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PUNJAB SINCE 1984

Disorder, Order, and Legitimacy

Gurharpal Singh

In the general discussion of legitimacy in South Asian politics, the issue of disorder and the maintenance of order in peripheral regions has received little attention. Most South Asian states face regional and subnational movements that stubbornly resist the transformation of order into routinized legitimacy. Some of these challenges (Kashmir, Sind, the Tamil movement in Sri Lanka) are so profound that they question the very bases of the state system; others (Punjab, Assam, Nagaland) 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 after 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 a "model"—with all-India implications—of a government that has successfully overcome one of the most difficult confrontations since independence.

This article aims to examine critically the explanations being offered for the transformation of Punjab's political crisis into a managed model of orderly rule. This will be done by focusing on developments from 1987 to 1995. After outlining the scale of disorder and reviewing the flawed attempt

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1. Political order and challenges to legitimacy in South Asia have recently been operationalized in terms of "governance," for example, in Atul Kholi's *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Ungovernability* (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 extremes and order occupying an intermediate position. The term legitimacy as used in this article will refer to rule-bound behavior that commands majority consent freely given and is underpinned by "normative agreement" on how rules are constructed.

to reconstruct the state's political system under the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, we will examine perspectives that underpin the dramatic change: (1) effective anti-terrorism; (2) Punjab's social structure; and (3) the case of "managed disorder." None of these perspectives is exclusive and there is considerable overlap. The article concludes with a reflection on the implications of achieving "order" for future politics in the state.

Disorder and the Rajiv-Longowal Accord

The magnitude of the disorder in Punjab can be appreciated by the scale of violence. Since 1981 almost 25,000 people have been killed, and the number of disappearances and illegal detainees remain unknown although the latter are estimated at from 20,000 to 45,000. At its peak between 1989–92, the insurgency by Sikh militants campaigning for Khalistan, a separate Sikh state, threatened to overwhelm the security forces and effectively sidelined the moderates in the Akali Dal, the mainstream Sikh political party. From May 1987 to February 1992, Punjab was under President's Rule, was quasi-militarized with a de facto "police raj." A series of special laws not only suspended the normal political process in the state but empowered the security forces to take draconian measures to contain disorder and insurgency. The level of violence increased dramatically from 1987 onward, with the death toll rising steadily from 1,333 in 1987 to 5,265 in 1991 before falling to 3,883 in 1992 and 871 in 1993.[2] During these years, Punjab was often referred to as an area of "darkness" where virtual civil war conditions prevailed.

In contrast to the events leading up to Operation Blue Star in 1984, the subsequent period has received little scholarly attention[3]; the causes of the "Punjab problem" were stressed rather than factors that sustained the political structure in the state during this period. Some scholars have now begun to explore the strategies of conflict management pursed by the center since 1984, but even here the emphasis is on broad policy—or the lack of it—rather than on local conditions or anti-terrorist strategy. A plausible explanation probably lies in the fixation with the 1985 Rajiv-Longowal Accord as a kind of social contract of Punjab politics.

Indeed, most conventional writing on the Punjab problem since 1984 suggests that the subsequent causes of the troubles lay in the inability of the center to deliver on the accord.[4] Completed against the backdrop of Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, the election of Rajiv Gandhi as Congress (I) leader,

2. The figures are cited in *The Week* (New Delhi), 5 June 1994.

3. For two recent contributions, see Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), and Gurharpal Singh, "The Punjab Crisis since 1984: A Reassessment," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18:3 (July 1995), pp. 476–93.

4. Atul Kholi, *Democracy and Discontent*; Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (New Delhi: Sage, 1991).

and the latter's landslide victory in the 1984 elections, the Rajiv-Longowal Accord appeared to mark a new departure in regional policy. The territorial, economic, and religious demands that had fueled the Sikh agitation before 1984, and were held to be non-negotiable by Mrs. Gandhi, were now recognized, and for the moderate Akali Da Longowal AD(L), the accord provided a return to democratic politics. For Rajiv Gandhi, it represented a dynamic breakthrough and a befitting start to his premiership.

