CHAPTER - 2

THE HISTORY OF ANTI SIKH RIOT, MOVEMENT AND SOCIO
–HISTORICAL POLITICAL CONDITIONS:
(IN THE CONTEXT OF NATION STATE AND INDIAN NATIONALITY.)

2.1 The Historical Backdrop:

Rise of Sikhism, Its sense of political and religions identity, partition of Punjab, movement of separatism, operation Blue Star and Anti Sikh Riot:

The Sikhs in Punjab, followers of Guru Nanak (1469-1538 AD), saint-preacher of devotion in one formless, all-pervading, all-embracing powerful God through nama (chanting of His name) and jap (meditation) formed a strong close-knit community. Sociologically, the Sikhs were allied to the Hindus and had relationship both in respect of intermarriage and interdinning. Along with the Hindus, they had historical struggle against suppression and persecution at the hands of the Moghul Emperors. It is an established fact of history that their fifth Guru Arjan Singh was killed by the Mughul Emperor Jahangir and the ninth Guru, Teg Bahadur Singh was killed by Aurangzeb for not reconciling to Islam by accepting this religion. Both of them were recognized by the Sikhs as their revered martyrs. The last and the tenth Guru Gobinda Singh (1675-1708AD) on the new day of the Baisakhi festival founded the ‘Khalsa’ - an organization of the ‘pure’ and the ‘faithfuls’ dedicated to the cause of humanity against religious tyranny and oppression by the Moghal power.¹ He transformed them into a very conscious, militant and active brotherhood and organized them to develop their fighting quality, well-practised in sword-fighting. The Sikhs had to keep five articles with them known as the five 5 ka- (kirpan, kara, kesh, kanga and kaccha*) and had to promise for safety of their religion even at the cost of their lives.² The strength of the community lay in the social observances of their rules and rituals and they thus became united, militant, hardened, powerful and hazardous. Soon they also became prominent in Punjab. They raised their dignity and significance and fought against the Moghuls and the Nawabs under their rule.
They were in majority in the districts of Ludhiana and some western portions of erstwhile Punjab but in other districts they were scattered here and there. The major religious communities were Hindus, the Muslims and the Jats (Jats are also either Sikhs or Hindus). All the Sikhs had Punjabi as their first language. But the Hindus were more prone to view Punjabi as merely a local dialect. The Sikhs insisted that it being a language in its own right, was also a holy entity. They wrote and read Punjabi in Gurumukhi script. They believed that the alphabets of this script had come from the mouth of their Guru.3

During the time of the fourth Guru, Saint Ram Das (1574-81 AD), the Moghul Emperor Akbar (1556-1605 A.D) in his attempts to have friendly relationship with the Sikhs donated lands to the Guru at Amritsar where the famous Sikh Temple now stands. The Temple was built by the Sikhs in 1579 AD and now the Golden Temple as it is famous today, has become the holiest shrine for the entire Sikh community. It stands in the centre of a pool (the tank of Nectar- Amrit-Sar). The Sikh Sacred Book- the Guru Granth or Adi- Granth Sahib- collected and compiled from the great sermons of Nanak and other saints by Guru Arjan Singh (1581-1606 A.D), is well-kept and preserved in this temple in its sanctum. Since then the temple served as the nerve centre of all religious, social, cultural and political activities.4 And, as an well-organized community they were pledged to overthrow the Muslim Rule, for they had to suffer most from the Muslim rulers continuously since the time of Guru Arjan Singh.

