CHAPTER-III

PUNJABI SUBA DEMAND: RESPONSE AND REACTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE PRAJA SOCIALIST PARTY

The Communist Party of India was founded in the 1920s at Tashkent under the direct fatherhood of M.N. Roy to create an alternative mass movement to the existing Congress anti-imperialist movement. From the very beginning the founders were convinced that British rule in India could be overthrown only through an armed insurrection by building a powerful movement of workers and peasants under the guidance of Communist Party.¹

There were three major communities in Punjab before partition i.e. the Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs. The Muslims League under the leadership of Jinnah, demanded the creation of a separate State of Pakistan for protecting the Muslims from the domination of the Hindus.² The demand for Pakistan alarmed the leadership of Akali Dal. The acceptance of this demand would have meant the subjection of Sikhs to the dominance of the Muslims. In order to counter it, the leadership of the Akali Dal demanded the creation of an ‘Azad Punjab” within the boundaries of the Indian Unions.³

Explaining the reason for this demand, Master Tara Singh stated that the Hindus and Muslim minorities could always look upon the provinces where their co-religionists were in a majority for security and protection of their right, but the Sikhs did not enjoy similar position for they did not have majority anywhere. He, therefore, insisted upon this form of protection (Azad Punjab) until a better and more
practicable form of protection was proposed. The anti-Azad Punjab conferences were organised at different places in the Rawalpindi division with the Congressite leaders Baba Kharak Singh and Sant Singh mostly being in the forefront. In several conferences in 1943, Baba Kharak Singh criticised the demand of Azad Punjab.

The Akali Dal bitterly criticised all those who opposed the Azad Punjab scheme, it has been asserted, “No Sikh leader ever demand, a sovereign Sikh State. This was only to counterblast to Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan on the basis of religion”.

The Communist Party believed in the policy of self determination. The CPI leadership supported the Muslim demand for the creation of Pakistan and opposed the Akali demand for Azad Punjab.

The fifth Session of the All India Akali Conference was held at Lahore in October 1944 and the demand for a separate State reiterated. Speaking at the Conference, Master Tara Singh declared that there were two dangers to the Sikh community, one from the Communists and other from Mahatma Gandhi and Jinnah. He added that Sikh were determined not to submit to the dictates of Jinnah and Gandhi.

A meeting was arranged between G. Adhikari and the Akali leader Gyani Kartar Singh. The argument of the Akali leaders was simple: ‘You Communists are supporting the Muslim’s demand for self-determination, you should support us also’. Dr. Adhikari’s pamphlet, ‘A Homeland for the Sikhs’ was the result of such discussions and meetings. Sohan Singh Josh, Teja Singh Sautantar and Gyani Hira Singh Darad took active part in these discussions as they had played
an important role in the Akali movement. The pamphlet was translated into Gurmukhi. It was greatly admired by the Sikh circles.\(^{11}\)

By 1944, the Communists had began to draw up the maps indicating the areas which rightly belonged to Pakistan. According to P.C. Joshi, the best solution for the Sikhs was to go to Pakistan on the basis of a Muslim-Sikh Pact which would guarantee the protection of their rights in Pakistan.\(^{12}\) It was argued that the Sikhs had no contiguous territory and were, an interspersed minority spread all over some districts but having a majority nowhere except in some tehsils here and there. A Sikh Homeland therefore can not be carved for them.\(^{13}\) The Akalis rejected this suggestion and denounced the Communists as atheists and danger to Sikh community.\(^{14}\)

The final attempt at drafting a Sikh policy was made by G.D. Adhikari, a Communist leader. His solution was that a Congress-Muslim League agreement should guarantee the rights of the Sikhs. In 1945, he brought out a booklet and supported the demand for a Sikh Homeland on the basis of the right to self determination.\(^{15}\) The support to the demand for Sikh Homeland was meant to win over the Sikh peasantry which had been alienated because of the CPI's support to the demand for Pakistan.\(^{16}\)

After the elections of 1946, the formation of Congress – League – Unionist coalition ministry instead of soothing the communal tensions, further accentuated them. The new coalition was totally against the expectations of the Communists.\(^{17}\)

On the eve of independence, there was a new spurt in the Communist activities in Punjab but by then it was too late for the
After independence, the Congress Party assumed power in Punjab. In 1948, the government appointed a Dar Commission to examine the question of linguistic States. The Communist Party has stood for the linguistic reorganisation of States as an essential step for the development of the democratic movement and for strengthening the unity of the country. The party changed its earlier stand on this issue. Instead of supporting the demand for a Sikh State, the party decided to demand the reorganisation of the State on linguistic basis.

