CHAPTER III
PUNJAB IMPASSE
Punjab enjoys the distinction of being the only Sikh-majority state in India. And perhaps the only state to have undergone such a dramatic transformation of its population distribution, composition and thus complexion since Independence. Prior to Independence such a development was related to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the resultant transfer of populations across the border and later with the successive reorganisations of the state till its assumption of the present form of a Sikh-majority state in 1966.

The politics, more so the linguistic politics has taken a unique route in Punjab, popularly regarded as the "sword-arm" and "bread-basket" of India. So unique has been the political scene in Punjab, that initially, even a separate state for them proved elusive for a long time. It was almost two decades in Independent India before the goal of a separate Sikh-majority Homeland conceived way back in 1909, could be realised.

An attempt has therefore been made in this chapter to trace the evolution—the how and why—of the Punjabi movement. It examines the ambiguity surrounding the language issue in Punjab due to the infusion of religious meaning into it. The attempt is to analyze the causes for the inadequacy of the linguistic question to meet the challenges of the Punjabi people as clearly manifested in the cropping-up of the Khalistan demand, despite the granting of a Sikh majority state (as demanded earlier). Hence the present exercise seeks to identify the factors contributing to the present crisis. The Punjabi demand now spanning over
three-quarters of this century has been divided into four phases: from 1909 onwards when the demand first took some shape with the birth of organisations like the Singh Sabha and the Akali Dal—the spokes institutions of the Sikh interests. The second phase starts from 1940s when the idea of a separate state for the Muslims—Pakistan—became a reality thus rousing the hopes of the Sikhs in a similar demand. However the demand of the Sikhs having backfired the main contention in the post-Independence era has been, at least a separate province for the Sikhs (within the Indian Union)—this being the main theme in the third phase. In the final phase the movement from 1966, the year when the Sikhs did succeed in attaining a province for themselves—Punjab—till the cropping-up of a demand for Khalistan (a sovereign state for Sikhs) a demand reminiscent of pre-Independence days is traced.

Even though the demand for a Punjabi state dates back to the beginning of the present century, it was only in the second major phase of reorganisation— the post-independence period— that the demand for a separate Punjab state was granted. This was as late as 1966. it is rather difficult to understand as to why Punjab inspite of being a strong agricultural state like Andhra took so long to realise a separate province of its own. Since agriculturists are basically interested in such an arrangement that it was but natural for the struggle to assume strong dimensions in Punjab too. The most likely reason in the Centre's delay in granting the Punjab demand could be the fact that in Punjab the problem was not just linguistic or economic (as in the case of Andhra) but rather merged or combined with other factors
like ethnic and religious. And it is because of this merger, the factor of languages took a firm foothold in Punjab. So without doubt a vertically divided Punjab with a different religion, script, language and social tradition provided a more conducive atmosphere than other parts of India for the emergence of the demand for a linguistic entity. Little wonder, the linguistic issue with its infusion of religion had a stronger grip than that was witnessed in Andhra. Its strategic position as one of the border-states could also be one of the reasons for the delay in the Centre granting the demand. Hence for long the Centre tried to resist and avoid the Punjab issue. But with the passage of time as the issue was assuming militant dimensions, the Centre caved-in (to the demand) hoping that the carving of the state at this juncture would put a halt to the ambitions and aspirations of the Punjabi people to attain higher goals.

An Historical Overview:
The Punjab Demand: 1909-1940

It is the period when the demand struck roots and attained a voice through the formation of organisations like Singh Sabha and the Akali Dal. The period witnessed hectic parleys in the light of communal electorates introduced by the British.

The demand for a separate Punjabi-speaking state began way back in 1909 under the British rule. The British could lay foot in Punjab only in 1849 that too consequent to the passing away of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was thus after almost six decades of British rule that the demand for Punjab had its first origins.
Arya Samajist versus Singh Sabha organisations:

The problem assumed serious dimensions with the criticisms aired by the militant Arya Samajists giving birth to Singh Sabha organisations- a movement aimed at consciously creating a sense of self-awareness and identity in the Sikh minds. Thus the Singh Sabha organisations founded in 1873 may be regarded as the foundation on which the Sikh nationalist movement grew. The crux of the Punjab problem lay in "the Sikh community's imperative to preserve its separate identity in the face of what is seen as the threat of re-absorption into the vast Hindu majority and the failure of the Hindu community to accept that imperative as a natural desire of one section of a pluralistic society".  

"Instead the Hindu dominant sections went on harping on a century-old theme that Sikhs were nothing but a part of the Hindu society, thereby creating bitterness in the minds of the Sikhs".  

Morley-Minto Reforms:

The acceptance of the principle of communal representation by Lord Minto in 1906 and subsequently its inclusion in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 lent a new and wider dimension to the problem of Sikh- non Sikh relations. The granting of the

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²Ibid.

province on grounds of narrow majority and economic backwardness of the Muslims helped stir the hornet's nest. As per the Census Report of 1921, the Muslims constituted about fifty-five per cent of the population vis-a-vis the Hindus and the Sikhs. The reasoning for the special and extraordinary rights to the Muslims constituting a majority was to offset the advantages enjoyed by the Hindus and Sikhs in the economic fields of industry, commerce, trade and banking. The economic domination of the non-Muslims over the Muslims in some parts of the province lent strength to the contention that they were on the threshold of economic exploitation by the non-Muslims viz., Hindus and the Sikhs. The legitimisation of representation and reservation of seats to the Muslims by the Communal Award was stoutly opposed by both the Sikhs and the Hindus. It was demanded that at least the statutory majority of fifty-one per cent provided to the Muslims in the legislature should at be reduced to less than fifty per cent so that no one community can boss over the other. The slightest of margins in the number game made the communal problem between the Muslims and the non-Muslims acute. It was aptly opined that "nowhere is the communal feeling potentially so dangerous and so complicated as in the Punjab".  

