CHAPTER-II
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The dissentions between the Sikhs and the Hindus are almost as old as Sikhism itself. It is true that Sikhism originally belonged to the family of Hindu reform movement in fifteenth and sixteenth century yet Sikhism went out of its tangent and evolved what has been called church and nation.¹ It was during the Guruship of Guru Amar Das (1569 – 1574) that the first major step was taken by Sikhs to disassociate themselves from Hinduism through the inauguration of the annual get-together, replacement of Sanskrit hymns by guru’s hymns, advocacy of monogamy and widow remarriage on the positive side, and the abandonment of the sati (burning of widows) and the caste system.²

The fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das, who happened to be son-in-law of Guru Amar Das acquired the site of the present city of Amritsar. He had a sarowar (holy tank) dug there around which the bazaars (markets) went up, and with the passage of time and it became a citry. His son and successor, Guru Arjun Dev raised the Harmandir in the midst of the sarovar.³ Thus, he gave the Sikhs a place of pilgrimage of their own. They started going to Amritsar to bathe in the pool surrounding the Harmandir instead of going to Varanasi or Haridwar to wash away their sins in Ganga. He gave them a scripture of their own, the Adi-Granth in their mother tongue and dispensed with the services of Brahmins to read out Sanskrit text from the Vadas or the Upamishads which was difficult for them to understand.⁴ Such innovations infuriated the Brahmins who went to the extent of requesting the Mughal emperor Akbar to take action against the Sikhs. They also allegedly began to bribe the local officials to harass the Sikhs. This was the beginning of Hindu oppression against the Sikhs.⁵ Another dimension was added to the Sikhs’ separate identity during the period of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind who decided to arm his followers and proclaimed himself both the spiritual and temporal head of the community. He built Akal Takhat where, instead of listening to sermons, the plans of military campaign were discussed. Taking up the arms thus, strengthened the break up of the Sikhs with the Hindus’ social polity.⁶
The nineteenth century was one of the catastrophes for the Sikhs because they not only lost their political glory but the Sikhism itself also faced the doom of extinction under the impact of the assimilative spirit of Hinduism. The loss of political power in 1849 also impacted their faith, the Sikhism. It was greatly weakened by the exodus of a large body of people who had adopted Sikhism during the period of Sikh ascendency for worldly gains. The Brahminism had reasserted itself by the rise of Dogras and Brahmans during the last days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.\(^7\) As a result, a cry went up in 1850 that Sikhism is fast being absorbed into Hinduism. The Sikhs found themselves leaderless and in a grim crisis of identity. With no defined boundaries in terms of religious worship, beliefs and everyday life Sikhism and Hinduism seemed overlapping.\(^8\)

A rural Sikh religious movement known as Kuka or Namdhari Movement had been started in Punjab. The Kuka movement was founded in about 1850 by one Balak Singh of Rawalpindi. After his death in 1863, the movement was led by his successor Baba Ram Singh who fought for the Sikh cause.\(^9\) He launched a crusade for religious reform and revival. He exhorted his followers to be strict in following the Khalsa Rehat (code of conduct). The Namdhari Movement though, was like a whirlwind, had made a limited impact on the general body of the Sikhs.\(^10\)

In between all this, the Christian missionaries also spread their network to Lahore, Amritsar and other parts of the Punjab after its annexation. They saw hopeful signs of conversion of the Sikhs and made them a special target. The conversion of Maharaja Daleep Singh in 1853 and the invitation extended to the missionaries by one Sikh Raja of Kapurthala in 1862 gave them a promising start.\(^11\) In 1870, a German linguist, Dr, Ernest Trumpp arrived in Lahore for undertaking a translation of Sikh scriptures. Because of his egotism as a missionary and rigorous training as a linguist, he thought he knew much more the meaning of the Sikh scripture than the people who revered it. He worked in association with the Hindu collaborators who were also against Sikhism. Later he made provocative assessment of Sikhism which stirred the Sikh revivalists. Dr. Trumpp also provided all the material that was later used by the Arya Samaj against Sikhism.\(^12\)

Thus, the Christian missionaries' attempts to secure converts from the Sikh youth, especially students from the Amritsar Mission gave a major impetus to the
Singh Sabha Movement to be founded in 1873 at Amritsar. It undertook to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity, edit and publish historical and religious books, propagate current knowledge and start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi language.\textsuperscript{13}

The main aim of the Singh Sabha Movement in the prevailing conditions was to get recognition for the Sikhs as a separate community in politics and the law. In pursuit of this, it created its political wing, the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1887 as a coordinating agency for the various Singh Sabha associations.\textsuperscript{14} Chief Khalsa Diwan acted for the Sikh community in Punjab in a manner similar to and partly patterned after the role played by the Aligarh Movement and Muslim League for the Muslims of North India.\textsuperscript{15} Though the Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Diwan provided the Sikhs with enough opportunity to do self-analysis and contribute to the growth of Sikh consciousness in more than one way yet both of these, on the whole, remained moderate and highly elitist with their leadership limited to towns and white-collared Sikhs.\textsuperscript{16} However, the strengthening of the tendencies towards separation of the Sikh community from the Hindus and internal communication among the Sikhs in Punjab mainly developed under the Singh Sabha Movement. There was complete identification of Sikhs with the Punjabi language; the publication of books and newspapers in Punjabi was reflecting the Sikh social, religious and political aspirations.\textsuperscript{17}

Similar tendencies developed among the Hindus in Punjab through the teachings and activities of the Arya Samaj which had already been founded by Sawam Dyanand in 1875 in Gujarat. The Samaj also promoted the use of Hindi in Devnagri script among the Hindus which encouraged the development of Hindi press in Punjab. Both the Arya Samaj and Jan Sangh, a ‘Hindu’ party formed after independence, have been important political forces in the sectarian mobilization of Hindus.\textsuperscript{18}

