

The Ongoing Denial of the Sikh Genocide

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the anti-Sikh bloodshed in 1984 through a case study examining the roots of the ethnic conflict from 1947 through 2021. By examining this historically important case, I clarify the process by which genocidal violence occurred against Sikhs in a systemic and orchestrated manner meant to attack the cultural standing of the group. The historical conflict studied includes issues present at the time of the partition, Sikh separatism, paramilitary operations launched by the state, and the contemporary emergence of an ethnic-terrorist narrative about Sikhs. I use secondary data collection and analysis to demonstrate that the violence of 1984 against Sikhs and argue that it should be classified as a genocide. Through the destruction of Sikh symbols and structures of faith, police manipulation of records, engagement of politicians, and the organized dissemination of violence, Sikhs became targets of genocidal violence. Data has been collected from books, reports, dissertations, and newspapers. This thesis challenges the argument that the 1984 Sikh pogroms was not a genocide and emphasizes the need for proper classification in the creation of building peace in India.

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Introduction

Despite perennial calls for justice for the survivors of the 1984 Sikh bloodshed, the Indian government has yet to accept responsibility for the organized carnage that destroyed Sikh families and communities. India has a complex history of purposefully mischaracterizing and maligning Sikhs as terrorists and extremists. Since time immemorial, Sikhs have continuously advocated for their religious and political autonomy through a call for the establishment of a distinct Sikh state named 'Khalistan' (Gill, 2015). This movement to safeguard and strengthen Sikh identity was viewed as a direct threat to the state. The Indian state's concern increased through the growing movement of Sikh separatism which led to Operation Bluestar, a paramilitary siege of the Golden Temple that resulted in the death of thousands and the destruction of Sikh relics. This open attack on the religious and political autonomy of Sikhs was justified and sanctioned by the Indian government, angering Sikhs worldwide. Soon after, the Prime Minister of India was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards which led to the organized pogroms of 1984 where Sikhs were systematically murdered. This paper examines research conducted on the violence of 1984 and examines the socio-political conditions that led to communal violence. Contributing to the literature on historical conflicts and genocidal violence, and drawing from Kaur (2006), Gill (2015), Jaijee (2008), Singh (2017), and Suri (2015), I explore the purposeful orchestration of an ethnic terrorism narrative against Sikhs by the Indian state and draw upon the farmers protest to draw parallels to 1984. Utilizing conflict resolution theories from the works of Rothman and Alberstein (2013), Galtung (1969), and Lederach (1997), I assess and consider ways of meaningful conflict transformation for Sikh communities in India. In the discussion, I recount what my findings mean for conflict transformation and reparations. This paper aims to demonstrate the genocidal aspects of the 1984 bloodshed and

explores whether or not Sikhs are continuing to be targeted by violence through an existing ethnic terrorist narrative. Through secondary data research and utilizing established theories of genocide and conflict transformation, this thesis aims to answer 4 questions. What conditions made it possible for intensifying violence to emerge across ethno-religious divisions resulting in the 1984 Sikh genocide? Can the 1984 massacres be classified as a genocide? How does the continued denial of genocide impact Sikhs seeking justice? Does the narrative of ethnic terrorism about Sikhs still permeate in the current fabric of Indian society? Through detailed historical analysis, this thesis attempts to contribute to an understanding of the violence against Sikhs and present a case in classifying it as a genocide.

Brief Literature Review

Lemkin's Conception of Genocide

Raphael Lemkin is known to have coined the term genocide, which derives from the Greek word 'genos', meaning race, and the Latin word 'cide', meaning killing (Shah, 2002). Lemkin defined genocide as a "coordinated plan aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups" (Wilt, 2012, pg. 6). Moses (2013) contextualizes Lemkin's conception of genocide and highlights the role of culture when assessing the genocidal destruction of a group. Culture is integral to Lemkin's conception of genocide as cultural needs are "just as necessary to [one's] existence as the basic physiological needs" (Moses, 2013, pg. 25). Lemkin argues that the loss of culture results in the denigration of physical health and thus, can result in the loss of life (Moses, 2013). Moses (2013) emphasizes that Lemkin's conception of genocide cannot be compared to mass killing. Mass killing is a direct attack on the physical elements of a group but genocide affects all aspects of group life. Kuper (1981) writes that Lemkin's definition of genocide considers the physical destruction of a group but also "political,

social, cultural, economic, biological, religious, and moral genocide” (Kuper, 1981, pg. 30). The intention to destroy group culture is what constitutes genocide and the annihilation of group culture would be a detrimental loss to humanity (Moses, 2013).

The Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that was adopted in 1948 was one of the first tools of international law in place to hold nations accountable for acts of genocide (UN General Assembly, 1948). The drafting of this convention was heavily influenced by Holocaust and the Cold War and the goal of this convention was to recognize the “fundamental right of a human group to exist as a group” (Lippman, 2002, pg. 179). The convention demonstrates that the acts of genocide can be addressed through international human rights law (Tams et. al, 2014). The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was critical in highlighting the importance of intent when determining the occurrence of genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2010). To prove genocide, the explicit intent to eliminate a group must be demonstrated (Greenfield, 2008). However, there is scholarly debate over the use of specific intent in demonstrating genocide. Goldsmith (2010) argues that intent directly refers to the perpetrator’s state of mind, which is counterintuitive in proving the main objective of destroying a target group. Moreover, Irvin-Erickson writes that “every individual who participated in a program to destroy a nation would have different reasons for doing so” (Irvin-Erickson, 2017, pg. 241). However, the Genocide Convention requires specific intent to be a key part of delineating genocide. When analyzing violence with the goal to classify it as a genocide, a key question must be asked: was there an intent to destroy a collective of people (Human Rights Watch, 2010)?

The Sikh separatist movement quickly gained momentum as the population of Sikhs grew in Punjab after the partition (Mohanka, 2005). Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was known to be a charismatic person as he preached of Sikh values to the masses, urging others to strengthen the narrative of Sikh separatism (Cibotti, 2017). Gill (2015) writes that Bhindranwale's influence is representative of the fight for minority rights. Bhindranwale's outright demand for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, a manifesto that outlined demands for Sikh autonomy of India, was considered to be a radical ask and a national security threat to the State (Cibotti, 2017; Gill, 2015; Sandhu, 1997). In order to establish an assimilationist national identity and discredit the demands for autonomy by Sikhs, the government integrated dangerous propaganda into the larger discourse that maligned Sant Bhindranwale for the crimes in Punjab (Sandhu, 1997). The heightened tensions underpinned by false accusations created an unsafe environment for Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his supporters which caused them to seek refuge at the Golden Temple, leading to the launch of Operation Blue Star (Gill, 2015; Sandhu, 1997; Singh, 2017). The demand for a separate state for Sikhs is not radical when digging into the past, exclaims Jaijee (2008). Jaijee (2008) suggests that Bhindranwale's demands were labelled as radical but the demands for Sikh separatism have always been a part of India's history, even proclaimed by the first Prime Minister of India.

Kaur (2006) extensively outlines the events of 1984, focusing on the orchestration of violence against Sikhs and testimonies provided by eyewitnesses. Kaur (2006) is one of the few scholars that suggests the adoption of the label of genocide when speaking about the events of 1984. The violence in 1984 was purposeful in targeting Sikh minorities (Jaijee, 2008). Through anti-Sikh slogans, targeting Sikh businesses, destroying Sikh markers of faith, and perpetration of other crimes such as rape and murder, Sikhs were victims of a coordinated plan aimed at

destroying the essential foundations of their being (Singh, 2017). Kaur (2006) outlines the organized and systematic implementation of the 1984 violence. Kaur (2006) and Singh (2017) write that political leaders were involved in this ruthless violence which is why evidence was falsified or destroyed by police authorities. When such violence occurs, it is necessary to look to the authorities that are meant to safeguard citizens (Singh, 2017; Suri, 2015). Suri (2015) discloses the participation of police in the manipulation of records and intentional destruction of evidence to curtail accountability for the pogroms of 1984. Despite the limited amount of research on this topic, all the prevalent research demonstrates how the Indian state deliberately began a pogrom against Sikhs in 1984.

Conflict Resolution

The field of conflict resolution allows for a variety of approaches when analyzing conflict. In protracted conflicts where the construction of self and other have been solidified, understanding the process of meaning making and narrative analysis becomes imperative (Cobb, 2003). Polkinghorne (1988) writes that narrative inquiry is an effective way of understanding the human experience and existence. Narrative inquiry is effective as it does not dilute the complexity of the conflict situation but also analyzes “the emotional and motivation meaning connected” with the actions undertaken by parties (Polkinghorne, 1995, pg. 11). Identity plays a key role in the construction of narratives. Rothman and Albertstein (2013) deconstruct the roles of individual, group and intergroup identity in conflict. Rothman and Albertstein (2013) argue that understanding identity is critical when analyzing conflict dynamics. Identity underlies all conflicts as it positions people against or with each other, making it a key aspect of conflict analysis. Galtung (1964) writes about the distinctions of positive and negative peace as a means of understanding the goals of peacebuilding and intervention. Furthermore, his typology of

violence offers a dynamic and multifaceted understanding of genocidal violence. Galtung's (1969) typology of violence offers an intricate understanding of direct, cultural, and structural violence and its emergence in society. Galtung's (1969) work provides an empirical foundation on which to assess the conflict and design processes of peacebuilding. Lederach (1997) conceptualizes a framework of peacebuilding that outlines key actors and their role in the peacebuilding process and suggests that conflict should not be temporarily resolved, rather it must be transformed. Lederach's (1997) pyramid of peacebuilding addresses ways of meaningful conflict transformation to promote positive peace by incorporating three levels of important actors: government leaders, community leaders, and grassroots communities.

