

**Plebiscite in Punjab
The Sikh Case**

SUMMARY

International Human Rights Organisation (IHRO) is a non-party, non-governmental organisation (NGO), dedicated to humanistic and democratic values. The voluntary organisation has a selective membership drawn from a variety of disciplines- Law, Journalism, Education, Medicine, Agriculture, Trade and Industry. Since its inception in 1985, the IHRO has been endeavouring to investigate and publicise violations of human rights in this part of the Indian subcontinent and abroad.

IHRO strives to bring together all those who cherish democratic values in all spheres of life- social, economic and political- and takes active steps to preserve, defend and strengthen democracy. It also strives to educate public opinion by propagating rational and constructive views on human rights, dignity and freedom, and to promote the cause of underrepresented nations and peoples including their right to self-determination, with a hope that these efforts will minimise the political conflicts and establish peace.

IHRO believes

‘Whereas it is essential, if a man is not be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by rule of law’ (Preamble to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948).

‘When all other means of resistance against tyranny and oppression have failed, it is legitimate, as a last resort, to turn to the sword’ (Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru (Master) of the Sikhs, 1704).

‘Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in UN charter and covenants. And Human Rights, including the right to self-determination of all nations, are not concerns exclusively within the domestic jurisdiction of the UN member states (Preamble to IHRO Constitution, April 7, 1985).

IHRO seeks

- Justice, social, economic and political
- Liberty of person, nation and peoples
- Equality of all human being in dignity and rights
- Fraternity in the spirit of universality

MEMBERSHIP: Every person shall be qualified to be a member of the organisation, if he/she agrees with its Constitution and accepts the rules and regulations. No office bearer of any political party shall be admitted to the Governing Council. And no member of any political party shall be eligible to be an office bearer of the organisation. Any religious group, institution or NGO can become a member of the IHRO.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

D. S. Gill, Chairperson, International Human Rights Organisation wrote this case. It is based on research undertaken by IHRO in India and United Kingdom. Sukhdev Singh, Chandigarh-based journalist, has edited it.

We are grateful to all those in Punjab, Chandigarh and London who contributed for the production of this manuscript. We also acknowledge the efforts of our colleagues Gurbhajan Singh Gill, Barrister Harjit Singh and Manjit Singh for sharing their enthusiasm and knowledge on the subject, and Mohinder Singh Jawanda, a founder president of the kisan (peasants') movement in Punjab, who liberally contributed for the publication of this case.

This work is dedicated to all those Sikh political activists, religious giants, temporal heads, lawyers, journalists and human rights advocates who have laid down their lives for the defence of their faith and the Sikh case

PREFACE

This work is the product of the joint efforts of our head office in Punjab (India) and European chapter. It succinctly and in plain language sets out the Sikh case. Indian authorities have always claimed that they do not understand the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and do not know what the Sikhs want. We trust that this will set the record straight. It was originally intended to include a chapter dealing with the Sikh situation under International law. Upon reflection, we decided not to do this because such a scholarly work might strain the intelligence of India's rulers.

We have examined the Sikh situation from historical, social, religious and political perspectives. It is a sincere attempt to find a just and lasting solution to the Punjab conflict. The question it poses is whether India has leaders of stature, understanding and goodwill to recognise that Indian diversity is at once India's strength and her weakness; that diversity by definition involves the recognition of India's different identities. The stark choice for India is between political federalism and disintegration.

Whither India? Will Indian leaders ever learn from history? Will the Indian minorities be content, forever, to live in a political vacuum? Sikhs, for one, will not.

Harjit Singh Barrister
President
IHRO European Chapter

LONDON
October 31, 1994

I INTRODUCTION

Sikhs and Punjab burst on the international scene in the wake of Indian army's invasion of the Golden Temple, Amritsar in June 1984. For maximum impact, the invasion was timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom in Lahore in 1605. The milling crowd of thousands of Sikh pilgrims was fired upon indiscriminately. According to the Indian government's figures, 3,374 were killed in the military action. Sikh estimates vary between 5,000 and 15,000. It's a measure of India's inhumanity towards its ethnic minorities that no commission or human rights agency has investigated these licensed killings that included a large number of old men, women and children. Bodies were carried away in army trucks and unceremoniously cremated in mass funerals. In living memory, this is the first time that state authorities have, as a matter of deliberate policy, assailed and demolished the holiest shrine of a religious minority. Not even tyrants like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Ceausescu did that. In the dark annals of Indian military history, this must represent their most inglorious adventure in which Sikh killed Sikh, brother killed brother, and son killed father out of a misguided sense of loyalty to the state. Indian secularism has produced a senseless, self-centred, egoistic and materialistic breed of Indian. Establishment Sikhs are prepared to kill their Sikh brethren for the sake of self-promotion and the government is sufficiently heartless and corrupt to exploit these misguided individuals. These are Machiavellian politics at their best. After all, the Hindus have always claimed that the inspiration behind Machiavelli's Prince is the work of Chanakya, the Brahmin, who glorified the killing of one's opponents to gain power, as an act of supreme wisdom and diplomacy. It is against this background, that we must examine the Sikh case.

For God-fearing Sikhs the invasion of the Golden Temple and the destruction of the Sikh library with its priceless collection of Sikh literature (a significant portion of which was in the hand of the Gurus themselves), Sikh paintings and artefacts, was a traumatic experience. For the first time it dawned on right thinking Sikhs that they can never live in dignity and honour in India (whose Hindu name is Hindustan). Hindu militancy and the rise of right-wing movements with their political slogan of Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan, has a very respectable pedigree. Even Mahatma Gandhi talked about Ram Rajya (the rule of Rama). The rises of Bhartiya Janata Party, Shiv Sena, Rashtriya Sewak Sang, Bajrang Brigade and others of their ilk are sounding the death-knell of Indian secularism, unity and integrity. Ethnic nationalism, amongst India's minorities, is a by-product of the degradation, frustration and humiliation in life suffered by their members. Little wonder then, that amongst India's 25 states some 12 are, to a varying extent, in a state of insurrection. Kashmiris, Sikhs, Assamese, Oriyas and Tamils are all seeking emancipation from Delhi's imperialism.

Historical background

Before British rule, India was never a united country. It was always a collection of princely states. Thus before the British annexed the Punjab in 1849, Punjab was a Sikh kingdom under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Chandragupta Maurya and his grandson, Ashoka, subjugated two-thirds of the Indian sub-continent but could not establish their paramourcy over the whole of India. Samudra Gupta, considered the Napoleon of India, could not bring Punjab and South India to heel. In a multi-state country, regional distinctions tended to keep alive the spirit of local autonomy in well-marked political units. The whole country has passed through a series of foreign invasions but these units (the Indian States) under different names and various ruling dynasties have continued their individual existence throughout Indian history.

Before the arrival of the Moguls and the British, India was parcelled into princely states forever at war with one another. To defeat enemy states, some of the Hindu rulers even invited foreigners to join their armies. The early history of the East India Company is a history of such escapades. The military adventures of George Thomas, born a poor Irish peasant in County Tipperary ended in his setting himself up as the Rajah of Hariana and Tipperary in 1798. Even after the East India Company had annexed the whole of the sub-continent, princely stirrings were in evidence in the Indian Mutiny in 1857. This was not much of a war of independence as there was little identity of purpose between the Moslems who wanted the restoration of the Mogul rule and the Marathas who wanted to re-establish Maratha hegemony. Even in 1947 when independence came, India consisted of British India and 562 princely states. As late as June 1947, the maharajas and nawabs of India met Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy, in the Chamber of Princes and threatened the fatal fragmentation of India into a score of states. 'They threatened to unleash all the fissiparous tendencies of race, religion, region and language lurking just below the fragile surface of Indian unity'¹.

Such is the tapestry of Indian nationhood. India has never been a nation and never will be one so long as the threat of communal, religious, cultural, linguistic and regional balkanisation persists and cultural pluralism and religious tolerance remains a mere vision. Dr. B. G. Gokhale in his book, *The Making of the Indian Nation*, talks about two Indias: "Hindu India" and the India of "regional and religious patriotism." He says that radically, linguistically and politically, the two Indias have remained separate and apart. Professor Sunderam Pillai in his *Autobiography* makes a similar claim on behalf of South India when he says that, that part of India is the India proper. Here the majority of South Indian people continue distinctly to retain their pre-Aryan (indigenous) features, language and social institutions. Dr. Gokhale points out that regional nationalism has always been dominant in Indian politics. He cites the oneness felt by the Marathas and the Sikhs in their heyday as examples of this regional and religious patriotism. Thus judged, India has more than 30 nations such as the Sikh, the Moslem, the Tamil, the Maratha, the Telegu, the Naga and the Mizo nations.

¹ Larry and Dominique and Lapierre: *Freedom at Midnight*, p 213

Although, British rule created a sense of political unity, it failed to transform the configuration of regional cultures in the country. The old European concept of nationality requires community of race, language, religion, culture and political consciousness. This concept does not suit a multiracial, multi-linguistic and multi-religious country like India.

