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The Literary Imagination and Recollections of the 1984 anti-Sikh Massacres (Chaurasi)*: A Study of the Forms of Remembering*

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Resum: Les memòries de les massacres antisikh de 1984, avui dia recordades com a *Chaurasi*, han perseguit la comunitat Sikh des d'aleshores. Quaranta anys després, els supervivents romanen al marge, lluitant contra el temps, els problemes de la vellesa i les experiències horripilants de *Chaurasi* que van impactar les seves vides dràsticament. Aquells que eren infants durant aquell període i que van sobreviure ja han superat la mitjana edat. Han estat testimonis de les lluites dels seus predecessors, especialment de les mares i els avis, els quals van combatre amb valentia per la justícia, sovint fins el fi de les seves vides. Les conseqüències d'aquests esdeveniments van donar lloc a formes de trauma que mai no han estat adreçades, portant molts fills d'aquestes famílies al món de les drogues i els delictes menors.

Què succeeix amb la gent que pateix violència i com es representa? Per què és important recordar i arxivar experiències com aquella? Finalment, com registrem i representem aquestes experiències? Com pot contribuir la literatura a la representació de la realitat? Com podem entendre les diferent formes d'escriure? Arran la recerca d'incidents que afecten les comunitats a nivell general, i *Chaurasi* en particular, presento algunes qüestions importants. L'objectiu d'aquest article és explorar diferent formes literàries de representar *Chaurasi* i, a partir de la literatura, crear un imaginari social de *Chaurasi* i les seves conseqüències. Per a fer-ho, hem d'entendre el seu rerefons sociopolític. L'article es divideix en sis seccions, que adrecen aspectes crucials i proveeixen un enteniment general de com es va dur a terme *Chaurasi* i el seu impacte a la contemporaneïtat.

Paraules clau. *Chaurasi*; Història Sikh; Narracions de memòries.

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Abstract: The memories of the 1984 anti-Sikh massacres, now remembered as *Chaurasi*, have haunted the Sikh community ever since. Forty years later, the survivors remain on the margins, struggling with time, old-age issues, and the gruesome experiences of *Chaurasi* that drastically impacted their lives. Those who were children at the time and survived are now past their middle age. They have witnessed the struggles of their elders, particularly mothers and grandparents, who courageously fought for justice often until the end of their lives. The aftermath of these events resulted in forms of trauma that have remained unaddressed, leading many children from these families into drug addiction and petty crimes.

What happens to people who experience violence, and how is it represented? Why is remembering and archiving such experiences important? Finally, how do we record and represent these experiences? How can literature contribute to the portrayal of reality? How do we understand the various forms of writing? While researching incidents that affect communities in general, and *Chaurasi* in particular, I present a few important issues here. The objective of this paper is to explore different literary ways of representing *Chaurasi* and creating a social imaginary through literature concerning *Chaurasi* and its aftermath. To do so, we need to understand its socio-political background. The paper is divided into six sections, addressing crucial concerns and providing an overall understanding of how *Chaurasi* was executed and its impact on contemporary time.

Keywords. *Chaurasi*; Sikh History; Memoir Narratives.

Resumen: La memoria de las masacres anti-Sij de 1984, ahora recordadas como *Chaurasi*, han estado atormentando a la comunidad Sikh desde que tuvieron lugar. Cuarenta años después, los sobrevivientes viven en los márgenes, luchando con el paso del tiempo, con los problemas de la vejez y con las horribles experiencias de *Chaurasi* que tuvieron un impacto drástico en sus vidas. Quienes entonces eran niños y sobrevivieron, ahora llegados a la mediana edad, han sido testigos de la lucha de sus mayores, particularmente madres y abuelos que lucharon incansablemente contra la justicia hasta el final de sus vidas. A menudos esto ha resultado en procesos de trauma que no han sido atendidos, lo que ha llevado a muchos de los hijos de estas familias a la drogadicción y a la continua comisión de delitos menores.

¿Qué sucede con las personas que experimentan violencia de este tipo? ¿Por qué es importante recordar y archivar tales experiencias? Finalmente, ¿cómo registramos y representamos esta experiencia? ¿Cómo puede la literatura contribuir a la representación de la realidad? ¿Cómo entendemos las diversas formas de escritura? Al investigar incidentes que afectan a las comunidades en general, y *Chaurasi* en particular, presentamos aquí algunas cuestiones caudales. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar diferentes formas literarias de representar *Chaurasi* y observar cómo se crea un imaginario social a través de la literatura con respecto a *Chaurasi* y sus secuelas. Para hacerlo, necesitamos entender su trasfondo sociopolítico. El artículo se ha dividido en seis secciones, que abordan distintos aspectos clave para ofrecer una comprensión general de cómo se ejecutó *Chaurasi* y de su impacto en los tiempos contemporáneos.

Palabras clave. *Chaurasi*; Historia Sij; Narrativas autobiográficas.

