Ad Dharm Movement started in 1925 perceived its first aim to be the creation of a new religion. The basic ideological theme which spurred the movement was to build a system of religious ideals and symbols. In fact it was not the creation but the realization that their religion and their community existed since times immemorial. Now the emphasis was upon distinctiveness from Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. At the time of the Movement’s inception, Master Gurbanta Singh, belonging to a village in Jalandhar District, was just eighteen years old. Mangoo Ram who was the main inspirational force came from a village in Hoshiarpur District. Under his guidance, the basic manifesto of the Movement was prepared. The manifests clearly stated:

“\textit{We are the original people of this country, and our religion is Ad Dharm. The Hindu qaum came from outside and enslaved us. When the original sound from the conch was sounded, all the brothers came together–chamar, chuhra, sainsi, bhanjre, bhil, all the Untouchables–to make their problems known. Brothers, there are seventy million of us}
listed as Hindus, separate us, and make us free. We trusted the Hindus, but they turned out to be traitors. Brothers, the time has come: wake up, the government is listening to our cries. Centuries have passed, but we were asleep, brothers. Look at the lines that Manu has written, but he is a murderer. There was a time when we ruled India, brothers, and the land used to be ours. The Hindus came from Iran and destroyed our qaum. They became the owners, and them called us foreigners, disinheriting seventy million people. They turned us into nomads. They destroyed our history, brothers. The Hindus rewrote our history, brothers. There is hope from God (bhagwan) and help from the king. Send members to the councils and start the qaum anew, brothers. Come together to form a better life”.¹

Analysing the manifesto, Jeurgensmeyer writes that this was a myth of power addressed to a people without power. It was intended to communicate the sense of strength that Mango Ram felt belonged to his caste fellows by right. As he explained, partly stating a fact, partly expressing a hope, “The Untouchables have three powers: communal pride (qaumiat), religion (mazhab), and organization (majlis)”² The Ad Dharm

² Adi Dharma Report, quoted in Ibid, p.46
leaders had hoped that these powers could be fostered and sheltered through force of ideology. They endeavored to convince their followers that they were part of a great qaum, and not simply village Chamars, by projecting a mythical past. In so doing they borrowed from other “Adi” movements of the early 1920s the idea that untouchables were the original people of India.³

It was heartening to note that the persons who gave leadership to the Ad Dharm Movement were all literate. Though they were not highly educated, yet most of them were teachers in the schools, hence honourable figures. Master Gurbanta Singh was one them who started his career as a school master in an Arya School at Jalandhar. He came into contact with Mangoo Ram quite early and joined the hand wagon of Ad Dharm is not as a follower but as a leader which his education warranted. The educated leaders of the movement studied and analysed the existing situation and carefully charted the independent course of action.⁴

Two documents–Memorandum submitted in 1929 to the Lt. Governor of Punja Province and the Ad Dharm Report prepared in 1931–give a graphic picture of ideological components of the Movement. As has already been referred to in the introductory chapter, the Memorandum which was submitted by the Ad Dharm leadership which included Master

