

Twenty-five years on...

1984 Sikhs' Kristallnacht



Four Sikh brothers, the owners of the burning Sahni Paints, are roasted alive by mobs; Paharganj, New Delhi, 1984

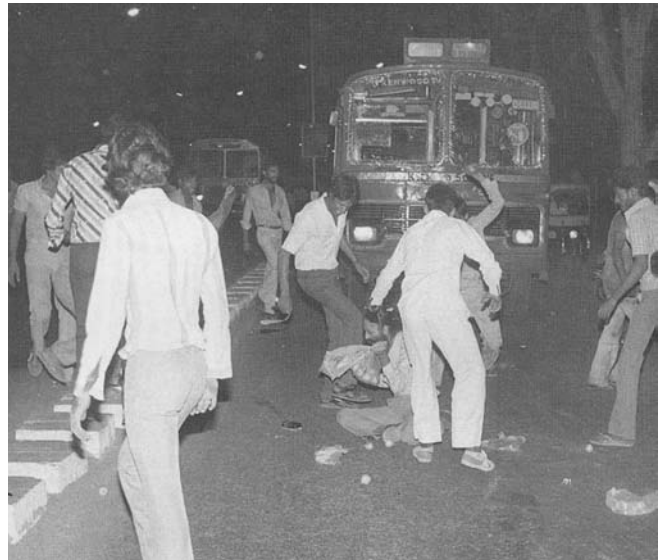
Introduction

An image still haunts me, even after twenty-five years. Ashok Vahie's lense had captured the beginnings of a horrible sequence of events, a Kristallnacht of India's Sikhs. On a wide and leafy British built New Delhi road, a terrified Sikh man is sitting, cross-legged while a group of men casually take turns in attacking him.

Despite being a minority in India, Sikhs had climbed up the heights of Indian society with the help of their strong work ethic. To the wider Hindu community though, it was time they were cut down to size.

Half a century earlier, another minority community, the Jews, faced similar challenges in Europe. Sikhs have a lot in common with the people of the Jewish faith. Both share an healthy and positive optimism in their attitude to life in the face of adversity. Both have faced centuries of persecution. The month of November has brought them together. In November 1938, a German embassy official, Ernst vom Rath, was assassinated by a Jewish teenager, Herschel Grynszpan, in revenge of the mass expulsion of his people to Poland. Kristallnacht or the 'Night of Broken Glass', though portrayed by the German authorities as a spontaneous outburst of popular outrage, were actually pogroms organised

by Hitler's Nazis. Synagogues and Jewish businesses were particular targets, while the police and fire brigade looked on. Jews were hunted down and thousands were deported. This marked the beginning of the Holocaust.



1 November 1984, New Delhi, India. Photo by Ashok Vahie



A burning Synagogue, Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938, Germany

46 years later in India, a similar event occurred. I was seventeen years old at the time of Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination on 31 October 1984. She was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards, in an act of vigilante justice for the attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' Vatican. Although 25 years have passed, that day still remains fresh in my memory. Like many other Sikhs of Indian origin living in Britain, I was glued to the television coverage, unaware what lay store for our kith and kin in India.

In the days that followed, Sikhs, for the first time in independent India, felt like Jews in Nazi Germany, as mobs of Hindus ran riot, setting upon Sikhs, who, by their distinctive turbans and beards, were easy targets. They were beaten and then burnt alive. Whole communities were wiped out.

Even children were not spared. The women subject to gang-rape. The government at the time, contrary to independent reports, admitted to 2,733 dead in Delhi alone. No attempt was made to count the dead in the violence that engulf the whole of India, especially in Congress (I) party ruled states or count the lynchings on trains, buses, trucks and taxis. Even the figure of 5,000 dead seemed an understatement.

At the time, the Indian media, controlled heavily by the government, made out that these were mere 'communal riots', an expected outcome of the assassination and downplayed the events. The newly installed Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi in his speech on 19 November 1984 at the Boat Club in Delhi excused the violence as a 'natural' phenomena:

'The mood in India 'bore an ominous resemblance to that of the 1930's Germany, likening the orchestrated urban pogroms against Sikhs and Muslims to so many Kristallnachts'.

'Some riots took place in the country following the murder of Indiraji. We know the people were very angry and for a few days it seemed that India had been shaken. But, when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little.'

With such a justification for mass murder, the stage was set for the cover-up that has lasted for 25 years.

In 2005, Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, himself a Sikh, in an astonishing admission, following on from the latest judicial inquiry into the events, said the following in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Parliament:

‘Twenty-one years have passed and yet the feeling persists that somehow the truth has not come out.’

Following affidavits filed by the victims as well as journalists a clearer picture has emerged, that an organised pogrom was carried out, with all the state's apparatus at its disposal. Weapons such as iron rods, kerosene and special combustible chemicals were widely in use. Delhi Municipal Corporation buses were used to ferry the mobs around. The police on hand to ensure the massacre was an orderly affair. And then later a judiciary that was all too willing to cover up the crime in order to save leading members of the ruling Congress (I) party and senior police officers. A cover up that remains in place, despite two inquiries over the last 25 years.

We have also learnt that, under testimonies gathered by the Nanavati Commission of 2005 and evidence from then serving policemen, that in Delhi in particular, senior leaders of the Congress (I) party held meetings on the night of 31 October in their constituencies, attended by senior police officers, to fine tune the plan, a Kristallnacht that would last for 3 days.



A Sikh man lies burnt to death by mobs in India, November 1984

‘Though some will find the analogy with Nazi Germany here too extreme, both the explicit targeting of Sikhs as traitors following Operation Bluestar and the clear earmarking of Sikh residence and business in the post-assassination carnage speak to an incipient genocidal campaign.’

CYNTHIA KEPPLEY MAHMOOD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
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Corpses of two Sikhs lie on a luggage trolley, New Delhi railway station. Photo by Ashok Vahie.

Front cover photo courtesy of India Today

June 1984	4
November 1984	8
25 Year Cover-up	14
Punjab 1984 - 1994	18
Intransigence to Insurgency	22
Conclusion	25
Books & Films	27

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June 1984

The event that triggered the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister took place 5 months prior. Code-named Operation Bluestar, began on 1st June 1984. Up to 150,000 Indian army troops were sent to the northern Indian state of Punjab, the Sikh homeland, equipped with helicopter gunships and tanks.

The state was sealed off from the rest of the world. Journalists were removed. Telephone lines were cut, preventing internal and external communication. All news and information was controlled by the Indian government. Independent newspapers and radio stations were closed down. An indefinite curfew was imposed across the whole of Punjab, with 20 million residents placed in a state of siege and imprisonment.

On June 4th 1984, India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, ordered the Indian Army to invade the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar, the Sikhs' national institution. As it was the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Sikhs' 5th Guru (teacher), Arjun Dev, it was full of thousands of pilgrims.



Farm workers rounded up after Operation Bluestar

'The army went into Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence.'¹

JOYCE J.M. PETTIGREW



Sant Bhindranwale, who led the defence of the Golden Temple, was eventually killed. Courtesy of Surya India.

'For five days the Punjab has been cut off from the rest of the world. There is a 24-hour curfew. All telephone and telex lines are cut. No foreigners are permitted entry and on Tuesday, all Indian journalists were expelled. There are no newspapers, no trains, no buses - not even a bullock cart can move. Orders to shoot on site were widely carried out. The whole of Punjab, with its 5,000 villages and 50 major cities, was turned into a concentration camp. The rules were what the Indian army and its political decision makers decided.'

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 8TH JUNE 1984

Forty other Sikh shrines were simultaneously attacked. On the pretext of apprehending 'a handful of militants' lodged inside the Golden Temple, the Indian Army unleashed a terror unprecedented in post-independence India.

It took the use of Vijayanta tanks to win the fight for the army. These let loose a barrage of highly explosive shells, which tore off the entire front of the Akal Takht, the temporal seat of the Sikhs, setting off fires in many of its internal rooms (some of which housed precious historical relics), and badly damaged its dome.

'It was a virtual massacre. A large number of women, children and pilgrims were gunned down.'

THE GUARDIAN, 13TH JUNE 1984



The damage to the Akal Takht's golden dome. Courtesy of India Today

¹ The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence (1995), Joyce J.M. Pettigrew, p 8.

Eyewitness to temple 'executions'

The Shiromoni (Temple) Committee secretary Bhan Singh was in the temple complex at the time of Operation Bluestar. On the 1st morning of the attack he counted 'at least 70 dead bodies' of old men, women and children. Soldiers, commanded by a Major, continued to line up young Sikhs along the hostel's corridor to be shot. When Bhan Singh protested, the Major flew into a rage, tore away his turban and ordered him to either flee the scene or join the 'array of martyrs'. Bhan Singh 'turned back and fled, jumping over the bodies of the dead and injured'. Hundreds of young Sikhs, innocent pilgrims from the villages, were killed in this manner.²



Sikh with their hands tied by their own turbans by soldiers. According to eyewitnesses, summary executions followed.

Ranbir Kaur, a women school teacher witnessed the shooting of another group of 150 people whose hands had been tied behind their backs with their own turbans.³

A singer at the Golden Temple, Harcharan Singh Ragi, his wife and their young daughter came out of their quarters near the information office on the afternoon of June 6. They witnessed the killings of hundreds of people, including women, and would themselves have been shot if a commander had not taken pity on their young daughter who fell at his feet begging him to spare her parents' lives.⁴

Associated Press correspondent Brahma Chellaney had managed to dodge the authorities to remain in Amritsar during the Operation Bluestar. Later, he reported that dead bodies were taken in municipal garbage trucks round the clock and burnt in heaps of 20 or more. One attendant at the city's crematorium told him that there was not 'enough wood to burn the dead individually'. He also saw 'an estimated 50 corpses' in a large garbage lorry which included women & children. He talked to a doctor who had been forced to sign post-mortem reports of some people killed inside the temple. The doctor corroborated the reports that their hands had been tied before the soldiers shot them.⁵



Sikhs interned in camps after Operation Bluestar



The Akal Takht on fire, June 6th 1984. Courtesy of Sophie Baker.

News of the attack on the Golden Temple quickly spread despite the curfew. Thousands of people in the surrounding villages gathered to march to Amritsar to defend the Golden Temple. At Golwand village in Jhubal, a crowd of several thousands gathered with makeshift weapons, under the leadership of Baba Bidhi Chand, and began to march the 25 kilometres to Amritsar. Helicopter patrols spotted them and sprayed them with bullets without warning. Within minutes hundreds were dead or wounded. Crowds gathered at the villages including Ajnala, Rajash Sunsi, Dhandhesali, Fatehpur, Rajpurtan and Batala in Gurdaspur. A large crowd gathered at Chowk Mehta, HQ of the Damdami Taksal, where the army killed 76 Sikhs and arrested 285. All across the region, wireless sets carried the message from army chiefs to soldiers to shoot on sight anyone on the streets.

About 4,000 Sikh soldiers from different parts of India revolted on hearing the news about the army attack. The revolt was heavily put down and many soldiers were court martialed.

The army continued its task of moving through the villages in the countryside and flushing out alleged 'terrorists'. The young Sikh men in the villages were lined up in rows; some were stripped and publicly flogged and accused of being terrorists or withholding information about terrorists. Some were taken away and sent to interrogation centres, never to be seen again.



Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

² The Punjab Story (1984), Amarjit Kaur, Arun Shourie, Lt-Gen J.S. Aurora, Khushwant Singh, p 13.

³ Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003), Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, p 38. Punjabjustice.org

⁴ Operation Bluestar: The Untold Story (1984), Amiya Rao, Aubindo Ghose, Sunil Bhattacharya, Tejinder Ahuja and N. D. Pancholi, p 13.

⁵ The Sikh Struggle, Ram Narayan Kumar & Georg Sieberer (1991), p 265.

Media reports

Mary Anne Weaver's report in the *Sunday Times* (UK)

'Thousands of people have disappeared from the Punjab since the siege of the Sikh's Golden Temple here seven weeks ago. In some villages men between 15-35 have been bound, blindfolded and taken away. Their fate is unknown. Recently in the tiny village of Kaimbala, 300 troops entered the Sikh Temple during prayers, blindfolded the 30 worshippers and pushed them into the streets. According to the priest, Sant Pritpal Singh, the villagers were given electric shocks and interrogated as to the whereabouts of Sikh militants. Gurnam Singh, a 37 year old farmer was held in an army camp for 13 days. Last week, his face bruised and his arms and legs dotted with burns, he said he had been hung upside down and beaten' ⁶

The Guardian (UK) reported the following: 'A Sikh doctor drafted from the Government hospital to Jullunder to conduct post mortem examinations said that he had seen the bodies of two Sikhs who had been shot at point blank range, their hands tied behind their backs with their turbans. His colleagues had reported others, some of whom had been machine-gunned. This doctor headed a team that conducted 400 examinations. He said that most bodies were riddled with bullets and bore bomb wounds.' ⁷



Soldiers in the circumference of the Golden Temple

According to *The Times* (UK) 'The same doctor told journalists that bodies of victims were brought to the mortuary by police in municipal refuse lorries reported that of the 400 bodies, 100 were women and between 15-20 were children under five. One was a two month old baby. The doctor said that one 'extremist' in the pile of bodies was found to be alive; a soldier shot and killed him.' ⁸

The Guardian went on to report: "Another police official told reporters that a lorry load of elderly Sikhs, who surrendered on the first day of the military operation, were brought to the main city police station and tortured there by the army. The soldiers removed their turbans, pulled their hair over their eyes and tied the long hair around their necks. Then they threw sand into their faces. The old men shrieked, but I helplessly watched all this from my office window.' ⁹

One resident of Amritsar gave an eyewitness account to the editor of the *Sikh Messenger*, a British publication.

'The army pounding of the Golden Temple area continued over the next few days confirming our fears of deliberate and vindictive destruction. On the night of the 5th, the aged and chronically ill father of the couple next door finally expired and on the morning of the 6th the army gave our neighbours special permission to take him to the crematorium. Even before reaching this site, they could smell the stench of putrid and burning flesh. On entering the crematorium grounds they saw a sight that literally made them sick with horror. Grotesque piles of dozens of bodies were being burnt in the open without dignity or religious rites like so many carcasses. The bodies had all been brought there by dust carts and from the number of carts; the attendant estimated some 3,300 had so far been cremated.' ¹⁰



Pilgrims, including women and children, were 'dragged into the corridors of the Golden Temple and shot'.

