

# ***Master in Partition: Master Tara Singh and the Partition of Punjab 1947***

**Busharat Elahi Jamil\***

## **Abstract**

*Master Tara Singh—an Akali leader—was disappointed with the role played by the Congress, the Muslim League and the administration of British India during the partition. Subsequently, he decided to counter them through violence and agitation in Punjab, and he led an anti-Muslim movement which resulted in the creation of anger and violence against the Muslim minority of the East Punjab. This movement aimed at securing the Sikh community, their holy shrines and exerting political pressure on the British administration to save their interests in Punjab. Master Tara Singh played a pivotal for the cause of Sikhs in Punjab. His activities regarding violence and instigating his community provided with new lines to the Sikhs. He used their potentials against the Muslims and the Muslim League in Punjab. This role of Master Tara Singh created the breaches and gaps between the Sikh and Muslim communities.*

## **Introduction**

Predominantly a bewildered community—the ‘Sikh’—could not entertain appropriately during the partition of the Punjab. The Congress used them politically, with its full potential, to get the eastern part of Punjab from the Muslims. Moreover, after the formation of Unionist Ministry under Khizar Hayat

---

\* Ph.D Research Scholar, Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.

Tiwana in Punjab, agitation by the Muslim League and bloodshed of Sikhs particularly in Rawalpindi Division brought the Sikhs at the height of aggression. This increased the breach between the Muslims and Sikhs. Consequently, Sikhs were not agreed to live under the Muslim rule in Punjab and decided to fight till the last drop of their blood. The Akali leader Master Tara Singh instigated the Sikh community to survive in Punjab socially, politically and economically. Gradually, the steps taken by him and his companions exacerbated the aggression in Sikh community. The Congress also exploited the situation and used them in this regard. In the meanwhile, the Muslim and the Hindu leadership of Punjab tried to find the solution of partition related issues according to their own vested interests but the Sikhs could not get way out. The aggressive behaviour of Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leadership caused huge violence and bloodshed during the partition of Punjab. It was a fact that all the three major political groups i.e. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were responsible for the disturbances in Punjab in 1947 but rigidity in the behaviour of Master Tara Singh pushed the Sikhs towards aggression particularly against the Muslims of Punjab. The Sikhs thought that Muslims were responsible for the partition of Punjab, violence and division of their community.

### **Master in Partition**

Master Tara Singh (June 24, 1885-November 22, 1967) from Rawalpindi in West Punjab was a Sikh eminent political activist and the leader of SAD.<sup>1</sup> He led the Sikh community during partition of Punjab as their sole spokesman. He fought for the social, political and economic rights of Sikhs on many fronts. As he had many fronts to tackle, therefore he could not concentrate on a single demand or issue of the Sikhs to satisfy them and the British administration of India. In 1931, he wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps and admitted that the

---

1 Shroimani Akali Dal (SAD) was established in December 1920, and worked as the principle activist organization of the Sikhs. This organization under the leadership of Master Tara Singh was involved in violence during partition of Punjab 1947.

Sikhs were not in majority in a single area of the province, so “it was unthinkable to demand domination.” He wished to carve out Punjab in which “the Sikhs are dominated by no single community.” It was to strengthen the Azad Punjab Scheme.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas even Sikhs were only 4 percent of the total population of India but they had their importance and status in Indian defense. On January 1, 1942, they were 11 percent of the total Indian army.<sup>3</sup> Because of this, Tara Singh was visualizing in 1942 the Punjab consisted of 40 percent Muslims, 40 percent Hindus and 20 percent Sikhs. He was dreaming of Azad Punjab and “...asserted that by creating Azad Punjab, the Sikhs and Hindus will get rid of the spectre of Pakistan”, but in 1943 he again changed his views and wanted to remain in India but did not succeed.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it was impossible for them to survive separately and their existence was provisional with Hindus or the Muslims.

According to O. H. K. Spate:

The history of Sikh relations with Muslims and Hindus is a very long story. The Sikhs were originally pacifist. It is hard to believe that now but their relations with the Muslim rulers of the Punjab were often, though not always, hostile, until about 1800 that very remarkable leader Ranjit Singh unified the Punjab as a separate entity. That was the position when we fought the Sikh wars just over a hundred years ago. It is thus not surprising that there was a strong following among the Sikhs that they were the destined rulers of the Punjab.<sup>5</sup>

During the partition, companionship and favours of Sikhs for the Congress had much importance to encounter the Muslims socially and politically because Sikhs were an energetic community in Punjab<sup>6</sup> and the Congress wanted to

---

2 F. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Revised Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173.

3 Latif Ahmad Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten* (Karachi: Council for Pakistan Studies, 1986), 100.

4 Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Revised Edition, 173.

5 Leonard Brooks, *et. all.* “The Partition of Punjab and Bengal: Discussion”, *The Geographic Journal* 110, no. 4-6 (Oct-Dec, 1947): 221.

