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Questions

Are you able to provide any information about disturbances in Jalandhar in the past few weeks directed at Dera Sacha Sauda followers, involving strikes and the burning of buses, which arose following the killing of a prominent Sikh in Austria, for which Dera Sacha Sauda followers had been blamed? Are you able to advise who the actions were directed at and why they arose?

RESPONSE

1. Are you able to provide any information about disturbances in Jalandhar in the past few weeks directed at Dera Sacha Sauda followers, involving strikes and the burning of buses, which arose following the killing of a prominent Sikh in Austria, for which Dera Sacha Sauda followers had been blamed? Are you able to advise who the actions were directed at and why they arose?

There was widespread violence and rioting across Punjab following the killing of a guru of the Dera Sach Khand (also Dera Sachkhand and Dera Sachkhand Ballan) sect in Vienna, Austria on 24 May 2009. Reports from *Associated Press* and *The Times* state that a group of Sikh men entered a Dera Sach Khand temple during a service in Vienna and attacked sect members, including the leader Guru Sant Niranjana Dass and his deputy, Guru Sant Rama Nand. Sant Rama Nand subsequently died in hospital, triggering the violence in Punjab amongst Dera Sach Khand followers. Subsequent articles sourced from *The Tribune*, *BBC News* and the *Indo-Asian News Service* report that several people were killed in the Punjab riots, that the rioters attacked police stations and private property, and torched cars, buses and trains. According to these reports, the worst of the rioting took place on 25 May, and the call-out of the military and the imposition of curfews reportedly calmed the situation somewhat by the next day (for details of the violence in Punjab, see: 'It's Dera Sachkhand versus

turbaned Sikhs in Vienna' 2009, *IBN Live*, (source: *Associated Press*), 24 May <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/its-dera-sach-khand-versus-turbaned-sikhs-in-vienna/93288-2-7.html> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 1; Singh, P. 2009, 'Army out to restore peace', *The Tribune*, 25 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090526/main1.htm> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 2; Page, J. 2009, 'Riots after Sikh guru Sant Rama Nand shot dead in Vienna', *The Times*, 25 May <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6359288.ece> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 3; Jolly, A. 2009, 'Heavy security after Punjab riots', *BBC News*, 26 May – Attachment 4; and 'Curfew relaxed in Punjab; violence affects Haryana' 2009, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 26 May – Attachment 5).

No reports were located which attributed blame for the murder of Sant Rama Nanad to the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS), and no reports were located suggesting that DSS followers were being targeted in the ensuing violence in Punjab. Early reports from *Associated Press*, *The Times* and *BBC News* apportion blame for the attack to fundamentalist Sikhs who see the Dera Sach Khand as a blasphemous sect, while reports from the *Indian Express* and *Punjab Newslines* claim the attacks were driven by disaffected members of the dominant Jat Sikh caste who resent the rising power and influence of the largely Dalit Dera Sach Khand. A 29 May article from the *Press Trust of India* states that Austrian police are investigating claims that the Sikh militant group the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) had claimed responsibility for the attack; another report, from *Tribune*, quotes a KZF source denying responsibility for the attack. A 24 May report from *The Tribune* provides the only instance of an attack on DSS adherents; the attack was reportedly carried out in Shimlapuri by fundamentalist Sikhs from the Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj, and occurred prior to the Punjab riots (for attribution of the Vienna attacks to the blasphemy of the Dera Sach Khand, see: 'It's Dera Sachkhand versus turbaned Sikhs in Vienna' 2009, *IBN Live*, (source: *Associated Press*), 24 May <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/its-dera-sach-khand-versus-turbaned-sikhs-in-vienna/93288-2-7.html> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 1; Page, J. 2009, 'Riots after Sikh guru Sant Rama Nand shot dead in Vienna', *The Times*, 25 May <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6359288.ece> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 3; and Jolly, A. 2009, 'Heavy security after Punjab riots', *BBC News*, 26 May – Attachment 4; for reports of caste-based motives for the attack, see: Mishra, V. 2009, 'Inside Dera Sachkhand', *Indian Express*, 31 May <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/inside-dera-sachkhand/468555/0> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 10; and Bains, S. 2009, 'Vienna incident – Jat-Dalit divide flashpoint', *Punjab Newslines*, 27 May <http://www.punjabnewslines.com/content/view/16855/38/> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 11; for the Khalistan Zindabad Force allegation and denial, see: Rao, H. 2009, 'Vienna gurdwara attack suspects identified', *Rediff News*, (source: *Press Trust of India*), 29 May <http://ia.rediff.com/news/report/2009/may/29/vienna-gurdwara-attack-suspects-identified.htm> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 7; and Bariana, S. 2009, 'KZF denies involvement in attack', *The Tribune*, 28 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090529/punjab.htm#6> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 8; for the attack on DSS adherents, see: 'Bloody brawl at Shimlapuri: 12 hurt as Khalsa Fauj, Dera followers clash' 2009, *The Tribune*, 24 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090525/ldh1.htm> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 12).

