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**Rise of the Sikh Militancy**  
**An appraisal of the economic factor**

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The Sikhs are an enterprising and a dynamic community. They are able to adjust to diverse situations and circumstances and still make a comfortable living in any part of the globe. A section of the Sikhs in the Indian Punjab was however involved in militant violence from 1978 to 1992. It cost the state exchequer many billions of rupees and loss of thousands of men in the security forces and others. Numerous public figures and political leaders including the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi succumbed to their violence. The impact of this violence was not only confined to the country but spilled over to all places where Sikhs had sizable population especially Canada, the U.S.A. and the western Europe. They were also involved in this struggle, directly and indirectly, following the premise of 'distant nationalism' a la Anderson.

This militant movement has been characterized differently by various people and political parties on the basis of their ideology. The Indian government led by the Indian National Congress (Indira) labeled it a 'separatist' (separation from India), 'disintegrationist' (breaking the integrity of the Indian nation), 'fundamentalist' (a la Khomeini of Iran), and a 'terrorist' movement. The then dominant party in opposition, namely the Bhartiya Janta Party called it an 'anti-Hindu' and an 'anti-national' movement interested in creating Khalistan, a Sikh theocratic state. They consider India a nation of the Hindus and Sikhism a sect of Hinduism. The Communist parties characterized militancy as an 'extremist', 'undemocratic', 'fascist', 'obscurantist', 'ethnic' and a 'fundamentalist' movement.

But a sizable section of the Sikhs led by their democratic party the Shiromani Akali Dal, and later the militant groups spearheading the movement did not believe in such characterization. They considered themselves 'fighting for a just cause' that meant their rights, against discrimination, for freedom of belief, expression and action. The former had earlier passed an Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 seeking more rights for the Indian provinces such that the regional communities and

parties have more freedom presently curbed due to centralization of authority in New Delhi.<sup>1</sup>

The militant groups were crying aloud that they had a 'distinct goal', a 'clear self-perception', a 'professed logic of violence' in their movement. Each one of these issues is a subject of an independent inquiry. In the present paper I intend to limit myself only to that dimension which is most objective, namely the economic factor. It would help us gloss on the subjective self-proclamations as well as imputations made by others. This attempt is made in two parts.

In Part 1, I intend to project only those statements and resolutions of the militants that pertain to the economic issues or their demands and that of the Akali Dal and other Sikh organizations. The Part 2, on the other hand includes the findings of the economists on the nature and state of the Punjab economy. A juxtaposition of the two perspectives would show that the issues that led to the rise of Sikh militancy were basically socio-economic and not religious even if these appeared to be so. The best way for the government would have been to redress the 'real' grievances of the Sikhs and the militants, and not to blow up the religious tenor of their demands. This approach could have facilitated the resolution of conflict rather than confounding it.

#### **Part 1. Sikh Militants' Perspective:**

Let me explain a little in the beginning that there were numerous militant groups active in the Punjab that were trying to establish an independent sovereign state of Khalistan where 'the Sikhs could experience a glow of their freedom'.<sup>2</sup> Each one of these groups claimed to have a clear vision about the social, political, cultural and religious aspects of the future society of their dreams. But in the present paper the focus is only on the socio-economic issues raised by them in their proclamations - handouts, posters, booklets and press releases etc.<sup>3</sup>

Singh Khalsa proclaim that by

Khalsa *raj* is meant a country (*desh*) or rule of pure people (*shudh lokan*). Khalsa *raj* would be free from evil (*pap*) and evildoers. Pain and suffering would not be there in theory or practice. It would also be farther from economic and cultural exploitation (*lutt-khassutt*). The Khalsa *raj* would be a truly democratic state. (Singh Khalsa, 1985:1)

They made it clear that their struggle was not directed against the poor of any caste or religion. 'It is desirable that we must preach amongst the poorest of the poor and the lower castes, and among those who have been misled by the ideology of the *Brahman* and the *Bania*.' (Ibid:33) It is suggested that 'the Hindu theory of Karma has made people timid, cowards and lazy. It has rendered them incapable of understanding what kind of spring (*bahar*) could economic and social change bring in their lives.' (Ibid:15) They argue that both *Brahman* and *Bania* are the rulers of the day.

These reactionary forces are out to destroy the Khalsa since they do not tolerate the rise of any revolutionary philosophy. In such a situation:

The Khalsa must win over the poor, and people of lower castes to his side who are slaves, both economically and socially. They must be made aware that the ideologies of *Brahman* and *Bania* (*Brahmanwad* ate *Baniawad*) are the cause of their ignorance (*jahalat*), poverty and weakness. (Ibid:17)

Finally, they impressed upon the lower classes and castes the need to realize that it is only Khalsa who could uplift them and ensure complete independence (*sampooran azadi*).

