CHAPTER I

PUNJAB POLITICS : A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Socio-Economic Profile

Punjab has been generally called as the shield, spear and the sword hand of India. Punjab derived its name from two Persian words - 'Panj' and 'Aab'. 'Panj' means five and 'Aab' means water. Some scholars also trace this name to the Sanskrit word 'Punj nad' which also means five rivers. Strictly speaking the word 'Punjab' refers to the land lying between the five rivers-Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Jhelum. It was also known as Sapt Sindhava in ancient times.

Geographically, the Punjab has two divisions namely the sub-mountain strip and the alluvial plains. The upper portion of the three districts namely Hoshiarpur, Ropar and Gurdaspur lies in the sub-mountainous strip whereas the remaining nine districts namely Amritsar, Jullunder, Patiala, Kapurthala, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Faridkot, Bathinda and Ferozepur and the lower portions of the sub-mountainous strip lie in the plains. Before partition there were five rivers but at present it is served only by three rivers-the Ravi, the Beas and the Sutlej. These rivers are the important sources of irrigation.

The state experiences three distinct seasons. The hot weather lasts from April to June. The rainy season from July to September and the cold season is from October to
March. The major part of the rain falls between the month of July and September. This rainfall is essential for growing the Kharif crops and for sowing the Rabi crops.

The re-organised State of Punjab has an area of 32,87,263 sq. km. The population of the state increased from 135.51 lakh in 1971 to 167.88 lakh in 1981. In 1981, it was 2,01,90,795. It was 2.39% of total population of India. The density of population which stood at 274 in 1971-72 was 267 in 1991. The percentage of males is higher than that of females. According to the 1971 census, there were 865 females for every 1000 males in the state as compared to the national average of 930 females. In 1981, the female population was 878 per 1000 males as compared to the national average of 935. In 1991, the sex ratio was 929 which means 929 females per 1000 males. The birth and the death rates in Punjab are lowest in comparison of the whole country. The district-wise density of population for years 1971-81 can be given in the following Table-I.

The Table-I reveals that there is a marked variation in the district-wise density of population. Jalandhar District with 510 persons per sq.km. ranked the highest and Ferozepur with 223 persons per sq.km. was at the bottom. In 1991, district-wise population was as given in Table-II.
### TABLE - I

**District-wise density of Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>Area in sq. km</th>
<th>Density per sq.km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>12,29,249</td>
<td>15,13,435</td>
<td>3,562</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>18,35,500</td>
<td>21,88,490</td>
<td>5,087</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapurthala</td>
<td>4,29,514</td>
<td>5,45,249</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalandhar</td>
<td>14,54,501</td>
<td>17,34,574</td>
<td>3,401</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>10,52,153</td>
<td>12,43,807</td>
<td>3,881</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ropar</td>
<td>5,59,538</td>
<td>7,16,662</td>
<td>2,085</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>14,19,421</td>
<td>18,18,912</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferozepur</td>
<td>10,44,836</td>
<td>13,07,804</td>
<td>5,874</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faridkot</td>
<td>11,51,738</td>
<td>14,36,228</td>
<td>5,740</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathinda</td>
<td>10,27,293</td>
<td>13,04,606</td>
<td>5,551</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangrur</td>
<td>11,46,650</td>
<td>14,10,250</td>
<td>5,107</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patiala</td>
<td>12,00,567</td>
<td>15,68,898</td>
<td>4,584</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punjab Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>135,51,060</strong></td>
<td><strong>167,88,915</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,362</strong></td>
<td><strong>333</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
TABLE - II

**District-wise Population (1991)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.N.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amritsar</td>
<td>25,01,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>24,25,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jalandhar</td>
<td>20,33,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Patiala</td>
<td>19,04,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gurdaspur</td>
<td>17,65,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Faridkot</td>
<td>17,25,212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sangrur</td>
<td>17,01,663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ferozepur</td>
<td>15,99,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bathinda</td>
<td>15,54,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hoshiarpur</td>
<td>14,30,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ropar</td>
<td>9,05,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Kapurthala</td>
<td>6,41,884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The percentage of literacy in 1981 stood at 40.74 per cent as compared to 37.7 per cent in 1971. The male literacy rate went up 40.38 per cent to 46.59 per cent during 1971-81. However, the increase in the female literacy from 25.19 per cent to 34.44 per cent was indeed remarkable. In 1991, literacy rate was 52.11%. The Male literacy was 63.86 and Female literacy was 30.42 per cent.

Situated in north-western corner of the country, Punjab is bounded on west by Pakistan, on north by Jammu and Kashmir, on north-east by Himachal Pradesh.

Three-fourths of the population is engaged in agriculture and about 83 per cent of the total geographical area of Punjab is under cultivation. The State is surplus in foodgrains especially wheat and rice. Other main foodgrains are maize, gram, barley and pulses. Major cash crops are oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and potato.

Bhakra Nangal Dam, Bhakra Canals, Harikar Barrage with a new lined canal called Sirhind Feeder and remodelling of Madhopur Headworks into Barrage are the important irrigation works.

Pong Dam on Beas is an important hydro-electric project. The state achieved cent per cent electrification in May 1976. In 1987-88 its per capita income was Rs. 5,477 as against the national average of Rs.3,284. Its per capita consumption of electricity and fertiliser is the highest.
Apart from agriculture, Punjab produces industrial items such as bicycles, cycle parts, sewing machines, hand tools, machine tools, auto parts, electronic items, sports goods, surgical equipment, hosiery, fasteners, textiles and vegetable oils.

Punjab is regarded a synonym for the Green Revolution. Punjab is the home of proud martial races who guarded the north-western gates of India for centuries. Today, as in the past, Punjabis make some of the finest soldiers in India.

The introduction of technological innovations in agriculture in Punjab in the mid-sixties provided an impetus to agricultural development. Green Revolution, based on fertilizer responsive high-yielding varieties, led to the growth of agricultural output. This was due to various factors, some of them being: (a) an increase in the net sown area (b) improvements in the cropping intensity (c) changes in the cropping pattern (d) increase in the yield per acre and (e) improved seeds.

