

# Massacres of 1984\*

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These words are addressed to all Sikhs<sup>2</sup> and especially those who, like me, are professionals settled outside India. Members of this segment of our community have generally been apolitical and have been interested only in their own immediate families and their own personal and professional success. However now the time has come for us to make a little contribution to the bigger Sikh family to which we belong. I came to this conclusion after a trip which I made recently to India; a trip which convinced me that *unless some facts are made known quickly to the rest of the world there is real danger of an enormous catastrophe befalling the entire Sikh community in India*. As far as I can see, the educated Sikh abroad is about the only person who would want to, and who is in a position to, disseminate these facts.

I visited many places and talked with many people in India about the events of 1984 in an attempt to learn *what* had happened and *why* it had happened; the following is an account of my understanding of the situation. I am mailing this to a number of Sikh professionals living outside India (and also to some Westerners who, in my opinion, are influential enough to be heard in the corridors of power and thus can help in bringing these facts to light). I hope that this process will snowball and become an effective method by which we will be able to inform the world about the true state of affairs in India.

## 1.

Indira Gandhi died on October 31, 1984, and November 1 to November 4 was the peak period for the 'riots' which followed in Delhi and elsewhere. Foreign news media covered these events from October 31 to November 6 and thereafter suddenly lost interest. What we learnt from the media was that, almost immediately after Indira's death riots broke out, that they were spontaneous and widespread, that Hindus were enraged because their beloved leader had been treacherously killed by her Sikh bodyguards and that Sikhs had to some extent brought it on themselves by celebrating publicly. By November 5 news items had started appearing which praised Rajiv for his poise and calmness, and by November 6 we were starting to learn that a well-placed Indian source had apprised the foreign pressmen in Delhi that Rajiv's 'mental condition is pro-American'. Simultaneously there had appeared scholarly analyses

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\*Excepting a few grammatical changes, this coincides with the paper circulated in early 1985; the numerical superscripts refer to the Notes on pp. 32-42.

of the ‘culture of communal violence’ which apparently pervades all of India and which apparently had been responsible for the riots in Delhi and before that those in Bhiwandi and before that those . . .<sup>3</sup> (The subsequent industrial tragedy in Bhopal, which was more newsworthy from the foreign point of view, ensured that world interest in the events of Delhi stayed over.)

The astonishing thing that emerged repeatedly as I talked with numerous people in India, including some I.A.S. officers of the rank of Secretary and above, was that *these ‘riots’ were ‘nt really riots in the true sense of the word: they were in fact murders done at the behest of Rajiv Gandhi himself.* These officers, with whom I talked independently, should know what they are talking about: some of them are actively engaged in running the administration of Delhi itself. All of them are convinced that ‘there is no way that what happened in Delhi could have happened without explicit orders from the P.M.’ In fact one of these officers had the opportunity to talk with Jyoti Basu, the communist C.M. of Bengal, a week or so after the Delhi massacres. According to Basu, Rajiv is reported to have said publicly before he took off for Delhi from an eastern airport, ‘*Let’s go teach the bastards a lesson*’. Further, Basu related how wireless messages had been sent from Delhi to a high ranking pro-Congress(I) police official in Calcutta to ‘start something’ against the Sikhs. (Indeed something did start in Calcutta, but Basu is to be praised for restoring law and order in Calcutta after 8 hours or so.) Similar messages must have been sent to other state capitals. When one keeps in mind that most states have Congress(I) governments, the ‘spontaneous and widespread’ nature of the riots is easily explained. It must be emphasised that there was a meeting at the P.M.’s residence ‘to review the law and order situation’ on the afternoon of October 31 (that is, even before All India Radio had announced Indira’s death) and yet another similar meeting at the same place around midnight. To use Arun Shourie’s words ‘*... late on the evening of October 31 a decision was taken to ‘teach the Sikhs a lesson’ ; that through dasas and criminals, with whom some politicians have a regular liason, groups were contacted that night; that the targets were identified and the groups mobilised on the morning of November 1; and that they were given a free hand till after the funeral was over on the evening of November 3*<sup>4(p.10)</sup>. Two watchdog non-government agencies, P.U.D.R. (People’s Union for Democratic Rights) and P.U.C.L. (People’s Union for Civil Liberties) have to be praised for conducting a combined on-the-spot investigation of the violence in some Delhi localities; their report concludes that the events in Delhi *... far from being a spontaneous expression of “madness” and of popular “grief and anger” at Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination as made out by the authorities, were the outcome of a well-organised plan marked by acts of both deliberate commissions and omissions by important politicians of the Congress (I) at the top and by authorities in the administration*<sup>5(p.1)</sup>. In his public speeches, Rajiv gave vent to thinly-veiled approbation of these acts of murder: he spoke about how ‘*the earth shakes when a big tree falls*’, and about the need for taking ‘*constructive revenge*’. Usually A.I.R. does not reveal the communal identity of persons when it is feared that such a mention might lead to communal violence; yet, in the case of

Mrs. Gandhi's death, it was quickly announced that her assassins were Sikhs. Besides, Doordarshan did not edit out shots in which one could clearly hear inflammatory slogans like *"khoon ka badla khoon"*. During his meeting with opposition leaders (while the 'riots' were still raging) Rajiv argued that the rioters were not 'ordinary' rioters; what they had done had been done under extreme emotional duress, and that they should not therefore be prosecuted: as long as they returned the looted property they should be released. (Such accounts of this meeting have appeared in magazines like 'Onlooker', 'Surya', etc.) The new Indian P.M. had adopted and executed a barbaric policy of justice through reprisals, and is guilty of 10,000 murders<sup>6</sup> which were committed in Delhi alone (the nationwide figure is around 20,000) from November 1, 1984 to November 5, 1984.

Available evidence increases rapidly as one moves down the echelons of the political and administrative hierarchies. The P.U.D.R.-P.U.C.L. report has this to say about the role of Cong(I). *'We were told by the local eye-witnesses in all the areas we visited, that well known Congress (I) leaders and workers (their names are to be found in Annexure I) led and directed the arsonists and that local cadres of the Congress (I) identified the Sikh houses and shops'*<sup>5,p.2</sup>. Amongst the politicians who figure in this, by no means exhaustive, list is a union minister, three other members of parliament, eight members of the Delhi municipal corporation, and four members of the youth wing of Congress (I). (It is a sad commentary on the extent of anti-Sikh prejudice which prevails in India that four of these people – well known to every Delhiite as participants in the massacre – have been elected to parliament with thumping majorities in the recent elections, and that one of them now heads the ministry of parliamentary affairs.) As the above report has it, *'It is difficult to believe that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, was unaware of the activities of important and well known members of his party for full five days (from October 31 to November 5). Mr. Gandhi has been General Secretary of AICC (I) since 1982 and in charge of reorganising his party. He had been presiding over training camps for Congress (I) workers at various places'*<sup>5(p.13)</sup>. It is important to remember that every party in India gives extensive patronage to lumpens and criminals – a practice made popular by Rajiv's late brother Sanjay – and one of the key elements of the aforementioned training programmes is the exploitation of these criminal elements for political ends.

Immediately after Indira's death, all Sikh members of Delhi Police had been confined to barracks *'for their own safety'*; regarding the rest, the above report has this to say: *'All through the period from October 31 to November 4 – the height of the riots – the police all over the city uniformly betrayed a common behavioural pattern, marked by (i) total absence from the scene; or (ii) a role of passive spectators; or (iii) direct participation or abetment in the orgy of violence against the Sikhs'*<sup>5(p.4)</sup>. Direct participation by police took the form of disarming Sikh households prior to their slaughter by the mob, of 'softening up resistance' being offered by Sikhs inside *gurdwaras* (a B.B.C. report gave a vivid account of one such incident), of transporting hoodlums in police jeeps, of egging

on the crowds to kill as many Sikhs as they could in the ‘time allotted’ to them, of actually committing the murders themselves, of teaching the crowds how to set fires efficiently, and so on and so forth: some of these things are vividly described in the P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report which goes on to say the following. ‘*While analysing the role of the administration, we cannot remain content to blame the Delhi administration and the bureaucrats only. The Lt. Governor Mr. Gavai, who was in charge of the administration of Delhi during the period under review and who has been replaced now, could not have acted on his own – whether they were acts of commission or omission. Both the Delhi administration and the Union Cabinet Ministers, including the Home Minister, were well-informed of the sequence of events beginning from the evening of October 31*’<sup>5(p.7)</sup>. (It might be mentioned that on November 4, Gavai was replaced by M. M. K. Wali, who was Home Secretary before his new appointment, and thus was one of the key men involved in implementing Rajiv’s policy of justice through reprisals.)

Next to Rajiv, the most insidious part of all was undoubtedly that of his top lieutenant, Bhajan Lal, the Haryana Chief Minister. It is fairly certain that truck loads of Haryana policemen in *mufti* had been slipped across the border into Delhi on the night of October 31 - November 1 to spearhead the killings in Delhi; these plain clothesmen perhaps played an even bigger role than the *goondas* and *dadas* who had been recruited by the Delhi politicians<sup>7</sup>.

On paper, the Delhi administration had called in the army fairly soon, and issued ‘shoot-at-sight’ orders to them; in actual fact, the orders were transmitted to the soldiers only three days later. Further, no joint control room was set up to coordinate the activities of the civil authorities and that of the army, and ‘*the deployment of troops followed a strange pattern. They were deployed by the civil authorities in stages, and in almost every case they were deployed after houses in the trouble spots had been burnt to cinders and the massacre was over*’<sup>5(p.9)</sup>. (Ivan Fera also mentions the use of strategically located loudspeakers relaying pre-recorded messages, as a means of diverting the army away from the actual trouble spots<sup>8(p.16)</sup>.)

Another point made in the above report is that repeated requests had been made to two top union ministers to provide army protection for the Rajdhani Express, the Pink Express, and the other trains which were due to arrive in Delhi after some hours. No such protection was provided. Instead, the authorities directed these trains to make unscheduled stops, so as to facilitate the killing of Sikhs by Bhajan Lal’s murderers.

## 2.

In consonance with the policy of justice through reprisals, it was necessary for the murderers not only to just kill, but also terrorize and humiliate the remaining Sikh community to such an extent that its spirit would stay broken for quite some time. As Ivan Fera points out : ‘*The most heinous aspect of the violence was that it was directed at the girls and the women who were spared. Certain images had to be burned into the psyche. How else to explain the fact that the men were not merely killed but tortured to death – limb severed*

from limb, eyes gouged out, burnt while they were still alive – in instance after instance, all over the city, in the very presence of their children and wives ? The killings were ritualistic : In several cases, the hair of the victim were shorn off, and their beards set on fire before they were killed. As a senior Sikh bureaucrat in the Union ministry sees it, “it seemed to have been a deliberate attempt to humiliate, to subjugate, to rule out any future possibility of retaliation.” <sup>8(p.16),9</sup>. The ritual nature of the killings and the uniformity of the methods employed in torturing the victims suggests that some Hindu godmen might also have been involved in masterminding the details of these murders <sup>10</sup>. Another factor which points towards the involvement of some godmen is the fact that ever since 1971 or 1972 Indira had displayed a very superstitious bent of mind, had gone to numerous godmen all over India, had even recruited a few of these (like Dhirendra Brahmachari) to be around her all the time, and had a number of *yagnas* performed by many people (including union minister Kamalpathi Tripathi) to propitiate various evil forces which were allegedly threatening her continued rule of India <sup>11,12</sup>. Thanks in part to the sycophancy of her courtiers, Indira had started imagining herself as a latter day Durga, and having put herself in this role, it is quite possible that she herself had outlined this policy of justice through reprisals in the eventuality of her (widely predicted) assassination at the hands of a Sikh. Again, it cannot be discounted (and one senior I.A.S. officer I met was of the firm view) that Indira had already planned some ‘riot’ with a view of exploiting the resulting communal fallout in the coming parliamentary elections : her own death merely served to prepone the massacre <sup>13,14</sup>.

The usual riot displays only localized patterns of violence: in the ‘riots’ of November the pattern was uniform all over Delhi and in fact this ‘pattern was similar in all Cong (I) ruled states’ <sup>5(p.1)</sup>. *‘In the north of the city, as well as in the east and the west and south-west, the bodies were burnt everywhere. In most cases, the victims were first assaulted with iron rods, then doused with kerosene and set alight ... Apart from kerosene, the bodies were burnt with petrol as also with diesel oil. Tyres, filled with diesel or petrol, were also used for the same purpose – to burn the bodies. There was equally a method in the manner in which trucks were attacked. The driver was first pulled out and killed. Once the tyres were set alight, the fuel tank was punctured. That did the job – it ensured that the truck would burn completely. The driver’s body was then thrown in between the wheels. The heat was so intense that the road under the wheels was turned into a puddle of burning tar’* <sup>8(p.15)</sup>. The idea of burning everything was probably some policeman’s : no bodies to deal with meant no postmortem reports to be obtained and no F.I.R.s to be recorded <sup>15</sup>. To this day Indian newspapers carry ‘missing persons’ ads inserted by bereaved and desperate relatives of Sikhs who were pulled out of trains, tortured and burnt to ashes on some god forsaken railway platform.

The Indian newspapers have consistently portrayed the Sikhs as being uniformly gutless and cowardly during the Delhi incidents : possibly this too is another facet of the pervasive Hindu desire to break the Sikh spirit once for all. (For example, there have been numerous Hindu-saves-Sikh stories but, as far

as I know, no Sikh-saves-Sikh story.) As I talked with the refugees<sup>16</sup> I learnt of many incidents which show that, despite overwhelming odds against them, many Sikhs displayed great courage and fortitude during these dark days :

(a) A refugee lady in Ludhiana narrated how her house in Delhi was attacked by the mob. Her teenaged son managed to escape, and her husband was away on business; but her brother, who happened to be a devout *amritdhari*, was visiting them, and the mob got hold of him. Before killing him, the murderers did their best to humiliate him in front of his sister. They offered to let him go if he would cut his hair and pay them Rs. 300. He refused, and asked them to do what they wanted to do. They proceeded to torture him: eye gouged out, one limb cut off, and so on. At each stage, an 'offer' of the above kind was made. He refused, and died murmuring the name, '*Waheguru*', which meant everything to him.

(b) A goods transport company was attacked by a mob. The Sikh truck drivers were armed and beat back the mob. Within a few hours a much bigger mob was on the scene. In the meantime the Sikhs had prepared a convoy of trucks and came roaring out of the headquarters and went trampling over the mob to make a break for Punjab. Throughout the 100 odd miles to the Punjab border numerous attempts were made by various miscreants, including Bhajan Lal's Haryana Police, to stop the convoy. Despite all these obstacles approximately 40 of these 50 trucks were able to complete the perilous journey safely. (It is ironic that many days later one of these truck drivers was shot dead by the police near Amritsar in a contrived 'encounter'.)

(c) A Sikh squadron leader commandeered an air force jeep, and made numerous sorties in it to colonies as far away as 10 miles, and rescued in all about 30 families from November 1 to November 4. The Congress(I) hoodlums eventually did get him however: about fifteen days after the riots he was the victim of a 'hit and run accident'.

Faced with the prospect of imminent death, many *keshadharis* had to cut their hair in order to disguise themselves. The Indian news agencies have given wide publicity to such stories and have tried their best to give the incorrect impression that the pogrom of November was directed only against the turbaned Sikh. The majority of the killings was done not on the trains or streets but by picking up Sikh households from their own flats and houses<sup>17</sup>: in this house to house slaughter the mob did not spare any *mona* Sikh. On the other hand, *keshadhari* Sikhs, being easier to spot, accounted for most of the victims in the incidents which took place on the streets and in trains. A clean-shaven Sikh refugee, who narrowly escaped death on the street, had the following to tell :

(d) He was driving a car with his turbaned brother in front and some female relatives on the rear seat. The mob stopped their car and started beating him and his brother up. At that very instant two young turbaned scooterists arrived on the scene. The mob's attention was diverted to them; they got hold of the scooterists and threw them into a fire which they had already lit by burning another vehicle. Again and again, these two teenagers tried to escape only to be

pushed back into the fire. Meantime, the *mona* Sikh had recovered his bearings and noticed that the hoodlums had forgotten to take the car keys out. Quietly he rolled up the windows, started the motor, and slammed his car through the four or five mobsters who were still around.