The Panthic Committee Panj Membari, a powerful apex body of five militant outfits headed by Dr. Sohan Singh, a former director of the health department of the Punjab government also suggests that in Khalistan:

Lack of education and social backwardness will not be allowed to be an obstacle in their way. Nor the monopoly of education will be allowed, as a tool, to snatch the rights of the illiterate as the children of the rich, and urban residents leave behind the rural and poor children. The rich enjoy the boons (*nihmatan*) of nature much more than what is due to them while the children of the rural and the poor remain victims of illiteracy, poverty, diseases and backwardness generation after generation. (PCPM,1986:26)

*Sarbat* Khalsa, a congregation of the whole Khalsa was held at the Akal Takht on January 26, 1987. It adopted a *Gurmata* (a resolution adopted by all those gathered in the presence of the sacred Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib) that reaffirms the self-perception of each militant outfit:

This congregation of today proclaims for the information of the whole world that the Khalsa, who wishes the welfare of all (*sarbat da bhala*), shall never attack the poor and the oppressed (*mazloom*). The present struggle of the Sikhs is directed against those plundering and destructive raiders (*lotuan, dharwian* ate *vinashkarian*) who have assaulted our principles (*sidhant*), gurdwaras (*gurdham*), Guru Granth (*Bani*), our form/dress (*bana*) and truthful earnings (*kirat kamai*)... This assembly of *Sarbat* Khalsa strongly endorses the armed struggles of the peoples of the world, especially those in India who are fighting against the tyrant colonial rule (*zalam samraj*) for their rights and independence... to maintain their cultural existence (*sabhiacharak hond*) and nationality. This congregation recommends the formation of all

religious minorities front... to confront the Delhi government (*Dilli sarkar*). (*Gurmata*,1987:3)

The militants were not only crying for their freedom and problems but also took notice of the living conditions of the poor people. They had identified agencies and institutions responsible for their poverty. Singh Khalsa stated categorically: 'Our struggle is against anti-Khalsa powers (*taktan*) like the big *Bania* (*vadde-vadde banian*), capitalists, feudal lords, big (*vadde-vadde*) *Brahmans* (sic) and official informers.' (Singh Khalsa,1985:32)

The Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) the most dreaded militant outfit in the last phase (1989-92) also championed the cause of the poor who were getting poorer while the rich were growing richer. The poor peasant, however, gets exploited twice, initially at the time of selling his products and later while procuring essential commodities from the market. The BKI asserts:

The Hindu capitalism (sic) intends to squeeze the poor economically, like a lemon, to such an extent that they could think of nothing more than mere subsistence and keep begging at their doors. These capitalists are leading a luxurious life after having sacrificed (*bali le le ke*) the means of subsistence, the sons, youth, honour and dignity of the poor. (Babbar,?:14)

Wassan Singh Zaffarwal of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) also made it clear in his interview that there could be no compromise with the *Brahmans* because 'they sit idle'. The government of Khalistan will be based on the principles of Sikhism enshrined in the *Bani*. He says forcefully: 'We will not create a society where one human being is poor and sleeps in the street while his neighbour sleeps in the palace or a luxurious building. We shall eliminate all remaining feudal and monopolist forces.' (Pettigrew,1995:154) Another leader of the KCF declares: 'You cannot take money from any poor person, ever. We're clear on that. However, we shall impose a tax of the Khalistan government on the wealthy. We don't force money out of them. We shall tax them.' (Ibid.:163)

Singh Khalsa also hold similar views about the chief enemies of the poor people and the Khalsa:

The feudal lords, *Brahmans* and the moneylenders (*soodkhor*) are supported by the Hindu colonialism (sic). They are filling their coffers by sucking the blood (*khooon choos-choos ke*) of people whom they have made their slaves (*gulam*) both economically and politically. (Singh Khalsa,1985:45)

The responsibility is fixed on the exploiting classes 'who are befooling and deluding us through caste, religion and social hierarchy (*ooch-nee ch*) to serve their own interests.' (Ibid.:45) That is why it is the duty of the Khalsa to acquire political power since no philosophy can live long without it. (Ibid.:10) Without this political sovereignty both the Khalsa *Panth* and the Sikh religion would be swallowed by the ideologies of the ruling

elite like the feudal lords, *Brahmans* and *Banias*. And this sovereignty of the Khalsa cannot be obtained without an armed struggle. (Ibid.:11)

The inimical attitude of the militants towards the systems of domination and exploitation of the poor have also been stated in the *Document for the declaration of Khalistan*. The Panthic Committee Panj Membari (PCPM) announced:

The Khalistan government would like to distribute the natural boons (*kudrati nihmatan*) and meet the bare minimum needs (*zaroori zarurtan*) on humane basis (*manukhi adharan*). Monopolist and capitalist tendencies will not be allowed to influence the government machinery and peoples' thinking (*sochni*). (1986:26)

