

started assaulting passersby Sikhs.” Further violence was noted around 5 pm, “when the cars in the entourage of President Giani Zail Singh were stoned at AIIMS.” At 6 pm, Gandhi’s death was announced on All India Radio. Soon after, Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as prime minister.

Around the same time, “crowds had gathered in several parts of Delhi and become violent,” the Nanavati commission wrote.

The Sikhs were beaten and their vehicles were burnt. Till then, the attacks were made by persons who had collected on the roads to know what had happened and what was happening. They were stray incidents and the attacks were not at all organised. The mobs till then were not armed with weapons or inflammable materials. With whatever that became handy, they manhandled Sikhs and burnt their vehicles. There were stray incidents of damaging houses or shops of the Sikhs.

At this stage, it was clear that Sikhs were being collectively targeted, and the Delhi administration, headed by the lieutenant governor, PG Gawai, would have been justified in deploying additional forces to avert the violence. In and around the capital, the army typically maintained one infantry brigade and one artillery brigade; it could also call on whatever limited manpower was available at the Rajputana Rifles’ regimental training centre. General AS Vaidya, the Chief of the Army Staff at the time, later told the Misra commission that an additional brigade of sixteen hundred soldiers had been ordered to move from Meerut to Delhi at 10.30 am on 31 October, and that it reached the capital before midnight. The Delhi area’s commanding officer, Major General JS Jamwal, told the commission that the total number of available soldiers was 6,100. Just under half were “available for field duty,” he said, while the remaining 3,100 were either “used for controlling movements at Teenmurti Bhavan, where the body of the late Prime Minister was lying in state,” or were posted along the route from there to Shakti Sthal, where Gandhi was to be cremated. Vaidya said he gave Jamwal his consent to immediately extend military assistance to the Delhi administration if asked for.

But no one did. The Delhi police commissioner, Subhash Tandon, told the Misra commission that there were not enough army personnel in Delhi to draw on, but this was plainly wrong; the commission itself found that his contention was entirely “without basis.” If troops had been called in on the morning of 1 November 1984, the commission concluded, “5,000 Army jawans divided into columns and moving into the streets properly armed would not have brought about the death of at least 2,000 people.” In other words, at least two thousand lives were lost because the Delhi administration chose not to deploy the army.

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Overnight, the violence in Delhi transformed. The Nanavati commission found that from the morning of 1 November the “nature and intensity of the attacks changed. After about 10 am on that day slogans like ‘Khoon-Ka-Badla-Khoon Se Lenge’”—blood for blood—“were raised by the mobs” that were soon operating across the city. “Rumours were circulated which had the effect of inciting people against the Sikhs and prompt them to take revenge.” One of these rumours that Sikhs had poisoned Delhi’s drinking water; another was that every train coming in from Punjab was freighted with dozens of dead bodies of non-Sikhs. “This was an out and out lie,” the Misra commission found, “but was intended to create the necessary panic and bring about the proper mood in the people constituting the mobs to react against the Sikhs.”

The mobs were well organised. According to evidence admitted by the Nanavati commission, the attackers “either came armed with weapons and inflammable materials like kerosene, petrol and some white powder or were supplied with such materials soon after they were taken to the localities where the Sikhs were to be attacked.” (The powder is likely to have been white phosphorous, a volatile substance not stocked in most households or ordinary shops. How an industrial quantity of this substance suddenly became available to mobs in Delhi was not investigated.)

The commission also acknowledged evidence that on the previous evening, “either meetings were held or the persons who could organise attacks were contacted and were given instructions to kill Sikhs and loot their houses and shops. The attacks were made in a systematic manner and without much fear of the police; almost suggesting that they were assured that they would not be harmed while committing those acts and even thereafter.”

One means of murder was common in neighbourhoods across the city:

Male members of the Sikh community were taken out of their houses. They were beaten first and then burnt alive in a systematic manner. In some cases, tyres were put around the necks and then were set on fire by pouring kerosene or petrol over them. In some case, white inflammable powder was thrown on them which immediately caught fire thereafter. This was a common pattern which was followed by the big mobs which had played havoc in certain areas.

