

# **RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM**

AKALI POLITICS AND SIKH RELIGIOUS  
FUNDAMENTALISM : A CASE STUDY .

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CERTIFICATE

I have the pleasure to certify that Neena Samota, an M.Phil student of the Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, has pursued her research work and prepared the present dissertation entitled "Religious Fundamentalism : Akali Politics and Sikh Religious Fundamentalism" 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 other monograph, dissertation or book. This is being submitted to the University of Delhi for the degree of Master of Philosophy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the said degree.



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## CHAPTER I

### RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

#### DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*The truths contained in religious doctrines are after all so distorted and systematically disguised that the mass of mankind cannot recognize them as truth.*

*Sigmund Freud (1)*

Punjab, the land of five rivers, offers a classic case for analysing religious (fundamentalism or revivalism) in a pluralist society like India. A host of scholars have done intensive research in separate fields concerning Punjab. Analysts have tried to approach their cases from different angles emphasising the political, social, religious and economic dimensions. Here attention will be drawn to the literature on the theme which, according to the focus of my study, are both useful and relevant.

To begin with, some elaboration on the terms religion and fundamentalism becomes imperative, so that they justify the situation or the reality for which they are used. Fundamentalism may not always a congenial choice for some movements. In those cases alternative terms such as ('obscurantism' or 'revivalism') may be used. The primary hypothesis of the research addresses itself to the assumption

that some of the movements branded as fundamentalist cannot be called fundamentalist at all. Used in the religious sense, Sikhism is integrationist in character. Problems in the Sikh religious tradition are hte result of some changing socio-political and economic factors. The case study sets out to prove that the above stated term about Sikhism is nothing but a misnomer. Sikhism is anything but fundamentalistic in nature. To prove this a semantic classification of these terms is essential, differentiating concepts and using them more finely since everyday language often confuses the usage of these terms.

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secularism?*

Any religion may regard itself to be eternally and universally relevant to human affairs. The social and political context is particularly important for the emergence and maintenances of fundamentalist attitudes (2). The aim therefore is to uncover some of the socio-political truths disguised by the frequent invocation of fundamentalist and revivalist claims in contemporary religion.

The term 'religious' evades precise definition. Religion encompasses a wide range of human experience. It gives the people a personal and social identity as well as, rites and ceremonies as forms of expressing religion. Religion implies a sort of cosmic or metaphysical backdrop and stipulates some behavioural correlates (3).

Functionalists postulate the close relationship between social structure and function of religion. They explain that by exposing latent functions of religion, a base would be provided for explaining the persistence of the non-rational facets of social life. Some functionalists take the utility of religion to society as the basis of its justification (4).

According to Bryan Wilson religion is not merely an intellectual statement of the pre-requisite of social order. Religion diffuses motivations in society and thus encompasses a wide range of human experience. It stimulates basic human emotions eliciting sympathy, altruism and love, that shape human comportment (5).

The explicit and manifest function of religion is to offer men the prospect of salvation and provide guidance for its attainment. This idea of salvation offers reassurance to the individual whatever form, cultural, local or personal anxieties may take, religion offers to freeze these anxieties by recourse to reassuring beliefs, practices or facilities. The function of a sacred text is to offer solutions through which human anxieties had been assuaged in the past.

According to Emile Durkheim, religion maintains a social cohesion and allows people to take cognizance of themselves as collectivities to symbolize their social orders and gain objective sense of their own society. This also



became the general anthropological wisdom of the functionalist school (6).

The function of religion lies in conferring a sense of identity on individuals and groups and in reinforcing the sense of identity derived from other association or affiliations. Religion answers the question 'Who am I' and 'Who are we'? W.H. McLeod has elaborated appropriately on this subject, in his book 'Who is a Sikh. The Problem of Sikh Identity' (7). The book is of much relevance for this case study.

A comparison of social institutions with religion is an interesting exercise. Social institutions, explains Wilson, are capable of internal rationalization whereas in religion there is a distinct limit in introducing rational procedures. In the case of other social institutions sub-division is possible owing to organization and hierarchy. In religion this is not possible because the ultimate commodity that it purveys is salvation.

The contingencies of human life occasionally force people to ask fundamental questions about meaning and purpose, and more often to seek support, solace and reinforcement for their goodwill and commitment. This itself suggests a private role for religion for individuals. But individuals in unison create groups and groups may become

movements in which a sense of wider common purpose and subscription to a substantive philosophy of life may become the focus for a large number of men (8).

In another facet of religion, the secular agency plays an important role. In his paper on 'The structuration of disenchantment: secular agency and the reproduction of religion' Lee Raymond focuses on the problem of secularization as a motor of change in religious systems. This theory will prove useful in explaining a case study of a religious movement that thrives in a secular and democratic country like India. The tendency to secularize reduces the public power of religious institutions, and reflects an action dimension of human agency capable of transforming prior social arrangements, but in the process reproduces basic principles which are masked by surface changes (9). This theory empirically applied reveals that when religious activists become critical of their government's increasingly secular policies, they seek to counter them through popular religious movements (10). As the issues of Punjab become evident it may be said that the problem arose not because of the decline of religion, but with the unique forms of religious reproduction occasioned by reactions to economic and political depravity.

Charles Y. Glock, who developed the 'relative deprivation' thesis, sees religion as virtually a

compensatory response of deprived people (11). This thesis, if applied in the context of Punjab especially Sikhism, does evoke a different thought process and provides a different hue to this study.

The 'relative deprivation' thesis developed by Glock was used for tribes. The deprivation he speaks about, implies the inability and inactivity of man and his subsequent withdrawal from the social system. When we study the origin and philosophy of Nanak panth, which was akin to Sufism, we realise that Nanak too preached about relinquishing worldly desires.

The origin of sufis is to be found in the ascetic religious tradition of early Islam, and in the growing dissatisfaction which the more faithful Muslim felt when their rulers became increasingly secular and irreligious. During the period of the Umayyad caliphs, the shia's, Quadarites and the Kharijites expressed dissatisfaction for caliphs. This grew out of a desire to recover the religious dimension to life. It implied a new emphasis on the virtues of abstinence and self-denial, on simplicity of life and the disciplines of prayer and fasting. They emphasized on direct, inner knowledge of God and developed a theory of union with God (12). In a way, the Sufi tradition can be said to have born out of deprivation.

"A mystical experience at the age of twenty-nine proved to be the turning point in Nanak's life. He abandoned worldly pleasures and undertook four long voyages during which he visited Hindu and Muslim pilgrimages. He taught his concept of God to people. His God was omnipotent, and omniscient. A good Sikh must not harm his fellow beings, for hurtful conduct such as, lying, cheating, fornicating, trespassing on a person or his property, and so on does not conform to the truth that is God" (13). Nanak advocated the gentle or *Sahaj* method. This was a similar kind of denial professed by sufis and even Kabir.

It was during the time of Guru Arjan and particularly during the time of Guru Gobind Singh that such an image of Sikhs was defied altogether. Self-denial gave way to assertion. "Guru Arjan was fully conscious of the new role he was planning for his community. He organised a revenue system, appointed tax collectors and tapped sources of income. He sent followers across the North West Frontier to Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey to trade goods and sell Indian silks and spices and buy horses. A devoutly religious man, Guru Arjan's varied activities promoted the well being of his following, turning him into a merchant prince. This was a radical departure from the earlier religious status of the Guru. His rising importance, invited the envy and wrath of Emperor Jehangir on his head, which led to his downfall (14). The final transformation of sikhism from a pacifist sect to a

militant fraternity came with Tegh Bahadur's son Gobind Singh.

Therefore it is clear that to begin with sikhism started with the concept of renouncing worldly pleasures and advocating self denial, but this image was denied by the fifth Guru downwards to the tenth.

While talking about the Sikh society as a social system one may say that it has many structures that provide the underlying rules and resources for interaction between the members of the community, and support to the political and religious institutions. This hypothesis is elaborated in the second and third chapters.

Another secondary hypothesis seeks to clarify words like 'modern', 'religious' and 'fundamentalism' which have been taken separately first, to understand their meaning. This clarification is well received in the project on 'Fundamentalisms Observed', by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. In what is called 'A user's Guide', they define these words. 'Modern' <sup>(X)</sup> resists easy definition. "The modern cultures have three dimensions which are uncongenial to fundamentalists. The preference for secular rationality, religious tolerance and individualism is a bane for fundamentalists" (15). A liberal culture would not expect a rise of fundamentalism, since they are recently developed

① Modernism now ques? 8  
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forms of traditionalisms. They were considered to be residues or throwbacks, not active elements in an emerging new world. Today they exist in a type of symbiotic relationship with the modern, since they make use of modern technology, mass media and such other instruments to flourish.

Religion, as suggested earlier, eludes precise definition. The word religion is derived from the combination 'Re + lig + ion'. Here 'lig' means to bind or tie (16). Religion has to do with what concerns people and gives them a social identity. It leads its followers to prefer myth and symbol as forms of expression.

According to Clifford Geertz, "the forms of society are the substance of culture" (17). Sikh forms like the five symbols of *kesh*, *kangha*, *kara*, *kacch* and *kirpan*, the Akal Takht, *miri* and *piri* concept, are all the substance of Sikh culture. As far as religious activities are concerned two somewhat different dispositions are induced mood and motivation. A motivation is a persistent tendency, a chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience certain sorts of feelings in certain sorts of situations, the sorts being commonly very heterogenous and rather ill defined classes in all three cases. Secondly man is susceptible to fall into certain moods, moods we lump together under covering terms as 'reverential', solemn or Worshipful (18).

The Sikh militants were motivated to act in the way they did and the sorts that gave impetus to such a tendency are described in the subsequent chapters.

It must be clarified at the outset that 'Fundamentalism' is not always the first choice for some movements. The so called 'Sikh Religious Fundamentalism', involves an error of having made a wrong choice of words. Although at the global level, fundamentalist movements have created news, the Sikh phenomenon for the moment can be appropriately judged as an obscurantist movement.

For a better understanding of fundamentalism and obscurantism we begin with definition of these terms. According to Oxford, Webster, Thorndike dictionaries - the word 'fundamentalist' relates to orthodox Christian beliefs based on a literal interpretation of the Bible and particularly relates to an American Protestant movement (19). This gives all the more reason to adhere to a cautious approach while applying the word in traditional societies like India. As the authors of the volume on Fundamentalism say, " it is a cross cultural term hence people may not agree on all features of its definition. What separates them from traditionalists or conservatives is that members of the movement no longer perceive themselves as reeling under the corrosive effects of secular life. On the contrary they successfully fight back."(20). Their inexhaustive exercise

proves that fundamentalism is primarily a 20th century phenomenon with 'historical antecedents' but no ideological precursors. In the case of Sikhism it cannot be applied in haste without conducting proper research.

*is a response to a crisis*  
"Fundamentalisms arise in times of crisis, actual or perceived. the sense of danger may be due to oppressive and threatening social, economic or political conditions, but the ensuing crisis of identity by those who fear extinction, as a people or absorption into an overarching syncretistic culture to such a degree that distinctiveness is undermined in the rush to homogeneity" (21).

The fundamentalists have a religious basis - and claim to represent the pristine and most authentic religious impulses of the tradition - many scholars have questioned the same authenticity. Is the call of the so called Sikh fundamentalists authentic? The answer to this query will be provided in the discussion of Sikhism as a syncretic culture in the subsequent pages.

Another definition of 'fundamentalism' by Lionel Caplan is in the context of Christian Fundamentalism. According to him it is a mode of reorientation as counter culture. They set themselves in opposition to modernism. As a form of resistance not only to modernity but also conventional religious world views is both unifying and divisive (22).



The significance of Obscurantism is moral rather than intellectual. According to the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, the state of darkness it denotes is not due to unenlightenment but more from opposition to light. An attempt to revive medievalism, gave rise to this term. Obscurantism, when it is wide spread, commonly makes its appearance in a decadent state of society. It assumes a variety of forms, prevents truth from coming to the light and often resorts to obscure phrases and undefined issues. It provokes both negative and positive reactions. Methods adopted by ~~the~~ obscurantists for the purpose of suppressing manifestations resemble, those previously adopted by it for the purpose of preventing them from making their appearance. Obscurantism is a deliberate intention and cannot be combated by agencies which are designed for the removal of error or ignorance (23).

After considerable nuancing of terms, it becomes imperative here to introduce the crux of this case study on Sikh Religious Fundamentalism.

Punjab has surmounted many political social and religious crises in the past years, making this land a source of recurring case studies for scholars. The people of this land have been equal participants to the crises, so much so that their resilient character must be lauded.

The colonial legacies left an indelible impact on the politics of this region. Some features of the colonial legacy include - emergence of revivalist movements, exploitation of religious animosities, politicization of religious institutions and symbols, in a response to compelling needs of political and economic development after independence and the problem of identity among sikhs. The manifestation of these fetures in Punjab, however has certain aspects which must be explained in terms of historical factors dating back to the early phases of the development of Sikhism.

Subsequent chapters attempt to trace the evolution of the Singh Sabha and study sikh politics in the context of the time and circumstances in history that gave birth to it. The religious framework formed a strong base for sikh politics. To focus attention on sikh politics within a particular parameter, the legal provision, religious sanctions, the social amalgam that constituted Punjab politics, the political leadership, grounds of mobilization and the relationship between the centre and the states and other such issues that existed before independence must be dealt with.

In a broader context, Donald E. Smith in his work on South Asian Politics and Religion outlines five dimensions that have implications on the politics of this region.

- \* The first dimension deals with the theory of history. Recourse to history tends to increase a religion's involvement in politics and Sikhism epitomises this.
- \* Second is the attitude towards other religions. Attitudes of intolerance reinforce the tendency to use the political process for communal advantage. Sikhism, in the recent years, became increasingly intolerant.
- \* Third is the capacity for ecclesiastical organisation. The more highly organised a religion, the greater its involvement in politics. Sikhism is organised, as is evident by the existence of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).
- \* Fourth is the politico-religious functions. The fusion of these two elements tends to increase a religion's involvement in politics. The Sikh politico-religious dimension reflects the same.
- \* Lastly, the tendency to regulate society. The stronger the tendency, the greater the area of conflict between religious authorities and the state. Sikhism during the 80's, revealed the desire to regulate society, and control every aspect of Sikh life (24).

In order to prove that the Sikh religious movement is not fundamentalist but is a form of religious extremism,

prompted by political and economic factors, we must study some aspects of the origin of the sikh religion and its philosophy.

Sikhism views life as indivisible into arbitrary compartments of religion and politics. There can be no separation between an individual and society, the religious, spiritual and political activity covers the totality of life of both the individual and the society. Sikhism therefore denotes itself to changing the inequality and injustice in all the spheres of life, social, religious and political (25).

Guru Nanak was the first of the line of the line of ten Sikh Gurus. He was the founding father of the Sikh faith. The Sikh gurus from Nanak to Arjan were held in great reverence by Mughal emperors. Guru Arjan's death is one of the few executions that have changed the entire course of history. It proved to be a turning point in the development of the Sikh movement. Politics and religion got enmeshed. Guru Hargobind who succeeded him, emphasized the need for political power to defend the faith and turned into a soldier saint. He girded two swords *Piri and Miri* and was master of *Tegh* (Sword like qualities) and *degh* (the spirit of hospitality and compassion). By establishing the Akal Takht in 1606 at Amritsar the fusion of religion and politics was complete (26).

The last guru, Gobind Singh, completed the religio-political transformation of Sikhism giving it a democratic form and a distinct identity. He propounded common salutations *Wah Gurui Ka Khalsa, Wah Guruji Ki Fateh*. (Khalsa is thine, O Lord, victory belongs to you, O Lord); *Raj Bina Nahin Dharam Bache Hai* (religion is not safe without political power) and *Raj Karega Khalsa* (the Khalsa shall rule) (27). Such slogans shape the ideals of Sikh political activity.

*"Sakal jag mein, Khalsa panth gaye  
Jage dharm Hindu, sakal bhand bhaje"*

(Let the pure triumph the world over. Let the Hindu dharma dawn and all untruth disappear). The above quote is the desire of Guru Gobind Singh. He records another aspiration -

*"Dharm Ved maryada jag mein chalayun  
Gau ghaat ka dosh jag se mitayun"*

(May I spread the religion and custom of the Vedas in the world / and erase from it the sin of cow slaughter) (28).

Sikhism incorporated a number of Hindu beliefs, practices and religious rituals. The priests owing to their affinity to Hinduism introduced Hindu images in the gurdwara worship. Donald E. Smith puts it thus, "Sikh's own priests thus increased the danger of absorption by Hinduism" (29). Speaking about priests, an important issue of debate emerges. Where has the problem in Sikhism always come from? An indepth

study into this matter will point accusingly to the priests earlier known as *mahants* who were power hungry and desired material benefits from their patrons. In the present day these priests became religious zealots, epitomised in Punjab by Bhindranwale. According to the Encyclopaedia of Religion, "Nanak did not believe in the profession of priesthood and this class has not been able to establish itself firmly in the Sikh community" (30). The position of a priest in the community is therefore ambiguous and have proved to be a veritable source of problem now and then.

Sikhs and Hindus shared a number of common social customs, and practised common personal laws. Intermarriages and the custom of many Hindus giving their first-born sons to Sikhism, promoted mixed families comprising both Hindus and Sikhs. There is therefore, a strong tendency to regard Sikhism as an offshoot and branch of Hinduism and the Sikh community to be an integral part of Hindu social order. The Granth Sahib is full of references from Hindu mythology. It invokes the name of *Hari* 10,000 times, of *Rama* about 2400 times, *Parbrahma* 500 times, *Onkar* 400 times. It invokes the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Smritis* 350 times. The names of the Absolute 2800 times, the *saguna* deity, 2000 times. *Vedic* concepts are mentioned 1,150 times (31).

Noted scholar Khushwant Singh observes "there is little evidence to support the belief that Guru Nanak planned

the founding of a new community synthesizing Hinduism and Islam. He simply planned to reform Hinduism". In his book 'The Sikhs' he asserts that while Sikhism was a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. Sikhism accepts Hinduism's basic philosophic concepts though these concepts are interpreted differently and evaluated otherwise, than in the various cults of Hinduism. Viewed thus, Sikhism is essentially and basically a Hindu religion (32). On the other hand Sikhs also share the Muslim view of the inseparability of religion and politics, a position considered anathema by most Hindus (33).

As Robert J. Wuthnow observes "the functional dimension of religion has been given more importance than the substance". (In the case of Sikhism, the same has occurred). Durkheim's views on religion fails to take into account religion without church and has not studied religious institutions lacking civilizational or archaic dimensions (34).

Syncretism is one such important social and religious dimension which has not been studied adequately. The word conveys the fusion or blending of religions by identification of goals, taking over of observances, or selection of whatever seems best in each other. It is the juxtaposition of two religions.

The dictionary of sociology defines syncretism thus, "the process of amalgamation of conflicting or at least different parties or principles of cultures. More specifically assimilation of foreign groups. The foreign elements disappear as physiological and cultural entities into the majority, and the majority adopts both the individuals and a selection and adoption of their culture traits" (35). Robert Wuthnow terms the syncretic religions as popular religion. Popular religion according to him tend to be syncretist as they draw simultaneously from indigenous folklore and the more formalised symbols associated with world religions. (36).

There are several types of syncretism. Defensive, aggressive, recessive, adaptive and pragmatic. it would be hazardous to make conjectures on Sikhism without inquiring into the matter from the syncretic dimension.

Syncretism does not function in a rigid manner and oscillates according to the changing political milieu. Adaptive syncretism occurs when minority groups coexist with majority groups coexist with majority groups without political subjugation and political clashes. Pragmatic syncretism occurs in a multi-ethnic situation as two or more equally powerful groups share political power and consciously or otherwise, syncretise their religions in a selective manner.



On the basis of this study one can say that Sikhism is a syncretic religion (adaptive syncretism is appropriate). It is virtually assimilationist and integrationist in character, adapting and improvising on Islam and the Hindu religion. This proves a part of our hypothesis - that Sikhism is not fundamentalist. The substance of Sikhism comes from injunctions, and their influence on sikh gurus, that are embedded in the Hindu and Islamic religions. One can safely say that the term 'Sikh fundamentalism' is virtually evanescent or amorphous because when we investigate terms and come to the crux of sikhism, fundamentalism evaporates and the injunctions of Islam and Hinduism are laid bare. Therefore there is nothing called Sikh fundamentalism.

As Ravinder Kumar's study on the Hindu world and the limits of fundamentalism portrays, the ideological and social diversity of centuries cannot be transformed in a few decades. Challenges to Hinduism come from within the core of the *Sanatan dharma*. The fabric of Hindu society over the centuries is characterised by diverse sectarian movements located around diminutive yet distinctive institutionalization, like the Kabir Panthis or the Ramanandis. Such movements are trenchantly opposed to the eradication of their distinctive identities by fundamentalist discourse. They oppose fundamentalism by raising their voices against it (37). Applying the same logic to Sikhism, one may say that it has the similar capacity and inclination to

oppose fundamentalist views. Sikhism too is divided into various orders - Nirankaris, Gangushahis, Kukas, Sewapanthis, Ramdasi, Udasis, Mazhabi's, Nanak-panthi's, Tat Khalsa etc. - to name a few. Sikhism is rent by schisms and it is difficult to enumerate all its sects and movements (38). This argument also proves that Sikhism is not fundamentalist by nature.

The study of Harjot Singh Oberoi "Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory" begins by saying that Fundamentalism among Sikhs is primarily a movement of resistance. Denied political authority and engaged in constant struggle for survival and legitimacy, Sikh fundamentalists have not succeeded in articulating their view of the world in any great detail. An elaborate model of how their world should look like is not clear. Since the social origins of Sikhs are to be found in Hinduism and Islam, one wonders that given the liberal origins and outlook, how can a Sikh be fundamentalist (39). In his study he examines the background of Sikh fundamentalism and the factors shaping it, political economy of Punjab, Sikh subjectivity and institutions like Damdami Taksal.

The inextricable connection between religion and political power and the role played by religiously grounded differences in the structuring of social reality has been

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made visible. The Sikh quest is for transcendent legitimation of demands of a specific ethnic group or social class (40).

Riyaz Punjabi in his article expresses that fundamentalism has not been used in the sense to bring some principles which form the corner-stone of a particular faith. It emerged more like an ideology to be a succour in the game of power. It has generated its own sets of beliefs based on the misinterpretation of religious beliefs and distortion of religious theories. They recourse to supportive techniques and breed a wrong consciousness among members of their groups. Cultural and political conglomerates promoting the ideology of Fundamentalism, have also been admitting members belonging to other religious groups to their fold (41). This is best exemplified by the recent call made by a faction of the Akali Dal, inviting non-Sikhs, to join the party (42).

