CHAPTER IV

MASTER GURBANTA SINGH AS A LEGISLATOR: 1946-1977

In the first Punjab Assembly after independence, Master Gurbanta Singh was an independent member. He urged the Congress Government to facilitate the democratic functioning. Flaws in the electoral system were noted by Master Gurbanta Singh right since the inception of the system itself after independence. He said if these flaws were not removed, the democratic system would become a mockery. He stated in Punjab Assembly:

“I wish to say a few words, on this subject, with respect to the rural areas. Patwaris have to prepare voter’s lists in the villages and as every body knows they are not in the habit of doing any work without getting money. Each Patwari has to prepare these lists for five or six villages. If he does this work properly, it would take him several days to complete it. At first he has to collect the necessary particulars and then to prepare the lists serially. I know all this as I have toured the villages several times in this connection. The Patwari goes to a village, summons one of its inhabitants, and asks him to let
him know the name of all the voters. It is possible that man may not know the names of all the persons. but this is how they work and in this way the names of several persons are not recorded. Adult franchise gives a very valuable right to the people but I can say without fear of contradiction that the names of fifty percent eligible persons are not being recorded and they will not be able to exercise their votes. I can say so on the basis of my own experience. I complained to the Revenue officer of my place that the names of ladies had not been included. He told that ladies did not wish their names to be included in the rolls. I was surprised at his reply because what he said could not be true. Patwaris should summon panchayats and with their help record all the votes. In the case of Harijans particularly, the names of a very small number of voters are being recorded. Patwaris sometimes shirk the task of collecting the necessary data and I know I had to get the names of a large number of Harijans recorded with great effort. Still I am afraid there must be hundreds of villages, where the votes of Harijans have not been recorded. I urge the government that when it is going to spend such a huge sum of money on the preparation of electoral rolls they should issue
instructions that the names of all the voters should be included in the list.”

Continuing to speak on the topic, he said:

Another thing which I wish to point out is that Harijans are being compelled to get their names recorded as Sikhs. In this connection, in some villages there have been scuffles between Harijans and over-enthusiastic Sikhs. If Harijans are not recorded as such, their number will be shown to have dwindled and consequently they may have to face great difficulties. I can say that in the electoral rolls which are being compiled in the East Punjab, the names of not more than fifty percent of Harijans are being included and till the Government issues instructions, this work will not be properly done. Patwaris are not prepared to do this work again. The Government should order that the names of all the persons, and of Harijans in particular, should be included in the electoral rolls, so that right use is made of the adult franchise.¹

The plight of Harijans in particular and ruralites in general in the field of education was miserable. Drawing the attention of the House to this pitiable situation, he stated:

¹ Punjab Assembly Debates, 26 October 1948, p.249.
“It is a matter of common knowledge that without education nothing can be achieved in this world. No nation can prosper and no country can progress if its youth is not given the right type of education. We in India have very little educational facilities to provide to our children. So our children are deprived of the new light that education spreads around. In our country-side there are no satisfactory arrangements for the education of our rising generations. We daily harp on the necessity of compulsory primary education for all. But what do we notice? There are very few schools in the rural areas. Most of the children have to cover a distance of about five or six miles. You will not come across a girls' school. To female education our most careful attention should be paid. The first and foremost duty of a Government is to impart education. It should spend liberally on this important item and take full responsibility in this connection. The District Boards have failed to discharge their duties. They seem to have run bankrupt. Many District Board Schools have been closed after partition and some more are expected to be. Congress Government should take this duty to itself. After partition Congress Government has made many mistakes. In the pre-partition days no teacher was appointed in the Department of
Education expect when he had first fulfilled the condition of producing certificate to the effect that he had made some illiterates literate. In my humble opinion this practice of giving certificates which has fallen into disuse should be revived. Special attention should be paid to female education.”2

Master Gurbanta Singh noticed the urban bias of the congress. He said:

“Rural areas should not be neglected. Urban population is already in the enjoyment of some facilities which the villages never have. Electricity, water, good roads and so many other advantages are being enjoyed by the people inhabiting the towns and cities, while on the other hand nobody cares for the villages, although they contribute most to the revenues of the State, and provide the best stuff for the army. They are the backbone of the nation and deserve to be well looked after. If this state of affairs continues, the fate of the congress will be sealed during the next elections. We would not allow anybody of their Party to get votes from the villages. We shall see that our villages return only such representatives as would look after the interests of their backward brethren sincerely. I would, therefore, sound a note of warning to the Government

2 Ibid, 13 October 1949, p.49.
that unless they take tangible steps to make primary education compulsory for all children in the Province and provide necessary facilities for the same, they are bound to lose the goodwill of the masses, and this loss will certainly endanger their return in the next elections. I can say without any fear of contradiction that if they continue to give scant attention to the feelings and interests of the rural people, their party would meet an utter rout and not even 15 members from amongst them would be able to return.”

Speaking on the plight of Harijans, he said: “That in this era of freedom a considerable section of the people of Punjab comprising 25 percent of the total population still has the feeling that the dawn of independence has not improved their lot. The governor has not said a word about their uplift. In other words, the Governments have not cared to devote any attention to the improvement of the hard lot of the Harijans. He mentioned few facts to show the miserable plight of these poor people. The Governor had remarked that the serious crimes in 1949 were substantially less than in 1948. Master Gurbanta Singh said that it was not true. Number of those crimes has dwindled down, which were committed by the dacoits in pillaging big zamindars and looting rich sahukars in the villages. But so

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3 Punjab Assembly Debates, 13 October 1949 pp. 48-49.
far as molestation or murder of poor people was concerned, it was on the increase.4

Regarding decline of the Congress of culture of sacrifice and simplicity, he stated that the Government had earned such a bad name that those of us who are responsible for having created it find it difficult to go out villages and face the people there. Before Shri Bhagat Ram Chodha became a Member of this House, he used to wear Gandhi Cap. Since his election he has started wearing turban. When he asked him the cause of this change, he replied that he could not go to his village in Gandhi Cap, because in that case the people would regard him to be a blackmarketeer.5

The country had become independent but the stigma of untouchability was still there. The Government was doing great injustice to them. He narrated the case of a Harijan clerk, who was employed in an office at Simla. A certain person, who was Brahman by caste, ill treated him and told him not to visit his house, as he was an untouchable. The Harijan clerk filed a suit against that person through the Advisory committee constituted by the Government, but it has not been decided so far. Another thing which Master Gurbanta Singh pointed out was that they have requested the Government several times that as our country has become independent the stigma of our being non-agriculturists should now

5 Ibid, 14 March 1950 p. (7) 64.
be removed. He was submitting that even after the attainment of
independence the disability which was imposed on us by the foreign rulers
still subsists. The Harijans are not so rich that they would purchase large
areas of land. The only thing which they desire is that they should be able
to live respectfully in the villages. Though their mainstay is the tilling of
soil, so long as the existing law is there we can command no respect in their
villages.\textsuperscript{6} Regarding discrimination against Harijans he was always
categorical: “In last June, certain percentage of services in Government
Offices was reserved for the Harijans. I am sorry that the Government is not
acting on its decision. Harijans are not being given their due share in the
services.”\textsuperscript{7}

Further he stated that in the matter of rehabilitation of displaced
persons, those who were landlords in Pakistan had been allotted land,
others had been given houses and shops, but so far as Harijans were
concerned, those who settled in the villages after partition are being
dispossessed of the lands which were originally given to them because no
provision has been made for landless tenants in the scheme of quasi-
permanent allotment of land. Harijans were not even being given loans by
the Government. In the villages they had been burdened with very heavy
taxes. House tax, profession tax, marriage tax, and sales tax were only a

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid}, 14 March 1950 p. (7) 64
\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid}.
few of these. While on the one band taxes on the villagers are so heavy, they were being provided no amenities. He further said: “In my village there are four schools at present but there is a proposal to close these. There are no hospitals or good roads in the rural areas.” The Master was of the view that rural representatives were not sincere to their cause. He said: “Some of my hon. Friends” who are representatives of the rural people never go to the villages except when they have to obtain their votes. Some of them who used to live in the villages, have now shifted to cities. Nobody appears to care for these backward people.”

Master Gurbanta Singh was deeply concerned about the unconcern of the government towards Harijans. He said:

“The Government constituted Harijan Welfare Advisory committees. Presidents of the Tehsil Congress Committees, members of the Municipal Committees and some other persons are appointed as members of these committees. Such a committee was formed in Jullundur also. These committees are not intended for the benefit of Harijans. Their only object is to do propaganda on behalf of the Ministers. When the work of a committee is not approved by the Government, it is dissolved and a new committee is constituted. I was also

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8 Ibid.
9 Punjab Assembly Debates, p.65.
member of such a committee in Jullundur. I protested to the Government against communalism prevalent there and also against its being used for doing propaganda. The same is the case with Panchayat Officers. They are used for carrying on propaganda in favour of some Ministers and Congressmen. I know the case of my own Tehsil. The Panchayat Officer went there and told the people that if they did not act in a particular manner, he would dissolve the Panchayat. The Jats turned him out from there. It is highly objectionable that the Government should use its officials for doing propaganda on its behalf. The Government which does such things can not last long.\textsuperscript{10}

Elaborating his point further he stated that he received a letter from a Harijan who was appointed Naib-Tehsildar by the Government of the United Punjab. He wrote that his colleagues look down upon him as a member of a lower class and treat him with contempt. If the treatment meted out to Harijans was brought to the notice of the Government, it told that these feelings could be removed only by co-operation. But he requested the Government to arrange for redressal of wrongs done to them and to take steps to get those who treat them ill, arrested under law. A Harijan

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}
Qanungo went to Kangra for receiving training. He could not get food there for ten days and had to leave that place without obtaining training.\textsuperscript{11}

