CHAPTER V

NATURE OF FACTIONALISM IN INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND SHIROMANI AKALI DAL: A COMPARISON.

The INC and the SAD have been faction-ridden but the intensity and pattern have undergone change with the passage of time. If in the INC there were clashes on principles and methods of working, before Independence, these and other factors like participation and demand of allocation of values etc. became the cause of factionalism after independence.

After Independence, the people, at large, wanted a share in the power structure. Universal Adult Franchise had strengthened their hands and gradually they came to know the power of 'one man, one vote'. Moreover, the leaders cutting across various party lines had not only promised the people of India adequate food, clothing and shelter but also liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. The last was the most potent of all, for which the masses were hankering. The INC understood that it would have to expand its base, it would have to carve a niche for itself in the hearts of the people. And this would have to be done quickly as there were, then, other political actors who were as interested in power play as the INC. New actors were emerging, at the national as well as regional level. The gains of acquiring freedom for the country had to be consolidated quickly so that the INC could cash on it and have a head start over its political competitors.

After Partition of India, there was an influx of refugees who wanted to and had to be settled. They had been forced to leave their home and hearth and thus, tempers were running high. Independence that had promised them better social, economic and political life had, they felt, only brought chaos, disorder and frustration in their lives. They had been uprooted from West Punjab, their home, and had to think of their
livelihood and means of settling. The expectations from Independence, ‘the glow of freedom’, were high but partition had added an entirely new dimension. On the other hand, people living in East Punjab were reluctant to share the meager resources with their brothers from West Punjab. The resources were limited, the demands were many. There was a demand for allocation of values from all sides, which put tremendous pressure on the administration. The leaders had not expected problems of this magnitude and were caught unawares. Moreover, with the passage of time the people started asserting for their rights. The fight for Independence had taught them the meaning of democracy. They had been awakened from their slumber by the speeches of the leaders who had told them in clear words the benefits of living in a democracy. They had been roused to the meaning of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ so wanted their fulfillment. The people wanted satisfaction of their demands but were ignorant about the scores of problems which had emerged as a result of Partition. The administration’s problems were too many. The people were ignorant, illiterate, divided on the basis of caste and religion and were infested with poverty. There was concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, while the teeming millions lived knee-deep in poverty. Hospitals, schools, colleges, orphanages etc. had to be built but the rich landlords and industrialists were not ready to part with their property even when they were given compensation. Any compensation seemed less to them. How could land be acquired to fulfill the Directive Principles of State policy which were a solemn promise to the people of India. How could the goal of a welfare state be achieved? How could the inequalities between the rich and the poor be minimised? How could relief be provided to the people? If the Directive Principles were fulfilled, the Fundamental Rights of the people were likely to be infringed upon. If the Fundamental Rights were safeguarded, the idea of Welfare state seemed far away. How could the minimum available resources be distributed among the maximum? How could the frustration of the people be minimised? The people had been promised freedom from poverty and want after Independence. Now they wanted the promises to be fulfilled. If reforms were not initiated quickly, the dissatisfaction and frustration of the people would simmer and could, possibly turn into a revolution. As it is, after partition, the people felt that independence had got them only poverty, fear and deprivation. The people were in a hurry, each wanting his gains to be the
maximum. If people were divided among the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, they were further divided on the basis of caste and religion. There was also the rural-urban divide. The rural people added a new dimension to the situation by asserting themselves. There was vast scale exploitation in the countryside and it was made worse because of the policy of untouchability followed against the Scheduled Castes. The people from the rural areas had migrated to the cities where again they were exploited. Migration had created its own set of problems. The cities were overcrowded, unemployment was on the rise and the factor of exploitation was always there. In the urban areas it was a clash between classes. And Partition had, forever, put the idea of religion in the hearts and minds of people. Every exploitation, every fight ended on the same note – religion. Every household had either lost a life, or some property or their women had been molested, so they had become sensitive. Everything took a backseat when religion came into question. The people were divided on the basis of religion but did not want another partition. This made them defensive to such an extent that they became offensive. The majority, the Hindus, blamed the government for appeasing the minorities (the Sikhs, Muslims and the Christians) and doling out too many benefits to them. They complained that there were just too many Articles in the Constitution in the list of Fundamental Rights for the benefits of the minorities, Articles 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. The minorities, on the other hand, felt apprehensive because of this attitude of the majority. The administration was hopelessly caught in this web of religion and vested interests. The selfish interests of each religion fanned the communal flames. It only added to the existing problems.

Besides this, the problem of difference in language had come up. Different language speaking people wanted the states to be divided on the basis of language. In the North, there was a demand for a Hindi-speaking state and the demand by the Sikhs for a Punjabi-speaking state. The regional leaders who were a non-existent entity found this opportunity to emerge as leaders. They cashed on this frustration of the masses by giving a political turn to it. They couched the demand in political terms, which led to further differences between the people. The Union government had to face a new problem and its attention turned from development to solving petty problems. The ego of leaders manifested itself through various problems. Indifferent
to the larger cause of the nation’s development they diverted precious resources for their petty, personal gains.

The effect of these clashes of leaders and ego conflict had an adverse effect on the leadership in the states. The regional leaders in the states, each looked to some Central leader for support. They knew that only if they had the required support and blessings from some powerful leader at the Centre could they survive in the political arena. Each leader was hankering after power and they invented devices to gain power and stay in power. One of the earliest examples is that of Gopi Chand Bhargava and Bhim Sen Sacher, both regional leaders within the INC. The party at the state level was divided into two factions, each led by these two leaders. If Gopi Chand Bhargava had the support of S. Patel, then Bhim Sen Sacher had the blessings of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. The clashes of the leaders at the Centre had a direct impact on the regional leaders not only in Punjab but throughout the country, in every state. In the INC factionalism was horizontal, there was interference from the Congress High Command. In the SAD factionalism was vertical, every Jat was a leader in his own right.

As we have already argued, factionalism has been quite rampant both in Indian National Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal. In fact, it can be seen as a phenomenon in nearly all the political parties in India. The nature of factionalism though differs from one party to the other. It also differs from time to time depending on a host of other factors. Sometimes the Sikh leadership consisting primarily of the Jat Sikhs clashes among itself, while at other times the clash is between the different castes and occupational groups within the Sikh leadership. A Jat Sikh leader may not find opposition only in another Jat Sikh but may feel his position threatened by a Ramagarhia (artisan) Sikh or from a Majhabi (Schedule caste) Sikh. This is ironical as the first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev started the new religion to eliminate casteism which was prevalent in Hinduism. But with the passage of time the caste factor has emerged as a major factor in the politics of the state. The idea of Pangat (sitting in a row and eating from the common kitchen) and Sangat (a religious congregation of the Sikhs in one place) as introduced by the Gurus has been relegated to the background or is confined to the Gurudwaras only.
The Sikhs, on the basis of their profession are divided into three prominent castes—the Jat Sikhs who are the peasant community and who dominate the rural areas. But with increasing mobilization the Jat Sikhs are spreading to the urban areas which is changing the demography of the cities. This also has an effect on the political health of the state and the people of the urban areas feel threatened as they would be under represented in the long run. The second group consists of the Ramgarhia Sikhs who comprise of the artisan castes. The carpenters, the blacksmiths etc. form this group. The third group demanding its share in political power consists of the Majhabi Sikhs who are equivalent to the Schedule Castes. The Sikhs are further divided into other castes and sub-castes too but those are not influential from the view of power politics. It is the above mentioned groups who compete to be one up against each other to attain power in the state. The arm-twisting also goes on between the parliamentary and the organisational wings of the party.

