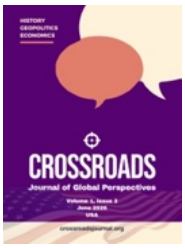

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Shiromani Akali Dal and the Fragility of Governance in British Punjab 1920–1925

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Abstract

This paper argues that the emergence of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in 1920 exposed the fundamental flaws in British colonial rule in Punjab and constituted a serious structural challenge to the British government. This study offers a novel theoretical framework based on three new concepts: collaborative captivity, the judicial-proprietary paradox, and legislative fragmentation. Current historiography, however, concentrates on either the efficacy of Sikh mobilization or the strategic skill of British officials. In addition to opposing colonial authority, the study demonstrates how the SAD systematically undermined the state's alliances by taking advantage of the traditional Sikh identity that the British had created for military recruitment. The study demonstrates how the SAD changed military sociology from a pillar of colonial power into a channel of imperial weakness, building on Oberoi's important analysis of colonial Sikh identity formation and Fox's cultural materialist perspective on Akali mobilization. The Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 is reinterpreted as a tactical tool of legislative division, allowing a fundamentally weak colonial state to survive by channeling religious independence into manageable institutional structures, rather than as a generous reform or a definitive nationalist victory. The paper advances the theoretical conversation on movement institutionalization, colonial knowledge creation, and the relationship between legal frameworks and political legitimacy by offering new perspectives on how anti-colonial movements might take advantage of the internal conflicts of garrison states.

Keywords: Shiromani Akali Dal; collaborative captivity; garrison state; Sikh Gurdwaras Act; colonial governance; Punjab; legislative fragmentation; non-violent resistance.

INTRODUCTION: THEORISING COLLABORATIVE CAPTIVITY

The colonial governance of Punjab in the early twentieth century poses an intriguing analytical challenge for scholars: how did a state apparatus, specifically designed for military security, become so susceptible to a religious reform movement that explicitly rejected armed insurrection? Current scholarship presents conflicting interpretations. Yong (2005) describes the administration as a formidable "Garrison State," founded on institutionalized military collaboration, paternalistic land policies, and the deliberate promotion of martial identities (p. 4). Akhtar Sandhu holds that the term ‘martial races’ was used by the British, although the cultural traits attest to the martial status of certain castes (Sandhu, 2026). In contrast, Condos (2017) provides a starkly different perspective, depicting the Punjab administration as an "Insecurity State" characterized by a constant, pervasive fear among its populace and governed by what he calls a "logic of pre-emptive violence" (p. 13). Blissett (2023) further complicates the discussion by illustrating that the Board of Administration period (1849–1853) established enduring patterns of civil-military integration that continued well into the twentieth century (p. 5).

This article goes beyond mere descriptive characterizations to create a new analytical synthesis. The Punjab administration exhibited both strength and fragility simultaneously — and this seeming contradiction is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of the Akali movement. The colonial government had established an exceptionally sophisticated system for military recruitment and political control, yet this very sophistication led to structural weaknesses that a strategically skilled adversary could take advantage of. The idea of collaborative captivity encapsulates this dynamic: the state's reliance on Sikh military personnel resulted in a situation where the population that ensured imperial security was also the same population whose discontent could lead to imperial downfall. The strategic innovation of the SAD was not to challenge this system from the outside but to engage with its internal contradictions, turning the mechanisms of collaboration into tools of in action. This analytical framework produces three significant contributions. First, the