The ruling elite also finds the use of such terms - fundamentalist - convenient as it helps them divert the attention of people from general issues and demands. Fundamentalists adopt another strategy to consolidate their hold by way of launching pseudo-religious organization and conglomerates. Most of these independent groups have been adopting militant postures and at times they give the impression of coming in collision with the state. Militant solidarity coupled and the ideology of Fundamentalism poses a great challenge to India's secular nationalism (43).

Meanwhile, a brief interlude into the realm of religious diversity would not be out of place for the purpose of this study.

Acknowledging the apparent increase in religious extremism around the world, Diana L. Eck, asserts that interfaith dialogue and cooperation are on the rise.

In her article, Reflections on Religious Diversity, she observes that the delegates to the first World's Parliament of Religions boldly proclaimed the "end of national religions" and resolved that their traditions would henceforth make war, "not on each other, but on the giant evils that afflict mankind". But today we see little evidence of a cooperative religious alliance against the ills of the world. In the late 20th century, religious rhetoric and the communal power of religious identity have been used in India, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, the Middle East and in sub-saharan Africa. The author wonders whether this is the beginning of a new era of religious extremism, chauvinism, and fundamentalism, or one of religious pluralism based on the recognition of interdependence and the necessity of interreligious cooperation? (44). She asserts that fundamentalism and pluralism pose the two challenges that people of all traditions face. Both are responses to modernity. While the fundamentalist tightly guards the borders of religious certainty; to the pluralist, the borders

are good fences where one meets the neighbour. Fundamentalists perceive secularism as the denial of religious claims while to the pluralist, secularism is the essential concomitant of religious diversity and is seen as the separation of government from the domination of a single religion.

However true and apt these observances may be, the term fundamentalism cannot be the right choice to describe sikh revivalism, for reasons that have been cited earlier.

Despite certain aberrations in the understanding of religion, one cannot ignore what Swami Vivekananda, a participant of the Worlds Parliament of Religion, had to say about the real spirit of religion. Well aware of the different religious systems within India he stated, "the different sectarian systems of India all radiate from one central idea of Unity or Dualism. They are all under Vedanta, all interpreted by it. Their final essence is the teaching of Unity. This which we see as many, is God, we perceive matter, the world, manifold sensation. Yet is there but one existence. These various names make only differences of degree in the expression of that ONE" (45).

If the real spirit of religion is unity, then the same is true of sikhism. It has imbibed its religious philosophy from Hinduism and its organisational character from Islam,

becoming integrationist in character. Therefore, there is no scope for fundamentalisms in this religion.

"Religious traditions are not fixed in amber and passed intact from generation to generation but are changing historical movements, constantly appropriated and reformulated by the people for whom they are meaningful and who speak for themselves. One fascinating irony of the ongoing history of religions is the emergence among some Hindus, Buddhists, sikhs, and others of explicitly more rigidified formulations of their own traditions" (46).

Evidently, Sikhism, like all other religions has been constantly in a state of flux. One phase in this change was characterised by some scholars, journalists and government officials as the decade of fundamentalism in Punjab. The sikh religious tradition does not reveal any portents of fundamentalism - may be of obscurantism and religious extremism, but that too is a transient phenomenon.

The term was inappropriately applied to sikhism without investigating the adequacy of such a category of thought which had been derived primarily from Christian experience in the West.

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## CHAPTER - II

### EVOLUTION OF SIKH POLITICS : 18th CENTURY TO 1947

#### EVOLUTION OF SIKHISM - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to comprehend the growth of Sikhism it is necessary to take a closer look at the important aspects of its world view and political history. In historical perspective, this unique religion appeared to have met the urgent need of the times. It flourished in the 15th and 16th century in a distinct religious and cultural milieu. India was then witnessing rapid change in her thought process due to the absorption of new elements like Muslim ideals. It was also a period when Islam was in the hands of orthodox clerics and Hinduism was dominated by casteism, brahmin priests and ritualism.

Sikhism borrowed ideas from a source that was free from Hindu casteism orthodox Islam the Bhakti movement and Sufism. The Bhakti movement in the 15th century had become the common platform for all devotional sects both within Islam and Hinduism (1). The followers of Sikhism came from among the Hindus - with the overwhelming majority from the Jat peasantry belonging to the then sudra caste of the Hindus in the central Punjab. The Jat Sikhs later acquired political power and became the elite caste among the Sikhs (2).

The philosophical foundations of Sikhism has been a matter of dispute. Until the end of the 19th century much social contact existed between the Hindus and Sikhs. Although scholars like Khushwant Singh and Kapur Singh hold diverse opinions on this issue. The relation between the two communities have been constantly changing.

Guru Nanak, the first of the ten Gurus advocated simple monotheism of one omnipotent, omniscient and formless reality who reveals himself through his own creation. The Gurus realized later that it was not enough to live merely on an ideal. The value patterns in society were in a constant state of flux (3).

The last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh who was determined to destroy Muslim power, faced the problem of timidity among his followers. The reason he understood, was the weak initiation the entrants to the Panth received. He, therefore imbued his followers with a new spirit whereby each would take up his sword and adopt the martial name of 'Singh' (lion). "So Sikhism underwent a remarkable transformation from a religious seet with ascetic and pacifist ideas into a militant theocracy" (4). In the latter half of the 18th century, Sikhism was a well-defined religion with a special code and distinct institutions of its own. The liberal policies of Akbar gave impetus to this growth (5). Guru Gobind Singh ended the line of gurus and gave the Adi Granth as the

visible body of Guru and the Panth. Guru Gobind created the Khalsa and led the Sikhs into a higher ethos which illuminated the idea of universal brotherhood and fellow feeling of true nationalism among Sikhs (6). The Khalsa thus left a distinct impression close to the form we are familiar with, in this century. The new line distinguished the Khalsa from all who adhered to Hindu forms, a distinction which set the Sahajdhari Sikh apart from the Khalsa and identified him with a Hindu (7).

The most important aspect of Sikhism is its social constitution. Initially they were quiet and pietistic but later turned militant in reaction to the repressive policies pursued by the successors of Akbar.

#### SIKHISM AND THE SIKH KINGDOM

The doctrine of the Guru Panth helped to overcome many dangers. During the middle of the 18th century many jathas were consolidated into twelve groups of varying sizes, known as misls. The members of these misls acknowledged common Khalsa loyalty and confronted the same foe. They were to accept membership in a single united army, the Dal Khalsa. But this pious idea could never become a practical reality due to internal dissensions. Their meetings were held in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and the formal decision reached by the leaders of the misls was called the gurmatta. As such it was held to represent the will of the eternal Guru

and a refusal to accept any such resolution constituted rebellion against the Guru himself (8). This belief helped in consolidating power to ward off the Afghan invasions, but lacked total security. As the Afghan threat receded, individual misls grew powerful and dissensions within the Khalsa became more acute.

Having progressively subdued the other misl chieftains, Ranjit Singh was eventually proclaimed Maharaja of the Punjab and a single administration set up over most of the area previously divided among the chieftains. Ranjit Singh continued to rule in the name of the Khalsa, but gatherings of the entire Sikh community Sarbat Khalsa met with his approval. Gradually the practice lapsed and the doctrine of Guru Panth wasted away. Ranjit Singh's reign saw the emergence of the doctrine of the Guru Granth and acquired an influence which it retains to the present day (9).

Sikhism was a representative and organised religion in the 18th century. Another doctrine that developed was the Gurdwara as an institution. By the end of the century the place of assembly was still called a dharamsala. Meanwhile, however, there had developed the custom of erecting shrines called gurdwaras. These evidently marked locations associated with events in the lives of the Sikh gurus (10).

At the end of the 19th century the Khalsa Panth had witnessed the many victories of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the

rapid decline of his successors and defeat in the two Anglo-Sikh wars. The conclusion of the second war was followed by the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849. The British also announced the imminent dissolution of the Panth which aroused the sentiments of the community leaders.

There are many who blame the loss of Khalsa identity to the 'secular' spirit of Ranjit Singh. But this assumption can be proved wrong on the basis that it was Ranjit Singh who restricted decision making to the Panth. Substantial largesse was bestowed upon prominent sikh shrines and the Maharaja's court gave conspicuous respect to the traditions of the Khalsa and its ideals (11).

#### ERA OF DECADENCE AND MOVEMENTS FOR REFORM

The Sikh community confronts another problem - the relationship between the Khalsa on the one hand and the Sahajdhari or Nanak-panthi Sikhs on the other. This problem existed in the early 18th century as well. During the course of the century the difference became increasingly marked as the Khalsa tradition consolidated and the political power passed into their hands. By the end of the century the Khalsa ideal was dominant and to some foreign observers it seemed that all Sikhs were infact sikhs of the Khalsa (12).

In 1810, John Maleolm published his 'Sketch of the Sikhs' an account based on documents and information



collected during a period spent in the Punjab in 1805. He noted two issues about the Sikhs. One was of the continuing distinctions within the Panth and the other was the evident awareness that Sikhs of the Khalsa were perceived as separate and distinct from Hindus. Some of his predecessors, like George Forster had already noted that the Singhs did not necessarily belong to the military order, as there existed other Sikhs as well, who did not deserve the outward form of the Khalsa (13). Malcolm makes an important reference to the lack of visible identity among Sikhs, which cannot be ignored in any discussion on the evolution of the Sikh Panth. The problem of defining the Panth remained a source of concern for the Sikhs.

Sikh leaders and scholars who contest the claim that sikhs are a part of the Hindu community agree upon one point, at the time of the arrival of the British in the Punjab, the Hindu and Sikh communities were very close to each other (14). The logic of the Panth's rigidity and codification takes us back to its doctrinal development. The Guru Granth encapsulated the doctrines of the Adi Granth as well as the Dasam Granth. The latter breathed the militant spirit that matched with the 18 century Khalsa. The Guru Panth doctrine performed an important role for the Khalsa in the middle decades of the 18th century. This was also the phase that produced expression of the doctrine suited to the contemporary needs of the Khalsa (15).

In order to give full expression to the doctrine of the Khalsa Panth many Sikhs urged for reform and institutionalisation of the doctrine. In the latter half of the 18th century many Sikhs expressed dissatisfaction with the attitudes and behaviour generated by military success or political patronage. From the period of Ranjit Singh, before the Singh Sabha movement began, date two reform movements - the Nirankari and the Namdhari movements. Both were sects within the Panth during the same period and in the same part of 'Ranjit Singh's domain. Although the two movements were condemned by orthodox Sikhs both the movements comprised an important context of the discussion relating to the 19th century development of Sikh identity.

The two movements grew simultaneously. The Nirankari tradition retained its Nanak Panthi philosophy and attracted a member of adherents who identified as Sahajdhari Sikhs, as Hindus or as both. The adherents of the Namdhari movement belonged to castes with strong Khalsa affiliation and it therefore later assumed a self-conscious Khalsa identity called Sant Khalsa. Both movements condemned the corrupt practices prevalent during the period of the sikh kingdom that diluted sikh identity. While one movement sought to return Sikhism to pristine Nanak-panthi principles, the other preached a restored and regenerated Khalsa (18).

During the hundred years of British reign in Punjab there were many forces undermining the Sikhs separate identity. In an effort to maintain their separate social and religious identity the Sikhs got involved in various religious movements in the second half of the 19th century - the Nirankari, Namdhari, Radhasoami - to name a few. These made a small impact on the Sikhs but they in turn found a formidable challenge from Hindu revivalists the Arya Samaj. They became an instant success, perhaps by being ambiguous. They combined criticism of many existing Hindu practices with an aggressive assertion of superiority over other existing faiths - Islam, Christianity and Sikhism (17). The very fact that so much of stress was laid on the emergence of these two movements, easily proves that the spirit of the Khalsa had dwindled during the later years of Sikh political power.

Another cause of disillusionment among Sikhs was the observance of caste. The Sikhs were marrying strictly according to their caste and ate in the manner of Hindus, outcastes were denied entry to the gurdwaras and the sacred karah-prasad was preserved from their contamination. The condition in the villages was worse. One could not distinguish a Sikh from a Hindu because the outward forms were so malleable (18).

Amidst this hue and cry about decline and decadence in the mid 19th century another movement arose that really gave

impetus to yet another movement - the Singh Sabha movement. After the British conquest, the movement was established in 1873, as a reform movement within Sikhism. Its purpose was to study the original sources of Sikhism and restore it to its pristine purity (19). It was widely acknowledged that the Panth was under threat, and a programme was devised to reform and restore Khalsa traditions and loyalties which seemed to be eroding. The movement was a success, as by the time the movement began to fade in the early 20th century a persuasive interpretation of Sikh tradition had been created and Khalsa identity defined with a precision never before achieved (20). It prepared a strong base to launch the Akalis into the politics of the Punjab.

To the Singh Sabha reformers decay was evident at all levels of Sikh society. The conservative Sikhs felt betrayed at the hands of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who distributed material treasures of the Khalsa to the Brahmins in the hope of achieving salvation. It was the Brahmins who performed his last rites and made four of his wives along with seven 'slave girls' commit suttee (21). This event was perceived as a threat by the Sikhs as these were the superstitions the gurus had so vigorously denounced. The precincts of the Golden Temple was vitiated by the presence of Hindu idols. The urgent compelling need for reform could not be denied (22).

The formation of the first Singh Sabha in 1873 was prompted by an incident that took place in Amritsar. Four Sikh students of the Mission School in Amritsar announced their intention of taking Christian baptism. On hearing this, a meeting was convened by a group of prominent Sikhs. The discussions concluded in the formation of the Singh Sabha. It was an elitist body representing the titled gentry, affluent landowners and noted scholars (23). This elitist nature of the Sabha was there to stay. In 1879 there emerged another Singh Sabha at Lahore, more aggressive and strident than the first one. Whereas the Amritsar organization was dominated by princely and landed interests, the Singh Sabha of Lahore attracted intellectuals with a more radical approach to the problems of the Panth. Prominent among them was Giani Ditt Singh, an outcaste sikh who promoted social reform and return to the casteless ideal of the Khalsa.

"Most radical of all was the small but embarrassingly noisy Singh Sabha of Bhasaur, led by Teja Singh Overseer. While the Amritsar Sabha was soft towards sahajdhari Sikhs, the Bhasaur Sabha was militantly fundamentalist" (24).

Those who represented the reformist sector of the Singh Sabha came to be known as the Tat Khalsa. On the other side, overwhelmed by the strength of the Tat Khalsa ideals, were the conservatives or the Sanatan Khalsa. While speaking of the Singh Sabha movement its historiography, doctrinal

formulations, we normally refer to the Tat Khalsa. Prominent amongst Tat Khalsa reformers were scholars such as Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha and the prolific and versatile writer Bhai Vir Singh. As a result of their association with the Englishman, M.A. Macauliffe they were responsible for moulding and recording a version of Sikh tradition that remains dominant in intellectual circles to the present day. Their understanding of sikh tradition and the role of the Singh Sabha could be summarized here. Although Guru Nank was born a Hindu, he separated his followers from Hindu society by requiring them to renounce caste. Both Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh affirmed that sikh were neither Hindu nor Muslim and the latter set the foundations of the Khalsa. But the Khalsa underwent some trials in which some were resilient and stood by their faith, while others collapsed under pressure and betrayed.

According to McLeod power is a source of corruption and the Khalsa is no exception to it. Political success and material affluence proved to be compelling temptations and many of the Khalsa were seduced by them. Hindu customs progressively reasserted their hold within the Panth, and, following the British annexation of the Punjab this tendency rapidly increased. The British policy of insisting on Khalsa observances within the army helped to sustain traditional loyalty, but this affected only a small segment of the Sikhs and the threat of disintegration stood firm (25). The Tat

Khalsa stood up to meet this challenge by initiating the Singh Sabha movement.

It is interesting to note that, to begin with, both the Aryas and the Sikhs of Punjab set out to establish a religion devoid of idolatory, caste and priestly domination (26). In the 1880's the Sikhs took part in the Arya Samaj and held executive positions as well. By 1888 feelings of Hindu orthodoxy reached a peak and several Arya leaders criticized Sikh religion. The sikhs left the Arya Samaj and joined the Singh Sabhas. The Shuddhi movement became a tool for social reform and reconversion. The goal of Shuddhi was maintained on either side by Sikhs as well as the Hindus. But in 1900 an event occurred which destroyed the Arya - Sikh cooperation for good. The Lahore Arya Sabha performed the Shuddhi of a small group of Rahtias or Sikh untouchables. As part of the ceremony they shaved their heads, beards transforming them into caste Hindus. This event ruptured the cooperative Sikh Arya Shuddhi venture and convinced many Sikhs that Arya Hindu reconversion movement was potentially as dangerous to Sikhs as the Christian missionary threat. This helped to crystallize an already forming Sikh identity quite separate from the Hindu community (27). In this change of self-perception, may be, we can find some deeds for the Sikh-Hindu enmity which continues to the present day.

Challenged by Hindu revivalists, communal organisations, Arya Samaj, enriched by upper class Sikhs and supported by the Raj, the Singh Sabha movement grew rapidly setting up a network of Khalsa schools wherein Guru Granth Sahib and Gurmukhi were compulsory. Alongside grew another organisation the Chief Khalsa Diwan.

A review of the formative period of Sikh politics also suggests several patterns and sets of problems affecting Punjab public life today. The Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Diwan attempted to deal with some common problems. The Sikh tradition and the basis of Sikh identity; which institutions constituted a legitimate leader for the community; relationship between religion and politics; what should be the pattern of communicating information effectively - to name a few problems. Despite opposing views on a few subjects, the Singh Sabhas were successful in providing precise definitions which became acceptable. "It was much later that the Akalis elaborated and further institutionalized sikh identity, especially the symbols of martial bravery and heroic traditions, although they added little to the intellectual discussions that had gone on before" (28).

The Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD), the first socio-political organisation of the sikhs, came into existence on 30th Oct. 1902 and was registered under Act XXI of 1869. In a



short time it gained the status of the central Sikh association, representing the sikh community as a whole. The main contribution of this body lies in the fact that it took the community ahead of the orthodox Sikh faith, strengthened the defences, erected by the Singh Sabhas, around the sikh identity, made efforts to safeguard the political rights of the Sikhs and mediated successfully in resolving the Gurdwara reform crises (29).

The Chief Khalsa Diwan, the political wing of the Singh Sabhas was created to get recognition for the Sikhs as a separate community in politics and law. It pledged to cultivate Sikh loyalty to the crown, safeguard sikh rights vis-a-vis other communities, fight for adequate representation of sikhs in the army. It was therefore the first real political organization of the Sikhs of the modern era. It played the same role as the Aligarh movement and the Muslim League did for the Muslim community of North India (30).

The CKD was the most representative organisation of the Sikh community till the emergence of alternative organisations like the Central Sikh League in 1919 and the Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1920. At the turn of the century more than 150 Singh Sabhas were functioning and were associated with different Khalsa Diwans. Due to their wide spread network it was impossible to

maintain satisfactory contact among the Sabhas. There was no central agency to coordinate smaller units. Besides the internal organisational crisis, the Sikh activities faced competition from the Arya Samaj which asserted that Sikhism was a modified version of Hinduism. So the CKD faced organisational and ideological crisis at times.

Two factors portrayed the CKD had its own resources. There were a large number of dedicated workers associated with the Singh Sabhas and the Diwan who extended their services for the Panthic cause. It was liberally financed by the Sikh Maharajas, rajas, rais and sardars. Important contemporary sikh newspapers like the Khalsa Samachar, Khalsa Advocate and the Punjab Darpan projected the CKD as the organisation of the Panth. Another factor was that the British Government for executing its ulterior motives, recognised the CKD as the representative organisation of the entire Sikh community (31).

Nevertheless, some of the important sikh activists refused to treat the CKD as the supreme Panthic body. Challenge in the beginning appeared in the form of theological differences. The intellectuals did not agree upon standardised Sikh rituals and customs as shaped by the CKD, infact a number of the Singh Sabhas did not affiliate with the CKD and continued to follow their own policies and programmes. Independent caste associations proved a

hindrance, prominently the Ramagarhia and the Ahluwalia associations who projected their own individuality and interests (32).

Primarily it was the form of constitution of the Diwan which began to generate crisis. The constitution was such that it allowed only a particular leadership to emerge and maintain status quo. The leadership of the sikh gentry could not be diluted by the sikh intellectuals. Rather most of the intellectuals genuinely believed in the magnanimity of the Raj and propagated the belief among the Sikh masses. No one could develop an alternative programme that could rally the sikh masses under their banner. The educated sikhs had serious religious differences with Arya Samajists. Due to the above mentioned reasons the CKD gave rise to only one type of leadership, which maintained status quo, once in power. Moreover, there was no provision of periodical elections of office bearers envisaged in the constitution of the CKD (33).

Though by the end of the 19th century, the Singh Sabha and Khalsa Diwan had become synonymous terms, yet the Singh Sabhas were generally, established in small towns while the CKD in bigger towns and cities (34). This period witnessed the gradual decline of these institutions as well, for the reasons mentioned earlier.

These institutionalised movements were elitist in character and this was the primary cause of their decline. The leadership was incompatible with the peasant dissatisfaction in rural areas which intensified due to various social, economic and political developments. These events had dual political outcomes. While the tendency towards national unity strengthened, the minority consciousness was intensified. In social life too, the hold of old customs and beliefs was weakened. This era also gave rise to romantic nationalism in all the three communities, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, glorifying the past and yearning for its revival ignited separatist communal feelings and religious loyalties (35).

#### PUNJAB AND THE RAJ-DYNAMICS OF THE 20th CENTURY

By the end of the 19th century the Sikhs felt more insecure about the future. Political conditions were changing as the structure and policies of government more directly affected community interests. Legal cases involved sikhs in disputes over Gurdwaras, personal law, and even on the definition of a 'Sikh'. The sikh association, the CKD consolidated sikhism and helped to organise new institutions. It strengthened the communication system linking the sikhs all over Punjab and across the world. A Sikh Educational Conference was held every year after 1908 to discuss social and educational issues (36). But the aura of the CKD

gradually atrophied. The leadership was unable to win the special privileges and representation expected by the community. Sikh disunity was another factor weighing against the CKD's effectiveness.

The interaction among the demographic, territorial and religious dynamics of Punjab resulted in the formation of a few legacies that exist to the present day in Sikh politics.

Historically, Punjab is the area as it existed before independence and partition between India and Pakistan in 1947. Pre-independence Punjab province had an absolute majority of Muslims 51%, Hindus 35% and Sikhs 12%. These partitions were radically altered by partition [Indian's Punjab in 1981 had 64% Hindus, 33% Sikhs and only 2% Muslims]. Demographic details suggest that Muslims dominated in pre-independence period and now the Sikh. It is evident that increasing ethnic and religious mobilization resulted in compromises including conflicts and accommodation within those communal groups (37). This legacy manifests itself in the present day politics of Punjab.