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1. Socio-Political Concerns Around *Chaurasi*:[1] The Background

The twentieth century was crucial for the Sikh community. The present concerns related to the identity of the Sikhs can be understood by reading across two important timelines: the early thirty years (1920s to 1940s) and the later years (1980s and 1990s). The Sikhs developed a separatist identity in the early years, identifying themselves as a distinct community that participated independently in the fight for India's independence. They laid independent demands and witnessed the Partition violence as a distinct cultural and religious minority from Hindus. Sikhs and Hindus had mixed families in the past, and therefore it was rarely necessary for them to keep apart. But the Partition violence resulted in a wide rift amongst them. The violent circumstances surrounding India's Partition may therefore have contributed to the development of communal identities that distinguished Sikhs from Hindus. The above time frame is also relevant for the development of an autonomous Sikh political system with autonomous demands and involvement in the fight for independence as a distinct entity.[2] Sikh political leaders like Master Tara Singh, his daughter Rajinder Kaur, Giani Kartar Singh, Sardar Hukam Singh and others provided a new shape to the Sikh politics in accordance with the newly formed Indian government in place now. As the Partition of India affected Punjab the most, the years after independence were spent resettling the people of Punjab who had been forced from their ancestral villages.

In the second period of the timeline, which covers the latter part of the 1980s in Punjab (1980s and 1990s), the two generations of the Sikhs had just resettled when there was a new upsurge to throw them into chaos. This time, it was concealed by a storyline that centred on militancy and a widely held but greatly misinterpreted demand for Khalistan, due to the state politics of the Congress Government. Further, the 1947 separation of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab had already reduced the large and very fertile Punjab into a small, haphazardly distributed area of about 50,000 sq. kms, reducing it from 3 lakh 57,000 sq. kms before Partition. In addition, Punjab suffered a great cultural loss and saw both its language and its religion threatened. Ultimately, the linguistic belt was used to Partition Punjab into three regions: Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and the remaining portion of Punjab. It is said that to harm a community one must harm its language. In the same vein, the Hindi Language Movement opposed Gurmukhi's status as Punjab's official language, sparking linguistic conflict in 1957. In 1961, when the census was conducted, many Hindus in Punjab who spoke Punjabi claimed Hindi as their mother tongue.

Any attempt at summarizing the early part of Punjab politics briefly is like fitting an elephant into a match box. Following the bitterness arising during the early twentieth century between

[1] The events of 1984 are referred to as *Chaurasi* in the Punjabi language. 1984 is the year when the Golden Temple, the sacred shrine of the Sikhs, was attacked by the Government of India in June, followed by the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in late October and the subsequent killing of more than 3000 Sikh civilians in Delhi and several cities across India. Further, for the Punjabis and Sikhs, *Chaurasi* refers to a whole decade, the years ranging from the early 1980's to the 1990's in Punjab. In this period the state of Punjab in India witnessed political conflict, years of terrorism, and insurgency. It is only in the late 1990s that the situation began to settle (if it settled at all, as the people continue to face the consequences of those years). In this paper, then, *Chaurasi* refers to the violence occurred in this period.

[2] This statement should not be misunderstood to mean that Sikh politics were non-existent prior to this time frame. As of the start of the Independence process, the Sikh community has been politically involved. The conversation between Guru Nanak Dev and Babur and other Gurus demonstrates the political philosophy that pervaded Sikh history, which the ten Gurus adopted, as well as their contributions to governance in their individual life-spans.

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Haryana and Punjab, Haryana did play a crucial role during the 1980s when Punjab began to be openly targeted by the politicians for their vote gain, not to miss that Haryana and Punjab shared the still-unresolved water dispute. The Sikhs were initially the soft targets, unaware that they would end up as the victims of the politicians. Soon a narrative of militancy, terrorism and Khalistan emerged in Punjab. Any Sikh displaying the five K's (H. Singh 2015, 26)[3] was lifted and imprisoned on the basis of suspicion, being termed anti-national. In retaliation, there was an insurgency in Punjab itself, where youth and some local groups were lured to adopt arms, and killings became the order of the day. The common citizens began suffering, both at the hands of the police, who were controlled by the state, and at the hands of local groups who resorted to arms and violence, troubling innocent villagers. The local groups too began troubling the common people, by hiding in their homes and openly killing officials on the road. People witnessed not days but months and years of curfews that curtailed the movement of people, filling days and nights with fear and threats. This situation further limited the growth and progress of the state: the rich land was reduced to a bleeding ground. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was installed as the face of the Sikh community and popularly referred to as a saint, was considered the main culprit. He was searched by the government, and located, found and killed in the Golden Temple Complex, as per the orders of the ruling government of India led by the Congress party's leader Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This plan was given shape and executed as Operation Blue Star, under which the Golden Temple was attacked, and Bhindranwale was finally assassinated. The attack carried on for eight days from 1st June to 8th June 1984.