In the years 1965-66 to 1971-72, the pronounced impact was on wheat and rice production, which trebled over this period. There was a relative decline in the growth of the output of wheat, rice, maize and desi cotton between 1971-72 and 1974-75. Between 1974-75 and 1979-80 the wheat production increased, but rice registered a higher growth
rate compared to previous years. Thus Punjab by 1978-79 was contributing 6.2 million tonnes of foodgrains out of 11.1 million tonnes of the all-India procurement. The production of cash crops like cotton, oilseeds and sugarcane also increased over 1965-66 to 1973-74. The increase in the per acre yield of these crops led to a large increase in marketable surplus.

The benefits of the technological innovations accrued to all sections. However, the major and disproportionate share of these benefits accrued to the big and middle farmers. The beneficiaries largely comprised Jat Sikh peasants. The nature of agricultural production has been increasingly transformed into commodity production, with a greater degree of integration in the network of the market. It brings with it requirements of some institutional changes, such as better marketing facilities, secured markets, remunerative prices and more and easier credit, which would ensure the maintenance and enhancement of the surplus.

The increase in yield experienced in the beginning years was not feasible in later years. There are limits to increasing the net sown area and cropping intensity. Now the requirement is for another major

5. The annual growth rate in agriculture between 1970-71 to 1973-74 was 19.87 per cent, between 1973-74 to 1976-77 it was 6.26 per cent and during the years 1977-78, 1978-79, 1979-80 and 1980-81, it moved to 9.5, 2.4, 7.4 and 11.6 per cent.
technological breakthrough, short maturity crops, suitable rotations, mechanisation of peak season operations to economise on limited time between crops, more use of fertilizer, large investment in soil improvement, water management, etc. This, however, will take its own time. It has led to the search for alternative avenues within the State for investing the existing surplus, to make it secure and also to multiply it. The possible avenues could be trade and industry.

The rich Jat peasants have built forward linkages in terms of branching out into agricultural trade, but lucrative avenues also exist in industrial production and general trade. To enter the latter spheres of economic activity would mean coming into competition with "Hindu traders", "Sikh traders" (Bhapa Sikhs) and already established industrialists.

Though Punjab has the highest per capita income in the country it lags behind as an industrially developed State. The rate of growth of total income was 3.45 per cent in India over the period 1960-61 to 1976-77, while in Punjab it was 5.05 per cent. The rate of growth of the manufacturing sector was slow during this period. Comparing the percentage shares of the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the net State domestic Product (N.S.D.P.) at factor cost in Punjab one can see a relative decline in the agricultural sector from 1973-74 onwards, while there has been a slow
increase in the share of the secondary sector. Within the secondary sector it is the manufacturing sector which has contributed to this increase in the share, compared to the non-manufacturing sectors. Large and medium industry has increased slowly from 122 to 203 units from 1973 to 1980 and that too with a capital intensive base. In 1970-71 small-scale industries contributed 61.75 per cent of the industrial production and large and medium industries only 38.25 per cent. In 1973-74 the former contributed 59.07 per cent and the latter 40.93 per cent. In 1978-79 the share of the large and medium industries improved to 48.56 per cent.

Another feature of the industrial development in Punjab is the rapid growth of those small-scale industries which depend upon raw materials procured from outside the State. Such industries include woollen textiles and hosiery, steel re-rolling, cycle and cycle parts. Industries based on the processing of agricultural raw materials produced in the State in abundance are conspicuous by their absence.

Social and Religious Groups:

The major social division in the Punjab is that between the two religious communities of the Hindus and the Sikhs. In 1951 the Hindus constituted about 62.3 per cent of the State's population, the Sikhs 35 per cent, and other religious groups 2.7 per cent. In 1981 the Hindus made up
63.7 per cent of the population, while the Sikhs were 33.3 per cent, despite the higher rate of natural increase believed to exist among the Sikhs compared to the Hindus.  

In 1961 the population of the Hindi-speaking region was 8.8 million (43.3 per cent of the State's total population) and that of the Punjabi-speaking region 11.4 million (56.3 per cent). This compares with a population in 1951 of 6.7 million in the Hindi-speaking region (41.7 per cent) and of 9.4 million in the Punjabi-speaking region (58.3 per cent). The slight changes in the relative proportions of the two regions in the State's population reflect migration from the Punjabi-speaking region not only to other States but also to the Hindi-speaking region.

Among the high-caste, land-owning, agricultural classes in the Sikh community, the most predominant and prominent is the caste of the Jats. In 1931, more than 50 per cent of all Sikhs in the Punjab were Jats. Most of the Sikh Jats are located in the Punjabi-speaking region.

In 1961 nearly 80 per cent of the State's population lived in rural areas consisting of over 21,000 villages, while 20 per cent lived in urban areas consisting

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of 187 towns and cities. In 1951 about 66 per cent of the population was dependent on agricultural occupations. Of this category, 61.5 per cent were cultivators of land they owned, 22.7 cultivated lands of others, and 12.5 per cent were landless agricultural labourers. 8 The Punjabi-speaking region is more urbanized than the Hindi-speaking region, 22.8 per cent of the former is urban as against only 15.8 per cent of the latter. In 1951 the refugees formed about 17 per cent of the population. These include the fairly prosperous Sikh Jat farmers from the canal colonies, and Hindus and Sikhs belonging to the high-caste professional and business classes.

The Sikh Identity:

Cunningham was, perhaps the first exponent of Sikh identity. He was the first to write, "It has been usual to regard the Sikhs as essentially Hindus, and they doubtless are so in language and everyday customs, for Gobind did not fetter his disciples with political systems or codes of municipal laws; yet in religious faith and worldly aspiration, they are wholly different from other Indians, and they are bound together by an object unknown elsewhere".

