

Akali Dal-BJP Coalitions as Marriages of Convenience: A Historical Perspective on the 2017 Election

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The 2017 Punjab Legislative Assembly election results assertively demonstrate that Punjab is its own political stage. Just like the 2014 general elections, it bucked Modi's Wave that led to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) spectacular win in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. For the first time in 2017, the state saw a triangular contest among the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and BJP alliance, the Indian National Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The electorate seeking a change stayed with the traditional alternative of the Congress led by Amarinder Singh which won 77 out of 117 seats. AAP gained momentum in the run-up to the elections but ended up with mere 20 seats, finishing a poor second. The governing Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance was decimated, winning only 18 seats, SAD with 15 seats and BJP just 3, finishing a disastrous third. In defeat, both the alliance partners were up in arms accusing each other of their dismal performance. In that sense, the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party coalitions can be termed the most unholy alliances - marriages of convenience. This paper provides a historical analysis of past coalitions as well as on the recent government.

Introduction

The SAD-BJP coalition has helped the two political parties to come to power in Punjab time and again. Yet despite this ground reality, there have been many contradictions in their relationship. They have been the longest standing allies who have also had protracted conflicts between them for several decades. To understand the political arrangements between the two, despite the conflicts, one needs to look back at the realities that have shaped this alliance.

In independent India, there were two dominant parties in Punjab: the Congress Party and the Shiromani Akali Dal. There were some other smaller parties such as the CPI, the CPM, the Jan Sangh, and the Bahujan Samaj Party. In their political journey, both the dominant parties have formed alliances with the smaller parties to come to power. Until the re-organization of the state on November 1, 1966, SAD had merged twice with the Congress Party - once in 1948 and a second time in 1956. It was only after post-re-organization of Punjab in 1966 that the Akali Dal saw an opportunity to come to power but that was only possible through an alliance partner. While the Congress Party had a wider representation both among the rural as well as urban sections of society the Akali Dal represented only the rural peasant Sikhs. To come to power it had to form a

coalition with the Jan Sangh that represented the urban traders, money lenders, service class and merchant manufacturers. There was no way that either of them could come to power in the state on their individual electoral strengths given the sectional social base each party represented. Thus electoral compulsions brought the Akali Dal together with the Jan Sangh, to fight the Congress preponderance in Punjab.

However, their alliance was never based on any ideological mooring, and therefore, their respective ideologies often became a cause of virulent cleavages between them. Even when they started forging political alliances to come to power in the state legislative Assembly, their ideological stances stood in the way of providing lasting stability, except, during the last decade when SAD emerged stronger and tried to move away from identity politics and the BJP responded to the changed circumstances in its own way. This aspect will be deliberated upon later in the paper.

There have been two phases of Akali Dal-Jan Sangh alliance. In the first phase they had a post-election alliance (1967-1972) and in the second, a pre-election alliance (1997-till date). Identity politics, perceived as the root cause of the cleavages between the two, had been practiced by both the Akali Dal as well as the right-wing Hindu organizations - Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) since pre-independence days. Post-independence through the RSS' political wing, Jan Sangh, which came into being in 1951 and was reorganized as the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980.¹ Their stances were shaped by historical events, economic interests and social and cultural differences.

Growth of Identity Politics in pre-independence India

Economic interests were the first to become the cause of social tension in pre-partition India among the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs, the three main communities inhabiting Punjab. By the middle of the nineteenth-century communal consciousness began to develop among all the three communities. In the post-1857² sepoy mutiny, also dubbed as, India's first war of independence, against the rule of the British East India Company, the British continued to be hostile towards the Muslims and as a result, they did not get opportunities in education and employment. The Hindu commercial castes and Brahmins, on the other hand, readily adapted to the new demands and began to dominate the professional classes and got employment in law, medicine and government service. The Sikhs found openings in the armed forces.³ When the Muslims realized that they had been put to disadvantage they too began looking towards the government for assistance. Over time, it suited the British to reconcile with the Muslims as they realized the growth of an agriculture class was necessary for the colonial system. The Muslims, along with the Sikhs, comprised the major agriculturists. Agriculture was not only revenue yielding but also provided the raw material for British manufactured goods, whereas, the professional and trading castes dominated by the Hindus contributed nothing towards the revenue and stability of the state. Thus, the priorities of the British changed towards

assessing the role of the Hindu urban middle classes, who provided the social base for the Indian National Congress when it was formed in 1885 and had started challenging British rule. Tensions grew among the Muslims and the Sikhs on the one hand and the Hindus on the other when the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 came into effect.⁴ The Act was meant to prevent the commercial castes, particularly the Hindus, from taking over the land of the agriculturists, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. The Hindus provided credit and in the event the agriculturists defaulted on their loans due to a bad crop or lower crop prices, they had no choice but to transfer their land to the moneylenders.

The growth of Arya Samaj⁵ in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Punjab brought it into direct conflict with the Sikhs. The Arya Samaj considered the Vedic tradition superior and rejected all latter-day philosophies and even went to the extent of calling the founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak 'illiterate', 'self-centered' and 'hypocritical.'⁶ This instilled fear among the Sikhs of absorption by the Hindu community due to their preponderance in numbers.⁷ The growth of Sikh identity politics was a reaction to the Arya Samaj movement. Their distinct identity was strengthened by the Singh Sabha movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁸

By the early part of the twentieth-century articulation of ethnoreligious identity politics gained stridency. Separate organizations came into being representing community interests in Punjab - Hindu Mahasabha, Punjab Muslim League and Chief Khalsa Diwan, an umbrella organization of various Singh Sabhas. The first unit of the Singh Sabha was formed in 1873 in Amritsar as a defense against proselytizing Christians and Hindus. This came to be known as the Singh Sabha of the Sanatan (traditional) Sikhs, who maintained a fluidity in the practice of the religion. While believing in the holy *Guru Granth Sahib*, they regarded themselves as part of the wider Hindu community and tolerated things like idols in the Golden Temple. It was followed by a more radical branch in Lahore that came to be known as the Tat Khalsa. By the beginning of the 20th century, the dominance of the Tat Khalsa became apparent. Due to their insistence on common initiation rites, they excluded other religions, which believed in the *Guru Granth Sahib* but partly followed Sikh customs, like the Sahajdari, Nirmala, Udasi and Sanatan sects. The Tat Khalsa Movement embodied in the Singh Sabhas stood for a new and more strictly defined Sikhism devoid of any references to Hinduism, rejecting the veneration of saints, idols and the services of other holy men.⁹ Kahn Singh Nabha, a major advocate and intellectual of the Tat Khalsa, penned, as part of ongoing discourses, *Hum Hindu Nahin* ('We Are Not Hindus') in 1898, which provided a powerful slogan to the movement. His work vehemently pressed for the distinction of the Sikh religion and identity and concluded with a versified note describing the characteristics of the Khalsa: not to cut body hair, shun halal meat and use of tobacco, believe only in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the ten Sikh gurus and in no other religion. By the end of the Gurdwara Reform Movement from 1920-25 Sikh politics was institutionalized. The SGPC emerged as the religious body of the Sikhs and the Akali Dal became their political wing. The two eventually emerged as the 'primary expressions of Sikh communal and political consciousness.'¹⁰

Identity politics and communal consciousness kept up its disorderly clamor in pre-independence or pre-partition Punjab because of Muslim domination. Muslims comprised 55.1 percent of the population while the Hindus and the Sikhs were both in a minority comprising 32 and 11.1 percent respectively.¹¹ Both the communities feared a permanent Muslim domination. This apprehension resulted in the growth of communal consciousness amongst all communities. Communal riots became a permanent feature of Indian political and social structure. This is evident from the fact that from 1900 to 1922 there were only 16 incidents of violence. But from 1923 to 1926 they increased to 72.¹² Riots broke out primarily between Hindus and Muslims and occasionally between Sikhs and Muslims too.

