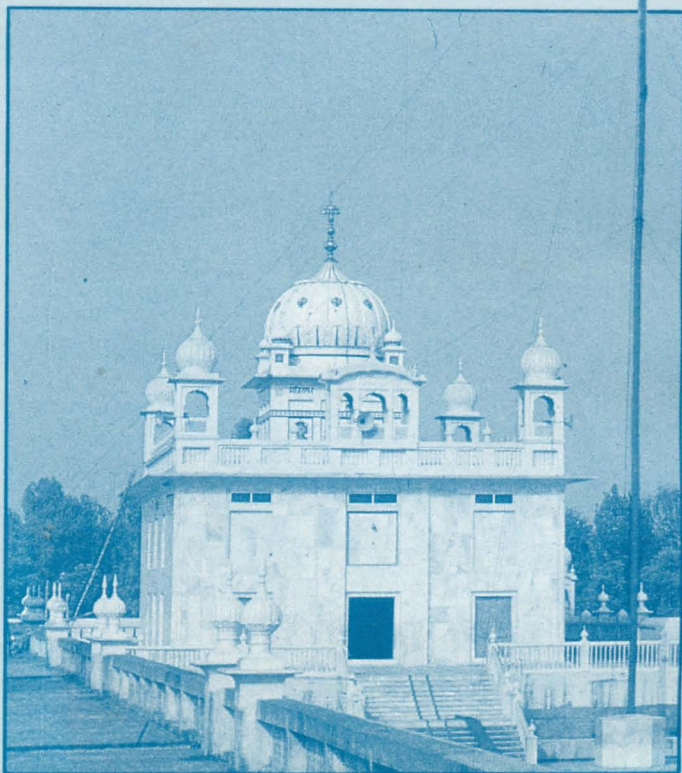




*The*  
**STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM  
OF  
RELIGIOUS WORSHIP IN  
JAITO**



**Sikh Itihas Research Board**  
**Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee**  
**Sri Amritsar.**

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**The Struggle for Freedom of  
Religious Worship at Jaito  
by S.G.P.C. Amritsar.**

*First Published* : 1924  
*Reprinted* : Nov. 1998

*Published by :*

Sikh Itihas Research Board (S.G.P.C) Sri Amritsar.

*Printed at:*

Golden Offset Press, Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib,  
Sri Amritsar.

# The Struggle For Freedom of Religious Worship in Jaito



## **PREFACE**

This book was written in April, 1924 and published in June, 1924. It is the most accurate and authentic detail of the Nabha/Jaito agitation.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has announced the release of 300 books on the occasion of the tricentenary of Khalsa. The present volume is one of those selected for the above project.

Jaito/Nabha agitation (1923-25) is a landmark not only in the history of the Gurdwara Reform Movement but also of Sikhism, the Punjab and the sub-continent. On February 21, 1924, the British administered State of Nabha massacred a very large number of Sikh men, women and children at Jaito for their "crime" of a peaceful march to assert their right to religious worship. Punjab, the Sikh Homeland, had already seen two massacres (April 13, 1919 at Amritsar and February 20, 1921 at Nanakana Sahib.) The British had already tested the Sikhs' resolve to fight for justice, freedom and Righteousness. In spite of this a mad-office Johnston carried on another massacre. This heinous act angered the international community. Per

chance the correspondent of the New York Times had witnessed most of the incident as he had accompanied the *Jatha* which had been fired at by the Royal Soldiers.

The present version had been written by those who were a part and parcel of the S. G. P. C., hence an authentic and official record. This book is very useful first hand source for the students of the Sikh history.

Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer

Director

Sikh Itihas Research Board

## FOREWORD

The Jaito struggle has had a career, beset with many ordeals and much martyrdom for the Sikhs. The details of the struggle have come up to public notice in press reports as they occurred from time to time. The attempt is made in the succeeding pages to piece them together in booklet form with a view to present a connected version capable of easy reference. In the following pages, only, revelations of first-hand authenticity have been included; nothing has been taken for granted; and the material published is drawn from the reports of actual sufferers or respectable eye-witnesses mainly of the moderate persuasion. The aim kept in view has been to eschew all tendency to advocacy one way or the other, and present the bare facts in their true sequence, leaving the reader to his own resources of judgement for the formation of independent opinion.

The booklet was written by the end of April this year, though due to a series of adverse circumstances, publication has been delayed all this period. As no additions have been made to the original version, the recent developments of Akali history beginning with

the arrest of the fifth and sixth Shahidi Jathas, and the march of the seventh, eighth and ninth, and leading up to the break-down of the Birdwood negotiations and the prosecution of the members of the first Shahidi Jatha have had necessarily to be excluded from this booklet. It brings its tale to a close with the start of the fifth Shahidi Jatha for the martyr-sector at Jaito. The contents cover a range of wide and vital purport including the genesis of the Nabha deposition; the Sikh objective to combat and defeat it; the transformation of the Nabha agitation into the fight for restoration of the Akhand Path at Jaito; its culmination in the massacre of the 21st February; the strict censorship of Jaito officials to prevent the trickling out of the news and the testimony of Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Zimand of the 'New York Times'; the unprecedented excitement amongst the public, followed by the clamour for a searching scrutiny; the farce of magisterial enquiry; the belated return to good sense and to the method of peaceful arrest: and finally, the succession one after another, of gallant bands of 500 Sikhs, marching to court arrest and hardships in the vindication of faith and freedom.

It is necessarily out of the question to depict to the finish a struggle that is still going on. For the purpose of publication, the thread of continuity must perforce be arbitrarily snapped somewhere, though each day goes on making history in the world of

unrelated events. But through all variations of potential suffering, prosecutions *en masse*, inhuman jail treatment and arbitrary executive impositions, enough has been indicated of the past to underline the essential impossibility of the Sikhs succumbing to terrorism or despair. Whatever the dangers and the difficulties, they will fight their way to the end of their goal, undeterred and undaunted into dismay. Indeed each new phase of repression has only quickened the impetus for fresh workers, until to-day the movement has transcended the limits of the Punjab and is the recipient of eager offers of personal service from the Sikhs of Patna, Sistan, Bengal and even Afghanistan.

The need for propaganda in the cause of Sikh reform is unlimited; but unfortunately, the means at the disposal are strictly limited. The S. G. P. C. therefore requests every reader of this booklet, to pass it from friend to friend after use, with a request for further circulation likewise. It also takes this opportunity of rendering its thanks to the Manager of "Swarajya", Madras, but for whose prompt assistance in the midst of innumerable other pre-occupations, this booklet could not have been so expeditiously printed and published.

25th June, 1924.

Secretary, SGPC,  
AMRITSAR.

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## BEFORE JAITO

The Gurdwara Reform Movement, otherwise known as Akali Movement, is a purely religious movement and has naturally commanded the sympathy and support of all right-minded men. But the Government views with suspicion the organisation and the rapid progress and development of this movement and has from the very start of the movement kept its iron-hand stretched out to check or stem this rising tide of Sikh Reform by all direct and indirect methods.

Through the negligence of the Government officials who were quite near *Nanakana Sahib* (the birth place of Guru Nanak Sahib) was enacted on 20th February 1921 the horrible tragedy in which about 200 perfectly non-violent Sikh pilgrims were burnt alive with kerosine oil or otherwise murdered in broad day light. This massacre gave a rude shock to the general apathy of the Sikh community and the brave Sikh masses shuddered with horror and rose as one man to sacrifice their lives in the noble work of purifying their holy shrines.

The Government did its best to place every hindrance in the work of the reform movement till at last the *keys of the Darbar Sahib*, Amritsar, were

snatched away in November 1921. Those who protested were flung into jails. After about 200 Sikhs had been imprisoned the Government restored the keys and released the prisoners.

The Government took it as a lowering of its prestige and hardly two months had elapsed when in *Spring of 1922* it started wholesale repression of these Sikhs. About 1700 black-turbaned Sikhs were arrested in a fortnight.

Later, in 1922, a batch of Sikhs going for the service of "*Guru-ka-Bagh*" shrine was forcibly stopped and subjected to heartless tortures. Every morning a party of 100 Sikh pilgrims began to leave for the shrine and the police with the preposterous object of scattering them by force, belaboured them with heavy sticks and butt-ends of bayonets till every single man fell down senseless. About 2,000 Sikhs were beaten in this manner but the Akali heroes never moved a finger even in self-defence. Tired of beating the Government began to arrest the batches of pilgrims and about 6,000 Sikhs were sent to the lock up.

"After the *Guru-ka-Bagh* affair, the atmosphere was cooling down and there was a good prospect of peace between the Government and the Sikhs. But the Government again plunged the Sikh community into a turmoil of agitation by *deposing the Maharaja of Nabha* in July 1923 on account of his sympathy with



the Gurdwara movement. Advantage was taken of the Patiala-Nabha dispute although both the states had in December 1922, almost come to a private understanding between themselves. The Sikh Community felt that this was a blow aimed at their organisation and a side-attack on the reform movement of which the S. G. P. C. (i.e., Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) is the custodian, and with one voice urged upon the Committee to take up the matter and get the wrong righted by all peaceful and legitimate means. The S. G. P. C. took up the matter but had, as yet, done nothing except publishing the true facts about the so-called abdication of the Maharaja and asking the Viceroy to refute those facts, when the Government started a new hunt of the Sikhs. The Government felt that its inability to controvert the facts given out by the 'S. G. P. C. had shaken the ground from underneath its feet, and so lost its head that instead of reasonably meeting the voice of protest began to suppress all expressions of sympathy even by the subjects of the exiled Maharaja. Sikhs were arrested for making speeches and taking out processions in sympathy with the Maharaja on the preposterous charge of disobeying that very Maharaja's standing orders.

## II

### **STRUGGLE BEGINS AT JAITO**

"When arrests were made at a Diwan held at Jaito in the Nabha State, the Sikhs assembled sat down to do

nothing else but to recite the Holy Granth night and day and pray for the Maharaja. But this also they were not allowed to do. The place of meeting and the Gurdwara were both blockaded and no food or water was allowed to go in. The Sikhs began to starve, and as they were obliged to ease themselves close to where they sat, insanitary conditions began to prevail and many fell sick. In this condition when the Akhand Path or the continuous reading of the Holy Granth became impossible outside the Gurdwara they asked the Sikhs in the Gurdwara to start the Akhand Path inside and they contented themselves with the ordinary reading of the Holy Granth. This was on the 14th September 1923. The officials who were determined not to allow even the Holy reading and praying for the Maharaja came with a military force and arrested the whole congregation assembled round the Holy Granth outside the Gurdwara. Then the armed soldiers in uniform were taken into the Gurdwara itself, where the Sikhs sat listening to the Akhand Path. The whole congregation, including the reciters and the attendants, were arrested and what was an unprecedented sacrilege, the Granthi actually reciting at the moment was caught hold of by his arms and dragged away and arrested. This interference with the sacred reading was a grave desecration according to Sikh religion. This interruption was even admitted by the Associated Press telegram published in the "Tribune" of September 19, 1923. Later on, when a storm of indignation burst

out in the Sikh community, the Nabha officials concerned in the sacrilege tried to explain it away by giving out that the reading was continued up to a finish. Even if this be accepted as true, it is no defence because the act of worship of that particular Sikh congregation was interrupted and improperly ended when the listeners and the reciters who had begun the ceremony were forcibly removed and the closing prayer which is an essential part of the ceremony was not made as they would have made it. The news of this desecration spread like wild fire and the very next morning a party of Sikhs gathered from the neighbourhood to go and restart the Akhand Path. The prohibition against freely visiting the Gurdwara had been enforced, according to official admission, from 31st August 1923, but from 14th September, the day of the desecration, it was made absolutely rigid. Sikh pilgrims from all quarters began to pour in to assert their religious right of freely visiting the Gurdwara and performing the Akhand Path and other acts of workshop."

(See "Gurdwara Reform Movement" by S. Kartar Singh.)

### III

## **JATHAS OF TWENTY-FIVE**

From 15th September 1923, Akali Jathas of 25 each have daily walked on foot to Jaito, after taking a pledge of non-violence in thought and deed before

Akal Takhat Sahib at Amritsar, which is the sacred throne and is the supreme centre of Sikh religious authority. The aim of these Jathas is (a) to resume the interrupted Akhand Path at the Gangsar Gurdwara, (b) to suffer in a meek and humble spirit all hardships and tortures inflicted on them by the proud officials for the sake of establishing the Sikhs' birthright of free congregation and free worship in all Sikh shrine. But all the callous Nabha authorities have not allowed them to proceed to the Gurdwara. They have arrested them; have kept them in custody for a few days, without any food, shelter or clothing, in the most insanitary surroundings; have sometimes severely beaten them and have afterwards removed them to a place about 300 miles away and there left them to their fate in a penniless condition. During these last seven months more than 5,000 pilgrims have shared this fate.

#### IV

### **THE FIRST SHAHIDI JATHA OF 500**

#### **THE JATHA STARTS WITH A PROCLAIMED OBJECT.**

All this sacrifice, however, failed to move the callous officials. In order to impress the Government and the public about the depth and sincerity of Sikh religious feeling by the intensity and vastness of Sikh suffering, it was decided that a Jatha of 500 Sikhs remaining perfectly non-violent should walk to Jaito to visit Gangsar and resume Akhand Path. Men

constituting the Jatha were drawn from all districts and professions including a number of meek Sadhus.