During the period of the British regime in India the Sikhs had also to fight bitterly against the British in two wars in 1845-46 AD and 1848-49 AD. During the Non-cooperation Movement against the British in India in the early part of the last century, there was an Akali upsurge initially for the religious reforms and it also identified itself with the non-cooperation movement. It is to be noted that there was a remarkable Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity in the Punjab during 1919 AD. when the provocative ‘Rowlatt Act’ despite the reform proposals for Indian Home Rule was passed by the Imperial Legislative Council and later on, the great tragedy of Punjab, the ill-famed Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre took place on 13th April,1919, in Amritsar, where The Golden Temple was just adjacent to it, only ten minute’s walk-able distance. The British Brigadier General Dyer ordered his troops to fire
indiscriminately on a peaceful, unarmed crowd of Indians. Officially at the final estimate, 500 people were killed but reliably, about 1000 people were killed. There was severe collective outrage against the British all over.

2.2 The Rowlatt Act, Satyagraha Movement and its impact:

The year 1919 formed an important landmark in the history of the Indian Independence struggle. The immediate post World War impact led the Indian National Congress to become more active for demand of Home Rule. After the Montague Declaration in 1917, the constitutional reforms of India – The Montague-Chelmsford report on reforms was published on 8th July 1919. But before the Government of India Act, 1919 coming into force, the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford (1916-1921) adopted the policy of reforms– cum–repression and appointed a committee in December 1917 to investigate and recommend how to deal and combat with the criminal conspiracies and growing spirit of nationalism in India under the chairmanship of Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt. It was officially called the Sedition Committee, but popularly known as Rowlatt Committee. The Committee submitted its report on 15th April 1918 and recommended special legislation, both punitive and preventive, suspending ordinary law of civil rights and privileges. On publication of the Rowlatt Report in July 1918, the Govt. of India hurriedly framed two Bills on the basis of the recommendations and made them published in Government Gazette in January, 1919. But in view of the intense public protest and agitation one Bill was dropped and the more stringent bill – The Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill was passed despite the serious opposition by non official members on 18th March, 1919 and was placed in the Statute Book on 21st March 1919.

This is known as the Rowlatt Act and it provided for expeditious trial of revolutionaries by the special courts, with no right of appeal. The court can meet in camera and can take evidences not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act. There are some more provocative sections in the Act – reflecting attempts to make War – time restrictions of civil rights permanent. The Government can detain a nationalist without trial for a maximum of two years. Thus this draconian Act was a bid to conciliate the official and the non official whites who were resentful for Montague’s liberal promises and grant of provincial autonomy to the Indian people.
The legislation of this Act provoked widespread protest throughout the country. The nationalist press and Indian National Congress expressed opinions vehemently against promulgation of the Act. And this brought for the first time, Gandhi’s Satyagraha into limelight and made him turn to All India protest-campaign. He declared an All-India Hartal on 30th March 1919, but later postponed to 6th April for convenience. Hartals were observed in the whole of India on both the dates. But towns of the Punjab became the worst victims of repression by the Government.

All the communities – the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs spontaneously joined the Satyagraha movement and participated in the peaceful hartals. Lt. Governor O Dwyer was already unpopular in Punjab because of his ruthless administration – his repressive measures, war exactios, his anti-reform attitude to the Sikh Temple reforms. Now, the remarkable unity demonstrated by the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims against the Rowlatt Act frightened the officials in Punjab. The hartals of 30th March and 6th April at Amritsar were peaceful, but it was a massive affair. On 9th April there was a Ram Navami festival-procession where even Muslims took part. The administration deported local leaders and interned them. Gandhi was asked not to enter Punjab. The press was gagged and a reign of terror was let loose. On 13th April, a peaceful unarmed crowd in a meeting was attacked and fired in Jallianwalla Bagh by Brigadier General Dyer without the slightest prior warning, culminating in horrible massacre of the innocent people. The five districts of the Punjab were seriously affected by the Rowlatt disturbances; but Amritsar took the heaviest toll of human lives. The list of persons killed in the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre on 13th April, available in the files of the Government of India, Home Department, included many Sikh persons besides Hindus, Jats, Brahmins, Khatris, Muslims and others – high and low.

