

Electoral Politics in Punjab: 1966-2004

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Punjab as a state holds a unique position in India as religion, caste, region, language and leadership factors combine differently in different elections to produce contrasting electoral outcomes. Over the last three decades virtually a bipolar party system has come to stay in the state, where power has been alternating between the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Congress, the two major contenders for power. The durability of the alliance between the SAD and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be explained in terms of the long-standing anti-Congress tradition of the SAD and the complementary electoral bases of the two parties. Parliamentary and assembly elections since 1996 have significantly reflected a shift in the electoral politics of Punjab in the sense that politico-economic issues have increasingly replaced the ethno-religious issues. Also discernable is the shift from anti-centre stand to cooperative federalism and from a politics of confrontation to peace and Hindu-Sikh unity. Such a shift in the political agenda of SAD represent the yearning of the people in today's post-militancy Punjab to have a break from Gurudwara politics and hope for lasting peace and prosperity.

Redrawing the Territorial and Demographic Map of Post-Partition Punjab

The partition of India after de-colonization on the basis of two-nation theory resulted in the massive reorganization of the territorial boundaries of Punjab. The Indian part of Punjab secured thirteen out of twenty nine districts, amounting to 38 per cent of the land area and 47 percent of the population of pre-partition Punjab [Akbar, 1985:155-156]. 4.29 million Hindus and Sikhs who migrated to Indian Punjab had to abandon 6.7 million acres of valuable canal colony land; for the 4.35 million Muslims going to Pakistan part of Punjab; the figure was 4.7 million acres in India. Subsequently in September 1966, the Punjab province was further trifurcated under the Punjab reorganization Bill. As a result, the southern, Hindi speaking plain districts were carved out to create a new state of Haryana inheriting 35.80 per cent of the territory and 37.37 per cent of the population. The other Hindi-speaking hill districts to the north of Punjab were merged with neighbouring Himachal Pradesh that received 23 per cent of the territory and 7 per cent of the population of the post-partition Punjab [Anand, 1976: 262]. The remaining Punjabi speaking areas formed the new state of Punjab. At present the geographical area of Punjab is 5,033, 00 hectares, of which 70.28 per cent is rural and 29.72 per cent is urban. Further, 36.93

per cent of the population is Hindu and 60.75 per cent are Sikhs as per the 1991 census.

Post-partition Punjab, originally known as the land of the 'five waters', a term describing the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej rivers, was left with only three of the five rivers creating three intrafluvial tracts resulting in to three internal physiographic regions. The region enclosed between the river Ravi and river Sutlej is the Majha region, widely considered as the 'cradle of Sikhism' due to the presence of major Sikh shrines and pilgrimage centres. The fertile tract of Doaba lies between the river Beas and river Sutlej. The territory situated across the river Sutlej is called the Malwa region. These socio-geographic regions with their distinct histories and traditions reflect internal social, cultural and political cleavages among the people of Punjab. [Deol, 2000: 2-4].

Besides geography, the cleavages have also been in the form of religion and the rural-urban divide in Punjab - in fact in all the 'four forms of Punjab'- undivided Punjab under colonial India, post-partition Punjab, the Punjab after the reorganization in 1956 and the post-1966 Punjab of today. Muslims numerically dominated in the western districts of pre-partition Punjab, Hindus formed the majority in the Southeastern districts of Haryana region while the Sikhs were numerically strong in the central Punjab. 'Regionalism and religion thus overlapped suggesting the two factors intensifying each other' [Wallace, 1989: 418]. The urban-rural divide existed in the sense that Muslims and the Sikhs were primarily identified as rural whereas the Hindus, despite sizable presence in the rural areas, were also identified as the urban community as they were in minority in rural Punjab compared with the Sikhs and the Muslims.

The contradiction between the Hindus on the one hand and the Muslims and the Sikhs on the other also had an objective class basis related to the factor of economic dominance. The landed peasantry belonged to the Sikhs and the Muslims whereas the Hindus dominated trade, money lending and commerce. It was reflected in the social basis of the political parties. The Muslim as well as the Sikh landlords both supported National Unionist party founded in 1923. Widely known as the 'Junker party' it even succeeded, in forming the first elected government by defeating the Muslim League in the 1937 provincial elections with the support of the Khalsa National party. The support base for the Congress in pre-partition Punjab thus primarily remained limited to the urban Hindus.¹ The electoral institutions introduced in the form of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935, thus, subserved the colonial interest by accentuating competition for political power among the communities. Political parties inspired by communal and caste interests. [Rai, 1987].

Besides religion the regional consideration also played a role in determining the political choices. Thus partition despite bringing significant changes 'in the geographic and social composition of the communal, rural-urban, and regional orientations' hardly affected their interactive nature and political dynamics. Demographically, despite having Hindu majority in Haryana and Hill areas, only a

minimum consensus existed between these two regions or with Hindus from other parts of post-partition Punjab. [Wallace, 1989:421].