The information provided below is presented in three sections, the first dealing with the [attack in Vienna and the subsequent riots in Punjab](#), the second with background on the [Dera](#)

[Sach Khand and caste-based motives](#) for the attack, and the third with the [attack on Dera Sacha Sauda](#) adherents in Shimlapuri.

The attack in Vienna, and the subsequent riots in Punjab

Associated Press reported on the attack on the Dera Sachkhand temple in Vienna on 24 May, quoting witnesses who “spoke of the chaos that broke out shortly after a group of bearded and turbaned men attacked the preacher and his followers moved to defend him”. A police spokesman stated that “all six attackers were in critical condition”; according to witnesses, “the perpetrators were fundamentalist Sikhs from a higher caste, who accused the preacher of being disrespectful with the Holy Book”. The attackers are further identified as “men of Indian origin and estimated between 30 and 50 years old” by a spokesman of “Vienna medical services”:

Sikhs wielding knives and a handgun attacked a preacher at a rival temple in Vienna on Sunday in a brawl that left at least 11 people wounded, police and witnesses said.

Police spokesman Michael Takacs said the clash occurred in Sikh temple. Mohinder Ram, a worshipper who said he had attended services there for decades, identified it as a temple run by followers of Shri Guru Ravidas, a late founder of a Sikh sect called Dera Sachkhand.

In Vienna, witnesses spoke of the chaos that broke out shortly after a group of bearded and turbaned men attacked the preacher and his followers moved to defend him.

“Everybody was praying and then it started with knives and a pistol,” said Nermal Singh, his shirt bloodied and his head bandaged from what he said was a knife wound.

Ram, 72, said, “I heard four to five shots” in the temple. “People started screaming, children were crying as they ran out.

“It was like war. There was lots of blood everywhere.”

Police spokesman Michael Takacs said the scene was “like a battlefield.”

He said all six attackers were in critical condition, while the wounds of the others were less serious. More people may have been slightly hurt and run out of the temple before police arrived, he said.

Witnesses said the perpetrators were fundamentalist Sikhs from a higher caste, who accused the preacher of being disrespectful with the Holy Book.

All the wounded were men of Indian origin and estimated between 30 and 50 years old, spokesman Bernhard Segal of Vienna medical services said.

Ram said about 400 people were at the service when the fight broke out in the temple, in a residential building of the working-class Viennese neighbourhood.

Four ambulances and three medical helicopters transported the victims to hospitals.

The temple is situated in Vienna-Rudolfshim, the capital’s 15th district near Westbahnhof, one of Vienna’s main train stations. Police cordoned off the area.

The Dera Sachkhand sect comprises mostly Sikhs belonging to the lower Dalit caste.