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Montague-chelmsford Reforms:

In deference to persistent demands for separate representation by the Sikhs they were granted communal representation through separate electorates in 1919 under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (p.150). The Sikhs were awarded seventeen per cent or twelve out of seventy-one elective seats in the Punjab legislature. In 1928, the Simon Commission granted a hike of only eighteen per cent representation although the Sikh representatives clamoured for an increase to thirty per cent. Separate electorates with reservation of seats gave the Sikhs their constituencies from which they elected their own representatives. The British thus keeping in line with their policy of divide and rule vested in the Sikhs an interest in retaining the Khalsa identity distinct from the Hindu. But how did the British succeed in their policy of divide and rule? Perhaps their success (in implementing the policy) should be traced to the multiple identities of the Hindu society. In fact the Indian society with its multiple embedded divisions provided the space required for the success of the policy. It is these multiple identities that also set into motion the transmutation of identities evident in India.

The communal base of the Sikh politics can be said to have concretised in 1916 with what has popularly come to be called the Lucknow Pact - a pact arrived at by the Congress with the Muslim League over the acceptance of the communal device of separate electorates for the Muslims.

The Singh Sabhas, the initial base on which the Sikh identity took birth gave way to a more concrete base in 1920 in the form of the Akali Dal with the main aim to liberate the Sikh Gurudwaras. The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) also came into existence unofficially in 1920 with the same purpose. Since the Akali movement coincided with the Congress call for non-cooperation, it invariably got enmeshed with the national movement and almost turned into a national movement, thus ushering what was called the "religio-politico phase of revivalism". The Akali Dal has been dominated by the middle and marginalised Sikh peasantry and the small Sikh trader, who are strong believers in the Sikh lore full of dialectical and revolutionary energy capable of bringing into reality action-obsessed and militant people.

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In the second phase the demand for a separate statehood of Pakistan turned a reality giving rise to a new fond hope among the Sikhs to be able to secure a separate homeland. This phase witnessed various schemes to bring some sort of solution to the Punjab problem like the Cripps' Declaration, Cabinet Mission Plan, Mountbatten Plan and the Partition Plan.

The climax in Punjab politics can be said to have come in 1940 with the passage of the Lahore resolution of the Muslim League containing the much-acclaimed demand for the creation of a separate Muslim state- Pakistan. It can be regarded as the watershed in Punjab politics. The state of Pakistan was to consist of "geographically contiguous units, demarcating into regions with such a territorial readjustment as may be necessary", thus obviously involving the splitting of the Punjab. Since Punjab had areas where Muslims formed a minority, it was not practical to include the whole of Punjab in Pakistan,\(^9\) thus necessitating the split.

Cripps Declaration, 1942:

But a new dimension was added to Punjab politics with the arrival of Cripps Mission in March 1942. Until then the Akali Dal did not put forward or even conceive the idea of Sikhs having a

separate state. But the draft Declaration issued by Sir Stafford Cripps in 1942, gave an impetus to the demand for the partition of India with such provinces opting out of India should they so desire. "His Majesty's Government would be prepared to agree upon a new constitution giving the same full status as the Indian Union".\(^{10}\) The draft declaration thus clearly envisaged Pakistan. The declaration greatly alarmed the Hindus and the Sikhs in Punjab because it meant that Punjab being a muslim-majority province could secede from the centre and enter the other dominions which could acquire, the same status as the Indian Union". The Hindus and the Sikhs in that case were to be under the perpetual Muslim domination. Hence in a strongly-worded memorandum to Sir Cripps, the Sikhs lodged a vigorous protest by stating that their position in the Punjab has been finally liquidated.\(^{11}\)

It was maintained that in order to give substantial protection to the Sikhs, the present Punjab should be divided into two parts and each be given the right of non-accession. Since the Sikhs and the Hindus do not want to go out of India, there is no reason as to why the non-Muslim majority of the central and eastern Punjab should be forced to go out of India against their wishes, went


\(^{11}\)Extracted from Memorandum, handed to Sir Stafford Cripps' by the Shiromani Akali Dal on March 31, 1942. In Singh, Kirpal., op.cit., p.8.
the argument. But the concerns of the Sikhs for an honourable status for themselves began to increase with the progress of the League's demand.

Cropping-up of the demand for a Sikh State: Azad Punjab

The demand for a separate Sikh state was revived in 1942 to counter the protagonists of Pakistan. If Pakistan was created the Sikhs opined they would necessarily have to ask for a state of their own, although their preference was to live as an integral part of united India, sharing political power with the Hindus and the Muslims. They further held it was not necessary for a nation to be embodied in an independent state 'to realise its nationhood'. However as the progress of the League's demand intensified so also increased the concerns of the Sikhs for a separate status for themselves. The Shiromani Akali Dal had put forth its demand for a Sikh state. It was based on the argument that the Panth (Sikhs collectively) demands the splitting up of existing provinces of the Punjab with its natural boundaries so as to constitute a separate autonomous Sikh state. The Akalis demanded that an Azad Punjab state should be created simultaneously with Pakistan and Hindustan. In an article entitled Mzad Punjab Scheme' brought out in 1943, Master Tara Singh's letter to Cripps', dated May 1, 1942.

