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THE PUNJAB CRISIS : CHALLENGE FOR INDIAN FEDERALISM AND DEMOCRACY ?

It used to be widely believed until recently that development and modernization were not only among the most important processes of national integration but also ensured socio-political-economic stability of the system. But recent developments in the domestic scenario of certain states across the globe specially in the Third World have shown some cracks in such a belief. A notion is thus increasingly gaining ground in the perceptions of scholars that development and modernization of life and society in a nation-state, particularly in a multi-ethnic state, breed a type of consciousness that may be called 'deprived-psychosis' among its ethnic and religious minorities. This consciousness may not only turn into political movements and at times serious violences but also prove counter-productive to national integration. And hence many of the nation-states throughout the world today are troubled by serious problems of integration essentially of ethno-religious nature. Ethnicity and religious factors are a perennial source of tension which can erupt into violent conflicts given the longstanding differences between the dominant actor and the aggrieved party. This may lead to ethno-religious crisis and the resultant violence and atrocities may hamper the cause of national integration as well as threaten the existing socio-political system. The crisis is more acute and complex in a federal state. Besides, such crises do often have spillover effects with a potential for affecting regional peace specially if they have crossborder implications.

The Punjab crisis in India is a case in point. India, the world's largest democracy, and ethnically a 'plural society' is rocked by violence and atrocities in the North-western state of Punjab. The militants among the Sikhs have been carrying out a violent struggle for greater autonomy and/or separation for some years now in the Punjab where Sikhs are a majority. The Punjab crisis, believed to have been solved first with the Operation Bluestar in 1984 and then with the Punjab Accord in 1985, is still very much there unresolved, and is perhaps becoming more intractable. Recent reports say that Punjab is in turmoil once again with the Sikh extremists' activities reaching a new height. There are shootouts in Punjab almost everyday. Normal life is vitiated by frequent acts of violences. While the state government tries its best to grapple with the situation with patience and fortitude and help from the centre, there is a nagging fear that the extremists in Punjab might prove much harder to be tackled than the central and state government had thought, that the problem cannot be solved by police or army action.¹

In fact, the mounting crisis has "engulfed the country in chronic terrorism and threatened it with civil war and authoritarian rule."² If the situation deteriorates further showing no sign of resolution, it is also apprehended that India's security environment will undergo a change in view of the strategic location of the Punjab, of sizable Sikh representation in the Indian army and such other related factors that are vital for the security structure of the country³. The Punjab crisis has thus become a crucial concern for Indian federalism, democracy and also for her security. What is the cause of Sikh agitation in Punjab? What are the factors that account for the present shape of the crisis? What are the likely direction of the crisis? Does it pose a severe challenge for Indian federalism and democracy? If so, is

1. *Sunday*, April 20-26, 1986, p. 12

2. Lloyd. I. Rudolph, "India and the Punjab : A Fragile Peace", *Asian Issues*, Report 3, 1985, p. 33.

3. Lok Raj Baral, "Nation Building and Region Building in South Asia", *Asia Pacific Community*, No. 28, Spring 1985, p. 85

there any possibility of secession of Punjab in near future? And if not, what would be the mode of the management of the crisis within the federal structure of the country? These are the questions that would be sought to be answered in the present paper. For the purpose of analysis, attempt is made first to review the background of the crisis. The second section highlights the Sikh perceptions and the crisis management measures adopted by the Rajiv government. Finally, the paper focuses on the challenges that the crisis poses on the future of the federal democratic polity of India.

Background of the Crisis

The Sikhs had been one of India's most patriotic, respected and successful communities⁴. Sikh officers and soldiers were a key component in India's military security. Sikhs proved their patriotism and valour in India's 1962 war with China and in the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan. Most Sikhs had been moderates and nationalists. But coming to the 1980s they sensed that they had become strangers (in their own country) whose bleak future engendered despair and dissidence⁵. A section of the Sikhs raised their open demands for the separation of Punjab as an independent state and resorted to the path of violence. What contributed to these "unhappy" developments?

The Sikh problem in Punjab, though a recent phenomenon is an outcome of a deep-rooted process. At the independence of India in 1947, the Sikhs demanded separate status for them but New Delhi did not pay any heed to it. Even in 1956 when the Indian states were reorganized on the basis of linguistic criterion, the Sikhs did not get a state for their Punjabi-speaking people. It was only in 1966 that they got a status of their own. However, the Sikhs continued to perceive themselves to be increasingly alienated by the New Delhi Government. The issues which led to the discontent and alienation were the following :

4. L. I. Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p. 33

5. *Ibid*

The first issue was regarding territorial aspirations. When the Punjabi subha was formed, Chandigarh was not handed over to the new state. Chandigarh was made a centrally administered area and both Punjab and Haryana were allowed to establish their headquarters there. The Punjabis demanded that Chandigarh be handed over to them. There was a suggestion that Haryana should build a new capital of its own. But no decision was taken in this matter.

