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**Cover Picture :** Sikh activist Tejinder Kaur addressing a vigil outside the Vancouver Art Gallery, in memory of the June 1984 army attack on the Golden Temple complex.

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**RADICAL**  
DES

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."  
Desmond Tutu

## Salute to brave men of US who laid down their lives while standing up against racism

**O**n May 26, two men died in a stabbing incident in Portland. They were attacked for trying to help a young Muslim woman in a hijab and her friend on a train when a white supremacist was harassing them. Both women are Afro-Americans. Jeremy Joseph Christian, who was arrested in connection with the incident, is accused of stabbing to death Ricky Best and Taliesin Namkai-Meche, and leaving a third individual injured. Christian has been posting racist comments about Muslims on Facebook. He is reportedly a supporter of US

President Donald Trump, who is known for his anti-Muslim rhetoric and strong anti-immigrant views. The whole episode has left everyone shocked, and has proved once again that Trump's emergence has emboldened bigotry in the US. Ever since he got elected last November, racist attacks on people of colour have increased, including incidents in Canada. Not only were hateful flyers distributed across BC, a mosque was attacked in Quebec City in January, leaving six people dead. Obviously, Trump's divisive politics has given legitimacy to the bigots in our communities. Trump's initial silence to the Portland stabbings was widely noticed. It was broken only after a reporter confronted him to say something on twitter. Though he described the stabbings as "unacceptable", the matter does not end there. He must take responsibility for all the hate crimes committed in his country since he took charge of the White House. A message has already gone to the racists that it is okay to target minorities. If Trump really means what he says, he should ask the investigation agencies to enlarge the scope of their inquiries into all these incidents, and smash the white supremacist gangs indulging in terrorist activities. By only talking about Islamic terrorism and doing nothing to stop the terrorism of white supremacist groups, Trump is being selective and prejudiced. Although it will be unrealistic to expect any meaningful action from Trump to deal with growing anti-immigration vigilantism and white supremacy, other nations, particularly Canada, which claims to be a human rights leader in the world and has strong trade relations with the US, can make a difference by putting pressure on Trump to stop this menace. The heroic act of the men who laid down their lives for standing up against racism has a lesson for everyone who remains indifferent to the actions of Trump. In spite of the tragic end of the story, it gives us some hope about a better future that lies in the hands of people's unity. It's time to recognize the bravery of the men who raised their voice for the two women in a public space, risking their lives without bothering about the consequences. We also need to learn from their sacrifice that if we all get united and stand up against racism, the bigots can be eventually isolated and defeated for a better world.

-Editors

## 1984

**A catalyst year in Orwellian India where assaults on minorities have grown in the past three decades**

For many, 1984 is a title of George Orwell's famous novel, depicting a totalitarian regime which does not give space for any dissent or hope. But it isn't a fiction for the Sikhs, and remains a reminder of a year that marked the beginning of three decades of systematic assaults on minorities in the world's so called largest democracy.

Every year, the month of June brings back painful memories of the bloodshed across India, mainly affecting the two

percent Sikh population. Not only was their holiest shrine attacked by the army, the community was targeted all over India by well organized mobs during the same year, to avenge the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister by her Sikh bodyguards.

The Sikhs during 1984 and later were game for the police and the security agencies, while the media demonized the community with impunity, and the state was bent upon teaching them a lesson for asking for their rights and

fighting back against injustice. Thirty-three years later, under a right-wing theocratic Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government the country is witnessing more repression, impacting all the religious minorities in a predominantly Hindu India. Once the stage was set for such politics by a secularist Congress government back then, the Hindu extremists got legitimacy. Not surprisingly, today they rule the entire country, and taking a leaf out of the history books, they

have been successful in polarizing society on religious lines and keeping minorities under their boots.

### **An unfortunate year**

Orwell was born in British India to a civil servant. When *1984* was published in 1949, he may not have thought how his fiction would become reality 35 years later in the country of his birth. In particular, how democratically elected Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would turn into a Big Brother and let loose her forces to go after Sikhs in June 1984 could never have entered into his imagination.

The roots of "Sikh Genocide," as the events of 1984 are frequently referred to by Sikh

activists, can be traced back to the religious division of India in 1947. Previously, British-occupied India included Pakistan and Bangladesh, which was earlier part of Pakistan and gained independence in 1971. When the British left, the country was partitioned on religious lines, resulting in the separation of Muslim Pakistan and Hindu-dominated India.

The Sikhs were a very small minority, and lacked bargaining power to get a separate homeland for themselves. Their popular leaders decided to go with India rather than Pakistan, fearing religious persecution in a Muslim dominated country.

Also there was a general feeling that Sikhs were closer to the Hindus as against Muslims. There was anxiety among a section of the Sikh community about assimilation into the dominant Hindu society, yet the murmurings for a separate state could not turn into a big chorus for lack of numbers and support. The Sikhs were given a choice: live in Pakistan or migrate to India. In the end, they had to leave behind their ancestral lands and important religious shrines, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism in west Punjab. For doing this, they had to bear violence at the hands of the Muslim

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fundamentalists and start their lives afresh as refugees in east Punjab.