Emergence of 'New' Kind of Identity Politics

Punjab has historically been witness to protracted conflicts between the Sikhs, with whom the Hindus were allied, and the Muslims that culminated in the form of partition followed by communal bloodbath and large-scale migration. [Nayar, 1968: 436]. The changed territorial boundaries as a result of the partition created a new kind of identity politics as the Muslims ceased to exist in any significant number in post-partition Punjab. After partition as per the 1951 census 61 per cent of the total population of Punjab was made up of Hindus, whereas the Sikhs constituted 35 per cent. This along with the concentration of the Sikhs in the central Punjab gave hope to the Akali leadership for the creation of a Sikh majority state. The urgency was also felt due to the apprehensive mood after the abolition of separate communal representation in the legislative bodies. The traumatic experience of the 1940's also impelled the Sikh leadership to look for a political solution that could safeguard the community's rights and interests. [Tan and Kudaisya, 2000: 101]. The language controversy reflected this 'deeper quest for recognition and power by a minority community in a multi-ethnic state.' [Deol, 2000: 94].

Much before partition the ethno-religious identity politics had found its concrete expression in Punjab as early as in the beginning of the 20th century with the formation of organizations like Punjab Hindu Sabha, Punjab Muslim League and Chief Khalsa Diwan. [Gill and Singhal, 1984:803]. The Tat Khalsa movement played a significant role 'to insert definition of religion and community into the day to day life of Sikhs' making it possible not only for the 'mass of people to experience themselves as Sikhs in the fashion desired by the Tat Khalsa, but also for non-Sikhs to visualize Sikhs as a distinct group.' [Oberoi, 1994: 416]. The Singh Sabhas were formed in response to the attempt by the Arya Samaj to construct a communitarian Hindu consciousness by celebrating the ancient Vedic tradition and renouncing all the later philosophies.

The Sikh identity politics emerged into an institutionalized form with the organization of a political party called Shiromani Akali Dal [SAD] in January 1921. SAD was to act as the political arm of Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandhak Committee [SGPC]. SGPC, formed earlier on November 15, 1920, was entrusted with the task of managing all the Sikh gurudwaras in the province after the passage of the Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1925. The Act followed the Gurudwara reform movement led by SAD.

The communal response of the Hindus in the form of their renouncing Punjabi as their mother tongue and declaring themselves as Hindi speaking in both the 1951 and 1961 census heightened the Akali leadership concern for preserving an independent Sikh identity. Thus, although the Punjabi Suba movement was launched ostensibly on the linguistic basis, in reality the Akali led Sikh leadership never

concealed their real intention either. [Lamba, 1999]. The non-inclusion of the non-Sikh Punjabi-speaking areas in reorganized Punjab receives attention in this regard.

Significantly while dubbing the rejection of Punjabi as mother tongue by the non-Sikhs as ‘an overt and deliberate political act designed to undercut linguistic basis of Punjabi suba demand,’ Brass has argued that ‘the dominant Hindu majority, unable to assimilate the Sikhs, adopted the tactic of avoiding their language so that the Sikhs, a minority people by religion, might become a minority by language as well’ [Brass, 1974: 327,298]. It did not help that the centre also, ‘for the first time faced with a political formation that was hostile to it’, as far as the nativist movements for linguistic re-organization of the states were concerned, promptly ‘ethniced’ it in order to marginalize it’s opponents. [Gupta, 1985: 1190]. While the slogan of ‘Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan’ found support among the Hindu community the feeling among the Sikh community was echoed by Sardar Hukum Singh who observed ‘While others got states for their languages, we lost even our language’ [Quoted in Brass, 1974: 320]. The Hindu-Sikh divide was evident in the conflicting assertions about the status of Punjabi as a dialect or a distinct language and also about what should be its script. [Sarhadi, 1970, 211].

Punjabi Suba Movement

The Punjabi *suba* movement was formally launched in August 1950, spanning over two decades following the refusal of the central political leadership to concede to the Akali leadership’s demand for separate communal electorates and reservation of the seats for the Sikhs in the legislature. The movement asking for reorganization of Punjab on linguistic basis was comparable to similar nationwide movement of linguistic groups seeking statehood. The assertion of the demand for a ‘self-determined political status’ for the Sikhs within the union [Anand, 1976: 263] received a setback after the refusal by the State Reorganization Commission in 1956 to grant a Punjabi speaking state on the grounds that Punjabi was not distinct from Hindi in grammatical and spatial sense and also that Punjabi Hindus did not support the idea in the census of 1951. The Arya Samaj, Jan Sangh and RSS opposed the movement by launching a counter ‘*Maha-Punjab*’ movement.

