The Logic of Religious Violence

Mark Juergensmeyer

‘When the struggle reaches the decisive phase may I die fighting
in its midst.’ — Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale

In the mid-1970s, when militant young Sikhs first began to attack the
Nirankaris — members of a small religious community perceived as being
anti-Sikh — few observers could have predicted that that violence would
escalate into the savagery that seized the Punjab in the 1980s. The Sikhs as
a community were too well off economically, too well educated, it
seemed, to be a party to random acts of terror. Yet it is true that militant
encounters have often played a part in Sikh history, and in the mid-1960s a
radical movement very much like that of the 1980s stormed through the
Punjab. The charismatic leader at that time was Sant Fateh Singh, who
went on a well-publicized fast and threatened to immolate himself on the
roof of the Golden Temple’s Akali Takht unless the government made
concessions that would lead to the establishment of a Sikh-majority state.
The Indian government, captained by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi,
conceded, and the old Punjab state was carved in two to produce a Hindu-
majority Haryana and a new Punjab. It was smaller than the previous one,
and contained enough Sikh-dominated areas to give it a slim Sikh
majority.

The violence of this decade, however, seems very different from what
one saw in the 1960s. For one thing, the attacks themselves have been
more vicious. Often they have involved Sikhs and Hindus indiscriminate-
ly, and many innocent bystanders have been targeted along with politically
active persons. The new Sikh leader, Jamail Singh Bhindranwale, was
stranger — more intense and more strident — than Fateh Singh was, and the
goals of Bhindranwale and his allies were more diffuse. Government
officials who were trying to negotiate a settlement were never quite
certain what their demands were. In fact there was no clear consensus
among the activists themselves as to what they wanted, and the items on
their lists of demands would shift from time to time. In 1984, shortly before
she gave the command for the Indian Army to invade the Golden Temple,
an exasperated Indira Gandhi itemized everything she had done to meet
the Sikh demands and asked, ‘What more can any government do?’

It was a question that frustrated many observers outside the govern-
ment as well, a good many moderate Sikhs among them. But frustration
led to action, and those actions made things worse. The Indian army’s
brutal assault on the Golden Temple in June 1984, and the heartless
massacre of Sikhs by Hindus in Delhi and elsewhere after the assassination
of Mrs Gandhi in November of that year caused the violence to escalate.
THE LOGIC OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Still, it is fair to say that quite a bit of bloodshed originated on the Sikh side of the ledger, and within the Sikh community anti-government violence achieved a religious respectability that begs to be explained.

The Rational Explanations

The explanations one hears most frequently place the blame for Sikh violence on political, economic and social factors, and each of these approaches is compelling. The political explanation, for instance, focuses on the weakness of the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, and its inability to secure a consistent plurality in the Punjab legislature. This is no wonder, since the Sikhs command a bare 51 per cent majority of the post-1966 Punjab. Moreover, the Muslims, who comprised the Punjab’s other non-Hindu religious community before 1948, were awarded a nation of their own at the time of India’s independence, so it is understandable that many Sikhs would continue to long for greater political power, and even yearn for their own Pakistan.²

The economic explanation for Sikh unrest is largely a matter of seeing the achievements of the Sikhs in relation to what they feel their efforts should warrant, rather than to what others in India have received. Compared with almost every other region of India, the Punjab is fairly well-to-do. Yet Sikhs complain, with some justification, that for that very reason they have been deprived of their fair share: resources from the Punjab have been siphoned off to other parts of the nation.³ Agricultural prices, for example, are held stable in India in part because the government maintains a ceiling on the prices that farmers in rich agricultural areas like the Punjab are permitted to exact. In addition some Sikhs claim that industrial growth has been hampered in the Punjab as the government has encouraged growth in other parts of India, and that the Punjab’s agricultural lifeblood – water for irrigation from Punjabi rivers – has been diverted to farming areas in other states.

The social explanation for Sikh discontent is just as straightforward: the Sikhs are a minority community in India, and their separate identity within the Indian family is in danger. Since the religious ideas on which Sikhism is based grew out of the nexus of medieval Hinduism, Sikhs fear they could be reabsorbed into the amorphous cultural mass that is Hinduism and disappear as a distinct religious community.⁴ The possibility is real: Sikhism almost vanished in the latter part of the nineteenth century. But in this century secularism is as much a threat as Hinduism, and like fundamentalist movements in many other parts of the world, Sikh traditionalists have seen the secular government as the perpetrator of a dangerous anti-religious ideology that threatens the existence of such traditional religious communities as their own. In the perception of some Sikhs, these two threats – the religious and the secular – have recently combined forces as the Hindu right has exercised increasing political power and Mrs Gandhi’s Congress Party has allegedly pandered to its interests.⁵
There is nothing wrong with these political, economic and social explanations of Sikh unrest. Each is persuasive in its own sphere, and together they help us understand why the Sikhs as a community have been unhappy. But they do not help us understand the piety with which a few Sikhs have justified their bloody acts or the passion with which so many of them have condoned them – even the random acts of destruction associated with terrorism. Nor are they the sort of explanations one hears from Sikhs who are most closely involved in the struggle. The socio-economic and political explanations usually come from observers outside the Sikh community or from those inside it who are least sympathetic to the militant protesters. The point of view of the activists is different. Their frame of reference is more grand: their explanations of the conflict and its causes achieve almost mythical dimensions. To understand this point of view we have to turn to their own words and see what they reveal about the radicals’ perception of the world about them.

The Religious Rhetoric of Sikh Violence

To understand the militant Sikh position, I have chosen to focus on the speeches of Jamail Singh Bhindranwale, the man who was without dispute the most visible and charismatic of this generation’s militant leaders. He was also the most revered – or despised, depending on one’s point of view. During his lifetime he was called a *sant*, a holy man, and a few Sikhs have been bold enough to proclaim him the eleventh *guru*, and thus challenge the traditional Sikh belief that the line of ten gurus ended with Gobind Singh in the early eighteenth century.

Jamail Singh was born in 1947 at the village Kodey near the town of Moga. He was the youngest son in a poor family of farmers from the Jat caste, and when he was 18 years old his father handed him over for religious training to the head of a Sikh center known as the Damdani Takal. The leader came from the village Bhindran and was therefore known as Bhindranwale, and after his death, when the mantle of leadership fell on young Jamail Singh, he assumed his mentor’s name. The young leader took his duties seriously and gained a certain amount of fame as a preacher. He was a stern one at that: Jamail became famous for castigating the easy-living, easy-drinking customs of Sikh villagers, especially those who clipped their beards and adopted modern ways. He carried weapons, and on 13 April 1978, in a bloody confrontation in Amrisar with members of the renegade Nirankari religious movement, he showed that he was not afraid to use them. This episode was followed by an attack from Nirankaris that killed a number of Bhindranwale’s followers, and further counter-attacks ensued. Thus began the bloody career of a man who was trained to live a calm and spiritual life of religious devotion.