The Indian leadership, especially the Congress Party, had promised to give them autonomy in post-British India. To the disappointment of the Sikh leadership under the Akali Dal, that promise was never fulfilled. They had to live with the Hindu majority in east Punjab, which was much bigger in size than the present day state of Punjab where they still have a thin majority.

The Akali Dal asked to reorganize east Punjab on a linguistic basis, since Punjabi, the main language of the Sikhs, was not being recognized in the state. The Congress leadership rejected the demand, while the Hindu

chauvinists opposed it vehemently. Both the Congress and the Hindu leadership dubbed the demand as separatist. So much so, the Hindu chauvinist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), of which the BJP is a part, tried to portray supporters of the demand as agents of Pakistan.

This led to a long struggle by the Akali Dal and bred a feeling of alienation among the Sikhs, who felt deceived by the Indian leadership that was not even willing to accept such a simple request, let alone the promise of autonomy.

In 1966, the state of Punjab was reorganized, but many Punjabi-speaking areas went to a newly formed state of Haryana and the neighbouring

Himachal Pradesh. During a census, the Hindu chauvinists ensured that the Punjabi Hindus declared Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue, enabling the officials who demarcated the boundaries of present day Punjab to keep these areas out. The Akali Dal felt cheated again.

The split of Punjab brought more problems. River water distribution added fuel to the fire. The Akali Dal now demanded that the Punjabi-speaking areas wrongly transferred to other states should be merged with Punjab, and control over river water flowing through its territory should remain with the parent state, according to riparian laws. Since Punjab relies on an

agro-based economy and the farmers are mainly Sikhs, the river water issue became part of the long list of grievances of a minority community.

There was a feeling that the Indian state was trying to safeguard the interest of Hindu-dominated states, by unfairly distributing the river water share and punishing the Sikhs for their confrontationist approach. When the Akali Dal tried to raise these issues through the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, a declaration that asked for autonomy to the states and decentralization of power, it was dubbed as secessionist.

In 1975, the Sikh activists under the leadership of Akali Dal overwhelmingly supported a civil rights movement against the Emergency and

press censorship imposed by Indira Gandhi all over India. As a result, the opposition leaders and activists were arrested and thrown into jail. The participation of the Akali Dal in this movement earned them the goodwill of non-Congress parties, including the Jan Sangh (the old avatar of the BJP). This brought the two parties closer, and the Akali Dal and the Jan Sangh formed a coalition government in Punjab following an election held after the withdrawal of Emergency.

Things turned ugly when the Sikhs came in confrontation with the controversial sect of Nirankaris, who according to them followed a living guru against the tenets of Sikhism and indulged in blasphemy. They felt that the sect was

being patronized by the Indian establishment and the Hindu chauvinists. In 1978, when some Sikhs organized a protest against a controversial Nirankari convention in Amritsar, the main centre of the Sikh faith, they were fired upon leaving 13 Sikhs dead. This enraged the Sikh activists, especially a faction led by fiery preacher Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who intensified his campaign for the political and religious rights of the Sikhs.

The Akali Dal around this time was trying to play safe for political survival. It was running the Punjab government with the help of Jan Sangh, which had a big following in the urban trading class, the main support base of the Nirankaris. The Akali Dal



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not only failed to get the Punjabi-speaking areas back, it also failed to get the river water issue resolved. This gave more credence to Bhindranwale, who gradually gained popularity among the Sikhs who were disillusioned by mainstream politics.

The 1978 incident had laid the foundation of the Sikh militancy that engulfed Punjab until the mid-1990s.

As Bhindranwale gained the upper hand, the Akali Dal started accusing him of being a Congress creation to weaken their fight. But nobody was convinced. More young men were attracted to Bhindranwale, who encouraged Sikhs to keep arms and resist. His charismatic personality, oratory skills and uncompromising nature won many young hearts. Soon dedicated militant ranks were formed, and they started indulging in political murders. Ultimately, the Akali Dal succumbed to his growing influence. To win him over, they let him use the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, as his refuge.

Bhindranwale's anti-Hindu rhetoric and growing violence against Hindus and Nirankaris in Punjab annoyed the Hindu majority. In any event of violence in Punjab, Hindu chauvinists retaliated by targeting innocent Sikhs in other states. The police too

harassed ordinary Sikhs travelling from Punjab to other states, and were seen as potential terrorists.

