

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Historical Backdrop of the Anti-Sikh Riots: Perspectives from the Victim Community**

Narratives of history are subject to revisions and new interpretations unless measures are intentionally taken to impede such endeavours. The act of rewriting history, particularly when it pertains to instances of historical violence that have had profound effects on entire societies, can be seen as a relevant political act. Engaging in this process facilitates a varied understanding of history from multiple perspectives, leading to a more nuanced and precise representation of reality. The documentation of history after the 1984 Riots was almost nonexistent and was largely influenced by political propaganda. There were conscious efforts to silence attempts to document the reality of the incident. The narratives which were in circulation in the subsequent years portrayed the incident as a communal violence between two religious groups, provoked by the assassination of Indira Gandhi. It is in recent years that various attempts have been made to rewrite the incident to throw light on the reality, particularly from the perspective of the afflicted. The truth of the incident (which took into account perspectives from both sides) generally remained hidden, and untold for many years until a few journalists, historians, scholars, novelists, and filmmakers started to document their versions of the incident.

It is debatable if we can call the historical writings of 1984 as rewritings, as it is difficult to differentiate them as a separate collection of works from the official and accepted version of history. The historical documentation of the incident was almost nonexistent. The official version of the documentation of the incident was largely manipulated and did not reflect the reality of the incident. The unofficial documentation was incomplete in the beginning, as they lacked clarity about the incidents. The historical attempts began after decades and intended to find and establish the reality of the incident. The use of the term 'rewriting' here is validated by the political and social dispositions evident in these writings to expose and highlight the reality of 1984. These writings along with fictional, cinematic, and other similar creative and non-creative mediums challenge the silencing and controlling of historical truths and create a new discourse on the incident.

A proper understanding of the history of the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots is mandatory when one tries to approach the creative works surrounding the incident. Most fictional works relating to the 1984 Riots are influenced by the writers' direct and immediate experience of violence, and most of the novels belong to the genre of historical fiction. My source for creating an elaborate understanding of the entire incident and different perspectives about it is formed mainly based on the historical writings mentioned here. In this chapter, I attempt to look at the various available perspectives about the incident alongside different fictional works, especially the works that have been selected for the study.

A detailed historical analysis of the fictional works is made possible by careful study of historical texts based on the incident. This includes non-fictional accounts, with a noteworthy emphasis on acknowledging that these non-fictional narratives are also penned by authors who are less recognized and fall outside the established canon. The extensive reliance on writings from lesser-known writers and historians is primarily due to the omission of the victims' suffering in official historical records. These works have been noteworthy in contributing to the process of uncovering the truth of violence and officially presenting an alternative discourse regarding the catastrophe. It includes texts like *1984: India's Guilty Secret* (2019) written by Pav Singh, *1984: The Anti-Sikh Violence and After* (2015) by Sanjay Suri, *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and its Aftermath* (2007) co-authored by Manoj Mitta and HS Phoolks, *Betrayed by the State: The Anti-Sikh Pogrom of 1984* (2007) by Jyoti Grewal, Jarnail Singh's *I Accuse...: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984* (2011), and Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay's *Sikhs: The Untold Agony of 1984* (2015). The non-fictional sections in the books *Black November: Writings on the Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath* (2019) compiled by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry and *1984: In Memory and Imagination* (2016) edited by Vikram Kapur have also attempted to document the traumatised section's version of the incident.

The relationship between writing history and writing trauma is inherently complex. The documentation of a traumatic event, which includes both its psycho-sociological impact and historical details, often presents a tension between representational practices that may appear incompatible. However, the study of texts on the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots seeks to explore how these works create a dialogue between trauma and history. By navigating through various literary representations of the event, the aim is to understand both the historical context of the incident and the portrayal of trauma. This analysis goes beyond

the representational challenges posed by the Western trauma paradigm, focusing primarily on how the event is historically documented. A focus on the historical dimension is essential for examining the fictional works in the following chapters. It is crucial to map how the text reflects various aspects of history, as these narratives seem to challenge the conventional, disruptive nature of trauma representation. The literary works confront the unresolved history of the violent event, both for the writers personally traumatized by it and for the broader community. By tracing the traumatic impact of the incident, an ongoing source of suffering for its victims, the writings endeavor to piece together a fragmented history.

## **2.1 History of Communal Riots in India and the Rise of Sikh Militancy**

The post-colonial attempts to shelter communities with diverse religious, cultural, and ideological choices and identities in India have not been always successful. The secular credentials of the independent nation seemed to have taken a beating in the 1980s. Of course, historians like Ashis Nandy have dealt with the incompatibility of the Western idea of secularism in South Asian countries including India. Nandy in his article titled ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’ (1999) has dealt with this topic in detail. Secularist ideologies, which were introduced by Nehru in India are identified by many scholars as being incompatible to bring together people of multiple religious identities. By studying Nandy’s observations, Salah Punathil shows that the “modern Western rational-scientific secularism, which Nehru sought to impose on us, has failed both in eliminating religions from politics as well as in promoting greater religious tolerance” (2019, 05). According to such post-colonial interpretations, the increased number of communal riots emerged on the failure of this secular project. One of the main arguments put forth by those scholars is that secularism is alien to India. Critics like Kaviraj have established that a secular state would not be able to defend religious plurality (Quoted in Punathil, 2019, 05).

Religious differences in India have been the primary factor that encouraged communal clashes in India. Punathil, by examining several studies like post-colonial, Marxist, psychoanalytical and instrumentalist engagements postulates that “violence is ultimately the consequence of the mobilization of religious identity” (2019, 04). Among the long history of communal violence starting from post-colonial times, violence based on such mobilization of religious identity was limited to the conflict mostly between Hindus and

Muslims. The 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots was the only incident of such violence aimed at Sikhs so far. Though there were attacks against Sikhs during the Partition of 1947, the community was only one among the many which were targeted.

Though the history of such communal violence goes back to the years before Independence and the colonial period, the worst communal riots started emerging after the colonial rule ended (Shezad, 2019, 03). The primary reason behind the outbreak of several such riots was probably the colonial policy of 'divide and rule' according to Stewart. The British policy of 'divide and rule' was adopted to create communal disharmony among the people of India who belonged to various religious, racial, caste, economic and socio-political groups (Stewart, 1951, 49). Shezad similarly observes that the colonial policy of divide and rule finally ended with the Partition of India. According to him, "various movements that took place in India promoted sharp ideological and separate identity culture that divided the people automatically" (2019, 03). This process, he has added, continued till the Partition of India and Pakistan in the year 1947. In the communal clashes that were unleashed following the Partition, millions were attacked and Partition has led to the growth of communalism in India (Stewart, 2019, 03).

The majority of communal riots that took place in the years following Partition and Independence occurred in the 1980s. Mention should be made of the Muradabad Riots (1980), Nellie Massacre (1983), Bhiwandi Riots (1984), Gujarat Riots (1985), Meerut Communal Riots (1984), Bhagalpur Violence (1989), and Kashmir Violence of 1989. Among these incidents of violence, the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots was the largest in Indian history in terms of its sheer impact. Shezad has pointed out that the main causes of these communal riots before the 1970s and 1980s were mainly religious differences and mobilization based on religious identity. But after the 1970s and 1980s, religious factors started to merge with several other causes (Shezad, 2019, 03). Various political and socio-economic problems started to also influence the nature of communal violence in India, the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots being one of those.

A closer look into the reasons that led to the largest communal riot in India sheds light on several reasons, apart from religion. All existing studies about the incident agree on one significant point; the incident was not a mere result of the immediate actions to avenge the community of the assassins of Indira Gandhi. Historians point to other reasons which are political, economic, as well as historical in nature.

Above all, unravelling the political interests and plotting behind the incident is crucial. The role of the Congress Party<sup>1</sup> in the incidents, which was the ruling party of the time, has been dealt with in detail in the previous pages. Though those organized actions seemed like a sudden provocation to take revenge for Indira Gandhi's killing, writers like Pav Singh and Mukhopadhyay have talked about the possibility of other various reasons. The uncertainty of the political dominance of the Congress Party, and the strained political relationship between Akali Dal<sup>2</sup> which was the strongest in Punjab, and Congress can all be listed as reasons that led to the incident (Pav Singh, 2017, 56).

The militancy in Punjab and the demand for a separate independent state had been used by Congress to strengthen their political propaganda to create a situation of growing resentment against the Sikhs (Pav Singh, 56). There were intentional efforts to make both Operation Bluestar<sup>3</sup> and the riots which followed 'inevitable' from the side of the Congress (Pav Singh, 56). The Sikhs were portrayed as 'anti-national', who were going to rip the country apart, which in effect gave the Congress Party images of guardians of the country (Pav, 57). The role of the Congress party in creating a leader of Sikh militants was also important. It is said that Congress "created" Bhindranwale<sup>4</sup> in their efforts to fight the Akali Dal (Suri, 2015, 42).

The economic reasons that led to the violence were also not less relevant in this regard. Investigation reports have found a pattern which adds to the credibility of the observations made by writers like Suri and Mukhopadhyay. There was a pattern in the acts of violence which had an economic base. Amod Kanth, who was the DCP heading the central district of Delhi confirms this in an interview given to Sanjay Suri, by adding more credibility to the observations made by historians (Suri, 2015, 135). The

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<sup>1</sup> One of the major political parties in India and was the ruling party when the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots occurred. Later investigations have revealed that a number of the party's political leaders were heavily involved in organising the 1984 Riots.