Ian Talbot's book, 'Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947', reviews among other things the demographic structure in rural Punjab, the support of local elites by the colonial government and much more. According to Talbot, the informal ties between the allies of the colonialist powers, Chiefs and religious leaders, civil servants and businessmen were

gradually institutionalized through the creation of loyalist political association and eventually political parties.

The British received a Punjab with a Muslim majority, and several regional variations in the communal distribution of communities. The British responded by encouraging allegiances based on kinship and tribe which cut across and competed with communal divisions.

The rural populace comprised landlords who owned substantial amounts of land which they let out to the tenants to cultivate, peasant cultivators, rich tenants, the village servant class who provided goods or services to the landowners in return for a share of the crop and the landless labourers who depended on the landowners for employment.

Another striking aspect of rural Punjab was the existence of spiritual heads- Pirs -who possessed great authority. They also owned large tracts of land. They had thousands of murids (followers) and such followings gave the Pir's great political influence. Recognising the fact, governments from the Delhi Sultanate to the British donated large amounts of land to the shrine in order to secure their sajjada (custodian, literally, "he who sets on the prayer carpet) loyalty. The requirement for becoming a sajjada nashin shrine gradually shifted from spiritual merit, to political loyalty to the government. The government

strengthened roots of its authority in the countryside by controlling these shrines (38).

The most striking aspect of Hinduism in Punjab was the weakness of the Brahmin caste. Their low status arose from the fact that they had to compete with Muslim Pirs and Sikh gurus for religious leadership. Hindu social leadership moved from the hands of the Rajput princes to the commercial classes the Khatri, Aroras and Banias. During the British rule this dominance was challenged by Jat peasantry. Despite their economic strength, the Hindus were insecure as they had lost several caste members to Sikhism. This fear increased with the advent of Christian missionaries in the region (39).

The British engineered many social and economic changes in the Punjab, the most notable being the development of canal colonies. Their political control had to be based on the support of the leading land owning group. Political power in Punjab depended on the control of land as it does today. With the advent of the British two competing political traditions confronted each other. The British nurtured a special relationship with the rural elite and took this important fact into consideration while constructing their administrative machinery. But unlike the Mughals the British introduced economic changes which led to the growth of a new urban educated elite, whose outlook varied from the traditional holders of power. Herein lay the seat of the

development of the two political traditions - urban and rural, within the British Punjab (40).

The colonial power continued Ranjit Singh's policy of neutrality in religious matters. His tactics of working closely with local leaders appealed to the British administrators. They favoured informal rule and relied usually on indigenous institutions. Therefore patronage became a major tool for insuring continued help of significant support groups. The British took steps to maintain village institutions to insure the existence of the natural leaders and the well being of Punjab peasant proprietors.

The bureaucracy was especially cautious in dealing with the Sikhs. They made such revenue and administrative decisions that maintained the prominence of Jat Sikhs in the rural areas of central Punjab - a part where they are still prominent. This was done because Jats furnished many soldiers for the Imperial Army. The Sikh Soldiers were made to maintain their rituals and symbols. To prevent religious fanaticism in the ranks, the British officers associated valour and loyalty with religious identity and therefore, encouraged a view of Sikhism quite separate from Hinduism and local sects. Sikh aristocrats, the landed families, the rulers of the Sikh states received attention in the form of educational opportunities and protection under the Court of Wards Act (41).



Traditional and modern elements could be found in the western style politics spreading in the Punjab local leaders controlling land and shrines continued to maintain influential networks based on marriage, caste and patronage. Religious identity was a legacy from earlier periods of conflict in the region, a factor that became prominent as Punjabis re-examined their past and how they could adapt to the challenges of British rule.

In the 20th century Punjab had assumed immense importance to British imperial interests. It was essential to win the support of the Muslim clan leaders and large landowners of West Punjab who acted in effect as the military contractors for the Raj. The native aristocracy was used as a bulwark for the state. Large landowners, for their cooperation got access the decision making process. Though the task of identifying local elites posed a problem in the egalitarian sikh and Hindu societies of Central and East Punjab. By patronising the Jats the British got the important Hindu ingredient for a provincial inter-communal rural alliance. Alliance with religious leaders was made by granting them position of authority. In return for patronage, the mahants of leading shrines obliged them by issuing Hukumnamas in support of the Punjab government in times of political crisis (42).

The British supported the Sikhs in all their efforts to raise their educational and social status through the Singh Sabha movement. After the Singh Sabha was merged with the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the latter body began to represent the political demands of the Sikhs to the government. The CKD was impeccably loyal to the British. In spite of such impression of loyalty, the Punjab governments sponsorship of the Singh Sabha had dangerous consequences. Their activities strengthened the ground sikh religious self-awareness, exploding into violence for Gurdwara reform in the 1920's. The religious appeal of the movement stood in direct opposition to the British attempt to organise rural society along non-sectarian lines (43).

The British were keen to pacify the discontent among the peasantry in Punjab. The British officials therefore expressed concern about rural indebtedness and transfer of land and other related problems. Various steps were taken for this purpose, starting with the land Alienation Act of 1901. Social and governmental policies that distinguished between rural and urban, agriculturist and non-agriculturist, became institutionalized in party politics. The Unionist party of notables, organized around rural landed interests, dominated the politics of the pre-independence era. Opposing urban and rural interests were evident in sikh politics as well. After partition the rural-urban cleavage further sharpened, affecting in turn the political processes (44).

According to A.S. Narang's study, communal politics rests on organizations evolved for this purpose within the rural areas the landowners and labourers conflict provides a favourable ground for the existence of class struggle, but since religion, language, caste and class, have traditionally aligned themselves, the politics of Punjab, both before and after independence, has been frequently dominated by communal considerations and antagonisms.

#### THE SIKH INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR POLITICS: 1900-1947

Leaders of the Sikh institutions consolidated their positions once in power. The Diwan leaders, for instance, controlled the Sikh Educational Conference which was established in 1908. The delegate fee and life membership fee were so high that it allowed only the well to do individuals to become its members. An alternative to the Diwan appeared when educated Sikh activists who advocated the socio-religious, economic and political demands of the community. They suggest a different line of action. In the wake of the Lucknow Pact of 1916 and the announcement of constitutional reforms under Montague Chelmsford Scheme the Sikh periodicals expressed the feeling that the Sikhs needed their own political organisation.

By 1914 the Diwan leadership stood alienated from the Sikh masses. Resident Sikh activists gathered at the Bradlough

Hall in Lahore on March 30, 1919 to form an exclusively political organisation for the sikhs, the Central Sikh League. Its aim was essentially political. It collaborated with the nationalists to acquire 1/3rd seats in the Punjab council under the Montague Chelmsford Act. The leaders of the Central Sikh League became office bearers of the Provincial Congress Committee (45).

Another institution, the Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), was formed in Nov. 16, 1920. The local sangats formed numerous jathas (congregations) all over Punjab and captured the Gurdwaras including the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht. The objective was to reform, manage and control the historic gurdwaras. It became a coordinating committee directing the affairs of the local gurudwaras. The SGPC had subordinate units like the District Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. So the SGPC and the Central Sikh League emerged as alternatives to the CKD. These institutions were representative in nature the office bearers being elected periodically.

At the same time the Sikh found a veritable threat in the activities of the Hindu fundamentalists on the one hand and proselytization of christian missionaries on the other. Sikh schools, colleges and religious institutions were set up to educate the Sikh masses in the principles and practices of their faith. Religious education became a compulsory component of the curriculum of all Sikh institutions. Under

the ideas of the Sikh educational conference, more and more sikh institutions came to be established. In the first decade, on an average 20 Sikh institutions were added every year, as the records show. Under changed circumstances, now, the Sikh institutions were being run by Sikh intelligentsia.

Table 1

NO. OF SIKH INSTITUTIONS DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

Year	No. of Institutions	
1908-9	7	
1909-10	18	
1910-11	38	
1911-12	40	
1912-13	60	
1913-14	85	
1914-15	110	
1915-16	127	
1916-17	169	
1917-18	210	(48)

Source: See reference no.48.

Another Sikh institution, the Akali Dal was the product not of the politics of the state but of the church embodied in the Sikh shrine. Formed on 14 December, 1920 it became a coordinating agency to raise and train volunteers

for action in taking over gurdwaras, as part of the gurdwara reform movement. Traditionally no rules existed for the management of the shrines. They were managed by Mahants who professed Sikhism but did not conform to its outward symbols. They could disclaim their association with Sikhism when their lines were in danger. This tradition deteriorated as a result of increase in gurdwara income derived from revenue free jagirs bestowed on them by Ranjit Singh and other Misaldars (47).

The government often used the mahants as tools to condemn political opponents. The climax was reached when Arur Singh, the government appointed Sarbrah of the Golden Temple invited General Dyer to the temple and presented him Saropa or a robe of honour. This act gave the advocate of reform the urgency to stop the prevailing system of management of the gurdwara (48).

The Punjab government indicated its intention of non interference in the religious affairs of the community and appointed a Provincial Advisory Committee of 36 members to propose rules of management of shrines. But the Sikhs organised a large meeting in Amritsar on 15 Nov. 1920. Here the formation of a 175 member committee known as the SGPC, for the management of all Sikh Shrines, was announced.

Further, the formation of the Shiromani Akali Dal strengthened institutionalised politics. The prominent

leaders of the SGPC publicly supported the nationalist movement and declared their alignment with the Hindus and Muslims in their struggle for Swaraj. The political aspect was further proved by the emergence of the Akali Dal as the militant wing of the SGPC.

Akali literally means immortal and is derived from Akal-Purusha. It is said that Guru Gobind Singh called upon his followers to be ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of their panth and faith. Those who came forward were called Akalis, known for their purity of character and sincerity of conviction. They became the guardian of the Akal Takht at Amritsar and other important gurdwaras. The word Akali came to signify a symbol of purity and strict morality. All these Sikhs who advocated reform in the Sikh shrine and were prepared to suffer like the old Akalis to achieve their object, came to be called Akalis (49).

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) was formed as a central organisation to undertake the unification and coordination of various local Akali Jathas which had emerged to take control of gurdwaras by direct action. To remove the recalcitrant mahants the Dal recruited members of the Akal Fauj. The movement was modelled after Congress methods and adopted a policy of direct action by non-violent means. The Mahants appealed to the government for protection which could not be denied. The authorities were concerned over the passing of

gurdwaras and their income to the SGPC. They envisaged that the funds would be used to arouse religious sentiments among the sikh masses and the gurdwara management could no longer be used to strengthen the hand of the Empire (50).

The Akali movement gave vent to the revolt of the Sikh peasantry. The militant leaders of the Akali movement took revolt to the villages. The leaders exploited the sentiment of the people who were already disturbed by repression and economic distress. The Akalis contended that the bureaucracy was bent upon destroying Sikh religion. The Akali movement represented the revolt of the peasantry against the British rule and feudal landlords. The SGPC records reveal that the numerical strength of the Akali jathas show that bulk of Akali volunteers came from the Sikh peasantry especially from the districts of Lyallpur, Sheikhpura, Amritsar, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. Roughly 86% of Akali volunteers belonged to the Jat Sikh peasantry (51).

After 1920 the Akali movement became a mass organization like the Indian National Congress. The officials in bureaucratic circles viewed this moment as strictly political and not religious. The Akali Dal was being organised for revolutionary purposes and would eventually form a regular revolutionary army which would be properly armed.



At the national level the INC was mobilizing peasantry in rural areas for the civil disobedience campaign. The Congress joined hands with parties representing the peasantry. The Congress and the Akali movement worked closely and the former even picked up Baba Kharak Singh, the SGPC president, to be the Punjab Pradesh Congress President. The Congress wanted to keep the leadership to itself, and Mahatma Gandhi insisted that the Sikhs should announce openly that the Akali movement was neither anti-Hindu nor against any other race or creed. He desired a statement from the SGPC that it was a purely religious body and did not wish to establish a 'Sikh Raj' in Punjab. But in spite of Gandhiji's insistence the Akali movement rose to become a religio-political movement. The Sikh soldiers showed their unrest and the government was forced to re-open talks. This resulted in the enactment of Gurdwaras Act in July 1925. With this Act the SGPC was given a statutory status and was made an elected body.

The Gurdwara Reform movement of 1920-25 had important political outcomes in the institutionalization of Sikh politics. It signified the transfer of leadership from landed aristocracy to the middle classes. The rural and urban classes united on a common platform as the middle class professionals were more acceptable to the Sikh masses.

The Akali movement brought Punjab peasants into the vortex of active politics. Most of the leaders in the forefront of the Akali movement, later constituted the vanguard of the communist movement in Punjab. This gave the impetus to the doctrine of fusion of religion and politics which could be used by the leadership for maintaining communal solidarity. The Gurdwara reform also resulted in the widening of the gulf between Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindus felt that the sacred shrines had been hitherto used, both by Hindus and Sikhs and that the extremist section in the Sikhs was trying to create a wedge between the two communities. The Sikhs were keen to separate their identity and religious institutions from the Hindus (52).

In retrospect, the formation of the SGPC and the Akali Dal is seen as the single most important event in the institutionalization of Sikh politics. These institutions emerged as the prime expression of Sikh communal and political consciousness and identity. This was also the period that saw communalism firmly entrenching itself in Indian politics and virtually influenced all social, religious and political events.

The SGPC became a political system for a varying and particular range of Sikh affairs. The dynamics of the SGPC are truly amazing. Externally it has relations, both direct

and indirect, with other systems such as the Punjab government and with Sikh groups related to SGPC concerns. Internally the dynamics of the system revolve around the relation between the contending political parties and groups. The internal dynamics of the SGPC are governed by a symbiotic relationship with the Akali Dal. The control of a working majority in the 175 member statutory body is the key to Sikh politics (53).

The new Akali custodians were politically more formidable. As political slogans continued to change, the spiritual instruction gave way to political fanaticism, exclusiveness and rebirth of ritualism, regeneration of the Panth, caste, faction and region became more important than religion. The religious platform became a springboard for political ascendancy in the Punjab. This trend continued after independence as well. The intelligentsia got isolated and took to professions other than politics which was falling into the hands of the caste and faction ridden demagogues (54).

The Singh Sabha brought the doctrine of Guru Granth into greater prominence, equating the Adi Granth with the Guru. They later revived the idea of Guru Panth, and it was from here that the movement of claiming Gurdwaras for the Sikh Panth was to be conceived. Historians look upon the Akali Movement as a political one, especially a movement which was

partly inspired by the leaders of the INC, but they have underestimated the religious dimension in the process. The SGPC was institutionalized for the sake of the doctrine of Guru Panth. The importance of this doctrine in the future affairs of the Sikhs was ensured by the genesis of the SGPC.

Analysing the whole sketch in the light of what Paul Brass observes, one concludes religion has to undergo metamorphosis in order to be an effective element in politics. About Punjab he says, that most of the Sikh religious and political leaders in the political arena derive economic strength from rural areas and they have built a separate institutional base for their activities in politics through their control of the Gurdwaras. In such a backdrop, religious has become a powerful symbol in the Sikh movement. He says, when ethnic groups turn to politics to achieve group demands, the political movement takes a life of its own to such an extent that political organisation may shape communal identities as well as be shaped by them. (55).

According to Prabha Dixit, 20th century politics were different wherein communal political parties were formed by certain sections of the elites on a religious<sup>ly</sup> cultural basis. In ethnically plural societies communalism is facilitated. Such a society creates ideal conditions for sectarian politics particularly as a consciousness of cultural identity seems as a sheet anchor for communal movement (56).

Francis Robinson assigns a central role to the British in creating a separate consciousness among the Indian communities by patronising the followers of one religion. A prominent feature of British rule was its tendency to see its Indian subjects as Parsis, Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims, giving recognition to their development of separate political identity and giving legitimation to their demands (57).

Covering the period from 1920-1932 David Page argues that, the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 were crucial to the growth of communal politics. For the first time reforms introduced political responsibility at the provincial level and efforts were made to balance the representatives of different communities in the councils. This encouraged the development of communal blocs within the council and it was done with the purpose of offsetting the weight of the nationalist politicians. The divide and rule policy evolved gradually changing to suit the changing circumstances, and varied from time to time and often from region to region and in degree as well. The communal Award of 1932 concluded the demand of separate electorate and reserved seats not only for the Muslims but also for Indian Christians, Sikhs, European, untouchables and Anglo Indian (58). It is evident that by such legislative, administrative measures the stage was being set politically to set apart religious identities.

Historically the most important integrative factor in Sikh society has been religion and the place of pride has been achieved by those who fought religious struggles in the name of the Sikh Panth. Preservation of religion has always been a great concern with the Sikhs because their adjustment with the larger Indian society is sometimes based on fear and at other times it is resisted. The symbols of religion are very important for the ideological make up of Sikh society because they facilitate self-preservation (59). The Akali movement was not merely for reform, but took a political hue after the tragedy of Nankana. The Akalis, by then had organized themselves strongly and launched a powerful offensive on the government of Punjab (60).

Religion in politics and politics in religion was encouraged and legitimised by the British and this complex socio-cultural and politico-cultural legacy was handed over to the Indian state after independence. Religious identity as a means to political power was established by the British and many religious groups and political parties intended to follow the same path to achieve their goals in a democracy, Punjab illustrates a living example of the relationship between communalism and imperialism (61).

In his study of religion and politics in the Punjab, Gobinder Singh Chooses to study the case of the SGPC keeping in view the fact that it is the most well organized and

powerful single religious institution of the dominant religious community in the state and that it has well preserved stocks of record which could provide abundance of authentic data. The SGPC is the supreme custodian of the Sikh Gurdwaras and controls huge moral and material resources. In his study he delineates the important factors leading to the genesis of the SGPC and its emergence as a political actor in the state (63).

An overview of Sikh political culture reveals that it is the product of radical social movement sustained by religious persuasions and sanctified community symbols. These symbols were generated in the medieval, Punjab society in the face of challenges from dominant community and hostile political environment. The Sikh political culture encompasses conceptual and behavioural norms, socio-economic values, political ethos and martial superiority. This culture provided a normal base for establishing Sikh power and continued to serve as a frame for later movements and political actions of Sikhs. It was in this broad milieu and culture that the SGPC emerged on the scene as the supreme religious institution. The politico-national consciousness of the Sikh masses had germinated in the context of the wider concrete socio-economic and cultural milieu of the late 19th century and early 20th century Punjab (63).

## THE AKALIS VIS-A-VIS OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

The Akalis emerged as the representatives of the Sikh Panth and pursued sikh politics in close nexus with the SGPC, with which it shared a common religious ideology. Political leadership was provided by the affluent scholars of the Sikh society and were leaders of the CKD. Their attitude was pro-British and their mode of politics was constitutional, with Akalis came the period of middle class leadership and non violent agitation. They were preceded by militant Ghadarites and followed by Babbars and Revolutionary Socialists. This mode of politics aligned them with the INC. Nevertheless they had to compete with pro-British constitutionalists among sikhs, militant nationalists and in the later decades with the communists as well. It is highly significant in this context that the Akalis emerged as the dominant political party among the Sikhs before 1947.

The significance of this development lies in the foundation of the Central Sikh League at the end of 1919. They had four objectives, to rebuild the demolished wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj in Deelhi, to bring the Khalsa college at Amritsar under the control of these representatives of the Sikh Panth, to liberte Gurdwaras from <sup>Rahants</sup> infants and place them in an elected body responsible for the action of the Panth and finally to inspire the Sikhs to participate in the struggle for independence. The first two objectives got



fulfilled in 1920 and the third in 1925. In this process the Akalis emerged as rivals of the leaders of the central Sikh League. So much for an inter-sikh party relationship.

The Akalis were closely involved with the Indian National Congress as well. With them they participated in the celebration of independence on 26 Jan. 1930, joined the Civil Disobedience Movement, boycotted the 1st Round Table Conference. The communal Award of 1932 obliged them to form the Khalsa Darbar to present a united Sikh front against its implementation. The Central Sikh League got merged with the Darbar. When the Darbar split in 1938, its leaders were divided into two camps - the Akali and the Congressite sikhs. A third party was the Khalsa National Party, represented by the former leaders of the Chief Khalsa Diwan who had by now aligned with the Unionists. Going by the number of seats won in the elections of 1937, all the three parties were nearly of equal importance. The Sikandar Jinnah Pact of 1937 brought the Akalis closer to the INC.

The Unionist Party, formed in 1923 was to protect the small as well as large landowners against the urban commercial and money lending groups. They propagated that the congress was identified with the money-lenders and led the Congress to relinquish its most important rural plank of its anti-British struggle. Sikandar Hayat Khan, the leader of the Unionist won the Punjab peasantry to his side by

promising to pursue a policy that would relieve agricultural debts. The Unionists therefore could win over a substantial section of the peasantry including Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs on the basis of common interest. In order to win over the Sikh peasantry on their seats the Akalis had to exploit religious sentiments and reveal its concerns about peasant interests (84).

The Akali's first resentment with the Congress grew with the latter's stance on the Communal Award of 1932. The all-parties Sikh Conference held at Lahore on 28 July, 1932 rejected the award alleging it as communal; an agitation ensued in which the party members (Akali) split into two. The result was that the British government went ahead to approve the award by enacting the Government of India Act 1935. This was the period of confusion and disappointment in Sikh politics. The elections of 1937 gave birth to several new parties among Sikhs - the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which changed its name to the Khalsa National Party. In the 1937 election the pro-congress Akali stance prevailed and the election were contested in collaboration with the Congress (85).

In the All India Akali Conference of 1938, the flags of both the Congress and the Akali Dal were hoisted together and the Akalis praised the Congress as the trustee of national honour and self-respect. The strains in their

relations came with the outbreak of the war in 1939. Unlike the Congress, the Akalis came to favour the war effort so as not to remain isolated in the Punjab where the Unionists and several other organisations were extending support to the 'war effort'.

During this period a number of new organisations emerged. The Khalsa Defence League formed in 1941 with the support of Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh and Gian Kartar Singh. In 1942 Baldev Singh formed a new party as a face saving device for the Akalis to join the Unionist ministry of Sikandar Hyat Khan. Very few Akalis eventually participated in the Quit Indian Movement. Another reason why the Akalis joined the Unionists was to hamper the prospects of realisation of the demand for Pakistan by a political alliance, with them, and of the Muslim and Sikh communities stood firm, the creation of Pakistan would have remained an aspiration. To the midst of this came the C Rajagopalachari proposal which intended to recognize the principle of Pakistan. The Muslim League and the Akalis jointly tried to resolve the Pakistan issue and reach an understanding, but the events in the Akali history their move away from the Congress, their coalition with the Unionist, all suggested that the Akalis chose to play a different role in the politics of Punjab (66).

