

MASTER TARA SINGH AND NEHRU REPORT (1928)

Dr Dharmjit Singh *

Abstract: Master Tara Singh occupies a specific place in the history of Sikh *Panth*. The life and conduct of this dignified man was not confined to the level of a single individual. Rather it had attained the status of an institution. Hardly there was any *Panthic* programme which was devoid of Master Tara Singh's role. He was the most acceptable leader of the Sikh community from 1927 to 1967. Sikhs felt gross injustice done to them when Moti Lal Nehru report's recommendations (Nehru Report) were made known. This committee was constituted to prepare the blue print of the constitution of India in response to the challenge thrown to Indian leadership by Conservative Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead. Under the leadership of Master Tara Singh, Akali Dal and other Sikh organizations offered its stubborn opposition to its recommendations and finally these recommendations were withdrawn.

Keywords: Panthic programme, legitimate rights, Lukhnow Pact, Central Sikh League, Muslim League, Hindu Maha Sabha, communal representation, Dominion status, *Puran Swaraz*(compete autonomy) and Sikh minority

Introduction: Forty years of Sikh history revolved round his personality and every political and religious event of the time had his imprint. He was in politics but behaved beyond politics and kept himself beyond power politics. His politics was for the welfare of all (*Sarbat Da Bhala*). Master Tara Singh used to say that his politics had always confined to the *Panth* and only for the sake of *Panth*. He was free from material attachment. When the interests of the Sikh minority was being washed in Punjab in the Nehru Report in 1928, then he came forward as the champion of the legitimate rights of Sikhs being ignored in it and strongly and successfully pleaded with the Congress high command to withdraw its recommendations. Though he was annoyed with

* **M.Phil., Ph.D (History) Principal, GNDU College, Verka-Amritsar**

Congress for not making care for Sikh grievances that actually edged Muslim preponderance, he did not favor breaking his relations with Congress at this moment.

Objective of study: The main purpose of the study of this theme is to explore the different facets of the personality of veteran Akali leader Master Tara Singh up to 1928 as well as to diagnose how Master Tara Singh with the help of other Sikh leaders and organizations opposed the injustice meted out to the Sikhs of Punjab in the frame work of Nehru Report and finally forced the Congress to withdraw it.

Research Methodology: Primary sources in the form of periodicals and News Papers of 1928, Government of India publications related to this period of eventual study, biographies and reminiscences of veteran political leaders have been exhausted to explore the different facets of Master Tara Singh and to have day to day information on events related to Nehru Report. Standard secondary sources available at different archives and universities were also consulted to have a fair and objective look of the theme.

Discussion : Master Tara Singh , in childhood known as Nanak Chand , born in Hindu family belonged to Malhotra sub-caste of Khatri , stimulated to Sikhism during his school days and baptized as Tara Singh under the influence of Singh Sabha movement and Sant Attar Singh , an altruistic Sikh missionary in 1902 and became an important figure on the Sikh political scene at the time of the Gurdwara Reform movement in the early twenties of the twentieth century. During the movement he courted arrest numerous times including Golden Temple Key *morcha* and and Guru Ka Bagh *morcha* in 1921. After the government approved the organization of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhik Committee as a central body to manage Sikh shrines , Master Tara Singh was elected as vice president of the SGPC. When Simon Commission came to India, then he was front runner in the agitation in Punjab that were waged against it in the form of protests and boycotts. At that time most of the political activities in the colonial Punjab was being handled by the Sikhs. Sikhs felt gross injustice done to them when Moti Lal Nehru report's recommendations (Nehru Report) were made known. This committee was constituted to prepare the blue print of the constitution of India in response to the challenge thrown to Indian leadership by Conservative Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead. Under the leadership of Master

Tara Singh, Akali Dal and other Sikh organizations offered its stubborn opposition to its recommendations and finally these recommendations were withdrawn.¹ Although he was an important political figure, his rise to the foremost position among Sikh political leaders came during the controversy in the Sikh community over the constitutional stalemate of the Nehru Committee Report. One group of Sikh leaders, led by Mangal Singh Gill, favored acceptance of the proposals for the sake of nationalism, even though they did not adequately meet the claims and aspirations of the Sikhs. Another group, led by Baba Kharak Singh, so thoroughly disagreed with the proposals that it even turned against the Congress party.² As a judicious and farsighted leader, Tara Singh took the middle position; he voiced support for the Congress party, since the Sikhs were a minority “there was no wisdom in standing aloof from the greatest and the only country-wide political organization,” but at the same time he condemned the proposals outrightly and demanded their withdrawal or report’s modification. Durlab Singh, one biographer of Master Tara Singh commented, he was a staunch supporter of the Congress no doubt, but only up to the limit that it did not interfere with the legitimate rights of the Sikhs.”³