On 9th February 1924, the First *Shahidi Jatha* or the "Band of Martyrs" who had resolved to devote their lives in the cause of religious freedom, took a solemn pledge of restarting the interrupted Akhand Path at Gangsar, before the sacred throne of Akal Takht Sahib. The Jathedar or the religious superior of Akal Takht Sahib exhorted them to remain perfectly non-violent in thought and deed, in words that shall ring in Sikh ears for a long time :-

\*"Dear Kalgidhar Satguru our Father, We Thy children lay down our lives for Thee. The honour and prestige of the *Panth* lies in Thy hands. Brave and saintly souls, you will be beaten mercilessly with sticks. You will be shot dead with bullets. You will be thrown into dark and solitary cells. Your steadfastness will be tried by the most violent and inhuman physical and mental tortures. Keep yourselves perfectly non-violent. Your sole aim is to pay homage to the Gurdwara of Gangsar and resume the recitation of Akhand Path. From the moment of your departure from Akal Takht Sahib and on the way feed your body, mind, and soul on the life-giving words of the Guru and do no harbour ill-will against any person in thought, word and deed."

---

\*(See the declaration of orders to the *Shahidi Jatha* by the Jathedar, Akal Takht Sahib on 9th February 1924)

### THE JATHA ON ITS WAY

The Shahidi Jatha left Amritsar for Jaito on foot among the loving adieus of the Sikh Sangat. The Jatha evoked tremendous enthusiasm wherever it went. Morning and evening Diwans were arranged at all halting stations and the attendance of those Diwans sometimes rose to 25 or 30 thousand, while an eager concourse of Sikhs always marched along with the Jatha. Sikhs came from long distances to have the Darshan of the martyrs and went away deeply impressed with their noble spirit of love and sacrifice. Many made up their minds to witness the resumption of the Akhand Path at Jaito.

The Jatha halted at Bargari in the Faridkot territory on the evening of 20th February. At the conclusion of the morning Diwan of 21st, the Jatha and the Sangat took their meals at Bargari and left for Jaito at 12 noon. Jaito is six miles from Bargari.

Before the Jatha reached the boundary line, the State Officials had stopped the motor in which Dr. Kitchlew, Principal Gidwani and Mr. Zimand, the representative of the "New York Times" were travelling to Jaito, and showed them the order restricting admission into the Gurdwara to bands of 50. On remonstrance the Officials sent a messenger to the Administrator for further orders. They waited for a long time but heard nothing in reply from the

Administrator. The Orders restricting admission into the Gurdwara to bands of 50 at a time was meant, it seems, for the Jatha. But who has given the Administrator of Nabha the right to restrict the number of worshippers at a Sikh Temple to 50 ? And the bonafides of this offer may be judged from the fact that both before and after this offer, the daily batches of 25 pilgrims have been invariably prevented from entering the Gurdwara and have been arrested. Twenty-five is certainly less than fifty. And, again, why should 50 be allowed and not 500 or why should the Sikhs be prevented from sitting in their shrine in religious worship as long as they like ? Why should the Administrator of Nabha arrogate to himself the position of religious dictator of the Sikhs ?

#### **PREPARATIONS BY AUTHORITIES**

The State authorities had very cunningly narrowed the passage to the Gangsar Gurdwara and the fort at Jaito by barbed wire barrier on one side and a long row of about 200 chained bullock carts filled with thorny bushes and masses of barbed wire on the other side. Near the end of this passage, in the immediate vicinity of the Gurdwara of Gangsar, and behind some buildings, concealed from public gaze by its peculiar position, they had erected a special barbed wire enclosure to serve as a trap for the Shahidi Jatha. On the top of the bullock carts and behind them were

men from villages armed with heavy sticks, stationed in a triple row. The State Officials has recruited a large number of these men from the surrounding villages, one from each family on the the threat of confiscation of the property and turning out any family which did not send its representative, or whose representative did not beat the Akalis severely. The men were drunk and were prepared for their brutal work. Amongst them were a number of policemen from Jhelum and Attock Districts, who had to their credit a brilliant record of similar services rendered in connection with the Guru-ka-Bagh affair. A platoon of Nabha infantry had dug trenches and taken up its position on and near the sacred Eminence of Tibbi Sahib. Beyond Tibbi Sahib there was the camp of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners with the tent of Col. Minchin in the middle and in front of this camp were stationed two detachments of cavalry. Lewis guns were fixed at some places. (See map)

### **THE JATHA APPROACHES**

The Jatha approached near the position taken up by the officials and the military at the mound where the telephone pole was erected, near the beginning of the narrowed passage described above. Half of the Jatha was in front in rows of four, Guru Granth Sahib in the middle and the other half bringing up the rear. The Sikh Sangat walked on both flanks, in a calm and



devotional mood keeping well behind the palanquin of Guru Granth Sahib out of reverence. Among the Sangat there were many ladies, who were distributing food and water drink to the Sangat. They had no chhavis, spears or fire-arms with them.

### **ORDER FOR FIRING**

At this stage the Administrator with some officials accosted the Jatha and asked them to stop. He declared that he would order firing in case they did not comply. The Jatha had taken the pledge of visiting their sacred shrine and recognised no temporal authority in matters of religion. It continued to move but took a turn to the right, in the direction of Tibbi Sahib. Thereupon he gave his signal to open fire by waving a small flag without the slightest provocation or cause of alarm from the Sikhs.

### **THE FATE OF THE JATHA**

Then followed a scene unique in the history of the world for the calm restraint, the cool courage, and a remarkable capacity for suffering in a righteous cause, displayed by Sikh victims of official fury. The big procession of Sikh devotees including women and old men sang hymns of glory, and marched on with uplifted hands towards their shrine under a snow of bullets. Many of their comrades dropped dead or seriously

wounded. But not a single person wavered. Lifting the dead or the wounded they made straight for the sacred mound of Tibbi Sahib. Bullets poured upon them from all directions. Lewis gun was also fired. A bullet struck a baby carried in the arms of its mother and the poor child expired. The Sikh lady stepped aside, put the little thing gently on the ground, rejoined the Jatha and moved on with the Sangat. Another Sikh had his bowels thrown out by a bullet that struck him in the belly. He was heard muttering thanks with his last breath, "Glory to the Guru, Wahiguru. the Great Guru has accepted this impure body of mine for the service of His Faith." The Sikhs took great care to keep the palanquin of the Holy Granth in the middle. Two vollies were fired with a short interval between and the firing covered more than five minutes the interval being excluded. The Sangat entered the enclosure of Tibbi Sahib Gurdwara. Many went to the neighbouring fields to bring the dead or the wounded to the Gurdwara. Some ladies began to nurse their wounded brethren. The Sikhs succeeded in removing only a few of their dead or wounded brethren, for they were soon checked by the military who snatched away the bodies of Sikhs from their hands. Many of the wounded died for lack of attendance and water. The Sikhs paid their homage at the sacred shrine of Tibbi Sahib with their precious life blood and after depositing the dead and the wounded in the Gurdwara, the Shahidi Jatha

rounded the eminence of Tibbi Sahib and marched in the direction of Gangsar, but their progress was checked by a detachment of cavalry, which blocked the way. A squadron of cavalry rushed on the Sangat congregated about Tibbi Sahib, and the sowars chased the Sikh parties for miles scattering them in all directions. This relentless hunt of old men, children and women, resulted in heavy casualties and many were trampled under the hoofs of the horses. The Shahidi Jatha was next surrounded by the Cavalry, and a strong party of Chhachhi-policemen and country recruits excited by drink started beating the Jatha. Every member of the Jatha was surrounded by a group of 5 or 6 desperadoes who encouraged by the State Officials plied their sticks freely, beating the heroes of the Shahidi Jatha to senselessness, and tying them into tight bundles with strong ropes, huddled them into bullock carts to be transported to the barbed wire enclosure. From the enclosure they were subsequently removed in the fort.

The few Sikhs who were lingering in the vicinity of Tibbi Sahib, and some ladies 20 or 30 in number who were attending to the wounded, were outrageously beaten and arrested. A lady who was serving the wounded Sikhs was abused by the soldiers and ordered to leave the place. On her refusal she was rudely pushed down from the mound of Tibbi Sahib to a place 20 feet below. The State authorities neither

allowed the Sikhs to attend and give medical aid to the wounded, nor offered any assistance themselves before full 24 hours after the shooting; with the result that many precious lives were lost for lack of timely help and attendance. The wounded Sikhs thirsted for water which was brought from long distances. The medical party in charge of the Jatha was arrested and medicine and other necessary materials belonging to the Jatha were forcibly seized.

#### **HOW ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO KEEP THE WHOLE AFFAIR IN THE DARK.**

And in order to be free to give any version that they pleased the authorities took great precaution to prevent the transmission of reliable reports to the press. Principal Gidwani, Dr. Kitchlew, Mr. Zimand, correspondent of the "New York Times" were stopped at the boundary. When they heard bullets being fired Dr. Kitchlew and Principal Gidwani could no longer remain at a distance. They entered the State Territory and were arrested. Respectable gentlemen, members of the Legislative Assembly, like Raizada Hans Raj, Mr. Shanmukam Chetty, Members of the Legislative Council like Sardar Tara Singh, Vakil of Moga and Jamadar Pratap Singh were detained at the railway station under a close custody. Jamadar Pratap Singh states that the gentlemen detained at the railway station were not allowed to go even for answering calls of nature and the police packed

people off from Jaito by the first available train, regardless of their destinations. The Jamadar heard reports of firing which in his opinion continued for four or five minutes and two vollies were fired. After the firing, he saw a squadron of Cavalry galloping and after sometime charging the people in the distance. A photographer who was taking some photographs was severely lashed by an European officer who ordered some soldiers to turn him out of the State Territory. The photographer reports that the same officer mercilessly whipped a Sikh lady who did not get up from behind a bush at his orders.

### CASUALTIES

These precautions clearly prove that the authorities had made every effort to keep the scene of tragedy and in fact the Nabha territory quite inaccessible and therefore the exact number of casualties has not been ascertained. The S. G. P. C. has been so far able to ascertain more than 300 casualties including about 100 deaths. The Government has stated its ridiculously low estimate of 21 deaths and 33 wounded. The S. G. P. C. has proofs, and witnesses with first-hand knowledge would be forthcoming, to prove the falsity of Government figures before an independent enquiry. Twenty-two dead bodies were cremated near the fort with ten tins of kerosine oil. Again, the S. G. P. C. has the testimony

of respectable eye-witnesses regarding the fact that a large number of dead bodies packed in boxes, had been removed by train to some unknown destination. Cavalry people snatched away dead bodies from those conveying them to their villages, and chased the country-folk even to their villages to find out the dead and wounded that might have been transported there. The three doctors from Amritsar report that they saw 45 wounded at Jaito, 22 of whom were sent to Ferozepur in their presence. But they say that they were admitted to one of the camps only. Eleven wounded have since reached Amritsar. It was later on reported that the number of the wounded removed to Ferozepur has risen to 38. Out of these, 13 have been sent to the Indian Station Hospital Ferozepur Cantonment. From the bodies of these 13 Sikhs 16 bullets have been extracted. Of these, 5 are said to be Lewis gun bullets and the remaining eleven all of ordinary military rifles. One of the wounded Sikhs died on the way from Jaito to Ferozepur and another Bhai Banta Singh died while he was under operation at Ferozepur. Bhai Sohan Singh of the Shahidi Jatha had received a bullet in his chest and has since died at Ferozepur. Out of the total casualties a considerable number belongs to the Shahidi Jatha. Further reports show that deep pits had been dug, covered with straws and earth all round the Gurdwara of Tibbi Sahib and many people received serious injuries by falling into

these pits. They had also dug a trench near the entrance of Gurdwara Gangsar and had treacherously filled it with water and covered it up with straws and had stationed machine guns and soldiers in the Gurdwara itself. The number of people that were arrested at Jaito at this occasion was more than 700.

## V

### **MISLEADING OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE**

The Government issued a highly misleading communique on 22nd February, in order to white-wash the heartless doings of its agents at Jaito. The Shahidi Jatha is alleged to have advanced to Jaito, "screened by a body of some 6,000 Akalis armed with lathis, chhavis, spears and fire-arms." The Jatha was in fact marching in the following order : half of the Jatha was in the front, Guru Granth Sahib in the middle and the other half brought up the rear. The Sikh Sangat, moving on the flanks, was reverentially keeping itself behind Guru Granth Sahib. In his open letter to Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. S. Zimand, correspondent "The New York Times" who remained with the Jatha from February 20th 7 P.M. to 21st 2 P.M. tells us in what order were the Jatha and the Sangat proceeding. "The Jatha moved closely. The crowds were moving mostly in the rear and on the right of the Jatha. There were only a few people in the front. Five Nishan Sahibs were in the front and Guru Granth Sahib was in the middle of the

Jatha. The crowds were shouting Sat Sri Akal. The whole procession passed in front of me....." No man in the Jatha or the Sangat was carrying any chhavi, spear or fire-arm. The Jatha had been marching for twelve days through the British territory and not a word of its carrying fire-arms, chhavis, spears etc. appeared in any official communique or press. The Associated Press message published after the Jaito tragedy in the "Tribune" of February 24 has no reference to any fire-arms or other weapons being carried by the crowd. Again the statement of five respectable eye-witnesses published in the Tribune of February 28 strongly contradicts the allegation. Besides, Dr. Kitchlew, who along with Principal Gidwani and Mr. Zimand saw the Jatha at Bargari just before it left that place has after his release made the following remarks in his statement given to the Congress Akali Sahayak Bureau :-"We had absolutely satisfied ourselves that the Jatha and the Sangat had no fire-arms or chhavis (except Kirpans) or any other instruments other than ordinary lathis." They again met the Jatha when it approached Jaito where their motor was stopped. And the Doctor goes on to say "Even at this time we did not see any fire-arms with the men of the Jatha or other people in the crowd." In the open letter to which reference has already been made, Mr. Zimand writes, "On the morning of February 21st, we went out to see the village (Bargari).