### 3.

I have yet to meet a Sikh who claims to have anticipated the full extent of the Delhi massacre. Even after Indira's death was announced most Sikhs went about their business as usual. In fact, in one of the Annexures of the P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report, there is an eye witness account of what happened near A.I.I.M.S. just before Indira's body was brought out of this hospital. The reporter describes that there were many Sikhs in the crowd and their faces betrayed no fear or apprehension. All of a sudden a cohesive group of about 30 people (led by a local Congress(I) councillor) appeared on the scene and started stopping buses, scooters, etc., and manhandling the Sikh passengers. There were only such localised street incidents of *goondaism* on the 31st and not more than 3 or 4 people were killed. Without government participation, Delhi would have seen nothing more than some more incidents of the same type. The large scale killings began systematically around 11 a.m. on November 1, and could not have occurred without the decision reached at the P.M.'s residence, and the subsequent preparations made down the line by Bhajan Lal, H.K.L. Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler, and others, to implement this decision. But still, even all of this would not have sufficed: '... *violence on such a scale .. cannot be effected only by the logistics of a cold-blooded coordination but requires a charged climate, particularly to inspire such savagery. Such a climate cannot come into being at short notice. Certain myths and caricatures, figures of evil, have to take root in the popular psyche, before mobs with a single purpose can be born*' <sup>8(p.16)</sup>. No Sikh had correctly gauged the *depth* of this hatred against them. True, the Government of India through its military and paramilitary forces, had already engaged in barbarism against them, and every Sikh was aware of this. What they did not realize was that government propaganda, to justify this barbarism, had been eminently successful, and that they were now perceived as national enemies. The destruction of the Akal Takht had '... *officially removed the deep-seated blocks in the Indian psyche against assaulting a religious shrine. Such assaults in the wake of an official precedent, were now legitimised, and in New Delhi, the riots in every locality began with an attack on the gurdwaras. It was the first instance in history since the Moghuls, since Shah Abdali, that the Sikh shrines were invaded. What made such violation possible was equally the fact that in Punjab, for the first time, the government attempted to radically restructure the church of a particular community – the disastrous attempt to foist a Nihang leader upon the Sikhs as a high priest, to create a new religious sect through the Sarbat Khalsa. Nothing was sacred anymore, everything was permitted. It was the first time that such invasions into the psyche of a particular community were carried out for purely political ends. Officially violated to this extent, the Sikhs were now common fodder for everyone. Identified as a whole*

*with Bhindranwale, it was only natural for the Sikhs to be identified with the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. All that was needed to do the trick was a few rumours about Sikhs distributing sweets. There were no scruples left – either religious or legal. Anything could be done to them now, and it would be totally justified* <sup>8(p.16),18,19</sup>.

Though the actual murderers were mostly Haryana plainclothesmen, and hoodlums recruited from the suburban villages of Delhi, it is a fact that hordes of young Delhiites tagged along behind them, and actively participated in the acts of looting and arson. Many photographs of the ‘rioters’ make it abundantly clear that a large number of them were quite well dressed in stylish jeans; the poor slum dweller in Delhi just does not wear such clothes. Many eye witnesses from Dehra Dun report that quite a few of the perpetrators were speaking fluent English and appeared to be convent educated. Almost all of Delhi enjoyed the *tamasha* from their rooftops, and every adult Delhiite was fully aware of the various leaders in charge of the gangs. That the policy of justice through reprisals is supported by the population at large is abundantly clear from the results of the parliamentary elections. At least four Congress(I) men, who were very active in killing Sikhs in Delhi, have been elected from Delhi by record-breaking margins. In fact, the B.J.P leaders openly rue having shown some lip sympathy for the victims of the Delhi massacre, because it cost them heavily in the elections: it is ironic that in this election the B.J.P., the traditional champion of Hindu chauvinism, got only some Muslim and Sikh votes.

Comments by Hindus in responsible positions indicate the extent to which this poisonous hate has spread. *‘An Indian who works in the UNO in Geneva, who flew to Delhi for Mrs Gandhi’s funeral, told a member of our team that the orgy of violence had been allowed to ‘teach Sikhs a lesson’. When asked about the suffering that this was causing the common people, he said : ‘Who is suffering?’* <sup>5(p.1)</sup>. Such comments continue unabated till this day. The commonest statement being heard in Delhi these days is of the following type : *‘If Sikhs are foolish enough to kill Rajiv, one would have to go to a chiryaghar to see what a Sikh looked like.’*

A clean-shaven Sikh I.A.S. officer had occasion to go to Delhi on some official duty in February 1985. Not many of his acquaintances know that he is Sikh. He decided to stay quiet, and just listen to what his Hindu I.A.S. colleagues of Delhi had to say about the carnage. He talked with about ten such officers, and was totally horrified with what he heard. He said, *‘Not one of these chaps had a single word of sympathy for the Sikhs. If they had any regret it was only that not enough Sikhs had been killed.’* He narrated how one of them took him to his high-rise apartment, and started explaining to him what he had seen on the streets below. ‘For five minutes or so I kept wondering whether he was sad at the horrors that he had seen. But soon this notion was dispelled. There was a glint in his eyes and excitement in his voice: he was just narrating some very high drama which it was his good fortune to have seen.’

A retired vice-marshal of the I.A.F., a tall handsome Sikh, narrates how young urchins taunted him to his face in Cannought Place saying *‘yeh Sikh kaise bacch*



*gaya*'. This public denigration of Sikhs is widespread throughout India. An old Sikh gentleman who runs a bus transport company in Bengal related how (in January 1985) he was attacked without rhyme or reason by some youngsters whose idea of having a good time was to knock his turban off and give him a few kicks just because he happened to be a Sikh.

During the Delhi massacre, the main pre-occupation of the Indian opposition parties was to keep a low profile, and not to criticize the Indian government, lest they alienate the Hindu majority even further, and thus lose what little chance they had of winning in the coming elections. The P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report related what happened when some concerned citizens went to the Janata leader Chandrasekhar, and pleaded with him to lead them in a deputation to the Prime Minister. *'Mr. Chandrasekhar rose, folded his hands and pleaded: "I cannot do it. I don't want to be accused of ruining the late Prime Minister's funeral" 5(p.14)*. Doordarshan gave time to leaders of all major parties (BJP, Janata, etc.) to explain their election planks to the public; not one of these had a single word of sympathy for the Sikhs. In fact, the news media in India has more or less declared by now that the massacres of November was a non-event: on January 1, most Indian newspapers did not even include it in their list of major events of 1984.

A few, very few, opposition leaders did raise their voice against the outrages: all of them lost heavily in the recent elections (Ram Jethmalini is one such example). Likewise, there is a handful of Hindu writers who have come out openly against the role of the government in these atrocities. It may be mentioned that all these writers fail to make any concessions to the strong national (or sub-national) aspirations of the Sikh community at large, and analyse the events of November exclusively in the context of the present set-up in India: The violence of November was the result of a government-contrived breakdown of the law and order machinery of India, and their goal is to replace this government of India with another. A few court cases have been filed (notably by P.U.D.R. and P.U.C.L.) and it seems likely that *slowly* they'll become embarrassing enough to cause difficulties for this government, and may eventually even lead to its downfall. However, there is absolutely no chance that any government of India (Congress, BJP, Janata, whatever) would take any steps to restore the Sikhs, the newest 'lepers' of India, to their former status.

#### 4.

Some understanding of how this alienation of the Sikhs came about can be reached by recapitulating the main events from April 13, 1978, to June 1, 1984:

*On Baisakhi of 1978 the long simmering Sikh-Nirankari<sup>20</sup> dispute spilled over into bloodshed: A procession of Sikhs led by the Akhand Keertani Jatha<sup>21</sup> and including some of Jarnail Singh's followers was fired upon by the Nirankari Baba's bodyguards. In this clash thirteen Sikhs and six Nirankaris were killed<sup>22</sup>. Prominent Arya Samaj<sup>23</sup> leader, journalist and Nirankari sympathiser, Jagat Narain<sup>24</sup> was with the Nirankari Baba when this clash took place.*

Jarnail Singh took up the cause of the Sikhs. A hukumnama was issued by the Akal Takht asking Sikhs not to associate with the Nirankaris. Murder charges were filed against the Nirankari Baba, Gurbachan Singh, and many of his followers.

Since 1977, a Janata led government was running India; in Punjab, political power was in the hands of the Akali-BJP coalition, and the Congress Party, led by Zail Singh, constituted the main opposition. Zail Singh had been the C.M. of Punjab from 1972 to 1977, and during his tenure he had made extensive shows of religiosity<sup>25</sup>; once out of power, he showed even greater religious fervour, and started visiting the various deras, including the Dam-Dami Taksal, quite regularly. On the same Baisakhi of 1978, Zail Singh was, however, in Chandigarh, giving his blessings to the launching of the 'Dal Khalsa'; this organisation was run by Vishwanath Tiwari, with Harsimran Singh as its figurehead leader<sup>26</sup>.

In 1979, the Janata government at Delhi collapsed because of infighting amongst its leaders. Also in 1979, Jarnail Singh fielded 40 candidates in the gurdwara elections after making an electoral alliance with the 'Dal Khalsa' and Jagjit Singh Chauhan; his main election issue was that the Akalis were too soft towards the Nirankaris; the Congress party contributed liberally towards this campaign. However the Akalis won 136 out of the 137 seats in this SGPC election.

In the parliamentary elections of 1980, Indira was swept back to power; many Congress candidates in Punjab had sought and received Jarnail Singh's help in their electoral campaign: they won 12 out of 13 seats. Zail Singh became the Union Home Minister.

About the same time, a Sessions Judge accepted the plea of self-defense put forward by the Nirankari Baba and his co-defendants, and they were all acquitted; Jagat Narain was the principal witness for the defense in this case.

The central government now dismissed state governments ruled by other parties: in Punjab, like in all other states, Congress won the ensuing Assembly elections handily; a Congress(I) ministry was installed in the state.

*On May 24, 1980, the Nirankari Baba and a bodyguard were killed in Delhi; the Nirankaris accused Jarnail Singh of masterminding the killings, and his name appeared on the F.I.R. The Home Minister however assured parliament that Jarnail Singh had no hand in these killings.*

*On May 31, 1982, Jarnail Singh led an A.I.S.S.F. procession in Amritsar demanding a ban on the sale and use of tobacco in the environs of the Golden Temple; the police fired on the procession and 12 Sikhs were killed. On July 26, 1981, a World Sikh Convention was held which authorized Harchand Singh Longowal to lead an Akali agitation against the government; on 7 September, 1981, many Akalis were beaten up by the police during a rally in Delhi; and, on 8 September, 1981, the Akalis presented a list of forty-six grievances to Indira Gandhi. (For example: A5, Applying Land Ceiling Act to gurdwaras in Haryana; A13, Illegal and forcible occupation of Delhi gurdwaras with the help of the police; B3, Keeping Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas out of Punjab and taking away control of water headworks and river water distribution; C1, Reduction in the recruitment quota of Sikhs in armed forces*

from 20 percent to 2 percent; D2, Projecting Sikhs in improper way in films and TV; etc.)

*On 9 September, 1981, Jagat Narain was killed while travelling in a car near Ludhiana. The subsequent funeral procession in Jullunder became an anti-Sikh riot during which there was extensive arson and looting* <sup>27</sup>. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Jarnail Singh when he was at Chandokalan in Haryana. However the warrants could not be served because the Union Home Minister instructed Bhajan Lal to allow Jarnail Singh to leave for Chowk Mehta. *After Jarnail Singh had left Chandokalan, Haryana Police swooped down on his followers and a number of them were beaten and tortured and two buses belonging to the Dam-Dami Taksal were burnt; furthermore, the Holy Granth was desecrated by the Haryana Police.*

Jarnail Singh agreed to surrender to the Punjab Police on 20 September 1981. Before that on 19 September 1981, a police car was provided to take him 50 km away for a dip in the Sarovar of the Golden Temple. Present during the arrest was Santokh Singh<sup>28</sup>, a religious leader of Delhi and a confidant of Indira. *On September 20, 1981, some hours after Jarnail Singh's arrest at Chowk Mehta, there was unprovoked police firing on a crowd of Sikhs; at least 20 Sikhs were killed.* There was great resentment at Jarnail Singh's arrest. For the first time, the Akalis sided with him and openly demanded his release: this, together with a demand for judicial enquiry into the police actions at Delhi, Chandokalan and Chowk Mehta was the first item in a list of demand presented to the government in October 1981.

Jarnail Singh was released unconditionally. From November 16, 1981, till the beginning of 1982, there were various meetings between the Akalis and Indira and her top ministers to discuss the Akali demands. In December 1981, Indira sprang a surprise, and without even consulting the Congress C.M. of Punjab, unilaterally announced her River Waters Award which was condemned by everybody in Punjab; simultaneously, she forced the Punjab C.M. to withdraw a case, regarding distribution of river waters, which was pending in the Supreme Court. At the third and last meeting, Indira's attitude towards the Akalis was formal and haughty from the very start: it was apparent that she had decided to break off the talks beforehand.

Indira Gandhi now hastened to implement her own Water Award and, on April 6, 1982, was at Kapuri, near Patiala, to lay the foundation stone of the controversial Sutlej-Yamuna link canal. Akalis and the C.P.I. (M) started a Nahar Roko agitation at Kapuri. Very soon afterwards the Akalis decided to shift their agitation to Amritsar and start it anew from August 4, 1982; the C.P.I. (M) withdrew from the agitation. *The new tough attitude of Indira percolated all the way down : Fifteen volumes of the Granth Sahib were burnt at Makha, Bhatinda, and some gurdwaras were desecrated. The Punjab Police behaved like barbarians. All over Punjab houses of alleged 'extremists' were raided and a number of them (at least 40, including some prominent leaders like Kulwant Singh Nagoke) were killed in faked encounters. The police set houses on fire, terrorized and detained relatives of the 'wanted' persons and destroyed utensils,*

*clothes and standing crop of these poor farmers* <sup>29</sup>. The Akalis and Jarnail Singh countered this by going around the villages, holding functions to expose the police brutalities, and honouring people who had been brave enough to fight this police repression. On July 13, 1982, Indira's candidate Zail Singh was elected to the figurehead post of President of India; due to Gurcharan Singh Tohra's <sup>30</sup> initiative the Akalis supported Zail Singh's candidacy. On 19 July, 1982, Punjab Police arrested A.I.S.S.F. leader Amrik Singh <sup>31</sup> on a charge of murdering a Nirankari. At this, Jarnail Singh started a morcha whose principal aim was to secure the release of Amrik Singh.

On August 4, 1982, the Akalis started their long announced Dharm Yudh. The two morchas were merged together. Every day jathas of 300 to 2000 Sikhs would set out from the Golden Temple and they would be arrested as soon as they came out for violating the order banning the assembly of more than five persons. This morcha was entirely peaceful from the Akali side and resulted in about 30,000 arrests: *about 40 Sikhs died while they were in police custody during this morcha*. On 15 Oct, 1982, the government released all the Akali prisoners. At the same time the Akalis were induced to negotiate once again, this time with veteran Congress leader Swaran Singh acting as mediator.

An agreement was in fact reached and Swaran Singh informed Indira of the details: she reportedly 'accepted' the agreement. A draft statement was shown to, and approved by, the Akalis on the one hand and a sub-committee of the Union Cabinet – constituted by Indira and comprising four top Union Ministers – on the other. The Akalis went back to Amritsar content in the belief that they had reached an honourable agreement. However Indira never had any intention of reaching an agreement with the Akalis and placed before Parliament a statement which was materially different from that shown to the Cabinet sub-committee and the Akalis.

