



MADHU KISHWAR

## “We Appeal To Honest People To Come And See For Themselves...”

### An Interview With Sant Longowal

be conducted by impartial people as the PUCL-PUDR enquiry was conducted into the Delhi riots. If Sikhs had conducted the Delhi enquiry it would have had no value. It was honest and impartial Hindus who played a big role in conducting that enquiry. That is why it is such a strong piece of evidence.

*So if organisations like the PUCL PUDR send a team to conduct an enquiry, will you be able to give them the facts ?*

Yes, the facts are available in the villages. How people in villages have been looted, robbed, how their homes have been raided by the police. For instance, in Bhatinda there was a dacoity in a village. One woman managed to catch hold of one dacoit. While he was struggling to be free, in the scuffle, she bit him hard. The next day, the villagers went to the police station to file a report. The SHO asked whether they could recognise the dacoit. They said they could. Just then, the ASI came in. The woman said : “There he is.” The SHO said. “This is our ASI. How can he be the person?” The woman said “Ask him to remove his shirt and see.” And they found the marks of her teeth on his body.

Similarly, when some Nirankaris were killed in 1982, the police brought dogs to trace the murderers. The dogs first climbed into the SDM’s car. Then they went through Talwandi village to the rented house of a particular policeman and caught hold of his shirt. The police then got another team of dogs. Those dogs too climbed into the SDM’s car and next went through Talwandi village to the policeman’s house and caught hold of his hand. The people said : “The dogs have caught the murderers. Arrest them.” But

the DSP said : “If dogs are to catch thieves then what is the use of keeping policemen?” The people said : “Then what is the use of keeping dogs ?”

*What do you think was behind the murder of the editor of Preetlari ?*

I think the Congress hand was behind that murder too. It was done just to frighten the Hindus. He was not a Hindu nor was he a Sikh. He was a man of progressive ideas. He was anti Congress. What quarrel did the Akalis have with him?

*They say he used to write against terrorism in his paper and that is why extremists killed him ?*

The Congress is the *janamdnta*, the mother of terrorists. The Congress gave birth to terrorism so as to defame Sikhs. It will take a long time for people to understand this fact.

*What about the murder of Chaudhri Balbir Singh in Hoshiarpur ?*

We have always supported Chaudhri Balbir Singh. The Akali Dal had no conflict with him because he was a leader of the Janata party which has had an alliance with the Akali Dal. Janata party leader Chandrashekhar supports our present struggle too. So Chaudhri Balbir Singh’s conflict was with the Congress. The conflict was over the control of DAV colleges in that area. There had been many quarrels over those colleges. It was a power struggle in which there were only two contestants—the Congress and Chaudhri Balbir Singh. Chaudhri Balbir Singh defeated the Congress several times because he had the Hindu votes as well as the Sikh votes. He was a Hindu Saini but Sikhs in that area are also Sainis. He was well respected among the Sikhs. The

*You have been repeatedly asking for an enquiry into events in Punjab. If an enquiry is held, what facts do you think will come out ?*

When an enquiry takes place, all the doings of those who are behind the terrorists will be exposed. We will let people know everything. This will be possible only if honest people conduct the enquiry. We can go to them and present the facts before them.

*Why does the Akali Dal not collect these facts and publish its own report ?*

Firstly, the Akali Dal has very little time or energy to spare from the struggle. We have to fight the cases of thousands of men, women and children who have been unjustly accused. Further, even if we do conduct an enquiry, none of our opponents will believe in its truth. The enquiry has to

Congress killed two birds with one stone—got rid of the Chaudhri and also defamed Sikhs and got their shops burnt.

As soon as the Chaudhri was murdered, a curfew was declared. Thus, Sikhs from villages were prevented from coming into town for the cremation of Chaudhri Balbir Singh. The Sikhs in the town being in a minority got isolated. Then rioters came and looted Sikh shops, in the presence of the police. If the SSP had not been standing there, perhaps so much looting could not have taken place. People would have defended themselves but the presence of the police rendered them helpless. Afterwards, the police killed one man, Gurmair Singh, and also arrested those whose shops had been looted. They were accused of having fought with the rioters. They are still in jail. But those who looted the shops have been set free even though the property was recovered from their houses.

