

1984: The Assassination & Massacre of Innocents

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The N.D.A. Government appointed, in mid-2000, yet another commission of enquiry, headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, for ascertaining various aspects of the carnage, vandalism, abuse of authority and apathy of law enforcement agencies during the Nov. '84 carnage of Sikhs and across north India.

Many questions about the causes that led to the allegedly state-sponsored genocide against a particular religious community solicit meaningful probe as a prelude to the judicial re-investigation of a calamity, vital substantiated facts about which got eclipsed during the intervening years.

Revered Sardar Ranjit Singh Narula, a former Chief Justice of Punjab & Haryana High Court, has listed 36 questions relating to the said genocide in an article captioned: 'The Ghalughara-1984: Questions that remain unanswered' in the September 2000 issue of *The Sikh Review*. After reproducing the first four from that list, I add a few more to them.

1. The official telex message sent at about 11 a.m. on 31.10.84 to Indian embassies and High Commissions abroad mentioned 'two Sikh guards and a clean-shaven' as the assassins of Indira Gandhi. Who was the third man, the clean-shaven one?
2. Why was the large number of Sikh police personnel taken off duty and sent to the barracks on 31st October when no one could see any risk to *their* lives? Why were they disarmed?
3. Who was the clearly visible and identifiable man who continued to be shown on the Doordarshan TV throughout the first part of October 31-November 1 night (standing at the threshold of the room where lay the dead body of Indira Gandhi for public viewing) shouting : *sardar quom ke ghadar* and *khoon ka badla khoon* openly inciting the spilling of Sikh blood?
4. Why no action has been taken against that man till date, for openly spreading disaffection between communities and provoking bloodshed of innocent Sikhs?
5. The Sikh members of the security staff posted at the residence of Indira Gandhi had declined to accept the Diwali gifts distributed by her as usual, which indicated clearly their resentment against her. Why were they not replaced immediately thereafter?
6. In spite of the volatile symptoms of hostility, why were two Sikh security guards, S.I. Beant Singh and constable Satwant Singh, posted in the innermost ring, knowing fully well that Indira Gandhi was to walk across that way for a TV interview on that morning?

7. Constable Satwant Singh reported back for duty on the evening of October 30, '84 after a long leave to his home in Gurdaspur District, where the atrocities committed through 'Operation Red Rose' were adding humiliation to the sacrilege inflicted through the military misadventure 'Blue Star'. Guards coming after leave are enjoined to be kept under observation for a fortnight or so before assigning sensitive duties. Why was Satwant Singh posted so close to the movements of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the very next morning, while he was still fuming and fretting at the damage caused to the life, property and self-respect of his kith and kin by the army personnel conducting the so-called Operation Red Rose?

8. Why was the *disarmed* Beant Singh killed by his captors within minutes after the fatal attack on Indira Gandhi?

Was that preplanned by the conspirators (towards whom '*the needle of suspicion*' was stated to be pointing in a subsequent judicial probe) for exterminating vital evidence about the assassination plot?

9. Why was no case registered against the killers of Beant Singh?

10. Why did not the President of India opt to seek the objective opinion of Supreme Court on the mercy petition of the young condemned assassin, Satwant Singh, instead of being led by the subjective advice of Council of Minister headed by the son of Indira Gandhi, who had quite unbecomingly declared 'when a massive tree falls, the earth faces tremors under its impact'?

All these unanswered questions call for impartial investigation and proper diagnosis of the national tragedy which struck a deadly blow to the secular character of Indian Republic.



1984: The November *Ghalughara*

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Justice (Retd.) Ranjit Singh Narula, former Chief Justice, Punjab & Haryana High Court, and a jurist of eminence, published an article under the heading "The Ghalughara - 1984" in *The Sikh Review* magazine Vol. 48:9, September 2000, wherein he raised 36 questions (he stated that he had a hundred more questions to be asked) to the Commission - that indeed, the Government must answer. The commission was created by the Government of Delhi State, which, on May 8, 2000, designated to Justice Nanavati for addressing all issues relating to the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs.