The government of Independent India and for that matter Punjab showed no concern to the low-paid employees. Commenting upon the Budget, he stated: The Budget that has been presented to the House contains no hope or promise for the low paid Government servants. No attempt has been made to raise their salaries. The House is already aware that the vernacular teachers have given a notice to the Government that they would hold a demonstration in front of the legislative assembly in case their demands are not granted. We often accuse the low paid police sepoys for accepting bribes. But I ask the Government pay them enough to meet their needs so that they may not resort to un-called for practices. A sepoy is always required to put on a neat and clean uniform, he must get himself shaved and keep tidy as otherwise disciplinary action would be taken against him. All this requires money and the Government has not enhanced his salary. Therefore, this Budget is not of the poor but of the rich who are sometimes paid more than 100 times the poor officials. He said: never sticks to one policy. About five or six months ago there was a notification issued by H.E. the Governor that the village artisans who earned Rs. 700 or less shall not be subject to a tax. This decision was not palatable to the big Zamindars because they thought that they might be asked to pay more as

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, pp. 65-66.
the poor people were being given exemption from tax. It was again imposed upon the artisans.\textsuperscript{12}

Regarding discrimination in recruitment of Harijan boys, he stated that there are hundreds of young men of good physique in our community who are anxious to serve in the police department and are quite fit for it and I would therefore urge the government that posts in the police department should be reserved for them according to the percentage that has been decided upon. It is a pity that the Hon. Minister who belongs to our community should say such things and if he says so, how will the other officers be willing to appoint any Harijans and give him his due share.\textsuperscript{13}

Master Gurbanta Singh drew the attention of the Government to the fact that the Harijan welfare fund was not being properly utilized. He said he did not doubt the intention of the Government. What he wanted to stress was that its instructions in the matter were not properly carried out by its officials. Circulars were issued but the educational authorities and the heads of schools and colleges did not care for them. The Harijan students had not been granted any fee concessions or any other relief. The school and college authorities probably grudged the advancement of this community, which they had hoped would continue serving them like slaves for ever. After allowing fee concessions, after some time they would stop on the

\textsuperscript{12} Punjabi Assembly Debates, p.63.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
ground that they had not fared well in quarterly or half yearly examinations. This resulted in a great hardship for the poor people as they were left with no other alternative but to stop the education of their children. This was just an excuse to deny the Harijan children the opportunity to educate themselves. He requested the Government to issue instructions to the school and college authorities to withdraw concession only in those cases where students get plucked in the annual examination.\textsuperscript{14}

Another issue was that of scholarships. He stated: It is the policy of the Government to grant scholarship to Harijan students right from the 9\textsuperscript{th} class to the post graduate (M.A.) stage. But I have to point out with regret that for the last two years and in some cases even for a longer time payment of scholarship has not been made to them and they are in great trouble.\textsuperscript{15}

Rehabilitation of cottage industries was another problem. He was referring to those cottage industries which were exclusively in the hands of Harijans. The Government should have sanctioned some money for the encouragement of these industries.\textsuperscript{16}

No help had been rendered to the Harijan refugees. Unlike the other refugees, they had not been allotted land or shops. Nothing had been done to rehabilitate them. They had not been given any loans or advance for their rehabilitation. No facilities of any kind had been given to them. The

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\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Punjab Assembly Debates}, p (5) 2.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}
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community was in a pitiable condition. Some provision must have been made to rehabilitate them. Some money must have been set apart for this purpose.\textsuperscript{17}

Another grievance of the Harijans as experienced by the Master was that landowners who gave land to Harijans for cultivation got their own names entered into the, ‘girdwari’ register and got the ‘Khasra’ issued in their own names so that they might be in a position to eject the Harijan tenants easily at the time of harvesting i.e. when the crop was ready. This made the position of Harijan tenants most insecure and left them at the mercy of the landlords. The position of the Harijan tenants could only become better if the government issued notification that the ‘Khasra’ be issued in their names; otherwise they would continue to be ejected from land for year to year.\textsuperscript{18}

Master Gurbanta Singh had seen the reality of poor rural educational facilities. He said:

“Sir I am surprised to find that provision in the Budget for the education of children is not larger than that of the last year. It would have been better if more schools were established for groups of villages which at present have only one school. On studying the Budget I find that in addition to three Directors,

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, pp (5) 2-(5) 3.

\textsuperscript{18} Punjab Assembly Debates, p (5) 3.
provision has been made for 145 Inspectors. I am quite familiar with the work these Inspectors do and am in a position to say that in place of giving any guidance and advice to the teachers they render them disservice by exacting ‘begar’ from them. I personally know that the village teachers have got to go every morning to the residences of the Inspectors either to flatter them or to do some domestic work and are therefore invariably late in the school. There is hardly a village teacher who goes to the school punctually at 10’ clock. If they are asked not to do so, they say that their salaries are very low and they can increase their income in that manner only. I can say without fear of contradiction that in the villages, the teachers do not reach their schools before 11 A.M. in winter and 10 A.M. in summer. I have asked the Inspectors of Schools several times to accompany me so that I could show them this state of affairs but they did not agree to do so because they were in the habit to taking forced labour from these teachers. They visit the schools only once in a year and on that occasion too they only enjoy the tea and dinner parties arranged in their honour by the village teachers. A teacher who flatters them gets good remarks while others get unfavourable remarks. It is not proper to spend a huge sum of
money on Inspectors. There is no necessity of such a large number of them. Then, Sir, I wish to point out that the Government does not pay proper attention to the necessity of providing sufficient educational facilities in the villages. It is said that a larger number of boys are reading in schools now.”

Master Gurbanta Singh repeatedly stated that rural representatives were not sincere. He said:

“It has been remarked, Sir, that the Minister belongs to a village. As soon as one becomes Minister, he comes to live in a city. Eighty percent of those Members who were elected by the rural people have settled in cities and towns. They have not the courage to visit the villages and face their electorate. Not only has the Government failed to make large provision for vernacular and rural education, it has also reduced the amount spent on scholarships. The amount of money which used to be given to our children out of the Peasant Welfare Fund has also been reduced. Those hon. Members who live in cities are quite up-to-date while country folk like Chaudhari Badlu Ram, Chaudhri Matu Ram and myself are simple people. When my hon. Friends like Master Kabul Singh shift

to the cities and become members of Municipal Committees
they do not care to visit their villages to see the condition of
the people living there.”

Remission of fees and grant of scholarship to the Harijan students was a point of ranker for the Master, He said: that the number of primary and high schools in the villages was very small. All the new schools and colleges had been opened in the cities and nobody looked to the need of the rural people. A sum of twenty three lakhs of rupees had been provided for being given in the form of scholarships to the children of backward classes. Such schemes exist only on paper. When the children go to seek admission to a school, they were told that the number of students on its rolls was already very large and that there was no more accommodation. If, somehow, one succeeds in getting his child admitted, he was turned our the school after three months on the ground that he got plucked in the examination. No fee concession had been given to at least seventy percent of Harijan children. The circulars issued by the Government for the remission of tuition fees of these children did not reach the village or District Board Schools. In the primary schools the fees were not remitted at all. As regards those children, who were studying in the fifth or high classes, the tuition fees seventy percent of that was not remitted. The Headmasters would say that they sent the necessary papers to the

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20 Punjab Assembly Debates, p.41
Government but no action was taken on these. The Director of Public Instruction was asked to place these funds at the disposal of Inspectors so that they might sanction the grant of scholarships. Great difficulty was experienced in the matter of getting children admitted to schools. The private schools did not pay any attention to this matter.  

Elaborating the point further, Master Gurbanta Singh said that when the Government had issued an order that no tuition fees should be charged from Harijan children, the grant-in-aid of those schools which did not observe this order should be stopped. Nobody would accept such a suggestion because the managing bodies of these schools had influence with one big officer or another. When it was enquired from the Principal of Jullundur College, why he did not remit the fees of Harijan boys in his college he replied that there were eight hundred students on the rolls of his college. According to the Government instructions, before a college could ask for aid in respect of Harijan students on its rolls, it had to remit the tuition fees of five per cent students itself. The Government gave aid in respect of the Harijans in excess of those five percent. In the case of his college he would have to remit the tuition fees of forty students, which he was not prepared to do. The Government was requested to take action against those colleges which did not provide free education to Harijan boys as ordered by it. He also pointed out that the secretariat of the Education

21 Ibid.
Department works at a very slow speed. The papers sent to it for the grant of scholarships keep lying there for months and in some cases for even a year. He asked the government to see that the orders issued by it are properly carried out. When the Master went to his village and tell people that the Government had made the education of Harijan children free, he was told that the schools were charging full fess from them. He took the Inspector to those schools and he told the Headmasters that if they had no funds, they could meet the expenditure out of Sports fund, which he promised to approve, but they turned down his advice. Why does the Government not take action against such schools? It merely issued communiqués that so many of Harijan students were being given free education and so many of them were in receipt of scholarship.\(^{22}\)

Inefficiency led to maladministration, he said. He said that such persons had been nominated to district boards who did not possess any knowledge about its working nor knew anything about the life in the rural areas. For instance, he said “my hon, Friend Dr. Sant Ram Seth does not know how and where dung is heaped in the villages. This is how nominations are made by Government.”\(^ {23}\) Master Gurbanta Singh knew that the loan scheme of the government was not going to benefit those poor persons residing in this State who would be badly in need of loans for

\(^{22}\) *Punjab Assembly Debates*, pp. 5(13) 41-42.

establishing factories and other business concerns. Only those persons who could approach the hon. Ministers or the high officials would succeed in securing loans without any rhyme or reason while the claims of those who were poor and needy would continue to be ignored. He said that there was nothing wrong in the provisions of the main Act under which the district officers, on receipt of applications for loans deputed inspectors and other officers to make necessary enquires and then submit reports whether the loan asked for by the applicant was justified. It goes without saying that recommendations for granting loans were made by these officers in genuine cases only. Under the provision of the amending Bill, poor people who had no approach to hon. Ministers and other high officials as they did not happen to know any of them, would stand to suffer. On the other hand, loans would be granted to undeserving and influential and a chosen few persons.24

