

COURSE TITLE :POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIA

COURSE -402

UNIT – IV

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SHIROMANI AKALI DAL (SAD),

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), English **Supreme Akali Party**, also called **Akali Dal**, regional political party in Punjab state, northwestern India. It is the principal advocacy organization of the large Sikh community in the state and is centred on the philosophy of promoting the well-being of the country's Sikh population by providing them with a political as well as a religious platform. The party also has a presence on the national political scene in New Delhi. The precursor to the present-day SAD was an organization established in December 1920 to help guide the quasi-militant Akali movement of the early 1920s, in which Sikhs demanded and (through the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925) won from the ruling British authorities in India control over the gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship). The present-day SAD, which has claimed to be the oldest regional political party in India, has also controlled Sikh religious institutions such as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and, more recently, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee. From the mid-1920s the SAD was a part of the Indian independence movement, and its members participated in the protests and civil-disobedience programs (*satyagraha*) of Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (Congress Party). Although the SAD remained committed to the broader objectives of

Indian independence from Britain, its primary mission remained the promotion and protection of the rights of the Sikh minority.

The SAD first contested elections as a political party in 1937, after the Government of India Act of 1935 had authorized the creation of provincial assemblies in British India. With Indian independence achieved in 1947, the SAD spearheaded the movement to create a separate state for the Punjabi-speaking and largely Sikh populace of northwestern India. The movement finally realized its goal when the state of Punjab was divided in 1966, the southeastern portion of it becoming the predominantly Hindi-speaking state of Haryana.

In 1967, in the first legislative assembly elections for the newly configured Punjab state, the SAD won fewer than one-fourth of the total number of seats but was able to cobble together a broad coalition of non-Congress parties to form the state government. Conflicts and power struggles within the party, however, led to the government's fall within months. In the 1969 assembly elections, the SAD won more seats than it had in 1967, but it was still short of a majority and again formed a coalition government—this time with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh party (a pro-Hindu forerunner of the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]). That government was also short-lived, again marked by intraparty fighting and frequent leadership changes that culminated in the dissolution of the government in mid-1971 and a period of rule by the central government in New Delhi. The SAD lost badly in the 1972 assembly elections, and the Congress Party, with a majority of seats, formed the government.

Over the next several years, the SAD attempted to rebuild and to reestablish itself as the sole representative of the Sikh community. The party nonetheless underwent divisions, with several splinter groups claiming the mantle of the

true SAD. The party did win a majority of seats in the 1977 state assembly elections and formed a government, with Parkash Singh Badal as chief minister (head of government). It was Badal's second term in the office, as he had served in 1970–71, during the first SAD-led government.

The party again lost to Congress in the 1980 state assembly elections. Also at that time, a growing number of Sikhs were agitating for greater autonomy, and some were resorting to violent means to promote their demands. In 1982 the main militant leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and his armed followers occupied the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar. They were forcefully evicted in June 1984 by the Indian military, and Bhindranwale was killed during the operation. There followed a period of violence in Punjab and elsewhere in India that included the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards at the end of October.

Despite continuing factionalism in the SAD, the party won a large majority of seats in the 1985 assembly elections and formed a government in the state that lasted for almost two years before central rule from New Delhi was reimposed. The party boycotted the 1992 assembly elections, and the Congress Party emerged victorious. Meanwhile, Badal, leader of the largest of the various SAD factions, became president of the party in 1996. The party won another large majority of seats in the 1997 assembly elections and formed the government, with Badal serving his third term as chief minister. After again losing to Congress in the 2002 assembly polls, the SAD—in alliance with the BJP—won in 2007; Badal commenced his fourth term as chief minister. The alliance retained power in 2012, with Badal continuing as chief minister. However, in 2008 he had stepped down as president of the party and been succeeded in that post by his son, Sukhbir Singh Badal.

The SAD maintained a modest presence in the Lok Sabha (lower chamber of the Indian parliament), often consisting of only a small handful of seats from Punjab constituencies. Its highest seat total was nine in the 1977 elections, and it garnered eight in the 1996, 1998, and 2004 contests. The party's total was reduced to four seats in both the 2009 and 2014 elections. For many years the party remained unaligned with any of the national parties, but in 1998 it joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance coalition that ruled the country from 1998 to 2004. During that time the SAD was able to exert some influence on policy at the national level, especially with regard to India's relations with Pakistan, with which Punjab shared a long international border. The party maintained its alliance with the BJP into the 21st century, and, following the BJP's landslide win in 2014, SAD member Harsimrat Kaur Badal (the wife of Sukhbir Singh Badal) was named to the cabinet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.