6 Mr. Menon to Mr. Abell 19/3/1947, R/3/1/130, *Transfer of Power Papers* (TOP), Vol. X, 44.

snatch the non-Muslim areas of the Province.<sup>7</sup> “Sikh community was used by Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru (November 14, 1889-May 27, 1964) and Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi (October 2, 1869-January 30, 1948) as tools against Muslims’ interests and they gladly played their absolute role. Master Tara Singh and Baldev Singh (July 11, 1902-1961) were later felt sorry for this bully.”<sup>8</sup> The issue of partition of the Punjab highlighted the Sikh struggle and they demand the partition of Punjab when the bloodshed of the Sikhs occurred in Rawalpindi Division in February/March 1947 because of Muslims’ agitation against Mamdot Ministry. Initially, the British administration of the province was not in favour of the partition of Punjab. Sir E. Jenkins in his note shared: “... I thought a partition would be disastrous and that the Punjab could prosper only if it retained its present boundaries.”<sup>9</sup>

Because of blood-shed in North-West Punjab, the Sikh community was much depressed and worried. In a public Dewan of 1000 in January 1947, Master Tara Singh said, “...that as unity between the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims was impossible; the Muslims would have to dispose of the Sikhs before they could rule Punjab.” He, therefore, urged the Sikhs to shirk their internal differences and to prepare for the future struggle for their just cause.”<sup>10</sup> In February 1947, in response to the incidents of the Rawalpindi Division, Tara Singh called a public meeting in which he encouraged Sikhs to face the coming onslaught, and being the Chief Commander of the Akal Fauj, he also exhorts to reorganize itself and revise its membership lists at once.<sup>11</sup>

---

7 Addendum to Item 11, Mountbatten Papers, Official Correspondence Files: *Transfer of Power*, Part I (a), TOP, Vol. X, 100.

8 Sarfraz Husain Mirza, Syed Farooq Hasnat and Sohail Mahmood, *The Sikh Question* (Lahore: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab Lahore, 1985), 23.

9 Note by Sir E. Jenkins (Extract), R/3/1/176:ff 63-5, TOP, Vol. X, 45.

10 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 1/2/1947, 51.

11 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 15/2/1947, 66.

On February, 16, 1947, in Amritsar in front of an audience of 7000, he urged to mobilize and reorganize the Sikh Jathas to counter the Muslim League threat. He said: "if Police collaborated with the Muslims in suppressing Sikhs, the latter would retaliate to the best of their ability."<sup>12</sup> He issued instructions regarding the Akal Fauj as:

1. Focused on the affiliation of the village zails with Akal Fauj;
2. Proposed the dark blue pugree, with yellow under pugree and khaki shorts and foot long kirpans;
3. The permission from Chief Commander was required for the members to contest in any election;
4. Each Sikh on enrolment is to sign a pledge to sacrifice his all for the Panth and to obey his officer's orders.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in March 1947, eighteen Sikh leaders announced a "War Fund" of rupees 50 lakh through a pamphlet with their signatures. The signatures of Master Tara Singh were on top of it.<sup>14</sup> Due to the incidents of the Rawalpindi Division, Giani Kartar Singh (1902-1974) and Master Tara Singh remained active in inculcating anti-Muslim ideas and passions into Sikh community. Master and his companions like Baldev Singh and Kartar Singh were demanding the right of choice of their affiliation with India or Pakistan in case of partition to get more and more benefits and bargaining. Viceroy Lord Mountbatten was fully agreed with their standings.<sup>15</sup>

---

12 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 22/2/1947, 85.

13 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 22/2/1947, 85.

14 It was written in the pamphlet: Although our community is poor, yet it has been wining every *morcha* by dint of sacrifice in the name of Tenth Guru. It is our vigorous appeal that money should be collected from every house, every Mohallah, every village and every city for achieving victory in the forthcoming clash." See Sir E. Jenkins to Lord Mountbatten 9/4/4947, *Disturbance in the Punjab 1947*, National Documentation Centre, Cabinet Division, Islamabad Pakistan, 129-135.

15 Record of interview between Lord Mountbatten and Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, Mountbatten Papers, Viceroy's Interview No. 76, 18/4/1947, TOP, Vol. X, 324.

Giani Kartar Singh represented the Sikhs' cause as follows. This was basically threats from the Sikhs:

The Sikhs were entitled to their own land as much as the Hindus or the Muslims. They must have their shrines at Nankana Sahib, at least one canal system, and finally arrangements must be made so as to bring at least three-quarters of the Sikh population from West to East Punjab...unless it was recognized by His Majesty's Govt., the Viceroy and the party leaders that the fate of the Sikhs was a vital issue, there would be trouble...they would be obliged to fight...that the Sikhs realized that they would be in a bad position, but they would fight on revolutionary lines by murdering officials, cutting railway lines, destroying canal head works and so on.<sup>16</sup>

On April 2, 1947, eleven Sikh members of the Central Legislative Assembly from Punjab wrote to British Government and to the Viceroy, in which they demanded only the partition of Punjab.<sup>17</sup> Master Tara Singh, opposed the formation of Muslim League Ministry in Punjab after the Unionists' resignation in March 1947. He supported the partition of Punjab with the stance that Sikhs would not be part of the League Ministry in Punjab.<sup>18</sup> If, according to the demand, Punjab was partitioned, while India rule mutually by three large groups after the partition of India and transfer of power; then it would also be caused the by dispersal of the joint government in Punjab.

