CHAPTER – 6

FORMATION OF PUNJABI SUBA AND THE ROLE OF PRESS

In Punjab, the press particularly the vernacular press in early 20th century got its readership and strength from the three communities-Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. It played a stellar role in monitoring, moulding and shaping the public opinion and thereby the Punjab politics during the pre-independence period of the 20th century.1

Punjab’s vernacular press did not project itself as Punjabi press, rather it moved on communal lines based on language or castes. It rather precipitated the differences between the existing communities. The proprietors or the editors could not identify between patriotism, religion and politics, there was non-clarity of ideas. A definite line of action thus always remained illusive for these papers.2

The Punjab was one of the storm centres of political developments after independence. Most of the newspapers reflected the growing Sikh resentment against the majority community for the failure to fulfill the assurances given to the Sikhs before partition of India. The Punjab press played a prominent role in arousing Sikh consciousness.3 The vernacular press has, by and large been the single most agency to flare-up the inter-communal tensions. The influence of the local press was more extensive and more intensive for the common man. The ‘communal warfare’ remained the chief attractions for the Punjab press.4
The Punjab, immediately after the partition was faced with a number of other problems and the Akali Party extended its whole hearted support to the Congress in all political matters. In fact Master Tara Singh gave a rebuff to the Pakistan propaganda, that there was a demand for a Sikh State in the following words, “the bogey of a Sikh State in the East Punjab which is being conjured up by the Pakistan propaganda machine in order to create dissensions between the Hindus and the Sikhs..........the Hindus and the Sikhs will rise and fall together. Their fates are inextricably linked.”

The Tribune wrote on 12 November 1949 that, “Why the Sikhs should show such a dread of the so-called Hindu majority in Punjab, when they are ready to accept the Hindi majority at the centre which has a far greater power then the provinces, we don’t know. The logic of the communal fanatic defies rational understandings. He (Master Tara Singh) is so desperately keen on promoting his own claims and he forgets that other interests and claims are to be reckoned with”. Discussing further the implication of the demand, it said, “Again, why should a Hindu minority in a proposed Sikh province remain under a permanent Sikh majority if the Sikhs show such a distrust of the Hindu majority. The logic of the communalist leads straight the exchange of the population and to the establishment of an independent State.”

In the pre partition Punjab, Punjabi used to written in all the three scripts Persian, Gurmukhi and Devnagri. The first two script were in greater use than the Devnagri. But after the partition, the Sikhs have generally insisted that Punjabi can be written only in one script i.e., Gurmukhi script. In course of time, the emphasis was
shifted from the plank of Sikh majority in the Punjabi Suba to that of Punjabi in Gurmukhi as the sole official language of the State. The Punjabi Suba thus came to signify a Punjabi-speaking Gurmukhi writing State. In June, the Punjab Government made Hindi and Punjabi the new medium of instruction in schools in place of Urdu. In June 1949, the Senate of the Punjab University, virtually a bastion of the Arya Samaj, refused to have Punjabi in Gurmukhi or even Devnagri script as the medium of instruction in schools. The Akalis in particular began to express their fears that Punjabi was likely to remain a secondary language even in free India.

The Punjab Government submitted its proposals popularly known as Sachar Formula in October 1949. It created a Zone in which Punjabi in Gurmukhi script was to be the medium of instruction up to matriculation and in which Hindi in Devnagri script was to be taught from the last year of the primary school. Though the Akalis objected to the option given to parents, whether for Hindi or Punjabi, they welcomed the Sachar Formula. The proposals met with severe criticism at the hands of the Hindu organisations like the Arya Samaj, the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha.

On December 29, 1953 the Government of India appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Saiyed Fazl Ali, then Governor of Orissia to examine the whole question of reorganisation of States. The Commission recommended the reorganization of Madras, Kerala, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Bombay, Vidarbha and Madya Pradesh. But the States Reorganisation Commission declined to recommend division of Punjab on the ground "that the problem of language in Punjab is..."
primarily one of scripts and in this battle of scripts, sentiment is arrayed against sentiment\textsuperscript{12}.

