Chapter III

TERRORISM IN PUNJAB
India has a long history associated with terrorism. Before 1947, freedom fighters were labelled as terrorist. Though they were given the name terrorists but like contemporary terrorists they never indulged in indiscriminate killings or resorted to violence against innocent peoples. In the first decade after the independence, there was little violence in the country. Later on the northeast became turbulent and violent. Terrorism which was limited to few parts of India spread to Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir in the eighties.

Almost all the terrorist movements in India made careful efforts to revive religious, cultural or ethnic identities in order to strengthen the process of de-Indianization of the masses. Punjab experienced a bogey of a Hindu threat to Sikhism articulated by the extremists and a call to the martial traditions of the Sikh faithful to pick up arms to protect the religion and culture. Sikh religion and its history of struggle against Muslim invaders and the British was used to justify the separate entity of the Sikh community - that nothing common exist between Hinduism and India is basically an exploiter of Sikhs. It was all done with the intention of a drawing an average Sikhs attention towards the cause of militants.

Religious issues became one of the main means of revivalist efforts because of the strong emotional hold of religion on people. The influence of religious heads, functionaries and institutions is strong enough to shape and mould public opinion hence, they are efficiently
used in the terrorist movement. In Punjab gurudwaras were the sanctuary as well as focal point of all militant propoganda. Kashmir extremist movement aimed to create the Nizam-e-Mustafa (The Lords' own system) for the people and the 'land of christ' in Nagaland. The hold of religious institutions was so strong in Nagaland that the Government peace process and negotiations have also been effected through the church.\textsuperscript{1} Though religion is used to sensitze the followers of it, there are other factors which cause terrorism which motivate peoples to seek redressal in the name of violence. Widespread inequalities in development amongst various regions or inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income often paves way for dissatisfaction or a sense of deprivation. This sense of deprivation or perceived sense of discrimination is one of the major factor which causes terrorism.

So the cause of terrorism in India is not universal. They are many and often overlap one another. They even differ from region to region. In most of the situations it is the sense of deprivation either actual or perceived which serve as a cause for terrorism. We analyse here the causes terrorism in Punjab which engulfed the state into its flames for more than a decade, resulting into the large scale violation of human rights made the Indian state to use harsh and which measures murder to defeat it. This too resulted into the violation of human rights of the hands of Indian state.
Historical

Rise of terrorism in the state of Punjab can be explicitly seen since the late 1970s when the dormant demand for independent recognition of Sikh identity took the form of Khalistan. The roots of this dormant demand for independent recognition of Sikh identity can be traced back to history of India. Sikhism, grew as a new sect around 'Hinduism' but outside it. Though the founder of the religion was Guru Nanak, the seeds of giving Sikhs a separate identity were sown by Guru Gobind Singh. He proclaimed the founding of a new Khalsa. He also laid down symbols to be carried by the members of Khalsa - the so-called five Ks (Kaish, Kirpan, Kangha, Kada, and Kachcha), thereby he institutionalised the Sikh culture. With the religion of the Sikhs, the problem was that Hindus adopted it and regarded it simply as a sect. Though large number of Hindus adopted the five Ks, they continued to practice like cow-worshipping and belief in cast distinction that the Gurus had depreciated. This raised a problem that remains with Sikhism even today. This between the two religious groups became apparent on various issue like issue related to the control and supervision of gurudwaras which were largely run by Hindu Mahantas or those who had abandoned their outward symbols of five Ks and became indistinguishable from Hindus. Perception of a grave threat to their religious identities led to the creation of Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) to manage Golden Temple, way back in 1920. Few months later Akali Dal or the army of the faithful or immortal
was created to wrest control of gurudwaras from the Mahantas. Simultaneously the campaign run by some Hindu communal forces to deny the emergence of Sikhism as an independent religion led to a growing fear amongst the Sikh elites that the Sikhs might be absorbed in the Hindu socio-religious social system. They blamed the Brahmanical conspiracy as something responsible for their consistent humiliation and persecution of Sikhs.