There was also a demand for the re-demarcation of the territories of Punjab by way of transferring Punjabi-speaking enclaves—some very large districts like Ganganagar in Rajasthan—in neighbouring states were not allowed to become united with fellow Panjabis. Though a proper solution would have been to refer the matter to a commission with powers of delimiting the areas on the basis of majority and contiguity, it was never done in a decisive and binding manner.

The second issue pertained to economic grievances. The central government's investment in Punjab, particularly industrial investment was negligible and there was severe unemployment in certain categories of persons, particularly amongst the educated youths⁶. Of total central investment in all the states in non-departmental undertakings as of March 1979, Punjab's share was only 2.2%. Even lower figures were reported by the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (Bombay) in 1980, with Punjab accounting for only 0.9% of central government 'Projects in Hand'⁷.

The issue of distributing the surplus waters of the Ravi and the Beas and the construction of Sutlej-Yamuna like canal has also been a severe bone of contention. Although it was basically an economic problem it turned into a political one. As mentioned earlier, Punjab was reorganized in 1966 on a linguistic basis, and the separate state of Haryana came into existence. The new state demanded its share

6. Amrik Singh (ed), *Punjab in Indian Politics : Issues and Trends*, Aganta Publications, India, 1985, p. 48.

7. *Ibid.*

of the surplus Ravi-Beas waters out of the composite Punjab's share. The issue was taken up by the central government. During the Emergency (in 1976) the government of India divided the share between the Punjab and Haryana whereby 3.5 million-acre-feet (maf) of the Ravi-Beas surplus water was allocated to Haryana and the balance, not exceeding 3.5 maf to Punjab, out of the total surplus of 7.2 maf, while 0.2 maf was kept apart to meet drinking water needs of Delhi⁸. The state of Haryana agreed to it readily, but it was unacceptable to Punjab. All political parties in Punjab opposed and it led to a lot of heart burning there. The perception in Punjab was that its share of the water was inadequate for its needs and the arrangement ignored its riparian rights. Though all the residents of Punjab, irrespective of their religion, were concerned about this particular issue, the Sikhs were more concerned, because the overwhelming majority of them were dependent one way or other on the income from the agricultural sections.

There were also some other issues which were related to the Sikh religion and community. The Shiromoni Gurudwara Probondhak Committee (SGPC), a centralized body that was established in 1920 by the Sikhs to manage sikh temples throughout the country did not have the legal right to govern gurudwaras outside Punjab. It is to be remembered that over the centuries, religion and politics have been inseparable for the Sikh community. In the context of Hindu revivalist movement in Punjab (which was spearheaded by the Arya Samaj in the earlier part of this century) the Sikhs turned inward and strengthened their own subnational identity⁹. In the process, the SGPC provided enormous material and organizational resources to the Sikh political elites to mobilize the Sikh public into a community distinct from that of the Hindus. Any attempt aimed at undermining the SGPC's influence and control upon the Sikh community has

8. Farhat Khalid, "The Politics of River waters in the Indian Punjab", *Regional Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter, 1982. p. 37.

9. Yogendra K. Malik, "The Akali Party and the Sikh Militancy: Move for Greater Autonomy or Secession in Punjab?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, March 1986. p. 347.

always been resisted by the Sikhs. The Akali Dal (an exclusively Sikh political party established in 1920) gradually took over as the platform to enhance the Sikh identity assertiveness. The issue got further momentum when the Sikhs found that they were losing ground in the army recruitment despite the fact that they were among the country's best soldiers.¹⁰

In 1973 the Akali Dal raised some constitutional issues in the name of 'Anandpur Shahib Resolution' which sought mainly to re-orient the centre-state relationship. The resolution urged that central intervention should be strictly limited to defence, foreign affairs, communications, railways and currency.¹¹ They (Akalis) sought the transfer of all other powers to the state government. But Prime Minister Indira Gandhi did not accept these demands on the plea that some of them were detrimental to national integration. The Akali Dal for its part, had all along been sticking to the letter and spirit of the 1973 resolution.

