

Rise, Dynamics, and Decline of Violence in Punjab: A Critical Reassessment of Existing Explanations

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Punjab witnessed unprecedented violence for about one and half decades from the late-1970s to the early-1990s. This violence took the lives of thousands of people, and created large-scale human suffering. The creation of Punjab state on a linguistic basis in 1966 was an attempt to satisfy the demand of the Sikhs for a Sikh-majority, Punjabi-speaking state within India. However, creation of the state did not prevent a subsequent violent struggle for an independent Sikh state of 'Khalistan' during the 1980s. The sense of discrimination and of being a minority amplified in the Sikhs, and the community felt utterly disappointed with the Congress-run central government for issues documented in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Fallouts of the Green Revolution, the nature of intervention of the central government to address Punjab's problem, and increased communalization of politics led to an eruption of militant violence. The state eventually empowered the security forces legally and logistically to deal with militant violence. The eventual strong resistance of the rural Sikh population against militancy, along with effective counterinsurgency strategies led to complete elimination of violence in the state in mid-1990s. In this article, we try to critically reappraise the existing literature, which claims to explain and describe the rise, dynamics, and decline of militancy in Punjab. Our analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the insurgency in Punjab.

Introduction

Punjab emerged as one of the most prosperous states in post-independent India. In the 1960s, it spearheaded the Green Revolution that bailed the country out of a food crisis. However, the violence that engulfed Punjab for more than one and half decades from the late 1970s and through the early 1980s made it a 'Problem Province,' and its majority community a 'Problem People' (Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab, 1989). The problem of violence was not confined to Punjab alone. Spencer (1992) observes that 'the 1980s in South Asia saw an alarming upsurge in what is still generally known as communal violence' (p. 261). It is believed that 'increased communalisation in the Punjab was the background to the crisis' for which long-term socio-economic factors along with some other issues were responsible to some extent (Morris, nd: 1). Thousands of people were killed in the violence. The security forces arrested thousands of

people as suspected militants or informers and kept them jailed for months or years together, without judicial trials or official records of their arrest and detention. Some of them were eliminated and allegedly security forces performed their last rites without informing their families (Amnesty International, nd, pp. 1-2). 'These human rights violations have taken place in a context marked by large scale acts of violence committed by armed Sikh groups. These acts have reportedly included hundreds of killings of police and other officials, hostage-takings and assassinations of political leaders as well as members of the public' (Amnesty International, nd, pp. 1-2). How Punjab came into the grip of the violence and what factors were responsible for its sudden rise are important questions. What led to its decline and then complete elimination is very thought-provoking aspect of this violence, which resulted in thousands of killings and even more people going missing.

This paper is a modest attempt to answer some of these and related questions. It critically examines the existing literature and explanations regarding the rise, dynamics, and decline of the "militant" movement in Punjab. The paper is divided into five parts. The first part deals with a brief history of separatism and violence in Punjab while the second part gives an overview of the various theories/explanations for emergence of violence. Part three delves into explaining the nature of violent activities pursued by the armed militant groups. The fourth part discusses explanations of the decline of violence along with the nature of counter-violence used by the state to crush militancy. The last part concludes the discussion.

Historical Background to Violence in Punjab

The political rise of the Sikhs coincides with the decline of the Mughal Empire and the consequent rise of successor states in the eighteenth century. The British and the Marathas emerged as formidable powers (Grewal, 2002, p.99). Ranjit Singh rose to become a powerful force in Punjab by unifying the region with the help of his army, comprised of Hindus and Muslims in addition to the Sikh majority. In fact, Sikhs formed the major chunk of the ruling class in the Ranjit Singh's kingdom (Grewal, 2002, p.99).

After the death of Ranjit Singh, '...infighting among the Sikhs and clever maneuvering on the part of the British resulted in the absorption of Punjab into the British Empire. However, the British exercised control over the Punjab through treaties made directly with the (former) Sikh Raj and not as part of India. Therefore, any negotiations for the end of British rule in the subcontinent would, naturally, have involved the discussion of Punjab as a separate entity' (Singh, 1986: p.6). The Congress persuaded the Sikhs to join the struggle against British rule and also to remain a part of India. However, '...it was the human value of trust rather than formal resolutions which persuaded the Sikhs to remain as part of India' (Singh, 1986, p.7).

Communal Representation during the British Era

The Communal Award was one of the many British policies and tactics used to keep religious communities of India divided. The Communal Award was part of the official British political statement of government policy with respect to the composition of provincial legislatures during the transfer of responsibility to India. It was announced on 16 August 1932 while considering dominion status for India. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms contained in the Government of India Act of 1919 provided for separate electorates on communal as well as non-communal bases. The implementation of these reforms was evaluated for effectiveness between the years of 1927 to 1932. The British government appointed Sir John Simon to chair an all-white Indian Statutory Commission for official review of the reforms in November 1927. There were large-scale protests and demonstrations in Lahore when the Simon Commission visited India (Lamba, 1999: pp. 6-7). The British demarcated separate electorates and representation in the legislatures for the various religious communities of India, including those electorates and legislatures which were to be created under the provisions of a new Constitution for the Federation of Princely Indian states and British Indian provinces under the Government of India Act of 1935. It was considered as a basis for Indian participation in a responsible government and also in framing a new constitution (Lamba, 1999).

On the issue of reforms, a conference of all parties was held under the chairmanship of Moti Lal Nehru in 1928. The Central Sikh League represented the Sikhs in this conference. The coalition advocated a dominion status for India, with a strong central government and reservation of seats for minorities in all legislative bodies except in Punjab and in Bengal. The Sikhs did not agree with the recommendations of the report of the Moti Lal Nehru conference. The Sikh League at its session in Gujranwala on 22 October 1928 passed a majority resolution disapproving of the Nehru report and demanding 30 per cent of the legislative seats in Punjab for the Sikhs, with adequate provisions for the protection of their rights in other provinces in case separate electorates were adopted. The Sikhs strongly opposed the fact that communal representation was granted for other minorities but not for them. They withdrew from the conference and decided to not attend the Congress session (Lamba, 1999).

In 1950, when the Indian constitution was drafted, Sikhs (along with Buddhists and Jains) were categorized as Hindus in some clauses. The Sikhs were deeply offended by this categorization and saw it as a refusal by the Congress party to recognize the independence of their religion. Therefore, considering the constitution unacceptable, and feeling betrayed, the Sikh representatives walked out in protest and refused to ratify the constitution. However, Sikh protests had virtually no effect and gradually all the personal laws of the Sikhs were abolished and Hindu laws were enforced upon them. For example, the 'Anand Marriage Act' was replaced by the 'Hindu Marriage Act', of 1955; and all this despite the solemn promise that no constitution would be imposed on them! (Singh, 1986: p.8). The disillusionment of the Sikhs with the political process after Indian independence can be understood thus.

Demand for a Sikh-majority, Punjabi-speaking State by the Akali Dal

Arguably, the position of Punjab was different from that of other states of India because it was an independent and sovereign kingdom spreading almost from Delhi to Afghanistan, and the last to come under British rule. The main demand of the Sikhs of Punjab after the partition of India was to secure a separate electorate and reservation of seats from the central government. The central government rejected this demand of the Sikhs straightaway, which caused anguish among the community. The Akali Dal party felt backstabbed by the Congress-led central government. The Akali Dal leadership led by Master Tara Singh changed its ideological position based on communal representation to one of a linguistic stance. Consequently, they raised their voice for the creation of a Punjabi speaking-state for the Sikhs with the 'right of self-determination for the Panth' in religious, social and political matters (Lamba, 1999, pp. 39-40). However, the seeds of a demand for a separate Sikh state can be seen as being sown at the time of birth of Sikhism as a religion, as is observed in the following words:

The evolution of new script of Gurmukhi, their sacred scripture Guru Granth Sahib, the institutionalisation of Akal Takht, the creation of Khalsa and enjoining of five 'Ks' and community 'Singh' and different ceremonies prescribed for births, marriages and deaths, provided the Sikhs a distinct identity. (Lamba, 1999, pp. 42-43).

Later on, the British policy of giving preferential treatment to Keshdhari Sikhs while recruiting for the army gave a further push to the Sikhs' sense of separation from the Hindus. In order to woo the Sikhs, the British government recruited Sikh priests and attached them to Sikh formations in the army. 'While Sikh Politics before 1947 had been largely an elite affair despite the *morchas*, in the post-independence period it increasingly assumed the character of mass movement (Sharma, 1985, p. 464).' In 1955, the Akali Dal, under the leadership of Master Tara Singh, launched an agitation to achieve the Punjabi Suba. However, the agitation failed, leading to factions developing within the party. The mass mobilization movement of Sikh politics entered a quasi-militant phase from 1966 onwards after the creation of Punjab on a linguistic basis (Sharma, 1985, p.467). Disgruntled elements in Punjab started raising the demand for a Sikh homeland. The Sikhs were very disappointed with the attitude of the national government as well as the Congress party, feeling that before Indian independence they were given step-motherly treatment, vis-à-vis the Muslim community by the British; and after Indian independence they received the same vis-à-vis the Hindu community.

Sikh Politics and the 1973 Anandpur Sahib Resolution

The socio-political and economic development associated with the Green Revolution proved very beneficial for the rich peasantry in Punjab. It led to a

rise in power of land-owning *Jat* families, but also pressure on the land. This caused frustration among the state's rural youth, and they started moving to urban areas in search of livelihoods. After independence, the Sikhs were no longer receiving preferential treatment in recruitment to the Indian army. The disappointment of these Sikh youth gave a new lease of life to the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF), which attempted to channel this frustration to demand political power and generate sympathy for the idea of a Sikh independent state (Stewart Morris, nd). 'There were also economic fault lines among the Sikhs themselves, caused partly by the extra benefit of the Green Revolution to larger landowners. The richer peasants traditionally supported the more moderate Akali Dal, so radical Sikh leaders like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (*leader of Damdami Taksal-Mehta*) were able to garner support among the frustrated peasants as well as urban youth' (Stewart Morris, nd, p.1).

The prevailing situation fuelled the already simmering Sikh feelings of being a minority, documented in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) in 1973. From here, the minority consciousness started taking an 'extreme' form in demanding to declare Punjab as the 'Autonomous Region' in Northern India with power to frame its 'own Constitution' (Pramod et al, 1984, pp.124-27). The ASR's main demands, among others, included transferring Chandigarh to Punjab along with the Punjabi-speaking areas that were given to Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, in addition to more autonomy for the state.