Lord Pathic Lawrence (December 28, 1871-September 10, 1961) suggested for the partition of Punjab as "...it seems to me that in spite of its grave practical difficulties and danger, the partition of the Punjab to such degree and in such forms as will satisfy the rival nationalism in the province is really unavoidable from the political point of view of the transfer of authority..."<sup>19</sup> The Congress provided the platform

---

16 Syed Nur Ahmed, *From Martial Law to Martial Law* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1985), 251-252.

17 Certain Members of the Indian Central Legislative from the Punjab to Pandit Nehru, R/3/1/157: f213, TOP, Vol. X. 88.

18 Lord Pathic Lawrence to Lord Mountbatten, Mountbatten Papers, Letters to and from Secretary of State 3/4/1947, TOP, Vol. X, 103.

19 Lawrence to Lord Mountbatten, 105.

and logistic support to the Sikh leaders like Tara Singh.<sup>20</sup> When the Congress demanded the partition of Punjab and raised the voice in the support of Sikhs in Punjab, Master Tara Singh, in a press statement in March 1947, supported “the Congress proposal to partition the Punjab or suggested the alternative clearly unacceptable to the Muslims, show that the Sikh leaders are still obdurate...”<sup>21</sup> Punjab had a pivotal status for the Congress. According to Sardar Patel (October 31, 1875-December 15, 1950), it was a key province but “the Punjab also hold the key to the future of India”.<sup>22</sup>

After the resignation of Unionist Party, the Lahore district Congress Committee organized a meeting in March 1947. Master Tara Singh and Kartar Singh represented the Akalis in this meeting.<sup>23</sup> The speeches were hostile, and they urged to form a United Front against Pakistan. The allegation was also there, that the British administration was supporting the Muslim officers and public. Moreover, Master Tara Singh, in his speech at Dera Sahib Gurdwara Lahore, focused on the “Sikh Raj” in Punjab. He also prepared the Sikhs for “Civil War” in the province. When Punjab Peace Committee was formed in Lahore, Master Tara Singh and Kartar Singh appeared as its enthusiastic members and they were stressing to observe “Anti Pakistan Day” on March 11, 1947.<sup>24</sup>

Initially, the Sikh community was not in favour of the partition of Punjab because they were afraid of the division

---

20 Initially, Sikhs were not in favour of the Congress because they believed that the Congress was only giving them the paper assurances. *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 15/2/1947, 66.

21 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 22/3/1947, 129.

22 Sharif-ul-Mujahid, “1945-46 Elections and Pakistan: Punjab’s Pivotal Role,” *Pakistan Vision* 11, no. 1-2.

23 Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh were seriously involved in the riots with the support of rulers of the Sikh states of Punjab. On April 9, 1947 Governor of the Punjab also reported to the Mountbatten that these Sikh leaders are planning agitation against Muslims. Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 105.

24 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 8/3/47, 102,104.

of their own community. Their holy shrines were becoming the part of the West Punjab. This partition could also cause their withdrawal from the fertile land of the canal colonies of the West Punjab. This created a sense of hatred in the Sikh community for the Muslims in Punjab as they were responsible for this partition of province. This resentment resulted in the creation of gaps between the Sikh and the Muslim communities. Consequently, they did not want to live with Muslims and under the Muslim rule in Punjab. Tara Singh, Baldev Singh and Kartar Singh in a meeting with Lord Mountbatten (June 25, 1900-August 27, 1979) asked openly that, "...they would fight to the last man if put under Muslim domination."<sup>25</sup> In other words, Sikhs were sacrificing the unity of the Punjab by refusing any settlement the Muslim League in this regard.<sup>26</sup>

Master Tara Singh and Kartar Singh were inculcating anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim notions into the Sikh community of the Punjab. Due to this hate and violence in the West Punjab, the Sikh community was shifting fast towards the Eastern Punjab particularly towards the Sikh states of Punjab like Patiala and Farid Kot.<sup>27</sup> Maharaja of Patiala was providing support to them in this regard.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, this Sikh migration was creating the problems for the Muslim community of these Sikh states of East Punjab. To settle and make space for these Sikh refugees, clashes started in these states. Consequently, Muslims panicked and started migration from East to West Punjab. On the same pattern, the events started in the West Punjab to push the Sikh community to the East Punjab.

Master Tara Singh and Kartar Singh both visited Ferozpur district in March 1947 to convince the Sikhs to take

---

25 Viceroy's Personal Report No. 4 L/PO/6/123:ff 51-9, TOP, Vol. X, 405.

26 Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947* (Maryland: the Riverdale Company Riverdale, 1988), 231.