The Punjab crisis assumed further complexity with India's seventh national election in 1980 that returned to power a Congress-I government led by Indira Gandhi. Her government dismissed the Akali Dal-Janata coalition government that had ruled Punjab since 1977. Moreover, she substituted state quotas for 'merit' in military recruitment, a policy switch that would reduce the proportion of Sikhs from about 15 to 6 percent or less of military personnel¹². Being ousted from the power of the Punjab state, the Akali Dal took recourse to movement through agitational politics. Such an approach kept the party in the public eye and enabled it to mobilize the Sikh masses against the central government.

It is also viewed by some analysts that the Punjab crisis was connected with Mrs. Indira Gandhi's post-1980 response to or

10. L. I. Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

11. For details see, *Anandpur Shahib Resolution*, Society For Integration, Kindness and Humanity, New Delhi; 1984.

12. L.I. Rudoldh, *op. cit.*, p. 40

encouragement of a Hindu backlash¹³. Mrs. Gandhi seemed to have understood that if she has to have a political future in the heartland of northern India, it now lay with a support from its Hindu majority. An analyst has pointed out : "A feeling had begun to grow, towards the end of the seventies that since independence the minorities had pampered at the cost of the Hindu majority. Mrs. Gandhi began to believe that there was bound to be a 'Hindu backlash' against any further pampering of the minorities. Far from challenging such revivalism, she decided to ride it as far as it would take her... Mrs. Gandhi did not, therefore, have a Punjab policy; she had a minority policy which she extended to the two minority states Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir"¹⁴. Sikh demands and their aspiration to rule in the Punjab thus confronted with the new minorities policy associated with Hindu backlash the result of which was further alienation of the Sikh community.

Fear-psychosis of the Sikhs also contributed to the deepening of the Punjab crisis. Led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Sikh extremists held that their community was threatened by extinction. Sikhs were disappearing through assimilation and emigration.¹⁵ So for the Sikhs it was a matter of life and death. Sikhs as a community could be saved, according to the extremists, by a state sovereignty in which the sants (religious teachers) would enforce the observance of a Sikh way of life on a Sikh nation. In July, 1984, sant Bhindranwale declared that "Sikhs are a separate nation" and that every Sikh should "fight for our independence as a separate nation; that this "liberation" should be equipped with guns"¹⁶

13. *Ibid*, p. 42.

14. M.J. Akbar, *India : The Siege Within*, Penguin, Middlesex, England 1985, p. 117.

15. There are indications that the Sikh majority declined in Punjab. While in 1971 the figure was 60.2%, in the 1980s it came down to 52%. For details see, Paul Wallace, "The Sikhs as a 'Minority' in a Sikh Majority state in India", *Asian Survey* Vol. XXVI No. 3. March 1986, pp. 364-365 and L.I. Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p. 45

16. *Statesman*, July 11, 1984.

It is worth mentioning that Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale "skillfully" and "demagogically" played upon his strategy to take over or replace the Akali Dal as the major authority for Sikhs.¹⁷ He passionately and violently sought to define the Sikh community in a fundamentalist manner. He differed markedly from the main line Akali Dal leadership in his narrow Sikh focus and in his tactics. Bhindranwale adopted extremist measures as he armed his followers and led a terrorist movement. Mrs. Gandhi also took a very tough attitude towards Bhindranwale. Even both the Akali Dal and Bhindranwale group were painted in the speeches made by her as 'potential secessionists'. Thus, in October 1983, when six Hindu bus passengers were murdered brutally and political violence led to a

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massive sense of insecurity throughout northern India, Mrs. Gandhi's Congress-I government dismissed Punjab's state government and assumed direct control under President's rule. This was followed by a spate of laws : Punjab Disturbed Areas Act, 1983, the Chandigarh Disturbed Areas Act, 1983, the Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh Special Criminal Procedure-Punjab Amendment) Act, 1983, the National Security (Amendment) Acts, 1984 and finally, the Terrorist Affected Areas (special courts) Acts, 1984. These Laws gave extraordinary powers to the army, police and the judiciary and had the effect of bypassing all safeguards incorporated in the ordinary criminal law designed to ensure a fair trial and legal

17. Paul Wallace, *op. cit.* p. 377

justice.¹⁸ These particular laws were imposed to deal with extremist violence, but what happened actually was that by imposition of these laws the entire Sikh community of Punjab was being deprived of the rights guaranteed in the constitution and thousands of ordinary citizens were being affected. In late May, after militants announced that they would prevent Punjab grain from leaving the state and cut transmission lines, Prime Minister Gandhi sent 70,000 additional troops into the state and surrounded the Golden Temple in Amritsar and smaller Sikh temples throughout the state. On June 4, the Indian army began to assault on the fortified and heavily armed Golden

18. For example, the Terrorist-Affected Areas (Special Courts) Ordinance 1984 was promulgated to "provide for speedy trials of certain offences of terrorist-affected areas and for matters connected therewith." The state of Punjab and Union Territory of Chandigarh were declared "terrorist-affected". Three Judicial zones were created each with a special court. The special courts were established at Patiala, Jullandhar and Ferozepur. Subsequently seven Additional Special Courts were also set up. Any one who has committed almost any crime could be tried in a special court.