Clash between the Nirankaris and followers of Bhindranwale

The separatism related violence in Punjab is generally traced to a violent clash that occurred on April 13, 1978 at Amritsar, involving members of the Nirankari sect on one side and the followers of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale on the other. The clash led to killings of more than a dozen followers of Sant Bhindranwale. This incident provided legitimacy as well as an excuse for armed attacks on the Nirankaris including the murder of the head of the Nirankari sect, Baba Gurbachan Singh, in 1980. Some other events of this time were the formation of the Dal Khalsa, the Akali Dal congregation at Ludhiana in October 1978, the election of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1979 in which Sant Bhindranwale was marginalized, the murder of the editor of the *Panjab Kesari newspaper*, Lala Jagat Narain, the dramatic arrest and release of Sant Bhindranwale in this case, the dismissal of the Akali government, and the formation of a Congress-led government in early 1980. The period between 1978 and 1984 experienced an unforeseen rise in the power wielded by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, under whose leadership a large number of persons were eliminated by his squads and the Golden Temple was fortified with sophisticated weapons (Sharma, 1985: pp. 468-70).

Operation Blue Star and Anti-Sikh Riots

The deadly violence in Punjab began to intensify in the late-1980s when recruitment to armed groups or organisations began to rise (Puri et al, 1999).

Prior to 1984, only three organizations were involved in violent activities. These were the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF), the Babbar Khalsa and Akhand Kirtani Jatha, with formal association with Dam Dami Taksal and Dal Khalsa respectively. Official estimates placed the number of militants to be between 150 and 300. These armed groups selectively chose their victims who included Nirankaris, Communists, government servants, Congress leaders, suspected informers, and police and paramilitary personnel. The reign of violence unleashed by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale ended through the army-run operation codenamed 'Operation Blue Star' in June 1984 with the objective of flushing out militants from the Golden Temple complex. The fierce battle that raged inside the complex resulted in significant loss of life and extensive destruction of the Akal Takht. The security forces killed Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his close aides in this operation, which involved the use of army tanks. The attack on the most sacred place of the Sikhs had far-reaching consequences. In addition to tremendous anger and anguish exhibited by the Sikh masses, there was a revolt in the Sikh Regiment of the Indian Army. Within a few months of the attack, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards. As a consequence, Sikhs in Delhi and some other parts of the country became, for the first time, the targets of killing and destruction of property by armed crowds in post-independent India. These developments brought, though temporarily, a division between the Indian State and the Sikh community (Puri et al, 1999).

Operation Blue Star and anti-Sikh riots in Delhi after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1984 led to a manifold increase in violence in Punjab. The state was already under President's Rule since September 1983. During this period many laws were enacted providing the security forces with extraordinary powers to deal with the armed groups. However, these acts were misused by a section of the security forces to hound and harass common people, in many cases for their own ulterior motives (*The Indian Express*, 1992). This resulted in a situation where a large number of young men in the age group of 18-22, fearing arrests, torture and elimination in police custody ran from their homes and joined militant groups. Many such young men crossed over to Pakistan, a training ground, and returned to India as trained militants.

Rajiv-Longowal Accord and Political Instability

Though an effort was made to resolve the vexed political situation in Punjab through the Rajiv-Longowal Accord in July 1985, it proved to be an illusion, a lull before the storm. The Akali ministry under the leadership of Surjit Singh Barnala proved not only helpless but caused further deterioration of the situation. The Golden Temple again became the sanctuary of the militants. It was from the precincts of the Golden Temple that a public declaration for the establishment of Khalistan was made on January 26, 1986. Subsequent developments like the entry of the security forces into the Golden Temple complex, the division of the Akali Dal, the launching of the so-called "social reform" movement by the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), and the dismissal

of the Akali government in May 1987 led to a gloomy state of affairs for the state and the dark clouds of a fear psychosis loomed large over the horizon of Punjab. The political infighting among dominant political players, and the inept and unstable government provided an environment suitable for the growth of the militant groups. The writ of the government was no good, as the common man, whose worries grew with each passing day, perceived the state as a seat of sin. There was a growth of armed organizations, as the number increased to more than a dozen, along with many splinter groups including anti-social elements. The situation provided opportunity to anti-social elements, mostly smugglers, petty criminals and outlaws who joined these organizations to serve their own vested interests (Dang, 1988, p.146). In such a volatile situation, new leadership emerged in many in the terrorist organizations (Puri et.al., 1999).

Militant activities increased manifold between 1987-92, which included killings, bomb blasts, bank robberies, extortions, ransom, smuggling and kidnappings. The killings in the state multiplied along with other sufferings experienced by the people (Dhillon, 1998, pp.120-22). It was estimated that more than a billion rupees were extorted by the militants between 1987-1992, making many terrorists, their relatives and shelter providers into mini-magnates (Wallace, 1995). The luxurious life style of the chief of the Babbar Khalsa, which became public knowledge after his death in 1992 (The Tribune, 1992), was further evidence for this extortion. Violence in the state obtained a greater stature when there was a complete absence of even minor protests, particularly in the rural areas. This happened because the rural folk were afraid of becoming direct targets of militants if they participated in any protest or resistance (Gill, 2001).

In this way, the prevailing situation provided militants groups with an opportunity to exploit the weak government and to up their ante with each new violent act. As the civil administration was totally paralyzed in the countryside particularly in the Majha¹ region, militants began to rule the roost, spreading awe and fear to deter innocent people and extorting money from them. It resulted in kidnappings, sometimes for ransom and in some cases, to secure the release of prominent militants from jail or to garner international recognition for the issues. Siddharatha Shankar Ray, the then Governor (1988-93) of Punjab, summed up the situation in the following words (Narayan, 1996, p.27).

There is a Government in Punjab but it is not in Chandigarh. It is in Amritsar. Rooms No. 45, 47, 48 of Guru Nanak Niwas. Like the *Jazhia* of the Mughal day, the militants are sending show cause notices to people demanding money. These people, both Sikhs and Hindus do not go to the police or to the D.C. They straight go to the militants, pay the money and go off.

The general elections that took place after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi gave an unprecedented victory to the Congress Party in the Lower House of the Indian Parliament. After that, the central leadership, various groups and political parties initiated the process of ending the divide with the signing of the

Rajiv-Longowal Accord in July 1985. Though Harchand Singh Longowal was shot dead by terrorists within a month of signing the Accord, the restoration of the democratic process and formation of the Akali Dal Government raised hopes for bringing an end to the era of hatred and warfare. But non-implementation of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, conflicts within the Akali Dal, and opportunist politics of leaders of both the Congress and the Akali Dal, among other reasons, derailed the political process in the state, which ultimately gave way to the dismissal of the elected government in Punjab. The dismissal of the government led by Surjit Singh Barnala and the imposition of President's rule in May 1987 hampered the process of effectively dealing with the terror and violence. On the other hand, the declaration of *Khalistan* and Social Reform Movement launched by the KCF and the AISSF deteriorated the already vexed situation in the state. Militant organizations mushroomed following the formation of a *Panthic* Committee and its declaration of armed struggle for *Khalistan* during this period. Though Operation Black Thunder in 1988 exposed the moral and political degeneration of the militant groups, violence erupted again soon after, and killings increased rampantly. More than twenty thousand people are estimated to have been killed in the violence from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. The number of people killed in militant violence was 598 in 1986, and this number jumped to 4,768 in 1991, with a decline to 3,629 in 1992 (Dhillon, 1998, p. 120).

The change of government at the Centre in 1989 witnessed a series of initiatives at the national level by three successive Prime Ministers, two of whom were from non-Congress political parties. When V.P. Singh took over as the Prime Minister in 1989, he appealed to the militants to join mainstream society. The advocates and sympathizers of the militants won the majority of the Lok Sabha seats in the 1989 parliamentary elections in Punjab. Simranjit Singh Mann secured an unprecedented number of votes and raised hopes of a new political initiative. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, the successor of V.P. Singh as Prime Minister, pursued this line of conciliation towards the militants through middlemen and direct negotiations. However, the killings in Punjab reached new heights and the police appeared to be thoroughly demoralized and incapable of dealing with the situation. In 1991, P.V. Narasimha Rao of the Congress became the Prime Minister, but the elections for the Punjab Legislative Assembly scheduled to be held in June 1991 were suddenly cancelled. During that year the annual toll of bloodshed, as mentioned earlier, surpassed all previous records. The new Prime Minister decided to hold elections in Punjab in February 1992. The Congress Party won the elections with a majority. Several major political parties contested the assembly polls held in 1992; they were Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)], Indian National Congress (INC), Janata Dal (JD), Lok Dal (LKD), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Shiromani Akali Dal (Kabul). (Election Commission of India, 1992). All of the other main Akali factions, however, boycotted these elections altogether, quite likely under pressure from the militants.

Table 1: Party Performance in the 1992 Assembly Elections in Punjab

Political Party	No. of Seats Contested	No. of Seats Won
BJP	66	6
CPI	20	4
CPI (M)	17	1
INC	116	87
JD	37	1
LKD	1	0
BSP	105	9
SAD	58	3

Source: Election Commission of India *Statistical Report on General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of Punjab*, New Delhi, Government of India, 1992.

There were 579 contestants who entered the poll fray for 117 seats (Table 1). The voting percentage was very low at nearly 24 per cent because of threats from terrorists and the poll boycott by the main Akali Dal.² Beant Singh became the Chief Minister in 1992. Surprisingly, within a span of one year, the government began to control the violence. Barring a few incidents of major importance, violence declined to the extent of virtual elimination by the end of 1993. During this period, the police remained the major instrument of suppression of violence and, in turn, came to be continuously accused of violation of human rights. Among those killed as suspected militants, hundreds remained unidentified. However, the state government fully supported the police and other security forces to deal with violence. Though the violence ended, the long spell of violence left an indelible mark on the Punjabi society, having affected its economy, polity, and education as well as the communal ties between Sikhs and Hindus.

Rise in Violence in Punjab

Over time, numerous explanations or causes have been put forward by scholars, police leaders, and media persons for the eruption and escalation of violence or militancy in Punjab between the 1980s-1990s. Among the explanations, some are based on the prime importance of religion while some others see it as a consequence of the Green Revolution and the culture of Punjabi society. Other theories try to study violence in the state from a communal perspective as well as from the context of the nature of central government intervention in dealing with demands and problem of the Sikhs and Punjab. The main theories and explanations are discussed next.

Centrality of Religion

The main proponent of the centrality of religion theory is Mark Juergensmeyer. He believes that the overriding importance assigned to religion in comparison to secular values in social and political dynamics should be seen as 'a religious

revolt against secular ideology which often accompanies a modern state' (Juergensmeyer, 1994). He argues that escalated tension due to conflicts between religious faith and secular outlook along with a sense of insecurity and threat from Hinduism led to violence in the state. The logic of social dynamics reflected in what actually happened and why the 'Sikh militants' were destined to act the way they did appears to be less relevant to him (Juergensmeyer, 1994).

Pettigrew (1995) contributes to this perspective by explaining the inception of large-scale violence in Punjab as the consequence of Sikh anger at Operation Bluestar, and a religious ethos supporting fighting on behalf of the community and faith. Nonetheless, she accurately argues that the Sikh community pursued politics which is based on social dynamics and individual interests, at the expense of the community's corporate interests. She highlighted the prevalent factionalism in the *Jat* Sikh community. In her empirical study on 'terrorists,' she found that the character of the movement and its course of action were determined by individualism and also family disputes, as well as revenge and the love of *Jats* for guns and social recognition. Therefore, in this view, there were no ideological elements in the separatist violence (Pettigrew 1995).

Modernization Breeds Conflict

This explanation is based on a political economy approach that correlates modernization with religious or cultural conflict. It argues that the process of modernization in Punjab led to some changes in the economy of the state, which in turn, became compelling factors for pursuing religion-based politics. The Green Revolution is seen as the main culprit behind the violent crisis. As Leaf (1985) observes 'The key to understand the tragic sequence of events from the attack on the Golden Temple to the assassination of Indira Gandhi lies in seeing how the legitimate and resolvable problems bundled into the arguments about federalism became submerged in the fundamentally unresolvable demands and ideas associated with separatism and terrorism' (p.491). Leaf links Punjab's crisis with the fallout of the Green Revolution. He identifies the base of violence in two models of development. The first model is related to the industrial domination of agriculture with its skewed redistributive agenda. The second model pertains to demands put in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973. He believes that the reason for the crisis lies in the disagreement between these two visions of development, which led to emergence of the crisis. Another argument proposed by Leaf to explain the escalation of terrorism in Punjab is related to the inherent contradictions within the capitalist agriculture strategy that led to large-scale unemployment, particularly of the educated youth (Leaf, 1984).

Gill and Singhal (1984) takes the internal contradictions of the Green Revolution into consideration, similarly to Leaf, and opine that the fruits of the Green Revolution benefitted only big and influential farmers who were well off, and this increased income inequality. Educated youth as well as small and marginal farmers remained deprived of the fruits of the Green Revolution. The mechanization of farming during the Green Revolution played havoc in these sections of society in particular, and more generally in the whole of Sikh society.

The economic might of the affluent landlords ('*Kulaks*') amplified their craving and avarice for political power. It was further argued that in their battle against the Indian State, which was allegedly controlled by the industrial bourgeoisie, these capitalist farmers used religious issues to mobilize the peasantry around notions of discrimination against the Sikh community by the central government (Gill and Singhal, 1984).

Apart from Murray Leaf, and Gill and Singhal, there are two other scholars who link violence in Punjab with the ill-effects of the Green Revolution. Shiva (1992), commenting on the dynamics and consequences of the Green Revolution, argues that the adoption of new technology in agriculture was aimed at engineering 'not just seeds but social relations as well' (pp. 4 & 56). She believes that the farmers became victims of heavy debts and declining returns of investment as well as cultural disorientation caused by the spread of a degenerative culture (Shiva, 1992). Kothari (1987) also blames the effects of the Green Revolution for Punjab's problems. However, he attributes greater blame to the central government and its role in handling the crisis at the outset. He blames the 'statelessness of the Indian State,' 'the institutional crisis' or 'a collapse of the state at lower reaches of society.' The discontent and the disillusionment generated by socio-economic changes created the context in which Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's combative rhetoric was able to secure ready supporters and adherents (Shiva, 1992).

Jeffrey (1987) explains that the process of modernization in Punjab enhanced the sense of victimhood among the Sikhs who, historically, were witnesses and victims of violence for a very long time. The farm technology associated with the Green Revolution led to a sudden and expansive rise of violence and renewed focus on religion and culture. Describing it as 'the perils of prosperity,' he emphasizes that the excitement of the Green Revolution caused incitement, which in turn, led to religious revival, ethnic conflict and secession (Jeffery, 1987, p.386).

State Intervention: Contextualizing Militant Ethnicity

This explanation has been advanced by Dipankar Gupta and Harish Kumar Puri. Their framework attributes the rise of the separatist violence to communal safeguards being ignored and power being centralized in post-independence India. Gupta (1996) focuses on interventions made by the Indian State and the ruling Congress party that created a context of 'special features of the occasion.' The Punjab agitation was, according to him, pushed into militant ethnicity and violence by the Congress party ruling in the Centre. Gupta's explanation is the context of the state's political prescriptions and pursuits - the failure of three attempts at negotiated settlement, the military operations 'Blue Star' and 'Wood Rose', the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 and the failure to utilize the opportunity offered by 'Operation Black Thunder' in 1988 - all of which determined the Sikh response to the state (Gupta, 1996).

Harish K. Puri (1989), on the other hand, refers to the presence of two competing tendencies in Sikh politics - the secular democratic efforts to

legitimize the struggle for economic and political power within the Indian polity, and the religio-cultural (or communal) rhetoric for popular religious support in confronting the 'other' (dominant religious majority). The nature of state interventions became a crucial factor in frustrating and foreclosing one kind of response and facilitating or provoking the other (pp. 340-342).

Instrumentalist Framework: Manipulation by Political Elite

Proposed by Brass (1991), this explanation dismisses both the theories of centrality of religion and of political economy as inadequate. He explains the crisis with reference to ideologies and strategies devised by the leaders and the role played by political entrepreneurs in pursuit of their interest in power. These include both the ruthless, unprincipled intervention by the Centre under Indira Gandhi, leading to oppressive centralization of power in Union-State relations, and the sheer opportunism of the Akalis and the other Sikh political elite (Brass, 1991). Narayanan (1996) observes regarding the violence in the state that 'the violence was more of the criminal and law and order variety than a programme of murder based on ideology and a clearly perceived cause.' The failure of the media in resisting blackmail by the militants and thus becoming their unwilling tool is another dimension that contributed to the escalation of fear and violence, according to this view.

