

Creation of Punjabi Suba: An Analysis

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Abstract

The genesis of the demand for Punjabi Suba can be traced back to the 1909 Minto-Morley Reforms, which first introduced the principle of separate Muslim electorates. Since then the Sikhs had been trying to protect their political interests in Punjab. Further the concept of the Sikh state gathered strength with the Muslim demand for Pakistan in 1940. Before the transfer of power, the Sikhs were guided by the Indian National Congress leaders. At the time of partition the Sikh leaders were confused whether to go with India or Pakistan. Congress leadership promised them to give an area in the North where they could experience the glow of freedom without any fear and the Congress party never betrayed them. Therefore Sikhs pledged their support with the Hindus and went with India. But after independence the attitude of Congress party underwent change especially with regard to Punjab and the Sikhs. Justice Dar Commission and J.V.P. Committee rejected the formation of Northern states on linguistic bases. This recommendation became the main cause of the demand of Punjabi speaking state. Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh played a very vital role to get the Punjabi Suba although Arya Samajis, Jansanghis and Hindu Mahasabha tried their best to dilute the demand of Punjabi Suba. Ultimately after long agitation the second partition of Punjab become effective on November 1, 1966 with the further considerable loss of area and population the incomplete Punjabi Suba came into existence.

Key words: Punjabi Suba, PEPSU, Sikh Homeland, Gurumukhi, Jan Sangh, Arya Samaj, Panthic, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Akal Takht, SGPC, Akali Dal.

The genesis of the demand for Punjabi Suba can be traced back to the 1909 Minto-Morley Reforms, which first introduced the principle of separate Muslim electorates. Since then the Sikhs had been trying to protect their political interests in Punjab. When in 1940, Mohamad Ali Jinnah proposed the Two-Nation Theory in Lahore Resolution. As the Muslim demand for Pakistan grew; the idea of the Sikh state gathered strength on similar grounds. Before the transfer of power by the British, the Sikh leaders allowed themselves to be guided by the leaders of the Indian National Congress instead of boldly demanding a Sovereign Sikh State.

As the Partition of India came nearer, the Sikh leaders found themselves in dilemma, whether to go with India or with Pakistan. Mohamad Ali. Jinnah approached the Sikhs with promise that if they supported

for Pakistan, then he would guarantee the protection of life, property, freedom to practice their religion and the privileges they had enjoyed under British Rule.¹

On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru², the leaders of the Indian National Congress also assured the Sikhs that they should look upon India as their home because the brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration, where they can experience the glow of freedom.³ Therefore, Sikh leaders decided to pledge their support with the Hindus and went with India. The Partition of India created a new situation. The scramble for land and urban property left by Muslim evacuees created ill-will between the Sikh agricultural population from West Punjab and Hindu refugees as well as the Hindus of Eastern and Southern Punjab districts who had taken possession of the lands left by Muslims. Sikh agriculturist class, Sikh trading classes of the west Punjab were severely hit by the administrative delays in granting loans and of the prevalent hatred among their own brethren.⁴ They began asking, “The Muslims got Pakistan, the Hindus got Hindustan; but what did we Sikhs get out of it?” They began to doubt their decision of having thrown in their support with India.

On 15 July 1948, Sardar Patel referred to the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) as ‘a Sikh Homeland’. A government was installed in August 1948, with a Sikh aristocrat, Gian Singh Rarewala as the Chief Minister. All that was required was to attach the Sikh majority districts of East Punjab to PEPSU and declare it as the Sikh State.

The process of the linguistic reorganization of States in India was far more prolonged and divisiveand raised more fundamental questions of Centre-State relations.⁵ The Indian National Congress had committed itself to the principle of linguistic reorganization of the provinces before Independence. But after Independence, its attitude to the subject underwent a change, especially with regard to Punjab and the Sikhs. The Constituent Assembly appointed a commission under Justice Dar to report on the feasibility of redrawing the State boundaries but excluded Punjab from its terms of reference. The Commission pronounced against any change.⁶ However this commission did not favour the demand of the Sikhs.