Sikh-owned shops in these localities were “identified, looted and burnt. Thus, what had initially started as an angry outburst became an organised carnage.”

It seems clear from these observations that on the night of 31 October, instructions were issued on how Sikhs were to



be killed, along with assurances that the police would not interfere. That disparate groups of rioters in different parts of Delhi spontaneously decided to string their victims with tyres and burn them alive is implausible. It is far more likely that orders to carry this out issued from a single point of command.

In March this year, in the course of reporting on Operation Bluestar, I met the former petroleum secretary Avtar Singh Gill at residence in Sainik Farms, Delhi. During one conversation, he told me that Arun Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi's close confidante, had sounded him out months before Bluestar about the possibility of the army invading the Golden Temple.

“As one of the few Sikhs in a senior position in the government—even though I was clean-shaven, he wanted to know my views,” Gill said, his back ramrod-straight. “He wanted to know how the community would react. It was not the first time he had spoken to me about Punjab, and he made no bones about his views. I remember him once telling me, with some pride, that he was a hawk. I told him such a move would be a blunder. Given the history of the Sikhs it would result in assassinations, and I remember using the plural.”

The mention of Nehru led Gill to relate his personal experience of the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's death. On 1 November, he went to his office. “Lalit Suri of Lalit Hotels, who used to come and see me often, dropped by. He was the errand boy for Rajiv Gandhi, and since he often needed some work done, he was close to me. He came to me in the ministry and said, ‘Clearance has been given by Arun Nehru for the killings in Delhi and the killings have started. The strategy is to catch Sikh youth, fling a tyre over their heads, douse them with kerosene and set them on fire. This will calm the anger of the Hindus.’”

Suri, Gill continued, “told me that I should be careful even though my name is not on the voters' list, the Delhi gurdwara voters' list. ‘They have been provided this list. This will last for three days. It has started today; it will end on the third.’”

Gill then told me an anecdote that captured something of the paranoia of that week. “On the third day, which was the day of Indira Gandhi's cremation, when people were paying last respects to her body lying in state at her residence—on that evening Lalit Suri sent a man to me in a car from the PMO.” The man from the Prime Minister's Office “told me, ‘Suri has said you still have not been there, it is evening, you must go.’ When I asked why, the man said, ‘It is all being recorded on TV cameras,’ and Suri sahib has sent him to fetch me. He took me in the car to where Mrs Gandhi was lying in state. When I reached home, my



wife told me she had seen me on TV circling the body.”

That Arun Nehru had a role in the violence has long been widely rumoured, but Gill’s statement marks the first time a senior government official has put the accusation on record. His story offers the first coherent explanation for the nature of the violence in Delhi. A detail in Gill’s story also helps solve one piece of a long-standing puzzle. The lawyer HS Phoolka has been at the forefront of the legal battle to secure justice for the victims of the 1984 violence. When I told him about my conversation with Gill, he immediately seized upon the mention of the gurdwara voters’ lists, which contain the names of people eligible to vote in elections to the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee. “We had always wondered how government voters’ lists were sufficient to tell a Sikh from anyone with the last name Singh,” Phoolka said. “But, of course, the ease with which Sikh houses were identified would make sense if gurdwara voters’ lists were available.”

Ordinary electoral rolls may have been accessible or familiar to local Congress leaders, but low-level politicians would have had no reason to keep copies of the DSGMC lists, which were of no use in election campaigns. That these lists were obtained from local gurdwaras after the violence began is also inconceivable. However, Phoolka had reason to believe that the lists were available to people in the higher echelons of the regime. “When we were collating material to present before the Misra commission, we were told by some people in the intelligence community that shortly before Operation Bluestar, fearing a reaction from the Sikhs of Delhi, detailed information on the community had been gathered by the government,” he said. “Unfortunately, we were not able to get any independent evidence.”

In May 1985 a body under the Commission of Inquiry Act was set up. This new commission, constituted that same month, was mandated to “inquire into the allegations in regard to the incidents of organised violence which took place in Delhi following the assassination of the late Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi.” This was the Misra commission, whose report was submitted to the government in August 1986 and made public the following February.

