

POLITICS IN THE PUNJAB

The following four papers are on the general topic of "Politics in the Punjab." Three of the four — those by Harjot S. Oberoi, Andrew Major, and Robin Jeffrey — were originally delivered at the Asian Association of Australia conference in Sydney, May 1985, and have been edited for publication. A fourth paper by Joyce Pettigrew — who was invited to the conference but was unable to attend — has been added.

The Editor

In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore*

Joyce Pettigrew

THE RECENT AND CONTINUING Sikh movement within the Punjab, whether for autonomy within India or for freedom from India, is one of national revival, in which the recurring themes are unity based on the Sikhs' historical and religious tradition, justice, and the purification of the Sikh people in the light of the principles of their faith. I intend to focus on the relatively more permanent aspects of Sikh religious tradition that have made this struggle, on one level, a conflict between two sources of authority—that of God and that of the secular state as represented by the central government of India. Only in conclusion do I make reference to problems relating to development within the agrarian sector of Punjab's economy and the state's lack of industrial development, both of which were

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propelling factors in the support rural people gave Bhindranwale.¹ Instead, I concentrate on the ideological framework provided by Sikh historical and religious tradition, because it was this that held the movement together. Thereby I am not claiming that differences between Sikhs and Hindus are of a purely theological order. However, over the years, as the various separate economic and political grievances of Punjab's Sikh community remained unresolved by the government in Delhi, they were given a religious colouring by the Sikh leadership in the Golden Temple. The struggle then acquired a different dimension, developing a spiritual space and historical duration that were not immediately amenable to settlement simply by the handing-over of Punjabi-speaking pieces of territory, extra allocations of electricity and canal water, and making Chandigarh the capital of Punjab—which were the original demands of the movement. Once issues that were essentially economic and political became interrelated with a religious and historical imagery that belonged to a distinct people, a purely economic solution was no longer tenable.

SIKHISM AS A SEPARATE FAITH

Sikhism's teachings emphasize the oneness, or indivisibility, of God, who is almighty, eternal, and formless. Thereby, He cannot be reduced to a material idol, fashioned by human construction or represented by an image. Sikhism, also, has no human representative of the deity, as has Hinduism. God is spiritually present in the holy scriptures (the Guru Granth Sahib), which is the divine word, and He is temporally present in the collective body of the Sikh people (Panth, Khalsa, Khalsa Panth), or any local congregation of them (*sangat*). The Guru Granth Sahib is sovereign, not the secular state. The first Guru's² teachings emphasized devotion to God. "Oh man entertain such love for God as the lotus has for water. Such love doth it bear it that it bloometh even when dashed down by waves."³ However, the true man of faith lives on in the adversity of the

¹ Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a religious preacher. Born in 1947, he was murdered during the army invasion of the Golden Temple in June 1984. A considerable part of his life was spent at Punjab's most influential preaching centre—the Dam Dami Taksal of which he became the head. The sources of his hold over his followers were the authority of his magnetic personality and his capability to translate the events of Sikh history into a language appreciated both by those of little education and those of learning and power. In a survey which covered students, lecturers, rural gatherings, and festivals in representative villages from Punjab's three main areas, *The Indian Express* (2 February 1982, p.7) reported that Bhindranwale was "respected and popular among Sikhs in all walks of life and was in fact 'Sikh of the Year'."

² In the words of W. H. McLeod (*The Evolution of the Sikh Community* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975], p. 106), the "Guru is usually a person but sometimes understood as the divine inner voice." In later Sikh theology the word connotes, according to McLeod, "the continuing spiritual presence of the eternal Guru in the Granth Sahib."

³ From hymns of Guru Nanak contained in M. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1963), vol. 1, pp. 270-71.

world for love of God and does not retreat from its difficulties, but “battles in open field with his mind perfectly in control and with his heart poised in love.”⁴

Already in the mystical writings of Nanak (the first Guru) there is implicit the resurgent spirit more especially characteristic of the writings of the sixth and tenth Gurus (Hargovind and Govind respectively). “Saintliness is within,” said the sixth Guru, while “sovereignty is external.” In abandonment to the Reality of God, attained through devotion, one had the courage to fight for Guru and Panth. The devotional remembrance of God (*Nam simran*) through constant repetition of His name (*Nam Japan*) is central to Sikh worship. In this respect, Sikhism, as noted by at least one influential writer,⁵ resembles Sufism.⁶ The Sufi practice of *dhikr*—a practice of Central Asian origin, according to Trimmingham,⁷ as indeed were the majority of Sikhism’s adherents, the Jats⁸—was in some, though not all respects, similar to the practice of *Nam Japan*. Trimmingham, for example, describes *dhikr* as “A particular method of glorifying God by constant repetition of His name.”⁹ However, Sikhism contained the mysticism which states that love of God is the only means of attaining purity with a fervent belief in justice. And, in this respect, as with its emphasis on martyrdom, in Southwest Asian perspective one may advance the view that it combines its strong Sufi element with an equally strong Shi’ite component. Skocpol,¹⁰ referring to the voluntary martyrdom of Husayn¹¹ for the just cause of resisting the oppressor, remarks that, “Shia Islam has especially salient symbolic resources to justify resistance against unjust authority and to legitimate religious leaders as competitors to the State.” And Trimmingham notes that the Sufi mystic, Al Junayyid,¹² when asked about Ali’s¹³ knowledge of mysticism, answered the question obliquely: “Had Ali been less engaged in wars he might have contributed greatly to our knowledge of esoteric things for he was one vouchsafed knowledge coming from the divine.” It is useful to compare that order of statement with one Bhindranwale made in a last message to the Sikhs:

⁴ *The Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 931, as quoted in Harbans Singh, *Guru Nanak* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969), p. 209.

⁵ J. S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh: Punjab University Press, 1969).

⁶ The aim of Sufism is to maintain among men the inner realization of the Divine Essence which makes the revealed law of Islam valid.

⁷ H. Spender Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders on Islam* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 97.

⁸ The hereditary landowning population, who may be small owner-proprietors, prosperous farmers, or landlords.

⁹ Trimmingham, *Sufi Orders*, p. 194.

¹⁰ Theda Skocpol, “Rentier State and Shia Islam in the Iranian Revolution,” *Theory and Society*, no. 11, (1982), p. 273.

¹¹ The grandson of the prophet Mohammed.

¹² One of the most famous Sufi mystics, who died in A.D. 910.

¹³ Ali was son-in-law and cousin of the prophet Mohammed.

Pacific Affairs

Peaceful means—*shānt mai*—these words cannot be found together in any part of the Sikh scriptures [i.e., you will find “peace” and you will find “means,” but no compound word] in the history of the Gurus nor, in the history of the Sikhs. . . . [He illustrates what he means by this.] Guru Arjun Dev [the fifth Guru, 1581–1606] fought a peaceful struggle and he became a martyr. Guru Hargobind took rightful revenge. The 7th [1644–61] and 8th [1661–64] Gurus took no part in wars, preached Sikhism and helped the poor. The 9th Guru [1664–75] again faced struggle which he fought peacefully and sacrificed himself for justice. The 10th Guru [1675–1708] redeemed that sacrifice in the name of justice.¹⁴

In the above statement, he clearly states that, according to Sikh religious and historical tradition, peaceful conditions can survive only when the community is left untroubled by the state (as during 1644–64). Once the community is the subject of attack it is its duty to restore righteousness in the temporal realm. Bringing this idea into present-day politics, he contrasts his own position as defender of the faith with that of the appeasing tactics of the Akali Dal.¹⁵ “Longowal (who negotiated with the government in Delhi) is 14th President of the Akali Dal. I¹⁶ [a slave] am the 14th descendant of Baba Deep Singh.”¹⁷

He also says that, whether it is right to adopt a peaceful policy, as Longowal enjoins, and continue to engage in negotiation, or whether it is right to take up arms in defence of the sacred, as did Baba Deep Singh, is a matter for the collectivity of the Sikh community alone to decide. For, he adds, “I am only your *chaukidar*.¹⁸ I am the servant of the Guru’s *sangat* and from you I ask only that you pray for me at the feet of the 10th Guru that I might ask of the Almighty (*Akal Purukh*) what He had asked: when the struggle enters the decisive phase may I die fighting in its midst.”