³ Ibid.
Gurbanta Singh who was the general secretary of the Ad Dharm Mandal at that time, became the Magna Carta of the Movement. The Memorandum is divided into three Parts – ideological by stated position of the community, statement of the present situation and the demands which may ensure the distinct identity of the Dalits. The memorandum states that the members of the Ad-Dharm Mandal Punjab Jullundur City were the representatives of downtrodden community comprising three million souls in the Punjab, and seventy millions in the whole of India, who were disgracefully called the “Sudras” or untouchable. It was known to the British authorities that Sudras belong to an ancient race which ruled India about 5,000 years ago, prior to the invasion of India by the Aryans. These bands of outsiders from Central Asia reigned India, and defeated Sudras’ forefathers, the latter were ruthlessly treated, they were foreign cruel masters in a way which spoke volumes of the barbarous mentality of the so called “Civilized Aryans”. The rest of the conquered race, who due to their self respect, refused to be enslaved were driven away to take shelter in the jungles. It was further stated in the memorandum that the Aryans whose present descendants were called high class Hindus, had all along been treating them with the most inhuman brutality so that their unlucky community numerically large as it was, was now little mere name. Inspite of the fact that there were some highly educated and capable men in their community, still they were not given any honourable status in society. No right of ownership of anything,
vested in them, even we had not the right to safe-guard their individual lives. The deplorable condition of the mute millions of the oppressed community was due to harsh treatment meted out to them by the High class Hindus in consequence of the ‘August’ pronouncement of the ancient Aryans which were embodied in the Manu Smriti and lot of other Hindu scriptures of that type. Further it was stated: “Your Excellency will be amazed to learn that scriptures of the so called religion are replete with the sayings such as that we the Ad Dharmies have been created to serve the high class Hindus, that we have no right to hold any property, that even our wanton murder by a high class Hindu involves him in no difficulty, etc. All our demands have been willfully suppressed by the High class Hindus, and all our attempts at ameliorating our condition have been deliberately trampled upon. We therefore beg to submit the position and demands of our community, which we venture to hope will receive adequate considerations at your hands. We are sorry to say that Hindu officials who appropriated all our rights and privileges have not done any justice to us. All the dealings of the Government with the Hindus mean with the high class Hindus only, with the result that our grievances cannot reach the government. It would be no exaggeration to say that the reforms given to the Hindus have been so given to the high class Hindus only. This being so, we are now under two
Governments, the high class Hindu Government and the present British Government”.

Coming to the question of untouchability, it was stated that owing to the predominance of the Muslims there was less untouchability in this province, as compared with other provinces but as regards political condition, the Suras were not a bit better than the most untouchables of other provinces. They were in the worst condition from the political point of view. Not even a single member of their community had ever been nominated to the local legislative or to any local body although in other provinces such nominations, had been made by the Government to the extent of seats ranging between 1 to 11 in legislatures. The present system of electorate could not be of any use to them because the high class Hindus were steeped with caste prejudices. Therefore the only method open to them should be separate electorate where in their political social and even moral salvation lay”.

The factual status of the community was briefly put as that community consisted of about three millions in the Punjab, and about seventy millions in whole of India. That comparatively speaking they were the most backward people in the Punjab as regard education, public service, social position etc.

5 Private papers of Master Gurbanta Singh in the possession of Chaudhri Jagjit Singh son of Master Gurbanta Singh.
6 Ibid.
They did not believe in the Hindu religion, nor did they hold it in high esteem, therefore they did not wish to call themselves Hindus. Untouchables of different classes being the ancient population of India wished to be called “Ad dharmies” and in the next coming census they should be enumerated as “Ad-dharmis”.

They did not desire to keep any close social or political contact with the high caste Hindus, who thought that they were polluted by mere touch or even by casting off the shadow on them by the untouchables. They tried to count the latter with demographically them so that they might enjoy greater rights at their expense.7

Remedies were suggested in the form of these demands: Necessary arrangement for better education of Ad dharmies (untouchables) boys and girls and national scholarship should be separately given to them and introduction of free primary education; separate representation, in all public bodies and legislatures, selected by the communities of their mandal; a minister in the Punjab province; equal rights of ownership of any property of dwelling houses and common fields as enjoyed by other communities; equal rights of using all District Board public wells, as enjoyed by other communities; proscription of Manu Smriti and all like Hindu scriptures in which contemptuous mentions have been made of their race and community; any mention of them by name of shudra should be strictly