I saw a number of policemen and officers near the camp. I went back to the place where the Jatha was encamped and looked very carefully over the whole body of men, the Jatha and the Sangat assembled there. *I had the opportunity of observing practically the entire Jatha and the crowds accompanying the Jatha. I did not see anyone carrying fire-arms or any other weapons.*" Again at the Nabha boundary "the whole procession," says Mr. Zimand, "passed in front of me, and again I saw no one carrying fire-arms or weapons of any kind. I saw the usual Kirpan and about 500 in the crowd had sticks. The latter were of the usual sort carried by farmers." He concludes his letter with the remarks : "The letter is rather a long one and there might be some danger of the main point being obscured. I want therefore to repeat again that I observed carefully the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha from February 20th, 7 P.M. to February 21st 2 P.M. when they entered Nabha territory and that to the best of my knowledge *the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha were not armed, and behaved in a peaceful and orderly manner.*" It may be remembered that no fire-arm or any other weapon was captured from the Jatha in spite of the fact that more than 700 men were arrested. The special representative of the "Tribue," whom the Punjab Government permitted to go to Jaito on the 14th March, the day of the arrival of the second Shahidi Jatha, says in his despatch

published in his paper in the issue of March 21 :- "*The capture of arms* : Several swords, 4 or 5 steel lances, 3 or 4 gandasas, one wooden rake, and a heap of stout branches of trees were shown to us as having been captured from men arrested out of the Sangat. (Here let me point out that the Administrator agreed that there was no violence by the Jatha men.) Out of these the swords usually pass for Kirpans now. The gandasas and the rake in my opinion clearly indicate that the men carrying them were toiling with these instruments on their land and joined the Jatha when it passed thither desirous of witnessing how it was received. As I have said before no fire-arms were captured.

The allegation that "the Akalis pursued the Administrator" is quite false. The A. P. I. in its press message dated February 21, says : "The State officers followed by sowars kept the Jatha in check and ordered the Jatha to retire, failing which it was pointed out firing will be opened. The Jatha is stated to have stood unwavered and was determined to advance. The eye-witness then describes that at this stage the authorities opened fire and there were some casualties from both among the crowd and the Jatha." There is not the least reference in this statement to the fact that the Akalis pursued the Administrator or his party. Again in the reports published in different vernacular newspapers supplied to them by their special representatives who were eye-witnesses, there is no

mention at all of any such incident or of the allegation that the Akalis carried fire-arms, chhavis or other weapons.

It is altogether false and highly outrageous on the part of the Government to say that the Akalis opened fire. Even the Magistrate appointed by the Government to hold an enquiry into the incidents of 21st February has tacitly admitted at least so much in his report that the Akalis did not open the fire first. The A. P. I. message as quoted above, is quite clear on the point, and contains not the least hint of fire being opened by the Akalis. The reports in the vernacular press emphatically contradict this allegation. Mr. Zimand, in the letter from which we have quoted above, says, "At 2.45 p.m. the first firing started. The firing was in regular volley and there were no desultory shots. This lasted for fully 2 minutes, i.e. from 2.45 to 2.47 p.m. At 2.55 p.m. I heard the second firing. It sounded like the first. It lasted till 2.58 p.m. That was all the firing I heard. None after, none before." This means in plain English that there was no firing from the crowd.

The statement of five witnesses published in the "Tribune" dated February 28, strongly repudiates such a charge against the Akalis. Several eye-witnesses met Pandit M. M. Malviya while he went to Lahore immediately after the occurrence, i.e. on February 23, and all of them swore before him, that there had been no firing on the part of the Akalis. The same statement

is emphatically repeated by Sardar Gulab Singh M. L. A. who characterises the statement in the official communique as absolutely false and says that a sufficient number of respectable witnesses will be forthcoming to expose this statement if an independent enquiry is held. The special representative of the "Tribune" whose despatch published in the issue of March 21st. is already quoted, says, in the same despatch :-

#### **NO FIRING BY THE SANGAT :**

This obviously is the most material point. While almost all the State Officials, whom I had occasion to meet, (although some of them admitted that they were not present on the scene of the occurrence) maintained that firing was actually resorted to by the Sangat before the military opened fire; about twelve men, land-owning cultivators, shopkeepers, employees etc. belonging to the town or otherwise putting up there and who were present there on the scene of the tragedy, swore before me that they saw no shots being fired by the Sangat. It was not an easy task to persuade them to speak out what they believed to be the truth. I cannot do better than give a translation of almost the very words of a typical reply which I got from about half a dozen men separately when I broached the subject with them. "Why ask me at all?" each one of them said, "Whatever I would tell you would be untrue." It then required some minutes, persuasion and a promise not to disclose

their names on my part to embolden them to let me know whatever they believed to be the truth. One of them did not even then go beyond making the indirect statement. "All that I could see was the letting off of some crackers by some people in the Sangat." It is significant in this connection that no fire-arms were captured."

The Government of India mentions that a nameless "Nabha villager received a wound." As there was no firing from the Jatha or the Sangat it may be that the said villager received the wound by the firing from the official side. The allegation in the Punjab Government Communique of 3rd March that shots were fired at eight British officers is quite groundless and the Government would not have omitted to mention the fact in the first communique or during the Assembly debate of February 26th when directly questioned whether any body had been injured.

Again the Delhi communique mentions that the Akalis later on "increased fire" and "delivered a determined attack." It has been shown above that the Akalis were carrying no fire-arms and not a single one has been captured by the authorities. Assuming for the sake of argument that they had fire-arms, is it not absurd to say that "the determined attack and increased fire" resulted in no casualties, especially when we remember that many of the Sikhs who were fired upon were retired soldiers and military officers? The

despatch of the special representative of the "Tribune," published in the issue of March 21 is worthy of consideration in this connection. It runs as follows :-

### **ORGANISED ATTACK BY THE SANGAT**

From the description of the "onslaught" by the Sangat which the Administrator gave in the presence of all of us, I do not think there is any justification for saying that there was an "organised" attack on the authorities. Even if it is taken for granted that two individuals approached the Administrator and some other officers in two different places in a menacing attitude and this is all that was described as an overt act (excepting of course the assertion about firing)-this at best indicates the misguided zeal of two separate individuals who paid with their lives for their deed. The crowd admittedly numbered about 12 to 15 thousands. With organisation and ammunitions as firing on their part is persistently asserted by the official side--it is well nigh impossible to imagine how a crowd, "organised" be it remembered which far out-numbered the few hundreds of the military at the disposal of the Administrator, could have been overpowered within the short duration of six minutes, which the Administrator, on the strength of the statement of Col. Gregsons's stenographer, says was the total time occupied by the firing. I leave it here to the judgement of the readers versed in military tactics. In the course

of the debate in the Legislative Assembly on February 26 the Home Member stated that there was no casualty on the official side because the firing from the crowd might be inaccurate. He would have us believe that so many people purposely carried fire-arms with them without actually knowing how to shoot."

The Secretary of State in his statement in the House of Lords on February 26 said in connection with Jaito incident "a crowd of 6,000 opened fire on the police." Obviously this was based on the information supplied to his Lordship by the Government of India. But never was more extravagant statement made by a man, in such high authority as the Secretary of State is. This is the first time that any one has said that a whole crowd of 6,000 men opened fire. This shows how coloured statements and perverted facts are supplied to the Imperial Government.

The Government communique states, that the Jatha itself was not fired on and no member of it was injured. The statement is totally false. Firing from Tibbi Sahib was particularly aimed at the Shahidi Jatha. The rifles and Lewis gun fired indiscriminately and many of the casualties belong to the Shahidi Jatha. Five wounded from among the Sahidi Jatha reached Amritsar and have been under treatment in Shri Guru Ram Das Hospital. Several members of the Shahidi Jatha have been under treatment in the Ferozepur Hospital. From the bodies of some of the wounded Lewis gun bullets

have been extracted.

The Government states that medical assistance was properly rendered to the wounded, whereas the fact is that the doctors accompanying the Jatha were harshly treated and not allowed to attend the wounded. Captain Mool Singh M. B. B. S. was not allowed to enter Jaito for medical aid. He wired to the Viceroy for permission but received no reply. Dr. Khan Chand Dev, Secretary, National Medical College, Lahore, sent a telegram to the Administrator, Nabha, asking permission for 12 ambulance men to enter Jaito to attend the wounded but he also received no reply. When, after the shooting, Dr. Kitchlew and Principal Gidwani went in their car towards the scene of tragedy they found the wounded scattered in the fields and one of the doctors accompanying the Jatha complaining that the wounded were not being attended to. The five respectable eye-witnesses whose statement has been published in the "Tribune" dated February 28 state that the ladies attending the wounded who lay scattered in the fields were harshly treated and prevented from looking after the wounded. In fact, no medical assistance was given for full 24 hours after the shooting when the two I. M. S. doctors arrived. The S. G. P. C. has sufficient proofs to establish that ladies were maltreated and arrested.

As regards Guru Granth Sahib, it was in the middle of the Shahidi Jatha at the time of the firing and beating.



No regard was at all paid to its sacred presence at that time.

The Punjab Government Communique dated 3rd March contradicts the fact that a child in the arms of its mother was shot by the official firing. The S. G. P. C. has the testimony of eye-witnesses to prove the truth of its statement, and the special representative of the "Tribune", from whose second despatch we have already quoted, says that eye-witnesses have deposed before him that they did not see the corpse of the child being cremated along with other dead bodies of the Jatha whom they had seen dying in the arms of its mother as the result of the firing of the military.

If an independent enquiry is conducted it can be easily established that Lewis gun was fired. Some of the bullets taken out from the wounds of some Akalis at Ferozepur Hospital and Guru Ram Das Hospital, Amritsar, are admitted to be Lewis gun bullets. Moreover a few military employees at Jaito deposed, though after much reluctance, before a press representative and some other responsible people, also learned at Jaito that Lewis gun has been fired and that if the range had been properly fixed the casualties would have been much higher.

# **Mr. S. ZIMAND'S TESTIMONY.**

## **HIS LETTER TO GANDHI**

*C/o BROWN SHIPLEY & CO.,  
122-123, Pall Mall,  
London, 9-7-24.*

To Mahatma Gandhi, Andheri, Bombay Presidency.

**Dear Mr. Gandhi,-** On the eve of my departure from India I want to tell you again how fortunate I consider myself to have had the opportunity of visiting your land. I want to use this opportunity of thanking through you, your innumerable friends and countrymen for their gracious hospitality, unfailing courtesy and generous help they have rendered to me during my whole stay in India.

At my interview with you at Juhu-Bombay, you asked me a few questions about the occurrences at Jaito on February 21st of this year. I feel that in my anxiety to find out your views on the different political and social problems, I monopolised the long time which you kindly gave me and neglected to give a coherent description of what actually occurred at Jaito. I shall therefore try to tell you now as truthfully as I know about the incident at Jaito. I am especially anxious to send you my version of the incident because my name has repeatedly been mentioned in this connection by the press.

On the morning of February 20th I arrived in Amritsar. According to my previous arrangements I was to leave on the morning of the next day for

Peshawar. A few hours after my arrival I decided to proceed to Jaito. I started from Amritsar by motor with Mr. Gidwani, Dr. Kitchlew and a Sikh gentleman whose name I cannot recall at present. We motored the whole day and after dusk we reached Bargari village where the Jatha was encamped. It was in Faridkot State territory.

After evening meal in a tent which was put at our disposal, I visited the different tents where the Jatha was resting. All was very peaceful and orderly. I went back to my tent at about 10 p.m. I walked out again. I noticed that a religious service was being held and that about 2,000 villagers (from near-by places and also from Bargari village) were listening to the recitation of the Sikh scripture. I passed the night together with Mr. Gidwani and Dr. Kitchlew. These two gentlemen were with me all the time. They did not address the crowd and as I followed them step by step, I can say that they held no conferences whatever with the Jatha. All three of us retired at the same time.

On the morning of February 21st, we went out to see the village. I saw a number of policemen and officers near the camp. I went back to the place where the Jatha and Sangat, assembled there. *I had the opportunity of observing practically the entire Jatha and the crowds accompanying the Jatha. I did not see any one carrying firearms or any other weapons.*

The recitation of what the Sikhs call "Asi-Di-Var" was over a little after 9 a.m. No speeches were delivered. By 11 O'clock the Jatha and Sangat took their morning meals at the nearby Gurdwara. About the same time I took another look around the open place where the Jatha was encamped and went into the interior of the village. Near the open space groups of good-humoured people were amusing themselves.

About twelve noon the Jatha started for Jaito. I suggested to Mr. Gidwani and Dr. Kitchlew that we might proceed in our motor ahead of the procession. First we walked for a mile and the car went ahead. On the way I noticed crowds of people waiting for the Jatha with refreshments and others were clearing the roads from branches and leaves. We entered the motor again and drove for nearly two miles. I again asked that the car be stopped so that I may again observe the Jatha in their marching order and also those who were accompanying the Jatha.

