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THE DOWNFALL OF SIROMANI AKALI DAL AND ITS ALLIANCE WITH BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY FOR NEW POLITICAL PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the decline of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and its alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Punjab politics. It highlights the historical background of the SAD, its emergence as a powerful regional party representing the Sikh community and its alliance with the BJP and the BSP. The article also discusses the electoral performance of the Akali-BSP alliance, the issues that led to the break-up of the alliance, and the SAD's alliance with the BJP as result of its victory in the Punjab assembly elections. Overall, it provides an insight into the journey, alliances and significance of SAD in Punjab politics.



KEYWORDS: Punjab, Alliance, SAD, BJP, BSP, Decline, Regional Party, Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, AAP, Factionalism, Sikhs, Dalit and Sri Akal Takht.

INTRODUCTION

It is very important to have political parties in a democracy. The real identity of democracy lies in the existence of the political parties. Common citizens of any country consider democracy as equal to political parties. Although the less educated citizens of the country may not know anything about their constitution and the nature of Government but they must know something about political parties. It is common for members of a party to hold similar views about politics, but parties tend to pursue specific ideological or policy goals. Political parties have become a major part of the politics of almost every country as modern party organizations have developed and spread around the world over the past few centuries. It would be very rare if a country had no political party. A political party is an organization that puts up candidates to contest elections in a particular country and comes together to form a government and hold power. They agree on certain policies and programs for society aimed at promoting collective welfare. Political parties are motivated by ideological goals such as liberal, conservative, nationalist, Marxist, rightist, and socialist. In a democracy that follows a Parliamentary system in India, there are two types of political parties. There are Nationwide parties also known as 'National parties'. These parties have units in different states but generally all these units follow the same policies, programs and strategy which are decided at the national level. Others are parties that exist only in one territory/state among the federal units.¹

Let's also talk a little about how regional parties started in India. regional parties with strong social and emotional bases in their communities have been involved in Indian politics since before independence. Territorial parties are parties that generally operate within a limited geographic area of

a state. It is also said that regional parties are influenced by narrow interests and are broadly opposed to national parties. Broadly speaking, regional parties fall into two main categories. The first are parties based on traditional regional ethnicity or culture, such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Bihar, Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh, Assam Gana Parishad in Assam, Jammu- National Conference in Kashmir and tribal community parties in North East. Other such parties are formed by breakaways from the Congress or various groups. These parties came into existence for the purpose of time but temporarily existed and succeeded and have been accepted as important regional parties in the initial phase. These include Bharatiya Kranti Dal in Uttar Pradesh, Bangla Congress in West Bengal, Kerala Congress in Kerala, Utkal Congress in Odisha, and Telangana Praja Samiti in Andhra Pradesh etc. However, as a result of their original nature and purpose, their existence soon ceases. But the first of these types of parties are playing an important role in the Indian political system.²

The Shiromani Akali Dal Party is also one of them. This party is one of the oldest regional parties in India which was founded on 14 December 1920 on the ideology of fusion of religion and politics with the aim of protecting and promoting the interests of Sikhs. Akali Dal is popularly known as Shiromani Akali Dal and more specifically Akali Dal (Badal) to the voters of Punjab. This party has been the main driver of Punjab politics since its inception.³ This party has been protecting the Sikh religious values and the political and socio-economic interest of the community.

CENTRAL SIKH LEAGUE

If we talk about the roots of Shiromani Akali Dal, we can find it from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, the conflict between the Sikhs of Punjab and the British increased. The aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the subsequent use of repressive measures by the British to quell civil unrest after the First World War fueled feelings of betrayal. Due to which the consciousness among the Sikhs rose as fast. Several Sikh newspapers such as the "Loyal Gazette" and the "Punjabi Darpan" began to write and suggest that the Sikhs were far behind the Hindus and even behind the Muslims in terms of political representation because of the representation of their Nation compared to the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. They have no political party of their own to do so.⁴ The Sikhs started looking for a militant organization of their own to air their grievances and protect their economic and political interests, which in December 1919 was called 'The Central Sikh League'.

The Central Sikh League was inaugurated on 29 December 1919 at the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League in Amritsar. Many prominent Congress leaders including Gandhi participated in this meeting. It was dominated by middle class educated Sikhs. The first president of the League was Sardar Bahadur Gajjan Singh who represented moderate political views. The leadership soon changed and at its second session at Lahore in October 1920, Baba Kharak Singh, an ardent nationalist, was elected president. The objectives of the Central Sikh League, according to its new constitution adopted on 22 July 1921, were to achieve Swaraj (self-government for the country) by legitimate, peaceful and constitutional means and promote sectarian unity, patriotism and public spirit among the Sikhs. To promote and increase the economic viewers of the development sector, religion and politics and their political, moral and organization. It began working in close collaboration with the Indian National Congress. The Central Sikh League, however, could not involve the entire Sikh community in politics. A growing concern for reforms in the management of historic Sikh shrines led to public mobilization. The Gurudwaras were in the hands of government-supporting Mahants at that time. Therefore, in November 1920, the Central Sikh League initiated the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁵ All these events gave rise to the Shiromani Akali Dal, which established itself as a religion-political body of the community and dominated Sikh politics.

The main objective of the Akali Dal was to train volunteers so that the Mahants could be removed from the Gurudwaras and then take responsibility for their upkeep. The movement was mainly based on Congress methods and forms and its method was direct action through non-violent

means. When the British government openly favored the self-interested Mahants, the Akali leadership fell into the hands of more aggressive people. Mahants could not last long before the opposition of the Alkalis. They agreed to surrender the Gurudwaras and become paid *Granthis* (custodians of the scripture or scripture readers), but some resisted and violently clung to their hereditary properties. On 25 January 1921, a group of Gurdwara reformers was attacked at Tarn Taran in which two Akali were killed. Finally the Mahants were thrown out of the Gurudwaras and the Gurudwaras came under the Shiromani Committee Management.