Master Gurbanta Singh vehemently criticized the working of government committees which would drain the public exchequer. He said that he got a letter from Secretary, Land Reform Committee, that he was appointed as a member of this Committee. But it was strange that he did not receive any programme of this Committee afterwards. The Committee had not been able to do any useful work during this period of about two years. Out of the total provision of Rs. 12,000 the sum of Rs. 6,000 will be

expended on the salary of the Secretary of this Committee. This amount could well be utilized for revising the grades of low-paid chaprasis. It would have been much better if the Government had in stand of setting up this committee, constructed houses for the tenants. The houses of remnants in villages have been completely destroyed as a result of excessive rains. When the houses in different towns collapsed, the Government supplied tents for the sufferers and the Deputy Commissioners in every district remained busy in providing all sorts of facilities to the victims of this calamity. If this amount of Rs. 12,000 was distributed in the twelve districts for the benefit of the tenants class, it would have certainly backed their efforts to construct houses for themselves. This was a sheer wasteful expenditure and would constitute as an unnecessary burden on the state exchequer. This Government should have spent this amount on any other item so that people might have derived real advantage of the amount spent.\(^\text{25}\)

Master Gurbanta Singh stated that floods had caused great misery to the boor Harijans. Most of the Harijans had kacha houses and they had crumbled down because of their being situated at low level in the villages. Rain water had caused great havoc as a result of which their houses had collapsed. There were certain villages in which houses of all the Harijan residents had fallen. At present their families were sitting in the open

\(^{25}\text{Ibid, 9 October 1950, pp. (7) 37.}\)
without any shelter. Even the beams of their houses had either been washed away by the floods or taken away by the villagers forcibly. These poor people were not big owners of land and gardens from where they could manage to procure timber for carrying out necessary repairs to their houses. He requested the Government to render them immediate help. Special aid should be given to the Harijans. In the case of agriculture the Government could render help by providing them Taccavi loans and remission of land revenue etc. But this form of aid was not going to help the Harijans. They should be provided separate funds for the construction and repair of their houses. Another difficulty of the Harijans and other poor people of the villages was that due to destruction of crops there is scarcity of foodgrain in the villages. Those who have foodgrain are unwilling to part with it even on high prices. Harijans of about ten villages came to him and complained that foodgrains were not available. So I request the Government to open cheap grain shops in the villages immediately. This step should be taken at once so that poor persons living in rural areas would be able to get foodgrains at fair prices from these depots. As regards the hardship caused by the non-availability of drinking water, he made a submission that permits boring of hand pumps should be issued forthwith. In the villages question of repair of houses had become difficult because on the one hand labour was not available and on the other hand the pacca bricks, the control price of which was about twenty-eight rupees were hardly available even at rupees forty-
five per thousand. The Government should provide all possible aid to the Harijans who had suffered great loss. This aid should not be in the form of loans because these poor persons would not be in a position to repay loans advanced to them. Relief should be given to them by way of grants by the Government and suitable persons should be deputed to distribute the grants to the Harijan sufferers.\textsuperscript{26}

Condemning the urban bias of the government, Master Gurbanta Singh stated that our Government was not doing what it would do for the rural population. There was a marked difference between the treatment meted out to the rural people and the urban people. The life, property and honour of the people living in rural areas were not safe. In cities, the police was there to protect them. But in the villages even murders take place and no one reaches in time to investigate immediately. The Government should pay its attention to this matter and try to put an end to such a state of affairs. So far as the Police was concerned, the Master draw attention of the Government to its excesses. Many poor people were put behind the bars under section 100 every day. The police officers were not working honestly. Of course, he admitted that the Ministry came into power only about two or three months back and they had not been able to implement their policy effectively due to shortage of time. But still he considered it his duty to place before them the condition prevailing in our rural areas. In

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Punjab Assembly Debates}, p (9) 42
villages the poor people were not treated properly by the police officers. Other departments were also not working for the benefit of the poor. Citing an example he said that some time back, a poor Government employee had his finger fractured while working in a factory. He was taken by his friend to a nearby hospital and admitted to it. He remained lying there for the whole of the night but his finger was not dressed. When the Master met the Civil Surgeon in this connection, he was surprised to hear that the subordinates had paid no heed to the poor government employee simply because none of his relatives was there to look after him. These were the conditions prevailing in the state, He would request the Government to remedy them as soon as possible. Further he said that previously, there used be a Peasant’s Welfare Fund from which help was given to the village people for the education of their children. It was pity that this fund had been abolished. Besides this, it was a well known fact that the Government used to give grants to the District Boards for purposes of improving the sanitary condition of the villages and providing other amenities of life to the villagers. But as ill luck would have it, the Government had withdrawn that grant to the great detriment of the rural folk. The Government in the past had been very tardy in making provisions for ameliorating the lot of the poor villagers who were ever ready to offer themselves for recruitment to the army for the purpose of defending their motherland and for recruitment to the police for the maintenance of law and order in the State.
He said that he had every hope that the uplift of the ruralites in general and the down-trodden Harijans in particular would receive the attention it deserved.27

Master Gurbanta Singh brought to the fore a great paucity of hospitals in the villages and medical aid which was very scarce. Ordinarily, there were three categories of hospitals which were maintained in the areas. Under the first category came those dispensaries which were entirely subsidized by the Government but were under the management of the District Board. The Government and the District Boards contributed funds on a half and half basis for the maintenance of dispensaries falling under the second category. The dispensaries under the third category were entirely run by the District Board funds. It was regrettable that only very recently the Government stopped the payment of subsidies to the District Boards for the dispensaries under the first category. As a result of the stoppage of this subsidy, the rural people would be hard hit as they would be deprived of the medical aid, which, though scanty was yet available to them. He requested the Government to reconsider this matter and see that the subsidy was again revived.28

Then Master Gurbanta Singh focussed upon the pressing need of schools. If illiteracy was to be liquidated from the rural areas, Government

28 Ibid, (7) 58.
should make a liberal provision for the spread of network of schools there. Now-a-days, in some villages, the students had to traverse seven to eight miles to attend a school. He hoped the present Government would provide facilities to the children of rural folk. 29

Master Gurbanta Singh drew the attention of Government to the Criminal Tribes Department. He said, “I think this department has become out-of-date, out-moded and out of tune with the present set-up, which has come into existence as a result of our freedom from bondage. In a free country, it is sheer injustice to label a person as criminal, simply because he was born in a tribe, which is considered as a criminal tribe by the previous Governments. I would request the hon. Chief Minister to abolish this department as early as possible. I think that he should not lose any time in announcing its abolition” 30

The Chief Minister announced right in the House that this Department would be abolished. 31

Master Gurbanta Singh was critical of the government on the question of reservation for scheduled castes. He said: “The Government has reserved 15 percent of the posts in the Government services for the Scheduled Castes. Although the intention of the Government in unconscionable in this matter, yet the pity of it is that Scheduled Castes

29 Ibid., (7) 58-59
30 Ibid, p. 59
31 Ibid.
hardly get their due share in the services. The reason is that the Officers-in-
charge of the department put obstacles in the way of the recruitment of the
Harijans. They are so communal-minded and conservative that they cannot
tolerate any person belonging to the Scheduled Castes being appointed to
the services. So, if the Harijans fail to get their due share of 15 percent in
the services, the whole responsibility falls on these narrow-minded officers.
I would request the Government either to dismiss such officers or transfer
them to some other places.\textsuperscript{32}

On the question of remission of fee of the Harijan students he said
that Heads of schools and colleges would not give this concession of
remission of fee on one pretext or the other. They had the audacity to tell
our boys to go to Shri Jagat Narain (a Minister) or Shri Bhim Sen Sachar
(Chief Minister) for remission of fees. They refused to admit the Harijan
boys sometimes that on the plea of financial stringency and sometimes if
they were admitted they were plucked deliberately and forced to pay their
own tuition fees. So even though the government had reserved a number of
scholarships for the Harijans and had ordered remission of fees, yet the
Heads of the educational institutions gave them no facilities. He requested
the Government to take steps to call for the explanation of such officers or
persons and take severe action against them.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid} p. (7) 60.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Ibid}
Master Gurbanta Singh brought to the notice of the Chief Minister that he had made an announcement on the floor of House that he would appoint an Under Secretary from amongst the Scheduled Castes. It was a matter of pity that a period of three or four years had passed and yet no such appointment had been made. If this plea was put forward that a competent man from among the Harijans was not available, he was not going to admit this. Competent Harijans were there; perhaps it was the will that was lacking. Some time back appointments were made in the Secretariat and yet no Harijan was taken or selected. It was his firm belief that the intentions of the Government are good but it was the officer, tainted with rank communalism who stood in the way of the Harijans being appointed to high offices and taking their rightful share in the services. He would request the government to give consideration to this matter and save from the infamy such officers bring to it.\textsuperscript{34} Another issue was representation in the Panchayats. He said that autocratic conduct of the Panchayat Officer is condemnable. These officers particularly did not care a fig for the Harijan area when they went on tours in the villages. When a Panchayat Officer visited a village, the Harijans requested him to give them representation in the Panchayat according to their population. But he turned a deaf ear and constituted a Panchayat of men of his own choice ignoring altogether the rights of the Harijans. The Harijans appealed to the Deputy

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p (7) 60.
Commissioner for the redressal of their grievance, but there, too, their voice went in the wilderness. The Panchayat Officer and the Deputy Commissioner paid no heed to their representation. So this was the state of affairs. He requested the Government to teach them a lesson by either dismissing them or transferring them to such places where they could not bring discredit to Government by their invidious treatment of the Scheduled Castes or Backward Classes.  

Master Gurbanta Singh’s concern for female education in the rural areas gets highlighted in the debates. He said that so far there has been no arrangement for female education in the villages. He said the government has planned to open five schools for female education. But surprising thing is that no school is going to be opened in the village. Also there is shortage of trained female teachers. Normally the trained female teachers do not prefer to serve in the villages. So to meet this demand, the rural girls should be trained as teachers.  