The Commission rejected the Punjabi Suba demand observing: "The case for a Punjabi speaking State falls firstly because it lacks the general support of the people inhabiting the area, and secondly, because it will not eliminate any of the causes of friction from which the demand for a Punjabi – speaking State emanates, the proposed State will solve neither the language problem nor the communal problem and far from relieving internal tension which exists between communal and not linguistic groups, it might further exacerbate the existing feelings\textsuperscript{13}.

On 22 January 1956, a compromise formula known as Regional Formula was evolved. Regional Formula was accepted by the Akalis at their meeting on 30 September 1956 by passing a detailed resolution, the relevant part of which reads: There was no doubt that the formula fell short of the Sikh demand, but Akali Dal accepted it in the larger interests of the country in the hope that goodwill and mutual accord, this might afford the protection that we had been asking for all these years'.\textsuperscript{14}

The Regional plan was not acceptable to the Punjabi Hindu and the people of Haryana. The Haryana Prant Front, including the Zamindar Party accepted the Regional Formula and merged into Congress\textsuperscript{15}. The working of the Regional plan did not satisfy the people of Haryana. Speaking in the Legislative Assembly, Pt. Sri Ram Sharma complained of the step motherly treatment accorded to Haryana Prant during the period of four to five months after the implementation of
Regional Formula which had given some kind of assurance and caused satisfaction to the people of Haryana. Dewan Alakh Dhari, a spokesman of the Maha Punjab, said that under the scheme, the proposal for the creation of a separate Haryana Prant stands no chance of being supported unless the territory of Haryana State was enlarged by absorption of the Agra and Meerut division of U.P. and the districts of Alwar and Bharatpur from Rajasthan. The mere excision of a few districts of Ambala division in the Punjab and their conversion into a ‘dwarf-sized Haryana State’.

The Arya Samajists who had earlier refused to implement the Sachar Formula in their schools, now opposed the Regional Formula as something much worse. Under the Hindi Raksha Samiti they started ‘Save Hindi’ movement. The Newspaper ‘Pratap’ writes: During the ‘Save Hindi’ agitation in 1957, the wide influence of Arya Samaj in the Haryana region prevented the movement in favour of the Haryana State, for that would have automatically meant acceptance of a separate Punjabi Suba, which the Hindus in the Punjabi – speaking region did not relish. In March 1958, the fore-most objective of the Akali Dal had been to get the Regional Formula implement. In June, however, Master Tara Singh indicated that he would be compelled to reopen the demand for a Punjabi province if the Regional formula was not implemented. The Shiromani Akali Dal and Master Tara Singh protested again and again against the deliberate neglect of the government but it was of no use. The government planned to oust Master Tara Singh from the arena of Sikh politics by removing him from the presidentship of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and a government nominated President took over on

167
November 1958. To strengthen its hold on the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the government in a most undemocratic manner brought in 45 members to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee from among its own henchmen in the Pepsu area.

The Gurdwara elections came in January 1960. The Shiromani Akali Dal fought elections on the Punjabi Suba issue. The Akali Dal captured 137 out of the 140 seats and Sadh Sangat Board (a joint organisation of the Sikh leaders associated with the Congress Party and the Communist Party) got only 3 seats. The Working Committee of Shiromani Akali Dal passed the famous 'Now or Never' resolution at its meeting held at its head quarters at Amritsar. So the Shiromani Akali Dal calls upon all the Sikhs to sacrifice their all for the protection of the Khalsa Panth and the Sikh religion. The Shiromani Akali Dal mobilise public opinion in regard to the formation of the Punjabi Suba. The convention was presided over by Pt. Sunder Lal, President of the All India Peace Council, Dr. Saifu-din-Kitchlu inaugurated the convention. Hindu leaders from Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab participated in that convention. In this convention the Akali Dal passed the resolution for the attainment of a Punjabi Suba.