12Cited in Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., pp.8-9, from Master Tara Singh's letter to Cripps', dated May 1, 1942.
Singh stressed that this was conceived to protect the Sikhs from the communal domination of the Muslims.\textsuperscript{13}

Gandhi's acceptance of the division of Punjab:

The contentious issue of the division of Punjab in an united India was finally accepted by Mahatma Gandhi the votary of India-the One Nation in September 1944. In a letter to Mr Jinnah, President of the Muslim League he stated:

\begin{quote}
I proceed on the assumption that India is not to be regarded as two or more nations but as one family consisting of many members of whom Muslims living in certain areas in absolute majority desire to live in separation from the rest of India,...The boundary should be demarcated by a Commission approved by the Congress and the League. The wishes of the inhabitants of the areas demarcated should be ascertained through votes of adult population of the areas or through some equivalent method. If the vote is in favour of separation, it should be agreed that these areas shall form a separate state as soon as possible after India is free from foreign domination.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

However this time the issue of plebiscite in the Punjab became a bone of contention. As Jinnah demanded the whole of Punjab for Pakistan, he did not agree with Gandhi on the question of plebiscite. Hence in a reply to Gandhi he argued that he did not

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
want separation on the basis of plebiscite in which all inhabitants could participate but wanted the issue to be decided on the basin of what he called self-determination confined to the Muslims alone.\textsuperscript{15} In fact Jinnah held that:

\begin{quote}
there is only one practical realistic way of resolving Hindu-Muslim differences. This is to divide India into sovereign parts. Pakistan and Hindustan by recognising the whole of the North-West frontier province, Baluchistan, Sind, Punjab, and Bengal and Assam as sovereign Muslim territories as they now stand.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Cabinet Mission Plan:

The stalemate over the division of Punjab which continued for sometime was broken with the commissioning of the Cabinet Mission to India by Attlee, the new Prime Minister of England. Its task was to look into the various ways of solving the problem of granting Independence to India. Thus in view of the near certainty of the creation of Pakistan, the Akali leadership felt obliged to declare just before the arrival of the Cabinet Mission that 'no safeguards and guarantees of constitutional nature, no weightage or protection, promised to the Sikhs by any of the majority communities can be considered adequate to protect the Sikhs and ensure their free and unhindered growth as a

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{See Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., pp.10-11, for extracts of Jinnah's letter dated Sept.21, 1944, Mahatma Gandhi, Last Phase, Vol.1, p.95.}

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{In Singh, Kirpal, op.cit., p.11 from Hector Balitho's: Creator of Pakistan, p.16.}
nationality with a distinct religious, ideological, cultural and political characters’ In a memorandum submitted to the Cabinet Mission, the Shiromani Akali dal stated.

as an alternative to the existing province of the Punjab, a new province may be carved out as an additional provincial unit in the united India of the future in such a way that all the Important shrines (Curudwaras) be included in it as also a substantial majority of the Sikh population of the existing province of the Punjab. 17

In other words, a separate autonomous Sikh state thus, as they put it is, 'the minimum demand and political objective of the Sikh Panth as a whole'.

The Congress Party contrary to the views of Jinnah and in line with the support to the Sikhs strongly felt that:

there must be no compulsion to any province or a part of a province by another province. The Congress cannot be a party to any such compulsion or imposition against the will of the people concerned....the right of the Sikhs in the Punjab should not be jeopardised.18

Mountbatten Plan:

There were obviously vital differences between the Congress and the Muslim League regarding the Cabinet Mission Plan which ended

in a disaster, with the failure of the Cabinet Mission Plan uncertainty once again enveloped Punjab politics. But it acquired a new optimism with the arrival of Mountbatten as the new Viceroy

Not only was Jinnah's idea of settlement- the whole of Punjab and Bengal- rejected out of hand by the new Viceroy, but in fact Jinnah was made to understand that he would have Pakistan only if its writ would run in the areas where the Muslims were a majority......and the Muslim claim in Assam would be limited to Muslim parts of the province alone.\textsuperscript{19}

Meanwhile instead of any communal settlement, Punjab stood a witness to communal riots. Hence on April 8, 1947 the Congress among others passed the following resolution reiterating its support to the Sikhs:

\begin{quote}
these tragic events, .... demonstrated ....... No arrangement based on coercion can last. Therefore it is necessary to find a way out which involves the least amount of compulsion- This would necessitate the division of Punjab into two provinces, so that predominantly Muslim parts may be separated from the pre-dominantly non-Muslim parts.
\end{quote}

Partition Plan:

The Shiromani Akali Dal reiterated that the creation of Punjab "was the only remedy to end communal strife". But Jinnah

\textsuperscript{19}ibid.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, p.28 from \textit{Indian Annual Register}, Vol.1, pp.118-119.
continuing in the same vein of opposing the sikhs held that he was against "the surgical operation on the provinces (Bengal and Punjab), which had 'ancient histories of unity' as proposed in the Partition Plan". In response, Mountbatten argued that the "feeling invoked in his heart (Jinnah's) by prospects of partition of those provinces was the feeling invoked in my heart and the heart of the Congress against the partition of India itself".\(^{21}\)

**Sikh-Muslim League Talks:**

Consequently the deadlock over the issue of the partition of Punjab led to talks between the Sikhs and the Muslim leaders. In the talks which naturally centred on the issue of a Sikh state the Muslim leaders agreed to the formation of a Sikh state within Pakistan, provided the Sikhs did not insist on the partition of Punjab and agreed to join Pakistan. The Sikh leaders however turned down the offer. Quite obviously the absence of a clear-cut policy of 'how the Sikhs would be treated in the event of establishment of Pakistan apart from assurances of good treatment' led to the breakdown of Akali-Muslim League talks. At their meetings in 1946 and 1947 with Jinnah, the Sikh leaders insisted on some constitutional rights which Jinnah was unwilling to concede.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Mishra, Madhusudan, *op. cit.*, p.88.
Sikh-Congress Relations:

The Sikh leaders on the other hand maintained good rapport with Congress leaders. The essentially anti-British Gurudwara Reform Movement automatically drew the Sikhs (represented by the SGPC and the Akali Dal) on to a common platform with the Congress. In fact the faith of the Sikhs in the Congress can be traced to the formal party resolution passed at the Lahore session of Congress that "no constitution would be acceptable to the Congress which did not give the Sikhs full satisfaction".  

