

BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN THE PUNJAB AND ITS AFTERMATH

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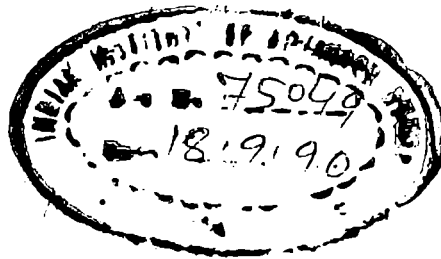
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BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN THE PUNJAB AND ITS AFTERMATH

S.S. BAL

The British began administering the Punjab through a Board, the like of which had not been devised by the British in their already long history of conquering places in India, forming provinces and setting up administrative machineries to govern them. The Board consisted of three members with equal powers, though one of them was called its President. The Board was abolished in January 1853 and the Punjab was placed under a Chief Commissioner. In 1858, for the signal services rendered in reconquering Delhi, the head of the province, till now Chief Commissioner, was made a Lieutenant-Governor.

Between 1858 and 1901, fifteen Lieutenant-Governors presided over the destiny of the province. They included some whose names are still remembered by laymen. They had among them others whose names would sound unfamiliar even to specialists in Punjab history.

The British began their rule of the newly established province in 1849 in a brilliant way. The Board of Administration demobilised the Sikh Army and raised auxiliary forces of which the Guide Corps and the Military Police attained big fame. They served the dual purpose of guarding the frontier and absorbing some of the demobilised soldiery. Those in the regular or irregular force were demilitarised. As many as 120,000 stands of armed matchlocks, swords and other weapons were made to be surrendered. Numerous forts and defensive fortifications all over the rural areas were levelled with the ground, whereas, new ones were built on the 'frontier'. It abolished transit duties and began a massive road-building programmes. In 1850 and 1851, it got 832 miles of roads under construction, 2487 miles traced and 5,272 miles surveyed for future construction. It introduced the policy of checking *sati* and female infanticide. It instructed Dr. Jamison to report on the physical features and the flora and fauna of the Punjab. It instructed Dr Fleming to report on the possibility of further exploiting the salt ranges.

The Board continued with the Summary Settlement begun in 1847-48. The demands in this settlement were fixed and in cash. These two features of the revenue demands fixed for the short period of three years could hit the peasantry hard and cause discontent if the prices were to fall. Luckily for the Board, that did not happen. On the other hand in 1850 and 1851, the harvests were good and the prices of agriculture products on an ascending curve.

The Board hit the *jagirdars*, perhaps the most powerful class during Ranjit Singh's rule, when in most cases their claims to rent-free tenures were granted only for life. Evidently, John, the younger of the two brothers on the Board, had his way. Unlike Henry, who advocated a liberal attitude towards the *jagirdars*, John stood for their early extinction. He regarded the *jagirdars* as parasites who lived on the blood of the honest *ryots* and who put a heavy strain on the state exchequer. He believed that their extinction would bring the people into direct contact with the 'benevolent British rule'. John could have his way because of Lord Dalhousie's agreement with his approach.

Dalhousie's choice for John's approach led to the Board's abolition and John's elevation to the Chief Commissionership and the sole headship of the province. The contradictory views on *Jagir* cases between Henry and John marred the proceedings of the Board and disgusted the former. He resigned. Dalhousie accepted Henry's resignation with a haste that suggested that he not only excepted it but wanted it. He abolished the Board and put the Punjab under the exclusive charge of John, as its Chief Commissioner.

John continued with the policies pursued by the Board, including the one he had successfully advocated on the *jagirs*. He not only completed and perfected measures originated by the Board of Administration but also initiated new ones. He got constructed the first railway in the Punjab which connected Amritsar with Multan and facilitated the Punjab trade with the outside world. He arranged the first census in the hope that it would help him and his officers to know their charge better. He constituted the Education Department and insisted on its opening schools to educate the Punjabis.

He breathed a new spirit into the administration and thereby laid the foundation of the celebrated Punjab school of administration. He streamlined it and laid down guiding principles for its officials. He divided the Punjab into seven divisions which were further divided into districts. He instructed the heads of the districts, the Deputy Commissioners, to move among the people and cultivate personal contacts with all classes so as to banish all sense of strangeness from their minds, and to make them feel at home under the British rule. He gave them enough powers to make "judges, revenue collectors, thief catchers, diplomats conservancy officers, and sometimes sergeants and chaplains, all in one". He made them dictators but insisted that they be paternal in their attitude towards their subjects.

What enabled John Lawrence to infuse a new spirit into the administration and coax his subordinates to imbibe the spirit was that his was a Chief Commissioner's Province and unlike the provinces of Madras, Bombay, Bengal and North-Western Provinces, the Regulations passed before 1833 were not applicable there. The Chief Commissioner had no executive councillor whom he was duty bound to consult and whom he was to out-argue to have his way. He was a despot and the Divisional

Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners, finding themselves in tune with John Lawrence, could act the despots too. The Commissioners exercised great powers. The Deputy Commissioners became the government for the bulk of the people in their districts. Many of the Deputy Commissioners in the Punjab were drawn from the army and so exercised the untrammelled authority allowed to them much more effectively than the civilians are trained to exercise. The government of John Lawrence became a government of men much more than a government of Laws. The Punjab administration was not bound, as in the Governor's Provinces of British India even by Rules, Regulations and Acts of their own. The personal elements came into play in a special degree and John Lawrence's administration of the Punjab became much more patriarchal than that in the older provinces.

In the crisis that the British faced in 1857-58, the Punjab not only remained calm but also helped in many ways to crush one of the most serious challenges to the British authority that they ever faced in the history of their rule in India. That was primarily due to the objective conditions prevalent in the situation. There was a deep antagonism between the Hindustanee troops and the Punjabis. The people of the Punjab regarded the Hindustanee troops as an army of occupation and detested them ever since the First Sikh War. Now that this army revolted, the disbanded soldiery and the martial classes of the Punjab felt that their opportunity had come.

The province was at the moment pacific. All the influential Chiefs who might have become the centres of disaffection were either in exile or had died. There was no nucleus left round which the anti-British elements could gather. The new regime had given to the people security and they had no wish to exchange that security for anarchy, the terror of which was vividly remembered by some of them. In the absence of agitators and popular leaders, the masses were apathetic. The foreign power to the north-west, Afghanistan, which would have behaved differently a decade earlier had no interest in fomenting trouble which it could create among the Muslim tribes in the trans-Indus districts of the Punjab. One-time great enemy of the British, Dost Muhammad, the king of Afghanistan, was feeling indebted to the Government of India for the material aid it had lately given to him for fighting the Persian menace. He now looked upon the British as a friendly power.

A succession of good harvests had put the Punjab agriculturists in a happy frame of mind. They were in good humour. Trade had begun flourishing and there was an air of prosperity everywhere. After a decade of disorder, the people had settled down to peaceful pursuits and all that they desired now was a tranquil atmosphere. They had no particular grievances and hence there was no desire for change.

Under the circumstances, it was not difficult for John Lawrence and his assistants to disarm the disaffected Hindustanee troops with alacrity. They adopted stern measures where they felt they were called for. At places some over-enthusiastic officials even indulged in wanton cruelty but without producing any reaction among

the Punjabis. Obviously, the Punjabi masses were quite willing to see the hated *Purbias* defeated.

That encouraged John Lawrence to go in for a gamble which subsequently earned him the description of the saviour of India. He ordered the famous Guide Corps to march for Delhi and followed that up with large-scale recruitments of Pathans and other dare-devils in right earnest. The fighting manhood of the province responded in thousands to Lawrence's call to arms. In July 1857, John made another gamble. He started a quick mobilisation of the entire military resources of the province to strengthen the British Army on the Ridge. He collected the Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims and sent them to Delhi. He raised thousands of new Punjabi troops, trained them and sent them to help the reconquest of the city whose fall, Lawrence felt, was absolutely necessary for the safety of the empire. By the end of August, 34,000 additional Punjabi troops, equal in number to the old Regular Army, were at Delhi.

On 14th September, Kashmiri Gate was blown off. Six days later, the city and the forts were captured. But for the large number of troops from the Punjab, the army on the Ridge might not have achieved these vital successes. Lawrence received as many congratulations on the fall of Delhi as the Governor-General of India and for good reason. His gamble had paid. The fall of Delhi rang the knell of the Mutiny. Now the rebellion entered a stage which was as disorganised as it was luckless and the British went on to fight the insurgents with confidence. Their victory was never in doubt.

The Punjab province gained in importance because of the Punjabis' role in the Mutiny. The Delhi territory was formally transferred from the North-Western Provinces to the Punjab. It added six more districts grouped in two divisions to the twenty-seven districts in which the Punjab was so far divided. It was elevated to become a Lieutenant-Governor's Province.

John Lawrence took charge of Delhi in February and immediately changed the policy of revenge that the British had pursued after its reconquest six months earlier. For three days after its fall, the city had been given up to vengeance of the victorious soldiers but that had not satisfied the European press and the population. The vengeance continued. It was fitful but ferocious. The British soldiers had indulged in bloodshed and a further display of savagery. John Lawrence decreed that no property be confiscated and no life taken except after trial by the Commission set up for the purpose. He showed forbearance and discrimination in the hour of victory and that helped him a great deal in fulfilling the task of reconstruction of the shattered city.

