CHAPTER – 5
SANT FATEH SINGH: ROLE IN COALITION GOVERNMENTS

The realization of the dream of Punjabi Suba brought the Akali Dal in the vanguard of the electoral politics of Punjab. Although, the Akali Dal emerged as a governing party yet there were lot of intricacies in the fluidic Punjab politics because the Sikhs never voted exclusively on communal lines and a section of Hindus too, was apprehensive of the emergence of a Sikh dominated political state. Moreover, the Congress party enjoyed considerable support from a section of Sikhs which resulted in the election of more Sikh legislatures from Congress party than that of Akali Dal.  

In the years subsequent to the formation of Punjabi Suba, the Punjab politics reflects two trends. If viewed with a brighter perspective, the contemporary Punjab politics shows flexibility and adaptability of the Indian political system which facilitated the intercommunal collaboration of Akali Dal and Jan Sangh. But there is no denying that this alliance was formed despite the fact that the then Jan Sangh president had gone on record to regard the Sikh as part and parcel of the Hindu society. Coalition politics in Punjab is a nice model of collaboration of two different parties professing different ideologies. Akali Dal and Jan Sangh were miles apart as far as the susceptible issue of religion was concerned but they somehow decided to work together for political gains, thereby bringing the Hindus and the Sikhs on a common platform.

The Indian nation is really a kaleidoscope of religions and castes. Its multi-faceted society demands multi-party rule as there is no dearth of political parties based on religion and cast in India. The possibility of a single caste, religious or racial group holding the reins of power is always ruled out. Consequently, this unity in diversity can

only be achieved by forming a coalition government and Punjab was no exception to this. The repercussions of the first anti-Congress wave of the year 1967 were felt in Punjab too. The formation of Punjab Suba coincided with the first of two anti-Congress waves which affected the mass base of Congress in 1967 and 1969 respectively. The denial of demands of various groups in the different parts of the country and crying wolf over the possible balkanization of the country had frustrated the Indian masses. The Dravidian movement of Tamil Nadu was the foremost campaign which focused on empowering the people of this particular region. Punjab followed suit and an era of coalition governments dawned in this part of the country. The Akali Dal along with the Jan Sangh, the Republican Party, few Independent members and the outside support of Communist Party of India, formed a coalition called ‘The People’s United Front’. All the parties agreed upon an Eleven Point Programme. The most important issues were good administration, price check, and exemption of land revenue to small farmers. The alliance was, in fact, a political compromise engineered by the stalwarts from all the parties. The Sant had, meanwhile, earned the reputation of being the harbinger of the Hindu Sikh unity. His image was crucial in bringing the two major parties of this alliance i.e., Akali Dal and Jan Singh on the same platform. However, a perusal of the contemporary mainstream newspapers brings out that the alliance was effected out of political compromise to exercise power.

Before analyzing the working of the coalitions in Punjab and the role of Sant Fateh Singh, an objective study of the policies and the activities of the Akali Dal in the few months preceding this coalition are vital for reaching at fruitful conclusions. For this, a study of the

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2 S. Bhatnangar and P.S. Verma, "Coalition Governments", in Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab (edited) by Paul Wallace and Chopra, 1988, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.
3 The Tribune, 5 March, 1967.
4 The Patriot, New Delhi, March 4, 1967.
election manifestos of both the Akali Dals is vital. The election manifesto of Akali Dal (Sant) before 1967 assembly elections had a lot to offer to the people of Punjab. But the manifesto lacked any clear political or economic formulation. In order to appease every section it became full of platitudes. Among the prominent allurements which may be listed here are: Introduction of urgent land reforms, state trading in food grains, struggle for nationalization of banks, more aid to the newly carved state and curbing monopolies. A brief perusal of the manifesto, manifests the change in the standpoint of the Sant who was now all in all of Akali Dal. This shift in the Sant’s standpoint is clearly visible although it is not radical. At this juncture the Sant is seen emphasizing more on economic well-being of the people as a whole than the particular grievances of the Sikhs. While the Sant decided to move with time and cash the anti-Congress wave resulting from governments’ failure at economic and strategic (diplomatic) fronts, the Master Dal continued to rely on the same Sikh homeland issue. Master Dal wanted a Sikh homeland within the Indian union and its status at par with Jammu and Kashmir. But masses incited by susceptible issue, sooner or later return into the hands of the leaders which are secular minded and which try to take along every section of society. The reality check often brings out that the masses are moved more by their interests and fears than by issues involving religion, regionalism or separatism.

A meeting held at Khanna finalized the future contours of the relationship between the coalition partners of The People’s United Front. As already told, the coalition was projected as a political compromise by the mainstream press which highlighted the proverbial sea of difference between the coalition partners as far as ideology and

stand point were concerned. Akali Dal’s keenness to rule in Punjab came to light when it decided to share power with different coalition partners which ranged from extreme left (Communist Party of India) to extreme right (Jan Sangh) wings. The Sant not only took the initiative for negotiation with almost all the non-Congress parties but also tried to demolish extreme communal trends within the party. So much so that the leader of Akali legislative party in the existing Punjabi legislative Assembly declared that even if the Akalis were in a position to from an exclusive Akali government after the election, he wouldn’t favour it. The Sant stressed the need for the communal harmony and didn’t refer to any particular Sikh grievance before and during the elections.

Except some minor incident of violence, the 1967 elections for the Punjab Assembly were peacefully conducted. The election results of the first elections of newly carved Punjab State had lot of ramifications as per as future course of Punjab politics was concerned. That Master Tara Singh faction was fighting a lost battle, is visible from the study of contemporary periodicals. This election proved the waterloo for the Master faction, the leader of which had so long dominated the political scene of Punjab and the Sikh demands. The faction only got two seats and 4.5 percent of total votes polled. While the master faction was badly routed in the elections, the Sant Akali Dal achieved moderate success by winning 24 assembly seats and getting 20.5% of total votes polled.

Coming back to the narrative, the first general elections held on February 21, 1967 immediately after achievement of Punjabi Suba had ten political parties plus independents in the electoral battle. The

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8 The Tribune, 5 March, 1967; Also The Patriot, 4-5 March, 1967
two Akali Dals were formally called the Akali Dal Sant and the Akali Dal Master. They got 35%, 24% and 7.20% of the total votes polled out of 8 women candidates in the foray, none belonged to Akali Dal. The voter turnout was 71.18%. Except the two Dals, all other eight parties enjoyed the status of national parties at the time of elections. Bhartiya Jan Sangh got 21.19% of total votes polled.\textsuperscript{12}

Although, electoral politics is much difficult to be generalized but the Sant Akali Dals’ moderate success can be traced to the Sant’s emphasis on political and economic issues, moderate slogans and his refusal to toe the line of Master Tara Singh as far as susceptible communal issues were concerned. Astonishingly, the enmity between both the Akali Dals had made the Sant faction more acceptable to the masses rather than causing damage to the both factions which usually happens in the case of a split. As far as the electoral performance of the parties concerned, a great number of factors accentuated the already worsened political situation in Punjab. As India moved on to the third five year plan; tax burden, inflation, increasing dependence on foreign did and increase in military expenditure had increased the desperation of masses which had further escalated the social unrest, increased the crime rate and the hatred against the virtual Congress monopoly over political arena of the country.\textsuperscript{13} This desperation erupted in the form of rejection of Congress candidates in many parts of the country.

The Sant was fortunate enough to control a regional party when most of the country was boiling with rage against the malfunctioning of the largest national party of the country which had failed to gather any achievement in its kitty after the independence. It would not be out of context to list another reasons for the Congress reverses as the change in the political views of the Sikh farmers, who saw in the Sant,


\textsuperscript{13} Baldev Raj Nayar, The Modernization Imperative and Indian Planning, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1972, pp.73-74.
a potential leader of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{14} The rout of the Master faction which contested elections purely on the basis of religious issues showed that the Sikhs were not interested in belligerent postures or efforts to erode the Sant’s personality but in socio-economic programme which aimed at their well being.\textsuperscript{15} But the Sant who had been a religious preacher and a mass-mobilizer before his entry into politics, now found it difficult to solve intricate problems of coalition politics.

Soon after the formation of coalition government, there started minor clashes between the two major coalition partners i.e., Akali Dal and Jan Sangh. The Sant accused Satya Pal Dang a leader of Communist Party of India, of originating and fomenting labour strike in Punjab while misusing the offices of the government.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, the Jan Sangh refused to agree to the proposal of making Punjabi, the official language of the state. It was an irony of the fact that one of the coalition partners, Jan Sangh was not agreeable to the declaration of making Punjabi as the official language while the State itself had been carved out due to the linguistic reorganization of the parent state.

But it solely went to the credit of the Sant that the United Front was organised and the coalition government formed. The Sant played a central role in forging an alliance between different parties who had been at loggerheads in past and there was a sea of difference in their opinions. This successful effort to bring together the Akalis and the Jan Sangh were nothing short of a miracle. There is no denying that the Jan Sangh, who stood only for the promotion of the Hindu interests had joined the coalition because it had realized that it could achieve its objectives by political leverage which was possible only if it aligned with Akali Dal to form a non-Congress govt.\textsuperscript{17}

To develop the chemistry between both the factions of the Dal,

\textsuperscript{15} Gurmit Singh, \textit{History of Sikh Struggles, Vol II}, p.145.
\textsuperscript{16} A.S. Narang, \textit{Storm over Sutlej, op.cit.}, p.183.
\textsuperscript{17} Dalip Singh, \textit{Dynamics of Punjab Politics}, Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 1981, p.931.
the Sant started his efforts, he got an opportunity in the form of death of his erstwhile political Guru Master Tara Singh who died on 22 Nov. 1967. His death created a void in Master Akali Dal, consequently, Master Tara Singh’s death paved way for the merger of the two Akali Dals. This became possible after the famous Batala Resolution was passed at Batala conference which was staged to accommodate the needs of different groups with different political orientations within the Akali party. In the core of his heart, the Sant had a keen desire to bring the two main Akali factions and other splinter groups of the Sikhs on a common platform and reorganise the erstwhile united Akali Dal.\textsuperscript{18} In this conference, the Sant openly criticized the Union government for its alleged interference in the working of state government in Punjab which he was managing from behind the curtain.\textsuperscript{19} The conference and the subsequent resolution passed at Batala occupies an important place in the political annals of Punjab and inter-state relations. Superficially, the resolution was passed in favour of more state autonomy but the main emphasis was on the unification of Master Akali Dal with the Sant Akali Dal.