Migration, Demographic Change and Emergence of New Cleavages

Certain historical developments after partition deepened communal cleavages. Within weeks after independence, millions of Hindus and Sikhs migrated from West Punjab to East Punjab and almost the entire Muslim population moved out from East Punjab to West Punjab. As a consequence the Hindu population in East Punjab increased to 67 per cent, the Sikh to 30 percent and all other religious communities, when added together, came to 3 percent. Even before the displaced population could settle down re nascent Hinduism threatened to engulf the minorities. The Sikhs were looking for minority protection in a preponderantly Hindu society but having experienced a violent partition in 1947 the Hindus were suspect of any further minority demand for a state. This was true of the national leadership as well as the Hindus in the state of Punjab.

The Arya Samaj-led Hindu communalists started an aggressive campaign in the vernacular press that the *Khalsa* was created to protect the Hindus against Muslim aggression. The narrative articulated was that given the Muslim issue had disappeared after Partition, Sikhs should return to the Hindu fold. They aggressively championed the cause of Sanskrit and Hindi, while denying Punjabi even the status of a language, dubbing it as a dialect of Hindi. The Hindus argued that Punjabi was not a full-fledged language, it did not have a thoroughly developed script of its own and there was no specific area or region in Punjab where it was being spoken because Hindus claiming Hindi as their mother tongue lived all over Punjab.¹³ The Sikhs saw in this an attempt to annihilate their cultural identity.

For the Sikhs there is a close connection between their language and the Sikh religion because their scripture and other important religious texts are in the Gurmukhi script and they felt that unless they could have a state of their own where they could preserve their religion, culture, and language without any impediments, they would be re-absorbed into the Hindu fold because of their preponderance in numbers.¹⁴ Also, because in the absence of minority protection and rising incidence of apostasy, a fear engulfed them as to how could they retain their distinct identity in a state 'nominally pledged to secularism but in actual practice increasingly Hindu.'¹⁵

In this backdrop, two decisions by the government in 1948 nurtured the concept of a Sikh State. First, Patiala was merged with East Punjab States Union (comprising Nabha, Faridkot, Malerkotla, Jind, Kapurthala, Nalagarh and Kalsia states) creating a compact Sikh majority area in a large number of contiguous districts in the divisions of Jullunder and Patiala. If Punjabi speaking areas of East Punjab were merged with PEPSU it would have created a linguistic state the Akalis were hankering after. The second was that Punjab was declared a bilingual state with both Punjabi and Hindi as its languages. This provided the Akalis just the opportunity they were looking for. They contested that while the majority of the region was Punjabi-speaking and had its literature in Gurmukhi (barring those of the Sufis) it should be made into a Punjabi state¹⁶ with Gurmukhi as the language of the province. The Haryana portion which was Hindi speaking should be merged with other Hindi speaking regions as a separate province. These opposing views and an underlying suspicion that another minority demand could lead to 'consequences similar to another partition would follow.'¹⁷

In 1953 when the Boundary Commission foreclosed the possibility of a Punjabi state, the Akali leadership seized upon it and made an impassioned case for a Punjabi-speaking state. This was aggressively opposed by the Jan Sangh-Arya Samaj leadership which demanded a Maha Punjab by the merger of Himachal Pradesh into Punjab. Communal tension led to rioting in many towns and slogans raised by the two groups summed up the opposite points of view. The Hindus raised the slogan '*Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan*' (India is for Hindi and the Hindus) and the Sikhs '*Dhoti, topi, Yamuna Paar*' (Those donning dhotis and caps should shift across the Yamuna).¹⁸ Interestingly, similar slogans found the place again in the 1980s when militancy set its foot on the soil of Punjab and tensions rose between Sikhs and Hindus.

Language, which is otherwise a uniting factor, became a dividing factor in Punjab. The central issue was, which language should become the official language of the state. The Sikhs stood for the Punjabi language in the Gurmukhi script while the Hindus wanted it to be Hindi in the Devanagari script. The two communities had started using language as a vehicle for their economic and political aspirations. Spatial distribution of the Hindus and the Sikhs and their different economic interests led to contrary positions. The Hindus inhabited urban areas and the Sikhs rural; the former were traders, manufacturers and service class and the latter primarily agriculturists. When the demand for a Punjabi Suba was raised by the Akalis the Jan Sangh-Arya Samaj openly lobbied among the Hindus to disown their mother tongue and adopt Hindi as their language in the 1951 and 1961 censuses. As a result: '...the Hindi movement succeeded in reducing the declared number of Punjabi speakers to a minority in the state for the first time in the history of the census. The declared Hindi speakers grew from a small minority into a big majority in Punjab and Punjabi speakers, who never constituted less than 60 percent of the total population of the pre-Partition province, became 41 percent of the post-Partition Punjab state.'¹⁹ The consequence of the cleavage was that a Punjabi state was not conceded almost until a decade after the rest of the country was reorganized

along linguistic lines. The commission appointed to go into redrawing state boundaries after independence foreclosed the possibility of a linguistic Punjabi state on the ground that: 'A minimum measure of agreement for making a change' in the existing set-up did not exist.'²⁰ Finally, when the Punjab state was carved out on November 1, 1966, it was not on linguistic but communal lines. The government granted a Sikh-majority state and not a Punjabi-speaking state, excluding vast Punjabi speaking territories outside.²¹ This led to several agitations by the Akali Dal, demanding merger of Punjabi speaking areas into Punjab. The demand was vehemently opposed by the Jan Sangh and caused communal tension between them.

These cleavages continued to mar their relationship even when they came together to form governments at different points in time.

Re-organization of the State and birth of SAD-BJP Alliance

Re-organization of the state on November 1, 1966, once again changed the demographics of the state. According to the 1971 census, the Sikhs made up three-fifths of Punjab's population whereas the Hindu majority was reduced from 67 percent to 37.54 percent. Re-organization not only made it a Punjabi speaking state but also transformed it into a Sikh majority one. For the first time, the Akali Dal saw the hope of coming to power. In the first election held after the re-organization of Punjab in 1967, the Akali Dal won 36 seats while the Jan Sangh won nine in a house of 104 members. The Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh which had ideologically been on the opposite sides of the spectrum, now got together in an alliance to form the government in Punjab. Hereafter, three SAD-Jan Sangh coalition governments were formed in a post-election alliance. The first one was an alliance of five political parties that was forged under the banner of United Front led by the Akali Dal, with Sant Fateh Singh as its leader. Its alliance partners were Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Jan Sangh, Republican Party, SSP and some independents.

The primary purpose of the Jan Sangh coming together with the Akali Dal was two-fold - to keep the Congress Party out and to help contain disintegrating tendencies as they saw them. Since there was no ideological commonality, the allies came together on a common minimum program. A resolution adopted at Khanna read: 'Whereas we stand for amity and goodwill among all sections of Punjabis irrespective of caste or creed and promise to take steps to strengthen the new state of Punjab economically and politically, we resolve to oppose all separatist trends and moves aimed at weakening the unity and integrity of the country.'²²

A government was formed under the leadership of Sardar Gurnam Singh but soon fissures developed between them. The communalist Hindus strongly criticized the Jan Sangh leadership for betraying the cause of Hindi. This compelled the Jan Sangh leadership under Yagya Dutt Sharma to demand that Hindi be given a status similar to that before the re-organization of the state. However, no compromise could be reached and the government fell anyway due

to defection by Lachman Singh Gill. This government lasted a mere eight months.