'Prisoners of War'

With dead bodies lying all around, the vast lake of the Golden Temple Complex was transformed into a thick red of profuse blood. No attempts were made to provide assistance to the injured or dying. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*: 'On Saturday, medical workers in Amritsar said soldiers had threatened to shoot them if they gave food or water to Sikh pilgrims wounded in the attack and lying in the hospital.' ¹¹

People were killed like that. No medicine was provided, in fact no medical aid was administered at all. Many people died in the camps. Neither water nor medicine aid was provided and you could not even donate blood for the injured in hospitals as it was stated that they were POW's and hence no blood transfusions were permitted. The Army detained volunteers of the Red Cross who wanted to help the injured at the nearby Jallianwala Bagh. ¹²

⁶ Sunday Times, 22 June 1984.

⁷ The Guardian, 13 June 1984.

⁸ The Times, 13 June 1984.

⁹ The Guardian, 14 June 1984.

See also Brahma Chellaney, who had provided much of the eyewitness accounts for The Times and The Guardian: [wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma_Chellaney](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma_Chellaney)

¹⁰ The Sikh Messenger, 1984.

¹¹ Christian Science Monitor, 8 June 1984.

¹² The Tragedy of Punjab (1984), Kuldip Nayar & Khushwant Singh, p94.



Aftermath of a peaceful demonstration against Operation Blue Star, New Delhi, 1984

G.K.C Reddy commented that 'Operation Blue Star will go down in history as one of the biggest massacres of unarmed civilians by the organised military force of a nation'. Further, he added that 'the word unarmed is used deliberately as the disparity in arms on the two sides was so great that those resisting army invasion of the temple could hardly be termed armed.'¹³

Subramaniam Swami published an article soon after the massacre inside the Golden Temple to say that the government had been master-minding a disinformation campaign to create legitimacy for the action. The goal of this disinformation campaign was to 'make out that the Golden Temple was the haven of criminals, a store of armoury and a citadel of the nation's dismemberment conspiracy.'¹⁴

Citizens for Democracy, a respected Indian civil liberties group headed by the distinguished former Supreme Court Judge, V.M. Tarkunde, noted that the actual number of alleged militants was quite small relative to the number of innocent worshippers who had gathered at the Golden Temple to commemorate the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev. 'It was indeed a mass massacre mostly of innocents.'¹⁵

A few months later in September 1984, Mrs. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, a social worker based in Delhi, moved a petition before the Supreme Court to raise some issues about the people the government had detained as the 'most dangerous terrorists.' The petition demanded the Court's intervention for the release of 22 children aged between two and 16 years, who had been rounded up from the Golden Temple and were being held in the Ludhiana jail. Two judges of the Supreme Court, Chinnappa Reddy and V. Khalid, ruled that 'there was no justification for detaining them as they were pilgrims visiting the Golden Temple during Operation Blue Star.' At this order, the 22 children lodged at the Ludhiana jail were released. But the police re-arrested most of them and tortured them at various interrogation centres for information on their relatives who had probably been killed during the Army operation.¹⁶

'Some 3,000 dead, including many who were only unconscious, were piled high in trucks and removed.'¹⁷

AMRIT WILSON, NEW STATESMAN,
16TH NOVEMBER 1984.

Amrit Wilson of the *New Statesman* wrote: 'On 4th June, a day of pilgrims for Sikhs when thousands had gathered at the Golden Temple, army tanks moved into the Temple Complex, smashing into the sanctum and shooting everyone in sight. Those left alive were then prevented from leaving the building, many wounded were left to bleed to death and when they begged for water, Army Jawans told them to drink the mixture of blood and urine on the floor. Four months later no list of casualties or missing persons had yet been issued. Then came the army occupation of Punjab with frequent humiliations, arrests and killings of Sikhs by soldiers. It caused a feeling voiced by many ordinary people who had never before been separatist that Sikhs could not be safe there.'¹⁷

In an effort to destroy a crucial part of Sikh heritage, the army, according to Temple sevadars, set fire to the Sikh Reference Library after it had been secured. Irreplaceable copies of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikhs' holy scriptures; archives of

documents from periods of Sikh history and even artefacts from the lives of the Gurus were reduced to ash. The Toshakhana, treasure house of the Golden Temple was systematically looted.

The government of India has always maintained that the army action was a 'last resort' necessary to flush out terrorists who had collected weapons. But according to Retired Lt-General S.K. Sinha of the Indian Army: 'The Army action was not the 'last resort' as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would have us believe. It had been in her mind for more than 18 months. Shortly after the Akali agitation of 1982, the Army began rehearsals of a commando raid near Chakrata Cantonment in the Doon Valley, where a complete replica of the Golden Temple complex had been built. Another training involving Aviation Research Centre Commandos, was given in the Sarsawa area and Yamuna bed in helicopters converted into gunships.'¹⁸

This was long before any militants had got inside the complex. H.S. Bhanwar revealed pertinent information regarding the arms that were planted inside the Darbar Sahib. Regarding the issue of arms in the Golden Temple he writes: 'A confidential source told me that before President of India, Giani Zail Singh visited Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) on June 8, 1984, the army brought a loaded truck of weapons into the Darbar Sahib complex so that Giani Ji was given the impression that the militants had so many foreign weapons.'¹⁹ With this, the Sikhs were defamed and the government had another justification for the army attack. Images of these weapons were broadcast on television showing that the militants inside the complex had an array of weapons. The scene had been set for an even greater calamity five months later.

¹³ Army Action in Punjab: Prelude and Aftermath (1984), G.K.C. Reddy, p 49.

¹⁴ Creating a Martyr - Imprint (1984), Subramaniam Swami, p 7.

¹⁵ Oppression in Punjab (1985), Citizens for Democracy, p 76.

¹⁶ Atrocities On Sikh Children, Gobind Thukral (30 Sept 1984), India Today.

¹⁷ Amrit Wilson : New Statesman, 16th November 1984.

¹⁸ Sant Bhindrawale did nothing wrong by defending the Golden Temple. Retired Lt-General S.K. Sinha, Spokesman (June 1984) p28-29.

¹⁹ Diary De Panne - Punjabi (May 1999), H.S. Bhanwar, p66.

November 1984

On 31 October 1984, the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards, in revenge for Operation Bluestar. What followed begged belief. Thousands of Sikhs were massacred in the most barbaric method of burning. Encouraged by central government ministers and Members of Parliament with the connivance of the police, mobs were assembled to carry out a three day orgy of killings and plunder.



A mother shows the remains of her son and his ID card. Photo by Ashok Vahie

Early next morning, hordes of people from the suburbs of Delhi were transported to various localities in the city where the Sikh population was concentrated. The mobilisation suggested the backing of an organisation with vast resources. The criminal hordes descending on the city carried crude weapons like iron rods, knives, clubs and combustible material, including kerosene, for arson. They were also supplied with government issued voter and ration lists of houses and business establishments belonging to the Sikhs in various localities.

The government controlled television station *Doordarshan*, and *All India Radio* began broadcasting provocative slogans seeking bloody vengeance, 'khoon ka badla khoon se lenge' (we will take blood for blood!).

Murderous gangs of about 200 people led by the leaders, with some policemen participating, began to swarm into Sikh houses, hacking the occupants to pieces, chopping off the heads of children, raping women, tying Sikh men to tires set aflame with kerosene, burning down the houses and shops after ransacking them. Mobs stopped buses and trains, in and out of Delhi, pulling out Sikh passengers to be lynched to death or doused with kerosene and burnt alive.

In some areas, the Sikh families grouped together for self-defence. The police officials then arrived to disperse them, by force when persuasion did not work. In other areas, the police searched the houses for weapons including ceremonial daggers, and confiscated them before the mobs came.

'I realised what Jews must have felt like in Nazi Germany. The killing assumed the proportion of a genocide of the Sikh community. For the first time I understood what words like pogrom, holocaust and genocide really meant. Sikh houses and shops were marked for destruction in much the same way as those of Jews in Tsarist Russia or Nazi Germany.' ²⁰

KHUSHWANT SINGH, FORMER MEMBER OF THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT



Mobs on the rampage through Sikh neighbourhoods

The Delhi pogrom has been documented by several organisations. *The People's Union for Civil Liberties* and the *People's Union of Democratic Rights* published a joint report, called *Who are the Guilty?* The report said that 'the attacks on the members of the Sikh community in Delhi... far from being spontaneous expressions of 'madness' and of 'grief and anger' at Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, as made out by the authorities, were the outcome of a well

organised plan marked by acts of both deliberate commission and omission by important politicians of the Congress and by authorities in the administration...' The report mentions the names of 16 important Congress politicians, 13 police officers and 198 others, accused by survivors and eye-witnesses. ²¹

The report by the *Citizens for Democracy* concluded that the 'carnage was orchestrated by the ruling party.' ²² Yet another investigative report compiled by a team of prominent citizens including retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, S. M. Sikri, former civil servants Badruddin Tyabji, Rajeshwar Dayal and others, came to the same conclusions. ²³

²⁰ My Bleeding Punjab (1992), Khushwant Singh, p 93.

²¹ Who are the Guilty? (1984), People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties - 31 October to 4 November 1984.

²² Truth about Delhi Violence - A report to the Nation (1985), Citizens for Democracy.

²³ Sikri Commission (1985), Citizens' Committee.



A Gurdwara (Sikh temple) is set on fire by mobs. Around 130 were attacked in Delhi alone.

Sikh temples attacked

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh guru was executed in Delhi on the orders of the then Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb in 1675. A sacrifice without parallel in the history of religious persecution. Here was a man killed for defending religious freedom of people of another religion. The Hindu Pandits of Kashmir were being forcibly converted into Islam, and the Sikh guru decided to defend their freedom of worship. The spot where his body was cremated is today marked by a Sikh temple, Rakab Ganj Gurdwara in New Delhi.

This sacrifice was however lost on the Hindu mob attacking the temple on 1 November 1984. Two Sikhs lost their lives and many attempts were made to burn the building. Senior Delhi police chiefs and a Congress (I) MP, Kamal Nath were also present during the siege.²⁴ Hundreds of temples were attacked and burnt across northern India, in a similar pattern to that of Jewish synagogues on Kristallnacht 1938. Copies of the Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib were publicly burnt.

'As we were standing just near the house, where I was being sheltered, we saw a child of about ten, dressed in a salwar-kameez, who was moving on the road. The child was walking quite normally down the street. He was actually a young boy in the process of fleeing to safety and had been dressed as a girl. Something about the child's appearance made the mob suspect that the child was a boy and someone shouted 'sardar ka ladka hoga (it must be the son of a Sardar - a Sikh).' The child panicked and started running but the mob pursued him and caught him. They asked him where the other members of his family were. The boy was really frightened and he pointed in a certain direction and said that his father was lying there and that he was dead. To my horror the mob dragged the boy up to the father's body, threw the child on him and burnt him saying 'yeh sap ka bachcha hai, ise bhi khatam kar do (This is the son of a snake, finish him off also).'

NANDITA HAKSAR AND UMA CHAKRAVARTI
INTERVIEW WITH GURMEET SINGH GILL, 'THE DELHI RIOTS'

Sequence of events

October 31, 1984

9.20 am: Indira Gandhi was shot by two of her security guards at her residence No. 1, Safdarjung Road, New Delhi and rushed to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

11 am: Announcement on All India Radio specifying that the guards who shot Indira Gandhi were Sikhs. A big crowd gathered near AIIMS.

4 pm: Rajiv Gandhi returned from West Bengal and reached AIIMS. Stray incidents of attacks on Sikhs in and around that area occur.

5.30 pm: The cavalcade of Sikh President Zail Singh, is stoned as it approached AIIMS.

Late evening and night: Mobs fanned out in different directions from AIIMS. The violence against Sikhs spread, starting in the neighbouring constituency of Congress (I) councillor Arjun Dass. The violence included the burning of vehicles and other properties of Sikhs.

Shortly after Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as Prime Minister, senior advocate and Opposition leader Ram Jethmalani met home minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and urged him to act fast and save Sikhs from further attacks. Despite all these developments, no measures were taken to control the violence or prevent further attacks on Sikhs throughout the night between October 31 and November 1.

November 1, 1984

Several Congress (I) leaders held meetings on the night of October 31 and morning of November 1, mobilising their followers to attack Sikhs on a mass scale. The first killing of a Sikh reported from east Delhi in the early hours of November 1. About 9 am, armed mobs escorted by the police, take over the streets of Delhi and launch a full scale massacre.

According to historian Rajni Kothari 'Evidence from various sources is mounting that soon after Operation Blue Star and the extremist response thereto in parts of Punjab, a plan of retaliation by identifying Sikh targets ranging from households to commercial establishments to Gurudwaras had been undertaken including the planning of logistics and the techniques to be employed.'²⁵

Mobs were armed with iron rods of a uniform size. Madhu Kishwar, editor of Women's magazine, *Manushi*, saw some of the rods being distributed among the miscreants. Mobs also had an abundant supply of petrol and kerosene. Victims traced the source of kerosene to dealers belonging to the Congress (I) party. For instance, a Congress worker called Brahmanand Gupta, a kerosene dealer, figures prominently in affidavits filed from Sultanpuri.²⁶

²⁴ MP Kamal Nath was Commerce Minister in the 2005-09 government. The subsequent Nanavati Commission of 2005 exonerated Nath, because of 'lack of evidence'. See Journalist Monish Sanjay Suri's affidavit before Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

²⁵ How and Why of it All? (1985), Rajni Kothari, p 14.

²⁶ Gangster Rule: The Massacre of Sikhs, *Manushi* (1985), Madhu Kishwar



In Trilokpuri, East Delhi, a whole community was wiped out. Photo courtesy of Hindustan Times

Violence Spreads throughout India

The meticulousness with which the massacres were organised bespeaks of a definite plan, being repeatedly executed in Saket, Bhogal, Jangpura, Ashram in South Delhi before spreading to the trans-Jamuna colonies, the resettlement colonies in West Delhi and other areas in the northern parts of the city. The pattern of killing was replicated in areas like Sultanpuri and Mangolpuri, as were the numbers killed. First the police sealed off the areas, then Congress (I) party workers and leaders led mobs, armed with voters lists, began their putsch. One family alone in Palam Village has 21 widows.