John Lawrence remodelled the civil administration of the six districts transferred from the North-Western provinces to his province after the Punjab pattern. He invested every district officer with triple powers, fiscal, magisterial and executive. He made no attempt to revive the complicated and intricate Regulations which

prevailed in the Delhi territory before the Mutiny. Instead of elaborate and complicated laws, he introduced a simple code based on popular customs and usages. He established Small Cause Courts which through their promptness, cheapness and impartiality brought considerable relief to the people who had been groaning under the Martial Law ever since the British troops had reconquered the City of Delhi. Within six months of taking charge of Delhi and the six districts transferred to the Punjab from the North-Western Provinces, he was able to report that perfect order reigned throughout the new territory.

The services of John Lawrence to the Empire did not end with the reconquest and rehabilitation of Delhi. In the next six months that he continued to remain the Lieutenant-Governor of the province, he crushed elements that dared challenge the British authority. He organised pursuing columns composed of Punjabi troops to chase the insurgents. These columns did their work well. What enabled them to do this was their mobility. "But for the mobility of our Punjabee troops", writes Thorburn, "this chase after the scattered mutineers would have been indefinitely prolonged."

John Lawrence gave up the Lieutenant-Governorship of the Punjab in February 1859. He retired with the reputation of having saved the Empire. His administration was praised, in fact overpraised, and gained the name of a school. That the system was subsequently given up in a number of ways was inevitable. Now the Punjab was after all only a part of the British Indian Empire with some provinces having an administrative history which was already more than a hundred years old.

The erosion of the Punjab system started within the term of the very first successor of John Lawrence as the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab. The erosion was complete by the beginning of the tenure of [his fourth successor. Perhaps it would have been even more rapid if in part of the period between the start of the erosion and its completion, John Lawrence had not been the Governor-General and Viceroy of India and taken a special interest in the Punjab. The Civil Procedure Code was introduced in the Punjab in 1859 and the Criminal Procedure Code in 1861. The Penal Code, widely prevalent elsewhere, was extended to the province in 1862. Special courts for civil suits were established all over the province and in 1865, the office of the Judicial Commissioner was abolished and a Chief Court with two judges was established. The system of administration established by Lawrence was nearly dead. It received its *coup de grace* when, in 1872, a series of laws were followed by Evidence and Contract Act and brought the lawyer class to the courts. Except on some minor points, the Punjab administrative system was from that year onward the same as in other parts of British India.

While the system was slowly being obliterated, the men operating within the system were continuing their work oblivious of what would become of it. They were zealous men who had the enthusiasm of the people committed to a school. They believed in working hard and doing things well. Land revenue work which they re

garded important kept them busy but still they had time for other things. They organised relief for the starving people in famine years and also arranged higher education for the ambitious young men.

In their assessment of land revenue, they stuck to some of the basic principles laid down by John Lawrence while effecting the Summary Settlement as a member of the Board of Administration or as Chief Commissioner. Land revenue collection was not to exceed one-half of the gross produce was one such principle. Another was that it was not to be accompanied by any such cesses as *nazarana* and *shukrana*, so zealously collected by the officials of the Sikh government. Still another was that the collection was to be in money alone and was not to be reduced for any reason whatsoever. It was presumed that doing that was as unjustified in the year when harvests had failed as increasing it in a year of bumper crops.

While fixing the land revenue in the Regular Settlement, the British officers engaged on it also recorded rights. They fixed ownership rights, occupancy rights and tenant rights. They did that a bit too thoroughly. Soon the individuals, guaranteed these rights, forgot their age-old obligations to the brotherhood who had guaranteed these when the State had never bothered about them. The result was disastrous for the very people who had received these rights with the State to back them. The worst sufferers were the peasant proprietors. The next worst were the tenants. But that was neither in the sixties nor in the seventies. At the moment, those who happened to be peasants or tenants rejoiced in their statutory rights which were becoming more and more valuable with every passing year. The prices were rising, the value of the land was increasing, and the land was becoming a marketable commodity.

While this trend was still on the way to creating the situation which was to force the Governor-General or the Lieutenant-Governor to note it, the functionaries at the lower level were attempting the spread of higher education among the Punjabis. In 1862, they opened a Government College at Lahore and another at Delhi. They even encouraged a movement in favour of female education in that year. They showed unbounding glee on first graduates coming out of these colleges. They were, of course, not quite sure as to what sort of education would suit their Punjabi subjects. Only Dr Lietner, who had come to the Punjab as the Principal of the Government College, Lahore, in 1864, seemed to feel sure of it. He founded the 'Anjuman-i-Punjab' and started the 'Oriental Movement for founding a National University in the Punjab. Perhaps because the officials did not support him, the Movement was only a partial success. After a strenuous, though peaceful, struggle of about five years what the Punjab got was a University college and not a University.

The heart of the British functionaries trained to paternal attitudes went out in sympathy to the Punjabi people in times of distress. In 1860, when there was famine, they organised large-scale relief works. Eight years later, when one of the worst famines of the century came to threaten the people, they organised even better relief

work Under the belief that prevention was better than cure, they took steps to that effect. The starting of an Agricultural Department was one such step. The passing of the first Land Improvement Act was another. Both the steps were taken in 1872.

The British functionaries trained in paternal schools felt angry with the sections of the Punjabi people who did not appreciate their exertions. They would not understand that sympathetic rule should not appear to sections of Punjabis a proper substitute for one that had symbolised their exertions of more than a century. When that section non-cooperated, they felt angry. When that section agitated, they felt scandalised. When opportunity came their way to teach that section a lesson, they showed no mercy. Cowen's blowing off sixty-nine Kukas by tying them to the mouths of guns was reflective of that approach.

The boom of guns that blew the Kukas to death killed the paternal system as well. It ended an era. Between 1871 and 1882, the Punjab administration was made to switch over from the rule of men to the rule of law. The provisions contained in the Punjab Civil Code were combined with Bengal Regulations and administrative rules and orders and were passed as Punjab Laws Act. The Punjab administration was successfully bridled when enjoined to stick to the provisions of the Act. More than ever before, the All-India Acts were extended to the Punjab. In 1883, it was the Land Improvement Act. In 1884, it was the amended code of Criminal Procedure Act and in 1886 the Income Tax Act.

The British were lucky to have decided to make the Punjab administration shift to the rule of law. By now, a new generation of men was coming of age to rejoice in it. These men who were imbibing modern spirit could not have tolerated the rule of men, however good it might have been. The Sikhs were waiting to get into the grip of the Singh Sabha Movement which, unlike the revivalist Kukas, was forward-looking and adept in the use of the press. It was soon publishing numerous papers and bubbling with enthusiasm. The educated Hindus were soon to take the Arya Samaj in a way as it had never taken to any other movement for centuries. In spite of its slogan 'back to the Vedas, it was more concerned with ridding the existing Hindu society of its numerous ills than something else. The Muslims were itching for the birth of some messiah to lead them to fame and glory.

A host of educational endeavours reflected the existing mood of the Punjabis to jump to modernity. The establishment of the Oriental College in 1877 was not followed by any new college but things moved faster after the establishment of the Punjab University in April 1882. The Arya Samajists built the Anglo-Vedic School soon after the establishment of the Punjab University and within three years raised it to a college. The Sikhs set up the Khalsa Diwan in 1883 and, as is well known, this Diwan subsequently contributed a great deal to Sikh endeavours in the educational field. In 1884, the Government opened the school for the children of the Punjab chiefs and named it, after the Punjab Governor, Aitchison School for Chiefs.

The intellectual stir accompanying these endeavours took two unfortunate courses. One led the reforming Punjabis to fanning the antipathy already developing between the Hindus and the Sikhs on the one hand, and between the Hindus and the Muslims on the other. Somewhat over-enthusiastic activities of the Arya Samaj were perhaps the cause of both. The Sikhs had been feeling as much sore over some observations of Swami Dayanand as over the last chapter of *Satyarth Prakash*. Its amended form had hardly soothed them a little when Pandit Guru Dutt and Pandit Lekh Ram's attack on Sikhism at the eleventh anniversary of the Samaj roused the Sikh anger once again. The Muslims did not know for many years how to express their anger. It manifested itself in a murderous form in 1897, when a Muslim assassinated Pandit Lekh Ram and became a hero. The second course taken by the intellectual stir of reforming Punjabis resulted in splits within the very movements that aroused their zeal. Between 1886 and 1892, the Singh Sabha was split in two and in 1892 the Arya Samaj divided itself in two Arya Samajs never to unite again. The Punjabi Muslims debated furiously on Mirza Ghulam Ahmed's claim to messiahship.