Research Methods

This thesis will be a case study coupled with qualitative research. My research analyzes the socio-political conditions of 1984. Following the research conducted on 1984 conducted by various authors, I generate a historical analysis that demonstrates the genocidal nature of violence against Sikhs. For this case study, the goal of investigation is to gain an in depth understanding of the situation to inform potential ways that genocidal conflict can be adequately addressed. Secondary data collection was necessary in forming the locus of my paper and a qualitative case study methodology was utilized to answer the research questions posed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The majority of the resources for the research are secondary data from books, dissertations, essays, news articles, and reports. By conducting a historical case study, I uncover the interaction of significant factors of the conflict and add to understandings of ethnic terrorism narratives against Sikhs in India. I acknowledge that a limit of my study is the fact that qualitative research is being conducted by the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and inductive analysis. Due to this, several limitations are in place as personal

frameworks and personal biases can interfere in the research process, particularly with my positionality (Taylor et. al, 2016). In order to mitigate bias in this research, the paper is well supported by a number of scholars and different research to support the claims made in this paper.

Positionality

As a student conducting qualitative research, it is important to begin by identifying myself. This thesis explores topics of religion and individual, group, and intergroup identity (Albertstein and Rothman, 2013) and consequently, it is important to discuss my standpoint (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). As a student engaging in research, I am “not separate from the study” but rather, I am “firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61). I am a Sikh woman who was born in Punjab and immigrated to Canada at the age of 6 with my parents. My social location and identity cannot be separated from this research. Social location demonstrates that our reality is constructed by a myriad of factors including but not limited to gender, race, culture, education, etc (Rheault, 1999). My family was directly impacted by the state-sanctioned violence of 1984 that killed thousands of Sikhs and whose family members continue to seek justice. This intergenerational trauma continues to permeate in the lives of Sikhs – in India and the diaspora. The violent events of 1984 are a point in history where the memories of the past have transgressed and are embodied in our present, the memorial repository of lieux de memoire that inextricably binds Sikhs (Meierhenrich, 2009). The collective trauma faced by Sikhs historically is interwoven into my large-group identity as a Sikh (Volkan, 2001). I have grown up hearing horrific stories of people recounting the trauma of *churasee* (1984). I have heard countless stories people witnessing their homes ablaze, people

slaughtered, hearing the piercing screams of families being torn apart, smelling burnt flesh, and witnessing the destruction of their communities as they fled in fear.

My commitment to exploring how the politics of naming and the continued denial of orchestrating genocidal violence by the state has resulted in the treacherous struggle for narrative legitimacy is affirmed through my standpoint. As written by Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013), standpoint can vary from being a perspective to being an analytical tool that is a “socially situated subject of knowledge” (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 332). Our standpoint inevitably informs our development with the research we undertake (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013) writes about ontology, epistemology, and axiology as part of standpoint theory.

Prior to writing this thesis, I had never categorized my standpoint as a Sikh-Punjabi woman since it is “ascribed through inheritance and achieved through struggle”, I believe that breaking down this triad is beneficial in understanding my positionality (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 340). Ontology is described as a “way of being” and as a Sikh-Punjabi woman, it is derived from my relations to religion – Sikhism (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Sikhism’s ontology is culminated in the classification of the five “k’s”, kes, kangha, kara, kachhehra, and kirpan (Singh & Smith, 2007). The five k’s of Sikhism outline five items of Sikh identity and although I do not explicitly adhere to the five identity markers, each of the five k’s establishes the Sikh way of life and of being. For example, I wear a kara which is a steel bracelet that symbolizes truth, unity, maturity, and restraint from temptations. It is a constant visual reminder of how I should live my life as a Sikh and the ethical underpinnings of my identity.

As a Sikh woman, my ontological relation to my religion, also a philosophical way of being, informs my epistemology. My way of knowing is constituted through the

interconnectedness of all – experiences, existence, etc. We are all a part of each form of life and must put the value of the collective above our own personal needs – to sacrifice is to restore humanity. My way of knowing as a Sikh woman is informed by putting our way of knowing into a way of doing - axiology. The Sikh way of living life and way of doing things is underpinned by the value of unity and community. We are taught to be aware of our privileges and view it as a responsibility to be held accountable to the larger community as we are all equal – regardless of any differences. The ontological and epistemological constructions of identity were directly targeted in the 1984 Sikh genocide and by grounding my research to my standpoint, I am consciously working towards genocide prevention by affirming my existence as a Sikh woman (Moses, 2013). As a member of the Sikh diaspora, I am in a position of privilege that I can engage with this topic in an academic setting without any imminent threats of violence or backlash against me, unlike many others in India. Therefore, I believe that writing this thesis is putting my way of knowing into doing – a small attempt at amplifying the truths that continue to be silenced.

History/Background of the Conflict

1947 – The Partition

Due to the complex and contested aspects of the history of Sikh struggles, it is difficult to offer a brief and unified overview of the violence against Sikhs. What follows is a synopsis intended to orient the reader to this convoluted topic. To understand the struggles of Sikhs in Punjab, it is important to outline their struggle for representation through a historical lens. The social, political, and religious roots of the 1984 Sikh genocide can be traced back to August 1947 – the end of the domination by the British and the division into two nations of India and Pakistan (Singh, 2017). This partition was predicated on the division of religion and “cut through the heart

of the northern state of Punjab” (Singh, 2017, p. 36). Punjab before the partition mainly consisted of Muslim majority whilst Hindus and Sikhs comprised the minority (Singh, 2017). India was divided on a religious basis where Muslim majority areas were to be given to Pakistan (Singh, 2017). Consequently, this transfer of land and power led to millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs becoming displaced leaving their ancestral homes and lands in an attempt to seek refuge (Singh, 2017). This resulted in extreme sectarian violence. Armed groups of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims were the cause of “massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and savage sexual violence” as they searched for the ‘other’ (Dalrymple, 2015). Approximately 2.5 percent of Sikhs were killed during the partition (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 5). Following the partition, the Sikh population became concentrated in East Punjab (Refugee Review Tribunal, 2006). The demand for a separate Sikh state was raised during the partition, but these demands were not met as there was no Sikh majority area (Mohanka, 2015). Prior to the partition, Jawaharlal Nehru, who became the first Prime Minister of India, affirmed his dedication towards the creation of an autonomous state structure. In his speech that he made pre-partition, he stated:

The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set up in the north wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom...the Indian union is an independent, sovereign republic comprising of autonomous units with residuary powers, wherein the ideals of social, political and economic democracy would be guaranteed to all sections of people, and adequate safeguards would be, provided for minorities, backward communities, and areas (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 3-4).

The linkage between territory and identity became a point of concern at the time of the partition as this demonstrated a willingness to grant sovereignty underpinned by religion. After the

partition, the promise of Sikh sovereignty and territory were highlighted but Nehru stated that “Sikhs had missed the bus” (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 5). In 1947, Sikhs only comprised 14 percent of the population in Punjab but after the partition, these numbers drastically changed to 35 percent (Mohanka, 2005, pg. 593). It was in this context that the separatist movement gained momentum.

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the Sikh Separatist Movement

The Khalistan movement is a separatist movement that demands the creation of a Sikh state (named Khalistan) in Punjab. This movement was led by a Sikh-centric political party called Akali Dal, which was established in 1920 at the time of the British colonial reign (Shabbir et. al, 2018). The platform of Akali Dal is the recognition, maintenance, and protection of the Sikh identity (Gill, 2015). Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale became one of the most revolutionary Sikh figures whose sole purpose became the promotion of Sikh sovereignty (Cibotti, 2017). Bhindranwale was “regarded either as a saint, a religious former, or as a simple-minded terrorist created and manipulated by larger political forces” (Gill, 2015, pg. 68). Despite all these attached labels, he was known to be charismatic, and he played a critical role in the actions leading to Operation Bluestar. As he gained more influence and his popularity within the Sikh community soared, this became a grave concern to the Indian government (Cibotti, 2017). The state was apprehensive and believed that Bhindranwale’s influence would “strengthen, spread, and eventually result in the emergence of a cohesive Sikh nation...possibly demanding the separation of Punjab from the Indian state” (Gill, 2015, pg. 69). The Indian government viewed movements of safeguarding and strengthening distinct identities as a form of political dissent.

Bhindranwale wanted the full implementation and delivery of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (Cibotti, 2017). This resolution was similar to a comprehensive manifesto that

explicitly outlined the demands greater autonomy for Sikhs in India (Cibotti, 2017; Gill, 2015). The resolution not only “provide[d] the ideological basis for the demand for Khalistan” but also highlighted the complicated relationship between Sikhs and the state, reflecting upon the broken promises of the past (Gill, 2015, pg, 62-63). Sant Jarnail Bhindranwale became a prominent political force to be reckoned with in Punjab. In the 1980s, Bhindranwale was accused of several crimes and there is discourse surrounding the legitimacy of the criminal accusations. As written by Gill (2015), the crimes Bhindranwale was accused of were a form of political entrapment as “Bhindranwale’s name was used to justify government control over the state” (Gill, 2015, pg. 71). In order to establish an assimilationist national identity and discredit legitimate demands for autonomy by Sikhs, the government promoted dangerous propaganda that “blamed Sant Bhindranwale for every crime that was committed in Punjab” (Sandhu, 1997, pg. 22).

This conflict over the hegemonic control of the state resulted in the creation of various laws that “grossly limited and restricted the rights of the people in Punjab” (Gill, 2016, pg. 71). Sandhu (1997) writes that the laws passed became an effective tool of the state that perpetuated misunderstandings about Bhindranwale and consequently painted all Sikhs with the same stroke – ascribing them as militants (Gill, 2015; Sandhu, 1997). With issues dating back to the partition and the continued attempts of the state at the desecration of Sikh autonomy, this led to a rise of Sikh militancy in Punjab. As Gill (2015) writes, the Sikhs involved in the Punjab Militant Movement acted out in violence towards the state, resulting in hostile socio-political conditions. Pal Singh (2002) writes that Bhindranwale argued for the elimination of existing social, political, and economic problems through religious rhetoric. Bhindranwale was accused of spearheading this militant movement with the goal of “establish[ing] an independent sovereign state of Khalistan” (Pal Singh, 2002, pg. 250). The media “projected Bhindranwale as an ‘extremist’ icon

symbolizing the Sikh religion itself...[thus] the Sikh community became stereotyped as the ‘enemy within’” (Bhogal, 2011, pg. 65). The accusations against the ‘radical’ Bhindranwale caused him and his supporters to seek refuge at the very place that encapsulates the distinct identity of Sikhs – the Golden Temple (Singh, 2017).

Operation Bluestar

The growing movement of Sikh separatism coupled with growing acts of Sikh militancy was extremely concerning for the Indian government as they believed that it posed direct threats to the power and legitimacy of the state. While Bhindranwale’s popularity grew, so did the acts of violence against his supporters and the Indian state (Gill, 2015). In an attempt to clear out Bhindranwale and his followers, the military action code-named Operation Bluestar was launched (Suri, 2015). Indira Gandhi made the highly contentious decision to send the Indian Army into the Golden Temple – the holiest shrine of Sikhism - to flush out the Sikh separatists. Operation Bluestar was not only an attack on Bhindranwale but also a direct attack on the Golden Temple - the epitome of Sikh ontology and axiology. As Gill (2015) writes, 70,000 army personnel backed with weaponry invaded the Golden Temple to “handle about 500 revolutionaries” (Gill, 2015, pg. 76; Pettigrew, 1975). Although the overt goal of the government may have been to capture the Sikh militants operating out of the Golden Temple, thousands of innocent Sikhs lost their lives. A member of the Indian parliament openly spoke of the hidden agenda of the government by saying that this para-military attack was “envisioned and rehearsed in advance, meticulously and in total secrecy, it also aimed at obtaining the maximum number of Sikh victims, largely devout pilgrims unconnected with the political agitation” (Gill, 2015, pg. 78; Singh, 2017; Suri, 2015).

The Indian government claims that Operation Bluestar was conducted starting June 5, 1984. However, there is evidence that indicates there was heavy planning prior to June 5 to initiate a violent encounter at the Golden Temple. Kaur (2006) outlines the planning of the state leading up to the besiegement of the Golden temple. On June 1, there was open fire directed as “soldiers shot at various buildings in the temple complex for seven hours” and failed to target Bhindranwale despite him being in full view on the rooftop (Kaur, 2006, pg. 20). Giani Kirpal Singh and Giani Sahib Singh, both eyewitnesses, stated that the Golden Temple suffered 300 bullet marks and 11 innocent pilgrims lost their lives (Gill, 2015; Kaur, 2006). Reporters and journalists were restricted and detained under house arrest and were given death threats by the Indian Army if they did not follow the orders (Kaur, 2006; Stevens, 1984).

On June 2, the government declared the state of Punjab as a “restricted area”, limiting travel from in and out of the state (Kaur, 2006, pg. 13; Stevens, 1984). The next day, a statewide “shoot-on-sight curfew” was imposed which severely restricted the movements of the citizenry but a media blackout was simultaneously imposed (Das & Rohilla, 2020; Kaur, 2006, pg. 13). Kaur (2006) writes that the people who had gathered inside the Golden Temple “could not leave before the Army’s attack for fear of arrest” as a strict curfew had been placed (Kaur, 2006, pg. 13). Gurmej Singh, a man who was visiting the Golden Temple on June 2 with others stated:

We were all still inside the Temple when the army imposed a curfew. Sensing trouble ahead, we tried to leave via the cobblers’ bazaar, but we were turned back by a group of angry soldiers who ordered us back into the temple complex until the curfew orders were in force...the Golden temple was converted into a bloody battlefield with bullets ranging from every conceivable direction. We took refuge in an office room in the complex but the bullets followed us everywhere. I was hit in my hip. Many of my village mates and

others were fatally wounded. It was pitch dark, hot, humid, and so deafeningly noisy that one could not tell if the person lying next to him was dead or still alive (Kaur, 2006, pg. 14).

It is estimated that 10,000 people were trapped inside the Temple, unable to escape the violence imposed by the Indian troops (Gill, 2015; Kaur, 2006). Red Cross volunteers were detained by the Indian Army and were coerced to not to offer any assistance to the trapped and injured civilians (Kaur, 2006). Furthermore, medical personnel in Amritsar were also apprehended by the army with death threats “if they provided food or water to Sikhs in hospitals, who had suffered wounds during the army attack” (Kaur, 2006; Kumar, 2008). Singh (2017) insists that Operation Bluestar was not just a simple exercise aimed at ridding a political figure or a movement of separatism but rather an organized terror unleashed upon Sikhs.

June 4, 1984 is the day Operation Bluestar was officially launched and thousands of lives were lost as “tanks were used to fire a barrage of explosive shells at the temple complex, undertaken without warning or evacuation” (Singh, 2017, pg. 42). The bloody military action continued for days. Not only did religious figures, workers, pilgrims, and innocent civilians die in this act of state-sanctioned violence but the Akal Takht was completely battered and destroyed by eight tanks (Kaur, 2006). The precious wall paintings were charred with the aftermath of the fire, leaving the Akal Takht completely damaged. The Akal Takht is part of the Golden Temple and is known as “the temporal authority of Sikhs” (Gill, 2015, pg. 81). Furthermore, the Sikh Reference Library was destroyed which contained sacred Sikh artifacts integral to the core of Sikhism (Singh, 2017). Kaur (2006) details Giani Kirpal Singh’s eyewitness account, proving that the intent of the Indian army was the desecration of Sikh ways of knowing and being. Giani Kirpal Singh testifies that sacred texts, historical records, historical paintings, sacred

photographs, manuscripts of the Guru Granth Sahib, and other sacred items belonging to the Sikh Gurus were all destroyed during the attack (Kaur, 2006). Kaur (2006) states that post-mortem reports indicate that a large number of Sikhs had their hands tied and were shot in the head or chest. The dead bodies were not given to the families for religious cremation but rather there was direct involvement by Government officials in “conducting or overseeing post-mortems and cremations themselves” (Gill, 2015; Kaur, 2006, pg. 18).

An accurate number representing the deaths and casualties of Operation Bluestar are difficult to find. Government sources estimate that 800-1000 Sikhs died but eyewitnesses and human rights groups indicate that the numbers provided by the government are grossly incorrect (Kaur, 2006). An article published in the New York Times on June 13, 1984 indicates that the numbers provided by the government should be evaluated with a critical lens. Sanjoy Hazarika writes that there

[was] a virtual news blackout on the situation [at the Golden Temple] except on what Government officials [were] saying. Only a handful of carefully selected Indian reporters, working for television, radio, and two major English-language news agencies, Press Trust of India and United News of India, ha[d] travelled to the temple... [those] two Indian news agencies obtain[ed] most of their money from the Indian government (Hazarika, 1984; Kaur, 2006).

Operation Bluestar was not meant only for Bhindranwale and his followers but perhaps also served as an advantageous political move for Indira Gandhi. If the goal of the government was to protect national interest by combating Sikh militancy, why was Operation Bluestar perfectly timed to coincide with the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Devji – a religious holiday when the Golden Temple would be filled with pilgrims? The attack against the minority

Sikh populace is indicative of the state's relationship with violence against Sikhs. Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2010) suggests that Indira Gandhi had a direct political motive to gain popularity among the citizens of India before the upcoming elections by painting herself as a hero protecting India from domestic terrorists. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (1996) White Paper report highlights key questions that arise when analyzing the falsified legitimacy of the Indian state conducting a para-military siege. The report (1996) asks,

What criterion did the Indian army adopt to make distinction between the pilgrims and the militants?...Was it necessary to enact the gory scene of blood, brutality, and destruction at the Golden Temple? Why was the Sikh Reference Library and archives, which had a collection of rare manuscripts and Hukamnamas, bearing the signature or marks of the Gurus, set on fire, after the attack came to an end? How was it that a large number of Sikhs whose dead bodies were brought for post-mortem had their hands tied at the back and had been shot in the chest or head? Why has the government not released a list of casualties to this day? (Dhillon, 1996, pg. 269).

Although there are no direct answers to these hard-hitting questions, they paint a poignant image of organized terror against minority groups by the Indian government.

Due to the undemocratic siege on the reporting of Operation Bluestar, eyewitnesses play a critical role in fighting against the narrative of ethno-terrorism which exists to attack the country's marginalized and minorities. Kaur (2006) effectively details eyewitness accounts in her report to highlight the acts of genocidal violence committed by the state and their attempts at shielding themselves from the piercing rays of accountability. In her report, Kaur (2006) details accounts of direct, cultural, and structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Kaur, 2006). Eyewitness

Ranbir Kaur described the blatant killings of Sikh pilgrims not ‘supposed’ militants, inside the Golden Temple. She stated that the people

were taken into a courtyard. The men were separated from the women... When we were sitting there the army released 150 people from the basement. They were asked why they had not come out earlier. They said the door had been locked from the outside. They were asked to hold up their hands and then they were shot after 15 minutes (Kaur, 2006, pg. 15).