The Pakistan resolution of the Muslim League affected the Akalis the most. Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh declared that Pakistan could be formed only over their dead bodies. To counter this idea of Pakistan the Akali leaders put forth the idea of Azad Punjab proposing reorganization of the Punjab within a sovereign Indian state with 40% Muslims, 40% Hindu and 20% Sikh population. The basic idea was to create a smaller political unit in which no single community could be numerically. The Akalis were unhappy with the congress attitude towards the idea of Pakistan. They put forth the idea of a sikh state in 1944, the base for which had been gradually established since 1940.

The Muslim League was emerging as a powerful party and was successful in breaking the Unionist stronghold over the Punjab, especially after the death of Sikandar Hyat Khan on 26 Dec. 1942. The Unionist ranks were divided and disorganised thereafter. The 1946 election results confined the cleavage pattern of Punjab politics. The Unionists fared miserably. On the basis of rural solidarity they got only 20 seats in the Punjab assembly. The power of the Muslim league in the 1940's signaled the realignment of politics around identity of religious communities. In the 1948 elections the Muslim League emerged the single largest party.

TABLE II  
1946 Election Results

Party	Muslim	Hindus	Sikhs	Total
Muslim League	75	-	-	75
Congress	1	40	10	51
Akali Dal	-	-	22	22
Unionist Party	15	4	-	20*
Independents	-	-	-	7
				175

\* including 1 Christian (67).

In the elections held in 1946, the Akalis fought on the issue of Pakistan, independently of the Congress, but in support of the unity and integrity of the country. They foresaw a better future for the sikh Panth in a united Indian sovereign state. In four Sikh constituencies they joined hands with the Congress against the Communists whose manifesto favoured a Sikh state as well as Pakistan. The Akalis won 23 out of 33 Sikhs seats, emerging as the dominant sikh political party. They were followed by the congressite Sikhs and not the Unionists. Though with only a narrow margin in their priorities, the Akalis professed to place the Panth before the country and the congressite Sikhs accorded priority to the country before the Panth (68).

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the Punjab as elsewhere in India one impact of British rule was that western ideas and Christian missionaries were seen in an accelerated process of reification of religious understanding. Wilfrid Cantwell Smith describes this as comprising. "the preaching of a vision, the emergence of followers, the organization of a community, the positing of an intellectual ideal of that community, the definition of the actual pattern of its institution (69).

This process of reification gained momentum in the 20th century and led to the mistaken belief that religious, social and political loyalties are invariably coterminous. As Surjit Mansingh's study reveals, the relationship between religious identity and political behaviour is not predetermined, but is true product of several conscious factors including the institutional framework (70).

The institutional framework of politics in British India was shaped, on the one hand, by the efforts of more and more Indians to enlarge the arena of their participation and control and on the other the multi-dimensional endeavour of the British to retain power themselves and reward cooperative Indians. It is evident that intricate manouvers by individuals and groups in the first half of the 20th century, were made to gain representation in provincial and

legislative bodies and share of power if possible in the government. However, every step of constitutional reform beginning in 1909 had clear communal accent, as they favoured representation through separate electorates and reservation at the discretion of the British government.

India, traditionally a socio-religious country with a hierarchical and a political system, now turned towards a different political culture marked by representation and self government aspiring towards democracy. The results were anticipated vertical division in society wherein horizontal cross-community coalitions were made extremely difficult. Another result was the translation of loose numbers of religious communities into tight figures of political identity leading to the permanent notion of majority vs minority with the British protection of the latter against the former.

At the national level the INC battled separate electorates and claimed to speak on behalf of all Indians. The All India Muslim League led by Jinnah claimed to be sole spokesman of the Muslims and fought for separate representation and reservation in proportion to historical contribution rather than numbers. In the Punjab it was the Sikhs who sought voice reflecting their importance and not merely their number. During negotiations of the 1930's, Sikh leaders dealt with the British, the Congress and the League,

trading their support for protection of Sikh rights in a changing situation (71).

Once the British implicitly accepted the League's claim that the Muslims were a separate nation entitled to an autonomous homeland on the subcontinent, the future of India was uncertain. In 1946, the British, the Congress and the League clashed on the issue of constitutional provisions for Independent India. Sikh leaders under Master Tara Singh spelt out the goals of sovereign state for the Sikhs in March 1946, when they perceived that the sabotage of the Cabinet Mission Plan by the Congress leaders was going to lead to communal partition of the subcontinent. The scheme had tried to avert partition on communal lines by recognising the provinces as autonomous units of a contemplated federation. Under it Punjab, like other provinces, was to become autonomous in all areas with three subjects reserved for central government.

Nehru and Patel manipulated the Constituent Assembly in a manner in which demands of leaders representing different communities were undermined. The Sikh members of the Constituent Assembly led by Hukum Singh and Bhupinder Singh refused to append their signatures on the constitution proclaiming, "The Sikh do not accept this constitution. The Sikhs reject the constitution Act". This rejection was activated by the fact that the principles which had been



agreed upon to form the basis of Indian constitution had been thoroughly undermined in the course of drafting. The sikhs realised that the notion of provincial jurisdiction under the constitution was a myth. The constitution bestowed on the Union the residuary powers of legislation over the states under Art 248 and 254 (72). The sikhs were not satisfied in joining either India or Pakistan, nor could the British assure the Sikhs protection of their lands, property and lives.

It was in this atmosphere, when some Princes' were expected to assume independent status, though the Sikhs put a claim for a separate homeland. This suggestion found the support of some influential British officials, but was rejected because the dispersal of sikhs throughout the Punjab, without predominance of numbers in contiguous districts, made it impracticable. Communal riots broke out and culminated in partition during the summer of 1947.

To outline the major concerns of the Akalis before independence, one notes that they were not much different from what the Singh Sabhas aimed at -

- Closely allied to the SGPC the Akalis were keen to preserve their distinctive identity.
- The question whether or not sikhs were Hindu had been answered for them by Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha before 1900 in his article Hum Hindu Nahin. The distributive

identity of the sikhs in their eyes was primarily religious and it was to be preserved through the Khalsa rahit, the Singh way of life. The Sikh identity was equated with Singh identity, relegating the Sahajdharis to the background. They had been marrginalized, numerically and doctrinally, during the previous half of the century.

- The Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script was another element in sikh cultural identity for the Akalis. This too was a legacy of the Singh Sabha movement.
- Another concern for the Akalis was on adequate share in political power separate electorate and weightage for sikhs had been introduced when the Akalis appeared on the political scene. This legacy came from the CKD. The national legacy of the Central Sikh League was cherished by the pro-Congress Sikhs, the religio-political concerns were appropriated and reinforced by the Akalis.

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## CHAPTER III

### AKALI POLITICS: POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD TO THE ANANDPUR SAHIB RESOLUTION

#### INTRODUCTION

The foremost tasks faced by independent India in the aftermath of partition and independence were to build national unity and bring about socio-economic progress. These were formidable tasks in a vast country inhabited by people of diverse ethnic groups, languages and faiths, tenuous political linkages, and immense disparities of wealth. The Congress approach to the problem was to win the allegiance of the maximum number of people by making available the fruits of freedom: full participation in public life through democratic institutions including universal adult suffrage, full religious freedom protected by a neutral and impartial state, economic development and social reform led by the state (1).

To accommodate the interests of vast ethnic groups the central government had to make prominent changes in its priorities and policies. As a result of changes at the national level, regional political parties also streamlined their demands. However, one regional political party, the Akali Dal in the Punjab did not show any drastic change in

the priorities. Their interest remained in boosting Sikh identity and in demanding a separate state. Certain changes in the nature of politics after independence, induced by changes at the centre, were visible in the later years.

This chapter is an effort to document and analyse the phenomenon of Akali ideology and tactics at the political level and a subtle account of Sikh religious revivalism at the cultural level. The paper will account for both religious and political changes in Punjab politics after independence to the pronouncement of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of Oct. 1973.

#### SECULAR PROVISIONS IN INDEPENDENT INDIA: CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Secular practice in India is equivocal though it has changed over time and reflects a certain degree of confusion over the meaning of the term secular. The ecclesiastical structure does not exist in India but religious symbolism manifests itself in everyday life making it difficult to interpret India as an anti-religious state. The secular provisions in the Indian constitution of 1950 are explicit. Art 14, gives equal protection of the law to all citizens, Art 15, forbids state discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in any matter. Art 25, guarantees freedom of conscience to all and equal right to profess, practice and propagate religion, subject to public

order, health and morality. Art 26, gives each religious denomination the right to establish and maintain institutions, to own and acquire property and administer its affairs in accordance with law. Art 27 and 28 prohibit the state from levying taxes in support of religion or making religious instruction compulsory in state schools. Art 29 reads, "Any section of the citizens of India... having a distinct language, script or culture shall have the right to conserve the same". Art 30, gives religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and administer educational institutions which may qualify for state grants without any discrimination.

The sharp focus of controversy have been the two explanations that follow article 25 of the constitution. The first states that the wearing and carrying of Kirpans is deemed to be included in the profession of the Sikh religion and the second states that reference to Hindus or to Hindu religious institutions should be construed as including persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religions. Whereas it is important to point out that, by the time the constitution of India was adopted in 1950, historical evidence from early 20th century, revealed that the Sikhs had asserted their distinctness and had also demanded a separate state before independence. This demand continued after independence as well, when economic, social and cultural aspiration began to find keen expression in politics. The

Akali Dal in Punjab was no exception and went a step ahead to intermix religion in politics. Despite the Akalis' steady desire to attain their political aspirations, the issues of politics underwent significant changes due to several developments in the realms of economy, social structure and culture.

After partition a climate grew wherein, the ills of religion found political expression but its strengths were unable to check corruption and violence in public life (2). This crisis was manifested by, though not confined to, the Punjab. At the theoretical level, the authority of religion determines, to a large extent the political responses and behaviour of the people; and for the Sikhs their religion was the supreme authority (3).

The partition left its mark on the political development and socio-economic structure of the Punjab. The creation of East and West Punjab caused the problem of rehabilitation of refugees and their socio-economic and cultural integration into the body politic of the Punjab. This altered the demographic pattern, changed forces and transformed the economic and class composition. The changed nature of the composition of the population, the local refugee conflict turned into a clash of communal interests around which the tension multiplied (4). The Hindu-Sikh and urban property left by the Muslims. This communal cleavage

became a permanent feature of the political system in Punjab. The rural-urban, agriculturist and non-agriculturist cleavages also came up, which reduced to Hindu-Sikh conflict.

The politics of separate electorate and weightage ended with the adoption of a new constitution for India after independence. There appeared to be no room for weightage to religious minorities in a federal republic with a parliamentary democracy, based on adult suffrage and with fundamental rights of all its citizens inscribed in a written constitution. The resolution of the Akali Dal in favour of continuing separate representation for Sikhs, passed in Oct. 1948, went unheeded. The concessions and reservation provided for the Scheduled Castes were not meant to be applicable to the Sikh Scheduled Castes on the argument that the 'panth' was an egalitarian social order. Last minute efforts of the Sikh members of the constituent assembly to get proportionate representation on the basis of joint electorate, with the right to contest additional seats, proved futile and they refused to sign the draft constitution to be adopted by the people of India on 28 Jan. 1950 (5). Ever since, the Sikh politicians remained a disgruntled lot and began movements to strengthen their institutional framework, which has served as an arena and a base for Sikh separatism. Sikh political demands before and after independence must be discussed in the light of the genesis of Sikh communal consciousness and

the motivations, strategies and tactics employed by the representative organization of the community.

Though there is considerable controversy over the term 'secular' one cannot deny its intricate linkage to religion and politics. "All religious movements in India are political. The people have not yet learned to sever religious faith from civil government. Hence the constant fear that the British Government is aiming directly at the conversion of the people to Christianity. Hence also the fact that every attempt to establish a new creed takes more or less avowedly, the form of an attempt to establish a new Government", (6) wrote a senior British official in 1863.

For the purpose of this paper, the structuration theory of Lee Raymond L.M. would be useful. His theory provides insights into the reproduction circuits inherent in religious systems and the impact of other systems on these circuits. Secularization acts as a motor of change in religious systems. "The secularizing tendency reduces or subordinates public power of religious institutions, actually reflects an action dimension of human agency capable of transforming prior social arrangement. But in effect reproduces certain basic principles which are masked by surface changes". He further explains that when religious activists become critical of their government's increasingly secular policies, they seek to counter them through popular

religious movements (7). The Sikh religious movement can also be seen as a unique form of religious reproduction occasioned by reactions to modernity and government policies over a period of time.

Ethnic passions, ideologues, movements and parties are the outcomes of elemental drives at the popular level. Manifestation of ethnicity in Indian politics is a creation of vested interests. Certain ethnically active political organisations exhibit anti-secular tendencies and this is where secularism and anti-secularism appear to clash (8). Empirical reality of ethnic politics is well illustrated in the Punjab, where the Akali Dal has managed to keep the issue of Sikh identity alive, by mixing religion and politics at the popular level. Infact the onus of ethnicising the politics of Punjab, lies partially on the Sikh Congress leaders.

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According to G.M. Banatwalla the Sikh history has not only raised the issue of the relationship between religion and politics in bold relief, but it also points to the dismal failure to comprehend the legitimate dimensions of the issue and to devise a sound and acceptable political strategy to deal with them. In his analysis, the events after independence have further muddled the issue of the use of religion in politics, causing serious aberrations to the 'secular' ideology enshrined in our constitution. "Subsequent



events, like the open campaign during the census exhorting the Hindus to repudiate Punjabi and declare Hindi to be their mother tongue; the States Reorganization Commission's rejection in 1955 of the demand for a Punjabi speaking state; the question of Chandigarh as a sole capital of Punjab; the agitation for several demands including centre-state relations and those concerning the Sikh identity such as granting 'holy city' status to Amritsar and permission to wear kirpans during air-travel; the demand for amendment of Article 25, of the Commission which clubbed Sikhs with Hindus; growing extremism, indiscriminate humiliation of all Sikhs going to Delhi for the 1982 Asian Games, the Operation Blue Star; the assassination of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and subsequent large scale massacre of Sikhs; have all been contributory factors in aggravating the situation and leading to a religious movement against the state (9).

#### A DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF POST-PARTITION PUNJAB

The killings and the trauma of partition forced a strong sense of self identity on the Sikhs and this has grown since 1947. A powerful voice of Sikh interests and aspirations was the Akali Dal and along with the congress (I) they have been contending for primacy in the politics of Punjab. In recent years the Akalis militarily championed many Sikh claims and demanded greater powers for the state vis-a-vis the national government. Extremists who wanted a

separate state killed several Hindus and members of the deviant Nirankari sect (10). Several queries are raised, which will be dealt with in this paper - if sikhs are a minority what is their self-perception? Whether minorities have a conception of territorial homeland? the extent of cohesion within the community? and whether the community regards itself as a disadvantaged or an achieving minority?

The present day state of Punjab in the Indian Union is the product of several territorial changes made in 1947, 1956 and 1966. Partition gave India 13 out of the 29 districts, 38% of land area and removed the 51% Muslim population. The 1951 census showed Sikhs constituting 33.4% of the population and 49.3% in the PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) (11). As a reaction to this census the Hindus declared Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue. The concept of the common Punjabi culture, languages and interests was hard hit. Both Hindi and Punjabi were declared official languages of the state with school instruction in one or the other, varying according to the majority community of a district.

The basic concerns which the Akalis had come to espouse before 1947 found a solution finally in the creation of a Punjabi speaking state. Paradoxically, however, this was made possible by basic change in the demographic distribution after 1947. Whereas in 1941, the Sikhs formed a little over 13% of total population, their percentage in 1951 rose to

35%. The erstwhile princely states and the districts of the Punjabi zone came to have sikh majority. For the first time in their history, the sikhs found themselves concentrated in a large contiguous territory. Before 1947 all they could expect from a territorial reorganization was some increase in their proportion in the total population. Therefore, they had insisted on reservation and weightage. After 1947 when reservations and weightage for the Sikhs were ruled out, the Akalis could take up the argument of reorganization on the basis of language because of Sikh concentration in a contiguous area. Even so, genuine recording of the mother tongue would have kept Sikhs in minority at least by a narrow margin. The 'communalization' of the language issue converted the Punjabi speaking state into a Sikh majority state.

From 1961-71 Sikhs increased more rapidly than did both Hindus and Muslims and in the next two decades to come, the trend continued. One indication of this process is the extent to which Sikhs and Hindus have increasingly distinguished themselves linguistically. After the Sikhs called for creation of a Punjabi Suba, the Arya Samaj and Tara Singh urged Punjab Hindus to repudiate Punjabi and declare themselves Hindi speakers. By 1971 only one-half of the 5 million Hindus in the state declared Punjabi their mother tongue and in Haryana almost all Hindus declared themselves as Hindi speakers (12). The Sikh diaspora is

worldwide. There are substantial numbers of Sikhs in the United States, Canada, U.K. and Germany, and this fact cannot be ignored. They are important sources for political movements within Punjab. Myron Weiner notes two specialities of minorities in India. Firstly their internal divisions and secondly their relationship with Hindus.

The Sikh society is not cohesive. They are divided between scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste sikhs, between Jat sikhs and other high caste sikhs. These divisions enabled the Congress to win substantial support from among the Sikhs and have prevented the consolidation of the Sikh vote in Punjab around the Akali Dal.

#### PUNJAB: PARTITION AND AGITATION FOR A SEPARATE STATE

Punjab was the key factor in Indian politics which led to the creation of Pakistan. The religious composition of Punjabi's population was peculiar. It pointed the Sikhs between the Hindus and the Muslims, and each one of them was tied up to it with traditions of historical, cultural and economic significance. All these communities held different states in Punjab and attempted to hold on to it till the process of partition of Punjab. This resulted not only from the impact of powers shaping Indian political life and thought, but also from the effects of the British rule on the internal forces which moulded the politics of the province (13). One such force that shaped the politics of the region

was the Shiromani Akali Dal, which claimed to represent the interests of the Sikh community.

In the pre-independence Punjab the main contending parties were the Congress, Muslim League, the Unionists and the Akali Dal. After partition the Muslim League and the Unionists ceased to exist in East Punjab. Their place was taken by new entrants which included the Communist Party and the Jan Sangha. The Akali Dal coalesced with these parties when in need of majority to preserve Sikh interests.

Sikhs in the Punjab were differentiated between predominantly agricultural Jats (the social base of Akalis), scheduled caste or Mazhbi Sikhs (who opposed the landed Jats) and merchant caste Sikhs. Sikh political allegiance was divided between the Congress and the Akali Dal with leftist parties playing a minor role. The Hindu population was mainly urban, though its composition and numbers changed after partition and in the later years, as a result of Punjab's growth in agricultural productivity and affluence which attracted labor from the Ganges Valley (14).

The demand for a separate Sikh state was made in 1940 when the Pakistan scheme was being discussed. This demand was provoked by the Sikh revivalists and at a time when the Singh Sabhas, the Gurdwara reform movement and the Akali Dal were fully active. Reform movement within Sikhism emphasized that

the Sikhs were clearly a distinct political entity and thus required a separate state. The orthodox Akalis deemed a Punjabi Suba important since the modern tendency among Sikhs towards unorthodoxy would mean their assimilation with Hindus. With the two world wars having come to an end and disembodiment of Sikh soldiers from the British army, the economic incentive of joining the army, culminated. With this process, also came to an end, the conversion and adoption of the five symbols by the Hindus seeking recruitment in the British army (15).

The Akali leaders coined the demand for Khalistan in specific geographic terms. Acting as a buffer between Pakistan and Hindustan, the geographical area of this mythical state comprised, in present geographical terms, the whole of Punjab, Chandigarh, Hissar, Rohtak, Ambala, Karnal, Simla Hills and parts of present Pakistan including Lahore, Lyallpur, Gujranwala and Sheikhupura (16). However this myth never became a reality.

After partition the Akalis thought of the linguistic issue more seriously. The outlook of the Indian National Congress on the issue of reorganization of states on linguistic basis had changed radically after Pakistan was created. The Congress leaders had espoused the idea for over two decades before 1947, but now they were strongly opposed to any such reorganization. The conditions suggested by the

Dar commission for reorganization on linguistic basis in 1948 were not easy to fulfil. The committee of the Indian National Congress which considered the Dar report, with Nehru, Patel and Sitaramayya, as its members, was clearly of the view that regardless of merit, no question about the provincial boundaries should for the present be raised in India. Even Nehru who advocated linguistic states before 1947 now favoured the view of giving foremost priority to the sense of unity and no reorganisation of states should be undertaken without the consent of all concerned. Such a consent was not easy to find in the case of Punjab. Not only the Arya Samajists, the Jan Sanghites and the Maha Sabhaites but also the Congress leaders in the Punjab including some of the most important Congressite Sikh leaders were opposed to the idea of the Punjabi speaking state (17).

The 1951 Vidhan Sabha elections brought the issue of the Punjabi speaking state to the fore. While only the Akali Dal was in favour of it, all other parties opposed the idea. In the election the Congress won with 122 seats and 34.8% of votes, the Akali Dal 33 seats with 14.7% of votes. Popular vote suggested that the people were not in favour of a separate state.

**TABLE I**  
**1951 VIDHAN SABHA ELECTIONS IN PUNJAB**

Political Party	Total seats of Vidhan Sabha (Punjab & PEPSU)	% age of Votes	Seats in Punjabi speaking region	% age of Votes
Congress	122	34.8	60	31.3
Akali dal	33	14.7	31	29.0
Communist Party	6	5.3	6	6.1
Jana Sangh	6	5.0	-	4.0
Others and Independents	21	40.2	13	34.6

Source: Report on First General Election in India 1951-52 -  
Vol.II.

The States Reorganization Commission (SRC) was to be formed in the end of 1953, raising hopes among the Akalis and fears among their opponents. The Akalis prepared the case for a Punjabi speaking state covering PEPSU as well as the 'Punjabi zone' of East Punjab. They had abandoned their earlier stand in favour of PEPSU as a separate state because of their experience of the first few years of politics in PEPSU. The Akalis were opposed by the advocates of Maha-Punjab which meant to cover the East Punjab, PEPSU, Himachal Pradesh and a few districts of Uttar Pradesh. The struggle became bitter after independence. The Hindus of the Punjabi



speaking zone won the battle when the commission recommended the formation of a new state by merging both PEPSU and Himachal with East Punjab in Oct. 1955 (18).