27 Till April 1947 because of violence in West Punjab about 20,000 Sikhs moved to Patiala State.

28 Record of the Interview between Mountbatten and Maharaja of Patiala, Mountbatten Papers, Viceroy's interview No. 78, TOP, Vol. X, 346-347.



revenge from the Muslims.<sup>29</sup> The Sikh community was becoming more aggressive day by day. The Punjab Government was distressing a lot due to this situation. There was a suggestion for de-weaponizing the Sikhs and to retrieve their kirpans but it was a difficult decision because in 1924 they got this religious right to have kirpans with them. Another option to contain the Sikhs was that the Muslims should allow carrying swords with them, but Viceroy Mountbatten was not in this favour<sup>30</sup> because he had some soft corner for the Sikhs. The Sikhs had fought in South East Asia with loyalty and bravely under his command.<sup>31</sup>

The sufferings of the Sikh community in the West Punjab increased due to the agitation of Muslim League in Punjab. The Sikh leaders started visiting Sikh minority areas. In January 1947, Master Tara Singh, during his visit to Rawalpindi, focused in his speeches that Akalis should unite immediately for the relief work of the Sikhs.<sup>32</sup> In response, an "Akali Relief Committee" with 20 members and a sub-committee with 5 members were also formed to address their grievances.<sup>33</sup> Processions were banned on March 4. In a Hindu, Sikh procession, Tara Singh shouted the slogans as "Pakistan Murdabad", "Raj Karega Khalsa" and "Baqi Rahe na Koi". Immediately, these slogans became the main cause for the riots in Punjab particularly in Lahore.<sup>34</sup> "Even on Baisakhi Day (April 13, 1947)<sup>35</sup>, he and 280 Jathedars<sup>36</sup>

---

29 Sir E. Jenkins (Punjab) to Lord Mountbatten, R/3/1/176: ff 100-7, 9/4/4947, TOP, Vol. X, P. 172.

30 Note by Sir E. Jenkins, R/3/1/190:ff 12-16, 16/4/1947, TOP, Vol. X, 283.

31 Record of Interview between Lord Mountbatten and Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, Mountbatten Papers, Viceroy's Interview No. 76, 18/4/1947, TOP, Vol. X, 321.

32 Master Tara Singh in January 1947 properly made the grounds against Muslims; even he blamed the Muslim League and Muslim Student Federation and held them responsible for the events particularly in Attock and Hazara. *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 18/1/1947, 27.

33 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 18/1/1947, 27.

34 Latif Ahmad Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 101-102.

35 On Baisakhi Mela.

36 Group members of a Jatha (band).

vowed at the Akal Takhat to sacrifice their lives for the community.”<sup>37</sup>

Tara Singh was one of the major leaders who were responsible for the political disturbance in Punjab. The agitation of February-March 1947 by the Muslim League resulted in the resignation from the Unionist Ministry in March 1947.<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Ali Jinnah (December 25, 1876-September 11, 1948) and Nawab of Mamdot (1906-October 16, 1969), the president of Punjab Muslim League, now wanted to have a Muslim League's rule in the Province.

According to Ian Talbot:

Whilst Evan Jenkins hold negotiations with the Nawab of Mamdot over the formation of a Muslim League Ministry, Tara Singh appeared outside the legislative assembly brandishing a sword and shouting 'Pakistan Murdabad'. Within it the Panthic Party passed a resolution declaring that it would fight Pakistan to the last drop of its blood.<sup>39</sup>

Viceroy held a meeting with Jinnah on 24 April, 1947 and took him into confidence about the activities and intentions of Master Tara Singh and Sikh community. He told Jinnah that Tara Singh and his mates were going to create a panic, and rebellion in case of Muslims rule in Punjab cannot be ruled out. He tried to convince Mr. Jinnah that Muslim League should not try to form government in the province so that violence could be avoided.<sup>40</sup> This provided a bit favour

---

37 Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977), 273.

38 Punjab was one of the largest Muslim populist province with 57 percent majority, in the elections of 1946 Muslim League secured 73 seats in Punjab but could not form the government in the Punjab because Governor of the Punjab invited Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwana of Unionist Party to form the government with the coalition of other groups like Hindus and Sikhs. Later, the Muslim League started agitation in Punjab till the resignation of Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwana. Riaz Ahmad, *Muslim Punjab's Fight for Pakistan: League's Agitation Against the Coalition Ministry of Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwanat January-March 1947*, *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, XXVIII, no. 1 (2007): 1-8.

39 Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, 227.

40 Record of the interview between Lord Mountbatten and Mr. Jinnah, Mountbatten Papers, Viceroy's Interview No. 100, TOP, Vol. X, 451-452.

from Viceroy to Sikhs and the circumstances went towards Governor Raj under Section 93 in Punjab.

The violence caused by the Muslims against the Sikhs of West Punjab created difficulties for the Muslim minority of East Punjab. Master Tara Singh said about the Muslims of Amritsar that peace in Amritsar was in the hands of the Muslims. He alleged that the Muslim administration of Amritsar was misguiding the British officers there. He suggested that the British officers should be used to run the administration of Amritsar. Otherwise "...if the government continues its present policy towards the Muslims of Amritsar, nobody else will be able to do anything."<sup>41</sup> But on the other hand, Tara Singh became an apostle of peace. On May 13, 1947, he wrote to Abbot the Secretary of the Governor of Punjab, "...I do not like to see a single innocent person murdered and shall do my utmost to prevent such murders whenever I find the Sikhs as aggressors...."<sup>42</sup>

In April 1947, Master Tara Singh, with his close companions like Giani Kartar Singh, wrote a letter to the Maharaja of Farid Kot,<sup>43</sup> in which they invited him to occupy the complete districts of Ferozpur and Ludhiana and some parts of district Lahore.<sup>44</sup> This shows the aims and ambitions of Master Tara Singh as he was taking steps for the formation of Sikh state by occupying the non-Muslim majority areas and pickets. He, therefore, was trying to take into confidence the rulers and the Sikh community of the Sikh states. These could strengthen and provided them the logistic support in this regard. Actually, Tara Singh wanted to get a big part of the Eastern Punjab in case of partition of Punjab because the whole canal colonies, where a large number of Sikhs were settled, and their holy shrines were going to become the part of West Punjab. When the British administration suggested 12 districts for East Punjab, Master