The ferocity of the conflict was the reflection of the emergence of an educated elite among all the three major communities in the Punjab. The most powerful were the Hindu educated elite; the next most powerful were the Sikh elite; the Muslims were the weakest. The Hindus had taken to Western education right from the start and could boast of highly placed officials. One such was Ganga Ram. He was the first Punjabi to become a Superintending Engineer and was posted at Lahore in 1885. During his tenure of office, he had constructed some of the most celebrated buildings of modern Lahore. By 1895, the Hindu educated elite had made enough money in commerce to establish the first Bank in the Punjab, the Punjab National Bank. Soon after, a quarrel in the Board of Directors had brought one Har Kishan Lal out of the National Bank. He floated a new bank—People's Bank of Northern India. It was followed by the formation of the first insurance company, the Bharat Bima Company. Most of these new Hindu elite were composed of urbanite commercial people with great potentiality to develop, into a capitalist class. They were Arya Samajists. The educated elite of the Sikhs, though remnants of the old Sikh aristocracy, had both rural and urban people. The Muslim educated class was almost entirely rural and almost exclusively in the Punjab west of the Ravi.

While these educated elite were coming up, the peasantry in the Punjab was losing its land to the village bania. That was partly due to the fixity of land revenue and partly due to the peasant's incapacity to save in the year of plenty for use in the year of scarcity. When rains did not fall or his crops failed, he ran to the village moneylender for credit. The bania, who would have perhaps felt reluctant half a century earlier to oblige the peasant proprietor won't hesitate now to lend the money. He did that for two reasons. One reason was that the British Courts and their laws made him feel sure that not only his money but even his exorbitant rates of interest on it were safe. The second reason was that

the land yielded profit through its produce, besides being an economic asset by itself. In their self-adulation, the British had ignored the trend and by the time they awoke to its serious nature, it was rather late. The fact that most of the tenants were Muslims and most of the Sikhs were peasant proprietors, whereas the village money-lenders were Hindus, further strained the amicable relations between the Hindus and the Muslims as also between the Hindus and the Sikhs. That might well explain much that happened in the early twentieth century and a good deal in 1947 also.

The British felt confused. They had done much to make the Punjab the granary of India. They had dug canals and established the canal colonies. In fact the canals for irrigation were among the very first things they had planned. Perhaps because they had already dug what later began to be called the Delhi and Hansi Branch of the Western Jamuna Canal, the Board of Administration drew up an ambitious scheme for irrigation as early as 1851. The Upper Bari Doab which started irrigating the politically sensitive Majha in 1860-61 was the first concrete result of that scheme. The Sirhind Canal a little later was another. On being pointed out that only eastern Punjab had gained from canal irrigation, a canal was planned for the Rachna Doab. An inundation canal started flowing through that arid the Doab in 1887. It was converted into a perennial canal in 1889. In early nineties, they had planned what was subsequently to become one of the best canal colonies in India, if not the world.

That the beneficiaries of their irrigation works should become the usurers was not a happy thought for them. In an attempt to prevent that happening, they went in for what may be termed the most momentous legislation that the British passed in India. This legislation, known as the Land Alienation Act, created a stir. The commercial classes, mostly Hindus, raised an outcry.

With the approval of the Land Alienation Act on 8th January, 1901, began a new era. The creation of the N.W.F.P. took place ten months later, thus making the first year of the twentieth century as one of the most momentous in the modern Punjab. What interested the Punjab bureaucracy at the moment, however, was another thing. A political Agent was appointed to control the political relations of the Punjab Government with three Phulkian states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. As if encouraged by the prospects of more of similar jobs coming up in the near future to relieve its members occasionally from normal duties, the Punjab bureaucracy got very active. When the Cis-Sutlej part of the Punjab was threatened with famine conditions, it opened test works at Hissar and afforded gratuitous relief to the people.

In 1902 was founded the Chief Khalsa Diwan, a loyalist organisation committed to educational activity among the Sikhs. It earned instant popularity which was, however, due neither to its loyalty nor to the laudable educational work it promised to do but to its insistence on the independent Sikh entity. That was in tune with the Sikh mood then. In 1905, the Sikhs were showing enthusiasm in removing

the Hindu idols from the Golden Temple. It was, however, another event of the year that had stirred the Punjabis more. The event was the murder of an Indian soldier by a British officer. The emotional Punjabis were touched to the quick. They derived genuine thrill next year when they heard patriotic songs. Iqbal's 'Hindustan Hamara' thrilled them. His 'Bulbul Ki Faryad' evoked their piteous cries. Mulk Raj Bhalla's poem 'Ram Chander Ki Faryad' despite its title, was as popular with the Sikhs and the Muslims as with the Hindus. In this poem; the poet demanded that Indians occupy the same place in their country as others did in theirs.

In 1904, there occurred what was perhaps the Punjab's first student strike. It was the student body of the foremost Government College in the province that had staged it. It reflected the youth's resentment against the recently imposed restrictions on employment of Indians in Government Service, though the immediate cause was the Principal's order that his students should wear in the college 'blazers' made of English cloth only.

An interesting result of the blazer strike was the start of a newspaper, *The Punjabee*. It soon replaced *The Tribune* as the spokesman of the Punjabi people. The cautious, liberal approach of the latter no longer reflected their latest mood. Two years after it had started its publication *The Punjabee* caused an anti-British upheaval. What enabled it do that was the extremist in the Punjabi in 1900. Lajpat Rai, one of the trio, constituting Lal-Bal-Pal, rose high in Congress, went as a member of its deputation to England and, on return, organised a public meeting at Lahore, believed to be the first of its type in the Punjab.

Under the belief that the inroads of Indian nationalism in the Punjab was an urban phenomenon and that it would never become a mass movement, the Punjab Government chose to crush it. As often happens, the repression boomeranged. Instead of getting suppressed, the movement went to the rural areas. In the hope that some step, which would bridle the rural families to safe conduct to the maximum, would stop the further spread of the movement, the Government passed the Colonies Bill. It proved to be the proverbial straw. The rural unrest combined with the urban unrest and set the province on fire. If Lyallpur resounded with 'Pagri Sambhal O' Jatta', Rawalpindi Bar was on the war-path and its railway workers on a none too peaceful strike. The Government deported Lajpat Rai to Mandalay. It also deported Ajit Singh, the fire-brand, who had voiced the rural unrest, to the same place. Showing a singular lack of imagination, it deported the two at the same time. The people declared that now they could not be cowed. They responded by forming Bharat Mata Society and to emphasise that the Muslims were as much behind it as the others also named it Anjuman-i-Muhibban-i-watan.

The Punjab stir of 1907 had its repercussions abroad. On a Government scholarship at Oxford, the brilliant Har Dayal started feeling that revolution was imminent in the Punjab when he was wasting time abroad. Not to miss the thrill of participation

in a great cause, he gave up his scholarship and hurried to India. On arriving in India, when he saw Lala Lajpat Rai behind the bars rather than marching in triumph in Lahore, he hurried back to England with the same speed. He made another trip to India and this time stayed long enough to form Nau Jawan Sabha whose members subsequently threw a bomb on the Viceroy. If their aim was to prove that the Punjabi Delhi would be as unsafe for the Viceroy as the Bengali Calcutta, they had succeeded in ample measure.

With some delay, the Punjab stir had its repercussions also in the distant Canada and the States. Stirred by what had happened back home, the aroused conscience of the Punjabis abroad led them to organise the first Khalsa Diwan Societies and then Associations. All of them were finally merged into Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast, popularly called the Ghadar Party. The Party was committed to Indian independence through armed revolution. It chose a wrong time to organise a revolution in the Punjab. When the war broke out, the members of the Party came in thousands to India only to find that the British recruitment of the Punjabis in large numbers had changed the situation to their great disadvantage. They still planned and they still acted but while they created a stir, they did not bring the revolution. All their plans and all their actions were soon forgotten except in guarded jails where they were lodged in large numbers.

The large-scale recruitment of the Punjabis in the first year of the war was not the only cause of Ghadar discomfiture. The other cause, perhaps the more important one, was the great deterioration in inter-communal relations of the three communities in the Punjab since the stormy days of 1907. The Minto Morley Reforms had contributed to this deterioration even before things had started happening in accordance with the provisions contained in them. That was because the Muslims were lobbying for communal representation and reservation on an All-India level while opposing them for the Punjab. The Muslims had got both, as much in the Centre as in Provinces where they were a minority. The Sikhs had got neither the weightage nor the separate electorate in the Punjab. Full of frustration before the Bill had become an Act, they felt bitter when it came into force. Their bitterness against the Muslims soon turned against the Hindus as well. In the first elections to the Council, not even one Sikh could enter the Legislature and they blamed the Hindu voters for it. When the Lt-Governor subsequently nominated one or two Sikhs to the Council, he supplied them the platform where they ventilated anti-Hindu feeling in abundance. In this strained atmosphere, the Ghadar failure was natural.

The position changed in the three and a half years that the war had continued after the Ghadar fiasco. The three communities came nearer and nearer with every passing month. The tempo of this rapprochement was directly proportional to the speed with which the war was being waged all over the world. Partly that was due to the fact that at the moment, the government was as keenly interested in it as the

nationalist forces, though for different reasons. Turkey's fighting the war on the side of the Germans against the British also increased the tempo of this rapprochement.