The Hindu trading class, which had earlier provided social base for the Congress in Punjab, started looking for a new ideology to unify and to defend their community, trading interests and to counteract the British discrimination. The Arya Samaj with its aggressive stance, its insistence on the unique and superior qualities of
Hinduism and its willingness to battle for the acceptance of these claims, provided such an ideology to this class in Punjab.\textsuperscript{19}

Initially, the \textit{Arya Samaj} criticized the Christians, the Muslims and the orthodox Hindus but in Punjab in their zeal to establish the Hindu supremacy they started criticizing the Sikhs also by calling their Gurus "illiterate", "self centered and hypocritical". This instilled in the Sikh religious leaders, a fear of their absorption by the Hindu community.\textsuperscript{20} This fear of assimilation of Sikhs into the Hinduism imparted strength to the revivalist fundamentalist tendencies in the \textit{Singh Sabha} and \textit{Chief Khalsa Diwan}.\textsuperscript{21}

The Sikh landed aristocracy which had acquired prominence through \textit{Singh Sabha} and later on through the \textit{Chief Khalsa Diwan}, nurtured different economic interests from those of the Hindu commercial class. There was a growing urge among the educated Sikhs for separate identity. The communalism of one group fed the communalism of other group. The economic imperialism and political sovereignty of the British dictated to the different communities such policies which ultimately fanned the communalism. British consistently projected the Sikhs having a separate entity and identity and their recruitment in the armed forces strengthened the notion of "martial race". The extremist \textit{Arya Samajis}, on the other hand started \textit{Shuddi Movement} (purification and re-induction into Hinduism of non Hindus particularly the Sikhs whose allegiance to Sikh principles and traditions was tenuous). There was vehement reaction by educated Sikhs and Sikh landed aristocracy. They turned back to their own traditional ways as a true form of conversion.\textsuperscript{22}

With the rise of the \textit{Singh Sabha Movement}, the systematic publication of newspapers in \textit{Gurumukhi} came into being, with the \textit{Gurumukhi Akhbar} published by Bhai Gurmukh Singh in 1881.\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Sudhark} and \textit{Khalsa Gazette} was started in 1885 and \textit{Khalsa Akhbar} in 1886.\textsuperscript{24} These papers were caught in fight with \textit{Arya Musafir} of Jullundur and \textit{Arya Gazette} of Lahore.\textsuperscript{25} The struggle between the Hindus and Sikhs became more acute in the later half of the nineteenth century. By the 1890, the relation between the Sikhs, the \textit{Tat Khalsa} (revivalists) and the \textit{Dev Samaj} (a sect among the Hindus) developed into open confrontation and hostility as the missionaries of both these groups came face to face with each other in Lahore.\textsuperscript{26}
realization of self identity generated among the Sikhs during this period formed a prelude to the Gurdwara Reform Movement.27

Thus, communalism had dominated the politics of Punjab in pre-independence period. Various political parties remained indulged in drawing support on communal basis. Paul Brass observed, “competitive political parties in developing multi-ethnic societies are likely at best to reflect and at worst to exacerbate ethnic antagonism, political organizations not only tend to be shaped by the social and ethnic environment but they in fact shape their environment and the identities of group members.”28 The communal parties attempted to appeal to religious sentiments of the people in order to build communal solidarity behind their linguistic and political demands.

The British rule had also a long lasting affect on the social and cultural life of the people in Punjab. The manifestation of communal politics in Punjab has the deep rooted socio-historic origins. The British rulers, basing their philosophy of imperialism and colonial exploitation on ‘divide and rule’ systematically punctured, fractured and demolished the emerging structures of Punjabi nationalism by setting one community of Punjab against the other. Punjabi nationalism which had reached its zenith during the Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s regime was destroyed by the British slowly but surely after annexation of Punjab in 1849 through their policies of colonialism and imperialism. They gave marginal concessions to one community and eulogized its historical role at the cost of other community. To further cement the dissensions among three communities of the region, they introduced the separate electorate on communal lines through various so-called “reforms”. The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 and the Act of 1935 perpetuated and intensified the communal consciousness among the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in as much as these reforms necessitated competition for limited unofficial elected seats.29

The Punjab land Alienation Act of 1900, divided the Punjabis into agriculturists and non-agriculturists and strictly controlled the sale of land from one group to the other. They could no longer hope to acquire land and the traditional status attached to it, nor could they invest their money as freely and profitably as before. Educated and trading Punjabi Hindus reacted to the land Alienation Act with
anger and fear. The affected Hindu sections found in it both an attempt to discriminate against them as a class and also as a part of an ‘overall’ anti-Hindu policy. This issue extended the role of Punjab press to the political events in Punjab and it became quite vocal.

In 1904, the government disclosed its policy of ‘balance’ by favoring recruitment of Muslims and Sikhs over the Hindus and thus intensified communal competition over employment. Each community now appealed to the British Government for protection of its rights and for reprisal of its grievances. The Hindu trading and money lending class which dominated the Congress in Punjab, felt annoyed with the Congress for its failure to take strong action for the repealing of the Land Alienation Act. In fact, the Congress had adopted a vacillating policy towards the Act and afraid of being dubbed as a Hindu organization, it did not come out sharply against the Act. The Hindus thus, formed a separate body, the *Hindu Sabha* in December 1918 with its Headquarters at Allahabad. The immediate aims of the *Sabha* were to get the Land Alienation Act repealed and to secure a larger share for the Hindus in the public services and local self governing bodies. The *Hindu Sabha* was successful in influencing the vast majority of Hindus to believe that all such measures as the land Alienation Act of 1900, the formation of Co-operative Credit Societies Act 1904, the Punjab Pre-emption Act 1905 and the Punjab Alienation of land Amendment Act 1907, favored the Muslims and the Sikhs at the cost of the Hindus.

Over the years, the British propagation of the ideology of the “martial races” and their attempts to keep the peasantry satisfied, had led to the closer association of the Punjab in general and Sikhs in particular with the army. After the outbreak of First World War in 1914, Sikhs’ recruitment in army was speeded up. The Sikhs fought valiantly to help the British in the war effort. The war had opened a new phase in the imperialist relationship. As the British imperialism got weakened the colonial power could no longer ignore the demands of the Indian capitalists. According to Brian Davey, there were basically three reasons for the change in policy and the limited support to industrialization;
I. Inter-imperialist warfare made it necessary to introduce a limited industrialization, for the military and strategic reasons as well as facilitating that process with a very effective form of protection.