Although he was initially at the fringes of Sikh leadership, during the late 1970s Bhindranwale began to be taken seriously within Akali circles because of his growing popularity among the masses. He seemed to have
been fixated on the Nirankaris; his fiery sermons condemned them as evil. He regarded them as a demonic force that endangered the very basis of the Sikh community, especially its commitment to the authority of the Sikh gurus. And in time he expanded his characterization of their demonic power to include those who protected them, including the secular government of Indira Gandhi.

Much of what Bhindranwale has to say in sermons of this period, however, might be heard in the sermons of Methodist pastors in Iowa or in the homilies of clergies belonging to any religious tradition, anywhere on the globe. He calls for faith — faith in a time of trial — and for the spiritual discipline that accompanies it. In one sermon he rebukes the press and others who call him an extremist, and explains what sort of an extremist he is:

One who takes the vows of faith and helps others take it; who reads the scriptures and helps others to do the same; who avoids liquor and drugs and helps others do likewise; who urges unity and cooperation; who preaches Hindu-Sikh unity and coexistence ... who says: 'respect your scriptures, unite under the flag, stoutly support the community, and be attached to your Lord's throne and home'.

Like many Protestant ministers, Bhindranwale prescribes piety as the answer to every need. 'You can't have courage without reading [the Sikh scriptures]', he admonishes his followers: 'Only the [scripture]-readers can suffer torture and be capable of feats of strength'. He is especially harsh on backsliders in the faith. Those who cut their beards are targets of his wrath: 'Do you think you resemble the image of Guru Gobind Singh?' he asks them. But then he reassures the bulk of his followers. Because of their persistence in the faith, he tells them, 'the Guru will give you strength', adding that 'righteousness is with you'. They will need all the strength and courage they can get, Bhindranwale explains, because their faith is under attack.

Lying only slightly beneath the surface of this language is the notion of a great struggle that Bhindranwale thinks is taking place. On the personal level it is the tension between faith and the lack of faith; on the cosmic level it is the battle between truth and evil. Often his rhetoric is vague about who the enemy really is. 'In order to destroy religion', Bhindranwale informs his congregation, 'on all sides and in many forms mean tactics have been initiated'. But rather than wasting effort in explaining who these forces are and why they would want to destroy religion, Bhindranwale dwells instead on what should be the response: a willingness to fight and defend the faith — if necessary, to the end.

Unless you are prepared to die, sacrificing your own life, you cannot be a free people ... If you start thinking in terms of service to your community then you will be on the right path and you will readily sacrifice yourself. If you have faith in the Guru no power on earth can enslave you. The Sikh faith is to pray to God, take one's vows before the Guru Granth Sahib [scriptures] and then act careless of consequences to oneself.
At other times Bhindranwale cites what appear to be specific attacks on Sikhism, but again the perpetrators are not sharply defined; they remain a vague, shadowy force of evil. 'The Guru Granth [scripture] has been buried in cow dung and thrown on the roadside', Bhindranwale informs his followers. 'That is your Father, your Guru, that they treat so.' On another occasion he urges his followers to 'seek justice against those who have dishonored our sisters, drunk the blood of innocent persons, and insulted Satguru Granth Sahib'. But the 'they' and the 'those' are not identified.

Occasionally, however, the enemy is more clearly specified: they are 'Hindus', 'the government', 'the press', the Prime Minister — whom he calls that 'lady born to a house of Brahmins' — and perhaps most frequently Sikhs themselves who have fallen from the path. This somewhat rambling passage indicates these diverse enemies and the passionate hatred that Bhindranwale feels towards them:

I cannot really understand how it is that, in the presence of Sikhs, Hindus are able to insult the [scriptures]. I don't know how these Sikhs were born to mothers and why they were not born to animals: to cats and to bitches .... Whoever insults the Guru Granth Sahib should be killed then and there .... Some youths complain that if they do such deeds then nobody harbours them. Well, no place is holier than this one [the Golden Temple] .... I will take care of the man who comes to me after lynching the murderer of the Guru Granth Sahib; I'll fight for his case. What else do you want? That things have come to such a pass is in any event all your own weakness .... The man whose sister is molested and does nothing about it, whose Guru is insulted and who keeps on talking and doing nothing, has he got any right to be known as the son of the Guru? Just think for yourselves!

And in a similar vein:

Talk is not enough against injustice. We have to act. Here you raise your swords but tomorrow you may wipe the dust from the sandals of sister Indira .... We have the right to be Sikhs .... The dearest thing to any Sikh should be the honor of the Guru .... Those foes — the government and Hindus — are not dangerous. Rather one has to be wary of those who profess Sikhism yet do not behave as Sikhs.

As important as Bhindranwale feels the immediate struggle is, he reminds his followers that the Sikh tradition has always been filled with conflict, and that the current battles are simply the most recent chapters in a long ongoing war with the enemies of the faith. The foes of today are connected with those from the legendary past. Indira Gandhi, for instance, is implicitly compared with the Mogul emperors: "The rulers [the Congress party leaders] should keep in mind that in the past many like them did try in vain to annihilate the Gurus." In other speeches, Bhindranwale frequently looks to the past for guidance in dealing with
current situations. When Sikhs who had sided with government policies come to him for forgiveness, for instance, he refuses. 'I asked that man', explains Bhindranwale, 'had he ever read a page of our history? Was the man who tortured Guru Arjun pardoned?'

Occasionally Bhindranwale refers to some of the specific political, economic and social demands made by more moderate Sikh leaders. He supports these demands, but they are not his primary concern. In fact, the targets of these demands are often characterized simply as 'injustices', illustrations of the fact that the Sikh community is abused and under attack. Since the larger struggle is the more important matter, these specific difficulties are of no great concern to Bhindranwale; they change from time to time. And it is of no use to win on one or two points and fail on others. Compromise is impossible; only complete victory will signal that the tide has turned. For that reason Bhindranwale scolds the Akali leaders for seeking a compromise settlement of the political demands made by Sikh leaders at Anandpur Sahib in 1973. 'Either full implementation of the Anandpur Sahib resolution', Bhindranwale demands, 'or their heads'.