As the measures of religious reforms, the Akalis were fighting to wrest control over the Sikh Gurduwaras from the corrupt Mahants and decadent priests who had mutually profitable alliance with the British to run the institutions. So, they had direct confrontations with the British administration. A reform-committee, called the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee was formed in 1920 to undertake the management of the Gurudwaras and other institutions. Since 1920s, their interests
were voiced by a party called Akali Dal- both a religious body and political party whose long - time leader was master Tara Singh. He joined this movement to get rid the Sikh Shrines of these vested interests of the priests and administrators. In Nov. 1921 the British Govt. refusal to hand over the keys of the Golden Temple treasury led to a direct confrontation with mass courting of arrest by the Akalis. But with the peak of the Non –Cooperation Movement, the British had to retreat and the prisoners had to be released. Yet the Akali struggle continued till the Sikh Gurdwara and Shrines Act of November 1925 came into being and established the elected body SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee) to take control over the Gurdwaras. It is to be noted that the Akali movement in the 1920’s carried the process of separatism between the Hindus and the Sikhs a step further. Khuswant Singh, the prominent writer, observed:

….the most significant outcome of the four years of intense agitation in which the Hindus supported the ‘Udashi’ Mahants against the Akalis was to widen further the gulf between the two communities.7

Already there was a pamphlet written by Kahan Singh of Nabha ‘Hum Hindu Nahi Hain’ (We are not Hindus). This was now more emphatically voiced in the Punjab Legislative Council in April 1921 by Mehtab Singh urging that if the Sikhs did not want to remain in the fold of Hinduism, the Hindus should not seek to force them to do so, they should let them go.8 So the remarkable unity of people shown after ‘Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre’ and also the link of broader national movement in 1921 was gradually lost after 1922 in this province of Punjab otherwise noted for its religious divisions.9

In 1931 Master Tara Singh became the head of the SGPC, a position of seat with vast authority and influence. He projected himself as the long suffering upholder of the Panth as a separate political entity. So, in the Independence movement while sharing in its continuation, the Sikhs under him wanted to recognize the identity of a Sikh State in Punjab, called ‘Khalistan’ or ‘Sikhistan’. From the time of Morley-Mintu reforms in 1909 the talks and proposals on matters of reforms, the Sikhs and the Muslims unsuccessfully claimed representation for their communities. But the demand was not taken seriously either by the Hindus or by the British.
The Sikhs were very much opposed to the concept of a separate Pakistan and to the division of Punjab. The Sikhs had built prosperous settlements in the irrigated areas of Punjab. Their holy city Amritsar lay in the east, but Nankana Sahib (the birthplace of the founder of their religion) lay in the west. So they wanted to stay where they were. But as the possibility of division became more likely on the eve of Independence, they claimed a separate state for themselves—the ‘Khalistan’. They felt that they had claims of language as well as religion.

2.3 The Partition:

India became independent but found herself partitioned on religious basis. A major portion of the state including Ludhiana and its western portions were transferred to the Pakistan (where 41.6% of population were the Sikhs) and a smaller portion to India. Consequently, the Sikhs had to flee to India—their percentage in the proposed Pakistan dropped to 0.1% & rose sharply in the districts assigned to India. They had lost their properties and left their most productive agricultural lands in Pakistan. They were the worst losers in the division of the country. They changed places with the largely landless Muslim peasantry of the East Punjab and had to take whatever little land was available to them. Besides losing their land and properties incoming to secular India they had also lost some privileges of the British Rule by way of reservation of seats in the political field and in the recruitment. So the partition of the Punjab in the wake of Independence once again brought about a feeling of bitterness in the relationship of Hindu–Sikh community and also with national political party i.e. Congress.