When the mid-term poll was held in February 1969, the Akali Dal won 43 seats and Jan Sangh 8. Once again the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh came together. But again it proved to be an unstable government because a strong faction emerged both within the Akali Dal as well as the Jan Sangh which opposed the alliance. The issue of Chandigarh for Punjab and official State language aggravated the crisis. The allies eventually agreed to maintain a status quo on the medium of instruction in government-aided private schools. Punjabi was to be the first compulsory language upwards from 4th class and English the third compulsory language from the 6th class. The Jan Sangh finally withdrew from the coalition on this issue after 13 months.

The third coalition was then formed after Gurnam Singh was removed and Prakash Singh Badal became the Chief Minister. This government too only lasted all of 15 months. Jan Sangh withdrew support on the issue of jurisdiction of Guru Nanak Dev University this time.²³ The primary differences between them lay on the issue of State autonomy and the transfer of certain Punjabi speaking territories to Punjab.²⁴

Despite the serious problems between them in each past coalition government, they still came together for the fourth time in 1977, during a post-emergency period in which there was much common cause among all opposition parties which had suffered at the hands of the Congress. But this election was an exception as all alliance partners fought under the banner of Janata party. The Akali Dal won 58 seats, Janata Party 25, CPI 7 and CPI (M) 8. A government was formed under the Chief Ministership of Prakash Singh Badal but fissures developed soon after between the Jan Sangh and SAD over the issue of autonomy and Sikh-Nirankari clashes.²⁵

Alliance Splits in the 1980s

Political developments in Punjab, culminating in the Sikh-Nirankari clashes on April 13, 1978, had soured relations between the two allies once again. When Mrs. Gandhi returned to power in 1980, after a Congress rout in the post-emergency period, she dismissed the Badal government. When Assembly elections were held in Punjab in June 1980, the Jan Sangh, after being part of the Janata Party, organized itself under a new name, the Bharatiya Janata Party and decided to go it alone. It won only three seats whereas the Akali Dal who fought the election in alliance with the Democratic Left alliance won only 37 seats. The primary reason for the dismal performance of the Akali Dal was that the elections were impacted by the Sikh-Nirankari conflict and Sikh rebels contested against the official candidates. SAD lost 12 seats because of infighting between the Badal and Talwandi factions - the former represented the Ministerial wing of SAD and the latter the organizational wing. SAD got 26.69 percent of the valid votes, much lower than its poll percentage of 31.43 per cent in the 1977 elections.

From the 1980s, SAD and BJP were again pitted against each other as militancy began to get a foothold on the soil of Punjab. Each party again started raising community interests. When some Sikh communalists, goaded by SGPC President Gurcharan Singh Tohra, demanded a holy city status for Amritsar and a ban on cigarettes, the Jan Sangh reciprocated by demanding a ban on the sale of liquor and meat as well. Initially both sides agreed on an intervention by the District Commissioner, Amritsar, but suddenly on May 29, Hindus led by a BJP leader Harbans Lal Khanna took out a separate march raising slogans like '*Kachh, kadah, kirpan, bhejo ena naun Pakistan*' (Those donning the Sikh symbols- underwear, steel bangle and sword should be dispatch to Pakistan.) and '*cigarette bidi piyenge/ hum Shaan se jiyenge*' (we'll smoke cigarettes and *bidis* to live in pride). In reaction, the Sikh communalists took out another procession on April 2, 1984, raising earlier slogans like '*dhoti, topi, Jamuna Par*' (Those donning dhotis and caps should shift across the Yamuna).²⁶ Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, there was a confrontation between the BJP and the SAD leading to deep cleavages between the two parties and the communities they represented. The allies got together only in the mid-nineties after militancy came to an end and peace was restored in the state. There was a radical change in the attitude and political stances of the alliance partners as there was a realization between them - when they fight the Congress benefits.

Reconstructing the Alliance from 1997

The SAD took the lead and spelled out the change in its thinking after unity between Badal and Tohra on April 14, 1995. This policy program formed the basis of the political line adopted by the party on its 75th anniversary celebrated at Moga from February 24th-25th, 1996 at Moga with emphasis on 'Punjabiati'. Though there was no formal resolution but the slogan given in Prakash Singh Badal's Presidential address of 'Punjab, Punjabi, Punjabiati'²⁷ became the cornerstone of Akali Dal's new policy. This formalization of the shift in the thinking of the Akali Dal has come to be known as the 'Moga Declaration.' This thrust was emphasized in the 1996 Lok Sabha election when the SAD's selling card was: 'peace and progress.' The effort was to take remedial steps for society which had been fractured by violence from both sides.²⁸ The transformation of the Akali Dal was complete by 1997. In the Assembly election manifesto, the thrust was on identifying the party with the Indian state. 'The glorious saga of sacrifices made by the party for the Sikh Panth, Punjab and India cannot be matched by any other political party...' ²⁹ Though the manifesto talked about the Anandpur Sahib Resolution it was only in the context of identifying with the Indian state: 'The Shiromani Akali Dal promises that true federalism as contained in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution can alone broaden the unity and integrity of the great Indian nation.'³⁰ However, there was no reference to the federal structure or the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in the common minimum program. The slogan for it was: 'Peace with honor; prosperity for all; and welfare of the entire people.'³¹ This was a major change on the part of SAD whose political edifice until the change in the party's policy in 1995 had stood

on panthic politics revolving around Sikh identity. The change in SAD's thinking, post-militancy, was determined by its realization that there would be no lasting peace in the state without Punjabi unity and a recognition that what the party had projected as state's demands in the past - such as Punjabi Suba, greater autonomy for the state, greater share in river waters and Chandigarh as capital for Punjab - were actually a charter of Sikh demands and not those of the state. This had caused suspicion in the Hindu mind about their real intention. More significantly, in its political resolution the Shiromani Akali Dal: 'refrained from harping on the controversial Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Instead, while reiterating its demand for greater autonomy to all states, the party has now made the establishment of 'Halimi raj' (a dispensation based on compassion and equality) its new political goal.'³²

The BJP responded with: 'Punjabi being our mother tongue should be the language of Punjab.' This was a major shift by the BJP too since the census of 1951 and 1961 when its leadership along with those of the Arya Samaj, had disowned Punjabi as their mother-tongue. As a result of this posture, many Punjabi-speaking areas had become part of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh states during the re-organization in 1966. That stance by the Hindu leadership had sowed the seeds of communal conflicts in the state. But post-terrorism, the BJP also changed its position on Operation Blue Star and the November 1984 anti-Sikh violence. The rural Jat peasantry also shed its prejudice towards the party paving way for forging a new alliance. Both SAD and BJP as alliance partners also projected the disputes over the apportionment of river waters, allocation of Punjabi-speaking territories as discrimination against Punjab rather than the Sikhs. There was a recognition between the SAD and the BJP that if issues concerning Punjab were projected as common problems of the state the spirit of 'Punjabiati' would be strengthened.

The BJP further changed its stance from a strong center approach to more autonomy for states. The BJP manifesto stated, 'we will ensure the main recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission are implemented and the balance of resources is restored in favor of states'.

