

# **SOCIAL WELFARE TO ACTIVE POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF SANT FATEH SINGH**

**A**

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
of the**

**PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA**

**In the partial fulfillment for the award of**

**The Degree of**

**DOCTRATE OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**HISTORY**

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***CERTIFICATE***

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Social Welfare to Active Politics: A Case Study of Sant Fateh Singh**” embodies the work carried out by **Mr. Gurdawinder Singh** himself under my supervision. The thesis is submitted towards fulfillment of conditions for the award of the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

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# **CHAPTER – 1**

## **INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Thanks to the different rates of modernization, the market capitalism and the divide and rule policy of the colonial masters which coincided with a great number of communal groups, there arose a gulf between different communities. The achievement of independence further accentuated the identity consciousness and tendency to compartmentalize within the same big house. In all the newly formed provinces, the issues about who was to govern were starkly posed more as compared to the colonial era because paramountcy (Which was purely alien) withered away, inviting more political groups to enjoy power. The lack of common consensus required to peacefully resolve the issues exposed the weaknesses of a political system which relied mainly on the political institutions to accommodate the expanded participation.<sup>1</sup> The most vibrant manifestation of this centrifugal tendency was the demand for the formation of new linguistic states. Due to this, the Indian government had to appoint a commission soon after independence. The demand for a Punjabi Suba was part of this bigger question that the Indian government faced after Indian got rid of their foreign masters.

It was on 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 1948 that 23 legislators belonging to Akali Dal resolved that if the five statutory safeguards demanded by them were not conceded, the Sikh should be allowed to form a new province of the seven districts i.e. Hoshiarpur, Jullundar, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ambala. In fact, the legislators had proposed to do so at the instance of their Supremo, Master Tara Singh who had raised the slogan of Punjabi Suba as an alternative if the statutory safeguards were not accepted. In his memorandum to the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Hardgreave (Jr.), *India, Government and Politics in a Developing Nations*, New York, Harcourt Brace J. Inc. 1975, pp 3-4.

president of the constituent Assembly, S. Hukam Singh sought “demarcation of a new linguistic state on the basis of Punjabi language.” In absence of Master Tara Singh and other prominent Akalis who were in jail, a representative convention of the Sikhs, however, had adopted Punjabi Suba as its objective on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1949.

While the constituent assembly was busy in drafting the constitution, the Akalis hoped that the Sikh minority would be compensated at the end. As soon as Master Tara Singh came out of jail, he put before the Sikh masses, the demand and concept of Punjabi Suba. This demand was raised by Master Tara Singh as an alternative to the five statutory safeguards for pressurizing the Indian government. When nothing came out for the Sikh safeguards in the Indian Constitution, the Akalis embarked upon a journey for achievement of Punjabi Suba. The Arya Samajist press and even the newspapers like "The Tribune" lashed at the Akalis for having raised this demand when the Indian nation was in the making. "The Tribune" in its leaderette remarked that why should majority Hindus accept to be ruled by the minority Sikhs when the Sikhs refuse to accept the majority Hindu government. It also called the Punjabi Suba demand a paradox because the Sikhs were ready to accept the central government which comprised of Hindus and yet they refuse to do so at state level while the central government was so powerful as compared to the state governments.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Master Tara Singh accused the central government of neglecting the Sikhs who had sacrificed so much for the independence of the country.<sup>3</sup>

An indepth study of the demand during its initial phase clearly reveals that it was primarily a Sikh demand. It would be logical to trace the Punjabi Suba demand from 1947. For this, an objective

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<sup>2</sup> *The Tribune*, November 12, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> *Ajit Daily*, November 27, 1949.

analysis of the effects of partition on the socio-economic fabric of the society is essential. Punjab was the most acutely affected province during the partition with exception of Bengal. Over 36 million Sikhs and Hindus had crossed the newly carved border into East Punjab. This large scale exodus coincided with that of Muslims of east Punjab into Pakistan. The local-refugee tensions emerged soon. Because of the nature of composition of refugee population, this tension took the form of a communal enmity.<sup>4</sup> The desire to overtake the land and property left by Muslims further increased the cleavage between locals and refugees. The Hindus and Sikhs who had normally cooperated with each other against the Muslim leadership, now had to put in new roles in the new politico-economic setup. Quite unexpected, this tension had not only inter-communal but also had Intra-Community form visible in the Sikh community. The urban Sikh traders found themselves severely hit because they had to compete with their Hindu counterparts who were better settled and had more access to markets via their long established links and relations. While the urban Sikhs could only hope to trade and join government services, the rural Jat Sikhs got the lands left by the Muslim agriculturists.

There is no denying that rural and urban Sikhs were undergoing same process of assimilation under directives of national government yet they had differential access to political and administrative power which was to determine every refugee's fate in such turmoil.<sup>5</sup> S. Hukam Singh, a refugee urbanite Sikh, ran a newspaper 'The Spokesman' which vociferously condemned the congress attitude in its editorials. Even the Akali Dal too vociferously condemned the attitude of the government as far as discrimination in employment was concerned. On the other hand, the Sikh agriculturist class did not share the same sentiment. The Congress government too

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<sup>4</sup> Satya M. Rai, *Partition of Punjab*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, pp.203-4.

<sup>5</sup> Joyce Pettigrew, "The Influence of Urban Sikhs on the Development of the Movement for a Punjabi Speaking State", *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Feb 1978, pp.153-154.

was more interested in forging an alliance with the rural Sikhs. When the new election process with direct franchise started, the Congress assigned 'The Role of Political Intermediaries to the landowning class who had access to vote banks based on local loyalties. The Congress affinity towards landowning class was also visible in the field of planning. The first five year plan ruled out any sort of ceiling on the existing holdings. The planners had altogether rejected the common ownership of land.<sup>6</sup> As a whole, the Punjab former had a lot to gain from such an attitude of Congress as compared to the urban Sikhs who were in professions related to delivering goods and services.

As far as the Akali Dal was concerned, its Sikh leaders were in dilemma when they observed a vast spectrum of economic interests which the members of their community had in the contemporary scenario. Its leadership mainly belonged to urban middle class who had little to gain from the incoming thrust of the Industrial Capitalism which was at the doorsteps of the newly Independent country. That is why it opposed every measure which went against the *status quo*. It opposed the changes in Hindu code and at the same time did nothing to oppose the Punjab land alienation act which had brought the rural Jats at loggerheads with other Sikh commercial castes.<sup>7</sup>

These developments led to the formation of two factions within Akali Dal, one pro-government (Congress) comprising of rural Sikhs and other anti-government which was led by urban Sikh leadership. For the first time, the later led by Master Tara Singh lost control of the Sikh stage and a group led by Udham Singh Nagoke and Ishar Singh Majhoul emerged. This group joined hands with the Maharaja of Patiala and captured the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. This development forced Akali Dal to join the Congress for a while, which culminated in making Mr. Gopi Chand Bhargava, the

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<sup>6</sup> Planning Commission, First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline, New Delhi, 1952, p.99

<sup>7</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, September 26, 1951.

Chief Minister of Punjab. Soon, the cycle of instability started as Congress could not sustain such an integrated regime and Bhim Sen Sachar replaced Bhargava as Chief Minister. By nature of its composition, the new Sachar ministry was little different from earlier coalition as it now contained Akalis, nationalist Sikhs and leading Hindu figures such as Lala Jagat Narain.

As soon as Mr. Sachar assumed office, Akalis presented him their five safeguards: (i) Sikh backward classes treated at par with their Hindu counterparts, (ii) Punjabi be accepted as official language, (iii) The Sikhs be assured of a guaranteed minimum representation in the state cabinet, (iv) Sikhs be given proportional representation in state administrative services and last but not the least, (v) Punjab be demarcated as "Punjabi Speaking" province by the central government.<sup>8</sup>

Threatened by growing campaign against him by Bhargava group, he agreed to the demand of treating Sikh backward classes at equal terms with their Hindu counterparts. On language issue, he evolved a pact known as "Sachar formula". This pact, alleged to have been actually written by Giani Kartar Singh, was the first step in making Punjabi the official language in the areas where the Sikhs were in majority.<sup>9</sup> The above pact provided a notional division of Punjab into two parts, The Punjabi zone and the Hindi zone. It also provided for compulsory learning of both languages in each zone to retain the bilingual character of the province.

Instead of pacifying the factions, the Sachar formula undermined the position of Mr. Bhimsen Sachar. The Akalis and the Congressits were more vociferous in their opposition. Consequently, Mr. Sachar lost the support and the Akalis led by Giani Kartar Singh continued to press for their demand of a Punjabi Speaking State. The

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<sup>8</sup> *The Tribune*, May 10, 1949.

<sup>9</sup> *The Tribune*, October 3, 1949.

Akali leadership felt that Congress was backing out of assurances given to the Sikhs. Under Master Tara Singh's dictates, Akali Dal in July, 1950 asked its MLAs to leave Congress and return to Akali Dal as the Congress party had failed to appreciate the sentiments of the Sikh community.<sup>10</sup>

Quite astonishingly, only one out of 23 legislators resigned from the Congress. S. Jaswant Singh Duggal, the lone M.L.A. who resigned was also a refugee urbanite like Master Tara Singh himself. All the other legislators who belonged to agriculturist families refused to resign. The narration of such developments is not out of context because it highlights the handicaps of Master Tara Singh's design which Sant Fateh Singh later on tried to remove successfully.

A brief perusal of the declarations, press briefs, speeches and decisions of the contemporary Akali leadership is quite essential to trace the nature and growth of Punjabi Suba demand from Master Tara Singh's stint to its culmination under Sant Fateh Singh who took the reins of the movement from his erstwhile benefactor.

As already told, Akali Dal had directed its MLAs to leave Congress and return to Akali Dal as the Congress party had failed to safeguard the Sikh interests. What is worth describing is not this directive but the fact that only one out of twenty three legislators resigned. S. Jaswant Singh Duggal, the sole M.L.A. whose resigned was too an urban displaced Sikh like Master Tara Singh. But the other twenty two legislators, most of which belonged to agriculturist families refused to leave congress because they associated their interests more with Congress party.

In fact, Master Tara Singh associated the Sikh demand more with safeguards for a communal minority than linking them to the demands of a linguistic minority. A perusal of his declarations, conference, speeches and press briefs highlights the above fact. The

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<sup>10</sup> *National Herald*, July 21, 1950.

modus operandi and the politics of Akali Dal under the leadership of Master Tara Singh clearly point out that the Akali high command struggled more for safeguards of a minority community than fighting for the privileges of a language whose majority speakers adhered to a single faith.

Even the resolution passed by Akali Dal after considering the draft constitution demanded separate electorate for Sikhs which it called "age old democratic maxim". The resolution called the Sikh apprehensions about aggressive communal mentality of the majority as *sine quo non* of the Sikh satisfaction. The resolution highlighted every possibility of a Hindu-Sikh conflict if elections were held under the joint-electorate system.<sup>11</sup> The memorandum submitted to the minority sub-committee of constituent assembly also demanded the communal electorate. A charter of demands which was submitted afterwards to reinforce this memorandum provided that if the demands of the memorandum were rejected, the Sikhs should be allowed to form a new province of the seven districts which had considerable Sikh majority.<sup>12</sup>

The advisory committee rejected the above Sikh demands with a queer argument. While acknowledging that Sikhs were a minority as far as their population was concerned, it opined that they were the "most virile" and the "most talented" of communities and were bound to reach a level of prosperity which was soon to be the envy of other communities.<sup>13</sup> This argument put forward for the rejection of the Sikh demands smacks more of social Darwinism than any scientific logic.

Master Tara Singh's outburst against such a rejection was full of allegations about Central leaders' maltreatment of the brave Sikh people. Master Tara Singh alleged that the liberty and the religion of

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<sup>11</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C.Kapoor & Sons, Delhi, 1976, p.165.

<sup>12</sup> *The Statesman*, November 9, 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Hukam Singh, "The Sikhs Denied Minority Status", *The Spokesman Weekly*, June, 5, 1978.

the Sikhs were crushed under "the garb of democracy and secularism".<sup>14</sup>

Amid such a climate of communal and linguistic controversies, the demand for Punjabi Suba was manifesting itself; sometimes as demand for Sikh homeland and sometimes as a demand for a separate linguistic state. Master Tara Singh directed S. Hukam Singh, the Akali representative in Constituent Assembly to make the representation that a commission should be appointed by the central authorities for the demarcation of a linguistic state on the basis of Punjabi. In the words of S. Hukam Singh "They (Sikhs) want protection from the tyranny of the communal majority...".<sup>15</sup> When India adopted its own Constitution, Akalis expressed dissatisfaction over the fact that the effective provincial autonomy and the minority safeguards were nowhere to be seen in it. They raised the question, "The Hindus have got Hindustan, the Muslims Pakistan, what have the Sikhs got?"<sup>16</sup>

Under such circumstances, Akali Dal passed a resolution in which it demanded a Punjabi Suba for Sikhs. The resolution states that the callous and unsympathetic treatment of the government had made it impossible for the Sikhs to lead a respectable life, thus making it necessary for them to demand a Punjabi speaking state for Sikhs.

However, the Akali high command including Master Tara Singh failed to see that soon after the partition and the communal bloodshed that followed it, the Congress would never accept a purely communal demand. The Akalis failed to realize that the Congress' stand on secularism, nationalism and the Hindu opposition to any communal demand would make it highly difficult for the central congress government to accept their demand.

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<sup>14</sup> Master Tara Singh, *Presidential address at 9<sup>th</sup> All India Akali Conference at Moga*, Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar, 1953, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, Kapoor & Sons, Delhi, 1976, p.154.

<sup>16</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, July 9, 1961.

Moreover, the phobia of balkanization of the newly independent country further gave impetus to altogether reject any communal demand which could consequently divide the country. This error was later ratified by Sant Fateh Singh.

However, it would be prejudicial to label the contemporary leadership as separatist. Master Tara Singh reiterated at every public platform that he wanted to strengthen the Sikhs as provincial entity rather as a separate nation. He wanted provincial autonomy for the Sikhs as it was granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370.<sup>17</sup> Even the Akali Dal manifesto issued on the eve of the first General Elections expressed that the Sikhs wanted the formation of a province on linguistic basis and they demand a Punjabi speaking province for Sikhs only because it would give them the needful security.

In its initial phase, the Punjabi Suba demand was concerned with the minority safeguards for the Sikhs. Thanks to the ingenuity of Sant Fateh Singh, gradually the emphasis was shifted from the plank of Sikh majority to that of Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script as the sole official language. It was the political acumen of the Sant who instead of sharpening the communal edge of the demand, covered it with the linguistic basis. So much so that even the growth of Hindu communalism failed to goad him to the threshold of failure. In spite of the partition for which the Congress was largely blamed, the Punjabi Hindus found no respite. If Sardar Patel and Mr. Nehru represented the Hindu hope in future, Mr. Shyam Prasad Mukherjee represented their rage at stages. Even the negotiations between R.S.S. and S.P. Mukherjee to form a National Hindu Alliance were primarily conducted through the RSS elites from Punjab.<sup>18</sup>

The partition had different reactions on Hindus and Sikhs. The

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<sup>17</sup> Master Tara Singh, Punjabi Suba, in Gurcharan Singh, *Sikh Kya Chahte Hain* (ed.) New India Publications, Delhi, 1950, p.172.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald A. Heeger, "Politics of Integration: Community Party and integration in Punjab". Thesis, University of Chicago, 1971, p.144 in A.S. Narang, *Storm over Sutlej*, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, p.55.

majority of migrant Sikhs were peasant proprietors whose love for the land was proverbial. While the refugee Sikhs tried to fulfill their aspirations in the truncated Punjab, their Hindu counterparts tried to associate themselves with the much larger and comprehensive Hindu community. Amidst such a turmoil, the Hindus grew suspicious, hostile and aggressive towards the Sikhs. They blamed the Congress for following policy of appeasement which resulted in partition of the country. The majority of Hindus took it for granted that the Central Government would follow strong policy towards the minorities i.e., Muslims and Sikhs. Muslims of the East Punjab nor had resources neither will to fight for their rights. Only the Sikhs were left to face the wrath of few Hindu communalists who were less but harsh than ever.

The *modus operandi* of the earlier Akali leadership further added fuel to the fire. The Akalis not only refused to camouflage the demand of a Sikh state with that of a demand for a linguistic province but they openly expressed their apprehensions of Sikh annihilation at the hands of the majority Hindus. The fear of virtual Sikh annihilation due to the dilution of Sikh principles was explained by close social and cultural relations between Hindus and Sikhs.<sup>19</sup> But instead of emphasizing on the close connection between the Gurmukhi script and continuance of Sikh doctrine which aptly justified the demand of Punjabi speaking state, the Akali stalwarts relied more on percentages and need of a "Sikh State".

In one of his presidential addresses, Master Tara Singh blamed his "Hindu Brethren" for keeping the Sikhs "in bondage". In the same speech he even accused Arya Samajists for spearheading the Hindu domination over Sikhs.<sup>20</sup>

Even the second rung Akali leader opined that the opposition to the use of the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script was based on

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<sup>19</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p.294.

<sup>20</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, July 9, 1961.

the principle of "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" and blamed the Hindu politicians for making no pretensions to secularism or anything of that kind.<sup>21</sup>

It seemed that the problem was reduced to a microcosm that represented the conflict between two types of leadership with different political mindsets: the nationalist leadership who aimed at achieving collective and societal goals regardless of religion, race or language and the parochial leadership that had aims based on religious and regional loyalties much narrower than the former.<sup>22</sup> The argument is incomplete to such an extent that it seriously distorts what it purports to describe.<sup>23</sup> As far as demand for the Punjabi Suba is concerned, the movement supporting the demand was composed of inter-community followers. On the other hand, various interests and classes within the Sikh community did not support the movement with the same enthusiasm. Likewise the support for Hindu opposition varied from region to region.

Coming back to the narrative, the Akali Dal working committee, in a resolution passed in 1953 said that the independence of the country had brought no relief to the Sikhs and their lot worsened after the colonial masters left the country.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, 9<sup>th</sup> All India Akali Conference held at Moga in April, 1953 passed a resolution which stated that the very existence of the Sikhs and their five principles was in jeopardy due to aggressive communalism which developed wings after the British left the land.<sup>25</sup>

The first concrete proof of discriminatory treatment of the Sikhs given by the contemporary Akali leadership was the refusal to accept some Sikh castes as scheduled castes while their counterparts

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<sup>21</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p.211.

<sup>22</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *op. cit.* p.8.

<sup>23</sup> Murray J. Leaf, "Economic Implications of the Language Issue: A Local View in Punjab", *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 2, July 1976, p.197.

<sup>24</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, July 22, 1953.

<sup>25</sup> *The Spokesman*, (Vaisakhi Edition), 1953.

professing other religions were given the same status. The Presidential promulgation of 1950 gave legal accreditation to the above refusal. Akali leadership fully blamed the central authorities for trying to force the Sikhs backward castes into Hinduism thus further accelerating the decline of Sikhism. The Akali representative in the parliament, S. Hukam Singh observed that this was an endeavour or a temptation to woo the Sikh backward classes into Hinduism where they were to get all the safeguards.<sup>26</sup> But the party which claimed to be the custodian of the Sikh tenets, sacrificed one of the fundamental tenets of Sikhism by accepting in principle; the caste distinctions. The second attack of Akali Dal came in the form of accusing the government of discriminating the Sikhs in services- both civil and military. They alleged that the Sikhs did not constitute more than ten percent of the higher grade posts in the government departments and in military too, their number was drastically reduced. It was alleged that many officers were guilty of apostasy which they committed in order to please their bosses.<sup>27</sup>

The contemporary Sikh leadership failed to justify the demand when it linked the demand to the percentages of Hindus and Sikhs and accused the central government of sabotaging the Sikh designs to preserve the Sikh identity. In spite of such loopholes in the Akali tactics, the Sikhs were justified in demanding a separate state on linguistic or on religious basis. Even the Hindus and Muslims shared the same fears of absorption which the Sikhs had. But Hindus and Muslims had much longer traditions and by the presence of their co-religionists in other parts of the country and the world, they were much confident of not losing their identity. On the other hand, Sikhs constituted a mere 1.7 percent of the total Indian population and could look backward to only five centuries of their history enacted in

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<sup>26</sup> *The Spokesman*, September 7, 1953.

<sup>27</sup> Satya M. Rai, *Partition of Punjab: A Study of its Effect on the Politics and Administration of Punjab*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.206.

one corner of this country.<sup>28</sup>

In fact, the Akali leadership wanted to bring home the point that Sikhism exists till it enjoys independence in its own matters. Sikhism offers not only Gurdwara for worship, but it also offered a social philosophy to its adherents. Consequently, if Sikh people were separated from a certain degree of political sovereignty or power, Sikhism becomes eviscerated from its clan and ethos. Even the litany (*Ardass*) which is repeatedly recited every morning and evening in every Sikh congregation throughout the world contains the words "Raj Karega Khalsa". In fact, if the order of Khalsa, which is the quintessence of Sikhism, is divorced from political activity aimed for achieving political ends, it loses any intelligible connotation. Sikhs aspired and continue to aspire to be viewed not as individual Sikhs but collectively as a theo-political community. In the Sikh doctrine, there is a sort of Hegelian subordination of the individual will to the collective will.<sup>29</sup>

Akali leadership tried to pressurised the state reorganization commission to accept the Sikh demand for a separate state and negated any thesis labeling this demand as communal. The appointment of a State Reorganization Commission kindled fresh hopes in the Akali ranks alongwith emergence of demand of "Haryana" province for Hindi speaking people. The greatest opposition to "Haryana" came from Jullundhar division which mainly included Punjabi Hindus.<sup>30</sup> They alleged that the propagators of demand of Haryana were guided by Akali leadership who wanted to promote the Sikh cause behind the smoke screen of Haryana province.<sup>31</sup>

During the State Reorganization Commission's deliberations there emerged a controversy started by the government's ban on

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<sup>28</sup> Donald E. Smith, *India as a Secular State*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963, p.442.

<sup>29</sup> K.M. Pannikar, *The Ideas of Sikhism*, Sikh Tract Society, Amritsar, 1924, p.20.

<sup>30</sup> Satya M Rai, *Partition of Punjab: A Study of its Effects on the Politics and Administration of Punjab*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.206.

<sup>31</sup> *The Organiser*, October 3, 1955.

shouting of Punjabi Suba slogans and taking out processions. In 1955, Akalis started a Morcha against the ban and despite repressive measures of government, the Morcha successfully continued. The mounting pressure forced Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to instruct the Punjab Chief Minister Bhim Sen Sachar to lift the ban. Mr. Sachar lifted the ban and tendered unconditional apology to the Sikh sangat at Golden Temple, Amritsar.

Amidst such atmosphere of struggle and hope, the State Reorganization Commission announced its decisions in which it rejected the demand of Punjabi Suba. The commission recommended: "...The proposed state will solve neither the language problem nor communal problem."<sup>32</sup> Instead of accepting the Akali demands, the commission recommended the integration of PEPSU, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab into one administrative unit. This was the almost acceptance of demand of Maha Punjab by the anti-Akali Hindus.

The Akali Supremo, Master Tara Singh was infuriated at the decisions of the State Reorganization Commission. He gave vent to his anger in the vernacular press and called upon Sikhs to unite for struggling against the majority oppression.<sup>33</sup> Henceforth, the issue of Punjab Suba became cynosure of Akali Dal's programme. Its election manifesto during 1954 midterm polls highlighted the demand alongwith favouring the abolition of "biswadari" and "jagirdari" and host of other schemes for those related to the farming sector in anyway.

The failure of Sachar government in dealing with 1955 Akali agitation and Arya Samajist adamant stand against any concessions for the alleged "Sikh Communalism" gave S. Partap Singh Kairon, who took a middle line, an advantageous position. The bifactional Congress politics forced the Congress high command to intervene to make Mr.

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<sup>32</sup> Report of State Reorganization Commission, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1955, p.146.

<sup>33</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, October 19, 1955.

Kairon the Chief Minister. While Mr. Kairon opposed the demand of Punjabi Suba, he also opposed the inclusion of Himachal Pradesh in Punjab as demanded by Hindu organizations led by Bhim Sem Sachar and Lala Jagat Narain. Before assuming the office of Chief Minister, Mr. Kairon had worked as the Development and rehabilitation minister. He had continuously eyed the rural vote bank for which he initiated many plans for the betterment of people of rural areas. During his stint as State Congress President, he filled various posts with candidates from rural background. Mr. Kairon declared that he was the first person after Maharaja Ranjit Singh who brought power to the rural peasants in Punjab since Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Mr. Kairon associated Master Tara Singh's Akali Dal with money lending urban Sikhs who had roots in Rawalpindi and were famous for money grabbing at farmers' expense.<sup>34</sup> The Akali fear of losing out to Congress in rural areas was not unnecessary as dissensions within Akali Dal had started, the most prominent being the formation of the Malwa Akali Dal by S. Gian Singh Rarewala.

In such circumstances, the Akalis adopted a softer stand by aligning with their arch enemy, the Congress party. This was bound to have effect on the demand of Punjabi Suba. As the further course of Akali actions showed, the Akalis were prepared to have some settlement with government even after they denounced the State Reorganization Commission's report. A search of via media was started by both Akalis and Congress high command which too was fed up with instability of Punjab Politics.<sup>35</sup>

While the subsequent Akali-Congress merger in political field brought some relief to the Congress from the Akali Dal's activities, it also resulted into introduction and implementation of the Regional formula for solution of the language problem. The peace bought by

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<sup>34</sup> Joyce J.M. Pettigrew, *Robbernoblemen, A Study of the Sikh Jats*, Routledge and Kegan Publishers, London, 1975, p.93.

<sup>35</sup> G.C. Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, New Book Society of India, New Delhi, 1956, p.222.

both the parties prevailed only for a year. Soon, Akali Supremo, Master Tara Singh got fed up of the governmental interference in his home turf i.e., Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Despite all the efforts of Government, the Sadh Sangat board, which enjoyed governmental support failed badly in Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee elections (only four candidates were successful).

This rupture in Akali-Congress relations revived the Punjabi Suba demand in the full sense of the term. 132 members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee vowed to sacrifice their bodies and souls for the cause of Punjabi Suba. As far as member of legislature were concerned, only 7 out of 28 Akali legislators obeyed Master Tara Singh's second dictate to resign from Congress legislature party. They not only remained in Congress but openly criticized their parent organization and its leader Master Tara Singh. This was beginning of challenges to Master Tara Singh's leadership.

Unconcerned with behaviour of MLA's, Master Tara Singh declared his plans for a mass agitation for achievement of Punjabi Suba. He failed to see the writing on the wall and resigned from presidentship of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to devote his all time to the agitation. Master Tara Singh failed to realize that he was on threshold of the start of his political decline.

The second innings of the agitation saw emergences of bitter differences between two factions of Akali Dal which had their different mass bases in urban and rural areas respectively. The internal bickering were visible at the time of first Punjabi Suba Conference held on October 12, 1958 at Amritsar, where the plan of action for attainment of Punjabi Suba was announced by Sant Fateh Singh who shot into prominence as the senior Vice President of Shiromani Akali Dal and as the trusted lieutenant of Master Tara Singh. As a reaction to this announcement by the Master group, Giani Kartar Singh got

Master Tara Singh defeated in the annual presidential election of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee by raising the question of Jats and non-Jats openly during the election.<sup>36</sup>

The rural urban Sikh divide in Akali camp was later represented by differences between Master Tara Singh and his erstwhile lieutenant Sant Fateh Singh on the strategy for the movement and their ambition to be the uncontested leaders of the Sikhs. The rise of young turks in Akali Dal was result of new economic order which emerged due to high yielding varieties of wheat brought in Punjab during the green revolution era which coincided with Punjabi Suba movement.

The rise of agriculturist class within Akali Dal was represented by Sant Fateh Singh who had enough political sagacity and acumen to see what was encumbering the acceptance of such a legitimate linguistic demand of Sikhs. In the above pages, a brief view of Akali Dal's stand on Punjabi Suba issue before the rise of the Sant has been given. An analysis of this stand brings out the weakness of the Akali Dal Supremo Master Tara Singh's thinking which linked this purely linguistic demand with Hindu-Sikh percentages, the Panth and the injustice done to the Sikhs. Akali Dal's elite of the pre-Sant era, as symbolized by Master Tara Singh failed to acknowledge that it was wrong to demand anything on the basis of a sectarian outlook in a newly independent country which had already suffered much due to the religious chauvinism displayed during the partition of the country. Whenever the Akali Dal raised the demand during pre-Sant era, it justified the demand by linking it to all sorts of deception and treachery done to the Sikhs by the nationalist political elite represented by the Congress. On the other hand, the nationalist leaders too were logical in their outlook because the worst fear that the country faced was the fragmentation of the country which was a

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<sup>36</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p.111.

kaleidoscope of races, religion and linguistic minorities. The second weakness was Akali leadership's failure to link the *nouveau riche* agriculturist classes with its policies and programmes. Even the credit for the meteoric rise of the Sant goes to this class of rich peasants who wanted to change the composition and leadership of the Akali Dal in the new politico-economic situation of the province.