In the Indian National Congress, for example, once the party is in power there is a clash over ministerial berths and for the post of the Chief Minister of the state. As Paul Brass says that in the Indian National Congress when there is absence of external threat and absence of authoritative leadership, conditions are ripe for factional politics. A majority of the leaders are less interested in ideological issues and more eager to derive maximum benefits for their local supporters. This enables them to build up their strength so that they can have an authoritative say in the organisational affairs of the party. In the process of building up their support group at the local level there is the clash of interests with the leaders at the helm of affairs. Control over the organisational wing is so important that the party leader or the party worker endeavours to have control over local administration. They distribute favors to their supporters and oblige their constituencies nurturing them for use in the long-turn. In the Indian National Congress, the local, district and state factions form alliances to fight the elections. The alliance or this grouping is at its weakest once danger from external sources decreases. Thus, the Congressmen are more concerned at the local level to extract maximum benefits for their followers. They feel that the support-group, more than the ideology will take them forward in the long run. They

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1 Brass, Factional Politics in an Indian State, p. 232.
accommodate the interests of their followers with their own interests harmonising their ascent to power. In the Indian National Congress once a dissident group succeeds in gaining majority support the process of factionalism starts all over again. The new majority group wants to replace the leadership. We have the example of the infighting between Bhim Sen Sachar and Gopi Chand Bhargava. In the Indian National Congress along with local politics it is the Congress High Command which also influences the nature of factionalism in the party. Bhargava became the Chief Minister because he had the blessings of Sardar Patel who was then the Home Minister at the Centre. So intense was factionalism that Bhargava accommodated two representatives from the Akali faction instead of reconciling with Sachar who had Pandit Nehru’s support. Factionalism leads to strange alliances. In this case one faction which was in control of the reins of power could work with people from other parties (the Akali faction) but not with its own party men. Sachar never forgave Bhargava for this act of his. When Bhargava had to resign as the Chief Minister because the Akali faction shifted its loyalty to the Sachar group, the latter became the Chief Minister. As soon as he took office he launched a campaign against corruption. The infighting among the Congressmen received the blessings of the Congress High Command with the Sardar Patel group supporting Bhargava and Nehru supporting the Sachar faction. Sachar had to resign as the Chief Minister soon after and Bhargava became the Chief minister with Sardar Patel’s support. Pandit Nehru could not help his disciple as he was on a visit abroad. With Bhargava’s accession to the post of Chief Minister, Sachar and Partap Singh Kairon united to topple him down. The Sachar- Kairon duo was warned by Sardar Patel to abstain from any mischief of destabilising the Bhargava Ministry. Sardar Patel’s death in 1950 saw Nehru consolidate his position in the Congress Party both in the legislative and organisational wings. The Sachar- Kairon group accused Bhargava of working against the interests of the Congress party and having a conciliation approach to the Akali Dal. Bhargava had lost his mentor with the death of Sardar Patel and later lost the support of Pradesh Congress Committee of which Kairon was the President. It can be inferred from this that right from the beginning the Indian National Congress has been divided into two factions. Pt. Nehru was considered a liberal leader with secular credentials who had been influenced by the Ox-bridge orientation. Thus, he
encouraged leaders of all hues and shades irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. He was the embodiment of the liberal thought in India, so he had no qualms of encouraging leaders like Sachar or Kairon who were Sikhs. The other faction comprised of leaders like Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad who were conservatists and deemed rightists and more or less supported the Hindu leadership. This may have been a factor which led to Sardar Patel to support Gopi Chand Bhargava. So before 1966 factionalism in the Indian National Congress had strong religious overtones. Besides the example of the clash between Sachar and Bhargava we also have the case of Sachar and Brish Bhan. Later on the open clash between Kairon and Prabodh Chandar lends further weight to the argument. Pt. Nehru supported the former irrespective of the fact that he belonged to the Jat Sikh community.

The Congress High Command asked Bhargava to send ten names from which six would be selected by the Congress High Command in the reorganisation of the Ministry. The Congress High Command excluded the names of the Akali Dal representatives and Bhargava resigned in protest. His resignation led to President’s rule because the Sachar-Kairon faction was not in a position to form the Ministry. The supporting of their own proteges by the Congress High Command led to more infighting among the Congressmen. In this case no ideology was involved, no principles were involved, it was mere clash of egos of the regional leaders who got encouragement from various quarters of the Congress High Command. It was a struggle for power for personal prestige between the national leaders of the party, Sardar Patel and Pt. Nehru, which filtered down to the regional level.

The President’s rule lasted up April 4, 1952 when Sachar became the Chief Minister with Pt. Nehru’s blessings. Kairon by this time had aligned himself with the Jagat Narain group which was Hindu dominated. This group was in majority so it took offence when Sachar was made the Chief Minister. When Sri Ram Sharma fell out with Sachar and the former left the party, Kairon had the support of 50 out of 96 Congress legislators. But Sachar was made the Chief Minister because of Pt. Nehru and Maulana Azad’s support extended to him. This again led to a rift in the Congress Legislative Party. Sachar could see himself through the crisis only because of the Congress High Command supporting him.
Sardar Partap Singh Kairon observed the role of Congress High Command in the State politics and thus, developed a good rapport with Nehru. This led to Kairon's total control over both the organisational and legislative wings of the Party. Anything for power and personal prestige. This was obvious when Sachar and Lala Jagat Narain came together to plan Kairon's fall for it was rumoured that Kairon had encouraged allegations against Lala Jagat Narain which were pursued by Sri Ram Sharma. The interference of the Congress High Command in the regional politics of Punjab was personalized when Sachar decided to remove Kairon from his Cabinet and the former was told to resign by the Congress High Command. Because of Kairon's good relations with the Congress High Command, he was made the Chief Minister of one of the prosperous states of India.

Sometimes, principles and ideologies lead to factionalism within the party. The Regional Formula which wanted to safeguard the interests of the two linguistic groups was a case. Many Congressmen resigned from the Congress Party membership as they felt that the Congress was anti-Hindu and pro-Sikh. The secular, liberal thinking of Nehru was not relished by a majority of the Congressmen.