7 Ibid.
forbidden; share in all public services including police, civil, military, railway, education, and medical department etc’ 60% of the untouchables did the work of agriculture with the agriculturists but they gave very meagre share to the poor untouchables. It was noticed that there were large chunks of uncultivated land in the hands of the Punjab Government. Therefore land in the colonies should be reserved for them in the same way as it had been done, for other communities. The Punjab Alienation Act had made them so weak that the people of other communities forcibly made them do their services in return of living in the houses built on their land, because they could not buy any land, even for houses under the Punjab Alienation Act of 1908. Therefore this Act should be repealed; although there were two Acts passed by the Government to prevent the forced labour (Baigar) yet the officials did not care for these Acts and they forcibly made them serve without any payment. The Government should proclaim the forbidding of all sorts of forced labour (Baigar); There had been criminal blame upon their community, while they were free from every crime. Therefore this blame should be wiped off. The natural presumption of innocence should attach to ad-dharmies as well; The leadership also demanded permission to go to the foreign countries, as their condition was very poor; They wanted to call themselves Ad dharmies while the other communities especially Hindus did not like it and they did their best to prevent the Ad Dharmis from doing so, and made them call them selves by
the same hateful word (Shudra) by troubling them in every possible way. Therefore a committee should be appointed by the Government from our community to settle these matters.  

Whether was stated in the Memorandum, the Report, apart from restating the ideology of the Adi Dharm, sketched the activities performed in that direction by the Ad Dharm leadership. The activities showed that the Movement had spread very fast. It had ignited the minds of the Dalits. It was stated in the Report that in India one-quarter of the population is that of the Untouchables: people who were enslaved by the high caste Hindus for the last 5,000 years. These poor people were dethroned from their political and religious status. Fact of the matter was that before the British, all other groups ruling India mistreated. The preset plight of the Untouchables was due to the way these invaders treated them. “The Untouchables were the descendants of the original people. They were the original children of paradise (dharm-khand) and were living a peaceful and spiritual life in their own land when they were attacked and slaughtered. Untouchability was so deeply entrenched that it seemed no power in the world could shake it “Untouchables communal pride (qaumiat), religion (mazhab), and organization (majlis). These were what everyday wanted to take away from

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
them. Whenever they could, these “generous” reform groups attempted to
destroy these traits in order to absorb them.  

The Ad Dharm Mandal, which was founded in 1925 as a collective
organization of all Untouchables in the Punjab, became the protector and
defender of these traits with a concrete programme. These high caste
Untouchable organizations, which shed crocodile tears over the
Untouchables, have tried to destroy the Ad Dharm Mandal but to no avail.
A society based on truth could be shaken. That truth was presented in 1928
to John Simon, Royal Commissioner. One deputation met Governor of
Punjab, Lahore, in Jullundur on 12 October 1929. This day should be
marked as the birthday of Untouchables as a people, for they were then
recognized as human beings. They received rights they never had before:
They got an 8 percent quota for legislative seats in the legislative assembly
of India, and in many provincial assemblies a well. The local government
also recommended 10 percent. The Round Table Conference in London
also mentioned the need for the rights of the Untouchables. The Education
Department also provided many facilities.  

In addition to the political aspect of Ad Dharm Mandal, there had
been greater emphasis on social reform. The religious and organizational
status of the Untouchables had been raised. The founding of the AD Dharm

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10 Ibid.
Mandal had been for humanitarian purposes and to fulfill their duty to humanity. It carried the banner of the downtrodden people, and devoted their entire lives to the cause, so that future generations might follow in their footsteps and follow the cause, a cause which had long been neglected. This report had been prepared for the sole reason of explaining their purposes. So if people ask, “Who are these people? Where did they come from? What are they doing?” they will be able to know.” After detailing about the emergence and programme of the Ad Dharam Mandal, the Report ideologically explained the rise and fall of the Adi people. It stated that Nature created human beings from the original source (adi) at the time that it created all being on the earth. Nature made humans superior to animal, but among humans all were equal. In the beginning, there was no discrimination. There were no differences and no quarrels. There were no such concepts as high or low caste. Everyone believed in one dharm which Nature had given them through intellect and knowledge; this dharm was Ad Dharm. Nature gave birth to these original people in the valleys of the original mountains – the Himalayas. Later on, the original (adi) people spread out. Some migrated to mountains, others to plains. As their numbers increased, so did the search for better places. Some lived in the caves, the mountains, and the plains of Central Asia and the Caucasian mountain. Some groups settled in Europe. Some groups came back to the original land after some time, and were known as Aryans. But there was another group
which did not go to the Caucasian mountains or Central Asia, but settled in the plains near the original mountains, in the original land. These people were the original (adi) people. Before the Aryans returned, this Adis had, great success in such fields as industry, arts, sciences, liberal arts, physical and spiritual arts. They were the most civilized people in the world at a time when others knew nothing of civilization or of science. They excelled in knowledge. And in those places where the rivers of knowledge were flowing today, there were only primitives. They lived in trees and caves, ate bark and leaves, and had no spiritual life. They lived as shepherds and hunters and had no sense of communal identities (qaum). This was their condition when the original land, India, was at the peak of civilization. Peoples of the world considered this land the crown of success, and paid tributes to it and as achievements. They respected and bowed down to its king. There was no enemy, no foe, no fear of foreign invaders, and no sign of internal dissention.”