There are several such Deras across the northern state of Punjab. While there are disagreements between the Deras and Sikh religious authorities, violent clashes are rare ('It's Dera Sachkhand versus turbaned Sikhs in Vienna' 2009, *IBN Live*, (source: *Associated Press*), 24 May <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/its-dera-sach-khand-versus-turbaned-sikhs-in-vienna/93288-2-7.html> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 1).

On 25 May, *The Tribune* reported that the rioters “defied the curfew imposed on entire districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, in Patiala and in Ludhiana”, and that “[r]oad and railway movement was crippled in Jalandhar and adjoining areas”. According to this report, “angry demonstrators not only torched trains, government buses and private vehicles but also resorted to widespread violence damaging both private and public property”, in Jalandhar and in other cities. This report also notes that Jalandhar is one of the “strongholds of followers of Guru Ravi Das sect”:

Punjab plunged into angry protests, violence and vandalism today before recovering by evening. The violence followed reports that Sant Ramanand (57), shot in Vienna on Sunday, had succumbed to his injuries. Angry followers of Guru Ravidas, mostly Dalits, hit the streets, torched trains, set vehicles on fire and set up road blockades, throwing normal life completely out of gear. They defied the curfew imposed on entire districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, in Patiala and in Ludhiana, abducted a policeman and tried to lynch another.

...Road and railway movement was crippled in Jalandhar and adjoining areas as protesters blocked the National Highway between Jalandhar and Pagwara, between Ludhiana and Panipat and also between Ambala and Delhi. Railway traffic between Delhi and Jammu was also crippled as the mob set fire to a train in Jalandhar Cantt Railway Station and vandalised railway property. At Jammu railway station, Railways ran out of cash for refunding fare to passengers and a large number of them were stranded on Monday evening.

...Deployment of the Army and the police brought the situation somewhat under control and by evening the situation appeared to be improving despite reports of sporadic violence in some parts of the state. The Shiromani Akali Dal called for a state-wide bandh to condemn the act of violence in Austria and parties called for restraint.

At a number of places in Ludhiana, Phagwara, Jalandhar, Nakodar, Nawan Shahr, Amritsar, Ambala, and Yamunanagar, angry demonstrators not only torched trains, government buses and private vehicles but also resorted to widespread violence damaging both private and public property. The normal life throughout the region remained disrupted as the security forces had a tough time in preventing arsonists from wreaking havoc.

The Doab, specially Jalandhar, Nakodar, Phagwara and parts of Nawan Shahr are the strongholds of followers of Guru Ravi Das sect (Singh, P. 2009, 'Army out to restore peace', *The Tribune*, 25 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090526/main1.htm> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 2).

A 25 May report from *The Times* quotes witnesses at the shooting in Vienna who claim that the perpetrators were “fundamentalist Jat Sikhs – traditionally the land-owning farmers in the northern state of Punjab – who accused one or both of the preachers of being disrespectful of the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhism’s Holy Book”. The report notes that Dera Sach Khand “differs from mainstream Sikhism on several religious issues, including worshipping living gurus such as Sant Rama Nand, which is considered blasphemous by most Sikhs”. The report states that “[m]ost of the violence was in or around Jalandhar, which is a stronghold of the Dera Sach Khand, a Sikh sect made up mainly of Untouchables, or Dalits”.

The fatal shooting of a visiting guru at a Sikh temple in Vienna sparked rioting across northern India today, with the Government calling in the army to help police restore order.

At least two people were killed and four injured when police opened fire on rioters who defied a curfew and army patrols by attacking police stations and torching cars, buses and trains, local officials said.

“The situation remains tense but under control,” said RK Jaiswal, senior superintendent of police in the northern city of Jalandhar.

Most of the violence was in or around Jalandhar, which is a stronghold of the Dera Sach Khand, a Sikh sect made up mainly of Untouchables, or Dalits, from the lowest level of the Hindu caste system.

A leader of the sect was killed and another preacher wounded yesterday when higher caste Sikhs wielding knives and a gun attacked the two at a Sikh temple that they were visiting in Vienna, according to Austrian police.