During 1960 the movement for Punjabi province gained some momentum. In May, Master Tara Singh called a Punjabi province conference which was attended by some leaders of the Swatantra and Praja Socialist Parties and announced a demonstration march in Delhi in June. He was arrested and the Akali papers 'Prabhat' and 'Akali' were suppressed. Sant Fateh Singh was the 'dictator' of the morcha in the absence of Master Tara Singh, declared on 1 November 1960 that
it had become necessary to lay down his life to save the country from dictatorial rule in the garb of democracy. On December 18, Sant Fateh Singh went on fast unto death to move the Prime Minister to concede the demand for Punjabi province on linguistic basis. On 23 December 1960 Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru requested Sant Fateh Singh to give up the fast and come for talks. Pt. Nehru was thinking in terms of making the entire Punjab unilingual. Sant Fateh Singh declined to have talks with Jawaharlal Nehru. Master Tara Singh persuaded Sant Fateh Singh to give up his fast. The Sant did so on 9 January 1961. However Sant Fateh Singh’s talks with Jawaharlal Nehru failed in May 1961.

Dr. Ganda Singh writes in The Tribune under the caption, ‘Punjabi Suba Demand’ in May 1961, “The Punjabi Suba issue should be discussed on its own merits. It is neither true that the real Punjab is a bilingual State nor that the Suba issue is communal one because a certain section of the people alone has placed it before the government. The problem has been made more complicated by the refused of some of the people to own Punjabi as their mother tongue. If all people were honest and truthful, there would be complication, no dissension and no trouble. The problem can be easily solved. The newspapers that preach communal hatred and tension should be asked to stop their anti-national propaganda and gagged if they do not do so”.

The general body of the Akali Dal allowed Master Tara Singh to start his fast on 15 August 1961. Sant Fateh Singh met the Prime Minister ten days letter but only to find that he was prepared to look into the grievances of the Sikhs but not to create a Punjabi-speaking
State. Master Tara Singh gave up his fast when Hardit Singh Malik came to Amritsar professedly as an emissary of the Prime Minister. This was treated as a sign of impending settlement with the Akalis. There was a strong reaction from the Hindu organisations and press. The newspaper Pratap writes that Jagat Narain, MLA warned the government that any settlement with the Akalis, the Hindu would not accept any settlement. Master Tara Singh declared that they have ended my fast but not my pledge to sacrifice my life for Punjabi Suba. Now either I shall die or see my pledge to achieve Punjabi Suba honoured.

Master Tara Singh met the Prime Minister on 30 October, 1961. The Commission was announced on 31 October 1961, with S.R. Das as its Chairman. Its report was submitted in February 1962. Balraj Madhok, a protagonist of the Jan Sangh, told the Commission that the real source of trouble was the Regional Formula and the ‘Regional Committees’, should be scrapped. Professor Sher Singh, a Jat leader from Haryana region submitted that there was no discrimination against the Sikhs and Punjabi was being enforced on the people of Haryana against their wishes. The Commission reported that it found no evidence of any discrimination against the Sikhs. Correspondence between Akali Dal and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on this subject did not yield any fruit. Akali Dal decided to oppose the recommendations of the Commission. Malik Hardit Singh in a letter to the editor of the national daily, ‘The Hindustan Times’ on 26 August 1964 asserted that Pandit Nehru had actually backed out of his word. According of his letter Pandit Nehru asked Malik Hardit Singh to convey to fasting Master Tara Singh that the principle of linguistic redistribution of
provinces which has been applied to other provinces will be applied to Punjab as well.33 In June 1963, Master Tara Singh’s effort to dislodge the Sant Fateh Singh from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee proved to be unsuccessful. The support of Sant Fateh Singh had increased much in one year at the expense of Master Tara Singh’s popularity.34 In July 1965 Master Tara Singh returned to the Akali politics and raised the slogan of a self–determined status for the Sikhs.

On 9 August 1965 the Working Committee of the Sant Akali Dal adopted a resolution stating that number of other States had already been formed on linguistic basis including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and Nagaland. The failure to form a Punjabi Suba on the same principle is a clear discrimination against the people of Punjab.35 Sant Fateh Singh in newspaper ‘Ajit’ said that ‘The government had always looked towards the Suba demand as a communal one’. He said, ‘facing with the opposition from the Hindu leadership and press, why government opposing to enhance the status of Punjabi language35’.