The definition of terrorist is itself wide enough to include just about anyone. Section 3 (h) defines a terrorist: "a person who indulges in wanton killing of persons or in violence or in the disruption of services or means of communications essential to the community or in damaging property with a view to : (1) putting the public or any section of the public in fear; or (ii) affecting adversely the harmony between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities; or iii) covering or overthrowing the government established by law; or iv) endangering the sovereignty and integrity of India."

Thus any person committing any offence listed in the schedule can be tried in special court. In fact section 7 (1) (b) of the Act states that all other cases involving scheduled offences committed in such area pending before any court shall be transferred to the special court. The schedule in the Act has been expanded to include offences ranging from offences against the state to criminal intimidation. Even a person wholly unconnected with terrorist activity can be tried under the special court. See, "Black Laws in Punjab, Report of an Enquiry", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX No. 19, May 11, 1985, pp. 826-27.

Temple, believed to be the headquarters of Sikh extremists under the command of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. On June 6, after heavy fighting, casualties and physical damage, the Golden Temple was captured from Bhindranwale and his supporters. Bhindranwale and a number of his supporters were killed in the process. Punjab was placed under military rule. The Indira government thus alienated the entire Sikh community by using the army to flush out the terrorists from the Golden Temple. Mrs. Gandhi's tragic assassination by two of her Sikh bodyguards within a few months of the Operation Bluestar and the subsequent mass-killing of Sikhs in early November 1984 were only its natural consequences which further aggravated the crisis.

In fact, the Punjab crisis originated from some grievances which with a few exceptions were not to be normally expected to change the balance of power within the Indian political system. Later, only when a state-wide non-violent but militant movement led by the Akali Dal and extremism and violences led by sant Bhindranwale resulted in political and military repression, the crisis turned into a grave shape. The breakdown of the system of accommodation and compromise could be attributed to the violent turn of events. There is no denying the fact that the secessionist stand was limited only to a "microscopic section of the community".¹⁹ It was the impact of the repressive counter-measures of the government that contributed to uniting of the different sections of the community, moderate and extremists together. Instead of trying to bargain politically with the moderate Akali leadership, Mrs. Gandhi resorted to conflictual means, spoke to the nation as if Sikhs meant terrorists. These proved to be counterproductive, strengthened Bhindranwale's hand and allowed him to capture the leadership of the community. The Politics of violence, assassination and repression was allowed to replace the politics of accommodation, policy bargaining, electoral competition and negotiation. It is thus obvious that a lot of wrongly perceived

19. Abida Samiuddin (ed) *The Punjab Crisis : Challenge and Response*, Mitali Publications, Delhi, 1985 p. XV (Introduction).

and directed policies of the centre accompanied with Sikh indentity consciousness and religious fundamentalism have contributed to the deterioration of the Punjab crisis.

Sikh Perceptions and the Policies of the Rajiv Government

Before going to the discussion on Sikh perceptions, it is imperative to mention two important related issues. First, at present several factions exist within the Sikh community and they have so many divergent perceptions that some of them are even opposite to each other. The divergences revolve around not only the objectives or goals but also in methods and strategies. Second, their perceptions and stakes have underwent changes over time in accordance with the changes in regime's perceptions and strategies. As a result Sikh perceptions have become a 'dependent variable' to regime perception and policies towards the community.

After the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi when Rajiv came to power, his perception of the Akali politics and the Punjab crisis appeared to be different from that of his mother. "Unlike his mother, Rajiv saw the Punjab crisis as a political rather than law and order problem".²⁰ The basic strategy of the new administration was to isolate the extremists and to bring the moderate Akali leadership to the negotiation table. Accordingly, in March 1985, Rajiv released the Akali leaders. On July 24, 1985, he signed an eleven-point memorandum of settlement with Longowal (known as Punjab Accord) in which most of the Akali demands were considered.²¹ While Indira Gandhi's strategy was dictated by partisan

20. Yogendra K. Malik, *op. cit.* p. 356.

21. According to the Accord, on January 26, 1986, Chandigarh was to be transferred to Punjab. An autonomous commission was to be appointed to settle the territorial claims of Punjab and Haryana. Its report was to be submitted by December 31, 1985 and its recommendations were to be binding on all parties. The final territorial exchange between Punjab and Haryana was to take place on January 26, 1986. A tribunal presided over by a Justice of the Supreme Court was to make an allocation of river water between Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. For details see Iqbal Narain, "India in 1985: Triumph of Democracy" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, Feb. 1986. pp. 257-58.

interests and the desire to destroy the power base of the Akali party, Rajiv sought to return the Akalis to power in Punjab even if such an event went against the interests of his own party (provided it did not threaten the territorial integrity of the country). Evidently there was not only a change in the political actors, but also a change in the perceptions and power play of the Sikh community.

