

BIDAR

The Signal from Bidar

Through this booklet, the Punjab Human Rights Organisation presents its first-hand account of the September 1988 incidents in Bidar, Karnataka, India. The PHRO Chairman, Justice A. S. Bains, himself visited the place, spent a week in the area to collect vital information soon after the incidents. The booklet provides a new insight into the incidents despite several limiting factors. There is no doubt that much more about these shocking incidents would become known as time passes. The police and Shiv Sena insiders have yet to come out with their parts of the Bidar story.

Nevertheless, Bidar sends important new signals again. The November 1984 incidents did convey a message but probably their significance was not fully comprehended by the world at large. The Bidar message is a little more mature and clear in its tone. India is not what many would wishfully call it a nation. There are numerous nations within India thinking and working at cross-purposes against each other. The country has not moved an inch towards one-nation State. On the other hand, contradictions between different nations in India are getting sharper and sharper. If Hindu-Muslim contradiction has been a matter of fact in India for centuries, the Hindu-Sikh cleavage is now a new reality.

With Sikhs and Punjab placed at a pivotal place in India and Southeast Asia's geography, the cleavage has a unique potential for the good as well as for the not so good for the region.

If the cleavage is allowed to grow, as a likely, it will have far reaching consequences for India and for the Southeast Asian security. The misdeeds of India's chauvinistic ultras are a Godsend opportunity to those who would like the region to be balkanised.

That is how the PHRO intercepts and interprets the signal from Bidar. The Bidar tragedy is certainly a nail in the coffin to Indian unity.

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Introduction

A Historical Background of Bidar

Guru Nanak (1469-1539 AD), founder of the Sikh faith, visited Bidar on his way to Ceylon around 1510. Ever since this ancient town appears to have supported a small but conspicuous Sikh society. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 AD), the 10th guru, paid much attention to these Sikhs. One of the "Five Beloved Ones," that is, the very first five initiates into the order of Khalsa namely Bhai Sahib Singh hailed from this town. During his last days he sent Mai Bhago, one of the spiritually elevated Sikhs of her time, to settle at Janwada (about 10 kms from Bidar) to preach Sikhism.

The sweet water spring (Jheera) around which the main Sikh shrine (Gurdwara) is built became again effectively controlled by the Sikhs at late as 1950. Development of the place began with renewed vigour. Sikh attention was also focused on it since a similar place of worship (Panja Sahib) became a part of the newborn Pakistan and access to which was restricted. Most Sikhs came to regard the town as a substitute for Panja Sahib making it a big centre of pilgrimage.

The offerings of pilgrims at Nanak Jheera steadily increased. The management was encouraged to undertake certain social welfare measures for the betterment of the people of Bidar. It built the following institutions:

Guru Nanak Hospital now with 500 beds was founded in 1969. It continues to provide free medical aid to the sick of all communities. Guru Nanak Public School was started in 1975. It has 1500 students on its rolls of whom 1454 are non-Sikhs. Guru Nanak Dev Engineering College started functioning on August 8, 1980. Admission to this college has been refused to any local student who applied for it. The non-Sikh percentage of students is 57. Guru Nanak Dev Polytechnic having 60 present Sikh students was set up in 1986. Guru Nanak Dev Pre-University College started functioning this year.

Altogether about 600-700 Sikh students of the above-mentioned institutions, mainly those of Engineering College, were victims of the present attacks on the Sikhs at Bidar.

This small (population: a little more than one lakh) ancient town, housing these and several other institutions, was rocked by looting, arson, mayhem and murder. It continued for at least four days beginning September 14, 1988, and left a deep ugly scar on the minds of Sikh people, as the victims were exclusively Sikhs. The impact of happenings was great. It sent shock waves through out the Sikh world as students from all over the country were studying at Bidar. News of concern and protest poured in daily. Brutal nature of happenings was particularly noted with grave concern.

A great deal thus already appeared in the Press before the Punjab Human Rights Organisation decided to send its Chairman, Mr Justice A. S. Bains, a retired Judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, to Bidar to probe into the matter. Mr Bains was assisted and accompanied by Mr Gurtej Singh, a former Indian Administrative Service Officer, who had at one time served in adjoining Medak district of Andhra Pradesh, and had acquaintance with the area and its people.

The team landed at Hyderabad on September 29, 1988, and discussed the Bidar incidents with local Sikhs including an engineer, a doctor and a businessperson. The team continued the discussions the next morning with a couple of civil servants also joining in. Thereafter, it recorded the statement of the still-dazed Kuldip Singh (18), who was making a miraculous recovery from nearly a dozen stab wounds in the local hospital. It also talked to his father and the doctors who had first attended on him and others.

Thereafter the team set out by road for Bidar that is 134 kilometres from Hyderabad. About four kilometres from Bidar its vehicle was stopped by a posse of police officers who thoroughly searched the vehicle. The luggage of the driver and the team was opened up and given a thorough check up. The persons of the occupants were frisked with hand-held metal detectors. The morning papers to all Sikhs entering the town that day projected the degrading welcome. The team went straight to the main shrine and saw thickly surrounded by the police. Police officers in uniform were freely moving about in the premises of the Gurdwara.

Rest of the day was spent in interviewing people, recording their statements, and gathering information and in discussions. Amongst those interviewed were a few officials, Gurdwara and College management people, some local politicians, social workers and students. This went on till late at night and was resumed early next day when discussions were also held with the police top brass. The team also visited the sites of the incidents.

Several Press clippings were collected and many photographs showing destruction were obtained. The team also held a Press conference. People interviewed were generally found to be co-operative and communicative except for the officials who would not say much in public in view of the impending enquiry by a High Court Judge. Justice A. S. Bains continued this sort of work on the next day. Some of those interviewed, however, requested anonymity. Before and after the visit, several students who have returned to Punjab and Chandigarh from Bidar were also interviewed and their statements were recorded.

The police did not allow the team to proceed to Janwada. It provided security to the point of annoyance. It must, however, be mentioned that the DIG promptly withdrew the rude police intruders from the Gurdwara premises once the team mentioned to him that they were serving no useful purpose as they many times outnumbered the peaceful pilgrims engaged in worship.

I Bidar - The Incidents

The local permanent Sikh settlers number only 11 households and 9 business establishments. All these establishments were looted and burnt. Extensive damage was done to buildings housing Sikh institutions. An attack on the main Gurdwara was attempted and Mai Bhago's Gurdwara at Janwada was desecrated twice on September 15-16 and 25. According to a conservative estimate Sikh property worth Rs 2 crore was looted or destroyed. Five Sikh students of Engineering College were murdered. The sixth similarly murdered was a Sikh student of Kishan Mal Pandey Ji D Pharmacy College, Bidar. Apart from a dozen or so grievously hurt, at least 125 Sikh students sustained serious injuries.

The most of all this happened on Ganesh Chaturathi festival that fell on September 15 this year. Ganesh is the son of one major god of Hindu trinity namely Shiva. He is supposed to have four arms and the head of an elephant. In Hindu mythology, he is believed to have been born on this day. His worship was popularised by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The other festival popularised by him was connected with Shivaji Marhatta, an eighteenth century patriot after whom Shiv Sena is named. The celebration of this festival invariably accompanies tension between Hindus and Muslims and has quite often resulted in violence.

There is evidence to show that isolated incidents had occurred last year too on the same occasion. Mr Joga Singh president of the Gurdwara management had written a letter to the SP Bidar apprehending what was averted last year but happened with a vengeance this year (Copy of the letter is appended). Students recall that of late tiffs between them and local toughs had become a usual feature.

Many such quarrels were reported to the police from time to time. Some students recalled the one near a local cinema that created quite a stir. Several students remember having received threats to their lives before the September incidents. At least in one case the response of the Superintendent of Police was; "Have not you heard that barking dogs never bite?" Central Intelligence Officials told our team that his office apprehended anti-Sikh trouble as early as May 1988.