The alliance worked. In the 1997 election, the Akalis won 75 of the 92 seats they contested and BJP won 18 of the 22 seats it contested. The change in political thinking consolidated urban Sikh and urban Hindu votes in their favor. The change in SAD thinking was also observed by the media. The Times of India said: 'In 1997 Parkash Singh Badal became CM for the third term and Sikh issues and Panthic idiom were relegated to back burner as he started projecting himself a leader of all Punjabis. Anandpur Sahib Resolution, etc., would only find a customary mention in election manifestos in the preceding years. He would prefer never to discuss these issues and any queries about these would be ducked.'³³

The consolidation of SAD's new policy continued through the 1998 Lok Sabha election when the SAD asserted in its manifesto: 'To ensure welfare and prosperity for all and to pave the way for all round development in the country, the Shiromani Akali Dal re-dedicates itself to working with like-minded parties for the creation of a new social and economic order in the country'.³⁴ There was

also a shift from anti-centrism which was synonymous with anti-Congress-ism when the Akali Dal declaring 'The era of confrontation has been effectively ended and replaced with a forward-looking thrust on working together for the overall good of the state and the nation.'³⁵ SAD defined its goal in no uncertain terms: 'Our goal now, as always is: 'Peace, amity, and prosperity for all.'³⁶ The SAD adopted the people's agenda which was based on restoring peace, social harmony and initiating the process of social reconstruction in the state fractured through years of violence by both sides. Again in the 1999 Lok Sabha election, the party's thrust was 'political stability, economic prosperity, and social harmony.'³⁷

Unfortunately, despite the electoral success in 1997, SAD did not use it as a template for future Assembly elections. Within two years of its forward-looking agenda, intra-party problems arose within the SAD. To resolve these SAD decided to turn back to its Sikh identity agenda. Trouble started when the 27-times Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) President, Gurcharan Singh Tohra's casual remark made in November 1998, that Akali leaders must only hold one-man-one-post, virtually asking Badal to choose between being the Chief Minister or Party President became a panthic issue. Supported by anti-Tohra forces within the party, Badal took on Tohra and expelled him from the SGPC on March 16, 1999. Then, in a bid to consolidate his position within the Akal Takht, Badal removed the Akal Takht Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh and replaced him with his hand-picked man, Giani Puran Singh. Badal made Bibi Jagir Kaur as the first woman President of the SGPC. Badal then went further to build bridges with fringe radical groups to consolidate his own position both within the SGPC as well as the Akal Takht. This move sharpened factionalism within the Akali Dal. Tohra floated his own party the Sarv Hind Shiromani Akali Dal (SHSAD) with five members of Badal's cabinet.³⁸ It turned out to be a spoiler. Although Tohra did not win a single seat but the intra-party conflict cost the Badal-led Akali Dal dearly in the 2002 election. A large section of the urban Hindu voters stood alienated from SAD. The urban upper caste Hindu vote went back to the Congress helping it to come to power. However, on 13 June 2003, Tohra and Badal finally buried the hatchet when the latter appeared before the Akal Takht, received mild punishment and the former praised him. In July of that year, Tohra was again appointed the SGPC chief.

By 2007 politics once again tilted in favor of the SAD and the BJP. This time the fault line developed within the Congress as Chief Minister Amarinder Singh tried to consolidate his position among the Jat peasantry and the SGPC and resorted to a policy of pandering to religion. He spent a lot of his energy on religious processions and functions but it badly backfired for the Congress, even though similar policies by Giani Zail Singh in the 1970s had strengthened his position in the state. Another important factor that contributed to Congress defeat was the organizational indiscipline in the party that led to a large number of Congress dissidents contesting the election as independents. It divided the Congress vote and thus contributed to SAD's victory in many seats. Many of

these dissidents were discreetly and sometimes not so discreetly supported by SAD's Sukhbir Badal who is known for micro-managing elections.³⁹

The SAD re-articulated its resolve to nurture its ideological platform of Punjabi unity and also added the development plank to it for the 2007 Assembly election. The pre-election alliance won once again but SAD did not perform as well in the 2007 Assembly election as it did in the 1997 Assembly election. In the 1997 election, SAD had won 13 out of 16 seats it contested in Doaba, all the 18 seats it contested in Majha and 44 out of the 58 seats it contested in Malwa.⁴⁰ Its ally the BJP won 7 out of eight seats it contested in Doaba, also 7 out of 8 in Majha and 5 out of 7 in Malwa. In the 2007 elections, however, while SAD won 13 out of 17 seats it contested in Doaba, 17 out of 19 in Majha it performed dismally in Malwa winning a mere 19 out of 58 seats it contested. SAD tally thus came down by 25 seats in Malwa as compared to its tally in the 1997 elections. The primary reason for the poor performance of the SAD in the Malwa region was the swing of the Dalit vote in favor of the Congress. The Dalit vote in the Malwa region is largely controlled by Dera Sacha Sauda. It had openly supported the Congress in the 2007 elections helping it to win in 37 seats. This election also dispelled the myth that whoever wins in Malwa wins the Assembly election. Though the SAD lost out to Congress in Malwa it still won the election in 2007.

The SAD-BJP alliance bucked the trend in 2012 by winning an election for the second consecutive time. Normally election victories have alternated between the Congress and the SAD. The latter's decision to stay with Punjabiati and development planks helped it win the second time. In fact, SAD furthered its Punjabiati concept by broad-basing the party. In 2012 it gave 11 seats to Hindu candidates out of which ten won seats.⁴¹ The real contributor to this victory was SAD's populist agenda. People supported the policy of subsidies - massive direct transfer of public resources to the rural poor in the form of *Atta-Dal*, *Shagun* (monetary help for girls' marriage), and *Mai-Bhago Vidya* (bicycles for girl students) schemes, in fact, 40 schemes in total, alongside sops for rich farmers like free power to tube wells helped the SAD victory. The SAD, this time also held out some incredible promises like grant of free five-*marla* plots for all the landless poor in the state, free gas connections for all BPL families, generation of one million jobs in the next five years out of which 200,000 jobs were to be in the government sector and free laptops to all higher secondary government schools. Most of the 2012 poll promises, of course, were never fulfilled but they established one important fact - that people of the state can be easily swayed by sops.

The 2017 Election

As for the 2017 election, the SAD-BJP coalition was decimated. The Akali Dal won 15 seats of the 94 it contested and the BJP only 3 of the 23 it contested. Their alliance was relegated to a third position behind the new entrant AAP, which emerged as the principal opposition party securing 20 seats but belying all expectations of forming a government in Punjab. The vote share of both the

coalition partners dropped - the SAD polled 25.2% of the votes while the BJP polled 5.4% of the votes, bringing down the SAD share by 9.55% and that of the BJP by 1.75%, compared with the 2012 election. The SAD had polled 34.75% of the votes in 2012 and 37.09% in 2007 elections whereas the BJP had polled 7.13% of the votes in 2012 and 8.28% in 2007 elections.

There were many factors that led to the downfall of the alliance. Beginning with pardon to Gurmeet Ram Rahim, head of *Dera Sacha Sauda* on September 24, 2015, the Akali Dal stumbled from one blunder to another. The pardon was seen as a deal, *quid pro quo* i.e in return for the pardon the Dera commits votes to the SAD and benefit the latter it electorally.⁴² The Dera is believed to have an influence in several constituencies in the Malwa region. In the pardon, both the motive and the process were seen to be tainted. Then came confrontation with the *Panj Pyara* (Council of Five). Although eventually both the suspension of Panj Pyara as well as the pardon to the Dera Chief were revoked, it created a widespread perception that the Akal Takht was being dictated by the Akali Dal for vote bank politics. In some quarters it was even believed that the deal was done at the behest of the BJP.⁴³ This was followed by large-scale incidents of desecration of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The party dug its own grave when instead of identifying and speedily punishing the guilty, the police fired at those protesting against acts of desecration in Behbal Kalan in Kotkapura, taking two lives. Further, protestors were *lathi* charged at Buttar Kalan village in Moga. After these incidents, the police and the Akali leaders became visible targets for attack as it was widely believed that they were suppressing voices of dissent through force and interference in religious institutions. Soon after, unrest spread to other districts – Moga, Ferozepur, Faridkot, Muktsar, Bathinda, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Tarn Taran, Amritsar, and Gurdaspur. For the first time, *panthic* politics and over-centralised power in the hands of the Badals came into question