The Akali leadership and its press intensified the propaganda in favour of the Punjabi language as the mother tongue in the Punjabi-speaking area. The newspaper ‘Ajit’ has played vital role for demanding Punjabi-speaking State37. On 16 August 1965, Sant Fateh Singh declared that he would go on fast on September 10 in the cause of the Punjabi speaking State and if he survived the fast for fifteen days, he would immolate himself on the sixteen day. However, in view of the armed conflict with Pakistan, he decided on September 9 to postpone his fast38. On 28 September 1965, Gulazari Lal Nanda, the Union Home Minister announced in Lok Sabha the formation of a Cabinet sub-
committee consisting of smt. Indira Gandhi, Mr. Y.B. Chavan and Sm. Mahavir Tyagi. He also announced the formation of a Parliamentary Committee under the Chairmanship of Hukam Singh, the Speaker was selected to head this Parliamentary Committee because he was expected to give a report against the formation of Punjabi Suba. A large number of memoranda were submitted to the Consultative Committee by various political parties and groups. The official position of the Punjab Government, Punjab Congress and Hindu dominated organisations who feared loss of their position and influence in the recognised Punjab was to retain status quo. The Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution favouring a Punjabi-speaking State on 9 March 1966.

The resolution was opposed by the Jan Sangh and it started as agitation for continuation of the status quo in Punjab, its general Secretary Yagya Dutt Sharma, began a fast unto death and the agitation spread to various parts of the State particularly in urban areas.

The Consultative Parliamentary Committee submitted its report on 18 March 1966. It recommended that the Punjabi-speaking region be reconstituted into a unilingual State. The recommendations were officially accepted on Punjab 21 March 1966 by the government of India and a Punjab Boundary Commission under the Chairmanship of Justice J.C. Shah with Subimal Dutt and M.M. Philip as members were appointed.

The Boundary Commission submitted its report relying on 1961 Census figures. The report declared Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar,
Kapurthala, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Bhatinda and parts of Sangruar district excluding Jind and Narwana tehsils, Patiala district and Ropar tehsil of Ambala district, as parts of Punjabi Suba. The majority of the Commission by two to one, declared Chandigarh and also Kharar sub tehsils, Ambala district to be part of Haryana State. In his dissenting note, third member of the Commission, Mr. Subimal Dutt favoured the inclusion of Kharar and Chandigarh in Punjabi Suba on the following grounds.44

(i) Through according to the Census of 1961, the basis of demarcation the Hindi-speaking population in Kharar tehsil is no doubt 52.2%, the Punjabi-Speaking population in the rural areas is 56.2%.

(ii) Under the Sachar Formula of 1949, Kharar tehsil had been placed in the Punjabi region.

(iii) The Hindu population in Chandigarh capital project is purely migratory having come form Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan for labour only. Therefore Kharar tehsil and Chandigarh can not be considered to be Hindi-speaking.

The Akali reaction to the report was sharp and they put pressure on the Union Government for inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab. Akali leader, Sant Fateh Singh issued a statement warning that the government would be responsible for the consequence that might follow if Chandigarh went to Haryana.45

The Akali Dal (Master Tara Singh) rejected the report as it smack of communalism in his resolution on 20 July 1966.46 The government
accepted the minority report regarding Kharar but declared Chandigarh to be a Union Territory. The Punjab Reorganisation Act was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 3 September 1966. The bill provided for common links between Punjab and Haryana such as a common governor, a common high court, a common electricity board, the financial corporation, and the housing corporation etc. It also provided for central takeover of Chandigarh and of the Bhakra and Beas Dam projects. The Punjab Reorganisation Act was approved by both the houses, it received the President’s assent on 18 September 196647 and Punjab was divided once again, this time into three parts. The Hindu majority state of Haryana with 16,835 square miles and 7.53 million people (with only 5 percent of Sikhs) and another part with 10,215 square miles of territory and 1.2 million people (Sikh constituting only 2 percent of the population) was created. The new Punjab was reduced to just 20,254 square miles and 11.58 million population out of whom 56 percent were Sikhs.48