Guru Sant Rama Nand, 57, died in the night after an emergency operation. Guru Sant Niranjana Dass, 68, was in a stable condition, police said. Both had suffered bullet wounds.

At least 15 other people were wounded, including four of the attackers, who were eventually overpowered by worshippers, police said.

Witnesses said that the attackers were fundamentalist Jat Sikhs – traditionally the land-owning farmers in the northern state of Punjab – who accused one or both of the preachers of being disrespectful of the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhism’s Holy Book.

Sikhism does not officially recognise caste and was founded partly to rebel against the system but the concept remains deeply rooted in Indian society, even among Sikhs, Christians and Muslims. The system divides society into hundreds of groups and sub-groups which for many Indians continue to define where one lives, who one marries, what job one does and many other things.

The Dera Sach Khand also differs from mainstream Sikhism on several religious issues, including worshipping living gurus such as Sant Rama Nand, which is considered blasphemous by most Sikhs.

At least some of the attackers were Austrian residents who had asked for asylum, prosecutors said. About 2,800 Sikhs were living in Austria in 2001, according to the last census (Page, J. 2009, ‘Riots after Sikh guru Sant Rama Nand shot dead in Vienna’, *The Times*, 25 May <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6359288.ece> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 3).

A 26 May report from *BBC News* states that “thousands of paramilitary soldiers, troops and armed police” have been deployed in Punjab, and that this deployment “appears to have significantly discouraged more rioting”; a curfew was reportedly being enforced “in several major cities”. This report states “[i]t is thought that the attack took place because Sikh hard-liners see the sect – which incorporates Sikh customs within its teachings – as a heretical offshoot”:

Heavy security has brought an uneasy calm to India’s Punjab state following riots on Monday over the killing of an Indian preacher in Austria.

The deployment of thousands of paramilitary soldiers, troops and armed police appears to have significantly discouraged more rioting.

Tens of thousands of lower caste Hindus and Sikhs took to the streets.

They were protesting over the murder of the preacher, Sant Ramanand, who was killed by a rival Sikh group in Vienna.

Mr Ramanand was attacked on Sunday during clashes at a religious ceremony by six men armed with knives and a pistol.

He was a senior leader of the Dera Sach Khand sect which is made up almost equally out of lower caste Hindus and poorer Sikhs.

It is thought that the attack took place because Sikh hard-liners see the sect – which incorporates Sikh customs within its teachings – as a heretical offshoot.

Many mainstream Sikhs also find the sect's beliefs to be offensive.

On Monday, supporters of the sect set fire to trains, vehicles and dozens of public and private buildings in Punjab.

A curfew is being enforced in several major cities but sporadic incidents of violence still continue (Jolly, A. 2009, 'Heavy security after Punjab riots', *BBC News*, 26 May – Attachment 4).

A 26 May report from the *Indo-Asian News Service* claims that curfews had been relaxed in "Jalandhar, the hub of Dera Sachkhand", and that conditions remained "by and large peaceful". The report notes the killing of a protestor by "an SAD [Shiromani Akali Dal] councillor", and claims that this killing took "the death toll in the violence in Punjab...to three":

Curfew was on Tuesday relaxed in four violence-hit cities of Punjab, which remained by and large peaceful barring a town in Mukhtsar district where protestors clashed with police, even as in neighbouring Haryana some areas were affected by disturbances after the killing of a sect leader in Vienna.

Curfew was eased in Hoshiarpur, Phargwara and Jalandhar, the hub of Dera Sachkhand whose followers had indulged in large-scale violence on Monday after the attack on its leaders in Vienna, official sources said.

...A protestor was killed late last night when an SAD councillor fired in "self-defence" in Jalandhar after his car was attacked and set on fire, they said. With this, the death toll in the violence in Punjab rose to three. Army and police patrolled the violence-hit area to maintain calm ('Curfew relaxed in Punjab; violence affects Haryana' 2009, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 26 May – Attachment 5).

