

## SINGH SABHA-FROM ITS BIRTH TILL THE FORMATION OF S.G.P.C

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### ABSTRACT

*In Sikh religion many socio-religious movements has been carried in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but Singh Sabha movement was not only based on pure Sikh religion but also it was based on Democratic and Western thoughts. Many Sikh leaders put efforts for the growth of Sikh religion. Bhai Thakur Singh Sandhwalia and Bhai Gurmukh Singh were its main leaders. They had set up new principles for the Sikhs and reorganize the Sikh religion. They also worked for the Sikhs social, economic, political and educational upliftment. But many times they faced many conflicts amongst them. In 1925, it shifted to S.G.P.C.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Thakur Singh Sandhwalia, Gurmukh Singh, Lahore, Amritsar, Khalsa Diwan & S.P.G.C*

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### INTRODUCTION

Like Hindus, the work of religious & social awakening among the Sikhs had been carried on in the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century by numerous sects and organizations like *the Nirankaris, the Namdharis, the Radha Swami's* sect of Beas and the Sri Guru Singh Sabhas<sup>1</sup> of those organizations -the last was the most active organization which had a vital influence in the awakening of the Sikh community. The earlier *Sikh movements, Nirankaris and Namdharis*, which were organized in the Punjab, had failed to respond to the challenge of the time.<sup>21</sup> The Sikh Community itself was divided into two groups, those who considered Sikhism as a new faith on the independent entity and those who considered Sikhism as a branch of the Hindu Protestants still owing allegiance to the Hindu deities and conventions.<sup>3</sup> In these circumstances it was essential for the Sikhs to try to understand them and solve their problems in the light of the changed social reality. Before the Singh Sabha, the *Nirankaris* had done their works more in the Northern and North-Western districts of Punjab and the *Namdharis* in Sutlej area. But both the movements failed to face the challenges posed by the Christian missionaries. Sikhs were greatly alarmed by the conversions to Christianity. The first Sikh who was converted to Christianity was Daud Singh who, while on a visit to Cawnpore was baptized by Rev. W.N. Pervens. From the Society got the propagation of the Gospel. This conversion took place in 1853. Maharaja Dalip Singh who after the annexation of the Punjab was under the protection of the British Government was also converted to Christianity. The historical conversion of Maharaja Dalip Singh was a red signal for the Sikhs. Some of the other aristocratic Sikh families also adopted Christianity and the most well known amongst them was Raja Harnam Singh of Kapurthala. The Sikh youth, who were educated in the missionary schools, also come under the influence of Christianity. In 1873 four Sikh Students Attar Singh, Aya Singh, Santokh Singh and Sadhu Singh of the Mission High School, Amritsar come under the influence of Christian missionaries and were actually converted to Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S.C.Sharma, **The Singh Sabha Movement and Transformation of Sikh Society**, The Punjab Past and Present, Punjab University Patiala, April, 1987, P.25.

The British Government was also taking a keen interest in detailing Christianity because they had the faith the Sikh and *Pathan* are two such like communities who can again revolt at any time against the British in Punjab. The centre of Sikhs is *Majha* and that of the Pathans at *Pishore*. In case they acquire them then they would have accomplished their control on Punjab.<sup>5</sup> The British asked Pandit Shardha Ram Philauri to write Sikh history but he started writing wrongly about Sikh Gurus, which provoked the Sikhs.<sup>6</sup> It also provided the Sikhs with an opportunity to remove the evils prevailing among them.

The situation became very serious when four Sikh Students, as already reported, were forced to adopt Christianity. A meeting to muster forces for allround *Panthic* upliftment was concerned by Harsha Singh Dhupia and Thakur Singh Sandhawalia in July, 1873 in Amritsar at the *bunga of Majithian* in the Darbar Sahib.<sup>7</sup> This meeting was attended by large number of Sikhs of different ranks and it was decided to form an association of the Sikhs which should effectively unite the community and also guide it on the right path. The new association which came into being on July 28, 1873 was given the name of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Amritsar.<sup>8</sup> The inaugural meeting of the Singh Sabha was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> October on the Dussehra Day.