Consequently as a compromise formula PEPSU was merged with Punjab and the state was divided into Hindi and Punjabi regions. Though the SAD accepted it at the time and did not contest the 1957 general elections, the Sikhs in general felt cheated. [Deol, 2000:93-95]. As a result the Akalis re-launched the movement in 1959 though the party under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh now gave a regional slant to the movement asking for the creation of Punjabi Suba exclusively on the basis of language ‘without consideration of the percentage of Sikh population’. Pakistan.² Akali leadership raised the emotive question: ‘the Hindus got Hindustan, the Muslims got Pakistan; what did the Sikhs get?’ [Master Tara Singh quoted in Nayar, 1966:102]. In the circumstances the Akali Dal continued to see itself more as a party of the Sikhs than a regional party. The party sought to project itself as protector of

the Punjabi language as well as the Sikh religion as against what it saw as the deliberate pursuit of the policy to assimilate the language and culture of a minority group.

Besides the language issue the growing cleavage between the two communities could be explained in terms of the exodus of the Muslims from Indian Punjab that made Punjab essentially dual community province, brought the Hindus and the Sikhs as the two communities competing for political and economic supremacy. The rural-urban divide also played a role.

Social Cleavages within the Sikh Community

In the post-1966 Punjab there was a change in the sociological origin of the Akali leadership during the *Punjabi Suba* movement. The Akali leadership until the 1962 elections came primarily from the urban upper caste middle class Sikhs while the majority of the Sikhs lived in the rural regions. The widening and deepening of the democracy in the electoral sense with passing decades along with the economic empowerment in the wake of the green revolution transformed the leadership structure within Akali Dal. The emergence of Sant Fateh Singh, a Jat in place of Master Tara Singh, an upper caste *Khatri* who was described as 'Bhapa' and a representative of urban Sikh symbolized it. [Bajwa, 1979:25]. Since then the Sikh and the Akali leadership has been dominated by Jat Sikhs, the numerically strong peasant caste. It holds true even for the Congress.³

Rapid social mobilization, economic development, party competition and factionalism have, however, also led to political divisions within the Jat Sikh community. The Congress has had a sizable support within the community along with the Akali Dal. The Jat Sikhs, for instance, averaged 37.47 per cent among the Congress MLAs elected between 1967 to 1992. [Verma, 1998: 63]. The dominance of the Jat Sikhs has diminished the political role of other castes among the Sikhs namely mercantile upper castes *Khatri*s, *Aroras* and *Ahluwalias*; artisan castes, like the *Tarkhans* or the *Ramgarhias* or the *Rais* and the *Lohars* (carpenter and ironworkers), *Chimbhas* (tailor), *Labanas* and *Kumhars* (potters); and the dalit castes, like the *chamars* (tanners) and *chuhars* or *Valmiki*s (sweepers) also called *Mazhabis* and *Ramdasi*s thus creating internal cleavages within the Sikh community. [Singh, 1984: 42]. Though dalits are made up of 37 different communities, the *chamars* and *chuhars* together make up for around three-fourths of the entire dalit population of the state of both Hindus and Sikhs. The dalit population now also consist of the migrant labourers coming from UP, Bihar and Orissa who started coming in the aftermath of the green revolution and have now mostly settled down and acquiring the voting rights. [Singh, 1984:44]

In addition to the observance of caste hierarchy, despite having no religious justification in Sikhism, the class division between the land owning *Jats* and the landless *Tarkhans* and the dalits working as the retainers/tenants and agricultural labour respectively, has been a major source of the internal cleavage in the Sikh

community in contemporary rural Punjab. This is ironical as the dalits account for around 29 per cent of the total population of Punjab, far above the all India average (16.32 percent) with the highest concentration in the Jalandhar district [Jodhka, 2000: 392]. The Sikh scheduled castes called the Mazhabi Sikhs have of late been developing their own distinct cultures of deprivation with new religious faiths and symbols of identity that reflect their alienation from the institutionalized Sikh religious structures. [Juergensmeyer, 1979: 255-62]. In electoral terms it is reflected in the emergence of Bahujan Samaj Party [BSP] as a distant third alternative alongside SAD and Congress. Pertinently, as the verdict of the recent elections show, though BSP has so far been unable to carve out an independent space in Punjab politics, its share of the popular vote has been impressive in recent years. [Table 1 and 2].

Politics of Autonomy

The religious-cultural identity politics as explained above, that have dominated politics of Punjab for most of the post-partition period has had a historical basis in Punjab. The demand for the Sikh homeland, which was based on the notion of *Raj Karega Khalsa* or *Khalse Ka Bolbala* (pre-eminence of Khalsa), found expression in the Akali movement for Punjabi *Suba*. The Punjabi *Suba* movement consolidated the process of religion-based linguistic differentiation by imagining Punjab as a homeland for the Sikhs.

