

ELECTORAL POLITICS IN PUNJAB : FROM AUTONOMY TO SECESSION

Fifty years of electoral history of Punjab has been intermeshed with issues relating to competing identities, regional autonomy and the political perception of threat and need paradox of democratic institutions. These issues together or separately have influenced the dynamics of electoral politics. The articulation of these issues in various elections has been influenced by the socio-economic and political context. Not only this, even the relevance of elections has depended on its capacity to seek resolution of conflicts emanating from interactive relationship of these factors.

These broad boundaries found expression in electoral discourse in four distinct phases i.e. pre-reorganisation from 1947 to 1966, reorganisation phase from 1966 to 1980, terrorism phase from 1980 and 1992 and post-terrorism from 1992 onwards.

Historically, social mobilisations and political articulation have also taken diverse forms. These assertions can be categorised under three main headings, i.e. communal, caste or religion; secular or strata based. All these competing identities have been co-existing. For instance, Punjab had, a culture and a language which transcended religious group boundaries, a unified politico-administrative unit and specialised modern technology, which initiated the integration process of the diverse religious, caste and other ascriptive group identities. In spite of the historical process of formulation and reformulation of the composite linguistic cultural consciousness, the tendency to evolve a unified sub-nationality with a common urge for territorial integrity remained weak in Punjab. On the contrary, politics mobilised people along communal lines resulting in the partition in 1947 and division in 1966 of the Punjabi speaking people.

All these forms of assertion have co-existed. A glance at certain historical events indicate that the process of formulation of communal identities was preceded by the assertion of separate religious group identities. However, secular and strata based articulations co-existed with these two trends. The co-existence of these identities also continues to have a bearing on electoral politics. A brief historical survey of the developments in politics, particularly in the realm of identity politics, is necessary to visualise the nature of electoral politics in the post-independent phase.

The 19th century saw the emergence of a number of religious reform movements in Punjab. In the initial phase these movements performed the role of boundary definition for their respective religious groups. These assertions on religious group lines led to the formation of religious group identities, which in the beginning of the 20th century acquired a communal form. The Arya Samaj and religious reform movements within the Sikh religious group in the initial phase shared some common concerns¹. Both these religious reform movements launched a campaign for redefining their religious boundaries which ultimately brought them into conflict with each other. The reformism which was initiated within the Sikh religious group by the Nirankari and Namdhari sects, however, confined themselves to the purification of their own religious norms and opposition to idol worship and other rituals to mark death, birth and marriage. These religious reform movements did not degenerate into a communal form.

The question of separate religious identity became important in the first decade of the 20th century. There is also evidence of religious reform movements like the Arya Samaj², the Singh Sabha movement, the Ahmadiya movement — with their emphasis on Shuddhi, Amrit Parchar, Tabligh and Tanzim — contributing to the resurgence of the culture and politics based on purity of religious practices, beliefs and criticism of other religious group practices and beliefs at the popular level. These movements blurred the real contradictions in society and promoted religiosity and differentiation among the people and made them vulnerable to fundamentalist propaganda.

¹Initially the Arya Samajists and Sikh reformers shared a common concern with the reform and vitalization of their faith and a deep felt apprehension at growing Christian missionary influence.. In August 1896 the Lahore Shuddhi Sabha precipitated matters by purifying and reclaiming to Hinduism a group of more than two hundred out caste Sikhs.

Kapur, Rajiv A., *'Sikh Separation : The Politics of faith'*, (New Delhi : Vikas Publishing House, 1987), p. 22.

² For Arya Samaj and its contribution to Hindu Militancy, see, Barrier, Norman G., 'The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, May, 1967.

The publication of two controversial booklets entitled 'Sikh Hindu Hain' and a rejoinder by Sardar Kahan Singh, 'Ham Hindu Nahin' was one of the manifestations, of the urge to have separate religious identities³.

The controversy generated by this issue of Sikh identity was hotly debated in newspapers, journals and series of pamphlets and responses. Men like Bhai Ditt Singh espoused the cause of a separate Sikh identity with vigour... These books stressed the distinctions of the Sikh community, and passionately argued that the survival of a separate identity was dependent on a clear demarcation of boundaries, a strong emphasis on traditions and customs identified as Sikh, and the elimination of 'non-Sikh' elements from the faith⁴.

The activities of the Arya Samaj, such as the establishment of Shuddhi Sabhas through which purifying and reclaiming converts not merely from Christianity or Islam, but also from Sikhism, precipitated the religious group identity issue. There was a growing urge on the part of the emerging middle class for maximising their share in political and economic power. This, along with the process of boundary definition initiated by various religious reform movements, vitiated the harmonious inter-religious group relations. Communal sentiments were institutionalised and intensified.

There is also detailed evidence to show that different religious and caste groups found enough issues to struggle together. These issues concerned the peasantry and were in no way confined to the exclusive demands of Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims. The different currents of the freedom movement, Kookas, Ghadar Lehar, Babbar Akalis, Kirti Kisan party played a progressive role in the evolution of a Punjabi identity, but communally divisive politics on many occasions successfully divided the masses on communal lines⁵. The process of formation of communal identities, although preceded by the assertion of separate religious group identities, started in the pre-independence period. Till the 1920s it is widely believed that retrograde movements were weak since the struggle against colonial rule united the common people : the anti-colonial movements did not mobilise the masses as Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims against the British who were mostly Christians. Nevertheless, there did exist a reservoir of mistrust and suspicion among members of different religious groups. Such mistrust or suspicion could not dominate the minds of peasants and workers as long as they were engaged in a united struggle against exploitative forces. However, in the first few decades of the consolidation of colonialism⁶ most of the struggles of the peasantry essentially remained non-communal. The

³ Kahan Singh, '*Hum Hindu Nahin*', (Amritsar : Singh Brothers, 1995).

⁴ Kapur, Rajiv A. op.cit. (1986), p. 20.

⁵ The Namdhari or Kooka Movement was launched in the 1858 by Guru Ram Singh at Bainsi Sahib a village of Ludhiana district. It was a militant movement. Its main character was anti-imperialist and its support base was mainly peasants and artisans.

The Ghadar Lehar was one the militant movements launched in USA (1913 to 1918). The main thrust of this movement was anti-imperialist and support base was mainly amongst unskilled labourers, farm workers and contractors in the pacific coast of North America and ninety five per cent happened to be Punjabi immigrant. Most of the Ghadarites later on joined Communist Party and also the Naxalites. For details see Puri, Harish, '*Ghadar Movement Ideology, Organization and Strategy*', (Amritsar : G.N.D.U., 1983). The Babbar Akalis were a off-shoot of the Akali movement of 1920-25. A small section of Akalis who did not have much faith in non-violence formed a separate group. Master Mota Singh and Kishan Singh Gargaj were its leaders. The Babar Akalis were anti-imperialists and believed in physical elimination of British agents and informers. The British tried to repress it and later on some of the Babbars joined the communist party.

Kirti Kisan party in 1927 was launched by Bhai Santokh Singh. Its leadership was drawn from the Lahore and Amritsar groups of revolutionaries. They mobilized peasantry in support of some of the progressive demands such as abolition of najrana and reduction in land revenue, water tax etc. This party was declared illegal by the government in the year 1934. Later on after the partition Teja Singh Swatanta a member of Kirti Kisan party launched Lal Party.