About three weeks before September 15, an organisation known as New Shiv Sena was launched at Bidar; along with an aggressive organisation mostly comprising rowdy elements. It was ostensibly formed for the celebration of Ganeshpuja. People belonging to the above three organisations started collecting funds for the festival. They indulged in huge

extortion, forced students to pay to several different batches of donation-seekers, and repeatedly threatened those who would not pay. Some students paid Rs. 100 or more even though they were reluctant to pay on the ground of financial stringency and also because they belong to a different faith. Altercations were common because of this and great tension must have prevailed in the town.

Ignition point was reached at about 21:00 hours on September 14, in the Baduruddin colony (renamed Gandhi Ganj) which is a meeting place and a trade centre. Several activists of chauvinistic organisations live in this area. Donation seekers confronted a group of Sikh students returning after eating out. They refused to pay on the ground of having paid earlier. Receipts were demanded but were not readily available. This led to an altercation and resulted in the students being beaten up by local toughs who were in large numbers and came prepared. The scenario was repeated and it further exasperated the situation. Agitated mobs soon started attacking Sikhs in the area and set their houses on fire.

Students gathered in-groups and started proceedings to the Gurdwara for safety. Police intercepted some such groups and took some students in custody. Two of them managed to reach the Gurdwara. The first three students reached at about 22:30 hours. Promptly they were sent to lodge a complaint with Gurdwara at about midnight.

Next morning at about 08:00 hours it was known that mobs were continuing with what they had begun earlier. Students pursued the same strategy to reach the Gurdwara or the college (the two are five miles apart). Soon some 600-700 students collected in the college. An attempt by about 30 of them to go to Gandhi Ganj to take revenge was foiled by the Principal Mr M. S. Sukhija who persuaded them to return to the college campus. Local police were present on the scene.

A small mob that steadily swelled soon gathered outside in the vast open space near the boundary wall and started demolishing a part of it. The Principal made repeated requests to the Deputy Superintendent of Police to prevent the demolition but failed to activate him or anyone of his 250-odd police officers. He stirred only when the mob entered the college campus and students tried to repulse the attack. The police then fired in the air, fired three rubber bullets on the students and lobbed several tear gas shells at them forcing them to retreat. Police stood by while the crowd destroyed the college property.

The Superintendent of Police appears to have been running around the town the whole day without intervening anywhere to prevent looting, assault, arson or murder. It was the Ganeshpuja day and crowds of 100-200 persons had gathered at every street corner for celebration. Instigators freely moved about the town inciting violence. He was informed in time about the burning of Mr Joga Singh's house by a responsible public man but did nothing to prevent it although he passed that way. Similarly, Mr Iqbal Singh Bhatia told our team that from the Gurdwara he could see the mob preparing to loot his house and to set it on fire. He kept on relaying a sort of running commentary of the happenings to the Superintendent of Police standing nearby but failed to move him to act. Most of damage to life and property was done on this day.

Right up to the evening crowds went about plundering, maiming and murdering without any fear of law. The students claim that they often heard the mob shout "Police Zindabad" (long live the police) and "SP Zindabad." Going by what all it calmly tolerated, it appears the police were attempting to immortalise itself in the estimation of lawless elements.

According to all accounts, the crowd was armed with bamboo sticks (of uniform size and colour), iron pikes, daggers and incendiary material.

At about 19:00 hours, the Deputy Inspector General of Police arrived from nearby Gulbarga. He arranged for eight busloads of students to be shifted from the college to the Gurdwara that was safer. Perhaps that is what should have been done the previous day. He also rescued 41 students who were in police custody, although the Superintendent of Police solemnly denied the fact earlier.