Another Committee called the J.V.P. Committee was set up by the Constituent Assembly to review the Dar Commission’s findings. The Committee endorsed the Dar Commission’s recommendations.⁷ This report was adopted by the Congress Working Committee in April 1949. This decision of the Congress Working Committee was considered to be clear discrimination against the Punjabi speaking population, particularly the Sikhs.

In March 1953, the democratically elected United Front Ministry under Gian Singh Rarewala in PEPSU was removed to make way for the Congress ministry led by Raghubir Singh and then Birj Bhan. The Akalis felt disillusioned and in the late 1950’s began asking for the merger of PEPSU with Punjabi speaking areas of Punjab to form a consolidated state based upon language.

Although, the issue of language was communalized in the 19th century, it became acute in the 20th century. In October 1949, to solve the language tangle, ‘Sachar Formula’ was proposed by Chief Minister Bhim Sen Sachar with the help of Giani Kartar Singh. The ‘Sachar Formula’ proposed the creation of two zones in Punjab i.e. Punjabi zone and Hindi zone. In Punjabi zone Gurmukhi script was to be the medium of instruction up to the matriculation and in that zone Hindi in Devnagri script was to be taught in the last year of primary school. In Hindi zone where the position of Punjabi and Hindi were reversed.⁸ This was not acceptable to Arya Samajists supported by Jan Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha. Some leaders of the Arya Samaj waited upon the Chief Minister before the Formula was adopted and under their pressure, a change was made, giving option to every parent to choose the mother tongue for their ward. The mother tongue is the language of the territory in which the child is born and not a matter of choice for anyone. This irrational concession to communalism resulted in an unfortunate communal division.

In May 1950, the Akali Dal working committee passed a resolution in favour of a State on the basis of Punjabi language, which was endorsed by the Panthic convention. In response to this, the Arya Samajists and their sympathizers, under communal influence, filled Hindi as their mother tongue in the language column of the Census of 1951, to weaken the claim of Akali Dal. Riots broke out on this question and the Union Government decided that the language column in the census form be left blank. Tension continued until representatives of the Akalis and the Chief Khalsa Diwan were called to Delhi by Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru for discussions.

The first step in the direction of the linguistic reorganization of provinces occurred in the aftermath of a major movement in the Andhra region of the old Madras Province. Towards the end of 1952, Potti Sriramulu died on fast for the creation of Andhra Pradesh; four days later the Prime Minister announced the separation of Andhra from Madras as a Telegu-speaking State.

In December 1953, the Government of India announced the formation of States Reorganization Commission, which kindled hopes in Punjab. The Akalis presented their case, strictly on the basis of language using the Census figures of pre-1947 period. The Jan Sanghis and Arya Samajis presented their case for ‘Maha-Punjab’. In the report submitted by the States Reorganization Commission on 30 September 1955, the criterion of a state based upon a language was set aside and recommended the merger of Himachal Pradesh, PEPSU and Punjab to form a new state on other grounds.⁹ The Commission rejected the case for a Punjabi speaking State on the ground that a “minimum measure of agreement for making a change” in the existing set-up did not exist.¹⁰ Thus, it played in the hands of Hindus of the Punjabi speaking zone.

The States Reorganization Commission’s Report was published in October 1955 and was rejected by the Akalis because the government not only refused to setup a linguistic state for Sikhs but also declared it unlawful to raise any slogan in the name of Punjabi State. This was not only unconstitutional move but the direct violation of freedom of speech act. Master Tara Singh denounced the report as a ‘decree of Sikh

annihilation'.¹¹ He called a convention of all parties and organizations of the Sikhs for the 16 October 1955 at Amritsar. It was underlined at the convention that the most democratic demand of the Sikhs has not been met and the Commission instead of giving Sikhs relief has obliterated PEPSU, which according to Patel was the 'Homeland' of the Sikhs.

As resolved at the convention, Master Tara Singh led a deputation comprising himself as President of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Bhai Jodh Singh as representative of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Gian Singh Rarewala, Giani Kartar Singh and Hukam Singh to meet Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru on 24 October 1955. The meeting did not achieve desired results.