During this time the Aryans heard about the original land’s civilization and came there. They learned the art of fighting from the local inhabitants, and then turned against them. There were many wars and then the Aryans finally defeated them, the local inhabitants, were pushed back into the jungles and the mountains. Some of them stayed and asked for mercy; they were enslaved and maltreated. The Aryans practiced so much

11 Ibid.
cruelty that the original people forgot their own identity. All signs of their glory remained were destroyed. Ten Manu appeared on the scene. He made some regulations and imposed them on the original people. For example, it was he who started the idea of discrimination, stating how different people were to be treated differently. Such principles of injustice were adopted as values by the Aryans. From that time onward, hundreds of governments came and went, but the original people were still slaves. Aryans have suppressed the original people. Not a single Aryan showed the correct path of freedom to these oppressed people. On the contrary, each generation had been worse than before. The condition of the original people had gone from bad to worse. The Aryans always followed the rules of Manu. Finally Fate decided to change the condition of these poor people. The Ad Dharmi leadership even justified the rule of Islam only because it put an end to the Aryan rule which was tyrannical, unjust, and discriminatory, the age of Islam came. The Muslims ended the unjust Aryan control and Manu’s philosophy with it. They became sympathizers of the downtrodden. They tried their best to get rid of the caste system. But unfortunately at one stage, Hinduism affected Islam and it too fell prey to discrimination. But domination of Aryan was over. After the rise and fall of Islamic government, the British took power. They tried to end the tyranny of injustice. At about the same time there was a Sikh government in the Punjab, but it did not last very long, because of its tyranny. As according to
Ad Dharmis the people preferred the rule of the British to that of the Sikhs.

Even after the British government was established, the Hindu Aryans and the Sikhs did not change their attitudes. They continued to discriminate against people on the basis of so-called high caste and low caste. Swami Dayanand considered the Britishers a threat to Hinduism. He tried to think of a way to keep the untouchables within the Hindu fold. He found an organization called the Arya Samaj. Its sole purpose was to bring all the Hindu organizations together so that the untouchables would not leave their ranks. They used many false fronts to keep the foundations of the Hindu caste system intact. The Arya Samaj established many other organizations. They preached, formed new societies, and started the whole movement of reconversion (Shuddhi). They seduced thousands of Untouchables in the net of reconversion. They conjured up all sorts of hypocritical arguments, saying that untouchability was over and there was no discrimination. The poor untouchable was trapped again by the Hindu Aryan. The fact was that the Hindu Aryans were still followers of Manu. When the untouchables realized that they were trapped by these Hindu Aryans, they wanted organizations of their own. The untouchables themselves started taking an interest in their own welfare; they did not trust the high caste Hindus. Organizations were established, societies were formed and they chose their own gurus.\(^{12}\)

