

Analyzing The Difference Between Punjab's Gurudwara Politics And Haryana

I. Introduction

Gurdwaras are crucial in developing Sikh religious traditions and shaping Sikh history. They are also important in Sikhs' spiritual, social, and political lives. In Punjab, the one who heads the gurudwara committee strongly influences state politics, so there has always been a tussle over managing gurudwaras.

The **gurudwaras in Punjab and adjoining areas** are **managed by the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) headquartered in Amritsar, Punjab** which has continued its legacy for over 100 years. However, due to the **demand for autonomy and independence, the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (HSGMC) was established** to manage the sikh shrines in the state. After years of legal challenges over its formation which threatened the supremacy of SGPC, The **Supreme Court upheld its validity in 2022 paving the way for a pivotal shift in the socio-political dynamics of Punjab and Haryana.**

II. Historical background

The year 1920 was one of the most eventful years for Sikhism. The prevalence of non-sikh practices, misappropriation of funds, and disgrace of core Sikh values due to widespread corruption by the mahants and British managers led to the degradation of these divine spaces. With the gradual **rise of the Akali movement and the Gurudwara reform movement, the SGPC was established in 1920** aiming to remove the corrupt priests and managers from Gurudwaras. The legal framework for its functioning was provided under the **Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1925** which shifted the control of historical shrines to the SGPC ensuring the preservation of the spiritual heritage of the Sikhs and the protection of the Sikh identity. The SGPC throughout the years played an important role in the Sikh community and in shaping the broader political landscape of Punjab. The leadership of notable presidents like Master Tara Singh and Sant Chanan Singh were instrumental in guiding the religious and political affairs of the sikh during the period of upheaval.

The **Punjabi suba movement**, led primarily by Akali Dal and backed by SGPC, advocated for creating a Punjabi-speaking state characterized by protests, strikes, and arrests. this led to the establishment of the Punjabi-speaking state of Punjab in 1966 marking a significant victory for SGPC and Sikhs in particular.

In the years following the SGPC continues to be a central figure in sikh religious and political spheres. It has navigated internal politics, interactions with the Indian government, and various community issues maintaining its position as a key stakeholder in advocating Sikh rights.

However in Haryana with the rising local governance issues and demands for establishing autonomy, there was a call for a separate Gurudwara management committee solely focussing on the diverse needs of Sikhs in Haryana. To address this issue the **HS Chatta Committee** was created under the **leadership of Bhupinder Singh**

Hooda to look into the legality of the separate management committee. And so in **2014, under the INC government in Haryana, the Haryana Sikh Gurudwara (Management) Act, 2014 was passed.** However, this decision received strong criticism from the SGPC and Akali Dal, the two dominant institutions looking after the sikh governance leading to several legal challenges. Despite the legal issues, finally, in 2022, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the act marking it to be a landmark event that led to a change in the socio-religious and political fabric of Punjab and Haryana.

The historical evolution underscores the struggles for representation and autonomy within the Sikh community.

The Sikh Gurudwaras Act, 1925

The Punjab legislative council passed this legislation marking the culmination of the struggle of the Sikh people from 1920-1925 to wrest control of their places of worship from the priests. The management remained with the priests mainly belonging to the Udasi sect who after the advent of the British in 1849 began to consider the shrines and lands attached to them as personal properties and used the income appropriating from it for personal use. Many of these even alienated or sold the Gurudwara properties at will. Apart from this, there have been instances of immorality giving rise to the Gurudwara reform movement.

The **Sikh Gurudwara and Shrines Act 1922** was passed which envisaged a committee nominated by the government to take control of the gurudwaras. However, the Akali Dal leaders did not accept this and continued with their agitation. The government proposed another draft bill and the principal demand about the shrines being handed over for management to a representative body of the Sikhs was conceded. The bill was moved in the Punjab Legislative Council by Sardar Tara Singh of Moga on 7 May 1925 and piloted by another Sikh member, Bhai Jodh Singh, eminent educationist and theologian.

The select committee presented its report on the bill on 20th June, passed by the council on 7th July. The bill was **operationalized on 1st November 1925 as the Sikh Gurudwaras Act, 1925.** The act aims to provide for better administration of certain sikh gurudwaras and for inquiries into matters and settlement of disputes connected therewith. The act has 3 parts.