### **Hypotheses**

Sant Fateh Singh's role in the events during the Punjabi Suba agitation and the two Akali Dal led coalition governments in the freshly carved Punjabi Suba is immense. But any work which deals only and only with the role of the Sant is not available. Some exhaustive works throw light on the political activities of the Sant during the Suba agitation. But little light has been thrown on the period since he entered political field till he founded his own Dal at Sri Mushkiana Sahib. "Why he entered politics" is a question that needs an exhaustive answer. What factors led him to formally join the politics and how he soon became favourite of the Akali Cadre as well as Akali stalwarts. There is no work available which discusses his outlook and the ramifications of his actions. In the works related to the concerned period, the scholars dealt only with his political actions and their effects. Even the causes behind his political moves have not been probed. Why he adopted the Gandhian technique of fasting and why these fasts unto death were left midway. The effects of these fasts need some real exploration. There is no secondary work on the social welfare activities of the Sant. But his social service was so extensive that it created a huge mass following for him. He worked at so many places and this won him devotion of innumerable rural folk.

Most of the available works portray him as a politician who led the Punjabi Suba agitation but failed to fulfill his vows taken at the time of fasts unto death. But no one bothered to minutely study the events before starting these fasts and the reasons behind the alleged

breaking of his vows before the purpose was fulfilled.

There has been no exploration about his outlook and standpoint whether he was conservative or progressive in his political and economic approaches. The existing studies fail to fully explore religious outlook of the Sant. There is different between offensive communalism and religious beliefs and practices. But there is no work which throws light on this aspect of Sant's life.

The honesty of the Sant in financial matters is near proverbial. There are many incidents which show his transparency and aloofness from taking personal favours. This needs to be explored so that posterity could know this. The Sant's personal life is also untouched by the scholars. Incidents related to his childhood, his inspirations and great personalities that influenced him are not given their proper place in the works related to the concerned period.

A fresh and exhaustive study is needed to probe the life of such a personality, the effects of whose actions changed the course of history. The Sant's emphasis on Hindu-Sikh unity especially in politics is not given its proper place in the annals of history. The Sant's efforts to cultivate good will among both the communities is not properly dealt with.

The study aims to clear the misconceptions prevalent about the Sant's early life, parentage and his early activities. It also aims to highlight the Sant's achievements especially in the field of social service, literature and various dimensions of his complex personality. To analyze the causes and effects of such junctures in the Sant's political career which have been susceptible to criticism by the masses and later on by the scholars. There junctures comprise mainly the formation of a separate Dal at Mushkiana Sahib the three fasts unto death and building of havan kunds during the immolation bid- The study would also include the presentation of an objective and fresh interpretation of the Sant's political contribution. Most important aim

of the study is to present the legacy of the Sant which is immense and needs to be acknowledged by the posterity. This legacy needs to be explored in the present context.

The study is basically based on the primary sources such as contemporary newspapers (especially Kaumi Dard) tracts, journals, pamphlets, reports, contemporary writings, records of talks between central leaders and the Akali stalwarts symposiums, Parliament debates and Election commission records. The Sant's literary works ranging from propaganda literature to purely didactic and religious literature also forms the main part of his works. The study has also made efficient use of other source material such as literature available in various libraries, institutions and library of Gurdawara Budhajorh. A lot of effort was made in accessing almost every type of primary source related to the Sant. The Sant's personal assistant Dr. J.S. Sabar, who is serving at Sikh Missionary Collage, Amritsar was also interviewed.

However, these sources were being studied keeping in view strictly the research methodology of an discipline. The causes behind the events have been explored and the ramifications of such events have been minutely. For an objective analysis facts and sources have been interpreted only to establish casual relationship between them. Avoidance of any bias while choosing the facts or while interpreting them have been taken care of.

Interdisciplinary approach with the help of theoretical formulation culminating to many vital issues which have not been so far explored will remain its basis. The required distinction between intent and consequence was also kept in mind while interpreting the sources.

Efforts were made to not confine the correlation with causation. The study focused on obtaining both ideographic and homothetic knowledge. The issues of vagueness and presentism were also

properly addressed.

The secondary sources and research was consulted for the preparation of the work. The secondary sources was chosen to study all opinions of a single event.

Before generalizing, it was kept in mind that sufficient data was available to make that generalization. Any tendency to frame an hypothesis that compensated for lack of labour was avoided. No such fact was omitted which went against the hypothesis. The hypothesis was not taken for granted and treated like a law before finding enough historical evidence to support it conjecture was not confused with hypothesis. Mere narration of events were strictly avoided. The required narrative was done keeping in mind the dictum– easy writing is a hard reading. Due care was taken to omit fallacies and omissions.

The first chapter deals with early life, parentage and social service of the Sant. After describing his childhood and upbringing, his work as a social servant is explored. A brief narrative of his works as a social servant ranging from building Gurdwaras, schools, bridges is given. The Sant vociferously propagated against the evils presented in the Sikh society. His efforts to baptize maximum number of Sikhs are also narrated. The last portion of the chapter deals with literary works of the Sant. An indepth study of the Sant's vernacular literature is made and a brief appraisal of his literary works done.

The second chapter deals with the entry of the Sant into politics. The inspiration motives and the factors necessitating his formal entry into politics are analysed. The Sant's political contribution under the leadership of the Master is objectively analysed. The differences in outlook and standpoint between the Sant and the Master have been properly analysed.

The reasons that led to breaking of fasts by the Master and the Sant are fully analysed. The Third chapter deals with the activities of Sant as president of his separate Akali Dal. The factors which led to

parity of ways between the Sant and the Master are analyzed. The events that led to the acceptance of the demand of Punjabi Suba have been analyzed. The Punjab Reorganization Bill have been analyzed and their effects on the future course of events is described.

The fourth chapter deals with the first coalition government led by the Akali Dal. The coalition partners, the common minimum programme, the election campaigning and the efforts of the Sant to make Akali Dal-Jan Sangh political alliance a reality, have been analyzed. The working of coalition government, the internal bickering within the coalition and the language question have been probed. The courses behind the downfall of the first coalition objectively probed the differences between the offices bearers and the Akali high command which accentuated into more serious problems also analytically narrated.

The last chapter deals with the second coalition government under the patronage of the Sant. The chapter discusses at length, the working of this government.

### **Review of Literature**

Baldev Raj Nayar's *Minority Politics in Punjab*, is an important element of his work relates to his analysis of the international and agitational strategies from a national perspective. His study covers the period before the reorganization of the state. The new state of Punjab has altered the entire demographic and political context.

Paul R. Brass in his work, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* presents psycho-sociological analysis of Punjab politics from the standpoint of ethnic sub-nationalism. Brass compares the coalition politics of post-Punjabi Suba period to that of Dutch political scenario in which different political parties reflecting their respective religions and class cleavage of society dominated the electoral and parliamentary arena.

M.S. Dhama's *Political Parties and the State: State Autonomy*

*Issue* is a case study of the Akali Party focuses on the origin of the demand and outlook of the earlier Akalis. Dhama opines that demand for more autonomy is directly proportional to the communal overtures.

K.C. Gulati traces the role of Akalis in politics of Modern Punjab. The work is full of narration of the events related to Punjab politics.

Dalip Singh in his work *Dynamics of Punjab Politics* discusses the coalition politics in Punjab. The book provides much valued factual knowledge about the important events but lacks analysis.

A.S. Narang's *Storm over Sutlej* traces the present Punjab politics to remote events. The changing political equations in Punjab since independence and the emergence of Punjabi Suba demand in the region. The study also deals with electoral performance of various political groups in Punjab and the factionalism present in them. The book is also a sort of handbook on the ideology of Akali Dal.

Joyce Pettigrew in her book *Robber Noblemen: A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats* is focused on the manipulation of Sikh Jats in a particular area by political leaders for their own gains. She analyses how they are manipulated by the state leaders to wipe the rivals and centralize power.

Charan Das Ghai's work *God's Own Man: A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh* was published in 1969. It is the only work which exclusively deals with Sant Fateh Singh's personality and contribution. It is the first work of its kind which throws on Sant's character and personality.

Ajit Singh Sarhadi's work *The Story of Punjab Suba* published in 1970, provides day-to-day account of the Punjabi Suba movement. It provides minute details of Sant Fateh Singh's activities during the Punjab Suba movement. It also throws a flood of light on the role of Sant Fateh Singh in Punjabi Suba movement. It also throws a flood of light on the role of Sant Fateh Singh in Punjabi Suba politics. It is a

reference book for the study of Punjab Suba movement and its leaders. Sarhadi traces the development of Sikhism from the times of Ranjit Singh.

Gurmeet Singh's work *History of Sikh Struggle, Vol.1*, published in 1983, attempts to give a chronicle account of events relating Sikhs particularly since the time of partition. Hence, it covers the period of Punjabi Suba movement. To make the work more authentic, all the important document referred in the text have been added as appendices. The book covers a variety of opinions with taking sides. Sant's speeches at various junctures are described in the work that form the major attraction.

Madhu Sudan Misra's work entitled *Politics of Regionalism in India*, published in 1988, takes up a detailed study of regionalism in Punjab since 1959. It describes the implications of Punjabi Suba demand in detail. The main Sikh grievances are also described which caused the demand of a separate state to emerge out. Misra traces out the differences in outlook of the Sant and Master Tara Singh as far as the concept of Punjabi Suba was concerned.

Pandit Mohan Lal who was also an ex-home minister of Punjab has thrown considerable light on the events related to the politics of Punjab from the year 1952 to 1983 in his work *Disintegration of Punjab*, which was published in 1984. Although, the work is pro-Congress because the author was himself a staunch Congressman. Yet it provides many valuable facts, because the author was himself involved in politics and provides a number of firsthand accounts that influenced the density of Punjabi people. He evaluates the contribution and achievements of prominent leaders of that era that also includes Sant Fateh Singh.

*Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab* published in 1988 and edited by Paul Wallace and Chopra is collection of papers on political dynamics of Punjab. Wallace's paper on religious and secular politics

of Punjab highlights Sikh dilemma in competing political systems. Bhatnagar and Verma's papers on coalition governments formed between the year 1967 and 1980 throw light on the working of first coalition government formed in Punjabi Suba in 1967 under the name People's United Front. The contributors focus on ever changing patterns and trends of politics in the Punjab. Most of the papers in this volume deals with Akali politics.

*Akali Dal in Punjab Politics* by Kuldeep Kaur which was published in 1999 is an objective study of Akali Dal. It traces the cause of rift between Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh. She also throws light on role of ruling party at centre in causing splits in Akali Dal. She makes an excellent ground work for learning the causes of factional fights in Akali Dal. Kaur also discusses the dominance of rural Jat Sikhs in Akali Dal at that time.

Gopal Krishan Lamba's work *Dynamics of Punjabi Suba Movement* highlights Akalis' modus operandis to achieve their aim. Lamba discusses how Akali leaders put forth their demand through various resolutions and morchas. Lamba discusses in detail the strategy and tactics employed by the Akali leaders. He has analyzed the struggle in terms of the response of Punjabi Hindus and the reaction of various national political parties such as Congress, Jan Sangh, CPI and the Republican Party. Lamba also discusses government's attitude towards the leaders of the movement. In this process, he describes the contribution of Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh. As this work is focused on the greatest contribution of Sant Fateh Singh i.e., achievement of Punjabi Suba, it provides valuable information although briefly about Sant Fateh Singh.

Harnik Deol's work entitled *Religion and Nationalism in India*, published in 2000 focuses on the nature of the demand for Punjabi Suba and strategies employed by the Hindu and Sikh leaders. The change of basis of demand for Punjab Suba was initiated by Sant

Fateh Singh. Deol describes how Sant Fateh Singh, who was a Jat Sikh, commanded a substantial following among the peasantry and held a base in Gurdwaras, gradually took the reins of the movement in his own hands. He also discusses the role of the Green Revolution in the prosperity of rural Punjab and its effects on the political activism of the rural Jats.

The bulk of A.C. Kapur's work *The Punjab Crisis* is devoted to a detailed study of Sikh aspirations. Kapur aims to tell that complications arose when Akalis wanted to go alone and spearhead the movement for achievement of a goal. Kapur has devoted few pages to the circumstances that led to rise of Sant Fateh Singh and eclipse of Master Tara Singh.

## **CHAPTER – 2**

### **SANT FATEH SINGH: LIFE AND WORKS**

Sant Fateh Singh was born in the house of a simple farmer, Chanan Singh Sidhu on 27 October, 1911.<sup>1</sup> His grandfather's name was Gandha Singh. Sant's mother, Sant Kaur was daughter of Samund Singh of Vairoke village. There is a lot of misconception about the place of birth of the Sant because he lived for many continuous years at Ganganagar, Dhollan and at other places. But the fact is that he was born at Badiala, a medium sized village 10 kilometer from Rampura.<sup>2</sup> Other siblings included two brothers Bhola Singh, Mukhtiar Singh and a sister of Sant, Sham Kaur who was married to Bhag Singh of Gulab Mandi.

Chanan Singh although a simple peasant, had a religious bent of mind. He lived almost an isolated life. He was called 'Giana' by the village folk<sup>3</sup> due to his knowledge of Guru Granth Sahib. He was always absorbed in meditation. He had only one friend in the village Mit Singh, the Granthi of village Gurdwara. He kept "Khartals" in his pocket and would start reciting the "Nam" as soon as he got time.<sup>4</sup> But Fateh's mother was a homely person. She disliked her husband's religious approach to life. This, often was the cause of family quarrels and she never wanted to make Fateh a copy of his father. She had a great fear about Fateh because he was the youngest and his father liked him more than all his children. CD. Ghai writes, "It is the case of a unique father, who wanted, willed and helped his son to follow the path of renunciation and sacrifice". Fateh got the first lessons in religion and Gurbani from his father. Perhaps, Chanan Singh wanted Fateh to follow the path of celibacy and sainthood because he himself

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<sup>1</sup> C.D. Ghai, *God's Own Man : A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.2; Also Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, (J.S. Sabar has remained P.A. of Sant for a decade).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> CD. Ghai, *God's Own Man: A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.152.

<sup>4</sup> CD. Ghai, *God's Own Man: A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.4.

had realized the limitations of a family life. The Sant too loved his father much and during his childhood, used to do everything to please his father. But Fateh's mother was alarmed at the duo's collaboration. She lamented lack of familial love in her husband. She had apprehensions about his son following the path of his father. Fateh continued to lead a religious life in spite of his mother's laments. As Chanan Singh wanted his son Fateh to lead a religious life, he knew he could not do it while living a in family. Up to this time the Sant had learnt to follow the hard routine of continuous meditation. Moreover, at that time it was common amongst Jat peasantry to give one of their many children to the Sant to do service and recite Gurbani.

For Fateh, his father chose Sant Sham Singh<sup>5</sup> (a retired military man) who had been doing service at a Gurdwara in village Sekha near Bhatinda. The man was known for his strict and uncompromising ways. As soon as the child Fateh was admitted, he was asked to prepare food and look after the cattle meant for running the common kitchen. Fateh obeyed these orders without complaining. Perhaps, it was here that he got his first lessons in humility and service of people. Once, Sham Singh asked him to stand outside the room as a punishment. He stood for many hours till he fell.

He was humble and kept a low profile throughout his life.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, seeds of self abnegation and service of others were sown at this time in Fateh's personality. It was this humility and low profile which later attracted attention of Harcharan Singh Hudiara at Ferozpur jail and that of Master Tara Singh at Anandpur.<sup>7</sup> These leaders were amazed at his popularity in Sikh circles, especially in village folk.

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<sup>5</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> J.S. Sabar narrates an incident when one of brothers of Sant came to visit him at Darbar Sahib. He was lodged in a A.C. and well furnished room. But when Sant came to know about this "special luxury" being provided to his brother. He immediately asked his brother to shift to common Sarai meant for pilgrims.

<sup>7</sup> Sant's first encounter with Punjab politicians was in Ferozpur jail i.e. with Harcharan Singh Hudhana, who was lodged along with Sant in anti-slogan morcha in 1955. He attracted attention of Master Tara Singh at the Jap-Tap Smagam at Anandpur. His humility and low-profile made him favourite with these leaders.

When his brother told about his pitiable condition to his father, he came to visit his son. To his surprise the child complained of nothing and said he was content. Chanan Singh brought him to village, but he communicated little with his relatives. The rumour spread that something serious had happened to the child. The Sant soon returned to Sham Singh's abode. This time, Sham Singh gave him ample time to learn and study Sikh scriptures and history. It was during these days that Fateh met a Sadhu named Chetan Das.<sup>8</sup> Interaction with him brought great change in Fateh's mind. Fateh wanted to follow Chetan Das's ways of isolated meditation and renunciation. But as Sant Sham Singh was against renunciation, Fateh returned to his village and told his father that he wanted to meditate alone like a vairagi. His father offered to build a 'Bhora' (an underground meditation room), but he insisted that he wanted to practice in "Bir" (a small jungle) nearby.

Geographically, the area surrounding Fateh's native village was not as fertile as it is today before the green revolution came in Punjab. It comprised of small "birs" here and there. Due to this, this area was a favourite haunt of Sadhus and vairagis. Fateh's mother was troubled a lot when she learnt about her son's decision to roam as a Sadhu but yielded when she saw that her son was adamant to practice 'Tap'. As now he had his parent's approval, Fateh happily started practicing 'Tap'. During these days, he roamed as a mendicant or a Sadhu. He roamed in regions surrounding Dhanaula, Tapa, Barnala, Bhudhlada etc.<sup>9</sup> Fateh lived a hard life during these days. He lived on simple diet and water. Fateh met another kindred spirit, Sant Sadhu Singh who had his dera at village Pandher.<sup>10</sup> Fateh also lived at this place for some time. It was in Sant Sadhu Singh's company that Fateh started reciting poetry.

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<sup>8</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.7.

<sup>9</sup> C.D. Ghai, *God's Own Man : A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.7.

After some period, he reached his village alongwith some of his followers. This time, he stayed at village Gurdwara instead of staying at his own house. He met his father without any sign of emotions. This was the last meeting between father and son. After this Chanan Singh never met his son and died without meeting him.<sup>11</sup> This was the strongest proof of Sant's transparency as for as politics was concerned. A man who has no time for familial affections can remain transparent in his public life. Familial affection meant little to him. Upto now, Fateh had travelled a lot in region surrounding his native place. He had a great number of followers by this time. Wherever he went, he became popular due to his saintly nature and self-abnegating qualities. Now he began the task to which he was most suited i.e. social service.

While analyzing his life's journey before his entry into politics, his greatness as a philanthropist comes not as an opaque inference but as a transparent reality. His activities for welfare of people are immense.<sup>12</sup> The Sant used to say that his father gave him four dictates which he obeyed throughout his life. These dictates were "Nam recitation, control over desires, kirtan and service of society and community".<sup>13</sup>

Sant Fateh Singh, when he was in his full youth was imbibed with a desire to do something for the welfare of the society. Opportunity came in the form of a disciple and his close aide, Bhai Bhakhtavar Singh.<sup>14</sup> Bhai had been living a religious life with Sant. He visited Ganganagar district to do some personal work and met some of his relatives. As he was a highly religious man, he was pained to see

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<sup>11</sup> Preface of "Fabven Uttar" edited by Sant Kirpal Singh, Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967. This book comprises Sant's statements which he gave press specially to correspondents of "Kaumi Dard" Jalandhar.

<sup>12</sup> One can get a description of his social service in his own book "Guruji Dian Bakshian Saadian Safaltavan", Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967 (Sikh reference library, Darbar Sahib, Amritsar).

<sup>13</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guruji Dian Bakshian Saadian Safaltavan*, Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967 (Sikh reference library, Darbar Sahib, Amritsar).

<sup>14</sup> Bhai Bhakhtwar Singh's first meeting with Sant is not known but afterwards he was a close aide of Sant particularly during Sant's social service innings.

the pitiable condition of the Sikhs living there. The Sikhs had settled there when the British set up a canal colony and the Sikhs from less fertile areas of Punjab were taken there. With their hard work, they had converted the sandy dunes of Rajasthan into a fertile region. But due to government apathy, they had no facilities there.

There was no provision of drinking water in this area. The greatest lack was absence of any Gurdwara or religious education there. People were not conscious of their noble heritage. When Sant heard this, he personally went along with Bhai Bhakhtavar to watch the situation. First of all he started "Amrit Paan" movement in this area in 1931.<sup>15</sup> He toured and stayed at 172 village (villages in Rajasthan were numbered in this way.) in his early years in this region.

The Sant's early years were wholly devoted to social service. The principles of the Sikh religion were so entwined in Sant's heart that he may be compared to some degree to Bhai Ghanaiya. In fact, all his public following was based not only on charisma as is the case with most political personalities; but on the years of social service that ranged from Ganganagar district of Rajasthan to whole of Punjab while wholeheartedly supporting his country whenever a national calamity came.

The principle of "Sarbat da Bhalla" (universal wellbeing) was followed by the Sant through his whole life. While doing service, the Sant never considered the religion or region of people for whom he was working. The Sant was son of a farmer and he had spent most of his life in the villages, where he had seen the ignorance and poverty of rural folk. He felt the pulse of the rural people and knew that he could remove the social ills by reinforcing the religion and educating people.

For this, he built a great number of Gurdwaras and schools wherever he went. Without any governmental support, he depended

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<sup>15</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.10.

solely on the public sources which he himself collected thanks to his altruistic nature and hard work whenever he went, he spread the teachings of Sikhism while motivating the people of respective regions to work for their own good. Even in jail, he was moved to see the plight of the inmates and started his non-violent protests against jail authorities. But, the Sant never praised himself for accomplishing these works. He attributed all these works to the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji.<sup>16</sup>

In his heart of hearts, the Sant was a social worker par excellence. The Sant never married and hardly met his family during his stint as a social service. The Sant spent his childhood at the Dera of Sant Sham Singh (a retired military man) who had been doing service at the Gurdawara of village Sekha near Bathinda.<sup>17</sup>

S. Chanan Singh like the child Fateh more than all of his children because he was more like him. In the words of C.D. Ghai, the only biographer of the Sant. "It is the case of a unique father who wanted, willed and helped his son to follow the path of renunciation and sacrifice".<sup>18</sup>

The Sant got his first lessons in social service and Gurbani from his father. During this period, it was a common custom among the jat families to give one of their many children to the Sant for doing social service. As already told, this was admitted in the Gurdawara managed by Sant Sham Singh where the Sant learnt the first practical lesson of social service and humility. His job at the Gurdwara was to rear the cattle and prepare *langar* for the devotees and visitor.

The Sant loved social service throughout his life. Nowhere, we find any sign of nepotism or familial prejudice in the Sant's life.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guruji dian Bakshian Sadian Safaltavan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Baga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.5.

<sup>18</sup> C.D. Ghai, *God's Own Man: A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> J.S. Sabar narrated an incident which occurred during the period when the Sant was at the helm of political affairs of Punjab.

Sant's brother came to visit him at Darbar Sahib. He was lodged in an air-conditioned luxurious room when the Sant came to know his luxury being provided to his brother, he immediately asked to shift his brother to common serai.

The tradition prepares a poet/writer to surrender himself to something higher than him. To be a great writer one must be aware of one's tradition. It is this tradition and history which helps writer in adopting a style. The great men are endowed with such sympathy and interest that they absorb and involve themselves in all the information and events of their age. They are embodiment of all this is valuable in that age.

The Sant too was a man of tradition. In all his works and speeches, he relies on tradition and makes full use of example and inferences from history to bring home the point to the readers. He discusses the sacrifice of the Guru, four Sahibzadas and Mata Guzri with much fanfare. He links those critical situation and sacrificial solution given by the great men of that age. He tries his best to highlight the supreme sacrifices of innumerable Sikhs who shed their blood for protection of Gau (cow), Gareeb (poor), and women. He wants to make the present generation aware of their sacrifices of their forefathers.

But one rarely sees the element of dejection in Sant's works. If it is visible, it only comes out of burping desire of to be with the Almighty. But in his didactic and propagalary works, the Sant never shows a feeling of helplessness. The first characteristic of heroism i.e., persistence is visible in life and works of the Sant. The sincerity of purpose which is visible in his life is also visible in his works.

The Sant's works, especially poetry expresses the experience of life which he gained through long years of social service and political agitations. The Sant's poetry takes all life as its province. It is concerned primarily not with beauty but with persuasion, experience

and truth. If the Sant uses rhythm and sound, his primarily objective is to reinforce the meaning and intensify the communication.

The Sant's poetry links neo trends and clings to tradition. The traces of modernism or post-modernism are nowhere visible in his poetry. That is why the Sant never closes out the past options and never relies on exhaustion of traditional faiths. The newer social atopias have no place in his works but he relies on reforming the society on the lines suggested by the Gurus.

The Sant has a tendency to generalize but he does not thrust his findings on others. He quotes several examples from history and from his contemporary age and leaves it to the reader to recognize the truth and generalize. But he tries to unify the generalizations and tries to bring back the wholeness. The Sant's thought which may confuse a semi-literate or a literate readers is nowhere visible because the Sant knew who his readers were.

The Sant is apt in depicting nature and in his plays like "Jagdian Jotan"<sup>20</sup> his penchant for describing the setting and environment of his play is clearly visible. In this short play, the Sant brings out the treachery of Ganga who got Mata Guzri and two Sahibzadas arrested due to his greed for gold and money which they carried with them. His choice of words and description of the minds of Mata Guzri and Ganga can be more attributed to a seasoned writer than a social servant or a political crusader.

The Sant had not only studied Gurbani but he had also studied the works of Sikh Scholars like Kavi Santokh Singh (Guru Partap Suraj Granth). Bhai Rattan Singh Bhangu (Panth Parkash) and Giani Gian Singh.<sup>21</sup> The martyrdom of the Z. Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh is described with so much attention to minute details

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<sup>20</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Jagdian Jotan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.4

<sup>21</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Kujh Paavan in Jagdian Jotan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.7.

that it seems as a firsthand account.

The Sant's work "Charki de deewe" describes the martyrdom of various Sikh martyrs from Bhai Mani Singh to the martyrs of Punjabi Suba agitation. This work is named so because the Sant compares every Sikh martyrdom to burning of one's own body fat. So that, the light of religion could continue illuminating. That is why he calls all these martyrs; Charki de deewe i.e., those who burned their own fat to provide oil to the lamp of religion and freedom.<sup>22</sup> This work includes twenty two poems and short prose the theme of which centres on religion, the rising apostasy among Sikhs and the Sant's standpoint on various issues. The prose works like *Asin Firkoo Kiven; Vitkara Kyon; Punjabi Boli Firkoo Nahin; Punjabi Suba Firkoo Nahin; Asadi Shakal Afirkoo Hai; Vatavaran Kharab Na Karo* and *Samooh Deshvarian de Nam Appeal* bring out the hallowness of the allegation that the Sikhs, their demands and their leadership is communal. The Sant blows to the wind, the arguments of the Hindu fundamentalists that the Sikh and their leadership eyes on the consolidation of a separate Sikh nation.<sup>23</sup>

His work "Pita Guru" covers the entire life span of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh ji from his birth at Patna to his demise at Nanded. The Sant narrates the life, achievements and and greatness of the tenth Guru with artistic expression and imagery while reading the above work, one feels involved in the life of the Guru as every page of the work traces the connection between the present generation of the Sikhs and Hindus and the Guru's sacrifice.<sup>24</sup>

The contemporary period was full of movements for establishment of democracy in various countries against the

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<sup>22</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Charbi de deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Charbi de deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.12.

<sup>24</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Pita Guru*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.43.

totalitarian governments which were mere shadows of one superpower or other. He was aware of this i.e., why in the above work. He claims that the tenth Guru was the first true democrat as he himself took *amrit* from five of his followers who belonged to so called lower castes. The Sant fully explores and praises the concept of "Ape Gur Chela".<sup>25</sup>

The tenth Guru are concerned, the Sant highlights one important aspect of brave and dauntless people in history. The Sant says that the Guru was truly brave because he was alone when he stood against the mighty Mughals as compared to Maharana Partap who too fought against the Mughals and Raja Ram Chander who destroyed the demon Ravan. The Sant opines that both these historical personalities had blue blood and the whole might of their people stood behind them while the Guru was alone when he thought of opposing the Mughal atrocities. He had no vast resources or disciplined armies at his disposal, yet through his own example, he converted the simple farmers, workers and menial workers into a fighting machine which set examples of bravery even when it was pitted against exceptionally large and disciplined Mughal forces.<sup>26</sup>

The Sant also highlights that the tenth Guru accomplished so much despite the opposition of Prithi Chand and Ram Paras. The Sant opines that it was nothing less than a miracle to collect resources and money to feed and maintain such an army by a Saint.

The Sant while praising the Guru in this work, cites his bani alongwith the narrative. He fully explores the philosophy of the tenth Guru and his views on family death karam and meditation.<sup>27</sup>

Sant's another work "Nirala Panth" is an excellent work on the "Khalsa Panth". In this work, the Sant delineates the causes of change

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<sup>25</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Pita Guru*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.56.

<sup>26</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Pita Guru*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.75.

<sup>27</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Pita Guru*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, pp.60-65.

of Sikh policy which resulted in the birth of Khalsa in 1699. The work is a complete history of Sikh panth. In this work, the Sant has taken help of a historical personality i.e., Bhai Daya Singh who like a historical narrator, narrates the story of Khalsa.<sup>28</sup>

In this work, the Sant highlights alongwith history, the life style of a common Sikh which include the necessary five Kakaars, one tenth of a Sikhs income being offered to the Guru and advises the Sikhs to beware of Pseudo-Sikh Gurus. The Sant also highlights the treachery of present day "Masands" who unlike the Masands appointed by Guru Ram Das have only one motive, i.e., accumulation of wealth in the name of Sikh Panth. The Sant's knowledge of Sikh customs and traditions is visible when he minutely discusses the process of "Amrit" (baptism), and other Sikh customs like marriage and bethrothal.