The Akali Dal told the people in Hoshiarpur to remain peaceful since our fight is not with Hindus but with the Congress. We want the murderers of Chaudhri Balbir Singh to be caught. They can be caught only from the house of the Congress. If government really wants to catch the murderers, the first suspects should naturally be those who were his traditional enemies, with whom he had a quarrel—the Congress.

*Could you speak about the death of Gurinder Singh in PGI hospital, Chandigarh, who was arrested by the police as a suspected terrorist ?*

I don't know any more than you do because he was killed soon after he confessed he was a Congressman. He was Santokh Singh Randhawa's and Barbara Singh's man. He lived with them in the MLA's hostel, in their rooms. He attended Congress sessions which only chosen people attend. He was at Santokh Singh's son's wedding. He was a Congressman, used to defame Sikhs and terrify Hindus.

I say and I have said at Delhi too, that if the Congress government remains, neither India's unity nor India's integrity can remain. The Congress has broken

India's unity. Consider this—if there is a revolt of PAC soldiers in UP, Sikh regiments are sent there to suppress it. Why ? Why should Sikh soldiers be sent? Why not a mixed battalion of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims ? When Muslims are to be killed, Sikhs are sent, as has happened in UP, and in Bihar. If they sent Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims together, every incident would not become a communal one.

*Many people complain that although nowadays you condemn such killings, before you never used to issue any statement when killings took place.*

Why don't you just look back at old newspapers ? When Lala Jagat Narain was killed, we asked for an enquiry into his death. We pointed out that the accused in that case had been arrested on the 5th of that month and had not been released. On the 9th, the Lala was killed. How could those men have committed a murder when they were in the control of police, unless they were brought from the police station in a jeep to commit the murder and were taken back to the police station afterwards?

If Sikh communalists had been behind these killings, they would have killed only Hindus. You can look at the record—more than half of those killed so far are Sikhs.

*This could be said to be due to the inner power struggle ?*

There was no such inner struggle in the Akali Dal. The Akali Dal has made one lakh twelve five thousand of its members take a vow before the Akal Takht that they will follow the Akali Dal policy which is to conduct a peaceful struggle. Those who take this vow are called *marjivras*, that is, those who are ready to die for their rights. They will not kill anyone else but they will die themselves. We did this because we know that the government always attempts to discredit peaceful movements by infiltrating them with terrorists. We swore that if the government attacks us with *lathis*, we will bear the *lathis*, if the government attacks us with bullets, we will not reply with bullets. We will remain peaceful and will die as martyrs.

Two lakh thirty five thousand of our

members have been to jail at different times but it could not be proved against any one of them that they had raised a wrong slogan or harmed anyone. One incident came before us. A group of Akali Dal members were arrested and taken in a bus to Ferozepur. On the way, the bus stopped at Hari ke Patan and the driver began to drink tea. The Singhs were hungry. They saw a shop selling *sev*. They took the *sev* and ate it. The shopkeeper dared not protest because the police were with them.

The arrested men said: "Take the payment from the police. We are under arrest and the police have not fed us. So let them pay." The next day, our workers brought the shopkeeper to us and told us the story. We asked him how much he had to be paid. He said : "Rs 500." We gave him Rs 550. After that, we gave special instructions to all our members that whenever they ate or drank anything, they were to pay for it from their own pocket. We have kept full control over our workers. It cannot be proved that any one of them is a terrorist.

*I have heard that you have evidence of the hand behind the random killings in buses too. Would you like to talk about that ?*

When the government conducts an enquiry, we will present the proof. At that stage, people will testify. At this stage, if we expose those who can give evidence, the enquiry cannot be held later. The events of Delhi can be repeated here. Just as in Delhi, now, people are intimidated by bomb blasts, so people here too can be finished off. Because the government is completely given over to ruffianism (*gundpane te utri hai*). People are fighting for their constitutional rights. At present, I can say this much—the Congress hand is behind this terrorism. The Congress hand is behind the killing of Hindus in Punjab. Conduct an enquiry and the guilty will be exposed.

Today, we are blamed for the concept of Khalistan. In 1979, in the *Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee* elections, the government set up a team called Dal Khalsa, against us, against the Akali Dal.