The site chosen for the meeting was *Manji Sahib*. The meeting was attended by the leading chiefs, theologians and the important dignitaries connected with the *Sikh Takhts* and the *Gurdwaras*.<sup>9</sup> The members of Singh Sabha had great faith in Sikh religion, like Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Thakur Singh Sandhawalia, Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala and Gyani Gian Singh of Amritsar.<sup>10</sup> All these people were drawn from the traditional Sikh Elite, noted for their loyalty towards the British and showed keen interest in the general welfare of the Sikh community.<sup>11</sup>

Khem Singh Bedi was the main leader of Singh Sabha Movement. He led his life educating the Sikhs. It was due to his efforts that many schools were established in various parts of Punjab. He spent a lot on education. He was in support of female education. He played an important role in Amritsar Singh Sabha.

Kanwar Bikram Singh of Kapurthala was an important figure of Amritsar Singh Sabha. He was one of the recipients of the mutiny medal for his distinguished services in crushing the revolt of 1857.<sup>12</sup> He was the master of classical music. He wanted Punjab to follow western style of education. He wanted the Sikh girls to be educated. At the time of his death, in 1887 he was elected as president of the Singh Sabha of Jalandhar.<sup>13</sup>

Thakur Singh Sandhawalia was the first president of Singh Sabha Amritsar. He played a crucial role in establishing Singh Sabha. In the beginning, Thakur Singh Sandhawalia was in the good books of the British.<sup>14</sup> But after his travel to England, the British government changed their perspective towards him because he was in favor of bringing Maharaja Dalip Singh back to India so that he can have control on Punjab once again. The government stood against him after this and he therefore had to leave Punjab.<sup>15</sup>

Gyani Gian Singh was the first secretary of Singh Sabha, Amritsar. His important role was in promoting Punjabi language and history. *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* and *Panth Parkash* are his celebrated works.

Besides stressing for reformation of the Sikh religion, these people were also desirous of its formation with modern Democratic System. These were the enlightened personalities of the *Samaj* who wanted to help Sikh religion to reach new heights of glory. They had kept new aims in their minds. The Objectives of the Singh Sabha Amritsar were:

- To restore Sikhism to its pristine purity.
- To edit and publish historical and religious books.
- To propagate current knowledge, using Punjabi language as their medium and to start magazines and newspapers in the same language.
- To reform and bring into the Sikh fold for those who had diverged from the right path through heresy, anti social activities or political bias.
- To interest the highly placed English men in and ensure their association with the educational Programme of the Singh Sabha.
- To cultivate loyalty to the Crown.<sup>16</sup>
- The main aim of the Singh Sabha movement in the prevailing conditions was to get recognition for the Sikhs as a separate community in politics and law.<sup>17</sup>

The main objective of Amritsar Singh Sabha was to uplift Sikhs on social and religious fronts with the help of the government. The membership of the Singh Sabha was extended to Sikhs residing all over the province. Certain qualifications were, however, laid down for the members. Each Member was required to be a Sikh having a firm belief in the teachings of the Gurus. He was also required to pay a monthly subscription, fixed from time to time, towards the funds of the Sabha. All the members were required to take a pledge of service and devotion to the community & legality to the Sabha. In the beginning the total number of the members of the Singh Sabha was ninety five. Most of the members in Amritsar Sabha were from upper classes.<sup>18</sup>

An Executive Committee of the Singh Sabha was constituted in which Thakur Singh Sandhwalia was the President & its first Secretary was Gyani Gian Singh. The overall control and management of the Singh Sabha was vested in the President who presided over all the meetings of the Sabha. The function of the Secretary was to draft a Schedule of the proceedings to be laid down in the meetings of the Singh Sabha<sup>19</sup> slowly and steadily after this its numbers started increasing. Besides the President & the Secretary, the new office bearers included Vice President, Assistant Secretary *Gyani* (Scholar in Sikh Scriptures), *Updeshak* (Preacher) Treasuries & Librarian<sup>20</sup>, the office bearers were elected for one year but they could be re-elected in case they win the confidence of the members of the Sabha.