The demand for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking States was made the main slogan of the party at the time of the Third State Party Conference held at Amritsar in 1953. On 29th December 1953, the Parliament appointed the States Reorganisation Commission to examine the question of the reorganisation of the States. The appointment of the Commission was welcomed by the Sikhs as it is an opportunity for them to place their case of the Punjabi Suba and get an adjudication thereon. The Communist Party, in its memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission put up a strong case for the Punjabi speaking province which, was in line with their all India policy of reorganisation of the Indian territory on linguistic basis. The party also supported the formation of Haryana. Their memorandum declared that their approach was basically different from that of the Akali Party, for it was put forth as a common demand of all Punjabis and was based on the rational principle of linguistic homogeneity. The party pleaded for the Punjabi-speaking State consisting of Punjab and Pepsu districts. It strongly favoured the merger of Hindi-speaking areas with...
Delhi and that of Kangra and Kandaghat with Himachal to form a Pahari-speaking State. The Communist Party criticised the slogan of the Maha Punjab as there was not cultural, economic or historical justification for lumping all this territory together into one state. Sohan Singh Josh, the Communist leader was of the opinion that the conflict was mainly between the Hindu and Sikh leaders of the Jullundur division. Rest of the people of the Punjab, the Himachal Pradesh and Pepsu were agreed the favour of linguistic States.

The States Reorganisation Commission in its report issued in October 1955 rejected the formation of Punjabi-speaking State. The newspaper Naya Zamana (Urdu) writes: The Commission has excluded the Communist Party's demand for the creation of a linguistic State in the Punjab and has refused to recognise Punjabi as a distinct language and accept it as a basis for a Punjabi speaking State. The proposal to merge Punjab, Pepsu and Himachal Pradesh will help in administrative matters, but in this the Commission has adopted a communal line and has thus further complicated the communal situation in Punjab. The Hindustan Times writes: The demand for a Punjabi speaking State has been callously rejected by the Commission which has gone out of the way to create a Maha Punjab.

Serious differences arose in the State leadership of the CPI over the assessment of the Regional Formula. The minority faction favoured its acceptance under the prevailing circumstances in the State. Keeping in view its support base among the trade unions, minority faction hoped that it would reduced communal tension in the State and also prevent the division of trade union workers on communal
lines. But the majority faction in Punjab, the Communist Party decided to oppose the Regional Formula.29

The Regional Formula was condemned by the Communist Party, because Communist leaders thought that the support to the Regional Formula would harm its support among the peasants who were the main supporters of the Punjabi Suba demand.30 However, after accepting the Regional Formula, the party leadership made no effort to make it a success.31 The Communist Party in Pepsu supported the issue of the merger of Pepsu with Punjab and the formation of Punjabi-speaking State.32

After accepting the Regional Formula, the Akali Dal decided to work as a purely religious body. Many Akali leaders joined the Congress and fought the 1957 elections on the Congress tickets but it made the Akali Dal unpopular among the Sikh masses and the Congress was successful in wresting the control over the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee from Master Tara Singh. Master ji launched an agitation for a Punjabi-speaking State in May 1960. He was arrested along with other Akalis at Amritsar on 24 May 1960. The newspaper, ‘The Hindustan Times’ writes on 25 May 1960 that the whole of the press approved it justified rather unavoidable.

Sant Fateh Singh was incharge of the Morcha for Punjabi Suba in the absence of Master Tara Singh. In this situation, the CPI leadership was forced to take a clear-cut stand on the nationality problem in the State. After a lengthy inner-party discussion, the party leadership decided that it would oppose the Akali agitation for the
creation of Punjabi Suba\textsuperscript{33}, but the demand for the creation of Haryana State was supported.\textsuperscript{34}

The majority leadership thus supported the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the State in the case of Haryana, but was not prepared to accept this principle in case of Punjab and Himachal because they believed that it would create disunity in its support structure. A CPI leader, Bhag Singh Sajjan demanded that Punjabi-speaking areas be jointed together to form a single State. The tribal and hill people within Punjab be given an opportunity to develop their culture. Punjabi should be reorganized as the official language of the State, but hill people should be allowed to write it in Devnagri and Urdu.\textsuperscript{35} Other Communist leaders Des Raj Chadha, Jagjit Singh Anand, Bhag Singh Sajjan and Darshan Singh Canadian opposed Punjabi Suba demand as they believed that it creates division among the population of the State, it should not be supported. But they decided that the party should work for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State. After inner party discussion the party decided that it would oppose the Akali agitation for the creation of a Punjabi Suba on the basis of religion and work for the reorganisation of the State purely on linguistic basis.\textsuperscript{36}

