

Militancy and Counter-Militancy Operations: Changing Patterns and Dynamics of Violence in Punjab, 1978 to 1993

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How did the patterns of violence committed by Sikh militants and the state security forces change during different phases of the insurgency from 1978 to 1993 and, most importantly, what explains the difference in these patterns? This study attempts to answer these questions. It argues that this variation in the patterns and dynamics of violence can be explained by changing socio-political circumstances and compulsions during this period. The violence committed by the militants intensified until this violence was eventually delegitimized by the common Sikh masses due to changing dynamics within the militant movement and the nature of its violence. Simultaneously, the violence committed by the state overpowered the militancy only after it was firmly backed by the political regimes in power, including providing de facto legal impunity to the police and security forces for a brutal and controversial counterinsurgency campaign. Thus, this article disaggregates the various phases of violence committed by both the militants and the state from 1978 to 1993, and examines the interrelationship between the forms of violence committed by both sides in the conflict. Important observations emerging from this empirical study are offered in the concluding section.

Introduction and Historical Background

The Sikhs, even after being defeated by the British and losing their political control in the north-western region, maintained a unique religious, ethnical and political legacy, which was separate from Hindus in various domains (Singh, 1963; Dhillon, 2006). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British fabricated the political scenario of India in such a manner that apportionment of political privileges was determined solely on the basis of population strength of the different religious groups. This led to an intense competition between Hindus and Sikhs to expand their recorded population. The Hindus denied the separate identity of Sikhs and declared them as sect of Hinduism (Nayar, 1966). To counteract the policy of denial of distinct identity of the Sikhs, a movement of identity articulation emerged among Sikhs. A number of politico-religious formations including the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Singh Sabha Movement, and Central Sikh League emerged on the scene. Above all, the Akali Dal and National Khalsa Party were explicitly declared and accepted as the premier political parties of the Sikhs (Dhillon, 2006). This movement of asserting political identity among Sikhs evolved at a time during which the Muslim League emerged as the vanguard of the interests of the Muslims, and the Congress had been largely branded as the party of Hindus (Guha, 1996). The

Gurdwara Reform Movement totally segregated Sikh Gurdwaras from Hindu Mahants, a paradigm which further served as a religious disconnect between Hindus and Sikhs (Singh, 2004).

The Sikh political parties faced new challenges to their objectives after the Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League (Isabel, 2015, 307). In this resolution, the Muslim League asserted the goal of attaining a sovereign state for Muslims, separating Muslim majority regions from rest of India, particularly Punjab, where Muslims constituted more than fifty percent of the population (Wallace, 1988, 5). In these circumstances, three options were available to the Sikhs: they could demand a Sikh homeland, join Pakistan, or remain with India. There were several realistic obstructions to the Sikhs acquiring a separate state for themselves. Numerically, they were a minority in all districts of the British Punjab (Sandhu, 2006, 219). Moreover, the political affiliations of the Sikhs were surprisingly scattered. Besides being Akalis, Sikhs were members of the Congress, comrades of the Communist Party, working for the Unionist Party and also were enthusiastic towards the Khalsa National Party (Pettigrew, 1995, 58). There were several historical and contemporary reasons for the Sikhs not wanting to join Pakistan. Several Sikh Gurus had been summoned in the Mughal courts and brutally executed. The same treatment was given to family members and the followers of the Gurus who were allegedly going against the political or religious goals of the Muslim rulers (Akbar, 1996). These conflicting relationships between the Sikhs and Muslims did not provide any hopes of strong Sikh-Muslim relations.

As the time of independence came nearer, the Sikh leaders started concentrating on the third option, i.e., to remain with India through the principle of a composite inclusive nationalism (Wallace, 1988, 7). Moreover, the Congress persuaded the Sikhs to join the Union of India. The Sikhs were given assurances by the elite leaders of the Congress that their demand to persist and display a separate identity would not be overlooked while formulating the Constitution (Gandhi, 1931, 128; Singh, 1986, 6). But, the Akali Dal leaders saw the final draft of the Constitution as the Congress being disloyal to the Sikhs. The separate religious identity of the Sikhs was neglected and the Constitution identified Sikhs (along with Jains and Buddhists) as Hindus. The personal laws of the Sikhs were eliminated and Hindu laws were imposed on them. For instance, in 1955 the Hindu Marriage Act was established replacing the Anand Marriage Act of 1929 (Singh, 1989).

In Independent India, some Hindu socio-political outfits started portraying Sikhs as Hindus (Akbar, 1996). Being only 1-2 per cent of the national population and 35 per cent of the population of Punjab, there were threats that the younger generations would abandon the identifying Sikh practices, like allowing hair to grow naturally, wearing the turban and keeping the *kirpan* (short dagger) on the body, instead merging into Hinduism (Akbar, 1996). The Akali Dal, which had been practicing the politics of religion and faith by proclaiming itself the pioneer savior of the interests of Sikhs, started forecasting a dismal future in Punjab. While executing politics of linguistic identity, the Akalis were able to influence the Central government to make a number of demographic

adjustments favoring them; these chiefly included the 'service formula, 'parity formula' and most significantly, the 'Sachar formula' (Chima, 2010). The first increased the number of public sector jobs for Sikhs; the second guaranteed an equal number of seats for Hindus and Sikhs in the ministry of Punjab, while the third demarcated the state into separate Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking regions in which their respective language was to be the medium of education up to matriculation and the other would be taught as a compulsory language after the fourth grade (Nayar, 1996).

The feeble performance of Akalis in the initial elections of the state as well as pressures from the central parliament compelled them to contemplate launching an agitation for the construction of Punjab as a Sikh-majority state, to challenge the electoral dominance of the Congress, and form Akali governments in the state (Chima, 2010). In the new secular fabric ascertained by the Constitution, their explicit demand for a Sikh-majority state would obviously be recognized as communal, illegitimate and unconstitutional. Therefore, very tactfully, the Akalis prepared a strategy to demand a Punjabi-speaking state, because correlating Sikhs with Punjabi language was the easiest theorem of the politics of Punjab. To achieve the objective, the Akalis decided to experiment their much practiced 'agitational' strategy. The *Morcha* (protest campaign) was commenced in 1955 with its prime objective to reorganize Punjab on a linguistic basis and create a Punjabi-speaking state (Nayar, 1996). Master Tara Singh formed a new Akali Dal (Master) in 1962 and argued for the 'freedom of the Sikhs' (Akbar, 1996). However, the original Akali Dal, under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh, warned the central government in 1965 of a new agitation if the demand for formation of the Punjabi-speaking state was not fulfilled (Chima, 2010). After the conclusion of India's war against Pakistan, Congress government at the Centre endorsed a strategy to create the Punjabi-speaking Punjab (Akbar, 1996). Eventually, the *Punjabi Suba* was formally created on November 1, 1966. The Akalis had succeeded in their movement for a Sikh-majority state.

The reorganization of Punjab on a linguistic basis did not minimize the tensions between the Punjab and the central government in general, and between the Akalis and the Congress government at the Centre in particular. Rather, it further aggravated the circumstances. The Akali Dal believed that they were betrayed by the Congress government at the Centre while reorganizing the state. Under the settlement, the central government decided to take control of the Bhakra and Beas Dam projects. Certain Punjabi-speaking areas were not added to Punjab. Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab (before reorganization of the state), was declared as a Union Territory, which jeopardized the claim of Punjab over Chandigarh. The claim of Punjab over its river-waters was drastically curtailed and the state was compelled to confer a major share of its river-water resources to Haryana and Rajasthan. These actions of the Congress government at the Centre intensified resentment among Akalis for the Central government.

