

**ETHNICITY, PARTY SYSTEM
AND
COALITION WORKING IN PUNJAB**

BY
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Dedicated
to
My Parents



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CERTIFICATE

I have the pleasure to certify that Miss Sutapa Lahiry, MPhil student of the Department of Political Science, Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawahar Lal Nehru University has pursued her research work and prepared the present dissertation entitled “Ethnicity, Party System and Coalition Working in Punjab”, under my supervision and guidance. The present dissertation is the result of her own research and to the best of my knowledge, no part of it has earlier comprised any monograph, dissertation or book. This is being submitted to the Jawahar Lal Nehru University for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE.

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CHAPTER I

**ETHNICITY, PARTY SYSTEM
AND COALITION POLITICS
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INTRODUCTION : ETHNICITY, PARTY SYSTEM AND COALITION POLITICS IN PUNJAB

Punjab, once the most prosperous state of India, plagued by the terrorist activities during the past decade gives a clear signal of its returning to normalcy. The Assembly elections in Punjab, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Shriomani Akali Dal - Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) alliance have ushered in a new era of hope for the overall growth of the Indian province which has undergone a long period of uncertainty and turbulence. After almost 14 years of foreign sponsored militancy and terrorism, Punjab is again poised for a sustained period of growth and development. Once again coalition or accommodation model of politics¹ has returned in Punjab. The coalition politics which emerged in Punjab in 1967 and 1969 (post-electoral alliance between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh and the other parties in Punjab except Congress) and in 1977 (pre-electoral alliance between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh), once again re-emerged in 1997, when pre-electoral alliance was formed between Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) and Bhartiya Janta party on the basis of a Common Minimum Programme.

The people overwhelmingly voted for a genuine and lasting peace, progress and prosperity of Punjab, by voting for the SAD-BJP alliance. The alliance recorded a historic success, winning 93 seats with 45.8% votes. The thumping victory for the alliance has been possible because it received support from all sections of society. Not only 66.8 percent of the Sikhs, but 44.1 percent of the Hindus and 28.2 percent of dalits also voted for the SAD-BJP alliance. With 27.9 percent dalits voting for Congress, its support remained low even among Hindus and Sikhs. About 66 percent of

the farmers, 54.7 percent of the white-collar employees and 54.4 percent of the students voted for the SAD-BJP alliance. The support for the Congress remained low even among farmers and white-collar employees.

Thus, the question emerges as to what necessiated the formation of pre-electoral BJP-SAD alliance in 1997 and what are the reasons for its thumping victory? The present enquiry is located within the above premise and, it seeks to explore the reasons for the emergence of coalition politics in Punjab, and to investigate it's working, with a focus on the present coalition government in Punjab. These are broadly speaking two basic objectives of the dissertation. The present objectives of the dissertation can be analysed from different points of view. However, we undertook the task of studying it from the point of view of ethnicity and ethnic groups, and it has tried to show that no permanent resolution to the problems of Punjab can be attained until the political dynamics are altered to produce a stable single party or a stable governing coalition, both of which should draw support from Sikhs and Hindus, united in a desire to promote the interest of people of Punjab.

Language and religion have been among the major symbols of group identity in South Asia during the past century. They have competed with each other for the loyalties of the hundreds of millions of people of the Indian subcontinent, with narrower loyalties of caste, kinship and locality, and the broader loyalties to the developing states of South Asian region. The nature of Indian society and politics is that of a multi-ethnic society containing many ethnic groups and nationalities moving towards the development of a society in which grand process of both social differentiation and assimilation between peoples are taking place. The nature of society and politics in the state of

Punjab is that of continuity and change. At a broad level of generalizations, continuity is manifested socially, in the central importance of religious identity in interaction with other religious identities; economically, via the dominance of particular caste/tribal groups as exemplified by the Jats in the countryside and merchant groups in urban areas; and politically, by the factions which must bridge and accommodate the diversities in order to construct the alliance systems necessary to protect or advance the group's position or achieve desired policy outcomes.²

Before moving any further, it is necessary here to introduce the definition of the term ethnic group and ethnicity. The term ethnic group refers broadly to any group of individuals who have some objective characteristics in common.³ Ethnic characteristics refer more to language, culture, territory, diet and dress than to the role in the division of labour. Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by De Vos as, consisting of the "subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups".⁴ According to Barth, an ethnic group is viewed as a self defined group based on subjective factors, which are chosen by the members from their past history or present existing conditions. The cultural traits so selected provide for the creation and maintenance of a socio-cultural boundary vis a vis other ethnic groups with whom they interact⁵. An ethnic group that uses cultural symbols in this way is a subjectively self conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group. In other words, the term community is used to refer to ethnic groups whose members have developed an awareness of a common identity and have attempted to define the boundaries

of the group.⁶ Ethnicity or ethnic identity also involves in addition to subjective self consciousness, a claim to status and recognition, either as a superior group or as a group at least equal to other groups. Ethnic groups that use ethnicity to make demands in the political arena for the alteration in their status, in their economic well being, in their civil rights, or in their educational opportunities, are engaged in a form of interest group politics and sought to improve the well being of group members as individuals.⁷ Some other ethnic groups in other context go further and demand that corporate rights be conceded to the group as a whole, that they be given not just individual educational opportunities on the same basis as others, but that they be given control over the public system of education in their areas of concentration so that they can teach history, language and culture of their group to their own children.⁸

An ethnic community becomes a nationality or a nation when it mobilizes for political action and becomes politically significant,⁹ that is when it makes political demands, and achieves a significant measure of success by its own efforts. Paul R. Brass argued that the term nation or nationality can be applied to an ethnic group whose political goals do not necessarily include separate sovereignty. A nation, according to Smith, "is a large vertically integrated and territorially mobile group featuring common citizenship rights and collective sentiments together with one (or more) common characteristics, which differentiate its members from those of similar groups with whom they stand in relations of alliance or conflict."¹⁰ Nationality formation has been defined as the process by which objectively distinct groups of people or ethnic groups acquire subjective self consciousness and political significance either within an existing state or

within a separate state. Ethno-nationalism, therefore, is the search for and expression within the nation-state of a particular ethnic, cultural, religious or regional identity, and can take many forms ranging from demands for minority rights, regional autonomy, to wars for national liberation. In Punjab it has taken the form of Sikh religious assertion with demands for redefining federalism with some separatist tendencies.¹¹

The movement toward communal consciousness in an ethnic group is accompanied by process of assimilation and inclusion, as well as differentiation or exclusion. India contains a series of parallel ethnic structures each of which is characterized by internal hierarchial ethnic group relations. That is, the predominant pattern in India is one of segmentation in which each language, tribal or religious group contains within itself a complete societal division of labour and also contains internal caste groups which may or may not be successfully assimilated into the broader ethnic structure. There are in India ethnic group within ethnic groups so that, for example, process of assimilation and differentiation may be going on at one level between competing language groups, while within each language group similar processes may be affecting the relation between different castes in the same language group.

The underlying basis of the Sikh political aspirations in Punjab has been widespread sense of group identity. Intensified ethnic and religious identification for all major groupings in Punjab received its major impetus through the process of revivalism and renaissance beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century following comparable developments elsewhere in India. Religious conflict between Mughal rulers and Hindu and Sikh

subjects created the context of deepening communal orientations, and the reformulation of Sikhism from the pacifism of Guru Nanak in the fifteenth century to the militancy of Guru Gobind Singh in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The growth of internal solidarity among Sikh has been accompanied by the process of boundary definition and boundary maintenance and selective adoption of aspect of Sikh history, culture and religion as special marks of the true Sikh community. In Punjab we have two objective criteria of ethnic identification. One cleavage has been more important than other : religion has been the primary line of cleavage and language, a secondary one.

The political elites choose the cultural symbols upon which they base their claims for group rights, and they make a determination as to which symbol is decisive, and they then work to make other cleavages congruent with the primary cleavage. Therefore, political conflict may induce cumulated cleavages just as the reverse process may occur in which cumulated cleavages produce political conflict. In the former case, the members of a group may change their objective marks of distinction, even such presumed givens as their language or their religion. In Punjab, language has not been a barrier, in fact, to communication between religious groups, but has been turned into a symbolic barrier by political elites seeking to advance the interests of their religious communities. A religious group seeking political dominance will often change its language for political ends. The Sikhs added Punjabi in Gurumukhi script to their self definition and then made their political claims for a Punjabi Suba on the basis of language, where upon many Punjabi speaking Hindus decided that they did not speak Punjabi i.e. they disown the Punjabi language

and that therefore the demand for a Punjabi Suba was not a legitimate one.¹²

Every ethnic group which seeks to build a sense of consciousness at some point creates a myth of its origin and destiny which is designed to instill pride among its members in its past and to create confidence in its ability to mould its own future.¹³ Akali leadership has sedulously cultivated among the Sikh masses a paranoid discrimination complex, charges of discrimination and injustice against Sikh figure prominently in party resolutions and public speeches of party leaders.

A self conscious communal group does not come into being until there is a socially mobilized population to whom the myth of group solidarity can be communicated. Elites in two ways can process social change and social mobilization affecting the groups they wish to lead. On the one hand, they develop means of communication with the already mobilized and the newly mobilizing population. At the same time they are prepared to compete with other elites manipulating other symbols to capture the allegiance of the newly mobilizing and unmobilized groups. In Punjab, before independence, the social context of political competition was somewhat different. In pre-partition tri-communal province, the Muslims though they were educationally and economically less advantaged than either the Hindus or Sikhs, were politically dominant. The Hindu and Sikh communities were both engaged in rapid process of internal social change and communication, which were moving both communities towards more intensive internal communication and sharper external boundary definition. Segmentation of two communities was increasing as was competition between them, but the major confrontation between Sikh and Hindu communal forces did not occur until after partition when Muslim

population was removed and the Sikh population was concentrated in East Punjab. The social context of Sikh-Hindu political competition now became in the Punjabi region, the classic case of a rapidly mobilizing predominantly rural Sikh community confronting with more urbanized Hindu community.

The particular symbol of group identity which are selected and the character of myth which is constructed depend greatly upon the elite group which do the selecting and myth construction. Whether or not a nationalist movement originates within a group, its success and failure, and the form it takes depend upon the character of the elites who have economic and political influence in the society, on whether they are willing to take the lead, and on how capable they are of mobilizing broader segments of the community. Throughout colonial dominated Asia and Africa, the imperial power relied upon and used as collaborators in their rule traditional elite groups- chiefs, princes and landlords.¹⁴ In Punjab, Sikh religious and political leaders struggled to achieve as much political weight as possible before partition when the Sikh community formed a small minority in a multi-communal province. Unable to achieve a position of dominance in public life of the provinces in a situation in which Muslims controlled the political arena and Hindus dominated the economic life of the cities, Sikh religious and political leaders made the most of their rural economic strength in the political arena and built a separate institutional base for their activities in politics through their control of gurudwaras. Establishment of the SGPC, the Religious Parliament of the Sikh's provided a community political arena solely for Sikhs distinctive from and, at times, competitive with the secular Vidhan Sabha Assembly political system. In such a situation, religion became the most powerful symbol in the Sikh

movement. The leadership of Sikh separatism has been the most cohesive of all in terms of consistency of goals, though the elite composition of the Sikh community has changed over time. While the early leadership of the Singh Sabha came from the rich landed gentry and the orthodox¹⁵; during the Akali movement in 1920s, the leadership was broadened to include middle class professionals such as Master Tara Singh. However the backbone of Sikh leadership continued to comprise a combination of Sikh religious leaders and the rich Sikh farmers who dominate the SGPC.

In a developing society, where ethnic identities have not been fully formed, it matters a great deal what kinds of political organizations come to dominate the political arena. The characteristics of political organizations will influence the kinds of appeals and demands that are made. They will also play a role in shaping group consciousness, in defining and redefining the ethnic group.¹⁶ In the development of Sikh communal consciousness and in the successful achievement of a Punjabi Suba, political associations and organizations played a decisive role. The Akali Dal in Punjab built an unshakable base of nationalist support through its ability to call upon the resources of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC), a body that manages all the Sikh temples in the province and the formation of which can be seen as the single most important event in the institutionalization of Sikh politics¹⁷. The formation of the SGPC in 1920 provided the community with a solid institutional foundation in Punjab from which its political action arm, the Akali Dal, could move towards the articulation and achievement of political advantages for the Sikh community. Legitimization of the dominant group within the Sikh community of Punjab, accordingly, stems from the control of the SGPC system. Its physical and institutional

resources, communication network, and financial support provide a firm base for the Akali Dal apart from the secular political system in which all communities participate. There is no comparable institutionalized expression for the Hindu community. Arya Samaj and Santan Dharm organizations do provide sets of resources, particularly in education, but no over-arching community institutional umbrella such as the SGPC for establishing the dominance of a particular group or alliance structure.¹⁸

Government policies and institutional mechanism may be critical factors in influencing a group's capacity or desire to survive as a separate entity, its self definition, and its ultimate goals. Government may choose to follow explicitly pluralist policies and solutions to state-nation relations by establishing political structures such as federalism, or by conceding to different ethnic groups the right to receive education through the medium of their mother tongue, or government may also indirectly influence the development of ethnic conflict through policies that distribute state resources and opportunities for government employment. India is a developing multi-national state or a state containing a number of dualized nationalities without a dominant neutrality, in which the central leadership of the country seeks to accommodate the political demands of diverse language, religious and cultural groups in ways which do not detract from the unity and integrity of the country. Indian government made it clear that the regional demands based on language and culture will be accommodated, but that regional demands which are explicitly based on religious difference will not be accepted. The Sikhs did achieve a separate majority state i.e Punjab, but they achieved it only after a transfer of leadership in Akali movement from Master Tara Singh to Sant Fateh Singh, who explicitly rejected the religious basis of demand and insisted that

the demand was only for the creation of a separate Punjabi speaking state. Politically, the Sikhs did achieve a state in which they are dominant, but in theory they were awarded not a Sikh state but a Punjabi speaking state in which they must share power with both Punjabi speaking and Hindi speaking Hindus.

The process of nationality formation in multi-ethnic societies is not necessarily incompatible with political integration even in regimes of competitive political parties where the parties are permitted to articulate the demands of ethnic groups. In post independence period, it has proved possible for mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic political parties to cooperate, even form coalitions after elections and reach agreement on controversial matters affecting their cultural rights or the claims of different groups. In this big and bustling political system based on universal adult franchise and free wheeling competition it has, however, proven extremely difficult for any political party to capture the solitary support of a single ethnic group. Several parties have been overwhelmingly mono-ethnic in composition and in popular support, but few ethnic groups have been represented by or given their support to only one political party. The striving for power in multi-ethnic societies with parliamentary systems tends to promote inter communal collaboration either before or after elections.¹⁹ The natural tendency of politicians in pursuit of power is to search for new alignments or diversions that will provide them with base to achieve it. The more open and competitive political system, the more likely it is that, in the long run, political divisions will develop even within majority ethnic groups that dominate minorities. The willingness of competing communal elites to share political power is of greater importance in maintaining the political cohesion of multi

ethnic and multi national societies.

Religion and Language are not the only symbols in Punjab politics in the post independence era, but caste has been a predominant symbol. In Punjab, there is multiplicity not only of groups, but of ethnic features also, which are not always congruent and cumulative. The system as a whole is segmented one characterized by the existence of parallel ethnic structures, which are in turn divided hierarchically within themselves. Akali Dal and the Hindu communal organizations i.e. Jan Sangh (now BJP), RSS etc. which created a community or group or ethnic consciousness among the Hindu and Sikh communities in Punjab, failed in their effort to create the same consciousness among the Scheduled Caste Sikhs and Hindus, who in terms of Mark Jurgensmeyer has developed their own distinct "cultures of deprivation"²⁰. The long struggle for Punjabi Suba did not bring the Akali Dal the degree of political power it might have expected in a Sikh majority state. Even after the creation of Punjabi Suba, the Akali Dal on the one hand has not been able to achieve cohesion; factionalism and splinter groups keep on developing within so that the Akali Dal has seldom, if ever, been monolithic party. A narrowly based, parochial irredentist approach-a purist strategy-can mobilize Sikhs on a religious, ethnic basis for such movements as temple reform, a Sikh majority or Punjabi speaking state, and other which are included under the code term of the Panth (religion) being in danger. But even under these circumstances, it is difficult to mobilize the entire heterogeneous Sikh community, especially the Scheduled Castes. Moreover, it becomes virtually impossible to forge sufficient links with Hindus so as to win a majority in the state Assembly. Irredentism facilitates a militant, extremist strategy with religion as the core thrust that can mobilize Sikhs, but makes it virtually impossible to

obtain political dominance through the electoral process. The strategy of accommodation makes it possible for Akali Dal to extend beyond its SGPC and Jat Sikh support base so as to achieve power in the Assembly.²¹

A complete polarization of parties is prevented in Punjab by two features of society and politics. One is that the Scheduled Castes constitutes a large and relatively non-attached third force, for whose support all parties compete. The second is that no party has succeeded in monopolizing the support of any single community. Hindus divide among Congress, the Jan Sangh/BJP, the SCF/RPI and the independents; the Sikhs among the Congress, the Akali Dal and CPI; Scheduled Caste among all parties. The parties in Punjab do not simply reflect basic religious and caste antagonisms, but they divide and deflect them. The system is not completely fragmented and compartmentalized into congruent cultural political segments. Communal coalition building is the strategy of most parties and internal political differentiation within each community the result of this process.²² The consequence of such a system is some discontinuity between the electoral bases of parties and the necessities of coalition building in the state. As a result of this, such collaboration or coalition building may be done in the electoral arena itself by parties such as the Congress which strive to appeal to all or most ethnic groups in the society, or by parties like Jan Sangh/BJP and Akali Dal who may form a pre-electoral alliance on the basis of a common minimum programme, or it may be done in the legislative arena after the elections are over by parties such as the Jan Sangh or the Akali Dal that appeal to only one community during the election, but combine to achieve power thereafter.

Such collaboration first emerged in 1967, then in 1977 and more recently in 1997. The decline of Congress and emergence of Akali Dal as an important political force in Punjab in 1967 can apparently be traced to the overall anti-Congress wave and the success of regional parties as a result of inner party factionalism in the Congress all over the nation.²³ In 1967 and 1969 Akali Dal's principal alliance partner had been Jan Sangh, CPI, Republican party and few independent members. Between 1967 and 1972, two Akali –Jan Sangh coalition governments were formed and both were brought down by factional quarrels within the Akali Dal. The fall of the first coalition was engineered directly by the Congress. In the case of second, the Congress threw its support, ineffectually as it turned out, to the Gurnam Singh group that was toppled by the dominant group in Akali Dal. The Akali-Janta (in which Jan Sangh was a dominant faction in Punjab)- CPM alliance was again able to win a landslide victory in the June 1977 Assembly election. The installation of the Akali-Janta ministry after the dark era of emergency was hailed by the people of Punjab.²⁴ In spite of the strains put on the coalition by the stance of the Akali Dal hardliners on the Sikh Nirankari conflict in 1978, the model continued till the split in the Janta Party in 1979. The decision of the Akali leadership to support Charan Singh led Janta-S (Lok Dal) faction government at the Centre forced the Janta Party to withdraw from the coalition government in Punjab.²⁵

The abandoning of coalitional politics since 1979 brought the Sikh-Hindu divide on the forefront. The gulf between them further widened due to the decision of the Akali Dal to launch 'Dharam Yudh' in 1982 for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. The inability of the

Congress leadership at the Centre and the Akali leadership from Punjab to arrive at a negotiated settlement contributed to the growth of militancy and secessionist movement in the state under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Nayar and Kushwant Singh argued that Giani Zail Singh, Darbara Singh and Sanjay Gandhi are all linked to the building up of Bhindranwale as a counterforce to the Akali Dal. But later did they realise at that time that they were creating a Frankenstein.²⁶ Sikh revivalism in the form of fundamentalism energized the movement as Bhindranwale exercised the power of defining a true Sikh. Politically, Punjab's normal authority systems had ceased to function with any effectiveness by summer 1984. Operation Bluestar (1984) mounted by the Indian military sealed off Punjab from the rest of the India. Communalism between Hindus and Sikhs flared in response to Operation Bluestar. Sikhs, including moderates, displayed a rare unanimity in condemning the military assault on the Golden Temple. Hindus tended to be equally ardent in defending the necessity of the action. Noted journalist Nayar and Singh, said 'Punjab's tragedy is that there are no Punjabis any more in Punjab-only Sikhs and Hindus.'²⁷ After Operation Bluestar and Bhindranwale's death, Punjab continued to be under intensified communal identities. National elections in December 1984, from one perspective, could be seen as further widening the communal divide. In the post electoral phase (1984), Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made an attempt to bring peace in Punjab. The Punjab problem was replaced by the Rajiv Longowal Accord. The Akali Dal for the first time won the 1985 Assembly elections with an absolute majority. A moderate accommodative party had been refashioned by Longowal and Barnala. Appeals to communal harmony were given substance with the election of three Hindus and one Muslim on the Akali

Dal ticket. Yet, maintaining this accommodative style of political leadership became difficult. Akali factionalism did not dissipate. Terrorism regained its momentum, followed by the dissolution of the Punjab Assembly in 1988. This was further followed by Operation Black Thunder in May 1988 and Presidents Rule in Punjab. Finally Assembly elections were held in Punjab in 1992 which was boycotted by the Akali Dal. Congress government was formed under Beant Singh in Punjab. However, in all these years no party in Punjab was able to bridge the Hindu-Sikh communal divide.

The 1997 Assembly election in Punjab, however, once again restored the coalition or accommodation model of politics in Punjab and made an attempt to bridge the Hindu-Sikh communal divide. The leader of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) realised the need for having an alliance with the BJP for securing Hindu votes at the time of the 1997 elections to Punjab Assembly. Jan Sangh and later its BJP incarnation have been Badal's traditional favourites for alliance because of the compulsions of the state politics. The Akali Dal cannot ally with the Congress which is its only rival in the power game in Punjab. The BJP being political foes of the Congress are natural allies who can help each other to gain power in Punjab with BJP as a junior partner.²⁸ The SAD-BJP alliance in 1997 Assembly elections in Punjab recorded a historic success, winning 93 seats with 45.8 percent votes.

The SAD-BJP government led by the Chief Minister, Mr. Badal, is the seventh non-Congress government in Punjab. The result of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha election reveals more than one trend. If on the one hand, the results add to the Congress erosion similar to other parts of country, on the other

hand the thumping majority of the SAD-BJP alliance signifies that the people of Punjab have too much of expectations from the new government.²⁹

Regarding the nature of functioning, the present BJP-SAD government in Punjab have failed to stand upto the expectations of the people. Instead of providing an efficient government, Badal has been both vacuous and ineffective. Once elected to power, the government almost completely overlooked the socio-economic and political demands of the state. The fortune of the state is in throes of a great financial crisis. The fortunes of the Punjab peasantry supposed to be the backbone of the Akali Dal are at the lowest ebb. There is an acute disillusionment, disenchantment and cynicism in the Punjab countryside, as is evident from a large number of suicides committed on account of the failure of the cotton crop, rural indebtedness and lack of employment opportunities. The adoption of the populist measures like free power to farmers only deprived the farmers of whatever electricity they were getting. It alienated the traders who are denied election promise of octroi abolition. There is growing alienation among the masses due to rampant corruption, nepotism, unemployment and non-governance.³⁰ The LokPal has been revived. However, it has not been given teeth.

It has taken less than two years for the internecine feud to break out within the ruling Akali Dal in Punjab. The solidarity which appeared to hold since the formation of the government in February 1997 gave way with SGPC President Tohra demanding that the Chief Minister Badal to quit the party post and devote his full time to govern the state. The feud ultimately led to a split in the ruling Akali Dal in Punjab, with expelled leader Gurcharan Singh Tohra forming a parallel outfit. The confrontation between Badal and Tohra has shifted the focus from good governance to competitive religiosity³¹. This

sudden and unforeseen development is bound to impair the functioning of the Akali-BJP combine in Punjab. This may affect the party's alliance with the BJP and bring about fresh political alignments in the region. The recent crisis may also give fillip to the militant elements in the Punjab. The effect of the recent crisis within the Akali Dal and the lacklustre performance of the government can be seen in the results of the bad performance of the party in the Lok Sabha elections, when the combine could just win 3 seats.

In spite of the lacklustre performance of the government, the age old harmony between Hindus and Sikhs is back with the formation of coalition government in Punjab. Prakash Singh Badal represent the moderate force in Punjab. Despite his certain administrative and political flaws, the people look upto him for fulfilling the promises he has made.³² The present government has managed to stave off terrorism which is no mean achievement.

Another welcome decision of the Badal government is to set up the Punjab Human Rights Commission. Abolition of land revenue is another promise fulfilled. Writing off of the huge loan which Punjab had to pay to the Centre on account of the large expenditure incurred on fighting terrorism is indeed a big gain for Punjab.³³ The Vajpayee led government recently bailed out the Akali ministry by giving an emergency assistance of Rs. 350 crore to the state government to save it from insolvency following the RBI's order stopping payment of Punjab government's cheque.

Thus what emerges or follows out of the above discussion is: firstly the increased segmentation/cleavages between the two ethnic communities i.e. Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab; and the existence of parallel ethnic structures i.e. caste along which the bulk of population is found to live, are the basic

reasons for the emergence of coalition government in Punjab. Secondly, although the present Akali-BJP coalition government in Punjab has succeeded to the extent that it has been able to stave off terrorism and provide political stability in terms of continuance of the coalition government in office for more than 3 years, but economically Punjab is a financially broken state, with its debt rising with the passage of each year. People also seemed to be fed up with the government and has already started thinking in terms of an alternative government. The elaboration of these hypotheses and development of measures to test it will be the major concern throughout this dissertation.

Although there has been an upsurge in the scholarly and popular literature on Punjab politics during the past so many years, but there are not many authoritative works on coalition politics in Punjab except a few. Infact this is one of the main reasons which inspired me to take up the task for studying.

In what follows, we enumerate some of the well known authors contribution in this field —

The most authoritative work is the one by Paul R. Brass. Brass in his book "Language, Religion and Politics in North India" presents a psychological analysis of Punjab politics from the standpoint of ethnic sub nationalism. He considers national conciousness an extension of ethnic conciousness among the Sikhs. He stated that since the communal parties organization and electoral appeal centered around the community, they formed electoral alliances with each other during elections and governing coalition afterwards. Brass compared the coalition politics during the 1967-71 to the Dutch system in which different political parties, reflecting the religious and class cleavages

of society, dominated the electoral and parliamentary arena. Brass, in fact, had argued that the striving for power in multi-ethnic societies with parliamentary systems tends to promote inter-communal collaboration either before or after elections.

Baldev Raj Nayar's book 'Minority Politics in the Punjab' is also one of the most earliest and authoritative account of Punjab politics, published in 1966, covers the period before the reorganisation of the states in India. The book in general deals with the question of nation building in India. It seeks to understand the basis and dynamics of one specific demand for the formation of new state out of the territories of Punjab in North West India. It examines the nature of demand, its origin, strategies employed by the Akali Dal to secure it and the prospects of its achievement. It also examined the status of the Congress Party in the state and strategies of this party to mobilize political support. Nayar in his book focussed a great deal of attention on the development of the Hindu-Sikh relations since the pre-independence days, which to a large extent is responsible for shaping the nature of Punjab politics in the post-independence period. He concluded that an important political implication of the social diversity in the Punjab is that, given a democratic framework, only a political party or coalition, which is secular and broad based, can remain in power in the government of the state.

Paul Wallace in his article "Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab" argues that ethnic-religious sub-political systems can exist side by side with secular systems and compete constructively within the same geographic area. In the Indian context, Punjab provides a striking case study of political



coexistence that has changed over time from a conflictual and periodically repressive interaction, to one that increasingly has functioned as an accommodation developmental model. Wallace in his article focuses on the growth, development and symbiotic relationship between the organized religious centre of the Sikh religion, the SGPC and the Akali Dal. The SGPC, however, comprises only one of the two major competing political systems within which Sikhs contest. Struggle in and capture of power in the state assembly or "secular" political system also is a necessity or compulsion of the Akali Dal. Since independence, and following the advent of Punjabi Suba in 1966, the Congress Party has been the major competitor along with the Akali Dal in this larger political system and has dominated under conditions of pure competition. Electoral alliances and collaborations with other parties become a political necessity particularly for Akali Dal. In essence, the Akali Dal would appear to succeed in the Assembly system only when it follows the political model of broad accommodation with every significant parties in Punjab.

Paul Wallace in his another article "Religious and Ethnic Politics : Political Mobilization in Punjab" argues that the religious and ethnic mobilization for at least one hundred years provide a basic framework for understanding the cross sectional structure of Punjab politics. A process of change and acculturation has taken and is taking place within the framework of their religious and ethnic groups, but within the context of a developing economy and the structure of cross-cutting factions. However, while religious and ethnic polities continue to be effective agents for mobilization in Punjab, but neither in a simplistic manner nor as the sole basis for domination. In particular, rural-urban cleavages coincide more neatly with religious community in contemporary Punjab. Nonetheless while Sikh Jats



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may be the single most important social group in rural area, and Hindu merchant castes in urban areas, political dominance continues to necessitate bridging and accommodating major identities. Moreover, economic and social change further complicates the Punjab mosaic. Scheduled Castes and artisans are increasingly important both economically and politically. None is hegemonic within the larger canvas of Punjab. Homogenous social groups, in a political sense, do not exist. Sikh Jats are split among at least three significant political parties and Hindus between two. Each political party, moreover, is composed of sub-coalitions which provide an even more important sense of identity for its members. In such a situation accommodation remains essential to a workable political process within Punjab and achieving political dominance within it.

Harish K. Puri in his article "Akali Politics: Emerging Compulsions" argued that men do not live only by one monolithic identity. They have multiple, divergent and even conflicting demands and identities because of varied economic and social interests. Akali Dal has no other way of aggregating the interests even amongst the Sikhs, than through struggle in and capture of power in the secular political system that requires both alliances and secular credentials in competition with particularly the Congress.

Dalip Singh in his book "Dynamics of Punjab Politics" analysed and explained Punjab politics in the context of the heritage of the state as also its distinctive character, keeping in mind the cleavages of religion, caste and language. He presents a study of the various trends and patterns in Punjab politics, particularly in the parliamentary and coalitional politics of Punjab.

Gopal Singh in his edited book 'Punjab Today' argues that the Akali

Dal has not been able to come to power alone in Punjab because of the presence of different factions within the Akali Dal and also because the Scheduled Caste Sikhs are hostile to Akali capitalist farmers and oppose them politically also.

Satya M. Rai in his article "The Structure of Regional Politics in the Punjab", argued that in the post 1966 period, the Punjab made a rapid advance in the economic field both in the industrial and agricultural sectors. The Punjab affluent class (both Sikh and Hindus) felt that they need wider areas for advancement, and a philosophy based on narrow communalism and regionalism will not pay. This in the main had been the ideological thrust of the political parties especially Akali Dal and Jan Sangh, in the post 1966 period. Also, the Akalis who claimed to be the sole representatives of Sikh interests had seen through the five successive elections that they did not had an exclusive electoral appeal even among the Sikhs. Consequently, the post independence years saw frequent permutations and combinations among the parties (particularly Akali Dal and Jan Sangh) on the eve of every general and state election.

A.S. Narang in his book 'Storm Over the Sutlej : The Akali Politics' provides an analysis of the changing structure of Punjab politics after independence, in which the demand for a Punjabi Suba emerged. The study is a useful source of information and reflects a comprehensive grasp of the electoral politics, factional conflicts and ideology of the Akali Dal. He argued that the Punjabi Suba, a Sikh majority state, became a reality in 1966 without the dreaded consequence of political disintegration for India. To the contrary Sikh cultural nationalism become more moderate and accommodating. Akali Dal provided evidence, of being more efficacious in secular contexts and in

regard to broader issues of political and economic development.

My work on the subject included in the dissertation is divided into five chapters. In the Introductory Chapter/Chapter I, co-relationship between ethnicity and party system, which led to the emergence of the coalition politics in Punjab is sought to be established.

Chapter II titled 'Hindu-Sikh Relations, and Party Politics in Punjab upto 1967' explores the genesis and growth of Hindu-Sikh communal cleavages in Punjab, both in pre-independence and post-independence period and post-reorganization period (i.e. 1966 onwards). The manner in which communalism of one group fed the communalism of other groups is discussed here. Three sets of symbol, i.e. historical symbols derived from the history of Sikh kingdoms, the religious symbol to define the boundary between Sikhs and Hindus and the linguistic symbol which has associated the Sikhs with Punjabi in Gurumukhi script, have been used by the Sikh communal leader to create communal consciousness. Linguistic division between the Hindus and Sikhs (Hindus in Devnagri script and Sikhs in Gurumukhi script) began to be used as a basis for the demand to create a separate Punjabi speaking province. Although, the achievement of the demand for the Punjabi Suba was the culmination of Sikh political aspirations in Punjab, yet it failed to create a heterogeneous society in Punjab. Hindus still remain an important independent community and the Scheduled Caste remained to be won over by the political parties of either community. All the political parties in Punjab i.e. Congress, Communist, Akali Dal, Jan Sangh / BJP with their definite and clear cut support bases failed to win the majority in the Assembly without following some kind of coalition or accommodational model of politics, which is pursued both by the Congress Party by appealing to both the communities

and by Akali Dal and Jan Sangh/BJP as pre-electoral or post-electoral alliance to form the government in the Assembly.

Chapter III is titled 'Politics of Coalition Building in Punjab in 1960s and 1970s'. The emergence and working of coalition ministries in Punjab in 1967-69 and 1977-80 is documented here. The coalition era in Punjab (1967 to 71 and 1977-80) exhibited a distinctive pattern of political development. From a multi-party coalition system, it moved towards the two party coalition systems. Punjab experienced a multi-party coalition government comprising seven political parties (divided by diverse political ideologies). The experience of first coalition government paved the way for the establishment of a viable coalition government that comprised of two parties i.e. Akali Dal and Jan Sangh in 1969. A third model of coalition system came into existence after the June 1977 Assembly elections, which can be termed as a majority party coalition government. Although Akali Dal had bagged an absolute majority in the Assembly, it decided to have a coalition ministry with the Janta Party to ensure communal harmony in the state. The intra-party conflict especially the factionalism within the ruling Akali Dal, and the Congress Party consistently operates so as to topple the inter-communal Sikh Hindu coalition in Punjab.

'Revival of Coalition Politics in Punjab in 1990s' constitutes Chapter IV. The causes and reasons for the revival of coalition government in Punjab are analysed. The Akali-BJP combine in the 1997 Punjab Assembly election had the highest ever performance. The Akali Dal (B) alone won 75 seats, highest ever by the Akalis in the state. The BJP in alliance with the Akali Dal (B) also won 18 seats. The Congress (I) was badly mauled. However the euphoria of the election result did not last for long. The Akali-BJP government almost immediately became trapped by its own populist menu of objectives

and assurances announced during the 1997-98 elections. The new regime vowed to provide free canal water for irrigation and free power to operate tube-wells, create more employment avenues, curbs on nepotism, construction of houses for the poor, abolition of octroi and simplification of Sales Tax etc. While some of these promises were not fulfilled, the government in their attempt to fulfill some others like free water and power has pushed itself into a debt trap. Now, Punjab is in a state of financial breakdown. The expenditure of the government has exceeded its revenue. The peoples faith in the government dwindled. Besides this, once again one witnessed intra-party conflict within the ruling Akali Dal, leading to the creation of a separate faction led by Tohra (AISAD), which played a decisive role in reducing the number of Akali Dal (B) -BJP seats to 3 in the 1999 Parliamentary election. However, towards the end of 1999, the Punjab government has revised its previous policy of populist measures, and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Central Government. The Punjab government has already stopped giving free electricity. Subsidies also has been reduced to a great extent.

Conclusion is included in Chapter V. Essential points emanating from the matters in Chapter I to IV lead to the following:- A plural and fragmented society of Punjab on the basis of ethnicity, religion and caste, intra-party accommodation or coalition building by different parties (Akali Dal and Jan Sangh/BJP) or accommodative politics by a single party (Congress) itself by appealing to all communities is and has become an essential feature of Punjab politics. As Congress was never and is still not a domineering party in Punjab and as Akali Dal failed to establish its dominance in the state, the coalition building by Akali Dal with other parties like Jan Sangh/BJP is the

only way out. Secondly, the nature and style of coalition working in Punjab suggest that it can be broadly discerned into two types of period. While the coalition governments formed in 1960s and 1970s can be classified as conflictual type, the present coalition government in Punjab is much more moderate in its style of functioning. Thirdly, while the people can be mobilised only to a certain extent on the basis of ethnic identities, the stretching of the ethnic issues too far for mobilisation can only lead to disharmony and chaos. In Punjab, the various segments of Akali Dal failed to mobilise even the entire Sikh community solely on the basis of ethnic issues. Lately, this has been realised by the Akali Dal leaders also. Thus with the passage of time the ethnic issues have been relegated in the background with economic issues occupying the center stage. Last but not the least, while the present Akali -BJP government in Punjab came to power in 1997 with a huge majority, they failed in their attempt to put the state on the path of economic prosperity and development. This happened mainly because of the governments pre occupation with the implementation of its populist measures like free electricity etc, which actually drained money out of the governments exchequer and increased the debt burden of the government. These policies benefited only a very small segment of people in Punjab and the large segment of the people remain unhappy with the nature of the government's functioning. Now, although the coalition government in Punjab has realised its fault and has reversed its previous policy of populist measures, yet, the government is still to come out of the financial crisis it is facing. It now depends upon the present government in Punjab as to how to deal with this financial crisis and put the state to the path of economic prosperity and development and regain the people's lost trust and faith in them. The recent Punjab budget for 2000-

01 just announced (while the dissertation was being typed) is being touted by the Punjab Government to be panacia of its economic illness. We did not discuss it in this dissertation.