2.4 The Large Scale Violence:

Before 1947 Master Tara Singh publicized that the Sikh Panth was in danger from the Muslims and the Muslim League. After 1947 he started to emphasize on the dangers from the Hindus and the Congress too. The leaders of the Congress including Mahatma Gandhi assured the Sikhs that they would be allowed to function as a semi-autonomous unit so that they may have a sense of freedom. (Resolution in the Indian Constituent Assembly on 9.12.1946). But that did not come true. Some Sikhs felt that they had been tricked into joining the Indian Union and that the identity of the Sikhs was slowly being eroded by Hinduism. The demand for Punjabi speaking state often referred to as the ‘Punjabi Suba’ became gradually intense. Master Tara
Singh protested against Hindu domination and declared ‘for the sake of religion, for the sake of culture, for the sake of the Panth, and to keep high the flag of the Guru, the Sikhs have girded their loins to achieve independence.\(^\text{12}\) This resulted in wide-spread protest throughout the Punjab. Hundreds of supporters went to jails. Master Tara Singh was arrested several times between 1948 and 1952. But opinions were divided also. Not all the Sikhs were behind him. At that time of negotiations on Cabinet Mission Proposals in the year of 1946 the extreme view for a separate sovereign state of Khalistan was expressed by Giani Kartar Singh. Master Tara Singh and Harnam Singh, however, preferred a undivided India but if India were divided they demanded a Separate State for the Sikhs with the right of federation with either Hindustan or Pakistan. Sardar Baldev Singh was opposed to the idea of a separate Sikh State but he asked for weightage in representation in the Punjab legislature.\(^\text{13}\) The Jats wanted to have a province within India, not independent. The low caste Sikhs were opposed to Akali Dal. Around 1950, the Hindus were roughly 62% of the population of Indian Punjab and the Sikhs about 35%. The eastern half of the portion was a chiefly Hindi speaking region, with Hindus being 85% of the population. The western half was a Punjabi speaking region, with Sikhs over half the population. Many Punjabi speaking Hindus identified Hindi as their mother tongue in 1951 census.\(^\text{14}\) Government of India rejected the demand of Master Tara Singh as communal. In the general Election, of 1951–52, the Akalis did not get more seats. Out of 126 seats they got only 14. Yet the movement did not end.

This idea of an autonomous Sikh state started taking a new shape with the announcement of the formation of a States Reorganization Commission for suggesting formation of the states on linguistic lines. This was done for all the major languages spoken in India except Punjabi speaking Suba. The Sikh construed this as discrimination against the community and began to agitate intensely for a Punjabi speaking Suba.\(^\text{15}\) The SRC did not find favour with the demand for a Punjabi Suba as there were differences of opinion and the confrontation between the Punjabi Hindus and the Punjabi Sikhs. The antagonism between the two communities continued fitfully with passive resistance movements like Satyagraha launched by the Akalis and fasts and threats of immolation by their leaders. Ultimately it is seen that on the conclusion of Indo-Pak war in 1965 in which the Sikhs played a notable role helping Indian troops on the front line, a commission was appointed to demarcate Punjabi
speaking areas from the Hindi speaking. Thus in 1966 the Punjab was split into three states Harayana, Himachal and Punjabi-speaking Punjab in which Sikhs formed about 60 percent of the population. This happened under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Chandigarh served as the capital of both Punjab and Haryana.

But the next burning issue after the partition of the State was the demand that Chandigarh as its capital should exclusively be given to the Sikhs, since it had been originally conceived and built for the Punjab. In 1969, this issue erupted into a dangerously explosive situation and so Mrs. Gandhi had to agree to the demand and of awarding the city to Punjab with proviso that Abohar and Fazika, being majority Hindi-speaking areas be transferred to Haryana in lieu there of. The later part of the Award was not acceptable to the Akali leaders and they were not prepared to part with this rich cotton belt in the State. In April 1973, the Akalis took another step which they thought would ensure Sikh hegemony in Punjab affairs. This was the passing of Anandapur Sahib Resolution. Here the Government of India was asked to hand over Chandigarh to Punjab. In this controversial resolution at least three different versions are in circulation. The Sikhs were described here as a separate nation. It also demanded a greater autonomy for the state, readjustment of the state-boundaries including Punjabi-speaking areas which had been given to Himachal, Haryana and Rajasthan. It is seen that not much notice was taken of the Anandapur Sahib Resolution when it was passed and later ratified by the Akalidal. Even during the time when the Akalis formed the Government they took scant notice of it. However, it is seen that when Mrs Indira Gandhi declared the state of Emergency on 26th June 1975, the Akalis not only opposed it but continued to agitate against it. This is the time when Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale entered the political scenario. Bhindranwala was a lean impressive six footer with a kind of prophetic air about himself. He became a powerful voice in the history of the Sikhs.