There were other core political-electoral aspects that disturbed the Akalis. Even in the favorable ethnic-demographic milieu, where the population of Sikhs was 60.22 per cent, the Akali Dal could not emerge as the leading party of the

State. From 1967 to 1969, the respective governments formed by the Akalis with the support of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and with outside support from Congress could not complete their tenures. In 1971, the Congress Party was again able to form its government in the State. The Akali Dal planned to chalk out a more aggressive and firm strategy to improve the electoral situation in their favor and minimize the influence of the Congress (I) in the state.¹ In October 1973, the Akali Dal passed a resolution in this regard at Anandpur Sahib which was named the 'Anandpur Sahib Resolution.' The resolution was designed to be enthusiastically accepted by the Sikhs as it stressed the distinct and autonomous identity of Sikhs and simultaneously, to not be criticized as a sectarian declaration as it concentrated on the justifiable demands of Punjab against the Centre and emphasized the federal political set up in the country. However, the Congress (I) government at the Centre rejected the resolution completely while ignoring the secular and legitimate demands. They declared the resolution as communal since it reaffirmed the mission of the Akali Dal as the "Preservation and keeping alive the concept of distinct and sovereign identity of the *Panth* (Creed) and building up of appropriate condition in which the national sentiments and aspirations of the Sikh *Panth* will find full expression, satisfaction and facilities for growth" (Singh, 1995).

Indira Gandhi imposed a national emergency in India in 1975, which suspended democracy as well as most of the fundamental rights of people in India. The Akali Dal emerged as the political party which protested against the declaration of emergency in the most vigorous and sustained manner (Singh 2006). The endeavors of the Akali Dal towards the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and its acknowledged role in confronting the Emergency proved fruitful. The Akali Dal won 58 seats in the state assembly and thus defeated the Congress (I) in the elections for the state legislature in 1977. It also obtained 9 seats in the parliamentary elections.² These trends exemplify that there were challenges to the 'Congress-ascendancy' in the state. The worried Congress adopted the strategy of patronizing quasi-Sikh sects to breach Sikh votes through them. The Congress started establishing close connections with the heads and other influential personalities of sects such as Nirankaris (Kumar, 2014; Singh 2005: X), which were auxiliary to Sikhism in Punjab. Many Sikhs viewed some of the religious practices of the Nirankaris as being insulting to the established Sikh faith.

During the late 1970s, a sect popularized as *Nirankari Mandal*, a sub-sect of Nirankari Darbar that emerged in the 19th century, started its religious campaigns in the rural as well as urban segments of Punjab (Singh, 2000, 8-10). The "blasphemous" activities of the Nirankari leader Baba Avtar Singh proselytizing himself as a living *sat-guru* (true deity) in the presence of holy *Guru Granth Sahib* and propounding himself as an embodiment of Guru Nanak in his text called *Avtar Bani* (Chima 2010) exaggerated the emotions of Sikhs against him in particular, and the Nirankari Mandal in general. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, after the death of Sant Kartar Singh the 13th head of Dandami Taksal, challenged the Nirankari head for disrespecting and misinterpreting Sikhism. The Dandami Taksal was a historical and prestigious

religious seminary devoted to a purist interpretation of Sikhism. Sikhs, inspired by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, launched a procession to protest against the Nirankaris' Conference to be held at Amritsar on 13 April, 1978. In a clash between the rival groups, 13 Sikhs were killed by the bodyguards and associates of the Nirankari head. There were several consequences of this event. The incident not only drew a blood-spattered line between the Sikhs and the Nirankaris, it also provoked the Sikhs to compel the state's Akali government to immediately take strong legal action against the Nirankari head. Bhindranwale started emerging as a dominant extremist Sikh leader after warning the Nirankari head not to enter in Punjab in future.

In 1980, the Congress, regained control at the Centre as well as the state, despite encouraging the extremists before they could gain popularity. The Congress initiated the risky policy of supporting, patronizing and protecting the extremists and used them to divide Sikh support attached to the Akalis (Grewal 1990). In the early 1980s, the intra-party conflicts among the leaders of the state unit of Congress and the Punjab cadre of the Congress representing the Centre was further aggravated. Giani Zail Singh, who was the Chief Minister of Punjab during the early 1970s, never had a cordial relationship with Darbara Singh because both yearned to be the most dominant persona of Congress in the state. Giani Zail Singh, who was Home Minister in the Central Government at that time, did not endorse Darbara Singh emerging as a dominant leader of Congress in the state as the Chief Minister.³ At the same time, Darbara Singh did not select any Congress legislator loyal to Giani Zail Singh to serve as minister in his government. To destabilize the Darbara Singh-led Congress government, Giani Zail Singh promoted the extremists, and especially privileged Bhindranwale (Gill & Sehgal, 1984, 608). In addition to this, promoting and pampering the extremists to emerge in the political scenario of the state enabled the central government of the Congress to confuse and divide the Sikh masses and weaken the effectual movement of the Akalis for the demands of the state.

In 1980, the confrontation between the two factions of the Akalis resulted into two separate Akali Dals, viz. Akali Dal (Longowal) and Akali Dal (Talwandi). The severe rivalry between the two factions of the Akali Dal intensified as each strived to be the dominant representative of Sikhs. Both factions attempted to use the popularity of Bhindranwale among Sikhs while supporting him openly. Akali Dal Longowal led by Sant Harcharan Singh Longowal was most vocal in supporting Sant Bhindranwale.⁴ The movement for implementing the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was dominated by Sant Bhindranwale. A number of other dominant Akali leaders including then SGPC president Gurcharan Singh Tohra openly advocated for Bhindranwale, whenever there were charges against him for keeping illegal weapons in the Golden Temple complex and exacerbating violence in the region.

The support, explicit or implicit, delivered to the extremists by various factions and leaders of the Congress as well as the Akali Dal, enabled Bhindranwale to enlarge his political image and influence in Punjab as well as to emerge as the most influential religious-political character of early 1980s. The Akalis were now reasonably worried due to the rising social acceptance and

political influence of Sant Bhindranwale, especially when he usurped the Sikh political agenda as well as the agitation techniques of the Akalis. Consequently, there were conflicts between the Akali Dal (Longowal) and Bhindranwale.⁵ The probable strategy of Sant Bhindranwale was to exercise 'violence as a political statement.' Reasonably, there were frequent incidents of violence in the region. Indira Gandhi was totally intolerant of violence executed by the Sikh extremists (Chima, 2010). When 'Operation Blue Star' was completed by the government security forces, the extremist outfits of the Sikhs retaliated by killing police personnel, public employees and civilians, both Sikhs and Hindus, preferably those affiliated with the Congress Party.

Consequently, there was a rapid and massive increase in the incidents of violence committed by the militants. It largely included the killings of police, security forces personnel, politicians, police informers and civilians, both the Sikhs and Hindus. The State, in response, dominantly relied on violence to counter the insurgency. Reportedly, there were numerous incidents of illegal arrests, unlawful detentions, custodial tortures and deaths, faked encounters and other forms of extra-judicial killings. However, eventually, the movement of militancy was crushed by exercising violence through unlawful and illegitimate means and methods.

Relevance and Methodology of the Study

It has been observed that the bulk of the literature written and published on the problem of militancy in Punjab mostly deals with the causes of the rise of militancy. There are number of experts who have dealt with the reasons behind the decline of militancy. But surprisingly, the investigators concentrating on the rise and fall of militancy in the state have ignored the very important, atrocious, and hence, unavoidable part lying between the rise and fall of militancy, and that is the era of violence by the militants and the violence by the state. It is obviously relevant to examine the socio-political circumstances which sidelined the peaceful and secular Akali campaign for the legitimate demand of state autonomy and later imposed on the state, the sectarian, secessionist and violent movement of militancy based on the demand of an independent Sikh state to be called "Khalistan." Another related query, which may emerge as a relevant concern, is to be acquainted with the socio-political factors responsible for the changing patterns of violence by the militants (if any). In addition, it is important to study the varying magnitude and the consequences of violence executed by the militants over the course of the insurgency. Moreover, it is extremely important to understand various attributes and dynamics of the counter-militancy policy of the state. Reasonably, it is also useful to examine the changing patterns of the counter-militancy policy of the state due the change in political regimes and circumstances at the level of the Centre as well as the State.

