

IV/2009

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



25 years after 1984
Tradition of Valour
Tryst with Destiny
"True to Your Salt"

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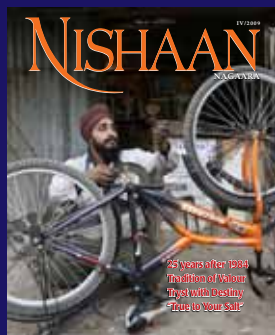
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Cover : The cycle of life goes on : Rajinder Singh, son of Kashmir Singh, auto driver and mother Jamuna Kaur, was only 20-days old in November 1984. His house in Trilokpuri was attacked and burnt. Now, 25 years later, he is working in his own cycle shop (Preet Cycle Rickshaw Garage) in Tilak Vihar.
Photo by Malkiat Singh



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Faces of Courage

For over half a millennium the history of Punjab has been inseparably intertwined with that of Sikhs. One defines the other.

Twentieth century Punjab has witnessed, shaped and lived three momentous, even defining, times; their larger impact has redefined the nation that is India and its sense of self.

First was the reform movement in the 1920s that freed the gurdwaras from British control – a struggle in which many, many were martyred or spent time in jail. This titanic struggle shook the British Empire to its core, but remained a model of non-violence to the end. It taught a lesson or two on the meaning of non-violence even to M.K. Gandhi who later became the apostle of such a model of resistance to tyranny. This influenced and shaped India's struggle for independence from the British. For Sikhs, it also gave birth to the Singh Sabha Movement the leader of reform in Sikh society, and the *Shiromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* that held promise of self governance.

The year 1947 saw the emergence of two independent nations out of the subcontinent – India and Pakistan. But the birth wasn't painless. There was a massive transfer of populations across a line drawn in the sand that divided real people, families and communities. It created more refugees than in Europe after the Second World War. The numbers massacred during those days remain uncounted and undocumented even today, 62 years later.

Then there were the years of, what are euphemistically dubbed, the troubled days and decade of the 1980s in Punjab.

In the 1980s, as many astute observers of the scene have documented, mostly governmental intransigence transformed a manageable politico-economic dispute between Punjab and the central government into a virtual civil war that brought India to the brink of fragmentation.

Twenty-five years ago in June 1984, the Indian government launched a full scale army attack against the premier Sikh place of worship (the Golden Temple at Amritsar) and 40 other gurdwaras across the Punjab. The date was the Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjan Dev and all gurdwaras in India, particularly the *Harmandir Sahib* at Amritsar were teeming with

devotees. Punjab was hermetically sealed off by the government. Rumours abounded but no news filtered out on the numbers killed or maimed. Sikhs were painted as 'terrorists' across the globe.

Those days of infamy have never been carefully and completely documented or explored.

Less than five months later, within hours of the killing of Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, mobs of looters and killers descended all over Delhi and simultaneously at many cities across India. They carried lists of Sikh-owned houses and businesses, guns and weapons to kill and kerosene to burn.

Remember that these were pre-Google days; addresses and lists could not be instantly downloaded; weapons and ammunition required licenses and kerosene was rationed. Thousands were killed within three days; the army was not deployed, the police stayed on the sides or even abetted the mayhem. Credible witnesses have attested that some leaders of the ruling political party led these mobs. Three days later violence across India stopped as suddenly as it had begun as if at the command of an unseen Commander.

Better than 10 Inquiry Commissions and 25 years later, five people have been convicted. It is as if thousands of Sikhs mysteriously self-destructed. It was not a riot but a murderous spree – a pogrom and attempted genocide against the Sikhs.

Last year, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, standing in India's parliament, took a bold and most heartening step. He apologised to the nation for this carnage. The apology, though delayed, is indeed welcome. But apologies don't come easy to governments. It reminds me that during the Second World War the United States, uncertain of the loyalty of its citizens of Japanese ancestry, interned over 120,000 of them in camps. The U.S. government recognised its failings against its own citizens but only 60 years later.

T.S. Eliot comes to mind:

*"After such knowledge what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions.
Guides us by vanities."*

In India, atonement and justice still wait. Many victims of the carnage of the 1980s survive. Neither the Indian government has owned up to its responsibility for them, nor have the many Sikh charitable organisations stepped up to the plate in full measure. The institutions of justice have only brought shame to their own moniker.

We need to see the issue as one of many gruesome injustices that have dotted recent human history. Admittedly, some were on a much larger scale than the killing and demonising of Sikhs in India 25 years ago that continued for a decade: the Holocaust that occurred during the Second World War and became a cause of the international community; like the genocide of the Armenians at the beginning of the last century; just like apartheid that once defined a regime in South Africa and like the killings in Rwanda in the 1990s.

Governments must not treat their own citizens thus or else it places in question their right to govern. The quarter century neglect has made it a cause which every Indian – nay, every person from across the globe – must embrace.

Justice should no longer remain the cause of the Sikhs alone and need not remain an isolated endeavour. I acknowledge here some of the many non-Sikh voices – Ram Narayan Kumar, Justice Tarkunde, Manushi magazine and its editors, Amnesty International and many others, that have joined our cause of justice.

Look at the pictures in this issue of the *Nishaan*. And these are only a few. These are the ones with courage. Words must fail; that is why there are so many words here today, including mine. A song wildly popular in the Sikh diaspora goes: “Many speak of courage, speaking cannot give it; stand as the Khalsa, strong as steel”

I salute these faces of courage. We must not fail them.

A Latin proverb reminds us that “Hidden valour is as bad as cowardice.” I am confident that from an unbiased, open and honest inquiry neither the Indian government nor the Sikh leadership of the time will emerge unscathed or smelling like a rose. Today, courage demands openness, transparency, honesty and accountability.

Although I have been away from India for almost half a century and am no longer its citizen, I think of Thomas Jefferson who said, “I weep for my country when I reflect that God is just.”

Of our duty, Guru Granth reminds us, “*Purja, purja kutt maray kabhoo na chhaday khayt.*” That tells us,

“To never let the story die.”

Dr. I.J. Singh

A Moral Imperative

Over the past few decades, life in Punjab has also been altered drastically. The prosperous, fertile land of a culturally rich people has been transformed into an arid and sterile land suffering from a multi-dimensional crisis. Water rights, as demanded by the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in the 1970s and 1980s, have become an increasingly important issue in Punjab as 75% of Punjab's waters have been illegally redistributed to other states by the central government. Due to this unlawful stripping of vital resources from an agriculturally dependent state, the economic viability of Punjab has been destroyed. Thousands of Punjabis, unable to sustain themselves due to oppressive governmental policies, have committed suicide. Farmer rights clearly form the basis of tension between the Punjabis and the central government and have prominently strained relations between the two groups over the past several decades. In an analysis of the role of the Punjab river waters dispute, the Institute of Sikh Studies reports “The River-Waters Dispute forms the prime social, economic and political issue in the Punjab and is central to the solution of the socio-political problems in the state, since all further progress in the social, economic and political fields depends on the fair and constitutional resolution of this matter.”

The Punjab is currently suffering from an economic, social, environmental and medical crisis, with these individual catastrophes leading to a convoluted web of unprecedented drug addiction and suicide, unthinkable rates of female infanticide and the rise of untreatable, rare diseases as the result of the growing pesticide use. Decade after the events of 1984, the Punjab issues have become a moral imperative, commanding us to take part in the movement to restore justice, freedom and human rights. It is our duty to ensure that the right to life of all persons is upheld, regardless of their age, religion or gender. If a government is particularly tyrannical, then we must call attention to this unjust rule. If we shut our eyes to these atrocities and shut our ears to the anguished cries of our fellow human beings, we silently acquiesce to inhumanity. How could we then say that we are any better than those committing such crimes? Only by acknowledging and correcting past atrocities can we expect that our children and future generations will not fall prey to such grave abuses.

Extract from **Lost in History**
Gunisha Kaur

Remembering "1984"



At the Constitution Club meeting to remember '1984', Dr Jaswant Singh Neki is flanked by Jaya Jaitly, Maxwell Pereira and S Tarlochan Singh; Dr Amrik Singh and others.

It has been said that "Our memories are independent of our will". It is not easy to forget – especially the memories of devastating happenings and ravaging exigencies. That is why the things we remember most are those that should better have been forgotten.

The Sikhs have often been advised to "forget" what happened in 1984 and "let bygones be bygones." When a nation is subjected to almost genocidal carnage, how on earth can the survivors forget the holocaust? Millions of Jews perished in the Nazi years. Have they been able to erase memory? Nor have the Sikhs been able to forget the various attempts at ruinous devastation of their entity. During the eighteenth century Divan Lakhpat Rai mounted armies upon them to finish them. The Sikhs have called it *Chota Ghalughara* (minor holocaust). A few years later, Ahmad Shah Durrani mounted an even more devastating internecine attack on them and declared with the beat of drums that "Sikhs have been exterminated." This event in Sikh memory persists as *Vada Ghalughara* (major holocaust). Both these holocausts still continue to haunt them and probably shall continue to do so as long as Sikhs exist as a nation.

However, the pogrom to which Sikhs were subjected to in 1984 in "secular India" by Indira Gandhi and her dutiful son Rajiv Gandhi make the above attacks fade before it in intensity as well as extensity. On the first

instance the army, along with its artillery and tanks was employed to invade the Golden Temple Complex, devastating *Akal Takht* and piercing walls of *Harmandir Sahib*. In the second instance, mobs were organised and studiously mounted on the carefully marked residential and business houses of Sikhs by leaders and agents of the ruling Congress Party which resulted in many thousand innocent Sikhs killed.

In a 'secular' democracy, any action by the majority community is easily considered as secular, while an action by the minorities to safeguard their interests, but not palatable to the majority community is blatantly dubbed as 'communal'. No wonder then that in 'secular' India minorities do not feel safe. The pattern set by Indira Gandhi was employed by the BJP in collusion then with the Congress Prime Minister to devastate the important Babri Masjid. The Muslim community was subjected to well-designed attacks in Gujarat state. Attacks have been mounted on Christian missionaries regularly. Don't all these happenings show a pattern?

The attacks on the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikh community by the armed forces ordered by the Congress Government were lauded by the supreme *Hindutva* leader of the Bhartiya Janata Party, Atal Behari Vajpai. Does that not underline that the Congress and the BJP have the same agenda vis-a-vis the minorities?

When, under Rajiv Gandhi's rule, mobs were mounted on the Sikhs not only in India's capital city, but in many other cities and towns of India as well, there was hardly any Muslim, Christian or Parsi 'rioter' among the violent mobs that attacked the Sikhs. Doesn't that stand out clearly?

The Sikhs remember very much the happenings of 1984, with anger and agony. The government did little to help the surviving Sikh widows and orphan children. Shockingly, on the other hand those of its leaders who organised the attacking mobs were honoured by providing them places in the Union Cabinet. The story doesn't end here. Commission after commission and committee after committee were set up to enquire into the anti-Sikh 'riots', but these commissions hardly did anything to assuage the injured psyche of the Sikh community. There were many private individuals however, that made efforts to dig out the truth., but the government simply ignored their findings.

It is understandable then that the Sikh psyche continues to smoulder with continuing anguish and resentment.

However, there is another side of the picture that makes us hang our heads in shame and embarrassment considering the role that some of its 'most honorable' members have played.

Many sensible Hindus rejected the lines of Indira's sordid designs. General Sunderji was ordered to mount an armed attack on the *Golden Temple-Akal Takht Complex*. However, he reminded her that the army was not meant to attack its own country. Major General K.S.Brar had less misgivings and attacked not only the sanctum sanctorum of his own "faith" but also on those who were his own countrymen and members of the community to which he ostensibly belonged.

Then Giani Zail Singh, who was not only the Rashtrapati of the country, but also Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces quietly acquiesced to whatever Indira did in June 1984. In November 1984 when S.Khushwant Singh asked if he could be given safety at Rashtrapati Bhavan, he was advised to "better seek asylum at some Embassy!"

The next 'Honorable' Sikh on the list was the Union Home Minister, Buta Singh. He did nothing to help the community, but only applied salt to its wounds by having the devastated *Akal Takht* repaired at expense of the government and against

maryada of the Sikh community who would not let it be desecrated by blood-smeared hands of the government. The community latter brought down the structure so "repaired" and rebuilt it themselves. Buta Singh at least had the decency of appearing before an assembly of the *Panj Pyare* accepting the *tankhah* meted out to him and carrying it out sincerely.

There was another Sikh General, one J.S. Bhuller, who became an agent of the Indian Government to sabotage the *International Sikh Organisation* that was coming up to organise the Sikh community world wide.

These were all official dignitaries and may have been assuming that they were obliged by their duty to the government. But there are others who consider themselves 'religious dignitaries' of the community whose actions have been even more abominable. A former President of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee actually conferred a *saropa* (robe of honour) on. Jagdish Tytler, one of the alleged leaders of the crowds which hunted out Sikhs and slaughtered them in the Capital city in 1984.

The current President of the DSGMC likewise decorated another riot leader, Babu Lal Sharma, who had been indicted by a non-governmental enquiry (titled *Who are the Guilty*) as one such who urged the riots on in their depraved task.

Another former President of the DSGMC is alleged to have prevailed upon a complainant Darshan Kaur (for whatever consideration) to retract her statement alleging as to who was leading the crowds that killed her husband.

While Indira and Rajiv Gandhi might have had some political agendas (however unsound and dishonorable), the Sikh dignitaries' alluded as above betrayed their community for whatever personal benefits, actual or desired.

The Sikhs justifiably express indignation against Indira and Rajiv for attacks unleashed upon the Sikhs but why have we condoned those 'Sikh' leaders who willfully betrayed their community? Have we been left with no conscience to even demand an explanation from these quislings?

We now wish to do so through these columns. Let them give whatever explanation they would like to offer. If they keep silent it would verify acknowledgement of their culpability.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

Selective Amnesia

While remembering '1984', Congress 'forgot' the Pogrom

There was a small but significant meeting held at the Constitution Club in New Delhi on 7 November 2009 in remembrance of the thousands of Sikhs who were mercilessly slaughtered by organised Congress goons after Mrs Gandhi's assassination. Elderly Sikhs, surviving victims, and the group of organisations that saved, helped and rehabilitated them were on hand. The journalist who threw a shoe at P. Chidambaram and so reminded the world that huge injustices still continued to simmer while sorrow resides within the hearts of Sikh widows, was also a part of the gathering. Despite his health, George Fernandes insisted on being a silent guest at the meeting to express solidarity. Pointedly, the mass media ignored the meeting.

Yet, just a week before, the country was flooded with reminders of the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Obviously there was an obvious *firman* issued from 10, Janpath, or wherever else such edicts come from, to newspapers across the country to effectively commemorate the 25th anniversary of her death. Unless such a 'suggestion' had been conveyed, it is hard to imagine the hard-boiled and cynical media making such a mass event out of an anniversary, the likes of which has not ever happened even for Mahatma Gandhi, who also did 'a lot' for the country and was also assassinated. It could not be coincidental that every newspaper and television channel had features, editorials and discussions about her legacy for days. Some honourable exceptions remembered the Sikhs, separately.

Every newspaper of any worth in the country had quarter, half or full-page advertisements about Indira Gandhi, her contribution, martyrdom and sacrifice, inserted by Congress-led ministries or governments. This was worth several crores of public money spent on raising a person to iconic status for the benefit of a political party.

When newspapers are flooded with paid advertisements and are asked to feature a particular subject in an unmentioned quid pro quo, it is very much 'paid political advertising' as has been raised by P. Sainath and *The Hindu* recently. Many political leaders and *The Other Side* raised this issue much earlier but now the Press Council and the Election Commission have been forced to take note. It is plainly obvious that if the Gandhi-Nehru family brings in



Jaya Jaitly with Major General Mohinder Singh Chadha (retd.) and S Mahip Singh.

so much revenue, then only positive things will be written about them and only its 'scions' will get column spaces.

We ask just one question here: was there not one single sensitive soul in the Congress party (or in the bureaucracy that serves it) who could have suggested sparing just a line of space in the recent prominent advertisements to add a remembrance of those innocent thousands of Sikhs who lost their lives on the three terrible days of slaughter from 31 October to 3 November 1984? It would not have cost another paisa and would even have shown a tiny spark of regret or decency.

On second thought, perhaps these qualities are actually lacking and thus it was more honest to forget about them completely.

Jaya Jaitly

Extract from

“When a tree shook Delhi”

On the 1984 carnage and its aftermath, by Manoj Mitta and HS Phoolka



The head office of M/s Uttam Singh Dugal & Co., one of the leading builders of India, set on fire by the mob, 1 November 1984.

19 November 1984: it was barely a fortnight since thousands of Sikhs were orphaned, widowed, or rendered homeless in the wake of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination. Her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, likened the pogrom to the reverberations caused by the impact of a fallen tree: “But, when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little.”

The statement created a sensation as it was the first time Rajiv Gandhi justified the conduct of mobs, which had sought to “avenge” his mother’s murder. The justification set the tone for the cover-up of the massacre as well as the national election held a month later.

Even otherwise, the tree-shaking-the-earth metaphor caught popular imagination because of the occasion on which Rajiv came up with it at the Boat

Club near India Gate. It was the first rally addressed by him as Prime Minister, commemorating Indira’s first birth anniversary after her death.

While paying tributes to his mother, Rajiv desisted from condemning the horrendous reprisal to her murder, let alone promising to take any action against the guilty. The closest he came to expressing any reservations about the massacre of Sikhs was for its “strategic repercussions to the nation”, rather than any human rights considerations. Referring to the need to ensure peace, Rajiv cautioned, “Any action taken in anger can cause harm to the country. Sometimes, by acting in anger, we only help those who want to break up the country.”

Empathising with their *krodh* (intense anger), as he originally put it in Hindi, Rajiv commended the



Office of S. Daljit Singh at Regal building, destroyed by the mob. His father Sir Sobha Singh was one of the pioneer builders of New Delhi from 1913.

mobs for ending the bloodshed as they did in three days or so, even if they had killed 3,000 Sikhs in Delhi alone by then: "But, from the way you put a stop to it, from the way India has again been brought back to the path of unity with your help, and is able to stand united together again, the world can see that India has become a genuine democracy." Thus, not only did he suggest that the massacre was inevitable, he even found a silver lining to it!

At that most traumatic moment in India's history, its prime minister made no bones about the fact that he was only reaching out to—or harvesting—with an eye on the upcoming election—those who were "very angry" with the Sikh community. In his entire Boat Club speech, Rajiv did not say a word about the bereaved families, much less about those conscientious non-Sikhs who had tried to save the Sikhs or believed that the violence had been politically engineered.

17 January 1985:

President Giani Zail Singh walked into Parliament House flanked by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who had led the Congress Party to a landslide victory in the election a fortnight earlier and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HKL Bhagat, whose Delhi constituency was by far the worst affected in the 1984 carnage.

Addressing a joint sitting of the two houses at behest of the Rajiv Gandhi government, Zail Singh said, "Disturbances and violence in Delhi and in some other parts of the country, following Indira Gandhi's assassination, resulted in loss of life and property. Stern and effective action was taken to control the situation within the shortest possible time. My government extends its deepest sympathy to the families which suffered during the violence."

That was the furthest the Rajiv Gandhi government went while referring to the carnage, in a tone that was evocative of his tree-shaking-the-earth metaphor. After the president's address, the two houses separately adopted a common 'resolution' the same day expressing condolence for Indira Gandhi's death. Though it said that she "loved India and the Indian people with a passion so sublime that it will live among us for long ages," the resolution expressed no regret about a section of the same Indian people being massacred in her name.

Its omission to offer a token of condolence to bereaved families seemed all the more glaring four days later, when the parliament took due cognizance of another major disaster that befell India in 1984, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, and the government responded by promising to take necessary civil and criminal actions against its perpetrators.

10 August 2005:

The ghosts of the 1984 carnage returned to haunt a coalition government led by the Congress Party as the parliament debated the subject for the first time in the twenty-one years that had elapsed. The provocation was the report of a fresh judicial inquiry tabled in parliament two days earlier.

Most political parties, including coalition partners and allies, reacted adversely to the government's decision to reject the Justice GT Nanavati Commission's

recommendation to take action against the minister for overseas Indians, Jagdish Tytler. But the Congress Party president, Rajiv Gandhi's widow, Sonia Gandhi, was evidently in two minds about dropping Tytler from the government, as that was fraught with the risk of reviving allegations of complicity against her late husband. After all, it was Rajiv Gandhi who had made Tytler a minister for the first time, that too, within two months of the 1984 carnage.