These factors prepared the background for Sikh alienation and perception that they are a separate people. Emergence of many other factors further perpetrated their fear about the loss of their identity and created greater alienation between the two communities. These factors were:

**Imperial Conspiracy**: After the annexation of Punjab the Kingdom of Sikhs in 1849 there began imperial Romance between Sikhs and British Raj on the recognition of the value of the Sikh soldiers. When the revolt came in 1857 Sikhs sided with the British and were invaluable in defeating the mutineers. The like-warm support given by Sikhs to the freedom movement further cemented their bonds. The Sikhs were only rewarded for their loyalty. British patronage after 1857 helped them to maintain the outward symbols of Sikhism. Whenever the question of Sikh identity arose they were supported by the Raj. Imperial Romance sharpened the differences between the Sikhs and the rest especially Hindus. This was based on the strategy of Divide and Rule, to keep Indian people divided. The British Raj rivalry between Hindu Mahantas
and Sikhs exploited to create rift between Hindus and Sikhs. British rulers encouraged the Sikhs to consider themselves as a totally distinct and separate community. Resultantly, Akalis too demanded 'Azad Punjab' in 1942 on the arrival of Cripps Mission in India.

Socio-Economic Factors:

A successful Green Revolution led to a rising demand of the rich peasantry for a greater share in the power structure of the country as well as demand for industrial development which was not given due consideration. With rising economic prosperity, there was an increase in the number of educated youths who were not desirous of traditional pursuits of agriculture. Educated but unemployed youth became one of the potential source of exploitation by extremist and terrorist in Punjab. Moreover 70% of agricultural land in Punjab is owned by a small number of people. The rest is owned by majority of poor farmers and share croppers. Average size of land holding of the poor farmers was 5 acres land which was further divided due to larger families. Below 5 acres farm is not economically viable. And it can not be a source of livelihood for more than one man. It means rest of the family members had to look for other avenues of livelihood which were absent thus causing frustration despairs and extremism among the people of Punjab.

The Green Revolution in Punjab has been financed by bank loans. Bank loans enabled the farmers to buy tractors, threshers, fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and other inputs required. Rural peasantry
was thus under a heavy debt burden. Repayment of debt and the interest became a problem as the price of produce failed to keep pace with the price of inputs. An acre under the rice/wheat cycle yields at best Rs. 7000 per annum. To that extent disturbed conditions suited the rich peasantry not only in Punjab but elsewhere in the country as well. They forced the government to ensure constant supply of agricultural inputs as well as to maintain a minimum support price. If pushed far enough they could force the Government to even cancel their loans. The rural rich were under a heavy burden. The farmer with small holdings were equally affected, in fact, more so. Their collective anxiety was at the root of a lot of Punjab's unrest.  

Economic grievances were given commercial overtones. A big majority of the Punjab peasants and landlords is Sikhs. Politically, a small section of it has been with the Congress, majority with the Akali Dal and even the Akali Dal leadership in the hands of rural rich, the Kulakas and the landlords. A big majority of the peasantry is also Sikh by religion and Jats by caste. While most of the agricultural labourers belong to the scheduled caste. Thus, caste and religion, economic crisis, proved to be important tools in the hands of Akalis who were able to rally behind them, the middle and the poor peasants and other Sikhs as well. Even non-religious demands were presented as the demands of the Sikhs. They tried to justify their agitation for more power and freedom on the ground that Centre discriminates against Punjab because Punjab's majority is that of the Sikhs, and their demands are not accepted because
Sikhs are treated as second class citizens. On the economic front anti-
people economic policies of the government leading to growing
disparities, unemployment, atrocities on weaker section, corruption and
too much of bureaucratisation led to grave discontentment especially
amongst rural youth.