It is the Sikh doctrine of *miri-piri*, the indivisibility of religious and political power, and of the spiritual and the temporal, that gave legitimacy to the political action organized from within Darbar Sahib (the Golden Temple), and which was indeed the organizing principle for that action. The doctrine emphasized the theological separateness of the Sikhs, and thereby their political separateness also. *Miri-piri* is indeed so fundamental that it receives material concretization in the *nishan*, or Sikh emblem, in

¹⁴ On this and subsequent translations of Bhindranwale’s speeches, see the footnote to the title of this article.

¹⁵ The Akali Dal is the present ruling party in the Punjab State Legislative Assembly and has been the principal opposition party to the Congress in the years following Independence. It functions with financial support from the gurdwaras (Sikh temples). Since the formation of a Punjabi-speaking state in 1966, it has become less and less associated with Sikh interests and more associated with the interests of Punjab as a province. It is interested in increased legislative powers to the states, but not in separatism.

¹⁶ Here he does not use the word “I” but the Punjabi “das” (servant or slave).

¹⁷ A most deeply revered leader figure who fought against the Afghans, knowing he was outnumbered, to prevent Darbar Sahib from being desecrated.

¹⁸ The *chaukidar* (watchman) is usually a landless laborer. What this sentence really means is “Among you I am the lowest of the low.”

which the double-edged sword representing the purity of faith is shielded by two protecting *Kirpāns* (swords). Within the Temple complex, the concept is expressed spatially by the Akal Takht (the highest seat of temporal authority), facing the Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple, the seat of spiritual authority). Indirectly the concept underlies many lines of scripture:¹⁹

Strengthen me, beloved God,
That I shrink not from doing righteous deeds,
That freed from the fear of my enemies I may fight with faith and win,
The wisdom which I crave is the grace to sing your praises,
When this life's allotted course has run may I meet my death in battle.

Likewise Bhindranwale, echoing scripture said: "You can't have courage without reading *gurbani* [the Guru's word; the sacred hymns of the Sikh scriptures]. Only the bani-reader can suffer torture and be capable of feats of strength."

Within the moral tradition there can be no justice without political power.²⁰ Equally, justice must be the foundation for any political rule. The historical tradition begins with Nanak, the first Guru, who states the essential elements of faith and ends with Govind, the tenth and last Guru, who asserts that these elements of faith are so central to men that they have to be defended, if need be, by force.

Religiously-regulated political action always remained a possibility in the Sikh system because of the indivisibility of religious and temporal power. The truly spiritual are expected to be concerned about the political conditions under which men live. The community belongs to God, the rules for its existence and life are laid down by the Gurus and enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib. Hence, the legitimacy of the ruler is precarious if he does not act in accordance with the principles of scripture, which are the ultimate source of legitimacy. The doctrine implies the supremacy of religion and a lack of autonomy for the political process. But government is legitimate and men are required to owe allegiance to it so long as it remains just. (Therefore, the Shi'ite Islamic tradition which Arjomand²¹ comments

¹⁹ Chandi Charitra, *The Dasam Granth of Guru Gobind Singh*, verse 231, p. 99, as cited in W. H. McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 55.

²⁰ An unjust regime is a usurpation of the authority of God and an oppression of the people. In Shi'ite Islam it is also a usurpation of the Imam—from Ayatollah Na'ini's text "The Admonition and Refinement of the People," as cited in Azar Tabari, "The Role of the Shi'ite Clergy in Modern Iranian Politics," in N. R. Keddi, ed., *Religion and Politics in Iran* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 58.

²¹ Said Amir Arjomand, "Religion, Political Action and Legitimate Domination in Shi'ite Iran Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries A.D.," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. XX (1979), p. 72.

upon, quoting from the Hadith—"Whenever a man accedes to authority he drifts away from God"²²—would be applicable in Sikh tradition only if that authority were considered unjust and oppressive.) The political sphere was not regarded as profane, as it was during certain periods of Shi'ite dominance in Iran, but rather as a shield for the protection of Sikh values. Only when, in situations of conflict, Sikhs gave their first loyalty to the temporal authority rather than to the Guru Granth Sahib, was: "the most excellent of *jihads* (holy wars) the utterance of truth before the tyrannical ruler."²³ Such an action was performed by Bhindranwale before one of Punjab's most ruthless senior superintendents of police. He later related the incident to the congregation as follows:

On the one hand they [the police and the then Congress government] are perpetrating atrocities and on the other they are asking for reprieve. I asked that man had he ever read a page of our history. Was the man who tortured Guru Arjun [the fifth Guru] pardoned? . . . and when *he* was not pardoned how then could he dare to come and ask me for a reprieve? [i.e., who was I to give a reprieve?].

By talking so much about the sixth Guru in his speeches, Bhindranwale's teaching gave a central place to the *miri-piri* doctrine. That concept in all its manifestations presented Sikhs as a bounded entity, and it was directly opposed to the reality of their dispersed state throughout India and their geographical location on an exposed plain, the Punjab, an area which historically had been a meeting ground for many peoples. Whereas "there was nothing from within Shi'ism that threatened the stability of the dual [theo-political] structure of domination in premodern Iran,"²⁴ by contrast in Sikhism one concept in particular undermined the idea of a Sikh state: the concept of Panth (the community of believers). Among the Sikhs, "community" is not a spatial entity; "community" is the collective body of those believing in the Sikh faith. A relationship between land, people, and territory, such as is found in Judaism, is not present in Sikh theology. From a theological point of view, territory could not be a focal point for a nationalist movement. No special claims to territory can be made that have any religious validity. Hence, Sikhism does not lend itself easily to the formation of a state, and it is very difficult to equate peoplehood and nationality in their case. It is this lack of association between Panth, as the community of the faithful, with a specific territory, that has portended ill for them in their endeavour to keep separate when confronted with the assimilative processes of the secular state. Temporal power was vested in the Panth, but precisely what this meant was difficult to ascertain, since Panth was the religious community of all Sikhs and not the localized

²² The Tradition attributed to the Prophet by Abu Dharr as quoted in Al-Ghazali, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Cairo. 1967, pp. 181-94.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

²⁴ Said Amir Arjomand, "The Shi'ite Hierocracy and the State in Pre-Modern Iran: 1785-1890," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. XXII. (1981), pp. 60-75.

community. In practice, these two traditions and the theological concepts of Panth and *miri-piri* exerted contrary pulls, and Sikh identity was formed not just by resistance in order to establish the rule of law and guard the faith, as implied in the *miri-piri* concept. It was also shaped by patterns of accommodation and compromise that were responsive to the consequences of the concept of Panth as the insubstantial rather than the territorial community. The polarity within the ideal order between *miri-piri* and Panth was paralleled in the temporal order by, for example, the different political practice and policies of the Sikh Youth Federation and the Akali Dal in the post-1978 period. *Miri-piri*, by promising sovereignty, gave the Sikhs an exclusive territorial home on earth, while Panth implied that their home was in the visible representation of the Guru—the Guru Granth Sahib. The concept of Panth summarized the Sikh historical experience of coexistence with other communities. It was in accord with assimilationist tendencies within the community, whether these took the form of negative individualistic acts of treacherous betrayal, or, more positively, of participation in the institutions of multi-national empires and states. The separation of peoples ran counter to the notion of the Panth, whereby the Sikhs were not a territorial entity to be encompassed within a political boundary on grounds of their faith and specific religious tradition. If *miri-piri* exerted a stronger pull at this particular stage it was, perhaps, a circumstance born of Hindu revivalism, which emerged as a force in the 1970s.

