

JULY 1993: MORE PEACE IN PUNJAB

by
Swarup Singh

"This is the first incident of its kind in the border region in the past nine months of peace."

— "The Tribune", while giving the news that 9 irregular Punjab policemen deserted with their arms on July 2, 1993.

The object of this article is to acquaint outsiders with the nature of this "peace", which continued unabated, despite the above false start, through the month of July 1993. This I'll attempt to do by giving in full two news items which appeared one day this month in the Punjab press, and some comments concerning them.

(A) NEWS ITEM 1. *The following is a translation of the leading news item from "Ajit" [a Punjabi language daily published from Jalandhar, Punjab, India] of July 24, 1993:*

[Three photos]

[Caption for photos:] Jalandhar-posted Superintendent Police Vigilance, Sardar Anup Singh Minhas, in an injured state (centre) after he and his family were attacked some days ago by communal elements near Benares, and (on left and right) shattered glass, and S. Minhas's blood stains, in an air-conditioned coach of the Howrah-Amritsar Mail.

What happened to a Sikh family during a sightseeing trip ?
Major Singh

Jalandhar, July 23. Even though, with the passage of time, the memories of the shameful and horrible communal happenings of the anti-Sikh disturbances of November '84, have now started dwelling in the subconsciousness of the Sikh community, this dance of death, unleashed by the rulers of our country, is still tormenting our people. What transpired a few days ago to Sardar Anup Singh Minhas, a Superintendent of Police (Vigilance) posted in Jalandhar, and his family, while they were returning from a sightseeing trip of eastern India, is enough to send chills down the spine. In broad daylight, communal mischief makers kept on attacking this family for full 8 hours in a train. Not one, from the thousands of passengers or police security detachments travelling on this train, came to their aid. It was only the courage and bravery of the family members which saved them from the jaws of death.

The S.P.'s family had started out on their trip on July 1. Accompanying S.P. Minhas were his wife, son, son-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law, and a two year old grandson.

Sardar Anup Singh Minhas relates that on 12th July they began their return journey for Jalandhar on the Howrah-Amritsar Mail. At about 8 in the morning the train stopped at Mughalsarai railway station. About 10-15 rowdies, of whom most were students, forced their way into the air-conditioned coach, and cracked some vile jokes on the S.P.'s daughter and daughter-in-law when they were returning to their cabin. At this the S.P. and his son rebuked these mischief makers and made them leave this compartment. He said that the train started moving a little while after this, but was again brought to a halt within fifteen minutes by somebody pulling the emergency chain. The train had hardly stopped when the same gang, who were this time equipped with sticks and iron rods, came again to attack the family. Acting swiftly and courageously the S.P. and his son beat back this attack and forced the rowdies to get out. Then this gang tried to re-enter through another door. On not succeeding, they started throwing stones at the compartment, thus breaking a number of window panes of the cabin. This damage to the train, and attack on a Sikh family, was coolly and shamelessly witnessed by an Assistant Sub-Inspector of Uttar Pradesh police, S.P. Singh, and a Havildar and Constable, who did nothing even though they were in police uniform and fully armed. Finally, after 45 minutes, the train started moving again.

Mr. Minhas's wife, Mrs. Prabhjot Kaur, related that "We now started fearing renewed attacks. We arranged all our luggage so that we could ourselves lie down on the floor or on the top berth to save ourselves from the stones." Mrs. Minhas said that the train then stopped at Kanshi railway station, but keeping in mind that an attack could come, the family kept all the doors shut and remained in their cabin only. The train then pulled out from here, and had reached the vicinity of Benares, when it was again brought to a halt by somebody pulling the emergency chain just two kilometres short of Benares.

The family again started to have forebodings of something evil about to happen. She said that about 20-25 people got out of the train and went away to the village in front. The family hoped that evil had been now averted: maybe there was some educational institution in the vicinity, and these people had only stopped the train so as to go there? But, when the train did not move even after a long while, their fears returned, and these turned out to be well founded. After about half an hour they saw a crowd, carrying lamps, iron rods, tyres, and kerosene cans, moving towards them from the village. When the crowd was near the train there came voices from it saying: "Hand over the Sardar family to us and take away your train". But, thank God, nobody from the train opened the compartment door.

