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## **Akali-Congress Political Struggle (1947-1956)**

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### **Abstract:**

The Akali-Congress political confrontation started with the independence of India in 1947 and apparently seemed to have ended, albeit temporarily, when the reorganization of Punjab happened in the year 1956 on the basis of an accord which became famous as the Regional Formula. The politics and the power play in reaching this settlement are the subject matter of this paper.

### **Key Words:**

Akalis, Congress, Reorganization, Punjab, Regional Formula

### **Paper Discussion:**

#### **Origin of the demand for the Reorganization of Punjab:**

With Constitution of India not providing any special political safeguards for the Sikhs, the idea of a Punjabi-speaking state became more important for the Akalis. The first Sikh leader to raise the issue of a unilingual state in East Punjab was a moderate Sikh leader, Bawa Harkishan Singh. His plea was addressed primarily to the Constituent Assembly as a lasting solution of the Punjab problem. Bawa Harkishan Singh was quite close to Master Tara Singh but it is not clear whether he wrote independently or in consultation with him. In 1949, Master Tara Singh himself wrote from jail to Nehru and Patel that a linguistic state should be created on the basis of the Punjabi language alone. He complained that the Hindu leaders of the Punjab who professed to be 'nationalists' were actually 'communal'. Their support for Hindi and their hostility towards Punjabi were two sides of the same coin. Master Tara Singh was convinced that 'Punjabi Suba' was the only alternative left for them.

After the adoption of the Indian Constitution and its enforcement in January 1950, Hukam Singh stressed the fact that the demand for a Punjabi speaking state was not 'communal' but secular and democratic. At a Panthic conference on 26 March 1950, Hukam Singh, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, referred to the worsening position of the Sikhs. The Punjabi language was denied a rightful place and the principle of linguistic states was rejected. Some of the Akali legislators who had joined the Congress Legislative Party issued public statements against the demand for a linguistic state. Master Tara Singh asked all the Akali legislators to state why they should not resign from the Congress Legislative Party. Sardar Patel advised Bhargava to deal sternly with Master Tara Singh's tactics to create a rift among the Congress legislators.



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On 10 July 1950, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Sardar Patel that Master Tara Singh was on a tour of the Punjab and PEPSU, where he was making speeches in support of his demand for 'a separate homeland' for the Sikhs. It was desirable that the Punjab Ministers and other prominent Sikhs in Delhi should say something about this demand.<sup>1</sup> Jawaharlal hinted at the necessity to orchestrate opposition to the demand. Patel wrote back that not only his demand for 'a Sikh homeland' but his entire policy should be opposed. Patel pointed out; 'Our main difficulty in regard to the Sikhs is that those who are with us do not take a definite hostile line to Masterji's politics. He hinted that Baldev Singh should be persuaded to do so as the previous attempt via Bhargava to ask Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir has not yielded results. Nehru himself could write to Baldev Singh then Patel could speak to him and then others would follow suit'.<sup>2</sup>

Nehru immediately wrote to Baldev Singh and suggested him to take the lead and advised him that, 'we should not allow a mischievous turn of events to grow and assume importance'.<sup>3</sup> Baldev Singh agreed with the idea of Jawaharlal Nehru and said that the utterances of Master Tara Singh were not in the interest of the country and was detrimental to his own community. He further elaborated that the bickering of the Punjab Government and the State Congress did little towards the solution of the difficult problem of communal amity. He informed Nehru that he had called a meeting of the Panthic legislators on 23 July 1950 in order to take an organized stand against Master Tara Singh's activities'.<sup>4</sup> The legislators met at Ambala and set up a committee of five with Baldev Singh as its president. They wanted to persuade the Akali Dal not to issue a directive to all the Panthic legislators who had joined the Congress to leave it. When the directive was issued, Baldev Singh handled the situation and except one legislator, Jaswant Singh Duggal, no other Panthic legislator resigned from the Congress Legislative Party.<sup>5</sup>

When the option of 'Nationalist Sikhs', who were supporters of Baba Kharak Singh came up for discussion, Sardar Patel's assessment was that the 'nationalist Sikhs had no following and that they could not deliver the goods. In order to counter the activities of Master Tara Singh the answer should come from the Panthic Sikhs, who were now members of the Congress Party as they were better organized and more active and can command better following. It was much

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<sup>1</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1974, Vol. IX, p.444.