The Akali leaders blamed the colonial rule for the religious corruption and especially the economic depression of the peasants. It formed an anti-government peasant movement in association with the Indian National Congress. The Akali Dal emerged institutionally as a religion-political group led by middle-class businessmen whose main concern was to protect Sikh interests and especially to gain greater representation in the legislative assemblies. The Akali Dal sometimes elected the Legislative Assembly in opposition to the Congress and worked for reservation of Sikhs in nominated institutions. It strongly opposed Pakistan's demand as it would have led to the partition of Punjab. At the same time, there was a fear of their effective political power falling into the hands of the Muslims. At the time of partition, the parties incited religious sentiments on a large scale. When India gained independence, political consciousness had certainly emerged among the Sikhs.⁶

ROLE OF SHIROMANI AKALI DAL IN ELECTIONS

The Shiromani Akali Dal emerged as a powerful party representing the interests of Punjabis and Punjabiats in general over the last several decades. For Shiromani Akali Dal, reaching out to the Dalits and Hindus of Punjab has been an important part of their election strategy. It has traditionally been supported by the Jat Sikhs as the leading political party in Punjab; the Akali Dal has successfully led the Sikhs in all movements, religious or political, as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was established in 1925, starting with the Sikh Gurdwara Movement (1920-1925). Sikh Struggle to Create Punjabi State and Own State after Partition, Akali Morcha against Emergency (1975-1977) Akali leaders has been raising Sikh issues from Prime Minister Nehru to Modi.⁷ The Akali Dal in its various incarnations has stood firm on its claim to protect the interests of the Sikhs of Punjab.

In 1952, India held its first general elections after Independence in which Punjab and PEPSU won a total of 186 assembly seats. Out of these, Congress won 122 seats with 34.8 percent votes and Akali Dal won 33 seats with 14.7 percent votes. Communist Party of India got 6 seats, Jan Sangh 6 seats and others 21 seats. Shiromani Akali Dal seats were less because they did not field their candidates in Hindi speaking areas. But in the Punjabi speaking region the results were in favor of Akali Dal and Congress

Table 1: Shows the seats won by the political parties in the 1952 Vidhan Sabha Elections

Participated Political Party	Total Seats in Vidhan Sabha	Percentage of Votes
Congress	122	34.8
Akali Dal	33	14.7
Communist Party of India	6	5.3
Jan Sangh	6	5
Others/ Independents	21	40.2
Total	188	

After a poor performance in the 1952 assembly elections, Akali Dal regained control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Committee in December 1952 in a compromise with other factions opposed to the Congress. The Shiromani Akali Dal contested the 1954 SGPC elections on the following issues:

- Removal of discrimination against Sikhs,
- Creation of a Punjabi state
- Sikh should be right of expression and opinion on Gurdwara issues.

The election results gave a huge boost to the party. Akali Dal contested 112 out of 132 seats and won all of them.⁸

The partition and influx of refugees in post-independence Punjab intensified competition between the Hindu and Sikh middle classes. Rural Sikhs joined the Congress through efforts to develop agriculture and compromise with landlords. Businessmen and professionals competed with the established Hindus to demand government policies in their favor but failed. Then they demanded a Sikh majority state called Punjabi Suba. The Akali Dal leadership of the city held a support rally for agriculture, especially with the help of religious identity. Initially rural Sikhs supported the Congress, but in the 1960s, its policies hurt the interests of the zamindars, causing rural Sikh voters to assemble to the Akali Dal. The Green revolution and class struggle intensified in rural areas, prompting rural Sikhs, especially Jats, to support the Akali Dal. Akali Dal gained more rural support after the 1962 elections. After that, the Akali Dal was divided into factions of Sant Fateh Singh and Tara Singh. The landlord class accused the Congress of undermining their interests and supported the decentralization of power demanded by the Akali Dal to the Punjabi Suba. After Nehru's death in 1964, the weakened central leadership sought regional support and, impressed by the role of Punjabis in the 1965 war with Pakistan, the central Congress leadership accepted this demand in November 1966 and made it a Punjabi-speaking state.⁹

After the reorganization of Punjab, there were speculations in the newspapers and by some observers that the Akali Dal would once again leave politics and focus on religious affairs and the Shiromani Committee. However, Sant Fateh Singh announced that the Akali Dal will not be dissolved. It would continue to protect the rights and privileges of the Sikhs and try to implement its economic program. Even after the reorganization of Punjab, there were continuous administrative and political divisions with Punjab. Punjab experienced its first coalition in the 1967 elections when the Akali Dal entered a multi-party government comprising the Akali Dal, Jan Sangh, CPI, Republican Party, and Sanyukta Samajwadi Party. This alliance was formed against the Congress party also known as United Front and was headed by Justice Gurnam Singh. This alliance soon faced many difficulties. This was followed by the 1969 elections in Punjab in which the Akali Dal won 43 seats, the Congress 38, the Jan Sangh 8, CPI-4, CPI (M)) 2, and Janata Party 1. Shiromani Akali Dal and Jan Sangh formed the government in alliance. But later the relationship between the two alliance partners became strained over the new language policy in the state. The Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh could not agree on the issue of Chandigarh and language due to Chief Minister Gurnam Singh resigned and Parkash Singh Badal was made the next Chief Minister from 27 March 1970 to 14 June 1971.¹⁰

In 1971, the Indian Parliament elections were held in which Shiromani Akali Dal won only one seat out of 13 seats in Punjab. After this in 1972 Punjab Assembly elections were held in which the Shiromani Akali Dal got a crushing defeat and Giani Zail Singh of the Congress Party became the Chief Minister of Punjab. After this defeat, the Akali Dal appointed a sub-committee on 11 December 1972 to consider the situation in which Surjit Singh Barnala, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Jeevan Singh Umranangal, Gurmeet Singh, Dr. Bhagat Singh, Balwant Singh, Gyan Singh Radewala, Amar Singh Ambalvi, Prem Singh Lalpura, Jaswinder Singh Brar were present. The first meeting of this committee was held at Amritsar. After this the venue of the meeting was shifted to Chandigarh where the committee completed its work in ten consecutive meetings. This document was unanimously adopted by the Working Committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal in a meeting held at Anandpur Sahib on 16-17 October 1973, which is also known as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The resolution included both religious and political issues. It called for the recognition of Sikhism as a separate religion from Hinduism. It also demanded that power be generally devolved from the center to the state governments and greater autonomy for Punjab.

In this resolution, Shiromani Akali Dal claims to be the party of all Sikhs and embodies the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh community and is fully entitled to its representation. The party demanded structural arrangements in which Sikhs would have a prominent role in the governance of the state and where the voice of the Khalsa would be raised. It therefore called for the reorganization of the central government's powers, which are limited to defence, foreign affairs and communications. This resolution

contained the party's economic ideology as well as regional demands. An unpublished Punjabi version of the resolution refers to the Sikhs as a nation. The way in which these two main issues were framed, elaborated and interpreted, however, raised different issues of concern and debate.¹¹ None of the serious newspapers of Punjab considered it newsworthy. Before discussing the intricacies of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, we may discuss the role of Shiromani Akali Dal till the 1977 elections after which the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was revived.