<sup>2</sup> Akali Dal or Shiromani Akali Dal is a prominent political party in India, specifically in the state of Punjab. It is a Sikh-centric regional party that prioritizes the needs of the Sikh community. Political conflicts between the Congress Party and Akali Dal are believed to have contributed to the events that culminated in the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

<sup>3</sup> Military action carried out by the Indian Army in June 1984 to remove Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his Sikh militant group from the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar, Punjab. Despite being successful, the operation caused controversy and harm to the Sikh community because it damaged the most sacred site in the Sikh faith.

<sup>4</sup> Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a known Sikh political leader/activist/militant who gained popularity in the years before Operation Bluestar. He was associated with Akali Dal and later became the centre figure of the demand for Khalistan, a separate state for Sikhs. He was killed by Indian Army in Operation Bluestar

perpetrators who attacked affluent Sikh houses and business enterprises were all from underprivileged backgrounds. This pattern was identified throughout all places of violence in India, where violence was unleashed. In response to Suri's query regarding this pattern Amod Kanth has replied that the Sikhs were "attacked by communities in the neighbourhood that were not so-rich. The attackers came from these communities everywhere" (Suri, 135).

The majority of Sikhs who were attacked and whose houses and shops were robbed were those who migrated from other parts during the Partition. Though, in the beginning, everyone in such resettlement colonies was poor, Sikhs became affluent and established over time. The majority of people who belonged to other communities and who were resettled during the Partition failed to raise their status at the same pace. In fact, different communities established colonies which stood close by but there were visible economic differences between them.

The perpetrators did not aim only to kill or attack like how they might have during communal violence. There were large-scale incidents of looting and burning of shops owned by Sikhs. There were clear motives to destroy all possibilities of the victims recovering to their earlier economic status. Though Sikhs as a religious community did not constitute a notable presence in the capital city, they had got the attention as very efficient when it came to running business. This was not different in other affected areas outside New Delhi, like Bokaro in Jharkhand, and Kanpur which were two of the worst affected areas after Delhi. Mukhopadhyay writes about the Sikh industrious community in Bokaro. According to him, "Sikhs were respected as an industrious community primarily because after Partition, a large number of migrants had initiated new business ventures in eastern India and gradually became influential members of Bokaro society. This was severely resented by the locals and when the riots broke out in November 1984, the Sikhs were targeted en masse irrespective of their economic status" (2015, 120-121).

This pattern was reflected in the violence against Sikhs in Kanpur as well. Kanpur was a city that had a significant industrious population of Sikhs. During the incident, large to medium entrepreneurs in the city were targeted, attacked and killed. The horrifying situation in Kanpur led to the immediate migration of the majority of Sikhs to other areas in India, where the Sikhs were large in number like Amritsar (Mukhopadhyay, 132).

Apart from that, there were historical reasons behind the Anti-Sikh Riots that had been in the making for several years. Sikhs, beginning from the distant past had established themselves as an identifiable politico-religious group irrespective of their smaller numerical presence. They had proved themselves as a community of great military, economic, agricultural, and political potential (Pav Singh, 62). Jyoti Grewal writes, “Despite the Turko-Afghan rulers,<sup>5</sup> Mughal satrapies,<sup>6</sup> Pahari rajas, <sup>7</sup>Ahmad Shah Abdali,<sup>8</sup> British annexation, the Partition, Sikh fundamentalism, and militancy- Sikhs, a minority religious community, as a qaum, have carved out a place for themselves in South-Asian history, however, contested that place might be” (2007,11). Above all, Sikhs held a special place in the British Indian Army. Special importance was given to the members of the community in the army because of their increased and active participation. There were efforts inside British Indian Army, writes Tully and Satish Jacob, to build the Sikh identity as a separate martial race which was loyal to the crown (Tully & Jacob, 1985, 48). The number of soldiers in the army increased during World War I and they played significant roles. The role of soldiers from the Sikh community was again very influential in World War II. Even today, their significant participation is acknowledged as remarkable. Recently, the British Army Brigadier, Celia Jane Harvey, has observed that the role of Sikh soldiers in both World Wars was exemplary and the valiant Punjabi soldiers were responsible for the liberation of European nations (The Economic Times, 2019). He pointed out that the Sikhs as a community are well respected everywhere in the world because of their sincere and hard-working nature.

The Sikh empire was one of the last to surrender before the British powers in India. “Sikh Army was probably the most formidable opponent the British faced on the Indian Subcontinent”, quotes Shaikh in an article examining the role of Sikh soldiers in colonial India (2023). There was heavy recruiting of Sikhs to the British Indian Army. Since then, the Sikh soldiers were prized and respected by the British for their gallantry in the battles in which they were part. Imy writes that “in the early twentieth century many

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<sup>5</sup> Refers to the historical period when different regions in South Asia were dominated by the rulers of Turko- Mongol or Afghan origin. During the rule of Turko- Afghan dynasties in the Indian subcontinent, Sikh have played major roles in resisting various religious and political oppressions.

<sup>6</sup> The Sikhs, being identified as a martial community, displayed a lack of tolerance towards Mughal practices and dominance. They actively resisted Mughal authorities in order to safeguard their religious freedom and preserve their distinct identity.

<sup>7</sup> The leaders of the Pahari region, encompassing the hilly areas of Northern India. Sikhs are recognized for safeguarding their religious sites in these mountainous territories of the Paharis.

<sup>8</sup> The originator and initial leader of the Durrani Empire, spanning present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northwestern India, experienced a tense relationship with the Sikhs.

Britishers believed that Sikh men were the living embodiment of perfect soldiers” (2023). Winston Churchill, the former Prime minister of England, was always full of praise for the Sikhs for their contributions. Acknowledging the indebtedness of the British, in the World Wars, Churchill has said that “British people are highly indebted and obliged to Sikhs for a long time. I know that within this century we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result of their timely help, we are today able to live with honour, dignity, and independence” (Beckerman, 2018). It is noteworthy that he was appreciating the Sikhs specifically and not the Indians altogether. It has been always a pride to the members of the community that they were part of various battles in different places in the past, it was not just limited to India. Ajay Sura wrote that “Sikhs have always been at the forefront of all the wars fought by India as well as its military operations. It was only because of the immense contribution of the Sikhs to the armed forces that Punjab has been known as the sword arm of the nation” (2023).

They remain a significant presence in different episodes of Indian history. They had always claimed a distinct collective identity and presence even while being associated with various administrative and military affairs of the country. After being divided during the Partition, there were demands for a separate land for the Sikhs. The demands for a separate independent state were not something formed during the years before Operation Blue Star or late militant years in Punjab. These demands, in fact, started with the Partition of 1947.

The continuous discussions and political movements for a distinct nation threatened the unity of the Republic of India, as can be seen from the continuous attempts of suppression which existed from the side of the government during those years till 1984. Another point raised by Jyoti Grewal as one factor which was not that visible like others is that, Sikhs as a minority community in India were expected to live in India by following certain conditions. She shows that there is an erroneous notion prevalent in India that minorities like the Sikhs and Muslims who have been living in India after the Partition of 1947, are doing so on the terms of the majority of Hindus (2007, 09). It should be noted that the 1984 violence was defended with the subtext which says - “Humne tumhe is mulk mein rehne diya, aur tumhari yeh himmat ki tumne hammari PM ki jaan li” (we let you live in this country, and you had the audacity to kill our Prime Minister) (2007, 09).



## 2.2 Sikhs in Modern India

The different narratives dealing with the Riots give special emphasis to the contributions of the Sikhs as a community in India. Such an emphasis seems to have been used by different writers to remind the significant role of the community in various historical events of the country. Though Sikhs have always constituted only a small percentage of the overall population of India, they have played significant roles in the country. Sikhs were always constructed as a martial race because of their role as brave warriors for ages. This identity of the Sikhs as a physically stronger and dominant martial race separated them on ethnic and religious levels from both Hindus and Muslims. This gave them the image of a stronger masculine race above other religious groups, especially Hindus who were considered feminine comparatively (Jyoti Grewal, 9).

The community always had played prominent roles in Indian military services and also contributed well to the economic and political affairs of the country as well. The article titled 'Contributions of Sikhs as Soldiers and Warriors' (Mystery of India) has attempted to look at the past to unearth the community's significant contributions. The article proves the community's contribution as brave soldiers and warriors to fight against foreign invasions beginning from the 10<sup>th</sup> century till their active participation in the Indian Army at present. Let it be during the rule of the Mughals,<sup>9</sup> during the fight against Persian or Afghan invasions, or the early attempts of the British to invade India, the Sikhs had been the most influential force in Indian history (Mystery of India).

During the days of the Sikh empire that had stretched from the Khyber Pass across the vast plains of Punjab to the Tibetan borders, and almost as far south as Delhi, they had maintained peace and stability in a region that had been always under foreign invasions and rulers. But after the arrival of the British, and the two World Wars, they diminished in number and strength. After that, in the years following, the community's contribution to the armed forces increased. Pav Singh writes, "In the armed forces where they were disproportionately represented- despite comprising only around one percent of the Indian Army at the start of the First World War... Conversely, the Sikhs would also become standard bearers of the Independence movement before, during and after the World Wars" (2017, 62-63).