Kairon gradually consolidated his position. In politics of collaboration and accommodation Kairon got rid of all his opponents and other strong leaders in the party. He did not want anybody who could challenge his position in the party. Kairon, a Jat Sikh had the support of Nehru thus, when the Bhargava – Prabodh Chandra faction accused Kairon of malpractices, he came out unscathed because of Pt. Nehru's support. After the Chinese war when Lai Bahadur Shastri asked Kairon to include Ram Kishan in his Cabinet and the latter refused, Shastri took offence. Lal Bahadur Shastri later made Ram Kishan the Chief Minister of Punjab when he became the Prime Minister of India. Kairon survived the 1958 crisis which Prabodh Chandra had presented against him in the form of a memorandum to the Congress President because of Pt. Nehru's support. Kairon survived crisis after crisis because he had Pt. Nehru's support and he had full control over the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and Congress Legislative Party.

The 1962 elections saw Kairon trying to confine Giani Zail Singh to the Upper House. Despite his opposition Giani Zail Singh could contest from the
Faridkot constituency only because of the Congress High Command’s support. Again the politics of the Central leaders, each supporting a regional leader led to the widening of gulf between Kairon and Darbara Singh.

After Pt. Nehru’s death, forces against Kairon doubled their efforts, as the Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri could not forgive Kairon as the latter had not accommodated Ram Kishan in his Cabinet earlier and had also supported Morarji Desai for the post of Prime Ministership against him. S. Gurbachan S. Bajwa and Prabodh Chandra were also against Kairon as they had been refused ministerial berths by the latter.

Partap Singh Kairon after his resignation because of the Dass Commission report in 1963 supported Darbara Singh as a candidate for the post of Chief Minister. Darbara Singh fell out with Kairon because some leaders at the Centre wanted the ouster of the latter. The Congress High Command decided to take the final decision and installed Ram Kishan as the Chief Minister. Thus, a new phenomenon was seen after the death of Nehru. There arose differences within the Sikh leadership. For example the differences between Kairon and Darbara Singh and then between Darbara Singh, Giani Zail Singh and Mohinder Singh Gill. Later on there was clash between Capt. Amrinder and Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. The reason behind this change in the nature of factionalism was that after the division of Punjab there was a change in the social demography of Punjab. Before 1966 the Hindus were in majority and the Sikhs were in minority. But with the formation of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh the Hindus were reduced to a minority in Punjab. The Sikhs being in majority led to a number of Sikh leaders coming forward which led to differences among the Sikh leadership. For the first time the State had a Sikh Chief Minister for a party to remain in power. Because the State became a Sikh dominated one there arose a need by each party to put forward a Sikh leader.

When President’s rule was clamped in the State in 1966 factionalism was at its peak. The fall out was that there was nobody to oppose the Punjabi Suba demand. The support of the Kaironites, who had been sidelined with his demise of Kairon, was sought after by both the factions – one led by Ram Kishan and the other by Darbara Singh. The Kaironites were in the control of the Punjab Pradesh Congress
Commitee and fearing their comeback a truce was declared between Ram Kishan, Prabcdh Chandra and Darbara Singh. Ram Kishan was supported by the Congress High Command which rebuked the supporters of Darbara Singh on starting a signature campaign against him. Thus, danger from one faction led to the other factions dissolving their differences for some time. With the resignation of Ram Kishan in 1966, the Congress in Punjab was again factionalised. The Kaironites came together with S. Darbara Singh as their leader while S. Swaran Singh tried to form a rival group against him.

For the elections of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, the Congress was again divided in 1966. The local leaders looked at the Congress High Command for directions as to whom it should support. Gurmukh Singh Musafir won as he was supported by the Congress High Command. He went on to win the election of the Congress Legislative Party and thus became the Chief Minister of the present Punjab in 1966. His candidature to the office of the Chief Minister was supported by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the Party President K. Kamraj. Musafir could not rise above party politics and factionalism intensified during his tenure. Because of factionalism, the Congress lost its absolute majority in the Assembly elections held in 1967. The Congress High Command withdrew its support to Musafir because of his dismal performance. The Congress High Command made the final decision of choosing Gian Singh Rarewala as the candidate for the post of Chief Minister. Again, the Congress camp was divided with Darbara Singh and Musafir opposing Rarewala. On the other hand, Giani Zail Singh and S. Swaran Singh supported Rarewala for the leadership of Congress Legislative Party. The Congress remained out of power in 1967 because of infighting. Even when out of power, the petty-minded leaders kept influencing the Congress High Command on selecting a leader. So, shortlived are alliances that Giani Zail Singh who had supported Gian Singh Rarewala for the post of leader of Congress Legislative Party turned against the latter. Gian Singh Rarewala left the Congress and joined the Akali Dal. Giani Zail Singh consolidated his position and developed an excellent rapport with Mrs. Gandhi. When Giani Zail Singh became the Chief Minister he got his own man, Niranjan S. Talib elected as the President of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee. With the demise of Talib, Mohinder Singh Gill became the President of Punjab.
Bhargava was removed as the Chief Minister and Sachar, a protégé of Pt. Nehru was elevated to the post. Every regional leader has a mentor in the Congress High Command in Delhi which is one of the survival strategies of the regional leader. With factionalism rampant in the party, the leaders try to outdo each other and they know that the Congress High Command can be a crucial partner in this game of political power. As long as Pt. Nehru’s blessings were with Sachar, a Sikh, the latter remained the Chief Minister of Punjab, but once Pt. Nehru’s blessings shifted to Kairon, another Sikh, Sachar was left alone to search for his identity in the political jungle. Kairon as Chief Minister was defended by Nehru who rebutted all charges of Partap Singh Kairon indulging in corruption. Even when the legislators complained to Pt. Nehru about Partap Singh Kairon’s political misdeeds, Pt. Nehru turned a deaf ear. The Congress High Command is the final authority, which gives the final verdict when factionalism is at its maximum and starts affecting the performance of the party. For example, when Kairon did not want Giani Zail Singh to contest for an Assembly seat, it was only with the Congress High Command’s support that the latter could contest from the Faridkot constituency.

Again, it was because of Lal Bahadur Shastri that Ram Kishan became the Chief Minister. Kairon had refused to include Ram Kishan in his cabinet and had also not supported Lal Bahadur Shastri in the struggle for the office of the Prime Minister. Lal Bahadur Shastri saw to it that Kairon paid a heavy price for this. Again, the Congress President, U. N. Dhebar who had once removed Devi Lal from the Presidentship of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, now helped the regional leaders to weaken Kairon’s position. Devi Lal led the Dass Commission inquiry against Kairon which finally led to the latter’s resignation. Ram Kishan took all the decisions with the Congress High Command’s advise. He looked to the Centre for all acts. Again, the role of the leaders at the Congress High Command is proved. Swaran Singh who was at the Centre was happy with Ram Kishan’s elevation for he thought he could rule Punjab by proxy. Ram Kishan’s accession led to opening of a fresh chapter of factionalism in the state. Darbara Singh could not pull along with Ram Kishan who he felt was super-imposed by the Centre. The lure of power led to the Kairon group being in the Centre of politics again. The Darbara Singh group and the group led by Ram Kishan both sought the help of the Kaironites to consolidate
Pradesh Congress Committee. But this led to a tussle between the ministerial and the organisational wings of the party. Giani Zail Singh emerged stronger because of his loyalty to Mrs. Gandhi.