There are certain questions that we need to raise at this point. Couldn't Bhindranwale be found outside the main shrine of the Sikhs? There are reports which suggest that Bhindranwale could have been easily arrested outside the Golden Temple in December 1983 itself, but owing to a different agenda this possibility was deterred (Dhillon 1996, 224). The question is, why was he not arrested then? Do we have to believe that the Government intended to locate him at the Sikh shrine to attack it and thereby threaten the Sikhs?[4] Since the pilgrims were celebrating Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom, why was the attack planned on that very day, when the government knew that the Golden temple complex would be full of visitors and pilgrims? How many people were killed? How many women were dishonored? What happened to those families who lost their people in the attack? Has there been any justice, any decision for these cases? Or have we lost our histories amidst the sounds of guns and tanks? Till date, the Golden Temple complex houses more than 10,000 pairs of unclaimed shoes (M. Kaur 2016).

A few months after the June attack on the Golden temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikh community, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in an act of revenge. The aftermath of this assassination was the brutal mass killing of thousands of innocent Sikh people across the country, with around 3000 killed in the National capital, Delhi alone (Mitta and Phoolka 2007, 8). These killings continued for three days, from 31st October to 4th November 1984.

[3] The people of the Sikh community keep long hair and beard (kesh) and observe five k's as a part of Sikh identity. These five K's are Kesh (Hair), Kanga (a wooden comb), Karra (a steel or iron bangle), Kirpan (Sword) and Kahchaira (a long underpants).

[4] "The reason for Bhindranwale's arrest on a charge of murder and later on his inexplicable release appear to be dubious. It is obvious that he was being exploited for political purposes. He could have been arrested as late as 15 December 1983, when he still lived outside the Golden Temple. But the Hindus and Sikhs had to be polarized still further, the situation had to be allowed to deteriorate still further, and only a spectacular attack on the shrine could help build the true Durga image [of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi]" (Dhillon 1996, 224).

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2. Identity Markers and Identity Consciousness

The manner in which these killings were conducted was not spontaneous in nature; rather it seemed to be a very thoroughly planned and coordinated assault. According to the survivors, the attacking mobs had a pattern. A voters list was first used to identify the Sikhs' homes, marking them with a cross made of lime powder to let the mobsters know that the house was of a Sikh family so it could be burnt. These marks were done with some white powder (J. Singh 2009, 26). A senior army officer stationed in Delhi during the violence is described in an official report as saying, "This arson is the work of an expert" (Mukhoty 1984, 6). It is unclear who provided these specialists and how they were used in the killings. The Sikhs in different pockets of many cities were hunted and killed brutally by garlanding them with burning tyres, previously having been humiliated by cutting their hair or beating them in all possible ways (J. Singh 2009, 105-107). In order to blend in with the majority, many Sikhs during this time chose to shave off their hair. However, the mob was sharp enough to compare freshly cut hair to previously cut hair with a modicum of suspicion. The killings were triggered by the smallest indication of recently cut hair or any other identity marker. Unfortunately, a large number of non-Sikhs were also mercilessly lynched after being mistaken for Sikhs. Many Hindus reported shaving their beards[5] to avoid being attacked because they were thought to be Sikhs. In her personal narrative "The Question of Identity," Sikh writer Preeti Gill records her experience of a narrow escape on the night when Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated. Growing up in a liberal household, the Gills had never connected to religion or politics. They never anticipated that the mobs would take up to streets to attack innocent people as they belonged to the Sikh community. She recalls that she and her husband were returning from a dinner at someone's home when they actually encountered a mob. At that moment, they truly understood that they were being forced into a religious identity regardless of how they responded to it. They remained unharmed because they didn't show any signs of Sikh identification, yet at the same time, their identity surfaced and bracketed them (Gill 2016, 78). She explains the impact this incident had on her life as follows:

> What incidents like this brought home to me, and to many others like me who are educated, upper middle-class, apolitical and irreligious, is that identity is a huge marker. Your name spells out who you are, the community or religion in which you are born, which then pins you to a spot where you remain fixed and unmoving, under a spotlight, waiting to be accepted and feted or rejected and marginalized. Whether we define ourselves in that way is immaterial. It is who we are seen to be that matters enormously. Identification affects experience. It is the most mundane thing and yet it matters in the most significant, extraordinary way in our everyday lives. (Gill 2016, 78)

It is incredibly ironical that a person should have no say in whether or not to identify with any particular identification marker—communal, ethnic, caste, race, or gender related. People's perceptions by the general public always come to light, especially during times of communal

[5] In conversation with a retired Captain from the Indian Armed Forces (name not disclosed for confidentiality), he said he had adorned a beard before 1984 which he shaved off after as a consequence of the anti-Sikh attacks. A Professor of Sociology (name not disclosed for confidentiality) in an informal talk once mentioned that 1984 violence was the first and the last time when he shaved off his beard (in conversation on 11 May 2017 at Ahmedabad). Due permission was taken from them to reproduce these accounts in the paper.

