

CRIMINALIZING DISSENT:

Repression of Sikhs in Indian-Occupied Punjab



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About the Sikh Liberation Front

Sikh Liberation Front is an international jathebandi committed to developing Panthic leadership. Sikh Liberation Front mobilizes the Sikh panth to embody its indigenous sovereignty in the fight for Khalistan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sikh panth has been actively resisting colonial dispossession and foreign occupation by asserting its right to sovereignty since 1849. **To this day, Indian security forces in Indian-occupied Punjab continue to repress Sikh dissent and expression through the criminalization of political activism.** The repressive measures used by the state eliminate the democratic political space required by peoples to exercise the right to self-determination and therefore risk further escalation of the armed conflict.

This report will outline specific cases of harassment and interference by the Indian state in which Sikh foreign nationals have been harassed upon their arrival into Indian territory due to their political activism in the Sikh diaspora; incidents of police firing on unarmed protestors resulting in multiple deaths; and multiple cases of activists killed extrajudicially in police custody with impunity. These examples illustrate the ongoing lack of democratic space for any dissenting Sikh political expression operating within the legal framework of India.

Following the British Transfer of Power to the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1947, the Indian state has continued to use all of the forces at its disposal to maintain the occupation and crush Sikh aspirations for independence through a fluid strategy ranging between assimilation and annihilation. After the Sikh genocide between 1984-1995, to quell the armed Sikh liberation movement for a separate state, Khalistan, **the Indian state continues to use its judicial and coercive security apparatus to criminalize and**

repress Sikh political dissent and expression.

In response to a renewed increase in Sikh political activity in Punjab in recent years, Indian security forces have been clamping down on activists across the region. Between April 16—December 1, 2017 alone, the Indian state has arrested at least 52 Sikh youth, accused of various purported acts of sedition and terror under draconian measures of the Indian penal code. Those arrested are dominantly young Sikh men, active in democratically organizing their communities to advocate for an independent Khalistan.

A significant proportion of those arrested are explicitly accused of engaging and promoting public discussions on Sikh sovereignty over social media or other democratic channels. Further, the demographic targeting of Sikh activists continues a genocidal policy which explicitly identifies Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs and those who maintain a dastar (turban) and beard, as national enemies, and therefore disproportionately targeted as legitimized subjects of suspicion, arrest, and/or elimination.

This report seeks to contextualize this recent chain of events in order to illustrate the Indian state's ongoing efforts to criminalize Sikh dissent and eliminate Sikh sovereignty from public discourse.

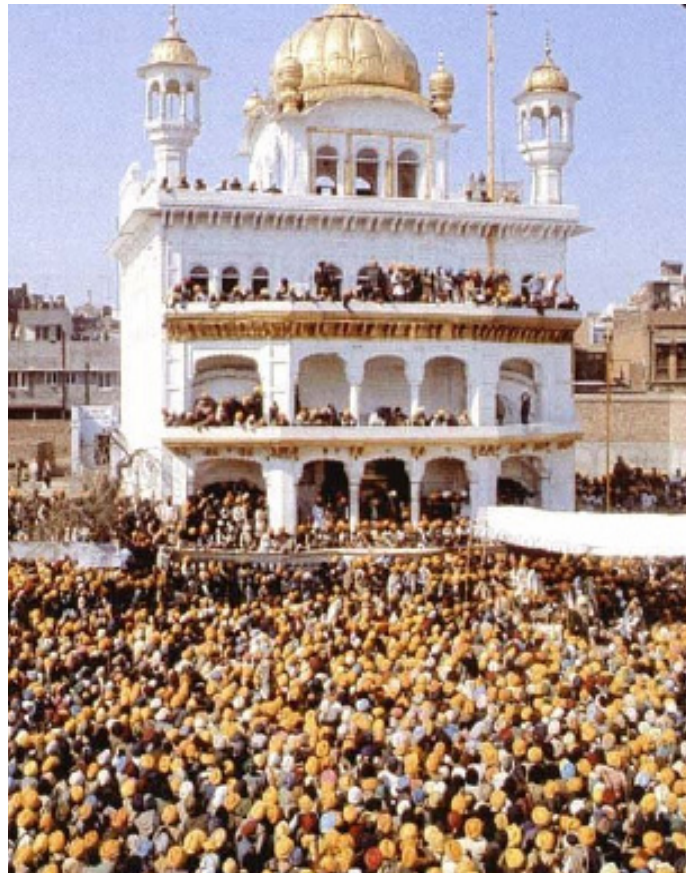
BACKGROUND: SIKH SOVEREIGNTY AND THE POLITICS OF GENOCIDE

Since the annexation of the Sikh confederacy by the British in 1849, the Sikh panth has been resiliently resisting foreign occupation and mobilizing to re-establish sovereign rule in accordance with the Sikh values of Patshahi and Miri-Piri. The manifestations of Sikh liberation movements over the past 168 years have taken a variety of forms that continue to inspire and drive Sikh self-determination today.

After the annexation, the British colonizers of the region sought to forcibly integrate Punjab under the unification and homogenization of the entire subcontinent within an artificial Indian identity that has never existed prior. Upon the the British Transfer of Power, the INC-dominated Indian state aggressively escalated this political program of centralization and homogenization despite the resistance of countless minority communities. In response, Sikh movements have strategically taken fluid and diverse forms to maintain the political autonomy, cultural identity, and economic sustenance of the Sikh panth. Despite the persistence of conflict, the Indian state has stubbornly refused any political settlement on the question of Sikh sovereignty.

In the face of growing Sikh resistance in 1984, the Indian political establishment, led by Indira Gandhi and the INC, shifted gears from a policy of assimilation to annihilation. In June 1984, the Indian army invaded the political capitol of the Sikh panth as the state embarked upon a genocidal campaign—that would last up to a decade—with the aim of eliminating the dissenting community.

Through indigenous mechanisms of self-governance, including the 1986 Sarbat Khalsa, **the Sikh panth has repeatedly declared the intention to secede from the Indian state and establish an independent state, Khalistan, to achieve the aspiration of Sikh sovereignty.** The unequivocal support for this objective can be seen in the resounding electoral results of 1989 and 1992 in support of secessionist demands, **and repeated ratification of this goal as recently as the Sarbat Khalsa in 2015.**



Sikhs gather at Sri Akaal Takhat Sahib for the Sarbat Khalsa which unanimously declared Sikh sovereignty as the primary political objective of the Khalsa panth.

GENOCIDAL COUNTER-INSURGENCY

In response, Indian security forces have been mobilized to eliminate this resistance with the full backing and support of the political and judicial establishment. By firmly rejecting a political settlement on self-determination, the Indian state has remained determined to crush dissent militarily and forcibly impose its political hegemony over the region.

In the early 1990s, the state's vicious counter-insurgency strategy to eliminate and permanently foreclose Sikh dissent was escalated in a well-documented formulaic process:

- Militarizing the police and overwhelming the region with an armed military presence
- Enforced disappearances of human rights activists, journalists, and democratic Sikh political leadership

- Incentivizing the extrajudicial murder of activists and guerrillas with impunity through an elaborate bounty system using unmarked funds
- Crushing popular support through illegal detention, enforced disappearances and draconian laws

In the interests of a military solution to the conflict, the state police force was highly militarized and supplemented with the mass influx of central forces including the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Border Security Force (BSF), and the Indo-Tibetan Border Force (ITBF).¹ The size of the state police force exploded over the period, with over 70,000 officers in March 1994 compared to a force smaller than 25,000 in 1975; this made Punjab the most highly concentrated area in the subcontinent with nearly 100 police officers per 100 square kilometres in comparison to a national average of 45 officers across the country.² This massive force would be



Officers stand over the body of a young Sikh man killed by Indian security forces.

¹ Birinder Pal Singh, *Violence as Political Discourse: Sikh Militancy Confronts the Indian State* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2002), p. 111.

² Pritam Singh, *Federalism, Nationalism and Development: India and the Punjab Economy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 84.



Indian Occupation: Officers of various Indian security forces pose for a photo in a Punjabi village.

supplemented by an army presence between 100,000-150,000 soldiers along with an additional 50,000 paramilitary troops.³ The most perverse twist to this scenario, however, is that the cost of upkeep for this military occupation—designed militarily repress to the self-determination of Punjab—has been estimated to cost the people of Punjab well over 80 billion rupees—for the state police operations alone.⁴

This occupation could not, however, contain Sikh resistance and spurred the armed secessionist insurgency.

The landslide victory of Sikh secessionist candidates in the 1989 parliamentary election, and the resounding boycott of the 1992 state assembly election mark clear democratic mandates for the secession of Punjab from the Indian state. Despite this overwhelming rejection of Indian state institutions, this latter election brought the Beant-led Congress government to power with the force of the military occupation at his back. Beant ascended to power with the popular support of less than 10% of the electorate in an election featuring less than 25%

participation—and literally zero participation in many Sikh constituencies. This turnout drastically contrasts from the Punjab average of 68.2% between 1966-1985.⁵ This illegitimate government facade placed significant resources into the hands of the security forces with a tacit agreement of impunity.⁶

By first picking off human rights activists and outspoken journalists in the region, security forces effectively silenced the means to document violations to maintain transparency against the repressive tactics of illegal detention and enforced disappearances. In the spring of 1992, leading activists of the Punjab Human Rights Organization were arrested and kept incommunicado in illegal custody. Exhibiting a penchant for violence and a blatant disdain for democratic norms and human rights, Chief Minister, Beant, openly declared in the Punjab Assembly that “his government would not release Bains [one of the PHRO leaders arrested] because his organization was engaged in defending terrorists.”

³ Rahul Bedi, “India: World’s Largest Army Fights Enemy Within,” *Inter Press Service*, 18 May 1993.

⁴ Gurharpal Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case-Study of Punjab* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 167.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156-7.

⁶ Jugdep Chima, *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India: Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2010), p. 220.

By neutralizing human rights work in the region, security forces were openly able to continue literally hunting Sikh guerrillas and activists using a sophisticated system of bounties using unmarked funds from the central government. According to the US State Department, over 41,000 cash bounties were distributed between 1991 and 1993 alone. Exacerbated by a lack of accountability and transparency, police officers engaged in mass killings and illegal cremations of activists and civilians with the incentive of claiming cash rewards and promotions. In addition to rewards for “listed militants,” officials offered unannounced rewards for killing “unlisted militants” with no government oversight:

Every week the IGs [Inspector General] of various ranges send their lists to Additional DG [Director General] (Intelligence) O.P. Sharma. The amount can vary from Rs. 40,000 [\$1,333] to Rs. 5 lakh [\$16,666]... [T]he operation of the secret fund is only known to a handful of senior police officers—the DGP, Additional DGs of intelligence and operations, and IG (Crime). Even the home secretary is kept out of it. Whatever records are maintained are erased after a few weeks.⁷

In this genocidal campaign to eliminate support for the secessionist movement, human rights organizations sketched the general profiles of targets identified by security forces for illegal detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings:

- Politically active young Sikh men, whether involved in political parties, student organizations, or religious groups
- Families of activists and guerrillas
- Any Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs or those who maintain the dastar (turban) and beard⁸

Those arrested at any point in time, would constantly remain subject to surveillance, intimidation, and harassment by security forces—regularly detained and interrogated in the case of any local political or guerrilla activity.

Despite the state’s purported secular self-identification, the specific targeting of Amritdhari Sikhs is a clear indication of the state’s genocidal policy towards Sikhs. According to an Indian army circular published in 1984:



Officers stand over the bodies of young Sikh men killed by Indian security forces.

⁷ Kanwar Sandhu, “Official Excesses,” *India Today*, October 15, 1992, quoted in Patricia Gossman and Vincent Iacopino, *Dead Silence: The Legacy of Abuses in Punjab* (United States: Human Rights Watch/Asia & Physicians for Human Rights, 1994).

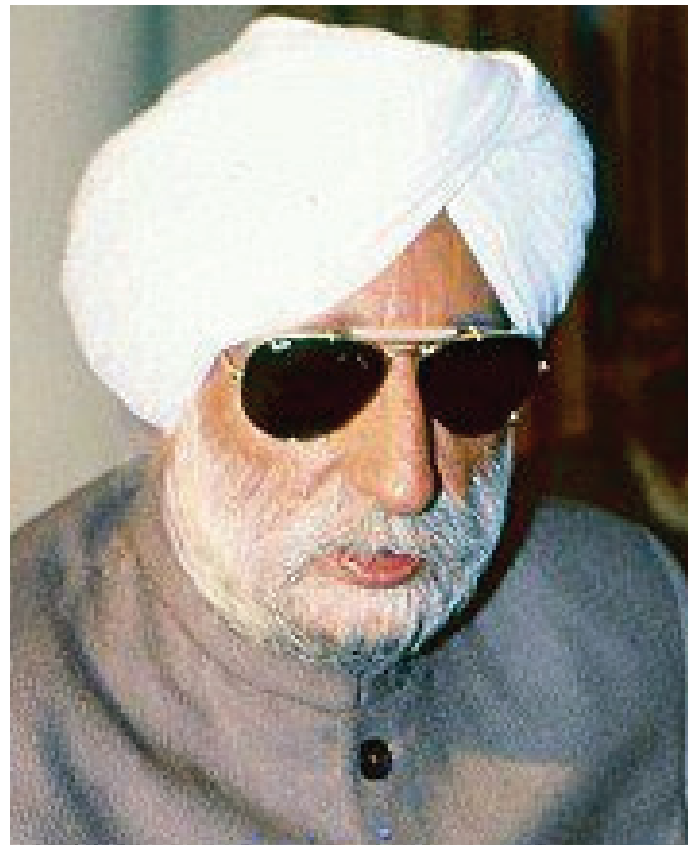
⁸ Patricia Gossman and Vincent Iacopino, *Dead Silence: The Legacy of Abuses in Punjab* (United States: Human Rights Watch/Asia & Physicians for Human Rights, 1994), p. 4-5.



Villagers gather for the collective sanskar (final rites) of five Sikh men killed by Indian security forces.