Soon after this, the Akalis announced that they will organise symbolic protests during the upcoming Asian Games at Delhi. Being very conscious of her foreign image, this had the desired effect on Indira, and some talks were hastily arranged for November, 1982. Bitter at their recent experience, the Akalis thought that it would be a good idea to bring the other opposition parties in on the talks. Indira was irked by this, but still some temporary agreement would have been reached, if the Haryana Chief Minister had not sabotaged the settlement at the eleventh hour. *'Bhajan Lal declared that "he would hang himself if there was any disturbance" .. 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 AC coaches, were made to get down to appear before a police official on the platform.'* *'People travelling in cars were no exception; many senior retired military officers were stopped ...'* *'.. the Hindus crossing into Delhi were not touched, even for the sake of form.'* *'The government expressed no regrets ...'* and the press kept quiet *'lest it should add to communal tension.'* <sup>22(p.66)</sup>. It was the first time since 1947 that Sikhs had been officially branded suspect simply because they were Sikhs. About this time Amrik Singh was released unconditionally by the government.

The first of the nine Tripartite Conferences was held on January 24-25, 1983 (the last one was held in early 1984); amongst the opposition leaders only those with strong Arya Samaj leanings (e.g. Charan Singh) were against the Akali demands at this time.

Hindu extremist organisations had started arming the Hindu population of Punjab: leaders like Pawan Sharma started gaining prominence in the press. Meanwhile the Akalis continued their peaceful protests. On Feb 21, 1983, all the Akali legislators handed in their resignations. On March 3, 1983, Indira unilaterally announced the formation of the Sarkaria Commission to look into Center-State relations. *The Akalis organised Rasta Roko for April 4, 1983. Determined police efforts were made to keep the roads open on this day and at least 26 Sikhs were killed in various police firings all over Punjab.*

There was a general escalation of murders in the state at this time; most of them seemed to have their genesis in the Baisakhi dispute of 1978 or else were in the nature of retribution against the police atrocities committed on the Sikh villagers starting from 1982. *On April 17, a witness in the Nirankari case was killed in Jullunder, another person was shot dead in Sultanpur Lodhi. On April 25, 1983, D.I.G. Police A.S. Atwal was shot dead outside the main entrance of the Golden Temple.* The Punjab government wanted to arrest Jarnail Singh from Guru Nanak Niwas (which is not amongst those parts of the Golden Temple where one cannot go without removing ones shoes) ; the central government vetoed this idea.

On June 11, 1983, talks resumed between the Akalis and the government. 'It was the same story of government evasiveness: now New Delhi's stand was that ... there were also other states which had to be consulted.' <sup>22(p.67)</sup>. Charan Singh was set against the Akalis, and Haryana units of all opposition parties now came out openly against the Akali demands. Meanwhile, Indira made another unilateral announcement: some disputed property adjacent to Gurdwara Sis Ganj wall was handed over to D.G.P.C. at a much publicised ceremony at which Rajiv and Gurcharan Singh were present. In August 1983, Harchand Singh Longowal strongly condemned the killings of Nirankaris and their sympathisers. This led to the beginning of the rift between the two *sants*.

During this time period the press gave wide publicity to a debate, started by some Arya Samaj leaders, regarding the semantics of the phrase '*Sikh quam*', which had been used in the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973, and a S.G.P.C. resolution of March, 1981. Harchand Singh and other Akalis said that it meant 'Sikh Nation'. This convinced many Hindus that there was but a shade of difference between Akalis and leaders like Jarnail Singh.

On August 29, 1983, the Kam Roko call brought all work to a halt for one day in Punjab.

*On October 6, 1983, six Hindu passengers of a night bus were killed near Dhilwan, Ludhiana.* Wide publicity was given to this crime in such a way that throughout India people came to believe that Sikhs were out to kill Hindus. Longowal spoke against the killings, and renewed his proposal for an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge into all the killings in Punjab. All Sikhs were horrified at the murders, but hardly any Sikh was willing to ascribe this crime to

Jarnail Singh. On the other hand almost all Hindus were convinced that it was Bhindranwale alone who had been responsible, and they wanted the Akalis to condemn Bhindranwale for these killings: this the Akalis obviously could not do. (Much later, in 1984, the B.J.P.-owned magazine, 'Surya', came out with some startling revelations and photographs which indicated that some agents of R.A.W. and Third Force<sup>32</sup> were in the vicinity of Dhilwan during this incident; the implication obviously is that this incident was engineered by Indira herself.) (Also another commonly held view about this incident is that it was the handiwork of Pakistani agents.)

In the furor which followed Dhilwan, Indira dissolved the Punjab government, and President's rule was imposed in Punjab. A special cell of the Union Home Ministry relayed all information from Punjab to a small coterie inside the P.M.'s residence: prominent amongst these extra-constitutional day-to-day decision makers were Rajiv, and his close confidant and friend Arun Singh. However final authority remained with Indira Gandhi.

*Four more Hindu bus passengers were killed in a similar incident near Nushera, Jullunder.* Longowal condemned these killings. This time the government gave him permission to telecast his condemnation on Doordarshan. The wide publicity given to this crime reinforced the general view that the situation was getting out of hand. There was universal condemnation of the government for not being strong enough against the Sikhs. All the prominent opposition leaders were now accusing Indira for being too soft in her dealings with the extremists. And by now, the words 'Sikh', 'extremist', 'Akali' and 'Bhindrawale' had become synonymous in the Hindu psyche.

*The Hindu Jai Sangh issued a statement threatening to drive all Sikhs out of Rajasthan by December 5, 1983. Jarnail Singh retaliated that if any Sikhs were killed in that state, the Hindus of Punjab would suffer the consequences.* There was an uproar in Parliament, with the Lok Dal and B.J.P. demanding army action against Bhindranwale. (The Jai Sangh statement, and various similar statements issued by other Hindu organisations, had been as usual downplayed in the national press, and there was no demand for any action of any type against these people.)

In Amritsar, the rift between Jarnail Singh and Harchand Singh was now complete, and most Sikhs looked upon Jarnail Singh to lead them. Harchand Singh tried to have a hukumnama issued against all killings; but he was dissuaded from doing it, because it would have given the wrong impression that all the killers were Sikhs.

On December 5, 1983, Jarnail Singh moved into Akal Takht.

In the Tripartite Conference held in early 1984, the entire opposition was solidly against the Akalis.

*On February 8, 1984, a peaceful statewide bandh of Punjab was organised by the Akalis. There was no violence from the Akali side but the Hindu Sangathan organised disturbances in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal.*

*On February 19, 1984, Bhajan Lal engineered riots in a number of Haryana towns, notably Panipat, Sonapat and Jagadhri. At least 3 gurdwaras were burnt*

and 50 Sikhs killed in these riots<sup>33</sup>. The Sikhs of Panipat went in a delegation to Jarnail Singh after having already met Longowal. Jarnail Singh reportedly told them, 'So you have been to Gandhi Niwas. What does the Gandhiwadi say; that there must be peace and unity. I tell you I shall give back *bhaji*'<sup>22(p.82)</sup>. *There were no anti-Hindu riots by the Sikh population at large but violence broke out in Punjab in the form of acts of murder done by small bands of armed men. At least 40 people, including some Sikhs, were killed in these incidents. Some time later a number of village railway stations were burnt and 24 more people killed in another wave of violence.*

The Akali leadership was now reduced to a pathetic shape. They had to 'get something' in order to re-establish themselves with the Sikh masses. They asked for an amendment to Article 25 of the Indian Constitution which clubbed Sikhs and Hindus together. (Rajiv had secretly assured Gurcharan Singh that the government would concede this demand and thus Akali face would be saved<sup>22(p.83)</sup>.) This was immediately dubbed as another anti-national act by the public at large and by the opposition leaders. The Akalis went ahead and announced that on February 27, 1984, they would burn copies of Article 25(b) in Delhi. The Akalis hoped that, as part of his secret deal with Tohra, Rajiv would come through before this deadline. But no, the government wants the Akali face to be blackened more. On February 27, 1984, the Akalis burn Article 25(b) in Delhi and Chandigarh and on March 30, 1984, the Home Minister concedes the Akali demand in Parliament, and magnanimously released the Akali leaders taken prisoner during this Article 25 agitation. Akalis now busied themselves in framing a separate personal law for the Sikhs ...

*On May 12, 1984, Arya Samaj leader, journalist, and Jagat Narain's son, Ramesh Chander, was shot dead. Anti-Sikh riots broke out and a number of Sikhs were killed.*

By this time, the government had already decided to attack the Golden Temple, and its political actions during May, 1984, were in the nature of a camouflage of its true intentions: for example, Rajiv made a statement in which he said that Jarnail Singh was a 'religious leader', lures of Chief Ministership were offered to Gurcharan Singh and he was shown a 'formula' by which the 'Punjab problem' would be solved by a simple exchange of Chandigarh with Abohar town, and finally, when Indira met Zail Singh on May 30, 1984, she took along maps with her and discussed this same formula with the President for one hour and forty-five minutes. 'Zail Singh was excited about the formula and expected the Akalis would accept it'<sup>22(p.96)</sup>.

The above time period has been depicted by each and every Hindu journalist as essentially one in which 'Bhindranwale's men' were running amok and 'no Hindu was safe'. *From the above straightforward chronology of events it is clear that indeed there was much terrorism from April 13, 1978, to June 1, 1984, but most of it was done by the government itself – indiscriminate firings during non-violent demonstrations, for example, at Amritsar on May 31, 1981, at Chowk Mehta on September 20, 1981, during Rasta Roko on April 4, 1983, etc.; killings and torture of villagers by Punjab Police during 1982; brutalities of Haryana*

*Police at Chandokalan; persecution of Sikhs during Asiad; unexplained deaths of many Sikhs in police custody; Haryana's government-engineered 'riots' of February 19, 1984, etc.; in fact, about 70 percent of the fatalities occurred during these incidents, and all of these were Sikhs.* But the government-manipulated 'free press' of India did not focus attention on the above incidents. One set of events, in which the victims were Hindus, was given wide and tendentious coverage; another, and bigger, set of events, in which the victims were Sikhs, was hidden from the public on the ground that it will 'add to communal tension'<sup>34</sup>. The obvious object of this policy was to arouse hatred against the Sikhs. Like a 'good general' Indira held her fire till the very last minute, till all of India was clamouring frenziedly for 'action against the Sikhs'. In such an atmosphere it was easy to pass off the ensuing massacre at Amritsar as a great victory for the forces of good over evil and thus ensure the perpetuation of her dynasty for some more time. A popular lament of many 'concerned' Hindus is, 'But what else – other than attacking a hundred gurdwaras and killing some thousands of Sikhs? – could she have done?' A more pertinent question that they can ask themselves is, 'But what could we have done?' The first thing that they should have done, if the much heralded 'integrity of India' was really that dear to them, was to oppose this Prime Minister who had, since December of 1981, relentlessly followed the cynical policy of arousing communal hatred against the Sikhs. No such attempt was made by any opposition party. In fact, as the media-inspired hatred against the Sikhs mounted, the opposition either joined the clamour or at best became very, very quiet. As with Indira, so with all of them, the only thing which mattered was that they did not want to lose the 'important' Hindu vote which was going to decide the fate of their petty political skins: the two per cent Sikhs were expendable in their calculations.

## 5.

Amongst the people who visited Guru Amar Das<sup>36</sup> was the mogul Akbar<sup>37</sup>, who was so impressed with the way of life at Goindwal that he granted a site to the Guru's daughter Bhani. In 1577, Bhani's husband, Guru Ram Das, started building a town on this piece of land. His son, Guru Arjun, invited the *pir* Mian Mir to lay the foundation stone of *Harmandir*, and by 1585 this temple was complete, and the tank surrounding it filled with water; in August 1604, the *Granth Sahib* was formally installed in Harmandir, and Bhai Buddha appointed the first granthi<sup>38</sup>. The town, which by now was a city, came to be known as *Amrit-sar* after the tank. Sikhism had flourished from its inception till 1606, but fortunes changed suddenly with the accession of Jehangir to the mogul throne. In 1606, Guru Arjun was charged with treason, for having allegedly aided Jehangir's rebellious son Khusrau, and tortured to death in Lahore by Chandu Shah and others. The local officials believed that this would keep the Sikhs subdued for a long time. The result was just the opposite. 'The young Hargobind took the seat of his father with two swords girded around his waist: one to symbolise spiritual power, and the other temporal. "My rosary shall be the sword-belt and on my turban I shall wear the emblem of royalty,"



he said. He made it known to his Sikhs that thereafter he would welcome offerings of arms and horses instead of money. He trained a body of soldiers and spent much time in martial exercise and hunting. He built a small fortress, Lohgarh, in Amritsar. *Across the Harmandir, he built the Akal Takht, where, instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and, instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests*<sup>35</sup>(vol.I,p.63).

*The official version of India's military conquest of this very Akal Takht in June, 1984, runs as follows*<sup>39</sup>: Lt. Gen. Sunderji was given his battle orders on May 25, 1984: he wanted three weeks for preparation, but this request was turned down by Indira, who asked Sunderji to move in by June 3, 1984. At 9 a.m. on June 2, Indira went on radio and television to announce that the army was being sent into Punjab 'to aid the civil authorities'; she also added that 'if any misgivings or doubts on any issue remain, let us sit around the table and find a solution.' Curfew was clamped down on the evening of June 3. [*By sheer chance (?) the day selected by Indira for commencement of hostilities – June 3, 1984 – happened to be the anniversary of Guru Arjun's martyrdom day. At least 15,000 pilgrims had to remain within the temple precincts due to the imposition of curfew. Out of them over 10,000 never went back to reclaim their pairs of shoes.*] At 4.40 a.m. on June 4, the Indian Army commenced a probing operation whose object was to determine the location and strength of the Sikh positions. (The Central Reserve Police Force had already attempted a similar probing operation on June 1; it had been badly mauled by Jarnail Singh's men but had managed nevertheless to wrest control of some nearby rooftops.) From 10 a.m. of June 4 there was a lull in the fighting which lasted till the evening of June 5. At 4 p.m. on June 5 megaphones were used and an appeal made to the devotees and others inside the temple to come out<sup>40</sup>; as a result of this 126 people came out. The army dismantled some heavy mounted guns and carried them to some rooftops, secured earlier by the C.R.P.F., and reassembled them there. Exactly at 7 p.m. on June 5 these guns opened fire and blew off the tops of the two *Ramgharia Bungas* and the water tower which overlooked the eastern side of the *parkarma*. At 10.30 p.m. on June 5 the battle proper began. Batches of specially trained Commandos – they had been simulating such a raid on a model of the Golden Temple built especially for this purpose at Chakrata near Mussorie – were sent in from the northern, i.e., the main *ghanta ghar*, entrance of the temple. Simultaneously the 26 Madras Regiment moved in from the east, where the *Guru Nanak Niwas*, *Ram Das Serai*, *Teja Singh Sumanhari Hall*, etc., the *Ramgharia Bungas* and the *guru-ka-langar* are situated. And yet another column, comprising soldiers of 9 Garhwal and 15 Kumaon Regiments attacked from the south where the library containing the precious Sikh archives was situated<sup>41</sup>. The Commandos were completely routed by the Sikhs: more than half were killed and the rest badly injured. After the reverse suffered by the Commandos, another crack unit of the Indian Army, the 10 Guards, took over from them and was slowly able to make it to the northern side of the *parkarma*. Likewise, the columns advancing from the east and south managed to reach

the eastern and southern sides of the *parkarma*. The Madrasis destroyed the small *beri gurdwara* which fell in their way. But no further ‘progress’ could be made because all 3 columns got bogged down under heavy fire coming from the *Akal Takht*, which is situated opposite the *Darshini Deorhi*, the entrance of the causeway which connects *Harmandir* to the (western side of the) *parkarma*. (The 10 Guards now made many futile attempts to move closer to the Akal Takht and even lobbed some canisters of CS gas<sup>42</sup> in the process.) It was about 1 a.m. on June 6, 1984, when an officer with an escort was sent upto the Guru Nanak Niwas ‘and found Longowal, Tohra, Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, and nearly thirty other people huddled together in Tohra’s room. They had been there for more than thirty hours without food and water. (Both water and power supply to the Golden Temple complex had been cut off on 3 June.)’ <sup>22(p.101)</sup>. All these people were brought out into the open where 400 other devotees who had come out from the Niwas and Teja Singh Sumandri Hall also joined them. Just before Longowal was driven off in an army vehicle, he instructed Ramoowalia to stay back and look after these people. At this point ‘hand grenades lobbed by terrorists fell not too far from them’<sup>22(p.101),43</sup>. ‘And seven terrorists, who were among the throng of people around Longowal, finding that others could not be persuaded to stay back, climbed to the roof of Sumandri Hall and fired at the devotees ... some devotees were hit. So also were jawans, who fired back and some more devotees were caught in the *cross fire*. The troops entered the Sumandri Hall and the Guru Nanak Niwas and fired indiscriminately. A few terrorists who were there fired back. Nearly 100 devotees, including 35 women and 10 children, lost their lives ... The firing at Guru Nanak Niwas sparked off indiscriminate shooting from the Akal Takht, Library and the adjoining buildings. The troops fired back. It was probably then that the damage to Harmandir Sahib was caused – it carried the mark of at least 300 bullets. One *bir* was hit by a bullet; the government tried to take away that volume on 13 June by trying to make a priest an accomplice’ <sup>22(pp.101–102)</sup>. At 4.10 a.m. on June 6 armoured personnel carriers were brought in from the eastern side; one of the APCs was destroyed by bazooka fire from the Akal Takht and the others retreated. The APCs were replaced by heavy armour. Seven tanks rumbled down the steps to take positions around the *parkarma*; the steps and many parts of the *parkarma* caved in under the weight of the tanks. A new round of appeals for surrender was now made on the megaphones. ‘Nearly 200 of them did [surrender], including 22 stationed in the Harmandir Sahib’ <sup>22(p.103),44</sup>. The tanks started shelling on the afternoon of the 6th. The *Darshini Deorhi*, as well as the sacred *elaichi beri*, were seriously damaged by shells coming from the other side of the *Amrit Sarovar*. The entire facade of the Akal Takht was blown off and its roof brought down by the shelling. Hand to hand fighting ensued with Jarnail Singh and his men determined to fight till the very end. Around 1 a.m. on June 7 the battle was over. ‘The bodies of Bhindranwale, his youthful associate, Amrik Singh, whose marriage Bhindranwale had blessed there only a few days earlier, and Shabeg Singh<sup>45</sup>, the commander of his forces, a walkie-talkie set still clutched in his hand, were among those found in the basement. There were 31 more bodies strewn all over’ <sup>22(p.104)</sup>. Occasional

sniping continued for 2 or 3 more days in which the Indian Army completed its 'mopping-up operations'.