article reveals that the British 'weaponisation' of Sikh identity for military ends — a phenomenon critically assessed by Oberoi (1994) in his study of colonial identity construction and by Fox (1985) in his cultural materialist analysis of Akali mobilisation — fostered a unified communal infrastructure that the SAD could seize and redirect. Second, it pinpoints the judicial-proprietary paradox as a particular legal contradiction that the SAD capitalised on to delegitimise colonial authority, illustrating how British property law became a hindrance rather than a benefit when applied to religious institutions. Third, it reconceptualizes the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act as a mechanism of legislative fragmentation — a strategic concession that upheld colonial authority by steering Sikh political energy into state-supervised electoral processes. This final finding challenges both the nationalist historiography that interprets the Act as an unequivocal victory and the colonial narratives that frame it as a form of benevolent reform. Several prominent historians particularly Grewal (1990), Oberoi (1994), and Fox (1985) have investigated the connection between the construction of colonial identity and the political mobilization of Sikhs. The assertion here is not that these interactions have been completely ignored, but rather that they have not been consolidated into a cohesive structural explanation that accounts for both the effectiveness of the SAD and the particular nature of the British concessions. The three concepts elaborated upon below offer precisely that integrative framework.

The Construction of the Martial Garrison: Imperial Strategy and Its Contradictions

The principles of collaborative captivity were established in the years following the annexation of 1849, as the British created a governance structure that Blissett (2023) describes as prioritising "security over development, military exigency over civil administration" (p. 4). The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was instrumental in solidifying this framework, demonstrating that Punjabi manpower was crucial in suppressing the revolt (Raj, 2024, p. 7; Chatterjee, 2019, p. 1076). In the aftermath of the rebellion, British officials systematically

developed the "Martial Races" theory — a pseudo-scientific ideology that attributed enhanced military capabilities to specific ethnic and religious groups, with Punjabi Sikhs at the top of this constructed hierarchy (Liebau, 2017, p. 468). Yong (2005) notes that the five Ks became mandatory for enlistment (p. 55), yet the analytical implications extend well beyond mere administrative convenience.

What has been inadequately acknowledged in existing scholarship — with the notable exception of Oberoi (1994, pp. 302–315), whose analysis of the Singh Sabha movement anticipates this argument — is the extent to which this racialized recruitment strategy necessitated active state involvement in the formation of religious identities. The military did not merely enlist Sikhs; it actively shaped a specific type of Sikh identity that aligned with imperial objectives. By establishing orthodox Sikh identity as a requirement for military service, and by positioning military service as the primary means of economic progress for rural Sikh families, the British fostered a community that was both more unified and more aware of its unique interests than any Sikh community prior to colonial rule. Fox (1985) illustrates that this phenomenon was intricately linked to the wider political economy of colonial Punjab, where land policies, canal colonization, and military recruitment converged to cultivate a distinct Jat Sikh peasant consciousness (pp. 79–98). The military regiments effectively served as training grounds for fostering communal solidarity, wherein Sikhs from various regions and castes cultivated a shared identity through common discipline, collective symbols, and the joint experience of serving the empire. Consequently, the concept of the 'Garrison State' transcended mere description, evolving into a dynamic system that created the very conditions for its potential downfall. This analysis revises Yong's (2005) narrative by illustrating that the garrison's strength was, in fact, the source of its fragility. As the connection between Sikh identity and military service intensified, the state's susceptibility to movements that could shift Sikh solidarity towards anti-colonial objectives increased.

Mechanism 1: Collaborative Captivity — The Paradox of Dependent Control

Collaborative captivity refers to a distinct structural condition that has not been sufficiently explored in the current literature regarding colonial governance. In contrast to mere dependency, which suggests a susceptibility to external influences, collaborative captivity illustrates a scenario where the state's coercive mechanisms become constrained by the sociological makeup of its own forces. The statistical implications of this phenomenon were striking: by the early twentieth century, Sikhs made up about 20% of the combat strength of the Indian Army, despite accounting for less than 2% of the population of British India. Furthermore, approximately one in every fourteen adult Sikh males was enlisted in the military during the Akali period (Yong, 2005, p. 226; Panesar, 2016, p. 35). These statistics indicate that any substantial repression of Sikh political engagement would inevitably affect the families, communities, and social networks that supplied the army with its most esteemed soldiers. The strategic acumen of the SAD was evident in its ability to identify and leverage this structural condition. The movement intentionally utilized ex-soldiers and military pensioners—individuals whose service histories symbolized imperial allegiance—as the primary participants in non-violent jathas (Singh, 1978, p. 12). This approach transcended a mere recruitment tactic; it represented a nuanced form of political jiu-jitsu that effectively turned the state's own resources against it. The incident in 1922, where police forces assaulted these decorated veterans at Guru-ka-Bagh, resulted in what this article describes as a recursive crisis of authority: the state found itself unable to dismiss the challenge to its power or to adequately penalize the challengers without jeopardizing the morale and loyalty of Sikh regiments.