The Red Communalist Party a militant group was active in PEPSU in the pre-independence phase. This group organized number of violent peasant struggles in phulkian state. This tendency found continuity in the Naxalite movement in the later 1970s.

⁶The British initiated a process of agricultural colonization. This was projected by the British as a kind of welfarism. It is with this motive that British introduced canal colonies. The canal colonies

demands raised were economic and were not confined to the aspirations of communal groups. The struggles were directed against landlords or money-lenders. Right from 1901 to 1937, there have been peasant struggles in Punjab. The first organised struggle was directed against the Land Alienation Act of 1901 and was organised by Kirti Kisan Sabha in 1906-07. In 1936, movements were launched against the land settlement cess, canal irrigation rates, chowkidara tax and police atrocities while the leadership was still in the hands of the Kirti Kisan Sabha⁷. The Charik agitation was started in early 1938 in Ferozepur district where the cattle market had been closed down, land tax was four times that in British territories and social amenities were lacking. The demand to abolish Biswedari was raised in an organised manner during and after 1937-38 in Patiala and other areas. It was in response to the growing unrest among the peasants that the British tried to accommodate the emerging interests in the rural areas. The politics of accommodation was extended to the emerging middle class from among all the religious groups. This introduced a new kind of social identity and competition on that basis among them. The patronage which was extended by the British to recruit the Sikh peasantry in the army⁸, in view of the increasing unrest in the villages, where according to Naved Hameed only 4 per cent of the population owned more than 50 per cent of the land, while 80 per cent of the population came to be composed of poor peasants, landless, share croppers and agricultural labourers⁹. It is here that the British followed a multi-pronged strategy to use and perpetuate the division on caste and religious lines. The British responses to the peasant unrest was to divide them between agriculturists and non-agriculturists. For instance, the Land Alienation Act of 1901 segregated the religious groups in their occupations also¹⁰. The introduction of the Land Alienation Act which divided Punjabis into agriculturists and non-agriculturists is having its ramifications on contemporary social, political and economic life in this region. The Act affected adversely the economic interests of the Hindu money-lenders. Some of the communalist Hindus interpreted and used this as an attempt at discrimination by the British against them as a religious group. Such an interpretation and usage helped in identifying a reference point and a possible misplaced target of attack on communal lines, in case of perceived discrimination.

At this juncture, peasant movements were launched against an increase in the water rates on land irrigated by the Bari Doab Canal and the proposed "Colonialisation of Land Bill", which strengthened Government control over the Chenab Colony. These two factors and the Land Alienation Act tended to unite rural and urban Panjabis. Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh spearheaded a movement against the British in the first decade of the 20th century.

The British Government accepted the two demands of peasant proprietors and, in the process isolated the urban Hindu money-lenders. The apparent solidarity with their rural counterparts crumbled under the ruthless repression of the British administration. This development further disillusioned the money-lenders, who were incidentally Hindus, and the perceived discrimination provided an opportunity for attempts at furthering communalisation.

This policy found continuity in various Acts. For example the Punjab Relief of Indebtedness Act of 1934 and Debtor's Protection Act, 1936, divided the population on similar lines by adversely affecting

represented the most extensive form of socio-economic and demographic engineering attempted by the British in South Asia. The gains that accrued from agricultural colonization made the Punjab appear to be the success story for British rule in India.

Closer examination reveals a very different picture. Canal colonization released vast resources and provided a real opportunity for economic development in the Punjab. However, despite significant economic growth, the Punjab remained an underdeveloped region. Imran Ali, *The Punjab Under Imperialism, 1885-1947*, (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 237.

⁷ For details see, Hari Singh, *Punjab Peasant in Freedom Struggle*, (Delhi : People's Publishing House, 1984), Vol. I and III.

⁸ These processes suggest that the period of British rule in Punjab was dominated by three major themes : political entrenchment, revenue extraction and military requirements, Imran Ali op.cit (1988), p.5

⁹ For details :

Naved Hamid, 'Dispossession and Differentiation of the Peasantry in the Punjab during Colonial Rule', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 10, No.1, 1982, pp. 67-8.

¹⁰ Pramod Kumar, Manmohan Sharma, Atul Sood and Ashwani Handa, *Punjab Crisis : Context and Trends*, (Chandigarh : CRRID, 1984), pp. 31-33.

the non-agriculturist Hindu money-lenders' interest¹¹.

In fact, there has been consistent efforts on the part of even British historians like James Mill, Montstuart Elphinston and H.M. Elliot to reinforce the perceptions of communal monoliths and communality of the secular interests of all the members of religious groups irrespective of their economic and political status¹². This kind of interpretation where history was divided into Hindu history, Muslim history and Sikh history reinforced separate and competing identities of different religious groups.

British colonialists also used racialism, however, in a disguised fashion¹³. This usage reinforced the concept of martial militancy. Before the British came, militancy having its basis in human values was a dominant tendency in Punjab. This included a sense of romance and gave a direction to the nostalgia of Khalsa Raj which a majority of the Sikh population was having during the colonial phase. In other words, the nostalgia of having a glorious past and without a continuity into the present, was successfully accommodated and given another direction by the British rulers.

In the post 19th and early 20th centuries the growing urge on the part of the emerging middle class for maximising their share in political and economic power and the emergence of reformist movements vitiated the harmonious inter-religious group relations. The steady growth in the number of educated Punjabis searching for employment and the tendency of Government servants to discriminate in favour of their co-religionists and members of their castes aggravated the problem¹⁴. The communal sentiments were institutionalised through the process of boundary definition and maintenance being intensified against each other. Earlier Hindu reformers had directed their communal sentiment against Christianity and Islam, but now it was turned against Sikhism as well. Further, British writers consistently projected Sikhs as having a separate entity and identity. The Arya Samaj leadership, due to its own ideological and circumstantial compulsions, like the communalist Sikhs, could not avoid becoming a victim of British designs to create mistrust and suspicion between the two communal groups.

Constitutional developments such as the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the Act of 1935, incorporating principles of separate electorates and communal reservations perpetuated and intensified (inasmuch as they necessitated competition for the limited elected seats) the communal problem.

The politicisation of separate identity intensified the movement for boundary definition at the social level also. Allegations and counter-allegations were made regarding pollution of one's religious faith by the other.

The Akali leadership replied that it stood for a united India, but in case of division, they would prefer a separate independent state with the right to federate either with Hindustan or Pakistan.

The recommendations made by the Cabinet Mission on 16th May, 1946 recognised the Sikhs as the third major community, but refused the division of Punjab, not to talk of Khalistan. The whole of Punjab was included in the north-west Muslim majority group. No special weightage was given to the Sikhs in the proposed Assembly of undivided Punjab.

¹¹ Chaudhary, Prem, *'Role of Sir Chhottu Ram in Punjab Politics : A Case Study of Rohtak Distt.'*, Ph.D. Thesis (New Delhi : J.N.U., 1979), pp. 252-53.

¹² Grewal, J.S., 'Communalization of Historiography on Medieval India', in Pramod Kumar (ed), *'Towards Understanding Communalism'* (Chandigarh : CRRID, 1982), pp. 97-102.

¹³ According to Richard Fox "this strategy grew out of British racial beliefs that allowed populations to have biologically given behaviors or propensities, such as martial Sikhs... the British military had chosen to make caste, tribe or religion the organizing principle of fighting units.