Vandalism and arson continued for the third day on the September 16. Mai Bhago's Gurdwara was perhaps looted on this day. Lawlessness was continuing when a meeting of the peace committee was arranged at noon by the administration. The college building evacuated the previous evening was extensively damaged on this day. It was alleged in the meeting of the peace committee that three bodies floating in a well were not recovered though one from the same place had been recovered. (Indian Express, September 19, 1988).

Some stray incidents also took place on September 17 and 18.

Of the students who lost their lives two were brothers and the only children of their parents, one was the only male child in the families of two brothers and a sister. The misery of these families is beyond comprehension. Dead bodies of four students were recovered from a well that is just about a hundred meters from the residence of the Superintendent of Police. Other two boys died in hospital as a result of injuries sustained during mob attacks. The dead students are listed below:

1. Upkar Singh (D Pharmacy College) S/o Lakhbir Singh Shonil Refreshment, Bus Stand, Dhariwal (Gurdaspur).
2. Jasbir Singh Anand (3rd year Mech) S/o Joginder Singh Anand 326-A, Vishnu Colony, Op. Co-operative Bank, Kurukshetra (Haryana).
3. Gurinder Singh (3rd year Civil) S/o Mohinder Singh C-50, South Extension Part-2, New Delhi.
4. Harvinder Singh (3rd year Civil) S/o Gurcharan Singh Lajpat Nagar, Barbanki (UP).
5. Amarjit Singh S/o Gurcharan Singh Lajpat Nagar, Barbanki (UP).
6. Balvinder Singh Bawra (3rd year Mech) S/o Puran Singh 556/6, Raj Park, Jaipur (Rajasthan).

II The Findings

A. Nature of the Incidents

1. The ways of those responsible for the November 1984 incidents of Delhi and other north Indian cities seem much too common with the perpetrators of similar crimes at Bidar. There was the absence of hurry. The underlying intention was to insult the Sikh religious symbols, to expel the Sikhs from Bidar, and to destroy their institutions and property.

2. The nature of injuries and the mode of killings show that the mobs were inspired by deep-rooted hatred of Sikhs and Sikhism. One beardless lad of 18, who had been in Bidar only for one month before September 14, 1988, was pursued for kilometre and was hunted down in a maize field like a wild beast. He received a dozen stab wounds. Four boys were badly beaten up and then thrown into a well to ensure that they would not survive. Hairs of some of them were removed. One boy was put up on the electric saw to be cut up like a log.
3. There are no reports of Muslims having taken part in attacks. On the contrary, they tried to save the students and several stories were current to show how they responded with compassion. Some Hindus of the town also did the same. It is creditable that they chose to remain unaffected by the prevailing sentiment of hatred.
4. Fans were removed before setting buildings on fire; tyres and engines of vehicles were likewise saved for themselves by arsonists. Our team saw several such vehicles. The pre-meditated nature of the holocaust is also clear from the fact that where students were living in houses belonging to Hindus, their property was taken outside and buried but where they were living in houses belonging to Muslims no such precautions were deemed necessary. Houses of Muslims were also set on fire.
5. Much significance needs to be attached to the fact that bamboo sticks carried by the crowd were of one colour and were uniform in size (Indian Express: Hyderabad September 24, 1988.)

B. Role of the Police and Administration

1. There is evidence to show that lumpen elements from outside Bidar were imported by road particularly on September 15, 1988. The police ignored it. Prevention of such infiltration into an atmosphere surcharged with anti-Sikh frenzy should have been the first priority and could have been easily managed by the administration when there were warnings and a history of incidents.
2. All civil administration except the police is totally out of the picture. The District Magistrate and the Sub Divisional Magistrate were both reported to be on leave and out of station. Abandoning their charge at the festival time is in contravention of instructions. Enquiry ordered by the Karnataka Government will perhaps also look into whether the absence was by accident or design. It certainly is abnormal.
3. The police turned Nelsons' eye to ample prior warnings. The experience also did not make it active. On the 14th evening, it did not try to nip the evil in the bud when such possibility clearly existed. It did not prevent damage to Sikh educational institutions but abetted their destruction. All nine-business premises belonging to the Sikhs were completely burnt down. Police failed to save even a single one. It, however, promptly used force on the besieged students.
4. Prior information about the burning of houses reached the police but it remained inactive. Boundary wall of the college was pulled down with connivance of the police. Professional failures are in scores. Their attitude of appeasing the criminally inclined mob erodes deeply into the very rationale of the existence of the force. The Superintendent's statement to the Press that he gave priority to saving lives and not property is ridiculous as neither could be saved.

