Sikhs wanted a sovereign Sikh state if Pakistan was to be formed.

Jinnah conceded the Sikh demand and the Sikhs to be a separate nation.

### Master Tara Singh not pressed for Sikh state-1944

Akali conference was held at Lahore on October 14 and 15, 1944. In his Presidential address on October 14, 1944, Jathedar Pritam Singh Gojran demanded that if India is to be divided, Sikhs must be given their homeland, an independent Sikh state on the basis of the land now in their possession of their political importance. However on October 15, 1944, Master Tara Singh moved the main resolution stating that the demand for an independent Sikh state is not pressed and it was being held back in order to keep the door open for negotiations. The Akali leaders emphasized that the Sikhs were prepared for any kind of settlement but they would in no case tolerate division of India or the establishment of Pakistan.

(N.N. Mitra IAR 1944, vol. 2 p. 219)

The formation of Pakistan was already at the final stage but the Sikh leaders were still intolerant towards it. Instead of seriously putting forth their demand for a Sikh state they were seeking to avoid Pakistan which had been already conceded to practically by all the three main forces—the Muslim league, the Congress and the British Government. The Sikh leadership failed in the assessment of the political situations. The congress leaders exploited them to the last.

### Simla conference –1945

Lord Wavell called the conference of Congress, Muslim league leaders for the formation of coalition govt. at centre on June 25, 1945. Master Tara Singh was also invited and he opposed the demand for Pakistan and demanded Sikh state in central Punjab if Pakistan is to be formed.

### Sikh state not demanded in All India Akali Conference–1945

All India Akali conference was held on September 29-30, 1945 at Gujranwala. No resolution was passed for the formation of a sovereign Sikh state in that conference. Thus Master Tara Singh's assertion at Simla conference was only an eye wash. Rather a Sikh Election Board to fight the 1946 elections was formed under the leadership of Master Tara Singh. The support of Akali Dal to congress was ensured in all political affairs. The same slogan of unity of India was repeated, though the partition of the

country was at its anvil. The demand for a separate Sikh state was in contradiction to the demand for the unity of India and against the formation of Pakistan. Formation of Independent Sikh state was to be the reality only with the partition of the country for carving out Pakistan an independent state for Muslims, still the Sikh leaders had been opposing it thus being exploited by the congress leaders who had themselves conceded to the formation of Pakistan privately though opposing it outwardly.

### Unionist-Congress Akali Coalition Government 1946

In the elections of Punjab assembly held in January 1946, Akalis got 23 seats. Sir Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana of the Unionist Party formed the coalition government in Punjab at its head with the inclusion of congress and Akali legislatures. Muslim league remained the opposition party though it had won the largest number of seats in that election. Its aim was the formation of Pakistan a separate state for Muslims, rather than to gain power in Indian provinces temporarily.

### Master Tara Singh and M.A. Jinnah meeting

On 4.4.1946, a meeting between Master Tara Singh and M.A. Jinnah, Muslim League leader, was held. Jinnah offered the Sikh state including Lahore as its capital and Nankana Sahib the birth place of Guru Nanak with the eastern side of Punjab to be in confederation with Pakistan but the Akali leader outrightly refused it as he preferred to side with and the negotiations with Indian congress leaders than Muslim league leaders.

## Sikh leaders rejected British offers of Political Power

### Cabinet Mission Plan-1946

In February, 1946, British government announced the cabinet mission plan to send a special mission of the British cabinet, consisting of Sir Stafford Cripps, A.V. Alexander and Pethic Lawrence, secretary of state to India for the finalization of granting Independence to India. The cabinet mission came to India on March 24, 1946. Sikh leaders Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Harnam Singh held the meeting with the cabinet mission on April 15, 1946. Baldev Singh met the cabinet mission separately. The Sikh leaders' point of view placed before the commission was not uniform in the shape of one consolidated plan but rather confusing with ifs and buts. By and large their prime demand was the unity and integrity of India without any partition to form Pakistan, instead of a separate Sikh state outrightly. But if Muslims were to be given a separate sovereign status, then they demanded a separate Sikh state. If two constituent bodies are to be set up, then Sikhs should also have their separate constitution set up. If Hindus and Muslims are to be transferred power on majority of population basis, then no one should dominate over Sikhs. If there are

