

CHAPTER - 1

PUNJABI SUBA LEHAR

PHASE 1 : 1947 TO 1960

PHASE 2: 1960 TO 1966

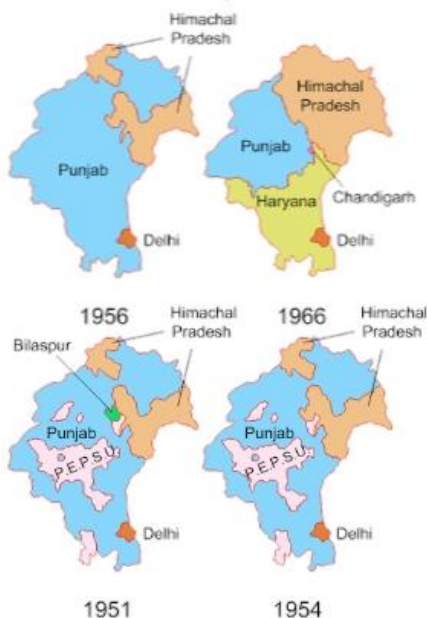


This Chapter focuses solely on the Punjabi Suba Lehar and the political developments that it went through. The objectives of the Lehar and the prominent faces who were the catalysts in leading this movement should be the pillars on which our conscience should stand.

The Formation of Punjab State as it is known today and the implementation of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 will be discussed in the next Chapter.

WHAT ?

The Punjabi Suba Lehar/Movement was a long-drawn political agitation, launched by the Sikhs, demanding the creation of a Punjabi Suba, or Punjabi-speaking state, in the post-independence Indian state of East Punjab.



WHY ?

Though it was commonly recognized at the time of Independence that the Indian states were created not on a rational basis, but were the result of the exigencies of the progressive British conquest of the subcontinent, a commission that had been set up in 1948 by the Government of India, tasked with drawing up clean-cut states corresponding to demographic and linguistic boundaries, was not effective in the north of the country.

Its jurisdiction was limited to the southern states, with northern India kept out of its purview, specifically to avoid problems like those of Punjab, and specifically issues raised by the Sikhs.

The Sikhs now constituted a majority in the northwestern seven districts of the 13 districts of East Punjab state at the time: Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Firozpur, Ludhiana, and Ambala, along with Patiala and East Punjab States Union, or PEPSU, with sizable populations in surrounding districts, while Hindus formed a majority in the remaining six, including the southeastern districts between PEPSU and Delhi (Hisar, Karnal, Rohtak, and Gurgaon), and the eastern Kangra and Shimla divisions.

The seven Sikh-majority districts would be the suggested basis of the Punjabi Suba, for which Tara Singh campaigned vigorously between late 1948 and early 1949.

The new platform of the Akali Dal mobilized strong support among Sikhs, though a decision adopted by the Congress in its annual session held in December 1948 read, "We are clearly of the opinion that no question of rectification of the boundaries in Northern India should be raised at the present moment whatever the merits of such a proposal."

Tara Singh himself was arrested on 20 February 1949 and imprisoned for several months, during which time the agitation was continued under the leadership of Sardar Hukam Singh.

DR. AMBEDKAR'S ROLE

In January 1948, Akali Dal's three-member delegation of leaders, Harcharan Singh Bajwa, Bhupinder Singh Mann, and Giani Kartar Singh, met the Minister of Law and Justice Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar encouraged & suggested that the Akali delegation should demand a Punjabi-speaking state or Punjabi Suba (Punjabi Province) as a Sikh state, since the central government had declared a commitment to a linguistic basis for the reorganization of the states.

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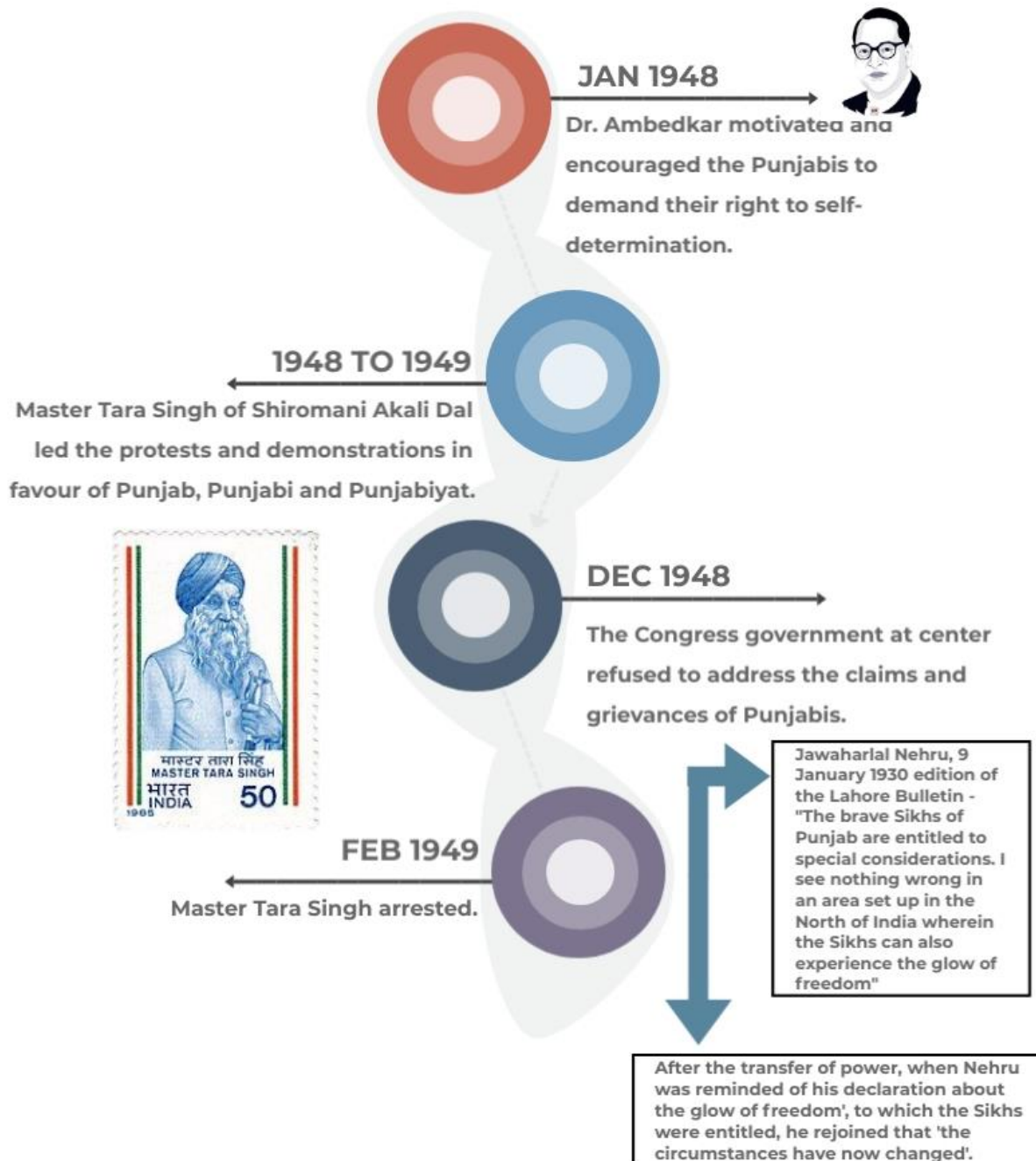
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A Historical Timeline