Finally, in June 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple Complex. The army operation left many pilgrims dead and buildings inside the shrine heavily destroyed. Many felt that the military attack was uncalled for, as Bhindranwale could have been easily arrested on earlier occasions, by using a limited police force or other means such as laying a siege or cutting power and water supply to the temple. They believed that this was done deliberately to win the forthcoming general election, as Hindus largely welcomed the army action. Even moderate Sikhs, like eminent author Khushwant Singh and prominent philanthropist Bhagat Puran Singh, were

moved and returned the awards they were given by the state in recognition of their good work. It is pertinent to mention that Khushwant Singh had been a known critic of Bhindranwale and had remained on his hit list. Still, he had to face a backlash from the mainstream media for standing up for his Sikh compatriots.

During the military operation, other Sikh temples were also raided by the army and there were many instances of harassment of ordinary Sikhs. Baptized Sikhs in particular were repeatedly hounded as potential suspects. Media censorship was imposed and any voice of dissent was crushed by using draconian laws. The government justified its actions by claiming that the military assault was necessary, as there was a larger conspiracy to

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disintegrate India by the Sikh militants with the help of Pakistan.

Under these circumstances, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards at her official residence in New Delhi on October 31, 1984. The incident was followed by anti-Sikh pogroms in different parts of India, including Bihar where Orwell was born in 1903.

The leaders of the Congress party were seen instigating the mobs that killed thousands of Sikhs. Against this backdrop, Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi got elected as Prime Minister with a brute majority. He mainly won the election on the slogan of "national unity,"

proving that this was all planned and executed to attract the votes of the majority community by teaching Sikhs a lesson. Following his election, he justified the anti-Sikh violence by stating at a public event, "When a big tree falls earth around it shakes a bit." That he was in no mood to repent became clear when he awarded the Congress leaders involved in anti-Sikh violence with ministerial positions.

The RSS also justified these acts of a Congress government, and some BJP leaders tried to rationalize the military attack on the Golden Temple Complex, despite their political understanding with

the Akali Dal, and blamed the Sikh leadership alone for the situation.

The events of 1984 laid the foundation of a movement for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan that claimed thousands of lives in Punjab and remained active until the mid-1990s. During the insurgency, Hindus, moderate Sikhs and political critics were frequently killed. All means were used to crush the movement by the Indian government. The armed struggle for Khalistan ended partly because it lost popular support due to excesses committed by the militants, and partly because of police brutality. Extra-judicial killings

of the militants became a common occurrence, and officers involved in state violence were rewarded with out of turn promotions.

### **History repeats**

Unlike the case of Sikh militancy, the origins of the Hindu extremism date back to the years before partition.

Hindu chauvinists seeking to turn India into a theocracy started getting organized under British India. The RSS was formed in 1925, with a clear mandate to establish a Hindu nation. Its members were given physical training, not to fight against the British, but against Muslims and Christians. While the Congress and the Akali Dal took an active part in the struggle against British occupation, the Hindu nationalists remained aloof to the movement. It is believed that they had a tacit understanding with the foreign rulers, who used such a reactionary force to keep the people of India divided and to discourage them from participating in a united fight against occupation.

Not surprisingly, when India was partitioned in 1947, the RSS indulged in large scale violence against Muslims, forcing them to migrate to Pakistan. In 1948, one of their supporters, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, the towering leader of the passive resistance movement against British rule. Gandhi's fault was that he had

earlier opposed untouchability, which is practiced against so-called low caste people in orthodox Hindu society, and later stood against violence against Muslims.

Though Godse was hanged for the crime, his doctrine remains alive. The supporters of his ideology are committed to turn India into an exclusionist Hindu state, and never lose an opportunity to renounce secularism, which is an essential part of the Indian constitution. So when India chose to remain a secular democracy in the post-British era, despite drifting away from its commitment to pluralism especially during the 1980s, the RSS and its cohorts felt aggrieved. Since then they have been fighting hard to see India converted into a Hindu republic, and to promote the philosophy of Hindutva, which is based on the notion that Hindus are the only and rightful custodians of India.

The RSS consider Muslims and Christians as aliens, and treat Sikhs and Buddhists as part of the Hindu fold. It is a separate matter that the Sikhs and Buddhists steadfastly denounce any attempt of assimilation and have been challenging the RSS and its expansionist designs.

During the 1980s, when the Congress government was getting into a confrontation with the Sikhs, the RSS intensified its campaign to

reclaim ancient Hindu temples which they claimed were turned into mosques by the Muslim rulers in the past. Around this time, apart from mounting their attacks on Muslims, the Hindu chauvinists targeted Sikhs to avenge violence against Hindus. Groups such as Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal openly terrorized minorities, including the Sikhs outside Punjab.

The movement for the liberation of Hindu temples that these groups claimed to have been turned into mosques picked up and instilled fear in the minds of Muslims. The Ram temple of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama, a revered Hindu god, became a major flash point. The RSS and others insisted that the original temple was demolished and replaced by a mosque by the Islamist emperor Babar. They now wanted to build a grand temple at the disputed site. The Congress government under Rajiv Gandhi, after committing a massacre of the Sikhs, incited more trouble by letting Hindus perform prayers at the disputed structure. If this was not enough, a TV series based on Ramayana the scripture depicting the story of Lord Rama - was started on the state run broadcasting network.