A 26 May report from *The Tribune* claims that "miscreants" took advantage of the riots "to settle scores with their rivals in Jalandhar" and other cities, and that these miscreants "ransacked hospitals, financial institutions, ATMs, showrooms of motor vehicles, goods stores, private buses and petrol stations":

While arsonists damaged government and public property worth crores over the past two days following the death of Sant Ramanand of Dera Sachkhand Ballan in Vienna (Austria), certain miscreants taking the benefit of the situation indulged in looting.

The miscreants also damaged property to settle scores with their rivals in Jalandhar, Phagwara, Adampur, Nakodar and certain other places in and around the city.

The miscreants ransacked hospitals, financial institutions, ATMs, showrooms of motor vehicles, goods stores, private buses and petrol stations.

Talking to *The Tribune*, Punjab Director-General of Police K.K. Attri claimed that certain criminals had mingled with the protesters to settle the score with their personal rivals. They took benefit of the situation.

The DGP expressed his inability to identify these troubleshooters in the mob. He claimed that the police forces had been authorised to take the necessary action against the miscreants to avoid any major tragedy (Bhardwaj, B. 2009, 'Arson to settle the score with rivals', *The Tribune*, 26 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090527/jal.htm#2> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 6).

On 29 May, the *Press Trust of India* reported Viennese police claims that “[a]ll six accused in the violent attack on a gurdwara in Vienna that left one top leader of an India-based Sikh sect dead and another injured have been identified as illegal immigrants”. A police spokesman also claimed that “[t]he attack was clearly pre-planned”, and that the police were “investigating reports that a group known as Khalistan Zindabad Force had claimed responsibility for the attack”:

All six accused in the violent attack on a gurdwara in Vienna that left one top leader of an India-based Sikh sect dead and another injured have been identified as illegal immigrants, police said on Friday, days after the incident sparked riots across Punjab and Haryana.

Police spokesman Michael Takacs said all the six were in custody, including the mastermind who was in coma in a hospital after he was shot in the head during the Sunday attack.

The attack was clearly pre-planned, Takacs said.

According to police, the suspects were illegal immigrants, including 24-year-old S Charnjit from Uttar Pradesh and 33-year-old S Hardeep. The two had reached Austria illegally in 2001 and 2008 respectively.

28-year-old S Sukhwinder from Haryana came to Vienna in 2001 and sought asylum citing a family feud for fleeing India while 34-year-old S Jaspal came in 2008 and requested asylum on religious grounds.

The other two suspects, 28-year-old S Satwinder from Uttar Pradesh and 45-year-old S Tarsum from Gujarat made only vague asylum claims.

...The Austrian police is investigating reports that a group known as Khalistan Zindabad Force had claimed responsibility for the attack, Takacs said (Rao, H. 2009, 'Vienna gurdwara attack suspects identified', *Rediff News*, (source: *Press Trust of India*), 29 May <http://ia.rediff.com/news/report/2009/may/29/vienna-gurdwara-attack-suspects-identified.htm> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 7).

On 28 May, *The Tribune* reported that the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF), a militant Sikh group, “has cropped up in the context of the assassination of Sant Ramanand”, but that they “denied any involvement in the attack”:

The Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF), the organisation that has cropped up in the context of the assassination of Sant Ramanand (57), tipped to take over as the next head of Dera Sachkhand, in Vienna on Sunday, today denied any involvement in the attack.

In an e-mail on a letter pad of the KZF, received by the Tribune office here, it has been pointed out the Punjab leadership was defaming their struggle for Khalistan (Bariana, S. 2009, 'KZF denies involvement in attack', *The Tribune*, 28 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090529/punjab.htm#6> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 8).

