

HISTORY LEADING TO THE 1984 SIKH GENOCIDE

Human Rights

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that every person deserves, no matter their religion, background, or country. These include the right to live, to be safe, to practice religion freely, to speak one's opinion, and to be treated equally under the law. Human rights also include access to food, clean water, education, and healthcare.

The Sikh Gurus strongly taught the importance of human rights. Sikhs throughout history have defended people of all backgrounds, not only their own community. They gave food to the hungry, shelter to the poor, and even their lives to protect others. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, for example, gave his life to protect the religious freedom of Hindus. Because of this long tradition, Sikhs have always expected fairness and justice in return. Unfortunately, these rights were often denied to them in India.

Promises and Betrayals

Before 1947, Indian leaders needed Sikh support in the struggle for independence from the British. Leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi promised Sikhs that their unique identity and rights would be respected in independent India. Gandhi even said that if the Congress party ever betrayed Sikhs, they would be justified in drawing their swords like Guru Gobind Singh Ji taught.

But once India became independent in 1947, these promises were broken:

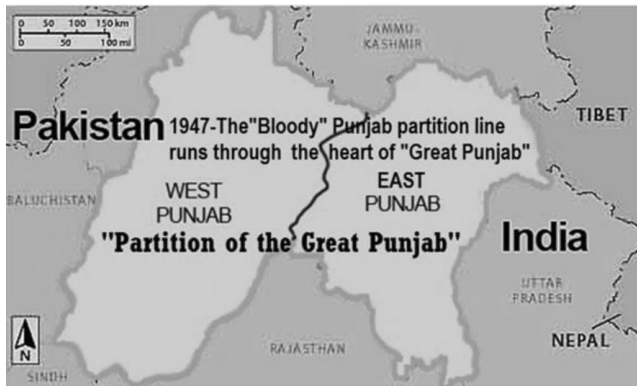
- Article 25 of the Indian Constitution declared Sikhs to be Hindus, erasing their independent identity.
- The Anand Karaj Act, which recognized Sikh marriage, was taken away, forcing Sikhs to be married under Hindu law.
- Punjabi language rights were denied, and Hindi was given more importance in Punjab.
- Punjab's water and electricity were taken and sent to other states.

This left Sikhs feeling betrayed. They had been promised protection, but instead their culture, faith, and economy were weakened.

Partition of India (1947)

India gained independence from British rule in 1947. But instead of freedom bringing peace, it brought tragedy. The country was divided into India and Pakistan. Punjab, the Sikh homeland, was cut in two. Sikhs were left as a small minority, split between the two new nations.

The sacrifice of Sikhs for independence was huge. 77% of those who died for India's freedom were Sikhs, and 81% of those imprisoned for life were Sikhs. Despite this, Sikhs did not receive their own homeland, while Muslims received Pakistan.



Partition caused violence, mass killings, and the forced migration of millions. Sikhs lost homes, land, and security. This was the first of many broken promises Sikhs would face in independent India.

Punjabi Suba Movement (1950s–1960s)

After Partition, Sikhs demanded recognition of Punjabi language and culture. Other states in India were allowed to organize around their languages, but Punjab was denied this right. Sikhs began the Punjabi Suba Movement to create a Punjabi-speaking state.

The protests were peaceful, but the government responded harshly. Over 12,000 Sikhs were arrested, including some inside the Darbar Sahib complex. Finally, in 1966, Punjab was reorganized, but instead of making it stronger, Punjab was made smaller. Large areas of land were cut away, and the state's capital, Chandigarh, was not returned to Punjab. Instead, it was made a Union Territory controlled by Delhi.

Sikhs were left with less land, fewer resources, and no true capital. Once again, the government's decisions weakened Punjab.

Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973)

By 1973, Sikhs were frustrated with constant betrayals. Leaders gathered at Anandpur Sahib and created the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. This was not a call for separation but a

list of demands for justice and equality.

The Resolution asked for:

- Fair distribution of Punjab's water and electricity.
- Punjabi to be recognized as the official state language.
- Return of Chandigarh as Punjab's capital city.
- Religious rights, including freedom for Sikhs to run their own institutions and broadcast Gurbani worldwide.
- Economic rights to allow Punjab to control its own development.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was peaceful, but instead of listening, the government portrayed Sikhs as 'troublemakers' or 'separatists.' This added to the growing tension.

Indira Gandhi and the Emergency (1975–1977)

In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was accused of cheating in elections. To hold on to power, she declared a State of Emergency across India. This gave her absolute power to rule like a dictator. She censored newspapers, banned protests, and arrested her opponents.