Darbara Singh too became the Chief Minister of Punjab because of his loyalty to Mrs. Gandhi. But the clash between Giani Zail Singh, at the Center as Home Minister and Darbara Singh, as the Chief Minister of Punjab led to differences persisting in the Congress Party in Punjab. The clash was because of caste differences. The Sikh leadership had been divided and these two leaders only helped to enlarge the differences.

The interference of Congress High Command only helped factionalism to flourish. The Congress High Command is intimately involved in the regional politics. Within the state, in the Congress Party, differences are not only due to ideology and principles of functioning but also because of caste. The real politics involves the Jat Sikh masses for whose attention the Congress leaders vie with each other along with the Akali Dal. On the other hand, the leaders who are not Jats but are Sikhs too claim or aspire for political power. In the Akali Dal only a Jat Sikh can hold on to power. In fact, being a Jat Sikh and an Akali worker are a prerequisite to step on the first rung of the ladder to power. On the other hand, the Congress is an amalgamation of interests where not only the Jat Sikhs but Sikhs of other castes along with the Punjabi Hindu clamour for power. This adds a completely new dimension to factionalism in the Congress Party in Punjab unlike any other state in India. The Congress High Command faces a greater dilemma in Punjab.

In Punjab, Congress factionalism is the result of many factors. As mentioned above, if sometimes it is the result of a clash between the leaders of different castes, at other times it is because of the Congress High Command encouraging one or the other leader at the regional level. The leaders at the Centre are also involved in their own petty game of political power. Each wants to emerge as an influential leader and so builds up his rank and file not only at the Center but also at the regional level. They try to muster maximum support from all possible quarters. They, then use their position to influence regional politics. We have the example of Sardar Patel supporting Bhargava and Nehru supporting Sachar. As soon as Sardar Patel died
their position. This led to mud-slinging between the groups each blaming the other for Partap Singh Kairon’s murder. It was the Congress High Command which put an end to this infighting by rebutting the Darbara Singh’s group of starting a signature campaign against the Chief Minister.

Once the Congress High Command decided to withdraw its support from Ram Kishan, the latter could not survive. The Congress High Command was unhappy at the dismal performance of Ram Kishan in Punjab politics. Ram Kishan had to resign for he could not continue without the Centre’s support.

Caste differences also fuel the fire of factionalism in the State and the main clash when it comes to caste is between the Jat Sikhs and the Sikhs of the other castes. Now, the Jat Sikhs claim to be Sikhs of a superior variety, they claim that they are the real protagonists and that they are the ones who are capable of holding afloat the banner of Sikhism. Thus, the Congress as a party needs Jat Sikhs within its folds to counter the attack of the Shiromani Akali Dal who also vie for the support of the rural Jat Sikh masses, of course, Jat Sikhs belong to different economic categories.

The Congress faces a unique crisis of factionalism where groupism among leaders takes place not only on issues, ideologies, principles and egos but also because of caste differences. At a point of time the Congress Party faced factionalism between Bhargava and Sachar, because of being proteges of Sardar Patel and Pt. Nehru respectively, the party later saw differences between Kairon and S. Darbara Singh, both belonging to the Jat Sikh peasantry. When one talks of factionalism in the Punjab Congress, again we see the caste differences come to the fore between Giani Zail Singh and Darbara Singh. The Congress High Command offers its support to the different sections of the Sikh masses according to the alignment of forces in the State. When Kairon resigned and an alternative to him was sought the leaders pleaded with the Congress High Command not to replace Kairon as the situation would help the Akali Dal to exploit the issue of the ouster of a Jat Sikh with that of a non-Jat being installed. It would strike at the base of the party’s rural vote-bank.

Horse-trading goes on because besides the Congress High Command, a leader is successful if he has control of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and the Congress Legislative Party. When Giani Zail Singh became the Chief Minister he
made his own man – Niranjan S. Talib, the President of Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee. With Talib’s sudden demise, Mohinder Singh Gill became the President of the body, which led to clash between the organisational and the ministerial wings. The clash on one hand was between a Jat and a non-Jat Sikh and on the other between two wings – each wanting to control the other. Factionalism is all the more prominent when a leader is refused a ministerial berth. The example of Prabodh Chander who was even accommodated as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly by Kairon is a case in the point. He worked against his own party because of rivalry with one man – Partap Singh Kairon.

Besides this, there has been a clash between those Congressmen who have come up gradually as party-workers and those who have joined the Congress after leaving their parent-party. The case of Darbara Singh and Giani Zail Singh is an example. Darbara Singh was a Nationalist Sikh who had been with the Congress through thick and thin. He never considered Giani Zail Singh a Congressman as Giani Zail Singh had been an Akali who had later joined the Congress. None of the leaders like Giani Zail Singh who moved on to the Center wanted to let go of the reins of power in a prosperous state like Punjab. Thus, even after his departure to Delhi, he kept meddling in the affairs of the state which was not liked by Darbara Singh. When one leader from the Centre tries to encourage his protégé in the region, the other regional leaders of the Congress are bound to look elsewhere to consolidate their position. Thus, there is the involvement of the Congress High Command in the affairs of the State. Bhargava, Sachar, Kairon, Ram Kishan, Giani Zail Singh and Darbara Singh, S. Beant Singh became Chief Ministers of the State only because of the blessings of the various Prime Ministers and prominent leaders at the Center. So this precedence, this tradition, i.e. the regional leaders of the Congress having no qualms of looking to the Centre for directions persists in the Congress. The Party also uses the various Jat Sikh leaders to its advantage as and when required. It tries to appease the various supporters from time to time. Capt. Amrinder Singh, who had once resigned from the Lok Sabha because of Operation Blue Star and had joined the Akali Dal, has been chosen as the Chief Minister because of his being a Jat Sikh over Mrs. Bhattal. The Congress wanted to appease the Sikhs so though Capt. Amrinder Singh and Mrs. Bhattal are Jat-Sikhs yet the former was chosen because of his protest.
against Operate Blue Star. The party wanted to rectify its mistake and wanted to win back the lost Jat Sikh rural support which is its crucial vote-bank in the State. Thus, besides the ego differences in Punjab the Congress High Command’s ever-interfering nature in the politics of the State also lends a new dimension to the nature of factionalism.

Besides, pursuit of power, pelf and status are the factors which makes a leader align himself with one or the other faction or build up a new faction himself. If Kairon and Lala Jagat Narain worked together against Sachar at a point of time Lala Jagat Narain collaborated with Sachar for weakening Kairon’s position. If Kairon supported Darbara Singh against Brish Bhan, Darbara Singh turned against Kairon because of personal unfulfilled ambitions. If Darbara Singh supported Ram Kishan in 1964 for the office of the Chief Minster, the former turned against the latter because he wanted to become more powerful than the leader who had been imposed on them by the Congress High Command. This led to both the groups, Darbara Singh and Ram Kishan groups woo the Kaironites. The people who were once daggers drawn against the Kaironites now looked for support, from that very quarter. Strange indeed! First, Swaran Singh supported Brish Bhan and then went on to support Gian Singh Rarewala with Giani Zail Singh. Darbara Singh joined Musafir to support Brish Bhan only because of Giani Zail Singh leading the other group. Later on, there was a tussle between Darbara Singh and Buta Singh again based on caste differences, the former was a Jat Sikh while the latter was not a Jat Sikh. A personality clash between the two led to more interference from the Congress High Command for both wanted to become the Chief Minister of Punjab. Thus, pursuit of power between the two leaders led to groupism and factionalism in the party.