Gandhi appeared on the scene and made a dramatic use of this rapprochement but chiefly because the British had first made a mistake. On the basis of recommendations made by a Committee set up two years earlier on the suggestion of the Punjab's Lieutenant-Governor, it published two bills in its gazette to be discussed in the Council. One of them was the Criminal Law (Emergency) Bill which sought to empower the government for an expeditious trial of revolutionaries, with no right of appeal. The nationalist India looked upon this bill as an attempt to frighten the people and prevent them from demanding what even the British had often declared they were planning to concede after the war, and felt angry. Gandhi used this anger to become an undisputed leader of the Congress. What helped him do that was as much the novel method he had adopted on behalf of the Congress to register the country's protest against the Bill as the events that followed the adoption of that method. He had given a call of nation-wide hartal and had worked hard to make it a success. The Punjab contributed to the success of Gandhi's call through precious blood. Gandhi decried the wrongs done to the Punjab under the Criminal Law (Emergency) Bill, demanding Government's redress and thanks to the war-time rapprochement of the three communities which rallied the Punjabi Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs round him in his attempt to force the Government to do so. Gandhi achieved quick success, at least partially so. In October 1919, the government appointed, tardily though, under Hunter, a Disorders Inquiry Committee which subsequently censured General Dyer and criticised the administration of the Martial Law.

Gandhi used this success to prevail upon the Congress a year later to begin a nation-wide non-cooperation movement against the introduction of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. For this purpose, a Sikh movement which arose in the Punjab soon after the appointment of Hunter Committee came very handy to him. The movement had arisen as a reaction to loyalist Sikhs of the Chief Khalsa Diwan trying to be on the right side of the Punjab Government when the tempers were strained and the Hunter Committee Report was just announced. Both because it chose its issue correctly and Sikhs were in as agitated a mood as other Indians, the Sikh League achieved one spectacular success. In an agitation it began within six months of its formation, it demanded the demolition of the wall around the Rikab Ganj Gurdwara at Delhi and backed the demand by threatening to send Shahidi Jathas there. The Government felt worried, found out an intermediary and through a face-saving formula proposed by him demolished the wall.

Meanwhile, the Congress launched its non-cooperation movement in the country in October 1920, but before it could catch momentum, the Government not only announced the implementation of the Montford Reforms but also held elections to the Provincial Councils successfully. In the Punjab Legislative Council

of ninety-four, seventy one were elected— 35 Muslims, 15 Sikhs and 21 Hindus and others. The majority in them represented the landed interests. They could come to the Council in large numbers as much because of the limited franchise as to the boycott of elections by the Congress and the Central Sikh League. Very aptly, they chose to club themselves in a group called Zamindara League and succeeded in having two out of the three ministerships instituted to run the transferred subjects. The two were Sir Fazal-i-Hussain and Sir Chhotu Ram.

But while the elections were being organised and held, the Sikhs encouraged by the victory of the Sikh League over the Government on the Rikab Ganj issue started the Gurudwara Reform Movement. Under the command of numerous Jathas simultaneously formed all over the Punjab, they started capturing the gurudwaras and began driving the Mahants out of them. A new leadership took the place of the Sikh League and then the Akali jathas.

Under the Montford Reforms, the Punjab, as a province, stood upgraded. A Lieutenant-Governor's province since 1859, it was now made a Governor's province. It symbolised the start of the new and last phase of the history of the Punjab under the British rule.

The elevation of the Punjab to a Governor's province took place when the Gurudwara Reform Movement was heading to a climax. The Central Sikh League had yielded the leadership of the community to the determined men of the Akali Jathas who had successfully mounted the Movement to unprecedented heights. That an elected minister instead of some bureaucrat handled them seemed to have no influence on them. Obviously, that was due to the reason that they looked upon all who had fought the elections as totally subservient to alien masters. They seemed to derive great strength from the fact that Congress under Gandhi had started a nation-wide movement against the British.

Even before 3rd January 1921, when Sir R.D. Maclagan got entitled to be addressed as the Governor, the Akali Jathas, still not united in one centralised *dal*, had literally snatched many Gurudwaras for the panth. These Jathas had in fact become a terror for the hereditary managers of gurudwaras, the Mahants. At Amritsar, for example, one Sikh Jatha had hardly met to discuss the course to be adopted for the take-over of the Harmandir when its Mahant fled the place. Obviously he could not have known that by doing so, he had given the movement a fillip it had never hoped for. Under the sincere belief that it owed its victory to the panth, the Jatha which possessed the Harmandir now threw it open to the entire community and to give concrete meaning to their action sent out a mandate to all Sikhs to come and meet at Amritsar on 15th November, 1920. The spirit of Gurmata seemed to have suddenly recovered from its long slumber to hand over its authority to what the Sikh representatives might choose to create on that day. The Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandak Committee that the Sikh representatives created on 16th November gave to the movement what it had lacked so far, a centralised

direction. From the S.G.P.C., as the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee began to be popularly called, to the formation of a unified organ of separate Akali Jathas was an important step. On 27th December, 1920, the Shiromani Akali Dal was born.

Between themselves, the two— S.G.P.C. and Akali Dal— created a situation which left only two alternatives before the mahants. They could go to the court and insist on the Gurudwaras being declared as their personal properties or they could create a situation which would force the district authorities to help them. Mahant Narain Das of Nankana Sahib chose the latter course and, perhaps because he adopted it rather clumsily, enacted a tragedy in which 130 men were consumed by flames. Because of the wide repercussions of the tragedy, the solution of the Gurudwara problem became even more difficult. Perhaps the bill, which Sir Fazal-i-Hussain had proposed bringing to the Council might have solved it but now he hesitated again and again. Gandhi's visit to Nankana and the Government's publication of the Hunter Committee Report created further complications. The latter did not satisfy even the moderates. The students strikes in the Khalsa College, Amritsar, and in the Islamia College Lahore, underlined the degree of the discontent which the report had created among the Punjabis. In that atmosphere when the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar committed the mistake of taking over the keys of the Harmandir Sahib, he precipitated another crisis.

When Gandhi withdrew the non-cooperation movement after the Chaura Chauri incident, the Akalis did not withdraw the Gurudwara Reform Movement. The Punjab Government hoped that with the Congress Movement withdrawn and Gandhi lodged in Jail, the Akalis might not carry on for long. As if to test if that would happen, the Punjab Government hastily passed a Gurudwara Act. Akalis responded to it by not only rejecting the Act but also starting another struggle known as Guru ka Bagh Morcha. In all probability, the Akalis calculated on the Government's changing its attitude after another Council elections. The Government brought out the mailed fist. A Hindu philanthropist stepped in. He saved the face of both sides but could not stop the struggle.

For both Akalis and the Government, it soon became a war of nerves, which was tested to the full in 1923 and 1924, when the Government deposed the Maharaja of Nabha. The Akalis hastened to start another morcha. In the hope that a final blow would do the trick, the Government declared both the Akalis and the S.G.P.C. unlawful bodies. That was in October 1923. The Akalis connived at if not encouraged, the Babbar Akali Movement and violence entered into the picture. It proved a prolonged thing and began to tell on both the Government and the Akalis. In sheer exhaustion, the two agreed to a compromise which enabled the passage of Gurudwara Reform Act. Their compromise, as all compromises go, did not satisfy the diehards in both the camps. Among the Akalis, it caused a split and considerably weakened them.

One of the important consequences of the Gurudwara Reform Movement was a cleavage between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Most Hindus sided with the Mahants and Akalis did not like it. It found expression in the none too new assertion that the Sikhs were an independent entity and not a sect of the Hindus.

The relations between the Hindus and the Muslims worsened. Perhaps because Gandhi had stopped the non-cooperation too abruptly or perhaps because Turks had solved the Khilafat problem by abolishing it. There was nothing to bind the Hindus and the Muslims. Hindus took to *Shuddhi* and the Muslims to *Tabligh* and this divided the two communities in two hostile camps. By 1925, when the Akalis ended their quarrel with the Government, the relations between the two communities had deteriorated a good deal. A series of riots all over the province made 1926 the worst year in the Hindu-Muslim relationship.

The quarrel between the Akalis and the British from 1921 to 1925 and the inimical attitudes of the three communities towards one another had benefited the landed interests in the Punjab. Well-organised since the formation of the Unionist Party, they continued to dominate all the four reformed Councils between 1921 and 1928.

The challenge to the landed interest in the Punjab after 1926, as before the Sikh Gurudwara Act, did not appear in the Council but outside the legislature. First it was expressed by the Kirti Kisan Party and then the Nau Jawan Sabha. The most active members of the Kirti Kisan Party were ex-Ghadarites. The members of the Nau Jawan Sabha were the idealist youths. Between themselves, they formed a dangerous combination.

Before, however, the challenge of the two groups could bear any concrete fruit either singly or in combination, Gandhi appeared on the scene and once again swept off everything before him. As in 1919, the pretext for him to galvanise the nation was once again supplied by the British. They sent Simon Commission to investigate the working of the Montford Reforms but saw to it that it consisted of none but the English. The collective ego of the nation was badly touched and Gandhi channelled it to boycott the Commission totally.