But the faith of the Sikhs in the Congress took a beating in the light of reversal of opinion with regard to the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The fears were however given a premature burial with the statement of Pundit Nehru in July 1946 "the brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and set-up in the North where in the Sikhs can experience the glow or warmth of freedom".

Thus resisting strong pressures from Jinnah and the British advisers the Sikhs permanently linked their destinies with India. Hence the religious composition of its (Punjab's) population was not only such as to posit the Sikhs between the Hindus aid the Muslims in the social equilibrium, what is more, each one of them was tied up to it with traditions of historical, cultural and

23Singh, Amrik, op.cit.
economic significance. As result of the different kinds of stakes which these religious communities had in the Punjab, all of them attempted to hold on to it till the end, and in the process, the partition of the region became inevitable.\(^{25}\)

Demand for a Sikh State in the post-Independence period:

The third phase consists of the crucial struggle of the Sikhs in the post-Independence period for a separate province at least, within the Indian Union. After a long struggle and commissioning of various committees and formulae like the S.K.Dar Commission, Sachar Formula, States Reorganisation Commission and the Regional Formula the Sikhs could attain a separate province for themselves in 1966 in which they were numerically a majority.

The ambiguity surrounding the language issue in Punjab, due to the infusion of religious identification continued even in the post-independence period, as the demand for a Sikh-majority state revived. But the revival of the demand leads to a serious question. The question (that inevitably arises) is why were the Sikhs who achieved the partition of Punjab, with the backing and support of the Hindus so disillusioned with them as to demand a Sikh-majority state in the post-partition phase.

While analysing the underlying factors for this development, it becomes rather clear that what drives the wedge between the Sikhs and the Hindus is not "the linguistic differentiation between the two communities on religious grounds" per se but rather the policies pursued by the Government at the Centre. It is maintained that the demand for Sikh state basically arose due to the lack of imaginative and relevant development policies taking the specificities of the regions.

For instance it is pointed out that in the era immediately after independence the Sikhs were concentrated in the central tracts, while the southern and eastern parts were predominantly Hindu dominated. The policy followed by the government in constructing canals for irrigation and other purposes, was such that it primarily benefited the southern tracts and aided the central tracts only marginally despite the fact that the major expense in constructing the canals was borne by the central tracts' farmers from their higher land revenue assessments. Added to it the drainage of this region was seriously disrupted by the canals, whose raised banks inevitably caused flooding on their upstream during the rainy season and since these canals raised the water table in some areas, it even caused loss of crop land through water-logging.27

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These difficulties led to the widespread belief that the needs of the central tracts are not being met partly due to the religious intolerance towards the Sikhs, thus automatically leading to its logical reasoning that a new state—a Sikh-majority state—would protect the Sikhs from such discrimination. Thus arose the twin-demands for a Punjabi-Subah as the political form for the central areas and Haryana as the complementary political entity in the south.\textsuperscript{28} But Congress leaders professing the principle of linguistic provinces theory throughout the freedom struggle were "unwilling to consider seriously a proposal—Punjab Subah, based explicitly on religious and communal grounds, specially in the aftermath of the partition of India on a religious basis".\textsuperscript{29} It is obvious that the causes for the demand of linguistic states in Punjab and the denial of the demand go beyond the linguistic question.

S.K.Dar Commission:

In 1948 the Sikh hopes were dashed to the ground when the S.K.Dar Commission appointed by the Constituent Assembly to report on redrawing of state boundaries categorically pronounced against any change. Added to it, Punjab was arbitrarily excluded from the Commission's terms of reference, groups. The demand for Punjabi-Subah was interpreted "as a demand for a Sikh state in camouflage and condemned as a replica of the Muslim League".\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p.477.
\textsuperscript{29}Brass, op.cit., p.320.
\textsuperscript{30}Mishra, Madhusudan, op.cit., p.97.
Sachar Formula:

In 1949, under the Sachar Formula, Punjab was declared a bilingual state. In order to overcome the difficulties faced in the bilingual state a language formula, popularly referred as Sachar formula named after the Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhimsen Sachar was introduced. Under the scheme, Punjab was demarcated into three areas the Punjabi-speaking, Hindi-speaking and the bilingual. It was provided that in their respective areas up to matriculation the language of the area would be the medium of instruction in all schools, whereas the other language would be taught as compulsory language from the first class of the primary stage up to matriculation.

The Sachar Formula got full support from the Sikhs, including the Akalis. But the trouble arose from the Hindu organizations who resented the introduction of Punjabi in Gurumukhi script as the medium of instruction. Later on it assumed the shape of Punjabi-Hindi conflict, as 'the Hindus sensing what the Sikhs were really after was a Sikh-majority state allowed themselves to be persuaded to declare to the Census Commissioners of 1951 that their mother tongue was Hindi'. Thus as a result of the undemocratic attitude of the Hindus in Punjab, language was dragged into the web of communalism. The battle over language in effect became a confrontation between Punjabi Hindus and Punjabi

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Sikhs.

In sum it can be held that the linguistic differentiation of Hindus and Sikhs on religious grounds reached its final stage with the declaration of Hindi as the mother tongue by the Hindus. This "culminated in dividing two groups of people belonging to the same racial stock and speaking the same language, but holding different religious beliefs and an attachment to separate scripts, who as a consequence of political action on the basis of religion have chosen to differentiate themselves further by changing their linguistic identification". 32 Thus the seemingly linguistic identity got transmuted into a communal one with this act (declaration of Hindi as their mother tongue) of the Punjabi Hindus.