But such large-scale public outrage was not just due to the mere dominance of politics over religion that had been practiced by the Akali Dal over a long period. The outrage was also a manifestation of people's frustration with governance. The government was seen to have completely failed on many counts - despite being in coalition with the BJP in the state and as a partner of the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre. Firstly, the government failed to provide any relief to farmers who saw successive crop failures in 2014-15. Secondly, the youth were not provided any employment avenues and to make matters worse their education levels dropped due to the large-scale privatization of education without ensuring that quality standards would be maintained. Thirdly, the government failed to contain the drug menace that was consuming the alienated youth who saw no future for themselves. Far from containing drug addiction, members of SAD were charged with promoting the drug trade to line their coffers. But the political leadership remained in a state of denial of the drug problem, even though there was overwhelming evidence for its existence. For instance a retired IPS officer, Shashi Kant alleged in a petition before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, that major political parties were hand-in-glove with the drug smugglers and that Punjab is currently witnessing an era of 'narco-

politics'.⁴⁴ It was also well known that Punjab had topped the list of highest drug seizures by the Election Commission in 2014, accounting for almost 75 percent of the nation's total drug seizures during election time.⁴⁵ Finally, the first ever survey done by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC) at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (Delhi) had found that in a population of around 2.77 crore people, there were more than 1.23 lakh heroin-dependent people in Punjab.⁴⁶ It was also reported that many households in the rural areas have either one person addicted to drugs or was suffering from a terminal disease like cancer. These issues caused deep distress to the common person.

Indifferent to the growing problems in the state, the government continued to dole out other freebies like running free pilgrimage trains and in the run-up to the elections, took measures to offer crop insurance to the farmers and lower power tariff for industry - but this proved to be too late and nothing worked for the alliance in the end. The fact is that freebies have cost the state dearly. Manpreet Badal, the Finance Minister in Amarinder Singh's new government, put the loan burden of the state at first at Rs. 1.78 lakh crore and after further scrutiny revised it to Rs. 1.81 lakh crore.⁴⁷ Badal's government continued its borrowing spree to sustain its fiscal obligations such as payment of salaries and pensions. In its last two years alone, it raised a loan of Rs 2100 crore by mortgaging to banks various state-owned properties, such as a widow's home.⁴⁸ a mental hospital, several jails, and several government-owned residential buildings. In addition, it bore an unsustainable annual burden of Rs. 2000 crore on electricity subsidy for farmers, a free *atta-dal* scheme for Below Poverty Line families and spending around Rs 1000 crore on various memorials in the name of preserving the state's cultural heritage. So despite being neck deep in the financial crisis, it continued to dole out freebies.

There was also a widespread perception that the Badals had enriched themselves at the cost of the people of the state. This perception and other issues collectively made Badals and other SAD Ministers objects of hate in the state.⁴⁹ Never in the history of Punjab had the Badals been hated so intensely. The paradox, however, remains that despite the grouse held against the Badals, both the father and son duo - Prakash Singh Badal and Sukhbir Badal, polled a large number of votes and winning their seats.

This is not to absolve the failures by the BJP as well. The Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley refused to give any economic package to Punjab to bail the state out of its deep financial distress. When the senior Badal personally called upon Jaitley to seek a package, he was told to practice 'fiscal prudence'. The hint was to address the issue of free electricity being doled out to farmers. The state leaders also kept the party on tenterhooks by making misleading public statements. Many statements were issued by state leaders that implied the BJP was toying with the idea of going it alone in the 2017 elections⁵⁰ As the communalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activity increased in the state, fear began to grip the state that it is moving into a communal conflagration once again. There was a lot of bickering between the alliance partners. For instance, the BJP accused the SAD of back stabbing it when SAD supported the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) instead of the BJP in the Haryana Assembly

election of 2014.⁵¹ Similarly, when the BJP inducted SAD's former defeated MLA candidate, P S Gill, into its party, SAD accused it of poaching in its backyard.⁵²

Pre and Post-Election Alliances: Success or Failure?

As we can see each Akali Dal-BJP coalition from 1967-1977 was a failure because they could not provide stability to the state nor made any major difference to economic development. The primary reason was that they did not have any sound policy program. Their sole aim of coming together was capturing power and keeping the Congress Party out. The coalitions were made possible because of the complementary social constituencies of the two main constituents - Akali Dal and the BJP. The two constituents had separate goals and when these could not be realized, despite the coalition assuming power, it created disillusionment in the ranks and led to failure. Thus despite coming together to form governments, they continued to clash ideologically on issues like inclusion of Chandigarh and Punjabi speaking areas of Punjab, a larger share of river waters and more autonomy for the state. The Akalis too were at fault as they projected the state's demands as 'Sikh' demands which caused Hindu leaders to stay away from them. The alliance worked well between 2007 and 2017 as the alliance partners had started working towards the larger goal of *Punjabi*. However, this is not to take away from the continuing cleavages. Despite the recognition that the BJP has a very small vote share in Punjab, around 7 to 8 percent, it has a larger ambition of emerging as a national party and having the ability to stand alone in Punjab, just like the Congress. In view of this RSS started making forays in Punjab in 2009 and increased its activity tremendously over the last five years.⁵³ The RSS revived the *Rashtriya Sikh Sangat*, its unit for the Sikh community, to make forays into the rural areas, historically the Akali stronghold.⁵⁴ The RSS supremo, Mohan Bhagwat visited the state four times in 2015 alone⁵⁵ and by 2015 their branches in the state had increased from 200 to 795.⁵⁶

Future of the Alliance and Other Political Parties

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty whether the alliance will hold together in the future. But one can definitely look at possible scenarios. One scenario is that the BJP, with its narrow sectional representation and a very small vote share in the state, has no choice but to stay with its alliance partner. The other possibility is that, given its aggressive growth and its ambition to emerge as a national party on its own strength, it may experiment at some stage to go it alone in Punjab, like the Congress. It has gained confidence from the fact that until a few years ago the BJP did not have a strong base in either Haryana, Uttar Pradesh or in the east - in Assam where it has successfully won Assembly elections or even Manipur where, although, it did not get a majority, but still did well as a first timer. The BJP also feels, especially, in view of changing demographics where the majority population is under 30 years of age which may

be looking towards a party that gives them a better chance of employment and a brighter future. On the flip side, however, is the harsh reality that among the five states that held Assembly elections in 2017 - Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Goa, and Punjab - the last bucked the trend of a Modi Tsunami that led to a spectacular win for the party in the first two states. In fact in the 2014 general elections too, Prime Minister Modi's wave stopped at the borders of Punjab. Much will also depend on future stability within the Akali Dal. Badal senior is now 89 years of age and he may not be around or able bodied enough by the time the next election takes place. At a personal level senior Badal appears to be a very amiable person. He has the ability to carry everyone along with him, even the dissidents if he so wishes. Unfortunately, his son, Sukhbir Badal, is not known to have those qualities. Much would also depend on the ability of the younger Badal to hold the party together after his father bows out. The way things stand today, there is a question mark, not only on whether the party will be able to hold its sway over the SGPC and gurdwara politics, but more importantly, on whether it is able to maintain unity and stability within the Akali Dal itself. These are some of the imperatives that will determine the shape of things to come in future years. Should the ground situation remain similar to what shaped past SAD-BJP coalition arrangements, the SAD-BJP may have little choice but to stay together.