In the Punjab, the boycott took a singularly Punjabi form. Lala Lajpat Rai, by now the undisputed leader of the Punjab Congress, received injuries which proved fatal. As if to prove that the Punjabi is not given to forgiveness, the Nau Jawan Sabha decided on an instant revenge. Bhagat Singh and his associates first killed Saunders and then threw a bomb in the Central Assembly. A protracted trial made them, specially Bhagat Singh, the darling of the youth all over the country and particularly in the Punjab.

In 1929, while Bhagat Singh was being tried, Punjab was all excitement. He had become a symbol and the Nau Jawan Sabha was active. Other things also added to the excitement. One such was the Meerut Conspiracy Case in which, among others, being tried were prominent Kirti leaders. If the Nau Jawan Sabha showed

particular concern for Bhagat Singh, the Kirti Party did that for Sohan Singh. The climax came when the Congress met at Lahore and passed what is remembered as the Independence Resolution.

In the following year, this excitement developed to reach a feverish pitch. As desired by the Congress, people observed 26th January as the Independence Day. The clarity of the goal combined with the magic spell of the Mahatma to make the people combine optimism with hope. The thrill resulting from taking the Independence pledge had hardly died away when Gandhi gave another surprise. It was not so much the disobedience of the Civil Law as the manner of it that attracted attention. A half-naked faqir, as Gandhi was, marched to prepare salt. It symbolised his concern for the poor.

Judgement on the Bhagat Singh case, in which Sukhdév, Rajguru and Bhagat Singh were sentenced to death, was a signal for daring acts. The fact that their case had gone to the Privy Council would not deter them. Har Kishan's opening fire on the Punjab Governor was the most daring of such acts.

The Punjabi excitement generated by the Civil Disobedience Movement and the trial of Bhagat Singh and his associates dropped as suddenly as it had arisen. In fact, to an average Punjabi, it seemed to have ended in an anti-climax. To him, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact appeared a surrender and Bhagat Singh's execution, a fortnight later, a proof of that surrender. The political depression started hitting the Punjabi in that year.

That was not completely true of the Punjabi Muslims. Perhaps because they had not shared the thrill of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience or Bhagat Singh's activities to the same extent as the Hindus and the Sikhs, or perhaps because the economic depression had started hitting them more, they were still prepared for political action. Two organisations, the Ahrars and the Khaksars founded in 1931, sought to organise them for it. They went in for ceaseless activity in the thirties and excited the Muslims and perhaps the other Punjabis a good deal. The two were, however, soon lost in political wilderness. Their tragedy was that they could not decide on the ultimate destiny of the Muslims whom they sought to lead in the shape of the things to come. They brought themselves in repeated conflicts with the Punjab Government and the neighbouring princely states. The excitement that they had created among the Muslims came handy to the Muslim League.

Other things had also happened while the Ahrars and the Khaksars were active. The political apathy of the Sikhs and the Hindus in 1931 and the subsequent years changed to active interest once again in December 1934, when the then Secretary of State for India introduced the Bill for the future government of India in the British Parliament. Till it became an Act eight months later, the excitement continued unabated. Whereas the Congress and the Muslim League were showing particular concern for the Federation and the Dyarchy envisaged in the bill for the Centre, the Akalis felt worried about the provincial autonomy as likely to be

introduced in the Punjab. There were heated debates on the bill all over India but more so in the Punjab. The Communal Representation in the Act was not a new thing, but the stakes were now bigger. The acrimonious debate between the Indian National Congress and the Muslims all over the country and their provincial units and the Akali Dal in the Punjab reflected the bigness of the stakes.

The British Parliament passing the Act did not stop the excitement. Most parties rejected the Federation and the Dyarchy at the Centre. Congress put conditions for accepting even the provincial autonomy. It is interesting to observe, however, that when the elections were finally held in 1936-37 in the Punjab, it is not those who had been most vocal about the drawbacks of the Act who got elected but the members of the Unionist Party. Out of the total of 175 seats, they won 86. It is difficult to say whether that was because they had organised for elections while the others debated on the Act or whether the landed interest knew how to protect its interests better. It would be worth noting that in the Ministry (three Muslims, two Hindus and one Sikh) the Unionist leaders formed to help him run the province, all but one were big landlords. Obviously, they had been selected to guard the interest of the class to which they belonged.

The outbreak of the second World War strengthened this Ministry a great deal. This was particularly so after the Congress asked its ministers in the provinces where it had its ministries to resign in protest against the British involving India in the war without consulting the Indian representative parties. Partly because of that and also because the Punjab supplied most of the recruits for the rapidly increasing Indian Army, the British got keen on strengthening the hands of the Unionist Ministry in the Punjab to the maximum. Subsequently, when Gandhi began his individual satyagraha, their keenness to strengthen this Ministry became all the greater. They naturally felt happy when Sir Sikander Hayat Khan entered into a pact with Baldev Singh and rallied Akali support around him. May be, the rank and file of the Unionists then thought they were in an unassailable position.

They were mistaken. The Ahrar and the Khaksar activities, particularly in 1939 and 1940, had alienated the Muslim masses from the Unionists. Under the circumstances, when the Muslim League met at Lahore in March 1940 and passed the Pakistan Resolution, it carried away the Muslim masses in toto. It is not without significance that from now onwards, most members of the Unionist Party were Unionists within and Muslim Leaguers outside the Punjab. It was more the Muslim League's pre-occupation with provinces where the Muslims were in a minority than even the British support that had kept the Ministry going. Even after entering into a pact with Baldev Singh, Sir Sikander knew that his fate as a premier rested in the hands of Jinnah. When he died in January 1943, he left a rather bleak future for his successor, Sir Khizar Hayat Khan.

Things started moving outside the Punjab much to the disadvantage of the Unionist Party. The Muslim League, taking advantage of incarceration of the Congress

leaders behind the bars had already strengthened itself in the provinces where the Muslims were in a minority and in the summer of 1943, it had succeeded in installing its ministry in the North-Western Frontier Province, one Muslim-majority province which the Congress had proudly claimed its own. Soon after Jinnah demanded that Khizar Hayat Khan should change the title "Unionist" and describe his government as "Muslim League Coalition". Khizar refused and the Muslim members started leaving the party that had brought them to the Assembly. In July 1944 appeared the "Rajaji Formula" which further strengthened the League. The Akali friendship on which Khizar had relied ever since becoming the Premier became embarrassing when sections of Akali leadership came out with Azad Punjab scheme as a counter-blast to Pakistan.

The end of the war led to the *coup de grace* of the Unionists. On 7th May, 1945, Germany laid down arms and soon after the Labour Party came to power in Great Britain. The general elections in India held in January 1946 brought almost a complete polarisation of votes between the Congress and the Muslim League. The Unionist Party in the Punjab became a major casualty of this polarisation. Out of the one hundred and seventy-two seats in the Punjab whose results were declared, it could secure only ten whereas the Muslim League captured seventy-nine, the Congress fifty-one, panthic candidates twenty-two and Independents ten.

In a bid to return to power, Khizar and his party formed a coalition with all the non-Muslim League elements in the Punjab Assembly. The Punjab paid dearly for this heterogeneous Ministry. It could continue for a year and three months, because the League and the Congress were too busy fighting on the all-India plane to bother about it. In the Punjab, however, it earned unbounded hatred of the Punjabi Muslims.

What followed was perhaps unavoidable. A wave of communal riots ran through the Province and when Independence came, it saw not only the vivisection of the Province but also Punjabis flying at one another's throats. In the words of Khushwant Singh, "Food-weary convoys of refugees were attacked till the roads were clogged with corpses ; trains were attacked and sent across the borders with bogies jammed with slaughtered persons. No quarter was given to the sick or the aged or even infants. Young women were occasionally spared only to be ravished. Never in the history of the world was there a bigger exchange of population attended with so much bloodshed."

Punjab After Independence

With the heavy price that the Punjab had to pay for the independence of the country, there began a new phase of its history. The Punjab, that came to constitute the Indian Punjab on the recommendations of Sir Cyril Radcliffe after partition, consisted of only thirteen of the erstwhile twenty-nine districts of the province. It included by and large the districts of only two divisions of the former Punjab with bits, albeit large ones, of the two districts of the Lahore division. It consisted of the districts of Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Hoshiarpur, Ambala, Simla, Kangra, Hissar, Rohtak, Gurgaon and Karnal districts together with some tahsils of Amritsar and Gurdaspur. It also included the upper reaches of Sutlej, Beas and Ravi. It covered an area which was 38 per cent of the total area of erstwhile province of Punjab of the British Empire in India and 45% of its population. For the next eight years, it did not include PEPSU constituted on 20 August, 1948 with the integration of the princely states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kapurthala, Kalsia, Nalagarh and Malerkotla. On 1 November, 1956, PEPSU was merged in the Indian Punjab. It was only with the merger of PEPSU that the number of its districts went up to eighteen and Punjab came to cover an area of 47,205 square miles, being about 370 miles long and 230 miles wide. In 1961, it had a population of 2 crores and 3 lakhs which represented an increase of more than 25% over the 1950 population of 16.1 millions. That was four years after the inclusion in it of PEPSU covering an area of about 9,956 square miles with a population of over 34.93 lakhs.