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CHAPTER II

**HINDU-SIKH RELATIONS AND
PARTY POLITICS IN PUNJAB
UPTO 1967**

HINDU- SIKH RELATION AND PARTY POLITICS IN PUNJAB UPTO 1967

1. INTRODUCTION

Punjab, the land of five rivers has played a major role in the history of India. The history of Punjab has left a deep imprint on the course of Indian history and the people of Punjab, through their courage and patriotism, have carved out an important place for themselves. Situated in North West India, Punjab is strategically an important state, bounded on the West by Pakistan and on the North East by China. To the North of the state are Jammu and Kashmir and part of Himachal Pradesh, to the South, Rajasthan; and to the East, Uttar Pradesh. Through Punjab, lies the only land route from the rest of India to Jammu and Kashmir. The present Punjab is, in part, the result of partition in 1947. The partition resulted in the division of the province of Punjab, splitting into two parts this 'land of five rivers', which had often been referred to as " the shield, spear and sword hand of India"¹. The partition constitutes a traumatic watershed in the politics of the truncated state of Punjab which came to the India's share. In the post partition Punjab, the Muslims were almost completely displaced, the Hindus increased their majority (about 67%) and the Sikhs were transformed from a small minority group in multicommunal province to a substantial minority in a dual community province (nearly 30%). The partition made for changes not only in the social composition but also in the political configuration of the Punjab. With the migration of Muslims from Punjab, the Muslim League ceased to be a political force in the state. The Unionist party had been disrupted before the partition, and

attempts to revive it later in Haryana area ended in failure. The Congress party emerged as the strongest political force, followed by Akali Dal, Jan Sangh and the Communist party in the post partition Punjab (before 1966).

Before independence both Hindus and Sikhs being minorities in Punjab, still in the process of mobilization, sought protection for their language, culture and political power against a less advanced but numerically dominant majority of Muslim. After partition the Hindus became a majority. The Sikhs, who had played the role of balancing force between the Hindus and Muslims in the pre-partition days now became the only substantial minority in the East Punjab. The communal leadership among the Hindus and the Sikhs, who had frequently cooperated in the face of the challenge from the Muslim communal forces during the pre-partition days, now found themselves in an entirely different role. The fears of the Sikh as a minority were now directed against the Hindus who had an overwhelming majority both at the centre and in the state. As a result there emerged the question of identity- community-nationality formation among the Sikhs and their apprehension of being absorbed into Hinduism.² This apprehension was however there even in pre-partition period among the Sikhs, which in turn resulted in the development of communal consciousness among them. Three sets of symbols have been especially prominent in the development of communal consciousness among them – historical symbols derived from the history of Sikh kingdoms before the British conquest of the Punjab; the religious symbols which have been used to define the boundaries between Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab in modern times; and linguistic symbol which have associated the Sikhs with

a particular form of Punjabi language written in the Gurmukhi script.³

2. GENESIS AND GROWTH OF HINDU-SIKH COMMUNAL CLEAVAGES

2.1 Religious Differentiation Between Hindus And Sikhs In Punjab : The Genesis

Sikhism as a religion has its origins in the religious ferment in the Hinduism of the fifteenth-century India. Under the impact of Islam, new schools of thought developed among the Hindus both through assimilation of certain Islamic ideas, such as the belief in a single God and recognition of the equality of man, and through the resurrection of older ideas with the object of reforming Hinduism to enable it to more effectively meet the Islamic challenges. One new school of thought was the Sikh religion started by Guru Nanak (A.D 1465-1539), the first Guru of the Sikhs. All ten Gurus came from the kshatriya caste of Hindus. Nearly all the followers of the Sikh Gurus came from among the Hindus, especially large numbers from the Jat peasantry in the Central Punjab.⁴ Authorities differ as to the influences that worked to create the Sikh religion. Some hold that Sikhism represents a mixture of Hinduism and Islam.⁵ Others say that while Sikhism was a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, in its general system of belief it was closer to Islam than Hinduism.⁶ Another authority dismisses the idea that Sikhism is a mixture of Hinduism and Islam, and asserts that although precipitated by Islam, Sikhism owes nothing to that religion. It is, on the other hand, a phase of Hindus religious revival and has in consequence, retained all essential features of real Hinduism.⁷ Viewed thus, Sikhism is essentially and basically a Hindu religion. For many generations the transition from Hindu to Keshadhari Khalsa remained an easy one as was evident in the almost overnight conversion of

Lakshman Das, a Rajput of Poonch, and his assumption of the leadership of the Khalsa with the title Banda Bairagi or Banda Singh Bahadur (AD 1670-1710). Relationships between Hindu and the Khalsa remained extremely close as long as they were confronting the Mughals, Persian and Afghan invaders.⁸ As one Sikh writer points out, "they worshipped the same old Gods and indulged in the same old superstitious practices from which their Guru had so heroically worked to extricate them. Their baptism and five symbols become a mere anomaly."⁹

Nevertheless like other reformist movements Sikhism broke away from its parent Hindu body and evolved its own distinct rites of worship and ritual, its own code of ethics, its separate traditions which cumulatively gave it a distinct religious personality and gradually culminated in the development of communal consciousness or self consciousness among the Sikhs. For the development of self consciousness among the Sikhs, the history of the growth and consolidation of such power under Maharaja Ranjit Singh provided a vast pool of symbols to draw upon to feed the modern sense of Sikh identity. Cunningham's classic account of the warfare and intrigue through which Sikh power was established in the Punjab is permeated with the recurring theme of the development of the 'Sikhs from a sect into a people' under Guru Gobind and from a people to a 'nation' under Ranjit Singh.¹⁰

The growth of internal solidarity among Sikhs has been accompanied by process of boundary definition and boundary maintenance and selective adoption of aspects of Sikh history, culture and religion as special marks of the true Sikh community. The character of intra-ethnic relations between Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab has been influenced by the common and

indigenous origin of Hindu and Sikh religious practices and beliefs and by the conflict between Hindu efforts to re-absorb Sikhs into the Hindu fold and Sikh efforts to establish definitively a separate identity. The movement towards increased differentiation acquired considerable force as early as the 1880s and 1890s¹¹ so that by 1900, Sikhs were less and less willing to class themselves automatically with the Hindu community.¹² The gradual institutionalization of communal identity first came in the form of the Singh Sabha movement which began in the early 1870s. The purpose of this movement was to study the original sources of Sikhism, and to restore it to its pristine purity. The process of reform took the shape of "de-Hinduising" the Sikhs since the only trouble with Sikhism at that time was that its doctrines and institutions had been completely Hinduised.¹³ The movement played certain important roles. The first important role played by the Singh Sabhas was to introduce an associational form into Sikhism instead of the traditional sectarian pattern of organization. Also deliberate effort was made to consolidate Sikhs into a single community. The second major role was to promote the social mobilization of the Sikh community and to strengthen internal communication.¹⁴ A literacy drive was launched, educational institutions were established, religious tracts were published, and newspapers were founded.¹⁵ Most of these educational and communication activities either promoted or used the Punjabi languages written in the Gurumukhi script. A third set of functions performed by it was that of boundary definition and differentiation from other groups in Punjab. Finally, a fourth set of function for the Sikh community in this period, was that of political representation. They demanded separate representation, weightage in representation, special privileges and safeguards

in services, and facilities for developing their language and preserving their way of life.¹⁶

The decisive period in the growth of a modern, militant Sikh identity and in the institutionalization of Sikh consciousness came in the early 1920s, during the Gurudwara reform movement. The agitations of the 1920s, culminated in the passage of the Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1925. Out of the Gurudwara reform movement emerged the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) to manage the Sikh gurudwaras and the Akali Dal, its agitational and political arm. During the Sikh rule, the gurudwaras were managed by Mahants, who usually belonged to the udasi sect of sadhus and who were under the control of local congregations, who did not rigidly observe the Sikh forms and symbols. The moral standards of most of them were, to say the least, dubious.¹⁷ The leaders of the Akali movement attempted to oust these priests and bring the management of the Gurudwara (Sikh shrines or temples) under the popular control of Sikh community. This move was resented by the Hindus.¹⁸

The struggle of the Sikh community against priests and the British government lasted for about five years and developed into a mass movement which spread into rural areas. The Akali movement served to widen the gulf between the Sikhs and Hindus of the Punjab. The struggle finally led to the passage of Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1925, by which SGPC control over Sikh shrines was formalized.

From its inception, the SGPC intended to extend its control over all gurudwaras rather than the few that had been taken from or given up by the

priests. The SGPC has been described as a government within the government of the Punjab and as an alternative to the formal government as a source of legitimacy and authority for the Sikh community. Virtually since its inception, the SGPC relied on the Shiromani Akali Dal which was formed less than one month after the founding of SGPC on December 14, 1920.¹⁹ The Akali Dal (band of immortals) was formed as a semi-military corps of volunteers to raise and train men for action.²⁰ The Shiromani Akali Dal is a typical case of a body which regards itself as the exclusive manifestation of the Panth and committed to maintain separate independent status of the Sikh community. According to Dal's Vidhan only a pure Sikh man or woman is eligible to be a member of the party. It considers the inseparability of religion and politics as a fundamental axiom; perceives itself as the one exclusive manifestation of the corporate will of the Sikh community and concedes to a non Akali less right to speak for the Panth.²¹ The successful identification of the Akali Dal with the Sikh Panth is a measure of the strong roots which the organization has developed in the Sikh community.

The Hindu chauvinism was also equally responsible for the more and more Hindu-Sikh differentiation. In the period of cultural uneasiness of the English educated Hindus, the message of Swami Dayanand through the founding of the Arya Samaj in Punjab in 1877, provided hope and pride in their Hindu heritage. Introduced into the Punjab in 1877-88, it soon became a powerful religious, educational, cultural, and political force within the Hindu community of the province. The Arya Samaj founded a network of high schools and colleges promoting both Sanskrit and Western studies.²² Its proselytizing activities, particularly among the low caste groups whose religious loyalties were indefinite, brought the Arya Samaj into conflict with the religious

ideologies and organizations of the Sikhs and Muslims. In the early period of the Shuddhi movement the Singh Sabha cooperated with the Arya Samaj, but soon this cooperation gave way to direct confrontation. In 1900, the Aryas purified a group of outcaste Rahtia Sikhs into 'pure caste Hindus'. For Sikh community this was a direct threat, potentially as dangerous as Christian and Islamic conversion.²³ The Arya Samajist in Punjab, in their zeal to establish Hindu supremacy, started criticising Sikhs also by calling their Guru 'illiterate', 'self centred' and hypocritical.²⁴ This instilled in the Sikh religious leaders a fear of their absorption by the Hindu community. The inevitable result was increased emphasis on a separate state identity.

Thus, the communalism of one group fed the communalism of the other group. The economic imperialism and political sovereignty of the British dictated to different communities a policy of fanning communalism. For e.g., the British writers consistently projected Sikhs as having a separate entity and identity and the recruitment of Sikhs in armed forces strengthened the notion of the martial race.²⁵ The real seeds of Hindu-Sikh separatism were sown by the British by conferring minority privileges on only Keshadhari Sikhs in matter of recruitment to the services and later introducing separate electorates and reservation of seats in legislatures.²⁶ With the partial transfer of power at the provincial level under Dyarchy, each community – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh – wanted to secure more seats in the Punjab legislative council in order to strengthen its position in the power structure. The Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme accepted the Sikh demand of separate representation and they were given 19.1% seats in the council.²⁷

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASES OF HINDU-SIKH CLEAVAGES

2.2.1 In Pre-Independence Period :

With the arrival of the British in India came the process of modernization and westernization generating new kinds of social competition and new kinds of scarcity. The differential response to social mobilization created mutual antagonisms among different communities. The forces to which socio-economic infrastructure of the Punjab gave birth were particularly conducive for the growth of such feeling.

Under the Sikh rule, considerable revenue-free land, by way of charity was assigned to the individuals and institutions for religious and charitable purposes. Some of these religious charitable centres also provided the traditional type of education, especially through religious scriptures in vernacular language.²⁸ This naturally provided a strong base for the development of traditional religious and social networks in Punjab society. The British annexation of the Lahore kingdom in 1849 united the two parts of Punjab trans and 'CIS-Sutlej' territories. After nearly half a century of the British rule in Punjab, Muslims formed nearly half of the total population. Hindus were around 40% and Sikhs little less than 9%. There was a certain degree of over-lap between Hindu and Sikh communities. Sikh society was able to mitigate certain regours of the caste system; it also provided considerable social mobility to peasant castes, especially to the Jats, and other backward castes; it also ensured a certain degree of equality – Islam and British impact too helped this process – but still caste distinctions persisted in Sikh society. According to the 1881 census the Jat peasantry formed 2/3rd of the total Sikh population, the next in numerical importance being the artisan and servicing castes and outcastes. The higher caste Sikhs, Khatri and Aroras

in terms of the extent of the Hindu caste hierarchy, together form barely 4.5% of the Sikh Society²⁹ Around 90% of the Khatri and a considerable majority of Aroras still remained within the Hindu fold. The other higher caste, such as Brahman, Bania, Sud etc., were almost outside the Sikh Society. This further divided the two communities along caste, class and occupational lines as well.

In the early period of British rule, the introduction of the money economy, and the new administrative and judicial set up had an adverse effect on the peasantry which in the Central and Western plains of Punjab belonged predominantly to the Muslim and Sikh communities – in the South Eastern and hilly areas the peasantry was mainly Hindu. In view of occasional crop failures, litigation in courts and usurious interest rates, the peasantry got burdened with debt. And in the event of non payment of debts, they had to mortgage their land to the money lenders. The money lenders generally belonged to the Hindu mercantile castes. Despite economic hardships, Sikh landowning peasantry occupied a dominant position in the social and cultural life of village society.³⁰

The Sikh community was pre-dominantly rural and it formed less than five percent of Punjab's urban population. Its leading urban component comprised small Khatri and Arora mercantile classes engaged in trade and professions, and a sprinkling of landed aristocrats. In the late 19th century, it was this small urban class which provided political and cultural leadership to the community. It faced competition in trade for scarce jobs from the more numerous members of the other two communities. At the social level, the deeper kinship relations still operated within a particular caste or within a group of caste related to each other by the similarity of

occupations and life styles. For the small Sikh urban community belonging to Khatri-Arora and allied castes, the kinship ties with their more numerous caste fellows still in the Hindu fold, suffered a setback as communal identities became the overriding loyalties. So, for these highly literate Sikh caste groups, interclass economic competition with Hindu urbanities got compounded with social tensions arising from their unfavourable social situation in urban settings.³¹

The social tension arose out of the gradual snapping of the older kinship and caste ties between the two religious communities belonging to the same mercantile castes. The minority position of the Sikhs within this class and the rise of aggressive communal consciousness created greater insecurity for the former. In this situation of emotional stress, the urban Sikhs yearned for spiritual solace through a wider, and emotionally deeper, religious brotherhood. The resurrection and reinterpretation of the rich Sikh cultural heritage through the Singh Sabha movement was the natural outcome.

The advent of British administration and particularly British law courts introduced into the Punjab a new conceptualization of land ownership. Land became private property to be sold or mortgaged as its owner saw fit. Land began to move into the hands of the Hindu commercial classes as the forces of financial change penetrated the rural Punjab. In order to check this, therefore, the Punjab Alienation of Land Bill was presented to the Imperial Legislative Council on September 27, 1899. The Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900) divided Punjabis into 'agriculturists' and 'non-agriculturists' and strictly controlled the sale of land from one group to the other. This Act struck at the aspirations of the rising Hindu trading class.

They could no longer hope to acquire land and the traditional status attached to it, nor could they invest their money as freely and profitably as before.³² In 1904, the government disclosed its policy of balance, by favouring recruitment of Muslims and Sikhs over Hindus and thus intensified communal competition over employment. By the first decade of 20th Century, communal competition become institutionalized partly through the dynamics of group identification, but also from social and economic pressure which tended to separate and place in opposition, elites of the same class. Hindus led in these new developments, first towards communal mobilization and second towards an articulation of a Hindu political consciousness.³³ While the Hindu middle classes resented the loss of the predominant position they had hitherto enjoyed, the Muslim and the Sikh middle and upper strata did not want to lose the gains that accrued to them from communal representation which remained a major factor of this nefarious system.³⁴

2.2.2 In Post-Independence Period (upto 1966).

The partition of Punjab brought about the most radical change in the life of this region since the fall of the Sikh empire and the annexation by the British. It came as a culminating point of social, economic and political upheavals of nearly half a century and as a result of the sectarian and partisan intrigues of the parties concerned. The division of the Punjab on communal lines, which affected every sphere of life-political, economic, social, linguistic, administrative, cultural and moral-equally influenced the population pattern. In total population of the 1961 Punjab districts, the Muslims were practically completely displaced, the Hindus increased their majority, and the Sikhs were transformed from a small minority group in a multi-communal province to a substantial minority in a dual community

province. Moreover, the Sikhs also became a compact minority with majority concentrations in a large number of contiguous districts in the divisions of Jalandhar and Patiala particularly. Although the urban Sikh population of Punjab more than doubled, the urban Hindu population also increased tremendously as a consequence of the post partition population transfers. Moreover, proportionate to their population, more than twice as many Hindus lived in towns in 1961 as did Sikhs. Even in the Sikh majority districts, all the major cities of the post partition Punjab contained Hindu majorities.³⁵

The local-refugee tension which were an overall problem of the state in post-independence Punjab, assumed a deeply communal colour in the Jalandhar division where as, in the Patiala division, the Sikhs became a majority constituting a rural hinterland surrounding the major Hindu-dominated cities. This was because the refugees from rural areas of the West Punjab who were mainly Sikh colonists Jalandhar division, were settled in their home district; and those coming from South-Western districts, mainly Hindus, were allotted lands and houses in South-Eastern districts of Punjab. Because of the nature of the composition of population, the local refugee conflict turned into a clash of communal interests, around which the tensions grew and developed.³⁶

The scramble for land and urban property left by Muslim evacuees also created ill-will between Sikh and Hindu refugees as well as the Hindus of Haryana region who had taken possession of lands left by the Muslims. In the Haryana region the displaced population introduced a new factor in its social, economic and political life and gave rise to new conflicts. These conflicts sharpened the already existing feeling among

the local people of Haryana that they were exploited by the more advanced people from the erstwhile central Punjab in administration, politics and economy. The majority of Sikh peasants in the canal colonies of Western Punjab were migrants from the Central Punjab plains on the Indian side. So, after the partition these peasants were allotted Muslim evacuee land in or near their ancestral places. Naturally, they faced not great hardship in adjusting to the new situation. Khatri and Arora (Bhapa) caste groups formed the leading section of the urban Sikh middle class. In the urban locales they found limited opportunities in private and public sectors, they faced competition with more numerous Hindus.³⁷ The economic interest of the Sikh agricultural castes in rural areas clash with those of the Hindu trading caste in the urban areas. In the urban areas themselves the Sikh traders had to contend with the competition from the Hindu traders.

The partition had a different reaction on the two communities-Hindu and Sikh. The Sikhs were the worst losers in the division of the country. Of the five million Sikhs, the prosperous half had their lands and homes in the part that went to Pakistan. This had a serious impact on their fortunes. The Hindus, both local and displaced, belonging to the urban industrial and commercial groups stood to gain economically by identifying themselves with the vast Hindu community all over India.³⁸ This clash of political and economic interests made the communalist Hindus suspicious, hostile and aggressive towards the Sikh.

2.2.3 In Post-Reorganisation Period in Punjab.

In the overall distribution of population, post 1966 Punjab, Sikhs formed 60% of the total population, and Hindus around 38%. In the rural

areas the Sikh retain their majority in even a more pronounced magnitude of 69.17% against the reduced Hindu minority of 28.56%. But in urban areas the Hindus far outnumber the Sikhs, 66.39% of the former against 30.79% of the latter. In Punjab, the population of the castes doing cultivation is very much over represented among the Sikhs and that of the castes following non-agricultural occupation such as trade and services are over represented among the Hindus.³⁹

The point, which is being made here, is that the nature of class formation in Punjab after 1966 has created new sources of tensions. The Jat Sikhs dominate the agricultural production, while the Hindu trading castes dominate the urban sector, including the marketing of agricultural produce. These dominant castes are naturally in economic conflict with each other.⁴⁰ In order to gain advantage against their economic enemies they invoke the solidarity of their religious group in safeguarding their economic interests from the encroachment of the dominant castes of the opposite religious group. The bourgeois aspirations among the Sikh rural gentry have come into clash with the bourgeois hegemony of Hindu traders, merchants and industrialists, in other words, the growing aspirations got blocked by the established hegemony. Unfortunately, also, the aspirations are located within the capitalist classes belonging to one religious community and the hegemony as such belongs to elements within another religious community. Green revolution has brought greater integration of agriculture into market network. Agriculture and trade are very much linked with each other. The link has become all the more stronger with the modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture, as a result of which most of the inputs and outputs of agriculturists have to pass through traders in the urban areas.⁴¹

Consequently, the issue of prices has become important for the farmers. It is of direct relevance to them at what price their output is sold and at what price they purchase modern inputs and non-agricultural consumer goods from the market.⁴² Whenever there is more than a normal cutback on supply to agriculture, the cry is heard that it is to favour the "Hindu-Bania" industrialist or when the rationing gets a bit severe for industry, especially during sowing and harvesting periods industrialists would grumble that the state pampers Sikh because of their agitational tactics.

While in the case of agriculture the Indian state went all out to develop capitalism in Punjab with all the investment as well as incentive and patronage, when it comes to industry the state does not or cannot support local bourgeoisie at the cost of monopoly or pan-Indian bourgeoisie. In Punjab, within this limited economic space, further restricted by the stagnant national economy, monopolistic networks, not necessarily monopolies in the technical sense, in trade and commerce and industry. Given the restrictive practices of established groups and their monopolistic control of limited possibilities, there is no easy avenue for the satisfaction of growing bourgeoisie aspirations among the rich rural Sikhs. The nature of the urban economy in Punjab with its various monopolistic control, is such that it has not permitted the entry of the Sikhs in a big way. Even the Bhappa Sikhs—the urban business caste among the Sikhs- who control some of the business and trade in Punjab feel their growth frustrated by the commercial hegemony of the Hindu business castes.⁴³ The Bhapas feel dominated in all spheres of economic activities by the Hindus and have not been able to compete with them. The Sikh traders generally operate on a lower scale as compared with the Hindu traders. What irks the Sikh traders most is the fact that Hindu traders surpass them in the

appropriation of money from Sikh agriculturists. Then again the entry of the rural bourgeoisie, through increasingly investing its surplus in industrial production, has further increased the tension between the Hindu and Sikh urban bourgeoisie on the one hand and the Sikh urban and Sikh rural bourgeoisie on the other.⁴⁴ Thus, the growth of trade and industrialization has given birth to a new class of Hindu and Sikh urban bourgeoisie and the Green revolution has created a class of Jat-Sikh rural bourgeoisie. The rural bourgeoisie having access to political power is now investing its surplus in industrial production.⁴⁵ These competing groups—the Hindu traders, the Sikh traders and the rural Jat bourgeoisie—give communal touch to their economic interests.⁴⁶

The green revolution accentuated the structural imbalances in the economy by inducing a heavy influx of migrating labour force into agriculture, with the consequence that a very high proportion of its workforce depends on relatively low productive employment. This cheap labour predominantly Hindu, comes from Eastern UP, Bihar and Rajasthan etc, and has helped Punjab capitalist farmers. This labour comes during harvest and sowing seasons and most of them settle in Punjab towns during non-harvest and non-sowing seasons taking petty jobs as rickshaw-pulling, road and house construction etc, and thus, acquire voting rights. The Sikh Jat capitalist farmers by the very mechanism of capitalist farming are bound to employ outside labour as it is much cheaper than local labour which is comparatively more organized to demand better wages. This hampers the unity and consolidation of the rural proletariat because of lack of interaction between the local and outside labour. The landlord's campaign for de-enfranchisement of outside Hindi labour. This has added to the already

existing social tensions in rural Punjab. The fundamentalist and extremist play upon the psyche of the Sikh community by indicating the “impending and imminent” of domination by Hindu majority in Punjab, and thus, emotionalise the objective reality to fan communal fire.⁴⁷

2.3 Language as a basis for Hindu-Sikh Cleavages upto 1966.

During the British period, in the vast multi-communal and multi-lingual province of Punjab, the predominant vernacular languages or mother tongues of the people were Landa in the Western, Muslim-majority districts; Punjabi in the Central districts occupied by Hindus and Sikhs; and Hindi in Hindu-dominated districts in the East. The official languages of the provinces were English and Urdu. The language movements of modern times in the Punjab had evolved in two stages. There had been first the movement of the vernacular mother tongues to displace Urdu and English in the schools and courts of the province. Second, there had been competition between the two primary mother tongues, Punjabi and Hindi, for supremacy. In the pre independence period, these two conflicts frequently were occurring simultaneously. In post independence period, of course, the language cleavage had been exclusively between Hindi and Punjabi, which crystallized in the Punjabi Suba movement.

The Hindi movement in the nineteenth century in Punjab was led both by Hindi speaking and Punjabi speaking urban Hindus, whose higher education had been in Urdu and English. In its origins, it was clearly a religio-political or communal movement promoted by the Arya Samaj to displace Urdu in persian script as the official vernacular language of the province. The spread of the vernacular languages, Hindi and Punjabi, was done largely by private agencies through the educational and publishing efforts of such organizations

as Arya Samaj for Hindi and the Chief Khalsa Diwan for Punjabi.⁴⁸ What began as a movement to replace Urdu by Hindi soon developed into a three way conflict among Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. In this conflict, Punjabi was the primary loser as Punjabi speaking Muslims opted for Urdu and Punjabi speaking Hindus for Hindi. By 1947, when, because of the emigration of the Muslim population, the status of Urdu was no longer a major issue in the Punjab many Punjabi-speaking Hindus had already become accustomed to what had been characterized as disowning their mother tongue for Hindi.

Contemporary conflict over the status of the Punjabi language had focussed upon three chief issues, namely the status of Punjabi as a distinct language or a dialect; the region in which the language is spoken as the mother tongue of the people; and the script used to write the language.⁴⁹ Hindus maintain that Punjabi is not even a language, which understandably irks the Sikhs. For such Hindus, Punjabi is merely a dialect of Hindi like other dialects in North India. Hindus argue that their attachment to Hindi is of no recent origin and that, while they speak a Punjabi dialect in their homes, they have never used it in correspondence or for commercial, educational or religious purposes. They consider the imposition of Punjabi as an attempt to establish Sikh supremacy over them, since never before in the states history-not even during Sikh rule-has Punjabi been used as an official language.

The Hindus emphasize that long before the Sikhs developed any concern for Punjabi in their schools, Hindi was being promoted in Hindu schools in the Punjab. However the Sikhs considered Punjabi as a distinct language. Grieson⁵⁰ considered Punjabi as a distinct language, with both

a standard form and with its own dialectical and sub dialectical variations. Although he believed that modern Punjabi was a composite language based upon an earlier fusion of Lahnda or Western Punjabi with Western Hindi, he was clear that the pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of modern Punjabi were sufficiently distinct to classify it as a separate language. Moreover, though he recognized that Punjabi literature was not extensive, he argued that this did not reflect upon the literary capabilities of the language, which he clearly considered to be more than adequate.⁵¹ He concluded his general discussion by arguing. "Even at the present day there is too great a tendency to look down upon (Punjabi) as a mere dialect of Hindustani (which it is not), and to deny its status as an independent language. Its claim mainly rests upon its phonetic system and on its store of words not found in Hindi, both of which characteristics are due to its old Lahnda foundation. Some of the most common Punjabi words do not occur in Hindustani".⁵²

However modern linguists like John Gumperz⁵³ argued that the urban and educated people in the Punjab are likely to be able to communicate effectively in several codes (i.e. one 'code', Hindi would be used in speaking to a Hindi speaker; a second code, which Gumprez calls 'code-switching' Punjabi, would be used to speak with another educated Punjabi-speaker in Delhi; a third code, Punjabi, would be the 'native idiom' or 'regional dialect' of the speaker). Thus, the extreme pro-Hindi view that Punjabi is nothing more than a spoken language, or a mere dialect is as contrary to the known linguistic facts as is the extreme pro-Punjabi view that Punjabi has a written literature that in antiquity, volume and variety compares well with that of any other vernacular of India'.⁵⁴

The second issue was that of the characteristics of the Punjabi language, namely, its regional distribution. The great demographic changes in Punjab which took place during mass migrations of 1946-47, demarcated its area into what were called Hindi-speaking and Punjabi-speaking regions, but in essence representing Hindu majority and Sikh majority area. The important policy decisions on language in the post independence period such as the Sachar Formula and the Regional Formula, were based upon the assumption that distinct Hindi speaking and Punjabi speaking zones existed. Proponents of Hindi in the Punjab were sometimes willing to accept the argument that a line could be drawn separating the Hindi speaking region from the rest of the Punjab, but they argued that the so called Punjabi speaking region was actually bilingual. Sikhs on the other hand, simply argued that the mother tongue of all people of all creeds in city, town, and villages was Punjabi.

Finally there was the question of script. The particular basis for the developing language conflict between Hindus and Sikhs was the fact that Hindi in Devnagari script was overwhelmingly the language of Hindus and Punjabi, in its written Gurumukhi style, primarily the language of Sikhs. While the mass of the Hindus and Sikhs alike, continued to communicate with each other in spoken languages of the province, the Hindu and Sikh literate elites took up the battle of scripts, the symbolic superstructure of a contest for political power in post independence Punjab.⁵⁵ Because the Devnagari script facilitates an effective liaison with Hindi, the Hindus insist it should be recognized as one of the scripts for the writing of Punjabi. The Gurumukhi script, they maintain, was an artificial invention of the founders of the Sikh religion and that, before the invention of

Gurumukhi, the Devanagari script had been used in the writing of Punjabi, and several Sikh scriptures were written in that script. Many of the Gurumukhi characters, they argue, were imitations of Devanagari and that from a scientific point of view, Devanagari was more appropriate script for writing of Punjabi. Before independence, they say, Punjabi was written not only in the Gurumukhi script but also in Persian and Devanagari script. They consequently object to the enforcement of Gurumukhi as the sole script for the writing of Punjabi. As one Hindu leader had said "there could be a mother tongue, but not a mother script".

The Sikhs on the other hand interpret the move to had Devnagari as an additional scripts in the writing of Punjabi as an attempt to kill Punjabi, and insist on Gurumukhi as the only script appropriate for Punjabi. Preservance of Gurumukhi script and compulsory teaching in Punjabi was, therefore, considered imperative for the protection of Sikh religion. Akali leader S. Ajit Singh Sarhadi wrote that their (Hindus) opposition to the use of the Punjabi language in Gurumukhi script was based on the principle "Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan", and they made no pretensions to secularism or anything of that kind.⁵⁶ The communal conflict between the Hindus and the Sikhs thus find its expression in the controversy over language, and was in turn reinforced by it. With the Hindus the spread of Punjabi had come to be associated with communal dominance based on separatism. For the Sikhs, the denial by Hindus of the Punjabi language is perceived as an attempt to destroy their culture.

The linguistic tension between Hindu and Sikh further intensified when during the census of 1951, the Hindus, by and large, declared Hindi as their

mother tongue. By such a declaration, the Hindus attempted to undercut the very basis of the formation of a Punjabi-speaking state by trying to show that about half of the population proposed to be included in the Punjabi Suba did not speak the language on the basis of which a linguistic state was being demanded by the Akali Dal and as a consequence, there was no reason for the formation of such a state. The Akali leadership saw in Hindu stand on language, an attempt to kill the Sikh culture and Punjabi language as a part of a move to re-absorb Sikhs in their fold, or keep them under their hegemony.

3. PUNJABI SUBA MOVEMENT: DEMAND FOR SIKH STATE.

Perhaps no other state of India has suffered so many territorial and political changes as the Punjab. In the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the Punjab extended from Peshawar in the West, the Sutlej in the East and from Kashmir in the North to Sind in the South. In 1849, the Punjab was formally incorporated into British India following the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1846 and 1849. Kashmir, which formed a part of Ranjit Singh's kingdom, was handed over to Maharaja Gulab Singh for a sum of rupees. After the uprising of 1857, territories lying between river Sutlej and Delhi, including the city of Delhi were added to the Punjab. In 1911, Delhi became the capital of India and soon after, Delhi and some of its surrounding villages were taken away from the Punjab. In 1947, the partition divided the country into India and Pakistan. The Punjab, which had come to acquire a distinct was also partitioned and its boundaries were fixed in accordance with the Redcliffs Award announced on August 18, 1947. That segment of the Punjab which continued to form a part of India (first called East Punjab, then Punjab) inherited 34% of the area and 47% of the population. The Indian princely

states in this area were grouped together and integrated into a new political unit called PEPSU (i.e. Patiala and the East Punjab States Union) in 1948. On November 1, 1956, PEPSU was merged in Punjab. Exactly ten years later, Punjab was reorganized on linguistic basis into the Punjabi-speaking state of Punjab and Hindi-speaking state of Haryana.⁵⁷

3.1 A Brief History of the Demand

The history of the Punjabi Suba Movement demonstrates clearly how a subjectively conscious group of people may create the objective conditions necessary for the success of the regional movement. A widespread sense of Sikh identity and its expression in explicitly political demands already existed before the formal demand for a Sikh-dominated state was made. The dispersal of the Sikh community in pre-independence Punjab, however, meant that Sikh political demands had to be confined primarily to questions of representation rather than territorial dominance. Under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms introduced in 1921, the Sikhs were granted communal representation through separate electorates in the Punjab legislature and were awarded twelve of the seventy-one elective seats or 17%. Thus the Sikh community was proportionally over-represented in the legislatures in the pre-1947 Punjab and was often able to act effectively as a decisive swing force in the communal political balance between the larger Muslim and Hindu communities.

When it became clear that the Punjab was to be partitioned into Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority areas, Sikh political leaders demanded the establishment of an independent and sovereign Sikh state. The Akali leaders formulated what was known as the "Azad Punjab" and Sikhistan (Free Punjab) scheme in order to secure greater political leverage for the

Sikh community. The primary purpose in the formation of Azad Punjab was "to break" the Muslim majority in the Punjab and to create a province where the Sikhs should hold the "balance of power." However their demand was rejected on the ground that the Sikhs were a much smaller community, 5½ as against 90 millions, and moreover, were not geographically situated so that any area as yet devised can be carved out in which they would find themselves in a majority. The partition of India, as announced by her Majesty's Government on June 3, 1947, finally envisaged the partition of the Punjab and Bengal also. The partition of the Punjab for Sikhs meant division of their holy places, splitting of the population and loss of fertile lands. The Akali Dal's desire was that an effort should be made, on the basis of other factors, to get the line of division shifted Westwards, even as far as the river Chenab, so that all the rich colony lands of the Layallpur and Mountgomery districts with their numerous Sikh peasantry would come into East Punjab. However, their demands were again rejected, and the boundary, marked by the Redcliffe award, cut through the heart of their most populous regions leaving the wealthy colonies and half the central Sikh concentration in Pakistan. As a result of mass migration, the Sikh population became heavily concentrated in the North-Western districts of the Punjab. Most of these districts became Sikh majority districts with significant political implications especially of eliminating the major block to the earlier territorial demands of the Akali Dal—the absence of a geographically compact Sikh majority area. Thus, by the time of independence of India, there had grown a definite sense of group consciousness among the Sikhs. The Akalis began to look upon themselves as the sole representatives of the community and entered the

arena of politics in independent India as such.⁵⁸ The importance of Sikhistan lay not so much in the demand itself, but in the particular doctrines that were advanced for its establishment, more especially that the Sikhs constitute a separate political entity, that they must act as a single group in politics, that they can be rulers or rebels, and that religion and politics are inseparable.

It was not long before Sikh political leaders raised the demand for the conversion of their numerical dominance in a territorial area into a separate political status for the area. By October 1949, the demand was explicitly made for a Sikh majority Punjabi Suba. In August 1950 the Akali Dal launched its first major agitational movement for the demand. Sensing amply the feeling of the Sikhs for political self expression, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, then Home Minister and incharge of Indian States Department created a Sikh majority state in the heart of the East Panjab, called PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) in May 1948 comprising of the erstwhile Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala and Faridkot.⁵⁹

3.2 Government Policies

During the period 1949 to 1966, three formula were implemented in the Punjab to deal with the language disputes – the Sachar and PEPSU Formulae, which were concerned with educational policy, and Regional Formula, which was meant to solve the political and administrative issues. The Sachar Formula made an effort to solve the question of the medium of instruction in the Punjab schools, excluding the princely states. The formula clearly differentiated two main languages or mother tongues in Punjab, namely, Punjabi in Gurumukhi script and Hindi in Devnagari script. It also assumed that area where one of two languages was predominant could be demarcated and it anticipated that the Punjab government

would so demarcate the Hindi speaking and Punjabi speaking areas of the state. The formula also specified the method of selecting the medium of instruction Hindi in the Hindi speaking areas and Punjabi in the Punjabi speaking areas, as demarcated, were to be the medium of instruction in their regions, but the parents or guardians of the pupils were to have the right to opt for Hindi in the Punjabi region or Punjabi in the Hindi region provided there was sufficient demand for such options in the class or school. Hindi was to be taught as a compulsory language from the last class of the primary stage in the Punjabi speaking areas and Punjabi was to be similarly required as a second language in the Hindi speaking areas. The Sachar formula was an ideal model for enforced bilingualism in a bilingual society. However the formula ran into difficulties. The Akali Sikhs resented the option given to Hindus to had their children educated through the medium of Hindi. In the Hindi region, most Hindus objected to the compulsion of learning Punjabi.⁶⁰

The PEPSU Formula, which was applied in the formal princely states areas of the Punjab, was similar to the Sachar Formula in that it divided the area into Hindi speaking and Punjabi speaking zones in which the respective languages would be media of instruction, but in which the other language would be taught compulsorily from the third class. However, unlike Sachar Formula it did not provide freedom of choice for the parents.⁶¹

The Regional Formula was introduced with the integration of the PEPSU into the Punjab in 1956. It was primarily a political-administrative formula rather than a education formula. The chief importance of the

Regional formula was in its extension of the principle of linguistic demarcation of the Punjab into two language zones, which was now applied to the governance of the state through the establishment of two regional committees in the legislature, consisting of the elected members from the Hindi and Punjabi speaking regions. The Formula divided members of the Punjab legislature into two groups, those elected from the Punjabi speaking area, the others from the Hindi speaking. Any measure concerning one region had to be discussed by members from the other before being considered by the joint house⁶². Finally, the Regional Formula declared Punjab to be a bilingual state, but provided that the regional languages would be the official languages in their respective regions at the district level and below.