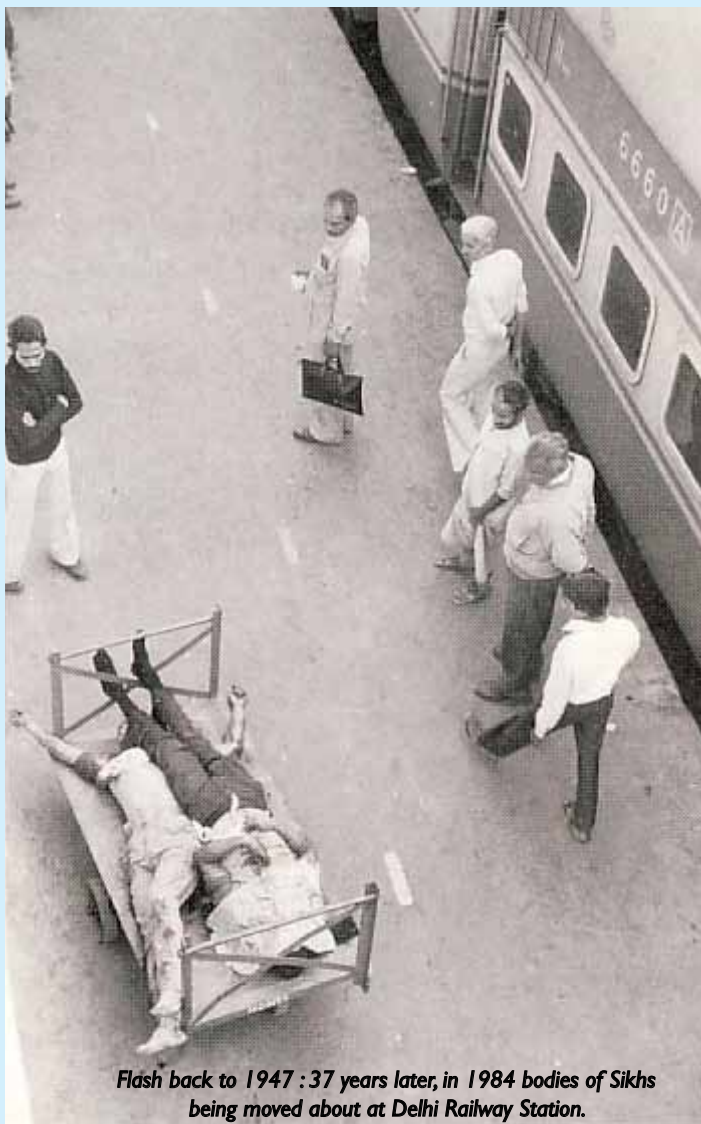
Unable to come up with a convincing response to the vehement attacks in the Lok Sabha on the government's action taken report (ATR), Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made the candid admission: "Twenty-one years have passed, more than one political party has been in power, and yet the feeling persists that somehow the truth has not come out and justice has not prevailed."

Conceding that "there is something called perception, and there is the sentiment of the House," Manmohan Singh gave "a solemn promise and a solemn commitment" to the Lok Sabha to reconsider the ATR. He also promised "all possible steps" wherever the Nanavati Commission had "named any specific individuals as needing further examination or specific cases needing re-opening and re-examination."

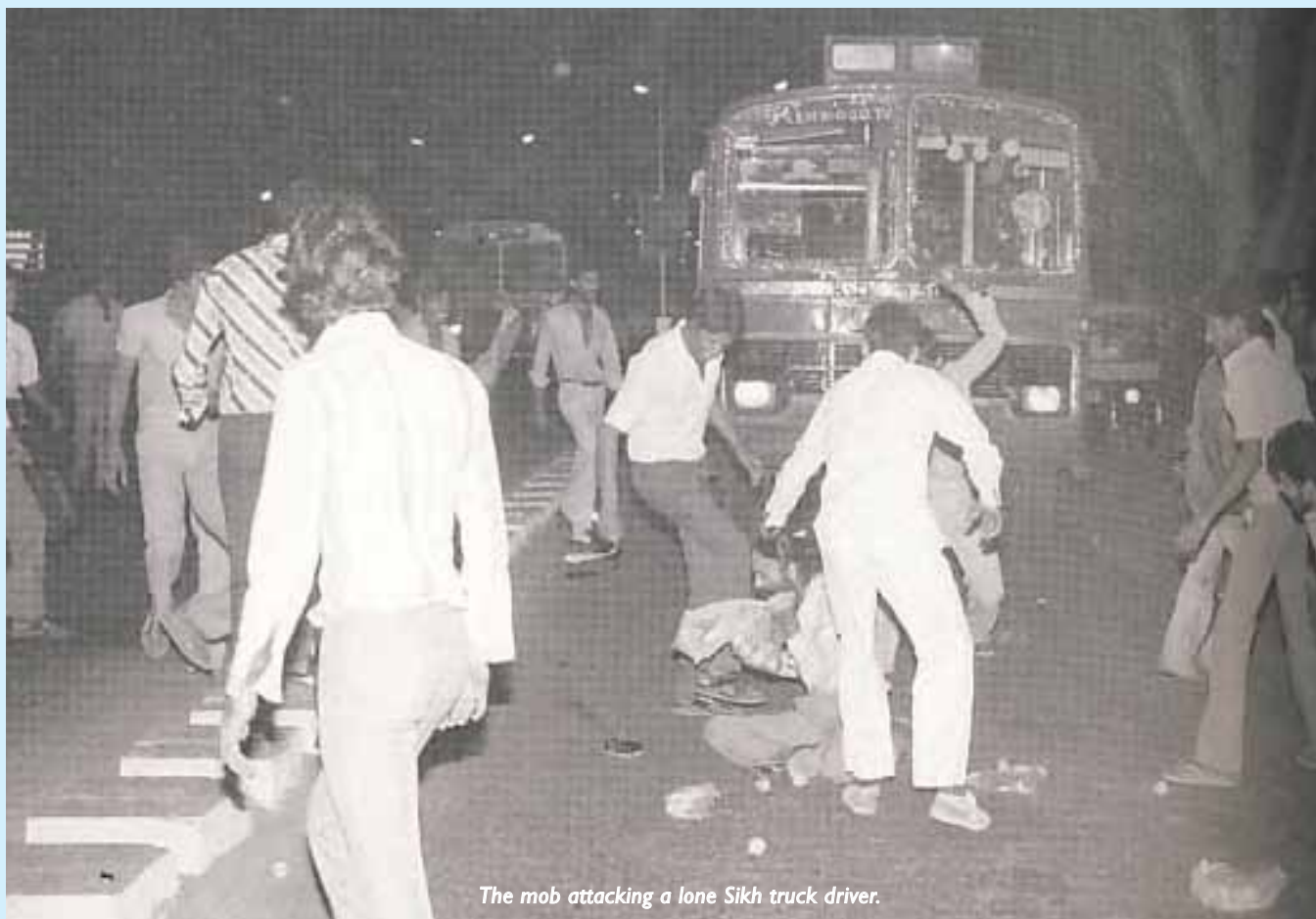
The message went home the same evening and Tytler finally yielded to the pressure to resign and saved further embarrassment to the government and the Congress Party. Simultaneously, another Congress MP indicted by the Nanavati reports, Sajjan Kumar quit a post given to him by the local Delhi government.

11 August 2005:

Emboldened by the resignations of Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, Manmohan Singh was more forthcoming in the Rajya Sabha than he was the previous day in the Lok Sabha. If he had conceded generally in the Lower House that "the feeling persists that somehow the truth has not come out," the Prime Minister was more categorical in the Upper House in owning up to that feeling: "There were lapses in 1984. Several commissions have gone into this matter. We all know that we still do not know the truth, and the search must go on. What he called a 'feeling' one day transformed the next day into something 'we all know'.



Flash back to 1947 : 37 years later, in 1984 bodies of Sikhs being moved about at Delhi Railway Station.



The mob attacking a lone Sikh truck driver.

Tracing the events that followed the carnage, Manmohan Singh, who is himself a Sikh, said, "It took the Sikh community a lot of time to regain its self-confidence after the tragic events of 1984." Since he did not have to be defensive any longer about having a carnage-tainted person like Tytler in his council of ministers, he himself seemed to have regained self-confidence, literally overnight.

Upping the ante, Manmohan Singh mustered the courage to do the minimum that Rajiv Gandhi should have done in the immediate aftermath of the carnage, namely, to apologise to the Sikhs for the 1984 carnage. "I have no hesitation in apologising not only to the Sikh community but the whole Indian nation because what took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood, as enshrined in our Constitution," Manmohan Singh said, adding, "On behalf of our government, on behalf of the entire people of this country, I bow my head in shame that such a thing took place."

Disarming Tactics

Given their inability to muster resources to defend themselves, the poor are generally more vulnerable to eruptions of mass violence. But the Sikhs living in Block 11 of Kalyanpuri in east Delhi in 1984 were an exception. For despite their poverty, a lot of them owned firearms, complete with licence and ammunition.

Those Sikhs belonged to a little-known section called Sikligar. While the Sikh mainstream originated from the Punjab, Sikligar Sikhs were traditional ironsmiths, tracing their roots to the Marwar region of Rajasthan. Guru Gobind Singh, the prophet who imparted a martial character to Sikhism about 300 years ago, is said to have entrusted Sikligar Sikhs with the responsibility of manufacturing and maintaining weapons for Sikh armies. Over a period, it was but natural for Sikligar Sikhs to develop a tradition of having their own swords and firearms, regardless of their economic status.

One Dr Ashok Gupta, who represented Kalyanpuri in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, was unaware of, or more likely had overlooked this peculiarity when he led a mob to Block 11 of Kalyanpuri on the morning of 1 November 1984, to attack the Sikhs.



Devastation in Kalyanpuri, November 1984.

In keeping with the pattern displayed then by its counterparts across Delhi, the mob that descended on Block 11 of Kalyanpuri was armed with no more than wooden staffs, steel rods, kerosene cans, tyres and the like.

Those crude implements, however, turned out to be inadequate in the case of Block 11, as some of its Sikh residents greeted the mob with gunfire. And that was more than what the mob could take, especially because of another rare factor in Delhi: Sikhs happened to be in a majority in that block. It was virtually a Sikh ghetto.

The mob, despite its frenzied slogans to avenge Indira Gandhi's murder, beat a hasty retreat. It was a tactical retreat, though. Within minutes, the police entered the same neighbourhood. But their intention was not to save the Sikhs from further attacks. It was just the opposite: to disarm the besieged community.

Flanked by armed constables, the chief of the Kalyanpuri police station, Soor Veer Singh Tyagi, read out from a list he had brought with him, of licensed weapon holders.

On the pretext of defusing tension in Block 11, Tyagi ordered all the Sikhs figuring in that list, to surrender their weapons, saying that the police were there anyway, to provide security. Most of the Sikhs were not taken in by that ploy. So, taking recourse to coercion, Tyagi threatened them at gunpoint, insisting that they part with their weapons.

After seizing a cache of licensed weapons in that manner, the police left the Sikhs of Block 11 at the mercy of the bloodthirsty mob waiting outside. Sure enough, Dr Ashok Gupta and his armed followers re-entered the block and resumed their attack even as some of the policemen lingered in the background.

The hardy ironsmiths still managed to put up a stiff resistance, improvising weapons from the tools of their trade. The impasse that

followed compelled the police to intervene again, this time, to take away all those who were getting in the way of the mob.

That was how Kalyanpuri police station arrested as many as twenty-five Sikhs from Block 11 on 1 November 1984. They were mostly those who had been divested of their weapons that very day. Completing the travesty of the rule of law, the police registered a case of rioting against them, FIR No. 424/84 at the Kalyanpuri police station. After spending the night at the police station, those twenty-five Sikhs were sent to Tihar Jail where they were detained for over a fortnight.

Thus, far from booking the aggressors, the police cracked down on the victims – the Sikhs who had been exercising their right of self-defence at home, against a mob that had come from elsewhere.

Apart from another member of their community from a nearby locality called Seelampur, those twenty-five Sikhs Block 11 of Kalyanpuri turned out to be the only persons to have been arrested in east Delhi on the first – and by far the worst – day of the massacre.

Another way of putting it in perspective would be to take the aid of the official death toll. Out of the 2,733 Sikhs killed in Delhi in the first week of November 1984, 1,234 were killed in east Delhi alone. Though more than half of those killings took place on 1 November, only twenty-six people were arrested in east Delhi on that fateful day and all of them were Sikhs, that is, members of the very community that was being massacred !

As for members of the marauding mobs, Kalyanpuri police station began to apprehend them only from the evening of 2 November, by the end of the second day of the massacre, well after most of the killings had already taken place.

Even then, that belated action against miscreants was taken thanks to the discovery by journalists of a particularly shocking massacre that had taken place in

Block 32 of Trilokpuri, a locality that fell within the remit of the Kalyanpuri police station.

Such is the record of the police station that was, by all accounts, the worst affected in the whole of Delhi during the 1984 massacre.

Out of the 2,733 officially acknowledged to have been killed in Delhi, almost half – 1,234 – were in east Delhi. And, out of the 1,234 admitted to have been killed in east Delhi, almost half – 610 – were in the jurisdiction of the Kalyanpuri police station alone.

In the course of the two judicial inquiries, appointed by the government and separated by almost two decades, several witnesses, including some of the twenty-five Sikhs arrested on 1 November, shed light on the bizarre sequence of events in Block 11 of Kalyanpuri. Here's a sample:

- Ram Singh testified that the police seized his gun saying that if the Sikhs did not hand over their weapons, they should expect no help. But then, after taking away their guns, Inspector Tyagi, according to Ram Singh, signalled the mob to attack the gurdwara in Block 11.
- Lachman Singh deposed that Tyagi, while directing him to surrender his licensed weapon, a 12-bore double barrel breach-loading (DBBL) gun, said that the police, in turn, were acting on orders "from above". Soon after Lachman Singh gave up his gun, the mob reappeared and started looting and killing.
- Santa Singh, however, disobeyed Tyagi even when the officer said that he had orders from higher-ups to seize all weapons. Tyagi responded by taking out his revolver and pointing it at Santa Singh. The victim surrendered his gun, sword and hatchet. Then the mob violence followed. Though they were not among the twenty-five Sikhs to have been formally arrested, Santa Singh and his son were taken to the police station the same evening, and released the next morning, by when their house had been burnt down.
- Kabool Singh and Shoba Singh were disarmed in the morning by Tyagi's team. Later, the police searched their houses and took them to Kalyanpuri police station, saying that other persons found with guns also there. Kabool Singh and Shobha Singh found themselves in the police lock-up as part of the group of twenty-five Sikhs arrested from their neighbourhood.

Taking cognizance of these and other such affidavits, the second judicial inquiry conducted by former Supreme Court judge, GT Nanavati gave a specific finding in 2005 that Tyagi and his men had "unreasonably deprived the Sikhs of their weapons with which they were trying to defend themselves against violent attacks". Besides indicting Dr Ashok Gupta for taking "active part" in the violence, the commission also recorded the telltale circumstance that the mob attacked the Sikhs "soon after" they had been disarmed by the police.

The high-level probe by the Nanavati Commission has, in effect, confirmed similar findings given in the early 1990s by two lesser but more specialised inquiries into different aspects of the rule of law.

The inquiry by retired civil servant, Kusum Lata Mittal, studied the lapses committed by the police real time while dealing with the mass violence in 1984. The other was by a committee consisting of retired High Court judge JD Jain and former police chief, DK Aggarwal which probed the lapses committed by the police and prosecution in the aftermath while booking and following up cases related to the same massacre.

Though they approach it from different angles, the two inquiries appointed by the government came to much the same conclusions on the issue of disarming of the Sikhs. The Mittal report held that weapons of the Sikhs in Block 11 of Kalanpuri had been 'systematically and forcibly taken away, thus ensuring that the Sikhs would no longer be in a position to defend themselves.'

The enemy within

One was a political leader, while the other, an Air Force pilot. Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Bir Singh Talwar might have had little in common. But, as fate would have it, their lives were intertwined in a rather uncanny manner.

The 1971 war with Pakistan, leading to the creation of Bangladesh, was by all accounts, Indira Gandhi's finest moment as the prime minister of India. It fetched her Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian award. The same war turned out to be the high point of Talwar's career too, as it brought him the second nation's highest gallantry award, the Maha Vir Chakra.

Talwar was honoured specifically for the manner in which he had led No. 5 Squadron with Canberra bombers based at Agra, Wg Cdr MBS Talwar and his men were resilient enough to began their retaliatory measures against Pakistan within an hour of an air

strike on Agra. According to the citation of his award, Talwar "led five missions deep inside Pakistan, extensively damaging installations at the Sargodha air force base. The next day, he led an attack on four gun positions and succeeded in silencing three of them, thereby facilitating advance of the Indian army in the inhospitable Chhamb region." While conferring the Maha Vir Chakra on him, the Indira Gandhi government acknowledged that Talwar's 'bold leadership, tenacity of purpose and flying skills' were largely responsible for the achievements of his squadron.

About a decade later, the assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984, wreaked tragedy on Talwar's life. In the carnage that followed the assassination, Talwar was arrested and thrown into prison for a fortnight, as a common criminal, that too for firing in self-defence from his house.

He had by then retired from the Indian Air Force as a Group Captain and, at fifty-four, was settled in his new career as a businessman. Talwar was running a garment showroom in the front portion of his house, which was located on the main road of West Patel Nagar in central Delhi. His account came to light thanks to an affidavit submitted by Talwar before the Misra Commission, the first judicial inquiry that was set up six months after the carnage.

The three-day carnage across Delhi began on the morning of 1 November. The first sign of violence on Talwar's premises occurred at 9.30 am. A mob started pelting stones at his showroom, though it was shut like any other shop in the area, as a mark of respect to the deceased prime minister.

The mob broke window panes, showroom windows, and neon glow signs. Some of the miscreants entered the front yard and tried to set the shop and house on fire. Talwar, with the help of his wife and two sons, doused the flames. They were thus left to their own devices though the Patel Nagar police station was located on the same road, less than half a kilometre from Talwar's house. Since the police did not respond to his repeated calls, the war hero came out with his family at about 10.00 am to plead with the mob.

"I had my 12-bore licensed gun in my hand and my sons had hockey sticks. We did not fight with the mob, but with folded hands, requested them to leave our house. I explained to them that I was a retired

defence services officer. I had fought against Pakistan in the 1971 war, and I had been awarded the MahaVir Chakra," Talwar revealed in his affidavit before the Misra Commission.

But, unlike that fateful night in 1971, Talwar failed to repel the enemy attack in 1984. The mob left his home only after his Hindu neighbours intervened. The relief, however, proved short-lived, as the mob returned by 11.30 am. After setting fire to a furniture shop across the road, the mob turned its attention to Talwar's shop. The rioters broke its shutter and set fire to Talwar's shop for the second time. The flames were again extinguished by him and his family.

The sight of the gun-toting owner deterred the miscreants from looting the showroom. Talwar, on his part, refrained from using the gun even when some of the rioters dared him to do so. "I explained to them that I had no enmity with them and that I would (fire at them) only if my own life or that of any of my family members was in danger." Luckily for him, the neighbours again prevailed over the mob, and compelled them to go away. Since the police had still not appeared on the scene, the neighbours took turns to guard Talwar's gate. The third and final attack on Talwar's premises started at about 2.30 pm when two government-run public transport buses were suddenly parked in front of the gate. A whole lot of people disembarked from those buses, armed with iron rods and incendiary material and shouting even more inflammatory slogans. In no time, they mobilised a mob, bigger and more frenzied than the earlier ones. A handful of determined neighbours still managed to keep the mob at bay.

By 4.00 pm, the mob had grown exponentially, with estimates ranging from 2,000 (of the local station house officer) to 5,000 (of Talwar himself). The situation was turning out of control as the slogans grew more hostile and the crowd more restive. In the stone throwing that followed, the mob injured one of the neighbours standing guard.

Not surprisingly, the feeble wall of protection provided by unarmed neighbours crumbled under the onslaught of the mob. Once it broke the locks on the outer gate, a part of the mob started looting the shop, while the rest spread out in the house in search of its inhabitants. Talwar and his family, meanwhile, hid in the rear portion of the building, hoping desperately that the mob would loot the shop and leave.

In the event, the assailants were not content with the looting. They set the shop on fire, and thick smoke billowed inside the house. Worse, after breaking the rear door, the mob traced the owners to their hiding place. One of the assailants hit Talwar on his face with a steel rod, breaking a tooth and cutting his lips. It was in such circumstances, as the last resort to save himself and his family from a murderous mob, that Talwar finally pulled the trigger.

The gunshot seemed to have had an immediate impact. Panic-stricken, the miscreants fled from Talwar's premises. But that was only to regroup on the road. And it was then, at least eight hours after the mob attacks started on his property, that Talwar, for the first time, saw a sign of police on the scene. But their arrival, however late, seemed to make little difference to the mob.

The sprinkling of men dressed in khaki clothes, presumably police personnel, made no effort to disperse the crowd. Instead, they seemed to merge with it. Worse, those uniformed men provided the mob with the firepower it needed to counter Talwar's gunshot. They fired at Talwar's house again and again. Their support emboldened the mob to stay on even as Talwar returned fire from the first floor of his house.

A section of the mob subsequently climbed the rooftops of neighbouring buildings and threw fireballs at Talwar's house. At some point, his *barsati* caught fire. Taking advantage of that distraction, the mob made fresh attempts to re-enter Talwar's premises. In the ensuing shoot-out, three members of the mob were killed on the spot, and two of the seven injured died in hospital.

The casualties suffered by the mob in front of Talwar's residence sent shock waves across the police force, bringing two of the senior-most officers to the spot, in quick succession. First, it was the police officer in charge of the central district of Delhi, one Amod Kanth. And the Police Commissioner Subhash Tandan himself rushed there.

In his written testimony before two judicial inquiries, Tandan disclosed that he had got a report of the trouble at West Patel Nagar when he was about to go to a meeting called by Home Minister PV Narasimha Rao at 5.30 pm at the Cabinet Secretariat. Deputing one of his officers to attend the home minister's meeting on his behalf, Tandan himself rushed to Talwar's place as the report said that "a

Sikh had opened fire from the first floor of his house on a crowd which had set the ground floor on fire."

The arrival of the highest ranked police officer on the spot, however, gave little cause for concern to the mob baying for Talwar's blood. The police still made no effort to nab any miscreant, or disperse the unlawful assembly. Their focus was entirely on disarming Talwar rather than enforcing the rule of law.

The police did not take on the mob even after an army unit, led by a major, was inducted into the operation. The arrival of the army, which is reputed to command awe as the ultimate safeguard of public order, made little difference to the mob attacking a war hero. The irony seemed to be lost on everybody!

The shoot-out ended after deputy commissioner of police, Amod Kanth, standing on the terrace of neighbouring building, negotiated with Talwar over a loudspeaker, and persuaded him to surrender. Talwar gave himself up, along with his gun, and sixty rounds of ammunition, relying on Kanth's word that the police would protect him and his family.

Kanth, however, reneged on his promise. Instead of taking Talwar for what he was, a victim who had fired in self-defence from his won besieged house, the police made him out to be the aggressor in the whole episode and actually booked him for murder.

