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ETHNIC PROBLEMS AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE: THE CASE OF PUNJAB CRISIS

Problems of ethnic origin and concomitant political violences are among issues that in recent years have attracted great human concern. The magnitude of such concern has been escalated due to the fact that such problems manifest themselves more often than not through the adoption of violence. In many instances the consequences of such violence are very deep and pervasive. It can hardly be over-emphasized that they affect with extreme adversity both the social and individual life in terms of economic, commercial, political administrative, legal, diplomatic and cultural aspects in a state. South Asia has not been spared by such adversities. The question of economic and political factors related to and compounded by the problem of ethnic identity have generated serious conflicts and tensions in the region in general. The magnitude and the seriousness of the problem in some South Asian countries demand careful attention of not only the policy makers but also of the analysts. The present paper examines the Punjab issue and probes into the nature and impact of political violence as an alternative to non-violent conventional political process.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the ethnic crisis in a general theoretical framework in order to understand how political violence eventually germinates from ethnic crisis. The second section deals with the specific case of Punjab, while in the third section an attempt is made to summarize possible conclusions.

I

ETHNIC CRISIS AND THE RISE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Ethnic group may be defined as a social collectivity of people that possesses shared historical experiences, and / or historical lineage, objective cultural attributes like race descent, language, religion, dress, diet, or a combination thereof; a subjective awareness of belongingness to a group provided by a cultural core: and a recognized group distinctiveness (the we-they paradigm)¹. It follows thus that a particular ethnic group is characterized by a distinct social entity, which forms a separate identity as contrast to the broader social or national or other ethnic identities. Very often such distinctive identity is a constant source of inspiration of a social group cohesion by virtue of commonness and shared experiences. According to the primordialists, attachment to the cultural markers like descent, race, language, religion, etc. forms a part of personality formation and development of individuals which persist with them either consciously or unconsciously throughout their life. Thus the element of ethnic identity forms a significant part of the very core of existence of the group and provide the impetus and impulses for social and political interactions.² It is quite logical that if the identity of an ethnic group is threatened a conflict is set in motion and the group asserts to restore its identity in the face of such threats. However, ethnic identity though significant, is not perhaps sufficient to explain the conflictual nature of the problem.

The identity factor does not adequately explain why relationship between different ethnic group at one point of time remains harmonious while at the other it is strained. The concept of dominant-subordinate patterns of interaction of ethnic groups appears to be

1. Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnic Tensions in South Asia—Implications for Regional Cooperation" in Bhabani Sengupta (ed.), *Regional Cooperation and Development in South Asia* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers), p. 5.
2. *Ibid.*, p-8.

most relevant in this context. The incompatibilities in social structures, value systems, belief patterns and more importantly, social and economic opportunities between the dominant and subordinate ethnic group is a great cause of tensions and conflicts. The 'dominant-subordinate syndrome' may again be only a partial aid to understanding conflict and perhaps the concept of 'relative deprivation' may provide further input to the study of the conflict.³ The real or perceived economic deprivation and exploitation of an ethnic group by an other imparts a 'deprived-psychosis' in the disadvantaged group and thereby generates a conflicting situation between the divergent groups. In sum, a situation of ethnic conflict may thus be explained in terms of threats to ethnic identity and / or cultural domination and / or real or perceived socio-economic deprivation.

The basic factors in ethnic group conflicts are ethnic consciousness and a heightened sense of group awareness, for status and recognition as a distinct social entity.⁴ Ethnicity is as much a device as a focus for political mobilization, involving select use of ethnic symbols for socio-cultural and politico-economic purposes.⁵ Ethnicity thus is the manifestation of the assertion of the ethnic group in the political arena to defend and / or sustain economic, political and cultural interests and wrest more concessions.⁶ Needless to mention, continued exacerbation of a conflict leads to a state of crisis. Put in a more clear terms, ethnic crisis is a product of long standing socio-cultural, economic, political, legal and administrative grievances. In the event of a non-accommodative nature of centre-periphery politics grievances are multiplied and the crisis is accentuated and often takes violent form.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 8-12.

4. Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia: A Case Study of Sri Lanka", *India Quarterly*, Vol. XXXV, No. 3, July-Sept. 1985.

5. Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnic Tensions in South Asia - Implications for Regional Cooperation", *op. cit.*, p. 6.

6. Urmila Phadnis, "Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia, A Case Study of Sri Lanka," *op. cit.*

Political assertion of the disadvantaged ethnic minority may take either form: conventional non-violent political process or adoption of political violence, depending on factors like intensity and magnitude of the threat, extent of possibility of accommodation of the contending forces; extent of confidence on the conventional political process in redressing grievances; the level of tolerance of the concerned parties, and the nature and role of the state apparatus etc. In a multi-ethnic society the presence of extremist forces adopting violence is not rare in the contemporary world, although the predominant category of political assertion of the ethnic groups has until recently been largely non-violent. The growth of real or perceived threat parallel with the growth of

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complexities of modern life where violence and terror are parts of reality, transformed the political movements of ethnic origin into more of violent nature. Associated with this was the decline in the level of tolerance and accommodation of the contending parties. Again the role of state is crucially important in this regard. The state is perceived as a "gatekeeper of contradictions and controller of conflict"⁷ Thus it is a dominant factor either in assuaging or accentuating conflicts and contradictions. Centre's neglect, delay and repression aggravates the conflict leading to a point of crisis. Further, due to the shortcomings of the prevailing political system the confidence on the conventional political process tend to decline. All these factors strengthen the conviction of the extremists in the use of violence, as an alternative to the conventional non-violent political process.

7. Joseph Rotschild, *Ethnopolitics—A Conceptual*. (New York. : Columbia University Press, 1981), p-4.

It is the contention of this paper that by reducing the political, economic grievances through appropriate political measures and socio-economic reforms alienation could be reduced to minimal. Such measures act as a safety valve in releasing the pent up emotions that were accumulated due to the sense of economic, political social and cultural deprivation and exploitation. On the other hand inappropriate political measures particularly, lack of accommodation and conciliation lead to the escalation of the sense of deprivation and exploitation leading thereby to a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence.

BACKGROUND OF THE PUNJAB CRISIS

The genesis of the current crisis in Punjab can be traced in the long past. At the core of the crisis lies the ethnic identity of Sikh community, determined by the specific ethnic values and distinct historical traditions. Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak at the close of 15th century, established its distinctiveness being influenced by Islam with respect to monotheism and by Hinduism in terms of the latter's values other than idol worshiping and caste system.⁸ As a consequence of the Muslim threat to the Sikhs, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind organized the devoted Sikhs and gave them the *Khalsa* (the pure) identity. The reavered religious Guru who established the 'militant' status of the Sikhs believed that it was impossible to safeguard the faith without political power and political power would not come unless there is a Sikh homeland.⁹ Sikhism maintained its ethnic distinctiveness in order to preserve its entity amidst threats initially from the Muslims and latter on from the Hindus. Due to the Sikh-Hindu religious and cultural proximity and social affinity Hinduism emerged as a greater threat in terms of not only domination but also possibility of absorption. As a result,

8. M.J. Akbar, *India : The Siege Within Challenges to a Nation's Unity* (England: Penguin, Middlesex), 1985.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 118-121, 143.

the status of Sikhism as a distinct religion came under threat, their symbols and temples were getting subdued and even the Gurudwaras turned into Hindu temples. It was through long non-violent struggle that the Akalis eventually had the Sikh Gurudwara Act passed in 1925 and the Sikhs regained control over their temples, their religion, their identity. As a consequence of the Gurudwara Reform movement however the Hindu-Sikh cleavage in Punjab continued to grow strong.

The Central Gurdwara Management Committee the SGPC, as it is known today, was formed to take over the Sikh temples. On 15 November 1929, the first elections to the 175 member SGPC took place. A corps of volunteers was formed on 14 December, the Shiromoni Akali Dal, which eventually became the formal political Party¹⁰. Throughout the history, the Akali Dal was severely constrained in becoming a strong political institution due inter alia, to its weak political support base caused by unfavourable demographic balance. The problem was compounded by the divisiveness and cleavages within the community and the influx of Hindu labourers seeking agricultural job from U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and out-ward migration of Sikhs seeking non-farm salaried jobs. A succession of Sikh congress Chief ministers ruled the state, but without the confidence of the larger number of their own community.¹¹

Types of Grievances

From the perspective of threats to ethnic identity, dominant-subordinate syndrome, and the relative deprivation the grievances of the Sikhs can be categorized into cultural, economic, and political. In addition, such grievances also pertain to centreperiphery relations. Attempt is made below to discuss them briefly. It is worth noting that the classification presented here is not intended to project them as mutually exclusive. They are rather of complementary and mutually re-informing nature.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 126-141.

11. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. "The North East, The Punjab, and the Regionalization of Indian Politics". *Astian Survey*, Vol. XXIII, No. 11, November, 1983, p. 1178-1179.

Cultural grievances : The grievances generated from the threats to religious entity of the Sikhs in the earlier period have been discussed. The issues of language and other socio-cultural nature have significantly contributed to the escalation of grievances in the present day. The Sikh scriptures that were written in Punjabi language, are the core of the Sikh faith which made the language an inseparable part of the religion. Punjabi language is regarded as one of the key cultural elements of the Sikhs. Hindus who normally speak Punjabi claimed that their mother tongue is Hindi in order to deny Punjabi language an official status in the state government. Consequently protests, and eventually riot broke out on the language issue.¹² The Sikhs consider this as a threat toward their ethno-religious and cultural identity.

The non recognition of the separateness of Sikh religion is an issue that, as already mentioned, has caused strong grievances among the Sikhs. Speaking in the Punjab legislative Council on April 5, 1921, Raja Narendra Nath referred to the Privy Council ruling of 1903 which held that the Sikhs were Hindus and added, 'I look upon Sikhism as higher Hinduism the Granth Sahib is nothing more or less than the higher teachings of the vedas and the Upahishads in popular language. It is well known that of two brothers one may be a Hindu and the other a Sikh'¹³

This summarizes the perception of the Hindus about the Sikhs and their religion and over the years of history there has been a matter of great concern for the Sikhs. The problem was compounded when the question of constitutional non-recognition of the distinctiveness of Sikh religion surfaced in the recent political developments in Punjab. The constitution defined Sikh religion as a part of Hindu religion. The Sub-Clause (b) of Clause (2) of Article 25 of the Indian constitution says, "the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist

12. M.J. Akbar, *India : The Siege Within, op. cit.*, p. 157-158.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 141-142.

religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly. The inclusion of the Sikh in the 'classes and sections' of Hindus as stated in the constitution was regarded by the Sikh as an historical threat of absorption of their entity by Hinduism.¹⁴

Another related issue was the role played by the Nirankari sect who claimed the Sikh scriptures as their own, but who overtly rejected the accepted historical exegesis and who from the Sikh point of view insulted the Gurus. The Sikhs understood that they were patronized by the central government in order to destroy the separate identity of the Sikhs. According to the SGPC booklet, it was being deliberately encouraged by the government of India designed to pollute the pure *khalsa* by encouraging them to eat meat and drink liquor. Such support is perceived by the Sikhs as another Hindu Conspiracy' to prevent the true *khalsa* Raj.¹⁵

Economic: The economic grievances centered around the issues related to regional economic development like canals, agricultural support prices, industrial development and employment. The issues regarding canals concerned both financing of construction costs and the allocation of water. It was felt that the share of Punjab in cost was much above the benefit it received in terms of water allocation. The Sikhs also maintain that Haryana, the other beneficiary of such projects in the region by definition is not a "riparian state" and has no right to the Punjab waters. According to the act that created Punjab and Haryana, Punjab was to receive 23% of the water from its rivers. In 1978, the Punjab state government brought suit for annulment of the settlement in the Supreme Court but no decision was given.¹⁶ In 1981, Indira Gandhi's Government arranged a new agreement between the then Congress Chief Ministers of Punjab,

14. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

15. Murray J. Leaf, "The Punjab Crisis", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV, No. 5, May 1985, p. 489; M.J. Akbar, *India: The Siege Within*, *op cit.*, p. 192-193.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 487.