However the various formulae ultimately failed to promote integration in the Punjab. First the Akali Dal never considered the formulae as solutions to the language or educational issues but only as a temporary compromises on the way to the ultimate goal of a Sikh dominated political unit. Second a large number of Hindus in the Punjabi region took the advantage of the freedom of choice option in the Sachar Formula to opt for Hindi, which the Sikhs interpreted as a denial by the Punjabi-speaking Hindus of their mother tongue for communal reasons. Finally, Hindus in the Haryana region decided that it was not in their interests that their children should be required to learn Punjabi compulsory.

3.3 ATTITUDE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

During the twenty five years of agitation on the communal linguistic issues in the post independence Punjab, the political parties had articulated

every important segment of opinion on the language issues. The Akali leadership from the very beginning started presenting the policies of the national state as endangering the ideological foundations of the Sikh community structure. It suggested to the Sikhs that they as a community were automatically disadvantaged by the secular framework of the national state, which in reality had serious assimilationist tendencies. The only way out of it was the creation of a Punjabi speaking state. When the Presidential promulgation of 1950 declared certain castes as Scheduled Castes did not include any Sikh caste on the ground that Sikhism does not believe in caste distinctions and untouchability it was interpreted as a calculated move for reabsorbing the Sikhs into Hinduism. The Akalis demanded that all Sikhs belonging to any Scheduled Caste anywhere in India be given exactly the same rights, and their demand was conceded in 1956. The other grievances which had been pointed out by Akali Dal as a case of discrimination against Sikhs was that the Sikhs were discriminated against in matters of promotions and postings, so far as public services in Punjab as well as in the Centre were concerned. Further, they argued that while Muslims, the Christians and the Parsis, were governed by their own personal laws in matters, among others, of marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance, the Sikhs alone were lumped with the general lot of the Hindus. Talking of the fears that gave birth to Suba demand, Donald E. Smith pointed out that the agitation for a separate Sikh state in the Punjab was in part a desperate attempt to preserve by political means the solidarity of a community in real danger of losing its identity.⁶³ The Akali Dal argued that in the Punjabi Suba the Sikhs will no longer be the important minority they allegedly are⁶⁴.

Moreover, compulsory teaching of Punjabi in Gurumukhi language will keep the younger generation in touch with rich history and tradition of the Sikh religion. The Akali Dal became determined to achieve Punjabi Suba which would not only have Punjabi as its official language but would also reduce the power of the Hindus in relation to the Sikhs. The Akali Dal, therefore, stressed the ideology that the Sikhs constitute a distinct political community that can only exist in two political relations, sovereign or rebel. Parity thus becomes important as a recognition of a supposed Sikh "co-sovereignty" over the Punjab. In conclusion, the Akali Dal said that the formation of Punjabi Suba would lead to the following beneficial result, among others :

- (i) The creation of geographically compact economically sound, and financially viable state.
- (ii) The eradication of the causes of the present unrest in the Punjab and the restoration of communal harmony.
- (iii) The elimination of the language controversy, and the provision of education through the mother tongue in a single language state, thus assuring further progress in the state.
- (iv) The securing of a contented Sikh community for the country.⁶⁵

On the other side had been the Jan Sangh, which throughout the period up to reorganization of the state, articulated the interests of the urban, Punjabi-speaking Hindus in opposing the Punjabi Suba and demanding not only the maintenance of multi-communal state, but the enlargement of the Hindu majority in that state through the inclusion of Himachal Pradesh in it. On the language issue, they argued that it was nothing more than a spoken language, or a mere dialect of Hindi. During the census of 1951,

the Hindus, by and large, declared Hindi as their mother tongue. The Hindu communal press and organisations argued that by declaring Gurumukhi as the only script for Punjabi, the Government had denied them their right to name Punjabi as their mother tongue. The main opposition to the creation of Punjabi Suba came from a section of urban Hindu-businessmen from the Punjabi region of the province. This was partly due to emotional reasons but was mainly based on economic and political consideration. The main thrust of the argument by the Hindu organizations like Jan Sangh was that the demand for Punjabi Suba on the supposedly innocent basis of language was merely a camouflage for the attainment of Sikh hegemony and the establishment of a base for an eventual sovereign Sikh state. The 1956 Regional Plan, which in a way made the study of both Hindi and Punjabi compulsory for all students in Punjab, was not acceptable to the Hindu communalists and the people of Haryana. The Punjabi Hindu leaders saw in it the gradual crystallization of the regional division and the progressive victory of the Sikh demands. According to Rai Bahadur Badri Dass, an Arya Samaj leader, "one reason why the demand for the Punjabi-speaking province is opposed appears to be the linking of the language with the Gurumukhi script."⁶⁶ The high watermark of cooperation among Hindu and Hindi organization in the Punjab was achieved in 1957 during the 'save Hindi' agitation, when all the major Hindu groups in both regions of the state joined together in a mass agitation to protest against the Regional Formula and compulsion in the use and teaching of Punjabi. A Hindi Raksha Samiti was formed to fight the cause of Hindi both in Punjabi and Hindi speaking areas. The movement was unsuccessful in achieving any of its main demands. Moreover in the course of the movement, it became evident that the interests of Haryana Hindus and

Punjabi Hindus were quite different. The former saw the division of the Punjab as a possible solution to their demands, whereas Punjabi Hindus feared a division of the state which would leave them in an isolated minority in a Sikh dominated, Punjabi speaking state.

The communist parties in the Punjab followed a consistent policy on the language issue of support for the use of regional languages in both education and administration, while opposing the linking of the linguistic and religious issues. The CPI popularized their concept of Punjabi Suba on the basis of language alone. The Communist party made the following demands (1) The Punjabi speaking area of Punjab and PEPSU should be reorganized into unilingual Punjabi state (2) Delhi or Haryana state may be formed with Hindi speaking areas of Punjab, PEPSU and Western parts of UP which had deep relations with Delhi.⁶⁷ The party leadership infact decided that it would oppose the Akali agitation for the creation of a Punjabi Suba on the basis of religion and work for the reorganisation of the state on a purely linguistic basis. Henceforth, it would be the policy of the party to mobilise masses in favour of its stand by creating unity among the people on the issue.⁶⁸

The Congress party, true to its image as an aggregative, pragmatic, dominant centre party, contained within its fold before 1966 representatives of three main view points—communalist Sikhs who wished to enforce Punjabi as the sole medium of instruction in the Punjabi region, communalist Hindus who wished to turn Punjabi into a language of the minority Sikh community; and secularists who proposed a formula after formula to satisfy all opposed interests and to attempt to maintain the communal,

linguistic, territorial unity of the Punjab. The Congress, in short, failed to take a principled stand on the communally sensitive issues, such as reporting of the correct mother tongue in the decennial censuses in the Punjabi region, medium of instruction for elementary education and finally the reorganisation of the state on a linguistic basis. P.C. Joshi, a veteran communist leader, lamented that the Congress in the Punjab, after independence, fought neither Sikh nor Hindu communalism, on any serious principled basis, but appeased both, by turns.....⁶⁹

Thus, while the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh adopted incompatible positions which reflected the communal concerns of their constituencies, the Communist party and the Congress consistently sought to separate the communal and linguistic issues and to moderate communal attitudes and the potential for communal conflict in the Punjab. The potential for a political polarization of the communal attitudes was also moderated by the persistent efforts of party leaders, especially in the Congress, to find a language formula acceptable to all groups in the Punjab. Their inability to do so reflected less a failure of the parties to adjust competing communal interests than the availability to the two most important political communities of other, more attractive political alternatives.⁷⁰

3.4 OPPOSITION BY HARIJANS

The Punjab had been pointed out as the one “notable exception” to the caste system in India. Whether or not caste in the Punjab parallels precisely the social classes of Europe, it undeniably had a great relevance for politics, no less so than do social classes. One aspect of caste in Punjab with important political implications in both regions was the basic conflict in the

rural areas between the high caste landowning agricultural classes whether Hindu or Sikh and the Scheduled Castes along with other backwards classes. Whereas, the high caste Sikhs supported the Punjabi Suba, the Mazhabi Sikhs (Scheduled Caste) opposed the demand because of their fear of complete domination by the non-Harijan Sikhs in a smaller state. At the time of 1951 census operations, the illiterate Harijans even when they belonged to the Sikh religion, declared that Hindi not Punjabi was their mother tongue. In 1965, the Akali agitation against the government to demand a Punjabi Suba was matched by demonstrations of Scheduled Caste Sikhs against this demand. They argued that the Sikh Scheduled Castes had been reduced to a position of mere serfs by the Sikh landlords who would literally crush the Mazhabi Sikhs if Punjabi Suba was formed. Like Harijan Sikhs, the Scheduled Castes in Haryana area also opposed the demand for separate Haryana Prant fearing the domination of Jat Hindus in such a province. Thus both Sikh and Hindu Harijans preferred to live in the larger state of Punjab where there was a large number of groups whose demands and aspirations had to be accommodated and aggregated. Political interests of a caste group here overrode any loyalty to a religious group or region.

3.5 AGITATION FOR PUNJABI SUBA

In the aftermath of the partition of India on a religious basis, the Congress leaders were unwilling to consider seriously a proposal based explicitly on religious and communal ground. Consequently in the presentation of their demands, the Akali Dal emphasized the linguistic basis of the demand, proposing the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state rather than a

Sikh majority state. Dissatisfaction with the working of Regional Formula and with the unwillingness of the Punjab government under the leadership of Pratap Singh Kairon to enhance the status of the Punjabi language led to the split of the Akali Dal from the Congress, a renewal of its demands for a Punjabi Suba, and finally the launching of a prolonged movement beginning in May 1960. In 1960, Master Tara Singh launched morcha to win Punjabi Suba. The agitation took a more drastic form, when Sant Fateh Singh, a member of his group began a fast unto death on December 18, 1960, in the Golden Temple, Amritsar to press the demand for the formation of a separate Punjabi Suba. On the advice of Master Tara Singh, the Sant broke his fast on January 9, 1961, to enter negotiations with Nehru. However, soon Master Tara Singh also launched his own fast-unto-death for the Punjabi Suba. As a result the government agreed to appoint a commission not to inquire into the Punjabi Suba demand, but only to consider the charge that there was discrimination against the Sikhs in the Punjab.

Sant Fateh Singh put forward a very different approach to the question of Punjabi Suba. He in the simplest words explained in his speeches that the Punjabi Suba demand was not the demand of Sikhs alone but that of the Punjabi speaking people (irrespective of caste and religion). Therefore it shall be formed only when the Hindus of Punjab will support it. Though he could not convince the hard core of the Hindus, yet he was successful in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect between the communities.⁷¹ The Sant formed a separate Akali Dal in 1962. The Master era in the Akali politics was closing and the Sant age about to dawn. The new Akali Dal had not only a new look to boost but also had a new programme. It was vastly more representative of the Sikh peasantry than the Master Akali Dal. It was

cleaver by far in that it was able to drive a wedge between the Hindu opponents of a Punjabi-speaking state by the simple device of demanding not merely a Punjabi Suba but a state of Haryana too in one and the same breath.⁷² On August 17, 1965, Sant issued an historic ultimatum to the government to accept his demands within 25 days. The Government of India announced the establishment of a three member cabinet committee to seek solution to the reorganisation of Punjab. The Government of India accepted in principle the report of the parliamentary committee recommending that Punjab be reorganised on a linguistic basis and that an expert committee be appointed to make necessary boundary adjustments. Despite the fact that Akali leader, Sant Fateh Singh, made many efforts to present the demand of the Suba on linguistic basis, the problem incidentally gave rise to communal feelings among the people of the Punjab. However it was also true that there did exist some common understanding between the Hindus and the Sikhs, because it was with their cooperation that the situation was brought under control by the Government, and within a few days there after the normal relations were restored in the state.⁷³ The Punjab Reorganisation Bill was introduced in Parliament on September 3, 1966. The Punjab was consequently divided into two states-Punjab and Haryana – and hill districts were merged with Himachal Pradesh.

The Punjabi speaking areas went to Punjab, the Hindi speaking areas went to Haryana and hilly areas to Himachal Pradesh. Chandigarh and its neighbouring villages were constituted into a Union territory, so that controversy over its allocation could be silenced. While in Haryana the Punjab Reorganisation Act was welcomed, in Punjab it aroused the opposition of both the Sikhs and the Punjabi Hindus. The Punjabi Hindus

opposed it because it had placed them in a minority in the new state. The Sant Akali Dal opposed it because (a) it had excluded allegedly predominantly Punjabi speaking areas of Chandigarh, Fatehabad, Guhla, Sahahabad, Ambala Sadar etc from Punjab (b) it had placed the management of Bhakra Dam complex outside the control of Punjab (c) it had retained certain common links between Punjab and Haryana. However In spite of such opposition, the Punjab Reorganisation Act survived.⁷⁴

4. COMMUNAL COALITION BUILDING IN PUNJAB

Although the Punjab, with its long history of communal conflict and violence and with the existence of political parties appealing directly to the religious sentiments of the people, would seem prima facie to support the fears of those concerned about the disintegrative effects of competitive politics in a multi-ethnic society, political patterns in the region since 1947 have not had uniformly catastrophic consequences. In fact at different times since 1946-47 to 1966-67, Punjab politics had moved in three distinctly different directions. In 1946 and 1947, just before the partition, the organization of the political parties reflected the communal organization of society at the time, with catastrophic results. For most of the period between 1947 and the reorganization of Punjab in 1966, the second pattern prevailed in which a single, large, dominant, secular, broad based political party, the Congress performed the tasks of communal political coalition building and provided stable government. In the reorganized and much diminished Punjab after the general elections of 1967, communal differences were reflected in the organization of the political parties and were prominent in the electoral arena, but they were accommodated after the elections in inter party coalitions to govern the state.

The tri-communal cleavage of the Punjab just before the partition, when Muslims comprised more than half the population, Hindus somewhat less than a third, and Sikhs approximately 14%, was transmitted into the 1946 Punjab legislature in which most Muslim members identified with Muslim league, most Hindus with the Congress, and most Sikhs with the Akali Dal. The Muslim league party in the Assembly comprised seventy five of the ninety one Muslim legislators; the Congress comprised forty of forty-four Hindus; and the Akali Dal had twenty-two of the thirty two Sikhs. The League had only Muslim members and the Akali Dal only Sikhs. The Unionist party continued to comprise some Hindus as well as Muslims and the Congress some Sikhs as well as Hindus, but neither party was large enough to play the role of a dominant, inter communal centre party.⁷⁵

4.1 Electoral support Bases of Political Parties

The partition made for changes not only in the social composition but also in the political configuration of the Punjab. With the migration of Muslims from Punjab, the Muslim league ceased to be a political force in the state. The Unionist party had been disrupted before the partition, and attempts to revive it later in Haryana ended in failure. The Congress party emerged as the strongest political force and assumed political power in the Punjab after the partition. Apart from the Congress party, there are three other organized political parties of major significance in the politics of the Punjab : the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (more popularly known as simply the Jan Sangh), and the Communist party. Religion, language and caste have been the predominant symbols in Punjab politics in the post independence era. They are also the most important explanatory variables in analyzing the bases of party support in

the electorate for most Punjab parties. The parties do differ, however, in the extent to which their electoral support bases are confined to one community over time or combine support from different communities.

Congress Party

Whatever the strength of the Congress party before partition in other states of India, in the Punjab it did not by any means command overwhelming support among either the Hindus or the Sikhs. Among the Hindus the Congress party had considerable support, but even here in the urban areas the Hindu communal parties cut deeply into its strength and in the rural area, especially in Haryana region, the Unionist party in 1946 proved a formidable and unbeatable competitor. A large portion of the Sikh community supported the Congress party, but the major political force among the Sikhs was the Akali Dal. Although the prospect of independence and partition brought increased support to the Congress party, the actual event of partition not only made it vulnerable to the charge, especially among the million of refugees, of being responsible for the vivisection of the Punjab and the holocaust that followed it, but also disrupted the party organization. Against this background it would seem that the Congress party had made significant progress in mobilizing political support in the Punjab during the period since 1947-66.

If the Congress was the only party in Punjab politics which did not had a fixed regional concentration of strength, it was also the only one of the three main parties whose electoral support had not been confined largely to a particular section of the population. The Congress as a broadly aggregate and secular political party, had deliberately attempted both to accommodate different religious, language, and caste groups in the Punjab and avoid accommodating one group at the expense of another. Baldev Raj Nayar had

argued that the religious and ethnic bases of Congress electoral support changed fundamentally from 1952 to 1957 and from 1957 to 1962. During the 1952 general elections the Congress party firmly opposed the demand for Punjabi Suba and was able to win considerable Hindu and Harijan support. Prior to the 1957 general elections, the Congress party conceded the regional formula to the Akali Dal and allowed the Dal to merge politically into the Congress party; in this manner it was able to secure larger support from that part of the Sikh community which was under the influence of the Akali Dal, but in the process it also lost a large part of the Hindu vote. Before the 1962 elections, the Congress party firmly opposed the Akali demand for Punjabi Suba and refused to be intimidated by Akali agitation, and consequently was able to count on Hindu and Harijan votes to a greater extent than would have been possible if it had made further concessions to the Akali Dal.⁷⁶

The Congress got the votes of all those groups which fear domination by an opposing group. In short the picture which emerged of Congress electoral support in Punjab confirms to the view of it as a broadly based, aggregate party which builds inter-communal coalitions which shift over time and territory, but which had relatively consistent opposition in areas where urban Hindus are concentrated and relatively consistent support in areas where there are large numbers of Scheduled Castes.

Akali Dal

In the period since independence, the Akali Dal had been the prime mover on the political scene in the Punjab, the Congress party had merely reacted and responded. In its conflict with the Congress party, the Akali Dal had continuously held the initiative. The Akali Dal is an avowedly Sikh party, whose membership is confined to Sikhs, and which only on the rarest

occasions has given its party symbol to non-Sikh candidates in an election. It draws its legitimacy and strength from its championship of the community interests, its symbiotic relationship with the SGPC. Its major resources in politics comes from the vast religious bureaucracy, the musicians, priests, seculars and a host of vested economic interests related to religious institutions and practices. The Akali politics started becoming caste and class oriented as the Jat peasantry became politicized and realised its overwhelming majority. Majahil group⁷⁷ who was looking for an opportunity to dislodge Master Tara Singh from the leadership of SAD and SGPC exploited this situation. He was described by these Jathedars as "Bhapa" and a representative of urban Sikhs. During the agitation for Punjabi Suba Sant Fateh Singh, second in command of Master Tara Singh emerged as the leader of rural Jat peasantry. He, himself being a Jat, was able to mobilize support of the rural masses and set up a rival Akali Dal in 1962⁷⁸. Thus the main base of the Akali support in Punjab is among Jat Sikh peasantry. Hindus are naturally disinclined to vote for such a party. The Scheduled Castes – both Hindus and Sikhs do not find the Akali Dal appealing because of its base among the Jat Sikhs, who are the rural overloads of the lower castes.⁷⁹

Mark Juergensmeyer pointed out that these poorer sections are also developing their own distinct cultures of deprivation with new religious faiths and symbols of identity reflecting falling away of the Sikhs Scheduled Castes from institutionalized Sikh religious structures. That may in part be a reaction against the Akali Dal's identification with landlord Jats.⁸⁰ Besides this the emergence of small groups with extremist theo-political orientations among the Mazhabi Sikhs or other non-Jat sections whose assertiveness creates embarrassing problems for the Akali Dal.⁸¹

Jan Sangh (Now B.J.P.)

Although the Jan Sangh did not restrict its membership to Hindus as the Akali Dal does to Sikhs, the Jan Sangh appeal had been directed explicitly to Hindu and Hindi sentiment in the Punjab. It's rare for the Jan Sangh to give the party nomination to a Sikh candidate in an election. The party took the lead in launching or supporting counter-agitations opposing the Akali Dal demand for Punjabi Suba during the twenty years of agitation in the Punjab over this demand. It opposed concessions to the Punjabi language at the expense of Hindi before reorganization and had sought to protect the status of Hindi in reorganized Punjab. After the reorganization, however, the Jan Sangh in Punjab accepted the fact of it and did not oppose the inclusion of Chandigarh in the Punjabi Suba. The Jan Sangh (now B.J.P.) had been considered the polar opposite of the Akali Dal, with its electoral base entirely among Hindus, particularly Hindus living in the cities and towns. There was, however, no evidence of consistent support for or opposition to the party in the Scheduled Caste area.⁸²

The Communist Parties:

Like the other major non-Congress parties in the Punjab, the Communist parties had a consistent bases of support and opposition among sections of the electorate. The leadership of the Communist movement in Punjab had been predominantly Sikh and it's generally believed that the party's electoral base had been among the Sikhs. The association of CPI support with the Sikh population remained strong. The Hindus as a result find no difference between the Akali Dal and the Communist parties. Moreover, the Jan Sangh (now B.J.P.) is present in the state to articulate their interests

and also to explain their communal feelings for its narrow political ends.⁸³ Both Hindus and Harijans had tended to oppose the Communist. Further the Hindus were hostile to the CPI because of its support for the Punjabi Suba and because of its alliance with the Akali Dal in 1962. Besides this there was a noticeable swing away from the party of a weak identification with the Scheduled Caste population that was achieved in 1957. As between the two Communist parties, it was the CPI, which had retained the main electoral base of the Communist movement in areas of rural Sikh population concentration. Paul R. Brass had pointed out that all correlation between the CPI vote and percent total and rural— Scheduled Caste were positive, but all those for rural male literate Scheduled Caste were negative. All correlation between the CPM vote and all categories of Scheduled Castes were negative, but all were also low. The Communist therefore did not had a strong and consistent bases of support or opposition in areas of Scheduled Caste concentration, although the CPI vote had tended to correlate positive with percent of Scheduled Castes.⁸⁴

The Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and the Republican Party (RPI)

The party of the Scheduled Caste contested the 1952 and 1957 elections as Scheduled caste Federation and subsequent elections as the Republican Party. The SCF and RPI won their small proportions of Punjab votes primarily from the Scheduled Caste population. In all elections, the rural male literate category of Scheduled Castes had been correlated strongly with the SCF and RPI vote than the other two categories of Scheduled Caste population. The SCF and RPI had done much better in Hindu areas than in the Sikh areas.

4.2 ELECTORAL POLITICS IN PRE-REORGANIZED PUNJAB

In the electoral politics of Punjab, the Congress fortunes varied greatly over the period of time. Its proportion of the popular vote in 1952, 31.3% was the lowest proportion of votes won by any Congress organization in any of the fifteen major states since independence. The Congress found itself in this position first because it had not been the main political force in the pre-independence Punjab; second, because it was divided into two bitterly opposed factional groups; and third, because it lacked an authoritative leader who transcended factional divisions in the party.⁸⁵ In the period between 1952 and 1957, however, the situation of the Punjab Congress was radically transformed in two respects. A single, dynamic leader Pratap Singh Kairon, took the control of both the party organization and the government, transforming the bifactional cleavage into single group dominance. Second, the Congress succeeded under his leadership in forging an inter communal alliance of Hindus and Sikhs, including the merger of the Akali Dal into the Congress in the 1957 elections. The consequence was a dramatic increase in the electoral strength of the Congress in 1957, which was largely maintained through 1962 despite the withdrawal of the Akali Dal from the Congress before the 1962 election. The Congress in 1952 election got the support of more of the Hindus than the Sikhs. In 1957 elections, the Congress got the support of the rural Sikhs and Punjabi speakers because of the merger of Akali Dal and Congress. In the 1962 elections because of the Congress party's reaffirmation in socialist policies and its breaking away from the Akalis, quite a big number of Scheduled Caste voted for the Congress party.

The Akali Dal or one its splinters had been always the second strongest party by a wide margin, in all elections it had contested. The

strength of the Akali Dal, unlike that of the Congress, had not fluctuated very much. The Akali Dal polled 24% of the popular vote in 1952. In 1962, despite the fact that it left some of its former leaders and members behind in the Congress and despite the fact that the Congress itself was led by a Sikh, the Akali Dal polled 20.7% of the vote. The Akali Dal had never passed the 30% barrier in electoral support during this period and it did not had the capacity to win a majority of seats by itself. In 1962, the Akali Dal won 22.1% of the seats.⁸⁶ Where as the Akali Dal was able to unify the Sikh community on purely religious and cultural matters and thereby monopolise the communal support, it could not reconcile urban-rural cleavage within Sikhs for matters purely political, as it was connected with economic interests. The Akali Dal, in 1962, as such was very much visible as a party of rural Sikhs or landed agriculturist castes.

The third party in Punjab i.e. Jan Sangh polled 4% of the popular vote in 1952, but won no seats in the Punjab region. It achieved major party status in 1957 by winning 7.2% of the popular vote and five seats. The Hindus, both urban and rural, supported Jan Sangh, urban Hindus did so overwhelmingly.

The fourth group of parties consists of the Communist parties, of which there had been three in the post independence Punjab. With the exception of 1957 when the CPI gained considerable new support among Sikh voters in the absence of an Akali opposition party, the level of electoral support for the Communist parties had been relatively stable, ranging from 7.9% to 9.8%.⁸⁷

The Scheduled Caste Federation and its descendant, the Republican Party of India did not won any seats in the elections. However, it did

polled 0.5% of the vote. Since 1957, there had been a steady decline in electoral support for the party.

Thus, in short, the Congress enjoyed the monopoly of power in pre-reorganized Punjab. The Congress was able to win all the three elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962. Its main political rival had been the Akali Dal. However, the Akali Dal merged with the Congress during 1948 and again in 1956, but separated from them when its political goals were not fulfilled. One issue - the creation of a Punjabi Suba-dominated the political scene of Punjab in this era, which was a period of turbulent agitation.

4.3 ELECTORAL POLITICS IN POST REORGANIZED PUNJAB (1967)

In the post 1966 Punjab, the Sikhs formed 60% of the population and Hindus around 38%. The Jan Sangh and Hindu members of the Congress who were the main obstacle in the way of the formation of Punjabi Suba, realised their mistake and soon accepted the demand. The formation of a separate linguistic state of Punjab constitutes a watershed in the Punjab and particularly in Akali Politics. In the changed situation in Punjab each party tried refurbish their demands in a cultural, linguistic, secular and national images. The support bases of these parties in post reorganized Punjab remain more or less the same. Where as the Akalis retained their support base among the rich and middle class Sikh peasantry in rural area and trading sections in towns; the Jan Sangh represented the shopkeepers, traders and low paid professional classes; and the Congress represented the bourgeois and rich and middle peasantry from among both Hindus and Sikhs. Thus, the post 1966 Punjab also saw

frequent permutations and combinations among the party to capture the power. The Akali Dal which earlier claimed to be the sole representative of the Sikh community, failed to capture the power in the state on its own. It was true that Sikhs since 1966 constitute a majority in Punjab, but a large sections were either antagonistic to Akali dominated Sikh politics, apathetic, or more attuned to the State Assembly system. The Akali Dal's failure to capture the support of the Sikh Harijans is the main reason for its failure to emerge as a dominant regional party. Alliance politics outside the Congress party, with its former major antagonists i.e. Jan Sangh, enabled the Akali Dal to form a coalition government in 1967, 1969 and 1977. In turn, the major Hindu oriented political party, the Jan Sangh (latter BJP) become increasingly moderate, even on sensitive language issues. The Congress electoral base was also affected in the 1967 and 1969 elections by the reorganization of the Punjab and by the emergence of the alternative non-Congress governing coalition of parties dominated by the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh. Thus the deliberate effort to overcome communal conflict through inter party coalition of communal parties occurred in 1967. Infact the creation of a narrow Sikh majority in the reorganized Punjab provided the conditions for greater inter party competitiveness, which was reflected in the results of the 1967 elections in which the Congress although it successfully maintained its inter-communal character, failed to win a majority of the seats.

5 CONCLUSION

During the past century, the Sikhs of the Punjab had developed from a distinctive religious sect, a dispersed minority intermixed among the much larger Hindu and Muslim communities, into a subjectively self conscious nationality, occupying a position of political dominance in a compact territorial

unit created by their own political efforts. In their development from a religious sect to a political nation, Sikh religious and political elites were able to draw upon a vast storehouse of historical, religious and linguistic symbols. In the process of symbol selection, certain elements of Sikh history and religion and of the Punjabi language had been emphasized while others had been downplayed. The process of symbol selection among the Sikhs demonstrates that when an ethnic group seeks political status, one symbol or set of symbols tends to be central, and that the end result is to achieve multi-symbol congruence with the central symbol. Thus, it was Keshadhari Sikhs, who displayed five symbols of Sikhism, who formed the central core of the Sikh nationality movement. The membership in the Sikh nation had come to refer primarily to Keshadhari Sikhs who speak Punjabi and write it in the Gurumukhi script and who identify with the martial traditions of the Sikh people. In the development of Sikh communal consciousness and in the successful achievement of a Punjabi Suba, political associations and organizations played decisive roles. In the post independence period when the Sikh population became concentrated in a compact geographical area and a demand for territorial autonomy became feasible, the linguistic division which had begun to develop in the pre independence period between Sikhs and Hindus began to be used as a basis for the demand to create a separate Punjabi-speaking province in which Sikh would be the politically dominant force.

Once the linguistic question had been brought to the forefront, a more sensible option available was to consolidate all Punjabi speaking areas, irrespective of their communal character so as to lay the foundation for a unified Punjabi cultural identity transcending communal divisions amongst

the Punjabi-speaking people. Since it refused, or what would be more charitable to say, failed to allow the Punjabi language to play a unifying role cutting across communal distinctions, the central leadership was to witness subordination of the basic cultural reality of language to the serving of communal purposes.⁸⁸ The achievement of the demand for the Punjabi Suba was the culmination of Sikh political aspirations in the Punjab. In the post reorganized Punjab, however the tendencies toward segmentation of the two communities in the Punjab had been modified in important respects both socially and politically. The Akali Dal failed to emerge as a dominant regional political party in the post-reorganization period, firstly because they are unable to get substantial support of the Sikh Harijans; and secondly because of the factions within the Akali Dal and finally there can be no future for the Akalis unless they can carry some of the Hindu with them. There is no alternative for them except to have the goodwill of the Hindu population and run the state in partnership with them.⁸⁹ For this they need to have an pre-electoral or post electoral alliance with other parties in Punjab like Jan Sangh/BJP. Besides this, all other parties in Punjab i.e. Congress, Jan Sangh and Communist had their own definite support bases. Large sections of the population i.e. Scheduled Caste had uncertain allegiances to the parties.

Punjab politics constituted politics of accommodation in which parties divide potentially antagonistic social groups in the process of competing for their support and then combined with each other for purposes of government. In Punjab one of the two main parties, the Congress, have been much stronger electorally than its chief rival, the Akali Dal. The Congress pursues its strategy of coalition building to capture power in the state through its inter

communal approach in accommodating the members of all the communities. When the Congress fails to win a majority in the Assembly, the Akali Dal comes forward and take steps to build its coalition system to capture power only by winning the support of two major communities and it will not be possible for any party to capture power on the basis of the exclusive support of one community alone. It also meant that the Akali Dal required both pre and post electoral alliances with other parties to compete successfully against the Congress. Second, two of the minor parties or group of parties in Punjab politics (the Jan Sangh (BJP) and the Communist parties) has acquired a regional concentration of strength and a stable support base in the electorate, which has so far resisted the inroads of the two major competitors. So the basic character of Punjab politics is the product of communal coalition building which is done both by Congress and the Akali Dal.

In short, Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab endured the hard crucible of cultural nationalism in a manner which reinforced their ethnic identity. In the process they appear to be evolving what Cynthia Enloe terms an appropriate "structural formula" through which they are able to design new political patterns.⁹⁰ Emphasis is not on the old cliches of modernization such as centralization, secularism and assimilation. To the contrary, decentralization, sacral concerns, and enhanced ethnic identities are part of the structural formula evolving out of the accommodation process. Increasing accommodation in the post reorganization period reflected the continuing institutionalization of political leadership and organizations in Punjab in relation to increasing levels of mobilization and participation. The continuing political institutionalization has been notable for both major communities in Punjab.⁹¹ They appear to

meet Samuel Huntingtons⁹² criteria of adaptability, complexity, and coherence in relation to the needs of their society. Political institutionalization and development in Punjab provides significant evidence that the existence of competing political systems in a multi-ethnic/religious society need not be contrary to the larger state and national interests as long as the political actors continue to be politically mature. As Paul R Brass pointed out that the consequences of ethnic politics in a regime of competitive parties may be, but are not necessarily, catastrophic. The possibilities for political solutions to ethnic- linguistic conflicts and for inter communal collaboration for political advantage are very great and are the rule, rather than a exception. Second, the political parties and political leaders do not simply reflect pre-existing ethnic cleavages. In the process of political competition, they shape them and moderate them as well.⁹³

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CHAPTER III

**POLITICS OF COALITION
BUILDING IN PUNJAB IN
1960s AND 1970s**

POLITICS OF COALITION BUILDING IN PUNJAB IN 1960's AND 1970's

1. INTRODUCTION

The years of 1964 and 1967 stand as two crucial landmarks in the democratic development of India's political system both at the centre and in the several states. In the three years since Nehru's death in May 1964, Indian politics entered fully into a major test of legitimacy.¹ Since 1964, the national leadership of the Indian National Congress has three times demonstrated its ability to handle smoothly the first stage of India's process of legitimizing democratic political authority - that of transferring power from a charismatic leader to his successors within the dominant party.² After the 1967 General elections, Indian politics moved to a second stage to confront the problems of transferring power from the previously dominant Congress to diverse parties and party coalitions in more than half the Indian states. Commenting on the outcome of the elections, Norman D. Palmer wrote, "In a sense, what many observers predicted for the fifth general elections in 1972, happened in 1967. The Congress monolith which for long has dominated the Indian political landscape, has been badly cracked, but not shattered—one party dominance has not been succeeded by a two party or three party or multiple but rather by, a cross party polity of dubious value."³ The term coalition is derived from the Latin word 'coalitio' which is the verbal substantive of coalescere, co-together, and alescere – to grow up, which means to go or to grow together. According to the dictionary meaning, coalition means an act of coalescing, or uniting into one body: a union of persons, states : alliance. It is a combination of a body or parts into one body or whole. In

the strict political sense the word coalition is used for an alliance or temporary union for joint action of various powers or states and also of the union into a single government of distinct parties or members of distinct parties. It is generally accepted that a coalition can take place only within the contexts of mixed motive in which both conflict and common interest are simultaneously present and must govern the course of action chosen.⁴

The reorganization of the state of Punjab in 1966 on a linguistic basis was primarily the result of the pressure from the Akali Dal. That the Akali movement for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state was not entirely based on its concern for the Punjabi language or Sikh religion was reflected in the fact that after fulfillment of its demand the Akali Dal behaved like any other moderate political party based on ideological commitments and economic classes, seeking to acquire power to serve the purposes to which it is committed and the interests which it represent. Immediately after reorganization of the state, Sant Fateh Singh declared that the Akali Dal would not be dissolved. It would continue to protect the rights and privileges of the Sikhs and seek to implement its economic programme. With that end in view it started to prepare for participating in the Fourth General elections.

Punjab also did not escape the sweep of the anti-Congress wave in 1967. In Punjab, the Congress organization was in a complete disarray, struggling to reacquire some organizational coherence in the aftermath of the dismissal in 1964 of a strong leader, Pratap Singh Kairon. The Punjab experiment presented some interesting contrasts with regard to other states. It was different from the rest in view of –(i) it's demographic

structure, particularly, as it had emerged after the states territorial reorganization in 1966. (ii) its somewhat different economic pattern and above all (iii) its being the exclusive home of one of the biggest and the most influential regional party, the Akali Dal.

During the two spells of the non-Congress governments –1967 to 1972 and 1977 to 80 - Punjab witnessed three coalition governments. The first one formed in March 1967 comprised the Akali Dal, the Jan Sangh, CPI, Republican Party and a few independent members. CPI (M) supported it from outside. The second government was a coalition between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh. Its continuity was slightly disrupted in March 1970 when its leadership changed hands from Gurnam Singh to Prakash Singh Badal. Its basic structure, however, remained intact. The third coalition government was formed in June 1977. It was the coalition between Akali Dal and Janta party. To all intents and purposes, the latter was in a no way different from the Jan Sangh except in name.

2. EMERGENCE OF COALITION POLITICS (1967-69)

The President's rule was revoked on November1,1966 after the reorganization of Punjab. The period between November1,1966 and February19,1967, when the polling for the IV general elections in Punjab was concluded, was marked by some disturbing developments which were directly or indirectly a part of the pre-election strategy by political parties aiming at gaining majority in the legislature. The Akalis renewed their agitational politics and the small political parties worked for forging a common front under the leadership of Sant's Akali Dal against the Congress party. The first important development was the agitational

politics of the Akalis. On November 1, 1966, the working committee of Sant Akali Dal met at Amritsar and passed a number of resolutions regretting the exclusion of Chandigarh and some other Punjabi speaking areas from the new state of Punjab and authorized Sant Fateh Singh to chalk out further programme for the redress of grievance. Master Tara Singh's Akali Dal passed a resolution demanding Sikh homeland which should be granted autonomous constitutional status and posts for Sikhs in the government services should be statutorily reserved. The extremist slogan however failed to win Master Tara Singh much support from the Sikh masses. The Sants self-immolation and fast caused a serious alarm. The government agreed to take up his demands for discussion and agreed to appoint a committee to look into the matter. However the government did not look into the matter.

Whatever the ethics of fasting and self-immolation plan and its future liabilities, the Sant's fast raised his political stock. It also barred the door to electoral alliance with the Congress. It further set the stage for the emergence of the United Front (UF) of opposition parties' with Sant Akali Dal at the centre and other political parties-the two Communist parties, the Republican party and the Samyukta Socialist party- playing the satellite. Master Akali Dal and Jan Sangh remained aloof.⁵ While originally the SSP was also a member of the United Front of like minded political parties but it disassociated itself not satisfying over distribution of seats. One of the notable feature of 1967 election was that the nominees of the Jan Sangh were predominantly Hindus and those of Akali parties predominantly Sikhs. The Republican Party fielded Scheduled Caste candidates. And, most of the nominees of the two Communist parties were

Sikhs, largely because of the demographic and communal composition of the districts in which the Communist parties had pockets of influence. The Congress party on the other hand, set up candidates drawn from all the religious communities, yet the Sikhs having a larger majority.⁶

Two political issues, one relating to Punjabi Suba problem and the other concerning the public grievances caused by rising prices, shortage of food stuffs and administrative lapses of the ruling party dominated 1967 elections. The Akali Dals, one led by Sant Fateh Singh and the other by Master Tara Singh, adopted a two fold approach to wean away the Sikh masses from the Congress party. They claimed credit for the formation of the Punjabi speaking state. But they resented the exclusion of Chandigarh and some other Punjabi speaking areas from Punjab. They presented the image of the Congress party as an organization which had always been discriminating against the Sikhs and denying to them their just claims.