Some of our innocent countrymen were administered oath in the name of religion to support extremists and actively participated in the act of terrorism. These people wear a miniature kirpan round their neck and are called "Amritdharis"... Any knowledge of the "Amritdharis" who are dangerous people and pledged to commit murder, arson and acts of terrorism should be immediately brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. In the interest of us all, their identity and whereabouts must always be disclosed.⁹

Security forces placed a "sinister importance" to taking Amrit, with the State Intelligence Department maintaining a monthly dossier on local Amritdharis¹⁰ —whom would be targeted and detained to fill quotas and maintain an environment of intimidation.¹¹ Despite the decline of the armed secessionist insurgency in 1995, this strategy remains firmly in place to neutralize the development of future Sikh mobilizations.



Chief Minister Beant Singh.

⁹ Government of India, "Serial Number 153," *Baatchheet (Indian Army Bulletin)*, June 1984.

¹⁰ Kanwar Sandhu & Ramesh Vinayak, "Punjab: Area of Darkness," *India Today* (New Delhi) July 15, 1992.

¹¹ Patricia Gossman, "India's Secret Armies," in B. Campbell and A. Brenner (Eds.), *Death Squads in Global Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 266.

The result of this genocide has been the grave erasure of democratic political space for Sikh political dissent. **The enforced peace since the decline of the armed insurgency is maintained not through political settlement, but by maintaining the omnipresence of repressive state violence—and making it felt by potential Sikh dissidents.** The continued incarceration of political prisoners beyond their legal sentences, continued fake encounters, torture, and arrests, and the promotion rather than prosecution of mass human rights violators are clear evidence of this.

Restricting the public space of Punjab exclusively to Indian nationalist forces, the state has maintained its coercive judicial-military apparatus to swiftly eliminate any Sikh political opposition through extrajudicial killings, judicial interference, and the lived reality of the omnipresence of state violence. The genocidal violence of the counter-insurgency maintains its lingering presence and is reproduced daily upon those who seek to dissent—forcing them to live under a regime in which violent perpetrators maintain positions of power over survivors.

The reassertion of Indian political hegemony over the region is thus not the result of a political settlement or the resolution of Sikh political demands but the imposition of a violent peace built upon genocide.

A Systematic Genocide

“...Cleansing the countryside of militant sympathizers became the next main task of the security forces in the state... A larger number of people in the border districts, picked up by the police for interrogation, simply “disappeared.” Reports published in the Pioneer... on 26 and 27 March 1992 suggested that many of the “disappeared” were killed and their bodies quietly dumped into Punjab’s irrigation canals. These newspaper reports said the government of Rajasthan had formally complained to the Punjab’s chief secretary that the canals were carrying large number of dead bodies into the state. The report also said that many bodies, their hands and feet tied together, were being fished out when water in-flow in canals was stopped for repair works.”¹²



Denial of Dignity: Municipal workers degradingly dispose of the bodies of murdered Sikh men at a local cremation ground.

¹² Ram Narayan Kumar, A. Agrawal, J. Kaur, & A. Singh, *Reduced to Ashes* (Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 2009), p. 53.

POST-INSURGENCY: LEGACY OF IMPUNITY AND REPRESSION

Officials responsible for mass human rights violations during the Sikh genocide are not only routinely protected from prosecution, but shamelessly promoted to positions of power and authority.

The systematic nature of promotions in particular remains shrouded in mystery and controversy. In 2015, the Punjabi Information Commission refused a Right to Information request disclosing information relating to the promotion of DSP Sulakhan Singh. The State Information Commissioner justified the refusal on the grounds that he was awarded promotions for neutralizing certain offenders during the period of militancy in Punjab and decided to withhold the relevant information from the public.¹³ This is despite several recorded cases of police officials receiving awards, cash payments, and promotions by killing unidentified civilians in the place of listed militants. The case of Ropar DSP, Paramraj Umranangal, is significant in this regard as he is known to have received a significant cash payment and several gallantry awards for allegedly killing Bhai Gurnam Singh Bundala of the Khalistan Commando Force in an encounter. Evidence to the contrary, however, shows that Bhai Gurnam Singh is still alive and well, and it was actually a civilian, Bhai Sukhpal Singh Kala Afghana, who was killed in his place in 1994.¹⁴ Further, a police officer, Surjit Singh, in July 2013, revealed how he was ordered by his superiors to engage in a number of fake encounters—murdering civilians—and was rewarded with a number of swift promotions. Surjit Singh detailed

how he was recruited in 1989 as a constable and was promoted to SHO within one month; the promotions would continue over the years as he continued to serve under the command of SSP Paramdeep Gill.¹⁵ Gill himself was promoted several times and served as the Commissioner of Police, Ludhiana as of July 2013.

A 2013 UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, made strong note of these practices as well. The report takes serious issue with the practice of police impunity—aggravating the dismal human rights conditions of the country—and points specifically to the case of Sumedh Saini—a notorious police official promoted to Director General of Police in Punjab despite the evidence of his responsibility for countless human rights violations and killings. The report further highlights significant delays in judicial proceedings to prosecute responsible officials noting that:

“The practice of paying compensation to victims or their respective families in cases of unlawful killings, while not pursuing criminal investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators in their cases further perpetuates impunity due to an absence of individual accountability. The Special Rapporteur stresses that, while compensation of the victim is a crucial element to redress violations, it cannot replace the judicial process of bringing a perpetrator to justice.”¹⁶

¹³ Cursewak Singh Sohal, “Details of police promotions during militancy period will not be disclosed,” *Ajit Jalandhar* (Chandigarh), January 14, 2015.

¹⁴ PK Jaiswar, “Sukhpal’s family won’t give up fight for justice,” *Tribune News Service* (Batala) September 28, 2014.

¹⁵ Sikh Siyasat Bureau, “I killed 83 innocent Sikhs in stage encounters on directions of high ups in Punjab Police: Surjit Singh (SI),” (Tarn Taran), July 2, 2013; Saurabh Malik, “Cop says he was forced to stage encounters,” *Tribune News Service* (Chandigarh) July 5, 2013; Special Correspondent, “I killed more than 80 people in fake encounters, says a repentant Punjab cop,” *The Hindu* (Chandigarh) July 6, 2013.

¹⁶ Christof Heyns. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Addendum: Mission to India. A/HRC/23/47/Add.1 Vol. UN Human Rights Council, 2013.

The lack of prosecution is not the only problem in the Indian judicial system. **While its role in denying transparency and accountability with regards to security forces is serious, the judiciary plays an actively coercive role in the ongoing debilitation and criminalization of Sikh activists.**

Ongoing Police Intimidation and Torture

“...in contravention of international and domestic laws, Indian security forces routinely resorted to **illegal and incommunicado detention**. The police did not inform families of the places of detention or allow confidential visits. Further, the Punjab police, including the Criminal Investigation Agency, frequently tortured the detainees. Torture methods included electric shocks, tearing the legs apart at the waist and causing pelvic and muscle injury, and pulling out the hair and beard of the detainees, among other techniques. The police also threatened and detained immediate family members of the targeted individual.”¹⁷



Izhar Alam, former Punjab police officer and founder of the Alam Sena death squad, embraced by Prakash Badal upon being appointed Vice President of the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal.

Indian Death Squads

In a cable sent on December 19, 2005, Robert O’Blake, deputy chief of the US mission in New Delhi stated:

“With regard to former senior superintendent of police (Jalandhar) Mohammad Izhar Alam, we can confirm that he now [as of 2005] holds the position of additional director general (administration), a senior police posting. During the insurgency, he assembled a large, personal paramilitary force of approximately 150 men known as the “Black Cats” or ‘Alam Sena’... The group had reach throughout the Punjab and is alleged to have had carte blanche in carrying out possibly thousands of staged ‘encounter killings’.”¹⁸



Sumedh Saini, DGP Punjab police (2012-2018), sits with the Butcher of Punjab, KP Gill.

¹⁷ Jaskaran Kaur, *Punjab Police: Fabricating Terrorism through Illegal Detention and Torture*, (Santa Clara: ENSAAF, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁸ IP Singh, “Alam Sena staged encounter killings,” *Times of India* (Jalandhar), September 11, 2011

FOREIGN NATIONALS: ARREST, INTIMIDATION, AND HARASSMENT

BHAI BALBIR SINGH BAINS

Balbir Singh has been a prominent activist in UK-based Sikh circles for many years. He has been closely involved in Sikh political prisoners' issues since 1982 when Shaheed Bhai Kulwant Nagoke and Bhai Baksheesh Singh were arrested and tortured by state police.¹⁹ His team worked to gather information regarding Sikh political prisoners languishing in Indian jails, organized the legal defence of prisoners, and provided financial support to their families for which many team members have been arrested and intimidated. On June 24, 1999, Balbir Singh travelled to India and landed at Delhi Airport on a personal visit. Upon being cleared through customs and immigration and leaving the airport, he and another Sikh activist were arrested at the perimeter of the airport and kept in illegal detention at Lodhi Colony Special Cells, Delhi until their arrest was acknowledged on June 30, 1999.²⁰

He remained imprisoned in Tihar Jail, Delhi for three years without a conviction until he would finally be released. Through the course of his trial, it was established that the state's prosecution was actually a "balloon of falsehoods" and that the explosives which Balbir Singh was accused of being in possession of were in fact planted from the police's own armoury.²¹ He was finally released on March 27, 2002.

Following his release and return to the UK, Balbir Singh founded the Sikh Organization for Prisoner Welfare (SOPW) to support Sikh



Bhai Balbir Singh Bains.

political prisoners and their families against the repression of India's judicial system. Building on past work, the organization institutionalized mechanisms to maintain data regarding Sikh political prisoners, organize the legal defense of many prisoners, and provide financial support to their families in order to decrease the debilitating impacts of their false imprisonment. Following a familiar pattern of repression, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) registered an investigation against SOPW on August 28, 2012 alleging that SOPW operates as a front for Sikh guerrilla groups because it provides financial support to Sikh political prisoners and their families.²² According to the arguments presented by the agency and parroted by Indian media, providing financial support to marginalized segments of the population who are vulnerable to state repression is akin to terrorism and waging war against the state. Amenities donated

¹⁹ Sikh Relief, "Balbir Singh Bains speech on Sikh Political Prisoners movement," August 7, 2015, *YouTube*.

²⁰ Fort: Panth Khalsa, "Illegal Imprisonment of Bhai Balbir Singh," accessed February 24, 2018, http://www.panthkhalsa.org/panth/Bhai_Balbir_Singh.php.

²¹ Prabhjot Singh, "Reunited with family after 5 yrs' ordeal," *Tribune News Service* (Chandigarh), October 9, 2004.

²² National Investigation Agency, "Case Number RC-05/2012/NIA/DLI under section 121, 121A of Indian Penal Code and 17, 18, 38, 39, 40 of UA(P) Act," accessed February 25, 2018, <http://www.nia.gov.in/case-detail.htm?37/Activities+of+Babbar+Khalsa+International+BKI>.

to prisons in Punjab, including gym equipment, fans, and water sanitization equipment, were confiscated, and volunteers of the organization continue to face an escalation in intimidation and harassment.²³



Bhai Pal Singh 'France.'

BHAI PAL SINGH 'FRANCE'

Pal Singh, a 62-year-old French national, decided to leave the comfort of France to do Sikh panchar full-time and raise awareness regarding social ills like drug and alcohol abuse in Punjab. On July 22, 2010, he was arrested from his village home unarmed according to multiple witnesses. He was kept in illegal detention until July 26, 2010 when the police alleged that he was arrested that day from a Jalandhar bus stand with a number of weapons in his possession. According to Pal Singh's testimony, he was beaten, electrocuted, deprived of sleep and subject to other forms of torture and abuse. He was threatened with elimination on several occasions, when police officers warned him: "This is not France, we can make you disappear and no one will ask any questions."²⁴

On December 17, 2013 he was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) along with Gurmukh Singh and Makhan Singh.

The trio would be the first Sikhs in Punjab convicted under this legislation. They appealed this decision successfully and Pal Singh was released on August 19, 2017 after the conviction was overturned. Pal Singh's ordeal highlights the way in which planted evidence, and draconian laws have been utilized by the state to restrict social activism aimed to reconnect Punjab's youth with their Sikh heritage.

BHAI JASWANT SINGH AZAD

Jaswant Singh, a respected Sikh activist in the UK, was arrested on September 30, 2012 from Jalandhar city on multiple charges. These charges included 120B (Criminal Conspiracy), 121 (Waging War Against the State), 121A (Conspiracy to Wage War), Section 25 Arms Act, and Sections 10, 13, 17, 18B, 20, 38, 39, & 40 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Police officials accused him of being a key "terrorist" link due to his activism in the diaspora and because he allowed one of his properties to be used for "unlawful" purposes by Akali Dal Panch Pardhani (ADPP)—a lawful Khalistani political party.²⁵ After being subject to physical and mental torture in police remand, Jaswant Singh was transferred to Model Jail, Kapurthala on October 10, 2012. A second case was registered against him in Ludhiana on November 2, 2012 on charges under Section 25 of the Arms Act, 2, 4, 5 of the Explosives Act, 121, 121A, 120B, 506 of the Indian Penal code, and 17, 18, 18B, 21, 22, 38, 39, 40 of UAPA.²⁶ He would be acquitted in both cases in 2016 and 2017 respectively, after having spent several years languishing in prison on false cases.

His arrest came as part of a wave of repression against Sikh activists associated with Sikh Shahadat magazine—an educational Panthic magazine which was raided and forcibly shut down in 2009—along with the ADPP. A number

²³ SOPW, "Harassment by the Indian Government Escalates," *Sikh24 News* (Nabha), March 3, 2014.

²⁴ Pal Singh, "Interview With a Judge," *Sikh Organisation for Prisoner Welfare*, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://prisonerwelfare.org/component/content/article/29-prisoner-welfare/case-studies/bhai-pal-singh/34-tab2-2.html>.

²⁵ Sikh Siyasat Bureau, "British national arrested in Jalandhar for allegedly financing Khalistan groups," (Jalandhar), October 1, 2012.

²⁶ Sikh Siyasat Bureau, "Arrested Briton, Jaswant Singh Azad, booked in another case; Counsel urged UK's High Commission to take notice," (Ludhiana/Jalandhar), November 5, 2012.

of key activists and members of the leadership were faced with multiple false charges, incarcerated for several years at a time, and then faced legal delay in drawn out court cases for several years. Analyzing how these allegations were framed and resulted in the crippling of ADPP's functioning, it is abundantly clear how the manufactured charges and court cases were designed to halt their dissenting political activity.