5. The police gave a solemn assurance to the college management and its Deputy Inspector General that no student was in its custody. Yet 41 students were in custody and they complain of harsh beating by the Police while in custody.
6. Under these circumstances, some significance can be placed on the fact that bodies of four students were recovered from a well very near the residence of Superintendent of Police.
7. As already stated the Director General of Police, his Inspector General and Deputy Inspector General all avoided discussing events, as they were expected to figure at the impending enquiry by the High Court Judge. They were quite annoyed and embarrassed at the handling of incidents by the local police. Some loud thinking on those lines was done by the Director General of Police and appeared in the Press on October 2, 1988.
8. The State Government inordinately delayed appointment of a judge and valuable evidence was allowed to be partially destroyed. Not a single penny has been paid to victims; not even an ad-hoc grant to those lost everything.

C. Role of the Media

The Press has many privileges that the average person may question only at grave peril to himself. Selective indifference to events is one such privilege. No one can help mourning the lack of professionalism in the Fourth Estate. Following assessment of the role of the Press is by an insider:

"The anti-Sikh riots in Bidar, a remote town in Karnataka, have many lessons for the country. The national Press, which reported the protests against the defamation bill even in far-flung areas, failed to take notice of the rioting for 10 days. Not a word came out until some Sikh students reached Delhi to tell their tales of woe.

"Stringers of newspapers and news agencies in Bidar, it appears, were late in sending their despatches; and what is worse, Press telegrams were not cleared for a few days. This is not the first time that a telegraphic office has acted as a censor or that a local official has sent unofficial instructions not to transmit messages. I experienced this in Guwahati some time ago when I filed my copy on the agitation against 'foreigners' in Assam.

"When reports did arrive at newspaper offices, the news desks also failed to appreciate the gravity of the situation - apparently because of delay, they tended to take the reports as "stale" news.

"The national Press, it is true, cannot have staffers in every town in the country but even when the story appeared in some regional newspapers, correspondents of big newspapers did not follow it up. I cannot say that this was because of any communal "prejudice," though most of the subsequent stories were categorical in putting the blame on the Shiv Sena for fomenting the trouble but the national Press cannot absolve itself of the initial lapse. How to ensure that it does not happen again is for the media to study."

- "The lessons from Bidar"
by Kuldip Nayar, The Tribune, October 6, 1988.

While talking to reporters at Bidar, our team wondered why stories were filed so late. The UNI reporter replied with a broad grin: "it was a holiday being Ganesh Chaturathi."

The All India Radio and the Doordarshan maintained a studied silence for several days. Who could have organised the operation blackout particularly at the level of the origin of the incidents? The Central Government offices deal with the transmission of news communication. The blackout reminds one again of the similar arrangements made at the time of the November 1984 incidents when the Press in Punjab was placed formally under censorship. The entire media in what appears to be a calculated move "acted" in concert. It seems certain powers that he kept a close vigil in the news agencies that were not allowed to report incidents in a normal manner. The newspapers that happen to be clients of the two monopolies, government-financed and government-controlled news agencies, had a right to ask the agencies why they did not report the incidents in time and in a proper manner. But there is no such evidence.