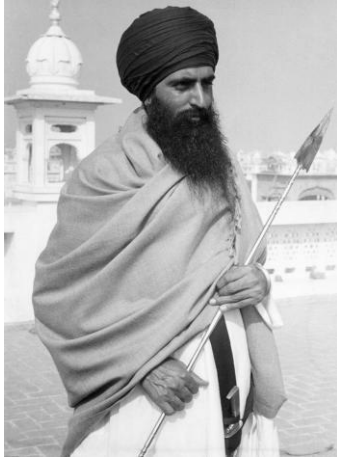
More than 140,000 people were arrested, and about 40,000 of them were Sikhs. Sikhs were treated as a threat to the government.

During this time, Sant Kartar Singh Bhindranwale, the Jathedar of Damdami Taksal, refused to accept the controlling measures of the government. He bravely continued Sikh religious practices and organized 37 Nagar Kirtans across Punjab. These large processions inspired Sikhs to stay connected to their faith and not bow down to Indira Gandhi's dictatorial measures. This strengthened the Sikh spirit during a dark period in India's democracy.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale

In 1977, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale became the 14th Jathedar of Damdami Taksal. The Taksal was a Sikh educational organization started by Guru Gobind Singh Ji at Damdama Sahib. Its first Jathedar was Shaheed Baba Deep Singh Ji, the great Sikh warrior-scholar who gave his life defending Sri Harimander Sahib.

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale carried forward this legacy of education, spirituality, and



sacrifice. He was a fearless and charismatic leader whose words touched the hearts of thousands. His parchar (preaching) focused on returning to the values of the Sikh Gurus: keeping kesh (unshorn hair), taking Amrit, rejecting drugs, alcohol, and immoral practices, and living as Khalsa.

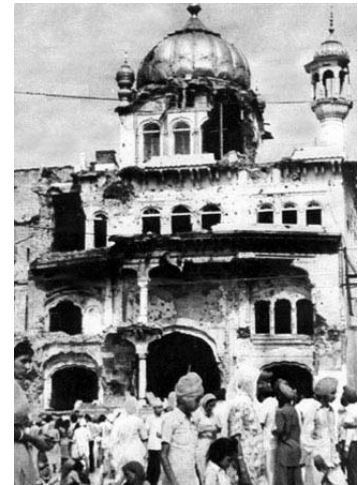
He traveled across Punjab giving speeches that were simple yet powerful, reminding Sikhs of their history, their duties, and their rights. Many young people who had fallen into bad habits left drugs and alcohol after listening to him and became Amritdhari. His leadership gave hope and courage to ordinary

Sikhs. For the Sikh community, he became a symbol of dignity and resistance. For the Indian government, he was seen as a leader who could not be controlled.

Operation Blue Star (Battle of Amritsar, June 1984)

In June 1984, the Indian Army launched Operation Blue Star, also called the Battle of Amritsar, against the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. This attack took place on the Shaheedi (martyrdom) day of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, when thousands of Sikhs had gathered for prayers.

The army surrounded Amritsar with 100,000 troops, cut off phone lines, expelled journalists, and blocked roads. Tanks and heavy artillery were brought into the sacred complex. The Akal Takhat, the throne of Sikh political authority built by Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, was directly targeted. It was destroyed after being hit with over 80 tank shells.



Eyewitnesses describe horrors:

- Innocent men, women, and children were shot.
- People were denied food and water for days, some drinking sweat or dirty water to survive.
- Survivors were tied up and executed at close range.
- 2,500 copies of Guru Granth Sahib Ji were destroyed when the Sikh Reference Library was burned.

More than 12,000 Sikhs were killed across Punjab during this operation. For Sikhs worldwide, this was not just an attack on buildings—it was an attack on their very faith and identity.

November 1984 Sikh Genocide

On October 31, 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, Bhai Beant Singh and Bhai Satwant Singh, who sacrificed their lives for justice after the attack on Darbar Sahib. Within hours, mobs began attacking Sikhs in Delhi and other cities across India. These were not random riots. They were organized massacres.



- Government officials handed out voter lists of Sikh homes.
- Weapons, kerosene, and iron rods were distributed.
- Mobs shouted slogans and were encouraged to kill.

For three days, Sikhs were hunted:

- Men were beaten, burned alive, or killed in front of their families.
- Women and girls were dishonored in brutal assaults.
- Children were not spared.
- Gurdwaras were attacked and set on fire.