All this culminated in the demolition of Babari mosque on December 6, 1992 by Hindu fanatics in the presence

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of senior BJP leaders. The Congress was still in the power in New Delhi, although under a different Prime Minister: Narsimha Rao, who was Home Minister of India when anti-Sikh pogrom was organized in 1984. It is another matter that the BJP governed the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) where the mosque was located. The UP police remained a mute spectator as Hindu fanatics razed the mosque to the ground. No anti-terror law passed to deal with the Sikh extremists was applied to stop this act.

The Babari mosque episode, like the military attack on the Golden Temple complex, became another turning point in the history of India. While the state was directly involved in the attack on a Sikh shrine in 1984, here the non-state actors, with complicity of the state, assaulted a Muslim shrine. Much as the military attack in Amritsar galvanized the Sikh militancy, the Babari mosque demolition pushed many young Muslim men to pick up arms and join the Islamic Jihad movement. There were riots in Bombay after Shiv Sena activists tried to celebrate the demolition of the mosque. Muslims were violently targeted during the pogrom.

The ghost of Ayodhya continues to haunt Indians. In February 2002, when the BJP was in power in Gujarat, a

train carrying Hindu pilgrims from Ayodhya was burnt, leaving more than fifty people dead. The BJP government under Chief Minister Narendra Modi blamed Muslim fundamentalists for the incident. It even claimed that the attack was aided and abetted by Pakistan, and was dubbed as a terrorist act.

Following in the footsteps of the Congress, the Modi government went after Muslims in a well organized manner. Thousands of Muslims were murdered across the state. Techniques similar to those used to hunt down Sikhs in 1984 were applied to target Muslims. In the aftermath of the massacre, Modi got re-elected with a huge mandate in the midterm assembly election. Like Rajiv Gandhi, he also played a card of nationalism, with a slight variation. He openly announced that his victory was important to send a strong message to Pakistan. Much as Rajiv Gandhi used the metaphor of a falling tree to justify anti-Sikh violence, Modi used Newton's law "for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction," to rationalize violence against Muslims. Modi had clearly learnt from Rajiv Gandhi how to make use of a bitter harvest. Against the backdrop of the anti-Muslim massacre, the Modi government claimed that the state was coming under threat of a well-organized

Islamic Jihad. Many Muslims were killed by the police in staged shootouts in the name of war on terror. The techniques used by the Punjab police to end Sikh militancy were now applied in Gujarat by the Modi government.

However, Modi cannot be accused of doing so alone. Even before he became Chief Minister, the BJP government had targeted Christians in Gujarat in a systematic manner in 1998. If Muslims are seen as potential terrorists by the BJP, Christian missionaries are also viewed as a group bent upon converting poor Hindus through faith healing and other forms of allurements. The problem did not remain confined to Gujarat. In 1999, Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons were burnt alive by a mob of Hindu fanatics in Orissa, which also witnessed a worse anti-Christian pogrom in 2008.

During this period, Hindutva extremists also started getting involved in bombings and other serious violent activities. Besides targeting Muslim areas, they have been killing critics with the help of death squads, a technique used by the followers of Bhindranwale in Punjab a long time ago. When their network was first smashed under a Congress-led coalition government, the authorities tried to downplay the threat of Hindutva

terrorism, fearing a backlash from the Hindu majority. They weren't referred to as terrorists as freely as the Sikh militants were referred to. Thanks to the efforts of some honest police officers, these individuals were charged and thrown into jail, but the current BJP government is trying to dilute cases against them. It is important to mention that Modi came out in support of the Hindutva extremists arrested for terrorist activities.

By the time Modi got elected as Prime Minister in 2014, the Hindutva forces had gained enough strength across India to form BJP governments in various states. Violence against Muslims and Christians had become a common occurrence in these states, with police and the administration remaining either mute spectators or directly complicit in these crimes.

Although Akali Dal remains a faithful partner of the BJP, Sikh settlers also came under attack in Gujarat while Modi was running for the post of Prime Minister. The BJP government in the state wanted to take back the land allotted to these settlers from Punjab a long time ago, on the pretext of a development project. Their refusal invited violent attacks by the BJP supporters.

As Modi's government completes three years in the

office, attacks on all minorities, including Dalits or so-called untouchables and tribals have increased. Muslims and Christians are constantly harassed, not only by the Hindutva goons, but also the police. Anti-conversion laws have given the police a tool to beat Christians, while anti-terror laws are being widely used against Muslims and tribals. To add to the woes of the Christians and Muslims, laws have also been formulated to check the consumption of beef, giving an excuse to the police and vigilantes to go after the two minority groups.

#### **Hindutva laboratory**

Many secularist activists argue that Gujarat was a Hindutva laboratory under the BJP. Now that the party has gained power all over India, it has started applying its social engineering formula everywhere. While there is some delay in amending the constitution to officially declare India as a Hindu state, the current situation leaves little doubt as to which way India is heading.