It is not to ignore the fact that the identity of 'Singh' or Kshtriya caste the warrior used to exist even in the pre-British period. But it is important to context of time identity.

Fox, Richard G., *'Lions of the Punjab'*, (New Delhi : Archives Publisher, 1987), pp. 141-43.

¹⁴ In 1891, the number of literate Punjabis were 819, 383 and of these 45,446 were literate in English. The number of students under instruction at all levels increased from 248,123 in 1901 to 329, 446 in 1909-10 and it further rose to 556,989 in 1921. Government of India, *'Census report 1921, Vol. I, Part IV, Punjab and Delhi'*, (Lahore : Civil and Military Gazettee Press, 1923), pp. 305-6.

In July 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru, at the All-India Congress Committee, Calcutta, had said :

The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set-up in the north wherein the Sikhs can experience the glow of freedom¹⁵.

At this juncture the Akali Dal decided in favour of partition of Punjab which could save the Sikhs from Muslim domination. This thinking brought them closer to the Congress.

It is clear that this shift in content and form of politics involved change from popular movements to elite manoeuvres and calculations. This dominant mode of political activity in turn accentuated communal divisions and adversely affected the process of formation of a secular Punjabi identity.

ASSERTION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

In the partitioned Punjab i.e. in the post-1947 phase, divisive politics and exclusiveness emerged as a dominant mode of political activity. This reinforced the belief that politics transcends class barriers. This kind of political activity emphasised the particularistic aspects of intra-religious or caste mobilisations and underplayed the universalistic cultural pattern. Three general elections i.e. in the years 1952, 1957, 1962 were held in the background of mobilisations around 'Punjabi Suba' i.e. demarcation of Punjab state on the basis of Punjabi and the 'Save Hindi' agitation. The Shiromani Akali Dal was in favour of a division of Punjab on the basis of Punjabi language¹⁶, the Congress party was opposed to the division of the state on a linguistic basis¹⁷ and the radical groups among Hindus, mainly Arya Samaj, launched a Save Hindi campaign¹⁸. There was a clear communal division in the state – a majority of the Sikhs supported 'Punjabi Suba' and a majority of the Hindus opposed this demand. The Punjabi Suba movement was seen and projected as assertions for a separate Sikh state. In the election campaigns these issues were articulated in a most virulent manner and the identity issue was mixed with religion. Hukam Singh, the then President of the Akali Dal, said, "The formation of a Punjabi speaking province is the most fundamental demand of the Sikhs. To give it up would constitute opportunism and a clear violation of the sacred Sikh traditions of open "fight and chaste policies".¹⁹

The results of 1952 general elections showed that the Akali Dal and the Congress got a communal response from the electorate. The Congress was supported by a large majority of the Hindus and the Scheduled Castes and the Akali Dal was supported by a majority of the Sikhs. The Akali Dal could secure 33 seats with 15 per cent of the total votes polled and whereas the Congress secured 122 seats with 35 per cent of the total votes.

The demand for a Punjabi Suba became intense which gave the Akali Dal control over the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). This was a clear indication of the support of the Sikhs to the agenda of Punjabi Suba. A commission was appointed for the reorganisation of the state on a linguistic basis in December 1953. This led to the intensification of assertions on communal lines. A section from among the Punjabi Hindus launched an agitation in favour of "Maha Punjab" irrespective of language. In 1954 the Akalis launched an agitation in support of a Punjabi Suba. A number of processions were taken out to mobilise the people in favour of Punjabi Suba. The divisive nature of the mobilisation can be gauged from the fact that on April 6, 1955 the following order was issued by the District Magistrate of Amritsar;

Whereas it has been made to appear to me that public order will be endangered by (a) the shouting or display of slogans such as (i) Punjabi (or **Maha Punjab**) Suba Leke Rahenge (ii) **Maha Punjab** (or Punjabi Suba) Amar Rahe or Zindaband or Murdabad (iii) Sine Wich Goli Khanwange, Punjabi Suba (or Maha Punjab) Banawange..."

The shouting of these slogans was prohibited under section 144 (I.P.C.). Subsequently, the State

¹⁵ Statement issued by Jawaharlal Nehru *The Statesman* Calcutta July 7, 1946.

¹⁶ Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *'Punjabi Suba : Story of the Struggle'*, (Delhi : UC Kapur, 1970), pp. 221, 25.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 207, 209, 211.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 211-212.

¹⁹ Ajit Singh Sarhadi op. cit. (1970), p. 221.

Reorganisation Committee report published in October , 1955 rejected the demand for a Punjab speaking state and recommended the creation of a Maha Punjab.²⁰ These recommendations further reinforced the minority persecution complex among the Sikhs. Elite machinations replaced mass movement and resulted in the formulation of the regional formula. The state was divided into so-called Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking regions and two regional committees were provided.

The Akali Dal accepted this scheme and in a convention held in Amritsar in October 1956 resolved to amend the constitution of the Akali Dal so as to continue its activities towards the religious, educational and economic welfare of the Sikhs. The regional formula invited strong reaction from communal Hindus and a 'Save Hindi' agitation was launched in May 1957.²¹

The regional formula which had delimited Punjab into Hindi-speaking and Punjabi-speaking regions, provided an impetus to the Hindi agitation. In regard to the use of language in the two regions, the formula provided that :

- (i) *The Sachar Formula (for details regarding the Sachar Formula see Appendix I) will continue to operate in the area comprising the existing Punjab State, and the area now comprising the PEPSU State, the existing arrangement will continue, until they are replaced or altered by agreement later.*
- (ii) *The official language of each region will, at the district level and below, be the respective regional language.*
- (iii) *The State will be bi-lingual recognising both Punjabi (in Gurmukhi script) and Hindi (in Devnagri scripts) as the official languages of the State.*
- (iv) *The Punjab Government will establish two separate departments for developing Punjabi and Hindi languages.*
- (v) *The general safeguards proposed for linguistic minorities will be applicable to the Punjab like other states.*
- (vi) *In accordance with and in furtherance of its policy to promote the growth of all regional languages, the Central Government will encourage the development of Punjab language.*

In 1962 general elections Punjabi Suba dominated the political space in the state. The results of the elections reinforced communal division. The Akali Dal could win only 19 seats, all from Punjabi-speaking areas.

²⁰ Ajit Singh Sarhadi op.cit. (1970), p. 251.

²¹ Swami Atma Nand was appointed dictator of the movement and launched a Satyagraha on April 30, 1957. The Hindi Raksha Samiti issued the following charter of demands;

1. That there should be one Formula for the whole State.
2. That the medium of instruction should be left entirely to the choice of the parents.
3. There should be no compulsion for the teaching of two languages, and the second language at any particular stage.
4. Hindi should replace English at all levels of administration.
5. All the Government notifications at the district level and below should be bilingual.
6. That applications should be allowed to be submitted in any language and the reply should be in the same language.
7. The office record at the district level and below should be in both scripts."

Ajit Singh Sarhadi op.cit. (1970), p. 294.

