

COMMUNAL TERRORISM IN PUNJAB

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

DELHI - 1987

Escalation of acts of violence in Punjab and its surrounding areas in the recent months has seriously affected the life and rights of citizens. While Punjab continues to be under a highly repressive police rule that indiscriminately arrests the youth and shoots down alleged terrorists in so called "encounters", bands of terrorists have steadily increased their acts of violence, killing people in surprise attacks and ransacking places, spreading terror in villages and towns and provoking communal violence. This stream of violence and counter-violence has become a major threat to the democratic rights of people and has made the much needed political solution of the basic issues of Punjab ever more difficult.

Voices of protest by the people against terrorism, whether of the State or of communalists, are now rising both in Punjab and other parts of the country. The PUDR joins this campaign hoping that a citizens movement for democratic rights will be able to reverse this trend of violence and help build up a climate for a political resolution of the present crisis.

At present there are no democratic channels or institutions in Punjab through which political discussions or negotiations can be conducted on the substantive issues which gave rise to the present crisis—issues whose roots lie in the demand for regional autonomy and cultural identity of a community, and for equitable development. The present crisis has its origins in certain distinct sources:

1. Social tensions generated by the Green Revolution—discontent among the farmers over rising cost of the necessary agricultural inputs; tapering off of the bonanza for the rich farmers, unemployment among the youth of these families.
2. The role played by the Congress (I) in refusing to solve the long standing problems of Punjab relating to the transfer of Chandigarh among other things, and in communalising the situation for its short-term electoral gains by encouraging Sikh fundamentalists like Bhindranwale and Dal Khalsa against the Akali Dal.
3. The role of the Akali Dal in entangling the political issues with religious demands which constantly asserted the exclusiveness of the Sikh community and thus encouraged growing division between the

accompanied by the behaviour of the Sikh religious authorities who harboured the Khalistani terrorists in the gurudwaras.

4. The rise of the Hindu communal organizations like the Hindu Suraksha Samiti who led attacks on Sikhs and their properties in retaliation to the assassination of Lala Jagatnarain of the Hind Samachar group of newspapers in 1981.
5. Operation Bluestar followed by the excesses inherent in Operation Woodrose, the anti-Sikh carnage in the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the failure of the Government to punish the guilty, and continued detention without trial of 365 persons at Jodhpur since June 1984, contributed to the growth of the fertile soil for escalation of terrorism. All these factors have aggravated the crisis to an extent that no party is now in a position to control forces that have been unleashed. In this situation the policy of the central government has tended to alienate the Punjab peasantry and the Sikh community at large and weakened the role of democratic forces who are committed to the unity of the people of India. During the past few years a steady escalation of both state and communal terrorism has grown into a mutually reinforcing process, reducing the people to the status of either helpless victims or mute audience to both kinds of violence.

All these factors have aggravated the crisis to an extent that no party is now in a position to control forces that have been unleashed. In this situation, policies followed by the Central government have tended to alienate the Punjab peasantry and the Sikh community at large, and weakened the role of democratic forces who are committed to the unity of the people of India. A bloated security structure harasses innocent citizens instead of protecting them from terrorist attacks. On the other hand, the terrorists appear to make 'Khalistan' a self-fulfilling prophecy by provoking communal violence between Hindus and Sikhs. Their acts of violence have generated an atmosphere of insecurity among the Hindus in Punjab and Sikhs outside Punjab, besides the general apprehensions affecting all.

This raises the disastrous spectacle of large scale migration of people out of communal considerations. In turn, this provides the government with an excuse for a proliferation of anti-democratic legislations and brutalization of the state's repressive apparatus.

In this cycle of violence and counter-violence all the issues that lay at the root of the problem are forgotten: the status of Chandigarh; disputed territories of Punjab and Haryana; the question of sharing the river water; the continuing detention of people without trial in Jodhpur; the demand for the punishment of those guilty of the anti-Sikh carnage of 1984. While the killings are becoming a normal part of our daily routine, they also threaten to dull the basic human sensitivities of those who are living and to paralyze their democratic instincts of intervention. It is in such a situation that the voices of protest against state and communal terrorism by the democratic elements in Punjab appear as a silver lining. An organised mass resistance to break the vicious cycle of violence can be the first step towards any meaningful solution of the Punjab problem.