Mrs. Prabhjot Kaur related that in just a few minutes the mob started raining their compartment with stones. All the window panes of the compartment were soon shattered to smithereens. The goondas tried to open the doors, but since these were securely fastened from the inside, they were unable to do so. So many stones were rained on the compartment that even its inside was soon littered with them.

The other passengers of the compartment as well as the Sikh family took refuge by lying on the upper berths. The marauders were however not

satisfied as they were determined to drag the Sikh family out of the compartment and then kill them. After some time, when they set some tyres on fire with the object of burning down the compartment, Mr. Minhas realized that in this case not only they but everybody in the compartment could perish. He decided that instead of burning to death it was better to die fighting in the open with these criminals, so he took out his service revolver, and, stepping out of the compartment, fired at the advancing mob. At this the mob stepped back, and the compartment too was saved from fire, but he was badly injured by the stones thrown at him by these communal rioters. He had been hit on the face by many a stone. The S.P. however managed to return to the compartment in this injured state. So much blood was flowing out from him that soon there were stains all over the cabin, and he fell into a state of semi-consciousness.

Recalling the memories of these evil moments, Mrs. Minhas related that this was when their hopes had started fading, and that she had then handed over her two year old grandson, with some valuables, to a Colonel travelling in the adjoining cabin. She wrote down their address, and requested him to please make sure that her grandson and these valuables would reach this address, in case it was God's will that the rest of them were to perish.

The frenzied mob again started stoning the compartment. When the crowd, which was raining stones, again started to approach the compartment, the S.P.'s son took hold of the revolver and fired some rounds at the crowd, and once again the mob stepped back. In the meanwhile a tanker train, bearing kerosene or diesel, came on the parallel rail track, and the mischief mongers stopped it also, and started taking oil out from it. For two full hours this naked dance of death had been going on, during which nobody had dared to re-start the train, and no police had come to their rescue. All this despite the fact that Benares was hardly two kilometres away. Finally the superintendent of Benares police arrived on the scene together with the district magistrate and seventy odd policemen. But even then the police failed to take any action against the miscreants, and instead started watching the proceedings while standing next to them. At long last Mrs. Minhas stepped out of the compartment and shouted at them that her husband was a senior police officer, who was bleeding profusely, and who was in urgent need of medical attention. At first the police showed no activity. However after 5-7 minutes of her shouting, when some goon from the crowd threw a stone at Mrs. Minhas, then the police moved into action and, after dispersing the crowd, escorted the train into Benares. Medical aid was given there to Sardar Minhas and the other injured members of the family. The doctors told them that S.P. Minhas had a cracked nasal bone, and that he should be admitted to the hospital. But the family did not stop there, and this treatment has been obtained from the civil hospital here after their return to Jalandhar.

Mrs. Minhas asks, again and again, whether Sikhs were not citizens of this country, or, whether this country was being strengthened by thus humiliating Sikh citizens living with honour and self-respect?

(B) NEWS ITEM 2. *The following appeared in the "The Tribune" [the leading English language daily of Punjab, published from its capital city Chandigarh] of July 24, 1993:*

Militant escapes from police custody

Chandigarh, July 23 (UNI) — A militant escaped from police custody in Punjab during the last 24 hours.

Identified as Swaran Singh, alias Master, he escaped from police custody when the vehicle in which he was being transported developed a fault near Katana Sahib in Khanna police district (Ludhiana) early this morning. While the police escort was busy mending the fault, Swaran Singh jumped into a nearby canal and escaped.

Earlier, a pistol and some rounds of ammunition were seized at his behest.

(C) **THE ATTACK ON THE FAMILY MINHAS** was obviously a highly newsworthy item: *the attack was made in broad daylight, and that too on the family of a senior police officer, while they were travelling in an upper class compartment of a prestigious train, right in the vicinity of the holy city of Benares (Varanasi), and yet was brazenly continued for full eight hours, in full view of many policemen, and at least a thousand other passengers!*

Any responsible news media would have *immediately* reported this attack, if for no other reason than as an urgent traveller's warning for Sikhs outside Punjab. However, till today, no mention of this news has been ever made on India's state-run radio and television!

And, even the privately-owned press of India has been almost as lethargic in this respect. For example, news items re this attack of July 12 started appearing in the "Ajit" only from July 24 onwards, and I have, till today, found only one mention of it in "The Tribune", viz. the following cryptic sentence buried within an innocuous looking political item on an inside page of the issue of July 27:

"The [Akali] party has decided to send a delegation to UP to meet the Governor to lodge a protest over the alleged brutal attack on a Punjab police officer and his family who were travelling in a train."