Yet, in retrospect the accord, far from marking a new departure in Punjab politics, was a continuation of the center's policy, dating from the late 1940s, of symbolic agreements accompanied by non-implementation. It had been hastily formulated by Rajiv's advisors, and the AD(L) party to the agreement was assiduously groomed by New Delhi along the familiar pattern of tactical concession of political power at the state level as quid pro quo for deflection, diffusion, and de-emphasis on ethnic demands. As a wit aptly put it, this effort was a continuation of a process in which secular and (Indian) nationalist Sikh leaders have been regularly "hailed" by New Delhi only to be "nailed" when they have served their purpose. That this role proved difficult for AD(L) was soon to become apparent. The AD(L) government, which came to power in September 1985, rapidly disintegrated as Rajiv's commitment to the accord waned and the Congress (I) government at the center reverted to interference in the administration of Punjab for short-term gains.

Whereas the center increasingly viewed the AD(L) administration in terms of containing militancy, the latter's capacity to do so was undermined by Delhi's reluctance to implement provisions of the accord. The transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, scheduled for January 26, 1986, was first delayed, then postponed, and eventually suspended for an indefinite period. Other provisions were either nullified or produced outcomes incompatible with the original agreement. The ultimate reversal of policy was marked by the Congress (I)'s factional penetration of the AD(L) government from April 1986 onward, the appointment of a highly partisan governor (Ray), and the installation of Julius Ribeiro as director general of police with a wide brief to undertake anti-terrorist operations.

The "Success" of President's Rule

The AD(L) government was dismissed in May 1987 when President's Rule was imposed on the grounds that there was "chaos and anarchy in Punjab." Anti-terrorism now became the main instrument of the center's policy in the state. Despite the misgivings of most analysts, the policy appears to have succeeded without making major political concessions, either to militants or the moderate Akali leadership. What factors account for this success? As noted above, there are three different interpretations that require further examination.

Effective Anti-Terrorism

The most public explanation for the restoration of order in Punjab credits the security forces' effective anti-terrorist policies. Although anti-terrorism had become the main thrust of the center's policy after May 1987, it was only in mid-1992 that the security forces achieved an impressive breakthrough. Nevertheless, the policy had been vigorously pursued in what Ribeiro called a form of "bullets for bullets," which led to a number of major changes. The security apparatus in Punjab, particularly the Punjab Police, was reorganized.[5] In addition to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF), and the regular use of the Army, the Punjab Police was strengthened with the creation of new senior posts and mass recruitment at constable and special constable levels. Anti-terrorist legislation—the National Security Act (1980), Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance (1983), Terrorist Areas (Special Courts) Act (1984), and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) (1985)—was rigorously enforced with official approval for a "shoot to kill" policy when known offenders were apprehended. Moreover, counterinsurgency was given a high priority with the employment of irregular hit squads intended to infiltrate and liquidate terrorist organizations.

The political backing for anti-terrorism began to waiver with the November 1989 Indian election of the National Front government and eight radical Sikh MPs from Punjab out of the state's 13 Lok Sabha constituencies. While V. P. Singh's National Front government sought to introduce more accountability into the operation of the security forces, its successor led by Chandra Shekhar opened a dialogue with the militants that eventually culminated in the agreement to hold Punjab Legislative Assembly (PLA) elections in June 1991. During this period, it is argued, the morale of the security forces plummeted as some former terrorists prepared to capture power through the ballot box in a contest that was boycotted by the Congress (I). Thus, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the massacre of 76 passengers on two trains, and the election of a Congress (I) government at the center in June 1991, provided a set of circumstances that led to the reinforcement of political will and commitment to anti-terrorism.

In the autumn of 1991, several measures were taken to "pacify" Punjab. K. P. S. Gill, the former chief of police who had ruthlessly prosecuted the anti-terrorist campaign, was reinstated in that post. Simultaneously, nine more divisions of the Indian Army were moved into the province to contain

5. The Punjab Police increased its personnel from about 20,000 in the early 1980s to approximately 60,000 in 1992, and expenditures went from Rs 200 million in 1981 to Rs 7 billion in 1993. *Tribune* (Chandigarh), 5 March 1993).

militancy.[6] The Army's deployment at its peak in February 1992 during the PLA elections blanketed the state with security, for in addition to 120,000 army personnel, it could call on 53,000 Punjab Police, 28,000 Home Guards, 10,000 Special Police, and over 70,000 paramilitary personnel. Unlike previous deployments, in Operation Rakshak II launched in November 1991, the Army took a backstage role by providing support to the police and administration to re-establish the authority of the state. This was done by freeing the police from routine duties to undertake more offensive actions and by sealing the Indo-Pakistan border.