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<sup>9</sup> A major imperial dynasty that ruled over a significant part of the Indian subcontinent for several centuries

There are reminders in the historical and fictional accounts regarding the riots, about the role and contribution of Sikhs in various historical events in India. These reminders seem to serve the purpose of expressing the disbelief and feeling of betrayal the community felt after Operation Bluestar and the Riots of 1984. Jarnail Singh remarks that “many in the Sikh community felt betrayed-the Sikh contribution to not just the freedom struggle, but to all the wars that independent India had fought - as well as to the prosperity of the country was unquestioned” (2009, 18).

Apart from the reminders of the illustrious Sikh history, the Partition of India and Pakistan is also mentioned by the writers. The partition ripped Punjab apart, and then millions had to migrate to Eastern Punjab which became part of India. Leaving the homeland and getting settled at places less prosperous for them, and the loss of lives in the communal riots happened, and atrocities against women appear in these works as a prequel to the horrors the community had to undergo later. The majority had to resettle around Delhi in areas such as Trilokpuri, Nangloi, Sultanpuri, Geeta Colony, Mongolpuri, and the like, which were affected badly during the riots later (Pav Singh, 2017, 124).

The various fictional narratives dealing with the riots mention the brave and glorious past of the Sikhs. These literary works have tried to express the sense of shock at the occurrence of the incidents by showcasing the role they had played in various historical incidents of the country. Their role as significant warriors is stressed to question the suffering they had to endure during and after the Riots of 1984. This aspect will be examined in depth in the coming chapters.

### **2.3 Operation Bluestar**

What comes to light after a careful examination of incidents before the assassination of Indira Gandhi is that the Anti-Sikh Riots or Operation Bluestar were not two random incidents. Rather, both incidents were in the making for years. Especially in the case of Operation Bluestar, the seeds of unrest were laid in the early years after Indian independence (Suri, 40). The demand for an independent Punjabi-speaking nation emerged immediately after a few years of Independence. These demands were formed and raised under the leadership of the largest political party in Punjab, Akali Dal. Along with that emerged the long years of insurgency, and political turmoil that ruled Punjab

and parts of Delhi. The Anandpur Resolution of 1973 can be seen as the basis of militant agitations in Punjab (Mukhopadhyay, 33). Harjot Oberoi in the essay titled “Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory” (2010) has observed that perhaps no other text in Independent India has caused so much contention and turmoil as the ten-page Anandpur Sahib Resolution <sup>10</sup>(2010, 153). There were routine violence and turmoil inside Punjab after that and Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his group played active roles. After years-long active militant actions, he rose to the status of a cult figure. A major section of the Sikh population started considering him a devout revolutionary devoted to protecting the Sikh identity and faith (Mukhopadhyay, 39).

The Anandpur Resolution asked for more power for the state government in comparison to the Central Government to obviate the possibility of any danger to the unity and integrity of the country (Suri, 2015, 41). Akali Dal, which was the largest political party in Punjab at that time anticipated it as a solution for many of their problems. The Resolution contained a series of policies that mainly intended to appeal to Sikh economic and religious sentiments (Pav Singh, 2017, 66). After the release of the Resolution, the troubles in Punjab worsened. The fight between the State political parties and the Central ruling Congress Party also worsened. The resolution became very controversial and many took it as a threat including Indira Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister of the time. The demand for the implementation of the Resolution became more aggressive by the year 1980. Conflicts arose in different parts of Punjab against the central government, and many were killed in militant attacks which were carried out by men who were associated with Bhindranwale.

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was the most controversial figure during the years and events leading to Operation Bluestar. He emerged as a religious and political leader in Punjab and was in a few years, in the middle of the demand for a separate state of Khalistan. He became popular in the 1970s in Punjab and soon all-around India when Punjab faced a variety of tensions. Though he was a less prominent figure, he started getting a significant amount of attention because of his involvement in the 1978

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<sup>10</sup> a document presented by the Akali Dal in the year 1973 articulating a series of demands and proposals that predominantly addressed political, economic, and religious concerns impacting the Sikh community. One of its key requests was for political autonomy for the state of Punjab.

Sikh-*Nilankari* Clash.<sup>11</sup> Though, in the beginning, he was just a preacher who was associated with the *Damdami Taskal*, soon his role shifted into a major political figure. He acquired "a reputation as someone who is uncompromising in asserting and defending Sikh interests" (Menon, 2023).

In the days that followed, Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party tried to join with *Bhindranwale* to resist the *Akali Dal*. But soon the scene changed when he was arrested for his involvement in the killing of a journalist. Then there was the famous hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Pakistan, which attracted international attention (Mukhopadhyay, 38). In 1982, during a joint march conducted by *Akali Dal* and *Bhindranwale* for the implementation of the *Anandpur Sahib Resolution*, police fired and hundreds died. This provoked *Bhindranwale* into open militancy against the central government, says Suri in his book (2015, 43). Punjab became a war zone after that. Many innocents were killed. As Mukhopadhyay mentioned in his book, in 1982, "Punjab was reeling under the worst communal riots" (2015, 40). The killings continued in Punjab throughout 1982... Apart from militant attacks, there were frequent reports of police atrocities involving young Sikh boys who were shot at random" (40). The tension between the central government and the various Sikh political and religious groups was at a high and Punjab was engulfed in violence, says Pav Singh (2017, 67).

By early 1983, *Bhindranwale* attained greater power. He shifted to the Golden Temple at Amritsar and soon entered the *Akal Takht*<sup>12</sup> which is the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs (Mukhopadhyay, 41). His stay at the Golden Temple Complex led the Indira Gandhi-led Government to become more vigilant regarding his movements and actions and his supporters. Mrs. Gandhi had ordered the Indian Army and police to be on high alert months before Operation *Bluestar* happened on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1984. *Bhindranwale* soon rose to the position of the most influential religious figure among the Sikhs. With his newly acquired status as a *sant* or *saint*, and the increasing strength of his militant groups, he even declared, "It is for the government to make up its mind whether it wishes

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<sup>11</sup> During the late 1970s in India, there were instances of violent confrontations between Sikhs and followers of the *Nilankari* sect. The primary cause of these incidents was the alleged lack of respect by the *Nilankari* leader towards Sikh Gurus and symbols of Sikh religion.

<sup>12</sup> This *takht*, (thrones of authority) situated within the Golden Temple Complex, is one of the five *takhts* in Sikhism. Regarded as the highest temporal and spiritual authority for Sikhs globally, it holds a significant position within the Sikh religious framework.

to remain with us or not” mentions Mukhopadhyay (41). That is when Indira Gandhi ordered Operation Bluestar in June 1984. The army stormed the Golden Temple complex. Bhindranwale was killed in that attack, along with hundreds of others inside the temple, and hundreds more from the army.

The incidents that happened in Punjab during the years of insurgency do not seem to have got importance in fictional writings. But the war-like situation of the time can be seen being described in a few works like ‘The General’ (2020) by Sarbpreet Singh, *Saffron Salvation* (1999) by Simarjit Kaur and a few other literary texts. But the period of insurgency in Punjab appears in non-fictional works as an incident that had huge roles to play in the Indian history of the years that followed.

It is important to mention that the traumatic memories of the affected community do not, in fact, begin with the Anti-Sikh Riots alone. The community of victims were traumatized by the desecration of the Golden Temple, which is considered by the Sikh community as the holiest shrine. In the writings that have dealt with the violence and trauma of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, the desecration of Akal Takht is highlighted, which was the ancient structure of great religious historical significance. For instance, characters grieving after its demolition are common in the short stories written by Sarbpreet Singh. The novels of Vikram Kapur (*The Assassinations*), Simarjit Kaur (*Saffron Salvation*) and Indira Goswami (*Pages Stained with Blood*) have portrayed the trauma of the characters caused by this incident.

A detailed depiction of Operation Blue Star is an unavoidable element in literary works focused on the 1984 riots. These writings establish clear connections between both incidents, often presenting characters who mourn the attack on the holiest shrine of their faith. In documenting Operation Blue Star, the writers offer a realistic portrayal of the event and its traumatic impact on the Sikh community. *The Assassinations* provides an in-depth account of the incident, examining its profound influence on the subsequent riots. As Kapur poignantly writes, "No one is thinking about the consequences, Pritam continued. The Golden Temple is the most sacred Sikh shrine. Any attack on it will be seen as an attack on Sikh faith. Every Sikh will be outraged irrespective of whether he is for or against succession. I am not even a practicing Sikh, yet I am having to wrestle with myself" (2017, 38).

Sarbpreet Singh's stories are grounded in historical references, lending his fictional accounts a sense of authenticity. His heavy reliance on actual events adds credibility to the trauma expressed in his narratives. References to the Partition of 1947, Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the riots that followed permeate all his stories. These incidents are recounted through the voices of characters who articulate their emotional responses to the events or reflect on the haunting memories of the past.

In the story *The General*, Rachpal Singh observes, "We have still not understood what has just happened at the Golden Temple, but one thing is clear: the news coming out of India has been carefully controlled, and the news reports you have read in *The Times* and elsewhere are inaccurate" (46). This statement underscores the manipulation and control of information surrounding the incident. The narrative examines how the repercussions of Operation Blue Star affected the victimized community during the 1984 riots, drawing clear links between the two events. The story is set within a historical framework that factually maps the timeline of these traumatic occurrences.

The fictional works consistently follow various methods of depicting the violence, aligning with patterns of representation across texts. This shared narration of violent scenes reflects the truth of the events described. For example, almost all accounts of the violence include scenes involving kerosene and rubber tires. As Chaudhry writes, "The flames seem to be not doing their work. One of the men threw some more kerosene oil towards Raja, another put a rubber tire on Raja's neck" (2019, 132). Such recurring imagery of violence reinforces the reality of the horrific acts witnessed during the riots.

