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**SANT JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE - LIFE, MISSION, AND
MARTYRDOM**

by

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1984, the Indian Government sent nearly a quarter million troops to Punjab, sealed the state from the rest of the world, and launched an attack, code-named 'Operation Bluestar', on the Darbar Sahib complex in Amritsar and over forty other *gurdwaras*¹ in Punjab. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, head of the *Damdami Taksaal*², and many students and teachers belonging to the *Taksaal*, perished in the conflict. Several thousand men, women and children, mostly innocent pilgrims, also lost their lives in that attack. This invasion was followed by 'Operation Woodrose' in which the army, supported by paramilitary and police forces, swept through Punjab villages to eliminate 'anti-social elements'. These 'anti-social' elements were identified as *Amritdharis*³. Instructions given to the troops at that time stated⁴: 'Some of our innocent countrymen were administered oath in the name of religion to support extremists and actively participate in the act of terrorism. These people wear a miniature *kirpan*⁵ round their neck and are called *Amritdhari* ... Any knowledge of the '*Amritdharis*' who are dangerous people and pledged to commit murders, arson and acts of terrorism should immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. In the interest of all of us their identity and whereabouts must always be disclosed.' These instructions constituted unmistakably clear orders for genocide of all Sikhs formally initiated into their faith. Another ten to twenty thousand are said to have been murdered, often with torture, during this phase. Typical of this period is a report by Mary Ann Weaver⁶: 'The pattern in each village appears to be the same. The Army moves in during the early evening, cordons a village, and announces over loudspeakers that everyone must come out. All males between the ages of 15 and 35 are trussed and blindfolded, then taken away. Thousands have disappeared in the Punjab since the Army operation began. The Government has provided no lists of names; families don't know if sons and husbands are arrested, underground, or dead.' Assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, allegedly by two of her security personnel who were Sikh, triggered another orgy of violence against the Sikhs. The Government estimated the number of persons killed in Delhi during the first three days of November 1984 at nearly 2,700. A list of 3,870 names was published by a newspaper⁷. The total for the country is estimated⁸ to be around twenty thousand, ten thousand in Delhi itself. A report⁹ recognized the number of Sikh women widowed in Delhi alone in three days as 1,300. It has been alleged¹⁰ that

¹ Throughout, italics are used for Punjabi words. *Gurdwara*, literally, the 'door' of the Guru, is the facility where Siri Guru Granth Sahib, the Scripture regarded as the eternal Guru is installed and where the Sikhs gather for worship.

² *Taksaal* is a school for Sikh religious instruction.

³ *Amritdhari* is a person who has been formally initiated into the Sikh faith through having taken *Khande da Pahul*. The ceremony is often referred to as taking *Amrit*.

⁴ Baat Cheet, A publication of the Department of Defense. Government of India, Serial Number 153, July 1984; reproduced in *Surya Monthly*, October 1984, page 6.

⁵ A sword, one of the five distinguishing marks of a Sikh. The others are uncut hair, a comb in the hair, a steel bangle, and a distinctive style pair of shorts.

⁶ Mary Ann Weaver, India's Sikhs are bitter as Army tries to weed out 'militants', Christian Science Monitor, October 15, 1984.

⁷ *Indiuan Express*, November 1, 1989.

⁸ Inderjit S. Jaijee, Politics of Genocide, Baba Publishers, Chandigarh, India, 1996, page 33.

⁹ Amiya Rao, Aurobindo Ghose, and N.D. Pancholi, Truth About Delhi Violence, Citizens for Democracy, New Delhi, January 1985.

¹⁰ Delhi: 31 October to 4 November 1984, Report of the Citizens' Commission, 1984.

leaders of the ruling Congress Party and officials of the Government organized and encouraged these massacres.

The oppression against the Sikh faith continued relentlessly for several years. Official sources place the total number killed between 1984 and 1992 at about 25,000 and ascribed all violence to so-called Sikh terrorists. On the other hand, Sikh leaders have claimed that nearly 200,000 Sikhs have been deliberately murdered, generally after arrest, by government agencies. Human rights organizations (for example, ^{11,12,13,14}) and other groups (for example ^{15,16,17}) have documented a large number of cases of torture, rape, disappearances and murder by the law-enforcement agencies in Punjab.

It is important to understand why a so-called democratic government would unleash such terror against a religious minority. What did Sant Bhindranwale preach and do to evoke so strong a reaction from the Indian Government, the news media and the public at large? What were Sikh expectations and grievances; how, and to what extent, was the Sant involved in them; what was the role of the traditional Sikh leadership through this sad saga; what lessons might this chapter in history provide for the future of India's pluralistic national fabric and for prevention of recurrence of such holocausts. Some readers might be unfamiliar with Sikhs and their problems. For this reason, we start this three-part essay by providing a brief description of Sikh beliefs, organization, and history. The first part also describes India's pluralist society and surveys the attitude of the majority community and the Indian Government towards minorities in general and the Sikhs in particular. It includes the historical developments leading up to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's emergence as the leader of a Sikh revival. The second part of the essay describes his life and mission as well as the growth of opposition to him. We specially note the campaign of misrepresentation and vilification carried on by the Government as well as the news media in propagating certain myths. The third part examines specific allegations leveled against the Sant in the light of his public pronouncements and of contemporary reports. It also discusses his relationship with the premier Sikh organization, the Shromani Akali Dal. Finally, we look at the past and attempt to see what the future might

⁵ Punjab Human Rights Organization Reports: Rape of Punjab, Indian State's indignities on Sikh Women and Children; The Fascist Offensive in Punjab, Reports of Human Rights Violations; An Indian Torture Chamber, The Full Story of Ladha Kothy; Sikh Villages Ransacked, among others.

⁶ Asia Watch, Punjab in Crisis: Human Rights in India, 1991.

⁷ For example, Amnesty International, India: Some Reports Concerning Deaths in Custody allegedly as a result of torture or shooting during 1985, ASA 20/03/86 dated 29 January 1986; India: A Review of Human Rights Violations, ASA 20/02/88 dated August 1989; and numerous Urgent Action Letters.

¹⁴ Oppression in Punjab, Citizens for Democracy, New Delhi, 1985.

¹⁵ Ram Narayan Kumar and Georg Sieberer: The Sikh Struggle, Chanakya Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

¹⁶ Joyce M. Pettigrew, The Sikhs of Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerilla Violence, Zed Publishers, London, 1995.

¹⁷ Harjinder S. Dilgeer and Awatar Singh Sekhon, India Kills Sikhs, The Sikh Educational Trust, Edmonton, Canada, Second Edition, 1994.

PART I

A. THE SIKHS AND THEIR RELIGION

The Sikh faith, and consequently the unique identity of its adherents, is defined by a set of beliefs, a cohesive organization, and a special history. The Sikh religion started with ten Gurus from Siri Guru Nanak Sahib (1469-1539 C.E.) to Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib (1666-1708 C.E.). The word "guru" in Indian languages has been used for any teacher or guide. However, in the Sikh religion, the Guru occupies a special position. The Guru and God are practically identical. While God is unknowable and not born, the Guru is the Perfect Being people can communicate with and receive advice from. He has all the divine attributes including immortality. According to Siri Guru Granth Sahib¹⁸: 'My True Guru is forever; He does not come and go.' Also: "Know the Guru and God to be One and the Same." The Guru is not in the cycle of birth and death like other mortals but has been specially deputed by God for the salvation of mankind. His mission is to bless people with God's Name and to unite them in worship of God. This is analogous to the position of Jesus Christ in Christianity.

The Sikhs believe in one God, revealed to mankind through the Guru. The Sikh view of God is summarized in the *mool mantar*¹⁹: "One God, Eternal, The Reality, The Name, The Creator and The Doer, Immanent, Fearless, Without Enmity, Transcending Time, Never Born, Self-existent, through the Guru's Grace." Elsewhere in Siri Guru Granth Sahib, God is stated to be indescribable, formless, merciful and loving, just and gracious. He is The Eternal Giver, Provider and Sustainer. Among the names used for God in Siri Guru Granth Sahib is *Vaheguru*, the Wondrous Guru.

A Sikh regards human life to be an opportunity to meet God. However, one cannot meet God by being clever but only through Guru's help and intercession. Merely reading and reciting the scriptures, going on pilgrimages, bathing in holy rivers, fasting, renunciation of the world, celibacy, various yogic routines, charity, etc., are all useless exercises. Skills of the mind and body only enhance one's ego unless one has understood the Guru's Word through God's Mercy. Foolish persons following their own wayward mind and not following the True Guru only receive what they deserve and waste this opportunity in pursuit of transitory gratification. Lust, anger, greed, attachment and self-will are impediments in realization of God. One has to cleanse his mind of the dirt of self-will and in humility seek the True Guru's help in understanding the purpose of life and the way to eternal joy in God. Meeting the True Guru can only come about through God's Mercy. The Sikh prays to God that He, in His mercy, may unite the Sikh with the True Guru. At the same time, just seeing the Guru is not enough. Deliverance from self-will cannot be achieved without studying the *Sabad*²⁰. The True Guru instructs the Sikh about God, warns him of the impediments to his quest for the Infinite, and instructs him in a lifestyle that would prepare him for the ultimate union. Meeting God is seeing Him in His creation,

¹⁸ Before he left the mortal world, Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib instructed the Sikhs to regard the *Granth Sahib*, consisting of verses given by six of the ten Gurus as well as selections from the works of several Hindu and Muslim saints and holy men, as their eternal Guru. It is the Sikh scripture and is referred to as Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

¹⁹ '*moolmantar*' is the expression used, either in full or in abbreviated form, at the start of every collection of verses in Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

²⁰ Sabad is God's Word or *Bani* given by the True Guru.

understanding that God created the universe out of Himself and to follow His Will. The relationship between God and creation is analogous to that between the ocean and the wave on the surface of the water. This is the realization of His being Immanent. Once this is understood, there can be no inequality in society, there can then be no bad people, and there can be no intolerance. The Sikh faith asserts equality of all men and women, denounces idolatry, superstition and hypocrisy, and holds that the ultimate joy is to see God in oneself and in all His Creation, and to constantly remember Him.

A person formally initiated into the Sikh faith is required to follow the *Sikh Rehit Maryada*²¹ which includes, in addition to instructions regarding regular prayer, service, and upright conduct in life, that they never cut their hair, never use any intoxicants including tobacco, never to commit adultery, and always wear the five k's (*kes* - uncut hair, *kangha* - a comb, *kara* - a steel bangle, *kachhera* - a special type of shorts, and *kirpaan* - a sword) symbolic of their faith. The assembly of all *Amritdharis* constitutes the *Khalsa Panth*, or simply the *Khalsa*, a distinct socio-political and religious entity. As members of the *Khalsa Panth*, Sikhs are committed to practice of their faith in everyday life combining the concepts of *Miri*²² and *Piri*²³ - the ideal lifestyle being that of a 'saint-soldier' exemplified by the Gurus during their own lifetimes. Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is said to have declared: '*Khalsa* is verily my own form; in *Khalsa* I abide'. A Sikh follows the Gurus' teachings and tries to live by them to achieve liberation while leading the life of an ordinary householder engaged in prayer, honest labor, and sharing the fruits of this labor with others. His belief includes tolerance for all religions, universal equality, and readiness to fight oppression in defense of the downtrodden. The Sikhs have a history of supreme sacrifice²⁴ to uphold the rights of the Hindus to free worship even though it was a different religion from their own.

Historically, organization of Sikhs as the *Khalsa Panth* has been viewed by successive governments in India with suspicion as a 'state within a state.' This is especially so because the Sikh faith requires its adherents to keep weapons, a *kirpaan* being the symbolic minimum. As this organization conceivably provides the Sikhs with the potential for concerted action, various governments have tried to control it directly as well as indirectly, through channelization or neutralization. Complete elimination of Sikhs was ordered in the 18th century but did not entirely succeed. The British policy, after an initial effort (1846 to 1855) to liquidate the *Khalsa* and to thoroughly disarm the Sikh population, outlawing their possession of any weapons, was to use the Sikhs' pride in their history of warfare to heavily recruit them into the military. However, Sikhs not in the military were not allowed to even keep their traditional *kirpaan* as required by their faith. They got permission to do so only in 1914. The Sikhs did not have control over their places of worship and won it only in 1925 after a long-drawn non-violent struggle and sacrifice of many lives. After India's freedom from British rule in 1947, this attitude of suspicion and the policy of 'control' has been continued. Many Sikhs feel they have yet to achieve freedom to

²¹ Sikh Way of Life: a documentation of personal and communal practices of prayer and ceremonies required to be followed by all who are initiated into the Sikh faith, issued by the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar.

²² Temporal authority.

²³ Spiritual authority.

²⁴ An historic example is that of Siri Guru Tegh Bahadar Sahib, the Ninth Guru, being beheaded by the authorities while advocating the rights of the Hindus to free worship.

practice their religion as taught by their Gurus without being subjected to constraints and controls imposed by non-Sikh governments.

B. SIKHS AND INDIA

1. India as a Pluralistic State.

India is a land of many different languages, cultures, religions, and nationalities. There are two distinct approaches to dealing with such diversity while, at the same time, forging or maintaining national unity. One is the pluralistic approach that accepts the diversity of the population and attempts to ensure that the minorities can retain their distinct identities without fear of deprivation or discrimination so long as they are loyal to the nation-state. The other is the integrationist or assimilation approach in which the minority is coerced to forego its distinct identity presuming that it conflicts with or hinders the development of the nation-state. India has formally adopted the pluralistic approach. It is enshrined in the Indian constitution which provides appropriate safeguards for minorities and is reflected in the linguistic reorganization of states preserving the identity of the larger linguistic groups. However, in actual practice, religious identity has been subordinated to the development of a national identity. As Madan²⁵ points out, the assumption has been that the state can and should forge an identity as powerful as that offered to a people via their religious community; and that 'the means to this end have been identified as the promotion of civic ties and class interests to take the place of the primordial bonds of race, language, and religion.' In line with this statement of principle, in Punjab, where the Sikhs are in a majority, pluralism has been abandoned in favor of national integration. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister for 18 years including 17 after freedom from British rule, believed in secular democracy, was impatient with religion and had difficulty recognizing the distinct cultural identities of minorities. His view of religion was²⁶: 'Organized religion, allying itself to theology and often more concerned with its vested interests than with things of the spirit, encourages a temper which is the very opposite to that of science. It produces narrowness and intolerance, credulity and superstition, emotionalism and irrationalism.' He professed support for autonomy for states when he wrote²⁷: 'It is not difficult, if passions and unreasoning emotions are set aside, to devise such freedom with the largest autonomy for provinces and states and yet a strong central bond. There could be autonomous units within the larger provinces or states, as in Soviet Russia. In addition to this, every conceivable protection and safeguard for minority rights could be inserted into the constitution.' However, he also wrote²⁸: 'I do not fancy beards or mustaches or topknots, but I have no desire to impose my canons of taste on others, though I must confess, in regard to beards, that I inwardly rejoiced when Amanullah began to deal with them in summary fashion in Kabul.' He could not identify such a thing as 'Muslim culture' in India and, using socialist parlance, termed religious organizations to be 'reactionary'. He adamantly refused to agree to the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. Apparently, he feared that creation of a Punjabi-speaking state would solidify

²⁵ T.N. Madan. *Fundamentalism and the Sikh Religious Tradition*, in *Fundamentalism Observed*, edited by Marty and Appleby, University of Chicago Press, 1991, page 595.

²⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Books Ltd., London, Fourth Edition, 1960, page 526.

²⁷ Ibid, page 544.

²⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1980, page 471.

Sikh identity with a 'homeland' and a language with the resulting potential for secession. The States Reorganization Commission stated²⁹: 'It has to be realized that the political unity of India is a recent achievement.' It also noted³⁰: 'There are certain aspects of the claim for linguistic units, the implications of which should be carefully analyzed and understood. The most important of these is the doctrine of an area claiming to be the 'homeland' of all the people speaking a particular language. ... This would cut at the very root of the national idea.' Earlier, the JVP Committee had reported³¹: 'The primary consideration must be the security, unity and economic prosperity of India and every separatist and disruptive tendency should be rigorously discouraged.' The safeguards for minorities provided in the Indian Constitution are effectively eliminated through being overridden by these statements of policy.

Preservation of minority identities and their being overwhelmed by the majority culture needs continuous conscious effort. However, it is easy for the majority to identify its own interests as national interests and to misinterpret such efforts as separatism, threat to national unity, and disloyalty to the nation-state. India claims to be a secular democracy, but, in actual practice, this secularism manifests itself as tyranny of the majority. Speaking before the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Mr. Ramaswamy, India's Attorney-General, admitted³² that while it was his personal dream to bring about a uniform civil code in India, the majority of members of Parliament belonged to the majority religion, making it difficult to enact laws affecting religious minorities. Extremist groups, hostile to the minorities, have been successful in effectively subverting preservation of minority identities. This subversion, in the name of national homogeneity, has taken many forms. Some sections of the press have constantly criticized the religious minorities and made highly provocative and derogatory pronouncements about them (for example, Jai Prakash³³). There has been no attempt by the Government to check them. In fact, whenever the minorities have tried to protest these actions, they have been beaten up, fired upon, imprisoned, tortured, raped, and massacred. The case of Babri Masjid is typical of Indian Government's attitude. This centuries old mosque was destroyed by Hindu hoodlums with the support of the state government in Uttar Pradesh. When Muslims around the country protested, over three thousand were killed. None of the culprits responsible for the destruction of the mosque, or for the subsequent killings, was punished. After Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, thousands of Sikhs were burnt alive or hacked to death all over India. The culprits are still to be punished.

Educational texts used in schools emphasize Hindu traditions and ignore the minority viewpoint. Tavleen Singh reports³⁴: 'Amreek Singh said that Sikh children were losing ties with their roots because they went to schools where from day one they were taught about Hinduism and Hindu culture.' Texts used in schools often misrepresent the Sikhs faith; for example, pictures and songs depicting Sikh children engaged in idol-worship by placing garlands over so-called likenesses of the Gurus. The Sikhs have had to struggle to correct the frequent incorrect

²⁹ Report of the States Reorganization Commission, 1955, page 148.

³⁰ Ibid, page 155.

³¹ Report of the Linguistic Provinces Committee, Congress, pages 4,5, 15.

³² Aparajita Suri, U.N. Rights Group Chides India, [India Abroad](#), April 5, 1991.

³³ Jai Parkash, Editorial titled '*Raj Karega Khalsa*', [The Daily Milap](#) (in Urdu), New Delhi, 7 December 1985.

³⁴ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in [The Punjab Story](#), edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books International, 1984, page 39-40.

portrayal of their faith in school textbooks. For example, they had to get the High Court of Punjab and Haryana to direct³⁵ the deletion of some material, derogatory towards Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, from a book published by National Council of Educational Research and Training and used in Indian schools. The Court's jurisdiction covers only two of the Indian states. Correction of the texts used in other states would necessarily involve further litigation placing an enormous stress on the community. Because the Gurus stood up for the right of the Hindus to freely practice their faith, they are often described³⁶ as Hindu reformers, and as nationalist Kshatris fighting Muslim rule in India. This is contrary to the Sikh belief that they were bearers of God's Word and the founders of a new faith; that their message was universal and not only for Hindus and India; that their message was of love and at no time did they have hatred or enmity towards anyone.

The attitude of the Indian Government towards the Sikhs has been that any proposal or demand that could be associated with them as a religious community had to be denied and any protest by them sternly suppressed. Punjab's agricultural interests were viewed and treated not as economic problems of a region but as communal and parochial because most farmers in Punjab happened to be Sikh. The purpose, apparently, was to humiliate the Sikhs, to impress upon them the helplessness of their situation in the national context, and to encourage them to believe that, if they wished to be heard, they would have to join the 'mainstream', i.e., de-emphasize their religious identity.

2. Hindu Attitude Towards Sikhs and Sikh Identity

a. The Arya Samaj and Sikhs

Throughout history, Hindus and Sikhs have lived in Punjab in complete amity. Many Hindus respect the Gurus and participate in Sikh worship. However, the Arya Samaj has all along been opposed to the Sikh faith. This opposition originated with its founder³⁷, Swami Dayanand. Till 1947 this opposition was largely overshadowed by the Hindu-Muslim conflict. However, after 1947 it started its sinister growth starting with the repudiation of Punjabi by the Punjab Hindus. The attitude of the Hindus in Punjab towards the Sikhs is summed up quite well by Gupta³⁸: '...from the early years of this century a significant section of the Hindu community in Punjab has rallied behind the Arya Samaj to deny Sikhism its separate identity. The gurudwaras too were under Hindu mahants who made every effort to efface them of any special significance to Sikhism. Hindu idols were installed in the gurudwaras to convey the impression that the Sikhs had no special claim to these shrines. The Sikh resentment of this was obvious and understandable. This explains why it was necessary to take Hindu idols away from the gurudwaras in 1905 to appease the Sikhs.'

³⁵ Des Pardes Weekly, London, U.K., May 3, 1996.

³⁶ For example, Daulat Rai, Sahib-i-Kamaal Guru Gobind Singh; and Manju Subhash, Rights of Religious Minorities in India, National Book Organization, New Delhi, 1988

³⁷ Ganda Singh, Hindu-Sikh Tension in the Punjab, The Sikh Review, March 1983.