The Sikh Students Federation also declared vociferously:

the Sikh struggle is directed only against those blood-sucking leeches (*lahu peenian jokan*), wicked (*dushtan*), tyrants (*jarwanian*), sinners (*papian*), and destructive (*vinashkari*) raiders (*dharwian*) who have made fatal assaults on their *Bani, bana, gurdwaras (gurdhaman)*, culture and truthful earnings (*kirat kamai*). (1989:27)

The Federation then specifies the enemy:

Therefore, the main targets of the Sikh struggle (*jaddo-jehad*) at the present moment are the *Brahmanic* forces who have captured the Indian state. But this also includes those forces (*taktan*) in Punjab who collaborate with the central government (*kendari hakman*) for their economic interests and oppose the Sikh movement due to their political kinship (*siasi natedari*) with them. All such people, irrespective of their caste and religion are also included in the enemy camp and they would be dealt with accordingly. (Ibid.:27)

The identification of the enemy alone was not enough. The allies too were identified. Who could be their supporters? It has been mentioned above that the Panthic Committee specifically invited *dalits* among other classes and minorities. Singh Khalsa also noted that if certain castes and classes opposed the Khalsa right from its birth, there are also such forces who have always helped the Khalsa. These forces include the peasants, workers, lower castes, middle classes and other dominated and oppressed people. These forces will help the Khalsa in future since the Khalsa has itself emerged from the oppressed people. (Singh Khalsa, 1985:44)

The Babbar Khalsa International questions if the Sikhs today have closed their eyes to the tyranny of the capitalists and decided to lead a life of comfort and luxury? How could such people be called Sikhs? Because, a Sikh is one who dies fighting

for justice and protects the honour of the poor. (Babbar,?:14) This organization doubts the possibility of a socialist revolution under the leadership of the 'so-called socialist revolutionary parties' and surmises if these were genuinely treading the socialist path. It is believed that true association of people (*sanjhiwalta*) cannot be raised on the 'foundations of atheism and hatred since it lacks sympathy for humankind. It could only be based on the pristine, social and spiritual principles of *Sri Dashmesh*.' (Ibid.:17) 'It was a result of this association only that the Khalsa, who emerged from each backward class (*pachhri shreni*) could overthrow the well entrenched Mughal empire established over centuries.' (Ibid.:15)

The Sikh Students Federation (SSF) is not only apprehensive of external threats to the Sikhs from the Indian state and the Hindu communalism, but is equally aware of those opportunist Sikh leaders 'who either belong to the rich class or ally with them. They are not remotely related to the Sikh principles and its way of life by way of their socio-economic status (*samajak arthak rutbe*) and life style.' (SSF,1989:24) These so-called leaders are in league with the capitalist class for their economic greed and political interests which have gone deep into their blood. Such Sikhs are responsible for the weaknesses and internal decay in the movement. This aspect becomes more glaring when it is compared with the earlier periods in the Sikh history. The Federation argues: 'So long the Sikh movement was guarded by the poor and the oppressed forces, it remained in perfect health (*naun-bar-naun*) and high spirits (*chardi kala*) with respect to its aims, objectives and principles.' (Ibid.:24)

The Panthic Committee Panj Membari (PCPM) also proclaimed that this struggle of the Khalsa is not directed against any religion, community or caste. Its targets are those forces of evil who have chained Sikhs to slavery through force, deceit and cleverness. 'These *Brahmanic* rulers (*hakam*) of Delhi who have been practicing treachery (*dagha*), deceit (*fareb*), tyranny (*julam*) and force against the Sikhs for the last 44 years are the foremost enemies of the Khalsa *Panth*.' (Panjwar et al.,1991) This statement identifies three types of enemies: (i) All those people in the security forces and bureaucracy who appear to be *singh* but are in fact subservient to the *Brahman*. (ii) All those political leaders or workers who have Sikh appearance but are mentally in league with the Delhi rulers, and in practice too take sides with them. (iii) The Sikhs who are not only morally corrupt and degenerated but also indulge in criminal and anti-Panthic activities. (Ibid.)

It is further argued that the Operation Bluestar (Indian Army action on the Golden Temple at Amritsar in June 1984 to flush out the militants) and the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in November 1984 (following the assassination of then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi) and elsewhere have removed the veil from the face of the 'tyrant and the killer communal Hindus': 'Now it is not enough to identify the tyrants and the killers, but they should be eliminated following the Guru's command. The Khalsa has

been created only to destroy the tyrant and the tyranny, and for the protection of the poor (emphasis in original).' (Babbar,?:17) Therefore, 'O'Khalsa adorn yourself with weapons following the command of the Tenth Father (*Dashmesh pita*) and bring the present (Sikh/Akali) leadership on the right track to fight against tyranny. And if they refuse to oblige then O'Khalsa remove these obstacles on your way to liberation.' (Ibid.:21) Khalsa raj or Khalistan will never be served on a platter. Thus, the battle is inevitable following the dictum '*Kou kisi ko raj na de hai, jo le hai nij bal se le hai.*'