Table 1
Partywise election results for 1962 Vidhan Sabha by regions in Punjab

Political party	Punjabi-speaking region			Hindi-speaking region		
	Votes polled	Per cent of votes won	Seats won	Votes polled	Per cent of votes won	Seats won
1. Congress Party	1,807,427	45.8	51	1,136,412	40.9	39
2. Akali Dal	780,105	19.0	19	9,820	0.4	--
3. Communist Party	396,080	10.0	9	97,830	3.5	--
4. Jan Sangh	302,130	7.7	4	337,435	12.1	4
5. Republican Party (SCF)	111,441	2.8	--	33,599	1.2	--
6. Swatantra Party	93,484	2.4	--	167,792	6.0	3
7. Praja Socialist Party	28,231	0.7	--	32,159	1.1	--
8. Independents	425,556	10.8	6	869,340	31.3	19
9. Others	1,835	--	--	96,293	3.5	--
Total	3,946,289	100.0	89	2,780,680	100.0	65

Source: Ajit Singh Sarhadi, '*Punjabi Suba : Story of the Struggle*', (Delhi : UC Kapur) pp. 152-53.

The Akali Dal and its alliance partners could secure 72.02 per cent (1541185 Sikh votes out of 2139913) of the total Sikh votes. The Congress party and independents polled 598728 Sikh votes. The election results have shown that the Congress polled 43.12 per cent of the total votes, but it could secure only one-third (27 per cent) of the Sikh votes. The communal division of the votes became a trend in this election. An analysis of the three general elections since 1952 indicate the following trends :

- (i) The Congress consistently improved its electoral position. In 1952 elections it secured 34.8 per cent of the total votes with 66 per cent of the seats. In 1957 elections it secured 47.5 per cent of the total votes with 78 per cent of the seats. In 1962 elections it secured 43.8 per cent of the total votes with 58 per cent of the seats (See Table 2).

Table 2
Partywise seats won in Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962

Political party	1952			1957			1962		
	Votes polled	Per cent of votes won	Seats won	Votes polled	Per cent of votes won	Seats won	Votes polled	Per cent of votes won	Seats won
1. Congress Party	2,206,898	34.8	122*	3,612,709	47.5	120*	2,943,839	43.8	90
2. Akali Dal	937,916	14.7	33	--	--	--	789,839	11.7	19
3. Communist Party	337,904	5.3	6	1,030,898	13.6	6	493,910	7.3	9
4. Jan Sangh	315,110	5.0	2	654,395	8.6	9	639,565	9.5	8
5. Republican Party (SCF)	145,484	2.3	1	410,364	5.4	5	145,040	2.2	--
6. Swatantra Party	--	--	--	--	--	--	261,276	3.9	3
7. Praja Socialist Party	257,701	4.1	1	94,564	1.2	1	60,390	0.9	--
8. Independents	1,602,133	25.3	21*	1,800,960	23.7	13	1,294,896	19.2	25
9. Others	539,921	8.5		--	--	--	98,128	1.5	--
Total	6,333,067	100.0	186	7,603,890	100.0	154	6,726,969	100.0	154
Electorate	11,265,725	--	--	13,105,735	--	--	10,738,443	--	--
Vote participation	--	56.3	--	--	58.0	--	--	62.6	--

* Including one member elected unopposed.

Source: Election Commission Reports, India 1952-62.

It could be inferred that the Congress increased its trend at the expense of the Akali Dal. The merger of the Akali Dal in the Congress in the years 1948 and 1956 eroded the Akali support base. Many of the Akali leaders who joined the Congress did not return to the Akali fold.

- (ii) Another distinct trend was increase in the support base of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. It polled 5 per cent of the votes in 1952 elections which increase to 8.6 per cent in 1957 and further to 9.5 per cent in 1962. It secured two seats in 1952 which increased to nine in 1957 and eight in 1962 (refer to table 2). The increase in the support base of the Jan Sangh was due to the fact that a section of urban Hindus did not support the alliance of the Congress and the Akali Dal.
- (iii) Another trend noticeable in these elections was the loss of electoral support of the Akali Dal.

The Akali Dal got 14.7 per cent of the votes with 18 per cent of the seats in 1952 elections. The percentage of votes polled by the Akali Dal was reduced to 11.7 in the 1962 elections (refer to table 2). However, the Akali Dal continued to consolidate its Sikh support base. The decline in the electoral support base in 1962 elections further reinforced the Akali Dal's demand for Punjabi Suba. The fear of the loss of religious identity and the idea of **Khalsa** (pure) rule were used to mobilise the electoral support base.

The split of the Akali Dal in 1962 facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of those who spoke for the rural Jat peasantry. In January, 1965, Sant Akali Dal won 95 of the 138 seats in the SGPC elections, giving a crushing defeat to the Master Akali Dal. It also increased its share in political power.²² The data indicate that the share of Jat Sikh ministers continuously rose particularly after Punjab was reorganised. On the other hand, the number of Bania/Khatri Aroras and Brahmins in the ministries came down (See table 3).

Table 3
Castewise Break up of Ministers in Punjab Vidhan Sabha - 1952, 1957 and 1967

Caste	1952		1957		1967	
	Number of seats	Per cent of votes	Number of seats	Per cent of votes	Number of seats	Per cent of votes
Brahmin	3	15.0	3	6.2	5	6.4
Bania/Khatri/Arora	7	35.0	12	25.0	12	15.3
Jat Sikh	5	25.0	14	29.2	38	48.7
Scheduled Caste	3	15.0	7	14.6	10	12.8
Others	2	10.0	12	25.0	13	16.8
Total	20	100.0	48	100.0	78	16.8

Source: Palta, Janak, 'Socio-Economic Profile Council of Ministers in Punjab', M.Phil. Dissertation (Chandigarh : Panjab University, 1981)

Another study indicates that Jat Sikh legislators in general and the Akali Dal in particular belonged to the upper strata.²³ Sant Fateh Singh was elected President of the parallel Akali Dal. The two groups into which the Akalis had split represented different tendencies and styles of functioning.

To sum up, during this period in Punjab, political activity accelerated the process of communalisation. The demand for self-determined political status for Sikhs in one form or the other was raised. The notion that Sikhs and Hindus are homogeneous and exclusive was propagated by their respective political parties.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY TO AUTONOMY

However, in Punjab, the re-organisation of the state in 1966 on linguistic basis and the introduction of the Green Revolution strategy initiated a new process of political and economic differentiation. This was in contrast with the politics of massification which dominated the pre-1966 phase. This phase was marked by the reality of differentiation on which was superimposed politics which was trying to conceal and blur this differentiation. In other words, the danger to the Panth or Sikhs as a single political entity having common secular interests found expression in the political discourses of three Akali Dal factions, but the demands raised were more economic in nature.

The economic differentiation within the peasantry and between the emerging agrarian interests and the urban trading and industrial bourgeoisie weakened the communal based nationality assertions. In other words the demand for an independent Sikh state could not find forceful expression in political discourses. However, as a slogan, it was raised by an insignificant political leadership. But at the same time, economic development strengthened incremental communalism.

However, the demand for greater state autonomy became a central issue in politics. The main political party i.e. the Akali Dal raised this demand in 1973 and it took the form of a movement around 1978. A

²² In the fifties, when Master Tara Singh (a Khatri himself) was President of the SGPC, the non-Jat Sikhs controlled 53.6 per cent of the key positions in this institution. Now, when the annual budget of the SGPC is Rs. 8.74 crore the institution is controlled by other Jat Sikhs whereby the influence of non-Jat Sikhs diminished drastically.