That was, in fact, the first case to be registered at Patel Nagar police station on 1 November, a murder case against a Sikh, on the very day when, ironically, he and thousands of others from his community were under attack across the capital.

Since the first information report recorded by them put the blame squarely on Talwar, the police took no action against any member of the mob. Despite the presence of senior police officers, they did not try to enforce the curfew either.

Talwar's military credentials could not help him get the defence that was due to him even as a murder-accused. The police confiscated his air force identity card and threw him into a police lock-up. He was formally arrested on 3 November and detained in Tihar Jail for a fortnight.

Despite his disclosure to the authorities concerned that he had a Master of Arts degree and had retired as a decorated and high ranking air force officer, Talwar was kept with C-class prisoners who were generally poor and illiterate. Another riot victim who

was in Tihar Jail around the same time, Narender Singh, while deposing in 2001 before the second judicial inquiry, divulged that the authorities there had forced Talwar 'to clean the latrines of prisoners'.

Though Talwar's case figured in both judicial inquiries held for the 1984 carnage, the police never came clean on why they made him a scapegoat, and why they took no action against any of the miscreants on the spot.

Commissioner Tandan passed the buck to his deputy, Amod Kanth. In his written deposition in 2004 before the second judicial inquiry, Tandan claimed that he had directed Kanth to provide protection to Group Captain Talwar "since he was obviously exercising the right of private defence". The action they took against Talwar conformed to a larger pattern of what police personnel, at all levels, did across Delhi on 1 November 1984, to disarm the Sikhs. Colluding with the mobs, the police spared no efforts to snuff out whatever little resistance the Sikhs had put up here and there.

Since the evening of 31 October, the police had by and large remained passive spectators to attacks on the Sikhs, starting with the one on President Zail Singh when he was on his way to the hospital where the body of the assassinated prime minister lay.


When those attacks took the form of killings the next morning, the police did finally intervene – but, as demonstrated in Talwar's case, or in Kalyanpuri and Trilokpuri – it was only to abet the mass crime.

The Future

Whichever way you look at India, whether as the world's largest democracy, or one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it is hard to imagine that any genocide could have taken place a few years ago, right in its capital.

MVC for "Conspicuous Gallantry"

Wing Commander
MAN MOHAN BIR SINGH TALWAR (4573)
Flying (Pilot)



Wing Commander Man Mohan Bir Singh Talwar, Commanding Officer of a Bomber Squadron led five day and night bombing missions against very heavily defended enemy targets within the first 10 days of operations. On one of these missions, Wing Commander Talwar inflicted very severe damage to the Pakistani Air Force installations at Sargodha. In a daylight mission in the Chhamb area in support of the army, Wing Commander Talwar attacked four enemy gun positions near the Munawar Tawi river and effectively silenced three of them facilitating the advance of our troops in difficult terrain. Both these targets were heavily defended; the latter was close to an enemy fighter base from where interception was also likely. Despite this, Wing Commander Talwar pressed home his attacks with great determination and much success. His conduct was an inspiration to the crews of the other aircraft, which he was leading.

The bold leadership, tenacity of purpose, flying skill and conspicuous gallantry displayed by Wing Commander Man Mohan Bir Singh Talwar were largely responsible for the many successes of his squadron.

Authority: Notification No. 20-Pres/72 dated 20th January, 1972 published in Part 1, Section 1, Gazette of India dated 12th February, 1972.

Unit: 5 Squadron, Air Force.

telling contrast with the 1984 carnage: however, in stark contrast almost all the casualties in Delhi were of a minority community, while scores of Hindus were killed in Gujarat in police firing. The Congress camp took refuge in an equally striking contrast: the Delhi massacre was controlled in three days, while the Gujarat carnage dragged on for three months!

Whatever the difference in circumstances, state complicity was evident in both instances. Not the least because Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi came up with his own variant of Rajiv Gandhi's tree-shaking-the-earth rationalisation. Even as the killings were going on, Modi was embroiled in a controversy over his reported reference to Newton's third

A UN convention, signed by India in 1948, defined genocide as mass violence committed with 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such'. In an uncanny transposition of the figures of that year Delhi had its tryst with genocide in 1984.

But there was little consciousness of genocide in the public discourse of that period, despite Rajiv Gandhi's infamous attempt to shrug off state responsibility by dismissing the massacre of 3,000 Sikhs in three days as "the tremors caused by the fall of a mighty tree."

The first time that Indian parliament and courts ever saw any serious debate on the question of genocide was in the context of the 2002 carnage in Gujarat, in which officially 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 223 persons went missing over three months.

The Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had presided over the 2002 carnage, sought to counter charges of genocide by citing one

law of motion, suggesting that an action of the Muslims had provoked an equal and opposite reaction from the Hindus. In another obvious inspiration from 1984, Modi got the state assembly dissolved prematurely in 2002 in order to force an election in a communally charged environment.

The BJP's attempt to emulate the Congress Party's example, however, provoked a specious reaction from sections of the civil society which, taking liberties with facts, downplayed the gravity of the 1984 carnage. Ashutosh Varshney, a US-based political scientist, who wrote a book on Hindu-Muslim conflicts – admittedly a far more serious fault-line in Indian society – asserted that 'the riots in Gujarat were the first full-blooded pogrom in independent India'. In his 2004 essay titled 'Understanding Gujarat Violence', he argued that it was 'not plausible' to consider the anti-Sikh violence in Delhi as the first pogrom because, unlike the BJP, 'the Congress ended up developing an attitude of contrition'.

Given the hostility displayed towards Sikhs by the Rajiv Gandhi government in so many blatant ways in the aftermath of the carnage, Varshney, it would seem, could not possibly have had that crucial and prolonged phase of the Congress rule in mind when he noticed signs of repentance in the party. But, strangely enough, he referred to actions of that very phase while trying to substantiate his theory that the Congress Party had undergone a change of heart!

The source he quoted was a newspaper article titled 'Pot is blacker than the kettle', written by senior journalist Shekhar Gupta, during the Gujarat violence, offering a comparison that was misleading, however well-intentioned. While making a case for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to take action against Modi, Gupta cited, of all things, what he saw as 'damage control' started immediately by Rajiv Gandhi, in 1984: "The Congressmen whose names surfaced, or were even popularly mentioned in connection with the killings, all paid the price. Political careers of HKL Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler, and Sajjan Kumar, never recovered from the taint of 1984 although nobody was ever convicted." In reality, the political careers of Bhagat and Tytler, far from suffering on account of 'the taint of 1984', blossomed almost as if they had been rewarded for engineering the violence. Having won the 1984 election under the shadow of the pogrom, Rajiv Gandhi immediately promoted Bhagat to the rank of cabinet minister, and inducted Tytler into the government for the first time as minister of state. Both remained in the Rajiv Gandhi government till the end of its tenure in 1989.

If such facts failed to register in the minds of opinion makers such as Gupta and Varshney, it is indicative of the extent of misinformation on the 1984 carnage and its aftermath. In a larger perspective, this shows that for all the material progress made by India, its social and legal culture is still far from developed. If the struggle for justice could not secure the conviction of a single political leader or police officer; if so many institutions collapsed during and after the 1984 carnage; if Delhi set a precedent for mass killings in Gujarat, the civil society cannot escape blame for lack of 'due diligence', and for neglecting the duty of 'eternal vigilance'.

Despite all the setbacks, the tale of this quarter century struggle is, thankfully, not entirely of despair. It has had its moments of consolation: when prosecution for murder was brought against Bhagat and Sajjan Kumar; when Bhagat was detained for a while during his trial; when Tytler was forced to resign as a minister after being indicted by a judicial inquiry; when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh "apologised" in the parliament for the carnage, even if that came twenty years too late.

The losses have been substantial; the gains, only symbolic. The challenge now is to make those gains more systemic and enduring.



In relentless pursuit of justice: senior advocate at Delhi, Harvinder Singh Phoolka with Maj-Gen MS Chadha at the Defence Colony Gurdwara.

For Whom the Bells Toll?



Serving Sikhs in India's Armed Forces murdered by mobs: November 1984

Addressing a recent press conference at Chandigarh, retired Colonel PIS Phoolka gave details of serving Sikh defence personnel, including officers, who were murderously attacked and killed in the first week of November, 1984. Most of the Sikh army personnel were either returning to duty after leave or were proceeding for training courses. The officers who were killed included Captain IPS Bindra of

the 63rd Cavalry at Meerut Railway Station, Major Sukhjinder Singh at Morena and Lt. Col RS Anand at New Delhi. Flt. Lt. Harinder Singh, an IAF test pilot selected for Mirage 2000 conversion, was brutally attacked and killed in New Delhi.

For whom the bells toll?

Killed in face of the 'enemy'?

Lt Colonel R S Anand (IC 15806)
Major Sukhjinder Singh (IC 29358)
Captain I P Singh Bindra (IC 39489)
Captain S S Gill (IC 31246)
Captin U P S Jassal (IC 39750)
Captain Partap Singh (IC 31786)
Subedar Anoop Singh (JC 71127)
Subedar (Clerk) Ranjit Singh (JC 97466)
Naib Subedar Surjit Singh (JC 13568)
Subedar Darshan Singh (JC 100508)
Subedar Pritam Singh (JC 1320221)
Havaldar Major Surat Singh (9203918)
Company Quarter Master Harpal Singh (3357526)
Havaldar S. S. Channan (272445)
Havaldar Nirmal Singh (1255848)
Havaldar Sukvinder Singh Mangat (2459028)
Naik Hardev Singh (1255848)
Naik Gurcharan Singh (14453859)
Lance Dafadar Harmeet Singh (4541054342)
Lance Havaldar Surjit Singh (1296912)
Naik Nachhatar Singh (2466082)
Naik Nidhan Singh (2463743)
Naik Gurmej Singh (2469943)
Naik Balbir Singh (2467163)

Naik Teja Singh (8363731)

Cpl (Clerk) J B Singh (646641)

Cpl (Equipment) Harvinder Singh (649388)

Lance Naik Puran Singh (1545611)

Lance Naik Dharam Singh (3372358)

Lance Naik Avtar Singh (3371158)

Lance Naik Karnail Singh (4544124)

Siphai Pargat Singh (2473256)

Siphai Pritam Singh (2474286)

Siphai Malkiat Singh (446339)

Siphai Balbir Singh (446554)

Siphai Jagtar Singh (4558100)

Gunner Dara Singh (5100051)

Sowar Kehar Singh (T/No 2737)

Rifleman Avtar Singh (13745166)

Rifleman Inder Jit Singh (13740611)

Siphai Boor Singh (24723480)

Siphai Santokh Singh (4548940)

Siphai Pargat Singh (3352257)

Siphai Pargat Singh (3367669)

Sowar Sukhvinder Jit Singh (1083615)

Master Warrant Officer G B Singh (207713)

Master Warrant Officer S B Singh Bedi (208362)

Aircraftman (Air Defence) Satpal Singh (683902)

Aircraftman (Fitter) J Singh (669365)

Aircraftman (Electrical) Jagtar Singh (651458)

50 names, 50 shaheeds, 50 fewer to defend India. Even 25 years later, the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India has not acknowledged, least lamented, the infamy of Indian citizens attacking India's defenders. Who then is the real enemy ?



Flt Lt Jose Mathappan (now Air Commodore and Commandant ASTE) recalls the murder of batchmate Flt Lt Harinder Singh, an outstanding Indian Air Force fighter pilot (at centre in photo above). Commissioned in June 1974 from the 115 Pilot's Course at Air Force

Academy, Harinder Singh was awarded three trophies, which remains an unbroken record. He was son of MWO SK Singh, who had represented the IAF in cricket and was then posted with the Wireless Experiment Unit in Delhi. Harinder was selected for conversion to the new generation Mirage 2000 fighter in France and along with four fighter pilot colleagues from the Aircraft & Systems Testing Establishment at Bangalore, was in New Delhi on that fateful day.

The family home was attacked by murderous mobs and even though the neighbours tried to plead that these were serving Air Force personnel, they were all killed: Harinder Singh, his father and two uncles.

'Vengeance':

India After the Assassination of Indira Gandhi

I returned to the Punjab in December 1984, more than a month after my first trip, to see for myself what changes had taken place in the state. The assassination of Indira Gandhi was no longer the main item for discussion in most people's homes. One of her assassins, Beant Singh, was killed within an hour of the shooting; Satwant Singh, the surviving assassin, was now being questioned by the authorities. All sorts of theories were being advanced about conspiracies. The American Central Intelligence Agency—always a convenient scapegoat in most of the Third World, but particularly in India—was said to be behind the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, whose political alignment with the Soviet Union had long been resented by Washington. Pakistan, which was said to support the separatists who wanted to establish Khalistan, was also believed to have been behind the plot. Relatives of Beant and Satwant were arrested in their Punjab villages, then freed, then re-arrested, and let go again. The investigators appeared to be making little progress.

Many Indians were coming around to the view that rather than being a major international conspiracy, the murder of Indira Gandhi had been a case of vengeance by a handful of Sikhs who were disturbed by invasion of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Beant and Satwant were reported to have taken vows of revenge at the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara in New Delhi. By mid-December, few Indians I encountered bothered to speculate much about conspiracies and the motives of the killers. Their attention, instead, seemed focused on the political future of India.

A national election campaign was in full swing in India—but the Punjab had been excluded from the parliamentary poll because of the political instability here. The army was still out in force around the state, but places like Amritsar were no longer under curfew. Rajiv Gandhi, the new prime minister, was going around the country saying that Sikhs would have no reason to fear for their safety under his administration; but few Sikhs had been compensated for the frightful loss to their property during the riots after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. And not one rioter had been brought to justice.

The Hindus and Sikhs of the Punjab continued their dangerous drift away from one another. Few civic leaders in this troubled state dared to openly call for

rapprochement. No one issued calls for national unity: there already were two countries within this one state. More than 8,000 men and women, suspected of being terrorists or sympathising with Sikh terrorists, were in the Punjab's jails; few of them had been allowed to see lawyers. Among those behind bars were said to be boys and girls under eleven years of age.

"It is very difficult now to go the Punjab and talk to the masses about any reconciliation," Manmohan Singh, one of India's most respected Sikh industrialist, said to me. "There are thousands of Sikh students now in jail on what are at best vague charges. Their parents won't even hear of reconciliation.

"So what does one do? You bide your time."

I found that Hindus were even more angry that Sikhs had not, as a community, formally condemned the assassination of Indira Gandhi. And Sikhs were bitter that few of those had murdered their brethren across north India and looted their homes had been arrested or punished.

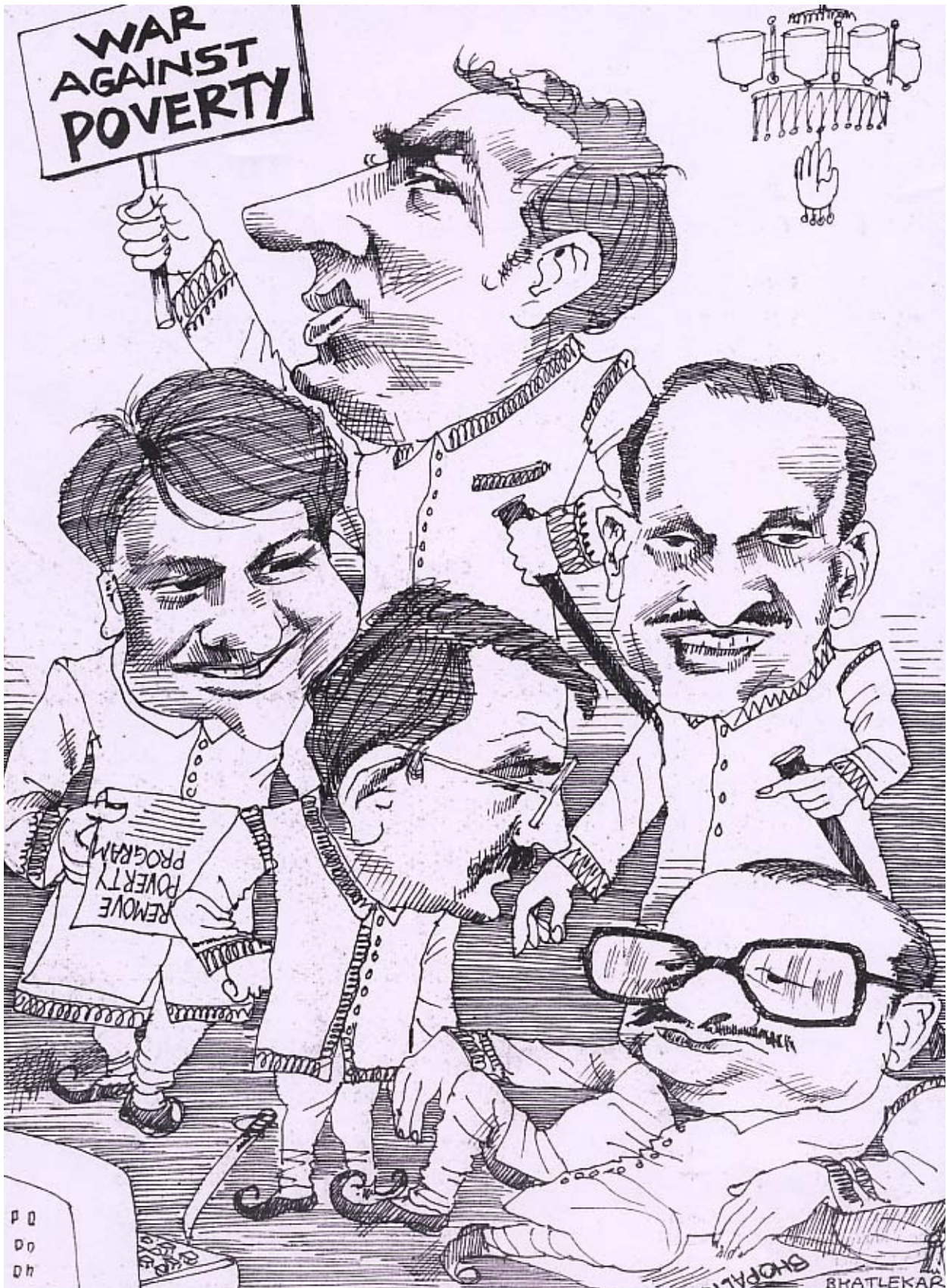
"This is justice?" You call this a free, civilized society?

Micky Singh, son of Bhagwant Singh Ahuja, was echoing outrage that was being expressed around the country by people who were shocked at the breakdown of law and order in the wake of the Gandhi assassination. I asked him, a tall sturdy Sikh who is only twenty-three but who appears much older, what he thought Mrs. Gandhi's legacy was for the Punjab.

"Legacy?" You ask about legacy? Just look around you. Look at the army, and the unhappiness. You want to find out about her legacy?"

In the weeks since my first visit to Amritsar, the arithmetic of population in the Punjab had stated to change.

More than 75,000 Sikhs emigrated to the state from other parts of India. They came here from Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, even as far away as Bihar and Orissa. They left their homes to escape further harassment. Many of the emigres are widows and orphaned children. There are still some seven million Sikhs spread across states other than the Punjab—but the 75,000 men, women, and children who poured into this already troubled state brought with them tales of horror.



Rajiv Gandhi and his 'Princes'.

From : Onlooker, January 1985.

These tales were narrated every day, and the narrations exacerbated tensions.

One evening near Amritsar, I listened to Amrik Singh, a young carpenter who had transplanted himself from his home in Delhi. He spoke before a small gathering of friends and relatives in a dhaaba, a roadside catering. People squatted on the floor, huddled in blankets to keep out the December cold. Singh was a tall, thin man, with a mustache and narrow eyes that looked at you with pain. His voice was so low that the slightest rustling of someone's blanket would smother a sentence. But everyone's attention was riveted on him.

He said he lost his father, five brothers, and two sons during the riots following Indira Gandhi's assassination. They were hacked to death, he said. His wife was gang-raped while he was to watch; his seven-year-old daughter was molested. He himself was repeatedly stabbed, almost castrated, and left for dead. Now he and his wife must start all over again in the Punjab.

His audience seemed stunned as he spoke. It is not often that a Sikh male will volunteer information that his wife's honour was violated. Women started weeping. Men began to shout in anger.

I thought: these tales will be told and retold until they become part of the Punjab's mythology. How many young men like Amrik Singh will swear revenge? How can Sikhs ever forgive Hindus? How will the bitterness and anguish ever disappear from this land? "We need the healing touch", Bhagwant Singh Ahuja had said to me that November evening not long after the murder of Mrs. Gandhi. But who will bring a healing hand to these proud and wounded people of the Punjab?

Rajiv Gandhi? Will he be able to forget—and forgive—the fact that his mother was shot by two Sikhs? His December election campaign was not especially heroic: his ruling Congress Party appealed shamelessly to the sentiments of India's overwhelming Hindu majority by charging that the Sikh leadership had balked at resolving the Punjab problem. He charged that opposition leaders were in collusion with antinational elements in the Punjab. A "foreign hand" was working actively to destabilise the Punjab, Gandhi said. He did not elaborate. This was not the sort of rhetoric that would reassure Punjab's Sikhs. But then, the Punjab was not voting in the 1984 election.

In Delhi I came across posters put up by Congress Party candidates that warned: "Would you trust a taxi driver from another state? For better security, vote Congress." Since a large number of Delhi's taxi drivers were Sikh, the message was very clear.

Even clearer, and more sickening, were billboards commissioned by Congress candidates in states like Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. These depicted a slain Indira Gandhi, blood gushing from her body, being held by her son Rajiv. Two Sikhs crouched at one side, their guns smoking. Indians rewarded Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party with 401 out of 508 seats contested for the national Parliament.

Healing hand?

During my travels around India, I was astonished how many non-Sikhs, particularly educated and affluent Indians, voiced the view that the Sikhs "had it coming" to them.