Haryana and Rajasthan whereby Punjab's share was raised to only 24%¹⁷. Also, in 1978, under another agreement negotiated in 1978 with the involvement of Janata Government, Haryana was due to receive 50% of the water from the Sutlej-Yamuna, while Prakash Singh Badal, who as the Chief Minister had been involved in the initial negotiations, was of the opinion that Haryana would have been satisfied with 40%. The Bhakra canal head works had been built by Punjab out of the state development fund after 1947, but from 1967 it was run by the central officials. This dam has immense impact on the agriculture and short and irregular supply of power and water may cause disastrous result. The dispute is concerned with the control of the dam. In fact the Sikhs view the problem as an outcome of inefficiency and indifference of the centre. They also maintain that the power and water supply situation will be greatly improved if it was left to them. The centre's interference against the interest of Punjab was highly resented, and a series of Akali agitation followed stopping the work for months together.

The price support system that in Sikh view was reasonably fair during the Janata period began to be adversely affected during the second innings of the Indira Government. The cost of the agricultural inputs were raised at the rate of 20% to 30% a year, while the support prices were raised at the annual rate of 5% to 10%. The problem was compounded by the central governments reimposition of "food zones", which prohibits the private commercial movement of food stuff to the adjacent deficit districts, in order to forcibly depress the price. As a result, the farmers were compelled to sell at Rs. 127 per quintal to the middlemen and stockists while the retail price went upto Rs. 200 per quintal. The policy was much resented. The farmers quite naturally saw it as not only denying them a legitimate return but also as impairing their ability to meet crisis in the future. As such they could see no sense in it and therefore were inclined to

17. Prata Sing Gill, *Dismantling Democracy* (New Delhi : Lancer International, 1984), p. 206-209.

treat it as atleast partly motivated by simple hostility to them, their state or their religion.

The industries issue cropped up in 1978 resulting out of the increased propensities of Sikhs seeking non-farm salaried work. There were few salaried job opportunities compared to the demand. The central government controlled the growth of industries through licensing and Punjab had never been able to develop industry compared to its agriculture. It had no spinning mills for its cotton, and did not have enough Sugar Mills for its own local consumption, while it was major sugar exporter.

As already stated, there was a great lack of employment opportunity in Punjab for those who sought non-farm salaried jobs. This became matter of particular concern in view of the recent trends in the migration pattern which adversely affected the demographic balance. In the absence of job opportunities the outward movement of Sikhs from Punjab to other states continued unabated. Thus the Sikh leaders demanded opening of greater employment opportunities for checking such migration and thereby ensuring their cultural continuity and integrity in Punjab.¹⁸

Political : After the 1971 elections the Congress government ammended the constitution and drafted economic legislations in order to bring out economic and social reforms in the interest of its supporters. The Punjab Land Reform Act of 1972 is an example which became a source of serious grievances. By curtailing the land rights of the minor sons the law violated the basic sikh concept of household order. The law also provided to the dissatisfaction of the sikhs that the family holdings once broken up could never be reaggregated.¹⁹ The law was declared unconstitutional and not in the interest of agrarian reform. Instead of implementing the decision

18. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 486-489.

19. Murray J. Leaf, *Songs of Hope : the Green Revolution in a Punjab Village* (New Burnswick Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. 167.

of the court in favour of bringing about change in the Act, the matter was sent to the Supreme Court. It remained in the court for 5 years and the central government enacted a series of constitutional amendments to undercut the challenges to the Act by limiting the individual rights in the face of measures declared to be in the interests of agrarian and social reform. Such measures instead of generating any positive results accumulated strong resentments and made the legal and administrative situation worse.²⁰

The core of political grievances of the Sikh community is its feeling of being subject to authoritarian imposition by the central government without regard to the aspirations and expectations of the Punjab people.²¹ In fact, the central government under Indira Gandhi concentrated so much power in its hand that "Indira is India"

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was a saying accepted by both herself and the majority of the Indian people.²² The central government measures like imposition of emergency, press censorship, use of preventive detention of opposition leaders etc. denied the fundamental political rights of the citizens. Such measures consequently accentuated political grievance among others, of the Sikh community.

