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## Punjab politics: Mergers and divisions within the Akali Dal

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### Abstract

*The Shiromani Akali Dal is a political party founded on democratic principles and devoted to fostering, through democratic and peaceful means, an environment that promotes a higher standard of living, equality, and justice for all members of society, as well as the protection of the interests of national minorities and Sikhs in particular. The Shiromani Akali Dal is cognizant that India is a geographical entity that is federal, republican, multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural. To maintain the fundamental rights of religious and linguistic minorities, to fulfil democratic traditions, and to pave the way for economic growth, it is essential that the centre-state relationship under the Indian constitution be rethought. Relations and rights based on the aforementioned ideas and goals No national or regional political party is immune to the politics of split and merger. The Akali Dal, which is a religion-based regional party, is far more frequent and intense than other parties. Since its inception, the Akali Dal has been riven by factionalism. Various sections within the party have often founded independent parties. However, these faction-based parties have often merged into a single party in recent years. Thus, split-and-merge politics has been a prominent element of the Akali Dal in Punjab. This research assists in comprehending Punjab politics in general and Akali Dal politics in particular.*

**Keywords:** Punjab politics, splits and mergers, Akali Dal

### Introduction

Liberal democracy may be found in India. Without political parties, there can be no such thing as a democracy. These are the several political parties that vie for votes during elections in the hopes of becoming the ruling party and forming the government. The opposition is made up of political parties that have no chance of capturing a majority of seats. In order for a democracy to function properly, there must be at least two different political parties. However, in order for India to function as a genuine democracy, the founders of our

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constitution made sure to include provisions for several political parties. In the United States, there are fifty-three state parties in addition to the eight national parties. The term "state-level parties" is frequently used to refer to regional parties. Since it was first established, the Akali Dal has always held the position as Punjab's most significant provincial party. On December 14, 1920, it was established as the head of the Gurudwara Reform Movement, which had been started to protect the religious interests of the Sikh community. **(Kuldeep 1999)** This movement was the driving force for its founding. The Akali Dal won the assembly elections in Punjab in 1967, 1969, 1977, 1985, 1997, 2007, and 2012, which allowed them to form governments in each of those years. However, because to internal turmoil, the majority of Akali governments were unable to see out their full tenure in office. Politics including splitting up the party and merging it with another were used because of the strife that raged inside it. An old saying states that "one Akali is a leader, two are Dal, and three are chaos" when referring to the Akali Dal. When the Akalis are not in control of the situation, they engage in conflict with those who are, but when they are in control, they fight amongst themselves. Presently there are many Akali Dals in Punjab- Akali Dal (Badal), Akali Dal (Taksali), Akali Dal (Sant Fateh Singh), Akali Dal (Amritsar), Akali Dal (Longowal), Akali Dal (Panthic), Akali Dal (Sanyukt), Akali Dal (United) but Akali Dal (Badal) is a major Akali Dal among all of these in present scenario of Punjab politics. **(Lalan 2005)**

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To know about the beginnings of the Akali Dal, including its philosophy.
2. To evaluate aspects that contributed to the internal divisions and reorganisations inside the Akali Dal.
3. To highlights the emergence of several factions within the Akali Dal, as well as their subsequent mergers.
4. To know the influence that the schism and subsequent merger within the Akali Dal had on the political landscape of Punjab.

### **Methodology**

In this research, an attempt has been made, although a poor one, to analyse the dynamics of the politics of the state of Punjab via an assessment of the politics of split and merger within the Akali Dal. However, this attempt has not been successful. In order to better serve you, I

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have partitioned this essay into four distinct parts. The first part of this essay is dedicated to providing background information about the Akali Dal. The second concern is to the causes of the rift that emerged inside the party as a result of the events that transpired. The results and conclusions are presented in the last part, which follows an examination of the origins, development, and subsequent mergers of the Akali Dal in the third section. A historical and analytical technique was used in the production of this specific piece of work. Methods such as analysis, comparison, and history have all been used thus far in this investigation. In the process of carrying out this investigation, a look was taken at both primary and secondary sources..