In the beginning of 1925, a society was formed with the name Ad Dharm: Guru Ravidas became the icon of the Ad Dharam Movement. Guru Ravidas, one of the famous untouchable saint-poets of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, is known as a leading star of the Bhakti Movement, especially the nirguna sampardaya or sant parampara (sect or tradition of devotees of a formless God) of the later medieval centuries in North India. He was a cobbler, saint, poet, philosopher, and social reformer, all rolled into one, who employed bhakti (loving devotion) as a method of social protest against the centuries – old system of untouchability.\(^\text{13}\)

He did not discard the religion he was born into, nor did he abandon his so-called degraded caste occupation to move up the scale of social hierarchy, as is often referred to in the case of radical separatism and assimilation models of upward social mobility in India and elsewhere.\(^\text{14}\)

Instead, he chose bhakti as a middle path to contest caste – based social exclusion and oppression. His middle-path method, free from religious rituals and sectarian formalities, was very novel and daring. It emphasized the dignity of labour and compassion for all. It reflected the democratic and egalitarian traits of his social philosophy. It was daring in the sense that he chose to challenge his tormentors by employing the

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\(^\text{14}\) Srinivas, M.N. Village Caste Gender and Method: Essays in Indian Social Anthropology, quoted in Ibid.
iconography of their dress as a symbol of social protest, which was not only highly objectionable but also equally deadly for a low caste person of his times. He challenged the tyranny of the Brahmins and defied their hegemony by adopting the prohibited dress – dhoti (cloth wrapped around the waist), janeu (sacred thread), and tilak (sacred red mark on the forehead) – for the untouchables. It is important to note here that in the popular calendar culture of Punjab, Ravidass is invariably presented in the aforementioned dress code. His iconography seems to work as a suitable pedagogic tool to convey the message of self – respect and the dignity of labour to the downtrodden, who were not only completely barred form entering into the spiritual sphere in a Hindu society monopolized by the priestly class of Brahmins, but also were treated worse than animals because of their low-caste birth and the nature of their occupation. It is in this context that his iconography turns out to be a form of social protest. In fact his life and bani provided a vision to the shudras to struggle for human rights and civic liberties.15

The Ad Dharm Mandal propagated the philosophy of Sant Randass. He presented the vision of an egalitarian model of State (Begumpura), where no one would be discriminated on the basis of caste and religion and everyone would be free from the burden of taxes and worries of food. His

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ideal state was to be free form caste based hierarchies. Also that state was to be free from all types of fears and anxieties. He was of the view that of the inhabitants of a State live in perpetual domination of their rulers, they could not realize their energies and their overall development would be stalled. Another characteristic of that state was that there would be no place for untouchability. Caste was not to be the determining factor of one’s status and existence. Everyone would be equal and enjoy equal rights. Similarly duties would be equally distributed. The pairing of rights and duties showed a unique mix of a political scientist in Sant Randass. There would be a provision for catering to the basic needs of every one. The envisioned state was also to be free from the arrogance of the so-called twice born and every body would be free to move anywhere at one’s will. There was to be no place for apartheid. It would be free from the distinctions of upper and lower, dwija and shudra etc. Everyone would be a friend of all and all would love one another. There would be no space concept of domination and scourge of oppression. Though Begumpura was an ideal state as visualized by Sant Ravidass, it was not just imaginative and impractical. He had a deep understanding of socio-economic and political conditions prevailing during his lifetime. Begampura sehr ko Nau || Dookh Andoh Nahin The Thau|| Na Tasvir Khiraj, and Mael || Khaaf na Khata na taras jawal|| || Ab mohe Khub watan geh pai|| Uhan Khair sada mere bahi|| Rahao (stop)|| Kayamdayam sada patsahi|| Dom na sem ek so
Though Guru Ravidas attired himself like a Brahmin, he never hid his caste. This is what made him a prophet of Dalit consciousness in North India and distinguished his innovative “middle path” from the stereotypical models of religious conversion and assimilation or Sanskritizatoin. He continued with his hereditary occupation of making and mending shoes. While adopting the prohibited dress and other symbols of the upper castes, and at the same time sticking to his hereditary occupation, he tired to show how the lower caste could achieve social mobility without sacrificing or compromising their distinct Dalit identity. It seems that Ravidas’s middle-path model of Dalit social mobility liberated Dalits from what Alfred Schuetz calls the dilemma of “a man without a history”. In other words, it rendered Dalit social mobility possible without sacrificing the social ties and customs of the group of origin (cf. Blau 1956, 290). Indeed, a unique method of Dalit Social mobility!

Ravidas was equally innovative in choosing poetry as a vehicle of social protest. Forty hymns written by Bhagat Ravidas in Guru Granth Sahib are considered the most authentic of his poetry. His poetry, written in

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18 Ronki Ram, Ibid.
the vernacular of a man in the street, is full of radical fervour. It provides “hope for a better world and a fight against exploiters, power-holders and oppression going on under the name of religion. It reflects his vision of the social and spiritual needs of the downtrodden and underlined the urgency of their emancipation. Therefore, he is regarded as a messiah of the downtrodden, who revere him as devoutly as Hindus revered their gods and goddesses, and Sikhs their Gurus. They worship his image, celebrate his jayantis (birth and death anniversaries), recite his hymns every morning and evening, raise slogans such a “Ravidass Shakti Amar Rahe” (the spiritual power of Ravidass live forever), and put faith in his spiritual power”.

This unique middle – path model of Dalit social mobility and social protest based on the negation of the viability of religious conversion, on the one hand, and the utility of following in the footsteps of the upper castes, on the other, was well received in Punjab – a vast Dalit constituency groomed by the Ad Dharm movement – for the following interrelated reasons: i) Dalits in Punjab had a rich background of Ad Dharm leadership, which facilitated the institutionalization of an alternative Ravidass culture in the cities as well as rural area in the state, based on the teachings and lifestyle of Guru Ravidass; 2) the fact that Ravidass himself belonged to one of the lowest castes (Chamar caste) allowed him to act as a catalyst for

20 Ronki Ram, Ibid.

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the adoption of his unique path: 3) Dalits in Punjab were not politically motivated enough to follow radical separatism, perhaps because of the influence of Ad Dharam movement, nor were they willing to tread the path of assimilation because of the fear of losing their very own culture in the whirlpool of the upper castes’ cultural life – style; and 4) they were, rather, well convinced of the potentiality of their indigenous religion (Ad Dharm) to salvage them from the abyss of social exclusion and oppression caused by the asymmetrical and oppressive structures of the Hindu social order. Because Ravidass himself did not embrace any other religion, nor did he try to escape social exclusion by assimilating into the mainstream social system of the upper castes, and above all he belonged to their own cast, the Dalits of Punjab found in him an exemplar of the “middle path.”

Community the causes for the decline of the Ad Dharm movement, Jeurfeus meya one could argue that the Ad Dharm was as political as it was religious, and that led to its undoing. The differences with Gandhi, and the movement’s friendliness towards the British, signaled a shift increasingly towards issues of public policy and away from those cultural matters that launched the movement originally. It was a path laden with compromises, and indeed, the ultimate failure of Ad Dharm as a broad-based movement can be traced back to that departure. Yet the political and cultural elements had been jumbled

21 Ibid, pp. 1345-46.
together in some measure from the very beginning, and what happened to the movement was more complicated than simply a displacement of cultural elements with those political. As the Ad Dharm changed, its political and social contexts changed as well. Ultimately then, the difficulty with the movement was not only that it was becoming more political, but that it was having to change from one form of politics to another.\textsuperscript{22}

Jeurgensmeyer further observes that by the mid-1930s politics in the Punjab was moving from the interaction of social movements and communal organizations to direct competition in electoral politics. In the early 1930s the Ad Dharm had laboured diligently to established itself as a qaum, a separate religious community similar to that of the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and the point had been won in the 1931 census. But the victory was short lived. The Ad Dharm was immediately faced with the need to create kind of identity that would supersede the qaum by forming a political party or by some other means entering into the realm of political representation. The change was baffling to the old Ad Dharm leaders for as they faced a number of political choices. The first election to the Punjab Assembly took place in 1937, and the Ad Dharmis supported independent candidates in the eight constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes. They mounted a campaign reminiscent of the great days of the 1931 census, and