II. Closely related to the first, the second was the maintenance of inner political stability during the war time and during the troubled times after the war. It was essential to secure the co-operation of Indian bourgeoisie. For this purpose economic and political concession were made to them.

III. Britain's gradual losing of its grip over the Indian market to foreign competitors. (By 1914, Britain's share of the Indian market was already on the decline from 82% of imports in 1874-79 to 66% in 1914)\textsuperscript{36}

Because of change in economic policy, the earlier group of traders, generally the Hindus became more and more capitalist and thereby strengthening their hold as the mercantile community. Unable to compete with the already established capitalist class, the emerging capitalists among the Muslims and the Sikhs resorted to the communal way of thinking.\textsuperscript{37}

In the midst of these developments came the Mont-Ford reforms of 1919. In view of their literacy, their special role in the Indian Army and their historical importance, the Sikh leaders claimed 30% of the seats in Punjab Assembly (as their population being about 13%). The leadership of the Sikhs, at the moment was in the hands of Chief Khalsa Diwan. Though the 'reforms' conceded the Sikh demand for separate electorates and acknowledged in principle, the right of the Sikhs to be recognized as a separate political entity, they gave them only 18.3% of seats. This made the Sikhs feel that they could no longer rely on the government and the other bodies including the Congress. Being conscious of their distinctiveness and acquiring a militant self-assuredness, they began to look for a militant organization of their own, in the absence of which, they felt their interests ran the risk of being neglected altogether, or at any rate of not being adequately safeguarded. Sikhs, in order to ventilate the grievances of the community and its economic and political interests, organized the 'Central Sikh League' in December 1919 at Amritsar.\textsuperscript{38}

With the strengthening of the communal process in Punjab in 1920 there occurred a rise in journalistic activities among the different communities as evidenced
by the rapid increase in magazines and newspapers. As the heat of communal temper increased, each community in Punjab armed itself with dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies, tri-weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies and annuals to propagate their own views and to attack and even ridicule those of the others.\textsuperscript{39} Efforts were made by each community to propagate their own views at the expense of others. The democratic innovations in Punjab in 1920 made the minority rule a distant possibility and the rise of majority community to power a fact, which in turn led the communities to consolidate their numerical strength. The Hindu, Muslim and Sikh literature that emerged from the press reflected the above trend in the attempt to propagate their own ideas and attack those of the others.\textsuperscript{40}

Communal violence became a widespread phenomenon in Punjab in 1920s. The figure of 4740 riots in Punjab in the period from 1922 to 1927 is staggering.\textsuperscript{41} Though, the Sikhs co-operated with the Hindus during these riots, but it was due to their self-preservation than their friendliness with the Hindus. Otherwise when the Hindus were in deep trouble, the Sikhs didn't even hesitate to destroy the Hindu shrines and sacred relics.\textsuperscript{42}

Punjab in 1920 served as a prelude to the partition in 1947. The inability of Punjab to develop a strong secular political life provided a wonderful opportunity for Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to evolve powerful communal organizations which led to the communal riots during that time. The three principal communities haunted by the possible emergence of Hindu-Raj, Muslim-Raj and Sikh-Raj, began to consolidate their strength by preserving what they had and by seeking new gains by all the means at their disposal, such as the press, platforms and even violence. In the socio-religious sphere, the Sikh launched the Gurdwara Reform Movement; the Hindus started the Shuddi and Sangathan campaigns and the Muslims, the Tabligh and Tanzim campaigns. On the political front, the communal representation that had already prevailed in the legislature was extended to the local bodies, public services as well as the educational institutions. These socio-religious and political developments contributed to an enormous degree, in institutionalizing the communal tension in government and society.\textsuperscript{43} The identity crisis among the Sikhs after the British takeover has been reflected by the popular Sikh slogans like \textit{Hum Hindu Nahi Hai} (we are not Hindus).\textsuperscript{44}
The *Singh Sabha Movement* had matured into the radical *Gurdwara Movement* of the twenties of this country, which was launched with the three principal objectives, first, to purify the Sikh religious institutions from the Hindus by taking control over *gurdwaras* from the *Udasis* and the *Nirmalas* who were the “blind Hindus”. Secondly, to remove government control and influence over Sikh shrines that was exercised through its ‘protégés’, the *Mahants*. And thirdly, to consolidate the Sikh community, so that it could claim from the government the privileges enjoyed by the Muslims as a distinct community in other provinces. The Sikh attempt to de-Hinduise the *gurdwaras* thus turned out into an all-out struggle with the government partly because of the British concept of sanctity of private property and also because of the volatile political climate of the time.

The Hindus, during this time launched a persistent campaign through press and platforms to prove the Sikhs as a sect among the Hindus. But all their efforts to keep the Sikhs in their fold, however, produced negative results. The Sikhs became more determined to scrape off their all affinities with the Hindus and de-Hinduise their religious institutions, even if that meant a protracted struggle with the government. For consolidating the distinct entity of the Sikhs apart from the Hindus and raising their voice as a distinct community, the Sikh reformers thus, decided to take over the control of *gurdwaras* from the ‘Hinduisé’ or at least pro-Hindu *Mahants*. The religious affairs of the *gurdwaras* were controlled by the managers appointed by the government, while the secular affairs were administered by the district officer at that time. The Sikh reformers decided to remove the indirect control over the *gurdwaras* which was felt as an obstacle in the process of de-Hinduisation of the *gurdwaras*. Initially the decision was made to gain the control of *gurdwaras* legally, but this method was slow, expensive and futile. That’s why; they decided to change tactics and resorted to violent as well as non-violent tactics to achieve the end. The government which was relatively sympathetic towards the *Gurdwara Movement* in the beginning decided to find a permanent solution to the problem. It decided to solve the problem through legislation to satisfy both the communities, the Hindus and the Sikhs. It introduced the *Gurdwara* Bill in the Legislative Council in 1921 to meet the demands of the Sikhs but was later postponed because of the conflicting Hindu-Sikh interests.
This development further widened the gulf between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Though, the Congress Party helped the Akalis for their demands but the move to remove Mahants and bring the shrines under the popular control of the Sikh community created some resentment among Hindus. Since, it was not only the removal of priests, who served as a bridge between the two communities but also of the breaking of the Hindu idols and elimination of Hindu elements of worship from the premises of the gurdwaras. The Hindu felt that the shrines which had hitherto served to and used by both Hindus and Sikhs were being expropriated by the extremist sections of the Sikh community, who were anxious to drive a wedge between the two communities. The Sikhs on the other hand were equally keen to separate themselves and their religious institutions from those of the Hindus.\(^51\)