Another dispute arose between the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh over not establishing the Arya Samaj University at Jalandhar. Finally Jan Sangh said that we walk out from the alliance. In the 1977 elections, the Akali again formed an alliance with the Janata Dal, which broke up shortly after due to the Akali Sant Nirankari conflict. Along with this, factionalism within the Akali Dal also started between the Badal and Tohra-Talwandi factions. In the 1980 elections, the Congress won a clear majority in 63 seats while the Akali Dal won 37 seats.

After 1984, nationalism in the guise of Hindutva took a new form in Indian politics. The anti-separatist sentiments transformed into Akali Dal or even anti-Sikh sentiments. Akali Dal came to be seen as a supporter of separatism. No other political party wanted to support separatism, so all political parties stayed away from the Akali Dal. This experience of isolation had a depressing effect on the Akali Dal leadership. Operation Blue Star gave the Akali Dal an absolute majority of the Sikhs of Punjab.¹² The Sikh voters of Punjab overwhelmingly voted against the Congress in the 1985 elections, resulting in 32 seats for the Congress, 73 seats for the Akali Dal and 4 seats for the BJP. The Akali Dal formed its government without any outside support and remained in power until 1987, after which President's rule was imposed on Punjab due to terrorism.

Rise of Akali Dal under the leadership of Badal

In the period of 1994, Akali Dal began to advance under the leadership of Badal. While appreciating Badal long-term stand, Punjab's protector Kuldeep Nayar wrote for the first time in many years, a Sikh leader has tried to bring the political debate from the forum of Gurdwaras to the public forum. In May 1994, the by-elections of two assembly constituencies of Nakodar and Ajnala were held in which Badal worked actively. In Nakodar, the ruling Congress party won by a narrow margin, but in Ajnala, the Akali Dal candidate won by a margin of more than 10,000 votes.¹³ Along with this, after winning the Ajnala by-election, Badal announced that he is ready to form a common front with the opposition parties, including the BJP, to defeat the Congress. In view of the decision in favor of Akali Dal and people's preference for peace, Akali leaders of different factions have once again started thinking about their position. On Baisakhi day, 13 April 1995, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht announced the formation of the Unified Akali Dal with Parkash Singh Badal as its President. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Surjit Singh Barnala, Captain Amarinder Singh gathered under the leadership of Parkash Singh Badal. In June 1995, the Unified Akali Dal won a landslide victory in the Vidhan Sabha by-elections in Giddarbha and the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee elections. 1996 Lok Sabha and SGPC elections

The Shiromani Akali Dal has shown interest in forming an alliance with the BJP and the BSP to defeat the Congress. Finally, the Akali Dal entered into an alliance with the Buhujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the 1996 general elections. Akali Dal contested in 9 seats and BSP in 4 seats. This alliance won 11 out of 13 seats¹⁴ in which Akali Dal won 8 seats in which it got 28.72 percent votes and BSP got 3 seats 9.35 percent votes.

Table 2: Position of Akali Dal and BSP Alliance in 1996 Lok Sabha Elections

Party	Seats of Contested	Seats of Win	Percentage of Votes
SAD	9	8	28.72
BSP	4	3	9.35
Congress	13	2	35.1
BJP	6	0	6.48

The Akali Dal offered unconditional support to the BJP after winning the elections at the Centre, which led to BSP supreme Babu Kanshi Ram expressing displeasure with Parkash Singh Badal. "BSP chief Babu Kanshi Ram said that Badal announced unconditional support to the BJP without any consultation or briefing, which is wrong according to the alliance. Accusing Babu Kanshi Ram on Badal, he said that Badal has cheated with Panth, Punjab and Dalits by declaring unconditional support.¹⁵ After this, Babu Kanshi Ram formed an alliance with the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, which broke the alliance of BSP and Shiromani Akali Dal. The Akali Dal accused the BSP of harming the movement for social justice by allying itself with the anti-minority, anti-Dalits and anti-national Congress.¹⁶

After breaking the accord with the BSP, the SAD realizing the importance of the alliance and entered into an alliance with the BJP. The SAD+ BJP alliance contested the elections on 7 February 1997 and won 93 seats in the 117 member assembly. SAD won 75 out of 92 seats by securing 37.64 percent votes. BJP won 18 out of 22 seats with 8.33 percent votes. The BJP was successful in capturing Hindu votes that previously went to the Congress. Along with this, BJP also won a large share of Sikh votes. The SAD received overwhelming response in both rural and semi-rural constituencies and the BJP fared well in urban and semi-urban constituencies in all three regions of Punjab.¹⁷ After this, the alliance formed under personal and political needs to survive in Punjab politics, soon gained a position in the center as well. The long dream of the SAD leadership to give a stable and strong government in Punjab came true after this alliance came to light. The SAD political claims shifted from featuring religious identity and Sikh rights to creating a secular identity where 'Punjabi identity' gave prominence to 'Sikh identity'.¹⁸

Table 3: Position of SAD+BJP in 1997 Punjab Assembly Elections

Party	Seat Contest	Seat Succeed	Percentage of Votes
Congress	105	14	26.59
SAD	92	75	37.64
BJP	22	18	8.33

Parkash Singh Badal has become the Chief Minister of Punjab for the third time leading the SAD-BJP government. The alliance further strengthened its position in the February 1998 parliamentary elections. It was a clean sweep victory for the alliance. SAD won all the eight seats with 33 percent votes and BJP won three seats with 12 percent votes. The remaining two seats were jointly won by I.K. Gujral (JD) in Jalandhar and Satnam Singh Kainth Bahujan Samaj Morcha. The 1998 Lok Sabha elections were the biggest victory of the Akali Dal so far. It then joined Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA government.¹⁹ Within sectarian politics, Parkash Singh Badal tried to dominate the party organizational structure and secular politics and emerge as the supreme and sole center of power.²⁰ He nominated his son Sukhbir Singh Badal to represent the Akali Dal in the central ministry of the NDA government. Many senior leaders within the party also opposed it, but they did not appear before Parkash Singh Badal.