Babbar Khalsa International is optimistic that such battles will usher Sikhs towards greener pastures:

The sacrifices of the martyrs will not go waste... We must make such a country/ nation (*desh*) where the Khalsa is supreme, which has its own constitution, flag (*nishan*) and Nanakshahi currency and where we can enforce the principle of 'Welfare of all' following the principles of the gurus. In such a country the religious people, the poor and the workers could be protected from the exploitation of the tyrant and cruel capitalists and monopolists, so that they may lead a happy life of self-respect with dignity and honour (emphasis in original) (Ibid.,:22)

Once again in 1991, this organization reiterated its stand for the creation of a 'new society': 'A new era is about to begin on the land of Khalistan. This new milieu will have exhaustive debates on the Khalsa culture, Khalsa vision, Khalsa rule and Khalsa society which will help us construct a beautiful model for the economic, political and social structural aspects of Khalistan.' (Babbar Khalsa International,1991:19)

But, the Babbar Khalsa International and all other militant groups are apprehensive about the realization of their vision of a 'new society' within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The Babbar Khalsa International holds that it is the biggest hurdle in the creation of Khalistan. 'There is no place for Khalistan in this cartload of papers.' (Ibid.:19) The Sikhs have already waited too long, since 1947. There is no alternative but to reject this Constitution. It is cautioned that 'If we start any struggle without rejecting the Constitution, our struggle is bound to lose direction.' (Ibid.:19) But what kind of a struggle: An armed struggle which must have harmony and co-ordination with the peoples' struggle for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Khalistan. It is further suggested that the given moment is most suitable to launch their struggle. 'The international situation is in our favour and India too is a victim of serious economic and political crises.' (Ibid.:19)

The Khalistan Commando Force and the Khalistan Liberation Force are also cognizant of the international situation and advise their sister organizations to understand changes that are taking place throughout the world. 'It is so very necessary today

as it had never been before.' (Labh Singh and Gurjant Singh Budhsinghwala,1989:26)It is in view of such developments that these organizations are bound to take their struggle to the international level: 'It is clear from India's intervention in the Sri Lanka's Tamil problem that one sovereign state could intervene in the affairs of another sovereign state. Therefore, we would be wholly justified in accepting assistance from some foreign country.' (Ibid.)

The four militant organizations - Khalistan Commando Force(Panjwar), Khalistan Liberation Force(Budhsinghwala), Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan(Chhandran) and the Sikh Students Federation(Bittu)- also made a strong and fervent appeal at the Anandpur Sahib convention in September 1991 to reject the Constitution of India which was referred to as a 'thief's mother' (*chor di maan*) and the 'root of all problems'. 'This heap of garbage looks nice on the *Brahman's* shoulders only.' (Panjwar et al.,1991:3) They also stressed on the suitability of that moment to launch a direct action which of course was to be undertaken as a last resort. They suggested: 'First of all we must remember that this battle is being fought on our own land. Therefore, we will exhaust all channels of the diplomatic world so that the war could be avoided. But we will not digress an inch from the path of obtaining an independent and sovereign Khalistan.' (Ibid.,:6) These organizations also impressed upon the urgency of direct action:

The international situation is so congenial, splendid (*shandar*) and appropriate (*dhukwin*) that if the Khalsa now failed to shape its diplomacy to these conditions or failed to avail of the contradictions of the world (*sansar dian virodhtaian*) (sic) in its favour, then we must understand that we have ourselves prolonged the period of our distress (*khuari di miad*). (Ibid.,:3)

These outfits also cautioned the Government of India that if tyranny against the Sikhs continued then the country would meet the same fate as Russia, once a superpower. They also issued a warning to all the countries of the world, the International Monetary Fund, and other international financial institutions that 'they must sign loan agreements with India on this understanding that *the people of Khalistan will not be a party to their repayment*. Because not a fraction of these loans has been invested, on the land of Khalistan. And we do not need it either (emphasis in original).' (Ibid.,:5) On the contrary:

The brave farmers of *our country*, Khalistan are feeding the empty stomachs (*bhukhe dhidd*) of crores (one crore = 10 million) of *Hindustanis* (we are not). These countless *Bhai* Ghanaiyas<sup>4</sup> in the service of humankind will maintain this tradition even after the recognition of Khalistan by the Indian government. (Ibid.,:5)



The Sikh Students Federation is not swayed by its religious affiliation alone in articulating the interests of Sikhs and the Punjab. It is equally concerned about other communities. It is fully conversant with the socio-political situation of India. It argues that due to the communal behaviour (*vihar*) of the Indian rulers, the people have been 'compelled to launch struggles in one form or another for their economic, political, social and cultural independence.' (SSF,1989:23) The Federation names all those Indian states where such struggles for liberation have taken varied forms to fight against

the imperialistic exploitation and neocolonial suppressive rule (*samrajvadi lutt-khassutt te navbastiana damankari raj*) of the Indian rulers. At certain places especially in Nagaland and Tripura, the people have already taken to an armed struggle for their freedom as a result of state terrorism that is continuing there for several decades. (Ibid.,:23)