Further support for the policy came with the Congress victory in the February 1992 Punjab Legislative Assembly (PLA) elections, which were boycotted by the mainstream Sikh political parties. As the raison d'etre of the new administration was to combat militancy, it gave a free hand to security forces to "systematically plan for five years to rid Punjab of militancy."[7] Gill bolstered the police by further recruitment; incentives were offered leading to the elimination of suspected terrorists, and police tactics were reevaluated. Massacres by terrorists were countered by massacres by the security forces, and the new mood of determination was aptly stated by Gill, who declared an "open season on terrorists."[8]

The first results of aggressive anti-terrorism became evident in the middle of 1992 when several leading figures of militant organizations were killed. Thereafter, despite the efforts of the militants to regroup and target families of the police, the security forces gained the upper hand. This turnabout was marked by a number of well publicized "surrender ceremonies" of terrorists and the death of Manochahal, the leader of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force, in February 1993. With the latter's death, most top-ranking militants had been eliminated and their organizations rapidly disintegrated.

Aggressive anti-terrorism, however, was not without its limitations. For one, though the policy's effectiveness against leading militants was quite marked, it lacked subtlety in dealing with the militants' support structures. One set of figures available suggests that the casualty rate between 1984 and 1994 was 60.8% terrorist, 31% civilian, and 8.2% security forces.[9] Thus, the main victims of violence in Punjab were not the security forces but civilians and terrorists. A more detailed assessment of figures for the elimination of

6. After 1984 the Army was deployed in Punjab in Operation Rakshak I (May 1990), during which its role was to seal the border with Pakistan and assist the police in anti-terrorist operations. In May 1991 the army was asked to withdraw from the border districts. In Operation Rakshak II (November 1991 onward), troops from I, II, and VI corps were used to swamp the state with a security cordon prior to the holding of Punjab Assembly elections in February 1992.

7. *Jane's Defence Weekly* (London), 23 June 1993.

8. *India Today*, 15 April 1993.

9. *The Week*, 5 June 1994.

terrorists in the first six months of 1992 suggests that the ratio of "hardcore terrorists" to "non-hardcore terrorists" killed varied from 1:9 to 1:18, respectively.[10] Methods may have been employed for sound reasons—to instill fear and discourage further recruitment by militants—but the outcome suggests a more blunderbuss approach. Concern at such "effectiveness" was expressed even by sections of the Army.[11] More significantly, however, the cost of counter-insurgency in Punjab since 1984 has been estimated at around Rs 60 billion, a figure that excludes certain hidden costs and army expenditures. While one might be justified in arguing that this expenditure was necessary to fight the "nation's war," we need to examine the implications of entrenching a "security state" that has become one of the main consumers of Punjab government spending.[12]

Punjab's Social Structure

A more interesting perspective on how order was reestablished in Punjab places the role of counter-insurgency in a broader context. It suggests that the success of anti-terrorism was not simply the result of actions taken by the security forces, 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 within the Jat Sikh peasantry, and this fact has drawn the attention of some social anthropologists.[13] Historically, studies of Jat Sikhs have shown the continuation of certain types of social behavior: high propensity toward factionalism, competitiveness, egalitarianism, and pursuit of vertical linkages to enhance the accumulation of property and prestige.[14] 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—apart from its religious institutions—has developed few associations of horizontal nature, and is characterized essentially by vertical

10. This is based on data cited in *The Tribune* (January-June 1992).

11. *India Today*, 30 April 1991.

12. See Shinder S. Thandi, "Counter-insurgency and Political Violence in Punjab 1980–1994," in Gurharpal Singh and Ian Talbot, eds., *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

13. Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, and Joyce Pettigrew, "Achieving a New Frontier: Rural Political Patterns and Their Impact on the Sikh Independence Movement," *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2:1 (April 1995).

14. Joyce Pettigrew, *Robber Noblemen* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1975).

linkages that in times of crisis can easily become porous and do not serve as structures of resistance, opposition, and mobilization.

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

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.[15]

These characteristics made the militant movement easy prey to infiltration, counter-insurgency, and manipulation by the security forces. Local and personal vendettas were skillfully exploited by the police and the unofficial counter-insurgency forces. In fact, it is suggested that the whole militant movement was thoroughly infiltrated by the counter-insurgency 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 to generate intense factionalism. Indeed, there is a powerful logic in this for it draws attention to the way Jat Sikh politics have been "managed" by the Congress Party since 1947 through skillful exploitation of factional rivalries. And if, under the disturbed conditions of 1984–95, use of the same tactic led to disorder, anarchy, and the loss of innocent lives, then it must be situated, its advocates insist, 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'."[16]

15. Joyce Pettigrew, "The State and Local Groupings in the Sikh Rural Areas Post-1984," in Singh and Talbot, *Punjabi Identity*.