In the 2002 Punjab Assembly elections, SAD and BJP faced defeat. The Congress formed an alliance with the CPI and won 63 seats with 38.2 percent votes. While the SAD-BJP alliance managed to win only 44 seats with 36.4 percent votes. Several reasons emerged for the defeat of the SAD-BJP alliance such as corruption, political revenge, mismanagement, misuse of police and bureaucracy.²¹ Apart from this, internal factionalism in the SAD became an important factor. The radical factions of the Akali Dal even accused Parkash Singh Badal of violating the order and mocking the Sikh religious institutions. He even said that Badal has made the Akali leadership a 'puppet of the BJP'. Due to this Shiromani Akali Dal was divided between Badal and Tohra. Due to the split between the Akali, the Akali-BJP alliance faced defeat.²²

In the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the SAD-BJP won a landslide victory. With this victory, the morale of both the parties increased. Due to this victory, the Akali Dal and the BJP again succeeded in forming their own government in Punjab in the 2007 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. The Shiromani Akali Dal crushed many of its opponents in sectarian politics. Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra biggest opponent of the Badal, died in March 2004 which paved the way for victory for Akali Dal Badal. Now

there was no big obstacle in the way of Shiromani Akali Dal. There was no stopping Badal from taking complete control over the SGPC. The SAD-BJP alliance fought the elections on the slogan of Punjabi unity and development to gain power. Along with this, Punjabi Hindus were encouraged to join the Akali Dal and a large number of Hindus were given tickets by the Akali Dal. Thus Akali gained access to Hindu voters and many Punjabi-Hindus from urban towns joined the Akali Dal.²³ Along with this, Sardar Parkash Singh Badal handed over the command of 2007 Vidhan Sabha elections to his son Sukhbir Singh Badal. The SAD-BJP alliance led by Sardar Parkash Singh Badal won 68 seats out of 117 seats in which the Shiromani Akali Dal won 49 seats with a total of 37.19 percent of the votes and the BJP got 19 seats with 8.28 percent of the votes.

Table 4: Position of SAD-BJP in 2007 Punjab Assembly Elections

Political Party	Seats Fight	Triumph	Vote Percentage
SAD	94	49	37.19
BJP	23	19	8.28
Congress	117	44	40.94

In the 2012 assembly elections, the Congress once again failed to gain the confidence of the voters. Although this happened due to the lack of coordination between the state and national level leadership within the Congress party, the feudal and arrogant behavior of Captain Amarinder Singh and Partap Singh Bajwa, factionalism within the party, rebel and disaffected candidates etc. Akali Dal took full advantage of this factionalism of Congress. In the 2012 Punjab Assembly elections, not only did the elections strengthen the state-level party of the Akali Dal, but also saw the emergence of a 'new' crop of leaders within the party such as the leadership of Sukhbir Singh Badal and Bikram Singh Majithia.²⁴ The new leadership of Akali Dal assured to continue the schemes like free electricity, social security schemes, Ata-Dal scheme, and bicycles for School girls etc. Parkash Singh Badal wanted to give the reins of Akali Dal to his son Sukhbir Singh Badal. But with this decision of Badal, there was a lot of opposition within the party. Along with this, Badal also had to face rebellion and conflict within the family. After a while, Badal nephew Manpreet Singh Badal resigned from the leadership of the party. Manpreet Singh Badal formed his new party People's Party of Punjab (PPP). In a few days, Manpreet Singh Badal got angry Akali leaders from all over Punjab to join his party. It seemed that PPP was getting stronger than Akali Dal. But Parkash Singh Badal, playing his political strategy, visited the entire Punjab and brought back all the Akali leaders who had joined the PPP to the Akali Dal. Parkash Singh Badal strengthened Sukhbir Singh Badal in the 2012 Vidhan Sabha elections in a very clever way. The Akali Dal increased its number of seats from 49 in 2007 to 56 in 2012, while its partner BJP's tally fell from 19 in 2007 to 12. Despite losing the 2009 parliamentary elections, the Akali Dal managed to win the 2012 assembly elections.

Table 5: Elections Results, 2012 Assembly Election

Name of Party	Contested Seats	Won Seats	Change	Vote Percentage
Congress	117	46	+2	40.09
SAD	97	56	+7	34.73
BJP	23	12	-7	7.18
BSP	117	0	0	4.29

Towards Decline of SAD in 2014 Parliamentary Elections and Rise of the AAP

The voters of Punjab accepted the SAD-BJP alliance as the flag bearer of the dream of 'Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiat' while they looked for another party to bring back this lost growth of Punjab's development and economy. In the 2012 assembly elections, the youth were shown dreams of a development project but their hope was soon dashed. The Shiromani Akali Dal remained engaged in

nepotism and money making politics and the Congress was more engaged in personal rivalries. Instead of solving the agrarian crisis, stagnant economy and youth issues, they were busy blaming to each other.

The voters of Punjab were now fed up with these two parties. They wanted to see a third alternative and they saw this alternative in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The AAP Party, a new wave of hope for alternative politics, began to emerge. Around 2011-12, the 'Arab Spring' movement emerged in the Arab countries which established democratic structures throughout the Arab countries. Somewhere the 'Arab Spring' movement also acted as a trigger in the rise of AAP. Less than a year after the birth of the AAP, born out of Anna Hazare movement,²⁵ AAP established its reputation as an alternative political force riding on the discontent and aspirations of the people of India. AAP entered Punjab with a promise not to 'do politics' but to 'change politics' and not to do politics but to practice people's policy. Its main focus is on "alternative politics based on the need for change in political discourse".²

*Yogendra Yadav said: It is not about governing better than others but it is about changing the paradigm of governance with a new model of democracy and development. ... It is not just about winning the political game but about changing the rules of the game. It's not just about creating a new party but a new kind of party. ... It is about creating a democratic, transparent and accountable instrument for democratic politics.*²⁶

These things of AAP party settled in the minds of the people of Punjab. These words of the AAP party brought down the Akali Dal to a great extent, which the Akali Dal has not been able to do even till now. The result of all this was that the AAP party managed to win more seats than the Akali Dal in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The AAP won 4 seats with 24.47 percent vote share, Congress won 3 seats with 33 percent vote share and Akali Dal won 4 seats with 26.4 percent votes. The BJP managed to win only two seats with 8.70 percent votes when Narendra Modi was storming across the country. Thus, the vote share of Akali Dal decreased from 33.85 percent in 2009 to 26.4 percent in 2014.²⁷ The AAP got a strong lead in 33 of the 117 assembly constituencies, 29 of which were in the Malwa region of Punjab, which was hitherto considered an Akali Dal-dominated region.