In response to the new initiatives taken by Rajiv Government, the Akali Dal (the party which adopted agitational approach during Indira period and was termed as separatist) responded positively. On July 26, 1985, the Longowal-Rajiv Accord was approved by an overwhelming majority of more than 250 Akali delegates and the district party leaders. Freed from the extremists' shadow, Longowal stood firm by his conviction and declared that "Punjab could not survive apart from India."²² The Akali leader however had to pay the ultimate price as he was assassinated by the extremists' bullets just after a few days of Punjab Accord. However, his party, the moderate Akali Dal (Longowal faction) under the leadership of Surjit Singh Barnala, swept the Punjab state legislative assembly (Vidhan Shabha) election on September 25, 1985 by capturing 73 of 115 seats. On September 29, 1985 Surjit Singh Barnala was sworn in as the Akali Chief Minister of the State.

In a policy statement presented by Akali government before the Punjab state legislature it declared that "the state government would give no quarter to any separatist ideologies or activities".²³ In terms of centre-state relations the Akalis seem to be giving up the policy of confrontation. The Akali government thus declared that "the State government did not perceive the centre-state relations in mutually exclusive and oppositional perspective. The contradiction between the two was really coordinational and could be resolved by mutual understanding and coordination".²⁴ Rajiv Gandhi's politics of

22. Yogendra K. Malik *op, cit*, p 357

23. *Statesman Weekly*, October 19, 1985 p. 7

24. *Ibid*

flexibility and accommodation thus has been successful not only in bringing the Akalis back into the mainstream of Indian politics, but also in making them change their perceptions to a large extent.

The Punjab Accord and the subsequent Punjab State assembly election, however, could not ensure permanent peace in Punjab. Since January 1986, the mainstream in Punjab has started getting divided dangerously. Chief Minister Mr. Barnala's isolation in Akali and eventually Sikh politics has been growing. The formal split within the Akali Party under the leadership of Prakash Singh Badal, a former Chief Minister of Punjab and the election of Mr. G.S. Tohra, an opponent of Barnala as the Chief of Shiromoni Gurudwara Probondhak Committee (SGPC) had created further complication. Unlike Barnala faction, Badal Tohra group has been maintaining a hardline approach for quite a long time, and recently they have become "hob nob" with the extremists. From perceptual point of view their position is in between the moderate Akalis and the separatists. While they don't voice for separatism directly they are inspiring and assisting the extremists from inside, to use the Khalistan demand as burgaining ploy.²⁵ Just after his election Mr. Tohra thus announced that the SGPC task force had been "disbanded". The force was raised by Mr. Kabul Singh, a leader of Akali Dal (Barnala faction) following the police entry into the Golden temple complex on April 30, 1986 to remove Damdani Taksal and AISSF activists. Mr. Tohra said that there could not be any task force in Sikh shrines as "it amounted to their sacrilege". Tohra's decision was clearly aimed at paving the way for the extremists to recapture the Golden Temple and use it as their headquarter. In fact the link between fundamentalism and terrorism in Punjab would have been weakened if Mr. Tohra was defeated. But his victory has marked a dangerous shift in the balance of power in favour of the extremists and their sympathizers and has taken the Punjab situation back to square one.

25. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, December 11, 1986.