The meetings of the Singh Sabha were also held. These were of two types: ordinary and emergency. Ordinary meetings were held regularly after some time, once a week or a fortnight to discuss day-to-day affairs. Emergency meetings were held on some important issues whose decision required immediate attention. These meetings used to be held especially during the main festivals. At its annual meeting (*Salana Jor-Mela*) usually held at the end of the year, the Sabha took stock of their activities & achievements during the year.<sup>21</sup> All the decisions of the Singh Sabha known as *Gurmata*s were made by the majority of Votes.<sup>22</sup>

The donations made by the members of the Singh Sabha were the only source of income. The Sabha kept a regular record of its income and expenditure.<sup>23</sup> The original fund, raised at the time of the forming of the Singh Sabha amounted to Rs. 503/-.<sup>24</sup> The Singh Sabha was connected with aristocracy due to which they were considered as the richest Sabha.

The Singh Sabha gained immediate popularity among the enlightened sections of the Sikh community. It must, however, be admitted that the appeal of the Singh Sabha, Amritsar was mainly confined to the urban areas. The orthodox Sikhs living in the Villages, failed to appreciate the new ideology. They made fun of the Singh Sabha leaders. The people from countryside began to criticize the Singh Sabha & ridiculed them by saying “*Jadon Muk Gaye Ghar Vicho daane, Ban Gaye Singh Sabhiye.*” (Meaning, that when the grain basket is empty, they become members of Singh Sabha) Some people ridiculed the Singh Sabha by calling it a “*Singh Safa,*”- the words signifying destruction.

The members of Singh Sabha hailed from aristocratic families due to which they never refrained from adopting partial attitude towards the lower strata of life. They sided with the Priests in discriminating against the low caste Sikhs, who were not allowed to visit the Gurdwaras.<sup>25</sup> They were not granted the right to make offerings.<sup>26</sup> They created great difference between the high & low due to which Amritsar Singh Sabha could not get the support of low caste Sikhs.

Baba Khem Singh Bedi tried to wield absolute control over the activities of the Sabha. Being a direct descendent of Guru Nanak, he aspired for reverences due to the descendent of a Guru and claimed some privileges.<sup>27</sup> He wanted a well furnished seat (*Gudela*) for himself even in the presence of the Holy Granth.<sup>28</sup> This was not linked by the Sikhs for a progressive outlook.<sup>29</sup> Thus some members expressed their disliking for the same and protested against his demand because they wanted equality for all. The Singh Sabha could not establish its hold with the same spirit along which it had to come with force. Its members could not get out of the mould of upper class due to which the Sikhs of good thoughts came out of it and they planned about forming a new Singh Sabha in Lahore.<sup>30</sup> Lahore was the capital of the then Punjab and was the main trade center due to which it was decided that Singh Sabha must be formed.

The enthusiasm with which the Singh Sabha came into existence did not last long, due to some vested interests aspiring for the fulfillment of their personal ambitions. The favoritism related to the caste was continued as before.<sup>31</sup> The radical among the Sikhs disassociated themselves from the activities of the Amritsar Singh Sabha to establish a separate Singh Sabha at Lahore. Lahore, the capital of the Punjab and being an important place was chosen as a site for the new Singh Sabha.<sup>32</sup>

Bhai Gurmukh Singh convened a meeting of prominent Sikhs on November 2, 1879 at the birth place of Guru Ram Dass at Lahore.<sup>33</sup> It was decided to constitute a body of progressive Sikhs to lay down the policies and programmes of the new Singh Sabha and organize their activities. Diwan Buta Singh was the elected President and Bhai Gurmukh Singh as the Secretary.<sup>34</sup> A resolution was passed that the Amritsar Singh Sabha had failed to protect the rights of the low-caste Sikhs. Under the guidance of its dynamic leaders, the Lahore Singh Sabha became more democratic in character and developed a wider and more comprehensive approach towards both the high and the low caste Sikhs and further extended its activities to both urban and rural areas of the Punjab. These leaders were strongly opposed to the institution of human worship and regarded all men as equal. They judged a man by his worth and not by his birth.<sup>35</sup>

Bhai Gurmukh Singh made an appeal to the Sikhs, of all castes and classes, to enlist themselves as volunteers for the newly formed Sabha and to carry their message to every corner of the Punjab.<sup>36</sup> It was decided to organize meetings and lectures, to raise subscriptions and to undertake preaching tours for the movements. Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Gyani Ditt Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh may truly be regarded as the chief Architects of The Lahore Singh Sabha.