The Sant's explanation of "Laavan" (Holy Bani recited at the time of marriage) is exhaustive and interesting. The Sant's directions for bride and bridegroom although inspired by Gurbani are very didactic and interesting.

The Sant has also thrown light on the importance of "Rahatnamas" in a Sikh's life. In the word of the Sant, "Rahatnamas are inseparable part of a Sikh's body and are to be practiced". The Sant has explained briefly the Rahatnamas of Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dera Singh, Bhai Chaupa Singh and Bhai Prehlaad Singh.<sup>29</sup>

Appendix of the above above work contains all the words which the Sikhs spoke during Gurudom but are not in vogue today. By listing there words with their meanings, the Sant has tried to explore Gurmukhi while giving knowledge about the language spoken by the Sikhs during Guru period. Thus, the Sant tries to link the present day Sikhs with tradition and glorious past.

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<sup>28</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Nirala Panth*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, pp.60-65.

<sup>29</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Nirala Panth*, p.237.

The Sant's work "Badesh Yatra" is a travelogue after his brief sojourn abroad. During his visit to Malayasia, the Sant had also written a travelogue "Amol Yatra" which quite brief a work. The work was completed by the Sant during his tour which he started after the acceptance of Punjabi Suba demand by the government. The Sant started his journey from Amritsar and reached England by passing through Bombay, Sri Hazoor Sahib, Kharagpur, Calcutta, Bihar, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malaysia, Rome and Paris. In the words of the Sant, the aim of this journey was not sightseeing but meeting the Sikhs residing in foreign countries, spreading the message of Guru Nanak and motivate the Sikhs to live by the Sikh principles.<sup>30</sup>

Like a seasoned writer, the Sant traces the origin of the Punjabi word "Yatra" in "Yatran", a Sanskrit word meaning travel, in the first line of the work. The Sant further writes that he took only Jathedar Mohan Singh Tur and Bhai Kikar Singh with him as a multitude could have cast him a lot. The work is biographical in nature. The Sant describes the respect and love showered on him by the Sikh Sangat in India and abroad without making the work hyperbolic in nature. In the whole work, the Sant describes the multitude that welcomed him everywhere but such is the style of the Sant that "Machdian Laatan" is collection of poems based on sacrifice and achieving martyrdom for a holy cause. These poems are full of expression of the Sant's desire to end his life for the Sikh cause. A perusal of these work forces the reader to ponder about the reasons behind the Sant's yearning to die while every human being wants to avert this inevitable truth. A study of these poems brings out the gradual developing of mindset of the Sant. It brings out the fact that the Sant had become a deeply religious person from his very childhood. He belonged to a religion

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<sup>30</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Badesh Yatra*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, pp.60-65.

which was full of examples of supreme sacrifices.<sup>31</sup>

As enshrined in the Sikh religion, the Sant not only adopted meditation and propagation of Sikh ideals, as his way of life but also fought on the social front to remove the social ills present in the Sikh society. The social service brought the Sant into struggle for Punjabi Suba, but the basis of the Sant's mental makeup remained same i.e., Sikh ideas of purity and sacrifice. This motivation brings the Sant on the threshold of offering the Supreme sacrifice.

The poem "Maut nu" in the above work brings out the same yearning of the Sant to hold the death in his arms. Another poem "Saathian Nu" seems to be the last words of a martyr to his followers. In this poem, the Sant even gives directions about the size of "Havan Kunds" in which he was going to immolate himself. In the same way "Baaz Nu", "Chaar July", "Sanjha Guru", "He Data " and "Bibi Bhani" are full of feelings of love for one's religion and desire to offer oneself for the supreme sacrifice for the Sikh nation.

Among other works "Piar Sunehra", "Ankhi Valvale", "Mithian Ramzaan", "Sewa Nu Mewa", "Abhul Yaddan", "Baanka Shaheed", "Akat Daleelan", "Sidki Putla", "Chanan Ban" and "Jagdian Jotan" are prominent. "Piar Sunehra" focuses on the loving relationship between God and his mediator. It brings out the true love and Vairag through 124 poems, Kabits, Baint and Rubais.<sup>32</sup> Nowhere, we found the traces of narcissism.

The work also contains "Maan Patras", the letters of appraisal offered by the Sikh Sangat everywhere to the Sant. There "Maan Paatras" show the love and dedication of Sikh Sangat residing outside Punjab towards the Sant. While travelling, the Sant continued his favourite work i.e., spreading the message of Sikh Gurus. In all his

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<sup>31</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Machdian Lattan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, pp.60-65.

<sup>32</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Piar Sunehra*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.45.

speeches he referred to the elements of universal brotherhood present in Sikhism. Apart from these, the work narrates the places the Sant visited and persons he met whose detailing would be out of content here.<sup>33</sup>

"Dhukven Uttar" is a collection of the Sant's speeches, press briefs and declaration. The work was published to remove the public misconceptions about the programme and policies of the Sant Akali Dal. The work blows to the wind, the allegations leveled by the Master Akali Dal and the newspaper "Jathedar" against the Sant. These speeches and declarations were published as a means of propaganda and distributed in public so that the Sikhs would see both sides of an issue rather than the rumours spread by the Sant's opponents.

These speeches relate to a variety of issues ranging from Punjab Suba politics to appeal for help to the flood-stricken people of Punjab. The Sant's messages to the Sikh troops fighting at the border are also included in which the Sant clears that the unity and integrity of the country is always first. Some of the speeches are quite interesting. Notably among these are the refutations of the blames leveled on the Sant that he is an agent of the government or that he is removing the epithet "Sant" and substituting it with "Bhai". But nowhere in his speeches, the Sant calls names and on the contrary maintains the political decorum.

It would not be futile to give description of his social works in brief here. He built many Gurdwaras including those at Chak Sahib Singh Wala, village number 192 and a central Gurdwara amidst 7-8 villages. To solve the water problem, the Sant built "Digis" (small tanks). He also built a Gurdwara Dharamsal at village no. 192. His social works even led to uproar in Rajasthan state Assembly. The opposition criticized the government that the Sant was doing what the

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<sup>33</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Badesh Yatra*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1966, p.54.

government was to do.<sup>34</sup> He was arrested while illegally building a bridge on a canal but later on acquitted due to public pressure.<sup>35</sup>

He also built a Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib in Padampur district. He also campaigned against consumption of Alcohol.

His another great contribution was construction of Sikh shrine at Budhajorh.<sup>36</sup> The place has a great importance in Sikh history. The place was lying unnoticed then. It was Sant's initiative to recognize the place with the help of historical texts. After coming out of jail in Oct, 1955, he decided to built a Gurdwara here. The place at that time was surrounded by sand dunes and there was no population nearby. The Sant laid the foundation of a Gurdwara in February 1956. The Sant faced a strong opposition from Nihangs who did not want to surrender the place. Even there were skirmishes between his friends and Nihangs, but the Sant pacified both and brought them to a point. A beautiful Gurdwara was constructed which overawes a beholder even today. He set up a Sikh museum also. The Sant even had to make Gurdwara's own lightning arrangement as the electricity came only in 1970 here.<sup>37</sup> Sant's philanthropism made him popular in this area. He loved this area and even applied "Ganganagar" to his name. His name became a household name. Even today people pay their homage in the 'Bhora' at which he used to meditate. He opened a missionary-college named Sant Chanan Singh Sant Fateh Singh missionary college to impart religious education. His works were even praised in Assembly. A rough estimate of Sant's works includes 132 primary schools, 59 middle schools, 33 high schools in this region. He also set up "Guru

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<sup>34</sup> *Sankhep Jeevani Santan di* (a preface by Gurmukh Singh in *Fabven Uttar*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967).

<sup>35</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guntji Dian Bakshian Saadan Safaltaavan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967

<sup>36</sup> The place reminds us of Sikh Mughal struggle when Massa Rangarh a Mughal official had done sacrilege of sanctum sanctorum of Sikhs. He brought dancing girls and drank in premises of Golden Temple. It was Mehtab Singh of Meerkot and Sukha Singh of Mari Kambo village who murdered Massa and brought his head to this place where they were able to befool Mughals for some time. Later on they were martyred. They symbolically played with Massa Rangerh's head here.

<sup>37</sup> Jasvir Singh Sabar, *Do Mananpurkh*, Amritsar, 1972, p.9.

Nanak College" at Ganganagar.

After working for more than ten years the Sant started social service at Dhollan, a village near Jagraon. He set up a girls' school here. Once he asked the village residents to make a building for the school. When they did not take it seriously, he declared that he would not eat anything until the school building was built. The school building was constructed in 11 days. He also lived at village Dhaliwal, situated between Hawara and Raikot. He constructed a Gurdwara Manji Sahib here. He used to go from here to Mullanpur Dakha to address religious gatherings. It was at Mullanpur that he met the Sant Chanan Singh, who was to accompany him throughout his life. His religious approach to life often put him in trouble. Once he admitted a boy from village Dhollan into Sikhism and baptized him by offering him the Amrit'. The boy's mother came to the Gurdwara and rebuked the Sant for making a family man a Sant. The Sant pacified her and remained cool despite her reproaches.

He also helped in construction of Gurdwara at village Rasulpur in Jagraon Tehsil.<sup>38</sup> But his works during this period were purely non-political. Apart from these areas, he also worked at Talwandi, also known as Guru Ki Kashi. Here he was astonished to see 'Guru Ki Kashi' without even a single centre or college for higher education. During annual gatherings at Baisakhi fair in Talwandi, politicians usually declared that they would set up a college here but forgot afterwards. When the Sant offered to open a college here, residents replied that earlier too many people had offered but nobody accomplished the task. It was a period of land reforms when ceiling law was in operation. The Sant said that if those having much land would offer -that to him to build a college, the land would be used for a good purpose. Consequently, a beautiful college named Guru Kashi

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<sup>38</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guruji Dian Bakshian Saadan Safaltaavan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1967, p.7.

College was constructed amidst 100 acres of land which has become a premier institution of the area today.

Coming to the literary works of Sant, it is worthy of mention that it is a great misconception that he was an illiterate. His political opponents like S. Lachman Singh Gill called him illiterate. Partap Singh Kairon even went to call him a head or "Sadh" of *Unpurh Tola* (group). But an indepth reading of the works of the Sant brings out the fact that although he did not get formal education, he was well versed in all the branches of knowledge.

The Sant's literary works have been hitherto lying unexplored. Most of his works are didactic or propagatory in nature. Most of his prose works are compilation of his speeches and declarations at various juncture of his political career. Except "Abhul Yaadein", all the works were composed with aim of educating public about the necessity of Punjabi Suba and eulogizing the Sant's endeavours in political field.

The fact that the Sant was a religious preacher influences most of his works. His knowledge and expertise of Gurbani is clearly visible in his works. He has quoted in abundance the examples from Sikh history. He discusses the sacrifice of fifth and ninth Sikh Gurus with much fanfare. He has discussed in his works the life and struggle of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh.

His poems are multi dimensional. Although religious in nature, his poems are multi dimensional. The verses also show both spatial and temporal dimensions. The temporal dimension of his poems relies mainly on music. Apart from this, the human mind as a perceptual organism is discussed in his verses. The Sant's verses show that he had high flight of imagination. Imagination is quintessence of a poem. It has been even recognized by Aristotle and S.T. Coleridge.

The Sant's poems are composed both within 'metre' and 'free verse'. Most of his verses are full of rhythm and flow. All his verses

have a close link with tradition but biographic element also shows its presence. Despite narration of all odds and pessimistic turn of events in his works, the Sant has an optimistic tendency. An over bearing tendency to personify abstract entities is visible in his works. His works also show humanistic and revolutionary tinge. The poems "Maut nu", "Hat Zao", "Ankhi Valvle" and "Machdian Latan" are full of "Bir Ras".<sup>39</sup> The Sant's poetry can be more compared to "stage poetry" which was in vogue in the first half of twentieth century.

It would be worthwhile to discuss the poetic trends in the Punjabi poetry at the time when the Sant composed his verses. It was time of the experimental movement in Punjabi poetry. This movement was a revolt against metre based poems of Punjabi poets. It aimed at composing the free verses which were free of any inhibitions of metre.

The Sants makes good use of "Alankaras" to bring home the point to reader, to create proper impressions and heighten the sense of beauty in his poems. As far as imagery is concerned, the Sant abstains from decrepit imagery in his poems. He relies on creating violent, radical and exuberant images. The Sant takes care to use proper language according to the subject matter of the poem. For didactic and religious poems, he used words from Gurbani while composing poems with propagandist content, he uses the common language of the masses.

His poems "Piar Sunehra", "Sewa nu Mewa", "Chanan ban", "Jagdhian Jotan" are religious in content.<sup>40</sup> The Sant takes care to not mix various contents in his works. In the above poems and all other religious literature, he never discusses the contemporary politics or Punjabi Suba issue. These works are only for arousing the religious sentiments in masses. The works "Nindak nu", "Sadial nu", "Kauri

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<sup>39</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Mithian Ramzan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

<sup>40</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Jagdhian Jotan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

Tumbi nu" and "Kami nu" are aimed at eradicating the bad habits like backbiting, bad temperament, foul language and over indulgence in sexual pleasures. "Birdh Avastha" inspires the younger generation to take care of their older ones. "Mali nu" highlights the dignity of labour.<sup>41</sup>

Among the prose works "Saadian Safaltaanav" and "Abhul Yaadan" are autobiographical in nature. In the former, the Sant lists his achievements like proper managements of Sri Harimander Sahib, establishing monuments of Sikh martyrs and extension of office building complex of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. "Abhul Yaadan" discusses the events of Punjabi Suba Morcha.<sup>42</sup> Sant's speeches titled "Jwan di Mang", "Hindu-Sikh Ekta", "Sant Samagham" and "Morcha Kyon" throws light on the mindset and tactics of the Sant while discussing at the same time some intricate problems faced by the Akali leadership in achieving the goal of Punjabi Suba.

"Akat Dalilan" includes narration of Nehru-Fateh talks, Shastri-Fateh talks and the Sant's meeting with Mr. Nanda, contemporary home minister of India. It has a great historical value as it is a source of primary nature. "Dhukven uttar" comprises of the Sant's replies to the questions or allegation of his political friends or opponents. The Sant blows all the allegations levied by his opponents in a very interesting and logical way. The work is propagandist in nature.<sup>43</sup>

"Fabven uttar" and "Suljhe uttar" are also part of the above series of the Sant's replies to the questions of his opponents raised in press during the period between 1960 and 1966.<sup>44</sup>

"Badesh Yatra" is a brief description of the Sant's brief sojourn

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<sup>41</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Mithian Ramzan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1970.

<sup>42</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Abhul Yaadan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

<sup>43</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukven Uttar* Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

<sup>44</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Fabven Uttar*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1970.

abroad in which the Sant has tried to narrate the customs and traditions of western countries with his lucid style.

Most of the Sant's works were composed with aim of providing religious education to the masses. The Sant through his works tried to make the Punjabi's aware of the problems that surrounded them. The Sant's readers were basically rural folk most of which were deeply religious. That is why the Sant choose religious via media for educating them. He had a long experience of preaching the Sikh principles to the masses. Before his entry into politics, the Sant had worked as a Sikh preacher for a considerable time.

This fact considerably enhanced his capacity to touch the very soul of masses through his speeches and prose works which are compilation of his speeches, messages and declarations. The Sant choose metaphors (similes) from Sikh scriptures, and history as they inspired masses more. There is abundance of metaphysical and mystical elements in the Sant's works thanks to his close association with religion and religious scriptures. It is beyond debate that Gurbani is storehouse of knowledge which is valid for all ages. The Sant with his mastery of Gurbani had acquired a vast knowledge about universe, society, mankind and the ills that prevailed in society since ages. He had formed his logical opinion about his surroundings with help of the Gurbani. This religious influence is clearly visible in his life and quite naturally in his works.

Apart from issues surrounding Punjabis, the Sant emphasized on the need of educating about the practical aspect of spiritualism and its relevance in contemporary society ridden with all sorts of vices. The Sant's concern for the problem of increase in number of non-believers is also visible in his works. He had baptized innumerable men and women into Sikhism by offering them "Khande ka Pahul" (religious nectar).

That the Sant was a staunch Sikh is beyond doubt. But hatred

for other faiths is nowhere found in his speeches or poems. He was a tolerant believer. While he emphasized on baptizing more and more Sikhs into pure Sikhism by offering them "Khande ka Pahul" he has nowhere shown fanaticism or intolerance in his works.<sup>45</sup>

The Sant's creation "Rehatname" is full of dos and don'ts for a true Sikh. In this work, the Sant lays emphasis on doing work remaining away from lethargy, worships weapons and takes care of his hair. The Sant calls poor man's mouth as "Guru ka Golak". The Sant explains Rehatnama of Bhai Nand Lal briefly. In this work, the Sant also describes how to make "Prasad".

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<sup>45</sup> C.D. Ghai, *God's Own Man: A Biography of Sant Fateh Singh*, Ludhiana, 1969, p.27.

## CHAPTER – 3

### SANT'S ENTRY INTO AKALI DAL

Before his formal entry into the Sikh Politics the Sant had an experience in organizing people and taking part in agitations. Most of the Punjabis have a preconceived notion that he was brought into politics by Akali stalwarts like Master Tara Singh. But a brief perusal of the contemporary sources and the Sant's literary works bring out the hitherto unnoticed facts.<sup>1</sup>In fact, his political activities go back as far as 1949 when he participated in the Akali agitation against PEPSU government. He sent many Jathas and was himself arrested while leading a huge Jatha of Akalis at Patiala while protesting against the PEPSU Government.<sup>2</sup> The Sant was also in vanguard of the agitation against the increase in *Abiana* (watercess) by Rajasthan government in the Ganganagar district which was populated by Sikhs. He led a Jatha of farmers and was arrested.<sup>3</sup>

During the ban on raising of slogans, he participated in the agitation against the government and was arrested by Punjab government in 1955. An agitation was started by the Akalis against this ban. The Sant actively took part in this agitation as the head of a Jatha of hundred Sikhs and was arrested on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1955 at Amritsar.<sup>4</sup>

Even during his imprisonment, he agitated for the betterment of civic amenities in jail. He was released on October 10, 1955 and he was given a warm welcome by the Sikhs of Ganganagar. Although, during these years his sphere of influence was limited to Ganganagar

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<sup>1</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guruji Dian Bakshian Saadian Safaltaavan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Mukh band* (Preface) of *Charbi de deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Jail Yatra* in *Charbi de deewe*, p.17; Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Guruji Dian Bakshian Saadian Safaltaavan*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971.

district yet he was truly at the beck and call of Akali agitators whenever the need came. He participated in the above agitations when the call of agitation was given from Akal Takht.<sup>5</sup>

After the implementation of regional formula which resulted out of the Akali-Congress detente, Master Tara Singh began to retrospect his line of thought which resulted in accepting the regional formula. His own instinct led him to oppose this half-measure which resulted out of the Akali-Congress talks at Delhi. The guilt so superseded his mind that he did not deem it fit to formally join Congress while most of his lieutenants joined Congress with the sole motive of being inducted in Kairon ministry.<sup>6</sup> The general elections of 1957 gave Master Tara Singh both excuse and opportunity to end his mental dichotomy and dilemma. The Akalis were offered only twenty tickets for the assembly seats and three for parliamentary seats. Quite naturally the Master cut off all his ties with Congress in his individual capacity and even set up his confidants against the Akali-Congress nominees in the elections. As the maxim goes, the history repeated itself when the Master was left alone in the same way as he was stranded in 1948. But the Master had only one advantage in this struggle and that was his control over Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee and Akali Dal. He started on the course of reinstating Akali Dal as an independent political party. Meanwhile Akali stalwarts like Giani Kartar Singh and Gian Singh Rarewala had joined Congress with the sole motive of enjoying power. In such an exigency, the Master was sure to find new replacements for Akali stalwarts like Giani Kartar Singh and Gian Singh Rarewala. It was at this juncture that our protagonist, the Sant emerged on the political scene of Punjab. The Sant's rustic simplicity, his benevolent nature and freshness appealed to the Master.

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<sup>5</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Charbi De Deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, Monohar Publications, 1983, New Delhi, p.357.

Meanwhile, Master Tara Singh had come to realize that the Punjabi Suba was a panacea for all the ills. But the formation of the Punjabi Suba had also a communal tinge as far as its importance for the Master was concerned. From his orations and actions, it becomes clear that language frontiers had become communal frontiers for the Master. The deliberate liquidation of the regional formula was perhaps the most important reason behind the uncompromising approach of the Master. But he was rational enough not to show his cards and continued to give impression in his public life that he had no desire to usurp the freedom of the Hindus and only wanted protection for the minority i.e. Sikhs.<sup>7</sup>

It was on 16<sup>th</sup> September of 1958 that he declared that he was compelled to revive the demand of Punjabi Suba due to the failure of the regional formula. The Master was justified because no regional committees were constituted till 1957 and the chairman of Punjabi regional committee had to resign in disgust because he was deliberately denied any establishment or staff by the S. Kairon government whose head was bent upon to torpedo any Akali design.<sup>8</sup>

The first conference on the demand of Punjabi Suba was held at Amritsar on October 12, 1958 where the Sant, who was the vice-president of Akali Dal, laid out the plan of action for attainment of such a Suba.<sup>9</sup> He vehemently deplored the inordinate delay and the dilatory tactics followed by the government in the implementation of the linguistic reorganization of states which was applied everywhere except in Punjab where government was deliberately linking the linguistic aspirations of the people to their alleged religious chauvinism.

The above narration and the further narrative is not out of context as these minutely trace the growth of internal rift in Akali Dal.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Tribune*, 15 June, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> *The Tribune*, 18 September, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> *The Tribune*, 13 October, 1958.

A brief perusal of the Sant's speech at the above conference delineates the differences between the Sant and his benefactor over the nature of the demand. The Sant, even at this juncture emphasized on separating the Sikh demands from alleged chauvinism and tried to expose the governmental design to link every Sikh initiative for linguistic reorganization to that of desire for a Sikh homeland. The Chief Minister as usual called the above efforts as a "Stage Tamasha" in the same way as his benefactor Mr. Nehru had dubbed the activities of Master Tara Singh a few years earlier.

As soon as the Punjab government realised the increase in Akali efforts, the chief minister put all the government machinery in ousting Master Tara Singh from his very home turf i.e. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee. Mr. Kairon found a handy tool in the person of Giani Kartar Singh who was successful in defeating the Akali Supremo by 77 to 74 votes. A blatantly naked move to control the resources and influence of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee came in form of Gurdwara Amendment bill which was passed more hastily than it was prepared.

The Sikh fears and dissatisfaction, the deliberate failure of regional formula and the activities of Hindi Raksha Samiti supported by the communal articles in the pro-Hindu news papers like the "Partap" had prepared a favourable ground for launch of an Akali agitation. Master Tara Singh, sensing the popular mood at which he was adept, started the agitation by announcing a silent procession without any slogans as a response against the governmental interference in his home turf i.e. Gurdwara management. The Kairon government was so apathetic of the popular mood that it arrested Master Tara Singh on March 14, 1959.<sup>10</sup> The arrest of the Akali Supremo whipped up the enthusiasm of the Sikhs who set an example by protesting in large numbers (50,000 to 3 lacs according to different

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tribune*, 15 March, 1959.

news papers). The all India Dharmic conference was held in the lawns of Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in which the Akalis lamented over the arrest of Master Tara Singh which was deemed as "wholly unwarranted".

Soon after his release, the Master tried to stop government's interference in the Gurdwaras by imposing a ban on the members of legislature from contesting Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee elections.<sup>11</sup>

Ajit Singh Sarhadi, a second rung Akali leader met the Chief Minister and was able to persuade him to examine the tentative bill (Gurdwara Amendment Bill) afresh but the matter was dropped by the Chief Minister when Giani Kartar Singh opposed the suggestion of Mr. Sarhadi tooth and nail.<sup>12</sup> The Akali struggle failed to make a dent in the able to force Mr. Nehru to agree to appointment of a commission to probe the bonafides and malafides of the individuals in Punjab government as a result of talks with Master Tara Singh at Delhi.<sup>13</sup>

Even such a small concession terrified the Kairon government to cry wolf. Sadh Sangat board, an organisation was formed with help of the Chief Minister; with the sole motive of somehow bringing out the exodus of Akalis from Gurdwara management, Gian Singh Rarewala and Giani Kartar Singh formed this organisation on the orders from Chief Minister office because the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee elections were near.

During this period, Amritsar the epicenter of Akali and Sikh struggles was buzzing with activity as the central government's decision to divide Bombay province further escalated the Sikh desire to have a separate province. The decision fueled the hope of formation of a separate state for Sikhs where they could preserve their heritage, language culture and holy scriptures. The Shiromani Gurdwara

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<sup>11</sup> *The Tribune*, 23 March, 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C. Kapoor and Sons, 1970, Delhi, p.316.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.317.

Parbhandhak Committee elections provided an occasion to the central government who, with help of some Sikhs like S. Hukam Singh wanted to bleed Akali Dal, whose life depended on its control and influence in Gurdwaras. Gurdwaras acted as a good platform for the Dal in moulding, and educating the public opinion of the Sikhs. The government wanted to cut this life line of the Dal. There is no denying that the auspicious occasions celebrated in the gurdwaras were marked by the religious speeches in which akali leaders also motivated the sangat politicaly. *The Tribune* in one of its leaderretes described the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee elections as a "purely religious issue" and criticized the Dal for discussing political and personal issue at those holy places.<sup>14</sup> The mainstream and the Hindu press followed biased approach towards Akali Dal. On the one hand the press criticized the Akali Dal for misusing Gurdwaras and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee in furthering its political end, while on the other hand, the press called the aforesaid Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee elections as the upcoming public verdict on the question of Punjabi Suba. The press fully propogated that the Akali Dal would be fully routed in these elections and called the upcoming defeat of the Akalis as "the defeat of Punjabi Suba demand".<sup>15</sup>

Despite the efforts of the government and some pro-Government Sikhs and propaganda by the press, the Sadh Sangat Board was badly routed in the elections. It was able to secure only four seats as compared to 132 bagged by the Akali Dal. The role of press again was shady instead of accepting the public opinion in favour of the Akali Dal and Punjabi Suba, the press gave illogical reasons behind the Sadh Sangat Board.

The mandate made it clear that the Sikhs stood behind the

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<sup>14</sup> *The Tribune*, 16 January, 1960.

<sup>15</sup> *The Tribune*, 16 November, 1958; also *The Partap*, 18 November, 1958.

Akali Dal. In a triumphant mood, all the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee members belonging to Akali Dal took a pledge on 25 January, 1960 to sacrifice their Tan (body), Man (mind) and Dhan (wealth) for the achievement of the Punjabi Suba. The newly elected Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee members rejected all the paraphernalia instituted by the clauses of the regional formula which, infact, was a mere eyewash. While rejecting Twenty Six member committee on language and a good relations committee comprising of two members, the new Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee declared that the solution for all the problems lay in bifurcating the state on the basis of language. All the legislators and members of parliament who were elected on a Congress ticket but were primarily members of Akali Dal were asked to resign forth with. This greatly disturbed the elected legislators and parliamentarians. Some progressive Sikhs disliked the idea of severance of all ties with Congress and with the political system of the country. This dictate of altogether severance and resignation meant a communication deadlock and was considered a blunder by these Sikhs. Moreover, the above step was sure to reinforce the already concrete notion of the national mainstream intelligentsia state was a religious one and not based on language.<sup>16</sup>

The deliberate ill-treatment to the Sikhs of Terai region added fuel to the fire. These Sikhs had laboriously converted the forests of Tarai into a cultivable land. But now, the government wanted them to vacate their farms as they were not the original habitations of the area. Along with this ill-treatment, the Sikhs were badly treated to many other parts of the country. Disrespect for the Sikh symbols was rampant at many places. This further spoiled the environment and led to distrust and dissatisfaction among the Sikhs. All these factors induced the Akali Supremo Master Tara Singh to take a bold stand on

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<sup>16</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C. Kapoor and Sons, 1970, New Delhi, p.321.

the issue of Punjabi Suba.

As a starter, the Master called a Punjabi Suba convention which was attended by Sikhs across Party lines including Dr. Saifudin Kitchler of martial law fame. A part from the Sikhs, Shri K.G. Jodh, the general secretary of All India linguistic states conference also addressed the convention. All the speakers stressed on the need of a Punjabi State and justified the Punjabi cause. After the convention, the master announced that the Sikhs would March to Delhi with which the Chief Minister decided to deal in a strict way. Further precipitating the crisis, the police arrested Master Tara Singh, some Sikh MLAs, some members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee and 200 Akali Workers. The arrest helped the movement to gain momentum and by July 25, 1960, 17821 Akalis had been arrested.<sup>17</sup> The Prime Minister again called the Akali struggle a "Stage Tamasha" which was staged under the garb of Punjabi Suba.

It was during this period, that our protagonist, the Sant managed the morcha in absence of the Master, as its virtual dictator. All the years of social service had made the Sant capable enough to appreciate the modus operandi and technique of the opposition. That is why, in his speeches, press briefs, and announcements, he always referred to the secular and linguistic concept of the demand while maintaining silence over any communal aspect of the demand.

It was on 28 October, 1960 that he gave his famous speech from precincts of Sri Darbar Sahib which may be considered a quintessence of his thought process". He declared, "We do not seek Sikh majority area. We are not bothered by percentages. We want the Punjabi Suba to comprise an area where the Punjabi language is spoken regardless of the fact that whether the Sikhs are in majority or in minority".<sup>18</sup>

In absence of Master Tara Singh the whole burden fell on the

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<sup>17</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C. Kapoor and Sons, Delhi, 1970, p.321.