PUDR's efforts have been to make a sharp distinction between communal forces and the rest of the Sikh community. Along with other, PUDR had been in the forefront to highlight and expose the atrocities committed on Sikhs in November 1984, as well as the pernicious influence of Black Laws in Punjab. PUDR is equally forceful in condemning terrorism and its role in subverting the people's struggle for democratic rights. Within Punjab today left parties, civil liberties groups and cultural activities are making valiant efforts to mobilise people to fight terrorism. Many of them have fallen victims to terrorist violence. Regrettably the media, particularly the Doordarshan and AIR, have, paid scant attention to these courageous attempts by Punjab's democratic forces against terrorism.

The PUODR in bringing out this booklet welcomes the initiatives taken by the democratic forces in Punjab, appeals to all sections of the people in the country to strengthen the hands of those struggling against both State and communal terrorism in Punjab. We hope that the strengthening of this process will eventually lead to the resurgence of a democratic process and facilitate a political solution of the problems underlying the present crisis in Punjab.

Communal Terrorism:

According to office estimates nineteen terrorist bands are presently operating in and outside Punjab. The communal terrorists have broadly four kinds of targets: (i) policemen and other officials of State agencies 120 policemen have been killed between January 1985 to October 1987; (ii) political leaders both Hindus and Sikhs belonging to almost all major political parties were killed in the past three years and this includes 15 Congress, 16 BJP, 7 Akali Dal (L), 20 CPI, 7 CPM and 3 CPI (ML) activists and leaders; (iii) random killings of people primarily Hindus, including reprehensible threat to kill school children; and finally (iv) killings motivated to avenge the anti-Sikh carnage of November, 1984 (such as of Lilit Maken), the excesses of Operation Blue Star and Woodrose (General As Vaidhya). Ofcourse some of the killings are works of simple criminal gangs profiting out of the complete breakdown of law and order machinery.

Several of the killings of Hindus within and outside Punjab were the works of committed Khalistani terrorist bands designed to further divide the communities and invite retribution from fanatic Hindu gangs. Notable among them were the transistor bomb explosion in Delhi and other parts of North India that killed 42 people (May 1985), bomb explosion in Air India's Kanishka killings 329 passengers (June 1985), killings of 15 bus passengers in Muktsar, Faridkot (July 1985), killing of 24 bus passengers at Khuda, Hoshiarpur (November 1986) attack on residential localities of South Delhi killing 14 people (July 1987), killings of 38 bus passengers in Fatehabad, Hissar (July 1987), and killings of 11 persons in South Delhi locality of Chittaranjan park (October 1987).

Most of the killings outside Punjab involve Hindus. But inside Punjab a fair number of Sikhs have fallen victim of communal terrorists. In the period 1983-87 out of the estimated 1650 killings by terrorists no less than 650 people belonging to Sikh community (almost 40%) have been killed. In recent times activists of left and democratic forces, who are actively engaged in mobilising the masses against communalism and terrorism, have become the chosen targets of communal terror and reportedly 40 activists have been killed.

The fact that of late such large number of victims have been persons belonging to left and democratic forces is ofcourse related to the step up in the organised democratic protest against terrorism in Punjab.

Terrorist killings in Punjab

1983	54
1984	275
1985	160
1986	520
1987 (upto October)	636

Source : Various Home Ministry Statements to the parliament.

The resistance offered by left and democratic forces to terrorism is a saga that remains unacknowledged by people outside Punjab. While for the national media heroism of left and democratic forces doesnot provide good copy, the state controlled media bent upon legitimising the law-and-order approach of the government and in order to facilitate passage of draconian measures has no interest in communicating news about popular resistance. Significantly it is the counter-terror of hindu fanatics which has been received well by Media. Needless to add this communal twist suits perfectly Khalistanis. The democratic movement against terrorism started in early 1984. Although from the time that Bhindranwale led group established themselves in Punjab, symbolised in their capture of Akal Takht, communists belonging to different parties were made targets of their attack and campaign. Indeed communists were proclaimed by AISSF as their major enemy. The murders of Sumeet Singh editor of celebrated left journal Pravak on February 22, 1984 for open condemnation of terrorists and of Sukhraj Khadder editor of Chingari on April 17, 1984 for his writings against Sikh fundamentalism testifies to that. Both lived and worked in areas dominated by terrorists; The former in Amritsar and latter in Gurdaspur districts respectively. But a step up in confrontation between left and terrorists became inevitable when the CPI initiated a mass contact campaign soon after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the anti-Sikh carnage all over North India in November 1984. Earlier CPI had organised marches and demonstrations in two dozen towns close to the border districts of Punjab. But the mass contact programme reached

After the Longowal-Gandhi accord and the subsequent elections in Punjab the momentum of the campaign ebbed. Only to pick up in mid 1986 when there was a perceptible step up in activities of terrorists. The CPI decided to start all party forums to counter terrorism as well as spread the mass contact programmes. A peoples service corps was formed to defend activists against terrorists reprisals and fund raised to finance this programme.