But the violence wasn't just confined to Delhi, but unleashed throughout India. Sikhs were killed in Uttar Pradesh, mostly in cities like Kanpur, where the administration there let things take their course for a day or so before imposing curfew. The steel town of Bokaro bore the brunt of the violence in Bihar. In Madhya Pradesh, the violence was spread over nearly 40 towns including Indore, Bhopal, Jabalpur, Ujjain, Raipur, Gwalior, Raigarh, Mahendergarh and Bina. Similar attacks of violence occurred in Haryana, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Refugee camps closed

From 10 November, the government - anxious to proclaim that 'normalcy has been restored' - with unimaginable callousness started to forcibly close the refugee camps, to forcibly send the refugees back to the colonies from which they had fled, in which they had seen their relatives being hacked and burnt just a week earlier, in which their houses were nothing now but burnt-out empty shells, in which the very gundas and policemen they had seen loot, burn and kill roamed freely. Their heart-rending pleas that they should not be thrown back to the mercies of these persons, that they should not be sent back till their colonies had been made secure, till their houses had been made habitable proved of no avail. They were given 50 rupees (less than £1) a piece plus some dry rations and herded into buses. Where on their return they huddled together in a park, as in Sultanpuri, they were forcibly dispersed.²⁷



Sikhs became 'refugees' in their own country.

Massacre in East Delhi

Rahul Kuldip Bedi and Joseph Maliakan of the *Indian Express* were the first newspaper reporters to enter Trilokpuri, in East Delhi on 2 November. This is what they reported:

'Shortly after sunset on 1 November, the mob, busy in Block 32, Trilokpuri, East Delhi, dispersed for dinner. It had built up an appetite. Killing, burning and pillaging the 400-odd Sikh families in the Block had, indeed left them hungry. An hour later, their bellies full, they casually strolled back, to the two narrow lanes in the trans-Jamuna resettlement colony, forcibly plunged into darkness; to join those already hard at work.'

'Labouring at a leisurely pace they split open Lachman Singh's skull and pouring kerosene into the gash set alight the half-alive man in front of Gyan Devi, his wife. Balwant Singh, who tried to escape after shaving himself, had his eyes gouged out before he too was similarly burnt. Sarb Singh, his terror-stricken father-in-law, watched. The sport continued, interspersed with solicitous visits from the local police to ensure that things were going well.'

'The calculated carnage in Delhi and over 80 towns in the country had begun. The pattern was similar all over, the brutality unbelievable and barbaric, the tragedy unspeakable. On 1 November, all exit points from Trilokpuri have been sealed off by massive concrete pipes. Conscientious men from the colony, armed with lathis, guarded the pipes, barely a kilometre from two police stations - Patparganj and Kalyanpuri - to ensure that no Sikh escapes. Also, that no one except the police set foot into Trilokpuri.'

'Around 2 O'clock on 2 November, we enter Trilokpuri. Just about the time that the killers, having toiled for 30 long and uninterrupted hours, were scouring Block 32 for booty or any young Sikh that inadvertently, they may, have overlooked. As if, around 350 Sikhs already killed and an equal number of looted and burnt houses was not enough. A plume of smoke spirals upwards from half-charred bodies. Two lanes of Block 32, an area of around 500 square yards inhabited by around 450 Sikh families, is littered with corpses, the drains choked with dismembered limbs and masses of hair. Cindere human remains lie scattered in the first 20 yards of the first lane. The remaining 40-yard stretch of the street is strewn with naked bodies, brutally hacked beyond recognition. Lifeless arms hang over balconies; many houses have bodies piled three-deep on their doorsteps.'²⁸

'Take me away', wails a three-year old girl, crawling from under the bodies of her father and three brothers and stepping over countless others lying in her one-roomed tenement, collapsing into the arms of a reporter'.

The massacre in Trilokpuri has become the largest ever massacre in a single residential block in any city in post-Independence India.

'The Delhi violence was well planned and well organised. It would have burst forth even if Indira Gandhi had been alive'

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY
8 DECEMBER 1984

²⁷Them v Us, quoted in The Assassination & After (1985), Arun Shourie, p85.

²⁸Politics of a Pogrom, quoted in The Assassination & After (1985), Rahul Kuldip Bedi, p51. See also Affidavit filed by Rahul Kuldip Bedi under Mishra Commission. Carnage84.com

Mass Rape

Although rape had become widespread in the days of the massacres, it received little coverage. This may have been to do, partly because of the social stigma associated with it, and partly because the killings were so intense in some neighbourhoods that it overshadowed rape. In Trilokpuri, East Delhi, after the massacres had taken their full toll and no Sikh man was left alive, about thirty Sikh women were abducted and held captive in the nearby village of Chilla. Countless cases of systematic rape occurred but none figured in the official inquiries. H.S. Phoolka and Manoj Mitta have argued that this neatly fitted in with the government view of an 'emotional reaction' to Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Rajiv Gandhi had already stated this in his 'When a Tree Shook' speech. Far from this, as many of the affidavits from the victims show, there were little signs of grief or emotion over the assassination among the rampaging mobs.²⁹ There was, however, a definitive pattern to 'cause serious bodily and mental harm' to Sikh women, as defined in Article Two of the United Nations' Genocide Convention.



Aftermath of a pogrom, photo courtesy of the Citizens Commission, Delhi

On November 1, Gurdip Kaur, her three sons and her husband were at home. Here is how she described the attack. 'Three of the men ran out and were set on fire. My youngest son stayed in the house with me. But they came into the house. Those young boys, 14 and 16 year olds, began to drag my son out even though he was hiding behind me. They tore my clothes and stripped me naked in front of my son. They raped me right there, in front of my son, in my own house. They were young boys, maybe eight of them.

After they had taken my honour, they left. I took my son to sit among the women but they came and dragged him away. They took him to the street corner, hit him with lathis, sprinkled kerosene over him, and burnt him alive. I tried to save him but they struck me with knives and broke my arm. At that time I was completely naked. I had managed to get a hold of an old sheet, which I had wrapped around myself. If I had even one piece of clothing on my body, I would have gone and thrown myself over my son and tried to save him. I would have done anything to save at least one young man of my family. Not one of the four is left.'³⁰



Widows and orphans of the November 1984 massacres

A woman from Trilokpuri described her harrowing experience. She and her husband, originally from Sind, had migrated to Rajasthan in 1947. About fifteen years ago they had moved to Delhi in search of better prospects. During the slum clearance drive of 1974-75, they had been resettled in Trilokpuri.

She and her husband and three of their children survive but the eldest son aged 18 was killed on 1 November.

She described the mob led by the Congress-I block pradhan as consisting of some people from the same block and others from neighbouring blocks and nearby villages. While the block pradhan identified Sikh houses and urged the mobs to loot, burn and kill, the women were herded together into one room. Some of them ran away but were pursued to the nearby nallah where they were raped. Their shrieks and cries for help fell on deaf ears. From among the women held in the room, the hoodlums asked each other to select whosoever they chose. All the women were stripped and many dishonoured. She herself was raped by ten men. Their lust satisfied, they told the women to get out, naked as they were. For fear of their lives they did so, hiding their shame as best as possible. Each begged or borrowed a garment from relenting neighbours and sought shelter wherever they could.



This women lost her entire family in the massacres

'Numerous women were gang raped in these areas after the men and infant boys had been killed. One such case was referred from the Shahdara Mental Hospital to JP Hospital - a young girl who had no clue to her identity, so brutally has she been ravished. Many cases went unreported as the women concerned wanted their shame to remain buried with the cinders of their homes.'³¹

This widow, a former resident of Kartarnagar (trans-Yamuna area), related that their house was looted and burnt by a mob on 2 November 1984. Her husband and two sons, one married only four months ago, were dragged out of the house and mercilessly beaten. Thereafter, kerosene was poured over the three men and they were set alight. No police or army was in evidence at the time. She could, she said, identify the person who killed her husband. Though she did not know his name. She was definite about the name of his father: a weaver of the area. She had originally come from Rawalpindi at the time of Partition. This was her second nightmarish experience of mob fury during which she had lost everything, including three male members of her family. She was accompanied by a completely dazed girl, hardly 16 years old, widow of her recently-married and recently-butchered son. This young girl sat through her mother-in-law's harrowing testimony shedding silent tears of grief and despair.

²⁹When a Tree Shook Delhi (2007), Manoj Mitta and H.S. Phoolka, p 68.

³⁰We Share Their Agony - Sikh Women Victims of November 1984, Madhu Kishwar, Manushi. See also Affidavit filed by Madhu Kishwar before Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

³¹Who are the Guilty? (1984), People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties - 31 October to 4 November 1984.

Congress (I) leaders meet to finalise the Genocide

One police officer, who was in charge of Kalyanpuri police station in the East Delhi Trilokpuri area worst affected by the carnage, subsequently broke ranks to the lawyer, H.S. Phoolka. Soor Veer Singh Tyagi was himself implicated in the violence and had been suspended but declared he had been made a scapegoat. In a sensational disclosure, he stated the massacres were a result of a conspiracy hatched on the evening of 31 October in the house of senior Congress (I) leader, HKL Bhagat. According to Tyagi, it was a secret meeting attended by senior police officers from East Delhi. Instructions were to be given to offices down the line to let the killings take place and then erase all traces of the crime. Many areas were successful in doing this, but Trilokpuri, due to the sheer scale of the killings and the amount of bodies to be burnt, there was not enough time to dispose of the bodies before any journalists arrived. Hence Tyagi's suspension by Deputy Commissioner of Police, Hukam Chand Jatav.

Ajay Kaur, one of the victims, made an allegation in her affidavit that she had seen Congress (I) leader H.K.L. Bhagat telling a crowd in her neighbourhood that the police would 'not interfere for three days', and those people were therefore at liberty to 'kill every Sikh' and do their 'duty to Bharat Mata (mother India).' ³²

Former governor and defence secretary, Govind Narain states 'Definitely there was a lot of evidence before us in trans Yamuna area where people had told us that Shri HKL Bhagat, a Congress (I) leader, had planned an organised massacre there. There was evidence before us that in other areas the people who were instigating and organising with petrol tins / kerosene tins to set houses on fire and here the names of Shri Sajjan Kumar and Shri Jagdish Tytler were mentioned. Some of these names also figure in the various affidavits that were filed before us.' ³³

According to Jagjit Singh's affidavit 'Congress (I) leader, Sajjan Kumar ordered distribution of Iron rods, from the Truck parked nearby there. After this distribution of Iron Rods Sajjan Kumar told the mob to attack Sikhs to kill them, loot their properties and then burn their houses and shops.' ³⁴

Raj Kumar of Palam Colony witnessed a huge meeting in Mangalpuri addressed by Sajjan Kumar. The mob raised slogans such as 'kill the Sardars (Sikhs)'. ³⁴ Moti Singh of Sultanpuri witnessed another meeting, this time in Sultanpuri, where Sajjan Kumar extolled people to kill the Sikhs and collect Rs 1000 for each Sikh killed. The police were also in attendance. ³⁵

Congress (I) party leaders who owned oil depots provided the crucial access to abundant amounts of kerosene, a resource too expensive for most of the assailants to afford.

Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, an Associate Professor at the University of Maine, U.S., was told by a Sikh women, who had three close family members in high positions in the government, that she was told to take her children out of school and get them to a safe place well before the killing began. She suspected that a plan to create communal violence had already been planned to coincide with the birthday of Guru Nanak in the second week of November, but had been pushed forward to take advantage of the conditions created by Mrs Gandhi's assassination. ³⁶



Police look on while homes burn

Delhi Police

Far from helping Sikhs faced with mob violence, the Delhi police spent the first day disarming Sikhs of any weapons they could defend themselves with. On the morning of 1 November, mobs led by local Congress (I) leader, Dr Ashok Gupta, descended on Block 11 of Kalyanpuri. The Sikhs of the area greeted the mobs with gunfire forcing the mob to retreat. Within minutes though, the police arrived. Flanked by armed constables, the chief of Kalyanpuri police station, Soor Veer Singh Tyagi, read out a list of licensed weapon holders. On the pretext of defusing tension, Tyagi ordered all the Sikhs listed to surrender their weapons insisting the police would protect them. Those who refused were threatened at gunpoint. 25 of the Sikhs were also arrested and sent to Tihar jail to be detained. These arrests were the only ones to figure in the police records of arrests on the first day of the massacre. After seizing licensed weapons in this manner, the police left the Sikhs of Block 11 at the mercy of the mobs waiting outside.

None of the police officers of Kalyanpuri, which covered Trilokpuri were ever brought to book, despite evidence from victims and journalists that they had a hand in the killing. Soor Veer Singh Tyagi, Station House Officer, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Sewa Dass, and Hukam Chand Jatav went on to get their promotions more than once in their careers. Sewa Dass went on to become Special Commissioner of Delhi Police.

The mobs were paid in proportion to the number of Sikhs killed by them. According to one of the survivors, Joginder Kaur, who had a very telling conversation with one of the police inspectors at Palam Colony, who had taken pity on them as 'they were otherwise apprehending and killing sadars (Sikhs)'. A mob they had come across pleaded with the police officers to hand over Joginder Kaur's two sons or else they would be 'putting them to a loss of 500 rupees each'. ³⁷

Jugti Ram was one of the few police officers to have rescued Sikh women who had been abducted to a nearby village and had also sent a message to his superiors about the massacres. It took 20 years for this crucial evidence to emerge. As duty officer in Kalyanpuri police station, he had sent a wireless message to Sewa Dass, Deputy Commissioner of Police, informing him about the large-scale killings in Block 32 in Trilokpuri and recorded the same in his logbook. He was subsequently moved from his post and into the field as his message was in defiance of the order not to record any messages relating to the killings of Sikhs.

³² When a Tree Shook Delhi (2007), Manoj Mitta and H.S. Phoolka, p 77.

³³ When a Tree Shook Delhi (2007), Manoj Mitta and H.S. Phoolka, p 221.

³⁴ Affidavit of Jagjit Singh, Kiran Gardens, before Mishra Commission. Carnage84.com

³⁵ Affidavit of Raj Kumar, Palam Colony, before Mishra Commission. Carnage84.com

³⁶ Fighting for Faith and Nation (1996), Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, p 139.

³⁷ When a Tree Shook Delhi (2007), Manoj Mitta and H.S. Phoolka, p 77.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

Heir apparent, Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in hours after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. While it was understandable his anger at his mother's killers, he seemed to blame the entire Sikh community for the actions of two individuals.