I would estimate the crowd following the Jatha at about 7,000; men and women of all ages and children. Those following the Jatha and the people who were waiting for the arrival of the Jatha were shouting "Sat Sri Akal." There was no element of disturbance anywhere.

As soon as the Jatha got near we got into the car again and drove ahead near the Nabha Frontier. As yet

none of us had entered the Nabha State. At the frontier there were a number of uniformed officers and one in plain clothes on horse back. One of them approached and asked us to stop the car. This request was immediately complied with. Then the officer handed over to Dr. Kitchlew a paper which Dr. Kitchlew read. It was an order from the Administrator for the Jatha. Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Gidwani said that the paper was not meant for them because they did not belong to the Jatha. I stood up in the car and said : "I am here merely as an observer." The officer in plain clothes asked my name and galloped towards Jaito. That was the last I saw of him.

While there had been no direct order stopping any of us from entering, I said that I should await the answer of the authorities thinking all the time that the officer who had galloped towards Nabha would bring back some word.

At 1.50 p.m. the Jatha passed into the Nabha State. No official presented to them the paper from the Administrator which was handed over to Dr. Kitchlew. In fact by this time there were no officials at the Frontier. The Jatha moved closely. The crowds were moving mostly in the rear and on the right of the Jatha. There were only a few people in front. Five Nishan Sahibs were in front and Guru Granth Sahib was in the middle of the Jatha. The crowds were shouting "Sat Sri Akal." *The whole procession passed in front of me*

and again I saw no one carrying fire-arms or weapons of any kind. I saw the usual Sikh Kirpan and about 500 in the crowd had sticks. The latter were of the usual sort carried by farmers.

We waited for some time on the Nabha frontier and then Mr. Gidwani sent a joint note to the Administrator asking him if we might proceed to Jaito. No answer came to this note.

"At 2.25 p.m. the first firing started. The firing was in regular volley and there were no desultory shots." This lasted for fully two minutes, i.e. from 2.45 to 2.47 p.m. At 2.55 p.m. I heard the second firing. It sounded like the first. It lasted till 2.58 p.m. That was all the firing I heard, none after and none before.

A short time after the second firing a young chap brought the news that there were many deaths and casualties and said that no arrangements had been made to take care of the wounded. It was at this juncture that Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Gidwani decided to motor to Jaito in order that they might take care of the wounded. Upto this time Mr. Gidwani had been saying to me that he would not enter the Nabha State without permission from the authorities. Only after the bad news came of the wounded left uncared for he felt that it was his duty to go to help to make adequate arrangements. I am convinced that had it not been for the news which aroused his concern for the wounded

people Mr. Gidwani would not have entered the State.

I did not enter Nabha territory because while there was yet no order stopping me from entering I was waiting to hear what the authorities had to say.

At about 3.30 p.m. a mounted officer who told me that his name was Sardar Fateh Singh of Faridkot, accompanied by six or seven policemen approached me at the boundary line of the Nabha and Faridkot territory where I was waiting. Sardar Fateh Singh enquired my name and asked me "whether I still intended to enter Jaito." I replied that I wanted to enter Jaito and waited to hear from the authorities.

He replied that I "was ordered to leave the State territory at once."

"But," said I, "I have not entered Nabha territory at all."

"You are asked." said he in reply "to leave both Faridkot and Nabha territory at once."

I then told Mr. Fateh Singh that I was waiting for the car.

"That is just it," said he, "I did not want to let you wait indefinitely because the car will not return."

I was then led by the officer in the direction of the Jaito railway station. We had walked only a few steps when I sighted the motor in which I had come. I said that I preferred to go back by car. The officer assented to this and asked me to sign a paper saying

that I was leaving the State Territory at once. This I did.

I asked the Sardar if he would tell me who was responsible for the order. He gave me no direct reply to this question.

"But," said he, "If you want to explain your position you had better write a letter to Colonel Minchin, Agent of the Governor-General for the Punjab States." I wrote the letter on the spot and handed it over to him.

In connection with this letter I read in a statement printed in the "Bombay Chronicle" of March 28th that the administrator of Nabha told Dr. Kitchlew "that Mr. Zimand had apologised." What I did in the very hurriedly written letter was to explain my position, and I ended up with the words : "if in my ignorance I had committed any offence I wish to apologise." The authorities knew very well that I had committed no offence and that this last phrase was a mere sign of courtesy. If there were to be any apology, the apology should have come from the other side. But it never came.

Before I departed, my chauffeur said to the Sardar that he had in the car Dr. Kitchlew's luggage and asked if he (the Sardar) would be good enough to have it handed over to Dr. Kitchlew, because the latter had not with him. The Sardar turned and said to me : "I



am sorry; I cannot take back with me Dr. Kitchlew's luggage."

In connection with this incident a Punjab Government Press communique issued from Lahore on March 3rd to contradict certain false (*sic*) statements with regard to the Jaito affair said that Dr. Kitchlew's luggage was accidentally carried off in the car in which he and Mr. Gidwani had arrived and which took Mr. Zimand back to Amritsar (quoted in the "Leader of Allahabad" March 5th, 1924.)

A few days later, while visiting Lahore I received the following note from the Senior Assistant Superintendent of Police, Lahore.

25-2-24-4 p.m.

"Would you be good enough to proceed to Nabha State and report to the Administrator who requires your evidence in the enquiry of the recent affairs at Nabha. For any further particulars would you ring up either Mr. Clarke As. S. Police No. 588 or Mr. S. S. S. Police No. 375.

(Signed) SENIOR,  
A. S. Police."

As I did not go to Nabha State, the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, Mr. Emerson asked me to testify before him concerning this and I did so under oath and the salient points mentioned in this letter are to be found in the testimony before the Deputy

Commissioner, Lahore.

I have tried to tell you in this letter, as truthfully as I can, the history of the Jaito incident. The letter is rather a long one and there might be some danger of the main points being obscured. I want therefore to repeat again that I observed carefully the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha from February 20th 7 p.m. till February 21st 2 p.m. when they entered Nabha territory and that to the best of my knowledge *the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha were not armed and behaved in a peaceful and orderly manner.*

Again I want to tell you how sad I feel to leave India and how much I rejoice that I had an occasion of meeting you and being here.

With best wishes,

Yours faithfully,

S. ZIMAND.

Below is given the "Tribune's" comment on this statement :-

#### **Mr. ZIMAND'S TESTIMONY**

If there was one man in India at the time of the Jaito incident whose testimony in regard to it was of the greatest possible value, that man was Mr. Zimand, the American journalist who accompanied the Jatha to Jaito. The reason is obvious. Here was an absolutely independent and impartial man, who was singularly free from bias, who had accompanied the Jatha only

for the purpose of finding out the truth, and who had absolutely no interest either in suppressing or perverting it. It was their consciousness of this fact that made so many newspaper representatives try to obtain from Mr. Zimand a statement on the subject on the very morrow of the occurrence, but all such attempts failed, because Mr. Zimand had definitely made up his mind not to take part in any newspaper controversy, while he was in India. Even Mr. Gandhi does not appear to have succeeded in eliciting a full statement from Mr. Zimand when the latter saw him at Juhu shortly before his departure. The secret which had been so well kept during Mr. Zimand's stay in India was revealed to a public which had almost ceased to expect it on the eve of his departure. And it is well that Mr. Zimand thus parted with his secret. His statement is clearly of such a kind that without it the knowledge of the public as to this most sensational incident would have remained incomplete and the serious divergence between the official and unofficial versions would have had absolutely no chance of being settled. It is just the weight that was needed to turn the scale definitely and decisively in favour of one side and against the other.

Need we say which of the two sides to the controversy has been a gainer by the publication of Mr. Zimand's statement? Even a cursory perusal of the statement can leave no doubt on the point. On every single point the verdict of this impartial and absolutely

trustworthy witness is completely in favour of the non-official version and against the official version. The most important of these points, of course, that on the determination of which the justifiability or otherwise of the drastic official action in this case wholly depends, was whether either the Jatha or the crowd was armed. And on this point Mr. Zimand's evidence is absolutely conclusive. Again and again, during the progress of the Jatha, he had stopped his car just for the purpose of finding out whether it was in any sense armed. In every case he had come to the same conclusion. That conclusion is thus stated by him at the end of his letter :—"I observed carefully the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha from February 20th 7 p.m., till February 21st 2 p.m. when they entered Nabha territory, and to the best of my knowledge the Jatha and the crowds following the Jatha were not armed and behaved in a peaceful and orderly manner." Unless, therefore, it is assumed that some mysterious agency had supplied fire-arms to the Jatha and the crowds after they had entered the Nabha territory, the story of the possession and use of fire-arms by them has absolutely no legs to stand upon. If the Government of India imagine that after such a statement by such a man any disinterested person, whether in India or elsewhere, will attach any importance to *ex-parte* official statements about the possession and use of fire-arms by the crowd, it is welcome to its delusion. So far as the public is

concerned, Mr. Zimand's statement coming on the heels of that of Dr. Kitchlew is literally the last word on the subject.

No less important is Mr. Zimand's testimony as to the attitude of Principal Gidwani. Mr. Zimand makes it perfectly clear that so far from entering the Nabha State in defiance of any order Mr. Gidwani had waited long enough for the return of the man who, after serving a wrong order upon him and Dr. Kitchlew had apparently gone to bring fresh orders, that during all that time he had been saying to Mr. Zimand that he would not enter the Nabha territory without the permission of the authorities and lastly that it was only after the bad news came of wounded persons being left uncared for that he felt it his duty to go to help to make adequate arrangements. His action, therefore, had absolutely no element of defiance or even resistance in it, but was purely humanitarian; and yet it is for this act, involving if at all, only a technical breach of an utterly indefensible executive order, that he has not only been sent to prison for 2½ years but is according to reports being treated as an ordinary felon. We can only hope the matter will receive the immediate attention of the higher authorities, and particularly His Excellency the Viceroy who has told us times out of number that he has come out to India to do justice. If that word has not lost its ancient meaning, Mr. Gidwani should be forthwith released.

Among other points emphasised by Mr. Zimand

are (1) that he had been with Dr. Kitchlew and Mr. Gidwani all through the journey, and that they did not at any stage address the crowd and held no conferences with the crowd; (2) that the crowd itself was perfectly orderly and that there was no disturbance anywhere; (3) that no order was served upon the Jatha prior to their entry into Nabha State, the order that was apparently intended for them having been actually served on a wrong party; (4) that the statement in the official "communique" that Dr. Kitchlew's luggage was accidentally carried off in the car in which he and Mr. Gidwani had arrived was both incorrect and misleading, the truth being that an officer of the Nabha State had deliberately refused to take back with him Dr. Kitchlew's luggage when asked to do so; and (5) that there were two firings, not one, that the firing in each case was in regular volley and there were no desultory shots and that there was no firing either before or after these, which means in plain English that there was no firing from the crowd. The last point emphasised in the statement was about Mr. Zimand personally. It had been said that Mr. Zimand had apologised to the Nabha authorities. It would have been strange, indeed, if he had, for as pointed out by himself, "if there was to be an apology, the apology should have come from the other side." What he actually did in his hurried letter to the Agent of the Governor-General was only to explain his position, the words with which his letter ended, namely, "if in

my ignorance I have committed any offence, I wish to apologise," being nothing more than "a sign of courtesy." That such words should have been interpreted as an actual apology only shows the frame of mind into which officials in Nabha had worked themselves. Altogether Mr. Zimand's Open Letter is a document of the greatest interest and importance, and is the final justification of the public in India in refusing to accept the official statements at their face value and in demanding an independent and impartial enquiry into a most deplorable affair.

\* \* \* \*

In the end of the report published by the Enquiry Committee appointed by the *Congress Committee*, the Secretary says :--

"On the evidence before me and on the published facts of the case I can only conclude :--(1) That the Jatha remained perfectly non-violent to the end; (2) that the crowd was unarmed except for lathis and was never aggressive; it certainly had no fire-arms. (3) There was no justification whatever for the action of the Administrator and the fire even if it had been opened only as a precautionary measure, was carried on for an unnecessary length of time."

## VI

### THE MAGISTERIAL ENQUIRY

In view of the unanimous expression of the Non-Official opinion that the official communique is

incorrect and unsatisfactory one would expect that the proposal of an independent enquiry would be most welcome to the Government if it were taking its stand on true facts. But unfortunately this is not the case. The Government pursuing its white-washing policy, chose to order one of its Subordinate Magistrates to conduct the enquiry. In the beginning of the report the Magistrate remarks :—

"That a batch of about 25 Akalis is being daily arrested by the Nabha State authorities at Jaito on their way to the Gurdwara to resume Akhand Path. They are usually non-violent in their character. But the declared object of the Shahidi Jatha, as its name implies, was a different one. It was to enter the Gurdwara and to resume Akhand Path at all costs and not to sheepishly surrender themselves like other Akalis to be arrested on their way to the Gurdwara and even if they were once turned out they would again and again come, and in the attempt they would even go the extent of losing their lives. So the object of the Jatha was unusually strong and a different one. At least it was obvious enough that marked distinction did really exist." The enquiring Magistrate is not an authority on the point of the objective of the Jatha and therefore has no right to impute motives. The object of the Jatha was declared by the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib in unequivocal words at the time of the departure of the Jatha from the Takht. He said :—"Keep yourselves perfectly non-violent. Your sole aim is to pay homage to the



Gurdwara at Gangsar and resume the recitation of Akhand Path. From the moment of your departure from Akal Takht Sahib and on the way, feed your body, mind, and soul on the life-giving words of the Guru and do not harbour till against any person in thought, word, or deed." As will be seen there is no suggestion in the orders to the Jatha that their conduct this time would be anything otherwise than non-violent. The fact that those pilgrims had pledged to dedicate the whole of their lives to the purpose of restarting the interrupted Akhand Path and if not allowed to do so on their first attempt they would be going there again and again till the end of their lives unless they succeeded, does not prove that they were going to be violent. They had dedicated their lives for the purpose of restarting Akhand Path. They were *Shahids*—Martyrs.