³⁸ Dipankar Gupta, The Communalising of Punjab 1980-1985; in Economic and Political Weekly, July 13, 1984 reproduced in Punjab-The Fatal Miscalculation by Patwant Singh and Harji Malik, page 220.

b. Denial of a Separate Sikh Identity

Many Hindus insist that the Sikh religion is just another Hindu sect, that the Gurus of the Sikhs were just another group of saints of India, that the Sikh martial tradition is a Hindu tradition - that the *Khalsa* were Hindus who became soldiers to defend the rest against oppressive Muslim rulers - and hold that one can call oneself a Sikh without actually following the teachings of the faith so long as he/she goes through certain rituals at the time of birth, marriage, death, among others. Citing the fact of some ignorant Sikhs following Brahmanical practices in their worship as proof, they consider the Sikh emphasis against idol worship and caste system as deviant practices encouraged by the British to foster separatism. Subhash's view³⁹ of Sikh identity, typical of most Hindu writers, is that it is an artificial device created by the British 'to drive a wedge between *Keshdhari* (who do not cut their hair) Sikhs and the general body of Hindus in a planned and systematic way.... The first step in this direction was a separate enumeration of *Keshdhari* Sikhs in the census of 1911, the second was extension of a separate electorate to Sikhs in the Government of India Act, 1919.' According to Subhash⁴⁰: 'Hindus were Sikhs and Sikhs were Hindus. The distinction between them was functional, not fundamental. A Sikh was a Hindu in a particular role. When, under the changed circumstances, he could not play that role, he reverted to his original status.' The apparent implication is that as Hindus are now free in India, Sikhs ought to revert to Hinduism. She considers 'the external marks of the Sikhs' to be 'accidental difference' from the Hindus. The Sikhs resent this refusal to accept the independence of their faith and to reduce it to merely a 'functional' format.

Some Hindus make much of a practice, prevalent during the British rule in India, among some Hindu families to have one of their sons become Sikh. In some cases this was indeed an act of faith or, perhaps, superstition (for example, after birth of several female children or several miscarriages, a Hindu woman would wish to God for a male child with the promise of raising him as a Sikh). In others, because Sikhs were allowed to possess and carry *kirpaans*, having a Sikh son had practical advantages in areas bordering upon the 'frontier' which were subject to frequent raids and depredation by some Pathan tribes. However, in many cases, the motivation was entirely mundane. This was a device to create better job opportunities for the son in a highly competitive job market. During British rule there were quotas, based upon religion, for government jobs. The level of education was much higher among the Hindus who were mainly urban and had access to better educational facilities than among the Sikhs who were mainly rural. Conversion to the Sikh faith would improve the son's chances of getting employment with the government. With India's freedom and disappearance of the economic incentive this practice has all but disappeared.

Many Hindus hold description of the Sikh faith as distinct from Hindu as a mark of hostility. Typical of this attitude is Nayar's comment⁴¹ : '...when the Akalis said that the Sikhs were a different nation the Hindus were really hurt.' Apparently, he does not expect the change of faith from Hindu to Sikh to be a genuine conversion involving change in belief but entirely a matter of change in appearance by adoption of external symbols of the faith.

³⁹ Manju Subhash, Rights of Religious Minorities in India, National Book Organization, New Delhi, 1988, page 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid, page 211.

⁴¹ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 69.

c. Denial of Punjabi

Language, according to Crystal⁴², 'is more than a shared code of symbols for communication. People do not fight and die, as they have done in India, to preserve a set of symbols. They do so because they feel that their identity is at stake - that language preservation is a question of human rights, community status and nationhood.'" At the time of the 1951 census⁴³ the Sikh population of Punjab was 6,769,129. Only 8,230,000 persons declared their language to be Punjabi, i.e., a large majority of the 12,930,045 Punjabi Hindus disowned the language they spoke and declared Hindi to be their mother-tongue. This was endorsed by the Punjab Boundary Commission when a Punjabi-speaking state was finally agreed to. The Commission determined⁴⁴ that Jatki or Lahanda was the predominant language of West Punjab before creation of Pakistan and that it was reasonable to assume that some of the Lahanda speaking migrants must have declared their language to be Hindi. It is to be noted that whereas Punjabi was recognized as one of the fourteen national languages, Lahanda was merely a dialect like scores of others in India. Puri⁴⁵, discussing the Sikh identity crisis after partition of India in 1947, writes: 'Punjabi Muslims could afford to forget Punjab and live like Pakistanis. After all, they got a sovereign state to rule, offered to them on a platter. The Punjabi Hindus could afford to forget Punjab and live like Indians. What could the Sikhs do? They could not shrug off their language. Their very scriptures are written in it. So the mantle of Punjab fell on the Sikhs. The Sikhs were willing to live like Punjabis, committed to Punjabi language and culture. The Punjabi Hindus were not, and they refused to acknowledge Punjabi as their mother tongue. Thus the seeds of the problem began to bear their bitter fruit. The alienation between Hindu and Sikh began. With the erosion of Punjab, the Sikhs began to be viewed as a community rather than a people belonging to a particular province. The Sikhs began to view themselves as a nation rather than a minority.'

According to Malik⁴⁶: 'The Sikhs ... found that in spite of being a minority in the new state, they were considered a real threat by the Punjabi Hindus....Their insistence on Punjabi and the gurmukhi script was, for them intrinsically linked with the preservation of their separate identity. But the linkage gave hostile elements a convenient handle to dub the demand as communal and anti-secular. Hindu militants countered with a campaign of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' and the Punjabi Hindu press began to reproduce pre-partition Sikh writings written in a period when Sikhs feared they would find themselves in Muslim Pakistan as a helpless minority, as proof that the Sikhs, represented by the Akali Dal, wanted a sovereign Sikh state. The disinformation campaign, which was to continue through the Punjabi Suba agitation when Congress Sikh leaders accused the Akalis of conspiring with Ayub Khan against India and of wanting to set up a Sikh state with Pakistan assistance, up to the 1980s branding of Sikhs as traitors, had begun.'

⁴² Crystal, David, 'Languages', Civilization, February-March 1997, page 44.

⁴³ Memorandum presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba by Sanyukt Punjab Sanrakshan Samiti of Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, New Delhi, page 18.

⁴⁴ Punjab Boundary Commission Report, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1966, page 24.

⁴⁵ Rajinder Puri, 'What it's all about' in 'Punjab in Indian Politics', edited by Amrik Singh, 1985, page 55.

⁴⁶ Harji Malik, The Historical Legacy, in 'Punjab in Indian Politics', Edited by Amrik Singh, Ajanta Publications, 1985, page 36.

d. Opposition to Sikhs and Sikh Institutions

Lala Jagat Narain, who headed a group of newspapers in Punjab, wrote columns slandering Sikh religious leaders. He was an Arya Samajist and 'a strong supporter of the Nirankaris'⁴⁷. He demanded action against the President of the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and the Jathedar, Siri Akal Takhat Sahib on the grounds that, during their visit to the United States of America, they had met with Ganga Singh Dhillon who was a proponent of an independent Sikh state. Extremist Hindus were bent upon misrepresenting the Sikh religion and tradition as inherently anti-national. They objected to the contents of the daily Sikh prayer, in use for nearly three centuries, as statements of separatism and sedition⁴⁸. An editorial⁴⁹ described this prayer as an act of treason and went on to advocate that those who are guilty (the Sikhs) should be awarded punishment which is ordinarily meted out to traitors and enemies of the nation, i.e., 'blowing them off by cannon fire or beheading them, by obliterating all signs of them'. It criticized the Government stating: 'let alone cut off their heads, even their tongues had not been cut off so that they would be prevented from uttering such vulgar words'. These contents of the Sikh prayer were among the reasons for Justice Gokulakrishnan's judgment approving the banning of the All India Sikh Students' Federation. Wrote the learned Judge⁵⁰: '*Raj Karega Khalsa*⁵¹ is a slogan of separation - Khalsa shall rule', and, 'the Sikhs want to preserve the interests of the Sikhs and Sikhism in an atmosphere which is congenial for such preservation.... As rightly put forth by the learned counsel for the central government, such resolutions are forerunners for the demand of Khalistan...' Arbitrary and hostile interpretation of the Sikh prayer was one of the devices used to declare this minority faith in India as inherently anti-national and to liquidate those who chose to adhere to its beliefs, principles, and values.

Hindu intellectuals have been belaboring the Sikhs for sticking to their religious practices and their religious identity. As an example, we quote Sethi⁵² who advised the Sikh leaders that 'they should have made attempts to delink themselves from the stranglehold of the SGPC⁵³ and the high priests of the Golden Temple and other religious leaders.' Noting that the SGPC is the elected body of Sikhs in charge of managing Sikh places of worship. Sethi was essentially calling upon the Sikhs to dissociate themselves from their own elected religious representatives.

There have been attacks on the Sikh heroic tradition. Shourie⁵⁴ refers to Sikhs' 'having retained a false pride in martial temperament and abilities'. As stated earlier, the ideal for a Sikh is to be a 'saint-soldier'. Sikhs have been soldiers in the cause of liberty and for protection of the

⁴⁷ G.S. Chawla, Assassination of Lala Jagat Narain, Illustrated Weekly of India, October 4, 1981, page 16.

⁴⁸ For example: Arun Shourie, Indian Express, May 13, 1982.

⁴⁹ Jai Parkash, Editorial titled '*Raj Karega Khalsa*', The Daily Milap (in Urdu), New Delhi, 7 December 1985.

⁵⁰ The Gazette of India Extraordinary, Part II, Section 3, Sub-section (ii), No. 456, New Delhi, Monday, September 17, 1984

⁵¹ A phrase that occurs in a verse which is part of every Sikh prayer meaning 'God's people will triumph'.

⁵² J.D. Sethi, Secularism, Communalism and Nationalism, in Punjab in Indian Politics, Edited by Amrik Singh, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1985, page 440.

⁵³ Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

⁵⁴ Arun Shourie, Lessons from the Punjab, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books International, 1984, pages 178-179.

oppressed since the time of their sixth Guru. Up to the time of British annexation of Punjab, they were 'soldiers to a man'. During the British rule, soldiering was the primary occupation of Sikhs; their population of nearly 2 million provided⁵⁵ 88,000 men to the army during the first world war. In free India, serving in the military is regarded as just another occupation and one can understand the view that this opportunity should be equally available to all Indians and not reserved for 'martial races' like the Sikhs. However, it is extremely unfair and arrogant to label the pride a community has in its heroic tradition built over three centuries as 'false'.

e. The Concept of 'Moderate' and 'Militant' Sikhs

To Hinduize the Sikhs, the Arya Samaj-dominated press in Punjab has coined the words 'secular' Sikh and 'moderate' Sikh. Those who violate Sikh religious principles and practices are fondly described as 'secular' and 'moderate' whereas devout Sikhs who follow the *Sikh Rehit Maryada*, which specifically forbids cutting of hair and abusing intoxicants, are branded orthodox, militant, extremist, terrorist, and criminal, in an orchestrated sequence. For example, Sethi,⁵⁶ describing his conversation with an aged Sikh in 1983, reported the Sikh's view that Hindus and Sikhs were like the finger and the fingernail as sane; but the same Sikh had 'suddenly lost his sanity' when he said that 'in his opinion, Sant Bhindranwale was the greatest Sikh leader alive'. However, a day spent in the company of 'a young Sikh of the clipped beard and short hair variety' with whom he visited a beer bar and later a home, where 'a young second lieutenant saunters in (you can't tell if he is a Sikh, he wears his hair short like every one else in the room, though he later admits to using a 'fake' turban for appearance's sake)', and Sikhs are addressed as 'Surds' and 'Surdies', as completely free of 'social uneasiness'. Evidently, the likes of Sethi are socially 'uneasy' with a Sikh practicing, or admiring one who practices, his religion. Such a person is offensive and insane whereas those who have decided to conform so that they are indistinguishable from the Hindus are wholesome, peace-loving persons. Tully and Jacob⁵⁷ describe Major General Brar who commanded the operation against Darbar Sahib as 'a Sikh from the same area and the same caste as Bhindranwale, who had committed the cardinal sin in the Sant's book of shaving his beard and cutting his hair.' Similarly, the operation in Patiala⁵⁸ 'was commanded by a Sikh general who had forsworn his beard, Major-General Gurdial Singh'. Nayar⁵⁹ finds it offensive that 'Bhindranwale ... said that Sikhs who trimmed their beards or imbibed liquor were not Sikhs. He was getting to be a fundamentalist and began to be described as the Khomeini of Sikhs. Upon his call many Sikhs even stopped tying their beards; some of the younger ones who had become *sahajdhari*⁶⁰ stopped having their hair cut and again started growing beards.' Clearly, Nayar is unhappy at the Sikhs following the codes of their faith. Referring to a part of the daily Sikh prayer Tully and Jacob state⁶¹: 'Their cry was '*Raj karega Khalsa*' - 'The Khalsa shall rule!' Sikhs still repeat this cry which, if taken literally, inevitably

⁵⁵ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990, page 69.

⁵⁶ Sunil Sethi, Journey in Punjab, *India Today*, September 30, 1983, pages 64-65

⁵⁷ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 147.

⁵⁸ Ibid, page 152.

⁵⁹ Kuldeep Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 70.

⁶⁰ In Sikh religion, the term *Sahajdhari* is used for a person who believes in the Sikh gurus but has not yet received initiation. Here, Nayar is erroneously using it to describe Sikhs who by cutting their hair have violated the Sikh code. Such persons are *patit* (fallen ones), not *Sahajdhari*.

⁶¹ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 20.

leads to a conflict of loyalties in a modern secular state like India.' They summarize the glorious history of Sikh resistance to oppression by stating that⁶²: 'The Sikhs, with their martial tradition, are a violent community at the best of times.'

There are those who have the Sikhs appearance but do not accept the faith and its history and culture. Darbara Singh, while Chief Minister of Punjab, is quoted as having⁶³ 'candidly stated his opinion that there was no longer such a thing as Sikh culture. There was a Sikh culture before. That Sikh culture has now reached the limit. Sikh culture is now dead ... Now the Sikh culture has been converted into a composite culture.' He was a 'secular' Sikh acceptable to the Hindu establishment. K.P.S. Gill, the former Punjab Police Chief who oversaw the elimination of thousands of devout Sikhs as 'terrorists' killed in 'faked encounters' is another 'moderate' Sikh because, in his opinion⁶⁴, the scriptures 'represent somebody's ideas hundreds of years ago and are hardly relevant in today's life.' Khushwant Singh is yet another favorite of the establishment because he confesses⁶⁵: 'My emotional attachment is more to the Sikh community to which by accident of birth I happen to belong to rather than to Sikhism'.

f. Equating Linguistic Identity with Political Separatism

Ever since India's freedom from British rule, the Sikhs had been demanding creation of Punjab as a linguistic state. The militants among the Punjab Hindus represented by the Sanyukt Punjab Sanrakshan Samiti represented to the Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba that⁶⁶ 'the real motive underlying this demand is to have an area in which only the Sikhs are in a majority and which can ultimately be carved out as an independent state, and a sort of buffer state between India and Pakistan.' Nayyar⁶⁷ reminded the audience at a conference held at Princeton University in 1985 that at the time of partition of Punjab in 1947, India welcomed half of the total Sikh population as refugees from Pakistan; that their religion, being a combination of Hinduism and Islam - which is Semitic - is, like all Semitic religions, inherently separatist. He stated that Muslims and Sikhs have come out of Hindus; that Sikh nationalism does not emerge from oppression but that it seeks power; that Sikh nationalism is in conflict with Indian nationalism and the secular Indian state has priority; that, by the very nature of their religion, the Sikh community is highly organized, combines religion and politics, institutionalizes conflict, sanctifies violence, uses a coercive approach, including effecting demographic changes through murders, in order to correct the status inconsistency of its enormous economic power and low political power. In his opinion, there was no possibility of reaching any agreement with the Akalis because their ambition was unbounded. He claimed that the line 'the Khalsa shall rule' in the Sikh daily prayer does not mean rule only over Punjab but implies a building of momentum to achieve a separate state; to get concessions, consolidate them and then proceed to another

⁶² Ibid, page 104.

⁶³ Ibid, page 69.

⁶⁴ Interview with Ramesh Vinayak: India Today, November 30, 1996, page 184.

⁶⁵ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 9.

⁶⁶ Memorandum presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Punjabi Suba by Sanyukt Punjab Sanrakshan Samiti of Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, New Delhi, page 18.

⁶⁷ B.R. Nayyar, Speech at the conference. The Proceedings titled 'India's Democracy', edited by Atul Kohli, published by Princeton University Press, 1988, do not contain the text of this speech. The above reference is from this writer's notes taken at the conference. No Sikh was invited to the conference. The writer was member of a group of Sikhs who sought and were given permission to attend on the last day of the conference.

state. Summing up the tragic events of June 1984, he believed that the Akalis had assumed that the Government would be deterred from taking action against the Sikhs because of the number of Sikhs in the army but that, sadly for the Akalis, Mrs. Gandhi also knew this and planned accordingly. He warned the Sikhs that the achievement of Khalistan was not going to be a costless process. Apparently, even very learned Hindus, assuming an extremist posture, accused the Sikhs of demanding a separate state when they were not. They equated the Sikh religion with anti-nationalism, and along with the Indian Government in which they were dominant, acted to control and crush a minority faith they had taught themselves to dread.

3. Persecution of Sikhs: 1947-1966

Persecution of Sikhs in Hindu-dominated India began immediately after India's freedom from British rule. A policy letter⁶⁸ dated October 10, 1947 from the Punjab Government informed the Deputy Commissioners⁶⁹ that 'the Sikhs, as a community, were a lawless people and were thus a menace to the law-abiding Hindus in the province', and called upon the Deputy Commissioners to take special measures against them. The Sikhs were still a minority in Punjab. Government was the biggest employer and most of the senior positions in the various departments were held by Hindus. Sikh employees were routinely harassed and penalized on trivial grounds. The case of Kapur Singh's dismissal from Indian Civil Service is well-known. There were numerous other cases of Sikh officials being victimized. Sikhs were removed from key positions in government and denied opportunities for advancement in practically all fields of employment. It was subtly made known that they would improve their chances of advancement if they gave up the external marks of their Sikh religious identity. Those who did not were dubbed as communal-minded. Whenever a Sikh superior tried to discipline a subordinate Hindu official, the typical defense was to accuse the superior of communalism. If a Sikh official was a regular visitor to the local *gurdwara*, he was dubbed as communal-minded. In other states as well, the policy against Sikhs was the same. Representations by Sikh leadership were largely ignored. Typical of this was the Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh's defense of the Tenancy Act according to which 'Rai Sikhs, Jat Sikhs, Virk Sikhs, and Kamboh Sikhs, were classified as criminal tribes'⁷⁰.

4. The Sikh Predicament

Under unrelenting pressure from the Hindu extremists and in view of the Indian Government's policies, the Sikhs in Punjab and elsewhere in India felt threatened. There was a marked increase in apostasy and Sikhs who held strongly to their religious practices felt that they were at a disadvantage in matters of economic and political advancement in India. Khushwant Singh expressed the Sikh predicament very well. Listing the reasons for increasing apostasy among Sikhs, he stated⁷¹: 'There is a close connection between the Punjabi language and Sikhism. In families where Punjabi has been replaced by other languages - English among the rich and the anglicized, Hindi among those desirous of getting the best in a Hindu-dominated India - the study of the *Granth*, the observance of Sikh ritual and Khalsa tradition have had a

⁶⁸ Kapur Singh, *Saachi Saakhi*, Navyug Publishers, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1979, page 209-210.

⁶⁹ Executive heads of administrative districts of the state.

⁷⁰ Joyce Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen*, Rutledge & Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1975, page 219.

⁷¹ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2, Oxford University Press, Indian Edition 1977, pages 304-305.

short lease of life.' He went on to note that 'with the resurgence of Hinduism, the official commitment to secularism is being reduced to a meaningless clause in the constitution. The emphasis on Sanskrit and Hindi, study of the Aryan classics, insertion of cow-protection as a directive clause of the constitution, the increase in the number of cow-protection societies, the growth of Hindu political groups such as the Bhartiya Jan Sangh and the militant R.S.S.⁷², and the suspicion with which other minorities have come to be regarded are but some indications of the way the wind is blowing. Hindus, who form 80 percent of the population, will in due course make Hinduism the state religion of India.' He concluded: 'The only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create a state in which they form a compact group, where the teaching of Gurmukhi and the Sikh religion is compulsory, and where there is an atmosphere of respect for the traditions of their Khalsa forefathers.' This was perhaps the first call for creation of Khalistan, a sovereign Sikh state. From the militant Hindus' point of view, in order to prevent the creation of an autonomous state envisaged in Khushwant Singh's comments, it was necessary to vigorously pursue the policy of undermining the identity of Sikhs as a separate religious community.

5. Akali Agitation for a Punjabi-speaking State

Faced with this situation, the Shromani Akali Dal started an agitation for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. The agitation was sternly suppressed. A solution was arrived at in the form of the Regional Formula but its implementation was delayed because of Hindu opposition. The All India Bhartiya Jan Sangh, the Haryana Lok Samiti, and the Punjab Hindi Raksha Samiti maintained that 'although Punjabi is understood by the vast majority of people in the Punjab, it is nothing more than a spoken language, or a mere dialect' and that 'Gurmukhi is a religious script of the Sikhs and cannot be foisted on non-Sikhs'⁷³. In 1966, Indira Gandhi finally agreed to the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state. Unfortunately, several Punjabi-speaking areas contiguous to Punjab were left out and merged with neighboring states because the population there happened to be Hindu. The Punjab Boundary Commission excluded Kharar Tehsil from Punjab. The Commission argued⁷⁴: 'Having regard to the special position of Chandigarh which occupies together with its controlled area a large part of the tehsil, superiority of Punjabi speaking rural population in the tehsil cannot be given undue importance' and recommended 'that Kharar Tehsil, including the Chandigarh Capital Project be merged with the Hindi-speaking State.' We must note here the dissenting note by Mr. S. Dutt of the Commission. Finally, Chandigarh was kept out of both Hindi and Punjabi speaking areas and given the status of Unilon Territory. In 1987, Gujral stated⁷⁵ that he had advised Indira Gandhi to exclude these Punjabi-speaking Hindu majority areas from Punjab despite protests by the Sikh leaders. He recalled that he had reminded the Akali leaders that if these areas were included in Punjab, Sikhs would be in a minority. Apparently, the Sikhs, motivated more by the desire to preserve their distinct culture and faith rather than ambition for political dominance, were willing to live as a minority in a

⁷² Rashtriya Svayam Sevak Sangh, a militant Hindu organization.