16. Manoj Joshi, *Combatting Terrorism in Punjab* (London: RISCI, 1993), p. 20.

"Managed Disorder"

Although the relative ease with which the security forces penetrated the militants can perhaps be attributed to the social structure, it has also 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 of events before and after 1984 and the fact that this view is strongly held by the main Sikh 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 contributing factor to the troubles, few have ever doubted the Indian state's capacity to impose its authority in the province. Unlike other peripheral regions of the Indian Union, Punjab hardly constitutes ideal territory for guerrilla warfare. Moreover, previous examples of insurgency (Babbar Akalis, Communists, Naxalites) in the province, before and after 1947, provide ready case studies of the failure of what the novelist Jaswant Singh Kanwal has called "revolts of the blood."[17] What was different about the militants' campaign for Khalistan was that elements within the central government actively supported the secessionists, only to put them to the sword later. The Machiavellian maneuvers of Indira Gandhi and events leading up to Operation Blue Star in 1984 have been well documented,[18] and even if the 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 center and the security forces did note end with the Rajiv-Longowal accord but continued thereafter. Evidence now emerging on the "secret war" against terrorism points conclusively to the direct involvement of sections of the security and counter-insurgency intelligence agencies in the setting-up, control, and actions of certain militant organizations.[19] This involvement cannot be dismissed purely in terms of the "necessary requirements of counter-insurgency"; the exact extent of the influence might never be known, but what is certain is that those who were in a position to provide some answers—militant leaders—have been killed with ruthless efficiency.

The "managed disorder" explanation is further supported by circumstantial evidence, as little systematic research has thus far been undertaken into the various "operations" and strategic acts of "terror." Many of the security operations (e.g., Operation Black Thunder) were stage-managed or deliberately

17. J. S. Kanwal, *Lhue de Lohe* (New Delhi: Arsi Publishers, 1982), in Punjabi.

18. See Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).

19. This point is forcefully made by Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, ch. 3. For confessions of a former police "black cat," see *Tribune*, 10 November 1994.

limited in nature (Operation Rakshak I).[20] 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 the 1992 Assembly elections—has hardly been started. Any such assessment would have to evaluate a number of inconsistencies, not the 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 Party has been the main proponent of anti-terrorism, its pursuit of this policy has "fortuitously" coincided with the resurrection of its political fortunes in Punjab.

The case for "managed disorder" also highlights a parallel example: Assam, it is suggested, was forerunner of the "Punjab model," and interestingly, many of the leading administrative and security personnel were transferred from Assam to Punjab.[21] More significantly, interviews with leading "moderate" Akalis indicate their dismay that the "10 percent government"—a reference to the Congress (I) victory in the very light voter turnout in the 1992 PLA elections—was able so effectively and quickly to deal with the militant threat. The militants, they contend, were either "paper tigers" or Congress "agents" whose actions directly or indirectly benefited only one party. Of course, reality might not be so simple and charges by Congress agents against the militants have been the regular retort to moderate Akalis. The truth probably lies somewhere in between, for as has been noted, both the militants and the security forces certainly succeeded in "terrorising the people of Punjab."[22]

Order in Punjab and Beyond

Whatever factors are held to be critical in the undermining of the militancy in Punjab, a number of implications arise for the political system in the state and for the management of regional conflicts generally. First, effective anti-terrorism creates more problems than it solves. In addition to the high costs of such a policy, there is the obvious brutalization of the administration and civil society, cataloged extensively by human rights agencies in the case of Punjab.[23] Such brutalization cannot be sustained simply 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. A per-

20. For a detailed account of the center's efforts to split the militant leadership before Operation Black Thunder, see Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles*, vol. 4 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers), ch. 5.

21. Shekhar Gupta, *India Redefines Its Role*, Adelphi Paper 293 (Oxford: OUP, 1995).

22. *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 23 September 1989.