The Batala resolution was marked by mild and reasonable speech although it was strongly in favour of more powers for states which was the favorite demand of all non-Congress governments in many states.\textsuperscript{20}

In this conference, the Sant openly criticized the union government for its alleged interference in the working non-Congress governments in all parts of the country because he was aware of the same sentiments in many parts of the country. Dravid Munetra Kazgham (DMK) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) were in the forefront when it came to criticism of central government. We can find

\textsuperscript{18} Sant Fateh Singh, Abdul Yaadan, \textit{op.cit.} p.34.
\textsuperscript{19} D.C. Pavate, \textit{My Days Governor}, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.90.
the roots of the more rigid and the famous Anandpur Sahib Resolution in the Batala resolution, which was the brainchild of the Sant. The Sant declared, “The state governments should be made more autonomous to a maximum possible extent. The Sant also demanded a change in methods of appointment of a governor. He cited the example of USA where the appointment of the governor was not affected by whim and fancy of the federal government and the states had much say in his appointment.21

Apart from the Sant, the other Akali dignitaries and leaders which made this Akali unity a reality were Giani Puran Singh, Prof. Bharpur Singh, Giani Bhupinder Singh, S. Kapur Singh, S. Jiwan Singh Umranangal, S. Pritam Singh Sarihra, Sant Chanan Singh, S.Hargurnaad Singh S. Amar Singh and Jathedar Santokh Singh.22

As already stated, the Batala conference paved the way for the unity of both the Dals and filled the void which had been created after the death of Master Tara Singh. To placate the Sikh homelanders of the Master faction, the merger agreement was meticulously drafted with instruction from the Sant himself. A brief perusal of the agreement throws light on the political sagacity and acumen of the Sant.23 The agreement defines the political goal of the united party as, “...to establish sovereign Sikh birth right of the Khalsa: within the frame work of the Indian constitution...” The achievement of a “well demarcated territory enjoying a constitutional autonomous status” was said to be the very basis of the organization and constitution of the party.24 That the Sant was adept at placating the warring factions is no doubt true, but he also had enough political wisdom to move a step backward in order to move two steps forward whenever the

22 Gurdwara Gazette of November, 1968 (issued under statutory requirements of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925)
23 Gurdwara Gazette, November, 1968
situation demanded. The Batala resolution highlights this trait in the personality of the Sant. This resolution was a clear cut departure from his earlier political methods which relied mainly on secularism and emphasized on the Hindu-Sikh unity. Moreover, it was this Akali unity which later helped the united Akali Dal to capture 43 seats in the 1969 assembly elections.

The ideological moorings of the different coalition partners resembled a “cocktail of ideologies”. But they had a common objective, i.e., to sabotage any effort of the Congress party to form government in Punjab.\(^\text{25}\) The coalition partners lacked even a common mass base. So much so that their leaders started talking diametrically and gave contradictory statements even during the poll campaign. However in terms of the social philosophy, the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh could be branded as conservative. Both believed in the \textit{status quo} than change. This was perhaps the more cohesive factor than any other which kept them together.

After his name was proposed by S. Lachman Singh Gill (then belonged to the Sant Dal), Justice Gurnam Singh was unanimously elected leader of legislative party and consequently elected chief minister of the new government. On 7 March, Gurnam Singh took fifty three members of the assembly to demonstrate before the governor, his strength in the assembly. The governor, Mr. Dharamvir invited him to form the government. On 8 March, 1967, Justice Gurnam Singh formed a coalition government with four ministers namely, Dr. Baldev Parkash (Jan Sangh) S. Lachman Singh Gill, (Akali Dal), S. Rajinder Singh sparrow (Independent) and S. Piara Singh Dhanowali (Republican).\(^\text{26}\) The ministry was twice expanded, increasing the number of ministers to sixteen. While analysing the distribution of portfolios among ministers, it is clear that coalition


partners of Akali Dal got larger chunk of ministries than Akali Dal which was disproportionate to their strength in the assembly. To accommodate the seven defectors from Congress and make the coalition more stable, they were included in the ministry.\textsuperscript{27} The ministry took oath at 5 P.M. on 8 March 1967. The Chief Minister justified the subsequent expansion of ministry by saying that it was done due to the work load and as a response to the wishes of the people of Punjab.\textsuperscript{28} As soon as the ministry took oath, the Congress party set the process of defection in motion with Bhajan Lal as the first defector from the front to join the Congress party.

As opposition and confrontation are inherent in politics, both horizontally and vertically, some members of the front were dissatisfied with the working of the Chief Minister. They also objected to behind the curtain control of the Sant, who was a virtual king maker now.

There is no denying that in the struggle for survival, the ideals and programmes for which the front was formed were thrown to the winds. The Congress, as it was natural tried to sabotage the unity of the front and set the process of defection in motion with Bhajan Lal as the first defector from the front the join the Congress party. Right from the beginning, the inclusion of Communist Party in the coalition had become a common problem for the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh. The day united Front government started working, Mr. Sat Pal Dang, a Communist Party of India (CPI) minister started mobilizing the party cadre for fomenting the labour agitations. As already told, the Sant publicly accused him of fomenting labour agitations.

Even inside the front, some members were not satisfied. So they formed a coterie under leadership of erstwhile maharaja of Patiala. This separate group formed inside the assembly comprised Darbara

\textsuperscript{28} The Tribune, 22 Nov, 1967.
Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, Dr. Jagjit Singh Faqir Chand, Raja Narinder Singh and Sardara Singh Kohli of Patiala. They alleged that eleven point programme was not honestly implemented but on the same day issued a statement that they would continue to be part of the coalition.\textsuperscript{29} In the last week of May, 1967, there was an intense activity among opposition members of assembly who wanted a show of strength on the floor of the house. Almost twelve legislators were supposed to be sitting on fence and were consequently wooed by both the sides. Moreover, S. Harcharan Singh Hudiara was getting disgruntled with the front. The main cause of Hudiara’s dissatisfaction was that, he was not even given a berth in the ministry. He blamed the Akali high command for having ignored the serious workers and consequently, the people of Punjab.\textsuperscript{30}

After close observation of political equation, the Congress party tabled a no-confidence motion against the government on 26 May, 1967 but if failed in 104 member house by 57 to 46 votes. Interestingly, S. Harcharan Singh, Hudiara, S. Hazara Singh Gill and Maharaja of Patiala voted against the government. As a consequence, Harcharan Singh Hudiara, H.S. Gill, Shiv Singh, Jhavan and Arjan Singh Budhiraja were expelled from the Dal on the same day.

The same day i.e., on 26 May, 1967, H.S. Hudiara organised a third Akali Dal at Chandigarh where a meeting of 200 persons passed a resolution expressing lack of confidence in the Sant’s leadership. Hudiara briefed the press citing the reasons behind his actions as the Sant’s unwillingness to introduce Punjabi at district and secretariat levels.\textsuperscript{31} Hudiara’s Akali Dal failed to cut some ice as its wire puller Lachman Singh Gill remained at the top of its affairs 23\textsuperscript{rd} of August. The United Front ministry was perhaps the oddest of all the coalitions formed till then. Gian Singh Rarewala dubbed this ministry as a

\textsuperscript{29} The Tribune, 25 May, 1967.
\textsuperscript{31} The Tribune, 27 May, 28 May, 1967.
“marriage of inconveniences”. 32

Further accentuating the crisis, Justice Gurnam Singh, the Chief Minister, could not carry on with the Akali leadership and was averse to being dictated by the unlettered the Sant duo (Sant Fateh Singh and Sant Chanan Singh), who chiefly comprised the high command of the Dal. This tussle between the organizational and the governmental wing was a serious blow to the coalition. The Akali Chief Minister felt that the Sant expected him to present all the crucial issues of the state to him for final decision. While the Sant was of the view that the fate of the newborn state was to be guided and controlled from the Akal Takht, the chief minister was more conversant with the secular functioning of the modern government. So, he refused to abide by the wishes of the Sant. This gap or lack of communication between the two Akali leaders, was perhaps the first catastrophe of the Dal.33 This problem appears the same the controversy between Acharya J.B. Kriplani and Jawahar Lal Nehru. The former resigned for the collective good, and Mr. Nehru’s writ ran all in the Congress party. But the Akalis had different mindset and hence the resultant internecine feuds. This controversy was not a peculiar development confined to Punjab. It occurred and continues to occur at all political levels in the whole nation. The tussle between the organisational and the governmental wings of a ruling party is imminent. As regards the Akali Dal, this controversy was relatively acute because the line dividing the religion and the politics was comparatively thin and the organizational wing of the party comprises of the Gurdwara based religious leaders who expect to have much say in all the matters pertaining to the governance. Moreover, the demographic profile of the new born state was such that the Akali Dal

couldn’t form a government of its own accord. It was only possible by forming a coalition with representatives of Hindus who were forty percent of the gross population of the state. That is why the Akali Chief Minister couldn’t afford to delegate the decision making power to the Holy Akal Takht. To retain power, he had to balance the interests of both the communities. The crux of the problem lied in the clash between religious and secular interests, which manifested itself in the form of tussle between the Sant and the chief minister. The second but more obvious problem that hindered the smooth working of the government was the perpetually simmering discontent between two major coalition partners i.e., the Jan Sangh and the Akali Dal. The harmonious functioning of the coalition was disrupted by contradictory religious leanings.

At this juncture, S. Lachman Singh Gill, an ambitious politician, took advantage of the open discord between the Chief Minister and the Sant. There is no doubt that S. Lachman Singh had support of majority of the Sant’s followers who had become legislators due to the good will of their benefactor. Almost three quarters of the Sant group legislators acknowledged his newsprung leadership. When the Punjab assembly met for the session on 22, November, 1967, S. Lachman Singh Gill defected from the front and formed ‘Janta Party’ consisting of 17 members namely, P.R. Khannowa, Faqir Chand, B.N. Makkar, Ram Parkash, Mahant Karnail Singh, P.S. Majhithia, Harbhajan Singh, Jasdev Singh, Narinder Singh (Raja) Dr. Jagjit Singh, Bhaktawar Singh, Shingara Singh Gurcharan Singh, S.S. Kohli, Hardit Singh and Natha Singh.34 With the above defection the resultant party position in the house was as follows: United Front, Janta Party 17, Independents 2, Congress 44. As a result of above defection and formation of ‘Janta Party’ the United Front ministry had

34 The Tribune, 23, November, 1967.
to resign on 22 November, 1967.\textsuperscript{35}

The 22\textsuperscript{nd} November of 1967 was, perhaps the most ill-fated day in the history of Punjab politics because on the same day Master Tara Singh, the veteran politician of the Sikhs died and the first endeavor of the Akali Dal to rule in Punjab failed. There is no denying that the Master died a neglected man in politics. Except his staunch supporters, nobody visited him in PGI, Chandigarh where he met his fag end. To the utter discomfiture of the Sant, nineteen M.L.A.s lead by Lachman Singh Gill sent a note to the governor informing him that they had broken their ties from the United Front and had formed a new party known as The Punjab Janta Party. The aims of the new political outfit were defined as working for a clean public life, to give security of life and property to the people and to strengthen the communal harmony.\textsuperscript{36} In the words of the, Governor Mr. D.C. Pavate, “only material point for my consideration was whether Sardar Gill's ministry, when formed would command majority or not…….. This was an occasion for the Aya Rams and Gaya Rams to make a good harvest……. Quite a few MLAs were reported to have taken money from both sides more than once.\textsuperscript{37}

It was now the prerogative of the governor to either dissolve the assembly or watch the further course of the events as there was a great possibility of the Congress high command asking the Congress legislative party to extend succor to this group of newly defected MLAs. In fact, Lachman Singh Gill had been working in close collaboration with the state Congress leaders like Giani Zail Singh and Gian Singh Rarewala and had been assured of Congress support if he succeeded in toppling over the first non-Congress govt. of Punjab. Quite convincingly, Gill had appealed to many political aspirants within the Dal and to those who wanted speedy implementation of the

\textsuperscript{35} The Tribune, 23 November, 1967.
\textsuperscript{37} D.C. Pavate, My Days as a Governor, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.70.
Punjabi language programme. He appealed to legislators that while Akalis had fought on their own for achieving Punjabi Suba, top rung ministerial positions had been given to the Jan Sangh and communists. He argued that it was only and only Jan Sangh which was resisting the implementation of Punjabi language at every level and until the Akalis severed ties with Jan Sangh, they would not be able to implement Punjabi language in the state. But the truth of matter is that Lachman Singh Gill had a longer standing in the Dal than Justice Gurnam Singh, the Chief Minister. In fact, the selection of Justice Gurnam Singh to the exalted office had made many Akali stalwarts Jealous. To achieve political success, Gill resorted to identifying the weakest links in the chain and exploited the issues where the United Front government had failed to deliver.

