

for "having the whole townships searched, and insulted lawyers and intellectuals, gagged the press and robbed every Sikh of his self respect." He characterised Chandra Shekhar government a dummy resting on the shoulders of Rajiv Gandhi, and added "Recently, killing of the Sikhs by the security forces in false encounters reached the proportion of a genocide."⁷⁶

The police excesses boomeranged and found expression in a series of gheraos of police stations and highway blockades following reports of false encounters. The killing of half a dozen farmers at Nathu Ka Burj in Amritsar district in army ambush in February 1991 helped to inflame people's resentment. Governor Malhotra's arrival there later only gave credence to the authorities insensitiveness to the villagers.⁷⁷

The decennial census operations completed by the time indicated the extent to which the Sikh genocidal policy initiated by Indira had had its impact during the decade 1981-1991.

Keeping in view the strength of the armed forces, the CRPF and the BSF in Punjab at the time of census operations and the strength of Purbea labour in various districts, and reading in between the lines the provisional population figures issued by the census authorities, one comes to the startling conclusion that in Punjab,

- a) the Sikhs have lost anything between ten to twelve lakh (1 to 1.2 mn) people mainly youth, during the decade 1981-91: the break up being over 200,000 thousand each in Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts; over 100,000 each in Ludhiana, Patiala; and Bhatinda districts; between 50,000 to 100,000 in Faridkot, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Ferozepur and Sangrur districts; between 25,000 to 50,000 in Rupnagar district.
- b) the number of the Sikh women in age group 15-35 in 1991 was higher than the corresponding figure for the Sikh menfolk in the same age group.

And, in case the Sikhs continued to observe the current family planning norms, the killing of their youth during 1981-91 which is still going on would show phenomenal downfall in the Sikh population in the next decennial census in 2001.

The formal results of the census operations were yet months away. Mann was still fulminating when it was confirmed that the talks between some sections of militants and Prime Minister had taken place. These were confirmed by Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan U. K. based head of Khalistan

76. Ibid, February 28, 1991. 77. *India Today*, March 31, 1991, p. 59

as also Chandra Shekhar.⁷⁸ One could only surmise whether Chauhan, a dubious character, had links with either Zaffarwal or Manochahal Committees, or possibly with both of them. Of all, Panthic Committee (Dr. Sohan Singh) was quite in the dark. It condemned those holding talks with Prime Minister as opportunists.⁷⁹

The fall of Chandra Shekhar government over the issue of spying by two Haryana policemen at Rajiv's house and India's hurtling towards another general elections stampeded the various Akali factions towards the election fray. Chandra Shekhar played not a mean role in persuading those who had held talks with him in January last to participate in the elections both for Parliament and for Punjab provincial assembly.

Piqued at Congress(I)'s withdrawal of support, Chandra Shekhar, to begin with, was for holding simultaneous elections to Parliament and Provincial assembly seats in Punjab in May 1991 alongwith elections in other parts of India. For that, he over-ruled President R. Venkataraman who had certain reservations mainly because of boycott of Punjab elections by Congress(I).

Chandra Shekhar was partially moved by army's strong recommendations to hold elections in Punjab at an early date. These in the eyes of the union Home Ministry had political overtones. The Army, not conversant with police links with certain militants and state-terrorist outfits, also talked of militant infiltration of security forces; it projected a scenario of militancy taking the shape of urban insurgency. The Punjab Police, knowing its role, described it as 'highly exaggerated'.⁸⁰ In short, while the army was interested in thinning down its presence, if not complete withdrawal, the government was attempting to institutionalise army presence by its continued involvement in electoral process and after.

But hardly was the notification issued that the union Home Ministry changed its stance. Elections in Assam and Punjab both for Parliamentary seats and for provincial assembly were delinked. Ultimately these were fixed for June 7 and 21 respectively, i.e., almost four weeks in case of Punjab after the completion of process in other parts of India. The point of mischief was that it would enable the new government to play havoc with them. In that, Chandra Shekhar behaved like a crafty Purbea. It also showed his malefic intentions towards the ongoing political process in Punjab. He was acting more as a Congress(I) stooge notwithstanding his earlier good intentions.

The first round of polling to seats in Parliament took place on May 19, 1991. Rajiv was killed by a human bomb, Dhanu (the blessed one - real name Kalaivathi) of LTTE the following day. That led to postponement of the next two rounds of polling to mid-

78. *The Hindustan Times*, April 22, 1991.

79. Ibid.

80. Kanwar Sandhu in *India Today*, April 30, 1991, pp. 73-75.