The notion of collaborative captivity provides a novel perspective on the reasons conventional indicators of state strength were inadequate in forecasting colonial vulnerability. The administration in Punjab had access to substantial material resources — including a trained police force, military units, and a legal framework — yet these resources became ineffective precisely at the moments they were most crucial. This observation calls into

question realist theories of state power that equate material capabilities with effective governance, instead illustrating that the social structure of coercive institutions can influence whether material capabilities can be converted into actionable force. Condos (2017) examines this insight through the lens of the psychological concept of "insecurity" (p. 13), whereas collaborative captivity provides a more accurate structural explanation: the state was not merely fearful of its populace but was objectively limited by the recruitment sociology it had established. This differentiation is significant for the comparative study of garrison states — a topic to which the conclusion will return.

Administrative Failure and Epistemic Blindness: The Production of Colonial Ignorance

The structural limitations of collaborative captivity were exacerbated by the systematic shortcomings in the production of colonial knowledge. According to Raj (2024), British governance in Punjab depended on what he refers to as "natural leaders" — these included landed aristocrats, hereditary priests, and traditional elites who acted as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the rural populace (p. 7). However, by 1920, these intermediaries had lost their legitimacy among the Sikh masses, who increasingly perceived them as corrupt collaborators, with their authority reliant solely on British protection rather than the consent of the community (Singh, 1978, p. 138). The administration consistently failed to recognize this transformation. Its intelligence networks were constructed around these intermediaries, resulting in a closed information loop where declining elites reported their own sustained relevance, while the emerging "Neo-Sikh" middle-class leadership remained undetected by official surveillance (Blissett, 2023, p. 865).

This state of epistemic blindness necessitates a theoretical examination. The ignorance exhibited by the colonial state was not merely a lack of information gathering; rather, it involved the active creation of a specific type of knowledge that systematically marginalized social realities that contradicted the

assumptions of imperial governance. Singh (1978) illustrates how officials persistently framed Akali mobilization as a matter of "conspiracy" and "external agitation," failing to acknowledge the authentic sentiment for religious reform due to their conceptual frameworks lacking the capacity to accommodate the political consciousness of the autonomous lower-middle class (p. 41). Consequently, Condos (2017) identifies a distinct pattern termed "pre-emptive force": officials, perceiving a threat yet unable to accurately identify its origins, resorted to violence as a means of compensating for their cognitive shortcomings (p. 49).

The 1921 massacre at Nankana Sahib exemplifies the lethal repercussions of colonial governance. A mahant, supported by British authorities and assured of their protection, orchestrated the murder of around 130 peaceful reformers who aimed to access the gurdwara (Singh, 1978, p. 32; Sarna, 2025, p. 426). This incident was not an isolated event; rather, it represented a coherent manifestation of a knowledge system that categorized mahants as 'loyal' and reformers as 'dangerous,' disregarding the actual substance of their religious beliefs. The theoretical implications extend further: epistemic blindness is an inherent characteristic of colonial rule, not merely a random administrative oversight. Colonial administrations rely on local intermediaries for insights into their subject populations, yet this reliance fosters systematic incentives for these intermediaries to distort social realities in ways that align with their personal interests. This insight challenges narratives that view colonial knowledge primarily as a mechanism of power (Cohn, 1996), revealing instead that the production of colonial knowledge could lead to significant vulnerabilities when the social landscape it claimed to depict experienced changes that intermediaries had reasons to obscure.