While Master Tara Singh was in jail Sant Fateh Singh started a fast unto death on 18 December 1960. On 20 December 1960, Pt. Nehru said that Punjabi must be promoted and he made a personal appeal to Sant Fateh Singh on 31 December to abandon the fast and come for talks.\textsuperscript{37} Sant Fateh Singh broke his fast and met the Prime Minister several times thereafter. Nothing came of these meetings. Master Tara Singh consequently announced that he would undertake

“Master Tara Singh forgets that the demand of a Punjabi Suba is the demand only of his group – a section, may be a predominant section, in the Sikh community. He pushes forward that demand as the demand of the entire Punjabi speaking people. But by this method the character of communal demand does not change. Unless the demand becomes the united demand of the Sikhs and Hindus, no government can possible give it serious consideration”.

At a convention in Ludhiana in July 1962, a resolution was passed to setup a separate Akali Dal under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh. The new party declared that they had fundamental difference with the parent body on the question of nature and concept of Punjabi Suba. Sant Fateh Singh announced that the question of Punjabi Suba would be pursued by his party on purely linguistic basis and a Suba at the cost of Hindu – Sikh unity would not be worth fighting for.

As a branch of the national party, the CPM in Punjab originated in July 1964 under the leadership of Harkishan Singh Surjeet (a prominent member of the party). CPI finally split in 1964, with one party, representing the earlier ‘right’ and ‘centrist’ trends, being known as CPI and the other party representing the earlier ‘left’ trend being known after sometime as the Communist Party (Marxist) or CPM.

Sant Fateh Singh tried to persuade the Congress leaders at the Centre about the genuineness of the demand for the reorganization of
the State. However, when this persuasive approach failed, he decided to undertake a fast over the Punjabi Suba demand in July 1965. Sant Fateh Singh's threat compelled the CPI and CPM to explain their stand on the whole issue. Both the parties criticised Sant Fateh Singh's tactics and repudiated his charge of discrimination against the Sikhs by the Central government.41

The Communists supported Sant Fateh Singh's demand for Punjabi Suba on the basis of language.42 The CPI and CPM extended support to the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of the State. The CPI even proposed the formation of a Joint Action Committee of all parties in support of this demand.43

Sant Fateh Singh clearly demanded the merger of Pepsu with the Punjab. CPM and other progressive parties supported this demand. The Akalis who were undergoing great sufferings in the Pepsu State, CPM propagated the idea of linguistic-reorganisation of the Punjab on democratic lines.44 The Indo-Pak war broke out on 5 September 1965 and Sant Fateh Singh gave up the idea of his fast in face of emergency facing the nation.45

The issue of Punjabi Suba was left in abeyance once again. After the war the government of India appointed a Cabinet Committee and a Parliament sub-committee for the examination of Punjabi Suba issue. A large number of memoranda were submitted to the Consultative Committee by the various political parties and groups whose views were well-known by this time. The Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Punjab in a press statement on 7 October 1965 said, "The party considers that the only way to solve the problem

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in the establishment of a Punjabi-speaking State on the basis of language and culture and contiguity, taking village as the unit for the demarcation of the boundaries.”

Punjab State Council of the Communist Party of India submitted a memorandum to the Parliament Committee. It demanded the “reorganisation of the present Punjab on a linguistic basis and the formation of Punjab State and Haryana Prant”. The memorandum rejected the various objections which were being raised against the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab.

a) It was argued that the entire Punjab was bilingual and therefore could not be bifurcated on linguistic basis. In support of such contention the Census figures of 1961. For those who had given Hindi or Punjabi as their mother tongue were cited.

The memorandum pointed out that it was well known that at the time of 1951 Census a campaign was organized by some leading Congressmen and Hindu communal leaders asking the Hindus and Harijans not to mention Punjabi as their mother tongue with a view to counter the demand for a Punjabi Suba. The campaign succeeded in misleading a larger number of people as millions of Hindus, though Punjabi-speaking declared Hindi as their mother tongue. Henceforth these statistics were cited to prove that nearly half the population in the Punjabi region was Hindi speaking and therefore the whole of Punjab was a bilingual State. These people by misrepresenting the facts virtually divided the
Punjabis on communal basis. As a matter of its reaction Master Tara Singh pleaded that the Sikhs had a separate identity and should be given “self-determined political status”.

b) It is argued that “a second partition of Punjab would be disaster”. Those who advanced their argument deliberately mix up two entirely different things, viz. partition on the basis of religion and reorganisation on the basis of language. If reorganization of division of an existing State, the boundaries of which were determined by the British in accordance with their interests or convenience, is to be termed partition, then let these people ponder over the number of States which have already been so “partitioned” from the Bengal Presidency, Bihar and Orissa were separated. Madras Presidency too, was “partitioned” along with the Hyderabad State and the present Kerala, Madras, Andhra any Mysore came into being similarly Bombay was partitioned.