Part 1 contains preliminary matters like title, extent, and definitions, the procedure for bringing other gurudwaras under its purview, and the appointment of and procedures for a gurudwara tribunal.

The definition clause does not define a sikh gurudwara but section 2.10 lays down a notified sikh gurudwara as any gurudwara declared by notification of the local government under the provision of the act to be a sikh gurudwara.

Schedule 1 of the act contains all the key historical shrines which can be undisputably claimed by the Sikhs. Originally 241 gurudwaras were included out of which 65 remained in Pakistan. **Schedule 2** contains institutions that were not sikh gurudwaras and for the control of which no questions could be raised. The gurudwaras in the above-mentioned schedules were declared as sikh gurudwaras by the state government. It also outlined the property owned by each gurudwara.

In respect of the second category, i.e. gurudwaras other than the scheduled gurudwaras listed in schedule 1, **section 7** prescribes that fifty or more worshippers of 21 years of age and residing in the area of the police station where the gurudwara is situated may forward an application to the state government giving the details about the property. The state government publishes the application and invites for objection if any, from either a hereditary officeholder of that institution or at least twenty worshippers thereof to be filed within ninety days of the date of the notification.

In case of no petition, the government issues a notification declaring it to be Sikh Gurudwara or in case of an objection it is referred to the Sikh Gurudwaras tribunal for adjudication.

Chapter 3 of Part 1 contains the provisions for the Sikh Gurudwara Tribunal and an appeal against the finding of the tribunal lies only to the high court and has to be heard by a bench of two judges.

Criteria for determining whether the disputed institution is a Sikh gurudwara or not:

- A. If the tribunal finds that the gurudwara established
 - I. By or in memory of the ten gurus of the Sikhs
 - II. Owing to the same tradition connected with one of the ten gurus
 - III. Owing to some incident connected with the life of any of the ten gurus
 - IV. In memory of a Sikh martyr, saint, or historical person
 - V. For use by the Sikhs for public worship

If the procedures of part 1 are not adopted, **section 38 of part 2** of the act provides that ordinary civil courts can decide for a particular institution to be a Sikh gurudwara or not, when it decides that a gurudwara is a Sikh gurudwara the state government issues the necessary notifications and provisions of part 3 of the act relating to the management of the gurudwaras.

Part 3 of the act provides a central body for the management of sikh gurudwaras referred to as the Gurudwara Central Board which at its first meeting got its name as Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. The government accepted the change and now the SGPC directly manages the important sikh gurudwaras and supervises the working of other committees which are partly nominated by the committee and partly elected by the electors of the district where the gurudwara is situated. **According to an amendment made in 1987**, all gurudwaras with an annual income of over 25000 rupees come directly under the control of SGPC. the act also contains detailed provisions regarding the elections of the members of SGPC, disqualification, meetings of the committee, elections of the executive committee and other office bearers, and their respective powers. It further entails details about the finances of the SGPC and other committees.

The religious fund is utilized for the propagation of the Sikh religion and if any surplus it is utilized for the welfare of the people. The research fund is utilized for carrying out research in Sikh history and for the publication of books. It also creates funds for the industrial and educational advancement of the community.

The act acts as a landmark in the sikh history of reforms and recognizes the right of Sikhs to manage their gurudwaras through elected representatives.¹

The Sikh Gurudwara Amendment Act, 2023 paves for eliminating the undue control of ‘Modern-day Masands over the free-to-air telecast of the sacred Gurbani. With the amendment section 125A would be inserted for the live telecast of Gurbani free of cost. It also stipulates that the SGPC board would be responsible for propagating the teachings of the gurus by broadcasting them live without any interruptions like advertisements.

The Sikh Gurudwara Act, of 1925 serves as a bedrock of the Sikh religious and political history which aims to manage the historical shrines and empower the Sikh community. As discussed earlier, before 1925, many gurudwaras were controlled by the hereditary mahants, mainly from the Udasi sect accused of corruption and practices apart from orthodox Sikhism. **The Akali Dal a dominant party in Punjab has a strong historical legacy and wields significant influence over the act as it used it for the creation of SGPC which was established in 1920.** This move marked a significant victory for Akali Dal as it aligned to centralize sikh religious authority under a body that could be controlled and therefore would enhance the political legitimacy among the Sikhs.