Background on the Dera Sach Khand and caste-based motives for the attack

Background information on the Dera Sach Khand is provided in a 26 May article from the *Gulf News*, which states that “[m]embers of Dera Sach Khand are primarily the followers of medieval Indian spiritual leader Ravidas”, and that “[o]ne of the followers of Ravidas, Baba Pipal Das, who was born in Bhatinda, Punjab, founded Dera Sach Khand in the early 20th century”. According to this article, “[t]he traditional Sikh community finds itself at odds with the Dera sect because Dera members believe in a living human guru while Sikhs do not”:

Since the establishment of Sikhism over 500 years ago, several sects have emerged within Sikhism.

These sects or groups are ideologically different from the mainstream traditional Sikh religion but have links with it. Main among these sects are Nirankaris, Namdharis, Dera Sachcha Sauda, and Dera Sach Khand among others.

Dera Sach Khand was in the news this week after one of its senior leaders was killed in sectarian violence in Austria.

Members of Dera Sach Khand are primarily the followers of medieval Indian spiritual leader Ravidas who was born in 1377 AD, more than 90 years before the birth of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Ravidas had a large number of followers who had formed a sect in his name much before Sikhism was established as a religion.

Ravidas wrote deeply devotional verses and 40 of his hymns have been incorporated in the Sikh scripture, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Ravidas is one of the few spiritual leaders, other than the Sikh Gurus, whose writings have been incorporated in the Granth.

Since Sikh Gurus were against social inequality based on caste system, inclusion of his writings in the Granth was a big boost to members of the lower castes. However, the caste system failed to completely die down in Sikh society.

One of the followers of Ravidas, Baba Pipal Das, who was born in Bhatinda, Punjab, founded Dera Sach Khand in the early 20th century. He was succeeded by Sarwan Das as the head of the Dera. After him, the heads of the Dera were Hari Das, Garib Das and Niranjan Das, the present head of the Dera, who was among those injured in Sunday's Vienna brawl.

Ravidas's other writings and socio-religious practices of his sect make Dera different. The traditional Sikh community finds itself at odds with the Dera sect because Dera members believe in a living human guru while Sikhs do not (Singh, D. 2009, 'Slain leader's sect has roots in Ravidas' teachings', *Gulf News*, 26 May <http://archive.gulfnews.com/world/India/10317281.html> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 9).

On 31 May, an article in the *Indian Express* provided background to the attack in Vienna, suggesting that in the “attack on the Dera Sachkhand”, “an older narrative is once again rising to the surface” as the dominant Jat Sikhs in Punjab “are seen to be intolerant of the successful efforts of the Dalits to pull themselves up, by embracing opportunities of educational and economic mobility”. The article also provides information on the rise of the “Ravidassis” in the Doaba region (which includes Jalandhar), the movement in which the Dera Sachkhand has its origins. The report also speculates on the political context of the conflict between Sikh groups and the Deras, and the importance of the Dalit vote in Jalandhar and the rest of Doaba:

Basically, in the shadow cast by the murder in Vienna, an older narrative is once again rising to the surface: the Jats-Sikhs have enjoyed a virtual monopoly over land, political power and management of religious places in Punjab. But they are increasingly confronted with, and are seen to be intolerant of the successful efforts of the Dalits to pull themselves up, by embracing opportunities of educational and economic mobility. The attack on the Dera Sachkhand, this story goes, is another example of this intolerance.

...Manohar Lal Mahey runs a successful leather business and the ‘Vigilant Brotherhood (International)’. “This is not an internal matter of the Sikhs,” he says. “After the social movement in the 1920s led by Mangoo Ram Mugowalia, our community got itself enumerated and registered by the British government as ‘ad-dharmi’ in the census of 1931.” The ad-dharmis say they are neither Hindu nor Sikh, but the ‘original inhabitants of India’.

Over the years, the movement consolidated. In the Doaba region, it grew under the unifying symbol of sant Ravidass. It found a spiritual home in the dera; politically, it veered towards Ambedkar-ism, though that did not translate into any significant tilt towards the BSP.