With all these examples before us why the boundaries of Punjab which were extended by the British in 1858 (and later modified in 1912) to include large Hindustani-speaking areas, never traditionally part of Punjab should be held so sacred and sacrosanct passes all imagination. It is well known that this was the punishment given to Harayan for its active partition in the first war of independence of (1857) and it may be recalled the demand for separating the Haryana region from the province of Punjab and constituting it into a Hindustani speaking State (of course, alongwith Delhi and some areas of U.P. etc.) was raised by known leaders as Asaf
Ali and Desh Bandhu Gupta in 1926. So what was the connotation “partition” was in reality a reorganization that would had undo the injustice perpetuated on the people had undo the injustice perpetuated on the people of Haryana by the foreign rulers and such a reorganisation would had satisfied the legitimate aspirations of the people of Haryana.

c) It was argued that the demand for Punjabi Suba was communal because communalists were making it and conceding it will strengthen communal forces. The argument is doubly wrong and misleading. Firstly, the demand for a Punjab State was raised not only by the Akalis along but a number of other parties including the Communist Party, which had consistently pressed for it on secular and democratic basis. Moreover, so far as Haryana was concerned its formation was explicitly supported by the political parties except the Jana Sangh.

The memorandum concluded with the following words:

“The Communist Party reiterates with all the emphasis at its command that the only just and democratic solution is to apply the principle of linguistic reorganisation to the Punjab to properly demarcate the two regions with necessary border adjustment with Himachal Pradesh and to establish a Punjabi State and Haryana Prant. This will end the present discrimination against the Punjabi and Haryanavi people bring this area in line with the rest of the country where linguistic States have already been formed”.

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C. Rajeshwar Rao, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, also called for the bifurcation of Punjab on linguistic basis as the only way to satisfy the people in present situation. The State was ultimately reorganised on linguistic basis on 1 November 1966. The Communist Party supported the Punjabi-speaking State on linguistic basis.

Response of the Praja Socialist Party

The two parties, Socialist Party and KMPP (Kishan Mazdoor Praja Party), merged in September 1952 to form Praja Socialist Party with Kripalani as the Chairman and Ashok Mehta as the General Secretary. It became the largest among the opposition parties and held the promise of being an alternative to Congress. Its two constituents had received 17.4 percent of the popular vote in the 1952 elections. Its party organisation covered the entire country and it had a large number of well-known and popular leaders at both the national and state levels. But the party could not maintain its cohesion for long.

The Praja Socialist Party and other Socialists also supported the formation of States on linguistic basis. In the memorandum submitted to the States Reorganisation Commission, the Praja Socialist Party advocated the creation of three States.

1. Pahari State, comprising Pahari-speaking areas of the Punjab, Pepsu and certain districts of Uttar Pradesh.

2. Greater Delhi or Haryana State comprising Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab, Pepsu and certain districts of Agra and Meerut division of U.P.
3. Punjab comprising the contiguous Punjabi – speaking areas of the Punjab and Pepsu.

The Praja Socialist Party made a case for the redistribution of the northern Indian region into States on a linguistic and cultural basis. The party openly supported the creation of Punjabi speaking State.54

From the beginning, the Praja Socialist Party suffered from ineffective and unstable leadership. Over a period of time, most of its leaders had renounced, defected or been expelled from the party, each time leaving it a little weaker by taking with them their loyal supporters. Dr. Rammanohar Lohia and his group left the party at the end of 1955. Acharya Narendra Dev died in 1956. Jaya Prakash Narain withdrew from active politics in 1954 and announced that he would dedicate his life to Bhoodan and other constructive activities. After the general elections of 1957, he retired from the politics, declared that party politics was not suitable to India and advocated, instead, ‘party less democracy’. In 1960, Kripalani left the party to play an independent role in politics. In 1963, Ashok Mehta agreed to become the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and when expelled from the party, joined the Congress in the summer of 1964, taking nearly one third of Praja Socialist Party cadres with him.55

Both the Praja Socialist Party and the Communist Party, thus supported the demand for Punjabi speaking province. The approach of Communist and Socialist Parties was diametrically opposed to the Akalis. The Praja Socialist Party generally supported the demand for linguistic reorganization of the State but in view of the complicated nature of the question, they suggested the creation of linguistic zones
within the same State set-up to provide protection for various linguistic groups.56