to be separate states on two nation theory then Sikhs should have their state with right to federate with Hindustan or Pakistan. "No commission would stand convinced over such type of ambiguous stand. Sikh leaders should have taken one united stand that Sikhs are a separate nation as Hindus and Muslims are and they had their own rule over Punjab before annexation by British and that now they want their rule back with a separate independent sovereign Sikh state, of course with some adjustments due to majority population of Muslims in some areas of Punjab, which could be solved by transfer of population, at least in the areas from River Ravi to Panipat including historical gurdwaras Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib etc. and Lahore, capital of Punjab to be in the separate Sikh state."

"Their demand against partition of the country to form Pakistan was on the face of it in contradiction to the demand an independent Sikh state which could only come into existence with the partition of the country. Moreover it was out of tune as the partition of the country and formation of Pakistan had been already decided much earlier by the British Government with the implied consent of the congress. Cabinet commission members and particularly Sir Stafford Cripps had given clear hints to the Sikh leaders for the viability of such a state for Sikhs in between Ravi and Panipat. Moreover Sir Stafford Cripps had given such a hint to Sikh leaders about four years back also in 1942 when he had visited India and met the Sikh leaders delegation and as to the creation of separate Muslim state Pakistan as well. Muslim league leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah had openly conceded to the formation of Sikh state in between Ravi and Panipat, though with co-federation with Pakistan but that condition of his could not be binding upon British Government and he would have withdrawn it at their instance as Britishers were already obliging him and the Muslims for the formation of their independent state out of India. The Sikh leaders remained under the exploitation of congress leaders throughout whose main aim was avoidance of a separate Sikh state as Muslim separate state was a reality for them, which they could not avoid. Muslim league leader M.A. Jinnah was a shrewed statesman to be exploited by congress leaders who outrightly rejected the empty assurances of congress Hindu leaders unlike Master Tara Singh Akali leader, who remained under their net to be betrayed in free India.

### Cabinet Mission Proposals

On May 16, 1946, cabinet mission released its report and proposals to set up Indian federation with the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communication with provision to raise necessary finances as central subjects. All other subjects and residual powers were to remain with the provinces. Three groups of states were to be formed. Group A consisted of six Hindu majority provinces; group B, included Punjab, NWFP and Sind. While group C had Bengal and Assam. Groups B and C excluding Assam had Muslim majority population. The groups could frame their own constitution and the provinces could opt out of the group after a period of ten years. It also provided for parity in

the central executive between 6 Hindu majority and 5 Muslim majority provinces with a population of 190 and 90 million respectively.

MK Gandhi, congress leader rejected the plan terming it worse than Pakistan and pleaded for composition of central legislature and executive on the basis of population while Muslim league accepted the cabinet Mission plan vide its resolution dated June 6, 1946.

## Akalis rejected British Cabinet Mission Report

On June 9, 1946, Akali Dal rejected the report of the British cabinet mission.

### Cabinet Mission's offer to Sikhs

The British cabinet mission while in India in early winter of 1946 at Delhi made the offer to Sikhs through Baldev Singh, the Sikh representative :

"If Sikhs are determined not to part company with Hindu India, the British Parliament in their solitude with the Sikh people was prepared to so frame the independence Act of India so that in respect of Sikh homeland wherein their areas eventually might go in Pakistan or in India, no constitution shall be framed such as does not have the concurrence of the Sikhs."

This offer of British cabinet mission was rejected by Baldev Singh after consultation with congress leaders as the congress would itself provide it. It was a political blunder of Baldev Singh, rather Anti Sikh.

## Sikhs and Congress Resolutions and Declarations

### Resolution for Sovereign Sikh state

On August 20, 1944, All Parties Sikh Conference passed the resolution for Independent Sikh state.

