

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

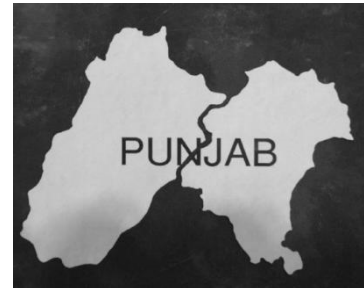
The Sikh Genocide of 1984 and the Widow Colony

In 1984, a terrible tragedy took place in India that changed the lives of Sikhs forever. It is known as the **Sikh Genocide of 1984**, when thousands of innocent Sikh men, women, and children were brutally killed across the country. This event is not only a story of violence, it is also a story of faith, courage, and the long fight for justice. Learning about this painful part of history helps us understand the value of equality, truth, and compassion for all people.

The Story Before 1984

Sikhism is a faith that stands for justice, equality, hard work, and service to others. Sikhs follow the teachings of the **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee**, their eternal Guru. Sikhs believe in defending the weak and living fearlessly while remembering God.

After India gained independence from Britain in 1947, the state of Punjab was divided and half went to Pakistan and half remained in India. Millions of Sikhs had to leave their ancestral homes and move across the new border. Thousands died during this time of violence and separation. Still, Sikhs worked hard to rebuild their lives and helped develop India's farms, businesses, and armies.



Over the next decades, Sikhs continued to ask for fair treatment and respect for their identity. In the 1950s and 1960s, they led the **Punjabi Suba Movement**, peacefully demanding a Punjabi-speaking state. In 1973, Sikh leaders gathered at Anandpur Sahib and passed the **Anandpur Sahib Resolution**, asking for justice in sharing water, land, and political rights, as well as respect for their distinct Sikh identity.

But instead of listening, the government treated these requests with suspicion. The ruling politicians, especially in the **Congress Party**, began spreading fear that Sikhs wanted to break India apart—something that was not true for the vast majority of Sikhs. This fear and misinformation were the seeds that later grew into a storm of hate.

Operation Blue Star (Battle of Amritsar)



In June 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian Army to invade the **Golden Temple** in Amritsar—the holiest shrine of the Sikh faith. The government said this mission, called **Operation Blue Star (Battle of Amritsar)**, was to remove Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers who were living in the complex.

But the attack happened during a sacred time when thousands of pilgrims, including women, elders, and children, were visiting to pray. Tanks, helicopters, and heavy weapons were used against people inside a holy place. The Akal Takht Sahib—the throne of Sikh temporal authority—was destroyed by shells. Historical manuscripts were burned.

Worse still, soldiers fired bullets into rooms where families were hiding and killed hundreds of unarmed pilgrims. Copies of **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee** were pierced by bullets and burned in the flames. Gurdwaras throughout Punjab were raided, their sacred spaces desecrated, and countless innocent people were arrested or disappeared.

For Sikhs everywhere, this was not only a political attack but a spiritual wound—a deliberate act of disrespect toward their faith. It felt as though the heart of Sikhism had been attacked. Pain, disbelief, and deep sadness filled Sikh homes around the world.

The Days of Fire and Fear

Only a few months later, tragedy struck again. On October 31, 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards, **Bhai Beant Singh and Bhai Satwant Singh**. Both men acted **independently, guided by conscience, to seek justice for the innocent lives lost during Operation Blue Star (Battle of Amritsar)** and to prevent any further harm to the Sikh community.

Within hours of the assassination, members of her own ruling **Congress Party** began to organize revenge attacks against Sikh civilians. What followed was not a spontaneous outburst of anger—it was a **carefully planned and organized genocide**.

Congress leaders held secret meetings on the night of October 31 and the morning of November 1. They used government voter lists to identify Sikh families and businesses. Then they gave out iron rods, knives, and cans of kerosene to mobs. The mobs were transported in buses and trucks owned by the government. They went from house to house shouting, *“Kill the Sikhs!”*

Sikh men were dragged from their homes, beaten, and burned alive in the streets. Women and young girls were assaulted in unspeakable ways. Homes, schools, and Gurdwaras were looted and set on fire. In many places, **copies of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee were thrown into flames, trampled, or torn apart**, and holy scriptures were urinated on. The sacred Gurdwaras that had stood for centuries were reduced to ashes.

Trains and buses were stopped; Sikh passengers were pulled out, beaten, and murdered. Some mobs poured gasoline on people and set them on fire in front of their families. The air was filled with black smoke, and the cries of innocent victims echoed through the cities.

Many survivors later testified that the police either stood silently watching or actively joined the attackers. In the neighborhood of



Trilokpuri in Delhi, police jeeps even supplied diesel to the mobs. It was clear that those meant to protect the people were helping the killers.