²³ Deol, H.S., 'Analysis of Political Elite in Punjab with Special Reference to the Legislature', Ph.D. Thesis (Chandigarh : Panjab University, 1979).

critical analysis of assembly elections from 1967 to 1980 shows that the question of identity did not play a determining role. Electoral politics raised economic issues. This period also coincided with the initiation of coalition parties and the decline of one party dominance in India.

In the 1967 elections the Congress secured 48 seats with 37 per cent votes and the Akalis secured 26 seats with 25 per cent votes (refer to table 4).

Table - 4
Punjab Assembly Elections 1967-1997
(Partywise percentage of votes polled and seats won)

Year of Election	INCs	JP/JD	BJP	CPI	CPM	SAD*	Others
1967 ** Won/contested votes polled (%)	47/100 36.56	--	9/49 (B.J. Sangh) 9.84	5/20 5.27	3/12 3.19	24/58 20.46	16/363 24.68
1969 W/C Votes polled (%)	38/103 39.18	--	8/30 (B.J. Sangh) 9.0	4/28 4.84	2/10 3.07	43/65 29.36	9/235 34.54
1972 ** W/C Votes polled (%)	66/89 42.84	--	0/33 4.97	10/13 6.51	1/17 3.26	24/72 27.65	3/244 14.77
1977 W/C Votes polled (%)	17/96 34.07	25/41 14.99	--	7/18 6.10	8/8 3.50	58/70 31.41	2/449 9.93
1980 W/C Votes polled (%)	63/117 45.19	0/8 1.29	1/41 6.48	9/18 6.46	5/13 4.06	37/73 26.92	2/452 9.6
1985 W/C Votes polled (%)	32/117 37.86	1/5 1.09	6/26 4.99	1/38 4.44	0/28 1.92	73/100 38.01	4/543 11.69
1992 W/C Votes polled (%)	87/115 43.71	1/37 2.14	6/67 16.60	4/20 3.64	1/17 2.40	-- --	18/323 31.51
1997 W/C Votes polled (%)	14/105 26.59	0/28 0.57	18/22 8.33	2/15 2.98	0/25 1.79	75/92 37.64	8/406 22.1

* SAD pertains to the dominant Akali Parties whereas its fractions have been included in others

** Years 1967 and 1972 have been taken from Iqbal Narain (ed.), 'State Politics of India', pp. 292 since SAD was not mentioned in election commission's report

Source: Election Commission of India 'Handbook : General election, 1997 to the legislative assembly of Punjab', (New Delhi : Election Commission of India, 1997), pp. 33-39.

The United Front Ministry in 1967 formulated a ten-point agenda. The major emphasis was on ensuring communal amity and recognising Hindi as a link language. This was a departure from the earlier phase in which emphasis was on religious group identity. It is interesting to note that from 1962 to 1980 the Akali Dals election manifesto did not perceive any danger to the Sikh Panth.

The experience of United Front Ministry in 1967 reinforced the politics of communal amity and post-election coalition. The Akali Dal emerged as the single largest party in 1969 elections. It could have formed a government with the support of CPI and CPI (M) and independent legislators and without the support of the Jan Sangh. The Akali Dal decided to form a coalition with the support of 8 Jan Sangh legislators in order to pursue the political agenda of Hindu-Sikh amity (refer to table 4).

The coalition politics initiated in the post-reorganisation Punjab as reflected in 1967 elections continued thereafter. The Akali Dal consolidated its position in the 1969 and 1977 elections. It secured 29 per cent votes with 43 seats in the 1969 elections and 31 per cent votes with 58 seats in 1977. In the 1972 elections the Congress secured 66 seats with 43 per cent votes and the Akali Dal won 24 seats with 28 per cent votes. The Jan Sangh could not secure even a single seat with 5 per cent votes (refer to table 4). However, in the 1972 elections, the Akali Dal could secure merely 28 per cent votes with 24 seats. The Congress emerged stronger and secured 43 per cent votes with 66 seats in 1972 and 45 per cent votes with 63 seats in 1980. Its performance in the 1969 and 1977 elections was dismal. It is interesting that the performance of the Jan Sangh was promising in elections in which the Congress performed badly. The Jan Sangh secured 9 per cent votes with 8 seats in the 1969

elections. In the 1977 elections, it contested along with other parties under the banner of the Janata Party and secured 25 seats with 15 per cent votes. Its performance was dismal in 1972 and 1980 (see table 4).

The Congress on the contrary started appeasing the extreme religious groups to marginalise the moderate communal politics of both the Akali Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party. In 1972, the Congress government led by Giani Zail Singh mobilised the second rank leadership of the Akali Dal and patronised the extremist leaders.

These assertions earlier used to be blurred by excessive doses of universal aspects of culture, religion and caste, but later it could not sustain the onslaught of the economic crises.

The penetration of the Green Revolution has made an impact on religious practices and belief patterns. In the absence of rational and scientific explanations available to the common man for the riches for some and rags for many, the common man has started responding to fatalism and superstitious beliefs. Political and economic vested interests rationalise the pauperisation of the landless labourers, small and marginal peasants, profits and losses incurred by traders and commission agents through excessive doses of religiosity.

FROM AUTONOMY TO SECESSION

Much of the politics in post-1980 phase in Punjab has been broadly shaped by the conflict between various class factions of the ruling elite. The basic thrust of this politics during the last decade was (i) appeasement of the extremist sections; (ii) making democratic methods of interest articulation ineffective and rendering moderate politics irrelevant; (iii) negotiating with various political groups for sharing political power without addressing the real issues; (iv) undermining the norms of competitive politics by dismissing popularly elected governments and not holding elections.

It helped the Congress to establish its bona fides with the Akali support base. The multi-cultural character of the Punjabi society was unable to express itself in the practice of politics. This was a setback to the state's claim to the allegiance of its members and also to the claim to some conception of a shared purpose or a sense of shared benefits. In other words, denied access to their own language, culture and resources, a large section of the people of the state was alienated from their culture and language and their own physical and material resource base. This process of alienation concealed a dormant violence.

The path of development on which the state embarked and the consequential denial of the legitimate claims of the people produced conditions of structural disequilibrium. The differentiation in the economy sharpened political assertions. Political discourse and symbolism of the pre-1966 period found continuity, but the political programme represented sectional interests. The danger to the *Panth* of Sikhs as a single political entity having common secular interests found expression in the political discourse of the three Akali Dal factions, but the demands raised were more economic than political in nature. This became visible in the latter half of the 1980s.

The three trends within the Akali Dal can be identified as (i) standing for state autonomy, but without unduly disturbing the existing political arrangement; (ii) demanding self-determination within the constitutional framework; and (iii) raising the slogan for Khalistan. This made it difficult for the various Akali factions to group themselves under one banner. Political demagogues used communal and religious symbols in an extreme form to outdo or eliminate each other and to increase their support base for greater leverage in politics. This provided an ideological cover to the use of violence.

The situation was further complicated by the penetration of the Green Revolution, the growth of which created agricultural surpluses which were not converted into investment in industry. The Green Revolution was not a total strategy and did not throw up organic inter-sectoral linkages. The surplus thus generated did provide an assured market for consumer goods, but it did not provide channels for profitable investment in industry and trade.