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conflicts. This kind of categorization is ongoing and recurrent. For example, the Muslim community has been stigmatized post 9/11 in the USA (McCauley 2009, 35). The deeds of a few extremists must be borne mostly by the innocent members of the same community who are not involved in the terror. Furthermore, these occurrences have an overlapping effect on different communities. Given the sharp rise in hate crimes in the USA123, the Sikh community could never be immune to the 9/11 attacks, as these hate crime perpetrators mistakenly believed the Sikhs to be Muslims. Vikram Kapur writes about this process in the introduction to his edited collection *1984 In Memory and Imagination: Personal Essays and Short Fiction on the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.* He explains how in the United States the 9/11 attack "transformed everyone with a brown face into a potential troublemaker in the eyes of many Americans" (Kaupr 2016, x). Anyone with a brown skin was viewed as a potential threat to the White people, regardless of whether they were participating in a terror attack or not. Additionally, Kapur discusses his colleagues' remark on how the White world would start to focus on Asian people instead of Afro-American communities (Kapur 2016, x-xi). He goes on to explain how each violent incident affects other communities, especially minorities:

> Until 9/11, the only time I felt like a minority in America was while filling out the race section of an official document. Unlike blacks and Hispanics, Indians were comfortably anonymous in the America of the late twentieth century. The fact they did not figure on the radar of the American mainstream, while rendering them obscure, protected them from overt racism. Furthermore, I inhabited the liberal and diverse world of university campuses and literary gatherings, where everyone went the extra mile to be seen as open and inclusive. 9/11 changed all that. Suddenly, I found myself being viewed with hostility by perfect strangers… (Kapur 2016, xi)

Therefore, these stories are important because they illustrate how any act of violence affects innocent, everyday people anywhere and everywhere. They have an overarching influence rather than only affecting the targeted communities.

3. From Partition to *Chaurasi*: the Intersection of Violence

Back in the 1980s, Sikhs were marked for carrying signs of their Sikh identity. Turbans, display of five k's and an open beard could easily invite scrutiny by police, search warrants and arrest just on suspicion even if someone was completely innocent. Practically, Punjabis had hardly recovered from the losses they had suffered during the division of India and Pakistan when they were ensnared in a new internal battle. Thirty-seven years after the country's division, Punjab was once again the target of violence, and forty years after *Chaurasi*, it still suffers from the effects of that historical episode, having lost many of its youth to drugs, unemployment, depression, and trauma. Many people who witnessed the *Chaurasi* violence recalled that it had a close similarity to the violence of Partition. One of the survivors of *Chaurasi* in Delhi, Jagtej Singh, remembered how he and his younger siblings were able to save themselves just because their father, having witnessed the violence which occurred during Partition, could understand how people around him behaved, and thus plan their escape. They first sought refuge at the home of a neighbour, who appeared uncertain of his role, of whether he genuinely wished to

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save them. Jagtej Singh's father chose to move out of this house, and they kept changing places before they could reach a safe abode.[6]

Chaurasi brought back painful memories of the brutality during the Partition. Those who experienced the Partition in eastern India have comparable experiences. Ashis Nandy recalls how 1984 anti-Sikh violence reminded him of his own experience during Partition:

> I was nine years old in 1946, when the Partition violence erupted with the Muslim League's call for Direct Action Day on August 16 of that year. I had forgotten my Partition memories, but they gradually came back to me, more so because of the anti-Sikh riots in 1984….
> [In 1984,] walking through the lanes of Delhi, seeing burnt houses and blood splattered walls – these were the things I hadn't seen before. In the Calcutta of 1946, after the first six days of violence, the killings were random. Mohallas [alleys and lanes] had volunteer guards. A Muslim who strayed into a Hindu locality or a Hindu who happened to venture into a Muslim locality was killed. (Nandy 2017)

Despite not being Sikh or a *Chaurasi* survivor, Nandy was affected by it because he witnessed some of the worst communal violence during the Partition era. He further elaborates that "until then, I had never realised that my interest in studying violence was connected to my own childhood trauma over Partition violence" (Nandy 2019). Nandy's experience of Partition, as a child, remained in his subconscious mind, and surfaced when he actually witnessed *Chaurasi* as an adult. Different events of conflict and catastrophe help people understand their own traumatizing experiences, regardless of their communal affiliations. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh, in his 1995 essay "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi," explores the lasting effects of his experience in Delhi on October 31, 1984. His essay revisits Partition, which he describes as a "mass slaughter." Comparing it to *Chaurasi*, he suggests that the impact of violence around them was of the same intensity as that of Partition: "Like many other members of my generation, I grew up believing that mass slaughter of the kind that accompanied the Partition of India and Pakistan, in 1947, could never happen again. But that morning in the city of Delhi, the violence had reached the same level of intensity" (Ghosh 2018).

In the essay, he recounts how he and his friend Hari's family rescued their neighbour, Mr. Bawa, completely ignorant of the gravity of the situation. At the same time, Ghosh was profoundly affected by the whole situation, as manifested in his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Despite not mentioning the violence of 1984 directly in the novel, Ghosh notes the psychological effects the event had on him as he was writing it. He says that this was "a book that led me backward in time, to earlier memories of riots, ones witnessed in childhood. It became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (Ghosh 2018).