---

41 Master Tara Singh to Mr. Abbot 13/5/4947, TOP, Vol. X, 803.

42 Master Tara Singh to Mr. Abbot 13/5/4947, TOP, Vol. X, 803.

43 Sir Har Indar Singh was the Maharaja of Farid Kot in 1947.

44 Viceroy's Personal Report No. 4, L/PO/6/123: ff 51-9, TOP, Vol. X, 406.

Tara Singh became angry and demanded half of Punjab as the non-Muslims were the 43 percent of the total Punjab population. Later, after partition, the East Punjab received 13 districts out of 29 than the 12.<sup>45</sup>

In April 1940, Master Tara Singh declared that, “the League would have to pass through the ocean of the Sikh blood to have the establishment of Pakistan and said that the Swaraj was the only solution of the problem...”<sup>46</sup> The Hindu Mahasabha fully supported the Sikh point of view. On May 19, 1940, the Hindu Mahasabha condemned the scheme of Pakistan and considered it as ‘anti national’ and ‘anti-Hindu’.<sup>47</sup> Later on, when the Cabinet Mission came to India, the Sikhs showed their full opposition for Pakistan and their behaviour was completely anti-Muslim. The Sikh spokesman, Master Tara Singh, said that, “he was for a United India; but if Pakistan was conceded he was for a separate Sikh state with the right to federate either with India or Pakistan.”<sup>48</sup> The demand for Sikh state of Sikh spokesman was actually an argument against Pakistan “robbed the suggestion of any chance of serious consideration”<sup>49</sup> of any Sikh demand.

The Sikhs’ demand of “Sikh state” in certain areas of Punjab, fully supported by Master Tara Singh, was not possible to accomplish by the British administration because Sikhs were not in majority even in a single district of the province. They were four percent of the total Indian

---

45 Master Tara Singh, Sardar Baldev Singh and Sardar Swaran Singh to Earl of Listowl, Telegram, L/P&J/7/12252:ff 13-16, 7/5/47, TOP, Vol. X, 660.

46 Proceedings of All India Akali Conference, Attari, 12/2/1940, IAR 1940, Vol. I. P. 357, *The Tribune*, Lahore, 18/4/1940. Sighted in Gode Singh, *The Punjab Past and Present* (edited), (Patiala: Dept. of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1985), 448.

47 Philip, C. H. and Wain Wright, M. D [ed.], *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947*, sighted in Gode Singh, *The Punjab Past and Present* (edited), (Patiala: Dept. of Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, 1985), 448; Azra Asghar Ali and Sajid Mahmood Awan, “Political Parties and Political Development in Punjab 1849-1947”, *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 29, no. 1 (June 2009): 65-78.

48 Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2, 258.

49 Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 2, 259.

population, 13 percent of the population of the Punjab. They were less in number than the Hindus in Punjab. Therefore, gradually, they withdrew from the said demand of "Sikh State".<sup>50</sup> Moreover,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Sikh community was living only in the districts of Jullundur and Lahore.<sup>51</sup> It is due to the fact that Secretary of State for India explained that Sikhs were only a minority in Punjab "and not even as a major minority."<sup>52</sup> But the sense of the communal superiority was still existed. The communal groups were expecting their shares and privileges in case of partition.<sup>53</sup> Raja Sir Har Indra Singh (1915-1989) of Farid Kot and Maharaja Yadvindra Singh (January 17, 1913-June 17, 1974) of Patiala also wrote to Viceroy to get favours and special privileges in case of partition.<sup>54</sup>

The Sikh leaders became completely hopeless as far as a free Sikh state was concerned. The hatred increased among both the communities of Sikhs and Muslims. It was becoming clear that now there was no chance of any breakthrough of patch-up among them in near future. Sir E. Jenkins wrote about Master Tara Singh's statement that, "He simply said that there could be no solution because neither the Muslims nor the Sikhs in the Punjab would submit communal domination. He indicated that in Pakistan the Muslims would massacre all the Sikhs and Hindus and that in the other part of Punjab the Sikhs and Hindus would massacre all the Muslims."<sup>55</sup> Jenkins considered this

---

50 Viceroy's Conference Paper V. C. P. 51, Mountbatten Papers, TOP, Vol. X, 860.

51 Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 103.

52 Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 111.

53 After partition, the West Punjab received total 62000 square miles area, total population was 15,800,000 in them Muslims were 11,850,000. On the other hand, East Punjab received an area of 37000 square miles with the population of 12,600,000 in them Muslims were 4375000. O. H. K. Spate, *The Partition of the Punjab and Bengal*, *The Geographical Journal* 110, no. 4-6 (Oct.-Dec. 1947): 212.

54 *The Partition of the Punjab 1947*, Vol. 1, (Lahore: Sang-i-Meel Publications, 1993), 240-244.

55 Note by Sir E. Jenkins R/3/1/176:ff 167-9, TOP, Vol. X, 893.

statement of Tara Singh a “completely hopeless idea.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, these were leaders not the common masses in both parts of the Punjab who were bringing the situations into violence and bloodshed.