Coming back to the narrative, the Governor declined to accept the advice of the outgoing chief minister to dissolve house and order fresh election as he thought it was a ‘waste of public money’. On 24th November, the governor invited Gian Singh Rarewala to form the government as he was now the leader of the largest party in the house after the Akali Dal fell prey to the defection. When he refused and expressed his inability, the governor invited Lachman Singh Gill, the leader of a splinter group of twenty legislative members but having the outside support of the Congress party. Although, it would be presumptuous to comment on the actions of the Governor because this office itself is considered above all politics and is considered constitutionally transparent yet it became clear enough that the Congress was a party to the conspiracy to topple the Akali Dal led coalition government.

Accordingly, Lachman Singh Gill formed the next government on 25 November, 1967. It was illogical to assume that a minority

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government led by S. Lachman Singh Gill could stay in power for long although it enjoyed the outside support of the Congress. Lachman Singh Gill formed his ministry including Ram Parkash Das, Parkash Singh Majithia, B.N. Makkar, Dr. Jagjit Sing, and Faqir Chand.

The Sant Akali Dal expelled Lachman Singh Gill and his supporters from Akali Dal on 2nd December, 1967. However, the Master Dal offered to give full support to the Gill ministry if it worked for the benefits of the Sikhs. After taking charge, Mr. Lachman Singh Gill cared more for political vendetta than performing as a chief minister. On the very next day, after he became Chief Minister, he accused the leading members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee of having committed the financial irregularities while managing Gurdwaras. He threatened to remove them and register cases against them. Being the General Secretary of this August institution of Gurdwara administration, Gill knew all the loopholes in the Gurdwara administration. As the Chief Minister, he tried his best to disrepute the Sant and his lieutenant Chanan Singh. In fact, he wanted to gradually extinguish the influence of the Sant in Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and control its vast resources with help of the Master Dal and the Congress. He ordered the arrest of Sant Chanan Singh and other office bearers by fabricating cases of embezzlement against them. He wanted to break the back of the Sant by dislodging him and his supporters from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. These arrests created great sensation in Punjab those days.

But there is no denying that S. Lachman Singh Gill stole the March over United Front Ministry as far as Punjabi language was concerned. It was during his brief stint as the chief minister that the Official Language Act, 1967 was passed and Punjabi became official

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40 *The Tribune*, 4 December, 1967.
language of the state. Later on Punjabi was introduced as the official language up to the district and secretariat levels. This was a strange case of political will versus political compulsions where a minority government performed a long pending task while the earlier United Front government followed dilatory tactics. The Congress party had given its outside support to the Gill ministry only to torpedo the United Front government. Soon, the relations between S. Lachman Singh Gill and the Congress Chief S. Gian Singh Rarewala worsened. Apart from ego clash between S. Lachman Singh Gill and S. Rarewala, the Congress party found it difficult to allow Gill ministry to continue because S. Lachman Singh Gill had begun trying to defect some Congress members. Mr. Gill even announced his intention to include three Congress defectors namely Tikka Jagtar Singh, Shiv Chand and Shingara Singh into his cabinet.

Gill tried his best to establish his hold over Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee with help of Congress party and Master Akali Dal. Some members of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee who belonged to Master Akali Dal even boycotted the its General meeting citing the reason behind it as the shifting of usual venue of such a meeting from Teja Singh Samundari Hall to Sri Akal Takht Sahib. Even an injunction was obtained from Additional Judge Amritsar, restraining Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee from holding such meetings at the Holy Akal Takht. The order was vacated on an appeal to Punjab and Haryana High Court.\textsuperscript{42} But the efforts of Gill bore no fruit as these backfired upon Gill himself. His opponents portrayed him as an agent of the anti-Sikh forces trying to sabotage the influence and the sanctity of the Sikh institutions. A member of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee even filed a complaint against the eligibility of Gill for as a member of the august institution of Gurdwara management as he was allegedly addicted to

\textsuperscript{42} Gurratanpal Singh, \textit{Illustrated History of Sikhs}, p.260.
alcohol which was against the tenets of the Sikh religion. The Gill interlude was marked by extreme instability and floor crossing. Even the government budget for the financial year 1968-69 was pushed through a hostile legislature. The speaker, Col. Joginder Singh Mann adjourned the assembly for two months in the midst of the budget session. This awkward constitutional deadlock was broken by taking recourse to extra constitutional remedies. The Punjab and Haryana High Court declared the budget as invalidly passed but the Supreme Court gave a favorable judgement for the government. Justice Gurnam Singh waited upon the President and presented to him a voluminous report highlighting corruption and mal-administration of the Gill ministry.

On the other hand, the Sant group was quite right in criticizing this minority government whose existence depended on the outside support of the Congress. Moreover, this outside Congress support was unheard of, in recent political history. Yet this support continued till the opposition mobilised the public opinion at such a large scale that Congress found it difficult to provide the proverbial oxygen mask to a government whose very birth took place on ventilators.

The fact that the Congress party failed to utilize various opportunities to overthrow the government because its central leadership lacked trust in Gian Singh Rarewala, the leader of Congress legislative party; becomes visible from the statement of Gian Singh Rarewala which he gave on the eve of the mid-term elections in November, 1968. He disclosed that the Congress support to this political circus had continued without his approval. The Congress high command was averse to any Sikh leader in the State organisation who refused to act as its stooge. Thanks to the efforts of the Sant, the

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44 D.C. Pavate, My Days as a Governor, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, p.84.
45 Ajit Singh Sarhadi, Punjab Suba, p.465.
Congress party had to withdraw its support to a minority government due to pressure of public opinion which was mobilized by the Sant.

Be so that as it may, the Congress high command instructed every legislator of Punjab assembly to withdraw support from the Gill ministry as it was apprehensive of Gill’s keenness in originating defections.\textsuperscript{46} On 20\textsuperscript{th} August, the withdrawal of support was made public and on the same day, Gill submitted his resignation to the governor. Presidents’ rule was proclaimed on 23 August, 1968, which lasted till 17 February, 1969.

During this, the Sant tried his best to woo all the splinter groups present in the political arena of Punjab. Even after the failure of the first Akali-Jan Sangh coalition to complete five years in office, Akali–Jan Sangh relations remained cordial on the whole. Under the patronage of the Sant, the Akali Dal continued its alliance with the Jan Sangh. The Proclamation of President’s rule made the mid-term elections inevitable. The Sant was also able to reach full accord on seat adjustment with the minor parties like the Republication Party of India and Samyukta Socialist Party.\textsuperscript{47} During this phase, the Sant got an opportunity to win over the other Akali group. Master Tara Singh’s death created a void in the leadership of his group, which was filled by the Sant when both the groups united at Batala Conference.\textsuperscript{48}

In the 16\textsuperscript{th} All India Akali Conference, the Sant openly criticized the Union Government for its alleged interference in the working of the state government in Punjab. He blamed the Congress leaders for sabotaging the plans of the Akali Dal which he called the only real political wing of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{49} The Sant was aware enough that voices for more state autonomy were raised in many parts of the country,

\textsuperscript{46} D.C. Pavate, \textit{My Days as a Governor}, p.72.
\textsuperscript{47} J.C. Anand, “Mid Term Elections in Punjab”, \textit{Political Science Review}, vol.10, No.1 and 2, Jan-June 1971.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Tribune}, Ambala, 29 Sept, 1968.
notably by DMK and Communist Party of India (Marxist) in their bastions. This conference became a centre where volley of protests had poured from all the Sikh circles and more than one lac people attended this conference.\textsuperscript{50} The Sant demanded certain changes in the federal set up of the country and the introduction of safeguards for the state governments. The Sant declared that the state governments should be given more powers and should be made autonomous to a sufficient extent. The Sant demanded change in the appointment of the Governors on the pattern of United States of America and demanded a paradigm shift in the role of the governors as he suspected the transparency of the Governor in Punjab during recent crisis.\textsuperscript{51}

As far as the Akali politics is concerned, the Sant realized that some concrete steps were required for bringing all the warring factions on the same platform. From a perusal of the Sant’s orations at this conference, it seems that his policy was a clear cut departure from his earlier politics of secularization and emphasis on Hindu Sikh unity. One can find the cornerstone of the famous Anandpur Sahib resolution in the Batala resolution which was brainchild of the Sant himself. Both the Akali sides, i.e., the Sant and other splinter Akali groups including the Master faction had now realized that if they wanted to hold the reins of power, they must work together. The recent coalition debacle and the way Lachman Singh Gill had exploited the political situation in his favour, had made Akalis realize that Akali unity was the only solution and panacea for all the ills.

The above conference paved the way for merger of the two Akali Dals, to placate the Sikh homelanders of Master Tara Singh, the Sant emphasized on the Akali unity. A merger document was prepared which was meticulously drafted by the Sant himself. The agreement

\textsuperscript{50} The Tribune, Ambala, 29 Sept, 1968.

\textsuperscript{51} The Tribune, 29 Sept, 1968.
defined the political goal of the party as to establish the sovereign Sikh birthright of the Khalsa within the framework of a well demarcated territory enjoying a constitutionally autonomous status. The Sant called this unity of Khalsa as the very foundation of the constitution and the organisation of Akali Dal.  