The study has been conducted through a descriptive-analytical approach, applying empirical methods and techniques. A summative content analysis technique has been taken into consideration while discovering the answers to the primary research question of the study. For this purpose, every single print-

issue of the Daily Ajit newspaper from the year 1978 to 1993 has been inspected. While examining the day-to-day copies of the newspaper, every single news item comprising details related to extremists, insurgency and especially violence by the militants as well as the state has been identified and scrutinized. Primarily, all news details of incidents of killings of civilians and security forces by the militants from 1978 to 1993 are accumulated year-wise. Similarly, every case of killing of the militants by the police/security forces has been counted year-wise. Two separate graphs have been prepared, i.e. one exposing the violence by the militants and the other highlighting the violence by the state. The dynamics and changing patterns revealed by the graphs have been explained while adopting an analytical approach.

Phases of Violence Committed by the Militants

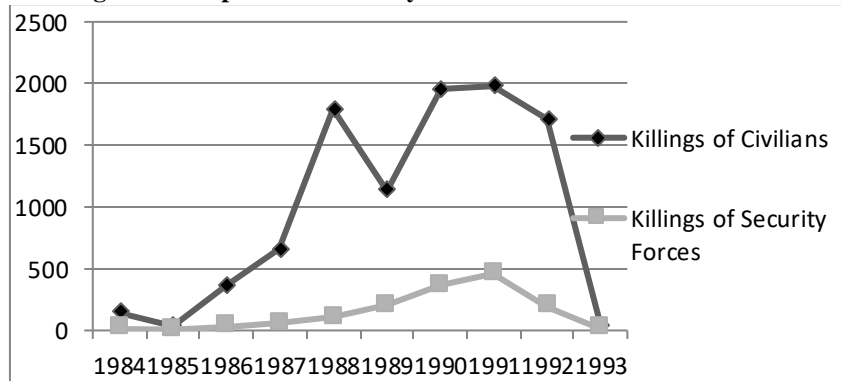
The most vicious consequence of militancy was obviously the violence committed by the militants as well as the state. According to the unofficial estimates, 30,000 people were killed until the beginning of 1991, (Gill, 1992, 187-192). Therefore, it is significant to examine the nature and patterns of violence perpetrated by the militants. Political violence was perpetrated by extremists in the state following the emergence of Bhindranwale. Eventually, the government declared Punjab a peaceful state in 1993, with no reported incidents of violence by the militants in that year. Therefore, for the purpose of the study, the phase of violence by the extremists/militants covers the period from 1978 to 1993. From the perspective of the nature and changing patterns of violence by militants, the period from 1978 to 1993 can be patterned into six major phases, i.e. 'violence as wider political statement' (1978-83), 'retaliative violence' (1984-85), 'violence as political strategy' (1986-87), 'violence as automatic resurgence' (1987-88), 'imprecise use of violence' (1989-91), and 'violence for survival' (1992-93)

Violence as Wider Political Statement (1978-83)

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale converted the 'political conflict' between the Congress and the Akalis into a 'community confrontation' between Indira Gandhi and the Sikhs, in which he gained the persona of a 'frontline warrior' of the Sikhs. He rejected the 'agitational' politics of the Akalis, and launched a new political methodology with 'violence' as the means to communicate a wider political statement. He knew that violence to attain the community objective had been legitimized and even glorified in Sikh history. Therefore, he systematically used violence for two political objectives. Firstly, he used violence to emerge as the 'sacred-warrior' to align Sikh sentiments in his favor by individually labeling the enemies of Sikhism and individually issuing verdicts against them. The killings of the Nirankari head, Baba Gurbachan Singh, on 29 April, 1980⁶, murder of Lala Jagat Narain, on 9 September, 1981⁷ and the assassination of Inspector General of the Punjab Police, A.S. Atwal are examples of such political killings (Thukral, 1983, 131). Secondly, he used violence as a deterrent

to establish himself as 'invincible' to protect himself from arrest and trial by the state and thus enlarge his influence. Whenever the representatives of state agencies announced and/or initiated plans to arrest Bhindranwale, there were incidents of violence. For example, after the arrest of Sant Bhindranwale in August 1981, there were bomb blasts in Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Moga, and Hoshiarpur on 7 October, 1981.⁸ On 9 October, 1981, there was a bomb blast in Chandigarh.⁹ Again after the arrest of Sant Bhindranwale in June 1982 in Bombay, there was firing in Patti town of Amritsar district.¹⁰ Afterwards, the incidents of violence became more frequent. There was a bomb blast in Moga and followers of Bhindranwale were suspected of being responsible for this.¹¹ On 6 August, 1982, a plane of Indian Airlines was hijacked by Manjeet Singh alias Museebat Singh.¹² On 23 March, 1983, the residence of a judge was bombed, and in another incident, a Nirankari was murdered.¹³ There was another bomb blast at the post of the CRPF in Jandiala Guru on 7 April, 1983.¹⁴ Incidents of bomb blasts followed on 24 June, 1983 at Jalandhar and Chandigarh.¹⁵ The violence executed by the extremists till that time period was planned and precise, and targeted the Nirankaris, police personnel or politicians labeled as 'anti-Sikh.' In the year 1982, there were 24 reported cases of killings by the militants in total. Noticeably, all of the victims were Sikhs. The Daily Ajit reported a total of 54 cases of killings by the militants in 1983. Among them, there were 32 Sikhs, 6 Hindus, 8 Nirankaris, 7 police personnel and one political leader belonging to the lower cadre of the Congress. Worryingly, on 6 October, 1983, a number of terrorists, alleged to be Sikh extremists, seized a bus in Kapurthala district and selectively murdered six Hindu passengers in the bus.¹⁶ Bhindranwale, however, condemned the incident and characterized it as the cunning strategy of the government to tarnish his image and quash his esteem among Sikhs.¹⁷ The government as well as the national media publicized the incident as the atrocious act of Sikh extremists. Above all, from 1978 to 1981, there were few incidents of violence by Sikh extremists which could be established and explained as the beginning of any violent militant movement. However, there were occasional incidents of violence by the militants, which became more frequent during 1983. The rate of the killings of civilians by the militants during 1982-83 has been reported as 0.10 cases per day. It can be established as a visible fact that violence from 1978 to 1983 was calculated and controlled but cumulative in effect.

The violence perpetrated by militants against civilians and the security forces from 1984 to 1993 is presented in the following graph. This graph precisely illustrates the changing nature and patterns of violence by militants from 1984 to 1993.

Figure 1. Graph of Violence by the Militants from 1984 to 1993

Source: Daily Ajit Newspaper from 1984 to 1993

Retaliative Violence (1984-85)

The earlier policy of the Congress leadership in the Centre was to allow and even implicitly support Bhindranwale to emerge as a powerful religious-political figure in Punjab in order to divide the Sikh support base of the Akalis. But Sant Bhindranwale was much cleverer than the expectations of the central leadership of the Congress. He actually exploited both the central leadership of the Congress as well as the Akalis in Punjab to amplify his political position with selective and systematic use of violence being his most explicit and effective method. Indira Gandhi was totally intolerant to the violence executed by the Sikh extremists from 1982 to 1983. She eventually declared Punjab a disturbed area and imposed direct President's Rule over the state in 1983. Bhindranwale, who had initially shifted his command center from Damdami Taksal's head office in Mehta village of Amritsar district to the Guru Nanak *Nivas* (Inn) of the Golden Temple, eventually established his control at the Akal Takht, situated inside the premises of the Golden Temple. The disciples of Bhindranwale, fearing the raids of security forces, started constructing observation posts and bunkers in the premise of the Golden Temple (Chima, 2010).