The BJP claims to have a mandate to transform India into a Hindu theocracy, but the events of 1984 indicate that the Hindutva laboratory experiments started much earlier under a different label. It may be that the Congress was doing this for purely opportunistic and pragmatic reasons, as against the BJP's

ideological reasons, but the idea of polarizing the majority community against a small minority to retain power was clearly used by Indira and Rajiv Gandhi under the garb of secularism much before Modi came on the scene.

The narrative used by the mother-son duo back then against the Sikhs in the name of nationalism, is no different from the one used by the Modi administration today. Any voice of dissent is brushed aside as "anti-national" and "unpatriotic," and every problem is blamed on Pakistan or an invisible "foreign hand". Such discourse was prevalent even under Congress, when the Sikh militancy was at its peak. While Indira Gandhi imposed an emergency, the Modi administration is accused of imposing an undeclared emergency that is impacting free speech of the media and political critics.

The terrorism by minority extremist groups has always been overplayed, while the one practised by the Hindutva forces has been generally been overlooked. If the BJP is doing it blatantly, the Congress has done it out of compulsion not to annoy the majority. The assassins of Indira Gandhi were punished promptly, but those who organized anti-Sikh massacres remain unpunished. While Khalistani terrorists died in staged shootouts, Hindutva terrorists were spared of extra-judicial

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murders. Under the current regime, leftist and Muslim extremists continue to be killed in faked exchanges of fire, while Hindutva terrorists held for bombings repeatedly get back door amnesty. Some of them are being acquitted.

If one assumes that Muslims and Christians are the only targets of the supporters of a government dedicated to Hindutva ideology, then one needs to follow the intensity of opposition which has grown against Sikh activists abroad, particularly those in Canada.

In recent months, the BJP government has started stirring up fears of a revival of the Khalistan movement by Sikh activists in Canada. Undoubtedly, the Khalistan movement was once very strong in Canada, where militants were physically attacking their moderate critics during the mid-1980s, and Air India Flight 182 was bombed, killing all 329 passengers aboard, a heinous crime blamed on Sikh separatists. But the movement has receded due to a lack of mass appeal in Punjab. It merely survives at a propaganda level, but the BJP government has been making people in India believe it still poses a major threat to peace. It has repeatedly raised this

issue with Canadian officials. The events of 2017 have established at least one thing very clearly: both the BJP and the Congress are on the same page when it comes to

pleasing the Hindu majority by creating a fear of Khalistan. Captain Amrinder Singh, the Congress Chief Minister of Punjab (who had once quit the Congress in protest against the army attack on the Golden Temple Complex and rejoined it later), has recently intensified his attacks on Khalistanis in Canada. After being elected with the support of urban Hindus of Punjab, where the major BJP base has shifted in favour of the Congress, it is safe to believe that he is trying to mimic Modi

by playing the nationalism card. During the elections, he too tried to dub his critics in Canada as supporters of Khalistan. He went to the extent of refusing to meet Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan on his visit to Punjab, accusing the latter of being a Khalistan sympathizer.

Sajjan's father was once a member of World Sikh Organization, which believed in Sikh sovereignty.

Incidentally, apart from bringing back horrific memories of the bloody events of Amritsar and its far reaching consequences, the birth anniversary of Orwell in June makes one wonder when the foundation of Orwellian India was actually laid. The Congress leaders have

been accusing the BJP of turning India into an Orwellian state, whereas the historical facts prove otherwise. The BJP is aggressively pursuing a totalitarian agenda and unashamedly trying to establish a Hindu nation. But the Congress cannot escape the blame for setting a precedent of appeasing a majority by picking a minority community as a target for political survival, giving Hindutva room to grow during all these years, and now to capture centre stage. **-RDNB**

## KPS to Kalluri: How barbarity has been patronized by majoritarian democracy

Gurpreet Singh

"Anti terror law does not apply on those involved in Gujarat riots." This was stated by former Punjab Police Chief K.P.S. Gill, in response to a question on the anti-Muslim pogrom engineered by the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002.

Gill, who passed away on May 26, is often credited by the mainstream political parties of India for wiping out Sikh militancy in Punjab and bringing peace.

I had an opportunity to interview this man a number of times, but the controversial statement he made in relation to the Gujarat violence came during a radio chat following his appointment as Special Security Adviser in the state after his retirement.

The appointment was made after the bloodshed to restore normalcy to felicitate the next assembly election, which saw Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi get reelected with a brute majority.

Thousands of innocent Muslims were slaughtered by mobs led by BJP activists, after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was burnt leaving more than 50 passengers

dead. The Modi government promptly blamed the incident on Muslim fundamentalists and dubbed it as a terrorist attack. They not only accused Pakistan of aiding and abetting

the crime, but also charged the alleged suspects for terrorism. However, those involved in well organized violence against Muslims were spared of charges under the anti-

terror law.