The Akali Dal has been a significant political force in Punjab and has maintained significant control over the SGPC through **electoral influence** which has allowed it to influence the major decisions of SGPC like the management of gurudwara, funds, and its religious policies. Apart from these, **certain leaders of Akali Dal like Master Tara Singh and Gurucharan Singh Tohran also hold important positions in the SGPC thus creating a space for Akali Dal to influence the SGPC.**

However the same has been **criticised by various leaders** accusing it of politicization as SGPC has become a political agenda for Akali Dal rather than being merely a religious body. **Second,** The centralized system of SGPC has been criticized for creating a monopoly and reducing the autonomy of local gurudwara committees. **Third,** the definition of Sikh identity by the act has been criticized for being too rigid especially by the Udasi sect as they had been historically involved in the management of gurudwaras. **Fourth,** there have been allegations of corruption, and have been even accused of neglecting the historical manuscripts and destroying the sikh heritage during renovations in Punjab. Apart from these, the **recent amendment to the act in 2023** which mandates free broadcasting of Gurbani from the Golden Temple has received backlash from Shiromani Akali Dal for being unconstitutional and interfering in Sikh religious affairs. Despite this, the act holds significant importance in the Sikh religious and political landscape.

Moreover, several sikh scholars hold divergent views regarding the sikh gurudwara act. **Harjot Oberoi** in his work particularly “The Construction of Religious Boundaries Culture, identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition,” considers the act as a consolidation of the Sikh religious authority.² Many scholars consider the act to have brought a major victory by democratizing the act. On the other hand, certain scholars like **Gurtej Singh**

¹ [sikhencyclopedia](https://sikhencyclopedia.org/)

² [wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh_Gurudwara_Act,_1925)

consider that Akali Dal's influence has led to the lack of appreciation for the Sikh heritage and has alleged prioritization of political agendas over religious matters.

III. Political influence

The SGPC and SAD are the two most important religious/political institutions of the Sikh community and have formed the main interrelated nexus of Sikh religious and political authority in Punjab since 1920. According to **Paul Wallace** at the center of Sikh politics is an institutionalized Sikh political system including the SGPC and SAD along with the Akal Takht. The SGPC is a democratically representative institution that administers historical Sikh shrines in Punjab and other parts of north India. It maintains its ties with the Sikh diaspora and aims to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Sikhs. Similarly, the SAD with Sikhs as its electoral base had two major goals since its independence i.e. one to extract maximum concessions from the Indian central government for the Sikhs and Punjab and second, to create a speaking state. However, despite its creation, the SAD could not assert its domination over the state electoral politics.

Under **The Sikh Gurudwaras Act, of 1925 the Gurudwara Election Commission, a statutory body holds the SGPC elections.** The union ministry appoints the Gurudwara Election Commission chairman to oversee the elections. They hold the elections in coordination with the Punjab security and provide security and other resources.

There are a total of **170 elected members of the SGPC.** In addition, there are 15 nominated members, 5 heads of the Takhts (Sikh temporal seats), and the head granthi (chief priest) of the Golden Temple.

There are **four essential conditions for becoming a voter in the SGPC elections.** At the time of enrolment, a person must sign a declaration saying that:

- a. They maintain unshorn hair
- b. They do not drink alcohol
- c. They do not consume halal meat
- d. They do not consume tobacco

Additionally, the voters must be Sikhs aged 21 and above. Though the elections should be held every five years, certain irregularities remain. So far, more than 5 million voters have been registered for the SGPC elections since last October. The **2011 elections** had 5.6 million registered voters, most of whom were from Punjab (5.27 million), followed by Haryana (337,000), Himachal Pradesh (23,011), and Chandigarh (11,932).