The Golden Temple was not the only place of Sikh worship attacked in June 1984. 41-75 other Sikh places of worship across Punjab were also simultaneously attacked by the Indian Army which are rarely spoken about when discussing Operation Bluestar (Jaijee, 2008; Kaur, 2006). After Operation Bluestar followed another act of state-sanctioned genocidal violence titled Operation Woodrose.

Operation Woodrose

Operation Woodrose was carried out by the Indian army in an attempt to “eliminate all Amritdharis” in the villages of Punjab (Gill, 2015, pg. 83; Singh, 1987). Amritdhari Sikhs are those who have been baptised and follow the rules of wearing sacred insignia, indicating their allegiance to serving others and upholding the values of Sikhism (Gill, 2015). People who were identified as Sikhs were captured and killed under the falsely labelled suspicion of terrorism (Gill, 2015). The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee White Paper report highlights the dangerous message that was circulated to the army about the *Amritdharis*,

although the majority of the terrorists have been dealt with and bulk of the arms and ammunition recovered, yet a large number of them are still at large. They have to be

subdued to achieve the final aim of restoring peace in the country... These people may appear harmless from the outside but they are basically committed to terrorism (Dhillon, 1996, pg. 271).

The events of 1984 cannot be viewed and analyzed in a silo, Operation Bluestar set a horrifying precedent for the Indian state in combating perceived political threats to the establishment. Gill (2015) and Sandhu (1997) write that in an attempt to curb insurgency, the Indian government utilized brutal tactics of arrest, killings, and torture that left civilians at the mercy of the state. The outright violation of the lives of Sikhs by Indira Gandhi caused outrage among the Sikh community in India and the diaspora. The attack was a direct threat to Sikh identity and led to retaliation in the form of an assassination.

Post-assassination of Indira Gandhi and the Events of November 1984

In October 1984, Indira Gandhi was shot dead by two of her Sikh bodyguards – Beant Singh and Satwant Singh (Singh, 2017). As news spread of Indira Gandhi's assassination, the organized attacks of violence against Sikhs ensued. Singh (2017) draws parallels from the attacks against Sikhs to the Holocaust in Germany. He writes that 330 Sikh places of worship were damaged and Sikh scripture was publicly desecrated in humiliating ways and urges readers to recognize the familiarity of these horrific scenes (Singh, 2017). Singh (2017) writes that the desecration of Jewish Torah scrolls during the rise of the Nazi party has an ominous resemblance to the acts of genocide committed against Sikhs in India. Singh (2017) writes that "one man who came across the dead corpses of both his uncle and the local Sikh priest described how the hair of both had been tied together and one volume of [the] holy book was lying on their bodies in a burnt condition" (Singh, 2017, pg. 55). Ruthless violence in the name of curbing terrorism was unleashed upon Sikhs, by dehumanizing them and slapping on a label of 'Khalistani' and

‘terrorist’. After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi was quickly installed as India’s next Prime Minister (Suri, 2015). When he learned of the news that his mother had been gunned down by two of her Sikh bodyguards, he covertly cried out for revenge in conversation with other politicians by posing a question, “but what have you done about it?” (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 110). These sentiments were once again echoed by Rajiv Gandhi on November 9 as he addressed a rally, he stated that “when a big tree falls, the earth trembles” alluding to the tree as his mother and the following acts of violence against Sikhs as the reverberations rightly caused by the assassination of his mother (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 433). Payal Singh Mohanka (2005), a journalist and eyewitness, recounts hearing shouts of “*Koi Sardar hai? Goli se maar dalenge*” which directly translates to, ‘*is there any Sikh? If so, we will shoot him*’ (Mohanka, 2005).

Organized mobs gathered and began travelling to Sikh neighbourhoods fully equipped with “firearms, iron rods, knives, clubs, and an abundant supply of kerosene” (Singh, 2017, pg. 58). Singh (2017) and Suri’s (2015) texts demonstrate the involvement of government officials in orchestrating violence against Sikhs. Political party leaders played a direct role in the distribution of weapons and money that assisted in the killings of Sikhs. A prime example of this behaviour was displayed by Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar who distributed “iron rods” and “liquor to each assailant” and said that “whoever kills the sons of the snakes, I will reward them...and [people] will get 1000 rupees each for killing any other Sikhs” (Kaur, 2006, pg. 28; Singh, 2017; Suri, 2015). Mohanka (2005) was a journalist who witnessed the aftermath of Indira Gandhi’s assassination and compares the violence against Sikhs similar to predators hunting for their prey to satisfy their primal desires. She writes that “in a frenzy of madness the mob, armed with iron rods and knives, brutally dragged out Sikhs, burnt their turbans hacked them to death and threw them across the [train] tracks” (Mohanka, 2005, pg. 589).

There was no intervention by the state authorities to safeguard the lives of Sikhs but rather vehicles of politicians were spotted driving alongside mobs accused of watching the violent mutilation of innocent civilians (Singh, 2017). Kaur (2006) utilizes an affidavit submitted by Aseem Shrivastava, a student that witnessed the violence, to speak to the orchestrated nature of these attacks saying that “the attack on Sikhs and their property in our locality appeared to be an extremely organized affairs... There were also some young men on motorcycles, who were instructing the mobs and supplying them with kerosene oil from time to time” (Singh, 2017; Kaur, 2006, pg. 29). The overarching theme of organized violence and the kleptocratic complicity of the state is poignantly presented in the research of Singh (2017) and Suri (2015). Singh emphasizes importance of understanding the intention behind the violence when analyzing this conflict as these attacks were highly organized with a clear intent of purpose. Written records were used to meticulously identify Sikhs, chillingly similar to the systematic killing of Tutsis in the Rwandan genocide and the systematic killing of the Jewish community in Germany. Sikh homes and businesses were carefully identified, and many locations were also marked with an ‘S’ on October 31, 1984 (Singh, 2017). Voter cards, ration lists, electoral rolls, school registrations, and various other records were used to cross-reference and generate lists of Sikhs for assailants (Kaur, 2006; Singh, 2017; Suri, 2015). The Indian media refers to this organized carnage as the ‘1984 anti-Sikh riots’ which implies that it was a series of random acts of violence unable to be controlled by the government. However, the swift killings of Sikhs were not spontaneous nor unorganized. On government sponsored media networks such as Doordarshan, slogans such as ‘*khoon ka badla khoon*’ which translates to ‘*blood for blood*’ were being broadcasted with influential celebrities chanting hate speech – purposely inciting violence (Rana, 2011).

Frenzied assailants killed Sikhs without any remorse by attacking their physical being but also culturally degrading individuals by severing their sacred markers of their faith. By attacking the sacred markers of Sikhism, the assailants were not only ridding the streets of the presence of Sikhs but also the existence of Sikhism through a direct attack on identity and history. Women were sexually abused and assaulted and “some Sikh children were ‘castrated and their genitals stuffed into the mouths of their mothers and sisters’” (Singh, 2017, pg. 64). Shami Kaur, a woman who had to spend three days hiding to escape the assailants that took the life of her family recounts being held at knifepoint and being told “we will cut off your breasts and send them to Punjab! You have killed our mother Indira!” (Crossette, 1989).

In the midst of this meticulous madness, the Punjab police did not intervene for days as Sikhs were brutally slaughtered and women were subjected to sexualized humiliation and degradation (Hardgrave, 1985). Sikh women were raped, often in front of their family, by the mobs to purposely humiliate them. Singh (2017) writes that the orchestrated sexual violence was executed “on the instructions of local Congress leaders” (Singh, 2017, pg. 92). Ved Marwah, the Delhi Police Commissioner in 1984, spoke about the passivity of the police in preventing the deaths of thousands of Sikhs (Suri, 2015). Following the violence of November 1984, Marwah was placed to lead the inquiry but the inquiry was halted upon explicit instructions by Subhash Tandon, the commissioner of police (Suri, 2015). Suri (2015) met with Marwah for an exclusive interview about three decades after the brutal killings of Sikhs. Marwah expressed that the police knew exactly what was happening but they “stayed put in the police stations” and “decided to keep their eyes shut” (Suri, 2015, pg. 137). The Indian government led by Rajiv Gandhi had a direct hand in orchestrating the genocidal violence against Sikhs, indicating why the inquiry was deliberately aborted (Suri, 2015). The exact number of casualties in the 1984 Sikh genocide

remains contested. Some say that the death count is approximately 3,000 but Jaijee (2008) writes that the “cumulative figure of those killed during the November 1984 genocide all over India would be around 20,000” (Jaijee, 2008, pg. 114).

After the widespread bloodshed, 50,000 Sikhs were displaced from their homes and communities (Singh, 2017). There were scarce resources available to attend to the survivors and relief camps were set up by various voluntary groups and Gurdwaras by November 2 (Kaur, 2006; Singh, 2017). The government made no attempt to provide aid to the victims until November 4, when a Relief Commissioner was appointed. Several commitments to provide relief in the form of medical assistance, food, blankets, and clothing were made by the Relief Commissioner but Kaur (2006) writes that these supplies did not arrive to the relief camps. Thousands of injured and displaced Sikhs were once again compelled to seek refuge elsewhere as the government began shutting down the camps starting November 6, 1984 (Kaur, 2006; Singh, 2017). During the attacks on Sikhs, the police did nothing to intervene. However, after the bloodshed, the police quickly turned to action. Several records and reports were manipulated, hiding the criminality of police officers and politicians involved (Kaur, 2006). For Sikh victims that approached the police to file complaints, the police refused to record information, refused to list names of assailants, and falsified documents (Kaur, 2006; Singh, 2017).