As for the Congress, if the party delivers it may be able consolidate its position in the state and get another term, although there cannot be any certainty. By all accounts, the 2017 Punjab Legislative Assembly election was the victory of Amarinder Singh and not of the Congress Party. Amarinder Singh has gone on record to say that 2017 is his last election. He will be 80 by the time the next Assembly election will be held in Punjab so if his statement is taken at face value the next Punjab election will have to be led by a new Congress leader. There is general prejudice against the Congress Party by the Sikhs ever since the army action on the Golden Temple and anti-Sikh violence of November 1984. These issues resurface at the time of every election. Amarinder Singh is the only Congress leader who is insulated from this prejudice since he resigned from the Congress Party over Operation Blue Star and later from the Barnala government on Operation Black Thunder. There is a big question mark on whether or not the new leader of the Congress Party in Punjab will be able to muster the kind of goodwill that the Patiala royal enjoys. Other factors that could determine the Congress fortunes in the state are how the party delivers on its key promises: to free the state and its youth from drugs, provide debt relief to farmers, generate employment for the youth and reinvigorate the industrial sector. There seems to be a strong will to deal with the drugs issue and the Amarinder Singh government seems to have started off well by busting some drug gangs. But lot more needs to be done in de-intoxicating the state to its roots. Regarding the debt relief to farmers, the government is banking on the center to bail it out. The center is not likely to oblige its opponent.⁵⁷ The state's fiscal health will not allow it to fulfill its poll promise. At best some small and marginal farmers may benefit. Punjab also faces the most serious problem of deceleration in growth. Elections raise expectations. Much will also depend on to what extent

Amarinder Singh's government can fulfill people's expectations and bring a turnaround in the state's fiscal health - a major challenge for the Congress government. Without a turnaround in the state's fiscal health, it will be difficult for the government to deliver on its electoral promises. Finance Minister Manpreet Badal has given enough indications of the gravity of State's finances, especially as the actual debt has turned out to be higher at Rs. 1.81 Lakh crore. It is hard to imagine how a cash-strapped state will deliver on its development promises.⁵⁸

Finally, regarding the third entrant in Punjab's electoral politics - AAP - there were many factors that led to the poor performance of AAP but its linkages with radical elements leading to a blast in the Maur area of Bathinda district just four days before the Assembly elections proved to be the last straw in the game of perception. The blast was indirectly attributed to the party's close ties with Gurinder Singh, a former Khalistani militant. It instilled the fear of the unknown in Punjab's electoral landscape. Is there a possibility that AAP can reinvigorate itself? It is said politics is the art of the impossible. So going by that, we need to examine the strength and weaknesses of AAP to understand whether the postulation will hold good for AAP or not. As things stand today AAP is in a state of total disarray. The anti-corruption image of the party has taken quite a battering in recent months. It will need to totally deconstruct the present image and reconstruct its old image of providing a clean government of the people by the people - the ideal *Swaraj*. But that will be a huge challenge for the party. In today's media-driven world, perception matters the most. In public perception, despite starting on the agenda of an idealist party, AAP has been found to be no different from other political parties. It has been found to practice nepotism, crony capitalism and has made many compromises from its idealistic position in its brief political journey during which it has seen a meteoric rise and a steady fall of the party. Yet, despite, these shortcomings the party should not be written off. It has built a solid base in the state. All it may need to do is that apart from reconstructing its image along the lines of idealism on which it came to power in Delhi, it may also need to search for a local face who has the ability to steer the party forward as a team leader.

In the volatile politics of the state, the people of Punjab are known to respond to developing situations. Given that, it is hard to predict what will happen in the future. Especially, when the present is punctuated with too many ifs and buts for all the three main players in Punjab. In the given situation, one can only consider the possible hypothetical scenarios, as explained above. The people's response will be determined by delivery of promises by the present government and political correctives taken by the lead opposition party, the AAP or the traditionally dominant party, Akali Dal, by the time the next Parliamentary or Assembly elections are held.

Notes

1. Jan Sangh came into being in 1951 as the political wing of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, popularly labelled as the RSS (National Volunteers Corps) by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. It called for rebuilding India in accordance with Hindu culture. In 1977, an amalgam of political parties opposed to the State of Emergency imposed between 1975 and 1977 by the Government of India under the Prime Ministership of Indira Gandhi, merged to form the Janata Party. The political parties which merged together were: Congress (O), Jan Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal and Congress (R). The Janata Party came to power in 1977 after the internal Emergency was lifted by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was, however, plagued by factionalism and internal disputes. Following a split within dissidents who wanted to prohibit elected Jan Sangh leaders to have any truck with the RSS or participate in its activities, the Jan Sangh was reorganized in 1980 to form the Bharatiya Janata Party under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi.
2. In 1857, the army in the garrison town of Meerut mutinied against the rule of the British East India Company after it introduced the Enfield rifle. The widespread perception was that the British were using cartridges lubricated with a mixture of pigs' and cows' lard. To use them, the sepoy had to bite off the ends of the lubricated cartridges and thus have oral contact, which, the Muslim and Hindu sepoy considered was an insult to them. It undermined their traditional beliefs and hurt their religious sentiments. The Mutiny spread to Delhi, Agra, Kanpur and Lucknow. The sepoy who mutinied were largely Muslims and Hindus.
3. A.S. Narang, *Storm Over the Sutlej* (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1983) p. 38.
4. While developing agriculture the British did not pay much attention to increasing productivity per acre of land. This impacted the farmer when the Administration demanded that revenue is paid to the government on a year to year basis. As man-land ratio began to shrink with growth in population in the first quarter of the 20th century the farmer came under pressure. To cope with the burden caused by cash revenues the farmer was forced to grow cash crops in addition to subsistence crops like wheat or paddy for his own consumption. Money flow for a farmer depended on the sale of his cash crop. If the farmer had a bad crop he was unable to pay taxes and was now forced to depend on the availability of easy credit. This need was fulfilled by private money lenders. When the farmers were not able to repay the credit, their land was taken over by the money lenders who always held it as collateral to safeguard their own interests. Many lands passed into the hands of the money lenders. This drove the peasant masses to rebellion. To prevent the money lender from exploiting the situation the British took some remedial measures and introduced the Land Alienation Act of 1900 and Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904. The former prevented land from passing into the hands of non-agriculturist class. These legislations,

though thought to be progressive, contributed to class tensions. The peasantry in Punjab comprised largely of Sikhs and Muslims while the money lenders were urban Hindus. The urban Hindus felt that the legislations had been enacted against them. See Harminder Kaur, *1984 Lessons From History, Intrigue and Conflict in Centre-Sikh Relations*, (Delhi, Corporate Vision, 2010) p. xxv.

5. According to noted Sikh historian Dr. Ganda Singh, it is a misnomer to say there is Hindu-Sikh tension in Punjab as we commonly understand it. It is, in fact, an Arya Samaj-Sikh tension. He traces the origin of tension to the derogatory language used against Guru Nanak and his followers by Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj, in his book the *Satyarth Prakash* published in 1875. The word used for the Sikh Guru therein is *dhurta*, which, according to Bate's Dictionary of Hindi language, he argues means 'rogue, cheat, fraudulent, crafty, cunning, knavish, sly, dishonest and mischievous.' The hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib have been described as *mithya* (falsehood) and Sikhism a *jal* (a snare) to rob and cheat simple folk of their wealth and property. See Dr. Ganda Singh, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies, Vol IX, Issue I*, Jan-March 2007, Institute of Sikh Studies).
6. A.S. Narang, *Storm Over the Sutlej* (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1983) p. 41.
7. Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975) p. 328.
8. The Singh Sabha movement helped the Sikhs to wrest control of their gurdwaras from *mahants* and priests into whose hands they had passed in the eighteenth century after the Sikhs were driven from the safety of their homes to remote hills and deserts.
9. Dietrich Reetz, *Religion and Group identity: Comparing Three Regional Movements in Colonial India*, in Annemarie Hafner (Hg.), *Essays on South Asian Society, Culture and Politics, Forderungsgesellschaft Wiss, Neu. mbH, FSP Moderner Orient, Arbeitshefte, 1995*, p.79. Also posted by author on academia.edu: link: https://www.academia.edu/2401345/Religion_and_Group_Identity_Comparing_Three_Regional_Movements_in_Colonial_India
10. A.S. Narang, *Storm Over the Sutlej* (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1983) p. 57.
11. K.L. Tuteja, *Sikh Politics* (Vishal Publications, Kurukshetra, 1984) p.137 quoting census 1921.
12. Ibid p. 136 quoting *Young India*, March 18, 1926, cited in S. Gopal, *Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin*, p. 8. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).
13. Atamjit Singh, *The Language Divide in Punjab*, South Asian Graduate Research Journal, Volume 4, No. 1, 1997, p.1..
14. Harminder Kaur, *1984 Lessons From History: Intrigue and Conflict in Centre Sikh Relations* (Delhi, Corporate Vision, 2010) p.2.
15. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs Vol. II* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras) p. 294.
16. Ibid p. 295.