³Within the Sikh community, the various sub-groups hold different significance and have other roles in voting for the SGPC elections. For instance, **every member of the SGPC must be an Amritdhari Sikh.** **Amritdhari Sikhs** are baptized and have been initiated into the purest form of Sikhism. The Jathedars of the five Takhts also have to be Amritdharis. Similarly, the **Keshdhari Sikhs** form a significant portion of the electorate. Its registration entails a village-level government officer documenting the voters' adherence to the Keshdhari tenets accompanied by a photograph depicting their "**Sabat Soorat**". The **Sehajdhari Sikhs** in a similar line have always remained a complex issue. The union ministry had also issued guidelines notifying the debarment of Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in the SGPC elections. This move resulted in protests from

³ [Indianexpress](#)

Sehajdhari Sikhs who unlike the baptized may trim their hair and may not wear all the five articles of faith. However, in December 2011 the Punjab and Haryana High Court nullified the SGPC polls held in that year. It restored the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs by quashing the 2003 notification by the center. The varied sikh groups have demanded fresh elections to be held since 2016 but the house elected in 2011 is still functioning. The SGPC moved to the Supreme Court in February 2012, challenging the order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The Supreme Court in 2016 reinstated the general house and disposed of the petition advocating the right to vote to 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' as the case became irrelevant following a new central law taking away their right. the Shiromani Akali Dal (the ruling party in Punjab) was in alliance with the BJP and also had control over the SGPC. According to them the **Sikh Gurudwaras Amendment Bill, 2016** should have "only Sikhs" being involved in the management of shrines. This move would strengthen the politico-religious credentials of the SAD.

According to the Sehajdhari Sikh Party, out of the 1.75 crore Sikhs as per the 2011 census, 70 lakhs have been pushed out of the management⁴. Presently as per the new bill, Sehajdhari Sikhs and Sikhs with shorn hair have no voting rights, and only the sabat surat Sikhs along with the Amritdhari Sikhs can vote. This step leads to divisions within the Sikh community whereas some consider it to be a political move and others see it as an exclusionary step undermining the unity within the Sikh community.

However fresh elections are anticipated to be held in June 2025. The **recent election process of SGPC faces a lot of challenges with minimum voter turnout.** As of July 25, 2024, the number of registered voters stands at approximately 27.87 lakh, a significant drop from the 52 lakh registered voters in the previous election held in 2011. Despite multiple extensions in the registration deadline, the responses have been meager and this can be attributed to a lot of factors. The series of controversial decisions by both the SGPC and Akali Dal may have eroded trust within the community. Further, the lack of engagement with the voters regarding registrations has led to the decline. Moreover, Kiranjot Kaur, an SGPC member outlines the complex voter registration process as one of the reasons. Thus the decline in voter registration can be attributed to several factors the mistrust with the Sikh community, the cumbersome voter registration process, the impact of migration, and the diminishing relevance of SGPC. Further, the upcoming elections would be a test of the future politics within the Sikh community.

In all the parliamentary elections being held the SAD has performed reasonably well and dominates the institutionalized sikh political system with the Sikh electorate but has a minimal representation in the national parliament due to less than 2% sikh population in the Hindu majority area. Presently the SGPC has been trying to regain the lost political ground and assert its dominance by filling the vacuum wherein the radicalisation is taking place and aims to re-establish the badals in the political scene.

The formation of the HSGMC, backed by support from Congress, marks a pivotal shift in the power dynamics of Gurudwara politics. The HSGMC sought regional autonomy and aimed to localize the representation of the Sikh people in Haryana. The Haryana government saw this move as a strategy to gain the support of the Sikh

⁴ [khalsavox](#)

population bordering Haryana, consolidate Sikh support, and weaken the SGPC and SAD's hold over the Sikhs in the region.

The **last elections of SGPC were held in 2011 and as per the results, Akali Dal gained victory over 157 seats out of 170 seats.** Nearly 580 candidates are contesting the polls. Of the estimated 57 lakh voters, about 60% cast their votes. ⁵This resulted in the landslide victory of SAD but presently their influence seems to have declined over the years. Similarly, in the **recently held elections of HSGMC, 21 independents were elected through voting in 39 wards.** In all 2.45 lakh electors cast their vote, recording a turnout of 69.85%⁶. The independent candidates dominated the first general elections of HSGMC winning 22 of 40 wards. The SAD and its alliance won 18 seats in the Haryana Gurudwara elections and it did not contest as a political party. Its candidates constituted a religious group in the name of Haryana Panthic Dal. Thus with the formation of HSGMC, a shift in the dynamics of SAD and SGPC can be witnessed.