<sup>18</sup> *The Tribune*, 30 October, 1960.

Sant who never faltered and successfully guided the Punjabi Suba movement; if the achievement of the goal is considered the sole perimeter of the success or the failure of a movement. The callous attitude of the government forced the Sant to write a letter to the Prime Minister in which he highlighted the step-motherly treatment meted out to the Sikhs. He also lamented about the apathetic attitude of the state government. When he did not receive a reply, he wrote another letter in which he stressed on the pressure build up in the Sikh nation. In this letter, he informed the Prime Minister that he was going to start a fast unto death. The Sant's declaration to go on fast forced Mr. Jai Parkash Narain to find a solution for which he met Master Tara Singh at Dharamsala. Whereafter, he met the Prime Minister and told Mr. Nehru that the Akali Supremo was ready for the talks. But the Prime Minister was apathetic towards the Sikh demand and he even commented that the Sikh leader (the Sant) was free to start his fast as he (Prime Minister) could do nothing about it.<sup>19</sup>

The Sant's emphasis on the linguistic basis of Punjabi Suba demand irked the chief minister who had found a handy tool in the alleged separatism of the Master. But the Sant's stand on language based reorganization left the Chief Minister with nothing to oppose. He could not cry wolf as the language principle was accepted everywhere in the country except Punjab. However, he was astute enough to release Master Tara Singh as soon as the Sant started his fast unto death. By releasing the Master, he did a balancing act of weakening the moderate Sikh lobby who wanted a state on the linguistic basis.

It was a difficult time for Mr. Kairon because the possibility of a strong Punjabi Suba agitation would have invited a counter agitation from the Arya Samajists. The onus of agitation would have shifted on the Arya samajists whom Mr. Kairon was neither willing to suppress nor had power to express. Mr. Kairon knew that Hindu communalists

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<sup>19</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C. Kapoor, 1970, Delhi, p.336.

were difficult to silence while his harsh measures on his Sikh brothers had already set examples for state repression Mr. Kairon knew that the Master had different concept of Punjabi Suba which was more near to Sikh homeland than to a unilingual Punjabi Suba.

Events followed the same route as the Chief Minister had anticipated. As soon as the Master was released, the section supporting unilingual Punjab was silenced with the entry of the Master into political scene. The working committee of the Akali Dal considered all the steps of the state government including the release of the Master and Mr. Nehru's milder statements. It apprised the Sant of the above development and wanted his views. The Sant, however, refused to break his fast on the mere statement or a letter of Prime Minister.

Before moving further and dealing with the first controversial fast of the Sant, it would be worth the space to analyze the vow he took before the Sikh Sangat at the time of starting his fast. To quote the Sant, "The Prime Minister and the government should listen to the argument and accept the principle. I will not break the fast until the demand is conceded".<sup>20</sup>

When the Master went to meet the Prime Minister the Prime Minister candidly told the Akali Supremo that it was the Master himself who was the greatest impediment in finding a peaceful solution for the Punjab problem. He alleged that the supporters of the Sant were ready to allow the Sant to break his fast but it was the Master who was encumbering unnecessarily to augment the crisis in order to derive the political benefit out of it. After a heated argument, the Master left the room and the Prime Minister reiterated his earlier statements without any reference to the demand of Punjabi Suba.<sup>21</sup>

The above version is quite contrary to what was reported in

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<sup>20</sup> *Jathedar*, 25 January, 1969, Jullundhur.

<sup>21</sup> *The Tribune*, 7 February, 1961.

press. Be that as it may, the Master, later on went to Bhavnagar and had a two hour talk with the Prime Minister on January 7, 1961. Master Tara Singh was disappointed at the interview and told the press that he would be reaching Amritsar. Meanwhile, the Sant refused to break his fast until the Master asked him to do so.

Even the second meeting related to this issue failed to yield anything. About the Sant's fast and his vow the Prime Minister commented, "Oaths are taken not with regard to some legal aspect or statutory ways of looking at things". He issued a statement at Delhi, that the whole of Punjab could be unilingual which in a way conceded the principle behind the Punjabi Suba demand. Satisfied with this, Master Tara Singh sent telegram to the Sant stating, "I am satisfied with today's speech of Prime Minister at Sardargarh. Request to break your fast. It fulfills the requirement of vow." Sant Fateh Singh was also commanded by S.Chet Singh, Giani Kirpal Singh, Giani Fauja Singh and S. Mohan Singh, head priest to break his fast as they were satisfied that the substance of the pledge had been conceded.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, the Sant ended his twenty two days fast on 8:30 a.m. on 9 January, 1961. Thus was followed by the Punjab Government's lifting all the restrictions and the release of all prisoners. According to the official figures, thirty thousand had been arrested since the beginning of agitation on 24 May, 1960.

Henceforth, the rift originated in the Akali Dal because Master Tara Singh failed to utilize the acceptance of the principle of unilingual character of Punjab. The Akali Supremo failed to realize the need of expressing a slight degree of satisfaction in the press which would have shifted the burden of agitation and struggle on the opposition i.e. propagators of Hindu. Raksha Samiti and Arya samajists. This was bound to relieve the Dal from its perpetual stand on agitation and struggle.

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<sup>22</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C. Kapoor, 1970 Delhi, p.345.

The Akali Dal should have demanded that a statutory form should be given to the Prime Minister's declaration. It was obvious when Prof Sher Singh, Chairman of combined action committee of the Arya Samaj and Haryana Pradesh party declared that the people of Haryana region would never surrender to such declarations which hinted at the unilingual character of the Punjab.<sup>23</sup>

But it seemed that the Master was himself accentuating the rivalry and commotion within the Akali Dal. He committed a Himalyan blunder when he declared that the battle for Punjabi Suba would continue after this short break. This gave the impression that all the struggle and efforts went in vain. The temperamental Sikhs were furious at this because it meant that the Akali Dal had lost the initial battle. When the Sant broke his fast, the Sikhs got the impression that all the arrests and martyrdom of Sikhs went in vain because of cowardly decision of Akali high command to save the life of one of its leaders. Consequently, the leadership and influence of the Master reached at its lowest ebb since the past forty years.

A huge crowd of Sikh youth hooted the Master on January 11, 1961 at Gurdwara Manji Sahib and he was not allowed to speak at Muktsar on Mela Maghi Conference of Akali Dal which was one of the major Akali congregations held every year.<sup>24</sup>

The unity is tested in the troubled waters. There are innumerable instances in the history about the ruptures and internecine warfare that started soon after the misfortune struck the organisations, empires, or alliances. The failure of fast was the first step towards the brewing of troubles within the Dal. The arch enemy of the Dal, Mr. Pratap Singh Kairon said in a press conference that the Akali Dal had failed because the movement for Punjabi Suba had

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<sup>23</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, vol. VIII, p.5687.

<sup>24</sup> *The Tribune*, 13 January, 1961.

submerged into oblivion.<sup>25</sup>

Further annoying the Suba supporters the meeting of the Sant with the Prime Minister failed to yield anything substantial. Soon after the meeting, the Akali Dal reiterated its demand but the Akali stalwarts were illogical in demanding that the non-Punjabi speaking areas should be cut off from Punjab. This was one of tactical mistakes which the Dal under leadership of Master Tara Singh ever committed. While demanding the cutting of non-Punjabi speaking areas, the Master was carrying the burden of opponents of Punjabi Suba demand who would have readily fought for it.

During such a political exigency, the Sant showed his political sagacity and acumen. The Sant's greatness comes out not as an opaque inference but as a transparent reality. He even tried to give a favourable interpretation of the Master's statement. The Sant interpreted that the Master only wanted to destroy any boundary wall between religions and he only wanted that areas where the majority spoke Punjabi should recognize Punjabi in Gurmukhi as their mother tongue.<sup>26</sup>

The Nehru-Fateh talks resulted in altogether rejection of the Punjabi Suba demand by the Prime Minister which detonated a wave of despondency and dejection among the Sikh masses particularly among the youth who by their very temperament wanted instant results and gratification. The utility of the Akali leadership began to be questioned. Ten long years of struggle sacrifice and here stood Sikh nation devoid of all the benefits and even devoid the purpose of starting the new struggle.

As a last resort, the working committee of the Dal held its meeting on 27 May, 1961 and considered the Master's offer of starting a new fast unto death. The onus of starting a fast unto death now

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<sup>25</sup> *The Tribune*, 24 January, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> *The Tribune*, 29 March, 1961.

rested on Master Tara Singh's shoulders. After deliberating for more than two months, the Master started his fast. As its trademark reaction, the Kairon government gagged the press and put all the staff of Akali and arrested all the Akali stalwarts of Akali newspaper "Jathedar" in Jail stalwarts under 107/151. The Sant met Prime Minister on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> August but no progress was made in the talks. To quote the Sant, there was no meeting ground. We repeatedly asked for a counter proposal but no reasonable or honorable proposal was made by the Prime Minister.<sup>27</sup>

During the talks with the Sant, the Prime Minister placed on table; his correspondence with Master Tara Singh and was unequivocal enough to convey to the Sant that the Master's version of Punjabi Suba demand was communal whom the Sant wanted to cover with a linguistic garb. He, however, communicated to the Sant that he may consider the allegations of discrimination against the Sikhs and a possibility of commission of enquiry to probe the above discrimination.

That the attitude of the Prime Minister had changed was a visible fact but yet he was nowhere near conceding to the demand. Such a prolonged period of fasting in old age deteriorated the health of the Master.

The whole Sikh intelligentsia was deeply concerned over the ramifications of eventual death of the Master. Like always, the central government again sent a Sikh mediator in the person of Hardit Singh Malik, an ex-ambassador of India to France. But his best efforts bore no fruit because the central government was little concerned with condition of the Master. The apathetic attitude of government becomes clear from the statement of Ajit Singh Sarhadi, a member of parliament who was refused the permission to speak in house during a discussion on Punjabi Suba demand. According to S. Ajit Singh Sarhadi, he was refused the permission to even speak in favour of the

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<sup>27</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 August, 1961.

government's stand because the Chief whip who was also the minister for parliamentary affairs thought that he might qualify his opposition even with his pro-government stand, with the help of "ifs" and "buts".<sup>28</sup>

The above apathy became more visible in the next few weeks and it seemed the Prime Minister seemed to take no interest in Master's fast. Some public leaders of standing began to appeal to the Master as the government did not seem to move from its stand. The argument that Mr. Nehru put forward was a communal one. He anticipated that in the proposed Punjabi Suba, forty percent Hindu population would not be at ease. While the Prime Minister gave such rationale behind his rejection, his stand was unequivocal when he declared in the lower house of the parliament that communal harmony was dearer to him than a demand for a separate linguistic state.<sup>29</sup> He even refused to accept any such demand even in the distant future. Mr. Nehru was vocal enough when it came to putting forward arguments against the demand. He even showed his apprehensions of a civil war in the eventual acceptance of Punjabi Suba demand.<sup>30</sup>

The Akali Dal alleged that Mr. Nehru had thrown all principles of democratic conventions to the winds. While denying the fundamental rights to a minority in his own country, he was preaching equality and universal brotherhood in International Conferences.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile the Master declared that if a commission was appointed to probe into the discrimination against the Sikhs, with name of the members suggested by him, "Then the breaking of fast would naturally follow that". S. Hardit Singh Malik and Maharaja of

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<sup>28</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, U.C.Kapoor, 1970, Delhi, p.356.

<sup>29</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. LXII, p.5635.

<sup>30</sup> *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. LXII, p.5687.

<sup>31</sup> *The Tribune*, 31 August, 1961.

Patiala met Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Home Minister on 1 October, 1961, coming out of the meeting, the Home Minister said, "I found goodwill on both sides". What transpired between both sides and what verbal assurances were given about terms and scope of the expected commission was not made public. Later on, both the factions within the Dal and government gave different versions. Moreover, the government does not make categorical statements on record during such exigencies which can be used for an objective historical analysis in future. The effect of this meeting was the breaking of fast by the Akali Supremo when Sant Fateh Singh along with Maharaja of Patiala offered him lemon juice mixed with honey. This was the first step towards the end of a glorious political career of the Master and perhaps he drank this glass to his own downfall. Without even a verbal assurance about the conceding of Punjabi Suba demand, the fasting leader broke his fast and vow on the mere promise of appointment of a commission to enquire into the discrimination against the Sikhs. There were no written assurances about even the terms of this commission. While maintaining the ambiguity regarding the terms and scope of the commission, the Prime Minister was astute enough to comment later that such a commission would have no power to redress the grievance of the Sikhs about the non-acceptance of Punjabi Suba issue.

The National Integration Council, whose irrelevancy and hibernation was proverbial in those days, woke up to express satisfaction in a telegram sent to the Master. The tragic irony of the contemporary monolithic political system is visible from the fact that while the fasting Master was on the verge of expiring, the National Integration Council constituted for betterment of minorities did not send any of its members to meet the fasting leader. But the breaking of fast which meant the minority hopes were dashed to ground quickly sent a message expressing satisfaction. The watchdogs of Indian

political system were perhaps happy over the failure of minority mechanism to fight for its rights.

From the above single episode, it becomes clear that integration as a concept meant what the majority desired irrespective of the justified demands of the minority. The government displayed same calculated indifference when it came to appointment of the members of the commission. S. Hardit Singh Malik, the mediator met Mr. Shastri, the Home Minister but in vain. Master Tara Singh was at the receiving end when it came to the anger and frustration of the Sikh masses, who blamed him for having broken the fast without achieving anything.

Another meeting of Master Tara Singh with Mr. Nehru yielded nothing. Meanwhile the government announced the appointment of the members of the commission without any consultation with the Sikh leaders. Mr. Jai Parkash Narain, known for his unfearing attitude, was the natural choice of the Akali Dal. He was not even invited by the government. On the other hand, the government appointed Mr. S.R. Dass, a former Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court. The Akali leaders did not have a high opinion of Mr. Dass. There is no doubt that the Punjabi Suba movement had created a lot of trouble for all the three wings of the governmental setup. Judiciary was not above it. The Akalis were apprehensive that a Chief Justice must have disliked the trouble they created in form of protests, Dharnas and arrests meant a pain for the judiciary too. Apart from this anticipated bias, everybody knew that Mr. Dass was son-in-law of union law minister Mr. Ashok Sen. Apart from the chairman, other members like Mr. Chagla were not above suspicion, Mr. Chagla was said to be given a cabinet birth if he favoured government's stand during the proceedings of the commission. Later on Mr. Chagla was included in the union cabinet. All this mudslinging might have been avoided if the Prime Minister had taken the Akali

Supremo into confidence.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the members of the commission, the Sikhs including the Akali Dal boycotted the commission. Only a less known and pro-government organization called, "The Rationalist Sikhs" participated through its spokesman S. Gopal Singh Dardi. The organization and especially its spokesman Mr. Dardi was presumably inspired by the Chief Minister who wanted the enquiry to be an eyewash from all angles. Apart from the above organization, Mr. Kartar Singh Chawla, a Suba supporter appeared in his personal capacity.

The findings of the commission as expected were nothing substantial, while it failed to suggest the introduction of Punjabi in whole of the Punjab, it failed to probe into the question raised by the Master that why the denial of Punjabi Suba should not be considered as an act of discrimination against the Sikhs.

Coming back to the narrative, the lowest ebb in credentials of the Dal was visible during the third general elections when Congress captured ninety out of 134 seats. As far as the Sikh voters were concerned, Akali Dal and its sponsored candidates secured 15,41,185 votes (72%) out of 21,39,913 Sikh votes.

The Congress despite the number of seats won polled only 5,98,728 Sikh votes. This can be easily calculated to less than 30% of the Sikh votes. As far as the total votes were concerned, the Congress polled 43,12% of the total votes polled. The projection of Punjabi Suba demand as the demand of only the Sikhs had perhaps created a dent in the non-Sikh support behind the Dal. Even after the aforesaid reverses, the Sikh reservations and loyalty for the Dal continued although the party had become a liability for the Sikh aspirations because the dogmatic thought process of the Akali Dal high

command.<sup>32</sup>

As expected Mr. Kairon, the natural choice of Congress high command represented by Mr. Nehru, declared that he would destroy communalism in his second stint as the Chief Minister. Apparently, the destruction of communalism meant elimination of Shiromani Akali Dal from the political arena of Punjab.

The debacle of breaking of fast unto death by the Master adversely affected his leadership which had remained virtually unquestioned for the past forty years. In early November, a group led by S. Lachman Singh Gill, challenged the presidentship of Master Tara Singh. To avoid this rift, *Panj Piaras* (the cherished five) were appointed for the second time in last one hundred and fifty years to enquire into the alleged violation of the pledges both by the Master and the Sant. Both the Master and the Sant were found guilty by the ecclesiastical court of the Sikhs and punished. Accordingly the Master was laid under expiation to have an Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib. In the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee elections too, the resentment against the Master was visible when 86 out of 160 members boycotted the election because the renewal of the presidentship of the Master was seen by the Sikhs as bypassing of verdict of *Panj Piaras* in whom the ultimate authority resided according to the tenets of Sikhism. There were many blunders committed by the Master in the past which brought him to such a position and consequential rift in the Dal.

Immediate cause of liquidation of the Master's leadership was his decision to boycott the high power commission which might have given a platform to the Sikhs to show the discrimination against the Sikhs. The proceedings of the commission could be used as a springboard for providing documentary support to the Punjabi Suba agitation as the members of the commission probably had no answers

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<sup>32</sup> Election Commission of India, General Elections, 1962.

to the questions raised by the Sikh intelligentsia. This illogical and ill-timed non-cooperation without declaration of any alternative struggle started turmoil in the Akali Dal which ended with Master Tara Singh's death.

The Master had been the leader of the community for the past forty years. Many a times, he had struggled with his back on the wall and emerged victorious at the end. The Sikhs had gone astray and foundered many times, but the Master remained at the top of affairs as he kept the Panthic entity, paramountcy and unity in the forefront.

In the words of King Arthur, "Old order changeth yielding place to new." This natural principle applied to the Akali policies. The young Turks had started emerging within the Dal who was dissatisfied with the policies and programme at the Dal under the Master. It would have been a viable option if the Master had entrusted the steering of the community to the collective leadership of some of his prominent supporters and a team of his lieutenants which he should have prepared in his exceptionally long career. Moreover, the Dal was bereft of the leadership when it was merged with the Congress in 1956. Another mistake of the Master was to suspend all the activities during Chinese aggression which gave the impression that the movement was abandoned at the critical hour under the pretext of Chinese invasion. Moreover, the rise of strata of rich Jat Sikh peasants and concentration of Jat Sikh population in certain areas provided an opportunity to the anti-Master group. The green revolution based on the fertilizers and high yielding Mexican dwarf varieties introduced due to efforts of Michael Borlough led to the growth of agricultural output.<sup>33</sup>

The major and disproportionate share of the benefits of the green revolution accrued to the big and middle class farmers. These

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<sup>33</sup> Agricultural Output Index [1950-51 (1.00) of Punjab – 1978-79 (5.23) of Punjab as compared to API of India which was 2.35]

farmers wanted a government which could transform the traditional agricultural production into commodity production, with a greater degree of integration in the marketing network. Moreover, the political assertion of these jat peasants found expression through Akali Dal in politics thanks to the regional nature of the party as compared to the Congress which had to cater to the demands of whole nation in a balanced way.

This economic factor was perhaps most emphatic in making the change of guard in Akali Dal possible. In politics, religious differences are used to mark real economic and political issues. Moreover, the conceptual artifact which implies that communalism is pervasive does not draw distinction between the communal ideology or the ideology of religious identity and the religion as a belief system.

Upto 1962, Master Tara Singh was able to contain Sikh fundamentalists, separatists and moderates. But the incremental conformist group along with manoeuvred forced cooperation of fundamentalists countered him by sheer political manoeuvres. Sant Fateh Singh was epitome of this section who alongwith countering extremists, also contained Sikh fundamentalists by his charisma as a religious leader and social worker.

Before moving further, it could be worth the space to explain the notion of majority or minority, a misnomer in case of Punjab politics. The basis of such a "majority" or "minority" notion should be merely a question of number i.e., respective percentages in the total population. But in the period under study, it is not other than the numerical basis, it was psychological based. This psyche was fed by the communal ideology. Moreover, the parameters of identifying a group were filtered through the communal prism. The propagation of identification through such filters lead to increased religious intolerance when the demands of such a "minority" were refused.

It was on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1962 that Master Tara Singh suspended

Jiwan Singh Umranangal and Lachman Singh Gill, both supporters of Sant Fateh Singh. They had openly rejected the party elections held under his presidentship as fraudulent.<sup>34</sup> On 16 July, 1962, their expulsions were ratified by a meeting of working committee of Akali Dal. On the very next day, Sant Fateh Singh voiced his disapproval of their expulsion in press.<sup>35</sup> Before publically denouncing Master Tara Singh's decision, the Sant had pleaded for reconciliation, but was not successful. On his declaration the Sant stated that he would place the matter before the panth for which he summoned a convention at Gurdwara Mushkiana Sahib, Mullanpur, Dist – Ludhiana. While the Sant blamed Master Tara Singh for initiating the process of division of the Dal, the Master denied that the Sant ever talked to him about the matter and suddenly called a separate convention at Mullanpur.

The story of the Akali affairs hence forward is the story of a gradual eclipse of Master Tara Singh and steady ascendancy of Sant Fateh Singh. The Sant fixed 22<sup>nd</sup> July as the date for the separate convention of the Sikhs at Gurdwara Mushkiana Sahib Mullanpur. The assembly attended among others by 78 of the 155 members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee and out of 19 Akali MLAs led to the birth of a parallel Akali Dal. The convention passed out two resolutions; the first applauded the services and sacrifices of those who had suffered for the country and the community particularly on the issue of Punjabi Suba. The second resolution eulogized the services of the Sant. It emphasized the necessity of giving the leadership of the panth to the Sant because the morale of the Sikhs had suffered downward trend due to his breaking of the fast before his vow was fulfilled.

Before moving further with the tussle within the Dal, it would be worthwhile to analyse the reaction and behavior of the political

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<sup>34</sup> *The Tribune*, 7 July, 1962.

<sup>35</sup> *The Tribune*, 17 July, 1962.

parties, regarding this Akali rift. The logic of politics which gradually developed in those days led a large number of Hindu leaders in the Congress to take a pro-Hindu stand. This trend was in its initial stages during the period under study. This started giving a sense of security to the communal Punjabi Hindu. The two groups within the Dal i.e., the Sant and the Master group represented different ideologies tendencies and styles of functioning. The Sant represented the incremental conformist group and a minority of fundamentalists while the Master represented the extremists and religious fundamentalists. The conformist tendencies of the Sant were much liked by the Congress party and government which wanted to continue the monolithic political system in India. The Sant group's tactics of struggling for concessions and gradually moving towards the bigger goals were also acceptable to the majority while the Master's harsh style and temperament was always an eyesore for the government. It is worth noting that the communalists irrespective of their religion always seek ruthless suppression of the extremists of the religion other than their own. The Kairon government's ruthless measures in dealing with all the agitators of the Akali Dal prior to the rift were in fact triggered by the leaders of the majority Hindu leaders at centre. Errors of both perception and conception led to the false and the baseless apprehensions on both sides. In this political and communal quagmire, the Akali stalwarts like Master Tara Singh deviated from the mainstream political etiquettes and demands. They amplified the discriminations and fears to such an extent that they terrified the majority who saw tendencies of separation in their demands. Non-communal section of the society failed because it attempted to extrapolate the strategies without taking into consideration the socio-cultural specific entities.

Moreover, the incremental conformist group represented by Sant Fateh Singh advocated more autonomy for state and greater

claims for the Sikhs. The Sant group articulated these demands through traditional as well as modern structures and belief systems. On the other hand the extremists group propagated the principle that Sikhs were either rulers or rebels and alleged that despite the huge Sikh sacrifice for achievement of independence of the country, they were treated as second class citizens. The rift between both the factions infact, had a positive ramification i.e., it led to political maturity of Akali Dal which resulted from the replacement of Master Tara Singh with Sant Fateh Singh and the advent of Punjabi Suba. The Sikh community was relieving itself from the earlier inhibitions which had made it politically rudderless. Political mobility and institutionalization at the grass root level were visible after the Sant replaced the Master. The Sikhs were rearing to meet the four criterion for political involvement and political institutionalization of a community i.e., adaptability, complexity, coherence and autonomy. Although the above criterions are concerned with consequential differentiation of politics from other spheres which is not possible in the Sikh Society. Yet, it may be considered a rough parameter for gauging the politicization of a community which is essential for its well being and getting increments from time to time, while having the conformist attitude.<sup>36</sup>

Before the Sant, the urban high class leadership of Master Tara Singh usually relied on the horrible memories of the past prosecutions of the Sikhs under the Mughal rule and associated these with the sense of Sikh community besieged by a hostile majority determined to atomise and absorb the Sikhs. The leadership frequently utilized this for strategic advantages in its struggles. To quote Master Tara Singh, "English man has gone, but our liberty has not come. For us, the so

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<sup>36</sup> Samuel, Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Heaven, Yale University Press, 1968, p.20.

called liberty is simply change of masters black for white....".<sup>37</sup>

The notion that the Sikhs got nothing even after they "smilingly opted for a great sacrifice of their community interests" by choosing to remain with India at the time of independence continued to be the main Sikh argument during the agitations and talks with central leaders.<sup>38</sup>

The internal feuds that brought the Sant in the forefront of Punjab politics signified a major change. It ended the hegemony of the urban higher caste Sikh leadership which had continued since the birth of the party. This Sikh urban higher class also included urban refugee Sikhs who had suffered much due to their exodus from their native places. When they crossed the border they found themselves at loggerheads with Hindu merchants as far as market equations were concerned. The educated urban Sikhs too found their competitors in the native Hindu educated class. Although not the sole factor, but it was an influential one which made them realise the necessity of concrete unity and brotherhood among them. There were many reasons for the extremist and rigid religion oriented posture of the urban higher caste Sikhs in terms of their sense of security in their social situation. On the other hand, the work situation i.e., the pattern of agriculture and allied occupations and kinship relations of the rural masses made them more "regionally oriented" than "religion oriented" but nonetheless.<sup>39</sup> Since 1947, Jat Sikh cultivators, in the landed security of their fairly isolated villages (as that stage) could be exposed for not being greatly interested personal remarks and extremities preoccupied them. But the "green revolution" alongwith

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<sup>37</sup> Master Tara Singh's Presidential address, All India Akali Conference, 28 March 1953, Amritsar, Shiromani Akali Dal, 1953, p.2

<sup>38</sup> Jiwan Singh Umrangal, *Sangharsh Kyon*; Mohan Singh Tur, *Eh Morcha Kyon*; Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, *Khalsa Panth de Naam Paigam*, Amritsar, Shiromani Akali Dal, n.d. pamphlets issued during 1975.

<sup>39</sup> M.S. Dhama, "Political Parties and State Autonomy issue: A Case Study of Akali Dal, in K.R. Bombwall (ed.) *National Power and State Autonomy*, Meenakshi Publications, Meerut, 1978, pp.153-54.

surplus production necessitated the need of a good road network. The great progress of the road network was later lamented by even a contemporary Police Chief of State because they enabled the anti-social elements to escape easily.<sup>40</sup> Violence and factionism of the village continued but the cables of face to face intercourse and inward looking rural life which previously kept them anchored to their villages had now been cut.

Jats, whom the Sant lead into politics, had been in North India for a century or more even before Julius Caser discovered Britain. The British scholars identified them as descendents of men from Alexender's army or as "Indo-Scythians" who entered Punjab a century before Christ. Large number of Jats had joined Sikhism from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century for it proved a faith that answered the dilemmas of Punjabi farmers. It was a religion which Jats could prefer, sympathize and call their own.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, the Sant's rise can be attributed to a more peculiar reason i.e., a certain mystique that the Gandhian methods exercised throughout India. The Sant, however, was able to control "The Fit" within the rural Sikh protesters because he was one of them unlike Master Tara Singh. A particular example is of the procession that the Sant organized in February, 1956. The procession which attracted cultivators from different areas around stretched for miles and took five hours to pass. Estimates had put the number of protestors between one lac to two lacs.<sup>42</sup> But this peculiar Gandhian March had an un-Gandhian feature: the marchers came "with shining swords and axes".<sup>43</sup>

These improvised Gandhian methods including the fasts unto death (although with the sole example of S. Pheruman's fast culminating into death) proved the undoing of Master Tara Singh who

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<sup>40</sup> P.S. Bhinder, *India Today*, 15 March, 1983, p.16.

<sup>41</sup> M.C. Pardhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1966, p.2.

<sup>42</sup> M.Brecher *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959, pp.486-87.

<sup>43</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in India*, p.24.

had always required a lieutenant who could appeal to the Jats. He eventually dragged the Sant into Sikh politics who soon became his nemesis. The Sant continued to improvise these methods with further additions each time the fast unto death failed i.e., why he was able to attract the masses again although each previous fast unto death had failed e.g., he added a new technique of burning himself at the end of set period if he failed to yield the authorities. This technique was used by the Buddhist Monks in Vietnam and had already been practiced by Tamil protestors in South India.