⁷³ Report of the Punjab Commission, (The Das Commission Report) Government of India, 1962, page 15.

⁷⁴ Punjab Boundary Commission Report, Government of India, New Delhi, 1966, page 46.

⁷⁵ I.K. Gujral, Speech at an international conference held at University of California, Los Angeles, October 24-25, 1987 on 'Punjab Crisis: Possible Paths to Resolution', Proceedings of the conference were not published. The report here is based upon the author's notes taken at the conference.

Punjab that was Punjabi-speaking and protested⁷⁶ these exclusions. While they felt betrayed that they had got a truncated Punjab, the view of the national leadership was that a state based on religion had been created which needed to be economically and politically controlled to avoid the possibility of secession. The Shromani Akali Dal successfully launched a 'save democracy' agitation against the declaration of a state of national emergency in 1975. It is possible that the leadership of the ruling Congress Party concluded at that time that the Sikhs had to be weakened and rendered incapable of launching successful agitations in the future.

6. Government Policies After Creation of the Punjabi-Speaking State

a. Sikh Views Ignored and the Hindu Minority in the State Given De Facto Veto

The Hindu-majority Indian Government has allowed the Hindu minority in Punjab a de facto veto in Punjab affairs. Even trivial requests such as the installation of a transmitter at Darbar Sahib, naming of a railroad train, equitable distribution of river waters and enforcement of riparian rights, imposing restrictions on smoking, securing adequate prices for agricultural produce, etc., by the Sikhs, were vehemently and successfully opposed by extremist Hindu elements with consistent support from the Indian Government. India is credited with being the country where methods of peaceful protest and non-violent non-cooperation were first introduced. However, in 'free' India, the Sikhs were not allowed this privilege. Whenever they launched any protest, the Government response was to arrest all the Sikh leaders and thousands of other Sikhs. This invariably led to replacement of the original demands by a demand for release of the detainees. After prolonged struggle, numerous arrests, tortures, and other suffering, the Government would agree to release the prisoners but the original demands would remain unsatisfied.

b. Economic Demands Seized Upon as Opportunity for Religious Oppression

Punjab has had reasons to be dissatisfied with the Indian Government's hesitation in developing the state's industry. Gujral⁷⁷, among others, has catalogued the economic difficulties experienced by the state of Punjab. The Sikhs viewed the Government's reluctance to develop Punjab industrially as a weapon being used against them, forcing them to tow the line or suffer. The central government in India saw the economic problems of Punjab in communal light. Shiva⁷⁸, describing the economic difficulties of the Punjab farmers, states:

'On Jan 31, 1984, a call for '*rasta roko*' (road blockade) was given and farmers got Rs. 12.5 crore⁷⁹ in relief for the pest damage to their cotton crop. On March 12, 1984, the Bhartiya Kisan Union started a *gherao* (blockade) of the Punjab Raj Bhawan (Governor's residence) at Chandigarh demanding a withdrawal of enhanced electricity rates, higher procurement price for wheat and the scrapping of APC and its replacement

⁷⁶ Resolution passed on July 20, 1966 by Shromani Akali Dal, reproduced in Saachi Sakhi by Kapur Singh, Navyug Publishers, Chandni Chowk, Delhi, 1979, page 248.

⁷⁷ I.K. Gujral, The Economic Dimension, in Punjab in Indian Politics, Edited by Amrik Singh, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 1985, pages 42-53.

⁷⁸ Vandana Shiva, The Violence of The Green Revolution, Research Foundation for Science and Ecology, Dehra Dun, 1989, page 127-128.

⁷⁹ One 'crore' is ten million. 'Rs.' is abbreviation for 'Rupees'.

by an agricultural 'cost' commission. Finally on March 18, 1984 an agreement was reached and the *gherao* lifted.' She goes on to state that 'In May 1984, the farmers' agitation was at its height in Punjab. For a week, from May 10 to 18, farmers *gheraoed* the Punjab Bhawan (Governor's house) since the state was under President's rule. By conservative estimates, at any time, more than 15-20 thousand farmers were present in Chandigarh during the *gherao*. Earlier, from May 1 to 7, the farmers had decided to boycott the grain markets to register their protest against the central government procurement policy. On 23rd May, 1984, Harchand Singh Longowal, the Akali Dal President, announced that the next phase of the agitation would include attempts to stop the sale of foodgrains to the Food Corporation of India...On 3rd of June, Mrs. Gandhi called out the army in Punjab and on the 5th of June the Golden Temple was attacked, which was for the Sikhs, an attack on the Sikh faith and Sikh dignity and honor. After Operation Bluestar, as the military operation was called, the Sikhs as a farming community had been forgotten; only Sikhs as a religious community remain in national consciousness.'

It has been argued that violence in Punjab was promoted by the Green Revolution that led to a dramatic increase in the number of poor unemployed educated Sikh youth, willing to be drawn into violent protest. Kumar and Lorenz⁸⁰ attribute the unemployment of the rural youth in Punjab to import of cheap labor from neighboring states and to reluctance of the Hindus, who control industry and trade in the state, to employ rural Sikhs. The economic component to the Punjab problem was a secondary factor and, as explained in the previous paragraph, arose out of discrimination against rural Punjabis most of whom happened to be Sikh. However, the Government used the economic demands by the Punjab farmers as voiced by the Shromani Akali Dal as a pretext for religious persecution. Placing things in perspective, Sant Bhindranwale noted⁸¹: 'This Government does not like the sight of the turban, the beard, the shorts and the *kirpaan*'. He criticized⁸² the Akali leadership: 'They do not talk about the history of *gurmat*⁸³ and, going out, they beat their drums over degrees; over public offices, over prices; over water; over soap and linseed oil. They only emphasize these things. No one pays any attention to the Sikh appearance, the beard and the hair, and *kirpaans* and weapons.' He went on to ask the Sikhs: 'If they approve a price of 250⁸⁴ instead of 200 but send you all home shaved clean, would those fifty rupees be worthwhile? If you get a couple of rupees less or more in prices but you are in you home (Faith) with complete Sikh appearance and in favor with the Guru, would that be beneficial or would it be better if you get the fifty rupees but are shaved off and become sons of Hindus?' Sant Bhindranwale's concern was for the survival of the Sikh religion as an independent faith. He had little interest in political issues. Harry Reasoner⁸⁵ of CBS News asked Sant Bhindranwale: 'If I was to tell Americans very briefly what you want, what should I say? What do you want?' The Sant replied: 'We want to bring an end to the slavery which has been put around the necks of the Sikhs'. Reasoner further asked: 'Some people, even some Sikhs, say

⁸⁰ Ram Narayan Kumar and Lorenz Skerjanz, Disappearances in Punjab, A videotape documentary, 1995.

⁸¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 16, 1983.

⁸² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 1, 1984

⁸³ *Gurmat* literally means 'Guru's wisdom'; here, the Sikh faith.

⁸⁴ Price in rupees for procurement of grain from the farmers by the government. Farmers in Punjab have been required to sell their harvest only to the government at prices fixed by the government.

⁸⁵ Harry Reasoner, Report on CBS News - 60 minutes, June 1984.

that this is not a religious movement but a political movement: Is that partly true?' Sant Bhindranwale replied: 'No; that is false.' As far as Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was concerned, his only demand was for freedom to preach his faith.

c. Subversion and Control of Religious Organizations.

The Indian Government sought to subvert and/or control the Sikhs and their religious organizations by dividing and weakening them. According to Malik⁸⁶: 'Covert government support to splinter and fringe groups amongst the Sikhs like the Nirankaris, was also part of the game. Directly linked to this strategy and a result of it was the bloody clash in Amritsar in 1978, between the breakaway sect of the Nirankaris and Bhindranwale's supporters, which triggered off the entire sequence of events leading to Operation Bluestar.'

End of Part I of III

⁸⁶ Harji Malik, The Politics of Alienation, in Punjab-The Fatal Miscalculation, Edited by Patwant Singh and Harji Malik, Patwant Singh, New Delhi, 1985, page 36.

SANT JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE - LIFE, MISSION, AND MARTYRDOM PART II

INTRODUCTION

This is the second part of an essay concerned with life, mission and martyrdom of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In this part, we describe his life and mission as well as the growth of opposition to him. We specially note the campaign of misrepresentation and vilification carried on by the Government as well as the news media in propagating certain myths. The third and final part will address the specific allegations levelled against the Sant by the Indian Government, and considers his relationship with the Shromani Akali Dal.

A. SANT BHINDRANWALE - LIFE AND MISSION

1. Early Life and Success as a Sikh Preacher

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was born in village Rode located in Faridkot District of Punjab, in 1947. From his childhood, he had a religious bent of mind. Sant Gurbachan Singh Khalsa, head of the *Damdami Taksaal*, the premier Sikh religious school, visited the child's village and suggested to Joginder Singh, Jarnail Singh's father, that his son join the *Taksaal* as a student. Coming to the *Taksaal* in 1965, Jarnail Singh received instruction in Sikh theology and history under Sant Gurbachan Singh's tutelage and later Sant Kartar Singh Bhindranwale's. He grew up to be an effective preacher of the faith. On August 25, 1977, upon the death of Sant Kartar Singh, he became head of the *Taksaal*.

From July 1977 to July 1982, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale extensively toured cities and villages of Punjab to preach the Sikh faith. He also visited other states and cities in India. Wherever he went, he carried Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's message to every home exhorting Sikhs to take *Amrit*, observe the Sikh appearance, and live according to the teachings of Siri Guru Granth Sahib. As Tavleen Singh tells us⁸⁷: 'His philosophy in six words was *Nashey chaddo, Amrit chhako, Gursikh bano* (Give up addictions, Take *Amrit*, Become good Sikhs)'. Explaining his mission, he said⁸⁸: 'My mission is to administer *Amrit*, to explain the meanings of *Gurbani*⁸⁹ and to teach *Gurbani* to those around me; ... and (to tell people) that a Hindu should be a firm Hindu, a Muslim should be a firm Muslim, and a Sikh should be a firm Sikh'. His preaching was based on love. He said⁹⁰: 'If we speak to someone with hatred and try to assert our superiority, it will create hatred in the minds of everyone. So long as we have the spirit of love, so long as we have the support of Satguru Hargobind Sahib, the Master of *Miri* and *Piri*, is there any power on earth that can subdue us?' He wanted the Sikhs to 'come back to Anandpur, their home' by taking *Amrit*, and become his brothers and sons of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib.

⁸⁷ Tavleen Singh, *Terrorists in the Temple*, in *The Punjab Story*, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, 1984, page 33.

⁸⁸ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Interview dated February 22, 1984 with a family visiting from Canada.

⁸⁹ *Gurbani*, means Guru's word, i.e., contents of Guru Granth Sahib.

⁹⁰ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 16, 1983.

Sant Bhindranwale had a charismatic personality and spoke in simple village idiom. Those who listened to him, were impressed by his simple living, personal charm, and clear thinking. Joyce Pettigrew, who met him in 1980, writes⁹¹: 'There was a very close association between the Sant and the people, as I myself witnessed on a visit to meet Sant Bhindranwale in Guru Nanak Niwas.' According to Shiva,⁹² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale 'gained his popularity with the Punjab peasantry by launching an ideological crusade against the cultural corruption of Punjab. The most ardent followers of Bhindranwale in his first phase of rising popularity were children and women, both because they were relatively free of the new culture of degenerative consumption, and they were worst hit by the violence it generated. In the second phase of Bhindranwale's popularity, men also joined his following, replacing vulgar movies with visits to gurdwaras, and reading the '*gurbani*' in place of pornographic literature. The Sant's following grew as he successfully regenerated the 'good' life of purity, dedication and hard work by reviving these fundamental values of the Sikh religion's way of life. The popularity of Bhindranwale in the countryside was based on this positive sense of fundamentalism as revitalizing the basic moral values of life that had been the first casualty of commercial capitalism. During the entire early phase of Bhindranwale's preaching, he made no anti-government or anti-Hindu statement, but focused on the positive values of the Sikh religion. His role was largely that of a social and religious reformer.'

According to Khushwant Singh⁹³:

'Within a short period of becoming head of the *Taksaal*, Jarnail Singh came to be recognized as the most effective instrument of renaissance of Sikh fundamentalism. He toured villages exhorting Sikh youth to return to the spartan ways of the Khalsa started by Guru Gobind Singh: not to clip their beards, to abstain from smoking, drinking and taking drugs. Wherever he went, he baptized⁹⁴ young men and women by the hundreds. An integral part of his preaching was that all Sikhs should, as had been required by their warrior Guru Gobind Singh, be *shastradharis* - weapon-bearers.'

Tully and Jacob⁹⁵ state that: 'In spite of the Government's propaganda, to many people Bhindranwale remained a *sant*, or holy man, not a terrorist.'

The religious revival led by Sant Bhindranwale resulted in a large number of Sikhs, especially the youth, receiving initiation into the Sikh faith. According to Khushwant Singh⁹⁶:

'Bhindranwale's *amrit prachar* was a resounding success. Adults in their thousands took oaths in public to abjure liquor, tobacco and drugs and were baptized. Video

⁹¹ Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*, Zed Books Ltd., London, U.K. 1995, page 35.

⁹² Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of The Green Revolution*, Research Foundation for Science and Ecology, Dehra Dun, 1989, pages 129-130.

⁹³ Kuldeep Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 25.

⁹⁴ Many writers erroneously use this term to describe the ceremony of taking *Khande da Pahul* or taking *Amrit*- formal initiation into the Sikh faith.

⁹⁵ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, pages 205-206.

⁹⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 329.

cassettes showing blue films and cinema houses lost out to the village gurdwara. Men not only saved money they had earlier squandered in self-indulgence, but now worked longer hours on their lands and raised better crops. They had much to be grateful for to Jarnail Singh who came to be revered by them as Baba Sant Jarnail Singhji Khalsa Bhindranwale.'

When Sant Bhindranwale was staying in the Darbar Sahib complex during 1982 and 1983, four to five hundred persons⁹⁷ were administered *Amrit* each Wednesday and Sunday. On April 13, 1983 over ten thousand were initiated and during the month ending on April 13, 1984, forty-five thousand Sikhs received *Amrit*⁹⁸. This revival was extremely significant and Sant Bhindranwale was emerging as the leading figure in the Sikh faith and a role-model for the youth. I was once told by a relative that his two sons had stopped taking tea. I asked him why, and if they had been to see Sant Bhindranwale. The reply was: 'No, it is just the way things are in Punjab. The young people love and admire him so much that if they come to know what the Sant does or doesn't do, they like to follow his example.' People sought his advice and intercession for personal problems and conflict resolution. Khushwant Singh reports⁹⁹:

'On a later visit to Amritsar I got an inkling into the reasons of Bhindranwale's popularity. I will narrate two incidents to illustrate this. One day a young girl came to see Bhindranwale. She clutched his feet and sobbed out her story of how she was maltreated by her husband's family for failing to extract more money from her parents and of her husband's unwillingness to take her side. Bhindranwale asked her name and where she lived. "So you are a daughter of the Hindus," he said. "Are you willing to become the daughter of a Sikh?" She nodded. Bhindranwale sent a couple of his armed guards to fetch the girl's family. An hour later a very frightened trio consisting of the girl's husband and his parents were brought to his presence. "Is this girl a daughter of your household?", he demanded. They admitted she was. "She tells me that you want money from her father. I am her father." He placed a tray full of currency notes before them and told them: "take whatever you want". The three fell at his feet and craved forgiveness.'

Khushwant Singh¹⁰⁰ tells us that he was so respected that, after his election to be head of the *Damdami Taksaal* in preference to Amrik Singh, son of Sant Kartar Singh, 'instead of resenting the choice, Amrik Singh became a confidante and collaborator of Jarnail Singh.'

2. Conflict with Sant Nirankaris

Sant Bhindranwale first gained prominence in public life when he organized a protest to stop the Sant Nirankari assembly in Amritsar on April 13, 1978 after he was unsuccessful in persuading the administration to stop it. A group of one hundred persons, including 25 from Sant Bhindranwale's group and 75 from the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, participated in this peaceful

⁹⁷ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 24, 1984.

⁹⁸ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 13, 1984.

⁹⁹ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 23.

¹⁰⁰ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 328.

protest. These unarmed people were fired upon by Nirankari gunmen leaving 13 dead and 78 wounded. The police, instead of stopping the massacre, hurled tear-gas at the protestors¹⁰¹ converting them into sitting ducks. A police officer who was present at the scene told this writer that the Sikh protestors had agreed to stop some distance away from the Nirankari assembly and to wait for the police to negotiate with the Nirankaris to end their public meeting. However, while they were waiting, Nirankari gunmen moved behind a row of busses, parked on one side of the road, to come to the rear of the protestors and opened fire. The leader of the protestors was shot dead by one of the police officials as he tried to persuade the police to intervene and stop the killing. Every attempt was made to avoid punishing the guilty. Instead of apprehending those who had committed the heinous crime, the local authorities escorted them safely out of the state. Sant Bhindranwale felt specially let down by Parkash Singh Badal, then Chief Minister of Punjab, and by Jiwan Singh Umranangal, a cabinet minister, who was present in Amritsar at the time of the April 1978 massacre. Badal felt constrained by the desires of the Hindu members of his coalition government and Jiwan Singh Umranangal never saw any merit in the protest organized by the Sikhs. These events caused extreme bitterness in the minds of the Sikhs. They felt that the Government was deliberately siding with the murderers and treating Sikhs as second-class citizens whose life had no value. An order was issued from Siri Akal Takhat Sahib calling upon all Sikhs to boycott the Nirankaris. Immediately after the massacre, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale personally cared for the dead and the wounded¹⁰². This endeared him even more to the Sikh masses. After prolonged agitation by the Sikhs, a case was registered against the perpetrators. However, the judge, reportedly upon receiving a bribe¹⁰³, acquitted all of them stating that they had acted in self-defense¹⁰⁴. The state government, controlled by Indira Gandhi's party, elected not to appeal this judgment. As Sikhs in various places in India continued to protest the Nirankari practice of openly denigrating their faith, each protest was met by firing by the police and the Nirankaris with the death toll of Sikhs gradually mounting to 28.

In April 1980, the Nirankari leader, Baba Gurbachan Singh, was assassinated. His followers named Sant Bhindranwale as a suspect even though he was nowhere near the scene of the crime. Several of his associates and relatives were arrested. For his part, the Sant continued to openly oppose the Nirankaris and expressed satisfaction that such a wicked person had been eliminated. He declared that if he met Ranjit Singh, the suspected killer, he would weigh him in gold. However, it is said that when Bhai Ranjit Singh did show up clandestinely at Darbar Sahib in 1983, he was not honored by Sant Bhindranwale. Also, when Singh Sahib Gurdial Singh Ajnoha, Jathedar, Siri Akal Takhat Sahib, was considering a rapprochement with the Sant Nirankaris, Sant Bhindranwale declared that he would abide by the decision taken by the Akal Takhat¹⁰⁵.

3. Growth of opposition to Sant Bhindranwale

¹⁰¹ Kapur Singh, They Massacre Sikhs, A White Paper issued by the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, May 1978.

¹⁰² Joyce Pettigrew, The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard voices of State and Guerrilla violence, Zed Books Ltd., London, U.K. 1995, page 33.

¹⁰³ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in early 1982 in Karnal.

¹⁰⁴ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 9.

¹⁰⁵ Akal Takht move to patch up with Nirankaris, Indian Express, February 16, 1982.

Sant Bhindranwale's phenomenal success in reviving the Sikh faith among rural masses of Punjab was viewed with concern by the established leadership of the country. The secularists viewed the revival of the faith as a reversal of the process of weakening of religious bonds. They were afraid that under Sant Bhindranwale's leadership, the Sikh religion might strengthen, spread and eventually result in the emergence of a cohesive Sikh nation which might possibly demand separation of Punjab from the Indian state. Even though many Hindus join Sikhs prayers, attend *gurdwaras*, and regularly participate in Sikh religious ceremonies, the extremists among them misrepresented the daily Sikh prayer as a call for Sikh domination. Whether by design to undermine the Sikh religion or due to paranoia against possible balkanization of India they confused Sant Bhindranwale's emphasis upon the distinct identity of the Sikh religion with political separatism. Akalis were worried that even though Sant Bhindranwale insisted that he had no personal political ambitions¹⁰⁶, he could emerge as a king-maker and jeopardize their hegemony over the Sikh community. The Indian news media, by and large, joined in the witchhunt along with several well known 'intellectuals'. Even Khushwant Singh, who had earlier discussed the survival of the Sikhs as a separate community in a rational manner, described¹⁰⁷ this revival as 'Sikh fundamentalism raising its ugly head'.

Each of these groups, anxious about defending its territory, policies, and/or beliefs, had a role in promoting misrepresentations and misunderstandings about Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and/or the Sikh religion. All of them, with different perspectives and interests, focused on a common target; Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who spearheaded the Sikh revival.

B. MISREPRESENTATION AND VILIFICATION OF THE SANT

1. Exaggeration and False Apportionment of Blame

In order to mislead the Indian public and to facilitate the passage of draconian laws restricting Sikh right to life and liberty, the Indian Government blamed Sant Bhindranwale for every crime that was committed in Punjab. At the same time, the level of crime in the state was grossly exaggerated to justify government oppression as necessary for control of separatism and the preservation of national unity and integrity. Punjab was a state with a crime rate significantly below the Indian national figures. According to government reports¹⁰⁸, 172 persons were killed in the period from August 5, 1982, to December 31, 1983, and 453 (including 118 killed by the police and paramilitary organizations and some killed in the neighboring state of Haryana), over the period August 5, 1981, to June 2, 1984. Sinha et al. tell us¹⁰⁹: 'In Delhi alone in the year 1983, 244 persons were murdered (Statesman, July 1, 1984). Clubbing together every kind of crime under the heading and blaming the Akali agitation for all of them is but an attempt to

¹⁰⁶ For example: Speech in May 1983 and speeches dated August 16, 1983, September 20, 1983, March 8, 1984, and the interview on February 22, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 13.