The **SGPC in Punjab has since long been dominated by the Badal family**. The dissidents ‘Taksali akalīs’ and the detractors of SAD have joined hands on several occasions to overturn the dominance of Badal’s family but all in vain. In 1996, 2004, and 2011, SAD won most of the seats. In the annual elections for the president, office bearers, and executives, SAD had always maintained hegemony. During their rule, several controversies surrounded them. In 2011 Badal was conferred with the title Fakh-e-Qaum by the then Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh causing an uproar. In 2022, SAD was decimated and was struggling to get their Panthic vote bank.

Jagir Kaur, presidential candidate of the SAD rebel group stated her main motive was to free the SGPC from the political influence and to streamline the working of jathedars appointed by the SGPC from time to time.

With the emergence of AAP as the third major player in Punjab politics, the dynamics seem to have changed. **The Bhagwaat Mann, the chief minister of Punjab has accused the leaders of the Badal family of misuse of power for political interests.** The remarks by Mann suggest that the AAP wants to wean away the Panthic body from the Badal family and the SAD. The Badal family has historically had a strong grip over the SGPC but was never without internal opposition. Factors like internal dissent, political opposition, and the call for reforms have changed the relationship between the Sikh religious institutions and political leadership in Punjab.

In Haryana, the Haryana Gurudwara Election Commission confirmed 22 independents being elected followed by 9 members from the Panthak Dal (jhinda), six from Akali Dal affiliated haryana sikh panthak dal, and three from sikh samaj sanstha led by Didar Singh Nalvi.⁷ As the congress led Bhupinder Singh Hooda played a key role in establishing HSGMC using it as a political instrument for garnering the support of Sikhs. With its inception, the SAD has lost its influence directly on the sikh institutions based in Haryana weakening the national sikh politics.

⁵ Hindustantimes

⁶ [TimesofIndia](#)

⁷ Tribuneindia

The **Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee or DSGMC** is an autonomous organization that manages the Gurudwaras, various educational institutions, hospitals, old age homes, libraries, and other charitable institutions in Delhi. The DSGMC is headquartered in Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, near Parliament House. Under the Delhi sikh gurudwara act of 1971, passed by the parliament the committee would be elected by the Sikh vote and the election would take place every 4 years. In the recently held **2021 DSGMC election, Shiromani Akali Dal won the crucial elections by clinching 27 out of 46 seats.** According to the Directorate of Gurudwara elections, the Manjit Singh GK-led Jago party won in three wards, while the Akali Dal (Delhi) headed by Paramjeet Singh Sarna won 14 seats.

Manjinder Singh Sirsa, the outgoing president had lost the Punjabi Bagh seat to Harvinder Singh Sarna by 469 votes. However SAD(Delhi) had secured 40.27% of the total votes outperforming the other rival parties. Despite the loss by Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Sukhbir Singh Badal, SAD chief, nominated Sirsa from the SGPC quota. But this move of Badal could either lead to internal weakness or would be to keep hold of the influence.

Sukhbir Singh Badal considers the results as the beginning of a storm that will sweep the Punjab polls. The nomination of Sirsa suggests that the Badal family's influence persists and holds strong control over the religious bodies. Though the control persists the party needs to broaden its horizon and move beyond the family loyalists.⁸

The SGPC adopts a central approach to gurudwara politics. Its roots are in Punjab and is supported by SAD. In contrast, the HSGMC, backed by Congress, caters to only Haryana. It aims to assert its regional identity and underscore the desire for self-governance. Both committees hold significant political and religious authority over the region, shaping the wider political landscape of the state.