In a sense, then, Bhindranwale feels that individual Sikh demands can never really be met, because the ultimate struggle of which they are a part is much greater than the contestation between political parties and factional points of view. It is a vast cosmic struggle, and only such an awesome encounter is capable of giving profound meaning to the motivations of those who fight for Sikh causes. Such people are not just fighting for water rights and political boundaries, they are fighting for truth itself.

Clearly the religious language of Sikh militants like Bhindranwale is the language of ultimate struggle. But two related matters are not so obvious: why is this language attached to the more mundane issues of human politics and economics? and why is it linked with violent acts?

A Pause for Definitions: Violence and Religion

Before we turn to these questions, however, it might be useful to pause for a moment for definitions. Since I want to look at issues having to do with the general relation between violence and religion, not merely those that affect the Sikhs, it might be useful if I describe what I mean by these terms.

I will restrict my use of the word violence to actions that are aimed at taking human life — that intend to, and do, kill. Moreover, I mean especially abnormal, illegal, shocking acts of destruction. All acts of killing are violent, of course, but warfare and capital punishment have an aura of normalcy and do not violate our sensibilities in the same way as actions that seem deliberately designed to elicit feelings of revulsion and anger from those who witness them. By speaking of violence in this restricted way, I mean to highlight the characteristics that we usually associate with terrorist acts.
The term religion is more difficult to define. I have been impressed with
the recent attempts of several sociologists to find a definition that is not
specific to any cultural region or historical period, and is appropriate for
thinking about the phenomenon in modern as well as traditional societies.
Clifford Geertz, for instance, sees religion as the effort to integrate
everyday reality into a pattern of coherence that takes shape on a deeper
level.27 Robert Bellah also thinks of religion as the attempt to reach
beyond ordinary reality in the ‘risk of faith’ that allows people to act ‘in the
face of uncertainty and unpredictability’.28 Peter Berger specifies that
such faith is an affirmation of the sacred, which acts as a doorway to a
different kind of reality.29 Louis Dupré prefers to avoid the term ‘sacred’,
but integrates elements of both Berger’s and Bellah’s definition in his
description of religion as ‘a commitment to the transcendent as to another
reality’.30

What all of these definitions have in common is their emphasis on a
certain kind of experience that people share with others in particular
communities. It is an experience of another reality, or of a deeper stratum
of the reality that we know in everyday life. As Durkheim, whose thought
is fundamental to each of these thinkers, was adamant in observing,
religion has a more encompassing force than can be suggested by any
dichotomization of the sacred and the profane. To Durkheim, the
religious point of view includes both the notion that there is such a
dichotomy, and that the sacred aspects of it will always, ultimately, reign
supreme.31 Summarizing Durkheim’s and the others’ definitions of
religion, I think it might be described as the perception that there is a
tension between reality as it appears and as it really is (or has been, or will
be).

This definition helps us think of religion as the subjective experience of
those who use religious language, and in fact it is easier with this definition
to speak of religious language, or a religious way of looking at the world,
than to speak of religion in a more reified sense.32 When we talk of the
various ‘religions’, then, we mean the communities that have a tradition of
sharing a particular religious point of view, a world view in which there is
an essential conflict between appearance and a deeper reality. There is the
hint, in this definition, that the deeper reality holds a degree of
permanence and order quite unobtainable by ordinary means, as religious
people affirm. The conflict between the two is what religion is about:
religious language contains images both of grave disorder and tranquil
order, and often holds out the hope that despite appearances to the
contrary, order eventually will triumph, and disorder will be contained.

Why Does Religion Need Violence?

There is nothing in this definition that requires religion to be violent, but it
does lead one to expect religious language to make sense of violence and to
incorporate it in some way into the world view it expresses. Violence, after
all, shocks one’s sense of order and has the potential for causing the ultimate disorder in any person’s life: physical destruction and death. Since religious language is about the tension between order and disorder, it is frequently about violence.

The symbols and mythology of Sikhism, for instance, are full of violence. The most common visual symbol of Sikhism is the two-edged sword (khanda), supported by two scabbards and surrounded by a circle. Sikhs often interpret the two edges of this sword as symbolizing spiritual and worldly foes, and they say that a battle sword (kirpan) is included among the five objects that Sikhs are supposed to wear at all times to symbolize an awareness of these same enemies. Unlike the Bible, the sacred scriptures of the Sikhs — known collectively as the Guru Granth Sahib — do not contain accounts of wars and savage acts, but the stories of the Sikhs’ historical past are bloody indeed. In fact, these stories have taken on a canonical character within Sikhism, and they more vividly capture the imagination than the devotional and theological sentiments of the scriptures themselves. The calendar art so prominent in most Sikh homes portrays a mystical Guru Nanak, of course, but alongside him there are pictures of Sikh military heroes and scenes from great battles. Bloody images also leap from brightly-colored oil paintings in the Sikh Museum housed in the Golden Temple. There are as many depictions of martyrs in their wretched final moments as of victors radiant in conquest.

Because the violence is so prominent in Sikh art and legend, and because many symbols of the faith are martial, one might think that Sikhs as a people are more violent than their counterparts in other areas of India. But if one leaves aside the unrest of the past several years, I do not think this can be demonstrated. It would be convenient to say that the prestige of violent symbols in the Sikh religion has increased Sikhs’ propensity for violent action, or that the Sikh religion is violent because Sikhs as a people are violent, but I do not think either of these arguments can be made very convincingly.

The fact is that the symbols and mythology of most religious traditions are filled with violent images, and their histories leave trails of blood. One wonders that familiarity can prevent Christians from being repulsed by the violent images portrayed by hymns such as ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’, ‘The Old Rugged Cross’, ‘Washed in the Blood of the Lamb’, and ‘There is a Fountain Flowing with Blood’. Or perhaps familiarity is not the issue at all. The central symbol of Christianity is an execution device — a cross — from which, at least in the Roman tradition, the dying body still hangs. From a non-Christian point of view, the most sacred of Christian rituals, the eucharist, looks like ritual cannibalism, where the devout eat the flesh and drink the blood of their departed leader. At a certain level, in fact, this interpretation is accurate; yet few would argue that the violent acts perpetrated by Christians over the centuries are the result of their being subjected to such messages.