*Jarnail Singh and his men, 'whose number did not exceed 350 and who were armed with a few light machine guns, hand grenades, .303 rifles of World War I vintage and an old bazooka'* <sup>22(p.114,46)</sup>, had been beaten but not disgraced : they had fought in the most glorious traditions of the militant Khalsa. The Indian government tried at first to hide its true losses and said that only 92 of its soldiers had been killed; but in mid-September, 1984, Rajiv himself conceded that the Indian Army lost 700 dead during the above battle <sup>22(pp.102,124)</sup>. But besides this, the Indian government tried also to hide something else which is much more evil and sinister.

*The official figure for the 'terrorist' and civilian dead was around 500. There is not one journalist who believes that this figure is anywhere near the truth; for example, Kuldip Nayar says that 'a figure of 3000 would be nearer the truth' and Khushwant Singh that, 'There can be little doubt that if a zero is added to the official figure of 516 civilian/terrorist casualties, we would be closer to the actual number of lives lost – it was certainly in the vicinity of 5000 dead'* <sup>22(pp.109,114)</sup>.

What these people are in fact implying is that the 'official version' of the above battle is inaccurate or, at least, incomplete: *Even if, for the sake of argument, one admits the obviously concocted 'hand grenades' and 'cross fire' stories, they account for at most 150 civilian fatalities. How did the remaining thousands die?* Certainly not inside the heavily-shelled Akal Takht : anybody who has seen this shrine knows that it is so small that it could not possibly have contained much more than Jarnail Singh's men. The only buildings which could have housed the thousands of pilgrims are the buildings on the eastern side of the complex: Guru Ram Das Serai, Guru Nanak Niwas, Teja Singh Sumandri Hall, *guru-ka-langar*, etc.

In this part of the complex there had been no major shelling; thus *the only way that these thousands could have met their death was through a cold blooded massacre at the hands of the Indian troops*. In Sangrur district, I met a Sikh villager who narrowly escaped such a death; the following is his story.

He and the village *granthi* had to go to Amritsar to discuss a dispute regarding the village *gurdwara* with some S.G.P.C. officials. The two of them were planning to come back on the evening of June 3, 1984, but, like so many others, could not. It was a hot, sweltering night and both of them decided to lie down in the open near the *serai*. Their sleep was suddenly disturbed by heavy firing, and they ran into the *serai* to seek shelter. There were thousand of people jam-packed in the *serai* and, for the next day and a half, all of them had to stay there without food or water or electricity. The firing continued, but on occasions would abate, and then flare up again. Nobody ventured out to check what was happening and nobody heard any 'megaphone appeals' either. After more than 36 hours of this torture many of them could bear it no longer and, during a prolonged break in the firing, about 400 people, including a few women and children, came out. He said that some Indian soldiers now surrounded them, and asked them to

raise their hands. After a while the women and children were separated and the men were asked to remove their shirts and once again raise their hands. *'Then, just like that, without any warning, the Indian soldiers started machine-gunning us. All the people around me, including my companion, started falling down. I too went down, but I'd not been hit – maybe the bullets missed me because I am so skinny ?'* He continued to lie there, blood spattered all over him, amongst the corpses, for more than an hour or so. 'Of this period I have very little recollection, except that I kept on hearing wails and groans of the injured and that there was some more machine-gunning off and on.' A garbage truck of the Amritsar municipality had now arrived and the soldiers started throwing the corpses into it; occasionally they would bayonet a body which still showed signs of life<sup>47</sup>. 'Suddenly,' he said, 'a Sikh brigadier of the Indian Army came on the scene and started shouting at and roundly abusing the soldiers. The brigadier took a megaphone and said that those who were alive, and still able to, should stand up; that he, being a Sikh himself, would see to it that all of them were treated fairly.' Slowly, very slowly, people started standing up. There were about 25 such people. Later on they were joined by some other similarly arrested 'terrorists' and taken to prison. This villager was under detention for three and a half months during which he was interrogated and tortured by both the police and the army. Finally, without any explanations, he was released one day and came back to his village ...

*'They shot boys of fifteen and twenty in cold blood after tying their hands behind them with their turbans.'* *'They gassed and burnt pilgrims hiding in the rooms along the parkarma'* <sup>48</sup>. An Associated Press correspondent, Brahma Chellaney, managed to evade the government dragnet and was the only independent journalist in Amritsar during this battle. In Jalandhar, Chellaney met an eye surgeon who had been rounded up by the police to perform some postmortems in Amritsar. *'The doctor corroborated what I had been told by a deputy police superintendent in Amritsar that several of the slain Sikh militants were shot at by troops with their hands tied at the back. The doctor, whose team examined 400 corpses, including a hundred women and fifteen to twenty children, said he conducted postmortems of several Sikhs whose hands were tied at the back with their turban cloth'* <sup>22(p.166)</sup>.

I happen to know the father of an Indian Army officer who is in the Commandos and who had seen action in Amritsar. I asked this Hindu gentleman if his son had told him anything about Sikhs being killed with their hands tied behind them. He was very indignant at this and told me that their *kaka* had in fact affirmed that about 300 people had been so killed but, *'they were'nt Sikhs at all. They were only Muslims with fake beards.'* As if killing Muslims in such a fashion was any more justified!<sup>49</sup>

A popular theory is that Indian troops killed all those people because of anger born out of frustration : after all, their commanders had promised that operation 'clean out' would take no more than two hours<sup>50</sup> and now, so many hours later, so many of them had been killed by a determined enemy who was going to fight till the very end<sup>51</sup>. However this does not seem to be the case. Top Indian Army officers tell that when Sunderji got his battle orders from Gen. Vaidya

he was so flabbergasted that he wanted to clear them with Indira herself. He requested an interview with Indira, and pointedly asked her exactly how much 'force' he could use: Indira reportedly lost her patience and told Sunderji to use whatever he wanted and to just go and '*annihilate them all*'.

*The fact that these massacres were pre-meditated comes out in stark relief when one looks at the other gurdwaras<sup>52</sup> which were attacked at the same time as the Golden Temple. There were hardly any 'terrorists' in these places and no opposition worth the name was met by the Indian Army. Yet the civilian casualties were uniformly high.*

In Ludhiana, I met an Army officer who had participated in the attack on *Gurdwara Dukhniwaran, Patiala*. He was very reluctant to talk about something which he badly wants to forget. On being pressed he said, '*All that happened was we tore down a part of the gurdwara wall, went in and started shooting those poor blokes on the parkarma and kept on shooting ...*'.

The following was narrated to me by somebody who lives a half-mile away from this *gurdwara*.

Late at night he heard, and going up to his roof saw, a tank (an Indian Army acquaintance told him subsequently that it was in fact an APC) trundle along the canal bank towards the *gurdwara*. Some time later there were three or four big explosions. (The Army had brought down the huge main gate of the *gurdwara* by using some plastic charges.) This was followed by some shelling. Even from this distance, he could see that *the gurdwara had now been lit up by some flares. After this, there was continuous machine-gun fire for at least three to four hours.* (Just like at Amritsar, the imposition of curfew had trapped hundreds of pilgrims inside the *gurdwara*. Most of them had chosen to spend that hot, humid June night on the cool marble of the *parkarma*. The Army had lit up that *parkarma* and was machine-gunning these pilgrims.) This was followed by long periods of silence interspersed with an occasional burst or two of machine-gun fire. (The Indian Army had now started hunting down those young men and boys who had hidden themselves in a number of small rooms in the *gurdwara*.) All through the night he could make out a persistent sound 'as if made by a big animal who has been wounded and is emitting a continuous growl of pain': he was hearing the collective sound of a thousand human wails and groans. This sound became louder (and the individual wails more distinct) with the onset of day and then slowly faded away by about 12 a.m. (It turned out that the Indian Army suffered no casualties at all. There had been exactly three 'terrorists' with guns inside the *gurdwara*. Two of them had been persuaded by a *granthi* to surrender their weapons – a sten gun and a rifle – to him, and the temple authorities had handed these guns over to the army. The third gun – a .303 rifle – was fired but once in defiance by somebody who had climbed up to the top of the *gurdwara* just before the flares were lit. He had been immediately cut down by heavy fire from the Indian troops.)

Two days later, by using some backroads (it would have been suicidal to go on the main roads because of the curfew) he was able to reach the house of some friends who lived just opposite the *gurdwara* (they had a little baby and his main

object in making this hazardous trip was to take some milk for the baby). They told him that all through that fateful day a number of lorries had kept on coming to the *gurdwara* to take the corpses; many a time they saw people who were not fully dead being thrown into these lorries. (The authorities cremated the bodies near 4 or 5 different suburban villages of Patiala: well over 500 bodies were so disposed. The Patiala police could not even go through the usual formalities of postmortems, etc. They were under the direct orders of the army and this was the army way of doing things, quickly and efficiently.) Throughout that day, a large number of women, old men and children had been herded together in an area lying between this house and the *gurdwara* and they had spent the entire day in the open under the hot June sun. Some women pilgrims who had come from nearby Haryana locations were however sent back, minus their menfolk, in a few Haryana Roadways buses, which had been stranded in the Patiala bus terminus for some days ...

A doctor holding a very senior position in the local Rajindra Hospital told me that an army officer had asked the hospital authorities to keep some beds ready because they were expecting some casualties. When asked how many, he said 'twenty one'. Sure enough, after the battle, the army officer turned up with exactly 'twenty one wounded terrorists': Twenty one who had been spared the trip in the lorry, to instead face the torture of the interrogators in the coming months.

The carnage in the temples heralded the commencement of a reign of terror in the countryside. On hearing that the Golden Temple was under attack lakhs of villagers converged on Amritsar from all sides. The Indian Army had however used an entire Infantry Division together with many tank squadrons to seal off the city, and swarms of helicopters were keeping a close watch on the villagers' progress towards the city. Even those who were in the heart of the city, like A.P. reporter Chellaney, could make out clearly what was happening on the periphery : *'Between 10:30 p.m. and midnight, we heard slogans from city outskirts of villagers trying to march to the Golden Temple from three different directions. The slogans – 'Long live the Sikh religion' and 'Bhindranwale is our leader' – were heard briefly on each occasion and were followed by rapid army machine gun fire and screams'* <sup>22(p.162)</sup>.

The Amarinder Singh Committee, in response to its announcement for information<sup>48</sup>, came to know of many tales of horror :

*'Villagers trekking towards Amritsar were ordered off the tarmac road and, as they proceeded on their journey through the neighbouring fields, armymen took pot shots at them killing amongst many others, an old woman in her seventies. The number of people reported missing by their relatives and presumed dead ran into the hundreds'* <sup>22(p.125)</sup>.

This Committee also came to know *'that a batch of 21 boys between the ages of 4 and 12 picked up from the Golden Temple complex were lodged in Ludhiana Jail and listed under three categories of terrorists; very dangerous, dangerous and potentially dangerous. When a writ of habeas corpus was moved in the Supreme Court on their behalf by Srimati Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, they*

were quickly and quietly transferred to Amritsar' <sup>22(p.125)</sup>.

Due to the diligence shown by a Ludhiana police inspector, this particular batch of 'dangerous' prisoners was eventually tracked down and their freedom obtained by means of the Supreme Court order; but police officers freely admit that there are many other young Sikh boys languishing in jail on whose behalf nobody has moved writ petitions in court<sup>53</sup>.

*The Army has by now probably subjected every young Sikh villager of Gurdaspur and Amritsar districts to third degree methods to extort confessions.* Most village families in these districts have now at least one boy who 'is over on the other side' – in Pakistan. Reports have appeared in Indian magazines, for example, in 'India Today' and 'Sunday', to the effect that many young Sikhs are undergoing military training in Pakistan<sup>54</sup>. This may very well be, and if so, is a glimmer of hope for a beleaguered community. But it is equally true that *the army and police have used 'gone to Pakistan' as a very convenient alibi for hiding some of the murders which they have committed in these border districts*<sup>55</sup>.

This persecution is being pursued to such an extent that the word *amritdhari* has become anathema for the 'secular' government of India and many of the so-called terrorists are simply *amritdharis* rounded up from *gurdwaras* and villages. Even some students of the prestigious Amritsar Medical College found that they were being continuously shadowed ever since they took *amrit* at a religious ceremony. The same was the experience of two Khalsa College professors who had organised such a baptismal ceremony<sup>56</sup>. [The extent of the Indian government's paranoia can be judged from the fact that 15-year old Harpreet Kaur was arrested on sedition charges for reciting a poem at Beant Singh's *bhog* ceremony in Maloya village.] Due to the sympathetic attitude of Sikh policemen some 'terrorists' do manage to survive their jail ordeals and are being brought to trial in the so-called *special courts* set up under the 'Terrorist Affected Areas Ordinance'. The proceedings of these courts are usually held in camera and the dice is loaded heavily against the accused : he is presumed guilty until he can prove his innocence, the specifics of the charges against him are in practice revealed to him just before the trial, and he may not cross examine – or in some cases even know the identity of – the witnesses who have testified against him.

Concomitant with this physical persecution has been the abuse heaped on the emotional and religious sentiments of the Sikhs. It is a haloed tradition that any construction or repair work in a *gurdwara* must be done through the *kar seva* of the *sangat* itself. Yet, barely 15 days after its tanks had destroyed it, the government had already replaced the damaged tiles of the *parkarma* by new ones. 'Patch up fallen plaster, fill in bullet holes, whitewash the walls as quick as possible so that no one would be able to know what havoc the confrontation between the army and Bhindrawale men had caused' <sup>22(p.121)</sup>.