Operation Bluestar is still considered the biggest internal security mission conducted by the Indian Army (India Today, 2018). The operation was carried out between June 1 and June 8, 1984. The main aim of the operation was to bring to heel the leader of the militants, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his supporters, who were alleged to be terrorists in support of Khalistan, a separate nation for Sikhs. "The Khalistan movement was a political Sikh nationalist movement which aimed at creating an independent state for Sikhs" (India Today, 2018). Bhindranwale and his followers received weapons training inside the Golden Temple and various other gurdwaras. In the operation which was conducted on 6 June 1984, thousands were killed, leading to a widespread feeling of outrage among the members of the Sikh community (Jarnail Singh, 19). Though a BBC report put the number of dead at a few hundreds, different Sikh groups

and writers have strongly denied this figure. According to them, the number of deaths during the operation definitely ran up to thousands (Firstpost, 2022).

Though the operation was aimed at Sikh separatists, the temple was severely damaged in the incident, including the Akal Takht (Hindustan Times, 2018). Along with Akal Takht and a major part of the complex, the Sikh Reference Library was also destroyed in the attack of the Army. The Sikh Reference Library contained numerous valuable documents and manuscripts about the Sikh religion and history adding to the misery and anger of the Sikhs. The Army's entry and firing at the most divine shrine, the desecration of the temple complex and mainly Akal Takht, and the killing of thousands of innocents severely wounded the Sikh faith. The impact of the incident on the believers of the Sikh religion was so severe that even today "the scar remains", writes Gurpreet Singh Nibber (2018). Historians point to the sudden change in the way Indira Gandhi was looked at after Operation Bluestar. Because it was the Prime Minister who had ordered the operation, she became the chief aim of revenge for the whole incident. The response to Operation Bluestar was loud and strong.

An attack against the community's most sacred place of worship was taken by members around the globe as an attack against them. The community was entirely shocked, deeply hurt, and outraged. Protests erupted in many parts of the globe, mainly Punjab and Delhi. Simarjit Kaur's novel has dealt in depth with the feeling of betrayal and pain reflected in widespread agitation against the government. There can be seen mentions of the spoiling of the sanctity of the sacred space of the Golden Temple in all major and minor writings about the 1984 riots. It was deeply hurtful and unbelievable for the members of the community who saw it as the centre of their religious faith. It was not just the religious and orthodox sections who were hurt and outraged by the incident. Eminent figures of the community who held important positions in the country expressed their grief and shock, including the then President Zail Singh. The Congress MP of the time Mrs Amarjit Kaur wrote, "Actually the blow to the Sikh community has been quite profound [...] we didn't have the guts to face the situation (quoted in Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, 1985, 204).

In the fictional writings too we come across descriptions of how the Sikh faith was hurt by the desecration of the Golden Temple Complex. In fact, the trauma inflicted by the 1984 Riots has been connected in most writings with Operation Bluestar. Two incidents

are represented as two stages of the traumatic event in these writings. In such writings can also be found details given to establish the resentment towards the Khalistan movement and the militants. The traumatic impacts are expressed from the side of the whole community, even those who were not too religious were hurt deeply because of the cultural significance the place held. The Army entering and shooting at the most sacred place of worship was unbelievable for every Sikh. They also felt that that the country for which they had served as a community for years turned against them. Even today, when Operation Bluestar is considered as a golden chapter in the pages of Indian history, as one of the major successful operations of the Indian army against militants, it is a traumatic memory for the members of the community.

## **2.4 The Assassination**

Indira Gandhi's assassination by two of her Sikh bodyguards is regarded as the main provocation behind India's largest communal riots. Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi, the third Prime Minister of India was assassinated around 9:20 AM on 31<sup>st</sup> October, while she was walking through 1 Safdarjung Road from her residence to her office, where she was supposed to be interviewed by the British actor and filmmaker, Peter Ustinov (Suri, 165). She was shot 31 times by her Sikh bodyguards Beant Singh and Satwant Singh and reportedly died in AIIMS where she was hospitalized following the incident. Mrs Gandhi was taken to the hospital immediately and her death was formally announced at 2:20 pm the same day.

The assassins had claimed that their actions were in retaliation for Operation Bluestar (Pav Singh, 04). It is reported that Beant Singh had said "We have done what we had to, now you do what you want to" (Suri, 2015, 166). Indira Gandhi had ordered the Indian Army to enter the Golden Temple<sup>13</sup> which the Sikhs considered the holiest shrine of the believers of the Sikh religion, five months before the incident. The anti-insurgency operation took the lives of scores of innocent pilgrims along with the militant group and resulted in the desecration of the Golden Temple. As a result, Indira Gandhi was assassinated in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar. As Mitta and Phoolka have remarked, "This was the first and mercifully, the only instance in India of a sitting Prime Minister, head of government, being killed" (2007, 9). It would be wrong to say that

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<sup>13</sup> The holiest shrine in Sikhism, located in Amritsar, Punjab. It is a central place of worship and symbol of Sikh faith



Operation Bluestar was the only reason that led to her assassination when one can point at multiple reasons that happened during her time.

The Prime Minister was immediately admitted to AIIMS and within a few hours, people started gathering outside the hospital. Slogans threatening to kill and attack the Sikhs were raised by the mob which later was pointed out as politically motivated. The attack against the Sikhs began at this spot where a large number of policemen and political leaders were present. The visuals of slogans being raised, and Sikhs being attacked in front of the police force were telecasted throughout the nation through the government-owned television channel Doordarshan. The then President of India, Giani Zail Singh, who reached the spot to visit the injured Prime Minister was also attacked by the mob. This was one of the earliest incidents that marked the inception of the riots. The attack against the Head of the State, and the first citizen of India, clearly showed the intricacies of the situation. It also points to the uncertainty of lives common Indians experienced during those three days.

According to Pav Singh, “As rumours spread of Indira Gandhi’s killing, followed by confirmed reports, the atmosphere across the capital and the country began to change. Whilst crowds had gathered outside the hospital where Mrs Gandhi lay and surgeons battled to save her life, the first sporadic attacks on Sikhs began” (2017, 6). Amidst the understandable public shock and sadness at the loss of a woman regarded by many as ‘Mother India’,<sup>14</sup> a deadly spark had been ignited, a spark that rapidly grew into a raging fire, engulfing all whom it touched (Pav, 2017, 07).

The epicentre of the violent events and killings, which continued for three days, was AIIMS, where Indira Gandhi was admitted and later declared dead (Mitta & Phoolka, 2007, 8). The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) witnessed a huge gathering of political leaders, the police force, and common people within a few hours after Gandhi was admitted. Sikhs who were in the crowd, were identified by their turbans were attacked in front of the police (Mitta & Phoolka, 10). Sikhs who were travelling in buses or cabs through the road in front of AIIMS were dragged out by agitated groups.

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<sup>14</sup> A commonly used term that symbolically represents the nation of India, depicting the country in the metaphorical role of a motherly figure. In this context, Indira Gandhi is perceived as embodying the essence of the nation itself.

Their turbans <sup>15</sup>were tossed off and they were beaten up. The attack against Giani Zail Singh signalled the horror of the scene. The aggression had become seriously violent by the time the President reached there. Even after identifying the President, the attackers were not ready to give way (Mukhopadhyay, 2015, 25). Such serious attacks against a President had never before been seen in Indian history.

Different writers have identified this attack on the President's cavalcade as the beginning of a wave of violence that culminated in the killing of about three thousand Sikhs over the next three days. The slogans which were raised during the attacks included "Sardar <sup>16</sup>gaddar<sup>17</sup> hai (Sikhs are traitors), and "Khoon ka badla khoon" (Avenge murder with murder). They have pointed out the fact that the passivity of the police as silent spectators of all these incidents gave license to the rioters to continue their actions. The attacks which started at AIIMS soon spread to different parts of the city, mostly in a more severe form. Literary accounts of the incident by different writers have mentioned the early signs of violence outside AIIMS. The description of the first scene of violence is given by many writers as a harbinger of the horrors that followed.

## **2.5 The 1984 Delhi Riots and Anti- Sikh Riots**

The incidents that broke out in different parts of India, particularly in the capital city of New Delhi, following the assassination of the third Prime Minister Indira Gandhi shocked the entire population and deeply wounded the community of victims. Though the series of violent events and killings that occurred across the country between 31st October and 2nd November 1984 were called both officially and unofficially riots, different historians, writers, and most specifically, the community of victims refused to agree. The literature that speaks about the incident along with other different artistic approaches like films, and paintings through their specific mediums portrayed the

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<sup>15</sup> A turban is a form of headwear worn by Sikh men, serving as both a religious and cultural garment. It holds great importance in Sikhism and is a fundamental aspect of Sikh identity, functioning as a visible symbol of their faith. The turban became a primary target during acts of violence, primarily aimed at undermining the religious faith and identity of the Sikh community.

<sup>16</sup> A term used in India to refer to Sikh men who wear turbans as a sign of respect. However, there are instances when this term is employed disrespectfully or derogatorily, as evident during periods of riots.

<sup>17</sup> The term "Gaddar" was used pejoratively to refer to Sikhs during the early 20th century, particularly in the context of the Ghadar Movement. The term "Gaddar" (which translates to "rebel" or "traitor") was applied to Sikhs who were involved in the Ghadar Movement by British colonial authorities and their supporters. The Ghadar Movement sought to overthrow British colonial rule in India through armed struggle. The use of the term "Gaddar" to label Sikhs involved in the Ghadar Movement was a derogatory attempt to discredit their efforts and portray them as traitors to the British Empire. The use of the term in the context of the 1984 riots was to label the members of the community as traitors.

incident as a pogrom. Those writings assert that it was an organized killing focused on the community of Sikhs and not a random series of violent incidents involving two religious communities. Jarnail Singh, the author of *I Accuse...: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984* (2009), who has written extensively on the incident has stated that it was well-organized killings and not riots (2009, 25). Riots in general break out between two factions in confrontation with each other and both suffer damage to a greater or lesser degree, unlike a pogrom or organised massacre which inflicts damage and loss of lives only in one particular community (Jarnail,2009, 25). The way acts of violence were being unleashed following Indira Gandhi's assassination, the apparent similarity of acts of perpetration in different states, the involvement of political leaders, the large number of deaths reported from only one particular community, and significant other factors point to the fact that it was organized killings rather than a series of violent incidents among two communities.

'Who are the Guilty' (1984), the report which was released by the People's Union of Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties, was the earliest to claim that the Congress Party leaders played a decisive role in organizing the violence. It stated that politicians misused their influence and power with the help of the police to lead the riots in small groups. Though different inquiry commissions could prove the role of the police and politicians in organizing the incident, the real magnitude of it stayed hidden till the literary attempts began.

The affidavits, personal interviews of victims and witnesses, and the personal experiences of different writers revealed through their writings clearly establish the role of the Congress Party, which was the ruling party of the time. The chapter titled 'Not Riots but Murder' in Jarnail Singh's book *I Accuse: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984* (2009) has attempted to establish these facts. The reality and the feeling of betrayal by the mother country, the memory of being hunted down and slaughtered, and the disbelief of accepting the truth of what happened etc. appear as major themes in the fictional and non-fictional works written on the incident.

One common aspect visible in the retellings is that there was a pattern to the incidents that happened - organized provocation was followed by systematic killings (Suri, 2015, 127). The organized attacks started at midnight on 31st October when groups of perpetrators, which were led by local leaders began to gather after police returned from

the streets. The chapter titled 'Aborted' part of Sanjay Suri's book includes his interview with Ved Marwah, who was the head of the Crime Investigation Department (CID) and had conducted an inquiry into police failures throughout the 1984 Delhi Riots killings in different parts of the country. In reply to Suri's query about the ruling party's role in the Riots, Marwah said that what stood out in his findings was that small and organised groups went about looting and killing in the capital city. (2015, 76) Similarly, another chapter in his book examines the role of the Congress Party and its political leaders -both national as well as local party leaders- in the incident. He testifies to witnessing one of the leading Congress Party members, amidst a crowd of perpetrators on the first day of the riots. Suri gives a clear picture of the role the political leader had played in leading the mob to attack Rakab Ganj Gurdwara <sup>18</sup>and the Sikhs who had gathered there (2015, 49). The mobilization of a large number of people near the gurdwara, was impossible that day without a political organization behind it. He states that the organization behind such mobilization could not but have been Congress (2015, 53). Similarly, Amiya Rao's 'Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab' has revealed a more active role of the party according to Pav Singh. Rao's report stated the involvement of at least 150 of the ruling party's members- including leaders, MP's and city councilors (Pav Singh, 2017, 102).

The victim community felt that the police department, which was supposed to enforce law and regulations, and to prevent any sort of crime and disorder failed to carry out its duty in the capital city during the three days of violence. As per the affidavits, interviews, and different literature available, police remained inactive and even took part in violent attacks all over the city. Different literary voices have pointed out that police played an active role in helping the perpetrators and political party members who organized the violence in different parts of the city. Sanjay Suri has written about the role police had in the incident in the chapter titled 'The Police' in his book. Suri's interview with Ved Marwah reveals the role of the police in the incident. According to Jarnail Singh, "The police was instructed to either turn a blind eye or to help the mobs" (2009,26). When the political leaders took active roles in organizing the violence, the mob of perpetrators was helped by the police (Jarnail, 2009, 27). The victims who approached the police for help were turned away. The logbook of the police stations remained blank, and no complaints were registered (27). In Marwah's words, "The

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<sup>18</sup> This historical Gurdwara, located in New Delhi, carries great importance in Sikh history. It became a target for attackers during the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

Police control room records showed that every few minutes there was a distress call...And the most affected police stations didn't show any movement of the police at all...The police just decided to keep their eyes shut" (Suri, 69).

Manoj Mitta and HS Phoolka have given a statistical and more credible account of the police involvement. Out of the seventy-six police stations that were in Delhi, only five bothered to record cases of anti-Sikh violence. Further, the number of cases registered by each of those five police stations was not more than one or two, which by considering the reality of the catastrophe is better to see as nothing (Mitta & Phoolka, 2007, 18). They have also added after examining the incidents that happened in Kalyanpuri, one of the worst affected areas, "the police actually sided with the mob and themselves participated in the attacks on the Sikhs...the police colluded with a mob led by local ruling party leaders to kill members of a minority community" (29). Similarly, Pav Singh has written in detail about the involvement of police in organizing and unleashing violence around the city. He has claimed that "the police officials down the line had been ordered and decided to let the killings take place and then erase all traces of the crime" (2017, 56).

In fictional narratives, the police department is often depicted as ineffective or passive during the days of violence. The police are portrayed as killers in uniform who act for the government, in the writings of Shonali Bose, Sarbpreet Singh, and Vikram Kapur for instance. The helpless situation of the victims while being turned away and targeted by those responsible for protecting them was seemingly influenced by the real situations. Pav Singh has dealt in detail with the police involvement in the chapter 'Killers in Uniform' (2017). He has criticized that, instead of carrying out their service, they abdicated from protecting the city's citizenry, and instead of justice, they serviced the perpetrators of mass murder, particularly through the wilful distraction of evidence (72).

Another significant and unavoidable detail that might prove the organized nature of violence is the similarity in the acts of perpetration across the country. The witnesses, survivors, journalists, and historians, who have in recent years attempted to look into the incident with the seriousness it demands, have pointed out unanimously a similar pattern. This is again not different in fictional writings: the literary scenes of violence share similarities and are recurrent. The repetitiveness of descriptions of violence across genres points to one singular fact: different incidents around India, and especially in the capital city, seem to have been carried out based on a clear blueprint.

One of the reasons that led to the incident was the various incidents of violence that occurred in Punjab during the years of insurgency (Pav Singh, 68). People from other states who belonged to different communities were attacked during those years, contributing to resentment against communities from outside the state. There were incidents of violence targeting individuals perceived to be outsiders or non-Sikhs, including people from other states. These acts of violence were often linked to communal tensions and the broader political and social turmoil in Punjab at the time. In one often-cited example of such events, Hindu passengers on a bus were separated and shot down in Punjab in 1983. After the occurrence of the Anti-Sikh Riots, this incident has been cited by many to justify the violence that occurred. Pav Singh writes, “the overwhelming majority of Delhiites felt that the killings and arson in November 1984 were, in some way, a justifiable response to what was happening to their kinsmen in Punjab” (68).

Riots tend to follow certain patterns. A closer look at different riots that have occurred in India shows that riots of diverse intensity and magnitude, spontaneous or non-spontaneous seem to follow particular patterns. Such patterns can be seen repeated throughout the singular incident, or can also be seen as reappearing in multiple violence that happened in different years. But what happened during the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, which were in fact the only organized violence aimed at the Sikh community, does not seem to have been repeated anywhere else. The nature and modes of violence were seen only in the three days long series of incidents. The methods and acts of violence were not modelled after any other violence that happened before. Similarly, the gruesome and horrific acts of violence do not seem to have been repeated to this date anywhere in India.

The patterns of violence visible during the days of violence were as follows. The perpetrators of killing and attacking were not from the affected areas and hence were mostly outsiders. They followed certain patterns and methods as if they were trained before the incidents. The acts of perpetration were most heinous and cannot be seen repeated anywhere in the history of communal violence that happened across India. These involved targeted attacks led by small groups of armed men. Their weapons were identified later as iron rods- which were used to beat up the Sikhs, tyres- used to put on the neck of a beaten-up victim to set it on fire, an inflammable white powder-

phosphorous which was used to powder on Sikh men and boys to set them on fire, and also kerosene. The rioters carried lists of Sikhs in each area and also looted the houses and shops of Sikhs. Men and boys were primarily attacked and killed, while women and girls were raped and left behind. A variety of sources show these observations as valid. For example, Jarnail Singh has pointed out that, to burn the Sikhs and their houses, sacks of an inflammable white powder were brought from chemical factories and distributed all over Delhi. This procedure is mentioned in many affidavits given by the survivors to the commissions of inquiry. Kerosene depots were told to make kerosene available. Sikh houses were identified and marked on the voter's list (2009, 26).

All fictional works and non-fictional accounts of the incident, which were written based on the inquiry commission reports, interviews, affidavits, and other available documents do not seem to say anything different. They all confirm the pattern which was evident in the acts of violence. A definitive pattern began to emerge within twenty-four hours of Indira Gandhi's assassination on 31st October. Though initially, the incidents seemed spontaneous they were all well planned. Organized mobs were transported in buses from outside Delhi and began descending on Sikh neighbourhoods. They were equipped with firearms, iron rods, knives, clubs, and an abundant supply of kerosene. Sacks of white phosphorous powder had also been procured and provided (Pav Singh, 2017, 17).