That the Sant was adept at placating the warring factions is no doubt true. The Sant had political sagacity to move a step backward in order to move two steps forward. After doing a lot of spade work, the Sant made the unification of all the scattered Akali groups, a reality. The political exigency arising out of the approaching elections had goaded both the Akali Dals to unite, so that the Sikh votes were not divided on the polling day. After the unity move was initiated, both the Akali Dals reached an agreement, according to which the united Akali Dal was reconstituted with Sant Fateh Singh as president, Sirdar Kapur Singh as Senior Vice President. Jiwan Singh Umranangal and Atma Singh were designated as general secretaries. Parkash Singh Badal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Satnam Singh, Sant Longowal were some of the members of the working committee. The merger document was signed by Sant Chanan Singh, Mohan Singh Tur, Sirdar Kapur Singh, Santokh Singh, Umranangal and Hargurnood Singh. The goal of the panth and the united Akali Dal, as contained in the merger agreement can be translated in English as follows: “………… its (Political goal) exegesis, in the current political situation is hereby affirmed in the following terms: the order of the Khalsa, as ordained by Guru Gobind Singh and in accordance with his commandments is a sovereign people by birthright and a sovereignty oriented party sue-generis. A sovereign Sikh people within free country. To achieve this goal within free India as the birthright of the Khalsa is to be established within

52 The merger document was published in Gurdwara Gazette, November, 1968. Also Devinder Pal Sandhu, Sikhs in Indian Politics: A Study of Minority, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, pp.111-112
53 The Tribune, (Ambala) 9, October, 1968.
the framework of a well demarcated territory, enjoying a constitutionally autonomous status. It is the very foundation of the organisation and the constitution of the Shiromani Akali Dal.\(^5^4\)

Amid such a boosting environment, the Sant began preparations for the coming mid-term assembly elections. Under the patronage of the Sant, the Akali Dal continued its alliance with Jan-Sangh and also made a pre-poll seat adjustment with Communist Party of India (M). However, Communist Party of India drifted apart from the Akali Dal and entered the poll foray with minor parties like Samyukta Socialist Party and Republican Party of India.\(^5^5\) The Sant worked hard by campaigning incessantly in rural and remote areas. He reached almost every mofussil town or big village. As he possessed great oratorical Skill combined with his knowledge of Gurbani, he was the star campaigner of the united Akali Dal and its coalition partners. Meanwhile, the Congress state president, S. Gian Singh Rarewala resigned from the primary membership of the Congress over the issue of allotment of tickets. Later on, he joined Akali Dal through the good offices of the Sant.\(^5^6\)

As already narrated, the Sant had performed his job commendably as the supreme leader of the Akali Dal by making all the arrangements to achieve power by winning the mid-term elections of 1969. The polling was exercised on the stipulated date i.e., 9 February, 1969 and the results were declared on 11 February, 1969. Before analyzing the results of mid-term election of 1969, it wouldn’t be out of context to narrate the failures of the United Front in the pre-poll scenario. An important aspect of the pre-poll scene of Punjab during 1969 election was the change in attitude of both the Akali Dal

and Jan-Sangh toward the right wing politics which is usually opposed to change and believes in reinforcing the status quo. A big influx of rich farmers had poured into Akali Dal, thanks to the boons of the green revolution which brought prosperity in Jat homes. Yet, one cannot deny that majority of this cadre was coming from the rich peasant families. The interests of this class were opposed to that of small farmers who were marginalized. Since the day he set up a rival Akali Dal at Mushkiana Sahib in 1962, the Sant had emerged as the most respected leader of this class which resided in villages.

As far as the election manifesto was concerned, Akali Dal reiterated its earlier stand on Chandigarh, the Bhakhra complex and the left out Punjabi speaking areas. Its coalition partners toed the same line which they followed in the first general elections of Punjab. This time, the Sant also tried to solve the most vexed problem between the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh i.e., the language problem. The Sant drafted an agreement related to the question of language, comprising of five points namely; the safeguards for Hindi in unilingual Punjab state, teaching of both Hindi and Punjabi in private schools, no discrimination with schools while allocation of grants, replacement of English as a link language with Hindi, being the national language. The most important clause of the agreement was strict stand against all the separatist tendencies.

The unity of both the Akali Dals helped the United Akali Dal to emerge as the single largest party in 1969 mid-term elections by capturing 43 out of 103 seats in a 104 member house. The Congress which had entered the foray all alone, relegated to the second position with, 38 seats. Jan-Sangh got eight seats and two independents.

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supported by the Akali Dal were returned to the house by people.\(^6\) S. Gian Singh Rarewala was himself defeated while Sirdar Kapur Singh was elected.

As already stated, the first anti-Congress wave of 1967 had ended the hegemony in the state politics. In nearly half of the states, it lost its old majority character. This non-violent upheaval had wrecked the consensus model that the Congress had given to the people of India as the only option. Its monopolistic position gave way to the regional parties who started a new era of coalition politics. No doubt, these coalitions were more representative, comprehensive and accommodating but these brought the greatest evils of the contemporary political system i.e., the defection or floor crossing.\(^6\)

Apart from Akali Dal, there were four principal political parties in Punjab: Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Jan Sangh and Janta Party. It would not be out of context to analyze their ideology, support base and role in state politics before narrating further. Communist Party of India had hold in certain pockets of middle and small land holding groups and landless laborers of some districts like Faridkot, Sangrur, Bhatinda and Ferozpur. In towns, it wielded influence among the industrial labour. Its support base varied in its choice from time to time; sometimes the choice was CPI and sometimes, the Congress party. Thus, it finds in Congress, the strongest contender as far as its targeted vote bank is concerned.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was never part of any coalition and found support from the middle and lower middle class peasants, mainly belonging to the Jat community. It had handicaps as far as the areas which had sizeable population of the landless labourers were concerned. The key leadership of the party principally

\(^6\) Punjab Election Office, Chandigarh, (1969 Elections)
comprised of the Jat Sikhs. Thus, in terms of support base, it has more resemblance to the Akali Dal.

Jan Sangh was primarily a party of the Hindus and drew its strength mostly from the middle or lower middle class traders and other white collared workers hailing mostly from the urban areas. The upper caste Hindus and refugee Hindus provided maximum support to this party. It invariably revolved around the language issues of Punjab. However, the Arya Samajist Section of its support base had always expressed disappointment over its coalition with the hard core Akalis. The Janta Party had a support base in the dissatisfied rank and file of Jan Sangh. Some of its constituents like splinter groups associated with Congress (U), Bhartiya Lok Dal, and Socialists had little role to play in Punjab. So they thought it best to rally under the banner of the Janta Party.

Coming back to the narrative, the unity of both Akali Dals, pre-poll settlements and incessant campaigns by the Akali stalwarts helped Akali Dal to emerge as the single largest party for the first time. The Jan Sangh got eight seats as compared to Nine in 1967 elections. Soon after the election results, a coalition was formed which also included defectors from Congress (thus reducing the Congress legislative strength to 28 from 38). Most of these defectors were Sikh peasants which again highlighted the ever-increasing support base of the Akali Dal in the rural areas.62

The main contenders for the post of Chief Minister were S. Gian Singh Rarewala, Justice Gurnam Singh and Sant Chanan Singh. Rarewala had earlier remained Chief Minister of erstwhile PEPSU government and leader of Punjab Congress legislative party and had joined Akali Dal prior to the polls on the question of the allotment of Congress tickets to his loyalists. Sant Chanan Singh, the loyal lieutenant of the Sant had been president of Shiromani Gurdwara

Prabandhak Committee continuously from Oct, 1962. It was magnanimity of the Sant that he persuaded his lieutenant Sant Chanan singh to not press his claim for the Chief Ministership and instead continue as the president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, which in his opinion was more important and influential post in the eyes of the Sikhs than the Chief Ministership.\textsuperscript{63} A meeting of Akali M.L.A.s was held at Amritsar where the Sant alongwith other Akali stalwarts deliberated for a long time over the issues of candidature for chief minister’s post.\textsuperscript{64} Justice Gurnam Singh was again chosen as the Akali candidate for the Chief Ministership.\textsuperscript{65}

The governor invited S.Gurnam Singh to form his ministry on February 15, 1969. However the oath was administered on February 17, 1969 and the ministry consisted of five ministers. The inclusion of Sohan Singh Bassi, a wealthy but a defeated candidate into ministry invited much criticism in press which blamed the Akali stalwarts for accepting huge sum of money from him for making him a minister.\textsuperscript{66} Everything seemed fine when the ministry assumed office on Feb, 17, 1969, But in the words of D.C. Pavate (The Governor), ”The ministry settled down to its work not in spirit of forgive and forget but with a determination to punish foes and reward friends”.\textsuperscript{67} But there is no denying that the coalition partners had learnt a lot of lessons from the past debacles. That is why Akalis and Jan Sanghis had shared dias during many poll meetings and rallies. This was perhaps the first time when these two belligerent political groups had shared dias, thanks to the Sant’s political sagacity.

As far as the selection of justice Gurnam Singh as the Chief Minister was concerned, the Sant had instructed Sant Chanan Singh to remain as the President of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak

\textsuperscript{64} Jasvir Sing Sabor, \textit{Do Mahapurkh}, Amritsar, 1970.
\textsuperscript{65} The Statesman, 15 February, 1969.
\textsuperscript{66} The Tribune, 14 February, 1969.
\textsuperscript{67} D.C. Pavate, \textit{My Days as a Governor}, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.98.
Committee. Gian Singh Rarewala had been defeated from Dharamkot constituency by S. Lachman Singh Gill. So, the question of a defeated candidate becoming the Chief Minister didn’t rise. The name of Sirdar Kapoor Singh was rejected because the parliamentary board of the Akali Dal didn’t accept his candidature because he was known for his extreme views. He had turned out to be a controversial personality on account of his stand on the Sikh homeland issue. Moreover, it was hoped that the Jan Sangh might not accept him.

Outside the room in Sri Darbar Sahib complex, where the deliberations for choosing the candidate for Chief Ministership were held, Akali legislatures were lobbying for their candidates. Amidst such a ruckus, the name of justice Gurnam Singh was agreed upon because he represented the more civilized and more educated face of the party. In the past, the political opponents of the Sant group especially Partap Singh Kairon had called it ‘Unpurh Tola’ and the Sant was aware of this criticism. That is why, he always suggested the name of justice Gurnam Singh despite all the ego clashes he had with him in the past. His administrative and the organizing capabilities were never questioned as far as running a coalition government was concerned.

As far as Jan Sangh Parliamentary board was concerned, its president Atal Bihari Vajpayee had made it clear that although the acceptance of linguistic demands would not be a pre-condition but some clarification about the was needed. Moreover, it was also in favour of a ‘mild’ Chief Minister than a Sikh hardliner. As both the parties were keen on enjoying power, a settlement was reached which accepted the adoption of Hindi as a link language alongwith English.

As already told, S.Balbir Singh and S. Darbara Singh, the two

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70 The Tribune, 15 February, 1969.
independents who were elected with Akali support and the blessings of the Sant, assured full support to the coalition government. All other minor parties issued press briefs which indicated that they were sympathetic to such a coalition government. For example, Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) both assured ‘Critical Support’ to the government in situations which would threaten its existence.