Bhindranwale’s own career soared and he was seen as a hero who could single handedly take on the Indian Government. It had begun with the confrontation between orthodox Khalsa and Nirankaris in Amritsar on 13th April 1978 which resulted in an overnight escalation of violence and state-sponsored terrorism. Following these incidents, the Akali Dal was dismissed from power and re-elections were held at which point a Congress Government was installed in the Punjab.
From 1977 until 1983, Bhindranwale led his agitation against the Arya Samajis too and other fanatic Hindu organizations who were thought to be working against the Sikhs too. It may be incidentally stated that it is true that Sikhism was born out of Hinduism. All the ten Gurus were Hindus till they became Sikhs. The *Granth–Sahib* was their living light. To them, it is the essence of *Vedanta*. In 1577 AD Swami Dayanandaji the founder of the Arya Samaj came to Punjab, opened a branch at Lahore and started a *purification* movement to bring back the break-away Hindus including the Sikhs to its fold. But in doing so the Samajists did not speak well of the Sikh Guru and Swamiji was also not temperate in his speech on Guru Nanak. The *Arya Samachar* published from Lahore lampooned Sikhism in verse. So that was a first blow to the Hindu-Sikh unity in the 19th century. Sikh organizations protested against it and wrote a number of books on Sikhism contending that they are not Hindus. Bhindranwala exploited the porous situation of history on religious enmity and became extremely fanatical. But in doing so many Sikhs however opposed him for his fanatical views.

The early eighties were a witness to the rampant unemployment in Punjab as a result of land holdings being reduced into economically unviable lots which forced the marginal farmer to look towards other avenues to earn his keep. As a result there was an wave of disgruntlement, particularly amongst the youth, who ended up falling easy prey to the temptations provided by “violence and terrorism” as an alternate means of “earning a living”. By 1983 about 500-1000 people were killed all over Punjab by armed brigades of young motor cycle driving-terrorists who would suddenly appear and with one burst of machine gun kill 10-15 people. In the year 1982, many rounds of negotiations between the Centre and the Akalis took place. No agreement was reached, the sticking points being the areas Punjab would give up to Haryana in *exchange* for Chandigarh, and the sharing of river waters. In the later half of 1982, Bhindranwale moved to the Golden Temple Complex where he setup his headquarters in Guru Ram Das Sarai. He made the Golden Temple, Sikhism’s holiest shrine, his fortress. From there he directed a terrorist movement that would result in the deaths of hundreds of Hindus and moderate Sikhs in the Punjab who did not support him. In the last weeks of 1983, Bhindranwala took up residence in Akal Takht, a building second in importance only to the Golden Temple itself where the great gurus issued their *hukumnamas* and edicts that all Sikhs were obliged to follow.
and honour.\textsuperscript{22} Centuries of peaceable relations between Hindus and Sikhs were collapsing. In interviews with journalists, Bhindranwala described the Sikhs as a “separate qaum.” The word qaum means \textit{community} but it can be translated as ‘nation’. He said that he had not asked for Khalistan but were it offered to him, he would not refuse. He mocked Prime Minister of India h as a “Panditain”, daughter of a Brahman, a remark redolent with the contempt that the Jat Sikh has for those who work with their minds rather than their hands.\textsuperscript{23}