The Akali Dal (Master) adopted an extremist stance vis-à-vis the Akali Dal (Sant) and reiterated the demand for 'Sikh Homeland' to win support of the Sikh masses. The Sant Akali Dal, on the other hand, adopted a more subtle and a rewarding strategy. It pursued an agitational approach to press for inclusion of Chandigarh and all other Punjabi speaking areas in new Punjab. Though the communal and religious aspect of the Punjabi Suba controversy receded into the background in the election campaigns of the Akali Dal (Sant), yet its impact on the Sikh and the Hindu electorate remained deep.⁷ The Akali Dal (Sant) group contested the 1967 elections along with the leftist parties, especially CPI, on the basis of a nine point programme. It included introduction of urgent land reforms, state trading in food grains and fighting for nationalization

of banks, aid and foreign trade, and curbing monopolies. Sant Akali Dals own election manifesto, however did not reflect any clear formulation of political or economic programme. It was full of platitudes as it wanted to placate every section of Sikh community particularly, in view of the rival Akali Dal led by Master Tara Singh contesting elections on slogans like creation of Sikhistan.⁸

The Communist parties — the CPI and the CPM — welcomed the formation of Punjabi Suba and supported the Akali Dal demand for the abolition of the common links and inclusion of Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas in Punjab. They disagreed with Masters communal politics. Their focus was on people's economic grievances and mistakes of ruling party, and secondly to work for a United Front of like minded parties to defeat the Congress. As far as Jan Sangh was concerned, its political support was confined to the urban Hindus. It adopted a dual policy to oppose both the Akalis and the Congress. The Akalis were criticized for their demands pertaining to Punjabi Suba and the Congress was condemned on economic issues. The Congress, which was the ruling party at that time, faced the election in such a divided and unorganized condition that it could not plan its strategy with any thought or design. The Punjab unit welcomed formation of Punjabi speaking state. This, however, did not appease Sikhs but further alienated Hindus. The Congress accepted the major demands of the traders, decided to establish a 'Revolving Fund' to extend interest free loans to Harijans and announced the provision of Rs. 21 crores for disbursement to peasants as loans for minor irrigation works. Besides, there were a number of instances of giving favours to its supporters in the distribution of governmental quotas, permits and licenses.

Turning to the electoral performance of different political parties, the Congress party failed to maintain its earlier dominant position. In 1967 elections, it got 48 seats out of the total of 104 seats with 37.42% of votes polled. The Sant Akali Dal won 24 seats. It effectively eliminated the Master Akali Dal who could win only 2 seats and established its claim to be the leading non-Congress party in Punjab. The Sant Akali Dal won the support of 20.45% of voters and Master Akali Dal of 4.22%. The Communist parties, CPI and CPM could win only 8 seats with 8.12% of valid votes. The Jan Sangh improved its position in the 1967 elections. It won 9 seats with 9.36% of valid votes polled. The success of the Republican Party can partly be attributed to its being a partner in the United Front. Altogether the United Front, consisting of Akali Dal (Sant), the CPI, CPM, and the Republican Party, captured 35 seats with 30.77% of the total valid votes.

Table - I :

Party-wise Position in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election, 1967.⁹

Total seats: 104				
<i>Name of the Party</i>	<i>Seats contested</i>	<i>Seats won</i>	<i>Percentage of Votes Polled</i>	<i>Percentage of Seats won</i>
Congress	102	48	37.42	46.15
Akali Dal (Sant)	58	24	20.49	23.08
Akali Dal (Master)	62	2	4.56	1.92
Jan Singh	49	9	9.36	8.65
CPI	19	5	4.85	4.81
CPM	13	3	3.27	2.89
Republican Party	17	3	2.16	2.89
Swatantra Party	10	—	0.50	—
PSP	9	—	0.51	—
SSP	8	1	0.72	0.96
Independents	96	9	16.06	8.65

The decline of the Congress and the emergence of the Akali Dal can apparently be traced to the overall anti-Congress wave and the success of regional parties as a result of inner party factionalism in the Congress all over the nation. But in addition, an important reason for the Congress decline in the Punjab was a change in the political orientation of the class of the Sikh farmers. Soon after the 1957 elections, because of the various reasons, starting from radical socialistic rhetorics and decrease in allocations for agricultural development, this class had started looking towards Congress as a party of businessman and industrialists. Consequently inspite of Congress government's efforts to appease the agriculturists and conceding their claim of the Punjabi Suba, it could not win over the rural class in Punjab. Thus, the issue of the division of Punjab was not in the forefront and was not getting the importance it was expected to get. Village factionalism and group rivalries were playing the important role. Rising prices coupled with the difficulties faced by the farmers in securing the necessary inputs for their fields appeared to be weighting heavily in deciding their role in the election. The class of peasantry was mainly with the Sant Akali Dal¹⁰.

2.1 United Front Ministry of Sardar Gurnam Singh (March 8, 1967 to November 24, 1967)

After the Fourth General Election in the state held on February 1967, the party position in the 104 member State Legislative Assembly was as follows: Congress 48, Akali Dal (Sant) 24, Akali Dal (Master) 2, CPI 5, CPM 3, Republican party 3, Jan Sangh 9, SSP 1, and Independents 9. Though the Congress party in Punjab returned to power with comfortable majorities in first three general elections, it was badly faction ridden and

public maligning each other by the leaders of the in-groups was not the least responsible for putting the party in the dock in the eyes of the people. The party was so fragmented that it could not select a leader before the opposition coalition was formed and had selected its leader. In a very delicately balanced house, where the first to act had the advantage, a diverse inter-party coalition was able to move faster and form the government before the Congress could muster its forces for an attempt.¹¹ “Moreover” as Baldev Raj Nayar says “without a forceful state leader such as Kairon or a national political hero such as Nehru, divisions within the Congress party were an even more serious liability than in the past”.¹² While Congress was still engaged in the torturous process of electing its leader in the legislature, the United Front parties won over the Jan Sangh, Master Akali Dal and Independents to claim a majority in the Punjab legislative assembly. With a view to forming a coalition, a meeting of the top leaders of the Jan Sangh and Akali Dal was held in Ludhiana. As a result of negotiations, the Jan Sangh agreed to join hands with the Akali Dal to form a coalition ministry in Punjab on the basis of agreed programme. The Sant Akali Dal and Jan Sangh came together and worked out a settlement on the vexed language question in Punjab. The five point formula on the language question laid down that:

- (a) existing safeguards for the development of Hindi would continue inspite of Punjab being regarded as a unilingual state;
- (b) privately managed schools would continue to teach both Punjabi and Hindi;
- (c) there would not be any discrimination against such schools, in respect of allocating governments financial grant;

- (d) Hindi, being the national language, would replace English as the link language and
- (e) the Front would fight against all separatist tendencies including the demand for a Sikh state.¹³

The Jan Sangh undertook to give up its claim that Punjab was a bilingual state, and that the Hindus formed a linguistic minority. After entering into an agreement with the Jan Sangh, the Sant Akali Dal leadership proceeded to obtain the support of other parties and independents so that it could pursue its goal of forming a coalition government. Other parties i.e CPI, CPI-M, Republican responded well to the Sant's call for a United Front Ministry. All these were all-India parties and all of them were directed by their national organizations to prevent the Congress from forming a Ministry. The United Front was indeed a cocktail of ideologies brought together by one consideration: to keep the Congress party out of power in the state.¹⁴ On March 4, 1967 the "Peoples United Front" a combination of all opposition parties and six independents was formed at a convention of Khanna. The United Front, which had a strength of 53 members, elected Sardar Gurnam Singh as its leader. The five member Ministry included two representatives of the Akali Dal (Sardar Gurnam Singh and Sardar Lachhman Singh Gill), one representative of the Jan Sangh (Dr Baldev Prakash) and one independent (General Rajinder Singh Sparrow). At first the CPI decided to support the Ministry without joining it, but latter the party joined the Ministry to make it more representative and to provide the necessary stability. The party's nominee (Mr. Satya Pal Dang) accordingly joined the cabinet on April 3, 1967. The CPM gave unconditional support to this Ministry without joining it. The

leader of the Congress party, S. Gian Singh Rarewala, described the United Front as a marriage of convenience.

The United Front government in Punjab was formed on the basis of eleven point minimum programme. The eleven point minimum programme of the United Front government was, indeed, an act of compromise as it reflected the viewpoint of all the alliance partners. This programme included:

1. To provide clean and honest administration.
2. To make Punjab strong and prosperous by ensuring communal harmony.
3. To check rising prices.
4. To exempt holdings upto 5 acres from land revenue.
5. To raise agricultural production by providing incentives to the peasants.
6. To rehabilitate and develop industry and commerce.
7. To provide tax relief to people of the urban areas.
8. To ameliorate the lot of the Scheduled Castes and other backward classes and distribute surplus land to the landless.
9. To appoint tribunals to investigate charges of corruption and nepotism.
10. To impose sales taxes at the source and to lessen the hardships experienced by the trading community at the hands of the 'Inspectorate Raj'.

11. To guarantee adequate wages and dearness allowances and to improve the working conditions of the workers.

Thus, it becomes apparent that the programme was intended to strengthen the support base of the major partners (the Akali Dal, the Jan Sangh and the CPI) as it stressed the need for improving the lot of the peasantry, the trading community and the working class.¹⁵

The five member coalition government had to be expanded from time to time to avert threats to its survival. The Congress party, keeping in view the thin majority of the Front, attempted to topple the Ministry through defections. But the Chief Minister outmanoeuvred the attempts of the Congress by expanding the Ministry on every occasion. On April 3, 1967, Mr. Satnam Singh Bajwa, who had defected from the Congress, and three Independents were sworn in. The Ministry was expanded for the second time on April 7, 1967 when Sardar Gurcharan Singh (Akali Sant Group) was inducted as Parliamentary Secretary. On May 6, 1967, five defectors from the Congress party (Balwant Singh, Baloo Ram, Shiv Chand, Tikka Jagtar Singh and Gurmeet Singh) were admitted to the Ministerial team. The size of the Ministry was raised to seventeen on May 12, 1967 when Mr. Kishen Lal (Jan Sangh) was appointed Minister, so as to act as leader of the ruling party in the Upper House. The Ministry was expanded for the fifth time on May 21, 1967 to accommodate three Congress defectors (Bhaktawar Singh, Shangara Singh and Harbhaj Ram) as Parliamentary Secretaries. In a twenty member Ministry, there were nine defectors. In other words, 45% of the representation in the Ministry went to the defectors.¹⁶

The first test of the United Front unity came in the month of April 1967, when the Congress opposition tabled an amendment to the motion of thanks to the Governor for his address. The amendment to the motion was as follows: "It is regrettable that no mention has been made in the address about the state trading of foodgrains in the state and about any deadline for the introduction of Punjabi at the secretariat level."¹⁷

The United Front Government led by Gurnam Singh suffered defeat in the State Vidhan Sabha when the motion of thanks to the Governor moved by the leader of the Congress opposition was adopted. The amendment was carried out by 53 votes to 49 in a 104-member house including the Speaker.¹⁸ None of the four member of the Front who voted in favour of the amendment actually crossed the floor. As soon as the amendment was passed, the Congress opposition demanded the immediate resignation of the United Front Ministry as it had been defeated on the floor of the House. The Chief Minister, Mr. Gurnam Singh, however, said that it was not obligatory on the government to resign on this issue particularly because (a) the substance of the amendment had been conceded by the government itself, (b) the voting was free, (c) no whip had been issued by the Front, (d) nobody had crossed the floor and, in any case, (e) the government continued to enjoy majority support in the House .¹⁹ The four recalcitrant M.L.A.s made it clear that they were with the government. The Governor was also of the opinion that the situation was not clear enough to justify the dismissal of the government. Above all, the Chief Minister disclosed that the government had already conceded the substance of the amendment and as such was not obliged to resign.

Regarding the functioning of the coalition government, to ensure the smooth functioning of the United Front government, the alliance partners had wisely established a coordination committee with Harkrishan Singh Surjeet of CPM as convener. The coordination committee assumed the role of the high command and helped the alliance partners in ironing out their differences. The coordination committee advised the coalition Ministry to take steps to abolish the Upper House and the professional tax, to nationalise passenger road transport, to review land laws in the interests of the tenants, to establish staff councils, to launch a drive against profiteers, to improve relations between the Government and its employees and asked for the introduction of partial state trading in grains. The Akali-Jan Sangh alliance worked well in the initial stage. The two worked together in the municipal elections held in October 1967. This benefited the Jan Sangh more and with the support of the Akalis, the party captured the key Amritsar municipality. The exigency of the situation forced the Jan Sangh to demonstrate the spirit of accommodation over the language issue. The Jan Sangh conceded that Punjabi was the official language of the Punjab and Hindi was to be used for communication with the Central government. This moderate language policy of the Jan Sangh came in for severe criticism at the hands of the Arya Samajists and the more conservative sections of the RSS and the Hindu Society. On the other hand the extremists in the ranks of the Akalis were equally critical of the increasing alliance between the two parties but things went on smoothly and the two leaders, Sant Fateh Singh and Yagya Dutt Sharma continued to had consultations to iron out the differences which arose from time to time.²⁰

The Akali Dal, instead of its uncompromising insistence on introducing Punjabi at all levels or any compulsion in this respect, that would have been

the natural corollary of Punjab being a unilingual state, the Akali Dal led first United Front Government allowed, significantly, the Sachar Formula to continue. The Chief Minister was not only lukewarm to, but definitely discouraged any clamping down of Punjabi at the secretariat level. The Chief Minister Mr. Gurnam Singh, infact agreed to consider the issue relating to the medium of instruction in private aided schools, provided the State Jan Sangh conceded that Punjab was a unilingual state. The State Jan Sangh accepted this and the Chief Minister going against the wishes of Akali Dal working committee, which had postponed the matter, relying on his personal popularity, announced that keeping in view the unity, harmony and goodwill of the state, it had been decided that the status quo regarding medium of instruction in private aided schools would continue.²¹ This close cooperation between the two religious parties representing different interests was welcomed by the people of the state as a signal of "intra-state integration and a better outlook for inter-communal harmony".²²

The economic programme of the Akali Dal seem to be tentative and amorphous like that of any political party keen to share power in a pluralist democratic society. These programmes accommodate a very wide variety of political attitudes ranging from extreme right, where the Dal can work out arrangements with the Jan Sangh to the extreme left, where it can enter into alliance with CPI and CPM. But seen in proper perspective, especially in light of its performance, these programmes can easily be interpreted as oriented towards rural reconstruction and favourable to the farming class. The first step by the Akali led first coalition-government was to exempt all landholdings upto five acres from payment of land revenues. The United Front government also accepted in principle the

demand for the abolition of betterment-fee levied on areas irrigated by the Bhakra canals, thus making the farmers not to pay even a small part of the cost of improvement of their lands. Similarly in place of existing fixed procurement price, the state government introduced the producers "guaranteed" price which was to include a reasonable and realistic profit on the cost of production, besides incentive. On its part, the Punjab Government fixed the procurement price for wheat considerably higher than previous year. Realising that through government procurement of food grains the state's revenue increased and that the farmers derived greater satisfaction, the Akali Dal started advocating complete take over of wholesale food grains trade, much to the dislike of urban traders. Punjab government's concern for betterment of farmers reflected not only in policy formulation, but also in a number of ambitious new schemes for improving agricultural production. It secured a World Bank loan of 39 million dollar to boost farm production. Of this loan 25.3 million-dollar was earmarked for the purchase of tractors. The tractors were to be given to farmers against loan to the extent of 75% of the price. The Punjab government also contemplated amending the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act 1956, to entitle married women to get a share in the laws property rather than the fathers land. This was vociferously demanded by the farmers on the plea that existing laws were leading to fragmentation of land holdings.²³ The Front brought about communal harmony in the state and set a high standard of honesty in the administration. The Ministry gave a tax relief through the abolition of professional tax. It granted dearness allowance at Central rates to its employees and implemented the Kothari Commission's recommendations for giving higher grades of pay to lecturers in colleges and universities. The government appointed grievance officers in

each district to look into public grievances and also appointed a pay commission for the revision of the pay scales of government employees.²⁴ According to Baldev Prakash, the Akali Jan Sangh led coalition government had three fold achievement to its credit: communal harmony, taxation relief and relief to government employees.

Since it was a multi-party coalition government comprising heterogenous groups with diverse political ideologies, difficulties were bound to emerge in running the state administration. Right from the beginning, the inclusion of the CPI in the coalition had become a common problem for the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh. The line followed by the CPI Minister did not appeal to the senior partners. As a result of this, the relations between the Jan Sangh and the CPI, on the one hand, and a dominant faction of the Akali Dal and the CPI, on the other, remained strained. The CPI Minister, Mr. Satya Pal Dang, had to face accusations both of the Jan Sangh and the Akali Ministers that he was fomenting labour agitations and strikes in the state. The members of the United Front were disturbed and alarmed by Marxists (CPI-M) efforts to carry Communist propaganda to the countryside and to develop an extensive network of political calls reaching into the villages; and were further angered by the Marxists proposal for new legislation to establish an eight hour day for agricultural labourers. The Communists in turn blamed the Jan Sangh for following anti-labour policies. The Front, therefore, functioned as a divided house. Even the coordination committee failed to keep the ambitious partners of the United Front together. The Akali Dal, by and large, sided with the Jan Sangh on economic issues, but it faced serious internal crisis over the communal issues.²⁵ The Republican Party leaders also expressed discontent on the government policy toward Scheduled Castes. While Gurnam

Singh, leader of the United Front, no doubt succeeded in accommodating the junior partners by dropping certain programmes which a larger section of the Akalis wanted to implement, but this policy of his was not liked by the extremist in the Akali Dal.²⁶ Infact right from the beginning discontentment among the various quarters in the Akali Dal was threatening the existence of the United Front Ministry. To begin with Harcharan Singh Hudiara, the leader of the Akali Dal, was not even made a Minister though he aspired for the Chief Ministership.

Thus, the next challenge to the survival of the Akali dominated coalition came from within the Akali Dal, due to its factional fights. Harcharan Singh Hudiara the leader of the 24 member Sant Akali Dal in the Assembly thought that since he was the leader of dominant Akali Party of the United Front, he was entitled to become the Chief Minister and not Gurnam Singh who was only a newcomer to the Akali Dal . And, contrary to his wishes, he was not even been made a Minister. The situation became more complex when the Congress decided to use him as an instrument against the United Front Ministry.²⁷ The Congress leader, Shri Prabodh Chandra brought no-confidence motion against the government. The motion was discussed on the next day on May 26. However the Congress lost the motion by 57 votes to 46. Only two dissident Akalis-Shri Harcharan Singh Hudiara and Shri Hazara Singh Gill - and the only unattached independent member, the Maharaja of Patiala voted with the Congress bloc of 43 members. No other member of the United Front defected. Shri Harcharan Singh Hudiara and Shri Hazara Singh Gill were suspended from the Akali Dal on May 26. The same day- May 26 Shri Hudiara announced the formation of a new Akali Dal. He was elected President by some 200 Akali workers, Jathedars and delegates at a meeting

of the Dal in Chandigarh. This became the third Akali Dal in the State-the other two having being those led by Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh. Each of the three Akali Dals claimed to be the only genuine organization of the Akalis.²⁸

Another leader Lachman Singh Gill, a trusted lieutenant of Sant Fateh Singh and Vice-president of the SGPC had also been a rival of Gurnam Singh, for leadership in the Akali party and was known to be dissatisfied with his own position and with the fact that his personal supporters had not received offices in the government. Ultimately Gill combined a variety of discontented elements and in November 1967 led fifteen legislators out of the United Front including five Sant Akalis, one Master Akali, six independents and three Republicans. He then went on to form a minority government of his own under the banner of Janta Party with Congress support.

They made it clear that they had quit the United Front mainly because they were opposed to the presence of the Communist in the Ministry. They further argued that the existence of the United Front Ministry was highly detrimental to the interests of the people and the growth and development of the state as they had failed to achieve the objective for which it was constituted. The Chief Minister, Mr. Gurnam Singh immediately conceded that he had lost majority support and tendered resignation of his ministry to the Governor on November 22. He advised the Governor to dissolve the Assembly and order mid-term elections.²⁹

2.2 Minority Government of Gill (November 25, 1967 to August 21, 1968).

On November 22, 1967, 19 MLA's headed by Lachhman Singh Gill sent a note to the Governor informing that they had parted company with

the United Front and that they were forming a new party to be known as Punjab Janta Party, which according to them, was to bring a clean public life, to give security and prosperity to the people and to strengthen communal harmony.³⁰ The then Governor, Mr. D.C. Pavate turned down the request of the outgoing Chief Minister to dissolve the Assembly and reiterated his right to form an alternate government. He said that 'it is not fair, either to the tax payer or to the government to go to the polls every now and then'.³¹ The Governor, at first, invited the leader of the Congress party, Gian Singh Rarewala, to explore the possibility of an alternate government. However, Rarewala declined this invitation but promised his party's support to the Gill in the event of Gill forming the Ministry. Gill explained to the Governor that he enjoyed the support of 66 members in a 104 member House. The members included: Congress-43, Punjab Janta party-16, Republican-2, Akali Dal (Master group) -1, Akali Dal (Hudiarra Group)-1, SSP-1, including the Maharaja of Patiala and the Speaker of the State Assembly Joginder Singh Mann. Accordingly, the Governor invited Mr. Gill to form the Ministry.

On November 25, 1967 Lachhman Singh Gill was sworn in as the new Chief Minister. The Congress wanted to be a backdoor driver without accepting any responsibility. The creation of the Gill Ministry constituted one bloc in the Assembly and the remnant of the United Front its bitter opposition. The Congress, however, divided internally into two inner party sub coalitions based on pre-existing groups in the party, now divided on the issue of support for the Gill Ministry. Gian Singh Rarewala, the leader of the Congress legislative party and some of his allies and supporters began to express opposition to the Gill Ministry. Rumors become increasingly common

that the Rarewala group was interested in forming a Congress government with the support of some or all of the anti-Gill Akalis. However, a sub coalition in the Punjab Congress opposed to the leadership of Gian Singh Rarewala group insisted upon continued support for the Gill ministry.³²

As per the terms of the agreement, Mr. Gill decided not to include any of the Congress defectors in his Ministry, as it was bound to have an adverse effect on the Congress ranks. Consequently, he did not include the three Congress defectors. After setting this modality for the formation of the cabinet, Mr. Gill inducted 13 Ministers into his cabinet on November 27, 1967. The four-day-old Ministry was again expanded on December 4 raising its strength to 16. The Gill Ministry earned the distinction of being a defector Ministry, as all the 16 Ministers (except Chaudhary Kartar Singh) were defectors.

The period of the Gill Ministry was marked by a series of political and constitutional distempers. Gill sought to deal with his opponents in a high handed manner, and his opponents retaliated in an equally ruthless way. The Sant Akali Dal expelled him and his fellow defectors from the Akali Dal. Gill, in turn, sought to humiliate Sant Fateh Singh and his close associate Sant Charan Singh, by instituting cases of criminal breach of trust and embezzlement of Gurudwara funds against the latter and some other Akali workers. The Sant too showed his hand and humiliated Gill in the budget of the SGPC where a resolution supported by a large majority was passed against Gill, despite the fact that Gill was the General Secretary of the SGPC. This demonstrated the Sant's hold on SGPC.

The United Front parties challenged the legality of Gill's appointment in the Legislative Assembly. On Dec 4, 1967 the legality and constitutionality

of the Gill Ministry was questioned on a point of order on the floor of the Assembly on three counts:

- 1- that the ruling Janta Party had a strength of only 18 in the 104-member House and as such was a minority government;
- 2- that the Janta Party had no constitution or politics of its own; and
- 3- that Shri Gill had not been elected leader of the House by a majority of the members since the Congress had only declared its support for the Gill Ministry and had not accepted Gill as the leader of the combined Janta and Congress parties. The matter was heatedly discussed in the Assembly for three days. After three days of debate, the Speaker overruled the objection of the Front leaders after ascertaining the majority of Mr. Gill in the Assembly. The Speaker while giving his ruling, reiterated that the Governor had the necessary discretionary power to appoint a Chief Minister whether he belonged to a majority party, minority's party or was a non-member.

The controversies that centered round the constitutional problems were the most important and serious of all distempers during this period. In November 1967, the Governor Pavate was criticised for not allowing enough time to Gurnam Singh, the leader of the outgoing United Front parties, which still formed the largest group in the legislature to indicate whether he could form the government. A more serious constitutional controversy was caused when the Speaker of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, J.S. Mann, adjourned the Budget session of the Punjab Assembly on March 7, 1968, for two months on the ground that the House was 'very angry and rowdy'. The real

reason was that on the previous day, i.e. on March 6, two notices of motions expressing lack of confidence in the Speaker for his failure to maintain the dignity and decorum in the House had been moved by some member of the Congress and the ruling Janta Party. This created a very serious situation as the Budget (Punjab Appropriation Bill) had not been approved by the House. After great deliberations, the Governor prorogued the House on March 12, under Article 174(2) of the Constitution. Next day, the Governor issued an ordinance laying down that the House cannot be adjourned until the Budget is passed except by an order of the House, thus curtailing the power of the Speaker.³³ The Governor also summoned the House to meet on March 18, 1968. When the Assembly met on the scheduled date, the Speaker, reiterated his earlier decision, again adjourned the House on the plea that the Governor had no power to summon the House when adjourned under Rule 105 of the House. But the government was successful in installing the Deputy Speaker in the chair, who restored order in the House. The Finance Minister, Dr. Jagjit Singh, put the demands for grants one by one. There was no discussion at all on any of the demands. The Deputy Speaker thus put the demands to vote and declared them as passed. The House was then adjourned. On March 22, 1968 the Governor gave his assent to the two Appropriation Bills. The opposition leaders filed two writ petitions in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The High court accepted the writ petitions and unanimously held the two Appropriation Bills as ultra vires of the Constitution and Governors ordinance as void. However, the Supreme Court in its judgment upheld the constitutional validity of the Appropriation Bills and nullified the earlier judgement of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The Gill Ministry had at least one achievement to its credit. The Gill

Ministry immediately after taking over in late 1967 passed the Language Bill which made Punjabi in Gurmukhi script the sole official language in all schools and colleges in the state and would be used as the medium of communication with the Central Government. Also in the case of private managed schools, choice of medium of instruction was left to their discretion.³⁴

While the Gill Ministry had won the legal battle, yet his Ministry was heading for a collapse due to the mistrust that had developed between the leader of the Congress legislature party (Gian Singh Rarewala) and the Chief Minister. Gill had started ruling the state according to his personal whims and refused to follow the directives of the Congress leaders.

On August 20, 1968, the Congress President, S. Najalingappa, formally announced the withdrawal of the Congress support to the Gill Ministry in Punjab as a consequence of which it fell, and President's rule was proclaimed in the state on August 23, 1968.

3. MID TERM ELECTION (1969) AND RESTORATION OF COALITION POLITICS IN PUNJAB. (1969-1971).

The President's rule was imposed on August 23, 1968 and the State Assembly was dissolved. The promulgation of the President's rule was welcomed all over Punjab. The leader of the opposition, Gurnam Singh, appealed to the people of Punjab to observe August 25, as a day of 'thanksgiving' and 'deliverance' of the Gill Ministry. The General Secretary of the State Congress Legislative party, Mohan Lal, claimed that the Congress withdrawal would lay foundation for bringing about political stability in the state. The Jan Sangh directed all its units to celebrate 'Liberation Day' by holding rallies to mark the Gill Ministry's exit. The leaders of the various

political parties and the public in general appreciated the decision taken by the Congress High Command.

A significant feature of the pre-poll scene in Punjab in 1969 was that of the merger of the two Akali Dals. On September 28, 1968, the 16th All India Akali Conference was held at Batala. Due to perhaps, to the needs of accommodation among groups of divergent political orientation, this Conference passed a resolution in favour of greater state autonomy.³⁵ In the conference, Sant Fateh Singh strongly criticized the Union government for its alleged interference in the working of the state government and demanded more autonomy for the state.³⁶ In the words of Ajit Singh Sarhadi, "It was a deliberate day to day interference by the Centre in the affairs of the State administration and the efforts of the Congress high command to sabotage the non-Congress Ministries of the States that impelled the Akali leadership to sponsor a resolution in the Akali Conference held at Batala in September 1968."³⁷ The same Conference also paved the way for the merger of the two Akali Dals.

The second most significant development was that the image of Congress party suffered in public esteem. The role of Congress party in opposition contributed further to its unpopularity. It failed to function as a responsible opposition party as also to prevent defections from its own ranks. It adopted a new strategy of installing Gills Janta Party into office as the new Ministry and extending full support to it without participating in the Ministry. The mis-deeds of Gill's Ministry came to be interpreted as the mis-deeds of the Congress party which was supporting the Ministry. Thus the Congress party was not at its best when it had to face the electorate in February 1969.

The third most important development was a growing estrangement between the Communist parties and Jan Sangh. Partly it was a result of the antagonistic postures of these political parties at All India level, but mainly it was due to sharp differences that arose between them during the working of the United Front Ministry in Punjab . The Akali Dal maintained its relation with the Communist party as well as with the Jan Sangh though it was drawn closer to the latter.

The mid term elections in 1969 also witnessed a number of electoral alliances and adjustments of seats between political parties. The Congress party stood aloof from other political parties neither seeking electoral alliances nor receiving any overtures from other political parties. Its major slogan, which was repeated by almost all its leading campaigners, including Mrs. Gandhi and Morarji Desai was that it alone could assure stable government in the State and that experiment of a United Front as well as that of Gill's minority government had failed. But its promise of establishing a stable government did not carry conviction as the party was a divided House because of the in-fights among its numerous factions and sub factions.

Gill's Janta party had neither any organization nor mass support in the State. It was a party of leaders without any followers. It was shunned by every other political party.

The parties of the United Front (the Akali Dal, the Jan Sangh, the CPI, the CPM, the SSP, and the RPI (A)) failed to maintain a United Front despite the fact that there had been a United Front Ministry in 1967. However, they still continued in their attempt to bring together the parties in United Front on the basis of some mutually agreed terms and conditions. The final result of

negotiations between the United Front parties was that, while the 'old United Front' could not continue, adjustment of seats between some of the parties was possible.³⁸ The intricate patchwork of these adjustments can best be indicated as follows:

- 1- There was no adjustment of seats between the Jan Sangh on the one hand and the two Communist parties on the other.
- 2- There was only a partial adjustment of seats between the CPI and CPM. While in the Fourth General election there was a dispute between them only on two seats in Attari (R) and Nangal constituencies, in the mid term election, the two Communist parties faced each other in four constituencies, including the Bara Pind constituency where Harkishan Singh Surjeet, the most prominent of the CPM leader in the state and the sitting member from the constituency, was contesting election.
- 3- In spite of the best efforts made by CPI to reach agreement with the Akali Dal over adjustment of seats, there was only a partial success in this direction. There were only five seats in three districts where the Akali Dal committed itself to support the CPI candidates, while there were 15 seats where the two parties opposed each other in three-cornered contests. The CPI supported the Akalis in 22 constituencies, but qualified its general support to the Akalis by the stipulation that it would not support candidates who were allegedly corrupt, fanatical, communal or had defected from other parties. The Akalis even opposed a prominent CPI candidate and an ex-Minister in the United Front Ministry, S.P. Dang in Amritsar (West) constituency.

- 4- The CPM arranged its adjustment of seats with the Akalis rather smoothly and agreed to extend full support to all Akali candidates in return for the Akali support for 10 of its candidates.
- 5- There was a broad agreement among the CPI, the SSP and the RPI (A) by which each political party supported the candidates of the other.³⁹
- 6- There was a kind of United Front between the Akalis and the Jan Sangh. They reached almost complete agreement over the adjustment of seats and there were only 2 constituencies in the state where they opposed each other. This was in marked contrast with the position in the Fourth General elections where the two parties had actively opposed each other in almost all constituencies. Only in respect of Jan Sangh a definite declaration was made by the Akali Dal that even if the Akalis won an absolute majority in Punjab they would not form a government without a coalition with Jan Sangh.⁴⁰ Their leaders addressed meetings from common platform and toured the constituencies together. This alliance was based on a realistic appraisal of the enlightened self interest of the two parties, one claiming to represent the interests of the Sikh community and the other generally recognized to be the spokesman of the communal section of the Hindus.

Almost all the major political parties issued special manifesto relating to problems of Punjab politics. There was a general agreement on many issues: honest and efficient administration; reduction of taxes on the poor; encouragement to agriculture and further facilities to the agriculturists;

setting up of heavy industries in Punjab, preferably in public sector; credit facilities to the low income groups for housing programmes and for setting up small factories; improvement of service conditions of the public servants; free school education, etc. The party manifestos vied with one another in promising better facilities for the Scheduled Castes and other backward classes and devoted large space in the manifestoes to the measures they would adopt if returned to power. Beside this all political parties promised to work for the inclusion of Chandigarh, Bhakra-Nangal complex and other Punjabi-speaking areas in Punjab. However the mode of expressing it and the stress laid on the means for accomplishing the task varied from one party to another. While the Akali Dal threatened agitation and struggle, the Republican Party of India (Ambedkar group) demanded immediate merger of these areas without the formality of securing the Prime Minister's award in favour of Punjab, the Congress party promised that it would request the Prime Minister to give her award at an early date. The Jan Sangh deliberately avoided any mention of the issue in its manifesto, though its leadership had already committed itself to raising the demand for including Chandigarh and other areas in Punjab and had accepted the principle of the Prime Minister's arbitration on the issue.⁴¹

A significant feature of the pre poll scene in Punjab in 1969 was the rightward swing in the attitude of both the Congress and Akali Dal, primarily to win the support of the agriculturist classes. While in the last general elections (1967) the Akalis had raised the slogan of land reform and nationalization of banks and tea estates. But the United Akali Dal in 1969, clearly resiled from that position. They promised the concessions that were to benefit the rich peasantry.⁴² The Akali Dal made a fusion of

Jat rule with Akali rule and played on sentiment of the rural voters. The non Jat section of the population especially the Punjabi Hindus had apprehensions that they would be dominated by the Jat rule. In order to woo the Punjabi Hindu, Akali Dal made an alliance with the Jan Sangh. The emergence of the Akali Dal as a unified single Sikh party had already brought concentration of landed aristocracy and rich peasantry in the same party. The Jan Sangh also in its manifesto for 1969 mid term polls agreed for a wide range of concessions for agriculturists.⁴³

While all the political parties accepted that Punjabi in Gurumukhi script was the regional language of the state and Hindi the national language, no political party, excepting the R.P.I. (A), raised the issue whether there was any Hindi-speaking minority in Punjab. The R.P.I. (A) recognized that there was a Hindi-speaking minority and its rights should be protected. The Jan Sangh manifesto affirmed that it would enforce the use of Punjabi at all levels of administration but laid its major emphasis on providing safeguards for Hindi which was discussed as not only a link and national language but also the language used by a big section of the people in Punjab. The Congress party laid emphasis on secularism and roundly attacked the Jan Sangh and the Akali Dal as communal political parties. The Akali Dal, claiming to safeguard the interests of the Sikhs, promised to work for the promotion of the common interest of all Punjabis as well as for the cooperation among all sections of the people, particularly between the majority community and the minorities.

In the 1969 mid term election to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, the Akali Dal further strengthened its position. It emerged as the single largest party by capturing 43 seats with 29.59% of vote.

The 1969 mid-term election further shattered the deteriorated image of the Congress and it relegated the party to a secondary position. In the 1969 election, it could win only 38 seats with 39.38% of votes polled. The Jan Sangh could win only 8 seats with 8.84% of votes polled. The CPI won 4 seats with 4.54% of votes polled in 1969 elections. Similarly the CPM also lost one seat by winning only 2 seats with 3.10% of votes polled in 1969.

Table II

Party Wise position in Punjab Vidhan Sabha Election 1969.⁴⁴

Name of Party	Seats Contested	Seats won	Percentage of Votes Polled	Percentage of seats
Congress	103	38	39.38	36.54
Akali Dal	65	43	29.59	41.35
Jan Sangh	30	8	8.84	7.69
CPI	28	4	4.54	3.85
CPM	10	2	3.10	1.92
SSP	7	2	0.84	1.92
PSP	3	1	0.51	0.96
Swatantra	6	1	0.41	0.96
Janta	14	1	1.41	0.96
Republican(A)	10	—	—	—
Proutist	6	—	0.43	—
Labour	3	—	0.41	—
Mazabi	2	—	0.13	—
Independents	161	4	8.90	3.85

3.1 Akali-Jan Sangh Coalition Ministry (February 17, 1969 to March 27, 1970)

The Akali-Jan Sangh coalition government was formed on the strength of the wafer thin majority of 53 in a 104 member house. The Communist

parties declared their support to be conditional and critical. Somewhat similar was the political stand of other minor political parties like the SSP, the PSP, and the Swatantra. The Independents joined the Akali Dal within less than six months of the formation of new Ministry. The Congress party sat in the opposition. Gurnam Singh was elected as its leader and was sworn in as Chief Minister on February 17, 1969. The Chief Minister preferred to call the coalition government a 'United Front' Government possibly to keep up the façade of the Akali-led United Front government (1967). However, the Akali Jan Sangh coalition was qualitatively different from the former United Front (1967) in more than one sense. Apart from the fact that the leftist parties, particularly the Communist parties of India, although out of Ministry, were extending conditional support to the Ministry, the composition of the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh legislators had undergone a metamorphosis. With the passage of time, the new rich class, both urban and rural, had come to dominate both the parties. In view of the precariously thin majority of the coalition, coupled with several pulls and pressures within the Akali Dal, the Chief Minister, Gurnam Singh, had brought about a great degree of circumspection and tact on the task of forming the Ministry. To begin with, Gurnam Singh had assumed power with four cabinet colleagues, two from the Akali Dal and two from the Jan Sangh. The Ministry was expanded by the addition of one cabinet Minister (Bhagat Singh, a Harijan Akali MLA) on May 16, 1969, to accord representation to the Harijan community. The Ministry was expanded a number of times and the strength of the Ministry thus went upto 18.