<sup>2</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. IX, pp.444-45.

<sup>3</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. IX, p.446.

<sup>4</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. IX, pp. 447-48.

<sup>5</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba: The Story of the Struggle*, U.C. Kapur and Sons, Delhi, 1970, p.210.



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better to create this opposition than to alienate it.<sup>6</sup> Sardar Patel was convinced that these legislators alone were ‘the answer to Master Tara Singh's activities’ and they should be strengthened. Thus, the former Akalis were to be used to weaken Master Tara Singh.

Giani Kartar Singh, who had full backing of Sardar Patel and enjoyed full confidence of Punjab Premier, Gopi Chand Bhargava started all out campaign against the Akali Dal. The Punjab Government also started a policy of repression as the Akali workers, who acknowledged their affiliation to Master Tara Singh and not to Giani Kartar Singh began to be arrested under the Public Safety Act. Master Tara Singh was arrested, tried for spreading hatred against the government, and sent to Karnal jail on 7 September 1950. But he had to be released on 29 November because the High Court rejected the validity of the application of the Article 124 under which he was imprisoned.<sup>7</sup>

On 15 December 1950, the day of Sardar Patel's death, Partap Singh Kairon called a convention of all the Congress and the ‘nationalist’ Sikhs at Amritsar to combat the growing communalism among the Sikhs. He declared at a convention that the Congress and the ‘nationalist’ Sikhs would take a firm stand against the creation of Punjabi Suba. Henceforth, the Congress started openly opposing the Punjabi Suba.<sup>8</sup>

On 16 December 1950, at a Panthic convention held at Amritsar, Master Tara Singh declared that the foremost grievance of the Sikhs against the Congress Government was its refusal to create Punjabi Suba. The Sikhs were asking for no favour and no concession because they were demanding territorial reorganization on the basis of language and not a separate state or even a Sikh-majority area.<sup>9</sup>

The widening gulf between Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjabi zone could be seen during the census operations of 1951. The Hindus by and large were returning Hindi as their mother tongue and asking the Scheduled Castes to do so too. There were incidents of violence. Udham Singh Nagoke wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru on 6 March 1951 that pressure was being exercised on people to declare their mother tongue as Hindi. Nehru on the contrary told him that he had received reports of great pressure being exercised on people to declare Punjabi as their mother tongue even when they did not want to do so. Social boycott was proclaimed to bring such

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<sup>6</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-50*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1974, Vol. IX, p.452.

<sup>7</sup> Master Tara Singh, *Meri Yad*, pp. 246-47.

<sup>8</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba: The Story of the Struggle*, U.C. Kapur and Sons, Delhi, 1970, pp. 209-10.

<sup>9</sup> Ajit Singh Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba: The Story of the Struggle*, pp. 215-16.



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pressure to bear, more especially on the Dalits. Much concerned with this grave situation, Nehru declared that ‘any census given in Punjab and in PEPSU on the language and script questions will not be considered to have any value’.<sup>10</sup> Master Tara Singh attributed the lawlessness and disorder to the role that the Congress leaders, ministers, and officials of the government played during the census. By now, the issue of language was enmeshed with the demand for Punjabi Suba.

In June 1949, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel were in favour of early general elections. It would be a challenge to the country and the people thought Nehru.<sup>11</sup> According to Sardar Patel, the most convenient time to dissolve the Constituent Assembly would be after the next Legislative session so that the elections could be held sometime in the months of December 1949 and January 1950 and the new legislature could meet after 26 January 1950.<sup>12</sup> G.B. Pant urged against the elections as the problem of indiscipline in the Congress could not be solved by elections. It was an internal organizational problem which was better solved before the elections.<sup>13</sup> These and other difficulties appear to have its effect on Nehru and Patel in dropping the idea of early elections.