It was such sentiment that found expression in the form of the Anandpur Sahib resolutions of 1973 and 1978 and later in the form of the autonomist/secessionist movement in the decade of the 1980's. The core of Akali demands relating to the political, economic and social relationship between the centre and the state of Punjab are to be found in the Anandpur Sahib resolution adopted by the working committee of the Akali Dal in October 1973. The resolution incorporated seven objectives aimed to establish the 'preeminence of the Khalsa through creation of a congenial environment and a political set up'. These were: the transfer of the federally administered city of Chandigarh to Punjab; the readjustment of the state boundaries to include certain Sikh majority Punjabi speaking territory, presently outside but contiguous to Punjab; demand for autonomy to all the states of India with the centre retaining jurisdiction only over external affairs, defence and communications; introduction of land reforms in the form of land ceiling being raised to 30 acres instead of prevailing 17.50 acres as well as the subsidies and loans for the peasantry as well as the measures to bring about heavy industrialization in Punjab; the enactment of an all India Gurudwara Act to bring all the historic gurudwaras under the control of the SGPC; protection for the Sikh minorities living outside the state; reversal of the new recruitment policy of the centre under which the recruitment quota of Sikhs in the armed forces fell from 20 per cent to 2 per cent. The working committee of Akali Dal added two new demands to the Anandpur Sahib resolutions in February 1981 after which a set of forty-five demands were

submitted to the centre in September in the same year. These were: the halting of reallocation of available waters of riparian Punjab to non-riparian states. Under the federally regulated arrangements, 75 per cent of the river waters of Punjab were being allocated to other states and the recognition of Sikh personal law⁵. [Deol, 2000:101-3; Pettigrew, 1995:5; Gill and Singhal, 1984: 606-7].

The texts of the two Anandpur Sahib resolutions irrespective of their different interpretations by the different factions of the Akali Dal and also the propaganda of the other political parties, essentially highlights the social, political and economic grievances of the state of Punjab under an increasingly centralized Indian federal polity. The 'theo-political ideology' of the Akali Dal does get reflected, however, as the resolutions stipulate that in the proposed 'new' Punjab with enlarged territory (where the Sikhs would be losing their slender majority as of present) the 'interests of the Sikhs are to be specifically protected' or that Sikhs are to have a 'paramount place or enjoy 'pre-eminence'. Holding religion as the basis of nationality, the Akali Dal pledged to become 'the embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh nation and fully entitled to its representation'. [Bombwall, 1986:889]. Sharp Hindu hostility to the resolution provoked emotional allegiance for the report amongst a sizable section of the Sikh community, disabling them to notice the contradictions in it. As in the case of the Punjabi Suba movement the mass thinking on the resolutions also received communal colouring.

Akali Dal: Emergence of Factions

The repeated failures in the negotiations with the central government that began in October 1981 led to the intensification of the second phase of Akali agitation that ultimately led to Operation Bluestar followed by Operation Woodrose after the Akali Dal threatened to intensify their agitation against clause (2)(b) of Article 25 that defines Sikhs as Hindus. Militancy in Punjab, which was already simmering in the form of the rise of Bhindranwale received further impetus after these repressive acts of the centre. The anti-Sikh riots that followed in Delhi and other parts of India further alienated the Sikh community. The Akali Dal leaders most of whom were released only in March 1985 after spending months in jail during the post-Bluestar period, made attempt to save Punjab from the rise of religious fundamentalism and militancy in the form of the Rajiv-Longowal accord on 24 July 1985.⁶ The failure of the accord in the aftermath of the assassination of Longowal and stiff opposition from Haryana meant that despite Akali Dal being able to come to power for the first time on its own by winning the 1985 elections. However, due to communal polarization, Punjab was witness to a heightened acrimony between the moderates and the extremists within the Akali Dal. The continued efforts to undercut the Akali Dal by the Congress with the help of the centre and taking over the Dal's support base further weakened the support base of the moderates leading to the subsequent dismissal of Barnala government in 1987. The Akali Dal eventually came under the firm control of the extremists and other elements supportive of militancy. The