When I asked Gill why those who killed Muslims were never charged for terrorism, he briefly said that the anti-terror law did not apply to them.

Those enamored by the glorification of Gill, ever since he became a celebrity for ending Sikh extremism, continue to see him as a man who resolutely fought against terrorism. But they never dare to question why he did not take on terrorism perpetuated by the Hindu groups, using similar techniques that were frequently applied to deal with the Sikh separatists.

Sikh extremists seeking a state of Khalistan were active in Punjab from early 1980s to early 1990s. Undoubtedly, they committed atrocities on Hindus, moderate Sikhs and political critics during their armed struggle, but Gill and the entire police force used much more violent means to crush their movement. Ordinary Sikhs suffered at the hands of the police, and the political suspects were killed in staged shootouts in the name of so-called war on terror through extra-judicial means. The women had to suffer custodial rapes. Those involved in this butchery were given out of turn promotions and bravery awards. Throughout this period Gill and his police force enjoyed the backing of the Indian state, which passed draconian anti-terror laws and supplied

unaccounted funds to crush the insurgency.

Gill became a media darling, and was often praised as "Supercop" by political parties ranging from the left to the right. The BJP and its cohorts, who wish to turn India into a Hindu theocracy, saw him as a great saviour. It is a separate matter that the self-styled secular Congress was mostly in power during that period, and its attitude towards the Sikhs was no different from the one BJP is known to have towards Muslims.

The Congress organized a massacre of Sikhs in 1984, following the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. In June that year, Gandhi had ordered a military attack on the Golden Temple Complex, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in Amritsar, to flush out handful of militants who had fortified the place of worship. The army operation left many pilgrims dead, causing widespread anger in the Sikh community. These ugly events of 1984 culminated in the Air India bombing in June 1985, that killed 329 people. The crime was blamed on Canada-based Sikh extremists seeking revenge for state repression. Interestingly, Gill had condemned both the military attack on the Golden Temple complex and the anti-Sikh massacre in one of his books, but he did not see either the

anti-Sikh violence or the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 as glaring examples of terrorism against minority communities. In one of my interviews, he even tried to justify the killings of militants in staged shootouts. When I asked how he would like to explain why policemen never got injured in their so-called encounters with the Sikh militants, he replied with a counter question, "How do you explain drone attacks by US on terrorist camps?" He claimed that the police operations against militants in Punjab were much more humane than those conducted by the big powers in their war on terror. Notably, Air India blast mastermind Talwinder Singh Parmar died in a staged shootout in Punjab in 1992. Gill was unable to explain why not a single policeman died in the so-called fierce exchange of fire between him and the police.

The critics of Gill were mostly dubbed as "anti-nationals" or the "apologists of the terrorists", whereas several human rights activists and advocates were kidnapped and murdered. If this was not enough, there was some kind of silence over his conviction in the infamous incident of sexual assault on a female administrative officer, Rupan Deol Bajaj. Instead, women supporters of the BJP frequently showed their solidarity with men like Gill by



tying Raakhi, a band of bondage between sisters and protective brothers, according to Hindu tradition, on their wrists.

Even if one agrees that the Sikh militants also indulged in human rights abuse, they were operating out of the constitutional framework. Moreover, they were killed with impunity. The question is, why do those who shed tears for Gill and pay tributes to him not see the growing Hindu extremism in India as a threat to the peace?

Ever since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in

2014, there is a huge increase in cases of violence and terror by the Hindu fanatics. Neither Gill nor his supporters, who were so perturbed by terrorism in Punjab, raised a question over Hindu militancy back then. Nor they have raised it ever since the menace has spread across India under Modi. So much so, this government is also trying to give back door amnesties to the Hindu extremists charged and arrested for bombings. The extra judicial measures widely used against Sikh militants to deliver quick justice were not even

considered to deal with them.

While the mainstream media is busy paying tributes to Gill, a senior police officer in the Chhattisgarh state of India, Inspector General S.R.P Kalluri, is being patronized on similar lines. He is posted in a state that is under the influence of Maoist insurgents.

Chhattisgarh is one of several states with sizable populations of indigenous communities. Their traditional lands sit over natural resources, so they continue to face eviction by the extraction industry, with the backing of the Indian

establishment. Due to the structural violence against them, many are forced to join Maoist movements. In the name of campaign against Maoists, the security agencies and the police have been harassing the tribal people. Staged shootouts and custodial rapes have become a common occurrence. Kalluri has been in the news a number of times for openly threatening human rights activists and journalists who question state repression. Not surprisingly, BJP supporters openly glorify Kalluri, whereas others try to demonize Maoists as "the biggest internal security threat." For them, the tribal people remain a road block on the way to development. Much like the Sikhs, who merely form two percent of the Indian population, the tribals with only eight percent population can easily be "othered" by the government and the security agencies to assure the Hindu majority of peace and prosperity. In the meantime, Muslims continue to face persecution every day. The Islamophobia in western society has made the task of Modi and the Indian forces easy to target them. Non-state actors often threaten and assault Muslims for eating cow meat, which is considered blasphemous by orthodox Hindus, and the police are in the habit of seeing them as potential terrorists.

