

The Need for Sikhs' own Media

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For decades, indeed for as long as India has been a nation, the powerful electronic media has served as the mouthpiece of govt. It is the chief custodian of "truth"— or at least, the official version of events. Following the first week of June 1984, every Sikh living abroad agonized about the catastrophe that gripped India. But the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's government was working hard to produce and distribute a video for the western countries (especially for Indian immigrants living abroad) whose logo read "this video tape shows the actual truth about why and what happened at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar during that fatal first week of June, 1984."

A colleague of mine, working in the same office I was in, came to me, within days of the attack on the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, and 38 other historical Gurdwaras throughout Punjab, and presented me with a copy of a video Tape. When I asked him, "Where did you get this tape?" He replied that the Embassy of India in Washington, DC gave him this tape to be distributed to the Sikhs. That meant that Government of India had planned, much in advance of the attack, to flood the news media in India (owned and controlled by the Government) and the rest of the world with a propaganda of labeling Sikhs in the Golden Temple as 'terrorists' and thus justifying the killings of thousands of innocent men women and children.

Sikhs living abroad were shocked to know about the production of such a tape and its distribution within a few days of the attack on Harmandir Sahib. One could have marveled at the efficiency of the then Indian Government and its embassies for a quick production and distribution when contrasted with the usual inefficiency of the Indian establishment. However, some critical viewers realized that it was not the dramatic improvement in the government's functioning, but rather a clever attempt at extension of a propaganda war that Mrs. Gandhi had initiated in 1980's. The speed with which it was distributed to the international circle continue to stick in Sikh psyche today. It portrayed Sikhs as terrorists to justify the attack. Later, during the same year, the genocide and its news coverage by the Government controlled media confirmed the worst fears of Sikhs. In retrospect, one wonders what India would have looked like today had its Government, instead of launching an expensive propaganda war, simply investigated both of the Nov. 84 incidences and punished the guilty.

It became obvious to the Sikh scholars that Indian leadership was on a dangerous course of propagating falsehood. To stay in power, the Indian leaders blatantly committed horrific acts against its bravest people. They ignored Sikhs' contributions during the Indian independence struggle, and later for the defense of India against Pakistan and China.

For foreign reporters trying to grab these sensational tragedies of 1984, the Indian govt. was the most visible gatekeeper, making it impossible to approve journalist visas for foreign correspondents. Thus, during 1984, Indian leaders were free to broadcast made-up stories through the govt. controlled Radio and TV. Consequently, all foreign news organizations were left with no choice but to take the twisted news of local govt. controlled media and rebroadcast over their own networks abroad. It was much later that the foreign newspapers knew only the partial truth about 'India's Unknown Holocaust.'¹

Since India's electronic media was state controlled, the western world had no access to the actual truth even after 20 years of those grave tragedies. Subsequent events show that they have been unsuccessful to cowing down the Sikh spirit. But they did succeed in maligning

Sikhs by the use of media (newspapers, Radio and TV) even as the Sikh leadership failed to respond, since they did not own, or operate, any newspaper, radio or TV.

Arguably had Sikhs have their own English language prominent newspaper in India and/or Radio or TV network, like ZTV or TVASIA, outside India, they could have responded effectively to the propaganda in India and abroad. Even after 20 years Sikhs do not spend on or support any media outlet. Instead Sikhs are spending lot of money on Gurdwaras, on infighting in courts and for personal glorification by spending on University chairs, Sikh Art Exhibitions, etc. in N. America.

We have, on our own, with our own resources, started a small weekly Radio and TV programs in Washington, DC area (the most powerful city in the world) since 1988 and continue to operate. We have also archived some of these programs on the Internet at web site www.passionfortruth.tv for worldwide viewing. But our small effort cannot be that effective - as a nation-wide or worldwide TV network could be. In addition to spending Sikh resources on building Gurdwara buildings, etc. I think we should spend money on the most effective medium of TV in India, UK, and USA.

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