When struggle between British imperialism and free evolution of Indian people was going on in the first half of the twentieth century, then on 26th November, 1927, Lord Birkenhead, the then Colonial Government’s Secretary of State for India challenged Indian statesmanship by stating in the House of Lords (even earlier on 7th July, 1925), “ Let them produce a constitution which carries behind a fair measure of general agreement among the great people of India”. It is relevant to cite the observation made by Gandhi on Birkenhead's challenge. Gandhi retorted: "Lord Birkenhead thinks the British Government are trustees of our welfare. We think they hold us in bondage for their benefit .His Lordship says we cannot be a nation with our 9 religions and 130 languages. We contend that for all practical purposes and for protection from outside, we are one nation".⁴ This pointedly observation of Lord Birkenhead was an open challenge to Indian statesmanship. Indian leaders, who were confident of their political acumen, did not delay in accepting this challenge.⁵ The question was taken up by Indian National Congress in its Madras session in 1927. It passed a resolution authorizing the Congress Working Committee to confer with similar committees, approved other organizations, political, labour, commercial and communal, to draft a *Swaraj* constitution for India and to place the same for consideration and approval before a special convention to be convened in Delhi not later than March, 1928. It was

keen to evolve a formula for Hindu Muslim unity. It also accepted the resolution of Master Tara Singh on 28th December 1927 unanimously urging that when the question of representation of Punjab was tackled, then special care to protect the interests of the Sikhs on account of their specific importance of minority, be taken. Master Tara Singh was present at the Madras Congress in 1927 as a member of the All India Congress Committee and he pointed out that the communal formula evolved by its Working Committee and the AICC included reciprocal concession in addition to joint electorates and reservation of seats on the basis of population. Hence the idea of calling an all parties conference found favour with the Congress. Majibur Rahman, Chairman of the Reception Committee in the 19th session of the All India Muslim League at Calcutta on 30th December 1927 said, 'While boycotting the Commission (Simon), we must accept Lord Birkenhead's challenge and evolve a constitution for our country in consultation with other political leaders and thus show to the world that we mean business' ⁶ Congress perceived that British Government would find no difficulty in accepting this constitution but the colonial instinct was different. Birkenhead repeated his challenge early in 1928 the Indians to produce their own scheme for a constitution, instead of always 'indulging in mere destructive criticism' of the government. ⁷ The Sikhs also accepted the challenge of Lord Birkenhead and decided to participate in the All Parties conference because since the introduction of Montague Chemsford reforms, the majority of the Sikhs have lost faith in the British as it had not given them adequate representation in the Punjab Legislative Council. But the Congress in its annual sessions of Nagpur (1920) and Madras (1927) had repeatedly assured the Sikhs that it would protect their interests. The Sikhs had also realized that their claims for representation were not recognized at the Lucknow Conference of Congress and Muslim League (1916) primarily because no Sikh was present at the time of settlement. They did not want this to be repeated again at the all parties Conference. Congress ignored the Sikh demand of representation in the Lucknow Pact but in order to keep the Sikhs within the fold of Non Cooperation Movement, the Congress assured the Sikhs in Nagpur session 1920 that their interests would receive the same protection in any scheme of Swarajya in India as is provided for Mohammadans and other communities in Provinces other than Punjab. ⁸

All Parties Sikh Conference was held at Guru Ramdas Langar Hall at Amritsar on 29th January 1928 in which thousands of Sikhs including Akalis i.e. Master Tara Singh, Mehtab Singh, Giani

Sher Singh ,Mangal Singh , Ujjal Singh, Hira Singh Dard and Amar Singh Jhabal participated. It was observed that communal electorates are detrimental for the healthy growth of the country, but since Congress and Muslim League had accepted it that was why Sikhs had demanded that Sikhs in Punjab be allotted one third seats in Legislative Councils and administration. It also stated that Sikhs should be protected in Sind and North West Frontier Province and Sikhs would not like to work in any way under any majority elected on the basis of communal methodology. The conference elected Master Tara Singh along with other Sikh leaders i.e. Kharak Singh , Mehtab Singh , Giani Sher Singh , Mangal Singh , Editor, Akali, Amar Singh Maliksher and Sant Singh Advocate as delegates for their participation in the proposed All Parties Conference.⁹ The first meeting of All Parties Conference was held at the invitation of the Congress on 12th February, 1928 at Daryaganj, Delhi under the chairmanship of Dr MA Ansari , a highly respected Mohammadan leader and President of Indian National Congress at his residence to discuss the future constitutional framework of the country and the Conference continued its meetings from day to day till the 22nd February. The Central Sikh League was the only Sikh organization invited to attend the conference and Mangal Singh represented it. He did not press for special rights for his community either in his home state or at the centre. In his private interview later on with Khushwant Singh , a noted historian and journalist, he admitted that at first he insisted that if the Muslims were given separate rights , the Sikhs would ask for 1/3 representation in the Punjab and 5% at the Centre. And, if weight age was abolished, he would accept representation on the basis of population with the right to contest other seats. Subsequently he however did not press Sikh demands on account the advice of Congress President Dr MA Ansari.¹⁰ Five resolutions were passed in this conference. Apart from others, the conference also passed resolutions dealing with the redistribution of Provinces, the electorates and reservation of seats in the provincial legislative councils. Shiromani Akali Dal telegraphically communicated Dr MA Ansari on 1st March 1928 that Sikhs would not submit to any communal majority, nor they would accept communal representation on a population basis in the Provincial Legislative Council. Though the Sikhs were in minority in Punjab yet they were prepared to make sacrifice by agreeing to the abolition of communal representation for the sake of nationalism, but if the communal representation was retained then the Sikhs be given 1/3 representation. Jinnah put forward for the first time a claim for reservation of seats in all provincial legislatures, including, Punjab and Bengal, where the Muslims constituted a majority