Jinnah did a lot to convince the Sikh leadership to be part of Pakistan to get more and more privileges like their best proportion in army, politics and economy etc., but in vain. Gradually, the differences grew and the gaps increased because the Congress was backing the Sikhs. In April 1947, Master Tara Singh again expressed his views about partition. He stressed the point that, “support of the partition demanded would give the Sikhs a very strong handle with which to bargain with the Congress against the Muslim League Jinnah had conceded the Sikh right to have their own homeland within Pakistan too strong to be ignored, he would be forced to concede a Khalistan. The Muslims in the Central and Eastern Punjab could be kept as hostages for the good behaviour of Western Punjab Muslims towards their minorities.”<sup>57</sup> Actually, some Akali leaders were fully insisting to establish Sikh State in Punjab to reach on a settlement with the Muslim League during partition process. but now Muslim League could not give them any assurances in this regard to entertain their demands.<sup>58</sup>

Master Tara Singh was involved in instigating hatred and violence in his community which was causing bloodshed particularly in Amritsar and other areas of East Punjab. Even Jenkins pointed out this situation as well. He assumed after a meeting with Master Tara Singh that he was

“...incoherent and obstinate as usual. Before he left I drew attention to the violence of some of his statements and asked him to do his best to keep his community quiet. It is lamentable that at this juncture the affairs of the Punjab should be so largely in the hands of this eccentric old man.”<sup>59</sup>

---

56 Jenkins R/3/1/176:ff 167-9, TOP, Vol. X, 893..

57 *Police Abstract of Intelligence Punjab*, 12/4/1947, 175.

58 Mirza, Hasnat and Mahmood, *The Sikh Question*, 23.

59 Note by Sir E. Jenkins R/3/1/176:ff 167-9, TOP, Vol. X, 894.

In March 1947, L. G. Thatte, the General Secretary of "All India Anti Pakistan Forum", appealed for the donations to be sent to Master Tara Singh. He told that he would send volunteers from Bombay to Punjab to assist the Hindus in Punjab for the struggle against the Muslims.<sup>60</sup> In March 1947, Tara Singh visited Calcutta to get favour of the Bengali Hindus for Sikh community. He received funds from Kram Chand Thapar and other Marwari Seths as well. At this moment, Master Tara Singh was enthusiastic to take the revenge of their losses.<sup>61</sup>

June Plan more prompted the Sikhs, so they completely rejected the 3<sup>rd</sup> June Plan of Lord Mountbatten for Indian partition.<sup>62</sup> The SAD rejected the said Plan through a resolution in a meeting under Giani Kartar Singh. The resolution mentioned that, "The Plan deprives the Sikhs of political power and status and does not provide safeguard to protect their interests, and calls upon all Sikh States to form a union of their own, within the Indian Union..."<sup>63</sup> The Sikhs wanted the boundary of the East Punjab at River Chenab and not at Ravi. Therefore, they were not agreed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June Plan of partition.<sup>64</sup> The views of Master Tara Singh on June 4, 1947 were:

Tara Singh complained of the 'total lack' of any provision in the Plan to give Sikhs 'any power or status anywhere, or for safeguarding their position and interests'. He went onto state that the 'ultimate acceptance or rejection' of the Plan by the Sikhs would depend a good deal on the terms of reference of the Boundary Commission; that the Sikhs would not be satisfied unless the dividing line is the river Chenab'; that they would continue the struggle till their

---

60 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 29/3/1947, 140.

61 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 29/3/1947, 140.

62 Sikhs were only the 14 percent of the Punjab's population even they were in majority in any district of the Punjab. But they wanted the maximum part of the Punjab from Jumna to Chenab while Muslims were the largest community with 57 percent population. British administration could not award them the maximum part of the province So, they rejected the partition plan as protest.

63 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 28/6/1947, 339.

64 But later Sikh leadership decided to wait for the final decision of the Boundary Commission which was later established under Sir Cyril Radcliff.

objective was obtained; that the 'very existence' of the Sikhs was at stake; and that Khalsa would 'prove to the world that the spirit of Guru Govind Singh still lives in their heart'.<sup>65</sup>

The stance of the Sikhs became weak when the Congress leadership accepted the 3<sup>rd</sup> June Plan because "they did not want the Pakistan issue to delay independence any further."<sup>66</sup> Later, the Sikhs unwantedly changed their standpoint as, "the West Punjab Sikh leader, Kartar Singh, urged Baldev Singh to publish the letter in which he accepted the Plan of 3<sup>rd</sup> June and made it clear that although the Sikhs agreed to the principle of partition, they would not accept a decision arrived at strictly on a population basis. Kartar Singh emotionally pointed out to Jenkins that the Sikhs would be obliged to fight if the boundary award went against them..."<sup>67</sup> The Sikhs then decided to focus on Boundary Award. A note on the Sikh plan explained that:

the Partition Plan envisages, says the Chief Secretary's report, divides their (the Sikhs') strength and leaves them in a minority in both areas... they have, therefore, been driven back on reiterating their demands and perfecting the organization of their forces... their endeavor in both directions is positive in character. The Sikhs are pinning their hopes upon the Boundary Commission and the Congress, but their latest circular issued by the Shiromani Akali Dal shows that confidence in the strength of the Panth has neither been undermined nor surrendered. The states that Pakistan means total death to the Sikh Panth and that the Sikhs are determined on a free sovereign state with the Chenab and the Jamna as its borders, and it calls on all Sikhs to fight for their ideal under the flag of the Dal.<sup>68</sup>