In the pre-independence days, the scheduled non-agricultural castes could not purchase land. So the question of Chamars purchasing land did not arise. When a deputation led by Master Gurbanta Singh met the Premier Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan to demand that such law should be repealed, he replied in the negative. But he said that Chamars could purchase land from

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35 Ibid., pp. (7) 60-(7) 61.
36 Punjab Assembly Debates 17 March 1954 p (8) 32.
the Chamars and similarly could sell to the Chamars. Same was the attitude of Sir Chhotu Ram, another Minister in the Unionist Ministry. But then after independence that law was repealed when Giani Kartar Singh was the Revenue Minister of Punjab. Master Gurbanta Singh stated that now the communally-oriented consolidation officers did not effect the transfer (Intakal) of land in the name of Chamars.37

Not to speak of the people in general, even at the level of the government, legally sanctioned derogatory words for Harijans were being used in the government records. Master Gurbanta Singh drew the attention of the government to this malpractice. He said that in schools if a Harijan student applied for fee concession, he would he asked to give in writing that he was son of a Kamin which was a derogatory term. Master Gurbanta Singh was pained to know that this practice was still continuing even after eight years of independence. Same was the situation in other departments of the government.38 It was after Master Gurbanta Singh’s tirade that this practice was stopped.

When Master Gurbanta Singh was given Minister-ship in 1956 under the Chief Minister-ship of Partap Singh Kairon, he saw to it that he would do maximum for the upliftment of Harijans. As Minister of Agriculture and Forests, he reserved the forest land for Harijans where they would grow the

37 Ibid, 16 March 1955 the Punjab Appropriation (No. 2) Bill, p. (20) 33.
38 Ibid.
crops. When he was criticized for this ‘bias’ he replied that these people have been exploited by the Indian society for centuries. The Congress Government decided to undo that injustice. The fees of Harijan students was remitted. Rs. 30 per was reserved for higher education. 30% reservation was provided to Harijans in services. Wasteland in the villages was reserved for them for agricultural purpose. All this was done for their economic and social advancement.39

Master Gurbanta Singh was a big stakeholder in the cooperative movement in Punjab. He was the moving spirit behind the establishment of cooperative societies in the villages. There were also societies exclusively for women and scheduled castes. Those who had small holdings would he benefited. Also the beneficiaries were the poor landless people. Women were given employment so were men through establishing poultry farms, dairy farms, fisheries, pigries etc. He debated in the house that these poor people were in a way enslaved by the rich landlords and moneylenders. It was gratifying to note that now most of these people had become economically independent. The custom of begar was also ended. Their children started going to schools. They would wear good clothes, have good food to eat and got a sense of dignity but all through the cooperative movement.40

39 Punjab Assembly Debates, 16 May 1957, p (13) 122.
About the non-implementation of much-touted Sachar Formula, he scolded the Minister of Education even when he himself was the Minister in the Government. When Sachar Formula was devised in 1951, he was quite optimistic about it. But in 1961 i.e. ten years after, he found that it was not being sincerely implemented which created lot of communal tension, particularly in the Doaba region. He prevailed upon the government to punish those educational institutions which were flouting it and causing inconvenience to the children and disturbing the communal harmony of the state.41

As Minister of Cooperation, he piloted a very important measure. The Punjab Cooperative Societies Bill, 1960 which went a long way in establishing the cooperative movement in Punjab. The bill not only sought to establish the societies, but to make them function on poor public-oriented lines. He said that now onwards the procedure in registering a society was simplified. It would be registered within two months if the society was not bogus and was genuine. Funds were also earmarked for training the people about the cooperative movement. It was also ensured that there would be no interference by the police in case there occurred a clash among the members. It was left to the registrar to take a decision about the working of a society. If the managing committee of a society did not work well or worked illegally, it would be dissolved and new elections would take place.

without creating any fuss. Similarly he rebutted the arguments of opposition leaders that cases be referred to the sub-judge. He opposed interference of secretary as well. If the members of the society spent money unauthorized by the by-laws of the society, they would be made to reimburse the said expenditure. Only the actual workers would be the members of the society. Nepotism would not be tolerated, it was said. Last of all, he stated that the cooperative societies were not meant for the rich landlords or other rich people. These were meant for poor ruralites. A provision had been made for advancing loans to the needy people not by mortgaging their land, but just in the surety of two members. He said that his focus were the poor men.\textsuperscript{42}

In a debate over Indian Forest (Punjab Amendment) Bill 1962, Master Gurbanta Singh as Forest Minister warned about the theft of wood from the jungles and mountains. The people living in the mountainous areas and the forest contractors were in league with each other. Lachhman Singh Gill, an Akali MLA, asked him not to indulge in these kinds of bickerings as his profession was that of leather. They peel off the skin of dead animals, treat them and then dye them. He was nothing to do with the wood.\textsuperscript{43} Master Gurbanta Singh retorted by saying that he not only peels off the skin of dead animals but also peels off the skin of morally and ethically dead

\textsuperscript{42}ibid, 30 March 1961, pp (28) 22-(28) 77.
\textsuperscript{43}ibid, 14 May 1962 p 935) 60.
leaders. That is the more important business. Those who indulge in theft of wood, not only cause damage to the mountains and eco-system, but also to the dams like Bhakra Dam which has been built as a monument of progress. Pong Dam was also being built. That would also be damaged, he warned. So he brought an amendment to the existing law so that the thieves would be sternly dealt with. There was an urgent need to check the erosion of soil. The Panchayats should be empowered to deal with this problem, he argued. This would become possible only if the villagers, instead of colluding with the contractors, take responsibility of fending the trees, of growing the grass and other wild plants so that greenery of the mountainous areas was maintained and fertility of soil was enhanced.\textsuperscript{44}

As Punjab was divided into Punjabi Region and Hindi Region, there was always a controversy on this count as to which region was getting more funds and more attention of the government. As Agriculture Minister, Master Gurbanta Singh was aware of the controversy. He told in the Assembly that no injustice has been done to the Hindi region. An agricultural college which may soon become a university, was functional in Ludhiana. On the similar pattern, another college had been opened at Hissar. Yield of foodgrains was almost equal in both the regions of Punjab.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid.
i.e. whole of the Punjab which was at the top of the country so far as the yield was concerned.\footnote{Ibid, 30 April 1962, p. (27) 64.}

Regarding horticulture, Master Gurbanta Singh told the House that in undivided Punjab, an area of 1 lac and 30 thousand acres was under cultivation of horticulture. When the Punjab was divided alongwith the partition of the country, the Indian Punjab got 53000 acres of horticulture land. Most of the gardens were uprooted. Many of gardens fell near the cities and these were effaced for construction. Many gardens were uprooted during consolidation of land. The farmers were the major losers. It was the concern of the government, he told the House, to provide some alternative source of income to the poor farmers. Those who shifted to the cities fared well. But those who stayed back in the villages had to face many hardships. Their children could not have good food, good education, good clothes, almost nothing whereas the city dwellers had innumerable benefits. He told Lachhman Singh Gill that he is a rich contractor and lives in Delhi. He does not know the problem faced by the poor rural people. The Department of agriculture, he said, had developed nurseries in every major city so that fruit bearing plants may he provided to the farmers free of cost. A special officer Deputy Director (Horticulture) has been appointed for this purpose. The government had also established seed farms in the cities, like one in Bathinda to provide cotton seed to the farmers at a cheap price. The seed
from such seed farms would he certified seed and would be available in sealed bags so that spurious seed may not be mixed with. Soil testing had been done at various places. Wells had been dug at a number of places. Stores had been constructed.  

Master Gurbanta Singh knew the economic condition of the tenants. He as Agriculture Minister got the ceiling of the land passed by the House, which was vociferously criticized by the big landlords. These landlords, the Master argued, would talk about decrease in production after ceiling. He said that the reference point was not decrease, it was the ceiling as it benefitted the tenants who had no land and who were made the owners of the land. Not only that, along with the ownership of land, these tenants and other poor farmers as well were provided with new implements like plough and harrow. The government had started manufacturing these implements and made them available at cheap rates. Master Gurbanta Singh stated that Pandit Nehru had once asked the Punjab Government to provide mechanized farming in Punjab which should begin with providing modern ploughs. The Master said that the Punjab Government had taken steps in that direction. The government also started quality marking so that sub-standard implements might not be manufactured. Anyone who manufactured implements, would have to get permission from the Government. The Government would provide the implements at subsidized

rates i.e. 25% subsidy would be provided on every implement. Sprays had been provided for plant protection so that pesticides might not damage the crops. Embankments had been constructed so that floods might not cause damage, particularly in the Rajpura area.47

In a debate over demand for grants relating to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Master Gurbanta Singh argued that Punjab needed such industry which may cater to the needs of its 70% rural population. His focus was upon the agricultural industry i.e. agri-based industry. If agriculture proposed, the whole nation would Proper. If agriculture suffered, everybody would suffer-the contractors, the arhtiyas, the shopkeepers, the transporters. Answering to the criticism by a member of the House who said that agriculture in Punjab had made no progress, he said that if we compare figures available for 1950-51, the production of foodgrain was 33.79 lac tons, in 1961-62, the production was 67 lac tons, i.e. almost double. In 1950-51, 3.1 lac bales of cotton were produced whereas in 1961-62, 9.19 lac bales were produced Gur (molasses) 4.4 lac tons whereas now it was 9.05 lac tons, sugar was produced 10 thousand tons and now it was 1 lac tons.48

Master Gurbanta Singh was very enthusiastic about establishing the Punjab Agricultural University in Punjab. Piloting the Punjab Agricultural

48 Ibid, pp. (27) 60 - (27) 61.
University (Amendment) Bill 1962, he told the House that the government is sure to establish the Punjab Agriculture University. One such university existed Pant Nagar in Uttar Pradesh. Punjab should feel proud of this fact. As we are ahead of other states in agriculture, so we are going to be in establishing the university as well, he said. It is going to be established for fulfilling an ambition of putting the agriculturists on the path of progress. The Board of Management has been established whose primary objective is to find a suitable Vice Chancellor. The government is also possessed of this matter. The one who has been chosen for the job is the most experienced person and has been found after a lot of effort in this direction. No country can make progress without top standard University. The chosen person would wholeheartedly work in realizing that objective. The much-needed research would be carried out by top scholars in the field and new scholars would be created who would be torchbearers in the Indian agriculture.49