Moreover, the Jat peasantry was becoming more and more likely to send its children to schools, to read newspapers, travel overseas, and listen to radio broadcasts. The message of non-Jat Sikhs had been heard with such vigor since 1947, found ears that were increasingly inclined to hear. For their part, the Jat Sikhs led by the Sant, brought to the new style of politics; their own traditions of factionalism, violence and readiness for sacrifice which has been the hallmark of peasant struggles throughout history of Indian peninsula. Be so that it may, the allegations and counter allegations from both sides continued which led to the accentuation of the rift between the both factions. About the fast unto death, which was an utter failure with the Master, the Sant claimed that on the forty fifth day of the Master's fast unto death, some of the close relatives of the Master came to him to persuade him to end his fast as his death seemed sure, if he did not end his fast. According to the Sant, S. Bakshish Singh, Baba Harkishan Singh, S. Hargurnaad Singh and the Master's son, S. Mohan Singh tried in vain to persuade him to ask the Master to break his fast. In the words of the Sant, "They told me that he Master was a financial asset for the Sikhs as only he could collect money from the Sikhs for the Dal. He further stated that the Master son S. Mohan Singh blamed him for accelerating his father's death so that he may become the leader of the Sikhs".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 3 September, 1962.

## **CHAPTER – 4**

### **SANT AS THE PRESIDENT OF AKALI DAL**

While Master Tara Singh failed to utilize the resources of the cash rich peasants, his tactics and personal outlook was too a hindrance in making the demand accepted. As stated above, his speeches, declarations and press briefs can be more or less compared to harangues than the clamoring of the leader of a minority struggling to preserve its ethos and script. The new leadership represented by the Sant appreciated the technique of the opposition and the Sant began to clear the position regarding the nature of Punjabi Suba demand. The Sant from the very day he took over the reins of the movement, referred to the secular aspect of the demand. He reiterated in his speeches that he would not mind however large the Punjabi Suba was made, provided that it was based on linguistic considerations and Punjabi in Gurmukhi script was made the state language.<sup>1</sup>

It was the Sant who shifted the basis of demand from religion to language basis thus paving the way for the acceptance of the demand. He made the demand more logical in the democratic and secular sense of the term. His concept of Punjabi Suba was more acceptable and less annoying even to the opposition. The Sant represented the simple village folk of Punjab. His rise in politics coincided with green revolution which had brought prosperity in Jat homes. The Sant fully realized that while rebellions of the belly are worst, a content and nourished public on the other hand yearns for more political participation. The Sant spent his whole time and energy in molding the opinion of the rural people which were hitherto living unnoticed and isolated from active politics. It was the Sant who made this large chunk of Punjabi speaking population realize the urgency and need of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Tribune*, October 30, 1960.

the formation of a Punjabi speaking state. For the first time, the rural Sikh peasants saw a leader who belonged to them. He was not a demagogue in the real context of the term but impressed his followers with his simplicity and honesty to the purpose.

The Sant removed all the contradictions in the Punjabi Suba demand which were thought to be inherent both by the propagators and opponents of the demand. Before the Sant, the Punjabi Suba demand was treated as a symbol of Sikh demands and aspiration by the Akali stalwarts. Due to this, a majority of the Punjabi Hindus had disowned the demand.

The Sant's disposition and stand point on Punjabi Suba was different from that of Master Tara Singh. The Sant presented before masses a new model of the Punjabi Suba demand. Instead of religion, he laid emphasis on language. Perhaps, he had noticed the weaknesses of Master Tara Singh's demand which was labeled by central authorities as secessionist. The Sant followed a secular approach and presented it as an issue related to the whole Punjabis. Unlike the Master, he laid emphasis on the Hindu-Sikh unity and due to this he was praised by the progressive forces in the country.

The Sant's stand was so logical that even Master Tara Singh accepted once that the Sant's stand was more logical because it was based on language.<sup>2</sup> This popularity and stand of the Sant was bound to enrage his erstwhile benefactor Master Tara Singh who tried to control him by adopting his traditional method of dealing with dissidents i.e., isolating the Sant by expelling a number of the Sant's leading supporters. But he gravely underestimated this time as the Sant's popularity was based on a large class support of rural peasants than a handful of close aides. It was the broader outlook of the Sant which saved him from sliding into oblivion like some earlier Akali leaders who opposed Master Tara Singh. Such leaders had either

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<sup>2</sup> *The Spokesman Weekly*, February 13, 1961.

joined Congress or had left politics. The Sant with his large mass base was bound to take over the Akali Dal and reshape it.

The main cause of the rift between the Master faction and the Sant faction was the difference over the concept and nature of the Punjabi Suba demand. The Sant himself explained that he had felt from the very beginning that Master Tara Singh was guided more by the percentages and effectiveness of the Sikhs in such an area, but he considered that the question was purely linguistic and must be treated as such. He reiterated that he had all along expressed his conviction that there could be no Punjabi Suba at the cost of the Hindu-Sikh unity. He opined that Punjabi Suba without non-Sikhs would be of little benefit even to the Sikhs.<sup>3</sup>

Since the rift between the Master and the Sant Faction was based on differences in nature of demand and tactics of struggle, both the factions tried focused on the Sikhs rather than to any other ascriptive entity.

As already told, the change in the nature of Punjabi Suba demand came due to class nature of the conflict visible in the stands of the Akali factions. While Master Tara Singh's faction relied more on the Sikh percentages and opposed socialistic policies of Congressmen, the Sant faction claimed to be basically more progressive. The Master faction reflected the view point of big industrialists and businessman. On the other hand, the Sant faction relied more on the nationalization of banks, insurance companies and corporations. But its leaders never felt any need for land reforms with the sole intention of letting the rural rich farmers stick to the Sant faction. These economic aspects of the nature of Punjabi Suba demand are not out of context as they are the basic issues which acted as the driving force(s) in moulding the shape of the demand.

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<sup>3</sup> J.S. Anand, "Sant Fateh Singh on Suba" in *Punjabi Suba : A Symposium*, National Book Club, New Delhi, 1960, p.1.

Coming back to nature and tactics of Punjabi Suba struggle, the Sant followed for good, Dr. Ramallulu of Andhra fame. The Sant rose during an era which saw the rise of linguistic demands in full swing. Dr. Ramallulu had sacrificed his life for the formation of Andhra Pradesh. After his sacrifice, the government had to accede to the demand of a new state in order to ward off the fear of protests after his death. In fact, the Sant had begun to appreciate the technique of fasting. The example of Mahatma Gandhi who usually resorted to fasts during Indian national movement stood tall before the Sant.

There is no denying that the Sant too had to undergo many ordeals during the struggle for achievement of Punjabi Suba. The masses had responded to the Sant's call more than expected. But mass agitations have a weakness in the form of the limited power of the popular endurance unlike the leadership. Moreover, Punjabis are known for their volatile temperament which is good for the leadership until it can show some hope to them. They cannot digest failure or an eventual hopelessness. At every such juncture, the Sant came out with his novel scheme of fasts which pressurized the government more than ever.

Strife, criticism and opposition are inherent in politics. The day the Sant formed his separate Akali Dal at Mushkiana Sahib, the Punjabi Suba demand started undergoing the process of being acceded. The Sant strongly condemned any religious reference to the need of a Punjabi Suba apart from a linguistic one. To quote the Sant himself, "Punjabi Suba will be made only on the basis of Punjabi language". In this Suba all the Punjabis will get justice love and sympathy. The formation of Punjabi Suba will increase the prestige of Punjabis".<sup>4</sup>

The Sant brought home the point that Punjabi Suba was a

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<sup>4</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukuen Uttar* (edited) by Sant Kirpal Singh, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971, p.15.

constitutional demand of the Punjabis. The Sant declared that he had separated away from Master Tara Singh because he had maligned the Sikhs and Punjabis fighting for Punjabi Suba by linking their endeavours to utter communal motives while in reality they did not profess so.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the close link between Sikh religion and politics was concerned, the Sant candidly admitted that the Sikhism was a way of life which naturally included politics. To those who questioned his secularism, he asked, "Why do you take oath in name of religion in the courts, the parliaments and the trials?" He told them that he can too label them as communalists who unnecessarily bring religion into legislatures and courtrooms.<sup>6</sup>

In his speeches and declarations, he quoted examples from history which justified the Sikh enthusiasm about the achievement of Punjabi Suba. He reminded that in past too, the Sikhs had been in the vanguard of the resistance which opposed the repressive policies of the monarchs.<sup>7</sup>

The Sant, while bore the brunt of majority opposition, he also had to bear the blame that he was a stooge of the Hindu communalists who wanted to sabotage the Sikh interests. The Sant was candid enough to accept that he considered the cooperation of the Hindus as vital as that of the Sikhs. He declared that he happily accepted the blame that he was supported by the Hindus because as far as the Punjabi Suba was concerned, both the Hindus and the Sikhs were equal in his eyes.

The Sant successfully balanced two aspects of his personality and activities i.e., his commitment to the demand of Punjabi Suba and his allegiance to the nation. In the past, all those who raised the

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<sup>5</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukven Uttar* (edited) by Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971, p.30.

<sup>6</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, September 13, 1972.

<sup>7</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukven Uttar* (edited) by Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1971, p.56.

demand of a separate state were labeled as separatists and traitors to the national cause. While the opposition could be blamed for unnecessarily raising hue and cry over a logical demand of Punjabis, the Punjabi Suba enthusiasts were also guilty as their outlook was purely religious if that is the apt word for describing their mindset. But the Sant professed no such shibboleths.

The Sant requested his followers to not add religious colour to the demand of the Punjabi Suba. During his whirlwind tours of the rural regions of the state he emphasized on bringing home to the masses, the secular nature of the demand. Even his supporters like S.Tara Singh Layalpuri, Jathedar Shiv Singh Jhavan and Giani Lal Singh relied on projecting the secular nature of demand in their speeches.<sup>8</sup>

The Sant quoted scriptures and events from Sikh history to corroborate his view that the Sikhs were most patriotic of all communities of India as far as the sacrifice for upholding the integrity of India nation was concerned. He used to cite the life and works of Sikh warriors including Guru Gobind Singh who sacrificed everything for the national cause rising above the narrow boundaries of religion, sect or caste.<sup>9</sup>

He appreciated the technique of the opposition so much that he used the same weapon which was used by the opposition to oppose the demand, for example he used the Sikh scriptures to show that the Hindu-Sikh ties were too strong to be broken by false accusations against Sikhs. During all the national emergencies necessitated by the war or the natural calamities, he immediately suspended the movement thus proving that the nation was above all the demands or interests.

Due to this, he had to face the atrocious libels which his Sikh

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<sup>8</sup> Address to the People in Conference at Dhunga Kalan (Hoshiarpur) October 25, 1962 in *Dhukhven Uttar*, p.68.

<sup>9</sup> Sant Fateh Singh addressed at Ganganagar Conference on October 25, 1962 in *Kaumi Dard*.

opponents fabricated to defame him. He was called a 'communist' and 'an agent of the Congress' planted within the Sikh leadership to sabotage the Punjabi Suba demand. It was his love for the nation which inspired him to stop for the time being the agitations and his fasts unto death, at the time of a national crisis. Although, such gestures caused short term damage to his reputation as a Sikh rights crusader but on the other hand elevated his stature as a national political figure much above the contemporary Sikh leaders.

During Chinese invasion of 1962, his role was exemplary. He appealed to the Punjabis to remain united within the nation in such turbulent times. He collected funds and appealed people to exercise moderation in the use of basic commodities as this could help the nation.<sup>10</sup> During Chinese aggression, he suspended the entire programme related to the Punjabi Suba movement and started only when the danger of Chinese onslaught was averted.

The newspaper "Kaumi Dard" almost daily included the Sant's address to the soldiers fighting at the war front. In his messages to the army he quoted examples from Sikh scriptures and history emphasizing on the tradition of sacrifice among the people of nation for upholding the territorial integrity of the nation. While he suspended the movement, he also reiterated that issue of Punjabi Suba was a domestic problem and the issue would soon be revived when the Indo-China hostilities subsided.<sup>11</sup> Apart from collecting monetary contributions for the war fund, he completed 101 Akhand paths for the betterment of the Indian nation at various Gurdwaras of Punjab.

Last but not the least; it was the Sant who moulded both the shape of this demand and public opinion in favour of its acceptance. He felt the pulse of his time and harmonized the demand with it.

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<sup>10</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, "*Desh di Rakhio Lai dat Jao*" in *Fabven Uttar*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhjorh, Ganganagar, p.73.

<sup>11</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, December 5, 1962.

While he painted it in tri-coloured shades, he never left the gist of the aspirations of his people. The demand, which was a sort of phobia to those who believed in status quo and feared its ramifications, became digestible to the same people with the efforts of the Sant. Before the Sant's arrival on the scene, the demand was struck in political quagmire of percentages. But the Sant was wise enough to rise above the narrow considerations of percentages and sectarian bias. The same lobby which opposed tooth and An indepth perusal of the Sant's activities during the Punjabi Suba struggle make it crystal clear that he was the first Sikh conman who replanned the decades old Sikh strategies which were the real cause of denial of the Punjabi Suba demand and maligned the reputation of the people of the region as separatists. He was fully responsible for ushering a new era of trust between the Punjabis and the Central Government. His insistence on various confidence building measures especially that of postponement of movements at the time of a national crisis led to the image building of Punjabis.

The research aims at not merely eulogizing the works of the Sant. His contribution is too immense to be wiped off the scene. Every right move or step that led to the acceptance of the demand was taken by the Sant. Although, the demand for Punjabi Suba was in full swing before the Sant fully took the reins of the movement, it was nowhere near its culmination. It was the Sant who brought the demand to its logical end by reshaping it to fit it into the national superstructure. It was the Sant's acumen and political expertise which appreciated the technique of fasting to achieve the goal. Although he had to leave such fast unto death without fulfilling his vow, yet the contribution of these tactics and the pressure which these fasts built on the authorities cannot be neglected.

The Sant's efforts led to evolution of a synthesis (demand on basis of language) out of struggle between thesis (demand based on

communal basis) and antithesis (its opposition). All the process that necessitated the change of basis form from communal to linguistic was necessitated by the Sant. He put all this work and reputation at stake several times for the sake of achievement of Punjabi Suba. His opponents accused him of stabbing Master Tara Singh in back. But the accusation is utterly baseless. Master Tara Singh's approach towards the demand was highly biased because of his communal perspective. Under his aegis, the demand of Punjabi Suba flourished as far as mass base was concerned. No doubt, he was a pioneer to discover this panacea (Punjabi Suba) for all the sufferings of the Sikhs but he planned and visualized only for Sikhs. This was highly detrimental to the probability of the demand being accepted by the Congress stalwarts at centre. His approach and way of dealing with the issue gave the authorities an excuse for their denial and they followed dilatory tactics. During the time the Sant worked under the Master's leadership, he had recognized the lacunae in Master Tara Singh's approach. This was the biggest factor in creating rift between the Sant and the Master. The radical change that the Sant brought in the Punjabi Suba demand and the tactics of agitation proved that the Sant's separation from the Master Akali Dal was not mere clash of ego or lust for power. In fact, the Sant's realization of the weaknesses of Master Tara Singh's stand had goaded him to part ways with the Master.

In a nutshell, the Punjabi Suba was a symbol of Sikh aspirations and longing for sovereignty in its initial stages. But the central authorities' attitude forced the new leadership represented by the Sant to find new avenues for the fulfillment of the demand. As far as the role of language is concerned, there is a systematic relationship between the grammatical categories of the language a person speaks

and the way he sees the world and behaves in it.<sup>12</sup>

Before tracing the growth of Akali Dal under the Sant's leadership from the day the Sant founded his separate Akali Dal at Gurdwara Mushkiana Sahib, it would be worth the space to analyze the organization constitutional and institutional strategies of the Dal. So far as the organization of the Akali Dal is concerned, it is hierarchical and pyramidal in nature. At the base of this superstructure are the Akali Jathas at village and towns led by respective Jathedars. There is no strict rule about the number of members which a Jatha comprises but it should have a minimum of ten members. Each Jatha has a Jathedar, two deputy Jathedars, two general secretaries, a secretary and a treasurer. Further up the hierarchy are circle jathedars, zila jathedars, and Suba (provincial) committee of the Dal. The headquarters of the highest rung of the party as well as the lower rungs are situated in the Gurdwaras. The head office of the Dal is at Sri Harmander Sahib which is called "the Mecca of the Sikhs" while the venue of lower rung meetings is at the mofussil Gurdwaras. This is due not only to the Akali doctrine of inseparability of the religion and politics but also because normally places of worship become privileged sanctuaries against the police force which the authorities use whenever the Dal launches an agitation.

As far as constitutional strategy is concerned, it involves use of methods that are within the framework of the existing constitutionally granted rights. In the past, the Dal held mass rallies and long disciplined marches to show the public support behind its demands. The Dal also participated in parliamentary activities its use the legislature and parliament as a forum and also to gain a share in the political power. The Dal also used the infiltration strategy by merging

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<sup>12</sup> Sapir, E. (1929): 'The Status of Linguistics as a Science'. In E. Sapir (1958): *Culture, Language and Personality* (ed. D. G. Mandelbaum). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Whorf, B. L. (1940): 'Science and Linguistics', *Technology Review* 42(6): 229-31, 247-8

with the Congress party in order to work for achievement of objectives of the Dal.

The formation of a separate Akali Dal was not enough for the Sant as far as tussle with the Master was concerned. He had to dislodge the Master from his favorite arena, i.e., the Gurdwaras if he was to fully project himself as the undisputed leader of the Sikh community. The formation of a separate Dal was interpreted as a move on the part of the Jat Sikhs in the rural areas of Punjab to overthrow the leadership of Master Tara Singh, allegedly representing non-Jat Sikhs of the urban areas.

Sant Fateh Singh faced the challenge of Master Tara group very boldly and lost no time in intensifying his efforts for the realisation of a Punjabi suba.<sup>13</sup> The foremost necessity before the Sant was to control the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee which had been under the virtual control of the Master. Besides having vast resources, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee is the supreme body of the Sikh community. It is unique among the religious institutions of the world as its elections are held quinquennially and its members are elected by all the adult Sikhs who enroll themselves as voters. The membership of this committee have been used as a springboard by many to rise and shine in the political affairs of Punjab. Infact, the political group controlling the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had always been recognized, to be the party steering Sikh politics.

The Mullanpur convention held by the Sant group led to the formation of two blocs within Akali Dal who started making preparation for a final showdown. On August 18, 1962, Lachman Singh Gill declared that they would be holding a separate meeting of the general body of the Dal in Guru Ram Das Sarai under presidentship of Sant Fateh Singh. This declaration provoked S. Kirpal

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<sup>13</sup> Dalip Singh, *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, McMillan, New Delhi, 1981, p.30.

Singh Chakksherevala, the then president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to announce that he would not allow this group to hold a separate meeting. He sought the help of police superintendent to stop this.<sup>14</sup> The police arrested the Sant alongwith others. The police entered Guru Ram Das Sarai which created resentment among the public against Master Tara Singh.

Feeling the need of the hour, the Sant sent a requisition asking the President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to call the general meeting of the house before 6<sup>th</sup> of September. The general meeting of the house was summoned for 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1962 but before the meeting, government arrested four members who were supporters of Master Tara Singh group. The Sant decided on a no-confidence motion in Master Tara Singh's nominee. However, S.Kirpal Singh Chaksherevala, the president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, in a statement to press said that the requisition suffered from legal infirmities and as such could be disregarded. As it was natural, Chief Minister S. Partap Singh Kairon too started opposing Master Tara Singh which was beneficial for the Sant group. The government interference increased to such an extent that a deputation of some Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee members who were loyal to Master Tara Singh even met the Governor on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1962 complaining of interference of the Government machinery in internal affairs.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the Kairon government, the Sant group was lucky because odds were in its favour. Especially the Hindu press was more vocal in favour of the Sant because he was known for his secular views and speeches. The Sant was able to take full advantage of the situation to channelize and consolidate the forces that were arrayed against Master Tara Singh. Before the pre-scheduled meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Tribune*, 17 August, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> *The Tribune*, 19 September, 1962.

September, 1962, the government arrested four members who were supporters of Master Tara Singh Group.<sup>16</sup> As a result, no-confidence motion against President of the Master group was carried by 76 to 72 votes when six members owing allegiance to Congress also supported the Sant group's no-confidence motion. Consequently, Sant Chanan Singh, a protégé of the Sant was made President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

The Master group endeavoured ceaselessly against the Sant but in the summer of 1963, its last attempt to oust the supporters of the Sant from Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee failed. The editorial of the Indian Express on 10 July, 1963 called this last effort of the Master as "Masterji's Waterloo".<sup>17</sup> The Sant had got the clear mandate of the Sikh sangat. Superficially it seemed a mere change of guard at the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee office, but it had great ramifications which can be felt by studying the later course of events.

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was now in hands of the Sant. Thanks to the simmering discontent against the Master, governmental support and the much vocal Hindu pressmen who vied with each other in praising the Sant and criticizing the Master, while hoping at the same time that the rise of the Sant would give Punjabi Suba issue a decent burial. The rift between the Dals coincided with another phenomenon which was in vogue since 1950s. The split of Akali Dal in 1962 facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of those speaking in the name of the rural Jat peasantry in the organization.<sup>18</sup> The data below clearly indicates the decreasing share of non-Jat members in the government machinery (cabinet)

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<sup>16</sup> Gurmeet Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles*, Vol.I, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, p.151.

<sup>17</sup> *Indian Express*, 10 July, 1963.

<sup>18</sup> In 1950, when Master Tara Singh was president of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the non-Jat peasants controlled 53.6 percent of the key positions in this institution.

itself.<sup>19</sup>

	1952-56	1957-66	1967-80
Brahmin	15%	6.2	6.4
Khatri	35%	25	15.3
Jat Sikh	25%	29	48.7

The rise of the Sant, a Jat peasant was in harmony with the above phenomenon. The climax of the above phenomenon occurred when the Sant founded a separate Akali Dal in 1962 pitted against the old Akali Dal which stood discredited by the failure of its leadership to deliver. The new Dal had not only an outer look to boast and inspire but also a new programme for the principal demand of the Sikhs i.e., Punjabi Suba. It was more vastly represented by the village folks as compared to the Master's Dal. It was cleverer by far in that it was able to drive a wedge between the Hindu opponents of a Punjab speaking state by the simple strategy of demanding not merely a Punjabi Suba but also the state of Haryana too in one and same breath. This clever stratagem isolated Punjabi speaking Hindus from Haryanvis. Before the Sant could plan anything further in the direction of achievement of Punjabi Suba, tension on Indo-China border increased. As always the Akalis vied with each other in showing their patriotism. It would be worth the space to highlight the Sikh magnanimity towards their motherland whenever it came under the dark shadow of foreign invasion. The Sikhs were, to show that their country come before their demand. They vied with each other in supporting the same central government which had been dillydallying in recognizing their much espoused cause.

Due to the social welfare activities done in Ganganagar district

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<sup>19</sup> Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India*, Routledge, London, 2000

by the Sant during his earlier years at Budhajorh, it was the only non-Punjabi district to exceed the Punjab districts in contributing in National Defence Fund. A contribution in gold was Ganganagar which was home to Sikh refugees.<sup>20</sup> The Sant even constituted a Defence Council to mobilize the Sikh community for defence efforts. On 7<sup>th</sup> February, the Sant presented a cheque of 50,000 rupees on behalf of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to Mr. Nehru as a contribution to National Defence Fund.<sup>21</sup> Sikhs, the backbone of the Indian Army fought bravely and were special target of Chinese atrocities perpetrated in gruesome manner during the hostilities. In the words of B.N. Malik, then Director of Intelligence Bureau, "Many of them (Sikhs) were tied and then dragged and their brains were battered".<sup>22</sup> The Sant through his speeches, press briefings and tours tried to boost morale of the Sikh fighting at the front and their families. The Sant daily showered praise for the valiant Sikh soldiers and their families in his speeches and press briefings.<sup>23</sup>

In the words of Edmund Burke, the famous English statesman, a faction is "a mean and interested struggle for place and emoluments" within a parent political organization.<sup>24</sup> But in the Akali vignette, both the groups shed their mutual rivalries whenever a national emergency came. Like the "Wet" and "Dry" groups in the Mrs. Thatcher's conservative party of England, they continued to work in contributing and consolidating of national frontiers. Both the Akali groups elected Maharaja Yadvindra Singh as the Maha Jathedar of the Sikhs in directing and coordinating the Punjabi efforts during the national crisis. The meeting held on 24 December, 1962 at Moti Bagh

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<sup>20</sup> Khushwant Singh, *A History of Sikhs*, Vol.II, Princeton University Press, 1966, p.30.

<sup>21</sup> *The Tribune*, 8 February, 1962.

<sup>22</sup> B.N. Malik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1971, p.413.

<sup>23</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 21 February, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke-I*, George Bell and Sons, London, 1900, p.376.

Palace was attended by both the Sant and the Master. A picture of the hour shows both of them sitting nearby while discussing the ways in contributing for the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking at a conference on 16 February, 1963, the Sant said, "Our immediate objective is to drive out the Chinese. The movement for Punjabi Suba has been slowed down as it is a domestic problem. This demand will not be pressed during emergency; we will again take up the issue after the Chinese are driven out."<sup>26</sup>

Nowhere in the vast expanse of the sources related to the contemporary period, we find even a slight inclinations of the Punjabis taking advantage of the situation at the borders. The whole Akali rank and file stood beside the country in collecting and contributing towards the war expenses. Punjab contributed 2 crores to the National Defence Fund apart from contributing a present of gold, double the weight of Mr. Nehru. But more *communautaire* sections like Jan Sangh toed the same old line. The working committee of Punjab and Himachal Jan Sangh suggested the abolition of state legislature and substituting it by a unitary form of government at center in its meeting held at Chandigarh on March 11, 1963.<sup>27</sup>

However, it would not be objective to blame the whole Jan Sangh party for following a communal agenda on its own. The events of past and a brief perusal of the contemporary sources show that even some of the Sikh stalwarts, knew that RSS leaders feared the much anticipated Sikh domination in the Sikh state which they alleged, as being demanded under garb of a Punjabi speaking area.<sup>28</sup> In November 1960, Rashtrya Swayam Sewak Sangh Chief M.S. Gowalkar advised Hindus of Punjab to accept Punjabi as their mother

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<sup>25</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 December, 1962.

<sup>26</sup> 17 February, 1963, *Kaumi Dard* in *Fabven Utttar*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, 1963.

<sup>27</sup> *The Tribune*, 13 March, 1963.

<sup>28</sup> *Gian Singh Rarewala Papers*, File no. 38, National Achieves of India, New Delhi.

tongue. The Punjab Jan Sangh publically repudiated him.<sup>29</sup> As already told the Sant during such a national emergency made whirlwind tours, gave speeches and issued press statements inspiring "jawans" fighting at the front and their families. The Sant's speeches and statements issued especially in the newspaper "Kaumi Dard" are full of inspiration and hope, while the whole country was aghast with reverses suffered by the Indian army at the hands of Chinese; the Sant continued to give hope to his countrymen. He showed examples of Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh, Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phoola Singh to the soldiers fighting at front.<sup>30</sup>

The Sant inspired the Sikh soldiers fighting at the front to continue their struggle while reciting Gurbani and to fight in the name of Guru Gobind Singh as this fight was thrust upon them as it had been thrust upon their Holy Father.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from motivating the Sikh soldiers, the Sant clearly stated in his speeches that the country was first and above everything else. He dubbed the Punjabi Suba issue as a domestic problem. When some sections raised doubts about the Punjabi Suba demand having withered away under the new leadership of the Sant, the Sant clearly stated in the press that the struggle for Punjabi suba would be ensued as soon as the national emergency is gone.<sup>32</sup>

The Sikh Sangat under the influence of the Sant started "Akhand Path" at many places for "Chardi Kalan" of the Indian Army, viz., 101 Akhand paths at Gurdwara Bulla Majra where the Sant himself read the Holy Scriptures for the betterment of Indian Army.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, the government became apprehensive of the Sant's efforts and banned the conferences, rallies under the Article 144. It was strange that the government should hinder the efforts of such a

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<sup>29</sup> *The Times of India*, 9 November, 1960.

<sup>30</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 4 November, 1962.

<sup>31</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 7 November, 1962.

<sup>32</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 12 November, 1962.

<sup>33</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 7 December, 1962.

man who was working tirelessly for arousing public and youth to take part in defending their own country. The Sant showed his resentment in the press but nowhere broke the law during such a national emergency. He vehemently criticized the actions of a Magistrate at Ambala who forcibly removed the kirpans of baptized Sikhs.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the governmental machinery, the Master group left no stone unturned in floating rumours about the Sant. A particular rumour was floated in Sikh Sangat that the Sant was going to appoint the Maharaja of Patiala, the Maha Jathedar of the Sikhs. The Sant vehemently denied this allegation at conferences and press briefings.<sup>35</sup> The Sant throughout his political innings, tried his best to build his image. He knew that character was foremost in the eyes of the Sikh Sangat because he was himself watching the decline of the Master who was temperamental and was now disliked by the Sangat for his hot headedness and monopolistic political practices. The Sant in many of his speeches, press briefings and counter allegations against the splinter Akali groups; called himself dust lying at the feet of Sikh Sangat. He always declared that he was grateful to Sikh Sangat for the love and respect showed to him. The hotheadedness which was typical of the Master was missing in the Sant.<sup>36</sup>

Before proceeding with the analysis of the transition that occurred from the Master's monopolistic control to the Sant's leadership it would be worth the space to compare the Akali tactics to the "national rulers" of opposition and agitation that had been formed during the national struggle. For the national elite, particularly Mr. Nehru, communalism meant the mixture of religion and politics and secularism meant the separation of religion and politics. After independence, the Indian state under Nehru's directions used its means of propaganda to propagate the ideas of secularism and to

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<sup>34</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 23 December, 1962.