THE BACKGROUND TO BHINDRANWALE'S CALL FOR UNITY

The pre-1947 undivided Punjab had been a multi-communal unit. The crucial Sikh institutions had evolved during the Afghan invasions and in the period of ascendancy subsequent to the Sikh capture of Sirhind from the Afghans in 1763, prior to Ranjit Singh's rule (1801–39). Each Sikh chief may have had a common enemy in the Afghan invaders and fought against them, but this unity was not shown in any form of concerted action. Thereby, their independence was not offended, and their spirit of submission to God, but to none other, was given practical realization. Their localized interests and independent power bases established the material foundation for a philosophy stressing friendship and enmity as guiding principles for action. In the period preceding Ranjit Singh's reign, neither these principles, nor the related political decentralization referred to above, allowed the easy formation of solidarity solely on a community basis, but rather they encouraged alliances stretching beyond community borders. The early pattern of political decentralization, the intermarriages between urban Sikhs and Hindus, the lack of a purely communal basis for local political networks, and the openness of the Sikh faith itself were merely the empirical signs of a structural pattern which accorded well with life on an open plain.

Communal identity became an issue for the Sikhs primarily, though not solely, when the common culture of the Punjab was broken in 1947. The Sikhs were then separated from a people to whom they were culturally allied, the Muslims of West Punjab. However, the Sikh religious leadership stressed (as it always had done) that the historic struggle of the Gurus was against unjust rule and tyrannical rulers, and not against Muslims. In 1951 Punjabi culture was broken yet again, when Punjabi Hindus declared Hindi to be their mother tongue, rejecting their linguistic heritage. This act and the Sikh position as monotheists, living among the many millions who believed God could be found in an animal or stone or worshipped in an image, gave a new edge of certainty to their religious and cultural distinctiveness. Yet this very development was accompanied by the community's economic integration into India through the services—army, civil, police and foreign—and the employment structure generally, and through its prominent business community, now dispersed throughout the subcontinent. Stratification patterns were therefore national, rather than regional and communal.

It was in the light of this combination of factors that the political leadership of the Akali Dal and certain sections of the Sikh élite became concerned with the erosion of Sikh tradition among the young, especially since all Sikhs were claimed by the Hindu population as being part of them, and their religion was seen as one of Hinduism's many forms. However, not only were they living in a country which, through its constitution, had contrary cultural ideals, but also they were living in a country which espoused secularism and whose élite in the early years of independence saw religion as backward—as a force a modern mind would not acknowledge. The Sikh élite saw the dangers of such a state but did not feel threatened by it. Nevertheless, the Congress Party's dedication to the eradication of religion as a collective force in political life contributed to unease when they, as a community, defined themselves with reference to religion. An important early indication of Congress Party policy was its attempt in 1956 to eliminate the Akali Dal from political life and to confine its activities to the educational, cultural, and moral uplift of the Panth. Much earlier, two ideologues of the Sikh faith—Sarup Singh and Kapur Singh—had predicted difficulties over the Sikh position in India. Sarup Singh made a well-publicized protest in 1945 over the consequences for the Sikhs of religion being declared the private concern of the individual.²⁵ Kapur Singh insisted that the Sikhs be treated as a collective entity, as a people, and not as individual citizens. The government, he said, "did not recognize its own self-limited character" (i.e., that its authority did not extend over Sikh affairs since God alone was their true Sovereign). He argued that "any

²⁵ Sarup Singh was an urban Akali Dal leader of prominence at partition in 1947 and in the twenty years after Independence. The protest was published in Amritsar on 21 October 1945 by the Akali Dal.

state which assumes it alone rules, forfeits its moral right to demand the allegiance of the Sikhs.²⁶ Until the 1970s, such arguments were talking points for the intelligentsia alone. Any concern among the Sikhs as a whole about their future in independent India, and about their own unity, occurred primarily because of the repudiation of Punjabi nationality by Punjab's two other major religious communities.

Referring to the Uttar Pradesh Muslims, Robinson²⁷ had remarked that a political alignment based on religion had arisen, due to the undermining of the dominance of the Urdu-speaking élite. In the case of the Sikhs, the élite in no way led the current revivalist movement, though some among their numbers from important Jat families were participant members of it. It attracted the support of some high-ranking ex-servicemen, most of whom were Jats, and also of some serving officers. This support had its basis in the recruitment regulations for the defence forces introduced in 1974, which dispensed with recruitment on a merit basis and assigned quotas to the various states on the basis of the recruitable male population. When certain men of the ninth battalion of the Sikh regiment (commonly called the "9th Sikh") protested against the army action in Darbar Sahib, they were disbanded.

Traditionally, the army was held by all sections of the community in high regard. It was still seen by Sikhs in the way Macauliffe had depicted it in the preface to the first two volumes of *The Sikh Religion*.

In our time one of the principal agencies for the preservation of the Sikh religion had been the practice of military officers commanding Sikh regiments to send Sikh recruits to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh and endeavour to preserve them in their subsequent career from the contagion of idolatry. The military have practically become the main hierophants and guardians of the Sikh religion.²⁸

Recently also in testimony before the court trying five non-commissioned officers of the Sikh Regimental Centre at Ramgarh, Bihar, for desertion when Darbar Sahib was invaded. Lieutenant-General Harbaksh Singh, in their defence, drew attention to the fact that "Sikh soldiers were nurtured on religious tenets and traditions."²⁹

The traditional place that the army had in Sikh life was threatened by the 1974 regulations, and the drop in the recruitment percentage was to have a direct economic impact on innumerable smallholding and labourer families. Prior to this date, even in the immediate post-partition period, when urban newspapers, such as the *Spokesman*, circulated reports of the

²⁶ S. Kapur Singh, "The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status," in Jaswant Singh Mann, ed., *Some Documents on the Demand for the Sikh Homeland* (Chandigarh: All-India Sikh Students Federation and Manjit Publishing Company, 1970), p. 3.

²⁷ F. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 33.

²⁸ M. Macauliffe, *Sikh Religion*, Vol. 1, p. xxv.

²⁹ *The Tribune*, 6 June 1986.

apostasy of Sikh officers in removing their turbans and cutting their hair, and of the supersession of Sikh officers by Hindus, spoken discontent remained confined to families and immediate circles of friends, and it did not surface in political expression. In the cities, Sikh urban refugees, scattered from their lands and homes in West Punjab, campaigned for a linguistic state with Punjabi written in the Gurumukhi script, which would also be a Sikh-majority state. After a long struggle, this was granted in 1966, thereby guaranteeing to future generations of Sikh children that they would be taught in their mother tongue, thus facilitating their access to, and knowledge of, the Guru Granth Sahib. The length of the struggle for a principle that had already been conceded throughout India—the reorganization of states on a linguistic basis—created bitterness. I remember hearing in the villages during 1965–66 comments such as: “Why should we have to beg for our rights from the family of a pandit” (referring to the family of Pandit Nehru, the prime minister, who were Brahmin). I have remembered those sentiments because such feelings came to be expressed publicly by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in his speeches fifteen years later.