As many writings confirm, the most favoured method for killing Sikhs, used repeatedly in Delhi during the three days of violence was by using tyres. Pav Singh calls it 'necklacing' in his book (2017, 22). In this form of execution, a rubber, which is filled with fuel, is placed around a victim's neck before being set aflame. The victim was severely beaten up, most of the time in front of his female family members before they were burned to death. In Shonali Bose's *Amu* (2004), Kajju witnesses her father being killed in the same manner. The protagonist of Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* lives with the trauma of witnessing the killing of his professor similarly. Mukhopadhyay has confirmed this as the most common weapon of destruction during the riot-stricken days. He observes that "even in obscure, unrecorded oral histories, a repetitive narrative was the manner in which Sikhs were doused either in kerosene or an inflammable chemical which at the time came to be known as white powder" (2009,77).

Altogether, what came to light was that the majority of local area leaders owing allegiance to the Congress Party were behind the mobs; and then, the killings were

carried out using three main substances namely, an inflammable powder of undeterminable composition; kerosene or petrol and old car tyres and thirdly and most importantly, a few Congress MPs found recurring mentions (Mukhopadhyay, 141).

The difficulty that can occur for perpetrators of a communal riot to identify their victims for the attack was not a serious concern in the context of the Anti-Sikh Riots. Sikh men's use of turban to cover their long hair, and long beards which are not that common among other religious communities made it much easier for the perpetrators to identify the Sikhs and attack them. Forcefully removing turbans and shaving or burning the hair and beard of Sikh men was a commonly followed method of perpetration everywhere. It was followed as an easy way to humiliate them publicly by hurting their religious sentiments and cultural identity. Wearing a turban and growing hair and beard have been followed by Sikh men and this asserted their religious faith for those with devout beliefs and also showed their indebtedness to the collective identity of the Sikhs above all.

Mukhopadhyay has dealt in detail with this targeted attempt of perpetrators to annihilate the Sikh identity. According to him, most Sikhs were easily identifiable by their turbans, and they became the initial target of the rioters (2015,76). During those three days of violence, the turban worn by Sikh men was tossed and kicked away. After that followed the forcible cutting or shaving of hair and beard. In Mukhopadyay's words, "This was the first step in an attempt to annihilate Sikh identity. In several instances, it became the tool for revenge" (76). After the continuous occurrence of such incidents, Sikh men tried to save their lives by cutting their hair and shaving their beard. Unfortunately, removing the turban or cutting hair was not successful every time (Mitta & Phoolka, 75).

Later, it became evident that the victim's forcible cutting of hair and beard and untying of turban did not aim always at attacking or humiliating each victim individually. This action aimed at humiliating the community altogether and carried many serious signification and intentions. The perpetrators primarily aimed at attacking these aspects more importantly, than hurting the victims individually.

Such attacks were seen throughout the occurrence of the incidents. This has been continuously mentioned in all writings about the incidents, including fictional works In the years following the incident, the turban and hair became much stronger symbols of religious identity and collectivity. A turban which was not necessarily an



assertion of one's strict religiosity stopped being so after the riots (Mitta & Phoolka, 75). It became an issue of regaining lost identity and ascribing a stronger self-image to Sikh cultural religiosity and it became essential (Mukhopadhyay, 101). As Mukhopadhyay has observed, "A five-yard-long fabric has willy-nilly become the sole identity of Sikhs and only because of the manner in which it was treated in 1984" (103). The use of a turban and other symbols of religious identity take a significant role in the novel *Saffron Salvation* (1999) written by Simarjit Kaur for example.

## **2.6 Violence Outside Delhi**

The 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots have been called and known by multiple names. It was called at first as 1984 Delhi Riots. But it has been pointed out by many as a move with a hidden political agenda, because the incident itself was not a riot in the real sense of the term. But that was not the only problem in calling the incident as Delhi Riots. It is possible that it might give misconceptions about violent events and killings happening in other parts of the country. The term is undoubtedly misleading, as it gives the wrong impression that the incident was centred around New Delhi.

It is an undeniable fact that no other city in India witnessed the severity of the incident like New Delhi. But the tremors of the incident were felt in different other parts of the country, where Sikhs represented a visible numerical presence. There were attacks against Sikhs in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Bokaro(Jharkhand), Patna(Bihar), Pattonganj(Jharkhand), Jamshedpur(Jharkhand), Bhagalpur(Bihar), Hazaribagh(Jharkhand), Jhumri Talaiya(Jharkhand), Lucknow(Uttar Pradesh), and different part in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Jarnail Singh, 30). There were attacks in several states in India, Jammu & Kashmir from the north and Rajasthan and Gujarat from the west to West Bengal in the east. Pav Singh writes, "From Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh in the north-west violence spread across central northern states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where close to forty towns were affected by the organized violence. Rajasthan and Gujarat in the west, and Bihar and West Bengal in the east saw outbreaks of violence as did Maharashtra in the south-west. The barbarity reached Assam in the remote north-east of the country" (30).

Violence erupted in different parts of West Bengal immediately after the news of Indira Gandhi's assassination was spread. But the Left Front government immediately made the

effort to seek the help of the Indian Army, which in effect could prevent violence within hours. In the state of Maharashtra, immediate measures were taken by the ruling state government to stop the further spreading of violence. Among all the places mentioned, Bokaro in Jharkhand and Kanpur in the state of Uttar Pradesh were the most affected. Most numbers of deaths were reported in these two cities after New Delhi.

Violence broke out in Bokaro<sup>19</sup> on November 1st and 78 were killed on the same day (Mukhopadhyay, 118). There were immediate efforts from the side of the state police to control violence and police reportedly opened fire on the rioters, which in effect normalised the situation by the evening of the same day. Though the official number was 78, Jarnail Singh claims the death of about 200 innocents in Bokaro. In Kanpur, all the deaths occurred between afternoon and night on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1984. 127 deaths had been reported in Kanpur officially when unofficial reports showed an estimate of 200, excluding the killings that happened in the trains which were running through Kanpur (Jarnail, 30).

Satya Vyas's 'Dear Friend! The World is an Enemy' stands as the initial fictional narrative aiming to provide a comprehensive account of the events unfolding outside Delhi during the three days of violence. The excerpt from the novel *Chaurasi* (2018) is specifically set in Bokaro, Bihar, and is written based on real incidents of violence that happened in that location. Consequently, as the fictional narrative unfolds, it not only seeks to shed light on the occurrences but also places a significant emphasis on the violence that unfolded beyond the confines of Delhi during the 1984 violence. The novel, situated in Bokaro, Bihar, underscores the striking similarity in the methods of attack, killing, and other atrocities carried out by the rioters, mirroring those witnessed in the capital. The excerpt from the novel, translated by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry, particularly delves into a period when the violence reached its most monstrous state. Within this section, Vyas' endeavors to reveal the distinct patterns and acts of violence perpetrated by the rioters. In the depiction, Vyas illustrates that Sikhs fell victim to the mob of rioters who employed brutal tools such as iron rods, rubber tires, and kerosene. The focus on detailing the violence outside Delhi adds a valuable dimension to the broader narrative of the 1984 Riots, expanding the scope to encompass the widespread impact of the tragic events. After the riots, a large percentage of the Sikh population migrated to different parts of Punjab, as they felt threatened at a place where they did not constitute a notable

percentage of the entire population. In cities like Bokaro and Kanpur, the visible similarity in the acts of violence followed by the perpetrators - like looting, killings targeted at men, use of tyres and kerosene to kill, and the involvement of Congress party leaders- show that the violence was organized. As Jyoti Grewal writes in her book, “Events have a casual connection, with one leading to another not by acts of providence but as deliberate human undertakings” (2007, 33).

## **2.7 The Trauma of 1984**

Like any other cataclysmic incident with an intensity to affect each aspect of human life and society, the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots left indelible marks on the individual and collective minds. As there were various measures being adopted to hide the reality of the atrocity in various ways over the years, retelling the reality with each minute detail is difficult after thirty-eight years. Cases were not registered all over India, the rioters were not taken into custody, the police witnessed violence firsthand, and the media kept silent about the incidents. These factors have directly affected the documentation of the incident in various ways. The writing which appeared after years, the majority of those writings already being examined, shared a sense of shock and pain. It is an undeniable fact that the trauma of a violent incident is best approached through the language of literature. The fictional works of the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots communicate the trauma of the incident in great detail. But the non-fictional writers have indeed tried to write about the pain the community of victims had to go through. The scars of the Riots still remain and demand to be addressed.

As already pointed out, every cataclysmic incident which took the lives of members of a society in mass numbers leaves indelible traumatic memories. The 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots were no different. Even after three decades, the trauma caused by the incident continues to haunt the community of victims. The narratives about the incident, which have been resurfacing in recent times after years of suppression tell the tales of pain and disbelief. A major portion of Mukhopadhyay’s book constitutes real stories of the few survivors of the incident. What is common in all these narratives is the language of trauma. These include the narration of the unfortunate incidents they had to witness during the three days of violence, the transformations in their lives in the years that followed, and most importantly the lingering traumatic effects which they are still trying to get over. Mukopadhyay has tried to bring together diverse experiences of human suffering,

including those of survivors and witnesses from various socio-political backgrounds. After three decades and occurrence of many similar incidents around India, these survivors, in the words of the writer “continue to feel haunted and manifest extreme nervousness, and fear for strangers” (2015, 20). Though they survived the incident, the lives of all these people are trapped in the grips of the past.