By the time of independence of India there had grown a definite sense of group consciousness among the Sikhs. The Akali Dal though led by urban middle and professional classes, had been able to unite the urban and rural classes on a common platform on the basis of its general stand which though, at times, was marked by the overtones based on the adoration of two political deities, Sikh nationalism and Indian nationalism. Both the ideas were regarded as indispensable and mutually helpful. But while swearing by the Indian nationalism, they could not cast-off their loyalty to the Sikh commonwealth or the Panth. They never considered it as antagonistic to the Indian nationalism. It was largely because of this that, by 1945 Punjab was left without any rival Sikh group. The Akalis began to look upon themselves as the sole-representatives of the community and entered the arena of the politics in independent India as such. And it was not long before that the Sikh leaders raised the demand for a separate political status for the Sikhs.\(^52\)

Punjab with the possible exception of Bengal was severely affected by the consequences of partition. Approximately 36 million Sikhs and Hindus crossed over from west Punjab to east Punjab and almost the entire Muslim population migrated in the reverse direction to Pakistan, thereby creating the problem of rehabilitation of refugees and their socio-economic and cultural integration into the body-politic of the Punjab. This also altered the demographic pattern, changed the political forces and transformed the economic and class composition.\(^53\)
Before independence, both the Hindus and Sikhs, being the minorities in Punjab, still in the process of mobilization, sought protection for their language, culture and political power against numerically dominating majority of Muslims. After the partition, the Hindus became a majority with about 70% of the state’s population from earlier 30%. The Sikhs, who had always played the role of balancing force between the Hindus and Muslims during the pre-partition days, now became the only substantial minority community in the east Punjab. The local refugee tensions which were an over all problem of the state, assumed a deeply communal color. The scramble for land and urban property left by Muslim evacuees also created ill will between Sikh and Hindu refugees as well as the Hindus of region now known as Haryana who had taken possession of lands left by the Muslims. In Haryana region the displaced population introduced a new factor in its social, economic and political life and gave rise to new conflicts. These conflicts sharpened the already existing misgivings among the local people of Haryana that they were exploited by the more advanced people from the erstwhile central Punjab in administration, politics and economy. So the communal cleavage remained a primary characteristic of the political system of Punjab because the Hindus and Sikhs who had generally cooperated against the Muslim domination in the pre-partition days were now cast in entirely different roles. The rural-urban and agriculturist–non agriculturist conflicts revived too.

The vernacular press, which was owned and run by the vested interests at that time contributed also its’ share to the deepening of the schism between the people of two religious communities. Most of the newspapers deliberately gave prominence to particular kinds of complaints and news items which had a very damaging impact on the public mind. They tried their best to perpetuate the existing differences and discredit the leadership of the other community. The press and communal leadership, thus, divided the people into water-tight compartments and tried to develop a narrow communal outlook among them with an obvious objective to increase the respective sale value.

The partition of Punjab and independence of the country once again brought about a change in Hindu-Sikh relationship. Numbers had always been the chief problem of the Sikh community. At the time of partition they formed not more than 13% of the population of un-divided Punjab and a bare 1% of the population of India.
Of the five million Sikhs the prosperous half had their lands and homes in the part that went to Pakistan. They were the worst losers in the partition of the country. This had serious impact on their fortunes as well as their psyche. The two and a half million who migrated from Pakistan had been the richest peasantry of India owning large estates in the canal colonies. They changed places with largely landless Muslim peasantry of east Punjab and had to take whatever little land that was made available to them as Muslims evacuee property. Besides loosing their land and properties, the Sikhs had to come to terms with the secular India. Privileges they had enjoyed under the British rule like the reservation of seats in the legislatures and preferential treatment in the recruitment to the armed forces and civil services were abolished. After independence, they had to compete with the other communities in India on the basis of merit. The abolition of the separate electorate and the introduction of a joint one also made the Sikhs feel irritated.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, the division of Punjab on communal lines also spread a sense of indignation and frustration among them because the hopes of creating a Sikh state (Azad Punjab) raised by the Sikh leaders and also supported by the Congress Party and the Hindu leaders, had not been fulfilled. Thus, the Sikhs felt that they had been given a raw deal in the distribution of territory between the Hindus and the Muslims.\textsuperscript{59}

The \textit{Akalis'} feeling in the post-independence was that the Sikhs were automatically disadvantaged by the secular frame work of the national state, based on the democratic set-up with the joint electorates. It was expressed in a resolution of the party while considering the draft constitution.\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Akali Dal} submitted a memorandum to the Minority Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly demanding:

I. That, the Sikh should have the right to elect representative to the legislature through communal electorates.

II. That, in the provincial legislature of the east Punjab, 50\% of all the seats and in the central legislature, 5\% of the seats should be reserved for the Sikhs.

III. That, the seats should be reserved for the Sikhs in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi also.
IV. That, their scheduled castes should have the same privileges as of the other scheduled castes.