Throughout these various political struggles Sikhs remained in high positions in all the services and in the ruling party. Sikhs had a tradition of working in the service of the larger empire, or state.³⁰ During the entire period of the independence struggle Sikhs had continued to enrol in the British army, and they fought in all Britain’s wars. Powerful indeed would be a political movement able to counter the long collaborationist tradition which, not surprisingly, surfaced in the action of the army generals in June 1984. Bhindranwale’s speeches draw no veil over Sikh divisiveness. Equally, they forcefully remind the Sikhs of their tradition of fighting against superior odds for a cause that is just. In his speeches, Sikh historical and religious tradition as a whole is presented before the people, not dismembered into those parts suitable for the movement’s momentary interest and advantage. There were differing responses to Bhindranwale from within the Sikh community, but religion was not used in a functional manner to forge some sort of unity among them. Certainly, the placing of the various economic and political grievances and civil rights abuses within a religious framework touched the heart of the community more than it would have done had they been presented purely as secular issues. However, this was no tactic, but a part of Sikh tradition, because the religious belief system was not separate from the community’s social order.³¹

³⁰ The army was the main medium of integration in this respect. The parallels with Scotland after 1745 are striking. B. Lenman, in *The Jacobite Clans of the Great Glen 1650–1784* (London: Methuen, 1984), comments: “Regiment raising was the means whereby the old Jacobite families were reconciled with Westminster. That process made them part of the British ruling classes which is what they remain” (p. 220).

³¹ Arjomand, “The Shi’ite,” similarly comments that for Shi’ism there was an absence of any differentiation between Shi’ite Islam as a religious belief system and the conception of the

Bhindranwale had the committed support of the educated youth with a rural background. This support grew with police excesses. The campaign waged against the Naxalites by the police and civil administration during the early 1970s, recorded by noted Punjabi novelist Jaswant Singh Kanwal,³² had its brutal repetition in the summer and early winter of 1982. Bhindranwale's concern over the many indiscriminate breaches of civil rights gained him many youthful supporters. That concern was restricted to those killed during and after 1978 (the year a peaceful protest by orthodox Sikhs had been shot at by members of a breakaway sect, the Sant Nirankaris, who believed in a personal Guru).³³ He remained unconcerned about more permanent forms of exploitation, unless they had a direct Sikh reference. He did not have unanimous support in the rural areas. Some, although not all, of the rural poor did not want to belong to a Sikh state that they claimed would be ruled by landlords and capitalists, "by people like Badal [a former chief minister of Punjab] and Balwant Singh [the present finance minister]," as one man said. This was the major reservation. Others feared for their "modernity," and, while supporting him in daylight hours, remembered by dusk the taboos he placed on drinking. And a former lady minister of social welfare, not modern herself, said "When I went to see Santji I felt as though I had to wrap my *dupatta* [veil] around my head twice."³⁴

Bhindranwale's revivalism created divisions among the Sikhs, and those with interests outside the Punjab, whether in land, or in business, or through occupying high administrative position, were particularly opposed to him. Bhindranwale—part of a preaching tradition—saw the lives of many of these Sikhs as a departure from God's truth, a departure that was threatening the distinct identity of the Sikhs. Accordingly, the Sikh community had to be purified of deviationist trends, of Communists, and of Sikh officers in Indian government service whose primary loyalty lay with India rather than the Panth. It has been argued that insistence on unity is one of the themes at the heart of nationalist ideology, and that such an insistence requires a "purification." No movement which served two incompatible ideals could survive. The doctrine of class struggle was unacceptable because it was incompatible with a unified independence movement: it was *sha'atnetz* (a forbidden mixture), as Jabotinsky³⁵ had

Shi'ite community as an autonomous social order. In other words there existed no conception of a secular society (p. 72).

³² Jaswant Singh Kanwal, *Lahu di Loa* (The glow of blood) (Delhi: Arsi Publishers, 1976).

³³ In Sikh religious terminology, "Nirankari" means one who worships a formless God. The Nirankaris referred to here are the worshippers of a living human being, which is contrary to Sikh tenets.

³⁴ Sant Bhindranwale was held in awe, and the meaning of her statement was that to such an esteemed person any respect she could give would be too little.

³⁵ Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940) was a right-wing Zionist from the Soviet Union.

called it in a different setting. Equally, members of the official opposition party, the Akali Dal, were distrusted by Bhindranwale because they stressed the Punjab and the peoples living within its territorial boundaries and presented the problem as one between centre and state. They did not see themselves as representatives of the Sikh people, but as the legitimate opposition in Punjab state. Bhindranwale promised the Sikh masses a political purge of the Akali Dal, and he pledged that he would not allow it to betray them as before.³⁶ Bhindranwale also set a challenge to Sikh officers in government service to work for the unity of Sikhs as a distinct people. Secularism and loyalty to the Panth were indeed to become a forbidden mixture. However, many of the murders that took place in the Punjab between December 1983 and June 1984, could not be related to that source. Some were a consequence of private vendettas,³⁷ and others were the responsibility of the fundamentalist religious groups within the Temple who were not affiliated to Bhindranwale.

BHINDRANWALE'S PREACHING

The sacrifice of Bhindranwale's life, and the lives of some of his followers, drew attention to the fact that many Sikhs live by a model of society opposed to India's. They were slaughtered in defence of their conception of what society should be. And, if Sikh economic and political assimilation to India had to be taken as a fact, so too did the tradition capable of reacting to that assimilation: that saintliness combined with sovereignty are a people's shield! In essence this was very similar to elements in the Hussite faith, which was intertwined also with the national consciousness of a people—the Czechs—and in which religion was likewise intimately linked with social order and justice in the state.³⁸ The Fourth Article of Prague,³⁹ a

³⁶ "You people come and offer me money, love and support. And if the Akali leaders try to compromise on the Anandpur Sahib resolution I'm not going to forgive them. I'll be your watch dog but I tell you as watch dog that you will have to force the Akalis! . . . But don't think that as in the past, leaders can settle everything in Delhi or by taking a glass of juice on their own [reference to Master Tara Singh abandoning his fast unto death in 1961] This time they can't give up by taking a glass of juice. Either the full implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution or their heads."

³⁷ Such as that of Squadron-Leader Paramjeet Singh Walia, murdered at his home just outside Amritsar in April 1984.

³⁸ In one sense, of course, I should not make this comparison when the Hussite faith was a rejection of orthodoxy, whereas Bhindranwale's movement was an affirmation of it. But I thought it appropriate because of the spirit of equality that was a hallmark of both faiths. All men were equal, because there was nothing inherent to justify their subservience to another. And Galia Golan points out, with reference to the Hussite tradition, that this had socio-political implications among which she mentions one of particular relevance to the Sikh case—the development of individualism (Galia Golan, "National Traditions and Socialism in Eastern Europe," in S. N. Eisenstadt and M. Azmon, eds. (New York: Humanities Press, 1975), pp. 41-76).

³⁹ "But should anyone write or speak or charge evil erroneous shameful or abusive things against us, we beg that he should not be believed as speaking from a lack of charity and as a

cornerstone of that faith, states that the secular arm is necessary in order to protect the truth. To quote Seton-Watson:⁴⁰

The Hussite struggle was responsible for building in the minds of the Czechs the idea of some special character attaching to the Czech nation, of its call to great deeds in the service of God and the divine law. The national consciousness of the Czechs thus acquired a special mystical tinge and impressive fervour and the Czech national idea was enriched by the thought that the nation . . . had had a great and positive task laid upon it—a fight for the pure truth of God.

Four centuries and more after the death of Hus, in 1950, the Czech writer Karel Havlíček (1820–56) wrote: “As a nation our life was almost gone . . . This *miserable* generation of ours had to be told the story of their great ancestors who had feared neither the tyrannical wordly popes nor the land hungry emperor.”⁴¹

A similar process of historical recall was in evidence in Punjab, with Bhindranwale reminding his rural congregations of their valiant tradition of fighting, as at Chamkaur, for righteousness, though he stressed that they *were* able to fight so because God was with them. “The rulers should keep in mind that in the past many like them did try in vain to annihilate our Gurus. We are the sons of our Father who fought with only 40 Sikhs besieged by 100,000 [reference to Guru Govind Singh] and the only difference is that we are not so strong as was our Father because He was our Father.”