The attack on the family Minhas is the only instance, of an attack on a Sikh travelling in a train, that has been reported in the press during these ten "months of peace". However conversations with frequent train travellers [e.g. army officers: see also a letter in the "Ajit" of July 29] show that apparently such attacks are not in the least unusual.

The only reasonable conclusion to draw from the above is that some unannounced news censorship [or "news management"] is in place; which in this one case tripped up only because the Sikh-owned "Ajit" decided, after prolonged cogitation, that it was safe to print the news, because of the exceptional circumstance that, in this case, the victim was

himself a high police officer !

NEWS ITEM 1 TELLS US QUITE A LOT ABOUT ANUP SINGH MINHAS, and besides, it seems reasonable to guess, from his position in society, that he was probably brought up in a rich or upper middle class Sikh family.

If we assume now that he received the "better education" — of one of the proliferating "English medium" schools — which people who have money enough to afford it tend to give to their children in India, then he has probably only a rudimentary knowledge of his own mother tongue ! Barely enough, I would guess, to read the account of his own attempted murder in "Ajit", and certainly not enough to understand the chaste olde Punjabi in which the holy book of the Sikhs is written !

In fact, one of the principal reasons for the current Sikh debacle is precisely this incredible near-illiteracy in their own mother tongue, and consequent lack of understanding about their community's aspirations, and so non-participation in their community's struggle, on the part of the upper class Sikhs. (This linguistic alienation being in addition to the usual reasons for non-participation, and even occasional active antipathy, of any upper class towards any struggle for independence : inertia due to fear of both the state and insurgents, and a desire to maintain their individual positions and social and economic status.)

So acute is anglophilia that most upper class Sikh children — maybe Sardar Minhas's children also ? — have now given up Punjabi altogether, and instead speak only in English or Hindi, the other language taught adequately in the aforementioned schools (a fact which saves the anglicized Hindu from losing all contact with his tradition).

On the other hand, the educated Sikhs from poorer sections of the community, i.e. products of ordinary schools, usually can't speak English at all, but do wind up with a much better command of their mother tongue. And thus, it is these people, sometimes very under-privileged themselves, who have been providing whatever little ground-level leadership the Sikh struggle has been getting lately.

But, even amongst the educated lower middle classes, most subscribe only to a English newspaper, perhaps because these are the newspapers of the decision-makers ? Thus the English newspaper, "The Tribune", has a much bigger circulation in the Punjab than the Punjabi newspaper, "Ajit", and so the fact that the former has continued to black-out the coverage of the attack on the Minhas family, has served to effectively control whatever "damage" the latter had done by revealing it.

It needs to be emphasized that the Sikh point-of-view is totally absent from the English press. None of the mass circulation English language newspapers is Sikh-owned, and in fact all of them are controlled by organizations — e.g. the Arya Samaj/Congress Party in case of "The Tribune", and the Rashtriya Seva Sangh/Bharatiya Janta Party in case of "The Indian Express" — with interests diametrically opposed to those of the Sikhs. (It is interesting to speculate what course the Sikh struggle would have taken if even one of these mass circulation English

papers was Sikh-owned !)

The editorial thinking, vis-a-vis Sikhs, of the English press of Punjab, is so close to that of the regime, that even if news censorship was removed, their own self-censorship would ensure the same result.

However this censorship has entirely changed the character of newspapers like the "Ajit" : barring some cautiously defiant op-eds, and some other measured risk-taking like printing the news of the Minhas attack, it too has fallen in line.

I have commented so far only on the news reportage of this attack. But to understand why such an attack occurred at all, we have to obviously examine not how Sardar Minhas is different from most of the people who have been murdered in Indian trains in this manner since those fateful first four days of November 1984, but rather examine that which he has in common with each and every one of them : namely, that like all these murder victims, this target of attempted murder was also a Sikh.

This is done in (E) below, where is given a very brief account of the continuing struggle, and its concomitant persecution, of which this incident was but a very small part.

(D) THE ESCAPE OF SWARAN SINGH. The introductory line of News Item 2 shows that it is more in the nature of a daily **police bulletin**. Each and every newspaper of Punjab runs this bulletin as a straight news item. Moreover, this "news" is printed verbatim — apparently even the insertion of the customary "alleged" is forbidden ! — and I have yet to see a case in which a newspaper has openly doubted the veracity of any such "news".