Before moving further, one needs to deliberate on the unity of the two rival Akali Dals this time. Although there may be several explanations to this but the fact is that the Sant had learnt a lesson about the importance of the unity in the Akali ranks. Earlier in 1967, there had been two unity moves. The brokers of the first deal were Giani Bhupinder Singh and Harcharan Singh Hudiara. It was the time when the Sant had started his fast unto death. The move didn’t succeed because the Sant’s fast onto death was broken prematurely and the Sant lost much of his prestige. His opponents accused him of breaking his vow before the promise was fulfilled. At that time the Master faction thought that it could build more bargaining power by building confidence in the rural areas hitherto considered the strongholds of the Sant.

The second proposal came during the 14th general election but the question of candidate for the Bathinda Parliamentary Seat spoiled the sport. The Sant was adamant on giving the ticket to his personal driver turned politician Kikar Singh, while the master faction wanted an experienced hand to win this seat. To generalize, the continuance or end of the unity depended on the political assessment by the leadership of both the dominant Akali factions as far as the Akali merger or unity was concerned.

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72 The Patriot, February 16, 1969
73 H.S. Hudiara had remained in Jail with the Sant in beginning of his political career, Jasvir Singh Sabar, op.cit. p.21, Amritsar, 1972.
Apart from mergers, the causes of splits also need attention and need to be analyzed objectively. There has been a variety of views about the causes of the rift between two factions and internecine fighting that ensued. The first viewpoint, if viewpoints are categorized periodically, is that the contemporary Chief Minister of the parent state, Partap Singh Kairon skillfully exploited the divisions and thus occurred the clash of titans i.e., Master Tara Singh and his erstwhile beneficiary Sant Fateh Singh.  

Second but more voiced view is that both Partap Singh Kairon and communist elements were involved in initiating the split in Akali Dal as they secretly supported the Sant which led to his meteoric rise in the Punjab politics. Those supporting this view opine that the above two were parties to a conspiracy for ousting Master Tara Singh from Sikh leadership and capturing Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

Another view highlights, to some extent the role of Swatantra Party in provoking both the groups. While these views highlight the role of outsiders, there is no denying that the loss of credibility on the part of top rung Akali leadership led the frustrated ranks to separate ways. This happened particularly when the Akali leaders broke their fasts before fulfilling their vows.

But while dealing with the multiplicity and hierarchy of causes behind such splits, one must not forget the importance of the ideology or the way different Akali leaders felt about these splits. Ideology had a definite role to play in such occurrences because the second generation of the Akali leaders to which the Sant belonged had

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75 B.N. Mallik, My Years with Nehru (1948-64), Allied Publishers New Delhi, 1972, p.431; Also Joyce Pettigrew, Robber Noblemen, A Study of Political System of Jat Sikhs.
77 Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, Glory of Akal Takht, Punjab Book Company, Jullunder, 1984, pp.77-78.
different mindset than the earlier leadership who was more rigid and orthodox. For instance, the Hindu-Sikh unity was always the first Priority of the Sant while Master Tara Singh’s views were partially different on this issue. One cannot undermine the importance of ideology or thought process of a historical personality while acknowledging that all history is the history of thought. Coming back to the narrative, an objective analysis of the standpoint of the Sant is vital for evaluating his role in the post-1966 Punjab politics. In a conference held at Khadoor Sahib on 12 Sept, 1968 the Sant had taken the first initiative and appealed to the Master faction for Panthic unity. As already told, the two akali Dals merged and the Sant became the Supremo of the United Dal and Sirdar Kapur Singh, a Master loyalist became its vice president.

This time, the Sant thought it best to incorporate all the influential dignitaries of the both the factions into organising body of the Akali Dal. Apart from the earlier members of the working committee, who were loyal to the Sant, Giani Puran Singh, Hargunaad Singh, Surjan Singh, Santokh Singh of Delhi, Kartar Singh and Kirpal Singh chak sherewala belonging to the Master faction were also taken into the working committee of the United Akali Dal. While welcoming the new members into the working committee, the Sant was frank enough to put on record that this merger would have no effect on the Akali-Jan Sangh coalition due to the fact the new entrants were known for their hardliner approach. While the Batala Resolution or merger agreement had a tinge of recognizing a sovereign Sikh birth right and special status under the aegis of Indian constitution, the Sant was absolutely silent about the Sikh homeland issues.

Candidly narrating, this merger was not a case of dilution of

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principles as far as the two Akali factions and the Jan Sangh were concerned. In fact, the downfall of the earlier coalition governments had forced all these groups to review the political situation of the state. Moreover, a slight influence of Sirdar Kapur Singh was visible in the four postulates of the merger agreement. These points highlighted the necessity of adopting the Sikh approaches towards social and political problems surrounding Sikh people.  

During these years, the Sant's writ ran in the rural areas which had badly affected the already decreasing influence of the Master faction in the rural and the mofussil areas. After Master Tara Singh's death, the Master faction's following among the urban Sikhs was also declining which obliged his confidants to work under the Sant who had the charisma at par with Master Tara Singh. Even the Sikhs in general were clamouring for the panthic unity. The popular sentiment too forced the both factions to come at terms with each other.

The big influx of the rich farmers alongwith rich transport operators and building contractors into Akali Dal, was possible due to the pro-agriculturist image of the Akali Dal, of which the Sant himself was the brand ambassador. The Sant represented the agriculturist class of the Sikh society. Late S. Baldev Singh, ex-union defence minister and the sons of S. Partap Singh Kairon joined Akali Dal in those days. The landowning population was worried about the socialist activities which consisted less of parliamentary tactics and more in creating a mass movement for equitable distribution of land with help of Harijans and landless farmers. This idea was highly detrimental to the interests of landowning class who was apprehensive of losing its place in the social fabric.

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85 A.S. Narang, op cit. p.70.
The right wing swing visible in the attitude of two major parties during 1969 elections was only brought to cash the support of the rich agriculturist class. The opposition to the nationalisation of the banks, tea estates and the strict land reform laws was not only to oppose the Congress policies but was an effort to forestall the socialist propaganda. Akali Dal didn’t bond with the parties like Communist Party of India, the Swatantra Socialist Party and the Republican Party because these wanted common minimum programme which must have created an ill will among the rich landowners of the villages.

As far as the Jan Sangh was concerned it never showed a disapproval of the Akali Dal’s promises and offerings to the rich agriculturist class and due to this the Sant was vocal enough to always declare that he had no differences on any issue with the Jan Sangh. The Sant, in his literature repeatedly urged about the need for unity with the Hindus who were primarily represented by the Jan Sangh.\(^86\) The Sant and the Jan Sangh leaders found in each other a handy instrument to remain in power and appease their support base with perpetual restrictions or hindrances from each other.

To start with justice Gurnam Singh’s Ministry; it had five members: 3 Akalis and 2 Jan Sanghis which clearly indicates that the Jan Sangh always had an upper hand in getting cabinet births because it had eight members in the house and two of them were ministers. There was much hue and cry over the absence of Harizan representative. The Sant pacified the Harizans by including Dr. Bhagat Singh\(^87\) in the ministry.

The Sant found innovative ways to escalate their strength on multiple fronts. In fact, the Sant and his proteges made every effort to increase the number of M.L.A.s supporting the government. There

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\(^{86}\) Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukwen Uttar, op.cit*, p.72.

\(^{87}\) Dr. Bhagat Singh (MBBS, LLB), remained Personal Physicians of the Sand for a long time.
were thirteen defections in favour of the Akali Dal led coalition including the famous Radha Krishan defection from Congress who was included in the ministry because at that time it was a tradition that a non-Sikh couldn’t become member of the Akali Party. Consequently he was included in the Akali legislative group which was the need of the hour.88

To quote Napolean Bonaparte, “the same people who garland me would hang me if I don’t deliver”. Such is the nature of the politics. A brief perusal of the sources of this period brings out the fact that after the formation of second coalition government, the Sant’s political career started following a downward trend. The Sant had to face opposition from his political opponents from within and outside the Akali Dal. The merger of the two Akali Dals had no doubt benefitted Akali Dal and the Sikhs as a whole but it proved detrimental for the Sant as his opponents within the Dal got a much revered platform to diminish the aura and charisma associated with him by their political and religious tactics.

Moreover, the differences between the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh were bound to arise over such issues as the language question, Chandigarh and other related territorial complications arising out of the formation of the Punjabi Suba.89 Accentuating further, soon after the formation of government, the factional fighting within the Akali Dal started. The ministry assumed office on 17 February, 1969. However, the Chief Minister at the outset had announced a ten point programme which included preserving communal harmony in the state, providing clean and efficient administration, taking steps for the inclusion of the left out Punjabi speaking areas denied by the reorganization of states act, 1966 and take steps for replacing English by Hindi as the national link language. The demand for the abolition

89 *The Tribune*, 3, July 1969.
of the Punjab legislative council was also raised by both the Akali and the Jan Sangh leaders. During the Gill ministry, the United Front had submitted a memorandum to the governor which highlighted the maladministration and vendetta politics and demanded an enquiry into these allegations which would be sincerely pursued.

In the words of D.C. Pavate, the contemporary Governor of Punjab, “The ministry started its work not in the spirit of forget and forgive but to punish the foes and reward the friends.” When the Punjab Vidhan Sabha was to start its budget session on 13 March, 1969, S. Gill was arrested at the Chandigarh airport same morning for charges of official corruption and was taken to Jagraon. However, he was released on bail by Justice Harbans Singh the same day. The legislative council was dissolved and Mr. Krishan Lal, a famous politician, was among others who had to resign as they were members of the upper house.

The issue of Chandigarh soon emerged again as the Sant’s opponents within the Dal exploited the situation and raised the banner of revolt and took the Akali leadership to task for not doing anything on the issue.

While discussing the issue of Chandigarh, it would be highly appropriate to study the role and efforts of S. Darshan Singh Pheruman who sacrificed his life like Dr. Ramallulu (Andhra fame) for the inclusion of Chandigarh into Punjab. Born in 1886 at Pheruman village, 40 Km from Amritsar, S. Pheruman served in British Army till the Jallianwala massacre. He participated in the civil-disobedience movement, the Quit India movement while responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi. That he was a staunch Gandhian, there is no doubt. He spent twenty years of his life in various jails while fighting for India’s independence. He was twice elected President of Shromani.

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90 D.C. Pavate, My Days as a Governor, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.98.
92 The Tribune, 26 February, 1969.
Akali Dal and later started his legislative career as a member of Rajya Sabha in 1952 as a Congressman. He was the president of the Swatantara Party when he started his fast unto death for the inclusion of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas into Punjab. His will indicates that he was frustrated with the contemporary Akali Politics. In his will, he criticized the breaking of oath by Akali leaders before the motive of oath was fulfilled. He blamed the Akali stalwarts for tarnishing the image of holy Akal Takht and destroying the sanctity of holy “Ardas”. He accused the past and present Akali leadership, of pusillanimity, of lacking the courage of its conviction. He was highly critical of the construction of ‘Agn Kunds’ on the roof of Holy Akal Takht which were demolished later on 12 June, 1970. He considered these structures as a standing disgrace and provocation to the whole Panth and called them symbols of hypocrisy and political fraud.