The Akalis were also worried about the rising social acceptance and political influence of Bhindranwale. The Akalis had totally underestimated the political perceptions of Bhindranwale and intended to exploit his socio-religious influence for their own benefit, especially with their intra-party conflicts. But, on the contrary, Bhindranwale very quickly and vigorously seized the political movement and momentum of the Akalis and started tackling it according to his own political aspirations. Consequently, there were conflicts between the Akali Dal (Longowal) and Bhindranwale.¹⁸

The image of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the 'iron-lady' (as proclaimed by her adherents), was now at stake. Indira Gandhi, to establish her influence among Hindus majority in the country, anticipating general elections in the

country and assembly elections in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh during late 1984, (Singh 1992) was determined to initiate army action in Punjab. According to reports, the training, mock drills and other preparations for the same had been completed in 1982 (Dhillon, 2006). Eventually, the army was deployed in the outer premises of the Golden Temple on June 1, 1984 and there was a major exchange of gunfire between the security forces and the Sikh militants resulting in several deaths (Chima, 2010). Subsequently, Operation Blue Star was completed by the government security forces. This Army operation completely traumatized the Sikh population. The government selected the day of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev, when thousands of devotees were present to pay tribute to the Guru at the Golden Temple, to implement Operation Blue Star. The strategy for the evacuation of the civilians was totally ignored which resulted in mass killings of civilians. The army did not maintain the sanctity of the sacred place. The White Paper of the Indian government after Operation Blue Star claimed that 493 civilians were killed in the gunfire. Mark Tully, the journalist who witnessed the events, estimated that approximately 1600 people were unaccounted for (or killed). Civil rights organizations estimated that the number exceeded 10,000 (Van Dyke, 2009, 986). The anger among Sikhs aroused by the casualties was further aggravated by the disrespect expressed by the central government towards their most sacred religious shrine. Immediately after Operation Blue Star, another operation code named Operation Woodrose, was launched to seal out the cross-border support received by the militants from Pakistan and to further trace, arrest and kill the other militants and the suspects to totally exterminate them (Sandhu, 1991, 315). The anger of the Sikhs could have subsided after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, but the anti-Sikh pogroms that occurred subsequently in Delhi, Kanpur and some other parts of India further aggravated the antipathy of Sikhs (Tully, 1985).

Thus, the method and approach adopted by the Indian state while attacking the Golden Temple complex provoked anti-state sentiments among Sikhs. The Sikhs were sought revenge against police personnel, lower cadre of Congress leaders and Hindus, to some extent. During the months following Operation Blue Star (July-December 1984), a total of 162 people were reported as murdered by militants. This comprised 80 Sikhs and 43 Hindus, 18 police/security forces personnel, 5 political leaders, 3 Nirankaris and 2 government employees. Notably, 11 persons killed by the militants during these months were declared as 'unidentified'. Reportedly, there were only a couple of militant groups active in these two years with a limited number of militia. Till the end of 1985, there was no emergence of an organized movement of militancy to achieve any consensual and definitive objective. On the contrary, the rate of killings of civilians and police/security force personnel by the militants had largely decreased in comparison to the year 1984. This confirms that the intensity of retaliation among the Sikhs after Operation Blue Star diminished in 1985 (See the Figure 1).

Violence as Political Strategy (1986-87)

Rajiv Gandhi, who received the sympathy votes of Hindus after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, became the Prime Minister of India in 1984. He initiated efforts to pacify the situation in Punjab. As a result, the 'Punjab Accord' was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Longowal on 24 July, 1985, and was popularly known as the 'Rajiv-Longowal Accord'. The extremists could not tolerate moderate Longowal reconciling with Rajiv Gandhi. Hence, Longowal was assassinated (Chima, 2010). Surjit Singh Barnala was declared as the president of the Akali Dal (Longowal). Thus, a problematic but much needed initiative to control the situation in Punjab was in vain. Anticipating assembly elections in Punjab, a new faction of the Akali Dal, branded the United Akali Dal, was formed in 1985 under the leadership of Baba Joginder Singh (father of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale) while absorbing the Akali Dal (Talwandi) and owning the support of the AISSF (All India Sikh Students' Federation). But in those assembly elections of 1985, the Akali Dal (Longowal) captured a majority of the seats in the elections of the state legislative assembly and Surjit Singh Barnala became the Chief Minister.

The results of the 1985 assembly elections were considered a 'mandate for peace and sanity' and a 'big blow to the secessionist and separatist forces,' as the United Akali Dal, the new political outfit of the Sikh extremists, faced a huge defeat (Singh & Thukral, 1985, 212). In reaction, the Sikh extremists chalked out a new political strategy. The United Akali Dal, along with Damdami Taksal, established control over the Golden Temple complex and declared a *Sarbat Khalsa* (Congregation of Sikhs) on 26 January, 1986. During the *Sarbat Khalsa*, a *Gurmata* (sacred resolution) was presented to the congregation and was passed by the gathering of thousands by enthusiastically raising their hands - a symbol of unanimous consensus. The noticeable clause of the *Gurmata* was to launch a "long drawn struggle against the government as the Sikhs were slaves in India and attaining freedom was their basic right."¹⁹ Besides that, the head priests of the *Five Takhts* (five religious command-centers of Sikhs) were replaced by the militants. The SGPC was dissolved and a Five-Member *Panthic* (Sectarian) Committee comprising militants was established to lead the Sikh community in religious and political matters under the guidance of the Akal Takht (Van Dyke 2009, 990). However, up to that time, there were conflicts and confusion among the various groups of extremists over what should be the objective of their struggle. But the Panthic Committee, on 29 April, 1986 announced the creation of Khalistan in a press conference held in the premise of Golden Temple complex. A brief 'Declaration of Khalistan' was also presented and read out to the media persons. A new military cadre of so-called Khalistan was established as the 'Khalistan Commando Force.' This event was the first declaration in which an independent nation for Sikhs was openly announced. However, the claimants almost certainly did not represent the majority of the Sikhs (Singh, Raminder, 1986, 127). This announcement intensified the concerns of both the state as well central governments. Consequently, 'Operation Black Thunder'

was executed to regain control of the Golden Temple complex from militants and extremists.

The militants, after gaining control over the religious-political institutions of the Sikhs had explicitly expressed their sole objective, i.e. attainment of a separate sovereign state for the Sikhs. During 1986-87, violence became more than a means of just expressing hostility. Instead, efforts were employed to justify the demand for freedom of Sikhs from the Indian state and hence, legitimacy was expected from the Sikh masses for the exercise of violence. During mid-1986, the militants were more vigorously asserting themselves in politics by using violence as a political strategy. Violence had been deliberately exercised as a policy to compel the central government to accept their demand. Violence, along with pressurizing the central government, was used to terrorize the Hindu population into vacating the territory of Punjab in order to establish Punjab as a predominantly Sikh-populated region and hence justify the demand for a separate Sikh state. Consequently, there was a significant increase in incidents of violence by the militants from 1986 onwards. The rapid and massive increase in violence committed by the militants included the killings of police, security forces personnel, politicians, police informers and ordinary citizens, both Sikhs and Hindus.

In the summer of 1987, a number of militant groups were prominent. The most active among those were the Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Liberation Force, Bhindranwale Tiger Force, Babbar Khalsa, and Sikh Students' Federation. Hence, there was huge increase in the incidents of violence by militants in the year 1986 and 1987. The number of killings of civilians by the militants rose alarmingly. The rate of killings of civilians increased from 0.27 killings per day during 1984-85 to average 1.07 killings per day in 1986. Notably, there was a rise in incidents of the killings of the police and security forces personnel by the militants. The rate of the killings of security forces by the militants almost doubled from an average of 0.034 killings per day during 1984-85 to 0.079 killings per day. There were a number of reasons for this increase in killings of security forces. In June, 1987, Rajiv Gandhi's central government dismissed the democratically elected Akali government and imposed President's Rule in the state. This politically-partisan decision of the Central government destroyed another opportunity of improving the circumstances in the state as it sidelined the moderate Akalis who could contribute to a process of peaceful settlement of the crisis in the state by facilitating negotiations between the central government and the extremists.

Violence as Automatic Resurgence (1987-1988)

During 1986-87, the central as well as the state government realized the magnitude of the militant threat and launched counter-militancy strategies. The details of the counter-insurgency policies adopted by the state during that time period are discussed later in the paper, describing the violence exercised by the state. In brief, the execution of Operation Black Thunder, deployment of Julio Ribeiro as the DGP (Director General of Police) and Siddhartha Shankar Ray as

the Governor could not effectively curb the incidents of violence by militants. On the contrary, the counter-insurgency policy of 'bullet for bullet,' initiated by Ribeiro and approved by Siddhartha Shankar Ray, became a catalyst of cumulative consequence, the process of replenishing of militancy through 'automatic-resurgence.' The killings of militants by the security forces were glorified with religious fervor. The militants and their leaders declared militants murdered by the police and security forces in encounters or in the custody as *Shaheed* (martyrs). Gurdwaras were established in their villages as tributes to the Shaheeds. There were frequent presences of elite Akali leaders at the last rites of the militants. More notably, young men deciding to abandon their families and joining the militant cadres were declared as *Zinda-Shaheed* (living-martyrs). The strategy of glorifying the militancy as well as the militants contributed formally and informally in inspiring Sikh youth to join militant groups. It further intensified social acceptance and support to the militants from the Sikh masses, especially those residing in rural areas of the state. Thus, the 'bullet for bullet' policy of the counter-militancy operators did not succeed and instead resulted in the 'automatic resurgence' of militancy, a snowballing effect on the recruitment of militants and catalyzing more violence. During 1988, the rate of killings of civilians by the militants increased to average 5.18 killings per day. The rate of killings of the police/security forces personnel also increased to average 0.28 killings per day in 1988 in comparison to 0.16 killings per day in 1987 (See Figure 1).

Imprecise Use of Violence (1989-1991)

The 'automatic resurgence' of militancy gave birth to a number of new militant outfits, established and controlled individually by widely recognized militants. The most notorious militants started declaring themselves as the chief-commanders of their outfits. During 1989, there was minimal organizational unity among various militant outfits. For instance, there were two competing Panthic Committees (Five-member Committees) one of which was led by Dr Sohan Singh, a former director of the health services in Punjab. In addition, there were multiple armed militant organizations such as the Khalistan Commando Force led by Paramjit Singh Panjwar, the Babbar Khalsa led by Sukhdev Singh Dassuwal, the Khalistan Liberation Force led by Gurjant Singh Budhsinghwal, the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan led by Gurbachan Singh Manochal, and the Sikh Students' Federation (Bittu group) led by Daljit Singh Bittu. There was also another faction named Khalistan Commando Force (Rajasthani group) which was controlled by its chief Gurjant Singh Rajasthani. In addition to these major groups of militants, several other high-profile militants including Satnam Singh Satta, Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, Nishan Singh Makhu, Nirvair Singh and Lakhwinder Singh Lakha had formed their own independent groups (Gupta 1990, 334). The militia cadres of those groups were less working less towards any common religious or political cause, but, rather, more enthusiastic about their individual groups. Hence, now the targets and the times as well as places of their killings were decided through the personal verdicts of the individual

heads of the militant outfits. These newly emerged militant outfits, to prove their influence among the masses as well as in relation to the other militant outfits, used violence as a 'larger indomitable impression.' During 1989, violence was still exercised to attain political objectives, but along with that, it was now being utilized to achieve several other temporary targets. As a result, there were incidents of indiscriminate firings in crowded areas, and killings of groups of migrant Hindu laborers from Eastern India. Inter-group rivalry among the militants to establish dominance and establish their respective outfits as the core militant squads increased 'inter-group violence.' Further, whenever the central government resumed negotiations with any leader of a particular faction, the leaders of other factions would use extreme violence to disrupt the process of settlement. Sunil Dutt, then Rajya Sabha MP, Darshan Singh Ragi, *Jathedar* (Head Priest) of Akal Takht and Jain Muni Shushil Kumar made separate efforts individually to facilitate negotiations between the central government and the militants (Chima, 2010; Singh 1987, 108; Gupta 1988, 263). But all efforts proved unsuccessful, certainly due to the dearth of unification among militants and total lack of diplomatic strategies among the militant leaders. Further, to consolidate their socio-religious legitimacy, the militants started using violence to implement their self-made social code of conduct (Chima, 2010). Due to the more planned counter-militancy operations of KPS Gill, the militants started facing enormous casualties as the police and the security forces began murdering militants more frequently. The militants, with vengeful intentions, started murdering police personnel, public employees, police-informers and Hindus. The governments of the National Front under the leadership of VP Singh and Chandra Shekhar respectively, were weak, and adopted a lackadaisical counter-militancy policy. The absence of a Centre-supported firm policy of counter-militancy provided an opportunity to the militants to execute maximum violence. Moreover, in that phase, there were a number of terrorists' groups, who were not motivated by religious or political enthusiasm. These groups were smuggling narcotics, looting banks, extorting money and using violence for personal gains (Singh, 1992). In 1989, along with an increase in the incidents of killings of civilians (Sikhs and Hindus indiscriminately), an amplification in cases of murders of police and central security forces was also observed from 1989 to 1991. In 1989, the rate of the killings of the civilians by the militants was 3.75 killings per day, which increased to average 6.35 killings in 1990 and average 6.67 killings per day in 1991.

Violence for Survival (1992-93)

It is an established fact that the militants largely depended upon Pakistan for financial support and supplies of ammunition. The military ruler of Pakistan, General Zia ul Haq (1977-1988) provided large amounts of money and advanced weapons to the militants to disturb India's stability (Aziz, 2015; Bhadwar & Singh, 1986). But in 1988, there were elections in Pakistan and Benazir Bhutto became the Prime Minister. During the early months of her regime, the monetary and military support to the militants continued. But very soon, Benazir Bhutto

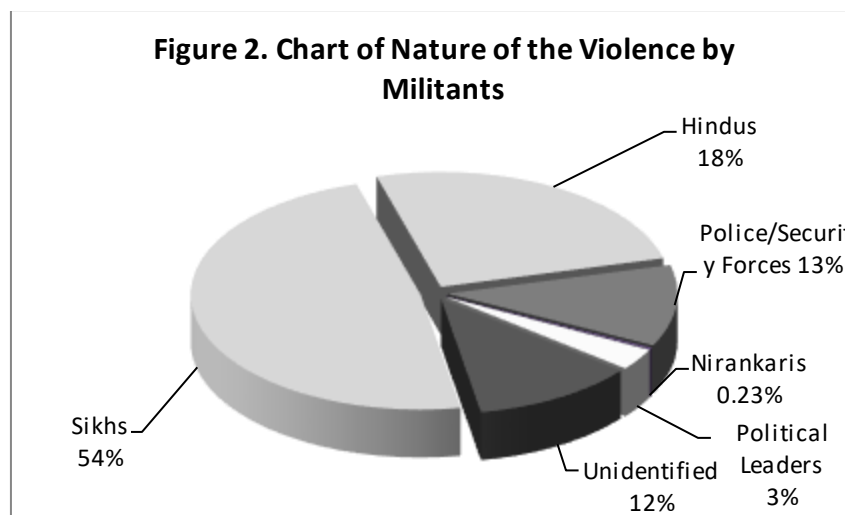
'reversed her predecessor's policy towards India by halting Pakistan's covert aid to the Sikh militants in their struggle for an independent state' (Shah, 1997). Rajiv Gandhi's consecutive visits to Pakistan in December 1988 and July 1989 could have contributed in some part to the change of Pakistan's policy towards the Sikh militants in Indian Punjab. As a result, there was now a dearth of weaponry and money being supplied from Pakistan to militants in Punjab. Further, in 1988, the central government took a strategically important decision to build a permanent counter-infiltration fence running along the country's boundary with Pakistan. These two steps reduced the pecuniary and weaponry supply to the militants from Pakistan and, proved a major setback for the militants.

