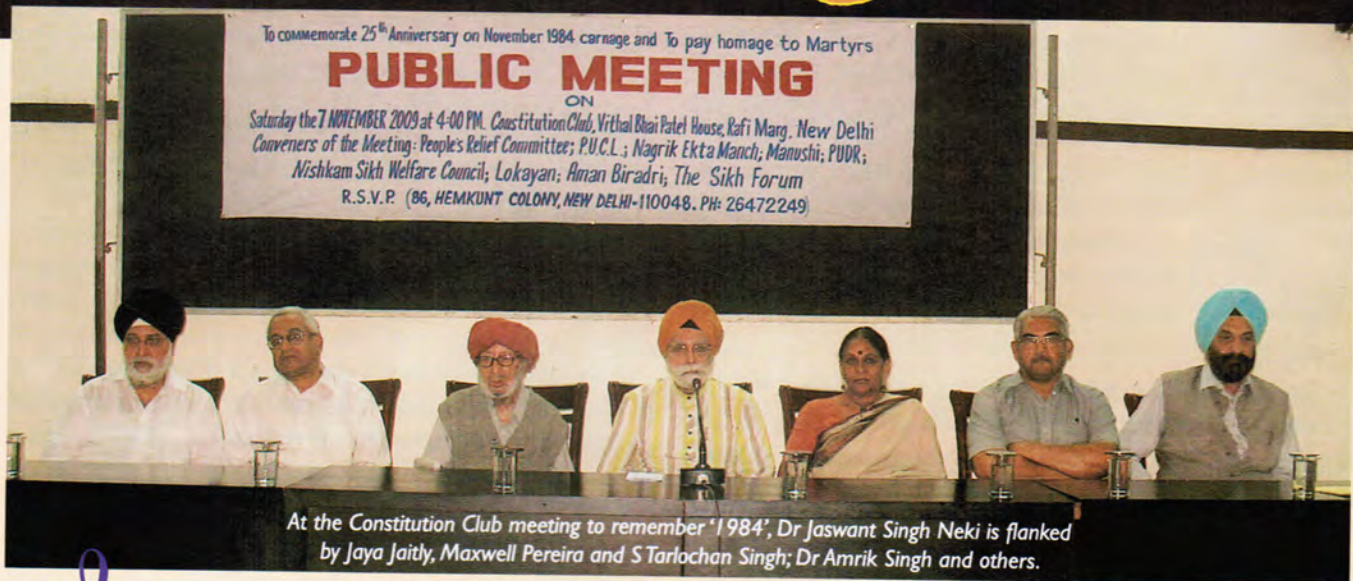


# Remembering "1984"



It has been said that "Our memories are independent of our will". It is not easy to forget – especially the memories of devastating happenings and ravaging exigencies. That is why the things we remember most are those that should better have been forgotten.

The Sikhs have often been advised to "forget" what happened in 1984 and "let bygones be bygones." When a nation is subjected to almost genocidal carnage, how on earth can the survivors forget the holocaust? Millions of Jews perished in the Nazi years. Have they been able to erase memory? Nor have the Sikhs been able to forget the various attempts at ruinous devastation of their entity. During the eighteenth century Divan Lakhpatt Rai mounted armies upon them to finish them. The Sikhs have called it *Chota Ghalughara* (minor holocaust). A few years later, Ahmad Shah Durrani mounted an even more devastating internecine attack on them and declared with the beat of drums that "Sikhs have been exterminated." This event in Sikh memory persists as *Vada Ghalughara* (major holocaust). Both these holocausts still continue to haunt them and probably shall continue to do so as long as Sikhs exist as a nation.

However, the pogrom to which Sikhs were subjected to in 1984 in "secular India" by Indira Gandhi and her dutiful son Rajiv Gandhi make the above attacks fade before it in intensity as well as extensity. On the first

instance the army, along with its artillery and tanks was employed to invade the Golden Temple Complex, devastating *Akal Takht* and piercing walls of *Harmandir Sahib*. In the second instance, mobs were organised and studiously mounted on the carefully marked residential and business houses of Sikhs by leaders and agents of the ruling Congress Party which resulted in many thousand innocent Sikhs killed.

