

# Roots of Democracy

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Writing of his country the Soviet writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, observed “in our country the lie has become not just a moral category but a pillar of the state”. Is present-day India any different? By brushing aside the Justice Nanavati Commission Report on the 1984 killing of Sikhs, the Indian state has not only failed to uphold public decency, just governance and moral conviction, but also mocked the constitutional and democratic rights of the Sikhs, for the sole purpose of protecting some critical elements in the ruling party. This ill-fated decision of a Congress-led government, which came to power on the pledge of offering an honest and clean government, underscores once again the waywardness of those who make such major decisions. It also shows the fragility of our constitutional and democratic institutions.

First, the national implications of the Action Taken Report – which means no action to be taken – placed before Parliament on August 8, 2005. By refusing to send to the Courts the key Congress functionaries who were identified as colluding in the mass murder of the Sikhs, the Union Government has betrayed a breathtaking lack of balance: as if saving the skins of a handful of criminal elements within its fold is more important than the outrage, hurt, and disillusionment of 20 million Sikhs. Or the despair of families of those killed, who are waiting since 1984 for justice and redressal?

Next comes the fragility of our constitutional and democratic institutions. No doubt India has endured as a democracy for 58 years despite all the dictatorships that have flourished in the neighbourhood. But are we really a democratic state if dual standards of justice and fundamental rights continue to betray the promise of our democratic principles after all these years? Obviously no lessons were learnt from the assault on our rights during the Emergency. Nor from the slaying of thousands of innocent men, women and children in 1984. These were stark betrayals of our democratic rights. The Prime Minister has to ensure that “necessary” democracy continues to be strengthened. Dr. Manmohan Singh is an upright and honourable man, as well as a scholar of standing and experienced in governance. He must not allow democracy’s foundations to be weakened during his watch. Sonia Gandhi, too, is wise and widely admired. So it is all the more baffling why neither found anything wrong in ignoring a report prepared by a respected and learned judge.

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