The official government claimed that 2,700 Sikhs were killed in Delhi, but eyewitnesses and human-rights organizations have shown that the true number was between **10,000 and 30,000 across India**. The genocide spread to at least eighteen states. It was not a riot; it was an organized mass killing of a religious minority.

Why It Was Genocide

The word **genocide** comes from two words: *geno*, meaning “race or group,” and *cide*, meaning “to kill.” The **United Nations** defines genocide as any deliberate attempt to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

What happened to Sikhs in 1984 fits this definition completely. It was not random violence. It was organized, targeted, and carried out with the involvement of those in power. The **Congress Party**, which ruled India at that time, played a central role in planning, supplying, and protecting the attackers. Their goal was to terrorize the Sikh community, to punish them collectively for the assassination, and to destroy their confidence and identity.

The genocide also aimed to erase Sikh culture and faith. Attacking the **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee**, burning Gurdwaras, and humiliating Sikh symbols such as turbans and beards were all deliberate

acts meant to break the spirit of the Sikh people. These actions showed an intent not only to kill bodies but to destroy faith.

International human-rights groups such as **Ensaaf** and **Sikhs for Justice** have called the 1984 violence a clear case of genocide under international law. Sadly, no world body has officially recognized it as such, and even today, many of the people who organized or led the killings have never faced justice.

The Widow Colony: Life After the Genocide



When the fires died down and the mobs disappeared, the streets of Delhi were covered in ashes and silence. In many homes, only widows and children remained. Their husbands, fathers, and brothers had been murdered. Entire families were wiped out in a matter of days.

To house these survivors, the government created a small settlement in West Delhi called **Tilak Vihar**, which came to be known as the **Widow Colony**.

Hundreds of women moved there, each carrying memories of horror that words could not describe.

Life in the Widow Colony was extremely difficult. The women had lost not only their loved ones but also their homes, savings, and dignity. Many were uneducated and had never worked before. Now they had to raise children alone while struggling with poverty and grief. Some had been assaulted during the violence and faced lifelong trauma and shame.

The government promised them compensation and justice, but very little help ever arrived. Many widows said that their statements were ignored or that officials mocked them when they came to ask for justice. Over the years, many of their children grew up without proper education, some turning to drugs or struggling with anger and loss.

Even today, if you walk through the narrow lanes of the Widow Colony, you can hear their stories. Some women light candles every year for their husbands and sons, whispering prayers for peace. Others keep silent, their pain too heavy to speak aloud. Yet their courage is extraordinary. Despite everything, they continue to live with faith in Waheguru and hope that one day the truth will be recognized by the world.

The Struggle for Justice

In 1985, the government set up the **Misra Commission** to investigate the killings, but it failed to punish the guilty and even hid much of the evidence. In 2005, the **Nanavati Commission** revealed that many senior Congress Party leaders had led the mobs and that police officers deliberately looked away. But again, only a handful of people were ever charged, and most continue to live freely.



In 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, himself a Sikh, offered a public apology in Parliament, saying, “I bow my head in shame that such a thing happened.” While his words gave comfort to some, the lack of true justice means the wounds remain open.

Lessons for the Future

The Sikh Genocide of 1984 teaches us how dangerous hate can be when it is encouraged by those in power. It reminds us that silence in the face of injustice is also a form of violence. When people are targeted because of their religion, culture, or race, the whole human family suffers.

As students and young citizens, we can honor the memory of those who died by learning their stories, standing up for truth, and treating every person with respect. We must reject hatred, speak out against discrimination, and help those who suffer.

History is not just something to read, it is something to learn from. Remembering 1984 helps ensure that such a tragedy never happens again.

Reflection

The Sikh Genocide was meant to destroy a community, but it revealed the strength of the Sikh spirit. Many Hindus and Muslims risked their lives to protect their Sikh neighbors, proving that humanity still exists even in darkness. The widows of Tilak Vihar, the survivors who still speak, and the youth who continue to remember—all of them remind us that truth can never be burned away.

When we study 1984, we are not studying hate; we are studying the power of resilience and faith. As Guru Arjan Dev Jee taught, *“Sweet is the will of God.”* The Sikh people continue to live with courage, compassion, and **Chardi Kala** — ever-rising spirit — showing the world that love is stronger than fear.

1. What event led to the organized attacks against Sikhs on October 31, 1984?

2. How were government voter lists and government-owned vehicles used during the genocide?

3. Why do human-rights groups describe the 1984 violence as *genocide* rather than random riots?

4. What challenges did the widows in Tilak Vihar, known as the *Widow Colony*, face after the genocide?

5. What emotions or thoughts do you have when reading about the courage and resilience of the widows and survivors of 1984?