After much protests and deliberations 'Regional Formula' was evolved by the efforts of Hukam Singh, Akalis and Congressmen. According to the 'Regional Formula', only PEPSU was to be merged with the Punjab and no other areas of Himachal Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh were to be included. As a result, the State was demarcated into two parts, Punjabi region and Hindi region. "The new State will be bi-lingual, recognizing both Punjabi (in Gurmukhi script) and Hindi (in Devanagri script) as the official languages of the State." Thus, Punjabi in Gurmukhi script was to be the official language of the Punjabi zone and vice versa.

Thus, the Government at Centre had moved in a deceptive manner and Akali leaders were made to believe that the merger of PEPSU into the Punjab was a step towards the establishment of the Punjabi Suba. The Akalis joined the Congress Party in big number. It dawned upon them later on that under the 'Regional Formula', the merger of PEPSU into the Punjab has created a situation where the Hindus would form a permanent majority of 65 percent against the Sikhs 35 percent, thus diluting the Sikh majority in the PEPSU, which had become the nucleus of Sikh homeland.

Apart from this, the chief supporters of Master Tara Singh in his demand for Punjabi Suba, namely Giani Kartar Singh, Gian Singh Rarewala, had passed on to the Congress. The suspicion about the nature of the deal with the Centre was confirmed over 'Regional Formula's acceptance, when 9 days after the acceptance of the Regional Formula by the General Body of the Akali Dal, the Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru proposed the name of Hukam Singh as Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, which proposal was seconded by the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. There was a general impression that he had been rewarded for cooling down the demand for Punjabi Suba.¹² Moreover the application of the Regional Formula depended upon the Chief Minister, Partap Singh Kairon. The Congress was fortunate in finding in Partap Singh Kairon a Chief Minister of the Punjab, who was at that time passionately opposed to the Akalis and the Punjabi Suba demand.

In 1956 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections, held the Congress won 120 seats in a House of 164.¹³ Partap Singh Kairon was elected as a leader of the Congress Assembly Party on 3 April 1957 and formed the Congress ministry, taking two erstwhile Akalis, Gian Singh Rarewala and Giani Kartar Singh in his

Cabinet.¹⁴ During the tenure of Partap Singh Kairon as Chief Minister, the Arya Samajists, who had earlier refused to implement the 'Sachar Formula' in their schools, opposed the Regional Formula. They started a 'Save Hindi' movement, under the Hindi Raksha Samiti, in opposition to Punjabi. Under pressure, Chief Minister Partap Singh Kairon conceded some concessions to Hindi, thus the Regional Formula was not implemented in letter and spirit as conceived by Jawahar Lal Nehru and as agreed by Akalis.

Partap Singh Kairon made a successful move to dislodge Master Tara Singh from the Presidentship of the S.G.P.C. with the help of Giani Kartar Singh on 16 November 1958. But on 19 January 1960, Master Tara Singh overcame the combined strength of the Congress, Communists and other anti-Suba elements in the S.G.P.C. elections by capturing 132 out of 139 seats, thus proving that the majority of Sikhs supported the Punjabi Suba. On 24 January 1960, 132 members of the S.G.P.C. elected on the Akali Dal ticket, headed by Master Tara Singh, took the pledge at the Akal Takht to sacrifice their all (Tan, Man, Dhan), at the behest of the Shiromani Akali Dal for the achievement of Punjabi Suba.¹⁵

When the meetings of Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh with Jawahar Lal Nehru failed to produce any conclusive results, Master Tara Singh started his fast on 15 August 1961 and gave up his fast on the 1 October 1961 on promise of Hardit Singh Malik, an emissary of Prime Minister that settlement would be made with the Akalis, which carried nothing concrete and was only done looking at the upcoming election. For this act of Master Tara Singh, he was not forgiven by the Sikh Panth.

