

## Indira Gandhi (1917–1984)

*You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.*—Indira Gandhi in a 1971 press conference

Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. As the country's leader, she charted the destiny of nearly 500 million people.

The daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi worked from birth with her father and Mohandas Gandhi (no relation) as they led the struggle for India's independence from Great Britain. The work was hard and dangerous: her parents were often jailed by the British, and Gandhi spent much of her childhood without them. When she was 12 years old, Gandhi set up a children's organization called Vanar Sena (Monkey Brigade). Its 6,000 members carried messages for the National Congress Movement and helped with first aid, cooking, and making flags.

Gandhi studied at Visva-Bharati University in Bengal and Oxford University, England. Much of her political education, however, came from the letters her father wrote to her from prison, which were later published as a book. In 1942 she married Feroze Gandhi, a young lawyer who was also active in the independence movement. Soon after the wedding, the young couple was arrested by the British and jailed for subversion for 13 months. Gandhi used the time to teach prisoners to read and write.

When India won its independence in 1947, her father was elected India's first prime minis-



ter. Gandhi served as his official hostess, since her father had never remarried after his wife's death. By the mid-1950s, Gandhi had become an important leader herself; in 1955 she was elected to the executive board of the Congress party. Four years later, she was elected president of the Congress party.

Gandhi became an effective and strong leader. After her father died in 1964, Rajya Sabha became prime minister

and Gandhi became minister of information and broadcasting. When Sabha died two years later, Gandhi was elected prime minister.

In 1975 Gandhi was convicted of a violation of the election laws. She responded by placing the country under emergency rule because she believed that the conviction was a means for her political rivals to have her removed from office. Although the conviction was overturned, the state of emergency lasted until 1977, when she lost her position. Five years later, however, she was back, having been reelected by an overwhelming majority. During the 1980s, India experienced both religious and ethnic conflicts. In 1984 Gandhi was assassinated by two of her bodyguards, both Sikhs, in retaliation for government actions against this group. Her son Rajiv took over the government, quelling the riots that followed her death.



1. WHO WAS INDIRA GANDHI'S FATHER? \_\_\_\_\_
2. WHAT MADE HER FATHER FAMOUS? \_\_\_\_\_
3. WHO DID HER FATHER WORK WITH? \_\_\_\_\_
4. WHAT WAS THE GOAL OF THE TWO MEN? \_\_\_\_\_
5. WHAT DID MRS. GANDHI DO IN PRISON? \_\_\_\_\_
6. WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE POLITICAL PARTY MRS. GANDHI BELONGED TO? \_\_\_\_\_
7. WHO ASSASSINATED MRS. GANDHI? \_\_\_\_\_
8. WHY WAS SHE ASSASSINATED? \_\_\_\_\_
9. MRS. GANDHI WAS THE FIRST FEMALE TO HOLD THIS POSITION IN INDIA, NAME THE POSITION. \_\_\_\_\_
10. WHO TOOK OVER FOR MRS. GANDHI? \_\_\_\_\_



**READ THE DOCUMENT “SLAYING MAY REND INDIA’S FABRIC OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY” THEN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

- 1. WHAT YEAR DID THIS ARTICLE TAKE PLACE? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 2. WHAT SHRINE IS CONSIDERED THE HOLIEST OF THE SIKHS? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 3. WHO WAS INDIRA GANDHI? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 4. WHAT HAPPENED TO MRS. GANDHI? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 5. WHO IS CONSIDERED THE FOUNDER OF THE SIKHS? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 6. WHAT IS THE TITLE OF THE SIKH SPIRITUAL LEADER? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 7. WHAT IS A TURBAN? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 8. WHAT WEAPON IS CARRIED BY SIKHS? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 9. HOW DO MALE SIKHS FEEL ABOUT HAIR? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 10. NAME THE FAMOUS CITY OF THE SIKHS \_\_\_\_\_**
- 11. LIST TWO OCCUPATIONS SIKHS ARE INVOLVED WITH \_\_\_\_\_**  
**\_\_\_\_\_**
- 12. HOW MANY GODS DO SIKHS BELIEVE IN? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 13. HOW DO SIKHS FEEL ABOUT THE CASTE SYSTEM? \_\_\_\_\_**
- 14. NAME THE SIKH STATE THAT HAS TALKED ABOUT SECESSION \_\_\_\_\_**