In a conference held at Rayya on 1st August, 1969, Darshan Singh made a public declaration that he will repeat the same "Ardas” as made by the Sant, and go on fast unto death from 15th August 1969. In the wee hours of 13th August, 1969, S. Pheruman was arrested under Section 9 of the Punjab Security Act. Before being arrested S, Pherumaan published a pamphlet “Dharam Sir Ditian Baaj Nahin Rehna”, He also wrote an open letter to the Sant criticizing his political methods and for not adhering to his Ardaas due to the fear of losing his life.

Before proceeding further, the “Agni Kund” controversy need to be aptly narrated. The Akali Stalwarts who were not at good terms with the Sant called a Sikh Sammelan alongwith S. Pherumnan criticizing the Sant’s role in this episode. The Sant was openly criticized by Harcharan Singh Hudia, Hazara Singh Gill, Arjan Singh

94 Khalsa Sewak, 30 August, 1969.
Budhiraja and others for tarnishing the image of the Holy Akal Takht. It was ironic that these same persons were founders of these Havan Kunds along with the Sant. A common action committee was formed which gave notice to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to demolish these kunds. S. Pheruman also called a conference at Dharamshala in which two thousand Sikhs participated. A notice was given to the Sant to reply why he had constructed these Agni Kunds inspite of the fact that such rituals were condemned in Sikh religion. S. Jawahar Singh Burj also vowed to sacrifice his life along with S. Pheruman. As already told S. Pheruman was arrested by Punjab Police. So, he started his fast unto death in police custody on the 15th August, 1969. Meanwhile, S. Jawahar Singh Burj died in police custody. This further accentuated the problems of the Sant.

However, the Akali leadership including the Sant failed to rise above politics and show some statesmanship. Had it fully supported Pheruman’s fast! It was sure to get substantial acceptance of demands by the centre and could have retained the Sikhs who were alienated after the tragic culmination of this fast. But most of the leadership saw it as an attempt to belittle the Sants’ political stature. Pheruman’s fast was called a “Political stunt”. The Sant was pressurized to acknowledge Pheruman’s efforts but he called the fast "unnecessary" at that juncture. An all party action committee also appealed to S. Pheruman to break his fast but he refused.

Pheruman insisted on being cremated in the same Havan Kunds which were constructed by the Sant. But fearing bloodshed in the percents of the Golden Temple, Pheruman agreed to change his will as far as his cremation site was concerned. On 10 October 1969, forced by the public opinion, the Sant went to see the fasting leader in the

96 The Tribune, 16-17 August, 1969.
hospital who was nearing his end. The Sant called the dying leader in loud voice but he didn’t respond. Pheruman died on 27 October, 1969 Next day his will was published in all the leading newspapers.

The conduct of the Akali leaders during this episode was no doubt partisan. The General secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal in a statement to the press, blamed, “the Congress for having arranged S. Pheruman’s fast in a bid to revive the dying party and to mislead the people”, whatever the causes were, the death of Pheruman after 74 days of his fast badly tarnished the image of the Sant. After achievement of Punjabi Suba, the Sant was virtually unquestioned Supremo of the Sikhs sans minor opposition. He was called the third Gandhi by the editor of ‘Blitz’ magazine during one of his sojourns at Bombay. Such was his aura at that time. What Pheruman accomplished, the Sant could not do. No doubt, Pheruman was a man of his words and had courage in his conviction. Also it is beyond an iota of doubt that S. Pheruman died for a cause which he loved. But apart from his consistency and love for his cause, there seem many other factors which led to his martyrdom. One of the many opinions is that the fast of S.Pheruman was an outcome of internal power struggles of the Akali Dal itself and Congress maneuvers to tarnish the image of the Sant. According to this view, the patriotic and religious minded Pheruman was encouraged by the Sant’s enemies to erase him from political picture of Punjab. Since the breaking of his fast before fulfilling his vow in 1966 (for inclusion of Chandigarh), the Sant’s opponents had been accusing him of such dishonorable conduct. When Pheruman announced his decision to go on fast, the two Akali factions were indulging in mud-slinging at each other. Whether it was folly on the part of the Sant, when he broke his fasts

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97 Dhan Singh Gulshan, op.cit, p.207.
99 Ajit Singh Sarhadi, The Story of Punjabi Suba, Kapur and Sons, Delhi, p.471.
100 Sant Father Singh, Badesh Yatra, Budha Jorh, Ganganagar. p.16.
101 Amrita Bazaar Patrika September 17, 1969.
in the past, is a difficult question which can be answered in many ways. But there is no doubt that Pheruman, whom the Prime minister herself called the greatest freedom fighter of India, had carried out his pledge. After his death, Pheruman’s supporters formed a separate Akali Dal called Akali Dal Pheruman. Gian Singh Rarewala, Jagjit Singh (finance minister), Parkash Singh Majithia, Nattha Singh, Ishar Singh Majithia and Sohan Singh Jalalusman were prominent member of this Dal. For the time being it seemed that, the martyrdom of Pheruman failed to substantially affect the Sant’s popularity.

The factual position was such that Sant Chanan Singh was unanimously elected the President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee with 118 out of 180 members present and voting. But it has been opined by many experts that Pheruman’s martyrdom was sufficient to bring an end to the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh. Moreover, the further course of events and the political equations hint at the substantial damage done to the Sant’s reputation because his opponents eulogized Pheruman’s martyrdom at the cost of the Sant’s reputation. It led to a sort of comparison, in popular mindset, about the character and deeds of both the leaders. It was natural that the Sant’s reputation followed a downward trend.

Pheruman’s martyrdom created such conditions and circumstances which compelled the Sant to take a serious view of the Chandigarh issue again. The Sant had written a letter to Prime minister in which he demanded a quick and straight forward decision in favor of Punjab. He told Prime Minister that he ‘could no longer wait anymore’. It became apparent that the Akali Dal was embarking on a fresh struggle for the inclusion of Chandigarh. The working committee of Shiromani Akali Dal unanimously adopted a resolution on September 23, 1969 giving another clarion call for a struggle to

gain Chandigarh.\textsuperscript{103} It authorised its President to constitute an action committee to devise the mode of its ‘Morcha’. The Sant, according to this resolution appointed a seven member committee under his chairmanship, for launching the struggle and in his statement to the press he sought the co-operation of all other political parties.

This appeal led to the formation of an all parties action committee comprising the representatives of seven political parties of the state on September 18, 1969. Even some representatives of the Punjab Pradesh Congress joined this action committee. The Chief Minister also called a meeting of the legislators belonging to all parties in support of the cause. About sixty legislators belonging to the different parties of the state except the Congress, started a twenty four hour ‘Dharna’ in front of the residence of the Prime Minster in New Delhi to press the demand for inclusion of Chandigarh. They also submitted a memorandum to the President. Another important aspect of the memorandum was that all parties accepted the Akali Dal’s assertion that S.Hukam Singh had given an assurance on behalf of the central government to the Sant before he broke his fast in 1966.\textsuperscript{104} To pressurize the Central Government, the Akali high command comprising of the Sant asked the State Council of ministers and the Akali members of the parliament to hand over their resignation to the Sant for “appropriate use.”\textsuperscript{105} It was for the first time that the Sant had put the entire coalition government in jeopardy, which he had so laboriously founded.

The Sant offered to commit self-immolation in a meeting of the All Parties Action Committee, but the committee asked him to wait.\textsuperscript{106} The action committee decided to hold a mammoth rally of the Punjabis on October17, 1969 to demonstrate their will to secure

\textsuperscript{103} The Tribune, 25 September, 1969
\textsuperscript{104} Ajit Singh Sarhadi, The Story of Punjab Suba, p.473.
\textsuperscript{105} D.C. Pavate, \textit{op.cit.}, p.124.
\textsuperscript{106} The Tribune, 9 October, 1969.
Chandigarh. The appeal by the Sant was broadcast to the people of the state to gather at Mohali which was five kilometers from Chandigarh and was undeveloped those days. From Mohali, a peaceful and orderly procession was planned towards the capital. Everything happened accordingly and reminded the spectators of the struggles during the Punjabi Suba movement.\(^{107}\)

The Sant announced that he had waited sufficiently long and now felt that he must begin his fast unto death. He declared that he would go on a fast unto death on January 26, 1970 at 10. A.M. and if he survived the ordeal till 31 January, 1970, he would commit self-immolation by burning himself on 1 February, 1970 at 3.00 p.m. He complained about the long delay of three years since the day he had postponed his decision to self-immolation in December, 1966. The Central authorities were left with no choice or pretext, because this time, all the political parties of the Punjab were supporting the cause of the inclusion of Chandigarh into Punjab. Pheruman’s martyrdom had further put the dilatory tactics of the Central governments on hold. An all-world Panthic convention of the Sikhs was called on 10 January, 1970, where the Sant reiterated his stand and declared that his cup of patience was full.\(^{108}\) Meanwhile, Hukam Singh, the Governor of Rajasthan who had been a sort of perpetual negotiator of the Centre-Sikh discords, reached Amritsar and declared from the precincts of the holy Akal Takht that their demands had been accepted. He also announced that a committee of linguistic experts would be set-up if the Sikhs accepted arbitration of Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi met the Chief Ministers of Punjab and Haryana on 27 January, and announced the most eagerly awaited award on 29 January, 1970. According to this reward, Chandigarh was to be transferred to Punjab within five years. While Punjab was to get the

\(^{107}\) Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *op.cit.*, p.473.
adjoining Punjabi speaking areas; Fazilka, Abohar and 104 villages in these two Tehsils were to be transferred to Haryana. Government of India was to give a 10 crore bond and a loan of 10 crores to Haryana.109

The Sant and the Akali Dal welcomed the award and Akali leaders along with Hukam Singh requested the Sant to break his fast which he did on 30 January, 1970. The Punjab government even declared state holidays on 1st and 2nd February to celebrate the event. The Sant through his protégé Sant Chanan Singh called upon the people of Punjab to illuminate their houses to mark the victory of Punjab.110 But this ebullience soon vanished when the valley of protests poured from many sides about the transfer of Fazilka and Abohar which were the most fertile Tehsils of Punjab and were known for their progressive horticulture. Moreover, this region was the most fertile cotton belt while Chandigarh was considered a slightly financial liability in those days. Akali ranks too conveyed that the Punjab government should reject the transfer of Fazilka and Abohar area to Haryana.111

As far as the Haryana Government was concerned it condemned the decision about Chandigarh but welcomed the decision related to Fazilka and Abohar tehsils. The argument put forward by the Government of Haryana was that the decision on Chandigarh, Fazilka and Abohar was a package deal. In the beginning, the attitude of Central government was not clear. The Union minister of state for home affairs, Mr. K.C. Pant stated on record that the award was not a package deal.112 But later on, the next incumbent of the same office declared that the decision on Chandigarh and the two Tehsils stand or fall together. Even at the time of breaking of the Sant’s fast, many of

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the Akali workers present had openly raised the anti-Sant slogans. Buta Singh, a resident of Fazilka Tehsil wanted to burn himself against the sell out of his people. The Sant was accused of bartering away one of the richest parts of the state for Chandigarh which at that time had a lack lustre image those days.\textsuperscript{113}

After the above episode, dissensions began to crop up among the top leadership of the Akali Dal which later led to the collapse of the coalition. Though Justice Gurnam Singh had stepped in to save the life of the Sant when he was about to immolate himself, yet the episode badly tarnished the image of the Sant. Naturally, the importance of the Chief Minister in day to day governance of the state had increased. The issue of abolition of legislative council in Punjab was the first blow to the harmony between these two Akali Stalwarts. The Sant was against any such move which led to the abolition of this council. The Sant wanted to retain the upper house and for this purpose, he met the central leadership to debar them from taking any such measure. On the other hand, the Chief Minister thought it an unnecessary burden on the exchequer and a back door entry point for those politicians which didn’t enjoy the popular mandate. The central government had naturally accepted the Chief Minster’s advice and had abolished the council. The Sant had to eat a humble pie as he had openly advocated for retaining the upper house.