situation remained the same even after the victory of Akali Dal (Mann) in November 1989 parliamentary elections when it won 6 out of the 8 seats contested, securing 29.19 per cent of the votes. The party now clearly stood for the right to self-determination under the presidentship of Simranjit Singh Mann that subsequently found expression in the form of Amritsar declaration. The marginalization of the two moderate factions of Akali Dal led by Prakash Singh Badal and Surjit Singh Barnala was evident as the two factions put together managed to win only 6.65 per cent of the votes and could not win a single seat. The Akali Dal factions led by Mann and Badal boycotted the parliamentary elections as well as the assembly elections that took place one year after the 1991 general elections under president's rule thereby undermining the legitimacy of the victory of Congress. It was only when there were elections for the panchayat raj institutions and municipalities that registered massive 82 per cent voting that competitive politics returned with Akali Dal fighting elections to the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. [Verma, 1995:1325]. The resurrection of the traditional Akali Dal under the leadership of Badal was also helped by the fact that by the end of 1993 militancy had been wiped out. Shiromani Akali Dal (United) came into existence in 1994 uniting as many as 6 factions of Akali Dal in the name of *Panthic* unity, primarily due to the efforts of Bhai Manjit Singh, the then acting Jathedar of Akal Takht, the seat of the temporal power for the Sikhs. However the Akali Dal (Badal) remained separate. Gradually however as the urge for peace became stronger Akali Dal (Badal) emerged as the dominant faction, being able to integrate almost all the constituents of United Akali Dal with the notable exception of Akali Dal (Mann). Akali Dal (B) was split again on the eve of the 1999 parliamentary elections as Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the president of the SGPC for close to two decades raised the banner of revolt against Badal with the help of the then Akal Takht Jathedar. The Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal (SHSAD) was formed under the leadership of Tohra on May 30, 1999. It formed an electoral alliance with AD (Mann), AD (Panthic), AD (Democratic). The different factions fought both the Lok Sabha and the assembly elections separately in 1999 and 2002 respectively contributing to the dismal performance of Akalis in both elections, as we will discuss below. The Congress Party that had a poor run in the 1996, 1998 parliamentary and 1997 assembly elections was able to make electoral gains. The 2004 parliamentary elections witnessed a newfound unity among the Akalis with the merger of the Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal [SHSAD] as well as the SAD (Democratic) led by Kuldip Singh Wadala with the official SAD. The ascendancy of Akali Dal (Badal) can be explained in terms of Badal's control over both SGPC and the Akal Takht the highest temporal and religious seats of the Sikh community respectively. Besides giving legitimacy and religious sanction, the SGPC has also been the major source of human and material resources for the Akalis who have always used the religious shrines for not only locating their headquarters but also for issuing appeals for *panthic* unity and launching their *morchas* and *dharam yudhs*.

Akali Dal and Congress in Punjab: Electoral Performance

Like in most other states of India in Punjab also there has been emergence of electoral bipolarity right from the reorganization of Punjab as the voters have alternatively been voting for the SAD and Congress in varying permutations and combinations for 13 parliamentary and 117 assembly seats, redrawn after the 1971 census, at different points of time. Significantly, in Punjab the voter's turnout has always been higher than the national average. [Tables 1 and 2].

The partition, as discussed above, not only effected significant change in the social demographic composition of Punjab but also in the nature of its political configuration. With the out-migration of Muslim community in the aftermath of partition and related communal bloodbath across the newly constituted territorial boundaries, the Muslim League ceased to be a political force in the state. From being a third force in terms of political significance in the pre-partition Punjab that was dominated by the rivalry between the Unionist party and the Congress, the Akali Dal emerged as one of the two major parties besides Congress. The ascendancy of Akali Dal in post-1966 Punjab has been remarkable especially if one considers the fact that the separate communal representation was abolished in independent India. [Table 1]. The revival of the party after it had merged itself into Congress in 1956 may be explained in terms of the following factors: decline of Congress after the fourth general elections as the dominant party, radical change in terms of social demography over time, control of the Akali Dal over the SGPC, and the economic empowerment of the Jat Sikh rich landed peasantry in the aftermath of the green revolution. The decline of the Unionist party helped Akalis. The electoral bi-polarity veering around the two parties is evidenced in terms of the vote share the two parties have received. The SAD has received on average a vote share of 30.23 per cent in the eight assembly elections it has participated since 1967 elections. The Congress average vote share in all the nine assembly elections that has taken place in the same period has been 38.13 per cent. [Table 1]. The figure for SAD in the last five Lok Sabha elections and the assembly elections has been 24.4 per cent and 27.64 per cent respectively. [Table 2].

Despite holding the centre stage of Punjab electoral politics the two parties have always been looking for electoral alliances. This is more so in case of Akali Dal. Why? The possible answer lies in terms of limited social support base of the Akali Dal that has made electoral alliances or united fronts a matter of political compulsion for them. Right from its role in the Gurudwara reform movement to the Punjabi Suba movement the Akali Dal has been identified primarily as a party being supported by the Sikhs especially the rural Jat Sikh landed peasantry. The Punjabi Suba movement and Anandpur Sahib resolutions also contributed to this benchmarking. Moreover, as discussed above, the Sikh community has had differences on class and regional lines that increased in the wake of the green revolution. [Puri, 1995: 49]. On the politico-ideological plane there are equally sharp divisions among the Sikhs as a significant section of the community has been

traditionally voting for the Congress. The cross-communal social bases of Congress was evidenced in the fact that Congress succeeded in getting elected more Sikh candidates than the Akali Dal in the first general assembly elections after the reorganization of Punjab. There has also been support among a small section of the Sikhs for the communist parties especially the Communist Party of India though the ideology of religious fanaticism during the phase of militancy severely eroded the ideology of socialism and secularism represented by the Left forces. [Dogra, 1986: 565]. To compound its problem, the Akalis have always been divided among factions due to internal conflict of an endemic nature over strategy and tactics as well as over leadership.