The large scale migration of population in and out of the Indian Punjab (including what subsequently constituted the PEPSU) in the few months on the eve and after partition had made it solidly non-Muslim, with only a few pockets of Muslim population. The major social division of the Punjab now was between the two religious communities of the Hindus and the Sikhs. In 1951 the Hindus constituted about 62.3 per cent of the State's population, the Sikhs 35 per cent, and the other religious groups 2.7 per cent. In 1961 the Hindus made up 63.7 per cent of the population and the Sikhs were 33.3 per cent.

More important than the percentages of the two communities of the Indian Punjab was the demographic division of the Punjab now. The Sikhs were in majority in the seven districts in the north-west of the Punjab and the Hindus in the six lying in the South-east. A political decision taken in 1952 was to divide the area of the State into what were called Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking regions, but in essence representing Sikh-majority and Hindu-majority areas. The Punjab as a whole

was officially considered to be bilingual, with Punjabi in Gurumukhi script and Hindi in Devnagri script as the official language of the State. However, at the district level and below, the language of the respective regions was used for the purpose of administration. Only the capital city of Chandigarh was treated as bilingual.

Between 1947 and 1956, the Indian Punjab and PEPSU had followed two independent but more or less parallel courses. In the Punjab the politics followed a course which was in many ways the continuance of the politics of the undivided Punjab under the British rule. That was understandable. The framework in which it operated was the same. The head of the State was the Governor but the administration was in the hands of the ministers working on the basis of joint responsibility for their actions and owing allegiance to the Chief Minister answerable for all the actions of his ministry to the elected Assembly. Between 15 August 1947 to 23 February, 1948, the Punjab was under a coalition ministry of the Congress and the Akalis and clearly the continuation of the ministry broken by the resignation of the titular head, the Unionist leader Sir Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana, on 2 March 1947. It was headed by Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava, the leader of the 51 strong Congress Legislative Party and 23 member Akali Party in a house of 79 members. This coalition was converted into a one party government with the Akali Legislative Party merging itself in the Congress Legislative Assembly Party on 23 February 1948. The strength of the Congress henceforth fluctuated between seventy-one and seventy-nine members till the elections held in April 1952 under the new Constitution of India drafted by the Constituent Assembly of India. The absence of any opposition in the Punjab Assembly should have ensured a permanent ministry in the four and a half years between the day on which India became free and the first elections held in independent India. That was however not to be. If for nearly twenty months between 15 August 1947 and 5 April 1949, Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava was the Chief Minister, in the succeeding six months between 6 April 1949 and 18 October 1949 it was his rival in the Congress Party, Shri Bhim Sen Sachar who held the reins of the Punjab ministry. On 19 October 1949, Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava became the Chief Minister once again and remained so for another twenty months between 19 October 1949 and 16 June 1951. There was President's Rule in the Punjab for the ten months between 20 June 1951 and 4 April 1952.

An important milestone in the history of this period was the Sachar Formula. Introduced on 2 October 1949, it divided Punjab into Punjabi and Hindi Zones and laid down that "Punjabi shall be the medium of instruction in the Punjabi-speaking area in all schools upto the Matriculation stage and Hindi shall be taught as a compulsory subject from the last class of the primary department... Likewise Hindi shall be the medium of instructions in the Hindi-speaking area in all schools upto the Matriculation stage and Punjabi shall be taught as compulsory language from the last class of the primary department and upto the Matriculation stage..." The formula further laid down that 'There will, however, be cases where the parent or guardian of the pupil may wish him/her to be taught in his/her mother tongue. In such cases without

questioning that declaration of the parent or guardian, arrangement will be made for instruction in Hindi/Punjabi during the primary stage, provided, there are not fewer than 40 pupils in the whole school wishing to be instructed in Hindi/Punjabi or 10 such pupils in the primary stage."

The formula was "devised by two Hindus and two Sikhs" all of whom were at the moment members of the Congress Party. It sought to retain "the two principles of mother-tongue education and enforced bilingualism" but by "accident or design" divided the existing Punjab in two regions one of which was an overwhelmingly Sikh majority area and the second still more overwhelmingly Hindu majority. Its real intention was to retain the bilingual character of the Indian Punjab but it acted as a sharpener that divided the Punjab into Hindu and Sikh areas.

Sachar Formula was partly meant to forestall the demand of the Punjabi Suba which was first made by Master Tara Singh as the President of the Shiromani Akali Dal in April 1948. What had enabled Tara Singh do that after partition, was an important change that had come about in the socio-political position of the Sikhs. In the Punjab which constituted the Indian Punjab, the Sikhs as already noted formed 35% of its total population compared to the Hindus constituting 62.3% and the other religious groups 2.7% but what was more important was that the Muslim majority that had coloured the Shiromani Akali Dal politics ever since its inception in 1920 had disappeared and could no longer remain an important plank of its politics. From the Akali point of view, another important change had come about. The Sikhs by the end of the first quarter of 1948 had become a majority community in a contiguous part of India for the first time in its history. Three of the seven districts in which they were in a majority touched Pakistan and the fourth Jammu and Kashmir.

Master Tara Singh saw in the Sikhs constituting a majority in a strategic province, the possibility of the Akali Dal becoming the exclusive repository of power in some part of India independently of the Congress. He therefore raised the demand of Punjabi Suba and suggested its formation in the seven districts of the Punjab where they constituted the majority. He campaigned vigorously for the formation of such a Suba in the second half of 1948 and the first half of 1949.

Master Tara Singh giving a new programme to the Shiromani Akali Dal and mobilising a large support for it among the Sikhs generated communal feelings between Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab to a degree that the Punjab had not seen any time earlier in history. It embarrassed the Sikhs opposed to the Akali Dal but more than the others the former Akalis who were now members of the Congress Legislative Party. What made things difficult for them as professional politicians was the Congress adopting in December 1948 the recommendation of the JVP (consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya) Committee which ran as follows : "We are clearly of the opinion that no question of rectification of the boundaries in the Northern India should be raised at the present moment whatever the merits of

such a proposal". This dilemma of the former Akalis now in the Congress did not bother Tara Singh. In fact, he used the decision of the JVP Committee which was adopted by the Congress in its annual session held in December 1948 as the pretext to guide the Akali Dal fight for it and prevail upon the Dal to go in for a show down with the Central Government headed by the most popular of the Congress leaders then. In February 1949, he began the movement popularly remembered as the demand for shouting Punjabi Suba slogans. He himself was arrested on 20 February 1949 and remained behind the prison bars for the next seven months but the Shiromani Akali Dal continued the agitation under the leadership of Hukam Singh. It was to forestall this agitation that the Sachar Government had announced the language formula which became famous as Sachar Formula on 2 October 1949.

The Formula evoked heated controversy in the Punjabi-speaking region of the Punjab and cost Sachar dear. He was forced to resign his Chief Ministership on 18 October 1949 and see his rival Gopi Chand Bhargava become the Chief Minister again.

Bhargava released Tara Singh in the hope that he would accept Sachar Formula but that was not to be. Tara Singh capitalised on the Sachar Formula and asked for autonomous status for the Punjabi-speaking region and added to the controversy already raising strong on the Sachar Formula. He reminded the Punjab Congressmen of their organisation's long commitment to forming linguistic states and got the reply that they were against doing that for Tara Singh's demand was a communal demand. In reply Shiromani Akali Dal emphasised again and again through its leaders that its demand was not communal. After all the Punjab Government itself had created a Punjabi-speaking region and it was difficult to understand how a demand for giving to this region autonomous status could be described as a communal demand.

Things heated up. In July 1950, the Akali Dal played what it must have regarded as an ace card but it misfired. It gave a show-cause notice to the Panthic members who had joined the Congress Legislative Party in 1948 to explain why they should not leave the Congress block in the Punjab Assembly and constitute a separate block of their own and soon after directed them to do so. The directive was not obeyed by twenty-two out of twenty-three of the Akalis in the Punjab Assembly who had joined the Congress Legislative Party in the Punjab Assembly in February 1948. That could not but encourage the Punjab Congress to come out in open opposition to the Akali demand of an autonomous status for the Punjabi speaking region but in common parlance called the demand for Punjabi Suba. To oppose the Punjabi Suba by redemarcating the boundaries of Indian Punjab was a party decision of the Congress and sought to be conducted on the political plane. It was led by the Pradesh Congress Committee with greater determination than the Punjab ministry. By the end of the year 1950, the entire might of the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee under the presidentship of Partap Singh Kairon was thrown behind the campaign against creating a Punjabi Suba by conceding autonomous status to the Punjabi region.