Communal Perspective

Apart from the above four explanations, there is one more explanation that frames the violence in Punjab from a communal point of view. Kumar et al. (1984) put forward this explanation. They do not altogether reject the political economy explanation for the Punjab crisis. However, they believe that '...the sufficient conditions such as electoral competition, religious fundamentalism, language controversies, etc.' became the basis for persistence of the crisis (Kumar, 1996, p. 17). Similarly, this explanation does not outright negate the 'developmental' explanation because 'in the present context, communalism derives its existence from the specific nature of development along capital lines and persists because of communal ideology' (Kumar, 1996: p, 23). Another argument in the explanation is that merely identifying with one particular religion is not sufficient but it is '...also a perception of antagonism towards followers of other religions' (Kumar, 1996, p. 24). The communal groups believe that their social, economic and political interests are in conflict with the interests of other groups and they need to protect their interests through religion for which any method, violent or non-violent, is justified. Therefore, communalism seems to be working not only in the political sphere but also in the social and economic spheres.

Nature of Violence by Militants

Separatist violence emerged as one of the biggest source of human rights violations in Punjab. The nature of violence was coercive and took the lives of a large number of people as shown in Table 2. It included violence committed by both the so-called 'militants' and agents of the state. The violence committed by the former included the deliberate killing of thousands of common people, kidnappings, and hostage-taking, which are the main focus of this section.

Table 2: Estimated Number of Persons killed during 1981-1993 in Punjab

Year	Civilian	Security Persons	Militants
1981	13	2	14
1982	13	2	7
1983	75	20	13
1984	359	20	77
1985	63	8	21
1986	520	42	78
1987	910	95	328
1988	1949	110	373
1989	1168	201	703
1990	2474	506	1411
1991	2591	496	2309
1992	1519	251	2109
1993	46	23	748
Total	11700	1776	8191

Source: Pramod Kumar, "Violence in Retrospect," in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence*, New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 1998, pp. 136.

Broad-Day Light Kidnappings and Traits of the Militants

The prevailing situation of violence at that time provided fertile ground for the militant and for criminal activity. The weakness of the state government favored them and they carried out their activities with impunity. Capitalizing on

circumstances in which the civil administration was quiescent, particularly in the Majha region, the militants pursued their activities at will. The acts of the militants were not just extortion, but also exploitation of helpless citizens. They acted without any fear of law and punishment, often kidnapping victims in broad daylight. It can also be inferred that the militants had complete sway over some areas of the state (Sekhon, 2012: 62-65).

The victims revealed their general perception about their kidnapers. The victims, during their captivity, did not see them reciting *gurbani* and observing other religious practices. A large number of them were clean-shaven or had trimmed beards. The leaders of these groups usually used very abusive language, not only against the victims, but also against their fellow 'militants.' The victims noticed criminal streaks in the behavior of these so-called 'militants', and a few of them were seen consuming liquor, opium or quantities of cough syrup - all of which are usually prohibited for consumption in the Sikh religion (Sekhon, 2012: 77-78).

Social Reform Movement of the Militants

Social Reform Movement in Punjab was not a social movement in the strict sense of the term (Sekhon, 1999 & All India Federation of Organizations for Democratic Rights, 1987); rather it was a forced code of conduct issued by the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) (a militant group) to dictate routine life and special ceremonies (such as weddings) of the people in the state. The code consisted of 13 points of Do's and Don'ts (see box), and any failure to follow them would earn the wrath of the militants and even result in elimination, as an extreme form of punishment.

However, this did not become a mass program as its acceptance was largely confined to the Majha region, and even there, it was mainly the most disadvantaged sections of society who accepted the code of conduct (Sekhon, 1999). The 'militants' justified these reforms by arguing that Hinduism posed a credible threat to Sikhism with Hindu society hatching a conspiracy to malign the Sikh community and eventually eliminate it in its entirety. The code of conduct (All India Federation of Organizations for Democratic Rights, 1987) pronounced by the KCF in the form of warnings is reproduced in the box below. Instead of being a social reform program, it was a potent weapon in the hands of militants and criminals who wanted to instill fear in the minds of the people.

**“Victory to the Panth. Victory to God. Victory to the Sword.”
“Khalistan Zindabad!”**

“There is a conspiracy by the Hindu Society to finish the Sikh nation, to addict Sikh youth to intoxicants, and drive them on the path of evil. There are many more conspiracies to defame the Sikhs, from which the Panth must remain cautious. Whosoever does not shun the social evils listed below shall be awarded capital punishment.”

“Warning From The Khalistan Commando Force!”

1. “The Amritdhari Sikhs who use intoxicants;
2. Those who sell and distil liquor;
3. Those who inform the police about the activities and hideouts of militant Sikhs;
4. Those who trim their hair and beard (literal translation: those who murder their hair, which is the Guru’s insignia);
5. Butchers, who kill animals for meat;
6. Any policeman, revenue clerk, electricity board employee, clerk in Block Development office or tehsildar who is found taking a bribe;
7. Those who give and take dowry, who sing lewd songs during marriages and who write pornographic literature;
8. Those who take more than 11 persons in a marriage party;
9. Those who sit in front of Guru Granth Sahib under the influence of liquor;
10. Those who visit Radhaswamis and Sant Dhesianwale, who believe in sorcery and *Jagratas*, and also those who buy the property of Hindus;
11. Those who run liquor shops, and also the ragis, dhadis (Sikh bards), preachers, granthis, and government employees who drink liquor;
12. Those who sell tobacco, bidis, cigarettes and opium in the villages as well as cities;
13. Those who send forged threatening letters and those who commit dacoities in the house of amritdharis and other Sikhs.”