PHASE 1

1947-1960: THE BATTLE FOR INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

SACHAR FORMULA

- Introduced on 2 October 1949
- Drafted by two Hindu members and two Sikh members of the Congress party
- Proposed making Punjabi as the medium of instruction up to the matriculation stage, in the "Punjabi zone" area, with Hindi taught as a compulsory subject from the end of the primary level onward, and vice-versa for "Hindi zone" areas

POLITICISATION

- Arya Samaj encouraged the Hindus of even the Punjabi-speaking area to disown Punjabi entirely and select Hindi in censuses beginning in early 1951.
- In response the Akali Dal mobilized the Sikhs of the region.
- This competition led to several clashes in Punjab, and heated electoral campaigns.

1953

States Reorganisation Commision

The Commission began its work in February 1954.

Akali Dal submitted an 18-page memorandum on 14 May 1954, proposing the Punjabi Suba to **include all PEPSU, excluding** the districts of Gurgaon and Rohtak, Panipat Tehsil in Karnal, and a few tehsils of Hisar district.

The Congress in Punjab, on the other hand, proposed the state **integration of East Punjab, PEPSU, and Himachal Pradesh**, which was similar to what the **Arya Samaj Lobby** and the **Jan Sangh** memoranda had stated

Sachar Formula- The Failed attempt to Divide & Rule

The Sachar Formula was introduced on 2 October 1949 under the government of Bhim Sen Sachar to forestall the growing agitation. Drafted by two Hindu members and two Sikh members of the Congress party, it proposed making Punjabi as the medium of instruction up to the matriculation stage, in the “Punjabi zone” area, with Hindi taught as a compulsory subject from the end of the primary level onward, and vice-versa for “Hindi zone” areas (as mentioned in the previous figure).

Its goal had been bilingualism, but as it divided East Punjab into Punjabi and Hindi zones, it had the effect of sharpening the divide between the Sikh dominated North territory and Hindu dominated South territory of East Punjab. Tara Singh was released at this time in the hopes that the formula would be accepted by the Shiromani Akali Dal, but **Tara Singh turned it down, reminding the Congress of its commitment to forming linguistic states**, and that a Punjabi-speaking region had already been demarcated for the purposes of the Sachar Formula itself.

After the transfer of power, when Nehru was reminded of his declaration about the glow of freedom', to which the Sikhs were entitled, he stated that 'the circumstances have now changed'.

In 1949, when the Central Government formally elicited the views of Punjab Legislature, on the draft constitution, the Sikh representatives reiterated their stand for a federal constitution saying:

“It has been the declared policy of the Congress from the outset that India is to be the Union of autonomous states and each unit is to develop in its own way, linguistically, culturally and socially. Of course, Defence, Communications and Foreign Affairs must and should remain the central subjects. To change the policy now is to run counter to oft-repeated creed of the Congress.”

1953 States Reorganization Commission

On December 29, 1953 the Government of India appointed a Commission under the chairmanship of Saiyid Fazl Ali, then Governor of Orissa to examine “the whole question of reorganisation of States carefully, objectively and dispassionately so that the welfare of the people of the constituent unit as well as of the nation as a whole is promoted”.

The Commission recommended reorganisation, of Madras, Kerala, Karnataka, Hyderabad, Bombay, Vidarbha and Madhya Pradesh.

But the States Reorganisation Commission declined to recommend division of the Punjab on the ground that “Linguistic homogeneity has to be aimed at as an instrument for facilitating social and political inter-course among the people, and for ensuring the close association of the people with the Government.

If this criterion be applied, it will be found that there is no real language problem in the State of Punjab as at present constituted. This is so because the Punjabi and Hindi languages as spoken in the Punjab are akin to each other and are both well-understood by all sections of the people of the State.” They also opined that “the problem of language in the Punjab is primarily one of scripts, and in this battle of scripts, sentiment is arrayed against sentiment.”