V. There should be statutory reservation of certain proportion in the army.\textsuperscript{61}

This memorandum was reinforced by another, submitted as a charter of 13 demands in the name of a minority committee of the east Punjab Assembly signed by all, with the exception of Pratap Singh Kairon, the Sikh member of the assembly. The Constituent Assembly however, completely rejected the demands, especially those relating to the reservation of seats in the legislature as they conflicted with the basic values of the new regime.\textsuperscript{62}

The notion of an autonomous Sikh state started taking shape with the announcement that the boundaries of the state will be drawn along linguistic lines. This was done for all the 14 languages spoken in India except Punjabi. The Sikhs construed this as discrimination against the community and began to agitate for Punjabi-speaking state. The cause of Punjabi was actually taken up by the *Chief Khalsa Diwan* in the last decade of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It produced a number of books and pamphlets in Punjabi in *Gurmukhi* script, dealing with various aspects of the Sikh religion. The *Gurmukhi* script was given its present form by the second Guru of the Sikhs and the holy *Granth* is also written in the same script. This gave a religious overtone to Punjabi despite of the fact that it was spoken by almost all the people living in the province, of course, with local variations.\textsuperscript{63}

The language issue assumed its political dimensions in the year 1949 when the demand for Punjabi-speaking state was made by the *Akali Dal*. The Punjab government submitted its proposals popularly known as “Sachar Formula” on the language question in October 1949. According to this, the state was divided into two linguistic regions, Punjabi and Hindi. The language of the region was to be the medium of instruction in all the schools till matriculation stage and the children were required to learn the other language at the secondary stage. The choice for the medium of instruction in the educational institutions was left entirely to the parents or guardians of the students. It was decided that English and Urdu would remain the official and court languages and were to be progressively replaced by Hindi and Punjabi.\textsuperscript{64} The Formula was acclaimed by the Sikhs including the *Akalis*, though they
criticized the right of the parents to choose the medium of instruction for the education of their children. On the other hand the proposals were met with severe criticism at the hands of the Hindu organizations like the Arya Samaj, the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha. In order to counter the Akali demand of Punjabi speaking state and the claim of Punjabi as the regional language of the Punjabi-speaking area, these organizations and the ‘Hindu’ vernacular press started a campaign that the Hindus of this area should declare Hindi as their mother tongue. The D.A.V educational institutions also asked the Hindus to oppose the introduction of Punjabi as the medium of instructions.65

The Akali leaders and Punjabi press started a counter-propaganda, which was intensified during the census operations in 1951. Both the Hindu and Akali papers warned their communities that they should be careful about false entries by the census staff,66 as it was alleged that the enumerators deliberately made false entries in favor of Hindi and Punjabi in accordance with their own preference for one or the other language. The atmosphere was so much charged with communal passion that the members of two communities clashed in a number of places.67 This battle over language, in fact became a confrontation between Punjabi Hindus and Punjabi Sikhs.68 The Sikhs felt that the Hindus by denying the right of the Punjabi as their mother tongue wanted to gain a position of superiority over them. The Hindu organizations, objecting to this right of Punjabi, argued that the government by declaring Gurmukhi as the only script for Punjabi had denied to them their right to name their mother-tongue. The vernacular press, however, carried on the campaigns in the bitter most language.69

It was in such a political climate of communal and linguistic controversies that Akali Dal President Master Tara Singh, who had already started talking about a Sikh state, dressing it as a “Sikh Homeland” and sometimes as a Punjabi-Suba, directed Hukam Singh, the Akali representative in the Constituent Assembly, to assert that a commission be appointed for the demarcation of a linguistic state on the basis of Punjabi language.70 Hukam Singh clarified the position thus;

What the Sikhs desire today is only respectable and dignified citizenship. They expect no favour and they ask for no concession. They want protection from the tyranny of
the communal majority, to which they are entitled to as law-
abiding citizens of the country. The Sikhs believe that they
can secure this protection if a Punjabi-speaking Province is
conceded to them, where they will have a more effective
voice.\textsuperscript{71}

After when the constitution of India was finally adopted, the \textit{Akali Dal}
expressed its dissatisfaction on the ground that the measure of provincial autonomy
granted in the constitution was not according to the assurances given earlier. Another
grievance of the \textit{Akali Dal} was that even the re-demarcation of the provincial
boundaries in the north was delayed with a view to deprive the Sikhs having a
political foot-hold in their home land. The question began to be raised, “the Hindus
have got the Hindustan and the Muslims have got the Pakistan, what have the Sikhs
got?”\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Akalis’} popular claim that “Sikhism in danger” received its greatest boost from
the movement for a Punjabi-speaking state. In 1953, the first Prime Minister of India
Mr. J. L. Nehru set up the States reorganization Commission in order to consider
demands from many parts of India that state boundaries should be redrawn on a
linguistic basis. Some linguistic groups received satisfaction but not the \textit{Akalis}. The
commission rejected the Sikh claim for a Punjabi speaking state on the ground that
Punjabi was not sufficiently distinct from Hindi and that further more the movement
lacked the general support of the people inhabiting the area.\textsuperscript{73}

On the other hand the \textit{Shiromani Akali Dal} placed the demand for the \textit{Punjabi
Suba} formally in a resolution which stated:

The callous and the unsympathetic treatment by the
government have made respectable life impossible for them,
they (Sikhs) therefore strongly feel the utter necessity for
the creation of a Punjabi-speaking province for protection
and preservation of their culture, language and self respect,
particularly when this solution is universally recognized as
democratic and which even the Indian National Congress
stands pledged to.\textsuperscript{74}
At the time of the origin of the demand, Master Tara Singh said that the Akali Dal felt that such a state was the best method to maintain the independent existence of the Sikhs. What he wanted, he said, was a state where the Sikhs would be in majority so that they could escape from the Hindu dominance in the legislature. He reiterated that the aim was to free the Sikhs on a provincial basis.\footnote{75}

The Shiromani Akali Dal was in favour of the formation of provinces on linguistic and cultural basis throughout India. But in Punjab, they mixed the question of the Punjabi-Suba with the question of life and death for the Sikhs. No doubt the demand for a Punjabi-Suba was a demand for a state with Sikhs in majority, and though in the course of time the emphasis was shifted from the plank of Sikh majority to that of Punjabi in Gurumukhi script as the sole official language yet the achievement of Punjabi Suba and fulfillment of Sikh aspiration remained always linked.\footnote{76}

The Sikhs, however, were not unanimous for the demand of Punjabi Suba. When the debate over issue of Punjabi Suba was still going on, the Hindu communalists started interpreting the demand as a strategy designed to create a ‘separate Sikh state’.\footnote{77} The pro-Hindu press began quoting from the Sikh writings and resolutions that Sikhs are aspiring for a separate Sikh state. Quotations from the pamphlets, papers and articles by the Sikh writers of pre-partition days were profusely given in the press to engender communal feelings, and to show that the Sikhs and their organization, the Akali Dal were aspirants to a Sikh state and that their communalism must be curbed in ‘secular India’ and they must be made to understand their place. The Arya Samaj particularly spearheaded the movement which held that it was no longer necessary for the Sikhs to remain as a separate entity as a ‘religion’ or as a Panth. The writings and speeches dilated on the theme that the objective, for which Guru Gobind Singh had created the Khalsa, was for the protection of the Hindu society against Mughal aggression. Now when this problem has been solved by the partition of the country and the eviction of the Muslims, the existence of the Khalsa as such was not necessary and the Sikhs should come back to the Hindu fold and be absorbed by it.\footnote{78}

It is alleged that the Hindus were compelled by their representatives in the local parties to deny Punjabi as their mother tongue. Its’ evidence is that a Hindu
dominated municipal committee in Jalandhar passed a resolution favoring Hindi as the medium of instructions within its jurisdiction. Some local Hindu leaders had gone to the extent of denying the Punjabi even the status of a language. They maintained that it was merely a dialect of Hindi like the other dialects of North India. The ordinary Hindus who recognized Punjabi as a separate language emphasized that there should be freedom to use the Devnagri as an additional script in the writing of Punjabi. Sikhs interpreted the move as an attempt to kill Punjabi and the annihilation of their cultural identity. Some Akali leaders were of the view that this action in Jalandhar, more than anything else, convinced the Sikhs of the communal motives of Hindus in Punjab and that from then on, the Sikhs became determined to achieve Punjabi Suba, which not only have Punjabi as its official language but would also reduce the power of the Hindus in relation to the Sikhs.

The Akali leadership saw a conspiracy in ‘Hindu’ stand on language. It was alleged as an attempt to weaken the Sikh culture and their language as part of a move to re-absorb Sikhs in their fold or keep them under their hegemony. Reflecting this point of view Master Tara Singh observed:

I am bound hand and feet and some of my Punjabi-Hindu brethren insist upon keeping us in our present bondage. They do not want to give-up the advantages and opportunities they have gained. They don’t trust us and I don’t know how to gain their confidence .... I may say that we cannot be satisfied unless we get rid of the present communal domination of the Hindus of Punjab led by the Arya Samajists, who in their effort to destroy our relations, went so far as to deny to acknowledge their mother-tongue even.

Similarly, another Akali leader Ajit Singh Sarhadi wrote that their (Hindus) opposition to the use of Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script was based on the principle “Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan” and they made no pretensions to secularism or anything of that kind. The communal Hindu leaders as such played a notable role in strengthening the Sikhs’ conviction to have a Sikh-majority state. Their attitude towards the Punjabi language, which the entire Punjabi Hindu population with the
exception of the people of Haryana region spoke but refused to own as their mother-
tongue, confirmed the fears of the Sikh minority that their separate entity could be in
danger in united Punjab.\textsuperscript{84}

In the aftermath of the partition, Congress leaders were, however, unwilling to
seriously consider a proposal based explicitly on the religious and communal grounds.
The rejection of the demands by the States Reorganization Commission in 1955, led
the Akali Dal to launch its Punjabi Suba Agitation on a large scale. On the other hand,
the demand for merging PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) and Himachal
Pardesh with Punjab to form a greater Punjab (Maha Punjab) also emerged. The
Hindu leaders alleged that the demand for linguistic state was only a ruse for creating
a state with Sikh majority; they also insisted that the language of Punjab was actually
Hindi.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, the leaders of both the communities, besides submitting their
memoranda to the States Re-organization Commission, the protagonists of the
Punjabi-province and Maha Punjab used the press and platform to propagate their
views. The anti-Sikh and anti-Hindu slogans became a common feature of their
meetings.\textsuperscript{86} The government decided to impose a ban on such slogans. The Akalis
regarded this ban essentially a ban on slogans in favour of the Punjabi-province. They
decided to defy the ban. Thousands of Akali volunteers courted arrest including
Master Tara Singh. The movement reached its peak in July 1955 when the police
entered the Golden Temple Complex, stopped the Langar there, arrested the head-
priests and used the tear gas shells on the volunteers gathered in the complex. The
troops were ordered to flag-march through the bazars and streets around the Golden
Temple. But all this failed to curb the movement. On July 12, 1955, the government
had to withdraw the ban on slogans. The Chief Minister, Bhim Sen Sachar visited the
Golden Temple and apologized.\textsuperscript{87}

In 1956, a scheme was presented to Jawahar Lal Nehru after the Amritsar
session of the Congress Party, which fell short of creating a state but met some of the
Akali demands, and he was willing to discuss it. An agreement was reached in
February 1956. In the general meeting of the Akali Dal on March 11, 1956, the
majority of the leaders were in favour of accepting the scheme which came to be
known as ‘Regional Formula’.\textsuperscript{88} Under this scheme, PEPSU was to be merged with
the Punjab and it was to be a bi-lingual state with both Punjabi and Hindi as regional
and official languages of the respective regions. The Punjab government was to setup
a separate department for the development of Punjabi and Hindi; the Union Government was to encourage Punjabi like any other regional language in the country. The Akali Dal accepted the “Regional Formula” and merged with the Congress Party and decided to work together. Both the parties contested the 1957 elections of Punjab Legislative Assembly jointly. Baldev Raj Nayyar termed the merger of the two parties under the Congress fabric as an “infiltration strategy” of the Akali Dal. The Akali Dal’s decision to join the Congress Party was interpreted by some, as a victory for secular nationalism, as it seemed that the Dal had apparently decided to give up its sectarian and communal politics. However, the Akali members inside the Congress Party functioned as a separate group under the leadership of Giani Kartar Singh. Their merger was not final as later on both the parties got separated.