The after-effects of a horrific catastrophe are felt not just by the immediate victims. Many are inflicted with inter-generational trauma and cultural trauma, without being directly exposed to violence. The children of those who were killed, attacked, and raped during those three days continue to struggle with the trauma passed to their generation. Those who were children during the incident and went through the unfortunate experience of witnessing their parents, siblings, or relatives being killed, beaten up, burned, or raped were obviously traumatized. Majority of them failed to build a normal life and career. The orphans of the rehabilitation colony at Tilak Vihar,<sup>19</sup> which was built for resettling the widows and orphans of violence, are a prime example of this. Most of them could not continue studying as they had to work for the family members who were left alive after the incident. Most of them fell into the usage of drugs and ended up as drug addicts (Jarnail, 50). They lead miserable and traumatized lives.

The traumatized youth losing their lives to drugs was not an unusual story in this context. After the male breadwinners of their families got killed in the riots, they were either compelled to earn for the family leaving their education, or they were left alone without proper care while their mothers went to work (Jarnail, 118). The terrible incidents cast their shadow on the lives of the youth, they had to grow up in an environment of despair and bitterness. According to Pav Singh, “the young among them who had borne witness to the barbarity were inflicted with an inter-generational trauma with enduring and real negative consequences” (Pav Singh, xxii). They turned to drugs as an easy way to forget their past and to get over with the horrible memories. Jarnail Singh writes that more than 2000 young men had lost their lives to drugs in one of the widow colonies (2009, 20). It is even believed by people that kids in the age group of ten to fifteen years are lured into drug addiction as part of a well thought-out conspiracy, as it reduces the chance of

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<sup>19</sup> A residential district in Delhi, recognized for housing a considerable number of Sikh families that migrated from Pakistan during the Partition in 1947. Often labelled as the 'widows colony,' this area gained its name due to the many families resettled there that were impacted by the loss of male members, initially during the violence of the Partition and later in the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

seeking justice for the death of their dead parents which will benefit the people who were involved (Jarnail, 2009, 121).

The resettlement colonies which were established to shelter the widows of Sikh men who were killed during the riots later came to be called widow colonies. The women who were leading affluent lives before ended up in these buildings which were crowded with similar bereaving women and children. In such resettlement colonies lived thousands of women who, though they survived the violence, were still struggling to escape from the clutches of those horrible memories. For the majority of them, the root cause of trauma was not just witnessing the killing of their husbands, fathers, children or other relatives being attacked and burned alive. The trauma of being sexually assaulted also haunted most of them. In 1984, when men were attacked and killed based on religious identities on their bodies, sexual violence against women was motivated by brutal power (Mukhopadhyay, 72). The female body has been a site to exhibit power and dominance during such violence always. This aspect has been well examined by Urvashi Butalia (2017) in her writings focused on the Partition of India and Pakistan. The bodies of women became the ground on which the two newly formed nation-states fought their wars during the Partition (Butalia, 2017, xxix). This was again applicable to define sexual violence which happened as part of every communal violence in India. The Anti-Sikh Riots were not different in this regard.

Though there were large-scale atrocities against women during those three days of violence, just like other incidents those were also suppressed. Most of the sexually assaulted women and children refrained from disclosing it in the name of honour. Mukhopadhyay writes, “it was noticed how survivors of sexual violence and their family members had experienced incredible shame in sharing details of the attacks and carried their memories to their graves” (72). Apart from this, the women felt that their sufferings were less in comparison to the survivors of other incidents. So, sexual violence against women does not seem to have gotten enough attention after the riots. Anyways, their trauma has not been documented well in writing, compared to the other forms of trauma. Jaspreet Singh’s novel *Helium*, on the other hand, delves deep into the trauma of the raped women, along with a few other similar literary works. The trauma caused by the incident has been dealt with well in creative reflection of the incident, primarily in fictional works. This has been dealt with in detail in the following chapters.

It is almost difficult to leave the 1947 Partition unmentioned when one is trying to talk about the trauma caused by the Anti-Sikh Riots, though on the surface both incidents seem unconnected. Even though the Partition followed with successive communal violence across the country over the years, the Anti-Sikh Riots in a way were massive enough to remind one of the terrors of Partition. Such a reminder was inevitable while considering the immensity of the violence that happened again after three decades. It has been mentioned in the previous pages that, a larger percentage of the victims of the riots had gone through the harsh reality of the Partition before. Most of those who were attacked had migrated before decades, from current Pakistan. The horrors that they had to go through in the year 1984 were a coming back of their worst fears. As Butalia writes, when Delhi erupted into terrible violence against Sikhs, in retaliation for the assassination of the prime minister, the violence of Partition did not seem so remote to the people (1998, XX).

Then there was the humiliation and trauma of having to hide one's cultural identity. The attacks of the perpetrators were focused on the religious identity of the victim community. Men were forcibly made to shave off their beards and hair, and take off their turbans, this was basically an attack on one's religious beliefs and identity, which in effect left the victims wounded psychologically. Even those who escaped direct attacks had to get rid of their turban and hair to hide from the perpetrators. The symbol of congregation and affinity to a larger community became a matter of fear and trauma at both personal and collective levels. Even after years, when most of them went back to wearing their religious symbols, there were a lot more others who while remaining faithful to religion, could not return to their previous selves (Mukhopadhyay, 102). To those who were easily spotted and attacked because of the use of a turban, going back was not that easy as they could never overcome the feeling of being spotted. (Mukhopadhyay, 10).

## **2.8 The 1984 Riots and Partition of 1947 in Indian Fiction**

A significant and recurring mention in fictional, as well as non-fictional writings of India, is the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan. The Partition was undoubtedly a turning point in Indian history changing the religious, geographical, socio-political, and economic situations of the country. This was indeed a turning point for the community of

Sikhs too, as it divided Punjab into two halves. The Partition separated people in Punjab and those in Western Punjab had to migrate to different parts of India, mainly the capital city in search of their 'promised land' leaving back everything they owned. The Partition followed the outbreak of communal riots, especially in the bordering states and led to the death of thousands along with other forms of violence. Several comparisons have been drawn connecting the horrors of violence, suffering and loss of lives, migration and the like that happened during and after these incidents. Mukhopadhyay writes, "the situation in 1947 was a precursor to 1984 as displaced Sikhs and Hindus from across the border took refuge in swathes of wasteland" (2015, 160). He observes that there were several uncanny and unfortunate similarities between 1947 and 1984.

Mentions about such unfortunate similarities can be seen appearing in the literary accounts too. For example, Indira Goswami in the novel *Pages Stained with Blood* (2002) draws connections between the sufferings and the trauma of both incidents through the character Sikh Baba. Sikh Baba is the representative of the community of Sikhs who had to resettle in Delhi after surviving riots and killings that happened during the Partition. He becomes a connecting link between the continuing trauma of the community of Sikhs from the times of Partition to the riots in 1984. Such comparisons can be seen appearing in different other fictional works as well.

The largest migration in Indian history happened during the Partition of 1947. In 1947, New Delhi had become the shelter of thousands of refugees who had escaped from Pakistan. It is estimated that a Hindu- Sikh population of about 50000 refugees entered the city, changing the demographics and nature of the city in multiple ways in the coming years. Delhi witnessed similar migration from and into the city again after the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. Sikhs from other parts of India like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and UP migrated to New Delhi, following the incidents. Though it was New Delhi which was worst affected by the riots, attacks against Sikhs had happened in different other parts, where Sikhs constituted a visible percentage of the population. Such targeted attempts of attacks forced a large number of Sikhs to migrate to New Delhi, where the number of Sikhs was larger. The Sikhs migrated to their countries in fear of death too. The emigration of Sikhs showed a spike in the years following the Riots. Mukhopadhyay writes about the migration during Partition thus: "Nearly forty years later, Delhi was

forced to change its character yet again after being overrun by the Anti-Sikh Riots, which was followed by a wave of migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar”(160).

Attacks that happened against the Sikhs during the Riots reminded the victims of Partition. There were targeted attacks based on religious identification, women were gang raped in front of male family members and children, just as it had happened during the Partition. In many ways, the Riots almost felt like a repetition of the 1947 Partition. Another significant similarity was that railway stations and trains across the country became the centre of violence. Pav Singh has written in detail about the outbreak of violence in trains during the riots and how it reminded them of the dark times of 1947. He writes, “Beyond Sikh neighbourhoods, India’s sprawling railway network became an early hunting ground for murderers – just as it had during the Partition” (2017, 32). During the three days of violence, across different parts of India, railway stations and trains became sites of the killings of innocents. Several Sikhs were dragged out of the trains, chased, and killed. Similar to the dark times of Partition, New Delhi received trains with the dead bodies of Sikhs. Perpetrators boasted of killing all Sikh travellers into the capital. Pav Singh has written about the horrors of the riots and how it was a re-play of the Partition:

The immediate aftermath saw survivors relocate to relief camps or simply flee. It is estimated that up to 50000 became internally displaced. Many heads turned toward Punjab, while others who could choose to leave the country altogether. Entire swathes of villages, towns and the capital city itself were ethnically –cleansed on a scale not seen since the Partition. Thirty- seven years on from the monumental horrors of the division of the subcontinent, a beleaguered community was once again on the move by any means necessary in order to reach safety. (2017, 43)

The community which had not survived the traumatic impacts of the Partition had to again go through similar experiences and trauma before the wounds of the first were healed. The voices of traumatised section found reflection in literary works which dealt with the Partition. Partition produced a great number of literary works, as the incident inspired creative writers. Though such a large flourish of literature did not happen after the Anti- Sikh Riots, the writings that have appeared so far talk in great detail about the trauma caused by the incident. The political attempts to suppress the voices of resistance



after the incident can be one significant reason behind it. Mukhopadhyay has claimed that “the anti-Sikh episode remained unresolved and therefore failed to coalesce as a cultural movement” (2020, 17). He has also added that because of the militant actions and socio-political unrest that pervaded Punjab during those times, it did not create empathy even among members of the same community (147).