There are two opposing tendencies found among the people of India. The advocates of national unity assert that the touchstone of such unity is the Aryan culture. They claim that India is the house of Aryans (originally migrants from Asia Minor and Iran) and that non-Aryans are not 'sons of the soil.' They proclaim Hinduism as the rightful religion of all India and Hindu culture as its sole culture. They wish to unify Indian culture by slogans of Hindi, Hindu, and Hindustan. Their opponents claim that Indian unity can only be achieved within a federal structure that respects the distinctive religious, cultural, linguistic and political traditions of each of the constituent regions. The protagonists for Indian unity stand for total integration, no assimilation, at the expense of diversity. Their opponents favour local autonomy amounting, in some cases, to independence. The Hindu majority represents the unitarists, while the non-Hindu minorities represent the federalists. The unitarists dub every claim by a minority as communalism. Such is the paranoia let loose that a simple demand for protection of the fundamental human rights and freedom of a minority is dubbed as anti-national. Little wonder that the minorities feel and are treated as second class citizens.

Indian Army's attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 and the demolition of the Babri Masjid (Moslem mosque) by Hindu fanatics are evidence of neo-Fascism and a shift towards a theocratic Indian state. These have, in turn, encouraged separatist movements in Punjab, Kashmir, Assam and Tamil Nadu. Under the pretence of rounding up a handful of alleged Sikh militants, Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian army to attack the holiest Sikh shrine on one of the most auspicious days in the Sikh calendar. To make things worse, Lieutenant General Dayal and Major General Brar, both Sikhs allegedly masterminded the Blue Star Operation or so the Indian authorities claimed on their behalf.

On October 11, 1984, two Sikh bodyguards assassinated Indira Gandhi. In the aftermath of her death, state-organised Hindu mobs murdered thousands of Sikhs in Delhi, Lucknow, Bombay and other Indian cities. Several hundred Sikh girls were raped and there was pillage of Sikh properties running into billions of Rupees. No one has been brought to book concerning these atrocities. The Justice Narula Committee recommended criminal proceedings against eight Congress leaders, including H. K. L. Bhagat, a Cabinet Minister and Sajjan Kumar Congress MP. But Delhi police are dilly-dallying. According to Sikh estimates at least 20,000, Sikhs were killed in Delhi alone, with another 15,000 in the rest of India. Compare this with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a Maratha Brahmin, and of Rajiv Gandhi by a group of Tamil Tigers, another Hindu group. Not a single Hindu civilian was killed in the aftermath of these assassinations. Little wonder, therefore, that the Indian minorities think that there is one law for the Hindus and a separate for the minorities.

The Indian authorities' only response to this genocide of Sikhs was to make a peace settlement with the traditional Akali leadership. This was the Rajiv-Longowal Accord signed at Delhi on July 24, 1985. It represented a sell-out of the Sikh community to the Indian government. The majority of Sikhs looked upon it as a betrayal of Punjab and as an abrogation of Sikh human and political rights. It resulted in Sant Harchand Singh Longowal's death at the hands of Sikh militants within a month of the Accord being signed. Indian government's duplicity over Sikh affairs played right into the hands of Sikh militants. It fuelled the demand for a sovereign Sikh State called Khalistan. A proclamation to this effect was issued from Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikh political and temporal authority, on October 7, 1987.

II PUNJAB

The word "Punjab" is derived from two Persian words 'Panj'(five) and 'Aab'(water). Thus, Punjab means the land of five rivers (Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Jehlum). Punjab, the Sikh homeland, is now bounded on the West by Pakistan, on the North by Jammu and Kashmir, on the Northeast by Himachal Pradesh (HP) and on the South by Haryana and Rajasthan, the Indian states. It lies in the North of India and has an area of 50,362 sq. kms. and population 20,281,969 (1991 census). The language of its people is Punjabi, which is written in the Gurmukhi script. According to the 1981 census, the breakdown of the population in percentage was- Sikhs 60.76, Hindus 18.56, Dalits 18.27 and others 2.4.

Though a majority in Punjab, Sikhs overall represent mere 2% of India's population of 880 million. Presently the area of Punjab is 1.53% of the total Indian area of 3,287,262 sq. kms. This makes Punjab bigger than Belgium (30,513 sq. kms) and Switzerland (41,288 sq. kms).

It is primarily an agrarian State. For about 70 percent of the people of Punjab, agriculture is the mainstay. About 84 percent of the total area of the State is under cultivation. Wheat, rice, maize, bajra, jowar, gram, barley and pulses are the important foodgrains. Oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton and potatoes are the principal cash crops. The State has always been surplus in food-grains, especially in wheat and rice. The Indian authorities to feed the rest of India mop up this surplus. It is for this reason that Punjab is known as the breadbasket or granary of India.

Punjab is also known for small scale industries that consist of footwear, machine tools, bicycles, sewing machines and parts, plastic goods, pipes, sports goods, nuts and bolts and screws, etc. Seventy percent of the woollen hosiery of India is produced in the State. The popular name for this type of industry is cottage industry, which is totally dependent on private enterprise. Indian government has persistently refused to set up any major or heavy industry in Punjab on the ground that it is a border state.

Three rivers, Sutlej, Beas and Ravi flow through the Punjab. Under the traditional riparian laws, this entitles Punjab to control the distribution of these waters. But the Indian central government retains firm control and has given most of the waters to the neighbouring states of Haryana and Rajasthan. The same applies to electricity generated by the hydroelectric plant at the Bhakra-Nangal dam complex. Again, the major portion of such electricity is diverted to the neighbouring states, while industry in Punjab experiences regular shutdowns due to lack of electrical power. The state has to depend on expensive thermal power fed by coal brought from the distant Bihar State. This sort of exploitation is eroding agricultural and industrial development of Punjab.

In geographical terms, Punjab is a semi-desert region. It is the industry of the Sikh farmer that has turned it into the greenland that it is. However, in order to tap the reservoirs of water under-ground, tube wells have been sunk on all arable land. This has seriously depleted the reservoir and the water level is fast falling. Experts believe that in another 15-20 year Punjab could become a dust bowl. Yet, no steps are being taken to conserve the water or to reverse the depreciation. In spite of the drawbacks, Punjab is the most heavily taxed state in India. The per capita tax incidence is Rs 251 as against Rs 153 in a highly industrialised state like West Bengal.

Another example of the Indian government's economic imperialism is the nationalisation some 13 years ago of the only international Sikh bank in India, the Punjab and Sind Bank Ltd. This bank provided jobs for some 55,000 Sikhs worldwide and was instrumental in producing a highly sophisticated and elite class of Sikh bankers. It provided immeasurable support to the Sikh entrepreneur. Its take-over by the Indian government dealt a body blow to the Sikh business community.

Punjab's political history

Punjab has been called 'the Gateway to India.' It is through Punjab that the early invaders sought to conquer India. The war-like and nomadic Aryans (lit. noblemen) from Central Asia came to Punjab around 1500 BC. They settled in Punjab and its neighbourhood in the early Vedic age. The Indus valley civilisation was a civilisation of prosperous city dwellers built around the cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The immigrant Aryans defeated the indigenous black aborigines (the Dravidians) of northern India forcing them to move down and to settle in South India. The warring habits of the Aryans made the people of the Northwest both aggressive and tough. Their nomadic life-style and the continental Punjab climate, with extremes of heat and cold in the summer and winter, helped to enhance the physical stature and prowess of the northern people. Emperor Darius of Persia conquered Afghanistan and parts of Punjab in 522 BC. He soon realised the fighting qualities of Punjabi men and enlisted them in large numbers in his army. In 326 BC Alexander the Great of Macedonian overran the Punjab up to the Beas river but could not continue beyond that due to stiff resistance from the brave people of central Punjab. "Flaming thunder-bolts" were hurled at Alexander's army by the Punjabi men of arms and it is the opinion of many scholars that gunpowder was invented not in China but in the Northwest of India. After Alexander, Chandragupta Maurya (of Taxila, West Punjab, now in Pakistan) organised an army of Punjabis and liberated the entire Punjab. After consolidating his power over Punjab and western India, he overthrew the mighty Nanda dynasty of Magadha (now Bihar state) and founded the glorious Maurya empire (322 BC- 185 BC) with its capital at Patiliputra (Patna). For the first time in history, he unified the Indian states of Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Gujrat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Punjab. He also subjugated the whole of the present Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Kashmir and made these a part of his vast empire. At its height, his empire extended from Baluchistan to Brahmaputra and in the North to the borders of Iran.

The Punjabi tradition of building empire continued under Harsh Vardhana (606-647 AD), another Punjabi, who included Qanauj, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam and Kashmir in his kingdom. When the Harsh Empire split, several independent states, among them Punjab, came into being. From the 11th century AD there was a series of invasions culminating in the Mogul Empire (1526-1707 AD). Most of modern India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were politically united under the Moguls. Babur founded the empire and Aurangzeb was its last ruler.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 AD), the Tenth and last Guru in human form of the Sikhs, was responsible for apotheosising the Sikh power (1770-1849 AD). He lived at a time when Aurangzeb was at the height of power. The Guru raised the dormant energies of the people and organised them into valiant fighters. He believed in the brotherhood of person and preached that One creator created all humankind. Among his followers were Hindus, both high caste and low caste, as well as Moslems.

Banda Singh Bahadur, the military leader of the Sikhs, fought against the Moguls and established the first Sikh rule at Sirhind and the surrounding area (1710-1716 AD). After him the Sikh missals, military confederacies, held sporadic sway over large parts of Punjab culminating in the establishment of a Sikh Kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1849 AD). Lahore, which was annexed in 1799, became the capital of the Sikh kingdom. The Sikh State extended from Sutlej to the base of the Afghan hills and included the Punjab, Jammu, Kashmir and up to Leh in Tibet.