Master Tara Singh had a strong position among the Sikh leadership. It is evident that Giani Kartar Singh, in August 1947, once in his speech declared on the Boundary Award by Sir Cyril Radcliff that, "Sikhs would not accept any settlement of any political issue, arrived at between Baldev Singh and the Central Government he declared that the Master was the sole leader who could speak on behalf of the

---

65 Times of India, J/6/47, P-7, cited in TOP, Vol. X, 136.

66 Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, 231.

67 Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, 232.

68 *Note on the Sikh Plan*, Superintendent Govt. Printing, Lahore, West Punjab, 1948, 25.



Sikh Panth..."<sup>69</sup> Master Tara Singh used his position powerfully and as mentioned earlier that he was virtuously involved in violence in Punjab during the partition. In an interview he revealed that:

I do not see how we can avoid civil war. There can be no settlement if the Muslims want to rule the Punjab. We cannot trust the Muslims under any circumstances. The Sikh had the ability to the Muslims out of the Eastern Punjab. But why should we stop there? We would drive them out of the Punjab entirely. The Sikhs had started to re-organize their own private volunteer army in response to the Muslim League month old agitation against the coalition ministry of the Punjab in which the Sikhs are represented.<sup>70</sup>

Master Tara Singh wanted to get the attention and sympathy of the British administration. On May 31, 1947, Swaran Singh (August 19, 1907-October 30, 1994) had a meeting with the Governor of Punjab and handed him a letter from Tara Singh in which he told him that, "he had received information that he and other Sikh leaders were going to be assassinated by Muslim Police Officers."<sup>71</sup> The Governor asked Swaran Singh to return the letter to Tara Singh and tell him that it was rubbish. Activities of Tara Singh were showing aggression in his self when the time of the partition was coming closer. He was preparing the Sikhs logistically for a war and for anti-Pakistan campaign he established a fund of 50 lakh in a meeting in Amritsar. Moreover, he also appealed for *Shahidi Jathedars* with an oath to devote their energies to serve the Panth.<sup>72</sup>

According to V. P. Menon:

The announcement of the June 3rd plan and its acceptance by the political leaders did serve temporarily to stem the tide of communal hostilities, but when the Muslim league in the Punjab declared that it

---

69 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 2/8/1947, 308.

70 Master Tara Singh in an interview to New York Press Representative, cited in Note on the Sikh Plan, Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, West Punjab, 1948, XIVII.

71 File R/3/1/176, cited in Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 113.

72 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 19/4/4947, 193.

would resist any change in the notional division of the Province, the Sikhs immediately launched violent counter agitation...<sup>73</sup>

In June 1947, "Shahidi Dal" was established and the "Akal Regiments" merged in it. It was done on the suggestion of Master Tara Singh. Moreover, a "Khalsa Council of Action" was also established. It consisted of Master Tara Singh, Udham Singh Nagoke (1894-1966), Bhag Singh Advocate, Isher Singh Majhel (1901-1977) and Giani Kartar Singh. It showed that Shahidi Dal was a volunteer body and getting the funds from the contribution of 50 Lakh.<sup>74</sup> Tara Singh and many other Sikh leaders were asking for funds from wealthy Sikhs but the rich landlord class of the Sikh community of the West Punjab was thinking to migrate to the Eastern part of the Punjab due to the uncertainty and economic crisis. Actually, "in anticipation of the end of the British rule, the Sikhs decided to jockey for a dominant position in the Punjab. The strategy which the Sikh leaders adopted to achieve that end was to encourage lawlessness among their followers."<sup>75</sup>

The hostility of the Sikh community had many aspects. It was due to the fact that they were not in favour of living in the West Punjab under Muslim domination. They, therefore, focused their energies on the partition of Punjab with the desire to get the maximum and best part of it. Apart, in case of the partition of Punjab, the Sikhs demanded the affiliation of their holy shrines with East Punjab. Particularly, the dispute on the Sikh shrines<sup>76</sup> at Nankana Sahib in district Sheikhpura near Lahore was much serious.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, Muslims were not agreed to withdraw from their majority areas of the West Punjab. The partition was also

73 V. P. Menon, *Transfer of Power* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 1997), 27.

74 *Police Abstract of Intelligence*, 5/7/1947, 354.

75 Sherwani, *The Partition of India and Mountbatten*, 101.

76 According to the Sikh leaders, there were about 700 holy places in the Punjab scattered all over the province and most of them were near Nankana and then Amritsar. Spate, *The Partition of the Punjab and Bengal*, 209.

77 Sir George Abell to Mr. F. F. Turnbull, IOR R/3/1/157, 17/7/1947, *The Partition of the Punjab 1947*, Vol. 1, 176-177.

hurting their economy as their fertile lands in the canal colonies of the East Punjab were going to become the part of West Punjab. Moreover, the partition of Punjab was also causing the division of the Sikh community into two parts i.e., West Punjab and East Punjab.

