

*M. L. A. Singh*

# THE CASE FOR A NEW SIKH-HINDU PROVINCE IN THE PUNJAB



by

GYANI KARTAR SINGH,

M.L.A. (Punjab) and Member, Constituent Assembly of India.

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I. SPECIAL CLAIMS OF THE SIKHS IN THE PUNJAB.

**HISTORICAL** : — Punjab is not only the homeland of the Sikhs but also their holy land. All their Gurus were born or brought up here, and almost all their important places of worship are located in this province.

The founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469 A. D. It was a dark period in Indian history and Northern India was being ravaged by invaders from the North, and corruption and misrule had reduced the Punjab to a state of utter misery. Guru Nanak achieved a synthesis of Islamic social democracy with Hindu idealism and created a new social order. His mission of goodwill was carried on by his successors who further enriched cultural life in the Punjab. Guru Nanak also evolved Gurmukhi, and thus for the first time gave the Punjabi language a script. Guru Arjun built the temple at Amritsar which has become the metropolis of Sikh faith. Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and made the Sikhs a martial nation, who became the main stay of law and order in the Punjab after the disintegration of Mughal Power. Later on Maharaja Ranjit Singh founded a Sikh kingdom in the Punjab stretching into Kashmir and the North West Frontier of India. It was in this period that the tide of invasion was reversed and India began to invade the Pathan regions after many centuries. The Sikh State was lost

to the British in the last century, largely due to the treachery of its generals and superior diplomacy of the British. The tussle, however, was so grim that in the words of the son of the then Governor General "another such engagement would shake the British Empire to its very foundation."

#### CONTRIBUTION DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD :—

During this period the Sikhs have played an outstanding role in the history of the Indian Army, and even now they form about 10% of its total strength. The large number of Victoria Crosses won by them in the two World Wars gives an idea of their valour and chivalry.

Nor have the Sikhs lagged behind in the struggle for Indian freedom, in which they have taken a leading part with their characteristic zeal and fervour. The Ghadar Party of San Francisco provided many martyrs in the cause of freedom, and revolutionaries like Bhai Balwant Singh, Kartar Singh of Sarabha, Bhagat Singh and countless others adorn the pages of Indian history.

PLACE IN THE ECONOMY OF THE PROVINCE:— Sikhs are the best farmers in India and are in fact the only successful colonisers of new lands. By their hard work they have made the deserts of Montgomery and Lyallpore blossom into a peasant's paradise.

On account of their capacity for hard manual labour and aptitude for mechanical work, they make fine industrial workers, mechanics and artisans, and will in fact form the working class of the future Industrial India.

Educationally also they are a forward community, and their percentage of literacy in the Punjab is 17%, as compared with 16% of Hindus and 6% of Muslims. They have produced a larger number of able administrators, engineers and doctors.

The importance of the Sikhs, therefore in the economy of the Punjab is out of all proportion to their numbers.



POPULATION AND ITS DISTRIBUTION:— According to the census of 1941, the Sikh population in the Punjab is 50,69,240, out of which 37,57,401 are in British Punjab and 13,11,839 in the Punjab States. In the former, Sikhs are mainly concentrated in Central and Eastern Punjab in regions known as Majha, Malwa and Doaba. The Majha districts are Gurdaspur, Lahore and Amritsar; the Doaba districts are Jullundur and Hoshiarpur; and Malwa consists of Ferozepore, Ludhiana, Ambala and Sirsa Tahsil of Hissar district.

## II. MUSLIM CLAIM OF PAKISTAN

Punjab is being claimed as homeland by "Paks" who consider it the pivot of their North West Pakistan. The unfortunate part of this claim is that it is being made by people, many of whom have neither homes nor lands in the Punjab. Maps are being drawn arbitrarily by schemers who conveniently ignore the presence of Sikhs and Hindus in the Central, Eastern and Southern Punjab. In the fourteen districts of British Punjab, between Jumna and Ravi, which form a compact and contiguous area, the Sikhs, Hindus and other non-Muslims number 89,25,537 out of a total population of 1,43,96,805, i.e., 62%. Again, there are six Sikh States which have played a distinguished role in the defence of the country and to which Sikhs are bound by inseparable ties of religion and history. There are also small but numerous Hindu Rajput States in this region. Are they all to be handed over unceremoniously to the proposed Pakistan?

