

# **“1984: We want the Centre to act”**

## **An Interview with Sr. Tarlochan Singh**

*Prashant Sood*

The National Commission for Minorities' former Chairman, Sr. Tarlochan Singh has taken steps to promote goodwill among various religious communities in the country and remove grounds for misunderstanding. A member of the Rajya Sabha, he has pleaded the cause of the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence both inside and outside the Parliament. Having a chequered career spanning public relations, tourism and sports, Mr Tarlochan Singh, 72, was elected as an Independent member of the Rajya Sabha in August 2004. Before his elevation as the NCM Chairmain in February 2003, he was its Vice Chairman. He was Press Secretary to President Giani Zail Singh. Born in a village in Jhelum district, now in Pakistan, he is a post-graduate in Economics. He says riots can be prevented if police does not connive with the troublemakers.

### **Excerpts from the Interview:**

#### **Q.: How do you view the Nanavati Commission report?**

**A.:** It is much below expectations. Along with eight earlier reports, it will probably go to the archives. Justice G.T. Nanavati had a lurking fear in his mind to mention what was true. He goes fairly close to the truth and then diverts.

#### **Q.: How do you see the Centre's 'Action Taken Report'?**

**A.:** The government is trying to fool the public. Our demand is not a Commission of Inquiry. The law of the land did not prevail as those who murdered 3,000 people were not hauled up. We want the government to act and not wait. It should not take shelter behind the Commission's reports.

We feel that evidence was destroyed and defective FIRs prepared so that there is no conviction. We feel that delayed action by the government will not help us now in any way. There was a deliberate delay in filing cases. Human rights were grossly violated. The administration did not want to take action. Well-known leaders were shielded by the government. The available evidence was not used.

It was known to trouble-makers that police will not act. Who gave such orders? Under whose control does the Delhi Police work? The Sikh policemen were used for other purposes. Sikh men were shown as terrorists to get votes. The motive was to win elections. The Sikh psyche was hurt. The government should own responsibility and come out with an apology in Parliament. At least that will give some satisfaction.

After he took over as the President of South Africa, Mr. Nelson Mandela set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for people who had committed crimes to own up their guilt. People in India know who are guilty for the barbaric 1984 riots. There was a coterie. Let those people apologise.

#### **Q.: How do you view the apology tendered by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on behalf of his government and people of the country?**

**A.:** We appreciate his sentiments. We welcome what he said but more is required. We want the government to apologise through a resolution in the Parliament. It should accept negligence. The real truth should come out and the culprits should be named.

#### **Q.: With two of the Congress leaders indicted by the Nanavati Commission having quit their posts, what more should be done?**

**A.:** It is only symbolic. It was the Congress which gave them the posts. When they were given these posts, the Sikhs had opposed this.

#### **Q. What should be done to prevent riots?**

A.: Riots takes place due to the negligence and connivance of the police. Politicians of the day should be fully conscious of this fact. There is need for police reforms. Police and administrative officers in the districts should be held responsible and made accountable in case of riots. There is need for strict government control.

**Q.: How do you see the Supreme Court judgement about communities like the Jains and Sikhs not being national minorities?**

A.: We will move the Supreme Court with a review petition.

**Q. How does the the NCM view demands for reservation on the basis of religion?**

A.: The NCM is against religion-based reservation. All minorities should be treated equally with no discrimination. The country has suffered in the past because of religion-based reservation. We have written to the states that proposes to give religion-based reservation not to go ahead with such measures.

**Q.: What is the record of minority welfare since Independence?**

A.: Half-hearted steps have been taken for their welfare. There is need to uplift the minorities economically and educationally at places where they have large population. Not much has been done beyond sloganeering by political parties.