The conflict in Punjab grew alarming. The terrorists started killing of the Hindus and those who were opposed to them. The Punjab was placed Under the President’s Rule on 6 October, 1983. An ordinance declaring parts of the state a disturbed area was promulgated, and the police was given arbitrary power to search, arrest or even shoot with immunity from legal action. Six additional divisions of the army including especially trained para-commandos were inducted into the Punjab by the end of May, 1984. On 31\textsuperscript{st} May, Major General R.S. Brar was summoned from Meerut, where he was in charge of an infantry division to lead the operation to rid the temple of the terrorists. The Prime Minister after much reluctance decided to flush the militants out and this operation was called the Operation Bluestar and it was to be finished in forty eight hours with no damage to the Golden Temple, and with minimal loss of life.\textsuperscript{24} On 3\textsuperscript{rd} June, Punjab’s road, rail, and phone links were cut off. But in Amritsar itself the curfew was lifted, to allow pilgrims to the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev. The actual assault of the army’s operation nicknamed \textbf{Blue Star} took place on the night of 5-6 June 1984.

\textbf{2.5 Operation Blue Star}

Army strategy for the Blue Star operation had been determined by three officers of the Indian army, Dayal, Sundarji and Brar. To achieve the prime objective to get Bhindranwale out of the temple complex they had planned commando operations. The operations began on June 5 at the night. Brar’s hopes were that the peripheral parts of the temple would be seized by midnight, after which a unit would be placed within the Akal Takht and the reinforcements would be sent up. Brar wrote that “due to intense multidirectional fire of the militants, our forces were unable to get close enough (to the Akal Takht) to achieve any degree of accuracy”.\textsuperscript{25} Several tanks were used in the operation. In the operation hundreds of men, women and children,
who came as pilgrims to Amritsar died in the crossfire between the terrorists and the military. Although the majority of the country’s 14 million Sikhs did not support the separatists, the army’s action in Amritsar was widely deplored by the Sikh community not only for the loss of lives in it, but also because of the extensive damage done to the Sikh Shrine. It was presumed to be a kind of desecration of the holiest shrine R.S.Brar remarked

…it must be admitted that the tenacity with which the militants held their ground, the stubborn valour with which they fought the battle, and the high degree of confidence displayed by them merits praise and recognition…..

The Sikh General to whom both Brar and Shubeg reported during the liberation of Bangladesh remarked about Operation Bluestar:

The army was used to finish a problem created by the government. This is the kind of action that is going to ruin the army.26

2.6 The Assassination of Indira Gandhi

Operation Blue Star was directed against the militants violently equipped with arms and ammunitions under the protective umbrella of the Golden Temple. Yet the desecration of the Golden Temple was shocking to the Sikh psyche. They were understandably hurt and outraged and some swore vengeance. After the Operation Bluestar Mrs. Gandhi had been warned time and time again of possible attempts on her life and was suggested by the intelligence agencies to remove all Sikh personnel from her private guard, but this she would not do. She is quoted as having said that if her Sikh bodyguards are removed she would be encouraging the religious discrimination and commented, “Aren’t we secular?”27

The people from outside the Punjab viewed the situation from the nationalist point of view and commended Mrs. Gandhi for her firm action, though belated. But the feeling of being hurt and anger most of the Sikh people bore in their minds was deep and provoked the two Sikh body guards. The warnings came true. On the morning of 31st October, 1984 while walking from her home to her office next door, Indira Gandhi was shot by Beant Singh and Satwant Singh, the two of her personal security guards. Crowds thronged and shouted “Indira Gandhi amar rahe” (Indira
Gandhi shall be immortal) and, more ominously, “Khoon ka badla khoon se lenge” (Blood will be avenged by blood).

Later that night some incidents of arson and looting took place in Delhi and but this violence spread and intensified through 1 and 2nd November. Everywhere now, Sikhs, and Sikhs alone were the target. 28

2.7 After Math of Indira Gandhi’s Assassination:

The assassination of Gandhi sent shock waves throughout the country and Delhi in particular. There was a cry for revenge against the murder and it was avenged on Sikhs on the city. In the streets of Delhi there was carnage as India was plunged into a massacre such as had not been seen since the partition of the country in 1947.