Given all the above factors it has always been a very difficult task for the Akali Dal to secure a majority of their own in the first-past-the-post polling system. [Kapur, 1986: 216]. Aware of this fact the Akali Dal succeeded in forming a coalition government led by Sardar Gurnam Singh as Chief Minister in an alliance with the Jan Sangh and the Communist Party after the first two assembly elections in the reorganized Punjab in 1967 and 1969, notwithstanding the fact that Jan Sangh regarded 'the Sikhs as part and parcel of the Hindu society'. [Brass, 1974:333]. The Akali Dal and Jan Sangh even agreed to have a three-language policy in 1969 replacing Sachar formula under which both Hindi and Punjabi had been given parity. Punjabi was made the first compulsory language and medium of instruction in all the government schools whereas Hindi and English as second and third language were to be implemented from the class 4 and 6 respectively. The realization that the Akali Dal will always find it difficult to come to power on its own even after the reorganization of Punjab made the party appeal to both the Hindus and to seek the electoral alliances in order to broaden its electoral base. In 1977 again the the Akali Dal formed a government under Prakash Singh Badal in an alliance with the Janata Party, a party primarily consisting of the erstwhile Jan Sangh members despite difference over the autonomy issue.

The chances of Akali Dal coming to power on its own are mostly in exceptional situation like when the voting takes place on sharp communal lines, as was the case in the 1985 assembly elections. The party polled just 38.4 per cent of the popular vote against Congress 37.8 per cent. And even if that happens, there would always be question mark about its legitimacy to rule over a state where Hindus are only marginally less than half of the population. That explains as to why even after securing majority on its own in the 1997 assembly elections Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chose to have a coalition government. It has been well argued that it is more of a strategic compulsion for the SAD to seek an electoral alliance with the BJP, a political party whose membership is primarily limited to the Hindus and which has a diametrically opposed ideology to that of SAD in the sense that BJP and its Hindutva allies do not acknowledge religious separatism or political separatism among the Sikhs and have been opposed to the Anandpur Sahib resolution. [Sharma, 1986]. Significantly the BJP- the the post-1980 incarnation of Jan Sangh - was not a signatory to the memorandum on autonomy presented to the constitution review

commission headed by Justice Venkatchaliah in 2000 despite being in the coalition government with the Akali Dal. As for BJP such kind of arrangement acted as a precursor of similar regional pacts that helped BJP to national power. [Singh, 1997: 229].

The continuation of Coalition politics in Punjab has promoted the culture of competitive populism but has also happily led to the 'gradual discarding of radical stances by political parties all over the state'. The latter is evident in the form of the manifestos of Akali Dal and its ally BJP to maintain 'peace, brotherhood, communal harmony, socio-economic welfare, all round development and sustainable and profitable agriculture through diversification'. The Moga declaration of SAD in 1995 has been illustrative of the shift in the agenda. The communal harmony theme is reminiscent of the common programme of the Akali-Jan Sangh coalition government way back in 1967. [Singh, 1981:103-4].

Table 1: Summary of Assembly Elections in Punjab (1952-2002)

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	INC		BJP BJS (1952-72)		CPI		State Party I			State Party II		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1952	126	55.3	96	36.7	-	5.6	4	3.9	SAD	13	12.4	ZP	2	7.5
1957	154	58.0	120	47.5	9	8.6	6	13.6	SCF	5	5.4	PSP	1	1.3
1962	154	65.5	90	43.7	8	9.7	9	7.1	SAD	19	11.9	SOC	4	1.4
1967	104	71.2	48	37.7	9	9.8	5	5.3	ADS	24	20.5	CPM	3	3.2
1969	104	72.3	38	39.2	8	9.0	4	4.8	SAD	43	29.4	CPM	2	3.1
1972	104	69.3	66	42.8	-	5.0	10	6.5	SAD	24	27.6	CPM	1	3.3
1977	117	65.4	17	33.6	-	-	7	6.6	SAD	58	31.4	JNP	25	15.0
1980	117	64.3	63	45.2	1	6.5	9	6.5	SAD	37	26.9	CPM	5	4.1
1985	117	67.5	32	37.9	6	5.0	1	4.3	SAD	73	38.0	JNP	1	1.1
1992	117	23.8	87	43.7	6	16.6	4	3.6	BSP	9	16.3	SAD	3	5.2
1997	117	68.7	14	26.6	18	8.3	2	3.0	SAD	75	37.6	BSP	1	7.5
2002	117	65.0	62	36.5	3	5.7	1	1.7	SAD	41	30.5	BSP	--	5.4

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Note: Remaining seats and vote have gone to either other minor parties or the independents.