Bhai Jaswant Singh Azad.

BHAI JAGTAR SINGH JOHAL

Jagtar Singh Johal (Jaggi), a British citizen visiting Punjab for his wedding, was abducted by plainclothes police officers on November 4, 2017, who placed a sack over his head and took him to an undisclosed location. He was kept in restrictive police custody, without his family informed of his whereabouts and with no access to a lawyer. Jaggi had been detained allegedly in relation to an arms recovery incident from 2016 and has since been accused of allegedly financing Sikh guerrilla organizations. In a press conference on November 7, the Chief Minister alleged that 8 murder cases had been solved with the arrest of four individuals, including Jaggi. No charges had been placed against Jaggi and the judicial process had not yet begun. The Chief Minister's incendiary comments severely prejudiced Jaggi's case by publicly passing unfounded judgement.

As a renowned Sikh activist who has conducted thorough research on the Khalistan movement and Indian human rights abuses, there is a clear link between his educational efforts and his incarceration. **In comments to the Tribune India newspaper, police officials explicitly stated that Jaggi's arrest is linked to the fact that he was "influencing youths through social media" and producing educational literature.** At his court appearance on November 13, Jaggi confirmed with his legal representative that the police had used mental and physical torture on him during his time in custody. The physical torture has included beatings, electric shocks to sensitive areas of his body, and body separation techniques. He remains imprisoned at the time of writing.



Bhai Jagtar Singh Johal.

These cases all paint a very clear picture of the systemic mechanisms used by the Indian state to repress any forms of Sikh activism and political dissent that it perceives as a threat. All four cases illustrate how security forces routinely fabricate evidence and implicate activists in unsubstantiated charges in order to disrupt and restrict their social and political activities. According to this modus operandi, the Indian state is able to effectively conflate Sikh parchar and social awareness, humanitarian aid and

charity, and democratic political organization and agitation with the spectre of terrorism in order to criminalize and restrict Sikh political activism and dissent.

There is a clear legacy of repressive legislation in India beginning with the notorious Rowlatt Act, passed by the British colonizers in 1919, which allowed individuals to be held for up to two years without due process. This draconian legislation has maintained itself in various avatars including the Prevention Detention Act of 1950, maintenance of Internal Security Act of 1971, the National Security Act of 1980, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act of 1985, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2002. While rescinding these various acts—due to political pressure—on various occasions, legislators merely cut and paste the various sections under a new name or previously existing legislation. Before the Prevention of Terrorism Act was repealed in 2004, an additional chapter was added to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 in which the exact segments challenged in past laws were reproduced.

As a recent report prepared by a well-reputed lawyer in Punjab has clearly shown, UAPA is another tool to repress political dissent. In 34 UAPA cases registered primarily against 104 Sikh dissidents in 2009, there have only been three convictions out of which two were subsequently overturned and one is currently under appeal. The analysis further reveals the identical nature and process of filing allegations against Sikh activists: stock witnesses maintained in multiple cases of a single police station are credited with providing information regarding the links of the accused with foreign Sikhs, and the intention to perpetrate terrorist acts, or procure funding and weapons to do so.²⁷

By invoking such legislation disproportionately against Sikh activists, the state is able to halt their social and political activities by confining the accused individuals for 2-5 years at a time, subsequently dragging them through 4-5 years of court cases, and then maintaining its surveillance apparatus to perpetually harass and intimidate the accused even when the cases are consistently dismissed.

Shingar Cinema Bombing: False Witnesses and Malicious Prosecution

In the 2014 judgement for the October 2007 Shingar cinema bombing case in which four Sikh activists were implicated, the defence counsel established that the witnesses examined by the prosecution are “stock witnesses” who have “appeared as a prosecution witness four or five times in police cases pertaining to the same police station.”²⁸ Furthermore, the judgement makes explicit reference to the testimony of one of the co-defendants’ mothers regarding police intimidation:

“When her son had grown up, he started inquiring about his father [who was killed by police]. When he tried to pursue the matter qua the disappearance of his father, he had been implicated in one case after the other. They had been threatened by the higher police officers with dire consequences and a threat was given that their entire family members would be eliminated.”²⁹

Despite the flimsy nature of the prosecution, these young activists were confined to prison for at least seven years. Before this ruling however, police officials alleged one of the defendants, Bhai Sandeep Singh, died of natural causes on April 26, 2013 despite clear marks on his body exhibiting evidence of extensive torture.³⁰ The remaining three defendants continue to be marked for surveillance and harassment due to their ongoing political activism.

²⁷ Jaspal Singh Manjhpur, *Report regarding registered cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in Punjab* (Chandigarh, December 9, 2017).

²⁸ *State v. Ravinder Singh et al*, (2014) SC 232, para 36.

²⁹ *Ibid*, para 41.

³⁰ Press Trust of India, “2007 Ludhiana blast accused found dead in prison,” (Patiala), April 26, 2013.

SIKH POLITICAL PRISONERS KILLED IN POLICE CUSTODY

BHAI SHAMINDER SINGH 'SHERA'

Bhai Shaminder Singh Shera was illegally detained by police on October 31, 2010 in Nawanshahar and subject to severe torture for 18 days while officers tried to coerce a false confession of his involvement in 'terrorist' activities. Upon his escape in November, Shaminder appeared on public television to reveal how he was subject to third-degree torture and declared his desire to pursue legal means of redress. In early January, the Punjab & Haryana High Court clears him of all terrorism related charges. A week later, Shaminder is attacked by a gang of masked men who beat him to death—leaving the investigation and action against the guilty officials at a stand still.³¹



Bhai Shaminder Singh 'Shera.'

BHAI SOHAN SINGH

Bhai Sohan Singh was arrested on March 7, 2011 for alleged "terrorist activities." A week later, various news outlets reported his death under "mysterious circumstances." Though police officials try claiming Sohan Singh hung himself with a small keski (short length-dastar) from an 8 ft. high ceiling, the family unequivocally states that he was killed as a result of police torture. Speaking with the media, Sohan Singh's wife describes their last meeting in the prison where Sohan Singh was unable to walk independently and bore clear signs of torture including burn marks from hot irons. She reveals that Sohan Singh told her that the police often threatened to kill him if he did not cooperate.³²



Bhai Sohan Singh.

³¹ Dayandnightnews Chd, "Day & Night Special - Shera - 13th Jan 2011 Part 1," "Day & Night Special - Shera - 13th Jan 2011 Part 2," November 6, 2012, *YouTube*.

³² neverforget2425, "Sohan Singh's wife Bhinder Kaur: He has died due to police torture," March 23, 2011, *YouTube*.