Nandy and Ghosh were not the direct victims, but the tragic events they witnessed had an indirect, everlasting impact on them. Meanwhile, the Sikhs who survived the violence surrounding both the Partition and *Chaurasi* were not only witnesses but also victims. Following their forced relocation to India during the Partition, many Sikhs who had to flee their homes in Pakistan have remained unsettled ever since. Once more, *Chaurasi* uprooted them

[6] Jagtej Singh (name changed for the sake of confidentiality) was interviewed during the field study I carried out in 2014. Their family had a furniture showroom in Delhi.

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and assured them of their unwanted and undesirable status inside their own nation. Speaking of my own experience, the researcher's maternal grandfather took part in a number of the India National Congress-led freedom movements. He always wore a Nehruvian jacket and wore a rose flower on his collar, since he was much impressed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. However, *Chaurasi* was a very hard time for him. Following the *Chaurasi* violence in free India, he was repeatedly and needlessly detained by authorities in his own nation, that had been long free from British rule. He eventually ceased making contributions to the Congress party because he was heartbroken and shattered. He frequently remarked that he thought *Chaurasi* to be a second Partition, and referred to the Sikh community as doubly marginalised.[7]

Similar to this, Phanda Singh survived the horrors of both Partition and *Chaurasi*. He was a member of the Sindhi Labana community,[8] and was interviewed by historian Uma Chakravarti in 1985. Chakravarti implies that, although he was around 70 years of age, he had a very clear memory of the Partition, as though it had just happened:

> He remembers Partition very clearly and described it vividly, as if he was talking about a recent event in his life. He sees his life as one long struggle for survival, marked by endless migration which appeared to have ended finally in Trilokpuri. Following the riots (*Chaurasi)*,[9] in which he lost two of his sons, he has moved once more and he now lives in Tilak Vihar,[10] where he runs a small tea shop. (Phanda 2019, 44)

Many years later, on revisiting Tilak Vihar widow's colony, Uma Chakravarti inquired about Phanda Singh.[11] She met his daughter-in-law, who told her that he had expired waiting for justice till his last breath.

4. Survivors' Narratives and their Struggle with the Legal System

Like Phanda Singh, many people await justice. The survivors, mainly women with children, were left alone to fend for themselves without any support system. Along with other basic needs for a decent living, what they needed was mental counselling, motivational support, decent education for their children, health care and proper hygiene. What they received was neglect, petty jobs such as a water carrier, peon, office support staff or house-keeping staff, and long working hours. As a result, they were forced to neglect their children, who were having a hard time understanding the numerous killing they had seen. The survivors experienced

[7] Regular conversation in our meetings with our grandfather during our childhood.

[8] "Labaniya or Labana Sikhs are originally from Sind and do not speak Punjabi. They are mostly engaged in carpentry, iron work or charpai making. There was a heavy concentration of Labaniya Sikhs in the resettlement colonies of Trilokpuri and Sultanpuri" (Singh, P 2019, 51).

[9] Since this interview was conducted in 1985 and the book was published in 1987, the editors used the term "riots", but the violence was planned and coordinated. As a result, terms like organized violence, pogrom, carnage, and massacres have been employed more recently and the use of the word 'riot' is avoided. Furthermore, the Sikhs have demanded that this incident be classified as a genocide because it targeted a community, and the mobs' chants made it obvious that attempts were being made to eradicate the genetic heritage of the Sikh population's families.

[10] This is a widow's colony in New Delhi where the widows of all the men killed during *Chaurasi* were sent to live together. Images of the colony can be found in the dossier edited by Amnesty International, *Chauraasi Kin Nainsaafi. The continuing Injustice for the 1984 Massacre* (see list of Works Cited).

[11] She expressed this a talk delivered at Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, through Skype chat at GIAN program on Marginality and Literature in August 2016.

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psychological stress, which eventually led to drug addiction and sadness. Within a few years, the colony of Tilak Vihar started to house small-time offenders who destroyed any hope for their struggling parents, mostly women who had to take care of their children and had no time to grieve for their deceased. Jarnail Singh reports Baljeet Kaur's narrative in his book, *I Accuse…The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984,* explaining that "Baljeet Kaur earns a living by working as a house help, washing utensils at people's houses. She had lost her husband to drugs. She has four daughters and sons to look after and no proper means of earning" (J. Singh 2009, 101).