On March 10, 1946 SGPC elected representative body of Sikhs under Sikh gurdwaras Act 1925, passed the resolution for the formation of independent Sikh state. All the Sikhs were voters of SGPC and as such it was the demand of the entire Sikh nation.

On March 22, 1946, Shiromani Akali Dal the representative political party of Sikhs, passed the resolutions for an independent Sikh state.

These resolutions were passed only to create hurdles in the formation of Pakistan and to assert that if Pakistan is to be formed for Muslim by dividing the country, then a separate Sikh state, Khalistan, be also formed for Sikhs and as such Sikh leadership did not take any serious steps for the implementation of these resolutions. Rather Sikh leaders first option was to keep India united.

## Congress resolutions for Sikh autonomous state

Indian National Congress also became active in assuring the Sikhs and affirming their previous pledges to provide a Sikh autonomous state in the Sikh homeland Punjab and the constitutional guarantees in order to undo the offers of the British and Muslim league for a Sikh state. In July 1946, congress working committee in its meeting held at Calcutta passed the resolution reaffirming their assurances and promises given to Sikhs to set up their autonomous homeland in Punjab with constitutional guarantees to set up their own self determined political status. Jawahar Lal Nehru gave the press statement :

"The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special constitutions. I see nothing wrong in an area and set up in the North where Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom."

*(Statesman Calcutta, July 7, 1946)*

Jawaharlal Nehru also made the declaration later on :

"Redistribution of provincial boundaries was essential and inevitable, I stand for the semi autonomous units as well. If the Sikhs desire to function such a unit, I would like them to hold semi autonomous unit so that they may have a sense of freedom."

*(National Book Club Publication, 147)*

'Congress Party resolution for Sikh rights'

On 5.1.1947 congress party passed the resolution :

"The rights of Sikhs in Punjab should not be jeopardised."

In July 1947, Punjab legislative assembly passed the resolution :

"In the divided Indian Punjab special constitutional measures are imperative to meet the just aspirations and rights of Sikhs."

## V.B. Patel Announced Sikh State

On 3.4.1947, Sardar V.B. Patel, the first Home Minister of India, announced the formation of 'Sikhistan' after independence of India.

## Baldev Singh Becomes Defence Minister

Akali Dal representative Baldev Singh had been inducted in the Indian cabinet formed by Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister on interim basis on September 2, 1946 as defence Minister.

## Swaran Singh replaced him in the Punjab cabinet

Congress leaders thus took every caution to keep the Sikhs with them. Sikh leaders also stood by the congress having blind faith in them refusing the offers of the Muslim league and of the British cabinet mission. It was political blunder on their part not to discuss the offer with the British cabinet mission. Even if Sikh leaders wanted to side with India, their autonomous state and constitutional guarantees should have been inserted in freedom of India Act."

## Sikhs rejected last British Offer 1947

On May 17, 1947 British Govt. invited Congress, Muslim league and Sikh leaders to London for a meeting to give the final touch of the Indian Independence Act. Jawaharlal Nehru of congress, M.A. Jinnah of Muslim league and Baldev Singh of Akali Dal attended that meeting in London. After the meeting, Secretary of state for India contacted Baldev Singh to stay on for further talks to save Sikh interests as :

"Britishers wanted the Sikhs to have a political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of World history."

Instead of staying there for further talks with the British government Baldev Singh divulged it to Nehru, who asked him not to stay behind and rather tell the Secretary of state that Sikhs have no demand, as they have settled their political aspirations with congress. Baldev Singh acted accordingly and gave a press statement at London as desired by Nehru :

"The Sikhs have no demands to make on the British except the demand that they should quit India. Whatever the political rights and aspirations, the Sikhs have, they shall have them satisfied through the goodwill of the Congress and the majority community."

Baldev Singh then accompanied Nehru to India disappointing the British and betraying the cause of Sikhs whom he had represented. Can there be a more bankrupt political wisdom and statesmanship ? The Sikhs had only to curse their own fate if their representatives were of such a caliber, void of any political understanding and bargaining and having no sincerity towards the Sikh cause.