¹⁰⁸ *White Paper on The Punjab Agitation*, Government of India, July 10, 1984.

¹⁰⁹ Sachchidanand Sinha, Jasvir Singh, Sunil, G.K.C. Reddy, *Army Action in Punjab: Prelude and Aftermath*, Samta Era, Delhi, 1984, page 38-39.

mislead the people.' Nayar confirms¹¹⁰ that 'Punjab Government circulated a secret document. This document said that there were 5,422 murders in 1980 and 5,068 in 1981 in U.P. while in Punjab there were 620 murders in 1980 and 544 in 1981.' It is noteworthy that of all the cases listed in the White Paper it was only in eleven cases that the attackers are even alleged to be Sikh. In all other cases the assailants were unknown. Responding to this propaganda, Sant Bhindranwale said¹¹¹:

'If someone's dog or cat dies, they say Bhindranwala gets it done.' Also¹¹²: 'At whatever place, whatever untoward incident occurs, whether any other place is named in that connection or not, the names of Harmandar Sahib and Nanak Niwas are always included. This is for anything happening anywhere, not only in a couple of cases. Madhya Pradesh is thousands of kilometers from here. Something happened at Bhilai a long time back. Even that case has been linked to this place. After that, at various other places, many incidents occurred. The Government and the *Mahashas*¹¹³, communal newspapers, have not hesitated in linking Harmandar Sahib to these. These conspiracies are being hatched and stories concocted with the sole purpose of vilifying the Akali Dal and to make this struggle unsuccessful.'

Extremist Hindus described Sikh religious practices as commitment to violence and initiation of people into Sikh religion as provocative action. They described the Sant's trips to Punjab villages as¹¹⁴: 'Sant Bhindranwale himself used to go about with about 50 of his armed men in a bus and a lot of tension was generated in the State as a result.' Noting this, Sant Bhindranwale said¹¹⁵:

'One who takes *Amrit* and helps others take it; who reads the *Gurbani* and teaches others to do the same; who gives up intoxicants and helps others to do likewise; who urges all to get together and work in cooperation; who preaches Hindu-Sikh unity and asks for peaceful coexistence; who says: "If you are a Muslim be a devout Muslim, if you are a Sikh be a devout Sikh, respect your *Isht*¹¹⁶, unite under the saffron *Nishaan Sahib*¹¹⁷ stoutly support the *Panth*, and be attached to *Satguru's*¹¹⁸ Throne and Guru's Darbar"; persons who preach like this are now all being called extremists by this Government and by the *Mahasha*¹¹⁹ press. In particular, I have been given a big title. They call me the "leader of the extremists". I am a firm extremist, but of the type which has the characteristics I have described to you.'

¹¹⁰ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1985, page 56.

¹¹¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in early 1982 in Karnal.

¹¹² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech dated April 29, 1983.

¹¹³ A term used by Sant Bhindranwale to describe Arya Samajist Hindus.

¹¹⁴ Harji Malik, *The Historical Legacy*, in '*Punjab in Indian Politics*', Edited by Amrik Singh, Ajanta Publications, 1985, page 17.

¹¹⁵ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 11, 1983; also, interview, with Surinderjit Singh of Vancouver, in January 1983.

¹¹⁶ *Isht* is Punjabi for Beloved, object of reverence, Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

¹¹⁷ The Sikh religious flag.

¹¹⁸ The true Guru: Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

¹¹⁹ Arya Samajist Hindu

He also said¹²⁰:

'Who is an extremist in this Government's eyes? It is one who has a turban on his head; wears the *kachhera*; supports unity and follows the Guru; is desirous of progress of the country; is desirous of justice for the blood of the martyrs, for the insult of Satguru Granth Sahib; and promotes good of all mankind. In Punjab today, anyone who believes in and follows the path of

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

"Nanak says: God's Name is glorious; there is good for all in accepting Your (God's) will", is an extremist.'

2. Staged Crimes

To brand devout Sikhs as criminals, the Government stage-managed numerous crimes. The modus operandi was that the police would orchestrate a crime, the Government would ascribe the crime to Sant Bhindranwale. Following this, the law-enforcement agencies would round up a few devout Sikhs and harass, torture, rape, and even 'eliminate' them through torture.

a. Cows' heads thrown in a Hindu temple

According to a report¹²¹: 'Surinder Kapoor M.L.A. created sensation, when in a meeting of the Congress (Indira) Legislative Party, Punjab, held on March 6, 1983, he accused the then Punjab Government of hatching a conspiracy at Mohali of cutting a few heads of dead cows and of actually conveying them to Amritsar for being stealthily thrown in some Hindu temple there and thus lit the first communal fire in the state'. Sant Bhindranwale and the AISSF had nothing to do with this, were ignorant about the conspiracy, but were blamed by the Government whereas it showed no interest in prosecuting a person caught red-handed throwing tobacco in the Darbar Sahib premises. Sant Bhindranwale said¹²²:

'A person associated with a Hindu *Vairagi*¹²³ brought and dropped some tobacco in the *Parkarma*¹²⁴. Sikhs caught him right there and handed him over to the police. He admitted that he been sent by Romesh¹²⁵ and that they were four men who had come. For throwing tobacco at a religious place of the Sikhs, for the desecration, the police would not even take him to the Police Station. He was released on the road outside the Station. On the other hand, someone brought a head of a dead cow from the slaughterhouse and dropped it in a Hindu religious place. Neither any Hindu nor any Sikh witnessed any Sikh boy doing it. Simply based on suspicion, a price of fifty

¹²⁰ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in early 1982 in Karnal.

¹²¹ Delhi Recorder, May 1983.

¹²² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Interview in January 1983.

¹²³ *Vairagi* is Hindi for an ascetic.

¹²⁴ The marble walkway around the pool at Harmandar Sahib.

¹²⁵ Editor of a Hindu newspaper, son of Lala Jagat Narain.

thousand rupees has been placed on the head of Jaswant Singh Thekedar of Gurdaspur and of twenty-five thousand on the head of Rajinder Singh of Mehta A price was placed on his head because he grew up in the village where Bhindranwala lives, because he is a student in the Federation, because he is an employee of the Shromani Parbandhak Committee, and he has the complete appearance (of a Sikh).' He further explained¹²⁶: 'No Sikh is in favor of placing cows' heads in temples. We are also not in favor of killing the cow. We do not consider the cow a guru, it is a good animal.'

b. Bombs Thrown at the Chief Minister of Punjab

According to Sinha et al.¹²⁷: 'Dubious attacks on Chief Minister Darbara Singh and such other activists were stage-managed in order to malign the Akali movement and to find a pretext to unleash repression..... On August 20, 1982, two hand-grenades were thrown at him at Rahon. A few policemen and onlookers were injured but the grenade thrown at Darbara Singh did not blast instead it was securely tied in a handkerchief. One man was claimed to have been arrested at the place of the incident. The following night one man in custody was later set free. It was proved that he was a police person who managed the show, and hence had to be set free.' Using this stage-managed crime as a pretext, an innocent *Amritdhari* Sikh was arrested and tortured to death. Sant Bhindranwale told his listeners¹²⁸:

'Bhai Gurmeet Singh of Dhulkot, the only son of his parents ... was caught. His nails were pulled out and salt was poured (over the wounds); his hands were burnt by placing candles under the palms of his hands. Then Bhullar¹²⁹ sent a wireless message to the Chief Minister of Punjab, stating that his hands had been burnt, his nails pulled out and salt poured over them but he would not say anything except *Sat Siri Akal*¹³⁰ and *Vaheguru*¹³¹. Then, the words came out of this proud man's mouth that this man should be shot to death. That is how he was martyred.'

c. Extortion

Some persons received letters demanding money. These letters were purportedly written on behalf of Sant Bhindranwale. Upon this being brought to his attention, he said¹³²:

'I like to make an appeal to the congregation and I like to inform the newspapermen too so that they can definitely publish it. I have this letter in my hand. Seven such letters have been received in the Qadian area. One has reached Pritam Singh Bhatia. In that letter too it is written about a Hindu that he should reach such and such place near the railway tracks, where Bhatia Sahib's sheller is located, on August 12, 1983, with 50,000

¹²⁶ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in February 1983.

¹²⁷ Sachchidanand Sinha, Jasvir Singh, Sunil, G.K.C. Reddy, Army Action in Punjab: Prelude and Aftermath, Samta Era, Delhi, 1984, page 30.

¹²⁸ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on August 20, 1983.

¹²⁹ Bhullar was a senior police officer.

¹³⁰ Part of *Jaikaara*, the Sikh slogan of victory.

¹³¹ *Vaheguru* is the Sikh word for God.

¹³² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on August 10, 1983.

rupees. The person to whom that letter is addressed has been asked to reach there at such and such time with 50,000 rupees and if he does not reach there, he should make preparations because he would be finished off in a few days. On the top is written:

ੴ ਖਾਲਿਸਤਾਨ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਾਬਾਦ

"There is one God, Eternal: Long live Khalistan." At the end, at the bottom, is written:

ਭਿੰਡਰਾਂਵਾਲਾ ਜ਼ਿੰਦਾਬਾਦ

"Long live Bhindranwala." So, I appeal to the congregation that this is the product of the Government's black deeds. This is because in the cases that they had registered against *Singhs* ... the *Singhs* are being acquitted and released. To hide this, to hide their own black deeds, and to tarnish the brightening image of the *Jatha*¹³³, to malign it, the Government has started these activities. There are some names mentioned in this letter. There is one Jag Mohan Lal, another is Tilak Raj, there are Om Parkash, Subhash Chander, Mohinder Lal, and Brij Mohan. ... So, *Khalsa Ji*, letters have been sent addressed to these names. ... There is one for a person with "Singh" in his name too. This has been done because if all the letters were addressed to Hindus, it might have aroused suspicion. The manager of the Punjab & Sind Bank in Qadian is, I learn, a Sikh. In the letter to him is written: "You should come to such and such place on August 11, 1983 with 300,000 rupees and you will be safe. Otherwise, I have Bhindranwala's permission to put you on the train (of death) on such and such date. You have the Sikh appearance; you should stoutly support us; bring a liberal amount." This is what is written in this letter. We have to guard ourselves against such people. To give a bad name, to place obstructions in the conduct of this ongoing agitation, the Government is going to use every possible trick. We ought to be fully alert to these. This *Taksaal* has never believed in robberies, thefts, using intoxicants, nor does it believe now nor it ever will.'

Speaking about the police and their 'dirty tricks', the Sant said¹³⁴:

'The Police is set up for protection of the public. But today's police have taken on the form of robbers to loot the public. There are innumerable examples of this, not one, two or four. When there was an investigation into a bank (robbery) case, during investigation of police officials, their names came up; if the culprits were caught red-handed placing bombs in a city, they proved that they were employees of the police. When dogs were used (to track criminals), they got into the car of the S.D.M.¹³⁵, they went into the home of a *Narkdhari* (Nirankari) and they entered a police station.'

¹³³ *Jatha* is Punjabi for any organized group of persons; here, Sant Bhindranwale's group, the Damdami *Taksaal*.

¹³⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 30, 1983.

¹³⁵ Sub-Divisional Magistrate.

3. Oppression Directed at Devout Sikhs

a. Murder of Devout Sikhs in 'Faked Encounters'

For officially orchestrated as well as fictitious crimes, devout Sikhs were rounded up, labelled as terrorists, tortured and often killed. Tully and Jacob report a conversation with Darbara Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab¹³⁶: 'He did order the police to take action against those terrorists they could not get hold of and there was a series of what the Indian police call 'encounters' - a euphemism for cold-blooded murder by the police. Darbara Singh admitted as much to me. On another occasion, when Satish Jacob and I both met him, the former Chief Minister said, 'Encounters did take place, and they were killed. I told my senior police officers, "You kill the killers and I will take the responsibility." ' And again¹³⁷: 'Bhinder told me that ten people he described as 'Bhindranwale's do or die men' had been shot by the police and that more than 1600 people had been arrested.' It is noteworthy that the appellations 'terrorist', 'suspected terrorist', 'do or die men' were being used, by Tully and Jacob, synonymously with *Amritdhari*, a formally initiated Sikh. Nayar reports¹³⁸: 'The police retaliated by raiding the houses of suspects, beating up the inmates and even killing a few of them in faked 'encounters'. Twenty four 'wanted' people were killed thus. This infuriated Bhindranwale the most; he would say that the Hindu police were killing 'innocent Sikhs'.' Also that¹³⁹: 'Since the police had no way to distinguish between a Sikh who is a terrorist and one who is not, every Sikh travelling to Delhi was searched. Trains were stopped at wayside stations at midnight in cold December and the Sikh passengers, travelling even in first class AC¹⁴⁰ coaches, were made to get down to appear before a police official on the platform. Buses were detained to get Sikh passengers down and at some places the rustic policemen said: "All Sikhs should come down." Khushwant Singh tells us¹⁴¹: 'The police were rarely able to identify or arrest the culprits. Its only method of dealing with the menace was to organize fake encounters and kill anyone they supported.' Often, young Sikhs, fearing torture by the police, would run away from their homes. In such cases their families were victimized by the police. Nayar¹⁴² confirms that: 'Relatives of the absconders were harassed and even detained. Even many days after the excesses committed by the police, we could see how fear-stricken the people were. Villagers gave us the names of some of the police sub-inspectors and deputy superintendents involved; some of them, they said, had a reputation of taking the law into their hands.' Zail Singh, who was President of India at the time, himself confirmed¹⁴³ cases of police shooting dead 23 Sikhs in 1982 for the simple reason that, as part of a statewide protest, they tried to peacefully stop traffic on a road, and of killing another six for shouting slogans.

b. The Chando-Kalan Looting by the Police and the Chowk-Mehta Massacre

¹³⁶ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 106.

¹³⁷ Ibid, page 108.

¹³⁸ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 54.

¹³⁹ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 66.

¹⁴⁰ Air-Conditioned.

¹⁴¹ Khushwant Singh, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books International, 1984, page 9.

¹⁴² Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 55.

¹⁴³ Zail Singh in Disappearances in Punjab, A videotape documentary by Ram Narayan Kumar and Lorenz Skerjanz, 1995.

On 9th September 1981, Lala Jagat Narain was assassinated and, immediately, without any supporting evidence, Sant Bhindranwale was presumed to be associated with the crime. Warrants for the Sant's arrest were issued on 11th September. The Police tried to arrest him in village Chando-Kalan in Haryana on the 13th but by the time they reached there, the Sant had left the place. The Police ransacked the village, killed 20 persons in indiscriminate firing¹⁴⁴, and set fire to two busses belonging to the *Taksaal*. The busses contained religious texts. The Sant frequently referred¹⁴⁵ to this wanton act of arson by the police as sacrilege committed by Darbara Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab at that time.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale announced that he would surrender to the police in Chowk-Mehta, his headquarters, on 20th September. The mayhem following his arrest, resulting in death of 18 innocent Sikhs in police firing, is said¹⁴⁶ to have been stage-managed by the government intelligence agencies. When Sant Bhindranwale was being taken away, in spite of his personal advice and entreaties by his staff for everybody to stay calm and peaceful, some people became emotional. According to one account¹⁴⁷, someone tried to grapple with the Senior Superintendent of Police on duty. There are reports that this too was orchestrated to give the police an excuse to open fire. Birbal Nath, the then Director General of Police, is said to have regarded Lala Jagat Narain's murder as his personal loss and along with the other members of the Punjab bureaucracy, wanted a 'good slaughter' of Sikhs at Chowk Mehta. He made plans to storm Chowk Mehta and had a commando unit trained for the purpose of capturing Sant Bhindranwale. Joginder Singh Anand, Deputy Inspector General, later committed suicide presumably¹⁴⁸ because of his remorse at having been associated with this massacre. The Sant's arrest and the massacre of Sikhs that accompanied it led to violent reaction in several places in Punjab followed by still more government oppression. It was much later, after continued demands by the Sikh leadership, that an inquiry into the incident was instituted. According to Sant Bhindranwale¹⁴⁹: 'There was an inquiry into the Mehta affair. Amrik Singh and others were working in connection with that. They were arrested and put in jail. The inquiry was completed but now they are not making it public. This is because according to its findings many big leaders will have to be punished. They are sitting on it.'

c. Murder of Hardev Singh and his associates

On 16th March 1983, the police reported¹⁵⁰ an 'encounter' in which 19-year old Hardev Singh, from Sant Bhindranwale's organization, was killed along with some of his associates. Mr. Pandey, Superintendent of Police, claimed that when the jeep was signaled to stop, the miscreants opened fire and managed to escape towards the Beas river. He said that he presumed some persons in the jeep were killed in the police firing. The Tribune reported its sources as

¹⁴⁴ Chand Joshi, Bhindranwale, Myth and Reality, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 1984, page 89.

¹⁴⁵ For example, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale: Interview in January 1983; Speeches on March 11, 1983; June 10, 1983; August 16, 1983; September 20, 1983; March 8, 1984; April 19, 1984.

¹⁴⁶ Surya Monthly, New Delhi, September 1984.

¹⁴⁷ Personal conversation with members of the family of the police officer involved.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Simranjit S. Mann to the Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab, dated January 22, 1984.

¹⁴⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 19, 1983.

¹⁵⁰ The Daily Tribune, Chandigarh, March 17, 1983.

saying that the jeep had been 'earlier followed by police vehicles on its emerging from a religious place in the city.' The next day, The Tribune reported that police sources did not rule out the possibility of the police having lobbed more than one grenade. It was surmised that Mr. Pandey received pellet wounds in one of these grenade explosions. According to The Tribune¹⁵¹, the Central Bureau of Investigation did not agree with the Punjab Government's version of the encounter and decided to shift Mr. Pandey to Delhi to facilitate an independent inquiry. According to Sikh leaders, it was a clear case of murder of innocent unsuspecting Sikhs travelling in the jeep. Tavleen Singh reported¹⁵²: 'All the factions that inhabited the Gurdwara at that point were ... convinced that the murder was a government plot devised to find an excuse to enter the Temple complex.' Paradoxically, instead of inquiring into the affair and punishing the guilty officials, the Indian Government used this murder by ambush as the basis for canceling the arms licenses of the victims and their associates. The Union Home Ministry¹⁵³ 'directed the State Government to deal firmly with the extremists and ensure that its orders canceling the arms licenses of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's followers are faithfully and expeditiously carried out.' While Sikh leaders were crying 'murder' and praying for the departed souls, extremist Hindu groups were quick to blame the victims and to protest the prayer meetings. Innocent persons had been killed but instead of seeking justice and noting the absence of due process, leaders of the Bhartiya Janata Party charged the Center and the State Government with 'failure' to deal with 'terrorists' and called for punishment to the mourners.

d. Charges against Amrik Singh

Amrik Singh and Thara Singh had been detained since July 19, 1982. They were acquitted by a court on July 21, 1983, but were kept in judicial custody for another two weeks or so while the police tried to cook up some other charges against them. Referring to this, Sant Bhindranwale said¹⁵⁴: 'Today they have initiated a new case against him. They had arrested Amrik Singh. They could not find any proof for the accusation they levelled against him. It was apparent that he would be acquitted. Now they have written up charges against him under the date 16th. I have got a copy of the F.I.R.¹⁵⁵ on this case. In it, it is said that Amrik Singh shouted Khalistan slogans. The case has been registered but the arrest under this case is not being made. They say that they will arrest him when he is released.' Amrik Singh was released and these charges were never pursued. However, this false report, drafted before the victims could have had any opportunity to commit the crime listed, was later presented as evidence before a judge of the High Court¹⁵⁶ and accepted by him as fact. In violation of the court's decision, the police planned to re-arrest him as he came out of the gate of the jail. The news media, instead of protesting government high-handedness, issued a de facto endorsement of the government policy of arbitrary arrest and detention, by calling the release a lapse on the part of the police. The police official concerned was placed under suspension and relieved of his duties even though he

¹⁵¹ The Daily Tribune, Chandigarh, March 25, 1983.

¹⁵² Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books page 34.

¹⁵³ The Daily Tribune, Chandigarh, March 23, 1983.

¹⁵⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 16, 1983.

¹⁵⁵ First Information Report of an incident filed at the police station.

¹⁵⁶ The Gazette of India Extraordinary, dated September 17, 1984; page 11, paragraph 26 referring to the evidence of Government Witness #11, Sardara Singh who stated that when he brought Amrik Singh and Tara Singh to the District Court on July 16, 1983, they raised slogans 'Khalistan Zindabad', etc.

had a history of faithfully torturing and killing Sikh youth and having his own son join the All India Sikh Students Federation in order to collect information for the Government¹⁵⁷.

e. Cremation of Sikhs murdered by Police

The Police routinely refused to hand over the bodies of Sikhs killed in police firings and faked encounters to the families of the victims. Sant Bhindranwale repeatedly mentioned in his speeches that the bodies of the victims of the 20 September 1981 police firing at Chowk- Mehta were not returned to the families nor were there any post-mortem examination reports made public. Even after his death, the Police continued this policy of disposing off the bodies as unclaimed¹⁵⁸. This was presumably done to prevent the families from conducting funeral ceremonies that could serve as gathering points for Sikhs to pay homage to the departed souls. This practice later on took the form of Sikh young men being simply kidnapped and 'disappeared'.

f. Encouragement to Hindu Mobs

Mobs, led by extremist Hindu organizations, repeatedly set upon and massacred innocent Sikhs in various cities in Punjab and neighboring states. No protection or support was given by the law-enforcement agencies to the victims of this violence. Often, it was the victims of violence who were arrested¹⁵⁹. The attackers' actions were justified as 'understandable' reaction to Sant Bhindranwale's 'inflammatory' speeches. Any demonstration or other protest organized by the Sikhs against these atrocities was met with extreme violence. Sant Bhindranwale emphasized that at no time in history had any Sikh set fire to Hindu scriptures or a Sikh mob set upon any Hindus.