He continues: "The last apostle of the Sikhs(Guru Gobind Singh) did not live to see his own ends accomplished,

but he effectually roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people, and filled them with a lofty though fitful longing for social freedom and national ascendancy, the proper adjuncts of that purity of workshop which had been preached by Nanak. Gobind saw what was yet vital, and he relumed it with Promethean fire. A living spirit possesses the whole Sikh people, and the impress of Gobind has not only altered the constitution of their minds, but has operated materially and given amplitude to their physical frames. The features and external form of a whole people have been modified, and a Sikh chief is not more distinguishable by his stately person and free and manly bearing than a minister of his faith is by a lofty thoughtfulness of look, which marks the fervour of his soul, and his persuasion of the near presence of the Divinity."

Sikhism was born out of Hinduism. All the ten Sikh gurus were Hindus till they became Sikhs. The Granth Sahib which Sikhs regard as the 'Living Light' of their gurus can be described as the essence of Vedanta. Nevertheless like other reformist movements Sikhism broke away from its parent Hindu body and evolved its own distinct rites of worship and ritual, its own code of ethics, its separate traditions which cumulatively gave it a distinct

religious personality. The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak (AD 1469-1539) was a Kshatriya of the Bedi (those who know the Vedas) sub-caste.

It is still disputed whether Guru Nanak intended to reform Hinduism, form a third community or bring Hindus and Muslims together. Being himself a Hindu he was at the same time equally concerned with reforming Hinduism. But as the years went by and his message caught on among the masses, he decided to give his teachings permanency through a sect of his own.

The process of separation was carried a step further by Guru Nanak's chief disciple, Angad, who succeeded him as the second guru. He evolved a new script, Gurmukhi, in which he compiled his mentor's and his own compositions. It was Arjun who made the first clear statement that Sikhs were an independent community:

I do not keep the Hindu fast, nor the Muslim Ramadan;
I serve Him alone who is my refuge. I serve the one Master who is also Allah. I have broken with the Hindu and the Muslim. I will not worship with the Hindu, nor like the Muslim go to Mecca. I shall serve Him and no other. I will not pray to idols nor say the Muslim Prayer. I shall put my heart at the feet of the One Supreme Being: For we are neither Hindus nor Mussalmans.

With the death of Guru Arjun a new dimension was added to the Sikh's separate identity. Arjun's son, the sixth Guru Hargovind (1595-1644) decided to arm his
followers and proclaimed himself both spiritual and temporal head of the community. Facing the Harmandir he built the Akal Takht (Throne of the Timeless God).

Guru Govind Singh (AD 1666-1708) brought about the final transformation of the Sikh community to a fraternity of the Khalsa Panth (Community of the Pure). For many generations the transition from Hindu to Keshdhari Khalsa remained an easy one as was evident in the almost overnight conversion of Lakshman Das, a Rajput of Poonch, and his assumption of the leadership of the Khalsa with the title Banda Bairagi or Banda Singh Bahadur (AD 1670-1710). It was under Banda's leadership that Khalsa armies won their earliest victories over the Mughals.

Relationship between the Hindu and the Khalsa remained extremely close as long as they were confronting the Mughals, Persian and Afghan invaders. With an alien neutral party set up as arbiter of their destinies the relationships between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs underwent a complete change. This had dramatic consequences on the close affinity between the Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs. They had been like one people, some bearded, other clean-shaven but together forming a united front against Muslim onslaught or domination and equal partners during the years of triumphs under Ranjit Singh. With both the Muslim threat and the Sikh kingdom gone, external pressures that had kept
them together disappeared. They had to redefine their mutual relationship. At the same time the British realised the advantages to them in keeping the Sikh identity separate from the Hindu. Assured of Sikh loyalty during the Mutiny of 1857 they rewarded Sikh princes and Zamindars.

The first blow to the Hindu-Sikh unity was struck by Arya Samaj. In 1877 Swami Dayanand Saraswati visited the Punjab and opened a branch of the Samaj at Lahore. He launched his shudhi (purification) movement to bring breakaway Hindus including Sikhs back into the Hindu fold. Swamiji was intemperate in his speech; he described Guru Nanak as a dambhi (hypocrite) and the Granth Sahib as a book of secondary importance.

The process of separatism was carried a step further by the Akali movement launched in the 1920s. Some Hindu leaders tried to retrieve the situation. "I look upon Sikhism as higher Hinduism", said Raja Narindra Nath. Sir Gokul Chand Narang described them as 'the flesh of our flesh and the bone of our bones'. It was too late. The Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 which passed the control of Sikh temples to an elected body called the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) defined a Sikh as one who believed in the ten gurus and the Granth Sahib and did not believe in any other religion.

Separate electorates with reservations of seats gave the Sikhs their own constituencies from which they
elected their own Sikh representatives. The British gave the Sikhs a vested interest in retaining the Khalsa identity distinct from the Hindus. Relations between the two communities remained cordial, even intimate, as much as matrimonial alliances between members of the same caste living in urban areas continued.

The abolition of separate electorate and the introduction of a joint one made the Sikhs, who were in a minority in all but a few districts of Indian Punjab, subservient to the Hindu majority. The Sikh community's point of view came to be expressed in purely communal organisations like the SGPC.

Sikhs came to form a majority of the population in some districts of Malwa. The deprivation combined with the fact that they had some regions where they predominated gave birth to the idea of an autonomous Sikh State. The sentiment was expressed in a single query: Hindus got Hindustan. Muslims got Pakistan. What did the Sikhs get out of Partition and Independence?

The notion of an autonomous Sikh State started taking shape with the announcement that boundaries of State would be drawn along linguistic lines. This was done for all the 14 major languages spoken in India except Punjabi. The Sikh construed this as discrimination against the community and began to agitate for a Punjabi-speaking Suba.
Their task was made easier for them by the Punjabi Hindus who, sensing what the Sikhs were really after was a Sikh majority State, allowed themselves to be persuaded to declare to the census commissioners that their mother tongue was Hindi. In 1966 the Punjab was split into three States: Maryana, Himachal and Punjabi-speaking Punjab in which Sikhs formed about 60 per cent of the population.