It is believed that no work can be fulfilled without the wish of God but one still needs methods and procedures to execute the work. Bhai Gurmukh Singh is the one who saved the Sikh religion from moving towards its extinction.<sup>37</sup>

Bhai Gurumukh Singh (1849-1898) was born in a poor family at Kapurthala. His father was employed as a cook in the palace kitchen of the Raja of Kapurthala. He was aided by the royal family in securing good education. He joined as lecturer in Oriental College, Lahore. He played important part in the establishment of *Gurmukhi Akhbar* 1880, *Vidyarak Panjab* 1881, *Sudharak* 1885, *Khalsa Gazetteer* 1885.<sup>38</sup> He was also the founder of the Singh Sabha. Above all, Bhai Gurumukh Singh possessed a magnetic personality which attracted many admirers.<sup>39</sup> Under his guidance Gyani Ditt Singh also started working for the Sikh religion.<sup>40</sup>

Gyani Ditt Singh (1853-1901) a Ramdasia Sikh was one of the leading spirits of the Lahore Singh Sabha. He was the one who bring enlightenment in Sikhs for their religion.<sup>41</sup> He was born in Nandpur Kalaur, a village in Patiala. He was fond of education so he shifted to Ambala under the guidance of Sant Gurbaksh Singh Gulabdasiye. He soon attained the higher levels of education under the guidance of *Pandits, Gyanis, Sadhus and Sants*.<sup>42</sup> After that one of his friends Bhai Jawahar Singh who was a follower of Gulab Dass joined Arya Samaj at Lahore. With his help Ditt Singh cleared the exam for *Gyani* and started working at Oriental College. He gained a lot of knowledge about Arya Samaj from Bhai Jawahar Singh. He continued promoting about Arya Samaj even after Swami Dayanand left Punjab.<sup>43</sup>

He met Prof. Gurumukh Singh in Oriental College who gave him knowledge about Sikh religion. He was told about the worsening conditions prevalent in the Sikh religion. He entered back to the Sikh religion and started working for Singh Sabha. He spread the message of the Singh Sabha through press and platform. Through his lectures and writings, he condemned idolatry, caste system and the institution of *Gurudom*. He came into an open clash with Swami Dayanand for his Anti-Sikh Propaganda. Ditt Singh was a writer and a journalist of great reputation<sup>44</sup>. From 1886 till his death in 1901, he remained the editor of the *Khalsa Akhbar* Lahore. He rendered Yeoman's service for the Singh Sabha movement.<sup>45</sup>

Bhai Jawahar Singh (1853-1902) was very close to Gurumukh Singh and Gyani Ditt Singh. He was employed as a clerk in the North Western Railway manager's office. He was a Khatri Sikh belonging to Gujranwala. His father was a *Granthi* at Golden Temple. He honored Swami Dayanand at his arrival in Punjab and became a leading member of Arya Samaj at Lahore.<sup>46</sup> But after getting influenced from Bhai Gurumukh Singh he joined back the Sikh religion and started promoting it. He was the President of Khalsa College.<sup>47</sup> Bhai Jawahar Singh's services for the cause of the Singh Sabha were incomparably worthy.