The First General elections were spread over six months from October 1951 and March 1952, with seventy seven political parties and contest over 3772 seats. Nehru covered nearly 25,000 miles and addressed about 35 million or a tenth of India’s population. All his speeches were part of a process of adult education, of teaching the masses that they had minds which they should use decisively.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the elections were held two years later at a time regarded favorable to the Congress leadership. As usual, Nehru toured the country, speaking on behalf of the Congress as the only party to lead the country towards realization of the basic objectives laid down in the Constitution. His speech at Ludhiana on 30 September 1951 was ‘An All-Out War on Communalism’. Nehru emphasized that communalism could lead to Balkanization of India referring to the communal organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha, RSS and the Jan Sangh.<sup>15</sup> It was ‘a very special problem’ in the Punjab as a border state with no harmony between Hindus and Sikhs. Nehru advised Master Tara Singh to appreciate that the country was facing serious problems and in this situation ‘whatever our political differences might be, we should not encourage disruptive tendencies which weaken the country and cast discredit upon

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<sup>10</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVI, Part 1, p. 294.

<sup>11</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. VIII, p.249.

<sup>12</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. VIII, p. 252.

<sup>13</sup> Durga Das(ed.), *Sardar Patel’s Correspondence, 1945-50*, Vol. VIII, p.309.

<sup>14</sup> S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Volume II, p.162.

<sup>15</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp.90-94.



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us'.<sup>16</sup>

To ensure success of the Congress, Nehru went to the extent of advising Partap Singh Kairon that he should take serious interest in the election of the office-bearers of the SGPC to meet the challenge of Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh as Giani Kartar Singh had left the Congress and are now working together. This matter was more important for Nehru than winning a few seats in the general elections. Therefore, he advised that 'every effort should be made to help Nagoke in the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee's elections'. Kairon and his friends and colleagues in the SGPC should throw all their weight in favour of Nagoke. To support Master Tara Singh was to oppose the Congress.<sup>17</sup> On 4 January 1952, Nehru declared at Patiala that he would not allow India to be divided again. And if there is trouble in any part of India, he would put it down with all his strength.<sup>18</sup> For him, thus, to concede the demand for Punjabi Suba was to divide India. He would use the might of the Indian state, he said, to suppress the demand.

Nehru blamed the Akali Dal for their role in the Partition of the country as 'the greatest responsibility for the Partition lay with the policy followed by the Akali Dal'.<sup>19</sup> Nehru even ridiculed the Akali leaders, saying that they never said a right thing and never learnt from a mistake; they were opposed to both democracy and a secular state. After the elections, Nehru felt gratified that the Congress had 'curbed Sikh and Hindu communalism in the north by giving a straight challenge'.<sup>20</sup> For Jawaharlal Nehru as much as for Master Tara Singh, Punjabi Suba was the basic issue in the Punjab.

The manifesto of the Akali Dal upheld the principle of reorganization on the basis of language and culture for the entire country. For the Sikhs, it was a question of life and death. Hukam Singh, then President of the Akali Dal, attributed the defeat of the Akali Dal to the division 'engineered' by the Congress between the Sikhs and the Hindus. He went on to add that no amount of deception, double-dealing, crookery, cajolery, intimidation, threats, and promises of promotion or patronage could lead the Sikhs astray. Formation of the Punjabi-speaking province, he said, was 'the most fundamental demand of the Sikhs'. Akali confrontation with the Congress became almost a certainty.<sup>21</sup>

### **Confrontation**

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<sup>16</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVI, Part 2, p. 192.

<sup>17</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVI, Part 2, pp. 223-24.

<sup>18</sup> Sarhadi, p.221.

<sup>19</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVII, Second Series, pp.86-88.

<sup>20</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVII, Second Series, p.357.

<sup>21</sup> Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, p. 222.