Previously too commissions has been created, but their reports were either suppressed by Government or their findings were completely ignored. This commission seems to be the latest

one, probably to delay (or just whitewash?) the actual record, like those of the earlier commission's enquiries, and thus to fool the Sikhs again. **While the Sikhs in India may not be able to extract justice from the previous - or the present Government - in power, the Sikhs settled abroad in the western democracies have the responsibility of keeping up this issue of 1984 Sikh *Ghalughara* alive and should continue to do their best not to let this issue die, or be swept away under the rug.**

There are number of thoughts that come to my mind which I would like to emphasize here:

1. This is the first time I have seen in writing the appropriate word "*Ghalughara*" being used for the 1984 massacre of Sikhs, although I have been using this term for a long time. There have been three *Ghalugharas* in Sikh history so far. The first one is called *Chhota Ghalughara* or the Minor Holocaust of June 1746 at Kahnuwan, wherein more than ten thousand Sikhs were massacred under the Mughal invasion, instigated by Lakhpat Rai. Second one is called *vadda Ghalughara*, or the Great Holocaust, of February 1762, wherein more than twenty thousand of Sikhs were massacred during the invasion of Ahmed Shah Abdali, partly because the Sikhs had been taken by surprise in treachery, being prepared inadequately in anticipation of the attack.

2. The third one, in 1984, should be called (*saab ton vadda*) or the Greatest Holocaust of 1984 where more than 20,000 of Sikhs were killed by their own countrymen under the tacit direction of the then Indian Government. **The suddenness with which the attacks came from their own government all over the country took the Sikhs by surprise.**

Therefore, I believe that Sikhs must recognize the 1984 massacre as the THIRD *Ghalughara* and clearly say so in their history books. **They should not allow others to write Sikh history for their future generations. They do a lot of sacrifices and make history but then tend to leave to others (Non-Sikhs or those who do not cherish fondness for Sikh history or philosophy) to write Sikh history.** I am relieved to know that an eminent and most reliable person, like Justice (Retd.) Ranjit Singh Narula, Chief Judge, in Punjab & Haryana High Court, used the correct word, *Ghalughara*, for the tragic events of 1984.

3. A quick review of 36 questions does raise a series of doubts about complicity and conspiracy of the then Indian government officials, including even the very top ones:

- Hiding the truth about the 'third person' involved at the killing scene of Indira Gandhi (could he probably be the one who had killed Indira Gandhi and then instigated Hindu mobs to attack Sikhs)
- Disarming and taking Sikh police personnel off the streets just before the *Ghalughara*.
- Plotting to confiscate Sikh *kirpans*, instigate and help Hindu mobs to kill Sikhs, destroy Sikh property and religious places, adopt illegal methods of not recording individual complaints (FIR) of separate incidents (but to lump all into one single case).

- Forcing top police officers, fire officials and transportation officials to cooperate with Rajiv Gandhi, Narasimha Rao, H.K.L. Bhagat, and other high Congress ministers and officials in the full blown conspiracy to kill Sikhs.
- Deliberately ignoring calls from victims to the high government officials for rescue operations, despite high officials receiving horrific reports of large scale murder of Sikhs.
- Turning down the request of even police commissioner for deploying army on November 1, and
- Not taking any action against the guilty police and other high officials (including Congress Party ministers), while talking loudly in public about providing full justice to the victims.

If India calls itself a democracy and wants to prove to the world that it is committed to these ideals, it is high time that India learns a lesson from USA on how to uphold the fundamental principles of democracy. There were 19 Muslims who did the horrific act of attacking the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing more than 3000 Americans on September 11, 2001. Yet, USA did not abandon its laws and followed the true democratic traditions even under the worst circumstances. It did not allow any intimidation of Muslims in USA. It did not encourage hate-groups of any nationality to resort to violence. The US President even went to a Muslim Mosque, assuring the Muslims of their safety and security. The President focussed his attention on punishing only the perpetrators/terrorists of the crime. A few incidents of hate crimes (committed by the majority community in USA) against the minorities are being vigorously pursued to punish those who committed those crimes.

Could India not have shown similar in 1984 to avoid killing thousands of innocent Sikhs following the assassination of Indira Gandhi? Is India behaving any differently today within the context of Muslim massacre of Gujarat? When will India learn to protect its citizens and behave in a civilized manner before it could claim to be a democratic country?