Master Tara Singh, who was almost an unchallenged leader of the Akali Dal, however, continued to strive for a separate political entity of the Sikhs. Dissatisfaction with the working of the “Regional Formula” and unwilling of the Punjab government to accept the demands of the Akali Dal, led to the withdrawal of the Akali Dal from the Congress Party and a renewal of its demand for Punjabi Suba and finally the launching of a prolonged movement beginning in 1960. The Akali leadership under Master Tara Singh strongly believed that their interests could be protected only if they had a Sikh majority area as a separate territorial entity within India. The Punjabi Suba Movement launched by him remained the most important factor of political debate in Punjab until 1966.

The pro-Hindu press became more chauvinistic and suspicious of any assertion by the minority communities. Hind Samachar, Punjab Kesari, Pratap, Vir Pratap and even Milap, all the papers attacked the Punjabi Suba demand as being anti national. If the Punjabi newspapers advocated the development of Punjabi language and acceptance of its status as the primary language of Punjab, the Hindi press supported the ‘Save Hindi’ agitation in 1956. As against the Punjabi Suba, they asked for Maha Punjab or Akhand Punjab. The Hindu organizations argued that the demand for Punjabi Suba on the basis of language was merely a cloak for the attainment of Sikh hegemony and establishment of a base for a sovereign Sikh state. Given that background, some of the Hindu leaders including Lala Jagat Narain, Lala Suraj Bhan, an educationist and Virender of Pratap as also the ‘Hindu’ press decided at the time of census operations of 1961 to register their mother language as Hindi rather than
Punjabi. It was certainly a political decision to disown the Punjabi by the Hindus, born out of the strategy to defeat the alleged design of Akali Dal to establish the Sikh hegemony. Large number of Hindus overnight fell in love with Hindi in Devnagri script and disclaimed their mother tongue Punjabi and associated them with ‘Hindu national’ thinking of North India. This was bound to strengthen reactive fears of what was described as ‘Hindu imperialism’ in the other community.93

A significant change came when the internal conflict in the Akali Dal brought Sant Fateh Singh on the scene; it ended the hegemony of the urban higher caste leadership in the Akali Dal. The new Jat peasant leadership which gained an upper hand was considered to be much less sectarian. Sant Fateh Singh emphasized the linguistic basis of the demand rather than its communal basis. In 1963 the Akali Dal was split into two separate political parties one led by Master Tara Singh and the other by Sant Fateh Singh. The latter’s Akali Dal gathered greater strength among the rural Jat Sikhs and demonstrated its’ bigger strength against Master Tara Singh’s Akali Dal by winning 95 out of 138 elected seats in the SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) elections held in January1965.94

Master Tara Singh, now more desperate, raised the slogan of “self determination” status for the Sikhs within the Union of India. Sant Fateh Singh had already distinguished his conception of the Punjabi speaking state and emphasized on the need for preserving Hindu-Sikh unity. The overwhelming mandate received for his programme, during elections to the SGPC in January 1965, further strengthened his position. After the death of Pratap Singh Kairon in 1964, a group of Sikh Congress legislature of Punjab gave their support to Punjabi Suba. In the meantime Indo-Pakistan war broke out in September 1965. The Sant postponed his proposed ‘fast’ and struggle for Punjabi Suba. It gave an incentive to the Union Government for resolving the political problem in Punjab and an “opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of the Sikh people to the defence of India by conceding the Punjabi Suba demand”.95 The pro-Hindu press became more virulent when it appeared that the government was seriously considering the division of Punjab into Punjabi speaking state and a Hindi-speaking state of Haryana. Punjab Kesari, in one of its editorials mentioned:
In this demand for Punjabi-speaking province or under its cover, it is a demand for such a province which would be completely sovereign and in which Sikhs would have supreme power of decision-making. If it (Punjab) is divided under the cover of language it will mean the funeral of secularism in this country. What will happen to the non-Akalis in the province? If Punjabi Suba is formed what will it ultimately lead to? Will it not abet the communal and disruptive elements which would injure the country’s unity?

96

The decision of the Central Government was criticized and regarded as “abject surrender”. The Government of Punjab directed the newspapers on 14 March 1966 not to publicize anything relating to the reorganization of states. Later, in August of the same year, the Hindi press demanded protection for the rights of Hindi speaking minority and asked the government that special provision for the protection of the minority and guarantee of their rights be made in the Reorganization Bill.97 As the Bill for reorganization with proposed demarcation of Punjabi speaking and Hindi speaking areas was introduced in the Lok Sabha, the Ajit and the Akali Patrika welcomed it with black borders98 and ridiculed the proposed new Punjab state as “lame”, “lifeless” and Subi, and even held Sant Fateh Singh responsible for this disgrace. Punjab Kesari on the other hand made a fun of the Punjabi press.99 The new state of Punjab was, thus constituted on November 1, 1966.