The demand in addition, enjoyed the support of All India Linguistic Conference was held at Ambala on 3 April 1955.57 Sh. Randhir Singh, a prominent member of the party said, “Punjabi Suba Ban Ke Rahega”. He said that the organization of States on linguistic basis was the fundamental right of the people. He added that if our demand was not met through appeals and by fillings the jails of the government by Gandhian weapons of Satyagraha.58 A resolution was passed at this Conference which urged the Government of India to announce unequivocally that homogeneous linguistic States must be formed by the end of this year.59

The Akali Dal launched an agitation for the creation of Punjabi Suba in January 1960. The party supported to the demand of Punjabi Suba. The party passed a resolution on 7 June 1960 in Bangalore pledge its support to the demand for Punjabi Suba.60

The National Executive of the Praja Socialist Party issued a warning that even those who opposed the formation of Punjabi Suba must realised that administrative severity and destruction of civil liberties were likely to intensify the agitation of the supporters of Punjabi Suba and impart a new firmness to their determination. In appealing for strict adherence to peaceful and non-violent methods by supporters of Punjabi Suba. The National Executive pointed out that this had assumed special significance in view of the aggression of India borders.61
Master Tara Singh was released from the Dharamshala jail on 4 January 1964. Following his release Master Tara Singh met Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on 7 January, but failed to convince him about the formation of Punjabi speaking State. Ashok Mehta, a leader of Praja Socialist Party, had seen through the reason behind Nehru’s adamant refusal to form a Punjabi-speaking State. He wrote in an article published in The Tribune on 31 May 1961, “No one can fairly blame the Sikhs if they concluded that real reason for not creating the Punjabi Suba is that it would be the one state without a Hindu majority”.

The Congress Party took the initiative for the reorganisation of Punjab at the meeting of its Working Committee held on March 1966. Surender Nath Dwivedi, leader of the Praja Socialist Party in Lok Sabha described the resolution of Congress as very ‘ambiguous and asked what about the Hindi region, which should not be required to accept Punjabi as its language’. He said, ‘in case a Punjab-speaking State is carved out, the rest of the areas of existing Punjab, excluding the hilly areas, should be called Haryana Prant. The hilly areas should be merged with Himachal Pradesh. To make the Haryana Prant viable, it should be considered ‘whatever Delhi or some parts of Rajasthan and U.P. should be merged with it’.

The Parliamentary Committee submitted its report to the Lok Sabha on 18 March 1966. In its report, it suggested that the State of Punjab should be re-organised on a linguistic basis. This would, in the opinion of the Committee, not only satisfy the political and economic aspirations of the people of the respective areas but also provide a lasting solution to the vexed question.
The recommendations of the Parliament Committee had a mixed reaction. While welcoming the recommendations of the Committee in general, the Haryana leaders felt that it would have been better if Committee had give a clear indication about the formation of Haryana Prant. S.N. Dwivedi of the Praja Socialist Party felt that a definite time limit should have been recommended for finalising the whole process of the re-organisation of Punjab into two linguistic States. The party had always supported the demand for reorganisation of the State despite its low profile.65

The formation of Punjabi Suba became a reality on 1 November 1966. The Chairman of the Praja Socialist Party, Goray welcomed the formation of Punjabi-speaking State.66
FOOT NOTES

3. Under the proposed, Azad Punjabi Scheme, the division of Ambala, Jullundur and Lahore and the districts of Lyallpur, Montgomery and a part of Multan were to be included in the new province. *The Tribune*, 23 July 1943; for details see Mitra, N.N. *The Indian Annual Register*, 1943, Vol. I, pp.298-99.
10. *The Hindustan Times*, 16-17 October 1944.
12. Home Political Reports, 7/1/45 Poll (1) KW, NAI, New Delhi.
24. Himachal Pradesh came into being on April 15, 1948 with the merger of some 30 former hill States. Like the Hindi and Punjabi people, the people of Himachal Pradesh also demanded a separate Himachal Pradesh. Dr. Y.S. Parmar, the then Chief Minister demanded that Punjab and Pepsu should be made an integral part of Himachal Pradesh. See *Naya Zamana*, 21 May 1954 and *The Tribune*, 18 May 1954.


42. *Ibid*; 4 August 1965.


47. Memorandum Submitted to the Cabinet sub-committee and Parliamentary Consultative Committee on 'Punjab Suba' issued by the Punjab State Council of the Communist Party of India, Chandigarh, 4 November 1965.


52. Gian Singh Rarewala Papers, File No-88, S.No.2 (available at National Archives of India, New Delhi).