“All the above will not be pardoned under any conditions, and will instead be burnt alive.

“Note: Heads of schools are hereby asked to prescribe the following uniforms for school children. For boys: Kesri turbans, white shirts, and black pants. For girls: Kesri dupattas, white shirts, and black salwars. Any headmaster who does not prescribe this uniform will be killed.

-Servants of the Sikh Panth

Harjinder Singh Jinda, Lt. Genl., Khalistan Commando Force, Bhai Labh Singh, Chief
Khalistan Commando Force.
Publisher: Malkiat Singh Ajnala.”

However, the reform program of the KCF was a failure as it was not accepted by the masses and hence failed to gain legitimacy. The ‘...unnecessary intervention in the day-to-day life by the terrorist groups created resentment in the minds of common masses’ for ‘a large number of anti-social activities were done by them.’ In the guise of this movement a large number of Sikh youth joined the militancy, which ultimately resulted in ‘creating chaos and lawlessness particularly in rural areas’ (Sekhon, 1999, pp. 84-85). The movement could not succeed as it failed to win people’s trust and, in some cases, the militants themselves violated the code of conduct in their social functions (Sekhon, 1999).

Violence Spurred Migration of People from Rural Areas

The 'high intensity of violence or threats of violence, kidnappings, rapes and extortions by various terrorist organizations and the failure of the state to protect their lives and property' (Puri et al., 1999, pp. 68-9) led to a large number of people shifting their residences to urban areas or to other states. Migration was a response to loss of near and dear ones to terrorist violence or to becoming 'actual or potential targets' themselves. Well-to-do families were the main targets. The police and the administration of the state failed to instill a sense of security and confidence among the people. 'A virtual anarchy prevailed after 1986, as scared policemen refused to step out during the night and more and more robbers and young men took to militancy, indiscriminate killings, kidnappings and robbery, [and] the targets were no more the Hindus alone' (Puri et al, 1999, pp. 139-140).

Decline in Separatist Violence in Punjab

There are various theories and explanations for the decline of militancy and terrorism in Punjab. The following are the main explanations for the decline and subsequent elimination of terrorism in Punjab:

Strengthening and Modernization of Police and Security Forces to Crush Terrorism

At the start of the violence, security forces were ill equipped to deal with violence in terms of their strength and weapons vis-à-vis the militants. The security forces also lacked in stern anti-terror laws and supportive laws for security forces (that give them immunity from human rights violations) while performing their duties. Besides, there were a number of sympathizers of the militants both in government departments as well as among common people and some politicians. In the initial decade, the government's response to the problem was half-hearted and '...there had been little or no effort on the part of the government to deal with the problem in its totality' (Sharma, 1996: p. 325). However, realizing the gravity and intensity of the crisis, the state and central governments made formidable efforts to crush the militancy. Accordingly, the state government recruited a large number of policemen and the strength of the police force rose to 70,000 by 1993 from a mere 35,000 in 1989. The police department created new police districts. The army and paramilitary forces joined the state police and therefore, in the early 1990s, around '15000 troops and 40000 paramilitary men were engaged in the anti-terrorist offensive' (Puri et al, 1999, p. 117). The weapons of the Punjab police (obsolete .303 caliber Lee-Enfield rifles of World War II) were replaced with 7.62 MM self-loading rifles and automatic assault rifles. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs provided weapons support to the security forces in the state (Sharma, 1996). Scores of strict terror and criminal laws were introduced in the state to curb terrorist activities, such as Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), Maintenance of

Internal Security Act (MISA), National Security Act (NSA), Armed Forces Special Powers Acts, Disturbed Areas Act, and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA). These provided for new and stiffer penalties and detention without trial, and new harsher powers for the police, army and paramilitary forces (The Times of India, 8 August 1994).

Nature of Counter-Violence by the State

The police used every possible strategy and tactic to crush militancy. They arrested thousands of people based even on the mere suspicion that they were either related to or supported the terrorists or were providing information to the militants about the movements and activities of the security forces. The force made use of stringent measures that were highly criticized. However, supporters viewed this collateral damage, and justified with end in mind. The army, Punjab police and paramilitary forces stationed in Punjab, made most of these arrests. In the first category, people were arrested or taken away by the police, detained for months or years without entering their names in the police record and without trial under the provisions of the special legislations. The police even used inhumane torture tactics, and in many cases the grandparents, parents, brothers and the sisters of suspects were arbitrarily detained, tortured, and in a few cases eliminated for no fault of theirs. The state gave the police a 'free hand' to carry out these acts that seem highly unjustified. In 1991, the whole of Punjab was declared a 'disturbed' state, which gave extensive powers to the security forces to deal with the situation, including the power to detain people without approval of the courts. In addition to police stations, special torture centers i.e. Beeco in Batala, Mall Mandi in Amritsar, and Ladhe Kothi in Sangrur, were opened. In most of the cases, the victims were denied access to their lawyers, parents and other relatives (Puri et al., 1999).

However, the state's counter-violence against the militants (Singh, 1992) resulted in the alienation of the people from mainstream politics, destabilized the state's social structures and produced many individual tragedies. The state emerged as the main source and perpetrator of violence and actions of the security forces were labelled as 'state terrorism' or a 'terrorist state' in contemporary India. Moreover, the draconian legislation related to security, law and order and so-called disturbed areas identified previously provided the police, army and paramilitary forces with sweeping powers. The National Human Rights Commission in its report mentioned that the police registered 17,529 cases under TADA in Punjab between 1985 and 1994 (The Times of India, 1994). Such laws sanctioned extra-judicial kidnappings and killings known as 'encounters,' 'custodial deaths' and alleged disappearances from police custody while coming from or going to the courts for trial.