This remark by an official executive body of the Central Government created a huge outcry among the protagonists of the Punjabi Suba movement as it implied on diminishing the scope and importance of Gurmukhi script. A similar viewpoint of the government’s approach and thought process can be found in the Constitution itself wherein Sikhs are considered as Hindus instead of being acknowledged by their own separate individual identity.

The conclusion as recorded by the Commission in paragraph 535 of the Report was as follows “The creation of a Punjabi-speaking State would offer no solution to the language problem, the present arrangements for the recognition of both Punjabi and Hindi could not be done away with, and the controversies would not in all probability come to an end, and while no major problem would be solved, both the languages might suffer.”

The Commission began to summarize its work in February 1954, and the Akali Dal submitted an 18-page memorandum on 14 May 1954, proposing the Punjabi Suba to include all of Punjab and Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), excluding the districts of Gurgaon and Rohtak, Panipat Tehsil in Karnal, and a few tehsils of Hisar district.

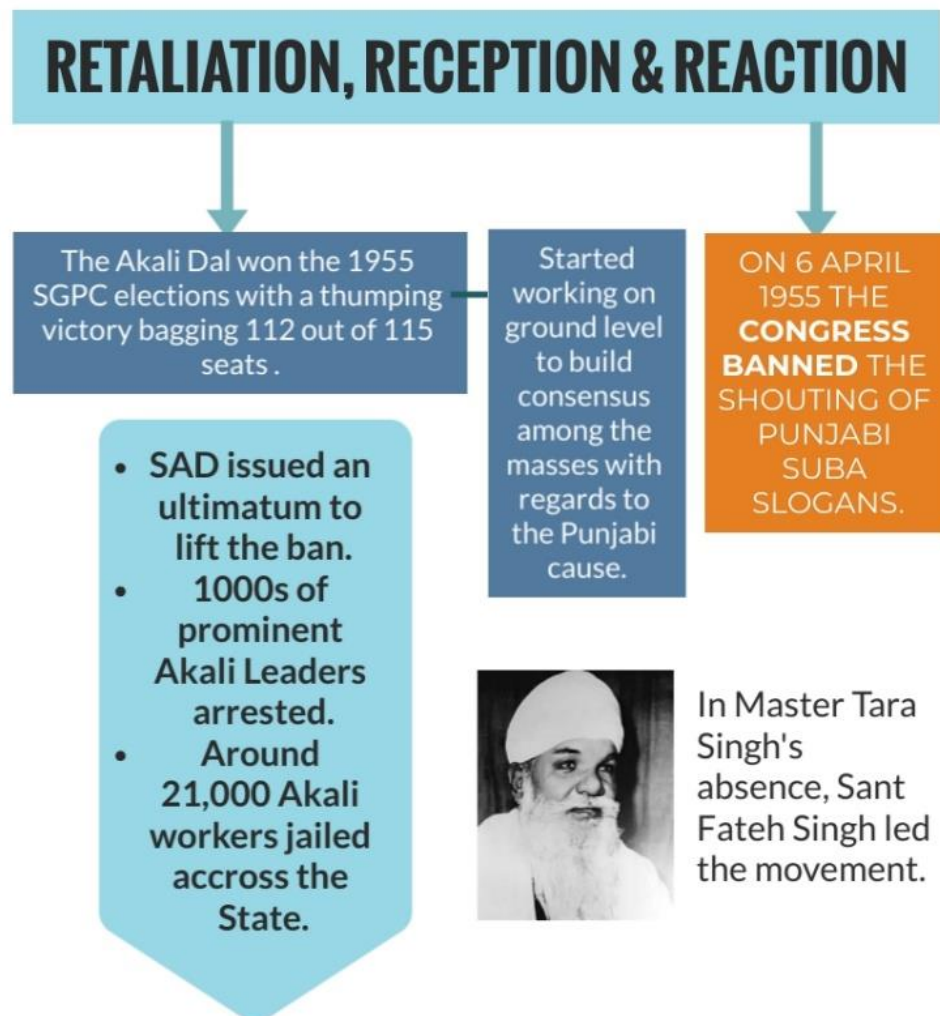
The Congress in Punjab, on the other hand, proposed the state integration of East Punjab, PEPSU, and Himachal Pradesh, which was similar to what the Arya Samaj and the Jan Sangh memoranda had stated, which had proposed the amalgamation of not only these territories but even Delhi as well.

SAD’s victory in 1955 SGPC elections

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (or SGPC) is an organization in India responsible for the management of gurdwaras, Sikh places of worship in three states of

Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh and union territory of Chandigarh. The SGPC manages the security, financial, facility maintenance and religious aspects of Gurdwaras as well as keeping archaeologically rare and sacred artifacts, including weapons, clothes, books and writings of the Sikh Gurus.

The Akali Dal under Master Tara Singh's leadership, entered the 1955 SGPC elections on this platform and won resoundingly, winning all 112 seats it contested against the Punjab Congress, which had contested under the banner of the "Khalsa Dal," which had only won 3 out of 132 contested seats. The results proved a strong morale booster for the party, which had demonstrated strong Sikh support for its platform, and felt encouraged to start a movement for the Punjabi Suba.



Retaliation and Reception to the Retailaition

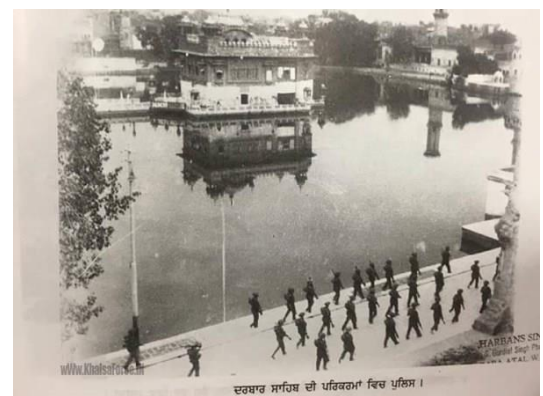
The opportunity presented itself when on 6 April 1955 the **Punjab Congress banned the shouting of Punjabi Suba slogans**; twenty days later the **Akali Dal issued an ultimatum** to rescind the ban by 10 May or face an agitation. **The ban was not lifted, and the agitation began** that day with Tara Singh and 10 companions being arrested for shouting Punjabi Suba slogans. In the next five days more than 1,000 prominent Akali leaders were arrested, and by July as many as 21,000 Akalis were jailed in Congress efforts to quash the growing movement.