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**The movement for Punjabi Suba gained considerable momentum from 1952 to 1955.** After the success in the general elections of 1952, Nehru believed that Congress had a complete support of the people across the country and he could wage a war against the ‘communalism’ by taking on the communal forces led by Akali Dal, Hindu Mahasabha and the Bharatiya Jan Sangh. Nehru established his control over Punjab Congress when Bhim Sen Sachar was chosen as the Chief Minister of Punjab in May 1952, with an advice that, ‘We have to put down corruption and nepotism at all levels’ and directed him to ensure full cooperation of Kairon in this regard.<sup>22</sup> Instead of giving the legislators a free hand to choose their leader of the legislature, the High Command imposed their choice on them and hence gave impetus to the factionalism in the Party, which resulted in two groups: the Sachar group and the Kairon-Jagat Narain group.

Nehru was wary of Master Tara Singh joining hands with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jan Sangh with the support of RSS. He was surprised at Master Tara Singh cooperating with the Communists in Pepsu. There are no principles-only ambition and hatred’.<sup>23</sup> Nehru felt that the combination of the communal forces had created an atmosphere similar to the one in which Gandhiji was assassinated and he felt alarmed at this development.<sup>24</sup>

In Pepsu, Nehru was able to weaken the Akalis by imposing President's rule on 5 March 1953 rather unconstitutionally, dispensing with what he himself saw as 'the Sikh Ministry'. President's rule was used by the Congress in order to ensure the success of the Pepsu Congress Party in the elections.

In order to weaken the Akalis, Nehru became all the more keen to ensure that the Punjab Government had its indirect control over the SGPC. On 29 June 1952, Nahar Singh, acting President of the SGPC, who was regarded as a nominee of the Nagoke group was elected as President. Master Tara Singh's nominee, Jathedar Achhar Singh was defeated by 75 to 72 votes, that is by a margin of three votes<sup>25</sup>.

Ajit Singh Sarhadi had observed that the so-called nationalist Sikhs headed by Jathedar Udham Singh Nagoke, who exercised control over SGPC were kept in power by the ruling party in the State by all possible means. In October 1952, certain members of the SGPC broke away from the Nagoke group due to the growing Sikh support for the Punjabi Suba. In December 1952, however, the Akali candidate, Pritam Singh Khuranj, was elected President<sup>26</sup>.

Emboldened by the growing support of the people for Punjabi Suba, Hukam Singh and Master

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<sup>22</sup> *Selected*, Vol. XVII, Second Series, pp.369-70.

<sup>23</sup> *Selected*, Vol. XX, Second Series, pp. 312-14.

<sup>24</sup> *Selected*, Vol. XXI, pp.347-48.

<sup>25</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XVIII, p. 321 fn.7.

<sup>26</sup> Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, pp.225-26.



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Tara Singh openly began to state their demand from public platforms and made strong speeches against the Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru. Master Tara Singh gave support to the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS in their anti-government programmes. However, he was arrested for some other alleged offence but had to be released about three weeks later on 14 March 1953. The Akalis were given assurance that there would be no interference in their religious affairs. In the SGPC elections held in towards the end of 1954, the Khalsa Dal led by the Congressite Sikhs contested all the 132 seats but won only three. The Akali Dal headed by Master Tara Singh won all the 111 seats it contested. In the Khalsa Dal, there were two groups, the official one led by Jathedar Udham Singh Nagoke and the unofficial group led by Partap Singh Kairon appealed to the voters on the basis of the schemes of the Congress Party for development. Master Tara Singh's thumping success in the SGPC elections on the issue of Punjabi Suba gave boost to the morale of his followers and entitled him to demand the creation of 'Punjabi Suba' with great emphasis. He once again emerged as the supreme leader of the Sikhs. On 9 December 1954, Nehru wrote to the Chief Ministers, 'it is of great concern for all of us how far communal and separatist tendencies grow in this country. There can be no doubt that the forces that triumphed in the SGPC were intensely communal, even though they might not be wholly separatist. Thus, Nehru justified his intervention in the affairs of the SGPC through his instruments in the Punjab. 'The activities of the Akali Dal and its leaders are singularly like those of the Muslim League'.<sup>27</sup> This shows that despite Nehru's persistent denials throughout his life, he encouraged Kairon and the Akalis in the Congress Party to ensure that the control of the SGPC remained in their hands. This became almost a matter of policy for the Punjab Government. Master Tara Singh was absolutely right in blaming the 'secular *sarkar*' for interference in the religious affairs of the Sikhs.