Baldev Singh had also ignored the Sikhs' interests earlier when he refused the offer of British Cabinet Commission to safeguard the Sikh political power. These offers were made by the persons who were at the helm of affairs. British Cabinet Commission comprised of three senior cabinet ministers of England while Secretary of state was the senior most authority to deal with Indian affairs. The British had a great regard for Sikhs for their heroism, self respect and dignity. They had themselves seen the Sikhs as brave and courageous in the Army who made their name in both the world wars and earlier in the battlefields in Punjab against them. So they did not want

humiliation and harassment of the Sikhs after independence when they would be unable to do anything for them. But Sikh leaders disappointed them and betrayed the Sikh cause in not getting in touch with them. It was really a sorry state of affairs for the Sikhs.

Master Tara Singh, the Akali Chief, and other higher level Akali leaders are also responsible for these political blunders. It was the duty of the Akali Chief to have himself met and discussed the Sikhs' political power affairs along with other members of the high command of his party with the cabinet mission and the members of the British cabinet when they had shown their desire to have talks in that regard and also with the Secretary of state at London, when he invited them.

### Penderal Moon's last effort for Sikhs state

Sir Penderal Moon, Secretary, Development Board, Govt. of India, a British Senior officer made a last effort to create a Sikh state, in his letter dated June 27, 1947 to chief of the Viceroy's staff advocating the exclusion of Gurgaon, Hissar, Rohtak and Karnal districts from east Punjab, which had the Hindu majority population. He mentioned in his letter :

"The Sikhs have already put this demand to congress who hesitated to accept it. This Sikh demand should be taken out of Hindu clutches as they want to be, and put in a more or less independent position of their own."

He hinted at the creation of a Sikh buffer state between India and Pakistan by planned migration.

Mountbatten wrote to Jinnah and Nehru. Jinnah sent no reply while Nehru declined saying that "the time was short." (*The Sikhs in History*, Sangat Singh, p. 205)

In spite of such support from the British, the high caliber Sikh leaders made no efforts to get a Sikh state. They rather kept themselves in Hindu clutches, out of which the British at a high post wanted them to be taken out and put them in an independent position even at the last hour. Sikh leaders were singing the tunes of congress leaders only on the empty assurances of Sikhs autonomous state and constitutional guarantees, which too were deceptive and fraudulent from the very inception. Sikh leaders could not find out the lack of bona-fides in those assurances in such a long period that those may not be implemented. Then what ? Prolonged confrontation with India. However, the Sikhs true to their own self gave sacrifices in the Indian freedom movement more than other Indians though in population they were only 2 percent, following the Sikhs tradition.

### Punjab and Bengal Divided to form Pakistan

British Govt. decided to create Pakistan in Muslim majority areas and to divide Bengal and Punjab. Lord, Mountbatten, the Viceroy announced it that the respective

legislatures of these provinces would be divided in two parts; one representing Muslim majority districts and the other, the rest of the Province. Each group would vote for or against partition. If any one group voted for partition a commission would be appointed to draw the line of demarcation. Congress and Muslim league agreed to the proposals in principle. The Sikh representative Baldev Singh stated that Sikhs position would be borne in mind in drafting the terms of reference of the boundary commission. Akali Dal in its meeting held on June 2, 1947 resolved to press for the partition of Punjab but it demanded that boundaries be drawn at River Chenab. (*Hindustan Times*, June 3, 1947)

In the Punjab legislative assembly, all the Muslim members voted against partition of Punjab while all Sikh and Hindu members voted for the partition of Punjab province.