Communal riots flared through the nation’s capital. Mobs of young men on motor cycles burned, raped and pillaged the predominately Sikh areas of the city. Shops run by Sikhs were burnt to the ground. Stories have been told about how the police drove through the areas inflicted by the riots and either did nothing or egged the protestors on. It is widely acknowledged that the rioters seemed to be secure in the knowledge that they would be protected. A senior police official hypothesized that there had to be strong leadership from well-known Congress leaders and these random attacks were probably better-planned than it appeared otherwise; it was not possible to identify the stores and established malls as to belong to the Sikhs or somebody else. Especially since all the signs were in Hindi and English and there was no real way to determine the difference between a store run by a Sikh and a store run by anyone else. Slogans such as “Finish off the Sardars” Kill the gaddars [Traitors],” and “Teach a lesson to the Sikhs,” were heard in the streets of Delhi. 29

For days the carnage continued. Gurudwaras all over the city were attacked. Not even the old and feeble were spared. The attackers swore that all women would be spared—but in reality, none who came before them was spared. They were perhaps spared of the physical anguish of the torture, but not the mental agony of losing their loved ones, their livelihood and their homes for something that was no fault of their own. Then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, son of Indira Gandhi, made a statement at Boat Club in New Delhi on 19 November 1984, on the birthday of Indira Gandhi:
Some riots took place in the country following the murder of Indiraji. We know the people were very angry and for a few days it seemed that India had been shaken. But, when a big tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little.  

The Print Media narrated the events in its true colour.

*The Times of India, November 2, 1984:*

India is ablaze with hate and anger. In city after city from one corner of the country to the other enraged mobs have gone and are going about systematically burning and looting Sikh properties and assaultng Sikhs without discrimination. Sikhs were sought out and burned to death. Children were killed, shops looted, cars burnt, markets destroyed, houses gutted. Trains were stopped and Sikhs were picked out and murdered.

*M.J. Akbar, The Times of India, November 2, 1984:*

Around 300 Sikh officers and men in uniform were done to death in the presence of non-Sikh soldiers, who stood as silent spectators.

*Economic and Political Weekly, Thapar Ramesh:*

Police officers stood by and watched arson, rape, looting and murder, without making any attempt to intervene to protect citizens belonging to the Sikh minority, without attempting to dissuade the attackers to call for reinforcements or other support, or even to inform the fire brigade.

*Independent Report PUCL and PUDR: The Times, 5 November, 1984:*

Many people complained that, in some cases, the police were not merely hanging back, but giving active support.

This anti-Sikh riot have been the sources of creative writings for the historians, novelists, travel-writers to interpret and reflect it. It even impinged on some of the memorable life writings even in their creative outputs as being done by Indira Goswami and V.S. Naipaul. These harrowing experiences is a scar in the history of India and it also reminds us of a similar experiences of a minority community who suffered in the Nellie incident which took place in Assam as well as in Godhra too.
2.8 Concept of Indian nation-state or Indian Nationality in the context of the Punjab Communal Crisis:

Though not directly relevant to the present study on the topic “Historical perspective as reflected in V.S.Naipaul’s *India: A Million Mutinies Now and Indira Goswami’s Pages Stained With Blood: A Comparative Study*, the Punjab crisis definitely leads to a little bit of discussion as to whether India because of its natural multiplicity or pluralistic character in its structure is only a loose State with the burden of millions of mutinies stained with blood for different languages, religious faiths and ethnic diversities, or whether India was never one, never can be one and therefore never should be one.³¹

Obviously, this leads us to discuss a little on the concept of nation, nationality or nation-state and nationalism.