The ten point programme of this coalition government was a continuation of the programme of the United Front Ministry. It assured inter alia:

- 1- To maintain communal harmony.
- 2- To provide clean and efficient administration.
- 3- To look after the welfare of ex-servicemen and government pensioners.
- 4- To examine the wage structure of low paid employees.
- 5- To take immediate steps for the inclusion of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking area, including the Bhakra Dam complex, in the geographical area of Punjab.
- 6- To take steps to replace English with Hindi as the national link language.
- 7- To augment the production of electricity for the development of agriculture and industry.
- 8- To increase agricultural production by providing the requisite facilities to the peasantry.
- 9- To lessen the burden of Sales Tax and to ensure an equitable taxation policy.
- 10- To ameliorate the conditions of the backward and Scheduled Castes.

As a matter of fact, the common programme represented an amalgam of the basic commitments of the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh towards ameliorating the conditions of the rural peasantry and the middle class urban trading community.⁴⁵

The Akali-Jan Sangh coalition started its functioning in a spirit of cordiality. The Jan Sangh was given due representation in the Ministry in accordance with its numerical strength in the Assembly. Since it was a two

party coalition government, the top leaders of the respective parties (Sant Fateh Singh and Dr. Baldev Prakash) used to meet to iron out their differences and therefore, the need for a coordination committee was not felt. However, in March 1969, about a month after assuming power, the rift between the coalition partners emerged on to the surface, over the various vital issues. The extremist sections of the Akalis and the Arya Samaj Hindus criticized the leaders of the two coalition parties for their conciliatory attitude towards each other. As the Akali Dal gathered greater numerical strength through defections from the Congress, the extremist section inside the Akali Dal began to clamour that the Akali Dal did not need the Jan Sangh support. The Arya Samaj press on the other hand subjected the Jan Sangh to seething criticism. The Jan Sangh also resented that it had not been taken into confidence by the Chief Minister on the expansion of the Ministry in July 1969. But the major point of difference between the two partners arose over the declaration of the new language policy by the government on July 2, 1969. The Sachar formula and PEPSU formula, which had hitherto been regulating the educational policy of the government, were scrapped and replaced by a 'Three language formula' according to which, Punjabi should be the first compulsory language and the medium of instruction at all stages in Government schools, Hindi would be the second language from the fourth class and English the third compulsory language from the sixth class. While both the coalition partners agreed to the application of this formula in the government schools, differences arose among them with regard to the private schools. The Akali Dal Ministers favoured a uniform formula for both the government schools and government aided private schools. The Jan Sangh ministers threatened to quit the Ministry unless the government

aided private schools were given an option to adopt any language as the medium of instruction according to the choice of the parents of the pupils. The Akali Dal succumbed to the Jan Sangh demand in order to save the coalition, but this further strained the relations between the two parties.⁴⁶

More serious challenge was posed by the revival of the Chandigarh issue. The adversaries of Sant Fateh Singh were successful in persuading Darshan Singh Pheruman to undertake a fast till death with effect from August 15, 1969 to try and achieve the merger of Chandigarh with Punjab. Sardar Pheruman scarificed his life after 74 days of fasting and his martyrdom damaged to a considerable extent the stature of the Sant, who had broken his fasts unto death in 1960 and 1966, without achieving his objective. To retrieve his honour, Sant Fateh Singh again resorted to a fast-unto death from January 26, 1970 and also threatened to immolate himself on February 1, 1970, if his demand for the merger of Chandigarh with Punjab was not conceded. The Union government after negotiations with the Chief Ministers of Haryana and Punjab, announced a package deal on January 29, 1970. According to this agreement, Chandigarh was to be transferred to Punjab, while Fazilka and Abohar towns including 104 villages were to be transferred to Haryana after a period of five years. A commission was to be appointed to settle the territorial claims of the respective states on a linguistic basis. This package deal however existed only on paper as no concrete steps were taken to implement it.⁴⁷

In March 1970, there was a constitutional crisis which led to the overthrow of Gurnam Singh's Ministry by the majority group of Akali Dal. It was a sequel of development inside the Akali Dal which stood divided

between the supporters of Sant Fateh Singh and Gurnam Singh. The Akali Dal fielded two candidates (Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Jathedar Santokh Singh of Delhi) in the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha which were held on March 25, 1970. Giani Bhupinder Singh (Chairman of the Parliamentary Board of the Akali Dal) contested this election in violation of the party directive. He entered the elections on an assurance from the Chief Minister who had managed support for him by entering into a secret deal with the Congress. As a result of this, one of the official candidates, Santokh Singh was defeated and Sardar Tohra and Giani Bhupinder Singh were elected to the Rajya Sabha. This annoyed Sant Fateh Singh and accordingly he decided to replace Sardar Gurnam Singh who had started defying the Sant. On the other hand, the Chief Minister had started resenting the interference of the Sant in the day to day administration. As a result of this tussle, the relations between the Chief Minister and the Party Chief became strained. Besides, the Jan Sangh was also feeling unhappy with the Chief Minister for his indifferent attitude towards Hindu interests. All these factors left no other option for the Sant except to replace the Chief Minister. Sant Fateh Singh drew up his strategy with the Dal alliance partner (the Jan Sangh) and decided to topple the Gurnam Singh Ministry immediately. When the Speaker called upon the Finance Minister (Balwant Singh) to move the Appropriation Bill, he refused to do so under the instruction from the party. After his refusal, the Chief Minister himself moved the Bill, which was rejected by 44 votes to 29. With the defeat of the government, the House was adjourned.⁴⁸

3.2. The Badal's Ministry (March 27, 1970 to June 14, 1971)

On March 27, 1970, Prakash Singh Badal was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the state along with two of his cabinet colleagues-Balwant Singh

(Akali-Sant) and Balramji Das Tandon (Jan Sangh). This was a coalition government consisting of the same old partners- the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh. After the oath ceremony, the Chief Minister stressed his priorities to restore communal harmony in the state and re-establish complete Hindu-Sikh amity. Besides, Hindu-Sikh unity, which was the sheet anchor of his government, Badal unfolded in 11 point programme for which his government would work steadfastly. The 11 point programme was as follows:

- 1- Besides steps to restore Hindu-Sikh unity, the government would develop and promote Punjabi as the state language and Hindi as the National language.
- 2- Education facilities would be extended both in the rural and urban areas with a view in achieving hundred percent literacy in the state within the next few years.
- 3- The government would root out corruption from public life as well as from administration.
- 4- And try to bridge the gap between the common man and the administration.
- 5- Special emphasis would be placed on the schemes for the welfare of members of the Scheduled Castes and the backward classes.
- 6- Immediate steps would be taken to distribute the evacuee lands to the landless Harijans. A sizeable revolving fund would be created for their welfare schemes.
- 7- In the field of agriculture, a new strategy would be evolved to maintain Punjab's position as the granary of India and also to promote

the cultivation of commercial crops. Small landowners would be given special incentives.

- 8- The programme for rural electrification as also the rural development works and construction of link roads in the state would be streamlined with a view to electrifying every village and connecting every village with the main roads.
- 9- A blue print for the growth of industries, particularly large and medium scale industries, both in the private and public sectors, would be prepared and special incentives would be given to the new industrial entrepreneurs.
- 10- Industrial workers, government employees and teacher would be given a fair deal, and all loopholes in the existing legislation relating to them would be plugged.
- 11- Efforts would be made to remove anomalies in the pay commission and Kothari commission grade.⁴⁹

Apart from conceding the demands of the Jan Sangh, the new programme of the Badal Ministry continued to be pro-peasant and rural oriented. The minimum programme fully reflected the basic commitment of the Akali Dal to tackle the problems of the poor peasantry and other backward classes including the Scheduled Castes.

The Ministry was expanded twice to win over the leftovers in the coalition by providing them berth in the new Ministry. With the last expansion of Ministry, its strength rose from 3 to 29. The Akali-Jan Sangh coalition had 57 members in the Assembly and almost every second legislator of the coalition was in the Ministry. The total membership of the Jan

Sangh in the Assembly was seven. Of these seven members, four were in the Ministry and one was Deputy Speaker, while the Akali Dal with 49 members in the Assembly, had six Cabinet Ministers, 11 Ministers of the State and four Deputy Ministers. Thus, the Jan Sangh was proportionately in an advantageous position so far as the distribution of ministerial offices was concerned.⁵⁰

Still, the relation between the Akali Dal (Sant) and the Jan Sangh began to deteriorate almost immediately after the formation of Badal's Ministry. Both the parties were under pressure from the extremist sections of their co-religionists. The major demand of the Jan Sangh was that the Ministry should honour the commitments made earlier to either set up a University at Jalandhar or to revise its stand on the jurisdiction of the new Guru Nanak Dev University established at Amritsar. It also wanted the Ministry to prevent the reported decision of the Punjabi University at Patiala to exclude the use of Hindi in the University not only as a medium of instruction but also as a compulsory subject. The entire controversy thus revolved around the language problem in the state. Jan Sangh's other charges were: the Ministry had been reluctant to implement policy decisions accepted by both the coalition parties; that promotions and transfers in the services were made on communal and partisan basis; and that the coordination committee, agreed to between the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh, had not been formed. The Jan Sangh, under pressure from the Arya Samaj Press, could not stay in the Ministry without getting its major demands conceded. A large section of the Akalis felt that the Jan Sangh's approach was communal and that it had a larger share in the Ministerial posts than its strength in the legislature warranted. The Akalis were not willing to make any change in the notified jurisdiction of the Guru

Nanak Dev University. This was endorsed by the Akali legislators in their meeting of June 26 and by the Akali Dal Working committee on June 28.⁵¹

The Jan Sangh withdrew itself from the ministry on June 30, leaving the Akalis in a minority in the legislature. Baldev Prakash, the Jan Sangh Finance Minister in the coalition government declared that the Jan Sangh had to withdraw support from the coalition primarily because of its disillusionment with the working of the Akali leadership, as also its failure to contain the irresponsible extremist elements in its party. Before bidding farewell to its junior partner (Jan Sangh), the Akali Dal had started thinking of various permutations and combinations in order to stay in power. The Sant made various attempts to get new allies. The Governor, D.C. Pavate told the Chief Minister to summon the Assembly as early as possible to demonstrate his claim that he still enjoyed majority in the Assembly. The Assembly was summoned by the Governor to meet on July 24, 1970. Sant Fateh Singh made an attempt to bring back Gurnam Singh's Akali Dal to Sant's Akali Dal. These did not succeed. A major effort was made to win the support of the Congress party. Both the Sant and Badal met the central leaders at Delhi. But the Congress leaders insisted that the Dal must furnish some proof of its progressive and secular outlook and should follow the economic programme of the Congress (R). The Akalis promised, among other things, that they would lend support to the ruling Congress in the Parliament and would contest not more than 4 Parliamentary seats from Punjab (out of the total of 13 elected from Punjab) and support the Congress from other nine Parliamentary constituencies. Sant Fateh Singh issued a 2000 word statement on the 'Policy and Programme' of the Akali Dal on July 20, 1970 which implied that the Akali Dal (Sant) had agreed to some of the major conditions laid

down by the Congress (R) to gain the latter's support. The statement on 'Policy and Programme' committed the Akali Dal (Sant) to land reforms, state trading in food grains, taxation on richer sections of society, support to weaker sections of the community, particularly the Harijans and the landless labourers. There was however, no reference to the status of Hindi or to the education policy of the Punjab government.

The Sant's statement had a desired improvement on relations between the Akalis and the Congress. The Punjab Vidhan Sabha met on July 24, 1970. The special session had been called to assess the support enjoyed by the Badal Ministry. Two no-confidence motions were moved against the Ministry. One of the motions stood in the names of SatyaPal Dang and Dana Ram (both CPI) while the other stood in the name of Balramji Das Tondon (Jan Sangh). These two no-confidence motions against the Badal Ministry failed to get admittance in the Assembly for want of the requisite support of 21 MLA's. Only 19 members rose in their seats in support of the motions. Those who stood in support of the motions were eight members of the Gurnam Singh group, seven of the Jan Sangh and four of the CPI. 28 member Congress legislature party remained neutral.⁵² After five months, on November 25, 1970, Gurnam Singh's seven member group rejoined the Akali Dal (Sant-ruling) unconditionally "in the interest of Panthic Unity". As a result of the merger of the two groups, the strength of the Akali Dal went up to fifty five. This provided the necessary boost to the Badal Ministry as it could now survive on its own strength.

There were prolonged negotiations for the adjustment of seats between the Congress (R) and the Akali Dal (Sant) for the Lok Sabha elections in March 1971. But the Akalis went back on their promise and staked their

claims too high. They wanted to contest at least seven seats and hoped to win even nine seats if there was no agreement between the Akalis and the Congress. The Congress looked to CPI and entered into close alliance with it. The Lok Sabha elections brought into sharp focus the inherent weakness of the Dal. Out of the 12 seats contested by the Akali Dal, only one was won by it and that too with a narrow margin, and the rest of 10 seats were won by Congress (R) and two by CPI. It put an end to the possibility of any electoral arrangement between the Akalis and Congress. The results also re-established the dominance of the Congress in Punjab.

After the Akali rout in the Lok Sabha elections, the internal dissensions in the party took an ugly turn. The member started levelling charges of corruption against certain Ministers and others started angling for the Ministerial posts. Sant Fateh Singh made frantic efforts to resolve the internal bickerings of the party leaders. But his attempts were foiled by Gurnam Singh who conspired with the Congress to topple the Ministry. Mr. Badal outmanoeuvred his rivals by advising the Governor to dissolve the Assembly. The Governor accepted the advice of the Chief Minister and immediately dissolved the Assembly and Presidents rule was imposed on June 15, 1971. Although Congress leaders and Gurnam Singh vehemently criticized the Governors decision, he had been praised by some for refusing to re-enact the Gill-type drama by installing a government of defectors.

Although much energy and time was wasted in inter party rivalry, yet the Badal Ministry was able to do some constructive work. For rural upliftment, it introduced the Model village scheme. It also established a corporate body with an initial capital of Rs 5 crore for the welfare of the Harijans.⁵³

4. RE-EMERGENCE OF COALITION POLITICS IN PUNJAB (1977-80)

The Congress (R) after its spectacular victory in the mid term Lok Sabha elections wanted to consolidate its position in states also. In Punjab, the Akali Dal Ministry apart from inter party conflicts was in trouble from its internal dissensions- too many MLAs fighting for rewards and officer to be satisfied. This helped Congress (R) which was working for the overthrow of the Ministry. Fresh elections to the Punjab Assembly were held in March 1972. By this time Congress (R) under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and her radical pronounce had become quite popular. The Indo-Pakistan war in December 1971 culminating in Bangladesh creation had added a lot to Mrs. Gandhi's prestige. On the other hand, Akali Dal was not only a divided house, but also was politically isolated. Neither Jan Sangh nor CPI could form alliance with it. The government instability during Akali regime (1967-71) was also exploited by the Congress (R). The Akali Dal got 27.65% of votes, though it won only 24 seats. It was a shift of Hindu and Harijan votes which tilted the scales. Not only many Jan Sangh candidates lost by large margins even in their traditional strong holds, but also the party could not secure even a single seat in the Assembly. As the main opposition party the Akali Dal from 1972 onwards consistently opposed the Congress (R) government, for its alleged anti- rural bias, discrimination against Sikhs and centres apathy towards Punjab's development. It also joined hands with other non-Communist opposition parties during the JP movement. The Akali Dal launched "Save Democracy Morcha" on July 9, 1975. The stand taken by the party during the emergency raised its stature and hence the Akali-Janta-CPM alliance was able to win a landslide victory in the June 1977 Assembly election.⁵⁴

In the Assembly elections in Punjab in June 1977, Akali Dal entered into an electoral alliance with CPM and Janta party. The Akali Dal and its allies were able to reach an accord on seat adjustment only after protracted and hard bargaining on May 20. Out of the total of 117 seats, the Akalis secured 68, Janta 40 and CPI (M) was left with 8 seats, the dispute still continued regarding one seat. Notwithstanding this poll adjustment, a number of Akali and Janta candidates who failed to get party nominations refused to withdraw. Unlike March Parliamentary elections, the Congress party entered into seat adjustment with CPI in June Assembly election, — CPI was to contest 18 seats while the remaining 99 seats fell to the share of the Congress. In this election there was less clamour among Congressmen for getting party nominations.

The Akali Dal based its programme for the forthcoming elections on the basis of its earlier manifesto issued on the eve of the March parliamentary elections. Akali Dal raised its voice against injustice and oppressive policies of the Congress regime. Balwant Singh, a member of the party high command, elaborating the party programme stated that the one major concern of his party was related to the problem arising from the reorganisation of the Punjab state- the problem of the demarcation of boundaries, future of Chandigarh, control over the Bhakra Dam, the distribution of water resources between Punjab and the adjoining states. The second issue he stated was related to the well being of the people. He promised that his party would try to remove the stigma of unemployment in the next five year period. He took serious note of diversion of Punjab's money and credit to other regions and talked of its utilization within the state for developmental purposes.⁵⁵ The

Akali leaders during their election campaigns exposed the Congress regime for deliberately creating small Punjabi speaking state, denying the establishment of heavy industries, delay in the clearance of Thein Dam, and inordinate delay in the enactment of All India Gurudwara Act. To the farmers the party assured remunerative prices for their produce and to the workers it assured bonus.

The State Janta Party's manifesto signified its dedication to the value and ideals of Gandhiji. The party would also attempt to evolve a consensus on the desirability of smaller districts and smaller development blocks so as to encourage democratic participation and sound economic management and planning. Its political character as usual talked of civil liberties. In the economic sphere, primacy was to be accorded to the agriculture, cottage, and small industries which had a rural base. Full employment to be achieved through self-employment. The manifesto ends with some ameliorative measures for backward classes, employees in private schools, traders and ex-servicemen⁵⁶.

The State Congress party in its manifesto stated the establishment of Gandhian order under which the poorest and lowly would not be permitted to be exploited at the hands of the rich and feudal elements. It also stated that it plans to nationalise large scale sugar, drugs and vanaspati units; promised free medical aid and free education to the children of families drawing income upto Rs. 300 per month.⁵⁷

The Communist party of India (CPI) blamed CPI (M) leadership for its policy of blind anti-Congressism, and stated that its leadership had gone into the lap of the communal reaction instead of aligning itself with secular and

democratic forces. As regards land reforms the party wanted the cancelling of benami transfers of landlords, and asked for inclusion of the Rai Sikhs in the category of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. It also asked for the nationalization of the wholesale trade in foodgrains.

The CPI (M) in its manifesto called upon the people of Punjab to defeat the anti-people and authoritarian forces represented by the Congress party and its allies.

The June 1977 Assembly election in the Punjab may be taken as watershed in the post-independence history of electoral politics in the state. The number of Assembly seats in Punjab was increased from 104 to 117 on the basis of the 1971 census. The Congress, the former ruler, could win only 17 seats with 33.58 percent of votes polled in 1977. The Akali Dal, the main rival of the Congress in Punjab won 58 seats with 31.43% of votes polled in the 1977 Assembly elections. The Jan Sangh, now the Janta Party won 25 seats with 14.93% of votes polled in 1977 elections. The CPI won 7 seats with 6.59% of votes polled in 1977 elections. On the other hand CPM won 8 seats with 3.50% of votes polled in 1977 elections⁵⁸.

The change in the electoral verdict may more properly be attributed to the realignment of political forces, which in turn led to the change in the support bases of the political parties. This meant a serious setback to the electoral fortunes of the Congress party. The Akali Janta-CPM alliance together won a total of 81 seats (69% seats) with combined 61.51% votes polled.

Table III :
Party Wise Position in Punjab Vidhan Sabha Elections, 1977⁵⁹.

Total Seats: 117				
Name of Party	Seats Contested	Seats won	Percentage of Votes Polled	Percentage of seats
Congress	96	17	33.58	14.53
Akali Dal	70	58	31.43	49.57
Janta	41	25	14.93	21.37
CPI	18	7	6.59	5.98
CPM	8	8	3.50	6.84
Independents	449	2	9.92	1.71

This was the first time in the history of the state that the Akali Dal was able to win a near majority in the Assembly and could have staked its claim to form a government on its own. However, given the context of the alliance it thought it advisable to form a coalition with other partners in election and invited the Janta Party and CPI (M) to share power. Since CPI (M) did not join the coalition it was the Akali-Janta coalition which formed the government.

4.1 The Akali-Janta Coalition Ministry (June 20, 1977 to February 17, 1980).

The Akali Legislature party unanimously elected Prakash Singh Badal as its leader on the recommendation of two member committee. Badal was elected the leader for a number of reasons which included his commendable role as Chief Minister in the earlier coalition Ministry of 1970-71, his rapport with the Janta Party High command at the national level, the heroic role he

played during the emergency, his popularity as a leader with a moderate and secular outlook and the support of the Punjab Janta leaders in his favour. Immediately after Badal's election as the leader of the Akali legislature Party, the Governor (M.M. Chaudhary) invited him to form the government. Badal assumed the office on June 20, 1977 and other Ministers were inducted later on. The Akali-Janta coalition Ministry was well balanced as it gave appropriate representation to both partners keeping in view their strength in the Assembly. The Akali Dal acquired 11 Ministerial posts (nine Cabinet Ministers, including the Chief Minister and 2 Ministers of State) and the Janta was given 5 posts (4 Cabinet Ministers and 1 Minister of State).⁶⁰

The installation of Akali-Janta Ministry after the dark era of the emergency, was hailed by the people of Punjab. It signalled the start of a new epoch to the people who had high expectations of seeing the end of injustice. The coalition experiment from 1977 to 1979 worked in a relatively favourable environment. There was a pronounced readiness for understanding and accommodation of each others aspirations among the Akali Dal and the Janta party. The formation of Janta government at the centre, and the fact that the Akalis were invited to share power with it also contributed to the creation of a better objective situation for the formation and working of the coalition government in the state. In the initial stages, the functioning of the Badal Ministry bore a close resemblance to the line followed at the centre by the Janta Government. In the beginning, the main emphasis remained on instituting commissions of inquiry against the former ruling elite of the Congress party, and also initiating changes aiming at the replacement of the pro-Congress elements holding important positions at different levels in the state administration.⁶¹

However, the interest and priorities of Akali Dal and Janta party, were not absolutely similar. The Akali Dal drew its support mainly from the rural peasantry and concentrated on the problems and concessions to the agricultural classes. The Janta Party unit in the Punjab on the other hand, was more concerned about promoting the interests of the urban industrial and trading sections. But there did not appear to be much divergence or conflict among them with regard to the policies and programmes the governments pursued during this period. A major emphasis was on agricultural sector and rural development. The government was able to secure clearance for the construction of the Thein Dam, launched a Rs. 30 crore Integrated Rural Development Programme and granted a series of concessions and facilities to the farmers. Flat monthly rate of electricity was reduced from Rs. 19.00 per horse power to Rs. 11.50. More loan facilities with reduced rate of interest were provided to the farmers. More than 41,000 new tubewell connections were sanctioned in just one and a half year. Consumption of fertilizers increased by 67% by the end of 1979. Large quantity of certified seeds were distributed among the farmers and provision was made for better marketing and allied facilities for rural development. The Akali legislators infact pressed for even more concessions to the agriculturists.⁶²

The debates in the Vidhan Sabha indicated, however, that the Janta legislators, had a preference for those programmes which helped the urban sections of the society. Janta legislators resented that whereas the flat electricity rate on tube wells had been decreased by 33%, no relief was given to the industry. They pressed for rapid urban development with a special focus on undevelopd and underdeveloped urban areas. The Janta party asked for the abolition of Sales Tax, and a general reduction in the tax

burden in urban areas. It did not, however, in any sense oppose the grant of special facilities to the agricultural sector. The party stressed upon speedy implementation of land reforms and transform of surplus land to the landless Harijans, a move which the Akali leaders did not relish.⁶³ The party emphasized the need to expand the industrial sector. The demand was connected with the desire to canalize incremental rural earnings sector. The demand had generally been made for agro-based and fertilizer and tractor industries.

There were some other issues on which Janta Party's preference was different from those of the Akali Dal. These included modalities and basis of compensation for the unemployed, setting up a dry port at Ludhiana, a railway line between Chandigarh and Ludhiana, post-ponement of elections to the Municipalities and Municipal corporations, the cancellation of the decision taken during the emergency for the apportionment of the Ravi-Beas water to favour Haryana, the low procurement price of wheat, rice, cotton etc, the establishment of a super thermal plant of Ropar etc. These minor differences were, however, not allowed to precipitate any tension or conflict among the coalition partners.

A major issue on which there was considerable disagreement among the coalition partners was the autonomy demand of the Akali Dal. Balwant Singh, Finance Minister in Badal's cabinet, emphasised on the recasting of centre-state relations mainly with a view to secure larger share for the state in financial resources. However at the party meetings and social and religious congregations, prominent Akali Dal leaders often passionately talked of greater political autonomy on the basis of Anandpur Sahib Resolution. This confused the other coalition partner, Janta Party, which became at times manifestly suspicious of the intentions and real motives of the Akali leadership.⁶⁴

In February 1978, when Badal decided to hold a Chief Minister's conference on the autonomy issue, the Janta Party suspected the intentions of the Akali leaders and therefore opposed the move.

Both the Akali Dal and the Janta Party were, however, internally divided into various competing factions and that had a direct bearing on the working of coalition government. The Janta party was formed by the merger of Congress(0), Bhartiya Lok Dal, Jan Sangh, Socialist Party, CFD and many others. It worked as a loose coalition of disparate groups. The different constituents of the Janta party found it more convenient to live with their past. They continued maintaining their distinct identities and competed with one another to influence the decision making process and to control the levers of power. The Janta legislature party of twenty five members was broadly divided into the following factions. The largest group composed of twelve MLAs belonging to the erstwhile Jan Sangh was led by Balramji Das Tandon. Another group of four legislators was headed by Choudhury Balbir Singh and paid allegiance to Chaudhury Charan Singh at the centre.

The organisational wing of the Janta Party in the state was also faction ridden though Jan Sangh elements were in a dominant position. There were differences in the attitudes among various factions on several socio-cultural issues. Another important factor which contributed to infightings in the Janta Party was a conflict between the R.S.S. and non-R.S.S. elements. The various constituents of the Janta party in the state were directly linked to the parallel factions at the centre. Following the tussle between the BLD and Jan Sangh - R.S.S. faction at the centre, a similar situation developed in the working of Janata Party in Punjab. Janta legislators in the State Assembly paying allegiance to Charan Singh trained their guns toward the Jan Sangh

– R.S.S. elements as early as in 1978.⁶⁵ These intra-party difference had a direct bearing on the inter-party relations and also contributed to the collapse of the Akali Janta coalition in 1979.

Major challenges to the Akali-Janta coalition came from the intra party factional struggle of the Akali Dal. The Dal appeared to be divided into three broad factions led by Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, the party Chief Jagdev Singh Talawandi and the SGPC Chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra. These broad factions competed with one another to control the levers of power within the government and the party. Badal had effective control over the legislative wing of the Akali Dal, which claimed to had the support of 42 MLAs out of a total of 58. The other two factions had a relatively weaker position in the legislative wing. The factions led by Tohra and Talawandi stressed on apparently fundamental issues relating to the Sikh community, to pressurise Badal, since he, as Chief Minister, had to operate in a secular framework and also compromise with his coalition partner. To start with immediately after assuming office, Badal government was subjected to pressures from Nihangs- an old martial sect of the Sikhs, for the transfer of Chandigarh and three head works located in Punjab to the control of Punjab government.⁶⁶ Tohra and Talawandi also supported them. Secondly, an explosive situation developed over the Akali-Sant Nirankari clash on April 13, 1978 at Amritsar in which seventeen persons belonging to Sant Randhir Singh's Kirtani Jatha and Sant Bhindarwala's group was killed. The dead were described as 'martyrs' in the Sikh cause against the Sant Nirankaris-the latter being considered as enemies of the Sikh Panth. Various anti-Badal factional leaders of the Dal and other Sikh organisations pressurised the state government for stern action against Nirankaris. The CPI, the CPM, and

the Congress party demanded for a judicial probe. Several Akali factions demanded the banning of the Nirankari books for their anti-religious contents. However, the Badal government resisted these pressures from the various factions of Akali Dal. Having failed in forcing the Badal government to ban the religious books of Nirankaris and also their weekly religious congregations, the ecelesiastical authority with due backing from the organizational wing of the party, went ahead with their own action by getting a hukamnama issued from Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh religious authority. The Hukamnama enjoined all Sikhs to boycott Nirankaris in all walks of social life. This in turn subjected Badal to censorious pressure both from his partners in state politics as well as from the Central Government who wanted guarantees for the safety and security of Nirankaris.⁶⁷ Issuing of the Hukamnama and demand for banning the Nirankari publications rocked the Akali-Janta coalition in the state. Where as the Akali demands were unacceptable to the centre, the Punjab State Janta Party maintained that either the Akali representatives would stay at the centre or the Janta party would come out of the coalition. Some of the Janta members of the coalition government, particularly those with a Jan Sangh- R.S.S. background, perceived in the Hukamnama a threat to the Hindus of the state.

The intra-party wrangling in Punjab continued at the state level but the differences between the Akali Dal and the Janta party came to the surface over the issue of lending support to either Moraji Desai or Charan Singh in their struggle to capture the Prime Ministerial Post. Badal tried his best to rally support for Moraji Desai, but the working committee of the Akali Dal on July 25, 1979, decided to remain neutral till the current fluid political situation settled. As a result of this neutrality, the two Akali Ministers (Surjit Singh

Barnala and Dhanna Singh Gulshan) resigned from the Desai Government on July 26, 1979. The Akali Dal decided to snap its ties with the Janta party as it was disillusioned with the attitude of the Union government (particularly of the Prime Minister) who had made no effort to look into the demands of the state. Due to the disintegration of the Janta party, Charan Singh managed to secure majority support in the Lok Sabha and he was consequently installed as the Prime Minister on July 28, 1979, but was directed by the President to seek a vote of confidence not later than the third week of August. Much against the wishes of Sardar Badal, the Akali Dal abandoned its neutral position on August 18, 1979, and decided to support Prime Minister Charan Singh who was to seek a vote of confidence of 20th August. The Akali Dal decided to support Charan Singh, as he had accepted the major demands of the Akali Dal. The failure of Charan Singh to win the vote of confidence had deep repercussions on the Akali Dal, and it intensified the factional fight between the ministerial wing (led by the Chief Minister) and the organisational wing (led by Sardar Jagdev Singh Talawandi, the party President). The resignations of the Punjab Janta Ministers, who had resigned as a protest against the withdrawal of support from the Desai government, were accepted by the Governor on September 3, 1979, under the advice from the Chief Minister. With this, twenty six month old coalition came to an end.⁶⁸

5. CONCLUSION

The coalition era in Punjab (1967 to 1971 and 1977 to 1980) exhibited a distinctive pattern of political development. From a multi party coalition system, it moved towards the two party coalition system. Punjab experienced a multi-party coalition government comprising seven political parties (divided by diverse political ideologies). The experience of first coalition government

paved the way for the establishment of a viable coalition government that comprised the two parties in 1969. A third model of coalition system came into existence after the June 1977 Assembly election, which can be termed a majority party coalition government. Although the Akali Dal had bagged an absolute majority in the Assembly, it decided to had a coalition Ministry with the Janta Party to ensure communal harmony in the state.

The intra party conflict was one of the main reason for the failure of the succesive coalition governments in Punjab during this period. Akali Dal has, seldom, if ever, been monolithic political unit striving for integral, composite, unified power. The Akali Dal in particular is found cleft into faction groups, each of whom is oriented to achieve power or influence in combination with or against each other, depending upon the specific situational matrix at a particular point of time. Also main line of division within the party occurs in terms of secular principle of "power", i.e. the one occupying the political power (the ministerial wing) and the one which does not (organizational wing). Factionalism within the Akali Dal always hampered the smooth functioning of coalition Ministry. According to Gopal Singh, the most important factor responsible for factionalism particularly during the post 1966 period was what can be termed as Sikh Jat "psyche." Since 1965, the Sikh Jats, had been in control of leadership of SAD and SGPC, finally, ousting Master Tara Singh and the urban Sikhs. "It's an inborn, innate and instinctive trait of a Sikh Jat that he never accepts the dominance of any one over him. Sikh Jats are best of friends and worst of foes. Personal enmity, group rivalry and personality clash are thus their natural traits. There are therefore, many factions among Sikh Jats and each faction tries to capture the leadership of SAD and SGPC"⁶⁹ In the periods of internal dissension the Akali Dal not

only is weakened in regard to competing in the State Assembly system, but its control over the SGPC is affected. Since the SGPC is the life line of Sikh politics, there is a tendency to panic by those who are in a minority. Thus, Jagdev Singh Talawandi who in March 1978 epitomized moderation and Sikh-Hindu harmony changed dramatically in late 1979 and 1980.⁷⁰

The Congress Party-whether it is in its Congress (R) or Congress (I) incarnation-consistently operates so as to prevent or topple the inter-communal Sikh-Hindu coalition. Political power at the Centre provides the Congress Party with added leverage. Between 1967 and 1972, two Akali-Jan Sangh coalition governments were formed and both were brought down by factional quarrels within the Akali Dal. The fall of the first coalition was engineered directly by the Congress. In the case of the second, the Congress threw its support, ineffectually as it turned out, to the Gurnam Singh group that was toppled by the dominant group in the Akali Dal. Not only had the Congress penetrated the Akali Dal by dividing it and giving support to dissident factions within it, but often it had also recruited its own leaders from Akali ranks, including such prominent persons as Pratap Singh Kairon. After 1977, due to the strengthened position of the Akali Dal and the much weakened position of the Congress, the Congress party used a different set of political tactics, namely, an attack on the support base of the Akali Dal in its core support areas and among its core support groups : the rural Jat Sikh peasantry under the political influence of the Akali Dal and under the religious influence of the Sants and preachers in the Gurudawaras and missionary organization in the Sikh majority districts of the province. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindaranwale was used for that purpose and was supported by the Congress, most particularly by Sanjay Gandhi and Giani Zail Singh from 1977 onwards,

after the massive defeat of the Congress. A. S. Narang argued that the Congress (I) can only retain its political power in Punjab by keeping the Hindus and Sikhs divided. It is in the Congress (I)'s interest to drive a wedge between the Hindu dominated Jan Sangh and Akali Dal.

However, this did not mean that the coalition governments in Punjab in the 1960s and 1970s had not done any commendable work during its different phases of functioning. Keeping in view the social and religious differences between the Sikhs and Hindus, the coalition government had in a way accommodated the interests of these two communities by giving them a due share in the coalition Ministries. For winning the trust and faith of its alliance partner, the Akali Dal inducted a person with liberal outlook as Chief Minister. To meet the challenge of its main coalition partner i.e. Jan Sangh, Sikh cultural nationalism became more moderate and accommodating. The Jan Sangh also changed its attitude to a great extent. The ethnic concerns revolving around the language and religion remained, but the gradual change over time to decentralization-reinforced by the expansion of emergency - enabled the Jan Sangh to be more moderate and instrumental as well. The best achievement had been that the Akali - Jan Sangh cooperation had eased out the pains of adjustment between the Sikhs and the Hindus on the language policy which was long over due after the establishment of the Punjabi Suba. Communal peace was maintained for most of the time.

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CHAPTER IV

REVIVAL OF COALITION POLITICS IN PUNJAB IN 1990s

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1. INTRODUCTION

After a long period of uncertainty and turbulence Punjab is once again poised for a sustained period of growth and development. The Assembly elections in Punjab in February 1997, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) – Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) alliance, have ushered in a new era of hope for the overall growth of the Indian province. Punjab woke up after its dark decade of militancy to discover that the promised dawn of democracy was not all it was cracked up to be. Life was much less brutal, to be sure, but still pretty harsh.

The coalition or accommodation model of politics in Punjab ended with the fall of the Badal Ministry in February 1980. It was during this period that the seeds of militancy and terrorism were first sown in. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, an extremist leader, and the Dal Khalsa, a well known extremist group, was used and was supported by the Congress most particularly by Sanjay Gandhi and Giani Zail Singh from 1977 onwards, after the massive defeat of the Congress.¹ Bhindranwale's violent confrontation methods did prove useful to the Congress at first. The Akali Dal leaders in the Akali-Janta government were divided and embarrassed by a violent clash between militant Sikhs and heterodox Nirankari sect in April 1979 in which Bhindranwale played a prominent role. The Tohra-Talawandi faction in the Akali Dal used the Sant – Nirankari clash against the dominant Badal-Longowal faction, which it accused of not acting firmly enough

against the Nirankaris. The factional divisions within the Akali Dal in turn contributed to its defeat and the victory of the Congress in 1980 elections.² When the Darbara Singh government came to power in Punjab in 1980, the time was ripe to put an end to Bhindranwale's activities which, if they were not themselves murderous, included praise for those who killed Nirankaris.³ Bhindranwale, however, was too useful in factional conflicts both in the Akali Dal and the Congress to be dealt with easily. From the viewpoint of Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the President of the SGPC and leader of one faction in the Akali Dal, Bhindranwale was useful as an ally in his struggles with the Longowal-Badal faction. Consequently, Tohra permitted Bhindranwale to move into the Golden Temple complex with his men and arms. From September 1981 on, therefore, after his arrest and release in connection with the murder of Lala Jagat Narain, Bhindranwale alternated between the sanctuary of the Golden Temple and, when he wished to roam about, the protection of the Home Minister, which kept him safe until terrorists began murdering innocent Hindus in Punjab. After a particular vicious set of murders of innocent Hindus during September-October 1983, Mrs. Gandhi finally imposed President's Rule in Punjab to take firm action against all suspected terrorists, including Bhindranwale, who took sanctuary in the Akal Takht within the Golden Temple complex itself.⁴

For its part, the Akali Dal, ousted from power by the Congress and placed on the defensive by Bhindranwale and other leaders and groups suspected of terrorist activities, who were placing themselves in the forefront as defenders of Sikh interests against the Congress, the Central government and the Hindu community, opted for the adoption of aggressive

but non-violent confrontational tactics in pursuit of Sikh and Punjabi regional interest. It was in this context that the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 was reactivated and placed in the forefront of Akali demands. The rise of Bhindranwale and other extremist and terrorist groups and leaders made it impossible in the 1980s for any single leader within the Akali Dal to repeat the feat of Sant Fateh Singh, though Longowal tried very hard to do so through the revival of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and through his various roko movements and the Dharmayudha Morcha in the period between 1981 to 1984.