In a 'secular' democracy, any action by the majority community is easily considered as secular, while an action by the minorities to safeguard their interests, but not palatable to the majority community is blatantly dubbed as 'communal'. No wonder then that in 'secular' India minorities do not feel safe. The pattern set by Indira Gandhi was employed by the BJP in collusion then with the Congress Prime Minister to devastate the important Babri Masjid. The Muslim community was subjected to well-designed attacks in Gujarat state. Attacks have been mounted on Christian missionaries regularly. Don't all these happenings show a pattern?

The attacks on the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikh community by the armed forces ordered by the Congress Government were lauded by the supreme *Hindutva* leader of the Bhartiya Janata Party, Atal Behari Vajpai. Does that not underline that the Congress and the BJP have the same agenda vis-a-vis the minorities?



When, under Rajiv Gandhi's rule, mobs were mounted on the Sikhs not only in India's capital city, but in many other cities and towns of India as well, there was hardly any Muslim, Christian or Parsi 'rioter' among the violent mobs that attacked the Sikhs. Doesn't that stand out clearly?

The Sikhs remember very much the happenings of 1984, with anger and agony. The government did little to help the surviving Sikh widows and orphan children. Shockingly, on the other hand those of its leaders who organised the attacking mobs were honoured by providing them places in the Union Cabinet. The story doesn't end here. Commission after commission and committee after committee were set up to enquire into the anti-Sikh 'riots', but these commissions hardly did anything to assuage the injured psyche of the Sikh community. There were many private individuals however, that made efforts to dig out the truth., but the government simply ignored their findings.

It is understandable then that the Sikh psyche continues to smoulder with continuing anguish and resentment.

However, there is another side of the picture that makes us hang our heads in shame and embarrassment considering the role that some of its 'most honorable' members have played.

Many sensible Hindus rejected the lines of Indira's sordid designs. General Sunderji was ordered to mount an armed attack on the *Golden Temple-Akal Takht Complex*. However, he reminded her that the army was not meant to attack its own country. Major General K.S.Brar had less misgivings and attacked not only the sanctum sanctorum of his own "faith" but also on those who were his own countrymen and members of the community to which he ostensibly belonged.

Then Giani Zail Singh, who was not only the Rashtrapati of the country, but also Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces quietly acquiesced to whatever Indira did in June 1984. In November 1984 when S.Khushwant Singh asked if he could be given safety at Rashtrapati Bhavan, he was advised to "better seek asylum at some Embassy!"

The next 'Honorable' Sikh on the list was the Union Home Minister, Buta Singh. He did nothing to help the community, but only applied salt to its wounds by having the devastated *Akal Takht* repaired at expense of the government and against

*maryada* of the Sikh community who would not let it be desecrated by blood-smeared hands of the government. The community latter brought down the structure so "repaired" and rebuilt it themselves. Buta Singh at least had the decency of appearing before an assembly of the *Panj Pyare* accepting the *tankhah* meted out to him and carrying it out sincerely.

There was another Sikh General, one J.S. Bhuller, who became an agent of the Indian Government to sabotage the *International Sikh Organisation* that was coming up to organise the Sikh community world wide.

These were all official dignitaries and may have been assuming that they were obliged by their duty to the government. But there are others who consider themselves 'religious dignitaries' of the community whose actions have been even more abominable. A former President of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee actually conferred a *saropa* (robe of honour) on. Jagdish Tytler, one of the alleged leaders of the crowds which hunted out Sikhs and slaughtered them in the Capital city in 1984.

The current President of the DSGMC likewise decorated another riot leader, Babu Lal Sharma, who had been indicted by a non-governmental enquiry (titled *Who are the Guilty*) as one such who urged the riots on in their depraved task.

Another former President of the DSGMC is alleged to have prevailed upon a complainant Darshan Kaur (for whatever consideration) to retract her statement alleging as to who was leading the crowds that killed her husband.

While Indira and Rajiv Gandhi might have had some political agendas (however unsound and dishonorable), the Sikh dignitaries' alluded as above betrayed their community for whatever personal benefits, actual or desired.

The Sikhs justifiably express indignation against Indira and Rajiv for attacks unleashed upon the Sikhs but why have we condoned those 'Sikh' leaders who willfully betrayed their community? Have we been left with no conscience to even demand an explanation from these quislings?

We now wish to do so through these columns. Let them give whatever explanation they would like to offer. If they keep silent it would verify acknowledgement of their culpability.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki