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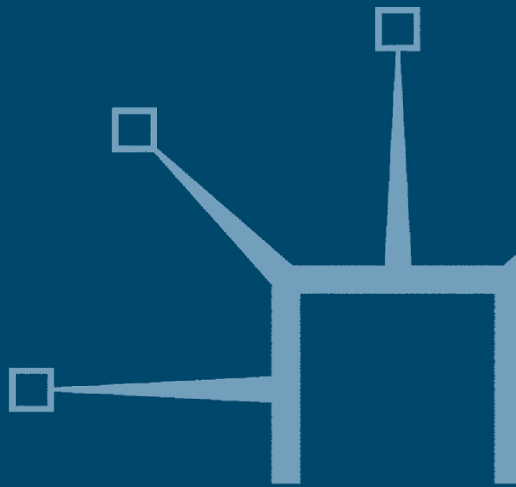
Ethnic Conflict in India

A Case-Study of Punjab

Gurharpal Singh



Ethnic Conflict in India

Also by Gurharpal Singh

REGION AND PARTITION: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent (*editor with Ian Talbot*)

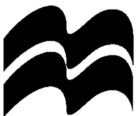
PUNJABI IDENTITY: Continuity and Change (*editor with Ian Talbot*)

COMMUNISM IN PUNJAB: A Study of the Movement up to 1967

Ethnic Conflict in India

A Case-Study of Punjab

Gurharpal Singh
University of Hull



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To Raghu, Sukhmani and Harman

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Preface

This volume brings together essays written between 1987 and 1997. With the exception of Chapters 5, 6 and 12, they have been published as articles in journals. Where appropriate I have taken the opportunity to make minor revisions. Because some of these essays were written concurrently, as self-contained pieces, occasionally an element of overlap remains.

The rationale for this collection is that it deals with common themes of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and its management by the Indian state in the peripheral regions. In a way the essays on the 'Punjab problem' over the last decade have constituted the building-blocks of the volume. The more general chapters are, indeed, late additions and demonstrate a concern to evaluate and contextualize the 'Punjab problem' in a comparative setting.

Despite the dated nature of some of the earlier essays, which obviously reflect my own understanding at the time, I have attempted to base the volume on two main arguments. First, the shortcomings of what I call 'conventional wisdom' – the traditional way of reading ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Indian politics, an outlook that has been reinforced by most post-structural and rational choice approaches which view ethnicity as a form of interest-based identity politics. By drawing on the recent radical reassessments of the Indian state, an alternative approach is developed which suggests that India should be viewed as a *de facto* ethnic democracy in which Hinduism functions as a form of meta-ethnicity. The limits of Indian nationalism, it is argued, are very much 'ethnic' and apparent in the failure of nation-building in the peripheral regions of the union. The politics of ethnicity and ethnic conflict are accordingly strongly influenced by these factors.

Second, with reference specifically to Punjab, but also Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern states, the rise and fall of ethno-nationalist movements is examined within the frameworks of hegemonic and violent control – the outer limits of India's ethnic democracy within which these movements are politically accommodated or physically suppressed. Hegemonic and violent control, it is asserted, are the operational mechanisms for managing peripheral ethno-nationalist movements. And although these mechanisms have,

at times, contributed to the rise of ethno-nationalist resistance since 1947, they have, nonetheless, contained the drives towards separatism.

The essays have been grouped together in four parts. Part I includes four chapters that introduce the discussion on ethnicity and ethnic conflict. Sikh identity and the emergence of ethno-nationalist consciousness is discussed at length in Part 2. The rise of Sikh separatist groups after Operation Blue Star and the efforts to restructure Sikh politics are the subject-matter of Part 3. The final section, Part 4, places the Punjab case-study in a comparative setting and revisits issues raised at the beginning.

In the years in which these essays have been written many individuals and institutions have helped me in my work. In particular I should like to thank Jim Manor and Subrata Mitra, both of whom, incidentally, feature as exemplary targets of my criticism. The staff of *Asian Survey* and *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* provided invaluable assistance in revising the original submissions; David Potter deserves special mention for his good humour and candour. I acknowledge the support of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, for allowing me to host seminars on ethnicity and politics in South Asia, the Political Studies Association (UK), for convening several panels on South Asia, and Chris Shackle and Arvindpal Singh Mandir at the School of Oriental and African Studies for assistance in organizing a major workshop on Sikh identity in 1998. The cheerful and incisive commentaries of Brendan O'Leary and Ian Lustick have ensured that I retained a comparative outlook. Ian Talbot's constant support in revising and refining my arguments has been invaluable.

The arguments made in this volume are unlikely to be received without criticism. As such I emphasize that the work is entirely my own responsibility and none of the individuals mentioned above are in any way accountable for errors of fact or interpretation.

GURHARPAL SINGH
Hull

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Chapter 3: This is a substantial reworking of the argument first made in 'The Punjab Crisis since 1984: a Reassessment', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18:3 (July 1995), 476–93.

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Figure 4.1 is used by permission of Cornell University Press from I.S. Lustick's *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza,* Cornell University Press, New York, 1993, 42.

Abbreviations

AD(A)	Akali Dal (Amritsar)
AD(B)	Akali Dal (Badal)
AD(K)	Akali Dal (Kabul)
AD(L)	Akali Dal (Longowal)
AD(M)	Akali Dal (Mann)
AISSF(M)	All-India Sikh Students' Federation (Manjit)
ASR	Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973) which calls for limiting the union government's powers to communications, defence, currency, and external relations.
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP	Buhajan Samaj Party
Congress	Indian National Congress; Congress (I)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DT	Damdami Taksal
KCF	Khalistan Command Force
KLF	Khalistan Liberation Force
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PLA	Punjab Legislative Assembly
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
SCs	Scheduled Castes
SGPC	Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Committee for managing the affairs of Sikh gurdwaras.
STs	Scheduled Tribes
UAD	United Akali Dal
UniAD	Unified Akali Dal

Glossary

Akal Takht	Building opposite the Harimandir. Seat of supreme temporal authority among Sikhs
amrit-dhari	A baptized Sikh wearing five Ks
Dharam Yud Morcha	The struggle for existence
Hindutva	The promotion of the primacy of Hindu cultural values and ethos
Jat	Agriculturalist caste
Jathedar	Head or head priest
kesh-dhari	Non-baptized Sikhs who keep hair
Khalsa	The pure/Sikh brotherhood
mona	Shaven
Panth	Sikh religious community
Sarbat Khalsa	Representative assembly of the Khalsa
sahaj-dharis	A Sikh who believes in the teaching of the Gurus but does not wear the five Ks

Part 1

Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Indian Politics

Introduction

The four chapters in this part address the theoretical issues concerning ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Indian politics. All were written between the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in December 1992 and the 50th anniversary of India's independence in August 1997 and, in some measure, reflect a concern with these developments. Against this background a considerable body of literature emerged, much of it largely uncritical of the macro-ethnic conflicts in Indian politics or, unwittingly, as in the case of post-structuralist and rational choice accounts, appeared as an apologia for the status quo. In sharp contrast, the arguments made in these chapters, when taken together, offer an alternative reading of ethnic conflict in Indian politics.

Chapter 1 was written in response to a demand from my students for a better understanding of the subject as a result of the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque. The aim was to provide a broad review of the approaches to, and solutions for, contemporary ethnic conflicts. Whilst the chapter rightly emphasized the instrumentalist and primordialist schools of thought, it gave perhaps less significance to the emerging state revisionist school which reflects the indigenous tradition.

Chapter 2 is a review article written in reply to the suggestion made by Mitra[1] that Rational Choice Theory (RCT) has much to offer in evaluating Indian politics, including ethnic conflicts. In developing a critique of RCT, the key elements of our approach are identified – 'the messy centre', the limitations of RCT in explaining nation and state-building in the peripheral regions, and the need to have historically grounded explanations.

These elements are further developed in Chapter 3. Issues that are tentatively probed in Chapters 1 and 2, such as state secularism, are directly interrogated. Challenging the conventional views about the

reading of ethnicity in Indian politics, this chapter argues that the Indian experience since 1947 in managing ethnic conflicts is not unique. Rather between the core and peripheral regions of the Indian union there exists a sharp divide accentuated by the difficulties of nation and state-building in the latter regions. To appreciate this division it is suggested that India should be viewed as a *de facto* ethnic democracy where hegemonic and violent control is exercised over minorities, especially in the peripheral regions.

The argument made in Chapter 3 is illustrated by a reassessment of the partition of India and the existence of ethno-nationalist movement with separatist claims in the border regions of India and Pakistan. Drawing on the work of Lustick,[2] Chapter 4 calls for a re-evaluation of the partition as calculated state contraction which created a configuration of borders that benefited the Congress. The 'disputed lands' which the partition and decolonization created have become fertile grounds for separatist movements which show a remarkable resistance to being institutionalized into the Indian political system. The structures of 'accommodation' which have been developed to placate these movements have been regularly disarticulated, progressively diminishing the Indian state's capacity to restructure the politics of peripheral regions.

Notes

1. S.K. Mitra, 'What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict?', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 3:1 (1996), 75–92.
2. I.S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and West Bank-Gaza* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

1 Perspectives on Ethnic Conflict in Indian Politics

Few images have better portrayed Indian society as beset by ethnic conflict as the physical destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodyha in December 1992. The violence which accompanied the destruction drew parallels with the partition of India. Although these events were quite dramatic, their symbolism disguises an obvious fact: that Indian politics, since the early 1980s, have become increasingly besieged by ethnic conflicts which range from 'civil wars' in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Assam to major discontent in the Hindi heartland. Non-territorial forms of ethnic mobilization, for or against affirmative action, have also been prominent. In brief, India like most multinational states, is experiencing an ethnic revival and the future of Indian democracy, in the short and medium terms, seems largely contingent on its ability to manage, contain and, if possible, resolve these conflicts.

This chapter reviews the main perspectives in the understanding of contemporary ethnic conflicts in Indian politics. Broadly they fall into three schools of thought: instrumentalist, primordialist and state-revisionist.[1]

Instrumentalism

In contrast to popular images of India as an ethnically conflict-ridden society, there is a remarkable degree of official and academic consensus that ethnicity in Indian politics is best understood in instrumental terms.[2] Instrumentalists maintain that ethnic identities in India are not cultural givens but have been shaped and reshaped on a regular basis. Ethnicity, for instrumentalists, 'is an exercise in boundary maintenance requiring a praxis: ethnic identity and group

boundaries may be defended, penetrated or ignored depending upon situational exigencies'.[3] According to some, the conditions of Indian political life ensure the regular success of this exercise; for others, it is at least partially qualified by the 'pool of symbols', or the level of political organization available to an ethnic group.[4] Emphasis of difference apart, the underlying approach to ethnicity, as relatively malleable, is accepted by both orientations and underscored by their analyses of Indian politics.

The instrumentalists school characterizes Indian politics in terms of group pluralism. The state is seen as an arena for group conflicts where no single group predominates.[5] Ethnically, India is said to comprise a 'relatively even gradation of groups in importance, from several large ones ... with no sharp cut-off points'.[6] This view has led some instrumentalists to conclude that 'ethnic configuration in terms of politically dominant and subordinate groups at the central level becomes virtually impossible'. The same, however, does not always pertain at the provincial level where the 'dominance of the centre may not always be spelt out in ethnic terms (but) the group perceiving itself discriminated against and subordinated may project its demands *vis-à-vis* the centre in ethnic terms'.[7]

Group pluralism has also been sustained by ethnic segmentation. India has ordinarily been described as a segmented society in 'which each language, tribal, or religious group contains within itself a complete societal division of labour and ... internal caste groups which may or may not be successfully integrated into the broader ethnic structure'.[8] Segmentation has two consequences for politics. First, it encourages the vertical articulation of ethnicity, thereby facilitating elite autonomy for ethnic coalition building. The ability of elites to select symbols of ethnicity at critical junctures in order to reconstruct ethnic identities has been identified as a key factor in shaping ethnic boundaries. At the same time segmentation is often cut across by caste and other loyalties which enable the state (and other ethnic groups) to compete for ethnic ties.

The instrumentalist perspective is further supported by the relative absence of cumulative cleavages reinforcing ethnicity. India, instrumentalists insist, is the most ethnically diverse society in the world. The complex stratification of caste unique to it is overlaid with equally complex identities of language, religion and region which straddle imprecise geographical boundaries. These cross-cutting cleavages, according to instrumentalists, dilute the force of ethnicity and frustrate the emergence of cumulative cleavages.[9] Even in cases where there

appears to be *prima facie* evidence of cumulative cleavages (for example, Sikhs in Punjab), experience suggests that ethnic groups systematically emphasize the most politically effective dimension of ethnicity, one capable of bringing the other cleavages into line.[10]

Instrumentalist interpretations highlight the policies of the Indian state on ethnic issues since 1947. In dealing with ethnicity, it is suggested, the India state has very much been influenced by an analytical distinction between benign and malign forms.[11] The benign view has included its legitimate recognition within the framework of a democratic, secular and federal political system committed to a socially democratic philosophy. The Congress's commitment to the linguistic reorganization of India's provinces pre-dates independence. Most states, with the exception of Punjab, were linguistically reorganized by 1965. Although substantial linguistic minorities persisted after reorganization, further division of existing states was avoided.[12]

In addition to linguistic recognition of ethnicity, the constitution empowered the executive to institute forms of affirmative action for disadvantaged groups. Articles 15(4) and 335 of the constitution allow the union government to make affirmative action provisions in the field of public sector employment and political representation in legislative assemblies. These articles were the result of the Congress's social policy and the pre-independence compromise in which the leadership of the untouchable castes agreed to forgo separate electorates under the colonial constitution for political reservation after independence. Since 1950, this provision has been extended to Schedule Castes (SCs) and Schedule Tribes (STs). At the provincial level, some state governments have increased the range of affirmative action to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The National Front government's decision in 1990 to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission – that affirmative action provision in employment be extended to OBCs who constitute approximately 50 per cent of the total population – led to a nationwide agitation by the SCs and OBCs and those opposed to the increase in affirmative action quotas.[13]

Against the benign view of ethnicity the Indian state has most emphatically opposed its allegedly malign forms. Regional movements that have demanded secession from the Indian union have been outlawed. A constitutional amendment introduced in 1963 empowers the Government of India to suppress secessionist demands by force. This outlook has been most apparent against the secessionist movements in the north-eastern states of Nagaland and Assam and, more recently, in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. Political organizations and militant

groups campaigning for the independent states of Kashmir and Khalistan are proscribed. In the case of these two states, the suppression of secessionist movements since the 1980s has resulted in almost 50 000 fatalities.[14] All national governments have avoided negotiations with militant secessionists unless they are first prepared to accept the legitimacy of the Indian union and to join the 'mainstream'.

Similarly, religiously based movements that lay claim to political recognition have also been opposed by union governments. The rationale for this is to be found in the 'secular' foundations of the Indian union and its birth amidst the religious violence of the partition. Although the Indian form of secularism is peculiar, based on *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (equal treatment of all religions), in practice, instrumentalists have insisted, it is equivalent to the European tradition. The logic of this policy has been to oppose religious movements which have sought the fulfilment of political demands under the cover of 'accepted currency' – linguistic, cultural and territorial demands. Thus after partition, the campaign for a Punjabi-speaking province, led by the Sikh political party, Akali Dal, was firmly resisted by Nehru on the grounds that it was really a movement for a political recognition of a religious demand. The Punjabi-speaking province, instrumentalists insist, was created in 1966 only after the Akali Dal reframed its proposal in *linguistic* rather than *religious* terms.[15]

The Indian state, instrumentalists further maintain, has been prepared to negotiate with ethnic groups in conflict provided they have genuine mass support. Political concessions have rarely been conceded on capricious grounds. Mass mobilization of support is often a trigger for the process of negotiations to begin, but agreement of ethnic groups in conflict, however (for example, over linguistic reorganization), is held to be a prerequisite of recognition of legitimate demands.[16]

The distinction between benign and malign ethnicity, according to instrumentalists, was clearly maintained and followed during Nehru's leadership of the Congress (1946–64). Nehru is credited with having created the 'Congress System' – a dominant one-party system in which the Congress combined political development with political competition by pursuing a socialist ideology, secular leadership, and nurturing autonomy for state units. The 'Congress System' incorporated elements of both 'domination' as well as 'dissent' and, in some ethnically plural states, like Punjab, the Congress often resembled an intra-consociational coalition, vertically organized to accommodate hostile ethnic groups. The political appeal of the Congress, universal suffrage, and structural differentiation within most ethnic groups introduced corrosive political

participation which, in time it was hoped, would temper malign forms of ethnic cohesion. In the most celebrated test case, the formation of a Punjabi-speaking state, Nehru and his supporters were able to steer the original movement away from religious ethno-nationalism towards linguistic regionalism.[17]

The election in 1965 of Mrs Gandhi to Congress leadership, most instrumentalists agree, undermined the 'Congress System' and the Nehruvian guidelines for ethnic conflict management. Mrs Gandhi, in her quest for absolute control, first destroyed the 'Congress System' and, in subsequently projecting herself as a plebiscitary leader, centralized power in New Delhi. The Emergency (1975–77) presaged the dénouement that was to follow after her return to power in 1980 when the distinction between benign and malign ethnicity was blurred. In fact the traditional relationship that the Congress had enjoyed with minorities was broken. Towards the end of her last administration, Mrs Gandhi deliberately courted Hindu revivalism as a new hegemonizing ideology for the Congress. In a political Machiavellianism of the first order, Mrs Gandhi, it is alleged, first inflamed passions among the ethnic minorities and then crushed them with overwhelming force.[18]

Nor did the succession of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 mark a departure in policy. After promising a return to Nehruvian guidelines, Rajiv soon resorted to the tried methods of his mother. Rajiv's replacement by the National Front coalition (1989–91) and the Rao Congress government (1991–96) also implicity placated Hindu revivalism while simultaneously promoting hyper-instrumentalism among the peripheral ethnic movements in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam and Punjab.[19] The one Nehruvian guideline on which most national political parties concurred and, indeed emphasized, was that secessionist movements, particularly led by minority ethnic groups in India's peripheral states, should be suppressed by force whatever the consequences. It remains to be seen whether in the post-Ayodyha period the rhetoric of secularism will mark a fundamental reassessment of policy or simply disguises a statecraft of crisis management.

Most instrumentalists' accounts emphasize the primacy of political factors in understanding ethnic conflict in India, but some acknowledge the significance of social change as a contributory cause. A selected application of strain theory version of modernization theory has been used to highlight the emergence of mass society. This approach has maintained that in some regions, for example northern India, there is already the appearance of mass society in which rural

communities have disintegrated and have been displaced by dislocating urbanism, consumerism and heightened expectations. In these conditions, old and new ethnic identities have provided firm anchorage for the rootless, unemployed, the new proletarians and the petite bourgeoisie. Simultaneously, the development of the modern media – TV, radio, new information technologies – has produced a revolution in political communications.[20]

Modernization strains, it is suggested, are creating a 'new India' – an India that is speaking to itself in a vernacular idiom in the process of undergoing rapid economic, social and communications transformations. In this change, modernization strains are finding natural tributaries in religious, regional, caste and tribal identities. But if modernization is transforming and redefining these identities by politicizing them, the outcome is as much the consequence of political choice as of social change. Although new opportunities have emerged for ethnic political entrepreneurs, there is no reason why this should lead to ethnic conflict. Responsible political leadership at the union level together with new political institutions could accommodate and better regulate the debilitating political consequences of rapid social change.[21]

Instrumentalist solutions for managing contemporary ethnic conflicts thus privilege the reconstruction of political ideals and structures that were relatively 'successful' in the Nehruvian period. Foremost among these is the demand for reaffirmation of the distinction between benign and malign ethnicity. Legitimate ethnic demands, whether territorial or group based, it is suggested, ought to be recognized. Many of these demands had arisen in response to the centralizing pressures produced by Mrs Gandhi's governments. A key feature of territorially based ethnic movements (Punjab, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir) is for a reworking of the union–state relations in favour of the latter. A revision of this kind could accommodate most of the political thrust of peripheral and heartland movements. Mrs Gandhi and her successors' failure to address the legitimate concerns of regional ethnic movements, it is claimed, emboldened some of them to eschew reformed federalism for confederalism or outright secession.

In extending the argument that competitive political democracy is the ultimate antidote to ethnic cohesion, a key demand of instrumentalists is for democratic regeneration, an Indian equivalent of *glasnost*. Democracy, it is argued, has been a powerful factor in limiting the intensity of ethnic conflicts in India. The increasing application of political closure in the peripheral regions, however, has encouraged primordialist tendencies by seriously limiting the political space for manoeuvre for regional

movements.[22] But the instrumentalist case for democratic regeneration goes beyond mere centre–state relations to calls for extending participation and involvement at the state, district, and local levels. Nehruvian democracy, it is alleged, was founded on the developmentalist model with the Congress as an 'Aristotelian party' guiding and nurturing the growth of a participatory political system. After Nehru, the elitist foundations of this settlement were corrupted in the drive towards centralization. What is required therefore is a profound reformulation of state structures as a basis of a new democratic regeneration.[23] Finally, the instrumentalist perspective also highlights the need to democratize and regenerate political institutions, especially political parties. Many scholars have commented on the decay and degeneration of the Nehruvian Congress. Opinions differ as to whether a centrist and accommodationist Nehruvian Congress can be re-created or a new consociational order may emerge from the pillarization of the party. Both views, nonetheless, concur that political parties ought to better reflect social change and accommodate new political movements (ecological, feminist, peasant-based) that have posed a challenge to established parties and whose support-base cuts across ethnic lines.[24]

Primordialism

Primordialists view the significance of ethnicity in Indian politics in its continued salience. For this school of thought

> every person carries with him through his life 'attachments' derived from places of birth, kinship, relationships, religion, language, and social practices that are 'natural' for him, 'spiritual' in character, and provide the basis for an easy 'affinity' with other people from the same background. These 'attachments' constitute the 'givens' of human condition and are 'rooted in the non-rational foundations of personality'.[25]

In India the variety and complexity of 'attachments', it is maintained, has proved an enduring source of political affiliation and mobilization. Some primordialists adopt the extreme perspective, that ethnic identities are 'immutable'; others recognize the role of political and social factors in influencing the basic components of ethnicity.[26] Both tendencies acknowledge another distinction: namely, the difference between minority and majority communities in India.

The most sophisticated primordialist approaches are to be found in the analyses of India's religious and caste minorities (Muslims, Sikhs, SCs). For example, primordialists contend that Muslims in India are not only a religious minority, but the social, political and historical experience of Muslims makes them a distinct cultural community. Muslim separatism in the past has been misunderstood as a form of interest-based movement, devoid of cultural sense of community as defined by Islam. The Pakistan movement, it has been persuasively argued, was very much actuated by the sense of distinct community which shared a common historical experience and the individuality of Islam. Muslim elites, then and today, were unable to establish politics as an independent realm, an arena separate from religion. They were constrained by the cultural and historical symbols at their disposal, the religious and political ideas of Islam, the determination to defend Muslim interests, and the need to do so in the face of increasingly assertive Hindu revivalism.[27]

In post-independence India, the Muslim sense of being a distinct community has persisted, being sustained by religious, cultural and political institutions. Even allowing for internal gradations among India's Muslims – language, region, sect – there is an overarching identity of interest which is constantly mobilized on issues of communal significance. The Indian state has, furthermore, implicity contributed to this by recognizing the separateness of Muslim personal law. The sequence of events which climaxed in Ayodhya, began in 1986, when in response to a Supreme Court decision that infringed Muslim Personal Law, and led to an outcry among Muslim organizations, Rajiv Gandhi allowed the Ayodhya dispute to be reopened as a *quid pro quo* to appease Hindu communal sentiment.[28] Viewed in this context, the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya was more than just an act of vandalism: it was a confrontation of India's two major primordial nations.[29]

For Sikhism, like Islam, the boundaries between the political and the religious are indeterminate. Religion has been a constant source of mobilization for the Sikh community in the twentieth century despite its minority status, internal factionalism, and the absence of structure elite predominance. Primordialist readings of Sikh politics and religion have highlighted the apparent disjunction between Sikh ideals and the realities of Sikh politics[30] – a disjunction painfully and forcefully brought home by the military action of the Indian Army during Operation Blue Star. If the Indian state had been particularly adept at managing the Sikh ethnic question through instrumentalist means during the Nehruvian era, Sikh ethnicity, nevertheless, remained 'cool

in the belly' only to re-emerge in its primordial form. Sustained efforts after 1984 to engineer a new instrumentalist settlement encountered extreme opposition until the mid-1990s.

Minority primordialists, moreover, interpret the claims of the Indian state to be secular with a great deal of scepticism. This view is supported by those scholars who argue that the Indian version of secularism is actually derived from M.K. Gandhi's 'translation of nationalist ideals into the vocabulary of neo-Hinduism'.[31] Such a construction served a useful purpose in forging an ideology for the nationalist movement, but it did so by doing extreme violence to the strength of religious loyalties. It also privileges a uniquely Hindu interpretation of truth, one in which all paths and all religions are 'true' and, thereby, 'explicitly rejects the idea that all people can have the same perception of truth, the same understanding of reality'[32] – a precept central to Islam, Christianity and Sikhism.

The need to espouse an anti-religious secularism was obviated, before and after 1947, by the strength of the Congress party. As the dominant party, it became representative of the 'majority as a matter of intellectual habit'.[33] Nationalist leadership overwhelmingly believed that 'Hinduism itself was democratic, tolerant and plural in essences, and therefore lacked communal or fundamentalist potential'.[34] Conversely, other religions, especially Islam, was frequently castigated for its 'separatist' tendencies. Indeed,

> The Congress did not need to adopt the slogan of Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan in order to come to power…Its vision of democracy and secularism did not include the provision of minority autonomy, or leave room for the accommodation of the language, culture and security of minority groups, which would have necessitated a more genuine federalism.[35]

Demographically and intellectually the Indian construction of secularism introduced what Sen[36] has called a form of asymmetry in the treatment of different religious traditions which cannot be overcome by further accommodation or a form of anti-religious secularism. Instead there is clear need for 'symmetry', an 'overarching concept of being a member of a nation (who are treated with symmetry)'.[37]

The official version of Indian secularism has also been challenged by students of contemporary religious violence.[38] According to some, the rebellion of religious minorities (religious militancy) arise from the false dichotomy between secularism and communalism which informs

the policy of the Indian state. These two phenomena are not opposites but are intimately related because of the subterfuge of a majoritarian secularism and the insidious contrast between 'communalism' and 'secular nationalism'.[39] It is true, of course, that behind the rise of much of religious militancy in India lurks the clash of alternative 'utopias', yet such militancy also reflects the actions of an unresponsive, authoritarian state to genuine political problems of minorities seeking collective cultural or political rights.[40] That these rights are denied to religious minorities is due mainly to the mistaken secularist construction of Indian nationhood which has led to 'subjugation by force of (minority religious) identities'.[41] Only a radical change in the nature of the state can accommodate these identities. In the absence of such change, these identities often legitimize religious violence as well as revolt against the existing state.[42]

Minority primordialist constructions of Indian secularism contrast sharply with majority primordialist interpretations. The latter have been given a fillip with the growth of the BJP and rise of Hindutva (the promotion of the primacy of Hindu cultural values and ethos) forces in the 1980s and 1990s. Most recently, the BJP came to power in New Delhi (March 1998), forming a coalition of 17 regional parties.

The BJP and its associated organizations draw their inspiration from a less ambiguous notion of nationhood and secularism than that identified with M.K. Gandhi. For them, Hinduism by virtue of being the main cultural force in Indian society, constitutes the natural material for nationhood and statehood. The BJP is formally committed to establishing a Hindu *Rashtra* (state) that would replace what it calls Nehruvian 'pseudo-secularism' – pseudo-secular because it professes western secularism for the majority Hindu community while consolidating minority religious identities like the Muslims and Sikhs. Genuine secularism, according to the BJP, would avoid the western ideal and assert the primacy of Hinduism – a common shared 'secular' value of all Indians – in which 'all would be Hindus, whether Arya Samajist, Santana Dharmics, Mohammedans, Hindus or Issa Hindus'. The destruction of the Babri Masjid was the start of this project because it was a 'symbol of Hindu defeat and foreign domination' and therefore 'had to be wiped out'.[43]

Majority primordialist accounts of the establishment of Indian secularism range from the elitists' charisma of Nehru to conspiratorial. The leadership of Nehru, it is claimed, forced through secular issues more through the influence of personality than a reflection of popular public opinion, either in or outside the Congress.[44] In fact even within

the Congress and its 'pseudo-secularism' the voice of Hindutva was a consociational pillar which, while not hegemonic, was a powerful actor that was recognized by Nehru and his successors.[45] With the post-Mrs Gandhi decay of the Congress, the ideological space opened up for Hindu revivalism. The demise of the Congress has been coincidental with the rise of the BJP.[46]

Minority and majority primordialist analyses advance relatively similar solutions for managing contemporary ethnic conflicts. Territorially based minorities have led the calls for either greater autonomy or complete separatism. Many view separatism as a necessary condition for the defence of religious, cultural or linguistic individuality threatened by a resurgent Hinduism waging a *Kulturkamp* against distinctive minorities. This defensive reaction, increasingly seen as a war between cultures, is often associated with perceived constitutional, economic, social and religious discrimination.[47] And if the strength of minority separatism derives from seemingly 'atavistic' ethnies, their project is essentially modern: to create symmetry between cultural and political units.[48]

Majority primordialist analysts also call for the need to abandon India's 'pseudo-secularism' for the full integration and assimilation of India's religious minorities into the Hindu cultural mainstream. The BJP, for example, is the most vociferous opponent of Article 370 of the Indian constitution which grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Its solution to the Kashmir question is to integrate Kashmir into the Indian union, both politically and culturally. The same remedies are offered for the discontent of other minorities. Group rights guaranteed by the constitution, Muslim Personal Law and affirmative action programmes for the SCs and STs, BJP ideologues insist, should be removed because of the imperative of nation building and cultural homogeneity. Where ethnic group boundaries between Hindus and non-Hindus are unclear, as in the case of the Sikhs, the call is for emotional empathy with such groups coupled with systematic integration into the Hindu fold.[49]

The programme of majority primordialists is directed especially at India's Muslims who represent about 12 per cent of the total population. In particular, they would be required to adhere to four conditions: they must '(1) accept the centrality of Hinduism to Indian civilization; 2) acknowledge key figures such as Ram as civilizational heroes…3) accept that Muslim rulers…destroyed pillars of Hindu civilization…4) make no claims for special privileges.'[50] These conditions, it is proclaimed, would promote *Ekya* (assimilation) and demonstrate Muslims as worthy citizens of a Hindu nation.

State revisionist perspective

Pessimism with instrumentalist and primordialist approaches has generated a new debate on ethnicity in Indian politics. This school of thought has been described as 'state revisionists' and draws on a diffuse set of influences – post-structuralism, neo-Gandhism, and cultural history. While the output of 'state revisionists' is varied and extremely heterogenous, they do agree on the need to radically reappraise the issue of ethnicity outside the conventional paradigms of modernist political science.[51]

For state revisionists the primary ethnic cleavages in India are religious which should be placed 'within India's indigenous tradition'.[52] The state tradition of Nehru's India, by contrast, is fatally flawed because it imposes a Euro-centric model in which the conduct of secularist forms of politics stands ill at ease with a largely religious society. The interaction between state and society under the Nehruvian state has generated defensive and ideologically charged religious reactions that seek to create primordial ideals in response to the zeal of secular policies. In so doing, the post-1947 Indian state has undermined the traditional, self-correcting, relationship between the state and the spiritual which has historically characterized Indian polity. Indeed, the modernist project of Nehru destroyed the relationship between the secular and the sacred. Aggressive modernism in an essentially religious society has led to largely defensive religious reactions which in themselves have become the basis for obtaining political power.[53]

State revisionists view the state more in terms of functional categories rather than legal definitions. Stateness, the degree of statehood, is a matter of 'tradition', 'historical existence', 'shared collective memories'. The solution to state loyalty and ethnic conflicts lies in heterogeneity rather than uniformity, difference rather that conformity, and diversity rather than homogeneity. Contemporary ethnic conflicts in India could be better managed, propose state revisionists, by varying the degree of accommodation between ethnicity (religious and non-religious) and the state, particularly at regional levels, without pursuing the goal of national uniformity. The failure of

> defending a strong central government at all costs in Punjab and more recently Kashmir is enough to demonstrate the need for greater political accommodation of regional and religious interests. A modern secular state as a lowest common denominator of regional and religious differences can generate neither the strength

> nor the legitimacy adequate to the task. A sense of organic unity and political coherence in a regionally diverse state can be created through the better integration of the sacred and the secular sources of authority in India.[54]

State revisionism overcomes many of the difficulties encountered in the instrumentalist and primordialist analyses. By arguing for plurality and variegated stateness, it accommodates religious and non-religious forms of ethnicity.

The emphasis on 'organic unity' would certainly contribute to the greater legitimation of the political system. Applied to minority ethnic movements, state revisionism would presumably accept their accommodation, and indeed, dominant assertion where they constitute the larger ethnic group. Thus state revisionism in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir would mean the political integration of Islam and Sikhism, even though it might be resented by significant minorities.

State revisionists' prescriptions for the majority would also have profound implications. Greater religious accommodation of minorities would also be accompanied by the political and ethnic integration of the majority into the state structure for underpinning cultural unity. Although caste, linguistic and cultural differences among Hindus might militate against the emergence of an overwhelming majority, there would, nevertheless, be the ever-present danger that majoritarianism could be used to construct new religious traditions.[55]

Conclusion

The relative weaknesses of the instrumentalist school in providing satisfactory explanations of contemporary ethnic conflicts have rekindled interest in primordialist analyses. The latter have found a receptive audience among India's minorities and, more recently, its majority. Yet despite this appeal, primordialism as a mode of analysis is, for the present, most fruitful in understanding cases of cumulative cleavages (Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir) though, since Ayodhya, its usefulness appears to be equally relevant in the case of the Hindu majority.

Despite these limitations instrumentalism still provides the main explanation of the causes and consequences of ethnic conflict in India. It is clear that its attractiveness to India's minorities (and majority) might be of limited nature, especially during periods of heightened tension. However, as transactional politics reasserts itself, the tendency to with-

draw into primordial closures may wane as the costs of such ethnic withdrawal outweigh the opportunities to bargain for political power. As the post-Ayodhya events have demonstrated, the value of instrumentalism for minorities may lie in its analytical and political effectiveness against the potent threat of majority primordialism.

The state revisionist perspective offers a radical alternative by suggesting a return to the politics of the neo-segmentary state that would eschew the Euro-centric instrumentalist and primordialist ideas inherent in the Nehruvian model since 1947. Paradoxically, state revisionism appears to anticipate the possibilities of state-breaking inherent in contemporary ethnic conflicts. But only a most optimistic interpretation of this perspective, however, would allow for a satisfactory management of these conflicts as a basis of state-building in contemporary India.

Notes

1. W.A. Douglass, 'A Critique of Recent Trends in the Analysis of Ethnonationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 11:2 (April, 1988), 192–206, has drawn attention to instrumentalism-primordialism as the main analytical distinction in the literature on ethnic studies. This distinction is commonly used by South Asian specialists since the 1970s, see D. Taylor and M. Yapp (eds), *Political Identity in South Asia* (London: Curzon, 1979). For a restatement of the position, see U. Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990). The state-revisionist perspective reflects the indigenous tradition identified with neo-Gandhism and postmodernist critiques of the Indian state.
2. See, P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), in particular, 3–48.
3. Douglass, op. cit., 192.
4. See P.R. Brass, 'Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia', in Taylor and Yapp, op. cit., 62–8, passim.
5. The pluralist thesis has been restated by L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).
6. Brass (1974), op. cit., 11.
7. Phadnis, op. cit., 45.
8. Brass, op. cit. (1974), 12.
9. For a recent restatement of this position, see J. Manor, '"Ethnicity" and Politics in India', *International Affairs,* 72:3 (1996), 459–75.
10. See Brass, op. cit. (1974), chs. 6–9.
11. For a general discussion of the distinction between benign and malign ethnicity, see John Rex, *Race and Ethnicity* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), ch. 5.

12. The proposed current legislation to create new states appears to be the largest reorganization since the mid-1950s.
13. See D. Kumar, 'The Affirmative Action Debate in India', *Asian Survey*, 32:3 (March 1992), 290–302.
14. See Chapter 10 for a more detailed discussion of the figures for Punjab. A figure of 25 000 or more is normally quoted for Jammu and Kashmir, see Sten Widmalm, 'The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir', *Asian Survey*, 37:11 (November 1997), 1005–30.
15. See P.R. Brass, 'The Punjab Crisis and the Unity of India', in P.R. Brass *Ethnicity and Nationalism*: *Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), 176–219.
16. Ibid., 168.
17. Ibid., 183.
18. Ibid., 190–193.
19. G. Singh, 'Ethnic Conflict in India: a Case Study of Punjab', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 84–105.
20. This argument is associated with R. Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), see chs. 1 and 8.
21. Ibid., 200–5.
22. See the contributions in S.K. Mitra and R.A. Lewis, (eds), *Subnational Movements in South Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).
23. This view is systematically developed in R. Kothari, *State against Democracy* (New Delhi: South Asia, 1987). See also J. Manor, 'Political Regeneration in India', in D.L. Seth and A. Nandy (eds), *The Multiverse of Democracy: Essays in Honour of Rajni Kothari* (Sage: New Delhi, 1996), 231–41.
24. See Jeffrey, op. cit., 200–5.
25. Brass (1979), op. cit., 35.
26. F. Robinson, 'Islam and Muslim Separatism', in Taylor and Yapp, op. cit., 77–112.
27. Ibid., 106–7.
28. For the significance of this event see N. Nugent, *Rajiv Gandhi: a Son of a Dynasty* (London: BBC Publications, 1990).
29. See G.J. Larow, *India's Agony over Religion* (New York: Suny Press, 1995) for a reading that India's religious divisions are historically rooted.
30. A good account is to be found in J. Pettigrew's, 'A Description of the Discrepancy between Sikh Political Ideals and Sikh Political Practice', in M.J. Aronoff (ed.), *Political Anthropology Yearbook I* (New York: Transaction Books, 1980), 152–92.
31. A.T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 40.
32. Ibid., 30.
33. P.C. Upadhyaya, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26:2 (1992), 841.
34. Ibid., 842.
35. Ibid., 842–3.
36. A. Sen, 'On Interpreting India's Past', in S. Bose and A. Jalal (eds), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10–35.
37. Ibid., 22.

38. See Embree, op. cit.; M. Jurgensmeyer, 'The Logic of Religious Violence: the Case of the Punjab', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 22 no. 1 (1988), 65–88; V. Das, *Critical Events: an Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
39. B. Chandra's *Communalism in Modern India* (Delhi: Vikas, 1979), is a classic example of this orthodoxy. For a critique of this position, see R. Singh, 'Communalism and the Struggle against Communalism: a Marxist View', in K.N. Panikkar (ed.), *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Manohar Books, 1991), pp. 109–26.
40. Jurgensmeyer, op. cit.; G. Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others: the Question of Identity in India Today* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1993), 20.
41. P. Chaterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 238.
42. Ibid.
43. BJP's Vice-President, *India Today*, February 15 1993.
44. Even Nehru was unable to resist the pressure for a ban on cow slaughter to be included as part of the directive of state policy.
45. See S. Bose, '"Hindu Nationalism" and the Crisis of the Indian State: a Theoretical Perspective', in Bose and Jalal, op. cit., 105–64.
46. This point is made, at length, by Bose, ibid.
47. For an example, see the statements in J.S. Bhullar *et al.*, *The Betrayal of the Sikhs* (London: ISYF, 1985).
48. Embree, op. cit., 132.
49. B. Madhok, *Punjab Problem: the Muslim Connection* (New Delhi: Hindu World Publications, 1985).
50. A. Varshney, 'Contested Meanings: India's National Identity, Hindu Nationalism, and the Politics of Anxiety', *Daedalus* (Summer 1993), 231.
51. See Varshney, ibid., and S.K. Mitra, 'Desecularizing the State: Religion and Politics in India after Independence', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33:4, 755–77.
52. Mitra, ibid., 773.
53. Ibid., 772–3.
54. Ibid., 773–4.
55. This, in a sense, it could be argued, would be the consequence of the BJP's programme – if implemented.

2
What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict?

The increasing pervasiveness of ethnic conflicts in South Asia has generated a growing body of publications that are of interest to regional and comparative specialists alike. In the last issue of the *International Journal of Punjab Studies*,[1] Professor Mitra provided an extended discussion of the subject with particular reference to Punjab. This review article will address the issues raised by Mitra and critically examine the relevance and value of rational choice theory (RCT) for understanding contemporary ethnic conflicts in South Asia[2] with reference to three recent publications: Ahmed's *State, Nation and Ethnicity in South Asia*, Ali's *Fearful State*, and Pettigrew's *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.[3] It is suggested that the application of RCT to ethnic conflicts in South Asia suffers from serious weaknesses – weaknesses which can be better overcome by adopting the theoretically 'messy centre approach'.

Rational choice theory

Mitra's starting point is the desire to locate the literature on ethnicity within comparative politics. For him, as for many others, the study of ethnicity appears to have 'departed from the familiar grounds of class interests, citizenship and other reference points through which the social sciences interpret the world'.[4] This development, Mitra acknowledges, is increasingly the product of the academic acceptance of hyper-subjectivism among ethnic (and non-ethnic) protagonists whose *raison d'être* is essentially 'I imagine therefore I am!' Indeed, it is difficult not to disagree with Mitra that the study of ethnicity in Indian politics has been little advanced by hyper-subjectivism and rampant relativism. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

The formation of the short-lived BJP national government (1996) marks a decade of rising ethnic conflicts within the Indian political system. Some of these have been regional (Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam), others non-territorial (over caste) and, others still, central to the ethnic character of the Indian state itself. Yet much of the academic debate about these conflicts has, with few notable exceptions,[5] taken flight from the hard categories of social science to find refuge in deconstruction, relativism and meta-narratives of irrelevance. Consider, for example, the argument advanced by Parekh that Indian nationalism is of non-derivative and non-nation type.[6] By posing the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan as ideologically derivative of western nationalism, Parekh argues that the project of M.K. Gandhi and the Congress was a self-conscious denial of nation-statehood, a pursuit of a 'relatively heterogenous traditional Indian civilization [that] best united Indians'.[7] Such a reading not only sidesteps the argument that the Muslim League's Pakistan demand was a defensive proposal – a proposal that could have been accommodated in a genuinely consociational India – but also overlooks the ethnic content of 'traditional Indian civilization' that is now coming home to roost. neo-Gandhism is a failed historical solution for today's conflicts and all it has to offer are vague platitudes in place of real policy alternatives.[8]

At the other extreme the hammer blows of deconstruction and relativism have been reined in on minority ethnic identities, disempowering them, exposing them as hollow totem poles erected by manipulative elites or ethnic entrepreneurs. With reference to Punjab, Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*[9] has torn asunder the polite consensus of doubt about Sikh identity, occasionally expressed, but firmly held by historians of the old tradition. A combination of Foucault and deconstruction has now opened a 'vision' of an identity that does not exist, is the product of elite manipulators, and is best consigned to the dustbin of meta-narratives. Not unexpectedly the 'vision' has been warmly welcomed by academics and non-academics with an axe to grind against *any* conception of a core Sikh identity.

Yet what is often lacking in discourse analysis, whether applied to majorities or minorities, is an absence of the discussion of power, hegemony and inequality. It is difficult to situate ethnic identities outside the complex web of material, political and, indeed, symbolic power. But if the understanding of these central social science dimensions is locked in a 'world of meanings, and meanings exhaust the world', as Gellner rightly asks, 'where is the room for coercion through the whip, gun or hunger?'[10] Anyone looking at Punjab or Jammu and

Kashmir over the last two decade will find little that addresses these concerns in the 'meta-twaddle' that is on offer.

It is precisely because these questions cannot be answered by meaning and meaning alone that Mitra espouses RCT. Extensively developed in Mitra's other writings,[11] RCT seeks to provide a 'bridge' between comparative politics and the growing literature on ethnicity. The appeal of ethnicity, Mitra argues, can be best analyzed in terms of 'the rational actor who responds to different structures of opportunities at different times'[12] He continues:

> The politics of ethnicity can be understood by disaggregating it in terms of the wishes and actions of the individual actors in the context of the larger political structures and processes within which they are located.[13]

These structures include six major dimensions: the gap between the dominant cultural values and those of sub-nationalists; the material conditions; the level of integration of sub-national elites; the strength and legitimacy of central rule; support for separatism from other states; and the level of social networks that support sub-nationalist leaders and punish defectors.[14] The cause of much of the ethnic conflict in South Asia, Mitra believes, is the growing divergence between the dominant cultural values and those of sub-nationalists.

Mitra's RCT extends beyond individual actors to include political institutions and rule-making as part of the political bargaining process. There is, he observes, 'room to manoeuvre only if the actors involved agree that the eventual shape of (political) institutions is also part of the bargaining process rather than starting from the premise that the existing institutions provide a sacred, moral boundary to political argument'.[15] In fact, as far as the sacred and moral are concerned, Mitra would prefer a strong distinction between those that can be transacted or transcended. The latter are best left in museums of symbolism where they provide reverence for, but not the psychic wages of, ethnic warriors.

There is another modification that Mitra urges us to accept. Instead of viewing the Indian state as the embodiment of modern nation and statehood it should, he insists, be seen as being in transition from a segmentary state in which values, identities, roles and functions were more diffuse and 'co-existed within a relatively loose authority structure'.[16] But today as democratization has extended, the symbols of the modern state have 'become the focus of popular resistance'. At one

end is the state which appears to be determined to defend, at all costs, the integrity of the Indian union. At the other are regional and religious movements, as in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, seeking a form of political accommodation that cannot be achieved within the legacy of the Nehruvian secular state. A move towards the reality of segmentation, and away from the modernist construct of Nehru, would enable many of the regional ethnic conflicts to be bargained away with firmer foundations for legitimacy. A move in this direction would also enable the RCT to provide a greater explanatory value – a value limited by boundaries of rule-making imposed by the Indian state.

It is the modified RCT approach that Mitra has used in analyzing the lessons of comparative ethnic conflicts and their application to India and Punjab in particular. After reviewing the failure of traditional methods of ethnic conflict management – co-optation, accommodation and qualified consociation – he is also doubtful of comparative novelties such as cantonization. At the heart of the 'Punjab problem', and many other ethnic conflicts in India, is the failure to evolve guarantees that would safeguard the political, religious and cultural institutions of minorities and be compatible with India's political system. Although Mitra sees signs for hope in the 'normalization' of events in Punjab since 1995, only a genuine bargained outcome, he contends, in which all actors participate and accept the realities of rule-making, is likely to provide an enduring long-term solution. The lessons of Punjab can hardly be ignored in Jammu and Kashmir or Assam.

Compared with the alternatives on offer, Mitra's RCT perspective is both elegant and parsimonious. It cuts through the confusion and profusion that pervades the subject to provide a perspective that is methodologically rigorous and speaks a comparative language which political scientists can understand, even though they may strongly disagree with what is being said. Given the 'uniqueness' of India, this is no small achievement.

Opponents of RCT will be quick to draw attention to its theoretical and empirical limitations – limitations that have been all too familiar to economists but appear to have been overlooked by political scientists.[17] The general criticisms of RCT are not really relevant to this discussion and are perhaps better reviewed elsewhere. What is significant are the modifications incorporated by Mitra and their explanatory power in the case of India. It is perhaps too optimistic to assume that a clear distinction can be sustained between the transactionable and transcendental demands. Ethnic conflicts are intractable precisely because of the clash of

'visions' rooted in history, culture and traditions that easily lend themselves to becoming zero-sum games. A cynical observer might be inclined to argue that the trouble with South Asia in general is that transcendental dimensions of ethnic identity are as much, if not a greater part, of ethnic group demands as transactional ones. Wishing them away is no great analytical achievement.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Mitra's perspective is the issue of rule-making. Without the introduction of the concept of the segmentary state we are confronted with a modern, authoritarian state that is unwilling to participate in rule-making which would include new political institutions *à la* Jammu and Kashmir as well as being intent on promoting ethnic closure within itself. A leap into segmentary identities would require a fundamental reappraisal of a kind that in contemporary realities would be perceived as a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the state itself. In seeking to provide a better fit between state and society, and ethnic conflict and RCT, state revisionism of the type proposed by Mitra appears to anticipate the possibilities of state-breaking inherent in ethnic conflicts in India. In a country where the intellectual discussion of separatism is forbidden by a constitutional amendment, the prospects of the state recognizing such segmentary realities are more than remote.

The 'messy centre'

It is because of the shortcomings of RCT in explaining state policy that we need to draw on alternative approaches. Between the extremes of culturally relativistic (and linguistically incomprehensible) post-modernism and RCT is the traditional 'messy centre'[18] which is characterized by theoretical eclecticism. The 'messy centre', as Peter Evans has written

> draws on general theories when it can but also cares deeply about particular historical outcomes. It sees the particular cases as the building-blocks for general theories and theories as lenses to identify what is interesting and significant cases. Neither theories nor cases are sacrosanct. Cases are always too complicated to vindicate a single theory, so scholars who work in this tradition are likely to draw on a melange of theoretical traditions in hopes of gaining greater purchase on the cases they care about. At the same time, a compelling interpretation of a particular case is only interesting if it points to ways of understanding other cases as well, so scholars in

> this tradition are often chastised for 'trespassing' on historical cases of other specialists in their search for broader generalisations.[19]

The practitioners of the 'messy centre' employ general theoretical frameworks to describe and analyze 'mechanisms that make the behaviour of actors and institutions causally plausible'.[20] Because such practitioners often service patrons as varied as consumers, bureaucracies and the state, their output is very much influenced by ability to predict accurately.

For scholars seeking a better understanding of ethnicity in South Asia, the 'messy centre' provides many fruitful points of departure that have yet to be applied. From sociology there is the extended debate on ethnic boundaries and multiculturalism; from politics there are the comparative examples of non-majoritarian modes of governance in plural societies; and from anthropology there is a better understanding of identity, real or imagined.[21] Working within this tradition it is also possible to be more discrete about ethnicity. The level of discrete analysis is most fruitful in South Asia's peripheral regions where ethnic resistance is not only reinforced by the existence of multiple cleavages but the regions are also ideal case-studies of nation and state-building projects. These processes, moreover, have intersected with India's partition almost fifty years ago, and unless the significance of this event is recognized, understood and contextualized, the study of South Asia's macro-ethnic conflicts is unlikely to make much headway.

'Messy centre' and the peripheral regions

It is a virtue of two of the publications under review that they locate the issue of ethnicity within this framework. Ahmed's *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* is really a compendium of the subject. Starting from a long introduction to the concepts of state, nation and ethnicity in contemporary South Asia (three chapters), Ahmed builds five hypotheses. First, he insists that multicultural post-colonial states are inclined to see ethnic separatism as a challenge to their survival. Second, where ethnic separatists have the resources to pursue a separatist strategy, they will do so. Third, this in turn often invites heavy repression by the state which tends to make the conflict intractable. Fourth, within the parameters of multiculturalism and in situations of intense conflict, the state may experiment with forms of limited autonomy. Finally, the capacity of

post-colonial states to resolve many of these conflicts is constrained by the condition of economic dependency that severely limits their political autonomy.

These hypotheses are then examined with reference to India (Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir), Pakistan (Sindh and Mohajir Quomi Movement), Bangladesh (the Chittagong Hill Tracts), and Sri Lanka (the Tamil Movement). Of particular interest to readers of this journal is Ahmed's analysis of Punjab. Much of this is largely uncontroversial and repeats the publications in the public domain, but the account is enlivened by an interview with Dr Chauhan. By focusing on economic factors as the primary cause of the 'Punjab problem', Ahmed, surprisingly, avoids sustained discussion of the Sikh question as a *residual legatee* of partition. The restoration of 'peace' from 1995 onwards is not situated in the context of state repression but treated unproblematically.

The inconsistencies in Ahmed's 'messy eclecticism' are most apparent in the comparative assessment of the case-studies. In seeking an appropriate exit the author reflects on

> what might have happened if British India had remained undivided. It would have meant a population ratio of seven to three between Hindus and Muslims. In addition there were Christians, Sikhs and Others. For such a state to survive and stabilize, a pluralist democracy, respecting regional interests and accommodating various groups in the state services, would have been necessary or else disintegration would have been a serious possibility. How such a state and society would have behaved in the face of modernization, uneven development and external pressures is, of course, a highly conjectural question, but unity through pluralist democracy could have avoided the antagonisms which the divisions of India brought.[22]

This observation leads Ahmed to embrace Lijphart's model of power-sharing consociationalism as an alternative to majoritarian democracy. In so doing, Ahmed has placed his argument back to front. Had he proceeded from the *failure* to establish a pluralist and consociational united India, a failure for which the Congress is largely responsible, the role of state policy in mismanaging the peripheral regions would have become apparent. There is a growing body of academic opinion that suggests we need to rediscover the failure of united India to come to terms with the failures of divided Pakistan and India.[23] The revenge of

the regions and the establishment of a BJP government in India's 12th Lok Sabha elections should be justification enough for such a sustained effort.

Ahmed's reluctance to go along this road can perhaps be explained by his preference for economic explanations. It was the 'inherent contradictions' of mid-1960s peripheral capitalism, Ahmed asserts, that led states in South Asia to 'employ force and violence on a massive scale in order to regain control over society'.[24] The value of such an explanation has to be weighed against evidence. In South Asia there has never been a time when there have not been 'contradictions within peripheral capitalism': the point, however, is that the regional ethnic conflicts have waxed and waned inspite, rather than because, of these 'contradictions'.

Ali's *The Fearful State* is less ambitious in its theoretical claims. Seeking to analyze contemporary 'internal wars' in South Asian states, its starting point is the post-1947 'nation-state paradigm'. Whereas nation building has 'emphasized national loyalties and identities' in opposition to 'sub-national regionalism', state-building, the project of evolving loyalty and attachment to institutions of governance, has been more problematic. According to Ali, state-building has been used by the ruling elite as 'the primary instrument of nation building and modernization'.[25] This insidious intertwining has resulted in the evolution of state-centric nationalisms that are neither capable of providing sound legitimacy nor inclusive enough to accommodate peripheral sub-regional nationalisms. Consequently, in the latter regions, mainly because of the artificiality of state boundaries created by 1947, there has always been sufficient cause for 'internal wars'.

Ali illustrates his argument by studies of India's north-eastern states, Sikh separatism in Punjab, Baluch nationalism in Pakistan, the tribal peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, and the Tamil movement in Sri Lanka. The omission of Jammu and Kashmir is all the more obvious given the framework that the author adopts. Although most of the case-studies, particularly of north-eastern states in India, provide ample support for Ali's central thesis, its application to Punjab is clearly lacking. We are presented with a bland chronology of Sikh history and post-1947 politics without any discussion of how Sikh identity has been managed by the Indian state since 1947.

Despite the author's shortcomings on Punjab (he is clearly at his best discussing the north-eastern states and the Chittagong Hill Tracts), Ali's conclusion draws valid lessons. South Asian societies and their leaders, he insists

> have to revise their view of national ideology and objectives by defining rationally the ends of statehood…[which] would open the way for radical restructuring of the region. It is not necessary to demolish existing borders, but their purpose and the nature of relationship across these, could be redefined. The regional must be given precedence over the national. In multicultural polities such as those in South Asia, the national is often defined by the prejudices of the dominant group…In India, the Hindi-speaking populace of the Gangetic plains has taken control. In Pakistan, power tends to lie in Punjab. The Bengali–Muslim majority in Bangladesh has virtually marginalized all minority communities. In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala reign supreme. It is the tensions generated by such regional and sectarian/communal concentration of power in highly competitive environments that threaten stability. The removal of sources of tension will demand political and psychological engineering of massive proportions. But it is not impossible and there is a recent precedent [collapse of USSR and the formation of CIS].[26]

That Ali's optimism is perhaps misplaced is demonstrated by Pettigrew's *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. This work comes almost two decades after *Robber Noblemen*[27] which established Pettigrew as the leading scholar of modern *Jat* (agriculturalist caste) Sikh society. Twenty years later the same author has taken on the task of addressing a more complex, if not equally daunting, task: the nature of 'Sikh resistance to the Indian state between 1984 and 1992'. Set in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star and almost a decade of violence that has seen nearly 25 000 fatalities, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* charts the rise and demise of Sikh armed resistance to Indian rule and the efforts to establish a separate Sikh state of Khalistan.

This is no ordinary publication. The author accepts that it lacks conventional academic rigour but pleads that the civil war condition (together with threats to her own safety) limited a more systematic study. Much of the raw data consists of extended interviews with guerrillas of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), most of whom have now been eliminated by the security forces. If these actors speak an 'ideological language', this language, Pettigrew asserts, gives us access to the 'consciousness of insurgency', an access stubbornly denied by the discourse of counterinsurgency. Hence perhaps the subtitle: *Unheard Voices*.

The structure of this work is also unconventional. Chapter 1 opens with harrowing accounts of state terror in rural Sikh areas after

Operation Blue Star. Chapter 2 reviews the rise of the resistance movement from political opposition to armed revolt. This is followed by an overview of the guerrilla movement (Chapter 3), a detailed history of the structure of the KCF (Chapter 4), and an extended discussion of the impact of strategies of the police and guerrillas on the local population (Chapter 5). In Chapters 6 and 7 we are provided with an introduction and text of the KCF interviews. The final chapter concludes with a wide-ranging discussion that raises issues of fundamental importance to Punjab and Sikh society alike.

Pettigrew's account has a number of merits. She is certainly on firm ground in identifying the role of state terror in giving rise to armed resistance. Excesses of state (and militant) terror have been widely reported by the Punjabi press and international human rights agencies. Yet these accounts have been lacking in reflecting the psychosis of fear, the civil war conditions, and the brazen use of violence by the state as a calculated policy. In the name of counterinsurgency ('fighting the nation's war') such violence was unleashed that civil society was literally crushed under the dictatorial rule of the security forces. This strategy ultimately defeated the armed resistance, but not before unduly prolonging the violence. The security state, as Pettigrew and others have rightly noted, was part and parcel of the 'Punjab problem'.

A second value of the work is that it articulates for the first time the programme, ideas and structure of the guerrilla movement as seen by itself rather than as it has been represented by state-sponsored anti-terrorism and its agencies of ideological warfare. True, Pettigrew's emphasis is largely on the KCF and is open to serious criticisms on grounds of group sectarianism, but it does provide valuable insights into the incoherent impulses, ideas and structures of the organization. What emerges is neither logical nor clear but a reactive movement staffed and controlled by 'village rustics' who have continuously failed to play the role in history that has been assigned to them by Punjabi Marxists.

The final major achievement of this work is that it problematizes, though perhaps not too clearly, the difficulties of realizing a 'Sikh revolution'. Drawing on *Robber Noblemen* and the history of the post-1984 resistance movement, Pettigrew concludes that there is a basic contradiction between Sikh values and the values of Jat Sikh society among which they are embedded. The latter, which are based on force, ultra-competitiveness, and continuously shifting factional alignments for personal aggrandizement, are directly at odds with the Sikh principle of

'the welfare of all'. It is the Jat Sikh values, insists Pettigrew, that undermined the guerrilla movement, and allowed it to be infiltrated and then crushed by the security forces. There is no evidence that the dangers of these values for 'Sikhs as a collectivity have been appreciated, except on the level of a tactical error'.[28] A guerrilla movement cannot hope to be successful unless it 'frees itself of cultural and historical constraints'.[29] In Punjab it perished at their hands.

Against these achievements there are some major shortcomings that will be obvious to Punjab and non-specialists alike. Foremost amongst these is the absence of the context within which the resistance movement emerged. Pettigrew rightly highlights the role of state terror in producing the various guerrilla groups, but state terror was a continuation, *by other means*, of the traditional policy of ethnic conflict management by the Indian state in Punjab. The argument that the Sikh question is a legacy of the partition, a clear blot on India's nation building since 1947, is hardly developed. Congealed within the application of Nehruvian secularism has been implicit ethnic domination which has set clear limits to the articulation of Sikh political identity. Unless these limits, and the continued resistance to them are recognized, the tendency to regress into *ad hoc* explanations, especially economic, will remain.

Pettigrew will also be criticized for her focus on the KCF. While the turn of events since 1992, which have seen most non-KCF guerrillas' leadership eliminated by the security forces, may justify the line that the KCF was the only authentic guerrilla group, there was sufficient evidence available in Punjabi and English to have established a more comprehensive history of these groups. In the tradition of all ideological movements, the charge of sectarianism cannot easily be rebuked.

Finally, Pettigrew's theory of 'Sikh revolution' is also likely to be seriously challenged. Whether an ideological movement could have emerged that could have transcended the 'cultural and historical constraints' of Jat Sikh society remains a subject for counterfactual history. What is less in doubt is that efforts to construct clear ideological movements in Punjab, for example by the Communists since the 1920s, have been spectacularly unsuccessful. The Muslim League succeeded because of ideology and numbers. Similarly, the secret of the failure of the 'Sikh revolution' was not an inability to forge a viable ideology of cohesion (the common lament of all revolutionaries) nor the iron laws of Jat Sikh values, but rather in the way that the process of statebuilding in Punjab has been directed at the partial incorporation of Jats

as well as non-Jat Sikhs. This incorporation has been most manifest in the repressive state apparatus and the production of 'official' intellectuals who have so successfully disarticulated and abused the 'village rustics'. Economic liberalization and the resulting industrialization of Punjab could atomize Jat Sikh values once and for all. It is also likely to produce greater opportunities for the integration of this historically recalcitrant social class that has proved so irksome to India's ethnic managers.

Conclusion

The fiftieth anniversary of the partition of India provides a sober moment for thoughtful reflection on the fortunes of the successor states. The symmetry of demands of the provinces before partition and today is too uncanny for us not take a backward glance. Of course the ideologues who propelled modern India and Pakistan and their successors would be appalled at such prospects but their legacy has been so catastrophic that such intellectual deceit can no longer be avoided. Because the reversal of faith in the late twentieth century has been so dramatic, the ideological content of the opposition to united, pluralistic and consociational India ought to be re-examined. Ideological secularism, like ideological communism, evidently served the same function: as an instrument of ethnic oppression.

Whereas the nation and state-building efforts of Pakistan have been tragically comical, in India the peripheral regions have proved resistant to both processes, forcing the state to indulge in creative state-building and regional 'nation destroying' within the fig leaf of formal democracy. When this façade has collapsed, violent control has been regularly imposed. It is arguable whether such methods can be sustained in the future given the intense pressures for democratization and globalization. Jammu and Kashmir is clearly providing a stern test for the limits of ethnic conflict management in India while Punjab's 'normalcy' may yet harbour a gathering storm. If these conflicts remain unresolved, and other regions proceed to decouple, the pressures for reshaping the state, as events in the former USSR and Yugoslavia have demonstrated, will become inevitable.

The books reviewed have shown the need to construct a better fit between ethnicity and the state in South Asia. This point is also recognized by Mitra who implicitly acknowledges that rule-making may eventually lead to state-breaking if the parties agree that 'letting go is hanging on'. The pan-state structures for such a reconstruction

may only be in their formative stage but developments in this direction need to be recognized. For academics the real challenge is to anticipate these developments with theories and approaches that provide useful guidance for enlightened policy-makers and political elites. The books under review, and the critical input of Mitra, have certainly provided a breath of necessary fresh air in an atmosphere stifled by the fog of nationalist ideology so assiduously generated since 1947. If readers want to avoid narratives of nonsense and the cyber-space fantasies of withdrawal currently on offer on ethnicity in South Asia, they would do well to start with these three books and the writings of Mitra.

Notes

1. S.K. Mitra, 'What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict?', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 3:1 (1996), 75–92.
2. It is appropriate and necessary to draw a finer distinction between ethnicity and nationalism. However, the two concepts are so interchangeable in the context of South Asia's peripheral regions the point seems hardly valid.
3. This chapter appeared originally as a review article of the following three books: I. Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Pinter, 1996); S. Mahmud Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal Wars in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1993); and J. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence* (London: Zed Books, 1995).
4. Mitra, op. cit., 75.
5. See P.C. Upadhyaya, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26:4 (1992), 815–53.
6. B. Parekh, 'Ethnocentricity of the Nationalist Discourse', *Nations and Nationalism*, 1:1 (1995), 25–52.
7. Ibid., 39.
8. See Chs. 1 and 3 of this volume.
9. H. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
10. E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63.
11. See in particular, S.K. Mitra, 'Rational Politics of Cultural Nationalism: Sub-National Movements in South Asia', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25, (1995), 57–78.
12. Mitra (1996), op. cit., 89.
13. Ibid.
14. Mitra, (1995), op. cit., 67.
15. Ibid., 87.

16. Ibid., 89.
17. D. Green and I. Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: a Critique of Applications in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), have made a devastating assessment. 'To-date', they write, 'a large proportion of the theoretical conjectures of rational choice theorists have not been tested empirically. Those tests that have been undertaken have either failed on their own terms or garnered theoretical support for propositions that, on reflection, can only be characterized as banal: they do little more than restate existing knowledge in rational choice terminology', p. 6.
18. The term is used by Peter Evans in a symposium on comparative politics, see Atul Kohli *et al.*, 'The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: a Symposium', *World Politics*, 48:1, 1–49.
19. P. Evans, ibid., 4.
20. Ibid., 5.
21. The relevance of some of this literature is discussed in G. Singh, 'The Punjab Crisis since 1984: a Reassessment', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18:3 (July 1995), 476–93.
22. Ahmed, op. cit., 295.
23. See I. Talbot, '"Back to the Future?" The Unionist Model of Consociational Democracy for Contemporary India and Pakistan', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 3:1 (1996), 65–73.
24. Ibid., 272.
25. Ali, op. cit., 16.
26. Ibid., 253.
27. J. Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).
28. Pettigrew (1995), op. cit., 191.
29. Ibid.

3

Reassessing 'Conventional Wisdom': Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict, and India as an Ethnic Democracy

The previous two chapters have provided an overview of some of the major perspectives on ethnic conflict in India. In this chapter the aim is to further identify the elements of the 'messy centre' for a working model of our analysis of ethnic conflicts in the core and periphery of Indian politics. The main argument is quite simple: India is unexceptional in managing ethnic conflicts since 1947 and the process of nation- and state-building has created a sharp divide between the core and peripheral regions. This division is better understood if India is seen as an ethnic democracy where hegemonic and violent control is exercised over minorities, especially in the peripheral regions, thereby creating the conditions for the resilience of ethno-nationalist separatist movements in the latter regions.

Ethnicity

Discussion of ethnicity in India normally evokes strong partisanship rarely evident elsewhere. Whereas other societies have ethnic divisions, similar divisions in India are often defined as non-ethnic. Language and definition are power; and in contemporary India this power is jealously guarded.[1] Indeed, one observer has noted the tendency to avoid the term ethnicity by leading academics in preference to identities and other signifiers. He himself uses it with quotation marks.[2] This ambiguity, as we shall see below, is part and parcel of the 'conventional wisdom' about ethnicity and politics in India.

Most definitions of ethnicity combine some elements of objective and subjective factors.[3] Whereas objective factors are often distinguishing characteristics, such as language, religion, colour, tribe, caste, dress or

diet, subjective factors pertain to collective action associated with these characteristics. Thus an ethnic group is 'sometimes defined as one that perceives a common identity based on characteristics acquired at either birth (colour for example) or through cultural experience (language, religion, caste, sense of regional identity etc.)'.[4] Ethnic groups are almost like complete societies with elements of 'division of labour and reproduction'.[5] As such they either are, or could be said to resemble, a nation. And 'Where an "ethnic group" ends and a "nation" begins is one of the smouldering questions of the twentieth century.'[6]

The mere existence of objective difference does not necessarily make a particular group ethnic, however. Ethnicity may be imposed – by another group – latent, uncontested or suppressed. In addition to objective factors three other elements are necessary: 'the sense of unique group origins, the knowledge of unique group history and belief in its destiny ... and a sense of collective solidarity'.[7] Taken together these elements give an ethnic group a sense of distinctiveness, individuality and collective solidarity – in short, a consciousness of being as well as being recognized as such by others.

Manor[8] has mapped out the main 'ethnic' categories in Indian politics. According to him these are really permeable 'identities' based around religion, language, tribe, and the Aryan/Dravidian divide. Religion is the key identity that dominates, and is identified with Hinduism (83 per cent of the population), Muslims (12 per cent) and Sikhs (2 per cent). Linguistically, there are nine major languages each spoken by over 25 million people and several minor ones like Punjabi and Kashmiri. Tribal identities include those outside or on the margins of Hindu society, now referred to as Scheduled Tribes and recognized tribal populations in the Himalayas and the north-eastern states who are often considered racially distinct. Lastly, there are the overarching identities of Aryan and Dravidian which were significant in the past but are no longer powerful symbols of mobilization.

For Manor these identities are rarely primordial, cumulative or homogenizing: they encourage heterogeneity and fluidity which is further accentuated by caste identities, religious sectarianism, and the existence of clans and familial loyalties as well as modern associations such as party, class, the region and locality. This pattern of cross-cutting, overlapping and intersecting cleavages ensures that

> ...Indians tend not to fix on any of these identities fiercely and permanently...They tend instead to shift their preoccupation,

> readily and often, from one identity to another, in response to changing circumstances. As a result tensions do not become concentrated along a single fault-line in society, and do not produce prolonged and intractable conflicts -'ethnic' or otherwise – that might tear democratic institutions apart.[9]

The 'efficient secret' of the Indian experience therefore, in Manor's assessment, is that ethnic fault lines are blurred, indeterminate and, most of the time, quite insignificant to the wider operation of the polity. Those Jeremiahs who have been predicting the break-up of the Indian union since its creation along ethnic lines have been proved disappointingly wrong.[10]

'Conventional wisdom'

The arguments advanced by Manor restate what might aptly be termed as 'conventional wisdom': that is, the traditional, familiar, formal way of addressing the issue. Conventional wisdom is rooted in a particular reading of Indian politics and society, of problematizing (or vaporizing) ethnicity, and emphasizing India's heterogeneity, diversity and complexity. Often conventional wisdom is articulated in metaphors and clichés such as 'unity-in-diversity', 'nation-in-the-making'; sometimes it is even elevated to the level of civilizational uniqueness, an exceptional societal virtue that has enabled the Indian state to escape the pernicious consequences of ethnic and nationalist conflicts that have bedevilled twentieth-century Europe.[11] The main ingredient defining civilizational uniqueness, however, is Hinduism, a plural religious tradition which abhors centralizing institutions or a holy text by accepting, tolerating and even encouraging diversity. Hinduism, according to some observers, provides the basis for the self-regulation of conflicts, underpinning a 'functioning anarchy' and a non-denominational state.[12]

This form of conventional wisdom has been predominant in the nationalist historiography of the independence movement, [13] those American political scientists who have dominated the study of Indian politics, [14] the uncritical readings of the Nehruvian state, [15] and the works of neo-Gandhians.[16] It has also received a further confirmation from postmodernists who are keen to rejoice in India's diversity, difference and infinite pluralism.[17] Thus conventional wisdom far from weakening under the pressure of contemporary developments continues to provide the point of departure for most standard interpretations of the Indian state and society.

Most accounts that fall in the remit of conventional wisdom share four key propositions.

1. *Ethnic identities are not primordial but constructed, permeable and contingent.*
   This extreme instrumentalism is supported by the 'deconstruction' of ethnicities, the role of the colonial state often in 'constructing' ethnicities where they did not exist, [18] and the apparent permeability of the most enduring identity: religion. Religious boundaries, it is suggested, are not fixed, constant or quasi-racial. Rather, in India they are vague if not self-consciously defined. Even sub-continental Muslims, it is contended, are 'thin' Muslims, being largely former converts from Hinduism. Similarly, Sikhism has struggled to establish clear boundaries between itself and Hinduism.[19]
2. *Ethnic groups selectively emphasize particular dimensions of their identity as appropriate.*
   Ethnic group identities are not constant, solid or unchanging. In practice ethnic groups highlight aspects of their identities – religion, language, tribe – as appropriate (and convenient), constantly shifting the focus of attention.[20] This flexibility casts doubts not only on the 'primordial' content of ethnicity but also highlights its often selective political articulation to meet particular exigencies. Ethnic groups operating within the framework of democratic rule, like other interest groups, are compelled to make strategic as well as tactical choices – choices which regularly undermine their own rhetoric of self-identification.
3. *Ethnic groups lack cohesion.*
   Conventional wisdom is dismissive of ethnic group solidarity. As Manor has pointed out, collective action by ethnic groups is prone to disarticulation because of the cross-cutting cleavages of caste, language, religion, tribe, party and class. Because of such barriers, it is difficult to sustain ethnic mobilization, especially if the ethnic group cannot enforce collective solidarity (for example, through coercion).
4. *The Indian state is secular and seeks to foster political integration alongside a multicultural society.*
   Conventional wisdom shares common assumptions about the state. These include: an explicit commitment to secularism, an ability to stand aloof from the main cultural force in Indian society (Hinduism), and the pursuit of political integration alongside the development of a multicultural society.[21] In brief, the state is not

the embodiment of an ethnic will but is a non-ethnic actor that has nurtured and developed Indian democracy.

Much of conventional wisdom locates the causes of India's contemporary ethnic conflicts in political perversion: that is, the decline of Nehruvian values identified in the post-Nehruvian processes of centralization, deinstitutionalization, and political decay.[22] Some elements, in particular neo-Gandhians and postmodernists, have also critiqued the modernizing zeal of the Nehruvian state in creating false antinomies between secularism and religion, of introducing a Euro-centric state tradition to a largely segmentary society.[23] But this school of thought stops short of interrogating the cultural basis of the state's legitimacy and instead decries its supposed desecularizing mission under Nehru – a mission that disturbed the traditional equipoise of Indian society.

The limits of conventional wisdom – it is ahistorical

In the last two decades conventional wisdom has been severely tested as India has witnessed violent insurgencies in the peripheral regions and the rise of the BJP. The assumptions sustaining it have been increasingly exposed while its explanatory value has diminished to a point where it no longer provides a satisfactory framework for those contesting the legitimacy of Indian statehood or seeking to redefine it in terms of Hindutva. That conventional wisdom is an ideological construct can be further highlighted by its ahistorical character, its assumptions about the state, and its inability to explain the tenacity of ethno-nationalist movements in the peripheral regions.

The most obvious problem with conventional wisdom is that it is ahistorical. It selects, rarefies, historicizes and ignores the foundational event of the modern Indian state: the partition.[24] Of course it can be argued, as Parekh has done, that the project of Jinnah and the Muslim League to create Pakistan was unashamedly Euro-centric, an alien intrusion into a civilizational society in which the Congress was leading a 'non-nationalist' nationalism.[25] But such a defence is untenable for two reasons: scholarship has demonstrated that Pakistan was a contingent factor for achieving political equality, [26] and it ascribes to ideas and elites an autonomous role in the development of nationalism which was evidently not the case.[27] What the Indian nationalism of the Congress represented was a combination of elite secularism (of individuals like

Nehru) with the populism of Gandhi and his appeal to a 'subaltern culture dense with Hindu religious symbolism'. This union placed Muslims in an awkward predicament: their acceptance as modern Indians required a denial of Islam, a forgoing of their claim to equal citizenship based on identity. 'Muslim separatism', it followed, 'was not the expression of a primordial identity but the necessary Muslim response to a modernity that offered them only a partial identity of being the minor term, the other, of Indian nationalism.'[28]

Apart from the partition which created an overwhelmingly Hindu India, the question arises as to what was the content of civilizational society? For Vanaik, the concept of India's civilizational unity and cultural essence was largely developed to fulfil the needs of an emerging Indian political elite at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Far from being devoid of religious essence the idea was founded on the 'catholicity of Brahmanical Hinduism'. In so doing, an 'indissoluble connection' was established between Hinduism and Indian civilization – a connection which was popularized by M.K. Gandhi as a form of cultural nationalism of inclusion only by the denial of existing identities of non-Hindus.[29] Behind the central tenets of civilizational essence lurks difficult questions about Hinduism's pluralism, tolerance and passivity. Embree for one has called for a critical appraisal of nineteenth-century German hermeneutics which celebrated the idea of Hindu tolerance embedded in the assertion that there are many levels of truth. 'What follows from this assertion', he notes, 'is not toleration; rather, all truths, all social practices, can be encapsulated within the society as long as there is willingness to accept the premises on which encapsulation is based.'[30] Encapsulation of course can facilitate accommodation, co-option and, eventually assimilation, but not political equality for movements that assert their exclusivity or externality against the Hindu universe. And where the state defines such religious tolerance (*à la* secularism) as a form of variegated truth – as in India after 1947 – the preconditions for encapsulation can be said to have been created.

The limits of conventional wisdom – the state

The assumptions underpinning the nature of the state within conventional wisdom can be sustained only because the latter is ahistorical. But increasingly a radical assessment of the Indian state has begun to question whether the political pluralism it is renowned for maintaining applies 'only to cultural groups that remain broadly in the Hindu fold

but discriminates against non-Hindu minorities'.[31] A major pre-occupation of this assessment has focused on the assumption of state secularism, its intersection with the majoritarian political discourse, and as a negative elite strategy of Nehruvian rule. For T.N. Madan, one of the leading exponents of this school of thought, the Indian state's secularism is essentially 'negative' strategy.

> At best, Indian secularism has been an inadequately defined 'attitude' ... of 'good will towards all religions', *sarvadarma sadbhava*; in a narrower formulation it has been a negative or defensive policy of religious neutrality (*dharma nirpekshta*) on the part of the state. In either formulation the Indian state achieves the opposite of its stated intentions; it trivializes religious differences as well as the notion of the unity of religions. And it really fails to provide guidance for viable political action, for it is not rooted, full-bloodied, and well thought out *weltanschauung*; it is only a strategy.[32]

This negative strategy had no particular agenda for the secularization of Indian society. It offered asymmetrical accommodation (encapsulation) in the form of state neutrality. But while the state's official policy was to treat all religious communities equally, 'one would be more equal than others – namely the majority Hindu Community'.[33] This outcome was implicit in the demographic majoritarianism built into the new state; it was also inevitable in the model of Indian 'secularism' advocated by M. K. Gandhi and adapted by Nehru.

For some revisionists, Hinduism in the post-1947 period functioned as a meta-Indian ethnicity in which Nehruvianism, was at best, a 'defensive strategy against communal conflict rather than a charter for secularization of Indian society'.[34] This strategy accommodated Hindu religious interests because in the early 1950s Nehru initiated a pattern in which the 'Indian state would respond positively to religious pressures, particularly those emanating from Hindu groups, but would keep a distance from communal parties and platforms'.[35]

The paradox of a state without ethnicity becomes further untenable when we examine the logic of Indian nation and state-building since 1947. Partition ensured that the Indian nation and state-building project was founded on failure; the determination to succeed thereafter provided a natural coincidence of interest between elite secularism and Hinduism, the main cultural force in Indian society. Such was this unholy marriage of convenience that legitimate political challenges

from minorities were regularly disarticulated as 'communal', 'religious', and 'sectarian'. This dominant discourse was normally presented in binary opposites such as secularism versus communalism, national unity versus separatism, 'authentic' religion versus fundamentalism, mainstream versus regionalism, and integration verses disintegration.[36] While the Nehruvian state spoke the language of modernity, it simultaneously tolerated the equation of Hinduism with national culture, its elevation to a form of 'civic religion'.[37] Indeed, the assertion of civilizational essence founded in Hinduism was seen as *the defining* characteristic of the nation. In one memorable instance the Government of India insisted:

> The Indian people do not accept the proposition that India is a multinational society. *The Indian people constitute one nation*. India has experienced through her civilization over the ages, her strong underlying unity in the midst of diversity of language, religion etc. The affirmation of India's nationhood after a long and historic confrontation with imperialism does not brook any challenge (emphasis added).[38]

Even if we accept the arguments of those scholars working within the assumptions of conventional wisdom that the above statement is an aberration, a deviation from actual practice, the issue arises of consistent *a priori* insistence on 'underlying unity' alongside the idea of multiculturalism, pluralism or difference. The reality of 'underlying civilizational unity', however, is actually encoded with Hindu myths, symbols and imagery and has little to do with issues of stateness.[39] As Kothari reminds us, the concept of a centrally ruled polity emerged only with the latter Mogul tradition and was perfected by colonialism.[40] The recognition of India as a genuine plural society, on the other hand, 'does not need an underlying unity, or any commitment to a single truth, to hold people together. It needs mechanisms to make integration possible without denying those characteristics that define the essential life of its component groups.'[41]

To suggest, as Kaviraj [42] has done, that the Nehruvian state waged an unrelenting struggle against Hinduism in seeking to erase the 'language of belonging' is to seriously misinterpret the project of nation building after 1947 in which Hinduism functioned as a meta-ethnicity of the new nation. Thus the challenge of linguistic reorganization of the states in the 1950s could be addressed because no fundamental issues about the ethnic character of the state were at stake. This dualism was

also possible because, as Gellner has noted, 'Hindus "speak the same language" even when they do not speak the same language.'[43] In other words, the process of Indian nation and state-building has not typically been along the linguistic fault lines as elsewhere: instead it has followed the contours of meta-ethnicity (Hinduism) in which there is inclusive, accommodating and encapsulating pluralism. As we shall see below, these fault lines become unbridgeable zones when we examine the process in India's peripheral regions.

The limits of conventional wisdom: ethno-nationalist movements in the peripheral regions

One of the central weaknesses of conventional wisdom is its inability to explain the persistence of ethno-nationalist movements in the peripheral regions. In the last 18 years these movements, and the efforts to manage them, have cost tens of thousands of lives and have tied down almost half of India's security forces.[44] Some of these movements, which date from the pre-1947 period, have been able to maintain their opposition not only because of the 'external factor' (a euphemism for support from India's surrounding states) but mainly as a result of their ethno-nationalist resources – distinctiveness, history, collectivity, and a sense of destiny.

Scholars working within the assumptions of conventional wisdom have questioned the solidarity of peripheral ethno-nationalist movements by extending the argument of cross-cutting cleavages.[45] Apart from the obvious fact that most global ethno-nationalist movements are affected by some degree of cross-cutting localities, what tends to be overlooked in the Indian case is that these cleavages, especially in the peripheral regions, are cumulative. Thus Sikhs (religion) are overwhelmingly attached to one language (Punjabi) and are preponderantly from one caste (Jat) grouping. Likewise, in the Kashmir valley the congruence between language and religion is unproblematic. In the north-eastern states, distinctive identities of caste, tribe and language (and, sometimes religion, for example, Nagas) are mainly reinforced rather than cross-cut.[46]

Similarly attempts to explain the rise of these ethno-nationalist movements in terms of political perversion cannot sustain critical examination. The main political science explanation put forward for these movements is the acute manifestation of the centralizing tendencies unleashed by the post-Nehruvian leadership.[47] Whereas objective tendencies within Indian politics over the last three decades have been

towards regionalism, pluralism and decentralization, the response of the national leadership to these pressures, it is claimed, has been to centralize power in New Delhi.

But there are four basic limitations of the centralization thesis. First, it does not satisfactorily explain why centralization drives should have *disproportionately* adverse consequences for India's religious minorities, especially a minority like the Sikhs who were deliberately integrated into the state's coercive apparatus.[48] Second, the differences in the centralization drives of the Nehruvian and post-Nehruvian leadership were one of degree rather than kind. A less sympathetic reading of the Nehruvian era, particularly in the peripheral regions, would reveal a high degree of 'bossism', constitutional subversions, and conscious efforts to culturally and politically assimilate minorities.[49] Third, decentralization as a strategy for containing these ethno-nationalist movements would, paradoxically, in the short term, require further centralization lest the forces that have supported separatism make decentralization untenable.[50] Fourth, and related to the last point, underpinning ethno-nationalist demands are parallel claims to political sovereignty which would be (and have been) difficult to accommodate within the framework of the Indian union. If anything, the demands of these movements are for separate statehood and confederalism rather than neo-federalism.[51]

Largely because of their shortcomings, political perversion accounts are commonly supplemented by auxiliary explanations. Peripheral ethno-nationalist movements therefore may be the product of economic 'under-development' or 'overdevelopment';[52] of ethno-nationalist intelligentsia's malevolent design on the Indian union by 'constructing' identities;[53] of Machiavellian machinations within Congress;[54] of emerging regional bourgeoisies seeking to undermine the threat from the landless and the proletariat;[55] of hostile intent by India's neighbours;[56] of inadequate political institutionalization;[57] and of a perceived threat to the orthodoxy of the ethnic group in question.[58] But though all these explanations have major empirical limitations, their principal shortcomings are twofold: the failure to explain the self-evident irrationality of ethno-nationalist movements in the Indian union which have cost so many lives, and the persistent need of a self-proclaimed, self-confident nation-state to regularly define *itself* against them.

Such irrationality can be better appreciated in terms of what Connor has called the psychological bond of a nation 'that joins a people, in the sub-conscious conviction of its members, from all its non-members in a most vital way'.[59] Indeed, it is the ethno-national bond, 'the

emotional depth of national identity', [60] that has been the backbone of resistance in the peripheral regions. This is not to suggest however that ethno-nationalism in the peripheral regions is anchored in a form of primordialism which is immutable, unchanging and constant. Ethno-nationalism and nationalism, as Gellner reminds us, are primarily modern phenomena and, in the Indian case, nation and state-building provided ideal conditions for the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements in the peripheral regions. Some of these movements have always contested their accession to the Indian union, maintaining that they were either coerced or deceived into joining the new state. More significantly, they have all the characteristics of 'low culture' and a 'powerless intelligentsia' pitted against confident power holders who had privileged access to the majoritarian 'high culture' of Hinduism which defines the quintessence of 'civilizational unity'.[61] The dialectic between these two phenomena over the last fifty years has engendered, on the one hand, a confident 'high culture' nationalism that has attempted to deform, disarticulate and delegitimize ethno-nationalist movements as the 'communal' biproducts of colonialism through its control of ideological resources and the process of state-building, while on the other hand, the resistance to this overwhelming process has been negative, defensive and timid ethno-nationalisms based in traditional social institutions without access to the scarce resources of the state.[62]

To sum up: in its totality, conventional wisdom reasserts the view of India as unique, exceptional, a universe unto itself where the logic of comparative analysis is inapplicable. At the same time built into this uniqueness is the dominant paradigm of the Nehruvian state as a bench mark against which the post-Nehruvian state is evaluated, conveniently omitting the foundational failure of the partition. As conventional wisdom has proved to be inadequate in understanding ethno-nationalist movements in the peripheral regions, an alternative interpretation of the Indian state and its relationship with ethnicity is required.

India as an 'ethnic democracy', and 'hegemonic' and 'violent control'

The recognition that Hinduism as a meta-ethnicity has been an essential component of Indian nation and state-building calls for a radical revision of the experience of Indian democracy since 1947. It clearly does not conform to secularized majoritarianism (where the

state encourages acculturation and assimilation but allows ethnic groups to maintain ethnicity in the private sphere, for example the USA). If anything, as Upadhyaya has demonstrated in a pioneering article, Indian democracy subordinated secularism to the 'nationalism of the Hindu majority'.[63] This process was further possible because the political structures of the new state included the Westminster model with its first-past-the-post system of elections which underpinned ethnic majoritarianism. The 'institutionalization' of one-party dominance under Congress went hand in hand with an essentially unitary structure with the supremacy of the elite all-India administrative service.[64] Within the shell of Westminster-style democracy Hinduism established a hegemonic position, as *primus inter pares* – a position from which it was able to promote the religious assimilation of minorities (for example, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs), establish linguistic and ritual pre-eminence, and undermine the political challenge from minorities.

Nor does the Indian experience resemble ethnically accommodative consociationalism (where ethnicity, along with individual rights, is recognized as the basis for the organization of the state which acts as an arbiter between ethnic groups, for example, Belgium).[65] For one, the structures of majoritarianism excluded elements of proportionality and autonomy central to consociationalism; for another, the partition of India was a partition *against* consociationalism and for the construction of a majoritarian and a unitary state.[66] Lijphart's effort to understand the 'puzzle of Indian democracy' in the form of a 'consociational interpretation' misunderstands religious 'encapsulation' as autonomy, tactical political accommodation within the Congress as elite power-sharing, and linguistic pluralism within meta-Hindu areas as developed federalism.[67] In an ideal consociational system minority rights are entrenched, guaranteed and backed by a minority veto. In India the minority veto has been practically non-existent for most religious minorities (for example, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists) and, in the case of Muslims, has been frequently undermined by 'compensatory' concessions to the Hindu community.[68] The visual metaphor for Indian consociationalism therefore is not one of balanced scales, of ethnic groups counterweighing each other within the state, both proportionally and politically, but of a puppet on a string where ethnic groups, especially religiously based ones, respond, often reluctantly, to the puppet master (the state).[69]

In contrast to majoritarianism and consociationalism, India would appear to resemble a third variant; namely, an 'ethnic democracy'.[70]

According to Smooha, the leading theorist of the concept, ethnic democracies combine 'the extension of political and civil rights to individuals and collective rights to minorities with institutionalized dominance over the state by one of the ethnic groups'.[71] Whereas in some ethnic democracies the process of 'institutionalization' is formal and explicit, in others it is informal and implicit. In India the 'institutionalization of dominance' would appear to derive from unspoken assumptions about state secularism and 'civilizational essence', the historic ascendancy of the Congress in fashioning the post-1947 state in its image, and the existence of Hindu majoritarianism. Thus though the minorities have been granted individual and, in some cases, collective rights, the recognition of these rights has been based on a tactical accommodation with hegemonic Hinduism.[72]

Although ethnic democracies share most features of liberal democracies for the inclusive ethnic group, their relationship with excluded, peripheral and marginal ethnic groups is more problematic. At the other end of the continuum, ethnic democracies might exercise 'coercive rule' in which the 'superior power of one segment [dominant ethnic group] is mobilized to enforce stability by constraining the political action and opportunities of another segment or segments [subordinated ethnic group]'.[73] In between these two extremes an ethnic democracy might attempt to move towards a liberal democracy or practise brute majoritarianism, thereby circumscribing the rights of marginal groups. In such a context the main ethnic group 'can effectively dominate another through its political, economic and ideological resources and can extract what it requires from the subordinated'.[74] This form of rule has been termed 'hegemonic control' because 'it makes an overtly violent ethnic contest for state power either "unthinkable" or "unworkable" on the part of the subordinated communities'.[75] Hegemonic control can coexist within the formal shell of liberal democracies and is characterized by the use of coercive and co-optive rule to undermine ethnic challenges to state power.[76] Thus whereas violent control resembles overt domination, suppression and open confrontation, hegemonic control combines elements of coercion with some degree of consent that often underpins administrative structures.

The recognition of a Hindu/non-Hindu distinction would suggest that in India an ethnic democracy coexists alongside hegemonic and violent control over non-Hindu minorities. Where non-Hindu minorities have constituted a majority in the federating unit, the operation of hegemonic control has been exercised through the Hindu minority (and other supporters and ethnic groups); the use of residual powers by the union

government; the use of administrative structures ('the official regime'); and the coercive power of the Indian state. Hegemonic control in India therefore is not only based on majoritarianism common to situations of binary ethnic group conflict. Rather, it coexists within a framework of *de facto* ethnic democracy which extends constitutional rights to minorities but mitigates their *de jure* application through the excessive application of residual controls and placation of dominant ethnic sentiment. Where ethnic groups have contested, often violently, the nature of hegemonic control, the Indian state has readily resorted to violent control and has made such contests 'unthinkable' by the ideological, economic and political resources at its disposal, and 'unworkable' by its coercive practice.

Ethnic democracy, hegemonic and violent control and peripheral ethno-nationalist movements

A view of India as an ethnic democracy in which hegemonic and violent control is exercised over ethnic minorities necessarily requires a reassessment of the post-1947 period. Applied to the peripheral regions it calls for re-evaluation of India's secularism, the ethno-nationalist movements and the strategies used by the Indian state to manage them. Such a reassessment would require a careful examination of how ethno-nationalist demands have been processed in terms of the consistent pattern of 'regional accords' which have been followed by non-implementation and, ultimately, revocation. It would question the role of political institutions (for example, the Congress) and administrative structures in underpinning hegemonic control by facilitating co-option, accommodation, encapsulation and ethnic negation. It would assess the language used to delegitimize ethno-nationalist movements and justify nation and state-building. It would reflect on the extent and the regularity of violence used to maintain control – coercive and non-coercive. It would contrast the operation of civil liberties and the processing of comparable regional demands within India's ethnic core with the peripheral regions. It would question the social and economic policies that have encouraged assimilation through settler populations which have transformed indigenous majorities into irrelevant minorities. It would examine alongside hegemonic control the creation of internal zones (tribal areas), redrawing of state boundaries, and the creation of special tribal rights as a way of managing and eliminating ethnic conflict.[77]

Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, the north-eastern states and India's Muslims provide analytically appropriate cases for the study of

hegemonic and violent control within the Indian union since 1947 as well as illustrating the thesis that India is an ethnic democracy. All these elements are

> aggrieved sections of [Indian society] with a long list of grievances against the centre, deeply resentful of the latter's encroachment of their political autonomy and democratic civil rights. In different ways and to varying degrees, they have desisted from taking part in the orthodox nationalist discourse.[78]

Before 1947, these regions were mostly outside the dominating influence of the Congress and were controlled by regional parties which did not share the former's vision of post-colonial India. At independence some of these regions were coerced into the Indian union or became the battleground of ethnic cleansing associated with partition. Since 1947, these regions have been the sites of Indian nation and state-building failure, maintaining a degree of resistance to these processes which has consumed an inordinate amount of the Indian state's scarce resources, exposed it to international opprobrium, and made counterinsurgency the preoccupation of its armed forces. These states or union territories, moreover, are populated by non-Hindu ethnic group majorities (Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunchal Pradesh, Meghalaya), who feel deep resentment against Hindu Bengali mainland settlers who have turned the 'sons of the soil' into an insignificant minority (Tripura and Manipur), or have witnessed a revival of regional ethnic identity pre-dating the conversion to Hinduism (Assam). Finally, these territories are also distinctive in that they form the external borders of the Indian state – borders which have been the site of several wars which have sacralized the territory of the union within the inner core of Indian nationalism.

Lastly, although the operation of hegemonic and violent control in the peripheral regions is only likely to give us indirect insight into the character of India's ethnic democracy, the challenge of the BJP in seeking to redefine it more exclusively demonstrates the increasing irrelevance of Nehruvian 'pseudo-secularism' as an elite strategy. Yet the BJP's project of Hindutva is not markedly different from encapsulated secularism: what distinguishes it, however, is the rhetoric, the assertiveness, the homogenizing drive around particular Hindu icons, and the belligerent tone towards the minorities, both in the peripheral and non-peripheral regions. This project may create difficulties for Hinduism as a meta-ethnicity within the core; equally, Hinduism may only be in the process of being restructured in line with contemporary developments to

articulate the new 'language of belonging' which the Nehruvian elite derided, marginalized and ostracized. Whichever direction it follows, the exercise of hegemonic control over the Muslims within the ethnic core and other minorities in the peripheral regions suggests that we need to distinguish more clearly between meta-ethnic conflicts (those between Hindus and Muslims and in the peripheral regions) and those that occur within the plural pantheon of Hinduism. Or to put it in other words: it seems *obvious* to highlight the continuity between the Indian Army's operation in the Golden Temple in 1984 and the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to argue that there is a serious need to rethink the implications of conventional wisdom on ethnicity and ethnic conflict in India. Conventional wisdom is distinctive only insofar as it represents a remarkable unanimity in asserting the plurality, diversity, secularism (of the state) and, above all, the underlying unity of India. Fifty years after independence such falsehoods have been cruelly exposed by the thousands who have died in challenging the state's legitimacy in maintaining these beliefs. They have also been shattered by the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 which, according to one leading commentator, provides the future trajectory of the Indian state.[79] Against this background therefore it is appropriate and, indeed, necessary to interrogate the assumptions which underpin conventional wisdom and the political consequences that it has produced. It seems valid therefore to argue that the Indian state is not a non-national civilizational state but one which has explicitly laid claims to an exclusive ethnicity rooted in an ancient past. This meta-ethnicity has defined the limits of subnational pluralism putting to the sword those who have dared to physically dismantle them. As the challenge has come mainly in the peripheral regions with non-Hindu majorities, these regions have been the sites of bitter struggles between ethno-nationalist movements and Indian nation and state-building. The Nehruvian state managed the underlying tensions between a multinational society and ethnic democracy by majoritarianism and hegemonic control; the post-Nehruvian state is in the process of restructuring ethnic democracy which may result in a more overtly assimilationist state or a more resized Indian union, like the Russian Federation, without the quarrelsome and costly peripheral nationalities.

Notes

1. For an interesting insight into the Indian state's denial of 'ethnicity', see M. Banton, 'Are There Ethnic Groups in South Asia?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 21:5 (September 1998), 990–94.
2. Jim Manor, '"Ethnicity" and Politics in India', *International Affairs*, 72:3 (1996), 459–75.
3. P.R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*: *Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), identifies three ways of defining ethnic groups: objectively, subjectively and behaviourally. See 18–19.
4. R. Jeffrey, *What is Happening to India?* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 3.
5. Brass, op. cit., 19.
6. Jeffrey, op. cit., 5.
7. A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68.
8. Manor, op. cit., 461–2.
9. Ibid., 463.
10. For a long time S. Harrison, *India: the Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), was singled out as such a Jeremiah. A recent poll in *India Today* (August 10 1997) showed that it now includes more than one-third of India's population!
11. See B. Parekh, 'Ethnocentricity of the Nationalist Discourse', *Nations and Nationalism*, 1:1 (1995), 25–52.
12. This form of self-regulating 'structural functionalism' seems to be implicit in popular views of Indian society. As Rushdie writes: 'India regularly confounds its critics by its resilience, its survival in spite of everything. I don't believe in the Balkanization of India … It's my guess that the old functioning anarchy will, somehow or other, keep on functioning, for another forty years, and no doubt another forty years after that. But don't ask me how.' S. Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), 33.
13. See in particular the works of B. Chandra, B.R. Nanda, B. Parsad and A. Tripathi.
14. See in particular the works of M. Weiner, P.R. Brass, S. and L. Rudolph, and A. Kohli.
15. See, for example, D. Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).
16. See B. Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1989), and *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989); A. Nandy, 'The Political Culture of the Indian State', *Daedalus* (Fall 1989), 1–26.
17. See in particular the works of A. Appadurai and N. Dirks.
18. See S. Kaviraj, 'Religion and Identity in India', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 20:2 (April 1997), 325–44; Gyanendra Pandy, *The Construction of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
19. Manor, op. cit., 461.
20. This point was first highlighted by P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), ch. 1.
21. These assumptions are stated most clearly by Brass (1991), op. cit., ch. 5.
22. Ibid.; A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and J. Manor,

'Anomie in Indian Politics: Origins and Wider Impact', *Economic and Political Weekly* (May, 1983), 723–5, respectively cover these three modes of analyses.

23. See the contributions in U. Baxi and B. Parekh (eds), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995), in particular of B. Parekh and S. Kaviraj.
24. This seems an obvious point but one which is conveniently overlooked. The outpouring of publications associated with the fiftieth anniversary of partition has led to some retrospective reflection. But even the historiography of the partition has been expropriated by nationalists and apolitical subalterns; see A. Jalal, 'Secularist Subalterns and the Stigma of "Communalism": Partition Historiography Reconsidered', *Modern Asian Studies,* 30:3 (1996), 681–9.
25. Parekh (1995), op. cit., 39. This view is contested by S.K. Mitra, 'Crowds and Power: Democracy and the Crisis of "Governability" in India', in Baxi and Parekh, op. cit., for whom nationalist discourse 'around the nascent Indian state, immaculately conceived by Nehru (one hears little of Gandhi or Patel) … invented a new essence – a "civilization united by social harmony" – as its legitimizing myth … an idealized *Bharatmata'*, 226.
26. See A. Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
27. Parekh's (1995) op. cit., insistence that 'the confusion and mischief caused by Jinnah's introduction of the nationalist language into Indian politics (eventually) broke up the country', 39, echoes Kedourie's idealist argument that nationalism is the result of a world-historical intellectual error. See E. Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).
28. T. Mitchell and L. Abu-Lughod, 'Question of Modernity', *Items* (Social Science Research Council, New York), 47:4 (December, 1993), 80.
29. See A. Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997) ch. 4.
30. A.T. Embree, *Utopias in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 30.
31. P.R. Brass, *The Politics of India since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2nd edn.), 69.
32. T.N. Madan, 'Secularism in Its Place', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46:4 (November 1987), 750.
33. P.C. Upadhyaya, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26:4 (1992), 817.
34. Ibid., 828.
35. Ibid.
36. These kinds of binary opposites were most common in popular discourse during the era of Mrs Gandhi. At the height of the Punjab crisis in the early 1990s, one Sikh leader proclaimed that the reason why the minorities held back from joining the 'mainstream' was the serious danger of drowning! But according to S. Patel, 'On the Discourse of Communalism', in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.), *Nation, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India,* vol. 3 (Delhi: Oxford University Press), pp. 145–79, these opposites have a long historical pedigree.
37. Embree, op. cit., 89.

38. Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation* (New Delhi: 1984), 17.
39. As A. Sen, 'On Interpreting India's Past', in S. Bose and A. Jalal (eds), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), notes, the anticolonial argument that religious diversity did not imply hostility does not require a 'claim that a tendency toward unity and a broad synthesizing priority are special characteristics of Indian culture – not to be much found elsewhere', 20.
40. R. Kothari writing in *The Tribune* (Chandigarh), August 15 1997.
41. Embree, op. cit, 64–5.
42. See S. Kaviraj, 'On State, Society and Discourse in India', in J. Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 72–99.
43. E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), fn. 1, 109.
44. See S.S. Thandi, 'Counterinsurgency and Political Violence in Punjab, 1980–94', in G. Singh and I. Talbot (eds), *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar), 159–185.
45. For a contemporary example on the Kashmir question, see V. Hewitt, *Reclaiming the Past?* (London: Portland Books, 1995).
46. Manor's efforts (1996), op. cit., to highlight the cross-cutting nature of these cleavages in the peripheral regions is factually incorrect.
47. See Brass (1991), op. cit., ch. 5.
48. Centralization, moreover, does not explain why India's Muslims who, apart from Jammu and Kashmir, are not regionally concentrated, should be at the receiving end of its consequences.
49. A more critical assessment of Nehruvianism in the peripheral regions dispels this proposition, particularly with reference to Kashmir and Punjab. As an example, see J. Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen* (London: Routledge, 1975), 105–24.
50. For those focusing on the centralization thesis the paradox of decentralizing a highly centralized state structure as a remedy to ethnic conflicts has hardly been addressed. From the experience of the former Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist states, it can perhaps be argued that centralization rather than decentralization is necessary to keep state structures intact.
51. See, R.K. Bombwall, 'Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Federal Polity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (May 17 1986), 888–90.
52. See J. Dasgupta, 'Community, Authenticity and Autonomy: Insurgence and Institutional Development in India's North-East', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56:2 (May 1997), 345–70.
53. A. Varshney, 'India, Pakistan and Kashmir: Antinomies of nationalism', *Asian Survey*, 31:11 (November 1991), 997–1019.
54. Brass, (1991), ch. 5.
55. T.V. Sathyamurthy, 'Indian Nationalism and the "National Question"', *Millennium*, 14:2, 172–94.
56. *White Paper*, op. cit.
57. Kohli, op. cit.
58. Brass (1991), op. cit., ch. 6.
59. Walker Connor, 'Beyond Reason: the Nature of the Ethnonational Bond', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16:3 (July 1993), 377.

60. Ibid., 386.
61. Gellner's typology for the development of nationalism and ethno-nationalism is discussed with clarity in B. O'Leary, 'On the Nature of Nationalism: an Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism', *British Journal of Political Science*, 27 (1997), 191–222.
62. The emergence of Sikh, Kashmiri and Naga diasporas based in the West has begun to address this historic imbalance, both intellectually and through access to new resources, especially based around information technology. With particular reference to the Sikh diaspora, see R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: an Introduction* ((London: University College Press, 1997), ch. 5.
63. Upadhyaya, op. cit., 816.
64. Ibid., 830.
65. See A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
66. This argument is further developed in I. Talbot and G. Singh (eds), *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Karachi: OUP, 1999).
67. See A. Lijphart, 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: a Consociational Interpretation', *American Political Science R*eview, 90:2 (June 1996), 258–68. B. O'Leary has recently pointed out in 'The Elements of a General Theory of Right-Sizing the State', a paper presented to the Social Science Research Council conference on 'Right-Sizing the State: the Politics of Moving Borders' (May 1997) (unpublished), the need for *StaatsVolk* to ensure a stable democratic federation. In a 'stable majoritarian democratic federation the number of politically effective cultural groups must be less than two on the ethno-national index'. But a 'multicultural federation which registers more than two effective cultural groups on the ethno-national index must use supplementary consociational practices if it is to persist as a democratic federation', pp. 33–4. These supplementary 'devices' appear to constitute the bedrock of Lijphart's interpretation.
68. The Shah Bano case was followed by concessions by Rajiv Gandhi to Hindu militants over the Ayodhya mosque which set off a chain of events that led to the demolition of the mosque in 1992.
69. This metaphor is drawn by I. Lustick, 'Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociationalism versus Control', *World Politics*, 31 (1979), 325–44.
70. For the literature on ethnic democracy see Y. Peled, 'Ethnic Democracy and the Legal Construction of Citizenship: Arab Citizens of the Jewish State', *American Political Science Review* 82(2) (July 1992), 432–43; O. Yiftachel, 'The Ethnic Democracy Model and its Applicability to the Case of Israel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 15:1 (June 1992), 125–36. Yiftachel classifies India as a consociational democracy, though with serious qualifications.
71. S. Smooha, 'Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: the Status of the Arab Minority in Israel', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13:3 (July 1990), p. 391.
72. This is clearly the case with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and such accommodation dates from the time of M.K. Gandhi. After 1947 some minorities, for example, the Sikhs, had their collective rights revoked and were made subject to Hindu Personal Law. Article 25 of the constitution moreover defined the Sikhs as a sect of Hinduism.