Human Rights Watch (2020) details the failure of police investigations, resulting in decades of impunity for the perpetrators. Various civil society groups and organizations that conducted independent research concluded that the 1984 anti-Sikh violence was perpetrated by influential politicians, thus explaining the complicity of the police (Human Rights Watch, 2020). 587 cases were filed to the Delhi police and 241 of these cases were closed without any form of investigation (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Several different commissions and committees were

created by the Indian government to investigate the events of 1984. Despite the implementation of all these commissions, all are critiqued by the Human Rights Watch (2020) for lacking depth and impartiality in investigation. However, there was one commission of inquiry that was led by a Supreme Court Justice, Justice G.T. Nanavati that recognized the pogroms of 1984. The 2005 Nanavati commission concluded that the events of November 1984 were in fact organized but failed to explicitly attribute responsibility, resulting in inaction (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Kaur, 2006).

Analysis and Discussion

Ethnic Narrative of Terrorism

Despite Sikh history commemorated with moments of valor and victory, these are all encompassed within a larger context of struggle. As early history and the events of 1984 exhibit, the Indian state has continually waged an existential war against Sikhs for their very survival through the perpetuation of an ethnic narrative of terrorism. The concept of ethnicity can be understood as a relation “to a community of physical and mental traits possessed by the members of the group as a product of their common hereditary and cultural tradition (Regmi, 2003, pg. 3-4). In India, there has always been a clash of ethnic movements underpinned by narratives of domestic terrorism. As history indicates, Sikhs have always organized through a religious framework to strive towards equity in an attempt to achieve cultural and political autonomy. Deliberate state reorganization of the self and others to create conditions of intensifying violence across ethno-religious divisions not only resulted in the 1984 Sikh genocide but this stereotypical thinking of Sikh identities is ever prevalent. Cobb (2003) writes that narratives draw attention to the way in which different parties in conflict are positioned in dialogue and discourse. In the general discourse, Sikhs were positioned as ‘anti-nationalists’ and ‘terrorists’ and were socially

constructed as illegitimate, making them direct targets of violence. Cobb (2003) writes that “marginalization is the consequence of delegitimization in narrative” (Cobb, 2003, pg. 103).

The rise in Sikh nationalism and the mobilization of youth by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was quickly labelled a grave concern to the security of the nation. Operation Bluestar was facilitated and accepted by the historic sown seeds of terrorism narratives against Sikhs. The apex of state-sanctioned violence was legitimized by the manipulation of the image of Sikhs as a martial race (Rand, 2006). The rise of Bhindranwale and the assassination of Indira Gandhi led to the widespread social production of hate as rumours permeated in which it became difficult to differentiate between the rumours and reality (Das, 1998). Das (1998) writes about the conditions created in 1984 which pitted social groups against each other, bound by feelings of fear and hatred. Das (1998) writes that the narrative was immensely manipulated in 1984 and painted Sikhs as the enemy but also the perpetrators of violence even though it was the Sikhs on whom the violence was being unleashed upon, clearing the state from any forms of accountability. The grand narrative was one oozing with venomous hatred of Sikhs and “the Sikh character was compared to that of a snake who turns round and bites the hand that feeds it milk” labelling them as traitors of the state (Das, 1998, pg. 121). The ‘othering’ of Sikhs had direct consequences. The fear of the ‘other’ concretized maligned views of the Sikh character which legitimized acts of genocide. This exact propaganda led to the practices of genocide in 1984 and the existence of this narrative is the reason why survivors have not been able to heal and reclaim the truths of the past. The media played a key role in the 1984 Sikh genocide by toying with narratives of ethnic terrorism. The Constitution of India is founded on principles of secularism, yet constant acts of violence against minority groups in India demonstrates the ineluctable erosion of secularism (Ganguly, 2003). The thematic framing of an ethnic terrorist narrative is a

“process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner” (Kuypers, 2009; Usharani & Priti, 2011, pg. 154).

The Struggle for Narrative Legitimacy for Sikhs

The media’s reporting, or lack thereof, is central to situations of conflict. It is important to note that media censorship was still prevalent in Punjab during the attacks of 1984. Due to strict censorship in Punjab, the government had complete control of the narrative being perpetuated to the citizens of India. The systematic crippling of democratic institutions such as the media demonstrates that these actions were taken by the state to stifle any form of accountability or dissent. Media censorship played an integral role in contributing to the narrative of ethno-terrorism against Sikhs. Due to the severe media restrictions, the Indian government had full control over the creation and distribution of information. If the Indian government had no ulterior motive behind Operation Bluestar, there would have been no reason to impose a media blackout.

As written by Usharani and Priti (2011), negative images of minority groups portrayed by the media are effective in reinforcing the public’s prejudiced perceptions. Ahmed (2010) writes that media broadcasts do not just exist to inform global audiences but “ignite the opinion-building process” and can “instigate further violence in an existing violent situation” (Ahmed, 2010, pg. 103-104). Ahmed (2010) writes that the media was heavily censored resulting in selective coverage, focusing on the assassination by depicting images of Indira Gandhi’s body not the eruption of murderers against Sikhs. Ahmed (2010) argues that the leading national media outlets such as *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times* painted all Sikhs as extremists and successfully incited hostility between the Hindu majority and Sikhs. The

transaction model of communication emphasizes that communication within social, relational, and cultural contexts constructs our realities (Barlund, 1970). Media censorship prohibited communication from Sikhs and the state became the only source of information, choosing when and what information to give to the public. Like Barlund (1970) writes, this communication or lack thereof, constructed the realities of the public. To them, the Indian state had secured the security of the nation but the public was not fully privy to the violence that occurred during Operation Bluestar. Pettigrew (1975) writes that the events of 1984 were purposeful in “suppressing the culture of a people...striking a blow at their spirit and self-confidence” (Pettigrew, 1975, pg. 49). The freedom of speech and the freedom of press should be the fundamental pillars of the world’s largest functioning democracy yet the Indian government proved to be corrupt through its insidious control of democratic institutions. The unrestricted flow of information is essential to the rights of the citizens and lays the foundation upon which democracy entrenches its roots. To limit access to information is the direct violation of the political rights of the citizens of India. By manipulating the narrative, the Indian government covertly targeted the Sikh community which raises significant concerns about the continued treatment of minority groups in India.

Framing narratives proved to be successful in waging war on the existence of Sikhs and resulted in a political win for Rajiv Gandhi in the elections of 1984, which were held soon after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The construction of a state of ethno-religious tension proved advantageous for Rajiv Gandhi. The framing of anti-Sikhness became disgustingly overt and “formed the central theme of the election campaign” (Singh, 2017, pg. 115). Advertisements rooted in the demonization of Sikhs were publicly displayed to gain political momentum,

Vipers crawl out of their holes, predators prowl the streets and seemingly normal citizens take off their masks and shuffle in the shadows, waiting for the hour of the gun. The hour of acid bulbs, iron bars and daggers... Your vote can stop your groceries list turning into an arms inventory. Your vote can make all the difference. Between order and chaos. Give Order a Hand (Manor, 1985, pg. 51).

Once again, the anti-Sikh theme underpinned by the imagery of snakes was being perpetuated in the election campaign. Images of Indira Gandhi's body being gunned down by two Sikh men were openly displayed and these explosive campaign strategies proved to be effective as "Rajiv Gandhi achieved a massive landslide in the December 1984 elections, winning 404 out of 533 seats" (Singh, 2017, pg. 118). It is almost impossible to overstate the polarization that has occurred through the adoption of ethnic terrorist narratives in stifling dissent. In fact, the same anti-Sikh narrative that led to the genocidal acts of 1984 has once again reignited in India and the reverberations are being felt across the Sikh diaspora.

Farmers Protest and the Role of Sikhs

At the time of writing this thesis, the world's largest peaceful protest is currently happening across India. An estimated 250 million people participated in the national strike, protesting against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's farm laws, referred to as 'black farm laws' (Agrawal, 2020). With the hopes to modernize the agricultural sector, Modi passed 'The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Ordinance', 'The Farmers Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Ordinance', and 'The Essential Commodities Ordinance' (Javaid, 2021). Farmers say that the three bills passed give corporations a chance to monopolize the agricultural sector of India. The privatization of the agriculture industry will not allow farmers to make enough to sustain their livelihoods as the bills do not explicitly guarantee minimum

support prices for their crops. Through this reform policy, corporations will have the ability to stockpile food, allowing them to manipulate market prices – leaving farmers at their mercy when selling harvests (Al Jazeera, 2020). Thus, farmers argue that this will leave them vulnerable to economic exploitation by corporations. Despite the government defending these bills, there is merit to the arguments being posed by the farmers. The ex-chief economist, Kaushik Basu, tweeted his thoughts about the three bills, labelling them as “flawed” and “detrimental to farmers” but advantageous to the agendas of corporations (Business Today, 2020). Currently, hundreds of thousands of people from neighbouring states of New Delhi have camped out to express their concerns, urging the government to repeal these bills.