Mechanism 2: The Judicial-Proprietary Paradox — When Law Undermines Authority

The second major mechanism through which the SAD exposed the weaknesses of colonial governance was the manipulation of the judicial-proprietary

paradox. In Punjab, British property law recognized mahants as private proprietors of Gurdwara lands — a legal status that officials had deliberately encouraged to ensure political loyalty from those managing religious institutions (Kaur & Gurna, 2025, p. 1070; Singh, 1978, p. 18). This arrangement served multiple colonial aims: it created a class of property-owning collaborators with vested economic interests in British rule, and it provided legal structures for controlling access to religious sites through property law, rather than delving into the more politically sensitive domain of religious regulation.

The paradox arose when the SAD presented an alternative view of Gurdwara ownership based on the Sikh principle of Panthic trust — the belief that Gurdwaras are the collective property of the Sikh community rather than belonging to individual owners (Sarna, 2025, p. 425; Singh, 1978, p. 19). This assertion extended beyond mere legal discourse; it represented an ontological perspective regarding the essence of sacred space that British property classifications were ill-equipped to address. The colonial legal framework acknowledged only individual or corporate ownership, rendering the notion of community trusteeship, which surpasses legal personhood, completely incomprehensible within British law. The state's use of police to safeguard the property rights of mahants against community assertions highlighted the inherent conflict between colonial legal principles and Sikh religious beliefs.

The judicial-proprietary paradox served as more than merely a legal technicality; it acted as a mechanism for delegitimization that undermined the normative claims of colonial authority. The British portrayed their governance as embodying the 'rule of law' and impartial justice; however, the conflicts surrounding Gurdwaras revealed that colonial law was fundamentally incapable of acknowledging the religious character of the institutions it was meant to adjudicate. This situation highlights a broader theoretical insight: when legal systems consistently generate outcomes that contravene the normative values of the populations they govern; the concept of legality transforms into a source of delegitimization rather than one of legitimation. The Akali case illustrates that the more the colonial state emphasized the formal

accuracy of its legal processes, the more it revealed the substantive injustices that those processes engendered.

The paradox also highlights a significant aspect of the interplay between property law and political authority. By converting religious institutions into private property, the British aimed to establish a reliable class of collaborators with a stake in colonial legality. However, this approach resulted in a legal framework where the defence of property rights held by corrupt custodians necessitated the suppression of the religious claims of the very community whose military contributions upheld the empire. Thus, property law, intended as a tool of control, evolved into a snare. The SAD recognized this dynamic and deliberately orchestrated confrontations that compelled the state to confront this untenable choice in a public forum, thereby ensuring that each legal triumph for the mahants translated into a political success for the Akalis.

Resistance Strategies and the Sovereign Combatant Dilemma: Reengineering Imperial Discipline

The tactical innovations of the SAD may represent one of the most overlooked aspects of the movement's effectiveness. While existing literature acknowledges the Akali's use of non-violent morchas and the involvement of military veterans, it has not sufficiently explored the connection between British military discipline and Akali protest methods. This article posits that the SAD successfully reverse-engineered imperial discipline, converting the behaviours that the British had instilled in their Sikh soldiers into tools of anti-colonial resistance. The evidence supporting this claim is considerable. Akali jathas marched in battalion formations, donned distinctive black turbans that served as uniforms, upheld strict discipline in the face of adversity, and utilized military terminology to articulate their operations (Singh, 1978, p. 27). These actions were not mere superficial imitations but rather systematic reapplications of military organizational strategies. The SAD understood that British military training imparted not only technical abilities but also psychological traits — such as obedience, bravery under pressure, and group

cohesion — that could be harnessed for political purposes the British had never envisioned. Fox (1985) highlights a significant aspect of this in his discussion of how Jat Sikh peasants transformed agrarian grievances into organized political movements (pp. 148–171), yet he does not analyse the specific mechanism through which military discipline was transferred.