## **2.9 Children of 1984**

The protagonist of Shonali Bose’s *Amu* (2004) undoubtedly represents the children who survived the violence of 1984. She stands for the thousands of children who later became scarred for their life because of the violent experiences they had to undergo during the day of the violence. The narrator of Jaspreet Singh’s *Helium* (2013) is another similar example. These characters are marked by the traumatic memories caused by the incident and they seem to be entrapped in the constant struggle to untangle themselves from the complexities the incident had resulted in their lives. The fictional representation of the children of the 1984 violence reflects the real sufferings of the entire generation of children and the intergenerational trauma if we look at it through the framework of trauma theory. As it later became evident, the horrors of the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots did not end with the closure of the catastrophic incidents which went on for three days in the capital city. Like every other similar incident with serious magnitude, its impacts are unimaginable and ever going. One of the worst affected sections of victims here is the children of those who have lost their parents, and siblings, and those who witnessed bloodshed and killings.

It seems relevant to talk about the children who were traumatized by the incidents of 1984, because several of the fictional narratives deal with the trauma of the incident. It was not always the trauma alone, but their lives changed completely suddenly and they were thrown into abject poverty and helplessness. They were left with nothing after their parents were killed, and after they were robbed by the perpetrators of the little that their parents had left behind. Just like the issues of women, the atrocities faced by the children during the riots also were not discussed much. It is mostly in the fictionalised representations; the thwarted lives of children victims of 1984 can be seen.

Most children who lost both their parents had to drop out of school to look after their younger siblings and earn a living (Jarnail Singh, 109). Most children who were

relocated to widow's colonies<sup>20</sup> turned to drug addiction. As Jarnail Singh writes, the widows were in a perpetual state of mourning and there was no one to pay attention to the children (46). He quotes a volunteer doctor whom he had interviewed, "When I started working with the child victims, I saw and heard things that haunted me for years. I couldn't sleep at night. I left Delhi and never wanted to come back" ( Jarnail Singh, 46). The sufferings of the children seem clear in the words of the interviewed here. How life turned out for them was evidently worse compared to the other survivors of the incident.

The story of Balvinder, a child victim of the violence of 1984, included in the section 'Orphans of the Massacre' throws light on the reality of the sufferings of the children (Jarnail Singh, 102-114). After witnessing the killing of her parents and brother in front of her eyes by a group of perpetrators who were also their neighbours, Balvinder had to stop going to school to take care of her younger sisters. From an economically well-off background, in a matter of a few days, they were left with nothing. Like hundreds of others, they could not go back to their burned-down house, where their other family members were killed in front of their eyes. They had to spend the rest of their lives in foster care and with relatives who were equally affected and mourning their losses.

A great percentage of the affected children ended up with drug addiction. It does not seem surprising considering the severity of the traumatic experiences they had to undergo, and also because of the lack of parents to take care of them. Even when one of their parents was alive, it did not do any good because they had to work to earn a living and were also in a perpetual state of mourning.

## **2.10 Women and 1984**

Mukhopadhyay writes about the women traumatized by the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots, "She is now scared of everyone... does not trust anyone besides her immediate family. She still wakes up in the middle of the night to check on doors and windows. She has nightmares where she screams and wakes up the entire home" (2020, 123). Though there was complete silence about the atrocities that happened against women during the incident, literary texts have attempted to address the issue.

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<sup>20</sup> Term often used to refer to the Tilak Vihar area in New Delhi.

Nelly, in Jaspreet Singh's novel titled *Helium* (2013) is the most accurate example of a woman torn apart by the horrors of 1984. She fits perfectly to the image of a traumatized woman seen in Mukhopadhyay's writing. She represents thousands of women who were psychologically wounded by the riots. She is a reminder of the largest communal riot in India, someone struggling hard to survive amidst the burden of the horrific memories. She was raped, she lost her children and husband to death, and lost herself to insanity unable to bear the trauma inflicted by the incident. Nelly represents all other women who have been going through similar experiences in the years following the riots. Characters similar to Nelly appear frequently in the fictional works as a reflection of the reality of the sufferings the community had to undergo.

Violence against women was quite common during the incidents of communal violence in India. Abduction, confinement, and raping of women, for the perpetrators, served the purpose of exerting their supremacy over something unattainable. Writers like Urvashi Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*), Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (*Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*) have examined these aspects in depth in the background of Partition of India. The basic nature of communal violence in patriarchal societies was repeated during the 1984 Riots.

There exist observations that claim the less severe intensity of violence targeted at women in comparison to other previous incidents. This can be primarily because of the lack of availability of information and evidence about the subject. Violence against women was found as comparatively less severe as there were victims of more serious forms of violence, like the killing of husbands or children. Scholars like Pav Singh talked about the possibility of large-scale sexual violence against women proving the claims of others wrong. Rape was the central element of violence from the onset of it according to him (35). It was the relative lack of attention given to the issue which later made others believe the opposite. Furthermore, the intensity and horrors of other incidents overshadowed the sexual violence against women.

There were no cases reported of molestation of women. Nobody was ever tried, or convicted of committing rape and other forms of sexual violence during the incident. This is not surprising when there exists evidence that shows the conscious attempts to not report any acts of violence including killings. But numerous incidents of assaults on women began surfacing later, proving the reality of the gruesome experiences they had to

undergo. The recently emerged literary and historical accounts of the incident and cinematic texts dealing with it have attempted to shed light on this side of the incident. One such incident was the kidnapping, confinement, and raping of about thirty to thirty-five women in Trilokpuri. The women who were kidnapped during the riots were confined at different locations and gang raped for several days, after the male members of their families were killed (Mukhopadhyay, 71).

The physical assaults against women were primarily motivated by power and not because their bodies were religiously marked (Mukhopadhyay, 71). The main aim of the perpetrators was to attack and kill male members of the community. They turned against women only after the male members were killed. An observation about violence against women is that the media did not give coverage of those incidents amidst other sorts of violence, and there were political interests involved. Apart from all the above-mentioned sides of it, women who were assaulted or their immediate family members tend to not disclose any act of violence against them as a matter of honour. They also considered that sexual violence against them might bring shame to the family. This aspect has been examined well by Madhu Kishwar in her writings. Mukhopadhyay's analysis of Kishwar's writings points out that there were few reports of rape because they thought it might dishonour them along with the male family members (73). The two reasons for not revealing the incidents of rape were, the fear of rejection in the perspective of marriage alliances, and secondly, to protect the honour of the family and thereby hide the failure of men to protect the honour of women (Mukhopadhyay, 74).

The negligence from the side of the authorities to record and take necessary actions against the perpetrators of violence, and later, in taking necessary measures to provide proper care for the affected, reflected in the case of women who were victims of sexual violence. A proper investigation aimed specifically at perpetrators of sexual violence or announcement of separate compensation and care for the affected women gives the possibility of a better handling of the situation. Offering compensation to the affected women would have possibly resulted in women coming forward and opening up, which in turn might have given clarity to the seriousness of the situation (Mukhopadhyay, 74). No victim of the carnage was given compensation of any kind for being raped, after the incident, in all these years. The compensation package that was given to victimhood of

other different natures never included rape. (Mitta & Phoolka, 69). The compensation was announced only for those who died, injured, and lost property or business.

Women who were victims of the incident later became carriers of traumatic memories. After losing their husbands, fathers, and children they lost the purpose of life. Many ended up in widow colonies set up in different parts of the city. Many women committed suicide unable to bear the trauma caused by the incidents. Life was never the same for them after 1984. The job of comforting the family members left behind by the riots, and earning for the family was on them while they themselves were struggling with the past.

There were incidents which intended primarily at insulting women directly and men indirectly by proving their inability to protect the honour of the female folk of their family. Such efforts mainly included dragging the young women out to the streets, tearing off their clothes and physically assaulting them. This, if observed closely, can be seen as a recurring aspect of violence and genocides of serious magnitude. Raping or assaulting women in the presence of their family members aimed at demoralizing and humiliating them (Pav Singh, 35).

Sexual violence that occurred during the 1984 Riots was unlike other similar incidents that happened in the past. It was intended primarily to insult the male population of the target community. Pav Singh writes that in all the situations of sexual violence, “the major purpose of these vile attacks was clearly to inflict maximum humiliation in order to completely destroy the victims' morale” (38). The women who survived the incident were traumatized. They were left to mourn perpetually. Some chose death over the agony and shame of being assaulted. Women who were traumatized could not give much care for the upbringing of their children (Pav, 6). They were brought up in adverse backgrounds seeing and listening to the horrors of the incident. This in turn leads to intergenerational trauma.