What binds the Ravidassis to the Sikhs, however, is the fact that they also worship the Guru Granth Sahib because sant Ravidass’s baani or teachings are enshrined in it. Forty shabads and one shloka of sant Ravidass have been included in the holy book of the Sikhs.

But the powerful link that binds the two communities now threatens to tear them apart. Earlier, the Ravidassis would observe all their religious occasions in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib in the Sikh gurdwara. But in the last few decades, first at home and then abroad, as the community started building its own gurdwaras or gurughars, controversy started brewing, among other things, over the fact that the Ravidassis place the portrait of sant Ravidass alongside the Guru Granth Sahib.

...The conflict that is now coming to the fore started with the diaspora, says professor of sociology at Guru Nanak Dev University, Paramjit Singh Judge. “It was triggered in Sikh gurdwaras in English-speaking European countries by fundamentalists associated with the Khalistani movement.”

What makes the Dera Sachkhand a target for the hardliners, he says, is that the Ravidassi movement is not outside of the religious parampara or tradition, but instead partakes of it. The ad-dharm Dalit samaj is well-organised; it has also been inventive in giving itself its own narrative and ritual that can often be aggressive.

Judge believes there is an immediate political context to the current face-off. After the Lok Sabha election, he says, a murmuring could be heard that the deras had voted for the Congress. “But after the violent reaction to Vienna, everyone realises that a direct confrontation must be avoided in Doaba. Jalandhar, for instance, has 37 per cent Dalits. To win Doaba, you need to make coalitions.”

Others point to the SAD's recent efforts to project a more inclusive and secular identity and wonder what the present face-off could mean for that project. In the last assembly elections, they point out, the SAD had given many more tickets to the traditionally Congress-supporting Ravidasiya community in Doaba. Recently, it has imported at least two prominent Dalit leaders of the region, Pawan Kumar Tinu and Avinash Chander, from the BSP. A tug of war has been on between the Congress and SAD for the vote of Doaba's numerically significant community.

For now, the face-off has triggered more of the usual Akali-Congress blame game. Gurcharan Singh Channi, district president of SAD (urban), says, "Some third force wants to disturb the peace in Punjab. This suits a third party. It suits the Congress. The day the violence took place, paramilitary forces were sent in late." Congress leader Chaudhry Jagjit Singh, a former cabinet minister, retorts: "The SAD's approach to Dalits has never been inclusive."

But for many Punjab watchers, the most significant question framed by the present controversy may be this: how will the Dera Sachkhand episode play into a long-running theme of domination and control in the state, featuring the SGPC? "It is when Sikhism became more and more defined by its exclusions, that the deras gained ground," says Rajivlochan, professor of contemporary history in Punjab University. In the recent past, the clash between mainstream Sikhism and the deras has taken different forms—there was the Jat-Dalit conflict over the management of a gurdwara at Talhan and the Dera Sacha Sauda controversy (Mishra, V. 2009, 'Inside Dera Sachkhand', *Indian Express*, 31 May <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/inside-dera-sachkhand/468555/0> – Accessed 29 June 2009 – Attachment 10).

A *Punjab Newsline* article from 27 May provides additional background on the role of caste conflict in the Vienna attack, and places this incident in the context of ongoing violence between mainstream Sikh groups and the Dera Sacha Sauda. The report states that "recent incidents of violence between Sikhs community and followers of deras mushrooming in Punjab are symptoms of caste struggle", and that "[t]he Vienna incident is the result of a simmering undercurrent of animosity between the dominant Jat Sikh community of Punjab and the largely Dalit Sikh dera-goers". Background is also provided on the Dera Sach Khand, which "was set up over 70 years ago in Ballan village near Jalandhar by Sant Pipal Singh", and "sect follows the ideals of Sant Ravi Dass, a late 15th century preacher". According to this report, "it has become a power centre for members of the lower castes":

The border State of Punjab which has passed through a decade-long nightmare of insurgency owing to unrest among Sikh fundamentalists now seems sitting on another volcano, that of casteism.