The demand for a Punjabi Suba was made in a political climate of communal and linguistic controversies. The then Akali Dal President Master Tara Singh, directed the Akali representative in the constituent Assembly to make representation that a commission be appointed for demarcation of a linguistic state on the basis of Punjabi. Sardar Hukam Singh (The speaker of the Lok Sabha) clarified his position thus; "What the Sikhs desire today is only a respectable and dignified citizenship. They expect no favour and ask for no commission. They want protection from the tyranny of the communal majority, to which they are entitled to as law-abiding citizens of the country. The Sikhs believe that they can secure this protection if a Punjabi speaking province is conceded to them, where they will have a more effective voice." (19).

The Akali negotiations with the Congress in the centre, and their ability to mobilize popular support from the Sikhs convinced Nehru that the Sikh political aspirations had to be accommodated. A compromise was worked out in the form of the Regional Formula which meant to safeguard the interests of the Punjabi language to create scope for a certain degree of legislative and political autonomy in the

Punjabi speaking region after the merger of PEPSU with East Punjab. The working committee of the Akali Dal resolved on 30 Sept. 1956 not to have any separate political programme of its own and to concentrate on the promotion of religious, educational, cultural, social and economic interests of the Sikh Panth. The new state of Punjab was inaugurated on 1 Nov. 1956 (20).

After partition the Akali Dal looked for alternative modes of safeguarding what they perceived to be the cultural and political interests of the Sikhs. Meanwhile, a Congress Akali coalition had been revived in East Punjab after independence under Dr. Gopi Chand Bhargava. As a concession to the Akalis, Giani Kartar Singh replaced the congressiite Ishar Singh Majhail in the Ministry. When Bhim Sen Sachar replaced Bhargava in 1949, Giani Kartar Singh was able to persuade him to resolve the language issue. Controversy over language was an old issue. Soon after the annexation of Punjab the colonial government had introduced Urdu as the medium of instruction as well as administration upto a certain level. Before the end of the 19th century, many educated Muslims had come to accept this policy and many an educated Hindu had argued that it should be replaced by Hindi. The Singh Sabha reformers were in favour of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. After independence, there were two contestants in the field, the protagonists of Hindi in Devanagrii script and Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. Bhim Sen

Sachar's formula was meant to accommodate both. The districts of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana and Ferozpur were to constitute the 'Punjabi Zone' together with Ropar and Kharar tehsils of the Ambala district and the portions of Hissar district lying on the north of the Ghaggar. Punjabi was to be the medium in this zone up to matriculation and Hindi in Devangri script was to be taught from the last year of the primary school. Where the number of pupils was not less than ten at the primary level, a parent could opt for Hindi medium. The rest of the East Punjab formed the 'Hindi zone' in which positions of Punjabi and Hindi were reversed. However the Arya Samaj institutions refused to implement such a programme (21).

In the political circles some people were not too happy with the Regional Formula. One of them was Partap Singh Kairon, the leader of the Congress Party in Punjab and leader of Congressite Sikhs. He ensured that the Congressite Sikhs should be in majority in the new legislative assembly. When the 'save Hindi' agitation was started by the Hindi Raksha Samiti, Kairon showed no hesitation in compromising the language component of the Regional Formula. For two years there was no sign of the Regional Committee visualized in the formula. The Akali leaders drew the conclusion that the Chief Minister was deliberately postponing its implementation. Infact, Kairon tried to dislodge the Akalis from the supremacy in the SGPC which, if anything, had gained in

political importance after independence. He succeeded in making serious inroads into the Akali bastion after the adoption of the Regional Formula. With the help of Giani Kartar Singh, who was then a minister in his cabinet, Kairon dislodged Master Tara Singh from the presidentship of the SGPC in Nov. 1958. An amendment bill was introduced to dilute its democratic character. But the bill was defeated due to its opposition from Sikhs outside the Congress. In the 1959 SGPC elections, the Akalis won 132 of the 139 seats and the members took a pledge at the Akal Takht to work for the achievement of a Punjabi speaking state - 'Punjabi Suba'(22). Baldev Raj Nayar perceived this demand on the basis of language as "a camouflage for the eventual creation of a Sikh theocratic state" (23).

However the majority of Akali legislators in the Congress Party refused to resign on a call from Master Tara Singh. He organised a Punjabi Suba Conference in May 1960 and announced a protest demonstration at Delhi. He was arrested alongwith numerous Akalis who courted arrest in the month following Sant Fateh Singh, the Senior Vice President of the SGPC, dictated the agitation in the absence of Tara Singh. He announced fast unto death in Dec. 1960 after some Akali detenus were killed in firing by the police at Bhatinda because of their refusal to be released. In view of the proposed talks of Sant Fateh Singh with Nehru. Master Tara Singh was released by Kairon. The latter met Nehru and got

assurances about the status of Punjabi in a united Punjab and persuaded Sant Fateh Singh to give up the fast. The Sant agreed and broke his fast on 9 Jan. 1981. About 30,000 Akali volunteers were also released. But the talks with Nehru failed and Tara Singh announced his threat to fast unto death on 15 Aug. 1981. Through Hardit Singh Malik's mediacy, the Master gave up his fast on 1 October and the Das Commission was constituted to go into the grievances of the Akalis. The commission concluded that the Regional Formula had been delayed but not abandoned and therefore, no injustice to the Akalis was involved. Its report was promptly adopted by the government (24).

In November, 1981, five representatives of the Sikh Panth awarded punishment to both Tara Singh and Faeth Singh for going back on their decision on fast unto death without achieving anything. In the election to the Vidhan Sabha held in 1982, the Congress won 90 seats out of 154 placing Kairon for the second term as the Chief Minister. But the voting pattern showed a clear shift of Sikh votes in favour of the Akalis. More than 72% of Sikh voters in the Punjabi speaking region voted for the Akali candidates. However the Akali leadership got divided and in the tussle for dominance Tara Singh lost to Sant Fateh Singh. The latter's whole hearted support to the government during the Chinese invasion established his patrioti~~c~~ credentials. Internal opposition undermined Kairons prestige. A commission of enquiry was

formed to go into the charges levelled against him. In face of an adverse report by the Commission, Kairon resigned in June 1964 and was assassinated in Feb. 1965. By this time, his supporter at the centre, Nehru had died already in May 1964 (25). Sant Fateh Singh had emerged successful in the elections of the SGPC. In the changed circumstances, while Master Tara Singh started toying with the idea of a Sikh homeland to be espoused later by Kapur Singh, Sant Fateh Singh pressed for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state and announced his decision once again to go on a fast. Before this could be done, war with Pakistan broke out in Sept. 1965. Once again he displayed his patriotic zeal during the three weeks of war. A parliamentary committee was set up after the war to go into the question of a Punjabi speaking state all afresh. Meanwhile Lal Bahadur Shastri died, to be succeeded by Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister in Jan. 1966. About six weeks later the Congress Working Committee recommended to the Union Government that a Punjabi speaking state may be created out of the existing state of Punjab. The 'Punjabi Suba' was inaugurated on 1 Nov. 1966 (26).

Perhaps, a separate state for the Sikhs was recognized keeping an important factor in mind. The government realised that the Sikhs were the backbone of the Indian Army. Reorganization in 1966 reduced the Punjab to nine districts with a total population of less than 12 million of whom Sikhs comprised 56%. Punjabi in Gurmukhi script became the

official language, the state capital of Chandigarh was to be shared temporarily with the new state of Haryana; and Hindu majority districts in the north were consolidated into a new state of Himachal Pradesh. Evidently the communal principle was victorious.!

The reorganization was nonetheless disappointing for the Akalis in its actual operation as the capital city of Chandigarh was not included in the Punjab. The issue became more complicated because of subsequent decisions and the control and division of river waters. This too had been much complicated by subsequent decisions, and has remained a vital issue for the Akalis. There also remained the issue of some Punjabi speaking territories left out of the Punjab State created in 1966 (27). The process of reorganization can be looked upon as incomplete and many of the problems of the past quarter of a century can be traced back to the way in which the Punjabi speaking state was created.

#### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE POLITICS OF PUNJAB

A number of factors account for the changing nature of politics in the Punjab. Some factors that existed in pre-independence period remain equally effective in the present day. Hindu communalism, the use of religion in politics by the Akali Dal, rival factions within the Akali Dal, demand for a Punjabi Suba, elections-particularly of the SGPC and the emergence of coalition politics - are some of the factors

that have weighed on the politics of the state, at one time or another.

The demand for a Punjabi Suba remained effective in the politics of the Punjab with slight change in the emphasis in the course of time. Though the achievement of the Punjabi Suba and fulfilment of Sikh aspirations remained interlinked. The Akali demand was encouraged further by the growth of communalism in Hindus. The Hindus attempted to stifle Sikh cultural identity in the Punjab. Spearheaded by the Arya Samaj, the Punjabi Hindu press, by quoting from pamphlets and articles from the pre-partition days, set out to prove that Sikhs and their organizations were aspiring for a Sikh state and their communalism must be curbed keeping with the secular ideal of India. Since the Khalsa was created for protection of Hindus from Moghuls, the problem no longer existed and therefore the existence of the Khalsa was not important, so the Sikhs should revert to Hinduism (28). This feeling was certainly opposed to the spirit of the constitution.

Throughout India, ethnic and communal forces became more assertive after the mid-1960's as seen in the growing strength of organizations seeking to protect the 'sons of the soil' against foreigners; organisations dedicated to equating India with Hindu culture and Hindu power; organisations protecting minority interests with arms. Economic



cooperation increased, so did social violence. Religious celebrations became ostentatious and strident. State institutions and government officials were not immune to these trends, and the neutrality of their decisions on matters ranging from economic allocations to enforcement of law and order became suspect, at the same period of time the role of the state in society and the economy increased, and group demands became more insistent. In the political realm as well, elections revealed increased salience of ascriptive social groups as vote banks swinging the fortunes of political parties at state and centre (29).

A prosperous educated community, the Sikhs, faced unemployment and many sought coherence in scripture - Granth and security in the community - Panth to face the uncertainties around them. At a mundane level, the SGPC funds and support was important for winning elections in Punjab, so that political competition between the Congress and Akali parties, as well as among rural individual leaders of each, centered on the control of the gurdwaras. Religion and politics intertwined at the expense of reason and moderation.

The Sikhs also faced religious annihilation. Young people showed increasing indifference towards religion and religious symbols. This bore harmful results for the Sikhs, because of unorthodoxy left to prevail, it would lead to shearing of hair and beard and this would culminate in their

absorbtion into the Hindu community. It was on this basis of alleged assimilation that social and cultural differences arose between the Hindus and Sikhs (30). According to Khushwant Singh, the sociological connotation for the word Sikh is primary to the religious connotation. To be a Sikh in religious sense does not mean belonging to the community of Sikhs. Those without turbans are Hindus, believing in Sikhism. No person is entitled to be recognized as a Sikh in sociological terms unless he observes the forms and symbols of Sikhism. Religion is indeed the affair of an individual, membership of an organisation is not (31). The orthodox Sikhs therefore considered preservation of the Gurmukhi script and compulsory teaching of Punjabi, imperative for the protection of their religion.

Baldev Raj Nayar's, 'Minority politics in the Punjab' is a study primarily concerned with the political analysis of particular societies and examines the role of religion and religious institutions as factors influencing their political processes. Nayar's work is an excellent analysis of the different forces, for and against the demand for Punjabi Suba during the 50's and early 60's. In this context it surveys the importance of the of the Akali control over the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and the strategic role of Sikh religious symbols in the mobilization of Sikh masses in support of this demand. Another significance of his work, as also of religion in Punjab politics, may be adjudged from

his valid hypothesis that "given the religious underpinnings of the demand for the Punjabi Suba ... it would be idle to expect that the Akali challenge would swiftly vanish" (32). At the national level, the political problem could be reduced to a conflict between two types of leadership with different sets of political values. First category belonged to the rationalist leadership, seeking the achievement of general societal goals regardless of ties to religion, race or language. The second belonged to parochial leadership, seeking the achievement of narrower goals corresponding to religious, ethnic, linguistic, or tribal groups, with little concern for general societal goals.

Such an argument is consistent, however, according to Murray J. Leaf, it seriously distorts reality. The problem seen through the point of view of the followers of religion, one comes to realize that different sections and classes within each community reacted differently and changed their stand according to changes in the socio-economic and political situation. The opposition from Hindus was region and interests based. The communal movement suggested that within the existing political and economic structure social change and participation would increase the scope and intensity of sectarian conflicts (33).

The Shiromani Akali Dal has exemplified the use of religion in politics, as a political party. With the passage

of the Gurdwara Act of 1925 the divisions among Akalis over tactics, got accentuated. This subsequently led to the formation of the rival Central Akali Dal. The original Shiromani Akali Dal, however, remained the dominant group and the central Akali Dal eventually ceased to exist. In post independence India, the SAD has from time to time had rival factions, but their differences have been tactical than ideological. The post-independence Indian National Congress also split into rival groups (34). Internal divisions within the Akali Dal and the Congress remained a prominent feature.

Prior to independence a demand for a Sikh homeland was made by Sikh leaders who conceived of India as having three nations - the nation of Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. The demand became a driving force among virtually all Sikh leaders after 1947, when the possibility of a Sikh majority state was within their grasp. The achievement of a separate state with a Sikh majority in 1966 left Sikh nationalists unsatisfied largely because divisions within the Sikh community frustrated their efforts to seize power. After the Punjab was recognised on a linguistic basis in Nov. 1966, the Akalis were able to form a Government for the first time, but their hold in political power was tenuous. It was not simply because a substantial portion of the Sikh community the scheduled caste Sikhs in their antagonism to Sikh Jats, voted for the Congress party. At different times, the Akali Dal was

therefore forced to join hands with the Congress or any other party in majority. Whenever out of power, the Akalis devised this ingenuous plan, to take a radical position and articulate Sikhs religious concerns (35).

The early activities of the Akal Dal were essentially religious and centered primarily on wresting control and management of the gurdwaras. The linkage of the Akali Dal and the SGPC allows the unique interplay of religion and politics. The Delhi gurdwaras, besides supplementing the income of the SGPC by crores, provides a strong foothold to the Akali Dal in the Union capital to conduct agitation against the central government as and when necessary. The control over SGPC implied that Akalis got ready audience at Gurdwaras since a large number of devotees flock at the shrines. Thus began the legacy of using the sacred precincts for political purposes.

A detailed reference to the relationship of the Akali Dal with the SGPC will prove that control of gurdwara management is an important factor in the politics of Punjab.

The SGPC is a politically relevant body, because the majority party in this elected body is the exclusive spokesperson of the Sikh community, it has huge resources under its jurisdiction and the government role in operationalizing the SGPC provides it the lever of influencing the structure and function of this institution

(36). Political forces in the state keenly contest to acquire and control the resources of the SGPC and herein lies its significance.

The gurdwara elections are especially relevant to the Akali Dal. In the 1960 gurdwara elections there was a vertical split in party leadership on the issue of strategy. One led by Jat leader Sant Fateh Singh and the other led by Master Tara Singh. Two major changes were invoked in the interparty interaction for control of SGPC. firstly, it liberated new forces in the form of the two Dals to which the struggle for dominance in SGPC was to confine. This trend was manifest from the successful no-confidence motions passed against Tara Singh and his executive committee, tabled by the Sant group, after the split. In this tussle the erstwhile issue of Punjabi Suba had relatively suppressed and mutual showdown was the foremost subject. The multifaceted Akali conflict for control of SGPC in the late 60's and early 80's appeared to be the modified version of the same trend (37). The establishment of two Akali Dals has also been interpreted by political analysts as the revolt of Jat Sikhs led by Fateh Singh against the Bhapa leadership of Master Tara Singh (38).

The Sikh elite controlling the SGPC have strong political aspirations and build links with the masses with an eye on the prospective elections to political bodies. Dominance in the SGPC is a factor *sine qua non* for ascendancy

in Sikh politics for any party or group of the Panth. As such the SGPC members are not only politically oriented but power motivated as well. Another finding has been that members of the SGPC succeed in elections by virtue of their performance and reputation in the religio-political field where the political variable acquires more significance (39).

As in the case of recruitment pattern and likages, so with regard to the value pattern of some SGPC members, religion has been found to be a rather weak factor in comparison to the political determinants of their attitudes. Religious values to the extent to which these interact with their political values, are most of the time subject to operational variation under the impact of their political affiliations (40).

Gobinder Singh's study highlights two factors - firstly it sheds the illusion that religious bodies are altruistic, non partisan and impersonal standing above social cleavages. The Akali Dal has proved tht it needs the SGPC to strengthen its own support structure among the Sikh masses and create crisis situation for political rivals, who happen to be in power. Control of this religious institution is therefore very important.

Secondly the Punjab experience indicates that politicization of religion by secular party provides more parochial orientation to politics. Thirdly, all demands

raised by the Akali Dal are made from the religious platform of the SGPC with the view to securing the emotional involvement of Sikh masses and gravitating its overall import.

Fourthly the Akali Dal has generated a milieu in which minority groups are motivated to seek communal cohesion especially the Hindu and Nirankaris. In every Gurdwara election the Akali Dal reiterates its political, cultural and minority demands with greater legitimacy basing its claims on the spokespersonship of the entire Sikh community. This pattern of interaction continues endlessly. The power motives of political parties and the indiscriminate handling of the religious and minority issues at government level have tended to sustain communalism in Punjab politics (41).

The events that took place in the decade of the 70's was to have its effect in the following decades. By the early 70's there was serious crisis in Punjab's political economy as it polarized class distinction. The scope of the crisis was enhanced by the nature of the Indian nation state in general and pro-rich policies of the Akali Dal in particular. As things took shape - the Damdami Taksal was established which would articulate their aspirations forcefully by challenging status quo, to turn the 1980's into a decade of so called Sikh fundamentalism.



A brief survey of some election results will show the circumstances under which coalition politics emerged in Punjab.

The Akali's dilemma after independence was how to unite the Sikhs who had varied economic interests. Prominent Akali leaders like Baldev Singh and Swaran Singh joined the Congress and the government. In such circumstances post-partition Akali politics was quite similar to pre-independence pattern. The Akali Dal broke into two factions, one pro-congress supported by rural Jats and the other anti-government led by urban leadership. One group of the Akalis led by Udham Singh Nagoke and Ishar Singh Mujhail made an alliance with the Maharaja of Patiala, in a bid to capture the SGPC and then join the Congress. The idea was to preserve Sikh unity and fulfil Sikh interests by pressurising the Congress from within and without (42). n

The relation of the Akali Dal to the Congress have been rather tenuous. The Punjab Congress prior to partition was involved in acute factional fights between Gopi Chand Bhargava and Satya Pal groups. After independence this continued. They sought to dominate the Congress by creating coalitions which would gain majority support in the congress, and bring about political integration. The faction of the Congress which sought Akali support became in turn more dependent upon their support and more vulnerable to criticism.

But as things turned out to be the Akalis withdrew support to Bhargava expressing dissatisfaction on the decision of the medium of instruction in schools. The Sachar group was now more favourable and thus the Akalis began a cycle of instability in the face of poor institutionalization (43). There were several occasions when the Akalis, owing to their dissatisfaction and in order to pacify the Sikh demands, directed the members of the legislative assembly to abandon the Congress and return to the Akali Dal. This was done in July 1950 when Master Tara Singh and his members left the Congress, to fight for separate state for Sikhs.

**TABLE 2**

**PARTY POSITION IN 1954 MID-TERM POLLS IN PEPSU**

Party	Seats contested	Seats Won	Percentage of votes
Congress	43	22	40.4
Akali Dal	33	10	27.6
Akali Dal(Rarewala)	22	2	9.9
CPI	10	4	8.1
Jana Sangha	7	0	0.6
Independents	37	5	13.3

Source: Report on Assembly Election in Punjab - PEPSU.

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

The Akali Dal contested the 1954 PEPSU elections primarily on Punjabi Suba issue. Their manifesto favoured the abolition of biswadari and jagirdari, grant of land to landless, development of cottage industries, introduction of profit sharing schemes for the welfare of those employed on land and in factories, stimulated the cooperative movement, amelioration of the condition of backward classes etc. But the Congress reaffirming its socialist ideology won the mid term polls of 1954. It won 22 seats with 40.4% of votes while the Akalis won only 10 with 27.5% of votes.

TABLE 3

PARTY POSITION IN 1957 ELECTIONS

Party	Seats in Punjab	% age of votes in Punjab	Seats in Punjabi region	% age of votes in Punjabi region
Congress	180	47.5	71	48.6
Jana Sangha	9	8.6	5	7.2
Communist	6	13.6	3	17.7
Others and Independents	29	30.3	7	26.5

Source: Report on IInd General Election in India. Vol.III, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Dramatic shifts could be discerned in the voting pattern. In previous elections the correlation between Congress vote and the proportion of Hindu population was positive and that with Sikh was negative. In the 1957 elections the order changed. The correlation with Hindus, scheduled castes and Hindi speakers were all negative and with Sikhs and Punjabi speakers, except urban, were all positive. Therefore it is clear that overwhelming support to Congress came from rural Sikhs. The election results should that the support for parties in Punjabi was largely class based. The results confirmed that whereas the Akali Dal was able to unite Sikhs on religious and cultural issues and monopolise communal support for matters such as SGPC election, it could not reconcile urban-rural cleavage within Sikhs for matters purely political as it was connected with economic interests (44).

The Akali Dal contested the 3rd general election of 1962 again on Punjabi Suba issue. Its manifesto reflected a substantial change from its earlier views on economic issues. In the 1962 manifesto Akali Dal opposed cooperative farming and high taxation. It favoured nationalization of banks and heavy industries. The manifesto was clearly drafted from the point of view of Sikh electorate who belonged to land-owning peasantry and urban middle class.

**TABLE 4**  
**RESULTS OF THE THIRD GENERAL ELECTIONS IN THE PUNJAB 1982**

Party	Seats in Punjab	% age of votes in Punjab	Seats in Punjabi region	% age of votes in Punjabi region
Congress	90	43.7	49	45.7
CPI	9	7.1	9	10.3
Akali Dal	19	11.9	19	20.7
Jana Sangh	8	9.7	4	7.6
Swatantra	-	2.4	-	2.4
Republican	-	2.2	-	2.8
PSP	0	0.9	-	0.7
Independents and others	25	20.8	5	10.3

Source: Election Commission Report on III General Elections in India, 1982. Nehru Memorial Museum Library.