<sup>35</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 26 December, 1962.

<sup>36</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 6 December, 1962.

criticize this "communalism". The advocates of this argument would say, "Pakistan must not be repeated". The Indian state would tolerate no avert connections between religion and politics.

These rules of the national game were particularly chafing for the Sikhs, who repeated the words "Raj Karega Khalsa". The Sikhs had further reasons for the consternation in their ranks. It seemed to them that the equal treatment for all religions was a hypocritical eyewash especially when some not headed Hindu communal groups confident of their numerical majority were setting off a "wave of communalism" against Sikhs in "official and public life".<sup>37</sup> These groups declared that Sikhism was an offshoot of Hinduism and must be absorbed by it.<sup>38</sup>

As far as Punjab is concerned, the imbroglio here has its roots in the close connection between religion and language. Quite astonishingly, the people in Punjab may speak one language in their daily affairs, use another for writing and official purposes and have their religious scriptures in a third. That is why the majority of the western scholars have failed to comprehend the linguistic complexities which many Indian children take for granted. "By the age of ten" writes a scholar who was born in 1911, "I was learning English and Persian, my curriculum was in Urdu and I spoke Punjabi at home and outside".<sup>39</sup>

Upto the beginning of nineteenth century, the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Sikhs all spoke Punjabi in daily life, but only Sikhs wrote it. The Arabic script of Persian was the language of official business and most of the written communication. The Sikhs, however, wrote in Punjabi, using the Gurmukhi script of their sacred book, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. After the British annexation of Punjab in 1849, people of various religions began to write Punjabi in this Arabic

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<sup>37</sup> A.S.Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p.158.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>39</sup> Parkash Tandon, *Punjabi Century: 1957-1947*, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1961, p.55.

script which had become familiar through schools and offices. Quite astonishingly there were abundant cases of wives of scholars who could not communicate with their husbands when they were away from each other as they could only write in Hindi and their husbands only in Urdu or English.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the devoted Sikhs read Guru Granth Sahib which was written in Gurmukhi script and understood it with the help of Punjabi language.

In this sense, the Sikhs comprised of the majority of the people who had an emotional attachment to the written Punjabi language. Quite astonishingly, although, virtually everyone in Punjab in 1947 spoke Punjabi, only few chose to write it. Even if, they did so, they used the Arabic script already familiar to them for having learning Urdu at the school. Only the Sikhs wrote Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. As a matter of fact, to disparage and devalue Punjabi was to ridicule Sikhs and undermine their religion. Examples of such denigration were easy to find. For instance, the Punjab University Senate in June 1949, rejected a proposal to introduce Punjabi as a language of instruction.<sup>41</sup> An essential part of the national caveat "Thou shall not mix religion and politics" and the complexity of Punjab's linguistic problems forced the Sikhs to identify more and more closely with the Punjabi language in the 1940s and 1950s.

Meanwhile the militant Hindu organizations responded to such demands by organizing a campaign to induce all Hindus in Punjab to register Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue during the Census of 1951. As already narrated, the demand for a Punjabi Suba came to be known as the demand for a Sikh majority state. "The shift of Punjabi speaking Hindus" Paul Brass writes, "was more dramatic than any linguistic choice previously made in Punjabi" because it was

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>41</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p.179.

an overt and deliberate political act.<sup>42</sup> The national ethical fabric that developed after the partition made religion an illegitimate basis for political demands. Even a hardliner like Master Tara Singh felt the need to slightly mould his line of expression and often spoke ambiguously about a state in which Punjabi would be able to develop and flower.

Coming back to the narrative, the cleavage between both the Akali Dals had reached a point of no return. The efforts made by Justice Gurnam Singh in uniting the Dals went in vain. Gian Bhupinder Singh, once a Granthi gradually climbed to the chair of the President of the Master Dal. He assumed office after the resignation of Achar Singh who resigned because he was reported to have taken stand for the Panthic unity.<sup>43</sup> The sympathizers of the Sikh Panth tried their best to unite both the Dals but the Sant criticized and blamed Master Tara Singh for sabotaging the efforts of unification of both the Dals.<sup>44</sup>

The immediate beneficiary of the rift was the Congress party who was victorious in the Patti by-election due to the fielding of separate candidates by both the Dals. The ground beneath the Master was clearly slipping away as his nominee polled only 2745 votes as compared to 22442 votes by the Sant's nominee.

The appointment and decisions of Dass commission resulted in the departure of Mr. Kairon from the political scene of Punjab. Although it would not be out of context to probe into the causes of the appointment of such a commission of enquiry, but its effects are too effectual to be ignored. Mr. Kairon was in the vanguard of the Congress Party in Punjab. He had been opposing all Sikh demands for the last eight years with an iron hand whatsoever the consequences. It

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<sup>42</sup> P.R.Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp.27-47.

<sup>43</sup> *The Tribune*, 23 January, 1964.

<sup>44</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 January, 1964.

was Mr. Kairon who himself alone encountered the Sikh opposition and agitations against the denial of Sikh demand. The foremost of which was a Punjabi Suba. He was held responsible for the innumerable Sikh sacrifices. The cause of his motivation can't be clearly assessed but superficially he was a sort of "Nehru Secularist". Due to his overzealous secularist mindset, he spared no efforts in eliminating the Sikh desire for a separate entity on the basis of their religious ideology. Mr. Kairon's exit left a sort of vacuum in the Punjab politics which no Congressmen could fill. While the Master group was trying to strive for supremacy, the Sant continued to meet the central leaders for bringing home to them the point of the futility of opposing the demand of Punjabi Suba. He continued to unfold his mind before the national press in which he assured that Punjab would remain the part and parcel of the Indian republic.

The restart of the efforts of the Sant for achievement of Punjabi Suba can be traced to Sant Akali Dal conference on 20 September 1964 near Faridkot where he criticized Ramkishan (Mr. Kairon's successor) administration which gave a spurt to the visibly dead Punjabi Suba movement. The upcoming Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee elections were sure to further spoil the efforts of unification of both the Dals and situation had become tense. Therefore, the Sant with the help of some well meaning persons held a Panthic conference at Patiala on 19 November, 1964 under the presidentship of Sant Gurmukh Singh to avoid the internecine warfare that was imminent in the forth coming Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee elections. Gian Singh Rarewala was appointed as a convener of the committee with Sant Gurmukh Singh, Jathedar Udham Singh, Teja Singh and Ajit Singh Sarhadi.<sup>45</sup>

At this junction too, the modest approach of the Sant was met by the Master group with indifference and rancor. In the words of A.S.

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<sup>45</sup> Gian Singh Rarewala, Papers File No. 37, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Sarhadi who was member of the aforesaid committee "we (members of the committee) found that the Sant was sure of his victory in the upcoming Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee elections but he was all prepared to agree to any reasonable proposition for the Panthic unity even to the extent of having a fresh recruitment of the Akal Dal general body which would have elected a new executive and a leader. But the Master group was insistent that the original Akali Dal from which the Sant had defected must be recognized first and thereafter, the recruitment done.<sup>46</sup>

The aforesaid proposition meant that the Sant should publically humiliate himself by backing from the stand he had taken and quite naturally the Sant refused to do so. The elections were held and the results declared on 18 January, 1965. The Sant group bagged twice the seats won by the Master group i.e., ninety as compared to 45.<sup>47</sup> In his press briefing the Sant attributed his victory to the service of the Gurdwaras he had undertaken in his life but nowhere mentioned the Punjabi Suba demand.<sup>48</sup> This victory was not a victory of an Akali faction over other faction involving only petty politics but the victory of a more logical, moderate and secular politics over the lesser one.

Master Tara Singh, like he always did after any political setback, went to Salogra, H.P. for a six months vacation or self imposed exile. Although, the field was open for the Sant to embark upon the journey for achievement of Punjabi Suba, but he did not further arouse the already much hyped public sentiment in favour of Punjabi Suba demand for a long time only. The Sant in his own way was continuing his efforts for the Panthic unity. In a Panthic convention held on 29 April, 1965, he spoke about the need for a Panthic unity. He even felt sorry before the Sikh Sangat saying he was sorry if someone was hurt by his spechs or his acts in the past. He

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<sup>46</sup> A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p.400.

<sup>47</sup> *The Tribune*, 19 January, 1965.

<sup>48</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 20 January, 1965.

requested the rival Akali faction and the press to remove bitterness prevailing on the stages and in the press statements. He strongly condoned the martyrdom of Kaka Inderjit Singh who died during the earlier phase of Punjabi Suba agitation.<sup>49</sup>

The Master group watched the slow pace of the Punjabi Suba campaign and tried to cash it. The Master tried to remove the feeling permeating among the Sikh masses that the Sikh leadership was failing them. A conference was held at Ludhiana in the name of the distinguished Sikh general, Hari Singh Nalwa. A resolution was passed which though emanated from the small Sikh community, yet had significance for the intelligensia of the country and for the world at large. The resolution dealt with issues of militant Hinduism and the separate identity of the Sikh nation. The resolution clearly demanded self-determined political status for the Sikhs.<sup>50</sup>

Master Tara Singh himself returned with the demand for self-determined status for the Sikhs, a favorable political environment was created for the return of Master Tara Singh from his self imposed exile on 24 July, 1965.<sup>51</sup> He held a press conference at a five star hotel in Delhi in which he elaborated his thesis about the nature of self-determined status in the presence of Khushwant Singh who acted as a interpreter of the Master.<sup>52</sup> Khushwant Singh's presence in the press conference of the Master raised many eyebrows and he had to justify his support for self-determined status for the Sikhs in an article.<sup>53</sup>

There is no doubt that the Master's new programme and the support of Sikh hardliners gave a boost to the Master's political leverage. But the demand of self determined political status for the Sikhs gave an excuse for the Hindu communalists to cry wolf. Apart

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<sup>49</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, 'Panthic Ekta Pakki Karo' in *Charbi de deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Budhajorh, Ganganagar, p.82.

<sup>50</sup> *Sikh Review*, XIII/14, May 1965, p.55.

<sup>51</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 July, 1965.

<sup>52</sup> *Sikh Review*, XIII/14, Sept 1965, p.56.

<sup>53</sup> Khushwant Singh, My Role in Sikh Politics, in *Sikh Review*, XIII/145, Sept 1965, p.56.

from the Hindu hardliners, the mainstream press and the leaders of national stature too became apprehensive of the hot headed Master Tara Singh and his supporters. This attitude of the national mainstream was highly beneficial for the Sant who provided a mild alternative to the national government in the form of a Punjabi Suba based on language. This acted as a pressure valve for the Sikh frustrations and a diversion from falling into the trap of extremism and violence. Lachman Singh Gill, the deputy leader of opposition in State legislature called the Master's stand as a betrayal to the country.<sup>54</sup>

But the ramifications of the Master's stand were immense. On the one hand, it shifted the support of the majority of the Hindus in favour of the Sant because he was the only viable option available while on the other hand, it rejuvenated the Sant Akali Dal which arose from the slumber as far as Punjabi Suba demand was concerned. While the Hindu press, Hindu leaders and the moderate Sikhs criticized the Master for his separatist tendencies, the Sant was tactical enough to thrust all his criticism on the central government for being responsible for such a mess which he declared was result of constant denial and dejection of Sikh and Punjabi demands.<sup>55</sup>

The Sant Akali Dal adopted a resolution saying "A number of states have already been formed on linguistic basis including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and even Nagaland. The failure to form Punjabi Suba on the same principle is clear discrimination against the people of Punjab.<sup>56</sup> The working committee meeting which passed the resolution was attended by the Jathedars from all the districts including several invitees and the advisor to the Sant Akali Dal. The meeting also authorized the Sant to meet the Prime Minister on the same lines. It was obvious that a serious move was intended in case of

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<sup>54</sup> *The Tribune*, 4 August, 1965.

<sup>55</sup> The Sant's speech at Muktsar on 3 August, 1965 in *The Tribune*, 4 August, 1965.

<sup>56</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 7 August, 1965.

the meeting with the Prime Minister failed.

The pressure of national leadership encouraged the government to at least open the dialogue with the Sant. The Hindu lobby gathered around the Sant to let down the Master. With the motive of boosting the Sant's public image, the Prime Minister invited Sant Fateh Singh for talks on Punjabi Suba on 7 August, 1965.

A brief descriptive analysis of these talks would be worth the space. On the very first day of the talks, which started at 7:30 p.m., the Sant asserted that Sikhs wanted a Punjabi Suba because their religion was in jeopardy. In the words of the Sant, "Our religion is not safe in India". The Sant raised questions about the deliberate maltreatment to Punjabi language and stalling its growth. He objected to the dislodging of Punjabi language from offices at the district level. He listed all the incidents where Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikhs were insulted.

A close perusal of the Sant-Sashtri talks clearly brings out the strategy adopted by the Prime Minister and Gulzari Lal Nanda. Both the statesmen tried to widen the rift between the Sant and the Master. To quote Mr. Nanda, "We are not all afraid of Master Tara Singh's threats. But we sincerely respect you. Mr. Shastri further added, "If the Master dares to create trouble we will crush him in five minutes. But we appeal to you to understand our problems".<sup>57</sup> But the Sant was not a simpleton and he silenced both the statesmen by saying that if Masterji can be crushed in five minutes, he could also be crushed in seven minutes. The above meeting ended on 8 August, with as much mistrust prevailing on both sides as was before the meeting. The press note prepared by Prime Minister's secretariat and handed over as a version of the talks was altogether rejected by the

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<sup>57</sup> Shastri-Fateh talks in Arjan Singh Budhiraja (Translated) Dialogue on Punjabi Suba listed in *Sikh Review*, XIII/148, December, 1965, p.11.

Sant.<sup>58</sup>

The Sant refused to accept that the talks were successful because there was nothing substantial granted and the primary demand of Punjabi Suba was not conceded.<sup>59</sup> The working committee of the Sant Akali Dal also rejected the version (note) of the Prime Minister's office by passing a resolution that Government of India did not trust the Punjabis in general and the Sikhs in particular.<sup>60</sup> Be so that is may, the Sant although rejected the note of Prime minister, but he was wise enough to see through that the demand could be accepted by the Central government if the proper pressure was built on the weak links in the Central government's stand, one of which was the formation of many linguistic states in past. The Sant also knew that it was also essential to unplug the holes in the Akali stand.

The single greatest asset was the person of Sant Fateh Singh. He was the most impelling force behind the Punjabi Suba agitation. He himself supplied the inspiration as well as the argument. The Sant, although, religious to the core had an acute political mindset. He was a born agitator and mass mobilize; though a peaceful one. With his balanced conviction, he had to keep alive the Sikhs' protest as well as their faith in their future. This time too, he chose with care, the issue to be contested and he chose his own moment to restart the struggle. He easily separated the essential from the inessential during his talks and hammered on his basic point i.e., Punjabi Suba during the talks.

Seeing the ripeness of the movement, the Sant declared on 16 August, 1965 that if Punjabi Suba was not formed within 25 days, he would go on fast on 10 September inside the Golden Temple and in case the demand was not conceded he would burn himself on 16<sup>th</sup> day. In a Panthic address to the 25000 Sikhs, who listened to him in a

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<sup>58</sup> Shastri-Fateh talks in Arjan Singh Budhiraja (Translated) Dialogue on Punjabi Suba listed in *Sikh Review*, XIII/148, December, 1965, p.11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>60</sup> *The Tribune*, 15 August, 1965.

drop silence, he narrated how the talks badly failed and he had only the option of fast unto death now. The announcement came as jolt to the multitude, and in a religious fury more than 100 people offered to sacrifice themselves on the lines as adopted by the Akali leader. The decision of Sant Fateh Singh was enclosed by a resolution in General body. Sant Akali Dal in a meeting held soon after.<sup>61</sup>

Such a fast had already been resorted to by the Master and the Sant earlier too and had been broken for one reason or the other. This raised a suspicion about any logical end of the fast this time yet the immolation bid this time made the situation for the government and the Sikh masses, serious.

The ultimatum came in the wake of demand of self determined status for the Sikhs within Indian union, which had far serious impact on the mind of union leaders. The Central leaders began to assess the direction in which the Sikh multitude would prefer to go due to constant denial and rejection of a legitimate demand of a new state.

This must have underlined the seriousness of the situation but at that moment Home Minister G.L. Nanda said in a statement in the Lok Sabha that government had deliberated over the possibility of conceding to such a demand but it was not good for the well being of both Hindi and Punjabi speaking people. He said that it was also in the interest of the country that a prosperous and strong state like Punjab should continue on the border.<sup>62</sup>

The demand for self-determined status no doubt made the Central leaders apprehensive yet they continued to hide their fears, but in their minds, they had prepared to divert the attention of the Sikh masses from self-determined status to a Punjabi speaking state. Our protagonist, the Sant, was candidly speaking, a handy tool in the

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<sup>61</sup> *The Tribune*, 17 August, 1965.

<sup>62</sup> *Indian Express*, 24 April, 1965.

eyes of the government in case the exigencies compelled them to give something to the Sikhs who populated the area allegorically called the sword of the nation. Moreover, the government was all in all in deciding the nature of the demarcation, it could manipulate the percentages of Punjabi or Hindi speaking people in its favour like in 1961.

The exigencies created by some factors including the demand for self-determined status force the Central leaders to think about the option of Punjabi Suba. The Sant too through his speeches and tours, swiftly erected a strong embankment of public opinion against the already dwindling stand of Central Authorities.<sup>63</sup> Like always the Sant distributed a lot of literature in the rural areas to make the Sikh masses aware about his stand on Punjabi Suba and his sincerity to the Punjabis.

A close perusal of the sources related to this period, highlight this characteristic of the Sant's style of working. There small pamphlets, which he distributed almost free of cost contain vital information about the demand of Punjabi Suba while at the same time blending it with similar metaphors from Sikh religious history. These articles were small and inspiring. The Sant was far ahead of his contemporaries as far as the distribution of propaganda literature was concerned.<sup>64</sup> The Sant possessed a great historical consciousness about the Sikh heritage and past.

Meanwhile, the newly developed enthusiasm in the Sikh masses was dampened, as always in the case of Punjabi Suba agitation by the tense situation at the border. By July 1965, Pakistan had assembled a

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<sup>63</sup> *Sant ji da Bhashan* on 16 August, 1965; Also Sri Akal Takht Sahib te Kiti Takreer in *Charbi de Deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, p.139.

<sup>64</sup> Mohe Marne Ka Chao, Panthic Ekta di Lod, Sant Baba Fateh Singh da Kaum Prati Sandesh, Sangtan nu Meri Pukar Benti, Mein Gulam Han; All in Sant Fateh Singh, *Charbi de Deewe*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara Budhajorh, Ganganagar, p.139.

massive tank force in Punjab at their side.<sup>65</sup> There was large scale infiltration by Pakistanis near Chamb sector on 5 August. On 1 September, 1965, Pakistan attacked India in the Chamb sector and the Army generals, advised Government of India that if it wanted to stem the enemy offensive they should attack the enemy in Punjab as a precautionary measure against further aggression.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile Congress M.L.A.s at Chandigarh issued a press statement that the Central Government should accept in principle, the demand for Punjabi Suba and defer its formal declaration to a later date. The government in order to take adhoc measures to please the Sikhs, appointed Ujjal Singh as the governor of Punjab also to act as a communication link between Central Government and Akali leaders.<sup>67</sup> As far as S. Ujjal Singh was concerned he was known more for his pro-Sikh views than his pro-government actions.<sup>68</sup>

The appointment of Ujjal Singh was seen by the Sikh masses as an indication of change in the policy of government, which for once, started to assuage the Sikh sentiments because the Punjabi Suba demand had become a Sikh demand virtually. The occasional support by certain non-Congress organizations was only a strategic move to criticize the Congress government. But thirteen years struggles by the Sikh had left no doubt the nature of the demand. The Master Dal's Ludhiana Conference demanding "a Self determined political status for the Sikhs" was the outcome of delay and the discrimination in the policies of the Government of India. The only alternative to this demand of "self determined" status seemed to be the declaration of whole of Punjab as a unilingual state. Even before the start of Indo-Pak hostilities the Master Dal, quite surprisingly declared to full support the Sant in his fast unto death.

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<sup>65</sup> UN Report on South Asia in B.M.Kaul, *Confrontation with Pakistan*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971.

<sup>66</sup> B.M. Kaul, *Confrontation with Pakistan*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1971, p.32.

<sup>67</sup> *The Tribune*, 2 September, 1965.

<sup>68</sup> Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles, Vol. IV*, Atlantic Publishers, Delhi, p.167.

The Hindu lobby too assessed the seriousness of the situation and tried its best to sidetrack the issue by calling a convention on 5 September, 1965 which was attended by Bhagat Dyal Sharma, President of Provincial Congress Committee, Shri Yash, an Arya Samajist, Kumari Lajya wati and others. The convention criticized the Sant's actions when "our Jawans are fighting life and death struggle in Jammu and Kashmir".<sup>69</sup>

The hostilities between both the nations escalated into an undeclared war. The day Indian forces entered Lahore sector upto Bata Shoe factory, the Home Minister appealed to the Sant in his speech in Lok Sabha to forgo the fast unto death. He promised only to hold fresh talks and promised nothing concrete or substantial.<sup>70</sup>

As far as the state government was concerned, Chief Minister Ram Kishan too opposed any future plan of bifurcation of the state and the executive of the Congress legislative party too endorsed his views.<sup>71</sup> It appointed a committee to draw a memorandum opposing the bifurcation of the state. Among other members of this committee, Tarlochan Singh Riasti, a Sikh MLA was also included. Other Sikhs who opposed the division of the State were Gurdial Singh Dhillon, and Darbara Singh, State Home Minister.

The Union Minister's announcement about the examination of the issue "afresh", again activated the dormant opposition against the demand. The working committee of the Arya Pratinidh Sabha in its meeting warned all concerned that it would be dangerous to disturb the present set up. An Ekta committee of all the Hindu organization was constituted to take necessary steps.

The Indian forces had an upper hand in the hostilities, thanks to the Sikh contribution to the war efforts which was immense. The Sikh peasants, smugglers (who understood the terrain better than

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<sup>69</sup> *The Partap*, 6 September, 1965.

<sup>70</sup> *The Indian Express*, 7 October, 1965.

<sup>71</sup> *The Tribune*, 7 October, 1965.

anyone), truck drivers, porters and even Granthis of the Gurdwaras contributed in their own way.<sup>72</sup> Even the Governor of the State praised the civil population in his address to the joint session of the two houses of the state legislature.

The intervention of UN Secretary General, U. Thant and the Security Council resulted in the ceasefire. The ceasefire was formally announced on 6 September, 1965. The mood of the nation was much hyped after the victory over Pakistan. Amidst such environment, the Home Minister announced that whole question of Punjabi Suba would be examined fresh and efforts would be made to its discover a co-operative solution based on good will and a reasonable approach.<sup>73</sup> The minister declared the formation of a Cabinet sub-committee consisting of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, then Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Y.B.Chavan and Mahabir Tyagi. This committee was to advise from time to time, the parliamentary committee to be set up with Hukam Singh, the Lok Sabha speaker as its President. The members of the parliamentary committee were to be chosen by S. Hukam Singh and the Chairman of Rayja Sabha.

As already told, during the hostilities, the Home Minister had appealed to the Sant to postpone his fast and had promised to view the demand afresh. The Sant had sent a telegram in which he rejected the Minister's statement saying it does not meet his demands. But he agreed to sent a deputation of five Emissaries. The deputation of five members met the Home Minister on 8 September, 1965 and was given some assurances.<sup>74</sup>

What transpired in the meeting and what assurances were given was not made public. Under these circumstances, the Sant had decided to postpone his fast on 9 September, 1965 on the advice of the working committee. The working committee resolution expressing

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<sup>72</sup> D.R. Manekar, *Twenty Two Fateful days*, Manaktalas, Bombay, 1964, pp.143-147.

<sup>73</sup> *The Tribune*, 29 September, 1965.

<sup>74</sup> *The Tribune*, 9 September, 1965.

dissatisfaction with the government viewpoint in the light of the report given by emissaries but directed the Sant to postpone the fast temporarily till the end of conflict with Pakistan. President Mr. Radhakrishnan too appreciated Sant Fateh Singh's decision to postpone his fast and promised that the Sant would be satisfied with the solution of the problem in the future.<sup>75</sup>

Before moving further, it would be worthwhile to describe the attitude of Schedule castes to the development of Punjabi Suba agitation at this juncture because they formed roughly one third of the population. The landless scheduled caste Sikhs: the only segment of Sikh population apathetic towards Akali Dal opposed the demand on the ground that creation of such a state would place them under the domination of wealthy Jat Sikhs. As the new Akali leadership including the Sant belonged to the landowning rural Sikh section of the society, the prominent Scheduled castes leaders alleged that the Jat Sikh domination would be more acute this time because rural Sikh landlords would be strict in adhering to the caste system than the urban educated Sikhs. Moreover the Akali opposition to any tenancy legislation in the state legislature further estranged them.<sup>76</sup> Infact, the schedule castes' leaders tried to match the Punjabi Suba agitation by holding protests against the demand.<sup>77</sup> A spokesman of scheduled castes' federation remarked, "... Sikh landlords would crush the Mazhabi Sikhs if the Suba was formed".<sup>78</sup>

The appointment of a Sikh as head of the Parliamentary Committee raised many eyebrows and even today it is worth analyzing. S. Hukam Singh was a staunch Congressman. As already stated, he was known more for his Sikh views than actions that would please the Congress high command. He was expected to

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<sup>75</sup> *Sikh Review*, XIII/146, October, 1965, p.2.

<sup>76</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p.40.

<sup>77</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 August, 1965.

<sup>78</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 August, 1965.

give a report against the demand. The government wanted to kill the Punjabi Suba demand with the help of a Sikh. It wanted to murder the Sikh aspirations and desire for a Sikh region within the Indian republic with the hands of a Sikh. Hukam Singh later on expressed such views, when the parliamentary committee was holding its deliberations. According to S. Hukam Singh, Mr. Shastri, the Prime Minister of India rang up S. Hukam Singh because he wanted that S. Hukam Singh should give report against the Punjabi Suba demand. But S. Hukam Singh was bent upon creating Punjabi Suba.<sup>79</sup>

Although, the President Mr. S. Radhakrishnan had assured the Sant during the hostilities that the outcome of the government's decision about Punjabi Suba would be much liked by him. But it seemed, the President and the Home Minister were not on good terms as became clear from the actions of the Home Minister Mr. Nanda in the next few days. His radical utterances were published in 'Times of India' and raised hue and cry among the Sikhs. It seemed that the Defence Minister not only wanted to back out on his word but also wanted to embarrass Mr. President. Mrs. Gandhi had an upper hand in the intra-party politics and she was elected leader of the party and consequently the Prime Minister on 20 January, 1966.<sup>80</sup> She wrote a letter to Sant Fateh Singh in which she requested him to appoint a sub-committee to discuss the question of Punjabi Suba with cabinet sub-committee and find the solution. The Sant was, however, able to see through this game plan and told pressmen that again sending representatives for negotiations would delay the settlement of Punjabi Suba question.<sup>81</sup>

Mrs. Gandhi's move was obviously to circumvent the proceedings of the parliamentary consultative committee of which majority of members were reportedly sympathetic to the demand. Mrs.

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<sup>79</sup> Hukam Singh, Punjabi Suba di prapti (Article) in *Sachittr Kaumi Ekta* (Nov.), 1974, p.38.

<sup>80</sup> *Indian Express*, 20 January, 1966.

<sup>81</sup> *The Tribune*, 28 February, 1966; Also *Kaumi Dard*, 28 February, 1966.

Gandhi wanted to kill two aims with a single arrow. She wanted to appease the Akalis for the time being without giving anything substantial while also silencing the opposition within the party by claiming to have given nothing to the Suba agitators.

These dilatory tactics forced the Sant to write a letter to Mrs. Gandhi in which he announced that he would wait till end of March after which his earlier plan of action i.e., fast unto death and immolation would be implemented.<sup>82</sup>The visible change in Mrs. Gandhi's attitude had an unhealthy impact on the radical Sikhs. The president of the Master Akali Dal declared in Jullundhar that even the formation of Punjabi Suba was not final and permanent solution for the Sikhs.<sup>83</sup>

The parliamentary committee had invited representations from the individuals and organizations which poured in thick and swift. The reports of the proceedings of the parliamentary consultative committee; though held in camera, showed that majority of the members of the committee were in favour of a solution of the problem, the solution being the creation of Haryana. There reports and the usual accompanying rumors aroused wide spread protests ranging from that of industrialists of Ludhiana to Mr. Yagya Dutt Sharma, General Secretary of Punjab Jan Sangh announcing that he would go on fast unto death at Amritsar against the attitude of the government which had become ineffective and impotent.

But now, the situation was out of control of religious freaks and orators. Now, the matter lay in the hands of a consultative committee; an independent body free from the pressure of the executive. The uniform implementation of linguistic reorganization in whole India made the acceptance of the demand by the committee inevitable.

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<sup>82</sup> *Indian Express*, 29 February, 1966; Also *The Tribune*, 29 February, 1966.

<sup>83</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p.422.

Watching the flow of the ebb, Mrs. Gandhi got the resolution in favour of a new state passed from Congress Working Committee.<sup>84</sup> The resolution was passed under the Presidentship of Mr. Kamraj. The resolution aimed at the creation of a unilingual Punjabi speaking state and government was to take necessary steps for that. Mr. Morarji Desai opposed the resolution while demanding that his dissenting note should not be recorded.