73. Lustick, op. cit., 328.
74. B. O'Leary and P. Arthur, 'Introduction', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Future of Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 9.
75. Ibid., 8.
76. The terms hegemony and hegemonic control are used distinctly. This distinction is necessary to grasp the difference between India's ethnic core and the peripheral regions. Our operational use of hegemony therefore conforms to the common Gramscian reading as a 'sphere of cultural and ideological influence of pure consent', D. Forgac (ed.), *A Gramsci Reader* (London: Lawrence and WIshart, 1988), 423. More particularly, it refers to the ideas of dominant elites ('hegemonic beliefs') within the ethnic core about boundaries, nationhood, and self-determination movements. Hegemonic control, on the other hand, refers to the peripheral regions and implies the use of coercion and consent, as well as the manipulation of consciousness, to exclude certain possibilities. When hegemonic control breaks down, it is replaced by overt coercion and domination ('violent control'). Hegemonic control therefore is unlike the concept of 'control' as overt domination by ordinary means, see I. Lustick, op. cit. In the Indian case hegemonic control is certainly more appropriate as in the peripheral regions formal democratic structures have provided the shell for nation and state-building.
77. The distinction between elimination (hard methods such as genocide, forced population transfers, partition and integration or assimilation) and management (soft methods such as hegemonic control, arbitration, cantonization and/or federalism, and consociation or power-sharing) has been highlighted by J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, 'Introduction', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1–40. In India's peripheral regions, these methods have been used alongside hegemonic control.
78. T.V. Sathyamurthy, 'The State of the Debate on Indian Nationalism', 25th Millennium Anniversary Conference, London School of Economics (October 1996) (unpublished), 15.
79. Brass in his manifold 'incarnations' now believes the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque defines the future course of India. Brass (1994), op. cit., xiv.

4

The Partition of India as State Contraction: Some Unspoken Assumptions

The fiftieth anniversary of the partition of India is likely to be accompanied by renewed calls for a more detailed re-examination of the causes and consequences of the most significant event in the modern history of the subcontinent. Coming as it does soon after the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR and its European satellites, the reunification of Germany and the implosion of Yugoslavia, the anniversary provides an ideal moment for reflection in a world where conventional assumptions have been turned upside down. The old world order of imperialism and the Cold War is a distant memory and the political elites who were bloodied in the partition no longer hold sway. As sub-national problems dating from the partition refuse to go away and South Asia faces the economic challenge of the ASEAN countries, there is a growing realism among leading politicians that an open discussion of the previously unmentionable is needed.[1]

In many ways these issues have been thoroughly examined by historians. With more and more evidence becoming available every year since 1947, the role of key actors and institutions has been put under intense scrutiny. Although historians have been sensitive enough to undertake this work within the context of developments within the discipline – the shift in history from above to below for example – it has been virtually impossible for those of subcontinental and British origin not to be labelled as partisan. To some extent the nationalists' schools of historiography generated by 1947 were always beholden to the ideology of nation building. What is more lamentable however, as Jalal[2] has recently pointed out, is the failure of self-proclaimed radicals, subaltern or otherwise, to ask the right questions and indulge in polemical attacks on scholarship they dislike. Historians, it would

appear, are ideological animals, especially insofar as the partition is concerned.

Some of the difficulties encountered by historians of the partition might be better overcome if we examine the event in a comparative as well as an historical context. Post-1947 history, especially post-1989 history, has much to offer in reworking old questions. State collapse, contraction and expansion are no longer uncommon; non-majoritarian modes of governance function relatively peacefully within ethnically plural societies; and some of the most intractable political problems (South Africa, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and Northern Ireland) have begun to be unravelled. A few scholars have recognized the significance of these developments in the language of 'Back to the Future?' and the relevance of reworking the partition to understand unmanageable ethnic conflicts in the periphery and the core.[3] More systematic and comparative work is also being done on ethnicity, state secularism and nation and state-building.[4] In short, the areas of comparative analyses today are so varied, complex and, potentially rewarding, it is difficult to sustain the insularity so far evident in the historiography of the partition.

The aim of this chapter is to review the partition with reference to Lustick's theory of state expansion and contraction.[5] Lustick's work, it will be argued, offers new insights into the process of partition and its post-1947 consequences, most notably the politics of the 'disputed lands' which it created.

Lustick's theory of state expansion and contraction

Lustick's work derives from his study of what he calls 'unsettled states' and 'disputed lands' with reference to three case-studies: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, and Israel and the West Bank-Gaza. His primary concern is to examine the causes of state expansion and contraction in a context in which the status of state boundaries is a part of the political competition that constitute them. This intertwining is best understood as a process of political institutionalization and deinstitutionalization which occurs as a result of changes in the geographical size of the state. Such change is often non-linear, sudden and discontinuous.[6] Any expansion or contraction in the size of the state, insists Lustick

> can be expected to trigger shifts in the distribution of power within a state by changing the resources available to different groups and,

> ultimately, by changing the prevailing norms and legal arrangements to correspond with the interests of newly dominant groups. Substantial change in the shape and size of the state thus has long-term implications for the relative power position of different groups within it.[7]

But borders, as Lustick continues, are also

> institutional constraints, subject to change in times of crisis, which advantage certain groups and rival elites within the state at the expense of others. Substantial changes in the territorial shape of a state represent institution-transforming episodes. Struggles over the size and shape of the state must accordingly be understood as struggles over the 'rules of the game'. Boundaries specify who and what are potential participants or objects of the political game and who and what are not. Different borders have different demographic implications and different political myths associated with them. The territorial shape of the state thus helps determine what interests are legitimate, what resources are mobilizable, what questions are open for debate, what ideological formulas will be relevant, what cleavages could become significant, and what political allies might be available.[8]

To understand the political outcome of such developments Lustick offers 'a theory of punctuated institutional transformation'[9] to the problem of territorial change. The theory contends that there are three distinct stages of state expansion or contraction related to the type of conflict they generate. The first type of conflict (incumbency stage) is associated with incumbency, a struggle for rule among the governing elites. At this stage the political future of governing elites is at stake. The outcome of this conflict is determined by the nature of political competition, and if 'competition is limited to political bargaining, threats to bolt from the ruling coalition, electoral campaigns and so forth, it is easily contained within the political institutions of a developed polity'.[10] However, if the political institutions for regulating conflict among elites are inadequately developed, such conflict may rapidly pass to the second stage (regime stage) where there is 'the real possibility of violent opposition and the mounting of extra-legal challenges to the authority of state institutions'.[11] Regime-level conflict often involves '"illegal" competition over the rules themselves in a game treated at least in part as an "end of the world" contestation'.[12] The third and final stage (ideological hegemony stage) involves conflict among governing elites over the regime and hegemonically established beliefs about the political nature

of the state and the community. The relationship between these three stages, Lustick notes, can be examined in terms of institutionalization and dislocation caused, for example, by state contraction from a particular region and the implications this may have for the governing elites (incumbency), the regime (the legal order), and the hegemonic political beliefs. This relationship is depicted below.

The three stages identified above are separated from each other by asymmetric thresholds with zones of transition. State expansion or contraction can be seen as a movement across the thresholds

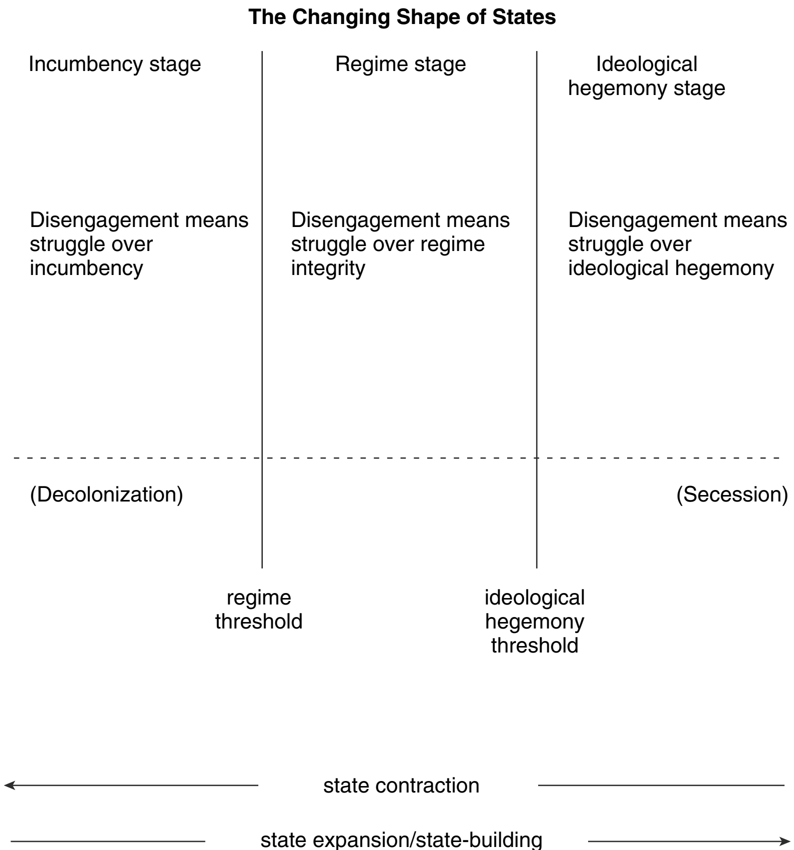


Figure 4.1 Territorial State-Building and State Contraction
Source: I.S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza*, Cornell University Press, New York (1993), 42.

determined largely by the degree of institutionalization and development of a particular polity. In the case of contested state contraction from a particular region, the movement will be backwards across the ideological hegemony threshold and may cross over to the regime threshold. The process of movement across and between the thresholds in either direction (state expansion or contraction) as depicted in Figure 4.1 can be analyzed in terms of Gramscian 'wars of position' (over the terms of political discourse) and 'wars of manoeuvre' (over the struggle for the control of instruments of state authority).[13]

Lustick maintains that his theory adequately explains the changing shape of the British and French states over a period of many centuries and Israel since the 1940s. In addition it can be applied to understanding the collapse of the USSR, the implosion of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, the retreat of colonial empires, and separatist movements as diverse as the Québecois and Basque nationalists. The theory also has considerable value, Lustick insists, in explaining the tensions around the new institutionalization of the European Union as a United States of Europe and the declining importance of nation states.[14]

Lustick's theory: partition and after

At first glance it would appear that Lustick's theory is of little relevance in enhancing our understanding of the partition and the events that led to it. If anything it is clearly more applicable to the post-partition period in which Pakistan witnessed serious state contraction with the creation of Bangladesh. Before 1945, moreover, the national political structures under the colonial state were poorly institutionalized. Not until the decisive elections of 1945/46 did there emerge a clear move towards establishing an interim regime of a sort. Indeed, this regime was beset by difficulties from the outset and remained a weak structure, incapable of effecting its own will let alone establish hegemonic beliefs. Political power rested above all at the provincial level where most of the key battles were fought and lost. Large areas of the country, furthermore, remained outside the formal structure of the colonial state as princely autarkies, nominally independent but strictly regulated. In fact it is difficult to ignore the strength of the argument that the colonial state was not an impartial arbiter but an instrument for structuring the choices, opportunities and outcomes made by the principal actors and parties in the events

that led up to the partition. In sum, the uniqueness of the partition, it could be argued, precludes it from being compressed into a case-study for the kind of theory Lustick has to offer.

Despite these potential objections it is still possible to operationalize Lustick's theory in a number of areas. First, we can examine why the colonial state did not adequately institutionalize national political structures long before the partition. Had such effective structures existed, institutionalization at the regime level might have been possible. Second, the movement back across the ideological hegemonic and regime thresholds might be better examined at the provincial level, especially in Punjab and Bengal where the 'ratcheting effect' was to produce chaotic conditions. Third, from 1945 onwards the debate between the Congress and the Muslim League about the future size, nature and boundaries of the Indian state can be seen as a shift from a 'war of position' to a 'war of manoeuvre' in which the objectives of political elites with reference to future career calculations in terms of territory, mobilizable resources, demographic strength, and ideological formulas becomes explicit, ultimately climaxing in the decision to accept partition. Of particular concern is the need to understand political interests that precluded a non-partitionable solution. Fourth, following partition we can look at how India and Pakistan structured dominant beliefs about the size of the state against the backdrop of partition and the international and domestic environment confronting them. What coalition of politically significant elites, for example, stood to gain from the new borders? Finally, as a legacy of the partition, how have India and Pakistan dealt with those separatist movements that claim to be the unresolved business of partition? Why was state contraction successful in the case of Pakistan over East Pakistan/Bangladesh but is proving more difficult for Kashmiri, Sikh and Assamese separatists in India?

Most of these issues require an extended discussion and there is sufficient secondary literature to undertake this more systematically. The rest of this chapter provides a summary of these points as a way of illustrating the relevance of Lustick's work in five areas: institutionalization of national political structures before 1947; state contraction and provincial-level politics; the national 'war of manoeuvre', 1945–47; post-partition state size and hegemonic beliefs about state size and borders; and, post-1947 separatist movements and the potential for 'resizing' and 'reshaping' the state.[15] Taken together these five areas provide a comprehensive research agenda for a detailed examination of the application of Lustick's theory.

Institutionalization of national political structures before 1947

Lustick has noted that one of the ways to review the collapse of colonial empires is to examine their shortcomings in institutionalizing governance in their respective countries.[16] In the case of the British Empire, the contrast between the older (white) and the new (black and brown) commonwealth could hardly be more striking.[17] But what is perhaps more relevant to the Indian case is the failure to evolve effective national political institutions that could have begun the process of institutionalization. To suggest that this was impossible, is to fall into a teleological trap which sees the partition as predetermined. Some historians have argued that if the 'federal provisions [of the Government of India Act (1935)] had become effective before the war ... the partition could have been avoided'.[18] To assert that these provisions provided an unworkable framework for resolving the question of Indian unity is to negate the proposition that if such an effort had been made then formal structures could have arisen which could have encouraged institutionalization. Of course these structures could have become unworkable, especially if the colonial state was reluctant to facilitate 'coercive power-sharing' because of its own short-term interests, but the experience of colonial institution building in India suggested that local politicians could construct inter-communal alliances, work within the rules of the game and establish harmonious governance. The absence of mediating federal structures certainly encouraged the process of communal polarization in which the Congress and the Muslim League became the embodiments of the majoritarian options. By 1946, when the interim government was established, it was clearly too late to resurrect the federal provisions which had become redundant as a result of the escalating demands of Congress and the Muslim League.

State contraction and provincial-level politics

If national structures were poorly institutionalized, at the provincial level the Government of India Act 1935 had encouraged the establishment of 'quasi-regime' politics. After 1935 provincial politics became the primary domain around which the main contenders for national political power eventually structured their strategies. However, before this development became pre-eminent, provincial politics provided a fascinating site for the emergence of power-sharing and consociational

arrangements. Recent research has drawn attention to how these arrangements resembled Lijphart's consociational model and were often founded upon similar structures at the level of the district and municipality.[19] In Punjab the Unionist Party was able to build a cross-communal alliance of agriculturalists that incorporated elements of power-sharing, proportionality, segmentational autonomy and the mutual veto.[20] These arrangements commanded sufficient political support in the province from the 1920s to the mid-1940s to marginalize the challenge of the Muslim League and the Congress. Indeed, Unionist position in Punjab was well established and the fact that it was undermined was a very close-run thing. Given this, how did the Unionist 'quasi-regime' respond to the Pakistan demand and the state contraction that it ultimately implied?

Although the Unionist Party had an ambiguous relationship with the Muslim League – a relationship that could be seen as twin-tracking – the official ideology of the party was committed to the integrity and unity of Punjab. The Sikandar–Jinnah Pact (1937) was as much a basis for autonomy of the party in Muslim affairs as a blank cheque for Jinnah. Following the Pakistan Resolution of 1940, however, there began a 'war of position' between the Muslim League and the Unionist Party in which the hegemonic beliefs of the latter were fundamentally challenged. Initially the Unionist response to the Pakistan resolution was to reassert faith in a united Punjab with complete autonomy from the centre. But the erosion of the Unionists' position was hastened when the collapse of the Sikandar–Jinnah Pact (1944) signalled the emergence of the Punjab Muslim League as the alternative to the Unionists. This collapse, as Talbot[21] has chronicled, was further underscored by the difficulties of managing a wartime economy which had inflationary consequences for the Unionists' natural supporters, the death of two leading Unionists, and the increasing uncertainty about the post-war nature of colonial rule. After the Simla Conference (1945), the hegemonic threshold was rapidly crossed as the 'war of position' became a 'war of manoeuvre' in which the local Muslim elites opted for the alternative ideological vision, power, patronage and career opportunities offered by the programme of the Muslim League. The Unionists' efforts to cling to power following the 1946 provincial elections were accompanied by extra-constitutional mobilization of communal violence that moved state contraction to the zone of incumbency. Ironically, the 'ratchet effect' of movement across the hegemonic and regime thresholds was so profound that the parties which had previously insisted upon a united Punjab – the Akalis and Congress – now demanded its immediate partition.

Thus the Punjab case clearly illustrates the asymmetrical nature of the transition zones. The movement from a challenge to the position of the Unionists to a fight over incumbency was so rapid and bitter that the 'quasi-regime' had little opportunity to manage the contraction as an orderly policy question at the regime level. Political uncertainty over the borders of possible contraction reinforced the sense of impending doom in which the mobilization of resources, particularly demographic, became an alternative to traditional institutionalized politics.

In Bengal, although there was no parallel to the Unionist Party as an intercommunal coalition, a sense of regional cultural unity did appear to transcend religious divisions. The provincial 'quasi-regime' was indeed buffeted by all-India developments but (unlike Punjab) when the possibility of state contraction reached the regime threshold in 1946, it was able to generate a counterproposal to regime collapse by proposing a united independent Bengal. This proposal was opposed most vociferously by the Bengali Hindu elite, whose demand for partition was influenced by the political opportunities which a united Bengal potentially foreclosed to them. 'It was the veto of the Congress High Command', as Sugata Bose concludes, 'that wrecked the possibility of preserving the unity of Bengal as a political entity. The partition of Bengal and Punjab had become a necessity for those who were anxious for a quick transfer of the centralized state apparatus from their colonial masters.'[22] In light of this, it could be conjectured that the 'quasi-regimes' in Punjab and Bengal might have fared better in maintaining and constructing new rules of the game had the absence of federal or confederal structures and the suddenness of colonial withdrawal not imposed the rapid crossing of hegemonic thresholds which quickly moved the debate to state contraction.

National 'war of manoeuvre', 1945–47

The existence of 'quasi-regimes' at the provincial level and weak institutionalization at the national level created a national 'war of manoeuvre' between 1945 and 1947 that in essence was a fight over incumbency. Traditionally this 'war' has been presented as an ideological struggle between two nations. Yet underlying this struggle were interest calculations of political elites that were often in conflict with the proclaimed ideological position. In Bengal, Kashmir and the princely states, the Congress and the Muslim League leadership sought

a quick transfer of power that was strongly contested, opposed and resented by regional elites.

After the Simla Conference the national 'war of manoeuvre' became focused around the Muslim League's demand for, and the Congress's opposition to, Pakistan. The acceptance by the Muslim League of the Cabinet Mission's proposals in May 1946 appeared to mark a decisive breakthrough, but the Congress's decision to impose its own interpretation on the proposal scuttled it. This historic decision, which was followed by the resignation of Azad as Congress President, was deeply influenced by the political implications for Congress if such an arrangement were accepted. The rejection marked a turning point after which 'direct action' and communal killings rather than negotiations began to dictate policy outcomes. Paradoxically, by the end of 1946 leading Congressmen rapidly moved to the position of privately accepting the need for partition which they had so consistently opposed.[23]

That partition rather then dual federation or a confederation was in the strategic interest of Congress became evident in early 1947. Congress organizations in Punjab and Bengal were activated to support the idea. Nehru vehemently opposed the May 1947 plan which gave the provinces ('quasi-regimes') the right to determine their future but soon accepted the 3rd of June plan which transferred power to two successor states on the basis of dominion status. The third option, preferred by regional elites in provinces like Kashmir, Bengal and some princely states, was undermined by a combination of threats, bribes and appeals to demographic and strategic realities. Even Gandhi's symbolic gesture in proposing Jinnah as an alternative leader of the interim government in an effort to prevent partition resulted in him withdrawing from the negotiations process because of opposition within Congress.

The absence of federal-level institutionalization might explain why majoritarian fears leading to the 'war of manoeuvre' rapidly became a fight for incumbency. The weight of revisionist historical scholarship appears to suggest that it was the intransigence of Congress sustained by its strategic political interests that frustrated the development of national regime-level rules fleetingly entertained by the Muslim League's acceptance of the Cabinet Mission proposals.[24] It has been persuasively argued that the demand for Pakistan was always a contingent bargaining counter for developing wider links with the Muslims in non-majority provinces. The argument that the partition was necessary to prevent bloodshed, civil war and balkanization

would now appear to be hollow given the consequences that ultimately resulted.[25] As Penderel Moon has noted: 'The Congress passionately desired to preserve the unity of India. They consistently acted so as to make its partition certain.'[26]

Post-partition state size and hegemonic beliefs

The partition of India strengthened the sanctity of the borders of the newly created states. The clash of visions that had led to the partition were now established as hegemonic beliefs supported by a coalition of interests who had most to gain from state contraction. As the new ideologies of nation and state-building were forged, the traumatic experience of state contraction, in both India and Pakistan created, as Lustick's theory predicts, a momentum across the thresholds for state expansion over 'disputed lands'. Kashmir became the main site of this contest though India's border with China and Burma also provided a number of complex borderland struggles.

In Pakistan this momentum for state expansion became regularized in the struggle for Kashmir, a Muslim-majority princely state that had failed to accede to Pakistan but whose Hindu ruler opted for the India union. Pakistan's ruling coalition of Punjabi landlords, bureaucrats and big business houses not only embarked on an ambitious programme of national integration, that included the imposition of Urdu as a national language, but also made the acquisition of Kashmir a necessary pre-condition of this process which had been set in motion by the 'two-nation theory'. That many Kashmiris did not wish to be part of a Pakistani (or Indian) state was a proposition which was denied by hegemonic beliefs so firmly established after 1947. Two wars (1948 and 1965) and continuing support for Kashmiri insurgent groups advocating accession to Pakistan, illustrate the success of all Pakistani regimes in embedding the Kashmir question beyond the hegemonic threshold. One could speculate (see below) that, unlike the case of East Pakistan, any 'war of position' towards the idea of an independent Kashmir would be unsustainable in Pakistani politics and may also precipitate a movement back across the regime threshold that could lead to a 'war of manoeuvre' and state collapse rather than contraction.

In India the ideology of the predominantly Hindu Congress became synonymous with 'secular' impulses towards state expansion. 'Disputed lands' – Kashmir, the princely states and the ambiguous colonial border with China and Burma – became the sacred territory of new 'secular' Bharat. Legitimizing Indian presence in Kashmir, the Congress fanned a curious double-speak which held that India's

secularism would be threatened if Kashmir left the Indian union. The obverse, that if India's secularism was so strong, the right of provinces to self-determination should be entertained, was insidiously made a political non-issue, supporting the inference that the forced inclusion of Kashmir symbolized a tokenist secularism and an instrumentalist ideology. Such instrumentalist realism was also apparent in the Congress's opposition to borderland movements for the linguistic reorganization of states, for example in Punjab, which invoked Congress's secularism for their own strategic reconstruction of internal borders in line with what was seen as the unfinished business of partition. In these states the traditional support base of the Congress which had so enthusiastically supported the clamour for partition in 1947, was mobilized to resist the new demands on the grounds of the threats it posed to the 'unity and integrity of the county'. After the Indo-China war (1962), the advocacy of secession from the Indian union was made a criminal offence punishable with three years' imprisonment.

Post-partition hegemonic beliefs about state size were further reinforced by the compulsions of the Cold War. State integrity in South Asia was underwritten by a complex system of external alliances and, when the Bangladesh movement emerged, it produced one of the most difficult episodes of the Cold War and the Nixon Presidency. Bangladesh became a rare example of a new state in a world where state boundaries were placed in the deep freeze of the Cold War. With hindsight, it is perhaps safe to conjecture that without the Cold War, state expansionist pressures might have produced more direct confrontations between India and Pakistan.

Post-1947 separatist movements, resizing and reshaping the state

An awareness of the dynamics of state contraction and expansion in India and Pakistan before and after the partition enables us to better appreciate the dynamics of contemporary movements for secession from these states. All too often such movements are viewed in isolation, as the product of external agents and conspiracies imputed with a malicious intent or as *sui generis* cases explicable in terms of specific factors.[27] If we apply Lustick's theory, however, and see such movements – and the efforts of states to control them – as part and process of political competition over the size of the state instead of a reopening of a 'settled question', we will be closer to a more realistic political analysis than perpetuating the mythology of political elites.

The real question about secessionist movements in India and Pakistan – and South Asia generally – is not what factors and conditions will enable them to succeed, but rather whether the state structures are sufficiently institutionalized to withstand the turbulence of movement across the hegemonic and regime thresholds without state collapse, and whether this institutionalization is adequately developed 'to destroy or deflect these movements so effectively that the image of united India [and Pakistan] whether Hindu [Muslim] or secular nationalist, can itself become hegemonic'.[28]

In the case of Pakistan, the creation of Bangladesh provides a perfect fit with Lustick's theory. There was a prolonged 'war of position' dating almost from the pre-partition days. The persistent refusal of the West Pakistan elites to institutionalize the politics of the demographically majoritarian Bengal province eventually led to the 'war of manoeuvre' and quick secession aided by external intervention led by India. That these rapid movements across the two thresholds produced only a regime rather than a state collapse in West Pakistan can perhaps be understood in terms of this state contraction benefiting traditional and new elites in the smaller (West Pakistan) state *à la* Bhuttoism and the Pakistan People's Party. But the post-1971 Pakistani state has continued to suffer from a weak political institutionalization as a result of populism under Z.A. Bhutto, military rule under Zia ul-Haq, and weak democratization since 1988 which has seen the presidential dismissal of two elected governments (1990 and 1993) and constant ethnic strife, especially in Sindh. It is possible, therefore, to appreciate why state expansion, for example over Kashmir, is pursued often in response to perceived dangers of state contraction, for example Sindh. The compulsions of these two processes may lock the Pakistani regime, democratic or military, into a nuclear South Asian Cold War in which the contradictions of state size are explicated in the rhetoric of defence of the Islamic republic.

By contrast, India's aggressive state expansion articulated in the language of nation and state-building has not precipitated state contraction. The extension of sphere of influence over Sikkim (1975) caused hardly a murmur among enlightened political opinion. The regional insurgencies in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam and the north-east have not eroded the ideological hegemonic beliefs about state size; if anything, they have reinforced them over the last decade and a half, particularly as these insurgencies have been portrayed in popular political discourse as foreign-inspired. Another explanation of why this erosion has been stalled could be related to the demographic size

of these provinces, their inability to play the role of Ulster Unionists in New Delhi, even at times of minority and coalition national governments.[29] In other words, the political constituency of these provinces in national Indian politics is too insignificant for ambitious elites, regional or national, to propose the restructuring of borders in a way that would challenge hegemonic beliefs. But an alternative argument, that the institutionalization of Indian democracy in the peripheral regions has crossed a threshold where it can act as an effective bar to secessionist movements, however, requires more serious assessment.

Some political scientists like Kohli and Mitra insist that the rise and fall of some of India's secessionist movements needs to be seen in the context of the rational and participatory opportunities afforded by India's democracy.[30] Kohli has argued that there is a bell-curve pattern of such movements which arise, accumulate momentum and then dissipate as their demands are co-opted, deflected or incorporated through participatory mechanisms.[31] In essence, the Indian state can permanently restructure the political demands of these movements. But this interpretation fails to appreciate the continuity in secessionist demands, the instrumentality of democratic structures in the regions where they arise, and the regular absence of political legitimacy of rule-bound behaviour that commands majority consent freely given and underpinned by 'normative agreement' on how rules are constructed.[32] Elsewhere I have suggested that a better approach to the issue of regional movements is to view Indian democracy in ethnic terms in which non-Hindu areas are subject to hegemonic and violent control. Hegemonic control provides scope for the kind of accommodation that Mitra and Kohli describe, but when such accommodation is challenged, contested and questioned, violent control is regularly imposed, undermining the structures of institutionalization.[33]

The constant imposition of violent control in the peripheral regions encourages deinstitutionalization within them and among the wider polity. An aggressive policy in Kashmir and Punjab, for instance, jeopardizes the kind of institutional regime strength that could also manage orderly state contraction or better integration through new structures. In fact, such is the suspicion with which peripheral movements are held, that their support for demands short of secession are treated as non-negotiable by governments at the centre – whatever their complexion – even though such demands are often readily conceded to areas within the fold of the ethnic democracy. Like Pakistan, the Indian state's response to movements of secession is aggressive state expansion and an enthusiastic

espousal of a nuclear Cold War in South Asia as a guarantor of state integrity. The main paradox regarding state size and political competition in India in the mid-1990s, almost half a century after partition, is that after 1947 the Congress was so successful in establishing state expansion as a hegemonic belief that today, as at partition, although state contraction offers enormous opportunities for new political elites, it is becoming increasingly difficult to escape from the trap of ideology that the Congress has constructed. The new emerging debate on the realities of partition is perhaps the beginning of the effort to escape from this predicament.

Conclusion

The five aspects that have tentatively been examined suggest that the reservations about the applicability of Lustick's theory to the partition and after are unjustified. The theory provides a good explanatory account of the difficulties associated with state contraction and the political factors that sustained the process. Its assumption about the rapid and chaotic movement across the hegemonic and regime thresholds in the absences of appropriate institutionalization is validated. It provides continuity between state contraction at partition, the subsequent drives for state expansion in India and Pakistan and resistance to this process in the 'disputed lands' which had contested the accession to either India or Pakistan. It also highlights the 'other' neglected dimension of separatist movements – whether it be Pakistan, Bangladesh, or the pursuit of independent Kashmir: that is, once the hegemonic threshold is crossed in a situation of weak institutionalization, state contraction can be rapid, decisive and irreversible. The focus of too much contemporary scholarship on South Asia is on reinstitutionalizing the politics of separatist movements within *existing* state boundaries. This emphasis is both ideologically prescriptive and stands in opposition to global tendencies of resizing and reshaping the state. Unless, as Lustick urges us to believe, we see state boundaries as part and parcel of the political competition that constitutes them and recognize the significance and strength of political institutionalization to sustain their expansion and contraction in a peaceful way, the dangers of a partition-like contraction cannot be ruled out. Lustick's comparative agenda suggests clearly that it is time to refocus political analyses on the state rather than the imagined demon of the separatist who is popularly projected as the arch culprit of political decay, violence and instability.

Notes

1. Muylan Singh Yadev, the Defence Minister in the United Front Government, openly called for a new federation in South Asia, see *The Sunday Tribune* (Chandigarh), July 21 1996. N. Mukarji in another article, 'Strengthening Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly,* (May 11 1996), 1129–34, proposed a reconsideration of the Cabinet Mission (1946) proposals for regenerating Indian democracy.
2. A. Jalal, 'Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of "Communalism": Partition Historiography Revisited', *Modern Asian Studies,* 30:3 (1996), 681–9.
3. See for example, I. Talbot's '"Back to the Future?" The Punjab Unionist Model of Consociational Democracy for Contemporary India and Pakistan', *International Journal of Punjab Studies,* 3:1 (1996), 65–73 and Y. Samad, *A Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan, 1937–1958* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).
4. See I. Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Pinter Press, 1996); S. Mahmud Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal Wars in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1993); S.K. Mitra, 'What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict?', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 3:1 (1996), 75–91; and G. Singh, 'What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict? (II)', *International Journal of Punjab Studies,* 3:2 (1996), 229–42.
5. I.S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and West Bank-Gaza* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993).
6. Space precludes a more extended discussion of the term institutionalization as used by Lustick. For him, 'An institution is a framework for social action which elicits from those who act within it expectations of regularity, continuity, and propriety. Such a framework is institutionalized to the extent that those expectations are reliably reproduced. Institutionalization is a process by which change in the rules of political competition becomes increasingly disruptive and decreasingly less likely to be part of the strategic calculus of competitors within the institutional arena.' Ibid., 37.
7. Ibid., 38.
8. Ibid., 41.
9. Ibid., 439.
10. Ibid., 41–2.
11. Ibid., 42.
12. Ibid., 42.
13. See ibid., ch. 2 for a detailed discussion of the theory.
14. Ibid., ch. 11.
15. Resizing refers to change in external borders; reshaping, internal.
16. Ibid., 447.
17. For an interesting aside into the differing political cultures and institutional development of these two entities of the British empire, see P.N.S. Mansergh, 'Some Reflection on the Transfer of Power in Plural Societies', in C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright (eds), *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 43–53.
18. R.J. Moore, 'The Making of India's Paper Federation', in Philips and Wainwright, ibid., 54.

19. See Talbot, op. cit. For a recent examination of the application of consociational theory to India see A. Lijphart, 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: a Consociational Interpretation', *American Political Science Review*, 90:2 (June 1996), 258–68.
20. See I. Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana, The Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (London: Curzon, 1996).
21. I. Talbot, 'The Unionist Party and Punjab Politics', in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 86–105.
22. S. Bose, 'A Doubtful Inheritance: the Partition of Bengal', in Low, op. cit., 131.
23. See V.P. Menon's discussions with Vallabhbhai Patel, in Philips and Wainwright, op. cit., 577.
24. See Jalal, op. cit.
25. This, of course, is the pro-Congress perspective. S.R. Mehrotra, writing on 'The Congress and the Partition of India', in Philips and Wainwright, op. cit., concludes that 'Continued slavery, civil war, chaos and the fragmentation of India – these were the only alternatives to partition in 1947. Nor was partition, in the judgement of many Congress leaders, an unmixed evil. *India was at long last free. The unity of at least two-thirds of India had been preserved,*' (emphasis added), 220.
26. Mansergh, op. cit., 47.
27. For a survey of the literature on Punjab see G. Singh, 'Understanding the "Punjab Problem"', *Asian Survey,* 27:12 (December 1987), 1268–77.
28. Lustick, op. cit., 443–4.
29. In contrast, the Machiavellianism of regimes in New Delhi in first precipitating a boycott from the mainstream regionalist parties and then holding elections in these regions has largely benefited the ruling national party in an emerging situation of minorityism or coalition politics. Punjab 1992 and Kashmir 1996 provide ideal examples.
30. See A. Kohli, 'Can Democracies Accommodate Ethnic Nationalism? Rise and Decline of Self-Determination Movements in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56:2 (May 1997), 325–44 and Subrata K. Mitra, 'Rational Politics of Cultural Nationalism: Sub-national Movements in South Asia', *The British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (1995), 57–78.
31. Kohli, ibid.
32. See ch. 1.
33. See ch. 3 and G. Singh, 'The Punjab Crisis since 1984: Reassessment', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18:3 (July 1995), 476–93.

Part 2

Punjab and the Sikhs

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a considerable increase in the publications on Punjab and the Sikhs. Much of this interest has been generated by the events in Punjab after 1984, but it is also the result of the growth of Punjab and Sikh studies in higher education in Europe and North America. A major preoccupation of this literature has been the concern with Sikh identity reflected in the emergence of two schools of thought: the traditional historians, instrumentally inclined political scientists and anthropologists, and post-structuralists for whom Sikh identity is essentially a modern construction; and anthropologists, Sikh historians and theologians for whom the essentials of Sikh identity were present from the time of the gurus.[1] What has been missing from this debate are the dynamics of mobilization which compelled the Sikh community into competition with Punjabi Hindus and Muslims in the late nineteenth century and its response to nation and state-building after 1947.

Chapter 5 provides broad coverage of these issues. It eschews the fashionable contemporary post-structural emphasis on 'raptures' and departures for a review of continuities and discontinuities. Sikh identity, it is suggested, is remarkably cohesive in modern times and is unamenable to the kind of *ad hoc* depoliticization that instrumentalist readings of it implies. Operation Blue Star (1984) highlighted the depth of emotional response that Sikh identity can evoke; events before and after it demonstrated that contingent explanations, economic or political, were by themselves insufficient in explaining the developments within the Sikh community. Any realistic understanding of contemporary Sikh politics therefore would be incomplete without an appreciation of this fact.

The limits to the political articulation of Sikh identity in post-1947 India are explored in Chapter 6. Operationalizing the concept of hegemonic control developed in Chapter 3, the Nehruvian and the post-Nehruvian experience is reassessed in terms of the relationship between the 'Sikh political system' and dominance of the Congress in Punjab. Neither the Sikh (Indian) nationalists (Sikh Congressites) nor Sikh Communists were, despite strenuous efforts, able to restructure Sikh identity in accordance with requirements of Indian nationalism as represented by Congress or the politics of class. Congress as the dominant force in Punjab politics used four mechanisms to maintain hegemonic control: ideological, factional penetration, tactical accommodation, and administrative residual control. Hegemonic control, however, became open to challenge following the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state, culminating in the violent confrontation of 1984. Hegemonic control, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, appropriately describes the acceptable boundaries within which Sikh ethno-nationalism is tolerated within the Indian union.

Chapter 7 was written in 1987 in order to make sense of the vast body of literature produced on the 'Punjab problem' and its immediate aftermath. At the time the objective was primarily to identify the various schools of thought. Nevertheless this chapter did raise the puzzle of Sikh nationalism: namely, its timid and defensive character, the need, above all, to account for its partial 'accommodation' within the Indian union. A sense of incomplete understanding at the time was reflected in the open conclusion as well as a call for a more comprehensive theory of Sikh ethno-nationalism.

Note

1. For a discussion of these issues see, C. Shackle and G. Singh (eds), *New Perspectives in Sikh Studies* (London: Curzon, 2000).

5
Sikh Ethnicity and Punjab

Writing in 1986, against the backdrop of Operation Blue Star, Oberoi argued that there was a serious need to interrogate the whole nature of Sikh ethnicity and its association with Punjab. The assumed naturalness of this identification so represented in Sikh 'metacommentaries', Oberoi insisted, was in fact a relatively recent development in which the territorialization of Sikh ethnicity from Punjab to 'Khalistan' reflected the conscious unfolding of historical actions and the stories Sikhs told about themselves.[1] Nor was it safe to speak confidentially about a clear Sikh identity. Even by the end of the Guru period, Oberoi insisted, 'The category, Sikh, was still flexible, problematic, and substantially empty.' For the modern Sikh identity to emerge, on the other hand, a 'long historical period was needed before it was saturated with signs, icons, and narratives made fairly rigid by the early decades of the twentieth century'.[2]

Oberoi's seminal argument was further developed in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.[3] Perhaps the most significant work on contemporary Sikh scholarship, this volume launched a powerful academic agenda by introducing post-structuralist methodology to Sikh history. In place of the old certainties of Sikh history, Oberoi emphasized 'ruptures', 'departures' and 'constructions'. Oberoi's main thesis centred around a Sikh world consciously 'reconstructed' in the modern image of *Khalsa* (Sikh brotherhood) ideology from the late nineteenth century onwards. This project, it is persuasively argued, was the result of Sikh elites' social engineering following the encounter with colonialism. Its consequences were that the plural identities which had pervaded the Sikh universe were rapidly displaced by Khalsa identity which was embedded through new institutions, rituals and legal norms. Along with the outward appearance of Khalsa identity a new

Khalsa *weltanschauung* was ‘constructed’, based primarily on ‘rhetorical history’, that provided psychological confirmation to the ‘new’ Sikh self, its claims to political sovereignty.[4]

Oberoi's extreme instrumentalism as far as ethnicity is concerned has become part of a new conventional wisdom where all identities are 'contingent', 'constructed', and 'fluid'. His work has been favourably received by those contesting the rise of 'essentialism' within the Sikh *Panth* (Sikh religious community), as well as those seeking to recover the margins of Sikh history, the neglected dimensions that have been allegedly suppressed by the 'discourse' of the Khalsa.[5] Today it is almost *de rigueur* to genuflect to Oberoi before seriously talking about Sikh ethnicity.[6]

Although chiming with the intellectual currents of the age, the post-structuralist approach suffers from serious weaknesses.[7] Empirically, it has yet to be proved that the Khalsa identity was such a minor player within Sikhism before the late nineteenth century.[8] Any interpretation of a ‘constructed’ Khalsa identity furthermore both negates the achievements of the eighteenth century and ascribes to Sikh elites of the late nineteenth century a degree of autonomy in shaping the ‘new’ identity which they may not have possessed. Even allowing for the fact that the elites were able to define the ‘boundaries’ of Sikhism much more clearly and precisely, these ‘boundaries’ were, nevertheless, limited by the sacred text and religious tradition dating from Guru Nanak.[9] Furthermore, in minimizing the role of ‘structures’, post-structuralists are also inclined to overlook the significance of context of Sikh ethnicity – that is, its development in relation to, and in competition with, other ethnicities.[10] But perhaps the most serious objection is that Sikh ethnicity is simply the product of ‘narratives’ which can be varied and ‘constructed’ according to circumstances. This reading fosters an unreal escapism to a genuine political problem; it also, uncritically, accepts the *status quo* of structures against which Sikh ethnicity is defined, contested, and determined.[11]

The radical claims being made by post-structuralists about Sikh ethnicity are only now being assessed. Interestingly, the post-structuralist departure has also recently fostered a remarkably original reinterpretation of Indic religions, Sikh text and identity which has both called into question Oberoi’s thesis and confirmed the distinctive individuality of Sikhism.[12] Given these differences, it is perhaps too premature to abandon the traditional ‘narrative’. The rest of this chapter will cover the historical background against which Sikh ethnicity has evolved into a mature ethno-nationalist movement.

Punjab

The modern Punjab has been one of the most distinctive provinces of India. Forming a transitional zone between the Muslim and Hindu worlds, it covered a vast area extending from Delhi in the south-east to the borders of Afghanistan in the north-west. In the east it was bounded by the Himalayas and the river Jamuna. In the west the river Indus marked its most extreme limits. The point where the province's rivers flowed into the Indus also marked its southern boundary. Most of the Punjab was a fertile plain divided by five rivers that gave the province its name: *Pun-jab*, the 'land of five rivers'.

Three factors gave Punjab a distinct identity which marked it off from the rest of India. As the premier land-gate to India the province witnessed the continual flow of foreign armies – the Greeks, Turks, Persians, Moguls and Afghans. Political stability was rare for there was never 'a period of peace long enough to allow a forgetfulness of the contingent'.[13] Uncertainty and violence bred a suspicion of, and hostility towards, the unfamiliar, a healthy respect for physical vigour, and a reluctance to submit to political authority. Regularly occupied, the Punjab became a 'home and grave for the careerism of collaborators and the bravery of [its] heroes'.[14]

A related feature of this geographical position was the evolution of a social structure that was in many ways atypical of the traditional Indian pattern. Although all the four *Varnas* were present – *Brahmins* (priest), *Kashatriaya* (warrior), *Visyya* (trader), *Sudra* (service) – caste was a compound of irregular classical pattern and tribal adaptation.[15] There were very few pure castes. *Brahmins* constituted a smaller proportion of the population than anywhere else in north India and did not enjoy an especially favoured social status. The social hierarchy was dominated by the numerically preponderant Jats whose outlook was closely identified with the frontier-agrarian features of Punjabi life. They, more than any other social group, embodied the *zeitgeist* of Punjab.

Modern Punjab's distinct identity was also symbolized by its language. A mixture of Arabic, Persian, Pushtu, Pahari, Western Hindi and Sanskrit, it captured in full the rugged raucousness of its rural speakers. Its slow, indelicate delivery articulated the essence of border-agrarian consciousness – its simplicity, vibrancy, spontaneity, lewdness and directness. Folklore, the culture of Punjabis, was glorified in epics like Waris Shah's *Heer*, Pilu's *Sabhan* and Hashim's *Sassi Pannu* as well as the more common forms like *lookgeets* (folk-songs), village festivals, and ballads. The violent and romantic

emotions familiar to the 'land of five rivers' also found a powerful expression in the popular and common idiom of poetry.

The age of the Gurus and Sikh rise to power

The Punjab of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, experienced the influence of religious reform movements in north India which coincided with the establishment of Mogul rule in India. These movements contested the orthodoxy of Islam and Hinduism in the name of regional tradition, devotional practice and folk heritage. Guru Nanak who was aware of these movements and drew on them, sought to transcend Islam and Hinduism by creating a new religion for a new age. 'There is', he proclaimed, 'neither Hindu nor Muslim.' Instead Guru Nanak's message focused on the devotional formless Creator who 'graciously bestows, through the spiritual True Guru, who is the manifestation of His message to humanity'.[16] The road to unity with the Divine, said Guru Nanak, rested on three injunctions: devotion and adoration of the 'Divine Name', hard work, and the sharing of rewards of one's labour with others.

Guru Nanak's revolutionary message soon attracted considerable appeal. He was succeeded by nine other gurus who guided the development of the Sikh community. By the time of the fifth guru, Guru Arjan (1581–1606), Sikhism had established a strong foothold in Punjab's central districts and the initial steps had been taken to formalize the development of the community with the founding of the *Harimandar* (Golden Temple, 1604) in Amritsar and the compilation of the *Adi Granth* (Sikh holy book). But this growth did not go unnoticed. Emperor Jhangir's efforts to check the spread of the new faith led to the execution of Guru Arjan in 1606. His martyrdom marked the beginnings of the transformation of Sikhism from pacifist reformers to the militant Khalsa.

This process began with the sixth Guru Hargobind (1606–1644) and culminated with the tenth, and last guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1658–1707). Faced with persecution of Sikhs, sustained attacks on their institutions, and heretic schism associated with rivalry for guruship, Guru Gobind introduced two major innovations that were to lay the foundations of modern Sikh identity. On *Basakhi* (New Year) 1699 Guru Gobind baptized the Khalsa (the pure) who were to undertake a fearless defence of the community. They were to adorn the external symbols of identity, the five Ks – *kesh* (unshorn hair), *kacha* (short drawers), *kirpan* (steel dagger), *kara* (iron bangle) – and rename themselves as Singh (male) or Kaur (female). Second, upon his death

Guru Gobind invested the guruship in the *Guru Granth* (the holy book), thereby terminating personal guruship. Together these two changes drew the boundary around Sikh identity much more distinctly and clearly. Whereas the end to personal guruship marked a break on schismatic pluralism, the Singhs of Guru Gobind were destined to assume a pre-eminent position within the Panth.[17]

If the Khalsa was created to challenge Mogul rule, the eighteenth century demonstrated that it passed the test. The century after Guru Gobind's death is referred to as the 'heroic age' when the institutions and teachings bequeathed by him inspired his followers to establish political rule in Punjab. As centralized Mogul rule collapsed, and parts of Punjab were ceded to the Afghan rulers, the latter and their vassals waged a continuous campaign against the Sikhs to contain their growing power in central Punjab. By 1765 the Sikhs had occupied Lahore and extended their influence throughout most of Punjab. This remarkable rise to power in the face of adversity, persecution, and minority status was due as much to the collapse of Mogul rule as Sikh state formation. In particular, Sikh institutions such as *rakhi* (protection), *misl* (militia), and *dal Khalsa* (combined militias) encouraged the 'revolt of the common people' against landlords, the local state, and centralized authority. But if the revolt of 'peasant tribes' fuelled this 'revolution', it was sustained by the collective vision of Gobind's Khalsa which proclaimed 'the right of every Singh to fight, to conquer and to rule'.[18]

The 'heroic age' climaxed with the proclamation of Ranjit Singh's 'Kingdom of Lahore' in 1801. In almost forty years Ranjit Singh was able to establish a powerful state that subjugated Afghan territories to the west, included Kashmir, and extended as far as Lhasa and Tibet. This expansion was sustained by the creation of a military meritocracy led by Sikhs, a period of tranquillity which encouraged economic development, and the weakness of rival states, especially the limits to cis-Satluj states of British influence by the treaty of 1809. Ranjit Singh's kingdom flourished under these conditions with one contemporary's description of it as 'the most wonderful object in the world' constructed by a skilful architect from essentially 'unpromising fragments'.[19]

That Ranjit Singh's state was shaped in the image of its founder became apparent upon the maharajah's death when it imploded as a result of weak successors, royal rivalry and British intrigue. Gradually the army took over the state engaging in encounters with the growing expansion of British power. The Treaty of Lahore (1846), and the subsequent annexation of Punjab by the British (1849), marked the final end to Sikh sovereignty. It had lasted a mere 50 years.

Ranjit Singh's rule led to a major change in the fortunes of the Sikh community as a whole. From being primarily peasant-cultivators, Sikhs came to represent over 50 per cent of the ruling class. Sikhs also led and constituted more than half of the army. State patronage was liberally bestowed upon Sikh cultural and religious institutions, with the latter enjoying 60 per cent of all revenues alienated to such bodies.[20] Within the Panth the position of the Singhs, who led the Khalsa army, was strengthened at the expense of the non-Singhs – Sikhs who often retained the pre-Khalsa sectarian pluralism which blurred the boundaries between Sikhism and Hinduism. In many ways the doctrine of the Khalsa was better suited to the social and political conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because of the ideas of equality, the need for mobility, and the requirements of guerrilla warfare. And although a wide gulf separated the Khalsa nobility and the ordinary Sikhs, there was a consciousness of the community's political power, a shared feeling that 'the rulers of their land were their own people'.[21]

The colonial period

The annexation of Punjab by the British introduced colonial rule which lasted a century. During this period the Punjab underwent rapid economic, political, demographic and social changes – changes that were to leave a permanent imprint on the successor provinces of Punjab after the partition of 1947. For the Sikhs the century witnessed the dethronement from a ruling community to minor status as represented by its numerical strength as the smallest of Punjab's three communities (Muslim, Hindu and Sikh).

In the aftermath of the British takeover Sikhs were viewed with suspicion by the colonial authorities. Their fortunes soon revived afterwards when the Khalsa helped to defeat the rebellion of 1857–58. This invaluable assistance was reciprocated with the designation of Punjab as the 'land of the martial race' and the province became the principal recruiting ground for the Imperial Army. By the end of the century, the Punjab provided almost 50 per cent of the Imperial Army's strength, and of this component, the Sikhs constituted about 25 per cent. The high watermark of Sikh military participation was reached during the First Word War when their representation increased from 35 000 at the outbreak of hostilities to over 100 000 by the end of the war.[22] This high level of participation was accompanied by the promotion of Singh identity by the army recruiters. According to some scholars the Imperial Army deliberately nurtured 'an ortho-

dox, separatist and martial Singh identity' in preference to the pacifist, non-martial orientation of non-Singh Sikhs.[23]

Mass military recruitment and the rewards that it generated – income, grants, pensions and patronage – was followed by colonial social engineering which benefited the Punjab agriculturalists from whom most of the Sikhs were drawn. The Land Alienation Act (1901) enabled the Punjab Government to protect the owner-cultivators from the vagaries of agricultural commercialization and usury. The construction of Canal Colonies, large tracts of barren land in west Punjab converted into fertile and cultivable plots by canal irrigation, provided a valuable resource for the colonial state to reward 'patriotic' and 'loyal' cultivators. From the late nineteenth century, large settlements of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh 'colonists' were established in western Punjab.[24]

Colonialism's social consequences were equally profound. Social reformers, unnerved by the colonial encounter, sought to revive, reform, and rejuvenate traditional identities. The Arya Samaj was among the first of these movements which sought to de-ritualize Hinduism and absorb what were seen as lapsed groups, including the Sikhs. Aggressive and proselytizing, the Arya Samaj gave rise to the Singh Sabha Movement (1880s) which too sought to assert the distinctiveness of Singh identity. The message of the Singh Sabhas was epitomized, above all, in the popular tract *Ham Hindu Nai* (We Are Not Hindus), the establishment of distinctive Sikh rituals, and the defence of Sikh institutions. Singh Sabhas did much to mark out the modern features of Sikh identity – a modernistic, de-angularized Khalsa – but the task so undertaken perhaps merely accentuated those pre-existing characteristics which enabled the distinction between Sikhs and Hindus to be drawn much more sharply than before.[25]

The Singh Sabhas' project was completed by the Akali Movement (1920–25). Begun as a movement for the liberation of *gurdwaras* (the Sikh temple) from the control *mehants* (Hindu priests) and nominated Sikhs, the movement turned into the 'third Sikh war', a full-scale mobilization between the Sikhs and the colonial administration in which 4000 suffered death, 2000 were wounded, and 30 000 men and women jailed.[26] In the event the demands of the movement were accepted in the passing of the Gurdwara Act (1925) which recognized the Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as the legal authority to manage and control Sikh gurdwaras. The Act established a 175-member SGPC that was to be democratically elected by all Sikhs with a tenure of five years. The Akali Dal, which had led the movement, was recognized as the political wing of the SGPC. Together the

Map 5.1 Pre-Independence Punjab Partitioned in 1947

SGPC and the Akali Dal provided the institutional framework of what Wallace has called the 'Sikh political system'.[27] Religion and politics which had been inextricably interlinked in the development of Sikhism were now formally entwined.

Both the Singh Sabha and the Akali movements made significant contributions to the homogenization of Sikh identity around the Singhs. By 1931, Singhs constituted 80 per cent of the community.[28] In terms of the caste, the Singh identity also claimed pre-eminence: in 1921 almost 80 per cent of all Sikhs were Jats.[29] Non-Singh Sikhs increasingly represented declining numbers with their constituency confined either to urban castes or the rural poor who, after 1951, became designated as Scheduled Castes. Thus by the last two decades

before partition the quintessential features of modern Sikh identity were clearly demarcated, institutionalized and legally recognized by the colonial state.

As these features have remained largely unaltered since this period, it is perhaps appropriate here to outline their contemporary characteristics and internal divisions. Figure 5.1 represents the sub-identities and the caste composition of the Sikh community. Premier positions of importance within Sikhdom are occupied by the baptized Singhs (*amrit-dharis*) who are few in number but represent the 'orthodoxy'. Non-baptized Singhs (*kesh-dharis*), on the other hand, constitute the overwhelming majority of Sikhs and are distinguished by their commitment to the five Ks, especially unshorn hair. The baptized and non-baptized Singhs combined account for between two-thirds and three-quarters of the Sikh population. A third category which, although numerically small but which has assumed increasing importance, refers to the clean-shaven Sikhs who belong to the diaspora. This has evolved with migration to western and non-western countries since the end of the nineteenth century. Because this category, in the main, originates from, and culturally reproduces among the baptized and non-baptized Singhs, the designation *mona-Singhs* (shaven Sikhs) would seem appropriate. On the outer boundary are the non-Singh Sikhs (*sahaj-dharis*) who still adhere to pre-Khalsa pluralism. Today, they are few in number and their distinctiveness seems to be in 'rapid decline'.[30] Since 1947, many non-Singh Sikhs have succumbed to the assimilationist appeal of Hindu sects or encouraged the proliferation of Sikh unorthodoxy through such movements as the Radho Swami, Adi Dharam, or Sant Nirankar. Interestingly the latter, which received official patronage, was directly involved in the chain of events that led to Operation Blue Star.

Caste is the main cleavage that cuts across the modern Sikh identity. In contemporary Punjab it is reasonable to assume that almost 80 per cent of all Sikhs are Jats.[31] Non-Jats are a substantial minority, and their number would be greater if Sikhs outside Punjab were included. Nevertheless the overall impression is still of caste homogeneity rather than division.

Given this fact, it might be asked why there is continuous emphasis on the issue of caste among scholars who have undertaken studies of Sikh ethnicity? This preoccupation can perhaps be explained by four considerations.

First, since 1947 the Congress has targeted the support of non-Jat Sikhs through the encouragement of affirmative action programmes for the Scheduled Castes. Although Sikh lower castes were initially

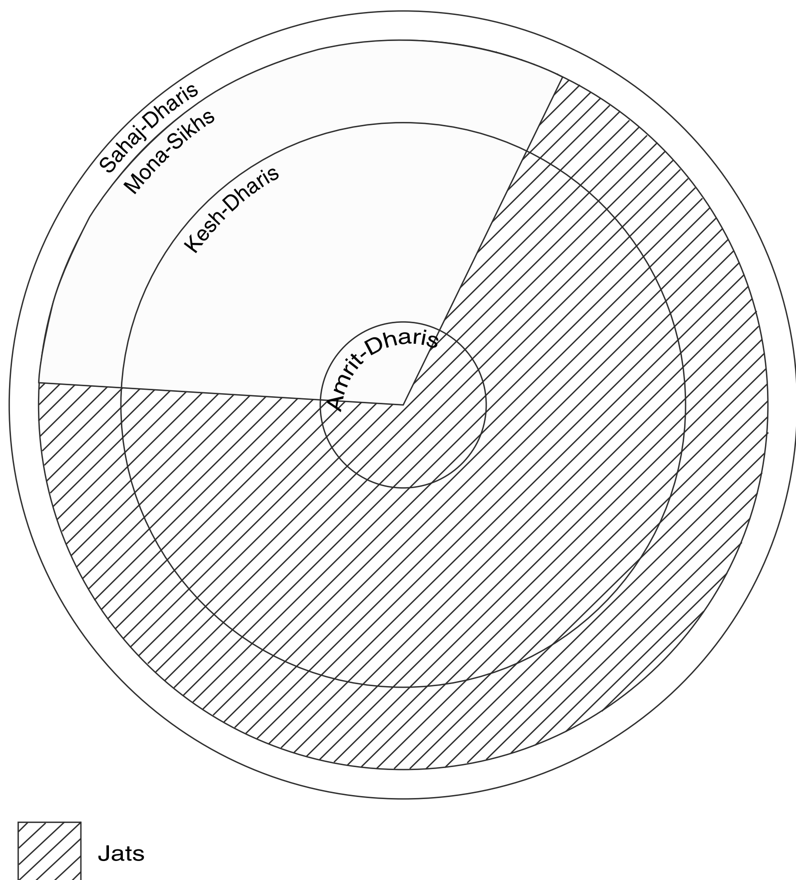


Figure 5.1 Modern Sikh Identity

excluded from these provisions, they have increasingly been made available to them, especially when so many have opted for Sikh heterodoxy or Hindu classification.[32] Second, Sikhism's proclaimed anti-casteism stands in clear contradiction to the religious injunction of the gurus. Ideology and practice, opponents of Sikhism have often insisted, differ remarkably with the vision of a monolithic community. Third, in the development of the Sikh community the role of its intellectuals has been 'over-determined'. Drawn mainly from urban and non-Jat rural castes, their consciousness of 'difference' heightened the stress on differentiation and disjunction *within* the Sikh community.[33] Fourth,

as most studies of Sikh ethnicity have been undertaken by instrumentalists, the tendency to highlight caste and other divisions, at the expense of those factors which promote cohesion or homogeneity, has been clearly evident in the search for the 'construction', 'reconstruction' and 'manipulation' of Sikh identity.[34]

Modern Sikh identity therefore is remarkably cohesive. Almost five centuries of development have resulted in a decisive demarcation from Hinduism which has, at times, threatened to absorb it. This demarcation is reflected in established institutions, formalized practices, and enduring antipathy to assimilationist pressures. But if Guru Gobind's Singhs have permanently displaced the followers of Guru Nanak, the political outlook of the former has been largely consociational rather than 'fundamentalist'. It is only since 1984 that the argument has been made, by some militant groups waging an armed campaign, that modern Sikh identity also requires a separate Sikh state which clearly entwines the political and religious.

(i) Pre-partition politics

Before partition Sikhs were the smallest minority, constituting only 15 per cent of the population (see Table 5.1). Hindus and Muslims, the two major communities of the province, had their case for proportionate and equitable treatment by the colonial state strengthened after the end of Ranjit Singh's empire and, in particular, when the Imperial Government adopted the policy of gradual devolved rule. The principle of weighted electorates for minorities had been established after 1919, but the Government of India Act (1935), notwithstanding representation by Sikh leaders for 30 per cent of the seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, awarded them only 33 seats in a 175-member assembly. The remainder were designated as Muslims (86), General (Hindu,42), and Other (landowners, women and graduates, 14).[35]

Underlying the Sikh political leadership's claims for 30 per cent reservation was its desire to play the role of arbiter between the Hindu and Muslim political leadership. This possibility was ruled out by the Unionist Party's victory in the first elections in Punjab held under the new structure (1937). The Unionist Party, with its constituency in rural Punjab, emerged as a broad coalition of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. While not strictly a 'grand coalition' being opposed by an official Opposition of class and communal parties, the Unionist Party, which ruled Punjab between 1937 and 1947, resembled a dominant one-party

type and became an open house for consociationalism. It adopted several consociational devices to disarticulate ethnic challenges. All three sections of the party leadership (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) were passionately committed to Punjabi nationality and opposed extraneous intervention in the province's politics, either by the Muslim League or the Congress. The principle of proportionality was strictly enforced in recruitment to the civil administration and distribution of state grants. Religious and social organizations in the province were given maximum autonomy, with the unofficial recognition of the principle of the communal veto on important matters. This delicate equipoise, between and among the communities, was sustained by the liberal use of patronage and power that was also sometimes extended to accommodate oppositional groups and factions.[36]

Whether the Unionist Party could have sponsored a post-independence consociational Punjab remains a question for counterfactual history. What is less debatable is that the 'Unionist model' was undermined by external pressures – the determination of the Muslim League to incorporate Punjab into its scheme of Pakistan and the Congress's opposition to such a proposal.

In March 1940 the Muslim League passed its famous Pakistan resolution at Lahore. The Sikh leadership's response to it was pragmatic, reflecting the community's dispersed position which was almost equally divided between west and east Punjab. When the Cripps

Table 5.1 Punjab's Area and Population, 1941–91

	Area Sq. km.	Population (mill.)	Muslims (%)	Hindus (%)	Sikhs (%)	Others (%)
1941	256 600	28.4	53	31	15	1
1951*	122 500	16.1	2	62	35	1
1961	122 500	20.3	2	64	33	1
1966**	50 260	13.2	–	38	60	2
1971	50 260	13.5	–	38	60	2
1981	50 260	16.7	–	36	62	2
1991	50 260	20.1				

Notes
* After partition.
** After the separation of Haryana.
Source: Census of India, 1941, vol. vi, Punjab, pt II; Census of India, 1951 vol. viii, Punjab-PEPSU, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi, pt 1-A, pt II-B, pt II-A; Census of India, 1961, vol. xii, Punjab pt I-A(i), pt I-A(ii), pt II-C(i); Punjab Provisional Population Total (1991), Director of Census Operations.

mission (1942) appeared to concede Pakistan, the Akalis floated an 'Azad Punjab' (an independent Punjab with a population ratio of 40:40:20 among the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh populations, respectively). During the Gandhi–Jinnah talks (1944), the demand for 'Sikhistan' was raised lest the two leaders accepted a formula that made the 'Sikhs the slaves of Pakistan [or] Hindustan'.[37] The Simla Conference (1945) and the Cabinet Mission (1946) which followed the breakdown of these talks were presented with equally ambiguous proposals: the Akali Dal favoured an undivided India with constitutional guarantees and electoral weightage for the Sikhs, but if Pakistan were conceded it demanded an independent Sikh state.

Throughout these discussions the case for a Sikh state was made as a counterweight to Pakistan. Because the Sikhs were a significant minority, and geographically dispersed, the arguments for Sikhistan were undermined by the absence of any contiguous areas where the Sikhs formed a distinct majority. Even the Communist Party of India's ingenious solution envisaged a 'transfer of populations' to create a 'Sikh homeland' that would command only 33 per cent of the total population in such a region.[38] The Sikh leadership's strategy thus comprised sabotaging the Pakistan demand while seeking assurances for a favoured status in post-partition India. Nehru's declaration therefore (July 1946) that the 'Sikhs of Punjab were entitled to special consideration' in north India where they could 'also experience the glow of freedom',[39] began the move in the Congress's favour. When Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, rejected the Muslim League offer of Sikh accession to a Muslim-majority Punjab, the prospect of partition was grudgingly accepted. In the tragedy which subsequently unfolded, 'east Punjab became a gift of the Akalis to the Indian union'.[40]

Post-1947 Punjab

On August 15 1947 the partition of India became a reality. The creation of Muslim Pakistan commanded most of the united Punjab and was accompanied by communal disorder on an unprecedented scale. Almost the entire Hindu and Sikh populations of west Punjab migrated to east Punjab and their example was repeated by the Muslim population in the latter region which moved in the opposite direction. In all about 8.6 million people were uprooted in the ethnic cleansing that left over 300 000 dead. East Punjab was reduced to two divisions of Jullundur and Ambala. Some of the Himalyan region was reorganized

into a new state of Himachal Pradesh and the leading princely states were grouped to form the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) which subsequently merged with Punjab in 1956.

Partition severely disrupted Punjab's economy. Net migration into the relatively 'underdeveloped' east Punjab turned it into a food-deficit province and generated severe pressure on agriculture, especially from Canal Colonists who returned to their ancestral homes in the central districts. The refugee influx was addressed by a number of radical reforms – consolidation of landholdings, graded cuts for Canal Colonists, and systematic land reforms which laid the basis of Punjab's future agricultural growth. These measures were further complemented by significant infrastructural investment in irrigation, power generation, and community development. The spirit of reconstruction, of 'rising from the ashes', was reflected in the decision to commission Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh, the new capital of the province.

Partition transformed Punjab into a biethnic state. Hindu and Sikh proportions of the population increased to 62 and 35 per cent respectively. Pre-independence fears of Hindu domination had led Sikh leaders to seek the type of constitutional assurances promised by the Congress. But when the Constituent Assembly rejected any idea of 'special' status for the Sikhs, and the Sikh representatives responded by refusing to sign the draft constitution of India, the process of social differentiation between Sikhs and Hindus became regularized in the demand for, and opposition to, a *Punjabi Suba* (Punjabi-speaking province).

As migration from west Punjab created a Sikh majority area in the central districts, the Akali leaders used this development for demanding a Punjabi Suba – a 'homeland for the Sikhs' and a 'principled' fulfilment of the Congress's pledge to reorganize Indian states along linguistic lines. This exclusive conception of a Punjabi-speaking state was vigorously opposed both by Punjab's Hindus and the Congress. The former insisted that Punjabi was a mere dialect of Hindi and encouraged Punjabi-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue in the 1951 and 1961 censuses, thus negating the case for a Punjabi suba. Congress, which had a significant Punjabi Hindu representation, was equally opposed to the demand on the grounds that it propagated 'communalism' in the guise of linguistic reorganization.[41]

However the political response to these polar positions were a series of compromises that proved unworkable. The Sachar (1949) and PEPSU (1948) 'formulas' accepted the principle of bilingualism and demarcated Hindi and Punjabi-speaking areas but remained unimplemented because of opposition from Punjab's Hindus. When the States' Reorganization

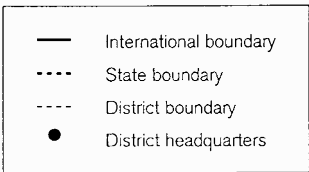
Commission (1953–55) rejected the demand for a Punjabi Suba on the grounds that the 'majority' in Punjab were opposed to it, the Akali Dal launched a peaceful agitation to force the issue. This mobilization was followed by another compromise, the Regional Formula (1956), which created the Punjabi- and Hindi-speaking zones, merged PEPSU with Punjab, and established regional committees in the Punjab Legislative Assembly for Punjabi and Hindi-speaking zones with a right to legislate on 14 listed subjects.[42]

Regional Formula too proved unworkable. Internal opposition within Congress emasculated the legislative autonomy of the regional committees; the 'Save Hindi' agitation (1957–58) galvanized the Hindu community's determination to avoid piecemeal linguistic reorganization. Faced with this hostility the Akali Dal disowned the Regional Formula and revived an agitation (1960–61) for its version of a Punjabi Suba in which 23 000 were arrested and Master Tara Singh undertook a fast-unto-death. The campaign collapsed as a result of the latter's suspension of the fast – without concessions – and vigorous opposition by Kairon, the Congress chief minister of Punjab, whose policies received the approval of Nehru.[43]

In the next four years a number of developments hastened the movement towards a Punjabi Suba. The deaths of Nehru (1964) and Kairon (1965) removed the main political opponents to the demand. Master Tara Singh's humiliation led to the rise of Sant Fateh Singh as Akali leader whose conception of a Punjabi Suba was more inclusive and cultural. Hindu opposition was also weakened by the growing strength of the Haryanavi movement which supported the creation of a Hindi-speaking state in the south-east. Thus when Sant Fateh Singh suspended his fast-unto-death at the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistan war (1965), this official approval of 'patriotism' in the 'national interest' was rewarded with a Parliamentary Committee which recommended the creation of a Punjabi Suba. The Punjab Reorganization Act (1966) came into effect on November 1 1966.

Punjabi Suba and after

Under the Punjab Reorganization Act the province was divided between Punjab and Haryana with some of the mountainous region transferred to Himachal Pradesh. With a 60 per cent Sikh population, a form of 'Sikh homeland' had eventually been realized. But the demarcation of boundaries between the new and old state left a bitter legacy



Map 5.2 The Punjab after November 1966

that provided the basis of future disputes between Punjab and Haryana and Punjab and the centre.

As the boundary commission accepted the 1961 census returns as the basis of demarcation, many Punjabi-speaking areas were excluded from the new state. The most controversial provisions of reorganization were the decision to exclude Chandigarh (subsequently turned into a union territory), the transfer of Bhakra-Nangal power and irrigation complex by the central government, and continued 'linked provisions' between Punjab and Haryana's administrations.

To revoke these provisions Sant Fateh Singh launched two further fasts (1966 and 1970), with the latter resulting in Indira Gandhi's award of January 1970. This award gave Chandigarh to Punjab but made its transfer contingent upon the exchange of 114 villages (majority Punjabi-speaking) in the Fazilka and Abhor tehsils in Punjab to Haryana. As these villages were not contiguous to Haryana, they were to be connected by a corridor along the inter-state border. In addition, Punjab was to compensate Haryana with Rs 200 million for the construction of a new capital. The transfer of these territories was scheduled for 1975.

Common links between the new Punjab and Haryana had been advocated by the Hindu political leadership which remained a reluctant convert to a Punjabi Suba.[44] Arya Samajists and the Jan Sangh continued to nurture their opposition to Punjabi, extracting a 'Three Language' formula, in which Hindi was given the status of a linked language, as the price for supporting an Akali coalition administration in 1969. As late as the 1981 census when the national unit of the BJP encouraged the state's Hindus to declare Punjabi as their mother tongue, the Arya Samajist leadership persisted with its advocacy of Hindi.[45]

A more serious confrontation over the unresolved legacies of linguistic reorganization in the late 1960s and early 1970s was, perhaps, avoided by the unprecedented prosperity produced by the 'Green Revolution'. Marking the most radical transformation of the province's agrarian economy since the Canal Colonies, the 'Green Revolution' multiplied output and incomes through the intensive use of high-yielding variety cereals (especially wheat and rice), chemical fertilizers, and mechanized agricultural machinery. Agricultural production rose by leaps and bounds (see Table 5.2)

From a food-deficit state Punjab became the 'granary of India', contributing 72.1 per cent of wheat and 53.3 per cent of rice to the all-India central pool of food production in 1988–89.[46] All sectors of the

economy and Punjab's regions felt the systemic consequence of this change, thereby making it the most prosperous state within the Indian union.

However by the early 1980s the shortcomings of a development strategy based on the 'Green Revolution' were becoming increasingly apparent. Punjab's economy became 'lopsided' with the share of agriculture's contribution to the gross domestic product persisting above 50 per cent. Outlets for industrial diversification were few or firmly controlled by the 'permit licence raj' of centralized planning. The manufacturing sector's status remained lowly, comprising only 11.4 per cent of the state's income in 1988.[47] The centre's reluctance to encourage industrial development and the rising input costs of agricultural production – and increasing demand for power and irrigation – gave vent to the argument, made by some Sikh leaders, that the union governments were practising 'internal colonialism' in Punjab.

Socially, although the impact of the 'Green Revolution' still awaits systematic analysis, some have suggested that it led to the emergence of mass society.[48] A disproportionate effect of these developments, it is argued, was felt in the rural areas which accounted for almost 80 per cent of the Sikh population. Commercial agriculture heightened the differentiation between 'capitalist' Sikh farmers and agricultural labourers on the one hand, and Sikh 'capitalists' and traditional Hindu mercantile capital in Punjab, on the other. The historic cleavage between the towns and the villages, between Hindus and Sikhs, and between traders and cultivators became locked in the modernization process and

Table 5.2 Selected Indicators of Economic and Social Change in Punjab, 1971–89

	1971	1981	1989	% change
Per capita income (Rs)	1030	2361	5477	+ 431
Literacy %	33.7	40.7	49	+ 15.3
Agricultural prod. (mill. tonnes)	7.5	11.9	16.4	+ 119
Wheat (mill. tonnes)	4.8	7.7	11.1	+ 13
Rice (mill. tonnes)	0.5	3.2	4.8	+ 840
Electricity (KHW per capita)	158.2	302.1	447.1	+ 182
Annual vehicles reg. ('000)	15	365	974	+ 6393

Current Prices.
Source: Statistical Abstracts of Punjab, 1977, 1981 and 1988–9, Economic Advisor to Punjab Government, Chandigarh; *Census of India, Series 20, Punjab, paper-1*, Director of Census Operations, Punjab, 1991.

class antagonisms. It was these conflicts, some have suggested, that provided the main driving force behind the Akali agitation (1982 and 1984) which led to Operation Blue Star.[49]

Although the modernization and class conflict explanations appear attractive, especially given the rapid social change that has attended the 'Green Revolution', they have been criticized on a number of grounds. Agricultural modernization is not exclusive to Punjab; the neighbouring state of Haryana is undergoing a similar transformation without the disastrous consequences of ethnic conflict.[50] Such accounts, furthermore, often also simultaneously talk of Punjab's 'overdevelopment' *vis-à-vis* other states in the Indian union and 'underdevelopment' in terms of the structural constraints of the 'Green Revolution'. By most economic indicators Punjab outperforms other Indian states, so the argument for relative 'underdevelopment', structural or otherwise, appears to be extremely weak.[51] The case of class conflict advocates is also internally inconsistent for they tend to 'switch the ground from the argument that communal divisions *reflect* the basic caste/economic cleavages to the position the communal divisions *supersede* them through the exercise of class hegemony'.[52] Finally, these approaches have been criticized on empirical grounds for providing inadequate data on which the theoretical arguments are made.[53]

Another set of interpretations have highlighted the 'centralization thesis'. Drawn mainly from the instrumentalist school, as we have seen in Chapter 3, these interpretations maintain that the 'Punjab problem' is mainly a biproduct of the centralizing tendencies generated by the post-Nehruvian leadership.

Although economic and centralization explanations provide valuable conjectural support for situating the origins of the 'Punjab problem', their general treatment of Sikh ethnicity, nevertheless, remains problematic. Anchored primarily in instrumentalist analyses, such accounts view Sikh ethnicity in three terms: as a resource for mobilization within the Sikh political system, as a resource for mobilization to capture the regional political system, and as a resource that is vertically fractured along caste and class lines and horizontally divided by intense factionalism. Naturally these interpretations have underemphasized the less transactional dimensions of Sikh ethnicity – its strong subjective historicity, its increasingly high degree of homogeneity, its fears of assimilation into Hinduism, and its integration of the religious and political. Clearly in themselves these factors do not constitute a primordial charter. They do, however, place firm con-

straints on the Sikh political elite's ability to 'construct', 'reconstruct' and 'manipulate' Sikh identity. Operation Blue Star symbolized the boundaries of this exercise; and developments thereafter severely constrained instrumentalist reconstructions by Sikh leaders or the Indian state.[54]

That a strong sense of history sustains the Sikh movement is supported by the revisionist view of Nehruvian and post-Nehruvian policies of ethnic conflict management *vis-à-vis* the Sikhs after 1947. These accounts suggest that at best they promoted assimilation and integration; at worst, they compromised Hindu hegemonic control by partial political accommodation of 'secular (Indian nationalist) Sikhs'. Thus even the 'principled' Punjabi Suba was hedged about with 'unprincipled' provisions behind which lurked the fear of a Sikh state. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973) (ASR), which has since become the 'Magna Carta'[55] of Sikh demands, needs to be evaluated against this background.

Passed in 1973, the ASR calls for restricting the union government's powers to defence, foreign affairs, currency and communications. A political framework based on these lines, the resolution states, would provide the appropriate environment 'where the voice of the Khalsa Sikhs will be pre-eminent'. The ASR also demands the integration of excluded Punjabi-speaking areas into Punjab, economic reform in favour of the agricultural sector, and central assistance in the construction of power generation projects.[56]

As the Akali agitation (1982 and 1984) developed, the ASR assumed an increasingly important position in the 'grievances' of the Sikhs. Whereas the moderate Akalis were prepared to consider the ASR as the basis for the discussion of constitutional reform of centre-state relations, the reluctance of Mrs Gandhi to accept this encouraged militant Sikhs to emphasize its non-negotiability and, later, to portray it as a precursor of 'Sikh self-determination' and 'independent Sikh rule'.[57]

Conclusion

Almost five centuries of modern history have made the Sikhs relatively unusual among religious communities. Influenced and shaped by the environment around it, Sikhism has adapted, changed and firmly institutionalized itself. As Brass notes, Sikhs today have 'succeeded in acquiring a high degree of internal social and political cohesion and subjective self-awareness'.[58] But if the pressures for statehood after

1947 were contained by the ethnic conflict management policies of the union governments, then by the early 1980s the cumulative effect of these policies was to spurn a 'freedom movement' into a Sikh 'revolution' in the making. It is to an evaluation of these policies that we must turn before assessing post-1984 developments.

Notes

1. H.S. Oberoi, 'From Punjab to "Khalistan": Territoriality and Metacommentary', *Pacific Affairs*, 60:1 (Spring 1987), 26–41.
2. Ibid., 32.
3. H. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition,* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
4. Ibid., see in particular ch. 6.
5. See R. Ballard, 'Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum: Continuity and Change in Four Dimensions of Punjabi Religion', in P. Singh and S.S. Thandi (eds), *Globalization and the Region: Explorations in Punjabi Identity* (Coventry: Association for Punjab Studies, 1996), 7–38.
6. For example, S.J. Tambiah's account of the Sikh case-studies in *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), ch. 5, is almost entirely derivative of Oberoi's work.
7. See E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63; C. Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and End of Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990); and D.S.L. Jarvis, 'Postmodernism: a Critical Typology', *Politics and Society,* 20:1 (March 1998), 95–142.
8. See W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 37 and J.S. Grewal, 'Evolving Contours of the Panth', *Sociology* (May 1995), 5–8.
9. Ibid. (Grewal); and see Nikky-Guninder Kaur's review of *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55:3 (August, 1996), 760–62.
10. Whereas the boundary theory of ethnicity, as J. Rex, *Race and Ethnicity* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), points out, gives primary importance to systems of thought, social structures and systems are central to understanding ethnic conflict situations. See ch. 5.
11. Thus Oberoi (1987), op. cit., 40, suggests that if the Sikhs are to avoid the dilemma of the Basques, Kurds, and the Palestinians, they ought to invent new 'metacommentaries' capable of forging new pan-Indian identities. The converse, that pan-Indian identities ('metacommentaries') could be responsible for the dilemma of the Sikhs (and other minorities), is hardly addressed.
12. See A.S. Mandir, 'Thinking between Cultures: Metaphysics and Cultural Translation', PhD. (unpublished), University of Warwick (1998).

13. J. Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1975), 32.
14. J. Pettigrew, 'Take Not Arms against Thy Sovereign: the Present Punjab Crisis and the Storming of the Golden Temple', *South Asia Research*, 4:2 (1984), 102.
15. D. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 1974), 14.
16. C. Shackle, *The Sikhs* (London: Minority Rights Group Report (No. 65)), 3.
17. For a discussion of the transformation see, W.H. McLeod, op. cit., 32–47.
18. J.S. Gerwal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. The New Cambridge History of India. Vol. II.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 93.
19. Ibid., 113.
20. Ibid., 114–15.
21. Ibid., 118.
22. K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 2: 1839–1988 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 119, 160.
23. See R. Fox, *The Lions of Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 10.
24. See I. Ali, *The Punjab under Imperialism, 1885–1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
25. For a further discussion of this, see W.H. McLeod, op. cit., chs. 3 and 5; and Oberoi (1994).
26. Gerwal (1990), op. cit., 162.
27. See P. Wallace, 'Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab: the Sikh Dilemma in Competing Political Systems', in P. Wallace and Surendra Chopra (eds), *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983), 1–32. See ch. 6 for an extended discussion of this system.
28. Gerwal (1990), op. cit., 138
29. Ibid.
30. McLeod, op. cit., 79. For clarity and standardization this section has drawn upon the categories employed by Gerwal (1990), op. cit., and McLeod, op. cit. The latter's point of *patit Sikh* regarding *mona-Singhs* is acknowledged but our designation is preferred for sociological rather than religious reasons.
31. M.S. Dhami, 'Changing Support Base of the Congress Party in Punjab, 1952–80', *Punjab Journal of Politics*, 8 (1984), 65–98 gives the proportion of Sikh population in 1971 among peasant castes, normally synonymous with Jats, as 82 per cent.
32. See P.R. Brass, 'Socio-Economic Aspects of the Punjab Crisis', in P.R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991), 224; Grewal (1990), op. cit., 183.
33. For a discussion of this, see D.S. Tatla, 'The Punjab Crisis and the Role of Sikh Intellectuals' [forthcoming, 2000].
34. See Fox, op. cit; Oberoi (1994), op. cit; P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); and B.R. Nayar, *Minority Politics in the Punjab* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966).
35. For details of the seats and electorate, see G. Singh, *Communism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1994), ch. 2.
36. For an assessment of Unionist rule, see I. Talbot, *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement, 1937–47* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

37. Nayer, op. cit., 86.
38. G. Singh, 'The Communist Party of India and the Demand for a Sikh Homeland, 1942–1947', *Indo-British Review* (April 1994), 89–95.
39. Quoted in K. Singh, op. cit., vol. 2, 291.
40. Gerwal (1990), op. cit., 180.
41. For a history of the Punjabi Suba movement see A.S. Sarhadi, *Punjabi Suba* (Delhi: U.C. Kapur and Sons, 1970).
42. Brass (1974), op. cit., 320–21.
43. P.R. Brass, 'The Punjab Crisis and the Unity of India', in P.R. Brass, (1991) op. cit., 180–87.
44. B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 144.
45. D. Singh, *Dynamics of Punjab Politics* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1981), 72.
46. *Economic Survey, 1988–89* (Economic Advisor to Punjab Government, Chandigarh), 59.
47. Ibid., 3.
48. See R. Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 8.
49. These arguments are reviewed in detail in ch. 7.
50. A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 354.
51. Brass, 'Socio-Economic Aspects…', op. cit., 229.
52. Ibid.
53. See ch. 7.
54. See ch. 8
55. K. Singh, op. cit., 345.
56. Ibid., 451–8.
57. See M. Tulley and S. Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985) and ch. 8.
58. Brass, op. cit. (1974), 277.

6 Hegemonic Control: Punjab Politics, 1947–84

Most accounts of Punjab politics between 1947 and 1984 fall broadly into two schools of thought: those that hold that the centralization drives created by Mrs Gandhi undermined the Nehruvian framework of regional politics, and those that accept many of the assumptions of the former but emphasize the destabilizing social and political consequences of the 'Green Revolution'.[1] Neither of these approaches, as we have seen, accounts for the main actor within the Punjab political system – Sikh ethno-nationalism. In contrast to these two approaches this chapter will outline the mechanisms of hegemonic control, suggest how they were contested by Sikh ethno-nationalism, resulting in full-scale confrontation in 1984.

Before partition Punjab's religious divisions were politically overcome through the power-sharing Unionist Party.[2] After 1947, with the separation of the Muslim population and the emergence of Hindus (62 per cent) as the dominant community, the framework of hegemonic control was created. Central to this development was the Congress which became the main instrument of control. The new framework became apparent in the conflict between what Wallace has called the 'two political systems': the 'Sikh political system' based on institutions and structures of the Sikh community, and the formal political system of representative institutions established after independence.[3]

The 'Sikh political system'

The bases of the Sikh political system are to be found in Sikh religious doctrine and the historical evolution of the community. Its corporate entity, the Panth, which entwines the sacred and the temporal, found

modern institutionalization in the recognition of the SGPC by the Gurdwara Act (1925). Often referred to as the 'Sikh Parliament', 'a state within a state', [4] the SGPC is primarily an organization for the management of Sikh gurdwaras and other religious bodies. SGPC's constitution is determined by the Gurdwara Act (1925) which stipulates quinquennial elections from an exclusively Sikh constituency. In recent times the resources controlled by the SGPC have witnessed a remarkable increase. It controls several hundred gurdwaras (in Punjab and outside the state), employs thousands of workers, and has an annual budget which increased from 9.5 million Rupees in 1966[5] to 600 million in 1993.[6]

Besides the SGPC there is the Akali Dal which comprises the other half of the Sikh political system. Founded in 1920, the Akali Dal represents the organized political voice of the Panth. Its relationship with the SGPC is intimate, interlinked and overlapping but exists without any formal organizational structure. Since its formation the SGPC has been controlled, almost exclusively, by the Akali Dal.

Historically, as Figure 6.1 below illustrates, this relationship has nurtured a pattern of organic legitimacy emanating from the Sikh populace and transmitted by the SGPC and the Akali Dal. Within this system, however, factional competition has been endemic, and has normally taken three forms: for the control of the SGPC and its resources; for the control of Akali Dal's organizational wing; and, when Akali Dal has been in government, for the control of its ministerial wing. After 1984, when the legitimacy of this structure was seriously threatened, a fourth form of factional competition emerged as militant Sikhs, waging an armed struggle for Khalistan, resurrected pre-SGPC traditional institutions such as *Sarbat Khalsa* (representative assembly of Khalsa), a more focused vision of the Panth, and renewed emphasis on the authority of the *Akal Takht Jathedar* (head priest of Sikh temporal authority). This development led to the creation of Panthic Committees which were justified on the grounds that the SGPC/Akali Dal Sikh political system had systematically undermined the self-determination of the Sikh Panth.

Since 1920 the Akali Dal has always laid claim to be the sole representative body of the Sikhs. Its constitution proclaims its primary objective as the 'protection of the Panth' and the latter's 'continued existence as an independent entity'.[7] While this claim has been contested, notably by the Congress, Communists, rival Akali Dals, and after 1984, Panthic Committees, the Akali Dal has, nonetheless, made it its main *raison d'être* over the last seventy years.

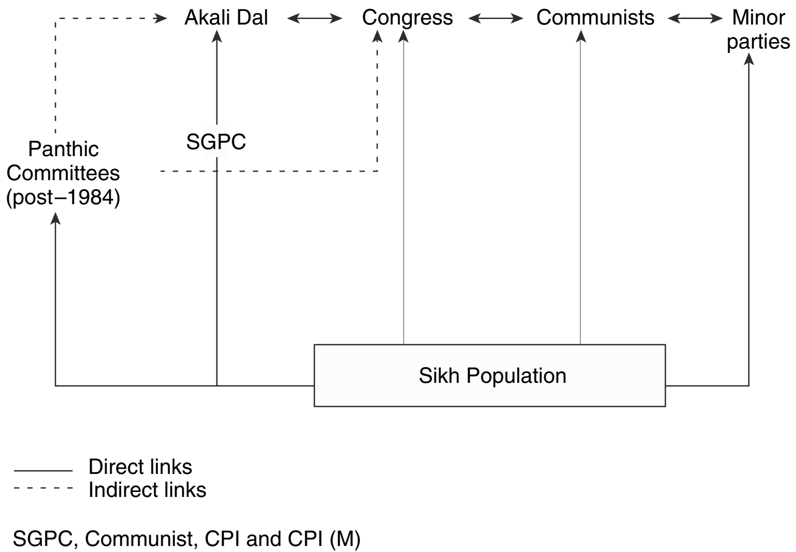


Figure 6.1 The Sikh Political System

Since 1947 the 'protection of the Panth' has led the Akali Dal to an almost continuous state of mobilization. Proceeding from a claim for special status for Sikhs in independent India in 1948, this had included the embittered agitation for a *Punjabi Suba* (a linguistic Punjabi state) and the *Dharam Yud Morcha* (the struggle for existence) of 1982–84. There is, despite qualifications noted above, an 'amazing continuity'[8] in the Akali Dal demands. As Table 6.1 illustrates, although these demands have ranged from constitutional, political, economic, religious and cultural, their emphasis has been to defend the distinctiveness of Sikh identity and political interests.

How has the Akali Dal attempted to realize these demands? Why have the outcomes been so unsuccessful?

Within the post-1947 Punjab political system the Akali Dal has employed three different strategies to articulate the interests of the Sikh community: tactical accommodation, mobilization and, especially after 1966, anti-Congress coalition-building.

Until 1966 Punjab politics were dominated by the Congress. The Akali Dal as representative of the smaller community initially pursued tactical accommodation with the Congress whereby it bargained its political representation for specifically Sikh interests. Between 1948 and 1951 the

Table 6.1 Akali Dal, Sikh Demands and Outcomes, 1947–84

Year	Demand/Mobilization	Response of Union and Punjab Governments
1948	Resolution for separate electorates for Sikhs and special status	Rejected
1949	Sachar Formula	Not Implemented
1949	Creation of a Punjabi-speaking state	Rejected by the Dar Commission
1949	Sikh Scheduled Castes to be included in SC reservation	Rejected
1953	Akali Dal-led United Front government in PEPSU	Dismissed by the imposition of President's Rule
1955	Creation of Punjabi-speaking state	Rejected by States' Reorganization Commission
1956	Regional Formula divides Punjab into Punjabi and Hindi-speaking zones	Not implemented
1961	Agitation over Punjabi-speaking state	Das Commission finds no evidence of discrimination against Sikhs
1966	Demand for a Punjabi-speaking state	Punjabi Reorganization Act excludes some Punjabi-speaking areas, Chandigarh and Bhakra–Nangal complex
1966	Mobilization over Chandigarh	Unofficially promised but subsequently rejected
1967	Akali Dal-led United Front government	Toppled by Congress support for breakaway faction
1970	Mobilization over Chandigarh	Awarded to Punjab but transfer (by 1975) linked to award of territory to Haryana
1976	Division of river waters between Punjab and Haryana	Union government awards Haryana 50%
1980	Akali Dal government	Dismissed through the imposition of President's Rule
1982	Akalis launch Dharam Yud Morcha over constitutional, economic and territorial demands	Several negotiations held but union government rejects the demands

Akali Dal merged with the Congress but retained its identity, exploiting factional divisions within Congress itself. This strategy provided rich rewards: the Akalis were able to exact language, employment and political concessions that were unwarranted by their political strength.[9] These 'concessions' in turn aroused the opposition of Hindu leadership in Congress and eventually resulted in the imposition of President's Rule and the termination of the Akali merger.

A second attempt at tactical accommodation occurred in 1956. It was preceded by Akali Dal mobilization over the recommendations of the States' Reorganization Commission which rejected the demand for a Punjabi Suba. Faced with this mobilization as well as impending state elections, the Congress proposed a Regional Formula – a *de facto* division of Punjab between Punjabi- and Hindi-speaking areas. As a *quid pro quo* for this formula the Akali Dal was asked to merge with the Congress. Subsequently as the provisions of the Regional Formula remained unimplemented, the Akali Dal gradually withdrew from the merger and, after the 1960 SGPC elections, was reconstituted as a separate party.[10]

Mobilization by the Akali Dal has been common. Generally explained away as either a means for Akalis to retain their control of the Sikh political system, or a ploy for capturing power at the state level, it has included *satyagrahas* (peaceful protests, 1955), fasts, threats of self-immolation by Akali leaders (1960–61, 65, 67, 70) and, more recently, civil disobedience (1982–84). Such mobilizations are also accompanied by the use of the ideological and material resources of Sikhdom, for example the assertion of Panthic independence, religious and historic symbolism of sacrifice, and the support of the SGPC. There are also constant efforts to 'internationalize' Sikh issues by appealing to international bodies such as the United Nations, human rights organizations, other governments and non-government organizations. Since the 1960s, the sizeable Sikh diaspora in western countries has played an increasingly influential role in Sikh politics in Punjab.[11]

Following linguistic reorganization the population ratios in Punjab were almost reversed with Sikhs comprising 60 per cent of the population, improving considerably the electoral fortunes of the Akali Dal. Under these changed circumstances the Akali Dal constructed anti-Congress governing coalitions (1967–67, 1969–71, 1977–80). While these coalitions succeeded in capturing political power, they were unstable, prone to factional penetration by the Congress, and undermined by the use of residual powers of the centre, notably President's Rule.

Mechanisms of hegemonic control

Arrayed against the Sikh political system has been the formal political system of Punjab which has been dominated by the Congress. Congress enjoyed a virtual monopoly of political power between 1947 and 1966, but its claims to secular ideology were seriously undermined by its mainly pre-1947 Hindu constituency, appeal as a majoritarian party after 1947, and the close relationship between Punjabi Hindu leadership and the senior leaders of the Congress. Consequently, the Congress functioned as a bulwark for secular ideology as well as a bulwark against Sikh separatism which was seen as the main threat to Punjabi Hindu society.[12]

In Punjab (and the centre) the Congress has used four strategies to establish hegemonic control: ideological, factional penetration, tactical accommodation, and residual controls.

Although the Punjab has several small parties that espouse secularism (CPI, CPI(M), BSP), it is the Congress which has projected itself as the main proponent of secularism, Indian nationalism and the nationalist movement. This claim has often been supported with reference to the existence of a small confessional Hindu party (Jana Sangh – the forerunner of the BJP). But in Punjab the vociferous advocacy of secular nationalism of Congress has both provided an ideological resource for hegemonic control and the main reason for de-legitimizing Sikh ethno-nationalism through its designation as 'communal', 'religious', and 'separatist'. Indeed, soon after 1947 the Punjabi Hindu political leadership established the Congress as the instrument of hegemonic control and set off a 'wave of communalism' against Sikhs 'in official and public life'.[13] 'The national sermonizing about keeping religion out of politics', to which the Congress ideology was officially committed, 'did not seem to apply to Punjabi Hindus.'[14]

Factional penetration by Congress of the Akali Dal has been another strategy. By controlling the main source of political power and patronage, the Congress has found it easy to exploit factionalism within the Sikh political system. Sometimes moderate, pro-Congress factions have been encouraged through material, ideological and administrative support; at others, extreme, separatist and Sikh nationalists have been backed with the aim of dividing the Sikh political constituency.[15] Whether Congress's factional penetration of Akali Dal has been benevolent or Machiavellian, its primary objective has been the same: to sustain the Congress's rule within Punjab.

Factional penetration of the Akali Dal by Congress has often been followed with, or supplemented by, tactical accommodation. On two occasions (1948–51 and 1956–58), as noted above, the Akali Dal was encouraged to merge with Congress. Such accommodation led some to comment that Congress was perhaps an intra-consociational coalition.[16] But these interpretations appear to have misunderstood the purpose of accommodation: it was *tactical* rather than *strategic*, and if it involved costs, in the form of concession to the Akali Dal, these concessions remained unimplemented or were subsequently revoked (see Table 6.1). Likewise, it could also be argued that the concession of a Punjabi Suba by the union Congress government in 1966 was, with its attendant qualifications, a form of tactical accommodation of the Akali Dal. While thereafter the linguistic reorganization of Punjab was not revoked, though the creation of a *Maha* (greater) Punjab has at times been suggested as a possible solution to the 'Punjab problem', its outstanding issues remain unresolved.[17] As we shall see below, the use of residual powers by Congress national governments has made linguistic reorganization contingent rather than strategic.

Lastly, hegemonic control by Congress has required a liberal use of regional and national state power. Administrative resources have often been mobilized, politicized and used to thwart the Sikh political system – the normal functioning of the SGPC and the Akali Dal.[18] Residual powers of union government, principally Article 356 of the Indian constitution which empowers President's Rule, have been frequently used to overthrow Akali Dal-led coalition governments. President's rule has been imposed in Punjab (including PEPSU, a union of former Princely states) on nine occasions since 1947. And when hegemonic control has been challenged by the Akali Dal, either in the 1950s and 1960s or the early 1980s, there has been a resort to the coercive state apparatus both of the Punjab and the union governments.[19]

Hegemonic Control: the Nehruvian period

During the Nehruvian period hegemonic control was distinguished by the ideological symmetry between Congress's secularism and Punjab Hindus' hegemonic aspirations. This was most directly manifest in the Congress's (and Punjab Hindus') opposition to a Punjabi Suba. Hindu leadership, well represented in the Congress, encouraged Punjabi Hindus in the 1951 and 1961 Census returns to disavow Punjabi for Hindi as their mother tongue with the aim of pre-empting the numerical case for a Punjabi Suba. Official support for this policy was provided by the States'

Reorganization Commission (1955) which rejected the Akali Demand for a Punjabi Suba on the 'grounds of lack of popular support'.[20] Nehru himself described the demand as 'communal' (that is, exclusively pro-Sikh) and lent support to the opposition because 'other communities' (that is, Hindus) were opposed it.[21] By defining the Akali Dal's demands for Punjabi suba as 'communal', the Punjab and national Congress succeeded in constructing a discourse of de-legitimization which elided the logic of hegemony implicit in the 'principled' opposition to the linguistic reorganization of Punjab.[22]

If ideologically the Akalis were assailed, practical realities suggested they needed to be politically accommodated. Yet this accommodation was always 'tactical' rather than 'strategic', 'encapsulating' rather than 'consociational'. The Akalis through such accommodation exploited intra-Congress factionalism, but the concessions so gained remained essentially unimplemented, notably when objections were raised within Congress's Hindu constituency. Kairon, the chief architect of tactical accommodation, and a Sikh (Congress) nationalist, became Nehru's principal regional political 'boss' who was the chief minister between 1956 and 1964. Kairon encouraged Akali Dal mergers with the Congress by arguing that within the post-1947 situation Sikh interests could only be guaranteed *within* Congress. In private musings, on the other hand, Kairon reportedly confided that his policy of Sikh pragmatism was intended to destroy 'Hindu leadership in Punjab for the next twenty years'.[23]

However when tactical accommodation of the Akali Dal proved unsuccessful, Kairon, with the tacit support of Nehru, encouraged factional penetration and the use of state power. Akali factions were frequently supported for enabling the transition of Akalis into the Congress; where resistance was offered, as for example in the control of the SGPC, administrative controls were used to undermine it. Singh[24] has shown the extent of this subversion which included electoral gerrymandering, constitutional amendments to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act (1925), and administrative coercions to wrest control of the SGPC from the Akalis. Despite these efforts the Congress was still unable to defeat the Akalis within the Sikh political system, though it did, for a brief period, capture significant factional support. Akali Dal successes in the SGPC elections (1954, 1960, 1965) subsequently provided the platform for the Punjabi Suba agitations of 1955, 1960–61 and 1965.

A more overt use of state power occurred with the dismissal of the Akali Dal-led United Front government in PEPSU in 1953. One of the few

non-Congress provincial governments after the first national and regional elections in 1952, its demolition by regional and national Congress provides a case-study for the subsequent destruction of Akali governments. Some independent Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) who held the balance of power were 'kidnapped', offered bribes, and then quickly disqualified by writ petitions alleging electoral malpractice. When these measures failed to shift the ministry, for the first time in post-independence India, President's Rule was imposed on an elected government. The Home Minister, who undertook a much publicized tour of the state, approved the action on the grounds of 'lawlessness'. Most non-Congress observers at the time however were unconvinced. Some Opposition MPs alleged that it was a constitutional *coup d' état* carried out at the behest of the PEPSU Congress.[25]

Hegemonic control: the post-Nehruvian period

In the post-Nehruvian period the structure of hegemonic control witnessed a significant shift of emphasis from ideological hegemony and tactical accommodation to a more overt use of state power. This change was not merely the result of post-Nehruvian leadership, though some of its policies have contributed to it, but rather the outcome of a Punjabi Suba which enabled the Akali Dal to establish a bridgehead against hegemonic control by mobilizing countervailing power.

Punjabi Suba, reluctantly conceded following the Indo-Pakistan war (1965), symbolized a new form of tactical accommodation 'outside' rather than 'within' the Congress. This accommodation was contingent upon a number of factors. The potential for Akalis to exercise their own domination over Punjab's Hindu population was qualified by private assurance to the latter by central Congress leadership.[26] Second, the union government retained an involvement in Punjab's affairs through territorial, economic and administrative affairs, an involvement that significantly influenced the fortunes of Akali administrations.[27] Prior to linguistic reorganization, moreover, the Akalis were encouraged to forgo the ethnic component of their Punjabi Suba demand for a principled commitment to Punjabi nationality, even though Punjab's Hindus had eschewed such a course. In other words, the Punjabi Suba could not be a 'Sikhistan' but those who had opposed its creation could sustain their opposition within a discourse of secularism, nationalism and minority rights.

The new fault lines between Sikh ethno-nationalism and Indian nationalism after 1966 were constructed within the discourse of India's

national unity. As the Congress under Mrs Gandhi increasingly arrogated to itself the custodianship of the latter, Akali demands were always defined as 'communal', 'sectarian', 'separatist', and outside the 'mainstream'. This ideological assault took on a virulent form in the discussion of the ASR prior to 1984. Whereas the Congress labelled the ASR as 'secessionist', for the Akalis it was a challenge to the Nehruvian settlement, a call for new constitutional and political order in which the powers of the union government would be greatly reduced.

Congress factional penetration in the post-Nehruvian period has taken two main forms with the principal aim of dividing the Akali constituency. Defections amongst Akali legislators have been encouraged to undermine Akali Dal-led anti-Congress coalition administrations. In 1967, the Akali Dal United Front ministry was toppled when, with the encouragement of Congress, a faction led by Gill came to power with Congress support. When this support was withdrawn President's Rule was imposed. Similarly, the 1969–71 Akali administrations, though subject to intense internal factionalism within the Sikh political system, were factionally penetrated by Congress, thereby precipitating the premature imposition of President's Rule in June 1971.

The second main form of factional penetration has been ideological. Congress has actively encouraged charismatic figures and factions within the Panth who can become the focus of Sikh militancy, a means of attracting support away from the 'moderate' Akali Dal. For example, the fast-unto-death by Darshan Singh Pheruman in 1969, which ended in his death, was encouraged by prominent Congressmen with the aim of embarrassing the mainstream Akali leadership of Sant Fateh Singh who had risen to prominence through fasting. Similarly, Congress support for Sant Bhindranwale in the late 1970s and militant groups such as Dal Khalsa was motivated essentially to undermine the Akali administration (1977–80).[28]

The post-Nehruvian period is also distinguished by the use of state power. Apart from the frequent imposition of President's Rule (1968, 1971 and 1980), the administrative and coercive apparatus was used to subvert the Sikh political system, provide protection and patronage of heterodox Sikh sects (for example, Narankaris), and ultimately, crush by force militant groups initially supported by the Congress itself. The administrative structure has been used against the Sikh political system in conjunction with factional penetration and support for heterodox sects such as Narankaris and Radho Sawamis. In fact the feud between the orthodox Sikhs led by Bhindranwale and heterodox Narankaris began in 1978 and culminated in Operation Blue Star. By 1984

Bhindranwale had emerged as a charismatic leader who had jettisoned his Congress connections as well as succeeded in outmanoeuvring the moderate Akalis to spearhead a militant movement in pursuit of Sikh demands. It was against this background that Mrs Gandhi, faced with a 'challenge to the security, unity and integrity of the country', took the decision 'to call the army into [the Golden Temple]'.[29]

Reassessing the Dharam Yud Morcha, 1982–84

Seen within the framework of hegemonic control the Dharam Yud Morcha led by the Akali Dal between 1982 and 1984 marks a culmination of resistance, a 'freedom movement'[30] which reopened the Sikh national question by drawing on the cumulative failure of Sikh national aspirations in post-independence India. This failure was also indicative of a type of statecraft used by the Indian state to manage ethnic conflict in Punjab. Repetitive symbolic accommodation was deployed in place of real tangible concessions, with a special emphasis on the co-option of political leadership. Between 1982–84 as the negotiations with the centre proved futile, Bhindranwale, a charismatic leader, was able to revive a vision of Sikh nationhood by drawing on the rich pool of Sikh religious and historic symbolism that cut away the ground from moderate Akali politicians. Of course this occurred at a time when there was a rapid development of media technology, external support to militants from Pakistan, and the growing involvement in Punjab affairs by the Sikh diaspora. But these were contributory factors which on their own could not marshal the resource of Sikh ethno-nationalism.

Similarly, the role of the central Congress government needs to be reassessed against traditional explanations. By the 1980s, the creation of a Punjabi Suba had provided a bridgehead for resistance against hegemonic control which had become increasingly threadbare. The Nehruvian approach of disarticulating Sikh ethno-nationalism through accommodation, co-option, symbolic agreements, and subsequently, non-implementation of such agreements, had more or less exhausted the limits of statecraft by the mid-1960s. Mrs Gandhi's innovations included a more overt use of violent control mechanism with a search for an alternative hegemonizing ideology in Hindu revivalism. If the Dharam Yud Morcha ultimately led to disaster, it was mainly because Mrs Gandhi was bounded by the compulsions of national politics and could not entertain making concessions to Akalis that would have meant dismantling hegemonic control, of surrendering to the discourse of 'autonomy', 'separateness' and the ASR.

Notes

1. P.R. Brass's, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*: *Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991) is representative of the former school while R. Jeffrey's, *What's Happening to India?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), the second. For a review of this literature see ch. 7.
2. See I. Talbot, *Kizer Tiwana, The Punjab Unionist party, and the Partition of India* (London: Curzon, 1996).
3. P. Wallace has drawn attention to the two political systems in Punjab since 1947 that have often been in mutual conflict: the all-India model of elections, legislature and legal institutions, and the traditional one based around the institutions and structures of the Sikh community, a legacy of Sikh sovereignty. Governance, Wallace notes, has historically depended in harnessing, accommodating and controlling the latter to the requirements of the former. See P. Wallace, 'Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab: the Sikh Dilemma in Competing Political Systems', in P. Wallace and S. Chopra (eds), *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), 1–32.
4. K. Nayer, *Minority Politics in the Punjab* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 177.
5. Gobinder Singh, *Religion and Politics in the Punjab* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1986), 91.
6. *India Today,* March 15 1993.
7. Nayer, op. cit., 169.
8. Ibid., 101.
9. Ibid., 217.
10. J.S. Grewal, *The Akalis: a Short History* (Chandigarh: Punjab Studies Publication, 1996), 7.
11. See D.S. Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: the Search for Statehood* (London; University College London Press, 1998).
12. As P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974,) has perceptively noted, 'governments in independent India have determined to atomize and absorb the Sikhs politically', 285.
13. Jeffrey, op. cit., 101.
14. Ibid., 102.
15. Brass (1991), op. cit., ch. 5 draws attention to this point. Although his interpretation is valid for the 'extremist' and 'separatist' factions, Brass treats the promotion of 'moderate' factions as unproblematic and conducive to national integration.
16. I made such an observation in 'Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case Study of Punjab', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), 84–105.
17. Beant Singh, the chief minister of Punjab from 1992 to 1995 was the main advocate of 'Greater Punjab'. He also found considerable support for this from the Hindu political leadership of Haryana.
18. See Gobinder Singh, op. cit., for a comprehensive survey of the administrative mechanisms of 'control' used to manipulate the political leadership of the SGPC.

19. Coercive measures were used in the 1950s and 1960s but not of the same magnitude as in the 1980s and 1990s.
20. Nayer, op. cit., 53.
21. Ibid., 52.
22. Even the CPI in Punjab was split between the Hindu leadership that was pro-Congress and the Sikh leadership which was unconvinced that the Akali Demand was communal. See G. Singh, *Communism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1994), ch. 5.
23. Nayer, op. cit., 313.
24. Gorbrinder Singh, op. cit., 115–27.
25. G. Singh, op. cit., 184.
26. These included the continuation of 'common links' between Punjab and Haryana such as a shared capital city, a single governor, a single high court and that the 'legitimate rights and interests of the minorities, linguistic and others, will…be safeguarded'. B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: the Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 144.
27. These included the management of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam complex, the unresolved territorial demarcation with Haryana, and the sharing of administrative structures between Haryana and Punjab.
28. Jeffrey, see ch. 6.
29. Government of India, *White paper on the Punjab Agitation* (New Delhi: 1984), 3.
30. J. Pettigrew, 'Take Not Arms against Thy Sovereign', *South Asia Research,* 4:2 (1984), 3.

7
Understanding the 'Punjab Problem'

No other subject since the Emergency in India (1975–77) has commanded such attention as the recent developments in Punjab: specialists and non-specialists alike have felt the need to comment on the events that preceded and followed the Indian Army's Operation Blue Star. The purpose of this chapter is not to add to this output, but rather to distinguish and evaluate the various explanations that have been offered for what is commonly referred to as the 'Punjab problem'. Such an exercise is unlikely to be comprehensive or satisfactory. However given the confusion which characterizes many of the accounts, its value would appear to justify the liberties taken. In this effort I have divided the literature into five categories: Sikh nationalism, conspiracy theories, regional and national factors, and Marxist interpretations. These headings, it is stressed, are neither exclusive nor exhaustive; at best they provide questionable divisions of convenience.

Sikh nationalism

Sikh nationalism has been isolated as the main explanatory variable by one group of commentators. Writing in 1974, Brass observed that 'of all the ethnic groups and peoples of north India, the Sikhs come closest to satisfying the definition of a nationality or a nation'. The achievement of a 'cohesive Sikh identity', he further added, had at times the 'appearance of an invincible, solidary, national force'.[1] But these compulsions towards nation and statehood, particularly after 1947, were contained by the parameters of linguistic regionalism set by the Indian national leadership and its alliance with secular Sikh political elites who successfully divided the community and supported the formation of a Punjabi Suba.[2] By the early 1980s, so the argument goes,

this delicate equipoise no longer existed; the Dharam Yud Morcha (1982–84), whether by default or design, reopened the Sikh national question, and in the process became a 'freedom movement', a 'Sikh revolution'[3] in the making. Seen in this light, Blue Star was not a security operation but a clash of two nations, the first 'war for Khalistan'.[4] In the words of Pettigrew:

> The sacrifice of Bhindranwale's life and that of his followers drew attention to the fact that Sikhs live by a model of society opposed to that for which India stood. They were slaughtered in defence of their conception of what society should be.[5]

Although these interpretations either highlight the modernism of Sikh nationalism, as a yearning to be a part of the international community of nation states, [6] or suggest that its objectives might fall short of statehood, [7] both concur that the current 'national revival' is predicated on four types of discrimination perceived by the Sikh community: constitutional, religious, economic, and social.[8] The rise of Bhindranwale, a charismatic leader who did not share the political culture of traditional Akalis, provided a critical catalyst in transforming the consciousness of a discriminated minority into a consciousness of a nation.[9]

Thus as the Dharam Yud Morcha became enmeshed in futile negotiations, 'a freedom movement always lurked at the edges because of the Sikh cultural and religious tradition that they were a sovereign people'.[10] Moreover this movement possessed an overarching ideology in fundamentalism which entrapped the traditional Akali leadership and sought to demonstrate the individuality of Sikhism. By counterposing a new 'world-view', fundamentalism gradually undermined the existing ground of moderate Akali politics – electoralism, lubricating corruption, and participation in the regional political system.[11] But if the fundamentalist vision drew its inspiration from the Sikh achievements of the eighteenth century, its objectives were essentially modern: to recreate a unit in which the Sikh community is a true repository of political power. In short, the Sikh nationalist wore many disguises; publicly, even Bhindranwale remained ambivalent on Khalistan.

Conspiracy theories

In sharp contrast to the above interpretations are what I have termed conspiracy theories. Put simply, they assert that the events which climaxed in June 1984 were the handiwork of a conspiracy to dismember India by external aggression and internal extremism through the use of

terror.[12] The *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation* provides an illustrative example.

> The essence of the problem in Punjab was not the demands put forward by the Akali Dal ... but the maturing of a secessionist and anti-national movement. The Akali Dal leadership allowed the initiative and control over the agitation to pass out of their hands [to the secessionists and terrorists]...
>
> The terrorists escalated their violence. With each passing day the situation worsened. The subversive activities of groups inside the Golden Temple had assumed menacing proportions in the context of India's security. The influence of external forces, with deep-rooted interest in the disintegration of India, was becoming evident. The Government was convinced that this challenge to the security, unity and integrity of the country could not be met by the normal law and order agencies at the disposal of the state. It was in these circumstances that the decision was taken to call the army in.[13]

The *White Paper*'s reluctance to detail the nature of 'external forces' – beyond a catalogue of Sikh nationalist organizations in Western Europe and North America – is not shared by Madhok, an ideologue of the BJP. For him the roots of the 'Punjab problem' lie in the 'Muslim connection'.[14] 'Muslim imperialism' led by Pakistan, insists Madhok, had attempted to divide Sikhs and Hindus – Sikhs being a 'militarized' wing of Punjab's Hindu society.[15] Remarkably, Madhok proposes a novel solution to the 'Punjab problem': the restoration, by force, of Lahore as the new capital of Punjab that would resolve the territorial dispute over Chandigarh and re-create 'emotional unity' between Sikhs and Hindus.[16]

Conspiracy theories also dominate explanations of Mrs Gandhi's assassination.[17] Ironically, though they have provided highly imaginative (and contradictory accounts), few writers have noted two obvious conspiracies: the attempted suppression of the Citizens for Democracy's publication *Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab*, and the official inquiry into the assassination.

Regional factors

More serious studies have focused on developments in Punjab in an effort to identify general factors responsible for the present crisis. While most accept the importance of the ethnic cleavage between Hindus and Sikhs in shaping the creation of a Punjabi Suba, there is

disagreement on the reasons for the collapse of the state's political framework of the 1960s and 1970s.

Robin Jeffrey[18] concentrates on the modernizing impact of the 'Green Revolution'. For him, it accelerated the emergence of mass society: face-to-face village communities disintegrated; urbanization, consumerism and mass literacy inflated expectations; ethnic identities became firmer emblems of occupational competition; rootlessness, alienation and graduate unemployment nurtured messianic tendencies, especially fundamentalism; and, above all, a revolution took place in communications, particularly political communications. Social change outpaced familiar political practices and the ability of institutions to regulate them. Politicians accustomed to factional intrigues among elites now became 'adrift on a sea of mass politics'. They responded to these changes by launching 'a desperate game in which few holds were barred'.[19] 'Modernization', asserts Jeffrey, 'played a large part in shaping the Sikh unrest (represented in its extreme form in the demand for a sovereign state) which ultimately led to the storming of the Golden Temple, Mrs Gandhi's assassination and the "communal violence" that ripped cruelly through New Delhi and other northern Indian cities in November 1984.'[20]

Another integrated approach is presented by Leaf for whom the 'Green Revolution' also provides a point of departure. The 'Punjab problem', according to Leaf, represents a choice between a pluralistic pattern of economic and political development favoured by the Akali Dal and a Sovietized model of political economy followed by the state's – and national – Congress administrations. The former stands for decentralization, ethnic and religious pluralism, and the use of ethical incentives to promote development; the latter, a quasi-monopolistic party–government relationship, industrial domination of agriculture and a distributionist socialist philosophy. Accordingly, the Akali agitation which crystallized around the ASR should be interpreted as an attempt to create a new developmental order. The 'Punjab crisis', Leaf concludes

> has not, fundamentally, been a clash between Sikhs and Hindus, nor between Sikhs and Indira Gandhi ... It has been a clash between two visions of the future and of India's proper political and social constitution. The basic questions remain unanswered.[21]

The comprehensive outlooks of Jeffrey and Leaf are not shared by the rest of the regionally centred literature. Most of it is too repetitive and isomorphic for detailed consideration, but some of the areas examined

need to be mentioned. They include: the impact of linguistic reorganization on the Akali Dal's electoral support; the subsequent change in political recruitment to the Akali Dal, in particular, the displacement of urban Sikh leadership by Jats Sikhs who are held to be the main beneficiaries of the 'Green Revolution'; the Akali Dal's adoption of a broad political and development policy, symbolized by the ASR, to accommodate conflicting caste and group interests while retaining the mobilizatory appeal of religion; the demographic threat to Sikh majority status posed by the growth of migrant labour from other states; and, the role of leading personalities, both within the Congress and the Akali Dal, in promoting ethnic conflict.[22]

National factors

Nearly all regionally inclined explanations make some reference to the national developments. At this point the value of the distinction between the former and the latter begins to diminish. Broadly, the nationally centred explanations can be divided into two: the role of Mrs Gandhi's leadership and the collapse of the Congress and the impact of modernization on the Indian political system.

Mrs Gandhi's role has been emphasized by one group of writers according to whom she deliberately created the 'Punjab problem' in order to exploit it. Her reluctance to resolve the Akali agitation, it is alleged, was part of a calculated strategy to divide the Akalis between moderates and extremists while cultivating sympathy among a predominantly Hindu electorate.[23] Mrs Gandhi thus portrayed herself as the defender of the Hindu community, and in turn, reversed the conventional, post-1947 relationship between the centre and moderate Akalis/Sikhs.[24]

The need for Mrs Gandhi to project herself in this way has also been linked to her emasculation of the Congress. Its nationwide, integrative and bargaining function, it is suggested, had been on the decline since the early 1970s; Mrs Gandhi's victory in 1980 hastened the process.[25] After 1980, political power became further centralized in New Delhi where 'fawners and flatterers'[26] ruled supreme. Moreover, Mrs Gandhi's domination over her party was reflected in the reappearance of a style that had characterized her Emergency years. It was a style that

> served one supreme end: [to] smash all threats to the political power of the ruling coteries and the projection of the prime minister as the supreme. The perceived threats came not only from within the Congress Party itself, and from the Opposition, but also from trade unions, the press, the judiciary, the students, the tribals, the rural

> poor whenever they turned rebellious. In fact, the threats came from within the country and from without, from the CIA, China, Pakistan and all those who were unhappy with 'India's progress' and wanted to 'destabilize' India.[27]

Perhaps the greatest 'threat' was posed by the prospects of an electoral defeat, hinted at by mid-term elections in some state in 1982 and 1983. The 'Punjab problem' was thus converted into a 'Sikh threat' that was nationalized and placed outside the bounds of practical politics.

An alternative way of reaching the same conclusion is to extend Jeffrey's mass society thesis, in modified form, to the rest of India. The variables in the Punjab equation are changed: Hindus replace Sikhs; Mrs Gandhi and her party the grasping Akalis (though, this time to retain power). The symptoms of rapid modernization are found *inter alia* in the growth of a new political culture, displacing the Nehruvian values by the criminalization of politics.[28] Though Mrs Gandhi, in the words of Shourie, made a special contribution to the 'enfeeblement'[29] of the state, she and her party merely reflected contemporary India, what Jeffrey calls its 'new self'[30] – a rapidly developing country undergoing economic, social and communications revolutions. Interpreted in this way, Mrs Gandhi and the Congress (like the moderate Akalis and their fundamentalist rivals) were hemmed in by the compulsions of competitive politics – their own rhetoric, the policies of the opposition parties, and the need to defend their constituency. And if the 'Punjab problem' ultimately led to disaster, it was because Mrs Gandhi and her party rode the same political roller-coaster as her principal rivals.

Marxist interpretations

Finally, there are the Marxist interpretations which mainly attempt to identify the interaction of three related issues: the 'national question', the impact of economic policies in Punjab on the emergence of social classes, and the role of the Indian state.

Most Marxist accounts proceed from the 'national question', that is, the process of nationality formation in India as an integral part of the development of capitalism.[31] Included in this framework, with the usual dialectical contingencies and ambiguities, are operational definitions of classes, relations of production, and the state. Depending on the assumptions made, India is either categorized as a multinational country, with a concurrent or a desynchronized development of the various nationalities, or is held to possess an 'Indian nationality' that is

prior to, and transcends, 'linguistic regionalism'.[32] Thus, for the CPI(M), the distorted development of Punjabi nationality is the outcome of politics followed by the Congress. According to the CPI(M), the Congress 'perpetuated' and 'exploited communal divisions', and 'never took a democratic stand … on the language issue or Punjab's reorganization'.[33] Sathyamurthy[34] and Gill and Singhal[35] also offer similar readings, though emphasizing the Congress's role in appeasing fractions within the 'ruling classes'. Asrafjan, Chopra *et al.,* and the CPI, on the other hand, present a different assessment. Inclined towards the primacy of 'Indian nationality', and the pre- and post-Independence role of the Congress in shaping it, they stress the perversion of Punjabi 'linguistic regionalism' by 'communalism', in particular, Sikh 'communalism'.[36]

Yet these differences betray strong similarities in identifying the nature of class relations in Punjab. All Marxists highlight the rapid increase in rural capital formation that began with the 'Green Revolution' and coincided with the formation of a Punjabi Suba. The introduction of modern agricultural practices, they maintain, led to peasant differentiation and the emergence of a class of 'capitalist' farmers. This development, it is further asserted, sharpened contradictions between the 'capitalist' farmers and the poor peasantry, between them and agricultural labourers, and between the 'capitalist' farmers and the all-India industrial bourgeoisie. Furthermore, in Punjab these contradictions are said to have reinforced two other social cleavages – caste, in which Jats Sikh ('capitalist' farmers) intensified the exploitation of *Mazbis* and *Ramdasis* (agricultural labourers); and the urban–rural divide, in which the traditional ascendency of Hindu mercantile capital established during the colonial period, was contested by 'capitalist' farmers.

Despite these commonalities, however, differences reappear in characterizing the pre-June 1984 Akali agitation. For Bains, Sathyamurthy, and Gill and Singhal, the agitation was directed at changing the balance of national economic power held, by the 'monopoly bourgeoisie'/'monopoly capitalist'/'big industrial houses', in favour of 'capitalist' farmers.[37] Asrafjan, Chopra *et al.* and the CPI disagree. The dynamics of the movement, they insist, were largely shaped by the 'communal' ideology of the Akali Dal, its reluctance to abandon 'confessional' politics in the quest for regional power.

These differences of interpretation are further evident in the contrasting evaluations of the role of the Indian state. Generally, ideological commitments and party affiliations determine the emphasis selected. For Banerjee, the 'happenings in Punjab were not an isolated

instance, but a symptom of the general ideological bankruptcy, brought about by the emergence of new socio-political forces unleashed by a lopsided development programme by the centre'.[38] Bains also inveighs against the 'big landlord' 'big capitalist' state (supported by Soviet 'social imperialism'), though adding that its ideological legitimation is underpinned by a cunning exploitation of the 'Brahmanical order'.[39] Vanaik, too, draws attention to the 'legitimation problem' of the Indian state, but for him this is connected with the political emergence of 'intermediate castes' and the Congress's attempts to mobilize them under the new 'hegemonizing ideology' of 'Hindu nationalism'.[40] Chopra and others are again an exception, locating the 'genesis of the Punjab problem' in the crisis of western 'imperialism', its 'neo-colonial' designs on India and encouragement of Sikh extremism.[41]

An interim conclusion

The idea of a Sikh national revival, whether understood as a part of further ethnic consolidation or as a drive towards statehood, does not adequately account for the accommodation of Sikh ethnicity within the Indian union since 1947. Most accounts lack a well-developed theory of Sikh nationalism that can explain its reactive, 'fundamentalist' and timid construction as well as its relationship with post-1947 nation and state-building. A more comprehensive theory would need to account for the overlapping and cross-cutting cleavages between Sikhs and Hindus and the distinct lack of appeal of Sikh nationalism to a significant size of the Sikh community who have traditionally supported the Congress or the Communist parties.

The conspiracy theories present the most unconvincing interpretations. In many ways the products of imaginative minds, they have lost any credence which they might have possessed because of Operation Blue Star and the subsequent persistence of militant Sikh terrorism in Punjab. Indeed, it is not difficult to conjecture that a militaristic reading of the 'Punjab problem' and its continual association with Pakistani machinations, might result in a conflict between India and Pakistan.

Regionally centred accounts, on the other hand, suffer from two major limitations : a tendency to exaggerate and an overemphasis on the Sikhs. Jeffrey's mass society thesis is based on a few selected social indicators which do not warrant such a construction. Similarly, Leaf's general framework overlooks the contradictory aspects of the Akali Dal's demand for economic and political autonomy – especially in the

non-agricultural sector, and the articulation of this demand in terms of ethnic exclusivity – while stereotypically characterizing the regional and national Congress administrations. The other studies in this category, in contrast, are marked by a relative neglect of the Punjab Hindu's contribution to the 'Punjab problem', to view the Sikh community in isolation, as an independent social entity.

Some of these shortcomings are also present in interpretations which stress the primacy of national factors. The use of modernization theory, for example, though analytically clear, still requires empirical verification. Nonetheless, these interpretations are, as the post-June 1984 events have demonstrated, more comprehensive than the personalization of the subject in terms of Mrs Gandhi.

Finally, the Marxist interpretations are certainly the most comprehensive in integrating the various analytical levels of the 'Punjab problem'. This achievement, however, is obtained at the cost of much simplification and reification – of class, caste, party and the state, of nationality, community and regional loyalties, and of class and non-class loyalties. With a few notable exceptions, nearly all of this literature belongs to the school of 'vulgar Marxism'.

Overall the recent publications on the 'Punjab problem' share several common shortcomings. There is a profusion of unclear definitions, assumptions and ambiguities. Few attempts have been made to demarcate the relevant analytical levels of the issue. And almost all the studies mentioned are flawed by the lack of sufficient empirical data – from the conspiracy theories to Marxist class alignments, from the Sikh nationalist interpretations to the regional problems of the Akali Dal, and from the structural changes in the Indian political system to factional infighting in Punjab. Although many of the works examined filled an immediate need to explain the dramatic events, their general contribution to an understanding of the subject remains limited. The 'Punjab problem' still stands in need of a rigorous analysis.

Notes

1. P.R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 277.
2. See J. Pettigrew, 'A Description of the Discrepancy between Sikh Political Ideals and Sikh Political Practice', in M.J. Aronoff (ed.), *Political Anthropology Year Book I* (New York: Transaction Books, 1980), 152–92.

3. G.S. Dhillon, 'Towards a Sikh Revolution', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (Bombay) (April 10 1983), 11.
4. M.J. Akbar, *India: the Siege Within* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 209.
5. J. Pettigrew, 'In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore', *Pacific Affairs,* 60:1 (Spring, 1987), 12.
6. Sikh Youth Movement, *The Sikhs and Recent Developments in India* (Birmingham: 1984), 46–57.
7. Pettigrew (1985), op. cit., 22; K.R. Bombwall, 'Ethno-nationalism', *Seminar*, 294 (February 1984), 44–51.
8. For further details see Maj-Gen. J.S. Bhullar, G.S. Brar and M.S. Sidhu, *The Betrayal of the Sikhs* (London: 1985).
9. A. Dietrich, 'Dharam Yud: Fundamentalist Ramifications of Sikh Autonomy Demand', *Internationales Asienforum,* 15:3&4 (1984), 195–217.
10. J. Pettigrew, 'Take Not Arms against Thy Sovereign', *South Asia Research,* 4:2 (1985), 111.
11. Dietrich, op. cit.
12. See C. Joshi, *Bhindranwale: Myth and Reality* (New Delhi: 1984).
13. Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation* (New Delhi: 1984), 3.
14. B. Madhok, *Punjab Problem: the Muslim Connection* (New Delhi: 1985), iv.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 150.
17. The literature on the assassination is too voluminous to list here. For an interesting example see S. Gupta, 'Claws of Conspiracy', in A. Shourie, *et al.*, *The Assassination and After* (New Delhi: Roli Books International, 1985), 11–37.
18. Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).
19. Ibid., 8.
20. Ibid., 2.
21. M.J. Leaf, 'The Punjab Crisis', *Asian Survey*, 25:5 (May 1985), 489.
22. See, P. Kumar, *et al.*, *Punjab Crisis: Context and Trends* (Chandigarh: 1984); H.K. Puri, 'The Akali Agitation: an Analysis of Socio-Economic Bases of Protest', *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 22 1983), 113–118; Y.K. Malik, 'The Akali Party and Sikh Militancy', *Asian Survey*, 36:4 (April 1986), 345–62; P. Wallace, 'The Sikhs as a "Minority" in a Sikh Majority State in India', *Asian Survey*, 36:4 (April 1986), 363–77; V.S. D'Souza, 'Economy, Caste, Religion and Population Distribution: an Analysis of Communal Tension in Punjab', *Economic and Political Weekly* (May 8 1982), 783–92; M.S. Dhami, 'Punjab and Communalism', *Seminar*, 314, (October 1985), 25–38.
23. See, for example R. Kothari and G. Deshingkar, 'Punjab: the Longer View', in A. Samiuddin (ed.), *The Punjab Crisis: Challenge and Response* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1985), 622–6.
24. D. Gupta, 'The Communalizing of Punjab', *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 13 1985), 185–90. See also the contributions in A. Singh (ed.), *Punjab in Indian Politics: Issues and Trends* (Delhi: 1985).
25. See W.H. Morris-Jones, 'India – More Questions than Answers', *Asian Survey*, 34:8 (August 1984), 809–16; and J. Manor, 'Anomie in Indian Politics:

Origin and Wider Impact', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number (May 1983), 725–733.
26. M. Tully and S. Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 219.
27. Kothari and Deshingkar, op. cit., 623.
28. This effectively comprises the other half of Jeffrey's thesis of a mass society as applied to the rest of India, though it must be emphasized that he remains ambivalent on whether the Hindu community constitutes a hegemonic ethnic group.
29. A. Shourie, 'A Ruinous Tragedy', in Shourie *et al.*, op. cit., 42.
30. Jeffrey, op. cit., 11.
31. See T.V. Sathyamurthy, 'Indian Nationalism and the "National Question"', *Millennium,* 14:2, 72–194; V.D. Chopra, *et al.*, *Agony of Punjab* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1984).
32. For differences on the Indian 'National Question', see A. Guha, 'The Indian National Question: a Conceptual Framework', *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 31 1982), PE2–PE12; J. Alam, 'Dialectics of Capitalist Transformation and National Crystallisation: the Past and the Present of the National Question in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 29 1983), PE29–PE46; B. Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984).
33. See H.S. Surjeet, *Lessons of Punjab* (New Delhi: 1985), 18.
34. Sathyamurthy, op. cit.
35. S.S. Gill and K.C. Singhal, 'Genesis of the Punjab Problem: Its Historical Roots', *Economic and Political Weekly* (April 7 1984), 603–8.
36. K.Z. Asrafjan, '*Sovremennye sikhskie natsionalisticheskie techenija v. Pendzabe'* (Sikh Nationalist Trends in Punjab), *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 5 (1984); Chopra *et al.*, op. cit.; A.S. Malhotra, *Save Punjab Save India* (CPI: 1984).
37. S.S. Gill and K.C. Singhal, 'Farmers' Agitation: Response to Development Crisis of Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 6 1984), 1728–32; and H. Bains, *The Call of the Martyrs: On the Crisis in India and the Present Situation in Punjab* (London:1985).
38. S. Banerjee, 'Punjab', *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 7 1984), 1019.
39. Bains, op. cit., 130–95.
40. A. Vanaik, 'India's Bourgeois Democracy', *New Left Review*, 154, 55–82.
41. Chopra, *et al.*, op. cit., 8–9, 94–130.

Part 3

Militancy and Counterinsurgency: Restructuring Sikh Politics

Introduction

Operation Blue Star marked a sudden break with the conventional form of politics in Punjab: the violent defence of the Golden Temple by militant Sikhs was met with an overwhelming response from the Indian Army. But within a year, Rajiv Gandhi, the new Congress leader, was able to engineer a settlement which appeared to have established the *status quo ante* 1984 and met the Sikhs' political demands. As events were to demonstrate, the symbolism of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord, in fact as far the centre was concerned, was intended to re-establish the norms of hegemonic control. When from the middle of 1986 the centre decided not to implement key provisions of the Accord, hegemonic control increasingly gave way to violent control as the principal strategy for managing the 'Punjab problem'.

Chapter 8 charts the twists and turns in the centre's policy from 1984 to early 1991. It highlights how in the absence of an effective political will to implement the Rajiv–Longowal Accord the 'Punjab problem' was deliberately constructed as a law-and-order issue. Anti-terrorism as the main weapon of this policy gave further life to a separatist militant movement which was almost at the point of extinction. This remarkable transformation resulted in the growth of a militant movement that launched an armed campaign for Khalistan. The militants and their front organizations achieved popular success in the Lok Sabha (national) elections of 1989. The chapter ends in 1991 with the growing power of the militants and political disarray at the centre which was epitomized by Chandra Shekhar's desperate efforts to accommodate the militants through Punjab Legislative Assembly elections (PLA) while threatening them with counterinsurgency.

Congress's triumph in the June 1991 Lok Sabha elections and the postponement of PLA elections scheduled at the same time led to a decisive

turn in the contest between militants and the centre to restructure Sikh politics. Thereafter counterinsurgecy was given a free reign, resulting in the 'Khaki' PLA elections of 1992 and landside victory of the Congress in the lowest turnout in Punjab since 1947. Chapter 9 chronicles these developments and the immediate consequences of the 1992 PLA elections.

With the election of a Congress government in Punjab the militants intensified their violence to oust it. The administration replied by counterinsurgency spearheaded by the police, paramilitaries, and the army which resulted in the destruction of most militant organizations by early 1993. Chapter 10 reviews the scale of disorder and violence in Punjab from the early 1980s to 1993. It assesses the merits of the three explanations given for the establishment of order: effective anti-terrorism, the weakness of the social order in sustaining the insurgency, and a view that much of the disorder was a form of 'managed disorder'. In light of this discussion the chapter also reflects on the difficulties of establishing order and normative legitimacy in the peripheral regions of South Asia. Whereas the Punjab example – and those of the north-eastern states in the Indian union – suggests that it is not too difficult to establish order, problems of normative legitimacy continue to linger, periodically undermining order and creating disorder. In other words, the existence of alternative claims to legitimacy in the form of regional ethno-nationalisms, pose a serious challenge to governance based purely on order or combined with some forms of co-optive administration. Until and unless the issues of legitimacy are addressed disorder cannot be ruled out.

8
The ‘Punjab Problem’: a Post-1984 Assessment

When in June 1984 the Indian Army entered the Golden Temple the ‘Punjab problem’, which had been simmering since the early 1980s, became an international media event. Subsequently it claimed Mrs Indira Gandhi and catapulted Rajiv Gandhi into national politics. Seven years on, the problem is no nearer solution than in 1984. Indeed, it now looks certain to bedevil any successor to the minority Janata (Socialist) government, and seasoned observers of Punjab politics regularly note that, if anything, the issue has become even more intractable. Why has this turn of events emerged? Why have the various ‘initiatives’ failed to provide a critical breakthrough? What lessons does the post-1984 ‘Punjab problem’ provide for ethnic conflict management in South Asia?

This chapter addresses these questions by examining political developments since 1984. Its central argument is that definitions of the ‘Punjab problem’ and the possibilities of its resolution have significantly altered due to the policies pursued by successive Indian governments and the responses they have generated among the Sikh community in particular. Opportunities for a negotiated settlement still exist, but the experience of the last seven years will strongly influence the behaviour of the leading participants in the dispute.

No serious analysis of events in Punjab can be undertaken without an understanding of the main political developments after June 1984. The period since has received little academic attention and the neglect appears unjustified. Among generalists it is likely to perpetuate a linear link between 1984 and 1991 which obviates the need for detailed evaluation. Among specialists it overlooks the rich potential for policy analysis of one of the Indian centre’s most pressing problems. Increasing ethnic conflicts are likely to intensify interest in comparative examples

and the Punjab provides valuable lessons which may yet have all-India implications.

Measured by the normal turbulent standards of Punjab politics, the seven years since 1984 have been quite exceptional: they have witnessed quasi-militarization, endemic terrorism, and an ill-fated attempt to restore the democratic process. A systematic evaluation of these developments remains to be undertaken but for our purposes three clear phases can be distinguished: after Operation Blue Star the attempt at a 'Political Solution' associated with the Rajiv–Longowal Accord and the Barnala Ministry (September 1985 to May 1987); the 'Anti-terrorist Solution' (May 1987 to November 1989) identified with the policies of the state Governor S.S. Ray and the Punjab Police chief Julio Ribeiro and his successor K.P.S. Gill; and the period since the Lok Sabha elections in December 1989.

'Political solution': the Rajiv–Longowal Accord and the Barnala Ministry

In hindsight the Rajiv–Longowal Accord was a remarkable agreement. The territorial, economic and religious demands which had fuelled the Sikh agitation before June 1984, and were held to be non-negotiable by Mrs Gandhi, were recognized. For the moderate Akali Dal led by Sant Longowal AD(L) the Accord provided a basis for a return to democratic politics; for Rajiv Gandhi, it represented a dynamic breakthrough, a befitting start to his premiership. True the Accord was open to potentially conflicting interpretations, and suffered an immediate setback with the assassination of Sant Longowal in August 1985, but at this juncture there was sufficient commitment among both parties to pursue a political solution.[1]

Longowal was succeeded by Surjit Singh Barnala, a former union Agricultural Minister. Barnala's success in transforming the 'Political Solution' into an enduring settlement depended on two factors: his ability to politically marginalize militant Sikhs and their allies within the Sikh political system, the institutions and structures around which Sikh politics are organized, [2] and to deliver effectively on the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. Initially Barnala had a promising start. In the September elections to the PLA (see Table 8.2) – boycotted by militants – the Akali Dal and the Longowal faction within it scored a resounding success. Akali Dal won 80 per cent of all Sikh votes and 73 seats. The mandate reflected the popular mood of the electorate and a widespread optimism that the 'Punjab problem' was about to be resolved.

Table 8.1. Main Developments since 1984

1984	Jun:	Golden Temple: Operation Blue Star
1985	Jul:	Rajiv–Longowal Accord
1985	Sep:	Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections, formation of Barnala Ministry (elections boycotted by Sikh militants)
1986	Apr:	Golden Temple: paramilitary action
1987	Jan:	Golden Temple: paramilitary action
1987	May:	Imposition of President's Rule
1988	Apr:	Golden Temple: Operation Black Thunder
1988	May:	59th Constitutional Amendment. Extends period of President's Rule by three years and provides for Emergency Powers
1989	Nov:	Ninth Lok Sabha Elections (Sikh militants participate and win)
1989	Dec:	Repeal of the 59th Amendment
1990	Apr:	65th Constitutional Amendment. Extends President's Rule in Punjab by six months from May 10
1990	Oct:	76th Constitutional Amendment. Extends President's Rule in Punjab by six months from November 10
1990	Dec:	Military crackdown: Troops of the 9th Division of the Indian Army moved to the border districts. Shekhar–Mann talks.
1991	Mar:	Termination of Shekhar–Mann talks. Resignation of Janata (S) Gov't.

Yet within four months of the PLA elections the 'Political Solution' was in ruins. Whereas the centre viewed Barnala's ministry mainly in terms of containing militant terrorism, Barnala's capacity to do so was constrained by the political concessions the centre was willing to make. By early 1986 Rajiv Gandhi's reforming zeal came to a strategic

Table 8.2 Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections, 1985

Party	Seats	% vote polled
Akali Dal (L)	73	38.0
Congress	32	37.9
BJP	6	5.1
Janata	1	1.0
CPI	1	4.2
CPM	–	1.8
Independents	4	9.9
Total	117	100

Source: M.S. Dhami, 'Religo-Political Mobilization and Shift in the Party Support Base in 1985 Punjab Assembly Elections', *Punjab Journal of Politics,* vol. xi, no. 1–2, (1987), 24.

halt.[3] The Rajiv–Longowal Accord was its major casualty. The transfer of Chandigarh, scheduled for January 26, was first delayed, then postponed and eventually suspended for an indefinite period. Other provisions in the Accord (see Table 8.3) were either nullified or produced outcomes hostile to Sikh interests. The ultimate reversal of policy was marked by the appointment of S.S. Ray as State Governor – an experienced Congress politician who had led the anti-terrorist campaign against Naxalites in West Bengal in the 1970s. He was to be assisted in his role by Julio Ribeiro as Director General of Police with special responsibility for anti-terrorist operations.[4]

By undermining the Rajiv–Longowal Accord the centre enhanced the claims of militant Sikhs to make a bid for the leadership of the Sikh Panth. Militant front organizations – the United Akali Dal (UAD), All-India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF), Damdam Taksal (DT), Panthic Committee, and armed group Khalistan Command Force (KCF), the Bhindranwale Tiger Force (BTF), the Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF) and Babbar Khalsa International (BKI)[5] – established control of the Golden Temple. From its precincts at an assembled Sarbat Khalsa they made a declaration of an independent state of Khalistan (April 29 1986). This declaration was accompanied by an immediate paramilitary action led by Ribeiro. The combined fallout from these two developments split the Barnala ministry: 27 Akali Dal MLAs led by Parkash Singh Badal AD(B) sought recognition as a separate group. Henceforth Barnala was dependent upon Congress support.

Barnala's failure to manage the Sikh political system became obvious in February 1987 when the UAD merged with the AD(B) defectees who had retained organizational control of the SGPC, to form a Unified Akali Dal (UniAD). Three months latter, and with ever diminishing authority, the centre decided to terminate the Barnala ministry and imposed President's Rule. Officially this action was approved on the grounds of the prevailing 'chaos and anarchy' in Punjab. Among the opposition, however, it was widely believed that the step had been taken to improve the Congress's fortune in the Haryana elections.[7]

'Anti-terrorist solution'

President's Rule signalled a distinct change in the central government's policy. Political solutions were to take second place to executive measures to re-establish law and order where there was alleged 'chaos' and 'anarchy'. Although terrorism had persisted during Barnala's administration, among other reasons for imposing President's Rule was Governor Ray's allegation that some of Barnala's own ministers were

Table 8.3 Rajiv–Longowal Accord

Issue	Agreement	Implementation up to Nov. 1989
1. Anandpur Sahib Resolution Commission (ASR)[6]	Referred to Sarkaria Commission Report	Oct. 1987: Rejects ASR approach to Centre–State relations
2. Transfer of Chandigarh	To be transferred by Jan. 1986. Punjab to compensate Haryana with equivalent territory for a new capital. Other territorial disputes to be settled by a commission	Three commissions (Matthew/Venkatarmiah/ Desai fail to provide an agreement. Strong opposition in Haryana. July 1986: union government suspends the transfer for an indefinite period
3. Sharing of Ravi-Beas Waters	A tribunal headed by a Supreme Court judge to adjudicate. July 1985 consumption as baseline.	May 1987: Eradi Tribunal reduces Punjab's July 1985 level while doubling Haryana's share
4. Nov. 1984 Anti-Sikh Delhi Riots	Referred to Mishra Commission	Feb. 1987: Absolves Cong (I) of responsibility placing guilt on Delhi police
5. Army Deserters	To be rehabilitated and given gainful employment	Aug 1985: of 2606 deserters, 900 had been rehabilitated
6. Political Detainees	Release of political detainees and withdrawal of special powers	Limited releases. May 1988, 59th constitutional amendment – provision for emergency powers
7. Religious Autonomy	Enactment of an all-India Gurdwara act	Not enacted; May 1988: Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Ordinance.

'deeply involved' with the extremists.[8] Before President's Rule Ribeiro had publicly criticized Akali Dal intervention in the enforcement of anti-terrorist measures.[9] Following Barnala's dismissal, Governor Ray and Ribeiro pursued a hardline anti-terrorist policy that was ruthlessly implemented until the end of 1989.[10]

Notwithstanding the infamous reputation of the Punjab Police and other paramilitary forces in Punjab, Ribeiro promised a technocratic solution to terrorism – a form of managerial 'quick-fix' increasingly favoured by the beleaguered Rajiv Gandhi.[11] Ribeiro's discourse was drawn from the rhetoric of western anti-terrorism; its application in Indian conditions was to generate its own unintended consequences, however.[12]

Ribeiro reorganized the security apparatus. In addition to the Central Reserve Police Force, the Border Security Force and the occasional use of the Army, the Punjab Police was strengthened with the creation of a new layer of senior posts. This was further augmented with mass recruitment at the constable level. Anti-terrorist legislation (National Security Act (1980), Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance (1983), The Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Acts (1984), and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985), was rigorously implemented with unofficial approval for 'police encounters' where known militants had been apprehended. Counterinsurgency was given high priority with use of underground police 'hit squads' to infiltrate and liquidate militant groups.[13] The new determination was aptly summarized by Ribeiro himself: to give a befitting reply to 'bullets with bullets'.

However, far from containing militancy the Ray–Ribeiro strategy provided it with a rich breeding ground. The killing rate rose dramatically from 1246 (1987) to 3074 (1988).[14] Ribeiro himself narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. 'Police encounters', moreover, politically disarmed the policy. Instead of marginalizing the militants they were transformed into martyrs; and the regular deaths of innocent individuals touched a raw nerve in the violent culture of rural Punjab. Well-publicized cases of police excesses and extortion further weakened the policy. Ray and Ribeiro were commonly accused of operating a non-accountable police state.[15] The official view that militant Sikh terrorism had invited a tough anti-terrorist response was now qualified by a popular perception that both were 'complementing each other in the ominous process of terrorizing the people of Punjab'.[16] Regular announcements that the end of terrorism was imminent were treated with incredulity by professional observers.[17] Ultimately even Ribeiro confessed failure. Terrorism in Punjab, he finally acknowledged, could not be eliminated by anti-terrorism. It required a 'political solution'.

Anti-terrorism further intensified political competition within the Sikh political system. The UniAD soon displaced AD(L). But this marriage of convenience between the overarching militant front organization (the UAD) and the organizational backbone of Sikh

institutional politics (the AD(B)) quickly proved unworkable. Whereas the former, led by Simranjeet Singh Mann, an ex-IPS and at the time under detention, sought to capture the SGPC, the latter, which had avoided identification with the Khalistan movement, attempted to swim with the tide by accommodating the militants. The disagreements could not be contained. They were formalized with the division of UniAD into AD(B) and Akali Dal (Mann) (AD(M)). And in its struggle with the former, the latter received help from an unexpected quarter – Governor Ray.

Throughout 1987 and 1988 Ray supplemented the anti-terrorist strategy with efforts at political engineering. It is alleged that Ray's intention was to divide Sikh political support by promoting AD(M) (and some associated militant organizations) at the expense of AD(B) in the belief that this would benefit Congress in Punjab.[18] Though the allegation remains to be verified, Ray's actions emboldened the militants: in September 1987, they made an open declaration for an armed struggle for Khalistan; and in March 1988, Jasbir Singh Rode, a nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was under detention at the time, was released on the grounds that he might act as an interlocutor between the militants and the centre. Rode's appointment as Akal Takht Jathedar by a Sarbat Khalsa received the support of all the leading militant organizations. The executive of the SGPC, a stronghold of AD(B), which had opposed Rode's appointment, was taken into custody when it sought to nominate its own Akal Takht Jathedar.[19]

Rode, however, failed to fulfil the centre's expectations. His initial statements for the resolution of the 'Punjab problem' within the 'national framework' were soon retracted. Between his release and April, the Golden Temple once more became a base for militants who established armed fortifications. Operation Black Thunder, the centre's response to this development, lasted eight days and led to the surrender of 192 militants. As in 1986, the fallout strengthened the militants, disarmed the moderates and exposed the limitation of the use of force as a solution. Bereft of policy the central government enacted the 59th Constitutional Amendment which extended the period of President's Rule in Punjab for three years and included a provision for the declaration of a state of emergency in the province. Barnala ruefully observed the centre's mismanagement. It was, he concluded, the 'natural climax of the disastrous course followed on the Punjab problem by the central government'.[20]

Another Punjab 'initiative' was announced by Rajiv Gandhi in March 1989. It made no reference to the Rajiv–Longowal Accord but

included measures intended to liberalize the enforcement of anti-terrorist laws with the promise of village elections. However, the elections were postponed in July and the centre continued to signal its support for Rode despite opposition from its own security forces that such a policy compromised the execution of the anti-terrorist strategy.[21]

Lok Sabha elections (1989) and after

Rajiv Gandhi's decision to hold the ninth Lok Sabha elections in November 1989 was accompanied by the announcement that elections would also be held from the 13 parliamentary constituencies in Punjab. This was the first test of public opinion since 1985 and the result transformed the 'Punjab problem'. The militants, who had boycotted the 1985 PLA poll, now participated under the AD(M). The result (see Table 8.4) produced a landslide for AD(M). It won eight seats and two of its supported candidates (an Independent and BSP) were also successful. Congress was reduced to two seats while Janata Dal could secure only one. Mann, who was in detention at the time of the poll, won by a margin of 464 000 votes, polling 91.7 per cent of the vote cast. AD(M)'s principal rival, AD(B), was routed while AD(L) failed to secure less than 1 per cent of the total votes polled.

AD(M)'s victory presented several difficulties for the new minority National Front government in New Delhi. The stock argument that the militants' power rested on AK 47 assault rifles lost much of its credibility. Rather, the relative lack of violent incidents in the Punjab poll gave the victory the Electoral Commission's approval. Second, despite political divisions in the Sikh vote – Congress, AD(B), AD(L), the BSP and the two Communist parties – the triumph of AD(M) gave an overwhelming impression of Sikh ethnic consolidation.

Third, the result fundamentally reordered the bargaining parameters that had been structured around the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. Now the post-Accord experience hardened the AD(M)'s resolve on securing the ASR. At the same time the National Front government, despite its emphasis on value-based politics, because of its minority position and dependence on the BJP and Communist parties, showed a marked reluctance to commit itself to the implementation of the provisions of the Accord.

The new government's first steps raised high expectations. It was initially welcomed by Mann and the militants and the centre's actions suggested dramatic developments: Ray was replaced by N.K. Mukerji

Table 8.4 Punjab Lok Sabha Elections, 1989

	Party and % Valid Votes									
Constituency	AD(M)	CON	BSP	AD(B)	JD	BJP	CPI(M)	CPI	AD(L)	IND
1. Jalandhar (TO = 60.1)		32.7	12.9		*47.2					5.2
2. Ludhiana (TO = 59.8)	*52.0	32.9	5.0	3.7						6.2
3. Patiala (TO = 63.6)	*45.4	32.9	4.2	7.9						NA
4. Faridkot (TO = 64.3)	*47.4	23.0	9.4	8.2				3.7		NA
5. Hoshiarpur (TO = NA)		*31.3	19.2		8.2	17.2	17.8			6.1
6. Phillaur (TO = 60.0)		27.1	*28.6	27.2	0.5		11.8			NA
7. Ropar (TO = 68.4)	*59.3	27.0	6.5					3.5		NA
8. Tran Taran (TO = 63.6)	*91.9	7.7	0.4							
9. Bhatinda (TO = 63.4)	*50.4	17.4		5.5				14.9	1.8	NA
10. Sangrur (TO = 71.6)	*35.8	15.8	2.6	9.9			20.3		9.7	NA

Table 8.4 continued

Constituency	Party and % Valid Votes									
	AD(M)	CON	BSP	AD(B)	JD	BJP	CPI(M)	CPI	AD(L)	IND
11. Ferozepur (TO = 41.7)	*30.0	25.5	16.5		18.2			3.4		NA
12. Gurdaspur (TO = 60.0)	25.7	*39.6	3.0	1.7		23.0				NA
13. Amritsar (TO = 60.0)	25.3	1.9		3.0	*$46.3	17.9				NA
% Total valid votes polled	33.4	26.2	8.5	5.2	5.2	4.1	3.8	2.0	0.9	NA

Notes

* = Candidate Elected; TO = Turn Out; *$ = Independent; AD(M) = Akali Dal (Mann); CON = Congress; BSP = Bharatiya Samaj Party; AD(B) = Akali Dal (Badal); JD = Janata Dal; BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party; CPI(M) = Communist Party of India (Marxist); CPI = Communist Party of India; AD(L) Akali Dal (Longowal); IND = Independents.

Source: *People's Democracy,* December 12 1989; *Des Pardes,* December 8 1989; David Butler, Ashok Lehari and Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections, 1952–1995* (New Delhi: Books and Things, 1995, new ed.).

with a special directive to curb police excesses; within 48 hours of swearing in as Prime Minister, V.P. Singh and three senior Cabinet Ministers visited the Golden Temple; a new enquiry (with provision for special courts) was established into the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi; an all-party conference was organized in Delhi; and the notorious 59th Amendment was repealed.[22] Feelers were sent out to AD(M) and AD(B) about the possibility of political settlement. Any agreement it was emphasized, however, would preclude discussion of the ASR and Khalistan and could only be entertained within the 'framework of the constitution and the Republic, without compromising the unity and integrity of the country'.[23]

AD(M)'s response to these limits was to assert its own interpretation of the resolution of the 'Punjab problem' within the Indian constitution. Soon after the elections it adopted a resolution which reinterpreted the ASR.[24] AD(M) MPs presented a set of preconditions before they would accept the parliamentary oath.[25] Mann, despite equivocating, did not depart too radically from this position. He refused to take his seat in the Lok Sabha over the 'sword controversy' and, by mid-1990, had perceptibly shifted from 'managing the militants' to 'casting his lot with them'.[26]

One factor contributing to this change was the failure of centre–AD(M) negotiations. V.P. Singh and Mann met on several occasions but neither was prepared to concede ground. Against this deadlock the centre's ability to implement a unilateral solution was limited by the lack of political support for its coalition partners in Punjab and the ambivalence of the Congress.[27] Consequently the centre, faced with the prospect of PLA elections (May 10 1990, at the latest with the repeal of the 59th Amendment) and a possible AD(M) landslide, responded by extending President's Rule for a further six months even though this required a difficult 65th Constitutional Amendment. The formal explanation for this decision was that free and fair elections could not be held until peace was restored; the informal one, that the militants would have won and created a 'Latvian Scenario'.[28]

After April the centre followed a threefold strategy with the aim of holding PLA elections in November. First, a new anti-terrorist 'action plan' was implemented. Based on the assumption that there were only 173 'hardcore' terrorists operating in Punjab, the plan sought to contain and eliminate them.[29] The security forces were re-equipped, reorganized and given new priorities. Militant front organizations, most notably finance companies, were closed.[30]

Second, efforts were made to assuage popular discontent about police excesses and make the security forces more accountable. In June Mukherji, who was criticized for weak supervision of the police administration, was replaced as Governor by V. Verma. The latter publicly criticized sections of the Punjab Police for corruption and extortion and ordered judicial investigations into well-publicized cases of police brutality.[31]

Third, renewed attempts were made to establish an anti-militant political coalition. Excluding Congress, the other parties (Janata Dal, CPI, CPI(M), BSP and the BJP) were encouraged to formulate a united front. However, because of the historic weakness of these parties in Punjab, the centre relied heavily on the popular appeal of the prime minister who visited Punjab on a number of occasions. AD(M) members, notably MPs, were also encouraged to defect, while the AD(B) was bolstered through executive action. The efforts in August to restore the prorogued 1987 PLA were seen as a centre-inspired move to create a moderate ruling coalition. Such a restoration would have pre-empted the need for another constitutional amendment (to extend President's Rule) that would have required Congress support and outflanked the militants.[32]

The impact of these measures on Sikh politics was to strengthen the claims of the Sikh political system as the premier political system in the state. AD(M) and its associated militant organizations intensified their efforts to consolidate their hold on the Sikh institutions, especially the SGPC – still formally controlled by the AD(B). A virtual civil war erupted with rival nominees for the Akal Takht Jathedar. Tohra, the SGPC president, escaped an assassination attempt. By October, 12 SGPC executive committee members had been killed.[33] Balwant Singh, a former Finance Minister and senior member of AD(B), was shot dead in Chandigarh.[34] Simultaneously the AD(M)'s bargaining stance further hardened around the ASR with suggestions that it was really a cover for Khalistan. The emphasis was still on the centre's intransigence but it was now accompanied by dire warnings of 'Khalsa Raj'.[35] An AD(M) meeting at the Golden Temple (August 29) adopted a series of resolutions that qualified the possibilities of the resolution of the 'Punjab problem' *within* the Indian constitution. These include a demand that the next PLA elections should be held under international scrutiny or would be boycotted by AD(M); that Operation Blue Star should be seen as the 'First War of Sikh Independence'; and a declaration that the AD(M) had no expectation of the National Front resolving the 'Punjab problem'.[36]

The AD(B), on the other hand, in order to retain its legitimacy within the Sikh political system', was by the nature of its competition with AD(M), compelled to adopt policies similar to the latter's. Rejecting centre-engineered blandishments in the face of militant criticism and violence, it nominated its own 'heroic' Akal Takht Jathedar to excel the AD(M) nominee in terms of sacrifice and Panthic deeds. Badal himself declared that the 'Punjab problem' could not be solved by implementing the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. 'The struggle', he warned, 'had gone beyond such a bargaining position as far as the Sikhs were concerned.'[37]

By September 1990 the centre's strategy was in disarray. In that month alone about 600 people died in militant and anti-militant violence, bringing the total for the year to about 4500.[38] Politically, the anti-militant coalition remained weak, with Congress opposed to such a bloc while the consolidation of AD(M) made the prospect of a militant victory at the polls seem even more inevitable than in May. Faced with a repeat of April, the centre opted for a 'national consensus solution' – a series of discussions with the National Front's coalition partners and the opposition parties about the desirability of elections; a common view was that given the level of violence in Punjab the elections should be postponed; and an agreement was reached to extend President's Rule in Punjab for a further six months through another constitutional amendment, failing which elections would be held in Punjab as a last resort. The National Front government came close to being compelled to hold elections with the failure of the first reading of the Constitutional Amendment Bill but it was eventually passed (October 4) with Congress support.[39] Exuding a sense of failure V.P. Singh acknowledged that the centre's strategy might have been ill-founded. 'One thing I will regret all my life', he said on the eve of the constitutional bill, 'is not holding elections [for the PLA] within six months [of his government taking office].'[40]

Following the crisis that led to the collapse of the National Front government and the formation of a minority Janata (Secular) administration, the 'Punjab problem' was put on the 'back burner'.[41] In the resulting impasse, and in response to the extension of President's Rule, the militants intensified their campaign: the killing rate rose to about twenty-five a day; the All-India Radio Director at Chandigarh was assassinated, resulting in the state-wide suspension of Hindi broadcasts in favour of Punjabi; and the militants issued a number of draconian 'notifications' (code of conduct for the media, students, dress, the consumption of intoxicants and the use of Punjabi) which led to widespread concern that

the 'centre's writ did not run in Punjab'.[42] Meanwhile the AD(M) consolidated its control over the Sikh institutions and at the annual elections to the SGPC executive Tohra was removed and Mann's nominee elected as President. Recognizing their increasing weakness and ineffectiveness the AD(B) and AD(L) agreed to merge with AD(M) and elect Mann as their leader.[43]

The centre's reaction to these developments was twofold.In early December, troops of the 9th Division of the Indian Army were sent to Punjab, especially the border districts, to check the activities of the militants. This was accompanied by senior changes in the Punjab administration: retired Lieutenant-General O.P. Malhotra replaced Verma as Governor; K.P.S. Gill was recalled to Delhi; and a new Chief Secretary was appointed. Chandra Shekhar, the new prime minister, offered without conditions to open discussions with Sikh leaders, including militants. He even suggested that the constitution could be amended to satisfy some of the Sikh demands.[44]

The new framework of Sikh demands became apparent at the Shekhar–Mann talks held in late December. Presented in a memorandum to the prime minister they omitted any reference to the resolution of the 'Punjab problem' within the Indian constitution and highlighted the need for Sikhs to have 'the right of self-determination in order to preserve their religious, political and cultural identity'. The circumspect language of ASR and the Rajiv–Longowal Accord was forsaken for a detailed denial of the whole basis of Sikh integration into the Indian union. The relationship between the Sikhs and the Indian union, the memorandum continued, could only be determined following an election of the PLA held under United Nations' supervision.[45]

The centre's response to these talks was guarded. Shekhar stated that he would not compromise the 'unity and integrity of the country', and any solution sanctioned by the centre would have to be within the framework of the Indian constitution.[46] His willingness to negotiate with AD(M) leadership, with suggestions that the militants should also be party to any agreement, in face of strong opposition from other parties (Congress, Janata Dal, the BJP, the CPI(M) and the CPI), was perhaps explained by impending termination of President's Rule (May 10 1991) – its extension would have required another difficult constitutional amendment – than Shekhar's alleged 'consistency' on the subject. At the time of writing (March 1991), the process started by the talks has come to a halt because the AD(M) leadership has been increasingly pressurized by militants to abandon negotiations and the resignation of the Janata (Secular) government.[47] In this impasse the

centre's Punjab policy is likely to continue along the lines of a 'national consensus solution' (a further extension of President's Rule), or failing that elections will be held as the last alternative. If elections are held they could have three possible outcomes: as a demonstration of the extent of public opinion *against* the Sikh demands; as a further consolidation of AD(M) support with perhaps some factional alignment from Sikh militants; and as a referendum on, and a prelude to, a declaration of Khalistan. Given the weaknesses of the non-Sikh parties and the result of the Lok Sabha elections, the centre's reasoning against PLA elections so far has been dominated by concern with the latter scenario. However despite these strong qualifications it would be premature to rule out the possibility of a negotiated settlement. Ultimately the success of any new agreement depends not only on the capacity of the centre to respond to Sikh demands but also on the ability of the Sikh leadership to accommodate these responses alongside its minimalist goal of 'Sikh self-determination'.[48]

Assessment

The developments since 1984 have been reviewed in detail to highlight the policies pursued by central governments and the forms of responses they have generated among the Sikh community. The emphasis has been chosen for the range of policies that have been utilized and the transactional role of the centre in managing ethnic conflict in South Asia. The post-1984 period appears to suggest increasing ethnic consolidation among the Sikh community behind seemingly non-transactional demands. Why has this happened? Why have the militants and their allies, a relatively insignificant political force within the Sikh community in 1984, come to displace the established leadership? How has this change taken place?

Most answers to these questions are structured around three constraints on the centre's policy formation and implementation: exogenous, regional and national.

Exogenously based explanations draw attention to the geopolitical constraints on the centre's Punjab policy. As in Jammu and Kashmir, and to a lesser extent Assam, strategic considerations it is argued have limited the policy options. In a sense these constraints have existed since 1947, but they were dramatically highlighted in the *White Paper on the Agitation in Punjab* (1984) which drew attention to the 'influence of external forces with a deep-rooted interest in the disintegration of India'.[49] Arguably the growth of militant power since 1984 can be

attributed to the material and financial support of successive Pakistani governments and militant Sikh organizations based in Europe and North America.[50] However such an understanding of the 'Punjab problem' *overestimates* the claims of militant organizations themselves and *underestimates* the capacity of the Indian state to effectively challenge such a threat, either militarily or politically. As Ribeiro observed, the strength of militant terrorism derives not from the real or imagined threats from 'external forces' but in the failure to find a political solution.

Similarly it is difficult to identify the regional constraint as the main factor determining the centre's policy on Punjab. Although the pre- and post-1984 dynamic within Sikh politics has been influenced by social and structural factors specific to Punjab, such as the 'Green Revolution', [51] the relative success of the militants since 1984 needs to be seen against the centre's erosion of the legitimacy of the regional political system. In 1985 there were formidable barriers to the construction of a militant movement – the existence of cross-cutting and overlapping economic, social, cultural, caste and political cleavages between Sikhs and Hindus and the institutional control of the Sikh political system by moderates. But the non-implementation of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord and the imposition of political closure by the centre at a critical juncture (May 1987) fatally disarmed the moderate Sikh leadership and emboldened the militants to launch a strategic movement for the capture of the Sikh political system. Subsequently centre-led attempts to build an anti-militant coalition using traditional forms of political management – patronage, defections and inter-factional conflict – have seriously compromised the credibility of the centre as the guardian of the democratic process in Punjab. The postponement, for example, of PLA elections in May and November 1990 by the National Front government was justified on *political* rather than *constitutional* grounds. Thus the centre's determination to impose a solution on the 'Punjab problem' has elevated the Sikh political system to the premier political system in Punjab with the result that ethnic consolidation among the Sikh community is now greater than at any time since 1947; and the traditional patterns of exchange between the Sikh political system and the formal political system have become ossified, restricted and narrow, limiting the familiar pattern of accommodation that had characterized Punjab politics until the 1980s. The centre, which has been so successful in creating Sikh leaders to sustain

this process in the past, is now confronted with unwilling recruits and a strident resistance from mainstream Sikh leadership to avoid the 'historic' mistakes of being first 'hailed' and then 'nailed'.

Centre's emasculation of Punjab's political system becomes meaningful within the broader framework of national political constraints on its regional policy. Rajiv Gandhi's premiership appeared to mark a distinct departure in regional policy toward problem states, symbolized above all by the 'Rule of Accords' (Punjab, Assam, Mizoram), [52] but this break was more formal than real and policy limitations were clearly evident at the level of implementation. This shortfall can perhaps be explained by the failure of Rajiv Gandhi to restructure the Congress as a neo-Nehruvian party and its consequent search for a new ideology of Hindu communalism.[53] Together these factors have restricted the capacity of Congress to resolve the 'Punjab problem' and produced an opposition consensus within which the Rajiv–Longowal Accord is no longer a negotiable framework. Indeed, the defeat of Congress in the ninth Lok Sabha elections and the formation of a National Front government saw no distinct departures in regional policy that could address the peripheral crises confronting the Indian state. National Front dependence on the BJP and Communist support severely qualified its ability to seek a negotiated settlement in Punjab and actually increased ethnic conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and Assam.[54] Consequently, the increasing national articulation of Hindu ethnicity through the BJP and compromise with it by other political parties, such as Congress, has contributed significantly to transforming seemingly regional problems into intractable ethnic conflicts. In the absence of a viable regional policy, the temptation to use force to contain these conflicts will persist.

In conclusion, the key lesson of the 'Punjab problem' since 1984 is that despite the existence of a clearly demarcated and politically organized ethnic community the emergence of ethnic primordialism among Sikhs was not inevitable but the range of policies pursued by the centre has made the probability of such an outcome more likely. It could be argued that there is a case for the suspension of democratic processes where there is a distinct possibility that they would intensify ethnic conflict. But the converse is also valid. In Punjab this suspension occurred at a juncture when the militants had been electorally disarmed. In seeking to resolve the 'Punjab problem' by force the centre has produced the outcome it least desired.

Notes

1. The Rajiv–Longowal Accord negotiations were conducted in the utmost secrecy. Centre's decision to preclude the faction led by Parkash Singh Badal (former chief minister) and Gurcharan Singh Tohra, who controlled the main Sikh religious institution, the SGPC, was to make them reluctant participants in the Barnala ministry and subsequently eager to precipitate its downfall. For the conduct of the negotiations see M. Tully and S. Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).
2. See Chapter 6 for description of the system.
3. N. Nugent, 'Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress Party and the 1989 Parliamentary Elections', unpublished paper delivered at the International Conference on 'National and State Politics in Post-Election India', University of Hull (May 10–12 1990).
4. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (hereafter KCA) vol. xxxii, 34562.
5. Militant Sikh groups operate at a number of levels: as front organizations (AISSF, DT); as underground Panthic Committees coordinating and developing strategy for the 'true' interests of the Sikh Panth; and as armed groups (KCF, BK, KLF and the BTF) engaged in a war of 'liberation' for Khalistan. Currently there is considerable overlap between the militants and the AD(M). These groups are also beset with intense factional rivalry. For a genealogy of the groups, see S. Dang, *Genesis of Terrorism*: a*n Analytical Study of Punjab Terrorists* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1988).See also ch. 9
6. The ASR calls for wholesale restructuring of centre-state relations with the centre's role confined to foreign relations, defence, currency and general communications.
7. This interpretation appears to be supported by the remarkable ruling of the Eradi Tribunal only two months before the Haryana state elections.
8. KCA, vol. xxxi, 35247–8.
9. Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab, New Delhi, *State Terrorism and Punjab: a Report* (New Delhi: 1989), 9.
10. *India Today,* December 31 1989.
11. For an illuminating insight into the cult of the technocrat in Rajiv Gandhi's security policies see B. Wariavwalla, 'Security Issues in Domestic Politics', unpublished paper delivered at the International Conference on 'National and State Politics in Post Election India', University of Hull (May 10–12 1990).
12. CIIP, op. cit., 10–61.
13. *Economic and Political Weekly,* September 23 1989.
14. KCA vol. xxiv and xxxv, 35718 and 36691.
15. *India Today,* September 30 1989.
16. *Economic and Political Weekly,* September 23 1989.
17. Ibid., March 11 1989.
18. *People's Democracy* (New Delhi), December 10 1989.
19. KCA vol. xxv, 36692.
20. Ibid., vol. xxiv, 35718.
21. Ibid., vol. xxvi, 36525.
22. *India Today,* December 13 1989; *People's Democracy,* December 10, 17 and 24 1989 and January 7 1990.

23. *People's Democracy*, December 24 1989.
24. The resolution 'demanded an autonomous Sikh region in the north as an integral part of the union of India entitled to frame its own constitution, and having all the powers except foreign relations, defence, currency and general communications. Such a region would include the Sikh inhabited areas of Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh that are contiguous to Punjab.' *India Today*, December 31 1989.
25. These included an official apology for Operation Blue Star; prosecution of 1984 anti-Sikh Delhi rioters; release of detainees; removal of Governor Ray and police chief Gill and their prosecution along with Gill's predecessor, Ribeiro; withdrawal of anti-terrorist laws; and the withdrawal of central security forces in Punjab. *Des Pardes* (Southall), December 15 1989.
26. *India Today,* June 30 1990.
27. *People's Democracy,* December 24 1989.
28. *The Punjabi Guardian* (Birmingham), July 15–30 1990.
29. *India Today,* April 30 1990.
30. *Financial Times* (London), July 24 1990.
31. *The Punjabi Guardian,* August 1–5 1990.
32. Ibid., September 15–30 1990.
33. *Des Pardes,* October 14 1990.
34. *The Punjabi Guardian,* August 15–31 1990.
35. *India Today,* June 30 1990.
36. *The Punjabi Guardian,* September 1–15 1990.
37. *Des Pardes,* September 21 1990.
38. See ch. 10.
39. *Financial Times,* October 2 1990; *The Guardian* (London) October 5 1990.
40. Ibid.
41. *India Today,* November 15 1990.
42. *The Guardian,* November 15 1990; *People's Democracy,* December 12 1990.
43. *Des Pardes,* December 28 1990.
44. *The Guardian,* December 14 1990; *Des Pardes,* December 21 1990 and January 18 1991.
45. *Des Pardes,* January 11 1991.
46. Ibid.
47. *Des Pardes*, March 1, 8, 15 1991.
48. After this paper went to press the decision of the President of India to dissolve the ninth Lok Sabha and call national elections for May (20, 23 and 26) 1991 was accompanied by a recommendation by the outgoing prime minister, Chandra Shekhar, that Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections should also be held in Punjab and Assam. Elections in Punjab are scheduled for June 22.

    Shekhar's decision seems to be motivated as much by pragmatic considerations, such as embarrassing the Congress, as any desire to find a principled solution to the 'Punjab problem'. While the prospect of elections has increased competition within the Sikh political system, the decision has been strongly condemned by the opposition parties, especially Congress. The latter has decided to boycott the elections with a commitment that if it is returned to power at the centre it will revoke the polls. See the *Indian Express,* (Chandigarh) April 13 1991, and *The Punjabi Guardian,* May 1–15 1991.

49. Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation* (New Delhi: 1984), 3.
50. Dang, op. cit.
51. See R. Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).
52. N. Nugent, *Rajiv Gandhi: a Son of a Dynasty* (London: BBC, 1990), ch. 6.
53. A. Vanaik, 'The Rajiv Gandhi Congress in Search of Stability', *New Left Review,* 154 (November/December 1985), 55–82.
54. President's Rule was imposed in Assam in November 1990 and the whole state was declared a disturbed area. *The Guardian,* November 29 1990.

9
The Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections, 1992: Breakthrough or Breakdown?

In retrospect, the February 1992 PLA elections marked a critical turning point in containing the Sikh militancy which had afflicted the state. From the Lok Sabha elections in Punjab in 1989, when the militant Sikhs and their allies established a semblance of democratic legitimacy by capturing the popular vote, the road to February 1992 witnessed the growth of mass terror, counterinsurgency, and the postponement of the PLA elections in June 1991 on the eve of polling – elections which, most commentators at the time predicted, would have produced a militant-led government. Against the militants' efforts to restructure Sikh politics along radical nationalist lines, the central governments followed the strategy of isolating the militants by using violent control. Subsequently the 1992 PLA elections gave democratic justification to violent control but in the immediate aftermath the success of this strategy was by no means certain.

This chapter examines in detail how the militants and their allies were able to displace the traditional Sikh political leadership and establish a pre-eminence that led to the boycott of the 1992 PLA elections by most mainstream Sikh organizations. It reviews the debasement of the militants' popular legitimacy in 1989 into mass terror, counterinsurgency, and open hostility to electoral politics. It also evaluates the 1992 PLA elections and the significance of the results in sustaining violent control.

Types of Sikh politics

In the previous chapter we noted how the militants had begun to displace the traditional Akali leadership during 1987, but to fully appreciate the complexities of ideological and factional alignments, at least

until the early 1990s, it is necessary to identify the types of Sikh political leadership that emerged.[1] These can be distinguished by chronology, strategy and tactics towards the pursuit of Sikh demands. In short four tendencies can be identified:

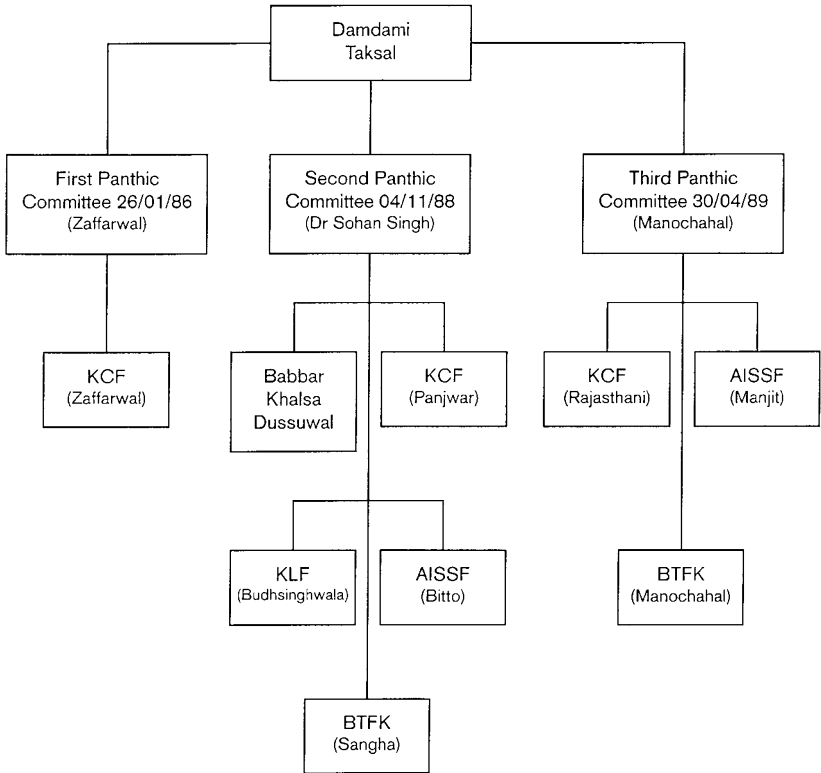
1. The moderates: Akali Dal(B), Akali Dal(L), Akali Dal(K), and Akali Dal (Panthic), who supported, enthusiastically or reluctantly, the Rajiv–Longowal Accord and represented the traditional pre-1984 leadership with their commitment to parliamentarism and ASR.
2. The radicals: Akali Dal(M) and United Akali Dal who from 1987 onwards, displaced the moderates, particularly after the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, and accepted the ASR but stressed the Sikh right to self-determination.
3. The democratic militants: All-India Sikh Students' Federation (Manjit), Damdami Taksal, Panthic Committee (Manochahl), Khalistan Command Force, Bhindranwale Tiger Force, and the Dashmesh Regiment, who espoused the twin strategy of parliamentarism and armed struggle for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan.
4. The armed militants: Panthic Committee (Dr Sohan Singh), Khalistan Liberation Force, Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Commando Force (Panjwar) and Panthic Committee (Zaffarwal), who consistently pursued the armed struggle for Khalistan and condemned the use of parliamentarism even as a tactic.

In reality the alignment between and within these groups was in a constant state of flux. Nevertheless as events were to demonstrate there were sufficient differences among them to warrant recognition. One such key difference which distinguished the democratic and armed militants was their efforts to establish parallel structures in opposition to the Sikh political system as represented by the moderate Akali Dals and the SGPC. Because the moderates retained control of the SGPC and the Akali Dals, the militants legitimized their action by resurrecting and emphasizing the importance of traditional institutions in opposition to the SGPC (see Chapter 6).[2] By short-circuiting the established structures of the Sikh political system, the militants justified their actions in terms of the 'authentic' articulation of the Sikh Panth's interests.

Panthic Committees were the main instruments for coordinating the activities of the militants. Between 1986 and 1993, three main Panthic Committees (see Figure 9.1) controlled the activities of armed groups and militant front organizations. By physically intimidating officials of the SGPC they were, at times, able to establish control of

the Golden Temple complex and install their own Akal Takht Jathedar. For most of this period, however, these committees operated through front organizations and were largely underground. Creating an elaborate network of support among the Sikh diaspora they were able to channel funds and weapons through Pakistan and other states neighbouring India.[3]

Most militant groups operated as area 'gangs'. Beginning as 'primitive rebels' over the years they developed a degree of sophistication in



KCF Khalistan Commando Force

KLF Khalistan Liberation Force

AISSF All-India Sikh Students Federation

BTFK Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan

Figure 9.1 Alignment of Militant Sikh Groups after 1986

organization as well as an ideological cutting-edge which was absent among earlier militants. The strength of militant groups depended on controlling the supply of arms from Pakistan which enabled them to establish a dominance in a particular area or undertake spectacular actions against the security forces or civilian targets. Like other formations in Punjab, the Panthic Committees and militant gangs were infected with intense factionalism. Internecine warfare among them was common and was frequently promoted by counterinsurgency operations undertaken by the security services.[4]

Prelude to the elections

Although the 1989 Lok Sabha elections resulted in the triumph of radicals led by AD(M), by the beginning of 1991 it was clear that the militants had emerged as the most significant political force in Sikh politics. Throughout 1990 and 1991 the militants were able to create near-civil war conditions with the Dr Sohan Singh Panthic Committee in particular issuing draconian 'codes of conduct' that had a profound effect on civilian morale in Punjab. These codes demanded the implementation of Punjabi in all government business, the 'positive' reporting of militants in the media, the end to dowry, and obligatory forms of social dress. The combined impact of these diktats created a psychosis of fear in which 'the militants very nearly captured the government without wasting bullets'.[5] According to one informed observer, in many parts of Punjab a parallel administration operated with a marked reluctance on the 'part of the public to approach the state machinery and the veritable recognition of the militants as an alternative centre of power'.[6]

These developments took place against the background of the collapse of the National Front coalition in New Delhi and its replacement by the minority Janata Dal (Secular) headed by Chandra Shekhar. Shekhar first sent in the army to contain militant violence and then opened talks with the radical Sikh leadership. When the latter proved vacillating, he made a direct approach to smaller militant groups (democratic militants). These talks produced a secret deal in which Shekhar, following the announcement of fresh national elections in March 1991, authorized a notification for state assembly and parliamentary polls in Punjab.[7] The democratic militants, for their part, agreed not to turn the elections into a 'referendum on Khalistan' but to use the poll to marginalize the radicals and the armed militants.[8]

Rajiv Gandhi replied to these manoeuvres by condemning the Shekhar-democratic militant deal and a promise to revoke the elections

if his party were successful in obtaining a majority at the centre. As the campaign progressed, the armed militants called for a boycott, while in the absence of Congress, the other Sikh leadership groups – democratic militant, radicals and moderates – competed with each other. During the campaign the AISSF(M), the front organization of democratic militants, emerged as the most 'potent force, helped by the infighting among [moderate Akali factions] and the firm support from the Panthic Committee (Manochahal)'.[9] Towards the end of the campaign, the level of violence escalated dramatically: 24 state and parliamentary candidates were killed; 76 passengers on two trains were massacred; and a week before polling, Punjab was declared a disturbed area.[10] Yet, despite these setbacks, the state administration expressed an unusual determination to hold the elections on June 22 1991.

However circumstances changed rapidly in the few days before polling as it became apparent that Congress would form the new Indian government. On the eve of election, the Chief Election Commissioner, after talks with the new Congress leadership, postponed the Punjab poll until September 25. He justified his action by insisting that the increased levels of violence had compelled him to make this unprecedented decision; informally, it was widely assumed that 'the Chief Election Commissioner had bent backwards to please his new masters'.[11]

The postponement had profound consequences. Confidence in the state administration was shaken as Governor Malhotra resigned in protest. Sikh leaders from all spectrums made common cause against the government's decision. At a meeting in Anandpur in early September, they decided to boycott any future poll on the grounds that the central government could not guarantee that it would be 'free and fair'.[12] Constrained by the September 25 deadline, the impending expiration of President's Rule, and the Congress's minority status that depended on a shifting coalition of Left and Right parties in the Lok Sabha, the administration responded by revoking the election process in Punjab by amending the Peoples Representation Act (1951) and with a further extension of President's Rule, though with an undertaking that elections would be held by February 15 1992.[13]

The government then took a number of measures to 'pacify Punjab'. K.P.S. Gill, the former chief of police, who had acquired the reputation of 'governor-general', and had ruthlessly prosecuted the anti-terrorist campaign, was reinstated despite opposition from the Punjab Governor.[14] In November nine divisions of the Indian Army were sent to Punjab in Operation Rakshak II to contain militant activity and provide support for the elections. In the biggest ever anti-militancy

operation since 1984, over 250 000 security and police personnel were mobilized. This total consisted of 34 army brigades of 150 000 soldiers, 40 000 paramilitaries (Central Police Reserve Force), 53 000 police personnel, 20 000 home guards and 12 000 special police officers. All major cities in Punjab were placed under army rule, and village-to-village combing operations were conducted in the border districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur.[15]

Politically the national government launched 'all-party' discussions as a way of finding a 'consensus' solution to the 'Punjab problem'. This move was accompanied by strong suggestions that the outstanding provision of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord would be implemented and that a new 'package-deal' for Punjab was being considered by a powerful Cabinet sub-committee.[16]

However, as the election time-table approached, the centre's strategy seemed increasingly threatened. In mid-January armed militant, democratic militant, radical, and the majority of moderate Sikh leaders reaffirmed their decision to boycott the elections.[17] Their conditions for participation ranged from withdrawal of 'military rule' to the involvement of the United Nations in administering the poll. Although the moderate AD(K) decided to participate, a last-minute suggestion that the central government was about to announce a new 'package-deal', to include the transfer of Chandigarh and settlement of the territorial and water disputes, was insufficient to entice the majority of moderates. Procrastination over the new package was only ended after the formal announcement of the Sikh boycott.[18]

The election campaign

Notification for the February poll was issued on January 25. It was preceded by two Presidential Ordinances that reduced the period of campaigning from 21 to 14 days and revoked the provision for countermanding an election in the event of the death of an independent candidate. These measures were taken to avoid a repetition of the June poll and to blunt the Sikh political leadership's plan to launch a counter campaign in support of the boycott. To pre-empt the latter, political leaders of the main six Sikh organizations and several hundred party workers were detained under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985).[19] Their efforts to lead a 'Kashmir style' march from Anandpur and a call for a *bandh* (strike) on polling day were forcefully repressed.

Armed militants maintained sporadic efforts to disrupt the election campaign. Warnings were issued to voters against voting, and several

campaigners – especially of the BJP – and electoral administrators were killed. But the level of violence did not reach the heights of the previous June poll; there were no significant pre-poll massacres and no candidate was killed. This relative success was attributed mainly to the massive security operation in which each candidate was issued with a security attachment of 32 personnel, and for more prominent leaders the figure was around 50 or higher.[20] This security cordon, combined with the threats from armed militants, created an atmosphere of heightened tension in which the candidates were often outnumbered by security personnel when addressing election rallies. For the most part, the election was largely urban-centred and candidates avoided the rural constituencies.

The programmes of the political parties which did participate ranged from the BJP's more forceful stance against Sikh militancy and the Congress's promises to 'pacify Punjab' to the Left parties – CPI and CPI(M)'s – advocacy of an immediate implementation of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. Congress's national leadership abandoned its proposal for common candidates following the Sikh leaders' announcement of the boycott, a decision that led some parties to argue that the Congress was only interested in securing the 13 Lok Sabha (parliamentary) seats in order to bolster its tenuous position in New Delhi. This perception was reinforced when the Congress decided to contest all of the state assembly and Lok Sabha seats. Seat adjustments occurred but this took place mainly between minor parties like the Janata Dal, AD(K), CPI and CPI(M). The BJP, abandoned by the Congress and the smaller parties, conducted a relatively low-key campaign even though its 'unity march' coincided with the beginning of the elections.[21]

Several smaller parties and independents complained of bureaucratic and security intimidation. Captain Amrinder Singh, the leader of the AD(K), alleged that three of his candidates were detained to prevent them from filling their candidacies. A breakaway faction from AD(B), which decided to participate in the elections, quickly changed its mind when its candidates could not file their papers. The total number of candidates for the assembly seats was the lowest since 1972, with an average of only five candidates per seat. Several reported cases of ballot-rigging on polling day were confirmed by independent observers.[22] The armed militants' call for a total boycott was occasionally countered, notably in front-line villages, by enforced participation by security forces.[23] Overall, however, where polling did take place, it was largely peaceful, but was subdued compared to the normal exuberant standards of Indian electioneering.

The result

The result belied the confident expectations of the Punjab administration of a 30–40 per cent voter turnout. The actual figures were 24.3 and 21.5 per cent for the state and parliamentary elections, respectively. Worryingly, the turnout was lower than critical assembly elections held in relatively similar circumstances in the two problem states of Jammu and Kashmir (31.6 per cent in 1987) and Assam (32.6 per cent in 1983) and significantly less than the normal Punjab average of 68.2 per cent (1966–85).

Nevertheless, the Congress made a clean sweep of the assembly and parliamentary seats gaining 87 and 12, respectively. The expected challenge to the Congress from the BJP and the AD(K) did not materialize. The latter performed dismally while the former made only a marginal improvement in seats from its 1985 showing. In the urban areas BJP support shifted to Congress, which gained over 50 per cent of the vote in the major cities of Amritsar, Jalandhar, Gurdaspur and Ludhiana. The two Communist parties also failed to capitalize on the Akali boycott in the rural areas. But perhaps the main surprise of the poll was the strong performance of the BSP, which become the chief opposition party in the new assembly and secured one seat to the Lok Sabha. Appealing to Scheduled and lower caste voters, it did exceptionally well in the Doaba area (Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur districts) and the district of Faridkot.

Table 9.1 Punjab Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections, 1992

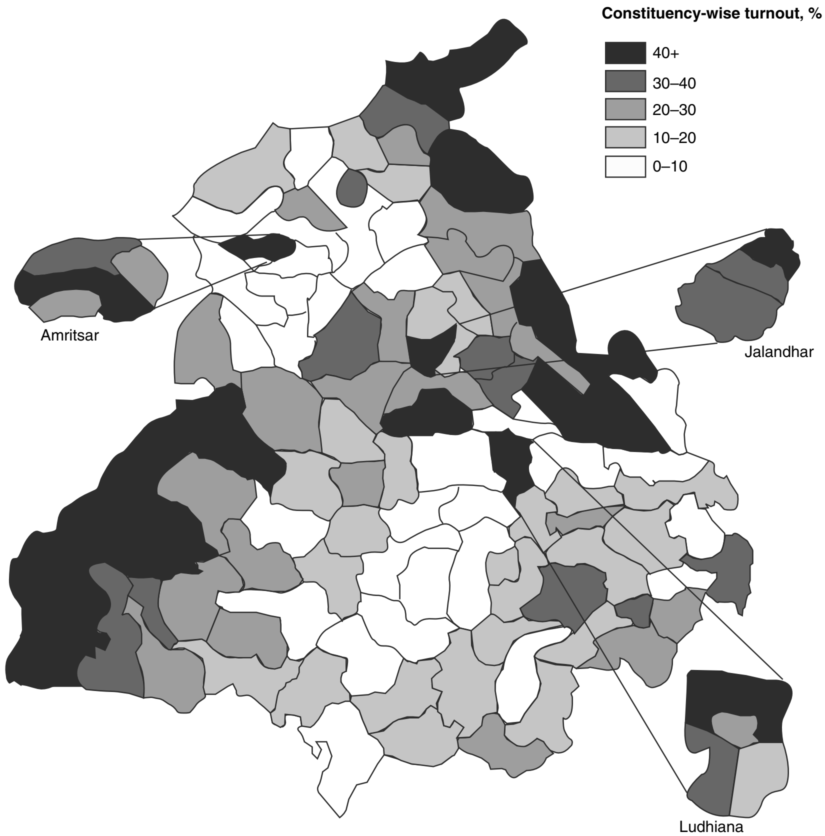
	State Assembly (turnout = 24.3%)		Lok Sabha (turnout = 21.5%)	
Party	Seats	% vote polled	Seats	% votes polled
Congress	87	43.8	12	50.8
BSP	9	16.2	1	18.6
BJP	6	16.6	–	16.5
CPI	4	3.7	–	1.7
Akali Dal (Kabul)	3	5.2	–	2.8
CPI(M)	1	2.7	–	3.4
Janata	1	2.1	–	1.9
Independents	6	9.6	–	3.4
Total	117	100	13	100

Source: *India Abroad,* February 28 1992.

Voter turnout was both extremely low and unevenly distributed. Only in three districts (Ferozepur, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur) did it exceed 30 per cent, and this was partly attributed to urbanization (Jalandhar), the local strength of non-Sikh parties (Ferozepur), and a high non-Sikh population (Hoshiarpur). Voting was especially low in rural Sikh majority areas that constitute 70 of the total 117 assembly seats, averaging 15.1 per cent in these constituencies. The assembly constituencies map (Map 9.1) illustrates the strong localized support for the boycott in the Sikh majority areas. In recent years these areas have also seen the rise of armed militant activity and a strong enforcement of anti-terrorist measures by the police and security forces. The rural constituencies set new records for lowest assembly polls. In Joga, which recorded a turnout of less than 1 per cent, a Naxalite candidate was elected with a mere 394 votes. The CPI(M)'s sole representative obtained only 1849 votes. In 24 constituencies, the winning candidate polled less than 5000 votes and in two they were returned unopposed. The pattern was not dissimilar in the parliamentary polls; in Hoshiarpur, the winning candidate was elected with only 15 627 votes, and two other Lok Sabha candidates polled less than 60 000 votes.

Turnout in urban areas, in contrast, was relatively high. Although polling did not reach the levels of 1985 (57.7 per cent), it averaged a respectable 38.3 per cent in the 12 urban constituencies. This significant difference was mainly due to the concentration of the Punjab Hindu population in urban areas – which turned out in large numbers – and the weakness of Sikh political parties in these constituencies. In semi-urban and semi-rural constituencies the figures were significantly lower, reflecting perhaps the possibility of dominant community pressure and fear of a backlash. In the main, the Congress did exceptionally well in the urban constituencies and the accusation that its success rests entirely on the 'Hindu vote' is perhaps an overstatement.

The Punjab elections and the unusual context in which they were held provides several clear pointers. First, though the Congress was remarkably successful in terms of assembly and parliamentary seats, this success was essentially fragile and was based on a very narrow support base. The aggregate number of state assembly votes for the party was only 10 per cent of the total electorate, and this support was heavily drawn from the urban areas with nominal representation of the Sikh peasantry. Congress's claims to be a broad communal and class coalition were further eroded by the rise of BSP, which made substantial gains in its traditional support among the Scheduled and other backward castes. To what extent the Congress vote was also a victim of



Map 9.1 Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections, 1992

the boycott remains a moot point. Assuming that one-third to one-half of Congress voters did not cast their votes, the election still confirmed the performance of the Congress as weaker than in 1985.[24]

Second, the virtual non-representation of the majority religious (Sikh) and social (peasantry) community cast a shadow over the viability of these results. Clearly, the Congress had 'won the battle for the state legislature but it has lost the war for Sikh hearts'.[25] Even allowing for the factor of intimidation, which certainly deterred many voters, it was likely that the impressive boycott was also an expression of disapproval of President's Rule. Taking into account the boycott, the level of mobilization in the June poll, and the results of the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the Sikh political parties, united or factionalized, would certainly have defeated the Congress. Their decision not to participate, therefore, was a

landmark development indicative not only of denial of self-interest but a recognition that simple elections will not restart the political process in Punjab.

Third, the conduct of the elections and the circumstances in which they were undertaken undermined one of the strategic cards that the central government possessed in disentangling the 'Punjab problem'. After 1984 the idea of assembly elections was largely geared to the belief that elections should restore the democratic process after a comprehensive agreement on Sikh demands according to the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. For pragmatic reasons the Shekhar ministry subverted this logic, and the February elections merely continued the process. By holding elections, the central government both demonstrated its commitment to constitutional propriety and illustrated that such a commitment, when it intersects with partisan interests, was worth maintaining even though at the cost of serious erosion of democratic legitimacy. Ironically, such a commitment was quickly jettisoned in the decision to postpone the election set for June 1991.

Elections and after

The formation of a first Congress ministry in Punjab after nine years did not provide a quick solution to the 'Punjab problem'. The party leaders and militant groups who had boycotted the elections intensified their campaign to oust what they called a 'puppet administration'. Despite the new chief minister's promise to 'pacify Punjab' and rule for five years, his immediate concern – like the President's Rule regime – was to contain the rising tide of violence. Less than two weeks after the elections, he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.[26] Armed militants also increased their attacks on military and civilian targets which caused an alarming rise in the daily death rate. In March 1992 the industrial areas of Ludhiana suffered a virtual paralysis and were placed under direct army rule alongside the adjoining district of Sangrur. This campaign by the militants led to mass resignations of *panchayat*s (village councils), intimidation of the media and an open exercise of parallel administration.[27] One comprehensive survey in July 1992 described Punjab as 'an area of darkness' where people lived in constant fear of violence by the militants and the security forces. The government found its 'boundaries rolled back and its political will undermined into non-existence'.[28] The survey described rural life in the state as

> almost at a standstill. The nights … are most eerie where roads are manned by trigger-nervous security men. As darkness deepens … the

> last few buses, before they are run off the road after dusk, are full to the brim with frightened human freight. In the witching hours no trains function on the branch lines, and by late evening even bigger junctions are deserted.[29]

The new government reacted by launching a massive counterinsurgency programme which eliminated most militant groups by the end of 1993. At the time this policy was identified with K.P.S. Gill and the Punjab Police. According to leading army sources, however, it was not until June 1992 that a 'winning side' was clearly established after the army had broken the hold of militants in the Tarn Taran area. This enabled the army to curtail its 'general sweeps' in favour of 'information based' strikes.[30] Thereafter the counterinsurgency operations proved particularly successful with the army providing general support to the Punjab Police.

The virtual end of militancy in Punjab by 1993 created the conditions for re-establishing hegemonic control in the subsequent years even though it required, as we shall see in the next chapter, excessive use of violence. The efforts of militant Sikhs to restructure Sikh politics came across the ultimate challenge. In this contest it would be mistaken to argue that either the centre or the Congress pursued a consistent strategy to combat Sikh militancy. Shekhar in encouraging the democratic militants to compete in the June 1991 PLA elections was merely following in the footsteps of Governor Ray in 1988 who had promoted the AISSF(M) with the aim of creating a wedge between the democratic and the armed militants. If the elections of June 1991 had been held, the democratic militants would certainly have been faced with the choice of governing or, in the words of Shekhar, 'brutal repression'[31] – that is, if they had used the elections as a referendum on Khalistan. In the event this interesting choice was instead denied by the 'brutal repression' by the militants on radical and moderate Sikh politicians which culminated in the February election boycott.

Notes

1. For details of the narrative see D.P. Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decade of Turmoil* (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1996); J. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (London: Zed, 1995); G. Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles* vol. iv (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1992).

2. In the eighteenth century the Sarbat Khalsa was a representative meeting of all Sikh parties and groups convened by the Jathedar of the Akal Takht to consider important matters relating to the Panth. It was abolished by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1809.
3. For a comprehensive analysis of the role of the Punjab diaspora and the 'Punjab problem' see D.S. Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: Search for Statehood* (London: University College Press, 1998).
4. For details of how the groups functioned see Pettigrew, op. cit.
5. V.N. Narayanan, 'Weathercock in the Wind', *Seminar* (Delhi), 43.
6. Sharma, op. cit., 247.
7. *Indian Express* (Bombay), April 28 1991.
8. Ibid., May 12 1991.
9. Sharma, op. cit., 257.
10. *The Guardian* (London), June 18 1991.
11. *Indian Express*, June 23 1991.
12. *Des Pardes*, September 20 1991.
13. *India Abroad*, September 27 1991.
14. *India Today*, December 15 1991.
15. *The Tribune*, December 4 1991.
16. *India Abroad*, October 21 and December 27 1991.
17. *Des Pardes*, January 31 1992.
18. *The Sunday Times of India* (New Delhi), January 26 1992.
19. *Des Pardes*, February 7 1992.
20. *The Tribune*, December 4 1991.
21. *The Sunday Times of India,* February 9 1992.
22. See Y. Yadev, 'Who Won in Punjab?', *Frontline*, April 10 1992, 122–6.
23. *Des Pardes*, February 1 and 14 1992.
24. Yadev, op. cit.
25. *India Today* March 15 1992.
26. *Des Pardes*, March 13 1992.
27. *The Tribune*, June 20 1992.
28. *India Today,* July 15 1992.
29. Ibid.
30. Manoj Joshi, *Combatting Terrorism in Punjab* (London: RISCT, 1993), 15.
31. *Indian Express*, May 12 1991.

10
Punjab since 1984: Disorder, Order and Legitimacy

In the general discussion of legitimacy in South Asian politics the issue of disorder and the maintenance of order in peripheral regions has largely been neglected. Most South Asian states face regional and sub-national movements that stubbornly resist the transformation of order into routinized legitimacy. Some of these challenges (Jammu and Kashmir, Sindh, the Tamil Movement in Sri Lanka) are so profound that they question the very bases of the state system; others (Punjab, Assam, Nagaland) at best have been 'managed' and would appear to provide useful lessons that might have some value in policy research and more detached reflection on the wider subject of political legitimacy.[1] The developments in Punjab since 1984 seem to fit into the latter category for, from being almost a pathological case of disorder for nearly a decade, the situation in the state, it is argued, has been 'transformed' in the last two years into one of near 'normalcy'. Punjab today is being projected as 'model' – with all-India implications – where a government has successfully overcome one of the most difficult confrontations since independence.

This chapter examines the explanations being offered for the transformation of Punjab's political crisis into a managed model of orderly rule. After outlining the scale of disorder, it will review the three competing explanations that have been identified with the dramatic change: effective anti-terrorism; Punjab's social structure; and the case of 'managed disorder'. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the implications of achieving 'order' for future politics in the state.

The scale of disorder

In spite of the high magnitude of 'disorder' in Punjab and the surrounding states from the early 1980s to 1995, no systematic and verifiable research has been undertaken to record the level of human casualties, arrests, and illegal 'disappearances'. National and state officials often described the situation in Punjab for most of this period as being akin to 'war conditions' in which extraordinary emergency measures were required to establish order. These measures led to a considerable militarization and a prolonged period of unbridled police raj which ultimately defeated the Sikh militancy but by using methods that seriously compromised individual human rights.

The scale of disorder in Punjab can be appreciated if we examine the death toll since the 1980s. In one figure, quoted by K.P.S. Gill, Director-General of Punjab Police, almost 25 000 deaths were recorded between 1981 and 1993 as result of militant violence and counterinsurgency operations by the security services.[2] Human Rights groups have put the figure much higher to account for 'involuntary disappearances'; they estimate that illegal detainees varied between 20 000 and 45 000.[3] In almost all the data series published so far there are significant variations. Table 10.1 below identifies data from four published sources. The series are inconsistent, but they do cover the critical years at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Apart from the figures drawn from the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, the other sources are within a margin of error of about 3000 and correspond closely to data provided by the Government of India which recorded the total of 16 462 killed in Punjab at the end of 1991.[4] The source which quoted this figure added an additional 3500 for 1992.[5]

For several reasons there appears to have been significant underreporting in the official figures. Some of the figures cited are clearly incorrect. For example, the *White Paper on the Agitation in Punjab* notes 646 casualties resulting from Operation Blue Star;[6] most reliable sources placed this near 1000.[7] Of course prior to the operation there was considerable unrest in Punjab resulting in several hundred casualties that have been well documented, even by the *White Paper*. A detailed analysis of daily reports of deaths in the newspapers indicates that the death rate was substantially higher than any recorded in Table 10.1. In 1987 and 1988, two years of relatively low violence, the totals according to these sources were 1190 and 3157, respectively.[8]

Table 10.1 Death Toll in Punjab, 1981–94

Year	1	2	3	4
1981	13			
1982	13			
1983	75			
1984	359		456	
1985	63	73	73	
1986	520	790	640	
1987	911	1400	1333	
1988	1949	2500	2432	2500
1989	1188	1900	2072	3000
1990	2467	4300	4293	4500
1991	2591	5000	5265	4768
1992		4000	3883	3591
1993			871	
1994			46	
Total	10 149	19 963	21 364	18 395

Sources: 1 *Illustrated Weekly of India*, January 18–24 1992; 2 *India Today*, April 15 1993; 3 *The Week*, June 5 1994; 4 *The Economist*, May 22 1993.

One explanation for this variation, as we shall see below, could be the deliberate over-reporting of militants killed by the police force to secure the 'bounties' and cash 'rewards' instituted for eliminating terrorists. Alternatively, the sources from which the higher figures are compiled included deaths in states other than Punjab-Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi. To be sure, if the deaths following Operation Blue Star (1000) and the riots in Delhi in November 1984 (3000)[9] are included, the approximate figure of 25 000 is not unrealistic. It might be significantly higher if verification of 'disappearances' and 'uncremated' deaths is established.[10]

Most of the victims of militant and counterinsurgency violence were Sikhs. According to one data set, the breakdown of casualties was 61 per cent Sikh, 38 per cent Hindu and 1 per cent Other.[11] Another data set has given the proportion of casualties as 8.2 per cent security forces, 31 per cent civilians, and 60.8 per cent militants.[12] These figures are strongly contradicted by *India Today* data which suggests that the main victims of the disorder were civilians (56.4 per cent), followed by militants (34.6 per cent), and the security forces (8.9 per cent).[13] The *India Today* data corresponds closely to official figures available at the end of 1991 which gave the same breakdown as 60.9 per cent civilian, 30.4 per cent militants, and 8.6 per cent security forces.[14] If to this total are added the civilian casualties resulting from Operation Blue Star and

the riots in Delhi, it is most likely that the civilian average exceeded 65 per cent. The one inescapable conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is that the principal casualties of the violence related to the 'Punjab problem' were neither the militants nor the security forces but Sikh civilians.

The level of disorder was the most serious challenge to stable governance in Punjab since the partition. Militant Sikh insurgency afflicted most of the rural Punjab but was especially endemic in the border districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozepur. Viewed simply in terms of the killing-rate, the violence was at its peak between 1989–92 – 'the three dreadful years'[15] when Punjab became 'an area of darkness'.[16] These years were a critical turning point in the militants' campaign for Khalistan: from the high watermark of 1991, when the militants appeared to be winning the 'civil war'[17] in Punjab, the security forces were able to make a decisive breakthrough by June 1992 which ultimately led to the militants' crushing defeat.

How was this breakthrough achieved?

It is appropriate now to review the three competing explanations that have since been suggested for the triumph of the security forces and the defeat of the militants.

Effective anti-terrorism

In the literature that is now emerging on the role of the security forces in Punjab in eliminating Sikh militancy, the success of effective anti-terrorist strategy is identified as the key factor.[18] This strategy has been closely identified with K.P.S. Gill who has been publicly fêted as 'true grit'[19] hero, who personally masterminded the defeat of militancy. It was his initiative, tactics, determination, and organization, claim Gill's supporters, which resulted in the 're-writing of known manuals in counterinsurgency'.[20] Gill's achievements have been hailed as providing a 'new model' for combating militancy in South Asia and across the globe.[21]

The journalistic hyperbole which described Gill's successes, and his own self-aggrandizement, however, overlooked the continuities in the anti-terrorist policy from the mid-1980s. As noted in Chapter 8, it was Ribeiro who created the foundations for this policy in which the security forces were given considerable legal powers to detain suspected militants and pursue aggressive anti-terrorism in the language of 'bullets for bullets'. The tactics of 'disappearances', police 'reappraisals' on civilians for harbouring militants, 'kidnappings', and the infiltration of militants by creating proxy militant organizations and criminal

gangs of counterinsurgency 'cats', were perfected during these years.[22] Notwithstanding isolated 'successes', such as Operation Black Thunder, anti-terrorism was unable to curtail militancy in Punjab. Quite the contrary. The brutal tactics resorted to by the security forces, especially the Punjab Police, further increased militant recruitment while the killing-rate rose sharply.

Throughout the 1980s the methods used by security forces in Punjab in the name of anti-terrorism achieved international notoriety. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the International Human Rights Organization catalogued the brutalization that had become endemic. The practice of rewarding police officers for 'eliminating' militants led to an inflation in the killing-rate.[23]

From the end of 1991, Gill's approach differed only in the intensity of the anti-terrorist strategy. It included a wave of counter-terror that was evident in the bounties for militants,[24] a massive increase in Punjab Police personnel, and the condoning of police brutality to instil fear in the populace and stop further recruitment to the militants. Massacres by militants were countered by massacres by the security forces.[25] In the first six months of 1992, for every hardcore militant eliminated, the ratio of non-hardcore militants killed – civilians, sympathizers – varied between 9 and 18.[26] This approach was best summed up by Gill himself who described it as an 'open season on terrorists'.[27]

Yet in reality anti-terrorism triumphed because of the massive security cordon thrown around Punjab after Operation Rakshak II which included 34 army brigades consisting of 150 000 soldiers, 40 000 paramilitaries, 53 000 Punjab Police, 20 000 Home Guards and 12 000 Special Police officers.[28] The key role in this operation was played by the army which was instructed to 'put the fear of God into the minds of terrorists'.[29] Learning from previous operations in Punjab – Blue Star (1984), Woodrose (1984), Brasstacks (1987), and Rakshak I(1990/1) – the army was deployed as an 'aid to civil power' in which, although it carried out major anti-terrorist operations, the Punjab Police were given the official recognition. Thus the bulk of ground assaults against militants in 1992 were undertaken by the army.[30] Actually, the army 'captured many terrorists, including some prominent ones, who were all handed over to the Punjab Police [with] the army taking no credit nor claiming reward money'.[31] One retired Major-general has concluded that it was only after

> the army got the upper hand, dominated the areas of terrorist influence, and had them on the run, [that] the Punjab Police

regained its lost morale and started fighting the terrorists which it had been avoiding in the past.[32]

Operationally, the army worked closely with officials at state and divisional levels, many of whom had previously been assigned to trouble-torn Assam. The army's combat role was so defined as to limit civilian alienation (and casualties) while targeting resources, manpower and skills in locating militants. Often the Punjab Police were brought in for the 'final kill'. Many times, the army itself engaged the militants resulting in 'heavy casualties in every encounter which finally broke their [militant's] backs'.[33]

The army also made collaboration with security forces 'easy again' and reassured 'people who had been terrorized into silence but could not trust the police'.[34] It undertook civil duties as well as training 9000 Punjab Police personnel and 20 000 Special Police officers in counterinsurgency and operational tactics.[35] In sum, the army rather than the Punjab Police crushed militancy in Punjab.

Whereas the army deliberately kept its involvement 'low key', [36] the Punjab Police led by Gill courted publicity and sustained the pretence of efficiency through 'operations' – Operation Night Domination, Operation Final Assault. In the aftermath of the death of leading militants by early 1993, Gill became a national hero, a 'super cop' who was courted by film stars and politicians alike. But the glamour for which Gill hankered belied actual efficiency; and when Beant Singh, the chief minister, was assassinated by a suicide bomber (August 1995), he was quietly recalled to New Delhi.

The effectiveness of anti-terrorism also needs to be evaluated against its costs. Excluding army operations, the cost of counterinsurgency in Punjab after 1984 has variously been estimated at 80 000 million Rupees (approximately $2004 million).[37] While this expenditure was seen as necessary to 'fight the nation's war', amongst other things, it entrenched a 'security state' that not only became the main consumer of Punjab government expenditure but also developed a vested interest in perpetuating anti-terrorism against possible political settlements or a return to normalcy.[38]

Punjab's social structure

A more interesting perspective on how order has been re-established in Punjab situates the role of counterinsurgency in a broader context. It suggests that the success of anti-terrorism was not simply the function

of actions taken by the security force, but rather that the failure of the militants – and therefore the success of the security forces – can be explained by the characteristics of Punjab's social structure, and in particular the values of Jat Sikh society.

The militancy was largely based on support among the Jat Sikh peasantry, and this fact has drawn the attention of some social anthropologists.[39] Historically, studies of Jat Sikhs have shown the persistence of certain types of social behaviour: a high propensity to factionalism, competitiveness, egalitarianism, and the pursuit of vertical linkages to enhance the accumulation of property and prestige.[40] These values, it is further suggested, are not purely the outgrowth of Sikhism but are rooted in Punjab's agrarian society. Economic development, including the 'Green Revolution', has done little to change Punjab's social values, and has in fact introduced further competition, factionalism, rivalry, and enmity by atomizing village society. In short, Jat Sikh society has developed few associations of horizontal nature, being characterized essentially by vertical linkages which, in times of crises, can easily become porous and are unable to serve as structures of resistance, opposition, and mobilization.

Detailed recent studies of militants and their organizations show that their mode of functioning was heavily influenced by the existing social structure. As well as utilizing cultural Jat Sikh history – heroism, resistance, and inevitable will to power – the militants in their daily operations became ensnared in existing social networks, including local feuds, factional vendettas, kinship retribution, and the social underworld of criminality. The private accumulation of wealth and personal aggrandizement became inevitable temptations. The militants thus pursued multifunctional tasks

> involving themselves in family disputes, maintaining contacts with kin, and with business partners or contacting the police for information on disappearing persons ... Instead of maintaining exclusivist, single purpose ties, guerrillas became involved in the networks of rural society inevitably perishing at their hands.[41]

Or to put it in other words:

> The movement [militancy] had been ideological in intent and a people's struggle. What distorted it was that rural society, where it was located, gave primary importance to the personal bond and to the individual ... Guerrillas working within a framework based

> entirely on personal connections rather than associational ties were fighting a modern war with primitive forms of organization.[42]

These characteristics made the militant movement easy prey to infiltration, counterinsurgency, and manipulation by the security forces. Local and personal vendettas were exploited by the police to the point where Jat caste enmities were deliberately fostered. According to Gill, the struggle for dominance in Punjab was 'purely between Jat Sikhs (militants) and Jat Sikhs (Punjab Police)'. The *bhapa*s (Sikh urban trading castes) had nothing 'to do with it'.[43] In fact, it is suggested, as we shall see below, that the whole militancy movement was thoroughly infiltrated by the counterinsurgency agencies.

This perspective has some tangible appeal insofar as it conforms to the 'iron law of Jat Sikh politics': that is, the more ideological a cause the more likely it is that it will generate intense factionalism. Moreover, it draws attention to the way Jat Sikh politics have been 'managed' by the Congress since 1947 through the exploitation of factional rivalries. And if, under the disturbed conditions of 1984–95, the use of the same tactic led to disorder, anarchy and the loss of innocent lives, then, its advocates insist, it must be situated in the 'rough and ready culture of Punjab [where] people find nothing extraordinary in the implementation of the maxim that "those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword"'.[44]

'Managed disorder'

The relative ease with which the security forces penetrated the militants can perhaps be attributed to the social structure; it has also however revived speculation that troubles in Punjab were carefully orchestrated, representing a form of 'managed disorder'. Such conspiratorial explanations would be difficult to entertain were it not for the strange congruence in events before and after 1984 and that this view is strongly held by the main political force in the state – the Akalis.

Whereas most serious analysts agree that the role of Pakistan and the Sikh diaspora in supporting the militants' insurgency was a contributory factor to the troubles, few have ever doubted the Indian state's capacity to impose its authority in the province. Unlike other peripheral regions, Punjab hardly constitutes ideal territory for guerrilla warfare. Previous examples of insurgency (Babbar Akalis, Communists, Naxalites) in the province, before and after 1947, provide case-studies of the failure of what the novelist Jaswant Singh Kanwal has called

'revolts of the blood'.[45] What was different about the militants' campaign for Khalistan was that elements within the central government actively supported the secessionists only later to call them to account. The Machiavellian manoeuvres of Mrs Gandhi and events leading up to Operation Blue Star have been well documented,[46] and even if militants led by Bhindranwale developed a 'relative autonomy' of their own, they could not avoid the final reckoning.

The policy of infiltrating and using militant organizations by elements of the centre and the security forces continued after the Rajiv–Longowal accord. Evidence now emerging of the 'secret war' against terrorism points conclusively to the direct involvement of sections of the security and counterinsurgency agencies in the setting-up, control, and actions of certain militant organizations.[47] According to Pettigrew

> The primary role of Punjab in the guerilla movement's subversion had ended in 1988. Anticipating the continuance of the struggle in the countryside, the [Indian] state raised a counter-organization of more comprehensive nature ... [It] emphasized, instead, the need for personal reform and purity rather than a sovereign status to protect one's rights. The constituency of this counter-organization was the middle classes whose reactions to the events of 1984 had been to develop an inward-looking spirituality. This organization [groups operating under Dr Sohan Singh's Panthic Committee] attacked the able and the intelligent in other guerilla groupings on various pretexts, threatened and killed the politically popular and prominent in rural society, abducted persons of importance from their local communities, in order to destroy the bases for an emerging solidarity between them and ordinary farmers, and organized occasional communal killings. Potential sympathizers of the militant movement from families of status and influence, such military personnel and large farmers, or those who, because of their own stature, had a basis for commanding influence in their own local areas or respective spheres were eliminated.[48]

This involvement went beyond the 'necessary requirements of counterinsurgency': senior police officers openly boasted of their influence among the 'groups'.[49] The police, in the judgement of one leading correspondent, were able to 'control the militants', but only did so 'when they wanted to'.[50]

The full extent of the influence of counterintelligence agencies on the militant movement might never be known, but what is certain is that those who could have been in a position to provide some answers – militant leaders – have, with the exception of Dr Sohan Singh, been killed with exemplary efficiency.[51]

The 'managed disorder' explanation is further supported by circumstantial evidence. Little systematic research has thus far been undertaken into the various 'operations' and strategic acts of 'terror'. Many of the security operations (for example Operation Black Thunder) were stage-managed or deliberately limited in nature (Operation Rakshak I).[52] More crucially, perhaps, the test of who benefited by some of the acts of timely terror, for example, shortly before each successive renewal of President's Rule, postponement of the June 1991 elections, the Akali boycott of 1992 PLA elections, has hardly been undertaken. Any such assessment would have to evaluate a number of inconsistencies, not least of which would be between the militants' goal of building a people's movement and the use of terror as strategy. Although formally the Congress has been the main proponent of anti-terrorism, its pursuit of this policy has fortuitously coincided with a revival in the party's fortunes in Punjab.

The case for 'managed disorder' further highlights a parallel example. Assam, it is argued, was a forerunner of the 'Punjab model', and, interestingly, many of the leading administrative and security personnel were transferred from Assam to Punjab.[53] More significantly, interviews with leading 'moderate' Akalis indicate their dismay that the '10 per cent government' (a reference to the Congress victory in the low turnout in the 1992 PLA elections) was able to so effectively and quickly deal with the militant threat. The militants, they contend, either were 'paper tigers' or Congress 'agents' whose actions directly or indirectly benefited only one party. Of course reality is unlikely be so simple and the charge of Congress agents against militants has been the regular retort of moderate Akalis. The truth probably lies somewhere in between for, as has been noted, both the militants and the security forces certainly succeeded in 'terrorizing the people of Punjab'.[54]

Order in Punjab and beyond

Whatever factors are held to be critical in the undermining of militancy in Punjab, a number of implications arise for the political system in the state and for the management of regional conflicts generally.

Effective anti-terrorism creates more problems than it resolves. In addition to the high costs of such a policy, costs which might or might not be justified, there is the obvious brutalization of administration and civil society, catalogued extensively by human rights agencies in the case of Punjab.[55] Such brutalization is unsustainable by the argument that it results from the conditions in the 'war against militancy'. To pose it differently, a liberal democratic system that replicates the methods of terrorists in its anti-terrorist policies threatens to undermine its own foundations. As a perceptive observer of the Punjab scene has noted:

> The free hand given to the Punjab Police may become a model for application elsewhere, and, more dangerously everywhere in the country. Unchecked by a political system … it could mean the collapse of democracy as witnessed in Sri Lanka in the 1980s.[56]

Indeed, the 'security state' in Punjab succeeded in establishing a degree of paramountcy over the civil administration that was resented both by the state's bureaucracy and, to some extent, the Beant Singh administration after 1992. It openly justified the coercion of non-militant opposition politicians, and it resented formal scrutiny, either by its own internal systems or outside bodies such as the judicial system or human rights organizations.[57] The submissions from Punjab to the National Human Rights Commission, the national debate over the renewal of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985), and the extensive use of writ petitions in the Punjab High Court have highlighted the executive pre-eminence of the 'security state'. But perhaps the major shortcoming of the kind of effective anti-terrorism practised in Punjab is its capacity for repetition. Based on the assumption of the overwhelming use of force, it requires a high level of commitment, both in political and financial terms, if it is ever to be replicated. In the short-term horizons that dominate most leadership in Punjab and the centre, such commitment may not always be forthcoming.

If there is some validity in the social structure and 'managed disorder' perspectives, then despite the reservations about the repeatability of effective anti-terrorism, one conclusion is obvious: problems of legitimate governance apart, the state has an enormous capacity to impose and sustain order in the social conditions pertaining in Punjab where the threat from militancy arises from one community which itself is a minority in the all-India context and is heavily integrated into the local and national state structures. Set against these overwhelming odds, it

seems that militancy is unlikely to succeed unless accompanied by a combination of concurrent crises: lack of cohesion and indecisiveness at the centre, a generalized geopolitical conflagration and, above all, a high degree of political unity among Sikhs.

Finally, given the difficulties of the post-1992 Congress government in generating legitimacy, it is relevant to ask whether normal rules of the game can be re-established in Punjab. Does it require, for example, a new Rajiv–Longowal Accord? Or has the Congress succeeded in reconstructing not only 'order' – out of 'chaos' – but the Sikh political system?

The argument presented so far contends that within the Punjab political system fundamental issues of legitimacy remain because the current 'order' is constructed on political pillars of sand without seriously addressing the central concerns that caused the Punjab troubles. Constructing lasting legitimacy requires seriously confronting the values of the Sikh political system. As previous chapters have demonstrated, the Sikh political system has been managed by a form of hegemonic and violent control; and one of the main factors contributing to the revival of militant politics among Sikhs was continued ethnic negation in the pursuit of factional instrumentalism.[58] Support for this interpretation can also be discerned in the writings of 'state revisionists' who, though coming from a different direction, call for a basic reassessment of the nature of the Indian state, and its need to generate alternative forms of 'organic unity' through the 'better integration of the sacred and secular sources of authority in India'.[59]

The case for such an accommodation is overwhelming in the few regions where India's minorities are in the majority because the integrative features of the old 'Congress System' have long disintegrated and central government is increasingly perceived as an alien, if not an occupying, force. Whether asymmetrical neo-federalism can accommodate some of these demands remains a moot point, as the issues are less of territoriality and region than of religion. To paraphrase Mao, the maintenance of modern secular systems in South Asia's peripheral regions may require that political power grows out of the 'barrel of a gun' rather than come from consent freely and willingly given.

In conclusion it needs to be noted that the issues of order and disorder in the case of Punjab, and probably elsewhere in the peripheral regions in South Asia, are intimately interwoven. What is perhaps problematic is not 'disorder' but how 'order' has been maintained, justified and, sometimes, legitimized. Clearly, the 'mystique' associated

with the maintenance of order since independence is now increasingly transparent as South Asia's peripheral regions have become the battlegrounds for low-intensity conflicts. In these conditions, disorder is likely to create new opportunities for those over whom order is exercised and create severe difficulties for those who are entrusted with the task of maintaining it. This realization should call for a better understanding of conditions that can contribute towards sustained normative legitimacy and acts of political closure that abort, limit and restrict normal politics.

Notes

1. Political order and challenges to legitimacy in South Asia have recently been operationalized in terms of 'governance', see for example, A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). In South Asia's peripheral regions it is perhaps more appropriate to see 'governance' as a continuum with disorder and legitimacy at the opposite extremes with order occupying an intermediate position. The term legitimacy as used in this paper will refer to rule-bound behaviour which commands majority consent freely and willingly given and is underpinned by 'normative agreement' on how rules are constructed. For discussion of the latter see, D. Held, *Political Theory and the Modern State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), ch. 4.
2. *India Today*, June 15 1993. Also see *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 23 1993.
3. See S.S. Thandi, 'Counterinsurgency and Political Violence in Punjab, 1980–94', G. Singh and I. Talbot (eds), *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), 165.
4. Ministry of Home Affairs, *Agenda: National Integration Council Meeting, December 31 1991* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1991), Annexure-I.
5. M. Joshi, *Combatting Terrorism in Punjab* (London: RISCT, 1993), 1.
6. Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation* (New Delhi: GOI, 1984), 169.
7. For a discussion of the casualties see M. Tulley and S. Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), 183–5.
8. These figures were obtained from daily reports in leading English-language newspapers recorded in S.C. Kashyap (ed.), *Political Events Annual*: *1987* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1989) and *Political Events Annual: 1988* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1990).
9. *Report of the Citizens' Commission: New Delhi 31 October–4 November* (New Delhi: Tata Press, 1985).
10. The exact number of the 'disappeared' is yet to be established. In a petition filed in January 1995 in the Punjab and Haryana Court it was claimed that over 2000 families in Amritsar district alone were waiting for the return of missing relatives. The petitioners produced records from the cremation

grounds in Amritsar showing how several 'unclaimed' bodies had been cremated during 1992. Amnesty International, *India: Determining the Fate of the "Disappeared" in Punjab* (London: AI, ASA 20, 28/95, October 1995).
11. *Illustrated Weekly of India*, January 18–24 1992.
12. *The Week*, June 5 1994.
13. *India Today*, April 15 1993.
14. Ministry of Home Affairs, op. cit.
15. The term was coined by V.N. Narayanan, the editor of *The Tribune*.
16. *India Today,* July 15 1992.
17. *Punjabi Guardian*, March 15–31 1991.
18. See Joshi, op. cit.; V.N. Narayanan, *Tryst with Terror* (New Delhi: 1996); D.P. Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decade of Turmoil* (New Delhi: APH Publishing House, 1996); K.P.S. Gill, *Punjab: the Knights of Falsehood* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997).
19. *India Today*, April 15 1993.
20. Ibid.
21. In the immediate aftermath of the death of leading militants, Gill's achievements were publicized, and eulogized, in the Indian and foreign media.
22. See Amnesty International, *India. Human Rights Violation in Punjab. Use and Abuse of the Law* (London: May, 1991).
23. For a particularly interesting example see D. Brown's report in *The Guardian*, April 29 1991.
24. See *India Today*, October 15 1992.
25. See, *Des Pardes,* December 11 1992.
26. These data are derived from daily reports in *The Tribune* from the beginning of January to the end of June 1992.
27. *India Today*, April 15 1993.
28. *The Tribune*, December 4 1991.
29. Maj. Gen. (Retd.) R. Nath, 'In the Eye of the Storm', *Defence Today* (Meerut), 1:1 (August, 1993), 38.
30. Joshi, op. cit., 31.
31. Nath, op. cit., 39.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Joshi, 19.
35. Ibid., 14.
36. *The Tribune*, April 11 1993.
37. This figure is the total of special loans given to the Punjab government during the period of civil strife. *The Sunday Tribune,* March 2 1997.
38. The budget of the Punjab Police increased from 200 million Rupees in 1981 to 7000 million rupees in 1993, a 35-fold increase in nominal terms. *The Tribune,* 5 March 1993.
39. See, J. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (London: Zed Press, 1995), and 'Achieving a New Frontier: Rural Political Patterns and their Impact on the Sikh Independence Movement', *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2:1 (1995), 80–101. Hereafter, Pettigrew (1995a).
40. See J. Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1975).

41. J. Pettigrew, 'The State and Local Groupings in the Sikh Rural Areas Post-1984', in Singh and Talbot, op. cit., 156.
42. Ibid., 154–5.
43. *India Today*, April 15, 1993.
44. Joshi, op. cit., 20.
45. See J.S. Kanwal, *Lohu de Lohe* (New Delhi: Arsi Publishers, 1982, Punjabi).
46. See M. Tully and S. Jacob, *Amritsar; Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).
47. This point is forcefully made by Pettigrew (1995, ch. 3), op. cit. For confessions of a former police 'black cat', see *The Tribune*, November 10 1994.
48. Pettigrew (1995), ibid., 143.
49. Ibid., 144; *The Tribune*, September 15 1992.
50. K. Sandhu, correspondent of *India Today*, quoted in Pettigrew (1995), ibid., 123.
51. Speaking of the security forces' ability to control the militants, K. Sandhu, correspondent of *India Today*, commented: 'When it came to the bit, Gill (police chief) was able to control militant activity within three months. When the police wanted to control it, they did.' Quoted in ibid., (Pettigrew, 1995) 123. Dr Sohan Singh, after his arrest, was acquitted of all charges.
52. For a detailed account of the centre's efforts to split the militant leadership before Operation Black Thunder, see G. Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles,* vol. iv (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers), ch. 5.
53. See S. Gupta, *India Redefines its Role*, Adelphi Paper 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
54. *Economic and Political Weekly,* September 23 1989.
55. See, for example, Asia Watch, *Human Rights in India: Punjab in Crisis* (New York: Asia Watch, 1991).
56. Joshi, op. cit., 28.
57. On August 28 1993, the Punjab Civil Service leadership demanded a judicial commission into the rise and decline of militancy during President's Rule *vis-à-vis* the role of the police. Cited in Pettigrew (1995), op. cit., 134.
58. See ch. 6.
59. S.K. Mitra, 'Desecularizing the State: Religion and Politics in India after Independence', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 33:4 (October, 1991), 755–77.

Part 4

Hindutva, Akalis and the BJP: the 'Punjab Problem' in a Comparative Perspective

Introduction

From the mid-1990s, the Congress's view of the 'Punjab problem' as an essentially law-and-order issue was contested by an emerging alliance between the BJP and the Akali Dal. As Sikh militancy was physically eradicated, moderate Akalis revived an anti-Congress front by courting the BJP. Despite their ideological difference the two parties, which had a history of working together, were drawn closer by the practical realities of competing with the Congress. In the February 1997 PLA elections the BJP–Akali Dal combine scored a landslide victory, preluding a form of regional pact which culminated in the formation of a BJP national government in March 1998.

Chapter 11 examines the developments in Punjab and national politics which drew the Akali Dal and the BJP into an alliance and resulted in the election of an Akali Dal government in Punjab. A key element in this success was the failure of the Congress government elected in Punjab in 1992 to convert its victory against the militants into enduring political advantage. The politics of violent control identified with the chief minister Beant Singh and the state's police chief K.P.S. Gill were dismantled only after the assassination of the former in August 1995 and the subsequent removal of the latter even though militancy had all but been eradicated by early 1993. In the aftermath, the state administration became besieged with pressures such as human rights violations and rampant corruption which had been largely suppressed by the years of counterinsurgency. Eventually the PLA elections were as much a verdict on Congress rule as a success of the Akali Dal–BJP alliance.

Although the Akali Dal–BJP alliance emerged out of the politics of violent control practised by the Congress administration it has the potential to become strategic. Chapter 11 argues that there is much in common between the two parties in shaping a regional and national

agenda but whether it will be realized depends on the ability of the BJP to rule in New Delhi and the capacity of the moderate Akali Dal leadership to deflect radical and militant challenges from within Sikhdom.

Chapter 12 by way of a summary revisits some of the key issues addressed in the volume by seeking to provide an overview of the relationship between state, ethnicity, borders and the politics of peripheral regions within the Indian union. Written as an observation on the state of the union at 50 years, it assesses the prospects for resizing (change in external borders) and reshaping (change in internal boundaries). Whereas the potential for both these processes is considerable – reflected in changing public opinion, economic liberalization, and the emergence of new political elites – significant obstacles still remain in the form of the BJP (and a commitment of its more militant factions to wrongsizing which would include Pakistan), the attachment of the Congress to the post-1947 state, and the opposition of ethnic groups, especially in the peripheral regions, who might become minorities in any such resizing or reshaping.

By situating the 'Punjab problem' in this comparative and historical context two things become apparent: by themselves self-determination movements in India's peripheral regions are unlikely to succeed because of their size and the policy of the Indian state to oppose them whatever the cost. At the same time these movements – and the absence of their equivalent in the heartlands – reinforces the core and peripheral divide, between the areas within the ethnic democracy and those governed through hegemonic and violent control. Self-determination movements may therefore uphold a moral mirror to Indian nation- and state-building, but if the violence and the civil wars they (and the efforts to contain them) produce are to be avoided, then hegemonic control provides the contemporary limits of statecraft within the Indian union for ethno-nationalist elites in peripheral regions.

In a broader sense chapter 12 (and 4) reaffirm the argument that external and internal borders in the long term are impermanent and dynamically related to political structures. In India the ideological opposition to this linkage continues to be strong but is increasingly open to questioning from alternative political visions of the future which are not beholden to the legacy of the partition. This, in some ways, represents the greatest challenge of Indian politics in the twenty-first century.

11

India's Akali–BJP Alliance: the 1997 Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections

In the 11th Lok Sabha elections (May 1996), the BJP emerged as the largest single political party. As speculation intensified about the possibility of the BJP forming its first ever national government, one regional party, the AD(B), made a public declaration of support for the BJP's claim, which surprised many observers. Why, they wondered, was the Sikhs' premier political representative prepared to give support to the leading Hindu nationalist party? Was there not something fundamentally irreconcilable in AD(B)-supported Sikh agitation in favour of regional political and cultural autonomy as proposed in the ASR and BJP's national agenda for a common national culture as espoused in Hindutva ideology? How could two such parties become political bedfellows?

This chapter analyzes the emergence of the Akali–BJP alliance within the context of regional and national political developments since the early 1990s, examining the tactical, strategic, and ideological factors that have enabled the two parties to coalesce and thereby unlock the 'Punjab problem' while simultaneously projecting an alternative agenda for national politics. Particular attention is given to post-1992 regional and national developments and the significance of the February 1997 PLA elections which resulted in a landslide victory for the AD(B)–BJP alliance.

Introduction

Although the recent minority national governments have rekindled interest in coalition politics in India, combinations of ideologically opposed parties have been common at the provincial level. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Communist parties (CPI and CPI(M)) developed

the concept of 'United Fronts', 'Democratic Fronts', and 'Left Fronts'.[1] One of the leading practitioners of such fronts, Harkrishan Singh Surjeet, coordinated the United Front combine of 17 parties that was led successively by Dev Gowda (May 1996–April 1997) and I.K. Gujral (April 1997–February 1998) as prime ministers.[2] Surjeet initially perfected his art in Punjab after the 1967 PLA elections, when a combination of the Akali Dal, Jana Sangh (BJP's forerunner) and the Communist parties defeated the Congress.[3] Applying formula Marxism, Surjeet rationalized these fronts in terms of developing the 'Democratic Front'; in reality, however, the fronts (especially between 1967 and 1971) were ineffective in challenging hegemonic control[4] which included the frequent imposition of President's Rule to sustain the Congress. The Akali–BJP alliance of the 1990s appears to pose a different challenge to hegemonic control. In conditions where Congress dominance has collapsed, the Akalis are seeking to establish themselves as a pre-eminent regional political party, while the BJP views this arrangement as a precursor of regional pacts that would lead to national power.[5] This process may offer opportunities for the AD(B) to dismantle hegemonic control. Equally, it could enable the BJP to establish the new ground realities for the reconstruction of hegemonic control in line with Hindutva.

This development needs to be understood against the background of how these two parties ideologically view each other. For the BJP and its sister organizations, Sikhism is essentially a militant, 'martial face' of Hinduism. At the height of the troubles in 1984, a BJP resolution declared:

> The Sikh Panth was born to protect Hinduism, and the venerable Gurus sacrificed themselves and their dear children to protect Hindu honour. The Sikh contribution to the strength and prosperity of India is magnificent, and the nation is truly grateful.[6]

These words were backed by deeds inasmuch as the BJP and its associated organizations offered a sympathetic ear to Akali politicians when the ruling Congress was condoning the pogroms against Sikhs in Delhi. At the same time because the BJP does not acknowledge religious separatism among the Sikhs it is vehemently opposed to claims for political separatism. The BJP followed a hard line against militant Sikhs waging an armed struggle for Khalistan throughout the 1980s; and like the Congress, it sees the ASR as a potentially secessionist document.

Historically, the Akalis have a long tradition of making alliances with ideologically opposed parties. Until 1966, as representatives of a

political minority, such tactical coalition-building was a political necessity. Today for the AD(B), as the leading practitioner of machine politics within hegemonic control, the limits within which Sikh ethnic identity can be articulated in Indian politics, the ideological baggage of the BJP has been elided in the language of the 'older brother' and the party's anti-Congress credentials. Because ideological pragmatism has been the hallmark of the AD(B), its sternest critics of such an alliance have come from among radical and militant Sikhs, especially the AD(M). The AD(M) has consistently sought to project the Sikh question as an issue of minorities alongside the struggle of lower castes and India's Muslims. Hence, although the AD(B)'s alliance with the BJP seems to pose the greatest threat to a distinct Sikh identity since the late nineteenth century, political realists within the AD(B) have apparently calculated that this alliance provides the maximum scope for preserving Sikh identity and, indeed, advancing the agenda for political autonomy.[7]

Punjab and political developments since 1992

The BJP rise to national prominence in 1996 has been accompanied by its spectacular growth in the northern regions, where it has ruled in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujerat, Madhya Pradesh and, in alliance, with Shiv Sena, Maharashtra. While many factors have contributed to this growth, [8] the BJP's stance on internal insurgencies in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and the north-eastern states has struck a chord with the anxieties of India's Hindu population. But, in contrast to Jammu and Kashmir, the party's position on Sikh militancy and the Punjab question marked a distinct shift after the 1992 PLA elections. These elections were boycotted by most leading Akali factions, resulting in a landslide victory for the Congress in one of the lowest voter turnouts in Punjab since 1947.[9] Under such legitimacy, the Congress administration of Beant Singh intensified the strategy of violent control against both militant and moderate Sikh political leadership. Politically harassed within Punjab, the moderates became active in Sikh politics outside the state. In the December 1993 elections to the Delhi Assembly, moderate Akalis encouraged Sikh voters in the capital to vote for the BJP. Delhi was one of the few successes for the BJP after the 1992 demolition of the Ayodhya mosque and the presidential dismissal of its governments in four states. The new BJP government in the capital reciprocated this support by declaring Punjabi a second language and launching cases against anti-Sikh rioters (mainly Congress supporters) of 1984.[10] The rapprochement between the two parties, however, took time

to consolidate: the proposal for an alliance against Congress strengthened only after the May 1996 Lok Sabha elections in which the two parties forged an 'understanding' which resulted in AD(B) victory in 8 of the 13 seats from Punjab.[11]

Congress's fortunes, in contrast, have been in sharp decline since the late 1980s; only the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 prevented the party's defeat in the 10th Lok Sabha elections in June that year. For the new minority national government headed by Narasimha Rao, a victory in the PLA elections was also accompanied by Congress success for 12 Punjab Lok Sabha seats. These additional MPs provided an important boost to a party at a time when it was desperately seeking to establish an overall majority in Parliament. Success in elections was further used to intensify counterinsurgency operations against militant Sikhs. A free reign was given to the security services to crush armed resistance, even though this resulted in high casualties among the non-militant civilians.[12] By early 1993, most of the leading militant organizations had been smashed, but the Congress was unable to transform this achievement into an enduring legitimacy. With a crippling fiscal debt and the reluctance of the national government to deliver the outstanding provisions of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord, the administration was compelled to engage in ideological warfare against Sikh militancy by proscribing the activities of Sikh moderates. The standard bearers of this policy were chief minister Beant Singh and K.P.S. Gill, the chief of police. Beant Singh's assassination in August 1995 by a suicide bomber, however, deprived the Congress of his firm leadership while implicating Gill in security lapses, which resulted in his subsequent removal from Punjab. Harcharn Singh Brar, Beant Singh's successor, was reluctant to wage an ideological war against Sikhdom. He preferred instead to reopen issues within the Rajiv– Longowal Accord, in particular the vexatious question of sharing water with neighbouring states, over which he had maintained remarkable consistency since 1992. Even Brar's moderate leadership failed to lift the Congress as the party became increasingly associated with decay, corruption and the systematic abuse of human rights. When the party suffered a humiliating reverse in the May 1996 Lok Sabha elections in Punjab, retaining only two of the 12 seats it had won in 1991, Sitaram Kesri, the new national party leader, ousted Brar and replaced him with a loyalist, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal.[13] But Bhattal's plan to revive the fortunes of the Congress with a populist 51-point programme on the eve of the elections backfired as the Election Commission, suspecting a pre-election spending spree, advanced the date of the polls.[14]

Within Sikh politics the move from violent control to hegemonic control eliminated the militants, marginalized the radicals, and

ultimately succeeded in strengthening the moderates. As counter-insurgency operations eliminated the armed and democratic militants,[15] their political residue sought refuge with the radicals. Between 1992 and 1994 – as in the years between 1985 and 1987 – the factional struggle for dominance was largely conducted within the SGPC, the Sikh political system. Confronted with the Beant administration's onslaught, the radicals and the SGPC leadership of Gurcharan Singh Tohra attempted to forge a united Sikh political front by employing the ideological, institutional and factional resources of Sikhdom. In this endeavour they inducted the services of the Jathedar of Akal Takht. Under his sponsorship, six moderate and radical Akali factions, including the AD(M), merged in May 1994 to form the Akali Dal (Amritsar) AD(A). This merger was followed by adoption of the Amritsar Declaration, which called for the formation of 'an independent Sikh homeland wherein the community would be free to profess and propagate Sikhism without interference from any quarter'.[16] The main moderate group, the AD(B), remained aloof from the SGPC's and the Jathedar's efforts to ensnare it in a unity dialogue. Subsequently, the AD(B) demonstrated the strength of its political machine in the successful PLA bye-election of May 1994. Emerging as the leading political representative of the Sikh community, the AD(B) acquired significant factional strength from the AD(A) and, perhaps more importantly, moderated the antics of Tohra, who had engineered the unity moves. Tohra and AD(B) leader Parkash Singh Badal reached a compromise in February 1995: the former agreed to restrict his activities to religion and the latter would lead the political programme. Tohra's ambitions were further clipped by the AD(B)'s victory in the SGPC elections in 1996. Overall, these developments further enhanced the status of the AD(B) and, together with the success of the party in the May 1996 Lok Sabha elections, appeared to vindicate its slogan of 'Panth, Punjab, and Punjaniat' (Sikh community, Punjab, and Punjabness).[17]

The campaign for PLA elections and the results

In the prelude to the PLA election campaign, nearly all political parties in the state felt it prudent to make seat adjustments with the rivals in order to mitigate the large seat swings inherent in the first-past-the-post electoral system. AD(B)'s base in the Sikh peasantry nicely complemented the BJP's urban Hindu constituency. The Congress was unable to attract a major partner and had to be content with the support of the CPI. The CPI(M) under the tutelage of Surjeet floated a

much publicized 'third front' that also included the Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Janta Dal. The BSP, a key player in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, was unable to strike a deal with either the AD(B) or the Congress. It fought the election in alliance with AD(A).

The AD(B)'s manifesto for the elections was a mixture of rural populism and a reassertion of the demands pre-dating the Rajiv–Longowal Accord, tempered with the need to emphasize Hindu–Sikh unity. The party pledged to fight for 'true federalism as contained in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1978'. This commitment included the repudiation of all previous accords on the adjudication of interstate river waters, the postponement of the Satluj–Yamuna Link project, the transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas to the state, and the proposal to set up a human rights commission. For the peasantry, the party promised free power to tubewells, free canal water for irrigation, and a hike in procurement prices of agricultural produce in line with the price index. A range of other measures was also proposed to attract industry, encourage development, and enhance democratization. The manifesto concluded with the need to 'maintain peace in Punjab at all costs'.[18]

Congress in turn repudiated the ASR as secessionist but promised to work for the implementation of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord as the framework for resolving the outstanding issues of river waters, Chandigarh, and the Punjabi-speaking areas. As well as proposals targeted at the poor and another supporting reservations (affirmative action) for women, the party sought to frighten voters by pronouncing that the Akalis had 'formed a suicide squad of one *lakh* [one hundred thousand] persons whose main target was to kill Hindus'.[19]

BJP's election manifesto echoed many of the AD(B) promises but differed in one significant respect: while maintaining its opposition to the ASR, the BJP proposed instead to implement the report of the Sarkaria Commission to increase powers to the states and stop the misuse of Article 356 (which gives the central government the power to dismiss state governments) which had perpetuated 'Congress raj'. In place of decentralization and federalism, the BJP document spoke of 'devolution' consistent with the 'unity and integrity of the country'. However, Atal Behari Vajpayee insisted that this main policy disagreement between the two parties was not a major stumbling block: the AD(B) had, after all, committed itself to 'guaranteeing peace, national integrity, and communal harmony'.[20]

The election campaign itself was limited to two weeks. Almost 70 000 police personnel and 100 000 paramilitaries were deployed

across the state to ensure free, fair, and peaceful polling at 18 097 polling stations of which 1057 were identified as 'hyper-sensitive' and 2744 as 'sensitive'.[21] In spite of the heavy presence of the security personnel, turnout was high in areas that had been the hotbeds of militancy in the Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts. The strict enforcement of the Code of Conduct by the Election Commissioners resulted in, among other things, an alcohol ban during the campaign itself. In all, 693 candidates contested for the PLA elections.

The AD(B)–BJP alliance won a landslide victory by capturing 93 out of 117 assembly seats and almost 48 per cent of the votes polled. AD(B) did particularly well in rural (70) and semi-rural (24) constituencies, making a virtual clean sweep of the Malwa region and with a strong showing in the Majha and the Doaba. The potential threat from AD(A) failed to materialize as that party secured only one seat despite fielding 29 candidates. AD(B)'s share of the popular vote was slightly less than the record 38 per cent achieved by AD(L) in the 'friendly' PLA elections of 1985.[22]

BJP also did better than was expected, winning its highest number of seats since linguistic reorganization. The party's performance was strongest in urban and semi-urban constituencies where traditionally it has competed with the Congress and the BSP. As the Hindu vote swung behind the BJP, the Congress's position was also undermined by competition from the BSP. The overall percentage of the BJP share of the popular vote as compared to 1992 actually fell by nearly 6 per cent because the party focused its efforts on mobilizing the urban Hindu

Table 11.1 Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections, 1997 (Turnout: 69.9%)

Party	Candidates	Seats won	% vote polled
Akali Dal (B)	92	75	37.2
BJP	22	18	10.6
Congress	105	14	26.4
BSP	67	1	7.5
CPI	14	2	0.9
Akali Dal (A)	29	1	2.9
Independents and others*	364	6	13.8
Total	693	117	100

* Others also include CPI(M), Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party and the Samajwadi Janata Party.
Source: *India Today*, February 28 1997; *The Tribune*, February 11 1997; *Daily Ajit*, February 11 1997; and *Des Pardes*, February 21 1997.

vote in 23 seats (including one contested by its Akali ally) that the Congress had won in 1992.

The biggest loser of the elections was the Congress. Its share of seats collapsed from 87 in 1992 to 14; the party's share of the popular vote also fell dramatically to 26 per cent. Congress was virtually wiped out in its traditional stronghold in the Doaba where its vote collapsed from nearly 40 per cent in the Lok Sabha elections nine months earlier to only 26.7. Its performance in the Majha region was also unimpressive: many leading Congressmen refused to participate in the contest, and the party did not win a single seat. In the Malwa region the party relied heavily on localized support. It retained only 9 of the 63 seats in this area, and won barely a quarter of the total vote. The expulsion of the former chief minister Brar just before the elections resulted in widespread dissent allegedly undermining the party's position in some two dozen seats.[23]

The minor parties were spectacularly unsuccessful. Whereas the Communist parties relied on local support, the BSP was the main victim of failing to ally with the major party before the elections. The party's share of seats collapsed from nine in 1992 to one in 1997, and its share of the vote declined from 16.2 per cent to 7.5 per cent. Kanshi Ram, the BSP leader who had hoped to make himself the 'king-maker' between Congress and the AD(B), proved particularly inept at managing to acquire an effective partner. Had he been able to do so, the state's 28 per cent Dalit vote could have been decisive in determining the outcome in at least 26 constituencies.[24] In the event, the party's stance frustrated the Congress while rewarding the BJP.

The BJP–Akali Dal(B) alliance and the limits of hegemonic control: prospects for the future

The AD(B)–BJP alliance's emphatic victory marks a decisive turning point in the configuration of political forces that have been party to the 'Punjab problem'. Previous efforts by the AD(B) and its predecessors to build a regional anti-Congress coalition have been frustrated by the regular defection from such coalitions by the minor political parties – Communists and BSP – as well as the factional penetration of Akali legislators by the Congress. For the first time, the alignment of the AD(B) with a dominant anti-Congress national party appears to foreclose the prospects of such a development while providing a model for the BJP to emulate in other states.[25]

Conversely, because the Congress and the minor parties in Punjab have always looked towards their patrons in New Delhi to influence events in Punjab, they are likely to lobby hard to make the life of the Akali–BJP administration difficult. No Akali administration has completed its full term and President's Rule has been frequently imposed to oust Akali governments. Given the strength of the AD(B) and the BJP, it is perhaps premature to assume that President's Rule will be imposed in the immediate future, especially as the defeat in Punjab was identified with Kesri's leadership. But as the Congress's influence extends over the national United Front government, and the latter itself implodes, the Congress and United Front leadership's temptation to interfere in Punjab will be difficult to resist – particularly if new national elections bring a Congress government to power. In the last two decades, the pretext for such intervention has been the mismanagement of law and order by the state governments. In addition, the ministry's fortunes will be influenced by its ability to fulfil its economic promises, the resolution of the outstanding Punjab issues, and the short- and medium-term calculations of the alliance for regional and national power.

The issue of law-and-order was pushed to the fore within months after the coalition came to power. While in opposition the AD(B) had promised a thorough review of the 'security state' which had waged the war of counterinsurgency against militancy. As violent control was dismantled after 1995, individual petitions against police were heard with greater frequency in the High and Supreme Courts. Allegations against the Punjab police have accelerated; nearly 1200 cases were registered against serving police officers and overall one-sixth of the total police force have been indicted.[26] This situation has arisen because political leaders have failed to find a settlement that would effectively end violent control. Such a settlement would necessarily include both compensation to victims and protection to security services. In the absence of this initiative, police officers who were at the forefront of counterinsurgency have, in the words of K.P.S. Gill, become the new victims in which 'public interest litigation has become the most convenient strategy for vendetta'.[27] The suicide of former police officer A.S. Sandhu, who waged a notorious campaign against Sikh militancy in the border area, was taken up by Gill as a spokesman of the beleaguered police officers.[28] His call for a constitutional commission to examine the issue has been echoed by human rights organizations in Punjab for a parallel commission – along the lines of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission – to examine the whole dimension of counterinsurgency.

The alliance also had to confront, in its economic plans, the reality of a debt trap that has increased since the early 1990s. At the end of March 1996, the debt of special outstanding loans to the centre was nearly $1.6 billion. Special pleas for this loan to be cancelled notwithstanding, the previous Congress administration succeeded in obtaining only a waiver in the annual liability on the loan of nearly $213 million. Estimates suggest that this interest will increase to $213 million in 1997–98 and rise to $271 million in 2001–02.[29] Servicing this loan has created a fiscal debt ratio of nearly 30 per cent for the Punjab government.[30] Against this high rate of indebtedness, in the first budget introduced by the alliance in June 1997 taxes actually increased while recording an overall deficit of $93.8 million. Apart from a few symbolic acts, such as a reduction in the police budget by $3.8 million, little headway has been made in fulfilling the alliance's generous promises to industry or agriculture.[31] Perhaps, most remarkable of all, the chief minister has been unable to secure an upward revision of agricultural procurement prices – set annually by the centre – that have deflated agricultural incomes and are, for example in the case of wheat, considerably below the market price.[32] The initiative to set up a non-resident cell may increase the pitifully low level of non-resident Indian investment in the state, but it is unlikely to generate the level of resources required for meeting the promises made to the agricultural sector or provide for further development. The debt-trap, like the issue of law-and-order, will increase the vulnerability of the government to interference from the centre.

Facing a high degree of indebtedness, the alliance, particularly the AD(B), may be inclined to revive the agitation for the settlement of outstanding Punjab demands over the transfer of Chandigarh, the Punjabi-speaking areas, and the river-waters dispute. Such a mobilization, as in 1982, is vulnerable to outflanking by an ideological challenge from militants and radicals within the Sikh political system. A challenge of this sort could become reality if the alliance were unable to deliver following mobilization. The vanquished and disgruntled factions within Sikhdom are only too eager to wage the ideological battle, and their fires might be easily stoked, as in the past, by a Congress in opposition. An early indication of this became apparent in the Akal Takht's honouring of the families of the assassins of Mrs Gandhi and General Vaidya in April 1997.

For the BJP, championing the Punjab demands is fraught with difficulties. Apart from being at odds with the AD(B) over the reform of centre–state relations and the ASR, the party would have to placate its

government in Rajasthan and partners in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh – who would be disadvantaged in any agreement favouring Punjab. The Congress deliberately stalled on implementing the Rajiv–Longowal Accord for over a decade because of its fear of destabilizing Congress governments in these states; the BJP is likely to follow suit given the national benefits of assuaging its units and allies in these states at the expense of the AD(B). Since 1985 no national government – even one with an overwhelming majority such as the Congress under Rajiv Gandhi – has been able to deliver on the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. The commitment of any future national BJP to effect such a package must be seen against this background and the coded misgivings it has expressed about the ASR.

If a national BJP government is able to deliver a Punjab package, there is certainly potential for the AD(B)–BJP alliance to become strategic. The differences between the two parties may be overcome by political symbolism such as the BJP's support for AD(B)'s candidate (Surjit Singh Barnala) in the elections to the vice-presidency of India.[33] Political rhetoric, after all, is rarely the stuff of Indian politics; and if the BJP is twin-tracking in a tactical accommodation of the AD(B) (and other regional parties) to capture national power, then these parties and the AD(B) are aware of the potential bargaining power they can wield in New Delhi, as the recent formation of the BJP government and its *National Agenda for Governance* demonstrated. Yet such independence for the AD(B)is unlikely to produce results given the record of non-BJP governments. In the long term, therefore, the strategic advantage to AD(B) of an alliance with the BJP lies in the possibility of the BJP, its rhetoric apart, giving it maximum room to satisfy the party's ambitions at the regional level and accommodate its ethnic pride without triggering a fratricidal factionalism within Sikhdom that has traditionally benefited Congress. If there is a 'growing realization within the BJP leadership that the objective of coming to power in New Delhi cannot be achieved until the party is ready to constructively integrate regional sentiments and aspirations', [34] then regional sentiments will also determine the degree of accommodation as well as the BJP's agenda. The irony of BJP's drive towards majoritarianism is that the ideological agenda of the party may be practical only in its core 'Hindi-belt', yet its appeal must reach far beyond for national-level success.

Conclusion

It is tempting to see the AD(B)–BJP alliance as pragmatic, opportunistic, and tactical. In reality it has been forged as a consequence of

ideologically charged politics of violent control practised by national and regional Congress governments in Punjab which fostered Sikh militancy and, ultimately, castrated the political activities of Sikh moderates. The ideological differences between the parties notwithstanding – differences which are in many ways more apparent than real – they have much in common in shaping a new regional and national dimension to Indian politics. For the AD(B) the basis of this dimension is to establish regional political ascendancy alongside the restoration of Sikh pride. The BJP's national project is to establish a new framework of hegemonic control that would promote Hindutva in place of the Congress's 'pseudo-secularism'. Both parties may well be excluded from political office by the powerful political combinations arrayed against them. But whereas for the BJP the Punjab model of alignment with the regional party offers a tantalizing vision of power in New Delhi, the physical elimination of militant Sikh nationalism in the early 1990s has fostered in the AD(B) a new realism that sees the BJP as offering the best hope for maintaining a distinct Sikh identity and achieving maximum political autonomy within the Indian union.

Notes

1. For detailed discussion of these fronts see G. Singh, *Communism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1994), and T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala* (London: Hurst, 1980).
2. For the role of Surjeet as a back-seat driver of the United Front, see *India Today,* December 31 1996.
3. See T.R. Sharma, 'Diffusion and Accommodation: the Contending Strategies of the Congress Party and the Akali Dal in Punjab', *Pacific Affairs* 59:4 (Winter 1986–87), 634–54.
4. For discussion of hegemonic control, see chs. 3 and 6.
5. *The Sunday Tribune*, February 23 1997.
6. Quoted in C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925–1990s* (London: Hurst and Company, 1996), 345.
7. Since pre-independence, Akali Dal tactical alliances with political parties have been determined largely by the possibilities they offer of advancing and protecting the interest of the Sikh community. For a classic case-study, see B.R. Nayer, *Minority Politics in the Punjab* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). The AD(B)'s embrace of the BJP since 1993 appears to be true to form.
8. See Jaffrelot, op. cit., ch. 11.
9. See ch. 9
10. *Des Pardes,* December 17 1993.

11. *India Today*, May 31 1997.
12. *Jane's Defence Weekly* (London), June 23 1993.
13. *India Today*, December 15 1996.
14. Ibid., January 31 1997.
15. For the use of these terms, see ch. 9.
16. *The Hindu* (International edition), May 7 1994.
17. *The Sunday Tribune,* February 16 1997.
18. *The Tribune,* January 28 1997.
19. Ibid., January 29 1997.
20. Ibid.
21. India News Network Digest, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA, February 6 1992.
22. *Ajit* (Daily, Jalandhar), 11 February 1997.
23. *The Tribune*, February 2 1997; *Ajit,* February 11 1997.
24. *India Today*, January 31 1997.
25. *The Sunday Tribune*, February 23 1997.
26. *India Today*, June 9 1997.
27. See K.P.S. Gill's Open Letter to the Prime Minister, *The Sunday Tribune,* June 1 1997.
28. *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), June 21 1997.
29. *The Sunday Tribune,* March 2 1997.
30. Ibid., March 23 1997.
31. *Des Pardes,* June 20 1997.
32. *The Sunday Tribune,* February 23 1997.
33. *India Today,* July 14 1997.
34. *The Sunday Tribune,* February 23 1997.

12

Resizing and Reshaping[1] the Indian State: the 'Punjab Problem' in a Comparative Perspective

In the comparative study of state expansion and contraction, the politics of moving borders, and ethno-nationalist movements for self-determination, India arguably occupies a unique position. Established in the carnage of partition it appears to have evolved as a successful liberal democracy in one of the most plural and underdeveloped societies in the world. This success is all the more striking given the complex range of external and internal threats confronted by the new state at independence. In the half century since, the Indian union has emerged as the premier representative of a developing democracy with a population fast approaching one billion. But as the country passes through the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, there is profound pessimism as to whether the current state can survive for the next half century. Gone are the old certainties of the Nehru–Gandhi dynasty, replaced by what the novelist V.S. Naipaul has called a 'million mutinies' with every 'vote bank' and disgruntled ethnic group making unmanageable demands on the political system. As the dominance of the Congress has declined, weak and unstable national governments have added to the sense of impending doom, voter disenchantment, and what Kohli has called a growing crisis of 'governability'[2] that afflicts nearly all aspects of Indian stateness and its political institutions. The most popular manifestation of this decay has been the major corruption scandals between 1995 and 1997 that placed the whole political system on trial.[3] The main beneficiary of Congress's decline and political uncertainty has been the right-wing Hindu revivalist BJP which succeeded in forming a national government in March 1998. The BJP, with its objective of a powerful Hindu state, has emerged as a national saviour that promises to provide effective remedies to the multiple crises that now afflict the Indian union.

The crisis of governability is acutest in India's borderlands, the peripheral regions away from the core Hindu heartland of central India. In the last 18 years violent secessionist movements in Jammu and Kashmir, [4] Punjab and the north-eastern states have given the impression of India being at war with almost 60 000 fatalities as a result of separatist violence and counterinsurgency operations.[5] According to one source, 50 per cent of the Indian Army has been tied down in dealing with Kashmiri, Sikh and Assamese separatists while an overall 80 per cent is on constant alert for internal duties.[6] The uprising in the Kashmir valley symbolizes the growing *intifadas* against the Indian state that are attracting global interest. Although these borderland insurgencies have been contained by a massive use of physical force, they show little sign of abating or being radically restructured within the framework of India's democracy. Not surprisingly, these struggles have generated a high degree of anxiety amongst India's political elites about the country's physical borders – an anxiety which is heightened in the media by a regular coverage of borderland violence 'against the nation'.[7]

India's political elites have responded to these multiple crises by a confident reassertion of Indian exceptionalism: that is, India's secular, plural, multi-religious, and multicultural democracy has successfully contained the tiger of ethnic separatism. Consider, for example, the comments of J.N. Dixit, a former Foreign Secretary who has been influential in formulating India's foreign policy in the 1990s. Commenting on the Kashmir situation in light of comparative state collapse, he noted:

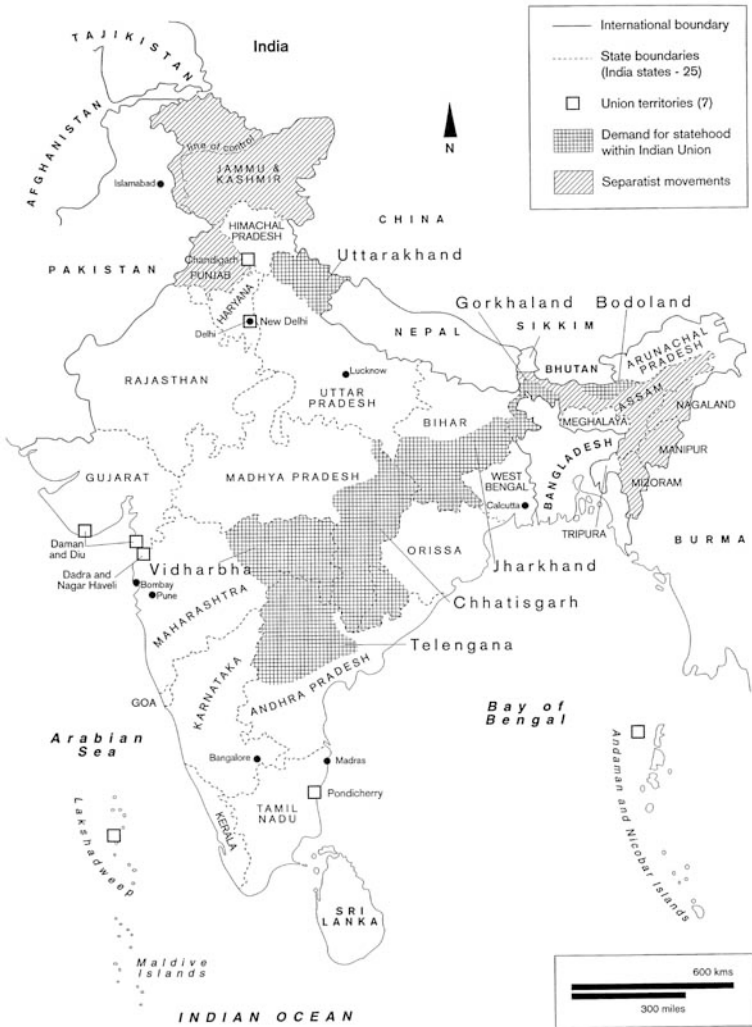
> India has observed with profound concern the disintegration of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious state structures like those of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslav Republic. The events which followed and the predicaments in which areas belonging to these states are now [in] should forewarn everybody about encouraging the break-up of such state structures or advocating simplistic solutions which do not comprehend the dynamics of such fragmentation of such societies. The situation in Bosnia, Georgia, Tadjikistan, parts of Azerbaijan would be repeated ten times in the subcontinental land mass because of the size of the population involved, and the diversity and range of ethnic, linguistic and regional factors characterising vast segments of these populations … A replication of the extensive and prolonged violence which has affected former Yugoslavia, republics of the former Soviet Union and countries of Africa, like Somalia and Sudan, can be anticipated

> if various quick fix solutions suggested for Jammu and Kashmir – and destabilising its link with India – are considered. India will certainly not have any part of this.[8]

Dixit's observations are significant not for the contextual distortions but as a statement of intent and belief. India has never been – and is unlikely to be – party to 'quick-fix' solutions for Kashmir, especially if they involve self-determination by the Kashmiris themselves. What is more disturbing is that for Dixit the comparative experience suggests that India's ethnic plurality can *only* be guaranteed by a form of statism informed by an enlightened elite, backed by a sizeable armed force engaged in counterinsurgency, and high levels of violence in the pursuit of a 'self-evident' truth. That such a prescription in itself is a form of ethnic oppression, or could be perceived as such in India's borderlands, is a proposition which Dixit is neither prepared to entertain, nor discuss.