### **Compromise**

The publication of the SRC Report on 10 October 1955 led to a great deal of disappointment among the Akali leaders as all the states of the Indian Union were to be reorganized on the linguistic basis but not Bombay and Punjab. It recommended the creation of Maha-Punjab consisting of the Punjab, Pepsu, and Himachal Pradesh areas. The criterion of language was totally set aside. The Akali demand for a linguistic state was dubbed as communal and those who dishonestly disowned Punjabi in favour of Hindi were seen as nationalist.<sup>28</sup>

On 16 October 1955, a convention of all parties and organizations of the Sikhs was held at

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<sup>27</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. XXVII, Second Series, p. 556.

<sup>28</sup> Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, pp.251-54.



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Amritsar. The resolution referred to the crucial support given by the Sikhs to the Congress in 1946-47 and their decision to throw in their lot with India, which was set aside by the Congress after independence. The Sikhs were discriminated against in all walks of life and a campaign of vilification was carried on against them to which the Shiromani Akali Dal had pleaded for the formation of a Punjabi speaking state as a secular and a democratic solution. The SRC had rejected the just and reasonable demand of the Sikhs thus exposing them to the hostilities of the dominant group in the Punjab. The convention authorized Master Tara Singh to take appropriate steps to convey the views of the Sikh community to the Government of India.<sup>29</sup>

On 24 October 1955, Master Tara Singh met the Prime Minister accompanied by four other Sikh leaders including Hukam Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, Gian Singh Rarewala and Bhai Jodh Singh. Also present in the meeting were Maulana Azad and GB Pant. After the talks Nehru seemed to believe that the delegation led by Master Tara Singh was satisfied by the talks as is reflected from the correspondence of Nehru with CPN Singh and Partap Singh Kairon.

On 11 November 1955, when Nehru visited Amritsar, he was warmly received by the Akalis. Nehru expressed his gratitude to the SGPC and Master Tara Singh for the warm reception accorded to him on his visit to the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. On 17 November 1955, Nehru met a delegation of Congress MLAs and MPs at Nangal led by Thakur Das Bhargava. He talked of a possible split in the Congress on the issue of the demand of the Punjabi speaking state, which he referred as 'a Sikh State and thus showed the separatist mentality of the Sikhs'. Nehru's patience with that 'Hindu gathering' was exhausted in twenty five minutes and he exhorted them to adhere to the Congress principles of winning the confidence of all.

On 23 November 1955, Master Tara Singh and four other Sikhs met Nehru in the presence of Azad and Pant. Nehru stressed the difficulty of bypassing the SRC recommendations and the Sikh delegation underlined the necessity of meeting the Sikh demands. The talks were 'friendly but rather vague'.<sup>30</sup>

On 23 January 1956, Kairon succeeded Sachar as Chief Minister because Nehru believed that Sachar had not got the popular touch and was rigid in his thinking and in his actions. On 8 February 1956, the plan proposed by the Cabinet sub-committee was discussed by the Sikh delegation and some other Sikh leaders. Giani Kartar Singh, Gian Singh Rarewala, Bawa Harkishan Singh, and Hukam Singh were in favour of its acceptance. Master Tara Singh did not express any opinion. Giani Kartar Singh asked Sarhadi to prepare a representation to the Prime

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<sup>29</sup> Sarhadi, pp.255-258.

<sup>30</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. XXXI, pp.156-57.