States Reorganisation Commission:

In the wake of the formation of Andhra in 1953 on the linguistic basis, similar movements were mounted in several other parts of the country necessitating the Government of India to appoint a States Reorganisation Commission under the Chairmanship of Fazl Ali in that very year, to go into the problem of redrawing of State boundaries. No Sikh was nominated to the Commission despite the fact that Punjab was the most disputed issue at that time. 33 Since the Congress leaders were unwilling to consider any proposal based on religious and communal grounds, the Akali Dal

33 Mishra, Madhusudan, op. cit., p. 98
in the presentation of their demands before the Commission emphasised "the linguistic basis of the demand proposing the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State rather than a Sikh-majority State". 34

The main arguments put forward in favour of a Punjabi-speaking state were:

It will remove all causes of unrest and discontent, eliminate language controversies, enable the imparting of education in the mother tongue and help the people to grow and advance.

The result: the formation of a homogeneous geographically compact area inhabited by sturdy people who would strengthen the defence of the north-western border.

Since it will be financially viable, surplus in food and rich in resources, naturally it will secure for the country a contented Sikh community and general peace, (p. 140)

The States Reorganisation Commission in its report considered the Punjab problem as unique in that the demand was equally opposed by people belonging to the same linguistic group (meaning the Punjabis Hindus) and residing in the areas proposed to be constituted into a Punjabi-speaking State. 35

Camouflaging the Sikh demand from a religion-based demand to a linguistic-centred Punjabi-state could not convince the States

34Brass, op.cit., p.320.
Reorganisation commission much as it could not ignore the communal part of the demand. In fact, it explicitly stated that the internal tension in Punjab followed communal rather than territorial lines.\textsuperscript{36} The Commission went so far as to opine that "the proposed state will solve neither the language problem nor the communal problem and far from removing internal tension, which exists between the communal and the linguistic and regional groups, it might further exacerbate the existing feelings". (SRC Report, p.146).

The report cited two main reasons for turning down the demand:

the nearness of Punjabi-language to Hindi grammatically and spatially, and more importantly the lack of general support of the Punjabi Hindus to the movement.

Needless to add linguistic homogeneity is generally considered an instrument to bring the people close to the Government but in the case of Punjab it failed to work as Punjabi Hindus denied the Punjabi language and instead declared Hindi to be their mother tongue. Communal identity, thus became a victim twice: in 1947 when the Punjabi Muslims broke away from the common culture of Punjab and the second time in 1951 with the declaration of the Punjabi Hindus of Hindi as their mother tongue, thus rejecting their linguistic heritage.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{37}Pettigrew, Joyce: "In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore", 113
The commission on its part set aside the fears of the Akalis that the Punjabi language would suffer, if Punjabi Subah was not formed. The dismissal by the Commission not only of the demand of a separate province as well as the separate status of the Punjabi-language also, prompted Sardar Hukam Singh of the then Akali Dal to comment in a lighter vein: "while others got States for their languages, we lost even our language". Thus the slogan of linguistic reorganisation of Punjab instead of becoming a cementing force proved to be a divisive factor of the Punjabi people.

Regional Formula:

The Akali Dal met the rejection of its demand by the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955 by launching the Punjabi-Subah-Slogan Agitation. It bore fruit in the form of the Regional Formula in 1956, resulting in the merger of PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab) with Punjab. Under the formula the Punjab Legislature would henceforth consist of two groups—those elected from the Punjabi-speaking area and the other from the Hindi-speaking ones.

Final Phase of the Punjabi-Movement: Carving of the Punjabi-Subah

However very soon dissatisfaction spread-in with the working of the half-baked plan of a Punjabi-Subah—the Regional Formula,

_{Pacific Affairs, Spring 1987, p.8._}

_{SeeBrass, op.cit., p.320._}
culminating in launching of a full-fledged movement in the beginning of May 1960. The movement gained all-out momentum by mid-sixties with the declaration of the Punjab State as a food zone during the drought of 1965. A food zone may be understood as a prohibition on the foodstuffs from one area to another. Punjab was so declared as to depress prices within the state to levels that would compel the farmers to sell to the central stockpiles. Quite naturally this policy was much resented by the agriculturists who viewed it as yet another blatant instance of Centre's hostility towards the Sikhs, their state and religion.

This indicates how the cultural and linguistic factors get mixed up with the economic and material. It is the intertwining of the linguistic with economic factors which has been responsible for the success of the anti-centre morcha of the Akalis.

Ultimately a Sikh-majority state was realised in 1966 with the coming of an end of the Indo-Pak War in which the Sikh peasantry played a notable role lending a helping hand to the troops on the frontline. A three-member sub-committee appointed to look into the Punjab problem came out in favour of redrawing the boundaries on a linguistic basis. Accordingly the Punjab Reorganisation Bill was enacted on September 18, 1966 and the State made its first appearance on November 1, 1966. The Punjab province was split into three States—Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjabi-speaking

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39 Brass, op.cit., p.321.
40 Leaf, op.cit., p.486.
Punjab in which sikhs formed about sixty per cent of the population.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus the centre's (delayed) response could be ensured only after a lot of camouflaging on the part of the Sikhs and the centre's conviction of the Sikhs' credentials as 'our' nation-loving people, attested by their notable contribution in the Indo-Pak war. Though the linguistic reincarnation of the Punjabi Subah demand has in fact, materialised since 1966, its communal or communo-territorial overtones have by no means been totally eradicated as some of the basic economic issues still remain to be solved.