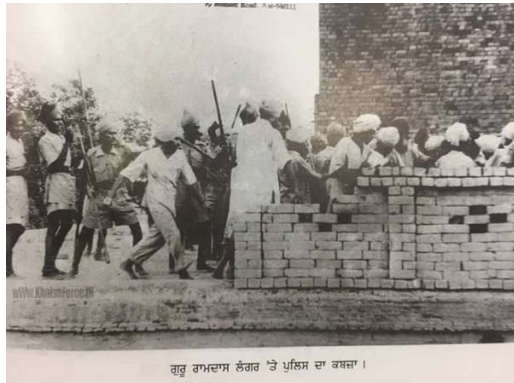
Master Tara Singh said that the distribution of the states on linguistic basis was the fundamental right of the people and he added “they would force the Government by Gandhian weapons of Satyagraha and by filling the jails of the Government to have it accepted. No power could stop the creation of a Punjabi speaking state which was in the interest of the both the Hindus and the Sikhs”.

Realizing the inherent danger in the situation the government withdrew the ban on slogans and the Chief Minister, Bhim Sen Sachar, presented himself at the Akal Takhat and in an open „divan’ apologized on behalf of the government for the police entry into Golden Temple. The Congress could not tolerate soft stand against The Akalis and Sachar lost his Chief Ministership. The charge against the Chief Minister was that instead of taming the Akalis, he had pampered them.

4 JULY, 1955 GOLDEN TEMPLE ATTACKED

A flashpoint occurred on 4 July 1955, when a group led by Fateh Singh had arrived from Ganganagar a few days prior to take part in the protest movement. Government police forces came onto the temple premises and heavy-handedly took the entire group into custody, along with the head Granthis of the Akal Takht and Golden Temple, volunteer protestors, and even cooks working in the temple’s holy kitchen.





The Guru Ram Das Serai and Shiromani Akali Dal offices were also raided, and batons used and tear gas and shells fired to disperse the protestors gathered on the periphery of the temple, damaging the periphery and sarovar, or pool, of the temple. Over 200 protestors were killed, more than 2000 arrested, and thousands, including women and children, were injured.

The reaction from this event gave further momentum to the movement, opposite to the intention of the government, and proved to be so potentially destabilizing to the government that on 12 July, the Congress government under B.S. Sachar (then CM of PEPSU) used the pretext of a "triumphal return from peace mission abroad" to lift the ban on Punjabi Suba slogans, appealing for peace. It also announced the release of Akali prisoners in installments, which proved slow to be implemented; Tara Singh was released on 8 September, and the last Akalis were not released until 18 October.



In addition, Inderjeet Singh, a 10-year-old boy from Moga visiting relatives in Karnal, would be beaten with batons, killed, and thrown in an irrigation well on 21 September 1955 by policemen for raising Pro-Punjabi Suba slogans.

Amritsar Convention

The States Reorganization Committee submitted its report to the Government of India on 10 September 1955 where it was considered and published on 10 October. The Commission recommended the integration of PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh with the Punjab, which was considered unacceptable by the mainstream Sikh political body, the Shiromani Akali Dal, whose leader, Master Tara Singh, took the opportunity to exhibit

Sikh unity and resolution on this point, summoning a representative convention of Sikhs at Amritsar on 16 October 1955; nearly 1,300 invitees attended.

The Amritsar convention strongly rejected the Commission's proposal, castigating it for bias against Sikh claims. The resolution called on the government to create the Punjabi Suba not only in the interest of the Sikhs but in the interest of the Hindi-speaking peoples of East Punjab; Tara Singh received authorization from the Amritsar Convention "to take suitable steps to for conveying the views and sentiments of the Sikh community to Government of India and urging them to do their duty to the Sikhs.

Tara Singh's first action was to arrange a conciliatory meeting with the Prime Minister, **Jawaharlal Nehru**, who had been quoted in the **9 January 1930** edition of the **Lahore Bulletin** during the freedom struggle that,

"The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special considerations. I see nothing wrong in an area set up in the North of India wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom," though afterwards telling the Sikhs after the British left that the "circumstances had now changed."

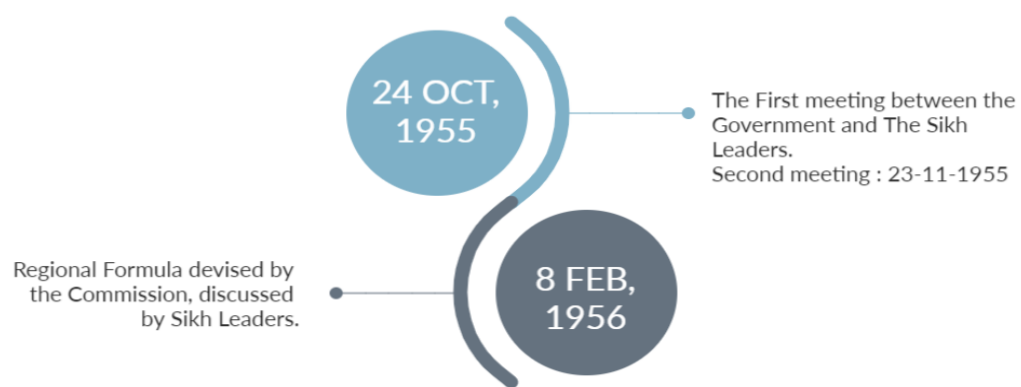
The meeting was facilitated by former cabinet member Baldev Singh, who presented Nehru with correspondence between Sikh leaders and the Muslim League, reminding him that the Sikhs had rejected the League's overtures to side with India. Baldev Singh would act as a mediator between the Akali leaders and the government in their meetings.