Recently there has been a sudden spurt in the extremist's activities and both the state and central government are finding themselves weak to cope with the situation.²⁶ The extremists who belong to the Damdani Taksal, the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and the Khalistan Liberation Front are the main actors of this extremism. They directly promote secessionism and seek the establishment of a separate and sovereign Sikh state 'Khalistan'. The extremists find ready recruiting ground among "the boys"—unemployed youth from farming families, many of them university graduates. They are swayed into joining the terrorist adventure on the basis of venomous propaganda for the creation of Khalistan and forging a Hindu migration.²⁷ The extremists seem to be convinced that it is only through the armed struggle that they can achieve 'dignity' and "independence" for the Sikhs. They view the Akali Dal Barnala

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faction as "anti-Sikh" and a "prop of the Delhi Darbar".²⁸ It is also important to mention that one of the reasons for the increase in terrorist activity is the failure to implement important clauses of the Punjab Accord. The accord has long been doomed because Mr. Gandhi has not yet implemented its key provisions such as the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab by January 26, 1985. Now the whole process leading to the accord stands reversed. While it sounds unrealistic that those who advocate separatism and believe in the cult of the gun are seriously concerned about the agreement between Rajiv and Longowal, the fact is that Punjab Accord is certainly relevant to

26. *Ibid*

27. *India Today*, December 31, 1986 p. 26

28. *Ibid*, p. 28

some extent in the context of the growing alienation of the Sikh masses from the national mainstream. The accord, notwithstanding its built-in contradictions and limitations, was aimed at bringing alienated Sikhs back into the mainstream. Statistics show that while during that period extremist violence ebbed, after January 26, 1986, there was a sharp rise in violent activities.²⁹ Had they been implemented expeditiously, Mr. Barnala's standing in his own party and among the Sikh masses would also have become stronger. The decision to suppress the findings of the Misra Commission that examined the mass murder of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 after the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi has also contributed to this alienation. It is thus obvious that though Rajiv Gandhi started with great fanfare to find early political solutions to the Punjab crisis, later when a disastrous set of actions has led to the current bloody stalemate, he shared the blame equally with the extremists and the Akalis. Today he finds himself almost at a dead end which suggests for taking a new initiative.

The Punjab Crisis in the Context of Indian Federalism and Democracy

Since the Punjab crisis has been the focal point in Indian national politics for quite a long time and has attracted wide attention beyond, several attempts have been made to define the crisis and visualize its future ramifications. Some have observed it as "a religiously motivated drive for secession that threatens India's political unity".³⁰ Some have viewed the crisis as "the most severe test of Indian democracy"³¹. In the present section of this paper we will attempt at examining the probable future dimensions of the crisis. As the crisis is blurred with separatist overtones let us first examine how strong these separatist elements are and what are their weaknesses.

29. *Ibid* p. 25

30. See Murray J. Leaf, "The Punjab Crisis", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXV. No. May 1985. p. 475.

31. L.I. Rudolph, *op. cit*, p. 41

As an analyst has rightly pointed out, for ethnic nationalities to succeed in forming separate states of their own, at least one of the following two conditions would have to be met: (a) a total breakdown of the centre accompanied by substantial nationalist and anti-centre activities in the minority area; (b) a commitment by a superior power on behalf of the ethnic separatist groups without countervailing response on the part of other major powers in support of the centre.³² While this is not the final word about the ramifications of the ethnic violence and there is enough scope of addition and deduction to this criteria, for the purpose of analysis we are using it as a tool.

So far as the above two conditions are concerned, the following aspects of the Punjab crisis appears to be relevant.

First, India has by and large been able to contain divisive regional and communal forces. Its federal democratic system possesses a remarkable measure of flexibility, resilience and manipulative capabilities and it has shown its resilience during the worst crisis since independence. So any separatist threat aimed at real secession in India is still likely to be far away. (We will return to this theme later)

Second, while numerous youngsters in Punjab are easy prey to propaganda and nurse a strong sense of grievance, the demand for Khalistan as a political movement has still not gained steam or respectability. It remains for the most part, a 'whispering campaign.'³³ And Punjab has a massive and viable middle class with a vested interest in protecting the state against any ultimate destabilization.

Third, today the Sikh separatists have no single leader and even no fixed plan. Unlike the pre-Operation Bluestar days they do not

32. Zalmay Khalizad, "The Politics of Ethnicity in South West Asia : Political Development or Political Decay?," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. VII, No. 3, Spring 1983, p. 63.

33. *India Today* : December 31, 1986 p. 24.

operate from any headquarter but from various centres, which are not necessarily gurdwaras. Moreover, they have become highly factionalized which is continuously undermining their strengths and mission. Keeping apart the difference between the extremists and the dissident Akali Dal led by Prokash Sing Badal, the front line rebel organisations i. e., the AISSF, the Khalistan Liberation Front and the Damdani Taksal also do not work as a team. Even the AISSF has also been divided into two major factions, one led by H.S. Kahlon and the other by Manjit Singh. Kahlon's group alleges that the split in the AISSF was engineered by the Akali Dal government. Whatever might be the cause of their dissidence, it is an undeniable fact that intense factionalism, lack of coordination and single command, loss of mass support have made it difficult for the separatists to achieve their goal. It is also reported that a section of the Sikh extremists have begun to show signs of exhaustion, with their morale lower than ever.³⁴