The Sikhs have already expressed their views emphatically and clearly on this point. At the All India Akali Conference held at Attari on 12th February 1940, they passed a resolution viewing with deep concern the growing endeavours of League Muslims to convert the Punjab into a part of Pakistan, and decided to resist such a demand by all possible means. They have since reiterated

this resolve on a number of occasions. The Hindus of this area, in particular of Ambala Division, have also taken a similar view in the matter and are pressing for the creation of a separate Haryana Province.

The position of the Sikhs in the Punjab is similar to that of Muslims in the whole of India. If Muslims cannot view with equanimity the Hindu domination in the Central Government, the Sikhs also cannot acquiesce in Muslim domination of the Punjab, particularly in Central, Eastern and Southern Punjab, where they, along with the Hindus, are in an overwhelming majority. The Sikhs have always expressed their opposition to the Muslim League claim for the vivisection of India on religious basis, but since the substance thereof has been conceded, in the form of Groups B and C, by the Cabinet Mission Plan of May, the 16th, the Sikhs along with the Hindus demand that the Central, Eastern and Southern portion of the Punjab, where they are in majority, be separated from the North and Western Punjab and constituted into a new Province, so as to give the Sikhs and Hindus of the Punjab a homeland where they will work out their destiny according to their genius. The proposal for the partition of the Punjab is a concrete demand which has the backing of the Sikh community, who desire that it should be implemented forthwith.

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### III. CABINET MISSION PLAN AND ITS GRAVE INJUSTICE TO THE SIKHS AND HINDUS OF PUNJAB

According to this plan there will be a three tier system of Government — the Centre, the Groups and the Provinces. Grouping has been devised to safeguard Muslim interests, and in the words of the Cabinet Mission "to remove the very genuine and acute anxiety of the Muslims that (in a unitary form of Federal Government)



they would find themselves subjected to a perpetual Hindu Rule, and to assure them a control in all matters vital to their culture, religion and economic or other interests". At the Union Centre, which will deal with all India subjects like defence, foreign affairs, and communications, Muslims have been given the following safeguard :

"Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities as well as a majority of all the members present and voting".

It will thus be observed that all possible safeguards have been provided for the Muslims.

No similar provisions, however, have been made to protect the interests of the Sikhs in the Punjab and Group 'B', though they have been recognised as one of the three main communities in India, having special interests in the Punjab. The result is that, though along with the Hindus they form an overwhelming majority in a compact and contiguous area, they will, if left as they are, always find themselves, both in the Province and Group B, subject to the "brute" majority rule of the Muslims.

It may be argued, that the non-Muslim interests will find a safeguard in the Union Centre wherein they will be in a permanent majority. But in the first place the Muslims, as pointed out above, have been given a virtual veto in all communal issues which may arise at the Centre, and secondly it will be the Groups and the Provincial Governments which will actually govern matters of vital interest to individuals and communities, viz, law and order, agriculture and industries, trade and commerce, local bodies, education, health, civil rights, etc. The Central subjects are but three in number, and do not affect the day to day life of most of the people.

Grouping under the Cabinet Mission Plan has religion for its basis. That is why N.W.F.P., Sind, Baluchistan and Punjab having different languages, economic interests, historical background and outlook have been grouped together. This being the case it is not understood why the Sikh-Hindu majority residing in a contiguous area in South-East Punjab has not been similarly treated.

Under the Cabinet Mission Plan, as understood by a large majority of the people of this country, it was provided that "Provinces should be free to form groups with executives and legislatures". If this had been the case, there was some hope that Groups B and C, with permanent Muslim majorities, would after all not be formed, as the N. W. F. P. and Assam had expressed their opposition to their formation. This hope, however, has now been set at nought by the latest declaration of the British Government made on 6th December 1946, that the decision to form Groups would not be taken by Provinces individually but by Sections as a whole by a bare majority vote. Not only this, the Sections, on the same principle, have been given the right to frame Provincial Constitutions as well. This in fact means, judging from the present temper of the Muslim League, a virtual dis-enfranchisement of all non-Muslim representatives in Sections B and C for purposes of framing Group or Provincial Constitutions.