The 1982 results showed the Congress ostensibly stronger than it had been in 1957, class support. Its correlation with both total Sikh votes and rural sikh votes became negative from a considerable positive in 1957. On the other hand the correlation between Akali Dal votes and all the variables was significantly positive suggesting that rural Sikhs had shifted their support from Congress to Akali Dal. The Scheduled castes voted for the independents. The

urban Sikhs like the urban Hindus with similar economic interests voted for Jana Sangh. The good relation of the Akali Dal and the Communists, fetched the latter a number of rural votes, presumably from small farmers and landless labourers. The Akali Dal in 1962 was very much visible as a party of rural Sikhs or landed agricultural castes (45).

In the 1960's the Akali Dal reflected an image of a party that was divided on issues of interests, conflict as well as strategy. The dominant wing of the Akali Dal no longer radiated the image of a pure militant communal party. The Akali motives were clear by the role it played in the reorganised Punjab. It reflected that it was interested more in acquisition and retention of power as a moderate political party. The Akali quest for power made them forge alliances with the Jana Sangha in 1967, 1969 and 1977 and give importance to moderate economic issues and legislative leadership as against militant communal issues and leadership (46).

A glimpse at the 1967 and 1969 Vidhan Sabha elections revealed the same trend in the political parties. The Master Tara Singh group contested the 1967 elections on purely religious issues and propagated communal demands. Despite voicing radical positions the group faced massive defeat. After the elections, with political power in sight, all non-Congress parties namely, both Akali Dals, CPI and CPI(M), Jan

Sangh, Republican party and Independents came together under the leadership of Akali Dal (Sant) with Gurnam Singh as the leader of the United Front government. He formed his ministry on 8 March, 1967 can be attributed 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. In addition an important reason for the decline of the congress was a change in political orientation of the class of sikh farmers. The Akali Dal not only retained popular support but increased it in the 1969 polls. (47).

**TABLE 5**

**PARTY POSITION IN PUNJAB VIDHAN SABHA 1967 AND 1969 ELECTIONS**

Party	1967		1969	
	Seats Won	Percentage	Seats Won	Percentage
Congress	48	31.8	38	39.2
Akali Dal (Sant)	24	20.46	43	28.6
Akali Dal (Tara)	2	4.23	-	-
Jan Sangh	9	9.85	8	8.8
CPI	5	5.18	3	4.5
CPI (M)	3	3.28	2	3.3
Republican	3	1.79	0	1.1
Praja Socialist	Nil	0.51	1	0.5
Socialist	1	0.72	2	0.8
Swantantra	0	0.50	1	0.9
Janata	-	-	1	1.7
Independents and others	9	16.10	4	10.8

Source: Punjab Election Results register Vol.III.  
Nehru Memorial Museum Library.

## AKALI DEMANDS AND THE ANANDPUR SAHIB RESOLUTION

The response of the Akali Dal to popular demands was shaped by the nature of Sikh political participation. The general normative notion is that the Sikhs are a collectivity, a 'panth' and they are monolithic. But on the contrary the Sikhs are divided by geography, ethnicity, social hierarchy, sects, ritual practices, and individual preferences. Therefore when it comes to political participation, Sikhs have never been represented by a single political party. They have been party to extremities from conservatism to radicalism (48).

Over the years it is remarkable how the Akalis have enlarged their support base among the Sikh landowners. But the Akalis have not yet achieved political dominance (49). Two new dimensions were added to the political situation of Punjab due to the struggle for power between the <sup>AD</sup> Punjab and the Congress, a fundamentalistic reinterpretation of the Sikh tradition, the seriousness with which the idea of Khalistan has been exposed by a number of Sikhs and supported with militant action.

In its struggle for achievement of their demands, the Akali Dal has access to large and significant financial and organizational resources. Three political strategies emerge as important in any consideration of Akali activities. The constitutional, involves use of methods within the framework



of the existing constitution. The Akali Dal submits memoranda and petition to government officials, including commission of inquiry. At public level it arranges large meetings, holds mass rallies. The infiltrational mode involves merger into the Congress which controls the government.

The Agitational mode involves launching a series of agitations or *morchas*. A *morcha* literally means an entrenchment, but while the Akalis do entrench themselves firmly inside the gurdwaras, they also engage the government in a direct confrontation organized and directed from within the gurdwaras, through sending out of quasi-military formations which deliberately violate the law in an attempt to fill the jails. Purpose is to overwhelm the government by inducing into the agitation thousands of volunteers ready to court imprisonment, thus forcing all government activity to concentrate on coping with the agitation (50).

The Akali Dal has given expression to greater political ambitions. The party's constitution states. "Shiromani Akali Dal stands for the creation of an environment in which the Sikh national expression finds its full satisfaction". In the past Akali leaders interpreted this aim to mean the creation of a sovereign Sikh state. Before 1947 several schemes for Azad Punjab and Sikhistan were formulated by the Akali leaders. Whatever the virtue of these schemes and strength of sentiment among the Sikhs for

them, the demographic situation of the Punjab stood against the achievement of Akali objectives. The British were sympathetic to the Akali demands but they too faced the same compulsions (51).

The top leaders of the Akali Dal made statements that made it impossible to divest the demand of Punjabi Suba of its communal association and implications. To the Sikh masses the demand was frankly presented in the name of the religion and as one that would secure the rule of the Sikh. Three factors seem important first, the nature of the Sikh community as interpreted by the Akali Dal and intellectuals. Second, fear about possible disintegration of the community resulting from religious unorthodoxy. Finally, the sense of grievance over alleged discrimination against the Sikh community.

The Akali leadership also reveals frequent shifts in ideology. Baldev Raj Nayar categorizes the leadership in three parts. The first type belongs to those leaders who not only have professed belief in secular nationalism and have also demonstrated their opposition to the Akali Dal, and its communal demands. The prime example in this case is Partap Singh Kairon. The second category belongs to those, who, while expressing sympathy with the Akali Dal demands, do so on a non communal basis. Hukam Singh, the speaker of the Lok Sabha is an interesting example. He favoured the achievement

of Punjabi Suba and actively participated in the agitation of 1955 and was arrested for it. The third category is of those leaders who find membership of Congress a suitable instrument for pursuing personal or community goals and are ready to forsake the party when the goals are frustrated. Giani Kartar Singh is a good example. He has been characterized as "the brain behind the Akali Party", "the most cunning intriguer" etc. Before independence he led the group that wanted to reach an accommodation with the Muslim League. He authored most of the political formulas - the Azad Punjab Scheme, Sikhistan, Sachar Formula and the Regional Formula (52).

A major resentment harboured by the Akali Dal was alleged discrimination by the central government. The Presidential promulgation of 1950 declared certain castes as scheduled castes on the ground that Sikhism did not believe in caste distinction and untouchability and it was interpreted as a calculated move for reabsorbing the Sikhs into Hinduism. The Akali representatives in the Parliament Sardar Hukam Singh observed, "they (Akalis) apprehend that this was a prop or temptation by the state to get Sikhs converted to Hinduism. Their apprehensions have since become true, as according to Census Commissioner it is only the Sikhs that have decreased in population, and our estimate is that about two lakhs have gone back. The reason is also explained by the commissioner himself that the Sikh backward

classes are reverting to their old faith as it is more advantageous for them for they cannot get the similar economic concession by continuing as Sikhs" (53).

Another instance in which Akalis got a chance to arouse Sikh masses was the promulgation of President's rule in PEPSU in 1952, which gave the province the distinction of being the first state in independent India to pass under Presidential rule. The Sikhs felt it an undemocratic move. Hukam Singh perceived it as a challenge to the Sikh homeland. It was meant to establish the impression that the centre was fully resolved to devalue the Sikh community. He changed the actual working of the Punjab administration and Congress politics had amply demonstrated that far from weaning themselves from irrational outlook, they had aggressively pursued the policy of deliberate discrimination of the Sikhs. The fears of annihilation of the Sikhs as a religious entity could be removed by creating a unilingual Punjabi state (54).

Even before 1947, the Akali struggle was essentially, a political struggle. Before 1966 they could think of a substantial share in political power. After 1966 they could look for dominance in politics of the Punjab because of the numerical superiority of the Sikhs whom they professed to represent. After the election of 1967, two Akali ministeries fell within 19 months, to be followed by President's rule. The third Akali ministry was formed after the mid-term poll

of 1969. Its tenure of about two and a half years was marked by the fast unto death by Darshan Singh Pheruman on the Chandigarh issue. The Prime Minister's award gave Chandigarh to the Punjab but a part of Fazilka was to be handed over to Haryana. The rupture between Sant Fateh Singh and Akali Chief Minister. Gurnam Singh resulted in the latter's replacement by Parkash Singh Badal. The rupture between the Akalis and the Jana Sanghite coalition partners marked the end of friendly alliance. Finally in June 1971, the Assembly was dissolved on the advice of the Chief Minister, P.S. Badal. In the elections held in 1972, the Akalis won only 24 seats out of a total of 104. Before the end of 1972, a sub-committee of the Working Committee of the Akali Dal made recommendations, inter-alia on Centre-State relations.

In Punjab many types of demands religious, political, social and economic combined to create further problems. The Akali Dal combined all these demands - such as water rights, agricultural support prices, investment in industry, traditional recruitment to the armed forces, enlarged territory and jurisdiction over Chandigarh - in a statement, Basic Postulates of the Shiromani Akali Dal (55). The Akali Dal decided to inculcate religious fervour among Sikhs creating a congenial atmosphere for Khalsa pre-eminence, and obtaining greater autonomy for Punjab and other states in federal India.

On 17 Oct. 1973 the Akali Dal met at Sri Anandpur Sahib and passed a number of resolutions (their basic postulates) which were documented as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) a document that was to create political turmoil in the state. It was authenticated by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal (56).

The Akalis seem to have convinced themselves that there was a diabolical conspiracy to deprive the sikhs of their heritage and to turn them into second class citizens. That will partly explain the emergence of the ASR. The resolutions insist on implementation of ASR in letter and spirit thereby conceding their demand for a separate Sikh state, which was not acceptable to the centre.

Socio-economic transformation in this state changed the nature of politics and consequently the leadership of Punjab. Following the capitalist path of development the accelerated growth in the agrarian sector made Punjab the first region in South Asia to experience the Green Revolution. The social costs of agrarian revolution have been extremely high and Punjab society became highly polarized. In comparison to small and marginal farmers the rich farmers were lucky in the Green Revolution. Negative returns for small farmers made it difficult to sustain family farms. As a result small holdings vanished and some Sikhs experienced unemployment.

According to the classical model of development, the dispossessed either join the ranks of the agrarian labour force or turn to jobs in the burgeoning industrial sector. In Punjab the transition was complex. The bulk of small and marginal farmers belonging to the high status of Jat caste faced landlessness, and were unwilling to work with low caste Harijans as farm labourers. The other option of working in the industrial sector was equally difficult. Firstly, because Punjab did not have large scale industries that could absorb the depeasantized Sikh farmers. Second, even if such jobs existed the work force made up of migratory labour from poorer regions who worked on subsistence wages for long hours. This was resisted by the peasants (57).

Rising tide of inequalities in Punjab did not blend easily with the dominant ethos of Sikh religious tradition, which demanded a just moral economy based on equitable distribution of wealth and resources. From its inception the Sikh discourse has sought to create an egalitarian society where all men would be equal and share the ritual, sacred, profane and economic resources collectively (58).

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In an overall perspective, the Akali Dal has used sizeable resources to create political instability to keep itself at the helm of Sikh affairs in the state. Their resources remain a permanent feature as any attempt to curb

them would result in the opposition by not only the Akali Dal but also by the Sikh community as well, since these resources originate from their place of worship. The All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) at the behest of the Akali Dal, performs the role of propagating the Sikh religion, but more importantly it spreads the Akali ideology and opinion. This youth organisation is completely controlled by the Akali Dal and is prominently used for demonstrations and *morchas*.

The Akali Dal presents a formidable challenge to the Congress in view of its ability to mobilize the support of a large part of the Sikh masses, its role in the gurdwara reform movement and its ability to use the large monetary and manpower resources of the SGPC. While the ASR showed its bias against traders and industrialists, the Akalis demanded the need to break the monopolistic hold of the capitalists on the economy. The Akalis consistently maintained that Punjab had been unfairly treated by the centre. It was this sentiment they propagated in the hope of remaining in power. But subsequent decades had different problems to confront, the major one being, rise of Sikh militancy.



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50. DHILLON DALBIR SINGH; op cit; pp.171-173.
51. Ibid, p.151.
52. NAYAR BALDEV RAJ; op cit; pp. 134-139.
53. NARANG A.S.; op cit; pp. 115-116.
54. Ibid; pp. 118-119.
55. CHOPRA V.D.; The Agony of the Punjab. Patriot Publishers; New Delhi, 1984, p.91.
56. A resolution was adopted in the light of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, at the open session of the 18 All India Akali Conference held at Ludhiana on 28-29 Oct. 1978 under the Presidentship of Jathedar Jagdev Singh Talwandi. It was after the passing of these resolutions that the Akali Dal started the struggle therefor.
57. OBEROI HARJOT SINGH; op cit; p.264.
58. Ibid; p. 265.

## CHAPTER - IV

### PUNJAB: STATE CRISIS AND DECADENCE IN THE 80'S

#### INTRODUCTION

The chapter is an attempt to document the growth and decline of militant Sikhism in Punjab. It emerged under the stewardship of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Over a period of time it lost its importance due to divisions, ideological schisms, oppositional forces and general apathy to terrorist methods. The 1992 elections constitute a milestone in Indian democracy. In the course of this chapter various instances will testify that democracy is still viable in a state like Punjab and militancy is only a temporary phase. Various factors which make this phase prominent, will be discussed hereafter under the political, religious, economic and social dimensions.

#### THE AKALI MALAISE

Many problems in a twice partitioned Punjab arose from the unsuccessful efforts of the Akali Party to play the leading role in Punjab politics.

With an assured support base confined to the agriculturist Jat Sikhs, the Akalis aimed to gain an absolute majority and control of state government. Political competition among rivals centered on control of well funded

Sikh Gurdwaras, especially the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Many economic and social problems among Sikhs surfaced in the 1970's as a result of shrinking landholdings and employment opportunities in the armed forces or overseas, lack of industrial investment in Punjab, and the confusing impact of modernism on their austere faith with its distinctive outward symbols (1).

During the ministry of Giani Zail Singh, formed after the elections of 1972, the Akalis chose to support the movement of Jai Prakash Narain against the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. When she declared the country to be under internal emergency in June 1975, the Akalis convened a special meeting of their executives to pass a resolution to oppose the fascist tendency of the Congress. After the emergency of 1975-77, an Akali-Janata combine came into power, under the Chief Ministership of Prakash Singh Badal. When the Janata government fell at the centre, the Congress routed this coalition and Darbara Singh was elected as Chief Minister of Punjab. The Akalis decided to destabilize the Congress government through agitation. They launched the 'save democracy' campaign in July and by the end of the emergency in 1977, nearly 40,000 Akalis had courted arrest (2).

The central government retaliated by giving an adverse verdict on the river waters issue. Simultaneously the Defence

Minister passed orders that recruitment to the army would be in proportion to the population of the state. This implied a drastic cut in the recruitment of Sikhs.

Amidst their agitation against the Congress, the Akalis hailed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as a charter of Sikh demands. Some important resolutions were passed in Oct. 1978 at Ludhiana having a bearing on the merger of Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas with Punjab. The other demands included the control and just distribution of river waters, the maintenance of traditional ratio of the Sikhs in the Indian army, and above all on greater autonomy for the states. The Akalis even appealed to the Supreme Court on the issue of river waters. The case was still pending in the court when Akali leaders met Indira Gandhi for negotiations in 1981 after their defeat in the elections of 1980. All these issues, along with many others, figured in Akali-Congress negotiations before June 1984 and in the Rajiv Longowal accord of 1985. But, as of today, these issues are still pending and the Akalis are still in political wilderness.

In the early 1980's symbolic matters such as naming of streets, the sale of tobacco, broadcasting devotional music-were subjects of bargaining between Chandigarh and New Delhi and the interests of a state of the union. Demands made for water rights, agricultural support prices, industry,



employment jurisdiction over the state capital of Chandigarh were labelled as Sikh demands opposed by a Hindu Central government. Such feelings further deepened the chasm between Hindus and Sikhs. The Akalis stridently took up the cause of the Sikhs and encouraged terrorist activities which aimed at eliminating the Hindus (3).

In this same decade the assortment of economic, religious and political demands put forth by the Akalis were revived. Mrs. Gandhi refused to respond to the demands reasonably expressed. She encouraged a village preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, whose appeal to young Sikhs, adrift in a tension between faith and non-faith, was strong. Their activities broke the leadership of the moderate Akalis and undermined the law and order situation in the state. Funds, arms and seditious ideas from Sikhs living abroad added to an explosive mix (4). By using the army to assault the Golden Temple in June 1984, Indira Gandhi's government alienated the Sikhs around the world, irrespective of their political affiliations.

In the midst of such disruptions the Akali Dal managed to keep <sup>a</sup> continuity in their political aspirations, arising out of their basic concern of dominating Punjab politics. It is remarkable that over the decades they have increased their support base among Sikh landowners of the Punjab, who constitute the bulk of the population. Conversely the number

of Sikh supporters <sup>and</sup> decreasing, but the Akalis have yet to realise their dream.

Meanwhile two new dimensions were added to the political situation of the Punjab due to the struggle for power between the Akalis and the Congress. These dimensions dominated Punjab politics and events in the decade of the 80's. One was a fundamentalist reinterpretation of Sikh tradition and the other was the seriousness with which the idea of Khalistan was espoused by a number of Sikhs and supported with militant action. Although these did not conform to their characteristic mode of mobilization, it became a reality and the Akali Dal deviated from its original path of demonstrating through agitations (5).

#### GENESIS OF PUNJAB PROBLEM: THE POLITICAL PROCESS

As the role of the state in society and economy increased, group demands turned more insistent. In the political realm as well, elections of 1977, 1980 and 1985 demonstrated the increased salience of ascriptive social groups as vote banks, swinging the fortunes of political parties at state and centre alike.

In the national political arena the Congress party lost the normative dimension and organisational ability that had enabled it earlier to mediate among groups, concert a wide variety of interests, and mobilise idealism. The

dominance of the Congress was eroded. No other national movement could replace it, though a brief interlude by the Janata coalition in 1977 tried to do so and failed. "Notwithstanding Mrs. Gandhi's populist platforms, her leadership of the party from 1966-77 and 1980-84 contributed to the personalism, centrism, factionalism and Machiavellianism that led to deinstitutionalization of Congress (6).

Politics at the centre sent waves of discontent in the states, specially among regional parties who began to assert their identity in a bid to remain in mainstream politics. Further deinstitutionalization of the Congress was accelerated by Sanjay Gandhi's ascendancy. Though Mrs. Gandhi regained power in 1980 and also won the Punjab state elections in June, her hold in the state began to dither. The Akalis regained strength but with a highly factious leadership. In the squabbling that followed among the political parties, only the militants gained. The stage was thus prepared for political confrontation in Punjab.

Comprehensive literature on events in the Punjab make it unnecessary to offer an amplified sketch here. Nevertheless it is important to highlight three sets of competition-cum confrontation which culminated in the tragedy.

The first was purely social. Intra sikh differences, as between orthodox and non-orthodox militants and moderates came forth. The state police could not prevent violent clashes between the Akalis and Nirankaris in April 1978. It also failed to prosecute the suspected murderers of the Nirankari leader, Gurbachan Singh in April 1980, or Jagat Narain, the publisher of Punjab Kesari; or Delhi SGPC President Santokh Singh in Dec. 1981. In such a social context Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale gained publicity, glamour and followers.

The second competition for the control of Punjab existed between the Akali Dal and the Congress\_ the cause was mainly political. The Akali Dal leaders, Parkash Singh Badal, H.S. Longowal and G.S. Tohra disputed amongst themselves for presidency of the SGPC but were overshadowed by Phindranwale. Alongside this issue was the dispute, of water and land, that lay between the Punjab government and the central government - primarily a discord in centre state relations. This took the form of Akali-Congress dispute. "A commission under Justice R.S. Sarkaria was appointed on June 1983 to examine the centre state relations but made no report. Mrs. Gandhi had three rounds of discussion with the Akali leaders but they broke down each time amidst changes. Meanwhile the number of random and planned killings in the Punjab increased as did agitations. Parts of the Golden Temple were fortified.

Bhindranwale as well as Akali leaders took up their residence in that complex of buildings" (7).

Another course of confrontation between the Akalis and the central government reveals religious overtones. Though Mrs. Gandhi publicly vouched the sanctity of temples, troubles began when she ordered the Operation Bluestar against the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras on June 5-6, 1984 - coincidentally the anniversary of Guru Arjan's martyrdom. This decision by the congress government deeply gashed the religious sentiments of the Sikhs. Sikh antagonism towards central government, for having invaded their sacred precincts turned violent. The events that followed implied Sikh secessionism to which the central government reacted by imposing President's rule and enacting the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (TADA) and National Security Acts (NSA).

#### OPERATION BLUESTAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The army action on 5 June, 1984 killed Bhindranwale and some 2000 others. It destroyed Sikh archives and much of Akal Takht. It struck a blow at the core of Sikh identity, alienated moderate opinions, was angrily demonstrated by Sikhs and prompted desertion among Sikhs serving in the armed forces. These events turned out to be the direct cause of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination on Oct. 31, 1984.

The brutal massacre of Sikhs-in Delhi, Kanpur, Bokaro and on trains-that followed Mrs. Gandhi's assassination was judged by several citizen bodies to be organised by persons closely affiliated to the Congress. Thereafter the depiction of Sikh militancy as threat to national security in the subsequent election campaign of the Congress (I) was widely interpreted as a bid for the majority Hindu vote in the Hindi heartland. The plea for Khalistan took sustenance from the Sikhs settled abroad. Instead of condemning terrorist killings these sikhs highlighted police atrocities in Punjab (8).

In July 1985, the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the moderate Akali leader, H.S. Longowal, signed an accord that conceded the substance of Akali demands within the constitutional framework of India. Despite the assassination of Longowal by Sikh extremists on August 20th, 1985, the people of the Punjab went to vote in September in favour of moderate Akali government headed by Surjit Singh Barnala. The return to a civil government, normalcy and law in the Punjab and revitalization of India's democratic and secular polity under Rajiv Gandhi's youthful leadership- was expected to follow.

On the contrary, the accord raised false hopes. Militants killed Longowal and Rajiv Gandhi failed to implement the accord. Army's Operation Woodrose against

village youth with terrorist links drove young men to Pakistan, the backstage of Punjab tragedy (9).