So far as the external involvement is concerned, Pakistan's alleged links with the separatist elements comes first. India charges that Pakistan fanned the flames in the Punjab by providing arms, training and sanctuary to Sikh militants. Recently Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has categorically mentioned that "Pakistan has set up training centres for terrorists from where they are being trained in sabotage and subversion to create internal disturbances in Punjab and other parts of the country"³⁵ Although Pakistan denies any involvement, and it is nearly impossible also to verify their alleged material assistance, in the context of Punjab's geo-strategic location and the long historic hostility between the two countries, it is not unlikely that Pakistan may be "tempted to harm their adversary when opportune".³⁶ Apart from this alleged "covert Pakistani support" for Khalistan, it is reported that there are other channels also

34. See Satindra Singh "The Punjab Scene", *The Bangladesh Observer*, December 22, 1986 p. 5.

35. *The Bangladesh Observer*, December 13, 1986.

36. Lok Raj Baral, *op. cit.*, p. 57

through which the Sikh extremists are acquiring their weapons. These include the western European gray market, traditional smuggling routes that crisscross the Indo-Pakistani Border and pilferage from Indian government armouries.³⁷

All these are, no doubt, advantageous factors for the separatists, but for making the Khalistan movement a success these cannot be considered as sufficient bases. The following discussion will probably make it clear.

First, of whatever strategic importance Punjab may be to Pakistan and even if Pakistani involvement is a fact, Pakistan will not be involved to an extent which will make India provoke for an armed conflict with Pakistan. It is also important to mention that recently Pakistan has come to an agreement with India ensuring that none of these two countries will inspire activities of any group considered to be detrimental to their internal security and stability.³⁸

Second, the other external sources that have been mentioned as the source of weapons for the separatists all seemed to be fragile and blended with uncertainties. These may provide any movement with survival strength for some time, not for a longer period or towards any specific goal.

Third, the main strength of any separatist movement is its mass base and the inspiration for its success must be generated from within the country in general, and the concerned ethnic community in particular. It is reported that the Khalistan demand raised by some in Punjab is not supported by the majority.³⁹ The Sikh community is as much tired and exasperated over the lack of normalcy in the state in the last four years as the Hindus are and they are now favouring to return to the mainstream.⁴⁰ So, the existing conditions suggest

37. See, Douglas C. Makieg, "The Simmering Sub-continent," *Journal of Defence and Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 7, July 1985, p. 25.

38. *The Daily Ittefaq*, December 23, 1986 p. 1.

39. Kuldip Nayar, "Solving The Punjab Problem" *The Bangladesh Observer*, December 13, 1986. p. 5.

40. *Ibid.*

that even if the external factors behind the Khalistan movement really work these are not sufficient for the movement to make it succeed.

It would however be a misleading statement if it is understood that the Punjab crisis does not pose any threat to Indian federalism and democracy and in course of time it will automatically disappear. In fact, unlike other ethno-linguistic problems, the Punjab crisis has appeared to be an intransigent issue. As time passes the crisis seems to be getting more complicated. Government efforts have failed to cope with the terrorists. Law and order in Punjab has been deteriorating alarmingly. As an analyst has observed, "the outlook today is unquestionably more fearsome than it was in the worst days of Bhindranawle terror."⁴¹ The existing legal weapons to tackle the situation like the Disturbed Areas Act, the Terrorism Prevention Act, the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act and the law to deploy paramilitary forces, all are there, but in facing the extremists' activities they have proved to be futile. Moreover, this deterioration has been accompanied by a weakening position of the Akali (Barnala) government in Punjab. They are becoming "irrelevant" in Punjab political scene.⁴² While the Rajiv-Longowal Accord and the facilitating of an Akali victory in the elections might have been a calculated attempt to remove the feeling of alienation from the minds of the Sikhs, the alienation has only increased.

There is no denying the fact that today India's polity has been placed under severe strain. Increasing problems and complexities in Punjab is rendering the power elites ineffective. Indian ruling elites seem to be relying on army and paramilitary forces for stemming crisis than on political mechanism. In the last few months the government has called the military for several times in many provinces of India including the Punjab. It is worth mentioning that for a

41. See, Amalendu Das Gupta, "No Answer in Punjab", *The Statesman*, January, 1987, p. 8.

42. Kuldip Nayar, *op. cit.* p. 5

multi-ethnic state like India, stability is to a large extent sustained by its democratic institutions and democratic way of life. "Democracy and national integration are so intertwined that both can provide India with stability and progress".⁴³ But if the present trend of bypassing democratic institutions and relying on the military for containing internal disturbances continues, in future, India, as Stephen P. Cohen points out, will face the same dilemma with the role of army as her neighbouring countries are facing today.⁴⁴ Moreover, any crisis if it is not resolved or contained properly but only suppressed by coercive means, there always remains a latent danger of subsequent eruption of crisis which may at a later stage take the worse shape.⁴⁵ The Operation Bluestar and the subsequent Sikh upsurge are examples.

