CHAPTER IX - POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF THE SIKHS.

After the partition of the Punjab into Pakistan and Indian parts in 1947, the Sikhs migrated to settle in their new homeland. As a result of this migration, their population though spread in the whole of Indian Union yet specially concentrated in the East Punjab, Sikh States of East Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The concentration of the Sikh population in these areas helped the National Government to rehabilitate the Sikhs in agriculture, industries and other vocations of livelihood. But the policy of the National Government which had taken over power from the British Government as representative body of the Indian people, effected the Sikh community very greatly.

Firstly, the National Government removed distinction between martial and non-martial races which opened the doors of the army service to every Indian irrespective of caste, colour or creed. This step put an end to the monopoly of the Sikhs for entry into the army and thus gave a last blow to the normal feature of the Hindu society in the Punjab where one set of brothers brought up Sikhs and another as Hindus in the same families, as it did not have any economic utility anymore. This stopped the embellishment of the number of Sikhs.
at the cost of the Hindus.

Secondly, the Land Alienation Act of 1901 which had divided the Sikhs into agriculturists and non-agriculturist was abolished and it put an end to the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural classes. Henceforth, anyone could be owner of land whether by new purchases from any class of agriculturists or by alienation of agricultural lands. This eliminated the possibilities of any division amongst the Sikhs on account of agriculturist and non-agriculturist question.

Thirdly, the separate electorate was abolished and the adult franchise was introduced. This made the communal leadership feel that their days were numbered. The separate Electorate had reduced the voice of the Hindus and the Sikhs to their proportionate number in population. In all the memorandum submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission, all the representatives of the Hindus and the Sikhs insisted upon the abolition of this practice and the Muslims were particular that they should be retained.

Fourthly, the reservations for the Hindus and the Sikhs in the Government posts, both civil and military were abolished and every appointment was to be made strictly on merit. This did not reduce the position of the Sikhs in civil and military services, and the increase of education enables them to compete very favourably in all the fields of
Government services.

Fifthly, the radical reform in the economic field such as abolition of zamindari which gave a death blow to all the landed aristocracy in India mostly affected the Sikhs. This engendered a sense of grievance against the ruling party which was identified with the Hindus.

For the Sikh community, the political and social changes have been on the whole disadvantageous. They were a privileged people under the old order, so the new order was to mean a lot of changes. Some of their leaders thought that they could have averted all these changes if they had their own Sikh States. Another important event for the Sikh community was the merger of the Sikh States. Two years after the Independence of India, the Sikh States of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala, Faridkot and Kalsia were merged into PEPSU (which means Patiala & East Punjab States Union). This brought to an end the ruling power of the Sikh princes yielding before the will of the national Government of India.

The Sikhs divided themselves into congressites, Akalis, Independents and Communists. The Congressite Sikhs were tacitly supported by the Congress party consisting of the Hindus and the Sikhs in the Punjab and the PEPSU, whereas the Akalis were supported entirely by the Sikh masses only. The Sikhs in the Communist Party and the Independents were
also almost entirely backed by the Sikh masses. The Akali Dal is the premier and the most important party of the Sikhs and has the greatest hold over the rural as well as the urban Sikh population in the Punjab and the PEPSU and was considered as the Central Sikh Organisation enjoying the confidence of the Sikhs. It stood for the separate political entity of the Sikhs to protect Sikh unity as it believed that there existed lackness of real nationalism and democratic consciousness in the country. Its one of the foremost and the greatest political objective was to carve out a Punjabi Speaking State on the basis of Punjabi language and culture, as an autonomous unit of India which it thought would provide the Sikhs with the needful security.

The Punjab and PEPSU has two languages - Hindi and Punjabi. To carry out and implement the policy of the central Government that a child should be instructed in the early stages of his education through the medium of the mother-tongue, the Punjab Government with the concurrence of almost all the elected representatives in the Legislature, formulated a policy in October 1949, which is popularly known as the "Sachar Formula". In pursuance of this formula, the Government determined the zones of Punjabi, Hindi, and bilingual tracts. In PEPSU also, the Government demarcated Punjabi and Hindi Speaking Areas.