Boundary Commission was appointed with Sir Cyril Redcliffe as Chairman, four judges—two Muslims and two Hindus—were to be the members of the Commission. Justice Teja Singh, a judge of the Punjab High Court, was also made a member of the Punjab Commission. A memorandum of 32 Sikh members of Punjab legislature given to the Boundary Commission put up the demand to include all the territories up to Chenab in East Punjab, to be a part of India, while the Muslim representatives claimed the territories up to Ambala district in west Punjab, to be part of Pakistan. The Boundary line between western Punjab and Eastern Punjab was drawn at Wagha Border in between Lahore and Amritsar. The main historical Sikh Gurdwaras particularly connected with the founder of Sikhism, Nanakana Sahib and Kartarpur, besides the Lahore city capital of Punjab went to Pakistan side. New Punjab in India was left with no capital of its own and no fertile canal irrigated lands which remained in west Punjab in Pakistan. Sikh leaders raised a hue and cry that Sikhs should be given the benefit of the land they held and land revenue they pay but it was of no relevance, as the partition of the country to create Pakistan was based on the majority of Muslims in those areas, who were consistently agitating for several years for it exhibiting their determination not to stay in Hindu majority India. The British were outspoken, that Sikhs opted for the partition and so it is their own doing though they expressed a few sympathetic words for Sikhs. There was no time now, to shed crocodile tears for Sikh leaders as they had lost the game of politics indulging in 'ifs and buts' never putting forth their case consistently for a separate Independent Sikh state and the exchange of population under the British Regime; rather shouting sentimental slogans to keep India united and against the creation of Pakistan to the last with no consideration to the reality of the decision to set up Pakistan much earlier.

On June 14, 1947, the press attache of Lord Mountbatten stated :

"The Sikhs see that the partition of India means substantially and irrevocably the partition of Sikhs and they feel themselves to be sacrificed on the altars of Muslim ambition and Hindu opportunism. No juggling of the boundary commission can prevent their bisection. They react accordingly and the leaders haplessly outmanoeuvred in the political struggle."

(Campbell Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 118)

The Governor of Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, wrote a letter to Lord Mountbatten dated July 10, 1947 regarding his meeting with Giani Kartar Singh, President Akali Dal, wherein he stated :

"Giani told me that British had said for years that they intended to protect the minorities and what had happened. The present situation was a clear breach of faith by the British. I replied that I realized that the Sikhs were dissatisfied but when independence came to any country some classes, who had formerly regarded themselves as protected invariably suffered. At the same time, I thought the Sikhs had only themselves to blame for the present position. The Giani himself insisted on partition and Baldev Singh had accepted the plan."

On July 13, Jenkins wrote another letter to Mountbatten, stating :

"The Sikhs believe that they will be expropriated and massacred in west Punjab and smothered by the Hindus and congress generally in East Bengal. They threaten violent rising immediately."

(Leonard and Moslay, *The Last Days of British Raj*, pp. 205-7)

It is interesting to note that Mountbatten did ask if the Sikh motive was to set up a Sikh state. V.P. Menon replied, No. Politically they had lost out and had not even gained the Jullundur Division. Their motive was almost lost.

(September 15, 1947 Campbell Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 191)

The Viceroy Lord Mountbatten in his broadcast on June 5, 1947 touched on the fate of the Sikhs that :

"We have given careful consideration to the position of the Sikhs. This valiant community form about an eighth of the population of Punjab, but they are so distributed that any partition of this province will inevitably divide them. All of us who have the good of Sikh community at heart, are very sorry to think, that the partition of Punjab which they themselves desire, cannot avoid splitting them to a greater or lesser extent. The exact degree of split will be left to the Boundary Commission on which they will of course be represented."

(Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs II*, p. 272, Lord Mountbatten's address at All India Radio).

And further; the next day at press conference, Mountbatten stated :

"There are two main parties to this plan – the congress and the Muslim league – but another community much less numerous, but of great importance—the Sikh community – have of course to be considered. I found that it was mainly at the request of the Sikh community that congress had put forward the resolution on the partition of Punjab and you will remember that in the words of that resolution they wished the Punjab to be divided between predominantly Muslim and Non-Muslim areas. It was therefore, on that resolution, which the Sikhs themselves sponsored, that this division has been provided for. I was not aware of all the details when this suggestion was made but when I sent for the map and studied the distribution of Sikh population under this proposal I must say that I was astounded to find the plan which they had produced divided their community into two equal parts. I have spent a great deal of time both out here and in England in seeing whether there was any solution which would keep the Sikh community move together, without departing

from the broad principle which was demanded on the one side and was conceded on the other. I am not a miracle worker and I have not found that solution."