Final Phase: 1966-80s
Khalistan Ordeal:

The final phase depicts the post-Punjab scenario which obviously consists of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and its-concomitant demand for Khalistan, a sovereign state for the Sikhs. The phase from the eighties has been the most turbulent period in the whole history of the Sikhs. Thus the Akalis after having exhausted the various strategies what Baldev Raj Nayar termed as "constitutional, infiltrational and agitational (depending on circumstances)" have adopted in this phase the "confrontational" strategy.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41}Mishra, Madhusudan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.110.

\textsuperscript{42}Quoted in Chopra, Surendra: \textit{op.cit.}, p.124.
"The birth of the Punjabi Suban finally, established an undeniable nexus between the Punjab and Sikh consciousness". The region of Punjab however, remained a hotbed of separatist agitation, inspite of gaining of separate statehood. The basically econo-communal problem of Punjab has in recent decades, deteriorated owing to the call given by a section of the community for the establishment of a separate Sikh-Homeland, Khalistan. "From Azad-Punjab in 1930 as a buffer state between India and Pakistan, the Sikh extremists and fundamentalists turned to Khalistan as an autonomous state in India after five decades". Thus the crisis, in Punjab has in the eighties acquired new dimensions. It has given rise to the demands for secession on religious lines and for more autonomy to apparently protect the group interests of emerging regional interests under the garb of decentralisation of economic power.

Anandpur Sahib Resolution:

There has been a perceptible change in the character of the Punjab problem from early-seventies onwards as it has spilled into the arena of Centre versus States relations. The spurt in Akali activity that began from then on had Anandpur Sahib resolution as its base. The Anandpur resolution envisaged in

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44 Mishra, Hadhusudan, op.cit., p.117.
Punjab 'Khalsa ke bol bala" (pre-eminence of Sikhs). It also revived the separate nation theory of pre-independence era. The main demands made in the Anandpur Sahib resolution passed in 1973 were:

1) The Illusion of the Punjabi-speaking regions that had been left out in the 1967 delineation, despite the clear acceptance of the linguistic criterion.

2) The oft-sought demand that the central Intervention in states affairs should be limited to foreign affairs, defence, posts, telegraph, currency and railways.46

The second demand has been for setting right the heavily loaded unitary bias in the constitution. This demand in effect is seen as resolving the underlying constitutional crisis by reversing the present Indian constitutional arrangement of reserved powers. The concurrent powers, it was argued should go to the States and not the central government. This implication was further underlined in a provision of the resolution that called for the Indian constitution to become 'federal in a real sense' and to assure that all States are equally represented at the centre.47

Although these demands are purely region-oriented they have been enmeshed with religion so as to mobilise the Sikhs. This has resulted in Punjabi Hindus (who constitute 48 per cent of the population) 48

47Leaf, op.cat., p.481.
population) opposing the move lending to Hindus being charged "of lack of interest in Punjabis just demands and the genuine economic and political grievances of Punjabis as a whole against the Union Government".

In order to drive a new balance in the federal relations and mitigate the Punjab agitation the Government announced the appointment of a retired Supreme Court judge Justice Sarkaria (a Sikh) to head a Commission to review Centre-State relations in a broader context. The Akalis committed to greater State powers welcomed the decision but continued to press the demands through agitation. The Commission has since submitted its report.

Punjab, the burning cauldron has shaken the entire nation. But why did Punjab erupt? Perhaps the answer lies not merely in the issues of transfer of territory, allocation of water or declaration of Amritsar as a holy city. Nor can the upheaval be traced to the contentious positions maintained by the centre and the Akali Dal and the disputes between the various groups of terrorists and extremists. Rather the issues it has thrown open for serious consideration by the political system are of a more fundamental nature than mere squabbles over them. But as held by Jannuzi: "the issues of contention are often less significant

49 Ibid., p.68.
Significantly four theories of analysis have been advanced to explain the contemporary situation of Punjab:

1) that the whole problem is the handiwork or a scheme perpetrated by the Congress (I).

2) an outcome of the deprivation syndrome at the political, economic and perhaps social levels also.

3) the result of the Akalis' strategy to agitate whenever out of power.

4) finally, the most popular and widely-believed theory that the distortions of the Punjab economy crept-in at the time of the Green Revolution has given rise to the present situation.\(^{51}\)

It is the fourth theory of analysis which has gained wide acceptability and has been the most sought-after for explaining the Punjab problem. In accordance with this analytical theory, the Punjab problem has been basically perceived to be an economic proposition. The Green Revolution experienced in the sixties has resulted in a spectacular growth of the Punjab economy. It made a notable dent in the agricultural sector. But the growth under it, although spectacular, has given rise to a crisis situation resulting in uneven and un-uniform development. "The Green

\(^{50}\)Jannuzi, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

Revolution, in fact has tended to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.\textsuperscript{52} The benefits of the Green Revolution has trickled-down unevenly among the various sections of the population as well as across the various regions of the State.\textsuperscript{53} The fruits of this so-called all-pervasive revolution apparently, has been cornered by barely ten per cent of the agriculturists, who owned almost thirty eight per cent of the land and may be called as capitalist farmers.\textsuperscript{54} Since in the distribution of benefits it was the size of the landholdings which mattered most, "the widening income inequality became a concomitant feature of the success story".\textsuperscript{55} The Green Revolution seemingly benefitted the creamy layer of cultivators, and has resulted in both proletarianisation and immiserisation of a vast proportion of the marginal and landless peasants. In other words, the capital-intensive agriculture introduced by the Revolution marginalised the position of the poor farmers and exacerbated landlessness.\textsuperscript{57} Although the question whether the Green Revolution has caused poverty in the Punjab as such is debatable what is certain is that the small farmers and landless peasants (i.e. who were not full participants in economic progress) were surely

