

COMMUNITY

Sikhs at odds over separatism debate

A 10-year-old child has asked, "Why are the Sikhs and Hindus in India killing each other?"

If there were a simple answer to that question likely there would be a simple solution. First we have to understand they are not two different nationalities but people of two different religions living side by side in the same country.

It must be remembered that at one time all Sikhs were Hindus. The Sikh religion took root as recently as 1500 A.D. when a young scholar named Nanak preached a new religion with only one God and where everyone was equal eliminating the hated caste system. This new religion had little similarities to the Hindu and naturally caused many problems.

Although the differences go back over 400 years, the present problems in the Punjab began when a small group of Sikhs in the Punjab called for a revival of ancient practices, a return to the old methods of Sikh worship including dress, long hair and diet. As the move-



Indo Canadian
By Joan Mayo

ment escalated some among them, not content with a return of the basics, formulated the idea of a separate country for Sikhs. A country administered along religious rules. The government of India, comprised mainly of Hindus, is

naturally opposed to losing the state of Punjab and many Sikhs now see the government of India as their enemy.

It should be remembered here that the state of Punjab is only one of 29 states and 10 territories that make up India, a country of 800 million people.

These advocates of a separate country for Sikhs call themselves Khalistani's, meaning the pure ones and would call their own country Khalistan, a country for the pure ones. There are 10 million Sikhs living in the state of Punjab and seven million Hindus with a few Moslems. A separate country for Sikh would mean all others would have to leave or be forced to live by Sikh rules. It is only natural these Punjabi's of other faiths do not favor a separate Punjab for Sikhs.

At the present time most Sikhs

are land owners and farmers while the businesses in the towns are owned by Hindus. As more and more Sikh youths are enjoying higher education they are naturally more interested in technical jobs than farming. The fertile Punjab supplies nearly all the food for the rest of India. As the agriculture state of Iowa is to the U.S. the Punjab is to India.

A recent T.V. broadcast from India boasted that India is now almost totally self sufficient but the population is increasing so rapidly that within 10 years the production of food must double.

Quoting from the book 'The Sikhs in their homeland India,' published in 1984, the Sikhs belong to all India even as all India belongs to the Sikhs.

The state of Punjab is the richest state in the union. Again quoting from the book; the Punjab has the

highest per capita income of any state, the highest enrolment of children in primary schools, the highest per capita consumption of electricity, the highest per capita number of automotive vehicles, the highest per capita bank deposits and the second highest percentage share of national wheat production.

The list continues, more irrigated land than any other state, and thanks to the hydro dams in the Punjab, their per capita consumption of electricity is 2½ times the all India average.

Many see Khalistan as a Utopia, an ideal holyland. However, not all Sikhs in the state of Punjab favor a separate country. Many respected Sikh leaders are committed to retaining the unity of the country and are working tirelessly to halt the terrorism and find a satisfactory middle of the road solution that will satisfy both the fundamentalist

religious Sikh and the practical business minded concerned citizen of India.

Three million Sikhs live throughout India and form a major part of Indias economy as well as holding high positions in the government and military. They are entitled to the same rights as all other citizens of India. At the time the above mentioned book was published in 1984, the mayors of both Delhi and Bombay were Sikhs. The book also contains a picture of a young Sikh carrying the torch at the opening of the Asiatic Games in 1982.

So, the trouble is not just between Hindu and Sikh but between those who favor a separate religious country for Sikhs and those who prefer the Punjab remain the most influential state in the world's second largest democracy and the supplier of food for India's millions of poor and hungry.