The policy of the Lahore Sabha was mainly directed by Gurumukh Singh and Gyani Ditt Singh. After a series of discussions, the following program was put forth as the basis for the activities of the Singh Sabha:

- The activities of the Sabha should be directed to check the external influences and undesirable elements which have engulfed into Sikhs mindset. The Sabha will also undertake the aim to eradicate the social evils, which were hindering the progress of the Sikh community.
- The main objective of the Singh Sabha was to inculcate the love for Sikhism amongst the Sikh masses.
- The Sabha will give a true interpretation of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and define the principles of Sikh religion and put to an end the false doctrines.
- The Sabha resolved to publish the authentic texts and to demolish other books such as *Janam Sakhis* after making necessary corrections and amendments in order to propagate Sikh religion.

- To encourage the Punjabi language, Sabha resolved to publish magazines, papers, periodicals and tracts in the Punjabi language.
- The Sabha resolved to remain loyal to the government.
- The Sabha resolved not to discuss any matter against the Government.
- The Europeans and others interested in the well being of the Sikh community will be welcomed to become the members of the Singh Sabha.

Amritsar Singh Sabha had upper caste people, while Lahore Singh Sabha had general mass base and that touched the hearts of the general masses. The members of Lahore Singh Sabha went far & wide to propagate its principles and them became the spinal cord of Sikh religion. This movement could not become the mass movement without their support. They contacted Sikh Regiments who were of great source in strength and wanted to spread their message through them. They used to sing sacred hymns in the Singh Sabha meetings. In the beginning the Singh Sabha held their meetings in *Gurdwaras* but later on when the reformers antagonized the *Mahants* and the *Pujaris* due to some ideological differences, their entry into the *Gurdwaras* was restricted.<sup>48</sup> Then they raised *Gurdwaras* on their buildings. Their people were roaming in whole of the country like *Ragis*, *Granthis* and *Updeshaks* to hold Diwans and to encourage the Sikhs for enrolling them in the Singh Sabha. The Bhasaur Singh Sabha which was developed due to *Panch Khalsa Diwan Bhasaur* became successful.

It turned into a stronghold Sikh militancy under the leadership of Babu Teja Singh, known for his missionary zeal.<sup>49</sup> All its members believed in five K's. They were mostly enrolled from the middle and lower strata of the society and all of them were treated on an equal footing. Babu Teja Singh gave strict instructions to the members that no one was to be allowed to violate the democratic traditions of the Khalsa.<sup>50</sup> All the office-bearers of the Sabha were known as *Tahlis* (servants). The English terms, President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer were substituted by the corresponding Punjabi terms that are *Jathedar*, *Mit-Jathedar Sewak*, *Mit Sewak*, and *Bhandari*.<sup>51</sup>

The constitution of Singh Sabha was dependent upon the circumstances of its leaders. The Karachi Singh Sabha for instance, had an executive committee of fifteen members out of which six positions were reserved for *Sahajdhari Sikhs*.<sup>52</sup> The Singh Sabhas of Ferozepur and Taran Taran had female Members who were as active as their male counterparts. The Taran Taran Singh Sabha had a Special branch for its female members known as the *Istri Sat Sang Sabha*.<sup>53</sup> At this time Lahore Singh Sabha opened its branches in different parts of Punjab. The year of 1882 was a landmark in the history of the Singh Sabha movement because in this year Singh Sabha sprang up to several places such as Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Bannu, Kohat, Jalandar, Gujjarwala, Lyallpur, Patiala, Shimla, Jhelum, Ludhiana, Ambala, Multan, Jind, and Faridkot etc.<sup>54</sup> The Lahore Singh Sabha showed a new ray of light for all.

Bhai Gurmukh Singh and other leaders of Singh Sabha decided that differences between Amritsar Singh Sabha and Lahore Singh Sabha should be resolved and they should talk with each other by coming on a common platform. The efforts were made in this behest and on April 11, 1880, Joint Board called the *General Sabha* which was set up to guide and supervise the work of the two *Sabhas*. The *General Sabha* kept under the Executive Body, who was asked to hold its meeting after six months and asked to submit the report about their views but as their views did not match each other, this effort become unsuccessful.