Religion and politics in Sikhism are inseparable and therefore
economic crisis and other grievances, despite spectacular success of
Green Revolution were given religious colours. Not only government but
also the Hindu resident of Punjab were held responsible for their misery.
Gradually they came over the conclusion that a greater share in power-
structure of the nation can be helpful in resolving their problems. This
feeling was infact ignited and given fuel by the political elites of Punjab
who had vested interest. Thus, worsening economic state of majority
was utilised by politicians for political expediency by giving it religious
and political colours. Soon they started propagating the thesis - 'Sikhs -
a separate nation' and 'the Sikh must have separate political identity'
(not only religious identity) and demand 'Khalistan'. The origin of this
theory is rooted in the history of Punjab since Britishers conquered
Punjab from a Sikh ruler and the Sikh must rule Punjab again.  

Political Factors

An analysis of political factors shows that what has happened in
Punjab is a failure of our attempts to secularise politics in the country.
We have failed to break the nexus between religion, and politics. The
legacy of the British strategy of 'Divide and Rule' affects our politics even today. Though the seeds of religious separatism as a basis for political demands were sown by the British, who did their best to preserve the Sikhs as an exotic in Indian milieu. Most of the political parties used religion, caste and such parochial values for the purpose of political expediency in the post-Independence era. The most depressing feature has been the collusion between some unscrupulous politicians (e.g. Akalis in Punjab) and the criminal elements of society, the smugglers, racketeers and illicit brewers. Flow of illegal money and muscle power in Indian politics, and the criminalisation of politics is the distinguishing feature of our political fabric today. In Punjab the bulk of such people joined the separatist movement to furnish their cause of smuggling and drug-trafficking. The charismatic hold of Sant Bhindaranwale over the Sikh masses was well exploited and made him some sort of a patron backed by number of Sikhs in foreign countries especially United State of America (USA), Canada and United Kingdom (UK). The Congress party of India used this movement to frighten the Hindus to vote for them.

Sant Bhindaranwale acquired prominence in Punjab politics. This sect, Damdami Taksal, with large support base militant religio-political ideology and sanction for violence for the pursuit led to the emergence of Sant Bhindaranwale's cult as promoter of Sikh cause. The goal of the sect was to preach strict adherence to the Sikh tenents. Nirankari movement which was started as a revivalist group started to
serve their founder and his successors as Gurus. In this respect they violated Guru Gobind Singh's pronouncement that he was the last Guru. Faced with the growing popularity of the Nirankaris, the High Priest issued a religious edict denouncing the Nirankaris as heretics. The Sikhs were told to ostracise Nirankaris and prevent the movement from growing. Tension between the Nirankaris and orthodox Sikhs and there were several clashes. Congress party thought of exploiting the growing popularity of Sant Bhindranwale to the advantage of Congress. Giani Zail Singh was deputed to establish contacts with the Sant to exploit him against the Akalis. By playing the Sikh religious cards, Congress not only won the confidence of Sant Bhindranwale but persuaded him to field his men to contest the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) elections against the Akalis in 1979.

Tensions increased when the Government allowed Nirankaris in 1978 to hold a convention in Amritsar. Sant Bhindranwale exhorted the Sikhs to attack the convention. This created a feeling amongst the section of Sikhs that Central Government dominated Hindus was deliberately encouraging sects like Nirankaris which deviated from the basic tenents of Sikh religion. A general feeling was developed amongst the Sikhs that the Government was intentionally helping the Nirankaris in order to divide and weaken the Sikh 'Quam' and that the Sikhs would not be able to maintain the purity of their religion unless they free themselves from the dominance of the Hindu Government. Tensions between the Nirankaris and the orthodox Sikhs led to the killing of Baba
Gurucharan Singh, the spiritual head of the Nirankaris, allegedly at the behest of Sant Bhindranwale. Sant, Bhindranwale, who proved to be a Congress frankenstein was encouraged by the Congress for two reasons:

1. It would finish the moderate leadership of the Akalis,
2. It would embarrass Darbara Singh, the political rival of Zail Singh.6

The strategy of Congress party to rule the Punjab was based on the following tactics:

1. It enjoyed a fairly good percentage of Hindu votes, practically all scheduled caste votes including a minority of Sikh votes. Hence, their policies were tilted in favour of above mentioned category;
2. To impress the Sikh voters that it always gave Chief Ministership to a Sikh;
3. It supported Sikh fundamentalism trying to prove that Congress Sikhs were more true to their faith than the Akali Sikhs. No Akali Chief Minister in the Punjab pondered so much to Sikh fundamentalism as the Congress Chief Minister Zail Singh. In 1980 elections Bhindranwale campaigned for the Congress and even government funds and resources were used to promote him;
4. Posts of honours were always given to the Sikhs to appease them but attention to their genuine socio-economic requirements was more or less completely lacking;
5. A small microscopic minority even raised the demand for Khalistan.
The emergence of Sant Bhindranwale with Congress support was a watershed event in the politics of Punjab giving rise to extremism. He inherited the organisation of 'Damdami Taksal' which was increasingly militant in nature. Bhindranwale and Khalistan group were separate identities and it was much later that the two converged into one. Because of his religious differences with Nirankaris there developed a rift between Bhindranwale and the Akalis which was fulfilled by Congress.

Trained in a fundamentalist tradition, head of a theocratic institution - Akal Takht - which is also the pivot of Punjab politics, Bhindranwale got an audience among the rural Sikhs and started pursuing fundamentalist policies. A sizeable number of youths were recruited who had no other outlets for utilization of their energy. The vote politics of Punjab led to competing communalism by the Akalis and the Congress. In March 1981 Shromari Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) declared Sikh as a separate nation and complained of discrimination against Sikh. By 1982 Sant Bhindranwale openly started using such Akali agitational words as were used by other Akali leaders such as 'tyranny', 'slavery', 'holy war' etc. to influence the Sikh psyche. Sant Bhindranwale became the arch-enemy of Congress the Nirankaris and the Akalis. And his Sect Damdami Taksal started promoting terrorism. Congress encouraged the growth and expansion of the Sikh extremism by giving covert support to Bhindranwale and when he become uncontrollable, took to large scale killings and spreading of
terror in Punjab. It ordered the Army to finish him off. Congress policy of support to Bhindaranwale and allowing the terrorists to operate without any effective restrain contributed much to the cause of terrorism in Punjab.

Role of Akali Dal

The first political party Akali Dal exclusively representing the Sikh community was formed in early twenties which provided a platform for the assertion of a separate Sikh identity. The Akali Dal through its complete control over the Shiromany Gurudwara Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC), a committee which extended the authority of various Sikh religious institutions particularly the Akal Takht beyond the questions of religious belief and practice, since its inception in 1925 was not able to satisfy its political objectives. The state legislature appear red to be a legitimate goal. The moral authority and pervasive influence of the Congress party in pre-Independence India precluded the possibility of the Akalis making any significant dent in the political configuration of undivided Punjab through the electoral process. Akali Dal had only to offer the ambitions of the party leadership to the people. Under the prevailing circumstances, it was not possible for Akalis to establish their exclusive hold even on the Sikh votes who constituted a little over 12 percent of the population of Punjab. A strategy of alliance with the Congress was consequently adopted and the Akalis threw their weight behind the national movement for independence.
Even after partition, the electoral odds remained strongly skewed against Akali Dal. Sikhs were still minority constituting 33 percent of the population. Akali Dal instead of divesting itself of its communal character to transform itself into apolitical party for all Punjabis limited its political space by focusing on Sikh electorate which it thought could dominate. It was in perfect conformity with narrow parochialism of those who were in the ascendant in the Akali party. The symbolic relationship with the SGPC was exploited to the hilt, as an agitation for a Sikh homeland was launched from the Gurudwaras of Punjab. The forces of the Akali-SGPC political rhetoric was on the alleged threats to the Sikh identity and the victimisation of the community by a supposed Hindu majoritarian conspiracy headed by the Hindu party, the Congress. The selective manipulation of Sikh history and Sikh religious symbols, both through the agency of the Gurudwaras and on secular platforms became the essential part of the Akali agitation.