From the beginning, the commission was procedurally biased. Police officials and administrators were allowed to depose in camera; even lawyers representing the victims were barred from attending, let alone examining the witnesses. According to Phoolka, neither the lawyers nor the media at large learned of these depositions until long after they took place.



Seeking to justify the initial violence after the assassination, the Misra commission termed it “natural.” Misra wrote, “According to the Indian tradition a lady cannot be killed and she is said to be Avadhya.”

Sikhs are reputed for their valour and valiance. When two of the Sikh guards drawn from the police and meant for providing security to the late Prime Minister opened fire on her and she succumbed to the injuries thus sustained, a sense of universal anguish was a natural reaction. The Commission, therefore, accepts the submission advanced before it that the incidents against the Sikhs on October 31, 1984, started as a natural reaction to the situation and at that stage there was no organised attempt to cause or spread violence by rioting directed against the Sikhs.

Misra then considered the subsequent massacre : The cause for the attacks on Sikhs from 01/11/1984 had not remained the same. Taking advantage of the anger of the public, other forces had moved in to exploit the situation. Large number of affidavits indicate that local Congress (I) leaders and workers had either incited or helped the mobs in attacking the Sikhs.

But for the backing and help of influential and resourceful persons, killing of the Sikhs so swiftly and in large numbers could not have happened.

Even after making this observation, and citing compelling evidence that the violence was highly organised and systematic, the commission chose to absolve senior Congressmen and place the blame on local leaders.

This conclusion does not stand up to scrutiny. It's improbable that local leaders acting independently would have devised the same method of violence. The commission provided no cogent explanation for how mobs across the city arrived at Sikh homes equipped with tyres and ample kerosene, and settled on exactly the same means of killing and burning the bodies of Sikhs. There is also no explanation for why, in cities such as Bokaro and Kanpur where violence also took place, this uniformity was absent.

The commission went so far as to argue that senior Congress leaders could not have organised the massacre because, if they had, the violence would have been even more severe: If the party in power or a minister or well placed person had masterminded or organised the riot, the same would had taken even a more serious turn.

The commission's final conclusion was that the "change in the pattern from spontaneous reaction to organised riots was the outcome of the take over of the command of the situation by anti-social elements."

But no clarification was forthcoming of who or what these anti-social elements were.

After heading the commission, Ranganath Misra went on to become the chief justice of the Supreme Court. In 1993, following his retirement, he was



appointed the first head of the National Human Rights Commission. Five years later, the Congress, then in the opposition, nominated him to the Rajya Sabha. The party's leadership, which was let off the hook by the commission's report, had rewarded its author with a seat in the Indian Parliament.

* * *

In May 2000, there was a final opportunity to arrive at the truth, when the GT Nanavati Commission was appointed by the newly elected National Democratic Alliance government. The first term of reference for the body was that it would "inquire into the causes and course of the criminal violence and riots targeting members of the Sikh community which took place in the National Capital Territory of Delhi and other parts of the country on 31st October, 1984 and thereafter."

GT Nanavati was a problematic choice to head the commission. In 1998, he was part of a two-member Supreme Court bench that commuted the convicted murderer Kishori Lal's death sentence to life imprisonment. Lal is often referred to as "the butcher of Trilokpuri" for his role in the 1984 killings. In the judgement, Nanavati and his colleague wrote:

We may notice that the acts attributed to the mob of which the appellant was a member at the relevant time cannot be stated to be a result of any organised systematic activity leading to genocide. Perhaps, we can visualise that to the extent there was unlawful assembly and to the extent that the mob wanted to teach a stern lesson to the Sikhs there was some organisation; but in that design, that they did not consider that women and children should be annihilated which is a redeeming feature.

It is difficult to follow the Supreme Court's logic that killing only the male members of a family mitigates the crime of murder. The judgement suggests that Nanavati had made up his mind about the events of 1984 before the commission was ever constituted. If he had already concluded that the violence in Trilokpuri was not organised, more evidence, and from other neighbourhoods in Delhi, was unlikely to change his mind.