For the Sant, half the battle was already won because resolution was passed by the working committee of the party that had been negating the very logic underlying the Punjabi Suba. But the repercussions of this Congress decision were far wide and violent. The Hindus of Punjab started protests by going on strike for three days. Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Abohar and Bhiwani saw many incidents of arson and police firing. The Police arrested 28 persons. There have been conflicting opinions about the number of casualties in the contemporary sources but there is no denying that 200 persons were injured out of which several died in hospital. The property worth twenty lacs was destroyed. The arch rival of Punjabi Suba; Jan Sangh, in its meeting passed a resolution in which it expressed its determination to oppose the division of the Punjab. Mrs. Gandhi declared in the lower house that the ultimate decision about the creation of the Punjabi Suba would be taken by the government who would take best care of the interests of the minority i.e., Hindus in the upcoming state.<sup>85</sup> The statement indicated that Mrs. Gandhi too was apprehensive of the majority of the Sikhs in the upcoming state.

While the Sant expressed gratification over the resolution of Central Working Committee, he appealed for the Hindu Sikh unity in the state. He laid emphasis on Hindu-Sikh unity in the ensuing Punjabi Suba. While the Sant was endeavoring to create a healthy

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<sup>84</sup> *Indian Express*, 10 March, 1966.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times of India*, 16 March, 1966.

atmosphere for the bifurcation of the State, Master Tara Singh continued to toe his older line of self determined political status.

The recommendations of the consultative committee were published on 18 March, 1966. The committee rejected the notion that the 'status quo' in the matter under its discussion was the best solution. It declared that it would lead to chaos and unrest in the state. It also rejected the suggestion of a referendum saying it was neither feasible nor desirable. The committee also confessed that the regional committees had been a failure and strengthening them, as was suggested by some quarters, would do nothing. The committee clearly stated that only feasible alternative was the bifurcation of the state on linguistic lines.<sup>86</sup>

However, there were loopholes in the report which were sure to cause some future complications. The most mischievous being the fact that this committee set seal to the central Punjabi region alone being the Punjabi speaking area. It failed or deliberately overruled the facts that Kangra (Kangri, being a dialect of Punjabi), Chandigarh, a part of Kharar Tehsil, most of the region of the district of Ambala, whole Karnal district, Sirsa Tehsil and Kaithal Sub-Tehsil were considered Punjabi speaking areas. S. Hukam Singh too was aware that Hindi zone had been demarcated on communal basis despite the protests of the Punjab ministers at the time of implementation of the regional formula. Moreover, it had been specifically laid down at that time that arrangements were temporary and tentative. Thus, the report of the above committee divided Punjab which gave birth to predicament which is present even today.

Before moving further, it would not be out of context to analyze the role of Hukam Singh. There is no denying that his advocacy of the creation of Himachal and Haryana proved costly to Punjab and dismantled it from its vital organs. In spite of adhering its Punjabi and

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<sup>86</sup> *Indian Express*, 20 March, 1966.

Hindu zones as the basis of demarcation, S. Hukam Singh might have suggested a committee of experts to decide which areas were Punjabi or Hindi speaking. Before joining Congress, Hukam Singh was member of working committee of Akali Dal and quite interestingly, the president of the Shiromani Akali Dal, when the resolution pertaining to demand of Punjabi Suba was passed. He also acted as a mediator whenever the Akali leaders started their fast unto death. It would not be prejudicial to overlook the fact that he was made the Deputy Speaker and later on the speaker after he was able to persuade Master Tara Singh to forgo his fast unto death. After his term as speaker was over, he was made Governor of Rajasthan. Earlier he was able to bring about the merger of Akali Dal with Congress. The reasons he had in mind were known to him only, yet one should keep the above facts in mind.

The opposition of Ekta Samiti, Jan Sangh, and the fast unto death of Yagya Dutt Sharma, gave the government an excuse to try its best to shape the new state in such a way as to reduce its geographical extent as well as the possible Sikh majority. However, the government through Home Minister declared the appointment of a commission who was to (1) examine existing boundary of Hindi and Punjabi speaking area as well as the hill areas (2) It should apply the linguistic principle with due regard to the 1961 census (3) should also keep in mind administrative convenience. This declaration and especially the 1961 census as basis, put five Tehsils in jeopardy, namely, Nalagarh, Una, Fazilka, Pathankot and Kharar.

The Sant meanwhile vowed to stay in Sri Darbar Sahib for forty days, inspite of the fulfillment of the pledge he had taken earlier. He was shocked to see that the 1961 census was taken as a basis for demarcation of Hindi and Punjabi speaking areas. In the words of the Sant, "The census of the 1961 was taken during Punjabi Suba agitation when the counter agitation by the Hindu communalists was

in full swing. The communalists had goaded the Punjabi speaking Hindus to register Hindi as their mother tongue. I consider the census taken from 1891 to 1932 as the correct solution of the problem".<sup>87</sup>

The government might have considered this mathematically possible option earlier but it seemed that the government was bent on giving birth to a dismembered baby. The commission was to be presided by Justice Shah Lal and two other members namely M.M. Philip and Mr. Subimal Dutt. The absence of a Sikh in the commission too irked the Akalis.

The Master Akali Dal boycotted the proceedings of the commission but the Sant Dal working committee adopted a resolution stating the basis of 1961 census for reorganization of new state was not acceptable to the Sikhs. Even the ministers from the Punjabi region of the cabinet in their meeting, considered steps to present the true case before the commission by examining old records and documents containing the disputed area. A seventeen member sub-committee was appointed by the Punjab Pradesh Congress. The executive met on the 4th of the May at Chandigarh and strongly opposed the consideration of 1961 census as the basis for dividing the state. The 1961 census was declared "false and unreliable" by Mr. Nehru himself too.<sup>88</sup>

The Sant was able to see through the game i.e., why he strongly rejected the 1961 census. The central authorities as well as the contemporary Congress high command had been opposing the realization of the Sikh demand of Punjabi Suba. Although the Sant Akali Dal and the Sant himself never uttered a word about the percentages of Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjabi Suba, the central authorities were too apprehensive of any Sikh majority area on the border with Rajasthan. They were certain that it should pose a threat

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<sup>87</sup> The Sant's address at Harmandir Sahib, *Kaumi Dard*, 21 April, 1966.

<sup>88</sup> Khushwant Singh, *History of Sikhs, Vol.II*, p.245.

to the integrity of the nation. Although the political exigencies forced the central leaders to accept the Punjabi Suba demand yet they wanted to do their best to not make Punjabi Suba, a Sikh majority area. As stated in the earlier pages, the language was closely identified with the religion in case of Punjab. There was no fault of the Punjabi Suba supporters if majority of the Sikhs spoke Punjabi. The Sikhs were perhaps punished for speaking Punjabi in large numbers.

The representatives of the Sant Akali Dal sent to the commission too falsified the claims of central authorities and nationalist intelligentsia that language was mere a sugar coating on the bitter pill of Sikh homeland within the country.

S. Hukam's personal views clearly bring home the true nature of the betrayal of the Sikhs by the central leaders.<sup>89</sup> Organizations like Chief Khalsa Diwan and individual Sikhs like Sirdar Kapoor Singh too reverted the central government's emphasis on 1961 census. In their representations to the commission, the Sikh organizations and individuals tried their best to remove the 1961 census as the basis of Punjabi Suba.<sup>90</sup>

Despite all the protests, boycotts and violence, the commission held sittings in camera for several days. The commission refused to accept the Sant Akali Dal's suggestion to verify on the spot, the language of the people of the disputed Tehsils. Candidly, it was not a commission of linguistic and geographical experts, it callously divided the state into two states on the basis of 1961 census. Its stoic attitude killed the aspirations of the people of Punjabi speaking areas who were joined with Haryana. A big slice of area went to Himachal State which got more than it struggled for.

At time of the publication of the report of the commission, Sant

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<sup>89</sup> Gurmeet Singh, *The Other Side: Revealing Truth about Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba*, (Appendix), in *History of Sikh Struggles*, Vol.-IV, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1983.

<sup>90</sup> Sant Singh, Hon. Secretary; Ch. Khalsa Diwan, Chief Khalsa Diwan on Terms of reference on boundary commission, in Gurmeet Singh, Appendix- *History of Sikh Struggles*, Vol.-IV, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1983.

Fateh Singh was out of country.<sup>91</sup> One cannot find the reasons why the Sant opted to go out on a "Vadesh Yatra" when the most important struggle of his life was ending fruitfully. It was a sort of ill timing to go on a foreign tour when the commission was declaring its report that was to divide the fate of people living on the hinges of upcoming Punjabi Suba and Haryana. Before going overseas, he held a press conference after coming out of his sojourn at Sri Darbar Sahib for 277 days since the pledge he took on 15 August, 1965. He declared, "Hindi had nothing to fear from Punjabi. We would learn Hindi alongwith Punjabi which would replace English."<sup>92</sup>

The reaction of the Sant Akali Dal to the report was distressing and painful. Justice Gurnam Singh; speaking at a conference organized by the Sant Akali Dal said that "the communal minded Congress government has tried to damage the Punjabi Suba".

As far as Jan Sangh, the arch opponent of the Punjabi Suba demand was concerned, the state Jan Sangh expressed its grim determination to oppose it by all constitutional and peaceful means. It even appointed a five men action committee to carry on the agitation to force its reversal. However, within weeks of the formation of the Suba, the Jan Sangh leadership moved to accommodating stance. It not only accepted it but also advised Hindus to own Punjabi.<sup>93</sup>

But the division of the central government forced the Jan Sangh to move two steps backwards in order to move one step forward. The obvious reason that compelled the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh and Jan Sangh leadership to beat a hasty retreat was the break up with the leading merchants of Jullundhar and Ludhiana who had no option but to placate the future ruling parties or a possible coalition of which the Akalis were sure to have a good share. The Jan Sangh was

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<sup>91</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Meri Badesh Yatra*, Sant Chanan Singh Bhai Bagga Singh, Gurdwara BudhaJorh, Ganganagar, 1969.

<sup>92</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 12 May, 1966.

<sup>93</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 10 March, 1966.

apprehensive of losing its most worthwhile supporters who supported it financially. So, Jan Sangh leadership inspite of the rancor in their hearts, had to participate in the festivities of the new dawn of Punjabi Suba.<sup>94</sup>

A more sensible option available was to communal and even caste consciousness. But the central government was adamant to subordinate the bani cultural reality of the language to the narrow communal consciousness.<sup>95</sup>

The findings of the commission manifested the ill will of the central government who wanted to weaken the Sikh cause as much as it could by cutting separate the important regions of Punjabi Suba. Insipite of the protests the boundary commission accepted 1961 census as the basis for arriving at the solution of linguistic problem. The majority of commission by two to one declared Chandigarh and Khara sub-tehsil of Ambala district to be part of Haryana province. In his dissenting note Subimol Dutt, forward the inclusion of Khara and Chandigarh in Punjabi Suba on the following grounds. (1) though according to 1961 census, the Hindi speaking population in Kharar Tehsil is no doubt 52.2%, the Punjabi speaking population in the rural areas is 56.2%. (2) Under the Sachar formula of 1949, Kharar Tehsil had been placed in the Punjabi region. (3) The Hindu population in Chandigarh capital project is purely migratory having come from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan only. Therefore, Kharar Tehsil and Chandigarh cannot be considered to be Hindi speaking.

Government accepted the report of minority of the commission of regarding Kharar tehsil but declared Chandigarh as a Union Territory. Moreover, the Punjab reorganization bill introduced in Lok Sabha on 3 September, 1966, provided for common links between the parent state and Haryana such as common governor, a common High Court, common electricity board, the financial cooperation and the

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<sup>94</sup> P.C. Joshi, *Triumph of a Just Cause in Punjabi Suba: A Symposium*, p.55, N.B.O.

<sup>95</sup> Attar Singh, "Supremacy of Akali Dal" in *Round Table*, 20 January, 1974, New Delhi.

housing cooperation. It also provided for central takeover of Chandigarh and Bhakra and Beas dam projects. The most tragic consequence of such decisions was that the Punjabi Suba was deprived of all the water and power sources. The Punjab reorganization bill was passed on 7 September, 1966. The clearly snacked of communalism. It was rejected by both the Akali Dals and almost all the influential Sikh intelligentsia including Sirdar Kapoor Singh who rejected it saying, "I reject the entire schemata of the Bill".<sup>96</sup>

The Sant after a brief sojourn in foreign countries returned on 5 November, 1966. A week later he expressed his regret that his negotiation with Haryana leaders had broken down and declared that he would take steps to undo the injustice that had been done to the Punjab. He called a conference of several parties including the communists, the Swatantra Party, the Republican Party, and the SSP. Wherein the representative promised to give full support in the contemplated agitation for abolition of common links and inclusion of Punjabi speaking areas and Chandigarh in Punjab. However, Jan Sangh did not join these deliberated.<sup>97</sup>

The Sant announced that he would send jathas from Gurdwara Manji Sahib to Chandigarh to press these demands. However, he agreed that he deliberately wanted to give more time to the central government to consider these demands. He declared that if the Central government adopted due dallying tactics in accepting his demands, he shall announce his next programme for the achievement of his objective very shortly. Ready a prepared speech he said that Sikhs and al the Punjabis wanted to live in the country with honour and respect. He declared to sacrifice his life for the cause of Punjabis.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Sikh Review*, XIV/758, October, 1966, pp.49-57.

<sup>97</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 12 November, 1966.

<sup>98</sup> *Kaumi Dard*, 10 November, 1966.

The Akali Dal working committee announced Sant Fateh Singh as the dictator and empowered him to announce a morcha or any step he thought proper for abolition of the wrong terms of reorganization bill. Thus, a new struggle began which was to be led by the Sant.

## **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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Harnik Deol, *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of Punjab*, Routledge, London, 2000.

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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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<sup>2</sup> S. Bhatnagar 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.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tribune*, 5 March, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>5</sup> But the manifesto lacked any clear political or economic formulation. In order to appease every section it became full of platitudes.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> *Sada Chon Manorath Pattar*, 1967, Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar.

<sup>6</sup> A.S. Narang, *Storm Over Sutlej*, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, p.179.

<sup>7</sup> *Sada Aawish Pattar Athwa Manifesto*, 1967, Shiromani Akali Dal, Amritsar, pp.7-8.

stand point were concerned.<sup>8</sup> 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 form an exclusive Akali government after the election, he wouldn't favour it.<sup>9</sup> The Sant stressed the need for the communal harmony and didn't refer to any particular Sikh grievance before and during the elections.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup>

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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<sup>8</sup> *The Tribune*, 5 March, 1967; Also *The Patriot*, 4-5 March, 1967

<sup>9</sup> A.S. Narang, *Punjab Politics in National Perspective*, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986, p.66.

<sup>10</sup> A.S. Narang, *Punjab Accord and Elections: Retrospect and Prospects*, Gitanjali Publish House, 1986, pp.55-65.

<sup>11</sup> CEO, Government of Punjab, Report on General Election in Punjab, 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 aid 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.<sup>13</sup> 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,

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<sup>12</sup> CEO, Government of Punjab Report on General Elections in Punjab, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Baldev Raj Nayar, *The Modernization Imperative and Indian Planning*, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1972, pp.73-74.

a potential leader of the Sikhs<sup>14</sup>. 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup> A.S. Narang, *Punjab Politics in National Perspective: A Study in Democracy, Development and Distortion*, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, p.67.

<sup>15</sup> Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles, Vol II*, p.145.

<sup>16</sup> A.S. Narang, *Storm over Sutlej, op.cit.*, p.183.

<sup>17</sup> Dalip Singh, *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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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

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<sup>18</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, Abdul Yaadan, *op.cit.* p.34.

<sup>19</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My Days Governor*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.90.

<sup>20</sup> Harish, K Puri, Akali Dal's State Autonomy Demand: A Case Study, in SAH Haqqy (edited) *Democracy Pluralism and Nation Building*, NBO Publishers, New Delhi, 1984, p.261.

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.”<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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

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<sup>21</sup> *The Tribune*, (Ambala) Sept 29, 1968.

<sup>22</sup> Gurdwara Gazette of November, 1968 (issued under statutory requirements of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925)

<sup>23</sup> *Gurdwara Gazette*, November, 1968

<sup>24</sup> Devinderpal Singh, *Sikh in Politics: Study of a Minority*, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, pp.111-112. Also *The Tribune*, (Ambala), 30 Sept, 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.<sup>25</sup> 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 *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).<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>25</sup> J.C. Anand in Iqbal Narain (ed.) *State Politics in India*, Meerut, Meenakashi Publishers, 1976, p.276.

<sup>26</sup> *The Tribune*, (Ambala), 9 March, 1967; also *The Tribune*, 10 March, 11 March, 1967.

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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> C.P. Bhambri, "General Election and Political Competition in India," *Political Science Review*, Vol.VII, No.34, July-Sept, 1968, p.60.

<sup>28</sup> *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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

After close observation of political equation, the Congress party tabled a no-confidence motion against the government on 26 May, 1967 but it 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.<sup>31</sup> Hudiara's Akali Dal failed to cut some ice as its wire puller Lachman Singh Gill remained at the top of its affairs 23<sup>rd</sup> 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

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<sup>29</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 May, 1967.

<sup>30</sup> Manju Verma, *The Coalition Ministries in Punjab*, Shivalik Publishing House, Patiala.

<sup>31</sup> *The Tribune*, 27 May, 28 May, 1967.

“marriage of inconveniences”.<sup>32</sup>

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.<sup>33</sup> 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

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<sup>32</sup> Gurratanpal Singh, *Illustrated History of Sikhs: 1947-78*, Chandigarh, 1979.

<sup>33</sup> S. Bhatnagar and p.S. Verma, Coalition Governments (1967-80) (article) in *Political Dynamics of Punjab* by Paul Wallace and Chopra (edited), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1981, p.177.

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.<sup>34</sup> 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

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<sup>34</sup> *The Tribune*, 23, November, 1967.

to resign on 22 November, 1967.<sup>35</sup>

The 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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

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<sup>35</sup> *The Tribune*, 23 November, 1967.

<sup>36</sup> *The Tribune*, 24 November, 1967, also *The Tribune*, 25 Nov, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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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<sup>38</sup> Devinder Singh, *Akali Politics in Punjab*, 1993, NBO, *Delhi the link* December 3, 1967, p.101.

<sup>39</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My Days as a Governor*, *op.cit.*, p.70.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1967.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

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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<sup>40</sup> *The Tribune*, 4 December, 1967.

<sup>41</sup> Gurratanpal Singh, *The Illustrated History of Sikhs*, p.259.

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.<sup>42</sup> 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 Parbhandak 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

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<sup>42</sup> Gurratanpal Singh, *Illustrated History of Sikhs*, p.260.

alcohol which was against the tenets of the Sikh religion.<sup>43</sup>

The Gill interlude was marked by extreme instability and floor crossing.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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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<sup>43</sup> For detailed analysis of defections at state level Subash Kashyap, *Politics of Defections: A Study of State Politics in India*, Delhi, National Publishing House, 1969.

<sup>44</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My Days as a Governor*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, p.84.

<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> On 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> The Sant was aware enough that voices for more state autonomy were raised in many parts of the country,

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<sup>46</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My Days as a Governor*, p.72.

<sup>47</sup> J.C. Anand, "Mid Term Elections in Punjab", *Political Science Review*, vol.10, No.1 and 2, Jan-June 1971.

<sup>48</sup> Harish K. Puri, "Akali Dals State Autonomy demand: A case study" in Sah Haqqi (ed.) *Democracy, Pluralism and Nation Building*, Nbo Publishers, New Delhi, 1984. p.261.

<sup>49</sup> *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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup>

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 homelander 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

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<sup>50</sup> *The Tribune*, Ambala, 29 Sept, 1968.

<sup>51</sup> *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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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

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<sup>52</sup> 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

<sup>53</sup> *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.”<sup>54</sup>

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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup>

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

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<sup>54</sup> The Merger Document: The Political Goal of the Panth, in Gurdwara Gazette, November, 1968. Monthly), Amritsar.

<sup>55</sup> J.C. Anand, Mid-term Poll in Punjab, *Political Science Review*, vol.10, No.1 and 2, Jan-June 1971, pp.12-14.

<sup>56</sup> J.C.Anand, Mid-term Poll in Punjab, *Political Science Review*, vol.10, No.1 and 2, Jan-June 1971, pp.12-14,

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.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

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.<sup>59</sup> 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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<sup>57</sup> *The Tribune*, Sept 29, 1968.

<sup>58</sup> J.C. Anand, "Politics of retreating communalisms" in Iqbal, Narain (ed.) *State Politics in India*, Meenakshi Parkashan, Meerut, 1976, pp.276-277.

<sup>59</sup> The Election of Lambi constituency was held on March, 2, 1969, (Asian Recorded, vol, XV, No. 11 March 12-18, 1969, pp.8812-143).

supported by the Akali Dal were returned to the house by people.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

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

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<sup>60</sup> Punjab Election Office, Chandigarh, (1969 Elections)

<sup>61</sup> Subash Kashyap, *Politics of Defections: A Study of State Politics in India*, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1969.

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.<sup>62</sup>

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

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<sup>62</sup> M.S. Dhama, *Changing Support Base of the Congress*, *op.cit.* p.90.

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 Prabandhak Committee, which in his opinion was more important and influential post in the eyes of the Sikhs than the Chief Ministership.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> Justice Gurnam Singh was again chosen as the Akali candidate for the Chief Ministership.<sup>65</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup> 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".<sup>67</sup> 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

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<sup>63</sup> S.C. Arora, *Turmoil in Punjab Politics*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.114.

<sup>64</sup> Jasvir Sing Sabor, *Do Mahapurkh*, Amritsar, 1970.

<sup>65</sup> *The Statesman*, 15 February, 1969.

<sup>66</sup> *The Tribune*, 14 February, 1969.

<sup>67</sup> D.C. Pavate, *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.<sup>68</sup> 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.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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

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<sup>68</sup> *The Statesman*, 15 Feb, 1969.

<sup>69</sup> Jamshid Ali Khan, *Politics of Coalition Governments in Punjab*, Madaan Publishers, Patiala, 2006, p.66.

<sup>70</sup> *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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup>

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.<sup>73</sup> It was the time when the Sant had started his fast unto death. The move didn't succeed because the Sant's fast unto 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Savita Kahyap, *Politics of Power*, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.387.

<sup>72</sup> *The Patriot*, February 16, 1969

<sup>73</sup> 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.

<sup>74</sup> Kuldeep Kaur, *Akali Dal in Punjab Politics: Splits and Mergers*, Deep and Deep Publishers, New Delhi, 1999, p.42.

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.<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup>

Another view highlights, to some extent the role of Swatantra Party in provoking both the groups.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup>

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.<sup>79</sup> 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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<sup>75</sup> 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*.

<sup>76</sup> Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles*, Vol I, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1989, p.157.

<sup>77</sup> Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *Glory of Akal Takht*, Punjab Book Company, Jullunder, 1984, pp.77-78.

<sup>78</sup> Satya M.Rai, *Punjab Since Partition*, Durga Publication, Delhi, 1986, p.306; Also Gurratanpal Singh, *The Illustrated History of Sikhs*, Chandigarh, 1972, pp.228-29.

<sup>79</sup> J.S. Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Sikhs of Punjab*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1990, p.200.

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,<sup>80</sup> who were loyal to the Sant, Giani Puran Singh, Hargunaad Singh, Surjan Singh, Santokh Singh of Delhi, Kartar Singh and Kirpal Singh chak shrewala 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.<sup>81</sup> 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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<sup>80</sup> For a simple and clear description of Akali Dal's Organisation, *Akali Politics in Punjab (1964-1985)*, NBO, 1993, pp.41-68.

<sup>81</sup> *The Tribune*, 10 Oct, 1969.

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.<sup>82</sup>

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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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.<sup>85</sup> 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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<sup>82</sup> J.S. Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India. The Sikh of Punjab*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1990, p.207.

<sup>83</sup> Khuswant Singh, *A History of Sikhs (1839-1974)*, Vol 2, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1977, p.291.

<sup>84</sup> A.S. Narang, *Punjab Politics in National Perspective: A Study in Democracy; Development and Distortion*, Gitanjali Publishers, New Delhi, 1986, p.55.

<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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<sup>87</sup> 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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<sup>86</sup> Sant Fateh Singh, *Dhukwen Uttar, op.cit*, p.72.

<sup>87</sup> 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.<sup>88</sup>

To quote Napoleon 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.<sup>89</sup> 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

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<sup>88</sup> Jamshid Ali Khan, *op.cit*, p.68.

<sup>89</sup> *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."<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup>

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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<sup>90</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My Days as a Governor*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p.98.

<sup>91</sup> *The Tribune*, 15 March, 1969.

<sup>92</sup> *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.<sup>93</sup> 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 "Ardaas". 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 'Agan 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 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1969, Darshan Singh made a public declaration that he will repeat the same "Ardaas" as made by the Sant, and go on fast unto death from 15<sup>th</sup> August 1969. In the wee hours of 13<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup>

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 Hudiara, Hazara Singh Gill, Arjan Singh

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<sup>93</sup> *Asian Recorder*, 3-9 December, 1969, pp.9369-70; Also in Karamjit Singh Aujla, *Mahaan Sikh Shaheed Darshan Singh Pheruman*, Sandeep Parkashan, Ludhiana, 2005.

<sup>94</sup> *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 alongwith the Sant. A common action committee was formed which gave notice to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to demolish these kunds.<sup>95</sup> 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 alongwith S. Pheruman. As already told S. Pheruman was arrested by Punjab Police. So, he started his fast unto death in police custody on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1969. Meanwhile, S. Jawahar Singh Burj died in police custody. This further accentuated the problems of the Sant.<sup>96</sup> 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 Sant's 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 precincts 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

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<sup>95</sup> Dhana Singh Gulshan *Ajji Da Punjab Te Sikh Rajniti*. Dhaliwal Publishing House, Bathinda, 1978.

<sup>96</sup> *The Tribune*, 16-17 August, 1969.

hospital who was nearing his end.<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup>

The conduct of the Akali leaders during this episode was no doubt partisan. The Genral 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",<sup>99</sup> 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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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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<sup>97</sup> Dhan Singh Gulshan, *op.cit*, p.207.

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Ajit*, 28 October, 1969.

<sup>99</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *The Story of Punjabi Suba*, Kapur and Sons, Delhi, p.471.

<sup>100</sup> Sant Father Singh, *Badesh Yatra*, Budha Jorh, Ganganagar. p.16.

<sup>101</sup> *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 Majhithia 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.<sup>102</sup> 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

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<sup>102</sup> *The Statesman*, 26 August, 1969.

gain Chandigarh.<sup>103</sup> 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 Minister 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.<sup>104</sup> 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."<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup> The action committee decided to hold a mammoth rally of the Punjabis on October 17, 1969 to demonstrate their will to secure

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<sup>103</sup> *The Tribune*, 25 September, 1969

<sup>104</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *The Story of Punjab Suba*, p.473.

<sup>105</sup> D.C. Pavate, *op.cit.*, p.124.

<sup>106</sup> *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.<sup>107</sup>

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.<sup>108</sup> 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

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<sup>107</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *op.cit.*, p.473.

<sup>108</sup> *The Tribune*, 11 January, 1970.

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.<sup>109</sup>

The Sant and the Akali Dal welcomed the award and Akali leaders alongwith Hukam Singh requested the Sant to break his fast which he did on 30 January, 1970. The Punjab government even declared state holidays on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup>

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.<sup>112</sup> 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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<sup>109</sup> *The Times of India*, 30 January, 1970.

<sup>110</sup> *The Tribune*, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1970.

<sup>111</sup> *The Tribune*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1970.

<sup>112</sup> *The Tribune*, 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1970.

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.<sup>113</sup>

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 Minister'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

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<sup>113</sup> Gurratanpal Singh, *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.<sup>114</sup> 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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<sup>114</sup> K.C. Gulati, *Akali's Past and Present*, Ashajanak Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, p.189.

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.<sup>115</sup> 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.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Kuldeep Kaur, *op.cit*, p.49.

<sup>116</sup> *National Herald*, March, 8, 1969.

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.<sup>117</sup>

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

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<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup>

Gradually, the crisis became so grave that the Sant in his statements on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> march, 1970 even accused the chief minister of planning to topple the ministry with the Congress party support.<sup>120</sup> 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.<sup>121</sup> This had grave ramification because 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.

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<sup>118</sup> J.C. Anand, "The Punjab: Akalis in Coalition" quoted by Rarunakaran (ed.) *Coalition Governments in India: Problems, Prospects*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1975, p.240.

<sup>119</sup> Sirdar Kapur Singh regarded the procedure of election of leader of Akali legislative party as undemocratic and against Sikh traditions, *The Tribune*, February 18, 1970.

<sup>120</sup> *The Tribune*, 29 March, 1970.

<sup>121</sup> *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.<sup>122</sup> 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 Minister was using his official position to make sure that Giani Bhupinder Singh emerged victorious.<sup>123</sup>

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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<sup>122</sup> Dhana Singh Gulshan, *Aj Da Punjab Te Sikh Rajniti*, Dhariwal Publishing House, Rampura Phul, 1978, p.221.

<sup>123</sup> Dhana Singh Gulshan, *op.cit.*, p.221.

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.<sup>124</sup>

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".<sup>125</sup>

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

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<sup>124</sup> K.C. Gulati, *Akali's Past and Present*, Ashajanak Publication, New Delhi, 1974, p.189.