Similarly CPM too has been actively resisting terrorists. The Agricultural Workers Union in particular has been active and therefore also bore the brunt of terrorists attack. The murder of Deepak Dhowan a popular cadre of CPM's AWU on May 19, 1987 in village Sangha near Taran Taran (dist. Amritsar) and of Gurdial Singh jt secretary of Jalandhar unit of Kisan Sabha on July 21, 1987 points to this. In Amritsar district the AWU demanded and succeeded in obtaining higher wages in kind for agricultural workers despite the threat of landlords and rich peasants supported by AISSF. The killing of Baldev Singh Mann on September 26, 1986 also illustrates that terrorists fear democratic forces since at the grass-root level they alone are in a position to challenge the terrorists. Mann was a leader of Kirti Kisan Union, a peasant organisation of CPI(ML) C P Reddy group and active in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts. They have been agitating for remunerative prices for crops, reduction of electricity rates, and exemption of loan repayments for poor peasants. The social base of KKV being the jat sikh, middle and poor peasantry, the KKV comes in direct conflict with Khalistani terrorists which regard this base of KKV as an encroachment into their own support base. The killing of Darshan Singh Canadian a peasant organiser in Amritsar district further lends support to the hostility of terrorists to resistance offered by communists at the grass roots.

The failure of "social reform" programme announced by Khalistani's in March 1987, which under the garb of fighting social evils sought to widen the gulf between the two communities and impose a fascistic puritanical regime for Sikhs, is in no small measure due to the resistance offered

alone. Several individuals (Playwriters, journalists) and democratic right activists such as belonging to AFDR etc too have suffered at the hands of terrorists for daring to oppose them. The killing of the son of Jivan Singh Umranganal a Akali D 1 (L) leader on May 8, 1987 was the price he paid for opposing communal terrorists since 1978. The miraculous survival of Harjit Singh Alam a member of AFDR in March 1987 does not detract from the fact that the terrorists had taken him for dead when they threw him into the canal. His crime was to openly condemn terrorists in the hostel of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, a place where AISSF holds its meetings. But the case of Nazir Singh a 66 year old comrade is typical of the role of individuals and parties belonging to the left and democratic forces in Punjab. Nazir Singh is a leading member of the CPI in the terrorist infested shahkot area bordering the notorious "mand" tract. CIP announced holding a rally-cum-drama in Talwani Sanghera. This happens to be the village of one Dhira who burnt small cigarette shops and barber shops as part of the AISSF's "Social reform" move in April-May. He had jumped bail and now he threatened Nazir Singh with dire consequence were this rally held. On October 10 when the rally began Dhira and his gang tried to disrupt the meeting but were made to retreat under public pressure. During a break in the rally Nazir Singh was called out to hear a complaint from a villager and attacked by Dhira's gang. Nazir a 66 year old man took out his revolver and fired at them wounding one terrorist while other ran away. When Nazir Singh informed the local police he was first advised to offer the family of the wounded person money and settle the issue. Refusing to do this Nazir was first threatened by S/O then charged under sec 307 IPC and arrested. Interestingly inspite of DSP's indictment of local police it was only when "peace and development committee" of Jalandhar organised public meeting that the case was withdrawn. However Dhira and his gang remain at large with no case against them.

STATE TERRORISM

In Punjab the ruling party at the centre seems to be operating from two diverse considerations; increasing public pressure resolve the problem and its own electoral consideration. The problem communal terrorism has enabled it to gather Hindu votes while it has also led to promulgation of black laws applicable not only in Punjab but also in rest of the country. Thus under the Anti-Terrorist Act, over 2000 persons who have nothing to do with Punjab problem were arrested in Andhra Pradesh, Gujrat, Madharastra, and Karnatka while in Punjab itself about 4720 people were arrested in the period 1985-87. The indiscriminate powers given to the police and para military forces have only led to excesses that alienated the people of Punjab. Thus CRPF atrocities in village Brahmamara, Amritsar, in December, 1986 led to mass protest forcing the government to apologise to the people. Similarly the excesses on the drivers and conductors of Punjab Road Transport Corporation at Sherawali Gate, Amritsar, in July, 1987 led to flash strike in the entire region.