While the crowds outside Teen Murti, where Mrs Gandhi's body lay, chanted 'Khooon Ka Badla Khooon' (Blood for Blood) and 'Sardars, qaum ke ghaddar' (Sikhs are the nation's traitors), Rajiv Gandhi remained silent and at no point intervened to stop the chanting mobs. Shanti Bhushan, former law minister and senior advocate of the Supreme Court, tuned into Doordarshan TV and was shocked to see the Prime Minister passively listening to the slogans.³⁸

Amiya Rao noted that 'the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in his maiden speech on Delhi's boat-club lawns did not have a word to condemn the killings nor did he give any assurance to the Sikhs that the killers would be punished; instead, he merely used certain ugly words such as 'avenge', 'anger', 'revenge' and explained away this unprecedented orgy of violence comparing it with a natural phenomenon: 'there is a shaking of the earth, whenever a big tree falls' - even then it was not clear who the 'big tree' was, Indira Gandhi or the thousands of Sikhs who had been felled and still more vague is the shaking of the earth, could it mean that the PM had put his seal of approval to what had happened?'³⁹

Nicholas Nugent of the BBC's has written that 'While the bloodbath continued, Delhi' police and civil administration were preoccupied with maintaining security in the more visible parts of the city in preparation for the scores of foreign VIPs who were arriving for Mrs Gandhi's funeral. Delhi police gave a higher priority to keeping the streets clear for the visiting dignitaries than to stopping the killings. Nobody, it seemed, had orders to seek out and try to prevent the holocaust that was taking place. Rajiv Gandhi seemed to be preoccupied with organising the funeral rites of his mother, and receiving the visiting dignitaries. During the election campaign which was to follow the assassination, Sikhs were portrayed as an alien community, as if all of them were being blamed for Indira Gandhi's death.'⁴⁰

Members of parliament and police officers who had been accused of organising the carnage were promoted to high office. Party tickets were handed out by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to members of his party who had been named by the victims as organisers of the carnage (See page 14). His widow, Sonia Gandhi, would carry on this practice when she became head of Congress (I) after her husband's murder at the hands of Tamil separatists. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, both Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler, alleged organisers of the massacres, were initially handed party tickets only to be forced to backdown following protests.

Rajiv Gandhi's Government reluctantly ordered a judicial inquiry into the violence as part of the Punjab Accord. Rajiv Gandhi himself made no bones of the fact that he appointed the inquiry in April 1985 purely to facilitate an agreement with Sikh Akali leaders. The press statements he made even two months after the carnage were dismissive of the inquiry demand. In fact, in an interview to India Today in January 1985, he said the inquiry into the violence would not help as it would only rake up 'issues that are really dead.' And, then in an interview the same month to the now defunct Sunday magazine, Rajiv Gandhi said no inquiry was being instituted as 'it would do more damage to the Sikhs, it would do more damage to the country by specifically opening this whole thing up again.'



Rajiv Gandhi (left) alongside Home Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao (3rd from left) and Minister for Information & Broadcast and one of the main organisers of the massacres, H.K.L. Bhagat (far right)

In contrast to the failure to prosecute those involved in the massacres, Mrs Gandhi's assassins were speedily brought to justice. Beant Singh was summarily executed and Satwant Singh and alleged co-conspirator, Kehar Singh were hanged.

In an interview with prominent journalist, M.J. Akbar, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seemed to justify the events of November 1984 by suggesting that the killings were only extensive in those areas where the Sikhs allegedly had celebrated the assassination of his mother by distributing sweets.⁴¹

Siddharth Varadarajan, in his article '*Moral indifference as the form of modern evil*' recalled the German sociologist Rainer C. Baum described moral indifference as the definitive form of modern evil. 'At no time did either Rajiv Gandhi or any other senior Minister display the slightest interest in understanding how such a terrible crime could have been committed on their watch, in ordering an inquiry, in ensuring that forensic and other forms of evidence were collected in a timely fashion so that the guilt of the perpetrators could be established swiftly. This is the way a leadership that was genuinely unaware of what was going on would have acted after the event. Conversely, it is only a government that knew it had something dreadful to hide that could behave the way the Rajiv Gandhi Government did in the weeks, months, and even years following November 1984.'⁴²

'Even if Mr. Justice Nanavati is correct in saying there is no evidence connecting Rajiv Gandhi or other senior leaders to the killings, their moral guilt is manifest from their behaviour both during the violence and after.'⁴²

Home Minister Narasimha Rao

P.V. Narasimha Rao was Home Minister in 1984 and was responsible for the security of the countries' citizens. Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, much decorated hero of the 1971 war, has said, 'The home minister was grossly negligent in his approach, which clearly reflected his connivance with perpetrators of the heinous crimes being committed against the Sikhs.'⁴³ Ram Jethmalani, senior advocate, met Rao on the evening of 31 October to urge him to call out the army to prevent a massacre. Jethmalani found Rao's response 'indifferent'.⁴⁴ Rao went on to become India's Prime Minister in 1991.

³⁸ Affidavit of Shanti Bhushan, New Delhi, to Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

³⁹ When Delhi Burnt (8 December 1984), Economic and Political Weekly, Amiya Rao

⁴⁰ Rajiv Gandhi - Son of a Dynasty (1990), Nicholas Nugent, p 25.

⁴¹ M.J.Akbar's interview of Rajiv Gandhi, Sunday Magazine, March 10-16 1985.

⁴² Moral indifference as the form of modern evil, The Hindu (12 August 2005), Siddharth Varadarajan.

⁴³ Affidavit of Lt. Gen. (Retd) J.S. Aurora to the Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

⁴⁴ Affidavit of Ram Jethmalani to the Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

25 year Cover-up

Once the massacres had taken place in November 1984, orders were handed down by senior police chiefs to hide its full extent. Bodies were quickly disposed of by mass cremations. Refugee camps were closed down forcing the survivors to either go back to the very neighbourhoods where they had witnessed mass murder, or flee to the safety of the Punjab. An inquiry was finally conceded by PM Rajiv Gandhi, in order to provide the judicial whitewash.

Genocide labelled as a 'Riot'

The Indian government quickly described the massacres of November 1984 as a 'communal riot'. This not only mischaracterised the violence but also masked its most brutal dimensions. It also paints the events as disorganised violence as genuine riots often are. But as we have seen, the 1984 Anti-Sikh pogrom was far from disorganised. There is no doubt an attempt with the method of burning by kerosene and the targeting of Sikh children as well as Sikh men, and subjecting the women to rape was made to destroy Sikhs 'as a group'.

This religious group was targeted for extermination as the following evidence shows: slogans calling for the death of Sikhs, repeated attacks by death squads whose whole purpose was to kill all Sikhs, direct attacks and looting of Sikh property, destruction of symbols and places of worship. A heavy police participation in the violence as well as manipulating the evidence of records and intimidation of victim's families post-violence. The most damning evidence against the idea of a 'riot' is the way it was systematically organised, firstly by public meetings the night before the plan was put into action, organised dissemination of rumours, effective identification of Sikhs through voter and ration lists, organised transportation of the gangs, large-scale provision and distribution of weapons and kerosene and finally the systematic and uniformity in the method of killing.

In 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ruled that the killing of an estimated 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in July 1995 'constituted genocide'. The International Crisis Group, looking at violations in Kosovo, stated 'Those who seek to deny that genocide has occurred on the basis of a body count do the term an injustice. It is clear from the very words of the definition in the Convention that more than killing is envisaged. The target of the crime is the group and the destruction of the group, or part of it, is the objective.'

Genocide is 'any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group - Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.'

UN CONVENTION ON GENOCIDE - ARTICLE TWO

Alleged organisers' political careers since 1984

Jagdish Tytler MP for Delhi Sadar, 1984, 1991, 2004

Minister of State for Non-Resident Indians (2004)
Minister for Surface Transport (1991)
Minister of Food Processing (1988)
Civil Aviation Minister (1985)

On 1st November, according to a witness, he led a mob that attacked Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, New Delhi. The temple was attacked and two Sikhs were burnt alive.⁴⁵ On 6th November he intervened at a press conference that the Police Commissioner S. C. Tandon was holding, and put pressure on him to have rioters, who he referred to as 'his men' released.⁴⁶

Sajjan Kumar MP for Mangolpuri (1984) and Outer Delhi, 2004

Chairman of Delhi Rural Development Board (2004)

According to affidavits, he held a mass meeting in a park in Sultanpuri where he revealed Rs 1000 rewards for killing each Sikh.⁴⁷ Bhagwani Bai was witness when Sajjan Kumar himself killed her sons⁴⁸ and Kamla Kaur reported Kumar kicked her to the side allowing the mobs could kill members of her family, including her husband and son.⁴⁹

H.K.L. Bhagat MP for East Delhi

Parliamentary Affairs Minister (1984)
Minister for Information and Broadcasting (1985)
Minister of Works and Housing; Tourism Minister and President of the New Delhi chapter of the Congress (I) Party during the 1990s.

Affidavits report him distributing money to the mobs leaders⁵⁰ and in many cases, leading the mobs.⁵¹ Reported to have intervened to get rioters released who were held in Shahdara Prison.⁵² He died in 2005.

Dharam Das Shastri MP for Karol Bagh Delhi (1984)

Reported to have carried voters list with him at Prakash Nagar to identify Sikhs. On November 5, according to newspaper reports, he along with other Congress (I) leaders tried to pressurise Karol Bagh Police Station chiefs to release rioters.⁵²

Lalit Makan MP for South Delhi (1984)

Reportedly paid Rs. 100 each to mobs plus a bottle of liquor.⁵² He was later assassinated by Sikh militants.

* See 'Genocide', Twenty Years of Impunity - The November 1984 pogroms of Sikhs in India (2004), Jaskaran Kaur, p 102-118. ensaaf.org

⁴⁵ Affidavit of Surinder Singh before Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

⁴⁶ Who are the Guilty? (1984), People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties - 31 October to 4 November 1984.

⁴⁷ Affidavit of Moti Singh, Sultanpuri quoted in Twenty Years of Impunity (2004), Jaskaran Kaur, p 28. Ensaaf.org Affidavit of Cham Kaur & Raj Kumar. Carnage84.com

⁴⁸ Affidavit of Bhagwani Bai before Nanavati Commission. Carnage84.com

⁴⁹ Shame (Oct 27, 1989) Indian Express, Tavleen Singh.

⁵⁰ Affidavit of Sukhan Singh Saina, Shakarpur, before the Misra Commission. Carnage84.com

⁵¹ Dead bodies were thrown in Yamuna, says victim of 1984 riots, Outlook India (Aug 7, 2001).

⁵² Who are the Guilty? (1984), People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties - 31 October to 4 November 1984.

The Tale of Two Inquiries

Misra Inquiry (1985)

The inquiry itself turned out to be a part of the cover-up. The Supreme Court judge who conducted the inquiry, Ranganath Misra, subsequently joined the Congress (I) party and became a member of the Rajya Sabha on its ticket. Misra's pre-determination to exonerate the Congress (I) party and its leaders was so obvious that a panel of eminent persons of the Citizens Justice Committee, which was the main representative of the victims, walked out half-way through his inquiry.

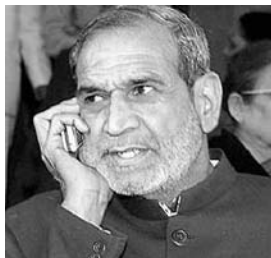
Dubious Hindu groups who were clearly anti-victim, were allowed to gain access to the Inquiry, to the point of intimidating the victims just before their deposition. A blanket ban on press coverage was instituted to prevent the press getting any wind of the mechanics of a cover-up.

Advocate Harvinder Singh Phoolka, who tirelessly fought for the victims as part of the Citizens Justice Committee, points the finger at judges as part of the cover-up.

Nanavati Inquiry (2005)

The Nanavati Commission of 2005 indicted the politicians for the massacre in Trilokpuri, but stated 'It appears that Shri (HKL) Bhagat, Rampal Saroj and Dr Ashok, who were local Congress (I) leaders, had taken active part in the anti-Sikh riots in this area. But since they had all been acquitted in the criminal cases filed against them, the Commission does not recommend any further action against them.'

Although the Inquiry had stated a 'large number of affidavits indicate that local Congress (I) leaders and workers had either incited or helped the mobs in attacking the Sikhs' and when on to say that 'But for the backing and help of influential and resourceful persons, killing of Sikhs so swiftly and in large numbers could not have happened'. It then went out of its way to give clean chits to the top leaders, including Rajiv Gandhi and home minister, Narasimha Rao who clearly had not exercised their powers to stop the violence. Other high ranking Congress (I) leaders who had a hand in the killing were also exonerated due to 'lack' of evidence. Furthermore, all the police officials in the worst effected areas of East and West Delhi were also acquitted.



Sajjan Kumar MP

Lt. Gov. of Delhi, P. G. Gavai

In an interview with *The Indian Express* in 2005, P. G. Gavai, who was Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi in 1984: 'I know I will again be made a scapegoat to shield the higher-ups.'

Gavai claimed the carnage came about because the Rajiv Gandhi Government at the Centre 'deliberately delayed' calling in the Army when the mass killings began on November 1, 1984. 'The sequence of events clearly tells a tale. Political authorities purposely wasted time in keeping with their nefarious design to teach Sikhs a lesson,' Gavai told *The Indian Express*. '(P. V. Narasimha) Rao was calling me up to only ask me to protect his friends.'

He said that after all this time the Indian state was not prepared to 'face up to the political complicity' in the massacre: 'It's a shame they are still engaged in that drama.'⁵³

⁵³ Rao told me to protect friends, Rajiv told me you're a heart patient, take rest, *Indian Express* (9 Aug, 2005), Manoj Mitta.



A courtyard full of corpses

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

If people thought the issues surrounding 1984 be resolved with the office of the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, were sadly disappointed. Following on from the release of the Nanavati Inquiry in August 2005, pressure began to build on the Congress (I) government to take action on 1984.