Table 2: Summary of Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab since 1966

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	INC		BJP (1984-)/JNP (1977-80)/BJS (1967-72)		CPI		State Party I			State Party II		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1967	13	71.13	9	37.31	3	12.49	0	4.28	ADS	1	22.61	ADDM	0	4.42
1971	13	59.90	10	45.96	0	4.45	2	6.22	SAD	1	30.85	NCO	0	4.48
1977	13	70.14	0	34.85	3	12.50	0	1.65	SAD	9	42.30	CPM	1	4.94
1980	13	62.65	12	52.45	0	9.97	0	1.27	SAD	1	23.37	INC U	0	2.56
1985	13	67.36	6	41.53	0	3.39	0	3.84	SAD	7	37.17	CPM	0	2.98
1989	13	62.67	2	26.49	0	4.17	0	2.10	SAD (M)	6	29.19	JD	1	5.46
1992	13	23.96	12	49.27	0	16.51	0	1.57	SAD	0	2.58	BSP	1	19.71
1996	13	62.25	2	35.10	0	6.48	0	1.60	SAD	8	28.72	BSP	3	9.35
1998	13	60.07	0	25.85	3	11.67	0	3.40	SAD	8	32.93	BSP	0	12.65
1999	13	56.11	8	38.44	1	9.16	1	3.74	SAD	2	28.59	BSP	0	3.84
2004	13	61.6	2	34.2	3	10.5	0	2.6	SAD	8	34.3	BSP	0	

Source: CSDS Data Unit

Note: In the 1989 elections, 1 seat was won by the BSP, which secured 8.62 percent votes, Independents won 3 seats. In 1998, the Janata Dal won 1 seat and secured 4.18 percent votes.

Paradigmatic Shift

Elections in the post- militancy Punjab have continued to reflect a shift in the electoral politics of Punjab that was first visible in the 1997 elections in the sense that politico-economic issues i.e. development, roads, bridges, octroi, free power and water, traders demands, water for Punjab farmers, fiscal governance, institutionalized corruption have increasingly replaced the ethno-religious issues like Anandpur Sahib resolution, transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, anti-Sikh riots or fake encounters. The restoration of civilian rule witnessed the Akalis moving away from the *miri-piri* and inseparability of religion and politics syndrome. It evolved gradually from an agitation party of the Sikhs to a political party that belongs to all the Punjabis. Focus shifted from the panthic identity to the Punjabi identity. The shift has been reflected in the common minimum programme of SAD-BJP alliance. Also discernable is the shift within the SAD from anti-centre stand to cooperative federalism and from a politics of confrontation to peace and Hindu-Sikh unity as clearly mentioned in all the Akali Dal election manifestos since 1997. [Kumar, 1999: 287-307]. Such a shift in the political agenda of Akali Dal represents the yearning of the people in today's Punjab to have a break from Gurudwara politics and hope for lasting peace and prosperity with the lingering memories of the loss of life and property. One can also refer to the new breed of Akali party workers who, unlike the past, have very little concern with the Gurudwara politics or the SGPC. As the memories of Operation Bluestar and anti Sikh Riots fade, and a new generation of youth who have grown up in the militancy free 1990's peaceful Punjab become the voters, the 'secular criteria such as governance and economic policies' have taken precedence over the identity politics drawing up on the community and regional aspirations. [Verma, 1999; Jodhka; 2000a].

Will this lead to the reconstruction of the SAD? The national election survey data of Centre for Developing Societies, Delhi shows that the social base of the SAD is in sharp contrast to that of the Congress. Akalis fail to attract a sizable support among the Hindus as well as amongst the lower caste groups of Sikhs. In other words, Akali Dal continues to be the party of Jat Sikhs and Khatri [Kumar, 2002]. This poses a critical problem for the Akalis. When in the post-Mandal India the aspirations of the lower castes are being articulated vociferously, how far can the SAD afford to ignore these aspirations? If it continues to do that, factionalism and decline awaits it. It is obvious that just like when the SAD adopted a new language of development, sooner or later, it will also have to adopt a new social profile.

The continued deceleration in the predominantly agrarian economy of the state and lack of governance pose critical questions about the ability of both Congress and SAD to bring back the state on the path of development. The Akalis, who for the first time remained in power for complete term, paid the price of non-performance in 2002. [Table: 1]. The Congress made a comeback on the promise of giving clean and efficient governance. However, since its beginning the Amrinder Singh government has been involved in factional fights within the party between the

groups led by Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Amrinder Singh and also in the politics of vendetta vis-a-vis Akalis in the name of combating corruption. It is interesting to note that post-2004 Lok Sabha elections [Table: 2], while a united Akali Dal seems to be in a better position to take on the faction ridden Congress, it may not be able to force an effective shift from the more traditional versions of emotive and identity based politics that has been bane of Punjab. [Kumar, 2004]. The united decision of these two parties to abrogate unilaterally the SYL treaty this year is not sufficient to alter the political perception of the electorate who are thoroughly disgusted with them. Ironically, with all their failings and limitations, it is primarily these two major parties that have the potential of actually affecting a shift in the political agenda of Punjab and bring Punjab back to rail.