In the elections of 1962, the Congress won 90 seats of 154 and Kairon became Chief Minister for the second term.¹⁶ The defeat of the Akalis in 1962 elections sharpened the divisions in the ranks of Akali Dal. In July 1962, it was resolved by the Sikhs to take up the cause of the Punjabi province entirely under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh.

On 18 January 1965, Sant Fateh Singh group won 90 seats and Master Tara Singh's group got 45 seats in the SGPC elections, thus giving leadership and supremacy to Sant Fateh Singh. After this defeat, Master Tara Singh for the first time openly put forward the demand for an autonomous state for the Sikhs '...a space in the sun of free India, wherein they can breathe the air of freedom.....'.¹⁷ It was partly because of the continuous backtracking of the Congress and mainly to redeem his credibility among the Sikh masses.

Sant Fateh Singh also resolved that the postponement of their legitimate demand for a Punjabi province by the Centre was clearly discriminatory and he met the new Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri on 7-8 August 1965 in this regard. After the conclusion of the Indo-Pak war in 1965, the Union Home Minister appointed a Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba under Mr. Hukam Singh, Speaker, Lok Sabha to examine all the issues pertaining to Punjab.

The Prime Minister of India, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri died at Tashkent on 11 January 1966. With the untimely demise of Shri Shastri, Indira Gandhi was elevated to the position of Prime Minister on 20

January 1966. On 19 February 1966, The Punjab Government and Congress leaders met the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the Congress president Mr. K. Kamaraj. The Punjab Chief Minister Mr. Ram Kishan met Mrs. Indira Gandhi to discuss about the issue of Punjabi Suba.

On 22 February 1966, the Cabinet sub-committee on Punjabi Suba was reconstituted with Mr. G.L. Nanda, Mr. Y.B. Chavan and Mr. Jagjiwan Ram as members. On 27 February 1966, Sant Fateh Singh turned down Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's request to send his representatives or to appoint a negotiating committee for discussions with the Union Government and the Congress sub-committee to find out some solution to the Punjabi Suba issue. The Working Committee of the Akali Dal were of the opinion that the stage for fresh negotiations had passed and that the Sant and his colleagues had made the Akali Dal's position clear during their meetings with the late Prime Minister, Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri on 7-8 August 1965. The inordinate delay resulted in the hardening of the postures.

On 9 March 1966, the Congress Working Committee conceded the Suba demand and requested the Government to constitute a State with Punjabi as state language out of existing state of Punjab. The Government was requested to take necessary steps for the purpose.¹⁸ The Working Committee had left it to the Government to adopt methods for implementation of its resolution.¹⁹

The Congress Working Committee decision was hailed by Mr. Swaran Singh.²⁰ However, the Jan Sangh leaders in their resolution said that the CWC resolution recommending the formation of another state out of the existing Punjab with Punjabi as official language was a blow to the forces of unity and integration in the country. It amounted to an abject surrender to separatism..... in the border state.²¹

After the CWC resolution, the Union Cabinet on 10 March considered the CWC's resolution recommending the formation of Punjabi speaking state out of the existing State of Punjab and favoured its early implementation. A formal announcement of the Government's decision was expected only after the Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba submitted its report and to expedite the execution of CWC's recommendation, the four man Cabinet sub-committee on Punjabi Suba was expanded to include three more Union Ministers. The expanded 7 member Cabinet sub-committee was to work on the legal steps to be taken for the formation of the Punjabi Suba and workout the financial aspects of the new State.

Sant Fateh Singh expressed his thanks to Congress Working Committee, Mr. K. Kamaraj and Mrs. Indira Gandhi for conceding to the Punjabi Suba demand of Akali Dal. He reiterated that the goodwill created by the Congress Working Committee's decision would be maintained and he appealed to the people to maintain peace and to ignore the communal minded people who were trying to cause disruption. He assured the people that the proposed Punjabi Suba would be common to all Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Muslims and that all of them would live together and in peace. On the other hand, the Jan Sangh, Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam were bitter over this decision of CWC. Mr. Yagya Dutt, General Secretary of the Punjab and Himachal Jan Sangh sat on a fast to oppose the creation of Punjabi Suba.