After this, the Akali-BJP alliance suffered a heavy loss for the 2017 assembly elections. In these elections, a new political force, the Aam Aadmi Party, directly contested the two traditional opposition parties, the Akali-BJP and the Congress. But in this election, Congress made a great comeback by winning 77 seats. Akali Dal won only 15 seats and BJP only 3 seats and did not even become the opposition party.²⁸ AAP played the role of opposition by winning 20 seats. For the 2022 assembly elections, the Akali Dal was reduced to only 3 seats.

The Reasons for Downfall of Shiromani Akali Dal

Since 2014, the Akali Dal is facing an existential crisis. There was a time when the Akali Dal was called a Panthak party and a party in favor of the Sikhs of Punjab. Today this party has lost its base due to these two things. If we analyze the primary reason for the downfall of the Akali Dal, why did the vote bank of the Akali Dal decrease in Punjab and why did the people become dissatisfied with it? So the first important reason comes from the Dera Sacha Sauda, for the sake of saving which the Akali Dal loses its balance, which is described below.

1. Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Incidents of Desecration of Guru Granth Sahib

The first reason for the downfall of the Akali Dal was the Dera Sacha Sauda dispute. This is a controversy that has shaken the foundations of the Akali Dal. Due to this controversy, the Akali Dal had to face a crushing defeat in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections of 2017 and 2022. The dispute between Dera Sacha Sauda and Sikhs began on 13 May 2007 when Dera Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh imitated the Sikh ritual of Khande Da Pahul, also known as Jaam-e-Ruhani, at Salabatpura village in Bathinda district. After this Jam-Eruhani followers were served as Guru Gobind Singh Ji has decorated the five beloved ones at Anandpur Sahib in 1699. He also dressed like Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and tied a turban. Dera Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim pictures wearing Guru Gobind Singh Ji costumes were published in various newspapers, seeing which the Sikh community expressed a sharp reaction. In this protest, the Sikhs come to the streets. Tarlochan Singh, a former member of the National Commission for Minorities and member of the Rajya Sabha, warned that Sikhs being an emotional community could react very badly to the Dera Chief's disgraceful act. Dal Khalsa General Secretary Kanwar Pal Singh and Damdami Taksal Spokesperson Bhai Mohakam Singh issued a strict warning to the Dera chief against playing with Sikh sentiments and making fun of the principles, traditions and customs of Sikhism.²⁹ He described Ram Rahim's action as a direct attack on Sikhism which the Dera chief did at the behest of Hindu-dominated central agencies. A Sarbat Khalsa is called by the Sikhs on the land of Damdama Sahib. After this, the conflict between the Sikhs and Dera lovers increases, even the camps of the Dera lovers are besieged. Many Sikh protestors also die. The Punjab government has to provide security to these camps. Then this matter went to Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar of Akal Takht. Acting on it, he appealed to the entire Sikh community to do a social boycott of Dera lovers.



The Akali Dal formed a new government in 2007. They already had a political grudge with Baba Ram Rahim because in the 2002 and 2007 Punjab assembly elections Baba Ram Rahim had openly supported to the Congress due to which the Akali Dal was defeated in about 21 assembly constituencies in the Malwa region.³⁰ Now the neck of Baba Ram Rahim comes in the hands of the Akali Dal government which they want to take full advantage. Under this, the Akali Dal government filed a complaint against Baba Ram Rahim from its own leadership man Rajinder Singh Sidhu for inciting the sentiments of the Sikhs at Kotwali police station, Bathinda. Based on the statement of the complainant, a case was registered against Baba Ram Rahim. After this, the Dera headquarters of Dera Sirsa released a CD in front of the media in which Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and his son Sukhbir Singh Badal were seen seeking the blessings of the Dera Chief for the votes. Now this dispute has taken a political form. Akali Dal came under suspicion for the sake of few votes.³¹

Due to pressure from BJP and RSS and political compulsions, Parkash Singh Badal had to adopt a soft attitude towards Dera because BJP gets a large number of votes from Dera Sirsa in Haryana state. Because of this, Baba Ram Rahim has political ties with the BJP and in Punjab; the BJP is a partner in the Akali Dal government. But Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee President Avtar Singh Makkar hardened his stand against Dera Sacha Sauda. He demanded the closure of all Dera branches in Punjab. Makkar declared that Sikhs can make any sacrifice to prevent any attempt to desecrate Sikh Gurus, Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh institutions. Makkar's radical stance put Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal in a very uncomfortable position. The CM Badal pulls Makkar to demand ban on Dera branches in Punjab and said him to retract statement.³² The CM Badal under pressure from BJP said that the Akali-BJP government is committed to protecting the lives and property of all citizens and their government is committed to protecting the Deras in Punjab.

The BJP wanted to solve the issue of Baba Ram Rahim in any way because BJP was afraid of losing it in 2009 Lok Sabha elections by making it more threatening but Akali Dal was busy dragging

this issue more and more. On 27 May 2007, the day the ultimatum to close the Dera branches in Punjab was to expire; the Dera chief issued an apology through a press note. The press note said, 'There is no question of imitating Guru Gobind Singh as we could never think of such a thing in the larger interest of humanity, we apologize to the great spiritual Guru Gobind Singh Ji'. But the Sikh organizations and community were still not satisfied as they objected that Ram Rahim did not apologize to the Sikh community. Bhai Mohakam Singh, the spokesperson of Damdami Taksal, said that the way the Dera chief has apologized, he has committed another crime. He accused the Dera chief of openly mocking Sikh Gurus and Sikh traditions. Following this, on 27 June 2007, the Sikh clergy rejected the Dera chief's apology in its entirety and the heads of the five Takhts unanimously passed a resolution stating that the content of the apology was not acceptable. An apology letter was released to the press which only looked like a press note and not an apology. This apology was neither signed by the Dera chief nor addressed to the Sikh Sangat. It was speculated that this decision of the Sikh priests was made under the guidelines of the Badal family.³³ Rajinder Kaur Bhathal, the leader of the opposition of Punjab Vidhan Sabha, also accused Badal of trying to gain political mileage from this very sensitive issue.³⁴ Dera Chief Ram Rahim gave only a mild apology to resolve this issue. He never personally apologized, but his management or camp management apologized which was never accepted.