The ubiquity of violent images in religion and the fact that some of the most ancient religious practices involve the sacrificial slaughter of animals
have led to speculation about why religion and violence are so intimately bound together. Some of these speculators are among the best known modern theorists. Karl Marx, for instance, saw religious symbols as the expression of real social oppression, and religious wars as the result of tension among economic classes. Sigmund Freud saw in religious rituals vestiges of a primal oedipal act that when ritually reenacted provide a symbolic resolution of feelings of sexual and physical aggression. More recently, Rene Girard has revived the Freudian thesis but given it a social rather than psychological coloration. Girard sees the violent images of religion as a symbolic displacement of violence from one's own communal fellowship to a scapegoat foe.

What these thinkers have in common is that they see religious violence as a symptom of and symbol for something else: social hostility, in the case of Marx; sexual and physical aggression, in the case of Freud; social competition, in the case of Girard. They may be right: religion and other cultural forms may have been generated out of basic personal and social needs. Yet it seems to me that even without these explanations the internal logic of religion requires that religious symbols and myths express violent meanings.

Religion deals with the ultimate tension between order and disorder, and disorder is inherently violent, so it is understandable that the chaotic, dangerous character of life is represented in religious images. Of course, the religious promise is that order conquers chaos; so it is also understandable that the violence religion portrays is in some way limited or tamed. In Christianity, for example, the very normalcy with which the blood-filled hymns are sung and the eucharist is eaten indicates their domestication. In ritual, violence is symbolically transferred. The blood of the eucharistic wine is ingested by the supplicant and becomes part of living tissue; it brings new life. In song a similarly calming transformation occurs. For, as Christian theology explains, in Christ violence has been corralled. Christ died in order for death to be defeated, and his blood is that of the sacrificial lamb who atones for our sins so that we will not have to undergo a punishment as gruesome as his.

In the Sikh tradition violent images are also domesticated. The symbol of the two-edged sword has become an emblem to be worn on lockets and proudly emblazoned on shops and garden gates. It is at the forefront of the worship center in Sikh gurudwaras where it is treated as reverently as Christians treat their own emblem of destruction, the cross. And the gory wounds of the martyrs bleed on in calendar art. As I have suggested, Sikh theologians and writers are no more hesitant to allegorize the meaning of such symbols and stories than their Christian counterparts. They point toward the war between good and evil that rages in each person's soul.

The symbols of violence in religion, therefore, are symbols of a violence conquered, or at least put in place, by the larger framework of order that religious language provides. But one must ask how these symbolic presentations of violence are related to real violence. One might think that they should prevent violent acts by allowing violent feelings to be
THE LOGIC OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

channelled into the harmless dramas of ritual, yet we know that the opposite is sometimes the case. The violence of religion can be savagely real.

Why Does Violence Need Religion?

A reason often given to explain why religious symbols are associated with acts of real violence is that religion is exploited by violent people. This explanation, making religion the pure and innocent victim of the darker forces of human nature, is undoubtedly too easy; yet it contains some truth. Religion in fact is sometimes exploited, and it is important to understand why people who are engaged in potentially violent struggles do at times turn to the language of religion. In the case of the Sikhs, this means asking why the sort of people who were exercised over the economic, political and social issues explored at the beginning of this article turned to preachers like Bhindranwale for leadership.

One answer is that by sacralizing these concerns the political activists gave them an aura of legitimacy that they did not previously possess. The problem with this answer is that most of the concerns we mentioned – the inadequacy of Sikh political representation, for instance, and the inequity of agricultural prices – were perfectly legitimate, and did not need the additional moral weight of religion to give them respectability. And in fact, the people who were primarily occupied with these issues – Sikh businessmen and political leaders – were not early supporters of Bhindranwale. Even when they became drawn into his campaign, their relation with him remained ambivalent at best.

There was one political demand, however, that desperately needed all the legitimization that it could get. This was the demand for Khalistan, a separate Sikh nation. Separatist leaders such as Jagjit Singh Chauhan were greatly buoyed by such words of Bhindranwale as these:

We are religiously separate. But why do we have to emphasize this? It is only because we are losing our identity. Out of selfish interests our Sikh leaders who have only the success of their farms and their industries at heart have started saying that there is no difference between Sikh and Hindu. Hence the danger of assimilation has increased.38

When they say the Sikhs are not separate we’ll demand separate identity – even if it demands sacrifice.39

Bhindranwale himself, interestingly, never came out in support of Khalistan. 'We are not in favor of Khalistan nor are we against it', he said, adding that 'we wish to live in India', but would settle for a separate state if the Sikhs did not receive what he regarded as their just respect.40 Whatever his own reservations about the Khalistan issue, however, his appeal to sacrifice made his rhetoric attractive to the separatists. It also
raised another, potentially more powerful aspect of the sacralization of political demands: the prospect that religion could give moral sanction to violence.

By indentifying a temporal social struggle with the cosmic struggle of order and disorder, truth and evil, political actors are able to avail themselves of a way of thinking that justifies the use of violent means. Ordinarily only the state has the moral right to take life — for purposes either of military defense, police protection or punishment — and the codes of ethics established by religious traditions support this position. Virtually every religious tradition, including the Sikhs', applauds non-violence and proscribes the taking of human life. The only exception to this rule is the one we have given: most ethical codes allow the state to kill for reasons of punishment and protection.

Those who want moral sanction for their use of violence, and who do not have the approval of an officially recognized government, find it helpful to have access to a higher source: the meta-morality that religion provides. By elevating a temporal struggle to the level of the cosmic, they can bypass the usual moral restrictions on killing. If a battle of the spirit is thought to exist, then it is not ordinary morality but the rules of war that apply. It is interesting that the best-known incidents of religious violence throughout the contemporary world have occurred in places where there is difficulty in defining the character of a nation state. Palestine and Ireland are the most obvious examples, but the revolution in Iran also concerned itself with what the state should be like, and what elements of society should lead it. Religion provided the basis for a new national consensus and a new kind of leadership.

There are some aspects of social revolution in the Punjab situation as well. It is not the established leaders of the Akali party who have resorted to violence, but a second level of leadership — a younger, more marginal group for whom the use of violence is enormously empowering. The power that comes from the barrel of a gun, as Mao is said to have remarked, has a very direct effect. But there is a psychological dimension to this power that may be even more effective. As Frantz Fanon argued in the context of the Algerian revolution some years ago even a small display of violence can have immense symbolic power: the power to jolt the masses into an awareness of their potency.

It can be debated whether or not the masses in the Punjab have been jolted into an awareness of their own capabilities, but the violent actions of the militants among them have certainly made the masses more aware of the militants' powers. They have attained a status of authority rivalling what police and other government officials possess. One of the problems in the Punjab today is the unwillingness of many villagers in the so-called terrorist zones around Batala and Taran Tarn to report terrorist activities to the authorities. The radical youth are even said to have established an alternative government.