In pursuance of this policy, a nondescript scoundrelly *nihang* was built up as the new religious leader of the Sikhs and put 'in charge' of rebuilding the Akal Takht (the actual work was done by the Public Works Department of the Punjab government). When the five head priests of the five holiest *Takhts* condemned this '*kar seva*' as fake, an effort was made – by means of the 'Sarbat Khalsa' farce of August 11, 1984 – to declare the five priests themselves as fake. The

*jathedar*<sup>57</sup> of the Akal Takht was hauled before TV – some said there was a gun pointed at his back – and made to lie that the *Harmandir* was untouched and the *Darshini Deorhi* was safe. This, despite the fact, known to all Sikhs, that the *Darshini Deorhi* was damaged beyond repair and that there were more than 300 bullet marks in the *Harmandir*, that a blind *ragi* Amrik Singh had been killed in it while singing the *gurbani*, and that the ‘*sacred granth* (– regarded as the ‘*living*’ symbol of their ten Gurus –) installed in the *Harmandir* had been pierced by a bullet’.

Day by day, Indira’s propaganda machine continued its tirades with the twin purpose of rubbing salt in the Sikh wounds, and of arousing hatred against the Sikhs. Mischievous stories, like there being prostitutes and drugs in the Akal Takht, were planted in, and given wide prominence by, the subservient press, and the air was saturated with unceasing tales of ‘unparalleled heroism’ shown by the marauding Indian troops ...

With this background, it is obvious that almost any Sikh, given a chance, would have tried to kill Indira. Two of them in fact did and were willing to make the supreme sacrifice in order to do it. This simple and transparent fact is unpalatable to the Rajiv sycophants who are busy trying to find a conspiracy<sup>58</sup> behind Indira’s assassination and thus put a sufficiently big halo around ‘the Indira that was India’.

*The destruction of the Akal Takht led to spontaneous mutinies in many Indian Army cantonments. Thousands of Sikh soldiers started travelling towards Amritsar from places as far flung as Agartala and Silichar.*

A soldiering career is much prized by the young landless or near landless Sikh peasant because it enables him to escape the economic uncertainties of rustic life. The thousands of soldiers who had mutinied had not lacked in courage: they were ready not only to spurn this prized career but also to face almost certain death in order to fight for the honour of their community.

What they lacked was a reasonable plan of action, and, when they started to use the main roads and bridges in broad daylight in their precipitate rush towards Amritsar, they fell easy prey to the helicopter gunships and army detachments lying in wait for them.

I met a number of Sikh lieutenants, captains and majors of the Indian army. All of them concurred fully with the following view which was offered by a high-ranking retired army officer: ‘*From the military standpoint the revolt was an abject failure and was in fact the turning point of the events of 1984. Even if a handful of Sikh officers had rebelled and given these jawans effective leadership things would have been very, very different; for one, there certainly would have been no massacre of the Sikhs in November.*’

What this gentleman was suggesting was not that a force of 2000 or so armed men could have overthrown the government in Delhi, but only that this force was sufficient to successfully attain some more limited objective, and thus harass the government for a couple of months. (It could have, for example, seized a Raj Bhawan and taken some provincial bigwigs hostage.) This standoff could have given the Sikhs ample opportunity to air their side of the story to the world,



and, coming close on the heels of the very costly military victory attained by India at Amritsar, would have compelled the Indian government to make some concessions to the Sikhs.

As a matter of fact, the mutiny *did* create some initial panic in the government, and Indira went hastily on TV, and promised that the errant Sikh soldiers would be treated very leniently if they were to give themselves up. But her tone stiffened once again when she learnt that the leaderless and ill-fated mutiny had been quickly crushed.

*This tragically unsuccessful revolt has dissolved the continuous nagging fear of a 'Sikh revolt' which all Delhi regimes had felt since 1947, and has left the Sikhs completely vulnerable.* The Indian government has been emboldened no end by this unexpected windfall and has started taking steps which it feels will permanently obviate the threat of any future revolt<sup>59</sup>.

The absence of officers amongst the mutineers is *partly* explained by the fact that very few Sikh officers are in command of predominantly Sikh units. (In fact this is one of the reasons why a secret study made by an Indian government-funded 'think tank' had concluded that the repercussions, of the sacking of the Golden Temple, on the Sikh troops in the Indian Army would be 'serious but manageable'.) The Sikh peasant – does'nt matter if he clips his beard and smokes a *biri* – has always felt himself very emotionally attached to the concept of a Sikh *panth* (community). This is because, even though relatively uneducated, he is paradoxically much more aware of the spirit of Sikh history than his anglicised middle and upper class brethren. In part, this is due to the oral tradition which is passed on from generation to generation in the villages, but almost never in the towns, and in part, because his knowledge of Punjabi, the language indispensable for a true feel of Sikhism, is quite often much better than that of the anglicised Sikh.

*When the Akal Takht was sacked, the Sikh peasant-soldier immediately understood the historical significance of the moment. The anglicised Sikh-officer was merely dazed; for him, it was the start of that transition period through which so many middle and upper class Sikhs were to pass during the next four months<sup>48</sup>. This transition was more or less complete by the time Indira was killed; the massacre of November merely served to drive home the point.*

A number of Sikh soldiers and officers, travelling to and from their units, were butchered in the trains during those fateful days. By the government's own admission 37 Sikh officers were killed during this carnage. At least 5 Sikh air force officers (including a Mirage fighter pilot) were burnt to death on the streets of Delhi. A Sikh lieutenant narrated how a near riot broke out in a Poona mess when news reached that 6 Sikh officers, travelling in the same compartment as 9 non-Sikh officers, had been killed even though they were in Army uniform<sup>60</sup>. There is 'open insubordination' according to a Sikh captain, and Sikh officers quite openly tell their Hindu counterparts and seniors to 'shut up' when they try to offer lip sympathy for these killings. A very promising young officer had been selected for a prestigious course in the Staff College; he found himself treated 'like an untouchable' in that place. Broad hints are dropped to the Sikh officers, especially to those on the higher rungs of the Army hierarchy, that 'We

can manage without you, why don't you resign ?' But quite wisely most Sikh officers are resisting the temptation to resign; as one of them puts it, 'Who knows when this army-issue gun may be of some use for my community.'

## 6.

*Even before Guru Arjun's martyrdom in 1606, the feeling that they were a distinct and separate nation, and therefore, not bound by the dictates and wishes of the emperor of India, had become firmly established in the Sikh psyche*<sup>36</sup>. The inauguration of the Khalsa order at Anandpur on that historic Baisakhi of 1699, re-emphasized this spirit of nationalism, and declared to the world that the Sikhs were ready to challenge the military might of Delhi<sup>37</sup>. Within 10 years of Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708, the *bandai* Sikhs had established numerous small holdings all over Malwa; by 1725, these had been consolidated into larger estates, and Sikh chiefs like Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala, had become prominent. Across the Sutlej, in Doaba and Majha, the Sikh peasants refused to pay revenue to the governor of Lahore. By 1749, their "*nawab*", Kapur Singh Virk, had had the pleasure of ruling Lahore for some days, and, in 1757, their "*padshah*", Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, had trounced the Afghans in the Battle of Mahilpur. By 1765, four *misdars*<sup>38</sup> had taken over the administration of Lahore. Down south, the Malwai horsemen were extracting tribute from the entire *doab* between Jumna and Ganga, and even some territories across the Ganga, and were coming in and out of Delhi at will. (The four famous *gurdwaras* of Delhi – Rikab Ganj, Sis Ganj, Bangla Sahib and Bala Sahib – were built by Bhagel Singh of Jind in 1783-84.)

In time, all the Sikh chiefs came to accept the pre-eminence of one amongst them, Ranjit Singh Sukerchakia<sup>61</sup>, who was crowned "*maharaja*" on Baisakhi of 1801. *He was impelled by the weight of tradition that had grown up over the years, that it was the destiny of the Sikhs to rule (Raj Kare ga Khalsa) and that perhaps he had been chosen by the gurus to be the instrument of their inscrutable design*<sup>35(vol.I,p.202)</sup>.

After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, many notables of *Darbar Khalsaji*, impelled by their ambitions and intrigues rather than such traditions, decided that their interests would be best served by collaborating with the new rulers of Delhi. Fierce battles<sup>62</sup> were fought and the five columns of the British East India Company prevailed over the Sikhs. A British general who witnessed the surrender of 1849 wrote, "The reluctance of some of the old Khalsa veterans to surrender their arms was evident. Some could not restrain their tears; while on the faces of others, rage and hatred were visibly depicted." "The remark of one veteran grey beard as he put down his gun summed up the history of the Punjab : "*Aj Ranjit Singh mar gaya*"<sup>35(vol.II,p.82)</sup>.

The Sikh peasantry had become so disgusted with the Sikh nobility that it was unlikely to help the latter regain their lost power. So the British felt no qualms about recruiting Sikhs in their army. This, plus the fact that the British had introduced a number of beneficial reforms in the country side, in

turn helped them temporarily win the confidence of the majority of the Sikh masses<sup>63</sup>.

But by no means all the Sikhs. In 1872, the D.C. of Ludhiana ordered 82 *namdhari* Sikhs blown up by tying them to the mouths of cannons, and their leader Ram Singh<sup>64</sup> exiled to Rangoon, to put down an uprising. 'The boycott of British goods, government schools, law courts, and the postal service and the exhortation to wear only *khaddar* which Ram Singh propagated in the 1860's were taken up again sixty years later by Mahatma Gandhi'<sup>35</sup>(vol.II,p.135).

The Amritsar Singh Sabha was founded in 1873; from this date onwards there was a rapid resurgence of interest amongst the Sikhs in their traditions : a spate of books on Sikhism were published in both English and Gurmukhi, a host of Punjabi newspapers mushroomed up in Amritsar, Lahore and Rawalpindi, a number of Khalsa Schools were set up, and the Khalsa College, Amritsar, established in 1892. (Throughout this time the Sikhs, by and large, stayed away from the activities of the Congress party. 'The domination of the Indian National Congress by Arya Samajists gave the freedom movement an aspect of Hindu resurgence and was chiefly responsible for the aloofness of the Muslims and the Sikhs'<sup>23,35</sup>(vol.II,p.147).) The rekindling of Sikh nationalism is what gave impetus to the building up of numerous Sikh grievances against the government: inadequate legal control of village moneylenders, a bill which treated tillers of newly colonised lands as mere tenants, mistreatment of Sikh immigrants in Canada (this gave rise to the Ghadr party), inadequate appreciation of Sikh efforts during World War I, etc., etc.

These grievances led to an outbreak of 'terrorism'<sup>65</sup>, which the government decided to suppress by making some drastic changes in the penal code (the so-called Rowlatt bills). When some Congress *netas* decide to agitate against these bills, the Sikhs made common cause with them. *On Baisakhi of 1919, Gen. Dyer opened fire on a crowd of Sikh villagers who had gathered at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, to protest against these bills, and 379 persons were killed and 2000 injured.* Martial law was imposed on the Punjab in the wake of this massacre. 'Gujranwala and its neighbouring villages were subjected to bombing and machine-gunning from the air; one of the targets successfully hit was the Khalsa High School at Gujranwala, where many people were killed and wounded'<sup>35</sup>(vol.II,p.165).

During the 7 weeks following Jallianwala Bagh, nearly 1200 people were killed and 3600 injured: the overwhelming majority of these casualties were Sikhs. But this did not keep the Sikhs down: they retaliated by launching an agitation to wrest control of those *gurdwara* which were run by *mahants*<sup>66</sup>. On Nov 15, 1920 a *hukumnama* from the *Akal Takht* brought into being, a committee of 175 Sikhs – the *Shiromani Gurdwara Pranandhak Committee* (S.G.P.C.) – which was entrusted with the task of managing all Sikh shrines. Simultaneously, a corps of volunteers, the *Akali Dal*, was constituted for taking over *gurdwaras* from recalcitrant *mahants*.

Most of these *mahants* declared their shrines to be Hindu temples, and won instant backing of the entire Hindu population. The birthplace of Guru Nanak, Nankana Sahib, was managed by one Narain Das 'who lived in the gurdwara

with a mistress and was known to have invited prostitutes to dance in the sacred premises ... and had hired nearly 400 thugs to safeguard and defend his interest<sup>35</sup>(vol.II,p.199). *On Feb 20, 1921, when an Akali jatha entered Nankana Sahib it was trapped within the gurdwara and attacked by Narain Das's thugs : 130 Akalis were slaughtered by the time the police arrived on the scene. This gurdwara was handed over to the S.G.P.C., but the government continued to drag its feet regarding the others. The Akali morchas at Guru-ka-bagh, Muktsar and Jaito followed. Hundreds of Sikhs were killed, the S.G.P.C. and the Akali Dal were declared illegal, the police raided Akal Takht and seized documents, and all Akali leaders were put in jail; but still, the morchas continued stronger than ever<sup>67</sup>. Finally, perturbed by the effect which these agitations were having on the Sikh soldiers in the army, the government relented, and the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, which met all the demands of the S.G.P.C., was passed.*

In 1929, Lord Irwin announced a conference in London to discuss some constitutional reforms, and to go into the question of granting Dominion status to India<sup>68</sup>. At these 'round table' conferences the British proposed, and subsequently incorporated in the Government of India Act of 1935, a federal constitution, with 2 houses of legislature at the center, and autonomy for the provinces and the princely states. Further, there were to be separate electorates and weightages for the different communities: the net upshot of all this was that the Muslims were to have a permanent majority in the Punjab legislature. *Sikh attention shifted from their current rulers, the British, to their perceived future rulers, the Muslims : correspondingly Sikh struggle changed from being anti-British to anti-Muslim.*

There had been serious Hindu-Muslim communal clashes before 1930, but till this date, relations between Sikhs and Muslims had been generally peaceful, if not amicable<sup>69</sup>. After 1930, they deteriorated rapidly, and spilled over into violence with the 1938 dispute over Gurdwara Shahidganj in Lahore<sup>70</sup>. *The Unionist ministry began talking of a Muslim state in Punjab, and this produced disaffection in Sikhs to such an extent that, for the first time after 1849, Sikh peasants were reluctant to enlist and there were large scale desertions from some army units : hundreds of soldiers were court-martialled and a few executed.*

In 1940, the Muslim League raised its demand for Pakistan. If the Sikh leadership had, at this time, put forward a strong and united demand for a Sikh state, which the Sikh masses wanted, things would have been very different. But the fact of the matter is that many Sikh leaders, during the last decade, had become not only anti-Muslim, but also pro-Hindu, and were under the influence of the Congress party, and no such *united* demand was put forward<sup>71</sup>. The formation of Pakistan (and even more that of a Sikh state) would have necessitated a shift of populations. It was clear to the Muslim League that the British, who were not averse to a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, even when it involved transporting an entire community over thousands of miles, would eventually accede to such a shift of populations. This became even more likely in 1942 when the Cripps Mission proposed that if any province wished to opt out of the Indian Union it could do so. The official Congress stance was that of 'no dismember-

ment', but the real sentiment within this party was evident from the utterances of its leaders: for example, in 1942, Rajagopalachari came out in favour of Pakistan; in May 1944, he published, with the backing of Gandhi, a "formula" along the same line; in August 1945, Nehru said that 'Muslim Leaguers would have to be given the right to secede if they so desired, "provided they did not drag others who did not want to do so" ' <sup>35</sup>(vol.II,p.254), etc.

By March 1946, sporadic communal riots had broken out in Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi, etc. *On March 22, 1946, the Akali Dal passed a resolution stating Sikhistan to be its political objective*, and, about the same time, Sikh leaders impressed upon the visiting British Cabinet Mission that, if Pakistan was conceded, a separate Sikh state, Khalistan, should also be constituted. But this turned out to be too little, too late. The Cabinet Mission ignored these appeals, and its '3-tier proposals' envisaged a central government and 2 sets of provinces; one Muslim majority and the other non-Muslim majority. It virtually conceded a Pakistan with *all* of Punjab in it.

Sikh leaders kept on talking about a Sikh state, but it was obvious that the only realistic course was to accede to the proposal for partitioning Punjab – this was finally broadcast to the nation on June 3, 1947, by Mountbatten – and to hope that factors other than incidence of population (e.g., location of religious shrines, ownership of land etc.) would be considered by the Boundary Commission.

*Sikhs were drawn into the vortex of large scale communal violence for the first time in the winter of 1946-47, when a large number of them were massacred in Hazara, N.W.F.P.* Rioting was further escalated with Attlee's statement on February, 1947, that the British would relinquish power by June 1948 at the latest.