The movement was revivalist in spirit and revivalist in form, and also orthodox, as was the Singh Sabha movement⁴² in its emphasis on the importance of *gurbani* and the keeping of the *rehetnamas* (codes of conduct). “Keep unshorn hair;⁴³ live according to tradition [i.e., according to the *rehetnamas*].⁴⁴ The SatGuru [the one and only True God] will show his

false witness. For we boldly confess before God and the world that with His grace no other feeling rules in our hearts than to dedicate ourselves to Him and fulfill his laws . . . but every opponent and all who would force us away from the good we must resist according to God's law and truth and . . . we must protect with the secular arm both the truth and ourselves . . . and should anyone suffer injury from our side this happens either in necessary self defence or as an enemy of God and our enemy since we defend God's law.”

⁴⁰ R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), p. 75.

⁴¹ As quoted in Seton-Watson, *A History*, p. 160.

⁴² McLeod, *The Evolution*, p. 55.

⁴³ A Sikh should always protect the dignity of his hair and thereby preserve the honour of the Sikh faith, the hair being the outward symbol of the inward faith of a Sikh (from the earliest-extant *rehetnama* of Chaupa Singh, a servant of the tenth Guru, quoted in W. H. McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984], p. 75).

⁴⁴ The *rehetnamas* include taking *amrit* (baptism), wearing the five symbols of Sikhism, attaching the name Singh to one's name if one is male, and Kaur if one is female, avoidance of smoking, abstinence from all drugs and intoxicants and from gambling, never committing adultery or theft, and putting aside one-tenth of one's income to enable the Guru to feed the Sikhs, repeating the Lord's name in prayers at dawn and at sunset. Sikhs in large numbers flagrantly disregarded them.

benevolence and success will come with His blessing. Always keep your allegiance to the *nishan* and always fight for Panth if need be with bare bodies [that is, not seeking advantage].”

And when long-standing wrongs were not tackled by the state’s economic and political process, a period of sustained protest began in the summer of 1982, organized around traditional teachings.⁴⁵ A unified Sikh community was a constant theme of the speeches, one unified around its symbols, its Gurus, its flag, and the living embodiment of the Guru—the Guru Granth Sahib. This has to be understood in terms of the fact that Sikhism was a young religion and the Sikh Punjab “a land between.” There was no border between the Sikhs and the Islamic countries to the west. An interesting statement in this respect was that made to me by Punjab’s deputy advocate-general (now advocate-general):⁴⁶ “Not just our scriptures but our entire Sikh history is one of crucifixion at the hands of Muslims. But the fact remains that socially and culturally we are closer to them.”

Culturally, Sikhs were Punjabis, while structurally they were a part of India. Any communal stance on their part had been purely reactive, and they in fact could be part of either nation. Sikhism was a non-exclusivist faith and had no separating observances of the kind and nature laid down for Jews in the Talmud and the Shulhan Aruch.⁴⁷ Regarding these, the eminent Hebrew scholar Ahad Ha’am⁴⁸ (1856–1927) had once declared that “the elaborate system of practical ritual was the only way of self-preservation left open to an enslaved and oppressed people” [a reference to Jews after the loss of their independence]. So the following injunctions of Bhindranwale must be seen as an attempt by Sikhs to control their own boundaries.

- (1) By separate, Guru Gobind Singh meant separate by *gurbani* and by *bhana* (dress). Everyone can come into a Sikh gurudwara. Therefore we are separate from the Hindus who do not allow the ritually impure to enter but also from the Muslims who do not allow women. We are religiously separate. But why do we have to emphasise this? It is only because we are losing our identity and the interest of our Sikh leaders who have their farms and their industries at heart

⁴⁵ It does not seem reasonable to see this protest as one of Adas’s revitalization movements which occur when social changes are “compressed and speeded up” (M. Adas *Prophets of Rebellion* [Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1979], p. 83). The social and economic change that the community underwent after partition was of a far greater order. Nor does it seem adequate to speak of mobilization around beliefs and programmes, as does Smelser, but rather to see the collective violence that occurred as a result of the opposition between two contrary ideas of legitimacy and hence as “a by product of contention for power and of its repression.” (C. L. and R. Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830–1930* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975]).

⁴⁶ Personal interview (late December 1983).

⁴⁷ Shulhan Aruch, meaning literally “a set table.” Otherwise, the set of precepts and rules of a very precise and detailed nature giving direction to practical observance.

⁴⁸ Ahad Ha-am, *Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, edited by Leon Simon (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946).

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have started making them say that there is no difference between Sikh and Hindu and hence assimilation dangers have increased.

- (2) We shall only rule if we become Khalsa . . . i.e., keep unshorn hair and take *amrit* [i.e., become baptised]. Being the sons of Sikhs you are trimming your beards. We ourselves are ruining Sikhism and no people in the world can dare to ruin Sikhism . . . The communists have started telling boys at school and students that they are not slaves and therefore they need not follow this movement . . . I'll tell you how we are slaves! We have a minority complex. But don't consider yourselves a minority. We are not the losers. A loser is the man whose Father is weak but the one whose Father is powerful he can never be a loser. A loser is the man who can have nothing from nowhere. But if the man who owns everything says that he is the loser, then who is the winner? Our Father says, "When I make my single Sikh fight against 125,000 enemies only then do I deserve to be called Gobind.⁴⁹ What a great promise that was!" [So how are we losers?]

He frequently mocked his youthful rural audiences, albeit humorously. "You people who cut your beard, do you think you resemble the image of Guru Gobind Singh? And if you don't and He was your Father then what does that make you? I hesitate to say what you should be called."

Deep suspicion of the Sikh élite emerges from the speeches, although, this was not revealed in the interview I had with him. "Sometimes you government people look towards the *gurdwara* (Sikh temple), sometimes towards your *bungas* (the traditional word for rest houses) and sometimes towards Guru Nanak." He correctly depicted them as a class possessing the ability for multiple allegiances and on which, therefore, a mass movement could not rely. Sikhs must be united by their faith, on its terms alone, and that faith considered it justifiable to protest against discrimination and to fight against abuses of power and repression.

Talk is not enough against injustice. We have to act. Here you raise your swords but tomorrow you may dust the chapples of Bibi Indira.⁵⁰ And you behave so even when if a Hindu is killed they point a finger at the Sikhs before they know the culprit. Before a proper investigation has been conducted they say it is the Sikhs! We have the right to be Sikhs and to live by the tenets of the Guru and they have no business to lay every crime at our door. The Guru will give you the strength because righteousness is with you. Anyone of you who is in the services, when there is danger to Darbar Sahib, must stand up for it. The dearest thing to any Sikh should be the honour of the Guru. When they say the Sikhs are not separate we'll demand separate identity even if it demands sacrifice. These foes—Government and the Hindus—are not dangerous. Rather one has to be aware of those who profess Sikhism yet do not behave as Sikhs. When it is a question of sacrifice it is the Sikhs who sacrifice. When it is a question of rewards and prizes they restrict entry into the services. Why should there be this injustice? We are not bound to defend the country every time if this is how the government behaves. I appeal for unity. If Longowal

⁴⁹ He means that only then do I deserve to be called a follower of Guru Govind and to consider myself a member of his community by virtue of my heroic action.

⁵⁰ He is suggesting that some Sikhs are sycophants. The statement literally means that they will lick the dirt from Mrs. Gandhi's sandals to please her, because of her powerful position and to gain advantage for themselves.

gives an order obey it. How many times have I told you if someone insults a Sikh girl, the Guru Granth, or acts against the weak and downtrodden, take revenge. The Guru Granth has been buried in cow dung and thrown on the road side. That is your Father, your Guru, that they treat so. And then you come to me and ask what are your orders? You should know your orders—if you are true Sikhs!