Under the mistaken belief that disowning of the Punjabi language by the Hindus of the Punjabi speaking area of the Punjab would strengthen the opposition to the Akali demand of Punjabi Suba by undermining the very basis of the demand, the Punjab Arya Samaj leaders overdid things. In the census conducted early in 1951, they went in for a virulent propaganda to persuade the Hindus of even the Punjabi-speaking region of the Punjab to disown Punjabi entirely. Many Congress leaders chose to join this propaganda under the same belief. The Akali Dal countered this propaganda by working up the Sikhs of the region and produced such great reaction among a large number of them against the Arya Samaj that it led to disorderly situation at several places in the Punjab. Pandit Nehru sought to diffuse the situation by directing that the census authorities in Punjab should not record language in the census forms at all.

The Hindu Sikh bitterness among the members of the two communities of the Punjabi region over the issue of the mother-tongue of the Hindus of the Punjabi region created by the 1951 census increased with every passing month and prevented the Punjabi Suba demand become a broad based secular demand. The Shiromani Akali Dal had to pay for it in the first elections held in independent India in the winter of 1951-52.

The Shiromani Akali Dal chose to fight the elections held between November 1951 and January 1952 both in the Punjab and PEPSU on the Punjabi Suba issue. It advocated its formation and opposed the Congress that stood for total opposition to the formation of the Suba. That the Indian National Congress and Congress led Government of India was behind the Punjab Congress was made clear by Pandit Nehru in his election speech on 4 January 1952 at Patiala. He said the formation of the Suba would lead to the division of the country. He declared : "I will not allow India to be divided again. I will not allow any further trouble. I would put it down with all my strength".

The Akali Dal was badly mauled by the Congress in this election both in the Punjab and PEPSU. In the final outcome, the Akali Dal won only 30 out of 186 legislative seats (126 in Punjab and 60 in Pepsu). The Akalis won most of their seats in the Punjabi regions of both the states but even there, in none of them it got more than 33% votes. On the other hand, Congress percentage in no Sikh majority district went below 21.7 percent (in Bhatinda with Sikh population as high as 72.3 percent). It got more votes than the Akalis in the two Sikh-majority districts—Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Moreover, the Congress party won seats in all the districts whereas the Akalis could not get even a single seat in many districts with considerable Sikh population such as Jalandhar and Gurdaspur.

The Akali Dal did not take the defeat as the rejection of its demand of the Punjabi speaking state. It attributed the Congress victory to the "base communalism" and "dishonest methods of the Congress."

The Akali Dal decided on fighting communalism with communalism and began emphasising its exposition of Sikh rights in the independent India to a greater extent than before. It hoped that by doing that it would win more Sikhs' support than it had won so far. It continued to retain its Punjabi Suba demand but more than that sought to win over the Sikh masses by decrying the Congress as an anti-Sikh organisation and depict itself as the sole champion of Sikh interest. In the ten months after the first elections of independent India, the Dal mounted a sharp attack on the Government of India and the Congress Ministry. It also did its utmost to prevent the formation of a Congress Ministry in PEPSU where it succeeded within four months of its "imposition" in January 1952 immediately after the elections. It formed the United Front of all opposition parties and formed the first non-Congress Government in India in April 1952. It bitterly attacked Sachar, the Chief Minister of the Punjab for not maintaining Hindu Sikh parity in reconstructing his Ministry in May 1952.

In August 1952, the Shiromani Akali Dal tested the efficacy of its policy of running down the Congress and choosing to fight for Sikh rights and was attended with success. It dislodged the pro-Congress Udham Singh Nagokie from the Presidentship of the Shiromani Akali Dal and claimed that it was the sole spokesman of the Sikhs.

The Akali Dal broadcasted its victory in the annual elections symbolized by the victory of its nominee over Udham Singh Nagokie as the Sikh verdict on its demand for Punjabi Suba and decided on putting forth the demand for Punjabi-speaking state as an urgent demand and its establishment as an immediate necessity.

At this stage, the Akali leaders also began demanding the amalgamation of the Punjabi region of the existing Punjab with PEPSU. In October 1952, Hukam Singh proposed that the Punjabi region of the East Punjab be merged with PEPSU and the Punjabi-speaking regions of Rajasthan to create the Punjabi Suba. In December 1952, Master Tara Singh demanded the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State by taking certain portions of the Punjab and PEPSU in forming them into one administrative unit. While asking for the amalgamation of PEPSU and Punjabi-speaking region to constitute a Punjabi Suba, they could at this stage feel sure that it was bound to be a Sikh majority State.

In the beginning of 1953, two things that happened then spurred the Akali Dal for greater tempo in demanding Punjabi Suba. One of them was in the distant South. The great Andhra leader Romulu, sacrificed his life for the formation of Andhra Pradesh. His death ushered the formation of the Andhra Pradesh. The second was the political crisis in PEPSU and the imposition of President's rule in March 1953. The Shiromani Akali Dal now got extremely keen on demanding the amalgamation of the Punjabi-speaking regions of the PEPSU and the Punjab.

In the later half of 1953, the Akali Dal blew its strongest blast against the Congress, particularly by citing its role in PEPSU. It projected the President's

rule in PEPSU as "a calculated design to suppress the Sikh community", as a clear manifestation of the "aggressive tyranny of the majority". It insisted that the imposition of this rule—the first of its type in independent India— "was a clear proof of the Congress getting exposed in its true colour and the Sikhs becoming helpless victims of communalism". The Akali Dal picked out some of the actions of the Advisor's of PEPSU Government under the President's rule as clear indications of the anti-Sikh character of the rule. The Dal's offensive on Rao's (Advisor under the President's rule in PEPSU) administration increased by the end of the year possibly because of the announcement of mid-term polls in January 1954. The Akali Dal mounted its criticism to a frenzied pitch in November and December 1953.

On 27 December the Government of India made an historic announcement on the reorganisation of the States that took the wind out of the Akali offensive in PEPSU. It announced on that day the appointment of the State Reorganisation Commission. That announcement went a long way in the Akali Dal losing badly in the mid-term elections in PEPSU in January 1954. The Akali Dal succeeded in securing only 10 seats with 27.6 per cent votes. Congress won 22 seats with 44.4 per cent votes. The Congress assumed power once again in PEPSU with Colonel Raghubir Singh as Premier and Brish Bhan as his deputy.

The States Reorganisation Commission began its work in right earnest in February 1954 when it invited memoranda from the public, individually and collectively. The energies of the Akalis as also the Punjab Congress got concentrated in drafting memoranda to the Commission. The Akali Dal finally submitted a .8-page Memorandum to the Commission on 14 May 1954. It demanded the formation of Punjabi Suba to include the entire area of the existing Punjab and PEPSU without the districts of Gurgaon, Rohtak, Tehsil Panipat of Karnal and a few tehsils of Hissar. The Memorandum argued that Punjabi was a distinct language and had been so recognised in the Indian Constitution. It was also endowed with a special script known as Gurmukhi, which was not derived from the 'Devnagri' script of Hindi, but from 'Brahmini'. This Memorandum of the Dal stood in sharp contradiction to the Memorandum earlier submitted by the Punjab Congress Committee. In its Memorandum the Punjab Congress Committee had proposed the integration of the three states of Punjab, Pepsu and Himachal Pradesh. The Memorandum came very near to those submitted by the Arya Samaj and the Jana Sangh. They had demanded Maha Punjab by merging PEPSU in the Punjab and not only enlarging Punjab by amalgamating Himachal Pradesh in it but also Delhi.

In the second half of 1954, the Punjab was full of excitement generated by almost a public debate on the respective merits of the Punjabi Suba and the Maha Punjab. While the Reorganisation Commission was touring the rest of the country, the Akalis in the Punjab were rallying support for the Punjabi Suba and the Punjab Congress holding public meetings again stthis demand and mobilising support for

the Maha Punjab. The climax was reached on the eve of the quinquennial elections for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to be held in January 1955.

The Akali Dal entered this election contest on the issue of Punjabi Suba as spelled out in its Memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission and won a resounding victory in it. It was opposed by the Punjab Congress under the garb of Khalsa Dal but lost to the Shiromani Akali Dal in a big way. The Khalsa Dal won only 3 out of the 112 seats that it contested; the Shiromani Akali Dal all the 112 seats that it contested.

The victory in this election proved a big morale booster for the Akali Dal. It convinced itself that at least there was unanimity in the Sikhs supporting the formation of the Punjabi Suba. It felt encouraged to begin a movement on some pretext connected with the Punjabi Suba demand. It got such a pretext on 6 April 1955 when the Punjab Government banned the shouting of Punjabi Suba slogans. Twenty days later, it gave an ultimatum to the Punjab Government for the withdrawal of the ban on 10 May 1955 if it were not to face a strong Akali agitation against it.

The ban was not lifted and the Akali Dal began its agitation on 10 May 1955 with Master Tara Singh courting arrest with ten close companions. They shouted the Punjabi Suba slogans and signalised the start of a strong Punjabi Suba demand. In the next five days as many as one thousand prominent Akali leaders courted arrest. By the beginning of July 1955, as many as twenty-one thousand Akalis were behind the prison bars. Obviously, the Punjab Government was as determined to crush the movement as the Akalis were keen on making a big success of it.