The British annexed Punjab in 1849. It was constituted as an autonomous province of British India in 1937. Under the Government of India Act, 1935 Punjabi Sikhs formed a separate electorate. In 1947, Punjab was partitioned into West Punjab (Pakistan) and East Punjab (India). On November 1, 1966, East Punjab was reconstituted as Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The Punjabi-speaking part became the present Punjab².

² Competition Success Review: Year Book 1994, New Delhi, p 664

III PUNJAB AND SIKHS

The history of Punjab during the last 500 years is primarily the history of the Sikhs. The culture of Punjab is the Sikh culture. It is the seat of Sikh religion (with its spiritual home at Amritsar) and the land of the Sikh Gurus and Sikh martyrs. Sikh Gurus and Sikhs generally have made the largest contribution in its economic, social and cultural development. The greatest commercial centre of Northern India and the largest city in Punjab, Amritsar, was founded and established by the Sikh Gurus, as are the important towns of Anandpur Sahib and Talwandi Sabo (Damdama Sahib).

Hari Ram Gupta, a respected historian of Punjab, observes that it was the "Sikhs who placed themselves at the head of the nation; who showed themselves as interpreters of the rights of the people; who maintained the struggle between good and evil, between the sovereign will of the people and the divine right of kings, and the opposition of liberty to despotism; who avenged the insults, the outrages and slavery of many generations of the past; who liberated their mother country from the yoke of the foreign oppressor; who displayed all that was great and noble; who left to the children of this province a heritage unsullied by the presence of any foreign soldier; who won for the Punjab the envied title of "the land of soldiers"; who alone can boast of having erected a "bulwark of defence against foreign aggression," the tide of which had run its prosperous course for the preceding eight hundred years and to whom all other people of Northern India in general and the Punjab in particular, owe a deep debt of gratitude"³.

Vijay Lakshmi Pandit (Jawahar Lal Nehru's sister), addressing a big public gathering at Chandigarh, said:

"Punjab which had always been in the forefront of resistance to oppression, kept its colours flying, during the Emergency also. It was in Punjab and Punjab alone that a large-scale resistance was organised against it. The worst thing that happened was that a brave nation was frightened into submission and nobody spoke except in hushed tones. I hung my head in shame and wondered if this was Bharat (India) for which we had suffered. Only the Sikhs organised a Morcha against this. Punjab's lead in such matters should continue"⁴.

Sikhs played a sterling role in opposing the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. In keeping with their tradition to fight against state tyranny, they came forward to stage a 'Save Democracy Morcha' from Akal Takht. They condemned the Emergency⁵ as a 'fascist step,' a 'reign of terror,' a 'rape of democracy' and a clear step towards dictatorship⁶.

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism as a new religious order in the 15th century. It believes in a casteless, classless, democratic and progressive society. Its twin pillars are: fatherhood of God and brotherhood of humankind. It's a religion rooted in respect for human rights and in upholding the dignity and honour of human beings. It enjoins its followers to earn their living by hard work and to share their good fortune with others. It stands for plain living and high thinking. It believes in equality of the sexes. It is for these reasons that one rarely finds a Sikh beggar or a Sikh prostitute. No religion in the sub-continent can make such a claim.

Guru Nanak was the founder of 'secularism.' His constant companions were Mardana, a Moslem, and Bala, a Hindu. When he was asked, whether he was a Hindu or a Moslem; he replied: "Neither." "I am just a human being." He was a staunch supporter of the Unity of Humanity. Sikhs do not believe in communalism, parochialism, sectarianism or any such narrow concept. Sohan Singh Sihota in 'Future of the Sikhs in India' says that wherever Sikhs have settled, in the East or the West or in Africa, they have shown a remarkable capacity for adaptation and adjustment.

The creed of Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), was aimed at freeing the people from the stranglehold of the caste system, devised by the Brahmins (upper caste Hindus), and the shackles of despotism, imposed by the rulers in the South-Asian sub-continent. Seeing their personal stakes threatened, the Brahmin Hindus and the rulers joined hands to frustrate the monotheistic mission of Guru Nanak by intrigues and suppression. Guru Nanak and the gurus that succeeded him, as well as those who embraced the new creed (order)- the Sikhs (disciples), were maligned, persecuted and tortured. Many were even killed by the authorities, in a bid to stifle the truth they preached and upheld. But the Sikh faith continued to grow inspite of all the persecution⁷.

³ Gupta, Hari Ram: History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1, New Delhi, p282

⁴ The Tribune: Chandigarh, March 13, 1977

⁵ The imposition of a state of Emergency in 1975 followed by an adverse court verdict in Rae Bareilly election case in which Indira Gandhi was found 'guilty of corrupt practices' and was debarred from holding any elective office for six years (The Hindustan Times, June 13, 1975). Notwithstanding the High Court Judgement, Indira Gandhi decided to continue in office as Prime Minister (The Hindustan Times, June 15, 1975). Indira Gandhi never forgot the intensity of Sikh opposition to the Emergency. Many believe that storming of the Golden Temple in June 1984 was actuated by a desire to settle her score with the Sikhs.

⁶ Dhillon GS: Research in Sikh Religion and History, Chandigarh, 1989, pp 101-102

⁷ Khalistan Gazette: February, 1991

Sikhism's growth took place at the time of the height of power of the Mogul Empire in India (1526-1707 AD). Wary of growing power of Sikhs, the Moguls took brutal steps to suppress them, executing their leaders (Gurus) and creating a tradition of militancy and martyrdom that resonates in contemporary Sikh politics⁸.

About 285 years ago, Banda Singh Bahadur, the great Sikh General, abolished the Zimindari (feudal land system) in Punjab and distributed the lands among the tillers (cultivators). This was according to the highest Sikh teachings of 'wand chhakna'(sharing your good fortune). Those Hindus, high and low, who became Sikhs, have reaped the rewards of the Sikh belief in social justice based on one's deed and not on the incident of one's birth. It is for this reason that Sikhs, who would by birth belong to the lower social strata of the Hindu hierarchy, have qua Sikhs become the President, Cabinet Ministers and Generals in the Indian armed forces. Indeed, even the Punjabi Hindus are less idolatrous and orthodox, less caste-ridden and more progressive than the Hindus of the rest of India are. They are also more chivalrous and enterprising than the rest of the Hindu race due to the influence of Sikhism.

After a struggle for sovereignty throughout the eighteenth century, the Sikhs established their sovereign state in 1799. When the Mogul Empire collapsed, two sovereign powers arose on the sub-continent, the British in the rest of India and the Sikhs in the North. Thus constituted, the Sikhs were a full-fledged nation and were treated as such by the British and all other countries. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule made no departures from the ideals of human equality, justice and freedom. He was a characteristic product of the Sikh ethos and tradition. He had most of his senior ministers drawn from the Hindu and Moslem communities. During his rule, there were no outbursts of communal fanaticism, no forced conversions, no attempts at bloody revenge, no language tensions, no second class citizens, no repression, no bloodshed, no executions and no tortures. He had no rancour against his Moslem predecessors who had been responsible for the persecution of Sikh Gurus and some of whom had unleashed a reign of terror on the non-Moslems.

Following the occupation of Punjab by the British in 1849, the Sikhs lost their sovereignty. The overwhelming British imperialism had interrupted the historical process of their national ascendancy. The same thing happened in case of many other Asian, African and American nations who had lost their independence to the British, French, Dutch and Spanish colonists. Yet, under British rule, the Sikhs never gave up their dream of regaining their sovereignty. They threw themselves heart and soul into the Indian independence struggle. They made disproportionate sacrifice in men and materials in the cause of Indian independence. According to figures given by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who became the Education Minister in India's first cabinet after independence, these were as follows:

1. Out of 2125 Indians killed in atrocities by the British, 1550 (75%) were Sikhs.
2. Out of 2646 Indian deported for life to Andaman islands (the place where the British exiled political and hardened criminals), 2147 (80%) were Sikhs.
3. Out of 127 Indians sent to gallows, 92 (80%) were Sikhs.
4. In the Indian Liberation Army founded by Subhash Chandra Bose in Japan, out of 20,000 ranks and officers, 12,000 (60%) were Sikhs.

The post-Second World War era saw the collapse of the Western imperial system, much as recent years have seen the dismantling of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc countries. Colony after colony and nation after nation tottered and fell away from the imperialist system and resumed its previous national status.

The transfer of power in India from the British took place in 1947. The leading Moslem party, the Moslem League, contended that since India had been seized from the Moslems, they were the natural heirs to the political power after British withdrawal. The Indian National Congress claimed India on behalf of all the communities. The British, as the colonial power, recognised three political groups - the Indian National Congress, the Moslem League and the Sikhs- as having the locus standi to negotiate Indian independence. This reduced the status of the Congress as a party representing the Hindus only. The British had originally set June 1948 as the date for India's independence. However, because of political manoeuvring by the various parties, communal riots broke out in Punjab, North West India and Bengal as early as March 1947, causing much loss of life, particularly Sikh life in the Sikh heartland in West Punjab. Upon Indian Viceroy Lord Mountbatten's advice, the British government decided to bring forward the transfer of power to August 1947. In order to induce the Sikhs to side with the Hindus, Hindu leaders made all sorts of promises, detailed in the following chapter. They thereby persuaded to allocate to India a larger portion of the Indian sub-continent than would have been the case if it were to be a tripartite division. Seduced by Hindu assurances, Sikhs decided to throw in their lot with the Hindus⁹.