17. *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. LVII, No. 17, p. 5651-82.
18. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs Vol. II* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras) p. 294.
19. Atamjit Singh, *The Language Divide in Punjab*, South Asian Graduate Research Journal, Volume 4, No. 1, 1997, p.1.
20. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs Vol. II* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras) p. 297.
21. Atamjit Singh, *The Language Divide in Punjab*, South Asian Graduate Research Journal, Volume 4, No. 1, 1997, p. 2
22. *The Tribune*, March 2, 1967.
23. Pramod Kumar & others, *Punjab Crisis: Context and Trends*. Chandigarh: Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, 1984, p. 68.
24. Ibid. During this phase of the post of re-organization period the Akali leadership kept on fighting for the following three demands:
 - i. Abolishing of common links. The Re-organization Act had provided 42 common links between Punjab and Haryana. Some of the common links were, for example, the Control Board, pending division of assets, PEPSU road transport, etc.;
 - ii. Return of Chandigarh and the Dam project control by the Central Government;
 - iii. The inclusion of certain Punjabi speaking areas (allegedly excluded from Punjab).

The Prime Minister awarded Chandigarh to Punjab and Fazilka and Abohar and 114 other villages to Haryana, the decision still remains unimplemented.

25. The ideological gulf between the Sikhs and the Nirankari's widened during the time of Nirankari sect head, Baba Avtar Singh. This sect first ran into opposition with the Sikhs for giving a second position to the Guru Granth in Nirankari congregations. Baba Avtar Singh wrote his own scriptures called *Avtar Bani* and *Yug Purush*. The former was largely an attack on the Sikh scriptures, rituals, and gurus. This further hurt the religious sensibilities of the Sikhs. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee brought out these differences in a pamphlet called, the *Nirankari Mandal's Challenge to Sikhism*. These were: one, elevation of the Nirankari head to guruship; two, changing the concept of *Khande-da-Amrit* (amrit prepared by the double-edged sword) to *charnamrit* (amrit prepared by dipping the feet); the concept of *Panj Piaras* to the seven chosen ones; four, derogatory references to the Sikh gurus in Avtar Bani and Yug Purush (incidentally, the latter has since been withdrawn by the Nirankari sect). The conflict acquired a fresh dimension in 1978 when the Nirankari mission decided to hold its annual Baisakhi congregation on the grounds of Railway Stadium at Amritsar. The Stadium is about 4 km away from the Golden Temple. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a fundamentalist Sikh leader, considered this an open challenge to Sikhism. Sant Bhindranwale and several members of the *Akand Kirtani Jatha*, a purist sect, wanted to stop this at any cost. A

group of people led by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha went to the Nirankari congregation, avowedly to plead with them to wind it up. As they approached the Nirankari congregation, clashes occurred in which 13 Sikhs were killed.

The next day the *Kirtanis* formed a hit squad called the *Babbar Khalsa* to settle scores with the Nirankaris, who became targets of their vengeance. Sant Bhindranwale also swore revenge. Many Nirankaris including the former head, Baba Gurbachan Singh, were killed. This conflict raged through the 1980s in Punjab and was the beginning of militancy. See Harminder Kaur, *Blue Star Over Amritsar: The Real Story of June 1984* (Delhi, Corporate Vision, 2nd ed., 2006) p. 249-251.

26. Ibid, p. 63
27. 75th-anniversary celebration of the Shiromani Akali Dal, February 24-25, 1996. Keynote address by Badal on February 25, p.17.
28. Jagtar Singh, *Khalistan Struggle, A Non-Movement*, (Delhi, Aakar Books, 2010) p. 512
29. Ibid, p. 512-513.
30. Ibid
31. Ibid
32. Ramesh Vinayak, *Special Report, Middle-of-the -roaders, Akali Leaders forge a moderate agenda*, India Today, March 31, 1996.
33. I.P. Singh, *The Times Of India Blogs*, July 28, 2014.
34. Akali Dal manifesto quoted in Jagtar Singh, *Khalistan Struggle, A Non-Movement*, (Delhi, Aakar Books, 2010) p. 513
35. Ibid
36. Ibid
37. Ibid
38. The five Ministers from Badal’s cabinet who joined Tohra’s SHSAD were: Higher Education Minister, Manjit Singh Calcutta, Science and Technology Minister, Mahesh Inder Singh Grewal, Public Works Minister, Harmail Singh Tohra, and Ministers of State, Inderjit Singh Zira and Surjit Singh Koli. Veteran Akali leader Surjan Singh Thekedar also joined Tohra.
39. Harminder Kaur, ‘Milking 1984 as an Election Issue’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 5, 2017.
40. Region wise votes polled by the three main political parties, seats won and constituencies contested in 1997 and 2007 Punjab Assembly elections

			INC	SAD	BJP
1997	Doaba	Won/contested	5/25	13/16	5/8
		Votes polled (%)	26.67	28.60	14.77
	Majha	Won/contested	0/24	18/18	7/8
		Votes polled (%)	28.03	37.32	14.10
		Won/contested	9/56	44/58	6/6

	Malwa	Votes polled (%)	26.05	40.81	4.07
2007	Doaba	Won/contested	4/25	13/17	7/8
		Votes polled (%)	38.30	30.71	15.96
	Majha	Won/contested	3/27	17/19	7/8
		Votes polled (%)	40.12	36.70	12.75
	Malwa	Won/contested	37/65	19/58	5/7
		Votes polled (%)	42.02	39.36	4.27

Source: Election Commission Report, Punjab 1997 and 2007.

41. The Hindu candidates who won under SAD ticket were: Desh Raj Dhugga (Sri Hargobindpur), Avinash Chander (Phillaur), Pawan Kumar Tinu (Adampur), Nand Lal (Balachaur), Deep Malhotra (Faridkot), Sarup Chand Singla (Bathinda Urban), Prem Mittal (Mansa), Prakash Chand Garg (Sangrur), N K Sharma (Dera Bassi) and Joginder Pal Jain (Moga).

42. In 2007 it was alleged that Dera Sacha Sauda Chief, Gurmeet Ram Rahim had committed an act of blasphemy by impersonating the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The mainstream Sikh community reacted with outrage and there were violent clashes between the Sikhs and the Dera followers leading to loss of life on either side. The Akal Takht intervened and issued an edict for the social boycott of the Dera and its followers.

In a sudden turnaround on September 24, 2015, the Sikh clergy pardoned the Dera Chief. People saw the pardon as a deal, a *quid pro quo* given that the Dera is said to influence many Assembly constituencies in the Malwa region.