Turning to the story itself, we note a certain old-world charm in this tale of a quick-witted desperado making a fool of his captors by taking advantage of a **singularly fortuitous set of circumstances** : *the police vehicle breaking down, the policemen becoming collectively careless, there being a stream flowing conveniently at hand, and the fact that he was presumably — for how else could he have swum ? — not handcuffed.*

Quite definitely, the escape of Swaran Singh sounds like a one-of-a-kind, and embarrassing, story which a blushing police force might well tarry in making public. But no, not at all ! The bulletins datelined July 13, 23, and 29 show that, there were, with minor variations, four such escapes in the month of July alone, and all of these were promptly made public by the Punjab police.

The old-world charm fades and grim reality returns. The patent absurdity of such a singular occurrence occurring so often is by no means lost on the police: this bulletin seems to be a macabre joke meant to brazenly inform us that **Swaran Singh didn't escape at all, he was murdered by the police**, with his body probably disposed off in the fast-flowing canal mentioned in the news item.

A study of all the bulletins appearing in "The Tribune" shows that there

were more than 50 separate incidents in July, which were for the most part armed "encounters" between the police and militant gangs equipped with sophisticated weapons. Yet, although as many as 53 militants lost their lives in these incidents, with none listed as injured, the police casualties were only 1 dead and 1 injured.

The sheer lop-sidedness of these figures — with the same being true for the figures of all the previous nine months of this "peace" — is, by and itself, reason enough to believe that most of these "encounters" are fake. It is worth noting here that the two police casualties of July are both from an incident (also between the Punjab Police and Sikh militants, but in far-away Gujarat) which happens to be the *only* incident which is described in these bulletins as a "chance encounter", as against simply "encounter" !

The police is obviously implementing a policy of arresting, torturing, and murdering those perceived as threats to the regime.

Another indicator of this fact is that, of the militants arrested by them, all in incidents not involving gunfire, names of only a very few — e.g. only 5 out of 23 in July — are ever disclosed in these bulletins.

As against this, the police does take care to identify the *slain* militants by name, especially those who carry large cash rewards on their heads, by virtue of being on a *mysterious and apparently inexhaustible list of "hard-core militants"*, which the police itself prepares and updates, and which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been printed in any newspaper !

Again, many a militant, arrested in some other state, and then handed over to the Punjab police, has soon ended up in its bulletin as having been "killed in crossfire while the police party escorting him was ambushed by other militants" (there were 4 such "crossfires" in the bulletins of July alone !), or having "escaped" :

In fact there *could* be one such case in July itself, for, according to a news item in "The Tribune", a *Paramjit Singh "Pamma"* was arrested by the Haryana police on July 3, and there is also mentioned, in the Punjab police bulletin of July 13, a *Paramjit Singh "Pamma"* who "escaped" into a water drain just like Swaran Singh.

NEWS ITEM 2 TELLS US VERY LITTLE ABOUT SWARAN SINGH, but most probably he was brought up, like almost all these police-murder victims, in a poor or lower middle class Sikh family, with the nickname "Master" suggesting that he *might* have been once a schoolteacher. Since the bulletin calls him "*militant*" let us now see what this word means.

About two years ago, when the struggle for a Sikh homeland entered into a brief period of ascendancy, the Indian news media was forced to start referring to a Sikh freedom-fighter as a "militant", instead of the erstwhile "terrorist".

Since then this struggle has again gone into a downswing. But, instead

of risking its neck by switching back to "terrorist", the news media has cunningly widened the use of the word "militant" to include a whole variety of dangerous criminals who had started operating in the Punjab because of the law-and-order vacuum created by this prolonged strife.

By calling him a "militant", the murderers of Swaran Singh are thus informing us that he was himself a cold-blooded murderer, or a man true to a cause which the present regime does not approve of, or perhaps a combination of both.

But, considering that such judgements are being passed, without even the fig-leaf of a kangaroo court, by men who are themselves murderers, I feel that the current operational meaning of the word "militant" is simply somebody whom the police has murdered, or else plans to murder.

Keeping this in view, probable murder victim Swaran Singh might well have been almost *anybody* : from an upstanding man who refused to bend to some unjust demands, to a hapless simpleton who was a victim of circumstances, to a petty police tout who was liquidated once his utility was over.

However, there is one thing which almost all these Swaran Singhs being murdered by the police have in common: they are members of the Sikh community.

(E) THE STRUGGLE FOR A SIKH HOMELAND. *I have used "a Sikh" only to mean "a member of the Sikh community", i.e. the community which arose from the birth, in the Punjab of the late fifteenth century, of a new religion called the Sikh religion. (This is analogous to "a Jew", which means more often "a member of the Jewish community" rather than "one who practises the Jewish religion".) I'll continue to employ this usage in the following, because it is obviously the community, not the religion per se, which has been involved in the struggle which I wish to describe. (In fact, his looks notwithstanding, I can assure you that a Sikh of a given age group is just as likely to be religious or not as a Jew, or for that matter a German, of the same age group !)* It will be convenient also, to switch back and forth in time, in course of the following account, to emphasize the amazing continuity of this long struggle.

It seems that the struggle for a Sikh homeland was well under way by the end of the sixteenth century, since the Sikhs had e.g. started to refer to their beloved Guru as "true emperor", as against "emperor" for the Mughal sitting on the throne in Delhi. Such expressions of independence, and even more so the growing prosperity of this vital community, soon attracted the wrath of the regime : the gentle fifth Guru of the Sikhs himself became, after unspeakable torture, one of the the first martyrs of this struggle which still continues today.

It is worth remembering here that *this Guru was denounced to the authorities by his own avaricious brother* : which of course, as the recent Stasi Files show, is not abnormal behaviour for some people in a state of terror ! It is ironical and worth noting also, that some Sikh

ministers and police officers of the Punjab, so busily engaged in fratricide themselves, were in the forefront during annual ceremonies marking the recent 387th anniversary of this martyrdom !

The first of the many declarations of Sikh independence was made as far back as 1609 by their sixth Guru, when he announced that he was taking charge of all political matters concerning his community, and laid the foundation of the Akal Takht or "True Throne", a building next to the sacred Golden Temple at Amritsar, which was designated as the supreme seat to oversee such matters.

Considering this historical fact, it is easy to see why the Indian regime was so perturbed when, in 1984, the Golden Temple authorities invited a defiant Sikh preacher, and a handful of his followers, to camp in the exact same Akal Takht. The Indian government realized that the Sikh nation was de facto making yet another declaration of independence, and so moved swiftly and brutally to crush this rebellion : troops of the Indian army, supported by tanks and heavy artillery, simultaneously attacked not only the Golden Temple complex, but more than forty other Sikh temples throughout the Punjab.

The Akal Takht was completely destroyed in this attack, and the Golden Temple damaged. Also, there followed a carnage, which continued for many weeks, in which thousands of Sikhs were murdered by the Indian army. The heavily anti-Sikh press of India still refers to these brutalities of June 1984 only by the coy euphemism "Operations Bluestar/Woodrose" !

In fact there is enough documentation available to establish, in any impartial court of law, a case of multiple murder against the then prime minister of India and many army officers. (The latest being portions of the diary of the then head priest of the Golden Temple, which is being serialized these days in the "Ajit".) Of course, one of the principals, namely the erstwhile prime minister of India, is now unfortunately beyond even the remote possibility of being ever brought to justice, because she was herself assassinated later in 1984, but there are many others who are still around.

Back in the seventeenth century, we find now that even though the main body of the Sikhs started living, under the leadership of their Guru, in some remote new towns they had built in the Himalayan foothills, state-sponsored intrigue and repression followed this freedom loving community there also. To start with, the Mughal strategy was to target the Sikh Guru : the sixth Guru probably died of poison, the seventh's son was coerced into creating a schism in the religion, the eighth was summoned to Delhi where he died in a smallpox epidemic, while the ninth Guru was brought to Delhi in chains and beheaded.

To some extent this persecution was due to the forthrightness with which the Sikh religion rejected the dogma of Islamic superiority : Sikhism in fact stresses the universality of all religions and, in every prayer, a Sikh invokes the blessings of God for all mankind. Moreover, the holy book of the Sikhs contains as many contributions by saintly people of other faiths (Islam included) as by their own Gurus ! But there is also

much in Sikhism which these rulers, who were no friends of the Hindus, probably approved of : Sikhism is totally against the vicious caste system which the cunning Brahmins have imposed on the group of Indian religions called Hinduism, and equally it forbids all rituals, idolatory, and asceticism. This liberal new religion simply held that the best way to salvation is meditation, based on an understanding of the teachings of holy men included in the holy book, and done while living an honest life spent shouldering worldly responsibilities.