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Notes

¹ The alienation of the Sikh community from the Congress in colonial India can be attributed to the troubled relationship Sikh leadership had with Gandhi. In the wake of Jalianwala Bagh tragedy the Congress had a close rapport with the Sikh community with Gandhi having visited Punjab as the head of the committee appointed by the Congress to investigate into the tragedy and the Martial law regime. Gandhi also supported the Gurudwara movement. The SGPC president Sardar Kharak Singh was elected as the president of the provincial committee of Congress in 1922. However, Congress lukewarm response to the declaration of the SGPC as an unlawful association by the British government in October 1923 and more importantly to the insistence of Sikhs of their distinct identity separate from the sweeping Hindu fold soured the relationship between Mahatma and the community. [Kaur Singh, 2003:171-191].

² Throughout the traumatic 1940's the Sikhs led by Akali Dal had a relentless campaign against the Muslim League and the Unionist Party seeking to safeguard their political future in the face of the movement for Pakistan. The Baldev –Sikandar pact of 1942, the demand for 'Azad Punjab' in 1943 that involved the demarcation of the boundaries of the Punjab by detaching the Western Muslim majority areas away so that no single community was to be in a dominating position, the Akali-Congress-Unionist electoral alliance of 1945-46, The Akali-Muslim negotiations of 1946, and finally the acceptance of the partition in the wake of the collapse of the popular government in 1947 all attest to the attempts by the Sikh leadership to win sufficient

political safeguards for the beleaguered Sikh community.[Tan and Kudaisya, 2000:124].

³ The Jat Sikhs being the 'dominant caste' in Punjab has had significant historical basis. The political and economic rise of the Jats began in the early seventeenth century and the consolidation came after the formation of the Sikh Misls in the later part of the eighteenth century, and especially after the establishment of the Sikh empire by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a Jat Sikh. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were recognized by the British colonial regime as the premier agricultural community in Punjab and central to their. The other castes like for example the Tarkhans were classified as non-agriculturists and therefore technically unable to buy land under the Alienation of Land Act of 1900. Dubbed as a part of Punjab's 'martial races' the Jat Sikhs comprised almost half of the British Indian army as early as in 1914. Between 1885 and 1947 the Britishers irrigated approximately 4 million hectares in the doabs, the countryside turning a virtual wasteland into the greatest revenue generating and most prosperous and commercially productive agricultural area. These canal colonies' 'squares of land' were granted mostly to the Jat Sikhs, recognized as the 'agriculturists' and not to the landless 'menial' castes. The colonial regime ensured that the emergent canal colonies replicated the social order of the villages of eastern and central Punjab from where the settlers had migrated. These canal colonies thus fortified the existing social structure of the rural Punjab (and also the structure of the British rule). [Stern, 2001: 51-53].

⁴ The rethinking on the part of the Akali Dal about the optimal level of state's autonomy within a federal structure that could be 'both unitary as well as federal according to the requirements of time and circumstances' has nothing been unusual for the non-Congress parties. As early as in 1969 the ruling DMK government in Tamil Nadu had formed the Rajamannar commission to examine the federal provisions and to recommend about the nature of the allocation of powers between the union government and the states. Centre-state relations came under close scrutiny once again in 1977 in the form of a *memorandum on centre-state relations* submitted by the Left front government in west Bengal. The National Conference accepted the state autonomy committee report in 1999 that recommended the restoration of autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir as per the Delhi agreement in 1952.

⁵ The river water dispute that has been simmering since the reorganization of the state has the potential to blow in to a grave crisis that may seriously undermine the federal fabric of the polity especially in the aftermath of the unilateral revocation of the 1981 inter- water treaty entered into by Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan in July 2004. [Iyer, 2004: 3435].

⁶ The Rajiv-Longowal accord provided for transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab without linking it to the transfer from Punjab to Haryana of the tehsils of Fazilka and Abohar (which are not contiguous to Haryana so their transfer would have required the creation of a land corridor). Instead it was held that Hindi-speaking villages

bordering Haryana, as identified by a commission to be set up for the purpose, would be transferred to Haryana. Another commission was to be set up to settle the claims and counter-claims for the readjustment of the Punjab-Haryana boundary. As for the river water issue the state of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan were to continue to draw water from the Ravi- Beas system at the current levels and the claims of the states of Punjab and Haryana were to be settled by a tribunal presided over by a supreme court judge. [Editorial, 1985:1].

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