The more serious concern of all political parties and democratic groups in Punjab in recent times is the increasing number of persons getting killed in false encounters. Among the notable instances of these disputed encounters were the killing of mentally retarded person by CRPF in Sohal, Amritsar (May, 1986), killings of a local youth Sukhvinder Singh, by CRPF, in Kheati, Amritsar (November, 1986), killing of a local youth by CRPF in Marne, Amritsar (June, 1987), killing of a village Mukhiya Karam Singh in village Gharonda, Amritsar, killing of a local granthi Nirraaj Singh in Amritsar (both September, 1987) and killing of Baldev Singh a peasant returning from his fields by CRPF in Bahurnagar, Amritsar (October, 1987). The Punjab Human Rights Organisation, led by Justice A.S. Bains released in September a report of its investigation into the 26 cases of killing of people in false encounters in Amritsar district alone. So far the government has admitted only two cases, that of Karam Singh in Gharonda and Baldev Singh in Bahurnagar. In addition the Punjab Police Chief also stated that 12 instances of innocent persons killed were brought to this notice this year (Indian Express, 4, September, 1987). In last three years an estimated total of 427 terrorists were killed in encounters increased dramatically after every attack by the terrorists. These have also become part of public relations exercise of the government. It is a direct product of the governments approach to solve a political problem through police. In the process the chief of Punjab police, Julius Rebeiro, publicity loving civil servant on extension, has emerged as an all too powerful figure. He frequently issues statement that sound like dialogues from cheap Hindi films ('Bullet for bullet', 'Khoon Ka badla Khoon').

That a democratic political system is becoming dependent pathetically, on a policeman forebodes ill for the country and its people. His unbridled powers fuels the campaign and the mayhem of the communal terrorists while innocent people get killed in the process.

KILLED IN ENCOUNTERS

1985	67
1986	70
1987	220
(Up to October)	
(Source : Various Home Ministry	
Statements, to the Parliament.	

LEFT AND DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE KILLED BY THE TERRORISTS

1984:

1. 18, February Sarabjit Attery, CPI, Jadian, Gurdaspur.
2. 22, February; Sumest Singh Shammi, Editor, Preet Lari Village Lopoke.
3. 13, April; Sukhrej Kheddar, Editor, Chingari.
4. 23, May; Randhir Singh, CPI, Village Raoke Kalam, Faridkot.

1985:

5. 14, January; Nau Nahal Singh, CPI, Village Koer Singhwala, Bhatinda.
6. 14, January; Nathi Ram, CPI, Village Dalam.

1986:

7. 23, March; Jagir Singh, CPI, Moga.
8. 27, March; Arjan Singh Mastana and Kanwaljit Singh, CPI, Village Ghariala, Amritsar.
9. April, 17; Baldev Raj, CPI, Village Talwandi Dasaundha Singh, Amritsar.
10. July, 2, Ajit Ram, Babla and Sukhtiar Singh, Village Fatehabad, Amritsar.
11. August, 11; Paraswarth Ram, Bibi Guro, Sabu Ram, CPI, Village Bua Mangli, Amritsar.
12. September, 4; Surinder Pal, CPI, Village Cheema Basti, Amritsar.
13. September, 19; Dr. Avatar Singh, CPI (M),
14. September, 26; Baldev Singh Mann, CPI, (M-L) Kukranwala Amritsar.
15. September, 25, Darshan Singh Canadian, CPI, Village Mahilpur Hosiarpur.

1987:

16. February, 3; Shyam Lal, CPI, Koer singhwala, Village Bhatinda.
17. February, 15, Channan Singh Dheot, CPI (M), Village Dheot Kalan, Hosiarpur.
18. February, 20; Mukunchand Gulshan, CPI (M), Hosiarpur
19. May, 2; Balwant Singh, CPI (M-L), Kala Afghana, Gurdaspur
20. May, 19; Deepak Dhawan, CPI (M), Village Sanghe, Amritsar
21. June, 29; Lalinder Kumar Lah, Revolutionary Center, Village Narakbasti, Moga.
22. June, 29; Lal Inder Singh, CPI, Chugawan, Faridkot.
23. July, 18; Sukhinder Singh, his two sons, daughter, bodyguard and a symphethiser Harpal Singh, CPI, Chugarvan Faridkot.
24. July, 19; Gurnam Singh Uppal, CPI (M) Village- Uppal, Amritsar.
25. July, 21, Gurdial Singh, CPI (M), Village-Mathada Kalan Jallandhar.
26. July, 21; Swaran Singh Sohal and family Village, Sohal Amritsar. (CPI)

1987:

27. August, 6, Karam Chand, Meerankot, CPI, Village Pringri Amritsar.
28. August, 6; Dalbir Singh Naboke, CPI, Village Bhamber.
29. August, 26; Mehinder Pal, CPI (M), Village Mudh, Jallandhar.