4. Role of the News media and 'Intellectuals'

In a democratic and free society, one would expect the press and the intelligentsia to be watchful of activities of the administration, to expose excesses against the innocent, and to be on the side of life and liberty. However, in the case of Sikhs, the Indian news media failed to look for facts and enthusiastically participated with the Government in its deliberate campaign of vilification of a dearly loved and deeply respected religious leader, criminalization of an entire faith through stage-managed criminal acts, and oppression of a religious community based on false accusations of illegal activities. Well-known writers, on the one hand, noted that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was an honest religious man without political ambition against whom no criminal charges could be substantiated and, on the other, went on to blame him for everything echoing government propaganda. As typical of this attitude, we quote Sanghvi¹⁶⁰:

'The rise and death of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale must be one of the most amazing sagas in the history of Indian politics. In 1978, he was an obscure 31-year-old village

¹⁵⁷ The Gazette of India Extraordinary, dated September 17, 1984; page 11, paragraph 23 referring to the evidence of Government Witness #5 Surjit Singh Bains.

¹⁵⁸ Ram Narayan Kumar and Lorenz Skerjanz, Disappearances in Punjab. A videotape documentary, 1995.

¹⁵⁹ For example, (here give reference to the Ganganagar incident)

¹⁶⁰ Vir Sanghvi, The Giani and Bhindranwale. Imprint, February 1986.

preacher who toured the Punjab warning youths against shaving their beards or cutting their hair. By 1984, when he was only 37, he had come to represent the single greatest threat to the unity and stability of India since Independence. And nearly two years after the battle in which he lost his life, taking the Akal Takht with him, he remains a martyr in the eyes of many Sikhs. Even today, rare is the Sikh politician who will dare to call him what he was: a fanatic and a murderer.'

It is amazing that Sanghvi should paint the Sant as a fanatic and a murderer without any supporting data. He is surprised at Sikhs, directly affected by government oppression and knowing Sant Bhindranwale more closely, honoring their extremely popular leader. Most journalists concede¹⁶¹ that the Sant was easily accessible and that whenever they met him he would describe details of police brutalities against Sikhs. Instead of following up on these complaints and looking for facts, the news-media ignored them as wild accusations. Nayar reports¹⁶²: 'Bhindranwale's speech would contain venom; he would pick up some instance of police excess or of 'discrimination' against the Sikhs and say that the Sikhs were not getting their due in India and that they must unite to fight for justice.' One wonders how a call for unity against discrimination could be construed as 'venom'?

Sant Bhindranwale noted the hostility of the news media in his speeches. For example¹⁶³:

'The newspapers do not publish or rarely publish the information I provide. I do not know what pressure is there. But I shall humbly request you, who are assembled here in large numbers, go to your villages and convey the message'. Also: 'The newspapers do what they will. May Satguru have mercy and give them wisdom. I should not say much about anybody in anger. Sitting there, in order to run their newspaper, they delete any news that is in the interests of the *Panth*¹⁶⁴. Whatever is in the interest of making money, in the interest of the press or the Government, is published.'

During the agitation that started on August 4, 1982, thousands of Sikhs peacefully courted arrest. The Government's consistent response was continued beatings and torture of Sikh youth. Instead of raising their voice against such oppression, most intellectuals justified government brutality against innocent people and accused Sant Bhindranwale of encouraging violence when he spoke out against state terrorism. Nayar, typical of the news media, while conceding that the police killed Sikh youth in faked 'encounters', noted¹⁶⁵: '...we could not but condemn the extremist elements who were out to defy law and glorify violence. Those who were accused of heinous crimes were honored in their absence in the villages of their birth and in recognition of their 'heroism' their kin were given *saropas*. We were shown in Jalandhar, where we ended our trip, photographs of people who had been charged with murder, rioting and the like being 'honored'. And we were pained to note that even the leaders among the moderate Sikhs were reluctant or afraid to condemn what the extremists had done.' This renowned columnist

¹⁶¹ For example, Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 34.

¹⁶² Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1985, page 60.

¹⁶³ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 13, 1983.

¹⁶⁴ The Khalsa Brotherhood.

¹⁶⁵ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1985, page 55.

apparently equated false accusations by an oppressive government with the actual commitment of a crime. Here was a journalist willing to condone widespread inhuman torture and condemning the relatives of innocent victims for 'honoring' their dead'.

Khushwant Singh, trying to ridicule Sant Bhindranwale, states¹⁶⁶: 'There was very little learning or piety to this man. Also¹⁶⁷: 'To Bhindranwale modernity was evil: the Sikhs must return to the simple ways of their warrior forefathers. They must look like them: wear their beards loose and not rolled up and tied under their chins; they must wear long shirts, below knee-length breeches (*kuchhas*) covering their shins. Likewise, Sikh women should not drape themselves in *sarees* which were Hindu, but in *salwar-kameez* (baggy trousers and long shirts) which are Punjabi, nor wear *bindis* (dots) on their foreheads. His newborn Khalsa were to be god-like (*saabat soorat gur Sikh*), while the rest of the world was ungodly-and woe to the ungodly. The newborn Khalsa were the Gurus' storm troopers who would trample their foes under their bare feet like so much vermin. It was a heady brew that Bhindranwale served to simple-minded Sikh peasants.'

The fact is that Sant Bhindranwale actually employed the tools of modern science in his missionary work. Khushwant Singh concedes that Sant Bhindranwale wanted Sikhs to carry modern firearms in addition to the traditional *kirpaan*; and, instead of the traditional horses, ride motorcycles. Sant Bhindranwale did advise people to return to simple ways, shun intoxicants, remember God, follow the Gurus' teachings, and reminded Sikhs of their role as saint-soldiers. However, contrary to Khushwant Singh's conjectures, he never implied that people of other faiths were ungodly and 'woe to them'. There was no question of 'reborn Khalsa'. The Khalsa, created by Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, have always been Gurus' storm troopers in defense of the helpless and in fighting oppression. Sant Bhindranwale did not initiate this concept.

Like many other journalists following the government line in blaming Sant Bhindranwale for all the violence, Khushwant Singh states¹⁶⁸, without any supporting evidence, that Sant Bhindranwale's 'services could be bought by the highest bidder; the Sant became a big time brigand'. He also reviles¹⁶⁹ the Sant as 'the Hindu-baiter', 'a martyred hero of lumpen sections of Sikh society' and blithely refers¹⁷⁰ to 'lads of the A.I.S.S.F.¹⁷¹ and nominees of the *Damdami Taksal* reared in the Bhindranwale school of terrorism'. He chastises 'gangsters who haul innocent, unarmed people from busses and kill them, lob grenades in crowded market places and cinemas', presuming that these gangsters were acting in Sant Bhindranwale's behalf or upon his instructions, ignoring the fact that Sant Bhindranwale consistently condemned such senseless acts, and clear evidence that the Government stage-managed several of these to promote hatred

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, page 13.

¹⁶⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 331-332.

¹⁶⁸ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 23.

¹⁶⁹ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 417.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, page 416.

¹⁷¹ All India Sikh Students Federation.

against devout Sikhs. Khushwant Singh further alleges that Sant Bhindranwale¹⁷² 'well understood that hate was a stronger passion than love: his list of hates was even more clearly and boldly spelt out. On top of the hate-list were apostates (*patits*) who dishonored emblems of the Khalsa by cutting their long hair and beards, smoked, drank liquor or took drugs. However, these *patits* could be redeemed if they agreed to mend their ways and accept baptism. Next on the list were Sant Nirankaris who had gained a sizable following among the Sikhs. They had committed the cardinal sin of recognizing a living human being as their guru when it was an article of Sikh faith that only the holy book, the Granth Sahib, was the 'living' embodiment of the ten gurus. The Sant Nirankaris had also fabricated their own sacred texts, *Yug Purush and Avtar Bani*. They were therefore beyond redemption and had to be liquidated. Finally, there were the Hindus-uncomfortably close to the Sikhs, and far too many to be liquidated. The only way of dealing with them was to treat them with contempt as an effeminate, non-martial race and a lesser breed without the law. Had not the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, proclaimed that one Sikh was equal to a *sava lakh* (one and a quarter million) and a *fauj*-a one man army? So spoke Bhindranwale: one Sikh could easily reckon with thirty-five Hindus.' About one occasion when he met Sant Bhindranwale, Khushwant Singh reports¹⁷³:

'Bhindranwale's short speech was largely addressed to me as I had been hauled out of the congregation to sit on the dais. He towered above me; a steel arrow in one hand, the microphone in the other. Pointing to me he said: "This Sardar Sahib here writes that I spread hatred between Hindus and Sikhs. This is wrong. What I do is to preach the gospel of the Gurus; I do *amrit parchar* and persuade young Sikhs to stop clipping their beards, stop smoking and drinking. If I had my way, I would get hold of all these Sardars who drink *bhisky-shisky* in the evening, pour kerosene oil on them, and set the bloody lot ablaze." This statement was greeted with loud acclamations of *boley so nihal! Sat Sri Akal*. It was ironic that more than half the Sardars sitting on the dais with me, and a sizable proportion of the peasant audience, were hard-drinking men.'

We have not been able to locate these comments in any of Sant Bhindranwale's speeches available to us. Sant Bhindranwale's speeches indicate that he hardly knew Khushwant Singh. In any case, the following statements by Sant Bhindranwale¹⁷⁴ regarding consumption of alcohol appear to completely contradict Khushwant Singh's report:

'I have declared that if there is someone who drinks while wearing a *kirpaan*, and you catch him drunk, the punishment I have announced is that you should get him examined by a doctor (to make sure he has been drinking) and then pour kerosene over him and burn him alive. I shall fight your court case. This is regardless of the party affiliation of the person in such a garb doing such a thing. My appeal to all is that no one should drink but this does not apply to the others, it is only for those with the *kirpaan*. ... If any *raagi*¹⁷⁵, *sant*, *mahatma*, *granthi*¹⁷⁶ even if he is from Bhindranwale (group), who wears

¹⁷² Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 330-331.

¹⁷³ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 27.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Mr. Surinderjit Singh Bains, January 1983.

¹⁷⁵ One who professionally sings verses from Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

¹⁷⁶ One who professionally reads from Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

a *kirpaan* and drinks, wherever you find him, blacken his face, put a garland of old shoes around his neck, put him on a donkey and parade him throughout the village or the district.'

Contrary to Khushwant Singh's diatribe, Sant Bhindranwale never held out any punishment for persons like him. His appeal was only for those with the *kirpaan*. It did not apply to the others. His disapproval was limited to hypocritical Sikh preachers who themselves violated the *Sikh Rehit Maryada*. Quoting the following line from Siri Guru Granth Sahib,

ਪਹਿਲਾ ਫਾਹਾ ਪਾਇਆ ਪਾਏ ਪਿਛੇ ਦੇ ਗਲਿ ਚਾੜਿਆ॥

"First the noose was placed around the teacher's (neck) and later around the (necks) of the disciples", he explained: "The noose will be put around the necks of the *jathedars*, the *sants*, the leaders, and people in responsible positions; around the necks of such of them as use intoxicants.' Sant Bhindranwale's use of the words 'pouring kerosene and setting the on fire' is merely a common Punjabi idiom equivalent to 'chewing somebody up' in colloquial English. In Punjab villages, mothers would often use this phrase while scolding their children.

Khushwant Singh's reference¹⁷⁷ to Bhindranwale's discovering 'that fomenting hatred between the two communities was the easier method of preserving the Sikhs' separate identity from the Hindus than *amrit prachar*' and Sant Bhindranwale's 'adding Hindu-baiting to his other activities' is contrary to his own observations regarding Bhindranwale's success with *amrit prachar*. The Sant was a Sikh preacher and, of course, he appealed to those born in Sikh families to respect their faith and live by it. His appeal was based on love, not hatred, and was indeed very successful. He did not advocate hatred, punishment, or any form of violence against the so-called *patits*¹⁷⁸ and others.

Sant Bhindranwale's opposition of the Sant Nirankaris was limited to their public show of disrespect towards Siri Guru Granth Sahib; their making parodies on the Sikh scriptures; the Nirankari Guru styling himself as *Bajaanwala*¹⁷⁹ in imitation of Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib; and their use of the names of the Gurus for their servants merely to insult and provoke the Sikhs. Neither prior to April 13, 1978, nor after that did Sant Bhindranwale 'pronounce damnation' on them. As Khushwant Singh, the Government¹⁸⁰, and other journalists (e.g. Tavleen Singh¹⁸¹), have noted, the Babbar Khalsa, always opposed to Sant Bhindranwale, claimed responsibility for the killing of Nirankaris. Certainly, Sant Bhindranwale deplored the fact that the Government was not interested in prosecuting the Nirankaris who had murdered 13 Sikhs in cold blood on April 13, 1978, in Amritsar, and at other places later on, and urged upon the Sikhs to unite in resisting such attacks upon their faith and their persons.

¹⁷⁷ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 336.

¹⁷⁸ For example: Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's Speech dated March 8, 1984, and an interview with Surinderjit Singh of Vancouver in January 1983.

¹⁷⁹ *Bajaanwala* literally 'one who keeps falcons' is a fond epithet Sikhs use for Guru Gobind Singh Sahib who kept a falcon on his wrist.

¹⁸⁰ *White Paper on The Punjab Agitation*, Government of India, July 10, 1984, page 129.

¹⁸¹ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in *The Punjab Story*, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 43.

Khushwant Singh's reference to thirty-five Hindus to each Sikh is picked out of context and distorts its implication. It was not at all an exhortation for every Sikh to tackle thirty-five Hindus. Sant Bhindranwale consistently maintained that Hindu-Sikh unity was an article of faith with him¹⁸². In the statement quoted by Khushwant Singh, he was simply telling the Sikhs not to be afraid merely because they were only two percent of the population and that there were thirty-five Hindus to every Sikh. He reminded them that at the Tenth Guru's time each Sikh had been asked to be ready to fight *sava lakh*¹⁸³. A similar expression was used¹⁸⁴ on another occasion in response to a threat by the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, that the Sikhs of Punjab should think about what might happen to Sikhs living in other states. Sant Bhindranwale responded¹⁸⁵: '*Bibi*¹⁸⁶, if this is what you think and this is your attitude towards the turban and the beard, we also have counted that they are only twenty to each one of us.' He emphasized that this exchange between him and Mrs. Gandhi was entirely rhetorical by adding: 'She did not send someone out with a sword, nor did Jarnail Singh send anybody out with a sword.'

Nayar writes¹⁸⁷: 'The state grew tense; 115 major cases of violence had taken place in two areas since Jagat Narain's murder in September 1981 and 24 innocent people had been killed by the extremists, who came to be known as Bhindranwale's men.' Also¹⁸⁸: 'There were regular reports of someone being killed here and another there and often Bhindranwale's men claimed responsibility for the killings.' This is incorrect. It was men of Dal Khalsa and Babbar Khalsa, groups openly opposing Sant Bhindranwale, who took responsibility most of the time. Again¹⁸⁹: 'Until 6 October, the target of Bhindranwale's men were Hindus who were known to be hostile, Nirankaris, police officials or Sikhs who had been 'informers', or who had sided with the Government. But from then on the killings became indiscriminate; six Hindus passengers in a bus were killed near Dhilwan, Ludhiana. They were innocent people who had nothing to do with politics, and this marked a watershed in relations between the Hindus and the Sikhs.' Even Tavleen Singh who filed some objective reports, joined in the general chorus of condemnation. She wrote¹⁹⁰: 'Slowly the venom that was being spewed out every day from the Golden Temple started to get into the very blood of the Punjab and this culminated inevitably and horribly in the killing of six Hindu bus passengers in Dhilwan village, near Jullundur on 5 October 1983. The men were singled out by Sikh terrorists and shot dead for the simple reason that they were Hindu.'

It is important to note Sant Bhindranwale's reaction to this killing of bus passengers. He condemned the senseless act and noted that Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had lost no time in dismissing the inept and repressive State Government upon seven Hindus having been killed

¹⁸² For example, Bindranwale's call for Hindu-Sikh unity, Indian Express, January 4, 1982.

¹⁸³ One hundred twenty-five thousand.

¹⁸⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in later part of February 1983.

¹⁸⁵ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech dated October 20, 1983.

¹⁸⁶ *Bibi*, in Punjabi, is a respectful form of reference to a lady.

¹⁸⁷ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 68.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, page 75.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, page 76.

¹⁹⁰ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 40.

whereas she had held out for sixteen months against demands by various organizations and opposition parties. Ten days after the killings that were immediately followed by the dismissal of the State Government, Sant Bhindranwale explained¹⁹¹:

'By installing a proud man with a turban as the leader, she was desirous of having the turbans of all the other Sikhs taken off. So long as he kept taking them off, so long as the Sikh turbans were coming off, the daughters and sisters of the Sikhs continued to be dishonored in the streets and villages; sometimes on pretext of foreign visits, at other times giving various other types of ultimatums; she kept on making all sorts of excuses. However, it so happened that someone killed six or seven persons belonging to the Hindu Brotherhood. All Sikh leaders condemned this. In spite of this condemnation, she was deeply hurt by the death of these seven while she was not impressed by the blood of one hundred and fifty persons with turbans having been spilt. This agitation has gone on for sixteen months. She did not feel the need to move one person but when the blood of those seven was spilt, then, *Khalsa Ji*, she could not wait even 24 hours.'

Again, a few days later, he said¹⁹²:

'Someone killed seven Hindus in a bus. No Sikh has said this was good, everyone deplored it. But because seven Hindus had died, even twenty-four hours didn't pass. The Ministry was dissolved. President's rule was imposed. The region has been declared as disturbed. However, one hundred and fifty Sikhs died and one man was not changed. Now all of you Sikhs should sit down and figure out as to what the thoughts of this Government of the Hindus are about the turban and the beard.'

Sant Bhindranwale's call to Sikhs to keep weapons as required by their faith was also misrepresented by the press as preparations for killing Hindus. Sant Bhindranwale, commenting on this, said: 'For a Sikh, his conduct has to be:

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੁ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਮਾਨ

"He (God's devotee) does not frighten anyone nor does he have any fear." ... I had given a statement that in every village there should be a motorcycle and three young men with three revolvers of high quality. Opposition newspapers, the *Mahasha* (Arya Samajist Hindu) Press, have published this news: "Bhindranwala says, get these and kill Hindus." Have you ever heard me say that?"

Referring to incidents of hijacking of airplanes, attacks on the Chief Minister, bank robberies, and murders, Khushwant Singh¹⁹³ implicitly and incorrectly assumes that Sant Bhindranwale was responsible for them. The Sant's connection with any of them has never been established. For instance, the hijackers of the Indian Airlines plane on August 4, 1982, belonged to Dal Khalsa which, according to Khushwant Singh himself, was a creation of Zail Singh. It has

¹⁹¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 16, 1983.

¹⁹² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 20, 1983.

¹⁹³ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, pp. 337-338 .

been reported¹⁹⁴ that Talwinder Singh Parmar, a leader of the Babbar Khalsa, paid for five of the tickets purchased by the hijackers. It has been reported that when the hijacker of August 20, 1982, landed in Amritsar, he demanded to see Sant Longowal and Sant Bhindranwale. Sant Longowal sent his representative but Sant Bhindranwale, upon being assured that the man did not belong to his organization, refused to oblige. Sant Bhindranwale protested the Government's barbaric treatment of the hijackers because they happened to be Sikh but himself had nothing to do with the crimes.

Even instances of oppression against Sant Bhindranwale's men have been described by some reputed columnists as wily schemes by the Sant to get his own men killed and tortured in order to assist the Government against the Akali leadership! Nayar¹⁹⁵ regarded Bhai Amrik Singh and Baba Thara Singh's arrest in 1982 to be a cunning device concocted between the Government and Sant Bhindranwale. According to him:

'Darbara Singh...sent a message to Bhindranwale to start a *morcha* earlier so as to take the wind out of their¹⁹⁶ sails... To give him reason enough, the Punjab Government arrested two of Bhindranwale's workers on 17th July 1982. And two days later, Amrik Singh, the AISSF President whose father had made Bhindranwale his successor, was taken into custody on the charge of murdering a Nirankari. Yet another close associate of Bhindranwale, Thara Singh, was arrested on July 20. All this provoked Bhindranwale who went from Chowk-Mehta to Guru Nanak Niwas and launched a morcha from the Golden Temple, pre-empting the Akalis.'

Apparently, in suggesting that the arrests were merely an agreed upon device, Nayar accepts that Amrik Singh was innocent of the crimes attributed to him. Tully and Jacob, without citing any evidence, write¹⁹⁷ about Amrik Singh that: 'As President of the All-India Sikh Students Federation he was responsible for organizing many of the murders, robberies and attacks on government property.' The assumption is that the Federation was a group of criminals. The fact is that the Government arrested Amrik Singh and kept him in detention for a year despite massive Sikh protest; and his release was protested by the Arya-Samajist press simply because the Federation he led was engaged in a program for revival of faith among the Sikh youth.

The news media propagated the myth that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was associated with or in a position to direct and control the activities of groups which claimed credit for violent acts. Tully and Jacob concede¹⁹⁸: 'Bhindranwale never openly associated with the Dal Khalsa. Until his death he maintained that he was a man of religion, not a politician.' However, they make a quick turnaround and, following the Indian Government's White Paper, say¹⁹⁹ that 'Bhindranwale used to preach hatred against India and against Hindus.' They also state that 'the Dal Khalsa was always known as 'Bhindranwale's party'. Contrary to this, Jeffrey²⁰⁰, among

¹⁹⁴ Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, Sikh Hijacker (Part 1), in Punjabi, Guru Nanak Institute of Sikh Studies, Norway, 1989, page 10.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, page 56.

¹⁹⁶ The Shromani Akali Dal.

¹⁹⁷ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 93.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, page 60.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, page 111.