The police stood by and did nothing. Some even helped the attackers. By the end, over 4,000 Sikhs were killed in Delhi alone. Yet many ordinary Hindu families risked their lives to protect Sikhs, proving this was not Hindus vs. Sikhs, but a state-sponsored genocide.

Punjab Today

The events of 1947–1984 left deep scars. Punjab, once the wealthiest state in India, now faces many problems:

- Drugs: Punjab has one of the highest addiction rates in India, especially among youth.
- Farmer suicides: Heavy debt and poor policies force thousands of farmers to end their lives each year.
- Water crisis: Punjab's rivers and groundwater have been diverted or drained, leaving villages with shortages and polluted supplies.

- Government-caused floods: In recent years, floods in Punjab have been worsened by deliberate government inaction. Water is sometimes released in ways that cause maximum damage to Sikh farmers and villages, bringing suffering and loss.
- Brain drain: Many young Punjabis leave for education and jobs abroad, taking talent away from Punjab.
- Economic decline: Punjab was once the richest state in India, but now it has fallen far behind.

The sacrifices of Sikhs for India's freedom were enormous, but the broken promises, betrayals, and tragedies of the past continue to affect Punjab's struggles today.

Please answer questions #1-10 in complete sentences in the following pages:

Reflection Questions – History Leading to the 1984 Sikh Genocide

1. What are human rights, and which Sikh Guru gave his life to protect the religious freedom of Hindus? **Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that every person deserves, such as the right to live, to be safe, to practice one's religion, to speak freely, and to be treated equally. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji gave his life to protect the religious freedom of Hindus and all people, showing the Sikh commitment to defending human rights for everyone.**
2. Which article of the Indian Constitution classified Sikhs as Hindus, erasing their independent identity? **Article 25 of the Indian Constitution classified Sikhs as Hindus, taking away their recognition as a distinct and independent religion.**
3. What percentage of those who died for India's freedom were Sikhs, and what percentage of those imprisoned for life were Sikhs? **77% of those who died for India's freedom were Sikhs, and 81% of those imprisoned for life were Sikhs.**
4. What was the main goal of the Punjabi Suba Movement in the 1950s and 1960s? **The main goal of the Punjabi Suba Movement was to create a Punjabi-speaking state that recognized and respected the Punjabi language and culture, just as other Indian states were organized around their regional languages.**
5. Name two of the demands listed in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973. **Fair distribution of Punjab's water and electricity resources. Recognition of Punjabi as the official state language and the return of Chandigarh as Punjab's capital.**

6. During Indira Gandhi's Emergency (1975–1977), how many Sikhs were arrested, and what important step did Sant Kartar Singh Bhindranwale take to keep Sikhs connected to their faith? **During the Emergency, about 40,000 Sikhs were arrested. Sant Kartar Singh Bhindranwale organized 37 Nagar Kirtans (religious processions) across Punjab to keep Sikhs spiritually strong and connected to their faith despite government oppression.**
7. Who was the first Jathedar of Damdami Taksal, and in what year did Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale become its 14th Jathedar? **The first Jathedar of Damdami Taksal was Shaheed Baba Deep Singh Ji, and Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale became its 14th Jathedar in 1977.**
8. What happened to the Akal Takhat during Operation Blue Star (the Battle of Amritsar) in June 1984? **During Operation Blue Star, the Akal Takhat, the throne of Sikh political authority, was destroyed after being hit by over 80 tank shells. The army's attack caused massive destruction and loss of life, including innocent men, women, and children gathered for prayers.**
9. Who assassinated Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, and what happened to Sikhs in Delhi and other cities across India in the days that followed? **Bhai Beant Singh and Bhai Satwant Singh, Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards, assassinated her in response to the attack on Darbar Sahib. In the days that followed, organized mobs attacked Sikhs across Delhi and other cities. Thousands were killed, women assaulted, homes and Gurdwaras burned, and police often did nothing or even helped the attackers. It was a state-sponsored genocide, not random violence.**

10. After reading about these events, how do you think broken promises, betrayal, and violence affected the Sikhs of Punjab, and what lessons can we learn today about standing up for human rights and justice? **The repeated betrayals and violence left deep scars on the Sikh community, causing pain, mistrust, and lasting trauma. Yet, Sikhs showed resilience and strength, holding onto faith and justice. The main lesson today is that we must always stand up for truth, equality, and human rights, and never stay silent in the face of injustice, no matter who it affects.**