Certain statements contained in extracts from Bhindranwale's speeches quoted on pp. 15 and 16 illustrate Minogue's view that "a people is trying to create itself at the same time as it claims its freedom."⁵¹ They illustrate that the movement was a crusade against moral corruption within the community. Sometimes, indeed, it appeared as if the issue of who was a Sikh had been raised, and that Bhindranwale's answer to that was determined by orthodoxy rather than by blood—and would have excluded those who were traitors to the Panth. Bhindranwale did not deviate from orthodox Sikh tradition, but he brought to the fore what Grewal has described in another connection as the three important legacies of Guru Gobind Singh: "the struggle against the State, the collective authority of the Khalsa and *bani* as the source of inspiration for religious life."⁵² Bhindranwale constantly stressed to the youth that they must remain peaceful:

I have requested them humbly to consider that their attempt to liberate the Sikhs from the chains of slavery could only succeed if they follow the path of the Guru and be true Sikhs. A preacher cannot influence others if he himself does not possess the qualities he asks for in others. . . . It is peace to suffer. But now our *isht* (beloved object, here connoting the Guru Granth) is on fire and matters cannot be worse.

It is at this point that one stops being peaceful. Tolerance stops short at the burning down of a gurdwara or the defilement of the Holy Book.

I cannot really understand how it is that in the presence of Sikhs Hindus are able to insult the SatGuru Guru Granth Sahib Sacha Patshah [the one and only True God, our Scripture, the True King]. I don't know how were these Sikhs born to their mothers and why they were not born to animals, to cats and to bitches Whosoever insults the Guru Granth Sahib he should be killed then and there Some youths complain that if they do such deeds then nobody harbours them. No place is holier than this one. If any Sikh tells a lie here, where would he go? I say this with all responsibility that I will take care of the man who comes to me after lynching the murderer of the Guru Granth Sahib, I'll fight his case as well! What else do you want? That things have come to such a pass is in any case all your own weakness The man whose sister is molested and does nothing about it, whose Guru is insulted and who keeps on talking and doing nothing, has he got any right to be known as the son of the Guru? Just think for yourselves! For while all this is happening you are clamouring for Hindu Sikh unity!

It was not difficult for a people who defined themselves by reference to

⁵¹ K. Minogue, "Nationalism, the Poverty of a Concept," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, Vol. VIII (1967), pp. 332-43.

⁵² J. S. Grewal, "A Perspective on Early Sikh History," in M. Juergensmeyer, and N. G. Barrier, eds., *Sikh Studies* (Berkeley, California: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), p. 37.

religious and historical tradition to identify themselves with Bhindranwale's message on questions relating to civil rights and the economic grievances of farmers, and for their subsequent action to be encapsulated within that religious tradition—captured by the faith, so to speak! The fact that the message came from the head of an important preaching centre and from Darbar Sahib only gave it more power, though neither his institutional affiliation with the Taksal (literally, place of education) nor his presence in Darbar Sahib were the main elements in Bhindranwale's effectiveness as a preacher. That came from his style of preaching, with the highly nasal sounds and word repetitions characteristic of rural Punjabi, and the themes of his preaching, which had relevance to what was occurring in the rural areas of the state. For, although saints do have large followings in the rural areas of the Punjab, there was no comparison with the situation described for West Punjab by Gilmartin,⁵³ where local shrines were centres of authority and descent from a saint gave one access to the favour of God and thus the ability to act as a religious intermediary. Sikhism allowed the teachings of the gurus only, and Bhindranwale preached orthodox Sikhism. He constantly referred to himself as slave of the Guru, and he preached to the Sikhs: "If you love your religion you will be the followers of the *Guru Granth Sahib* but not of any *sant* (holy man) or man."

In what came to be a closing message to the *sangat*, he said: "I have no wish to be your leader nor am I your sant. I am the Guru's *sangat's* [God's congregation's] servant. I do not want to die lying on a *charpoy* (string bed) or a sofa. Sat Guru bless me that my life should end for religion, for Panth, for the honour of Sikhism and the sanctity of religious places. My only duty is that of a preacher and this is a duty that I shall continue to perform."

There is no doubt that the movement was greatly aided by the willingness to die for love of Guru and Panth. Bhindranwale had said:

Unless you are prepared to die, sacrificing your own life, you cannot be a free people If you start thinking in terms of service to your community then you will be on the right path and you will readily sacrifice⁵⁴ yourself. If you have faith in the Guru no power on earth can enslave you. The Sikh tradition is to pray to God, take one's vows before the *Guru Granth Sahib* and then act careless of consequences to oneself.

At the end of one of his speeches a *shabd* (hymn), haunting in tone, is sung:

"Young Sikh brothers", it says, "sacrifice yourselves for Sikhism. Today the Sikh Panth is under threat, repay it [i.e., give back to it what it has given to you] by sacrificing your life Indira has sent Darbara [Darbara Singh, former Congress chief minister of Punjab] to wreak atrocities on the Sikh nation. Many Sikh heads

⁵³ D. Gilmartin, "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (1979), pp. 485-517.

⁵⁴ "Sacrifice" being understood as the interior abandonment to the Reality which has caused one to be, and to which, through one's devotion, one is now joined.

would be required to build its mansion. All strengthen yourselves for action and be ready for sacrifice.”

Bhindranwale himself abandoned his community here on earth for the historic community in order to determine its direction towards the place sought for it by the Gurus, that is, sovereign status.

CONCLUSION

In 1922 Martin Buber wrote: “A people is a phenomenon of life, a nation one of awareness, nationalism one of overemphasised awareness.”⁵⁵

Many times I have thought of these words when witnessing the Sikh attempt to construct a political ghetto on an open plain, the plain of Punjab. Yet they have been the last of Punjab’s three communities to do so: the sole remaining religious community without a state of its own. One can understand the impetus to some form of autonomy in the light of their forty years of independence under Ranjit Singh in the nineteenth century, which itself had been preceded by a period of ascendancy for thirty-seven years after their capture of Sirhind in 1763. Moreover, there are the words attributed to Guru Gobind Singh—“The Khalsa shall rule; no enemy shall remain. All who endure suffering and privation shall be brought under the safety of the Guru’s protection.” But the claim for some form of national autonomy has arisen not just in the context of religion and history but also in a more recent economic and political environment, created by central government actions and policies. It is these that have led the Sikhs to equate nationality with peoplehood, when in fact it need not be so correlated. For, in defence of the multi-national state India has made too much use of its powers to centralize. The aim of that centralization has been a reduction of the cultural distance and the quality of cultural difference between the State and its constituent units through the medium of secularization, with a view to furthering the emotional integration of India. Additionally and inter-connectedly, the central government has used Punjabi money to finance the other regions of India in that a high proportion of agrarian and commercial savings deposits have been channelled through the banks to other states.⁵⁶ Deposits in the commercial banks were more than central government advances in loans. Only one-third of the total number of

⁵⁵ Martin Buber, *Nationalism in Israel and the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 60.

⁵⁶ This has also been a problem in Yugoslavia. See J. C. Fisher, *Yugoslavia, a Multinational State* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1966), p. 53: “Though various attempts have been made to siphon off the northern economic surplus for southern development, the operation has usually not been harmonious.” Yugoslavia has a lot in common with India by virtue of the diverse presence within its frontiers of “historic nations” and considerable variation in levels of internal development. Significantly, it was Slovenia, the region with the highest level of development—partially industrialized and agriculturally advanced—that showed greatest resistance to the creation of the Yugoslav state.

deposits (to be precise, 35 percent) invested in Punjab's banks remained within the Punjab.