By being dangerous the young Sikh radicals have gained a certain notoriety, and by clothing their actions in the moral garb of religion they
have given their actions legitimacy. Because their actions are morally sanctioned by religion, they are fundamentally political actions: they break the state’s monopoly on morally-sanctioned killing. By putting the right to kill in their own hands, the perpetrators of religious violence are also making a daring claim of political independence.

Even though Bhindranwale was not an outspoken supporter of Khalistan, he often spoke of the Sikhs’ separate identity as that of a religious community with national characteristics. The term he used for religious community, *quaam*, is an Urdu term that has overtones of nationhood. It is the term the Muslims used earlier in this century in defending their right to have a separate nation, and it is the term that Untouchables used in the Punjab in the 1920s when they attempted to be recognized as a separate social and political entity. Another term that is important to Bhindranwale is *miri-piri*, the notion that spiritual and temporal power are linked. It is this concept that is symbolically represented by the two-edged sword and that justified Sikh support for an independent political party. Young Sikh activists are buttressed in their own aspirations to leadership by the belief that acts that they conceive as being heroic and sacrificial – even those that involve taking the lives of others – have both spiritual and political significance. They are risking their lives for God and the Sikh community.

Not all of the Sikh community appreciates their efforts, however, and the speeches of Bhindranwale make clear that disagreements and rivalries within the community were one of his major concerns. Some of Bhindranwale’s harshest words were reserved for Sikhs who he felt showed weakness and a tendency to make easy compromises. In one speech, after quoting a great martyr in Sikh history as having said, ‘even if I have to give my head, may I never lose my love for the Sikh Faith’, Bhindranwale railed against Sikh bureaucrats and modernized youth who could not make that sacrifice, and ended with a little joke:

I am sorry to note that many people who hanker after a government position say instead, ‘even if I lose my Faith, may I never lose my position’. And our younger generation has started saying this: ‘even if I lose my Faith, may a beard never grow on my face’... If you find the beard too heavy, pray to God saying ... ‘we do not like this Sikhism and manhood. Have mercy on us. Make us into women ...’

But most Sikhs in Bhindranwale’s audience, including the youth, were not the sort who would be tempted to cut their hair; and few, especially in the villages where Bhindranwale had been popular, were in a position to ‘hanker after a governmental position’. People, such as the Akali leaders whom Bhindranwale castigated for making compromises for the sake of personal gain, were no doubt objects of contempt in the villages long before Bhindranwale came along, and by singling them out, Bhindranwale identified familiar objects of derision – scapegoats – that humbled those
who had succeeded in worldly affairs and heightened the sense of unity among those who had not.

Bhindranwale made a great plea for unity. 'Our misfortune is disunity', he told his audiences. 'We try to throw mud at each other. Why don't we give up thinking of mud and in close embrace with each other work with determination to attain our goals.' Those who eventually opposed him, including the more moderate Akali leader, Sant Harmand Singh Longowal, regarded Bhindranwale as a prime obstacle to the very unity he preached. During the dark days immediately preceding Operation Bluestar in June 1984, the two set up rival camps in the Golden Temple and allegedly killed each other's lieutenants. It is no wonder that many of Bhindranwale's followers, convinced the Indian army had a collaborator inside the Golden Temple, were suspicious when Bhindranwale was murdered in the raid and Longowal was led off safely under arrest. No wonder also that many regarded Longowal's assassination a year later as revenge for Bhindranwale's.

While he was alive, Bhindranwale continued to preach unity, but it was clear that what he wanted was for everyone else to unite around him. He and his supporters wished to give the impression that they were at the center, following the norm of Sikh belief and behavior, and that the community should therefore group around them. This message had a particular appeal to those who were socially marginal to the Sikh community, including lower-caste people and Sikhs who had taken up residence abroad. Some of the most fanatical of Bhindranwale's followers, including Beant Singh, the assassin of Indira Gandhi, came from the Untouchable castes (Beant Singh was from the lowest caste of Untouchables, the Sweepers), and a considerable amount of money and moral support for the Punjab militants came from Sikhs living in such far-away places as London, Houston, and Yuba City, California.

These groups gained from their indentification with Bhindranwale a sense of belonging, and the large Sikh communities in England, Canada and America were especially sensitive to his message that the Sikhs needed to be strong, united and defensive of their tradition. Many of Bhindranwale's supporters in the Punjab, however, received a more tangible benefit from associating with his cause: politically active village youth and small-time clergy were able to gain support from many who were not politically mobilized before. In that sense Bhindranwale was fomenting something of a political revolution, and the constituency was not unlike the one the Ayatollah Khomeini was able to gather in Iran. In so far as Bhindranwale's message was taken as an endorsement of the killings that some of these fundamentalist youth committed, the instrument of religious violence gave power to those who had little power before.
THE LOGIC OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

When Does Cosmic Struggle Lead to Real Violence?

The pattern of religious violence of the Sikhs could be that of Irish Catholics, or Shi’ite Muslims in Palestine, or fundamentalist Christian bombers of abortion clinics in the United States. There are a great many communities in which the language of cosmic struggle justifies acts of violence. But those who are engaged in them, including the Sikhs, would be offended if we concluded from the above discussion that their actions were purely for social or political gain. They argue that they act out of religious conviction, and surely they are to some degree right. Destruction is a part of the logic of religion, and virtually every religious tradition carries with it images of chaos and terror. But symbolic violence does not lead in every instance to real bloodshed, and even the eagerness of political actors to exploit religious symbols is not in all cases sufficient to turn religion towards a violent end. Yet some forms of religion do seem to propel the faithful rather easily into militant confrontation: which ones, and why?

The current resurgence of religious violence around the world has given an urgency to attempts to answer these questions, and to identify which characteristics of religion are conducive to violence. The efforts of social scientists have been directed primarily to the social and political aspects of the problem, but at least a few of them have tried to trace the patterns in religion’s own logic. David C. Rapoport, for instance, has identified several features of messianic movements that he believes lead to violence, most of which are characterized by a desire for an antinomian liberation from oppression.48

My own list of characteristics comes directly from our discussion of the religious language of cosmic struggle. It is informed by my understanding of what has happened in the Sikh tradition, but it seems to me that the following tenets of religious commitment are found whenever acts of religious violence occur.