The differences in attitude toward agriculture and economic development, implicit in the land reform act between Indira Gandhi and her supporters on one hand and the leadership in Punjab, among other states, on the other resulted from the constitutional anomalies prevalent in India. Because of the constitutional arrangements the

20. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

22. Reijiro Toba, "In Search of Stability on the Indian Sub-Continent", *Asia Pacific Community*, Spring 1985, No. 28, p-5.

central government became biased in favour of development through industrial and commercial growth and through urban development. The state governments for their part were more inclined toward regional development and thus favoured more focus in agricultural and rural development. The Indira Government tried to resolve these conflicts by concentrating power in the central government by placing economic growth above rural development and by assuming greater directive power in allocating economic resources in the name of general economic good. In contrast the states were more inclined toward greater decentralization and governmental pluralism, respect for local, religious and ethnic traditions as bases of policy decision.²³ The Sikhs in Punjab quite logically viewed such a tendency toward centralised control and totalitarianism as the compounding force in the source of threat against their community. This created deep resentments and led to very strained centre-state relations.

Types of Reactions

This part of the section explicates the types of reactions of the concerned actors to the issue in terms of chronology of principal events in order to show how the crisis accentuated and led to the use of violence.

The Punjabi Suba Movement: The Punjabi Suba Movement emerged with the objective of establishing a political and socio-economic order where the Sikhs would be protected against economic discrimination and threats, where *Guru Mukhi* (scripts) could be the official language as a means for preservation of their distinctiveness. Although the States Reorganization Commission agreed upon the rationale and logic of determining the boundaries on the linguistic basis and recommended for giving all other lingual groups separate status, the Punjab issues was turned down on flimsy grounds. Instead of granting a smaller linguistic state the commission proposed to make it larger by integrating PEPSU

23. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

(Patiala and East Punjab States Union) and Himachal Pradesh into one.²⁴ Such deliberate policy of deprivation, consequently strengthened the Sikh convictions and they rallied behind the movement for *Punjabi Suba*. In SGPC elections of 1965 Sant Fateh Singh, an Akali leader own an overwhelming majority. He then began a carefully orchestrated agitation for the establishment of the *Punjabi Suba*. The movement led to direct talks with the central government as a result of which Sant's linguistic criterion was accepted in March 1966 as the basis for the division. The new state government began to implement a series of promotional measures, particularly in the agricultural sector. These includes infusion of large amount of capital, supply of agricultural inputs and expansion of rural electric power grid. This was further strengthened by the state government aggressive negotiation with the centre to secure favourable agricultural support prices. As a result of these, the states agricultural production expanded substantially in 1966 compared to that in previous years and continued to rise in subsequent years. With the success of the green revolution the farmers who were principally Sikhs felt themselves assured and their interest secured. So the separatist demands declined to a great extent and Sikh dissatisfaction became dormant for a time.²⁵ This demonstrates that healthy and accommodative measures can abate militancy and separatism.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution and the Aftermath : We have indicated earlier that the structure of the Indian Government, the policies, measures and attitudes of the central Government and the dominant political party, the Congress contributed to mounting frustration and disadvantaged feeling of the Sikhs in Punjab. The Congress, mainly an urban based political party, in fact, represents the interest of the urban rich, particularly the industrialists, large business and a section of urban and rural labour who constitutes a major voting block, as against the great

24. M.J. Akbar, *op. cit.*, p. 158-159.

25. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 477-478.

rural masses who are principally dependent on agriculture and small independent means. The latter are markedly under-represented in the central parliament but dominant in the state legislature.²⁶ Consequently the conflicting interest of the classes remained to dominate the Indian polity. We have also discussed the problems arising from centre-periphery relations, particularly those connected with the developmental thrusts. The *Anandpur Sahib Resolution*, formulated by the working committee of the Akali Dal, in 1973 was addressed to resolve such structural constraints, and indeed emerged as a direct response to the impositions and centralization of power by the central government. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution centered around economic, religious and political issues. The demands were : *First*, Chandigarh must come to Punjab without any territorial compensation to Haryana. *Second*, Punjabi speaking areas (parts of the districts of Fazilka and Abohar) left outside Punjab should be brought into the state. *Third*, the control of the Punjab irrigation headwork should be in the hands of the Punjab government, as should be the management of the Bhakra-Nangal dam. *Fourth*, Punjab, being a riparian state, must be allowed much more than the 24 percent shares of the waters it gets (the rest went to non-riparian states like Haryana and Rajasthan). *Fifth*, there should be greater industrialisation through a larger investment of central funds in Punjab. *Sixth*, the centre, accepting the principle of genuine federalism, must surrender some of the power it had usurped from the states. *Seventh*, army recruitment should be on merit, not on population quota. *Eighth*, Sikh farmers in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh should not face any harassment. Then there were the religious demands : the installation of a radio station to relay hymns from the Golden Temple; election to the managements of all gurdwaras in the country (All India Gurdwara Act, A national Act to bring all Gurdwaras in India under the purview of SGPC) ; and a ban on the sale of tobacco and liquor around the Golden

26. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

Temple area—that is, in the precincts of the walled part of Amritsar.²⁷

In effect the central focus of Anandpur Sahib Resolution, was the demand for federalism in the genuine sense. This is illustrated by the provision of the resolution that Indian constitution be made "Federal in a real sense" and assure that "all states are equally represented at the centre"²⁸ and that Central Government's function be strictly limited to defence, foreign affairs, posts and telegraph, currency and railways. The existing federal relationship involves a permanent tug-of-war, and "rising regionalist tendencies" are a predictable response to increasing centralization in both government and the Congress party as practised under Indira Gandhi.²⁹ During the 19 month emergency beginning in 1975 the centre acquired enormous coercive authority the voice of the opposition was shattered through the indiscriminate use of preventive detention and the use of President's Rule to overturn state governments dominated by political groups other than Indira Gandhi's own³⁰ The emergency by creating an atmosphere of intimidation and threat unprecedented in Indian post-independent history, in fact contributed positively to strengthen the opposition solidarity. It was much for the united stand of the opposition that Indira Congress suffered severe defeat in the 1977 national election. The Janata Coalition came to power on March 1977 and discarded some of the undemocratic policies and practices of Mrs. Gandhi's administration. It was first of all an era of consolidation and importantly of returning to autonomy to the states. During the Janata period very little was heard of Anandpur Sahib Resolution in Punjab.³¹

27. M. J. Akbar, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

29. Robert J. Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 1172.

30. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 483.

Agricultural production in the state turned sharply upward and in 1978 the production was at an all time high.³² The brief period of Janata rule demonstrated that political and economic policies that were supportive to the interest of the masses as distinct from coercive measures help reduce tensions (also abates the use of violence) and increase productivity. However, the Janata government failed to remain in power for long and Congress (I) returned to power in the the centre in 1980. Punjab for its part continued with its previous Janata coalition. The Akali Dal in alliance with the Jana-Sangh, with Prakash Singh Badal as Chief Minister, consistently refused the central imposition and continued to pursue its own policies and solution.³³ Consequently, in February 1981, the central government declared President' rule in Punjab.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution became a major focus again soon after Mrs. Gandhi's return to power. More concrete grievances cropped up along with new versions of the old ones. The Akali Dal intensified the 'holy war' and continued with strong agitation which culminated in the operation Blue Star. The key to understanding the tragic sequence of events from the attack on the Golden Temple, the assassination of Indira Gandhi to the atrocities in the current period lies in seeing how the legitimate and resolvable problems bundled into the arguments about federalism became submerged in the fundamentally unresolvable demands and ideas associated with separatism and terrorism.³⁴ In fact what the Akali moderates really wanted was to take the initiative away from the extremists by resorting their credibility through the movement of federalism focusing on Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Even a blind government in Delhi could have seen that and offered a way out. But instead of healing the wound the government allowed it to become septic.³⁵

32. M.S. Gill, *Punjab Maintains Lead : A Review of Agricultural Production in Punjab 1973-1980* (Chandigarh : Argicultural Information Service, Department of Agricultural, Punjab).

33. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

34. *ibid.*, p. 491.

35. M.J. Akbar, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

The central government under Indira Gandhi, took measures at various points of time that consequently weakened the moderates and strengthened the extremists. The progressive denial of the political rights of the Akalis the middle ground of the political opinion-started with declaration of the President's Rule in 1980. By the use of President's Rule the state government that was unfavourable to the central policies, was removed and thereby the moderates were disenfranchised. Indira Gandhi simply was not the kind of person who could tolerate plural centres of power, whether at the centre or in the provinces, which might threaten her supremacy.³⁶ Mrs. Gandhi was necessarily depriving those who favoured alternative policies of the power to speak through established government organs with a force appropriate to their local strength.³⁷ The consequence of such deprivation is creation of an atmosphere where the moderates and the bulk that they represent are left aside and eventually the leadership started passing to the extremists.