Again there is the allegation in his report that the mob followed the Jatha at the instance of the Jathedar. Dr. Kitchlew in the course of his statement to the Congress Akali Sahayak Bureau says :—"Just before the Jatha entered the Nabha State territory, we saw the Jathedar addressing the outsiders who were accompanying the Jatha. On enquiring we were told that the Jathedar was giving his final instructions to his men to keep non-violent, and the crowd to keep behind if they wanted to come at all." Again, the time-honoured old custom of the Sikh Langar (Free Kitchen) is that anybody of whatever caste or creed can take food there. The Magistrate holds the fact of

the Sangat dining at the Langar as an invitation to them to join with the Jatha. This is preposterous.

The following editorial note has appeared in the 'Tribune' on the report of the Special Magistrate. The 'Tribune' is well-known for its moderate tone and restrained language.

### **A USELESS ENQUIRY**

If the object of the authorities in instituting an enquiry through Mr. Balwant Singh, P. C. S., into the recent deplorable incident at Jaito was to satisfy the public of either the correctness of the official version of that incident or the justifiability of the official action, we have no hesitation in saying, after a careful perusal of the report of the enquiry, that in that object they have entirely failed. In the first place a purely official enquiry by an officer of Government is the very last thing that can satisfy any reasonable person in a matter of this kind. Secondly, this particular enquiry appears, on the face of it, to have been of the usual white-washing kind. In every part of the report there is a visible attempt not to say one word which might involve the slightest reflection upon any official, from the Administrator downwards, who had anything to do with the affair. On most of the important points connected with or arising out of the affair the report is, in fact, only an amplification of the official statement first made through a communique and subsequently

repeated by the Home Member in the Assembly. Thirdly the report throws little or no light on the points left obscure by the official statements. These were, first, how it was that, if the mob had fire-arms, not a single one of these arms could be captured by the police and the military, and secondly how it happened, if there was so much firing on the side of the mob, that there was no casualty on the other side. On the first of these points the report is entirely silent. On the second all that it does is to repeat the statement about a Nabha villager having received a shot, and to add that "one bullet passed through the turban of one Hazura Singh, another passed through a door of a cattle shed belonging to a resident of Jaito, and several others passed by various British officers." All these persons, we are told, were behind the firing party, and the conclusion is drawn from that alleged fact that it is highly improbable that "these shots came from any other side than the Akalis." But is it not, to say the least of it, equally improbable that in every single case the shots should have struck or narrowly missed striking men behind the firing party, and not any one in the firing party itself? The explanation, given by Sir Malcolm Hailey in the Assembly, that the firing must have been very inaccurate, is scarcely convincing. Is it easy to believe that men should have deliberately taken guns with them on such an occasion not one of whom was fairly accurate marksman?

But if the report does not serve the purpose of

the authorities, there are at least three points on which it goes against them, though the officer himself does not seem to be conscious of the fact. The first and most important of these points is as to who began the firing. It will be remembered that the original official statement definitely said that it was the crowd or rather some one among them who first opened fire. This is what it said:—"The warning given by the administrator was utterly disregarded by the Akalis who hotly pursued the Administrator and his party. At this point a Nabha villager received a wound from a bullet fired by the Akalis. The Administrator gave order to fire three rounds of buckshot at the leaders who were within a few yards." Compare with this the finding of Mr. Balwant Singh. In the first place it does not say anywhere that the Akalis were the first to open fire or that the Administrator gave order to fire only after the Akalis had used their fire-arms and inflicted a wound upon a Nabha villager. Secondly, it tries to evade the issue by saying that it does not matter much who began the firing. Most people will consider that the omission in the one case and the evasion in the other are just as damaging as an actual admission. The second point is as to the number of guns or other fire-arms which the crowd had in their possession. On this point two definite statements were officially made. One was the statement in the official *communique* that at a particular point "the Akalis increased their fire and delivered a determined attack led by a mounted Akali

who gave orders in English to his comrades to charge." The other was the even more extravagant statement of Lord Olivier in the House of Lords that "a crowd of 6,000 men opened fire on the Police." The report of Mr. Balwant Singh gives the lie direct to the last statement and throws considerable doubt on the correctness or rather the implication of the first. "The evidence given before me," he writes "that the number of guns with the Akalis ranged from 5 to 10 or 12 does not seem to be convincing. For the purpose of this enquiry, however, I think it is not necessary for me to determine the exact number of guns the Akalis possessed or used. \* \* \* After giving a thoughtful consideration to this I am of the opinion that they had a few guns, and they used them all right at the time." The difference between a crowd of 6,000 persons opening fire" and the crowd in question "having a few guns and using them all right" is somewhat serious. The third point is as to whether firing was resorted to only once or twice. On this point the official *communique* was not quite clear, but the Associated Press which first stated that fire was opened twice by the State forces lost no time in contradicting that statement by saying that "it was understood that there was firing only once." It is not easy to believe that the agency would have been in such a hurry to contradict a statement made by itself on the basis of the evidence of eye-witnesses, if it had not in the meantime received information to the contrary from official sources.

Here, again, the finding in the report supports the unofficial version. "Even after this short burst of fire", it says, "the mob showed no signs of retiring. They swerved on to their right, and made a dash towards Tibbi Sahib. The situation being grave and critical once more, Mr. J. Wilson Johnston had to order the State platoon to fire, which was accordingly done."

A determined attempt is made in the report, as was, of course, only to be expected from its general tenor, to show that the firing was justified. But this question of the justifiability or otherwise of the firing, in our opinion, turns decisively on an answer to the other question, whether the crowd had fire-arms and were using them. The second question not being yet answered in a manner that could be considered even fairly satisfactory by any reasonable person, the public must be permitted to adhere to its original opinion regarding the first. To say that a large crowd accompanied the Jatha, or even that the crowd was unruly and inclined to be violent, would not prove the necessity for firing. That necessity would not, indeed, be established even if it were shown that the crowd had other arms, including "cudgels from trees," and not fire-arms. It could not, or at any rate ought not to have, been difficult for the authorities, who had been forewarned of the approach of the Jatha with the crowd, to assemble sufficient forces at the place to manage and disperse such a crowd without resort to

firing. Nor, lastly, are we at all convinced by anything we have read or heard so far that either the Jatha or the crowd would have done any harm to anyone if they had been permitted to go their own way without interference on the part of the authorities. Indeed it has always seemed fairly clear to us that no crowd would have accompanied the Jatha at all had it not been for the expectation of sensational developments at Jaito, and there is nothing in Mr. Balwant Singh's report to lead us to alter that opinion."

Besides S. Tara Singh, Vakil, M. L. C. of Moga Tehsil, District Ferozepur, has raised the following legal objections about the magisterial enquiry in his letter to 'The Tribune', dated March 16.

(1) A Judge who has personally witnessed the whole or a sufficient part of an incident cannot and ought not to try the case himself.

I am confident that Mr. Balwant Singh can't deny that he accompanied the Jatha from Zira to Mudki and witnessed the whole proceedings and the general conduct of both the Jatha and the spectators and submitted his daily reports to Lt. Col. J. C. Coldstream, the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur. I dare say that at none of the 4 halting stations of Zira, Talwandi Bhai, Kot Karor and Mudki where he was present he entertained or made any complaint against the rowdiness of either the Jatha or the spectators. Nor is he said to have reported that any man was carrying

fire-arms. If I mistake not he praised the disciplined self-control of the Jatha.

(2) A judge can't import his own knowledge into his judgement. If he does so the judgement becomes vicious and therefore *ultra vires*. But Mr. Balwant Singh has, in fact done so. I refer my readers to lines 9 and 10 of the paragraph under head "Why firing was opened" on page 2 column 4 of the "Tribune dated March 14th, 1924" The officers who reasoned with the Jatha at Talwandi Bhai are no body else but Mr. Balwant Singh, the enquiring Magistrate himself. He was the head of that official party. His one proof for justifying the opening of fire is his reasoning with the Jatha at Talwandi Bhai and their refusal to listen to him. Is it not importing his own knowledge and justifying the innocence of the accused on the strength of the Magistrate's own knowledge, say evidence ?

(3) A subordinate cannot and ought not to sit in judgement of his superiors' conduct. If he does so his judgement cannot be frank and open and cannot inspire public confidence. I may here submit for my readers' information that Lt. Col. J. C. Coldstream is the Deputy-Commissioner of Ferozepur and Lt. Col. E. I. Gregson the Superintendent of Police where the enquiring Magistrate is serving as an E. A. C. and L. Izzat Rai of Faridkot was before his transfer to Faridkot recently an E. A. C. under both Col. Coldstream and Mr. J. Wilson Johnston when the latter



was at Ferozepur as D. C. This amounts to saying that one subordinate is enquiring into the guilt or innocence of his previous superior with the help of his present superior and co-servant as his witnesses.

(4) In the enquiry the Sikh community was the complainant and Mr. J. Wilson Johnston, the administrator of Nabha, and his co-helpers were on the defence. Thus mere perusal of this official enquiry will show that the findings are mainly based on the evidence of the very persons who are on their trial. It is mainly the statements of those who are directly or indirectly charged with this onslaught that the Sardar is relying upon. He is justifying the action of the defendants on their own statements without calling upon the prosecution to put their case before him, nay in their absence. The Magistrate in his hurry and over-anxiety has white-washed the whole affair and has not cared to summon even a few of those thousands of eye-witnesses, who, he says, were present at the time of this ghastly occurrence. The Magistrate was appointed by the supporters of those whose conduct was on trial and against the declared wishes of the Sikh community and the public at large. He has dismissed the case by taking and relying upon the defendants, statements and without calling upon the aggrieved party. This is briefly the legal aspect of his Enquiry."

## VII

### **UNPRECEDENTED EXCITEMENT : UNANIMOUS DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENT ENQUIRY**

The Jaito firing has caused the greatest sensation in the country and the Sikh community in particular is deeply stirred over it. A wave of utter disgust has spread all over the country followed by unanimous condemnation of the Government action.

Sardar Gulab Singh M.L.A. sent on 23rd February the following telegram to the Viceroy :—"An unprecedented excitement prevails among Sikhs in the Punjab on Jaito massacre of defenceless non-violent Akalis. Unless immediate steps are taken to soothe high feeling, by punishing the guilty, situation may become more serious."

According to the Amritsar correspondent of the Civil and Military Gazette Lahore, 'the happenings at Jaito have aroused a storm of indignation amongst the Sikhs and the excitement took the form of half a dozen of public meetings within a few hours after the receipt of the news. The same was the case throughout the country. Public meetings were held at Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Karachi, Madras in fact all over the country attended by very large audiences, addressed by popular leaders like Maulanas Mohammad Ali and Shoukat Ali, Mr. C. R. Das, Pandit Moti Lal Nehru, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and eminent members of legislatures,

expressing their abhorrence at the Jaito tragedy and calling upon the Government to institute a non-official enquiry into the firing. In the Azamgarh political Conference, the President, Maulana Mohammad Ali read out the telegram containing the Jaito news with great feeling. He was greatly moved and did not wish to speak in the excitement. The entire audience stood up in honour of the Akalis and passed a resolution expressing deep sympathy with them in the hour of their trial at Jaito and pledging to stand by them in every way to the last. All the other work of the Conference was postponed and the meeting adjourned till next day.

On 25th February, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya in the Legislative Assembly moved the adjournment of the House to discuss the occurrences of the 21st February at Jaito which had resulted in the death of a large number of His Majesty's subjects. The Home Member objected to the adjournment on the plea that the occurrences took place in an Indian State territory, and the motion was disallowed. In vain did Pandit Malaviya point out that he was not going to discuss the question relating to the administration of the affairs of an Indian State and that he wished to confine his proposition specifically to the incidents at Jaito, and that he did not want to go to the question of the deposition of the Maharaja of Nabha. And in vain did Diwan Rangachariar, the Deputy President of the Assembly say that in view of the seriousness of the

situation the rule should at once be modified and he was at a loss to see how it could be the intention of the rule that such a serious question could not be discussed.

Sardars Jodh Singh and Narain Singh M.L.C's both separately moved on 25th February, the adjournment of the business of the Punjab Council to discuss the situation created in the British Punjab by the shooting of a large number of Akalis (British subjects of the Punjab) at Jaito on 21st February. The President of the Legislative Council was assured that not a sentence would be spoken about the occurrence itself or anything affecting the relations of the Government with the Nabha State. Still the motion was disallowed. And when the President announced his decision, more than 30 members—Hindus, Mohammadans and Sikhs rose in their places simultaneously and said, "We protest." Later on the members of the Punjab Council met outside the Council Chamber and unanimously adopted resolutions regretting the loss of lives, expressing the opinion that the official communique was unsatisfactory and strongly urging the appointment of an Enquiry Committee commanding public confidence.

Forty-two members of the Legislative Assembly addressed a joint letter to the Viceroy urging the appointment of a non-official Enquiry Committee.

Sardar Jodh Singh M.L.C. sent the following telegram to the Secretary of State for India :—

Sikh members, Punjab Legislative Council,

appreciate your remarks about Sikh community and sympathy with their objective of Gurdwara reform. Had Local Authorities evinced similar sympathies and acted with foresight there would have been no Sikh trouble. Gurdwara Act passed in 1922 merely provided enquiry Board with temporary control of contested shrines. Sikhs want permanent control through representative committee elected by themselves. Hence, Act passed in teeth of opposition by Sikh and Hindu members remains dead letter. You are hopelessly misinformed in saying that reason for non-acceptance of the Act was that the Sikh movement was captured by political agitators. Strongly resent your characterising Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, central elected body for control of Sikh shrines, as revolutionary body. The whole community feels insulted. The Committee has all along pressed for law that would secure purpose admitted by you and has always been prepared to work such a law if passed. Government itself recognised this body as representative of Sikhs in Gurdwara Reform and further gave it statutory recognition in Gurdwara Act passed by it. Government has also publicly recognised the services of this community in assisting in maintaining peace at Amritsar during Hindu-Muslim riots at Amritsar in April last. To characterise such a body revolutionary is pure fiction. We have already challenged the truth of official version about firing at Jaito and demanded an independent enquiry. Position

of Sikhs about Nabha is simple and clear. Abdication is not voluntary as alleged by Government. Sikhs want observance of treaty right and fair treatment towards all Sikh princes. Either convince them of voluntariness of abdication or justice or right the wrong. Jathas going to Jaito merely to vindicate right of unrestricted worship; if granted that trouble is sure to cease. The exemption of Kirpan or sword religious symbol from all restrictions under Arms Act is another important religious demand. In our opinion repression will not and cannot serve the purpose. On the other hand, it would widen gulf. Removal of grievances alone will pacify the community."

Sardars Gulab Singh and Kartar Singh, the elected members of the Sikh community, sent the following telegram on 11th March to the Secretary of State regarding the Sikh situation :—

"As elected Sikh representatives (of the) Legislative Assembly we beg (to) invite your Lordship's attention (to the) growing acuteness (of the) Sikh situation. (The) Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee Amritsar (which is) elected (on) universal suffrage, (is) purely religious (and is) recognised by Government as such (has been) unjustly declared unlawful. Since (the) Akhand Path (continuous recitation of Holy Granth Sahib) at Gurdwara Jaitu (was) interrupted (on the) 14th September, batches (of) 25 Sikh pilgrims solemnly pledged non-violent (who have) daily sought (to) reach Gurdwara with (the)

declared object (of) restarting (and) completing (the) recitation, (have been) turned back forcibly. 500 pilgrims sought (to) reach Gurdwara Jaito (on) 21st February under (the) vow and with (the) object aforesaid. (They) bore no arms, nor attacked police or troops posted to prevent entry (to the) Gurdwara. Information supplied (to) your Lordship that (a) band (of) six thousand opened fire on police and troops (is totally incorrect) Government statement (in the) Assembly Debate (of) 26th February (says that) one villager (was) wounded. As there was no firing by (the) Jatha or crowd (it) may be (that the) villager (was) wounded by Government firing. (The) Punjab Government communique (dated) 3rd March (that) shots were fired at eight British Officers (is) groundless. Otherwise Government would not have omitted mentioning (it) in (its) first communique or (the) Assembly debate (of) 26th February when directly questioned whether anybody had been injured. Your Lordship (is) probably aware (that the) Nabha Administration refused permission (to) two members (of the) Assembly, two members (of the) Punjab Council, Professor Gidwani, Dr. Kitchlew, Mr. Zimand, correspondent of the "New York Times" who went (to) Jaito to witness happenings there. (The) Home Member objected (to the) motion (of) adjournment (in the) Assembly (and this) prevented discussion (about the) Jaito tragedy. According (to) official statement (in) Assembly fourteen (were) killed

(and) 34 wounded by Government firing, of whom five subsequently died. Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee estimates (the) number (of) casualties so far ascertained above 300 including 90 deaths. So many deaths necessitate immediate investigation. Ten days ago 42 members (of the) Assembly jointly sent (a) letter (to the) Government (of) India urging (the) immediate appointment (of an) independent Enquiry Committee. (The) members (of) Punjab Council moved similar adjournment. (The) motion (being) disallowed forty members met outside the Council (and) adopted (a) resolution urging immediate Enquiry Committee, commanding public confidence. (But the) Government (has) appointed no (such) committee. (The) public (is) deeply pained (and) disappointed. Batches (of) 25 pilgrims daily proceeding (to) Gurdwara Jaito (are) forcibly removed 300 miles away (and) subjected (to) hardships. (The) second Jatha (of) 500 vowed (to remain) non-violent left Amritsar (on) 28th February (and is) reaching Jaito (on the) 14th March (to) restart and complete (the) interrupted recitation. (We) earnestly request your Lordship (to) direct (the) Government (of) India (to) remove all restrictions and permit (the) Sikhs (to) visit (the) Gurdwara for religious purposes. (We) also request (the) immediate appointment (of an) Enquiry Committee, commanding public confidence. Delay (is) deepening dissatisfaction amongst all Indian communities, alienating (the) Sikhs (from) the Government."



It will be seen that far from appointing such an Enquiry Committee the authorities have been specially careful to keep the facts about the incident shrouded in darkness. In his reply to the letter of some M. L. A.s asking permission to be allowed to go to Jaito on the 14th March, the day of the arrival of the second Shahidi Jatha the Home Member wrote to say:— "There will be no objection to your going to Jaito and staying there until the Jatha arrives and for such period afterwards as the Administrator may determine. It is not unlikely that if there is no trouble on the 14th, he will ask you to leave on the morning of the next day." On what basis their presence at Jaito was undesirable is quite obvious. On March 20, on the adjournment of the House of Commons Mr. Lansbury drew the attention of the house to the Jaito disturbances and expressed surprise how no one on the official side was injured. In reply Mr. Richards under-Secretary of State tried to paint the whole struggle as a quarrel between two different sects of the community avoiding any direct reference to the incident in the short interval at his disposal. Had he known that the Nirmalas and the Udasis have marched with the Jathas as members and that the Namdhari Durbar and the Chief Khalsa Diwan have passed resolutions strongly condemning the Government action, sympathising with the martyrs and insisting on the free worship in Gurdwaras as the birth-right of the Sikhs, he would not have characterised the

struggle at Jaito as a quarrel between two different sects. Questions relating to the tragedy have been disallowed in the Legislatures. Even booklets and posters published by the S. G. P. C. and Shiromani Akali Dal giving true facts are proscribed. The publication of the communiques of these two bodies in the press has been prohibited and the use of the postal and telegraph services have been denied to them.

### VIII

## **HOPELESS DISREGARD OF PUBLIC OPINION**

Not only in the matter of appointing an independent enquiry commission but throughout the affair one can discern a hopeless disregard of the public opinion on the part of the Government. The situation had been clearly explained to the authorities both at White Hall and Delhi well before the occurrence of the tragedy. If a proper notice had been taken and due consideration paid, the loss of so many precious lives could have been safely averted.

A distinguished gentleman from Amritsar cabled to the Premier of England a full week before the tragedy, tracing the progress of the Akali movement for the last three years and pointing out that the object of the pilgrims going to Jaito in restarting the Akhand Path was purely religious and inviting the intervention of the Imperial Government to avert further troubles.

He had expressly mentioned that the Shahidi Jatha of 500 Sikhs pledged to complete non-violence and determined to restart the Akhand Path would reach Jaito on February 21st.

Again, a few Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly sent telegrams to the Viceroy saying that Akhand Path is a religious function, that Sikhs were determined to perform the pious duty at Jaito and that interference in the religious duty would create critical situation and explaining that no arbitrary limit can be put for attendance at a religious ceremony and hoping that the Government will issue orders before 21st February to avert further frictions.

S. Jodh Singh, M. L. C. gave notice of the following resolution to be moved in the Punjab Legislative Council:—

This Council recommends to the Governor-in-Council that he be pleased to take immediate steps to remove the present tension between the Sikhs and the Government by removing the real grievances of the Sikh community in the matter of Gurdwara Reform and with a view to achieve that object to withdraw the notification declaring the S. G. P. C. and Shiromani Akali Dal as unlawful associations, to release all prisoners, under trial or convicted as a result of the above notifications or for any other acts done in furtherance of the Gurdwara Reform Movement and

to take the earliest possible opportunity to pass a Gurdwara Bill, acceptable to the Sikh community."

But the resolution was disallowed as being within the restrictions of sub-rule (1) of Rule 23 (Art. 104). S. Jodh Singh in reply wrote to say that "the said rule prohibits the moving of a resolution which contains any matter affecting the relations of His Majesty's Government of India, or of the Governor, or the Governor-in-Council with any foreign State. I have not been able to trace any words in my resolution which show that I wanted to discuss such relations in any way. As for speeches in support of that resolution, the president has every right to call to order any member who transgresses the rules of procedure."

But all such attempts proved futile.

## IX

### **HOW THE FIRST SHAHIDI JATHA FARED AFTER THE OCCURENCE OF FEB. 21**

It would be remembered that those from among the Jatha who survived the shooting and some from amongst the Sangat, numbering more than 700 in all, had been arrested. They were imprisoned in an enclosure hardly sufficient to accommodate even one-third the number. They were kept without any shelter during day and night and very often without any food, and without any clothing for the night. Some were severely beaten and intimidated to sign statements

in accordance with the version of the authorities. After about a month the prisoners were removed to the Fort at Bawal by a train which nearly ran through all the stations over a line of 300 miles. They were kept in a portion of the fort which had been used in the past as a stable, the building being in the most insanitary and wretched condition, full of mosquitoes, etc. One of the tottering roofs fell down but fortunately none was underneath at the time. The food was supplied only once a day. It was merely half-cooked by men summoned on *begar*, and as a result forty of the prisoners fell ill. No pots for water were supplied to them till lately. They have been detained for about two months without any case being started or any charge having been proved against them. Now, the authorities have begun to let them off occasionally in small batches who according to their pledge again seek to reach Gurdwara Gangsar and restart the Akhand Path. They are arrested and let off at different stations on the way to Bawal. On April 17, 60 of such prisoners reached Jaito and were beaten so severely that three of them died and more than a dozen received serious injuries.

The treatment meted out to Dr. Kitchlew was most humiliating and unjustifiable. He had to go for some time after his arrest without any food. He was hand-cuffed and had to walk up to the railway station while being removed to Nabha. He was given no clothes to change. The food offered to him at Nabha

was most dirty and was presented in the most objectionable manner. He had to refuse and do without food for one day after which he was told that he could have his own food. No arrangements were made for his baths and the latrine was unspeakable dirty. He was locked in a solitary cell. His wife could only see him after a great deal of botheration. After about a month he was released. No prohibitory orders having been served upon him on his entry in the Nabha territory, his detention for over a month was unjustifiable.

Similar treatment was meted out to Principal Gidwani who is still in the Nabha lock-up. On what charge, the Nabha authorities have not enlightened the public.

## X

### **SECOND SHAHIDI JATHA**

The second Shahidi Jatha started for Jaito on 28th February 1924. Over forty thousand people assembled to bid farewell to the Jatha. The river of Sikh religious sentiment was in floods and Sikhs from all classes and professions displayed an eager rivalry for enlistment in the "Second Shahidi Jatha". A Sikh from a neighbouring village had tried hard to join the first Shahidi Jatha but was prevented by some house-hold work. On the occasion of the organisation of the second Jatha his wife tried to detain him. He sent his

family to his father-in-law and set fire to his house in order to put an end to all worries connected with his house and marched to Jaito with a light heart. Another country Sikh complained, "I have been collecting wheat and fuel for the service of the Guru's kitchen for years; I have done my share in the Kar Sewa; but they have not allowed me to join the Jatha and have wrongly deprived me of this rare opportunity of offering my head in the service of my religion. They send their friends. The Sikhs have also begun to show partiality for their friends and favourites." An old Sikh said, "Do you reject me on account of my old age? I am stronger than many of your so-called youths. I can run for five miles and carry a load of two maunds. I have been in jail and have never got out by offering apology to the *Sircar*. I have never disgraced the good name of my community. Let me go and win the crown of martyrdom. I have lived long enough." Some Sikhs, before leaving for Jaito, wrote out their wills bequeathing all their property to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. Two young Sikh brothers quarrelled as to who should go to Jaito and drew lots. The winner jumped with joy and the loser shed tears. When the wife of another Sikh reminded him of the dangerous condition for Amritsar to join the second Shahidi Jatha, he said, "There is enough of fuel in store to burn them." Many Sikh mothers, wives and sisters garlanded their sons, husbands and brothers

and gave them a loving send off to Jaito. A mother whose first son had fallen a martyr with the first Shahidi Jatha, advised her second son while garlanding him on this occasion, in brave words that pierced the hearts of the congregation. "Dear son" said she, "fight the battle of your Panth and bless your mother with thy heroic sacrifice." According to the A. P. I. "considerable excitement and enthusiasm were evinced by huge crowds of Sikhs both ladies and gentlemen assembled before Akal Takht Sahib this afternoon to watch the departure of the second Shahidi Jatha or the "martyrs band" like the first." "In view of the fact that the previous Jatha had been fired upon the gathering within the precincts of the Darbar Sahib was overwhelming and beyond all calculations. The Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib advised the Jatha "to remain perfectly non-violent and to face bullets and all sorts of severities." "There were about a dozen Nirmala Sadhus accompanying the Jatha with a batch prepared for medical assistance. Large crowds had flocked throughout the route greeting the Jatha with ovation and at different places it was entertained with sweets and other refreshments." "Strange mis-givings are being aroused as to the fate of this Jatha, but it is understood that the S. G. P. C. is taking special precautions to ward off crowds from joining the Jatha upto its destination." "The following statement has been issued :— "The second Shahidi Jatha which will leave Akal Takht Sahib



tomorrow, the 28th February, to resume Akhand Path at Jaito, is deeply pained at the loss of life and the injuries sustained by the Sangat (congregation) which accompanied the first Shahidi Jatha on the 21st February out of love and reverence. As the basic idea of these Shahidi (martyr) Jathas is to confine all sufferings only to themselves, therefore they earnestly wish that the Sangat should not suffer on their account. On the request of the Jatha the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib has decided to enjoin on all Sikhs the duty of refraining from accompanying the Jatha on its march. All people of villages by which the Jatha passes should content themselves by bidding farewell to the Jatha just outside their villages and should not march on with the Jatha so that it may reach its destination attended by nobody except doctors, press reporters and such other few indispensable helpers. Cause is so sacred that the Sikhs should learn to control even the legitimate apprehensions of their heart that the Nabha authorities may not invent any story about their going with the Jatha and according to the correspondent of the "C. and M. Gazette". The Jatha was successful in persuading any followers from following it across the Nabha border."