The Shiromani Akali Dal has also been faction-ridden but the problem of factionalism is different from that persisting in the Indian National Congress. The SAD and its control is directly linked with the leadership in the SGPC. The Shiromani Akali Dal is a party of the rural masses, of the rural area with the leadership in the hands of the elite Jat Sikhs. The followers who comprise the rank and file of the Shiromani Akali Dal belong to the rural peasantry. They are the real strength of the party and it is this Jat psyche which leads to factionalism within the
party. The Jat Sikhs are a valour class and are united only when there is some external danger to the ‘Khalsa’. As soon as the crisis is over, they get down to settling scores which never seem to end. This was the case when the Sikhs were divided into twelve Misls until Maharaja Ranjit Singh united them. At first the Sikhs rose as one because they had factors like kinship and religious faith which bind them. Religion was not only a faith but a motivating force which made them rise for military conquests. It was the common kinship factor which united them and ironically it was the same factor which divided them into convenient territorial combinations when the Singhs grew in power. The Singhs, as mentioned in the earlier chapters, evolved four institutions i.e.- Rakhi, the Dal Khalsa, the Misl and the Gurmata. It was the last one which extended equality and freedom to the followers of the faith which further gave them strength. Each misl was led by a Sikh chieftain who tried to surpass the others in valour. In crisis two or more misls could come together and then share the spoils of the war. The conditions of fighting were decided before the conquest with the help of the Gurmata. But after the crisis was over the same misls could be expected to fight amongst each other. Prominent and powerful chiefs like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Charhat Singh Shukarchakiya, Jai Singh Kanhaiya, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Hari Singh Bhangi could be expected to fight amongst each other. The Chiefs were independent of each other in matters of governance and administration. The common factor of Guru- Panth and Guru – Granth united them. But in matters of principle there could be differences which could be resolved either through a battle or amicably through a Gurmata. The Chieftains were very firm about their suzerainty and took measures to safeguard their territory and their influence. Each chief was a suzerain in his own way. There were twelve misls – the Bangis, the Nishanias, the Shahids, the Ramgarhias, the Nakkais, the Ahluwalias, the Kanhayas, the Feizulapurias, the Sukerchakiyas, the Dallehwalaas, the Punjgarhias and the Phulkias.2 This basic trait of the Sikhs ,i.e.- that of valour and of asserting one’s supremacy, has infiltrated into the future generations. No Jat Sikh wants to be a follower, each is a leader in his own right. The yearning to be a leader has led the outer forces to divide the Jat Sikhs and

make them fight among themselves. The misls corroded the power of the Sikhs and this division in its ranks presently still leads to weakening their effect. Considering themselves to be superior to Sikhs of the other castes there is also a clash because of caste differences. The clash arises from the fact that though none of the Guru was a Jat Sikh, yet the latter have come to dominate over the affairs of the Sikh masses. They claim to be the guardians of the interests of not only the Sikh masses but also the Gurudwaras. On the other hand, the Khatri, the urban trading class trace their roots to the Gurus and vie to control the Sikh affairs. The clash leads to differences in the political arena. The Jat Sikhs overshadowed the Khatri by the time of the Tenth Guru because of their valor traits. A recent report by K.S. Chawla in The Tribune asserted this point that the non-Jats feel alienated from the Akali Dal. It said, ‘Non-Jats are feeling distanced from the mainstream of the Sikh Panth. For the last three decades no notable second rung leader from among the non-Jats has surfaced in Akali politics.’ It further said that the Ramgarhias formed a bulk of the population in the towns yet they were ignored. Elaborating further it said that the urban Sikhs had been with the Akali Dal till the ascendency of Master Tara Singh.  

Factionalism has always been prevalent among the Sikhs. In fact, the Singh Sabha was also infested with this disease. It could not grow as a movement because of infighting among its leaders. In Punjab politics, at that time, the landed people because of their common interests had got together for political representation. The propertied classes fought for Sikhism but under the garb of looking after its own interests. Even with the formation of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee and Akali Dal the devil of factionalism could not be wished away. The SAD consisted of some moderates who didn’t believe in anti-government activities; there were the extremists who believed in the cause of the Panth as well as the struggle for freedom and there were others who initially didn’t believe in fighting the British and rather believed that the government would help them in the reforms in the Gurudwaras. The last group, later joined the extremists when the British refused to help them. But it was very difficult for a common man to see the difference between a moderate and an extremist leader for many a times the cause of the country and that

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K.S. Chawla, “Non Jats feel alienated from Akali Dal,” The Tribune, Chandigarh, Dec 2, 2004
of the Panth overlapped. But the leaders were divided not only on the basis of the cause they were upholding but also because of the caste and class differences. Each leader had some interest to defend and thus, factions. Another faction, that of the militants differed from the peaceful methods of the Akalis. They found the peaceful and gradual movement stifling and thus framed their own course of struggle which led the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee to denounce them. Even during the time of the British, the government created factions so that it could keep control over the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. The 1926 elections of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee is a case in this point. The, then Governor of Punjab, Malcolm Hailey floated a Sudhar Party which tried to win and guarantee a control of the Governor on the Sikh politics. The divide between the urban and the landed gentry could be seen in these elections. The landed interests claimed to defend not only their interests but also that of the rural masses while the group led by Kharak Singh and Master Tara Singh represented the non-agriculturist urban interests. It was because of factionalism that the Sikhs could not take a decision regarding their attitude towards the Muslim League’s demand for a separate state.

The dilemma during the freedom struggle for the Sikhs was whether to align themselves with the Shiromani Akali Dal or the Indian National Congress. The former body was confused whether to support the cause of the Panth or to join the freedom struggle. The dilemma was whether they should take part in politics to protect religion or use the latter to involve the rural masses in the freedom struggle. Thus, the divide between the Sikh leaders into SAD workers who limited themselves to the cause of the Panth and the other Sikh leaders who were a part of the larger picture of that of the nation. That is why in 1925 with the British recognising the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee’s legal authority to manage the Gurudwaras, the ruler asked the Akalis not to participate in any agitation for the freedom of the country.