The second method of depriving the moderates of their political credibility was centre's unresponsiveness. Centre's delay, insensitivity and ineptitude have strengthened the hands of the Sikhs extremists.³⁸ The principal issues of Akali Demand was side-tracked. In fact Mrs. Gandhi often displayed an anti-minority stance.³⁹ Mrs. Gandhi's distrust for the Sikhs weakened the moderate bases of the Sikhs and strengthened the fanaticism of the extremists.

The Third method by which the moderate were weakened was the efforts of Indira Congress to destabilise the power equation of Akali-Jana Sangha Alliance. It is widely believed that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was supported financially by Sanjay Gandhi in collaboration with Zail Singh (President of India after Indira's reelec-

36. S.P. Seth, 'India's Despair and Hope. Domestic and Foreign Issues' *Asia Pacific Community*, Spring 1985, No. 28, p. 20.

37. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

38. R.L. Hardgrave *op. cit.*, p. 1179.

39. M.J. Akbar, *op. cit.*, 198.

tion in order to widen the difference within the Akali Dal⁴⁰ and drive a wedge between Sikhs and Hindus and thus break up the political cooperation between Akali Dal and the urban Hindu-oriented Jana Sangha.⁴¹ Instead of cooperating with Akalis to isolate the Sikh extremist, the congress (I) not only propped up the extremist like Bhindranwale at the initial stage but also encouraged the Fanatic Hindu Organizations like *Hindu Frankenstein*, *Hindu Suraksha Samiti* or *Hindu Safety Organization*.⁴² Consequently the Hindu-Sikh conflict, discussed earlier, that was sowed in the long past was revived in a more intensified fashion. This strategy needless to mention, was most dangerous and self-destructive. Bypassing the economic and political issues the Congress government, by virtue of its control of news media, identified the Sikh leaders (opposition) as communal, fundamentalists and separatists. This is not to suggest that there were no extremist demands for separation and no use of terrorist means. It was there, but large masses were not in favour of such demand. The policy of the centre had the logical effect of magnifying the extremist and discouraging the moderates⁴³ which culmina-

Repressive measures have proved to be counterproductive, if anything, and in effect strengthened the elements of extremism further.

ted in death of Bhindranwale and assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. The result was a permanent cleavage between the Sikh and Hindus and a deep alienation of both from each other, It was thus largely the central government's policies that shattered the economic and political aspirations of the mainstream of masses in Punjab. This

40. Ayesha Kagal, *The Times of India* (Sept. 12, 1982); Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab : Operation Blue Star and After* (New Delhi : Vision Books, 1984), p. 31.

41. Murray J. Leaf, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

42. M.J. *op. cit.*, p. 198.

43. Murraray J. Leaf, p. 493.

contributed to two-way outcome of the sense of deprivation of the Sikhs. The sense of deprivation in the moderates led them to undertake a rational process of democratic politics and demand for federalization of the Indian constitution. On the other hand, the sense of deprivation in the extremists bred intolerance which contributed to their resorting to the path of political violence and terrorism against the government, Hindus, Sikh deviants (Nirakeri sect) and also some moderates, as an instrument for attainment of their goal of separatism.

The moderates and the extremists acted differently and perhaps the moderates could have contained the extremists forces if the government had not taken such political moves which on the one hand disenfranchised the moderates and weakened them and on the other hand encouraged and strengthened the extremists in order to weaken the moderates. In fact because of such coercive politics many of the moderates changed their position and became extremists. It is to be noted here that the difference of impact of ethnic values and convictions on the courses of action of moderates and extremists are due to the difference they maintain on the ways to uphold and pursue their fundamental values and convictions. Thus while the extremists preferred to continue with their violent measures, the moderates chose to be accommodative as demonstrated by their signing of the accord with the Rajiv government.