And at page 274, British parliamentarians had also shown sympathy towards Sikhs on July 15, 1947. R.A. Butler said in the house of commons :

"The British had the happiest possible relations with the Sikh community and of all the martial races of the world the Sikhs probably had built up the greatest reputation. The only situation which could mitigate the plight of Sikhs was that the boundary commission should so define the boundary that the maximum portion of the Sikhs should be included within one conglomerate."

*(The Tribune, July 16, 1947)*

While nothing could be now done at this last stage, the Boundary Commission was itself bound by the majority population of Muslim criteria on which Pakistan's foundation had been laid. It was before setting the issue that the Sikh case was required to be built up for independent state by exchange of the population. Now the matter had gone out of the hands of negotiations. The Sikh leaders now could not change the policy decisions already taken. They did issue a circular for a free sovereign state now when confronted with the partition problems, but now it could be of no value. Chief Secretary, Punjab, had sent a note on the Sikh plan :

"The partition plan envisaged, divides the Sikh strength and leaves them in a minority in both areas..... They have therefore, been driven back on reiterating their demands and perfecting the organization on their forces. Their endeavour in both directions is positive in character. The Sikhs are pinning their hopes upon the Boundary Commission and the Congress, but their latest circular issued by Shiromani Akali Dal shows that the confidence in the strength of the *Panth* has neither been undermined nor surrendered. The circular states that Pakistan means total death to the Sikh Panth and that the Sikhs are determined on a free sovereign state with Chenab and Jumna as its borders and it calls on all Sikhs to fight for their deal under the flag of Dal."

*(Note on Sikh Plan, p. 25, A History of the Sikhs, p. 273)*

Such a circular, distributed to Sikhs could be of no value. If Akalis sought a sovereign Sikh state, then they should have put their case to the British Government and pursued it constantly with facts and figures to get it conceded on convincing grounds and to negotiate it with all the parties concerned, so that it could be decided favourably before finalizing the independence act. But they refused to even talk to the British government when invited. Now the stage reached was the demarcation of the boundaries on the partition of Punjab which the Sikh leaders themselves demanded. No body could do much in this regard as the majority of Muslims was the criteria and it was a matter of record. It could only be a few words of sympathy for Sikhs which their well wishers could utter. The whole process of the independence of India was finalized creating a separate country for Muslims named Pakistan. The British transferred their powers in all respects to the people of India and the newly created Pakistan. Sikhs were divided in both countries but were forced out of Pakistan area to India.

On August 15, 1947, India achieved freedom under the Indian Independence Act of the British Parliament. India was partitioned and divided in two countries of India and Pakistan as demanded by Muslim League. Mountbatten became the first Governor General of free India, who had finally settled the Independence issue as the last Viceroy of British Empire. Punjab was bifurcated. West Punjab went to Pakistan from Wagah border in between Amritsar and Lahore, while the east Punjab remained in India. Sikhs remained in India but the Indian Congress leaders and their government refused to implement their agreement with Sikhs to make their homeland Punjab an autonomous state and the constitutional guarantees as promised. They had to suffer betrayal, discrimination and persecution in the Indian republic due to the failure of their leadership to obtain anything solid for their political power and rather having been caught in the net of clever and crafty Congress leaders.

## Sacrifices and contribution of Sikhs in Independence movement

Sikhs made sacrifices and contribution in all respects in the Indian Independence movement much more than all other Indians though Sikhs comprise only about two percent of Indian population. According to the statistical records :

- i) Out of 121 persons hanged to death, 93 were Sikhs.
- ii) Out of 2644 persons awarded the sentence for transportation of life, 2147 were Sikhs.
- iii) Out of 1300 persons killed at Jallianwala Bagh shootings, 799 were Sikhs.
- iv) Out of 42,000 persons of INA, 21,000 were Sikhs.
- v) Out of Kamagata Maru passengers killed, 22 were Sikhs. The Sikhs from India and other countries came to give sacrifices.