✓ In the context of recent deterioration of law and order, some Indian intellectuals have suggested for imposing President's rule in Punjab.⁴⁶ It is not however quite clear whether Punjab is really once again about to be placed under President's rule. But before that the following factors should be taken into consideration. Imposing President's rule will establish the failure of the Punjab Accord, of the freely elected state government which, as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said earlier, was New Delhi's recognition of the Punjabi demand for self rule. If it is violated it will obviously set the clock back. Second, President's rule had been imposed earlier and many measures were taken during that period, but all those proved counter-productive. Still any harsh measure taken to quell the Sikh extremists' activities might alienate the Sikh community as a whole.

43. Lok Raj Baral, *op. cit.*, p. 58

44. Quoted in Baral, *op. cit.*, p. 60

45. See Daniel Faci (ed) *Managing International Crises*, SAGE Publications Ltd. London 1982, quoted in Humayun Kabir, "Crisis Management : A Case Study of Tamil Crisis in Srilanka", *Regional Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Winter 1985. p. 90-92.

46. See, *Times of India*, Dec 2, 1986.

As a matter of fact, the problem of extremism will have to be tackled by both political and administrative means. Preference must be given to political mechanism. Of course, President's rule is both legal and constitutional. But constitutional morality and the feasibility of its application are no less important than constitutional legality. However, if any constitutional arrangement is sought in meeting the challenge in Punjab, it should be done in the line of Article 371 of the Indian constitution where there is a provision to safeguard some special interests of particular regions (without denuding the Union of its jurisdiction under the 7th sch).⁴⁷ Dr. Justice Durga Das Basu, an Indian constitutional expert, however, mentioned that such special provisions can be made for the Sikhs, only if, they give up their claim for separate nationhood and to overturn the

A political or constitutional solution would go in favour of the government and Indian federal entity. The prevailing sense of injured pride, injustice and insecurity will have to be addressed and redressed.

existing federal structure of the Indian constitution.⁴⁸ Rationale behind such a precondition is obvious, but the present reality suggests that notwithstanding its stake for national integrity government's approach must be softening and convincing. It is needless to mention that any political or constitutional solution (if it is possible at this moment) would go in favour of government and for the country's federal entity. So, the main quest should be: how to create an environment in which Sikhs would be able to respond in large numbers to calls for political solution of the crisis. And for that matter the feelings that dominate Punjab today...the sense of injured

47. For details see, K.R. Bombwall, "Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI No. 20, May 17, 1986, pp. 888-9 and also Dr. Durga Das Basu, *Constitutional Aspects of Sikh Separatism*, Princeton Hall of India, 1985, p. 14.

48. Dr. Durga Das Basu, *op. cit.* p. 14

pride, injustice and insecurity—will have to be first addressed and redressed by the government, instead of resorting to operations against terrorists.

In fact, nation-building process is a very complex and arduous one. It is an endless process. Nation-building is also referred to as integration of disparate minority groups into a single unit. It is the aggregate sentiment of a people who sense their future to be enhanced by membership in a particular collectivity, namely the nation-state. So, in transitional stage, fear-psychosis and identity assertiveness of any ethnic group may occur and make the process more painful. In that case, a nation has to explore how fear-psychosis can be eradicated and identity assertiveness of concerned ethnic group can be merged into the mainstream of national life. For India, as already mentioned, it is not a new experience. Indian democratic system faced similar challenges earlier and it has displayed great resilience in blunting those challenges. No doubt, the case of present Punjab is more complicated. Its complicity and stridency has broken all the previous records of Indian history. There is genuine feeling that "what started out as a violent political agitation has now assumed the trappings of an insurgency that could rip to shreds the delicate weave that sustains the country's democracy and integrity".⁴⁹ Hence it is the most formidable challenge for the present leadership and also for the country. To sum up, an analyst may be quoted: "should Rajiv succeed in salvaging the Punjab situation he will be remembered in history as another Indian leader who dared to make a tryst with destiny."⁵⁰

49. *India Today*, December 31, 1986 p. 22

50. *Ibid*, p. 30.