A showdown occurred on 4 July 1955 which helped the Akalis and went to the disadvantage of the Sachar Government. In the early hours of that day, the Police swooped on Sant Fateh Singh's *jatha* within the precincts of the Golden Temple. Sant Fateh Singh's *jatha* had come from Chaqlani in Ganganagar to Golden Temple, Amritsar to take part in the *morcha* a day or two earlier. The Police took into custody not only Sant Fateh Singh's *jatha* but everyone including the cooks of Guru-ka-langar. The police also raided Guru Ram Das Serai and arrested the High Priests of the Akal Takhat and the Golden Temple. The Police did not stop at that. It also raided the office of the Shiromani Akali Dal and used tear gas on the volunteers that had gathered to protest in the *parkarma* of the Golden Temple. Some of the shells used by the police in the Golden Temple fell in the sacred *sarowar* near the Golden Temple itself. The police had thereby committed what was subsequently described as "the most infamous sacrilege committed in the recent past."

If the intention of the Police sacrilege was to demoralise and crush the Akali *morcha*, it did not succeed. On the other hand, the *morcha* gained by way of reaction such great momentum that the Punjab Government found it difficult to

cope with the situation created by it. Sachar's Government beat a retreat and on 12 July, 1955, it used the pretext of the Prime Minister's "triumphal return from peace mission abroad" and lifted the ban on shouting of the slogan and appealed for peace.

The Punjab Government of Sachar announced that it would release the Akalis by instalments. That proved a slow process. Master Tara Singh was released on 8 September. The last batch of the Akalis was not released till 18 October 1955.

An important thing in the contemporary history of India which produced profound impact on the politics of the Punjab happened, even as the release of the Akali workers was reaching its final stages. The States Reorganization Commission submitted its report to the Government of India on 10 September 1955 and it began receiving active consideration of the Government of India. Its text was published on 10 October 1955. The Commission's Report amounted to a total rejection of Akali Dal's demand for carving out the Punjabi speaking State and the acceptance of the Punjab Congress demand of Maha Punjab.

The publication of the Report infuriated the Shiromani Akali Dal with Master Tara Singh as its President. The Master threatened an agitation against the implementation of the recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission to form the Maha Panjab. He called a 'convention of the Sikhs' at Amritsar on 16 October 1955 and made it pass a strongly worded resolution against the States Reorganisation Commission's recommendation to create bilingual Maha Punjab instead of a unilingual Punjabi Suba. The resolution stated : "...this convention of the Sikhs view with alarm and great resentment the complete and callous rejection of the States Reorganisation Commission of the just and reasonable demand for Punjabi speaking state". The resolution asked the Government to create the Punjabi Suba not only in the interest of the Sikhs in the Punjabi-speaking area of the existing Punjab but also in the interest of the Hindi-speaking people of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. Master Tara Singh got an authorisation from the convention "to take suitable steps for conveying the views and sentiments of the Sikh community to Government of India and urging them to do their duty to the Sikhs.

Backed thus by the resolution of the Sikh convention of many shades of political opinion, Tara Singh led a deputation of five members to the Prime Minister. It was by and large an Akali deputation of all hues but it also had a representative of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in it. This deputation of the five Sikh leaders to the Prime Minister took the form of a high powered meeting of the Sikh leaders with the Government of India albeit it was not put that way officially. The five Sikh leaders were received by the Prime Minister with Maulana Azad and Pandit Pant, the Education Minister and the Home Minister of the Government of India respectively by his side. *The Tribune* rightly reported the meeting as the beginning of "parleys" between the Government of India and the Akalis.

Partap Singh Kairon, both the President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress and a Minister of the Punjab Government and a consistent advocate of Maha Panjab got active to defeat the parleys. He arranged a counter Sikh deputation to the one led by Tara Singh to the Central Cabinet. The deputation asked for Maha Panjab but simultaneously desired for the introduction of Pepsu language formula in the Punjabi region of the proposed Maha Panjab whereby Punjabi in Gurmukhi script was to be made the compulsory medium of instruction there.

Kairon's counter offensive on Tara Singh strategy to threaten agitation and carry on negotiations only made Tara Singh more determined than before on continuing his policy with which he had lately guided the Akali politics. His doing that soon took the form of a war of nerves between him and his antagonists. It showed itself in the show of strength that Tara Singh decided upon during the seventieth annual session of the All India Congress held at Amritsar at the end of December 1955. The Shiromani Akali Dal also held an Akali Conference on the same days at Amritsar. It arranged a procession in Amritsar to herald the start of the conference in which all told 50 lakh Sikhs participated.

The trial of strength did not end the parleys carried on intermittently through intermediaries who shuttled between the Akali leaders and the Central Government. They continued despite the fact that Sen Chand Sachar made room for Partap Singh Kairon as the Chief Minister of the Punjab on 28 January, 1956.

In February 1956, the Government of India communicated to some Akali and a few other leaders a scheme and there began some hard bargaining in it. The scheme had three parts of which the first was political, the second linguistic and the third administrative. The political part laid down that the boundaries of the Punjab would not be on the lines suggested by the Linguistic Commission. They were not to be fixed by amalgamating Punjab, PEPSU and the Himachal Pradesh but only the first two. It, however, suggested that the new Punjab constituted by the amalgamation of Punjab and PEPSU would continue to be demarcated into two regions, Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking as laid down under the Sachar Formula of 1949. The linguistic part laid down that in the whole of the Punjabi-speaking region, the Pepsu Formula rather than the Punjab Formula shall be applied. The two formulas were similar in so far as they laid down that in the two regions Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking, the respective language would be the media of instructions, but in which the other language would be taught compulsorily from the third class. But they differed in one important way. The Punjab formula gave the parent the right to decide the mother-tongue of the child, but the Pepsu formula did not give any such right to the parent. The administrative part was the longest and the most important. It dealt with the governance of the State through the establishment of two regional committees in the legislature, consisting of Hindi and Punjabi-speaking regions. The regional

committees were to have large powers in the regions. This part of the Formula declared Punjab to be a bilingual state, but provided that the regional languages would be official languages in their respective regions at the district level and below.

The understanding on the Formula was finally arrived at on the Akali side and blessed by Master Tara Singh through the efforts of Giani Kartar Singh and Hukam Singh. The two were supported in their efforts by Gian Singh Rarewala, Bawa Harkrishan Singh and Hakam Singh Maan.

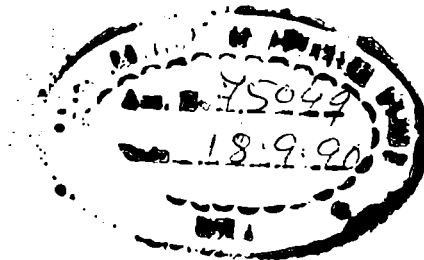
It appears all of them also entered into another understanding with the Congress but whose details were never made public and perhaps wrongly conveyed to Master Tara Singh. This understanding was with an eye to the second general elections to be held in Punjab (now including PEPSU) in the winter of 1956-57. This understanding provided for the Shiromani Akali Dal giving up political activity and confining itself to cultural and religious betterment of the Sikh community. It was understood that the Akalis would join the Congress and be provided enough tickets in the forthcoming elections to play an effective role in the legislative and administrative governance of the province.

The Shiromani Akali Dal passed through a good deal of internal tension while formulating this secret understanding that its leaders had entered into with the Congress, but did get a resolution passed by the Dal on this basis on 30 September 1956. By this resolution, the Akali Dal resolved that (i) it would not have any separate political programme of its own, (ii) would concentrate on the protection and promotion of religious, educational, cultural, social and economic interests of the *Panth*, and would guard against any violation and infringement of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution that adversely effect the Sikhs and (iii) actively participate in the execution of the Regional Formula, and in the implementation of various plans for the development of the country. Master Tara Singh proclaimed his commitment to the resolution with the statement that he would not forsake Nehru thereafter and stand by him.

The Congress leadership at the Centre had already executed its commitment by the time the Shiromani Akali Dal had passed its resolution mentioned above. It had got passed the States Reorganisation Bill both by the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha and got the assent of President of India to it. The Reorganisation Act merged PEPSU into the Punjab but not Himachal Pradesh. The merger of PEPSU in Punjab took place on 1 November 1956 and soon after all prominent Akalis joined the Congress. The Congress now girded up to fight these elections in the confident hope that it would carry everything before it. The Congress High Command nominated 3 Akalis on the State Election Board selecting the Congress candidates for the Punjab Assembly elections. The three former Akalis so nominated were Giani Kartar Singh, Hukam Singh and Ajit Singh Sarhadi.

The Congress swept the polls. It won 120 seats in a house of 164. Out of 120 Congress M.L.A.'s in the new Assembly as many as fifty-eight or nearly 50% were Sikhs. In the Punjabi region, it captured as many as 71 seats out of whom 70% were Sikhs.

It marked the triumph of an accord reached between Pundit Nehru and Master Tara Singh albeit an unwritten one. Little did the people conjecture then that it was to be wrecked soon and the Punjab which now included PEPSU in it was to become the scene of one conflict after another which were not to end even after the formation of Punjabi Suba ten years later on 1 November, 1966.



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