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., pp. 196-197.
\textsuperscript{53}Singh, Gopal, \textit{op.cit.}, p.42.
\textsuperscript{54}Chopra, Surendra, \textit{op.cit.}, p.199.
\textsuperscript{56}Narang, A.S.: \textit{Storm Over the Sutlej}, (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House 1983), p.23 and also Singh, Gopal, \textit{op.cit.}
placed in a position of "at least relative deprivation - ad they perceived it".\textsuperscript{58} No doubt the Green Revolution led to the trebling of food grain production from 4.6 million tons in 1966 to 11.96 million tons in 1980, but the affluence has been more illusory than real as benefits accrued disproportionately according to the size of the landholdings.\textsuperscript{59}

Besides in the economic proposition of Punjab arises the clash of interests between the regional bourgeoisie and the central bourgeoisie. The emerging class of capitalist farmers in Punjab perceived a clash of interests with those of the big industrialists outside Punjab. In fact Punjab politics has acquired a new dimension in the face of this projection of clash of interests between the emerging agrarian bourgeoisie and the central bourgeoisie. The latter are seen to exercise control over industrial licencing (under the Act of 1951 powers to give industrial licences is vested with the central government) and besides other things, a total control over market and political power. Hence the demand for greater autonomy.\textsuperscript{60}

The agricultural boost has given rise to a clash at a more local level. The clash has been between the economic interests of the agriculturist castes in the rural areas with those of the Hindu

\textsuperscript{58} Jannuzi, \textit{op.cit.}, p.33.
\textsuperscript{60} Kumar, Pramod et al, \textit{op.cit.}, p.75.
trading castes in urban areas. \(^{61}\) In short the communal colour lent to the economic relationships has led to the present crisis. In other words the bourgeois aspirations among the Sikh rural gentry have come into clash with the bourgeois hegemony of Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists. \(^{62}\) In Andhra where both the emergent capitalist farmers and the productive merchants are Hindus the clash between these two forms of capital has remained a straight-forward economic one. In Punjab on the contrary the contradiction between the merchant capital and the productive capital in agriculture has communal dimensions. \(^{63}\) The internal contradictions, arising out of competition for the market both within industrial and merchant capital, thus acquires a communal character of competition and antagonism between emerging local industrialists from outside Punjab and between Hindu and Sikh traders. \(^{64}\)

Another facet of the economic success story of Punjab has been the inundation of labour force from neighbouring states, thus affecting the employment opportunities of Punjab's own work force as well as tilting the balance against Sikhs demographically. The problem in Punjab, as Hardgrave opined, "is

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\(^{61}\) Singh, Gopal, op. cit., p. 46.


\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Kumar, Pramod et al., op. cit., p.61.

\(^{65}\) Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Basis of Punjab", op.cit., p.44.
partly a question of ethnic balance". 66 Ironically it is their success as a community which is tilting the scales against them. A heavy influx of migrating labour force into Punjab agriculture has been matched by a parallel process of out-migration of Sikhs from Punjab. As a result the Sikh population has dipped to fifty two per cent from sixty per cent while that of the Hindu population has shot up from forty per cent to forty eight per cent, causing the alarm bells to ring. The immigration has been confined generally at the lower end of the rural economic structure, whereas it was from the middle and upper layers of the rural population that the out-migration took place. The number of migrant workers in Punjab agriculture negligible in 1961, shot up from 1.5 lakhs in 1978-79 to about 4 lakhs by the mid-80s. Thus in the mid-eighties 25%-33% of all male workers in the Punjab agriculture were migrants. These figures obviously leads to the threat of Sikhs getting absorbed into the Hindu majority gaining firm ground, a threat reminiscent of pre-partition Punjab. The main beneficiaries in this complex game (as in any community) needless to add, are the fundamentalists and the extremists who in order to gain leverage, seek to play upon the psyche of the Sikh community by indicating the impending and imminent danger of domination by Hindu majority in Punjab and thus emotionalise the

66 Hardgrave, Robert L (Jr): "The Northeast, the Punjab & Regionalisation of Indian Politics", op.cit., p.1179.
67 Ibid. Also Singh, Gopal: "Socio-Economic Basis of Punjab", op.cit., p.45.
Punjab with only 1.6 per cent of the nation's land area and about 2 per cent of the population, provides 73 per cent of the country's procurement of wheat and almost 48 per cent of its rice but when it comes to processed food products the bulk of it are imported from other States.\textsuperscript{69}

Although agriculturally Punjab has a strong base industrially its base is rather too fragile. One of the most appealing reasons which has been always given for the low industrial investment and activity in Punjab has been its location as a border-state. Compared to the large-scale industry, the small industries sector experienced growth in the seventies, it nonetheless could not broaden its base. Apart from the low generation of employment in these industries, the distribution of gains, whatsoever, has tended to be concentrated in districts like Amritsar, Patiala and Ludhiana. The Amritsar district occupies the second position in the small industries sector, most of its work consists of cotton and wool processing, the gains from these are generally cornered by the predominantly Hindu businesses of Amritsar. The scene is no better in the large-scale industry sector.\textsuperscript{70} It is not surprising to note that "less than 25 per cent of Punjab's gross domestic product comes from industry, a share which is one of the

\textsuperscript{68}Singh, Gopal, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{69}Telford, Hamish, \textit{op.cit.}, p.980.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid. Telford has given a comprehensive picture of the political scene of Punjab.
lowest in India, even below states like Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar though the per capita GDP of these states is far behind that of the Punjab. As a result of tardy industrialisation, the surplus being generated finds its way for investment outside the state or is frittered away in conspicuous consumption. Thus the lack of openings for the surplus generated from the agricultural sector can partly account for the Punjab crisis, coupled with the fact that there can be two opinions as regards the agricultural successes of Punjab having reached a plateau. So in the face of critical levels reached in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, the eruption seems to be a logical off-shoot of the crisis. It is in this context that Punjab's rigorous drive to achieve a new balance in the federal system should be understood.