In April, 1883, another attempt was made to revive the *General Sabha*. This resulted in the formation of the Khalsa Diwan with its headquarters at Amritsar.<sup>55</sup> At the time of its foundation, it had 36 or 37 Singh Sabhas and the Diwan was to guide and control all these Singh Sabhas. Baba Khem Singh Bedi became its President and Bhai Gurmukh Singh became its Chief Secretary. The Lt. Governor of the Punjab and Raja Bikram Singh of Faridkot became the Patrons of the Khalsa Diwan.<sup>56</sup> Baba Khem Singh Bedi suggested that its name shall be changed to Sikh Singh Sabha but this proposal was rejected but in spite of this at Rawalpindi and Sialkot where Khem Singh Bedi had great influence lost no time in changing their names to the Sikh Singh Sabhas. Bhai Gurmukh Singh and other members of his party raised opposition to it. In Annual meeting held in April, 1884, Bhai Gurmukh Singh put this issue before the Khalsa Diwan that it should not be accepted. At last the meeting came to an end. It was very difficult for Bhai Gurmukh Singh to put forth his view before the party at that time. At last it was negated.

Khalsa Diwan started their own work by amalgamating all the Singh Sabhas but it could not do any valuable work. The differences remained between them. While Amritsar group was dominated by slow-paced reformers who were conservative in true outlook the Lahore group was then constituted by the leaders who were radicals and believed in quick change.<sup>57</sup> Baba Bikram Singh wanted to take full control over the Diwan and Baba Khem Singh Bedi wanted his authority to be recognized as Supreme in all ecclesiastical matters but his desire could not be completed due to Bhai Gurmukh Singh & Bhai Ditt Singh. Bhai Gurmukh Singh opined that we should not make much difference between *Sehajdhari Sikhs* and *Khalsas* of Guru Gobind Singh. He wanted to give relaxation in 5 Symbols. He was keen to admit *Sehajdhari Sikhs* into the Singh Sabha.<sup>58</sup> The Lahore Singh Sabha was not ready to make any compromise with Hindus.

Another difference came into light when Bikram Singh of Faridkot made a commentary on the Holy Granth popularly known as the '*Faridkot Teeka*' prepared by Gyani Badan Singh Sekhvan. With the passage of time, the bitterness between the two reached a high pitch while the conservatives led by Baba Khem Singh Bedi were not ready to break off with the practices of Guru and untouchability. The Lahore group insisted upon the elimination of these non Sikh practices. Khem Singh's desire to be worshipped and revered like a Guru met with a stiff opposition from the Lahore leaders.<sup>59</sup> Khalsa Diwan could not remove social disparities. Those hailing from conservative Singh Sabhas were openly proclaiming that low-caste Sikhs cannot worship in Gurdwaras but on the other hand Bhai Gurmukh Singh and others were strongly opposing it that this discrimination should be abolished. Some high caste Sikhs had insulted Gurmukh Singh by naming him as '*Langri-Ka Putur*' (son of the Cook). Even Gyani Ditt Singh who was a Ramdasia Sikh also suffered humiliation at the hands of these hot-handed Sikhs.<sup>60</sup> One more reason for the discrimination that crept in them was when Bawa Nihal Singh wrote the book, "*Khurshia-i-Khalsa*." This book became controversial in which the annexation policy of Punjab Government and his lost kingdom were condemned. Bhai Gurmukh Singh asked to delete some points out of it but Bawa Nihal Singh, who had the support of Baba Khem Singh, refused to do so. Bhai Gurmukh Singh was asked to go out of Khalsa Diwan. A '*Hukamnama*' was also issued to this effect from Amritsar. Under such circumstances, Bhai Gurmukh Singh had no other alternative but to sever his connections with the Khalsa Diwan Amritsar.<sup>61</sup> In 1886, Bhai Gurmukh Singh and his supporters formed New Khalsa Diwan at Amritsar. With this the Singh Sabha Movement received a temporary setback due to a split in the Khalsa Diwan. Khalsa Diwan Amritsar suffered a great loss and was left with only three Sabhas at Amritsar, Rawalpindi and Faridkot. On the other hand the Lahore Khalsa Diwan enjoyed the support of the great majority of the Singh Sabhas.<sup>62</sup> Khalsa Diwan Amritsar elected Baba Khem Singh Bedi as its President and Bhai Avtar Singh Vihiria as its Secretary, which had only three Singh Sabhas. These were from rich families due to which they helped it monetarily. Raja Bikram Singh donated Rs 75, 000/- for construction of *Langar-Khana*. He also donated