The proposed Punjabi Speaking State consisted
of the area of Punjab, PEPSU and Rajasthan (Canganagar colony of Bikaner State predominantly Punjabi Speaking Area contiguous to the Ferozepur and Nisar districts of the Punjab where the colonists mostly Sikhs have settled). This area covered a population of about 12 millions as per details given below *:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portions</th>
<th>Area in sq.miles</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Punjabi Speaking area in Punjab.</td>
<td>19,630</td>
<td>87,09,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Punjabi Speaking area in PEPSU.</td>
<td>7,953</td>
<td>25,63,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Canganagar district in Rajasthan.</td>
<td>8,220</td>
<td>6,36,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35,153</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,19,01,727</strong></td>
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The Punjabi speaking areas covered a greater majority of the Sikh population, and mainly depend upon agriculture. This move was neither sectarian nor communal and was quite democratic as it was in consonance with the principles of linguistic autonomy all over the civilized world. Even Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said in a Press statement on 5th April 1946 that "redistribution of Provincial boundaries was essential and inevitable. I stand for semi-autonomous units as well. If the Sikhs desire to function as such a unit, I should like them to have a semi-autonomous unit within the province so that they may have a sense of freedom."

* Figures calculated from Census Report 1951 and from Memorandums placed before the State Re-organisation Commission.
But the Hindus in Punjab and PEPSU sponsored a counter demand of Maha-Punjab consisting of Punjab, Pepsu and Himachal Pradesh. This created tension between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Both the parties represented their case before the State Reorganisation Commission which rejected the demand of Punjabi Speaking State and recommended the merger of PEPSU with Punjab. The Punjab Government placed a ban against shouting slogans and processions in connection with the Punjabi and the Hindi Speaking States demands. On 10th May 1956, the Akalis launched a Morcha against this ban. 

"Thousands of Akalis courted arrest and there was no end visible. The chief minister found himself in an impasse by the tactless handling of the situation by him and his Government. Finding no way out he bowed down before the Akalis and taking refuge in the 'great occasion of Mr. Nehru's triumphant return' from Russia he lifted the ban on slogans on 12th July 1956 without consulting his other colleagues, both in the Government and the Congress Party. During these two months the State had to spend ten lakhs of rupees to meet the situation and maintenance of law and order."

"The demand of the Hindus was untenable", says Sharma, "and indicated the expansionist tendencies of the commercial communities amongst them who felt the sphere of their activities contracted and restricted due to partition and loss of that territory."** It was but for the intervention

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** " " " " p.380.
of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru and the evolving of regional and zonal councils safeguarding the interests of the minorities, the Sikh problem would not have been solved.

A settlement between the representatives of the Akali Dal and the representatives of the Central Government was arrived at in April 1956. It is mainly based upon the 'Sachar Formula', accommodates PPSU Formula within, divides the State into two regions - Punjabi Speaking and Hindi Speaking, declares Punjabi as Regional language and lower official language for one region and giving a supreme position to Hindi in both regions. It may be said, at least logically speaking that under this formula, learning of Punjabi is a necessity only in the Punjabi Speaking Region but would be only an obligation upon the residents (who are also members of a bilingual State) or the Hindi speaking region.

Apart from giving a regional status to Punjabi, the Regional Formula grants a sufficient degree of political autonomy to the people of the two regions separately in as much as it provides for the formation of 'Regional Councils' and invests them with various recommendatory powers, which of course will normally be accepted by the cabinet. The main aim of the framers of the formula appears to satisfy once for all the virile Sikhs, although in minority but a healthy and fairly strong minority concentrated in the border State of India.
Soon after the settlement in April 1956 the Akali Dal abandoned Politics and decided to advise its members and supporters to join the Congress party for political activities. The Sikhs in Shromani Akali Dal joined the Congress and fought the recent elections on Congress tickets which proved a great success. PEPSU was merged in Punjab State in 1966.

At present the Sikhs are divided into Congressites, Independents, Communists and Schedule Caste Federation. The Congress has the largest number of the Sikhs into its fold, but the remaining parties too have no less number. Out of 18 Independent members in the Punjab 8 are Sikhs, out of 6 Communist members 5 are Sikhs and out of four Scheduled Caste Federation members two are Sikhs.