In addition, KPS Gill, who understood and ended the process of 'automatic-resurgence,' disrupted the militants' support chain. And again, the Indian Army was deployed to Punjab as part of Operation Rakshak II, launched in November 1991 by PV Narasimha Rao. The decisive movement was the withdrawal of President's Rule, which was imposed on May 11, 1987, and election of the Congress Party to political office in Punjab in February 1992. The Beant Singh regime had endeavored to diminish militancy at any cost. As a result, impunity was provided to KPS Gill and his police officials to ruthlessly implement any method – lawful or not – to repress the militants. As a result, major leaders of militants were killed by the police and the security forces (Tejpal & Vinayak, 1992, 232). There was an absence of efficient and diplomatic leadership among militant outfits. The militant movement was segregated into a number of factions, which were not only disunited but also attempting to tarnish the image and threaten the existence of each other. Moreover, as part of the state's new counter-insurgency policy, all unrelated crimes in the state, including vindictive killings, lootings and rapes, were declared and disseminated as crimes committed by the militants. The militants used terror not just in order to establish their dominance but also to merely ensure their survival. They used indiscriminate violence against civilians as well. As a result, there was a rise in incidents of civilian killings, largely Sikhs, by the militants. The principles of Sikhism and the historical legacy of the Sikhs pinched the conscience of the Sikh masses, and they disapproved of the brutal and aimless violence used by the militants. This ruthless violence, killing thousands of civilians, mostly Sikhs, was not owned, accepted or supported by the Sikh masses. Even so, the Sikh masses continued their sympathy and support to the militants despite numerous threats and extreme risks to their lives from the state security forces because they viewed the militants as warriors fighting against the injustice and viciousness of the state. But this compassion among the Sikhs was lessened when they realized the magnitude of indiscriminate and illegitimate violence utilized by the militants. Even Sikhs supporting the demand for a separate sovereign state did not approve of the overly violent activities of militants, looting households and banks and killing innocent civilians, most of whom were Sikhs. Realizing the diminishing social support base of the militants, the Akali leaders withdrew their political associations and strategic support for them.

In these circumstances, violence by the militants represented their efforts for survival and the survival of the militancy. Notably, there were numerous incidents of collective surrenders by the militants. As per reports in the daily newspaper Ajit, 338 militants surrendered in 1992 and 122 militants surrendered in 1993. The police and security forces killed many others until 1993. The graph of violence by the militants decreased swiftly in 1992. In 1992, the militants murdered an average of 5.21 civilians per day. The rate was approximate 22 per cent less than the previous year, i.e. 1991. The steep decrease in the incidents of civilian killings continued in 1993, and the average number of civilian killed by militants fell to 0.13 per day. Simultaneously, there was a steep decrease in the incidents of the killings of police/security forces personnel by the militants in 1992-93. In 1992, 0.52 police/security personnel were murdered per day on average while this rate reduced to 0.13 killings per day in 1993. Significantly, at the end of 1993, no incidents of violence by militants were reported.

Assessment of the Nature of the Violence by Militants

After observing the various patterns and dynamics of violence utilized by the militants, the question about the nature of violence exercised by the militants remains. To answer this question, the social, political and professional affiliations of the persons killed by the militants have been investigated. It has been found that among the total murdered by militants, 52.28 per cent were Sikh civilians and 18.38 per cent were Hindu civilians, while 0.25 per cent of the total numbers killed were Nirankaris. Notably, 12.56 per cent of the total killings by the militants were of police/security forces personnel, while 3.37 per cent were political leaders. The remaining 12.63 per cent killings are of 'unidentified' persons.

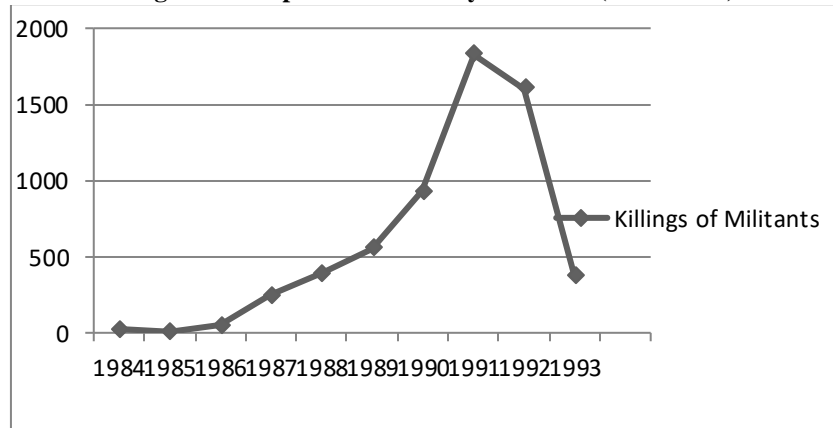


Source: Daily Ajit Newspaper (1978-1993)

Analysis of the nature of violence of the militants exposes a new finding that the majority of those killed by Sikh militants were Sikh civilians. More than half of the persons killed by the militants were ordinary Sikh civilians who were not formal office-holders of any political party and were not part of any formal counter-insurgency squad. This finding also challenges the perception that the Sikh militants exercised violence largely against Hindus in Punjab. Another perceptible fact that arises here is that of the total number of killings of police and security forces personnel, 66 per cent were the personnel of the Punjab Police. The militants killed a large number of police officials during attacks at their homes, and in several cases, even family members of police officials were murdered. The militants for a number of reasons murdered political leaders, mostly belonging to the lower cadres. Firstly, those political leaders who were more vigorous opponents of the aims and/or the methods of the militants were murdered. Secondly, a number of lower level leaders including the *Sarpanches* (elected heads of village assembly) and *Panches* (elected members of village assembly) affiliated to the Congress Party were killed. Again, many were murdered because they were suspected of informing the police about the whereabouts of the militants. In a number of cases, political leaders were killed by the militants just to increase the extent of their terror in the region.

Phases of Violence Committed by the State Security Forces

The year-wise graph of reported incidents of killings of militants by the police depicts that the nature and patterns of violence used by the police and the central security forces changed due to the changing dynamics of the political scenarios at the levels of the central and the state governments. The changing nature of violence by the security forces during the whole period of militancy can be classified into three categories: 'violence as deterrent' (1984-1986), 'violence as an evolving counter-insurgency policy' (1987-1990) and, 'violence as a concerted counter-insurgency policy' (1991-1993). The abovementioned classifications of violence by the state have been constructed while observing and analyzing the changing patterns of violence by the police/security forces exposed in the graph given below.

Figure 3. Graph of Violence by the State (1984-1993)

Source: Daily Ajit Newspaper (1984-1993)

Violence as Deterrent (1984-1986)

After Operation Blue Star, Operation Woodrose was launched in the same year, 1984, to tackle the antagonism of the Sikhs against the government by arresting and detaining suspected militants. But that operation did not dampen the resentment among Sikhs. A number of already active militant outfits started their aggression through violent activities. Both the state government of Surjit Singh Barnala and the central government of Rajiv Gandhi did not anticipate that these acts of shootings and bomb blasts would be the beginning of mass violence which would lead to a prolonged movement of militancy. Hence, the local Punjab Police was assigned the responsibility to tackle and curb the violence by militants in a very routine manner, even though that police force did not have any previous experience of tackling insurgencies. Although the TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) was enforced in the state in 1985, the vast majority of militants arrested under the TADA were acquitted by the courts (Vinayak, 2013, 445). The state government was unexpectedly unaggressive towards the militants, and violence was used by the state only as deterrence. In the Barnala government, there were a number of ministers and a large number of legislators who implicitly or explicitly were supportive of the militants. For instance, Barnala was appreciated by the national media for a brief, largely non-violent and successful operation to remove the extremists and militants from the Golden Temple complex. But influential leaders of Akali Dal (Longowal) criticized Barnala for his action against the militants. As a result, Parkash Singh Badal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Captain Amarinder Singh, along with 27 legislators of the state assembly left the Akali Dal (Longowal) and formed a new Akali Dal (Badal). Possibly, the Barnala government was inherently soft towards the militants, even as they used and justified violence. Another reason for the Barnala regime not being severe towards the militants was the probable threat of losing the support of Sikhs, as the community had

compassionate sentiments for the militants during that time period. Therefore, in those circumstances, violence was used only as a deterrent by the state. There were several incidents of killings of militants in encounters. There were reports of arresting and interrogating militants. But, there were no massive allegations of faked encounters, custodial deaths and other forms of extra-judicial killings made by the media, civil society or opposing Akali factions.