On 12 March 1966 violence spread to four major towns of Punjab namely Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Hisar where students protested against the CWC's decision on Punjabi Suba.²² On 14 March, Police mob clashes spread to other Punjab towns of Ambala cantonment, Abohar and Jind. Police opened fire on violent anti-Punjabi Suba demonstrators in Jalandhar and Bhiwani as a result of which 4 persons were killed and 15 others injured. Master Tara Singh and 17 other Akalis were arrested at Amritsar under the Defense of India rules and sent to Rohtak Jail.²³

On 18 March 1966, the Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba headed by Hukam Singh presented its report to the Lok Sabha and recommended the reorganization of Punjab on the basis of language. The Committee made a specific recommendation that "the Punjabi Region²⁴ specified in the First Schedule to the Punjab Regional Committee's Order of 1957 should form a unilingual Punjabi State".

On 20 March in their talks with Union Home Minister, Mr. G.L. Nanda, representatives of the Punjab Jan Sangh, Ekta Samiti and Arya Samaj spelt out their demands for the reorganization of Punjab on linguistic basis. This could be effectively achieved by having Chandigarh as the common capital and by having a common Governor, High Court, Public Service Commission and Irrigation and Electricity boards. They also urged to have Devnagri and Gurmukhi script be given equal status.

On 22 March, the Union Home Minister, G.L. Nanda clarified that the reorganization of Punjab would be on the lines recommended by the Parliamentary Committee. He quoted the exact relevant section from the Parliamentary Committee's report:

- a) The Punjabi Region should form a Unilingual Punjabi State;
- b) The Hill areas of Punjab, included in the Hindi Region which were contiguous to Himachal Pradesh and have linguistic and cultural affinity with that territory should be merged with Himachal Pradesh; and
- c) The remaining areas should be formed as a separate unit which may be called the Haryana State.²⁵

On 17 April 1966, in the Lok Sabha, the Union Home Minister, Mr. G.L. Nanda, announced the appointment of a Commission to examine the existing boundary of the Hindi and the Punjabi region of the present State of Punjab and recommend what adjustments, if any, are necessary in that regard to secure the linguistic homogeneity of the States of Punjab and Haryana.²⁶ The Commission would be submitting its report by the end of May.²⁷

On 23 April 1966, the Government of India announced the appointment of a three-member Boundary Commission for the demarcation of the boundaries of the new Punjabi-speaking State and Haryana. Mr. Justice J.C. Shah, Judge of the Supreme Court was to be the Chairman of the Commission. The other two members were Mr. M.M. Philip and Mr. S. Dutt,²⁸ it is surprising that the commission should

comprise members, who had no knowledge of the area, and were not required to have an on the spot examination for the adjustment of the boundaries.

The terms of reference were designed to deprive the Punjabi Suba of its legitimate rights.²⁹ The Commission was told to take the Census figures of 1961 into consideration along with other considerations like geography, homogeneity and communication. The declaration, instead of giving scope of enlarging the boundaries of the existing Punjabi Region, put in jeopardy the future of five tehsils (Nalagarh, Pathankot, Una, Kharar, and Fazilka) four of them were in the Punjabi Region and one in the Hindi Region.

The plea that the 1961 Census figures pertaining to mother tongue were flawed and should not be made the basis for determining the future political set up is justified, when considered in the light of historical record and statistical data of previous Census. Data in connection with the three districts (Ambala, Hoshiarpur and Ferozepur) reveal that Punjabi had been the major language of the people of these areas until 1951.

In 1941 there was no census and in the 1951 census, the language column was deleted. These facts reveal that the spurt in favour of Hindi in these three districts alone is not because of migration of any Hindi speaking people from adjoining States or any other factor but because of a planned campaign by a certain section of people against Punjabi in as much as that even the Punjabi speaking people who registered themselves as such upto 1951 were compelled to indicate Hindi as their mother tongue.