In its 2005 report, the Nanavati commission effectively retraced the steps taken by the Misra commission twenty years earlier, and followed much the same reasoning. Like that previous body, the Nanavati commission, in its conclusions, contradicted the evidence placed before it:



Some of the affidavits filed before the Commission generally state that the Congress Leaders/Workers were behind these riots. In Part-III of this report, the Commission has referred to some

of the incidents wherein some named Congress(I) Leaders/Workers had taken part. No other person or organisation apart from anti-social elements to some extent, is alleged to have taken part in those incidents. Smt. Indira Gandhi was a Congress (I) Leader. The slogans which were raised during the riots also indicate that some of the persons who constituted the mobs were Congress (I) workers or sympathisers.

According to the commission, there was simply no evidence that “Shri Rajiv Gandhi or any other high ranking Congress (I) Leader had suggested or organised attacks on Sikhs. Whatever acts were done, were done by the local Congress (I) leaders and workers, and they appear to have done so for their personal political reasons.”

Neither commission reconciled the contradictions in its account of the violence, and neither gave due consideration to evidence that went against its conclusions. Both bodies’ reports found that the carnage—organised through meetings that ensured police cooperation and a uniform method of murder across Delhi—was the result of uncoordinated acts by local Congress workers.

The 1984 massacres are a clear case of violence organised against a community by a political party for electoral gain. But these allegations have never been subjected to an honest, independent inquiry. The Misra and the Nanavati commissions sidestepped the question of a larger conspiracy. This had the legal effect of ensuring that any subsequent inquiries would be restricted to looking at the role of specific individuals in specific cases. If the conspiracy had been properly investigated, it is likely that testimony such as Avtar Gill’s statement about Arun Nehru would have come to light much earlier.

Hartosh Singh Bal

Journalist,
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1984 Riots : Thirty years of impunity

Thirty years ago, Maina Kaur was a young woman in Delhi all set to get married. Her modest home was filled with members of her extended family who had gathered for her wedding. It was then that a mob suddenly attacked her house. The attack was so brutal that it ended up in the murder of eight of her family members including father, brother, uncles and cousins. Maina herself was sexually assaulted and abducted by the mob and she returned home, ravaged and distraught, after three days. Her wedding was called off as the trauma wrecked her physically and mentally. As if all that suffering were not bad enough, the Indian state failed to deliver any semblance of justice to her. None of the accused persons identified by her and her mother have ever been convicted. In varying degrees and forms, such is the searing story of thousands of Sikhs affected by the 1984 carnage.

As somebody who has written on such repeated undermining of the rule of law, I deeply appreciate the gesture of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the US Congress in organising this event on the 1984 carnage titled “Thirty Years of Impunity”. The meeting honors the memory of those innocent persons who had been killed in 1984 and pays tribute to those survivors who had been widowed, orphaned, grievously injured or rendered homeless. Let me also commend the Sikh Coalition for this timely initiative. I addressed a similar meeting five years ago in the historic building of the British Parliament commemorating the 25th anniversary of the 1984 carnage. The ongoing struggles for justice in India gain strength from such expressions of solidarity from abroad. The shielding of mass murderers can’t be passed off as internal affairs of any country. As Martin Luther King famously put it, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” When the world is being increasingly globalised on the economic front, it is apt to recall an old saying in India: VasudhaivaKutumbakam. The contemporary message that can be drawn from this is that whether the world is one market or not, the entire humanity is one family. Indeed, more than globalisation of the economy, the world needs universalisation of human rights standards and practices.