²⁰⁰ Robin Jeffery, What's Happening to India, Macmillan, 1986, page 175.

others, tells us that the founding of the Dal Khalsa in 1978 was 'with the alleged backing of Zail Singh' of Indira Gandhi's Congress Party. Again, they refer to²⁰¹ 'the Sikh fundamentalist Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who had been spreading violence, hatred and communal poison in Punjab'; that²⁰² 'Bhindranwale went on to appeal to Sikh villagers to organize and support terrorism'. Tully and Jacob²⁰³ state: 'Badal and Longowal lacked the courage to stand out against a force they knew was evil. Tohra tried to use it for his own ends.' The 'evil' force was, presumably, Sant Bhindranwale. The fact is that in one of his speeches²⁰⁴, Sant Bhindranwale complains that Longowal had terminated his speaking to the public at the Manji Sahib Diwan Hall and that Tohra did not have the courage to correct Longowal when he denounced and misrepresented Sant Bhindranwale. Again, after Sodhi's murder in April 1984, Sant Bhindranwale asserted that this was done with the connivance of some Akali leaders and wanted Gurcharan Singh, Secretary, Shromani Akali Dal removed from his office. He did not succeed in getting Longowal and others to comply. The 'evil' force depicted as so dominant in Punjab could not or would not enforce its will even within the confines of Darbar Sahib complex. Nayar²⁰⁵ states that 'the reign of terror that began with the Jagat Narain murder did not stop. Innocent people were killed. The targets were mostly Hindus and Nirankaris but many Sikhs who had the courage to speak out against the extremists were also killed.' In fact most of those killed were Sikhs and the killers were the police. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had nothing to do with these murders. The news media was eager to blame the Sant but not the persons who claimed responsibility for the crimes. According to India Today²⁰⁶: 'Whereas Bhindranwale has publicly disowned each act of the extremists, the Babbar Khalsa openly claim credit for most of these, barring the killing of Hindu bus passengers and that of Atwal.' Regarding the Babbar Khalsa, we have Tavleen Singh's²⁰⁷ report: 'Jathedar Sukhdev Singh, a youth of about 28, who dressed like a Nihang, started requesting journalists to come up and meet him in a small, sunless room in the Akal Rest House. He would talk about how it was really the Babbars who had killed most of the Nirankaris so far and how they would continue to kill them (the toll was already around 40) because they followed the dictate of the Akal Takht and they were only abiding by an edict (*hukumnama*) issued by them.' Babbars are known to have opposed Sant Bhindranwale throughout. According to India Today²⁰⁸, their leader, Sukhdev Singh said: 'We have nothing to do with Bhindranwale who is basically a coward.' Sukhdev Singh was instrumental in making false accusations against the Sant. In one of his speeches, Sant Bhindranwale said²⁰⁹: 'Day before yesterday, a farce was enacted here at Akal Takhat. After getting some tape-recording done by someone, he was called to the Akali stage and made to say that Bhindranwala was conspiring to get him killed. His name is Sukhdev Singh; people often call him Sukha. They say that I have hatched a conspiracy to kill him.'

²⁰¹ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, Amritsar, Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle, Rupa, New Delhi, 1985, page 11.

²⁰² Ibid, page 114.

²⁰³ Ibid, page 218

²⁰⁴ Sant Bhindranwale's interview dated February 22, 1984, and speeches of March 8, 1984 and after.

²⁰⁵ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 54.

²⁰⁶ India Today, December 31, 1983, page 37.

²⁰⁷ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in The Punjab Story, Edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 43.

²⁰⁸ India Today, December 31, 1983, page 38.

²⁰⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 24, 1984.

American correspondents, fed erroneous information, generally went along with their Indian counterparts. Reasoner²¹⁰, apparently following Khushwant Singh's logic, said of Sant Bhindranwale: 'He hated the successful urban Sikhs who trim their beards and wear two-piece suits. The poor and the illiterate loved him and brought him what rupees they could spare. He spoke openly of the deaths and violence his followers had caused. These were not murders, he said, but justice; and, if necessary, the Sikhs would set up their own state and, the Government feared, start the disintegration of India as a federal nation.' Sant Bhindranwale's admirers included numerous Sikhs who wear 'two-piece suits' and he did not advocate disintegration of India. It is extremely unfortunate that, instead of investigating Sant Bhindranwale's complaints that innocent Sikhs were being tortured and killed, newsmen regarded him and the victims he referred to as convicted criminals.

Even after Sant Bhindranwale's death, the press has continued to work hand-in-glove with the government. When some Punjabi newspapers published information concerning death of Sikh young men, most of whom died while in police custody or in 'fake' encounters, the Punjab Government approached the Press Council of India to enlist its co-operation against its own members, the Punjabi newspapers. The Council, assuming that the official view of the situation in Punjab was the correct one, dutifully ignored the protestations of its members and recommended that the Government set up proper arrangements to provide authentic information to the press²¹¹. The Government not only continuously harassed newspapers like the daily Ajit, the Akali Patrika, and Charhdi Kala but also regularly fed disinformation to the newsmedia. A Times of India article²¹² revealed: 'Often and unwittingly... journalists fall prey to the government disinformation which suavely manages to plant stories... The confusion gets compounded when government agencies also resort to feeding disinformation on letterheads of militant organizations since there is no way of confirming or seeking clarifications on press notes supposedly issued by militants who are underground and remain inaccessible most of the time.' The writer went on to report: 'A group of journalists, including myself, had called on the former governor to lodge a protest against the registration of a case against the Times of India and the Punjabi daily Ajit, last January. After hastily apologising and promising to withdraw the case "shortly" (that the case was ultimately never withdrawn is a different story), the governor had sought the journalists' co-operation in tackling the militants. "Don't publish press notes that preach violence against an individual, an organisation, etc. but you are free to publish their press notes that encourage inter-gang rivalry," he said, adding "We have drawn up a plan for disinformation to be issued on the militants' letterheads. We hope that you will co-operate".'

Hindu leaders were content to go along with the government or indeed to demand stricter action against the Sant. They paid no heed to the Sant's complaints of violation of human rights in Punjab. Typical of this attitude was a statement by Gujral²¹³ who said, in the course of an eloquent speech, that the Sikh agitation had been peaceful but was taken over by violent

²¹⁰ Harry Reasoner, in 60 minutes, CBS, June 1984.

²¹¹ The Press Council of India, *Crisis and Credibility*, Lancer International, New Delhi, 1991.

²¹² Dinesh Kumar, 'Dispatches from the Edge', *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 11 August, 1991.

²¹³ I.K. Gujral, Speech at an international conference held at University of California, Los Angeles, October 24-25, 1987 on '*Punjab Crisis: Possible Paths to Resolution*'. Proceedings of the conference were not published. The report here is based upon the author's notes taken at the conference..

elements. This writer asked him²¹⁴ if he was referring to Sant Bhindranwale as the 'violent elements'. He agreed. Reminding him that Sant Bhindranwale, in one of his speeches, had mentioned that over 140 persons had been killed and another one thousand crippled in police torture up to that date; that the Sikhs had tried persuasion with the police, legal action in courts and appeals to the national leaders and the press but that nobody had made any effort to stop the torture and the killings in custody; and then had gone on to ask the public as to how long the Sikhs should continue to quietly suffer without hitting back, this writer asked Gujral as to whether, in his opinion or according to his information, Sant Bhindranwale was lying and if not, what did leaders like him do about the killings and torture by the police and what should the Sant have done in the face of this oppression? Gujral replied that he had never thought about the problem from that point of view.

End of Part II of III

²¹⁴ Personal conversation with Mr. I.K. Gujral, during the international conference held at University of California, Los Angeles, October 24-25, 1987 on 'Punjab Crisis: Possible Paths to Resolution.'

SANT JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE - LIFE, MISSION, AND MARTYRDOM PART III

INTRODUCTION

This is the third and final part of an essay concerned with life, mission and martyrdom of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In this part we examine specific allegations that were levelled against the Sant by the Indian Government, and considers his relationship with the Shromani Akali Dal. we end the essay with a look at the future.

A. ALLEGATIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

In justifying its attack on Sikh places of worship, the Indian Government declared²¹⁵: 'Bhindranwale and others operating directly from the Golden Temple complex began to extol and instigate violence'; that 'extremists were attacking conscientious police officers who were doing their duty of enforcing the law'; and that 'Bhindranwale had advocated the killing of Hindus in Punjab so as to set in motion a general exodus'. The army action was described as²¹⁶ 'operations taken to remove terrorists, criminals and their weapons from sacred places of worship.' Indira Gandhi, in her broadcast to the nation on June 2, 1984, described the leadership of the Sikh agitation as²¹⁷ 'a group of fanatics and terrorists whose instruments for achieving whatsoever they may have in view are murder, arson and loot'. The Indian Government's 'White Paper' charged²¹⁸ that 'the tactics employed by the secessionist and terrorist groups were: systematic campaign to create bitterness and hatred between Sikhs and Hindus; indoctrination in the ideology of separatism in militant terms behind the facade of *gurmat*²¹⁹ camps; training in the use of modern weaponry; use of terrorism against specific targets in the police and the administration of Punjab; preparation of 'hit lists' of those who disagreed and organizing their murder; random killing of persons of a particular community aimed at creating terror and instigating communal violence; stockpiling of arms and ammunition in places of worship; utilization of smugglers and anti-social elements for procuring supplies of arms, ammunition and for looting banks, jewelry shops and individual homes; and obtain covert and overt support from external sources?' Was this indeed true. Let us examine the various allegations.

1. Initiation of Violence

Tavleen Singh²²⁰ reports: 'Contrary to the popular belief that he took the offensive, senior police sources in the Punjab admit that the provocation came in fact from a Nirankari official who started harassing Bhindranwale and his men. There were two or three Nirankaris in key positions in the Punjab in those days and they were powerful enough to be able to create quite a lot of trouble. The Nirankaris also received patronage from Delhi that made Sikh organizations like Bhindranwale's and the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, headed then by Bibi Amarjit Kaur's husband,

²¹⁵ White Paper on The Punjab Agitation, Government of India, July 10, 1984, pages 26,27,33.

²¹⁶ Ibid, page 4.

²¹⁷ Ibid, page 105.

²¹⁸ White Paper on The Punjab Agitation, Government of India, July 10, 1984, page 2.

²¹⁹ Camps for religious instruction.

²²⁰ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in The Punjab Story, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, page 32.

Fauja Singh, hate them even more.' Khushwant Singh²²¹ tells us: 'Terrorist activity preceded the *morcha*²²² by more than six months and was born out of encounters faked by the Punjab police and the armed conflict between the Nirankaris and Sant Bhindranwale beginning April 13, 1978.' Sant Jarnail Singh Bindranwale repeatedly declared²²³ that he would never initiate a dispute or a confrontation. However, he also asserted that if someone attacks a Sikh, he should get a proper response. In his view²²⁴:

'When is a Sikh wrong? It is when he poses a question. When is a Sikh's sin washed away? It is when he responds. A Sikh will never be the first to attack, to ask the question. Asking the question means being the first to attack. That is what we call asking a question. Later, seeking justice is called the answer. If we are sons of Sikhs, we shall never be the first to attack in the form of a question. Also, if we are sons of Sikhs, we shall never hesitate in responding. If we hesitate then we are artificial Sikhs, spoilt Sikhs, not real Sikhs. If we attack first then too we are spoilt Sikhs.'

2. Attacks on 'Conscientious' Police Officials

As oppression against devout Sikhs escalated during 1982 and 1983, Sikhs from villages flocked to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale seeking redress. At first he felt that there were some unscrupulous police officials who were responsible for the spate of arbitrary arrests followed generally by brutal torture and often resulting in death in police custody. He sought redress from higher authorities in the administration and from courts. Higher police officials listened to him, assured him of fairness but took no action. For example, referring to the assurances given by the Inspector General of Police in the case of Harbhajan Singh and Harpreet Singh, Sant Bhindranwale commented: 'Deviously, they keep telling the President (of the Shromani Akali Dal) on the phone that the boys have not committed any offense. If they are innocent then why are they kept there, for fun? How long are we going to suffer this oppression?' The news media and the political leadership would not believe his charges of police brutality. The administration, instead of punishing the guilty policemen, rewarded them with promotions. He found that the courts were powerless in enforcing their decisions. For example²²⁵:

'At the time of Amrik Singh's arrest, Puran Singh Hundal, his lawyer, went to the judge. He petitioned the judge and after submitting the petition came and met the (police) officers. He said to the officers: "Here is his (Amrik Singh's) petition to the judge and the judge's signature. The lawyer can stay (with the accused)." The officers at that place told him: "We do not know the judge. Here, we are the judges." The lawyer went back to the judge and told him: "Sir, here is your signature. These are your orders and the officers say they do not know the judge and that they are the judges." The judge folded his hands and said that this was not in his power. Where will you go? When

²²¹ Khushwant Singh, *The Brink of the Abyss*, in Punjab, *The Fatal Miscalculation*, Edited by Patwant Singh and Harji Malik, Patwant Singh, New Delhi, 1985, page 130.

²²² *Morcha* is the word generally used by Sikhs for any campaign: here it refers to the agitation started on August 4, 1982.

²²³ For example, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 18, 1983; and Harry Reasoner's report on CBS '60 minutes'.

²²⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on December 31, 1983.

²²⁵ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on March 1, 1983.

there is no respect for the judge and the (police) officer says he is everything, then there is the instruction:

ਆਪਣ ਹਥੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕਾਜ ਸਵਾਰੀਐ॥

"With your own hands, take care of your business".'

He publicly identified²²⁶ some of the most notorious culprits in the police force. Some of these officials were eventually killed, possibly by surviving relatives of their victims. The Government and the news media immediately held Sant Bhindranwale responsible for 'death of conscientious police officers' without any evidence that he was connected with these incidents in any direct manner. For example, he protested that he had nothing to do with Atwal's murder in April 1983. However, most writers continue to blame him for it. There is a feeling²²⁷ that the Government had got Atwal killed to silence him forever. He was a Sikh police officer who knew too much about the murder of Sikhs in Chowk-Mehta in 1981 where he was on duty at the scene, and the murder of the 19-year old Hardev Singh and his associates by the police in March 1983 for which he was supervising the investigation. However, later on, faced with continuing torture and brutality of his adherents, Sant Bhindranwale did declare that he would provide shelter to any one who would punish the culprits. This was after the Sikhs had been driven to the wall. Frustrated in his attempts to get the Government to inquire into incidents of police excesses and to punish the guilty officials, he told his audiences in March 1983:

'Khalsa Ji: one gets justice out of inquiries when there is room for (ਵਕੀਲ, ਦਲੀਲ, ਅਪੀਲ) legal representation, argument, and appeal. Here (under Indian Government) it is outright injustice. They have decided to annihilate the Sikhs, to insult their turban, to destroy their Faith. Under this situation, why do you need to use a lawyer and appeal?'

Again, in July 1983, he said:

'Khalsa Ji: what assurance, what justice, what fairness can you expect from a Government, from courts, which no longer trust people, which have lost all faith in men and trust only dogs? How can you expect justice from them? Those who have no faith in men, those who have no faith in the legal process, in reasoning, and in appeal to conscience of the perpetrators; those who only trust dogs, but if the dogs point to their own house as the source of crime, they don't trust the dogs either.'

3. Keeping 'Hit-Lists'

Indian Government and its supporters have said that Sant Bhindranwale kept 'hit lists of those who disagreed with him and organize their murder'? Amarjit Kaur refers²²⁸ to 'the barbaric acts, duly sanctioned by the author of the 'hit-lists' living in the safety of Akal Takht'.

²²⁶ For example: Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on February 27, 1983.

²²⁷ Personal conversations with some members of Atwal's family and some other individuals.

²²⁸ Amarjit Kaur, The Akali Dal, the Enemy Within, in *The Punjab Story*, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 24.

Noting this propaganda, Sant Bhindranwale said²²⁹: 'If, from this stage, I say something naming someone they say: "Bhindranwala has given out the name of such person, now this name has come on the list." This kind of gossip goes on.' Also²³⁰: 'It is said that I have already made a list. I haven't made any so far but the way these people are forcing us, it is quite possible that the youth may have to start such a list. I have not made any.' He got quite upset upon learning that Indira Gandhi had accused him of keeping 'hit lists' and said²³¹:

'She has said that Bhindranwale has prepared a hit list. You might even have read this in the newspapers today. I have challenged her and given a warning. Upon my life and upon my breath, let her prove where did I get the paper for that hit list, where did I get the pen, and the ink and the inkpot. She should get the CBI²³² to check this out. If she proves that I have signed any paper; that I have signed for the purpose of any body's being killed; standing here in the presence of *Hazoor*²³³, I declare that I shall cut off my head and place it before the Congregation. I shall leave Guru Nanak Niwas and go away. But she should tell, she should provide proof. If she does not have any proof but has some honor, dignity and some little decency, she should resign the office of Prime Minister and come before the public in the streets. A person should be occupying an office of such responsibility, be the Prime Minister; and listening to news from favorites like Romesh, news from the likes of Virendra and Yash²³⁴ should start saying "He is very dangerous. He has made up a hit list!" Where is that list? It is only in the newspapers. If she has said that a list has been made, who has told her about it? She should apprehend those people who have found it. She should interrogate them the way others, *Singhs*, are treated. They should tell her where that piece of paper is. She should get that paper and show it to me.'

There never was such a list though many journalists bought the official line and kept harping on it. Khushwant Singh claims²³⁵: 'I was on Bhindranwale's hit list for the many unkind things I had written about him in my columns and said over the BBC.' The fact is that Sant Bhindranwale hardly knew him. Addressing a Sikh gathering, he said²³⁶: 'There is one Khushwant Singh. I have only seen him barely once. He is from Delhi and is close to Indira.' Apparently, Khushwant Singh was claiming to be on a fictitious 'hit list' merely as a quixotic target of a non-existent threat.

4. Hating and Killing Hindus and Others

The Government blamed Sant Bhindranwale for 'advocating the killing of Hindus in Punjab so as to set in motion a general exodus', 'random killing of persons belonging to a particular community aimed at creating terror' and for 'carrying on a systematic campaign to

²²⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 11, 1983.

²³⁰ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 19, 1983.

²³¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 16, 1983.

²³² Central Bureau of Investigations of the Government of India.

²³³ Respectful form of reference to Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

²³⁴ Editors of militant Hindu newspapers in Punjab.

²³⁵ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 10.

²³⁶ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 13, 1984.

create bitterness and hatred between Sikhs and Hindus'. As noted earlier, prominent intellectuals and the news media went along with the official line of thinking.

Sant Bhindranwale emphasized the uniqueness of the Sikh faith being founded upon its set of beliefs and practices, not upon hatred of any religion. He advised²³⁷ everyone to be true in their own faith. The Sant did not consider Hindus to be 'close' to the Sikhs in their beliefs and practices. However, emphasizing the catholicity of the Sikh faith, he pointed out that Siri Guru Granth Sahib includes verses composed by some Hindu saints. Addressing the Hindus, he said²³⁸:

'Who was Jaidev? Wasn't he a Hindu from amongst you? He was a Brahmin. Jaidev is sitting here in Guru Granth Sahib. If a son of a Sikh has made obeisance here he has done so at the feet of Jaidev, the Brahmin.'

Sant Bhindranwale did note that even though Sikhs had defended the Hindus' right to free worship, Hindus were ungrateful. He said²³⁹:

'The one who got the Fifth King²⁴⁰ tortured on the hot plate was from among them; the one who administered poison to the Sixth King²⁴¹ was from among them; the one responsible for the martyrdom of the *Sahibzadas*²⁴² was from among them. For the sake of all of them, for the sake of their *janeoo* and *tilak*²⁴³ the Ninth King²⁴⁴ gave his head and now these people have had books published claiming that Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib Ji gave his head for some personal feuds and he did no service to the Hindus. What can we expect from the nation, the people, into whom such ingratitude has crept in.'

Nayar, informs us that²⁴⁵: 'Bhindranwale asked Longowal to give a call to the Sikh masses to purchase motorcycles and revolvers to kill Hindus in Punjab.' This accusation was based upon a public statement by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, President of the Shromani Akali Dal. Sant Bhindranwale took Longowal to task²⁴⁶ for attributing to him something that he could never even dream of, namely, killing members of a certain community. During one of his speeches attended by many Hindus, he said²⁴⁷:

'You have learnt from the newspapers, and from propaganda by ignorant people, that Bhindranwala is an extremist; that he is a dangerous man, a communalist; that he kills

²³⁷ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 13, 1984.

²³⁸ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in early 1982 in Karnal.

²³⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 4, 1983.

²⁴⁰ Siri Guru Arjan Sahib.

²⁴¹ Siri Guru Hargobind Sahib.

²⁴² Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's two younger sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh.

²⁴³ The sacred thread and the saffron mark that devout Hindus wear.

²⁴⁴ Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib.

²⁴⁵ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 79.

²⁴⁶ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 19, 1984.

²⁴⁷ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech in early 1982 in Karnal.

Hindus. There are many Hindus sitting here. You should carefully note how many I injure and how many I kill before leaving. You will be with me. Keep listening attentively. Having listened, do think over who are the communalists; whether they are the turban-wearers or your newspaper owners, the *Mahasha* Press.'

Addressing this issue in some detail, he said²⁴⁸:

'I have no enmity with the Hindus as such. If I were their enemy, why would I rescue the daughter of a Hindu from Jalalabad. ... Kailash Chander owns a retail shop here. His shop was burnt down. The Retail Merchants Union asked him: "Name Bhindranwale." He did not do so. The Hindu along with two Sikhs, the three of them, came to see me in my room. He came and started to cry. I asked him: "What is the matter? Why are you crying?" He said: "My shop has been burnt down." ... I gave him the five hundred rupees. In Kapurthala, a copy of the Ramayana was burnt. The leaders of that place know about this. The *Jatha* spent 5,000 rupees in litigation over that. On the 4th (April 1983), two Hindus were martyred in connection with the '*rasta roko*' agitation. Shromani Akali Dal and the Shromani Committee paid (their families) 10,000 rupees each and the *Jatha* gave another 5,000 to each family. If I was an enemy of all the Hindus, where is the need for me to pay all this money?'

