CONCLUSION

Master Gurbanta Singh was fully aware of the social cleavages which existed in the rural society of Punjab and the concomitant conflicts of interests and values between master and slave, capitalist and worker, oppressor and oppressed, in class, race and gender. He condemned the leaders even of the Congress, who denied the existence of huge social divides. As a crusader of Dalit rights, he kept on harping upon the theme that injustice and oppression, whatever its form and colour was a threat to peace and harmony of Indian society in general and Punjabi society in particular. He and his Congress Party of the Nehruvian era stood with the masses who struggled against exploitative and oppressive system which was as old as the struggle. He knew that resistance would go side by side the domination. He refuted the ideological justifications of domination by launching Ad Dharam Movement in the early years of his life. He alongwith other leaders of the Movement adapted from but not adopted Brahmanism and Sikhism, their sacerdotal literature, social structure and religio-political institutions so that as against ignorant, servile and disunited Dalits, they would create literate, independent and organized Dalits. Ad Dharm Movement went a long way in humanizing Dalits. From Ambedkar
they learnt that Brahmanism of the Manu variety was contrivance to suppress and enslave humanity.

Master Gurbanta Singh attacked the caste as wrong, inhuman and futile. His main targets were the rigours of caste which he himself had experienced as a school going boy. He did not allow his struggle to be complicated by ideological verbosity. Simple vernacular medium of the masses was adopted to propagate his ideas. His was the work of the people, of the masses and not of classes. His gurus and guides were those saints who came from lower orders of society tailors, carpenters, potters, leather workers, gardeners, shopkeepers, barbers and even Mahars. Dalit leadership got succour and inspiration from these saint poets. Ad Dharam Movement, from a scattered one became a force to reckon with.

It had tremendous effect till the partition of the country. After the partition, Master Gurbanta Singh joined the Indian National Congress aspiring to operate at a wider canvas. He successfully attempted to make the sectarian issue a national one and became an acknowledged leader of the Dalits.

As Paul Wallace called “Two political systems” the Sikh political system based on institutions and structures of the Sikh community, and the formal political system of representative institutions established after independence, Master Gurbanta Singh, although born in a Sikh family yet operated within the latter. He was able to discover that the two systems
were in mutual conflict. In the representative system, he forcefully countered the framework of hegemonic control which was created by the dominant Hindu community with 62 per cent population in Punjab after partition. His major contribution lay in creating the Dalit political system within the representative one, not by making the former subservient to the latter but by making it coterminous. Unlike many top Congress leaders in Punjab, he kept himself away from the Sikh political system. That was an act of farsightedness so far as widely ethno-religious part of the Punjab politics was concerned. In the Nehruvian period, his actions and reactions were more forthright whereas in the post-Nehruvian period, these became more muted because of the overall centralizing drives at the Centre and shrunken space for autonomous politics.

Master Gurbanta Singh fought against evils like communalism, corruption, nepotism and immorality. He came to observe that right since independence, many leaders in the Congress had started maligning the party’s ideology of secularism particularly the Akali Sikhs who had infiltrated into the Congress. He fought against their machinations, particularly that of Giani Kartar Singh and his group. He understood that communalism would weaken the Punjabi society in general and Dalits in particular because in the rural social structure, the Dalits had to depend upon the rich landlords for many social and economic obligations. Master Gurbanta Singh’s opposition to Punjabi Suba had stemmed from these
realities of rural life. He was of the view that if Punjabi Suba became a reality, it would further strengthen the Jat domination in Punjab politics which would cause more discomfiture to the poor rural Dalits. He prevailed upon his Dalit constituency to declare Hindi as their mother tongue. With this declaration, he not only established his nationalist credentials, but also, to some extent, warded off the ill-effects of communal dragon. The move also generated Dalit solidarity particularly in the Doaba region which remained his political stronghold till the end.

Master Gurbanta Singh’s fight against corruption in politics and administration was endless. Just two years after independence when he was participating in the Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates, he said he was pained to know this fact that Gandhi Cap and home spun Khaddar (course cloth) which were symbols of independence struggle had got maligned. An MLA told him that when he went to the villages, he would remove the Gandhi Cap because people would call him blackmarketeer. Such a steep decline of the Congress culture of selfless service and sacrifice was unthinkable. In the ensuing thirty years of his public life as a Congress Minister, ordinary legislator or leader of the opposition, he endeavoured to stem the decline. At the party level, his success might be partial, but at the personal level, it was complete. That is why he won the 1946, 1952, 1957, 1962, 1969 and 1972 Assembly elections with thumping majorities. In 1972 Assembly election, he won the election unopposed and that splendid
victory set the ball rolling for the Congress return to power in the State. In 1946 United Punjab Legislative Assembly elections, he defeated a rich leather merchant of Jalandhar. His humble origin paid him rich dividends. He stuck to it and did not let the glow of power blinker his vision. Poor Harijans, farmers, tenants, daily wage-earners, all these remained in the centre of his politics.

Master Gurbanta Singh’s recurring theme in political life was strengthening the democracy in Punjab. Insensitivity of the police and bureaucracy to the problems of the disadvantaged people, brazen play of vote politics by the political leadership, illiteracy of large sections of society, communally-oriented social cleavages all these hindered the progress towards truly democratic system. He observed in the villages that Patwaris who were assigned the task of preparing the voter’s lists were not sincere to the job as they were accustomed to doing those jobs only which brought financial benefits. He said in the Assembly about the first general elections to be held in 1952 that such spurious voters’ lists were a mockery of democracy. He said that he contested the elections in 1946 and was contesting again in 1952, but the experience in the Independent India and that of the universal adult franchise was going to be bitter because of the rampant corruption under undemocratic work culture.

Similarly, vote bank politics was also a matter of concern for him. He said that the elected representatives were not sincerely representing their
The representatives of the rural constituencies, after being elected, would come to Chandigarh and become urbanized totally forgetting their rural constituencies. Not only that, these representatives would justify the urban bias of the government. They would go to the villages only at the time of elections. They would continue nurturing their stooges in the villages. They would coin catchy slogans so as to allure the poor voters. Even the blatant use of groupism and bitter cleavages was welcome. He condemned this undemocratic and unparliamentary conduct of the people’s representatives both in and out of the government. He said communal riots had occurred in Jalandhar in the wake of the formation of Punjabi Suba. Shops were looted. Houses were set on fire. Fatal assaults were committed upon the people. All this happened in the constituency of the then Chief Minister, Comrade Ram Kishan. But he was not moved only because of the vote politics. That was the kind of degeneration set in the political system. He categorically stated these harrowing facts in the Assembly.

Scheduled Caste Federation established by Dr. Ambedkar and thereafter its new version Republican Party of India were the Dalit organizations which opposed Master Gurbanta Singh’s Dalit constituency. It is creditworthy for Master Gurbanta Singh that in the first general elections held in 1952 when Dr. Ambedkar had himself come to Punjab to campaign for his candidates, the former defeated the SCF candidate with a big margin. Similar was the fate of RPI’s candidates afterwards. After the
1946 Assembly elections, Dr. Ambedkar directed the four non-Congress Scheduled Caste MLAs which included Master Gurbanta Singh to ally with the Muslim League and form the Government, he refused. It was a courageous step because no Dalit leader could dare to oppose Dr. Ambedkar at that time. Master Gurbanta Singh also spurned the political enticements in the form of Ministership or Parliamentary Secretaryship as offered by the Muslim League. The later developments showed that History stood by the side of Master Gurbanta Singh.