Despite expressing 'regret' over the events of 1984 and offering an apology, Manmohan Singh refused to accept responsibility on behalf of his party or government. In fact, he went out of his way to exonerate the Congress (I) Party: 'They have finally nailed the lie and they have shown that all these canards which have been spread about the involvement of the top leadership of the Congress Party in those dastardly acts were totally untrue.'⁵⁴

Prime Minister Singh saluted Jagdish Tytler, who was repeatedly cited by survivors as one of the main organisers of the massacres, as 'a valued colleague.' Thus, as survivors and witnesses continued to describe the role of Congress (I) leaders in organising and implementing the massacres, the Prime Minister called them liars and praised the perpetrators, rendering meaningless his calls for continuing the search for truth. The Prime Minister's Rajya Sabha speech added a statement against remembrance of the massacres, criticising an MP who had highlighted how assailants targeted all segments of Sikh society during the 1984 massacres. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, both Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar were initially nominated by the party leadership to fight the elections, but were forced to withdraw amid protests.



Jagdish Tytler MP

The government did, however, increase the compensation to thousands of carnage victims from the previous dismal Rs 20,000 to Rs 7 Lakhs in 2004, as well as helping the widows, now the main breadwinners in areas of employment.

⁵⁴ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speech to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha quoted in *Twenty Years of Impunity - The November 1984 Pogroms of Sikhs in India* (2004), Jaskaran Kaur, p137. Ensaaf.org

1984 and the Indian Media

As soon as it became clear Mrs Gandhi's assassins were two Sikhs, the government controlled television station *Doordarshan*, and *All India Radio* began broadcasting scenes from Teen Murti House, where Mrs Gandhi's body lay in state, with mourners shouting provocative slogans seeking bloody vengeance, 'khooon ka badla khooon se lenge (we will take blood for blood!)'. Assem Shrivastava noted this happened time after time 'within earshot of the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi'. He further added 'Such seemed to have been the depth of state endorsement of the violence. Not one image of the looting and arsoning, let alone of the killing, was ever shown on TV. It would have appeared that the city of 9 or 10 million people was in solemn sorrow and mourning at the death of the great departed leader'.⁵⁵

The administration quickly imposed strict censorship of both national and international press regarding reporting of the violence. Satellite transmission facilities some U.S. journalists were using to send images out of India were damaged. All journalists were banned from entering relief camps and copies of the magazine, *Surya*, which had a picture of bodies burning, were removed from news stands. In the state of Punjab, all newspapers were banned from reporting the carnage and throughout India, government-run television and radio stations also carried no news of the pogroms.

In contrast, during the December 1984 parliamentary elections, huge posters went up around India showing Sikhs brandishing automatic weapons over a bullet-ridden body of the former Prime Minister and asking voters to unite against this menace.

In 1987, the Bombay born author, Salman Rushdie, while visiting some of the surviving widows, was refused permission to use his camera, such was the paranoia of the government. He ended up just using their voices to record their testimonies for his documentary, *'The Riddle of Midnight'*.

If one was to go into any bookshop in New Delhi to find a book on the events of 1984, they would have struggled. When *People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR)* and *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL)* report on the massacres *'Who are the Guilty'* was released, it was swiftly banned by the government in 1985. *'Government Organised Carnage'* (*Sarkari Katal-i-am*) by eyewitness Gurcharan Singh Babbar was also banned in 1998.

'If someone had relied only on TV news and coverage in those days they couldn't possibly believe that almost 3000 innocents were murdered in 4 days, most of them in broad daylight, in India's capital city.'⁵⁵

When an independent report about the events in the Punjab: *Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab* by the *Citizens for Democracy* was released, the Government arrested the owner of the press, Om Prakash Gupta and general secretary, N.D. Pancholi. They were charged with sedition and inciting sectarian discord. President of the *Citizens for Democracy*, and retired Supreme Court Justice, V.M. Tarkunde was also charged with sedition.

When *Associate Press* reporter, Brahma Chellaney reported in *The Times* (UK) that soldiers in the Golden Temple 'tied Sikhs up and shot them at point blank range' during the June army attack, the government charged him with sedition. He was accused with 'arousing the religious emotions' of Sikhs who may have read *The Times* in the UK.

'Advocacy for human rights of Sikhs became synonymous with threats to national security, creating a climate of popular sanction and effectively preventing international attention to state abuses.'⁵⁶



The massacres were completely ignored by radio and television

The mass entertainment industry in the shape of Bollywood remained silent for a long period after 1984. Both the Kapoor and Bachchan families, who dominated the film industry, were close to Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress (I) party.

It took an Indian director living in the U.S., Shonali Bose, to make a highly acclaimed film set against the events of 1984. *Amu*, was released in 2005 in India and tried to deal with India's collective amnesia about the events of November 1984.

The Indian Censor Board delayed it for 3 months. Finally in December 2004 the verdict was given after actor Anupam Kher was fired for initially passing *Amu*. Six lines of dialog were ordered to be removed from the film - or redubbed with acceptable dialogue. Almost all the lines were from the scene where a group of widows explain to the protagonists who exactly organised the 'riots':

'Why should young people know a history which is best buried and forgotten?'

THE INDIAN CENSOR BOARD'S ARGUMENT FOR AWARD THE FILM 'AMU' WITH AN 'A' CERTIFICATE



The authorities declared an 'open season' on Sikhs

"Minister hee to thhe. Unhee ke shaye pe sab hua" (It was a Minister. It was all done at his direction).

"Saare shamil thhe... police, afsar, sarkar, neta, saare" (They were all involved ... the police, the bureaucracy, the government, the politicians - all).

⁵⁵The Winter in Delhi, 1984, Counterpunch (Dec 10 2005), Aseem Shrivastava.

⁵⁶ Twenty Years of Impunity (2004), Jaskaran Kaur, p 22. ensaaf.org

Sikhs saved by Hindu neighbours

The government and media promoted the idea that the anti-Sikh backlash was an inevitable consequence of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. But an independent report into the violence by the *Citizens for Democracy*, headed by retired Supreme Court Justice V.M. Tarkunde, came to a completely different conclusion. Based on extensive interviews with victims and eye witnesses it noted the following:

'Although violence had erupted after Mrs Gandhi's death had been announced, no Sikh had been killed until after plans for their massacres were matured by party leaders on the night of the 31st of October. Clearly people's anger had not reached such an intensity as to burn a man alive, and to gloat over his anguished cries or his burning flesh'.⁵⁷

Furthermore, even at the height of the massacres, there were many instances of Hindu neighbours sheltering Sikhs from the mobs. 600 Sikhs were saved by the Hindus of Trilokpuri. According to an army officer posted in Shahadara, of the Sikh

'We came across a large number of Sikh inmates in the relief Camps who told us repeatedly that but for these neighbours they would have been butchered.'⁵⁸

families he rescued from different parts of the area, at least 70% were sheltered by Hindus.⁵⁸

In Yusuf Sarai market, Hindu Shopkeepers laid down in front of Sikh shops and told the mob they would have to burn them first before touching any Sikh-owned businesses.⁵⁹

But much of the Hindu public by and large appeared to be in a mood that sanctioned such assaults, given the propaganda against Sikhs after Operation Bluestar. Comments by high ranking officials in Delhi indicate to some extent the popular psyche. A Police Officer was heard to comment that the government was not preventing the violence so that people could let off steam and the Sikhs in Punjab would be 'taught a lesson'.⁵⁸

According to Ashish Banerjee 'middle-class Hindus had nearly complete sympathy with the killing and lynching of Sikhs.'⁶⁰ Ashis Nandy recalled the image of an elite boutique owner directing the mobs with his golf club.⁶¹

Amiya Rao noted 'people in Shivaji Park, a middle-class colony in East Delhi, told me that long before October 31, for weeks they would hear a voice, at midnight calling on the Hindus 'wake up, to arise and destroy' (utho, jago, maro).'⁶²

A Sikh man recalls those days: 'Every time the mob spotted a Sikh, it burst into joy: 'Here comes a Sardar, we have found one here''. The killers were combing the residential colonies and markets for Sikhs, a majority of whom were killed right in their homes. After killing the men, the mob raped their wives and daughters. Sikh women begged the killers to spare their men and children. The more they begged, the more savage did the killers become.'⁶³



Hotel Marina on fire, Connaught Place, commercial centre of New Delhi. Photo by Ashok Vahie

Amitav Ghosh, Author - Eyewitness to the killing

'It was still and quiet, eerily so. The usual sounds of rush-hour traffic were absent. But every so often we heard a speeding car or a motorcycle on the main street. Later, we discovered that these mysterious speeding vehicles were instrumental in directing the carnage that was taking place. Protected by certain politicians, 'organisers' were zooming around the city, assembling the mobs and transporting them to Sikh-owned houses and shops.'

'Apparently, the transportation was provided free. A civil-rights report published shortly afterward stated that this phase of violence 'began with the arrival of groups of armed people in tempo vans, scooter, motorcycles or trucks,' and went on to say:

'With cans of petrol they went around the localities and systematically set fire to Sikh-houses, shops and Gurdwaras...the targets were primarily young Sikhs. They were dragged out, beaten up and then burned alive...In all the affected spots, a calculated attempt to terrorise the people was evident in the common tendency among the assailants to burn alive Sikhs on public roads. Fire was everywhere; it was the day's motif. Throughout the city, Sikh houses were being looted and then set on fire, often with their occupants still inside.'

'A survivor - a woman who lost her husband and three sons - offered the following account to Veena Das, a Delhi sociologist: Some people, neighbours, said it would be better if we hid in an abandoned house nearby. So my husband took our three sons and hid there. We locked the house from outside, but there was treachery in people's hearts. Someone must have told the crowd. They baited him to come out. Then they poured kerosene on that house. They burnt them alive. When I went there that night, the bodies of my sons were on the loft - huddled together.'

'Over the next few days, thousands of people died in Delhi alone. Thousands more died in other cities. The total death toll will never be known. The dead were overwhelmingly Sikh men. Entire neighbourhoods were gutted; tens of thousands of people were left homeless.'⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Truth About Delhi Violence (1985), Citizens for Democracy

⁵⁸ Who are the Guilty? (1984), People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties - 31 October to 4 November 1984.

⁵⁹ Gangster Rule: The Massacre of Sikhs, Manushi (1985), Madhu Kishwar, p 186.

⁶⁰ Comparative Curfew (1990), Ashish Banerjee, p 37.

⁶¹ The Politics of Secularism (1990), Ashis Nandy, p 89.

⁶² When Delhi Burnt (8 December 1984), Economic and Political Weekly, Amiya Rao.

⁶³ Government Organised Carnage (1998), Gurcharan Singh Babbar. The book was subsequently banned by the Indian government.

⁶⁴ The Ghost of Indira Gandhi (1995), Amitav Ghosh, Professor at Queens College, New York.

Punjab 1984 - 1994

Following Operation Bluestar, the government commenced a sweeping crackdown on Sikhs across Punjab under the code name 'Operation Woodrose'. The Indian army rampaged through Punjab's villages and towns. Sikh males, particularly young, were rounded up and taken away.

Amritdhari (baptised) Sikhs were particular targets as the following Indian Army publication illustrates. These instructions constituted unmistakably clear orders by the government of India for the targeting of all visible Sikhs.

'Any knowledge of the 'Amritdharis' (baptised Sikhs) who are dangerous people and pledged to commit murders, arson and acts of terrorism should immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. In the interest of all of us their identity and whereabouts must always be disclosed.'⁶⁵

Terror Laws

India prides itself as the world's largest democracy, but in the state of Punjab, democracy was curtailed in order to suppress a people. From 1984 onwards, rule from Delhi was imposed repeatedly and elections cancelled. The following draconian measures were imposed on the people of Punjab.

The Terrorism & Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act allowed for the detention of a person on mere suspicion. Special courts were held in secret by executive magistrates who were appointed centrally. Tens of thousands of Sikhs were detained, tortured and disappeared. Only 1% of people were ever convicted of a crime under the act.

Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code allowed a person to be presumed guilty if he were found at the scene of a crime and to be held without charge for a year. The state could close down a newspaper or seize a book or any other material considered prejudicial to national integration. Under the National Security Act an individual could be preventively detained for a year if judged to be likely to behave in a manner inimical to the interests of the country.⁶⁶ Human right activists, lawyers, teachers and journalists were also targeted, harassed, detained and even murdered.

'Justice in Punjab had been crucified on the cross of the law'.⁶⁷

KRISHNA IYER,

RETIRED SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

As a consequence Ram Singh Biling, a newspaper reporter and secretary of the *Punjab Human Rights Organisation (PHRO)* 'was picked up and unceremoniously executed.' Then Justice Ajit Singh Bains, chairman of PHRO and retired judge of the High Court was illegally arrested, handcuffed and humiliated in April 1992. The 70-year old heart patient, admired for his integrity and independence, was held without trial for weeks, and only released after the *Bar Association of India*, at the urging of Fali Nariman, the *Bar Association of the Punjab and Haryana High Court*, and the Geneva-based *International Commission of Jurists* protested at his arrest. Jagwinder Singh, a human rights lawyer, was picked up on September 25, 1992. 'Although the chief minister and the chief secretary promised to intervene, Jagwinder Singh never returned'.



A police truck filled with the corpses of Sikh youth, 1993

The right to life of citizens is at the heart of India's Constitution Article 21. But in 1988, the Indian Parliament passed a 59th Amendment which enabled the suspension of Article 21 on the grounds of 'internal disturbances'. Punjab was then declared a 'Disturbed Area' under the Disturbed Areas Act of 1991. This astonishing move meant that India was legally suspending protection of the right to life against arbitrary violation in the state where the majority of Sikhs lived.

Punjab became a police state far exceeding what George Orwell envisaged in his book, named chillingly 1984. After 1987 the army and security forces' death squads penetrated into the heart of many rural homes in search of the young. Third degree methods were employed by the police.

The UK-based *Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture* documented Sikh torture victims who had fled India. The methods used by the security forces in torturing Sikhs were barbaric to say the least. The rape of women began to be used systematically as a form of torture.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Baat Cheet Serial No. 153 (July 1984), Department of Defence, Govt. of India, quoted in Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle (1985), Mark Tully & Satish Jacob, p 204.

⁶⁶ This legalised the detention of a person on mere suspicion of 'terrorism'. According to Amnesty International, the term 'terrorist' or 'extremist' in India is 'so broadly defined that it may include people who non-violently express their political opinions'. Amnesty International, Death Penalty Report, 25th April 1990.

⁶⁷ Siege of the Sikhs - Violations of Human Rights in Punjab (1988), Ajit Singh Bains, p 27.