Particularly in Muslim dominated Kashmir, where a fight for self determination has been going on for years, the army and its vigilantes openly indulge in attacking the people in the name of national unity and integrity. Killings of Kashmiri insurgents in staged shootouts have always been seen as normal, while women in this conflict zone have been frequently subjected to sexual abuse. Perhaps the security officials have become used to treat the bodies of women as a battlefield because of top cops like Gill. Had he been given an exemplary punishment for harassing Bajaj, women across India would have been spared sexual violence at the hands of the protectors in uniforms.

Only recently, an army officer who had tied a Kashmiri man on a jeep to prevent protesters from throwing stones at the soldiers, was honoured. And guess what? The Congress leader and the Punjab Chief Minister Capt. Amrinder Singh welcomed it.

He had also called upon aging and ailing Gill some time ago. Playing the nationalism card, he went to the extent of calling his opponents based in Canada as Khalistanis, and the Defence Minister of Canada Harjit Singh Sajjan as a sympathizer of Sikh militants. Sajjan's only fault is that his father used to be associated with the World Sikh

Organization that once supported Khalistan. Against this, Modi's proximity with some well known Hindu zealots has been constantly overlooked.

The connection between KPS and Kalluri suggests that India has become a majoritarian democracy, where the interest of the Hindu majority has to be safeguarded all the time to ensure electoral victory. Officially India is a secular democracy. But it has repeatedly shown signs of being a Hindu state inclined towards keeping minorities under its boots, so that the eighty percent of the population that believes in Hinduism (read Hindu nationalism) can be swayed by the ruling classes in the name of nationalism. A true democracy is inclusive and considerate for all, including those on the margins, and not just the majority.

To counter all this, some might suggest that Gill was an intellectual who loved poetry and also promoted culture. But keep in mind that while Hitler too was a painter and architect, that part of his personality remains rightfully eclipsed because of his crimes against humanity.

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### Remembering Birsa Munda

This month marks the 117<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of an Indian tribal hero who died fighting for the emancipation of his community, both from the British Empire and the feudal lords.

Birsa Munda was a leader of the Munda tribe, an indigenous group of central India.

Born in British-occupied India in 1875, in the present day state of Jharkhand, he organized indigenous peoples to fight back against exploitation of the community by the settlers and feudal lords who ruled over them with the backing of the powerful empire.

As he was growing up, the socio-economic situation of the Munda community was very pathetic. They were marginalized on their own traditional lands by settlers who enjoyed the backing of the British government. Not only did they face eviction, their identity and culture came under attack from both the Christian missionaries and the Hindu religion.

Pushed to penury, they heavily depended on landlords and money lenders for their livelihood and were often forced to work as bonded labour. Their women were also subjected to sexual violence by those who were privileged and had control over their

lives.

Birsa Munda got his early education at a missionary school, where the Christian priests treated the indigenous culture as inferior. As a result he had arguments with a priest, leading to his expulsion. Later he joined the Hindu religion, but eventually discovered that the tribals needed to be empowered to lead their own future, without looking for others to take care of their aspirations.

Soon he became a leader. With his organizational skills, he encouraged Mundas to give up social ills such as alcoholism and superstition, and inspired them to get educated for self-empowerment. Many saw him as a spiritual figure with healing power, helping tribals recover from various ailments, and gaining recognition as an undisputed indigenous leader. Under his influence, the Mundas began refusing to work as bonded labour.

## RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

His growing popularity gave sleepless nights to all those who had enjoyed authority over the Mundas. Among them were the priest class, the landlords and the money lenders. Under their pressure he was first arrested in 1895 and thrown into jail for two years.

After being released in 1897 he started organizing Mundas against the empire. He had realized that until British occupation in India was ended, their sufferings would continue. He began encouraging his followers to get united and organize against the British rulers. He also emphasized ending the rule of the Queen and establishing their own kingdom. They began attacking the British forces, especially the police stations, to liberate the tribal areas of foreign rule and to end exploitation of the indigenous peoples once and for all.

Under these circumstances, Birsa Munda was arrested in February 1900 with the help of informers who were given a huge monetary award.

On June 9, he died in jail at the age of 25. While the authorities claimed that he had died because of health reasons, it is believed that he was poisoned to death.

Though Birsa Munda died more than a century ago, he continues to inspire the indigenous communities of India even today. As the exploitation of the tribal people continues in post-

natural resources enjoy the backing of the Indian state.

The indigenous activists who challenge this are frequently tortured, abducted and killed in the name of the war against Maoist insurgency, which has

been going on in these areas for many years. It is a fact that when socio-economic disparity and marginalization force the indigenous peoples to take up the guns, they are demonized by the mainstream as Maoist sympathizers. Their women are often subjected to sexual abuse by the security forces with impunity.