One very cold January evening in Delhi, I sat in the drawing room of my brother-in-law, Ajai Lal, a successful producer of audio visuals and television commercials. The mood in Lal's home was one of general jubilation over Rajiv Gandhi's unprecedented victory in the December national elections. Gandhi and some of his top aides, such as Arun Singh, had studied at the exclusive Doon School in north India—and most of the males present this evening also were Doon graduates (they called themselves DoscOs). In fact, thirty-two newly elected parliamentarians had attend the Doon School in Dehra Dun.

One particular guest did not, however, dwell too much on the Old-Boy angle. He was a young local businessman, and he consumed several glasses of whiskey and kept up a harangue about the Punjab. He himself was a Punjabi Hindu.

"We will fix them now," he said. "They thought they were God's gift to India, eh? They thought they wee the only strong, virile ones around, eh? Well, they sure showed themselves to be cowards recently, didn't they? How many faced the mobs with courage, eh?"

"Would you have faced a mob like that?" I asked.

The businessman shrugged. He helped himself to another whiskey.

"Those b—s", he said, presently, "those Sikh b—s. If I had my way, I would rip their bowels out. I would slaughter every last one of them. I would decimate them. Those arrogant, filthy bastards. Who do they think they are? They have destroyed India."

I shivered, and it was not because of the cold.

Pranay Gupte

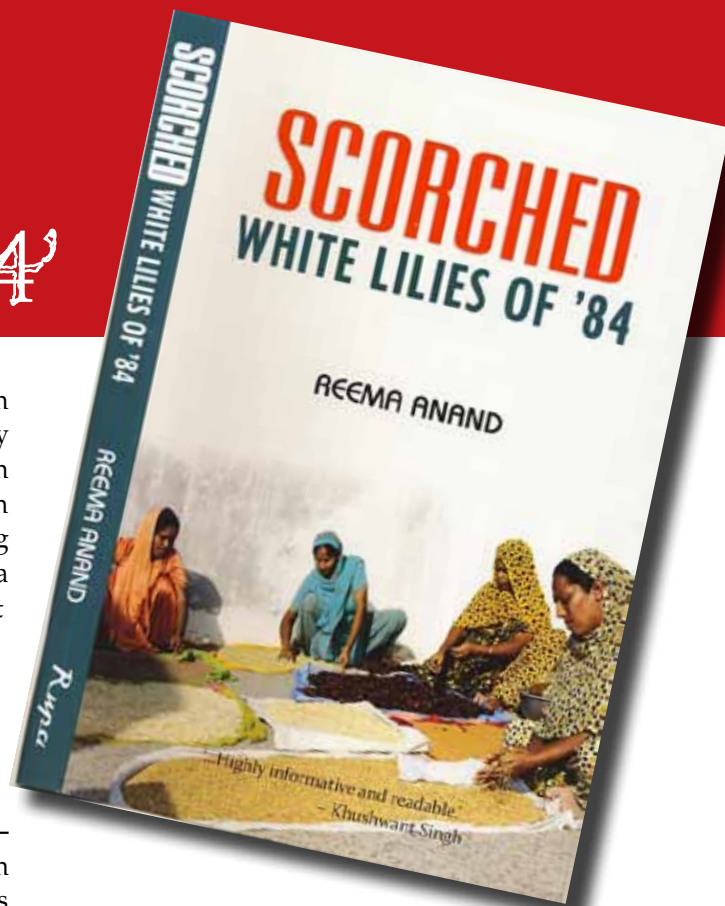
('DoscOs' close to Rajiv Gandhi included Arun Singh of Kapurthala, Ramesh Kohli, Vikram Narain, Kamal Nath, Mohan Thadani, Romesh Chopra - the last named had actually taunted another senior Dosco, Brigadier Sukhjot Singh MVC of Kapurthala that 'Sikhs would have to prove themselves' if they wanted to stay on in India : Ed)

Review of Scorched White Lilies of '84

Nearly 25 years back, the when autumn in Delhi was slowly fading to give way to winter at the end of October, thousands of Sikh families were devastated in the pogrom of 1984, in the capital and other states of the country, following assassination of then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. Gathering the remains of their distraught lives, survivors of the trauma took a lot of time, effort and strength to reshape their lives to some semblance of normalcy.

Scorched White Lilies of '84 by Reema Anand is a book dwelling upon the emotions and recollections of their former lives by some brave Sikh women – “scorched white lilies” – narrated by the author in very poignant and emotional manner. Yet there is an undercurrent of harsh reality running through almost every saga of loss, grief and havoc. Using the resettlement colony of Tilak Nagar (where the first colony for anti-Sikh riot victims was set up by the government) as a metaphor for resettlement of all refugees of the 1984 riots, the author weaves a tale of how a *papad* manufacturing unit eventually giving way to a *masala* packing and grinding unit, including activities like making pickle and *seviyan*, was able to rehabilitate 18 girls and their offspring for a period of three consecutive years and how it was organised into the NGO ‘Hope Charitable Masala Project’. It indeed is a very moving and apt precedent for society to emulate in order to join hands and help in rehabilitation of those who are still struggling to make ends meet and come to terms with their emotional demons which continue to haunt them now more than two and a half decades of their (or national?)tragedy.

This is a tribute to all those courageous women who overcame their physical and



mental dilemmas to emerge victorious against the ravages of time, despite the paucity of funds and the menace of drug addiction and sexual abuse rearing their ugly heads from time to time in their immediate surroundings.

Some **extracts** from the book :

“...Through the keyhole we saw our *chacha* go down under just a few blows. Then they broke open our door”.

Kali paused, her eyes wet and hands cold, sweat breaking out on her forehead. I gently pressed her hand.

“It has been twenty-two years *didi*, but the nightmare doesn’t go away. In front of my eyes, they kept seizing young girls in our group. They flashed torches in our faces. They used knives to slice open the cord of the *salwars* of the girls they thought desirable. These girls were picked up like pigs – two people holding on to the legs and two



At the launch of Reema Anand's book.



Reema Anand with Surinder Kaur, supervisor of the masala project.

holding their arms – and they were carried out of the rooms, screaming and howling”.

One cannot gauge one’s own sensitivity by any parameter, unless it is exposed to a full blast, a searing test of volcanic dimension.

“...The girls were crying because they were reminded of ’84 riots and the subsequent brutality which they faced at the hands of their tormentors and rescuers. I was crying at my helplessness in being unable to stop the mental torture.

One and a half years of collective hard work was brought to naught in just forty-five minutes. The girls had been regularly counseled in language, patience and humility. We were bereaved of everything in those few minutes and I was left with a sense of despondency and acute loss gnawing my nerves and a sense of calamity nibbling at my heart”.

S.Khushwant Singh reviews the book in the following words: *The tragic tale of the massacre of nearly 5,000 Sikhs following the assassination of Mrs Gandhi on 31 October 1984 has not yet ended.*

We shall have no clear account of what happened to survivors of the holocaust. Thousands of families lost all they owned along with their breadwinners. Many more thousands were scarred for life.

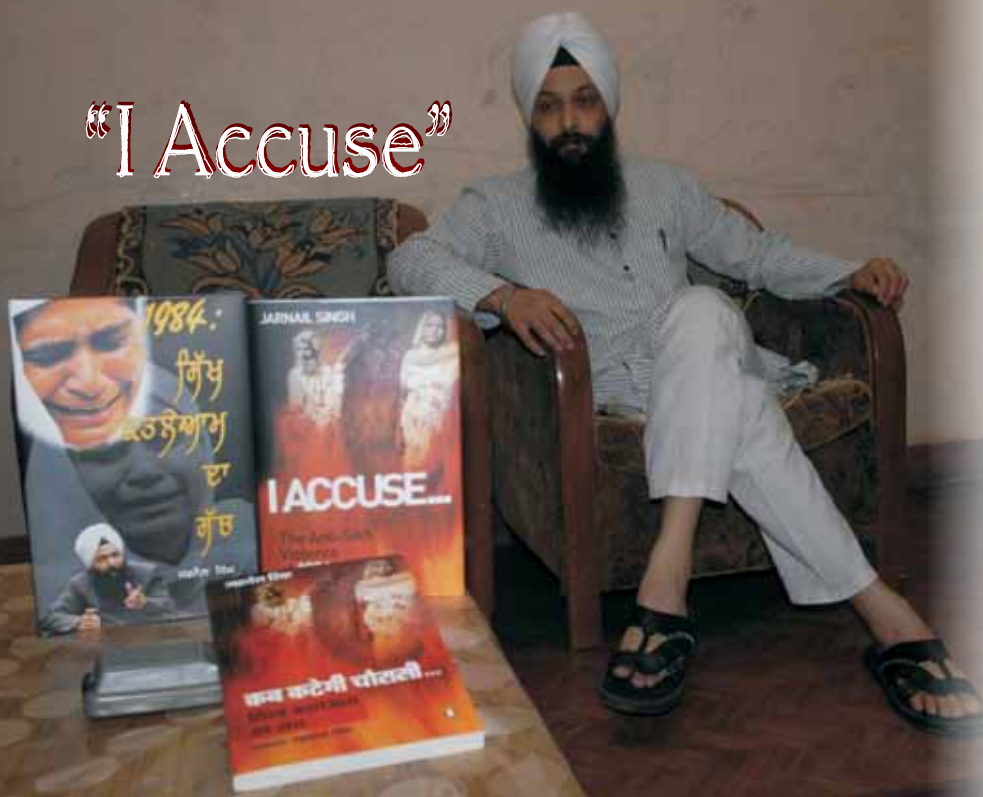
Wounds inflicted have yet to be healed. Reema Anand has carried the tale to its conclusion by telling us how the victims are coping with life, what is being done for them and how much remains undone. Highly informative and readable.

Reema Anand was born and brought up in the Punjab, has a Master’s degree in English literature and a post graduate diploma in NGO management. She started as a journalist and has been writing in major dailies like Hindustan Times, The Indian Express, The Tribune and The Times of India. Also a film-maker, she has made a number of documentaries touching upon unacknowledged heroes and issues of importance.



Some of the audience at the book launch : an emotional evening.

"I Accuse"



water tanks in Delhi. There was limited TV in those days except for the State-owned Doordarshan, which barely reported the violence. Most newspapers, too, were biased.

These incidents left a deep impression on my mind. I closely followed the news related to the attacks. Amongst Congress leaders who were identified as leading the mobs, HKL Bhagat then became a minister in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet. Sajjan Kumar, who was a councillor, was made an MP after these attacks. Tytler, too, became a minister. On the other hand, witnesses were harassed. The Government scrapped the Ved Marwah Commission when it was ready with its findings. In 1991, Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister. He had been home minister at the time of the carnage and things never really moved towards justice for the victims of 1984.

At some point, I decided to become a journalist so as to keep better track of events. I finished my MA in political science and started working in 1995. After that, I have closely followed the cases and written about them.

In 1993, when Madan Lal Khurana became Delhi's Chief Minister, he appointed the Justice RS Narula Committee which recorded statements of the surviving victims, their families and other witnesses. But the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi did not approve formation of the committee. The committee handed over the affidavits containing the depositions to the Centre, which sat over these for a few years. When Khurana as Chief Minister asked the CBI to investigate the matter, the CBI said they "didn't have time". The CBI has time to investigate singular murders but when the matter involves the brutal killing of over 5000 citizens, it "does not have time".

'Maut ke Saudagars of 1984'

I was 11 years old when the 1984 carnage took place. We lived in a house in the F-Block of Lajpat Nagar then. The house was allotted to my grandfather, who came to Delhi from Lahore after Partition. I clearly remember reports of attacks on Sikhs coming from all over and we were tense. My elder brother, who was struck by polio as a child, wanted to go to Niwasपुरी. The elders at home wouldn't let him go. He insisted the mobs wouldn't harm a physically challenged boy. He was wrong. They threw him off his tricycle on to the road and beat him up mercilessly. He returned home badly shaken. Soon after, the gurdwara in our area was set on fire by a mob. Over a thousand gurdwaras were burnt. The Delhi Development Authority stated in an affidavit that it had repaired 131 gurdwaras in Delhi.

My maternal uncle, who owned a taxi at the Hyatt Hotel taxi stand, was attacked and left on the road to die. My aunt, his sister, somehow managed to take him to her house in Safdarjung Enclave. Despite the serious injuries, we couldn't take him to AIIMS. The doctors there were turning away injured Sikhs. He was treated discreetly by a South Indian nurse in the evenings at my aunt's house.

What happened in 1984 were certainly not riots. It was a planned massacre. Delhi Transport Corporation buses and a train were used to ferry the hired mobs for attacks on Delhi's Sikhs. Voter lists were arranged and Sikhs' homes marked out at night. A white inflammable powder, some kind of explosive, was procured and used to burn the victims and their belongings. Many survivors talk of this white powder being used by the mobs. The police helped spread rumours that Hindus were being slaughtered in the Punjab. Someone said Sikhs had poisoned overhead

Despite all this, I have continued to wait for justice. All the victims want justice. But what can you expect when the first FIR against a political leader responsible for the 1984 carnage was registered 11 years later, in 1995? But the common people have waited patiently for justice.

On 2 April 2009, the CBI gave a clean chit to Jagdish Tytler! Things seemed to be slipping away. It seemed Tytler was going to be let off. Someone asked Home Minister P Chidambaram for a reaction. He said, "I am happy my friend Jagdish Tytler has been exonerated by the CBI." Is the CBI an investigating agency or a court? How can it give him a clean chit? Several such questions ran through my mind. When there were charges of mass murder against Tytler and he was dropped from the ministry in 2005, why was he getting the ticket again? The CBI does not report to the home minister but he is in charge of the country's internal security. Should he be expressing happiness over this? The Congress has always adopted double standards in this matter. No commission has yet held Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi guilty of the 2002 carnage, but the Congress has repeatedly called him *maut ka saudagar*.

Who were the *maut ke saudagar* in 1984?

It seemed to me they were set to bury the case. The last hope of justice was fading away. I was disturbed. On 7 April 2009, I was there at Chidambaram's conference at the Congress headquarters. I asked him why he'd expressed happiness over the clean chit given to Tytler. He said the matter was sub-judice. When I persisted, he said I was using the press conference as a platform for my own agenda. I decided to protest. I spontaneously slid off my shoe and flung it in his direction— but away from him. I did not want to hit him but I wanted to protest the 25 years of injustice. Still the only regret I have from that day is that I used my position as a journalist to lodge my protest. I am proud of standing up against injustice, but not for hurling that shoe.

I was taken away by the security, with one shoe on. Outside, the camera crews mobbed me. I clarified that my unprecedented protest was not against Chidambaram but against the continuing injustice against the victims and survivors of 1984.

I was soon let off by the police and called home to ask my family not to speak to the media. They are simple people who were themselves left speechless by my act. I knew that politicians would try to swing this incident their way. I have been absolutely clear on this. I will not affiliate myself to anyone's politics. The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee offered me a job as media advisor. An Akali leader offered me Rs 2 lakh as a reward, while another wanted to buy my shoe for Rs 5 lakh! I declined.



Jarnail Singh and family at their home.

I have declined overtures from several political outfits since. I have turned down invitations from prominent politicians for meetings. I have no political ambitions and don't want politicians hijacking the cause. The incident again brought the plight of the 1984 victims into focus. Of course, I lost my job. I have none today. 'Dainik Jagran' issued me a show-cause notice and I was asked not to join work for some time. Then on 1 July, my services were terminated. I have not pursued the matter legally because it will take attention away from the real issue: justice for the 1984 victims.

My book, 'I Accuse', also focuses on the denial of justice. I have survived somehow because we live in a joint family. The money from my books will take care of the family for a few months, I hope.

The time between April 2009 and now has been spent in writing. The Punjabi version of my book was released in Canada, where it has sold 1,000 copies. A cultural organisation there also conferred an award on me. I have attended over two dozen programmes promoting the cause of justice for the 1984 victims. This is Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's second term. He should visit the widow colonies of 1984 victims which no PM or heavyweight politician has done till now. Instead of suggesting that Sikhs should "forget 1984," he should ensure that justice is done.

Jarnail Singh

2009 : 25 years after the Pogrom

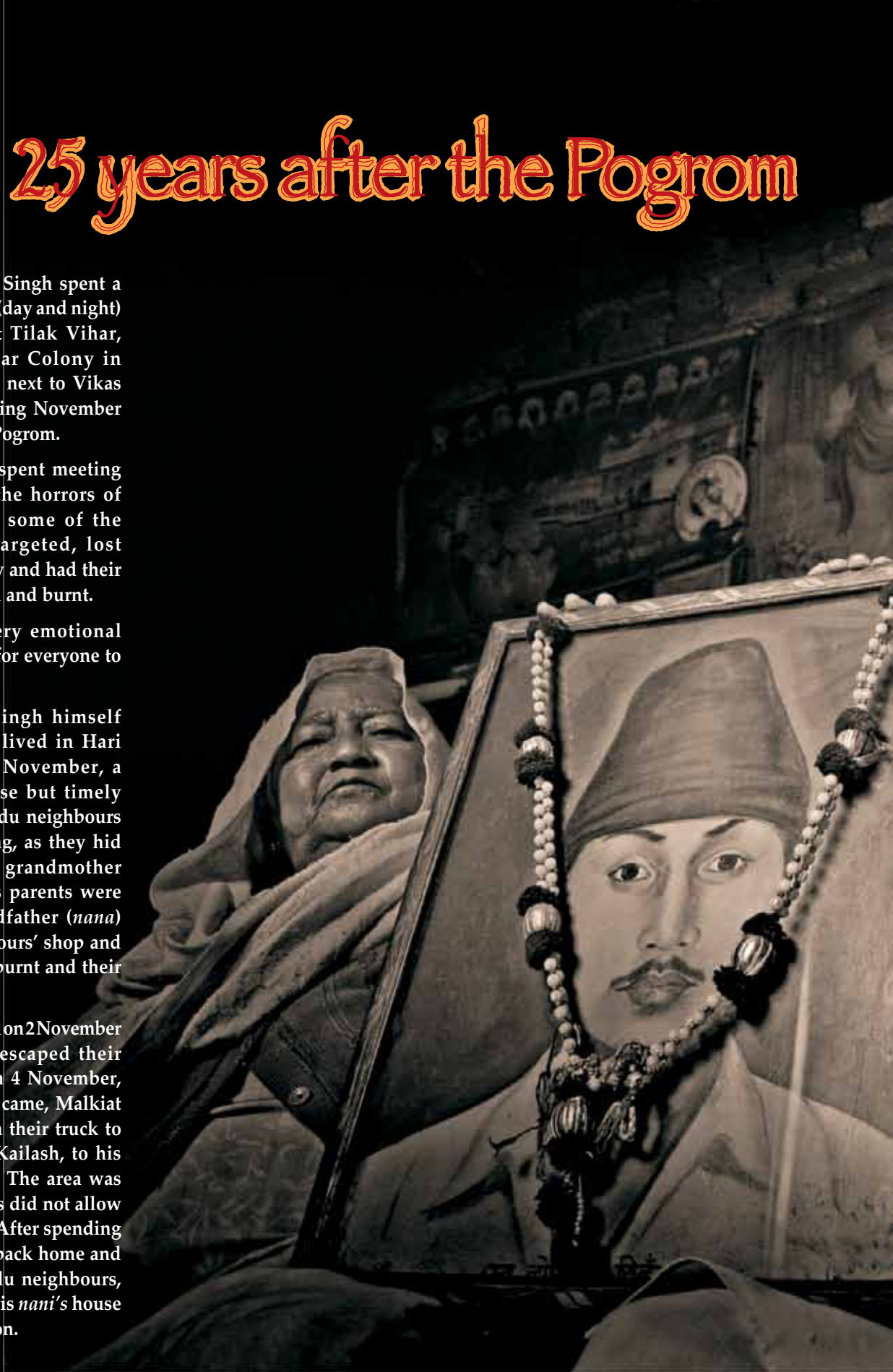
*M*alkiat Singh spent a week (day and night) taking photographs at Tilak Vihar, Chander Nagar, Sardar Colony in Rohini, Nilothi village, next to Vikas Puri in West Delhi during November 2009, 25 years after the Pogrom.

Another week was spent meeting with and recounting the horrors of November 1984 with some of the families who were targeted, lost members of their family and had their homes and shops looted and burnt.

It was indeed a very emotional and very difficult time for everyone to recollect.

In 1984, Malkiat Singh himself was 10 years old and lived in Hari Nagar Ashram. On 1 November, a mob attacked his house but timely intervention of his Hindu neighbours prevented any searching, as they hid both Malkiat and his grandmother (*nani*). At the time, his parents were in Lucknow and grandfather (*nana*) in Bahrain. The neighbours' shop and home were looted and burnt and their son was killed.