Violence as an Evolving Counter-Insurgency Policy (1987-1990)

In 1986, the militants' siege of the Golden Temple complex, gathering of *Sarbat Khalsa*, passing of *Gurmata* for 'freedom of Sikhs from India' and their vigorous control over the religious and political bodies of the Sikhs caused panic in the central and the state governments. Moreover, there was a noticeable increase in incidents where militants were indiscriminately killing civilians, local politicians and police officials. The paralyzing law and order situation traumatized both the state as well central governments. The central government under the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi pressured Surjit Singh Barnala to take solid steps to control the violence by militants in Punjab. The worried Barnala demanded that the central government deploy the Central Security Forces to tackle the militants. Militancy was now viewed as a challenge to the peace, harmony and integrity of the nation. Therefore, a firm policy to curb the problem was chalked out. Under that policy, two strategies were structured, i.e., 'immediate action strategy' and 'long-term strategy.' Under the 'immediate action' strategy, the Golden Temple complex was regained from the militants and extremists through Operation Black Thunder. While implementing the 'long-term' strategy, a well-known officer of the Indian Police Service, Julio Francis Ribeiro, who had considerable experience of tackling communal violence, was deployed as the Director General of Police in Punjab. In addition to that, Siddhartha Shankar Ray, who had deployed a strong approach against Naxalite ('Maoist') militants in North East India, was appointed as the Governor of Punjab. Soon after their deployment in Punjab, Barnala's government was dismissed and President's Rule was established in the state. Ribeiro, with the consent of Ray, adopted the policy of diminishing violence through violence. Thus, violence was no more a tool of deterrence but a firm policy of counter-insurgency operations of the state. As a result of the 'bullet for bullet' counter-insurgency policy (Ribeiro 1998), there were reportedly numerous incidents of illegal arrests, unlawful detentions, custodial deaths and faked encounters. KPS Gill, who had been functioning under Ribeiro as the additional DGP in Punjab, replaced Ribeiro as the DGP in 1987. KPS Gill was more vigorous in combating militancy while responding more severely to the violence by the militants. Therefore, the graph of violence by state substantially increased from 1987 to 1990. Notably, during the initial years of his deployment, KPS Gill followed and further pursued the same policy of deliberative use of violence as counter-insurgency policy. Consequently, there was a further increase in cases of state violence.

Violence as a Concerted Counter-Insurgency Policy (1991-1993)

The National Front government formed in 1989 was a coalition of several parties and hence it was unstable, weak, and reluctant to take firm decisions required to solidify the counter-militancy operations in Punjab. Therefore, during the regime of VP Singh and Chandra Shekhar, the police and the central security forces in Punjab pursued the previous strategy of 'deliberate use of violence' to curb violence by militants. As a result, there was a notable increase in incidents of killings of militants by the security forces. The militants reacted by intensifying their acts of violence and killings, despite retreating.

However, the Congress government at the Centre under the Prime Ministership of PV Narsimha Rao in 1991 insisted that the managers of counter-militancy operations in Punjab be more firm and take more severe action against the militants. As a result, Operation Rakshak II was launched which resulted in a huge influx of central security forces to the state. Further, since a Congress government came to power in the state in 1992, with Beant Singh becoming the Chief Minister, the police and security forces were compelled to adopt more effective measures to eradicate militancy. KPS Gill, who was in charge of state's counter-insurgency policy, now realized that the 'bullet for bullet' strategy, as launched by Ribeiro and earlier followed by him was not going to work. He probably understood that the sympathy and support provided to the militants by the Sikh masses had resulted in the 'automatic resurgence' of militancy.

KPS Gill did not pursue the previous strategy of defeating the militants only by tracing and arresting them or killing them in sudden encounters any longer. Instead, he decided to break the chain of the support of militancy and eliminate the supporters of militancy more vigorously. He deliberately formulated an illegitimate strategy against the militants despite being an IPS officer and the DGP, and obviously knowing the nature and consequences of such a course of action. He utilized the assistance of loyal police officials to execute his bold and unlawful strategy. To uplift the morale and confidence of the police officials to follow his strategy, he glorified the counter-militancy operations of the police as a patriotic war. This included offering rewards to police personnel, in terms of promotions, for killing militants. In addition to departmental promotions, financial rewards were also given to police personnel for killing militants and to informers for disclosing the whereabouts of militants (Mahadevan, 2007, 7). India's central government created a special fund to finance Punjab's death squads, to pay the network of informants who provided information about militants and those suspected of supporting militants, and to reward police officials who captured and/or killed them (Gossman, 2002). As per the estimates, the annual outlay of the unaccounted financial rewards given to the police personnel by the police department was Rupees 11.3 million (Sandhu, 1992, 238). This policy not only provided impunity to the police but also cumulated in a squad of mercenary police personnel.

During that time period, there was an enormous increase in the incidents of extra-judicial killings of militants and young men suspected to be associated with the militants. There were abundant cases of forced disappearances of youth

who were arrested by the police as suspected militants. The police would vigorously deny these arrests and detentions when family members of these youth sought information about them. These persons were never legally prosecuted and they never returned to their families (Amnesty International 1991; Human Rights Watch 2007). The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India, while adjudicating the cases of 'Punjab Mass Cremations' has verified executions carried out as part of that vicious counter-insurgency policy by the police and security forces in Punjab. On the basis of the investigation of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) of India, the NHRC found that in more than 1200 cases, persons disappeared after their arrests were cremated as 'unidentified' in the three cremation grounds of Amritsar district, after being killed in an unlawful manner (Ensaaf, 2007). Most of the cases of forced disappearances and mass cremations happened from 1991 to 1992.

Further, to destroy the image of militants among their supporters, a new strategy of 'pseudo terrorists' was practiced. Under that strategy, police personnel, masquerading as militants, were trained and eventually dispatched in the areas prone to the militancy as 'pseudo militants'. Their task was to carry out massacres of innocent people and execute other activities displaying vicious violence (Mahadevan, 2007). The objective was to tarnish the image of the militants and consequently shatter their support base. Reportedly, the 'pseudo-militants' were sent to the households of the supporters of the militants. Acts to humiliate the female members of the households and other acts of disrespect executed by these 'pseudo militants', trained and planted by the security forces provoked bitterness among the supporters of militancy against the real militants.²⁰ In addition to the policy of slandering the image of militants, all unrelated crimes, including the killings, lootings, rapes etc. were deliberately reported and disseminated through the print and audio-visual media as committed by the militants (Mahadevan, 2011).

The security forces in general and the Punjab Police in particular, were more efficiently equipped with advanced weapons, bulletproof vehicles (jeeps, trucks, tractors) and firm strategic support to repress the militants. Reportedly, there were numerous cases of faked encounters, custodial deaths, enforced disappearances and other forms of extra-judicial killings of militants, suspected militants, their supporters and associates. Eventually, the state authorities officially declared in late 1993 that the militancy had been crushed in the state. However, even during 1994-95, there were still numerous cases of extra-judicial killings of persons suspected of being militants. In addition, journalists and human rights activists were being arrested, tortured and killed as a policy of throttling the voices demanding thorough investigations and justice for the victims of the violence executed by the state while implementing its counter-insurgency policy.

Concluding Observations

Several important conclusions emerge from this study of the changing patterns and dynamics of violence in Punjab from 1978 to 1993. First, there is a general

misperception that insurgency and militancy emerged simply with Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the religious-political arena of the state. But a thorough analysis of the political happenings from the period of 1978 to 1984 (the period of religious-political dominance of Bhindranwale) establishes that Giani Zail Singh, through his shrewd and self-centered political activities deliberately provided space to Bhindranwale to emerge as a significant political figure. Obviously, the motive was to destabilize the government of Darbara Singh, Zail Singh's nemesis and factional rival in Punjab. Even for Indira Gandhi, the rising religious-political influence of Sant Bhindranwale proved useful in dividing and confusing the support tendered to the 'agitational' politics of the Akalis by the Sikh masses. Further, several miscalculated political strides taken by the Akali leaders allowed Bhindranwale to hijack the peaceful and secular agitation of the Akalis for the legitimate demands of the state of Punjab and convert it into a 'communal war' between the Sikhs and the Central government. If both the Congress as well as the Akalis, had anticipated that the stalwart image of Bhindranwale, crafted by him while strategically exercising violence as a broad political statement for immediate effect, could result in the rise of a vicious movement for militancy, the violence could probably have been avoided. Above all, violence by the extremists from 1978 to 1983, or during the Bhindranwale era, can be identified as organized, selective but cumulative violence.