Rising unemployment, growing disparities of wealth and incomes leading to unequal conditions for availing opportunities and poverty gave rise to individual and social anger. A sense of deprivation seized vast masses and bred insecurity and fear. It became easy for retrogressive ideologies to

flourish in such an atmosphere. But the economic differentiation within the peasantry and between emerging agrarian interests and urban trading and industrial interests, weakened the assertions of a community based nationality. In other words, the demand for an independent Sikh state could not find forceful expression in political discourse and was raised as a slogan by a marginal political leadership and the mainstream political forces did not articulate the demand for Khalistan. The demand for Khalistan did not acquire mass support despite the unimaginative and ruthless political and administrative initiatives and the protagonists' brutal and senseless killings. The manifestations of this violence like Operation Blue Star of 1984, assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, November 1984 anti-Sikh riots thwarted the democratic process. However, attempts were made to hold elections to legitimise non-democratic and communal politics. The 1985, 1989 and 1992 elections were held in this background. The 1985 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections were held in the background of the Rajiv-Longowal accord signed in 1984 and 1989 Lok Sabha elections were held in the background of the failure to honour the accord.²⁴ In the 1985, Assembly elections, the Congress secured 32 seats with 38 per cent votes and the Akalis secured 73 seats with 38 per cent votes (refer to table 4). In the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the Akali Dal (Mann) won 10 seats with 32 per cent votes (refer to table 5).

Table 5
Punjab Lok Sabha elections 1967-1999
(Party wise percentage of votes polled and seats won)

Year of election	INC	JD/JP/ BLD	BJP	CPI	CPM	SAD*	Others
1967 won/contested	9/13	-	1/6 (Jan Sangh)	-	3/9	-	-
% of votes polled	37.12	-	2.56	4.26	1.88	22.49	31.69
1971 won/contested	10/11	-	0/5 (Bhartiya Jan Sangh)	2/2	0/3	1/12	0/51
% of votes polled	45.96	-	4.45	6.22	2.20	30.85	10.32
1977 won/contested	0/13	3/3	0/0	0/3	1/1	9/9	0/50
% of votes polled	34.85	12.50	0	1.65	4.94	42.3	3.76
1980 won/contested	12/13	0/9	-	0/1	0/1	1/7	0/116
% of votes polled	52.45	9.97	-	1.27	2.53	23.37	10.41
1985 won/contested	6/13	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/3	7/11	0/39
% of votes polled	41.53	2.24	3.39	3.84	2.98	37.17	8.85
1989 won/contested	2/13	1/4	0/3	0/4	0/3	0/9	10/191
% of votes polled	26.49	5.46	4.17	2.10	3.90	5.38	52.50
1992 won/contested	12/13	0/4	0/9	0/1	0/3	--	1/48
% of votes polled	49.27	1.30	16.51	1.57	3.98	--	24.78
1996 won/contested	2/13	0/1	0/6	0/3	0/3	8/9	3/224
% of votes polled	35.10	2.66	6.48	1.60	2.68	28.72	22.75
1998 won/contested	0/8	1/1	3/3	0/1	0/3	8/8	1/78
% of votes polled	25.85	4.18	11.67	3.40	1.06	32.93	20.91
1999 won/contested	8/11	0/2	1/3	1/1	0/1	2/9	1/93
% of votes polled	38.44	0.10	9.16	3.74	2.18	28.59	17.86

* SAD refer to the dominant Akali Dal and not its factions which are included in others.

Source: Election Commission of India 'Handbook : General election, 1997 to the legislative assembly of Punjab', (New Delhi : Election Commission of India, 1997), pp. 40-46.

Elections to the state assembly were postponed on the pretext that the voting would be influenced by the gun and the victorious militants would dictate terms. This was patently an afterthought to rationalise the success of the Mann-led Akali Dal in the 1989 elections and to ward off future electoral losses of the same shattering magnitude. Incidentally, parties opposing the election secured more than 61 per cent of the vote.

²⁴ Mr. S.S. Barnala the then Akali Chief Minister was alleged to be appeasing the militants and consequently the Congress government in the centre dismissed the ministry. The moderate leaders like Mr. Prakash Singh Badal and Mr. G.S. Tohra were arrested and hundred of others were sent to distant Jodhpur Jail to languish in detention for some years. Liberals who had full faith in the system were isolated and those nursing serious grievances against the system were patronised. This approach adopted to counter the people who were a potential threat to the legislative power of the ruling party at the centre. Political rivals (even when they subscribe to the same political beliefs) were attacked and political forces representing extreme views were patronized. President's rule was thought to be the most conducive, if not the sure instrument, to put down militancy. That these have failed is no surprise, since a fragmented diagnosis could never succeed.

In these elections, the agenda of peace was dominant and as was reflected in the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal accord in 1984, creating conditions for political participation of the hardliners in Sikh politics in 1989 and providing a 'facade' of representative politics in 1992. The 1992 elections were boycotted by a major competing political party i.e. the Akali Dal. However, the 1992 elections have been described as a major step towards the revival of normal democratic process in Punjab. However, in this election around 24 per cent of the people voted and it was, therefore, rightly labeled as an 'apology for a representative character of democratic polity.'

Table 6
Percentage of votes polled in the Lok Sabha elections (Punjab) 1967-1999

S.No.	Year	Percentage of Votes Polled
1.	1967	71.1
2.	1971	59.9
3.	1977	70.14
4.	1980	62.7
5.	1985	67.36
6.	1989	62.7
7.	1992	24.0
8.	1996	62.0
9.	1998	60.07

Source: Election Commission of India '*Handbook : General election, 1997 to the legislative assembly of Punjab*', (New Delhi : Election Commission of India, 1997), pp. 40-46.

This was the lowest turnout since 1966. Punjab had the highest turnout of 72 per cent in 1969 mid-term elections, which ushered Punjab into the era of coalition politics. However, the percentage of votes polled continue to decline gradually since 1969 with 62.67 per cent votes polled in 1989 Lok Sabha Elections (refer to table 6. In the 1992 Lok Sabha elections the decline was unprecedented, perhaps due to the unexceptional political situation. However, the representative character of democracy got a boost with the January, 1993, elections to grassroot institutions like panchayats and municipalities. The massive participation i.e. to the extent of 82 per cent in these elections was presented as a vote against terrorists, which by implication legitimised the Congress rule in the state.²⁵ The representative character of democracy having been restored, competitive politics was seen functioning in the post-terrorism phase only during the direct elections to the 40 per cent seats of the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads in October 1994. The same competition was witnessed during the three Assembly by-elections. The Congress was forced to give political space to other political parties. In the three Assembly by-elections in mid-1994, two seats were captured by the Akalis and the ruling Congress could retain the lone Nakodar seat.

However, the Gidarbaha by-election to the State Legislature brought to the surface the aspirations of the Jat peasantry, which has been a traditional support base of the Akalis, to maintain peace. A large section of the Jat peasantry voted for the Congress in this election. Though the Akalis won this election, a significant point was to have peace at any cost, even at the cost of identity. Had the Congress complemented its performance on law and order with good governance, the results would have been more encouraging. This became amply clear when Mr. Prakash Singh Badal termed his party's victory to be a victory against rampant corruption. In a rally in Ajnala Mr. Badal said that the outcome was also an eye-opener to those Akali friends who were misusing religion for their own vested interests.

The message was clear that issues like state autonomy or Anandpur Sahib Resolution did not merit the people's first preference. In the people's agenda, peace ranked high, accompanied by unemployment, price rise, better remuneration for crops etc.