of the population. The Hindu Mahasabha and Sikh leaders were then found to be strongly opposed to any reservation for the Muslims in the Muslim majority provinces in Punjab and Bengal while Muslim League was equally strongly in its favour as Shauib Qureshi stated that Punjab Muslims were very apprehensive as they were being much in deep debt to the Hindu moneylenders, economically far behind the Sikhs and Hindus and there was probable danger of undue influence on Muslim voters from the Hindu side¹¹. It was found that there was no agreement between the representatives of the Muslim league and the Hindu Mahasabha on the separation of Sind from Bombay Presidency and on reservation of seats for majorities. The Sikhs were also strongly opposed to the latter claim. Since no unanimous decision could be reached on certain important issues, the next session of the Conference was conducted in May, 1928.¹²

When All Parties Conference met again on 19th May, 1928 in Bombay the situation was not a promising one. The communal organizations had drilled further apart and each of them hardened in its attitude and was not prepared to change or modify it. As there was no likelihood of an agreed and satisfactory solution at that stage, it was thought that a small committee viewing the communal problem as a whole and in its relation to the constitution might succeed in finding a way out. A small committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to do the spade work of the constitution of India.¹³ Imam and Shuaib Qureshi (Jinnah had left for London on 5th May 1928) were to express the Muslim point of view in this Committee. Of the ten members of the committee elected by the Conference, MR Jayakar and NM Joshi expressed their inability to act on it and did not take part in it. Of the two Muslim members Sir Ali Imam could attend only one meeting due to illness and Shuaib Qureshi, did not endorse the views of the committee on Muslim representation in legislatures and reservation of seats¹⁴. Mangal Singh was the representative of the Sikhs in this small committee. Between June 5th and 22nd June 1928 the Committee met almost daily for several hours at Motilal Nehru's house at Allahabad. Master Tara Singh, Mangal Singh, Kharak Singh, Mehtab, Amar Singh and Giani Sher Singh attended the conference at Allahabad. Though Jawaharlal Nehru was not a member of this committee, he took an active part in its meetings¹⁵. The work of drafting a constitution proved more arduous than was perhaps expected. There were two formidable difficulties in the way of complete or even substantial unanimity.¹⁶ This Committee made progress on the general-outlines of constitution but the communal question which remained intractable. The conference of thirty

Muslim leaders under the President ship of Mohammad Ali Jinnah at Delhi on 20th March 1927 had some time earlier agreed to the institution of joint electorates in all provinces under certain conditions including in Punjab and Bengal legislative councils. Mohammadans at that moment were also prepared to make Hindu minorities in Bengal, Punjab and North West Frontier the same concession that Hindu majorities in other provinces were prepared to make to Mohammadan minorities but it did not material subsequently.¹⁷ Even thereafter Mangal Singh Gill, General Secretary, Central Sikh League, in his communication to the President, Indian National Congress on 25th March 1927 shared his satisfaction that their Muslim friends had taken a step in the right direction in agreeing to have joint electorates. There was consensus of opinion among the Sikhs that the principle of communal representation was harmful to the healthy growth of nationalism. Central Sikh League felt that it would have been better if they had courageously stood for joint electorates with no reservation of seats.¹⁸

Nehru report suggested for Dominion Status for India with federal system that ensured strong centre. Adult suffrage and joint electorate with reservation of seats for Muslims and non Muslim minorities was proposed. They did not recommend separate electorates for minorities or any community because separate electorate was to awaken communal sentiments. Therefore it should be scrapped and introduced joint electorates. Previous constitutional reforms were based on separate electorates. Nehru Report which sought to solve the Hindu – Muslim tangle , outlined that there would be no special representation in Parliament for communal groups except for Muslims in Bengal and for non Muslims in the North West Frontier Province where they are in minority.¹⁹ It fixed ¼ Muslim representations at the Centre. It did allow for reservation of minority seats in Provinces having minorities at least 10%. It meant reservation for Muslim minorities in provincial Legislatures could be possible where their population was at least 10% but for them joint electoral constituencies be chosen. It denied similar reservation to other religious minorities. Full protection was to be given to the religious and cultural interests of the Muslim community. It asked for similar reservation for Hindus in North West Frontier. There will be no reserved seats for communities in Punjab and Bengal. It discarded reservation of seats for Muslim majorities. There was no reservation of seats for Sikhs in Punjab. There was reservation of seats for Muslims and non Muslims along with the right to contest from additional seats. The committee rejected communal representation for the majority community in any