⁸ Punjab Crisis: Asia Watch Report, 1991, p 11

⁹ Sohan Singh Sihota: Future of the Sikhs in India, Amritsar, 1970, pp 6-7

IV HINDU INDIA AND SIKHS

'In politics, the highest principle is the principle of political expediency, promises are made to be broken' (Chanakya)

On the eve of the All India National Congress, 1929, session at Lahore, the Sikhs had taken out a five hundred thousand strong procession from the ramparts of the ancient fort at Lahore with veteran Baba Kharak Singh leading it on elephant back. THE TIMES of London described it as:

"a most impressive spectacle of human congregation that put the Congress show into shame and shade."

The reasons for taking out the procession were twofold. One was to impress upon the Congress leaders that the Sikhs were a political entity to be reckoned with. And the other was that the procession was being mounted from the Lahore fort, which was the seat of the Sikh kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The message was not lost on the Congress leaders. Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru went to meet Baba Kharak Singh, at his residence on Chauburji Road, and gave the Sikhs a solemn assurance that:

"after India achieves political freedom, no Constitution shall be framed by the majority community unless it is freely acceptable to the Sikhs"¹⁰.

This promise was then reduced into a formal policy Resolution of the All India Congress Committee in 1929 session when complete independence for India was fixed as the political goal.

In order to reinforce the assurances given by the Congress leaders, Mahatma Gandhi visited Gurdwara Sisganj, Delhi on March 16, 1931, and in an answer to a question he said:

"Sardar Madhusudan Singh has asked for an assurance that the Congress would do nothing that might alienate sympathies of the Sikhs from the Congress. Well, the Congress in its Lahore session, passed a resolution that it would not enter into or be a party to any settlement with regard to the minority question that failed to satisfy any of the minorities concerned. What further assurances the Congress can give to the Sikhs, I fail to understand. I ask you to accept my word and the resolution of the Congress that it will not betray a single individual much less a community. If it ever thinks of doing so, it will not only hasten its own doom but that of the country too. I pray you, therefore, to unbosom yourselves of all your doubts... what more shall I say, what more can I say than this. Let God be the witness of the bond that binds me and the Congress with you."

When asked what may the Sikhs do in the event of betrayal, Gandhi said that in that case, the Sikhs could take their Kirpans (swords) in their hand with perfect justification before God and man. Moreover, he said, the Sikhs are brave people. They well know how to safeguard their rights by exercise of arms, if it should ever come to that¹¹.

Soon after the partition in 1947, the Indian authorities decided to come down heavily on the Sikhs and to curb their political power. In October 1947, secret instructions were issued to all the Deputy Commissioners in Punjab in the following terms:

"Sikhs as a community are a lawless people and are a menace to the law abiding Hindus of the Province. Deputy Commissioners should take special measures against them."

Sardar Kapur Singh was a Deputy Commissioner (DC) at the time. He refused to comply with the illegal instructions and was eventually expelled from the Indian Civil service¹².

India adopted its first Constitution on November 26, 1949, and it was put into effect on January 26, 1950. The Constitution had been drafted by B. R. Ambedkar and enshrined certain guarantees for the rights of the Harijans or untouchables but none for the other minorities. The two Sikh representatives of the Shiromani Akali Dal, Sardar Hukam Singh and Sardar Bhupinder Singh Mann refused to sign the Constitution. Furthermore, by Article 25 Hindus were defined to include Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. This seriously undermined the distinctive identity of the Sikhs and their aspirations to nationhood. They became subject to Hindu law, which is often repugnant to Sikh customs, traditions and usage.

Thus, undermining of the Sikhs as a political entity had begun in earnest. By this time, the Hindu leadership was feeling sufficiently entrenched to renege on promises made to the Sikhs. Master Tara Singh, the erstwhile Sikh leader, demanded a Punjabi speaking state. Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the then Home Minister of India and a wily Barrister, told him curtly: "I am ready to concede to it. But you will have to take back all the Sikhs from the rest of India. Now you form 17 percent of the

¹⁰ Speech in the Lok Sabha (Indian Parliament) by Sardar Kapur Singh MP on September 6, 1966 when he opened the debate on the Punjab Reorganisation Bill 1966

¹¹ Bannerji AC: The Constitutional History of India, Vol. II, Delhi 1978, p 117

¹² Kapur Singh: Sachi Sakhi (True Story), Delhi, 1979, pp 4-5

army. They will have to be dismissed. Are you prepared for that?"¹³. The authenticity of the above conversation has been vouched for by no less than the late Prime Minister of India, Chaudhry Charan Singh¹⁴.

Another noteworthy conversation about this time was between Master Tara Singh and the Home Minister who succeeded Patel, K. N. Katju:

Katju: Master Ji, I agree that the Sikhs made many sacrifices for the country and Hinduism. But now the country is independent and free so are the Hindus. There is, therefore, no need for the Sikhs to exist as a separate entity. Why do not the Sikhs come back into the Hindu fold?

Master Tara Singh: Do you think that the Hindus will never, in future, face any danger to their existence, property or honour? The world situation is changing drastically. A time may come soon when the Hindus are again in need of Sikhs. Are you so power drunk as not to realise that Sikhs may be needed soon again. If you wipe out the Sikhs, what will you do then?

Katju: Then we will create a new Khalsa.

Master Tara Singh: How will you do it? In old days, Guru Gobind Singh had to sacrifice his four sons and his entire family to establish the Khalsa. Do you think that you can create a new Khalsa by political power alone?¹⁵

These comments were not confined only to Patel and Katju. They represented the collective thinking and sentiments of the Hindu leadership. In her autobiography *My Truth*, Indira Gandhi has stated that her father Jawahar Lal Nehru had been "strongly opposed to the idea of Punjabi State"¹⁶. Even Dr. Ambedkar (Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution) had his misgivings about the extremist attitude of the Indian leadership:

"The only difference between the Congress and the Hindu Maha Sabha is that the latter is crude in its utterances and brutal in its actions while the former is politic and polite"¹⁷.

Khushwant Singh, journalist and writer, in his book 'A History of the Sikhs,' says:

"The chief cause of Sikh uneasiness in free India was the resurgence of Hinduism which threatened to engulf the minorities. Renascent Hinduism manifested itself in a phenomenal increase in Hindu religious organisations, the revival of Sanskrit, and the ardent championing of Hindi. The Punjabi Hindu was more aggressive than the Hindu was of other provinces. Organisations, notably those connected with the Arya Samaj and its political counter-part, the Jan Sangh (now Bhartiya Janata Party, BJP) started a campaign to persuade Punjabi-speaking Hindus to disown their mother tongue and adopt Hindi"¹⁸.

In its dealing with Sikhs, the Hindu leadership has been guilty of gross betrayal of the trust that the rather naive and unsophisticated pre-1947 Sikh leadership reposed in them. There is a lamentable catalogue of broken promises. The Sikh case was succinctly put by Sardar Kapur Singh, MP, in his speech in the Lok Sabha on September 6, 1966, when he opened the debate on the Punjab Reorganisation Bill, 1966. He said, inter alia:

"The Policy Resolution (of 1929) was repeatedly reiterated, officially and semi-officially, throughout the period unto August 1947, and it was not officially repudiated till 1950 when the present Constitution was framed. The trusting Sikhs, who in their Daily Prayer, extol keeping faith as the noblest of human virtues, placing complete reliance in this solemn under-taking given to them by the majority community, resisted and refused all offers and proposals made to them by the British and the Moslems. The Moslems, whom we now prefer to call, the Moslem League, which proposed to accord the Sikhs a sovereign or autonomous status in the areas constituting their ancestral home-land between the river Ghaggar and the river Chenab. This is the first link of the story, which I am going to narrate here to provide background to the conclusion why this Bill should be rejected.

"The second link is that in the year 1932, at the time of the Second Round Table Conference, the British Government, through Sardar Bahadur Shivdev Singh, then a member of the Indian Secretary of State's Council, made an informal proposal to the Sikhs that:

¹³ Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay, June 10-16, 1984

¹⁴ Illustrated Weekly of India Ibid.

¹⁵ Spokesman: Chandigarh, January 1994, p 12

¹⁶ GS Dhillon: India Commits Suicide, Chandigarh, 1992, p 16

¹⁷ Amedkar BR: Pakistan or The Partition of India, Bombay, 1946, p 30

¹⁸ Khushwant Singh: A History of the Sikhs, Oxford University, Press, London, 1963, p 289

"if they dissociate finally with the Congress movement, they would be given a decisive political weightage (importance) in the Punjab, such as would lead to their emerging as a third independent element in India after the British transfer power to the inhabitants of this sub-continent."

"The much maligned, the naive, Master Tara Singh, to my personal knowledge, promptly rejected this tempting offer. I was then a student at the University of Cambridge and was closely associated with these developments.

"The third link is this: In the month of July, 1946, the All India Congress Working Committee met at Calcutta, which reaffirmed the assurances already given to the Sikhs, and in his Press Conference held on the 6th July, there, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru spelt out the concrete content of these solemn undertakings in the following flowery words:

"The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and set up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom"¹⁹.

"In these words, an autonomous State to the Sikhs, within India, was promised.