BHAI VEER SINGH 'HEERA'

Seventeen-year old Bhai Veer Singh 'Heera' was arrested and taken into police custody for questioning by Inspector Rajesh Sunehi and 20 others on the afternoon of January 8, 2012. The family claimed that they received no news of his whereabouts until the morning of the 9th when an unknown individual dropped Veer Singh's corpse off at the Barnala civil hospital. The family alleged he was tortured and killed by police as evidenced by the post-mortem report and further confirmed that they were intimidated by police officers to take back the allegation. In an interview with local media, Veer Singh's mother clearly states that the police began threatening her family with dire consequences if they continued pursuing action against the police officers responsible. She elaborated that the same officers who arrested Veer Singh had threatened to kill her second son and implicate her in countless false cases if she did not agree to drop the charges.³³

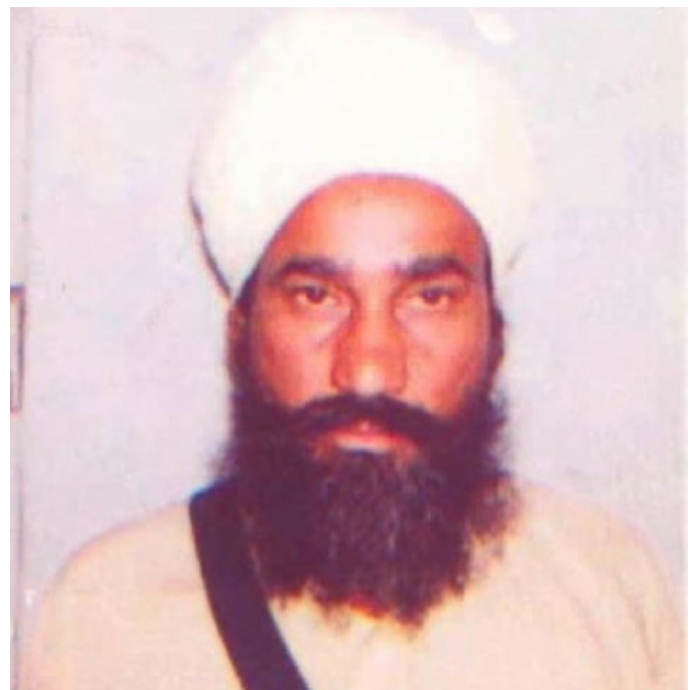


Bhai Veera Singh 'Heera.'

BHAI KULWANT SINGH VARPAL

Bhai Kulwant Singh was one of the individuals linked with Pal Singh of France and picked up by police in a spate of arrests made in the summer of 2010. He was admitted to the Guru Nanak Dev Hospital with life threatening injuries as a result of police torture in August of the same year. When he was brought to the hospital the first time, Dr. Saurabh Dhanda said "there were electric shock injuries on his ears and private parts. Kulwant's stomach also had injuries owing to severe beating with batons."³⁴

The day before Kulwant Singh was due to testify against his perpetrators in court, he was killed in a suspicious fire set in his jail cell on February 11, 2012. He succumbed to his injuries and died on February 14. Although authorities and fellow inmates refused to comment, the jail superintendent, Rashpal Singh, tried to suggest that the incident was the result of an attempted suicide.



Bhai Kulwant Singh Varpal.

³³ Sikh Siyasat, "Human Rights Violations - 17 Years old Sikh Killed in Punjab Police today (January 2012)," January 21, 2012, *YouTube*.

³⁴ Yudhvir Rana & Shivani Mehral, "Cops 'torture' suspected terrorist," *Times of India* (Chandigarh), August 6, 2010.

SIKHS KILLED IN POLICE FIRING

The following Sikhs have been killed by police bullets when Indian security forces have indiscriminately opened fire on civil demonstrations on multiple occasions:



Bhai Darshan Singh Lohara (54 years old)—Killed by police bullets in Ludhiana (December 5, 2009)



Bhai Jasjeet Singh (23 years old)—Killed by police bullets in Jammu (June 4, 2015)



Bhai Jaspal Singh Sidhwan (18 years old)—Killed by police bullets in Gurdaspur (March 29, 2012)



Bhai Gurjit Singh (27 years old) and Bhai Kishan Singh (45 years old)—Killed by police bullets in Bargadi (Oct 14, 2015)

CASE STUDIES



Bhai Manjinder Singh Hussainpura.

BHAI MANJINDER SINGH HUSSAINPURA

In 2009, Manjinder Singh was a leading grassroots activist of the Shiromani Tat Khalsa, a social and religious organization, that did Sikh parchar against social ills, like cults, caste, and drug addiction. Along with countless Sikh youth, Manjinder Singh joined peaceful protests in Ludhiana on December 5, 2009 when the notorious cultist, Ashutosh, held an event under the state patronage of the SAD-BJP state government. As a socially engaged Sikh organization, Manjinder Singh's group was among those that spearheaded the protest against the exploitative practices of the cult, and particularly the denigration of Sikh philosophy and practice as a quietist Hindu sect rather than a socially-engaged sovereign way of life.

With multiple angles caught on mobile phone footage, the Ludhiana police viciously attacked the protestors, firing live ammunition into the crowds and ruthlessly beating protestors of all ages—from children to seniors. Manjinder Singh was one amongst dozens who was severely injured in this incident and hospitalized.

Immediately following his recovery, along with his companions from Shiromani Tat Khalsa, Gurjant Singh Jangpura and Jaswinder Singh Rajpura, Manjinder Singh filed a complaint and pursued legal action against the perpetrators. Shortly after beginning this process, the trio was ominously arrested on July 18, 2010 in suspicious conditions on various charges, including allegations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. They would remain in prison until December 2015.

Upon his release, Manjinder Singh carried on his community work and continued his studies—pursuing an MA in Journalism & Mass Communication. On April 22, 2017, he was arrested again in Ludhiana under UAPA and the Arms Act. According to the registered charge sheet, a stock witness accused Manjinder Singh of “establishing a new organization in Punjab that will encourage youth into anti-national terrorist activities,” and that he had already received funding from “abroad” that is a threat to the unity and integrity of the country.³⁵ After being held in remand until April 28, he was transferred to Central Jail, Ludhiana until granted bail.

³⁵ Ramnish Chaudhri, “Charge sheet in case #125 under sections 10/11/13 UA(P)A and 25, 54, 59 Arms Act against Manjinder Singh @ Nikka,” (Jodhewal police station, Ludhiana, April 23, 2017).

Manjinder Singh’s case is a clear example of how committed young Sikh activists are criminalized and deprived of any public space in Indian-occupied Punjab. This well-educated activist has spent several years in prison and continues to be surveilled and harassed by security forces—inhibiting him from channeling his youthful energy into the community service he is clearly driven towards.

Fabricating “Sikh Terrorism”

“The Indian police constructed and presented elaborate stories of thwarted militant crimes... and the discovery of an international network to revive militancy in Punjab. These stories... served to conceal the escalation in human rights abuses committed in the name of national security. Further, the exaggerated stories, in direct contrast to testimonies of detainees and their families, indicate that police fabricated evidence to support criminal charges.”³⁶

BHAI JASPREET SINGH JASSA

Jaspreet Singh (22 years old) was arrested on August 5, 2016 in FIR #93 registered in Hoshiarpur under UAPA and the Arms Act. According to the charge sheet, several US-based members of Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) have been propagating “false” stories of atrocities and oppression against Sikhs in hopes of “reviving terrorism” in the state. To this end, the document alleges that these US residents influenced Jaspreet Singh, Hardeep Singh, Kuldeep Singh, Bikramjeet Singh and Balvinder Singh over social media to convince them to commit various acts of terror.³⁷

The charge sheet goes on to describe how the “dangerous plot” was uncovered with the recovery of three country-made pistols with several rounds from the five accused, as well as 15 t-shirts featuring slogans for the “Punjab