### **Akali Dal: A Profile**

The second-oldest political party in India, behind the Indian National Congress, is the Akali Dal. It was established on December 14, 1920, as the spearhead of the Gurudwara Reform Movement, which had been initiated to safeguard the religious interests of the Sikh community. This organisation was formed to protect the Sikh religion. Notably, the Sikhs organised a commission in the 1920s with the objective of rescuing shrines from corrupt Mahants who had seized them for their personal use. This is significant enough to mention here. The Akali Dal was established as a semi-military organisation of volunteers to train and nurture action-oriented men. Throughout their numerous successful nonviolent confrontations, Sikhs have made enormous sacrifices for their cause. On November 15, 1925, the British government conceded to the Sikhs' primary demand by transferring ownership of Gurudwaras to the elected Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). With this, the Sikhs gained a massive victory. The SGPC is the Sikh Religious Parliament, a commonly used phrase. Since then, the SGPC's claim to represent the religious interests of the Sikh community has been taken seriously, and the organisation has received a tremendous flood of funding to further the Akali Dal's political objectives. The Akali Dal has also functioned as a respectable spiritually motivated political party for some time. This has been going on for some time as part of the role of the party. Marxists contend that the richest farmers govern the whole peasantry, and that the Akali Dal's most powerful factions reflect this. They employ religious appeals to mobilise the majority of the peasants behind their goal, and they also use similar means irregularly to keep their control over the farmers. The organisation claimed to be the legitimate representative of all Sikhs.(Harish K 2006)

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To join the Akali Dal, you must be a Sikh, however they claim to speak for all Sikhs in the nation and the globe. All Akali Dal members must be Sikhs. However, since the great majority of Sikhs reside in Punjab, the Akali Dal's power is limited to that province. In its policies and objectives, Akali Dal has always been influenced by two overriding principles: Sikh communalism and regionalism. This party's religious and geographical limits offer it a unique viewpoint on the complexities of politics. As a regional party, it is natural that it would advocate for more autonomy within the framework of Indian federalism. This is because checks and balances are fundamental to Indian federalism. Extreme Akalis merge Sikh communalism and regional nationalism under the name "Sikh Homeland," which characterises their united philosophy. One of their other desires is that Chandigarh and any other allegedly Punjabi-speaking districts be included into the Punjab. In political topics pertaining to the state of Punjab, the Akalis advocate for the mostly Sikh rural landowning classes. The Akalis, on the other hand, either disregard or purposefully work against the demands of the mostly Hindu Harijan urban middle and upper classes and landless labour (largely High caste Hindus).(Singh 2009).

### **The Akali compulsion**

Sikhs comprised only 15% of the population in colonial Punjab, but the Akali Dal allied with the Unionist Party and, after the reorganisation in 1966, the Jana Sangh in order to gain political power, despite the fact that the latter viewed "the Sikhs as part and parcel of the Hindu society" and was adamantly opposed to the demand for a Punjabi Suba and pushed for Hindi to be the second official state language. The following explanations may explain the 'unnatural' alliance and its durability beyond the anti-Congress stance they share. Second, the Congress, which has historically had a larger geographical and ethnic base of support, profited from the territorial remapping of the 1971 election districts, which made them less urban, less rural, and less Hindu and Sikh in terms of demographics. (Gopal 2009)

Thirdly, the Akali Dal's status as the Sikh party in a state where Hindus make up less than half of the population compelled them to seek an alliance with the BJP and, before, the Bahujan Samaj Party. Even though it had won a majority in the 1997 assembly elections, the party asked the BJP to join the government in order to restore religious unity in the divided province of Punjab. The coalition created a pattern of long-term collaboration between the

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two groups, with the declared objective of attaining a social balance that each group could accomplish on its own. (Grewal 2008)

### **Split and Merger: Determinants**

The present study lacks clarity since it does not examine the origins, conditions, and situations that led to the internal divisions and eventual reunion of the Akali Dal. This is particularly true if one wishes to grasp the inner workings of the Akali Dal and its periodic disintegration and restoration. Prof. Gopal Singh has said that the Akali Dal has "moderates," "extremists," and "militants," notwithstanding the party's recent schism and subsequent merger. According to him, there have always been three reasons for the division and reformation of the Akali Dal. The struggle for dominance is vital for them. Following India's independence, the Congress party's influence has expanded to become the most significant force. The attitude of the Jats and Sikhs, particularly after 1966, is the third and most essential factor of the division and merging. Other factors that contribute to the formation and maintenance of factions include ideological differences, power, status, patronage, and prestige concerns, personality conflicts, personal gain, personal antagonism, and group competitiveness. There has always been factionalism when two or more party leaders vie for leadership posts. Joyce Pettigrew lays a more emphasis on personal hostility while analysing the Kairon and Rarewale factions of the Congress Party than she does when examining Jat-Sikh antagonism. The same is true of the Akali Dal, particularly after 1962. Historically, the Akali Dal has been split along rural-urban lines. The Sikh community is further split between supporters and opponents of those in authority. In conclusion, the formation and preservation of Akal Dal factions across time have been influenced by any one of these elements, or by any combination of two or more of them. (Chum 2013)

### **Split and Merger: Rise and Development**

In researching the independence movement from 1925 to 1947, historians have unearthed various instances in which the Akali Dal was split into multiple groups. Due to their divergent views on the 1928 Nehru Report, the Akali Dal was first divided into three groups, each commanded by a different individual: Baba Kharak Singh, Giani Sher Singh, and Mangal Singh. In 1939, on the verge of World War II, Giani Kartar Singh and Udham Singh