The escalation of Akali movement by Sikh militants in 1980s and state repression had accentuated communal polarisation. This led to uncertainties, social tension and economic hardship to all sections of the Punjabi Society. It was against this background that the September 1985 Assembly elections were held. The September 1985 Assembly elections were preceded by three years of militant Akali Dharam Yudh, and state repression culminating in Operation Bluestar and Operation Woodrose. If the activities of the Sikh militant groups created fear and insecurity amongst Punjabi Hindus, the subsequent horrendous events after the assassination of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi thoroughly alienated the Sikh community. It was under this difficult situation that Dal's President Sant Harchand Singh Longowal signed the Punjab Accord in July 1985.⁵ The Punjab Accord was the first in the series of strategic agreements of the Congress leadership at the Centre with the regional elite in India to restore peace and stability in various pockets of disturbance in the country. As regards the Punjab Accord, it was an eleven point agreement covering a wide variety of issues claiming

importance in mid-1985. The issues were compensation to innocent persons killed, army recruitment, enquiry into November incidents, All India Gurudwara Act, disposal of the pending cases, territorial claims i.e. the capital project area of Chandigarh will go to Punjab, centre state relations, sharing of river waters, representation of minorities, promotion of Punjabi language. The Sikh militant groups characterised the Accord as a sell out and also boycotted the subsequent elections. The Punjab Accord was only a partial measure which did not go deep into the fundamental issues of the Punjab crises and leaves them unsolved.

The September 1985 elections in Punjab were not normal elections. They, on the one hand were a referendum on two different modes of politics - the democratic mode and the terrorist mode. Although nominally, the contest in this election was between candidates of different parties the real adversaries in the fray were Indian democracy on one side and secessionism and terrorism on the other. The Akali Dal, for the first time won a clear majority in the Assembly, winning 73 seats out of the 100 it contested for the 117-member Assembly. It got 38.54% of the total votes polled.

The Congress on the other hand could win only 32 seats in a House of 117 as against 72 seats won by the Akalis. Observers interpreted the Akali victory in Punjab as a resounding vindication of the stand taken by the party moderates under the leadership of Sant Longowal and later, Surjit Singh Barnala. The Akali Dal campaigned for communal harmony and refrained from populist appeals to religion as in the past. The election results show that there had been a bigger consolidation of Sikh votes in favour of the Akali Dal than even before. Even the Mazhabi Sikhs and the

other so called backward classes in the community which traditionally voted for the Congress, closed ranks and voted in significant numbers to the Akalis. The 1985 election had virtually eliminated other political parties like the BJP, the Communist party and the CPM, which used to had substantial representation before. So politics had polarised in the state between the Akalis and the Congress.⁶

The fact that the September 1985 elections were held in an extremely abnormal background and atmosphere of fear and yet people participated in them enthusiastically provides the silver lining and hope for coming out of paradox. However this silver lining soon vanished. Although in the 1985 elections, the Akalis were voted to power in a massive way yet the stability of their government was not at all as much as their numerical strength in the House would warrant. In fact, the experience of nearly one year's functioning of Barnala government suggests that when the Akalis were out of power, they tend to unite and because of this unity they succeed in capturing power, but once in power they tend to divide mainly on the question of mode of exercising power.⁷ A Sikh Jat of Akali Dal in power, particularly the Chief Minister did not need enemies to invent. Persons from his own group who were kept out of power become his natural and unavoidable enemies. When Surjit Singh Barnala became the Chief Minister after 1985 elections, Badal and Tohra joined hands to see that Barnala did not continue as Chief Minister. Badal along with 27 other MLAs split the Akali Dal (Longowal). The 28 MLAs named their Akali Dal as Akali Dal (Badal) and withdrew their support to Barnala Ministry on the issue of police entry into Golden Temple, thus leaving Barnala to fall back on the support of Congress (I) MLAs who after a few months withdrew

their support (May 1987) and Barnala was dismissed as Chief Minister.⁸

The split in the Akali Dal and the sacking of the Barnala Ministry in May 1987, was followed by five years of President's rule. The inability of the Punjab government to end terrorist actions and the killing of innocent Hindus in Punjab led the Central government to impose President's rule once again in the state in May 1987. The following year, the Centre went further and imposed an emergency in Punjab under the terms of the newly passed 59th Constitution Amendment Bill, 1988, which authorized the Central government in effect to eliminate the civil liberties of the people of the state. Once again fertile grounds were created for the rise of militancy in Punjab. New hopes for a Punjab settlement were again around by the defeat of the Congress in the parliamentary elections of 1989 and the installation of a National Front government under Prime Minister V. P. Singh. The latter immediately took a number of symbolic and concrete measures, which had a favourable impact among most political elements in Punjab. These included a personal visit in an open car to the Golden Temple, the repeal of the 59th Amendment, the replacement of the discredited Punjab Governor, Siddhartha Shankar Ray by Nirmal Mukherji, the holding of an all party meeting in Ludhiana, the release of many detenus from Punjab jails, and the establishment of special courts to institute criminal proceedings against those suspected of instigating the program against the Sikhs in 1984, among other measures. By April 1990, however, V.P. Singh also had reached a stalemate in his efforts to find a solution to the Punjab problem.⁹ The elections in Punjab were put off because of the opposition of the two parties backing V. P. Singh's National Front Government, namely the BJP and the Left, both of whom

vetoed any early elections in Punjab. After the fall of the V.P. Singh government there was the promise of a breakthrough under Chandra Shekhar. In spite of the precarious tenure of his Prime Ministership, Chandra Shekhar made a positive contribution by exploring the possibility of opening a dialogue with the militants. His decision to hold elections in Punjab which the then Governor-General Malhotra, assiduously prepared for, was however opposed by Rajiv Gandhi, who rather thoughtlessly announced that the Congress would not participate in it. Just hours after winning the 1991 Parliamentary elections, but even before it could form the government, the Congress once again pulled the carpet from under the feet of the common man, cancelling the election barely 36 hours before polling was to commence. The abrupt announcement of poll cancellation at the very last moment gave fresh impetus to the militants. Moderate Akalis were pushed to the wall. The militants pressure on them increased. The Akalis at a meeting held on September 1991 at Anandpur Sahib accepted militants to be the real leaders authorised to talk to the Centre and agreed to boycott the elections. The Centre did not try to bring the moderate Akalis around to fighting the elections and compounded this by failing to win the ordinary voters confidence in the democratic process. The Narasimha Rao government did not even bother to make a token gesture towards the moderate middle in the state, which easily constitutes the vast majority despite years of sectarian violence and lack of a popular government since 1987.¹⁰

In this background the battle for votes in Punjab was taken as a contest between the militants and security forces to the extent that both were equally determined to show that it was their writ which ran in the

state. The BJP did not join the Akali Dal (Badal) and the Akali Dal (Mann) in boycotting the 1992 elections to Punjab Assembly. The election results look wired. The poll percentage despite massive security arrangements, was a meagre 21.7 percent against Governments claim of 28 percent. The militants threat had been adequately supported by the boycott of the mainline Akalis who told the voters to be prudent to realise that participation in elections without addressing the outstanding issues would accentuate fratricidal battle among Sikhs and mar the communal bonds between Hindus and Sikhs. More than 90% of the Sikhs in urban and rural areas stayed away from the polls. The Congress, the absolute winners with 12 of the 13 Lok Sabha seats and 87 out of 117 Assembly seats had in fact lost its broad base the low percentage of voter turnout notwithstanding. The real dent in Congress base had come from Bhaujan Samaj Party.¹¹

After the February 1992 Punjab Assembly elections, with the Congress coming to power with a reduced social base, and with the moderate Akalis having been pushed to wall a new power struggle had emerged in the state. The militants were nursed not only by Sikh fundamentalism, but also by residual discontent in Punjab life. The BJP supported the efforts of the Congress (I) government headed by Beant Singh, which was formed after these elections, for crushing militancy. On the other hand, various factions of the Akali Dal remained highly critical of state repression against the militants.¹²

Initially, the Congress (I) under the stewardship of Beant Singh had gained considerable support of the people on account of the restoration of peace in the strife torn state of Punjab. It was clearly revealed during the Municipal and Panchayat polls besides the by-elections to the Jalandhar

Parliamentary and Nakodar Assembly seats in 1993 and 1994 respectively. The Akalis, though they boycotted the February 1992 polls, also participated in these elections. During the January 1993 Panchayat polls the voter turnout shot up as high as 82 percent.¹³

However, the peace-card alone failed to sustain the tempo in favour of the ruling Congress (I) for long. The growing corruption, nepotism, lawlessness, fighting, police atrocities, frequent abuse of power, widening credibility gap and certain knocks from the judiciary on arbitrary decisions negated the gains, including the hard won peace and revival of democratic process in the beleaguered state. Moreover, the assassination of Chief Minister, Beant Singh, on August 31, 1995 gave a serious jolt to the ruling Congress party. He held the twin offices of the Chief Minister and PPCC President till his assassination. In fact his assassination rendered Congress leaderless in the state. His successor, H.S. Brar, was hardly a match for Beant Singh. Even Brar's replacement by Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, first woman Chief Minister of Punjab, failed to check the Congress (I)'s growing base. Under her leadership the party became acutely factionalised, which persisted through the Assembly and Parliamentary polls in 1997 and 1998, respectively.¹⁴

It is important here to focus upon the socio-economic factors, which are often bracketed at the same time with other root factors such as the communal ethos or attacks on civil liberties, for a complete explanation of the causes for degeneration of the political situation in Punjab in 80s and first half of the 90s. The Punjab economy is an integral part of Indian economy as the economy of any other part of India is and Indian economy is closely integrated with international monopoly. Retarded and

underdeveloped as the Indian capitalism is, the national bourgeoisie makes compromises at both levels, first with the regional bourgeoisie, generally agrarian (ruling classes are thus generally referred as “bourgeois – landlord combine”) despite periodical conflicts with it, it also not only collaborates but also make “compromises” with international monopoly while at times adopting “seemingly conflictual postures” which in practice mean nothing. And after P.V. Narasimha Rao government’s wholesale liberalization, possibility of these postures is ruled out. The exploitation of the people in India in this process, particularly of the “peripheral” population like tribals, Scheduled Castes and minorities-cultural, linguistic or otherwise has indeed been colossal. The people of Punjab, inspite of Punjab being first in terms of per capita, income, are no exception to this exploitation, because per capita income is more “illusory” than real. One of the most disturbing development in Punjab economy is the disjunction between agriculture and industry, that one does not feed the other, that agriculturally Punjab is highly developed while industrially quite backward. The Indian ruling classes thought of converting the Indian Punjab into a “food bowl” of independent India because most of the fertile land, canals, and canal colonies had gone to Pakistan after partition, and India was a food deficit states in fifties and remained so till mid sixties, the time when Green Revolution was picking up in Punjab and within a couple of years after that India virtually became self-sufficient in food, and the new state of Haryana contributed its own share to national food stock. It was Pratap Singh Kairon who started the process. Through Bhakra Dam, a cannal system was created bringing vast stretches of land under irrigation and raising the level of ground (sub-soil) water for tubewells. By late sixties, Green

Revolution was at its peak but by mid-seventies it had reached its "plateau" and started petering out. Like colonialists the Indian ruling classes "kept Punjab out of reach for heavy industries".¹⁵

The consequences were indeed disastrous for peasantry as a whole. First, there has been tremendous increase in the number of landless workers. With capitalist intensive agriculture, the ratio of landless workers in the total agriculture work force rose from 9.1 percent in 1961 to 20.1 percent in 1971 and 32.1 percent in 1981. This was partly because of eviction of tenants by owner cultivators, partly because of displacement of rural artisans like weavers, potters, cobblers, oilman, barbers, masons, carpenter, blacksmiths etc.¹⁶ and partly because of distress sale of land by marginal peasants. According to Bhalla and others, 24 percent of small peasants and 31 percent of marginal peasants live below the poverty line.¹⁷ The fruits of green revolution had been grabbed by just 20 percent of capitalist farmers who own more than 60 percent of total land.¹⁸ In the present set up of cooperative societies, rural banks and other credit institutions, it is again the rich farmer who is able to secure the loan at 6 to 10 percent interest whereas the small peasant, being a defaulter in the very first instance, has to borrow ultimately from the money lender, or other sources of unorganised money market at the interest varying from 12 to 15 percent and in this process, ultimately, there is distress sale of his land obviously to the rich farmers. The uneven economic development in rural areas generated by Green Revolution was partly responsible for the rise of religious revivalism and ultimately for the politics of violence and terrorism and in its turn invoking state terrorism and repression. The

ruling classes did not assign any heavy industry to Punjab which could have absorbed the educated youth. The argument given in fifties and sixties was that Punjab was within the “firing range” of Pakistan but with the new technology of war, Pakistan can make any industry as its target, the argument now given is that there is no land for heavy industry in Punjab.¹⁹ In Punjab, in particular, the non-availability of openings for the expansion of the capital formed in agricultural has had far reaching consequences for the activation of certain elements of the inherited social cleavages. Thus, there are no employment avenues for the rural educated youth belonging to small and marginal peasantry and they were drawn into the vortex of militancy under the leadership of late Sant Bhindranwale who succeeded in mobilising a section of the youth in the name of restoration of pristine glory of Sikhism and projecting it as the panacea for all problems, including that of unemployment and openly preached use of violence. Infact, it was the sons of the debt ridden farming families, particularly from the Majha belt comprising Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts who formed the militant ranks. They were the first post green revolution generation who had the benefit of school and college education. But the state had no jobs for them. The mechanisation had already forced labour off the fields. The traditional Akali leadership was in the hand of the rich farmers of the Malwa belt. Bhindranwale just happened to be around at that point of time. The educated, unemployed youth saw hope in him as he himself was a marginal farmer.²⁰ Thus, in short the economic conditions in Punjab in a way contributed towards the degeneration of the political situation in Punjab. Politically, Punjab state had always remained highly unstable because of the factional and communal nature of its politics and

the political manipulation by the Centre. The Central Congress government had never allowed the non-Congress governments to function and run their full terms. Lacking any firm support base of their own, the ruling Congress leaders in the state always function as puppets of the Central leadership and, therefore, were incapable of taking a firm stand in the interest of the state. By reducing Punjab to the status of a satellite state, Centre had not allowed the development of a long term perspective of industrial development, economic growth and social change.²¹

2. REVIVAL OF COALITION POLITICS IN PUNJAB : AN ANALYSIS OF THE PUNJAB ASSEMBLY ELECTION (FEBRUARY 1997).

With the Assembly election rescheduled for February 7, 1997, Punjab was again at crossroads politically. Not that there was any doubt about the vigour of democratic forces. Democracy had, in fact, come alive in the state with the free play of alignments and adjustments made by different parties. A bitter and high pitched poll battle lies ahead for over 2 crore Punjabis, who were scheduled to elect 117 members to the State Assembly in February 1997, even as Congress paints a grim scenario involving the revival of terrorism, if it was voted out of power. Political lines were clearly drawn. The SAD –BJP alliance was pitted against a broad understanding of the Congress and the CPI on the one hand and the BSP's tie up with Akali Dal (Mann) on the other. Basically, Punjab was heading for a triangular fight with each alliance having its own pockets of influence in the Majha, Malwa and Doaba regions.²²

2.1 PRE-ELECTORAL ALLIANCES FOR PUNJAB ASSEMBLY POLLS(1997): AN ACCOUNT

Mr. Prakash Singh Badal's SAD project a new image for itself in

company of the BJP. Incidentally, the Akalis had started working towards evolving this image of theirs, as early as the beginning of 1990's. The Akalis, who were terribly divided into as many as eight different groups in the early 1990's, started setting their house in order with a view to countering Beant Singh's increasing influence among Sikh peasants. The moderate Akalis under the leadership of Prakash Singh Badal took the onus of mobilising people towards this goal. Moreover, keeping in view the mood of the Sikh masses, Badal denounced extremism and rejected the line of the Sikh radicals. Badal, infact, emphasised 'Punjabi-ness', Hindu-Sikh unity, true federal structure and unity and integrity of the country. It was basically on this plank that the Badal group had entered the Assembly by polls in 1994 and 1995. Most interestingly, this group in these elections, or for that matter, in all the successive elections, refrained from using the usual rhetorical panthic propaganda combined with anti-Centre, anti-Hindi, anti-Hindu stances and all types of emotional outbursts²³. For the first time in many years a Sikh leader had tried to take the debate on politics from the podium of gurudwaras to the podium of public platform, a feature that distinguishes secular democracies from the theocratic states.²⁴ Badal in 1994 jettisoned the controversial "Amritsar Declaration" of the United Akali Dal, a conglomerate of six Akali factions. This declaration aimed at waging a struggle for establishing an autonomous region within the federal structure where the Sikhs could enjoy freedom and in case of non-fulfillment of this demand, the Dal would wage a struggle for sovereign Sikh state. The Badal Akali Dal called this declaration secessionist and stressed greater autonomy for Punjab. Badal's emphasis on 'Punjabi-ness' and his moving away from the militant line was widely appreciated and

made him undisputed leader of the Sikh peasantry in Punjab. Soon he emerged as the rallying point for the various Akali splinter groups most of which one after the another joined hands with his party. In its two day conference on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on February 24 – 25, 1996, the Akali Dal (B), emphasised the establishment of 'Halemi Raj', a holy expression used by Guru Arjun Dev which means a just dispensation in which no person, community or country would predominate over others. A.S. Parashar observed that "the Akali Dal would now try to transform itself into an organisation representing all sections of Punjabis, irrespective of their caste, creed and religion, instead of being a body of the Sikhs alone".²⁵ It was from the Moga conference that the Akali Dal (B) launched its election campaign for April 1996 Parliamentary polls which were perceived as a run-up to the February 1997 Assembly elections in the state. As a matter of fact, the Moga spirit of the party was well approved by the voters in Punjab.²⁶ Thus, ever since the Assembly elections were announced, the writing on the wall clearly indicated an SAD victory in Punjab. With the announcement of the poll, the SAD and BJP entered into an alliance to contest 94 seats leaving 23 seats for BJP. Akali Dal (B) in order to strengthen his newly created moderate outlook, entered into pre electoral alliance with BJP. This worked in a great way towards enhancing his image among both the Sikhs and Hindu and ultimately towards his winning the elections.

The Congress party gauging the limitations of contesting the elections alone, tried to enter into an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party, but their talks failed on the issue of seat sharing and they could not form an

alliance. Factionalism had been a major disease in the Congress party in Punjab. Congress remained a divided lot even when they were to face the elections. The Congress seemed so desperate in its attempt to retain power that it had not even hesitated to bring the guillotine down on its own party's former Chief Minister H.S. Brar, who was suspended from the Congress, and two former Presidents of the State Congress Virendra Kataria and Ambika Soni. What had indeed added to the trauma of the Congress and cheered the hearts of its political opponents, chiefly Akali Dal (B) and BJP combine, was the bad news of severe drubbing received by the Congress party in the Municipal Corporation elections in Chandigarh in 1996, where the BJP had made a clean sweep by winning 13 out of the 20 Corporation wards, while its ally Akali Dal (B) had won 2 seats. The Congress, which had a poll alliance with the CPI, was badly rejected by the city voters as only one of its candidate could get elected.²⁷ In the 1997 Punjab Assembly election, however, Congress entered into seat adjustments with the CPI leaving 10 seats for that party and had friendly contest in three seats.

Months before the elections were announced, a joint campaign in the form of conventions, etc was run in Punjab for a number of specific demands of the people. For this purpose, the CPI, CPI (M), Janta Dal, Republican Party and Congress (Tewari) had come together. The CPI (M) and more so the Janta Dal portrayed this combination as the Third Front (vis a vis the Akalis and the Congress) which would contest all 117 seats in the 1997 Punjab Assembly elections. The Janta Dal even wanted to announce the name of a shadow Chief Minister. The CPI had differed and even objected to such pronouncements. It had pointed out that a third

alternative was very much needed in Punjab but as yet there was not even the remotest chance of such an alternative emerging by the time the Assembly elections would become due. The only two left parties in Punjab are the two Communist Parties. And even the two together would not be able to poll more than six or seven per cent of the votes at the maximum. And that too given complete agreement between the two. The Republican Party and the Congress (Tewari) hardly mattered in Punjab. The position of the Janta Dal was not much better. As a party it was hardly there. Kirpal Singh of Amritsar with a base of his own had joined the Janta Party. The only other place in Punjab where the Janta Dal had some influence was the Moga district. Here too this influence was based on the personal influence of Roop Lal Sathi and his son Vijay Sathi. Thus what finally emerged in the form of Third Front was that CPI was not in it.²⁸ The Congress (Tewari) went back to the Congress (I), Janta Dal, Samajwadi Party and CPM formed United Front and contested the elections in an alliance in Punjab.

Since the CPI considered the CPI-M slogan of the Third Front to be unrealistic, it searched for an alternative strategy. It wanted to take into account the fact that despite all its sins and acts of omission and commission, the Congress (I) does not and cannot stand for a theocratic state in India or Punjab (unlike the BJP and the Akalis) and to had some adjustments with it. The state leadership of the CPI wanted that the two Communist Parties together should agree and make adjustments with the Congress (I) or a Congress (I)–BSP combination (if it were to materialise), Congress(I) not contesting some seats of the CPI and some of the CPI–M and the two supporting the Congress (I) candidates in a certain number

of constituencies, provided the Congress candidates would not be notoriously corrupt. However CPI-M rejected this view. Under the circumstances, the CPI ensured that in no seat the CPI and CPI-M were pitted against each other. The CPI made it clear to the Congress leadership that in 15 specified seats the CPI would support the CPI-M against both the Akali – BJP alliance on the one hand and the Congress (I) on the other. The Congress (I) agreed not to contest 10 seats against the CPI. On four seats, the CPI and the Congress both put up their candidates. The CPI did not call for the defeat of the Congress, but did not also say that it was for a Congress government in the state. It gave the slogan for a secular government in Punjab.²⁹

As no major party was left, the BSP had no option but to form an alliance with the Akali Dal (Mann). Though Kanshi Ram made tall claims of creating an Uttar Pradesh – like situation in his home state, Punjab, having the largest Dalit population (26.8 per cent), he lacked the same appeal among the Dalits of Punjab, as he had among the Dalits of U.P. Simranjit Singh Mann and his party Akali Dal (Mann), no more had a mass base, and so without a party structure and lack of support, the Akali Dal (Mann) - BSP combine was contesting a lost battle.³⁰

2.2 SEARCH FOR ISSUES IN PUNJAB POLLS (1997) : AN ANALYSIS

While state level political parties had earnestly taken up the most difficult task of selecting the suitable nominees, who had winning chances in the Assembly polls, the top leaders of the Congress, SAD–BJP alliance, BSP and the four party United Front desperately looked

for main issues that should hopefully appeal to the majority of the voters during the election campaign so that they could convince them about their claim for power. While the SAD – BJP's main plank was that of Hindu-Sikh amity for the state's stability, the alliance also made the rampant corruption during the Congress rule as a major poll issue in the election campaign. The SAD– BJP alliance leaders also planned to expose the Congress government at the centre and hold it responsible for instigating terrorism in the state. The former Delhi Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana stated at a press conference in Chandigarh that the Congress was equally guilty of provoking the 1984 riots which led to the killing of innocent people in various parts of the country. The state level leaders of the BJP exploited the emotional relationship built up by its top leaders like Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani to assuage the hurt feelings of the majority of the Sikhs in the state. The party referred in this connection Mr. Vajpayee's visit as Prime Minister to the Golden Temple but also his participation in the joint rally of the SAD-BJP for launching the election campaign at Ludhiana. The party's state leaders also referred to the visit of the party's national president, Mr. Advani to Maghi Mela at Muktsar. This, the party leaders felt would convince not only the party's own state cadre but also the majority of the population of Sikhs about the BJP's sincerity towards the SAD (B) which they think would certainly improve electoral prospects of the SAD – BJP alliance during the Assembly polls in Punjab.³¹

Apart from the stress on Hindu-Sikh unity which is the need of the hour in Punjab, the SAD – BJP combine had come out with Common Minimum Programme (CMP). The Common Minimum Programme was

quite categorical in stating that while working for genuine and lasting peace, the alliance would quell the proxy war being waged against the country by a hostile neighbour and go all out to preserve and enhance the dignity and honour of Punjab and Punjabis.³² The Akali Dal projected itself as a defender of Punjabi rights and lambasts the Congress for a history of betrayal. Partnership with BJP had changed the Akalis in one way they were no longer anti-Centre. The plank was solely anti-Congress.³³ Besides the Common Minimum Programme, the Shiromani Akali Dal (B) also issued a separate election manifesto, where they pledged to fight for true federalism as contained in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1978, scrapping all previous accords on the adjudication of inter-state river waters, scrapping of the SYL projects, transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas to the state and setting up a state Human Rights Commission. It promised free education to girls upto graduation, free power to tubewells, free canal water for irrigation, abolishing of land revenue, Rs 300 as pension to men and women aged above 65 and 60 respectively, and construction of senior citizen homes, linking the procurement prices of food grain and farm products with price index, extending crop insurance to more crops, curbing price rise of fertilisers, tractors and other agricultural machinery, liberalised and soft loans for buying tractors, farm machinery, fertilisers, raising a corpus fund for covering loss of crops due to natural calamities and payment to cane growers without any delay. For traders, the manifesto promised the abolition of octroi, banning of raids on business premises by any authority outside the administrative set up without prior permission of the District magistrates. The SAD manifesto promised an ambitious programme to totally eradicate

unemployment and new avenues for creation of large scale employment. The manifesto said that the SAD would lay special emphasis on eradicating corruption from all spheres and would provide a clean administration in the state.³⁴

The Congress started preparing for the Assembly poll on a defensive note with its back to the wall. At the very outset it can be said that the Congress had never felt so weak and helpless. There was a discernible streak of "demoralisation and despondency", both in leadership and rank and file. Whatever energy it had and whatever might had been its plus points and achievements of the past five years, all seem to look brittle and put on the spoils. After 1985 (even then it was a friendly political match between the Congress and the Akalis in the wake of Punjab Accord and aftermath of Operation Bluestar at Golden Temple and anti-Sikh riots in 1984) the Congress would face the Akalis squarely for the first time; the latter were in the fray in 1991 when the poll was called off at the last minute but boycotted the 1992 elections, therefore the stakes were high for both contenders.³⁵ The senior Congress leaders in the state felt that the sudden decision of the Election Commission regarding the announcement of the election date (February 6) had deprived the Congress led Government in the state of the chance to implement a package of Rs 500 crore on developmental schemes which the Chief Minister had announced for the people of the state. The decision had certainly deprived the party of electoral dividends it hoped to get by implementing the package. However the party leaders decided to cash on it and made it one of the party's election campaign issues. The Congress strongly attacked the unholy and politically motivated alliance between SAD and BJP, which

the party leaders felt would break soon.³⁶ The Congress tried to make an inroads into the Jat-Sikh vote bank. Its leaders projected themselves as true Sikhs and charge the Akalis with exploiting religion for political purpose.³⁷

The left parties set the prevention of BJP –Akali alliance from coming to power and creation of a strong left block in the new Assembly as their tactical goal in the ensuring elections. The Akali– BJP coalition in Punjab according to them, was an opportunist gang up of two communal forces, whose sole aim was to grab power. This represents a danger to Punjab's future. They argued that their efforts should be to increase the left presence as well as of other democratic forces, so that it's possible to have a secular government in Punjab.³⁸ Mr. Balwant Singh, CPI(M) assistant secretary, says "We are very clear that the communal forces must be stopped from coming to power as that could be disastrous, with the state sliding back to dark era." For CPI state secretary, Joginder Dayal, "strengthening the secular forces is the need of the hour keeping in view the agony the people have gone through during the era of militancy". Both the left parties considered the Congress (I) equally corrupt to the core and was equally responsible for the rise of terrorism in Punjab.³⁹ Therefore they raised the slogan "oppose both and work for bigger left representation in the Assembly".⁴⁰

Thus, the issues in the 1997 Punjab Assembly polls range from accountability for terrorism to the possible revival of terrorism; Hindu – Sikh relations to a separate identity for the state; economic concessions in the form of sops and promises; and corruption to non performance. In a pre election survey in Punjab, about 54% of the respondents mentioned

economic issues like reduction in prices of agricultural inputs, free electricity and water and unemployment to be major issues.⁴¹

2.3 PUNJAB VIDHAN SABHA POLL ELECTORAL VERDICT : AN ANALYSIS

Punjab, which is usually known for its progressive ways, appears to have chosen to retreat politically - all the way back to 1977 but for good. It had left far behind the turbulent years and resolved for deeper bonds of unity and integrity of the nation. Punjab witnessed one of the most peaceful elections. People voted in large numbers, the average turnout being 68.9 per cent. The Sangrur district recorded the highest turnout of 77.1 per cent, where as the Ludhiana district witnessed the lowest turnout of 63.4 per cent. Generally the urban areas like Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ropar, Patiala districts witnessed slightly lower turnouts as compared to the relatively rural districts.

The SAD- BJP alliance in Punjab recorded a landslide victory. For the first time in Punjab's history, the alliance won over three - fourth majority in the 117 member state Assembly. The alliance won 93 Vidhan Sabha seats with 45.8 per cent votes. The Akali Dal (B) alone won 75 seats, highest ever, by the Akalis in the state. It was two seats more than the previous highest ever Akali tally of 73 seats during the September 1985 Assembly elections, held against the background of the Rajiv - Longowal Accord of July 24, 1985. The BJP in alliance with the Akali Dal (B) also won 18 seats in the 1997 Assembly polls. It was twice the highest ever tally of its earlier incarnation, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, in 1967. The Congress, which won 87 seats, one short of three fourth majority in the previous elections in 1992 boycotted by the

Akalis, was badly mauled and had drawn a blank, like the 1977 Lok Sabha elections which were held after emergency and the sterilization programme. The Congress managed to win only 14 seats with 26.6 per cent votes.⁴² The Akali Dal (Mann) – BSP alliance received a drubbing getting only 2 of all the 17 seats it contested and polled 10.4 per cent votes. In another major blow to its hope, the alliance leader Mr. Mann lost from both the constituencies. CPI won 2 seats with 2.9 per cent votes. Independents managed to win 6 Vidhan Sabha seats with 11 per cent votes. Worst was the performance of four constituents of United Front - Janta Dal, Samajwadi Party, Samajwadi Janta Party and CPI – M which drew blank despite fighting the election jointly.⁴³

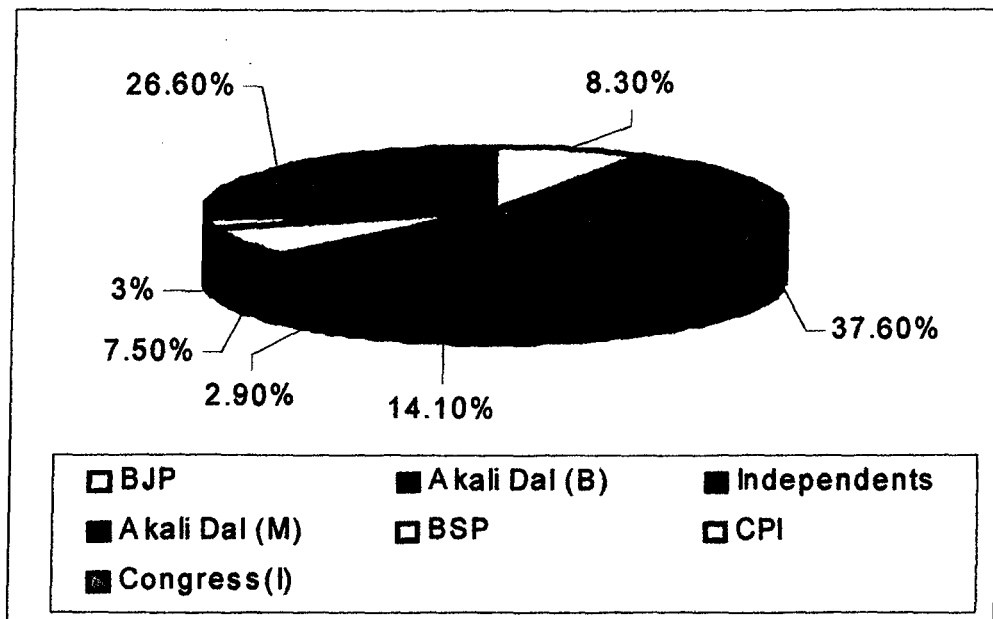
Table I : 1997 Punjab Assembly Polls :
Alliances : SAD (B) – BJP
Congress – CPI (understanding)
BSP – Akali Dal (Mann) (understanding)

Party Position :

Total seats	117
Elections Held	117
Results Declared	117
Akali Dal (B)	75
BJP	18
Congress – I	14
CPI	2
BSP	1
Akali Dal (M)	1
Independents	6

(Source : “Badal Ministry likely to take office tomorrow”, Deccan Herald, February 11,1997)

Figure :



(Source : Kanwar Sandhu "Back to the past, with a fresh vote," Indian Express, February 21, 1997)

Table II :

Party's Success Rate :

Akali Dal (B)	81.5 %
BJP	81.8%
Congress - I	13.3%
CPI	14.3 %
BSP	1.5%
Akali Dal (M)	3.5%

(Source : Kanwar Sandhu "Back to the past, with a fresh votes" Indian Express, February 21, 1997)

The badly splintered Congress which had in the past invariably succeeded in splitting the Hindu and Sikhs votes, besides garnering a majority of Harijan votes, was largely ignored. As a senior Akali leader explained, the Congress game plan was played back. Due to the failure of the Congress to reach an understanding with the BSP, there was a split

in Harijan votes. The Sikh voter (who statistically make up more than 60% in the state), realizing the futility of extremist politics, voted almost enmasse for the Badal faction advocating moderate politics. And with the Badal faction insulating itself against the radical Akali Dal leader, Mann, the Hindu voters (about 40%) were able to put their weight behind the SAD – BJP combine whole heartedly in a large number of seats. Badal's understanding of the grounds well also helped. The Akali Dal had been leaving a large number of seats to the left (CPI and CPI – M) candidates in earlier elections. Their decision to contest most seats themselves in 1997 and leave about one-fifth to the BJP proved highly beneficial.⁴⁴

The Akali Dal – BJP combine apparently made a dent in even the traditional Congress vote bank in all regions of the state. Majah region which lies sandwiched between the Indo-Pak border in the North and river Beas in the South, and which was known as a traditional stronghold of Congress Party, had completely turned the tide in favour of the SAD – BJP combine. The alliance won 25 out of 27 seats with 51.1 per cent votes in this region.⁴⁵ With not even a single seat from the Majah region, which comprises Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts and was worst affected during the days of terrorism, going to the Congress, the myth of the Congress had been shattered. This also means that not only the people had forgiven the Akalis for not openly opposing militancy, but also reposed faith in the Akali – BJP's commitment of maintaining peace at all costs.⁴⁶

Doaba, the North-Eastern part of Punjab, which had witnessed large scale migration of Punjabi youth during the past few years accounts for 27 Vidhan Sabha seats, and was a traditional stronghold for the BSP and Congress, with a sizeable dalit population, witnessed the

biggest swing in favour of SAD-BJP alliance. The SAD-BJP managed to invade into the Congress bastion of Doaba (which includes Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala districts) where the Congress could win only 5 of 27 seats, with alliance winning 20 seats with 43.3 percent vote, one seat each was won by CPI and an independent candidate.⁴⁷

In many places, the Badal tide was helped by the BSP cutting into the Congress votes. This was particularly pronounced in the Doaba belt, where the urban Harijan votes played a significant part. The Congress lost some seats for the first time. This included seats like Jalandhar South. "Kanshi Ram's ambivalence was our gain" said an Akali leader.⁴⁸ While the BSP cut into the Congress votes, its partner, Akali Dal (Mann) could only do limited damage to the Akali Dal (B). His candidate made a dent in the Akali votes in about half a dozen seats, but it was not enough to hinder combines ascent.

Malwa, the Southern part of Punjab, geographically the biggest, politically the most significant accounts for 63 Vidhan Sabha seats. This rich cotton belt, with sizeable Sikh population has been a traditional stronghold for the Akalis. The SAD - BJP combine won 48 seats with 44.8 percent vote from this region. The Congress won 9 seats, 2 seats won by CPI while Akali Dal (M) managed to win its lone seat from this region. Independent candidates won 3 Vidhan Sabha seats from here.⁴⁹

This was the first normal election in Punjab since 1980. The clear verdict in favour of the SAD - BJP coalition in Punjab was a definite mandate for peace in the border state.⁵⁰ The defeat of terrorism was the party's trump card in the elections. The elections were also

remarkable for the wiping out of the militant fringe from the Akali politics as the miserable performance of the opportunistic alliance between Akali Dal led by Mr. Simaranjit Singh Mann and the BSP had shown.⁵¹ The wave in favour of the Akali BJP combine, highlighted two factors. One, that the people do not want to waste the precious vote and later suffer a government which is not of their choice, as was the case last time. It proved that the Punjabis, irrespective of caste and creed, wanted the heavy hand of the police to be lifted. For many Punjabis the abuse of power by men in uniform had become a greater threat than the violence of militants.⁵² Secondly, there was a marked resentment against the Congress, which though claimed credit for restoring peace in the state, but continued to demand heavy price for the same – with its leaders indulging in large scale corruption, one of the major reason for party's debacle. Besides, a dwindling mass base in the state, the Congress suffered a major setback owing to the serious conflict within the party after the death of Beant Singh. The efforts to strike a deal with the BSP till the last minute proved dear to the Congress which could not even properly implement its alliance with the CPI – with the two contesting each other on at least 12 seats.⁵³

The trends which had come up in these elections show that the SAD – BJP alliance had transcended the regional barriers and performed equally well in all three regions. The factors which had helped the Akali – BJP alliance to win nearly 80 per cent of the seats, in the Assembly include the following:

- 1- The peace card played by the Congress and the left did not work. The argument that Akalis-in-power would increase the danger of

revival of terrorism did not cut much ice.