If the political elites' perspective is clouded in rhetoric, then the academic literature on the subject is also an unhelpful guide. In the last decade there has been a proliferation of publications on Indian nationalism, sub-regional problems, ethnic conflict and counter-insurgency.[9] Much of this output, especially by analysts of Indian background, avoids problematizing the issue of borders, self-determination, and questions of nation- and state-building in the peripheral regions.[10] Postmodernists, for example, in celebration of India's heterogeneity, diversity and complexity have disembowelled regional ethnic identities, exposing them as imagined souls without bodies. Paradoxically, the only approach which in some measure goes half way draws on heavy qualifications to rational choice theory and advocates the need to politically accommodate ethno-nationalism of religious minorities with the segmentational realities of Indian society.[11] In the absence of a systematic approach, therefore, most analysts, like Brass,[12] have formulated their own *ad hoc* rules as to how the Indian state responds to movements for secession or autonomy.

A group of scholars who are now explicitly beginning to address these issues have traditionally specialized in the politics and history of the peripheral regions, partition, ethno-nationalist movements and identity.[13] To some extent, their enterprise has been spurred on by the growing academic and popular interest in the appropriateness of pre-partition political proposals for a decentralized, confederal united India. These scholars are currently engaged in reworking the partition to understand unmanageable ethnic conflicts both within the



Map 12.1 Self-Determination and Autonomist Movements in the Indian Union

periphery and the core; and more systematic work is also being undertaken on ethnicity, state secularism, and nation and state-building.[14] My own research is located within this school of thought, and recently I have sought to illustrate the relevance of Lustick's[15] theory of state

contraction and expansion to the Indian subcontinent with reference to the partition and politics of separatist movements in the borderlands that it created.

This chapter aims to further demonstrate the relevance of Lustick's work by incorporating the insights of McGarry and O'Leary[16] on conflict management and the revisionist debate about the ethnic character of the Indian state discussed at length in Chapter 3. It will focus on separatist movements in the peripheral regions and evaluate why even though they have posed a serious challenge to the Indian state, and its ability to control them, these movements have yet to become an agenda at the ideological hegemony stage in terms of Lustick's theory, let alone cross the threshold to the regime stage. This paradox, it will be argued, arises because of the ethnic character of the Indian state which is closely defined by the majority Hindu community and has resulted in the creation of a *de facto* ethnic democracy.[17] In the peripheral regions, where this is often not the case, Indian nation- and state-building since 1947 has been sustained by what McGarry and O'Leary call 'hegemonic control' – a form of 'coercive and/or co-optive rule which successfully manages to make unworkable an ethnic challenge to state order'.[18] When hegemonic control has broken down, it is often substituted or complemented with simple violent control.

The main argument of this chapter is that hegemonic beliefs about India's external borders have been shaped by the partition in 1947. The existence of separatist movements in the peripheral regions, perversely, continues to reinforce rather than challenge these beliefs among political elites. Although the growing crisis of governability suggests that there is enormous scope for both resizing and reshaping the Indian state, under the prevailing circumstances this potential is unlikely to be realized by the separatist movements waging self-determination struggles in the peripheral regions. Instead there is more likelihood of change if there are fissures, cracks and dissension within India's ethnic core with simultaneous demands for reshaping. Change of this nature is further possible if elites within the ethnic core recognize the need to either link or delink the borderland struggles with the prospect of creating a more homogenous core *à la* BJP and/or undertake a fundamental restructuring involving substantial autonomy to the states. Barring these two possibilities, or a combination of them, it is also unwise to preclude an implosion triggered by continued political decay, uncertainty and economic collapse.

The rest of this chapter illustrates the relevance of these propositions by examining: (i) the hegemonic beliefs about state size and border

embedded by political elites after the partition; (ii) with reference to Kashmir, Punjab and the north-eastern states, the response of the Indian centre when these beliefs have been violently contested; (iii) why these beliefs have not encountered sustained opposition within the ethnic core; (iv) the coalition of political forces and processes supportive of resizing and reshaping the Indian state; and (v), the coalition of political forces and political processes opposed to resizing and reshaping the Indian state.

Post-1947 hegemonic beliefs about state size

The partition provided the foundations of dominant beliefs about the Indian nation and statehood. 'What the partition succeeded in doing', Gupta has noted, 'was searing the lineaments of India's territorial boundaries deep into the national consciousness … [through] the popular sacralization of territory.'[19] Nehru and the Congress had opposed the colonial proposal for a united India on the grounds of 'balkanization' and 'communalism' (concession to the Muslim League), but as power was transferred to two centralized dominions, the demographic realities of independent India (83 per cent Hindu) belied the confident belief in state secularism which had been used as an ideological weapon against the Muslim League. Nehru's own secularism had never been in doubt, but his leadership of the Congress, which accommodated the mainstream of Hindu nationalism, together with a predilection to use the Soviet model of national self-determination[20] coincided with majoritarian discourse on any future secession, division, or separation. In fact after 1947 any movement for autonomy or secession would be labelled as partition, vivisection and division of the country.

Logically it could be argued that if the Congress's commitment to secularism was deep-rooted, it had little to fear from movements for self-determination, religious or otherwise. This not being the case, it is appropriate at this juncture to refer to the revisionist debate about the ethnic character of the Indian state examined in detail in Chapter 3. Because the formalism of Nehruvian secularism and its coalescence with majoritarianism remained, until recently, unquestioned, most analysts of Indian politics have tended to take this commitment at face value.[21] In line with the common view of Indian diversity the idea of an overarching ethnicity defined by Hinduism has been resisted on the grounds of cross-cutting cleavages of caste, religion and language.[22] In Chapter 3 this reading of Indian politics is identified with 'conventional wisdom'. A more relevant perspective, it has been argued, is one that views

India as an ethnic democracy in which Hinduism functions as a meta-ethnicity.

Within India's ethnic democracy hegemonic and violent control is exercised over minorities, especially borderland minorities. Here hegemonic control underpins the functioning of political and administrative structures; and when it is challenged, contested or opposed, the Indian state regularly resorts to violent control.[23] Hegemonic control has also been used with internal repartition (redrawing the boundaries of borderland states, co-option, the creation of tribal zones, and special territories) and attempted integration and assimilation.[24] In short, the methods of ethnic conflict management followed by the Indian state since 1947 with special reference to the borderland states pose a fundamental challenge to the assumptions of state secularism and the view of India as a multinational and plural democracy.

If partition created in-built hostility to secession, in the five decades since, the Indian state has consciously pursued a policy of state expansion to which most national political parties have willingly consented. In the name of national integration, princely states (nominally independent after August 1947) were coerced into the Indian union. The accession of Kashmir still remains shrouded in mystery, but what is certain is that without the presence of Indian forces in the valley this achievement would have been doubtful if not impossible. The Portuguese territories of Goa, Damn and Diu were forcibly liberated despite strong US pressure. On its northern border, India has territorially integrated the former independent kingdom of Sikkim (1975), eroded the independence of Bhutan, and since 1950, has ensured paramountcy over Nepal which makes the latter's claim to independence resemble that of a dependent territory. India has also successfully taken part in 'state-breaking' by dismantling the eastern wing of Pakistan in the war which led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Most recently, the involvement of the Indian peace-keeping force in Sri-Lanka (1987–90) was terminated after heavy casualties suffered by the Indian Army in the Jaffna peninsula.

In one example, however, state expansion was severely checked, resulting in the creation of new myths about the sanctity of borders. Nehru did not only accept the colonial border with China but instigated a forward policy that the colonial administration had let lapse. Despite numerous proposals by the Chinese government for a negotiated settlement and joint demarcation of the border defined in colonial treaties – to which the Chinese government had not been party – Nehru persisted with the forward policy, thereby precipitating a war with China (1962).[25]

When this short border war resulted in a humiliating defeat, the experience was used not for reflecting on the consequences of state expansion entailed in the forward policy. Instead, the mythology of the sacred Himalayas was further reworked into the sanctity of claimed borderlines. Indeed, Nehru and most Indian nationalists

> assumed, without verification, that the large imaginary north-eastern and north-western borders of the country (mainly defined by the McMohan Line) as determined by the colonial power would hold good in perpetuity. They had given no thought to the political dynamics of borders that inevitably straddle neighbouring countries across soft areas and societies lying on either side of highly permeable interface. These rigidities prevented India from settling outstanding international and regional issues within South Asia, involving small countries as well as large neighbours such as China. No other regional power in the world is held in greater suspicion by its neighbours than India.[26]

Against the backdrop of the war with China, hegemonic beliefs about borders were formalized in declarations, statutes and a constitutional amendment to strengthen their application in the peripheral regions. During the war, parliament adopted a resolution to 'drive out the aggressors from the sacred soil of India, however long the struggle may be'.[27] To date this resolution has neither been revoked nor amended. An amendment to the Indian Criminal Act (1961) made it a punishable offence by imprisonment for three years to question by words, written or spoken, signs, or visible representation the territorial integrity of India. The 16th Constitutional Amendment Act (1963) imposed restrictions on the rights to freedom of speech and expression, to assemble peaceably without arms, and to form associations in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India. It further prescribed that all candidates seeking election to provincial and national parliaments had to affirm an oath of allegiance to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India. Although the validity of measures is often challenged in peripheral regions, within India's ethnic core they have lost none of their resonance: in the 1984 national election campaign, for instance, following the assassination of Mrs Gandhi and the pogroms in Delhi against Sikhs, one of the most effective posters used by the Congress depicted the borders of India being moved to the outskirts of Delhi if the party were not re-elected.

Hegemonic and violent control: the challenge of state contraction in Kashmir, Punjab and the north-eastern states

Although India's momentum for state expansion in the peripheral regions has been cloaked in the language of nation and state-building, it has been unable to proceed without significant challenges. Much of the contemporary literature on this resistance situates it in terms of a desire for more autonomy *per se* (against a centralizing state)[28] or affirms the bell-curve pattern in which these movements, arise, accumulate momentum and then dissipate as their demands are co-opted, deflected or incorporated through participatory mechanisms.[29] These simplistic interpretations largely ignore the 'plebiscitary' nature of 'democracy' that often prevails in the peripheral regions, sustained as it is by weak structures of institutionalization or normative legitimacy. In reality hegemonic control provides for precisely the kind of accommodation that is suggested, but when such accommodation challenges hegemonic norms, violent control is frequently used, thereby undermining the fragile structures of institutionalization. Rigged elections, the nomination of a large proportion of 'independents', or outright boycott of elections by regional parties, has not been uncommon (see Table 12:1). Thus Kashmir, Punjab and the north-eastern states which have witnessed the frequent imposition of President's Rule (direct rule from New Delhi), 'plebiscitary' elections, counterinsurgency, and other methods of political closure, provide analytically appropriate cases for evaluating this argument.

(i) Kashmir

The story of Kashmir ('the oldest unresolved conflict before the United Nations' [Butros, Butros Ghali]) is too familiar to require full narration. The decision of a Hindu prince of a Muslim majority province who at partition acceded his kingdom to the Indian union resulted in hostilities between India and Pakistan, a *de facto* division of the province in January 1949 along the ceasefire line.[30] The accession to India was softened by the concessions to Kashmiri nationalism embodied in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that limited the powers of New Delhi to defence, communications and foreign affairs. At the time of United Nations' intervention in the dispute this article was seen as a transitional measure before the proper exercise of the right of self-determination by Kashmiris. Nehru personally gave an open pledge to ensure that the 'fate of Kashmir is to be ultimately

decided by the people', and accepted the Security Council resolution of April 21 1948 that the question should be 'decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite'. This commitment, however, soon waned as Congress first promoted the Kashmiri nationalists led by Sheikh Abdullah and then, in a *volte face* as a result of Hindu nationalist pressure in 1952–53, Nehru started the piecemeal integration of the province into the union. Abdullah, the 'Lion of Kashmir', was interned for two decades while a compliant assembly, established by extensive vote-rigging, voted for the merger with India in 1956. Thereafter India's response to a renewed Security Council resolution (March 24 1957) – for a 'free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations' – was to cloak integrationist intentions under the pretext of a Cold War threat to national security emanating from the US's policy of encirclement that included a military alliance with Pakistan.

Three wars (Indo-China and Indo-Pakistan [1965 and 1971]) and the emergence of India as a nuclear power (1974) convinced Abdullah of the limits of the demand for Kashmiri sovereignty. Towards the end of his life he signed an accord with Mrs Gandhi (1975) which accepted that Kashmir was a 'constituent unit of the union of India' in return for the formal survival of Article 370, though its actual provisions were extensively diluted in the application of central powers to the state. For almost a decade Abdullah nurtured a political dynasty with his son Farooq taking over after his death in 1982. Farooq's reign was marred by the need to straddle regional nationalism and the limits of autonomy imposed by New Delhi; his effort to establish an all-India oppositional front for more autonomy resulted first in his dismissal, and then his return to power in alliance with Congress in the rigged elections of 1987. It was these elections, and the denial of the growing support of the Muslim United Front, that triggered the Kashmiri uprising. Thereafter the separatist groups (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front and Hizbul Mujahideen) transformed decades of ethnic oppression into a generalized uprising against the Indian state. Between 1990 and 1996, 25 000 people were killed in Kashmir, almost two-thirds of them by Indian armed forces; Kashmiris put the figure at 50 000.[31] In addition, 150 000 Kashmiri Hindus have fled the valley to settle in the Hindu majority region of Jammu. In 1991 Amnesty International estimated that 15 000 people were being detained in the state without trial.[32]

The Indian state's response to the Kashmir crisis has been to resort to violent control which is justified according to four principles: that the insurgency is externally supported and directed by Pakistan

against India; that it is rooted in Islamic fundamentalism which poses a serious threat to India's secularism; that the separatist movements have no legal or political claim to independence; and that the insurgency is a threat to India's overall security, territorial integrity, and nationhood.[33] In furtherance of these principles the Indian Army, paramilitaries and *lumpen* counterinsurgents were unleashed against Kashmiri separatists to contain the violence and re-establish hegemonic control. After 1994, in response to global concern about the violation of human rights in the valley, national governments attempted to restart the political process by holding regional elections. In September 1996, elections were held for the state assembly for the first time since 1987. Conducted under the shadow of a khaki umbrella provided by the Indian forces, they have seen the revival of Farooq in a campaign largely boycotted in the valley with overall turnout of less than 30 per cent.[34] Farooq recognized the serious shortcomings in his mandate and joined the beleaguered United Front government in New Delhi to set up a commission to investigate the issue of autonomy from 1947 to the Gandhi–Sheikh accord of 1975. A sustained revival in the fortunes of the Farooq administration may lead to a gradual dismantling of the coercive apparatus, but because the history of Kashmir suggests that 'periods of relative calm can turn overnight into outbursts of rage and violence without an end',[35] India's political elites are likely to proceed with extreme caution in this direction.

(ii) Punjab

The 'Punjab problem' which emerged in the early 1980s posed a different challenge to dominant beliefs about state borders. In a sense Punjab has never been a 'disputed territory' like Kashmir, but the distinctive position occupied by Sikhs in pre-partition Punjab – and their hostility to the division of the province – led Sikh political leadership to seek special guarantees within the Indian union. After partition the promise of such guarantees by Nehru was broken with the result that the Akali Dal (the main Sikh political party) contested Nehruvian secularism by pursuing a campaign for the linguistic reorganization of Punjab. Opposition to this campaign was marshalled largely by the Congress which became the main instrument for exercising hegemonic control, mobilizing Punjabi Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue, and thereby frustrating the numerical case for a Punjabi province. A Punjabi state was eventually conceded (1966), but this concession came as a *quid pro quo* for the defence of Punjab during the

Indo-Pakistan war (1965). Linguistic reorganization was hemmed in by so many qualifications that it soon led to an autonomy movement organized by the Akali Dal around the ASR which called for New Delhi's powers to be limited to currency, defence, communications and external affairs. This agitation led to Operation Blue Star in which the Indian Army stormed the Golden Temple.

Coercive measures had been used in Punjab in the 1950s and 1960s but what distinguished the 1980s, with the failure of Rajiv Gandhi to re-establish some degree of political normalcy, was the extent to which the central governments were prepared to use force to crush Sikh separatism. By conservative estimates something like 25 000 people were killed as a result of separatist violence and counterinsurgency operations by the security forces between 1981–93. The number of involuntary disappearances and illegal detainees remains unknown although the latter were estimated to vary between 20 000 to 45 000.[36] At the height of the insurgency in the early 1990s, almost a quarter of a million military and paramilitary forces were engaged in counterinsurgency operations against groups campaigning for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan. These groups were not without significant support: in the 1989 national elections, their representatives or supporters won 10 of the 13 parliamentary seats from Punjab and captured the majority of popular support; and in June 1991, had the newly elected national Congress government not postponed the poll, the militants would certainly have won the assembly elections scheduled at the same time.[37] In the event, the Congress aborted these polls and held khaki elections in February 1992 that were boycotted by the militants and moderate Sikh political leaders. The boycott resulted in a Congress triumph (turnout 24 per cent) that was used as a pretext to intensify the war against separatism. By the end of 1993, most leading militants and their organizations had been eliminated, the moderates had been muzzled, and Punjab was being hailed as a 'model' for combating separatism.[38]

The overwhelming use of force against Sikh militants and moderates between 1981 and 1993 highlights the limits of Sikh ethno-nationalism and the resolute determination of the Indian state to defeat it. But if separatism has been defeated, and hegemonic control defines the acceptable limits of contemporary Sikh ethno-nationalism, it remains a significant political force which in the latest assembly elections (February 1997) returned the Akali Dal to power with a landslide. Interestingly while the demands of the Akali Dal remain rooted in the ASR, the realities of operating within the limits of hegemonic control have drawn the party closer to an alliance with the BJP, both regionally and nationally. This

Table 12.1 Performance of Regional Parties in State Assembly Elections in the Peripheral Regions since 1983

State	Year	% Votes for regional parties@	% Votes for others and independents	% Votes for national parties
Jammu and Kashmir	1983	55.8	10.4	33.8
(8m)	1987$	36.7	37.5	25.8
	1996	^		
Punjab	1985	37.9	11.9	50.2
(20m)	1992*	5.2	9.9	84.8
	1997	40.1	13.4	46.4
Mizoram	1987	23.7	43.3	33.0
(0.6m)	1989	54.6	10.2	34.8
	1993	40.4	23.4	36.2
Manipur	1984	22.1	43.1	34.8
(1m)	1990	35.2	6.3	58.5
	1995	42.6	8.2	49.2
Tripura&	1983	59.7	9.0	31.3
(3m)	1988	58.7	3.0	38.1
	1993	56.3	9.5	34.2
Assam	1983*	10.8	29.0	60.2
(22m)	1985	55.0	15.0	30.0
	1991	33.6	24.3	42.1
Meghalaya	1983	49.3	25.5	27.7
(1m)	1988	47.4	20.0	32.6
	1993	44.1	21.3	34.6
Nagaland	1987	60.0	0.0	40.0
(1m)	1989	44.4	4.2	51.5
	1993	33.1	20.9	46.4
	1998*			^^
Arunachal	1984	41.0	11.5	47.5
Pradesh	1990	2.2	20.5	77.6
(0.8m)	1995	0.0	25.9	74.1

@ Supporting greater autonomy/separatism.
* Elections boycotted by the main regional parties.
$ Elections generally believed to be rigged.
& State unit of CPI(M) defined as a regional party.
^ Elections won by the regional National Conference
^^ Congress won 42 seats 'unopposed'.
Source: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections 1952–1995* (New Delhi: Books and Things, 1995).

tactical agreement is a product of the realities of political competition: it could also become the basis of redrawing boundaries if the BJP decides to forgo its ambition to create a continental Hindustan, however.

(iii) North-eastern states

In the north-eastern states Indian nation and state-building has always been bitterly contested since partition. After 50 years of independence the region is still tormented by separatist insurrection, guerrilla warfare and terrorism with some of the movements campaigning for independence dating from before 1947. The original inhabitants of the region, nearly half of whom are from aboriginal tribes, are uncertain of their place, whether within India or outside it. In a visit to the area in 1996, the former Prime Minister, H.D. Dev Gowda, acknowledged that people in the north-east feel that New Delhi treats them like a stepmother and pledged to provide basic services to bring the region 'to the standards in the rest of the country'.

In August 1947 Nehru's response to self-determination movements in this region was blunt: 'We can give you complete autonomy but never independence. No state, big or small, in India will be allowed to remain independent. We will use all our influence and power to suppress such tendencies.'[39] Thereafter the strategic importance of this area in state expansion led to state-building and 'nation-destroying' as the inaccessible five regions were brought within the parameters of New Delhi's rule. Where economic exploitation of the region's vast natural resources resulted in indigenous opposition to migration from the mainland, a variety of administrative and constitutional provisions was adopted to placate tribal sentiment – the creation of tribal zones and councils, of autonomous districts, union territories and, eventually, new states. According to one commentator, state-building in the face of separatist pressures has followed a three-step strategy: 'to fight the insurgency with military force for some time; then, when the rebels seem to be tiring, offer negotiations; and finally, when the rebels are convinced that no matter what the casualties are on either side, they are not going to be able to secede, win them over with the offer of constitutional sops, invariably resulting in power being given to them in the resulting elections'.[40] Although the same commentator emphasizes the capacity of the Indian state to control these movements, he is silent on numerous cases where constitutional rehabilitation ('sops') has been followed by renewed struggles, violence and endemic terrorism. Since the 1950s the history of Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Manipur is littered with 'accords' signed by New Delhi with separatists. In Assam, as in Punjab, much of the resentment which fuelled the separatist movement was the failure of New Delhi to deliver on the regional accord agreed in August 1985. This failure revived the fortunes of the United Liberation Front of Assam, resulting in the repeated deployment of the army to crush the movement.

Unlike Kashmir or Punjab, coercion tempered by minimal consent has been the main strategy by which India has maintained its hold on the north-eastern states. In this sparsely populated region what is surprising is not the willingness of the insurgents to accept hegemonic control – in face of overwhelming odds – but their determination to sustain such opposition to the Indian state for so long. Current developments suggest that these states have been far from pacified, or politically integrated into the Indian union. The emergence of a first generation of educated youth among these communities combined with a growing realization of India's 'internal colonialism' (Assam produces 70 per cent of India's oil and the bulk of its tea) has strengthened the arguments and resources for separatism.

Separatism within the ethnic core

If the argument advanced thus far that India should be seen as an ethnic democracy is valid, then it is necessary to address the issue of separatism in the ethnic core. Opponents of ethnic democracy have pointed to the successful completion of linguistic reorganization in the 1950s and 1960s and the containment of the Dravidian Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) separatist threat in Madras (now Tamil Nadu) in the 1950s and 1960s. Separatism in the core, and separatism at the periphery, they argue, follows similar trajectories.[41]

Such interpretations however overlook the fact that there are significant differences of *kind* rather than *degree*. Given India's immense diversity, size and complexity, the question posed should perhaps not be *how* separatist movements have been contained but *why* many more such movements have not emerged in the heartlands for outright self-determination. One obvious answer is that these heartlands are the bedrock of the Indian democracy's power-structure with the Hindi-belt providing almost 40 per cent of the MPs to Parliament; West Bengal and the Dravidian South are, their cultural differences with the Hindi-belt notwithstanding, also intimately locked into this structure. In 1947, the Bengali Hindu elite successfully sabotaged the emergence of an independent Bengal largely out of the fear of Muslim majoritarianism. In this move the Hindu elite were supported by the national Congress High Command which sought a quick transfer of power to a centralized state.[42] Similarly, it is mistaken to interpret the advocacy of cultural separatism by Tamils in the 1950s and 1960s as a movement for independent statehood on a par with the peripheral regions. Most of the demands of the DMK, the regional political party

which led the movement, were for cultural and linguistic autonomy couched in anti-Brahmanical rhetoric (Brahmins had traditionally dominated the regional Congress). Once the DMK established itself in power in 1967, the rhetoric of separatism was quietly forgotten and has not been rekindled, even by the Tamil strife in Sri Lanka. Compared with demands from the peripheral regions for linguistic reorganization and autonomy, the Indian state is remarkably responsive to such demands from the core – contrast the reorganization of Andhra Pradesh with Punjab and the north-eastern states; the non-imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu, with the non-imposition of Punjabi in Punjab.[43] This experience suggests that some of the contemporary movements for reorganization of existing states within the core led by lower castes and tribals – Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Telengana and Vidharbha (see Map 12.1) – will be conceded whereas similar demands in the borderlands – Gorkhaland, Bodoland – are likely to be rejected, contested, or tactically conceded to undermine separatist movements.[44]

It is within the ethnic core that the BJP has established its power-base. Since 1990, the party has formed state governments in Uttar Pradesh (the largest and most populous state of 139 million), Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and, with its allies, in Maharashtra. The BJP has also been making inroads into Karnataka, Bihar, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab (where it rules in coalition with the Akali Dal). This rapid growth has transformed the BJP into the leading national party in the 1998 national elections, capturing 250 seats with its allies (out of 545). But if the BJP ideologues sometimes advocate a continental-wide Hindu state (including a form of wrongsizing that would incorporate Pakistan), the political reality is that it is essentially a Hindu constituency party, without much firm support outside the ethnic core. Where it does have such pockets of support, as in Jammu and Punjab, this is mainly from the borderland Hindus or settler immigrants who have historically influenced Congress policy in these regions. Whether the compulsions of party-building pull the BJP in the direction of the ethnic core or ideological borderland, remains to be determined. What is less in doubt, however, is that if the party is to emerge as a dominant national force, it needs to consolidate its support-base further within and beyond the Hindi-belt. This factor may drive the BJP in two possible directions: like Russian nationalists, it may consider the advantages of resizing the Indian state without the peripheral nationalities; alternatively, like the Congress in its heyday, it may build regional alliances as the road to national success. Whereas the former option is likely to

preserve the ideological integrity of the party, the latter may lead to its reincarnation as a 'meta-regional' party with a mellower ideological tone.[45]

Political forces and processes favouring the resizing and reshaping of the Indian State

Given the discussion so far, what are the political forces and processes at work which support the movement for resizing and reshaping the Indian state? In brief, four distinct factors can be identified: (i) the persistence of separatist movements in the peripheral regions; (ii) the emergence of the neo-federalist debate within the ethnic core; (iii) the long-term regional implications of economic liberalization started in 1991; and (iv), the emergence of alternative beliefs about external borders and the internal boundaries of the state among the non-elites.

Although the separatist movements have been remarkably unsuccessful in altering the external boundaries of the Indian state, their continued significance lies in their potential to do so. In terms of resources and political representation, the peripheral states (Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and the north-eastern states) constitute 7 per cent of the total population and 7.8 per cent of the total seats in the national parliament. Clearly despite their desire to play an active role there is limited potential for political parties from these regions to influence national events, even during minority governments. In the absence of large mobilizable resources, therefore, including external support from other states, the importance of these movements lies in presenting a legal, constitutional and moral mirror to Indian nationhood.

Secondly, these struggles have consumed an extraordinary amount of scarce resources that have been diverted to the security services and the war against 'terrorism'. In Punjab alone the cost of fighting insurgency has been estimated at $2004 million.[46] This expenditure could be considered a price well worth paying, but if it undermines overall external defence capability it could trigger serious rethinking. These considerations seem to have influenced the Sino-India agreement in September 1993 on the border dispute – an agreement which 'agreed to differ' on the territorial question but provided the basis of better trade and economic relations, a joint international front on human rights, as well as China's neutrality on Kashmir.[47]

Finally, the separatist movements in the last decade have been successful in globalizing their demands. The Kashmiri, Sikh and Naga

diasporas have been active in lobbying governments, international agencies (United Nations and NGOs), and human rights bodies with considerable effect. The brutal violation of human rights in Kashmir and Punjab by the security forces has focused international attention in a way which the separatist movements never succeeded in achieving. Both China and India supported each other at the United Nations' sponsored conference on human rights in Vienna (1993) against the non-government (separatist) representatives in order to overcome their embarrassment in Tibet, mainland China, Kashmir, Punjab and the north-eastern states.

The main momentum for reshaping the Indian state has come in the demand for autonomy. Whereas in the peripheral regions the exercise of hegemonic control has often led to the rearticulation of separatism in the guise of greater autonomy (Kashmir, Punjab), within India's ethnic core the growing pressures of centralization have also generated considerable demands for redefining federalism. To be sure, though the peripheral regions have been at the forefront of the campaign for autonomy, the ethnic core states and their political elites have rarely been forceful advocates of the former's case. Since the 1980s some political elites in West Bengal, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu have called for a new power relationship between the centre and the state, as well as a serious discussion of confederalism along the lines of the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946.[48] India's Defence Minister under the United Front government openly proposed new confederal arrangements embracing India and Pakistan.[49] Even *India Today*, a publication rarely noted for its radicalism, in an editorial pointed to the desperate need to reverse 'the five-decade long trend of centralization'. This call was made with reference to the intentions of the framers of the Indian Constitution as spelt out in the Objective Resolution of 1946 to create a loose confederation in which the states would 'retain the status of autonomous units'. Although the partition strengthened the hand of the centralizers, the editorial continued, the 'time is indeed right to revert to the Objective Resolution and confer greater autonomy on the states'.[50] The election in May 1996 of the national United Front government, a coalition of over 17 parties, most of whom were regionally based, represented the most significant development of this demand. In its *Common Minimum Programm*e the United Front government committed itself to a radical reform of federalism, agreed to legislate on greater financial powers to the states, and devolve power in large areas of centrally administered programmes.[51]

The continued rise in regional party support in national elections is likely to increase the possibilities that in the medium term the relationship between the centre and the states will be restructured. However the experience of the United Front government suggests that this will be a painful and slow process. General policy change since the 1980s has been pitifully slow: the Sarkaria Commission (1987) on centre–state relations confirmed the *status quo*, proposing minor modifications to existing arrangements; and the period of National Front government (1989–91) was largely overtaken by other crises. Unless and until there is a substantial majority in New Delhi for new federal arrangements, the demand for autonomy is unlikely to make substantial headway.

Demands for greater autonomy to the states have also been strengthened by economic liberalization pursued since 1991. The Nehruvian view of the Indian state was underpinned by centralized planning based on the Soviet model that systematically eroded the limited constitutional powers of the states. Following the virtual financial collapse of the Indian state in 1991, a policy of economic liberalization was adopted which abandoned economic planning. Deregulation, disinvestment in public sector undertakings, and efforts to promote foreign investment have provided new opportunities for the states to generate and manage resources, as central transfers of revenues to the states from New Delhi have been reduced to meet the targets of the national fiscal deficit.[52] All states have been competing with each other to attract foreign investment. Some, like Maharashtra, India's financial capital, have been remarkably successful, capturing 17.5 per cent of all proposed inward investment. Maharashtra's state government has ambitious plans to emulate the success of Hong Kong and Singapore to become the 'financial nerve centre of Asia'.[53] Similarly, Gujarat with its large (western) diasporic Gujarati community, has emerged as the front-runner for foreign investment.[54] Others states, particularly the more populous ones such as Bihar and West Bengal, have shown little enthusiasm for the policy or proved attractive to foreign investors. All things being equal, economic liberalization is likely to accelerate the development gap between the western and eastern states; and if the present growth and population patterns persist, this gap will become ever wider.[55] Given that the more affluent states (for example, Punjab) have traditionally been reluctant to subsidize the less developed ones, similar movements for autonomy are likely to have a bitter economic edge, especially if the growth is acquired as a result of external markets or inward investment. A vision of 'bloody and anarchic change'[56]

ushered in by economic liberalization may be sometime in the future but the policies of some state governments in seeking to restrict internal migration and promote preferential treatment for the 'sons of the soil' is perhaps indicative of things to come.[57] By itself economic liberalization may not provide the sufficient condition for separatism, particularly if the growth of all-India markets remains a powerful attraction, but rapid growth at the state level may intersect, as it has done so far, with demands for more powers for states to regulate their own affairs. Liberalization has reversed the economic logic which led to the creation of a centralized union after partition; and this process, moreover, appears to be largely irreversible as all major national political parties, including the BJP, are committed to the new industrial policy.[58]

Lastly, in contrast to hegemonic beliefs about state size and borders which are articulated by political elites and the establishment, surveys of public opinion suggest a more fluid picture on the range of alternative possibilities. Much of this is perhaps due to the emergence of a new generation for whom the partition and the Cold War are but distant events. It is also to some extent a reflection of a wider global reality in which borders are no longer perceived as sacrosanct. Indeed, Dixit himself expressed amazement at the response of college students 'up and down' the country to the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia who, according to him, demonstrated an unhealthy enthusiasm for the event repeating itself in India.[59] A poll carried out on the eve of talks between India and Pakistan showed interesting results: asked what they felt about a solution to the Kashmir dispute, 51 per cent of those polled said the territory must be granted more autonomy within India, 35 per cent said that Kashmiris must decide their own future, and 14 per cent said the issue ought to be handed over to the United Nations.[60] In another poll published in *India Today* ahead of the 50th anniversary of India's independence, 36 per cent of the respondents said India would disintegrate into independent nations in the next 50 years, while 41 per cent said it would stay united.[61] Such surveys give the impression that for most Indians peripheral separatist movements and the question of the unity of India are now emerging as secondary to issues of corruption, poverty and insecurity.[62] The rise of lower caste parties in the most populous states has further strengthened this trend by projecting bread-and-butter issues to the fore.

The main difficulty facing the political forces and processes working towards resizing and reshaping the Indian union is establishing effective

links between the fragments. Political elites in the peripheral regions have often spoken in the language of greater autonomy, but the ethnic core's mistrust of such language – as a cover for separatism – has contributed to disarticulating a genuine debate about the nature of Indian federalism. In contemporary Indian politics there is only a small section among the enlightened political elites who recognize the need to decentralize (as well as economically liberalize) in order to address the emerging democratic deficit confronting the poor sections of society and the historically oppressed nationalities in the periphery.

Political forces and processes opposing the resizing and reshaping of the Indian State

Against the factors favouring the resizing and reshaping of the Indian state's external and internal boundaries are substantial obstacles that have to be overcome if the processes are to gain momentum. These include: (i) the rigidity of hegemonic beliefs and their influence among the security forces; (ii) the Congress and the BJP; and (iii) the opposition of groups who are likely to become minorities in any such resizing and reshaping.

The increasing scepticism within the general public about India's borders is not reflected in the hegemonic beliefs as articulated by state representatives. Two recent examples will illustrate this fact. A newly arrived British High Commissioner to India inadvertently forgot to include the reference to Jammu in his informal party invitation to Kashmiris. This serious *faux pas* brought forth howls of protest within the Indian press and among leading politicians with righteous declarations that the whole of Kashmir (including Pakistani-occupied territory) was legally part of the Indian state. In a second instance the Vice-President Albert Gore in a communication incorrectly referred to Punjab as Khalistan; this resulted in diplomatic ruffled feathers which caused much ill wind in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. Yet if these incidents illustrate the lighter side with which these beliefs are held, their inculcation among the security services and the administrative elite – especially the Indian Administrative Service – has been systematic. Because the peripheral territories are India's external borders and have been the sites of several wars, they are seen as essential to the strategic defence of the country. This significance is perceived to be so fundamental that according to one source in 1990 the insurgency in Kashmir came close to triggering a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan.[63] (Ironically, the nuclear Cold War between India and

Pakistan has had the consequence of reinforcing the sanctity of existing state structures not necessarily against each other but from domestic challenges.) Elite administrators and leading members of the security services have always demonstrated significant opposition to territorial change, either externally or internally. This is reflected in their public utterances (for example, the writings of Jagmohan, the former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir) and imprinted in every successive external treaty that India has signed since 1947. In short, hegemonic beliefs among the ruling elite about the sanctity of borders have been *over-determined* by the consequences of partition – an experience, in some ways, shared by other states which have also been partitioned (e.g. Ireland, Palestine, Cyprus).

Second, notwithstanding the progress made by the United Front, which represented a pro-states 'third front' in national politics, the BJP and Congress still occupy influential positions. The Congress, though the weakest of the three national groupings at the present, succeeded in undermining the United Front government in 1997, thereby precipitating a fresh round of national elections. As a party whose fortunes have been intimately connected with post-independence politics, the Congress has traditionally responded in a belligerent way to any prospects of resizing. In spite of the induction of Sonia Gandhi into the party's election campaign in 1998 (and her subsequent elevation to party leadership), Congress's share of seats in parliament actually declined, and its share of the vote fell to an historic low of 25.4 per cent.[64] A revival in the support for Congress in the short term seems unlikely – and in the long term cannot be ruled out – but its ability to consume coalition governments (1979–80, 1989–91, 1996–98) suggests a remarkable capacity for survival. A substantial period in opposition might enable the Congress to 'reconstruct' itself as a party of the regions but this endeavour, if undertaken, will challenge the historic association of the Congress with the creation of the modern Indian state. In all probability the Congress, like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, will be a reluctant partner in resizing the state it has founded.

The BJP openly despises the 'Congress culture' which it holds responsible for the country's contemporary difficulties. The party's meteoric rise since the 1980s has coincided with a Hindu revival which has led the BJP to aggressively advocate a Hindu state and cultural values to replace Nehruvian 'pseudo-secularism'. The BJP's vision of genuine secularism is founded in Hinduism, a common shared value of 'all Indians' that includes Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Hindus. Uncompromising ideological Hinduism is the BJP's remedy for preserving India's cultural identity which it sees as threatened by the growing

pressures of assimilation inherent in economic liberalization on the one hand, and regional insurgencies, on the other.

These policies have led the BJP to follow the politics of direct action that climaxed in the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque and led to nationwide clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Ayodhya prompted the dismissal of the BJP state government, but the party soon recovered its momentum by stoking xenophobic fears against the cultural consequences of globalization following economic liberalization. After the 1994/5 state elections, the BJP formed a short-lived national government (May 1996), and was the main beneficiary of political uncertainty gripping the nation. In the mid-term national elections of February 1998, the BJP achieved a landmark breakthrough which resulted from tactical alliances with regional parties.

Formally the BJP programme supports the creation of a Hindu state with some more militant factions often calling for the dismemberment of Pakistan (in the name of a continental Hindustan). The party, furthermore, has long supported the development of a nuclear programme and has resisted the pressures on India to join the Nuclear Test-ban Treaty. The BJP has also been the most vociferous opponent of Article 370 which grants special status to Kashmir. Its solution to the Kashmir question is to repeal Article 370 and integrate the valley into the Indian union, both politically and culturally. Similar proposals are also offered for resolving the discontent of peripheral and non-peripheral minorities. Group rights guaranteed by the constitution, such as Muslim Personal Law, the BJP insists, should be removed because of the imperative nation building and cultural homogeneity.[65]

However in the aftermath of the February 1998 national elections, the BJP seems to have moderated its political outlook. In leading a 17-party coalition, it agreed to a *National Agenda for Governance* which excluded three of the party's key manifesto commitments: the repeal of article 370, a uniform civil code, and construction of a temple on the site of the Ayodhya mosque. The coalition's programme was prominent on cultural nationalism ('India is to be built by Indians') but lacked detail in defining the parameters of this nationalism, especially with reference to economic policy.[66]

These developments have led some commentators to view the emergence of the BJP as a moderate nationalist force that is best reflected by its parliamentary leader Vajpayee. Others have been more sceptical, suggesting that the current moderation of the party is a 'mask', a 'master strategy to wrest political power under false pretences'.[67] Fears of such twin-tracking are further supported by statements by senior party officials that its agenda is currently on 'hold' until the party can establish itself as

the dominant one. The clearest indication of this is perhaps provided by BJP president, L.K. Advani, also one of its leading ideologues, who has described the current situation as 'the transformation of an ideological movement into a mass-based party'.[68]

Finally, since 1947 one of the main arguments used by New Delhi to resist the demands for resizing and reshaping the state is the potential opposition to such a policy from groups who would become minorities in any reorganization. In the debate about separatism for Kashmir, for example, the right of self-determination for Buddhists in Ladakh and Hindus in Jammu is counterposed to the claims made by Muslims in the valley.[69] In the peripheral regions the existence of large – and politically powerful – settler Hindu populations provides a constant source for nourishing beliefs about borders. These arguments were also skilfully exploited in the efforts to frustrate linguistic reorganization, and have been raised in opposition to new demands for creating further Indian states. To be fair, there are, indeed, large minorities in some of the Indian states: in Punjab, Hindus constitute 40 per cent of the total population; and in some smaller states the figure is even higher. Within the ethnic core the degree of diversity is less but not insignificant. Whether the existence of such minorities can continue to be used to deny decentralization, autonomy or self-determination is a matter for debate. In an interesting proposal, one writer has suggested the use of article 371 of the Indian Constitution, that allows for special provisions for individual states 'notwithstanding anything in the Constitution', to enable states to formulate their own constitutions with entrenched provisions on amendment (two-thirds and individual and group rights).[70] This proposal is remarkable only insofar as it draws directly from the suggestions made by the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) for establishing a loose federation for a united India.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to argue that in the debate about state expansion and contraction, the politics of moving borders and ethnicity, it is mistaken to accept the thesis of Indian exceptionalism: that is, the Indian experience since 1947 suggests a unique capacity for managing self-determination movements and ethnic conflicts without a fundamental revision of external borders. This view is ideologically prescriptive, theoretically untenable, and is empirically incorrect. The cost of sustaining an Indian Leviathan is the permanent militarization of the peripheral regions (punctuated with periods of hegemonic control), increasing uprisings, and global exposure to the brutal realities of India's

democracy. Because the peripheral regions have commanded few political resources, their demands have failed to be articulated at the regime level. Indeed, mainly because Nehru and other Congress elites were exceptionally successful in using the partition to embed beliefs about the new state's borders, the mere questioning of these beliefs became synonymous with subversion. This outlook, moreover, was reinforced by the peripheral and core divide in which the latter was the main power-base of the new state. If the self-determination movements in the peripheral regions served a function, they did so by holding a distorted reflection to the logic of Indian nation and state-building; and the methods used by the Indian state to manage conflicts in the peripheral regions revealed the hollow realities of its secularist credentials. Fifty years on the environment which created the Indian state no longer prevails. The bankruptcy of Nehruvian economic planning has resulted in economic liberalization and growing demands for decentralization within the ethnic core. Such a development, if it gains momentum, holds considerable potential both for resizing and reshaping the Indian union. This potential will really become meaningful if links are established between the two processes. Although there are significant forces which oppose the pressures towards resizing, the strength of this opposition is perhaps more ideological than rooted in contemporary political realities. In many ways the rise of the BJP represents the most promising potential for change – either towards a continental assertion of Hindutva or its contraction to the core. The main irony of the 1990s is that the legacy of Congress nation and state-building offers few opportunities for ambitious political elites today. Only if they escape from the intellectual trap that Congress ideology has constructed, is it possible to utilize the resources available for reshaping and resizing the Indian union to meet the political challenges of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. Resizing refers to external borders; reshaping, internal boundaries.
2. See A. Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
3. See G. Singh, 'Understanding Political Corruption in Contemporary Indian Politics', *Political Studies*, 45:3 (1997), 626–38.
4. To highlight the legal claim to Kashmir, the Indian usage, as we shall see, is always Jammu and Kashmir. For simplicity we shall use the designation Kashmir where appropriate.

5. This total is a guesstimate between the under-reporting in the official figures and the over-reporting by protagonists. For example in Punjab whereas the official figures are around 25 000, human rights groups believe that the actual number of fatalities is near 45 000. Likewise in Kashmir the official figure is around 25 000 whereas Kashmiris put the total at 50 000. The additional 10 000 includes the casualties in Assam. See Ch. 10 for a more detailed discussion of the Punjab figures and Ch. 1, n. 14 for reference to Kashmir.
6. S.S. Thandi, 'Counterinsurgency and Political Violence in Punjab, 1980–94', in G. Singh and I. Talbot (eds), *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change* (Manohar: New Delhi: 1996), 159–85.
7. See S. Krishna, 'Cartographic Anxieties: Mapping the Body Politic in India', *Alternative*, 19: 4, 507–21.
8. J.N. Dixit, 'Kashmir: the Contemporary Geo-Political Implications for India and Regional Stability and Security', paper presented at a conference on Kashmir, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, April 8 1994 (unpublished), 6–7.
9. See Ch. 2 for a review of some of the literature.
10. For examples, see A. Varshney, 'India, Pakistan and Kashmir: Antinomies of Nationalism', *Asian Survey,* 31:11 (November 1991), 997–1019 and contributions to the special issue of *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 56:2 (May 1997), on 'Community Conflicts and the State in India'.
11. S.K. Mitra, 'Sub-national Movements in South Asia: Identity, Collective Action and Political Power', in S.K. Mitra and R. Alison Lewis (eds), *Sub-national Movements in South Asia* (Boulder: CO, Westview Press, 1996), 14–41.
12. P.R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*: *Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), see ch. 5.
13. See Y. Samad, *A Nation in Turmoil: Nationalism and Ethnicity in Pakistan, 1937–1958* (New Delhi: Sage Publications); I. Talbot, '"Back to the Future?", 1995. The Punjab Unionist Model of Consociation Democracy for Contemporary India and Pakistan', *International Journal of Punjab Studies,* 3:1 (1996), 65–73.
14. See I. Ahmed, *State, Nation and Ethnicity in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Pinter Press, 1996) and S. Mahmud Ali, *The Fearful State: Power, People and Internal Wars in South Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1993).
15. I.S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993). See ch. 4 for its application.
16. J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, (eds), *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), see Introduction.
17. See Ch. 3
18. McGarry and O'Leary, op. cit., p. 23.
19. D. Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.
20. The influence of the Soviet nationalities question on Nehru was considerable. Writing before 1947 he noted: 'The right of any well-constituted area to secede from the Indian federation or union has been put forward, and the argument of the USSR advanced in support of it … Before any such right of secession is exercised there must be a properly constituted, functioning, free India. It may be possible then, when external influences

have been removed and real problems face the country, to consider such questions objectively and in the spirit of relative detachment, far removed from the emotionalism of today, which can only lead to unfortunate consequences which we will regret later. Thus it may be desirable to fix a period, say ten years after the establishment of the free Indian state, at the end of which the right to secede may be exercised through proper constitutional process and in accordance with the clearly expressed will of the inhabitants of the area concerned.' J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Signet Press, 1989), 534. In the event Nehru's commitment to the right of self-determination of Indian states after 1947, as Kashmir was to demonstrate, was more tactical than strategic.

21. See, Brass as an example.
22. For a recent statement of this position, see J. Manor, '"Ethnicity" and Politics in India', *International Affairs*, 72:3 (1996), 459–75, 495–7.
23. This description of hegemonic control is made with reference to Northern Ireland, see B. O'Leary and P. Arthur, 'Introduction', in J. McGarry and B. O'Leary (eds), *The Future of Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1–47, but clearly has wide application.
24. For a wider discussion of these methods, see McGarry and O'Leary (1993), op. cit., 'Introduction'.
25. Most contemporary interpretations of the Indo-China war blamed communist China as the aggressor. At the height of the Cold War, when Nehru successfully portrayed India as the leader of the Non-aligned movement, this interpretation was readily accepted. Recent scholarship has shown that 'India led the world up the garden path' and demolishes the belief that 'India was the victim of Chinese aggression'. For a rigorous account of one such interpretation, see N. Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).
26. T.V. Sathyamurthy, 'The State of Debate on Indian Nationalism', 25th Millennium Anniversary Conference Paper, (October, 1996) (unpublished), 23–4.
27. R. Thakur, *The Politics and Economics of India's Foreign Policy* (London: Hurst and Co., 1994), 76.
28. See Brass, op. cit., ch. 5.
29. See A. Kohli, 'Can Democracies Accommodate Ethnic Nationalism? Rise and Decline of Self-Determination Movements in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 56:2 (May, 1997), 325–44.
30. For a useful survey of the Kashmir dispute, see B. Puri, *Kashmir: towards Insurgency* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).
31. K. Balagopal, 'Kashmir: Self-determination, Communal and Democratic Rights', *Economic and Political Weekly* (November 2 1997), 2916–21.
32. Amnesty International, *India: Torture, Rape and Death in Custody* (London: 1992).
33. Dixit, op. cit., 1–6.
34. *India Today*, October 31 1996.
35. Ibid., October 31 1996.
36. Thandi, op. cit., 165.
37. See Chs. 8 and 9.
38. See Ch. 10.

39. Ali, op. cit., 31.
40. S. Gupta, *India Redefines its Role* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and IISS, 1995), 25.
41. See Mitra, op. cit.
42. S. Bose, 'A Doubtful Inheritance: the Partition of Bengal', in D.A. Low (ed.), *The Political Inheritance of Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 130–43.
43. Hegemonic beliefs about the Indian nation have an underlying assumption, as Upadhyaya notes, 'that minorities should forgo their status and identity and identify with the cultural and political quest of the majority community (that is, Hindu). This perception is evident in the nature of debate about India's current political problems, for instance, the reporting of troubles in Kashmir and Punjab. Minority political mobilization is automatically viewed as being inherently anti-national, separatist, even when it is couched in constitutional terms, as in the case of the demands put forward by the Akalis in the 1960s and 1970s. But similar demands are not treated with the same suspicion when they come from "Hindu" quarters.' P.C. Upadhyaya, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 26:4 (1992), 841.
44. Interestingly the BJP in its manifesto for the 1998 elections supported the creation of new states within the ethnic core while advocating the abrogation of article 370 and a hard line against terrorism and separatism. See *India News Network Digest*, 2 (February 7 1998), indnews@INDENET.ORG. The India Network Foundation, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA.
45. See C. Jaffrelot and B. Hansen, *The BJP and its Allies* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
46. See Chs. 10 and 11.
47. *India Today,* September 30 1993.
48. N. Mukarji, 'Strengthening Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly,* (May 11 1996), 1129–34.
49. See *The Sunday Tribune,* July 21 1996.
50. *India Today*, September 15 1996.
51. Ibid., June 30 1996.
52. Between 1991 and 1996 central transfers to the states declined from 6 per cent of gross domestic product to 4.5 per cent. *India Today,* June 30 1996. As a percentage of states' expenditure, the share of gross transfers from the centre has declined from 56 per cent in 1990–91 to 42.2 per cent in 1993–94. *India Today*, December 31 1995.
53. Ibid., December 31 1995.
54. Gujarat, over the same period, attracted 20.6 per cent of all inward investment. *India Today*, December 31 1995.
55. Much discussion in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, India's leading intellectual journal, has focused on the increase in poverty *within* states as a result of economic liberalization. This tends to overlook the fact that poverty is regionally concentrated, both before and after economic liberalization. In 1987–88, for instance, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, accounted for 34 per cent of the population defined as poor. See A. Sen, 'Economic Reforms, Employment and Poverty: Trends and Options', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number (September 1996), 2460. As these and other populous states – West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil

Nadu – have been relatively unsuccessful in attracting foreign investment, the argument that inter-state disparities will increase seems valid and is reflected in their current income per capita.

56. Again within the columns of the *Economic and Political Weekly* there is much discussion of the potential political consequences of economic liberalization – usually equated with globalization – for India. See A.M. and Kishnaswamy, 'Between Friends ... ', *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 22 1994), and R. Kothari, 'Globalization and Revival of Tradition: Dual Attack on Model of Nation Building', *Economic and Political Weekly* (March 22 1995), 625–33.
57. 'Sons of Soil' policies came into prominence in the 1970s as a result of increasing migration within Indian states, see M. Weiner, *Sons of Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Some transnational corporations operating in India have encountered strong political pressures to ethnically discriminate in favour of the 'sons of the soil'. Interview, R. Bagga, December 12 1997 (London).
58. Despite BJP's rhetoric about 'self-reliance', its economic policy does not seek to reverse economic liberalization but to adapt it to an Indian vision of globalization. See *India Today,* March 30 1998.
59. These comments were made by Dixit at the Centre for Indian Studies, University of Hull, March 4 1996.
60. *India Network News Digest*. indnews@INDENT.ORG, March 26 1997.
61. *India Today*, Special issue on the 50th anniversary of independence (August 10 1997).
62. Ibid., March 15 1996.
63. D. Cartwright and A. Matto, 'Elite Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons' Policy in India', *Asian Survey,* 36:6, 545–60.
64. *India Today,* March 16 1998.
65. These proposals were included in the BJP manifesto for the 1998 elections. See *India News Network Digest*, 2 (7 February 1998), indnews@ INDENET.ORG.
66. *India Today*, March 30 1998.
67. Ibid., February 9 1998.
68. Ibid.
69. See V. Hewitt, *Reclaiming the Past?* (London: Portland Books, 1995).
70. Mukarji, op. cit., 1315.

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