1. The Cosmic Struggle is Played Out in History

To begin with, it seems to me that if religion is to lead to violence it is essential for the devout to believe that the cosmic struggle is realizable in human terms. If the war between good and evil, order and chaos, is conceived as taking place in historical time, in a real geographical location, and among actual social contestants, it is more likely that those who are prone to violent acts will associate religion with their struggles. This may seem to be an obvious point, yet we have some evidence that it is not always true.

In the Hindu tradition, for instance, the mythical battles in the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics are as frequently used as metaphors for present-day struggles as are the actual battles in Sikh and Islamic history and in biblical Judaism and Christianity. Like members of these traditions, Hindus characterize their worldly foes by associating them with the enemies of the good in their legendary battles. The main
difference between the Hindus and the others is that their enemies are mythical — that is, they seem mythical to us. To many pious Hindus, however, the stories in the epics are no less real than those recorded in the Bible or in the Sikh legends. A believing Hindu will be able to show you where the great war of the Mahabharata was actually fought, and where the gods actually lived. Moreover, the Hindu cycles of time allow for a cosmic destruction to take place in this world, at the end of the present dark age. So the Hindu tradition is not as devoid of images of divine intervention in worldly struggles as outsiders sometimes assume.49

The major tradition that appears to lack the notion that the cosmic struggle is played out on a social plane is Buddhism. But this is an exception that proves the rule, for it is a tradition that is characteristically devoid of religiously sanctioned violence. There are instances in Thai history that provide Buddhist justifications for warfare, but these are rare for the tradition as a whole. In general, Buddhism has no need for actual battles in which the pious can prove their mettle.

2. Believers Identify Personally with the Struggle

The Buddhist tradition does affirm that there is a spiritual conflict, however: it is the clash between the perception that this imperfect and illusory world is real and a higher consciousness that surmounts worldly perception altogether. And in a sense, the struggle takes place in this world, in that it takes place in the minds of worldly persons. This kind of internalization of the cosmic struggle does not in itself lead to violence, and Buddhists are not ordinarily prone to violent deeds. Nor are Sufis, the Islamic mystics who have reconceived the Muslim notion of jihad. To many Sufis, the greater jihad is not the one involving worldly warfare, but the one within: the conflict between good and evil within one's own soul.50

This talk about the cosmic struggle as something inside the self would seem to be easily distinguishable from external violence, but in Sikh theology, including the rhetoric of Bhindranwale, they go hand in hand. "The weakness is in us," Bhindranwale was fond of telling his followers. "We are the sinners of this house of our Guru."51 Militant Shi‘ite Muslims are similarly racked with a sense of personal responsibility for the moral decadence of the world, and once again their tendency toward internalization does not necessarily shield them from acts of external violence. The key to the connection, it seems to me, is that at the same time that the cosmic struggle is understood to impinge upon the inner recesses of an individual person, it must be understood as occurring on a worldly, social plane. Neither of these notions is by itself sufficient to motivate a person to religious violence. If one believes that the cosmic struggle is largely a matter of large continuing social forces, one is not likely to become personally identified with the struggle; and if one is convinced that the struggle is solely interior there is no reason to look for it outside. But when the two ideas coexist, they are a volatile concoction.

Thus when Bhindranwale spoke about the warfare in the soul his listeners knew that however burdensome that conflict is, they need not
bear it alone. They may band together with their comrades and continue the struggle in the external arena, where the foes are more vulnerable, and victories more tangible. And their own internal struggles impel them to become involved in the worldly conflict: their identification with the overall struggle makes them morally responsible, in part, for its outcome. ‘We ourselves are ruining Sikhism’, Bhindranwale once told his congregation. On another occasion he told the story of how, when Guru Gobind Singh asked an army of 80,000 to sacrifice their heads for the faith, only five assented. Bhindranwale implied that the opportunity was still at hand to make the choice of whether they were to be one of the five or the 79,995. He reminded them that even though the cosmic war was still being waged, and that the evil within them and outside them had not yet been purged, their choice could still make a difference.

Sikhism is not the only tradition in which this link is forged between the external and internal arenas of the cosmic struggle. Shi’ite Muslims bear a great weight of communal guilt for not having defended one of the founders of their tradition, Husain, when he was attacked and martyred by the vicious Yazid. During the Iranian revolution some of them relived that conflict by identifying specific foes — the Shah and President Jimmy Carter — as Yazids returned. There was no doubt that such people should be attacked. Radical Shi’ites in Iran were not about to compound their guilt and miss an historical opportunity of righting an ancient wrong.

The same sort of logic has propelled many Christians into a vicious anti-Semitism. It is a mark of good Christian piety for individuals to bear the responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus: the theme of Christians taking part in the denial and betrayal of Jesus is the stuff of many a hymn and sermon. Some Christians believe that the foes to whom they allowed Jesus to be delivered were the Jews. Attacks on the present-day Jewish community, therefore, help to lighten their sense of culpability.

3. The Cosmic Struggle Continues in the Present

What makes these actions of Sikhs, Shi’ites and anti-Semitic Christians spiritually defensible is the conviction that the sacred struggle has not ended in some earlier period, but that it continues in some form today. It is a conviction that also excites the members of the Gush Emunim, a militant movement in present-day Israel, who have taken Israel’s victory in the Six Day War as a sign that the age of messianic redemption has finally begun.

Not all Israelis respond to this sign with the same enthusiasm, however, just as not all Christians or Shi’ite Muslims are convinced that the apocalyptic conflict prophesied by their tradition is really at hand. Many of the faithful assent to the notion that the struggle exists within, for what person of faith has not felt the internal tension between belief and disbelief, affirmation and denial, order and chaos? But they often have to be persuaded that the conflict currently rages on a social plane, especially if the social world seems orderly and benign.

Bhindranwale took this challenge as one of the primary tasks of his ministry. He said that one of his main missions was to alert his people that
they were oppressed, even if they did not know it. He ended one of his
sermons with this fervent plea: ‘I implore all of you in this congregation.
Go to the villages and make every child, every mother, every Singh realise
we are slaves and we have to shake off this slavery in order to survive.’

In Bhindranwale’s mind the appearances of normal social order simply
illustrated how successful the forces of evil had become in hiding their
demonic agenda. His logic compelled him to believe that Punjabi society
was racked in a great struggle, even if it showed no indication of it. Long
before the Punjab was torn apart by its most recent round of violence,
Bhindranwale claimed that an even fiercer form of violence reigned:
The appearance of normal order was merely a demonic deception.
Bhindranwale hated the veil of calm that seemed to cover his community
and recognized that his own followers were often perplexed about what he
said: ‘Many of our brothers, fresh from the villages, ask, “Sant Ji, we don’t
know about enslavement.” For that reason, I have to tell you why you are
slaves.’