On the other hand, the Akali Dal also wanted to keep this issue burning because the 2012 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections were coming up. Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal now had his eye on winning the 2012 assembly elections and Sukhbir Badal saw Dera chief Ram Rahim as a heavy vote bank in Malwa region. Sukhbir Singh Badal wanted Dera Chief Ram Rahim to promise to help in the elections and then we will solve this issue. Finally an agreement is reached between Sukhbir Badal and Dera Sacha Sauda. Five days before the Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections on 30 January 2012, on 25 January 2012, the case registered against Ram Rahim in the police station of Kotwali was cancelled. Explaining the reason for the cancellation, the police station incharge said that on 13 May 2007, there was no Satsang/Samagam at village Salabatpura in Bathinda district. Gurmeet Ram Rahim did not come there, if he did not come then there is no question of hurting anyone's religious sentiments by dressing up. Because of this, no role of Ram Rahim has been found in this case. The complainant of Akali Dal, Ravinder Singh Sidhu, gave an affidavit in the court to withdraw his complaint. It can also be said that the complainant refuses, which freed the Dera Sirsa Chief from this case. It will be understood from this that the Akali Dal itself filed a complaint against Baba Ram Rahim and later reversed the action.³⁵ Akali Dal got huge advantage in 2012 elections by canceling Ram Rahim's case. The Akali Dal got more seats than in the 2007 elections and was again successful in forming a strong government. Many people warned this cancellation report in the court.

Akali Dal and SGPC stopped opposing Gurmeet Ram Rahim but some radical Sikh organizations like Sant Daduwal, Simranjit Singh Mann and others continued to protest. Now Ram Rahim's activities in Punjab become faster because Akali Dal and BJP have their hands on him. The 2014 parliamentary elections are approaching. The seats of Bathinda, Firzopur and Faridkot are very important for the Akali Dal. In these seats, Ram Rahim once again favors and Akali Dal is successful in winning these seats.

Dera Chief apologizes from Akal Takht

On 24 September 2015, Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh acquitted Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim who was accused of hurting Sikh religious sentiments by dressing up as Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and distributing Amrit. The Jathedar of the Akal Takht justified the decision by saying that a written apology had been given by the Dera chief which clearly stated that 'the Dera chief respects all the Sikh Gurus and goddess of other religions and he cannot copy to Guru Gobind Singh Ji.³⁶ But many Sikh organizations objected and said that the Sikh priests had taken this decision at the behest of the Badal because the centre government had put pressure on CM Badal to acquit Gurmeet Ram Rahim.

This decision of the Jathedar of Akal Takht was not accepted by the radical Sikh organizations because they said that the Dera chief was acquitted by the Sikh priests without following any procedure. He also questioned the timing of the forgiveness to the Dera chief as an apology was sought in 2007 and

forgiveness was granted in 2015. Former Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib Joginder Singh Vedanti revealed to the press that when he was Jathedar of Akal Takht, several such explanatory letters were sent to him but all the letters were rejected for two reasons: the Dera chief never directly did not formally apologize and secondly he never appeared before the Akal Takht in human being. The clarification letter that was sent by the Dera chief was in Hindi language, how did it become in Punjabi? This letter was not made public by Akal Takht and SGPC on any public domain. On the contrary, the SGPC gave 90 lakh in newspapers that a written apology has been taken by the Dera chief.³⁷ This decision is against the principles of Akal Takht, which also created cracks in the Shiromani Committee. The SGPC General Secretary Sukhdev Singh Bhora also expressed his displeasure and said that this decision of the Jathedar not only gave a big blow to the Sikh mentality but also raised a big question mark on the credibility of Akal Takht Sahib.³⁸ The Sikh community opposed this decision of the Jathedar. It happened for the first time in the history that the effigy of the Jathedar of Akal Takht was dragged in Harminder Sahib of and brought out of Harminder Sahib and the effigy was blown up by hitting shoes.³⁹

On the other hand, the Akali Dal made tireless efforts to convince the Sikh community that pardoning the Dera chief was in the interest of the Sikhs. Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal while addressing a meeting of Shiromani Committee members termed the decision to acquit the Dera chief as 'holy' and said that the Akal Takht is supreme and its every decision is guidance for the Sikhs and accept it but the people didn't do that. The process of forgiveness was not well resolved yet the incidents of desecration of Guru Granth Sahib took place in Malwa region. On 1 June 2015, the Guru Granth Sahib was stolen from Burj Jawahar Singh Wala, a village near Dera. This entire incident is done by Dera Premis. Handwritten posters were then pasted on the walls of the Gurdwaras of Bargarhi and Burj Jawahar Singh openly challenging the Sikhs that the stolen beer leaves would be scattered in the street.

On 12 October 2015, more than a hundred pages of Guru Granth Sahib were found torn and scattered outside the Gurdwara of Bargarhi village in Faridkot district, which is also considered an organ by the Sikh community. The Sikh community believed that the torn pages belonged to the beer sahib (Holy Scripture) which was stolen on 1 June 2015 from Burj Jawahar Singh Wala. As soon as the news of the desecration of Guru Granth Sahib Ji came to the people, the Sikh community was enraged. Sikhs can tolerate anything but cannot tolerate insult to their Guru. In protest, people started holding protest rallies and protests. Violent clashes also took place between the police and the Sikhs at many places. The Punjab government had to deploy paramilitary forces with the help of the Center to control the growing violence.⁴⁰ The deployment of Central forces has also failed to control the worsening law and order problem in the state. On 14 October 2015, police opened fire on protesters at village Behbal Kalan on the Kotakpura-Bathinda road as the protesters were demanding the arrest of those responsible for the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib at Bargarhi. Two Sikh protestors were killed in this firing. Captain Amarinder Singh, Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Badal because he has lost control over the state which is spiraling towards anarchy.⁴¹ Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal termed the incident of sacrilege as a crime against Punjab and Punjabi and alleged that the act of sacrilege is behind the hands of those forces who want to create communal riots in Punjab and plunge Punjab into a turbulent period of militancy.

The situation in Punjab became tenser day by day because Sikh organizations and Nihang organizations intensified protests across Punjab against firing on peaceful protesters. They even said that the Sikh organizations, the Shiromani Committee and the Akal Takht do what the Badal order. He said, 'the root of the problem is that the Sikh religious institutions are controlled by the Akali Dal leadership. The Akali leadership uses its influence over the SGPC and the Sikh clergy to fulfill its own selfish political interests.⁴² Due to the political influence of Dera Sacha Sauda, Badal father and son are shielding the people responsible for the desecration of Guru Granth Sahib. Captain Amarinder Singh even said that the people of Punjab need to be aware of Badal's divisive agenda because Badal can do anything to protect his personal and political interests. Thus, the Dera Sacha Sauda dispute, the desecration of Guru Granth Sahib at Bargarhi and the Behbal Kalan shooting incident became the first

cause of downfall for the Shiromani Akali Dal. This controversy uprooted the roots of the Akali Dal, due to which the Akali Dal could not come to its foundations even now.