The Sikh Students Federation is also concerned with the status of the cultural and linguistic minorities and other nationalities, the tribals and *dalits* who are being exploited economically by the capitalists, and both politically and culturally by the ruling class. They likened India to a 'prison' from which all such exploited and oppressed minorities would like to escape. All such classes are interested in establishing a political system in which they could realize their economic, political, social, religious and cultural aspirations without any intervention from outside. 'Thus, the Sikhs are inclined to extend support and hand of friendship towards those struggling classes.' (Ibid.,:27) It is argued that the above mentioned minorities could obtain democratic rights only

If the present Centre-oriented aggressive state administration (*kendar-mukhi dhakkar raj parbandh*) is forcefully uprooted and a new federal structure is raised which ensures democracy and complete self-determination to the states in the true sense of the term. (Ibid.,:27)

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale considered as the fountainhead of militancy was also not simply bothered about religion and religious demands. He was concerned about the social, political and economic problems of the Sikhs as well, but only cloaked their articulation in religious terminology. Most often these demands of the Sikhs and the Punjab were clubbed under one term 'injustices'. Juergensmeyer substantiates: 'Since the larger struggle is the more important matter, these specific difficulties are of no great concern to Bhindranwale; they change from time to time. And it is no use to win on one or two points and fail on others.' (Juergensmeyer,1988:71) Elsewhere, Pettigrew also notes that Bhindranwale's words were a religious expression of a broad-based rural discontent and anger. (Pettigrew,1984:113) In an interview to a monthly journal Bhindranwale remarked rather simplistically that 'the Punjab and the peasant are synonyms. The former will flourish only if the latter flourishes. And only

then the business of Hindu brothers will grow, otherwise it will collapse.' (Nanda,1983:49)

## **Part 2. Findings of the Economists:**

It will become clear from the following discussion that even if socio-economic issues were articulated in a religious frame, the substantive issues were truly material. The experts of Punjab economy have enough economic and statistical data to show economic stagnation. It becomes amply clear from such studies that there is distinct decline in the dominantly agricultural economy of this state. The Johl Committee report confirms that except for an increase in per hectare income during 1977-78 and 1978-79, there has been a decline in returns from farming in Punjab. There is even evidence of a decline in the real income per hectare from 1978-79 onwards. (Shiva,1992:179). In 1981, 59.1 percent of the total workforce is employed in agriculture which contributed 73 per cent of the total wheat procured by the central government. This sector together with livestock, contributed 49.04 per cent of the state domestic product at 1970-71 prices.

The small and marginal farmers did experience some rise in their income levels in the beginning that however could not be sustained. Numerous small and marginal landholdings have become non-viable. A survey conducted in 1974 reveals that small farmers (below 5.0 acres) were running annual loss of Rs. 125.00 per capita, the middle ones (between 5.0 to 10.0 acres) were making an annual profit of Rs. 50.00 and those above 20 acres of land were incurring profit of Rs. 1200.00 per capita. Gill writes:

With the rise of development crisis in agriculture, the small and marginal farmers are finding it difficult to survive. Between 1970-71 and 1980-81 large number of such holdings have disappeared... The decline is 25.3 per cent. This decline is contributed solely by marginal and small holdings. The marginal holdings declined by 61.9 per cent, and small holdings declined by 23.3 per cent. (1994(a):295)

Moreover the rate of return of wheat cultivation per quintal, the dominant crop of this region along with rice, declined from 24.50 per cent in 1970-71 to 1.32 per cent in 1977-78. 'As a consequence net income per hectare from wheat cultivation at 1970-71 prices declined from Rs. 328.00 in 1971-72 to Rs. 54.00 in 1981-82.' (Ibid.:296) Over the last several years the price system has moved against agriculture from 100 in 1970-71 to 81.8 in 1980-81. The fall is sharp and consistent from 1974-75. (Ibid.:296)

The contradiction between agriculture and industry referred to above pertains to the integration of rural agricultural production with urban market economy. The Sikhs constitute 69.37 per cent rural population in 1971 and the Hindus make 66.39 per

cent urban population. The second contradiction pertains to the emergence of capitalist farmers.