FROM SECESSION TO RESURGENCE OF PUNJABI IDENTITY

Electoral politics witnessed a major shift in the political agenda of the state in the post-1992 phase.

²⁵ Verma, P.S., 'Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Elections in Punjab : Revival of Political Activity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 22, 1995, p. 1325.

The revival of democratic politics and institutions was accompanied by a resurgence of Punjabi identity. Political parties which had been historically articulating the language question on communal lines shifted their stance. For instance, the Akali Dal - Bhartiya Janata Party in their Common Minimum Programme (1997) asserted, "Punjabi being our mother tongue is the state language of Punjab. Every Punjabi is proud of the richness of the Punjabi language and culture". This was a major shift because the underlying thrust of the dominant political discourse in the pre-1992 phase was that Panjabi was the language of the Sikhs and the Hindus never owned Panjabi as their language.

Ten years of violence in Punjab has made people realise that it is dangerous to follow the communal logic and support the politics of drift. And also the memories of the event like the Army's entry into the religious shrine of the Sikhs at Amritsar, the November 1984 massacre of the Sikhs and the killings of both Hindus and Sikhs, acted as a check on the political parties' use of the communal divide.²⁶ It is in response to this that Mr. Prakash Singh Badal in a statement in November, 1996, said, "All Punjabis should join hands in the massive task of social restructuring and economic rebuilding by making sure that anti-people and anti-Punjab Congress regime is routed from the state". Not only this, the Akali Dal in its policy programme adopted on 14 April, 1995, presented the demands like disputes over apportionment of river waters, allocation of Punjabi speaking territories as a discrimination against Punjab rather than the Sikhs (as it used to be in pre-1992 resolutions), linking the prices of agricultural products with the price index etc. To quote :

Over the decades, Punjab has continually been a victim of the discriminatory and repressive policies of the Centre, in particular the rights of Punjab in respect of its left-out territories and the river waters have been ruthlessly suppressed and undermined ... For pursuance of the above objectives, the spirit of Punjabihood would be strengthened so that these matters get projected as common problems of the entire Punjabis rather than a **section thereof**²⁷ (emphasis added).

The resolution indicated a shift in the Akali Dal from its earlier political pronouncements. The resolution reflected a change in the social category of analysis i.e. from the Sikhs to the Punjabis. The resolution implies that the demands raised pertain to Punjabis and their non-acceptance is a discrimination against Punjabis rather than Sikhs. And the struggle for realisation of these demands has to be launched in the spirit of Panjabihood rather than as **Khalistanis** or Sikhs.

Another major shift in the political discourse was on issues relating to greater autonomy for the states. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) changed its position from a strong centre to greater autonomy for states. The BJP's 1997 election manifesto reinforced this shift. To quote;

We (BJP) shall pursue with the centre for the implementation of the main recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission²⁸,

- (a) Restore the balance resources in favour of the states,
- (b) Ending the misuse of Art 356 of the Indian Constitution²⁹,
- (c) Consulting states on the choice of governors.

All these issues were incorporated in the Common Minimum Programme 1997 evolved by the Akali-BJP alliance. However, it was interesting to note that the thrust of the Akali Dal agenda changed from anti-centrism to co-operative federalism.

The Akali-BJP government has opened a new chapter in Centre-State relations, ushering in the age of co-operative federalism in the country. The era of confrontation has been effectively ended and replaced with a forward looking thrust on working together for the

²⁶ 'Secessionist Forces Will be Countered : Badal', *The Hindu* (New Delhi), October 2, 1997.

Mr. Prakash Singh Badal said that during the decade and a half of violence, all political parties committed blunder which led to incidents that hurt the sentiments of the people. But a lesson has to be learnt by political parties is that the people will not tolerate secession or violence any longer and as a government we are bound to respect public sentiments.

²⁷ The Policy Programme of Shiromani Akali Dal approved by a committee on 14 April 1995.

²⁸ The Sarkaria Commission was set up on June 9, 1983 to restructure India's Centre-State Relations.

²⁹ Art 356 of the Indian Constitution deals with the provision in case of failure of constitutional machinery in state.

overall good of the state and the nation.³⁰

This position marks a radical shift from the anti-centre stance as reflected in the 1973 autonomy resolution and later in its 1985 memorandum to the Sarkaria Commission.

Further, there was a noticeable shift in the Akali Dal (Badal) resolutions and assertions with emphasis on human rights. The main plank of the Akali Dal was that the unity of all Panjabis shall become a reality only if lasting peace was ensured. There was also a pragmatic consideration of cementing the Akali-BJP alliance which demanded human rights to be played down and peace at any cost to be reinforced.

Peace in Punjab is very dear to us. We will make all endeavours to ensure peace and harmony that will last. The unity of all Panjabis could be the only true and dependable basis of lasting peace and there could be no social and political stability without Punjabi unity.³¹

This gave the Akali-BJP alliance an advantage over the Congress which was seen as anti-Sikh due to its role in Operation Blue Star and 1984 anti-Sikh riots. The Congress continued to harp on restoration of peace as its main achievement; whereas the Akali Dal-BJP alliance presented maintenance of peace as their main agenda. The Congress wanted to take credit for restoration of peace, but was reluctant to own the manner in which peace was brought, particularly when a large number of policemen were being hauled up by the judiciary.³² This ambivalent position led to the shift in the mood of the electorate.

In the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress could win in only 32 Assembly segments and lost in the remaining 85.³³ Further, the Congress could retain its hold only in the periphery of Punjab. In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress could not win even a single seat. The Akali Dal won eight, the Janata Dal one, and the BJP four seats. It has been marginalised in rural Punjab and could maintain its hold only on 55 per cent of the urban and semi-urban Assembly segments. This decline in urban support is attributed to the division of votes between the Congress and the BJP, particularly in Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, and Ferozpur. The Bharatiya Janata Party polled 7 per cent of the votes in Jalandhar, 9 per cent in Hoshiarpur, 12 per cent in Ludhiana, and 18 per cent in Ferozpur.³⁴

The 1997 Assembly elections witnessed the worst ever performance of the Congress which secured only 14 seats with 26 per cent of the votes. The Shiromani Akali Dal won the largest number of seats, i.e. 75, and polled 37 per cent of the votes (see Table 4). The Bhartiya Janata Party won 18 seats and polled 8.33 per cent of the votes.

After the 1997 Assembly elections and 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the agenda which had been shaped by the people of the state who were recovering from a decade of humiliation and torture received a major set-back. In other words, political parties which were relatively less independent to shape the political agenda in the elections acquired space to provide an impetus to pre-Blue Star politics.

Mr. Prakash Singh Badal launched himself in the religious domain on January 7, 1998 at Anandpur Sahib with a desire to decimate the then SGPC President, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra. This brought him into direct conflict with Mr. Tohra and the Akal Takht Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh. On the other hand, Mr. Tohra has been raising issues relating to governance, people's commission probing human rights violations and formulation of a separate civil code for the Sikhs. Both these factions, in order to checkmate the other, are increasingly operating in the religious domain. Having infiltrated into the space of religious leaders, Mr. Badal started politics of confrontation with individuals rather than religious extremism. This trend got an impetus by the 'bridge politics' followed by the apex Akali

³⁰ Akali Dal Election Manifesto, 1998.

³¹ Statement issued by Prakash Singh Badal at Meet the Press at Chandigarh Press Club, November 1996.