The second important feature of the terms of reference of the Boundary Commission was to regard "tehsil" as the basic unit for the reorganization. "tehsil" cannot be fixed as the basic unit because tehsils had been established for the collection of revenue and their formation does not involve any linguistic principle. Therefore, it was the wrong application of the linguistic principle (which was the basis for the reorganization of Punjab), where 'tehsil' were accepted as the basis for demarcation.

On 31 May 1966, the Punjab Boundary Commission submitted its report to the Government of India and completed its work in a month's time, in which more than 1500 persons appeared before the commission in person. The three-man Punjab Boundary Commission had by a majority of two to one, recommended that Chandigarh should go to the proposed Haryana State. While third member, Mr. S. Dutt expressed the view that Chandigarh should go to the Punjabi Suba, since the Hindi-speaking population of the area is 'migrant'.³⁰

On 10 June 1966, the Union Cabinet accepted the report of the Commission. The Punjab Reorganization Bill provided for the creation of a replaced Punjab based upon Punjabi language and Chandigarh would become a Union Territory and the Centre would exercise police and other powers in that territory. The States of Punjab and Haryana, which would have their capitals there, would be what was called tenant Governments. Representatives of both State Governments were likely to be associated with the various bodies connected with the administration of Chandigarh. In response to the Union Government's

decision on the Boundary Commission's report, the Haryana legislators threatened to submit their resignations from their seats en masse as they were against the idea of declaring Chandigarh a union territory.³¹

On 22 June 1966, the Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Kishan, submitted his as well as his Ministry's resignation to the Governor, Mr. Ujjal Singh. Mr. Ram Kishan described it as the "most opportune time" to quit. The resignation of Mr. Ram Kishan ministry thus paved the way for the President's rule in Punjab. On the same day as per communiqué issued by Rashtrapati Bhawan, Mr. Dharma Vira was appointed as Punjab Governor, who replaced Mr. Ujjal Singh.³²

On 26 June 1966, Mr. K.V.K. Sundaram, Chief Election Commissioner, announced that the fourth General Election would be conducted in February 1967. He announced that the Delimitation in Punjab would be done afresh because of the division of Punjab and the enlargement of the territory of Himachal Pradesh. Mr. Dharma Vira, after being sworn in as Governor of Punjab, recommended Central rule in Punjab to the President, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan on 29 June 1966.

On 5 July 1966, Punjab was placed under President's rule. However, there was one exception in the case of Punjab, where the State Legislature was not dissolved; however, the legislative powers were suspended. The State legislature remained in the state of suspended animation and it was proclaimed that the Central Administration would last till 2 October, 1966.³³

On 3 September 1966, the Punjab Reorganization Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha which was passed in the Lok Sabha on 7 September 1966. After the Bill was passed by the both Houses of Parliament, the Bill received the President's assent on 18 September 1966, providing for the creation of the two States of Punjab and Haryana from 1 November 1966. There were protests in Punjab with regard to the Punjabi speaking areas by the Akalis but all protests notwithstanding, the reorganized Punjab came into being on 1 November 1966.

Thus, the Central Congress leadership had resisted the demand for the Punjabi Suba and its demarcation under the fear that once the Punjabi Suba was created, the Sikhs might be in majority in it, and giving them a 'Homeland' on the border, in contiguity with Pakistan would create all sorts of problems. Yet when it became a political necessity and came to actual demarcation, calculated plans were drawn up to ensure that such area should be as small as possible knowing very well that it would ultimately have Sikh majority. The only conclusion that could be drawn from the terms of reference was that an effort was made to make the Suba as small as possible, economically unviable and isolate it from its contiguity with the Jammu and Kashmir State.

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29. As early as 1955 the States Reorganization Commission had recorded “the repudiation by large sections of the Hindu community of the Punjabi language as their mother tongue. This led, during the last census operation to a situation in which the separate tabulation of Hindi and Punjabi speaking people had to be abandoned.” After the 1951 census the Union Home Minister said in Parliament: “It is believed that the returns submitted on the question of language had been generally incorrect in large parts of Punjab, i.e. as to the mother tongue of the persons concerned, whether it is Punjabi or Hindi.” By the 1961 census the Hindi campaign had become even stronger.

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