This led to differences among the Akali leadership with Master Tara Singh and Baba Kharak Singh refusing to come out of the jails. Other leaders like Mehtab Singh, Giani Sher Singh agreed and were released. Though, the factions joined hands soon after, yet we can see the causes of differences at various points of time in the
Akali leadership. Even at this time the Indian National Congress was approaching the Shiromani Akali Dal because it wanted to reach out to the rural Sikh masses and this could be possible only by being one with Shiromani Akali Dal. The Indian National Congress ignored the religio-political identity of the Shiromani Akali Dal because it wanted to cash on the popularity of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Later on, the Indian National Congress, the Shiromani Akali Dal claimed, ignored the interests of the Sikhs in the Nehru Report of 1929. Because of the Nehru report, differences were created among the Shiromani Akali Dal for there were some who did not want to associate with the Indian National Congress while there were others who wanted to support the Indian National Congress unconditionally. The faction led by Baba Kharak Singh was not with the Congress. The second faction led by Giani Sher Singh demanded 30 per cent representation for the Sikhs. The third faction led by Baba Gurdit Singh and Mangal Singh wanted to give unconditional support to the INC.

Master Tara Singh mediated between the different factions. Alongside, the issues generated there were crosscurrents flowing, which were basically a clash between the urban Sikhs and the rural Sikhs. Till then the leadership had been confined to the urban Sikhs while the rural Sikh masses formed the force of the agitation. The latter were difficult to ignore and gradually they realised their contribution to the activities of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Thus, amongst them rose leaders who wanted not only to be a part of the agitation but also to plan it and execute it. This led to an increase in factionalism in the Shiromani Akali Dal – the clash between the leaders and the once-upon-a-time followers who were eager to emerge as leaders or men of prominence. During the Quit India Movement Giani Kartar Singh wanted to support the British government while the group led by Udham Singh Nagoke wanted to extend co-operation to the programme of the INC.

The first obvious clash was between Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh. The former was the undisputed leader of the Sikh masses and inducted the Sant, a social worker, into politics who later shifted the attention from the urban area to the rural masses. The Sant and his followers worked on the fact that Master Tara Singh was a Khatri, a non-Jat and the reins of the Shiromani Akali Dal were in the hands of the urban Sikhs while the real force to reckon with were the rural masses. They
highlighted the control of the urban Sikhs on the Gurdwaras, its resources and gradually dislodged the Master from his position. The Master in a hurry to consolidate his lost position committed mistakes which were further manifested and made prominent by the lobby consisting of Jat Sikhs.

Whenever the Shiromani Akali Dal has merged with Indian National Congress temporarily, further factions have arisen because of vested interests. For example, in 1956 when the Indian National Congress did not give adequate constitutional safeguards to the Sikhs, Master Tara Singh asked the 23 legislators of his party to leave the Indian National Congress though only one resigned. The rest continued their alliance with the Indian National Congress and remained within the folds because of vested interests though they gave their own arguments to counter the claims of Master Tara Singh.

The clash between the urban and the rural masses has led to consequences which effect the events today too. The Panth, the Shiromani Akali Dal and Punjab politics have come to be divided on caste basis. Moreover, the control of the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee has slipped into the hands of Jathedars, semi-literate people from the hands of the educated people as in the past. These people cannot think beyond caste. For them politics is linked with religion. Fanaticism rules as religion tells them to deal with the affairs of the state. For them democracy, party politics, elections, campaigning all revolves around caste. The influence of caste is obvious because factions are formed on these basis and so are alliances and alignment. Now they don’t talk of Punjabis, they talk of Punjabi-Hindus, Khatris and Jat Sikhs. As long as the Shiromani Akali Dal represented the interests of the Sikh bourgeoisie, it failed to attract the masses. Only when the support structure, the Jat Sikhs were actively involved, could the party widen its base. The Indian National Congress also realises the power of this vote bank i.e. the Jat Sikhs, thus, installs Jat Sikh Chief Ministers from time to time. S. Partap Singh Kairon is a case in this point. With his elevation to the office of the Chief Ministership, the Indian National Congress managed to woo over many from the Jat Sikh masses. The demand of a Sikh state was put on the hold by Nehru and Partap Singh Kairon till they had the support of the rural masses. As soon as Sant
Fateh Singh assumed the leadership of the Sikh masses, the Indian National Congress had to give an ear to the demand of the Sikh state.

Besides caste, pursuit of power also leads to factionalism. We have the example of Lachman Singh Gill who left Master Tara Singh to become the Chief Minister of the state with the support of the Indian National Congress, a party which he had once criticised. Later on Lachman Singh Gill and Master Tara Singh worked together to weaken the position of Sant Fateh Singh. The Master’s group was demanding a Sikh Homeland, a communal demand and working with Lachman Singh Gill who was supported by the Indian National Congress which was resisting the demand of the Sikh Homeland. The rivalry between Jat-Sikhs leads to factionalism. To counter their enemy, they make an alliance with a third party. If they are uncompromising in their loyalty, they are uncompromising in their rivalry too. When S. Gurnam Singh started ignoring the political experience of Sant Fateh Singh, the latter eliminated the former politically.

The leaders who are in power refuse to be ignored while there are others from his caste, his clan with the same traits who are anxious to come to power and become destiny-makers or breakers. Justice Gurnam Singh’s clash with Sant Channan Singh, the leader of the legislative and organisational wing, cost the former his seat. The former was an educated person, one from the elite strata while the other was a ‘Sant’, a spiritual person who headed the spiritual organisation of the Sikhs which made the latter more powerful. This is the result of the leadership passing into the rural hands. After Gurnam Singh, the Shiromani Akali Dal elected Parkash Singh Badal as its leader.

From then onwards, only that leader has come forward who may be educated but should understand the pulse of the people living in the villages, in the rural areas. The leader should be able to understand the problems of the rural masses, he should be able to talk about the sacrifices of the Gurus and his interests should be one with that of the farmers. The leader can be a landlord, one form the bourgeoisie class but should be a ‘son-of-the soil’. The SAD comprises of such people and is led by a leader by these qualities so that the rural masses do not sway towards the Indian National Congress or any other party. In this game of naked politics, each Jat Sikh
wants to emerge as the leader. The qualities, the traits all are the same for they belong
to the same valour class. The crucial point is as to how to exploit any situation well
which will make each of them emerge as a leader. Sant Fateh Singh announced self-
immolation to remain the undisputed leader of the Sikh masses.