All this tends to make the Indian fourth estate a unique institution: a vibrant, democratic entity when dealing with ordinary, run-of-the mill events but a closely self-censored/officially-censored institution when dealing with the affairs of the Indian minorities and Dalits. Thus, those who wish to know about the human rights of the minorities and Dalits and their plight in India should look for other sources than the Indian news media. It is a matter of grave concern that certain inter-national media organisations such as the BBC, the Voice of America etc. routinely depend on the Indian news agencies exclusively for the coverage of the entire Indian scene.

III Analysis of cause theories

Immediate Reasons

1. The role-played by official news agencies such as the United News of India (UNI) in the present crisis is blatantly partisan. On the strength of information obtained as usual from 'official sources,' UNI floated the theory of a "clash between two groups over the installation of an idol." This story, incredibly filed on September 16 from Bidar, was picked up by the Indian Express of September 17. The same paper repeated it on September 19, 1988. It was left to the Deccan Chronicle of September 19 to deal a deathblow to it and to highlight the fund collection drive as the real cause.
2. The most favourite of such theories is generally sold as "an island of affluence in a sea of poverty." It suggests that Sikhs at Bidar are very affluent and arouse the jealousies of others. The fact is that they own humble establishments such as a small restaurant, a homeopathic dispensary or a cold drink store. The list of articles lost by students and other Sikhs does not show affluence either. They own small shops in blocks in which others own similar ones. Only one Sikh Mr Joga Singh can pass off as an affluent person. In any case, 11 Sikh families owning nine shops could not have inspired such widespread resentment. What really knocks the bottom out of this theory is that although the economic condition of Muslims is much worse than that of Hindus, not a single Muslim was so consumed by jealousy as to join the mobs.
3. It has been suggested that the students indulged in eve teasing. To have become a menace inspiring a holocaust of this nature, it should have been noticeable enough before the incidents. Yet, neither the Gurdwara management nor the college Principal ever received a single complaint of this nature. The personnel of the Central Intelligence Department were clear that this was not a problem in Bidar. The Deputy Inspector

General of Police supported them. As an afterthought, however, the Director General of Police waved a file at our team and did try to suggest that eve teasing might have happened but agreed that it did not merit notice. "The Inspector General of Police himself confirmed that there was no record of cases registered against them for such offences." Indian Express October 4, 1988, page 3. Mr Veerashethy Kushnour told our team on September 30 in the presence of several respectable persons that stories of eve teasing were circulated on the eve of Chief Minister's visit after the riot to malign the students." Our team at a press conference used this statement the next day. Subsequently when Mr Kushnour gave his statement in writing, he omitted this portion. His spontaneous reaction appears to be more correct than the considered version he penned later.

4. Mr J. S. Aurora, a Member of Parliament, was partly original because apart from subscribing to the affluence theory, he proposed one of his own. "The college needs to change its complexion and approach and shed its exclusiveness. Only then can it be acceptable to the locals and one of the tensions that led to this tragedy eliminated" he told the press. The Constitution of India permits minority institutions to function and maintain "exclusive character." Quite apart from that, his theory does not hold water, because Guru Nanak Engineering College has only 43 percent (forty percent according to Indian Express of September 24, 1988) Sikh students. Shedding of this complexion is not even possible as there are nine such colleges functioning in the area and many locals prefer to study in other colleges. Last year as well as this year no local student who approached the college authorities for admission was refused admission, according to the management. Maximum damage was, however, done to Guru Nanak Public School that has only 46 Sikh students on its rolls. Rest is all local non-Sikhs.
5. It has been repeatedly asserted that the real cause of jealousy was that a medical college, sought by several other rival organisations, was finally sanctioned in favour of Sri Nanak Jheera Sahib foundation. The Chief Minister had to clarify (Indian Express dated September 26, 1988) that the Congress (I) Member of Legislative Council Mr G. M. Bhimanna Khondre had not applied for a medical college as was propagated. In spite of that, the media has loudly proclaimed this rationale for ugly incidents. It is also a fact that by a letter dated 18.7.88 the Government of Karnataka had rejected the request of the Foundation for affiliation. This letter could not have been unknown to the rival organisations as it was also marked to them all.