Coming back to the decision of the Central government regarding Chandigarh, the Sikh masses were enraged at this clear discrimination. The old Zail area of Fazilka tehsil was to go to Haryana alongwith Khuhian Sarwar police station. Further aggravating the grievance of Punjab, a strip of territory which was furlong wide with interstate boundary of Rajasthan and Punjab in village Kandu Khera of Mukatsar Tehsil was to be given as a corridor to Haryana. This reminds one of the Polish Corridor forcibly set up by the Nazis before

\textsuperscript{113} Gurratanpal Singh, \textit{The Illustrated History of the Sikhs}, Chandigarh, 1979, p.284.
the second world war. Although the working committee of Akali Dal had asked the fasting Sant to break his fast, but the Akalis failed to see what would happen to those areas which were cut from Punjab’s territory and glued to the territorial map of Haryana. The resentment of the Sikhs was clearly visible at Sri Darbar Sahib. Some Sikhs threw stones at the residence of the Sant and burnt his effigy. This was the first time in the Sikh history that the Sikhs had themselves thrown stones at their leaders inside their sanctum sanctorum complex for protection of which their forefathers had shed their own blood like water in the past. The Sewadars of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee had to draw out their swords to make their own brethren flee.

In the last ten years, it was for the third time that the Sant had broken his fast before fulfilling his vow. When the decision was announced, S. Jiwan Singh Umranangal was such a leader who openly rejected this award and breaking of the Sant’s fast, while other leaders had given their tacit approval of the breaking of fast. As it was natural, all the leaders who were present at the time of breaking of fast, turned hostile overnight when the Sikh sangat started opposing such a decision. Iqbal Singh, a minister in Union Government and representing the separated areas (acc. to the award) in Lok Sabha, blamed the chief minister Justice Gurnam Singh for having authored the deal. The Chief Minister stoutly rejected the charge and blamed Sant Chanan Singh for having sent a Harijan minister of the Coalition government to Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the Congress Chief on 27 January, 1970 with the message that Akali Dal would have no objection to such a package deal. The Sant faction altogether rejected this blame for having saved the Sant’s life at the cost of Fazilka and Abohar Tehsils. Such controversial questions are bound to be unanswered because Central Government does not make

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categorical statements as who was responsible and who was not for a particular event.

Coming back to the working of a coalition government, a new controversy developed between the Sant and the Chief Minister over the candidature of the Akali Dal’s nominee for Bathinda Parliamentary seat. Moreover, this downward trend in the Sant’s real politic was consequently increasing the prestige and the influence of the Chief Minister. As the Sant’s hold on the party decreased, the rift and the clash between the Sant and the Chief Minister became inevitable. A scholar has aptly labeled the tussle between the Chief Minister and the Sant as the clash of personalities.115 As already told, the indirect signs of the internal bickering were visible immediately after the birth of the second coalition. The lack of rapport between chief minister and Sant Chanan Singh’s ‘Jathedar’ group was clearly visible. Being the president of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Sant Chanan Singh had great following among the Sikhs and controlled the mammoth budget of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. Due to his staunch religious and Akali mindset, Sant Chanan Singh did not have rapport with other parties which were the members of the coalition.

It was with the outside support that the chief minister was able to abolish the legislative council. The Congress party had majority in this house which irked the chief minister because it hindered the legislative work of the government. Whereas the Sant faction was concerned, it had made many of its Jathedars, the members of this council. The abolition of this house clearly meant the loss of reputation on the part of the Sant faction. The abolition of this house further widened the gulf and was the most deliberated issue in the contemporary press.116

115 Kuldeep Kaur, op.cit, p.49.
The Congress Legislative Party had intentionally walked out of the house when the resolution for the abolition was introduced so that the entire responsibility for abolishing the council fell on the Chief Minister. After the Congress walked out, all the 67 members present had voted in favor of the abolition of the upper house. It was neither considered the defeat of Sant Chanan Singh or the Congress party but it was certainly a loss of prestige on part of the Sant, who had tried his best to influence even the central Congress leaders to not agree to the abolition when he found himself helpless in his home turf.117

Before moving to the next part of this internal struggle, it is worthwhile to discuss the disposition and the mindset of these two groups of Akali Dal. In fact, justice Gurnam Singh and the Sant had little in common as far as mindset and earlier political career were concerned. Justice Gurnam Singh belonged to the Master faction and was one of the staunch supporters of the Sikh autonomy within Indian Political structure. Both the Sants wanted to impress upon the Chief Minister, the superiority of the organizational wing over the legislative wing of the party. It was a common case of the organisational wing of a political group struggling for inclusion of large number of its supporters into the governmental setup. Moreover political realities, political ambition and natural desire to enjoy power had placed Justice Gurnam Singh at the mercy of the two Sants. To counter effect the popular mass base of the Sants; it was, a sort of defence mechanism of Justice Gurnam Singh to befriend non-Congress parties and even top Congress dignitaries in order to face the might of the Sant when the time came. On the other hand the Sant had built his prestige and cult over the years starting from the lowest rung of the ladder. The Sant could never brook any shade of disobedience. Being a retired judge, Justice Gurnam Singh was chosen to lead the government because he was a learned man and

117 D.C. Pavate, My Days as a Governor, p.104.
possessed administrative experience. This covert struggle had started the day justice Gurnam Singh ministry took oath. Among the causes of these internal bickerings which may be mentioned here, are the distribution of political rewards, party’s resolution with the Jan Sangh, the Sant’s propriety or lack of it and the partial failure of the Sant’s immolation bid after Darshan Singh Pherumans’ martyrdom.\textsuperscript{118}

This lack of harmony further aggravated the already existing suspicions and mistrust. This conflict was more a conflict of power than a conflict of ideology. Justice Gurnam Singh, a highly educated judge couldn't carry on with the Sants who were the virtual all-in-all of the Dal. He was averse to being dictated by the two Sants in policy making and party affairs. Moreover, the way the top rung offices were allotted in Akali Dal was highly criticized by the Sikh intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{119}

Gradually, the crisis became so grave that the Sant in his statements on 27\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th} march, 1970 even accused the chief minister of planning to topple the ministry with the Congress party support.\textsuperscript{120} Despite his hard work, this internal factionalism had badly maligned Justice Gurnam Singh government’s administration. The all party action committee had expressed dissatisfaction over the January 1970 award related to the Chandigarh.\textsuperscript{121} This had grave ramification became Akali Dal was also member of this All Party Action Committee formed to deal with question of inclusion of Chandigarh into Punjab. Both the groups spoiled their own reputations. The Sant was blamed for breaking his vow and the Chief Minister was blamed for negotiating the deal to save the Sant’s life. Moreover, the memory of S. Pheruman’s martyrdom was fresh in popular mindset who had literally displayed to how to fulfill a vow.


\textsuperscript{119} Sirdar Kapur Singh regarded the procedure of election of leader of Akali legislative party as undemocratic and against Sikh traditions, \textit{The Tribune}, February 18, 1970.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{The Tribune}, 29 March, 1970.

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{The Tribune}, 30 January, 1970.
Political affiliations and bonds are tested in the troubled waters when participants of such associations often go astray thus marring their and their partners' chance of survival.

The budget session of the Punjab Assembly, summoned on February 23, 1970, veiled such sentiments. The factional fight between both the factions was an open secret during the Rajya Sabha elections held on 25 March, 1970. Three seats to the upper house were to be filled from Punjab. The working committee of the Akali Dal authorised the Sant to nominate two candidates from the Akali Dal as there was no possibility of winning all the three seats. At this, the Sant’s opponents were annoyed at the Sants’ arbitrariness and accused him of neglecting some of the veteran Akalis. To sabotage the Sant’s designs, the Sant’s opponents nominated Giani Bhupinder Singh as their own candidate resulting in multiple candidatures from the same party. Giani Bhupinder Singh was a Master loyalist and the chairman of Akali Dal Parliamentary Board. The action committee of Akali Dal took immediate action against Giani Bhupinder Singh by suspending his primary membership of the party. It was an open secret in political circles that the Chief Minster was using his official position to make sure that Giani Bhupinder Singh emerged victorious.

To the utter discomfort of the Sant, Giani Bhupinder singh won by defeating the formal candidate of Akali Dal, Jathedar Santokh Singh, in whose success, the Sant was personally interested. This was a great setback to the Sant because this episode was a clear manifestation of struggle between the Sant and the Chief Minister and Chief Minister’s upper hand over the Sant. As it was natural, our protagonist, the Sant was infuriated at such a loss of prestige and political say. Giani Bhupinder Singh was expelled from the Akali Dal.

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He later on floated a new Akali Dal under the name of Master Akali Dal. Another show of strength came in the form of appropriation bill which was introduced in the house on March, 25, 1970. It provided an excellent opportunity to both the parties to act in a concerted manner. During the assembly session, the finance minister Balwant Singh refused to introduce the bill under the dictates of the Akali Dal supremo. Hence, Justice Gurnam Singh had to himself move the bill. Most of the Akali M.L.A.s and Jan Sangh M.L.As voted against it. While 35 Akali legislators voted against it, the entire Congress opposition, four CPI legislators and one legislator of Samyukta Socialist Party didn’t vote.\textsuperscript{124}

Those who remained loyal to their chief Minister included eighteen Akalis legislators, one member each of Paraja Socialist Party (PSP), Samyunkat Socialist Party (SSP) and notably Sirdar Kapur Singh who was also as legislator then. It seemed that S. Parkash Singh Badal led all the legislators voting against the bill and consequently against the Justice Gurnam Singh ministry. After the defeat of Justice Gurnam Singh ministry, the Sant called a meeting of Akali legislators in which it was decided to expel Justice Gurnam Singh from Akali legislative party and Akali Dal itself. Justice Gurnam Singh was accused of working against the party and its interests. The contemporary mainstream press called it “acts of personal vendetta” and “palace revolution”.\textsuperscript{125}

Both the Sants thought it as a necessary evil to punish Justice Gurnam Singh because he had openly disobeyed the duo. Both the Sants enjoyed supremacy in both the Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. Any person questioning their propriety was considered detrimental to their interests by them. That is why the Sant thought it prudent to topple the government which he

\textsuperscript{124} K.C. Gulati, \textit{Akali’s Past and Present}, Ashajanak Publication, New Delhi, 1974, p.189.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Tribune}, 26 March, 1970.
had so laboriously built. It is illogical to blame the Sant for making this coalition government a failure became it was natural that the Sant, who was harbinger of the Hindu-Sikh unity as well as an era of coalition governments commanded respect and obedience form the same leaders who he had helped in rising to the exalted offices of the ministries. While he sat just behind the curtain, justice Gurnam Singh organised his own party under name of Akali Dal Gurnam Singh which met little success but he kept trying to sabotage the designs of our protagonist for a brief interval.