Second, the central government can be established as equally responsible for the emergence and intensification of insurgency and violence in the state during and after 1984. Indira Gandhi, in her capacity as Prime Minister, totally rejected even the legitimate demands of the Akalis. This minimized the political influence of the Akalis among the Sikhs. The gap created by the shrinking influence of the Akalis as the Sikh community's main leadership provided an opportunity to the extremists, including Bhindranwale, to emerge as the 'warrior' leader of the Sikhs. Further, when the democratically elected Akali government was proving to be proficient in countering the militancy, Rajiv Gandhi dismissed the democratic government and imposed President's Rule in the state. The thorough and micro-level analysis of the incidents of violence in the state reveals that during President's Rule (1987 to 1991), the violence by the militants further intensified. However, during the democratic regime of the Akalis under the Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala, the magnitude of violence by the militants was much less. Moreover, militancy intensified during President's Rule and was eventually crushed during the regime of an elected government, though the 'democratic character' of that regime has been questioned.

Third, violence executed by the Sikh extremists immediately after Operation Blue Star was more in the nature of spontaneous violence. It can be explained as reactionary or 'retaliative' in nature. Moreover, as is typical of compensatory violence, the violence was beginning to be pacified during late 1985, after the Sikh extremists realized that the disrespect articulated towards the Golden Temple by Indira Gandhi was, in a sense, repaid with her assassination. The resentment was also neutralized by the Sikh extremists through violence against police officials, Congress leaders and civilians. Punjab could have escaped from further violence by insurgents as well as the state, if the Akalis, while exercising

their political authority while being in power and utilizing their religious-institutional influence while controlling the SGPC, had not given the opportunity to the extremists in 1986 to capture the Golden Temple(and other famous gurdwaras for basing militant activities.

Fourth, this study challenges another perception regarding the militancy - that it was a sectarian movement launched by the Sikhs for the attainment of the 'Sikh Homeland' and hence, the most vulnerable and frequent targets for the militants were the Hindus. The present study raises a primary but relevant concern that if the main objective of the militants' movement was to attain Khalistan, i.e. separate, sovereign state for the Sikhs, the most immediate and vigilant enemies of the militants would be those who vigorously opposed that aim as well as the methods of the militants. It further means that militants largely killed those persons who were against the objective and means of the militants. The statistical data exposing the nature of killings by the militants reveal that the Sikh militants largely murdered Sikh civilians. This implies that the common Sikh masses, who opposed and countered the aim and the means of the militants and earned their most frequent and most brutal hostility, were the main opponents of the Sikh militants.

Fifth, violence is generally perceived as profane and illegitimate, but both the militants and the state tried to justify their use of violence to the community and nation. In essence, the militants as well as the state made every effort to convince the common masses to grant legitimacy to the violence generated by them. The militants not only asserted violence as the 'last and lone method' but a 'sacred device' to stand against injustice and to achieve the sacred cause of *Raj Karega Khalsa* (Khalsa would Rule). But the illusion created by the militants to proclaim violence as a 'sacred device' did not last for long and very soon the common Sikhs disowned the militants' violence. On the other side, the state attempted to create an illusion that violence exercised by the state through the police and security forces was only 'reactionary' and 'unavoidable.' Efforts were made to brand state-violence as 'patriotic violence,' unavoidably used to save the nation from the risk of disintegration. But the common masses of the state did not support the violence executed by the state. This attitude of the masses of Punjab disowning state violence is evident in a number of facts. There was emergence of a human rights movement against the brutal acts of violation committed by the state. The human rights organizations which emerged during the counter-militancy era (from 1985 to 1993) and post militancy era (1993 onwards) were comprised of academicians, judges, lawyers and even the communists, who were always vigorous opponents of militancy but raised their voices against the violent, unlawful and inhuman counter-militancy policies of the state. Further, the masses boycotted the assembly elections of 1992, which can be explained as reflecting their alienation from the state. Though, the Congress Party under the Chief Ministership of Beant Singh, completed its tenure of five years from 1992 to 1997, the efforts of the Congress cadre to establish their Party as the 'savior of Punjab' by pulling the state out of the dark era of militancy and attempts to proclaim Beant Singh as the 'great martyr sacrificing his life for the cause of peace' did not work. On the contrary, the

people of Punjab, through their electoral mandate in the assembly elections of 1997, demonstrated that they disagreed with and disowned the indiscriminate, illegitimate and unlawful use of violence exercised by the Congress regime to counter the militancy. Hence, it can be said that violence executed by both the militants and the state, was considered as equally vicious and destructive by the common masses despite the justifications given by the militants as well as the state. The reason was that violence, from whatsoever channel it was generated, resulted in the gross violation of human rights.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study defies the established belief that militancy was crushed by the state through its police and security forces with the concise and energetic use of coercive force. Rather, the study exposes that the credit for the elimination of the militancy should be given to the common masses, especially the rural Sikh masses, who eventually disowned the 'gratuitous' violence exercised by the militants. The state had failed badly to tackle the militants when the militants were recognized as 'sacred warriors' by the Sikh masses. But later, there were increasing reported incidents of looting, indiscriminate shootings, and the unreasoned killing of innocent people. Moreover, the Sikh militants killed mostly Sikh civilians. These incidents reportedly committed by terrorists explicitly depicted 'criminal violence' in the camouflage of 'political violence'. Neither the religious philosophy nor the historical practice of Sikhism has any place for approving and endorsing these types of violent acts against humanity. These circumstances constrained the common Sikh masses to reserve their support that was earlier granted to the militants. Undoubtedly, the political-diplomatic calculations of the regimes, political outfits and forces countering the militancy, compelled them to highlight their own cadres as the warriors and heroes of counter-militancy operations. If the common Sikh masses had not withdrawn their support to militants, no force could have been successful in curbing militancy in Punjab.

Notes

¹ Congress (I) indicates was the party formed by Indira Gandhi and her followers, after seceding from the Congress (R) faction following the 1977 elections. After winning elections in 1980, Indira Gandhi assumed the office of the Prime Minister again. At the time, the designation "(I)" was dropped and Congress (I) was declared to be the Indian National Congress for 1984 general election by the national election commission.

² Statistical Report on General Elections, 1977 to the State Legislative Assembly of Punjab, Elections Commission of India, 1977.

³ Daily Ajit, 3 June, 1981.

⁴ Daily Ajit, 3 July, 1981.

⁵ Daily Ajit, 30 October, 1981.

⁶ The Tribune, 30 April, 1980.

⁷ Daily Ajit, 10 September, 1981.

⁸ Daily Ajit, 8 October, 1981.

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- ⁹ Daily Ajit, 10 October, 1981.
¹⁰ Daily Ajit, 7-8-11 June, 1982.
¹¹ Daily Ajit, 23 July, 1982.
¹² Daily Ajit, 7 August, 1982.
¹³ Daily Ajit, 24 March, 1983.
¹⁴ Daily Ajit, 8 April, 1983.
¹⁵ Daily Ajit, 25 June, 1983.
¹⁶ Daily Ajit, 7 October, 1983.
¹⁷ Daily Ajit, 8 October, 1983.
¹⁸ Daily Ajit, 30 October, 1981.
¹⁹ The Tribune, 27 January, 1986.
²⁰ Interview of the Author with a Retired Police Personnel in Moga who served in Faridkot, Ferozepore and Moga Districts Punjab.

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