All along its route to Jaito the Jatha was accorded hearty receptions at every halting station and served by the public to the best of their means in a manner which, in enthusiasm and devotion, far exceeded the

reception accorded to the First Shahidi Jatha.

"On March 14, Pandit M.M. Malaviya, Sardars Gulab Singh, Kartar Singh, Mr. D.P. Sinha, M.L.A. s and Messrs Rangaswami Iyengar, Vedmurti and K. S. Bhatt, Members of the Council of State arrived from Delhi at 7.30 a.m. Three Punjab Councillors nominated by the Punjab Government had reached by the previous day.

"Immediately on arrival the M.L.A.s along with the Punjab M.L.C.s already here, i.e., Messrs. Jawahar Singh, Maqbool Mahmud and Duli Chand, had a long conversation with the Administrator lasting till about 11 o'clock. During this time Pandit Malaviya and party also visited the Gurdwara Gangsar and agreed that the hall of the Gurdwara could accommodate 400 people and the courtyard, into which the doors of the hall opened, was spacious enough to accommodate 1,000 people. Pandit Malaviya and party were of the opinion, of which they apprised the Administrator, that at one time only one Akhand Path could take place with due propriety but that if it was desired to hold simultaneous Paths, 3 could be held without impropriety. In this way it would take 10 months if one Path were performed after the other while 3 at a time would occupy about 3½ months for 101 Akhand Paths which the Shahidi Jatha were pledged to complete. The Administrator said that the duty he owed to the subjects of the State made it impossible for him to allow an invasion of the State

territory by outside people for a period of ten months or even for that of 3 months. He said the only basis on which a compromise could be considered or negotiations opened was a precedent guarantee from the S.G.P.C. that the Akhand Paths would be finished in a very short definite period, say, seven days. Mr. Johnston proposed for this purpose the holding of 101, or at least 50 Paths simultaneously. As a result of the discussion he was willing to admit the Jatha into the Gurdwara but only on the condition that Pandit Malaviya should give the required guarantee on behalf of the S.G.P.C. This Pandit ji was not in a position to do. Pandit ji emphasised, on the other hand, that the only possible basis of solution could be the unconditional admission of the Jatha into the Gurdwara, since they were pledged to start the Akhand Path, and then to carry on negotiations with S.G.P.C. He hoped that in a view of the establishment of the principle of religious liberty by the unconditional admission of the Jatha the S.G.P.C. would be persuaded to instruct the Jatha so as to finish the 101 Paths within a short time, although Pandit ji was not prepared to admit that any time limit can be legitimately placed on a fellow's worship, which he is entitled to carry on uninterruptedly even for the whole of his life. Mr. Johnston's main objection, however, was time.

As it was already about 11 o'clock and Pandit ji and party desired to meet the Jatha on the way to

ascertain their view they left in two motor cars towards Bargari where the Jatha were reported to be halting.

### **MILITARY MANOEUVRES.**

The fields on both sides of the Kachcha path presented the sight of a veritable field of battle with the observation posts, the flash signal stations, small squadrons of troops lying behind copses and bushes, cavalry people riding restlessly hither and thither across the cultivated fields, and couriers coursing along the path with "important" messages about the movements of the Jatha. And all this enormous military display, beside very much more which I will presently describe, to meet a Jatha of 500, admittedly non-violent people who had, as the latest official information itself went, no Sangat with them!

### **MEETING THE JATHA**

Pandit Malaviya and party met the Jatha, which was preceded all along by about 100 fully equipped mounted troops and about 80 infantry men. It was really a soul stirring sight to see 500 faces beaming with the happiness of expected martyrdom. They were all unarmed, except for the Kirpans, and there was not one spectator accompanying them, except, of course, for two press reporters and their red-cross brigade. Pandit Malaviya and Sirdars Kartar Singh and Gulab Singh talked to some of the Jatha and were told

that they were pledged to begin the Akhand Path to-day and had no desire to hold simultaneous Akhand Paths. They were, however, always prepared to obey the order of Akal Takht Sahib.

Pandit Ji and party came back and again discussed the situation with Mr. Johnston, who was not prepared to enter into any negotiations unless the requisite guarantee were forthcoming, for which there was absolutely no time left.

Thereupon all the gentlemen, who had come up from Delhi and who were present behind the Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib where the discussion was taking place, wrote out a letter to the Administrator embodying their view of the situation. They requested S. Jawahar Singh and Ch. Duli Chand, Punjab M. L. C.s present there, to sign it. These gentlemen, however, refused to do so. When the letter was presented to the Administrator he said he was not prepared to take it at that time.

## **JATHA SIGHTED IN JAITU**

An hour or so later the Jatha was sighted and the danda police military men, and the cavalry were stationed at the bifurcation of the roads to meet it. The Jatha arrived at 3.10 p.m. On Mr. Johnston calling a halt they halted and were immediately surrounded on all sides by the police. Mr. Johnston then spoke to some of the Jatha men and offered to allow them all to

start the Akhand Path in Gurdwara Gangsar provided they promised to come out of the Gurdwara after the first Path had finished and await the result of the negotiations with Akal Takht Sahib (which he was told by the Jatha men was the proper authority and not the S.G.P.C.) This the Jatha men resolutely refused to agree to. For them to leave the Gurdwara without completing 101 Paths was as sacrilegious as to break the continuity of one Akhand Path. They also definitely refused to bide them voluntarily, till some settlement was arrived at. They said they had taken a vow to commence the Path to-day or die in the attempt. They were prepared for bullets, beating and, in fact, anything.

All this parleying took about two hours after which time, the Jatha having resolutely refused to accept any compromise which would take away from their oath, were placed under arrest and were led without, happily, the use of any force, to a pen inside the Fort. They also insisted on taking the Sowara Sahib with them and were permitted to do so. A Shamiana and a Takht were provided for Guru Granth Sahib inside the pen.

Pt. Malaviya, as all others, were all the time present on every occasion. Previous to the arrival of the Jatha Pandit Malaviya remonstrated with Mr. Johnston that, since the Jatha was coming unarmed and there was no Sangat with it, no use of force could be justified.

Immediately on the arrival of the Jatha the two press reporters that were accompanying it were placed under arrest. One of them is representative of the *Bande-matram*, Lahore. They will be sent away to their places to-morrow morning" —(Special Representative of the "Tribune")

Inspite of all this the authorities have issued the following misleading communique from Jaito—"The second Shahidi Jatha arrived unaccompanied and was met and interviewed by the Administrator. Under advice of the members of the Assembly and Legislative Council and Sikh Sardars it consented to peaceful arrests pending negotiations between the Members and the S. G. P. C. regarding the Akhand Path subject to reasonable conditions laid down by the Administrator."

Even the A. P. I. message given below materially contradicts the official communique on the point of the conditional surrender.

"JAITO, March 14.

Pandit Malaviya and party met the Jatha a mile and a half before it entered Jaito and asked the Jatha leaders whether they would wait for orders from the Gurdwara Committee. The Jatha declined on the ground that they had taken an oath to read Akhand Path to-day. The Jatha arrived at 3 p.m. and Mr. Wilson Johnston spent over an hour in discussing the terms of compromise which the Jatha refused. Eventually the Jatha was allowed to proceed a hundred yards near the

Gurdwara where they offered themselves for arrest. They were arrested without any hitch. The situation is quiet."

On the point of the conditional surrender and the allegaton made by the Administrator against the Akalis that the inhabitants of Jaito ran the risk of being mal-treated at the hands of the Akalis and therefore he could not allow the Jatha to go to the Gurdwara without restrictions, the special representative of the "Tribune" has to say the following :--

"Having narrated in my previous despatch how the second *Shahidi Jatha* was received on its arrival at Jaito on the 14th March, I propose to say something regarding a few incidents which deserve particular mention. Before I do so, however, I hasten to controvert a possible nay, a very likely, interpretation to which the official *communique* about the arrest of the second *Shahidi Jatha* is liable. It is said in the *Communique* that the Jatha "consented to be arrested pending negotiations," etc. This is quite open to the interpretation that the motive of the Jatha men in agreeing to a peaceful arrest was to bide time till some settlement had been arrived at between the Administrator and the S. G. P. C. Far from this, the Jatha, resolutely refused to postpone the commencement of the Akhand Path for this, or, in fact, any other consideration. They made it repeatedly clear that they had sworn to commence the Path on the 14th



and only physical impossibility could prevent them from doing so and not any hope or promise of the opening up of negotiations. They could have anything to do with such negotiations they said only by way of offering obedience to the orders of Akal Takht Sahib that might be received as a result of these negotiations. As a matter of fact, immediately after the arrest of the Jatha, I had occasion to make it clear personally to Mr. Wilson Johnston that the attitude of the Jatha did not admit of any such interpretation as the *official communique*, issued later, is open to, and Mr. Johnston readily agreed.

### **RUINATION OF CROPS.**

Now I come to some incidents, which though apparently not very relevant, form yet the main ground on which the Administrator bases his refusal to permit the Akalis to go unconditionally into the Gurdwara.

(1) His main ground, as I indicated in my previous despatch is that the people of Jaitu Pargana have suffered for the last seven months from the "onslaught" of these Akalis from outside in that their crops have been ruined. How, as a matter of fact, the crops sometimes suffer will be clear from the following incident which took place on the 14th on the Jatha's march. About 100 mounted troops and 80 infantry men marched in front of the Jatha, as the reader is by now aware. Over 4 miles from Jaitu, while coming from Bargari on the direct path the Jatha deviated to

another longer path after the troops had passed the turning. When these found themselves thus outwitted the horse and the infantry men turned back and passed through the standing crops along the narrow *kacha* path where the Jatha were journeying. A similar incident happened a second time the same day much nearer Jaitu, when not only the troops moving in front of the Jatha had to cross through cultivated fields but also the police and the cavalry that were waiting to receive the Jatha near Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib. From these incidents of the 14th it would seem that it is the movements of troops that is responsible for the ruination, if there is any of the crops and not the movements of the Jatha people who were found to be journeying by a regular path.

(2) Another ground is that the residents of Jaitu have an enormous fear of loot and mischief on behalf of the Akalis and have, on account of that fear, sent away their women and cash and jewellery. On investigation, however, I found that, unfortunately, the Administrator was misinformed either by some of his overzealous subordinates or by some residents of the town for motives of their own. As a matter of fact two allegations of misconduct on the part of men of the military stationed there were actually made to me.

It is also significant in this connection that several women of the villages, which lie on the way from Bargari to Jaitu, turned out to see the Jatha passing by

and also there were many women sitting on the tops of houses around the Fort in Jaito to witness the arrival of the Shahids.

Doubtless, however, there is a deal of annoyance at the continued incursions of the Akalis into Jaito, but that in an indirect way, and so far as these incursions are the cause of the presence of military then in the town."

Some days after the arrest the Jatha was removed to Nabha and imprisoned in a *Bir* there, overgrown with wild grass and in the most insanitary conditions. During the removal of the Jatha from Jaito to Nabha a grave insult was offered to the Sikh feeling by ordering, in a highly objectionable manner, the removal of Sri Guru Granth Sahib to the brake van which was already full of parcels.

## XI

### THE THIRD SHAHIDI JATHA

The third Shahidi Jatha started from Amritsar on March 22.

Amidst scenes of extraordinary enthusiasm and religious devotion, to the third Sikh Shahidi Jatha of five hundred men started from Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar to resume the interrupted Akhand Path at Jaito. Among those present to see the Jatha start and to extend cordial good wishes were Lala Lajpat Rai,

Dr. Kitchlew, Mr. Phookhan of Assam, Dewan Daulat Rai, C.I.E. of Rawalpindi, Mr. D. Chaman Lal, M.L.A., Mr. Deep Narayan Sinh of Patna and Mr. K.M. Panikkar. The Jatha collected in the Darbar Sahib below Akal Takht Sahib at about 12 Noon. The whole place was crowded with pilgrims from all parts of the Punjab. Overflowing the premises of the shrine the crowd which was estimated at more than 50,000 had spread into the streets and open spaces surrounding the Darbar Sahib. Women and children of all ages had come to see the martyrs go off and the neck of each volunteer was heavy with garlands with which his wife, children and other relations had wished him godspeed. They had gathered in their thousands and their enthusiasm was something worth seeing. Though there were old mothers, young wives and little children who had come to see their sons, husbands and fathers go, there was not a face in the whole crowd that was not lit up with spiritual enthusiasm. One young boy of about seven was seen going up to garland his father and expressing with true Spartan heroism the hope that he would be able to do it after his father.

