

Apex court ratifies Punjab militant's life sentence

The Supreme Court has ratified the life sentence of a Punjab militant who killed his former colleague in May 1992 because he quit terrorism and decided to settle down.

A bench of Justice S.B. Sinha and Justice L.S. Pantia ratified the life sentence awarded by a Punjab anti-terror court to militant Dilbag Singh who is now held in the Maximum Security Jail at Nabha. The apex court judgement, pronounced Tuesday, was released Thursday.

The bench dismissed Dilbag Singh's appeal against the anti-terror court's ruling, saying it had "no merit".

Dilbag Singh was arrested in September 1999 and convicted by the trial court in April 2004 on charges of killing his former colleague Jagmail Singh.

According to the prosecution, Jagmail Singh was an extremist himself earlier, but quit terrorism after falling in love with a girl.

Realising the futility of the violence, Jagmail Singh quit terrorism, married the girl and took up farming, the profession of his ancestors, the prosecution said.

But he continued to receive threats from his former militant colleagues, who wanted him to return to the fold of the militant group.

To help Jagmail Singh settle down at his Atlon village under the Ghagga police station in Patiala district, the state government gave him and his brother Kirandeep Singh two rifles to defend themselves against militants.

But he was gunned down by Dilbag Singh, his accomplice Jasbir Singh and one more unidentified person on the evening of May 9, 1992 when he was returning home from his fields along with his brother.

The assailants accosted Jagmail Singh a few paces away from his home and began firing at him, while his brother managed to save himself. Jagmail Singh's father stared helplessly as the trio gunned him down, the prosecution maintained.

The court convicted Dilbag Singh on testimonies of Jagmail Singh's brother and father.

Defence counsel sought to defend the militant in the apex court by contending that Jagmail Singh was gunned down by the police, who had then forced his father and brother to support their version.

Defence counsel also pointed out that besides the father and the brother, the police had not been able to field any independent eyewitness to the killing of Jagmail Singh.

But the apex court ratified the trial court judgement, dismissing all objections raised by counsel for Dilbag Singh.

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