"Fourthly, in the early winter of 1946, the Cabinet Mission, while at Delhi, communicated to the Sikhs through the late Sardar Baldev Singh that if the Sikhs are determined not to part company with Hindu India, the British Parliament, in their solicitude for the Sikh people, was prepared to so frame the Independence Act of India; so that in respect of the Sikh homeland, wherever these areas might eventually go, in Pakistan or India, no Constitution shall be framed such as does not have the concurrence of the Sikhs.

"But Sardar Baldev Singh, in consultation with the Congress leaders, summarily rejected this offer which went even beyond the assurances given by the majority community, in 1929 and in 1946 by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in Calcutta.

"Fifthly, in April 1947, Mohd Ali Jinnah, in consultation with certain most powerful leaders of the British Cabinet in London, offered to the Sikhs, first through Master Tara Singh and then through the Maharaja of Patiala:

"that a sovereign Sikh State, comprising areas lying in the West of Panipat and east of the left bank of the Ravi river, on the understanding that this Sikh State then confederates with Pakistan on very advantageous terms to the Sikhs.

"Master Tara Singh summarily rejected this attractive offer and the Maharaja of Patiala declined to accept it in consultation with Sardar Patel and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru.

"Sixthly, on December 9, 1946, when the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly was held under the chairmanship of Babu Rajindra Prasad, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru moved the first and the fundamental Resolution which said:

"Adequate safeguards would be provided for minorities... It was a declaration, a pledge and an undertaking before the world, a contract with millions of Indians, and, therefore, in the nature of an oath, which we must keep."

"What happens in case of political perjury is not a point I propose to discuss today, for, when neither the feelings of shame, the reproaches of conscience, nor the dread of punishment from any bar is there, the sufferers can only pray to God, which the Sikhs are doing today. But since it is the pre-requisite of power to invent its own past, I am putting the record straight for the public opinion and for posterity by recapitulating this sorry tale of betrayal of the Sikhs, a trusting people.

"Seventhly, in the month of May, 1947, precisely, on the 17th May, Lord Mountbatten, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Nawab Liaqat Ali Khan and Sardar Baldev Singh, flew to London on the invitation of the British Cabinet, in search of a final solution of the Indian communal problem. When the Congress and the Moslem League failed to strike any mutual understanding and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru decided to return to India, the British Cabinet leaders conveyed to Sardar Baldev Singh that, if he stays behind, arrangements might be made:

"so as to enable the Sikhs to have political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of World History."

¹⁹ Statesman: Calcutta, July 7, 1946

"Sardar Baldev Singh promptly divulged the contents of this confidential offer to Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and in compliance with the latter's wishes, declined to stay behind and flew back to India after giving the following message to the Press:

"The Sikhs have no demands to make on the British save to say that they should quit India. Whatever political rights and aspirations the Sikhs have, they shall have them satisfied through the goodwill of the Congress and the majority community."

"Eighthly, and lastly, in July 1947, the Hindu and Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly met at Delhi to pass an unanimous resolution favouring partition of the country, in which resolution occurs the following words:

"In the divided Indian Punjab, special constitutional measures are imperative to meet the just aspirations and rights of the Sikhs."

"It is these very Hindus of the Punjab, who, with the assistance of the Government of India leaders, even when their understanding was not qualified to keep pace with the wishes of their heart, adopted every conceivable posture and shrank from no stratagem to keep Sikhs permanently under their political heel, first, by refusing to form a Punjabi-speaking State in which Sikhs might acquire political dominance, and second, by falsely declaring that Punjabi was not their mother tongue.

"The Bill before the House is a link in this anti-Sikh chain, the sordid story of which I have just narrated. When in 1950, the present Constitution Act of India was enacted, the accredited representatives of the Shiromani Akali Dal declared in the Constituent Assembly that:

"the Sikhs do not accept this Constitution, the Sikhs reject this Constitution Act."

"Our representatives (Sardar Hukam Singh and Sardar Bhupinder Singh Mann) declined to append their signatures to the Constitution Act as a token of this clear and irrevocable rejection."

Sardar Hukam Singh's note in the constituent Assembly reads:

"To-day India is almost free of foreign domination and we pride ourselves on the freedom of our country. But the real freedom will only come if the minorities are given due protection and safeguards are provided for the development of their culture, language and religion"²⁰.

Sardar Kapur Singh further said in his Lok Sabha speech:

"I will, for want of time, skip over the story of the Sikhs' suffering during the last 18 years in an Independent India under the political control of political and anglicised Hindus. I will merely refer to the reply, which Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru gave to Master Tara Singh when the latter reminded him, in 1954, of the solemn undertaking previously given to the Sikhs on behalf of the majority community. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru calmly replied:

"The circumstances have now changed."

"If there is one thing that the Sikhs know too well, it is how the circumstances have changed!"

In conclusion, Sardar Kapur Singh referred to the resolution passed by the Shiromani Akali Dal on July 20, 1966:

"Sikhs resolve and proclaim their determination to resist, by all legitimate means, all attempts to devalue and liquidate the Sikh people in a free India"; and continued:

"Consequently, the Sikhs demand that the following steps be taken forthwith by the rulers of India to ensure and enable the Sikhs to live as equal and respectable citizens of the Union of India: first, that Sikh areas deliberately demarcated and excluded from the proposed new Punjab be restored to Punjab. These are the areas of Gurdaspur District including Dalhousie; Ambala District including Chandigarh, Pinjore, Kalka and Ambala Sadar; the entire Una Tehsil of Hoshiarpur District; the areas of Nalagarh, called Desh; the Tehsil of Sirsa; the sub-thesis of Tohana and Guhla; Ratia Block, of District Hisar; Shahbad block of District Karnal and those areas of Ganga Nagar District of Rajasthan which border on Sikh areas of Punjab. The new Punjab must include all contiguous Sikh areas into a single administrative

²⁰ Partap Singh: Biography of Sardar Hukam Singh, New Delhi, 1989, p 45

unit to be the Sikh homeland, within the Union of India. Second, that such a new Punjab should be granted self-autonomous constitutional status on the analogy of Jammu and Kashmir, as envisaged in the Constitution of India Act.

"Thus, on behalf of the Sikh people through their accredited representative, the Shiromani Akali Dal, I reject the entire scheme of this Bill, and oppose it. I call upon the Government to take necessary legislative measures to implement the Resolution of the Shiromani Akali Dal, just referred to, as the final solution of the Punjab problem.

"I do so for three reasons: first, the Bill is conceived in sin; secondly, it has been delivered by an incompetent and untrained midwife; and thirdly, it is opposed to the best interests of the nation. It will most certainly undermine national integration and lead to loss of faith in the integrity of those who exercise political power in the country. I say that it is conceived in sin, because it constitutes the latest act of betrayal of solemn promises, nay a series of promises given to the Sikh people by the accredited leaders of the majority community, by the revered leaders of the Congress party and by the unchallenged spokesmen of the ruling party."

This was a clarion call for self-autonomy for the Punjab within the framework of the Indian Union. But it all fell on deaf ears. One of the tragedies of Indian democracy is that the voice of the minorities has forever remained a voice in the wilderness. With rampant corruption and criminalization of Indian politics, the Indian rulers have always viewed democracy as the imposition of the will of the majority on the minorities.

In another passage in his Lok Sabha speech, Sardar Kapur Singh said:

"I have already referred to the Executive and the Judiciary. I now turn to Parliament, this august House, which is deserving of our highest respect, as its dignity is the dignity of the people of India and hence inviolable. Nevertheless, Sikhs are aware that under the existing constitutional arrangements, they can send no more than a couple of their own representatives to the Parliament and even they are not always heard freely. How many times has this been made plain to the minority Members of this House that if they speak out of turn, a hearing will be denied to them. How many times have minority Members been disciplined without a hearing?"

Such are the vagaries of Indian Parliamentary process and free speech. In an earlier passage in his speech, Sardar Kapur Singh had talked about the despotism of the Indian Executive and corruption of the Judiciary. About the latter, Sardar Kapur Singh said:

"Madam Chairperson, permit me to say that if there is one political crime greater than any other, it is frequent employment by the ruling party of Judiciary for quasi-political purposes. The result is that the Working Committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal has passed a Resolution on July 20, 1966, which reads:

"After having carefully viewed the findings, the reports and judgements of judicial and quasi-judicial Tribunals and Forums which have dealt with Sikh interests, we have come to the conclusion, that Hindu politicians have entirely undermined the impartiality and the integrity of the judiciary and there is total perversion of justice in relation to the just and legal rights of Sikhs."

Turning now to the despotism of the Indian Executive, an Editorial in the London Economist of August 26, 1984, likened Indira Gandhi to 'Kali'(the Hindu Goddess of death) and said that "Indira Gandhi views all opposition as an unnecessary evil." The Editorial continued:

"Like the warrior-goddess (Kali) she set out to smite all centres of opposition power, starting with the tiny ex-kingdom of Sikkim, moving on to terror-ridden Punjab, and then to opposition ruled states of Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh. A ruler who regards opponents as demons is liable to start behaving like one. Democratic countries guard against abuses of power by institutionalising the right to oppose. But even the world's two biggest democracies, elected leaders have broken this rule. Richard Nixon, 10 years out of the American presidency, has yet to say sorry. Indira Gandhi, four years back in power in India, is up to her dirty tricks again. The one good thing about Nixon's Watergate was that it proved that America had effective self-cleansing mechanism. The question facing India today is whether its parliamentary system has a similar capacity for righting its rulers' wrongs"²¹.