It shows that Sikhs gave voluntary sacrifices and contributions in the Indian Independence movement more than forty times of their population ratio in India as the Sikhs are courageous and dedicated to the cause they take over. Before the British during the struggle against Mughal tyrannical rule and Afghan invaders, it was the Sikhs alone, who uprooted the Mughals and Afghans and established their Sikh rule. They saved India from these foreign invaders when other Indian population had mostly submitted to them. Historians have recorded that otherwise their rule would have been prolonged. The Hindu scholar Daulat Ram Arya has commented in his book on Guru Gobind Singh; "if Sikhs had not been on the scene, most of Hindus would have been made circumcised Muslims in Mughal Rule." A price cannot be put on sacrifices of Sikhs, to throw out the foreign powers from India. The Sikh leaders appear to have blind faith in Indian leaders because of this entire history but in politics these matters count little. Sentimentalism and sincerity have no place in modern politics.

## Failure of Sikh leadership

Sikh leaders are responsible for not obtaining Sikh political power at the time of the granting of Independence to India by the British. They did not play their cards well. No doubt, Sikh leaders were not well-educated like the barristers of Indian National Congress and Muslim league and lacked the political experience in comparison to them, besides political manoeuvring and shrewdness, but they also failed to be consistent in their political aims and determination. They had blind faith in congress leaders and so were easily caught in their net. They even refused to have discussions with the British and Muslim league leaders on the only ground that Congress had given them the assurances for an autonomous Sikh state and constitutional guarantees for their self determined political status. They put their case of 'ifs and buts' to the cabinet commission without taking the one clearcut and consistent stand and when the commission wanted to have further talks, they did not avail of the opportunity. Similarly, they did not meet the Secretary of state when invited.

The Sikh leaders were kept by the congress leaders in their confidence and not because they wished to negotiate for the Sikh political power independently but more so under the impression that they are not in majority in any area of Punjab and the minority can have no claim to any area. They should have pleaded for the immigration of Sikhs from the areas being created as Pakistan on Muslim majority, visualizing the forced migration amidst bloodshed after independence which was what happened. Migration of Sikhs from Pakistan areas to east Punjab and of Muslims to Pakistan areas from east Punjab before partition of the country would make east Punjab a Sikh majority area for Sikh political power. It was a realistic and justified step in that surcharged violent communal atmosphere. The bloodshed of forced migration in the post independence era could have been avoided. This plan was hinted at by the cabinet mission and particularly by Sir Stafford Cripps and even earlier in 1942 by him when he met the Sikh leaders. Jinnah had supported this plan. It was the congress leaders who torpedoed it and kept the Sikh leaders exploited to constantly oppose the partition of the country to form Pakistan. So much so that on 3.3.1947, when Muslim league was asked to form govt in Punjab, Akali leaders met at Lahore assembly chamber. A crowd of Muslims outside raised provocative slogans for formation of Pakistan. At that time, Master Tara Singh, Akali Chief, came out, unleashed his sword and shouted :

"We shall lay down our lives but would not concede Pakistan."

Master Tara Singh was kept so much in ignorance by the congress leaders that he did not know that formation of Pakistan had long been decided by the British government and to which congress leaders themselves had conceded but he was still shouting emotional slogans against its formation.

Even if the Akali leaders were satisfied with the understanding with the congress

for the autonomous Sikh state as Sikh homeland in Punjab with constitutional guarantees to set up their own political self determination status and the constitution to be only that is acceptable to Sikhs, then these agreements should have been inserted in Indian Independence act. In the meeting at London on May 17, 1947 to give final touches to the Independence Act, Sikh representative Baldev Singh was present. He should have pressed for this to be a part of the Independence Act. Congress could not raise any objection to it as it was their offer to Sikhs. If it was left to be so done in the meeting, then with the meeting of Secretary of state, it should have been got inserted. It is not at all understandable as to why it was not done. If it had been so inserted in Independence Act, the Indian government could never refuse its implementation.