The central government provided Punjab with no industrial outlets for its sugar and cotton surpluses, nor did it increase the river-water allocation required by the new strains of wheat and the double-cropping pattern. Indeed farming became steadily unremunerative due to the low procurement price for wheat, which failed to keep pace with the rising cost of inputs, such as tube wells for irrigation, fertilizer, and agricultural machinery—all of which were necessary for the maintenance of high yields. Shortage of diesel oil affected not only transport costs but also the cultivation process itself, as it became expensive to irrigate those areas watered by tube well, because tube wells had first to be energized by electricity or diesel before water could be lifted for cultivation purposes. Cuts in power supply, sudden increases in the flat rate of power, and discontinuous supply led to unremunerative farming⁵⁷ for those with small-holdings and falling profits for richer farmers and landlords. Land was frequently mortgaged to purchase tractors, seed, and fertilizer, and—production costs being higher than procurement prices—the profit to the farmer was greatly reduced, and indeed there was much indebtedness.

These economic developments began to occur throughout the years of Congress Party rule, between 1971 and 1977. It therefore was not surprising that, when the Akali Dal was returned to office in 1978, it gave its formal support to the Anandpur Sahib resolution, demanding financial autonomy and seeking the restriction of central government power to the spheres of foreign affairs, defence, and communications. During the 1970s the Punjab had lost its economic and political rights as power was increasingly centralized in New Delhi. Agricultural small-holdings needed the support of fair-pricing policies for wheat and paddy, and they had not received it. Industrial development⁵⁸ was hindered by the restrictive licensing policy, and job opportunities were contained, as from 1974, by the decrease in Punjab's percentage of army recruitment. Simultaneously, mechanization of the land was releasing more labour onto the market, mostly young people with a college education, for whom there was no work. Production in the agricultural sector justified the creation of new

⁵⁷ In this connection, see Nirmal Azad, "Recent Farmers' Agitations in Punjab," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 26 April 1975, pp. 702-06.

⁵⁸ Punjab was industrially backward, and such industry as existed, was dependent on imported raw materials—petroleum products, coal, and steel. There were high freight duties on raw material procurements, as well as heavy outward freight charges on finished products. There was considerable discontent because Punjab's economy supplied food grains and agricultural raw materials, while its highly developed market was utilized for consumer goods produced outside the state.

agro-based concerns,⁵⁹ which would have given employment if they had been established.

Punjab's problems have occurred, not because of its richness, but because control over irrigation and power, and all aspects of development, was in New Delhi rather than in Chandigarh. The province in fact has few investments in the public sector, and such public works as there are—for example, the headworks of the Bhakra-Nangal dam at Madopur on the Ravi and at Rupar on the Sutlej—are centrally controlled. Public sector investment in the Punjab did not even double in the thirteen years preceding the passing of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, and projects such as the Thein dam have been held up by the central government for twenty years, despite the province's need for both water and power. When the community which was experiencing this mismanagement was not part of the Hindu mainstream—its economic region coinciding with a culture, history, and religion not shared by other Indians—it was inevitable that conflict should arise if legitimate demands, especially over irrigation, power, and financial autonomy, were neglected. To quote again the deputy advocate general: "Khalistan [an independent Sikh state] is in the minds of the Sikhs, not on their lips! It is in their minds, because of over centralization. Over centralization will not keep India united."⁶⁰

The purely secular demands of the Akali Dal leaders were never seriously discussed by the central government in New Delhi.⁶¹ Therefore the hoped-for strengthening of the secular bases for Sikh identity in a sound economy could not occur. What were issues of centre-state relations were put into a religious framework, readily understandable by the mass of rural people for whom Bhindranwale spoke—transformed into a matter involving the Panth and presented as discrimination. It needed only comparatively easy rhetoric to compare Giani Zail Singh (president of India) with Zakarya Khan and to typify Indira's rule as that of Mir Mannu.⁶² Bhindranwale, sincere and devout, did his job in providing the moral symbols for revolt by restoring them to memory. He was let down by his more

⁵⁹ Significantly, on his accession to the office of prime minister Rajiv Gandhi awarded two large industrial units involving a total of thirty thousand jobs to the Punjab and authorized provision for more agro-based industry. It had always been in the power of the central government to make such an award!

⁶⁰ Personal interview (late December 1983).

⁶¹ In that regard, Robin Jeffrey (*What's Happening to India?* [London: Macmillan, 1986], p. 181) remarks that the "calculations and style [of Mrs. Gandhi] had contributed so much to the making of the Punjab crisis." Similarly, M.J. Akbar (*India: The Siege Within* [London: Penguin, 1985], p. 196) comments, "Even a blind government could have seen that what the moderate Akalis really wanted was a 'victory' over Delhi which would enable them to take the initiative away from the extremists."

⁶² Notorious figures in eighteenth-century Sikh history. The first was a governor of Punjab who tried to stop people practising Sikhism, and under whom it was punishable to give shelter to the Sikhs. The second was a feudatory of the Afghan King during the second and third Afghan invasions.

educated lieutenants who missed the opportunity of engaging their own community in a dialogue on the question—why are Sikhs prepared to fight and die for communities and peoples other than their own? Such a discussion would have complicated Bhindranwale's view of the Sikhs, because Sikhs have fought and died for India with great valour since 1947 and rendered notable service to its foreign, civil, and police services.

Hence, it is not only the day-to-day practical problems creating discontent in the rural areas that require alleviation. Of far more importance for the Sikhs are the implications of their fully assimilated position for the doctrine of *miri-piri*.⁶³ How are Sikhs going to cope with *that* part of their tradition now that they are fully participating members of a multi-national entity? The *miri-piri* tradition was an awkward one to defend if Sikhs were envisaging remaining within the multi-national state of India. Yet, clearly, for the community to relinquish such a central part of its ideology would be tantamount to self contempt. The only approximate recognition that this could possibly be a problem lay in the Akali Dal's quest for autonomy within India, rather than for separation from it. The autonomy demand made some concession to the theological notion of Sikh sovereignty, while recognizing that participation in Indian political institutions must continue. It was, of course, not the intention of the party leadership to adapt the *miri-piri* concept in order to assure the community's accommodation with secular India. But autonomy could in fact have been presented as the achievement of sovereignty and in many ways thereby rendered religiously acceptable. And, since doctrinal change was an impossibility, it would indeed have been wise to make such an association, for the contradiction between *miri-piri* and the secular state proved similar to the containment of lightning in a bottle.

Other long-term difficulties can be foreseen. Unequal distribution of central investment is unavoidable in terms of Indian government policy. As is stated in a Reserve Bank report:

... with respect to benefits to the state economies from the central public undertakings, these central government enterprises are conceived mainly in the national context. Better inter-regional balance has been one of the original and long term objectives of planning and the location of central industrial and mining projects has been decided with respect to achieving a more balanced regional development.⁶⁴

For Bhindranwale, Sikhs were the heroic fighters of Guru Gobind

⁶³ This problem was put in an interesting way by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia at a seminar organized by the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation at Paonta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh: "The most crucial question for the destiny of Sikhism in the context of contemporary realities is—what is the institutional form in which the Sikh movement could realize its claim to *Miri* (temporal sovereignty) in a way that would not only ensure the sovereign Sikh identity but also be in keeping with the imperatives of secularism?" ("The Concept of *Miri-Piri*," *Spokesman Weekly* [New Delhi] 9 June 1975, pp. 5-6.)

⁶⁴ *Annual Report of the Working of Industrial and Commercial Undertakings of the Central Government, 1972-1973* (New Delhi: Government of India, Reserve Bank, 1974).

Singh. However, they were also a permanent minority at the junction of two of the world's major civilizations with a large diaspora that could so easily produce persecuted victims. Their history shows an oscillation between these two statuses. In 1984 they were militarily defeated, and at present they are experiencing a disenchantment that is deeper than hatred, and that ultimately may prove more corrosive. The way out of this situation may lie in their retaining separateness through religious education, strict practice of the *rehetnamas*, and the wearing of the Sikh symbols. This would require the appropriate institutional strengthening of the preaching side of the SGPC (the body controlling the historic Sikh shrines) activity, and a degree of awareness at all levels of the community as to why this was necessary for its future existence. A useful parallel may be found in the rabbinic tradition which preserved Jewish distinctiveness through the centuries, whereas (as Bernard Lewis writes,⁶⁵) from the confrontation at Masada there were no descendants.