The Punjabi Hindu opposed it because it had placed them in the minority in the new State. The Sant Akali Dal opposed it because a) it had excluded allegedly predominantly Punjabi-speaking areas of Chandigarh, Fatehabad, Sirsa, part of Una tehsil and Dalhousie, etc from Punjab, b) it had placed the management of Bhakra Dam Complex outside the control of Punjab, c) it had retained some 6 common links between Punjab and Haryana.49

On 12 September 1966 at Sirsa, the Akalis represented by Master Tara Singh’s Akali Dal went further and expressed their resentment by burring a copy of the Punjab Reorganisation Bill.50 Master Tara Singh described it as another move to enslave the Sikhs
and said that the Sikh would be accept a lifeless Punjabi Suba for which 52 common links of bondage were being provided. However, in spite of Sikhs opposition, the Bill was passed. The Act provided bifurcation of Punjab into Punjab Suba and Haryana from 1 November 1966.

The reorganisation of Punjab was however, not liked by the Akali Dal which had led to agitation for the achievement of the Punjabi speaking State. On the eve of formation of the two States, Sant Fateh Singh told newsmen at Amritsar that great injustice has been done to Punjab by the retention of common links and by not including several Punjabi-speaking areas and Chandigarh in it. He warned that this party would launch an agitation if its demands were not accepted by the government. The Akali Dal boycotted all the functions held in connection with the formation of Punjab Suba.

The Punjab Jan Sangh which had been dissociating itself from the move to divide Punjab, also followed suit. The Working Committee of the Punjab Jan Sangh called upon the people to boycott the special functions being organised by the government on 1 November 1966 to celebrate the birth of new States because the division of the already truncated Punjab has weakened the country’s defence potential. This was a matter of sorrow and not rejoicing.

The Communist Party was also dissatisfied with the reorganisation of Punjab and making Chandigarh a Union Territory, which in its opinion actually formed part of the Punjabi – speaking areas. The party demanded the formation of a Punjabi – speaking State by merging the Punjabi-speaking areas of Pepsu with Punjab and also
advanced the case for the formation of a Vishal (Greater) Haryana by consolidating the Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab Pepsu and areas around Delhi.55

The situation took a new turn on 5 December 1966, Sant Fateh Singh announced at a largely attended diwan at Manji Sahib, Amritsar, his decision to go on a fast on 17 December and commit self immolation on 27 December in support of his demand for the abolition of common links between Punjab and Haryana and inclusion of Chandigarh and some other Punjabi-speaking areas and in Punjab.56 During this time, Master Tara Singh said that he was agree with Sant Fateh Singh’s thinking.57

Master Tara Singh’s Akali Dal passed a ‘Sikh Homeland’ resolution at the Seventeen All India Conference of the Akali Dal held at Ludhiana on 11 December, 1966. The resolution demanded that the ‘Sikh Homeland’ should be granted autonomous constitutional status such as Jammu and Kashmir now had; and the posts for Sikhs in the government services should be statutorily reserved.58

The reorganisation of Punjab witnessed for reaching changes in the demographic and political structure of the State. The Punjabi Suba thus formed had Sikh majority. As per the Census of 1971, the Sikhs were 60.22% of the total population. Thus the Akali Dal became the major political beneficiary after the reorganisation. It came in power in Punjab five times between 1967 to 1997, but three times with the support of other non-Congress parties. Finally, it may be concluded that the formation of Punjabi Suba could not fulfill the political desires of the Sikhs.59
FOOTNOTES


177
17. Pratap, 13 October 1957.
27. Synopsis of the Nehru-Fateh Singh Talks on the issue of the formation of Punjabi-Speaking State, Secretary, Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar, 1961 p. 60.
32. The Hindustan Times, 7 February 1962.
33. Ibid., 10 February 1962.
34. Grewal, J.S., op. cit., p. 201.
35. Akali Patrika, 10 August 1965.
40. The Hindustan Times, 10 October 1965.
41. Pratap, 10 March 1966.
44. Singh, Gurmit, op.cit., p. 175.
47. Akali Patrika, 19 September 1966.
49. The Tribune, 10 September 1966.
52. Ajit, 1 November 1966.
53. The Tribune, 1 November 1966.