Province and they pointed out that the majority in Bengal and in the Punjab, namely, the Muslims did not require at all special communal representation. While discarding communal representation for the majority community, the Committee, however, as a temporary measure, agreed to give communal representation in proportion to their population of the Muslims in Provinces other than Bengal and Punjab. Thus in the UP, CP, Bihar, Bombay, and Madras, the Muslim minorities were to have communal representation on the basis of their respective populations in these Provinces. The Committee, however, did not give the same privilege to the Hindu minority in Bengal and Hindu and Sikh minority of Punjab on the ground that the Hindus minorities in these provinces were strong enough to protect their interests which were not the case of the Muslim minorities in other provinces. About the communal aspect of the report relating to Punjab, the report stated, “As regards the special claim of the Muslims and Sikhs for greater representation than their population would justify----it is enough to say that in the view we have expressed above, no such claim is admissible on the part of any community, however, important it may consider itself to be” The report accepted claims by the Muslims in the provinces where they were in minority while dismissed the Sikh claims on the basis that the Punjab problem is a peculiar one where there is the presence of the strong Hindu minority side by side with the Muslim majority and the Sikh minority. The report further said, “endless complications will arise if we recommend reservations for all minorities. The communal question is essentially a Hindu- Muslim question and must be settled on that basis.” Sikhs were treated outside Hindu and Muslim question. The Committee felt that Muslim problem is an all India problem and had been viewed in that aspect. It was an injustice with the Sikh identity. Over the publication of the Nehru Report, Sikh leaders expressed anxiety over their future in India under a nationalist government which provided them no statutory protection as a minority. Master Tara Singh pointed out that it was wrong to say that there was no communal representation for the Punjab in the Nehru Report. The Muslims had accepted joint electorates on the condition of universal suffrage which was to ensure Muslim domination in Punjab. In the other provinces communal representation was in tact.²⁰

Indeed the Hindu and Sikh minorities in the provinces of Bengal and Punjab should have representation on the basis of population on the same principle as the Muslim minorities in other provinces. The Sikhs have, of their own accord, sacrificed their right to have special

representation on the same principles the Muslim minority community in the Provinces. The Committee had spoken, in the highest terms of this spirit of the Sikhs. Moti Lal Nehru however argued that complete abolition of communal representation in Punjab was in accordance with the wishes of the Sikh community which had been demanding it since long. The Committee also argued that the reservation could not be granted to the Hindus in Punjab because they constituted 35% of the population and could not therefore, be regarded as a minority. The Sikhs, who constituted a small minority in the Province, were denied this concession on the plea that they had never asked for reservation which was very strange argument.²¹ The Muslims being in a minority in India as a whole feared that the majority might harass them, and to meet this difficulty they made a novel suggestion—they should at least dominate in some parts of India. Their indication was towards Punjab and Bengal. Mangal Singh's point that there should be no reservation of seats for the majority Muslim community in Bengal and Punjab was conceded. The Hindus on the other hand although in a great majority all over, were in a minority in Bengal and the Punjab and Sind, Baluchistan and NWFP. In spite of their all India majority they are afraid of the Muslims in these provinces. Another proposal in regard to the Punjab was that there should be no reservation whatever but that special safeguards in the constitution for educational and economic advance of backward communities might be provided. The Committee however felt that it was unnecessary to pursue the subject any further in the present volatile atmosphere. This system of special representation or reservation of seats was, however, to disappear automatically at the end of ten years and earlier if the Muslim community agreed.²² The Sikhs consistently opposed reservation of electoral seats on the basis of religion and also sought to prevent Punjab from being placed under a statutory Muslim hegemony. Indeed the Sikhs moved by national impulse and to pave the way for the creation of integrated nationalism, advocated complete abolition of separate communal representation. But the committee headed by Moti Lal Nehru never examined the Sikh problem in its proper perspective. It was seized of the Hindu Muslim problem from an all India perspective on the basis of give and take between the two major communities. The Sikhs were being given the dose of disappointment.²³

Some however commented that Nehru Report was a bunch of uneasy compromises and therefore stood on shaking grounds.²⁴ But it received a hostile reception in Britain everywhere except in certain Socialist circles.²⁵ A conference of all important Indian parties was invited at Lukhnow

on August 28, 1928, at 12- 00 noon (lasted up to 31st August), to consider the Nehru Committee Report.²⁶ Pandit Moti Lal Nehru presented the report and Lala Lajpat Rai moved the resolution of its appreciation. Gandhi was not present at the conference but he hailed it most enthusiastically. It would have been easy for the Hindus or the Muslims to block the way. The Sikhs could have done likewise.²⁷ Twelve persons addressed on it. Giani Sher Singh, on behalf of Sikhs, Raja Ram Pal Singh on behalf of Hindus and Maulana Ahmad on behalf of Muslims urged the delegates to accept the report. On the fourth day of the Conference, Punjab delegates mutually signed an agreement at about 9-30 am in which it was stated that Muslims of Punjab recognized communal representation as given in Nehru Report, there should be no reservation of seats for any community in Punjab and there should be joint electorates, every adult having the right to express his opinion and the question of communal representation would be open for discussion after ten years. This agreement was signed by Zafar Ali, Gazi Abdul Rahman, Dr Satpal, Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Lala Duni Chand ,Lala Girdhari Lal and others.²⁸ It was unanimously accepted by the All Parties Conference at its Lukhnow session. The nationalist Muslims expressed their satisfaction with its recommendations. Lukhnow resolution, where by all the parties agreed, stated: "every one of them will stand by it (the Report) as a whole and refuse to accept any single part of it without giving full force and effect to all other parts".²⁹ For Lala Lajpat Rai the most welcome part of the Nehru Report was the provision for the joint mixed electorates throughout India. It amply vindicated his stand against the pernicious principle of separate communal representation which had been accepted both in the Congress- League Scheme of 1916 and the Bengal Pact of 1923. He earnestly appealed to the people to judge the report from a national point of view and not from a narrow communal angle. He was particularly critical of those Punjab Hindu leaders who were against the acceptance of the Report and had asked for separate electorates and reservation of seats for Hindus in the provincial Legislature. He warned them against the risk of losing the sympathy and support of the rest of Hindu India in their attempt to win the favours of the Government. Lala Duni Chand presiding over Punjab Provincial Political Conference (Congress) at Lyallpur on 29th September, 1928 said that Congress took up the challenge thrown out by Lord Birkenhead and prepared a constitution the major recommendations of which were acceptable to all. It accepted the resolution of Maulana Abdul Quadir of congratulating Pandit Moti Lal Nehru and his colleagues on drafting the report

and wholeheartedly supported the system of joint electorates and also maintained that the Nehru Constitution offered the best solution for India's multifarious problems.³⁰

The reactions of Muslims to the Nehru Report, however, were mixed. Shaukat Ali demanded the reservation of seats to the Muslims in Punjab and Bengal while Muhammad Yakub, the President of the Jinnah League in 1928, complained against the treatment of Muslim claims. The report was denounced by almost all Muslim leaders, except the ' Nationalist Muslims' such as Abul Kalam Azad, MA Ansari, the Raja of Mahmudabad, and Dr Saif-din-Kichlu ready to accept the report, who stood for unqualified support to its recommendations, the old Khilafatists such as Maulana Mohammad Ali, were divided but most hostile. Followers of Mohammad Shafi (Punjab) refused to accept it outright and another group of Muslim League led by Agha Khan felt that the Nehru Report had repudiated the Lukhnow Pact(1916) regarding the separate electorates and weightage.³¹ Shaukat Ali and Maulana Muhammad Ali, on his return from Europe denounced it in typically strong language. Jinnah was in London when Nehru Report was finalized. When he landed in Bombay, his colleague MC Chagla told him that he had committed the League to the acceptance of the Nehru Report. Jinnah lost his temper. He rebuked Chagla and told him that he had no right to do so and he would consult the League Council first. In fact he had made up his mind to go with the majority Muslim opinion. The joint and mixed electorate concept was practically unacceptable for Muslim League. They apprehended that it would result in hindering their sure victory in the Muslim dominated areas. Motilal Nehru felt let down and his friends in the Congress chided him for having trusted Jinnah who, they said, was a " a communal wolf in the shape of a nationalist sheep"³² Jinnah though discouraged , did not give up his hope and was to give a conditional acceptance and suggested some amendments.³³

At the invitation of Mangal Singh , General Secretary , Central Sikh League, Sikh Sarb Party Conference was conducted at Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar on 19th August 1928 at 1-00 pm under the president ship of Kharak Singh in which key Sikh leaders of the time numbering 70 participated to diagnose the pros and cons of the report. This meeting of Sikh Sardars was held before the conduct of All Parties Conference at Lukhnow. There were two factions and one for its acceptance in totality and the other for its acceptance subject to some modification demanding that Sikhs in Punjab also be given special rights of representation on the pattern of minorities of

other provinces. Final decision went in favour of its acceptance subject to desired modification. It was also decided that a delegation of seven Sikh members would participate in All Parties Conference at Lukhnow to get Nehru Report amended as per the wishes of All Parties Sikh Conference which included Master Tara Singh along with Giani Sher Singh , Gopal Singh Qaumi, Mangal Singh. On August 21, 1928 about 80 Sikhs representing different parties assembled to discuss the report. Master Tara Singh criticizing the Nehru Report moved a resolution and he was highly critical of Mangal Singh for signing it. It asserted that the Sikhs would not relinquish their rights under the existing circumstances when; special representation had been allowed to minorities in other provinces. It demanded the same consideration for the Sikhs in the Punjab.³⁴ In the All Parties Conference, to accommodate the Sikh point of view, a pact was proposed between the Sikhs and the Congress. The proposal repeated the recommendations of the Nehru report with minor changes. It provided joint electorates on the basis of adult franchise without reservation of seats for any community in Punjab, and stipulated that the formula be given a trial for at least ten years after which, if necessary, a suitable amendment be made. But the formula did not find favour with Master Tara Singh and other Sikh leaders. They argued that Sikhs were an important minority. In order to give them weighed representation, 30 percent of the seats in Punjab, must be reserved for them.³⁵ Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and several others had long discussions with the Sikh leaders. In the end, the proposal was signed by the Punjab delegates including Mangal Singh on the panel of Nehru Committee. In obedience to Party discipline he had signed the Nehru Committee Report without a dissent and thus put the seal of Sikh assent on its recommendations. Master Tara Singh and Giani Sher Singh, however, appended strong minutes of dissent on the method of election in Punjab by proportional reservation and on the impracticability and prematurity under the present circumstances of the introduction of adult suffrage immediately. They presumed that adult suffrage did carry with recognition of any principle of communal representation directly or indirectly, to which they are strongly opposed.³⁶ In the All Parties Conference held at Lukhnow , the Sikhs were represented by Master Tara Singh and Sher Singh who opposed the report tooth and nail and had their dissent recorded.³⁷

Apprehending the Muslim majority rule through adult suffrage in Punjab on the basis of Nehru Report, in the editorial of September 15, 1928, in *Akali Te Pardesi* , Master Tara Singh wrote,

“A Sikh can sacrifice his all for a good cause or the cause of religion, but not for the establishment of any kind of despotism. The Congress is assisting the Muslims to establish a kind of majority despotism in Punjab and telling the Sikhs to sacrifice for this cause. The Sikhs have always favoured the end of communal representations as a sacrifice for the national cause, with some provisions to safeguard the interests of the minorities.” In the annual session of the Central Sikh League at Gujranwala on 22d October, 1928, it was declared that Nehru Report was a fitting reply to the challenge of Lord Birkenhead, but the Lukhnow decisions were not sacrosanct. As Sikhs were annoyed with Mangal Singh’s signing of document, so he was driven out of the Secretary ship of the Central Sikh League within a week of the publication of the document and he was substituted by Master Tara Singh for that office and Mangal Singh also resigned from the editorship of the *Akali* paper.³⁸ He was accused of having acted divergent to the directives specified to him and of having intentionally betrayed the wellbeing of his community. Baba Kharak Singh declared that communal representation was regarded by the Sikhs as deadly poison, which should not be permitted. They could not tolerate that poison to continue in operation through communal representation being given to one community. It was further urged that the Sikhs made no prayer to the Government, but would create majority in the Congress and get the poison removed. Subsequently the Akali group led by Baba Kharak Singh was so much disgusted with the report that he favoured completely cut off his connection with the Congress, while Master's group, though unhappy about it, decided to continue its association with the Indian National Congress. Kharak Singh in his extempore presidential address to the Central Sikh League on 22nd October 1928 declared: "If the Nehru Report is not trampled underfoot, I shall cease to be a member of the Sikh League". Nehru report, he added, was one to be looked down upon with shame, as having lowered the Indian ideal, and for having stated that Dominion Status instead of Complete independence was acceptable. In his view Nehru Report sinned against the self respect and dignity of India. He wanted a field, and not the favour. Let all be free, observed Kharak Singh, seek election by mixed electorates. And Nehru Report was open to objections, as it laid the foundations of communalism. Nehru report was disapproved in this meeting of Central Sikh League.³⁹ Though Master Tara Singh was known as a big supporter of Congress in Punjab but he gave maximum opposition to Moti Lal Nehru Report. Throughout 1928 Sikhs struggled against the injustice meted out to them through Nehru report.⁴⁰

All Parties Convention, to whom Muslims allegedly termed overwhelming Hindu in composition conducted at Calcutta on 22th December 1928 and continued its sittings till January 1, 1929.⁴¹ The convention failed to ratify the report, and also disregarded the plea of Jinnah of three new demands of Muslim League that the Punjab and Bengal should have seats reserved for the Muslims on population basis, the reservation of one third of the seats in the Central Assembly for Muslims and for a federal, rather than unitary, constitution, with the provinces holding residuary powers. Jinnah went to Calcutta with hope to find the constitutional solution as per his own thinking. But the unanimity and positivity shown at the Lukhnow Conference did not last long. The communal minded Hindu members MR Jayakar and MM Malaviya, opposed Jinnah's new demands in this convention. The modifications suggested by Jinnah were also voted down in the subject committee after an acrimonious debate, even though the lawyer and liberal leader Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru urged the Congress for a gesture to the League leader by conceding his demands and 'be finished with it' but he also described Jinnah as 'a spoilt child'.⁴² His amendments were termed incompatible with a national constitution. Sapru then however, commented that a great damage was done to the country from which it would not recover for a quarter of century. Jinnah lost, agonized and left in protest and joined the more reactionary section of the Muslims led by Agha Khan and Mohhammad Shafi of Punjab. He left Calcutta broken- hearted, and with tears in his eyes and he said to a friend, 'This is the parting of the ways',⁴³ It was the agony of Indian polity and on account of unwise policy of Congress. This conference marked the turning point in the life of Jinnah and in the history of the sub-continent. An angry Muhammad Ali formally left the Congress, asking Muslims to stay away from it.⁴⁴ In December 1928 at their annual meeting Jinnah and Shafi branches of the Muslim League reunited against the Nehru Report though Jinnah was still refusing to endorse separate electorates. Jinnah thereafter carved out fourteen points as prerequisite for any communal settlement.⁴⁵ KM Munshi, a noted legal luminary and freedom fighter, however, had given a different picture about the arrogant attitude of Jinnah at Calcutta Convention stating: 'Jinnah played his own game. The convention was kept waiting , then he arrived , surrounded by leading members of the Muslim League with the air of a conquering hero, undermining the representative status the whole convention. Jinnah in a truculent mood found fault with the Nehru Report.'⁴⁶ Muslim politicians of Punjab were already divided over the Nehru Committee Report. The Report's attempt to solve the communal tangle failed rather resulted in a schism and only exacerbated it, and the Muslims now closed their

ranks, demanding the continuous of separate electorates and a federal constitution in which Muslim majority areas would have complete autonomy.⁴⁷ From this moment onwards Congress became, in the eyes of Muslim League, an almost completely Hindu body and assumed the character of chief opponent to their claims and aspirations.⁴⁸ The prospects of national unity was foiled by 'communal' groups and due to lack of sincerity and earnestness on the part of some leaders having vested interests and communalism began to grow as volcano devastating the secular fabric of Indian polity and obstructed the road for freedom.⁴⁹ Thereafter Jinnah never looked back. Step by step he moved forward on the road which was finally to end in the division of India and the creation of a separate Islamic State. The Calcutta Convention was followed by the emergence of the All India Muslim Conference which met at Delhi on December 31, 1928. Among various demands, Muslims demanded 33% representation in the Central Legislature, adequate safeguards for Muslim minorities and retention of separate electorates.⁵⁰ A delegation of Sikh leaders under the leadership by Master Tara Singh met Mahatma Gandhi but there could not be any compromise. All Parties Conference held at Calcutta (towards the close of the year 1928) was attended by a strong contingent of almost all important Sikh leaders, 30 in number. They walked out of the All Parties Conference after the amendment moved by Mehtab Singh of the Central Sikh League that 'communalism should not be made the basis of the future polity of India in any shape or form' was ruled out by Dr MA Ansari, President of the Conference. After their walk out from the conference, Rallia Ram, an Indian Christian leader from Punjab moved an amendment that Sikhs be given the same concessions as had been provided to the Muslims and non Muslim minorities in other provinces. But Moti Lal Nehru and other Congress leaders strongly opposed it as they did not want to modify the recommendations of the Nehru Committee in the case of Punjab. Harnam Singh, however, asserted that Nehru Report's division of the country into Hindu India and Muslim India was not acceptable to Sikhs. It was here that Master Tara Singh emerged as principal opponent of the Congress on the communal question. He charged Moti Lal Nehru of ignoring the typical Sikh opposition abiding in Punjab in order to arrive at a settlement with the Muslims and thus paving the way for establishing permanent Muslim hegemony in Punjab which was likely to threaten the very survival of the Sikhs. This stance of Tara Singh irritated Moti Lal Nehru to such an extent that in his presidential address read in the annual session of the Congress at Calcutta, he dubbed Tara Singh and his adherents as only a few 'dissentients' and 'communalists'. After the Sikhs walk

out it was expected that Sikhs would be given same concessions as were being given to Muslims and other minorities in other provinces but Moti Lal Nehru didn't care for it and gave a very stunning statement: "He wished he could blow the Punjab out of the map of India." He felt the Sikhs constituted an inconvenient third party in all India polity. Thereafter Sikhs also withdrew their support and convention was adjourned sine die.⁵¹

Master Tara Singh expressed his views in his editorials in *Akali-te-Pardesi*. He along with the majority of the Sikhs at that time was against the communal electorates and was suspicious of the intentions of the makers of the Nehru Report; about the abolition of communal provisions. He suspected that in Punjab also this has been maintained in such a way so that the Muslims can dominate the other minorities. He wrote, "As Congress wants to please the Muslims so it is ignoring the Sikh interests. From the provisions and views expressed in the Nehru Report itself, it is clear that Congress is taking into question only two major communities and working out a compromise between them. Although it admits the importance of Sikh minority, yet it is doing nothing to safeguard its interests in Punjab."

Sikhs regretted and dubbed that Nehru Report is just as Lukhnow Pact of 1916 between Congress and Muslim League with which Sikhs interests were bypassed. Mahatma Gandhi even admitted on 1st January, 1929: "Personally I think we have not done full justice to the Sikhs."⁵² Congress conducted its annual session at Lahore towards the end of 1929. In those days *Akalis* also held its conference at Lahore. Public strength in the *Akali* Conference was many times more than Congress strength which gave some jerk to Moti Lal Nehru and Gandhi. They reached Akali Dal office and compromised with Master Tara Singh and Kharak Singh promising that Congress in future would not take such a decision which would not be acceptable to Sikhs and informed them that the Congress Working Committee had replaced the goal of Dominion Status by Complete independence on which Baba Kharak Singh was insisting.⁵³ Master Tara Singh was satisfied with this assurance not Baba Kharak Singh unless yellow Sikh colour was added to Congress flag. Not only Central Sikh League decided to reject the Nehru Report but also decided to boycott the Congress session scheduled to be held at Lahore in 1929.⁵⁴ Baba Kharak Singh was actually opposed both communalism and dominion status. By going against dominion status, for complete independence, he in a way had not diluted the Sikh opposition though it has been