GOVERNMENT TALKS (AFTER 1955)



HOW THE GOVERNMENT REACHED AN “IMPASSE” USING COVERTLY TACTICS

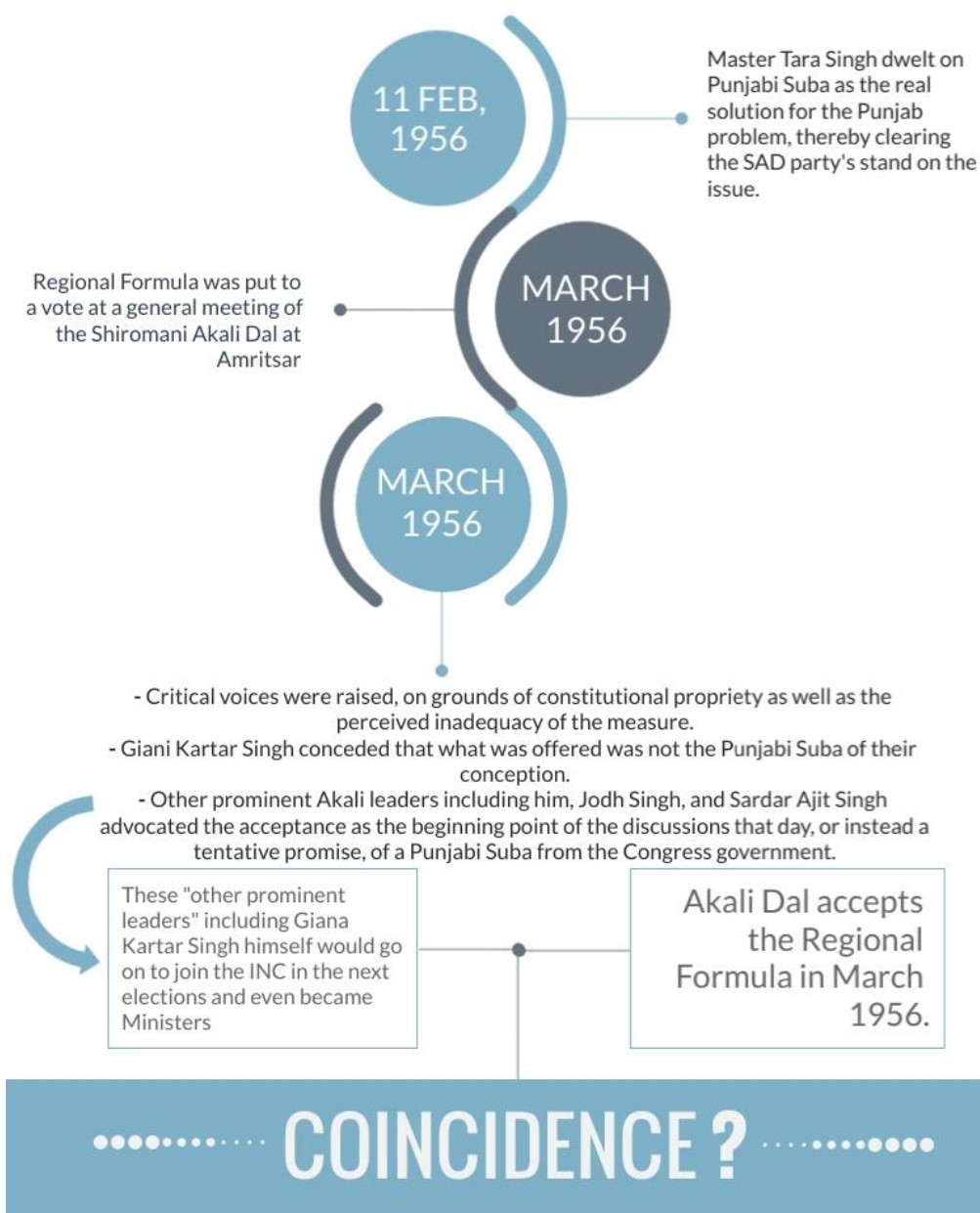
1. The first meeting took place on 24 October 1955 in Delhi between
-THE GOVERNMENT, represented by Nehru and two of his senior cabinet colleagues, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant,
-AND THE SIKHS, represented by
Master Tara Singh, who would present opening statements,
Bhai Jodh Singh, also a member of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, who would explicate the language problem,
Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Hukam Singh, who were to meet the political points, and
Sardar Gian Singh Rarewala; a second meeting followed on 23 November the same year.
2. The talks were ‘friendly but rather vague’. On 8 February 1956, a plan, generally known as the **Regional Formula (based on Sachar Formula)**, was discussed by the Sikh leaders.



If you can't beat them, BREAK them! - How INC used

Divide & Rule amongst SAD Leadership

It is not the first time that the terms "Divide & Rule" and Indian National Congress have been used in the same sentence. Old habits die hard they say, and INC surely has a habit of following this age-old colonial formula to break the consensus of the masses and take the leftover pieces to mould and sculpt it into a puppet of its own.



In his address to the All-India Akali Conference on 11 February, **Master Tara Singh dwelt on Punjabi Suba as the real solution** for the Punjab problem.