On the recommendations of Bains Commission report, Barnala released many Sikh youth from jails and the worst nightmare came true. After their release a fresh spurt of terrorism at its worst, began in Punjab. The militants occupied the sacred precincts once again. The Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala sent the police to flush them out. This decision was the cause of the first vertical split in the Akali Dal, thereafter multiple fissions were to follow. Chaos reigned supreme and Surjit Singh Barnala lost his chair.

After the collapse of the accord in 1986, the non transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, as demanded in the Anandpur Sahib resolution. The Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala was unable to control a renewed spate of killings in the state and President's rule was imposed for the second time in May 1987. Thus the solution of the Punjab imbroglio virtually remained in limbo.

Despite a remarkable continuity in the political aspirations of the Akalis and their concerns, the issues of politics have undergone significant changes due to disruptions and developments of several kinds. Conceptually therefore it will be more helpful for a scholar to think of transformation rather than continuities in view of the numerous changes in the realms of economy, social structure

and culture which find their reflections in present day problems of Punjab. The Punjab problem came to be equated variously with the Akalis, the fundamentalist militants and the problem of law and order (10). Scholars have documented economic change and its implication on the socio-political life of the people. It would be equally useful to study cultural changes, which have an important bearing on politics, in Punjab.

Control of the SGPC has been a source of constant strife among the Akalis. When G.S. Tohra was elected the SGPC Chief in 1986 everything went awry. It was an open invitation for terrorists to enter sacred premises again. Tohra was hob-nobbed by leftists and fundamentalists. The sikhs blame him largely for the Punjab problem, pointing out that it was during his presidency of the SGPC that Bhindranwale was allowed to stay in the Golden Temple complex and convert it into an armed fortress, making Operation Bluestar and subsequent events, almost inevitable. Tohra controlled the SGPC for fourteen long years, almost without break. He obviously had built a vast and diverse patronage. The people he appointed for managing Gurdwaras, were as inefficient and corrupt as the *mahants* who managed the Sikh shrines untill the movement for reform toppled them in the 1920s. Unprincipled opportunism became the order of the day in Akali politics (11).



The Akalis dislike for Barnala blinded them to the larger realities of the situation. Amarinder Singh proposed the name of Tohra for SGPC presidency and his proposal was supported by P.S. Badal, fully knowing that they opposed Tohra not long ago.

The Akalis are a divided house. They split again after Operation Search on April 30th, 1986 to flush out terrorists from the Golden Temple. In order to retain power, Barnala had to offer all kinds of inducements, such as ministerial berths, profitable chairmanships of corporations to those MLA's who showed signs of defection. So under Barnala the Ministry comprised some of the most corrupt MLA's Punjab government had ever known.

The Akali Dal as a political party did not display any evidence of integrating and solving Sikh issues instead they themselves have been bickering endlessly over seats of power. In ten years the Akali Dal split in 15 factions. The differences among party leaders have varied. Barnala swore by the Rajiv - Longowal accord, which was anathema to Simranjit Singh Mann. Mann's demand for a sovereign Sikh state was not in tune with Amarinder Singh's idea of autonomy. Infact the Anandpur Sahib Resolution itself became a matter of controversy, where each faction interpreted it differently. While some leaders have wanted to give it a quiet burial as is evidenced by the recent Amritsar Declaration of 1994. A

member of the Babbar Akali group - Jasmer Singh Bala proposed this resolution. But Sikh intellectuals and scholars found the declaration boggling, as it was secessionist, confusing and may incite others' against the Sikhs (12).

According to recent reports the fourteen factions of Akali Dal decided to merge except the one led by Parkush Singh Badal. With this merger, the Golden Temple Complex has again become the hub of Akali politics. The Akalis have revived a political agenda and now plan to restructure and reorganise the party from within. The party has been out of touch with grassroots since 1978, when the membership drive was last held. The membership drive has begun since June 1994. Most of the Akali Dal factions had no office, no treasurer or audit system. "Organisational elections may do the same to Akali Dal what the Kamaraj Plan did to the Congress. It will imperill the fortunes of old war horses like Badal, J.S. Talwandi, Tohra or even Simranjit Singh Mann" (13).

Akali politics over the years reveals that whenever they have been in power, they did not attempt to integrate the state's segmental society. Instead they concentrated more on controlling the SGPC and to retain its hold, evoke religious and cultural sentiments of the masses. The Akali party was unable to transcend Jat loyalties and did not embrace other social groups like the dalits and harijans,

while Congress accused the Akalis of endangering India's unity, the Akalis blamed it for endangering the Panth. Both charges were fraudulent. No faith can ever be in danger if it is followed with unswerving pride and devotion" (14).

The flip side of the coin was equally at fault. The Akalis demanded more autonomy for the state. The centre had been loath to let non-Congress parties govern in states. They accused Akalis of separation making the demand for autonomy appear as a move to secede from the Union. This threw up yet another debate-that of power sharing based on the concepts of federalism and decentralisation.

#### RELIGION AND CULTURE-AN ISSUE OF POLITICS

The threat to Sikh identity became a sufficient cause to oppose the Indian state and for others an excuse to avoid tackling the real problems of Punjab. The much vaunted *Punjabiyyet* or composite culture of the region became diluted.

A situation came where Sikhs were faced with the dilemma where religious revivalism was pitted against the achievement of political power. The result of discriminating Sikhs to a status of a threatened minority.

Sikh identity was loosely constructed as prior to 1980, there was no good reason for the sikhs to fashion a sharply defined image of themselves. For the majority of sikhs, to be a sikh was to observed sikh practices somewhat

invisibly and habitually. This was the kind of ethnic identity the sikhs possessed till 1984.

Today Sikh identity is sharper, less incoherent, consciously integrated and one in which the martial tradition is particularly enlivened. The miri-piri formulation, introduced by Guru Hargobind Singh, sanctified the militant approach to politics (15). This was also followed by the last Guru. Infact historical events make it evident that when under Muslim rule the Sikhs felt threatened, they showed solidarity as a 'Panth' by adopting outward symbols and asserting their identity. Similarly in the Punjab of the 80's when too much of centralization threatened the Sikhs they resorted to the same strategy - that of asserting, or militant assertion, of Sikh identity.

In Punjab the militants succeeded in imposing a dress code on children and women, but this can be understood as an outcome of fear of militant reprisals rather than the thought that the populace acquiesced to the demands of the so called fundamentalists. The militant appeal that existed earlier slowly vanished and Sikh identification with militants became largely vicarious (16).

As for today the reason for a militant anti-Hindu edge to Sikh identity must be seen in the light; how Hindus as a community or government at the centre, has interacted with Sikhs in their contemporary specificity.

2 second

Two contrasting patterns of political behaviour can be traced in Punjab politics. One emphasizes accommodation of intra-Sikh differences and careful attention to nurture alliances with non-Sikhs. The second pattern centers on a narrow definition of Sikhism and a felt need to defend the community against perceived threats, both internal and external. The second pattern has historical precedents as well. The panth began to reassert itself in 1978, became a systematic campaign in 1981 under the leadership of Bhindranwale. This phase was marked by militant expression of Sikh identity. This phenomenon suffered the consequences of severe repression in 1984 and regained momentum in 1985 (17).

According to Paul Wallace, Sikh revivalism has encompassed a clearer and institutionalized sense of identity over a period of time during which its political and geographical parameters have markedly changed. Hindus dominated the urban areas and Sikhs the rural. This demographic feature heightened the differences between two major communities but also provided opportunity for cooperation. Different social bases resulted in Akali Dal and Jana Sangh identifying each other as major antagonists at times, while coalition partners at other times. The congress drew support from both communities and played off mutual antagonisms to dominate state government during virtually the entire period. Revivalism in this period took shape in the Punjabi Suba movement (18).

On the other hand the movement led by Bhindranwale led to the breakdown of Sikh institutions, constructed and nurtured so carefully from 1925-namely the SGPC. He unfolded a new violent reaction to the oft proclaimed threat of Sikh Panth in danger. Charan Singh the Prime Minister in 1979 and subsequently leader of opposition in Parliament criticized the government for not taking steps against Bhindranwale's threat against Hindus. He assumed control of the Akal Takht the physical centre of Sikh community. During Operation Bluestar many Akali Dal leaders sided Bhindranwale. Sikh identity as reformulated by him became exclusivist and violent in nature. All the Akali Dal demands based on Anandpur Sahib Resolution related to Sikh issues. Bhindranwale represented fundamentalist or revivalist thrust of religion and the felt need for a clear Sikh identity (19).

The ruined integrity of Sikh institutions revealed that the Akali Dal failed to play its role as the guardian of Sikh identity and splintered before the onslaught of revivalist forces led by Bhindranwale. In a larger context, the Akali Dal's sensitivity relates to the cooperative Hindu-Sikh relations. Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, Akali Dal parliamentary leader, directly confronted this dilemma between religious and secular imperatives at a Gurdwara function in New Delhi on 19 July 1986. He called upon Sikhs to "scrupulously follow the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. This interpretation of Sikh religion, however is critical of

religious fundamentalism which results in communal tension and clashes. According to him the Akali Dal is a secular party which could come to power only on the basis of Hindu Sikh unity (20).

The most recent expression of renewing faith in Hindu Sikh unity is the call by the Akali Dal (Amritsar) to open its membership to non-Sikhs. Prior to this the Akali Dal (Longowal) was the first to open such membership, followed by the Akali Dal (Badal). The party leader of Akali Dal (A) Mr. Prem Singh Chandumajra submitted that the party stood for communal harmony and now by this decision a basic change in the character of the party will become inevitable" (21).

The Akali demand for a separate state on the basis of religion and language has always been very ambiguous. Noted Sikh scholar Khushwant Singh has failed to meet a single individual who could "rationally explain to him the concept of Khalistan, its geographical boundaries, its religious composition and its proposed political and economic set-up" (22). Ground realities have been such that attempts to create a *de facto* Khalistan failed because mass of Sikhs refused to respond to a notion of a separate sikh state. The tragedy of Punjab, in his words was this, "On the 1st of Baisakh, 13th April 1978, celebrated as New Year's day in Punjabi Calendar, J.S. Bhindranwale exploded like a nuclear bomb. It not only shook overfed Punjabis out of their slumbers but the

fallout continues to plague the rest of the country even today". The unfortunate result of all these happenings is that progress in the most progressive state of India has come to a standstill. Its agriculture, industrial economy has ruined and its administration and judiciary have been reduced to shambles.

On religious issues Khushwant Singh recently observed, Hindu rituals have got commercialised so have sikh rituals where scripture readers (*Granthis*) and *raagis* demand different fees for reciting the Granth Sahib and singing *Gurbani* (23).

A group of Akali leaders recently formulated the Amritsar Declaration. It says, "the Akali Dal, being a champion of Punjabi culture based on Guru Granth Sahib, reiterates its commitment for waging a struggle within democratic norms for the creation of such a separate region for the Sikhs where they could enjoy the glow of freedom. In this new region, the religious, economic, political and social institutions would have the liberty to freely profess and propagate their views and ideas and such a region would, thus, provide them an opportunity which has never been provided to them in the past history. With this attainment, the Sikhs and their *Punjabiyyet* would be able to enrich the cultural heritage of the world... If the Government of India failed to restructure Indian polity into a federal structure,



the Akali Dal would be left no alternative but to wage a struggle for a sovereign Sikh state" (24).

Strongly and differently worded, the Amritsar Declaration is somewhat different from the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The use of words the 'Punjabi culture based on Guru Granth Sahib', 'confederation', '*Punjabiyyet*' imply a change in demands that matches with the changing times.

Coming back to the issue of Sikh identity one thing is for certain that it cannot pose a threat to national integration as Sikhs are a part of our cultural heritage. Between the adoption of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 and the present times there has been slow but regular resurgence of fundamentalism and religious revivalism among Sikhs. Militant Sikh youth believe that the Sikh political identity can be preserved only in an independent Sikh state. This attitude poses a threat to integration (25). But reality is otherwise claims to nationhood by a people is based on their moral rights to a specific territory. Such a claim cannot be sustained by a religious collectivity, like Sikhs, because of the disjunctive between religion and territory.

Several lessons of national unity can be learned from the case study of Punjab. Linguistic regions are held to be potential bases for recessionist movements, and at the same time caste as a disintegrative factor in Indian society.

Punjab is a peculiar case where split arose on religious lines, since the caste factor is weak in Punjab. Loyalties to language, religion and caste result in political pressures. What is harmful to national unity is social cleavages (26).

### CRIME AND TERRORISM

The gruesome story of killings in Punjab began when the Sikh fundamentalist movement, under the leadership of J.S. Bhindranwale, ran parallel to the passive resistance of the Akalis on the political front. It began with the confrontation between orthodox Khalsa and Nirankari Sikhs in Amritsar in 1978, in which Bhindranwale's followers lost their lives. This religious leader swore vengeance and the Akali's lent their support to him.

The supporters of Bhindranwale were aided by the Akalis in the name of religion, resorted to terrorism and crime. This has been an ongoing process leading to political instability. Punjab had been living in terror even after President's rule was imposed in 1984. The inhabitants in Punjab became victims of terrorist violence as illustrated by the table below:

**TABLE I(a)**

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Persons killed by terrorists	13	13	75	359	63
Hindus	10	8	35	237	45
Sikhs	3	5	40	122	17
Cops killed by terrorists	2	2	20	20	8
Terrorists killed	14	7	13	77	2
Terrorists arrested	84	178	298	1630	491

**TABLE I(b)**

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Persons killed by terrorists	520	910	1949	1188	2467	2591
Hindus	324	425	858	442	743	744
Sikhs	193	478	1044	134	1694	1847
Cops killed by terrorists	42	95	110	152	493	496
Terrorists killed	78	328	373	699	1321	2177
Terrorists arrested	1581	3750	3882	2486	1759	1949

Source: The Times of India, 9th Feb. 1992 Gun-ho-Syndrome  
by Dinesh Kumar.

Punjab faced major social disorder where youth took to the gun under the umbrella of religion. The so called social reform movement prescribing certain rules and restrictions on how people should live, and what women should wear and the spread of religious fundamentalism and subversion were all symptoms of the intractable morass in which the state was placed (27).

Every Punjabi family, Sikh or non-Sikh living inside or outside Punjab was affected by the human tragedies exacted there, though not all reacted in the same way. *Punjabiyyet* and the hitherto intimate relations between sikhs and Hindus suffered damage, notwithstanding the heroic efforts of non-communal organizations such as the Nagrik Ekta Manch and the Punjab group to relieve suffering and mediate problems. A negative reaction also took place. This was the Hindu response to sikh terrorism as it resulted in the formation of militant Hindu groups as the Shiv Sena in the urban areas of Punjab. Year after year terrorists, counter terrorists, smugglers, arms dealers, drug peddlars and bands of armed men trampled the fields of villages in Punjab, taking young men to crime, death or torture, and leaving behind raped women and orphans. Elections and restoration of representative government was also delayed, while the Indian constitution was amended and Indian army was deployed to guard the integrity of the country (28).

From being a land of peace and plenty, known for the vigour and *joie do vivre* of its people, Punjab became a land of mistrust, fear and armed insurrection, in which state tyranny flourished, as did administrator's contempt for citizen's rights. The Congress agenda contemptible though, did not lead the Hindus and Sikhs to erupt against each other, nor did the Punjabi farmer allow agricultural production to slacken (29). A few incidents did occur, but not to the intensity that would lead to internal war.

Militancy got impetus by Bhindranwale's unstinted support and through other support groups. The All India Sikh Students Federation constituted a major support group of revivalism for Bhindranwale. It supplanted communist student groups as dominant element in Punjab institutions of higher education. Many of them were rural youth cooperating unsuccessfully with urbanites on the latter's territory. Badly educated, they looked forward to marginal jobs in agriculture and in urban areas, but the motorcycles of hit squads symbolised a new social freedom and exciting life style and Bhindranwale assumed the mantle of a charismatic leader of the movement. Owing to the importance of religious and ethnic identity among mainstream and successful sikhs, large numbers fell under the revivalist spell, even in the violent form cast by Bhindranwale (30). As many as twelve militant outfits operated in Punjab, under his reformatory spell. When the major Akali leaders went to jail, secondary

leaders of Akali Dal, SGPC regained authority and continued their operations. The estrangement of Sikhs from Hindus stemmed from riots that erupted all over.

The government took a step towards reconciliation in the form of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. Longowal was shot dead by extremists in August of 1985. In the September of 1985 state assembly elections a sympathy wave for Longowal's Akali Dal propelled it to power, with absolute majority. The voter turnout in these elections was exceptionally high 67.58%; which gave legitimacy to the moderate approach to Sikhs and the Punjab problems (31).

Revived terrorism and revivalism returned Punjab on the forefront of India's problem list in 1986. The Mathew Commission in January, and Venkataramiah Commission in July failed to effect transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab. Militant Sikh opposition to Sutlej Yamuna link canal received less public attention, but was an explosive issue. Failure to implement the accord encouraged extremists led by the revivalist Damdami Taksal and militant AISSF to retake control of the Golden Temple on January 26, 1986. Many attempts were made to flush out the terrorists, but force could not weed out terrorism (32). At the national level, the ability to maintain cooperative relation with the ruling Akali Dal and foregoing the temptation of President's rule was a continuous test of federalism.

The terrorists worked in an autonomous network. They demonstrated the capacity to hit targets at great distances, undermining every kind of security. This became evident with the destruction of Air India's Boeing 'Kanishka' over the Atlantic in June 1985 ;and the assassination of the retired chief of army staff General A.S. Vaidya at Pune in February 1986. The counter-terrorist ordinances and laws adopted by New Delhi - led to even more dissatisfaction. These were used to silence any voice of political dissent (33). Civil liberties suffered in the process. The issue of state rights in a federal polity came to be questioned, as well as the related question of tolerance by a Congress government in New Delhi for a non-allied, non-Congress government in a state capital. The report of a much delayed, incomplete and largely secret investigation made by Justice Misra Commission into the November 1984 killings of Sikhs was eventually published in 1987. It failed to inspire confidence in the capacity of Rajiv Gandhi's government to carry out function with equal justice for all sections of its citizens in compliance with the secular mandate of the constitution (34). President's rule was reimposed in 1987.

#### DECLINE IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES

The nature of the terrorist movement has undergone many changes since the beginning of the 80's. By the end of

this decade terrorism was dissipating. Life was returning to normalcy. There were several reasons to this.

Militant outfits apparently were left in a disarray because many of their organisers planners and hitmen were killed in encounters. Not only was this demoralising for them but it also created logistical problems for the units. Though each militant outfit had a top contact man abroad to arrange, weapons supply, the liason men had the no connection with the second and third rung of hitmen on the ground.

Most demoralising was the loss of ideologues. Twelve chiefs of different outfits died like that of Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Liberation Force, Khalistan National Army, Khalistan Armed Force, KCF, Bhindranwale Tiger's etc. The social code prescribed by militants was flouted with impunity by villagers. By June 1989, groups of villagers had begun confronting extremists (35). According to Khushwant Singh by June 1990 the terrorists were no longer motivated by religious or political zeal. They were merely thugs extorting money from rich relatives (36).

A review of militancy from 1988 to 1993 reveals that terrorism and crime has been virtually decimated in a once strife torn state.



**TABLE II**

**Decline of Militancy**

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Terrorist killings	538	1188	2487	2591	1519	8
Terrorist killed (Hardcore)	-	102	92	133	139	4
Terrorist killed (Non hardcore)	-	601	1228	2044	1976	45

Source: Times of India Graphics. A Farewell to Arms.

Report by Surinder Awasthi.

What happened in Punjab, if studied as a social revolution reveals an interesting situation. The established leaders of the Akali party did not resort to violence. It was the second rung of leadership - a younger, more marginal group for whom the use of violence was enormously empowering (37). As Frantz Fanon argued in the context of Algerian revolution some years ago, even a small display of violence could have immense symbolic power, enough to jolt the masses into an awareness of their potency (38).

Violent actions in Punjab made the masses aware of militant power. The radical youth set up their own counts and offices. Since their actions were morally sanctioned by

religion, they were politically acceptable. The speeches of Bhindranwale revealed that disagreements and rivalries within the community was a cause of major concern.

Bhindranwale taught unity but it was clear that he wanted everyone united around him. He wished to give the impression that he was at the centre following the norm and belief of sikhism and the community should therefore group around him. Those who grouped around him belonged to a different economic strata of society and had their own reasons for revering him as their leader. Those looking for a centre to sikhism wanted to be associated with him. Sikhs who were socially marginal, like Beant Singh, Indira Gandhi's assassin was an untouchable. Those who were living overseas also identified him as a true leader of the masses. They gained from their identification with Bhindranwale a sense of belonging. Sikhs living abroad became sensitive to his message, that Sikhs needed to be strong and united. But Bhindranwale's supporters back home received more tangible benefits from associating with his cause. Politically active youth and small time priests were able to gain popular support (39). The instrument of religious violence, encouraged by Bhindranwale gave power to those who had little power before. Even after his death tangible benefits seem to have upgraded the status of his family. Back home in his village, "prosperity has visited the family since Operation Bluestar as it glitters in the many vehicles they have

acquired and the facelift their houses have got. One of his brother's own a newspaper with a modern printing press. There is profit in keeping the dead preacher alive" (40).

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The greatest challenge to secular ideology of post independence state emerged in Punjab during the 1980's. The Indian state failed to deal with the crisis because it took recourse to manipulation and compromise by surrendering to secular ideology. The state failed to contain the religio-fascism of the terrorists. The case of Punjab revealed that the centre's ability of intervening in state was limited since it could not launch an ideological offensive. The Indian state, in the case of Punjab, emerged fractured and society and state were left to deal with multiple and competing ideologies (41).

In retrospect, on the political front, the Akali Dal as a political party of rich Jat peasants and believers in politics linked themselves with religion, religious identity and religious mobilisation.

The dominance of Akali Dal, ambitions of the Sikh peasantry and blunders on the part of the Indian state gave birth to Sikh militancy and the cult of violence in Punjab. The terrorists were mobilized by ideology to serve the interests of capitalist farmers by imposing religious

orthodoxy on the heterogenous Sikh society. Punjab terrorists performed the social role of Khomeini's. Iranian Revolution and the essence of these movements was to establish despotism to contain democratic forces. Those who did not go by the reforms were punished. But this was just a passing phase. Marginal social groups, like the terrorists were mobilized by religious fanatics to serve the interest of the dominant class (42).

At the economic plane the capitalist farmer in punjab accumulated surpluses which he wanted to invest in trade and industry. This opportunity was blocked, since other communities had already occupied the economic space in trade and industry. As compensation the farmers were given more power and resources. The Green revolution brought capitalist development, which brought with it disparities, class division and social tensions. Randhir Singh reasons, that in the absence of a countervailing democratic culture, there was a compensatory appeal of religious fundamentalism harking back to the puritanical tradition of early Sikhism. Since fundamentalism cannot survive in the face of democratic culture, democracy still survives (43).