⁶⁸ Lives Under Threat - Sikhs coming to the UK from Punjab (1999), Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. torturecare.org.uk

Mass Cremations Case

If one was in any doubt about the extent of the oppression, the following episode put that doubt to rest. Human rights activist, Jaswant Singh Khalsa, set about uncovering a dark secret in the Punjab. He discovered that missing Sikhs in their thousands had been executed without trial by police and security forces and that most of the bodies had been secretly disposed of through mass cremations. Just by examining three of these cremation grounds, Durgiana Mandir, Patti and Tarn Taran, records showed that police cremated three thousand bodies. It is generally believed that there were a total of fifty such cremation grounds used by police across Punjab.



Jaswant Singh Khalsa came from a family of freedom fighters. His grandfather, Harman Singh, was on the infamous Komagata Maru ship in 1914. Khalsa's father, Kartar Singh, was an active member of the Indian National Congress before independence.

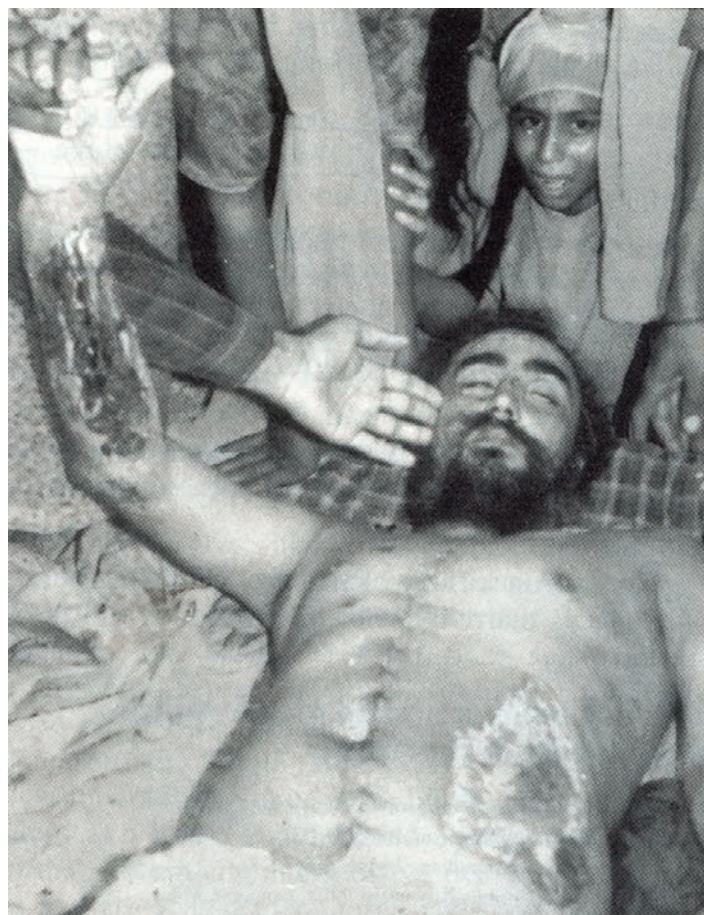
Khalsa's incisive and damning investigative work, provoked a vicious reaction from the police. On 6th September 1995, following an international tour to expose the human rights atrocities in Punjab, he was suddenly abducted by the police and never seen alive again. He had previously been warned by the police that if he persisted, 'he too would become one of those missing names'. The findings of a subsequent inquiry by the *Central*

Bureau of Investigation on the issue of illegal cremations have been kept secret by the Indian government. *Amnesty International* has long expressed its serious concern about the sinister 'disappearance' of Jaswant Singh Khalsa.⁶⁹ On 18 Nov, 2005, six mid-level police officers were convicted of Khalsa's murder but police chief, KPS Gill went unpunished even though during the trial it emerged he had interrogated Khalsa.⁷⁰

Many bodies were dumped in the rivers and canals of the Punjab and neighbouring states. The Rajasthan state government went on record in complaining to the then Chief Secretary of Punjab about the large number of bodies being carried into their state through the canals. Eyewitnesses often spoke of bodies of young men with hands tied behind their backs. Similarly in 1988, when serious floods struck the Punjab, bodies were washed into neighbouring Pakistan. *Radio Pakistan* referred to 1,700 bodies being carried by the flood waters coming from India.

When faced with evidence collected by the Criminal Bureau of Investigation Inquiry into the Cremations Case, expressed 'horror and shock' and described the mass cremations as 'worse than genocide'.

JUSTICE KULDIP SINGH
AND JUSTICE SAGHIR AHMED



Avtar Singh, beaten and tortured to death with a hot iron and electric shock by the Indian Police.

'Our empirical findings indicate that the intensification of coordinated counterinsurgency operations in the early 1990s was accompanied by a shift in state violence from targeted enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions to large-scale lethal human rights violations, accompanied by mass 'illegal cremations.'

VIOLENT DEATHS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES DURING THE
COUNTERINSURGENCY IN PUNJAB, INDIA (2009),
ENSAAF AND THE BENETECH HUMAN RIGHTS DATA ANALYSIS GROUP

A reign of violence and repression became persistent until at least 1994. *Amnesty International* noted that : 'thousands of suspected members and supporters of Sikh opposition groups advocating the creation of a separate Sikh state (Khalistan) in Punjab have been arrested by the Indian security forces and detained under special legislation suspending normal legal safeguards. In many cases the arrest of the detainees has remained unacknowledged for weeks or months, and there have been numerous reports of torture during interrogation. Scores of those arrested have been tortured to death or have otherwise been deliberately and unlawfully killed in custody (although official reports sometimes say they have died in 'encounters' with the police or while 'trying to escape'), while others have simply 'disappeared', the security forces refusing to acknowledge that they had ever been arrested.'⁷¹

⁶⁹ A Mockery of Justice - The case concerning the 'disappearance' of human rights defender Jaswant Singh Khalsa severely undermined (1998), Amnesty International. Amnesty.org

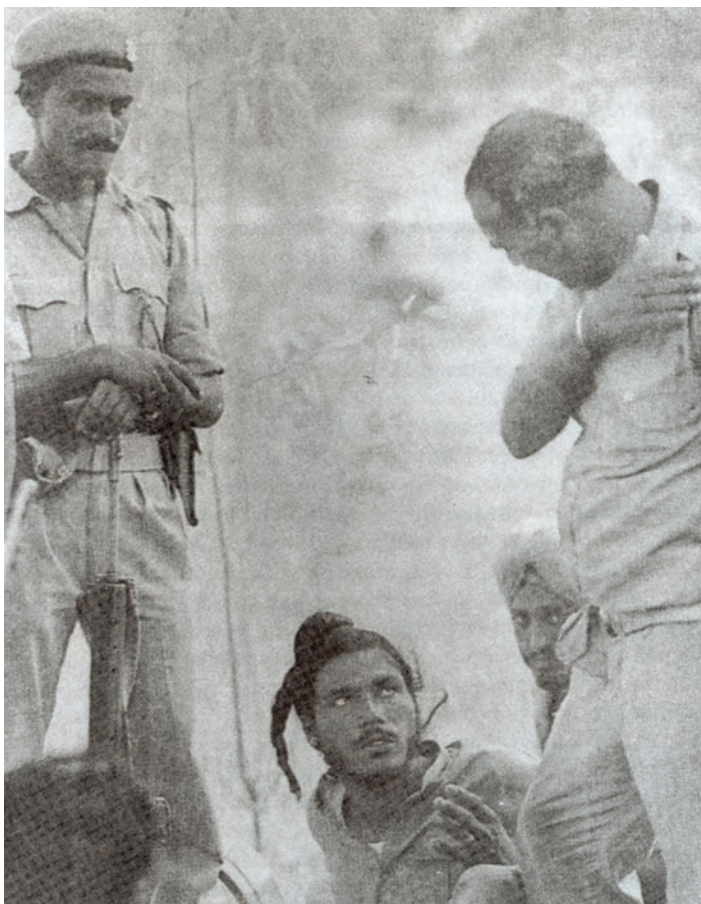
⁷⁰ The Murder of Jaswant Singh Khalsa (2007), Ensaaf, for details of the 2005 trial. Ensaaf.org

⁷¹ Wrongful Detention of Asylum-Seeker Raghbir Singh (February 1996), Amnesty International.

Case studies

Satvinder Kaur & Sarabjit Kaur

Police officer-in-charge of a post at village Bham, in Batala subdivision of Gurdaspur district, kidnapped two teenage girls, Satvinder Kaur and Sarabjit Kaur, in front of eyewitnesses in his official jeep. The officer-in-charge of the police station in Har-Gobindpur denied their custody. Four days later their naked dismembered bodies were recovered from a nearby canal. Officers of Har-Gobindpur police station tried to pressurise the parents to sign a declaration that the bodies were unidentified and unclaimed, and were threatened that they would be eliminated... if they disobeyed.⁷²



Sikh prisoner, turbanless, being abused by Central Reserve Police, Punjab, 1984

'There is plenty of evidence to show that extra-judicial killings are perpetrated on a large-scale by the police and security forces in Punjab, and that the conspiracy to mass murder extends up to the highest levels of government.'

LORD AVEBURY (CHAIR, BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP,
LETTER TO MARK LENNOX BOYD,
JUNIOR FOREIGN MINISTER, UK (9 APRIL 1993)

'Six years ago, the Indian Supreme Court directed the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to investigate 2,097 cases of illegal cremation in Punjab's Amritsar district. The NHRC has yet to hear testimony in a single case. Between 1984 and 1994, thousands of persons 'disappeared' and were believed illegally cremated in Punjab as part of a brutal police crackdown to quash insurgency. Police counter-insurgency efforts included torture, forced disappearances, and a bounty system of cash rewards for the summary execution of suspected Sikh militant. By early 1993, the government claimed normalcy had returned to the state. Police abuses continued, however, and there was no effort to account for hundreds of forced disappearances and summary killings.'

JUSTICE ELUDES FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED
IN PUNJAB (10TH JUNE 2003),
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.

Pragat Singh

Sixty-five-year-old Baldev Singh from Amritsar had retired from the 9th Punjab Regiment of the Indian Army after suffering serious injuries during the war with Pakistan in 1965, which he fought at Poonch sector in Jammu and Kashmir. Baldev Singh's eldest daughter Manjit Kaur had been India's star female weight-lifter, earning 19 gold medals. She had also represented India in many international events, including the Asian Games held in Beijing. His youngest son, 25 year old Pragat Singh, earned his livelihood by running a dairy farm. The police began to harass him, picking him up for interrogation and torturing him in illegal custody.



The consequence of police raj in the Punjab

Unable to put up with the harassment, Pragat Singh ran away from home but was arrested on 19 September 1990 while he was watching a film along with his cousin Chayan Singh at Sandhu Talkies, a cinema hall in Amritsar. On 5 November 1992, newspapers reported Pragat Singh's death in a supposed armed encounter with the police near Raja Sansi, a suburb of Amritsar. Baldev Singh spoke to an employee at the General Hospital in Amritsar where the post-mortem of the body had been conducted. The employee's description of the body matched Pragat Singh's. Baldev Singh reached Durgiyana Mandir cremation ground just as the police lit the pyre. The head was already burning, but the rest of the body was still intact. Although Baldev Singh was allowed to carry the ashes for the last rites, the abduction and the illegal cremation of Pragat Singh remained officially unacknowledged. Baldev Singh's affidavit also said that his daughter Manjit Kaur was so traumatised by the incident that she decided never again to represent India in any competitive sport.⁷³

⁷² It's Never too late to uncover the Truth, (2000), Sikh Review, Patwant Singh.

⁷³ Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003), Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, p 6. Punjabjustice.org



Indian police and their latest victim in the killing fields of Punjab

'Impunity in India has been rampant in Punjab, where security forces committed large-scale human rights violations without any accountability. No one disputes that the militants were guilty of numerous human rights abuses, but the government should have acted within the law instead of sanctioning the killing, 'disappearance,' and torture of individuals accused of supporting the militants.'

BRAD ADAMS, PROTECTING THE KILLERS
- A POLICY OF IMPUNITY IN PUNJAB, INDIA (2007)
ENSAAF AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Gurdev Kaur & Gurmeet Kaur

On the afternoon of 21 August 1989, a party of Batala Police (one was in uniform, five others were in plain clothes) picked up Gurdev Kaur and Gurmeet Kaur, both employees of the Prabhat Financial Corporation, from their offices opposite Khalsa College, Amritsar. Many bystanders witnessed the arrest. The women were pushed into the vehicle and whisked away to Batala, another district altogether. There they were taken to a makeshift interrogation centre which had been set up in the abandoned factory premises of Beiko Industries. It was 6pm. Gurdev Kaur watched Senior Superintendent of Police Gobind Ram beat a Sikh youth with an iron rod then he suddenly turned and struck her with the rod across the stomach. He rained blows on her stomach until she began to bleed through her vagina. Then Gurmeet Kaur was beaten in the same way. Gurdev fainted but was revived and beaten again. The two women were taken to the Batala Sadar police station at about 11.30pm. Next morning she they were taken to the Beiko factory again. Their limbs were massaged then followed by further beating. With their legs crippled by rollers, they were molested and threatened with death.⁷⁴

It was after these kinds of cases that even the governor of Punjab, S.S. Ray, admitted that the police had become 'sadistic'.

'The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special considerations. I see nothing wrong in an area set up in the North of India wherein, the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom.'

PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, LAHORE BULLETIN,
JANUARY 9, 1930.

Kulwinder Singh

Tarlochan Singh described the hurdles he has faced in his now 18-year struggle before Indian courts for justice for the killing of his son, Kulwinder Singh: 'I used to receive threatening phone calls. The caller would say that they had killed thousands of boys and thrown them into canals, and they would also do that to Kulwinder Singh's wife, kid, or me and my wife...' ⁷⁵

Balvinder Singh

On 30 August 1991, three unnumbered police jeeps carrying eight or nine men each went to Jatana village in Ropar district, Punjab. On the pretext of arresting Balvinder Singh, they killed his 95-year old grandmother, his maternal aunt, her teenage daughter and his polio-affected infant cousin. The police then set the bodies on fire and departed.⁷⁶

Members of the *Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab* secretly taped the following conversation with a Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) about what used to happen in the days before the SSP's periodic meetings with Director General of Police K.P.S. Gill:



'You can check that up! Before such a meeting with K.P.S. Gill, 300 to 400 Sikhs used to die in Punjab. Every SSP had to report: I have killed 14. The other who said I have killed

28 was appreciated more. The third SSP who had to outsmart the first two had to report 31. The night before the meeting with Gill, the Sikhs used to die so that the SSPs could vie with each other in showing their anti-terrorist achievements.'⁷⁷

⁷⁴ The Sikhs (1999), Patwant Singh, p 246.