This class is using government machinery at the state level to promote its interests. While using government machinery at state level it comes into conflict with class in control of government machinery at central level. Against the growing assertion of this class it finds powers of administration at state (read province) level being continuously eroded by the Central Government. (Ibid.:298)

On the basis of this study the author concludes:

Emerging contradictions have provided an objective basis of the current crisis in Punjab. These contradictions are the product of capitalist development in the specific situation of the regional economy of the state. *In the absence of this objective basis, present crisis was not possible.* The role of external factor is secondary to the situation (emphasis added). (Ibid.:299)

The decline in economy is also reflected by Pritam Gill on the basis of data analyzed by Pradhan Prasad. He writes:

That Punjab may be on the road to a decline in its relative position among the major Indian states is suggested by the annual average percentage growth of SDP at constant prices between 1960-70 and 1984-85... Gujarat and Haryana surpassed Punjab during these 15 years and Andhra Pradesh was catching up. (1994:311)

He also doubts Punjab's potential to sustain economic development based on agriculture:

Over 84 per cent of Punjab's geographical areas and about 93 per cent of its total cultivable area is under cultivation. With forest area of only about 5.65 per cent of the total area in Punjab, and cropping intensity having reached as high as 175.7 per cent, the bubble of Punjab's agriculture is about to burst. (Ibid.:311)

Much earlier, a study conducted by Bhalla and Chadha about the income distribution in Punjab agriculture during the early 1970s reported an overall prosperity of peasantry as a result of the green revolution, although its effects have been differential. The gains have been proportional to the land holdings. They note:

It is striking to note that about one-third of the marginal farmers (tilling less than 2.5 acres of land) are living below the poverty line. It is ironic that despite a tremendous advance in technology, many of the marginal farmers in Punjab are still unable to eke out a minimum living. It is equally disturbing that about

24 per cent of small farmers (tilling between 2.5 to 5.0 acres of land) are also living below the poverty line. (Bhalla and Chadha,1982:876)

The situation has not improved over these years. S.S. Gill quotes Sukhpal Singh that 34.07 per cent marginal farmers were living below poverty line in 1990-91. 'It is further found that the condition of marginal farmers was worse than that of agricultural laborers in the state (read province) both in terms of per capita income as well as consumption.' (Gill,1994(b):77)

Bhalla and Chadha also comment on the dismal state of Punjab economy: 'Unfortunately, however, inspite of putting in very hard labour both in farm and non-farm activities quite a few amongst them are not able to save themselves from the clutches of poverty. It is indeed a disquieting feature of the Indian agrarian situation...' (Bhalla and Chadha,1982:877) Finally, summing up their analysis they suggest that all problems of rural poverty cannot be solved within agriculture. 'One of the main reasons for rural poverty is overpopulation in agriculture combined with inequality in land distribution. It is, therefore, essential to withdraw labour force from agriculture to non-agricultural occupations and industry.' (Ibid.:877) They suggest that the real solution of rural and urban poverty lies in rapid industrialization and diversification of the economy.

The dwindling agricultural economy and rising disaffection of the Punjab farmer, coerced the government to appoint an expert Committee under Sardara Singh Johl, a noted economist to look into the diversification of agriculture. The Committee submitted its report based on the twin considerations of raising the profit margins of the Punjabi farmers and ensuring a raised per capita availability of food grains to the people in the rest of the country. The Committee suggested immediate diversification of agriculture, and recommended the government to assure prices and procurement support to the farmers who were getting squeezed economically since the early 1970s. (Johl et al.,1986:44-54)

Gill notes that Johl developed these ideas further and spelled out four basic factors for the need to diversify agriculture and economy. (1) Fragile eco-system as a result of excessive pollution of soil, water and air; (2) Over-dependence of farmers on wheat and paddy has created uncertain market situation due to delayed announcement of procurement prices and dampened demand for Punjab grains; (3) that 38 per cent of landholdings below two hectares cannot engage even an average size family on itself and ensure it essential requirements of health care and education; and last but not the least important (4) is the problem of educated unemployed youth in rural areas. (Gill,1994(b):84-5)

Such findings of the experts seem to suggest that the cry of discrimination against the Sikhs/Punjab by the protagonists of the 'Sikh cause' was not without substance. Similarly, the militants issuing threatening commands to the commercial banks in

Punjab, against siphoning out their deposits to other states were also not baseless. The economists have shown that the advance-deposit ratio in Punjab during 1975-91 remained between 32.5 to 44.6 per cent which is much below the minimum level of 55 percent prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India. If this limit has been adhered to by the banks, an additional investment of Rs. 1404.50 crores would have been made in the province by the end of 1991. Gill notes:

On the other hand, if advance-deposit ratio had achieved (an) all India level then additional investment would have been equivalent to Rs. 2496.93 crores. Thus banks have been collecting funds from the Punjab and investing in states with higher advance-deposit ratio such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Union Territory of Chandigarh, Kerala etc. (Ibid.:64)

Punjab suffers losses not only in terms of export of bank capital but also the food grains. Gill writes:

The second factor contributing to outflow of resources from the Punjab has been adverse terms of trade between food grains exported from the Punjab and manufactured goods purchased from other areas of India... Prices of food grains in India have grown at slow pace compared to prices of manufactured products after 1975-76. (Ibid.:64)