23. For example, *Human Rights in India: Punjab in Crisis* (New York: Asia Watch, 1991).

ceptive 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."[24]

Indeed, the "security state" in Punjab established a degree of paramountcy over the civil administration that has been resented both by the state's bureaucracy and, to some extent, Chief Minister Beant Singh's administration since 1992. It openly justified the coercion of non-militant opposition politicians, and it resents formal scrutiny, either by its own internal systems or outside bodies such as the judiciary or human rights organizations.[25] Indeed, the submissions from Punjab to the National Human Rights Commission, the national debate over the renewal of TADA, and the extensive use of writ petitions in the Punjab High Court have increasingly highlighted the executive preeminence of the "security state." But perhaps the major drawback to the kind of "effective anti-terrorism" practiced in Punjab is its capacity for repetition. Underpinned by the assumption of 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 center, such commitment may not always be forthcoming.

Second, 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 government 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 that itself is a minority in the all-India context and is heavily integrated into the local and national state structure. Set against these overwhelming odds, it seems that militancy is unlikely to succeed unless accompanied by a set of concurrent crises: lack of cohesion and decisiveness at the center, a generalized geopolitical conflagration, and above all, a high degree of political unity among Sikhs.

Third, in light of the above arguments we must also reflect on the ability of the Congress (I) government in Punjab since 1992 to convert "order" into "legitimacy." So far this process has been relatively problematic, with the political capital gained in "defeating terrorism" wasted in scandals, corruption, and the continued use of coercion to intimidate mainstream Akalis. While the government has had some success in municipal and *panchayat*

24. Joshi, *Combatting Terrorism in Punjab*, p. 28.

25. On 28 August 1993, the Punjab Civil Service leadership demanded a judicial commission enquiry into the rise and decline of militancy during President's Rule vis-à-vis the role of the police. Cited in Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, p. 134.

elections, the relatively nonpartisan nature of these elections and the extensive use of security personnel and the civil administration to influence the outcomes has been well noted. Surprisingly, Congressites are split between those who want to sustain the anti-militant coalition and continue to malign the Akalis with it, and those who recognize that long-term political stability in the Punjab necessitates hearing the voice of the Sikh peasantry.

In the short term, however, the anti-militant rhetoric is likely to remain as a substitute for policy because of the ideological investment of Punjab's Congress leadership in the strategy, the lack of fiscal resources to pursue a social/development policy, and the potential for mobilization by the Akalis. Even the much publicized decision of the central government, announced during Prime Minister Rao's visit to Punjab in April (1995), to cancel Punjab's Rs. 60 billion debt incurred in fighting terrorism remains to be implemented. Thus far, the center has only waived one installment of interest on this debt. In the medium term, the possibility for change cannot be ruled out because of the possibility of leadership change in the national Congress Party.

Finally, given the difficulties faced by the Congress (I) government in constructing legitimacy in Punjab, the question arises as to whether normal rules of the game can be re-established. Does Punjab require, for example, a new Rajiv-Longowal Accord? Or has the Congress succeeded in reconstructing not only order but the Sikh political system?

The argument presented so far contends that within the Punjab political system, fundamental issues of legitimacy remain not only because the current "order" is constructed on political pillars of sand without seriously addressing the central concerns that caused the Punjab troubles, but also because maintaining lasting legitimacy requires confronting the values of the Sikh political system. I have argued that the relationship between the Indian state and the Sikh community since 1947 has been characterized by "hegemonic 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. 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. As Mitra has persuasively argued:

> Defending a strong central government at all costs in Punjab, and more recently Kashmir, is enough to demonstrate the need for greater accommodation of regional and religious interests. A modern secular state as the lowest common denominator of regional and religious differences can generate neither the strength nor the legitimacy adequate for 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 secular sources of authority in India.[26]

The case for such an accommodation is surely overwhelming in the few regions where India's minorities are in the majority because the intra-consociational features of the old Congress System have long since disintegrated and the 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 a modern secular system in South Asia's peripheral regions may require that political power grow out of the "barrel of a gun" rather than come from consent freely and willingly given.

In conclusion it should be noted that the issues of order and disorder in the case of Punjab, and probably elsewhere in the peripheral regions of 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 severe difficulties for those entrusted with the task of maintaining order. This realization should call for a better understanding of conditions that can contribute to sustained normative legitimacy and acts of political closure that abort, limit, and restrict transactional politics.

26. Subrata K. Mitra, "Desecularising the State: Religion and Politics in India After Independence," *Comparative Studies in Society*, 33:4 (October 1991), pp. 755–77.