Those who contested the election against us were Santa Singh Buda Dal, Jagjit Singh Chauhan Dal, Master Tara Singh Dal and Sant Bhindranwale group. Giani Zail Singh gave the slogan of Khalistan, Sanjay Gandhi provided the money and Indira Gandhi helped them. They had Congress backing and they fought the election on the Khalistan slogan. They told the people that if they were elected, they would create Khalistan out of the land that lies between Shyam Singh Atari's *samadhi* and Jarnail Singh's *samadhi*. Their plank was that they would give Khalistan to the people. The Akali Dal said: 'How can you give Khalistan to anyone? Where will your strength come from? This is a *gurudwara* election. You are to serve and look after the *gurudwara*. Here, you can give more or less *kadah prasad* to someone. But how can you possibly give Khalistan to anyone? Kindly explain this to us.'

Well, they lost and forfeited their deposits. One Congressman won, one of Sant Jarnail Singh's men won, two independents won, and 136 Akalis won. They fought on the Khalistan slogan, Akali Dal fought against that slogan, and Akali Dal won. And today they accuse us of demanding Khalistan. We say: "Good people, you raised this slogan, you set up a Dal Khalsa, you fought elections against us, you spent lakhs of rupees. Akali Dal won, the people stood with Akali Dal, you lost. And now you call us terrorists and separatists."

*Could you say something about the Akali Dal's demands?*

The Sikhs fought very bravely against the British, they participated in the freedom struggle and made many sacrifices. First, we fought to free the country. Now our fight is to free the states—how long can the centre treat the states as slaves? The states should have the freedom to solve their problems themselves—such as unemployment.

The states should be able to decide the export prices of their own products. Our wheat is taken over by Delhi and exported to Russia at Rs 240 but the farmer gets only Rs 155. Is this not cheating the



farmer? Why should we not conduct our trade ourselves? The Anandpur Sahib resolution framed by a committee headed by Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala in 1973 has four parts—religious, political, economic and ethical. The first three are addressed to the central government. Akali Dal demands are legitimate and not confrontational. They do not conflict with anyone's interests.

*One demand which has been disturbing supporters of women's rights in the country is the demand for a Sikh personal law which seems to have an adverse effect on women's matrimonial and property rights. Could you talk about that?*

We want a law according to which, as soon as a woman gets married, her husband's property will automatically be divided, and she will have an equal share in it. So, if a man has two sons, then his land will be divided into four parts, and will be owned by the two sons and the two daughters-in-law. This is for the good of all concerned. If she inherits her father's land she cannot cultivate it because she goes to live in her husband's house. She will have to sell that land to a stranger. That will create tension between the brothers and her. But if she inherits in her

husband's family, everyone will be benefited because their daughters will likewise inherit their in-laws' property.

*But the problem is that a young bride is never sure how she will be treated by her in-laws, whether or not she will even be allowed to live there?*

If the law says that she will be co-owner in the property of her husband's family from the day of her marriage, they will not dare ill treat her. You will see how she is pampered. (*Usde pairan thale hath rakhange.*)

She should be considered a co-owner automatically after her marriage. It should not even require the formality of registering the property in her name.

*What if a girl does not get married?*

A girl who does not get married should get a share of her father's property.

*But since even today, girls do not normally claim their share of the father's property but sign it away to their brothers, why do you need to bother about a change in law?*

Why should girls not be able to claim a share to property? That is also wrong. Why should they have to sign away their share and say they give up all right in their father's property? We want both women and men to have property.

*What about the demand that a widow should marry her husband's brother?*

She can marry whomever she likes. If she wants, she can marry her brother-in-law.

*Even if he is married?*

No. How can that be? A man is not allowed to have two wives, according to the law of our country. If he is unmarried, she can marry him. She can marry anyone she likes—our religion does not place any restriction on widow remarriage.

*What do you have to say about the accusation which is repeatedly levelled against Akalis that they have weapons hidden in gurudwaras?*

No illicit weapon has been recovered from any Akali worker. The Akali Dal has no weapons in any *gurudwara*.

*But Bhindranwale had collected weapons...*

Then he should have been asked where he got them from.

*But the gurudwara is yours too ?*

The gurudwara is the whole world's. The gurudwara is not my property. Anyone can go there—Hindus, Muslims, harijans, Christians, all can go there. Everyone has a right to eat there, stay there. There is no restriction on anyone. We are responsible only for Akali Dal workers. And no illicit weapons have been recovered from Akali Dal workers. In any case, I say that the weapons found in the gurudwara belonged to the government.

The government wanted to defame the Sikhs, wanted to bring out a truckful of weapons to display to people. Bhindranwale used to openly move about in the country with sten guns, carbines, rifles. He went to Bombay, to Delhi and many other places. If those weapons were illicit, why did the government not stop him when he was moving about freely with them ? Even after he was arrested, why was he released after the central government intervened on his behalf ? He had licensed weapons. This recovery of weapons from the gurudwara was only to defame Sikhs, to destroy Sikhs.

*But what did they get by defaming Sikhs ?*

The votes of Hindus. The whole massacre conducted by the Congress was only for votes. Whenever they have fomented Hindu-Muslim violence, it has been for votes. The Hindu harijan conflict in Gujarat is also geared to getting votes.

*But does it not prove very costly ?*

How is it costly for Congress ? They got power. This newcomer has accumulated the kind of power that Nehru and Indira Gandhi never had.

The issue of the Sikhs vis a vis the central government is just like the issue of the Tamils vis a vis the Sri Lankan government. Our government sides with the Tamils. We say: "They are our brothers, do help them. But help us also. What you say about them should be applicable to us also. What you demand for them should be implemented by you in Punjab."

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*"The Akali Dal made one lakh twenty five thousand of its members take a vow before the Akal Takht that they would follow the Akali Dal policy which is to conduct a peaceful struggle. Those who take this vow are called marjivras, that is those who are ready to die for their rights. They will not kill anyone else but they will die themselves. We did this because we know that the government always attempts to discredit peaceful movements by infiltrating it with terrorists."*

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*What do you see as the solution to the problem ?*

The solution is oneness among the people. Until people understand their own strength and renew their unity, this problem cannot be solved. I am not speaking only of Hindu Sikh unity but of the whole of India.

*What steps have you taken in this direction ?*

I can guarantee that if you go to any village in Punjab where Hindus are five

percent of the population and ask them if

version throughout the country. We are trying to the best of our ability to explain to people the truth of the matter. Our helpers, honest Punjabis, both Sikhs and Hindus, are helping us in this task. We try to expose the guilty before the people. Unfortunately, the press gives more coverage to the government version. We are fewer in number but we are trying as hard as we can to present the facts.

Until the people understand the divide and rule policy of the ruling powers, they

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percent of the population and ask them if Sikhs' trouble them, you will not find one Hindu who will say that Sikhs trouble them in any way. All the troubles have been in cities where Sikhs are in a minority and are being terrorised by the Congress. Their shops have been burnt and looted. Then how can it be said that Sikhs want to kill

will continue to be divided amongst themselves. When they begin to understand the manipulative policies of the government, they will be able to think for themselves and will be able to see the truth for themselves.

We have been declared guilty. We, the Sikhs, the Akali Dal, have been declared

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*"In 1979, in the Gurudwara Prabhandhak Committee elections, the government set up a team called Dal Khalsa, against the Akali Dal.... Giani Zail Singh gave the slogan of Khalistan, Sanjay Gandhi provided the money and Indira Gandhi helped them— They fought on the Khalistan slogan. Akali Dal fought against that slogan, and Akali Dal won. And today they accuse us of demanding Khalistan !"*

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Hindus ? Have you heard of a single anti Hindu riot in Punjab ?

Hindus and Sikhs sit together at teashops and have tea, they eat together, they attend each others' weddings. The tension has been created by the government. The Akali Dal has never at any stage raised any slogan against any other religion. But the government has control over the radio, over the television, over the press, they can spread their

guilty, have been called separatists and extremists throughout the country. But we are appealing to honest people to come and conduct an independent impartial enquiry here. The people of the country have passed a very wrong verdict in calling us extremists and separatists. Those who talk of terrorism should come here and see the reality for themselves before they decide who is responsible. □

*(translated from Punjabi)*