The emergence of so many deras in Punjab has been changing the socio-religious demographics, making certain sections of society vulnerable to even small provocations.

The incident of Vienna where certain Sikh fundamentalists have allegedly attacked the religious leaders of a dera in Punjab has exposed the growing unrest among the poor Dalits who are living in isolation for decades on the social and economic fronts.

The Vienna incident is the result of a simmering undercurrent of animosity between the dominant Jat Sikh community of Punjab and the largely Dalit Sikh dera-goers. Much of the following that the dera sects are attracting is because people from lower castes and the lower strata of Punjabi society are trying to carve out a distinct identity for themselves.

While the Vienna attack, police claimed, was an organised crime, the violence in Punjab was neither organised nor targeted. It took a few minutes to set all of Punjab aflame. The total

failure of the State machinery to handle the situation is another matter but fear of communal backlash loomed large on the faces of the State authorities. The State police allowed the furious mob to damage public and private property and vent out their anger.

In at least one village in Jalandhar district, a senior official said Jat Sikhs had direct clash with the Dalits but the situation was handled in time.

Punjab has no history of communal riots. However, recent incidents of violence between Sikhs community and followers of deras mushrooming in Punjab are symptoms of caste struggle.

In the midst of ongoing confrontation between Sikhs and Dera Sacha Sauda, the Dera Sach Khand of Jalandhar is a new chapter added to Punjab politics. The Sikh community has banned congregations by Dera Sacha Sauda that led to clash between the two sides at many places in Malwa region. In Tallan village in Jalandhar district, major clashes took place twice between Jat Sikhs and Dalits over control of a gurdwara in the village.

Similar clashes are on between Sikh fundamentalists and Divya Jyoti Jagran Sansthan and Baba Bhaniarewala who also has influence over Dalits.

The Vienna attack had its roots in local factors linked to Dera Sach Khand headed by Sant Niranjana Dass. His deputy Sant Ramanand died in the attack. This Dera had lakhs of Dalit followers all over the world.

Dera Sach Khand was set up over 70 years ago in Ballan village near Jalandhar by Sant Pipal Singh. The sect follows the ideals of Sant Ravi Dass, a late 15th century preacher. Over the ages, it has become a power centre for members of the lower castes.

Sect leaders have been placing the Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, in their gurdwaras and religious ceremonies, much to the annoyance of the Sikh clergy and community. The Sikhs object to their holy book being placed equally to living leaders of this sect (Bains, S. 2009, 'Vienna incident – Jat-Dalit divide flashpoint', *Punjab Newslines*, 27 May <http://www.punjabnewslines.com/content/view/16855/38/> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 11).

Attack on Dera Sacha Sauda followers

A 24 May article from *The Tribune* reports an attack on followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda by fundamentalist Sikh group the Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj; the attack appears to predate the violence in Vienna and to be unconnected with the subsequent rioting:

Tension prevailed in Shimlapuri area this morning after 20 armed assailants of the Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj, Damdama Sahib, allegedly attacked followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda at Street No. 8, Satguru Nagar, leaving 12 injured.

The followers of both the groups sustained serious injuries and were rushed to the CMC and the Civil Hospital for treatment.

The incident took place at around 7.30 am when the Dera Sach Sauda followers were returning after attending a weekly prayer. Area residents said the followers of the Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj were armed with swords and other sharp-edged weapons. After being attacked, the Dera followers ran backwards for cover.

In the meantime, a few more followers of the Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj arrived on the spot and surrounded the Dera followers from both sides and attacked them ('Bloody brawl at

Shimlapuri: 12 hurt as Khalsa Fauj, Dera followers clash' 2009, *The Tribune*, 24 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090525/ldh1.htm> – Accessed 30 June 2009 – Attachment 12).

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Search engines

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Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

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