Speaking in the House on the Tenth Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1960-61, Master Gurbanta Singh, Minister of Agriculture and Social welfare, said that the debate had created an opportunity to talk about the Welfare of Harijans. He said that a large section of Indian society whose number is 42 lacs in Punjab at present was deliberately kept backward in the social and religious field. India was

country of Rishis, Munis and Avtars. The great souls preached that the
achhuts are part of the country. Their conditions must improve. But the
atmosphere in India was such that these great souls were worshipped but
their preachings were not honoured. Mahatma Gandhi was so deeply
concerned about the miserable condition of the Harijans that he lived with
them in their slums so that the people of the country may feel that if such a
great leader loves them so much, we must also love them. At one occasion,
he went on fast unto death for the sake of Harijans. His argument was that
they are my part, part of the country and if they are excluded from the
Indian society he would not live in this country, he would leave India.50

Speaking further, Master Gurbanta Singh stated that in the pre-
independence days, untouchability was rampant. The untouchables were
not the owners of the houses. They could not purchase even five marlas of
land for constructing a house. They had no representation. They were not
allowed to meet any officer of the government to redress their grievances.
Then the laws were enacted for their betterment. Laws were also enacted
for the education of their children, for their employment, houses and work.
It was gratifying to note that when we got independence in 1947, we had
set apart Rs 8 lac for this purpose, he said. At present i.e 1963, 45441
scheduled caste students were getting scholarship which amounts to Rs 47,

50 *Ibid*, 17 April 1963, p (36) 120.
79, 495. Apart from this, right from primary to M.A, they had total fee remission.

Those schools and college which do not submit the claim in time and become defaulters, would he liable to punitive action.\textsuperscript{51}

Master Gurbanta Singh pointed out in the House that Harijan students do not get employment in technical posts because majority of the Harijan students would not complete their education. They would dropout in the midway. Now seats had been reserved for them in technical institutions as well where scholarship of Rs. 40, Rs. 60 and Rs. 80 had been fixed. Now onwards, this shortage would be made up.\textsuperscript{52}

Master Gurbanta Singh never felt small being a chamar. Rather he felt pride in his caste. When he used the world chamar, some members objected to the use of this word. But Master Gurbanta Singh said that he feels proud of using this word for himself. The word has been used in the Constitution and in the Scheduled Caste List. It is a very proud word. Chamar was not a black marketeer, he was not dishonest. It is a highly honourable word. Its piety could not he expressed in words.\textsuperscript{53}

Master Gurbanta Singh told the House that if a Harijan employee is dismissed from service, his vacancy would be filled by a Harijan. He told further that this year 15 percent staff was retrenched in the government

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, pp (36) 120-122.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p. (36) 123.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, p (36) 125.
secretariat. Some other staff members were also retrenched. But it has been satisfying to note that no Harijan employee had been retrenched. Provision was also being made, as demanded by a Scheduled Caste member Chand Ram for reservation in the promotions also.  

Master Gurbanta Singh informed the House that the government advanced loans to a Harijans without asking for any surety. There were cooperative societies exclusively for Harijans. Their number at present was 1366 and a loan of Rs. 38.50 lac had been advanced to the Harijans through these societies. In the whole of state there were 177 thousand members and Rs. 1.17 crore has been given to these societies. The loans advanced to Harijans were free of interest so that the loanees could start industry. He also told that if a Harijan tenant was evicted from land, the government provided him free legal aid to file a suit against the landlord. It has been decided that in the district courts where there were Harijan advocates they would be admitted to the panel of advocates.

Master Gurbanta Singh told further that Punjab was first state in India where in every Panchayat, one or two seats for Harijans had been reserved. In every Panchayat Samiti, there were four seats reserved for Harijan members and in every Zila Parashad, there were four seats reserved. He also told that efficiency in administration was not

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55 *Punjab Assembly Debates, 10 April (1963) pp (36) 1296- (36) 127.*
compromised. If anywhere an inefficient and corrupt Harijan employee or officer had been found, he was shunted out.56

Master Gurbanta Singh knew that common land (Shamlat) in the village had normally been appropriated by the rich landlords. They paid just nominal price and got the land leased for 10 to 20 years. The panchayats were not getting any income from the land. But then the Punjab Village Common Lands Regulation, (Amendment) Bill 1964 was brought in the House. After its passage all the leases were cancelled, thereby paved the way for income for the panchayats. There was a different provision for the common lands which normally were rivulets and choes in the mountainous villages. There the lands would not be cultivated but brought under tree plantation so that the dams would not be filled with silt and the mountains would not be denuded.57

While discussing the Eleventh Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the year 1961-62, Master Gurbanta Singh said that a lot had been done for the Scheduled Castes. He said the communally oriented officers had been identified and their mechanism of blocking the progress of Harijans had been understood. They had been persuaded to behave properly so that promotion of Harijans would not be blocked. He told the House that the sweepers were given special pay

56 Ibid, p (36) 129.
57 Ibid 10 April 1964 pp (36) 69-(36) 70.
of Rs. 20 because of nature of their job. Provision was made for construction of houses for them in the cities. An officer was appointed to evaluate the work of the government done for the betterment of Harijans. 58

The House was further told that Harijans who were cultivating for the last ten years, would be made the owners. He stated categorically that corrupt Harijan employees and officers would not be tolerated. He told that some Harijan welfare officers were rusticated because they embezzled the funds. But the government saw to it that the replacement would be by another Harijan only so that their quota in services remained intact. 59

Matter of concern for the government was not only Scheduled Castes, but also Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Areas i.e. that is the hilly areas. Cooperative societies had been formed which made provision for the marketing of the crops of that area. There societies were provided funds for marketing. In the remote Lahul-Spite area, provision was made for transport. Programmes were also chalked out for the advancement of the Scheduled Tribes. The members in the House belonging to higher castes tried to stall these programmes, he boldly stated. But he was also of the view that otherwise in Punjab, untouchability was not that obnoxious as it was in other parts of the country. He said that some friends sitting in this House itself practiced untouchability. He said: ‘These friends still do not

58 Punjab Assembly Debates, 15 April 1964, pp (37) 66 - (37) 67.
allow me to enter their houses. Nor do they serve food in their house. Such was the condition of Harijans even after seventeen years of the Congress rule under the stewardship of the tallest leader of the country Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. So deeply entrenched were the caste prejudices in the Indian society.⁶⁰

Master Gurbanta Singh said that Harijans were not beggars. They fought for their rights and got them. Some members said that previous times were satyuga times i.e. the days of truth and honesty. He said that of Kalyuga i.e. dark ages where only the landlord enjoyed the rights. Satyuga had dawned now when the landless tenants had become the owners, when the Harijan had equal rights of decent living.⁶¹

As Minister of local-self government, he was much concerned about the corruption in the municipal bodies. He stated in the house that he had dismissed a lot number of the committees, because they were found indulging in malpractices. When some members tried to defend them, he said that they should not defend them on the floor of the sacred House. If they wanted to defend them, they should do it outside the House. If a member is charged of theft, involved in embezzlement, indulges in unethical practices, he lost his right to serve the government, he said.⁶²
In May 1964, Punjab Government was reorganised after the exit of Partap Singh Kairon as Chief Minister. Comrade Ram Kishan became the Chief Minister of Punjab. Master Gurbanta Singh was not taken into the Ministry. As an ordinary member of the House, particularly the person who had remained Minister for eight years, he kept on representing his constituency in particular and Punjab in general in a forceful manner. He did not hesitate to criticise even his own party government. Participating in the discussion on Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, he stated that many important issues relating to Harijans had been deliberately left out. He said many issues had been solved during his ministership which this report made no mention of. The report referred to the question of land, houses, digging the wells. But he said the most important question was that of the bread for the Harijan. If he was able to earn his bread, he could think of land and house as well. But if earning the bread was a problem all other issues went to the background. He said that to ensure bread for the Harijan, officials working in the Harijan welfare department should be empowered more so that they could take initiative and not look towards their bosses for the implementation of the welfare measures.63

Speaking on the Punjab Motor Vehicles Taxation (Amendment) Bill 1965, he criticised the Transport Minister for enhancing the transport tax on

63 Punjab Assembly Debates, 19 October 1965, p (7) 63.
the truck operators. He said that the system had already got rotten to the disadvantage of the truck operators. Transport is the life line of a state as whole of its development depends upon it. The government had raised the tax on transport which would damage the economy of Punjab. He said in Punjab most of the truck owners have purchased trucks by selling land or jewellery. He said that in the recent war with Pakistan, these truck operators helped the defence forces in transporting the good even at the cost of their lives. Ultimately the burden of taxes would be falling upon the public. The quantum of jump in taxes was so big that it would harm the body politic, he said.\textsuperscript{64}

Master Gurbanta Singh criticised the pro-rich stand of the government. He said that it was decided that land from Sutlej and choes of Ambala would he distributed among the poor farmers and landless Harijans. But that was not done. That land had been given to the rich people. The Home Minister, Master Gurbanta Singh said, made a ridiculous statement that Birlas would give technical advice to the state on agriculture. The state had its own full-fledged agricultural university which was the top one in Indian Universities. Why did the government not seek technical advice from its experts. He said this was a tilt towards the rich, which is condemnable. The government made one mistake of giving the land to

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid, 25 October 1965, p (11) 74.
Birlas. He cautioned the government not to comment other mistake of giving the remaining land to Tatas.  

Master Gurbanta Singh forcefully opposed the Punjab Commercial Crops Cess (Amendment) Bill 1965 which was piloted by his own party government. He said it was ridiculous to levy cess on these farmers who destroyed their crop by their own hands when Pakistan attacked India. The farmers of three border districts Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur had to undergo all kinds of travails. In other districts, particularly Jullundur where air force station is situated at Adampur, it was around there that paratroopers from Pakistan descended. The farmers of Jullundur District destroyed their crops so that the paratroopers could not hide there. It was shameful that those farmers were being taxed. A poor farmer sowed sugarcane, prepared molasses (Gur) from that and used it in his home. He sows cotton, spins coarse cloth (Khaddar) and wears it. In Punjab, majority of the farmers had less than five acres of land. It was decided by the previous government that the cess was for three years only. But was being revived. The Government should feel that the cess is being levied on soldiers as half of population in every village in Punjab is serving in the army. When Master Gurbanta Singh was debating in the House, a member said loudly that farmers are true nationalist.