After the preliminary speeches in which the situation was carefully explained, the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib read the *Hukumnama* to the *Shahidi Jatha*. In it the Jatha was called upon to go and resume the Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib at Gangsar shirne at Jaito. They were asked to observe non-violence in

thought, word and action and every one of them was asked to take a solemn vow for that purpose before the Takht. Amidst resounding shouts of Sat Sri Akal, the whole Jatha to a man bowed to do this. Then the Jathedar, who had been in the service of the *Sarkar* and gone through many a campaign was asked to come forward and he was given a ***kirpan*** which had been specially blessed. Then his second and third in command under-went the same ceremony.

The Procession started from the Darbar Sahib at about half past two. The enthusiasm among the people was indescribable. As the Jatha carrying Guru Granth Sahib in the middle and followed by a crowd of over 10,000 people passed along the narrow lanes of the city. The whole population demonstrated its strong sympathy with the Akali cause by crowding all the house tops and throwing flowers and ***Attar***. When the Jatha reached the city gates it was past six.

Beside five hundred volunteers, the procession consists of a separate kitchen, a special ambulance corps under the charge of a qualified doctor and provisions for the way. The Jatha will take a circuitous route and march in slow stages reaching Jaito in two weeks time. (Akali Sahayak Bureau.)

Mr. Panikkar, Secretary, Akali Sahayak Bureau, spent a day with the third Shahidi Jatha at Jagraon and has a lot to say about the reception accorded to the Jatha and the feelings of the masses towards the

movement. Here is his account.

"The third Shahidi Jatha which started from Amritsar on the 22nd March was announced to reach Jagraon, a small town in Ludhiana District, on the 2nd April. With a view to examining at first-hand the arrangements made on the way as well as to study the feeling in the villages about the movement, I went up to Jagraon without previous notice. Jagraon is hardly a town. It is an overgrown village with a population of not more than 15,000 souls. The Sikh population in the town is not more than 10 percent—the rest being Hindus and Mussalmans. The Jatha was announced to arrive only by about 6 O' clock in the evening, but with the view to find out whether the population took any real interest, I reached Jagraon early at about 12 noon. A quiet walk round the town convinced me beyond doubt that the approach of the Jatha was being looked upon with great enthusiasm by all sections of people. All the streets were already crowded and for more than two miles along the route it was not possible to drive in a carriage or cart. The camp where preparations were being made to hold the diwan was about two furlongs from the market place. It was well enclosed for the proper reception and the accommodation of the Jatha.

I drove out of the town in order to meet the Jatha in one of the villages before it came near the town. All along the route and even outside the town there were

large crowds waiting anxiously for the Jatha to come. These men and women had been waiting in the hot sun for hours in order to be the first to welcome the heroes to their town. We caught the Jatha up at a village of about five miles from Jagraon. The *Sangat* or the crowd that had gathered round the Jatha at that time was not more than five thousand. But when it began to march towards the town, the crowd began to swell. A part of the Jatha walked in front as a protection for the flags and the *Guru Granth Sahib* which was carried in a palanquin and the rest followed behind, the Ambulance Corps making up the rear. The crowd was so peaceful that even without much help from the volunteers it settled down as if according to a definite plan. There was not the least trace of disorderliness in the whole affair. I talked to a few members of the Jatha. They told me that the enthusiasms in the villages through which they passed was immense and that both Hindus and Mussalmans of all grades were equally kind to them. After the local *Sangat* had treated the Jatha to milk and sweatmeats the procession towards the town began. It was about 6 p.m. when they reached to the camp. A big diwan was held there which was attended by many thousands of people. The Jatha camped there for the night.

From what I saw about the Jatha and the procession, I was convinced that whatever Government might say the Sikh Community in the rural part is

behind the Akali movement to a man. It is not a sectional movement. The enthusiasm for the Jatha convinced me of that. The respect that the S.G.P.C. commands from the villages is unique. The attempt that is now being made to rally the loyal Sikhs is therefore foredoomed to failure. Secondly, what struck me was the fact that Hindus and Mussalmans were very sympathetic towards the Jatha. It has been said by Government that the villages on the way were being harrassed by the Sikhs for provisions and supplies. This is certainly not true. Inspite of strong propaganda by officials, voluntary offerings from Sikh gentry pour in wherever the Jatha halts and in the villages that I went there was no question of harrassing in any way. It is said that the authorities have made it known that they would penalise those who help in the reception of the Jatha either by offerings of milk and provisions or by personal service. The names of those who had shown sympathy are said to have been noted down in order that when Punitive Police is imposed they may be made to pay the large share. Inspite of this, Hindus and Mussalmans have made substantial contributions, and the Sikhs everywhere have been enthusiastic.

The thing which was prominently noticeable about the crowd was the extraordinarily high percentage of men in Khaddar clothes. The Akali movement has given a great impetus to Khadi in the Punjab. Every man, woman and child who accepts the lead of the S.G.P.C.



has discarded foreign cloth. More than 80% of the huge crowd which met the Jatha was clothed in homespun.

The crowd was not only orderly and peaceful but entirely unarmed. Very few carried even walking sticks and except for crackers, which are unavoidable accompaniment of every procession in India there was nothing in the Sangat to give even a faint colouring to any suggestion of the crowd being menacing. On the other hand the whole attitude of the Sangat all along was extremely reverential. It was a solemn religious occasion; and not a gay carnival. It has been to me an ennobling experience to watch Sikh women both old and young in large numbers singing the Shabads and attending to the comforts of the Jatha.

What I saw in the villages around Jagraon has convinced me that the educative value of the Jathas, both from the Sikh religious point of view and from the national point of view is great. The present Jatha is traversing an area which is politically backward and the meaning of non-violence it carries is reaching homes and hearts which have so far been uninfluenced by the current nationalism. The idea that communal feelings are being disturbed by the demonstrations which are disliked by Hindus and Musalmans has no foundation whatever. I found the Hindu population in the villages sympathetic towards the Jatha and anxious to serve in whatever way they can. The Jatha moves on from Jagraon tomorrow and is expected to reach

Jaito on the 7th instant."

The following is the account of the arrest of the third Shahidi Jatha on the 7th April, as given by Sardar Tara Singh and Mian Fazal Haq M.L.C.'s who were eye-witnesses:—

"As the III Shahidi Jatha was timed to arrive at Jaito on the 7th April, "1924, we arranged to be there by afternoon. On alighting the train at 1 p.m., we approached the platform gate where the Police requested us to wait in the adjoining tent. After formal enquiry the Officer-in charge informed the Administrator of our arrival through a special Sowar and waited for his order. An hour or so after a reply was received instructing that officer to send us directly to the Administrator. We started towards the mound and in our journey of about one mile we passed by several platoons stationed at different positions. The horsemen were running hither and thither at hot haste probably carrying news to the officer. All were astir and looked anxious as the Jatha was nearing its destination. About 50 country carts were requisitioned and arranged in a line near the Tibi Sahib. The whole scene had the appearance of a regular war field. By this time the Administrator looked in sight and we were in turn introduced to him. After few questions and answers we were directed to be taken to Captain Cliff on the Tibi Sahib where we were met by Sardar Kartar Singh M.L.A. There, we all had a long informal talk

with L. Izat Rai of Faridkot when the bell rang and our attention was drawn to the Jatha approaching nearer. Soon we saw the whole military moving fast towards that direction and taking their final position. The long row of country carts began to trudge in the same way.

We all three together with Captain Cliff hastened thither and took our stand on a bushy mound some 200 yards off from the Cavalry which was arranged on both sides of the Faridkot Kacha road. At 4.40 p.m. the Jatha made its appearance shrouded in clouds of dust but we could see Nishan Sahibs and hear the chanting of hymns. At 4-53 p.m. the Jatha was met by the State authorities who were standing just ahead of the Cavalry. We could not hear or see what passed between the Jatha and the authorities for we were not allowed to go there till 5.10 p.m. by Captain Cliff under instructions from the Administrator. This much we could observe that the Jatha was at once surrounded by the Cavalry and several units of infantry were posted nearly on all sides. This we may however remark that some 20 or 40 villagers did in fact reach that place while we, inspite of protest, were prohibited. We were getting nervous to go there as we had heard strong rumours that this Jatha will be badly beaten and packed into country carts "which we had already seen and which had reached the spot". A man also told us that he had himself seen a cart full of Lathis. A Cart carrying stretchers and a big just presumably of milk was

standing near our mound. Under these circumstances we wanted to hurry to that place and see things personally when a "Sowar" coming running to us gave a line clear. Quickly we fetched the spot and saw batches of Akalis handcuffed with rope and carried by Police moving towards the Fort. The whole Jatha was busy with "Sat Nam, Sat Nam, Sat Nam Jee, Wahigru, Wahigru, Wahigru Jee." and looked cheerful. When some 50 Akalis had thus passed, this process was discontinued. Small groups of Jatha people were surrounded by the Military armed with *Lathis* and carried towards the Fort. This went on for about 45 minutes when suddenly our eyes fell upon a military party dragging an Akali whose turban was off and *Keshas* hanging. These carriers were kicking his body with rough iron shod military boots but the Akali was patiently muttering "Wahiguru". He was photographed in that condition. We could not discover reason for this illtreatment. The arrests were finished by 6 p.m. Only 7 or 8 Akali Sewadars of Guru Granth Sahib were let behind and they refused to part with their Holy Scripture. (One of the responsible officers jeered at the Akalis and tauntingly remarked that they had taken too much of milk and *ghee* in the way and had fallen ill. Sardar Tara Singh replied "probably because they and their hosts apprehended starvation after arrest"). We apprehended some illtreatment to these Sewadars in our absence and left the correspondent of "Bande Matram" there to watch it and we went along

with the Administrator to return immediately. On our way back we were told that the Akali Sewadars were forcibly removed from Guru Granth Sahib and were replaced by the State people. Then we all three left for Ferozepore.

We close our statement with thanks to the Administrator for affording us facilities to watch the whole situations personally."

After a few days this Jatha was also removed to the Nabha Bir. For lack of adequated food arrangements and on account of insanitary conditions in which they are kept, two of the third Shahidi Jatha recently died. When some of their companions expressed a desire to participate in the cremation ceremony, they were very severely beaten. As a result some fractures are reported and several others had their teeth broken.

## **XII**

### **THE FOURTH SHAHIDI JATHA**

The fourth Shahidi Jatha started from Anandpur Sahib, the sacred throne of the Tenth Guru, on the morning of March 27.

"The ceremonies in connection with the departure of this Jatha were similar to those of the previous ones, except that it being the centre of Sikh population the number of spectators was very large.

The Jatha received the usual sermon from Takht

Keshgarh Sahib which is equally sacred to the Sikhs like Akal Takht Sahib. Before the Jatha departed Amrit (Sikh initiation) was administered to many Sikhs. This Jatha will traverse the whole Doaba on foot and is due to reach Jaito on April 18." (A.P.I.)

In spite of desperate attempts on the part of the Police to dissuade people by all sorts of means, from joining the reception of the Shahidi Jatha, the reception accorded to the Jatha all along its route was simply grand. The Jatha reached Jaito on April 18. It was handcuffed by ropes in groups of 6 and removed to Nabha by a train.

### **XIII**

#### **THE FIFTH SHAHIDI JATHA**

Ever since it was announced that the fifth Shahidi Jatha would start from Lyallpur on the 12th April. Visakhi day, there has prevailed a reign of terror throughout that district. The authorities have, during the interval of few days, thrice searched the office of the two main Gurdwaras in the district and have carried away all that they could find. They have been going about in the villages threatening people with the confiscation of their land, and using all sorts of intimidations in order to dissuade them from joining the Jatha, from taking part in any celebrations connected with the departure of the Jatha and from contributing any food stuff for the *langar*

(sacred kitchen). Some Nambardars have been suspended and wholesale arrests made in the *Ilaqa* as is clear from the telegram sent to the press by Sardar Harchand Singh M.L.C. Besides, strong epidemic of plague prevails in the district and crops being ripe, these are the busiest days for the farmers.

In face of all such difficulties the Shahidi Jatha marched in the usual manner, greeted by a very large gathering.

In the villages in that district, through which the Jatha had passed, the Police went so far as to search the houses of prominent Sikhs and remove any provisions which they found in excess of the requirement of the family on the presumption that such provisions were meant for entertaining the Jatha. All Such attempts have proved futile and the Sikhs have not been deterred from joining the Jatha or from participating in the reception and the service of the Jatha.

The Jatha is expected at Amritsar on April 26, and will proceed to Jaito on May 1, reaching there on May 21.

## XIV MORE JATHAS

More Jathas are getting ready and it is expected that every district will in turn send out Jathas to Jaito

with the object of restarting the interrupted Akhand Path. Once more the surging waves of official wrath are beating furiously against the Sikh religious sentiment. But beatings, wholesale arrests, the elimination of brain and even shooting have failed to crush the Sikh morale.

### **THE SIKHS ARE FULLY DETERMINED**

To establish their right of free worship and free congregation in a Sikh Gurdwara at any cost. This privilege is dearer to them than life itself. For the maintenance of this right they are prepared to pay the highest price—that of their lives.