In September 2020, three agricultural reform bills were hastily passed in India’s parliament. The farm bills impact over “50 percent of the country’s population” and “agriculture employs half of the Indian workforce” yet two out of the three agriculture bills were passed without discourse and debate (Agrawal, 2020; Yadav, 2020). Congress Chief Whip. Jairam Ramesh posed questions about this breach of parliamentary conduct saying, “the anti-farmer bills were passed in the din without voting. Why the tearing urgency? On whose orders?” (Nair, 2020). Modi’s conscious circumvention of parliamentary procedures to appease his agenda enraged the farmers of India – particularly the farmers of Punjab who began marching to New Delhi in November 2020. Punjab is referred to as India’s breadbasket and “is the second largest producer of wheat and the third largest producer of rice in the country” (Dutt, 2020). Many of the farmers protesting at the borders of New Delhi are from Punjab which has a large Sikh population. An independent journalist at Singhu border, Sandeep Singh, says that the role of Sikhism in the farmers protests cannot be overlooked and argues that the protests are being “led by Sikh farmers of Punjab” (PunYaab, 2020). Ghuman (2012) writes that high proportions of

Sikhs “are engaged in agriculture and in allied agricultural activities, either as cultivators and dairy-farmers or as agricultural labourers” (Ghuman, 2012, pg. 88). It is of no surprise that the foundation of this movement is based upon Sikh practices and principles. Aujla and Mann (2020) write that agriculture is the backbone of Sikhism as Guru Nanak Devji – the founder of Sikhism – “tilled his own fields”. A core tenet of Sikhism is ‘sewa’ which means “self-less service” (BBC, n.d.).

Through collective efforts, the protest is being sustained through the Sikh principle of sewa. Daily essentials and food are distributed free of cost to all those present at the protest sites – regardless if they’re protesting or not (Kaur, 2020). The media is being used by the Modi government as a weapon of mass destruction, attempting to dismantle and criminalize all forms of dissent. The protestors are being met with police brutality from the Indian police in the form of tear gas, water cannons, barricades, concertina wires, and trenches dug to stop the transportation of masses (Aga, 2021). Thirty-seven years have passed yet the ethno-religious divisions in India are hauntingly similar to that of 1984. The rhetoric of Sikh militancy and a narrative of ethnic terrorism has once again emerged through this protest. Language is extremely powerful as each word communicates a particular message. Whether we are conscious of it or not, language is used to generate influence and control (Ng & Bradac, 1993).

January 26 is India’s Republic Day and this year on that day, farmers held a historic tractor march, circling New Delhi. The events of January 26 are complex, riddled with conspiracies and propaganda. This thesis will not delve into all the events of Republic Day but will draw parallels of 1984 to present day and highlight the overarching narrative of the vilification of Sikhs in India. Disinformation campaigns were present for the events of 1984 and narratives of Sikh extremism have again been reignited to ensure that the public denigrates the

Sikh community and their legitimate demands. Several journalists such as Mandeep Punia and Nodeep Kaur have been wrongfully detained, charged, and abused for reporting on the farmers protest (Punia, 2021; Tantray, 2021). As the farmers were being met with paramilitary violence, internet services around New Delhi were suspended “followed by a campaign of censorship, media blackouts, large scale Twitter suspensions...and deafening silence from Prime Minister Narendra Modi” (Singh, 2021). Cracking down on journalism, stifling dissent, passing laws in an unconstitutional manner, and controlling the media to fit a certain narrative are all traits of a fascist government. This raises a question, is the world witnessing a harrowing dissent of the world’s largest democracy into fascism? Perhaps that is overly generalized statement to make but not one that is completely void of any legitimacy.

Continued Vilification of Sikhs

The transparent attempts to paint the protesting farmers as Sikh separatists became clear on January 26, drawing direct parallels to 1984. Some protestors stormed the historic Red Fort and hoisted a Nishan Sahib, a flag that is representative of the values of the Sikh faith such as “equality of all humans, love and respect of all, [and a] life of service and dedication” (SikhWiki, n.d.). Although the national flag of India remained hoisted at the top of the Red Fort, the protestors were vehemently condemned for their actions and labelled as ‘extremists’, ‘khalistanis’, or ‘anti-national’ (Bal, 2021). The contrast between the reality of what happened and what is being perpetuated to the citizens of India is worrying. Even before the rally occurred, news articles were publishing stories about militant groups disrupting the parade. An article published by NDTV News, a large media network in India, writes that “rogue elements linked to Khalistani outfits are likely to hijack and disrupt the tractor rally” and separatist groups such as “Sikhs for Justice” will likely cause terror (Sengar & Bhasin, 2021). The media referred to the

protestors are anarchists threatening the unity of India by disrespecting the flag. On twitter, several hashtags started trending after images of the Nishan Sahib at the Red Fort began circulating. Twitter became a watershed of hate speech with thousands inciting violence by “using words like ‘genocide’, ‘1984’ and hashtags like #MissingIndira #shoot” (Sircar, 2021). Through the hundreds of thousands of tweets that have been posted demonizing Sikhs at the protest, one tweet perfectly encapsulates the social production of hate against Sikhs in India. In a now deleted tweet, Kangana Ranaut, an influential Bollywood celebrity who has been vocal about her opposition against the farmers protest tweeted this on January 26, 2021,

I feel so elated, I don't remember being so happy/excited ever, the cancer in the body of this nation we were looking for has been located, identified and now the process of eradication will start, together we will see through this. Not just survive but also thrive. Jai Hind (TheWire, 2021).

This tweet was removed by Twitter but demonstrates an aggressive call for genocide thinly veiled under the guise of patriotic nationalism, eerily similar to 1984. Just weeks before this, the former President of the United States was suspended from Twitter for inciting violence following the insurrection on Capitol Hill. When influential figures spew hateful rhetoric, it creates conditions of threatening online discourse, resulting in violence. This is exactly what happened in 1984 and history has begun to repeat and reveal itself in insidious ways.

Engaging in dialogue and opposing the actions of the government are not extremist activities. Although this protest has been labelled as the ‘farmers protest’, the protest has evolved into much more than the agitation against agriculture legislation. As history shows, ethno-religious divisions have always been consciously created. Consequently, although the protests began from an apolitical standpoint, the movement has evolved into one about identity and

combating the disinformation being perpetuated by a crumbling institution of democ(k)racy. Questions about national identity are at the surface of this movement, “who is Indian and who does the government exist to serve?”. Farmers can be Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, or of any ethnicity but this protest is ultimately about the unity of people who have continually faced the brunt of state oppression.

Identity

Rothman and Albertstein (2013) locate the role of identity within conflict expansion and resolution. They conceptually organize identity into three categories: Individual identity, Group, and Intergroup identity. Identities encompass a “distinct set of core concerns” (Rothman and Albertstein, 2013, pg. 635). Group identity, known as Hindutva identity, plays a key role in legitimizing violence against minority groups. Rothman and Albertstein’s (2013) write that group identity is understood in two ways, how the group understands themselves and how everyone else understands the group through “social scripts and narratives” (Albertstein & Rothman, 2013, pg. 641). Through social script and narratives, Sikhs were understood to be anti-nationalist contributing to conflict between different group identities. The presence of minorities in India plays an integral role in the country’s rich diversity. However, minority groups in India, such as Sikhs, continue to face grave issues and concerns in regards to maintaining their distinct identities. India encompasses a vast combination of languages, religions, cultures, and communities. An overarching problem that continues to exist is the prevalence and dominance of the assimilationist “Hindutva” identity, where the entire identity of the nation state is represented by the majority Hindu population in the country (Gill, 2015; Singh, 2017). Different social identities can be at the root of the conflict and constructed through the conflict (Black, 2003). Gill (2015) builds upon the work of Kinvall (2002) and writes that the Hindutva identity

insinuates that an Indian citizen is a “Hindu who belongs in the imagined state of Hindustan” (Gill, 2015, pg. 2). Consequently, this paints other religious minorities as the ‘other’, covertly establishing the fact that Hindus represent the nation, not other minority groups.

As highlighted in earlier in the paper, Sikhs have always strived to establish a distinct identity from other groups present in India. Kinnvall (2002) writes that the Hindutva nationalism, an identity that aims to concretize that an Indian is a Hindu, emerged out of growing concerns against the growth of Christianity and Islam (Kinnvall, 2002). As a result, this overarching nationalist group identity is used by the state as a tool of assimilation, putting other religious communities outside of Hinduism in jeopardy. The role of identity is paramount in the Indian context as it lays the foundation in understanding how the construction of the “other” results in violence against a targeted group (Singh, 2017). Rothman and Albertstein (2013) write that the progression and construction of identities are affixed “through language and interaction...by telling stories about who we are and what matters to us” (Rothman & Albertstein, 2013, pg. 635). The term Hindutva encompasses the word ‘hindu’, indicative of the dominance of the Hindu identity and its acceptance as a legitimate identity by the nation state. At the beginning of my paper, I write about how Sikhism informs my personal standpoint, the construction of my identity. The goal of this was to demonstrate the connection between the expression of individual and group levels of identity. Discussions of values, emotions, desires, and relationships are articulated through personal terms. However, I would argue that the three levels of identity are not mutually exclusive. The demand for a separate state and distinct rights for Sikhs reflect a set of core concerns for the Sikh community but even within group conflicts, expressions of individual level identity appear (Rothman & Albertstein, 2013). Sikhism informs ontology, a way of being, which directly informs the construction of personal identity. The desire to

safeguard Sikhism is an essentialization of self needs, contributing to the construction of individual and group identity (Rothman & Albertstein, 2013). Furthermore, through a narrative of ethnic-terrorism against Sikhs, it became apparent that distinctions between individual and group identity became increasingly blurred – every single Sikh was labelled as a ‘terrorist’. The emergence of a hegemonic Hindu nationalistic identity that was accepted led to people distinguishing between ‘us’ and ‘them’, triggering individual and collective clashes.