Congress leaders exploited Sikh leaders and always kept putting in their minds of the majority of population to be the only criteria and they were caught in such a net of Congress to refuse any discussion with any body, including the British who were to decide each and every matter relating to Indian Independence affairs and to enact the law for that purpose in spite of the offers by them for Sikh political power.

Sikhs had lost their just and genuine cause due to the utter failure of Sikh leadership which was not capable of dealing with the intricate issues at that crucial time particularly in comparison to the congress and Muslim league leadership. It lacked the political wisdom, shrewdness and manoeuvring besides self confidence, intelligence and political experiences. Master Tara Singh himself admitted in his autobiography that : "ignorance of Sikh leadership of the history and world politics is the reason of their failure to get Independent Sikh state."

Very important historical Sikh gurdwaras including Nankana Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib and Panja Sahib relating to Guru Nanak, Founder of Sikh religion and Dera Sahib Lahore relating to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and several others relating to other Sikh Gurus remained in Pakistan. The Sikh leaders should have got it inserted in Independence Act the special provisions for these gurdwaras to continue under the management of SGPC and for the visits by Sikhs to these historical Sikh shrines without any hindrance from the governments. of Pakistan and India. The absence of which made these historical Sikh gurdwaras to be foreign for the Sikhs and SGPC. It has been now made dependent upon these governments to permit or not the Sikhs' visit to these Gurdwaras, what to say of their management by Sikhs ! Sikh leadership was thus not farsighted.

## Master Tara Singh Admitted Ignorance of History and World Politics

Master Tara Singh himself stated at page 197 in his autobiography shedding the crocodile tears :

"The reason for our not pressing the demand for a Sikh state was our ignorance of history and world politics. None of us had known that a community could have a state of its own in spite of its being a minority in that area. Jewish state 'Israel' is one such recent example. I came to know about it in 1949 when I was in Almora Prison. I was informed there by some one that Russian News Paper *Pravada* had once commented that "In this world there are two communities who possess all the ingredients of being a nation but have no homeland of their own. These communities are Jews and the Sikhs". The Jews have got their homeland but the Sikhs have no homeland of their own so far. When Isreal came into existence, the Muslim population there was 600,000, Christians were 86, 000 while jews were only 46,000. But within a few years, the population of jews has grown up to 6,00,000 due to migration of jews from other countries. But for such ignorance, we might have obtained a Sikh state, particularly when the Britishers sympathised with us."

The comments about Sikh leadership of the two senior most officers, Viceroy General Lord Wavel and Sir Lepel Griffin are very distressing but these are their own bonafide assessments about them.

In the entry dated March 13, 1947 in Wavell's Journal, London, 1973 at page 427, it is recorded :

"The Sikhs who are in a position to negotiate on the spot are disunited and poorly led. Master Tara Singh is stupid and emotional."

In *Ranjit Singh* Oxford, 1946 at page 16, Sir Lepel Griffin recorded :

"In intellectual competition with Hindus and Muslims, he (the Sikh) was a cart horse pitted against thoroughbreds."

In 1942, Sir Bertrand Glancy, Governor of Punjab, commented :

"Master Tara Singh was sailing in two boats when he supported the Britishers in war efforts, but at the same time wooed the congress leaders who were against any such support.

These are the impressions of those highly placed persons in the British administration who were effective in the independence affairs dealings. At the crucial hour, an honest well educated and capable leadership was a must for calculating the correct assessments, with a shrewd bargaining capacity and not to be emotional and inactive as to leave their fate in the hands of the leaders of other parties with blind faith in them. It may not be any exaggeration or miscalculation to say that in the twentieth century, the incapable and politically unwise and inexpressed Sikh leadership, having little farsighted vision on the intricate issues involved, lost the Sikh political power at the time of Indian Independence; as it was destroyed in the nineteenth century by the ambitious rivalries of Sikh Sardars, the turning of Sikh democratic rule to selfish monarchy and bringing Dogras and Brahmins at the helm of Sikh affairs, to have easily become traitors.