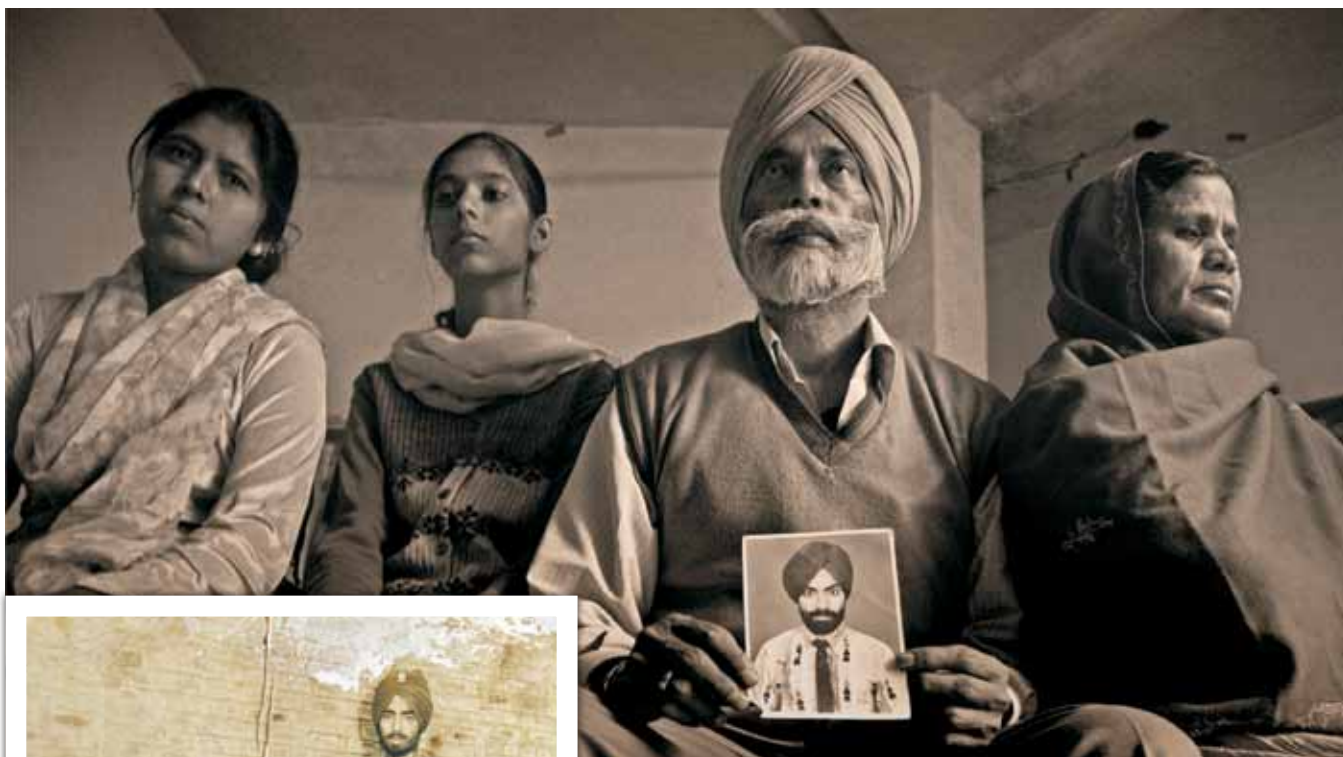
The attackers returned on 2 November at night but Malkiat escaped their violent clutches and on 4 November, when the Army finally came, Malkiat went with the troops in their truck to Garhi village, East of Kailash, to his uncle (*chacha's*) house. The area was a safe one as the Gujjars did not allow any mobs in their area. After spending 15 days there, he came back home and was welcomed by Hindu neighbours, who thereafter slept at his *nani's* house every night for protection.





Sewa Singh aged 74, his wife Bhagwant Kaur, 65 with their son Hoshiar Singh's photograph. Sewa Singh lost both sons, 21-year-old Hoshiar Singh and 18-year-old Mohan Singh in the 1984 pogrom in Sultanpuri, the boys burnt by the mob in their house which was then set on fire.

Sewa Singh spent a few months with other victims at the Shakurpur Basti Relief Camp, where he did odd jobs before becoming a rickshaw puller. He now lives with his wife in Sardar Colony.



Gurcharan Singh lost his younger brother Mangal Singh in the Pogrom. Mangal Singh worked as a DTC Bus conductor at Shahdara Depot and was killed in Nand Nagri on 2 November 1984, when a mob of almost 800 came with different agendas – some for looting, most for killing. He was seized by the mob and thrown into his burning house.

His father, Havaldar Gopal Singh, was with the Bengal Engineers and honoured with a 'Jangi Inam' in 1947 (inset - Gursharan Singh when in the army).



Bhupinder Singh was 10 years old when his father (seen in photograph on the wall behind) a DTC Bus driver, was killed in Nandnagri 25 years ago. Bhupinder hid with his mother, two sisters and two brothers at a neighbour's house.

Today, Bhupinder runs a tiny tailoring shop while his brothers make their living working as drivers in the Tilak Vihar, Tilak Nagar area.



*Padam Singh, 80, belonging to an ironsmiths family, today lives with his daughter Parvati Kaur.
On 1 November 1984, his house in Sultan Puri was looted and then set on fire.*



The third generation : young Ajit Singh and Ranjit Singh's grandfather, Ishwar Singh and chacha Naval Singh, were brutally murdered and their house was torched in 1984. Both the boys study at Nishkam Bhawan Tuition Centre at Tilak Nagar in Delhi.



Sukhi Kaur, 80 with two daughters Jal Kaur 35 and Harjeet Kaur 40 and her grandsons. Her husband Chaakar Singh was killed in Sultanpuri on 1 November 1984 and her house burnt down.



Simranjeet Singh was only 10-days old when his grandfather's small pattern making factory was destroyed by the mob in Anand Parbat Industrial Area in 1984. Now, he continues with the same profession after discontinuing his education following the 12th class.



Two old men seated outside a park at Tilak Vihar, perhaps recalling those terrible days. Some 60 % of the riot victim families now have jobs as drivers in the Tilak Vihar area.



Mohan Singh Lubhana, President of the Riot Victim Camp at Tilak Vihar seen in front of a painting depicting the murderous attacks and arson at Trilok Puri, led by HKL Bhagat and Sajjan Kumar. Mohan Singh lost his two brothers and his house was completely destroyed.



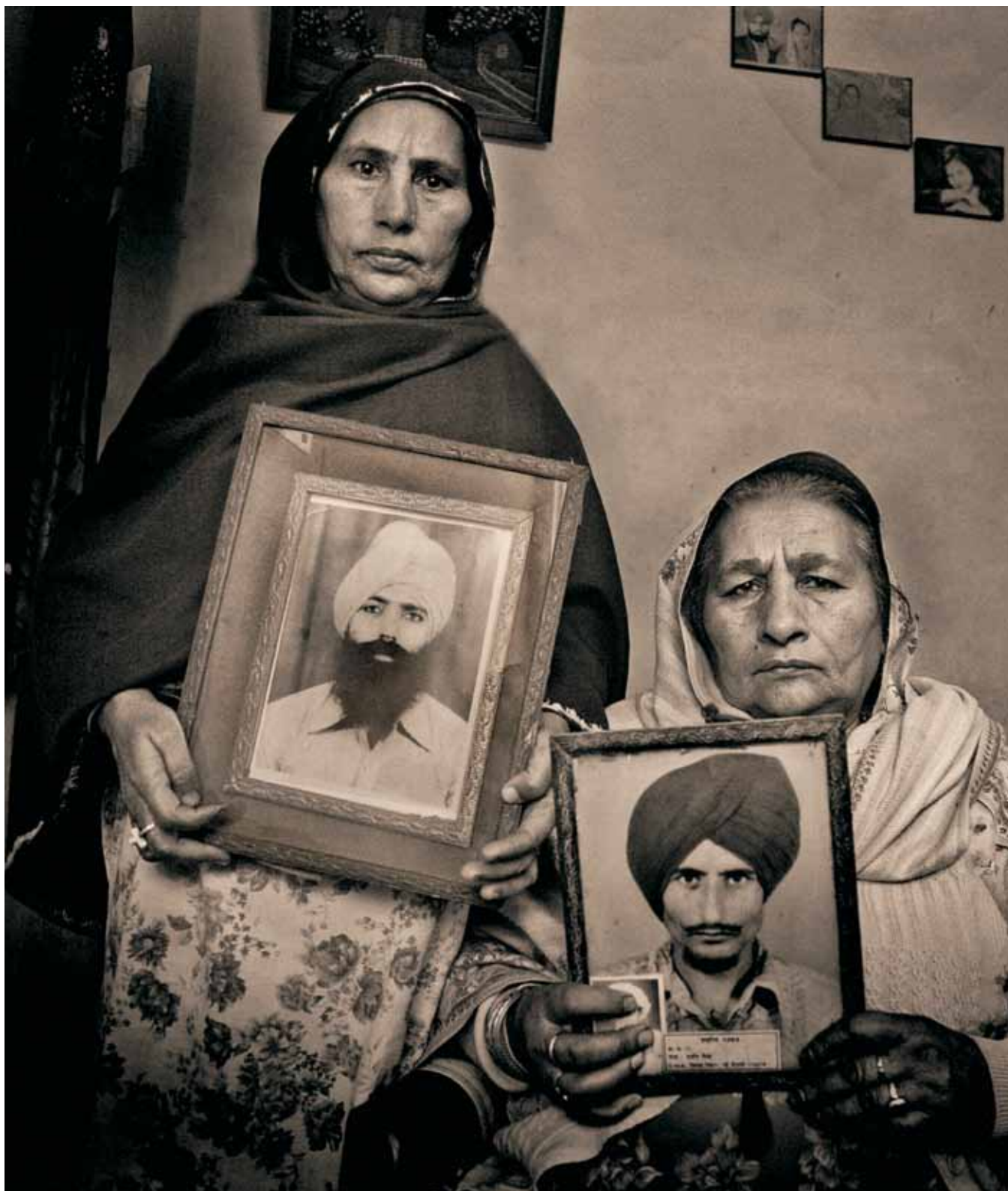
Jado Kaur is 70 years of age and works at a stitching house set up by the Nishkaam Bhawan in Tilak Vihar. Her husband Bhagat Singh and son Jarnail Singh were killed by the mob in Mangol Puri in November 1984 and her house destroyed.



Gursharan Singh and his mother Kulwant Kaur owned a home and shop and were doing “quite well” before the 1984 carnage. Today, Kulwant lives alone at Sardar Colony and the mother works as a teacher at Sri Guru Angad Dev Kendra, Rohini.



Kulwant Kaur, teacher in-charge at Sri Guru Angad Dev Kendra at Rohini imparts knowledge on the shabad-kirtan to girls from families of the victims of the 1984 Pogrom.



Gian Kaur (right) and her sister Sundri Kaur (left) holding photographs of their husbands Bhagwana Singh and Lakshman Singh who along with another ten family members were killed by the mob on 2 November 1984 in Sultanpuri. They lost their entire family comprising Bhagwan Singh (jijaji), Prabha Singh (elder brother), Inder Singh and Jaggu Singh (younger brothers), Sattu Singh (nephew), Kundan Singh and Sawan Singh (younger brothers-in-law), Attar Singh and Tota Singh (nandoi) and Bhakta Singh (chacha's son). The surviving women were moved to the relief camp at Farsh Bazaar on 3 November, 1984.



Quarterguard of the 5th Sikhs present arms.



A tradition of Valour

VALOUR – what does this word evoke in the mind’s eye ? Great deeds against insurmountable odds – the limits of human endurance pushed to its extreme – courage of the human spirit in the face of trial and tribulation – courage both physical and moral, especially the latter since this struggle is waged in the hollow corridors of the mind with no spectators or rewards? Perhaps all these aspects in one form or the other. The one common thread that runs through this otherwise tangled skein is that of the “Human Spirit”.

Valour can thus, in a manner of speaking, be attributed to the universal human spirit and may possibly be best defined as an overwhelming overflow of the deepest well springs of a primeval response to extreme situations. It is not the exclusive preserve of any creed or societal group of civilisation.

The question then arises – can so universal a human trait become a “tradition”, a practice or an observance handed down from generation to generation ? One answer in the affirmative may be found in the Sikh community. Conceived in the crucible of adversity, virtually from its nascence, the martial character of this young Faith took root – as with any similar persecution or suppression of the human spirit – within the contours of the willing acceptance of martyrdom in the defence of their Faith. Martyrdom, or the ethics of absolute ends, was perceived to be the sole ultimate defence to belief within the Sikh community. This is borne out by the gory accounts of efforts by Mughal Rulers of those times, seeking to put this fledgling Faith, its sages and teachers or “Gurus” as also its adherents, to the sword, seeking hopefully in their view, to extinguish



Sikh cavalry charging German defences in France doing the Great War.

one possible source of opposition to their rule and domination of the Islamic Faith in the Mughal Empire. The Sikh community rallied and retaliated by borrowing the term “martyr” from Islam and using it with telling effect against their tormentors. This is perhaps best illustrated in an article entitled *Martyrdom – Substructure of Sikh Identity* where it has been stated that “Thus martyrdom in Sikhism is not self-extinction; it is, on the other hand, a sort of affirmation of the Faith the martyr holds and a positive projection of the urge of the martyr to uphold virtue and to resist evil”. Martyrdom became a tradition and an attitude in the eighteenth century, and was anchored in the Sikh psyche as an instinct, indeed as a real passion. It was not derived from any other instinct, indeed but as a real passion. It was not derived from any other instinct but is a principle *sui-generis*, that is, a specific and necessary form of structural power.”

Cast in this mould, it is hardly to be wondered that the Sikh yeomanry and later, its soldiery, should so effortlessly display this inherent trait of a “Tradition of Valour”.

Valour in combat is taken as read. In the Sikh etymology valour came to connote personal sacrifice both within and without the realms of physical combat. Consequently, the attribute of valour inheres to those who sacrificed their lives for the Sikh Faith and its tenets, such as the Sikh Gurus, their disciples and adherents who were put to the sword, to various Sikh military leaders and their followers like Baba Banda Bahadur (1670–1716). Perhaps Banda Bahadur can be regarded as the first Sikh military leader who sought to weld the Sikh peasantry and yeomanry into a cohesive fighting entity. Then Jassa Singh Ahluwalia (1718–1783). As the Commander of all the Sikh *Missls* or clans when in conflict against the Afghan invaders, in 1762 he personally led the Sikh Army during the epic fighting retreat against the marauding Afghan hordes, saving the bulk of the Army together with the caravan of their families, at the cost of some 20,000 Sikh casualties. The retreating Sikhs inflicted many times more casualties on their attackers. This event in Sikh History is known as the *Wada Ghalughara* or “Great Holocaust”. Jassa Singh himself



Leading the President's Body Guard.

reportedly sustained 22 wounds in this engagement. On all other occasions he led the Sikh forces to victory, capturing Lahore by 1765.

Hari Singh Nalwa (1791–1837). This lion hearted armiger of many battles, personally led the Armies of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab. Interestingly, he is perhaps the only military commander to have planted the Standard of an Indian potentate on the Khyber Pass in the turbulent North West Frontier and to have finally blocked this Pass as an invasion route

into India from the North and West. His performance as an administrator and military commander in the rugged and lawless North West Frontier remains unsurpassed. Two centuries later, this turbulent area has continued to defy the efforts of NATO powers such as Britain and the United States to pacify it. Having left his indelible imprint on the pages of History, Hari Singh died a soldier's death at the Battle of Jamrud in May 1837. Finally to this galaxy, can be added the legendary Lion of the Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab (1780–1839).

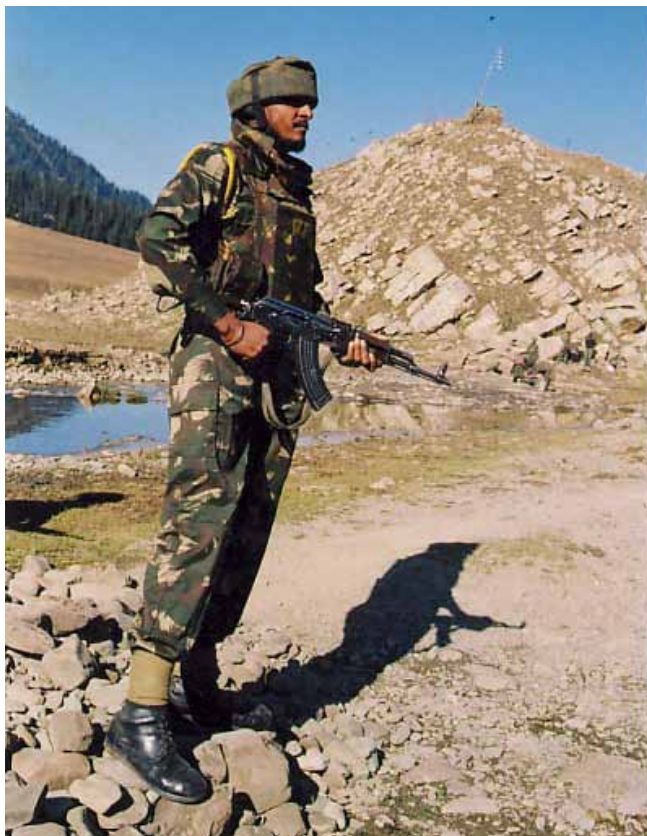
With such a pedigree coupled with a fierce inborn independence of spirit, the Sikh soldiery soon became synonymous with *Valour* and *Fortitude*.

Saga of the Sikh soldier in modern times can perhaps most accurately be dated from the mid-nineteenth century or around 1846, after annexation of the last sovereign Indian Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Lion of the Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, after whose death in 1839, would see the Sikh army of Ranjit Singh's successors, clash with the army of the East India Company and only be defeated by intrigues after bitter and hotly contested battles in 1845-46 and 1848-49.

So impressed were the British by military prowess of the Sikhs who had the measure of the British at the crucial battles of Moodkee (18 December 1845) and Ferozeshah (21 and 22 December 1845) that in 1846



Commanders of main battle tanks.



Guarding the frontiers : northern Kashmir.



Mortar team in the western desert.

itself first recruitment commenced of the disbanded Sikh soldiery into the Bengal Army of the East India Company. Two Regiments of Sikh infantry, the Regiments of Ferozepur XIV Regiment (later the 1st Battalion The Sikh Regiment) and the Ludhiana XV Regiment (2nd Battalion The Sikh Regiment) came into being by mid 1846. These Battalions were officered by British Officers with some Non-Commissioned Officers and comprised an approximate strength of 1100 troops. In January 1856, a third Regiment, the 45th (3rd Battalion The Sikh Regiment) was raised at Lahore by Captain Thomas Rattray whence it derived the appellation of 'Rattray's Sikhs.'

Thence commenced the Sikh soldiers march into the annals of History and the epigraph of **Valour as a Tradition.**

In 1857, the newly formed Regiments of Sikhs distinguished themselves at Allahabad (May 1857), Lucknow (July 1857), during the defence of Arrah

(July and August 1857). The Regiments were awarded a total of 3 Victoria Crosses, numerous Indian Orders of Merit and various Battle Honour entitlements.

The years that followed saw the Sikh Regiments at forefront of the Imperial Wars, from the frontier with Afghanistan in the North West of the sub continent to



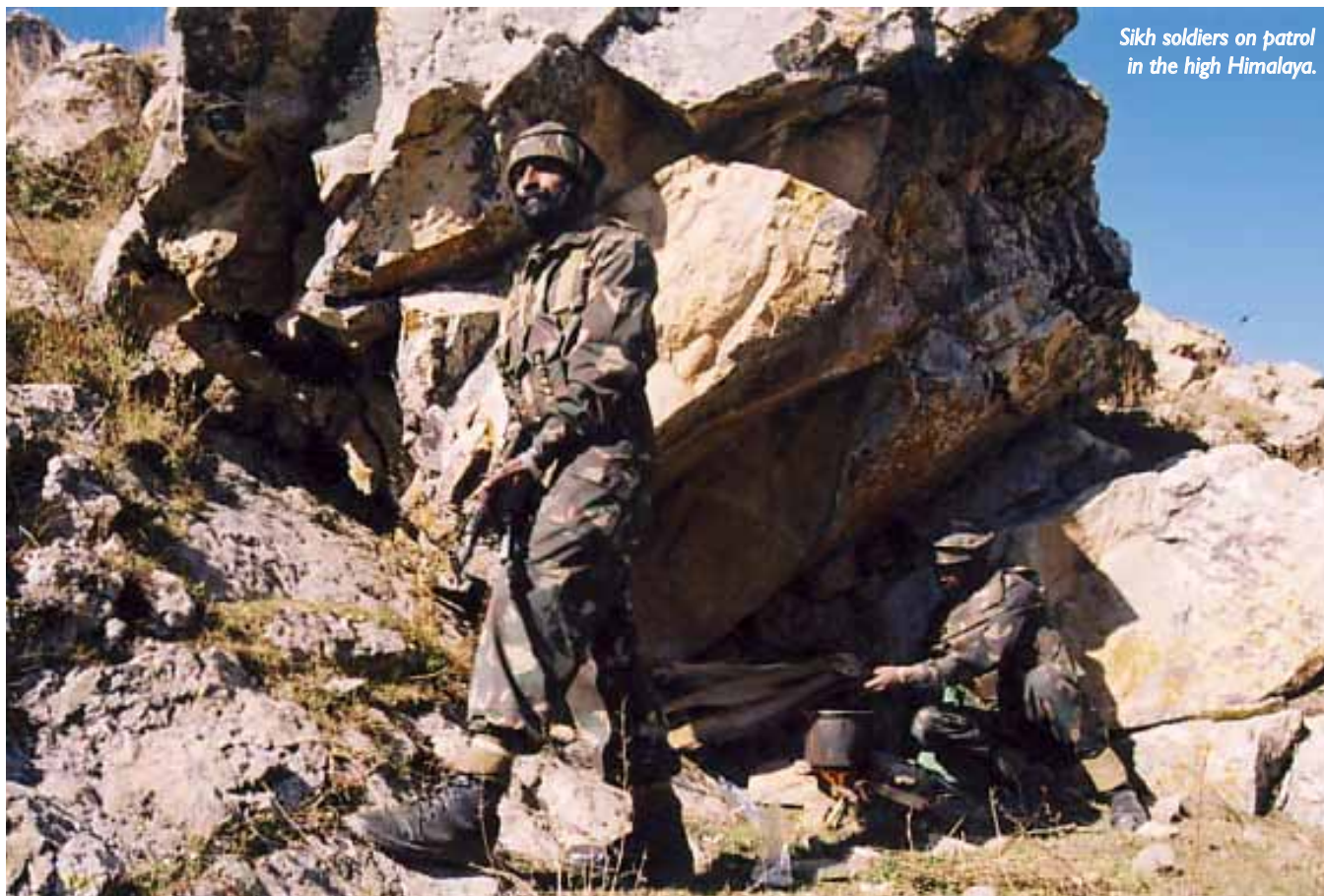
Manning an anti-tank missile.



In the mortar pit : northern Kashmir.