Identity plays a key role in communal violence in India and in such deep-rooted conflicts, productive analysis must include an analysis of identities. The purpose of analyzing conflict is not only to understand the complexities of it but also to begin thinking about ways conflict resolution can be approached. Black (2003) argues that conflict resolution analysis must attend to identity and ask questions like “what kinds of people do the disputants consider themselves to be” (Black, 2003, pg. 165)? I would also argue that perhaps the opposite of that question should also be asked such as, ‘what kinds of people do the disputants consider each other to be?’. How people position and orient themselves plays a direct role in conflict expansion and transformation (Black, 2003). To begin the transformation of conflict requires proper classification and labels. In the next part of the analysis, I aim to demonstrate why the events of 1984 should be called and accepted as a genocide.

Lemkin’s Definition of Genocide

Lemkin coined the term ‘genocide’ in 1944 and argued that genocidal killings occur in two phases, the deliberate destruction of the “national pattern of the oppressed group” and the “imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor” (Shah, 2002, pg. 354). Moses (2013) emphasizes that Lemkin’s conception of genocide cannot be only compared to mass killing. Mass killing is a direct attack on the physical needs of a group but genocide utilizes Lemkin

argued that cultural needs were just as necessary to the survival of a group as the basic physical needs (Moses, 2013). Culture is an important part of identity, health, and wellbeing. It is the basis of traditions, customs, values, language, ways of knowing, and being. Therefore, the breakdown of a culture contributes to a breakdown of health and well-being.

As Lemkin emphasizes, physical destruction also encompasses “political, social, cultural, economic, biological, religious, and moral genocide” (Kuper, 1981, pg, 30). Lemkin writes that “the destruction of cultural symbols is genocide” as it purposefully targets the existence of the social group through an attack on group culture and identity (Moses, 2013, pg. 25).

Understanding what genocide is and what genocidal violence eradicates is crucial. Lemkin writes that genocide is violent and destroys a groups way of being and knowing. However, there are still depths to be explored with Lemkin’s conceptualization of violence. What kind of violence eradicates the knowledge and existence of a group? This question can be answered thoroughly when connecting the works of Lemkin along with Galtung’s concepts of direct, cultural, and structural violence.

Galtung’s Typology of Violence and Genocide

Hobson (2019) utilizes Galtung’s typologies of violence to deconstruct the concept of genocide understood through a categorical analysis of violence. By contextualizing Hobson’s (2019) analysis within the Sikh genocide, facets of genocidal violence can be thoroughly anatomized and examined, illustrating genocide as a “complex socio-political act” (Hobson, 2019, pg. 17). Galtung’s concepts of direct, cultural, and structural violence demonstrate how genocidal acts attack a group’s way of being and knowing through various forms of targeted violence. Galtung’s violence typologies exhibit the variety of ways that genocidal violence is delivered to destroy a groups “essential foundation of life” (Goldsmith, 2010, pg. 247). For

Lemkin, mass murder cannot be separated from an attack on culture desecration as “physical and biological genocide are always preceded by cultural genocide” (Moses, 2013, pg.34). Galtung’s (1969) comprehensive typology of violence is an effective way of understanding covert and overt forms of violence present in acts of genocide (Hobson, 2019). In his paper, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research”, Johan Galtung (1969) suggested three types of violence represented by the three corners of a violence triangle: direct, cultural, and structural violence. The triangle is meant to emphasize the fact that all three types of violence are interconnected and necessary in order to sustain each other.

Generally, people equate the word ‘violence’ with what Galtung (1969) refers to as ‘direct violence’, an act that visibly produces harm that can be linked to an offender. It is imperative to acknowledge direct violence; however, structural and culturally based approaches of violent conflict argue for a much broader understanding of violence. Cultural and structural violence are significantly more dangerous forms of violence because they are invisible forms of oppression that sustain relations of exploitation among the society (Galtung, 1969). As explained by Galtung, “direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a ‘permanence’, remaining essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture” (Galtung, 1969, p. 294). Using Galtung’s understanding of cultural violence and applying it to Lemkin’s conception of genocide, it is evident that genocide begins as an act of cultural violence and is reaffirmed through structures which then produces events of direct violence (Hobson, 2019). Genocide is not a series of sporadic acts of violence against a group, but rather is a crime that involves the perpetuation of a narrative accepted by the general population that legitimizes acts of violence. Thus, I would

argue that the foundation of a polarizing narrative needs to exist before acts of genocidal violence occur.

The perpetuation of an ethnic-terrorist narrative against Sikhs in itself is an act of cultural violence in “which the acts of direct, structural violence are legitimized, internalized, and thus rendered acceptable in society” (Galtung, 1990, pg. 292). The Indian media and political figures were a dominant source on discourse of political violence and terrorism against Sikhs and the construction of this narrative contributed “to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups” (Graef et. al, 2020, pg. 437). This polarizing narrative attempted to destroy the Sikh collective through directed acts of cultural violence. As Lemkin suggests, genocide entails the adoption of beliefs that highlight a group as superior, creating polarizing tensions and legitimizing violence (Hobson, 2019). These conditions led to Operation Bluestar, successfully enacting structural violence in the form of a paramilitary operation. The cultural violence inflicted upon Sikhs was a process of cultural decomposition that aimed at producing a Hindutva subject. Through the construction and perpetuation of an anti-Sikh narrative, genocidal violence against Sikhs was first perpetuated through a cultural discourse of violence. Using Sant Jarnail’s Bhindranwale as a tool to paint all Sikhs as militants, the state inculcated the population with propaganda.

Galtung (1969) writes that structural violence is inequality “in the distribution of power” and institutions perpetuate violence through “structurally built-in alienation” (Galtung, 1969, pg. 175). In the case of the Sikh genocide, a narrative of anti-Sikh was accepted by the population which legitimized the actions of the state to sanction structural violence by enacting Operation Bluestar, Operation Woodrose, and then purposefully failing to intervene in the events of November 1984 as Sikhs were openly being massacred. As demonstrated by the research of

Singh (2017), Jaijee (2008), and Kaur (2006), structural violence sanctioned by the Indian state was purposeful in attempting to destroy the totality of group existence. Lemkin writes that an act of genocide is to destroy “the essential foundations of the life of national groups” (Goldsmith, 2010, pg. 239). By attacking the center of Sikh identity – the Golden Temple, it demonstrates that there was a clear attempt at destroying Sikhism. The destruction of symbols and structures of the Sikh faith and identity exhibits the attempt of the state to “leave marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and spirit” (Galtung, 1990, pg. 294; Hobson, 2019). After the open massacre of Sikhs in November of 1984, the organized and systematic implementation of the carnage by both politicians and the police are a direct example of structural violence. The organization of discriminatory measures to ensure impunity of assailants portrays how violence is embedded within powerful structures and institutions.

The next and most overt form of violence is direct violence. The mass killings of genocide are what constitute direct violence. Galtung (1969) writes that direct violence as “somatic incapacitation, or deprivation of health, alone (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an actor who intends this to be the consequence” (Galtung, 1969, pg. 168). Direct violence constitutes the open acts of cultural and structural violence which results in visible harm (Hobson, 2019). Thousands of Sikhs faced repeated acts of direct violence whether it was beatings, mutilation, murder, rape, sexual assault, extortion, and more. Galtung’s (1969) definition of direct violence encompasses one part of genocide which is the physical destruction of a group. All three forms of violence are interconnected and necessary in order to sustain each other. Connecting Galtung’s work to Lemkin’s offers a holistic perspective on the culmination of violence leading to genocide (Hobson, 2019). Galtung offers a broad perspective on violence and the underlying processes that lead to direct violence. Similarly, genocide is not a sporadic event.

Genocide occurs through a process of polarization which leads to targeted violence against the existence of a group, as Lemkin argues. Linked together, Galtung and Lemkin illustrate how polarization leads to direct, cultural, and structural violence against a group, leading to genocide (Hobson, 2019).

Genocide Convention

Due to the failure of the Indian state to prosecute the assailants and investigate into the abuses of the anti-Sikh violence, it becomes imperative to analyze other avenues when seeking justice. As published by Human Rights Watch, despite several commissions created by the government to investigate the communal violence against Sikhs, only 30 people have been convicted for the attacks, not including rape (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The anti-Sikh violence of 1984 is still not recognized as a genocide which severely prohibits the victims to achieving justice. The process of conflict transformation and peacebuilding cannot occur without the recognition of the Sikh genocide.

The label of genocide is highly contentious and politicized. Mamdani (2007) writes about the ‘politics of naming’ and why nations avoid the proclamation of genocide. The United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948 outlines genocide as a heinous crime that must be condemned by the international community. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine formalizes this by outlining that “each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide” (Bellamy, 2008, pg. 622). Naming violence as a genocide plays a significant role in garnering international attention. Thus, genocide would trump state sovereignty and allow the international community to unite and justify the intervention through moral indignation. By labelling the anti-Sikh violence as genocide, India would need to address the victims and take responsibility, revealing to the international community of the systematic murder of Sikhs and

Sikhism. It is clear that the Indian government is resisting taking accountability for this genocide as an attempt to save face in the international community. By providing the Sikh citizens of the country with justice, it will only benefit the nation by working towards healing intergenerational trauma, restoring harmony and peace. Despite the highly politicized implications of declaring genocide, there is no need to shy away from genocide discourse. The failure to employ certain labels has direct ramifications on the lives of those affected by the violence. What is more important, to depoliticize acts of violence so that no nation has a perverse label of 'genocide' seared into their history or to ensure victims can begin the process of healing their traumas?