Over all these years the net barter terms of trade between the two commodities remained between 83.29 and 96.11, if 1970-71 is taken at 100. This indicates that purchasing power of food grains in terms of manufactured goods has fallen and remained low during 1976-77 to 1991-92. On the basis of such an unfavorable net barter terms of trade it is estimated that

the state of Punjab suffered a loss in earnings from state's contribution of wheat and rice to the central pool to the extent of Rs. 2280 crores during 1980-81 to 1991-92... In the absence of this drainage of resources, the rate of capital formation in the state in general and in agriculture would have been higher than the existing level. (Ibid.:65)

The above discussion lends at least some credibility to the fact that the hue and cry raised by the Punjab farmers and their discrimination by the central government were not altogether baseless. The militants issued stern commands specifically to the banks, and labelled Punjab a 'colony of the Centre' that has been reserved to produce wheat and rice only for the rest of India. It is estimated that in the year 1990-91 alone, despite government's declaration of economic plans and subsidies to the terror stricken state, Punjab incurred a total loss of Rs. 727.80 crores. It includes Rs. 401.80 crores on account of

adverse terms of trade and Rs. 326.0 crores shifted through lower advance deposit ratio to other states by the commercial banks. (Ibid.:73)

But simple industrialization of Punjab economy (cf. Bhalla and Chadha) and diversification of agriculture as suggested by Johl Committee do not seem to solve the problem. The nature of economy and the value system of farmers would together go a long way in resolving the contradictions characteristic of this region. As noted above, the Punjab model of economic development combines small scale industry with agricultural capitalism. And:

The rate of industrial growth in the state on the average, has been higher than that of Indian economy as a whole. But its nature and character is such that it absorbs largely migratory labour. In fact wages are very low and working conditions so unattractive ...Thus the cultivators being released by the capitalist development in agriculture are not being absorbed outside it and are experiencing redundancy. (Gill,1994(a):295)

Pettigrew also gives primacy to land relations and the agrarian situation in the state for the rise and growth of guerrilla violence. She notes: 'Shortages of power, frequent cuts and a generally discontinuous supply ensured that farmers would never be free of state control.' (1995:5) Summing up the discussion she says:

On account of the above, all agrarian interests saw the injustice of Indian central government planning and policy and witnessed its effects on their production. Hence here began in the 1970s a non-violent campaign for autonomy... Its political expression was the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 which sought to rectify many economic grievances of the Punjab as a region...Only as this movement for socio-economic redress went unheeded did it broaden to include other issues and developed a national colouring. (Ibid.:5-6)

She links up the Indian government's newly formulated policy for army recruitment as a factor in the Punjab violence. She quotes at length the ex-servicemen's memorandum to the Governor of Punjab that condemned the new recruitment policy and expressed strong fear that 'since the government of India would not establish any industry in the Punjab, being a border state, Punjabis... would be reduced to total dependence on agriculture.' (Ibid.:6) Pettigrew notes that the central government investment in Punjab also fell from 2 percent in 1980 to 0.8 percent over the next ten years, and the former continued to return to Punjab as investment only one-third of what it borrowed. Thus, 'the state's centralization policies, particularly its control over the productive process, were an

important source of gathering discontent.' (Ibid.:7) Gill also notes:

The Central Government intervenes in the pricing of various commodities under regulated prices system and has capacity to change relative price system. Over the last several years the price system has moved *against agriculture* and in favour of industry under the pressure of Indian monopoly bourgeoisie which has decisive influence over the Central Government. The terms of trade have moved against agriculture from 100 in 1971-72 to 85.48 in 1990-91. *The fall is sharp and consistent from 1976-77* (emphasis added). (1994(a):295)

Shiva locates Punjab crisis in the failure of Green Revolution. In her own words: 'The present essay presents the other side of the Green Revolution story - its social and ecological costs hidden and hitherto unnoticed. In doing so, it also offers a different perspective on the multiple roots of ethnic and political violence.' (Shiva,1992:12) Later, she extends her logic to explain social conflicts in the whole of South Asian region: '...the most "successful" experiments in economic growth and development have become in less than two decades, crucibles of violence and civil war.' (Ibid.:190)

Pettigrew also provides a similar explanation: 'The story of the rise and fall of the guerrilla movement is essentially and materially a story of what happened to a community of farmers as they experienced the effects of a process of economic change known as the Green Revolution.' (1995:55)

Shiva argues that this Revolution is based on the expansion and intensification of irrigation from surface as well as ground water because of the 'shift from water prudent crops such as millets and oilseeds to mono-cultures and multi-cropping... and the replacement of old varieties of wheat with new varieties.' (Shiva,1992:125) This enhanced the intensity of irrigation from 20-30 to 200-300 per cent. The hybrid varieties are water thirsty crops. Even if 'the comparative yields of native wheat varieties and the HYV varieties (sic) is 3,291 and 4,690 kg/ha respectively in Punjab. The productivity with respect to water use is therefore 620.90 and 293.1 Kg/ha/cm. respectively.' (Ibid.:128)