The capital city of Chandigarh and some Punjabi speaking areas were kept out of the new Punjab. The Central Government also retained the control of water and hydel power projects in its hands. It made the Akalis unhappy; Sant Fateh Singh demanded the same rights for the state administration as were allowed to other states.100 In the first elections to the legislative Assembly of the new state in 1967, the Congress Party failed to secure majority. The other parties decided to form a coalition with the Akali Dal. Justice Gurnam Singh formed the first non- Congress government in March 1967 with the support of Jan Sangh, the communist parties and the others. Due to the promised support of the Congress Party to an Akali leader, Lachhman Singh Gill, who wanted to replace Justice Gurnam Singh, the Gurnam Singh government fell on November 22, 1967. Lachhman Singh Gill formed a new
government with the support of Congress Party but he too remained unable to save his
government for long due to internal dissention among the Congress Party leaders who
were supporting the government. It also fell on August 23, 1968. President rule was
imposed on Punjab within two years of its formation.101

On the other hand, the two Akali Dals which were separated over the issue of
Punjabi Suba reemerged after the death of Master Tara Singh on November 22, 1967.
This happened during the 16th Akali Dal Conference held at Batala on September 28-
29, 1968. In the Batala Conference the demand was made that the Constitution of
India should be on correct federal basis and the state should have greater autonomy.
The Akali Dal thus, added this new demand in its earlier concern i.e. to get the
Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas back to Punjab and the demands related
to the power projects also.102

The mid-term elections to the state legislative assembly were held in February
1969. Justice Gurnam Singh again formed the government in coalition with the Jan
Sangh. After a very short time a tussle developed between Sant Fateh Singh, the
President of Akali Dal and Justice Gurnam Singh, the Chief Minister over the
candidate of Giani Bhupinder Singh for the seat of Raj Sabha. Due to this, Justice
Gurnam had to resign and Parkash Singh Badal became the new Chief Minister of the
Akali led coalition government on March 27, 1970. But he too had to advise the
Governor of Punjab to dissolve the state assembly due to the resignation of the
members of Jan Sangh, the coalitional partner of the Akali Dal, from the government.
They insisted on demanding parity of Hindi with Punjabi and also wanted the colleges
of Jalandhar district not to affiliate with the newly established Guru Nanak Dev
University at Amritsar. Consequently the President rule was again imposed on Punjab
on June 15, 1971.103

The Akalis allegedly considered the maneuvering of the Congress Party the
‘ultimately instrumental’ in overthrowing their two ministries. The fall of their
governments and the debacle in the parliamentary as well as assembly elections in
1971-72 obliged them to review their policies and programmes for the future.104 The
idea of state autonomy which had emerged in the Batala Conference was discussed
again and evolved to the demand of a truly federal basis of the Constitution of India.
Now at this stage, the majority of the Akali leaders were in favor of a separate
constitution for the Punjab. On the basis of such rethinking, they appointed a subcommittee of 12 members on December 11, 1972. Among these members were those who had been espousing the idea of Sikh Homeland. Kapur Singh, a Sikh scholar and politician was the crusader of this idea. He was of the view that the Sikhs were “sui generis, a free and sovereign people” and claimed that it was the birth right of the Sikhs to “establish a sovereign political status for themselves by creating a Sikh homeland.” However made it clear that the “sovereign political status” and the ‘homeland’ were possible within the sovereign and the territorial integrity of India.

The Sub-Committee headed by Surjit Singh Barnala thus, drew up the aims and objectives of the Sikh Panth to give a more vigorous lead to it. The Committee presented its report at the meeting of the working committee of Shiromani Akali Dal held at Anandpur Sahib on October 16-17, 1973. The Committee’s report was subsequently known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and became the basis for the demands that Akalis were to raise in the agitation which ended in the Indian Army storming the Golden Temple. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was also to provide Bhindranwale with a weapon to seize control of the agitation from Akali Dal leaders.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution defined the political aim of Akali Dal as the creation of such “congenial environment and the political set up in which there is pre-eminence of the Khalsa.” It demanded that the Centre should have only four subjects under its control i.e. defence, foreign affairs, communication and currency and that the rest of the powers be with the states. It also included the demand for inclusion of Chandigarh and other contiguous Punjabi speaking areas in Punjab. Akali Dal once again started talking of the discrimination against the Sikhs.

The vernacular press in Punjab interpreted the issue in different fashion. The leading newspapers of Punjab i.e. Ajit, Punjab Kesari and Nawam Zamana tried to influence and even shape public opinion on the issue in their own ways. Ajit through series of its editorials described it as a genuine demand for truly federal relations. Taking note of the writings in many newspapers which termed it as a demand for the separate Sikh state and a threat to the nation’s unity and integrity, the paper stated that they have misunderstood the issue; the demand for more financial autonomy couldn’t be termed as demand for separation.
The *Nawan Zamana* in its editorial titled, 'Center State Relations' stated that the demand for financial powers to state was correct. It accused the *Akalis* for making it a communal and sectarian issue and thus harming the larger interests of inter-communal harmony and unity of the country. It stated:

Ours is a federation but lacks true federal basis. center has been strong and states have to depend upon the mercy of the centre. Many democratic forces are also demanding more financial powers for the states, but it is wrong to associate any such demand with any particular community or religion. By doing so, *Akalis* are destroying Hindu-Sikh unity and strengthening the undemocratic forces.\(^{114}\)

The paper also pointed out the two contradictory interpretations of the demand made by the *Akali Dal* in different forums. Whereas, the legislative wing and more particularly the Chief Minister and the Finance Minister generally advocated that they demanded only more financial powers for the states, the organization leaders generally clothed it in a sectarian idiom of a demand for a Sikh dominated autonomous state within Indian Union.\(^{115}\)

However, the sharpest tirade against the demand came from *Punjab Kesari*. In its editorial entitled, "*Akali Dal, the supporter of more state autonomy*", it argued:

So far the demand for the financial powers of the state is concerned, it is genuine and justified. But one has grave doubts about the intention of these parties which are sectarian or communal. Behind this demand of more state autonomy, they want to give a practical shape to their separatist designs, so that centre should become weak and India again be balkanized state.\(^ {116}\)

It indeed went much farther and described this demand as "extremely dangerous", "open treachery", "anti-national", so much so that it rather frequently described the demand as "very much close to Mohammad Ali Jinnah's Two-Nations Theory".\(^ {117}\)
The most virulent propaganda of distrust and hatred centered round the issue of Akali Dal's demand for state autonomy. The role of vernacular press in Punjab in distorting things out of the proportion by inciting and provoking the people of the two communities, was significant and the demand for state autonomy made by the Akali Dal was responsible for instilling the idea of and fear of Khalistan much before a section among the Sikhs raised it.

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