The documentary we just saw – indeed, the circumstances in which the so-called Widow Colony had come into existence – testify to the horror and magnitude of the violence that we are commemorating today. Even for

a country such as India, which is inured to mass violence, the 1984 carnage remains exceptional from a human rights perspective, for at least three reasons. First, it was the closest that post-colonial India ever came to a pogrom as the violence was almost entirely one-sided and the casualties almost entirely from one community and there was hardly any instance of police firing during the three days that the killings went on unchecked. It was as if the entire state machinery had colluded with the mobs targeting Sikhs in response to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two policemen of that community. The second exceptional feature of the 1984 carnage was the sheer scale of the death toll, although the violence had largely subsided in three days. Since the partition riots at the time of its independence way back in 1947, India has never seen as much violence as it did in November 1984, in a carnage spread across far-flung places such as Delhi, Kanpur and Bokaro. The third exceptional feature was that most of those genocidal killings took place in Delhi, yes, right in the Capital of a country that prides itself on being the world's largest democracy. The official death toll in Delhi alone was 2,733.

Given that I am speaking in the Capital of a country that considers itself the world's oldest democracy, I can't help wondering whether such a mass crime, in which rampaging mobs had fatally attacked hundreds of people, could have ever occurred in Washington DC? In the unlikely event of mobs taking over the streets of this orderly city, could the perpetrators of mass murder have got away with it? Could the security forces here have colluded with the mobs as blatantly as they did in Delhi? Could your President at the end of it all have dared to justify the mass crimes, as Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi did, by declaring that when a big tree had fallen, the earth was bound to shake? Such questions would seem equally inconceivable about other leading capital cities too. Whatever the provocation, could there ever have been such massacres, at any rate post-World War II, in London, Paris, Berlin or Tokyo? But if we look beyond liberal democracies, the scale of the bloodshed in Delhi 1984 is perhaps comparable to what happened in Beijing five years later, during the Tiananmen Square massacre. But then, those students at Tiananmen Square happened to be gunned down by security forces in a single-party political system; so the long arm of the law grabbed the protesters rather than the troops. Come to think of it, the death toll of Delhi 1984 was similar to that of 9/11. But again, there is a big difference: 9/11 was the result of sudden and unforeseen terror attacks, not mob violence that had deliberately remained unchecked for three days. By any standards of the civilized world, Delhi 1984 is one of a kind, a monstrosity without a parallel.

Honoured as I am by this opportunity to speak on the premises of the US Congress, let me dwell on the role played or not played by its counterpart in New Delhi in the context of the 1984 carnage. In the



elections held within two months under its shadow, Rajiv Gandhi won the biggest ever mandate in the history of the Indian democracy. Consistent with the anti-Sikh frenzy whipped up by him during his campaign, Rajiv Gandhi was dismissive of the demand for a judicial inquiry into the carnage. As a corollary, when the two Houses of Parliament passed resolutions condoling the death of Indira Gandhi, they steered clear of any reference to the thousands of innocent Sikhs who had been killed to avenge her murder. This is in contrast to the alacrity with which the US Congress passed a resolution condemning the post-9/11 attacks on Sikhs although those were isolated instances based on mistaken identity. That the victims of the 1984 carnage were purposely ignored by the Indian Parliament became evident from its expression of concern around the same time for another distressed community: the victims of the Bhopal gas leak, caused by the negligence of an American multinational company. As a human rights defender, I urge you to commemorate 30 years of that industrial disaster too. The Delhi carnage and the Bhopal tragedy were separated by barely a month and there has been no closure for either of them. When the judicial inquiry into the Delhi carnage was finally set up after a lapse of six months, it turned out to be farcical despite being entrusted to a sitting judge of the Supreme Court, Ranganath Misra. All the proceedings were in camera, riding roughshod over the principles of transparency and accountability. It got worse when a few of the state actors appeared before it.

The Misra Commission ensured that their testimonies were recorded behind the back of the groups appearing for carnage victims. On the basis of such official testimonies which had thus remained untested by any cross examination, the Misra Commission absolved the Rajiv Gandhi regime of all responsibility for the carnage that took place on its watch. The crude cover-up did not end with that. When the Misra Commission's report was tabled in Parliament in February 1987, the ruling Congress party used its brute majority to gag the lawmakers. Given the tenuous nature of its findings, the government could not afford the risk of subjecting the Misra report to a discussion in Parliament. In a brazen display of their pliability, the presiding officers of the two Houses ruled out any debate on the report. There couldn't have been a more glaring abdication of the parliamentary function of holding the government to account on issues of national importance. Parliament's pusillanimity in the aftermath of the 1984 carnage legitimized impunity.