Rs. 25, 000/- for electrification of its sacred premises.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, Lahore Diwan had such leaders who were more progressive. On the whole, it emerged as a true representative body of the Sikhs.<sup>64</sup> The members of Lahore Diwan were from common masses. They represented the hopes, desires and aspirations of the people.<sup>65</sup> They did many works to uplift the Sikh community. Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Gyani Ditt Singh, Bhai Mayya Singh, Attar Singh of Bhadaur and Bhai Jawahar Singh were the pioneers of the Lahore Diwan. Attar Singh Bahadur was its first President and<sup>66</sup> Bhai Gurmukh Singh was its Secretary. It was patronized by the Lt. Governor of the Punjab and the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Forces.<sup>67</sup> Diwan became very popular in a short time and attracted the cream of the Sikh Community.<sup>68</sup> They formed Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1892. From 1886 up to the formation of Chief Khalsa Diwan, in 1902 the Amritsar and Lahore Diwans were separate bodies. They both got published a separate literature, which was effected to uplift the Sikh religion.

Despite all this, the politics between the leaders, the work of reform marched ahead. The urge for progress and reform was responsible for the springing up of the Singh Sabha, all over the Punjab both in the urban and rural areas. During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Sikhs living in the other parts of India as well as in some foreign lands, such as Burma, Malaya, Singapore, & Hong Kong also came under the influence of the Singh Sabha movement. In a very short period of time almost every major city, town and village in the province came to have a local Singh Sabha. Many of these Singh Sabha assumed the name of Khalsa Diwan. Many new Sabhas became autonomous units and refused to owe allegiance to the present bodies then the Lahore and the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan, as a result the Lahore Diwan lost some of its earlier popularity. It received a further setback owing to the expiry of its dynamic and devoted members. Sardar Attar Singh died on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1896, Bhai Gurmukh Singh died on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1898 and Gyani Ditt Singh died on 6<sup>th</sup> September 1901. In the absence of any worthy successors the *Diwan* lost its popularity. The Sikhs now began to feel that for the preservation of their interests unity was the need of the hour.

The death of the main leaders formed vacuum which could not be filled. The leaders of the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan convened a meeting of prominent Sikhs from all over the province in November, 1901. The Lahore Party was also invited. A Resolution was unanimously adopted stressing the need of establishing a central body to look after the welfare of the Sikh Nation and to co-ordinate and control the activities of the numerous Singh Sabhas and the Khalsa Diwans which multiplied within a short period.<sup>69</sup> There was another factor which necessitated the founding of a Central Sikh organization: the growing political consciousness in the country led the Sikh leaders to believe that they could no longer afford to shun politics. They realized that they must unite under a common platform in order to safeguard the political rights of the Sikhs.<sup>70</sup>

The plan to establish a Central Sikh organization materialized with the founding of the Chief Khalsa Diwan on October 30, 1902.<sup>71</sup> Sunder Singh Majithia was elected its first Secretary and Bhai Arjan Singh Bagrian of Ludhiana district as its President<sup>72</sup>. With this the Sikhs again gathered themselves under a single platform and Singh Sabha entered a new phase. It heralded a new era of progress and reform.<sup>73</sup>

Chief Khasla Diwan was registered on July 9, 1904, with the Government. When it was constituted the number of Singh Sabhas, Khalsa Diwans and other Sikh societies was 39. Till 1920, their numbers increased to 105.<sup>74</sup> Its constitution was framed by Arjan Singh of Bagrian, Tarlochan Singh, Mehar Singh Chawla, Bachan Singh, Bhai Mohinder Singh, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh and Sunder Singh Majithia.<sup>75</sup> The Chief Diwan had five Committees: General Committee, Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Advisory Committee and Life Member Committee<sup>76</sup> which used to take care of various

types of works. The members of Chief Khalsa Diwan were progressive and enlightened section of the Sikh Community. They constituted the new aristocratic elite which had once again emerged as a strong power.<sup>77</sup> The Chief Khalsa Diwan emerged solely as a powerful body which started doing valuable works for Sikh Community. Their leaders collectively envisioned some aims and objectives, which were to be accomplished by them. They were as follows:

- To promote the spiritual, intellectual, moral, social, educational and economical welfare of the *Khalsa Panth*.
- To propagate the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as embodied in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.
- To propagate the teachings of *Gurbani* and to spread knowledge of Sikh history and other authentic writings.
- To safeguard the political rights of the Sikhs. To make constitutional efforts for their attainment according to the time and conditions.
- To represent them to the government.<sup>78</sup>

The first meeting of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar was held on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1902 and it elected Bhai Arjan Singh Bagarian as its President and Sardar Sunder Singh Majitha as its Secretary in addition to propagate the Sikh faith among the masses and giving the community a political entity of its own. It has done a great service in the field of education through its educational committee and Sikh educational conference holding its annual sessions at different places in the country. Sant Attar Singh of Mastuana and Bhai Vir Singh of Amritsar have been its leading lights.

Many contradictions also crept in Chief Khasla Diwan when Babu Teja Singh formed his separate '*Panch Khalsa Diwan*,' in 1906 at village Bhasaur, in Patiala. It then followed with the formation of *Panch Khalsa Diwan*, first *Khalsa Diwan* was formed at Nabha then at Rajgarh, then *Akali Diwan* at Taran Taran. Many other *Diwans* were formed at later stages like Central *Majha Khalsa Diwan*, *Khalsa Diwan Malaya*, *Burma* etc. In 1902, the meaning of '*Singh Sabha*' and "*Diwan*" became one.<sup>79</sup> Another organization which challenged the supremacy of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was the Central Khalsa Diwan established in 1909, at the outcome of *Majha*. On the other side of the Chenab, Jhelum, Rawalpindi, etc; Baba Gurbaksh Singh Bedi who was later appointed to the Punjab Legislative Council as a representative of the Sikh Community piloted the Sikh activities.<sup>80</sup> His group was known as the orthodox Sikh party.

With the awakening it brought about the Chief Khalsa Diwan among the Sikh masses where there was an urge for democratic control and management of the Sikh *Gurdwaras* or temples. They had, for over two hundred years, been controlled by Professional Priests who had become almost hereditary. To begin with some of the reformers occupied some of the *Gurdwara* at Sialkot and Amritsar by slow penetration. A committee for the management of *Gurdwaras* by the community was formed at Amritsar on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1920 under the name of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee*. This alarmed the old priests and *Mahant* Narayan Dass of *Nankana Shaib Janam Asthan* -the birth place of Guru Nanak which not only forced the transfer of control of his *Gurdwara* to the committee but also massacred in cold blood on 21 February, 1920. More than one hundred Sikhs volunteers called *Akalis*, had gone there to take possession of the *Gurdwara* and it was followed by clashes with the governments which stood for the vested interests. The passage of the *Gurdwara Act, 1925*, in the Punjab Legislative council, however finally solved the problem in favor of S.G.P.C. For improving the economic conditions of the Sikhs, a step was taken by the Chief Khalsa Diwan in, 1908 with the starting of Punjab and Sind Bank Ltd. at Amritsar.<sup>81</sup> The Chief Khalsa Diwan did not confine its attention to economic, social and religious problems of the community only, but it also tried to solve the political problems of the community as well.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

When Maharaja Dalip Singh shifted his religion to Christianity and four Sikh students were getting influenced with this, the leaders of Sikh community stopped them and this led to the formation of Singh Sabha in 1873 by Thakur Singh Saudawalia and Harsha Singh. The motive behind the foundation was revivalism of Sikh religion. It made the Sikhs aware of their great spiritual and cultural heritage of their being khalsa, the "pure". It revived fresh hopes and aroused in the Sikhs and feeling that they were meant for a much higher destiny.

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