³² 'A Peace Card Which May Spell Trouble', *The Hindu* (New Delhi), January 25, 1997.

³³ Election Commission of India, *Handbook : General Elections, 1997 to the Legislative Assembly of Punjab*, (New Delhi : Election Commission of India, 1997)

³⁴ Ibid.

leadership. Instead of co-opting each other, the major factions started building bridges with the fringe elements bringing religion based politics to centrestage. For instance, in January, 1999 Mr. Badal presided over the ninth anniversary of Bhai Harminder Singh Sandhu, a former general secretary of the All-India Sikh Students Federation and a close associate of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale.

Mr. Badal hijacked the religious agenda and chalked out a programme of baptising and puritanism on January 7th, 1999 at Anandpur Sahib. A similar trend was noticed in the early 1980s when the *Amrit Parchar Lehar* (baptism movement through partaking of 'amrit') to create a religious reservoir was misappropriated into politics. During 1981-90 as many as 79100 youths were baptised by religious leaders. Of these 25000 were in Amritsar alone which witnessed the bloodiest violence since the partition-related riots of 1947.

The process of redefining the religious identities and building bridges with fringe elements reached its crescendo, in view of the celebrations of 300 years of the establishment of the **Khalsa** (pure). The shift in the political agenda from Panjabi identity to Sikh identity alienated a large section of urban Hindus. The peasant- oriented doles like free power made the rural based Scheduled Caste population apathetic to the Akali-BJP alliance. The results of 1999 Lok Sabha elections have shown this trend. The Akali Dal (B) suffered a major defeat. It could win three seats with **29** per cent votes and the Congress won eight seats with **38** per cent votes. The Bharatiya Janata Party could win one seat with 9 per cent votes. The SAD (Mann) could win one seat with 3 per cent votes and though the SHSAD of Mr. Tohra could not win a single seat, it secured 5 per cent votes.

If we analyse the elections in terms of votes polled, we will find that the Akali vote bank has remained intact, whereas there has been a major shift in the vote banks of urban Hindus and Scheduled Castes. The SAD(Badal) secured 28.5 per cent votes in the 1999 parliamentary elections and the Akali Dal (Tohra) got 4.6 per cent votes. If we add these two, the total votes polled are equal to the votes polled in the 1998 elections i.e. 32 per cent (refer to table 7). The performance of the Akali Dal was three times less in semi-urban areas in the 1999 elections as compared to the 1998 elections. Similarly, the BJP lost its hold over urban and semi-urban constituencies in the 1999 elections. The Congress was the main beneficiary. In terms of percentage of votes polled, there was a sharp decline of around 10 per cent in urban areas and an additional 5 per cent rural voters, mainly the Scheduled Castes, came out to vote. It can be safely inferred that the alienation of the urban Hindus and the Scheduled Caste voters has caused the defeat of the Akali Dal(B)-BJP alliance.

Table 7
Partywise votes polled in 1998-99 Lok Sabha elections

Name of Party	1998	1999
Congress (INC)	25.85	38.44
BJP	11.67	9.16
SAD (B)	32.93	28.59
BSP	12.65	3.84
SHSAD	-	4.64
SAD (M)	2.73	3.41
CPI	3.40	3.74
CPM	1.06	2.18
Others	9.73	5.99

Source : Election Commission Reports of India, 1998, 1999.

Table 8
Lok Sabha Election - 1998-99
Regionwise Assembly Segements Won by Parties in 1998 and 1999

Parties	1998				1999			
	Doaba	Majha	Malwa	Total	Doaba	Majha	Malwa	Total
INC	1	-	11	12	20	10	36	66
SAD	-	9	45	54	2	7	13	22
BJP	8	17	2	27	2	8	1	11
BSP	3	-	3	6	-	-	1	1
CPI	-	-	2	2	-	-	8	8
Others	13	1	2	16	1	2	6	9
Total	25	27	65	117	25	27	65	117

Source : Election Commission Reports of India, 1998, 1999.

The interaction of monotheistic ideology with the multi-cultural social structure leads to diverse kind of political activity within Akali politics.

Succession politics, leading to a division in the Akali Dal, and appropriation of religious space by the Akali Dal (B) on the occasion of celebrations of 300 years of the establishment of the Khalsa, has reversed the 1998 election trend. These developments contributed to the alienation of a large section of the Hindus and the Scheduled Caste population and caused a division among the Sikhs.

Not only this, the politics of populism introduced a new competition among various strata of the population. It was alleged that Mr. Badal's populism is pro-Jat peasantry and it discriminates against other sections of society.³⁵ For instance, the Bahujan Samaj Morcha, as ally of the Akali Dal (B) asserted that the Punjab Chief Minister's decision to give free electricity to farmers has created a wide gap between the farming community and those living in urban areas and 'dalits' (landless labourers).³⁶ In response to these assertions, the state government decided to give free domestic power upto 30 units each per month to those Scheduled Caste consumers who had a sanctioned load of not more than 300 watts.³⁷ This effort of the state government to appease the Scheduled Castes and the Backward Castes did not succeed. The Badal government was accused of betraying the weaker sections by fixing the 300 watt limit, whereas no limit was fixed in the case of farmers. The competitive populism created a sense of relative deprivation among various strata of the population. Further, failure to abolish octroi led to strong resentment in the urban areas. As a reaction to this, the urban traders refused to pay sale tax. Consequently sale tax revenue of the state declined.³⁸ The competitive populism and financial crisis in the state restricted the choices of the Chief Minister to placate people with more doles.

The politics of populism and religio-political mobilisation dictated the outcome of the 1999 elections. Political parties came together on the plank of Hindu-Sikh unity, but started relying on the pre-Blue Star political agenda. History has witnessed that these experiments have strengthened communal divisions and produced extreme religious movements in the 1980's.

To sum up, the interaction of the structural reality with the nature of the state and the path of development has produced conflictual identities. The religious identity, communal articulations and secular Panjabi assertions have co-existed, and none of these identities could emerge as dominant. The political discourse articulating these has been intermeshed with elite maneuvers and violent assertions. These articulations vacillate between one variety of ideological monotheism to another, thereby adversely affecting the formation of a secular Punjabi identity having its basis in democratic consciousness. Therefore, the interactive relationship between the structural reality, the state and the path of development is producing an electoral arithmetic which aims at co-opting sectional interests, or communal, religious, linguistic and cultural aspirations in a piecemeal manner. The structural reality continues to produce a dwarfed secular Punjabi identity and blocked economy is finding it difficult to provide alternatives to the emerging agrarian crisis. Politics is increasingly becoming less representative, competitive and federal.

³⁵ Verma, P.S., 'Akali-BJP Debacle in Punjab : Wages of Non-performance and Fragmentation', Economic and Political Weekly, vol. 34, No. 50, 1999, pp.3521-29.

³⁶ 'BSP Insects Caste into Akali feud', *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), January 15, 1999.

Some dalit leaders threatened that the landless residents would use direct electricity supply unless the state gave at least 100 units free to all landless households since farmers were being given free electricity supply for irrigation.

³⁷ Man, Kuldeep, 'Free Power to the SC's, BCs : An Eye Wash', *The Indian Express* (Chandigarh), April 19, 1990.

³⁸ 'Punjab all set to take hard fiscal measures', *The Times of India* (New Delhi), October 14, 1999