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Minister for adding more subjects to the regional list.<sup>31</sup>

The sixty first Congress Session was held on 11-12 February 1956. There were two other major conferences, the Akali Conference on 11-12 February 1956 and the Maha Punjab Conference on 12 February 1956.<sup>32</sup> The Akali Dal had decided to hold the tenth All India Akali Conference at the same time in Amritsar in order to demonstrate the Sikh support for the Akalis. Professor Teja Singh writes, 'It seemed as if the whole Sikh nation had turned out. At least five lakhs had come to join the procession. On the other hand Brecher, the biographer of Nehru writes that Nehru was 'sympathetic to the Sikh fears' but he was 'under strong pressure from communal minded Hindu Congressmen'; they were not prepared to place the Punjabi Hindus in an inferior political position.<sup>33</sup>

Nehru in his address at the Amritsar session mentions of the day long processions taken out by the Akali Dal and the Maha Punjab Samiti in Amritsar to press for their rival demands of Punjabi Suba and Maha Punjab respectively.<sup>34</sup>

The Maha Punjab Samiti had started an agitation for the merger of Pepsu, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh into one province as suggested by the States Reorganization Commission, while the Akalis insisted on the formation of Punjabi Suba with the merger of Punjab and Pepsu states. The Congress viewed that language could not be the dominating factor in the demarcation of states.<sup>35</sup>

In his address to the All-India Akali Conference on 11 February 1956, written with an eye on the proposed plan, Master Tara Singh was emphatic that Punjabi Suba alone was the permanent solution of the Punjab problem. He stated that in Punjab, the creation of a linguistic state was being opposed by some people who actually spoke Punjabi. Elsewhere it was a question of preserving the culture or having political safeguards but in the Punjab the religious as well as the political identity of the Sikhs was at stake. The opponents of a linguistic state in the Punjab were putting forth false arguments deliberately to stall its creation.

However, the meeting of the General Body of the Akali Dal was held on 11 March 1956. Gian Singh Rarewala unfolded the plan. Bhai Jodh Singh was most eloquent in its justification. Sarhadi elaborated how speakers were carefully chosen to carry the resolution through. Giani Kartar Singh had brought a few followers to shoot down any serious critic of the proposals.

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<sup>31</sup> Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, pp. 262-264.

<sup>32</sup> Selected Works, XXXII, p.139.

<sup>33</sup> Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba*, pp.259-60.

<sup>34</sup> Selected Works, XXXII, p.234.

<sup>35</sup> Selected Works, XXXII, p.548.



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Professor Satbir Singh was one such critic who had to face the opposition. Pritam Singh Gojran was eloquent in his opposition. Sarhadi was not in favour of a total rejection.<sup>36</sup> Master Tara Singh clarified his position by stating that, ‘the proposal offered by the Government does not constitute the Punjabi Suba but under the present circumstances, I do not want to fight.’ He left it to the General Body to decide the issue. Many members of the Working Committee were against the acceptance of the proposals. The split in the Akali Dal looked imminent, however it was averted. In view of the national situation and in the belief that ‘the new plan may solve some of the difficulties which the Punjabi Suba was expected to remove’, the Akali Dal gave its general support to the principle of the plan and was prepared to work it honestly.<sup>37</sup>

On 26 March 1956, Master Tara Singh explained his stand on the scheme which was called as the Regional Formula. He said he was indecisive for many days, not sure ‘if the scheme will give us protection against the aggressive communal domination under which we have been groaning during the past 8 years’. Between the devil and the deep sea, Master Tara Singh remained hesitant till he heard the speeches in the general body meeting of the Akali Dal on 11 March.<sup>38</sup> Regarding the deal with the government, Master Tara Singh expressed hope that it had brought the Sikhs out of despair and an atmosphere of good will was created in which he could work for the Hindu-Sikh unity. He regarded it as a great gain that an opportunity for Hindu-Sikh unity had been created, therefore he exhorted the Sikhs to take up the challenge and be ready.<sup>39</sup>

The Regional Formula was worked out between October 1955 and March 1956.

