

# An Open Letter From Manushi

## To AISSF And Damdami Taksal

WE are deeply grieved at the way the Golden Temple is being desecrated by making it the scene of gun battles and promoting a situation of civil war within the Sikh community. *Kar seva* for the re-building of the Akal Takht was supposed to strengthen the Sikh people and bring them solace for the sacrilege committed in the holy place. Instead, you have converted this into an occasion for launching an attack on your own community and all the positive traditions of Sikhism.

The Golden Temple, more than any other shrine, stands as a symbol of communal harmony and amity. It has kept its doors open to people of all religions, castes and communities. In accordance with that tradition, *kar seva* of Akal Takht ought to be open to any worshipper. Instead, we are grieved to find that you are denying access not only to people of other communities but also even to the vast majority of Sikhs by your strong arm tactics.

You claim that you are provoked by injustice done to the Sikhs. That injustice is of concern to all of us. All such acts must end and the guilty ones need to be exposed. But you cannot effectively fight against wrongs done to the Sikhs unless you stop the injustice that you are inflicting on your own community. Even the attacks on the Sikh community cannot justify your setting yourselves up as the ultimate authority in religious matters by guns and dictatorial edicts. Your actions only make it easier for those who seek to weaken the Sikh community.

You can be of greatest service to your people by voluntarily retiring from the Golden Temple immediately. Present

your viewpoint to the Sikh people without coercing them into submission. If you wish to make noble sacrifices for your faith, you can do so only when you take counsel with the rest of the Sikh people without usurping their rights. You cannot speak for the whole community without fully gaining its confidence. You are trying to hijack all other Sikhs by sitting in the Golden Temple and issuing edicts based on guns and intimidation. You are committing a great sacrilege by attempting to hold the shrine as hostage.

Please realise that by your misguided actions, you are thoughtlessly endangering the lives of your own coreligionists in Punjab and

all over the country.

We appeal to you to come out of the Golden Temple voluntarily and have the courage to struggle openly, democratically and peacefully for your views. This is the time for you to try and help heal wounds rather than inflict new ones.

## To SGPC And Akali Dal

WE feel extremely perturbed at the irresoluteness of the SGPC and the Akali Dal party in dealing with the forcible takeover of the Golden Temple. This approach is disastrous.

We are told that the SGPC and the Akali Dal are carrying on negotiations to work out a compromise with AISSF and Damdami Taksal. However, if the



The Golden Temple—symbol of communal amity

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negotiations result in the AISSF and the Damdami Taksal gaining a foothold in the Golden Temple and in *gurudwaras*, SGPC and the Sikh community would be well on the way to internal disasters.

The only appropriate response to their murderous attack on the democratic rights of the Sikh people is to ensure that they end their 'legal occupation' immediately.

We appeal to the Akali Dal to mobilise Sikhs all over the country and launch a massive peaceful *satyagraha* to reclaim the Golden Temple without any further delay. The task of protecting the sanctity of the Golden Temple and the *gurudwaras* cannot be left to the army or the police. Each and every Sikh has a duty to raise a voice and organise to end the desecration at once.

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## Protest The Ban

THE government has banned the press from reporting the proceedings of the Misra commission, set up to enquire into the anti Sikh riots of November 1984. We feel that this undemocratic step can only further the suppression of truth. Already, many witnesses have alleged that the police have been harassing them to prevent them from testifying before the commission. Public vigilance is the only way to ensure that the incidents of November 1984 are not hushed up and that the culprits are brought to book. The ban on press reporting amounts to denying us, the people of this country, our fundamental right to information about the way this country is being run. Whenever a ban is imposed, it is intended to cover up antipeople policies and practices of the government, for example, during the army rule in Punjab and in northeastern states, press reporting was severely censored.

Therefore we request you to write letters to the prime minister and the Misra Commission, Rajendra Prasad Road, New Delhi, asking that the ban be raised. The letter could be along these lines, with any changes you desire:

"We are distressed to learn that the press has been banned from reporting the proceedings of the Misra commission. The commission was set up in response to a people's demand for an enquiry into the genesis of the anti Sikh violence of November 1984 and exposure of the guilty. The purpose of exposure cannot be furthered by a ban.

Secrecy can only help the guilty while openness will conduce to the truth being revealed. Secrecy is against the spirit of enquiry and investigation. This is the reason that courts in democratic countries are open to the public and the press.

All of us who were deeply troubled by the violence that took place in 1984 are naturally anxious to follow the proceedings in detail. The violence was a public event which affected all of us. The enquiry should also be public and all of us have a right to be kept informed of its progress.

The fundamental right to freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution of India necessarily includes the right to know, to enquire, to acquire information and to exchange ideas. The press medium for citizens to exercise this right. Therefore, a free press is an integral element of any democracy and a safeguard of the freedoms of citizens. The placing of a ban on press reporting of the commission proceedings amounts to an interference with our fundamental rights.

As citizens of India, we insist on exercising our fundamental right to freedom of expression, and ask that you immediately lift the ban on press reporting of the Misra commission proceedings, thereby upholding the freedom of the press which is a hallmark of a free and democratic polity.

—Manushi