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65 Punjab Assembly Debates, 19 October 1965, pp (7) 65-(7) 66.
Master Gurbanta Singh said that sources of revenue had not dried up; rather these were not properly exploited. The government had leased land to Birlas on Rs 30 per acre whereas its market rent was Rs. 200. He said that Sardar Balwant Singh, Chairman of the Estimates Committee told him that the government was providing wood to a mill on cheap rates. Why the government did not increase these rates? Why did the government withdraw some taxes which were levied upon the rich? Registration fee on the purchase of a house was decreased. The government introduced Sales Tax Bill which was withdrawn because it was opposed by some influential members. But it was a matter of pity that no body spoke for the poor farmers. Government had the feeling that the farmers were not vocal like traders and businessmen so they could he taxed easily. The previous government had reserved Rs five crore for the welfare of Harijans. But it was surprising that this government had used more than three crore rupees for some other purpose. He sarcastically said that this government had looted the money of poor Harijans. Harijans apart, the poor farmers were not getting fertilisers, water and connection for tubewells. They were running from one end to the other in search of fertilisers and electric connections.\(^67\)

As said before, Master Gurbanta Singh repeated that Punjab farmer was very hardworking. He went to UP and wrote success stories in

\(^{67}\) Ibid, pp (25) 62-(25) 63.
agriculture. He went to Australia and America and established big farms. But the Punjab Government was of the view that Birlas would produce better seed; hence lease of land to them and not to Punjabi farmer. The Punjab Agricultural University was asking for some land for experiments. So instead of giving land to Birlas, the government should have given it to the University. He said that the Cess Bill should be thoroughly discussed by the party before being passed by the government. The government claimed that it was pro-poor it should substantiate its claims, he said.  

The Government of Comrade Ram kishan when came into office in May 1964, had declared that it would efface the black spots of the previous government and would provide a clean and pro poor administration. The declaration was welcomed by all. But it had been observed in breach rather than implementation. Even the pro-poor policies of the previous government had been shelved.  

Master Gurbanta Singh argued in the House that the government had wrongfully changed the system of procurement of fertilisers to the farmers. The previous government had decaded that the Agriculture Department would issue the permits and the farmer would procure the same from a cooperative shop. Now the cooperative societies had been authorised to distribute the fertiliser. Master Gurbanta Singh was of the view that the

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68 Ibid, pp (25) 63-(25) 64.
cooperative society would refuse to give them on credit as their credit limit would not allow them to purchase the required quantity. It was unjust act on the part of the government. Moreover the credit advanced by the government was on low rate of interest whereas the cooperative societies would charge high rate of interest which would put additional financial burden on the poor farmers.\textsuperscript{70}

When Kapur Singh, the Finance Minister said in the House that the government had no money, so the taxes were the dire need of the government, Master Gurbanta Singh replied that the government should reduce the non-productive expenditure. He said that a large contingent of bodyguards had been deployed on the premises of the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Chief Minister and Ministers including Kapur Singh What kind of threat they have? they are common citizens trying to live in an uncommon manner. Their guards should be removed and money saved. Moreover they had purchased eight big cars like mercedezes and the money they had spent was from the Harijan Welfare Fund. He said the Scheduled Caste leader Chand Ram who represented the Harijans in the Ministry had failed of secure the money of Harijans.\textsuperscript{71}

Master Gurbanta Singh further told the house that the government had reserved 10 lac rupees as industrial loan to advance to the Harijans. But

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, p. (27) 14.
he was pained to know that nepotism and corruption had eaten away that fund. The committees formed for advancing the loans worked so biasedly that the members did not move beyond their relatives. He said that he met the concerned Minister and also the Chief Minister and told them that the loans had been illegally advanced, but none bothered to entertain his complaint. He said that out of five crores, some money was yet to be spent. He requested the House that the remaining amount should not be spent by this government as none of the Harijan Ministers was trustworthy.72

Master Gurbanta Singh raised his voice against the communal riots in Punjab in the wake of ensuing reorganisation of the state which was effected on 1 November 1966. He said that there had occurred communal riots in the State. Three persons were charred to death in Panipat. Some incidents had occurred in Jullundur as well. The shops were put to flames. These were looted and deaths had also occurred. The government should hold judicial enquiry into all these incidents and those responsible for the heinous crimes should be given exemplary punishment. He said that the Chief Minister belonged to Jullundur where these incidents had occurred. The unresponsiveness of the Chief Minister created doubts in the minds of the people. To begin with, the government should announce compensation for the losses incurred there in. He said that it was shameful on the part of some colleagues of the Chief Minister who said that some miscreants

themselves put the house and shops on fire. This was an unthinkable charge. He said only the judicial enquiry would bring the truth out.\textsuperscript{73}

As said earlier, Master Gurbanta Singh lost the 1967 Assembly elections which were held after the formation of Punjabi Suba which he had vehemently opposed. But there was a general decline in the popularity of the Congress. The Congress lost power in nine states including Punjab. It got a slender majority at the Centre. Master Gurbanta Singh was able to retrieve his position in the 1969 mid-term elections which he handsomely won against the Akali Dal, Republican Party of India and Jan Sangh. But the party could not form the government. MLAs had to sit in the opposition. He very responsibly performed that role of an opposition member as in evidenced from his participation in the debates. As an independent member from 1947-1952, as member of the ruling Congress from 1952-1956, as a Congress Minister from 1956-1964 and 1973 to 1977, again as an ordinary MLA of the ruling Congress from mid 1964 to early 1967 and as a member of the opposition from early 1969 to mid 1971, his performance as a legislator remained steady. He remained a crusader for the poor Dalits, poor farmers and tenants. In march 1969, when the second non-Congress government was formed in Punjab under the stewardship of Justice Gurman Singh, Master Gurbanta Singh’s participation in the debate on Governor’s Address which normally carries the policies and

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. p. (27) 106.
programmes of the ruling party, is quite instructive. He said that he would oppose the Address because it did not refer to the much-maligned Punjabi-Hindi controversy which had spoiled the communal atmosphere of Punjab. Even after the formation of Punjabi Suba, the problem remained unresolved. An Akali minister spoke differently and a Minister belonging to Jan Sangh spoke differently. They had not learnt anything from the damage done by the communal monster. One said that that Sachar Formula would be implemented whereas the other said that the Sahcar Formula had been scrapped. The Address should have addressed this problem on priority.  

Master Gurbanta Singh further stated that the Akali-led coalition government had started putting undue pressure upon the bureaucracy. This would not-only degrade them but also lead to corrupt practices. The ruling coalition had rescinded the democratically elected and democratically functioning Jullundur Municipal Committee. The Minister in charge categorically stated that as they did not have majority in the committee, they did away with it. It was a lesson for other municipal committee as well.  

The coalition government, he said, was working revengefully. The Minister openly threatened the voters who did not vote for them. He

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referred to a case in Jullundur where a Minister said that Jullundur District was going to be reorganized. Some of the areas could be attached to Kapurthala thereby putting the villagers to inconvenience.\textsuperscript{76}

So far as the welfare of the Harijans was concerned, the Address was totally misleading, Master Gurbanta Singh said. He quoted two instances which told that the Harijans were being victimized. He told the House that a Harijan family from Babalka village of Jullundur District was liquidated. It was a quite well off family. When the case was reported to the police, the police said that if was a case of suicides as the witnesses told that the family was poor and could not make both ends meet. He said that it was a ridiculous explanation as no Harijan family in Jullundur District was that poor as to commit suicide on that count. They were hard working people and the Congress government had created enormous opportunities for their employment. Another case was that of an assault upon a Harijan family. The members were mercilessly beaten and when they reported the matter to the police, the Akali Jathedars of Jullundur City reached the police post in support of the criminals. They argued that assaulting the Harijans was not serious crime. Hence the police officer did not take any action against the criminals. He did not file the case even. That was the condition of law and order in the Akali-led coalition, said the Master.\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, p. (5) 77
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
Master Gurbanta Singh raised the issue of canegrowers who had to demonstrate because low prices of sugarcane. He said that they, most of whom were Jathedars, were mercilessly beaten, their turbans were thrown away, their beards were snatched and they were arrested. It was a disgraceful act on the part of the Akali-led Government. He said that he felt ashamed while describing their condition. They reduced the price of the cane from Rs 10 to Rs 9 per quintal. It was unjust. The whole matter should have been enquired into.\textsuperscript{78}

Master Gurbanta Singh said that there had been embezzlement in the funds collected for Sehgal Memorial at Jullundur. Funds were forcibly raised from truck operators, industrialists and shopkeepers. Balramji Das Tandon, Minister in the present government was also involved. The matter should be enquired.\textsuperscript{79}

Master Gurbanta Singh stated that the government was that of the defectors. One prime defector acted as a conduit who managed the defections. He said that he was Kamboj by caste which was very sharp in such matters. The reference was to Balwant Singh who said only a day before that there would be no defections. He was an honourable MLA of the Congress but his greed overpowered him and he defected to Akali Dal. He acted like a special ostrich for Akali Dal who managed other ostriches

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}, p. (5) 78.
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}
as well. That was a reputed tactic of hunters of ostriches. Congress High Command should be thanked for not giving ticket to the defectors as this practice would go a long way in curbing defections.80

Master Gurbanta Singh further argued that the government had reserved Rs. 35 crore for fertilizers to be distributed through cooperative societies. But most of these Societies were defaulters. These would not give fertilizer to the poor farmers. The big zamidars like, Sardar Jasdev Singh an Akali who was a potato grower, Sardar Umrao Singh a Congressman who also was a potato grower, Kulwant Singh, a Comrade, who owns 100 acre farm for growing potato would get the fertilizer, not any poor farmers. The Governor’s Address made no mention of the fact that the cooperative societies were defaulters. Similarly the seed scandal which had done tremendous loss to the farmers had not been referred to in the Address. The waterlogging was a serious problem, the government should take note of that, he said.81

Another serious flaw in the Address, according to Master Gurbanta Singh, was the absence of any mention to the state-trading of foodgrains. He said that without state-trading, the farmers would not get the proper price for their stuff. He said that he knew as to why state-trading had not

80 Ibid, pp. (5) 78-(5) 79
81 Ibid, p. (5) 79.
been mentioned. It was because of the pressure of Jan Sangh, a coalition partner which was a party of traders.\footnote{Ibid.}  

Master Gurbanta Singh said that Panchayats had not been given due attention. Rather adverse comments had been made against these bodies. But these bodies did commendable job during China War and Pakistan War. These bodies created new leadership. When the Panchayati system was introduced, it was forcefully opposed by the bureaucracy. So the system was introduced at the Tehsil level only just to satisfy the bureaucracy. Afterwards the system was brought to the block level. He said that as the Chief Minister came from the judiciary, it was possible that he had opposed the system so that the bureaucracy might remain supreme and not the elected members of Panchayats. It was undemocratic thinking. It was said by the government that Panchayats had been affected by party politics. The Master said that party politics had afflicted every organisation, even the Assembly itself. Party politics should not be made the excuse for abolishing the Panchayati system which was the backbone of rural society. He said that need was to make up the deficiencies in the system.\footnote{Ibid., pp. (5) 79-(5) 80.}  

Though he criticized most of the items in the Governor’s Address, yet he thanked the Governor and also the Government for including the Christians in the list of Scheduled Castes for benefits of reservation and
other benefits. He said that Congress Government had taken the step, but it was opposed by the priests and Hindu and Sikh converts. But the coalition government had taken this laudable step, Government should provide more funds for Harijan as because after the inclusion of Christians, the number of Harijans would increase.84

Speaking on the Resolution “flat rate charged for electricity consumed by tubewells in the state be abolished with immediate effect”, Master Gurbanta Singh said that the Resolution was introduced in the House by Comrade Kulwant Singh. It was a welcome resolution and the government should immediately pass it and act upon it because the flat rate system benefitted big landlords. He said that he was told by a friend that a zamidar who was using seven and a half horse power motor, the electricity bill was around Rs. 200 to Rs. 250. But now the flat rate had been reduced to Rs. 70. These high-powered motors were installed at big farms because small farmers worked with low-powered motors. Only the big landlords were to be benefitted at the cost of small and marginal farmers. The latter would consume less electricity because of erratic supply. The government argued that flat rate was introduced because of theft of power. But the Master said that the real thieves were the landlords. The poor farmers who owned 3-4 acres of land did not require much electricity. Hence they did

84 Ibid., pp. (5) 83- (5) 84.
not commit theft. He said that for somebody else’s offences, the poor farmers were being punished.85

Master Gurbanta Singh raised the issue of the casual approach of the government towards education. Nepotism, undue recommendations of political leaders, maladministration of the bureaucracy were the main causes which hampered the spread of education in the state. He said that the government reported that 45 primary schools and 45 middle school were upgraded. He condemned the working of government on this count as no consideration was given to the feasibility and requirement of upgradation. The neglected areas were not taken care of. Similarly a large number of teachers and employees in the education department were dismissed who went to court and got their dismissals vacated. The government had to suffer not only humiliation but also financial loss. He said that the officers responsible for fiasco should he punished. Action should be taken against them so that the poor teachers and employees would work fearlessly and honestly.86

Master Gurbanta Singh forcibly opposed vote politics. As somebody who voted the Congress Party, he/she would not be given any concession, was the attitude of the ruling parties. This was highly undemocratic, uncalled for and politically unjust. He debated in House about this impolitic

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attitude of the government. The voters would be harassed but the people in the government would say that it would be seen after five years as to which way the voter thought about. This way the government had the license to misrule for five years, he said.  

Master Gurbanta Singh forcefully defended the Panchayati system in Punjab during the Akali-Jan Sangh coalition government. The Chief Minister, Justice Gurnam Singh had given a statement in the Assembly that the government had decided to abolish the Panchayati system. Master Gurbanta Singh retorted by saying that although the Chief Minister belonged to a village, yet he had first migrated to Lyallpur and after partition settled at Chandigarh. So he had forgotten about the developments in the villages. If he had been to villages and seen the working of Panchayats, he would never have thought of abolishing them. If his government felt that party politics had become the bane of Panchayats, he should have known that this had flowed from above and not from below. Party politics in the high echelons had affected the Panchayats at the village level.

Master Gurbanta Singh said as Punjab had taken to compulsory education, the number of students seeking admission had multiplied manifold, whereas the number of schools had been much less than that. So

87 Ibid., p (7) 15.
88 Punjab Assembly Debates, 2 April 1969, pp (13) 1-(13) 2.
the students were being harassed. Mass copying in the examination was another big problem. The government had tied up the promotion of teachers with good results. So the teachers, by hook or crook, were out to upgrade the results. Hence the menace of copying had sullied the examination system. Then he raised the question of private schools. He said the government was unnecessarily harassing the managements of private educational institutions. The DAV Schools, The Khalsa Schools and such other educational institutions had done laudable service in the field of education. These institutions needed governmental patronage instead of harassment.\textsuperscript{89}

Master Gurbanta Singh said that the Coalition Government was inimical to Harijans. During the previous Congress regime, many Harijan welfare schemes had been introduced which this government had shelved. One very important scheme was that only Harijans would participate in the auction of the land meant to be distributed among Harijans. After auction, they would make the payment in installments in ten years. At the time of auction, the payment to be made was 5% only. But that system had been suspended. It had also suspended the promotion system introduced by the Congress Government.\textsuperscript{90}

Master Gurbanta Singh was greatly concerned about corruption. Whenever and wherever he found that some Minister or some bureaucrat

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p (13) 4.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p (13) 5.
got involved in corruption, he never hesitated in exposing them. While participating in the general discussion on the budget, he said that the Chief Minister had been accused by a member in the House of taking bribe from the wine contractors. The member had stated in the House that if the accusation was false, he would resign his membership. But if the accusation was established, the Chief Minister should also resign. Master Gurbanta Singh said that the Chief Minister was supposed to accept the challenge and he should have ordered for judicial enquiry into the case. It was imperative that the Chief Minister established his upright character and high moral standards in public life by which he swore day and night.91

Master Gurbanta Singh was in favour of nationalisation of transport. He also wanted that if not nationalised, some of the routes should be given to Harijans so that they might also be able to earn their livelihood.92

Master Gurbanta Singh referred to the Young Farmers Association formed in the villages whose main purpose was to train the farmers in modern ploughing and some other agriculture techniques. These were the creations of the previous Congress Government. He said that the present government had not recognised the worth of these Associations in context of village development. These needed to be encouraged more.93

92 *Ibid*.
93 *Ibid*.
Master Gurbanta Singh condemned the urban bias of the government. He said the government's budget did not refer to spending upon minor irrigation. It had just mentioned that two lac rupees would be spent upon digging the wells and one lac rupees would be spent upon boring tubewells. The amount was just ridiculous. With the introduction of new variety seeds, the farmers needed more water. Hence durable projects of minor irrigation were needed. But the government was spending recklessly upon urban areas. It had no consideration for increase in foodgrains which was otherwise priority of the nation. 94

Master Gurbanta Singh referred to the seed scandal and lot of corruption in production of seed which was spurious. He said the scandals exploited the poor zamidars but as the traders of seed were partners in the government, the exploitation would not end. 95

Master Gurbanta Singh had consistently been harping upon the cooperative movement in Punjab. He was of the view that cooperative farming through cooperative societies was the lasting solution for the ills of rural society. The government had given scant attention to these societies. The government had also ignored the labour cooperative societies. These were funded by the central government to the extant of 80%. The state government would contribute only 20%. The societies were meant for

94 Ibid., pp. (13) 6-(13) 7.
95 Ibid., p. (13) 7.
labourers, poor people and ordinary artisans and the money funded by the Central Government was meant for them. But unfortunately money did not reach these sections. The contractors in league with the government usurped the money. Lachhman Singh Gill's government was also run by contractors and the present government had also been mortgaged to them. Some cooperative societies were declared defaulters. But Master Gurbanta Singh said it was the responsibility of the cooperative department to see that a society did not become defaulter. A society became defaulter because its goods were not sold. It was so because most of the members were poor farmers who did not have the purchasing capacity. The result would be that the cooperative department would appoint a liquidator who in turn, would charge 25% commission from poor members. The cooperative movement needed an additional fillip, he said.  

Master Gurbanta Singh emphasized upon establishing cottage industry in the villages so that the poor village labourers and artisans would get employment. He said that the budget had made nominal provision for cottage industry because the Industry Minister was a Jan Sanghite whose primary concern was urban trade and industry. He said that the government was creating poverty zones in the villages.

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96 Ibid., pp. (13) 7-(13) 8.  
97 Ibid., pp. (13) 8 -(13) 9.
Master Gurbanta Singh's one of major concerns was the representation of Harijans. He said that he had succeeded in securing representation of Harijans in Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, Zila Parishads and other bodies. But he was helpless on one count and that was the present cabinet which had no Harijan representation. He said that it was constitutionally unjust and unethical to exclude the Harijans from the ministry formation. It was because of anti-Harijan attitude of the government that problems faced by Harijans were not being solved.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. (13) 9.}

There was need to set high standards for the opposition as well so that it might facilitate the working of the government in good points. Master Gurbanta Singh, an opposition leader was conscious of this fact and he mentioned the same in the House while participating in the discussion on the Consolidation Bill. He said that consolidation of land was done in the whole of Punjab. In the consolidation some chunks of land were set apart for the Panchayats so that the Panchayats might construct panchayat Ghar, or school or gurdwara or use the land for some other common purpose. But what happened was that some influential people appropriated that land. It was written in the Panchayat Act that whenever the Panchayati land was auctioned, one-third of the proceeds would be given to Panchayats. But the act was not followed. Land allotted to the Panchayats was under the control of influential persons like patwaris and others. First job to be done by the
government was to get that land vacated and then hand it over to the Panchayats. The consolidation led to lot of trouble in the villages. At many places, scuffles arose among the people leading to litigation. If the rules of the Act had been followed, these problems would not have arisen. So the Bill brought by the government was the need of the hour and being in opposition nevertheless, he congratulated the government for its introduction.99

An official resolution under article 252 of the Constitution of India was moved in the House which said: In pursuance of clause (I) of article 252 of the Constitution of India this assembly hereby resolves that Parliament shall by law make provision for the dissolution of the aforesaid Punjab Agricultural University in relation to the state of Punjab for vesting the rights and liabilities of the university so dissolved in the university to be set up and for all other matters connected therewith or incidental there to". Master Gurbanta Singh supported this resolution saying that Punjab was an agricultural state. There were few industries. Large industries were almost nil. 80% population of Punjab depended upon agriculture. The professors of this university after serious research evolved high yielding seeds and made Punjab the food basket of India. It was heartening to listen last time from the Chief Minister that the quantum of foodgrains which India imported,

half of that was grown in Punjab. It was hoped that in a year or two, Punjab would supply the whole of that quantum.