This tradition of despotism is now firmly entrenched in the Indian body politic. Every one of its Prime Ministers and leaders practices this to the point of megalomania. In the 47 years since India's independence, no Prime Minister has been impeached or threatened with impeachment, though several criminal charges were preferred against Indira Gandhi by Morarji Desai's short-lived government.

²¹ The Economist: London, August 26, 1984

Sardar Kapur Singh's eloquence was all in vain. Instead of making Punjab a Punjabi speaking province, the Indian authorities, in 1966, divided Punjab into three parts: Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the mini-state of Punjab. This came about because the Punjabi Hindus disowned their mother tongue, Punjabi, and instead voted for Hindi, a language a very small minority of the Hindus understand even today. Thus linguistic aggression was used to undermine the Sikh claim to a united East Punjab. To understand the importance of language as a political factor in the Indian political and democratic tradition, it is interesting to note that today Haryana has Hindi as its first language and Telegu as the second; by like token, Himachal Pradesh boasts Hindi as its first and Urdu as its second language. Thus, for the Sikh in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, language was used by the Hindu to do him out of his hearth and home. In the numbers game, the Hindu holds all the trump cards. Being swamped by Hindus is a constant fear in Sikh hearts. After all, Mrs. Thatcher, when Prime Minister of England, expressed fear of 60 million white Britons being 'swamped' by three million coloured people. China has perfected swamping as a political weapon by settling enough Chinese in Tibet to turn the Tibetans into a minority in their own homeland. It is conceivable that given the corruption of Indian politics, Indian authorities can move enough Hindus into Punjab to turn the Sikh majority into a minority. After all a large number of Hindu casual labours from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, do find employment in Punjab during the harvest seasons. What if the authorities were to offer them inducements to settle in the Punjab?

Sikhs articulated their fears of Hindu domination in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution passed at Anandpur Sahib, the birthplace of the Khalsa, in 1973. The initial draft was perfected and finally passed in October 1978. In addition to propagation of the Sikh faith, the resolution called for the "creation of such an environment where Sikh sentiment can find its full expression." It also demanded the transfer of Chandigarh and other neighbouring "Punjabi speaking areas" to Punjab. The resolution also called for self-autonomy whereby Punjab would have control over all government departments and all areas of Punjabi life save for the portfolios of defence, foreign affairs, communications and transport and currency.

The resolution, in practical terms, seeks a Sikh homeland within India where the Sikhs can be master of their own destiny. Jawahar Lal Nehru himself had suggested such a homeland in July 1946. It also seeks that in this region the paramountcy of Sikh interests should be constitutionally recognised. Nehru had given an assurance, endorsed by Mahatma Gandhi, that "the brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration." Hence, in political terms, the resolution breaks no new ground.

The second demand is that this autonomous region should include the adjoining Punjabi speaking areas of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan so as to constitute a complete Punjabi-speaking region. This is in accordance with the pre-independence resolutions of the Indian National Congress which provided that in a free and independent India, Congress will recognise provinces on a linguistic basis. This principle has been implemented in the rest of India, for example Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, just to give two examples.

The resolution also seeks to bring the main contiguous Sikh population areas into a single Sikh region within the Union of India. In principle, one can see no objection to Indian rulers allowing Sikhs to converge on such a national or ethnic region if diversity of India and Indians is to be maintained.

V SIKH CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT-1982

On August 4, 1982, Sikhs launched a civil disobedience movement from the ramparts of the Akal Takht (the supreme seat of Sikh temporal authority within the Golden Temple complex), Amritsar. The main thrust of this Morcha (struggle) was economic deprivation of Punjab at the hands of the Indian government. As a matter of deliberate policy, Indian authorities have been looting Punjab of its wheat, grains, hydro-electric power and river waters, while refusing to site any major industry in the state. The Morcha thus derived its inspiration from the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

Earlier, in April 1982 Sikhs had started a Morcha at Kapuri village to prevent the digging of the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) canal that aims to divert Punjab waters to Haryana and Rajasthan. This Morcha was ultimately shifted to Amritsar and became part of the civil disobedience movement. During the struggle, some 200,000 Sikhs were arrested and 200 Sikh lives were lost at the hands of the Punjab police. The reign of terror by the police had begun in earnest.

Even the atrocities by the police could not contain Sikh discontent. Indian government, led by Indira Gandhi, decided to take drastic measures. On June 3, 1984, the Indian army, in Operation Blue Star, under the direct orders of Indira Gandhi invaded the holiest of Sikh shrines, the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar. Nearly 120,000 military men, including the crack 4th Division (known as the Tiger Division) with helicopter gun-ships were involved. The battle lasted for five days, at a loss of 3,374 (government's version) Sikh lives including women and children. Simultaneous strikes were made at 38 other Sikh shrines, most of which are connected with Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth prophet. In total, all over Punjab, the army killed over 10,000 Sikhs to gain control of the Sikh shrines. The army thus devalued its military traditions and by attacking civilians' targets became a willing arm of the Indian politicians. It is no surprise that next to the Punjab police the Indian army is the most hated Indian institutions among Sikhs. In the attack the Akal Takht was demolished, the Sikh library deliberately set on fire and Sikh artefacts and Hukamnamas (edicts in Gurus' own handwriting) were destroyed.

According to the 'Surya'(a prestigious Indian magazine), a great part of violence in Punjab was planned and executed by a government-controlled intelligence agency, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing). In its issue of September 1984, Surya published a news report based on information supplied by reliable RAW officials, showing how the central agency called the 'Third Agency' aided and abetted the murders and killings in Punjab.

The Observer, London: June 17, 1984 commented: "The 1984 Battle of Golden Temple, like the 1919 Amritsar massacre (Jallianwala Bagh) marks the beginning of a new and potentially turbulent chapter in the Indian history. The chapter, which opened in 1919, ended with the departure of the British (from India). And no one can say how it (army action) will end."

The Guardian, Manchester, June 14, 1984, wrote: "All newspapers in Punjab and Chandigarh had to suspend operations from June 7 to June 10 as the authorities had refused curfew passes to journalists and printing workers and withdrew those already issued."

In October 1984, two Sikh bodyguards killed Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and in the wake of her assassination, in a concerted campaign of violence, the state sponsored Hindu mobs killed thousands of Sikhs, their women and children in Delhi and other parts of India. Even Khushwant Singh, a journalist of international repute, who was held up in his house in New Delhi by Hindu mobs, said that he "felt like a Jew in Nazi Germany."

There was no letting up against the Sikhs. State repression was stepped up. In another operation "Wood Rose," thousand Sikhs were rounded up on the flimsiest grounds. Amritdhari (baptised) Sikhs were made the main targets. They were declared dangerous people. In the July 1984 issue of 'Baatchet,' the official magazine of the Indian army, a Circular (No 153) was issued in the following terms:

"Any knowledge of the 'Amritdharis' should immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from the outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. Their identity and whereabouts must be disclosed²²."

The plan was to shoot and kill Amritdhari Sikhs wherever and whenever apprehended or encountered. Genocide of Sikhs ensued amidst a rigid press censorship and a blanket ban against foreign press and international human rights agencies entering the State. No record was kept of the names, identities and numbers of those killed in contrived or fake encounters²³.

The Indian security forces adopted increasingly brutal methods to stem the insurgency. These included arbitrary arrests, torture, prolonged detention without trial, disappearances and summary killings of civilians as well as the suspected militants. The Indian army became political arm of the Indian government and, at the latter's behest, violated the laws of war and all norms of civilised behaviour. This not to say that the militants did not respond in kind²⁴.

²² Oppression in Punjab, pp 29-30; Indian Express, September 30, 1984; Tully, Mark and Jacob, Satish: Amritsar- Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985) p 204

²³ GS Dhillon: India Commits Suicide, Chandigarh, 1992, p 250

²⁴ Asia Watch Report: Punjab in Crisis, 1991, p 1 & Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab: CFD, 1985, p 65 & IHRO: Punjab Bulldozed, 1988

In an attempt at neutralising militants, Indian authorities negotiated a short-lived political settlement with the traditional Sikh leadership. This took the form of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord that was signed in New Delhi on July 24, 1985. Sikhs, almost unanimously, rejected this Accord as a betrayal of Punjab and Sikhs. Within a month, the Accord was given its quietus with the assassination of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal. This, in turn, fuelled the original demands of full regional autonomy, which when denied, progressively matured into the demand for an independent and sovereign Sikh State, Khalistan.

The invasion of the Golden Temple and the resultant killings in June 1984, the November 1984 Sikh carnage, the indiscriminate killings of Sikhs by the Indian security forces with impunity, and the collapse of the judicial and democratic process in Punjab brought home to Sikhs the true dimension and scale of Indian hostility and antipathy towards Sikhs. Every right-thinking Sikh rethought the Sikh leaders' 1947 decision to join Hindus in a united India. The general feeling was that the Hindu-Sikh partnership had failed abysmally and had been dissolved in favour of the Hindu. This feeling manifested itself in the form of a full-blooded declaration from the Akal Takht in January 1986 for the independent sovereign Sikh State of Khalistan. Period during 1986-89 represented the heyday of the Sikh struggle for sovereignty. In 1989 Parliamentary elections in Punjab, out of 13 MPs elected to Indian Parliament, no less than nine were committed protagonists of Khalistan. Pro-India candidates mostly forfeited their deposits.