The provision in the Cabinet Mission Plan enabling Provinces afterwards to opt out of Groups is illusory, because the Muslim League majorities in Sections B and C can so manoeuvre Provincial Constitutions as to make opting out impossible. Even this inadequate provision to opt out of Groups does not exist for areas in Punjab and Bengal, where non-Muslims are in a clear majority, for this right can only be exercised by Provinces as at present constituted.

It is thus clear that the interests of non-Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal have been ignored, and there are no prospects of a

fair deal being meted out to them in Sections B and C, as now proposed to be worked by the British Government. Their case qua these sections, it may be pointed out, is exactly similar, in fact stronger, than that of Muslims qua the whole of India, as they constitute 43% and 45% of the total population of the Punjab and Bengal, whereas the Muslims constitute only 24% of the total population of India.

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#### IV. SOLUTION.

The non-Muslims in the Punjab and Bengal should be granted the same autonomy which has been given to the Muslims in relation to the whole of India, viz., the right to form autonomous Groups in areas where they are in a majority. This means that contiguous areas in the Punjab and Bengal, where the non-Muslims are in a clear majority, should be formed into separate autonomous Provinces. Such a step was taken in Ireland in 1911 when the boundaries of Ulster were revised and the three Catholic Counties excluded from its area and joined to the Catholic South. A similar step in the case of Punjab and Bengal will be widely welcomed by their non-Muslim population and will not be contrary to their wishes or interests as stated by the Cabinet Mission. On the other hand, they will strongly resent and resist the imposition of Provincial and Group Constitutions framed against their wishes by Muslim majorities in Sections B and C. The proposed autonomous non-Muslim Provinces in the Punjab and Bengal should be given the freedom to join any of the Groups A, B or C.

It has been suggested in certain quarters that the contiguous areas in Punjab and Bengal, where the non-Muslims are in a majority, should be formed into sub-provinces, on the analogy of the sub-province of Croatia in pre-war Hungary and Ulster under the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The latter experiment was never tried and Croatia formed an uneasy partner of pre-war Hungary. Moreover, there are three objections to this proposal. Firstly, the sub-provinces will be

subject to the Muslim majorities of Punjab and Bengal. Secondly, in the proposed three tier system of Indian Government, they will form the fourth tier and, after the apportionment of Central, Group and Provincial subjects, will hardly have any important subjects left with them and will thus be no better than glorified local bodies. It may here be mentioned that the sub-provinces of Croatia and Ulster formed the third tiers in their systems of Government and, therefore, had powers and functions similar to those enjoyed or to be entrusted to Provincial Governments. Thirdly, the sub-provinces in Bengal and Punjab, will not have the right to opt out of their respective Groups under the Cabinet Mission Plan of May, the 16th. This is, therefore, not a practical or satisfactory solution.

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#### V. THE PROPOSED PROVINCE IN THE PUNJAB.

This will consist of Ambala and Jullundur Divisions and Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore Districts. The total population of the proposed Province, according to the census of 1941, will be 144 lakhs, of which 62% will be non-Muslims, mainly consisting of Sikh and Hindu Jats, who are closely akin to each other in race and culture. The composition of the population, by communities, will be 19% Sikhs, 38% Muslims and 43% Hindus and others. No single community, therefore, will be in an absolute majority and in a position to dominate the rest. Each will have an effective voice in the administration of the proposed Province. The position of the Sikhs will be further improved, if the Sikh States decide to coalesce with it at a later stage.

In economic and financial resources also, the proposed Province will be self-sufficient and compare well with many of the existing Provinces of India. It will include within its boundaries the rich and fertile tracts of Majha, Malwa, Doaba, and the Ambala Division with its bright future prospects when the Bhakra Dam Scheme materialises. It will also contain important commercial and industrial centres like Lahore, Amritsar, Jullundur and Ludhiana.

## VI. SIKH AND HINDU MINORITIES IN NORTH WEST PUNJAB.

The interests of these minorities, particularly of Lyallpur, Montgomery, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura and Rawalpindi districts, have not been forgotten. Nor has the question of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib and other Gurdwaras and places of worship been overlooked. The proposed Sikh-Hindu Province will be a bulwark of strength to them, and there are certain other proposals in view which will satisfactorily solve their problem, of which the writer is fully conscious.