2. Entry of 'AAP' in Punjab

The second primary reason for the downfall of the Akali Dal is the entry of the Aam Aadmi Party into Punjab. The youth of Punjab had become disillusioned, sad, and dissatisfied with these traditional parties. The unemployed young generation of Punjab was flowing in the sixth river of drugs. The failure of the SAD-BJP government, which had promised to curb drug addiction and facilitate good governance, created a massive lack of confidence among the Punjabi electorate. When all these are considered together, we can see how they turned the political arena of Punjab into a heated pitch during the second term (2012-2017) of the SAD-BJP alliance. On the one hand, the people of Punjab wanted to get out of the dirty politics of corruption and parallel political administration led by constituency incharge and the exchange of power between the SAD-BJP and the Congress at various intervals. The people of Punjab realized very well that although SAD-BJP and Congress look different from each other, but in reality they are two sides of the same coin.⁴³ They wanted to see a third change party which he saw as a ray of hope in the party AAP. AAP' was born as an anti-corruption movement and the supreme value of honesty. The Akali Dal was under the illusion that the AAP was a threat to the Congress in Punjab because the AAP came into being because of the UPA government's financial Scams. AAP had gained popularity in Punjab even before establishing its organizational structure in Punjab. AAP surprised the country by winning 4 out of 13 seats in Punjab during the 2014 general elections.⁴⁴ This success was driven by the resentment and frustration of the Punjabi people towards the ineffective governance of the SAD-BJP alliance. This electoral success convinced AAP to focus on Punjab and build a strong organizational structure. In a short period time, AAP has established itself as a credible alternative to the existing political parties. In the assembly elections of 2017, although AAP was not successful in forming its government, it was seen as the opposition party. AAP demonstrated the power of grassroots movements to emerge and showed that an alternative political force could be built on the basis of popular discontent. As AAP grew in popularity, it gave hope to those who were seeking a cleaner and more inclusive political system. In this way, AAP formed a strong government by taking 92 seats in the 2022 elections. AAP's entry into Punjab was also a major cause of collapse for the Akali Dal.

3. Farmers laws in 2020

The next reason for the downfall of the Akali Dal was the Agrarian Act. On 24 September 2020, the central government passed three farm laws related to India's agriculture sector namely: the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce Act, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, and the Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act. The main objectives of these laws are to allow any buyer to purchase crops directly from the farmers thereby eliminating middlemen 'Aritiyas'; Encouraging private investment in food processing and storage, and encouraging farmers to adopt contract farming.⁴⁵ A nationwide debate broke out over this law; National Democratic Alliance (NDA) alliance's supporters were supporting this law while the real farmers of the country were opposing it. When the Modi government introduced the Ordinance of the Farmer Bill, the Akali Dal strongly supported it, citing its potential to liberalize agricultural markets and provide farmers with more opportunities to sell their produce. But farmers across the country opposed this agricultural law in which farmers from Punjab played a leading role. Every farmer of Punjab was against this law and the Akali Dal party also went against it

A significant shift in the Akali Dal's stance took place as growing opposition from farmers forced the party to reassess its position. Procedure, and raised concerns about corporate dominance in agricultural markets, forcing the Akali Dal to withdraw its support for the laws and break its alliance with the NDA. Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Member of Parliament of Akali Dal in the Union Cabinet, resigned. Her resignation signaled the party's alignment with farmers' demands and commitment to amplifying their voice.⁴⁶ But the people of Punjab were very angry with the Akali Dal on this issue that the Akali Dal earlier stood in favor of the central government regarding the anti-farmer laws and now it is doing a

political stunt by breaking ties with the central government. The people of Punjab said that this political stunt of Akali Dal is only a trick to get political benefits in Punjab, but people will not fall for its fox tricks anymore. They had to suffer the consequences in the upcoming elections.

4. Factionalism within the Party

Factions have been forming in the Shiromani Akali Dal from time to time, but Parkash Singh Badal never allowed factionalism to emerge or strengthen in the party while he was the president of SAD. Parkash Singh Badal's nephew Manpreet Singh Badal resigned from the post of Punjab Finance Minister as well as party membership in October 2010, allegedly raising grievances, and three Akali and one independent MLA formed the People's Party of Punjab (PPP). (Hindustan Times 2010, 2). Parkash Singh Badal threatened not to create factionalism within the party. The party's erstwhile leadership somehow accepted Parkash Singh Badal's strategy of centralizing his family-centric authority. But when the leadership of the party came to the hands of Sukhbir Singh Badal and Bikram Singh Majithia, the party went into a period of decline, especially after the results of the 2017 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections.⁴⁷ The old leadership of the party was not ready to work under the leadership of Sukhbir Singh Badal and Bikram Singh Majithia.

The senior leaders of the party accused these two leaders and senior leaders of neglect, misbehavior, arbitrariness and dominance of nepotism. After losing the 2017 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections and Parkash Singh Badal getting old, the senior leaders gathered some strength. These senior leaders said Sukhbir Singh Badal to take responsibility for the party's defeat and to resign from the post of party president, but Sukhbir Singh Badal did not do so. In December 2018, senior Akali leaders and MPs from Khadur Sahib, Ranjit Singh Brahmputra, Ratan Singh Ajnala and Sewa Singh Sekhwaan rebelled against Sukhbir Singh Badal, and his brother-in-law Bikram Singh Majithia. They accused Sukhbir Singh Badal and his brother-in-law Majithia pardoning the Dera Sacha Sauda chief and firing on protesters against the Bargari desecration incident. Brahmputra also alleged that before appointing the Jathedar of the Akal Takht Sahib, they used to make an agreement with the Jathedar that whatever they said, the Jathedar would have to do. (The Pioneer, 5 November 2018). Ranjit Singh Brahmputra, Ratan Singh Ajnala, their sons Amarbir Singh Boni and Sewa Singh Sekhwaan left the party and formed a new party Shiromani Akali Dal (Taksali).⁴⁸