# Slaying May Rend India's Fabric of Ethnic Diversity

Los Angeles Times

Since June 6, when government troops stormed into the holiest shrine of India's Sikh religion to oust a group of heavily armed fanatics, there have been fears that the proud and devout Sikh people had become irreversibly alienated from the mainstream of the country's Hindu-dominated society.

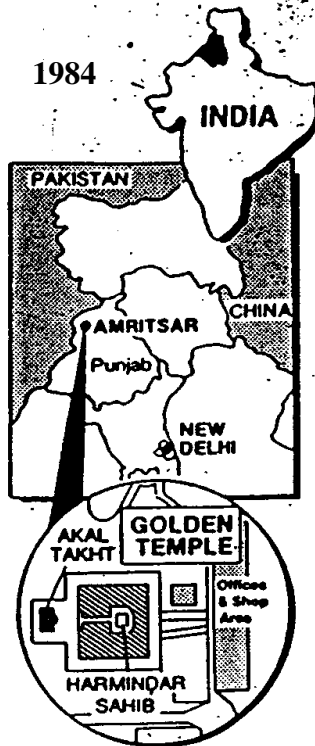
And the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, apparently to avenge what they believed to be the desecration of that shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, has heightened concern for the survival of India's intricately woven fabric of diverse ethnic communities.

Sikhism had its beginnings about 500 years ago in what is now northern India when a leader named Nanak tried to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, preached a monotheistic philosophy emphasizing religious exercises and meditation and opposing idolatry and the caste system.

Under spiritual leaders known as gurus, Sikh fighting men battled the forces of the Mogul emperors who dominated the subcontinent and became widely respected as fierce warriors. The 10th and last guru, Govind Singh, who died in 1708, created the Kalsa fraternity of soldier-saints and introduced the Sikh practices of carrying a dagger, wearing a turban and not cutting the hair and beard.

In the 19th century, Sikhs became dominant in the Punjab region and clashed with the British, who had incorporated India into the British Empire.

When the Punjab was split up in 1947 at the time of the division of the subcontinent into Hindu India and Moslem Pakistan, more than



2 million Sikhs migrated eastward from Pakistan into India. Altogether, there are now 14 million Sikhs throughout India, about 2 percent of the population. In Punjab state, however, where the holy city of Amritsar is situated, they make up 52 percent of the population.

With their military tradition, Sikhs are prominent in India's armed forces and are highly respected as farmers, having made the Punjab India's most agriculturally productive state. Members of the faith have risen to high positions in Indian society, per-

naps most notably Zail Singh, the Sikh who holds the largely ceremonial presidency of India.

For two years before Gandhi ordered Indian forces to seize the Golden Temple last June, there had been growing separatist agitation and violence in Punjab. Months before the attack, Sikh extremists took over the sprawling temple complex, stockpiled weapons there and used the shrine as a base for terrorist operations in support of their demands for a separate nation to be called Khalistan.

Even moderate Sikhs have argued for years that their community puts more into the Indian economy than it gets out of it government services, and they have pressed New Delhi for a variety of economic and political concessions.

However, the prime minister firmly resisted demands for political autonomy, arguing that Sikh autonomy would encourage similar demands in other regions of ethnically diverse India and would fragment the union.

The militants in Amritsar were led by a fiery, self-styled Sikh saint named Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who died in the assault on the temple by the Indian army. The government says 492 Sikhs and 93 soldiers were killed; by other accounts, as many as 1,000 militants and 220 soldiers died.

Gandhi sent the troops into the temple only after months of delay that was criticized both by Sikh moderates and by opposition politicians. But when she moved, she said, "No government can be a mute witness to the wanton and brutal killing of innocent people," and she appealed to all Indians to "heal the wounds" that had been caused by the two years of violence in Punjab.