At Anandpur Sahib, more than 30 Sikh political parties and organisations united for the first time to endorse the demand for Khalistan and resolve upon a democratic struggle for an independent sovereign Sikh State²⁵.

In April 1992 about a dozen Sikh leaders representing the Sikh nation, presented a memorandum to the visiting UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali at New Delhi, seeking UN intervention for a plebiscite among Sikhs on the issue of Sikh State in Punjab. The top leaders included Gurcharan Singh Tohra, chief of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Parkash Singh Badal, former chief minister of Punjab, and Simranjit Singh Mann.

The 11-page memorandum appealed to the secretary-general to intervene on behalf of Sikhs. This historic document charged the Indian government with violating human rights, denigrating the "Sikh religion, language, culture and values" and "enforcing draconian laws in Punjab"²⁶.

Earlier, the Sikh leadership had also delivered a memorandum to US Ambassador to India, William Clarke, explaining how the colonisation of Punjab by New Delhi had forced the Sikhs to demand self-determination and eventual sovereignty. The signatories included Simranjit Singh Mann, Baba Joginder Singh Rode, Surjan Singh Thekedar, Kartar Singh Narang and Jagdev Singh Talwandi.

On May 1, 1994, when several factions of the only Sikh political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, unified themselves at the Akal Takht, the party in its historic Amritsar Declaration resolved the following:

"The Shiromani Akali Dal reiterates its commitment to work within democratic limits and renews its struggle for the creation of a separate region for the Sikhs where they as the avant-garde of Punjabi national culture, based on the holy Guru Granth Sahib, can enjoy the glow of freedom. The envisaged region, promised by the Indian National Congress before partition (of India in 1947) but never created, will fulfil not only the aspirations of the Sikh nation and Punjabis, but also help the minorities in it to realise their potential.

"At this juncture of history, when the entire South East Asia is in turmoil and Western nations are also looking for a stable value system and a new model for reorganising their cultures, a region based on Sri Guru Granth Sahib's ideas of cosmic harmony, dialogue, poetry and non-exploitative politics free from negative hegemony to subordinate, will serve as a centre of light to other cultures.

"The Sikh ethos, translated into distinct religious, economic, political and social institutions of this region, apart from incarnating the original consciousness of people, will give them an opportunity, denied in recent past, to reveal their best and make a vital contribution to world culture.

"The Shiromani Akali Dal is of the view that Hindustan (India) is a sub-continent of diverse national cultures, each with its own heritage and mainstream. The sub-continent needs to be reorganised with a confederate structure so that each culture could flower up according to its genius and add a unique fragrance to the garden of world cultures. If such a conferral reorganisation is not accepted by the Hindustani (Indian) rulers (Government of India),

²⁵ IHRO: Indo-US Shadow Over Punjab, London, 1992, p 176

²⁶ The Times of India: April 23, 1992

the Shiromani Akali Dal will have no other option than to demand and struggle for an independent and sovereign Sikh state."

The signatories to the declaration included Surjit Singh Barnala, former chief minister of Punjab, Amarinder Singh, Simranjit Singh Mann, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Manjit Singh Bhai, Jasmer Singh Bala and Gurcharan Singh Tohra.

VI IHRO's APPROACH TO POLITICAL DIALOGUE

International Human Rights Organisation was set up in Punjab in the wake of the Indian army's invasion of the Golden Temple complex. It is basically a body to agitate, both in India and internationally, for protection of Sikh human rights and those of other ethnic minorities. It has chapters in Europe, North America, Australia and other Asian and African countries that lobby international agencies on behalf of Sikhs and other minorities in India. It has published a number of reports in India and world-wide detailing Punjab police and Indian security forces' atrocities against Sikhs, in the main, but also against Moslems, Assamese and other Indian minorities.

From the day it was born, IHRO has been asking the Indian authorities to seek a political solution to the Punjab problem. It has repeatedly pointed out that the Punjab problem is not a problem of law and order and can not be solved simply by killing every able-bodied Sikh in Punjab. In 1988, on the eve of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Punjab, IHRO urged him to unilaterally announce a political initiative to solve the problem. In its letter to the PM of September 17, 1988, IHRO urged:

"Punjab needs a political initiative rather than economic concessions. Justice to the State can be done only if the democratic norms are observed in letter and spirit, and the policy of confrontation is stopped.

"Recent history of Centre-Punjab relations shows that political decisions have been taken on the basis of dealings on a stock-exchange with the attendant manipulations. This market tendency should cease when dealing with political rights and aspirations of the Indian peoples. Political decisions should be based on respect for civil and political rights and not on manipulating political parties and political grouping within a State.

"Since the Punjab problem has been complicated by the wholesale violation of human rights, the rolling back of this process by the government could, in the opinion of IHRO, contribute a great deal towards restoring normality thus assisting a solution within the democratic framework rather than through conflict and war.

"We, therefore, make a set of recommendations to help solve the Punjab conflict. These recommendations, if honestly and unilaterally implemented by the Government of India, would unleash their own dynamics and create an atmosphere conducive to a negotiated settlement. The recommendations are:

1. All anti-democratic "black" laws enacted for Punjab are repealed.
2. All prisoners held in connection with the Punjab conflict be released or tried under the due process of the laws.
3. All responsible for the November 1984 massacres in Delhi and Indian cities should be brought to book speedily. Those responsible for killings in fake police encounters in Punjab face the due process of law.
4. A commission should be appointed to investigate the names, identities and numbers of those killed by the Indian security forces in Punjab. Without a proper head-count no relief or rehabilitation scheme can be devised or implemented.
5. Those Sikhs who lost their positions and appointments with the public service or indeed in private sector because of alleged involvement in the Sikh struggle be reinstated. These would include members of the Indian armed forces and police who were summarily dismissed without compensation.
6. In keeping with the All India Congress Working Committee resolution of March 9, 1966, favouring the creation of a "Punjabi speaking State out of the (then) existing State of Punjab," strictly on linguistic basis, all distortions in the Punjabi speaking State be removed forthwith. Thus, Punjabi speaking areas in Haryana, Rajasthan and also those in Himachal Pradesh should be merged into Punjab. More specifically, the areas comprising Bhakra, Pong and other adjoining hydroelectric projects are transferred to Punjab.
7. The constitutional right of Punjab to its river water resources (Entry 17, List II, Schedule 7) be restored and respected in toto and not curbed or curtailed for any reason. In turn, Punjab should show goodwill towards its neighbours and allow water supplies based on equitable bilateral, time-bound agreements on consideration. The controversial, politically motivated, Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) canal should be dismantled forthwith.

"The implementation of the above recommendations will create its own momentum to pave the way for a negotiated settlement of the Punjab problem.

"Your failure to take political initiative along these lines on the day of your visit to Punjab will certainly confirm many people's fear that the Congress government is not interested in solving the Punjab conflict."

There was no response to the letter and the Government of India continued to follow its old divisive policies. In the November 1989 Parliamentary elections, V. P. Singh became the Prime Minister of India upon the Janata Dal party's victory. He decided immediately to address the Punjab issue and appointed a Cabinet sub-committee for this purpose. He visited Punjab and went to the Golden Temple, Amritsar to do obeisance and offer his respects at the central seat of the Sikh faith.

On December 14, 1989, IHRO wrote a letter to him, setting out the recommendations it had made to Rajiv Gandhi's government and urging that he should take immediate steps to implement the Constitution. The letter added:

"Implementation of the above-mentioned measures will have the merit of placing Punjab on a par with other States and in restoring to Punjab its lost dignity. It is for the parties to the talks to finalise agenda but such talks could be held in a few months time.

"IHRO believes that you will give serious thought to the suggestions made above. Mere sentimental gestures will not soothe Punjab"²⁷.

Once again, our plea was ignored. The Cabinet sub-committee ended in fiasco because there was no real will to engage in a meaningful dialogue with Sikh representatives. On February 15, 1991, IHRO once again wrote to the new Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar urging him to hold talks with Sikh leadership. IHRO's letter said:

"We strongly feel that the real objective of any genuine and meaningful talks should be to bring peace to the region and succour to the public. What is needed today is ability and willingness on your part to take appropriate preparatory measures to create a congenial atmosphere for the talks.

"You may recall participating in the Round Table Conference held at Chandigarh on January 19-20, 1987. It was then agreed that the government would take certain initiatives, certain unilateral steps (already mentioned in our letter to Rajiv Gandhi) which could pave the way to fruitful talks. These proposals assume greater significance today since you yourself are the Prime Minister and, as such, in a position to implement them.

"We would like to emphasise that in order to hold any meaningful talks, it is imperative that the rule of law should first be restored in Punjab.

"It is imperative to remove some of the glaring anomalies and injustices done by the successive Indian governments. All this could be accomplished in six months. Needless to say, these preparatory measures will establish your government's credibility with the people of Punjab and will pave the way for a meaningful dialogue. Talks can then begin with an open agenda."

Instead of paving the way for a meaningful dialogue, Chander Shekhar's government stepped up the military and police initiative. The army's strength in Punjab was significantly increased and an army general, General O. P. Malhotra was appointed as Governor of Punjab to quell the Sikh struggle. No talks with Sikh leaders were held. Instead, Chandra Shekhar announced that elections would be held in Punjab.