In brief, the theological differences between Islam and Hinduism were far, far more serious than those between Islam and Sikhism ; yet Sikhs were persecuted far, far more than the Hindus. Clearly, as is once again the case now, the primary reason for the persecution of the Sikhs was political, not religious, intolerance : the Delhi regime was determined to stamp out all ideas of independence from the Sikh mind. Furthermore, the Mughal strategy of targeting the Guru was based on the premise, still current today, that, once they are deprived of leadership, the Sikhs would revert to Hinduism, from which most of them had converted, and which had never posed any serious political threat to the Mughal regime. To some extent the Mughals were justified in this premise: not only had many Sikh priests, now far away from the direct supervision of the Guru, started misusing temple funds, they had also switched back to the evil caste practices of the priests of Hindu temples.

In fact the Mughal strategy might well have worked except for one remarkable fact: in 1699 the tenth and last Guru gave the "Khalsa" identity (un-cut hair etc.) to his Sikhs, and asked them all to adopt the same surname "Singh/Kaur" ! This defiant assertion of their collective identity by the Sikhs was at once a gauntlet thrown at the Mughals, who wanted to crush them politically, and at the Brahmins, who wanted to ensnare their religion in the age-old morass of the vicious Indian caste system. The Mughals responded to this renewed challenge to their authority by switching to a policy of general persecution of all Khalsas, who faced it with great fortitude and bravery. Before passing away in 1708, the last Guru told his Khalsas that now they should regard their community itself as the "body", and their holy book as the "soul", of an eternal Guru.

Considering this historical fact, it is easy to see why the Indian regime was so perturbed when, in the late 1970's, a movement "to preserve the Khalsa identity" started to grow rapidly in the Punjab : it too was correctly perceived as a challenge to state authority, and met by a series of oppressive measures, culminating in the violent attack of June 1984 on the Sikh temples of the Punjab.

The percentage of Sikhs maintaining the Khalsa identity has varied with time, e.g. from almost 100 % during the first third of the nineteenth century, when the Sikhs ruled Punjab, to almost 0 % during some decades in the first half of the eighteenth century, when it was a "crime", punishable by death by torture, to be a Sikh ! Understandably, all Khalsas were then "outlaws", fighting against the regime from their jungle hide-outs. Because of this, and subsequent prolonged procrastination, almost all Sikh temples continued to have non-Khalsa

priests for well-nigh 150 years ! *Deja vu happened* : these priests too misused temple funds and property, and reverted to the idolatory and evil caste practices of the priests of Hindu temples. It took a reform movement of the early twentieth century almost 20 years of very hard struggle before the Sikhs regained control of their own temples ! Incidentally, this older movement *too* had been bitterly opposed by the Brahmins, but then they were of course *not* in power. This movement was however unable to completely undo the damage of those 150 years: e.g. even though the the holy book of the Sikhs forbids idolatory, it itself is *more* worshipped, and *less* understood these days, perhaps because its chaste olde Punjabi is no longer in common use, and, even though there are good translations available in *other* languages, there is still no translation of the holy book into *modern Punjabi* ! Because of such reasons, there had been a steady, but slow, decline in the percentage of Khalsa Sikhs since 1947, the year the British left India. It was only in the late 1970's that the Sikhs (excluding their upper class) woke up to this fact, and this trend was reversed, which, as I mentioned above, greatly perturbed the Brahmin rulers of India.

The Brahmins are less than 3 % of India's population, *i.e.* about the same percentage as the Sikhs; however, while the Sikhs are struggling for a homeland of less than 3 % of India's size, the Brahmins are total masters of today's India ! They have subverted this "democracy" to such an extent that almost all of India's prime ministers, and fully 75 % of the officers of the Indian bureaucracy have been Brahmin : the one (non-Brahmin) prime minister who attempted to give something resembling parity to the 60 % "untouchables" and "lower castes" of India, was hounded out of office after a few months. The old obsession of trying to ensnare *all* religions within the Brahmin's caste system — the longest surviving tyranny in the world — continues. In the case of Sikhism, the strategy is to dilute the Khalsa identity of the Sikhs by means of a persistent "debate" of sorts in which the Sikh's repeated "No, thank you, we are different" is ignored, as the Arya Samaj/Congress Party keeps on telling him that "Sikhism is a sect of Hinduism", while the Rashtriya Seva Sangh/Bharatiya Janta Party holds that "Sikhism is the sword-arm of Hinduism" ! And, just like Buddha, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs now figures in the Brahmin's long list of Hindu deities, and a "Sikh temple" has been popularized on the ground that, in a previous re-incarnation, this Guru had meditated there ! What gives a sinister tone to these otherwise cranky proceedings is the fact that the last such "debate", by Brahmins in political power, took place in the seventh century, and was followed soon thereafter by a complete annihilation of the Buddhists of India : not a vestige remains, in today's India, of the original Buddhism, which was, for at least five centuries, India's predominant religion.