- 2- People wanted to punish the Congress for the unprecedented corruption indulged in by the Congress government.
- 3- Infighting in the Congress, had a negative effect on the Congress.⁵⁴ It was the irony of Punjab situation that the party i.e. Congress which claimed that it had defeated terrorism and made state safe for democracy, was voted out because it was seen in the eyes of the people as mother of terrorism.⁵⁵
- 4- Big promises like free electricity and water for agriculture and irrigation also seemed to have helped the Akali – BJP alliance.

Another significant thing of the 1997 Assembly elections was that every major party was reluctant to contest the polls on its own. The Shiromani Akali Dal went along with the BJP, the Congress with the CPI and the BSP with the Akali Dal (Mann). This is being seen by some political analyst as the beginning of a coalition era in the state. The Akalis had an opportunity to build a Punjabi, secular ethos. But ultimately they preferred a Sikh–Hindu front. The overwhelming victory of the combine had squeezed out whatever chance the Punjabi ethos had.⁵⁶

3. FORMATION OF AKALI – BJP GOVERNMENT IN PUNJAB: AN ACCOUNT OF ITS WORKING

The SAD – BJP government, led by the Chief Minister, Mr. Prakash Singh Badal, is the seventh non-Congress government in Punjab. The nature of the Akali Dal – BJP success, however, has also placed a heavy burden on the Badal government. The Akali Dal leadership which had during their earlier tenures, functioned only as a Panthic party,

will now be called upon to meet the aspirations of the people of the whole state. While this is indeed the first time when a coalition Ministry has come into being on the basis of a clear political alliance arrived at before the general election in Punjab on the basis of a Common Minimum Programme, but the inherent tension between the two partners have been surfacing off and on.⁵⁷ For years the Akalis have been demanding the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab along with the Punjabi speaking areas of Haryana. The BJP has avoided the issue as its Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh units have taken conflicting stands. Though Punjab Chief Minister P.S. Badal has maintained that the offer of an alternative capital would be too attractive for Haryana to refuse, the BJP MP from Chandigarh, Satya Pal Jain has promised his electorate that the Union Territory status would remain.⁵⁸ Badal has to forge a good working relationship with the Centre, if only to ensure Punjab gets the sort of political settlement that will put a psychological seal on the end of the demand for Khalistan. The most onerous task ahead for Badal will be keeping the SGPC out of his hair. Although the SGPC passed a resolution declaring its neutrality in government matters, Badal may find it difficult to keep Punjab's most wily politician, Tohra from interfering in the affairs of troubled state.⁵⁹

3.1 Yearly Accounts of Working of Coalition Government in Punjab 1997 and 1998: Achievements and Failures.

The Akali – BJP government began with a promise to provide clean, efficient and people-friendly regime whose Ministers and legislators would declare their assets within 90 days of their election besides accounting annually for any increase in their assets. The Akali leaders promised complete transparency and ruled out the possibility of any

repeat of the Congress (I)'s rule which according to them, was symbolized with galloping increase in corruption and all round mal-administration causing an economic crisis which crippled both industry and agriculture.⁶⁰

3.1.1 1997: YEAR OF PROMISES AND FAILURES

Having achieved a near political stability in Punjab, its time for the SAD (B)-BJP coalition government in the state to stress on the shattered economy. The newly elected Akali-BJP coalition government had inherited a legacy called "unprecedented financial crisis" from the previous government. Therefore the government of Punjab at present must perform a balancing act-balancing the aspirations of the people and accelerating the process of development with "heavy debt burden" which yoked the state. The Punjab Finance Minister, Captain Kanwaljeet Singh, presented a Rs 352.52 crore deficit budget (1997-98) to the Vidhan Sabha on June 11, 1997. As promised no new tax was being suggested. Of the total allocation under various heads, the maximum share-46% had gone to irrigation and power; the latter was the nucleus of all agro industrial development. The creation of a social reconstruction fund with a corpus of Rs 50 crore would be set up for all the needy not earlier covered by any existing schemes. Generate one lakh jobs over and above the promised employment for 2.78 lakh separately projected in the annual plan⁶¹. The state plans to play the role of only the promoter by withdrawing itself from direct investment in industrial enterprises and to discontinue budgetary support to public sector undertakings. The budget also talked about establishing a series of Adarsh (Model) schools in Punjab. The Finance Minister opted for a rationalization of the existing taxes rather than expanding tax base. The budget in a way tried to bring about economic

regeneration and improve productivity in every sector and sphere⁶². But the coalition government in Punjab failed to implement the budget properly and the state was relegated to the path to economic degeneration.

The populist promises made by the Badal Government during the elections and latter on, proved to be the death trap for the government itself. The ruinous marriage of politics and economies is slowly bleeding the economy of precious resources. The election time commitments for freebies to the people long fed on a steady diet of sundry subsidies, loan melas, free power, etc., have been sending wrong signals to all with little regard to the economic consequences in the long run⁶³. Immediately on coming to power after the February 1997 Assembly elections, the Akali dominated coalition government decided to implement its election promise of providing free electricity and irrigation water to farm sector. This put an additional burden of over Rs. 300 crore a year on State Electricity Board, obviously to offset its enhanced power tariff. As a result the consumers have started receiving inflated power bills⁶⁴. This decision of their's has sparked off criticism from all corners of the state. The contribution of Punjab and its farmers in making India self-sufficient in food grain production and in providing continued food security for the country is well known. While the achievement are there for every one to see, little is, however known about social cost, in terms of depletion of natural resources and degradation of environment, at which this increased production had come about. The most notable consequence of this agricultural development strategy on natural resource base has been on the depletion of groundwater-the groundwater table in the state is declining at the rate of almost 0.5 to 1 meter per year. The severity of the

situation can be gauged from the fact that out of the 108 blocks in the state, about 85% have already been classified as either dark or gray, implying that either no further scope or very little scope exist for the exploitation of ground water resources in Punjab. The economic logic is that subsidised or free electricity provides for strong incentive for inefficient use of both electricity and water. The newly elected Punjab government in its wisdom has, however, decided to go contrary to the economic logic. Such populist measures in a state with already precarious groundwater situation, apart from serious financial implications for the state exchequer are likely to lead to further inefficient use of energy as well as groundwater⁶⁵.

One of the foremost question of social relevance that arises from such policy pronouncement relates to the issue of equity-will the announced policy pronouncements be equally beneficial to both resources- rich and resources-poor farmers. Given that groundwater perse is a “free” resource the electric tubewell owning farmers enjoying free power for lifting water will be at an advantage over those who have a diesel tubewell. Similarly, in the groundwater “dark” declared areas of the state, fresh electricity connections for tubewells are banned. As a result those farmers who do not have an electric-tubewell of their own will be deprived of the benefit of free electricity for no fault of theirs while others who have an electricity connection will be allowed to deplete the groundwater much faster. Even in other areas of the state, one has to wait for substantial period of time for getting a fresh electricity connection. This will lead to increased corruption in sanctioning new connections. Further due to inequality in the size of holding of the farmers, the amount of subsidy enjoyed by larger

farmers will be much larger than those by small farmers⁶⁶ . It also has resulted in alienation of the non-agriculturist classes in the state. As a matter of fact, the Scheduled Castes, forming as high as 28.31 percent of the state's population, called at a step-motherly treatment and accused the ruling Akali Dal of favouring its traditional vote bank of farmers by way of supplying free power and free water. Most of the Scheduled Castes were landless and earned their livelihood as agriculture labourers, weavers, masons and construction workers. Many dalit leaders raised their voice against the decision of giving free power to farmers. Even the Bahujan Samaj Morcha MP, an ally of Akali Dal, urged the Punjab Chief Minister to review the decision of giving free power to farmers as it had created a wide gap between the farming community and those living in urban areas and dalits. Some dalit leaders, among others, also threatened that landless residents would start taking direct electricity supply unless the state gave at least 100 units free to all landless households as farmers are being given free electricity for irrigation⁶⁷ .

Apart from the social implication this move by Punjab government is likely to create a vicious circle. The demand for electricity in Punjab already exceeds the supply and as a result, the supply of electricity is often erratic. Given the rate at which the water level is falling in the region, even if no more tubewells are installed, the demand for electricity for irrigating pumping is likely to go up significantly in the near future as a result of higher electricity requirements for pumping the same amount of irrigation water from a greater depth. The agricultural sector in Punjab enjoys a priority over other sectors of the economy in the supply of electricity. Given the political influence of the powerful

farm lobby in the likely event of the demand exceeding the supply of electricity, power will be diverted from the non-agricultural sector affecting the production of other sectors of the economy. According to some "the urbanites feel that the industry, trade and commerce in the cities are being used by the government for cross-subsidization of the farm sector"⁶⁸. The abolition of land revenue and water cess which form part of the political package announced by Badal on the first day of his attending office, are bound to lead the state into a deeper financial mess. Agricultural income being completely free of tax, it guarantees growth in personal wealth at the cost of economic growth of the state.

The government has gone back on the promise to abolish octroi. In town areas non abolition of octroi created almost a stir like situation. Even the BJP, an ally of the Akali Dal and partner in the coalition Ministry, expressed strong resentment against the continuation of octroi . Besides, most BJP, leaders had reservations with regard to the issue of free power and water to the farmer. However, the BJP neither allowed any hike in the sales tax nor any tax drive or raids against the evaders. In fact, no enforcement on realization of sales tax was launched.

The Akalis had promised to give a "Shagan" of Rs. 5100 on the marriage of every girl belonging to the Scheduled Caste. On coming to power, they fixed an income limit for families for eligibility of shagun. Under this scheme, 11,716 Sechduled Caste girls have been married off. It cost the exchequer about Rs 6 crores, which has gone into non-productive sector. This scheme also carries the danger of encouraging underage marriage. The populism by the government has an additional burden of about Rs 350 crores on the economy⁶⁹.

Old age pension to all women above 60 and to all men above 65 was promised. On coming to power, action on all pending applications was stopped. It was announced that teams would go from house to house with doctors to give age-certificates and new applications would be taken from all those eligible by March 31, 1997. Nothing happened. The scheme was then given up.

To get the votes from the working class, Badal visited some of the closed cooperative mills (for example at Malout, Budhlada and Mansa) and told the workers of these mills that if they voted for his party, their vote would ensure the reopening of the mills "within a week". Soon after the Akali-BJP government was formed, Badal told the workers of the Malout Mill, "There is no question of reopening the mills". The same attitude is being conveyed in relation to other closed mills. The demand of the working class to revise the minimum wages has been turned down.⁷⁰

The Lok pal has been revived. However, it has not been given teeth. For instance, the fee of Rs 1000 has not been abolished. In the Lok Pal Act, enacted when Beant Singh was the Chief Minister, the provision was that all proceedings would be in camera except when it was ordered otherwise by the Lok Pal for reasons to be recorded in writing. Now the "in camera" provision has been made absolute and punishment for leaking proceedings has been made harsher. And all this notwithstanding the tall talk of transparent government. The only improvement is that now complaints against MLA's too can be filed directly. No rules have been framed under the Act as yet.⁷¹

The alliance commitment to provide a transparent and responsive government is not visible in the general administration. The city administration which has to be strengthened is rather indifferent to the political leadership following the super-session of over a dozen IAS officers in appointments to top bureaucratic positions. This has resulted in inertia. Untimely rains and the apathetic attitude on the part of officials have adversely affected paddy procurement, frustrating the small and marginal farmers, another section for which government is yet to evolve a proper strategy.⁷² While on one hand, the Punjab government which prides itself on being the strongest well wisher of the farmers in the country, on the other hand, it has not been able to make available quality seed, fertilizer and pesticides to them, and failed miserably to break the nexus between the manufacturers and official machinery at various levels. As a result of all this, say the farmers, output of wheat, paddy and cotton has not matched the efforts made by them nor has the farming remained an attractive vocation.⁷³ The farmers argued that no action is taken by officials against dealers or companies whose samples failed even when seized from their premises.⁷⁴

Effective steps were promised in connection with removal of the grievances machinery. Precisely the opposite has happened. Sangat Darshan Darbars have proved to be a gimmick. Grievances committees were earlier disbanded. The new ones by and large have not been formed as yet or have not yet become functional. Their composition has been weakened to suit the government. Mr. Badal has to be given credit for his perception of the various problems but his piece meal approach comes in the way of proper result. He has favored the setting

up of a series of Adarsh (model) schools instead of taking up overall reforms in the education system. He has preferred block level planning without decentralisation of powers, throwing up a paradox in a well-meaning venture.⁷⁵

Shortcomings notwithstanding, the government has a reason to pat itself on the back. It managed to get an announcement from the former Prime Minister, Mr. I.K. Gujral, on waiver of a Rs 8000 crore loan incurred by the state in fighting militancy. The Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP in Punjab laid emphasis on industrial development. The thrust is on agro-industrial policy for the state. Mr Badal invited the industry to set up units at focal points and avail of 'A' category concessions. He said that the stress should be on the handicraft industry, which would provide employment in the villages. The Chief Minister dispelled the fears of the industry that the state would be faced with power shortage in the future. He said that a 600 MW Ranjit Sagar dam project would be commissioned before June 1998. A 150MW power station would be set up at Bhatinda in the joint sector with Indian Oil Corporation.⁷⁶ Infact, the coalition government can take the credit for getting sanction of Bhatinda refinery worth Rs 16,000 crore. The Bhatinda project has been hanging fire for years, and it is nothing short of a miracle that the entire proposal has at long last overcome several artificial barriers put up by certain vested interests who were out to kill it.

3.1.2 1998 : Financial Crisis, Crop Failures and Suicides by Farmers : Year of Growing Despair

In 1998, the coalition government decided to reorient the governments policies and programmes. The year 1998, Badal said,

would be observed as industry year with a major thrust on information technology. The government would take the initiative and encourage participation of the private sector, including Human Resource Development. Secondly, a theme paper "Vision 2002" has been prepared and the State Planning Department asked to work out details on the given priority issues and involve experts. It is a time bound programme and will cover political, social and economic aspects related to power, infrastructure, agriculture, "minimum" governance and "shrinking" administrative intervention, urbanisation, health and social sector.⁷⁷

The preparations for the 12th Lok Sabha elections started in Punjab in the beginning of 1998 with the political parties busy in searching for political alignments. As elsewhere, Punjab also demonstrated that there are no permanent friends and permanent enemies in politics. The Punjab Congress entered into electoral alliance with BSP. The existing ruling Akali-BJP alliance remained. The Akali Dal also struck a deal with Bahujan Samaj Morcha, a breakaway group of BSP.⁷⁸ The main contenders—the Akali Dal and the Congress, contested eight seats each, leaving the remaining five to their allies. While the Congress left four seats to the BSP and one seat to CPI, the Akalis had left three seats for the BJP, one for rebel BSP leader Satnam Singh Kainth in Phillaur and one for former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral. The lacklustre performance of the alliance government, would no doubt, be an issue in the elections. What would however influence the mind of the voter, particularly the educated, would be the issue of stability at the Centre. The Akali Dal-BJP combine won 12 seats, the Phillaur seat won by a BSP rebel, supported by the combine. The Congress party failed to win even a single seat. Although elsewhere

in the country the incumbency factor had worked against the political parties, in Punjab it had gone in favour of the government. This was perhaps because Mr. Prakash Singh Badal had performed better than the previous Congress government had done. He got the Rs 8000 crore loan waived from the Centre, which was retarding the progress of the state.⁷⁹ Viewed in the larger national context, the mandate for the combine assumes significance on two counts: the secularisation of state politics that it implies and the entry of the Akalis into the national mainstream.⁸⁰

The Akali-BJP alliance government in Punjab, in meantime tried to implement some of their populist policies in order to win the support of the people of the state. This time they made an attempt to win over the support of the Scheduled Caste in the state. It is under such conditions that the state government on April 22, 1998 decided to give free domestic power of up to 30 units each per month for those Scheduled Caste and backward class consumers who has sanctioned load of not more than 300 Watts.⁸¹ The government made no categorization of farmers while giving free electricity for tubewells, but did do so for weaker sections. Thus, Scheduled Caste leaders accused the Badal government of betraying the weaker section by fixing the 300 watts limit. This apart, it is only a small group of beneficiaries that could be identified by the government. The state government thus spent only about Rs 30 lakh annually on all such beneficiaries whereas it has incurred a loss of Rs 300 crore annually by giving free power to farmers. Some dalit leaders demanded that the Punjab government should implement the SC/ST Atrocities Prevention Act as incidents of atrocities against members of Scheduled Castes has

increased during the present Akali- BJP regime. In addition some complained that the farmers has never allowed the Scheduled Castes their due from the village common lands, presently managed by the village panchayats in the state. The state has around 1,79, 543 areas cultivable 'Shamilat' land, most of which has been leased out to the relatively well-off farmers, denying even the one third share of the Scheduled Castes under the Village Panchayat Act.⁸²

Another failed scheme was for providing houses to Scheduled Caste and those living below the poverty line, for which an amount of around Rs 60 crore was earmarked in the 1997-98 budget for the construction of 12,000 houses in all the 17 districts of the state. In fact the government could build only 7,862 houses by cutting down the budgetary allocation to Rs 44 crore reducing the target to 8,800 houses. Official sources said that up to January 31, 1999, only 4,124 houses were allotted and the rest were lying unallotted.⁸³ Subsequently, the government reportedly withdrew the scheme and introduced a new scheme for granting a loan of Rs 25,000 to the beneficiaries, which would obviously create bureaucratic hurdles of one type or the other. On this the CPI MLA accused the Punjab government of withdrawing the pro-Scheduled Caste policies and schemes one by one.

Pensions for the old was not released for months at which many people, including the leaders of the ruling Akali-BJP combine, criticized the government. As the governments financial position worsened, even salaries of some sections of employees were not paid for months. Widows of terrorist victims, numbering over 11,000 did not receive

their subsistence allowance of Rs 2,500 per month which was the main source of meeting their daily needs. As a result of all this, on the directions of Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, the Social Security, Child and Women Development Department launched a special drive for the benefit of the common man in the district. The newly introduced schemes were old age pension, family benefit and maternity benefit.⁸⁴ The Punjab government had accepted with some modifications, recommendations of the Fourth Pay Commission in respect of pensioners. However it would mean an additional financial liability of Rs 110 crore.⁸⁵

The main focus of the annual plan (1997-98) was on generating employment opportunities but it remain unattended due to meagre resources. In fact the government had to issue a circular banning fresh recruitment at all levels on December 10, 1998. The educated unemployed youth account for 71 percent of the total unemployed in the state.⁸⁶ Previously the army had a quota of about 8 per cent for Sikhs, this has been cut down to almost 2 percent. The high levels of unemployment in the state can be traced to slowing down of agricultural growth in the last eight years. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the non-agricultural sector has not developed and crucial agro based sector, which could have absorbed, a sizeable percentage of the educated youth has failed to kick off. A study of unemployment pattern conducted by Dr. R. S. Bawa of School of Economics at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, has found 60 percent of Punjab's jobless youth are educated. Therefore, if the state government does not make enough effort in this direction, then given the aspiration levels of the youth and lack of suitable opportunities, Bawa warns youngsters could turn once again to militancy, drug trafficking and the ISI.⁸⁷

The Punjab Finance Minister, Capt Kanwaljeet Singh who presented the second budget of the Akali-BJP alliance government on June 24, 1998, levied fresh taxes worth Rs 173 crores as an attempt to cover up a resource gap of Rs 400 crores in the proposed annual plan of Rs 2,500 crore which was 19 percent more than that of the last years outlay.⁸⁸ The major constraint for the government initiative emanates from its fragile financial position of the total Budget of the state of about Rs 15,000 crore, the additional resource mobilisation was less than Rs 400 crore- 2.67 percent of the total Budget. It does not cover even the annual price rise. Increasingly, the government was depending more on public borrowing and less on tax based resource mobilisation. In the Budget, 41.84 percent of the total receipts were based on public borrowing and, consequently, 31.36 percent of the spending would be made for repayment of debt and interest. This practice of reckless borrowing was resorted to avoid tax based resource mobilisation. This not only accumulates the mounting debt burden for future government and liabilities for future generations but also progressively eats into tax resources of the state on account of payment of debt obligations.⁸⁹

The low tax effort by the government is the result of its policy to please the influential section of tax payers, particularly the business community. On a list of eight commodity classes the sales tax cut introduced ranges from 8 percent to 2 percent to benefit the business community. As per the statement of the Finance Minister, the occupancy rate in the state transport sector (which is generally lower than the crowded private buses) is more than 80 percent, but the special road tax is being collected at the rate of 60 percent. This is to benefit the private transporters.⁹⁰

Under the policy of competitive populism, the state government is giving subsidy/tax concessions to influential sections. This includes affluent / rich farmers, business, industry, commission agents, etc. These sections have a considerable tax paying capacity but this policy has made the financial position of the state very precarious. There are at least 25 percent traders without sales tax licence and registration number, who nevertheless, charge the tax from the consumer, but do not pass the same to the government in the absence of number and pocket enhanced profit.⁹¹

While the revenue expenditure as percentage of state Gross Domestic Product is rising, the capital expenditure is declining and revenue receipts are stagnant. The revenue from state taxes grew at an average rate of 12.4 percent between 1985 and 1990-91, at 14.8 percent between 1990-95 and only five percent between 1995-98.⁹² The government has no money to provide basic health, primary (quality) education for all, improve road networks, provide clean drinking water and make investment in the power sector. Consequently, the basic services in the rural areas are deteriorating day by day. It's a cruel joke that the Finance Minister had allocated Rs 9 crore for the construction of primary school buildings and other infrastructural facilities. This is hardly enough to cover the requirements of only one of the 140 development blocks. By this pace the government would be able to provide such facilities in the primary schools of the state in a period of 140 years. If the power supply is to be kept adequate, the state requires an investment of \$5 billion (Rs 21,000 crore approximately) by 2002. The Punjab State Electricity Board is not in a position to do so in view of the government policy on electricity charges. Moreover, the

investment requirement of electricity alone is more than the size on the Ninth Five Year Plan of Punjab (Rs 14,300 crore).

The state administration has expanded beyond expectations making it top heavy at all levels. A government document lists that because of excessive expenditure on administration (62 percent or Rs 3654 crore) it has no resource to fund its plans.⁹³ This is one of the two main reasons why the states Non Plan (non development plus maintenance) Expenditures grew by almost seven times in 12 years, from Rs 786 crore to Rs 5030 crore.⁹⁴

Eventually, financial crisis led to a near bankruptcy. The Punjab government landed in financial mess, with Reserve Bank of India advising banks not to honour the states cheques from the night of December 9-10, 1998. The reason for the Punjab government temporarily finding itself without money was that it had not been able to meet the RBI norm to clear its overdraft with the RBI in 10 days. The total overdraft had come to Rs 480 crore.⁹⁵ An impending catastrophe was averted when the Centre doled out Rs 350 crore as loan to the state, but in the absence of any long strategy, the vicious cycle of deficit could prove disastrous for the state.⁹⁶

Apart from the financial crisis, the farmers in Punjab faced the fury of untimely rains leading to huge loss of paddy and other cash crops like cotton in 1998. The Punjab crop, like last year, had been damaged by the unseasonal rains and had excessive moisture content. As a result, apart from a higher content of broken grain, it is discoloured as well. In June 1998, the Food Ministry wrote to various states offering them last year's

stock from Punjab. According to sources, all states had refused to take this stock, stating that their millers were refusing to take rice with such high moisture content.⁹⁷ As if nature's wrath was not enough, man connived with nature to further rob farmers when paddy procurement started. Prior to this came the news of farmers committing suicide. The DAP fertiliser muddle due to monopolistic marketing and sale by Punjab Markfed added to their woes.⁹⁸ The farmers felt cheated by the Badal government due to sluggish procurement of paddy and lack of relief for the damaged crop. Due to the delay in relaxation of specification of paddy by the government, the farmers were left at the mercy of rice millers who purchased paddy at their own terms and conditions, paying much below the minimum support price. The condition became so appalling that several hundred tonnes of paddy lying in the grain markets had turned black. Most farmers had to make distress sale of paddy. Some farmers said that they had to sell paddy for Rs 200 per quintal. This was mainly because of lackadaisical handling by procurement agencies like Markfed, Punsup, Agro industries, war house and food and supply department. Any delay in the procurement of farm produce causes problems to farmers because they can sow the next crop only if enough money is generated for purchasing seed and other inputs like fertiliser and diesel.⁹⁹

Apart from defective procurement of paddy, the year 1998 was the third successive bad year for cotton growers in Punjab. The failure of the cotton crop for the fifth consecutive year had reduced the farmers to penury. The crop touched an all time low of 7.13 lakh bales as against the target of 22 lakh bales in 1998. The result: a severe cash crunch in the cotton belt comprising districts of Bhatinda, Mansa, Sangrur, Faridkot,

Ferozepur, Muktsar and Moga.¹⁰⁰ As a result of all this the Punjab farmers today are reeling under credit and debt, estimated by a study to be whopping Rs 5,700 crores annually, a vast chunk being owed by the marginal, small and medium farmers, mainly to the informal sector comprising commission agents and others.¹⁰¹ In Punjab large number of farmers also take huge amount of loan for non-productive purposes i.e. for domestic consumption and social ceremonies. All this in turn had resulted in debt related suicides of farmers. Agriculture in Punjab is in a precarious condition. The menace of water logging in the Western districts and plummeting water table in the major rice growing Central districts of Ludhiana, Kapurthala, Amritsar, Jalandhar etc. aggravated problems.¹⁰² Even free power for tubewells failed to generate any appreciation of the government among the farmers due to erratic supply of electricity during the peak hours. At one level, the farmers and other section were being appeased and at another level they were being fleeced for which they were cursing the government. The WTO is helping the agriculturally surplus countries to push their produce to India. Once that happen the plight of farmers will worsen. The farm sector therefore needs much more from Punjab government than mere appeasement.¹⁰³ In what was likely to be seen as one of its most politically and socially significant decisions, Punjab's ruling SAD-BJP coalition was set to completely revamp and restructure the states rural cooperatives. The new Punjab Cooperative Act would be aimed at removing: excessive bureaucratic controls; undue external (political) interference, which has been the main cause for non viable and loss making operations; the unprofessional approach of the largely under qualified staff.¹⁰⁴

3.2 Akali Infighting and Sectarianism.

Soon after the installation of the Akali-BJP coalition government, the usual war of attrition and infighting commenced on matters of portfolios. The dissident Akalis accused the Chief Minister of favouring family members, relatives and close associates at the cost of senior party leaders. Some hard-liners in association with the Sikh clergymen blamed him for interfering in religious matter. Some BJP leaders decried that their party was not consulted before taking crucial decisions such as increase in power tariff, bus fare, transfers, appointments, auction for the liquor vends, etc. These things had sent contradictory signals and put a question mark on the basic ideals of peace, prosperity, brotherhood and good governance enshrined in the Common Minimum Programme of the Akali-BJP combine.¹⁰⁵

The infighting in the Akali Dal soon acquired serious proportions. The tussle was first manifested when Prem Singh Lalpura, a veteran Akali leader and MLA who was also elected to Lok Sabha in February 1998, refused to take oath as Lok Sabha member in protest against the induction of Badal's son into the Central Ministry. Infact, Lalpura preferred to continue as MLA instead of joining the Lok Sabha. This infuriated the Akali high command resulting in his expulsion from the party for six years. His expulsion further aggravated the crisis as a couple of other senior Akali leaders from this area, Majha region, objected to the increasing influence of late Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon's family which was related to Badal's family, in Akali politics. There were other clashes of interest with certain other traditional political families like that of late Sunder Singh Majithia, founder of Khalsa College and related to Badal's family.¹⁰⁶

Alongside, the Akali hardliners also stepped up their criticism of BJP, a partner in the coalition government. They denounced the Hindutva agenda of the BJP and took exception to the BJP's stand on Udham Singh Nagar. The Udham Singh Nagar issue had become quite emotive for prosperous Sikhs in Punjab with landed interest in this newly created district of Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, they demanded the exclusion of Udham Singh Nagar from the proposed Uttaranchal state. The SAD in Punjab even threatened to withdraw support to the Vajpayee led coalition government on this issue. While Mr. Badal confined himself to the Udham Singh Nagar issue, Mr. Tohra opened a broad front. Dwending on Akali Dal's demands, he said the party wanted the Vajpayee government to fix responsibility for the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and elsewhere, pay interim compensation of Rs 3.60 lakh to the kin of victims as per the Delhi High Court verdict and issue similar instructions to other states as well. Another major demand was the payment of Rs 1,000 crore by way of compensation to the SGPC for the damage caused to the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar during "Operation Bluestar" and appointment of a commission to go into the circumstances that led to the army operation and other related developments in Punjab.¹⁰⁷

As a result the BJP leaders also started voicing their views against the Akalis. Some senior BJP leaders of Punjab described the Peoples Commission as dummy champions of human rights as their only purpose was to demoralise the police force and glamourise the cause of militants. The Peoples Commission is a body consisting of three retired judges set up under the aegis of the World Sikh Council headed by a former Supreme Court Judge, Kuldip Nayar. The BJP vowed not to let them hold

any hearing in Amritsar where 124 senior police officers, including some DIG and SSP level officers, were summoned to probe acts of violation of human rights by the police. According to these leaders, it would only promote the cause of militants. Later the commission's proceedings in Amritsar were stayed by the Supreme Court. In reaction to these developments, the Akali hardliners soon reverted to the religious agenda and raised issues such as panthic unity, Anandpur Sahib resolution, rehabilitation of army deserters, release of TADA detenus, human rights violations, observance of Sikh tenets by government employees etc.¹⁰⁸

The difference between the Akali Dal and BJP and the dismissal performance of the two in Punjab, soon resulted in a definite sense of disappointment among large section of the people, and turned them against the ruling Akali-BJP combine. As a consequence, the invincibility of the ruling combine was broken by the Congress party during the November 1998 Adampur Assembly by-election. Although the margin of victory of the Congress candidate over the Akali nominee was only of six votes, the results gave a big boost to the former which had experienced a series of electoral reverses in the state between 1994 and 1998. The ruling Akali Dal, which witnessed the local voters moving away from it in the rural constituency of Adampur, did not launch any programme of retrieving its fortunes. The party's defeat at the hustings was merely another opportunity for some top leaders to engage in sabre-rattling on important issues, including organizational matters. Tohra who was nursing grievances against the BJP for favouring Badal, attributed the defeat to the Vajpayee government's open pursuit of Hindutva agenda by way of

attempting to push through 'Saraswati Vandana' and 'Vande Mataram' in educational institutions.¹⁰⁹

Though Badal and Tohra had been on the same side of the fence by the large for the past nearly two and a half decades, the political shadow boxing and an ever active game of one-upmanship between the two had been a constant bane of their complex relationship. The apparent reason for Tohra taking potshots at Badal's leadership was that the year of 1999 would see the Sikh community celebrating 300 years of its existence. Under the circumstances, both Badal and Tohra, besides jathedars of different religious thrones, had been trying to project their supremacy, as each of them wanted to be recognised as the supreme leader of the Sikh masses. The crisis in the Akali Dal (B) Party as well as in the coalition government had been caused by Tohra, who surprised Badal on December 10, 1998 by asking for his resignation as party president in view of party's debacle in the Adampur Assembly by election.¹¹⁰ The Tohra group started raising dissenting voices after Badal ignored Tohra's claim for a Ministerial berth in the Vajpayee Ministry. The Badal camp viewed Tohra's moves as a launching pad for releasing his ambition to become Chief Minister. Both Badal and Tohra intensified their campaigns against each other. Besides accusing Mr. Tohra of being over ambitious, Mr. Badal started charging him with having played a major role in inciting terrorism in Punjab in past decade. Tohra accused Badal of trying to prop up his son Sukhbir Singh Badal as his successor and for nominating his son for induction in Vajpayee Ministry. A show cause notice was issued against Tohra.¹¹¹ The controversy was followed by the resignation by five Tohra loyalist Ministers and removal of some prominent pro-Tohra supporters

from the party's organisational set up and pro-Tohra officers from key district posts. This led to the beginning of the open conflict between the two camps with Badal deciding to dislodge Tohra from the SGPC Presidentship.

However Badal enjoyed unchallenged supremacy both in the Akali Dal and SGPC, in terms of support of the members it had. With Badal emerging as the religio-political supremo, Tohra opted for the protective shield of the Akal Takht Jathedar Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh took the first step to save the beleaguered Tohra from his opponent's threatened disciplinary action when he issued a 'hukamnama' (religious edict) on December 31, 1998 ordering a truce between the feuding sides till April 15 "in view of the Khalsa tercentenary celebrations". His move was sought to be countered by the Badal camp by holding a joint meeting of Akali MPs, MLAs, SGPC members, party working committee and district Akali Jathedars at Anandpur Sahib on January 7. Though the meeting did not discuss the Badal-Tohra feud, its unanimous decision to make Badal the sole authority to chalk out programmes and constitute committees for the Khalsa tercentenary celebrations was a message to his adversaries about Badal's unchallengeable supremacy in Sikhs politics.¹¹²

The no holds barred battle between the two Akali leaders ultimately resulted in Tohras removal from the Presidentship of the SGPC as well as the primary membership of the Akali Dal. This marked the end of the Tohra's 25 years as Chief of the SGPC and about 50 years as member of the Akali Dal. Likewise the turbulent phase of Bhai Ranjit Singh as Jathedar of Akal Takht (December 31, 1996 to April 28, 1999) during which about 12 hukumnamas were issued, also ended when the executive

committee of the SGPC removed him from the post on April 28, 1999. Since Badal enjoyed complete hold over the MLAs, SGPC members and party delegates, his group could easily mobilise support in these bodies against Tohra and Bhai Ranjit Singh. The Chief Minister dabbling into religious affairs created confrontation with states agenda on the one hand and Sikh hardliners and fundamentalist on the other.¹¹³ The Akalis led by Badal installed Bibi Jagir Kaur, the first ever women President of the SGPC. Orchestrated and engineered through political machinations, the turns and twists in Akalis gameplan of religious and political manoeuvres saw head roll, creating bitterness and diffidence in the Sikh circle.

The fight between Badal and Tohra soon resulted in a split in the Akali Dal. Gurcharan Singh Tohra formed a parallel outfit on May 30, 1999 climaxing six months of bitter feud between himself and Chief Minister Badal that engulfed Sikh religio-politics. Tohra's Akali Dal is called All India Shiromani Akali Dal (AISAD). The birth of one more Akali party further factionalised the panthic political space and disappointed people belonging to traditional Akali vote bank in the state. However, the new outfit did not lend support to Khalistani elements. Tohra emphasised the unity and integrity of India and opposed all separatist demands and fissiparous forces. The resolution passed at the convention said "We honestly believe in the development and strengthening of a truly federal India for the preservation and progress of various religious, linguistic and cultural denominations, particularly the minorities and regional identities. This would lead to a strong and prosperous India."¹¹⁴ The first priority of the former SGPC Chief would be to prove his clout in a negative manner. He would like to cut into the votes of the Akali Dal (Badal) in the 13th Lok

Sabha election. He would simultaneously attack the record of the present Punjab Government and the alliance with the BJP: Badal in order to prevent such an act, must get on with his job which is to give a dynamic and responsive government.¹¹⁵

3.3. 1999: DECISION FOR REVERSAL OF POPULIST MEASURES AND AKALI – BJP DEBACLE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION (1999).

The Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Prakash Singh Badal, looked back at 1998 with a sense of satisfaction and said that the state remained peaceful and free of tension with political stability as an added advantage. However, the development oriented ideas and dreams of the Chief Minister were constricted by paucity of funds and an unresponsive bureaucracy. Despite a showing signs of resilience, mundane religio-political affairs consumed much of his time, distracting him from administrative responsibilities. The Chief Minister, therefore, listed “infrastructural development and reorienting primary education” as top priorities in 1999. A viable infrastructure, particularly a good network of roads is the immediate need of the state. Detoriation in primary education, which lacks quality input is a matter of concern. Mr. Prakash Singh Badal said that given the inbuilt limitations in the government jobs cannot be created for all. Self employment is way out. Experiments like integrated farm oriented projects coming up at kal Jharani or Padrikalan in Bhatinda and Amritsar, respectively may show a new way out of growing joblessness. As the year 1998 had been a bad year for the farmers of Punjab, Badal therefore declared that the farmers who sold paddy below the Minimum Suport Price (MSP), will get 50 percent of the price differences between what they got and the MSP. The cooperative short term loans will be converted into medium

term loans and farmers not considered “defaulters” enabling them to borrow more. Punjab will pursue with the Centre the case for comprehensive crop insurance.¹¹⁶

If the uninhibited resort to populist measures by the two year old Akali–BJP government had pushed the already resource strapped state to the brink of virtual bankruptcy, the states 1999-2000 budget represents a bold attempt by the coalition government to stem the rot. According to Finance Minister, Capt Kanwaljeet Singh, the major causes of the huge fiscal imbalance are proliferation of manpower, the ever increasing quantum of implicit and explicit subsidies, the increasing non-plan expenditure of departments and institutions, the growing inefficiency of the public sector and cooperation institutions, the heavy and indiscriminate growth of grants to institutions and the inadequate flow of tax revenues. These factors were pinpointed by a high power officers committee appointed by the government.¹¹⁷

Therefore, Finance Minister in 1999 promised tough remedial action. While presenting a Rs 1190 crore deficit Budget for 1999-2000 in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, the Finance Minister Capt. Kanwaljeet Singh, jacked up tax rates and fees to partially bridge the gap. By tapping transport, taxation and revenue departments, the Finance Minister’s series of measures to raise additional resources will put more burden on various categories of society in the state, burning holes in the pockets of consumers. The Budget proposals, cleverly camouflaged behind glib and seductive figures of speech, often bordering on rehtoric, seemingly had a two pronged strategy: introducing austerity measures in the administration like abolition of rent free accommodation to employees, stopping free

power and water supply to officials etc., including a cut of 5 percent in the non plan expenditure and temporarily suspending the facility of leave travel concession for employees for one year, and at the same time proposing an across the board cut on all subsidies by 15 percent in each of the next three years. The gap would be bridged to an extent of Rs. 850 crore. The remaining gap of Rs 340 crore would be met during the course of the year. On taxation side, tax slabs had been reduced from 13 to 7. The Budget gently pushed up sales tax on more than 20 items like petrol, bicycles, rubber goods etc. The enhanced rates would fetch Rs 70 crore.¹¹⁸ As the growth of revenue from state taxes and duties in Punjab had registered a big decline during 1998-99 with Sales Tax the single biggest source of the states income, recorded a lower growth rate of only 6 percent against 9 percent in 1997-98. To meet the yawning deficit, the 1999-2000 budget proposed mobilisation of around Rs 1000 crore through additional taxes, reduction in subsidies and increasing charges for public services and effecting economy in government expenditure.¹¹⁹ The Finance Minister steeply jacked up levies on road transport. The special road tax on trucks plying from other states, special road tax on tourist vehicles registered in other states, special road tax on mini buses were increased. The imposition of Sales Tax on the installed capacity of vanaspati unit is a welcome innovation. The starting point levy is easy to enforce and eliminates evasion and needless harassment. However, there is a major area of worry though.¹²⁰ The impending pruning of subsidy would affect services like health and education. Towards achieving decentralisation, the Finance Minister would give freedom to the Panchayats in the remote villages for recruiting teachers locally at their level.¹²¹ Thus the Punjab

government, started the year 1999, by reversal of its populist policies. The effect of this reversal was adequately reflected in the results of 1999 Parliamentary elections.