China in the Far East. In 1860, the XV Sikh Regiment were on their way to China to serve there during the Boxer Rebellion. The 45th Sikhs were engaged in pacification duties in the tribal areas of the Garo Hills of Eastern India as well as in the Kuki Hills. Because of their proven worth as redoubtable soldiers, two more Sikh infantry battalions, the XXXV Sikh (later The Sikh Regimental Centre) and XXXVI Sikh (4th Battalion The Sikh Regiment) were raised in 1887. XXXVI Sikh distinguished itself on the North West Frontier with the Malakand Relief Force, winning three Indian Orders of Merit. Again, this time with the Tirah Column it rendered yeoman service. The last of the original Sikh Regiments, the XLVII or 47th Sikh Regiment (today, 5th Battalion The Sikh Regiment) was raised in October 1900.

Winning eternal renown, in 1897 was the incredible heroic action, fought by 22 soldiers of XXXVI Sikhs in the North West Frontier. Led by a Non Commissioned Officer, this intrepid band of 22 Sikh soldiers, tasked to defend a link post between two strongly held forts, held at bay some 10,000 Afridi and Orakzai tribesmen seeking to overrun this post at Saraghari. Defended by this small detachment of Sikhs, the post held out for the entire day



Sikh soldiers on patrol in the high Himalaya.



'Pomp and Circumstance': pipes and drums of a Sikh battalion during a formal occasion.

of 12 September 1897. Finally, the last man left alive, a signaller, sought permission to pack his heliograph and join his comrades in death rather than surrender. These lines were composed to honour the act of collective gallantry, rarely witnessed in the annals of military history.

*"On Saraghari's ramparts died the bravest of the brave,
Neath Saraghari's ruined walls they found a fitting grave,
For Saraghari bears the fame,
They gave their lives to save."*

In a rare recognition of this act of indomitable courage and collective bravery, each soldier was posthumously awarded the Indian Order of Merit, then considered to be the Indian soldier's Victoria Cross. The Battle Honour "Saraghari" was awarded the Regiment, to be borne upon its colours and Appointments.

In 1917, this same Regiment, the XXXVI Sikhs Regiment, supported by its sister Battalion the 45th Sikhs covered itself themselves with glory at the Battle of the Hai River in Mesopotamia against the Turkish Army. The Regiments sustained 80 per cent

of their total strength as casualties but refused to yield captured ground to the Turkish counter attacks. For their gallantry, the XXXVI Sikhs were awarded the Battle Honour and a number of gallantry awards.

Battalions of the Sikh Regiment served with honour and distinction, in various theatres in both World War I and II.

World War I

France and Flanders
Gallipoli and the Dardanelles
Mesopotamia
North West Frontier (India)

World War II

Italy
Greece
North Africa and the Egyptian Desert
Middle East and Lebanon
Eritrea
North West Frontier (India)
Burma
South East Asia

In World War II, the Indian Army fielded a volunteer force of 2 million men, the largest volunteer Army in history. Troops from the Punjab comprised a high percentage of this total and a very large number of these men were Sikh soldiers.

Of the Victoria Crosses awarded to the Indian Army, five went to Sikh soldiers, there being only two Indian Officers who were awarded this coveted decoration of superlative gallantry in combat. Both were Sikhs, Second Lieutenant (later Lieutenant General) P S Bhagat (Eritrea 1941) and Lieutenant Karamjit Singh Judge (posthumous, Burma 1945). The latter Officer was from Kapurthala.

After 1947, as part of the Independent Indian Army, Sikh soldiers continued to maintain their well merited reputation of a "Tradition of Valour", winning numerous gallantry awards :

Param Vir Chakra (PVC, equivalent to the VC)	Four
Maha Vir Chakra (MVC, equivalent to the DSO)	56
Vir Chakra (VrC, equivalent to the MC)	215

The Sikh Regiment now stands at some 25 Infantry Battalions, including 3 Territorial Army Battalions and various Rashtriya Rifle Units.

There are several other Sikh units of the Indian Army, some all-Sikh like the Sikh Light Infantry, others with high proportion of Sikhs with other 'classes' like the Punjab Regiment, J&K Light Infantry, Mahar Regiment, The Guards, Parachute Regiment and Mechanised Infantry Regiment.

Sikhs serve in large numbers with the Armoured Corps, Regiment of Artillery, Bengal and Bombay Engineer Regiments, the EME, and other supporting arms. The Indian Air Force, Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard have considerable number of 'Sikhs in service'. The only Param Vir Chakra (PVC) awarded to an officer of the Indian Air Force was won by Flt. Lt. Nirmal Jit Singh Sekhon, a fighter pilot, in December 1971.

What then is this esoteric *mantra* of "Valour" so inextricably woven into the Sikh identity? Perhaps the most cogent explanation is contained in these lines from Lord Moran's seminal work *The Anatomy of Courage* :

"Courage (Valour) is a moral quality; it is not a chance gift of nature like an aptitude for games. It is a cold choice between two alternatives, the fixed resolve not to quit; an act of renunciation which must be made not once but many time by the power of the will. Courage (Valour) is will power."

Link this postulate with the opening statements of this article and the parallel with the Sikh community of being forged in the crucible of adversity and its psyche of sacrifice, and the parallel becomes an almost exact fit.

Of course, his trait of Valour is exhibited throughout the World, in the uniformed services of all Nations in the line of duty. It exists among law enforcement agencies, fire fighters, para-medical emergency teams and common citizens faced with extreme situations. The difference that perhaps sets the Sikh community apart from all others lies possibly in the fact that a real Sikh always remains in "uniform". Their distinctive appearance in any milieu, coupled with the injunctions of the Tenth Master or Guru who gave them their martial rallying points, assures that they remain forever at the service of the society in which they reside. For, of a truth, they are

Khalsa Tayar Bar Tayar

"Khalsa Ready – Aye, Always Ready"

Thus is tradition born and History records the event when uncommon Valour becomes a common virtue of a Sikh soldier.



**Brigadier Sukhjit Singh MVC
of Kapurthala**

**(Text of the talk delivered at the
Library of Congress
Washington DC, June 2009)**

Sikh fighter pilots over Europe



Lt. Hardit Singh Malik, in service with the Royal Flying Corps.



Hardit Singh Malik in his Oxford blazer.

The No. 28 Squadron Connection

What is the connection between a British Royal Air Force Squadron and the Sikhs? Actually, a lot! While still known as the Royal Flying Corps, No. 28 had a distinguished record, its CO being the most decorated pilot in service and also including Hardit Singh Malik, the first Indian and Sikh to fly warplanes. No. 28 then moved to and served continuously in India till 1947, supporting the army engaged in operations on the NWFP and during the Burma campaign, fighting against the Japanese in Assam and Burma alongside No. 1 Squadron Indian Air Force which was led by the redoubtable Arjan Singh, the first and only Marshal of the Indian Air Force.

The British premiere of a documentary about British-trained Sikh fighter pilots of the First and Second World Wars was screened at the RAF Museum at Hendon, northwest London, on 22 November. A seminar about the deployment of the Merlin helicopter in Afghanistan had been held at the same venue.

Diverse as they are, these two events illustrate what a small world of unexpected inter-relationships exists within the RAF. Both the first Sikh pilot, Flight Lieutenant Hardit Singh Malik, and the speaker at the seminar, Merlin pilot Squadron Leader Simon

Reade from RAF Benson in Oxfordshire, are officers of No 28 Squadron RAF. Reade is the Squadron's second-in-command.

Hardit Singh Malik was born in Rawalpindi in 1894 and educated at Eastbourne College in East Sussex. He joined the forerunner of the RAF, the Royal Flying Corps, in 1917 as the first Sikh, and indeed the first Indian, to serve with any air arm. During the First World War, he flew with No. 28 Squadron in France, managing, it appears, to fit his turbanned head into an outsized flying helmet as well as shooting down a number of Fokker triplanes in dogfights. The documentary includes his only television interview and a rare interview with his daughter Harji. He died in 1985.

Also featuring in the documentary, among the Sikh heroes of a later war, is Squadron Leader Mohinder Singh Pujji DFC, now 91 and living in retirement in Britain. Pujji qualified as a pilot in India before volunteering for the RAF in 1940, subsequently flying Hurricanes out of RAF Kenley, near Croydon, to intercept enemy bombers and reconnaissance aircraft, as well as participating in Spitfire sweeps over occupied Europe. His tally was two Me-109s confirmed shot down and three damaged, and he was treated as a hero in wartime Britain. Serving with the Indian Air Force

later in the war, he flew with No. 6 Squadron with Hurricanes adapted for reconnaissance and ground attack over Burma — another point of contact with No 28 Squadron, as that unit, too, was heavily involved in such operations.

Commissioned by the *Sikh Art & Film Foundation* based in New York, the documentary, *Flying Sikhs: A History of Sikh Fighter Pilots*, is directed by Navdeep Singh Kandola, himself a Sikh. "It's an important subject because in Britain today there is very little remembrance of the Sikh community's participation in the two world wars," he says. "Yet, during the Second World War in particular, the Sikh contribution was very much recognised and respected by the British. Sikh fighter pilots — the men with the wings and the turbans — were very well known and often got



ushered to the front of cinema queues or invited to eat free in restaurants."

Currently only 868 RAF personnel — 2.2 per cent of the total — come from an ethnic minority (the Sikhs among them are still welcome to wear turbans, except when they should be wearing flying helmets, in which circumstances even an under-turban, the *patka*, is not permitted). Kandola hopes that the RAF might use his film for a recruitment campaign among the Sikh community.

UK PREMIERE OF ACCLAIMED DOCUMENTARY

FLYING SIKHS

A History of Sikh Fighter Pilots

Sunday 2pm
22nd November 2009

RAF Museum
Hendon
London
NW9 5LL

To reserve tickets
call 0208 358 4849
or email groups@rafmuseum.org

Director Navdeep Singh Kandola
Producer Clare Cooke

a Sikh Art & Film
Foundation production



British Army troops parade through Luton on their return from active service in Iraq.

“True to your salt”

Honour and Hatred on the streets of Luton

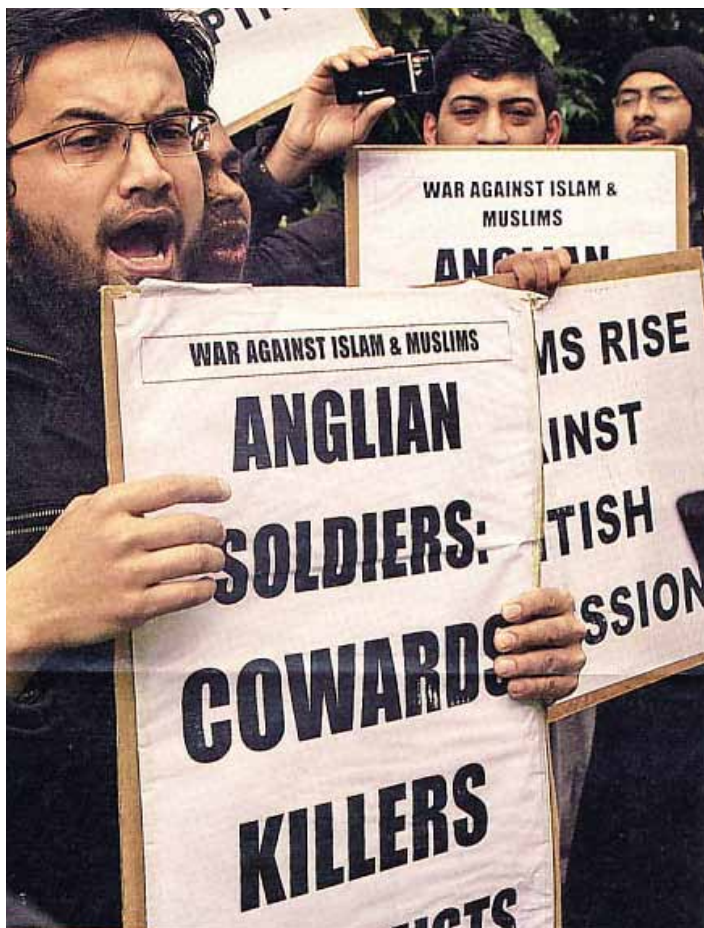
“Harmony makes small things grow, lack of it makes great things decay”. Contemporary multicultural communities prevailing in developed parts of the world, say England, are increasingly finding themselves at the receiving end of long-simmering tensions and ethnic eruptions from time to time. These moments are unpleasant and sad, especially when troops from Iraq or Afghanistan’s battle areas return home and are greeted with mixed responses from different groups – in this case, Muslims and the English.

Resident populations are getting sharply torn along racial lines by recent events. When bodies of four British soldiers from Afghanistan were brought to a dignified and sombre reception at Wellingborough, the local Sikhs sent condolences tinged with understanding

at their sacrifice. These British soldiers were accorded full military honours, having laid down their lives in the fight against fundamentalism and intolerance that threatens and endangers the world’s future. The Sikh community in Wellingborough, Northwest was in solidarity with the citizens of the town.

In Indian history, as the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar eventually surrendered and was sent to exile in Rangoon, the nation was relieved at end of barbaric Mughal rule, which had resulted in annihilation of entire populations, plundering from temples and manifold atrocities against women.

However, we live in confused times today. Everyone blames everyone else : moderate Muslims blame the extremists, extremists blame the moderates, ethnic Europeans blame the Muslims and so on till



Hatred....

everyone is caught in this vicious circle of prejudice and hatred. The authorities blame the media for their coverage of events such as the parade of soldiers marching through the streets of Luton. The world sees the picture conveyed to it by various media channels without really understanding the slow-simmering tensions in such multi-cultural centres. Their struggle for community cohesion is actually the story of our times; the tale of harmonising myriad races and religions, to accept differences and live peacefully together. It is indeed a balance of competing freedoms of expression – the freedom to march, freedom to protest, the right to be free from religious or racial hatred.

The problem is compounded by economic instability or, as commonly referred to, times of recession. These communities (like those at Luton), which have attracted thousands of Asians from the sub continent to provide ready opportunities for skilled and unskilled labour. However, with economic decline, resources are getting stretched and tempers are on the boil. Thus when returning British soldiers from Afghanistan or Iraq are feted on the streets, the balance gets precariously tilted.

Despite that the democratic world is ranged against terrorist groups in Iraq, or Afghanistan, which includes the 'whites', 'brown' or 'blacks', the UK Muslim protests against UK troops lead to provocative gestures against the soldiers and their families who lined up to applaud the marching soldiers. The army (and its supporters) argue that the Muslim protestors should take their grievances to the government, which promoted the war and spare the soldiers, who were following orders. However, the Muslims felt that these British soldiers were responsible for atrocities committed against innocent Muslims. The vicious circle of doubt and mistrust goes on, which reiterates the fact we are all victims of the times that we live



Mistaken Identity : farcical but serious

After the soldiers' parade had dispersed, Kier McElroy, a white youth aged 18, was walking across St George's Square in his "England" shirt. Kier was still feeling wound up by what he had just witnessed back by the Arndale. He had a cousin in the army and a family friend who had been killed in action. Bloody Muslim extremists, Kier was thinking to himself. How dare they !

Then he saw the mayor crossing the square, walking high and proud in his robe and chains. He was Asian. So far as Kier was concerned, he was a Muslim too, and it was all his fault. He was the head of the council; the council had given permission for the extremists to make their protest. F... it, Kier thought, then ran up to him and fly-kicked him in the back. Councillor Lakhbir Singh, the mayor of Luton, a Sikh by faith, not a Muslim at all, stumbled and fell forward, putting out his hands to stop himself falling. Kier turned around and, before the police could do anything, he ran through them and was away.

It would be farcical if it were not so sad and unpleasant, that brief moment in the life of modern, multicultural Britain. A Sikh in a turban had been mistaken for a Muslim by a white youth too ignorant to know any better, and apparently too angry to express himself other than with a kick. The incident had been caught on camera, but it took the police a while to catch up with Kier. He was finally arrested six weeks later, outside Luton Town Football Club.

In the weeks preceding Kier's arrest, for some unexplained reason, the assault on the mayor was kept a secret and the mayor himself kept it under wraps. He would not talk to me for this article, and I only found out about the attack through a contact in the town after Kier had been charged.

"It's political correctness in it," Kier told me, after being released from custody. "We feel we're being treated differently. They won't nick the Asian lads, will they?" "We", of course were the white lads. Luton has been sharply divided along racial lines by recent events. Many of the town's white youth are restless and incensed, and those other extremists, of the far right – the National Front (NF) and the British National Party (BNP) – are circling like vultures. Not for the first time, many of the town's 30,000 or more Muslims are fearful of the backlash provoked, as they would see it, by the actions of the few Islamic extremists, or "troublemakers", as I often heard them called.

Among the would-be march organisers was a white man called Paul Ray who didn't even live in Luton. He runs *Lionheart*, a blog in which he appears to believe he is re-fighting the medieval crusades, the good Christian against the Muslim hordes. He's currently bailed on suspicion of inciting racial hatred. A man who had no shame about giving his name and address wrote to the local paper, *The Luton News*, asking, rhetorically, what he was going to do about Muslims demonstrating and attacking "our troops".

Everyone was blaming everyone else. The whites blamed the authorities for letting it happen and the police for not doing anything about it – why didn't they arrest them ? The moderate Muslims blamed the extremists, the extremists blamed the moderate Muslims for not having the courage of their convictions; the authorities blamed the media for its inflammatory coverage of the parade and the intemperate language it tended to use when writing about Muslims.

But, of course, the rest of the world knew little of the long, slow-simmering tensions in this town and its struggle for harmony – community cohesion, in the jargon of the age – over many years, during which with its mix of race and culture has become increasingly diverse. It's a story of our times – the struggle for all of us, with our varieties of race and religions, to accept our differences and live peacefully together, and the tricky balance of competing freedoms of expression : the freedom to march, the freedom to protest, the right to be free from religious or racial hatred or harassment. "I'm not a racist, but..." one middle-aged white man in Luton told me, "...if they don't like it here, why don't they p... off home ?"



Lance Corporal Sarjit Singh checks his colleague Signaler Simranjit Singh at Wellington barracks in London. The two men were the first Sikh soldiers on public duty in London.



In contrast....

in. The need is to have a holistic picture and not fan any embers of personal prejudices and biases against fellow brethren in the name of culture or religion. Rising above these petty differences and working towards humanity as a whole is the only dictum—and the true religion.

*Compiled from articles by
Rajendra Singh and David James Smith*

Lance Corporal Sarjit Singh, left, of the Army Air Corps, and Signaller Simranjit Singh of the Royal Signals, pose together at Wellington barracks in London, 31 July 2009. [Agencies]



The Portrait



Guru Tegh Bahadur's relics from Dacca

Dr Trilochan Singh was the first Indian writer who visited Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1958-59, and stayed there for about 45 days, doing intensive research work for his book *Guru Tegh Bahadur: Prophet and Martyr*. During this research tour he met eminent writers, thinkers, artists, and had discussions with Major General Umrao Khan, then Martial law Administrator in East Pakistan. The General presented the author a copy of holy *Qu'ran* in January 1959, which is preserved in the library of the author. The complete text of the memorandum given to Major General Umrao Khan was published in *The Sikh Review* of Calcutta, February 1959 part of which is basis for the text of this paper:

"I came to East Pakistan with some fears and misconceptions about the prevailing conditions, but am happy to state that I go back to my country with good impressions and unforgettable gestures of goodwill, touching courtesy and helpful attitude from every quarter. In this memorandum I wish to state some facts, which I hope, will receive due attention from your (East Pakistan) Government. I may mention that I do not represent the views of any political party, nor the views of the Indian Government, as I am not a member of the Government. But I take this opportunity to express my individual views as an Indian thinker and writer."

Sikh Shrines in East Pakistan (Bangladesh)

"I congratulate the Pakistan Government for not interfering in the management of any Gurdwara here although only two or three Bengali Sikhs, and an aged lady, are all that are left to manage the temples in Chittagong, Dacca and Mymensingh. Only two historical places that were left by the Priests (*Pujaris*) have been forcibly occupied by some intruders. All other Gurdwaras are in an excellent condition, and even three hundred year-old records and paintings have been carefully preserved. I give hereunder the exact prevailing condition of these Gurdwaras so that those that are forcibly occupied by some people may be vacated, and others may receive, from time to time, helpful attention of the Pakistan Government."

Sangat-Tola Gurdwara at Dacca

"This is the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur came and stayed for two years (1666-1668). It is here that Guru Tegh Bahadur received news of the birth of Guru Gobind Singh (at Patna). I found two letters of Guru Tegh Bahadur written from Dacca describing how the birth of Guru Gobind Singh was celebrated here. The Dacca Sikh Sangat was called the Hazuri Sangat and in one letter, the Guru blesses Dacca as the 'House of God'. Such was the peace and harmony that prevailed during Shaista Khan's rule."

"We still have a very old painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur, a letter of Guru Gobind Singh dated 1694 and a number of old recensions of *Adi Granth*. An illuminated copy is the best I have seen anywhere. The Gurdwara is maintained by a 75-year-old Bengali Sikh lady, Kanchni Devi, about whom Dr Ahmed Hasan Dani, Curator of Dacca Museum, writes in the recently published book on Dacca: "Popularly known as *Sikhar Ma* (Sikhs' Mother), she is left behind by her co-religionists to keep aflame the torch of Sikhism in this far off land of East Pakistan. The lady, in her old years deserves our appreciation for her great enthusiasm and love of devotion. This lady is a Pakistan national and her son, Kirpal Singh, who comes here from time to time is an Indian national."



Sikhar Ma

The credit for preserving the sanctity of this Gurdwara and the life of this lady goes to a Muslim policeman, Fateh Muhammed, who protected her from all dangers during the troubled period. Fateh Muhammed has been transferred from Dacca but he came back for a weekend the other day and I was able to see the touching affection between Fateh Muhammed and *Sikhar Ma*. Once more I was convinced that the light and wisdom of true religion creates only love and never hatred and bitterness.