⁷⁵ Protecting the Killers - A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India (2007), Ensaaf and Human Rights Watch. hrw.org

⁷⁶ The Sikhs (1999), Patwant Singh, p 245.

⁷⁷ Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003), Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, p107. Punjabjustice.org

Intransigence to Insurgency

Following the First World War, Jews were blamed for Germany's plight and their patriotism questioned. In 1984, Sikhs found themselves in similar circumstances. Every murder, including every killing of a Hindu in the state of Punjab was immediately blamed on the Sikh community, without any independent investigation. Shadowy militant groups claiming to represent Sikh interests began to appear, often with official backing. Both Sikhs and Hindus lay victim to the terrorist attacks in the Punjab yet the Congress (I) party machine made good the attacks on Hindus only and projected the Sikhs as traitors and secessionists.

The Congress (I) government, during the period 1981 to 1984 were in no hurry to settle the grievances of the Punjabis. The communist MP, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, who was once party to negotiations revealed 'Three times in six months an agreement was reached and three times the Prime Minister backed out. Each time, the interests of the Hindus of Haryana weighted more heavily with her than a settlement with the Sikhs.'⁷⁸ The cost to ordinary Punjabis, Hindus or Sikh, was to prove disastrous.

There is a perception though that Sikhs in general may have forced the state to come down hard by aligning with separatist demands of a Khalistan or Sikh state. Yet no credible Sikh leader was asking for this at the time. Even Sant Bhindranwale was unwilling to support it until the day the army entered the Golden Temple. The demands of the Morcha or struggle headed by moderate leaders like Sant Longowal could have been accommodated within the framework of the Indian Union. What was being demanded was some degree of control over Punjab's river waters, Punjab's own state capital and an end to Police brutality.

Most writers are agreed that the primary responsibility for the situation spiralling into disaster lay at the door of a government so used to playing politics to further their own ambitions, to the detriment of the country. Talking about the period just before the attack on the Golden Temple author Patwant Singh noted 'the danger was acute: the government's Machiavellian policy of blurring public perception of the distinction between moderate Akalis and the firebrand it had so assiduously built up was now crowned with success in the fusion in the public mind between the Constitution-burning Akali leaders and the inflammatory utterances of Bhindranwale.'⁷⁹

Sant Bhindranwale

According to writer Manraj Grewal, the Congress (I) party initially 'appeared to have a soft spot for the young chief (Sant Bhindranwale) of the Damdami Taksal' (a Sikh seminary).⁸⁰ This was especially true of Congressman Giani Zail Singh and Mrs Gandhi's son, Sanjay. In 1978, the inaugural meeting of the radical Dal Khalsa, supported by Bhindranwale, was funded by Zail Singh. Bhindranwale campaigned actively for Congress (I) party candidates in the 1979 Gurdwara and 1980 General elections.⁸¹ Both viewed him as a useful weapon to counter the Akali Dal, the main Sikh party, and Zail Singh's arch-rival, Darbara Singh, the Chief Minister of the Punjab. This relationship was short lived though when in September 1981, the Punjab police on their way to arrest him set on fire two buses which were carrying the holy Guru Granth Sahib.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale remains a controversial figure to this day, with some seeing him as a communal figure, inciting acts of violence against the Hindus of Punjab and the Nirankari sect.⁸²

The main Sikh party, the Akali Dal, looked at him ambivalently, concerning themselves primarily at maintaining political support from Sikhs. It is also alleged that in April 1984, active conflict broke out between Bhindranwale and Akali supporters.⁸³

People close to the Sant though, saw him in a completely different light. A saint-soldier who was only interested in preaching - 'nashe chado, amrit chako, Singh sajo' (discard



Sant Bhindranwale (far right) and his followers.
Picture courtesy of Swadesh Talwar, Indian Express

drugs, take baptism and become practicing Sikhs). They even cite that he had no quarrel against ordinary Hindus, and during his brief stay in prison helped build a Hindu temple. Although he repeatedly spoke of the hurt caused when Punjabi Hindus stated in the State Census that they spoke Hindi rather

than Punjabi. It has been argued by some that Bhindranwale's outbursts against Hindus were merely a reaction to the rise of the Hindu nationalism which began increasingly making inroads in the Punjabi Hindu community, to the detriment of Sikh-Hindu relations, which had hitherto been close. Attacks on the minority Sikh communities of the neighbouring states of Haryana and Rajasthan during February 1984 further exasperated an already communally charged situation.

Bhindranwale led the defence of the Golden Temple against the Indian Army attack in June 1984 and was eventually killed.

⁷⁸ Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle (1985), Mark Tully & Satish Jacob, p 91.

⁷⁹ The Sikhs (1999), Patwant Singh, p 233.

⁸⁰ Dreams after Darkness (2004), Manraj Grewal, p 11.

⁸¹ Tragedy of Punjab (1984), Kuldip Nayar & Khushwant Singh, p 36. See also: The Sikhs in History (2002), Sangat Singh, p 342.

⁸² The Sikhs in History (2002), Sangat Singh, p 370.

⁸³ Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle (1985), Mark Tully & Satish Jacob, p 133.

Khalistan

Tens of thousands became victims to the Indian Army's and Punjab police's methods of torture and 'fake encounters' in the months following Operation Bluestar and in the subsequent decade. Little wonder then, that many Sikhs came to the conclusion that they were no longer safe in India. They had been hurt by the assault on their pride and identity, labelled 'terrorist' post-operation Blue Star, and singled out in the pogroms of November 1984.

Sectarian conflict in the Punjab increased in the early 1980s. It is alleged, from sources close to the Indian government, that on 5 Oct, 1983, a bus was hijacked in the Kapurthala district of the Punjab. The Hindu passengers were separated from the Sikhs and one by one shot. 'Six Hindus died and one was seriously injured'.⁸⁴ However, attacks like this were widely condemned by Sikh leaders at the time, but rarely reported in the press.

The idea of a separate Sikh state of Khalistan found favour amongst a large section of Sikhs in both India and the diaspora, especially after the army attack on the Golden Temple and the November 1984 massacres. But as the years passed, many Sikhs have come to believe, having sacrificed over and above their numbers during the independence days and numerous wars since then, that their continued success lies in a united and secular India. Historic Sikh shrines such as Takht Sri Patna Sahib, Takht Sri Hazur Sahib and Sri Hemkunt Sahib are spread over the far corners of the country, and having to give them up would have been disastrous. The loss of Nankana Sahib in 1947 to Pakistan still pains the community to this day.

According to Joyce Pettigrew 'it was the police treatment of civilians that had driven the population to support the guerrillas'.⁸⁵



'Fake encounter' killings drove Sikh youth to join the insurgency

'...despite the continuing violence (terrorism in Punjab) over the past five years, the vast majority of both (Hindu and Sikh) communities continue to live in harmony. It is significant that in all this period there has not been a single instance of Sikh mobs attacking Hindus. Unlike what happened after Mrs Gandhi's assassination when Hindu mobs attacked Sikhs; in the Punjab all killings have been carried out by small gangs against individuals.'⁸⁶

'...our Sikh identity has always been intrinsically connected with the history and culture of India in all its diversity. As such, we maintain that Sikhs have a right of ownership to the whole of India and should never settle for anything less.'

1984 & I - A PICTURE SPEAKS A THOUSAND WORDS
ARTISTS AMRIT & RABINDRA KAUR SINGH



Aftermath of a bombing in the Punjab

In May 1988, the police cleared the Golden Temple of terrorists with little violence. No sacred buildings were blasted by tanks. If only this could have been done 4 years earlier, when again, a handful of militants led by Sant Bhindranwale could have been dealt with. It has been noted that on June 1, 1984, the day of the army action, Sant Bhindranwale held his rooftop meeting in the Golden Temple complex and the army failed to target him or his followers, despite they being in full view. Instead, army fire was directed at the buildings in the temple including the Golden Harmandir Sahib as well as pilgrims. The militants were under strict orders by Sant Bhindranwale not to return fire unless the army entered the complex.

By 1991, 'Terrorists are no longer religiously or politically motivated; they are gangsters who rob, abduct and extort money, commit rape and murder.'⁸⁷

Air India Flight 182

The bombing of Air India Flight 182 on 23 June 1985 was one of the inexcusable crimes to be carried out in this period. 329 people, including 60 children, perished when a bomb exploded onboard the Boeing 747 over the Atlantic Ocean.

Inderjit Singh Reyat pleaded guilty to manslaughter and a charge of aiding in the construction of a bomb and was sentenced. Furthermore, it is widely thought that the main conspirator was Talwinder Singh Parmar of the militant Babbar Khalsa organisation, who died at the hands of the Punjab police in 1992. Two others were acquitted in March 2005. Despite this, questions still remain about the role of the Indian intelligence services who, some believe, knew of and could have prevented the outrage.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle (1985), Mark Tully & Satish Jacob, p 104.

⁸⁵ The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence (1995), Joyce J.M. Pettigrew, p 114.

⁸⁶ My Bleeding Punjab (1992), Khushwant Singh, p 160.

⁸⁷ My Bleeding Punjab (1992), Khushwant Singh, p 149.

⁸⁸ See the Commission of Inquiry into the Investigation of the Bombing of Air India Flight 182 at majorcomm.ca See also airindia182.com

Police 'terror' Groups

By the early 1990's, the battle in the Punjab was not just between militant groups with a political agenda and the police. The situation was complicated with the emergence of outfits that had no support from the population, and some evidence has pointed the finger at the security agencies themselves. Others clearly had the support of the *Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI)*, from neighbouring Pakistan.

In a landmark investigative report published in 2003, *'Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab'*, Ram Narayan Kumar notes: 'My own research on Punjab in that period suggested that the state agencies were creating vigilante outfits in order to infiltrate the Sikh radical movement and generate a climate of moral revulsion by engineering heinous crimes which they then attributed to armed Sikh groups.'⁸⁹

Dhiren Bhagat of the *Indian Post* reported on custom officers at New Delhi airport intercepting a consignment of arms, including rocket launchers and ammunition on an Indian Airlines flight from Kabul. Sometime later, the arms were used by so-called militants in the Punjab. The Indian media sensationally reported the use of rocket launchers and this helped the government rush through emergency powers in the Punjab curtailing life and liberty rights. Dhiren Bhagat's story suggested that the rockets had been fired by the government-sponsored agent provocateurs with the intention of whipping up anti-Sikh hysteria in the country.⁹⁰

Sushil Muni, a Jain monk, who had been working with both the government and militants to come up with a settlement soon realised that the government itself was fomenting terrorism and was told this was the case by individuals in high positions. The militants too realised that there were 'other actors on the scene, and that the level of infiltration into various organisations was escalating.'⁹¹

In his book, *Bullet for Bullet*, Julio Ribeiro, police chief of Punjab during the period, writes about the undercover operations with an extraordinary candour: 'In Punjab there were some persons with criminal propensities, who were known to police officers at various levels. They were approached and a few of them agreed to form groups which would move in the guise of terrorists and confront the real militants in their dens... The police did give them financial and logistical support, but their demands grew to an extent where it was impossible to satisfy them within our resources. Besides, they were very greedy people, with a criminal tendency, who began to prey on law-abiding, rich citizens on the assumption that the police were indebted to them and so would do nothing to stop them.'⁹²

'The consensus view, from a wide range of people to whom I talked, was that the strategy of these massacres and killings were planned elsewhere. It was also a general view that they were carried out with a view to discrediting groups that appeared to have roots among the population.'⁹³



A victim of a 'fake encounter' - a euphemism for an extra judicial killing

The story of a militant

Many ordinary people did join 'the movement' out of a genuine wish to make society a better place to live. They may have been misguided considering the might of the Indian security set up they were up against, nevertheless, their narratives are relevant to explain why the militants enjoyed support from the rural population and also shows that not all were religious fanatics. Here, one explains in her own words why she joined:

Amandeep Kaur: 'Well, I didn't have any interest in politics prior to 1988. But when I went to college I saw some victims of the brutality of the state, and this shook my conscience. One girl, Harjinder Kaur Khalsa, had come from Australia to get married in Punjab, and on the way back she was arrested at the airport in Delhi and was martyred. Then there was a boy, Gurmukh Singh, who was the captain of the hockey team at my college. He was tortured so badly by police that he was admitted to the hospital and died on the fifth day there due to profuse bleeding. Some of us went to his house to express our sympathy to his family. We found out that he was the eldest. When I saw those little girls crying I thought, why can't the police be held answerable for these atrocities? My mind was in a state of excitement. Why shouldn't it be me who should ask



Mass 'bhogs' (funeral ceremonies) in Punjabi villages became common place during the 1990s as killings by the police and army reached epidemic levels

these police why this innocent boy was killed? I was the best athlete of my college for four years, and I became captain of our team of girl's hockey. I was considered to be a brilliant sportswoman and an intelligent girl, and I came from a good family, but it was paining my heart that Sikh boys and girls who

were really deserving couldn't reach the positions in life they deserved. I saw discrimination everywhere.'

Amandeep later helped smuggle some ammunition for the militants. 'It occurred to me that if I could be successful in this, why couldn't I join my Sikh brothers in direct combat action? After all, Sikh girls are as brave as Sikh men, and I knew they always stood by their brothers and husbands in times of need. I knew I was capable of taking any risk, that nothing could scare or deter a Sikh woman.'⁹⁴

⁸⁹Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003), Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, p104. Punjabjustice.org

⁹⁰Rajiv's spies smuggle arms (24 April 1988) The Observer.

⁹¹Fighting for Faith and Nation (1996), Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, p 158.

⁹²Bullet for Bullet: My Life as a Police Officer (1998), Julio Ribeiro.

⁹³The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence (1995), Joyce J.M. Pettigrew, p 123.

⁹⁴Fighting for Faith and Nation (1996), Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, p 213.