The Regional Formula was put to a vote at a general meeting of the Shiromani Akali Dal at Amritsar on 11 March 1956. There were critical voices raised, on grounds of constitutional propriety as well as the perceived inadequacy of the measure. In addition to this, Giani Kartar Singh conceded that what was offered was not the Punjabi Suba of their conception, and other prominent Akali leaders including him, Jodh Singh, and Sardar Ajit Singh advocated the acceptance as the beginning point of the discussions that day, or instead a tentative promise, of a Punjabi Suba from the Congress government.

But the Akali Dal accepted the Regional Formula in March 1956.

Furthermore, **the Akali Dal Working Committee resolved in September 1956** to implement the Formula. The constitution of the Akali Dal was suitably amended and the Akali legislators joined the Congress party.¹

Consequently, most of the front-rank Akali leaders joined the Congress. On 30 September 1956, the Akali Dal renounced politics. It proposed to hold a rally a few weeks later and 'present' two lakh Akali members to the Congress. After the Assembly elections, the Congress Government that came to power in Punjab on 3 April 1957, with Partap Singh Kairon as chief minister, included former Akalis Giani Kartar Singh and Gian Singh Rarewala, as members of his cabinet. It would be interesting to note that Parkash Singh Badal, Punjab's five-time Akali Dal chief minister, fought the 1957 elections as a Congress candidate.

*"As Master Tara Singh had told in an interview, he did not join the Congress. Disillusioned by subsequent developments that failed to achieve the objective of a 'wholesome' Punjabi-speaking state of his dreams, **Master Tara Singh repudiated the regional formula on 14 June 1958 and resurrected the demand for a Punjabi Suba.***

On 14 February 1959 he called a general body meeting of the Akali Dal at Patiala. The meeting resolved, among other things, to restore the political character of the party.

*Later, however, the rival leaders of the **factionalism-ridden Akali Dal** succeeded in isolating Master Tara Singh, resulting in the emergence of a new Akali leadership in the form of a secular and saintly figure:*

¹ The Akali–Congress Compromise, J.S. Grewal

*Sant Fateh Singh. Chief Minister Partap Singh Kairon played a covert role in bringing about the change in the Akali leadership's hierarchy.*²

Opposition to the Formula

The Regional Formula was also opposed by Hindi language supporters of Punjab as being harmful to their interests, and under the Hindi Raksha Samiti, campaigned to have it annulled. During the course of the Hindi movement, several Sikh gurdwaras had been desecrated. However, Sikh sentiments remained hurt by the violent desecrations, the Sikh masses had not enthusiastically accepted the Regional Formula either.

Though the post-independence intellectual and cultural milieu that had driven Punjabi advocacy and the initial drive toward the Formula did yield institutions like Punjabi University in 1956, the Formula was increasingly viewed as an inadequate solution to the Punjab problem.

Language frontiers had become communal frontiers, and Master Tara Singh considered the Punjabi Suba as the only solution against rising Hindi fanaticism. He called a general meeting of the Shiromani Akali Dal at Patiala on 14 February 1959, which 299 out of 377 members attended. The convention strongly supported restoring the political operation of the Akali Dal.

Continued Efforts to re-write SAD's Legacy

The political rivalry between Congress and the Akali Dal resulted in the narrow loss of Master Tara Singh in the election for the office of president of the SGPC to another Akali candidate, Prem Singh Lalpura. **Tara Singh** reacted by arranging a **Punjabi Suba conference in Chandigarh**, at which he announced his intention of launching a mass movement. He was subsequently arrested, though a silent procession in Delhi on 15 March 1959 proceeded as arranged; the procession, with portraits of Tara Singh, ended in a religious divan at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, and Tara Singh was released from jail in under a week.

The 1960 SGPC election was another political contest between Kairon's Congress and Tara Singh's Akalis. Congress Sikhs strove hard to defeat the Akalis.

² Behind Closed Doors: Politics of Punjab, Haryana and the Emergency, BK Chum

Giani Kartar Singh (who was previously an Akali and worked with Master Tara Singh, but joined in INC under the infamous horse-trading of September 1956) even resigned from his ministry to focus solely on campaigning, and with help from the state government created the Sadh Sangat Board to contest the elections. The Shiromani Akali Dal overwhelmingly won the elections however, taking 136 seats to the Sadh Sangat Board's four.

Renewed Efforts towards the Struggle

All the Akali members assembled at the Akal Takht on 24 January 1960 to dedicate themselves to achieving the Punjabi Suba. Another **Punjabi Suba convention** was held on **22 May 1960**, to which members of the Swatantra Party and Praja Socialist Party were invited. Presided over by Pandit Sundar Lal and former Congress member Saifuddin Kitchlew, the main resolution was moved by Sardar Gurnam Singh, calling upon the government "not to delay any more the inevitable formation" of a Punjabi-speaking state, especially when language-based states had been carved out in other parts of the country.

Another march was announced, to commence on 29 May 1960, going through the Punjabi countryside to end at Delhi to join a Sikh procession on 12 June 1960, stopping at important Gurdwaras to make speeches to rally support for the Punjabi Suba. He was arrested and detained in jail on the night of the 24th, and the government cracked down heavily on the Akalis, with large-scale arrests made throughout the Punjab, and lines of arrests at Amritsar, at which the Golden Temple was the main center of mobilization, and Delhi. Akali leaders made stirring speeches asserting the Sikhs' right to self-determination, and the evening divans, or assemblies, at Manji Sahib attracted vast audiences.

THIS MARKED THE END OF PHASE 1 OF THE STRUGGLE

The thumping victory of Akali Dal in the 1960 SGPC elections was a wakeup call to the Congress government that the untiring efforts of Master Tara Singh's brigade cannot be overlooked and thus, eventually a Punjabi Suba will serve as the only solution to address the concerns of the people.