Unlike the 1998 Parliamentary elections, the 13th Lok Sabha elections in Punjab in 1999 witnessed a triangular contest in almost every constituency. The credit for making the contest 'triangular' could be attributed solely to G.S. Tohra who had vowed to defeat the ruling combine even before the announcement of the Parliamentary polls. With the announcement of the 13th Parliamentary polls, Tohra made concerted efforts to form a United Front consisting of Left parties (i.e. CPI and CPI (M)), Janta Dal, BSP and the various panthic groups to trounce the ruling combine at the hustings. However, since the Left parties forged an alliance with the Congress (I), Tohra could only form a United Front consisting of the BSP, Akali Dal (Democratic) of Kuldip Singh Wadala, Akali Dal (Panthic) of J.S. Rode (nephew of Bhindranwale), Akali Dal (Amritsar) headed by Simranjit Singh Mann and the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) led by Bhupinder Singh Mann. Out of the 13 seats, Tohra's AISAD contested six, BSP three and BKU, Akali Dal (D), Akali Dal (P), Akali Dal (A) one each. The sacked Akal Takht Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh, was made the convener of the United Front. The major focus of the Front remained on local issues and non-performance of the Akali- BJP combine. They did not raised the issue of Khalistan and instead pledged to strengthen the hands of Hindus without whose presence the state could not prosper.¹²² Tohra called the Badal government corrupt, inefficient and anti-panthic and appealed to the brave Sikh 'Sangat' to vote against the present Chief Minister who

used the state power to fill the Akal Takht by his cronies after removing the widely acceptable Bhai Ranjit Singh as Jathedar.¹²³

The ruling Akali Dal and BJP entered the election fray jointly. They focused primarily on issues such as Vajpayee, the 'Swadeshi' vs Sonia the 'Videshi' and Kargil victory. Badal avoided talking of local issues. While making an oblique reference to Tohra and other split factions, Badal further said that these very factions were responsible for disturbing peace and communal harmony in the state.¹²⁴ Vajpayee on the other hand, blamed Congress (I) for creating divisions and orchestrating fights among communities, and further stressed "Let the country know what communal amity is. How hard earned peace and Hindu-Sikh unity have paved the way for brotherhood and development. Punjab has seen enough of bloodshed. With peoples cooperation and unity that dark phase is over".¹²⁵ The Akali Dal (B) contested nine Parliamentary seats leaving three seats for BJP and one for Bahujan Samaj Morcha.

The Congress Party in the post-Adampur by poll period, seem rejuvenated. The Punjab PCC President, Captain Amrinder Singh in an interview claimed, "There is a clear crystallisation of the Hindu vote in favour of the Congress. The BJP vote bank in Punjab has totally collapsed. The Hindu vote would en bloc go in favour of the Congress in addition to the traditional Congress vote. Additionally, the division of the Akali votes between the two Akali Dal factions led by Badal and former SGPC Chief G.S. Tohra is bound to help the Congress improve its performance."¹²⁶ The Congress party emphasised non-performance and discriminatory attitude of the ruling Akalis towards the downtrodden,

urban dwellers and employees. Regarding the social profile of Congress (I) candidates, eight out of 11 were Sikhs and three Hindus.

Triangular contest made the election 1999 quite absorbing. But the turn-out, was the lowest ever, except for the 1992 general elections. There was a sharp decline in the voter turn out in urban areas which could be attributed to the alienation of the urban voters from the Akali-BJP combine. The peasantry though it benefited from free water and power, also felt alienated because of inadequate supply of power, faulty procurement system, spurious pesticides and fertilisers, corruption and lack of development activities. The Lok Sabha elections in Punjab reveal that the Congress (I), which was trounced by the Akali-BJP combine in all the 13 Parliamentary constituencies in 1998, had bounced back by winning eight seats, besides one seat going to its ally, the CPI. The ruling combine had been able to retain only three seats: Akali Dal two and BJP one. The break away group, the United Front snatched one seat from the ruling Akali Dal i.e. the seat of S.S. Barnala. Barnala was humbled in his native constituency by Simranjit Singh Mann of United Front. The defeat had unnerved the Punjab leadership of the BJP. The party led by Badal also suddenly finds itself marginalised on the scene of national politics, as it has now only two Lok Sabha members. The intra-party hassles had become a big bane for the besieged Badal. Gurcharan Singh Tohra was able to inflict damage on Badal Dal's candidates though his own party failed to secure any single seat. Besides this the non performance of Akali-BJP government was also an important reason for lacklustre performance of the alliance.¹²⁷

As a consequence of the parliamentary poll, Punjab today is precariously placed in the crucible of time. The state is financially broken

and politically battered, the future looks scary. The government, therefore, after parliamentary election results, took immediate and major policy initiatives for economic resurgence in the state. The Chief Minister of Punjab Mr. Badal, announced that public schools with quality education would be opened in the state in the name of Maharshi Valmiki, Guru Ravi Dass and Bhagat Kabir, so that the children belonging to weaker sections could get quality education for competing for IAS, IPS and other top services of the country.¹²⁸ Besides this, the Chief Minister launched pension scheme for Panchayat Secretaries and employees of Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samities.¹²⁹

The ruling Akali Dal–BJP alliance leaders were sharply divided on the issue of continuation of octroi in the present form where the contractors collect tax on behalf of the Municipal Councils. The unusually harsh measures which the Punjab government had outlined in the Punjab General Sales Tax (Second Amendment) Act, 1999 to deal with violations of various provisions of the Act had raised storm of protest from trade and industry. The act confers extraordinary power on sales tax and municipal officials for sending violators to jail for up to two years along with fines. However the government was forced to withdraw both the provision for dealing with the assest of violaters in the Punjab sales tax and the privatisation of octroi posts in certain cities.¹³⁰ Thus, the government instead of taking the issue of tax collection seriously, it continues with the old attitude to please tax evaders.

While the government on the one hand avoided a drive towards greater tax collection and compliance, on the other hand it announced several subsidies, some of them irrational and unsustainable, and put the

burden on boards and corporations. These boards and corporations were to be compensated by the state government in lieu of the subsidies offered by these organisation on behalf of the government. But the government shirked its responsibility while passing on the burden to the boards and the corporations. This led to the collapse of the working of these organisations due to financial crunch.¹³¹

Punjab is once again caught in a precarious debt trap. At present whatever revenue Punjab is able to earn, largely goes to meet the debt servicing. Punjab has accumulated debt of Rs 2000 crore at least. Having realised the grave situation, Punjab government has taken shelter and put forward a number of concrete suggestions before the 11th Finance Commission. According to Capt. Kanwaljit Singh, Finance Minister, "the huge liability of outstanding Central loan cannot be met out of the normal revenue of the state government. Therefore there is an urgent need to revise the pattern, terms and conditions of Central loans given to the states to relieve them from the fiscal stress. The Finance Commission should allow consolidation and rescheduling of repayment of Central loans outstanding on March 31, 1999 over a period of 30 years in order to reduce the fiscal deficit of the state".¹³²

Inspite of the debt trap situation, the states economy has staged a sure and definite upward trend in 1999. Cash strapped Punjab had recorded a sharp increase of 27.4 percent in its tax receipts during the first eight months of the financial year, 1999-2000 over collections in the corresponding period of last year. Although the quantum jump in the revenue had provided some respite to the hard pressed Akali-BJP government, the financial crisis it had been facing remains unabated. The

government employees working in state secretariat could not be paid their November salaries for about a week under a court order. The big growth in the tax revenue in the first eight month was in sharp contrast to the meagre growth of about 7 percent in collections for the entire 1998-99. The biggest factor that caused the quantum jump in tax receipts was the bumper wheat and rabi crops which led to a record collection of sales tax and purchase tax. In an attempt to check evasion, the government has now set up information collecting centres at a number of places in Punjab to collect information for hauling up those who try to avoid sales tax payment. Punjab, is infact, all set for the second phase of fiscal reforms.¹³³ An attractive package on introducing the scheme of "golden handshake" is being worked out. The corrective will apply to economic pricing of social and economic services, downsizing of the government, discipling of the Public Sector Undertaking (PSUs) and phasing out of the explicit and implicit subsidies and subventions, including the existing provision of free power and irrigation water to agriculture sector.¹³⁴ The government decided to impose separate rates of Sales Tax on different categories of items following a consensus between various governments on implementation of uniform Sales Tax from January 1,2000. Besides, it had decided to withdraw the tax exemption being given to new industries for seven years since their inception.¹³⁵

The government of Punjab had already signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Central government that it will roll back its policy of blindly subsidising economic services. The point is the state government has started moving in two clear cut directions—a phased reduction of subsidy to various economic services and mobilisation of

resources in tax as well as non tax areas. A clear understanding had been reached between the Punjab government and the Central Government that the national consensus of 50 paisa per unit of power would be re-introduced. That will help the state to collect nearly Rs 650 crore. And irrigation water would be collecting Rs 45 crore to meet the expenditure of maintaining and operating the Punjab canal system. The state government is providing a lot of subsidy to public sector undertakings like PEPSU Roadways and Punjab Roadways. This reform will cut every subsidy to these sector and increase the cost of diesel and others. The government will not buy any new fleet of buses to incur any capital expenditure in the sector, bring in private bus operators on pre determined prices on a cost plus basis. A few steps of these reforms as well as promises of new steps under the MOU signed with the Central Government will, certainly, lift the state out of the present morass of fiscal bankruptcy, but will not release any investible resources for infrastructure projects as well as development activities.¹³⁶

While 1998 was a bad year for the farmers, the 1999 saw a turn about with both wheat and paddy yielding better returns to the growers. Even cotton, which had been devastated by nature and man for over three years, also saw a marginal improvement. However cotton crop has not proved to be "white gold" for farmers of Punjab. Cotton trade sources said the prices of cotton had been falling in the market ever since the season began in September 1999. The fall in the prices of cotton had affected the small and marginal farmers as they could not hold their stocks due to tight financial position. The government should provide farmers with high quality seeds for producing cotton of the finest quality so that foreign exchange

could be earned through export and farmers could be given remunerative prices.¹³⁷ According to former Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Balram Jakhar the Central Government had not been able to exhaust thousands of bags of wheat stored in the godowns of official purchasing agencies, but had allowed import of wheat. Same is the case of cotton which is again imported by the government.¹³⁸ In spite of all this the agriculture had recovered some what in 1999. But tillers of the soil suffered economically. As agriculture is the mainstay of Punjab, Punjabis and their economy, the scientist have sounded an alarm bell. They argued that Punjab faces a virtual "economic death" is the essence of their message.¹³⁹

The Punjab government seems to have limited option on continuation of subsidies available to the agriculture sector. Primarily these subsidies are on fertilizers, irrigation water and electricity. Though the state faces a dire financial crisis subsidies to the agriculture sector have crossed Rs 2000 crore. While supply of electricity is free, the recovery of water charges "abiana" has been abolished as well as land revenue. The Punjab government took some decisions in respect of the farm sector. Despite majority opinion for an end to all subsidies, the SAD-BJP government, divided as it is on the issue, is seemingly dithering on whether to roll back subsidies or not. The Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, has explicitly told the government that all agricultural subsidies would have to be "contained, if not completely eliminated". A gradual and planned withdrawal is suggested. To raise the financial resources for improving the infrastructure and efficiency, the report by PAU, Ludhiana has suggested the three steps: firstly power should be charged at the rate of Rs 50 per kwh. This will generate Rs 300 crore, Annually. Second, operational and maintenance

expenses of the canal water supply cost the state Rs 90 crore per year. This should be recovered while at the same time operational inefficiencies that escalate these costs should be effectively contained. Lastly land revenue, which is very nominal tax, should be recovered since it give a sense of belonging to the farmers. It should be levied in a progressive manner. A formula suggested says the state could fetch Rs 10 to 15 crores; a small sum but carrying a large social value. These three measures would mean generating Rs 400 crore annually.¹⁴⁰

Free power for farmers in Punjab is soon going to be the thing of the past. Punjab will soon stop doling out free power to the agriculture sector and bring in a proper tariff mechanism to eliminate subsidies as part of measures to wipe off the Rs 3,000 crore Fiscal Deficit (FD) over the next three to five years. The governments policy of free power has been criticised on the ground that it is a policy apparently aimed at favoring rich landlords.

This has also encouraged the farmers, to sell water to their compatriots without tubewell connections.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the state government has now decided to impose user charges for three main subsidised items provided by the state. Subsidies in diesel for state transport, power and water supply will be discontinued soon and user charges imposed. The State Government has also decided to pass on the cost of developing infrastructure to the consumers. Financing of the infrastructure projects would be done through tax and user charges. The State Government also decided to establish Infrastructure Initiative Fund (11F). The government would ensure that Rs 120 crore flows into the 11F annually. The money would come from the cess on petrol and diesel.¹⁴²

Punjab is among the 10 states selected by the centre for a pilot project on seed crop insurance. The certified, foundation and breeder seed crops selected for providing an insurance cover are wheat, paddy, gram, cotton, soyabean and arhar. The seed crop insurance scheme will be operated by the General Insurance Corporation. However the scheme has run into some trouble.¹⁴³

The rout of the Akali-BJP combine at the hands of the Congress (I) and its left allies may not endanger the survival of the coalition regime in the state as there exists a favourable government at the Centre yet it would amount to severe strain on the ruling group. Infact the crisis situation had already started brewing between the two. Both partners had different views and propounded different hypothesis as to what led to the humiliating debacle in the Lok Sabha Poll. BJP identified four factors for the poll debacle in Punjab: urban–rural divide; parting of the ways between Badal and Tohra which had a cascading effect down the line; raids by the Excise and Taxation department on business and trade; and continuation of octroi contrary to poll promises to abolish it. BJP, infact had taken the stand that the party should continue its alliance based on principles, with SAD as “party” and not with any particular “individual”. This was a significant development which had emerged, meaning, thereby, that in case there was any change within the SAD leadership, the BJP should remain a political ally of the SAD and not owe allegiance to a particular leader.¹⁴⁴ Mr. Jagmohan Kaura, General Secretary of the State unit of BJP, said that at the time of the formation of the SAD-BJP government, it was decided that the post of Deputy Chief Minister would be given to the BJP. But Badal, did not comply with the decision. Nor did he give due

representation to the BJP in his cabinet according to the strength of the party in the State Assembly at the time of the formation of his Ministry. He further stated that Mr Badal should now give due representation to the BJP by including at least its three MLAs in the proposed expansion of his cabinet.¹⁴⁵

The re-election of Bibi Jagir Kaur as the President of the SGPC, in a way meant the consolidation of the position of Badal, as she is his candidate. Infightings within Akali Dal which posed a threat to Badal's leadership also had been strong handedly dealt by Badal. Mr. Ravi Inder Singh, who spearheaded the dissident movement within the party stand isolated. He was very soon expelled for such an act. The Chief Minister, Badal, expanded his Ministry on December 31st. The strength of the Punjab Council of Ministers rose to 41 with the induction of 15 new members. Going by statistics, Mr. Badal has inducted 13 Akali and two BJP MLAS into his Council of Ministers. This raises the strength of Akali representatives to 34 (out of 74 MLAS in a house of 117) while the number of the BJP, SAD'S coalition partner, Ministers now is seven. While some like Tohra criticised this act of Badal as an attempt to buy stability, others argue that the state would be burdened more financially with the increase in the number of ministers. Around this period BSM had announced their decision to disassociate itself from the SAD-BJP alliance. Now it all depends upon Chief Minister Badal as to how he tackle the present crisis.

4. CONCLUSION

Punjab, the state as it stands today is financially broken and politically batterd and the future looks scary. The time has come for all

political parties in Punjab to shift their attention to economic development and social upliftment instead of getting bogged down in partisan politics. The message is very clear. Today power to the people comes not from the barrel of the gun but from the forward looking economic policies and strategies and their speedy implementation. Punjab has all the advantages to keep itself in number one position in socio-economic development. But it has slipped because the leadership has often not shown the necessary vision and guts to accept developmental challenges.

The states problem are essentially those of growth, building infrastructure and rapid transformation. These problems must be tackled professionally with a sense of urgency, sensitivity and understanding and without resort to opportunistic weapon of politicisation. Infact, economic and political management should be made sterner stuff in the state, or else frustration among the people, especially the youth, will grow into deep depression. A political consensus is needed in the state of Punjab amongst various parties so that the Punjab government's new agenda of rolling back the regime of irrational subsidies and mobilisation of new resources from the tax and non tax areas, is not met with violent opposition from the state political forces.

A total commitment at every turn within the administration could make a world of difference in pricing the social services being rendered by the state and ensuring improvement in the delivery system of the same, may it be in the field of education, health, realisation of taxes, resuscitating research in agriculture or reinventing college and university education. Making these institutions self sustaining and financially viable is imperative.

The same holds true of the municipalities, which have been gagged and deprived of natural flow of revenue from certain sources.

Dr S.S. Johl, member of the Punjab Planning Board, argued that there should be complete withdrawal of all kind of subsidies to agricultural sector. The schemes like "Shagun" should be scrapped. Punjab will be within its right to levy "development cess" on foodgrains (wheat and rice) which is sold out. That cess should be on the buyer. The money realised should be ploughed for improving production, post harvest technology and marketing system to make agriculture sustainable and re-green the 'Green Revolution', which has paled and crop yields having plateaued. Whatever cost farmers incurred on inputs should be adequately met through support price by the commission on agricultural cost and pricing. Punjab's municipalities could be helped to shore up their revenue by imposing house tax on urban property, which should commensurate with the size of plot and its market value. In return municipalities must provide adequate services.¹⁴⁶

Finances in Punjab are in extremely bad shape. The credit rating of the state has gone so low that no international agency is ready to lend money to the state. Expenditure of the government has been expanding at a much faster rate compared to the rate of growth of revenue collection. The government avoided a drive towards greater tax collection. In sum, Punjab shows all symptoms of politico-administrative and religio-social schizophrenia. If allowed unattended, social tensions will grip the state sooner than later. It is a paradox that issues like the All India Gurudwara Act and Nanakshai calendar hang fire just as does Thein Dam-Ranjit

Sagar Multipurpose Hydro-Electric Project, which developed technical snags. Yet no responsibility has been fixed on anyone.

For Punjab to survive and reinvent itself, it will have to adopt a “service-cum-industrial development” pattern of policy with bureaucrats showing their administrative skills and initiative and the political masters their unbiased will by rising above petty personal and electoral considerations.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis of the nature of society and politics of the Punjab suggest that while the political and cultural patterns shaped by group history have hardened over time into ethnic identities, these in turn have taken the political shape in the form of alliances and factions resulting in dominance patterns which may be transitory or long lived but cross-cut the neat compartmentalization on the basis of either ethnicity, religion or caste.

A cross sectional perspective of Punjab's diversity uncovers the complexities of dominance patterns. Vertical alliance and faction systems link lower levels of the state, often from village to intermediate linkages extending to the Centre. Homogenous social groups, in a political sense, do not exist. Sikh Jats are split among at least three significant political parties and Hindus between two. Both Congress and Akali Dal receive rural support, and the urban base is shared by the Congress and Bhartiya Janta Party. Scheduled Caste in Punjab constitutes the third large and relatively non-attached third force, for whose support all parties compete. Each political party, moreover, is composed of sub-coalitions, which provide an even more important sense of identity for its members. They can and do shift their political support so as to result in internal dissidence, a change in party support or even both simultaneously.¹

All these are important identities, which operate in Punjab and serve as the basis of mobilization for varying, including political purposes. None, however, is hegemonic within the larger canvas of Punjab. It is true that caste, religious and ethnic identities overlapped

more closely after partition in 1947 and were further enhanced by territorial changes in 1966. In particular rural-urban cleavages coincide more neatly with religious community in contemporary Punjab. Nonetheless, while Sikh Jats may be the single most important social group in rural areas, and Hindu merchant castes in urban areas, political dominance continues to necessitate bridging and accommodating major identities. Besides this, Sikh Jats are coming in larger numbers to urban areas, while Hindu migrant labour from other states may be becoming a permanent feature in rural areas. Moreover economic and social change further complicates the Punjab mosaic. Scheduled Castes and artisans are increasingly important both economically and politically. A thoroughgoing polarization of Punjab politics has been prevented partly by the presence of a large Scheduled Caste population, of uncertain religious allegiance, to whom all parties must appeal. Thus, in short, Punjab presents a picture of a fragmented, plural society, where it became necessary, that the parties competing for political dominance, must either appeal to all segments of the Punjab's society or else form some kind of pre-electoral or post-electoral alliances.

Therefore, communal coalition building is the strategy of most parties and internal political differentiation within each community the result of this process. Accommodation remains essential to a workable political process within Punjab and achieving political dominance within it. No one group is sufficiently large, no issue so encompassing, no sub-region so significant to provide the necessary support base. Competition, factionalism and conflict have been endemic within all the Punjab's and certainly have not been stifled during broad-scale

accommodation periods. Nonetheless, sensitivity to and accommodating diversity does tend to moderate particularistic demands and communalism. This is true for Congress party as it is for Akali Dal. As Congress is not a dominant and powerful party in Punjab with a clear cut support base, and as Akali Dal failed to establish its political dominance in the state, coalition building is the only way out. The willingness of competing communal elites to share political power is of greater importance in maintaining the political cohesion of multi-ethnic societies than any other factor. Where that willingness to share power exist, communal conflicts between mobilized groups can be accommodated. Where it does not exist conflict, escalation of political demands, and ultimately violence are common.

Secondly, the preceding analysis of the nature and style of functioning of the coalition governments in Punjab suggest that it can be broadly discerned into two types of periods. The period from 1967-71 and 1977-80 can be classified as one specific period where as the present coalition government in Punjab as a second period. They are basically of two types: Conflictual and Moderate. This classification is done on the basis of nature and style of functioning of coalition governments. The coalition governments formed during the period from 1967-71 and 1977-80 were marked by the feature of intra-party and inter-party conflicts which led to their fall. This period can be classified as conflictual type of coalition politics. The First coalition Ministry formed in Punjab under Sardar Gurnam Singh, was a multi-party coalition comprising of heterogenous groups i.e. Akali Dal, Jan Sangh, CPI, CPI-M, Republican Party, having diverse ideologies, with the

result that the difficulties emerged. Inter-party conflicts emerged between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh being on one side and CPI, CPI-M, and Republican Party on the other side. Intra-party conflict within the Akali Dal over the post of Chief Ministership finally led to the fall of the coalition Ministry and formation of Lachhman Singh Gill Ministry with the support of the Congress, which also did not last for long because of the intra party differences within the Congress party, over the support extended to the Lachhman Singh Gill Ministry. The next coalition Ministry which was formed after the mid term elections in 1969, was basically a coalition between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh, with the leftist parties extending only conditional support from outside without actually joining the Ministry. This Ministry functioned smoothly only with a minor change in Chief Ministership i.e. Gurnam Singh was replaced by Badal. This Ministry also, however, could not complete its term because of the emergence of inter party conflict between Akali Dal and Jan Sangh, which led to the withdrawal of the Jan Sangh from the Ministry. The coalition government re-emerged in 1977 in Punjab. This coalition Ministry was formed by Akali Dal and Janta Party. This coalition Ministry was also linked to the coalition government formed in the Centre by Janta party. The formation of Janta government at the Centre, and the fact that the Akalis were invited to share power with it also contributed to the creation of a better objective situation for the formation and working of the coalition government in the state. The intra party differences within Janta Party i.e. conflict between BLD and Jan Sangh- RSS faction at the Centre had a direct bearing on the inter party relations i.e. between Akali Dal and Janta Party at the state level. Intra-Party factionalism within Akali Dal i.e. conflict between Badal on

the one end and Tohra and Talawandi on the other also put pressure on the government. The intra-party wrangling in Punjab continued at the state level but the difference between the Akali Dal and the Janta Party came to surface over the issue of extending support to either Moraji Desai or Charan Singh in their struggle to capture the Prime Ministerial post. The Akali Dal support to the Charan Singh, led to the withdrawal of the Janta Party from the coalition Ministry in Punjab, which finally led to its fall.

The coalition Ministry formed in 1997 is much more moderate in its style of functioning and therefore this period can be classified as that of moderate type of coalition politics. The coalition Ministry, which is formed in 1997, is functioning smoothly. Although inter party conflict did arise over the Uttarakhand issue which was raised by the coalition government at the Central level in which Akali Dal is also a partner, but it was solved peacefully by the two coalition partners. Both the parties clarified and sorted out their differences. Intra-party conflict within the Akali Dal led to the split in the ruling Akali Dal led by Badal and led to the formation of a new Akali Dal called All India Shiromani Akali Dal (AISAD) by G. S. Tohra. However it did not lead to the fall of the existing coalition ministry under the Chief Ministership of Badal.

The nature of the issues which dominated the working of coalition government, goes a long way in deciding the type of coalition government i.e. whether it is a conflictual type or moderate type. The issues which were important for the coalition governments in Punjab formed between 1967-71 and 1977-80, were of communal nature i.e. the language question and the question of inclusion of Chandigarh within Punjab. On the other hand for the present coalition government in Punjab, the

economic & developmental issues are important. The communal issues like language and Chandigarh are not important.

Thirdly, the religious and ethnic mobilization for at least one hundred years provide the basic framework for understanding the cross-sectional structure of Punjab politics. Neither Hindus nor Sikhs face the kind of identity crisis posed in the 19th century. A process of change and acculturation has taken and is taking place, within the framework of their religious and ethnic groups, but within the context of a developing economy and structure of cross-cutting factions. Competition makes it essential to further improve one's family position and, by extension, the community without which the family cannot adequately function.

Competition and conflict obviously have the consequences of some individuals and factions being more successful than others. Changing positions so as to be individually successful and or politically dominant is a normal feature of the ongoing process. Extremism tends to be the tactic employed by the dissident elements of the community. Political dominance within the electoral process of necessity involves linkages with broader groupings and mutual accommodation. Akali Dal morchas in the 1980s resulted from the breakdown of the accommodation system in 1979. Curtailing the dominance of what generally is referred to as the legislative wing of the party enabled the organizational or jathedar wing to assume the leadership.

Dominance within a particular grouping, however, does not necessarily lead to dominance in the broader realm. Nor does the utilization of militant or extremist tactics mean their continuance once

the linkage is effected to the larger cross cutting configuration. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale succeeded in mobilizing and politically directing Sikhs in a religious movement, but not all or a majority of the Sikhs. His revivalist and fundamentalist movement could not properly be characterized as a Jat, rural or Punjab movement. Moreover, as a movement directed at Sikhs it could neither include Hindus nor the urban areas of the state in which Hindus are a dominant majority.²

This was realised by the moderate section of the Akali Dal led by Badal in the early 1990s, when he started mobilizing the various factions of Akali Dal to come together and counter the extremist forces. Badal denounced extremism and rejected the line of Sikh radicals. The Sikh hardliners, according to the moderates, not only isolated the Akalis but also threw the state into the quagmire of violence and repression which marred the entire socio-political and development process for over a decade. Badal therefore emphasized 'Punjabi-ness', Hindu-Sikh unity, true federal structure and unity and integrity of the country. The importance of Hindu-Sikh unity is also raised by the extremist Akali group led by Simranjit Singh Mann in 1999 Parliamentary elections, when he declared that the issue of Khalistan would not be raised hence forth and emphasized on Hindu-Sikh unity and economic issues. In short, one of the most interesting aspects of 1999 Parliamentary elections in Punjab is that panthic or communal questions were hardly raised by Akalis. Both Hindu and Sikh leaders (moderate and extremist) realize that the stretching of the ethnic issues too far can lead to the rise of extremism and creation of a condition of chaos.

Thus, it can be argued that there is a complex interaction between parties and society. Although the outgrowth of the societies in which they are placed, parties do enjoy a degree of autonomy from social forces, are capable of creating new identities & based upon them separatist mobilization. This process is reversible because economic and political circumstances, and correspondingly the ideology of parties can undergo change which explains the change in inter-communal relationships and periods of demobilization and resurgence experienced by separatist movements. The Akali Dal has not succeeded in drawing boundaries between the Sikhs and the Hindus based upon religious symbols and control of economic resources to create a "Sikh Nation", and thereby gaining a pre-emptive right to exercise political power in its "homeland". Rather these boundaries remain blurred, and internal differentiation in the Sikh community itself has increased. The Sikhs have not given monolithic support to the Akali Dal, which sees itself as "the very embodiment of their aspirations."³

Fourthly, the preceding analysis of ethnicity, party system and coalition working in Punjab help us to conclude that ethnicity is a multifaceted concept. Ethnic characteristics at times may go beyond language, culture, territory, diet and dress to include economic issues. In Punjab, both Akali Dal and Jan Sangh/BJP created an ethnic consciousness among certain sections of Sikh and Hindu population on the basis ethnic and religious characteristics. But as mentioned previously, they failed to mobilise the entire section of either Hindu and Sikh population solely on the basis of those characteristics. And with the passage of time, even this certain sections of the Hindu and Sikh population also failed to be failed to be

mobilized by the parties solely on the basis of these characteristics. People began to look beyond narrow religious and ethnic issues for some broader issue i.e. economic issues. The political parties in Punjab also find it easy to mobilize and create a homogenous group of people on the basis of issues, which promised to bring about economic prosperity and development to the people. The electoral verdicts of 1997 Assembly election and 1999 Parliamentary election in Punjab support this argument. The economic issues dominated these elections. While the people of Punjab voted for Akali Dal- BJP coalition in 1997 on the basis of the parties economic and developmental policies, the failure to keep the populist promises made during the previous elections brought on a punishing backlash in 1999 Parliamentary election for the Akali Dal and BJP. In short, with the passage of time religious and ethnic characteristics takes a backseat and people in Punjab began to rally around the sole and the most important issue that is economic prosperity and development of the people of Punjab, which is indeed the need of the hour.

Last but not the least, the present Akali- BJP alliance or combine, which was formed on the eve of the February 1997 Assembly elections and claimed to be poised to play a crucial role in state politics, made the most impressive gains by securing the highest ever tally of seats in the state legislature in 1997. But the Akali – BJP government almost immediately became trapped by its own populist menu of objectives announced during the 1997-98 elections. The expectations of the citizens are high. They want better educational facilities and proper health care. But, unfortunately, in their obsession with politics and other peripheral issues the politicians

in Punjab have ignored economic home truths and messed up development priorities.

Most of the flamboyant promises came unstruck and their non-fulfilment disappointed the people in the state. The people expressed their disappointment with the nature of the functioning of the Punjab government in the 1999 Parliament elections, with the result that the ruling Akali-BJP combine in Punjab has been reduced to three seats. Their failure to keep populist promises made during the previous elections, brought on a punishing backlash.

Finances of the Punjab government are in an extremely bad shape. The government has become poor in a prosperous state. The state government is not in a position to meet its obligations towards local bodies and autonomous institutions like Universities. Consequently, there are a large number of government departments which have become non-functional (for want of funds), and vital institutions are moving towards being paralysed. The capability of the government is so undermined that it has no funds for development purposes and no credibility to mobilize resources from financial institutions. The crisis has come at a time when the government is expected to play a very active role to put the economy back on rails.

In order to work out a solution to the crisis it is necessary to analyze and identify the major contributing factors. A look at the trends of expenditure and revenue collection makes it clear that the government expenditure has been expanding at a much faster rate compared to the rate of growth of revenue collection. There are two major factors on the

spending side which have made government expenditure far exceed its revenue. One relates to the orientation of the government towards law and order rather than development. This orientation was moulded during the disturbed years of the 1980s. Another factor which derailed the government finances relates to high interest and debt repayment obligations. This head accounted for 11-12 per cent of the budget in the 1980s which has remained between 22-29 per cent during the 1990s. The mounting debt obligations are caused by wilful fiscal indiscipline by the successive governments (including the present one) to depend on public borrowing rather than tax collection to meet their expenditure needs. The governments attitude have been casual towards resource mobilization and irresponsible towards spending, financed through the best option of borrowing, which accumulated debt obligations through the 1980s and the 1990s, and continues even today. The government avoided a drive towards greater tax collection and compliance and announced several subsidies, some of them irrational and unsustainable. Instead of taking the issue of tax collection seriously, the state government continues with the old attitude to please tax evaders.

The Akalis lost their sense of purpose early on and used their political power not for the state's prosperity but for personal pelf and perks. Populist decision like writing off crores of revenue annually took a further toll, whilst the farmers-who have helped make Punjab India's bread-basket by producing over 70 per cent of the country's wheat and 60 per cent of its rice-were driven to distraction by increasingly erratic power supply and other aggravations. With scarcely any heavy industries in the

state, thanks to the invidious policies of successive Central governments which denied large state-sector plants to Punjab while extending largesse to other states, even the small-scale industrial sector were allowed to stagnate. Odd, considering that since Punjab accounts for more than eight per cent of India's small scale industries with only 2.5 per cent of its population, a more conscientious government would have injected a new dynamic into raising the state's share of small scale industries to say 12 percent or more. Nor are efforts made to make Punjab hi-tech Cyber State offering immense scope in communications and information technology to enterprising young men and women.

The ongoing calendar controversy which has generated so much heat can be shelved for a while. But none of the party to the controversy i.e. neither Bibi Jagir Kaur nor Giani Puran Singh is ready to do so. What the controversy reflects however, is a triangular power struggle in which Bibi Jagir Kaur of the SGPC wants authority over the Akal Takht, while giving into the authority of the Chief Minister who brought her to power. An incensed Jathedar Puran Singh of Akal Takht, wanting none of it, has excommunicated Jagir Kaur for her temerity in opposing him on the calendar issue. The latest episode in the tussle between the Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Puran Singh, and Bibi Jagir Kaur, is that Bibi Jagir Kaur has removed Giani Puran Singh from his position and appointed Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti as new Akal Takht Jathedar in his place. And so a non-issue has become a bone of contention. Bibi Jagir Kaur could have done better, as the first ever women President of the SGPC, by distancing herself from the government, avoiding confrontation with the Akal Takht,

and endeavouring to unify Sikhs rather than dividing them.⁴ Thus with the passage of time the internal conflict within Akali Dal has accentuated.

Of late, however, the state government has started realizing finally that its populist policies cannot keep retaining electorate support as the overall consequence is that the economic welfare of every citizen in the state gets effected. The point is that the state government has started moving in two clear cut directions – a phased reduction of subsidy to various economic services; and mobilization of resources in tax as well as non tax areas. Subsidies can and should be checked. Punjab, a kisan friendly state should examine the possibility of quality supply of electricity to agriculture and fix the tariff accordingly. The kisan can be compensated by way of a higher procurement price calculated on input costs.

In keeping with its promise to taking the state into the path of development, the Akali-BJP government in Punjab has for the first time evolved a strategy for integrated development of the state. The strategy is postulated in 'The Economic Policy-2000'. For added emphasis in the Economic Policy-2000, the three critical areas of economic development are agriculture (integrated with industry and service development), small and medium enterprise and the services sector have been taken up together for "balanced" development and growth. The salient features of the economic policy are –

- * Setting up of an economic development board.
- * Creation of an enabling environment for economic activity which will include off the shelf provision of quality infrastructure, rationalization of tax structure and streamlining of institutional roles

through legislative reforms and information technology for better governance;

- * Fiscal discipline in economic policy implementation through rationalization of the role of incentives in investment attraction and minimization of the state's presence in commercial enterprise; and
- * Human resource development.

The policy takes into account the problems and prospects of agriculture, small and medium industrial units, services sector and communication including infrastructure. The policy, takes a note of action plan on diversification of agriculture. There is a growing realization that wheat paddy rotation has to be changed. Farmers have to be educated on how soil is losing micro nutrients and on how the sub-soil water is depleting. The policy and action plan also repeatedly refer to promoting agro-industries or food processing industry by ensuring crop varieties or vegetable and fruits which are "processable", not just produced for table purposes alone. Potential for exports has to be explored and necessary institutional back up, financial help and infrastructure development provided for throughout the state. Without "value-addition" which will include:

Agriculture production of processable produce and of high value exportable products;

Industry- primary, secondary and tertiary processing and packaging and;

Services- extension service with missionary zeal, contract farming, procurement services and pro-harvest operations, storage, transportation and ware housing, trade and distribution, marketing and branding ⁵

Thus, the action plan gives a ray of hope that for once, Punjab's political executive and the bureaucracy is taking up new challenges in the new millennium, certain flaws, and distortions in the populist policies notwithstanding. The Akali-BJP Government in Punjab presented a Rs. 498.35 crore Budget for 2000-2001, proposing new taxes to mop up Rs. 150 crore while reiterating its commitment to cut down on non-essential and unproductive expenditure. The Government has proposed to levy a five per cent electricity duty on all consumers instead of the fixed rate for various categories. The Government has proposed to withdraw the additional tax of 10 per cent on the Sales Tax, but has replaced it with a new levy of Social Security Cess on all items. Collections under the fresh levy will be used for social causes, including pensions to senior citizens, the physically challenged and destitute children. The Finance Minister said that the Budget proposes a comprehensive strategy for ensuring a sustained growth rate of eight per cent per annum. The four pillars of stabilisation, special focus on social and physical infrastructure and the promotion of small and medium enterprises led by information technology.⁶

Political consensus is now needed in the state of Punjab amongst various parties so that the Punjab government's new policies can be adopted and implemented peacefully without violent opposition from the states political forces. For the present, we can only wait and watch as to how the ruling Akali-BJP government tackle the ongoing financial and economic crisis in Punjab. Their credibility and future prospect of returning to power in the state depends upon their present ability to deal effectively with the emerging crisis in Punjab.

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