The Sikhs achieved their distinctiveness over centuries through certain cultural and religious practices. The differences among the moderates and extremists on the methodology for attaining their goals apart, all Sikhs were equally concerned for their identity and distinctiveness, creating in them emotionalism and sense of deprivation which coupled with 'martial heritage' led them choose whatever path, on occasions even armed violence. It was indeed largely the misperceived and unimaginative political moves of the government that helped political violence grow in Punjab. The fact remains that repressive measures like operation Blue Star aimed at exterminating

the extremists could not solve the Punjab crisis. If anything, such measures have only proved to be counterproductive and in effect strengthened the elements of extremism further. It therefore, would be in adopting appropriate, particularly, accommodative political and economic measures that solution of the crisis should be sought.

Conclusion

A conflict turns into a prolonged crisis when it is marked by high tension and urgency and is fraught with serious consequences of not being handled timely and properly. By virtue of the very nature of problems and their origin the imperatives for political handling of the same in order to abate violence and tragic turn of events come in the forefront. As a matter of fact use of violence in politics is an outcome of distorted growth of mass consciousness in a society

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that breeds intolerance, parochialism and primordiality. Faced with various kinds of threat perception and counter-measures of similar nature from the opposite side such consciousness leads to a socio-pathological reaction and counter-reaction leading thereby to the adoption of violence instead of act of higher level of consciousness manifested through the use of positive democratic institutions. Thus in order to liquidate such political violence in the short run, constructive and positive political moves but not coercive and repressive measures need to be adopted, while in the long run, positive democratic institutions and atmosphere addressed to the root causes of the problem may prove to be effective. Democratic values like perseverance and tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, respect for each other's view, peaceful settlement of disputes, subordination

of individual and sectoral interest to collective interest and above all, liberal attitude towards social, religious and ethnic mosaic of nation-state must be inculcated.

It is most obvious that the initiatives and measures for conciliation and accommodation would be anticipated more from the majority and more powerful (ruling) ethnic or social group than the minority and disadvantaged ones. The role of political parties and leadership capable of rising above narrow group interests and of cultivating liberal and democratic political values appears to be crucial. It is also very important, particularly in the context of a federal state structure that appropriate level of devolution of power is ensured so that all sections of the society develops a sense of participation. This latter can provide the most useful guarantee against the source of 'deprived-psychosis' of the minority and disadvantaged groups. It also works as the most effective channel of communication between the state authority and the masses the absence of which may prove to be most disastrous. Measures leading to greater autonomy, increased mass participation and institutionalised devolution of power may also prove effective in minimizing intra-group conflicts and to some extent exploitation of such conflicts by the advantaged groups.

It is also very important to establish and develop respect for and confidence on the impartiality and effectiveness of governmental machinery in order to channelize the oppositions viewpoint through the use of legal and constitutional set ups. These Government organisations often fail to secure confidence of general public as they resort to nepotism, favouritism and discrimination. Added to these are wide scale red-tapism, impersonality and procedural delay. All these cause a strong sense of despair, frustration, anger in the heart of masses, making the state organisations ineffective and sterile bodies which fail miserably to voice the grievances and protests in a formal democratic set up. Consequently people and their groups are provoked to exhibit disloyalty and disregard to the rule of law, contributing thereby to the adoption of violence.

One other area where the importance of accommodation appears to be most essential is the contradiction between democratic and progressive trends on the one hand and local traditional and ethnocentric values and norms on the other. In a society which retains such traditional values attempts to graft indiscriminately an alien pattern of development and progress may create harmful fusions and indeed retard the process of development and progress itself.⁴⁴

Since violence breeds violence, political violence can not be contained wholly by the adoption of counter-violence. Of course this is not to say that certain law enforcement measures are not helpful. Although such measures may temporarily control a violent situation, nevertheless in the long perspective such measures can hardly prove to be effective. Since the root causes of political violence lie in social, religious, economic, political and administrative grievances, appropriate political measures are extremely necessary to work out permanent solution of such grievances.

Finally, since intolerance is an outcome of anti-democratic values and low level of consciousness, it is extremely important to inculcate the democratic values in the masses through proper education and establishment of healthy democratic institutions, which can promote a healthy mechanism to redress the genuine grievances.

44. Amal Kumar Mukherjee, 'Keno Bharatey Aaj Shantrashbad'. (Why terrorism in India today) *Desh* (a Bengali magazine) 25 October, 1986.