On the eve of elections, IHRO issued a seven-point people's "manifesto." The manifesto entitled '7-Point Poser' was issued on May 4, 1991. In it, IHRO suggested a series of measures aimed at protecting human rights and in securing a just and lasting peace. Foremost in the manifesto was a proposal to scrap all inter-state river water distribution arrangements, unconstitutionally imposed on Punjab, and immediate stoppage of water supplies to Haryana and Rajasthan. It was also proposed that human rights agencies in Punjab be strengthened and given a definite role in combating state tyranny. A clarion call was made to the Sikh nation not to succumb to the divide and rule tactics of the Indian authorities and to resist the Centre in installing its puppets in power²⁸.

In the ensuing June 1991 elections, unidentified gunmen gunned down 27 Sikh candidates. The Congress Party had boycotted the poll. In the meantime, in the national elections, Congress Party won and formed the government. The day Narsimha Rao was sworn in as the Indian Prime minister, he cancelled the Punjab elections. Once again, the campaign of terror in the State was stepped up. Army presence was increased to some 500,000 persons. From 1987-91, at the height of the Sikh struggle, the Indian government for one reason or another, did not hold any elections in the Punjab. Instead, the army of occupation and Punjab police was given free rein to liquidate the Sikh activists. All democratic and judicial process was abrogated.

The IHRO and other human right groups, in co-operation with Sikhs settled in the USA, UK, Canada and other western countries, launched a campaign to inform the international community of the fascist regime in Punjab. In particular, Western

²⁷ IHRO: Implement the Constitution First, and Talk Later, Ludhiana (India), December 1989, pp 6-7

²⁸ IHRO: Approach to Elections (June 1991)- A 7-Point Poser, Ludhiana (India), May 1991, pp 5-7

governments were asked to link aid to India with human rights. As a result, the USA and other Western countries, which regularly provide support for India's perennially ailing economy, impressed upon India the need to restore the democratic process in Punjab. In due course, an election was announced for February 1992. The presence of the 500,000- strong army ensured that the Sikh masses were terrorised into staying at home and not voting. The Sikh leaderships were convinced that a Kashmir-type fake election was at hand. They decided to boycott the election. Sikh masses gave the boycott their full support. Indeed, Sikh Sarpanches (Village Mayors) and panches (Village Councillors) resigned from the village panchayats (Councils).

In the February 19, 1992, elections, more than 80% people of Punjab boycotted the poll. Media reports suggest that the Sikhs totally and completely abstained from voting. Mostly Hindus (18%) and Communists participated in the election. There was no violence in the State from either side. Earlier, when the Congress Party had boycotted the aborted June 1991 election, there were large-scale killings of election candidates, including 27 Sikh Akali candidates. This poses the question: Who are the real killers in Punjab?

The near unanimous boycott of the 1992 Punjab election by Sikhs demonstrates that Sikh masses are totally disenchanted with the present political set-up in India. It is a clear verdict of the Sikh people that they will not condone India's misdeeds, butchery, and barbarism and Sikh genocide in Punjab. Apropos the boycotted election, the Akali Dal leader, Simranjit Singh Mann said:

"The successful election boycott is a referendum in favour of a sovereign Sikh State as demanded by the six Panthic Organisations (Akali groups) and (Sikh) militants"²⁹.

²⁹ Indian Express: February 22, 1992

VII WHY SIKHS DEMAND SELF-DETERMINATION

"Sikhs are more than a religious sect, they are almost a race and almost a nation. As a nation the Sikhs defeated the Moguls and established a kingdom in the Punjab which they lost as a result of the first and second Sikh wars" (Per Lord Templeman in the House of Lords case of Mandla and Another versus Dowell-Lee and others-1983).

Punjab and Sikhs have gone through a major upheaval in the early and middle part of 20th century. Not only have they been dispossessed of their homeland, they have suffered frustration, degradation and deprivation at the hands of unjust rulers. This has, in turn, fuelled the Sikh struggle for sovereignty.

Kapur Singh says that the Sikhs are 'sui generis,' a free and a sovereign people; that this right is inalienable and cannot be compromised. The Sikh gurus and generation after generation of Sikhs have laid down their lives to live in freedom, dignity and honour³⁰. Sikhs believe in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Human Being. This means that while they treat everyone as equal, they will not be subjugated.

Tracing the demand for a Sikh State, Khushwant Singh, a pro-India Sikh, says:

"The idea of a sovereign Sikh State has never been very far from the Sikh mind. Ever since the days of Guru Gobind Singh, Sikh congregations have chanted the litany *Raj Karey Ga Khalsa- the Khalsa shall rule-* as a part of their daily prayer; innumerable Sikhs gave their lives to achieve this ambition. The establishment of the Sikh Kingdom of Ranjit Singh confirmed the belief of the Sikhs that it was their destiny to rule the Punjab. The fall of the kingdom was regarded as a temporary setback. During the independence, the Sikh leaders' view was that: "If the British have to go, it is only right that Punjab should be restored to the Sikhs from whom it was wrongfully seized."

"The concept of the Sikh State that had never been abandoned was resuscitated. It gathered strength as the Moslem demand for Pakistan grew. In the critical years preceding the relinquishment of power by Britain, 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 Sikh masses wanted), put forward the theory of Independent Punjab only as an argument against Pakistan. All matters of consideration- historic, economic, hydrographic and geographic- were advanced to inflate the size of the non-Moslem part of the Punjab so that what remained would make Pakistan a mockery. Sikh leaders did not press the case for a Sikh State with sincerity. No one took their line of approach seriously"³¹.

Commenting on the concept of Sikh State (or Sikh Homeland), from an ethical point of view, Sohan Singh Sihota adds that the location of Sikh Homeland will not only ensure the defence of the national frontiers of India but shall also serve as a laboratory for working out and experimenting the latest socialistic and democratic values of life. For instance, in matter of shedding away castes, idolatry, superstition, social inequality between man and woman, and in establishing an egalitarian society, Punjab is more than 100 years ahead of the rest of India.

In a leading article, the Los Angeles Times of the USA, comments upon the Sikh disenchantment with the Indian government, because of the broken promises with regard to an autonomous State and the economic exploitation of the Punjab. It says that over the last decade, this disenchantment has given rise to Sikh nationalism and a desire for an independent Punjab, Khalistan. The army attack on the Golden Temple, which occupies for the Sikhs a position similar to the Vatican for Catholics, has had a great effect on Sikhs around the world³².

It is clear beyond doubt that Delhi, ruled by Brahmanical Hindus, has always been hostile towards Punjab and the Sikhs. Since 1947, the Akalis, the leading Sikh political party, has been in power for a mere five years. No Sikh government has been allowed to complete its full term of five years. Punjab has had the longest spell of President's Rule in India. For the rest of the time, the Congress Party has reigned supreme.

On the economic front, 75% of Punjab River waters have been illegally and unconstitutionally diverted to non-riparian Hindu states, even though Punjab itself is in dire need of these waters. The World Bank has advised that diversion of these waters to distant desert areas is not justified on legal or economic grounds. The hydroelectric power generated at Bhakra-Nangal complex is likewise being looted and Punjabi factories have to suffer regular shutdowns because of lack of electricity. Punjab's wheat and grains are likewise used to feed India's starving millions. For obvious reasons, India cannot afford to let go of Punjab. Hence, the Sikh struggle is likely to go on for a long time.

The Indian rulers have developed a notion that Punjab and Kashmir can be ruled by sheer force of arms. To believe that it is possible to subdue Sikhs in this way is to belie Sikh history and Sikh ethos. India must, in the fullness of time, pay for this serious miscalculation.

³⁰ Sohan Singh Sihota: Future of the Sikhs in India, Jalandhar, 1970, p 21

³¹ Khushwant Singh: A History of the Sikhs p 289

³² Los Angeles Times: December 4, 1987

VIII PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT

This would depend upon the willingness of the Indian rulers to listen to the voice of sanity and reason. The mighty Soviet Union disintegrated within a matter of two years. The Soviet Empire crumbled like dominoes. Has history any lesson for India? Are Indian leaders prepared to learn from history? Sikhs are not, forever, going to wait for the answers. Under International law, every people have the fundamental and inalienable right of self-determination. United Nations Charter affirms this right. One group of Sikhs has already decided. They announced the formation of Khalistan from the Akal Takht Sahib in 1986 though no nation apart from Afghanistan has recognised the new State.

IHRO, therefore, suggests that Sikhs, a nation of 16-18 million people, must under International law be given the right to exercise their sovereignty. The Sikhs seek and must be accorded the right of a full, free and true plebiscite in Punjab to ascertain the wishes of the majority. A United Nations' supervised referendum is the only answer.

The alternative is an unending civil war in Punjab from which neither side can gain. In his recent book called 'CIVIL WAR,' Hans Magnus Enzensberger writes that civil wars have become almost respectable; killing the ones you know seems to have become an acceptable alternative to destroying anonymous millions with a touch of the famous button. Enzensberger suggests that "civil war has long since moved into the metropolis. Its mutations are part of everyday life in our cities, not just in Lima and in Johannesburg, in Bombay and in Rio, but in Paris and Berlin, in Detroit and Birmingham, in Milan and Hamburg."

In the Punjab context, civil war has become an inescapable aspect of every village, town and city, where citizens no longer feel protected from India's security forces. When will the Indian rulers realise that 'state-regulated slaughter does not pay dividends'?³³ Life in Indian Punjab is indeed nasty, brutish and short (Hobbs).

³³ Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Civil War, Granta Publishers, 1994