He further stated Professor Dilbag Singh was the person who evolved Kalyan seed which revolutionized the agriculture in Punjab. The seed was named Kalyan because the professor belonged to village Kalyan. When he was offered some job outside Punjab, Master Gurbanta Singh went to the Vice Chancellor and told him not to let him go and increase his salary here itself. But he was not heeded to at that time. So the Punjab Agriculture University had made tremendous progress in agricultural research. If the Haryana Government wanted to have a separate university by dividing its assets, it was a welcome move. Punjab should have its own separate university. Only then it would make new inventions. He said that the university had massively contributed to the affluence of the villages. Even the backward classes had also been benefitted. So he supported the resolution moved by the Government inspite of the fact of his being in the opposition.\textsuperscript{100}

When the discussion on the Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was held, Master Gurbanta Singh categorically told the Speaker in the House that such discussion was fraud upon the House as such reports were presented in the House after 5-6 years of their completion. Such delays absolved the incumbent governments of

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 21 April 1969, pp. (24) 311–(24) 312.
the responsibility of the lapses committed in context of welfare of the Harijans. He said that the present Report had been casually and erroneously written. The Commissioner went to the South, Assam and many other places and found out the observance of untouchability at these places which had no relevance to the situation in Punjab. He further said that he had been Minister for eight-nine years and member of the house for 20-25 years. The Congress Governments did a lot for the upliftment of Harijans. That was why untouchability was less in Punjab. The report had referred to Shankracharya. The moral duty of the House would be not to let another Shankracharya take birth in Punjab. He said that he respected the religious granths but if a granth permitted untouchability, that granth should be consigned to fire or should be confiscated or should be thrown out of Punjab. He further said that the report did not make just reporting. Before partition, the Harijans faced numerous problems. They could not purchase even five marlas of land. No Harijan was owner of the land. The Congress Government removed such hinderances and gave freedom to Harijans to purchase land. Professional tax and begar was removed. These facts were not reported in the Report. The Commissioner had not referred to the fact that the Director of the Harijan Welfare Department practised untouchability which created problem for them while seeking jobs. He said that number of Harijan IAS officers was very small. In 1969 it was just 5.8 percent of the total whereas in 1959 it was 2 percent. The increase was very
slow and the Harijans were not keeping pace with the advancing times. In class one category Harijans were 1.18% in 1959 whereas in 1969 they were 1.77%. In class II category, it was 2.38% in 1959 and 3.85% in 1969, why was the number less? He explained that reservation of posts was at the time of recruitment, not at the time of promotion. It was 10 percent during the Congress government which should have been reintroduced and enhanced. Same was the condition in context of houses. Previously it was Rs 30 for one marla. The government would purchase the land and give it to Harijans to construct the house. That scheme had been shelved. Now the price of land had trebled. The Harijans could not purchase at this price. Before the advent of this government, there was 2 acres, evacuee land which had been usurped after this government took over. The usurpers must be taught a lesson and that land be distributed among Harijans. Untouchability got removed because Harijans’ standard of living was raised. That standard was not being maintained at present. Hence the scourge of untouchability was emerging again. Eviction of Harijans from land should be immediately stopped. For the remission of fee of Harijan students, a limit of income of Rs. 150 was fixed in 1952. But now in 1967, that limit had been the same. It should have been raised to Rs. 300. In universities and colleges of technical education, Harijan students were not coming forth for admission because they were not eligible. Their eligible marks should have been reduced and also training centres should have been opened to train the
Harijan students. Harijan’s share in general departments like agriculture, industry, cooperation, Panchayats should also be fixed, apart from the Harijan welfare department.\textsuperscript{101}

Master Gurbanta Singh was pained to know that there were many top Harijan officers who were condemned as Chamars and Chuhras and were dismissed. They should be reinstated. When the Chief Minster announced in the House that all of them had been reinstated. Master Gurbanta Singh thanked the Chief Minister for the benevolent act.\textsuperscript{102}

Master Gurbanta Singh said that population of Harijans had gone upto 25 lacs. That constituted a solid vote bank. At present the rulers were not being born to begums and queens. They would come out of the ballot box. Anyone who hated the Harijans, they would reduce him to non-entity. Harijans did not subscribe to family planning. he said that he had been contesting elections since 1937. At that time, few votes would come out of the ballot box but thereafter these were brimmed to the full only because he served them wholeheartedly. Harijans did not beg anything. They only asked for their constitutional rights. He said that Harijans were not given due representation in the Punjab legislative council which had been abolished. Same would be the condition of anyone who would not do favours to the Harijans. Situation had changed. Now even the Gianis and

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Punjab Assembly Debates}, 23 April 1969, pp. (26) 83-(26) 84.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, (26) 84.
Granths who did not allow Harijans to enter the gurdwaras would go to Harijan houses and ask for votes. So vote was a big power with the Harijans. 103

Master Gurbanta Singh was opposed to the use of ordinance issuing power of the government. He said that this power was meant to be used in emergent situations not in ordinary circumstances and that too with motives. He was speaking on the Punjab Co-operative Societies, Bill, 1969. This Bill had been implemented through an ordinance. He was of the view that the ordinance was introduced to remove some incalcitrant but honest elements through empowering the Registrar of the cooperative societies. There was no need to amend the Bill which was passed in 1960 after a lot of deliberations and had passed through many stages. The amendment was deliberate. It was to curb the popular cooperative movement in Punjab which had come on the top in India. The new government wanted to take the popular element out of the movement by officialising it this was an undemocratic step.

In 1972 Punjab Assembly elections, Master Gurbanta Singh won the election unopposed and he was made the Minister of Agriculture and Forests under the Chief Ministership of Giani Zail Singh. It was also his last stint as a Minister and also as a member of the House because he did not contest election after 1972 Assembly elections. During this period,

again as a legislator first, keeping the honour and status of the Assembly in mind, he attempted to establish good governance so far his department was concerned. He knew that he would get support from all the sections of the House on this count and also from the Chief Minster who himself was a seasoned political leader and had come to the top through grassroots. His participation in the debates in the Assembly went a long way in establishing the responsiveness of the Government. He could emphatically say that if any financial bungling or irregularity was brought to his notice by a member of the House, he would immediately ask for enquiry and then take action if found guilty. But then he expected from the complainant member or some other member not to pressurize him for revocation of action taken. A member Gurcharan Singh Nihalsinghwalla complained about a market committee about which the Master immediately ordered enquiry and took action. But then the allegation proved false. He censured the member for making false accusation.104

Master Gurbanta Singh took Surinder Singh Kairon to task for purchasing pesticides and insecticides worth Rs. 30 lacs. He asked him in the House itself as to why he used his name and his father’s (Partap Sing Kairon) name while making purchases. He said that his father was a great leader and he would not allow his name to be maligned like this. Suridner

Singh Kairon must tell the House as to whom he paid the commission and how much he paid so that dealings might become transparent.\textsuperscript{105}

Master Gurbanta Singh was of the view that tremendous agriculture development had become possible because of the hard work done by the farmers of Punjab and minimal role of corruption. It was a matter of pride that Punjab was ahead of all other states in agricultural production. He said that agricultural development needed three things apart from land good fertilizers, good seeds and surplus water. Punjab Government provided all these three things in abundance and at cheap rates so far. In Punjab, the farmers had got installed 4 lac and 70 thousand tubewells. When he became the Agriculture Minister for the first time in 1955, farmers of Punjab which included Haryana and parts of Himachal used 40 thousand tons for fertilizers. But now he had become totally fertilizer-minded and had used 19 lac tons of fertilizers. For the next year, the target was 22 lac tons. It meant that Punjabi farmer could get better produce by hook or crook i.e. by spending money from his own pocket, by getting loan from cooperative societies or by some other sources. He said that so far good seeds were concerned, particularly that required to be replaced by new ones every three to four years, intensive research done by the Punjab Agricultural University had done wonders. It was because of improved seeds that in the year 1976-1977, Punjab produced 89 lac tons of foodgrain and fixed the target of 92

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p. (7) 36.
lac tons for the coming year. He said that no company could dare to supply spurious seed to Punjab farmer. The government got only certified seeds to distribute among farmers. The Punjab Government had established Seed Corporation with the assistance of World Seed Corporation. The Government had spent 20 crore rupees on that. The farmers and the Agriculture University would have share in the Corporation. Quality of seed would further improve. He said a firm supplied pesticides which proved ineffective. He himself went in the villages and checked the crops. That firm had been blacklisted and the concerned officer who had placed order with that firm had also been suspended.106

Corruption-free efficient state administration had become responsible for green revolution in Punjab. It could he sustained by such an administration only.

It is how Master Gurbanta Singh performed his role as a legislator in four capacities as an independent member, as a minister, as a member of the ruling party without being a minister and as a member of the opposition when there was non-congress Government in Punjab from January 1969 to June 1971.

106 Punjab Assembly Debates, 8 April 1977, pp. (11) 63-(11) 64.