Conclusion

Further details into the events surrounding the November 1984 massacres have now emerged. P. G. Gavai, who was Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi at the time, has pointed the finger at Rajiv Gandhi's government of 'deliberately delaying' calling in the Army so that to 'teach the Sikhs a lesson'. He said that after all this time the Indian state was not prepared to 'face up to the political complicity' in the massacre. This is true today as it was 25 years ago. The present Congress (I) leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi have continued to shield members of their party who have been repeatedly accused of organising the November massacres. In 2009, two of the accused were initially nominated to run for election before being forced to withdraw amid mass protests.⁹⁵ India also remains in denial over its complicity and also the extent of human rights abuses that took place in the decade 1984-1994 in the Punjab. The victims and families pursuing justice have been routinely harassed by the police.⁹⁶

It would be foolish to compare the Jewish Holocaust, a unique event in human history, to the events of 1984 both in terms of implementation and scale. Nevertheless, there are some striking and chilling similarities. It is quite clear from all the evidence collected that the November 1984 massacres were a highly organised affair, with death squads operating in a manner similar to Himmler's Einsatzgruppen death squads, who operated in Eastern Europe during the 2nd World War and meticulously hunted down Jews marked for execution.

Hit squads made repeated visits to Sikh households with lists to ensure that they had killed those they could identify. One survivor, Baljeet Kaur described how the mob returned seven times before finding her father, axing his abdomen and head, and burning him alive.

Madhu Kishwar, editor of *Manushi*, writes: 'Many eyewitnesses confirm that the attackers were not so much a frenzied mob as a set of men who had a task to perform and went about it in an unhurried manner, as if certain that they need not fear intervention by the police or anyone else. When their initial attacks were repulsed, they retired temporarily but returned again and again in waves until they had done exactly what they meant to do - killed the men and boys, raped women, looted property and burnt houses.'

The crime and cover-up of 1984 were committed not by a group of criminals or gangs, but leading politicians and police, local and central administration and the judiciary.⁹⁷ In other words, the Indian state, with all its apparatus, committed these crimes. It would therefore be a pointless exercise, after 25 years of inquiries and commission, for a state to prosecute itself. The Indian Penal Code does not allow this. It also does not recognize genocide or crimes against humanity including mass rape. Other agencies like the *Criminal Bureau of Investigation* have also been unable to bring to justice leading politicians and police chiefs.⁹⁸

'Indians and the rest of the world are watching to see if the current Indian government can muster the political will to do the right thing. If it fails, then the only conclusion that can be reached is that the state's institutions cannot or will not take on the security establishment. This has grave implications for Indian democracy.'

JASKARAN KAUR, CO-DIRECTOR,
ENSAAF



The agony of the women left behind. Will they have to wait another 25 years for justice?

In 2001, former President of Serbia faced a trial at The Hague on charges of Crimes against Humanity. Recently, the International Criminal Tribunal has finally caught up with Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic and others. Trials have also taken place regarding the Genocide in Rwanda. In all these cases, as well as individuals who had carried out killings, those who planned, instigated, ordered or otherwise aided and abetted in the planning of the genocide were also called to account.

When a former fighter pilot, Manmohan Bir Singh Talwar and his family was set upon in the early hours of 1 November, it was leading police chiefs like Amod Kanth who intervened by disarming him and threw him in jail for 2 weeks for simply defending himself. Talwar was one of India's war heroes, as commander of a bomber squadron in 1971, successfully repelled Pakistani attack on Agra as well as leading a series of missions over Pakistan's air bases. Kanth was later conferred with a gallantry award by Rajiv Gandhi.

WHEN A TREE SHOOK DELHI (2007),
MANOJ MITTA AND H.S. PHOOLKA

⁹⁵ Sikh group against Tytler, Sajjan Kumar's nomination, The Times of India, 24 Mar 2009.

⁹⁶ A Judicial Blackout: Judicial Impunity for Disappearances in Punjab, India (2002), Harvard Human Rights Journal, Jaskaran Kaur.

⁹⁷ Judges have been a party to a cover-up (2004), Harvinder Singh Phoolka, The Times of India

⁹⁸ CBI clears Tytler in '84 anti-Sikh riots case, The Times of India, 2 Apr 2009. See also: Shoe-hurl opens Sikh riot wounds (25 Apr 2009). Jawed Akhtar, Hard News Media.

Questions remain unanswered

- Who was the 'senior intelligence officer' who ordered the 1600 strong 15th Sikh Light Infantry back to Delhi Cant., after they had dispersed a mob who were attacking a family? Why was the army not called out for 3 days?
- Who ordered around 46 Indian Railway trains to stop and allow the death squads to hunt down Sikhs?
- Who ordered the Fire Brigade not to save Sikh property?
- Who gave the order for the police to travel through areas spreading rumours that Sikhs had poisoned Delhi's water supply and trains arriving from the Punjab were filled with Hindu bodies?
- Who ordered Medical staff in hospitals not to treat Sikhs?
- Who authorised the use of Delhi Transportation Company buses to transport the mobs?
- Who supplied the mobs with money and weapons?
- Who was involved in the pre-planning, possibly months before the assassination? Was the government aware leaders of Congress (I) & the Police met on night of 31 Oct?
- Who authorised the use of government-issued voter and ration lists which were used to identify Sikh homes?
- Why was *Doodarshan TV* and *All India Radio* allowed to repeatedly broadcast crowds chanting anti-Sikh slogans?

'Setting aside their personal tragedies, Sikhs are now a robust part of the mainstream', wrote Sandeep Pal Singh in *The Times of India* in 2004:

'In all these years, have the Sikhs asked for more than their share of justice? The men who assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi have been hanged long since. Has anyone been hung for the gruesome murders of Sikhs that began on the night she died? Who does a father go to seek sanity for his son, who has grown retarded because of what happened in November 1984?'

'So while the struggle for justice continues, the community has refused to be overcome by one event. It has moved on to find its peace.'



'The time for commissions that do not lead to prosecutions is over. After two decades, the prosecutors and police should act. There is more than enough evidence to do so now.'

BRAD ADAMS, ASIA DIRECTOR OF
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

India since independence has enjoyed an inexplicable immunity from international censure, as Barbara Crossette notes in *India: Facing the Twenty-First Century*. 'The images of Gandhian pacifism and Eastern mysticism cover up a multitude of abuses, not only vis-à-vis the outside but within India as well, where a huge media apparatus functions to keep people largely in the dark about the level of popular disaffection and the erosions of democracy that are both on the increase. She notes that more Indians fall victim to their own army and police each year than were killed during the entire seventeen-year dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile! Despite this appalling level of state violence, there have been no mass protests in India and there is no significant international outcry.' The 'mantra' of



democracy, as Crossette dubs it, overwhelms all dissenting voices. 'It is time Indians as a people, together with the international community, break this silence and usher in a new era of openness, justice and a commitment to human rights.'

Resurrecting the idea of India

Peace finally arrived in the Punjab in 1994, after a decade of bloodshed. But the cost to ordinary people was immense. In 2002 in the Indian state of Gujarat, a similar pattern of state-sponsored killings took place. This time it was the turn of the BJP and its far right allies to whip up violence against the minority Muslim community. The mistakes of 1984 came back to haunt the country, and the very idea of a secular India was threatened again.

If the country truly wishes to join the nations of the free world, it must open up the events of 1984 to independent scrutiny. Recognise Operation Bluestar was a major blunder ending in a massacre of mostly innocent pilgrims, which in turn alienated an otherwise proud and patriotic community.

We should also, without any hesitation, condemn any acts of violence against innocents, including attacks on Punjabi Hindus and atrocities such as the bombing of Air India flight 182. Those behind such attacks should be brought to book.

The Indian government, 25 years on from the November 1984 massacres, must realise the enormity of the events, as outlined in this report, cease from describing it as a 'Riot' and recognise it as a Genocide.

We ask that it instructs the Indian Supreme Court to establish an independent mechanism, using Article 2 of the United Nation's Convention on Genocide and Article 7 of the International Criminal Court on Crimes against Humanity, in order to prosecute successfully the perpetrators. In this way, India can give a message that such crimes will never be tolerated. Only then can we resurrect the idea of India and bring closure to the victims and their families.



'It is important for all peoples that we seek not just the truth about the events of 1984 and beyond in Punjab but that we also act for justice.'

JEREMY DEAR, GENERAL SECRETARY, NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS, UK

The 1984 Truth & Justice campaign is supported
by the National Union of Journalists (Books) UK

1984kristallnacht@googlemail.com

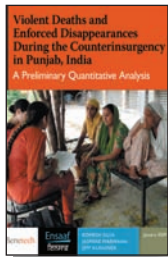
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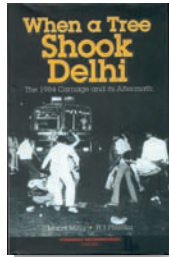
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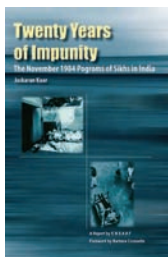
Books



Violent Deaths and Enforced Disappearances During the Counterinsurgency in Punjab, India (2009)
Ensaaf and the Benetech Human Rights Data Analysis Group
ensaaf.org



When a Tree Shook Delhi (2007)
Manoj Mitta and H.S. Phoolka
amazon.co.uk



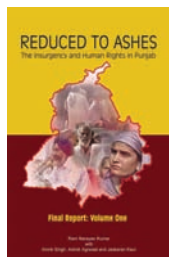
Twenty Years of Impunity - The November 1984 Pogroms of Sikhs in India (2006)
Jaskaran Kaur
ensaaf.org



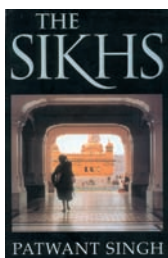
Protecting the Killers - A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India (2007)
Human Rights Watch & Ensaaf
hrw.org



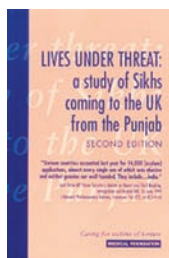
A Sea of Orange - Writings on the Sikhs and India (2001)
Cynthia Mahmood
amazon.co.uk



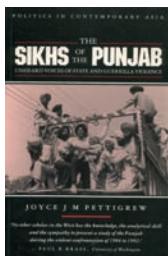
Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003)
The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab
punjabjustice.org



The Sikhs (1999)
Patwant Singh
amazon.co.uk



Lives Under Threat - a study of Sikhs coming to the UK from Punjab (1999)
Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.
torturecare.org.uk



The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence (1995)
Joyce J.M. Pettigrew
amazon.co.uk



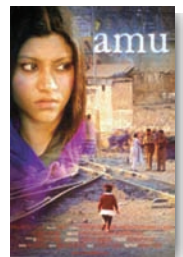
Amritsar, Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle (1985)
Mark Tully & Satish Jacob
amazon.co.uk

Films

Amu (2005), Shonali Bose

Amu is the story of Kaju, a 21 year-old Indian American woman who returns to India to visit her family. The film takes a dark turn as Kaju stumbles against secrets and lies from her past. A horrifying genocide that took place twenty years ago turns out to hold the key to her mysterious origins.

amuthefilm.com



The Widow Colony (2005), Harpreet Kaur

Borrows its name from the settlement in Tilak Vihar, on the west-side of New Delhi, which is locally called the Widow Colony or Vidhva Colony. The film takes the viewer to the streets of Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri, Himatpuri, Sultanpuri and Mongolpuri, the same localities that suffered the major brunt of the Sikh killings in November of 1984.

thewidowcolony.com



1984 Sikhs' Kristallnacht (2004), Truth & Justice

An authoritative account, using eyewitness testimony, of the massacres of India's minority Sikh community during the course of 1984 and the repression that took place in the state of Punjab in the decade afterwards. This film was first shown by the 1984 Truth & Justice campaign to MPs in the UK Houses of Parliament to raise awareness on the 20th anniversary of the pogroms.

youtube.com/1984TruthandJustice



Kaya Taran (2004), Sashi Kumar

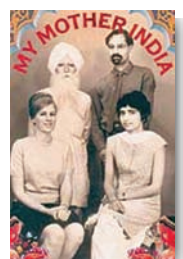
On October 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Over the next few days several hundred Sikh men, women and children were killed in Delhi and other places in northern India. On February 27, 2002, a coach of the Sabarmati Express was set on fire at Godhra railway station in Gujarat, killing 58 Hindu pilgrims. Over the next two months several hundred men, women and children were killed in retaliatory anti-Muslim riots in the state.

kayataran.com



My Mother India (2002), Safina Oberoi

The story of a mixed marriage set against the tumultuous backdrop of modern Indian history. What begins as a quirky and humorous documentary about an eccentric, multicultural upbringing unfolds into a complex commentary on the social, political and religious events of the anti-Sikh pogroms of 1984 which tore this family apart.



Air India 182 (2008), Sturla Gunnarsson

Air India 182 is a first-person account of the Air India conspiracy and its tragic aftermath. The story is told by those who were directly involved, including families of those who died, key CSIS and RCMP investigators and the conspirators themselves.


airindia182.com



Des Hoyaa Pardes (2004), Manjeet Mann

Punjabi Film. Set in the late 80's in the Punjab.





'A suggestion from any quarter that there is torture in India, political torture, is really not acceptable. We have rule of law and an independent judiciary, we have a vibrant and free press which is vigilant and we have a national human rights commission. Judicial protection is available to all Indian citizens.'

INDIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER, MR NARESHWAR DAYAL
BBC RADIO FOUR, 3 AUG 2000

'Our party has apologised to the Sikhs even before. I want this matter to be buried. It happened 20 years back and why should it be raked up again?'

R.K. ANAND, SENIOR ADVOCATE, WHO DEFENDED ACCUSED IN NOVEMBER 1984 GENOCIDE
AND CONGRESS (I) CANDIDATE FOR SOUTH DELHI IN 2009 ELECTIONS

'Why doesn't the judiciary take any action against them? These judge-folks, they know everything. They hear the pain in the voices of the victims and see the honesty in their eyes. Yet they are helpless. It's been six-and-a-half years since I've been pushed around, and still I have no relief.'

MOHINDER SINGH, FATHER OF JAGRAJ SINGH.
DISAPPEARED 14 JANUARY 1995

'It's wrong he got a ticket. How can he be given a ticket? What can one person do! I gave my statement against Sajjan Kumar in court. Nothing matters.'

PREM KAUR, AFTER THE CONGRESS (I) PARTY
NOMINATED SAJJAN KUMAR FOR OUTER DELHI IN 2004 ELECTIONS
SHE LOST BOTH HER HUSBAND AND SON IN THE NOVEMBER 1984 GENOCIDE