The Anandapur Sahib Resolution claimed that Sikhs of India are a historically and politically recognized political nation since the inauguration of the order of the Khalsa in the concluding years of the 17th century. Bhindranwalla described the Sikhs as a ‘Separate quam’ meaning community, but can justly be translated also as a nation, which is already referred to.³²

Mohammad Ali Jinnah also in his fight for Pakistan, though initially he was with Indian National Congress, called the Muslims as a separate nation and wanted division of India on two-nation theory.

The Congress leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru vehemently opposed his two nation theory. Yet, however Pakistan was created only on the basis of religion.

Prof. Ram Chandra Guha writes:

Behind every successful nationalist movement in the western world there has been a unifying factor, a glue holding of the members of the nation together. This has been provided by a shared language, a shared religious faith, a shared territory, or a common enemy – and sometimes all of the above. Thus the British nation brought together people huddling on a cold island – people who were mostly Protestant and who detested France. In case of France, language combined powerfully with religion.
For the Americans, a shared language and a widely shared faith worked in tandem with animosity towards the colonists. As for the smaller last European nations – the Poles, the Czechs, the Lithuanians etc – their population have been united by a common language, a mostly common faith and a shared and very bitter history of domination by German and Russian oppressors.  

The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin once said that

....a national community is inconceivable without a common language and that there is no nation which at one end and the same time speaks several languages.

Sir John Stracey, once a member of the Governor General’s Council in India, wrote a book on India where he commented that

....there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing according to any European ideas any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.

To him there is no political or social identity in India. He could not imagine Punjab and Madras ever forming part of a single political entity. These are countries but not nations.

Thus, Mr. Stracey and such other European scholars viewed the situation of India from the concept of European ideas on nation and country- the ideas of one religion, one language and one state. In Europe at that time new nations were identifying themselves on the basis of shared language and territory.

India has not privileged a single nation, a single language or religious faith. Majority of its citizens have been Hindus, but it has not been a Hindu nation. Its present Constitution or even in the past history of India it did not discriminate between people on the basis of faith- all were first Indians or ‘Bharatiyas’ in spite of territorial divisions, small kingdoms and princely states. Its nationalism has not been based on a shared language, religion or ethnic identity. M.V Kamath wrote that

Hindus & Sikhs came from almost the same stock; most of the Sikh Gurus had been originally Khatris. The Sikhs had a history, as a people of not more than 300 years.

So here in India unity and pluralism have been inseparable inspite of the revolts, protests, mutinies at different times. Peculiarity of peaceful co existence even after rioting, fighting and ethnic troubles continues to exist because of its past
historical, geographical and cultural links that India inherently possesses. The Western observer’s belief that ‘profusion of tongues would be the undoing of India has not come true’. So the common factors of traditional definition of the State in population, fixed territory, government and sovereignty, remaining generally the same – the concept of modern state taking the form of a nation-state has undergone changes on a broader base. Usually nationality refers to a set of people based on common race, language, religion and culture, geographical compactness, common political aspirations and historical developments and on this basis many writers define nation and advocate for a separate state for each nationality. But this view has not been valid. Nation has grown today on a much wider base referring to people living in a defined territory, inspired by a sense of unity, common political aspirations and interests, common history and common destiny, though they may belong to different nationalities.

On this basis India has been such a nation-state a State in diversity but bound by one common sense of Indianness. Indian nationalism has thus grown in a mature way.
References


*kirpan or Khanda – steel sword or knife
Kara – iron bangle; Kesha – hair cut; Kangha – comb; Kaccha – the short drawers.


16. Ibid p.7


22. Ibid.557

23. Ibid.556

24. Ibid.562

25. Ibid. 562

26. Ibid. 563

27. Ibid. 565

28. Ibid. 565

29. Ibid.565

30. Ibid.566


33. Ibid, p. 739

34. Ibid. 741 -742 quoted from A Marxism and National Question by Joseph Stalin

35. Ibid.3, p. 755