After this, the rebellion in the Akali Dal reached its peak when Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, a close associate of Parkash Singh Badal and the leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha, resigned from the party leadership position in the Rajya Sabha due to being sidelined. Dhindsa rebelled against Sukhbir Singh Badal and in September 2019. Dhindsa resigned from the post of General Secretary as well as from the core group of the party. Along with this, his son Parminder Singh Dhindsa resigned from the post of party leader in the Vidhan Sabha. Dhindsa has also been the general secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal for three decades and stood by Parkash Singh Badal during the power struggle between various factions.⁴⁹ Then both Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa and his son were expelled from the party by the Akali Dal. They formed a new party named Shiromani Akali Dal (Democratic), claiming to be the original Akali Dal. After this, the rebel Akali leader formed the Shiromani Akali Dal (United) in May 2021 in which the Shiromani Akali Dal (Jamhuri) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (Taksali) dissolved themselves and appointed Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa as the president and Ranjit Singh Brahmputra as the new patron. Party Shiromani Akali Dal (United) formed. The Shiromani Akali Dal (United) is looking for an alliance with a party against the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) to contest the Shiromani Committee and Vidhan Sabha elections.

After this, Shiromani Akali Dal expelled senior leader Bibi Jagir Kaur from the party for anti-party activities. Bibi Jagir Kaur, she was a loyal to the Badal family. Bibi Jagir Kaur was the president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1999, 2004 and 2020. This happened after she failed to appear before the party's disciplinary committee to explain her decision to contest the elections for the post of president in the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁵⁰ She was suspended from the Akali Dal for contesting elections against the wishes of the party. Bibi Jagir Kaur contested SGPC elections with the opposition of Badal parties against Akali Dal candidate Harjinder

Singh Dhama but lost. But she prepared a platform to raise a faction against the Akali Dal which will actively work against the Akali Dal in the coming elections.

Shiromani Akali Dal alliance with Bahujan Samaj Party

The Shiromani Akali Dal broke its alliance with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in September 2020 over the Farmer Law issue, which led to nationwide farmer protests. After breaking ties with the BJP, the Akali Dal was feeling isolated in Punjab, so it started thinking of joining hands with the BSP to tap into the Dalits vote to compensate for this loss. Hence it is also called the alliance fighting for Sikh-Dalit unity and federal interests. Finally, on 12 June 2021, SAD President Sukhbir Singh Badal and BSP General Secretary Satish Mishra announced in Chandigarh that they would contest the 2022 Punjab Assembly elections together. After nearly 25 years, the SAD widely perceived as a party representing the interests of Sikhs and wealthy Jats, once again joined hands with the Bahujan Samaj Party, and known to represent the Dalits community. Sukhbir Singh Badal and Satish Mishra announced that they will jointly contest the 2022 elections in 117 assembly seats of Punjab, out of which the SAD will contest in 97 seats and the BSP in 20 seats.⁵¹

Sukhbir Badal also said in his announcement that, "This alliance will not be limited to the assembly elections of 2022 but will continue in the future as well." When the SAD holds someone's hand, it does not let go quickly. The SAD and BSP share an ideology - both will continue to work for the betterment of farmers, dalit and farm labour. Along with this, Sukhbir Badal promised with dalit voters in his favor that if our government is formed, the Deputy Chief Minister will be from the Dalit community. In Doaba region, a university in the name of Dr. Ambedkar sahib and a medical university in the name of Sahib Shri Kanshi Ram Ji will be established. Along with this, Sukhbir Badal has promised that he will build a religious place in the name of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji.

"It is a big day in the history of Punjab, when the BSP has entered into an alliance with one of the oldest regional parties in India," Mishra said. The BSP supreme Mayawati said the alliance with the SAD is a "new political and social initiative" that will usher in a new era for the "progress and prosperity" of all in Punjab. Mayawati gave a slogan that "**Har Polling Booth Jitna Hai Aur Gathbandhan Ko Satta Main Lana Hai**". The BSP had supported SAD even before this alliance in the year 1995 in the by-election of Giddarbaha constituency, BSP had supported SAD candidate Manpreet Singh Badal. Subsequently, in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the two parties formed an alliance again and won 11 of the total 13 seats in Punjab - SAD won eight and BSP three. But many political leaders and political experts say that this alliance seems to be motivated by political opportunism instead of commonality. Prof. Narinder Kumar Head of Department Political Science says that the way the SAD and BSP won 11 out of 13 seats in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. But a few months after this victory, without informing the BSP, the SAD formed an alliance with the BJP and severed ties with the BSP. The SAD extended its unconditional support to the BJP at the Centre. To this, BSP Supreme Sahib Shri Kashi Ram reacted with a depressing heart that the SAD has done a great disservice to the dalit community. In the same way, when the BJP agreed to an alliance with the SAD, the SAD will not take a minute to leave the side of the BSP.

Despite this alliance, SAD and BSP could not perform well in the 2022 assembly elections. The SAD and BSP could win only 4 seats. After this, the Lok Sabha constituency Jalandhar by-elections were held in May 2023, which the SAD and BSP contested together again. In this by-election, the joint candidate of SAD and BSP, Dr. Sukhwinder Sukhi, came third. Senior journalist Jatinder Panu and many political thinkers said that in this general election, the SAD workers did not insist, even on the day of voting, the SAD workers kept their distance from the booths. It was only the BSP workers who put all their efforts in this by-election. The reason why SAD workers did not participate more in this election was that Parkash Singh Badal died shortly before the election due to which the entire SAD leadership was in grief. Any SAD prominent leader was unable to reach the ground level workers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) emerged as a powerful party representing Punjabi and Sikh interests, historically supporting the Jat Sikhs. It played an important role in the Sikh movement and led the political scene of Punjab. And currently it lost its political base so it allied with BSP to strengthen its lost base and compensate for the political loss but without success. Amidst its decline, the emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab proved significant, offering an alternative to the traditional parties. The Shiromani Akali Dal faced criticism for its handling of the Dera Sacha Sauda controversy and incidents of desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib. Due to these events it lost its political base.

The Akali-BSP alliance should come up with a way to address key issues of Punjab like youth migration due to unemployment, agriculture, education, health care, groundwater depletion, environmental degradation and social justice. This coalition should focus on its core political agenda as well as focus on establishing a focused agenda. Effective communication through various channels to strengthen the alliance's political base, (which the alliance has underutilized) engaging with the local community, collaborating with like-minded parties, empowering local leaders, targeted campaigns, It is necessary to mobilize party workers and establish a continuous response mechanism. These strategic approaches can contribute to its rise and victory.

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