The credit for preserving the relics of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh at this Gurdwara goes to Kanchan Devi and her ancestors and credit for preserving the sanctity of Gurdwara Sangat Tola, relics of the Sikh Gurus and life of 75 year old lady, goes to Fateh Muhammed. Kanchan Devi, a Pakistani national was taken to Calcutta by her son Kirpal Singh during the 1971 war for liberation of Bangladesh Desh. She died peacefully in 1973.

Relics of this shrine, the original painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur, prepared by the court painter of Shaista Khan, Governor of Bengal and manuscript copy of *Adi Guru Granth Sahib* were brought to India after the war and emergence of Bangla Desh. The painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur was in bad condition and since has been preserved at the Victoria Memorial Museum in Calcutta while copy of *Adi Granth* is at Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar, Calcutta.

Shaista Khan, a devoted follower of the Guru, also granted *jagir* in the manner of land to Gurdwara Sangat Tola Dacca and

Gurdwara Nanak Shahi Ramna Dacca. The historic Sikh shrine of Sangat Tola is in the heart of the old city of Dacca and was in dilapidated condition. Restoration and building work of the Sikh shrines in Bangla Desh has been taken up by Baba Sukha Singh, Sarhali (Tarn Taran) and the Bangla Desh Gurdwara Management Board.

Historical Painting of Guru Tegh Bahadur by Shaista Khan's Royal Painter

During his stay in Eastern India (1666-1671) Guru Tegh Bahadur lived in Dacca from January to June 1667 and from January to December 1668. A royal reception was given to him at Dacca. The Dacca *Sangat* had built a house specially for Guru Tegh Bahadur's stay, which is now known as Guru Tegh Bahadur's (congregation) *Sangat* and is situated in the Sangat Tola Lane. The locality (*mohalla*) is also called Sangat Tola, this mainly reserved for foreigners. (Close by, was the Christian mission under Father Bernard de Jesus). Unfortunately the historical sermons of Guru Tegh Bahadur, delivered to the congregations (*sangats*) of Bengal, for whom he developed a deep and tender affection, have not been preserved. However, Bengal and the Bengalis have not forgotten the Guru and his message, although Sikh organisations of Northern India, claiming to be custodians of Sikh heritage and values, have unfortunately failed to maintain the spiritual and cultural ties long established by the Sikh Gurus. Shaista Khan had issued a royal order (*firman*) not to collect taxes from the *Dharmasala* of Guru Tegh Bahadur, as a mark of respect for the Guru and devotion to his universal message of peace and brotherhood.

Before his departure from Dacca, Guru Tegh Bahadur consented to the request of Bhai Bulaki Das's mother in having his portrait done by Ahsan, the royal painter of Shaista Khan. This was so that she could continue *darshan* of the Guru's divine personality. Sarup Das Bhalla, a descendent of Guru Amar Das, recorded this historic event of preparing the historical portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur, in his magnum opus *Mehima Prakash* (1773).

*Bara likhari liai mai. Satgur hazur tasbir likhai.
Sagal ang bastr subh likha. Mukh kamal prabha nahi likh saka.
Dekh dial kalam hath lina. Nij hath sudhar sampuran kina.
Tab mai ko murat prabh dina.*

"Mother (of Bhai Bulaki Das) brought the renowned royal painter. The royal painter prepared the portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur in holy presence of the Guru. The entire portrait along with the apparel worn by the Guru, was done by the royal painter, but he could not portray the radiant face of the Guru. Sensing the helplessness of the painter, the compassionate Guru got hold of the painter's brush and completed the self-portrait with his own hand. Then the Guru presented this portrait to the old lady.

The other Sikh chronicle which gives details of this historical portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur is Kavi Santokh

Singh's celebrated work *Suraj Prakash* (1842):

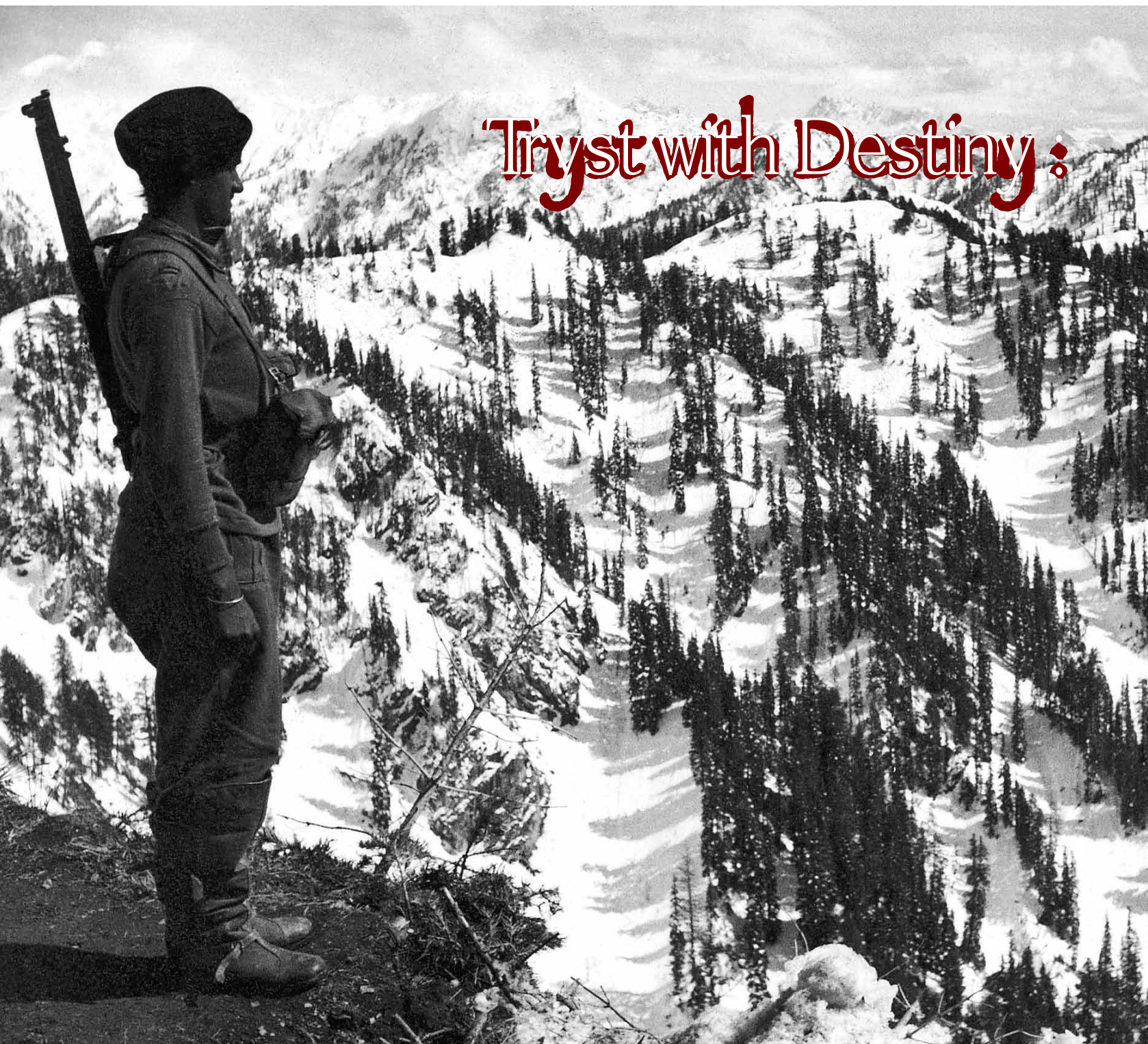
*Ham karne ab kaj ghanere, tav ais te jahi agere
Lihu kikhai meri tasbir, hai ab jatha sachir sarir.
Sun ur harkhi tural sidhai, jai chatere kau le di.
Bhay dhan de kar kahat sunai, jatha jag pikh likhoi
Chatur chitera kar chit chau, baith nikat bandat banai dhar bhau
Ang su basat saje hain jaise, dhare prem ko likh kar tese.
Badan prafulat kamal smana, ruchar bilochan kirpa nidhana
Nah likh saky rahyo pachhutai, tab so kalam gahi gat dai.
Apan hath te mukho likhayo, ur bismae jin jin pikhayo
Nij har te bridhe he dai bhari enand so sundar lai*

"I have to undertake further journeys to perform my divine mission. I shall be leaving this place (Dacca). (To fulfill your earnest desire), you may get done a portrait in my presence, as I am".

Elated at the grace of the Guru, the old lady brought an artist for painting portrait of the Guru. She offered a handsome amount to the artist and requested him to do the portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur in his divine presence. The sagacious painter was delighted and in all humility, sat near the Guru. After invoking blessings of the Master, the painter started work on portrait of the Guru. The painter depicted the Guru in his royal dress in which he was attired. The radiant face of the Guru was blooming like a lotus flower and his eyes were radiant, divine rays of grace, which overwhelmed the painter. Thus he expressed his inability to work upon the glowing face of the Guru. So the merciful Lord took the brush from the painter and painted it in his own hand, giving final touches to complete this portrait. Whosoever had a glimpse of this unique portrait went into ecstasy. Guru Tegh Bahadur thereafter presented this portrait to the old lady who felt blessed tranquility of the mind."

During the Bangladesh war of 1971, various Sikh shrines were also endangered. The holy relics, historic portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur, along with manuscript copy of *Adi Granth*, were retrieved from Gurdwara Sangat Tola, situated in the old quarter of Dacca, built by Bhai Bulaki Das and brought to India in 1975 by the intrepid Capt. Bhag Singh (of 'The Sikh Review'). While other parts of the portrait have faded, the facial part, prepared by the Guru himself remained intact. Another oil painting, a copy of the original portrait, is understood to be preserved in Gurdwara Nanak Shahi Ramana at Dacca. The painting was handed over to the Victoria Memorial Museum at Calcutta for restoration and preservation and was on display in the museum for some time but later in custody of the curator. Another copy was displayed at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

It is a matter of great concern that while crores of rupees are spent on demolishing old Sikh shrines and constructing new ones in their place, nothing is spent to retrieve old relics, preserve old heritage buildings and create historic archives.



Tryst with Destiny :

Iconic picture of Sikh jawan on guard, looking at snow-clad mountainscape of the Kashmir Valley (prize-winning photo by Col Harwant Singh MC).

The 1st Battalion of The Sikh Regiment were at Clement Town, Dehra Dun in early August 1947 when they were specially selected to move to Delhi for ceremonies marking the Independence of India. The battalion mounted guard at the Red Fort, presenting arms to the last Viceroy and the many dignitaries present, both Indian and foreign. Along with contingents of the Royal Indian Air

Force and Royal Indian Navy, the 1st Sikhs unfurled the Tricolour flag of an independent India at the India Gate at 6:00 p.m. on 15 August 1947 and again on 16 August 1947 at 8:00 a.m. at the historic Red Fort. Major Harwant Singh MC was Deputy Parade Commander and the fine bearing and turnout of the guard was greatly praised by General Sir Rob Lockhart, then Commander-in-Chief.



1st Sikhs secure the Vale of Kashmir

and maintaining communal peace. Two companies were deployed at this town, the other two at Palwal and Rewari and other rural areas. The battalion was shortly visited by Lt. General Sir Dudley Russell 'Pasha', Army Commander of the just raised Delhi East Punjab (DEP) Command which had been formed on 20 September 1947. As recorded by his Staff Officer Major (later Lt. General) SK Sinha. "During a tour of Rohtak and Gurgaon in early October 1947, the C-in-C visited several units including 1 Sikh at Gurgaon, commanded by Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai. One could not but be struck by his confidence and bearing which was strikingly different from that of other officers. Russell was visibly impressed and later mentioned that a battalion reflected the personality of its commander. This certainly was to influence the Army Commander in selecting 1 Sikh for a very crucial operation just some weeks later. Earlier, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the Supreme Commander in writing to General Sir Rob Lockhart had singled out the 1st Sikhs on their "exemplary and impartial manner" in which they had performed "their thankless task" at Gurgaon.

On the late evening of 26 October, urgent summons took Major SK Sinha immediately to Command HQ for high level meetings with the BGS, GSOI (Ops) and GSO (Int) where General Russell briefed them on the grave situation developing in Kashmir. The Prime Minister had just given DEP Command the vital task of defending Srinagar and driving out the raiders from the Vale of Kashmir. General Russell directed that an infantry brigade be sent to Srinagar by air starting very early next morning with a parachute brigade group starting their move by road from the Punjab to Jammu.

This was now late October and winter would soon set in, rendering the small airstrip at Srinagar inoperable while the Banihal Pass would also be completely blocked by snow. The RIAF could muster only 3 Dakotas and so other Dakotas had to come from the private civil airlines. With astonishing rapidity, 40 additional Dakotas were requisitioned in 36 hours. General Russell directed that the first troops dispatched by air to Srinagar would be from 1 Sikh, while 77 Para Brigade from Gurdaspur would move northwards by road.

Even amidst the rejoicing, however, was the grimness of communal strife and vicious rioting in northern India, in fact not far from that scene of ceremonies. The battalion, under command of Lt.Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai and including Major Sampuran Bachan Singh, Harwant Singh MC, Hazura Singh, Sardara Singh, Lichmore and KL Suri, Captains Kamaljit Singh and Joginder Singh and Lt. Vijay Singh were soon ordered to Gurgaon, just south of Delhi beyond Palam airfield for internal security



Map from National Geographic, April 1947.

The sub-continental flash point, over six decades after 1947.

1 Sikh, less two Companys, were to assemble at Palam airfield before dawn on 27 October 1947. To make up strength, one battery of 13 Field Regiment (all Sikhs) then located at Delhi was placed under command to function in an infantry role.

The CO was briefed on the operational task at the airfield itself, where warm clothing, rations and ammunition were issued. Information on the enemy was very scanty : "Tribesman numbers and arms unknown but reliably reported to be in thousands and advancing towards Srinagar. The situation is critical". The Op. instruction was to secure Srinagar airfield and the wireless station and "to take such actions with available troops which would drive the tribesmen

away from Srinagar and provide aid to the civil administration for law and order". However, should the pilots not establish contact with civil aviation authorities at Srinagar or if weather conditions were poor, the Dakotas would divert to Jammu to await further instructions.

It was later known that the raiders (or *Kablis*) mostly from the northwest frontier including Pathans, Chitralis and viscous Mahsuds were supported by regular troops "on leave" including the 11th (PAVO) Cavalry in mufti. They were commanded by Brig. Akbar Khan of the 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles under the title of 'General Tariq' who after capturing Muzaffarabad and Domel on the Kashmir

border on 22 October, had swept the few State Forces troops aside and after sacking Uri, had invested Baramula, just an hour's drive away from Srinagar. Some days later, the estimated number of these *Kablis* had increased to 15,000 and they were entering the state of Jammu and Kashmir from various directions, the most ominous being in the Vale itself.

Lt. Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai with his Tac headquarters and 'C' Company, commanded by Capt. Kamlajit Singh, the defence platoon and a section of 3" mortars for the first airlift, were in place at 0330 hours on 27 October. The second wave to follow consisted of 'D' Company under Major Harwant Singh MC and another section of mortars, the rest of the battalion to follow on 28 October, responsibility for the later moves being vested with Major Sampuran Bachan Singh, who would rejoin the battalion at Srinagar soon thereafter. 1 Sikh had an enviable war record, with most of the JCOs and NCOs being experienced war veterans, many highly decorated for gallantry, including Jem. Nand Singh VC, now a platoon commander plus 8 Military Cross holders from the Second World War.

The first Dakotas took off from Palam airfield at dawn, flying northwards over the Punjab and Jammu, past the Pir Panjal range before crossing the Banihal Pass into the Kashmir Valley. They circled over the airstrip south of Srinagar but there were no apparent signs of activity and the lead aircraft touched down at exactly 0915 hours. The troops immediately deplaned and set up defensive positions at the airfield.

Lt. Colonel Dewan Ranjit Rai had two options, either to establish his defences right there and so attempt to hold the raiders or carry the fight to where the enemy were, reported to be numbering some 5000 men, armed with automatic weapons and mortars, but indulging in loot and rape at Baramula, some 45 miles away by hard-surfaced road. Colonel Rai was clear in his mind and immediately



Platoon of the 1st Battalion, Sikh Regiment in position astride Srinagar-Baramulla road, late October 1947.



Light machine gun fire support as the troops advance.



Firing position in the Handwara area.



Advancing along the Wodhapur-Naugam-Kupwara road

led his 264 men in commandeered state government buses along the Jhelum valley passing Pattan and selecting the fateful hill on the 32nd milestone just short of Baramula, for confronting the enemy.

Major Harwant Singh MC, leading 'D' Company had flown into Srinagar with the second wave of Dakotas by 1400 hours and almost straightaway carried out a "flag march" in Srinagar city before also moving out towards Baramula.

Meanwhile Capt. Kamaljit Singh's 'C' Company had begun to dig defensive positions at the mile 32 hill, a dominating feature with its northern flank resting on the Jhelum. Joined by 'D' Company in the late evening under command of Major Harwant Singh, the 1st Sikhs established defence positions between Khojabad and Poshbagh by nightfall and were ready for battle. Early on 28 October morning, the raiders were seen moving out towards Sopur but were now confronted by the Sikhs. The first battle of independent India had begun, with fierce fire fights, including mortar fire exchanges continuing intermittently through the day, even as Colonel Ranjit Rai rushed back to Srinagar to concentrate the move of more de-planing troops. The raiders, seized of how close they had been to their prize, now began to outflank the defensive lines, also moving from Gulmarg towards Sangam. By the evening, with large numbers of enemy fanning around the positions, it was decided to regroup 'C' and 'D'; Companies at Pattan closer to Srinagar. Tragically, Colonel Ranjit Rai fell to a sniper's bullet while re-deploying the troops close to the hill at milestone 32, his body and those of others killed then being hidden under some bushes to be recovered later.

As much later eulogised by a Pakistan military historian "... with no reserve of men or ammunition, Rai made an attack on the invading forces as if he had the entire Division at his support. He saved Srinagar airfield, dashed down the Baramula Road, delayed

the raiders from advancing by a vital 36 hours and enabled reinforcements sent by air to land at Srinagar. He saved Srinagar, although he gave his life in the effort".

In recognition of his courage, Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai was posthumously awarded the first Maha Vir Chakra of the Indian Army and 27 October has since been perpetuated in Indian military history as *Infantry Day*.

The 1st Sikhs re-deployed their defences, thinly strewn from Pattan to Arnaburam and fought off several attacks, even as Major Sampuran Bachan Singh joined them at Pattan and took over command.

Meanwhile, airlift of troops from Delhi and Jammu continued apace and by 30 October, tactical headquarters 161 Infantry Brigade was established at Srinagar, with 1 Kumaon, 1 Punjab and 4 Kumaon. Maj. Gen. Kalwant Singh took over Command of JAK Force and the Royal Indian Air Force provided close air support with Spitfires and Tempests, perilously close to the airfield as also ranging over the valley for tac-rece missions.

The raiders were now flanking towards Srinagar airfield and fierce fighting took place at Badgam and the situation became critical. 1st Sikh remained fully deployed at Pattan with fighting patrols seeking the enemy but were again moved back towards Srinagar to cover the north-east perimeter, guarding the main approach near Shelatang Bridge.

The decisive battle of Shelatang on 7 November 1947 was to break the raider's back and spirit, removing the threat to Srinagar and the Vale of Kashmir. 'B' Company of 1 Sikh had been attacked by nearly 5000 raiders on the 6th night, all attacks beaten back and heavy casualties inflicted. In brilliant tactical moves, while enveloping attacks were carried at by

the Kumanois and armoured cars came up from the rear, 1 Sikh continued their frontal attacks, stunning the enemy who fled the battlefield leaving 472 dead and another 146 on the road towards Baramula, abandoning 138 civilian lorries, field ambulances and load carriers plus a great quantity of arms and ammunition.

An immediate advance was then begun along the main axis, 1 Sikh closely pursuing the fleeing enemy, clearing Pattan on 8 November morning, killing another 150 and wounding 200 of the raiders, capturing vehicles, wireless sets, arms and ammunition. Some of the Pathans captured were regular troops from the Frontier Force "on leave", thus immediately exposing Pakistan's perfidy.

Moving ahead, the battalion flushed out several enemy positions and on 9 November entered a devastated Baramula where the mortal remains of Col. Rai and other NCOs and men were cremated with full military honours. Continuing, the battalion advanced to Rampur and then Uri, via temporary bridges, to find utter chaos all around and then established defensive picquets covering the road Uri to Domel.

The regular Paksitan Army was now committed to battle and adopting an aggressive posture, attacked the battalion with machine guns and mortars. One of the fiercest fighting was for Nalwa picquet on the night of 23-24 November, where 1 Sikh killed about 400 of the enemy, the hero of this defensive battle of Uri being Naik Chand Singh, who was awarded an immediate MVC.

It was soon winter and heavy snowfall meant re-deployment of Indian troops to the lower heights of the wooded Sank Ridge on Uri's southern flank, with regular Pak-Army troops now dominating the Uri bowl. However the brigade, without proper appreciation directed Lt Col. Sampuran Bachan Singh to evict the enemy from Bhatgiran in a frontal, daylight attack.



Medium mortar crew supporting forward positions.



Directing fire during the crucial Battle of Shelatang.

Nb.Sub.Nand Singh VC who had rejoined the battalion was leading his 'D' Company platoon when an unfortunate lapse of communication exposed the advancing troops to well entrenched enemy positions and they suffered heavy casualties. Nand Singh with his platoon tore into the massed enemy with bayonets, he was severely wounded but continued to lead till killed by a burst of LMG fire. His repeated acts of "valour, leadership and devotion to duty", won him a posthumous MVC. Nand Singh passed on into military legend as the most highly decorated soldier of the Commonwealth.

To perpetuate the memory of this gallant warrior, the main bridge over the Uri *nala*, has been named as 'Nand Singh VC'

Bridge and the road to Salamabad as 'Nand Singh VC Road', built with an imposing memorial, overlooking the bridge.