IV. Religious authority

Punjab has the largest population of Sikhs forming around 57.8% of the state population and is the only Sikh-majority state in India. The SGPC since its inception in 1920 has emerged as a notable body in guarding the sikh interests. **Under the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, it has gained the legal authority to appoint the jathedar of akal takht.** The SGPC controls the finances and administration of the majority of Sikh shrines in Punjab and adjoining areas. However, according to the critics, the intertwined relationship between SGPC and SAD undermines the moral authority of Akal Takht making it susceptible to political interference. The SGPC members are forced to work according to the sikh religious doctrines. Recently, the SGPC members have approached the Akal Takht and Jathedar alleging that the political leaders have not publicly accepted their mistakes. This undermines the significance of akal takht and therefore in the Sikh religion there is accountability towards the religious institution. In addition to this, the jat sikhs being in the majority dominate and hold the various posts in Punjab politics with very little or no such positions being given to Dalits and OBC sikhs. Charanjeet Singh Channi was the first one to become the Chief Minister belonging to the Dalit community. The Jats and the upper castes do not allow the Dalit Sikhs- Mazhabis and Rangretas to

⁸ [Hindustantimes](#)

even participate in religious ceremonies. Several attempts have been made to remove the caste system from the Sikh community, the “Singh Sabha Movement” is one such example. But all the efforts were in vain thus prompting the Dalit Sikhs to establish separate gurudwaras. They still struggle to find representation within the Sikh community⁹. The SGPC being an old institution in Punjab asserts its religious authority and tries to maintain peace and harmony between the religious faiths, however, certain irregularities and instances of caste differences within them can’t be ignored.

However, **in Haryana, the Sikhs are in the minority accounting for only 5% with the majority being the Hindu Jat population.** The attention was drawn to the Sikhs in Haryana catering to their regional demands. Many Sikhs in Haryana allege that the policies of SGPC only favor the Punjab-based gurudwaras neglecting the needs of Haryana, so a separate management committee would resolve the problem and provide autonomy to Haryana in managing the religious affairs.

Punjab and Haryana have long histories and cultures, but different political, economic, and linguistic identities. Though they share religious doctrines and principles, they take different approaches to managing religious affairs.

V. Regional Identity and socio-cultural Dynamics

The regional and socio-cultural dynamics of both Punjab and Haryana have been shaped in the presence of SGPC and HSGMC.

The **SGPC in Punjab** has played a greater role in asserting the regional identity promoting the khalsa traditions. It acts as an important religious political institution influencing the sikh identities and working for their progress and growth. They also work for community welfare and promote their language, festivals, and cultural traditions. The SGPC through such measures tries to uphold the ethos of Sikh traditions by managing the gurudwaras across the state.

However, with the establishment of **HSGMC in 2014**, there was a pivotal shift in the governance of gurudwaras. Its formation denotes a separate identity of Sikhs in Haryana. It was seen as a means to **empower** them and provide some **autonomy in making their decisions**. They had greater control over regional affairs. Moreover, Haryana held the first general elections of HSGMC in January 2025 ensuring legitimacy and showcasing the importance of democratization in asserting the regional identity.

The different trajectories adopted by both the management committee shape the socio-cultural dynamics of the area. **The differences denote the cultural and social dynamics of north India where Punjab tries to create a more centralized authority in establishing the Sikh identity whereas Haryana aims for regional autonomy of Sikhs in Haryana and create a more conducive and inclusive environment.**

VI. Governance and administrative approaches

The governance and administrative approaches adopted by both the SGPC and HSGMC in Punjab and Haryana reflect the socio-cultural dynamics. The **SGPC in Punjab is referred to as the mini parliament of**

⁹ [opindia](https://www.opindia.com/)

Sikhs which acts as the apex governing body of all the gurdwaras in India and abroad. It works under the directives of Shri Akal Takht Sahib. The SGPC is directly elected through the elections by Sikh sangat wherein the sikh male and female voters above 18 years of age are registered under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925. The first election to the central board of SGPC was held on June 18, 1926. Presently it has 191 members of which 170 are elected from different areas including Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh. 15 members are nominated from all over the country and six members include honorable jatedars of 5 Takht sahibs and head granth of Sachkanand Shri Harmander sahib.

For over a century, they have been transparently managing the historic shrines. Apart from a fair and transparent election system, various educational institutions are established under the SGPC management to empower the people in rural and backward areas. Further, it also manages the finances and multiple donations and assets received from the various gurudwaras for the community welfare and the betterment of society.

