

choice

INDIA

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL ISSUES

Editor's Page

Our hats off to N.T. Rama Rao. His fight against the gang of lusty demons out to grab power and keep it at all costs has been truly heroic. Since the gang of lusty demons ranged from New Delhi to Hyderabad, few of us really believed NTR would succeed. His success, therefore, is unprecedented in the history of modern democracy. It has surely acquired an epic grandeur about it.

Our hats off also to the people of Andhra Pradesh, particularly to the MLAs. Never before in modern Indian history common people have so consciously and willingly fought for the preservation of democratic rights. This is, therefore, a singularly historical triumph of the people's power. They deserve highest praise for their exemplary courage and integrity in their refusal to be bought by the enemy. It requires a very strong will-power indeed to resist the temptation of changing side for the fantastic amount of Rs. 25 to Rs 30 lacs. But they did resist it. Our heartiest congratulations to them. They have unmistakably shown that all is not lost yet in India. There is still hope.

In Punjab, however, the imbroglio continues as before. The problems there are much more complex and complicated than in Andhra, or even in Kashmir. The army action, euphemistically called, the blue-star operation, has not only solved nothing; it has on the contrary added enormously to the complication of the issues there. Even under the army rule in Punjab, terrorist activities are continuing unabated.

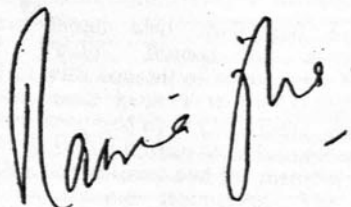
Obviously, the Punjab problem has many dimensions. We hope that our this month's interview with Khushwant Singh, one of the distinguished Indian intellectuals, will throw some revealing light on some of the dimensions of this seemingly baffling problem.

Gautam Chattopadhyay's piece, included in this issue, we hope, provides a useful historical background to the complete issue of mixing

politics and religion in the Golden Temple complex.

This issue of CHOICE India also carries a number of pieces on another constantly burning issue in India: the woman's place and role in the modern Indian society. This again is multi-dimensional, multi-layered and multi-sided issue. It is so baffling, so menacing, that even the most enthusiastic champions of women's cause content themselves with touching the fringes of it. We, however, try to go deeper into the issue. As the three pieces published here will show, we endeavour primarily to show the huge gap that exists between the traditional and the modern, stress the need for understanding it clearly, and, then devise our strategy for change.

We are overwhelmed with numerous letters of good wishes in response to the inaugural issue of CHOICE India. Although we are trying to thank all those well-wishers individually by post, we take this opportunity to thank them all once again, and wish to assure them and all our readers that we shall constantly endeavour to come up to their high expectations of us. Their confidence in us is our great strength.



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Secretary of Punjab Government had written on 5th June 1882, to the Commissioner and Superintendent of Amritsar, that "remedy provided in the above enactment (Act XIV, 1882) to such cases as may call for interference in regard to the Temple arrangements, and that you will report in due course whether the provision of the law are sufficient to meet the case". The Commissioner continued the practice to report the state of management and sphere of law was enlarged from time to time as the British concern grew.

It is unravelled that in religious spheres Britishers also had mastered its say in the management of Golden Temple. It was in 1886 the then Granthi Jawahir Singh died, and the question of successor cropped in. Nihang Doola Singh petitioned his candidature for "Granthi" and it all gave a torrid time to Britishers and Golden Temple committee. The Britishers dealt the situation with aplomb.

Doola Singh — the Nihang, had the sympathetic support of Nihangs who used to hold the Sikh forte in the days of Ranjit Singh. But Nihangs' say was considerably reduced as Britishers annexed Punjab with the ruling thumb. By 1886 Nihangs had almost lost its say in the management, so a renewed intention of Nihangs to champion the lost cause had seen a new dawn, in the vacant billet of the Shrine. Available document indicates that Britishers were in no mood to compromise with Nihangs.

On 20th August 1886, Commissioner of Amritsar had written a letter to Under-Secretary about the Government involvement in the "Granthi" affair. The letter said "I have every reason to believe that Col. Lang (Dy. Commissioner of Amritsar Division) and the Golden Temple Committee will do what is right in regard to the appointment of a successor to the deceased Jawahir Singh".

Col. Lang had observed in his 12th August, 1886 Demi-Officio despatch that "Appeal maker Doola Singh is a well known Nihang who on being turned out of Hyderabad for seditious conduct in connection with the temple there, turned his hand to giving trouble here (Golden Temple)."

Britishers considered Nihang Doola Singh as an outsider "with no real interest in the

place and not a Pujari." But Doola Singh encashed the sentiments of other Nihangs, who had considerable influence in several shrines of Amritsar.

Col. Lang noted "they (Nihang) are a fanatical sect and naturally wish to regain their ancient (Ranjit Singh's time) prominent influence in Darbar Sahib."

Nihang Doola Singh also played the role of "Self-appointed agent" and "wanted to be recognised as having a voice in the management of the temple" as Col. Lang sketched his movements. But Government took strong exception of the mentioned act, Govt. said "...This of course cannot be permitted."

In another vista Nihang claimed for "Poor-house" and its fund, which ages ago belonged to Akal Banga in Sikh days and collection went to the Pujaris, but the claim for it was turned down by British authority. Col. Lang who was directly involved with Golden Temple Management, observed that "It would be out of question attempting to change the constitution of the Temple and try every new fad — the attempt would raise a storm about our ears."

Furthermore, Nihangs stood "fanatics" from British angle and they were not trusted with "Authority". In this regard Dy. Commissioner of Amritsar Division noted, "It is quite sufficient that they have a strong religious and political influence in the Committee of the Management." So colonial British never stood for more flexibility. It would have exposed them to more vulnerable situation in the power game.

Doola Singh also challenged audit of accounts "rule" framed by a General Committee with consent of Britishers. Framed rules were more harmful to the Committee so a conflict cropped up. Col. Lang observed that the tension between the Manager and the Committee was extreme and the members could not get on amongst themselves. The consequence was that "Rule" had not been acted upon. Government sided with the Manager Sirdar Man Singh and he was trusted by District Authorities to do the "right". 'Law' was the worry of the Manager, as Pujaris and others had recognised rights in the Temple were "most notoriously pressed, grasping, unscrupulously lot." Thus Govt. ruled that Doola Singh as an outsider has no right to be heard on this point at all."

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