Rewards, Promotions for Apprehension of Terrorists and Extra Judicial Killings

The Police force in Punjab, as a retired senior officer observed, was known for its 'servility and oppression' (Dhillon, 1996). It indulged in staging 'fake

encounters' which was later on acknowledged by the Punjab Governor when he publically appealed to police officers 'to stop fake encounters.' An important official order of the Director General of Police issued on 30 August 1989 to all district superintendents of police promised to the police personnel handsome specific rewards, such as quick promotions for the apprehension/liquidation of 53 specifically dreaded militants (Puri et al, 1999, p. 118). It was also alleged that the arrest of terrorists by the police for prosecution and trial was considered unnecessary. The methods of torture used by the police are as following (Puri et al., 1999, p.136):

- Their legs were pulled apart to 180 degrees to cause intense pain as well as damage to the muscles.
- A heavy metal or wooden round rod is rolled over
- The thighs and ankles of the arrested; often the police men sit or stand on the rolling stick in order to make it unbearably heavy;
- Electric shocks were given to the genitals, to the head, ears and legs;
- Prolonged severe beating with leather whips or metal rods;
- The victim's hands were tied behind his back and he was suspended by his arms on a wall or from the ceiling;
- Threat of rape or other sexual abuse of the victim.

Encounters and Killings by the Security Forces

There were numerous reports of 'encounter deaths' of the alleged militants. The suspects in most cases were first apprehended and then killed. Whether the encounters were real as in some of the significant cases, or fake, the police shot dead a large number of suspected people or informers including militants. Many thousands suffered torture in custody, long periods of illegal imprisonment and other forms of physical and psychological torment. According to police figures published in 1993, security forces in Punjab killed 2119 terrorists in 1992, under the euphemism of 'encounters.' A large number of people 'picked up' by the police for interrogation simply 'disappeared,' particularly in the border districts. Evidence that later surfaced shows that the 'disappeared' were killed and their bodies were quietly disposed of.

Peoples' Resistance to Terrorists and Support to Police and Administration

The people were sandwiched between state oppression and 'Khalistani' terrorism, and they were at the receiving end from both quarters. The state and security forces were instrumental in crushing the violence in Punjab; however, the common people too played a significant role. After realizing that they would have to take action on their own to protect themselves, the common people started resisting the so-called 'militants.' The people got fed up and exhausted with daily violence and the fear of being killed. Egged on by leftist parties and democratic forces, people started taking on terrorists and communal forces (All India Federation of Organizations for Democratic Rights, 1987). The people's

resistance, both armed as well as unarmed, to terrorism is generally traced to the late 1980s when 'the widespread but quiet resistance of that kind symbolized rejection of the militants and their ideology under a moral conviction' (Puri et al., 1999). Besides individual or familial resistance, there were many instances of 'organised collective resistance, along with a number of rallies and public demonstrations organised by political groups/parties' (Puri et al, 1999, p.169). These cases of personal courage and bravery provided a morale boost to people in the rural areas and 'a source of inspiration in an otherwise highly demoralising sense of all round submission to' the so-called social reform programme (Puri et al, 1999, p.182).

Conclusion

Punjab became one of the most prosperous states in post-independent India and this is an important factor for understanding the political economy of the state, as well as the violence that the state experienced. The creation of a new state of Punjab in 1966 neither solved the problem of the state nor satisfied the disgruntled elements among the Sikhs. The feeling of being an endangered minority and a sense of being discriminated against by the Centre and the Congress party were increasingly palpable. State governments, which had taken credit for the Green Revolution and the associated growth, instead found themselves facing blame for increased inequalities and relative deprivation as byproducts of that 'revolution.' The communalization of politics in the state as well as factionalism within the Akali Dal added fuel to the already simmering fire of discontentment with the skewed model and vision of development. The resultant violence did immense short-term as well as long-term damage to the state, shattering not just the state's society but also its economy, culture, politics, development and education, particularly in rural areas lying in the border belt of the Majha region. It dented the image of the Sikhs throughout the world. However, 'at the heart of the Punjab problem [...] is the failure to evolve guarantees that would safeguard the political, religious and cultural institutions of the Sikhs [...] and be compatible with India's political system' (Singh, 1996: p. 232). The actions of the state (which were often controversial and brutal) and the support of the central government, combined with resistance of the rural Sikh population and the efforts of democratic forces resulted in complete eradication of insurgency-related violence. The vigilant press did not shrink from its role and remained steadfast in its duty. Although the security forces killed hundreds of militants, many of them went into hiding and it is also believed that many had gone abroad to safe havens to elude prosecution and to keep the separatist movement alive. The lack of an ideological perspective and a good cause along with loss of common people's trust are key factors in understanding the decline of the militants. This article has tried to contribute to the academic understanding of the rise, dynamics, and decline of the violence in Punjab by critically reevaluating existing explanations on the topic.

Notes

¹ Majha region is one of the three geographical as well as cultural regions of Punjab-two other being Doaba and Malwa. Majha during 1980s consisted of two districts-Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Presently, Majha region has 4 districts; the two newly created districts are Pathankot and Tarn Taran.

² The Akali Dal was divided into many factions at that time. The major factions of Akali Dal included Akali Dal (Longowal), Akali Dal (Talwandi), Akali Dal (Badal) and Akali Dal (K).

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