The story of the new Indian Punjab since its inception has been one of political instability against the background of spectacular advances made in agriculture. On the political front, governments came and went - sometimes of the Congress, at others of Akalis and there was also the President's Rule. At the same time Sikh peasants took to modernising their farming methods by using tractors, introducing new varieties of hybrid seeds developed in the Ludhiana Agricultural University, using fertilisers, insecticides and harvesters. The yield per acre was doubled and then trebled. The Green Revolution in wheat was followed by similar increase in the production of rice and sugarcane.

**Sikhs in India's Freedom Struggle:**

Agrarian unrest was the primary cause which led to the famous song of Banke Dyal:- "Pagri Sambhal Jatta, Pagri Sambhal oae. Lut lia maal tera, halon behal oae ("Assemble your turban, the symbol of your honour, O Jats, for all your wealth has been drained by the ferangi to your ruin). Ajit
Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai, a lawyer of Lahore, were expelled on May 9, 1907, from the country. Ajit Singh left for abroad in 1909 and landed in Rio-de Jeneru (Argentina) travelling via Iran, Paris, Geneva, etc. In 1914, he aligned himself with the Ghadar (Revolutionary) Party of San Francisco (U.S.A.). Lala Lajpat Rai, along with Bhai Parmanand, a descendant of Bhai Mati Das (and then a Professor at the D.A.V. College, Lahore), organised the students and other youths in a revolutionary movement in India.

Bhai Parmanand was sentenced to death in 1915, for his alleged part in the Lahore riots of the same year, but this sentence was later commuted. Another academically highly brilliant Punjabi, Lala Hardyal, M.A., a student of Gurukul Kangri and later in England (who was considered to be a mathematical wizard and had a prodigious memory) left his studies to join Lala Lajpat Rai at Lahore, in 1908. Later in the same year he again left for Europe and started a paper, Bande Matram from England. He visited India again in 1910, founded a Bharat Naujwan (youth) Sabha (Association) along with Dina Nath a Punjabi, and Chatterjee, a Bengali. Entrusting the work of the Sabha to Lala Amir Chand, a Punjabi teacher of Delhi, he left for California in 1911, and became the literary spokesman of the Sikh settlers who were busy consolidating their own Ghadar (Revolutionary) Party there.
The Ghadar party (originally known as Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast) came into being at Astoria (Oregon), on April 21, 1913, through the efforts of the Oregon-based Bhai (Later Baba) Sohan Singh Bhakna, Bhai Harnam Singh Tundilat, Bhai Udham Singh and Bhai Ishar Singh, Pt. Kanshi Ram and Lala Ram Rakha, with the help of the philosopher-litterateur, Lala Hardyal, Bhai Parmanand, the revolutionary, and Mr Jitendra Nath "Lahiri", a postgraduate student from Calcutta at the Berkeley University, California and Mr Barakatullah. A Ghadar Ashram (also called Yugnatar Ashram) was founded in San Francisco.

Headquartered in San-Francisco, the main aim of the organisation was to end British rule in India, through an armed revolution and to set up a Republican Government based on liberty and equality. To be called a Canadian or an American Sikh became in those days a badge of honour.

Punjabi poems, written by Bhai Bhagwan Singh, a Granthi at Hongkong who later shifted to Vancouver and from there to San Fransisco, inflamed the passions as nothing else could. Other popular poets also followed in the wake. One of the poems headed "Kill or Die" reads:-

Let us kill the Whites; kill the wicked and tyrannous European.

Do not leave any trace of him. Extirpate the whole nation.

Set fire to all the churches. Kill European men as well as women.
Show no mercy whatever. Flay them alive so that they remember for ages.

Fill the rivers with their dead. We’ll even go to England shouting ‘Kill, kill, kill’.

The Kamagata Maru was the name of the Japanese ship, which was chartered by Sardar (later known as Baba) Gurdit Singh, a contractor from Sarhali (Amritsar district) of the Punjab then working in Malaya. The growing unemployment at home and the favourable (though highly exaggerated) reports reaching the Punjab of high incomes earned by the immigrants in Canada and U.S.A. persuaded many young persons in the Punjab and the Punjabis in S.E. Asia and Hongkong still struggling to plant their feet abroad to migrate to Canada.

The Canadian authorities sent out a boatload of policemen to surround the ship. They fired at the passengers without warning and the passengers, hungry and roused to anger, hit back with lumps of coal.

After being in the Canadian waters for two months, the ship Kamagata Maru sailed back (July 23) on its return journey to Calcutta. Before they reached home, however, the revolutionaries of the Ghadar party, notably Bhai Bhagwan Singh, had got them provided with 270 pistols at Yokohama, through Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, who had also fired them with a new revolutionary zeal to strike for the country’s freedom when back home.
The Ghadarites made an honest and a determined effort to liberate their country. They collected money, purchased arms, enlisted the sympathy of the German Consulates in the U.S.A. (and later also Kabul) and sent out bands of dedicated and idealistic young men like Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Parmanand of Jhansi and others. They were fired by the patriotic feeling instilled in them by Barkatullah, Giani Bhagwan Singh and Pandit Ram Chand. Their number, according to Lord Hardinge, was no less than 7000. And, a large majority was of the immigrants from the Punjab.

Denied a mass base, lack of central direction and cohesion, lack of sympathy on the part of national leadership, the active hostility of Sikh leadership (the Chief Khalsa Diwan disowned them, and idealism not grounded in fact caused the movement to fail. However, the episode left a trail of heroism and sacrifice behind, and roused the Political consciousness of the masses.