Shanti Kaur lost her son Sohan Singh to drugs just a few days before his marriage. He simply disappeared. She made huge efforts to get him "out of the quagmire of drugs after a lot of effort. But the drug traders had killed him for refusing to buy anymore" (J. Singh 2009, 114). Not only that, but she didn't discover his body until it began to smell. It was hidden under the bed. Since *Chaurasi* has created a gloomy shade over her life which the sun has refused to shine on, her entire story is incredibly sad. She was never able to obtain justice for her son, her father, her brother, or her father-in-law. As a result of his neck being slashed by swords during the *Chaurasi* violence, her spouse also passed away from throat cancer. They never got the funds for the treatment, thus he passed away without being able to take any medication. This is just one of many similar accounts from *Chaurasi* survivors living in the widow's community in Tilak Vihar.[12]
During my own field work,[13] husband and wife Harbans Singh and Shakuntala[14] described the violent killings of sixteen members of their family. Harbans's narrative was incredibly vivid because, as he spoke, it was easy to picture the method of the executions. Shakuntala sobbed inconsolably while she spoke to us. Harbans revealed that Shakuntala often slid into depressions for days together. Their son was around seven or eight years in '84. Today, he is a grown-up man and has a seven-year-old son. In a one-room house with a kitchen in one corner that is divided by a curtain, seven people live together. The room smells of seepage. Speaking casually with the daughter-in-law, it was discovered that the family never celebrated Diwali[15] because Shakuntala's family had celebrated it on October 24, six days before the carnage.

Eleven days after Shakuntala's brother's marriage, his newlywed bride was mercilessly burned alive. When she requested water, members in the mob urinated on her (Singh, S. and H. 2019, 3-11). While Harbans and Shakuntala spoke vividly about the carnage, they were reluctant to discuss their children. This was mostly because they continued to worry that their children might be harmed at any time, so they were extremely protective of them. Shakuntala's family awaits justice and declines any charitable assistance from the Gurudwara committee or any other organization. Shea strongly feels that her father's clan has been humiliated and there cannot be any compensation for her and her father's humiliation (Singh, S. and H. 2019, 3-11).

Similarly, Kamlesh Kaur waits for the day when she will get justice. Having retired now from a school where she was a class four employ, she faces several ailments. She has spent her life-

[12] Tilak Vihar Widows' Colony had been established in 1985 to house the widows and families of the Sikhs killed in the 1984 pogrom, as explained above. For details about this colony refer to *Black November: Writings on the Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath* edited by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry.
[13] I and my cousin Jaspreet Kaur interviewed the survivors staying in Tilak Vihar Widow's colony in 2014. Shakuntala and Harbans Singh were interviewed then. Jaspreet Kaur and Karnail Singh had helped me get in touch with the survivors. I am forever indebted to them for this support.
[14] For details of this interview, read Kaur 2016 in list of Works Cited.
[15] Diwali is a major festival in India.

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term sitting on *dharnas:*[16] "We have spent our days on *dharna* and nights on the roads" (Kaur, C. and R. 2019, 24). She explains the importance of sitting on the *dharna* as follows: "It is only when we sat on *dharna* that they declared a compensation. But once they declare any compensation, they don't provide that compensation. Only when we sit on *dharna* they give us something" (Kaur, C. and R. 2019, 27).

It has become commonplace for these widows to plead justice. It is not until they sit on *dharnas* and demand their rights that they receive what has been promised to them. Committee after committee has changed over the last thirty-five years, and each time a new committee is appointed, the entire process is delayed, since they have to start all over again. It took three decades for the courts to settle some claims, but not all of them, which suggests that the Indian legal system does not appear to be supportive of the survivors. It took thirty-two years for the court to convict only one of the major Congress Party leaders, Sajjan Kumar, out of many other prominent leaders of the period, like HKL Bhagat, Dharam Das Shastri, Jagdish Tytler and Kamal Nath. The indifference of the various governments over the years and their casual conduct when handling the 1984 cases point to utter irresponsibility. Justice Dhingra, who was appointed as one of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) members to probe into the closure of 246 cases, describes the way in which the government functions. He remarks that he was appointed in January 2018 as a Chairman for this three-member Special Investigation Team, the other members being an Indian Police Services Officer, Abhishek Dular, and a former special DG of BSF, Rajdeep Singh. Since, Mr Rajdeep Singh expressed his inability to join the committee, and the court's permission to continue with a two-member team was given only in Nov, 2018. (Yadav 2020). It took ten months for the court to decide on that point. Justice Dhingra further states that even though the report was submitted to the Union Law Ministry by late April, it was not submitted to the court till November for unknown reasons. He explains:

> I do not know the motivations behind the Centre informing the Court that the report was received in October. I can tell you with all the responsibility that the delay wasn't from our end. We had submitted the report in April. For reasons best known to the government, the report was not submitted until November and that too in sealed covers. (Yadav 2020)

The prolonged delay is not a new thing in this case; rather, previously, four commissions, nine committees, and three SITs haven't been able to bring the cases even to trial, let alone dispense justice and judgement. To claim that the Indian judicial system has failed to provide justice to the victims of the 1984 state-led pogrom is not incorrect; this will go down as a sombre chapter in the nation's history of impunity. According to Justice Dhingra, there are no grounds for reinvestigation in any of the cases. He gives the following explanation for the way the police have compromised investigations and the court's final delay:

> At best, there are grounds for appeal in a handful of cases but none for reinvestigation. This is not so because the cases are false or do not deserve further investigation but because of the manner in which they have been compromised by not just the police but also the judicial system. In most cases, original records have been weeded out from the trial courts because of the long period of time that has elapsed. In several cases, we issued summons to witnesses only to learn that the individuals concerned had died many years ago. In a few cases, we found

[16] *Dharna* is a Hindi word for a mode of demand for compliance or compensation promised by court, in this case by sitting in front of the court, that is, a kind of protest.