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## VII. CONCLUSION.

It is strongly urged that steps should be taken forthwith to form the proposed autonomous Sikh-Hindu Province in the Punjab, to allay the genuine fears and apprehensions of the large non-Muslim population residing in this area.

If this just demand is not conceded, it will mean the ruin of the Hindu martial, as well as commercial, classes under the permanent domination of those who believe in their being a separate nation. Similarly the Sikhs, 95% of whose world population resides in the Punjab, will become politically extinct. A people, who not a hundred years ago, were rulers of this land, would become subservient to those whom they had conquered and ruled. This is unjust, unfair and preposterous and shall not be permitted. Therefore :

By the right of self determination,

By the right of majority,

By the inherent right of a culturally homogeneous people to live their own life,

the division of the Punjab is absolutely essential.

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## APPENDIX — I.

*Area and population of the fourteen districts of Eastern and Central Punjab  
(between Jumna and Ravi) according to the Census of 1941.*

Division or District.	Area (Sq. miles)	Total population.	Hindus.	Muslims.	Christians.	Sikhs.	Others.
<i>AMBALA Div.</i>							
Hissar	5,213	10,06,709	6,52,676	2,85,208	1,292	60,731	6,802
Rohtak	2,246	9,56,399	7,80,474	1,66,569	1,043	1,466	6,847
Gurgaon	2,234	8,51,458	5,60,498	2,85,992	1,673	637	2,658
Karnal	3,126	9,94,575	6,66,036	3,04,346	1,249	19,887	3,057
Ambala	1,851	8,47,745	4,10,333	2,68,999	6,065	1,56,543	5,805
Simla	80	38,576	29,466	7,022	934	1,032	122
<i>JULLUNDUR Div.</i>							
Kangra	9,979	8,99,377	8,38,479	43,249	788	4,809	12,052
Hoshiarpur	2,195	11,70,323	4,68,225	3,80,759	6,165	1,98,194	1,16,980
Jullundur	1,334	11,27,190	1,98,160	5,09,804	6,233	2,98,741	1,14,252
Ludhiana	1,339	8,18,615	1,66,678	3,02,482	1,913	3,41,175	6,367
Ferozepore	4,085	14,23,076	2,79,260	6,41,448	12,607	4,79,486	10,275
<i>LAHORE Div.</i>							
Amritsar	1,572	14,13,876	2,16,778	6,57,695	25,973	5,10,845	2,585
Lahore	2,595	16,95,375	2,84,351	10,27,772	70,147	3,10,646	2,459
Gurdaspur	1,846	11,53,511	2,83,192	5,89,923	51,522	2,21,261	7,613
Total	39,695	1,43,96,805	58,34,606	54,71,268	1,87,604	26,03,453	2,97,874

## APPENDIX—II

*Population of the Punjab States according to the Census of 1941.*

State	Total Population.	Hindus.	Muslims.	Christians.	Sikhs.	Others.
Dujana	30,666	23,727	6,939	...	...	...
Pataudi	21,520	17,728	3,655	9	...	128
Kalsia	67,393	29,866	25,049	55	12,135	188
Loharu	27,892	23,923	3,960	2	7	...
Sirmoor	1,56,026	1,46,199	7,374	38	2,334	81
Bilaspur	1,10,336	1,08,375	1,498	7	453	3
Mandi	2,32,593	2,27,463	4,328	11	583	208
Suket	71,092	69,974	884	...	234	...
Kapurthala	3,78,380	61,546	2,13,754	1,667	88,350	13,063
Malerkotla	88,109	23,482	33,881	116	30,320	310
Faridkot	1,99,283	21,814	61,352	247	1,15,070	800
Chamba	1,68,908	1,55,910	12,318	190	107	383
Patiala	19,36,259	5,97,488	4,36,539	1,592	8,96,021	4,619
Jind	3,61,812	2,68,355	50,972	161	40,981	1,343
Nabha	3,40,044	1,46,518	70,373	221	1,22,451	481
Punjab Hill States } }	3,59,520	3,45,716	10,812	161	2,693	138
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,49,833</b>	<b>22,68,084</b>	<b>9,43,688</b>	<b>4,477</b>	<b>13,11,839</b>	<b>21,745</b>

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