To make matters worse, Hindu fanatics are trying to convert them as part of their design to turn India into a Hindu theocracy,

and use them as foot soldiers in violence against Christian missionaries.

Very negligible attempts are being made to promote their independent identity, language and culture.

As long as repression of indigenous peoples continues in the world's so called largest democracy, Birsa Munda will remain relevant.

-RDNB

## A Document of Dissent

**B**hagat Puran Singh was a famous Sikh philanthropist who served the poor and destitute. He was given the Padam Shree award for his exceptional service to humanity. He returned this award to the Government of India in protest against the military attack on the Golden Temple Complex. This letter he wrote to the then-President of India has been reproduced here to mark his birth anniversary that falls on June 4:

**To,  
The President of India,  
Rashtrpati Bhavan,  
Delhi.**

**Subject: Return of the award of Padam Shree against the in-human army action at Sri Darbar Sahib Sri Amritsar.**

Shriman ji,  
Sending the armed forces into Sri Darbar Sahib for military action has already produced countless painful results. As a result of this army action the Sikh world has been deeply hurt. You have seen how painful has been the effect of this army action on the Darshani Deodhi and the building of Sri Akal Takhat. Army has perpetrated acts, which you could not have known. Up to September 9, 1984, I have been investigating what I have heard from the people. I have exercised much restraint and

have not rushed to conclusions. I will relate some of the happenings (that I have investigated).

1. Army-men arrested a scripture reader of Sri Darbar Sahib along with his family. The entire family was not

given either food or water for the whole day. Rifle butts were administered on the scripture reader's hands the whole day. Another scripture reader of the shrine was given the same treatment until his hands were swollen.

## RADICAL NARRATIVE

2. The sangat in Darbar Sahib complex consisting of women, men and children has been fired upon (and killed) as the mosquitoes are wiped out with poisonous spray.

3. The pilgrims who had been arrested in Sri Darbar Sahib and Teja Singh Samundari Hall around 12 noon on Tuesday were given water by the Sikh army-men after thirty hours on Wednesday. The children's eyes were popping out with thirst and their mothers tried to moist their lips with sweat. When some women asked for water for the children the army-men told them that the children would grow up and kill the army-men so why should they be given water? On Tuesday the small quantity of water that was given to the children had cigarettes thrown into it. They were told that this is the prasad of their Guru. Army-men smoked cigarettes in Teja Singh Samundari Hall and kept on blowing the smoke at the Sikhs.

The treatment meted out to the Sikhs in the name of army action has deeply hurt the feelings of the Sikh world. Hands of the young pilgrims, arrested from Darbar Sahib, were tied with their turbans, their hair were untied and used to cover their eyes with. They were forced to kneel down on the hot marble floor and to walk around on their knees. Hands of the boys were tied

behind them and they were shot through their foreheads.

On the first of June 1984 the CRPF had commenced firing on Sri Darbar Sahib Amritsar. On the first of June before the arrival of the army, the CRPF had killed a scripture reader in attendance upon Guru Granth Sahib and the volume itself was shot at. After it was all over, the Sikh Reference Library and the Sikh Museum were set on fire out of enmity and in pursuance of predetermined action.

On June 3, 1984, two Sikhs wearing yellow turbans and kirpans got off at Batala bus stand. They were asked by the army-men to take off their turbans. On their refusal to do so they were both shot dead. Another Nihang was shot at and killed near Gumtala jail because he had refused to surrender his kirpan. One Sikh in proper Sikh dress was standing on the roof of his house in an area of Amritsar called Kittas. Army-men killed him because he was wearing a yellow turban.

On the third of July a black turbaned and kirpan-wearing young Sikh of about 25 years of age was walking past the Kitchlew traffic island. The army arrived, handcuffed and arrested him although nothing incriminating was found on his person. When army-men went to arrest the President of the Shiromani Gurdwara

Prabandhak Committee Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tohra from Teja Singh Samundari Hall, one of them was smoking a cigarette. When Sardar Tohra asked him not to smoke (in the holy precincts), his reply was, "shut up old-man or I will shoot you dead. Tohra said 'I am the President of this place' upon which the army-men became quiet.

Temple servants of Sri Darbar Sahib Mukatsar, were made to lie face downwards in the circumambulatory path around the sacred tank and beaten mercilessly. As a result of this one of them died. All those boys who had taken amrit were pulled out of their homes in the villages and were beaten severely.

I am compelled to observe that the army has displayed bankruptcy of character and has acted with hearts full of enmity and in a manner indicating that it wanted to wipe out the Sikhs. Young-men from villages have been troubled much after the army action. Apart from the truth depicted above, I have received information about such shameful incidents, to mention which is to violate the cultural norms.

After hearing of and seeing such happenings, I reject and return to you the award of Padam Shree conferred upon me.

**Puran Singh Bhagat**  
*Courtesy: Khalsa Force*