The strategic outcome of this reverse-engineering process resulted in what this article refers to as the Sovereign Combatant Dilemma. The Akali protester, who was both a disciplined soldier in formation and a non-violent religious martyr, posed an insurmountable tactical and ethical challenge for British officers. How could an officer command troops to fire upon individuals who exhibited the same behaviors as those troops had been trained to display, who shared their religious beliefs, and who chose not to respond to violence with further violence? This discovery enhances our understanding of non-violent resistance by illustrating that its success is contingent not merely on moral persuasion but also on the particular strategic context in which it is situated. In the case of the Akali movement, Gandhian non-violence was effective not because it swayed the hearts of the British, but because it undermined British military strengths by taking advantage of the unique vulnerabilities of a garrison state reliant on minority recruitment — a context-specific strategic innovation rather than a universally applicable moral approach.

Media Mobilisation and Transnational Networks: The Globalisation of Local Resistance

The Akali movement's interaction with media and transnational networks introduces an additional aspect where current scholarship has offered descriptions but lacks sufficient analytical integration. Singh (1978) chronicles the establishment of newspapers by the SAD, such as Akali, and its collaboration with The Hindustan Times, while also highlighting the involvement of Sikh diaspora communities from Canada, Hong Kong, and Shanghai (pp. ix, 12). Raj (2024) recognizes the media's role in revealing colonial atrocities (p. 17). Nevertheless, what remains unexplored is the

precise mechanism by which media mobilization altered the strategic considerations of colonial officials.

The SAD's media strategy served as a coercive multiplier, converting local confrontations into international crises with ramifications that extended well beyond the immediate protest arena. The Jaito Morcha (1923–1925) exemplifies this dynamic with particular clarity. When British forces opened fire on a Shaheedi Jatha consisting of 500 volunteers, the SAD's media apparatus ensured that the incident received international attention that colonial censorship could not contain (Singh, 1978, p. 72). Sikh organizations in the diaspora leveraged this coverage to exert pressure on the British government through channels unavailable to domestic actors — including parliamentary questions in London, press campaigns in sympathetic foreign newspapers, and diplomatic representations through imperial networks.

The coercive multiplier functioned through two separate pathways. Firstly, it heightened the political repercussions of repression by converting local law enforcement actions into global reputational harm. The British government, acutely aware of American and international sentiments in the aftermath of World War I, discovered that each act of suppression in Punjab resulted in diplomatic challenges that were disproportionate to the military importance of the actions taken. Secondly, the transnational aspect weakened colonial assertions of providing 'civilised' governance. The dissemination of atrocity narratives via global Sikh networks fostered a counter-narrative portraying British rule as barbaric and illegitimate — a characterization that the British themselves had employed to rationalize their governance. This analysis challenges perspectives that view media solely as a tool for information dissemination, instead illustrating that media mobilization can significantly transform the strategic landscape by expanding the audiences before whom confrontations are enacted.

The Colonial Response: Legislative Fragmentation as Strategic Retreat

The shift from coercion to legislative measures during Governor Sir Malcolm Hailey's administration has been interpreted in the scholarly discourse as either a reaction to Akali pressure or a deliberate adjustment within colonial policy. Raj (2024) characterizes the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act as a "historic victory" for non-violent mobilization (p. 17). In contrast, Singh (1978) offers a more complex perspective, emphasizing Hailey's strategy of fostering anti-Akali "Sudhar Committees" to provoke internal conflict (p. 134). Although these interpretations capture elements of the colonial response, they do not sufficiently theorize the distinct outcomes that legislation could facilitate, which coercion could not achieve. This article reconceptualises the 1925 Act as a tool of legislative fragmentation — a strategic manoeuvre intended to dismantle the movement that the state was unable to suppress. Legislative fragmentation denotes a particular governance strategy: when confronted with an organized populace that resists coercion, the state establishes institutional frameworks that incentivize moderation and penalize radicalism, thereby dividing the movement along tactical disagreements. Hailey's notable innovation was to link the release of prisoners to their written acceptance of the Act's implementation, ensuring that those who embraced the settlement (moderates) and those who sought unconditional amnesty (extremists) would cultivate enduring organizational hostilities (Singh, 1978, p. 112).