The real causes thus must be sought elsewhere.

Historical Reasons

The real cause must be sought in the fact that there are historical contradictions between those supporting and upholding the caste system and those opposing it as inhuman and oppressive.

Sikhism, according to its adherents, is an independent dispensation seeking to establish a casteless world order based on equality and justice under the Fatherhood of one God. A lot in this is not acceptable to Brahmanised Hindus. This aspect is said to be at the root of the present Sikh situation in independent India.

This sort of situation has not developed overnight. In fact, it was vividly envisaged. Sir Vincent Churchill and Swami Dharam Tirath were such discerning minds. With prophetic insight, both these great men predicted the consequences of power falling into

"Brahmanised Hindu hands." In *Menace of Hindu Imperialism* (Lahore 1946), the Swami predicted perpetual strife and constant suppression of Dalits and minorities. Both he and Churchill were of the opinion that the only way to avert great misery in the sub-continent was to deny freedom to India. Liberals were of the opinion that constitutional safeguards to Dalits and minorities could achieve the same result, by federal structure and communal representation. Dr Ambedkar attempted to immunise the Dalits by providing fixed quotas for them in bureaucracy and reservations in elections to legislatures. None of these remedies appear to have worked. Juggernaut rolls on remorselessly. It was Bhiwandi yesterday. It is Bidar today.

In India, about 35 lakh Sikhs live outside Punjab. These are settlers who migrated at various stages particularly after the partition of the country in 1947 when most of their State became a part of Pakistan. (At Bidar Mr Joga Singh and few others are descendants of troops sent by the Sikh empire to help the Nizam of Hyderabad around 1830 AD). Several others joined them in 1947 and there is at least one Mr Iqbal Singh Bhatia who has settled only recently after his retirement. Most of the evacuees from Pakistan settled at Delhi and other towns of Uttar Pradesh. Some spread out all over the Hindi speaking areas. Bengal has substantial Sikh population. Local Sikhs who converted to Sikhism early in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries are to be found all over the country.

It has also been generally observed that these migrants are imbued with the pioneering spirit of Diaspora and have economically prospered. There is no doubt also that the spirit of Sikhism that encourages industry, modern scientific approach, adventurous life, casteless ritual-free society and above all service of humanity through productivity has much to do with the prosperity of Sikhs in India and elsewhere.

Sikhs are generally known to be steadfast in their religion have built shrines (Gurdwaras) wherever they have gone. These symbolise democratic behaviour, ritual and caste-free society. This is perhaps the main cause of resentment against them. Stoning, desecration and even destruction of their Gurdwaras has been taking place at the slightest pretext. Gurdwaras Sis Ganj, where the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur was beheaded on orders of Emperor Aurangzeb (in 1775 AD) for upholding the right of Hindus to worship in their fashion, has been no exception. The Sikh holy book, regarded by them as their "eternal living Guru," has never been spared.

This basic feeling of distrust, in the background of doctrinal incompatibility, has been fully exploited by politicians of the Indian National Congress party. It has further been promoted as a considered response to the assertion of their constitutional rights by the Sikhs of Punjab. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, took the lead in declaring the Sikhs outside the Punjab to be hostages depending upon the mercy of local Hindus.

"Sikhs were advised not to press their demand as it would result in their eviction from other States of the Union. It is alleged that Nehru and other national leaders went as far as holding out the threat of persecution of Sikhs by Hindus outside the Punjab if the former insisted on Punjabi Suba." (Cf. Pettigrew, London 1975 Page 92)

His daughter Indira Gandhi echoed the same sentiment both inside and outside the Parliament during the present Sikh agitation for securing certain constitutional rights to Punjab. This refrain was in keeping with her new policy of henceforth depending upon Hindu votes. The Congress (I) party inaugurated the elevation of her son to the office of

Prime Minister in 1984 with the indiscriminate massacre of Sikhs all over the northern States governed, he heads.