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Nagoke once again split the nation. Master Tara Singh, Partap Singh Kairon, and others split the Akali Dal in regard to involvement in the Quit India Movement. In 1948, the Akalis joined the Congress administration in East Punjab, ushering in the "politics of merger" inside the Akali Dal. Almost immediately, a separate state for the Sikh majority became a point of contention between the Congress and Akali leadership. This is why the previous Akali administration lost ties with the Congress. As a freshly established political party after independence, the Akali Dal emphasised caste disparities. Master Tara Singh, a Bhapa Sikh, joined his organisation with the Congress in an attempt to undermine his Jat-Sikh peasant opponents. Nonetheless, when the demand for Punjabi Suba arose, he found himself at odds with the Congress. Therefore, in 1960 he resigned from Congress and founded the Morcha to achieve these goals. Master Tara Singh almost starved to death in the Golden Temple when the Morcha failed to achieve its purpose. The appeal of Yadavindra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, convinced him to break his fast. Nonetheless, his action was seen as a betrayal of the Panth, and as a result, Sant Fateh Singh rose to prominence in Sikh politics while he fell out of favour. Consequently, the Akali Dal began to fracture. Sant Fateh Singh, supported by a strong Jat-Sikh peasantry, gave Akali politics a secular tone by presenting the demand for Punjabi Suba primarily on linguistic grounds; the then-central Congress administration agreed, and the modern state of Punjab was formally established on 1 November 1966. (Grover 2006)

In 1967, after the restructuring, elections were conducted for the Punjab Assembly, and the Akali Dal (Sant) emerged as the second biggest party, leading to the formation of a coalition government led by Gurnam Singh, the leader of the Akali party. In 1968, Lachman Singh Gill, a minister in the Akali administration, together with 17 MLAs, resigned from the party and formed a minority government supported by the Congress, thereby splitting the Akali Dal in two. In order to participate in the 1969 Punjab Assembly elections more successfully, the Akali Dal (Sant) and the Akali Dal (Master) merged. After losing the 1980 Assembly elections, the Akali Dal once again split into three factions, this time under the leadership of Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Harchand Singh Longowal, and Bhupinder Singh Danewalia. Sikh militant commander Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale convinced the Akali Dal (Talwandi) and the Akali Dal (Longowal) to combine into the Akali Dal. The Akali Dal (Longowal) formed a government in Punjab on September 29, 1985, under the leadership of Surjit Singh Barnala,

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after winning the Assembly elections that year. Parkash Singh Badal and twenty-seven MLAs from the party split away in 1986 to create the Akali Dal (Badal). Prior to the 1989 parliamentary elections, three separate Akali Dals were active in Punjab. The Akali Dal had three main factions: Longowal, Talwandi, and Akali Dal (Maan). Even though these elections demonstrated that the authentic Akali Dal was the Akali Dal (Maan), even this party was unable to avoid internal strife. Currently, there are two separate Akali Dals led by Parkash Singh Badal and Baba Joginder Singh, who both quit the Akali Dal (Maan). After another split within the Akali Dal (Badal), the Akali Dal (Panthic) was formed. In order to fight in the legislative and assembly elections held in February 1992, the Akali Dal (Panthic) and the Akali Dal (Longowal) agreed to merge. In 1997, the Akali Dal (Badal) won the Punjab Assembly elections and established a coalition government with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Parkash Singh Badal and Gurcharan Singh Tohra's power battle sparked a schism within the Akali Dal (Badal). G.S. Tohra created the Sarva Hind Akali Dal, an autonomous offshoot of the Akali Dal. Due to this divide, the Akali Dal did poorly in the 1999 parliamentary election and the 2002 Punjab assembly election. Thus, the two Akali Dals agreed to join before to the 2004 Parliamentary elections, and the resulting party received an overwhelming majority of the vote. Additionally, it won the Assembly elections in 2012 and 2017, allowing it to create the current Akali-BJP coalition government in Punjab. (Narang 2014)

### Conclusions

The aforementioned analysis indicates that split and merger have been constant hallmarks of the Akali Dal since its inception. It has been linked mostly to power rivalries and personality conflicts. The data also reveals that the split and reunification had an influence on the Akali Dal's performance in several Punjab Assembly elections. The results of the elections in 1969, 1977, and 2002 demonstrate that it had a role in winning and losing power inside the state. It is difficult to appreciate the political dynamics of Punjab and Sikh politics without an examination of the politics of split and merger within the Akali Dal. This factor has profoundly affected the political strategy of the Akali Dal and its opponent in several elections. As a result of the division of the Akali Dal, the Akalis were mostly defeated and their foes were victorious. Nonetheless, if the Akalis and Akali Dals joined forces, the Akalis generally triumphed and their opponents typically lost.

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