The Punjab had taken to political agitation far ahead of the other states. When Gokhale visited Amritsar in 1907, the students of the Khalsa college (then wholly British-managed) drove his carriage, yoking it to their bodies. In 1909, Sir Curzon Willie was murdered in London by a Punjabi.
On March 30, 1919, there was a complete hartal (suspension of business) at Amritsar. On April 9, two popular Punjab leaders, Dr S.D. Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal, were arrested and detained. The people rose in angry protest and attacked two British banks and killed their white managers. On April 11, Brig. Gen. Edward Harry Dyer arrived in Amritsar and occupied the city. He banned all public meetings. People rose like wounded tigers and went on a rampage, cutting telegraph wires, removing fish-plates on the railway tracks, setting post offices and other Government buildings on fire. European life became unsafe. The Government declared Martial Law in major towns - Amritsar, Lahore, Gujrat, Gujranwala and Lyallpur. A reign of terror was let loose. When an English woman was murdered in an Amritsar street, men and women were made to crawl to their homes.

The Indian National Congress held its annual session at Amritsar in December, 1919.

The Sikhs who had, like Gandhiji before, looked upon the British Raj as a blessing in disguise, now started looking towards Gandhi and more particularly towards Jawaharlal Nehru as their future leaders and deliverers. They had suffered the most, both in the Ghadar movement and during the war. In the Jalianwala Bagh tragedy, it was their lot to shed more blood. And soon thereafter, they launched the Gurdwara Reform movement (Popularly known as
the Akali movement), which though initially aimed at purging the Sikh shrines of the corrupt practices of their hereditary custodians, ended up in politicalising the masses against the Government and making the Sikhs the vanguard of the freedom movement. An All India Central Sikh League, wedded to freedom as well as fight for Sikh rights, was born. A meeting was held at Lahore in 1920 under the auspices of the Sikh League, presided over by Baba Kharak Singh, and attended among others, by Mahatma Gandhi.

On Nov. 15 and 16, 1920, a representative meeting of the Sikhs was called at Amritsar through a Hukamnama (edict) issued from the Akal Takht, and as a consequence, a committee of 175 was constituted to take control of and manage the Sikh historic Gurdwaras throughout the Punjab. It was given the name of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.).

On January 24, 1921 the SGPC's political wing, the Shiromani Akali Dal, also came into being after a meeting at Amritsar. When the Akalis wanted to capture the historic Gurdwara at Tarn Taran, they were attacked by the Pujaris (Custodians). Two Sikhs were killed and 17 injured. 18 Pujaris were also wounded in the scuffle. But, the control of the Gurdwara was taken over by the community. On Jan. 31, the Akalis took possession of Guru Ka Bagh, near Amritsar.
Mahant Narain Das, custodian of Nankana Sahib, the birth-place of Guru Nanak, had much to lose—the vast Jagirs attached to the Sikh temple, besides the huge offerings of the devout. The S.G.P.C. decided to hold a large Sikh gathering there on March 4 to 6, 1921, to put pressure on the Mahant to mend his ways, but before this could happen, a Jatha of 150 Sikhs, led by Bhai Lachhman Singh of Dharowal had reached Nankana Sahib about a fortnight earlier (Feb. 20), with a view to a peaceful visit to the holy shrine. As they entered the precincts of the inner sanctuary, the doors were suddenly shut on them and the congregation squatting on the floor and engaged in hymn singing was indiscriminately fired at or attacked with the swords and cutlasses and spears. They were cut into pieces, sprinkled with kerosene oil and burnt to ashes.

The tragedy shook the community to its very depths. The Governor and other officials and ministers reached the spot next morning. The control of the Gurdwara was handed over to a seven-man committee consisting of Sardar Kartar Singh Jhabbar, S. Amar Singh, editor "Sher-e-Punjab" of Lahore, and others.

In the beginning of March, Mahatma Gandhi, L.Lajpat Rai and the Ali Brothers visited Nankana Sahib and made fiery speeches. The S.G.P.C. appealed to all Sikhs to protest against this heinous crime by wearing a black head-
gear (turbans and dupattas) as a sign of mourning. On October 12, the Government declared both the Akali Dal and SGPC illegal bodies, and arrested all the sixty members of their executive committees. A case was launched against them "for waging war against the king".

On July 9, 1925, a Gurdwara Act was passed by the Punjab Council, transferring the legal control of all historic Gurdwaras of the Punjab into the hands of the S.G.P.C.

The main fruitful result of the Akali movement was the politicalisation of the Sikh community down to its rural roots.

For a decade and a half (1925-1939), the Akalis earned a great reputation for themselves as the dedicated soldiers of India's freedom. They became the most militant wing of the Indian National Congress and participated in every satyagraha movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. The name of Sardar Bhagat Singh, the revolutionary, became a household word. His daring and supreme sacrifice of life (1931) inspired and boosted the sagging morale of every youth throughout the country.

In 1937, on the eve of the first General Elections, leading to provincial autonomy, a joint Akali-Congress ticket was evolved. After the elections, they were to form part of a single opposition.
The Pre-Independence Legacy:

When the Congress party launched its own non-cooperation movement against the British government in the 1920s, the Akali movement began to be considered a part of it.

For its part, the Congress party, while receiving support from the Akali Dal, aggregated and channelled Sikh demands as part of the nationalist demands. Thus, in 1929, at its session in Lahore, the Congress party acceded to the demand that it should not agree to a constitution which was not acceptable to the Sikh community. While cooperating with the Congress party, the Akali Dal engaged independently in political activity to secure political privileges specifically for the Sikh community.

Under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, the Sikhs were given separate electorates and representation in the Punjab legislature to the extent of 18.50 per cent of the total number of seats even though they were only 13 per cent of the total population of undivided Punjab. During the 1930s the Akali Dal strongly opposed not only the Muslim League, which frankly stood for Muslim interests, but also the Unionist party which the Akali Dal considered to be promoting primarily Muslim interests under the cover of a secular economic programme oriented towards the rural areas. It was bitterly critical of any Sikhs who associated with the Unionist party. In 1937, when another Sikh political
organization joined with the Unionist party to form a ministry in the Punjab, the Akali Dal immediately characterized its leaders as "traitors" and "enemies" of the Sikh Panth.

After the elections of 1937, which the Akali Dal contested as a separate political group, the Dal aligned itself more closely with the Congress party and even asked its members to join the Congress Party. Many of its functionaries came to occupy important positions in the Congress organization.