Main Provisions of the Regional Formula<sup>40</sup>, which represented a compromise between contending parties were:

1. The Punjab and PEPSU should be merged in a single bilingual state with a common governor, ministry, legislature, public service commission and a high court. The predominantly Hindu state of Himachal Pradesh would provisionally become a Union Territory.
2. For the transaction of government business with regard to certain specified matters the state would be divided into two regions, one Hindi-speaking and the other Punjabi-speaking.

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<sup>36</sup> Sarhadi, pp. 265-266.

<sup>37</sup> Sarhadi, pp.267-268.

<sup>38</sup> Sarhadi, pp.268-270.

<sup>39</sup> Jaswant Singh, *Master Tara Singh*, pp.279-280.

<sup>40</sup> Joyce Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen*, Appendix II, Ambika Publications, New Delhi, 1978, pp.221-222.



3. For each region there would be a regional committee of the Punjab State Assembly consisting of members of the Assembly, including the ministers belonging to the region but excluding the Chief Minister.
4. Legislation regarding the specified matters would be referred to the regional committees, who would also make legislative proposals to the state government. Advice tendered by the regional committees would normally be accepted by the government and the state legislature, but in the event of difference of opinion the matter would be referred to the governor, whose decision would be final and binding.
5. The regional committees, with power to legislate on 14 Subjects, would deal *inter alia* with the development and economic planning (within the framework of general development plans formulated by the state legislature), local government, public health, primary and secondary education, agriculture, cottage and small scale industries, livestock, fisheries, cooperative societies and charitable and religious institutions.
6. The demarcation of the Hindi and Punjabi regions would be carried out in consultation with the state government and other interests concerned.
7. Both Punjabi and Hindi would be recognized as official languages of the state. At district level and below, the official language of each region would be the regional language. The state government would set up two different departments for promoting the Punjabi and Hindi languages. The proposals contained in the State Reorganization Bill were unanimously approved by the PEPSU Legislative Assembly on 22 March.

Hukam Singh, who was believed to be the chief architect of the Regional Formula said in April 1956 that the success of the scheme would depend on how it was implemented. The major role in its implementation was to be played by the head of the government, the Chief Minister Partap Singh Kairon, whose antipathy and opposition to any Formula of that nature was too well known.<sup>41</sup>

Giani Kartar Singh and Gian Singh Rarewala were in favour of joining the Congress. The latter was the first to say that the Akali Dal needed no separate existence after the Regional Formula. The Akali Dal Working Committee reiterated its resolve to maintain its distinct identity. Rarewala joined the Congress early in August 1956. In the meeting of the Akali Dal Working Committee to consider the matter of his expulsion, Giani Kartar Singh argued that the Akalis should join the Congress on certain terms, including the political status of the Akali Dal. He then negotiated with Maulana Azad, who eventually clarified that the Akali

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<sup>41</sup> Sarhadi, p. 270.



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Dal as a religious and cultural organization would have the right to raise its voice against any injustice to the Sikh community but the Sikh members of the Congress would not participate in any action in defiance of the Congress Party's decisions.

The Akali Dal Working Committee unanimously passed the resolution on 30 September 1956<sup>42</sup>, in which it was resolved that:

1. The Akali Dal would not have any separate political programme of its own.
2. The Akali Dal would concentrate on the protection and promotion of religious, educational, cultural, social and economic interests of the Panth and would guard against any violation and infringement of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution that adversely hit the Sikhs.
3. The Dal would participate in the implementation of the Regional Formula.

**Conclusion:**

The meeting of the General Body of the Akali Dal was called for on 24 November 1956 in which 322 delegates from Punjab and outside were present. The resolution was passed despite the opposition by 5 members. The constitution of the Akali Dal was suitably amended and the Akali legislators joined the Congress Party. Master Tara Singh declared never to forsake Jawaharlal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru praised Master Tara Singh for his courage and honesty of purpose. Pepsu became formally a part of the Punjab and the new state came into being on 1 November 1956. Thus, the political struggle between Akalis and the Congress seemed to have ended with the reorganization of Punjab on the basis of Regional Formula.

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<sup>42</sup> Sarhadi, p.284.