The saving grace is that Parliament did finally discuss the 1984 carnage, and that was over two decades later. It was in a vastly changed political landscape, long after Rajiv Gandhi himself had been assassinated by a Sri Lankan Tamil group. Though it was back in power when the discussion took place in 2005, the Congress party this time was leading a

tenuous coalition government. By a quirk of fate, its prime minister Manmohan Singh happened to be a Sikh. The discussion was triggered by the report of a fresh judicial inquiry instituted by its predecessor, another coalition which had been headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party's Atal Bihari Vajpayee. While tabling the report on August 8, 2005, the Manmohan Singh government rejected its indictment of some of the leaders of the Congress party, including minister Jagdish Tytler and lawmaker Sajjan Kumar. Thanks to the outrage expressed by MPs from Opposition parties as well as its own allies, the Manmohan Singh government was forced to make a U turn in two days leading to Tytler's resignation from the Cabinet. The prime minister went on to tender an apology to the Sikh community and the nation admitting that the 1984 carnage was "a great national shame" and "negation of the concept of nationhood". This was the closest the Government of India came to acknowledging Rajiv Gandhi's monumental failure and complicity in the 1984 carnage.

The massacre at Trilokpuri, which claimed the most number of casualties in the 1984 carnage. In just Block 32 of Trilokpuri, the death toll was estimated to have touched 400. According to the officially recorded testimonies of survivors, the police facilitated the massacre by driving the Sikhs out of a Gurdwara and leaving them at the mercy of a mob led by a local Congress party leader. In a neighboring block, the police had even disarmed the Sikhs before the mob took over. The collusion was so pervasive that it took over 36 hours for the Block 32 massacre to come to light, although it was barely 10 kilometers from the Delhi police headquarters. The evidence available on Trilokpuri also nails the recurring claim that crimes targeting minorities are entirely or spontaneously the result of public anger. The anger in the public over Indira Gandhi's assassination, however deep it ran, was unlikely to translate into violence on such a large scale in Delhi without political instigation and administrative complicity.

Whatever the symbolic value of Manmohan Singh's belated apology, the fresh inquiry did serve to fill a gap in knowledge base. It helped me and H S Phoolka, the moving force behind the campaign for justice, to put together a book on the violence and its cover-up. Since the whole point of the fresh inquiry was to undo the mischief done by Misra under the guise of fact-finding, the commission headed by former Supreme Court judge G T Nanavati not only conducted its proceedings in public and but it also released a great deal of the old records related to the 1984 carnage. It was mainly on the basis of these belatedly-released official records that Phoolka and I came out with the book titled *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and its Aftermath*. Though published 23 years later, this was actually the first



book on the subject. That there had been no book on it for so many years may come as a shock to people in the US, where issues of lesser consequence generate a flurry of books. The difference betrays a larger malaise in India: an appalling lack of documentation culture, especially on human rights issues. Clearly, this deficiency is another reason for the impunity.

The electoral endorsement of the 1984 violence and the impunity that followed set a template, which has been applied with increasingly corrosive consequences.

Manoj Mitta



Memories of '84

Some memories do not fade, however old they become. It is really the pain which accumulates because of disappointment and helplessness in not finding justice. I realized this the other day when an old Sikh friend of mine called me from Faridkot in Punjab and cried on the phone. He asked me again and again why the government did not take action against the 1984 anti-Sikh rioters, some of whom he complained were still roaming free.

The simple answer which I gave him was that when protectors become predators, the punishment is negated. This is what happened in November 1984, when 3000 Sikhs were killed or burnt alive in broad daylight. The then Congress government was reportedly accused of being part of the pogrom. Hence whatever little action taken was perfunctory, not meant to bring the culprits to book.