The same spirit is working in Bidar and Janwada. That is also the cause of anti-Sikh propaganda incessantly pouring out of the State-controlled media. Matters have been further exasperated by the undeclared but nevertheless effective immunity extended to all those who perpetrated such crimes in November 1984. Going still further, the guilty ones of that massacre have been rewarded with ministerial berths in the Central Cabinet. A number of others have been similarly adjusted in the Hindu belt.

A systematic vilification campaign against the Sikhs was launched by the Congress (I) at the time of December 1984 elections. Both State owned and private media was used to whip up anti-Sikh feelings. It paid dividends. Politicians found it cost-effective. The malicious ones find it safe to hate the Sikhs who are just 2 percent of the total population. Congress (I) particularly discovered in it a goldmine to bolster up its dwindling fortunes.

It is in that context that we must view the happenings at Bidar.

Muslim population of the town is nearly 50 percent, (about 60,000). Hindu-Muslim tensions have been usual at the time of Ganeshpuja. Because of the above mentioned factors, and because of dramatic increase in the number of Sikhs seen at Bidar with the opening of Engineering College, the Muslim-Hindu conflict transformed itself into Sikh-Hindu conflict. Helpless students were available for harassment and extortion. Particularly for the last two years, many people made hay while the sun was shining. This evil grew and grew until it engulfed the entire town on the occasion of Ganeshpuja this year. It is significant that although people from outside joined them, main body of attackers consisted of locals of all ages, many of whom have been identified by the students. The irony is that a few locals (and Punjabi students) were also in the forefront of criminal groups.

No other explanation for what happened at Bidar is therefore possible.

IV The Conclusions

All accounts of the holocaust agree that it is the result of a deep-rooted conspiracy. (Perhaps the enquiry to be conducted by the High Court judge will examine the matter threadbare) Circumstantial evidence that can form the basis of conclusion is as follows:

1. Congress (I) was the biggest beneficiary of arousing anti-Sikh feelings at the time of last elections. It has been widely alleged that ever since it has kept the cauldron boiling with an eye on the next elections.
2. Elections are now in the air and position of that party is much worse, particularly as against the united Opposition parties.
3. Congress (I) has tried to "politicise" the Bidar issue. It allowed its workers to demonstrate at a venue at which members of Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly were not permitted to protest.
4. Congress (I) at the centre has been actively encouraging formation of underground police hit squads to aggravate the Punjab and the Sikh problem.

5. Much against the wishes of the State Chief Ministers, Congress (I) stalwarts have been directly contacting District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police, to cultivate them with a view to using them against the interests of the States concerned and the local administration.
6. Grave allegations have been made in the Press. "They alleged that the mob fury was the handiwork of Congress (I) and RSS elements" (Indian Express September 24, 1988, Page). Editorial comments also point an accusing finger at the Congress (I), "All must also watch the use of which Rajiv Gandhi and his party are putting death and killings in Karnataka." (Indian Express, September 30, 1988).
7. Mr Sanjay Singh's allegations of a murder being committed at the instance of Congress (I) big wigs to implicate him are all too fresh to need repetition.
8. The State government of Karnataka has tried to defuse the crisis and has nothing to gain from it. It appears that SP and Deputy Superintendent of Police symbolise the attitude of Congress (I) while the Deputy Inspector General of Police, that of the Karnataka government to a very large extent including its incompetence and lack of control of the situation.

The circumstantial evidence points an accusing finger only in one direction. The guilty ones of Bidar in 1988 appear to be the same as the guilty ones of November 1984. The aim is also the same that is to pass off as Ultra-Hindus and to sweep the coming elections by again arousing chauvinistic Hindu sentiment.

It will do the country's unity and integrity much good to keep in mind that Bidar may be repeated in all non-Congress (I) ruled States of the Union. All must remain vigilant lest traitors and criminals masquerading as political leaders succeed in their diabolical design of destroying inter-community relations.