Meantime, Sub.Bishan Singh MC of 'D' Company launched a counter attack and in severe hand-to-hand fighting, the enemy was thrown back, even as more troops were thrown into battle but Bishen Singh, continuing to cheer and encourage his men, was killed fighting. His cool courage, inspiring leadership and dogged determination against heavy odds, earned him a posthumous MVC, Sub. Gurcharan Singh MC+Bar also showed gallantry of the highest order and earned

via Sopur and advanced along the snow bound road, securing a firm base at Handwara the next afternoon. Ironically, the Pakistani 1st AK Battalion facing 1st Sikhs was commanded by Lt Colonel Nausherwan Khan, formerly of the 5th Sikhs and a colleague of Harbaksh Singh. Soon Handwara was cleared and the 1st Sikhs advanced along the road Wodhapur-Naugam-Kupwara, the going being very hard because of snow and burnt bridges. Tregham was then relieved, the enemy seen fleeing and pursuit continued with some fire fights including at village Shulur where 40 of the enemy were killed. The clearing operations



1st Sikhs patrolling in the glacier-like terrain.

a VrC. But the battalion suffered 125 casualties in this futile action because of inept orders from the top.

However, the Pakistanis thereafter stopped interfering with traffic over the Uri bridge, which led to another successful operation that cleared the area upto Sank. 1 Sikh had within six days re-captured the towns of Pattan, Baramula and Uri over a distance of 100 kilometres, suffered severe casualties but inflicted multiple times that on the enemy, mostly regular Pak. Army troops. *The Kashmir Valley had been saved by the bold and courageous warriors of the 1st Battalion, of the Sikh Regiment.*

Lt Col Harbaksh Singh had now taken over as CO 1 Sikh when during the height of severe winter, news came of the enemy, having crossed over Pharkian Gali, were spreading into the Tregham Valley. On 8 February 1948, the battalion moved out in darkness,



1st Sikhs after securing Handwara.

in the Tregham Valley were some of the toughest in the J&K operations, but were tackled with courage and tenacity.

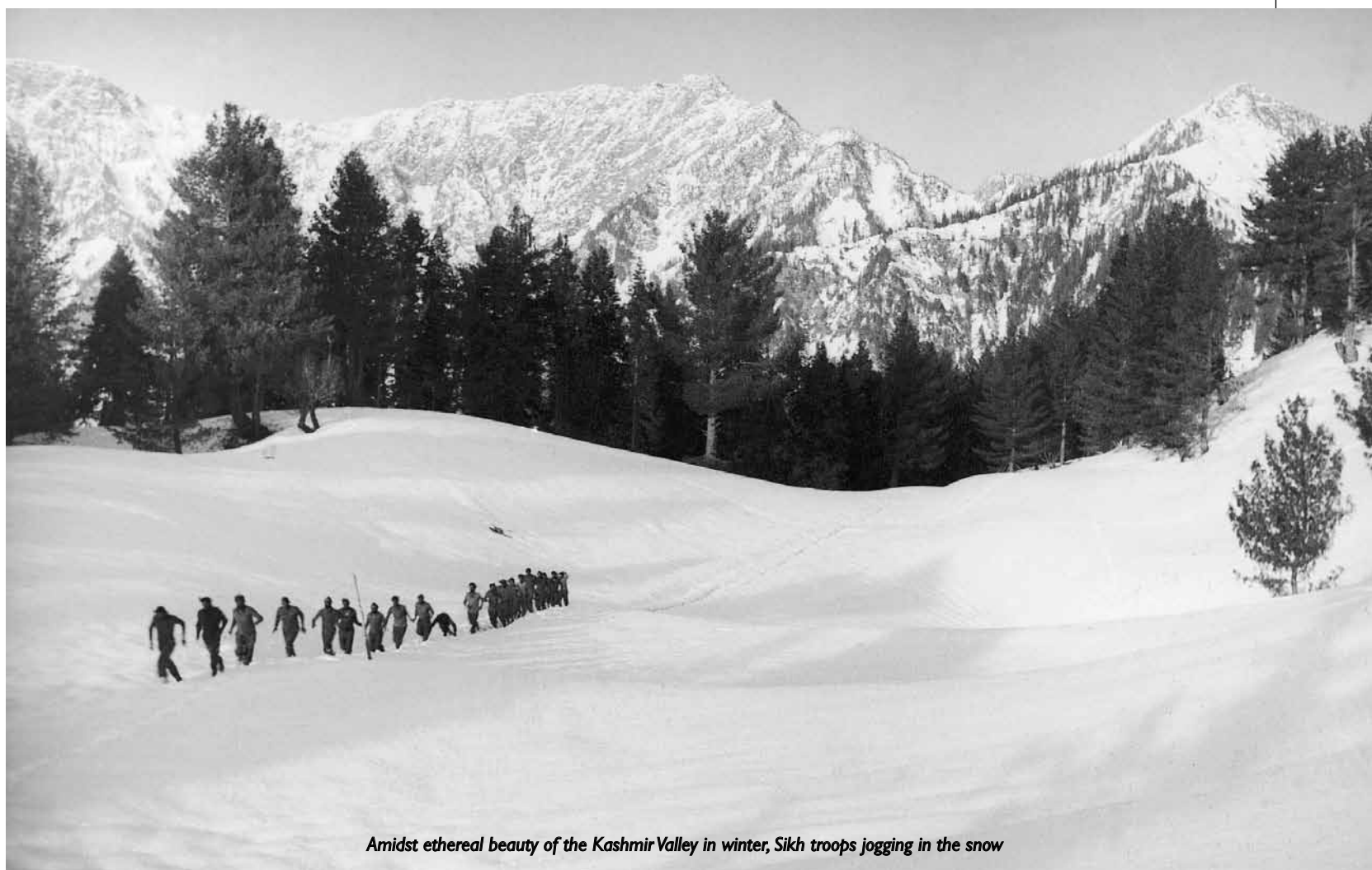
After some rest and re-organisation, 1st Sikh were in fine fettle and spirits when regular Pak. Army formations were identified as astride the heights along the Uri-Muzaffarabad area and Haji Pir, spreading north of Uri and into the Kishanganga area. The Pakistan Army's "official" involvement in J&K was eventually admitted in April 1948 by General Sir Douglas Gracey, C-in-C Pak Army stating that "it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Nowshera". The first Pak Army's formation to go into Kashmir was 101 Brigade and by June 1948 both the 7th and 9th (Frontier) Divisions were reported in action.

Major General K.S. Thimayya, GOC Sri Div (later 19th Infantry Division), with 163 Brigade now commanded by Brigadier Harbaksh Singh of which 1 Sikh, 3 Garhwal and 1 Madras were constituent, had planned offensive operations towards Domel in the spring but resources were grossly inadequate. Regardless, 1 Sikh secured Chokibal on 21 May 1948 and two days later Tithwal was captured. 1 Sikh were assigned the task of clearing the heights of Richmar Gali and Point 7229 on the left of Nastachhun Pass and north of the Kishanganga. Commanded by Lt. Col. Keshar Singh IDSM, 1 Sikh carried out a reconnaissance in force, with 'B' and 'C' Companies being grouped under Major Harwant Singh MC.

crests well covered by series of machine gun posts. The C.O. had declared that even though the enemy was strongly entrenched, shouted '*Sheron, Chhad Jao !*'.

They certainly did and the 1st Sikhs assaulted the enemy (identified as the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment, the venerable 53rd (Royal) Sikhs of undivided Indian Army) with severe hand to hand fighting. The opposing 10th Pak. Army Brigade included some five battalions, including the 4/16 Punjab, 3/12 Frontier Force Rifles, 5/12 FF Regt ('Guides') and MMGs of 1/15 Punjab plus a mountain battery.

1 Sikh defences then leant on Pir Sahiba in the west with a rifle company on Nangi Terki, the troops creating very strong defence works in the wooded



Amidst ethereal beauty of the Kashmir Valley in winter, Sikh troops jogging in the snow

The approach to Richmar Gali involved a single file climb up a steep gradient with enemy positions to be cleared all along. On 30 May, assaults were launched against the strongly held ridge and wooded

feature. On 4 June, under heavy artillery fire, the enemy launched strong attacks, but were held by Jem Harchand Singh's platoon and counter attacked with bayonets and grenades, killing 53 and capturing arms



1 Sikh mortars in action.

and ammunition in this battle which coincided with *Gallipoli Day*, the epic action that had taken place 33 years earlier.

Although a UN-directed Cease Fire was anticipated, the enemy used heavy artillery, mortars and machine guns to continuously attack 1 Sikh positions, having declared that the Kashmir war was to be a '*jehad*'. The re-capture of Tithwal, with Richmar Gali as vital objective, became the Pakistan Army's obsession and a reinforced brigade, with artillery, was deployed to ring the position and the General even broadcast that the Tithwal Valley-Nastachhan pass upto Kupwara was to be "an Id gift for Pakistan".

A four-man section of Sikhs on a small knoll covering the knife edged ridge was to beat back battalion-sized attacks, the man of the moment being L/Nk Karam Singh who had won the Military Medal in Burma. From the evening of 12 October 1948, heavy artillery and mortar fire damaged the main defences but the saddle had been overlooked. Throughout

13 October, the battle was fought, wave after wave of assaulting Pak Army troops being beaten back as Karam Singh, though wounded, fought it out, bayoneting those who came near his trench, holding the saddle for over three hours against five waves of attackers.

Counter attacks, artillery fire and RIAF strafing during daylight hours held the enemy even as Sikhs in the forward-most trenches grappled with the attackers, using bayonets and grenades. On the night of 13 October and following morning, the seventh and last of the attacks was beaten off and even if every bunker was destroyed, the enemy did not capture any. While the Pak Army lost over 300 men and 500 wounded, with many POWs taken, the 1st Sikhs had 15 killed and 263 wounded.

Maj. Gen. Thimayya, brimming over with pride and praise, termed the battle for Richmar Gali as "a magnificent fight". L/Nk Karam Singh was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his fiercely proud spirit and



Prime Minister of India inspects 1st Sikh Guard of Honour at Badami Bagh in Srinagar.



Injured but cheerful, jawans of the 1st Sikhs after the 'magnificent fight' at Richmar Gali.



The heavily wooded mountains of Richmar Gali where the 1st Sikhs held off four infantry battalions of the Pakistan Army, supported by heavy artillery fire.

as a "dauntless and born leader of men in crisis, where spirits could neither be subdued by fire nor hardship".

1st Battalion of The Sikh Regiment were given the battle honours *Srinagar 1947* and *Tithwal 1948* and *J&K 1947, 1948* as Theatre Honours.

The Vale of Kashmir remains with India.

[Photographs from Col. Harwant Singh MC]

Epitome of Harmony

Gurdwara Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Dhubri, Assam.

Dhubri is a small town near the India-Bangladesh border in Assam and about five hours drive from Guwahati and very famous for the historical Gurdwara Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Ji. This is the most important shrine for the Sikh community in the north-east of India and managed by the Sikh Pratinidhi Board, Eastern Zone. Though, the Sikh population in Dhubri is small as compared to other places of Assam like Guwahati, Golpara, Borkhola, Chaparmukh and Dibrugarh, this place is seen thronging with devotees from all over India—and the world—every year in the month of December to mark the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur, with due solemnity. This day is marked as the *Sahidi Jormela* or *Sahidi GURPURAB*.

The Gurdwara, *Sri Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib Ji*, located within busy streets of this town, stands on a high platform near the banks of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The white structure of the Gurdwara rises high from its base with its simple but distinctive architecture. At the entrance is a simple gateway, followed by a number of stairs painted red in colour leading to the open courtyard from where one can enter into the sanctum or *Darbar Sahib*.

At corner of the courtyard stands the *nishaan-sahib* wrapped in saffron-coloured cloth. The first floor of the Gurdwara is actually a gallery overlooking the sanctum where *Guru Granth Sahib*, is enshrined. On the terrace is a dome with an elongated drum where a hand written *Guru Granth Sahib* is placed. There is also an octagonal domed structure, towards the left side. The whole structure looks like a white building whose lower part is made of white marble while the upper part is covered with white plaster. Its monotony is broken by a number of small arched windows. There are a number of miniature domes and kiosks or *chattris* around the terrace wall which add animation to the architectural setup. Besides there is a *Langar Hall* or Community Kitchen where food is prepared and served to the *sangat* twenty four hours a day. New upcoming structures can also be seen in the Gurdwara complex.

Tracing historical significance of the place, we come to know that it was visited by the First Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev in 1505, during the reign of the Ahom King Suhungmung. He came here during his first major travel or *Udasi* to exude goodness (*Jagat Udharan*) and spread the word about the oneness of



Places that Guru Nanak Dev visited in his Udis.

God. Later in February 1669, the Ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, visited this place with Raja Ram Singh, of Amber (Jaipur). At that time India was being ruled by the autocratic Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

There was a long-drawn war between the Mughals and the Ahoms. The Mughals had captured many areas of Assam, but in 1667 the Ahoms not only

recovered most areas taken by the Mughals, but also occupied Guwahati, the seat of their faith and culture, the city of Kamakhya temple, the soul of their dharma and very existence. It was with this purpose that Aurangzeb sent Raja Ram Singh, a mercenary Rajput General in his army to reconquer the lost territories from the Ahom ruler, Chakradhwaj Singh. The Ahoms were well known not only for their war skills but also for possessing supernatural powers and the "art of black magic". Of all the generals who had been sent on that mission, none except Raja Man Singh, ever returned. Thus Raja Ram Singh's parents who were the followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur, advised him to seek protection of the Holy feet and accompany him in his expedition, in which case victory would certainly be his. Guru Tegh Bahadur accepted his request in order to revive the religious message spread by the earlier visit of Guru Nanak Dev.

When King Chakradhwaj Singh heard the news of Raja Ram Singh's arrival to attack him, he made



Guru Teg Bahadur arranges for peace between Raja Ram Singh and King Chakradhwaj of Ahom. (Painting by Amolak Singh).

preparations to destroy him and his army. He sent for women of his land who were known for their magical skills to overpower natural forces and destroy human beings. One of these witches was a *dhoban* or washerwomen named Naitani who hurled a very heavy piece of stone measuring 3ft by 2.25ft in thickness and 25ft in length towards Guru Teg Bahadur. The stone came hurtling across the sky like a missile and struck the ground at a distance of about 100 yards from the holy benefactor, so hard that nearly half of it went into the ground and the other half (about 13 ft) remained jutting out, at an angle of about 50 degrees. On failure of her first attempt she flung a *Pipal* tree towards him, which kept flying in the air without causing injury to anyone. The witch tried all means but her powers failed in promise of the great Guru. finally she asked for forgiveness, and told him that they were only fighting against the foreigners who had come to enslave them. She then took his blessings and became his disciple. Guruji was pleased by her devotion and dedication and named the place '*Dhubri*' after her.

Guru Tegh Bahadur thus acted as a pacifier between Raja Ram Singh and the Ahom King and asked them to achieve their end through peaceful negotiations. This scene of mutual no-war agreement between the two sides is beautifully painted by the artist Amolak Singh, now displayed in Bhai Mati Das Bhai Sati Das Bhai Dayala Museum of Gurdwara Sis Ganj, New Delhi.

In this painting Guru Teg Bahadur is seen seated on the right side while leaders of the two armies extend hands of friendship towards each other. This is further emphasised by both Hindu and Muslim soldiers who are shown digging earth in the background and carrying the mud in their shields to make the mound of peace as per the Guru's order. The foreground is well carpeted and indicates the interior of a tent. On the left are shown people from different tribes witnessing the event.

The belief is that the tree started growing on this new soil and survives to this day which can be reached from the third storey of the Gurdwara.

As for the huge stone, it too stands in the same position, outside the Gurdwara in the *Kchahries* or Court complex across the road. It is said that during the British period when some officers tried to take it out from its original place to start some construction work, they failed to do so.

In order to blow it up, they started drilling on its sides to fit explosives but blood then started flowing from it! Thus it was left unmolested under official instructions. It is now protected by a low height wall and an iron railing from three sides.



The present sight of the tree at Gurdwara Teg Bahadur Sahib, Dhubri.



The stone still embedded near the massive Gurdwara at Dhubri

The Dhubri Gurdwara remains a major Sikh pilgrimage centre in the North Eastern region of India as an epitome of peace and harmony.

Rupinder Kaur

Be Prepared!

Sikhs in the Scout Movement

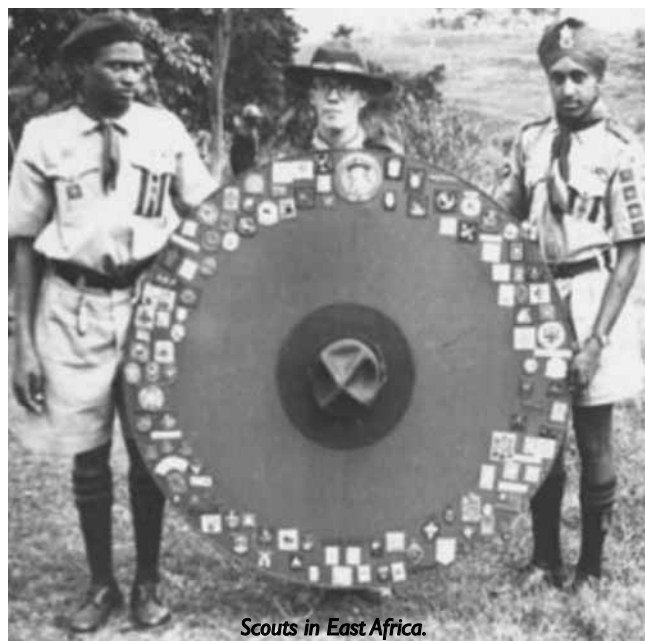
Sikhs had always been part of the British Empire in its heyday, whether it was in the armed forces or in the engineering services, they travelled, contributed and conquered the minds of everyone associated with the British. The Sikhs also became the first to get introduced to typically British institutions such as the worldwide Scouting movement that took birth under the Imperial umbrella. The principles of Scouting worked well in congruence with the Sikh ethos.

The Scout movement took shape based on ideas in the book, *Scouting for Boys* (London, 1908) by Lord Robert Baden-Powell of Gilwell, who was earlier a Lt. General in the British Army. The movement reached Indian shores as early as 1909, within two years of its inception. The first troop of the Scouts was started in India by TH Baker in Bangalore. The Scout Headquarters in London also appointed a Chief Commissioner for India. Brigadier General FG Bond, Scout Commissioner for Madras was appointed Chief Commissioner. In another development in the year 1907-1908, Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha State started a scheme for training of boys called "Munda Fauj" (Army of boys) which was very much like Baden Powell's scheme of training. It included drill, camping and a literacy programme. Each boy was required to spend some hours a week in the exercise of drill. They were provided with khaki uniforms. Colonel Kharak Singh was appointed their leader to organise the movement.

On 30 January 1918, a troop of scouts was inaugurated at the A P Mission School, Dehra Dun, with Rev HR Ferger as the Scout Master. Sardar Hardial Singh joined as his Assistant Scout Master. The First World Scouters' INDABA was held at Gilwell Park, England in 1952. Among the fourteen scouters who attended was Sardar Hardial Singh representing the Punjab. He continued to serve the Scout Movement in India till the very end at the Taradevi Training Centre in Simla Hills as its Camp Chief. Captain (Navy) Mohan Singh Kohli, Leader of



Canadian Scout leaders showing interest in the Indian badges worn by RS Somi.



Scouts in East Africa.

the Indian Expedition to Mt Everest which created a record by putting nine men atop the summit, was made Honorary Commissioner of the Boy Scouts.

Another distinguished Sikh who at an early age became well known to the world of Scouting was RS Somi. Born in the Himalayan town of Landaur



Sikh scouts in Kenya.

near Mussoorie, Somi had a rare career in the Boy Scout Movement ascending from a Cub Scout to the highest levels of training in scoutcraft. He was admitted into the scout fraternity as a cub scout and later as a boy scout. Somi independently ran open groups including the Doon Valley Cub Pack, Adersh Scout Troop and the Doon Hills Rover Crew and rose to become Assistant District Scout Commissioner for Dehra Dun. He received the Scout Wood Badge and Cub Wood Badge under the training scheme of Gilwell Park, London at a very young age. He was hon'ble in charge of the Deputy Camp Chief attached to General Headquarters of the Boy Scouts. He has been their Chief Public Relations Officer throughout and contributed richly to the scout publications. He was awarded the Long Service Medal, Medal of Merit and the Silver Star.

In the continent of Africa, Sikhs took to Scouting early. The honour of the 'King's Scout' goes to Harcharan Singh Sehmi of Nyeri who got his 'Bushman's Thong' from Lord Rowallan in 1950. Avtar Singh Purba and Manjit Singh Dhillon earned their 'Queen Scout', the highest award for a Boy Scout which was presented to them by the Chief Scout of Kenya, Sir Godfrey Rhodes. Avtar Singh was the only Asian selected for the honour of laying a wreath on the grave of Lord Baden Powell in Nyeri, as being the first Queen Scout after Princess Elizabeth's accession to the throne. Avtar Singh being a first class scout was an excellent all-rounder sportsman, excelling

in hockey, cycling, mountaineering and so on. He was the coast table tennis champion and represented Kenya many times in this field.

Formed in the UK, the 13th Southhall Sikh Scouts have carved their niche in the movement during the year 1998. The Sikh Scout groups take part in traditional Scouting activities, becoming increasingly independent and adventurous. The scout movement is spreading among Sikh youth in a big way.

Any Sikh youth who has been touched by the spirit of Scouting, has discovered that it has its foundations on principles that are similar to those of the Sikh faith. This not only prepares young Sikh boys towards becoming good world citizens but also exposes them to world platforms in the true Sikh tradition of *Chardi Kalan!*

Dr. Rishi Singh

Dr Rishi Singh is PhD in History from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