alleged by some historians, rather had served the country in the true nationalistic spirit.⁵⁵ Though Master Tara Singh did not want to break away from the Congress but he was the first Sikh leader who sent protest wire to Moti Lal Nehru instantly against the recommendations of Nehru Committee Report as soon as these were published. He cabled: “Regret, Sikh rights have been overlooked by Nehru Committee.” He articulated that the Congress should not ignore the Sikhs. He was not for the Muslim Raj and he was not for British Raj either but would, while working with the Congress, was to secure for the Sikhs their rights even if he had to die in his work in pursuance thereof. Tara Singh wanted to fight for the Sikh rights by remaining in the Congress. He did not perceive any intelligence in boycotting the national organization when Congress was to take key decision like *Puran Swarz* (complete autonomy from the colonial yoke) at Lahore in December 1929. Most of the Sikhs dreaded the prospects of universal suffrage without reservation of seats for the Sikhs as a minority.⁵⁶ In response to Master Tara Singh’s wire , Pandit Moti Lal Nehru cabled him cautioning that his opposition to the Report would cause only help to the regressive forces but would result in no way to benefit to Sikhs. He also requested Master Tara Singh to give a deep thought to his suggestion.⁵⁷ In connection with the complaint about Dominion Status Gandhi reiterated his well known opinion and adjured the Sikhs to be patient and not to lose faith in the Congress.⁵⁸ Later, when the Congress party withdrew the Nehru Committee proposals in the Lahore session of Congress in 1929 , Tara Singh emerged as leader who had fought for the demands of the Sikh community and had the support of the nationalist organization. His stand made him popular among his co religion lists. Indeed Nehru Report was the means to unleash predominant Muslim community’s rule in Punjab on solid footing. Congress gave a number of arguments in order to get the Sikhs agreed. Master Tara Singh diagnosed the danger involved in the recommendations and finally his opposition impelled the Congress to withdraw the report. Nehru Report deeply affected the politics of Punjab as it did not only cause disappointment to the Sikh Community but was responsible for the division among them especially over the minority clauses which ignored the Sikhs in Punjab. The Report became the root cause of acute differences between Master Tara Singh and Sardar Mangal Singh on one hand and Baba Kharak Singh and the Congress on the other hand. When Congress was on the threshold of starting Civil Disobedience in January 1930, Master Tara Singh appealed to the Sikh councillors to quit their irrespective seats in respect to the Congress programme.⁵⁹ Lukhnow Pact (1916) and Nehru Report (1928) engendered Muslim separate tendencies which

slowly and steadily culminated in the cry of separate home land for Muslims. Master Tara Singh was a staunch nationalist who, in the course of intense communal violence after the resignation of Khizar Hyat Khan, premier of Punjab, in March 1947, not only drew his sword, rather raised the slogan *Pakistan Murdabad* and *Raj Karega Khalsa Aki Rahe Na Koe*. Thereafter Sikh and Hindu students led a procession and recited:

Master Tara Singh Da farman , Jad Tak Hath Vich Hai Kirpan, Nahi Banega Pakistan

Paying glowing tribute to Master Tara Singh, C Rajagopalachari, former premier of Madras stated: “Master Tara Singh was a rock solid personality who faced every oddities. It is my supplication to the Sikhs, to the nation, to the leaders of the entire nation to tread his footsteps and build value based society. We need to take him as inspiration because such dynamic leaders are not born daily. Let us not stay in darkness anymore.” Eulogizing Master Tara Singh’s personality, Smt. Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister also said:” Sacrifices test an individual. Master Tara Singh was successful in all these examinations. Whatever he considered appropriate, he followed it with honesty. We must learn from his patriotism, honesty and his devotion for the nation. We must seek inspiration from him.”⁶⁰ Sardar Kapur Singh, a former ICS officer and a Sikh scholar wrote: “Master Tara Singh’s death , has removed from the Sikh world , a person who not only dominated its politics for many decades but who also has been instrumental in putting up firm tracks over which future politics of the Sikhs must move , for many decades to come.”⁶¹

Conclusion: It can be surmised that Master Tara Singh played no politics but remained straightforward and his concern was only the wellbeing of the Sikhs. He fought religiously for the legitimate rights of the Sikhs to be incorporated in the Nehru Report which was being denied to them. Sikhs deserves logical special representation in Punjab on the basis of at least 10% minority population clause while their proportion was 13%. There was every possibility of Muslim domination after electoral election on the basis of adult suffrage having population proportion 57% which could jeopardize Sikh interests. He presumed that there was lack of fair play on the part of Congress. He was demanding for the Sikh minority in Punjab what Muslim minorities were being given in other provinces and Hindus in North West Frontier Province by Nehru Report. His pressure finally wielded weight and Nehru Report was finally withdrawn by

its authors. Even after his sad demise, he continues to be a source of inspiration for many Akali leaders.

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