Ever since the midnight of 14th August 1947, the prospect of a well-defined and properly demarcated Punjabi speaking state seemed to be an obvious way to compensate the wounded state which had undergone brutal social injustice through the partition. PANJ-AAB as it was, had been reduced to mere DHAI-AABs and yet the government was still adamant on ignoring the concerns of the state with regards to their cultural individuality.

The brave Akalis of 1920s, the Ghaddari Babe of 1910s were still alive and fighting in the form of every Punjabi who fought for the sake of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabinat post-independence. The victims of this ongoing socio-cultural erosion were the same i.e. Punjabis, however the political perpetrators had changed, from the Colonial British Government to the Tyrannical Congress regime under Nehru.

Looking back at it, if we actually study the way we had to “take what is ours”, no Punjabi will be satisfied with what we have in 2020. This takes me to writing about the Phase 2 of the Punjabi Suba Lehar which gradually resulted in bifurcation of PEPSU in 1966 into Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh.

PHASE 2

1960 ONWARDS: HOW THE GOVERNMENT “RESOLVED” THE CONFLICT



Sant Fateh Singh's Fast unto Death

-On 29 October 1960, Fateh Singh wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru saying that if the Sikhs' democratic and constitutional demand for a Punjabi-speaking area was not accepted, he would go on a fast.

-The fast commenced on **18 December 1960**.

-Indian leaders of diverse opinion attempted to intervene to persuade Fateh Singh to abandon the fast.

-Nehru in a speech in Chandigarh on 20 December 1960 conceded that Punjabi was the dominant language of the Punjab and that it must be promoted in every way; this was repeated in a speech in Rajpura later in the day.

ASSURANCE FROM NEHRU

-On 7 January 1961, Nehru added a postscript to what he had told Tara Singh, that the formation of linguistic states had not halted due to any discrimination against Punjab or distrust of the Sikhs, and that "Punjab state is broadly speaking a Punjabi Suba with Punjabi as the dominant language."

-Nehru's statement reassured Tara Singh, who had a call made to Amritsar (to Fateh Singh) stating that the obligations of his (Fateh Singh's) vow had been fulfilled, and asking him to terminate his fast

Sant Fateh Singh's role in the absence of Master Tara Singh

With Tara Singh in jail, Sant Fateh Singh directed the movement from the Golden Temple, assisted by the Sikh Students Federation in delivering speeches drawing from Sikh history to garner support, in 1966. He tactically stressed the linguistic basis of the demand, while downplaying its religious basis — a state where the distinct Sikh identity could be preserved. The government resorted to rigorous measures to put down the agitation, but volunteers continued to join and the movement continued, even as thousands of Sikhs were put in jail.

On 29 October 1960, Fateh Singh wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru saying that if the Sikhs' democratic and constitutional demand for a Punjabi-speaking area was not accepted, he would go on a fast (a novelty in Sikh tradition) he sought to impress upon him the Sikhs' sense of grievance and the repressiveness of the Congress-run Punjab Government.

Nehru did not intervene, and the fast commenced on 18 December 1960. Indian leaders of diverse opinion attempted to intervene to persuade Fateh Singh to abandon the fast, though he would not withdraw from his resolution. With growing national concern over his life, Nehru in a speech in Chandigarh on 20 December 1960 conceded that Punjabi was the dominant language of the Punjab and that it must be promoted in every way; this was repeated in a speech in Rajpura later in the day. On 31 December he made a personal appeal to Fateh Singh to stop the fast.

Assurance from Nehru

Chief Minister Partap Singh Kairon, under the advice of his old teacher and informal counsel Jodh Singh, set Tara Singh free on 4 January 1961. Tara Singh immediately called on Fateh Singh, severely weakened from his fast, then arranged to meet Nehru while he was in Bhavnagar, Gujarat for the annual Congress session. On a specially chartered flight from Delhi to Bhavnagar, he was accompanied by Harbans Singh Gujral, Lachhman Singh Gill, Hargurnad Singh, Harcharan Singh of Bathinda, and Seth Ram Nath, one Punjabi Hindu who openly espoused the cause for a Punjabi-speaking state. While in flight the group held mutual consultations and reduced their minimal demand in writing.

On 7 January 1961, Tara Singh held a two-hour meeting with Nehru without result, but the next day Nehru added a postscript to what he had told Tara Singh, that the

formation of forming linguistic states had not halted due to any discrimination against Punjab or distrust of the Sikhs, and that "Punjab state is broadly speaking a Punjabi Suba with Punjabi as the dominant language." He also expressed concern regarding Fateh Singh's health and wished to see his fast ended.

Nehru's statement reassured Tara Singh, who had a call made to Amritsar (to Fateh Singh) stating that the obligations of his(Fateh Singh's) vow had been fulfilled, and asking him to terminate his fast, a motion also adopted by the Working Committee of the Akali Dal, who on behalf of the Khalsa, told Fateh Singh that they were satisfied the his pledge had been complied with and that he must forthwith end his fast.

Fateh Singh ended his 22-day fast with a glass of juice on 9 January 1961, marking the end of the seven-month-long morcha, or movement. According to official government figures, 30,000 Sikhs had been placed in jail over the course of the morcha; according to Akali figures, 57,129 Sikhs had been placed in jail.

How a Hunger Strike changed the Lehar's leadership

hierarchy

Political negotiations resumed between the Akalis and the government, with three meetings between Fateh Singh and Nehru on 8 February 1961, 1 March 1961, and 12 May 1961. While cordial, they did not yield solid results. Nehru offered to extend protection to the Punjabi language but did not accept Punjabi-speaking areas forming a separate state, which was not accepted by Sikhs.