Unfortunately, the army entry into the Golden Temple may ultimately have decided irrevocably whether or not nationality and people will merge. The attack on the Golden Temple and other historic shrines decisively communalized the struggle. There are very few concrete symbols of a collective nature in Sikhism. Historic gurdwaras are such symbols. Gatherings at historic gurdwaras on the birth and martyrdom days of various Gurus include people from all parts of the Punjab and beyond, irrespective of social identity.⁶⁶ Therefore it was not surprising that the ages of the 706 known pilgrims⁶⁷ killed during the army assault on Darbar Sahib, ranged from a few months to old men of seventy-eight, their occupations were diverse, they included women as well as men, and they were from all regions of Punjab and further afield as well. It is interesting that the centralized state should not have verbally attacked with similar venom the feudal relations that prevailed extensively over large parts of the subcontinent. Rather these found sanctuary within the political order.

In the light of events since June 1984 there may be every reason for the Sikhs to wish to leave India, though in my view it is not practical for them to cut themselves off from a subcontinent in which they are as yet free to work, hold government positions, buy land, and build businesses, though they are increasingly less free to do so. However, what is significant is that such separation is conceptually and metaphysically feasible. Hence, I am

⁶⁵ Bernard Lewis, *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 102.

⁶⁶ In this respect, gurdwaras are very similar to mosques in that their gatherings are not local but have diverse origins. See Emrys Peter, "From Particularism to Universalism in the Religion of the Cyrenaica Bedouin," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies: Bulletin*, vol. III, no. 1 (1976), pp. 5-14.

⁶⁷ The 126-page report of the SGPC lists their names not under "name of dead person" but under "name of martyr."

sceptical about the uses of nationalism for minority peoples who, occupying sensitive, strategic positions, also have the difficulty of balancing their institutional commitments to the wider multi-national entity with their own distinctive cultural traditions (not to speak of the problems of a diaspora of three million). Therefore, I have suggested (pp. 20 and 21) a solution operative within the framework of the Indian Union. Yet, I am also uncertain whether political developments may not have rendered that solution inoperative. Certainly, if I were to say that the political intent of the central government alone will determine the degree to which Punjab will be restored to its multi-communal tradition, I would be betraying an over-confidence in its power, because, for the Sikhs now, no magic lies in the name India, and they are in every sense in search of a new kingdom of Lahore. Those killed in the army operation have been named as martyrs, and the atrocities committed in the Punjab during June 1984, although not officially added to the *Ardās* (the Sikh congregational prayer), are in fact already sung by many *Bhais* (singers of religious music) when the *Ardās* is recited, and they occupy their place alongside a catalogue of similar acts of persecution recorded there. Thus, a permanent partition between Sikhs and Hindus has been created, where formerly none existed.

The accord between the Indian prime minister and the Akali Party (24 July 1985) may be a purely temporary one, since it does not involve either in reconciling the two traditions: theocratic and secular. It also does not tackle the issue of centralization, and it ignores the years of Sikh cultural resurgence, the impact of a military defeat, and an attack on the central Sikh cultural institution. It has gravely misjudged the mood of the countryside and disregarded the now intense desire “to free the land”—to free it from further desecration of private and collective value. There is a desperation to the resistance now, a total lack of moderation, which indeed is not surprising in the light of the facts presented in the report, *Oppression in the Punjab*.⁶⁸

What is required for the future peace of India and of the Sikh Punjab is the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution. The Indian state has to become more committed to cultural pluralism. Among the Sikhs there has been a retreat into culture unhelpful to their community’s survival. Even while Bhindranwale was alive, so many myths collided: the myth of the invulnerability of the Golden Temple, the myth of their superior fighting capacity, and the utopian project for an independent state. All these took precedence over the need for self-defence units for those Sikhs living outside Punjab. So long as any people remains captive within its own historical tradition, they remove themselves from the field of effective action, and within the context of national and international affairs they are talking to themselves, and themselves alone. Seeing the prospects afforded

⁶⁸ A. Rao, A. Ghosh et al., *Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab* (New Delhi: Citizens for Democracy, 1985).

by this insular resistance, will the Sikh élite display the same spirit towards integration as the Scottish nobles did in 1707 through the Act of Union—and trade nationhood for the economic interests of their class? Assimilation with prospects of the loss of nationhood, or annihilation, are unpalatable. I have indicated that the choice need not necessarily be so stark. Whichever route the community takes to safeguard its interests, Marc Augé's⁶⁹ words are no doubt relevant: "The reaction of peoples who have suffered not merely ethnocide but also genocide is, when they are in a position to produce one, totally and absolutely justified."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper does not have a wide empirical data base (though undoubtedly my twenty years' contact with the rural areas of Punjab must be assumed, in an intangible way, to have influenced what has been written). Its sources are: eighteen speeches of Sant Bhindranwale on six recorded tapes and interviews with Bhindranwale, his close associates in the All-India Sikh Students Federation, and his other advisers, as well as leading members of the Akali Dal, during December 1983 and January 1984. I was also in the Punjab during the summer of 1982 and became acquainted with the details of several reported encounters of police with orthodox Sikh youth in the rural areas, as told by their families to certain State ministers in Chandigarh.

The violence which was part of the Sikh campaign was a response to the killings (referred to on p. 11 in 1978 of orthodox Sikh believers by the Nirankaris in conspiracy with the police and the murders in the rural areas of orthodox Sikh youth by the Punjab police in the summer and winter of 1982 and the early months of 1983, to which reference is made also on p. 11 and in an earlier article of mine.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, too, it was a delayed response to the consistent vilification of their community by the vernacular Hindi press based in Jullundur. I am aware of the image that has been projected of Sant Bhindranwale and of the extent to which it has gained acceptance through the activities of the international media. By the mere fact of briefly noting the actual nature of the violence he accepted and seeing him as an exemplar of Sikh tradition, my intention has been to restore some balance to the way in which he is regarded. However, this said, comments such as that made by Leaf⁷¹ that "there doesn't seem to be any serious doubt that Bhindranwale was the main organiser of a terrorist

⁶⁹ M. Augé, *The Anthropological Circle: Symbol, Function and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 105.

⁷⁰ J. Pettigrew, "Take Not Arms against Thy Sovereign," *South Asia Research*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1984), pp. 102-23.

⁷¹ M.J. Leaf, "The Punjab Crisis," *Asian Survey*, vol. XXV, no. 5 (1985), pp. 475-98.

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campaign that was responsible for the random murder of several hundred innocent Hindus” require to be proven, and indeed they can be disputed by those who were close to all groups within the Temple complex.⁷² Moreover, it may be said legitimately that the scale of state violence in the Punjab, particularly during the month of June 1984, and in Delhi, 31 October–4 November⁷³ was of significantly greater proportions than the violence it was supposed to terminate.

The Queen’s University of Belfast, Northern Ireland, November 1986

⁷² See A. Dietrich, “Dharam Yudh: Fundamentalist Ramifications of Sikh Autonomy Demand in the Punjab,” *Internationales Asien Forum*, vol. 15, no. 314 (1984), pp. 195–217.

⁷³ Peoples Union for Democratic Rights/Peoples Union for Civil Liberties, *Who are the Guilty?* (Delhi: PUCL/PUDR, 1984); S.M. Sikri et al., *Report of the Citizens Commission* (New Delhi: Citizens Commission, 1985); and A. Rao, A. Ghosh, and N.D. Pancholi, *Truth about the Delhi Violence: The Tarkunde Report*, (New Delhi: Citizens for Democracy, 1985).