"The key to understanding the tragic sequence of events from the attack on the Golden temple to the assassination of Mrs Gandhi lies in seeing how the legitimate and resolvable problems bundled into the arguments about federalism became submerged in the fundamentally unresolvable demands—ideas, associated with separation and terrorism". It has always been maintained that it is quite possible that "the drive for federalism will lose force if the economic problems are erased". Harry Izmirlian, who after

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71 Quoted from Jeffrey, Robin: that's Happening to India? P-34, in Jannuzi, op.cit., p.34.
73 Leaf, op.cit., p.491.
74 Ibid, p.497.
showing that the Sikhs constituted an independent identity discovered that"....the sikh farmers most frequently provide a surplus of agricultural products....it is not surprising that Sikhs are inclined to view their contribution to the security and the prosperity of the country in terms far greater than the small number might warrant". He goes on to say that "the agitation for greater representation in the political structure makes sense if viewed in this context, from the Sikh point of view both the British and the post-1947 India Government's responses were inadequate". 75 Hence the Punjab ordeal continues.

In brief in Punjab the linguistic controversy engineered by communal elements, rural-urban dichotomy and convergence of economic, caste and communal cleavages with it, emergence of a class of rich farmers as a result of the Green Revolution and little scope for investment of the surplus of this class, tardy industrialisation and urbanisation provide the background for the eruption of this crisis.

CONCLUSION:

In the final analysis it can be held that the core of the linguistic problem in Punjab is rooted in the question of ethnic


identity. In the pre-independence period it, lay in the Sikh community's drive to maintain its separate identity in the face of special concessions given to the Muslims by the British. Subsequently in the post-partition phase what lent impetus to the movement was the threat of reabsorption into the vast Hindu community. Although the demand was for linguistic-centred state the movement clearly aimed at a Sikh state with language playing the role of what may be called "sugar-coating". Since the agriculturists were basically interested in the linguistic question, the call for such a demand assumed forceful articulation in Punjab. But the decision to create the state was delayed by the centre on account of the dominance of the monopoly of the capitalistic class at the all-India level whose interests lay beyond the geographical boundaries of linguistic states.

However the Indo-Pak war of 1965 signaled a shift in the attitude of the central leadership towards the Punjab demand. The shift was necessitated on account of the enormous contribution made by the Sikh peasants towards helping the front line Indian troops in the 1965 Indo-Pak war. The demand was finally conceded a year after the war.

But despite granting of separate statehood, the situation in Punjab remains in a flux. The Green Revolution of the late-sixties has brought about a spectacular change in the Punjab

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economy. But it has resulted in unequal sharing of benefits among the various sections and uneven development not only in different regions within the state but also for the population engaged in agricultural pursuits. The growing pauperisation of the marginal farmers and the heavy influx of migrating labour force into agriculture from neighbouring states led to a fear psychosis among the Sikhs. Hence the problem in Punjab can be partly attributed to the question of ethnic balance. But perhaps the Sikhs success as a community ironically assists in tilting the scales against them. As pointed out entrepreneurial spirit has led to an out-migration of Sikhs (there are more Sikhs in India outside the Punjab than within) while agricultural prosperity in the Punjab has drawn Hindu labourers into the state from as far as Bihar.\textsuperscript{78} It is this discontentment— the fear of getting reduced to a minority— among the large agriculturists which triggered the political unrest that the state has been passing through in recent times.

The militant and aggressive dimensions that the Punjab problem has assumed is a result of the competing and conflicting interests of the merchant capital and productive capital in agriculture. The communal colour lent to the agitation has been the result of the conflict between the emerging regional agrarian bourgeoisie, the Sikhs, with the entrenched bourgeois interests of the Hindus both at the national and provincial levels. In

\textsuperscript{78}Hardgrave, op.cit., p.1178.
other words the growing aspirations got blocked by the established hegemony. And since the aspirations are located within the capitalist classes belonging to one religious community and the hegemony to another, the situation assumed alarming dimensions.

Further the lack of openings for the surplus generated in agriculture in Punjab may also partly account for the present crisis. Punjab, no doubt has been an agricultural state, but industrially it has a weak base. And even in the agricultural sector it is not hard to find opinions suggesting growth levels reaching an impasse. In the face of such critical levels reached in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, it is hardly surprising to find such a serious eruption of the crisis. It is obvious that the causes for the demand of linguistic State of Punjab and the denial of the demand go beyond the linguistic question. In fact it indicates how the cultural and linguistic factors get mixed-up with the economic and material. Thus the demand begun as a simple form of a linguistic problem goes far beyond and gets entangled with the larger ethnic and economic spheres.

At one level the Punjab question broadly fits into what Lenin observed on the Central authority and the region. He observed "if in a country the state system is distinctly pre-capitalist in

\[\text{Telford, op.cit., p.979.}\]
character, there exists a nationally demarcated region where capitalism is rapidly developing, then the more rapidly capitalism develops, the greater will be the antagonism between it and the pre-capitalist system and more likely will the separation of the progressive region from the whole with which it is connected not by modern capitalistic but by Asiatically Despotic.

The crisis of Punjab has to be, therefore, seen in its historical context. A problem started as a linguistic question aggravated into a secessionist movement. This explanation has to be located in the overall political economy. Autonomy for economic development has to be located in the power arrangement. The cultural identity is associated with the economic crisis and restructuring of power. In the final analysis the Sikh movement may be viewed as purely a drive to redress distortions of centralisation and in the process place the federal units on an even keel. A genuine democratic and federal set-up with economic decision making (as envisaged in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution) located more at peoples level, perhaps, is an answer to the type of disintegrating tendencies that contemporary India has been witnessing in the recent past.