The demand for a Sikh homeland was first raised by a small group of Akalis led by the Late Master Tara Singh in 1946. He appealed to the Government "if you are true nationalist then, for the sake of the nation, you must let the Sikh live honourably ....we value our honour. If we have no separate existence, we shall have nothing to be proud of ...."9 Master Tara Singh had been a bitter critic of Indias national Government, which, he said, was scheming to enforce the will of the Hindu majority and absorb Sikhs into Hinduism. By 1960 Tara Singh
succeeded in dragging most Akal’s sympathisers out of the Congress party. He continued his agitation for the creation of Punjabi Suba, a state in which the Punjabi language and Sikh would be supreme. He was claiming the right of self-determination for Sikhs who had a culture different from Hindus.

Militant Hindu organisations responded to such demands by organising a campaign to induce all Hindus in Punjab to record Hindi, not Punjabi as their mother-tongue in the census of 1961. Their reason was that if Hindi were shown to be the language of Majority in Punjab, no state based on Punjabi language will be created. They increasingly started their children in Hindi and affirmed that Hindi was their mother-tongue. As a result Hindus in Punjab virtually all of whom were Punjabi speaking, registered themselves as Hindi speaking in the Census of 1961. Communal tensions mounted and incidents of rioting between Hindus and Sikhs were reported for the first time in the history of Punjab. This added more fuel in the fire and confirmed the Akali thesis of Hindu treachery in the minds of Sikhs.

The Punjabi language state was finally achieved in 1966. Under the terms of settlement Hindi speaking belt became the new state of Haryana with its borders running up to Delhi. The foothills of the Himalayas became the new state of Himachal Pradesh and the rest remained Punjab. Punjab had a narrow Sikh majority of 56 per cent. However the creation of Punjabi Suba turned out be a hollow victory for the Akalis. Since the Sikh votes were split there was no chance of their
becoming the natural party of power in Punjab. Akalis discovered that although they had been instrumental in getting the Suba, when it came to wielding power, it was the Congress party that won the polls. The only way they could form a government was in alliance with other political parties especially the Hindu Jan Sangh party. So the Akalis had their homeland but could not govern it. And whenever they were out of office, they had to revive a sense of grievance among the Sikhs by returning to agitational politics. Every demand whether it was for the completion of the Thein Dam, for higher support prices for wheat, for the transfer of Chandigarh, for the renaming of a train or the settlement of the innumerable nagging problems between the centre and the state government, became a Sikh grievance. Every failure to concede a demand was part of the Brahmin Conspiracy to oppress or humiliate or wipe-out the Sikh community and Sikh identity.

The entire history of Akali politics since Independence has been of political adventurism. None of the grievances they persistently harped as essential for the Sikh panth were pursued by them when they were in power. Their motivation was an unadulterated appetite for political power. Master Tara Singh once confessed to his true motives for starting the Punjabi Suba agitation: "Unless I keep my turbulent followers occupied by one agitation or another they either fall apart and quarrel among themselves or try to pull the leadership down”. To hold the Sikhs in ones charge, he said, "one needs to live and act as dangerously as to keep the throne of Afghanistan". Akalis to protect their position as
also to out-wit the Congress they adopted a new plan of action by adopting and accepting the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 which became the basis for future Akali politics in Punjab. The factional struggle within the Akali Dal resulted in the escalation of communal rhetoric in 1978 which led to the adoption of a more than habitually strident posture by one of the factions to demand for the recognition of Sikh nation, variously interpreted from time to time according to the exigencies of the situation, became the core of all subsequent political discourse.

The process of transformation of Gurudwaras into instruments of political propaganda, the distortion of the Sikh faith, the cynical exploitation of its symbols, the mingling of its history and traditions of sacrifice and suffering with a contemporary pseudo history of deprivation and exploitation created an automatic spiral towards extremism. As a result the vortex of violence had reduced the Akali leadership to submission to terrorist violence and dictates. Making it irrelevant in the political process within the state. They allowed themselves to be swept away in the whirlwind of their own sowing.