Master Tara Singh was a member of the working committee of the Punjab Congress party and of the all India Congress Committee. Despite the official policy of the Congress not to extend any cooperation to the war effort, Master Tara Singh met the British Viceroy of India in October 1939, then resigned from the Congress party and actively engaged in the recruitment of Sikhs to the British army in India through the Khalsa Defence of India League.

When the Congress party launched the Quit India Movement in 1942, there were two opposing factions in the Akali Dal: one, headed by Gaini Kartar Singh favoured a policy of active cooperation with the British government; the other, under the leadership of Udham Singh Nagoke, wanted to extend support to the nationalist movement and the Congress Party.
In June 1943, the Akali Dal, meeting under the presidency of Master Tara Singh, elaborated on the Azad Punjab scheme. It issued a statement which said, the Shiromani Akali Dal hereby declares that in the Azad Punjab the boundaries shall be fixed after taking into consideration the population, property, land revenue and historical traditions of each of the communities... If the new demarcations are effected on the above-mentioned principles then the Azad Punjab shall comprise of Ambala, Jullundur, Lahore Divisions and out of the Multan Division Lyallpur District, some portion of Montgomery and Multan Districts.

An All-Parties Sikh Conference, dominated largely by pro-Akali elements, held in Amritsar in August 1944, asked Master Tara Singh to appoint a committee to go into the question of an independent Sikh state. In a speech at this conference Tara Singh declared that the Sikhs were a nation and if there was going to be a division of the country then they should not be made slaves of Pakistan or Hindustan.

At the fifth session of the All India Akali Conference held at Lahore in October 1944, Master Tara Singh declared that there were two damagers to the Sikh Community, one from the Communists and the other from Gandhi and Jinnah.
The Viceroy of India called a conference at Simla in 1945 to which were invited most of the important Indian political leaders. Master Tara Singh attended the conference on behalf of the Akali Dal. At the Simla conference, Tara Singh said that the Sikhs did not "identify themselves with the Congress though insofar as the Congress favoured India's freedom they were in sympathy with it". He believed Pakistan to be a greater danger for the Sikhs than for the other communities, but was "quite prepared to agree to Pakistan if Jinnah on his part would agree to a separate state for the Sikhs.

Although the Cabinet Mission recognized that the Sikhs were the third important community in India, its proposals really aimed at a settlement between the Muslim League and the Congress party.

Under the Mountbatten Plan, the final demarcation of the boundaries, split the Sikh community into two halves, one in India and the other in Pakistan.

The Sikh population, as result of the mass migration became heavily concentrated in the northwestern districts of the Punjab and PEPSU in independent India. Most of these districts now became Sikh-majority districts, whereas the southeastern districts and the northern hill districts continued to be Hindu majority. Some Hindu leaders allege that this concentration of the Sikhs in the northwestern districts was a deliberate design on the part
of Akali leaders. They point out that at the time of resettlement of the refugees, the two most important portfolios in the Punjab ministry - Home affairs and Rehabilitation - were headed by Sikh leaders who had been prominent in Akali politics before the partition.

**Transfer of Power and the Sikhs:**

The S.G.P.C. in their Memorandum of March 31, 1942 had suggested the river Ravi to be the boundary between the two Punjabs. According to V.P. Menon, Master Tara Singh had declared at Simla that "he was prepared to accept Pakistan if Mr Jinnah should agree to a Sikh state."

The Akali Sikhs decided to boycott the constituent Assembly and refused to take their seat in the interim Government in view of "the Cabinet Mission's proposals being unjust and gravely detrimental to the interests of the Sikhs". They constituted an ALL Party 10-man Panthic Board, under Col. Niranjan Singh Gill of the I.N.A., for resistance "against this permanent subjection to a statutory communal majority in the Punjab." But after a little thunder and pledge-taking at Amritsar (June 9 and 10, 1946) not to accept this unholy conspiracy, and to fight against it to the bitter end, and refusing permission to Baldev Singh to join the interim Government (June 17), they withdrew their earlier reservations and entered both the Constituent Assembly and the Cabinet at the Centre.

As Master Tara Singh wrote later in his
Autobiography: "Our case, we knew, was weak on three counts: (a) we had made the plea for an independent Sikh state contingent on Pakistan coming into being. Many thought we were not serious and put forward this plea only as a counter-argument against Pakistan. (b) Those Hindus who supported us in the demand were not at all themselves willing to concede this demand. They used it only as an argument against Mr Jinnah. (c) The Sikhs were divided in the Punjab legislature into Akali (23) and Congress (10).(d) Above all, there were not more than two tehsils (Tarn Taran and Moga) with Sikh majority, and these two were also not contiguous.

When freedom came, the Sikhs were the most depressed of all the Indian people. They had been split into two, with the other (and more prosperous), half rendered penniless and without a home or sure means of livelihood. They had asked for a separate state in the event of the Muslim state of Pakistan being conceded, but had now abandoned that slogan. Master Tara Singh declared: "It is the enemies of Sikhs who are raising this slogan; now we only want to rehabilitate our uprooted race." 10

10. Pandit J.L.Nehru told a deputation of Punjab Hindus on Sept. 20, 1947: - "Master Tara Singh met me yesterday. He protested vehemently against any idea of Khalistan and said the Sikhs being a small section of the people of India would not pick any quarrel with them. They wished to remain citizens of India and live with the Hindus as brothers". (India from Curzon to Nehru, by Durgadas p. 269.)
Formation of Punjabi Suba:

In 1946, elections were held in Punjab. The party position in the 175-member Punjab Legislative Assembly was as follows: Muslim League 75, Congress 51, Panthic Akali Sikhs 22, Unionist 20, and the Independents 7. The Muslim League was the largest single party, but it could not claim absolute majority. A coalition government consisting of the Congress, the Unionist Party and the Akalis was formed.

On 21 March 1946, the Unionist Congress-Akali-Sikh-Coalition Ministry was formed under the premiership of Malik Khizr Hyat Khan. The six-member Ministry consisted of three representatives of the Unionist party, two Congressmen and one Akali Sikh.

His Majesty's Government declared on 20 February that they would transfer the power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. On 5 March 1947, the Punjab was placed under the Governor's rule under section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. As per 3 June 1947 Plan, His Majesty's Government declared that two Boundary Commissions would be set up to deal with the partition of Bengal and Punjab. The Punjab Boundary Commission consisted of Justices Mehar Chand Mahajan, Teja Singh, Din Mohammad and Mohammad Munir. Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed the Chairman.

Gopi Chand Bhargava became the first premier of the East Punjab. Sir Chandu Lal Trivedi, I.C.S., replaced Sir
Evan Jenkins as the Governor of the State. On 6 April 1949, after one and a half year of his Premiership, the Congress High Command advised Gopi Chand Bhargava to seek a vote of confidence from the Congress Assembly party. Dr Bhargava failed to secure the confidence of the House by a margin of one vote. Bhim Sen Sachar took the oath of office. In order to prevent recurrence of faction-feuds in the Congress party, Punjab was brought under the President’s rule on 20 June 1951.

After the First General Elections held in February 1952, the party position in the 126-member Punjab Legislative Assembly stood as follows: Congress 98, Akali Party 13, Communists 5, Zamindari League 2, Forward Block 1, Communist Party 1, and Independents 6.

On 26 February 1952, Nehru directed the members of the Punjab Congress Assembly Party to elect Bhim Sen Sachar as their leader.

In May 1955, the Akali Dal launched a ‘morcha’. The lenient attitude of Sachar towards the Akalis was exploited by Kairon. Nehru felt that Kairon was indispensable for Punjab and got him (Kairon) elected in place of Sachar. Kairon became Chief Minister of Punjab on 23 January 1956.

In October 1956, Kairon manipulated the merger of the Akali Dal with the Congress. In the Second General
Elections held in 1957, the party position in 154-member House was: Congress 118, Jana Sangh 9, Communists 6, Scheduled Castes Federation 5, Praja Socialist Party 00 and Independents 13.

In 1962, the Third General Elections took place. Partap Singh Kairon was returned by a majority of only 34 votes from the Sarhali Constituency against his Akali opponent Mohan Singh Tur. The Congress Legislature Party elected Kairon as their leader. Kairon formed his new Ministry on 11 March, 1962. In 1963, the President of India appointed Justice S.R. Das to inquire into various charges levelled against Kairon.


In 1957, the Akalis did not contest the Second General Election, as they had reached an understanding with the Congress. The Political activities of the Akali Dal were resumed in 1959. The Akali Dal launched their 'morchas' in 1961. About fifty thousand Akalis courted arrest in support of Punjabi Suba. In 1961, the Akali 'morcha' led by Master Tara Singh failed. Master Tara Singh was accused of sacrilege as he broke his 'fast unto death' without attaining the Punjabi Suba.
In 1963, the Akali Dal was split into two separate parties, one led by Master Tara Singh and the other by Sant Fateh Singh. On 18 January 1965, the SGPC elections were held. Sant Fateh Singh's Group secured 95 seats as against 45 captured by Master Tara Singh's group.

Sant Fateh Singh on 16 August 1965 announced from the holy 'Akal Takht Sahib', that he would go on a 'fast unto death' to secure Punjabi Suba from 10 September 1965. On 9 September, Sant Fateh Singh, on the advice of the Akali Dal Working Committee, decided to postpone his fast.

On 23 September 1965, Gulzari Lal Nanda, the Union Home Minister, declared the Government's decision "to set up a committee of the Cabinet to pursue the demand for Punjabi Suba further and request the speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, to set up a Parliamentary Committee of the Members of both the Houses under the Chairmanship of the Lok Sabha Speaker. The Parliamentary Committee headed by Hukum Singh deliberated upon three alternatives: (a) Maintenance of status quo, (b) Strengthening the Regional Committees and (c) Reorganization. The Committee opined that a suitable alternative was that the present state of Punjab should be re-organized on a linguistic basis.


United Front Ministry with Gurnam Singh as the Chief Minister was the first government of the Punjabi Suba. The first hundred days of the United Front Ministry had an uncertain period with tales of members being "purchased" and "sold" by both sides, and frequent horse trading and crossing of the floor. The United Front started with a strength of 53 in a House of 104 and a Ministry of five. The Congress persuaded Hudiara to revolt and tried to topple the United Front through him, but failed. The Congress also failed to win over the Maharaja of Patiala to make serious efforts to oust the United Front Ministry.

The Congress made many efforts to bring down the United Front Ministry, but without any success. Ultimately, it succeeded in bringing about a cleavage among the top Akali leaders. The dissident Akali MLAs of the Sant group led by Lachhman Singh Gill began a tirade against Gurnam Singh. On 22 November 1967, Lachhman Singh Gill revolted and defected along with 16 legislators from the United Front. Gurnam Singh tendered the resignation of his Ministry, requested the Governor to dissolve the State Assembly and order mid-term polls.

On 25 November, the Governor invited Gian Singh Rarewala, leader of the Congress Legislative party to ascertain whether his party was in a position to form a
stable Ministry in the State. Rarewala declined the invitation but promised his party's support to Gill in the event of Gill's forming the Ministry. Gill explained to the Governor that he enjoyed the support of 66 members in a 104-member House. The members included: Congress-43, Punjab Janata Party-16, Republican-2, Akali Dal (Master Group)-1, Akali Dal (Hudiara Group)-1, SSP-1, including the Maharaja of Patiala and the Speaker of the State Assembly, Joginder Singh Mann. On 25 November 1967, Lachhman Singh Gill was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State.

Gill raised a slogan "Gill or Nil". Gill was aware of the fact that no Congress legislator in Punjab favoured mid-term poll and he exploited this weakness. Gill suggested to them three alternatives, namely: first, the Congress should continue its support to his Ministry till November next (1968) in order to provide him with ammunition to fight the Sant Akali Dal in the forthcoming Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) elections; secondly, he was prepared to join the Congress party with the precondition that as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party, he (Gill) should be re-elected, and thirdly he was even prepared to quit and was prepared to support a Congress Ministry, along with his Janata Party colleagues.

On 20 August 1968, the Congress President announced the formal withdrawal of the support of the
Congress Party to the Gill Ministry in Punjab. The Central Congress leaders did not favour the formation of a Congress Ministry in the State. Instead, they favoured the promulgation of the President's rule to be followed by a mid-term poll.

The President's rule was imposed on 23 August 1968 and the State Assembly was dissolved. After the mid-term elections in the State held in February 1969, the party position in the 104-member Legislative Assembly was as follows: Akali Dal 43, Congress 38, Jana Sangh 8, CPI 4, Communist Party (Marxist) 2, Swatantra 1, SSP 2, PSP 1, Janata Party 1, and Independents 4.

Though the Akali Dal had won only 43 seats in the 104-member Vidhan Sabha during the mid-term polls, the joining of two Independents (who had won the election with Akali support) raised its strength to 45. Jana Sangh had 8 members. The only rival to the coalition was the 38-member Congress group. The remaining 13 members were splintered over half a dozen groups - CPI 4, CP(M) 2, PSP 1, Swatantra 1, Janata Party 1, and Independents 2. Gurnam Singh was elected as its leader and was sworn in as Chief Minister on 17 February 1969.

The Chief Minister preferred to call the Coalition Government a 'United Front Government possibly to keep up the facade of the Akali-led United Front Government (1967). Differences between the Akali Dal and the Jana Sangh arose

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over three vital issues, namely, language, Centre-state relations and the status of Chandigarh.

By the middle of April 1969, the strength of the Akali Dal rose to 48 by inducting four defectors from the Congress party and one Independent. By June 1969, owing to defections from the ranks of the opposition, mainly from the Congress Party, the strength of the Akali Dal swelled to 49 in a 104-member State Vidhan Sabha.

In the first week of January 1970, in a Panthic Convention of Akali MLAs, it was decided to remove Gurnam Singh from the leadership. On 15 March, Sant Chanan Singh directed the toppling operation, giving the green signal to Balwant Singh, the Finance Minister to revolt by refusing to move the Appropriation Bill in the State Legislature. Balwant Singh announced in the State Legislative Assembly, that he would not move the Appropriation Bill. Gurnam Singh, the Chief Minister, thereupon himself moved the Bill. This was, however, opposed and voting followed. Only 22 MLAs voted for his motion, while 44 voted against it. The 28-member Congress and 4-member CPI abstained from voting. The members who voted against the Appropriation Bill were Sant Akalis 35, Jana Sangh 7, and CP(M) 2. Thus the Appropriation Bill was rejected.

After the defeat of the Ministry, the Akali Legislature Party held its meeting. In the meeting, it was
unanimously resolved to remove Gurnam Singh from the leadership of the Akali Legislature Party. Gurnam Singh was dislodged because he had forfeited the confidence of his mentor, Sant Fateh Singh.

On 27 March 1970 Parkash Singh Badal was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State.

On 30 June 1970, the Jan Sangh, the junior partner of the Coalition Government withdrew its support to the Ministry and preferred to sit in the opposition.

The Lok Sabha elections were held in March 1971. Out of the twelve seats contested by the Akali Dal, only one was won by it and that too with a narrow margin. While the CPI captured two seats, Congress (R) was able to capture the remaining.

On 13 June Badal and some senior Akali Ministers made abortive attempt to enter into an agreement with the Congress. In the meantime dissident Akalis numbering about seventeen, including six ministers, defected from the Akali Dal (Sant) and formed a new Akali Dal under Gurnam Singh. Gurnam Singh along with the followers reached Raj Bhawan at 1.40 p.m. But the Chief Minister stole a march over him by submitting the resignation of his Council of Ministers and advising the Governor to dissolve the State Legislature with a view to seeking fresh mandate from the people. The Governor accepted the advice and dissolved the State
Legislature with immediate effect. President's rule was imposed on 15 June 1971.

In March 1972, the election results in a 104-member State Assembly stood as follows: Congress 66, Akali Dal 24, CPI 10, CPM 1 and Independents 3. The Congress secured 42.84 per cent, CPI 6.51 per cent, Jana Sangh 4.96 per cent and CPM 3.26 per cent of the votes polled. The Jana Sangh failed to secure even a single seat. The Congress with the support of CPI formed its Ministry on 17 March 1972. Giani Zail Singh became the Chief Minister of the State.

Declaration of national emergency in June 1975 provided a handy tool to the Chief Minister to deal with the opposition with a firm hand.

The Janata Party stormed into office at the Centre in March 1977. Fresh elections for the State Assembly were held in the middle of June 1977. The election results for 117-member State Assembly were: Shiromani Akali Dal won 58 seats with 31.67 per cent votes while Janata Party secured 24 seats with 14.82 per cent votes, Congress got 17 seats with 33.64 per cent votes, CPI got 7 seats with 6.64 per cent votes while CPI (H) secured 8 seats with 3.53 per cent votes, vacant 1 and Independents managed to get 2 seats with 9.71 per cent votes. Parkash Singh Badal (Akali-Janata) assumed office with the support of the Janata Party on 19 June 1977.
January 1980 elections to the Lok Sabha brought back the Congress (Indira) into power. Punjab was brought under the President's rule on 17 February 1980. Fresh elections were held in May 1980. The election results for the 117-member State Assembly were: Congress (I) got 63 seats with 52.45 per cent votes, Janata Party secured 1 seat with 9.97 per cent votes, Shiromani Akali Dal obtained 37 seats with 23.37 per cent votes, CPI got 8 seats while CPI (M) secured 5 and Independents won 2 seats. On 7 June 1980 Darbara Singh (Congress-I) was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State. He formed his Ministry on 10 June 1980.