The massacres of 1984, and the continuing killing of the Sikhs by mobs and police death squads, indicate that the Sikhs of India also face a similar annihilation. I have already spoken of the June 1984 massacres in the Sikh temples of the Punjab, and of the Swaran and Anup Singhs being continually attacked till today, and I mentioned too that the prime minister of India responsible for the former massacre was herself assassinated later in 1984. The subsequent four days are now etched on every Sikh mind. To avenge the death of her mother, the new prime

minister of India unleashed a general reign of terror on all Sikhs of India ! When the four days had passed, tens of thousands of Sikhs — almost all Khalsas — had been murdered, some in the most brutal of ways imaginable : "See, see the Sardar dance!", the crowd shouted, as the tyre burned around the neck of a Sikh being killed in Delhi.

Again, more than enough documentation is available to establish a case of mass murder, in any impartial court of law, against the then prime minister of India, and many of his cabinet colleagues, and numerous functionaries of the ruling Congress Party, and the police, who were in some cases actually seen participating in these murders on the streets of Delhi and elsewhere. For instance, a report, based on eye-witnesses, and brought out by a (non-Sikh) Delhi human rights group says : " ... far from being a spontaneous expression of "madness" and of popular "grief and anger" ... as made out by the authorities, [these murders] were the outcome of a well-organized plan marked by acts of both deliberate commissions and omissions by important politicians of the Congress [Party] ... ". However, in the intervening nine years, not one murder case has been ever filed against any of the aforementioned murderers. Also, once again, this prime minister of India is also now unfortunately beyond even the remote possibility of being ever brought to justice, because he too was himself assassinated (but mercifully by non-Sikhs this time!) some years later.

Many of the aforementioned murderers, e.g. the current prime minister of India, i.e. the then home minister of India, are still very much around. Quite understandably, the Sikhs are not much interested in the hullabaloo, being made in the press of India these days, about the suitcase, containing 10 million rupees, which this man apparently took as bribe from some businessman : this very same press continues to maintain a studied silence about the much more serious crime of mass murder, which this very man committed in November 1984, in his capacity as the minister in charge of India's "law and order" ! In his capacity as the current prime minister of India, this very man is now responsible, along with the state's chief minister and police general, for the continuing police death squad murders in the Punjab.

Going back in time once again we find that, in 1746 there was a similar massacre of the Sikhs, led by the Hindu prime minister of Punjab, to avenge the assassination of a relative. (There were many Hindus, and even a few non-Khalsa Sikhs, who held high posts in the Mughal times.) And yet another, bigger, massacre (comparable in size to those of 1984) of the Sikhs, this time led by an Afghan, in 1762. However the Sikhs of the eighteenth century had prevailed over all this persecution, and from 1765 till its annexation by the British in 1849, Punjab was ruled by the Sikhs. Thus the current struggle for a homeland is one, in fact, to regain this lost homeland !

Besides their great fortitude and valour, the success of the Sikhs of the eighteenth century was however, in part, due to the fact that their land had become a battlefield between the Afghans and the Mughals. Now that both India and its neighbour to the west are armed with nuclear weapons, the Sikhs are the last to wish for a battle in the Punjab between these countries. The Sikhs are not wishing for either conflict

or vengeance, their long struggle for freedom is simply a cry for justice ! But, when those running a state have themselves, over a period of ten years, committed mass murder, does it make sense for international organizations to continue making humanitarian appeals to these criminals ? I suggest instead that the Sikh community should be recognized as a separate nation and the present criminal regime of India boycotted by the international community, and an international court should begin a probe into the mass murders of the Sikhs committed by this regime during the last ten years.

Punjab, July 31, 1993.