There was the Chief Justice Ranganath Mishra report and some other assessments. But they talked more about the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi than the killing of the Sikhs. The only worthwhile probe was that of Justice Nanavati. But he too did not go deep enough and did not apportion blame to anybody specifically. Even when, in an interview, I tried to pin him down to name person behind the carnage, he merely said: "You know who he was."

I think the naming of the guilty was important to punish them. Had the law taken its normal course, the killing of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 would not have taken place because the rulers and their associates would have learnt the lesson for complicity. Yet we must know why the Sikhs, as a community, were targeted and what was the motive behind doing so.

I still think that there is a necessity to appoint a Truth and Conciliation Commission like the one the South African government did when the blacks assumed power under Nelson Mandela. Several white men appeared before the commission and gave gory details of what they did by resorting to untoward and illegal methods to keep the blacks suppressed. The white admitted the abominable role they had played.

None was punished because the very nature of the commission required true confessions to avoid punishment. Similar confessions are required from the Congress leaders and the authorities of those days. Only then would we be



able to reconstruct the tragedy, particularly the participation of the top leadership in the party and the government.

"This is happening because we are only two percent in the country," said a young Sikh at Jantar Mantar, adding that even the Muslims met the same fate in Gujarat although they were 17 per cent. His note of helplessness struck me more than his pessimism. His is a telling remark on a polity which takes pride in being democratic and adherent of secular constitution.

The 80 per cent Hindus can brush the criticism aside as most of them do. Yet the fact remains that the taste of democracy goes sour if the minorities feel that they are not getting their due. I must admit that the thoughts and conversations I have shared with the Muslims tell me that they find the millstone of partition still hanging around their neck even after 65 years of independence. However, some confidence is beginning to build.

In a speech, Jamia Millia vice-chancellor Najeeb Jung, said a few days ago: "... There is need to understand Muslim concerns and address them to give the community greater confidence, and ensure its greater involvement in the national mainstream. Two committees appointed by the government, both chaired by retired judges of the Supreme Court, have submitted reports underlining the weak economic and educational standards of Muslims, their inadequate representation in government jobs as compared to their population, and suggested means to address them. The Government of India is making the right noises and there is hope that some positive steps will be taken to improve the lot of the Muslims. The Muslims themselves have realised their political power. In almost one third of seats in the lower house of Parliament Muslim vote can make the difference between winning and losing. The Muslims have gradually understood the value of tactical voting, and their sheer numbers will also gradually force the government to take them more seriously than the first 30-40 years of Independence."

On the other hand, the Sikhs, who consider themselves close to Hindus, are beginning to feel that the relationship does not mean anything if the Hindu community gets worked up as it did in 1984. Maybe, there is a bigger lesson in the tragedies of Operation Blue Star and the killings. Only by delving into them would we understand the killing of General A.S. Vaidya or the attack on Lt. Gen. K.S. Brar who led the Operation Blue Star against the insurgents entrenched in the Golden Temple.



Whatever the reason, it does not lessen the sanctity of orders given by the elected government to the army commanders who are duty bound to carry them out faithfully, whatever their predilections. It would be a sad day when the military would question the order of

rulers backed by parliament.

However, the role of the army takes me to the theatrical posture of the retired General V.K. Singh. There is something called propriety which he has thrown to the wind and has come down to level of urchins asking for gehraoing parliament. I am shocked that Gandhian Anna Hazare, who shared the platform with him, has not realized the harm he has done to the movement he has initiated to bring back the value system.

See the comparison between the two. One is itching to join politics while the other, Brar, a Sikh, is facing the fallout of political rulers' order. The real question is not political but human. The Sikhs are voicing their grievance against non-rehabilitation of the victims' families. "I have been living the horror everyday for the past 28 years. My entire family, including my husband and two sons, were mercilessly killed by the rioting mob. I recount my story every year to the media, but what difference has it made? Have I got justice?" says Surjeet Kaur, one of the victims.

True, one should move on. It is easier said than done. But punishment to the guilty will serve as a balm. The government has to initiate steps that would in still confidence in the Sikh community which should not feel helpless or abandoned. EOM

Kuldip Nayar