With the emergence of Parkash Singh Badal and Tohra, a new kind of
factionalism emerged. Till Sant Fateh Singh and Channan Singh there was no clash
between the leader of the SAD and that of the SGPC. They acted together to curb the
power of the leader of the legislative wing. After their exit from politics, a tussle
started for the control of one person over the office of the Chief Minister, leader of the
SAD and leadership of the SGPC. The proof of this can be seen in the various alliances and fights between Badal and Tohra. If the Shiromani Akali Dal captures
and gives vent to the grievances of the people, i.e. the vote bank, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee controls the resources, the Gurudwaras which are
used by the Shiromani Akali Dal during elections. The Gurudwaras are the foundation of the support struggle for the SAD, so control has to be maintained over it. This
means a crisis with the leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal desiring control over the
Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee and vice-versa. To be the undisputed
leader, one has to be in control over the legislature as well as the organisational wings
of the party otherwise the position can be challenged anytime. In the Sikhs there is a
unique problem of factionalism arising because of the existence of the SAD which is a
political body and the SGPC which is a religious body. The Akali Dal is the political
arm of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee. The former gets its
infrastructure from the latter and yet wants to hold sway over the affairs of the latter.
The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee commands over the hearts of the
Sikhs around the world and thus, is influential. It wants that its dictate should be the
final word as it makes available the infrastructure to the Akali Dal. The Shiromani
Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee has started asserting itself in the recent past. This
leads to clashes in the form of factionalism which could be seen in the infighting among Parkash Singh Badal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra. In the Akalis factionalism
can also be the result of the differences between the moderates and the extremists
within the party. The extremists, once in power, would not want to include the other
communities for power sharing. They would stress on Punjab, Punjabi and the
Sikhs being the major force in the state hierarchy. We have the example of leaders like Lachman Singh Gill, Simranjeet Singh Mann who are fanatically connected to their religion. Their ethos is still rooted in the concept of, ‘Raj Karega Khalsa.’ (Sikhs will rule) And they are not ready to forget the atrocities committed on the Sikhs at any point of time. But they forget that in a democracy this phenomenon does not work. In a democracy it is numbers that count. On the other hand we have the moderates in the party who believe in their religion but are liberal enough to follow the policy of, ‘live and let live.’ They try to hammer out a harmonious equation with the people of other castes as well as other religions. This would help them to abstain from political suicide. Once in power their ministry would be headed by a Jat Sikh but would give some position of importance to leaders of other religions like Hindus, Muslims and even Christians. This has led leaders like Badal to lean towards the Hindu leadership. The party cannot have an alliance with the Congress as that would lead to political suicide so they have combined with the Bhartiya Janata Party. It suits both the parties because their vote-banks are different, the former’s base is in the rural area while the latter’s is in the urban areas. This can lead to clashes between the two factions of the moderates and the extremists. Factionalism, in fact, is not a bad phenomena as it shows the political health of the state. It reflects that free thinking and free exchange of ideas is possible in that state. Factionalism is healthy if there are differences in matters of detail but agreement in matters of principle.

Factionalism has its repercussions. On the basis of this it would be appropriate to argue that there are primarily four major aspects that distinguish factionalism in the SAD from that in the INC. Firstly, the Congress and the SAD present two divergent patterns in regard to their membership, ideology and support structure. The Congress Party’s membership is all inclusive, it claims to represent ‘the legitimate interests of all communal, linguistic, economic and sub-regional groups in the state’. The membership is wide and open to all. ‘...the Congress party claims to be at once the spokesman of all the social and economic segments of the state’s

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population. On the other hand, the membership of the SAD comes mainly from one community – the Sikhs. ‘Akali Dal claims to be the sole spokesman of the Sikhs – particularly of the relatively well-off rural Jat Sikhs’. Ideologically, also the two parties are poles apart. The Congress party claims to be a secular party while the SAD is a religion-based party. The latter draws its support on the basis of religion and fights for the protection and promotion of Sikh religion. Consequently, the nature of factionalism in the two parties is vastly different. The INC is a national party while the SAD is a regional party. The leaders of the Congress party at the State level look to the leaders at the Centre for guidance. They compete among themselves and have to have the blessings of some leader at the Centre. Thus, in the Congress party, factionalism is double-edged, it is two sided. It emanates from top to bottom as well as from bottom to top. Blessings of leaders from the Centre to some individuals or groups in the State lead to factionalism.

On the other hand, the SAD is a regional party. Hence, factionalism emanates only from below. It is one-edged. The rural Jats compete against each other to emerge as leaders. Factionalism starts from the villages and travels right up to the higher echelons of the party at the State level. The Jat temperament is such that everyone considers himself a leader and does not want to be a follower. He does not want to be subservient to somebody belonging to his caste. He considers it as an insult to work or stay under the shadow of another Jat Sikh. The Jat Sikh considers the SAD, his domain, his personal fiefdom over which he must have total control. One reason for this thinking can be a reason, which not many have investigated. The Jat Sikhs are the only community as a whole who got converted into Sikhism. Among the Khatri, the Bhapas there are within the same family, some members who are Hindus and others who are Sikhs. On the other hand, one does not find this phenomenon among the Jat Sikhs in the whole of Punjab, the Jat Sikhs have adopted Sikhism en bloc. This leads them to think that they have a superior claim over the SGPC, the SAD and the State of Punjab.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
SAD is a regional party but it is vastly different from other regional parties in the country. The basic difference is in regard to its membership. If we compare it with the Dravid Munnetra Kazaghram of Tamil Nadu, again this basic difference comes to the fore. Hence, factionalism in Dravid Munnetra Kazaghram (DMK) or All India Dravid Munnetra Kazaghram (AIDMK) is different from factionalism in the SAD. The Dravid Munnetra Kazaghram is a regional party but it draws its membership from all sections of the society. Membership is open to all Tamilians irrespective of caste, class or religion. On the other hand, the SAD opens its arms to the Sikhs only. It represents the interests of the rural peasants and farmers. All its demands are based on religion and the interests of the community. The issues of the SAD are, thus, vastly different from the issues confronting the other regional parties. If we compare the SAD with the Telugu Desam of Andhra Pradesh again the same difference emerges. The factions in the Telugu Desam have emerged because of different family members clamouring to capture the party apparatus. Its membership is open to all; the accession to power is open to all. On the other hand, in the SAD, it is the Jats who constitute the majority of membership and it is only a Jat Sikh who can aspire to lead the party. The major space given to non-Jats is very minimal. Thus, because of its composition, factionalism in the SAD is vastly different from the other regional parties.

The Congress party is a secular party and its rank and file consists of people from all sections of the society all castes, all communities, and all strata's. Thus, the Congress party does not feel the need to have a tie up with "third" political parties as junior partners in the consociational/governmental "club". The membership of the INC is drawn from all religions and all castes so the nature of political alignments within the party is qualitatively different from the nature of political alignments in the SAD whose membership is limited primarily to one community. The Congress feels that it can come to power on its own so does not believe in accommodation of other political parties. The defusionist strategy of the Congress party is essentially aimed at warding off threats that other political parties, singly or jointly, are capable of posing

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7 Ibid., pp. 635-36.
Concessions are doled out in such a way that they cut down the support base and narrow down the base of the other political parties. The concessions are doled out in such a way that the Congress party broadens its own support base and narrows down the base of the other parties. The INC is not dependent on any other party for handing out concessions. Alliances with any other political party is not political compulsion for the INC. In formulating its policies it need not consult other political parties. It is the sole judge for determining the content or timing of concessions, or the mode and pace of their implementation.  