The 'revenge' under aggressive Sikh leadership like Akali leader Master Tara Singh turned into a major cause of bloodshed in Punjab during partition. The leadership of Indian National Congress used Sikhs as a tool for the affiliation of the East Punjab with India because without the support of the Sikhs of Punjab the survival of the Hindu community of Punjab was quite impossible in the province.

According to Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan:

The Indian Leadership used every tactic to run-down Pakistan; they incited murder and rapine... in the East Punjab and Sikhs were employed as hatchet-men in the East Punjab. Sikhs handled their jobs through trained ex-army men, who had joined the Indian National Army. They organized murder squads, on a military guerrilla pattern...<sup>78</sup>

*Akal Fauj* with the logistic support of the RSSS (Rashtariya Swayam Sevak Sangh) triggered violence in Punjab at the time of partition in which lakhs of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus were killed.<sup>79</sup> The Sikh leaders like Master Tara Singh were fiercely struggling for the dominion of the Sikh Panth and Khalsa. This bloodshed and the hostile preparations were to put pressure on the Muslim leadership and also to get attention of the British administration. Under these circumstances, Sir George Abell wrote to the Boundary Commission as:<sup>80</sup>

---

78 Sirdar Shaukat Hayat Khan, *The Nation That Lost Its Soul*, (Lahore: Jang Publishers, 1995), 190-191.

79 The rising activities of militant groups pushed the province into huge bloodshed and violence. Till June 1947, the members of the RSSS raised over 58000, MLNG 39000 and Akal Fauj 8000. Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, 233.

80 Sir George Abell to the secretary to the Punjab Boundary Commission, enclosure No. 3, IOR R/3/1/157, *The Partition of the Punjab 1947*, Vol. 1, 220.

...these tragic events have demonstrated that there can be no settlement of the problem in the Punjab by violence and coercion, and that no arrangement based on coercion can last. Therefore, it is necessary to find a way out of which involves the least amount of compulsion. This would necessitate a division of the Punjab into two provinces so that the pre-dominantly Muslim part may be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim part.

In response to the antagonistic statements and actions of the Sikh leadership in Punjab, the Muslim leadership and masses also came into action. Mr. Ghulam Jilani, MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) from Mazafargarh said that, "Muslim majority areas of the Punjab must form part of the Punjab. No unreasonable propaganda about property, religious shrines etc., be allowed to deprive the Muslims an inch of their majority areas."<sup>81</sup> Muslims of Chak No. 168, Jhang in a telegram viewed as, "Muslims will shed their last drop of blood in retaining the Muslim Punjab. Let British Government beware of it."<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, Sikhs became much aggressive and in September 1947 the situation became more critical. The Sikhs had sworn to kill every Muslim in India in retaliation to the Rawalpindi massacre. In Grand Hotel Simla many Muslim women and children were slaughtered in front of other guests and no news was allowed to leak out.<sup>83</sup>

Press also provided the hypes to the bloody happenings of partition and migration. Communalized local newspapers like 'Ajit' and 'Rajput' also instigated the Sikh community to offer sacrifices for maintaining unity and the existence of the Panth.<sup>84</sup> The violence in the East Punjab reached its peak. A Sikh army officer confirmed that the whole East Punjab was

---

81 Clipping from daily *Dawn*, New Delhi, dated Saturday July 19, 1947, sighted in *The Partition of the Punjab 1947*, Vol. 1, 194.

82 *The Partition of the Punjab 1947*, Vol. 1, 194.

83 Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1986), 239.

84 Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality, Violence, Migration and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947-1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.

engaged in slaughtering the Muslim community.<sup>85</sup> Gradually, the leadership of the involved communities brought the situation towards the huge bloodshed. Particularly, the Sikhs' undefined and antagonistic leadership doomed the affairs and this was unmanageable for the British, Sikhs, Hindus and the Muslims of the Punjab. Tara Singh used all possible ways to snub the Muslim community of the East Punjab but at final analysis we find that he could not get the desired results, because the Congress did not fully support them. The Sikhs were divided into many groups with variation in demands, and were not in majority in any district of Punjab and on the other hand Muslims were in strong majority in the province which was an obstruction to the Sikh cause.

### **Conclusion**

The leadership, hostile dogmas and supervision of Master Tara Singh brought the Sikh community towards the horrifying bloodshed and violence in Punjab. His extremist policies could not fulfill the demands of the Sikhs. The partition resulted in the division of the Sikh community into East and West Punjab. The green fertile lands and the Sikh holy shrines became the part of the West Punjab. Master Tara Singh was responsible for the instigation of hatred and gaps among the Sikh and Muslim communities and there was no possibility left behind for any sort of reconciliation among them. This partition of Punjab sanctioned the political motives and objectives of the Congress but not the Sikhs. This put the question mark on the intelligence and the leadership of Master Tara Singh. All in all, the Sikhs could not maintain their prestige, identity, worth and status in Indian politics after partition.

---

85 Col. Peter Green, 'Eyewitness to the end of Empire', *Canberra Times*, 15/8/1987, (Peter Green Papers, Mss Eur C 416, O.I.O.C), cited in Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality, Violence, Migration and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947-1961*, 88.