Independence Day Referendum 2020,” and 20 books recovered from Jaspreet Singh regarding the atrocities against Sikhs in India. Jaspreet Singh was kept in police remand for ten days until August 15 when he was transferred to Central Jail, Hoshiarpur. On August 19, he was transferred to the hospital after his lawyer filed an application citing his extensive injuries. Due to the severe torture in police custody, Jaspreet Singh suffered severe spinal injuries making it difficult to lie down or walk normally. According to family members who visited him on August 18, he was unable to recognize his sisters or even speak normally.³⁸ A report by Lawyers for Human Rights International (LFHRI) outlines how **all of the accused were repeatedly electrocuted on their earlobes, testicles, nostrils and nipples; beaten on their tailbone making it difficult to sit or lie down; beaten on their feet with a thick wooden stick making it difficult to stand in addition to further physical and mental abuse.**³⁹

Jaspreet Singh and his co-accused volunteered with Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), in particular supporting “Referendum 2020”—a campaign to urge the UN to hold a referendum in Punjab Punjab on the basis of the UN Charter and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Police officials admit that their involvement advocating for a referendum figured significantly in their arrest.⁴⁰



Bhai Jaspreet Singh Jassa.

³⁶ Jaskaran Kaur, *Punjab Police: Fabricating Terrorism through Illegal Detention and Torture*, (Santa Clara: ENSAAF, 2005), p. 4.

³⁷ Kulwinder Singh, “Charge sheet in case #93 under sections 10/11/13/17/38/39 UA(P)A and 25, 54, 59 Arms Act against Avtar Singh, Balwinder Singh, Harjap Singh, Jaspreet Singh, Hardeep Singh, Kuldeep Singh, Bikramjit Singh,” (Chabbewal police station, Hoshiarpur, August 6, 2016).

³⁸ IP Singh, “Terror accused in hospital, kin allege torture by police in custody,” *Times of India* (Hoshiarpur), August 23, 2016.

³⁹ Navkiran Singh, “Torture by electric shock a routine investigative technique used by the Punjab police in India,” *Lawyers for Human Rights International* (Chandigarh) August 21, 2016; Navkiran Singh, “Continuance,” *Lawyers for Human Rights International* (Chandigarh) August 9, 2016.

⁴⁰ IP Singh, “Police link terror module to US-based Sikh rights group,” *Times of India* (Hoshiarpur) August 11, 2016.

CRIMINALIZING SIKH DISSENT AND EXPRESSION: APRIL 2017—DECEMBER 2017

In recent months, particularly since the February 2017 election of the Amrinder-led Congress government, Indian security forces have ramped up concerted efforts to arrest, intimidate, and harass young Sikh activists. Using the backdrop of a spike in insurgent strikes in Punjab over the past two years and the resurgence of multiple Sikh guerrilla organizations, state security forces have manipulated this context to debilitate grassroots Sikh political activism by criminalizing Sikh dissent as sedition and terrorism. In standard fashion, Indian security forces have alleged foreign conspiracies to destabilize the country and have swooped in to neutralize activists across the region.

In the span of eight months, various Indian security forces have arrested at least 52 young Sikhs from across Punjab on various terror-related charges—a significant proportion of them explicitly arrested for engaging and promoting discussions on Sikh sovereignty over social media. Further, the demographic targeting of activists continues the genocidal policy which explicitly identifies Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs and those who maintain a dastar (turban) and beard, as national enemies, and therefore as subjects of suspicion and viable targets for arrest, and/or elimination.



Bhai Mann Singh and Bhai Sher Singh following heavy torture in custody of security forces (May 2017).

A clear pattern is apparent in the manner of the recent arrests:

- Boisterous claims of intelligence agencies uncovering foreign plots to destabilize the country
- A surge of illegal detentions of grassroots activists held incommunicado in police remand for “enhanced interrogation” (prominently featuring torture) without legal representation in order to coerce confessions and extricate information
- Alleged weapons recoveries alongside intimidation and harassment of activists’ families into silence
- Waves of raids and arrests of activists across the region, held under various anti-terror laws—freeing police from the requisite legal rights afforded to citizens
- Prolonged trials and drawn out legal procedures, tying individuals up in years of

court cases and placing a strain on activist resources

- Perpetual security surveillance, intimidation from engaging in future activism, and constant harassment of activists post-arrest and incarceration; those impacted continue to be arbitrary targets of spurious allegations and connections with indiscriminate “terror-related” cases and continue to be arrested and interrogated for years after the initial incident.

Creating a Climate of Fear

“In several cases, when the police visited the residences of the targeted individuals, they threatened to take other family members into detention if the families did not comply with their demands. They also intimidated women, in one case threatening to strip naked one detainee’s wife and daughter in police custody and put feces in their mouths. Because families still remember the horrors of the counter-insurgency period, these threats create a strong climate of fear, inhibiting reporting of abuses and preserving impunity for perpetrators.”⁴¹



State representatives hold a press conference to pronounce the guilt of arrested Sikh men in several murders before any criminal proceedings or before the accused even receive legal counsel.

⁴¹ Jaskaran Kaur, *Punjab Police: Fabricating Terrorism through Illegal Detention and Torture*, (Santa Clara: ENSAAF, 2005), p. 20.

TIMELINE OF ARRESTS

APRIL 16, 2017

State police arrest Palwinder Singh Ghodu and Sandeep Kumar Shinda on allegations of belonging to a Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) module in Batala, Gurdaspur and claim to have recovered several weapons. Links with foreign Sikh leaders are also alleged.

APRIL 22, 2017

Manjinder Singh Hussainpur and Raj Singh Sahina are arrested by Ludhiana police. Manjinder Singh charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act on April 23, 2017 amid allegations of foreign funding for insurgent activities.

MAY 21, 2017

The Border Security Force claims to have arrested Mann Singh and Sher Singh near the border along with several weapons and ammunition.

MAY 26, 2017

Tarsem Singh, Manjit Singh, Mohkam Singh, Jasvir Singh, and Jaswant Singh are arrested by state police in the Bathinda area for allegedly **founding a “terrorist organization” under the banner of the “Khalistan Zindabad WhatsApp group” due to their participation on social media raising awareness about anti-Sikh injustices in India.**

MAY 29, 2017

Following the May 26 arrests, Harbarinder Singh, Amritpal Kaur, Jarnail Singh, and Randeep Singh are also arrested by state police for joining the alleged “Khalistan Zindabad WhatsApp Group terrorist organization.”

JUNE 3, 2017

Gurdial Singh, Jagroop Singh, and Satwinder Singh are arrested by state police in connection with the May 21 arrest of Mann Singh and Sher Singh, on claims that Gurdial Singh’s yatra (pilgrimage) to Nankana Sahib was actually a cover for “terrorist training.”

JUNE 13 2017

The Rozana Pehredar reports that Gurjit Singh Guggu and Gurmukh Singh have been arrested in Nawanshehar, allegedly with weapons; Ramandeep Singh Khalsa and Parminder Singh Harry arrested near Bathinda; minor, Gurdeep Singh, arrested from village Buladewala; and Satnam Singh arrested in Mohali.⁴²

JUNE 15, 2017

Makhan Singh Gill is arrested by state police from his home on smuggling allegations. Following Makhan Singh’s release from Nabha jail in February 2017, he had been outspoken regarding the intimidation of security forces demanding he become an informant or face incarceration again.