The Radcliffe Commission did not take 'other factors' into account. On June 14, 1947, Mountbatten's press attache writes, 'We are in the heart of Sikh country here, and the prevailing atmosphere is one of tension and forboding ... they see that the partition of India means substantially and irrevocably the partition of the Sikhs, and they feel themselves to be sacrificed on the altars of Muslim ambition and Hindu opportunism'<sup>35</sup>(vol.II,pp.279–280). *On July 13, 1947, the governor of Punjab reported to Mountbatten, 'The communal feeling is unbelievably bad. The Sikhs believe that they will be expropriated and massacred in West Punjab and smothered by the Hindus and Congress generally in East Punjab. They threaten a violent rising immediately.' Unfortunately, no such uprising occurred either : about 100,000 Sikhs perished needlessly during the violence of 1946-47* <sup>72</sup>.

*A community with national aspirations as deeply rooted in its collective psyche as the Sikhs is never going to rest till it has attained its homeland. A look at Sikh history would suffice to convince anybody that, not the defeat of Jarnail Singh and his gallant men, not the massacres in Punjab and Delhi, not anything is going to stop the inexorable drive of this community towards what it perceives to be its destiny. The question is not 'Will a Sikh state – or Khalistan or Azad Punjab or Sikhistan or whatever – be formed ?' but 'When will it be formed ?'*

*The answer to this question depends to my mind on how the educated, westernized, thin crust of Sikh society behaves. If it continues, as it historically has, to stand in the way of the driven Sikh masses, or, even worse, provide them with a disjointed, squabbling leadership, there will be more defeats and much agony before it comes to pass; if it stands aside, and lets things take their course, soon, in a decade or two; if it provides the masses with a united leadership which too, like them, is impelled by 'the weight of the destiny of the Sikhs', maybe within a year or two. I am not an optimist, and so don't believe that such a utopian leadership will come to pass. I am only hoping that this 'thin crust' would stand aside in a constructive way : that it would empathize with, if not participate in, the struggle; that it would take the trouble of listing, and placing before the rest of the world, the details of the atrocities to which the Sikh masses will be subjected during this struggle; that it would not believe in everything which is written in the Indian and foreign press<sup>73</sup>, but would try to make sincere efforts to find out the true facts, etc.*

Amongst all the darkness there are good signs too. I met young convent-educated Sikh army officers who had started reading Punjabi *kaidas* and were hoping to discover their lost roots. And this time, mecifully, I heard almost no *bhapa vs. jat* talk at dinner parties : 'if *jat* blood had been spilled at Amritsar, *bhapa* blood had been spilled at Delhi.' Amongst Sikh leaders outside India I have noticed a very healthy change: they have stopped lecturing their counterparts in India, who after all are taking all the risks, as to what they should do, and have instead started strengthening their hands. It is also amusing to note, that despite all the cant and nonsense being fed to them, in their heart of hearts. many Hundus do see justice in the Sikh cause, and they do see that there is nothing sacred or 'geologically fixed about 40-year old frontiers'<sup>74</sup>. For example, Kuldeep Nayar has this to say about the opinion of many Hindus after the Amritsar massacre. 'Curiously, the solution they perceive is very similar to Bhindranwale's – to force the Sikhs living elsewhere in the country, about a third of the total Sikh community, to shift to a Sikh State in a mass exchange of populations. Whether Sardar Patel said it or not, he is quoted as having said that the Sikhs could take six districts of Punjab to form a state of their own, and that the Sikh population from the rest of India should also move to it'<sup>22(p.128)</sup>.

One can only speculate as to how events might unfold in the coming months. The current thinking in Delhi is that Rajiv's managerial-cum-criminal outlook towards administration is exactly what is needed to build a 'strong India'<sup>75</sup>. For these worshippers of fascism, minorities are only of marginal importance. But still, some attempts will be made to 'mollify' Sikh feelings, and some stooges will be found who will sign some pieces of paper signalling a 'rapprochement' between the government and the Sikhs. Even some Sikhs committed to fighting for a separate Sikh state might consider playing along with the government to buy some time. But during this 'phoney war' *the position of the Sikh community outside Punjab – and even in some Punjab cities – will be very precarious : they will be virtually hostages in the hands of an unscrupulous enemy. The only way*

*we can prevent – or at least reduce – their suffering during a future crisis (for example, if somebody, Sikh or non-Sikh, kills Rajiv) is to expose what happened at Delhi.* In this respect we should learn something from the Jewish community: if *we* don't climb to the rooftops and shout out to the world the indignities to which we have been subjected, *nobody else* will. I doubt very much that during this time there will be any massacre of the Hindus by the Sikhs: isolated killings maybe, but no massacre. The reason is not that Sikhs are less *jalam* than Hindus or Muslims, but simply that they don't have power, and massacres can be perpetrated only by those who have power over their victims. I sincerely hope that even after they have gained power Sikhs would not indulge in such bestiality, and that Sikh leaders would keep their struggle as 'clean' as possible.

## NOTES

1. Pseudonym. Writing this article under my real name would have impaired my ability to keep on making trip to India to report on the events there, and also would have compromised some of my sources. (See also **73** below.)
2. That is, all members of the Sikh community, ranging from the most atheistic of the clean shaven Sikhs, to the most devout of the *amritdharis*. Throughout this article the word 'Sikh' refers to the community and not the religion.
3. The weekly 'India Abroad', which is but an unofficial mouthpiece for the Government of India in North America, covered these events in roughly the same way except that it played down the gory details and also the apathy shown by the police and army in curbing the rioters, and played up the fact that Sikhs had celebrated Indira's death in many places and that many more Sikhs would have died but for the magnanimity shown by Hindus. It too gave a sequence of scholarly analyses which laid bare the root causes of this 'culture of violence'. Further, there was a continuous sequence of letters – many of them allegedly from Sikhs in U.S. and Canada – which pointed out that 'violence begets violence' and that Sikhs should not have celebrated on the streets or gone on TV to express their 'relief' at Indira's death and that Sikhs should do this and that Sikhs should do that.
4. Arun Shourie, *Can we survive teaching each other lessons ?*, Illustrated Weekly of India, Jan 13 - 19, 1985.
5. P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report, *Who are the guilty ?*, published by Rajni Kothari, president P.U.D.R. and Gobinda Mohanty, president P.U.C.L.
6. The Indian government itself admits to about 900 deaths in Delhi. A recent issue of 'India Today' says 'over 2000'. The published figures have been climbing up steadily towards the estimate of 10,000 given to me by some I.A.S. officers posted in Delhi. Even if, for the sake of argument, one accepts the lower figures, the massacre of November, 1984, ranks much higher than the one at Jallianwala Bagh in 1919, and is almost on par with the *chota ghallugara* inflicted upon the Sikhs by Lakhpat Rai in 1746 to avenge the slaying of his brother.
7. The Haryana Police had been used previously, in an analogous fashion, during the anti-Muslim riots in Meerut and Moradabad.
8. Ivan Fera, *The enemy within*, Illustrated Weekly of India, Dec 23-29, 1984.
9. It is clear from the P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report, **5**, that many women, children, and old men were *also* victims in the carnage : 'In some areas of Mongolpuri we heard from the survivors that even children were not spared. We also came across reports of gang-rape of women' (p. 2), 'Among the directions heard being shouted to the mob were 'kill men, rape women' (p. 18), 'A pregnant woman was stabbed by the rioters and some women are reported to have been raped' (p. 18), 'Women survivors told us how their children were ripped apart ... ' (p. 20), etc.
10. There might be a historical parallel to this in the persecution of the Buddhists at the hands of the Brahminical godmen. The role of the Brahminical kings in these massacres is widely accepted. More controversial are the repeated references in many ancient and medieval, Indian and Tibetan, works to the role played by godmen, for example, (a) Kumarila is supposed 'to have organized a religious crusade against Buddhists. He is said to have instigated King Suddhanvan of Ujaini to exterminate Buddhists', and, (b) the biographer of Samkara (circa 788 A.D.) 'tells us that the great Guru led a religious expedition against the Bauddhas and caused their destruction from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean. Samkara is known to have founded his Sringeri Matha on the site of a Buddhist monastery. His anti-Buddhist activities may have been very terrible, and according to Tibetan tradition, at his approach "the Buddhist monasteries began to tremble and the monks began to disperse pell-mell" ' (pp. 395-397 of L. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhist Culture of India*. See also Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. II).
11. It is a moot question whether Indira had already adopted the political strategy of going after the 'Hindu vote' before turning to the godmen or whether it was the influence of the godmen which had resulted in the adoption of this political policy.



12. The close connection between the Government of India and Hindu godmen is illustrated by the recent incident when the Phillipines government – which is run by Marcos, who along with Mrs. Marcos, is an ardent disciple of Mahesh Yogi – extradited Jasbir Singh to face sedition charges in India. Jasbir Singh is accused of trivial things like pamphleteering and raising pro-Khalistan and pro-Beant Singh slogans while in Nankana Sahib, Pakistan. The most serious ‘charge’ against Jasbir Singh is that he happens to be the nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale !

13. Many Sikh residents of Delhi told me that around the beginning of October, 1984, they had received anonymous letters saying that they should leave Delhi or else they would be killed.

14. In this context it is worth pointing out that Guru Nanak’s birth anniversary was going to be celebrated on November 8, and it would have been easy to provoke the Sikhs during the scheduled *gurdurb* procession.

15. Later on the government insisted that the survivors present a postmortem report and/or a copy of the F.I.R. before they could be compensated for the death of an earning member of the family.

16. There are at least 100,000 refugees in Punjab at this moment. The government itself admits to a figure of around 50,000. The main effort of the government is directed towards convincing the refugees to go back to Delhi or Dehra Dun or Kanpur or wherever they came from. The task of rehabilitating the refugees is being done by voluntary Sikh agencies. A leading role in this regard is being played by the Akali Dal. Besides, some dailies (notably *Ajit* of Jullunder) have started funds to help these refugees.

17. Cong(I) leaders used voters lists and ration cards to identify Sikh houses : see P.U.D.R. - P.U.C.L. report, 5.

18. The same pattern was repeated throughout Uttar Pradesh : I was told by refugees from Dehra Dun and Roorkee that not a single *gurdwara* in these towns was left intact.

19. This fact again indicates the hand of some Hindu godmen in masterminding the details of the violence : not only the community but also the Sikh religion had been branded a national enemy. By this strategy of involving the public at large in mass sacrilege, the government has obviated any possibility of being accused for having desecrated 100 Punjab *gurdwaras* in June, 1984.

20. The *asli Nirankaris* had broken away from Sikhism way back in 1850 : in 1978 this sect was led by Man Singh and orthodox Sikhs had no quarrel with it. The *Nirankaris*, led by Gurbachan Singh in 1978, had broken away from the *asli Nirankaris* around 1975 and now were more numerous than the latter. The religious dispute was centered around the fact that their holy books *Avtar Bani* and *Yug Purush* contained derogatory references to the Sikh Gurus and the *Granth Sahib*; in November, 1973, a *hukumnama* had been issued by the Akal Takht declaring *Nirankaris* as renegades.

21. Amongst Sikh *deras* most prominent in 1978 in doing *amrit prachar* and persuading young Sikhs to return to the spartan traditions of the *Khalsa* were *Akhand Keertani Jatha* and the *Dam-Dami Taksal* led respectively by Fauja Singh and Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. Fauja Singh was killed in this clash and was succeeded by his wife Amarjit Kaur. Jarnail Singh was at Golden Temple when this clash took place.

22. Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*, Vision Books, 1984. (Chapters 2, 3, 5 are written by Kuldip Nayar, and chapters 1, 4 by Khushwant Singh.) This book gives three different casualty figures for this clash : ‘thirteen people’ (p. 26), ‘sixteen Sikhs’ (p. 32), and ‘thirteen Akalis and six *Nirankaris*’ (p. 119). For the sake of accuracy, I had also to revise 3 or 4 other casualty figures mentioned in this book; otherwise, in this chronology, I have listed essentially the same facts which appear in Kuldip Nayar’s, *Towards disaster* (Chapter 2 of this book). These facts do not warrant some of the conclusions which Kuldip Nayar has chosen to draw from them in his essay.

23. A majority of the Hindus of Punjab and Haryana belong to the *Arya Samaj*, a sect founded by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) who was in Punjab for only about 15 months in 1877-1878. The teachings of Dayanand appealed instantly to the educated and upwardly

mobile Hindu elite because they 'legitimized change through the authority of ancient scripture' by the simple device of rejecting all those Hindu scriptures which were not *arsha*, that is, not written by the divinely aspired *rishis*. The *Vedas* themselves were infallible for Dayanand – 'I regard the Vedas as self-evident truth, admitting of no doubt ...' – , and it was inconceivable to him that anybody ignorant of Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas, could have attained any worthwhile knowledge. Dayanand published *Satyarth Prakash* in 1875, and this book, which is revered by all Arya Samajists, contains passages which malign all religions. For example, Guru Nanak is called *dhurta*, Granth Sahib *mithya*, and Sikhism *jal* in this book. (In Amritsar, when Dayanand belittled Sikhism, some Sikhs responded by threatening his assassination.) As the Arya Samaj movement caught on, most of its adherents felt compelled to shrilly justify Dayanand's views vis-a-vis Prophet Mohammed, Guru Nanak, etc. Guru Datta, the most prominent Arya Samajist leader of the time, had this to say at a Lahore Rally on Nov 25, 1888 : 'If Swami Dayanand Saraswati Maharaj called Guru Nanak a great fraud, what did it matter ? He held the sun of the Vedas in his hands, so if he wanted to compare this light with anything, what was that ?' Again *Arya Samachar*, an organ of the Samaj, published the following lines :

*Nanak shah fakir ne naya chalaya panth,  
Idhar udhar se jor ke likh mara ek granth.  
Pehley chelay kar liye, picchay badla bhash,  
Sir par safa bandh key, rakh liye sab kesh.*

Dayanand had analysed and dismissed Sikhism in just a page and half of his book and, to start with, most Sikhs did not consider this criticism very important, and a few actually joined the Samaj. The comments made by Guru Datta and other Aryas at the Lahore rally of 1888 had an immediate effect on these Sikhs; they went over to the Lahore Singh Sabha and became staunch defenders of Sikhism. A few Samajists, belonging to the so-called College Party, tried, in the 1890s, to mollify Sikh feelings by saying 'that Swami Dayanand had an imperfect knowledge of Gurmukhi, and that the remarks made by him regarding Guru Nanak in the *Satyarth Prakash* are based on second-hand information'. But they attempted further to also prove that 'Sikh Hindu hain'. This had the predictable effect of alienating Sikhs once more: Kahan Singh's famous booklet *Hum Hindu Nahin* was published in 1899. On June 2, 1900, some Rahtia Sikhs (weavers) of Doaba were converted to the Arya Samaj at a well publicised *shuddhi sabha* : " ... when the time of initiation of Rahtia Sikhs came, they were seated on a pulpit and their heads were shaved by half a dozen barbers before hundreds of the multitude that had assembled to witness the performance. A sprinkling of Sikhs was also present but insult done to their feelings in such public fashion drove them mad and they withdrew from the scene. By 12 A.M., however, the whole Sikh community of Lahore was mad with rage and ran to and fro in a helpless manner." Such 'purification ceremonies' sufficed to complete the Sikh - Arya Samaj schism by 1904. (K. W. Jones, *Arya Dharma*, Univ of California Press (pp. 31, 40, 138, 208, etc.) and Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, vol. II, ch. 9.)

**24.** Jagat Narain, owner and editor of the dailies *Hind Samachar* (Urdu) and *Punjab Kesri* (Hindi), was notorious for the virulence of his anti-Sikh editorials; before 1947, Jagat Narain had written similar anti-Muslim articles in his Lahore based newspapers.

**25.** Khushwant Singh : '*Keertan darbars* were organised on a massive scale; public functions began with an *ardas*; the road running from Anandpur to Patiala was re-named Guru Gobind Singh Marg; a string of horses alleged to be descended from Guru Gobind Singh's stallion were led down this road and villagers picked up their droppings to take home; a new township was named after one of the Guru's son's as Shaheed Ajit Singh Nagar. And much more' (pp. 23-24 of **22** ).

**26.** Kuldip Nayar : 'Tiwari ... never made a secret of the fact that he had a hand in the foundation of the Dal Khalsa. He told me ... that what he and his mentors, Zail Singh and Sanjay, wanted was to embarrass the Akali Party' (p. 33 of **22** ).

**27.** One of the more memorable anti-Sikh slogans, '*Kaccha, kara aur kirpan – bheyjaingey ise Pakistan*', was first heard at Jagat Narain's funeral (p. 41 of **22**).

**28.** Santokh Singh was shot dead in Dec 1981 in Delhi in an incident unrelated to Punjab politics. Zail Singh and Buta Singh touched Jarnail Singh's feet when they met the latter at

Santokh Singh's funeral (p. 42 of **22** ).

**29.** P.U.C.L. report, V.M. Tarakunde chairman. This report also gives names of S.P.s, D.S.P.s, sub-inspectors, etc., accused by the villagers for having committed these atrocities.

**30.** S.G.P.C. president. He was used (and possibly was not averse to being so used) by Rajiv more than once for Cong(I) party's own sinister ends.

**31.** All India Sikh Student Federation leader Amrik Singh was the son of the previous leader of the Dam-Dami Taksal and was thus very close to Jarnail Singh.

**32.** Two of the many intelligence services which are under the direct supervision of the P.M. Indira took no legal action against 'Surya' beyond banning the sale of this issue in Punjab.

**33.** Bhajan Lal's Haryana Police played a leading role in these 'riots': for them this was but a dress rehearsal for the pogroms in Delhi. Besides Chandokalan and the Asiad, it may be mentioned that the Haryana Police had already been 'used' to kill Muslims during 'riots' in Meerut and Moradabad, and had also been sent to Garhwal to sabotage a parliamentary bye-election.

**34.** Given this backdrop, in which the killing of so many Sikhs was being treated as a non-event, and that of a few Hindus was given nationwide coverage, it is easy to understand why the average Sikh found it hard to cry himself hoarse while lamenting the death of the Hindus. Each and every Hindu, however 'broadminded' or 'liberal', failed to understand this obvious point, and kept on rubbing salt in the Sikh wounds by saying things like : 'The Akalis' failure to speak out when Hindus were harassed or even murdered was perhaps their major blunder', 'Few Sikhs spoke against the killings', etc. (pp. 55, 77, etc., of **22**). It is astonishing that even after the massacres in the Golden Temple complex, in which thousand of Sikh devotees perished, one such 'broadminded' Hindu can say the following: ' ... in the resolutions passed by the Sikh organisations regret was expressed over the death of 'innocent Sikhs' but no mention was made of the innocent Hindu lives lost. The '*Shahidi Diwas*' (July 17, 1984) commemorates the memory of only the Sikhs who died during the army action. Had there also been an expression of grief for the Hindus killed by Bhindrawale's men, the state could well have begun a new chapter of Punjabi ethos, not a communal one' (p. 131 of **22** ). This behaviour is somewhat reminiscent of the British attitude during the months following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 13, 1919: the Britishers continued to be perturbed for a long, long time over the fact that five Englishmen had been killed, and a lady missionary severely assaulted by some miscreants in March, 1919.

**35.** Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol I and vol II, Princeton University Press.

**36.** *The religious pre-eminence of the Gurus occasionally tends to overshadow and obscure their great achievements as leaders of the Sikh community.* During the 22 years of Guru Amar Das's leadership, 1552-1574, Sikhism had spread far beyond the confines of the three towns - Kartarpur, Khadur, and Goindwal - where the first three Gurus preached. A network of *dharamsals* (later, *gurdwaras* ) had been established, each with a *guru-ka-langar*, each supplied with a copy of the hymns written in *gurmukhi* script, and each with an *akhada* where the Sikhs participated in competitive games. And Sikhs had their own ceremonies for births and deaths and went to their own *Baisakhi mela* at Goindwal. The 25 years under his grandson Guru Arjun's leadership, 1581-1606, saw the emergence of Amritsar as the premier city of the Sikhs. Besides, the Sikhs built the three more thriving towns of Taran Taran, Kartarpur II and Sri Hargobindpur. *'He became a leader of national importance, and his church grew rich and powerful. The Guru began to be addressed as the Sacha Padshah (the true Emperor).'* The new emperor of India tried to quell the rising Sikh nationalism. But Guru Hargobind was more than equal to the occasion and showed great flair and astuteness in guiding the Sikh ship across the turbulent waters of the next 38 years. He had to suffer some years of imprisonment in Gwalior Fort. After this Jehangir underwent a change of heart which gave the Sikhs about 15 years of respite. This time was used in consolidating their position and in building the town of Kiratpur in the Shivalik hills. The advent of Shah Jahan in 1627 renewed the armed struggle. Guru Hargobind's Sikhs clashed with mogul detachments, sent out to arrest the Guru, at Lahira and Kartarpur and were victorious both times. *'With Arjun the title Sacha Padshah was only honorific; with Hargobind it became a reality as far as the Sikhs were concerned.'* ( **35**, vol. I.)

**37.** *The relations between the house of Babar and the house of Nanak* were friendly till Akbar's death in 1606: in fact Akbar's 'admiration was an important factor in building Sikh fortunes.' To start with Aurangzeb, like Jehangir and Shah Jahan, limited his anti-Sikh efforts to harassing the Gurus. He had the seventh Guru send his elder son Ram Rai to the moghul court and then 'encouraged him in his pretensions to guruship and gave him land on which to build his community center.' This effort to create a schism within the Sikh church was however only a very limited success (some *gurdwaras* of Dehra Dun are still run by *Ram Raiyas*). Around 1672 Aurangzeb changed tactics and embarked on a policy of religious persecution. Additional taxes were levied on all non-Muslims and there were even some demolitions of temples and forcible conversions. Guru Tegh Bahadur took up the cause of all these oppressed and for this was sentenced to death and executed in Delhi in 1675.

*To protect their right to wear  
caste-marks and sacred threads,  
Did he, in the dark age, perform the supreme  
sacrifice.* (Bachitar Natak)

To escape the moghul oppression the Sikhs took to the hills. The next 25 years were basically a period of re-consolidation. (And fortunately the only real military threat during this time came not from the moghuls but from Bhim Chand and the other local hill chiefs. The Sikhs established their ascendancy over these Hindu *rajās* at the Battle of Bhangani in 1686.) *The institution of the Khalsa at Anandpur on that historic Baisakhi of 1699 signalled that the Sikh Nation was ready to challenge the might of the moghul empire.* This time there was no stopping the Sikhs. The fierce battles of Anandpur, Chamkaur and Muktsar made it clear – and it showed in the defiant letter of victory, the *Zafarnama*, sent by Guru Gobind Singh to Aurangzeb – that the Sikhs had struck the first of the blows which were to lead to the demise of the moghul empire. In fact within 7 years of the tenth Guru's death in 1708, Banda Bahadur and his Sikhs had wreaked terrible vengeance on Sirhind, where the Guru's two younger sons had been murdered, and had control of large areas around Delhi. (**35**, vol. I.)

**38.** *The Harmandir and the Akal Takht figure prominently throughout Sikh history.* In 1738 the manager of Harmandir, Bhai Mani Singh, was tortured to death in Lahore. In the *chota ghallugara* of 1746, the Dewan of Lahore, Lakhpat Rai, massacred thousands of civilians, burned all copies of the Granth Sahib that could be found and desecrated the Amrit Sarovar with rubbish. In 1757 the Afghan, Shah Abdali blew up the Harmandir; Deep Singh and thousands of villagers were killed while trying to reach Amritsar to rebuild the temple. In 1762, after the *vada ghallugara* in which 30,000 women, old men and children were massacred near Kup by the Afghans, Abdali once again destroyed the Harmandir. In 1764 Abdali's hordes fought with and killed Gurbaksh Singh and 29 other defenders of the Harmandir and once again destroyed this temple. The Harmandir was rebuilt completely in 1765. The present marble and gold leaf construction is the result of a grant made by Ranjit Singh in 1802. After Banda's execution in 1716 the leaderless Sikhs started the tradition of deciding all matters concerning the community at *Sarbat Khalsa* assemblies which were held at the Akal Takht on each *Baisakhi* and *Divali*. Such a Sarbat Khalsa resolved that the army of the Sikhs, the *Dal Khalsa*, should be made up from many small and highly mobile *jathas*, each under its own *jathedar*. Later on, in 1748, such a Sarbat Khalsa resolved that the entire Dal Khalsa should be reconstituted into eleven *mists*. (From the beginning of the eighteenth century the Sikhs were de facto rulers of the Punjab countryside: the writ of the governor of Lahore ran no further than some city limits, or, where his army happened to be. This army, and those of the other imperial satraps and of the Mahrathas, were reduced to shambles by the Afghans. On the other hand Sikh power and prestige grew with each of Abdali's nine invasions, as small roving Sikh *jathas* continued to extract a heavy toll from the loot-laden Afghans, as they wound their way back to Afghanistan after pillaging the plains of India. Even before Abdali's death in 1772 the Sikh *misdars* had divided up the entire territory from the Indus to the Jumna amongst themselves.) (**35**, vol. I.)

**39.** This is essentially what is given in Kuldip Nayar's '*Operation Bluestar*' (ch. 3 of **22**). Nayar's essay is a fleshed-out version of the account given in Ch IV of the Govt of India's 'White Paper' of July 10, 1984 (Annexure H of **22**).

40. It is doubtful if these appeals were at all made. They were heard neither by Longowal and others who were in Guru Nanak Niwas (p. 101 of **22**), nor by the pilgrims who were in the Serai.
41. All the precious documents contained in the library, including some *hukumnamas* bearing the signatures of the Sikh Gurus, were reduced to ashes. The librarian D.S. Duggal, who was in his office during the fighting, has told that the library was set on fire by the Indian troops on the morning of June 7, that is, well after the battle had ended. The Indian soldiers had engaged in extensive looting and 'the offices of the SGPC were deliberately set on fire to destroy their account books. It is also more than likely that the archives housing hand-written copies of the *Granth Sahib* and the *hukumnamas* were likewise set alight under the impression that they were account books.' (p. 124 of **22**.)
42. It so happens that this is one of the items banned by the Geneva Convention resolutions against chemical warfare.
43. Khushwant Singh: 'First reports, all issued by government agencies, admitted the death of thirteen women and some children. The same agencies then denied that any women or children had died. When faced with the contradiction, a third version was floated, viz., the women and children had been killed by a grenade thrown by Bjindrawale's men.' (p. 116 of **22**.)
44. Khushwant Singh : 'Bhindrawale forbade his men from entering the Harmandir and there was no firing on the army from it.' (p. 116 of **22**.)
45. Shabeg Singh was one of the star performers of the Indian Army during the 1971 Bangla Desh war: he had infiltrated behind the enemy lines to organise the highly successful *Mukti Bahini*. Jealous of his subsequent meteoric rise, his 'colleagues' had eased him out of the Indian Army by framing him with some trumped-up corruption charges.
46. The Govt of India's list of captured weapons is bigger but as Kuldip Nayar points out 'to say that they were of a sophisticated type is not correct' (p. 111 of **22**).
47. Brahma Chellaney: 'I twice visited the main city crematory on 9 and 11 June to check the fatality toll in the Golden Temple assault. Strangely, while there were troops everywhere in the city, there were none at the crematory. 'The army probably thinks that the ghosts would take care of the intruders,' said the man on duty at the crematorium. He and police officials, who were given charge removing the dead from the temple complex, said *bodies were being brought in municipal garbage truck round-the-clock since early 6 June .... Near the Golden Temple, I saw an estimated 50 corpses in a large rubbish lorry that had sewage still smeared on its outer body. From the back of the grey truck, at least two masculine legs were sticking out and from the left side one could see hanging the forehead and the long flowing hair of an apparently unturbanned Sikh. As I peeped into the truck from the back, I could see dead bodies of at least two women and a child. That night it was difficult to sleep; I kept on thinking of the dead bodies.*' (p.163 of **22**.)
48. Khushwant Singh is one of those affluent (or at least middle or upper middle class) Sikhs who had felt that Sikh interests would be best served by joining the 'Indian mainstream'. In his preface to **22** he states that 'My reaction to the military action was more as an Indian than as a Sikh'. In '*Genesis*', the first of his two essays in **22**, he dismisses the quoted statements by adding, 'Their minds were so inflamed that they believed anything they were told'. Obviously his views had changed drastically by the time he wrote '*The Healing Touch*' (Chapter 4 of **22**) because now he is certain that about 5000 civilians had died in the Golden Temple. Partly this transition may have come about by his close association with the Amrinder Singh Committee, formed to organise the defense of Sikh civilians under detention. As he says 'no newspaper or magazine published in the State was willing to accept a simple paid advertisement asking relatives and friends of people killed, wounded, detained or missing to communicate with the ... Committee.' Finally a Punjabi paper of Delhi carried such an announcement. 'The paper was flooded ... with tales of horror which surpass belief that such things could happen in a civilised society.' Many other Sikhs underwent the same transition as Khushwant Singh during the same time-period. A clean-shaven Sikh I.A.S. officer told me : '*Before Amritsar, I was an Indian and hardly thought of myself as a Sikh. After Amritsar, I found myself talking as a Sikh. And now, after Delhi, I am an angry Sikh.*'

49. I talked to many doctors of the Amritsar Medical College who had performed these postmortems. None of them came across a corpse with circumcision or, for that matter, with a detachable beard. At Patiala and other mofussil towns, the Indian Army, unhindered by any armed opposition, was able to keep a closer eye on the Punjab Police, and the disposal work was done more efficiently: the formality of postmortem was almost totally dispensed away with.
50. The divisional commander had ordered that his 'chilled beer' be kept ready because he'd be back in two hours or so! This confidence was based on the Indian Army's foreknowledge of the kind of arms at the disposal of Jarnail Singh's men: it did not take into account their morale.
51. Brahma Chellaney: 'I spoke to Sikh fundamentalist leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was inside the temple, by walkie talkie from an old, decrepit building near the sprawling shrine complex *'We will not surrender. We will fight to the last man,'* said the 37-year old Bhindranwale in what was apparently his last interview with a journalist. *'No might in the world can make us bow our head.'*" (p. 162 of 22.)
52. The Indian army attacked almost all *gurdwaras* of Punjab, including even the very small and insignificant ones, during the first 2 weeks of June. About 50 of the bigger *gurdwaras* were attacked at the same time as the Golden Temple: *what happened at Dukhniwaran was repeated, with minor variations, at Faridkot, Moga, Muktsar, Ropar ...*
53. There is still no trace of many of the small *amritdhari* boys of the Dam-Dami Taksal who used to accompany Jarnail Singh on his *amrit parchar* tours: a police officer told me that a number of them were shot dead by an Indian army officer because they refused to say *jai hind* instead of *sat sri akal*.
54. Pakistan looms large in the rumour mills of India. Besides this story one can also cite numerous 'foreign hand' charges made by both Indira and Rajiv. Again there was 'the allegation made by Indian official quarters that Pakistan had promised to launch a limited attack on Punjab on 10 June and to instal and recognise Khalistan in the territory gained during the initial thrust' (p. 95, 22). A similar invasion rumour was floated later in September 1984. These days there is a story going around that Pakistan has already started raising a Sikh Regiment. Maybe the idea is simply to keep the pot boiling: who knows when one might need some excuse or the other to justify a 'pre-emptive' strike against Pakistan.
55. The Indian Army in Punjab has quickly cultivated all the vices common to any army of occupation. The going rate for getting your son released, if he has been caught with an unlicensed firearm (a 'very serious' offense), is 3000 rupees.
56. A high-ranking C.B.I. official told me that the government of India has a list of intellectuals active in the fields of Punjabi/Sikh history, literature or theology and that these people are being kept under close scrutiny. Incidentally Yahya Khan's government also maintained an analogous list of intellectuals working in Bengali culture: they were the first to be killed when the Pakistan Army began its massacre in Dacca on March 26-27, 1971.
57. A couple of days ago Kirpal Singh made the news again: this time he had escaped what looked like an amazingly amateurish 'assassination attempt'. Possibly the government hopes that this would boost his sagging image amongst the masses.
58. This helps them incidentally in neutralising some more irksome Sikhs like S. S. Mann etc.
59. The present Sikh members of the officer corps are being quietly relegated to support units, the recruitment of Sikhs has been practically halted – this is not entirely because of the government directives; very few Sikhs are trying to enlist in the Indian Army and I even heard of some Sikh cadets who had resigned from the N.D.A. – and the government is going ahead with its oft-declared intention of 'mixing up' all the units so that, for example, even the 'Sikh Regiment' would have very few Sikhs.
60. The common man in India had great respect for the Indian Army uniform. For this reason, *many Sikh officers did not use their hand weapons at all in the vain hope that somehow their uniforms would save them. Obviously the Indian government, now without fear of any Sikh revolt in the army, had given special instructions to its goons not to spare Sikhs in uniform.*

61. In 1792 Sukerchakia *misdar* Maha Singh died and his 12 year old son, Ranjit Singh, became ruler of a small principality around Gujranwala. Abdali's grandson Shah Zaman started making plans for reconquering India. It was left to 16 year old Ranjit Singh to rally the Sikhs together, and inflict a crushing defeat on the Afghans at Ram Nagar, and again, two years later, near Amritsar. In 1799, Ranjit Singh took over the administration of Lahore and on Baisakhi of 1801 was crowned Maharaja of Punjab by a venerable Bedi descendant of Guru Nanak. Soon Ranjit Singh's suzerainty came to be accepted by all the Sikh chiefs, including the ones across the Sutlej in Malwa. The British sent Metcalfe to the *Durbar Khalsaji* to 'spin things out' with Ranjit Singh while a large British army was brought up to the Sutlej. When Metcalfe sprung his ultimatum on the Sikhs, many hot-headed generals wanted to engage the British army right then, but Ranjit Singh realised that the enemy was stronger and signed a treaty of friendship with the British in 1809 accepting the Sutlej as his southern boundary. The period 1809-1822 saw the armies of *Sarkar Khalsaji* conquering places as far flung as Multan, Kashmir and Attock. The British, who had their designs all along on the Punjab, now started hemming in the *Durbar*, while all the time protesting ever-lasting friendship. The Amirs of Sind were coerced into signing a 'commercial' treaty; encouragement was given in 1827 to a phoney *jihad* by one Syed Ahmed (which was quickly put down); and, using the presence of a refugee grandson of Abdali at Ludhiana, they started interfering in the politics of Afghanistan: they even persuaded Ranjit Singh to sign a Tripartite Treaty in 1838 under which the armies of the British, the Punjab and the refugee Afghan Shah Shuja would jointly retake Kabul. Ranjit Singh was stricken ill soon after signing this treaty and died in 1839. (35, vol. I.)

62. *Anglo-Sikh Wars*. Ranjit Singh had foreseen the impending danger from the British and had raised a large, well trained and patriotic army. However many of the best Sikh generals, for example, Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phoola Singh, had been killed during the previous campaigns; and the Sikh nobility fell to fighting amongst themselves, and there were a number of palace intrigues and murders in the six years following Ranjit Singh's death. Effective power had by 1845 passed to the *panches* of the leaderless Sikh army. However Ranjit Singh's youngest son, 8 year old Dalip Singh, was on the throne and palace administration was in the hands of Dalip's mother, Rani Jindan, and Lal Singh. Both of them hated the army *panches* for having murdered Jindan's brother Jawahar Singh. Lal Singh, Tej Singh (a nephew of Ranjit Singh's brahmin *deorhidar* Khushal Chand/Singh, and now the C-in-C of the Sikh army) and Gulab Singh Dogra (the governor of Jammu) had all already made secret deals with the British. Lal Singh deliberately held back the major part of the Sikh army and committed the rest against a superior British force: even then, the Sikhs almost won the fierce battle of *Mudki* on Dec 18. Three days later at *Ferozeshahr* the Sikh army had brought things to such a pass that the British generals were thinking in terms of an unconditional surrender. '*The British suffered terrible casualties; every single member of the governor general's staff was killed or wounded. That frosty night "the fate of India trembled in the balance"*' (p. 49). All that remained was the *coup de grace* which could have been easily delivered by the fresh Sikh troops under Tej Singh which had just arrived on the scene. '*Tej Singh's guns opened fire. The British artillery had no shot with which to reply. Then, without reason, Tej Singh's guns also fell silent ...*' (p. 50). Defeat was now inevitable, but still the Sikh army did not give in. *Sabroan, February 10, 1846, was the Waterloo of the Sikhs*. Sham Singh Attariwala and thousands of Sikhs fought bravely till the very last. 'Lord Hardinge, who saw the action, wrote: "Few escaped; none, it may be said, surrendered. The Sikhs met their fate with the resignation which distinguishes their race"' (p. 53). The British took over the Jullundur *doab* and gave Jammu and Kashmir to the Dogra; administration of Lahore was also effectively under British control but Lal Singh and Jindan stayed on for a few months. The new governor general Dalhousie now started thinking in terms of complete annexation of Punjab. A small revolt in Multan was deliberately allowed to deteriorate and then the *Durbar* (which had been allowed to keep a very small army) was blamed for not putting it down. In the fierce battle of *Chillianwala* (Jan 13, 1849) the British were defeated soundly. But Sikhs were in no position to capitalise on this and the superiority of numbers and armour decided the issue in the decisive battle of *Gujarat* on March 11, 1849. On March 29, 1849 Dalip Singh 'stepped down from his illustrious father's throne - never to sit on it again'. (35, vol. II.)

63. All Punjabis (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) remained unaffected by the mutiny of 1857. 'This was not surprising because those, who in the summer of 1857 claimed to be crusaders for freedom, were the very people who eight years earlier had been the feringhees' instruments in reducing Punjabis to servitude.' (Vol. II, p. 109 of **35**.) From 1860 onwards there was a period of great prosperity for some Sikhs, ushered in by the development of the canal colonies in W. Punjab.
64. Throughout Sikh history 'the lost *sau sakhi* of Guru Gobind Singh' has been used and abused, both by Sikhs and non-Sikhs, as a vehicle for channelising Sikh national aspirations by playing upon the superstitions of the masses: in 1857 the British discovered a version which predicted a joint Anglo-Sikh conquest of Delhi. In 1970s the *namdharis* discovered another version predicting a Russian invasion and the founding of the dynasty of Ram Singh. In 1947 still another, predicting that the ruler of Patiala would become the "maharaja" of the Sikhs, was found. Various new versions of the *sau sakhi* are being circulated in Punjab these days.
65. Throughout the British rule revolutionary activity was confined almost exclusively to the Sikhs: Maulana Azad, in '*India Wins Freedom*', mentions that 80 per cent of all revolutionaries sentenced to death, or deported to the Andamans, were Sikh.
66. In the eighteenth century it had become necessary, because of moghul persecution, to leave the management of many *gurdwaras* to non-Sikh *mahants*. In course of time these hereditary managers had introduced idol worship in these *gurdwaras* and had obtained proprietary legal rights to the shrines.
67. Khushwant Singh: 'The government tried to isolate the Akalis by giving wide publicity to the story that they (the Akalis) wished to restore Sikh rule in the Punjab. This propaganda had the reverse effect. Even Sikhs who had kept aloof from the movement felt that it was their duty to support a party which intended to restore their kingdom.' (Page 210 of **35**, vol. II.)
68. Emboldened by this announcement, the Congress went ahead and asked, a few months later, for complete independence. (In December 1929.)
69. During the *gurdwara* agitation, there were Hindu-Muslim communal riots in March 1923. Not surprisingly, the Sikhs remained aloof from them: In fact they "rendered useful assistance to the authorities in maintaining order pending the arrival of military reinforcements" and due to this there was a temporary rapprochement between the Sikhs and the British government and 1000 Akalis arrested at Guru-ka-Bagh were released (p. 207, vol. II of **35**). Most of the Hindu-Muslim tension stemmed from the *shuddhi sabhas* (**23**) of the Arya Samaj and the fact that a prominent Arya Samaji was assassinated by a Muslim in 1897.
70. *Shahidganj* is where thousands of Sikhs had been slaughtered in 1746 during the *chota ghallugara*; the Muslims claimed that it was a mosque.
71. Khushwant Singh: 'In the critical years preceding the relinquishment of power by Britian, Sikh leaders allowed themselves to be guided by the leaders of the National Congress and, instead of boldly demanding a sovereign Sikh state (which the masses wanted), put the notion forward only as an argument against Pakistan.' (Page 290, vol. II of **35**.)
72. *In retrospect 1947 was but a pause in the continuing Sikh struggle to achieve the proclaimed objective of a Sikh state.* As a first step, Sikhs now tried to persuade the Congress party to apply its principle of linguistic provinces (which had been applied to Madras and Bombay states) also to Punjab. They were unsuccessful; in fact the government merged the small princely states (which already had Sikh majorities) into Punjab and thus created a single Hindu-majority state. *In 1960 the Akali Dal launched an agitation for Punjabi Suba; over 50,000 Sikhs were arrested but nothing came out of this morcha.* To some extent the Sikh struggle had been stalled by the ebullience and industry of the Sikhs themselves. In a few short years after 1947 they had spread far and wide over India, and in Punjab, they had ushered in the "green revolution" which had brought them unprecedented prosperity. A school of Sikhs, of which Partap Singh Kairon (the Chief Minister of Punjab from 1957 to 1964) was the leader, came to believe that Sikh interests would be best served by continuing to remain in the Indian body politic. It was clear however that in a country where they only made two per cent of the population, and where their prosperity evoked intense jealousy in



the Hindu majority, this state of affairs was only temporary. With Kairon's removal in 1964, the Suba movement gathered fresh momentum. *However, the Sikhs sided with the Indian government during the Indo-Pak Border War of 1965 and, in fact, had it not been for the Sikh soldiers' loyalty, the Indian army would have suffered a disastrous defeat in this war.* In 1966, the Congress government finally conceded the demand for a Punjabi Suba. However, some Punjabi-speaking areas, and the capital city (!) of Chandigarh, were left out while drawing the boundary of this new state. Inevitably, this led to new agitations, but to this date these issues remain unresolved. Concomitant with these agitations was the demand for more state autonomy (voiced first in the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973) which was construed (perhaps correctly) by the government as a demand for a Sikh state, and led to the bloodshed of 1984 described above.

**73.** Because of legal constraints it is obvious that no Indian journalist can give full expression to the Sikh side of the story. But let alone speak one's mind, one can't even write what one has seen: A.P. correspondent Brahma Chellaney is being harassed to this day for having written a straightforward account of what he had seen in Amritsar from June 5, 1984, to June 11, 1984. (The police is, amongst other things, investigating whether this Hindu was inciting Sikhs to kill Hindus!) Some Sikh journalists – I am referring mainly to the Punjabi press for there is hardly any Sikh working for the English language newspapers and magazines – are trying to get their message across by simultaneously saying things in opposite directions, and hoping that (i) the authorities would deem them to have cancelled each other, and (ii) their readers would be sharp enough to see what they meant and what they didn't; some others have tried to use analogy, for example, various *sakhis* from Sikh history, or else some form of verse. As far as the rest of the journalists are concerned, 99 per cent of them are so anti-Sikh that it is only by mistake that they say anything sympathetic towards the Sikh cause. Fortunately, most of these scribes are so bad at their job that they could not possibly fool even the most gullible amongst the Sikhs. But there is a small elite of Arya Samaji journalists (working for some of the best known newspapers and magazines of North India) who are so 'good' at their job that they can more often than not mislead and misinform even the wary reader. In each article they do on the Sikhs, these people casually let drop some anecdote or opinion whose object is to keep the *bhapa vs. jat* pot boiling; and equally casually, something about 'the Sikhs' traditional antipathy towards the Muslims'. [The fact of course is that no community hates any other *per se*. History shows that Sikhs have fought tooth and nail against *those* who happened to be thwarting their national aspirations: be they Muslim, or British, or Hindu. And history also shows that 'traditional enemies' – for example, the Hindus (and Sikhs) of India and the Muslims of East Pakistan – are quick to shake hands when it is to their mutual advantage.] *However some of these top journalists are politically aligned with the B.J.P. and the Janata Party and are interested in the Delhi massacre simply because there is plenty of legally admissible evidence available by which complicity of the Congress can be proved in the courts; thus in so far as exposing the Delhi massacre is concerned, these people would be of immense help to the Sikhs.* The '*Illustrated Weekly of India*' and '*Sunday*' are about the only English language magazines which still publish articles by people who have genuine sympathy for the Sikhs. The newspaper '*Indian Express*', and the B.J.P. - R.S.S. owned '*Surya*', have their own axes to grind against the Congress government, and so are also worth reading. The Western press correspondent gets his information second-hand from 'Indian' friends and sources: almost invariably this means some anglicized Hindus, usually high-level civil and military officers or some foreign-trained academics and technicians. All these Hindus are absolutely convinced that, 'it is very regrettable, but the Sikhs had to put in their place'; and, to them, what happened in Delhi was simply that 'an outraged majority, which could not bear any more the depredations of the Sikhs, lost its patience and taught them a lesson'. 'Of course, in the heat of the moment, some local Congress officials and policemen lost their head and became 'over-enthusiastic', but that's all!' If one supplements this by providing the necessary 'background', e.g., 'like cholera and typhoid communal riots break out all the time and all over India', the poor befuddled Westerner is apt to believe all this. If such a massacre had happened, say, in Paris, the government of France would hardly have been able to hush it up. But this is India, the mysterious East, where the sublime is so intimately mixed with the slime, so what can one say?

In '*The Continent of Circe*', Nirad C. Chaudhri makes some perceptive comments about

the way in which the world's knowledge of India is collected. Before 1947 the district-level British administrators (later to be caricatured as *koi hais* and Colonel Blimps) were the ones who collected the information. They were practical men and interested only in knowledge that was of practical usefulness. *'It was not strong in generalization, and what theories it aired were more or less amateurish. But being absolutely first-hand the knowledge rang true ...'* These people collected their information directly from the common man and 'knew little about the Westernizing middle-class, and certainly cared still less ... All this has been not only changed but replaced by the opposites. The seekers of knowledge about India are no longer workers seeking it for practical ends, but nearly all *des cerbreux*, engaged in observation and interpretation, sometimes out of intellectual curiosity, sometimes in the service of preconceived ideas and policies ... *the world's knowledge about India today is obtained overwhelmingly at one remove from people belonging to the Westernized and urban upper middle-class, who have become heirs of British rule. For nimbleness of wit, plausibility, argumentative skill, and gift of the gab they are not surpassed by many people on the face of the earth'*. Chaudhri points out – and Chellaney can testify to it – that, 'Any attempt to know India by direct observation is resented ... If ... a large number of qualified foreigners were to appear with the avowed object of carrying out field observations, the existing silken curtain is likely to be replaced by one of iron.' Such an attempt is resented not only by the Indian government, but also by the Western diplomats who are fearful of any news reportage which might create strains between their governments and the government of India: 'if one were to consider only the immediate interests of policy and not its long-term results, it has to be admitted that the abject fear that the West displays in respect of everything said or published about contemporary India and the other newly emancipated countries, is fully justified.' 'Any foreign journalist who shows unwelcome curiosity, or any writer, Indian or foreign, who is capable of detachment soon runs into trouble.'

Still, if an investigative foreign reporter is willing to buck the system by bringing out all the ugly facts regarding the Delhi massacre to light, it should not be so difficult: I am pretty sure, for example, that some Western diplomats have by now a very accurate idea of exactly what was discussed at those 'law-and-order' meetings of October 31 which took place in the P.M.'s residence.

**74.** William F. Buckley Jr., '*... and the wall of separation*': 'The Indian state, as an independent country with its present borders, is less than 40 years old, and no American will with any confidence give objective reasons why existing frontiers are the correct ones, or historical reasons to suggest that there is something geologically fixed about 40-year old frontiers ... we fought a huge civil war twice 40 years after the United States was founded because a whole region of the country wished to disassociate itself.'

**75.** Rajni Kothari, '*The aftermath*', Illustrated Weekly of India, December 23-29, 1984.