Decay of Morality:

The growth of extremism in youth in India since 1947 is co-terminus with the decay of morals in India. An unjust system racking with corruption is enough to produce terrorists against their own government. In the presence of unprincipled and rapacious politicians
and bureaucrats who enjoyed both power and influence, the disgust of idealistic youth was natural. Increasing role of money and muscle power caused much frustration amongst the youths. The link between rampant corruption and youth extremism is clear. Extremism in Punjab was linked to a extent to the attitudinal changes, moral decaying in the youths who were targeted by the leaders of Khalistani movement as the recruits for terrorism.

**Role of Ex-servicemen**:  

This is also one of most important and vital factors. Each year approximately 60,000 servicemen are released from service. A fair proportion of these go to the Punjab. Due to the imperatives of keeping a young profile in the service, servicemen are retired relatively early. Since the military is a closed micro society there are considerable readjustment problems faced by ex-servicemen, the biggest of which are the economic imperatives of settling down in a new civil environment. It can often lead to anxiety bordering on depression or neurosis and consequent adjustment problems. If the mass of the educated unemployed youth present a very lucrative fishing ground for fomenting trouble, the destabilisation potential of this trained military manpower is even more dangerous and how dangerous it has been was highlighted in Punjab. Two retired Major Generals of the Indian Army, Jaswant Singh Bhullar and Shabeg Singh, masterminded most of the terrorist operations in the Bhindaranwale phase. Valuable military expertise, especially experience in insurgency type operations was available to them
particularly in the person of Maj. Gen. Shabeg Singh, who had gained vast experience in low-intensity operations in Nagaland and in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. It was this that lent such a dangerous aspects to the unrest in Punjab. Serious attempts were made through religious fundamentalists and communalists overtones to subvert the loyalties of serving and retired Sikh soldiers. The number of arms indigenously acquired by the terrorists were staggering and could not have been acquired without the ex-serviceman connection. Operation Metal became a full-scale conventional assault which caused considerable casualties to our forces. No amount of smugglers and criminals could have generated such effective fire-power and resistance. Interrogation reports of Pakistani trained terrorists indicate that Pakistani intelligence personnel were primarily looking for Sikh ex-servicemen. They have intelligence value and are being preferred for training and formation of hard-core terrorist cells. The bitterness of being unwanted and forgotten breeds alienation and frustration among trained military manpower that can be exploited by the disintegrative forces. Few of the Ex-Army man became instrumental in promoting violence in Punjab. They helped in providing training and planning terrorist operations.

1980-84: Period of Sikh Alienation

This was the period when many incidents took place which alienated Sikh masses and were made to perceive in those incidents a real threat to their identity - humiliation of Sikh soldiers during Asiads in Haryana, opposition of Hindu organisations on the ban of smoking in
and around Golden Temple complex, the breaking of Golden Temple replica at Chandigarh railway station, burning the picture of Guru Ramdas. In this background Bhindranwale said, 'Sikhs were second class citizens and slaves in India and that they must fight for their independence. Our aim is to break the shackles of this slavery'.

Thus Bhindranwale's fight against the Central Government was not too far removed from Sikh struggle which since the 10th Guru has been mostly viewed in the images of 'lifting up the sword' against the tyrannical rules. The sense of grievances and alienation increased manifold after the Operation Blue Star in 1984 which completely shook the Sikh psyche. To quote Khushwant Singh, 'now it will be increasingly difficult to find a self-respecting Sikh who will have a kind word to say for the Government. Sikhs will feel isolated and a separate people'. This army action was exploited by the leaders seeking independence for Khalistan to the maximum advantage for their cause, alienating the Sikhs from the mainstream, justifying their demand for Khalistan. Riots in Delhi and other places in the wake of assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1984 were instrumental in promoting many to join the rank of terrorists of these events mauled the Sikh psyche badly. The Sikh youths saw the Operation Blue Star and 1984 riots as discrimination and deprivation of the Sikh community took up arms to average the injustice. A few army deserters, collected together and formed a militant outfit, Khalistan National Army (KNA).
Punjab faced extremism and violence due to various politico-religious and other related factors. In fact, the violence there had no single or common cause. Its causes were diverse, often one cause overlapping another or several causes. The fact is that the people of Punjab had to face it for more than a decade.
REFERENCES


8. Ibid.