Candidly narrating, the dissatisfied and dominant section of Akali Dal alongwith support of the Jan Sangh and CPI (M) had finally out voted the Gurnam Singh ministry on March, 25, 1970 and elected in its place a new government lead by S. Parkash Singh Badal. Although, the immediate cause of this 'place revolution' was inequitable distribution of the Rajya Sabha tickets yet this was only the proverbial last straw. In fact the pressure for ousting the Gurnam Singh ministry had been building up since it look the charge of the office.\textsuperscript{126} The role of external factors in dismantling this structure can't be underweighted. The Congress high command was always on its toes to dismantle this non-Congress coalition government of newly created Punjabi Suba.\textsuperscript{127}

After Gurnam Singh’s oust from power, Parkash Singh Badal, who was development minister in Justice Gurnam Singh’s Government and Gurcharan Singh Tohra who was more associated with Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, enjoyed Sants’ confidence. With Sants’ support, S. Parkash Singh Badal was elected as the leader of Akali legislative party. The traces of factionalism were still visible in the Akali Dal because S. Parkash Singh Badal’s election was later on opposed by S. Gurcharan Singh Tohra who was in favor

\textsuperscript{127} D.C. Pavate, \textit{My days as a Governor}, pp.108-109.
of making S. Surjit Singh Barnala, the leader of Akali legislature party.\(^{128}\)

Jan Sangh leaders had been watching the internecine fighting of the Akali Dal. To the utter discomfiture of Akali Dal, the Jan Sangh leaders started exerting pressure on Akali Dal for fulfilling the linguistic demands of the Jan Sangh vote bank which comprised of the Hindi speaking masses. On 30 June, 1970 Jan Sangh minister tendered their resignation justifying themselves, they cited the reason of their resignation as the dilatory tactics of the government in fulfilling the linguistic aspirations of a linguistic minority in Punjab i.e., Hindus.

As the Badal ministry was surrounded by a shadow of extinction, Justice Gurnam Singh further added fuel to the fire by introducing a no confidence motion against the Badal government. It was a crucial time for the Akali Dal whose mentor, the Sant immediately met the Congress President Mr. Jagjiwan Ram on 21 July, 1970 accompanied by P.S Badal.\(^{129}\) What transpired in the meeting was not made public but the Akalis succeeded in wooing the Congress president who instructed the Punjab Congress legislators to abstain from voting against the coalition and remain neutral. The Badal ministry won when the no-confidence motion was not even admitted due to the neutrality of the Congress legislators.

The role of language problem in Akali-Jan Sangh coalition is far from minor and needs an objective analysis. The contemporary Punjab government had been following the language policy which was introduced on 2 July, 1969. According to this policy, Punjabi was the first language and instructional medium at all stages in schools, while Hindi was to be the second language from fourth class, English was


\(^{129}\) *The Tribune*, July 22, 1970.
introduced at upper primary level i.e. sixth class. Another clause relating to the governmental funding of aided schools classified only those schools as beneficiaries who taught Punjabi at Primary schools. This part of the language policy deprived most of the schools which refused to implement the teaching of Punjabi at primary level. During his stint, Justice Gurnam Singh declared that schools with Hindi as medium of Instruction would be allowed in the state. But when the Akalis raised the issues of not providing the grant to Hindi medium schools, the Jan Sangh leaders had threatened to quit the coalition. During this deadlock, the Akalis had shown open heartedness by accepting the Jan-Sangh demand in order to keep the coalition working.

But this controversy surfaced again over the issue of the jurisdiction of a new university which was established at Amritsar (Guru Nanak Dev University) during the Chief Ministership of Justice Gurnam Singh. The Punjab government affiliated forty six colleges of Majha and Doaba region neglecting the advice of University Grants Commission to not affiliate more than thirty colleges in one go. At this, the Jan Sangh leaders openly disapproved the government’s decision. They expressed their resentment to Sant Chanan Singh, who was the second centre of power after the Sant himself. The Jan Sangh president, Dr. Baldev Parkash also expressed his dissatisfaction to the Chief Minister for having neglected his cabinet colleagues before taking such an arbitrary measure.

The matter gradually became a major issue of clash between the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh. The Change of guard in Akali Dal i.e.
Parkash Singh Badal replacing Justice Gurnam Singh as Chief Minister, somewhat softened the Jan Sangh stand because S. Badal was known for his moderate views and flexible nature than his predecessor. As soon as Parkash Singh Badal settled himself in the saddle, Jan Sang intentionally increased pressure over its major ally as factionalism of the Akali Dal had become an open secret. This time, it raised the demand of setting up a new University called Dayanand University at Jalandh as a way out to keep out some colleges from the influence of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Infact, the Jan Sangh leaders wanted to make some areas; protection and promotion zones of the Hindi language. The same areas including Jalandhar and some mofussil towns had witnessed Arya Samaj activities in the past. This Hindi protectionism was unaccepted to the most moderate of the Akalis who were not ready to accept more. Both the parties were on the brink of losing their committed vote banks because the issue had been much highlighted by the respective advocates of Punjabi and Hindi.

Moreover, any middle way would have led the beneficiary party to intrude other party’s vote bank because of the sensitivity of the question. The Akali policy makers including the Sant were caught in a dilemma because there was not even a little possibility of following dilatory tactics with Jan Sangh who was adamant on getting the demand accepted. Before moving further with the narrative, it is worthy of space here to describe how the language was gradually indentified with the religion in the post independence Punjab. The Sant during the heydays of the Punjabi Suba movement had declared that he had nothing to do with the percentages of the Hindus and the Sikhs and was leading the masses only for protection of Punjabi language. He had shifted the basis of demand from communal to linguistic and in this way reshaped the demand.

But an indepth perusal of the sources related to the Punjabi
Suba movement indicates that the language had become a symbol of the religious group identity i.e., the Sikhs. With the passage of years, this became symbol of a group's political power and the symbol of the struggle between the Hindu and the Sikh elites for power. The Punjabi Suba issue, whatever the basis of demand was, further consolidated the differentiation between the Hindu and the Sikh leaders and cadre. Thanks to the earlier sponsors of the Punjabi Suba demand, the issue had roots in a susceptible issue i.e., religion. The trend of the modern state surveys like Census of India further blended the mixture of linguistic and communal identities. It was an open secret during the 1961 census that the number of Punjabi speaking population had decreased despite the influx of millions of Punjabi speaking refugees into Indian Punjab during the partition. In fact, the Punjabi speaking Hindus were goaded to register Hindi as their mother tongue by the advocates of the Hindi development movement. In the successive surveys, Punjabi suffered more in the same way. This phenomenon had its roots in the print capitalism and the introduction of modern system of governance by the British. The Abohar tehsil was a classic example of this phenomenon.

As already told, the Akalis found it difficult to accede to the demands of Jan Sangh. The Jan Sangh was left with two alternatives: either bear the stigma of being more inclined to enjoy power than fulfilling the promise given to its Hindu vote bank or walk out of a coalition who refused to give Hindi the Prime status which hardcore Hindus demanded. It opted to walk out of the coalition. The Jan Sangh leaders declared that they were withdrawing their support because the Akalis refused to abide by the terms which were settled at the time of formation of the Badal ministry.137

Until recently, there had been 'a priori' assumption in India that coalition politics is an antithesis to the nation building and the

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effective governance.\textsuperscript{138} The Punjab’s experiment with coalition government occupies a special place in the objection to the above assumption. It may therefore be useful to retrospectively review the reasons responsible for this fall. The foremost reason among these was the tussle between organisational and governmental wings. This tussle was the sole reason behind the fall of Justice Gurnam Singh ministry. As already told, the chief minister felt that the Sant expected him to submit all the crucial issues of the state to him for his final decision. Actually the malaise runs in whole country. When a party is not in power, it looks towards its high command and patrons for disposing all types of issues. But as soon as it comes in power, a parallel decision making unit comes into being the governmental wing which dons the attire of the official machinery. The result is the fact that the former continues to assert its earlier supremacy without realizing the fact that in the new situation, the governmental wing has to shoulder the responsibility not only of the party but of the whole state or nation whatever applies in the case. The former, therefore, has two options either to take the government in its own hands or reconcile itself, sooner or later with the limited role that it is to perform vis-à-vis party affairs and must consequently concede vital decision making to the government wing.

As regards the Akali Dal, this situation was acute because on the one hand, the line which separated the religion from the politics was blurred. It could not easily give up its religious approach. Thus, the Gurdwara based Jathedars or the Sants had a role to play. On the other hand, the demographic structure of the state was such that it could not form a government by itself. It had to form a coalition with Jan Sangh which was the only viable option in Punjab. Accordingly, the Akali Dal could not afford to either be a pathetic to the Sikhs or take the decision making to the Akal Takhat. It had to properly

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balance the interests of both the communities i.e., the Hindus and the Sikhs. How to balance the religious and the secular interests was the crux of problem apart from the tussle between organisation and government wings of Akali Dal. It remained a dilemma for Akali chief ministers.

As already told, the Akali Dal’ working committee rejected Jan Sangh demand of Change in the jurisdiction of the newly set up Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. The central parliamentary board and Jan Sangh met on 29th June and permitted its Punjab unit to withdraw its support to the ministry. In fact, the debacle of Akali Dal in 1971 Lok Sabha elections, large scale expansion of the ministry and serious charges of corruption against some of the ministers made the position of the Sant and Parkash Singh Badal very awkward. As the rumour of Justice Gurnam Singh’s effort to topple the government of Badal surfaced, Badal in consultation with the Sant rushed to the Governor and advised dissolution of the assembly.

Thus ended another coalition government headed by the Akali Dal and made possible by the good efforts of the Sant. The sant himself died of cardiac arrest in V.J. Hospital Amritsar on 30 October, 1972. Akali Dal was devoid of leadership. It is worthy of mentioning here that all the makers of modern Punjab, the Principal actors on the political stage departed as soon as their mission was over. Partap Singh Kairon who ruled with iron hands for eight years, died at the hands of assassins in broad daylight on 6 February, 1966. Master Tara who fought indefatigably for Sikh rights, died as a fallen hero. The Sant who succeeded in humbling him, was himself humbled. He retired or was retired forcibly. He eventually was rescued by an early death from oblivion Sant Chanan Singh barely outlived his benefactor by three weeks. However, S. Darshan Singh Pheruman excelled above all by his martyrdom.