JUNE 21, 2017

State police arrest Gurpreet Singh and Simranjit Singh in Moga district of Punjab. Police claim to seize two small weapons and ammunition from their possession.

JULY 8, 2017

Gurpreet Singh arrested by Mohali police for sedition and criminal conspiracy in relation to promoting SFJ’s proposed independence referendum in Punjab.

⁴² Anil Verma, “22 Sikh youth arrested on terrorism allegations in first 80 Days of Captain’s rule,” *Rozana Pehredar* (Bathinda), June 10, 2017.

JULY 11, 2017

Gurpreet Singh Gopi and Avtar Singh Pamma arrested by state police from Ferozepur and Kapurthala respectively on allegations of their involvement in two assassination cases in 2016.

AUGUST 9, 2017

Balvinder Singh Gill and Balkar Singh are arrested from Gwalior city by UP police on allegations of providing weapons to Sikh guerrilla groups.

AUGUST 16-17, 2017

UP Police arrest Jaswant Singh Kala and Balwant Singh, allegedly in connection to several cases of assassinations in Delhi, Rajasthan, and Punjab.

SEPTEMBER 19, 2017

Various police forces arrest six Sikh youth, allegedly in relation to the Nabha jailbreak case of November 2016. Among the arrested are Harpreet Singh Tony, Satnam Singh, Harjinder Singh Kahlon, Amandeep Singh, and Sandeep Singh.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2017

State police arrests seven alleged members of Babbar Khalsa International from Moga area **claiming their involvement in “terrorist activities” based on participation on social media websites, like Facebook. The ages of the youth arrested range from 18-23, in addition to one minor.**

OCTOBER 31, 2017

Taljit Singh Jammu is arrested upon arrival at Delhi airport, allegedly due to his connection with a vague incident report in 2016 in which one country-made pistol was discovered underneath a tree.

NOVEMBER 4, 2017

Jagtar Singh Johal kidnapped from Jalandhar by plain clothes officers and held by police in Bagha Purana, due to his involvement in publishing educational literature on the Sikh genocide and “influencing youth over social media.”⁴³

NOVEMBER 9, 2017

Security and government representatives, including Chief Minister Amrinder, hold a press conference to announce that they have solved seven assassinations **before any criminal proceedings, judicial pronouncements, or before the accused are even allowed to meet with legal counsel.**

State police arrest Ramandeep Singh Bagga on allegations of involvement in “terrorist activities.”

NOVEMBER 10, 2017

Hardeep Singh Shera arrested by state police outside a Fatehgarh Sahib gym as an alleged “sharp-shooter” in several high-profile assassinations.

DECEMBER 1, 2017

Jagjeet Singh arrested in Jammu in relation to the same incident report that Taljit Singh is initially held on, allegedly for facilitating “terror financing.”

⁴³ Jupinderjit Singh, “Terror module recruits kept low, had no criminal record,” *Tribune News Service* (Chandigarh), November 8, 2018.

CONCLUSION

Despite these brutal conditions, voices of Sikh dissent continue to resist the repression of Indian security forces. With various mass mobilizations in the past 5 years, a new generation of Sikh activists continues to claim its right to political dissent and sovereignty.

Recent examples include the uprisings against the pending execution of Sikh political prisoners and in support of their immediate release in 2012 and 2014—heavily featuring Sikh sovereignty at the centre of political discourse outside of the Indian electoral system. The momentum of these uprisings have been channelized into reconvening the Sarbat Khalsa, a collective assembly of the Sikh panth, for the first time in nineteen years to re-establish independent institutions of Sikh self-governance to guide the Sikh liberation movement. This mammoth gathering of the global Sikh panth, represents an important strategic maneuver to establish sound leadership in the Sikh liberation movement—while rejecting Indian political institutions—under the leadership of revered guerrilla commander, Bhai Jagtar Singh Hawara, as the Jathedar of Sri Akaal Takhat Sahib.

Alongside this rejuvenation, a handful of Sikh guerrilla organizations have also clearly regrouped as evidenced by the significant spike in militant strikes across the region and the high-profile arrests of several guerrilla commanders in 2014 and 2015. This resurgence is a strong indication of the simmering discontent, particularly due to the closing of political space for Sikh dissent.



Political prisoners, Jathedar Jagtar Singh Hawara and Bhai Paramjit Singh Bheora, raise jaikaray (war cries) and Khalistan slogans in defiance of police aggression.

These developments clearly illustrate the lack of closure to Sikh demands for self-determination and the ongoing nature of this political conflict.

With the emergence of a new generation of Sikh leadership and resistance, it is imperative that the Indian state immediately cease its repression of Sikh political expression and dissent. This is the only way that can guarantee a peaceful and amicable settlement to the complex political issues at hand. If the Indian state continues with repression of dissent and Sikh expression, it calls upon the inevitability of renewed armed struggle for the establishment of Khalistan.

There is a determined will of the Sikh panth to achieve sovereign rule—as is the right of all peoples of the world. To illustrate a firm commitment to a political settlement, the Indian state must immediately remove all officials accused of complicity and participation in genocide and human rights violations over the course of the past three decades, and release all Sikh political prisoners. There are dozens of Sikh prisoners who remain incarcerated despite having completed their legal sentences or who have been arrested for spurious charges relating to democratic political activism, including campaigning for independence or using social media as a medium of expression. These are the minimum necessary steps the state must adhere to in order to negotiate the democratic political space in which the Sikh panth can effectively exercise its right to self-determination.

It is evident from the above that Sikh tension with India and movements for Khalistan have not disappeared or “faded into irrelevance” as the Indian establishment claims. The state’s vicious military operations violently eliminated Sikh political activists, guerrillas, and their families from political discourse with impunity in the early 1990s and continues to enforce its erasure with the omnipresence of state violence. It is

crucial that the recent wave of repression in the past year is understood in this context of a political conflict between two political entities rather than misrepresented as a problem of terrorism and extremism, or conversely as individual human rights issues that can be resolved through the Indian judicial system.

The Indian state has consistently demonstrated that it will use all of its mechanisms of coercion to violently repress any political entity that does not submit to its political boundaries. The use of draconian laws, rooted in colonial legal frameworks, has seen India institutionalize the political repression of Sikhs in a bid to further subsume the Sikh panth into the realm of state regulation.

Sikhs, as a sovereign people, continue to resist and build institutions of sovereign self-governance and will continue to do so in multiple arenas outside the terms and conditions that the state tries to impose. As long as the Indian state continues to repress the right to self-determination and restricts the political space necessary to advocate for Khalistan, the Sikh panth will resolutely continue its movement towards sovereignty by any means necessary.



Sikhs gather for the Sarbat Khalsa (2015) to re-establish institutions of self-governance and ratify sovereignty as the primary political objective of the panth.



The state's vicious military operations violently eliminated Sikh political activists, guerrillas, and their families from political discourse with impunity in the early 1990s and continues to enforce its erasure with the omnipresence of state violence. It is crucial that the recent wave of repression in the past year is understood in this context of a political conflict between two political entities rather than misrepresented as a problem of terrorism and extremism, or conversely as individual human rights issues that can be resolved through the Indian judicial system.

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