To impress this point, Tara Singh himself embarked on a fast on 15 August 1961, during which notable Sikh mediators like Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala, and Hardit Singh Malik kept in touch with Nehru and Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on one hand and Akali leaders on the other.

Tara Singh was persuaded to end his fast without concrete progress on the issue 48 days later on 1 October 1961. The responsibility for having Fateh Singh's vow ended was also directed at Tara Singh. A committee of five Sikh religious notables, including religious scholars, jathedars of Kesgarh Sahib and the Akal Takht, and the head granthi of the Darbar Sahib, were selected and authorized on 24 November 1961 to investigate and determine the circumstances leading to the ending of the fast and determine penalties for not fulfilling the objectives of the fast.

Five days later, they pronounced Tara Singh guilty of breaking his word and blemishing the Sikh tradition of religious steadfastness and sacrifice, and he was ordered to perform additional prayers for a month and clean the shoes of the sangat, or congregation, and the dishes of the langar, or open community kitchen, for five days. Fateh Singh was also to recite extra prayers and wash "langar" dishes for five days for his own fast ending, though it was recognized that his fast had ended at Tara Singh's request.

Photographs of Tara Singh's service were circulated widely in newspapers and served to somewhat rehabilitate his popular image, though his political reputation never fully recovered. He had been rejected by crowds at divans as far back as when after Fateh Singh's fast had ended. Fateh Singh would begin to eclipse him as the leader of the movement, and by 1962 after a period of interparty schism, had been elected president of the Akali Dal, and had the support of the majority faction. A close associate of Fateh Singh, Sant Channan Singh, was elected SGPC president, further consolidating Fateh Singh's position. With the parallel factions remaining divided, Tara Singh withdrawing from the scene for six months for contemplation amid dwindling political fortunes.

This led to the ascendance of Sant Fateh Singh as the flag bearer of the movement and Master Tara Singh's 13 years of hard work was overlooked because of a single five day isolated incident.

Meanwhile, following the settlement made up to that point, Nehru appointed a commission to address the question of Sikh grievances. The Akali Dal did not agree with its composition and did not present its case to it, though the commission carried on regardless, and rejected suggestions of anti-Sikh discrimination, rejecting the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state as a Sikh state.

Nalwa Conference

Attention to the Punjabi Suba, the shared objective of both factions of the Akali Dal, was renewed at a conference on **4 July 1965**. Named the Nalwa Conference after **famed Sikh general Hari Singh Nalwa of the Sikh Empire**, the main Conference resolution was drawn up by eminent Sikh scholar and intellectual Kapur Singh, and moved by Gurnam Singh, then leader of the opposition in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, and seconded by Giani Bhupinder Singh, then president of Tara Singh's faction of the Akali Dal.

Nalwa conference Ludhiana asserted Sikh's right to self-determination. The text of the resolution follows:

NALWA CONFERENCE RESOLUTION for Self-Determination Status

SHIROMANI AKALI DAL

Resolution of Sikh political status
General Hari Singh Nalwa Conference
Ludhiana (Punjab)
July 4th, 1965

1. This Conference in commemoration of General Hari Singh Nalwa of historical fame reminds all concerned that the Sikh people are makers of history and are conscious of their political destiny in a free India.
2. This Conference recalls that the Sikh people agreed to merge in a common Indian nationality on the explicit understanding of being accorded a constitutional status of co-sharers in the Indian sovereignty along with the majority community, which solemn understanding now stands cynically repudiated by the present rulers of India. Further, the Sikh people have been systematically reduced to a sub-political status in their homeland, the Punjab, and to an insignificant position, in their mother-land India. The Sikhs are in a position to establish before an impartial International Tribunal, uninfluenced by the present Indian rulers that the laws, the judicial processes and the executive actions of the union of India are consistently and heavily weighed against the Sikhs and are administered with bandaged eyes against Sikh citizens.
3. This Conference, therefore, resolves, after careful thought and consideration that there is no alternative for the Sikhs in the interests of their self-preservation but to frame their political demand for securing a self-determined political status within the Republic of the Union of India.

Moved by: Sardar Gurnam Singh,
Bar-at-law, Judge, High Court (Retd.)
M.L.A. (Punjab), Leader of the Opposition

Government deliberations

On 24 July 1965, Tara Singh ended his self-exile from politics, and on 2 August, he addressed a press conference in Delhi, applauded and pledged support for the Nalwa Conference resolution, calling for the Sikhs' "place in the sun of free India." Fateh Singh announced on 16 August that in order to secure the Punjabi Suba he would commence another fast on 10 September, and if it was unsuccessful, in the 25th he would self-immolate at the Akal Takht. SGPC president Channan Singh, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, and Harcharan Singh Hudhara went to Delhi on 8 September to attend a high-level meeting with prominent government leaders including Yadavinder Singh, the Defense Minister, The Minister of State for Home Affairs, and members of Parliament. They requested Fateh Singh to defer the fast in light of the declaration of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965; some, including the Yadavinder Singh, gave their assurance of support for the cause if the government continued to avoid the demand after normalcy was restored. This message was relayed to Fateh Singh on 9 September as Channan Singh and the

Akali leaders returned to Amritsar. Fateh Singh accepted the request and appealed to the Sikhs in Punjab to support the war effort and the senior commanders, who were almost all Sikh.

The Indo-Pak War was another hurdle in Congress led Central government's attempt to deny the people their socio-cultural rights and stretch this revolt any further. It is a universal fact that the valour and bravery of the Punjabi community cannot be ignored when it comes to defending their soil. After leading the Indian Army to an astounding victory, it was an obligation, a reparation, a moral debt on the Government's part to acknowledge the interminable revolution i.e. Punjabi Suba Lehar.

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