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> witnesses but they refused to cooperate because they did not want their wounds [to] cut open again without any guarantee of justice. In a large number of cases, the police had not even kept proper records to begin with, so even tracking the original FIRs was impossible. (Yadav 2020)

Several questions come up at this point: Will there be no resolution to the *Chaurasi* cases? How can members of a given community be spotted, humiliated, and brutally killed openly in the streets of a country that is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic that promises social, economic and political justice along with fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual?[17] Is there no place for these citizens to make their cases and pursue some resolution that would at least give them a sense of dignity and rightful justice? How could records be altered and documents be misplaced?

At the end of the legal process, who would be willing to accept responsibility for the delays? Is anyone in the system accountable? In his interview, in a way, Justice Dhingra suggested that the time lapse cannot give justice to anyone. His words give meaning to the proverb 'Justice delayed is justice denied'. In a study entitled *Conflicted Democracies and Gendered Violence: The Right to Heal,* Chatterji et. al. explain that accountability is essential for maintaining linkages between the oppressed people and the subjugating groups, who are mutually incompatible: "Accountability requires that judicial, legislative, and other bodies address the root causes and effects of disarray and dissension. In doing so, they must seek out the vital contributions of victim-survivors' capacity of healing" (Yadav 2020).

This lack of action, in a sense, demonstrates how a minority community is marginalized within its own nation. Such an institutional nonchalant attitude is a risk, since it creates opportunities for future criminal activities. Countries risk becoming a common ground for communal disputes and recurring riots, pogroms or massacres such as the ones already occurred. The security of their citizens is therefore always compromised. The survivors and victims' still harbour mistrust and resentment born the day they lost their loved ones, which marked a sea change in their own lives.

5. The Literary Imaginary and Modes of Representation

Understanding how mainstream writers have addressed a certain event in the mainstream languages is one of the important gaps to be filled when examining the literature of a particular minority on a very specific, narrowed down event. For a variety of reasons, mainstream writers typically tend to overlook politically instigated conflict. One of the main causes of this ignorance is the fear of agency, which is followed by feelings of shock and surprise in accepting the reality of the situation, let alone write about it. This means that there are instances when the violence is beyond human comprehension and the scenario is so violent that it takes time for writers to handle it, and years pass with no portrayal of the entire incident at a global scale. *Chaurasi's* situation and the literature around it are comparable. Additionally, political influence dominates the literary marketplace, state agencies control the national media, and there is an imposed silence on the subject. In the case of *Chaurasi*, the silence lasted around three decades.

[17] From the Preamble to the Constitution of India.

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It is only after three decades that varied and diverse forms of representation started being visible on the subject. In their essay "What is a Minor Literature?" Deleuze and Guattari had emphasised on 'experimentation' as an alternative to 'interpretation'. Referring to Kafka's works, they remark on the "mode of expression" and the "unformed expressive material" that leads to "less and less formalized contents" (Deleuze, Guattari and Brinkle 1983, 14). This applies to the context in question here.

Despite a three-decade gap in *Chaurasi* literature, the first written work on the subject appeared as soon as two months after the attack on the Golden Temple. In September 1984, eight writers—Amarjit Kaur, Lt. Gen. J.S. Aurora, Khushwant Singh, M.V. Kamath, Subhash Kepekar, Sunil Sethi, and Tavleen Singh—edited an anthology of journalistic essays titled *The Punjab Story*. After this initial response, there are evidently different forms and genres addressing the issue. In 1987, Uma Chakravarti and Nandita Haksar produced a collection of first-hand interviews with the survivors of the anti-Sikh slaughter, entitled *The Delhi Riots: Three Days in the Life of a Nation.* The same year, Surender Tiwari compiled *Kala November*, a collection of short stories in Hindi. After 1987, an English translation of *Kala November*, by Saroj Vasisht, saw the light 1990. The first full-fledged novel on the matter was published only in 2001, written in Assamese by Indira Goswami, entitled *Pages Stained in Blood*. From 2004 onwards, novels on *Chaurasi* began appearing in English, beginning with Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2004) followed by Preminder Singh Sandhawalia's *Beyond Identity* (2007), Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* (2013), Amandeep Sandhu's *Roll of Honour* (2014), Vikram Kapur's *The Assassinations* (2017) and Bobby Sachdeva's *Once There was Me* (2020). In 2016 Vikram Kapur published the anthology of personal essays *1984: In Memory and Imagination – Personal Essays and Stories on the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.* In 2019 an anthology of literary works edited by myself came to light, entitled *Black November: Writings on the Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath.* This collection included interviews, affidavits, short stories, poems and plays. Activist and researcher Sanam Sutirah Wazir has recently published an anthology of interviews of women survivors who witnessed *Chaurasi* first-hand: *The Kaurs of 1984*. As we can see, even though there have been few works of literature on *Chaurasi*, other forms of writings offering political analysis and journalistic writing are available in both Punjabi and English.