The Sikh movement must be understood, not only in the light of its ideological background, but also in terms of various demands brought in throughout this struggle. The Sikhs gradually moved from religious to cultural concerns leading to a demand for a separate sikh state.

In the beginning religious identity was asserted. Determined to keep their identity separate from Hindus, Sikhs tenaciously maintained outward symbols of Sikhism. In the next phase Sikhism shifted from a narrow notion of religious identity to a much more cultural view of religious identity. Questions about religious organization of state, its language, the capital of Punjab - came into the fold of religious issues. Politics became a larger factor in the question of Sikh identity, yet it was seen in cultural terms rather than in terms of nationalism. In the third phase the economic power of Sikhs increased and became translated into political power where politics was no longer seen in a cultural light. The question of religious nationalism shook the Sikh community (44).

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution showed signs of Sikh national consciousness, its objective being the maintenance of the feeling of separate entity of the Sikh Panth and creation of an environment in which national expression of Sikhs could be satisfied. They demanded fulfilment of economic, cultural, religious and political concerns of the Sikhs and for this the Akali Dal sponsored an agitation in Oct. 1981.

Demands concerning Sikh identity as a religious group included granting 'holy city' status to Amritsar on the pattern of Haridwar, Kashi and Kurukshetra. Secondly

permission for Sikhs to carry *kirpans* on domestic and international flight. A resolution sought the immediate merger of Punjab with Punjabi speaking sikh populated areas in Haryana, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh besides Chandigarh (45).

Among the general demands, a demand was made to bring about a fundamental change in center state relations. When the same demand was voiced or reiterated in 1982 it had a different emphasis. The initial demand involved limiting central authority, but the next version emphasized formation of a single administrative unit where the interests of the Sikhs and Sikhism could be safeguarded. At is interesting to study how far the national identity apart from a religious and cultural identity has extended beyond the Akali party and a small section of the educated urban elite. Does the Sikh peasantry in the village understand the demands made by the Akalis, especially the political, is a subject for empirical investigation.

Inspite of turmoil, positive signs do exist. Hindus and non-Hindus perceive the indivisibility of a democratic civil liberties fabric and are working to restore it. Economic indicators in Punjab continue to lead the country, revealing that rationalism prevails in the country side inspite of newspaper headlines and political machinations. There remains tragedy but also the resilience of character to meet it.

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## CHAPTER - V

### CONCLUSION

The summation would reiterate, in a precise form, the responses of religious movements to the dynamics of polity and economy in general and in the context of this case study in particular.

All religious movements may not be termed fundamentalist. After a thorough elaboration of the terms and concepts used, one realises how easily these terms can be misused making semantic classification an appropriate approach in this study.

The close nexus between religion and politics has brewed trouble for the Indian state several times. It has thrown up many debatable issues in a multicultural society like India. J.S. Furnivall described India a "plural society" where vertically separated communities coexisted without integration (1). During the colonial rule, discriminatory rewards had the effect of reinforcing vertical lines of division among the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Infact representative institutions were introduced in India in the context of a plural society and in a way that hardened vertical division along ethnic or religious identity. Thereafter subsequent events in politics, their fall out in

the economy and their effect on society and social institutions, further distorted the essence of a particular religion and ignored the great question of 'truth' they set out to tackle. As Ashis Nandy succinctly puts this malaise in his words, "There is now a peculiar double mind in Indian politics. The ills of religion have found political expression but the strengths of it have not been available for checking corruption and violence in public life" (2). Under the fundamentalist garb, interested groups have used religious symbols to gain political power and serve their economic interest. The religious sentiments have been issued to unify a group and prepare it to face some kind of a posed challenge from other groups.

Our case study on the so called, Sikh religious fundamentalism reveals that a Sikh communal political party - the Akali Dal - had initiated a movement for a Punjabi speaking state in which Sikhs would constitute a majority. This separation was motivated by the fear of dissolving sikh socio-religious distinctiveness in the vast expanse of Hinduism, unless Sikhs achieved its own concrete political identity.

Therefore what is termed as 'fundamentalism' in religious and ideological context and its manifestations in Punjab, is infact 'obscurantism' or better still an aggressive militancy by religious fanatics. By nature this

movement can be exposed as momentary, changing and accomodating to the specificities of their sphere of operation.

Ethnic zeal, ideologies, movements and parties are the direct fall out of basic drives in many at the popular level. As Dipankar Gupta reasons in his study on communalism and Fundamentalism, ethnicity in Indian politics is a creation of vested interests (3). While studying ethnicity in Punjab we refer to ascriptive identities - caste, language religion etc. When ethnic ideologies get political expression they launch some persons or religious spokesmen to the forefront of society. "These individuals gain 'source credibility' by virtue of the fact that the ethnic views they sponsor are seen by the mass of people as relevant explanations for a variety of problems in their social life" (4). Religious weakness of society manifests itself in the functioning of the state and in the behaviour of the people. Punjab has been instructive in this case, where the Akali Dal has kept sikh identity alive and mobilized the sikhs on the basis of religious symbols, just as the RSS and Shiv Sena do with respect to Hindu identity. Therefore ethnicity is a motivating variable that manifests itself in different forms and is subject to change. Ethnic identities are not limited to any one observance, belief, practice or aesthetic preference. Ethnic groups demonstrate a profusion of symbols

and a series of overlapping features which signify ethnic distinctions.

Fundamentalists base their notion of statehood on religion. Global level studies on this subject have revealed that fundamentalists dictate how criminals should be punished, how business should be conducted, what sartorial ensembles are acceptable, all aspects of social life are imbued with religious sanction. In such societies privilege is given to the religious leader either as a grey eminence or as the centre stage pivotal figure. Fundamentalists seek to establish hegemony of their ethnic identity over others. They seek to dominate much more than political and aim to establish an order drawing perennially from the vast symbolic energy making grammar and not the book important for fundamentalism (5).

Fundamentalism makes use of a natural principle to dominate social life and what could be more natural to man than his own religion and way of life. This makes the reach of fundamentalism far greater. It resembles some form of racism, but unlike it, fundamentalism does not need an active enemy within, though the presence of one helps to establish a fundamentalist society. Fundamentalism is essentially self-generating and once in place, internally and relatively tranquil unless challenged (6).

While reading such descriptions on fundamentalism many are inclined in making the mistake of believing that the sikh religious movement is fundamentalistic. Some surface similarities do create this illusion but once we probe deeper it becomes evident that that tragedy of Punjab cannot be equated with fundamentalism. "The broad mass of sikhs not felt the need of fundamentalism different militant outfits have warned against liquor consumption but with little effect. The sikh religious virtuosos- *paijis, granthis, jathedars, and sants* do not call the shots in Punjab. It is the militants who tell them what to do and if the religious specialists do not acquiesce they run the risk of being exterminated. But this does not denote fundamentalism" (7). As suggested in the earlier chapter religion was not the direct cause of terrorism in Punjab. The political and economic reasons took primacy.

In developing such comprehensive systems which cover the entire spectrum of human activity - social, economic and political, fundamentalism has proven itself to be selectively traditional and selectively modern. They reject the clinging to tradition and the uncritical conservation of all that has emerged in the tradition, for they view tradition as a mosaic of compromises. Fundamentalists select from a plethora of doctrines, practices and interpretations available in the tradition (8). Sikhism has in a similar fashion evoked selected practices from the past.



In traditions where orthopraxis counts more than orthodoxy, fundamentalist like movements reinvigorate traditional practice with a puritanical discipline. In the process of interpreting tradition, evaluating modernity and selectively retrieving salient elements of both, charismatic and authoritarian male leaders play a central role (9). Bhindranwale did something similar but only to incite his followers against Hindus living in Punjab and encourage terrorists to kill.

He drew a comprehensive plan for society, to begin with, but his injunctions were clearly flouted by the villagers in Punjab in the later years. Fundamentalists do not shrink from accomplishing piecemeal the desired regeneration of society. But under Bhindranwale, The society was degenerating. The Gurdwaras offered him religious canopy under which people congregated assuring him a huge following, and of which he made good use. This social institutions of the Sikhs became a breeding ground for terrorists, who were sheltered by Bhindranwale. After committing crimes the terrorists would hide in the sacred precincts.

"Among the qualifications about the religious character of 'pure fundamentalism is the awareness that religion, culture and economic interests have all been emphasized as the key element or elements in the fundamentalist demand for autonomy or independence.

Fundamentalism has a variety of political alliances and platforms congenial to itself. It both supports and opposes nationalist movements, participates in democratic processes in some cases, but have favoured authoritarian regimes or modified theocracies in others, have forged alliances with communists and socialists in order to form ruling coalitions in some nations while bitterly opposing them in others. Although, pure fundamentalism shrewd and media savvy in their courting of public support, were described as enjoying in many instances a broad based popular appeal, the hard core of that support has time and again proved to be statistically insignificant" (10). While these may be observances at the global level, but in the case of Punjab, the religious movement was opportunistic and merely situational. It changed its demands according to its needs. Whenever Sikh identity was threatened or felt slighted by the actions of the central government, it retaliated violently. This movement for revivalism did not enjoy popular support, although the majority of the Sikhs living abroad encouraged religious revivalism to the hilt of orthodoxy.

Events in the past few years bear testimony to the fact that the battle against religious revivalism cannot be fought successfully on the ideological front alone. Lofty goals and futility of pre-occupation with sectarian and obscurantist issues have weaned the people of Punjab away from those seeking a fundamentalist path (11).

Obscurantist forces took shape after mid-80's when concern for social justice and people centred development began to be diluted. In Punjab the economic reforms enthused only the upper strata of society but created serious misgivings among the organised working class and apathy and disillusionment among the unorganised sectors constituting the large majority of the population. Severe cuts in public outlays on essential infrastructure, social development and poverty alleviation have strengthened these misgivings (12).

A recent example of such obscurantism that prevails in Punjab can be appropriately cited. A noted Sikh scholar Dr. Piar Singh was admonished by the Akal Takht for "blasphemy" on account of his controversial book, "Gatha Sri Adi Granth". This penance coincided with the ongoing efforts to make Akal Takht the focus of unity among the fractious Akalis. By punishing the scholar the assertive force of the Akal Takht in the panth's affairs became prominent. This verdict can be perceived as a slide into obscurantism rather than a step forward for the community (13).

In Punjab too the religious activists became increasingly critical of the government's secular policies and sought to counter it through a popular religious movement. Unfortunately the reins of this movement were in the hands of fanatics, who breathed militancy into Punjab (14). The problem of secularization is not so much concerned

with the decline of religion, but with the unique forms of religious reproduction occasioned by reactions to modernity.

Dipankar Gupta observes that Pseudo-secularism, (one that India practices) has twin characteristics by definition it is conspiratorial and by its action it gives legitimacy to anti-secular forces. When certain ethnically active political organisations are allowed to roam freely even after committing criminal acts it gives those organisations and their leaders an aura which a large number of people, particularly the youth, find appealing and charismatic (14). Similarly Bhindranwale was given full freedom for four years to isolate the Akali Dal and hand over Sikh confidence and a potential vote bank to the Congress. Further, Pseudo-secularism aids anti-secular forces by undermining the strength of secular politics. In Punjab the main demands which were put forward in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, concerned Chandigarh, water distribution and border adjudication. The centre dithered on all fronts but willingly condescended to discuss the promulgation of a Sikh code bill, radio transmission of prayers from the Golden Temple and so on. After the 1984 Sikh killings in Delhi, three successive governments have not shown any inclination to book those responsible for the killings. The wilful abrogation of Rajiv-Longowal accord of 1985 and imposition of President's rule in Punjab followed. In the face of such behaviour from the centre it was obvious that the call of the extremists on

grounds of religion, appealed more to the Sikh masses. This was used to mobilize the Sikhs and assert Sikh identity aggressively. The problem with the centre was its inability to accept ethnic demands and accommodate social problems.

The relative deprivation thesis adopted by Charles Y. Glock which sees religion as a compensatory response of deprived people may not hold good in the case of Punjab but it can be a subject of debate (16). Bryan Wilson sees the social significance of religion in the provision of categories and symbols that help man in comprehending his circumstances and enabling him to cope with them emotionally. Religious language is useful as it is a storehouse of values and a battery of manipulative symbols (17). In Punjab religion was used to pacify some and incite some against others. The language was used in a way that evoked separatist feelings. The militants even issued injunctions that extensive use of Gurmukhi must be made in all schools, institutions and government offices.

Idea of salvation proffers present reassurance. Whatever form cultural, local or personal anxieties may take, religion offers to still anxieties by recourse to reassuring beliefs, practices or facilities. The sacred literature recounts episodes of human anxiety and anguish and the ways in which such experience may be assuaged (18). Religion maintains social cohesion according to Emile Durkheim.

Religious activity allows people to take cognizance of themselves as collectivities to symbolize their social order and gain an objective sense of their own society. Religion confers identity on individuals and groups and answers questions 'who am I' and who are we? Rituals facilitate expression of emotions and elicit response, encourage expression and the means of assuaging emotions. Latent functional analysis supplies the answer to the question why religion persists. Unfortunately in the case of Punjab there was no social cohesion, and whenever cohesion was revealed, say by the Akali Dal, it was never for a religious purpose but with the view to attaining political ends. The sacred literature of the Sikhs is vast and enlightening. Sadly, though, religion did not seem to assuage the anxieties of those in trouble in the 80's.

Contingencies of human life occasionally force people to ask fundamental questions about meaning and purpose, and more often to seek support, solace and reinforcement for their goodwill and commitment. On itself, this suggests a somewhat private role-religion functioning for individuals. But individuals in remission create groups and groups may become movements, in which a sense of wider common purpose and subscription to a more substantive philosophy of life might become a focus for large numbers of men (19). But as asserted earlier recourse to religion were minor palliatives,

for the malaise was rooted deeply in the domestic and internal politics as well as economic of Punjab.

Comparison between social and religious institutions makes apparent the extent to which other institutions have been capable of internal rationalization, while religion exposes distinct limits in introducing national procedures. Taking this cue, the religious extremists in Punjab chose not to divorce means from ends. Religious sanction by the *jathedars*, members of Akali Dal and militant leaders in the Golden Temple gave legitimacy to the most irrational decisions ever made. The Sikh social system provided structures that called for close interaction with religion, but never to the level of extremities that were carried out in Punjab.

In a study on patterns of sectarianism, by Bryan Wilson, four types of sects can be listed. There are five distinctive ways in which sects originated. Firstly, when a charismatic figure represents new teaching, and recruits from any or all other religious movements, restoration of old concepts is revived. Secondly, it may begin as a result of internal schism within existing sects. Thirdly it may be formed by the coming together of a group of seekers who evolve as a group experience, new patterns of worship and new statements of belief. Fourthly it arises from an attempt to revitalise the beliefs and practices within a

movement. Finally a non denominational revivalism, as an unintended consequence, bring new sects into being, as those who undergo similar enthusiastic conversion find assimilation into existing denominations difficult (20).

The Bhindranwale phenomenon and religious revivalists could be fitted into the mould of a conversionist sect Wilson talks about. It is a sect that converts people into its own way of life and worship. Bhindranwale represented a new teaching and a new group experience for members. It began as a result of the clash between Nirankaris and Akalis. But we must bear one important fact in mind, sect studies can fall into errors of prediction since conclusions rested on the experience of certain types of sects, sects which existed in very particular social circumstances and accommodated people whose social marginality and sense of anomie were temporary and a consequence of inadequate readjustment to rapidly changing social conditions (21). The Bhindranwale sect should therefore not be taken as the reason to expose Sikhism as fundamentalist. As explained in previous chapters the rise of this sect was a nightmare and its fall was predictable.

T.N. Madan points out that "contrary to what may be presumed, it is not religious zealots alone who contribute to Fundamentalism or fanaticism which is a misunderstanding of religion, reducing it to mere political bickering, but also the secularists who deny the very legitimacy of religion in human life and society and provoke a reaction" (22).



Harjot Singh Oberoi in the conclusion to his chapter on Sikh Fundamentalism remarks, the last decade belonged to sikh fundamentalists. Not only did they define the public agenda within the province, but their impact was felt across India. Appeal of Sikh fundamentalism was demonstrated during the Dec. 1989 parliamentary elections of the 13 elected candidates, 6 were from Akali Dal and two others elected from Amritsar and Ferozepur were closely aligned to this party. Those 8 candidates won with the efforts of the AISSF. It is closely associated with Dandami Taksal and served as its political front in the late 80's and early 90's. Legitimacy conferred by fundamentalist Taksal enabled candidates to trounce the contestants from the Congress and from the two Akali factions - Badal and Longowal groups" (23). According to Oberoi elections demonstrated that fundamentalists became an autonomous and authoritative discourse in Punjab it subsumed other ideologies, particularly Sikh ethnonationalism. The exclusive preserve of the state and conventional political parties was usurped by fundamentalists. In 1991 Sikhs in increasing numbers turned towards fundamentalist organizations to settle land claims, labor disputes, marital discord and other collective and personal problems. The material conditions have continued to sustain fundamentalism and its ideology seemingly gives solutions for everyday life.

Unfortunately, though, however apt this explanation may seem, the whole phenomenon has been grossly misquoted as fundamentalistic. At best we can replace it with obscurantism or explain the events as the outcome of actions of some religious fanatics. However, here again we cannot find adequate explanation in religion alone. Bits and pieces need to be assembled from history, geography, economy and polity. As Krishna Kumar observes in his paper on Hindu revivalism, "unlike some societies where fundamentalism or revivalism surfaced as a discrete element in politics, revivalism in northern India is a phenomenon organically related to the cultural development of a specific stratum of society" (24). Rise of fundamentalist forces in other countries helped revivalists in India gain popular sanction in the 1980's. It is no wonder, then, that they got the ability to mobilize a vast cross-section of the masses.

As T.K. Oommen stresses it, in a society like India with an ancient and plural religious tradition, a large number of movements anchored around religion are bound to emerge. Movements are adaptive mechanisms in a period of rapid social change. With adaptation, change is institutionalized. In India movements have been pre-political or religious in orientation, variously described as millenarian, revivalist, revitalization, nativist, messianic etc. When objectives of these movements is political or economic, mobilization of participants is achieved by

invoking primordial similarity and employing religious symbols (25).

Satish Saberwal says that, "it is characteristic of any enduring complex tradition, and of the associated identities, that these can generate individuals and groups committed to defending the integrity of the tradition and of identity, regardless of personal cost. That is very much the stuff of martyrdom—a prolific source for fresh symbols (28). The situation in Punjab and the Bhindranwale movement can be adapted well into the observations of Oommen and Saberwal.

A theoretical observation made by Clifford Geertz on culture maintains that as an interworked systems of construable signs, culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviour institution or processes can be casually attributed. Instead it is a context something within which they can be intelligibly described (27). Similarly the assertion of Sikh identity and symbols in the recent past can be described as a part of Sikh culture and tradition. It would be grossly wrong to casually attribute the growth of so-called fundamentalism to Sikh culture. As described in the first chapter, Sikh fundamentalism is a misrepresentation of a phenomenon.

In understanding the contemporary problem related to religion, Randhir Singh comments thus: "the most important conclusion for purpose of my argument is that the criticism

of religion and inter-related phenomena of revivalism and fundamentalism, and communalism, especially as it is also an escape into, or aggressive assertion of an identity based on religion, must become the criticism of society that makes religion and the rest of them, both necessary and possible" (28).

Given the religious character and class history limitations, the aggressive assertion of Sikh identity by so called fundamentalists, in? due course lost its momentum and became conservative and a reactionary factor in social life. He further observes that organised religion is essentially divisive of humankind. peaceful, coexistent, tolerant, accomodating and even fraternal in one context, it can become explosive and murderous as well. Sikh religious revivalism revealed these dangerous portents, which requires no further explication here. " We should not seek the cause of recent explosive emergence of communalism primarily in religion or religious revivalism and fundamentalism, or in religious identities. The cause is to be found in the concrete historical conjunctures, the economic, and political matrix of contemporary India" (29).

The Punjab malaise can be succintly put into Randhir Singh's explanation. The Indian economic development with its structural logic of inequality and unevenness has produced two India's. One which characterizes affluence. The other is

marked with poverty, hunger, inhuman conditions for masses, insecurities, alienations, no jobs, no ideals for the youth, a society in deep social and moral crisis. This condition provides a continuing social material basis for the sustenance and reinforcement of all sorts of religiosity or *dharmikata*, revivalism, fundamentalism and obscurantism and also ideologies and practices like communalism. The degeneration that occurred in Punjab's society is the outcome of the absence of a strong countervailing democracy or socialist culture. This would explain a great deal about the compensatory appeal of religious forces, with their harking back to puritanical traditions of early Sikhism (30).

The nature of leadership in Sikh institutions was not encouraging either. They portrayed a rebellious stance. Young Sikh activists are buttressed in their own aspiration to leadership by the belief that acts, that they conceive as being heroic and sacrificial, have both spiritual and political significance. Bhindranwale reinforced and encouraged this idea. His message was taken as an endorsement of killings that these youth committed. Religious violence gave power to those who had no power before (31). Harchand Singh Longowal - moderate leader of the Akali Dal - regarded Bhindranwale as the prime obstacle of the very unity he preached.

To understand Sikh identity it is misleading to go principally to the Sikh scriptures and then try and trace a unilinear logic that will connect Sikh militancy of today with the Sikh religion and tenets of yester years. The Nanak panthis, to begin with, grew in opposition to rigid Hindu and Muslim practices. Later, Sikhism left Nanak-panthis behind and took on a militant anti-Muslim character from Guru Gobind Singh's time that lasted till Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Later, this quiescence was disturbed in the 1870's with Singh Sabhas, where the important issue was to culturally separate Sikhs from the Hindus. In the 1940's, Sikh identity again focused around their enmity with Muslims. Akali opposition to Pakistan was fuelled by this cultural memory. The Punjabi-Suba movement of the 1950's and 1960's did not enliven the Sikh militant tradition to any significant extent, but only sought parity with other regional communities across India. Militancy crystallized first with the Operation Bluestar and then the November 1984 massacres. Sikh militants along with ethnicists and communalists expound on questions, why the Indian government failed to restore Sikh pride (32). The misgivings on the part of the central government can also be spaced in this sequence of events.

The centre was left with little choice since 1980. Sikh identity of today, alongwith its militant flavour is an outcome of the interaction from 1980 onwards between Sikhs and Hindus and the Indian nation state. It is no wonder,

then, that Sikhs in general, commended the militant image, however vicariously. The Sikh community stands today, at the crossroads of history.

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