Along the same lines, the **HSGMC was formed under the Haryana sikh gurdwaras (management) Act of 2014 to upkeep the Sikh Gurdwaras in the state.** The recently conducted elections of HSGMC in Haryana act as a major milestone for the Haryana sikh community with an opportunity to independently manage the gurdwara affairs and funds. **Around 3.5 lakh voters have been registered showcasing the importance of democratisation and the participative nature of people¹⁰.** This also marks the **autonomy of the Haryana Sikhs** in managing the sacred spaces. The gradual development witnessed since the formation of SGPC to separate committees being formed for Haryana Sikhs denotes the evolving nature of Sikhs and the importance of regional identity in the Sikh community changing the socio-political dynamics in both states.

VII. Controversies and conflicts

The stage for a confrontation between the SGPC and HSGMC emerged with Haryana's demand to set up its management committee called the HSGMC to cater to regional demands. **The combination of political interest, money power, and religious sentiment fueled by a lack of trust make the demand for separate authority to manage the Gurudwaras in Haryana a highly volatile issue.** The decision angered the SGPC leaders as the Badal family could recognize their decline over the control of nationwide gurudwaras. This also prompted the SGPC leaders to take a legal route by challenging the Supreme Court decision on July 25, 2014.

The people who managed the Gurudwara in Haryana claimed that the SGPC Sikhs didn't let the Haryana Sikhs make decisions on their own. It was alleged that the SGPC appointed the members without any discussion and even had cases of financial irregularities. The Punjab government considers the HSGMC not to be a religious issue but a diversionary tactic used by the Badal government. The Akalis, on the other hand, consider the move to be one that can lead to a division within the Sikh community. Moreover, the SAD and SGPC both considered the move as a direct interference in Sikh religious affairs and carried out protests from various places to the Golden Temple, Amritsar opposing the recognition of HSGMC. Sukhbir Singh Badal alleged that all political parties including Congress, and the Aam Aadmi Party wanted to deprive SGPC of the right to manage the gurudwaras across the country.

¹⁰ babushahi.com

The BJP was in alliance with SAD in Punjab and, therefore, opposed the move by the Haryana government, considering it an interference in personal Sikh matters. However, when the SC upheld the validity of the HSGMC, the BJP accepted it with grace and supported the local committee's needs. Thus, as the Haryana gurdwara is freed from the control of SGPC, the hegemony established by the Badal family comes to be at stake. This decision of the Supreme Court has led to significant changes in the political landscape of Punjab and Haryana.

There have been skirmishes regarding coercion between the Sikh leaders and the ad hoc HSGMC. It is alleged that the ad hoc panel pressured the gurudwara's employees to hand over control, leading to allegations of using coercive tactics to assert control over Haryana gurudwaras. The forcible possession of the gurudwara in Kurukshetra led to a scuffle between the supporters of HSGMC and SGPC inside the gurudwara's sanctum, destroying the sanctity of the place.

These conflicts pose a deeper challenge involving politics, religious interests, and regional identity. Apart from the conflict between the SGPC and HSGMC over the management of Gurudwara, there have been **internal conflicts within the two committees**. In **Haryana**, the internal power struggles and allegations of financial irregularities necessitated the interference of the chief minister of Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar in the internal matters of HSGMC, raising questions about its governance and management styles. Further, the **critique by Jagir Kaur the former president of SGPC regarding the politicization of SGPC** and the need to free it from the control of SAD shows the need to divert from the political influence and focus more on administrative and religious responsibilities.

The tensions between the HSGMC and SGPC reflect the need to prioritize the community and local needs of people rather than address political interests and bring a balance between political-religious and regional issues.

VIII. Conclusion

The differences between the SGPC and HSGMC show an interplay of religious, political, and regional dynamics within the Sikh system. The **SGPC** is a **century-old institution** intertwined deeply within the political system of Punjab, especially the **Shiromani Akali Dal**. The SGPC has a **centralized authority** over the gurudwaras across the country but has been **criticized for prioritizing political interests over religious and administrative responsibilities**. On the other hand, **HSGMC** caters to the Sikh population of Haryana and focuses on **enhancing regional autonomy and aspirations**. However **both the management committees face internal disputes and factionalism thus emphasizing the need to have a more balanced approach**. The **divide between the SGPC and HSGMC needs to be reduced and a balance needs to be brought by focusing more on the welfare of the communities rather than on the political aspirations**. By addressing the underlying tensions and skirmishes, the cultural ethos of Sikhs can be preserved and can promote harmony within the Sikh community.

IX. References

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