6. An Act of Remembrance: Saheed Ganj Gurudwara, Tilak Vihar Widow's Colony

During my field work in Tilak Vihar Widow's Colony, I met Cheeja Kaur, who pointed towards a photograph that was hanging on the wall of her house. The young boy in this picture may have been between 20 and 23 years old. He had an innocent face with a sweet smile, which appeared to be very calm in the photograph. He was an autorickshaw driver. For Cheeja Kaur, this photograph is perhaps the most prized possession of her life, as this is the only memory of her husband, Bhura Singh. Finding a photograph, however, had been difficult, especially for someone who had lost her possessions in the house's looting and burning during the chaos. Cheeja Kaur recalls that Bhura Singh's family did not have a photograph of him. Bhura Singh had applied for a license just before the assault. She went to the Regional Transport Office to specially collect the photograph from his application and get it framed. Later the widows in the

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colony gathered photographs of the deceased and displayed them at their local gurudwara.[18] The young man's innocent expression illustrates how quickly such incidents can change the course of innocent and harmless people's lives. What this picture might mean to Cheeja Kaur is another question. In order to commemorate the deceased and record the past, Cheeja Kaur was eager to have her husband's picture displayed in the gurudwara. For her, the photograph is no less than a monument, because it depicts the suffering of ordinary people who have no say whatsoever in state politics or religious communities. These photographs serve as a token of remembrance in and of itself. Ironically, yet, the political struggle is borne primarily by them.

The numberless photographs in the Gurudwara depict the sad plight of the community. These photographs are not just a compilation of people who were killed and humiliated; rather, they are memorial archives that serve as a collective memory of every person who fell prey to politically led state violence. Veena Das has remarkably articulated the relationship of violence and the everyday in her seminal book *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, where she questions:

> How did the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi become an event of specific local importance in Sultanpuri, folding in it so many lives from peripheral colonies in the city? I want to argue that to understand the subjectivity of the crowds we have to read how institutions of the state and the local networks of political allegiances and hostilities left their tracks in the acts of violence. (Das 2007, 136)

The bigger worry is that violence manifests itself in different ways and affects other communities as well when historical lessons are not learned. The offenders continue to promote hate and grow more self-assured in their violent deeds. Memories and remembrances are restricted to the boundaries of the impacted community. Rather than individuals developing empathy for one another, the rifts deepen and never go away.

Conclusion

The worst effect of not providing closure to these cases is that it increases the likelihood of future crimes, since the offenders are incentivized because participants of the mobs are not held accountable. By the time justice was served to a few cases, many people had already lost their life or were in their dire old age. Before a ruling could be made, one of the Congress party leaders who was involved in several cases had passed away without being brought to the book. Journalist Ravinder Kaur, as quoted by Amarjit Singh Narang in his book *Politics of Revenge: Understanding 1984 Anti-Sikh Carnage*, writes about the impact of injustice regarding 1984 violence on other communities in India. She says:

> The violent events of 1984 set their own unhappy precedents which were repeated in the riots that have occurred since then. Obviously, no lessons have been learnt from the assault on our rights during the emergency nor from the slaying of

[18] This gurudwara is in the Tilak Vihar Widows Colony, called Saheed Ganj Gurudwara, where photographs of men who were killed in the massacre have been displayed in on all the walls. The place in the room falls short to the numberless frames still piled up one upon the other. See Amnesty International, *Chauraasi Kin Nainsaafi. The continuing Injustice for the 1984 Massacre*.

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> thousands of men and women in Delhi and elsewhere in 1984 and Gujarat in 2002. If India is to enforce any kind of rule of law and substantial democracy, (not just procedural) if we are to prevent further atrocities on innocent people, we must not allow this dust to settle down. We must keep the momentum for the cause of justice, harmonious coexistence and democratic values. (Narang 2009, 15)

It is now nearly obvious to the Sikh community that the numerous administrations over the past forty years have not demonstrated the necessary concern for the violence against the Sikhs in 1984, as discussed in the fields of state legislatures and judicial inquiry. The survivors have been forced to swallow this fact, but the assertions continue and must go on. Any forms of writings, discussions or representations must continue for this gruesome issue to stay alive. There is a need for this subject to be brought forth in various forums, including university curriculums, school syllabi and educational institutions. Even though the courts have failed the country's citizens, there are numerous other avenues for raising public awareness. Over the past ten years, there have been a growing number of films and literary portrayals of this issue, but much more work and discussion are still required.

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topic. Indian readership may be familiar with the concepts, but this paper will provide a comprehensive source information and knowledge to those who are not familiar with *Chaurasi*.

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