The SAD because of its composition has to make an alliance with some political party. It is a political necessity for having legitimacy. The Akali Dal represents the Sikhs and it cannot radically change or modify its membership pattern. It cannot open its doors to the Hindus and Muslims. If it does bring about this change the Jat Singh community will turn its back to it. The Akali Dal will lose its unique feature. It can change its composition only at the risk of eroding its Sikh membership. This would be damaging to its image. However, it has to find a way out keeping in mind all the options to keep the Sikhs with it and somehow win the Hindu electorate or a section of them. So, it must carve out an alliance with a party which represents the Hindus preferably, the urban Hindus only then it will have legitimacy. But it has only a limited choice, for example, going in an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is unlikely because the Bahujan Samaj Party has its own ambitious plan. Moreover, the membership of the Bahujan Samaj Party mainly comprises of the Scheduled Castes who have since ages been exploited by the Jat Sikh in the rural side. The latter form the main membership of the SAD so this option is virtually closed. The Akali Dal could think of an alliance with the Communist parties or with one of them but again it would not be a happy marriage. This can happen only in some exceptional circumstances because the basis of the Akali Dal is religion and the Communist parties condemn religion. Their very stand is against religion while the Akali Dal’s is rooted in religion. The SAD cannot move a step without quoting

8 Ibid., p. 636.
9 Ibid.
religion and religious issues. The Gurudwaras and its audience are the Akali Dal’s starting points. SAD’s going with the left parties is virtually ruled out. The only option left for the Akali Dal is to have an alliance with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). These two parties do not cross each other rather they are complementary. The Akali Dal’s electorate consists of the rural peasantry while the BJP’s membership consists of the Hindus from the urban areas. The Akali Dal represents the agriculturists while the BJP represents the industrialists, the shopkeepers and the businessmen. The Akali Dal does not feel danger from the BJP as the latter does represent the Hindu electorate but so do the Congress, the Communists and the Bahujan Samaj Party. The BJP’s presence can be felt in the state only with the help of the Akali Dal. It can be the minor partner yet an indispensable partner in the alliance with the SAD. Thus, both need each other for survival in the political arena.

However as soon as the alliance between the SAD and the BJP is worked upon, factionalism brews up in the Akali Dal. In the SAD, as in every other party, there exist the hard-core and the soft-core groups. In the Akali Dal too we have the hard-core who are committed to maintain their separate identity by harping on religious issue and the use of the party to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs. Their plank is to maintain their special position as caretakers of the community. On the other hand, we have the soft-elements within the party who try to carry with them the Hindu elements and others. If the Akali Dal tries to appease the alliance partner, i.e. the Hindu electorate, the hard-core elements within the party expresses discontent and frustration and it generates factionalism. If the demands of the BJP are not accommodated, the soft core gets alienated and there are chances of the alliance breaking up. Thus, it is a very uneasy alliance yet the compulsions of political arithmetic force the Akali Dal to have an alliance with a political party which is primarily a Hindu party. The hard-core elements are not against the Hindus but have to appease their supporters by harping on the issues, which ensures them the people’s support. They cannot move away from their communal ideology. We have had a Tohra or a Talwandi who would argue and take a stand on the question of the party safeguarding the interests of its members – the Sikhs. The SAD needs some pre-poll alliance with a non-Sikh political party to give it legitimacy. But such an alliance itself leads to factionalism between the hard-core and soft-core within the Akali Dal.
disagree on it. The Congress, because of its secular credentials is under no such obligation; hence the factionalism in the INC is of quite a different order. In its intra-party affairs the Congress Party has been accommodating all communities and castes. 'It has always been a divided house'. Since Independence the party has always had at least two factions, each reflecting some definite interest. Unlike the Akali Dal, the Congress party has not split because each group is confident that it would be accommodated in the changing power equations. The Congress party has skillfully managed to harmonise the interests of both the communities - the Sikhs and the Hindus. The Congress party tries to accommodate the interests of both by giving them representation in proportion to their share of the population.

The Akali Dal, instead of accommodating the various interests, forces them either to merge with the party or leave the party completely. The differences also arise in the SAD because there are three major seats of power - the SGPC, a powerful Sikh religious organisation having control over the Sikh shrines, the legislative-ministerial wing controlling the government when the party is in power and the organisational wing of the Akali party. 'One major reason for frequent splits in the Akali Dal is that each of these three (wings) tries to become more powerful than the other two in the system. The three wings rarely work in harmony.' The Akali Dal has always been the political arm of the SGPC. After the Gurudwara Reform Movement, the SGPC tried to control the SAD, which is a political wing, by its religious authority. The Akali party too tries by various means to have control over the SGPC. The tussle goes on. It leads to intense factionalism within the Akali party. The Akali Dal being un-communal, i.e. the power struggle within one community only intensifies factionalism. The Akali Dal cannot accommodate the Hindus because of its this character for it professes to consist of membership exclusively of Sikhs. The Akali Dal unlike any other regional party in any other state of India has this composition because of the demographic realities of Punjab. Moreover, 'some foreign

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11 Ibid., p. 649.
anthropologists like Joyce Pettigrew have tried to ingrain in the minds of Sikh elites that they are a chosen people meant to rule not to be ruled over."¹²

The demographic changes which have occurred since Independence have led to other changes also. The Sikhs who were a minuscule minority (about 2 per cent) in the country were afraid of being absorbed by the Hindus who are a minority in Punjab but a preponderant majority (83%) in the country. The Sikh elite in the Akali Dal finds it easier to whip up communal sentiments on this basis and gain power. They, at times, place unreasonable demands before the Hindu dominated federal authority, which when unfulfilled is exploited as discrimination against the region and particularly against the Sikh community. Within the Sikh leadership there are differences between the rural Jat Sikh peasantry and the urban Sikh leadership. The latter have been marginalised by the former. The urban Bhappa leaders were once at the helm of affairs of the SAD and have been sidelined now which has, invoked in them feeling of alienation within the Akali party.

As Gopal Singh says,¹³ "in the Akali Dal, factionalism starts at the grass root level and goes up the party while in the INC the clash start at the Centre and gradually seeps at the regional level. The conflicts at the Centre has its repercussions at the regional level. In the Akali Dal, factionalism arises because the society is divided into various castes which compete with one another to wield power. The Jat Sikhs have control over the means of production; they are the owners of land so they want to continue with that power. In fact, they do not want it to slip away from their hands so they try to consolidate it further. The conflict is between those who wield power and those who don’t. Within the Akali party there is conflict between the people of the same caste. The Jats do not enjoy seeing somebody from their own caste as a

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¹³ Gopal Singh, Lecture on ‘Factionalism in Punjab’, Department of Correspondence Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, March 31, 2005.
leader. They put in all efforts to see his fall. They can even have an alliance with somebody from the other caste and community to bring about his downfall”.

Thus, factionalism, at times, arises because of traditional loyalties, interests and at other times because of traditional rivalries. Though sometimes ideology and principles are involved, it usually stems from a desire for political power and not for advancement of interests of the Community. The latter reason is quoted to justify one’s protest against the dominant group. As P.P.S. Gill says, “Akalis are like Amoeba. The Congress has taken advantage of factionalism in the Akali Party. The Akalis are good at spoiling their own chances of coming to power.”\(^\text{14}\) However, both the parties suffer because of the evil of factionalism. The infighting takes its toll on the performance of the parties and they cannot function effectively when they are in power or functioning as the opposition.

\(^{14}\) Interview with Mr. P.P.S. Gill, Former Chief of Bureau, The Tribune, at his residence in Sector16, Chandigarh.