The intensive irrigation has not only decreased productivity but also caused ecological disruption. It has drastically destabilized the water balance throughout the region. Joshi and Singh suggest that the water table is receding at the rate of 0.3 to 0.5 metre per year due to increase in tube-well irrigation. (Gill,1994(b):82) Several areas of Punjab have been affected by water logging and salinity. It is estimated that an area of about 2.86 lakh hectares has a water table depth of less than 1.5 metre even in the month of June. The water table further rises by 0.5 to 1.2 metre during the monsoon season. Shiva concludes:

Yet the Punjab experience brings home the point that even the Green Revolution was bounded by ecological limits, and by attempting to break out of them, it further increased those limits, generating new levels of scarcity, insecurity and vulnerability. (1992:142)

The militants too raised their voice much in line with the findings of the social scientists mentioned above. Not one, but all major militant organizations have used such arguments in favour of their logic of violence. They were also critical of the processes of development, and of state's intervention hence discrimination against Punjab, and its people. Sukhdev Singh Sukha and Harjinder Singh Jinda, who were later sentenced to death for assassinating the former chief of the Indian army, General A.C.Vaidya wrote to the President of India from the prison cell more sharply:

You also retained the initiative and powers for Punjab's economic development. The path of development that you adopted was one-dimensional and directionless. It resulted into the imbalance of economy.

Your design is to keep our industrial development at your will and never let us be self-reliant. You want to see us standing as beggars at your door. There is hardly any Agro-Industry in the Punjab. Heavy industry is totally non-existent. We want to keep our capital safe for our development, but you are exploiting us as if we were your colony. (Sukha and Jinda, July 28, 1990)

### **Conclusion**

The above discussion shows that the Sikh perception of their discrimination articulated earlier by the Shiromani Akali Dal and their sympathizers often led to conflict between them and the government of India. This time the *morcha* (nonviolent agitation) launched by the party to block the digging of the Satluj-Yamuna link canal to divert Punjab waters to the neighbouring state/s was taken over by the militants that led to unprecedented violence. The Sikh militants though often cloaked their arguments in the religious frame but they were in fact addressing largely to the economic demands and issues of the Punjab that for them is synonymous to the Sikhs or the Sikh religion, hence this obfuscation of region and religion. The above analysis tends to show that the issues raised by the militants were surely of economic import that they were articulating in their own politico-religious mould. The findings of the economists also reflect on the deepening of the crisis in the Punjab economy. If the government of India had appreciated the politico-religious stance of the militant organizations and cared for the scientific findings of the economists and other social scientists, the violent conflict could be resolved without loss of men and material.



### Notes

- The draft is prepared following the recommended style sheet of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*.
  - The glossary of the Punjabi words is not given since the paper would be presented at the conference by the author himself.
1. There were numerous militant groups and their factions that emerged during the heydays of militancy that were subsequently clubbed under four apex bodies called the Panthic Committees. The Khalistan Commando Force was the first militant outfit organized in 1984. This was the largest and the oldest one, constituting an independent Panthic Committee (Wassan Singh Zaffarwal). During the late eighties, the most powerful Panthic Committee was led by Dr. Sohan Singh, former director of health services of the Punjab government. It had Khalistan Commando Force (Paramjit Singh Panjwar), Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (Sangha), Khalistan Liberation Force (Gurjant Singh Bhudhsinghwal), Babbar Khalsa International (Sukhdev Singh Babbar) and the Sikh Students Federation (Daljit Singh Bittu). That is how it got its popular name Panthic Committee Panj Membri or the Five Member Panthic Committee. The third Panthic Committee headed by Gurbachan Singh Manochahal had Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (Manochahal), Khalistan Commando Force (Gurjant Singh Rajasthani) and the All India Sikh Students Federation (Manjit Singh). The fourth Committee of Gurdev Singh Osmanwala was of little significance.
  2. The Anadpur Sahib Resolution is "The Draft of the New Policy Programme of the Shiromani Akali Dal". Without giving details of the Draft it would suffice to mention that the "Economic Policy Resolution No. 3" occupies the largest space (pp.-11) compared to the remaining resolutions (pp.12-15).
  3. The statements of the Sikh militants have been translated from Punjabi by the author. Important terms are given in parenthesis. It is taken care during translation to remain closest to the original word, in both letter and spirit, even if it meant writing bad English.
  4. Bhai Ghanaiya used to provide drinking water to the injured soldiers irrespective of their religion or camp, during the Sikh wars with the Muslim rulers. The Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh about his nursing the soldiers of the enemy's camp. The Guru summoned him to explain his conduct. He pleaded not guilty and replied that he acted only according to the teachings of the Guru. The guru was pleased and asked the complainants to emulate him.

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