Sensing widespread resentment among the people and following a spate of resignations from the SGPC, the *Panj Pyara* (council of five) rose against the Sikh clergy. However, they were quickly summoned to the Akal Takht and asked for their stance on the pardon controversy. When they did not show up, they passed a resolution directing the SGPC to withdraw the duties assigned to them. The SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar responded by suspending the *Panj Piaras*, fueling further controversy.

Forgiveness is central to Sikh religious ethos for the one who seeks it. In the Dera case, both the motive and the process adopted in granting pardon had cast a doubt. The Sikh clergy is expected to be neutral arbiters in contentious issues that confront the Sikh community and are supposed to act in a democratic fashion through consensus. In the Dera case, the motive and the process were seen to be tainted and influenced by Akali Dal's political considerations. See Harminder Kaur, *Akali Dal boxed in by disorder of its own making*, (*ABP Blogs*) November 4, 2015.

43. A senior Akali leader told the author that the BJP pushed the Akali Dal to patch-up with the Dera Sacha Sauda head, Gurmeet Ram Rahim. He said

the Dera had helped the BJP in the Haryana Assembly elections in 2014. The Dera is headquartered in Sirsa. The Dera head has a number of cases of rape and murder registered against him and needs the help of the BJP. According to this leader, because these matters are being probed by the CBI, the Dera Chief will feel obliged to help the party. He further argued the BJP was of the view that if the Dera head directs his followers, which are spread throughout the Doaba and Malwa regions, the BJP will benefit in Doaba and the SAD in Malwa. This suited the SAD and SAD found it expedient to patch up with the Dera in 2015 because in its calculation, if religion and the Sikh-card no longer play an absolute role in its electoral performance and communal amity does, then it was logical for it to settle with the Dera. Confrontation with the Dera had been a cause of much communal tension in the past with loss of life among the Dera followers as well as the Sikhs. Besides, SAD's political calculation was that if the Dera supports the alliance in the 2017 election it will help restore Akali Dal's hegemony in Malwa.

44. Shashi Kant petition in the matter of Court on its *Own Motion vs State of Punjab*, Punjab and Haryana High Court, C.W.P. 20359 of 2013, para 9.
45. *The Tribune*, May 12, 2014.
46. Drug Opioid Dependence Survey was conducted between February and April 2015 by the Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses in collaboration with National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), New Delhi. It was conducted for the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India and supported by Department of Health, Government of Punjab.

The study has found that 0.84% (around 2.3 lakh) of the entire state's population is opioid dependent. It took account of both opium derivatives as well as artificial substances that have the same effect as opiates on the nervous system. Previous studies conducted in select districts of Punjab had shown widespread use of synthetic or pharmaceutical opioid drugs. While around 2.3 lakh people are opioid-dependent in Punjab, around 8.6 lakhs are estimated to be opioid users. Heroin-dependents are the highest at 123,414. For the survey, NDDTC collaborated with Delhi based non-profit organization Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses. The study further revealed that 76 percent of the addicts are in the age-group of 18-35 years, 56 per cent of them are in rural areas, out of which 21 percent are farmers, 27 percent unskilled workers, and 14 percent transport workers. Most common opioid in use is heroin and 53 per cent population is dependent on it whereas raw opium and variants are used by 33 percent of the drug addicts.

The study was conducted between February and April 2015. Data was collected from 3,620 opioid dependents from 10 districts. Among the men aged between 18 and 35 years, four in 100 are opioid dependent, while 15 in 100 could be opioid users. 'We must also note that this survey estimates a much higher number of injecting drug users in Punjab (around 75,000) as compared to the existing estimate (under 20,000). Thus there is a clear

- threat of an explosive epidemic of HIV among injecting drug users in Punjab,' said the lead investigator and the principal author of the survey, Dr. Atul Ambekar. See *Times of India*, January 15, 2016.
47. According to a briefing given to Manpreet Badal by the officials of the Finance Ministry, the state's total debt burden now stands at 1.78 lakh crore, unpaid bills to the tune of Rs. 3000 crore and revenue deficit of Rs 8000 crore. See Sarbjit Dhaliwal and Ruchika M. Khanna, *The Tribune*, March 18, 2017.
 48. *Times of India*, December 9, 2015, and *India Today*, December 9, 2015.
 49. *The Tribune*, November 20, 2015, *The Hindustan Times*, November 26, 2015, *The Tribune*, November 16, 2016, and *The Tribune*, January 12, 2017.
 50. Manjeet Sehgal, *Mail Today Online*, November 7, 2014.
 51. *Times of India*, October 11, 2014.
 52. *The Tribune*, August 26, 2014, and *PunjabKhabar.com*, August 28, 2014.
 53. Praveen Swami, some years ago, argued that few people paid much attention to these early signs that the RSS had resumed its historic campaign to reinvent Sikh identity within a larger Hindu-nationalist paradigm. That had to wait until April 29, when the RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan arrived in Chandigarh for the first National Executive committee meeting of his organization's newly-formed front body, the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat. Sikhs, Sudarshan proclaimed, were part of the 'Hindu mainstream', and further argued that Sikh organizations which claimed that the community had an 'exclusive identity' were secessionist. Describing the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, as a 'national hero', Sudarshan said the RSS was 'working hard to revive the custom of the eldest son in every Hindu family being raised as a Sikh'. See *RSS Forays Into Punjab*, *The Frontline*, June 9, 2009.
 54. Khushboo Sandhu, *The Indian Express*, Chandigarh Edition, November 14, 2014.
 55. Sukhbir Siwachi, *The Times of India*, Chandigarh Edition, September 30, 2015, & Manjeet Sehgal, *Mail Today Online* Oct 14, 2015.
 56. Chander Suta Dogra, *The Indian Express*, Chandigarh Edition, December 15, 2015. The RSS Punjab unit Vice President, Brig Jagdish Gagneja, was shot at on August 7, 2016, by unidentified motor cycle-borne men. News reports stated that the reason may have been the growing RSS activity in Punjab. See also Harpreet Bajwa, *The Indian Express*, Chandigarh Edition, September 25, 2016
 57. Ruchika M. Khanna, *The Tribune*, May 23, 2017. The latest data compiled by the state-level Bankers Committee reveals there are 17, 19,038 small and marginal farmers who have availed a loan of Rs. 36,000.37 crore. The total agriculture advances in Punjab stand at Rs. 85,360.86 crores with 31.29 lakh farmers having taken these loans from banks. Crop loan has been taken by 21.51 lakh farmers. It stands at Rs. 63,180.13 crores. The government is now compiling data category wise: less than Rs.50000 and 1 lakh, Rs. 1-2 lakhs, Rs. 2-5 lakhs.
 58. According to Punjab's Finance Minister, Manpreet Badal, Punjab's total revenue in 2016-17 fell short by over Rs 4770 crore while the debt mounted

to Rs. 1.81 crore. Even though Punjab's total revenue in 2016-17 fell short by over Rs. 4,770 crore, the recovery of loans and advances remained the lowest and disbursement of loans remained the highest in the past several years. The state recovered just Rs99.57 crore as loans and advances as against Rs. 5,728.06 crore recovered in the previous fiscal (2015-16). Against this, the state disbursed Rs. 7,181.49 crore as loans and advances even as the budget proposals had laid a provision to disburse only Rs. 399.70 crore. Badal, said the fiscal indicators for 2016-17, released now, have confirmed his worst fears. 'The revenue deficit is nearly one billion dollars. The debt, which is over Rs1.81 lakh crore against a projected debt of Rs1.30 lakh crore, is high and unsustainable. (Ruchika M. Khanna, *The Tribune*, May 16, 2017).