He did not at any time preach initiation of conflict or confrontation although he did advise resistance to oppression and to wanton killing of innocent people. In response to Indira Gandhi's accusation, he declared²⁴⁹:

'She says that Bhindranwala destroys temples, that he does not like temples and wishes to destroy them, that he kills Hindus. Responsible persons who are associated with the *Jatha* go there and build temples. You can figure out yourselves whether I am in favor of destroying temples or of keeping them. Our Father²⁵⁰ sacrificed his entire family for the sake of (Hindu) temples and she gives help to people who destroy gurdwaras; to the followers of human gurus and of hypocrites. On top of it she blames Sikhs that they make trouble.'

Emphasizing the need to stay peaceful and to avoid confrontation as far as possible, Sant Bhindranwale said²⁵¹:

'The Government is trying very hard to start Hindu-Sikh riots. Avoid this as long as you can. However, if the Hindus also get into the Government's boat and start to dishonor the daughters and sisters of the Sikhs and to take off the Sikhs' turbans, then, in order to save our turban, we shall take what steps the *Khalsa*, following the path shown by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, has always taken in the past. We might have to adopt

²⁴⁸ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on September 20, 1983.

²⁴⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 16, 1983.

²⁵⁰ Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib.

²⁵¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 18, 1983.

those methods but we shall do so only when we are forced to. We shall not resort to those methods on our own. We have to be peaceful.'

5. Hiding from the Law

Was Sant Bhindranwale a criminal wanted by the law? India Today reported²⁵² in December 1983 that a senior officer in Chandigarh confessed: 'It's really shocking that we have so little against him while we keep blaming him for all sorts of things.' The fact is that when the Government was in the process of training army units in the planned invasion of Darbar Sahib, the only charges against Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale were that his speeches were 'objectionable'.

Sanghvi reports²⁵³: 'In April 1980, after the Congress had returned to power, murderers believed to be linked to Bhindranwale, assassinated Baba Gurbachan Singh, the leader of the Nirankari sect. At the time, there was an outcry and demands were raised for the arrest of Bhindranwale. As Home Minister, Zail Singh told Parliament that Bhindranwale had nothing to do with the murder: a statement for which he has been criticized by every writer on the Punjab. His supporters do not dispute that he made the statement (it is on record) but argue that it was a reply to a Parliamentary question and had been written for him by his civil servants. In fact, they say, whatever Bhindranwale's involvement, the Government had no concrete evidence and the ministry thought it inadvisable to arrest him on a flimsy case only to have him acquitted and transformed into a hero.'

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had, apparently, not committed any violation of the law and, accordingly, had no need to 'hide' anywhere. But, speculates Khushwant Singh²⁵⁴: 'When Bhindranwale sensed that the Government had at long last decided to arrest him, he first took shelter in the Golden Temple, then occupied and fortified portions of the Akal Takht.' Why, one might ask this famous columnist, would Sant Bhindranwale present himself, along with over 50 of his supporters, at the Deputy Commissioner's residence on the day he moved to the Darbar Sahib complex, if his purpose in moving there was to hide from the law? Gurdev Singh, District Magistrate at Amritsar till shortly before the invasion is on record²⁵⁵ as having assured the Governor of the state that he could arrest anyone in Darbar Sahib at any time.

There were people who felt offended by Sant Bhindranwale's views and wanted him silenced. They noted his innocence but stubbornly refused to accept it. Commenting on Sant Bhindranwale, Shourie conceded²⁵⁶: 'For all I know, he is completely innocent and is genuinely and exclusively dedicated to the teachings of the Gurus'. However, he went on to state in the same paragraph: 'It is not Bhindranwale who triggers reflex actions in the tension that precedes a riot, it is this apprehension and fear that he has invoked.' Amarjit Kaur, while accepting that the Government had to release Sant Bhindranwale after his arrest in 1981 'for the lack of any legal

²⁵² India Today, December 31, 1983, page 36 .

²⁵³ Vir Sanghvi, The Giani and Bhindranwale, Imprint, February 1986.

²⁵⁴ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1985, page 10.

²⁵⁵ Gurdev Singh, Letter addressed to I.K. Gujral, dated January 26, 1996, published in Abstract of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, October-December 1996, pp. 106-111.

²⁵⁶ Arun Shourie, The consequences of pandering, Indian Express, May 13, 1982.

proof, goes on to state²⁵⁷: 'Everybody was frightened because they felt that if they did give any evidence against Bhindranwale or against any of his men, they and their entire families would be killed. Bhindranwale had put fear into the people because innocent people were being killed and any officer who went against his wishes was killed.'

Why were these people frightened and so apprehensive if he had committed no crime? It was a self-imposed dread of the revival of the Sikh faith and the popularity of the Sant. Why would he hide from the law? No court had asked for his personal appearance for any crime. Was he wanted by the 'lawless' police and an oppressive government so that he could be killed, as many other Sikhs had been, in order to silence the voice of protest²⁵⁸ and to check the revival of the Sikh faith which he led?

6. Advocating Political Separatism

The Government blamed Sant Bhindranwale for 'indoctrinating an ideology of separatism in militant terms behind the facade of *gurmat* camps'? A government note alleged²⁵⁹: 'The obvious direction and thrust of the movement was towards an independent Khalistan-fully supported by neighboring and foreign powers. The terrorists led by Bhindranwale were perhaps only cogs in the wheel. If the army action had not been resolute and determined, the movement would have moved towards full scale insurgency which would have crippled the armed forces in any future confrontation across the borders.' These were wild and baseless accusations but many Hindu writers joined in this chorus. According to Surendra Chopra²⁶⁰: '...it is argued that all this would end when shackles of slavery are broken. Bhindranwale never elaborated what he meant by this. An obvious connotation is the achievement of sovereign state.' Nayar claims²⁶¹ that Sant Bhindranwale said 'the next stage was to have a separate homeland, and for that the Sikhs must be ready to fight'. There is no corroboration available for this view. In fact, the Sant repeatedly declared that he had no interest in political matters and had not raised the slogan of Khalistan²⁶².

Firstly, the *gurmat* camps were not organized by Sant Bhindranwale and the only ones he spoke to were those held within the Darbar Sahib complex. Secondly, claiming his assertion, that Sikh religion had an identity of its own and was not a sect within Hinduism, to imply political separatism and demand for an independent state is illogical and perhaps mischievous propaganda by the Government and extremist Hindus. Sant Bhindranwale was repeatedly questioned by reporters regarding the demand for an independent state for Sikhs. A few of his responses are:

²⁵⁷ Amarjit Kaur, *The Akali Dal, the Enemy Within*, in *The Punjab Story*, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 17.

²⁵⁸ Bharpur Singh Balbir, Speech at the annual meeting of the All India Sikh Students Federation, September 22, 1983.

²⁵⁹ M.M.K. Wali, *The Army Action at Golden Temple*, Note dated June 13, 1984, in *The Fatal Miscalculation* edited by Patwant Singh and Harji Malik, page 147.

²⁶⁰ Surendra Chopra, *Ethnicity, Revivalism and Politics in Punjab*, in *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*, edited by Paul Brass and Surendra Chopra, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1988, page 472.

²⁶¹ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, pages 71-72.

²⁶² For example, *Bhindranwale pleads for IA hujackers*, Indian Express, January 5, 1982.

'I don't oppose it nor do I support it. We are silent. However, one thing is definite that if this time the Queen of India²⁶³ does give it to us, we shall certainly take it. We won't reject it. We shall not repeat the mistake of 1947. As yet, we do not ask for it. It is Indira Gandhi's business and not mine, nor Longowal's, nor of any other of our leaders. It is Indira's business. Indira should tell us whether she wants to keep us in Hindostan or not. We like to live together, we like to live in India.' ²⁶⁴:

'How can a nation which has sacrificed so much for the freedom of the country want it fragmented but I shall definitely say that we are not in favor of Khalistan nor are we against it.' ²⁶⁵:

And,

'I have given my opinion that we do not oppose Khalistan nor do we support it. We are quiet on the subject. This is our decision. We wish to live in Hindostan but as equal citizens, not as slaves. We are not going to live stuck under the *chappals* (Mrs. Gandhi's shoes). We have to live in freedom and with the support of *Kalghidhar*²⁶⁶. We wish to live in Hindostan itself. It is the Central Government's business to decide whether it wants to keep the turbaned people with it or not. We want to stay.' ²⁶⁷:

There were persons, some of them even close to Sant Bhindranwale²⁶⁸, who supported an independent state but he himself was not one of them. Sant Longowal is said to have confirmed that, as late as June 5, 1984, Sant Bhindranwale refused to declare his support for an independent state. He did, however, declare that if the Indian Government invaded the Darbar Sahib complex, foundation for an independent Sikh state will have been laid. This was to emphasize that the invasion would unalterably confirm the Government as an enemy of the Sikhs. The Khalistan bogey was apparently a creation of the Indian Government responding to the clamor of the extremist factions among the Punjabi Hindus.

7. Getting Support from External Sources?

Did Sant Bhindranwale 'receive covert support from external sources'? Raising the specter of 'the foreign hand' was Indira Gandhi's favorite ploy and it was eagerly accepted by the Indian public which is always suspicious of 'colonial powers'. The accusation was obviously added to other innuendoes against Sant Bhindranwale in order to mobilize public opinion. Responding to an accusation by Indira Gandhi, Sant Bhindranwale challenged her saying²⁶⁹:

²⁶³ Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India.

²⁶⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on March 27, 1983.

²⁶⁵ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 11, 1983.

²⁶⁶ Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib.

²⁶⁷ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 19, 1983.

²⁶⁸ For example: Harminder Singh Sandhu, interview with Harry Reasoner of CBS News: 60 Minutes, May 1984.

²⁶⁹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 23, 1983.

'If you know that persons from Pakistan come here to see me, you have so large a C.I.D.²⁷⁰ why are those persons not arrested on their way? Then, they return from here. Why are they not apprehended at that time? If you know that they come to see me then you must be in league with them and they must be coming, getting out and returning with your permission'.

He further said: 'It has been said from this stage that Indira should resign her office but, perhaps, I am right when I say that only such persons do this who have some sense of dignity. What is the use of saying anything to those who have no sense of shame at all? Occupying such high office, having become the Prime Minister of Hindostan, without thinking, she has herself started to accuse leading personalities. Which court will you turn to for justice?' Regarding receiving funds from Sikhs living outside India, he told the prospective donors²⁷¹:

'The foremost way of helping the martyrs is that if the congregations in foreign countries collect some money, bring it yourselves. From here I shall give you a car and my driver. He shall take you to the homes of the martyrs. You can give them yourselves whatever you consider appropriate. The second alternative, if you cannot adopt the first, is that I can give you the addresses of all the martyrs. You can take these and directly send help to the martyrs, not through intermediaries. The third alternative is that if you can trust the *Jatha* and you voluntarily wish to send the moneys to the *Jatha* - I do not ask you for any money - you may send it. I do not ask for it.'

There was nothing underhanded or secretive about this at all. Sant Bhindranwale was a preacher and there was no support for this activity from any foreign government. To Sikhs settled abroad, his advice was to help the families of victims of torture and extra-judicial killings by the police. His enemies interpreted, and continue to do so, this assistance to the victims of government brutality as support of terrorism.

8. Procuring Weapons for Looting Banks, Jewelry Shops and Individual Homes?

Keeping weapons is part of the Sikh faith in which the ideal person is a 'saint-soldier'. Sant Bhindranwale often reminded the Sikhs that, in line with the principles of their faith, they should possess and carry arms and quoted Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's instructions²⁷²:

*ਬਿਨਾ ਸ਼ਸਤ੍ਰ ਕੇਸੇ ਨਰੇ ਭੇਡ ਜਾਨੋ ਗਹੇ ਕਾਨ ਤਾ ਕੋ ਕਿਤੈ ਲੈ ਸਿਧਾਨੋ॥
ਇਹੈ ਮੋਰ ਆਗਿਆ ਸੁਨੋ ਸਿਖ ਪਿਆਰੇ॥ ਬਿਨਾ ਸ਼ਸਤ੍ਰ ਕੇਸੇ ਨ ਦਿਵੇ ਦੀਦਾਰੇ॥*

'Without weapons and hair a man is but a sheep. Held by the ear, he can be taken anywhere. Listen, my beloved Sikh, this is my command: Without weapons and hair, do not come to my presence.' Sant Bhindranwale explained²⁷³ that a Sikh does not keep weapons for offense or for hurting people: they are only for defense against oppression. He compared the Sikh concept of

²⁷⁰ Criminal Intelligence Division of the police.

²⁷¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Interview dated February 22, 1984 with a family visiting from Canada.

²⁷² For example: Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on March 27, 1983.

²⁷³ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on May 14, 1983.

keeping weapons with a nation's maintaining its defense forces in a state of preparedness. He quoted from Siri Guru Granth Sahib:

ਜਬ ਘਰ ਮੰਦਰਿ ਆਗਿ ਲਗਾਨੀ ਕਢਿ ਕੁਪੁ ਕਢੈ ਪਨਿਹਾਰੇ ॥੪॥

"When the house is on fire, he (one who did not use his time to prepare for the possibility) goes to dig a well to get water."

Following Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's teachings, Sikhs were not to be looking for conflict. However, Sant Bhindranwale reminded Sikhs of Guru Sahib's statement that when all other means of redress fail, it is right to use weapons to fight oppression. Explaining the Sikh attitude towards possession of arms, Sant Bhindranwale expressly reminded his listeners²⁷⁴:

'I am strongly opposed to having weapons and then engaging in looting shops, looting someone's home, dishonoring anyone's sister or daughter. With reference to weapons I shall only say that you should bear arms. Being armed, there is no greater sin for a Sikh than attacking an unarmed person, killing an innocent person, looting a shop, harming the innocent, or wishing to insult anyone's daughter or sister. Also, being armed, there is no sin greater than not seeking justice.'

This teaching, basic to the Sikh faith, was described by many Hindus as 'cult of violence'. Sinha et al. wrote²⁷⁵: 'Bhindranwale wanted to revive an older tradition of armed fight which went several centuries back, and originated in some of the Gurus themselves. This went very well with the archaic outfit of the revivalist movement. It also filled its adherents with the irrational zeal.'

After the British occupied Punjab, Sikhs were completely disarmed. In 1914, the Government agreed that any Sikh could keep a *kirpaan* as part of his faith. However, for firearms, one had to obtain a license from the local authorities. This practice has continued after India's freedom from British rule. The Indian Government as well as the press have harped on the circumstance that Sant Bhindranwale, on his travels in the country, was often accompanied by an armed retinue. It is not at all uncommon for important persons in India to have armed escorts. All the weapons carried by Sant Bhindranwale and his men were, at one time, duly licensed and he was not breaking any laws. There have been no reports of any of Sant Bhindranwale's escort hurting anyone. On the other hand, the press never protested the fact that the Nirankari Baba traveled with enough armed men with him, that in Amritsar on April 13, 1978, they fired upon an unarmed group of about 100 protesting Sikhs killing 13 and injuring another 78. The 'White Paper' referred to the subsequent Sikh protest as²⁷⁶ 'dogmatism and extremism'. The Indian Government's solution to the problem was to disarm the victims, instead of protecting them. In 1981, responding to the clamor of the extremist Hindu Press in Punjab, the licenses issued to Sant Bhindranwale and his men were ordered canceled. In March 1983, after Hardev Singh's murder by the police, the Home Ministry asked the State Government to seize all

²⁷⁴ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on October 20, 1983.

²⁷⁵ Sachchidanand Sinha, Jasvir Singh, Sunil, G.K.C. Reddy, Army Action in Punjab: Prelude and Aftermath, Samta Era, Delhi, 1984, page 32.

²⁷⁶ White Paper on The Punjab Agitation, Government of India, July 10, 1984, pages 23,26,27,33.

firearms in the possession of the Sant and his men. When the Sikhs launched an agitation in August 1982, government response to peaceful protest consisted of beatings, brutal torture, and killing in fake encounters of Sikh youth, in particular of those belonging to Sant Bhindranwale's group. Sant Bhindranwale placed²⁷⁷ the number of persons so killed at 113 in February 1983, about 140 in July 1983 and about 200 later that year. Over 2,000 are said to have returned from police stations as cripples. It was under these circumstances that Sant Bhindranwale asked his men to defy the order to deposit their weapons so that, if need arose, they could defend themselves against the Nirankaris²⁷⁸ and others who might be bent upon mischief.

Much has been made of the Darbar Sahib complex having been turned into an arsenal and a fort by Sant Bhindranwale. Since 1982, extremist Hindu factions had demanded that the Government forces should enter the Darbar Sahib complex and arrest Sant Bhindranwale. All the Sikh leaders, including Sant Bhindranwale, had made it clear that if the Government invaded this center of the Sikh faith, they would resist with whatever means they could muster. The Government is alleged to have arranged for weapons being smuggled into Darbar Sahib. This influx of weapons was apparently planned to heighten the scale of the conflict in order to justify the killing of as large a number of Sikhs as possible without arousing a national protest against the genocide and also to ensure that after the invasion was complete, these could be shown as having been recovered from the so-called 'rebels'. Noorani states²⁷⁹:

'Prem Kumar reported in The Statesman of July 4: "The arrival of light machine-guns and sophisticated self-loading rifles had been taken notice of by various agencies. The information received was so detailed that even the make and the country of origin of the weapons was known...The authorities had some idea of the source of these weapons, mainly smuggled from Pakistan and obtained through thefts and robberies and leakage from Indian Ordnance units... Many may be surprised over the fact that the Central and the State Governments used to receive almost hourly reports of monthly meetings of Akali leaders even when only five or six of the top leaders attended these meetings in the Temple complex. When Sant Bhindranwale discussed his plans with only one or two close confidantes, the information reached the authorities. It is understood that the Government got information about Sant Bhindranwale even when he was confined to the Akal Takht and till as late as June 6." As P.S. Bhinder, former IGP, told Neerja Chowdhury and Shahnaz Anklesaria of that paper, shortly before he quit, "Intelligence information reached the places it should have. It was a political failure." A.S. Pooni, Home Secretary of Punjab, also confirmed that "the Government had a fair idea of the kind of weapons inside the Golden Temple".... How did they reach there? In *Kar-seva* (voluntary labor) trucks carrying food and construction material. "They were not intercepted because there were oral instructions "from the top" until two months ago not to check any of the *Kar-Seva* trucks", Bhinder told the two correspondents.'

²⁷⁷ Speech in May 1983, speeches on August 16, 1983, September 20, 1983, and March 8, 1984, and the interview on February 22, 1984

²⁷⁸ Interview with Om Chawla, *India Today*, July 1-15, 1981, page 77.

²⁷⁹ A.G. Noorani in The Illustrated Weekly of India, July 22, 1984 reported in *Punjab-The Fatal Miscalculation* by Patwant Singh and Harji Malik, page 149.

B. AKALIS AND SANT JARNAIL SINGH BHINDRANWALE

1. Sant Bhindranwale's Early Disappointment with the Akali Leaders

Not interested in political office, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale accepted the Shromani Akali Dal as the sole representative of Sikh political interests and considered himself an ardent supporter. However, he was greatly disappointed when Parkash Singh Badal, then Chief Minister of Punjab, and Jiwan Singh Umranangal, another minister in Badal's cabinet, did not support him on the Sant Nirankari issue in 1978. This, and the widespread belief that many of the Akali Dal leaders did not faithfully follow the Sikh code of conduct and even abused alcohol, led to his decision to oppose the Shromani Akali Dal in the 1979 elections to the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Bhai Amrik Singh, Sant Bhindranwale's close associate, lost to Jiwan Singh Umranangal, the Akali candidate. The Sant attributed this loss to the support that the Akalis had sought and received from Radhaswamis and Nirankaris, who had been encouraged to register as Sikhs and participate in the voting. After his split with the Akalis in mid-1983, Sant Bhindranwale often referred²⁸⁰ to this election rigging and urged his listeners to punish renegades who address the leader of the Nirankaris as their 'father' to get votes.

2. Relationship with the Congress Party

Sant Bhindranwale's opposition to the Akalis was good news to the Congress Party since a split amongst the Sikhs could be used to their own advantage. Even after Sant Bhindranwale's death, many writers have insisted that he was 'planted' by Indira Gandhi and Zail Singh to promote dissension among the Sikhs. However, there were differences within the Congress leadership. When Darbara Singh, the Chief Minister of Punjab, unleashed systematic oppression against Sant Bhindranwale's men and other devout Sikhs in Punjab, Zail Singh, at that time Home Minister in the Indian Government, apparently did not endorse this line of action. For example, Sanghvi reports²⁸¹:

'Zail Singh's critics continually point to the failure of the Government to arrest Bhindranwale even when it became clear that he was a man of violence. This failure suggests, they argue, that Zail Singh wanted him free so that he could harass Darbara Singh. In September 1981, the Punjab police issued a warrant for Bhindranwale's arrest. At that time, Bhindranwale was preaching in Chando-Kalan in Haryana. When the Punjab police crossed the state lines, and got there, they found that he had fled. The Haryana police knew he was a wanted man: why, then, did they let him escape? According to Kuldip Nayar, the reason was simple. Zail Singh called up Haryana Chief Minister Bhajan Lal and told him to let Bhindranwale get away. Nayar says that Bhajan Lal himself told him this.'

²⁸⁰ For example, speeches on August 16, 1983; August 20, 1983; March 8, 1984; April 19, 1984; and the interview with a family from Canada on February 22, 1984.

²⁸¹ Vir Sanghvi, The Giani and Bhindranwale. Imprint, February 1986.

It is quite possible that the Congress party tried to take advantage of the differences between the Sant and the Akali leadership and later, Zail Singh and Darbara Singh might have argued over policy, there is no evidence to support the claim that the Sant was at any time working as any body's 'agent' or that he was being guided by any one.