<sup>125</sup> *The Tribune*, 26 March, 1970.

had so laboriously built. It is illogical to blame the Sant for making this coalition government a failure because 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 from 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 took the charge of the office.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup>

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

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<sup>126</sup> A.S. Narang, *Storm over the Sutlej*, Gitanjali Publishers, New Delhi, 1983, pp.186-87.

<sup>127</sup> D.C. Pavate, *My days as a Governor*, pp.108-109.

of making S. Surjit Singh Barnala, the leader of Akali legislature party.<sup>128</sup>

Jan Sangh leaders had been watching the intercentine 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.<sup>129</sup> 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

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<sup>128</sup> Gurratanpal Singh, *Illustrated History of the Sikhs*, Chandigarh, 1979.

<sup>129</sup> *The Tribune*, July 22, 1970.

introduced at upper primary level i.e. sixth class.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup> During his stint, Justice Gurnam Singh declared that schools with Hindi as medium of Instruction would be allowed in the state.<sup>132</sup> 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.<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> 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.<sup>136</sup>

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.

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<sup>130</sup> *The Tribune*, March, 17, 1969.

<sup>131</sup> *Asian Recorder* Vol XXIII No. 27, p.1381.

<sup>132</sup> Dalip Singh, *op.cit.*, p.112.

<sup>133</sup> Mr. Sohan Singh Bassi had started the controversy by stating that only Punjabi Medium schools would get grants. *Asian Recorder*, Vol XXIII, No. 29, p.13836.

<sup>134</sup> D.C. Pavate, *op.cit.*, p.109.

<sup>135</sup> *The Statesman*, 21 March, 1970.

<sup>136</sup> *The Statesman*, 21 March, 1970.

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 Sangh 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 Jalandhar 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 unacceptable 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 identified 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.<sup>137</sup>

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.<sup>138</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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.

## CONCLUSION

It is always difficult to evaluate a historical personality in terms of political contribution. If politics is continuation of war by other means, confrontation and opposition are inherent in it. A political personality always has opponents and supporters both. Those who get the icing on the cake always praise their benefactor, but those who have to suffer criticize that Personality's policy and ideology.

There is no denying that landlords, industrialists and moneyed people were attracted to Akali Dal not because of their conviction, but because it opened up avenues for them to get a foot hold in the political field. They came and went out as and when it suited them. S. Baldev Singh, S. Hukam Singh, S. Ujjal Singh, S. Swaran Singh and S. Rarewala are only few of the leaders who ultimately joined the Congress and got high positions. This continuous exit and enter drama had earned a bad name for Akalis and people developed a feeling that Akali Dal was a mere ladder for getting high positions.

Contrary to such practice, the Sant tried to stabilize the Akali politics. The creation of Punjabi Suba gave Akalis the confidence that they could also effectively influence the political life of State. And there is no denying that it was change of nature of demand from religious to secular and linguistic basis that made creation of Punjab Suba possible. The Sant was responsible for this change without which creation of Punjabi Suba was sure to be more delayed or it might have been a dream to be achieved yet. Moreover, the Sant's emphasis on Hindu Sikh unity which later on developed into Akali Jan Sangh alliance was instrumental in putting Akalis on saddle of power.

In the words of the Sant, Sikhism was 'Indian Socialism' and achievement of this was the political aim set before the Sant. His belief that religion and politics could not be separated from each other suited Sikh aspirations. There is no doubt, he was conservative in

some matters e.g. he opposed tooth and nail, the revision of Hindu code. But what could one expect from a statesman who had a rural background and was a Jat Sikh. The Sant had an apprehension that if more rights were given to women as far as inheritance of property was concerned, it was sure to create social and family tensions in rural and uneducated society. The Sant represented the Sikh peasantry, who had got means and influence in the congenial environment created by green revolution. The Sant's rise coincided with rise of Jat peasants who achieved prosperity due to good effects of green revolution. Before this, urban middle class, who had the privilege and environment to get education usually dominated Sikh politics. The long domination of Master Tara Singh over Sikh politics is a pointer to the fact. It was the Sant who brought Sikh peasants from villages to offices of ministries.

The Sant, no doubt was a first class patriot. He knew that Sikh religion had roots in nationalism. In fact, Gurus were themselves greatest patriots who suffered themselves than anybody else and inspired their followers to fight autocratic foreign regimes. The Sant's capability as runner of mass movements was excellent. It was the Sant who ran Sikh agitations, set aims before Sikh Sangat and fulfilled the dream of Punjabi Suba.

The Sant's down to earth approach impressed everyone. He had a profound Knowledge of Gurbani. His speeches were simple, in the language of masses. The Sant usually quoted from Gurbani which made him more popular. He remained a bachelor throughout his life. He had none on whom he could bestow his transparency in monetary affairs. Since the day he joined active politics, he took it as his duty, to avoid all familial ties which could hinder his transparent dealing. He had no political heritage, yet he reached at top of Akali leadership. This is possible only if a leader has virtues which make him popular in masses.

The Sant's achievements and legacy are immense. It was he, who ran mass movements for the achievement of Punjabi Suba. His emphasis on Hindu- Sikh unity resulted in Akali-Jan Sangh alliance which is in vogue even today. History is not a chapter of accidents or chance coincidences. If one assumes that Punjabi Suba was achieved because government in order to kill the demand, appointed Hukam Singh, a Sikh whose loyalty to Congress was well known, one cannot forget the question that what made the government appoint a Parliamentary committee on whose decisions the fate of Punjabi Suba depended. It was the Sant, who risked his life many times for achieving Punjabi Suba.

The only charge on the Sant Fateh Singh is that he broke his fasts before the motives of these fasts were achieved. All the episodes related to fasts have been explained earlier. One can easily see through that the Sant had no fault in these sordid chapters of Akali politics. His greatest weakness was that he believed everyone. He obeyed every time the dictates of working committee. It was not only the Sant who made decisions regarding these fasts. Moreover, no one can suspect that a leader of stature like the Sant could start fasts only as propaganda means. He had in his mind, novel examples of Mahatma Gandhi before Independence and of Dr. Ramullu in post-independence era. He was honest to his purpose.

He represented simple village folk of Punjab. His rise coincided with green revolution which had brought prosperity in Jat homes. If rebellions of belly are worse, a content and well nourished public, on the other hand, yearns for more share of political power. The Sant spent his whole life in moulding public opinion in rural areas and made people realize the urgency and need of the demand of Punjabi Suba.

For the first time, common Sikhs saw a leader, who belonged to them. In his press conferences too, he gave replies like 'I don't know',

"I will his simplicity and honesty to purpose. Gurbani was his only guide and he applied Sikh tradition to every situation. His political thought was based on the Sikh tradition of piety, service and sacrifice.

Clarity of mind was his greatest asset. He never fumbled, never went astray and was never irrelevant since the day he took up the cause of Punjabi Suba. The Sant's first endeavour was to remove all the contradictions in the Punjabi Suba demand. During his talks with talks with Mr. Nehru and Mr. Shastri, he showed logic unknown to common men, subtlety not found in most of the people, knowledge beyond the capacity of many.

The Sant's throughout his career made attempts to bring unity in Akali ranks but people like Lachman Singh Gill spoiled all his plans. He even tried to compensate Jan Sangh but refused to yield when it started demanding unjust concessions in lieu of support in the legislature. He made whirlwind tours of Punjab, usually slept in his jeep with a blanket wrapped around himself. His schedule was so hectic and he labored so hard for the cause that he usually slept for three or four hours hardly.

The Sant always struggled cheerfully and courageously. It was again, a single man's fight against the entire might of the Punjab government backed by the centre. The Sant tried to stabilize the Akalis politics throughout his life, but he succeeded only to a certain extent. He failed to precipitate the fluid Akali politics.

Akali politics, like the political situation of Punjab has been baffling and fluid. The Sant succeeded only to some extent because he lacked shrewdness and crookedness which is necessary in politics. He insisted not on torturing the enemies with violence but on showing that his demands were just. His shift from religion as basis of Punjabi Suba demand to language as basis paid. His methods can more be compared to Mr. Gandhi than to Bismarck.

Politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in the

affairs concerned with them. During such a juncture, a personality emerges and opens the flood gates for the commoners into the political arena. The Sant was such a crusader who brought common peasants in the offices of ministries. The Sant during his social services had minutely watched the inequality and injustice meted out to Punjabis. The continuous denial of Punjabi Suba demand was such a leverage which the Sant used to bring the common peasants into mainstream politics. Before his entry into politics, educated and urban Sikhs made career in politics. The common Sikh peasant used to throng in religious political and festival congregations as mere listeners who listened to urban and educated Sikh leaders. Right from the national movement against Britishers these people served as a cadre in the political parties.

The Sant was not born with a silver spoon. Being the son of a common farmer he started his life at the lowest ladder. With his purity, religious bent of mind and simplicity, he himself built a huge mass following by dint of hard work as a social servant.

It would be a great injustice to pay heed to such allegations like he was planned by communists, history illuminates reality. A perusal of his actions clearly brings but that he was a self made personality whom the course of events brought into helm of political affairs from his favourite field i.e., social service. The greatest tragedy of modern period is not the strident clamor of bad people, but the dangerous silence of good people. The continuous denial of just demands of Punjabis had reached a dangerous level. It was the Sant who give a logical twist to the Punjabi demands so as to make them palatable.

The Sant, in fact, diverted Punjabis from following violent paths to get their share. The Sant's shift from religion to language as the basis of Punjabi aspirations and demands saved the day for the country without him, the emphasis on religion as the basis of Punjabi demands was sure to take a bigoted form sooner or later.

The Sant's greatest critics would not falter to highlight some events in which he acted moderately or appeared to be yielding. But they fail to highlight the outcome that would have followed if the political obstinacy had been the favourite path of the Sant. It was easy for the Sant to become a political extremist for he had all the necessary resources. He enjoyed a huge mass base; people thronged to hear his speeches and most importantly he had religion at his back.

But the Sant's political sagacity and wisdom was much above such tactics. He followed non-violent methods for achievement of goals. The Sant's methods were new to the Sikh politics but there is no denying that it was the Sant who was able to materialize the dream of a Punjabi state within the Indian Union.

The Sant in spite of his stature in Sikh politics, never occupied a government office. He never longed for political posts or cabinet berths. It is rare to find such a historical personality who had no interest in post of offices. The Sant in fact was above material gains and embodied the true meaning of word "Sant". Morality and religious purity remained the first priority for the Sant. He continued to practice spread the message of the ten Gurus despite his occupations as a politician. He was not a politician in garb of the Sant but the Sant in garb of a politician.

The Sant's mass following was noted by Akali stalwarts. During his stay in Ferozepur jail alongwith Akali leaders humility and desire to do service was noted by likes of S. Harcharan Singh Hudara. In jail, he used to do petty jobs for his Akali brethren despite his stature as the Sant. The Sant never accumulated a rupee by using his political influence and left no huge sums to his near and dear ones. The Sant's close aid S. Jasvir Singh Sabar is still working in Sikh missionary college at Amritsar.

The preached the message of the ten Gurus far and wide. He brought many into the field of Sikhism. He was called "Punjabi

Gandhi" by editor of "Blitz" magazine Mr. Karanzia for resemblance of his political methods to that of Gandhi. He continued to baptize people till his end.

The Sant was a pioneer in sowing the seeds of Hindu-Sikh unity. He was a visionary who wanted to take this unity to new level of political partnership. The Sant's legacy as a harbinger of Hindu-Sikh unity to immense. It was the Sant who first made the dream of Punjabi Suba a reality. Alongwith the realization of such a dream, the Sant continued to reinforce the political unity of Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindus and the Sikhs collectively as Punjabis got a state of their own where they could govern themselves and frame laws for betterment of Punjabi culture.

It was the Sant who removed the popular misconceptions about the Punjabi language. He removed the apprehension that Punjabi was a communal language related solely with the Sikhs. His speeches, articles (e.g., Punjabi Boli Firkoo Kiven ?) and didactic literature removed the doubt in the minds of national mainstream intelligence that to demand a region on basis Punjabi language does not mean demanding a state on the basis of religion. Apart from committing the mistake of placing the religion as the basis of demand for Punjabi Suba, the earlier Sikh leaders did not do much to solve the above problem.

The reasons behind the split in Akali Dal have been explored at the cost of the reputation of the Sant as if he back stabbed the Master. As already told the Master's approach towards the basic issues was not objective. He had toed the religious line at the cost of the demand of Punjabi Suba. It seemed imminent that for the proper redressed of the Sikh grievances, change of guard was must. The hardliners had been dominating the Sikh politics which added to the consternation among the central leaders. Every cry for Sikh homeland made the central leaders cry wolf. That is why; the Sant chose to form

his own Dal.

The fasts unto death form an important part of the Sant's political contribution although the major criticism of the Sant's contribution and works springs out of this facet of the Sant's life. As explained earlier, the Sant was made a scapegoat for all the reverses. He broke fasts either on the assurances of central leaders or during the national emergencies. The fasts unto death are undertaken to protest non-violently or to prove that the protesting person is the one who has suffered. The vows are made not in the literal sense of the terms. They are taken to protest and bring the authorities to an agreement.

No doubt, the Sant broke his fasts in the literal sense of the term. But why he did so is a question that required some probing. As already explored, the reasons behind the breaking of fasts were substantial. The Sant was a patriot first. The Sant knew that apart from being a Sikh leader, he was part of a nation which is Kaleidoscope of races and linguistic groups. The Sant was not a separatist of a power hungry politician who wanted absolute sovereignty for his Sikh brethren. The Sant wanted a proper place and respect for Sikhs who had golden past but he wanted to do so within the Indian republic. He broke his fasts during such a crisis when his death might have spilled the blood of innumerable Sikh youth. The Sant wanted the authorities to redress the Sikh grievances instead of cajoling them into submission. The Sant's political opponents accused him of breaking his fasts without fulfilling the vows in the literal sense of the term. But while evaluating the Sant, one must not forget that the pressure built by those fasts was substantial in making the government yield to Sikh demands.

The Sant's transparency in financial matters was proverbial in those days. Even his critics never accused him of taking financial favours or misusing his good offices for his personal betterment. The

Sant enjoyed the status of a king maker for a long time, but he was content with his status as undisputed leader of his community. Nowhere in the annals, we find him craving for posts or offices. The Sant entered the political arena at the behest of Akali Stalwarts and when he saw the Sikh energy being channelized into wrong directions, he tried to set things right when the Sikh masses expressed confidence in him, the same Sikh leaders accused him of playing political gimmicks.

The Sant was and remained a social servant and a religious preacher till his end. He continued to do service at Gurdwaras. Although, he was formally uneducated, he led his best to open schools and colleges alongwith Gurdwaras religious and education institutes at Talwandi Sabo are a testimony to above fact. As already objectively narrated, the Sant was above the narrow concepts of nepotism and favouring family members. He remained a bachelor, and he did not favour relatives or offering them political or financial gains.

Instead of emphasizing on the communal and susceptible issues, the Sant wanted to improve the lot of his Sikh brethren. The Batala resolution which was the brainchild of the Sant clearly manifests his thought process. The Sant's efforts to bring political unity in Punjab both horizontally and vertically are worthy of the space. After the demise of Master Tara Singh, the splinter groups of Akalis too joined the Sant Dal. The merger agreement made by the Sant defined the aim of the United Akali Dal as to establish the Sikh sovereignty within the framework of Indian Constitution. The Sant had the political sagacity to bring all the warring functions under one banner.

Apart from bringing the Akalis under one banner, the Sant was able to bring two parties with altogether different ideologies i.e., Akali Dal and Jan Sangh on the same platform. The Sant performed his job commendably as the patron of Akali Dal as well as a coalition

manager. Although the coalition governments formed with his efforts did not complete their terms but it was the Sant who showed the Akali–Jan Sangh political alliance was possible. With profound knowledge of history and scriptures, the Sant remained star campaigner of the Akali Dal and its coalition parties. It was the Sant who made the Hindus and the Sikh leaders share the same dais during election campaign.

There is no doubt that these coalition governments were detrimental to the Sant's career. Moreover, the merger of the Akali Dals gave the Sikh opponents of the Sant a revered platform to belittle him with their tactics and political gimmicks. Apart from this every coalition government during those turbulent times assumed office not with a spirit to forgive and forget but to punish the foes and reward the enemies.

It was a strange irony that the same persons who were founders of the Havan Kunds on the roof of Holy Akal Takht later formed an alliance to demolish these kinds and to punish the Sant for this act. This single episode illustrates what happened to the Sant during his last years. The Sant, however, sacrificed everything whenever the need of hour came when it came to the question of inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab, the Sant was able to take with him all non-Congress legislators with him. He even demanded resignation from entire council of minister while putting into jeopardy the entire coalition.

An important development which occurred in the post-independence era was the fact that language was gradually identified with the religion. The Sant tried his best to stop this since the heydays of Punjabi Suba movement but his deep insight alone could not make enough effect as all the political players wanted to cash the language cheque with the help of religious sentiments of the people. The linguistic question was less susceptible as compared to the religion. That is why the politicians wanted to coningle language with religion

thus making the confusion more confounded. The ignorant masses could be easily swayed by a cocktail of language and religion than the former alone. The Sant successfully requested his followers to make people aware of the above confusion. His supporters like S. Tara Singh Layalpuri, Jathedar Shiv Singh Jhavan, and Giani Lal Singh relied on projecting the secular nature of demand in their speeches.

The Sant had to suffer atrocious libels like he was a stooge of Hindu conservatives. The Sant candidly accepted the blame that he was supported by the Hindu community. He used to take it as a compliment which he said raised his stature as a propagator of Hindu Sikh unity. The Sant with his deep insight had seen that the Punjabi suba demand and other issues problems related to Punjabis had been reduced to a microcosm that represented the conflict between two types of leadership with different political mindsets– the nationalist leadership and parochial leadership that had aspirations based on religious and regional loyalties much narrower than the former. The above argument even today seems so incomplete to such an extent that it seriously distorts what it purports to describe.

The Sant represented agriculturist class in Akali Dal. The rise of this class was result of a new economic order which emerged due to high yielding varieties of wheat brought in Punjab during the Green Revolution era which coincided with Punjabi Suba movement. Akali Dal's elite prior to the Sant failed to link the nouveau rich agriculturist classes with its policies and programs. Even the rise of the Sant in politics can be more or less contributed to these farmers who wanted to change the composition and leadership of the Akali Dal in the new politico-economic situation of the province. As far as the Master was concerned, he failed to cash the manpower and resources of rich peasants. Moreover, his tactics and outlook was too a hindrance for the aspiration of the young Turks. The Master's speech and press releases can be more or less compared to the clamouring of a leader of

a religious minority struggling to presence its ethos and script. The Master led the Sikhs for almost forty years. Many a time, he had struggled with his back on the wall and emerged victorious at the end. The Sikh unity had foundered many times but the Master remained at the top of affairs as he kept Panthic entity and unity at the forefront. It would have been a viable option if the Master had entrusted the steering of community to the collective leadership of some of his prominent supporters and a team of his lieutenants which he should have prepared in his exceptionally long career.

As already told, the Sant represented the village folk of Punjab. His manners, rustic simplicity made him the beloved leader of these innumerable rural masses. The Sant's political activities coincided with Green Revolution which had brought prosperity in Jat homes. The rebellions of the belly are worst; a content and malnourished public on the other hand yearns for more political participation. The Sant's attention remained towards rural folk who were hitherto living unnoticed and isolated from active politics. The Sant made this rural population realize the urgency and need of the formation of Punjabi speaking state. The Sant was certainly not a rabble rouser or a demigod but impressed his followers with his simplicity and honesty to the purpose.

Before the Sant a majority of Hindus with mild outlook had discovered the demand because it was viewed as a symbol of only Sikh aspirations. But his emphasis on language instead of religion and on Hindu-Sikh unity turned the tables. The progressive forces in the whole country too welcomed the Sant with open arms. These differences in the standpoint of the Master and the Sant irked the Master. But this broader outlook saved the Sant from sliding into oblivion like some earlier Akali leaders who opposed the Master. The Akali leaders who opposed the Master in the past had either joined Congress or left Akali politics for good. But the Sant with his large

mass base was bound to take over the Dal and reshape it.

Unlike the Master the Sant had nothing to do with percentage of the Hindus or Sikhs in Punjabi Suba. The Sant had all along expressed his conviction that there would be no Punjabi Suba at the cost of the Hindu-Sikh unity. He opined that Punjabi Suba without non-Sikhs would be of little benefit even to the Sikhs. While the Master faction opposed the socialist policies of the central Congress government, the Sant projected himself as a more progressive leader while supporting nationalization of banks, insurance companies and corporations. But the Sant remained silent on the issue of land reforms due to fear of losing the support of big farmers who had much influence in their villages.

The Sant was conservative in some respects too like he opposed some clauses of Hindu Code Bill. The Sant was not in favour of giving land share to daughter. This right, he feared would upset the whole social fabric and familial ties as the lure of land was the greatest cause of disputes in villages.

The Sant's era was full of linguistic parties I the whole country. The Sant can be compared to Dr. Ramallulu of Andhra Pradesh. Dr. Ramallulu's sacrifice and consequent formation of Andhra Pradesh inspired other linguistic groups to raise their respective demands. The Sant too had begun to appreciate the technique of fasting. The example of Mahatma Gandhi stood tall before him. The masses responded to the Sant's call more than expected. But mass agitations have a weakness in the form of the limited power of the popular endurance unlike the leadership leading them. Moreover, the Punjabis are known their volatile temperament which is good for the leadership until it can show some home to them. They cannot digest failure or an eventual hopelessness. At every such juncture, the Sant came out with his novel scheme of fasts which revitalized the public and pressurized the government.

As far as the close link between Sikh religion and politics was concerned, the Sant used to admit candidly that Sikhism was a way of life which naturally included politics. To those who questioned his secularism he asked, "Why do you take oath in the name of your respective religions in courtrooms, parliaments and trials? In order to justify the demands of the Sikhs, he quoted from the history, such events when the Sikhs opposed the mighty monarchs who wanted to impose a uniform code on the whole nation.

The Sant was humble and kept a low profile throughout his life. The seeds of self-abnegation were sown during his very childhood. It was this humility and low profile which later attracted attention of S.Harcharan Singh Hudiana at Ferozepur jail during anti-slogan Morcha of 1955. During Jap-Tap samagam at Anandpur Sahib, his humble inspired the Master.

Conflicts are inevitable in human society. Their emergence at any level in any period is quite common. There have been many methods adopted by human beings from time to time during the struggles. Gandhian methods emerge out as the most unique methods adopted for a struggle. The Sant adopted the fast for struggling against the unjust denial of Sikh demands.

The Sant with all the above virtues soon rose to the upper rung of the Dal, thanks to the long years of social service and the role of economic factor which was emphatic in making the change of guard possible. In Indian politics religious differences are used to mask real economic and political issues. Moreover, Indian politics fails to differentiate between communal ideology or the ideology of religious identity and religion as a belief system. This trend is sometimes broken usually by a combination of the economic and other immediate factor. Till early sixties, the Master was able to contain Sikh fundamentalist, separatists and moderators. But the incremental conformist group along with a maneuvered forced cooperation of

fundamentalists countered him by sheer political maneuvers. The Sant was epitome of this section who along with countering extremists, also contained Sikh fundamentalist by his charisma as a religious leader and a ardent social worker.

The etymological meaning of the word, the Sant is the one who has found the truth. The Sant have been part of rural Punjab life. In the past, they used to relieve the monotony of the village by carrying news and reading the sacred texts in a polished entertaining way. A British army officer in the 1920s noted that virtue in the 1920s noted that virtually every Sikh village welcomed Sant and encouraged them to stay. The Sants' potential was even recognized by the British.

Apart from the above, the Sant himself was imbibed with qualities that made people trust him and regard him with great respect.

Although, no fast unto death ended in death except that of Pheruman's, but the fasts undertaken by the Sant made a great impact on the government and the role of his fasts unto death cannot be understated.

He added a new technique to the fasts i.e., self immolation, as it was done by Buddhists monks in Vietnam and by Tamils in Sri Lanka. Although he is criticized for building Havan Kunds above the Holy Akal Takht but this single action cannot wipe all the imprints left by the Sant on the sands of time.

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The Statesman  
The Times of India  
The Tribune, Chandigarh  
The Week

## ***DECLARATION***

I hereby affirm that the work presented in the thesis entitled "**Social Welfare to Active Politics: A Case Study of Sant Fateh Singh**" is exclusively my own and there are no collaborators. It does not contain any work for which a degree/diploma has been awarded by any other University/Institution.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*It is with Divine grace that the long awaited opportunity in my life has come to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my mentors and well-wishers who inspired me, instilled confidence and courage in me and supported me throughout my period of research. My first thanks go to Dr. Jaspal Kaur Dhanju, Professor & Head, Department of History, Punjabi University, Patiala, who willingly accepted me as her pupil for the doctorate degree. She has been a source of great strength throughout my period of research. I have always felt overwhelmed by her clarity of mind, her dedication and commitment to the job in hand. I had the audacity of disturbing her even at odd hours. But for her constant support, I could not have thought of completing this work. More often than not, feelings and gratitude cannot be translated into words.*

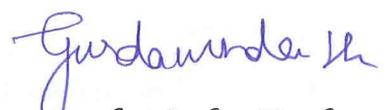
*My sincere thanks are due to Prof. Kulbir Singh Dhillon, Prof. Sukhninder Kaur Dhillon, Dr. Mohd. Idris, Dr. Balraj, Dr. Parneet Kaur, Dr. Sandeep Kaur and all the members of Department of History for their cooperation and help. I am also thankful to the staff of libraries that I visited during my research work, for helping me in locating and providing Xerox copies of valuable research papers from libraries.*

*Many friends and well wishers have lent me constant support for completing this work. I acknowledge their contribution gratefully.*

*I cannot adequately thank Dr. Gurnam Virk, Department of Social Work, Punjabi University, Patiala, for the successful completion of my thesis.*

*I am also thankful to Paramjit Singh, ex-office Incharge of Department of History for helping me in completing my official works.*

*For final printouts and set-up of my thesis Tanya's Documentation, near Punjabi University, Patiala is thankfully acknowledged. Their professionalism and dedication to work is greatly appreciated.*

  
Gurdawinder Singh

## PREFACE

Sant Fateh Singh is an important figure in the history of Punjab and remained at the helm of the affairs as far as the Akali politics is concerned during the period from 1960-72. While analyzing the events of this period, one cannot ignore the role played by the Sant in Punjab politics. His non-political background, his simplicity and honest to the purpose inspired many. The Sant's whole life was spent in social service and politics. The Sant's transparent dealings and sincerity of purpose inspired his followers. In the present thesis, an attempt has been made to evaluate this historical personality.

There are lot of misconceptions about birth, parentage and working style of Sant Fateh Singh. The Sant is charged with breaking of the fasts, which he started first for achieving Punjabi Suba and later for Chandigarh. All these charges need fresh inquiry and analysis. One needs to scrutinize whether he was made a scapegoat or he got his due for all the sacrifices he made. Such questions need to be settled which arise due to the lack of categorical statements by the contemporary authorities and non-exposure of some sources which lie unexplored.

The first chapter deals with historical background of the Punjabi Suba demand. The chapter traces the Punjabi Suba demand from 1948, when 23 legislators belonging to Akali Dal resolved that if the statutory safeguards demanded by them were not conceded, the Sikhs should be allowed to form a new province. The rise of agriculturist class within Akali Dal represented by the Sant has also been discussed in the chapter. The rural-urban Sikh divide in the Akali camp is also analyzed in the chapter.

The second chapter deals with early life, parentage and social service of the Sant. After describing his childhood and upbringing, his work as a social servant is explored. A brief narrative of his works as a social servant ranging from building Gurdwaras, schools, bridges is given. The Sant vociferously propagated against the evils presented in the Sikh society. His efforts to baptize maximum number of Sikhs are also narrated. The last portion of the chapter deals with literary works

of the Sant. An indepth study of the Sant's vernacular literature is made and a brief appraisal of his literary works is done.

The third chapter deals with the entry of the Sant into politics. The inspiration, motives and the factors necessitating his formal entry into politics are analysed. The Sant's political contribution under the leadership of the Master is objectively analysed. The differences in outlook and standpoint between the Sant and the Master have been properly analysed. The reasons that led to breaking of fasts by the Master and the Sant are fully analysed.

The fourth chapter deals with the activities of the Sant as the President of his separate Akali Dal. The factors which led to parting of ways between the Sant and the Master are analyzed. The events that led to the acceptance of the demand of Punjabi Suba have been analyzed. The Punjab Reorganization Bill has been analyzed and their effects on the future course of events also described.

The fifth chapter deals with the coalition governments led by the Akali Dal. The coalition partners, the common minimum programme, the election campaigning and the efforts of the Sant to make Akali Dal-Jan Sangh political alliance a reality, have been analyzed. The working of the coalition government, the internal bickerings within the coalition and the language question has been probed. The causes underlying the downfall of the first coalition have been objectively probed. The differences between the offices bearers and the Akali high command which accentuated into more serious problems are also analytically examined. The chapter also deals with the second coalition government under the patronage of the Sant. The chapter discusses at length, the working of this government. The last part of the work deals with the inference and results of the study undertaken.

Although it is difficult to evaluate a historical personality in terms of its political contribution yet an attempt has been made to objectively evaluate the political and social contribution of Sant Fateh Singh.

  
**Gurdawinder Singh**

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