This reconceptualization yields three innovative findings. First, legislative fragmentation functioned as a more nuanced form of control than coercion, as it resulted in outcomes that seemed to be victories for the movement: the SGPC acquired authentic institutional power; Sikhs attained real control over their religious sites. However, these advancements occurred within a framework that fundamentally transformed the nature of Sikh political organization, redirecting energies that had previously been aimed at opposing the colonial state towards electoral competition for state-regulated institutions. Second, the Act established what Riat (2013) describes as a contemporary "religion-secular binary," necessitating that Sikhs adopt state-

approved legal definitions of identity to engage in electoral processes (p. 26). This requirement marginalized heterodox groups and reinforced the authority of a particular Khalsa elite, whose power increasingly relied on colonial legal structures. Third, the long-term implications of the Act — the "institutionalized communal separatism" that Chatterjee (2019) associates with Partition — were not merely unintended consequences but rather essential components of a governance strategy that prioritized short-term stability at the expense of long-term communal polarization (p. 1104).

Engaging Counter-Evidence: The Problem of Victory

The theoretical framework established herein must thoroughly address the counter-argument that the 1925 Act signified a true victory for the Akalis. Kaur and Gurna (2025) describe the passage of the Act as the successful conclusion of the gurdwara reform movement (p. 1070). Abbas and Ali (2022) highlight the achievement of the SAD in attaining "passive resilience" in the face of overwhelming state power (p. 383). Grewal (1990) also regards the Act as a pivotal moment in Sikh political evolution. These interpretations are not merely incorrect; they reflect a genuine aspect of the transition of institutional authority from colonial collaborators to representatives of the community. Nevertheless, a counterfactual analysis lends credence to the interpretation of legislative fragmentation. Had the British continued with a strategy of persistent coercion instead of transitioning to legislative co-optation, it is likely that the Sikh regiments of the Indian Army would have revolted — a scenario that military officials considered seriously throughout the Akali era (Yong, 2005, p. 226). Thus, the transition to legislation can be viewed as a survival strategy for a fundamentally vulnerable state, rather than a concession won by a victorious movement. Condos (2017) identifies a broader trend: when insecure states encounter threats, they are unable to suppress, they alter the institutional framework to maintain the essential structures of authority while relinquishing peripheral elements of control (p. 113).

Resolving this tension necessitates a clear distinction between outcomes and frameworks. The 1925 Act yielded results that were genuinely beneficial to Sikh communal interests: the SGPC acquired authority over gurdwaras, corrupt mahants were ousted, and the principle of community governance of religious institutions was legally recognized. However, these results were attained within frameworks that limited future political progress — frameworks that legally defined Sikh identity, linked political representation to control of religious institutions, and directed political efforts into electoral competition overseen by the colonial state. The Akalis secured control of the gurdwaras but forfeited the ability to mobilize the movement that had achieved this victory.