3. Making Common Cause with the Akalis - The *Dharam Yudh Morcha*.

On 19th July 1982, Bhai Amrik Singh and Baba Thara Singh, two of Sant Bhindranwale's close associates, had gone to the district courts in Amritsar in connection with the inquiry into the Chowk-Mehta incident. They were arrested. Sant Bhindranwale was quite ill at that time and under doctor's orders not to move 'even twenty paces'²⁸². However, fearing that the two would be tortured and possibly killed in custody, he came to Darbar Sahib complex and led a group of peaceful protestors the same night to secure their release. Thereafter, a group of protestors would peacefully court arrest each day. On 4th August, Shromani Akali Dal agreed to merge its agitation for greater state autonomy and other political and religious concessions with the Sant's efforts for the release of Amrik Singh and Thara Singh. The combined movement was under the leadership of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, President of Shromani Akali Dal. Sant Bhindranwale specifically defined²⁸³ his role in the agitation: 'Our demands were primarily the release of our *Singhs* and classification of Amritsar as a holy city. That was all. These were the basic demands. Regarding the Anandpur Resolution, an agitation on that basis was already going on since a long time. On 4th August, all these came together. Now it is a *Panthak*²⁸⁴ agitation on behalf of the Akali Dal.' His interest and his demand were submerged in the larger issues represented by the Shromani Akali Dal.

After Bhai Amrik Singh and Baba Thara Singh's release Sant Bhindranwale's stated purpose of participating in the joint agitation led by the Akalis had been fulfilled. However, the Sant pledged his continued support to the Akali agitation and decided against returning to his headquarters in Chowk Mehta. He said²⁸⁵: "Some people might be having other thoughts that, perhaps, after Bhai Amrik Singh's and Thara Singh's release this *Morcha* or Bhindranwala who has been going along might quietly sit down, go to sleep, and not cooperate. The Congregation should have no such doubts in their minds."

During the course of the agitation, the Akali Leaders wished to use this simple and honest religious leader for their own political ends. Khushwant Singh informs us²⁸⁶ that Sant Harchand Singh Longowal described Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as: 'He is our *danda*²⁸⁷ with which to beat the Government.' The Akali leaders needed the influence of this popular Sant with the rural population to ensure a steady supply of volunteers.

²⁸² Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on July 19, 1983.

²⁸³ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Interview in January 1983.

²⁸⁴ *Panthak* means pertaining to or representative of the entire Sikh brotherhood..

²⁸⁵ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on August 8, 1983.

²⁸⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2: 1839-1988, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, India, 1991, page 337.

²⁸⁷ *Danda* is Punjabi for a stick.

4. Rift with the Akali leadership and Martyrdom.

Indira Gandhi's Government did not view the Akali agitation seriously but wished to suppress Sant Bhindranwale's message of returning to basic Sikh values which was receiving increasing support in the Punjab villages. The Government was selective in the treatment of detainees who were Akalis and those belonging to Bhindranwale's group. Akali protestors were generally released after two to fifteen days in jail or even taken out of the city and let off the day they were arrested. On the other hand, protestors from Bhindranwale's organization, most of whom were *Amritdhari*, were brutally tortured and often killed while in police custody²⁸⁸. Sikhs were prosecuted for various real or faked charges. The victims again were predominantly from Sant Bhindranwale's group. The Sant claimed, on April 19, 1984, that out of nearly 400 Sikhs charged for various offenses, he had to defend 375 whereas the Shromani Akali Dal had to defend only 25. At the same time, the Government was describing the Akalis as 'moderates' and urging upon their leadership to dissociate themselves from the 'extremists'. Eventually, this policy was successful in promoting a rift between Sant Bhindranwale and the traditional Sikh leadership. The Akalis, became advocates of 'peacefulness regardless of provocation and oppression' while Sant Bhindranwale, whose followers were the primary targets of police brutality, began advocating retribution against the guilty police officials and accused the Akali leadership of pusillanimity in the face of oppression.

The Akali leadership viewed Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's soaring popularity with the rural masses in Punjab as a potential threat to their hegemony over Sikh affairs even though Sant Bhindranwale repeatedly disavowed²⁸⁹ any political ambitions. They tried to obstruct Sant Bhindranwale's access to the public. When Sant Bhindranwale called a meeting of Sikh intellectuals in September 1983, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal tried to put him down stating that as the leader of the agitation only he (Longowal) had the authority to call such meetings. After that incident, Sant Bhindranwale was never invited to speak at Manji Sahib Diwan Hall. In the interest of unity Sant Bhindranwale did not fight back at that time but in his later speeches, he mentioned the restrictions placed on him²⁹⁰:

'The Dictator, the President of the Shromani Akali Dal, has said that Shromani Akali Dal has no connection with Bhindranwale's meeting; have I ever said that I have no connection with the Akali Dal? If there is no connection with me, tell me why has it been broken? Secondly, the President of the Shromani Akali Dal has said that he appeals to the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee that Bhindranwale should not be allowed to speak from Diwan Hall Manji Sahib. This is a statement by Longowal. Has any of you Sikhs asked him why? It is eight months since I spoke at Manji Sahib. Has anybody asked why I do not speak (from there)?'

²⁸⁸ For example, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speeches on August 9, 1983, March 8, 1984, April 1, 1984; Interview with Surinderjit Singh, January 1983.

²⁸⁹ For example: Speech in May 1983 and speeches on August 16, 1983, September 20, 1983, March 8, 1984, and the interview on February 22, 1984

²⁹⁰ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 19, 1984.

At the start of the agitation in August 1982, the Akali leaders as well as Sant Bhindranwale had assembled at Siri Akal Takhat Sahib and in their *Ardaas*²⁹¹ resolved that they would continue the agitation till the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was accepted by the Government and implemented in toto. Later, noting Indira Gandhi's intransigence, it appears that the Akali leaders were willing to water down their demands. Sant Bhindranwale emphasized that he was not there when the Resolution was adopted by the Shromani Akali Dal but having said the Ardaas at Siri Akal Takhat Sahib no Sikh could go back on his solemn word. He said²⁹²: 'Those persons who having taken vows at Akal Takhat, making pledges at Harmandar Sahib, making pledges at Manji Sahib, have decided to go back on all of them should not think they will go to heaven, to the regions of truth.' The Akali leadership wished him to be sidelined so that he would not interfere with the progress of negotiations with the Government by repeatedly and publicly reminding them of their solemn vows. In order to discredit him, the Akalis intensified their propaganda stating that Sant Bhindranwale was an agent of the Government and a Congressite at heart and that he deliberately advocated violent response to police brutality in order to provide the Government with an excuse to label the Sikhs as separatists and militants. The Sant was furious at this misrepresentation. He said²⁹³: 'My licenses have been canceled under Congress rule, but some Akali workers, not all but some, have accused me in the newspapers of being an agent of Congress. Talab Singh Sandhu, President of the Ludhiana District Akali Dal; Hari Singh Zira, President of the Ferozepur District Akali Dal; Sucha Singh Chhotepur, President of the Gurdaspur District Akali Dal; Nirlep Kaur about whom I should not have said anything because you know this well; and there is a contractor from Bathinda whose name perhaps is Jaswant Singh; these are the persons who have said that Bhindranwala is an agent of the Congress and a traitor to the *Panth*. You may pull out the Daily Ajit of September 6 from the newspapers and read it.'

On December 15, 1983, Sant Bhindranwale was forced out of Guru Nanak Niwas by members of the Babbar Khalsa with Akali leadership's acquiescence. According to Tavleen Singh²⁹⁴:

'Early on the morning of 15 December, six armed youths belonging to the Babbar Khalsa group entered the Guru Nanak Niwas which was recognized as Bhindranwale territory. ... According to Balbir Singh Sandhu who witnessed what happened, from Room 32, "These youths came in looking for a fight. They marched into some rooms occupied by Sant Jarnail Singh's men and told them to get out. They said the rooms were theirs." Bhindranwale had at least 200 armed men staying in the Guru Nanak Niwas at the time but instead of fighting the Babbars, he and his followers packed their belongings and moved by that afternoon into the Akal Takht. Bhindranwale said later, "I did not want to desecrate the sanctity of the Harmandar Sahib by allowing a fight to take place, that is why I moved".'

²⁹¹ *Ardaas* is the Punjabi word for Prayer.

²⁹² For example, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on February 1, 1984.

²⁹³ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on February 1, 1984; also speeches on March 8, 1984; April 1 and 19, 1984; and May 24, 1984.

²⁹⁴ Tavleen Singh, Terrorists in the Temple, in *The Punjab Story*, edited by Amarjit Kaur et al., Roli Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 42.

On February 1, 1984, Sant Harchand Singh²⁹⁵ stated that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had suggested to him that motor cycles and arms should be purchased on a mass scale for killing members of a particular community'. Regarding killing 'members of a particular community' Sant Bhindranwale angrily declared²⁹⁶ that nothing could be farther than that in his mind and that Sant Longowal's statement could conceivably be used as evidence against him in a legal action.

There were several attempts, possibly in collusion with the Government, to assassinate Sant Bhindranwale. At a press conference on September 15, 1983, Sant Bhindranwale stated²⁹⁷:

'Three murderous attempts were made on my life during the past few days, but through God's grace, I escaped unhurt every time. The first attempt on my life was made in the Parkarma. The assailant was waiting for me in the stairs leading to the Temple. My disciples grew suspicious and caught hold of him before he could take out his pistol. He was brought to Guru Nanak Niwas where he confessed that he had a hand in the conspiracy to murder me. He was let off after administering a warning. During the second attempt, the assailant followed me up to Room No. 47 in Guru Nanak Niwas but his pistol fell down on the way. The third attempt to kill me was made in Gurdwara Manji Sahib.'

Joshi²⁹⁸ mentions another attempt on Sant's life: 'It was obvious that some persons/organizations had mixed a certain amount of poison in his food. But given the traditional Indian "efficiency" it was just not enough to kill him. On 23 September, Bhindranwale's condition was reported to be critical with his urine containing 40 per cent blood.' Then, in April 1984, Baljit Kaur confessed to having been paid to kill him. On April 17, 1984, Surinder Singh Sodhi, a close associate of Sant Bhindranwale, was assassinated with the connivance of some Akali leaders. Joshi, describing a June 1, 1984, attempt by the military to kill Sant Bhindranwale, states²⁹⁹: 'At a silent order four shots were aimed in a vain effort to assassinate this fountainhead of terror.'

Sant Bhindranwale's speeches clearly show the change in his attitude towards Sant Harchand Singh Longowal. From one of total respect before July 1983, it became one of increasing defiance until he openly accused Longowal as well as other Akali leaders of lying and double-speak. Faced with a scenario of escalating police and paramilitary oppression designed to provoke a violent response from the peasantry, which was to be used as justification for the already planned army action, and with the premier Sikh political organization abandoning him, Sant Bhindranwale said:³⁰⁰

'ਇਹ ਪੰਛੀ ਇਕੱਲਾ ਏ ਏਹਦੇ ਮਗਰ ਸਿਕਾਰੀ ਬਹੁਤੇ।'

²⁹⁵ The Daily Tribune, Chandigarh, February 2, 1984: newsitem titled 'Longowal Admits Rift With Sant'.

²⁹⁶ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on April 19, 1984.

²⁹⁷ Surjit Jalandhary, Bhindranwale Sant, Punjab Pocket Books, Jalandhar, page 66.

²⁹⁸ Chand Joshi, Bhindranwale, Myth and Reality, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, page 118.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, page 21.

³⁰⁰ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Speech on February 1, 1984.

"This bird is alone; there are many hunters after it." Eventually, according to Nayar³⁰¹: 'On 26 May, Tohra informed the Government that he had failed and it could do whatever it wanted to. Bhindranwale was not under his control or, for that matter, under anyone else's.' The Shromani Akali Dal had abandoned Sant Bhindranwale leaving him holding their bag of economic and religious demands.

C. A LOOK AT THE PAST AND AT THE FUTURE

In the history of mankind, whenever a corrupt and degenerate society has felt threatened by moral and social revival, the powers of the day have branded the leaders of such revival as traitors and criminals and so justified their elimination and brutal subjugation of their associates and disciples. These messengers of peace and brotherhood were killed not because they had committed any crime but because they did not toe the line of the rulers of the time. These people were 'inconvenient' because of their popularity and influence with the people. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's martyrdom represents yet another addition to this illustrious list.

Sant Bhindranwale was a religious preacher without interest in politics. His mission was to propagate the basic principles of Sikh religion. He emphasized a life of prayer and saintliness and himself set an example for the other Sikhs. He advised Sikhs to possess weapons and to be ready to lay down their lives, if necessary, in the interest of ensuring justice and protection of the defenseless and the weak, in line with the teachings of the Gurus. He insisted that a Sikh should never initiate a confrontation. A Sikh's way is one of love and mercy and not of violence. Sikh response to oppression and injustice had to consist of persuasion, legal action, appeal to higher authorities in the Government, and that a Sikh should follow the tradition of recourse to weapons only as the last resort when all other means had been exhausted. This is the path he followed when faced with escalating state oppression. After the confrontation with the Sant Nirankaris on April 13, 1978, when 13 Sikhs lost their lives to firing by gunmen in the Nirankari camp, all he wanted was that the Government arrest and prosecute the murderers. After the incident at Chowk-Mehta, on September 20, 1981, in which the police fired upon Sikhs and killed 18 of them, all he asked for was a judicial inquiry into the matter and for punishment of those who were guilty. Upon Amrik Singh's arrest, convinced that Amrik Singh had committed no crime, he sought the intervention of the District Magistrate, Amritsar, through peaceful demonstration. He sought legal redress and found the courts to be powerless; their orders were not obeyed or the victims were re-arrested on trumped-up charges immediately after release. The news media and the national leadership, instead of checking police brutality, lauded such arbitrary re-arrests and indeed called for them in order to keep the 'terrorists' behind bars. The Government canceled the arms licenses of the victims and not those of the perpetrators. He would narrate stories of police brutality to news reporters but they, instead of bringing these to public attention, dismissed them as his 'favorite yarn'. Till the very end, the Sant claimed that he had never used his weapons to hurt any one and complained about police high-handedness. Arbitrary arrest, torture and elimination of young Sikhs went on till the Sant felt pushed to the wall and, not getting redress from the higher authorities, the courts, the news media, and the

³⁰¹ Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, Vision Books, New Delhi, 1984, page 88.

national leadership, told his men to resist because arrest, in most cases, meant elimination in police custody and a faked report of an 'encounter'.

The revival of the Sikh religion led by Sant Bhindranwale worried the extremists among the Hindus because it stemmed the tide of apostasy among Sikh youth and reinforced the Sikh sense of religious identity. The so-called 'moderates' among the Sikhs at first wished to use this immensely popular religious leader to advance their own purposes but later, as his popularity among the Punjab peasantry grew, considered him to be a threat to their hegemony over Sikh affairs. He had to be killed not because he had committed any crime but because too many people loved him and looked up to him for guidance in their misery. Laura Lopez wrote in June 1984³⁰²: 'By early this year, it was apparent to her³⁰³ that Bhindranwale had become so popular he had usurped the Akalis' authority, leaving the party impotent in negotiations and fearful of his violent fanaticism. No matter how long she talked to the Akalis, Mrs. Gandhi concluded, they could never deliver on an agreement that would hold while Bhindranwale was alive.' In order to eliminate him, he had to be depicted as a criminal, as the symbol of all that was evil and dangerous for the country. Indira Gandhi's Government, influenced and assisted by extremist Hindu politicians whose support she needed for the next elections, carried on a continuous disinformation campaign to vilify Bhindranwale and the institutions he represented and symbolized. He was blamed for everything that went wrong and for every crime that was committed in Punjab. Government agencies routinely fed the news-media with such 'information'. The Press, the Indian Government, and even the highest courts in the country, found it convenient to interpret the centuries old Sikh prayer as a call for Sikh supremacy and secession and, therefore, an act of sedition. Sikh possession and carrying of weapons - the Indian Constitution accepts the possession and carrying of a *kirpaan* by a Sikh as part of practice of his religion - was described as creating tension and terror. Peaceful Sikh protest against public ridicule of their religion was met with bullets. The tradition of peaceful civil disobedience, successfully used against the British by M. K. Gandhi, was regarded as treason when it was adopted by the Sikhs to press their economic and religious grievances, and met with mass killings to 'teach them a lesson'. At the same time, attacks on Sikhs and Sikh institutions were dismissed as 'natural reaction.' The propaganda was eminently successful. Even though there was no evidence of the Sant having committed any crime, many well-meaning people were misled into believing that he was leading a revolt against the country, that he was a secessionist, that he hated Hindus and encouraged their being massacred, etc., and that Government action against him and other Sikhs was necessary and justified. The sensitivities of the Indian people were dulled to the point that they accepted without protest, and even endorsed, the gruesome torture and unlawful elimination of tens of thousands of devout Sikh men, women, and children.

If Sant Bhindranwale was indeed the fountainhead of all trouble, Indian Government's success in killing him should have marked the end of the campaign. But it was not so. Sant Bhindranwale was merely a symbol. The real target was the Sikh faith itself because it was viewed as a threat to the concept of Indian nationhood. According to Pettigrew³⁰⁴: 'The army

³⁰² Laura Lopez, India, Diamonds and the Smell of Death, Time, June 25, 1984, page 47.

³⁰³ Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India.

³⁰⁴ Joyce Pettigrew, The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard voices of State and Guerrilla violence, Zed Books Ltd., London, U.K. 1995, page 8.

went into Darbar Sahib not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence.'

By 1996, after twelve years of ruthless persecution, much of it by a puppet Congress Party state government installed in 1992 after a sham election boycotted by a large majority of people in Punjab, the State Government claimed that the final solution had been realized and that peace had been restored in Punjab. A large number of Sikhs had ceased to display the outward symbols of their faith effectively reversing the reforms initiated by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. It was reported that Punjab led the nation in consumption of alcohol. The Sikh in Punjab, instead of taking pride in his faith and tradition, had acquiesced to Brahminism. Many Sikhs had started to celebrate Hindu festivals involving idol worship and superstitious propitiation of fictional gods, forbidden by their own faith, merely to demonstrate to their Hindu neighbors that they were in the 'mainstream' and not 'fanatics'. The religion founded by Siri Guru Nanak Sahib and the nine succeeding Gurus and nurtured with the martyrdom of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib, Siri Guru Tegh Bahaadar Sahib, Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's four sons, and thousands of Sikhs; the way of opposition to the caste system and idol-worship; the way of equality and brotherhood; the lifestyle of the saint-soldier forever praising God, abstaining from drugs and alcohol, engaging in honest labor, sharing the fruits of labor and being ready to lay down one's life fighting for the right of all to life, liberty, and freedom of worship; had been criminalized. One who lived a lie by calling himself a Sikh without being initiated into the faith and without following its code of conduct was the moderate Sikh acceptable to the Government. One who chose the path shown by the Gurus and was initiated into the faith as a Sikh was a fanatic, a terrorist, a threat to the unity and integrity of the nation, and deserved to be eliminated. The State Government is said to have maintained lists of people who took *Amrit* in order to watch their activities closely. The Indian Government is said to have actively watched the activities of Sikhs in other countries around the world as well to ensure that no one spoke about the unbridled state terrorism let loose against minority religions in India.

Recently, there have been some changes. Elections in Punjab have resulted in a popular government in the state led by Parkash Singh Badal, a 'moderate' Akali leader. The people of Punjab are tired of all the violence and are looking forward to life without fear of being picked up at the middle of night and 'disappeared'. At the Center, I.K. Gujral has taken over as the new coalition Prime Minister. He is a Hindu from Punjab personally familiar with the problems afflicting that region and is believed to be broadminded. He does not denounce his mother tongue and is a believer in Hindu-Sikh amity emphasizing the bonds of language and culture. It is possible that this time around, the State Government will be allowed to function without day to day interference from the Center and without constant fear of dismissal.

But these are short term hopes. Governments and ruling parties may change and it is possible that the scenarios that resulted in the holocausts of 1984 and after be enacted again. Looking longer ahead there appear to be three approaches available.

The first option is to recognize the fundamental right of the Sikhs to practice and preach their religion as taught them by the Gurus and as historically understood by them. They should not have Hindu interpretations of their faith imposed upon them. This would mean that the majority community must accept that the Sikh prayer is not 'anti-national activity', that initiation

into the Sikh faith is not 'conversion to religious bigotry' or 'taking vows to commit acts of terrorism'; that possession and carrying of weapons by Sikhs, the *kirpaan* being the symbolic minimum, is part of their faith, does not imply their use for terrorism, and should not alarm or frighten anybody; that Sikhs being in a majority in Punjab does not automatically mean that the Hindus and the Hindi language are in any danger; and that a Sikh is as much entitled to protection of the law as a Hindu. If this option had been exercised 1947 onwards, Sant Bhindranwale would not have to describe the Sikhs as slaves in India.

The second option is the one that has been prosecuted with ruthlessness for the last thirteen years. In this, Sikhs who do not accept the Hindu view of their faith - that Hindus are Sikhs and Sikhs are Hindus and but for the external symbols, their religion is essentially same as Hinduism - are separatists and traitors to the country; that the Sikh tradition of keeping weapons is out of date, scares other segments of the population, and should be abandoned, and that those who do not give up their weapons are, by definition, terrorists; that taking *Amrit* is an unnecessary ritual which marks a Sikh as distinct from a Hindu and, therefore, constitutes 'conversion to religious bigotry'; that the Sikh prayer should exclude reference to ascendancy of their faith because that is contrary to India's secularism; that it would be a good idea to install idols in gurdwaras so Hindus and Sikhs can worship jointly; and that Hindu festivals are national events and Sikhs who do not join in the celebrations are separatists and fanatics. This option would integrate the Sikhs into the Hindu fold and, obviously, imply the end of the Sikh religion as historically understood.

Finally, the third alternative is for Punjab to secede from India and create an independent state - Khalistan. This would guarantee freedom for the Sikh way of life. This does not mean another partition but, might indeed be an occasion to build bridges of understanding and friendship. Such a step could bring the people of the subcontinent together in a commonwealth of free nations. Punjab might once again be a region covering three states with five rivers flowing through it and proud of being Punjabi-speaking. With freedom assured to all of them, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims might live together as friends and neighbors. People of the subcontinent might then concentrate more on economic development and cultural enrichment than spend large portions of their budgets on police and surveillance

End of Part III of III