The evidence that Bhindranwale gave for the oppression of Sikhs was
largely limited to examples of police hostility that arose after the spiral of
violence in the Punjab began to grow. Some of his allegations, such as the
account he gave of the treatment meted out to followers who hijacked
Indian airplanes, have a peculiar ring:

If a Sikh protests in behalf of his Guru by hijacking a plane, he is put
to death .... None of the Sikhs in these three hijackings attacked any
passenger nor did they damage the planes. But the rule is that for a
fellow with a turban, there is the bullet .... For a person who says
‘Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama’, there is a government
appointment. Sikh brothers, this is a sign of slavery.

Those who attempted to combat Bhindranwale could not win against
such logic. If they responded to Sikh violence they would be seen as
oppressors. If they did not respond, the violence would escalate. And
even if there was neither violence nor repression, the absence of the overt
signs of conflict would be an indication to Bhindranwale of a demonical
calm.

4. The Struggle is at a Point of Crisis

On a number of occasions, in referring to the immediacy of the struggle,
Bhindranwale seemed to indicate that the outcome was in doubt. His
perception of the enormity of the evil he faced and of the torpor of the Sikh
response made his prognosis a dismal one. Sometimes he felt that the best
efforts of a few faithful Sikhs were doomed: ‘today’, he darkly
proclaimed, ‘the Sikh community is under threat’. But on other occasions
he seemed to hold out a measure of hope. Things were coming to a head,
he implied, and the struggle was about to enter ‘the decisive phase’.

What is interesting about this apocalyptic rhetoric is its uncertainty. If
the outcome were less in doubt there would be little reason for violent
action. If one knew that the foe would win, there would be no reason to
want to fight back. Weston LaBarre describes the terrible circumstances surrounding the advent of the Ghost Dance religion of the Plains Indians: knowing that they faced overwhelming odds and almost certain defeat, the tribe diverted their concerns from worldly conflict to spiritual conflict, and entertained the notion that a ritual dance would conjure up sufficient spiritual force to destroy the alien cavalry.60

LaBarre concludes that sheer desperation caused them to turn to religion and away from efforts to defend themselves. But by the same token, if they knew that the battle could be won without a struggle, there also would be little reason for engagement. The passive pacifism of what William James called ‘healthy-souled religion’—mainstream Protestant churches, for example, that regard social progress as inevitable—comes from just such optimism.61 Other pacifist movements, however, have been directly engaged in conflict. Menno Simons, the Anabaptist for whom the Mennonite church is named, and Mohandas Gandhi are examples of pacifist leaders who at times narrowly skirted the edges of violence, propelled by a conviction that without human effort the outcome they desired could not be won. In that sense Gandhi and Bhindranwale were more alike than one might suspect. Both saw the world in terms of cosmic struggle, both regarded their cause as being poised on a delicate balance between oppression and opportunity, and both believed that human action could tip the scales. The issue that divided them, of course, was violence.

5. Acts of Violence Have a Cosmic Meaning

The human action in the Sikh case is certainly not pacifist, for Bhindranwale held that there would be ‘no deliverance without weapons.’62 He was careful, however, to let the world know that these weapons were not to be used indiscriminately: ‘It is a sin for a Sikh to keep weapons to hurt an innocent person, to rob anyone’s home, to dishonor anyone or to oppress anyone. But there is no greater sin for a Sikh than keeping weapons and not using them to protect his faith.’63 Contrariwise, there is no greater valor for a Sikh than to use weapons in defense of the faith. Bhindranwale himself was armed to the teeth, and although he never publically admitted to any of the killings that were pinned on him personally, Bhindranwale expressed his desire to ‘die fighting’, a wish that was fulfilled within months of being uttered.64

According to Bhindranwale, those who committed acts of religiously sanctioned violence were to be regarded as heroes and more. Although he usually referred to himself as a ‘humble servant, and an ‘uneducated fallible person’65 Bhindranwale would occasionally identify himself with one of the legendary Sikh saints, Baba Deep Singh, who continued to battle with Moghul foes even after his head had been severed from his body. He carried it manfully under his arm.66 In Bhindranwale’s mind, he too seemed destined for martyrdom.

To many Sikhs today, that is precisely what Bhindranwale achieved. Whatever excesses he may have committed during his lifetime are
excused, as one would excuse a lethal but heroic soldier in a glorious war. Even Beant Singh, the bodyguard of Indira Gandhi who turned on her, is held to be a saintly hero. Perhaps this has to be: if Indira was such a demonic foe, her assassin must be similarly exalted.

Even those who value the sense of order that religion provides sometimes cheer those who throw themselves into the arena of religious violence. Such people are, after all, struggling for good, and for that reason their actions are seen as ultimately producing order. But until such recognition of their mission can be achieved among the more conservative rank and file, such activists are forced, as prophets and agents of a higher order of truth, to engage in deeds that necessarily startle. Their purpose is to awaken good folk, mobilize their community, insult the evil forces, and perhaps even to demonstrate dramatically to God himself that there are those who are willing to fight and die on his side, and to deliver his judgement of death. The great promise of cosmic struggle is that order will prevail over chaos; the great irony is that many must die in order for certain visions of that victory to prevail and their awful dramas be brought to an end.

NOTES

Support for this project has come from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. I greatly appreciate the kindness of the staff of the Center, the collegiality of the Fellows, the diligence of my research assistant, Jonathan Hornstein, and the critical judgment of my colleagues, Sucheng Chan and Jack Hawley, who have read this paper in draft form and helped me to improve its flow of thought. I have also benefited from discussions of some of these ideas in a Dupont Circle sub-group of the World Affairs Council in Washington, DC, a discussion group at the World Bank, and a faculty and student gathering at Amherst College.


2. Indira Gandhi, 'Don't Shed Blood, Shed Hatred', All India Radio, 2 June 1984, reprinted in V.D. Chopra, R.K. Mishra and Nirmal Singh, Agony of Punjab (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1984), p.189. Indian government officials seemed to be genuinely caught off-guard by the Sikh militancy. I remember once in the summer of 1984 when the Indian Consul General in San Francisco turned to me after we had been on a radio talk show and said, 'I haven't a clue; can you tell me why in the devil the Sikhs are behaving like this?'