Institutional Legacy: The State Within a State and Its Contradictions

The institutional legacy of the 1925 Act significantly altered the political landscape of Punjab for subsequent generations. The SGPC wielded financial resources, administrative capabilities, and electoral legitimacy that were unmatched by any other political entity in colonial India. Singh (1978) observes that this institutional foundation equipped the SAD with the necessary resources to evolve from a volunteer reform group into a resilient political party adept at advocating for Sikh interests through both electoral and administrative avenues (p. 150). Nevertheless, this institutional achievement harboured an inherent contradiction — a phenomenon this article refers to as the institutional capture of mobilisation. The very resources that empowered the SAD as a political entity simultaneously limited its ability to engage in the type of extra-institutional mobilisation that had previously made the Akali movement effective against colonial authority. The SGPC transitioned into an institution that required defence and management, rather than serving as a platform for contesting the frameworks of colonial governance. This shift altered the relationship between means and ends: rather than employing institutions as tools for mobilisation, the SAD increasingly used mobilisation to sustain institutional integrity. This observation enriches social movement

theory by pinpointing a distinct mechanism by which the institutionalisation of movements fosters conservatism — not merely through the co-optation of elites, as suggested by the resource mobilisation literature (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), but through the structural transformation of organisational interests that accompanies institutional control.

The long-term effects transcended the SAD, influencing the overall course of Punjabi politics. The Act's creation of a legally recognized Sikh electorate not only reinforced but also legitimized communal political identities, undermining efforts for cross-community collaboration. Raj (2024) points to this "communalisation of Punjabi politics" as a contributing factor to the eventual disaster of Partition, emphasizing the 1925 Act's importance beyond the immediate context of gurdwara reform (p. 17). The institutional structure that ensured Sikh religious autonomy also played a role in the political dynamics that ultimately led to the division of Punjab — a tragic irony that the legislative fragmentation framework elucidates, setting this analysis apart from the more optimistic narratives presented by nationalist historiography.

Conclusion

The most notable new discovery concerns what this article calls the reverse-engineering of imperial discipline. Current interpretations of Akali 'non-violence' either view it as a manifestation of Gandhian methods or as a reflection of Sikh martial heritage expressed in a non-violent manner. This article illustrates that it signifies something more precise: a strategic innovation specifically designed to exploit the weaknesses of a garrison state reliant on minority recruitment. This discovery carries significant implications for the wider discourse on non-violent resistance (Sharp, 1973; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), indicating that the success of non-violent approaches is heavily influenced by the structural characteristics of the states they confront. The most important new insight relates to what this article has labelled the reverse-engineering of imperial discipline. Existing narratives surrounding Akali 'non-violence' either interpret it as an application of Gandhian principles or as

a manifestation of Sikh martial tradition in a non-violent context. This article reveals that it signifies something more nuanced: a context-specific strategic innovation designed to exploit the vulnerabilities of a garrison state that relies on minority recruitment. This insight has broader implications for the literature on non-violent resistance (Sharp, 1973; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), suggesting that the efficacy of non-violent strategies is critically contingent upon the structural makeup of the states against which they are employed.

Nonetheless, a notable generative gap persists. The current academic literature fails to adequately elucidate the specific pedagogical mechanisms through which British military training was adapted into Akali protest techniques. This article has established that former soldiers constituted the disciplined core of the morchas, and that jathas utilized military formations and terminology. However, the exact nature of the translation process remains unexplored. Did Akali leaders intentionally study British training manuals and devise systematic methods for redirecting military discipline towards non-violent objectives? Alternatively, did this transformation occur more organically, as soldiers applied familiar organizational structures to new political contexts based on their shared experiences? Addressing this gap necessitates the examination of vernacular Punjabi sources that have not yet been analysed in English-language scholarship: SAD organizational diaries from 1920 to 1925, training pamphlets distributed to jatha leaders, and memoirs of military veterans involved in the movement. Such investigations could clarify whether Akali 'non-violence' was a deliberate psychological reverse-engineering — a conscious effort to undermine the effectiveness of British officers' military training against subjects who had mastered its forms while rejecting its aims — or a more spontaneous convergence of organizational cultures. The findings would not only enhance the understanding of the Akali movement but also contribute to a broader theoretical framework regarding how military institutions can inadvertently serve as training grounds for the anti-colonial movements that ultimately supplant them.

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