\textsuperscript{22} Jeurgensmeyer, \textit{op.cit}, p.142.
to their own surprises, they swept all but one of the seats. In the urban Jullundur constituency, the Ad Dharm candidate won the elections by a margin of 1,400 votes. The victorious candidate was none other than Seth Kishan Das, the wealthy Boota Mandi leather merchant who had supplied the building for the Ad Dharm headquarters and served as Mangoo Ram’s press agent during the Gandhian counter-fast. The other six victories were those of Master Harnam Das from Lyallpur, Bhagat Hans Raj Sialkot, Gopal Singh Khalsa from Ludhiana, Chaudhry Fakir Chand from Rohtak, Juggal Kishore from Jagadhri and Choudhry Prem Singh from Gurgaon.

The elections had the effect of making more visible what factions already existed in the movement. In the Jullundhar-Hoshiarpur area there was a division between supporters of Seth Kishan Das and other families of Boota Mandi who supported Master Gurbanta Singh. Both groups were loyal to Mangoo Ram, but each had its own following. Gurbanta Singh had been general secretary of the Ad Dharm in 1929; had served enthusiastically and honestly. Gurbanta Singh ran for office in the 1936 elections, unsuccessfully, and the Ad Dharm gave its official backing to Seth Kishan Das instead. Family rivalries and personal disputes had always separated these two camps, and the election had the effect of deepening these differences – ultimately at the expense of the Ad Dharm. It

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24 Ibid., p.143.
25 Ibid.
was not many years after the 1936 elections that Seth Kishan Das and
Master Gurbanta Singh bypassed the Ad Dharm altogether in expressing
their opposition to each other: one took up a central position in Ambedkar’s
organizations and the other became a principal figure in the Congress. The
pattern was not very different in some of the districts of West Punjab,
where dissensions within the Ad Dharm were also exacerbated by the
elections. The lure of office with all the power and status that it seemed to
imply, magnified the personal ambitions of those who had up until then
been content with the political arena that the Ad Dharm provided and
aggravated their rivalries.26

Gopal Singh, Prem Chand and Mulla Singh (who had been elected
previously through the Congress) were also elected as M.L.A. on the
Unionist ticket in 1946. Gurbanta Singh assumed office in the same
elections, beating his old foe, She Kishan Das, who was running with the
support of Ambedkar’s Scheduled Caste Federation. Gurbanta Singh in an
interview on May 8, 1971, claimed he was an independent in that election.
The support base in this election was not clear.27

In June 1946, Mangoo Ram closed the office of the Ad Dharm in
Jullundur City. That, however, was only the official demise of the
movement; in fact, the organization had dissolved many years earlier. There

26 Ibid.
27 Interview with Chaudhri Jagjit Singh Son of Master Gurbanta Singh on 26 February 2011.
was no grand moment of collapse. The movement had simply fragmented and dissolved as events and other social movements had overtaken it. In the final years of the Ad Dharm movement, the high hopes and great expectations had been replaced by factionalism and petty ambitions. The demise of the movement according to Jeurgenomeyer is a story of factions and personal ambition. Eventually, the building became the Ravi Das High School, which continues to exist till today Seth Kishan Das had given most of the money to construct the building. Yet when the building was vacated by the Ad Dharm, it was his rival, Master Gurbanta Singh, who eventually stepped in as custodian of the property and as chairman of the Ravi Das High school came to occupy it Punjab.

Something else, however, had been gained: the creation of politicians was a signal achievement of the movement. Seth Kishan Das helped to found the Punjab Republican party, and Master Gurbanta Singh became leader of the Congress, serving first in the Punjab cabinet of Parap Singh Kairon and then as vice-president of the Punjab Congress Party.  

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