3. The demand for a Khalistan - a Sikh state similar to Pakistan - was raised by a small number of Sikh militants, including a former cabinet minister of the Punjab, Jagjit Singh Chauhan, who set up a movement in exile in London. It was not, however, a significant or strongly supported demand among Sikhs in the Punjab until after Operation Bluestar in June 1984. The Indian government's account of Chauhan's movement is detailed in a report prepared by the Home Ministry, 'Sikh Agitation for Khalistan', reprinted in Nayar and Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, pp.142–55.

4. The Anandpur Resolution supported by leaders of the Akali Dal focused primarily on economic issues. For an analysis of the Punjab crisis from an economic perspective, see Chopra, Mishra and Singh, Agony of Punjab.
5. The fear of the absorption of Sikhism into Hinduism is the frequent refrain of Khushwant Singh; see, for instance, the final chapter of his History of the Sikhs, Vol.2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966). He attributes the cause of many of the problems in the Punjab in the mid-1980s to this fear as well; see his Tragedy of Punjab, pp.19–21.

6. For an interesting analysis of the general pattern of religious fundamentalism in South Asia of which the Hindu and Sikh movements are a part, see Robert Eric Frykengberg, 'Revivalism and Fundamentalism: Some Critical Observations with Special Reference to Politics in South Asia', in James W. Bjorkman (ed.), Fundamentalism, Revivalists and Violence in South Asia (Riverdale, MD: Riverdale, 1986).

7. I am grateful to Professor Ranbir Singh Sandhu, Department of Civil Engineering, Ohio State University, for providing me with several hours of tape-recorded speeches of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Professor Sandhu has translated some of these speeches, and I appreciate his sharing these translations with me. For this article I am relying primarily on the words of Bhindranwale. They are found in the following sources: 'Sant Jarnail Bhindranwale’s Address to the Sikh Congregation', a transcript of a sermon given in the Golden Temple in November 1983, translated by Ranbir Singh Sandhu, April 1985, and distributed by the Sikh Religious and Educational Trust, Columbus, Ohio; excerpts of Bhindranwale’s speeches, translated into English, that appear in Joyce Pettigrew, 'In Search of a New Kingdom of Lahore', Pacific Affairs, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Spring 1987) (forthcoming), and interviews with Bhindranwale found in various issues of India Today and other publications.

8. The spiritual leader of the Nirankaris, Baba Gurbachan Singh, was assassinated at his home in Delhi on 24 May 1980. Bhindranwale was implicated in the murder, but was never brought to trial. Kuldip Nayar claims that Zail Singh, who became President of India, came to Bhindranwale’s defense at that time (Nayar and Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, p.37).

9. It is said that Bhindranwale was first brought into the political arena in 1977 by Mrs Gandhi’s son, Sanjay, who hoped that Bhindranwale’s popularity would undercut the political support of the Akali party (Nayar and Singh, Tragedy of Punjab, p.31, and Tully, Amritsar, p.57–61).

12. Ibid., p.15.
13. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p.2.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

27. Clifford Geertz defines religion as 'a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' ('Religion as a Cultural System', reprinted in William A. Lessa and Evan Z. Vogt, (eds.), Reader in


31. Durkheim describes the dichotomy of sacred and profane in religion in the following way: 'In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another .... The sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common .... In different religions, this opposition has been conceived in different ways', Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976) (originally published in 1915), pp.38-9. Durkheim goes on to talk about the sacred things that religions encompass; but the first thing he says about the religious view is the perception that there is this dichotomy. From a theological perspective it seems to me that Paul Tillich is saying something of the same thing in arguing for the necessary connection between faith and doubt (see, for example, the first chapter of his Dynamics of Faith).

32. On this point I am in agreement with Wilfred Cantwell Smith who suggested some years ago that the noun 'religion' might well be banished from our vocabulary, and that we restrict ourselves to using the adjective 'religious' (The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp.119-53).

33. For the significance of the two-edged sword symbol and its links with the Devi cult revered by people, such as Jats, who have traditionally inhabited the foothills of the Himalayas adjacent to the Punjab, see W.H. McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p.13.

34. Ibid, pp.15-17, 51-2. These five objects are known as the five K's, since the name for each of them in Punjabi begins with the letter 'k'. The other four are uncut hair, a wooden comb, a metal bangle and cotton breeches. See also W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.36.


37. Renn Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); see especially Chapters 7 and 8. What is not clear in this book is how symbolic violence leads to real acts of violence; this link is made in a subsequent study of Girard's, Scapegoat, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

38. Bhindranwale, excerpt from a speech, in Pettigrew.

39. Ibid.

40. Bhindranwale, 'Address to the Sikh Congregation', p.9.

THE LOGIC OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE


45. Joyce Pettigrew argues that the mīrī-pīrī concept 'gave legitimacy to the political action organized from within the Golden Temple' (Pettigrew, op. cit.). This 'political action' was the establishment of an armed camp of which Bhindranwale was the commander; it was to rout this camp that the Indian army entered the Golden Temple on 5 June 1984, in Operation Blue Star.


47. Ibid., p.8.

48. David C. Rapoport, 'Why does Messianism Produce Terror?' paper delivered at the 81st Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, 27 August – 1 September 1985. Although I find Rapoport's conclusions helpful, and in many ways compatible with my own, his emphasis on messianic movements seems unnecessary. The notion of messianism is largely alien to the Asian religious traditions, and much of what he says about it could be said of religion in general. See also his Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions, American Political Science Review 78:3 (Sept. 1984), pp.658–77, which includes case studies of the Thugs, Assassins and Zealots and the essays in David C. Rapoport and Y. Alexander (eds.), The Morality of Terrorism: Religious and Secular Justifications (New York: Pergamon, 1982).

49. There are also examples in other cultures where mythic battles are thought to have had a historical effect. At a recent presentation at the Wilson Center, for instance, Professor Billie Jean Isbell described the influence of the notion of cosmic cycles of order and chaos in traditional Andean cosmology on the propensity for violence of the Sendero Luminoso tribal people of Peru ('The Faces and Voices of Terrorism', Politics and Religion Seminar, Wilson Center, 8 May 1986).

50. The term jihād is derived from the word for striving for something, and implies 'the struggle against one's bad inclinations' as well as what it has come to mean in the popular Western mind, holy war (Rudolph Peters, Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History, The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979, p.118).


52. Bhindranwale, excerpt from a speech, in Pettigrew.


54. For an interesting analysis of the Gush Emunim, see Ehud Sprinzak's essay in this volume.


56. Ibid., p.2.

57. Ibid., p.3.

58. Bhindranwale, excerpt from a speech, in Pettigrew.

59. Ibid.


63. Ibid., p.10.

64. Bhindranwale, excerpt from a speech, in Pettigrew.