The recognition of conflict is necessary before approaching ways to building conditions of positive peace (Galtung, 1964). Galtung's (1964) conceptualization of peace presents a dichotomy between negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace means the "absence of violence" and positive peace means "the integration of human society" (Galtung, 1964, pg. 2). Positive peace involves the eradication of cultural, structural, and direct violence which are the root causes of violence and injustices in society. In 1949, India signed into the Genocide Convention and it was ratified in 1959 (Kaur, 2006). The genocide convention presents as a powerful legal tool that has the potential to achieve justice non-violently but in order to do that, it is imperative prove the need for international judicial recognition of genocide by analyzing the genocide convention and its application to the anti-Sikh violence of 1984.

The Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that was adopted in 1948 is an important tool of international law in place to hold nations accountable for acts of genocide (UN General Assembly, 1948). Article II of the Convention outlines five specific acts that constitute a genocide:

1. Killing members of the group,

2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm,
3. Deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part,
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births, and
5. Forcibly transferring children

A question arises when delineating whether genocide has occurred or not. Do all these requirements need to be met to prove genocide? In order to answer this question, Kaur (2006) suggests that the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda can be analyzed.

Following Kaur's (2006) line of thought, I will also utilize two cases of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda discussed in her report to engage with the topic of genocidal intent. The case of *Prosecutor v. Akayesu* details that at least one of the acts outlined in Article 2 of the Genocide Convention had to have occurred with intent by the perpetrator to prosecute genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kaur, 2006). Firstly, the events of 1984 clearly indicate that Sikhs suffered serious "bodily and mental harm" (UN General Assembly, 1948). This fulfills the first element of genocide. Furthermore, through the case study analyzed in this paper, it can also be demonstrated that there were attempts made to terminate the Sikh community, fulfilling the third act of genocide as outlined by Article 2. However, the intent in the crime of genocide must be analyzed (HRW; Kaur, 2006). As written in *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, "genocide is distinct from other crimes inasmuch as it embodies a special intent or *dolus specialis*" (Human Rights Watch, 2010, pg. 18; Kaur, 2006). In the interview with Ved Marwah, Suri (2015) proves that the active role of police in the perpetuation of violence against Sikhs and in upholding impunity for all those involved is evident. Police records were destroyed and manipulated, effectively eliminating important evidence that would aid in proving intent (Kaur, 2006). However, in the

previous elements discussed in this paper such as the role of politicians in organizing the violence, the perpetuation of an anti-Sikh narrative, violations of human rights law, the destruction of Sikh markers of faith, the death toll of thousands of Sikhs, the eyewitness reports, and the continued denial of genocide provide enough evidence to prove the intent behind this violence.

In *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, the case highlighted that intent can be inferred if victims of a particular group are deliberately and systematically targeted while excluding members of other groups (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kaur, 2006). The anti-Sikh slogans that were broadcasted on television and were chanted by mobs clearly indicate that the goal was to kill Sikhs, not any other group of people. Sikhs were meticulously targeted through lists to ensure no Sikh survived. In *Kayishema and Ruzindana*, the inference of intent is analyzed further stating that “for crimes of genocide to occur, the mens rea must be formed prior to the commission of the genocidal acts” (Human Rights Watch, 2010, pg. 23; Kaur, 2006). The creation of lists targeting Sikh homes and property indicate the formation of mens rea. The methodical pattern of behaviour in which kerosene and other supplies meant to kill Sikhs were distributed exhibit specific genocidal intent. *Kayishema and Ruzindana* emphasizes that this specific intent is what constitutes genocide and differentiates between genocide and murder (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kaur, 2006). Furthermore, *Prosecutor v. Akayesu* clarifies that the actual extermination of a group is not required for genocide to occur but the intent to destroy “in whole or in part” is enough to constitute genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2010; UN General Assembly, 1948). *Kayishema and Ruzindana* case proves that the intention to destroy a significant number of individuals of a specific collective must be there but there is no official number of deaths that would establish a genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Kaur, 2006). Although there are debates about the

number of Sikhs killed in the violence of 1984, that does not impact the argument set forth in this paper. This bloodshed still constitutes genocide as there was specific intent to destroy Sikhs “in whole or in part” (UN General Assembly, 1948).

Eight Stages of the Sikh Genocide

To further support the claim that the anti-Sikh violence in 1984 is genocide, I will succinctly analyze Gregory Stanton’s (1996) eight stages of genocide, as delineated in detail throughout the case study. Stanton (1996) developed ‘the eight stages of genocide’ model to outline genocide as a process, vividly describing the foundation upon which the genocidal violence continues and grows. The first two stages are ‘classification’ and ‘symbolization’ in which clear divisions begin to emerge between people in society (Stanton, 1996). These two stages are essential in ‘othering’ the target group as a way of establishing them as a threat. McCordic (2012) writes that in the Rwandan genocide, the portrayal of ‘otherness’ laid a foundation for discrimination and violence to occur against Tutsis. This phenomena as research in the context of the Rwandan genocide directly parallels the violence faced by Sikhs. Using physical symbols and cultural symbols, a collective identity of the ‘other’ was clearly identified through sacred insignia, effectively concretizing divisions. People began to categorize themselves into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Regarding religion, there were clear distinctions made between the Hindu majority and Sikhs, turning the diversity of religions into concrete lines of segregation. Stanton (1996) writes that at this stage, groups in society are unable to transcend ethno-religious divisions which is evident as the distinct Sikh identity was seen as a threat and it quickly became a discussion of India vs. Sikhs. At this point, groups of people begin to become distinguished through symbols and various names. These symbols and names have strong negative connotations, contributing to

discrimination underpinned by a hateful rhetoric. Labels such as ‘khalistani’ and ‘terrorists’ placed onto Sikhs lead to the next stages of ‘discrimination’ and ‘dehumanization’. The false claims and arrests of Sant Jarnail Bhindranwale and the hateful rhetoric painting a common image of Sikhs as militants is an example of how dominant groups uses political power to discriminate and dehumanize (Stanton, 1996). This directly led to Operation Bluestar which was predicated on the stages of ‘dehumanization’ and ‘organization’. Operation Bluestar was a direct example of how the rights of Sikhs were denied and this denial was legitimized through a dehumanizing narrative. Media blackouts, lack of medical care, invading a holy place of worship, the destruction of sacred items, and the deaths of thousands are just a few of the ways the rights of Sikhs were violated. Post assassination of Indira Gandhi and the meticulous killings of Sikhs in broad daylight without any police intervention and the manipulation of police records exemplify the organization of genocide.

The next stage is ‘polarization’ and I would argue that the perpetuation of an ethnic terrorism narrative was present throughout all the stages, leading to extreme polarization between groups. The polarization was present when Indira Gandhi justified Operation Bluestar on the claim of combating Sikh militancy, broadcasting propaganda that reinforced prejudice through thinly veiled hate speech. The next stage as written by Stanton (1996) is ‘preparation’. At this stage, victims are clearly identified, explicitly drawing up lists that identify who the ‘other’ is. As discussed in the paper, the November 1984 carnage was systematic as lists were written up, identifying Sikh homes and properties. The police and politicians had a direct role in the orchestration of this methodical plan aimed at killing Sikhs (Singh, 2017). This directly leads to the next stage of ‘extermination’ where mass killings begin. The November 1984 bloodshed

clearly exhibits the mass level of extermination that occurred as aggravating attacks against Sikhs were occurring throughout Delhi and other areas.

The final stage titled 'denial' deals with the aftermath of the genocide where the annihilation of a collective is denied. (Stanton, 1996). As Kaur (2006) writes, after Operation Bluestar and the events of November 1984, government officials conducted cremations themselves, "destroying opportunities at identification of victims and crucial physical evidence on causes of death" (Kaur, 2006, pg. 18). Furthermore, the police explicitly ordered their force to ignore the attacks against Sikhs, released culprits, manipulated police records, destroyed evidence, and blocked investigations (Kaur, 2006; Suri, 2015). At this stage, one can see the complexity of engaging in processes of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Stanton (1996) writes that international courts are instrumental in dismantling claims of denial and impunity which is why it is imperative to label anti-Sikh violence as a genocide.

Labels as a Form of Education

Dancing around the consequential term of 'genocide' is problematic and presents significant limitations for victims of atrocities that desire transformative justice. The path towards justice begins with a proper label of 'genocide'. Kaur (2006) and Jaijee (2008) posit that the violence of 1984 should be correctly labelled a genocide. These demands can also be seen within the Sikh diaspora. Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic Party, says that the anti-Sikh violence should be correctly labelled as a genocide as the naming of these crimes is essential in beginning the healing and reconciliation process (Rabson, 2018). After this, the creation of a collective truth that can answer questions that Sikhs continue to ask is necessary to provide healing. Similar to the phrase, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', is horrifying genocidal violence subject to the same perspicacity? The global calls for a proper label have

direct impacts for the parties involved in the conflict. The label of genocide will allow victims to feel that their trauma and loss is recognized and validated. There is extensive debate whether the anti-Sikh violence is genocide or not but such discourse surrounding the socio-political implications of labels deviates from the path of peacebuilding. As written by Alexander et. al (2004), an acknowledgement of cultural trauma through the use of appropriate labels is integral to survivors and their struggle for narrative legitimacy. The struggle of combating propaganda and narratives of ethnic terrorism have always been a part of Sikh history and from this vantage point, it is evident why a campaign of classification is at the crux of conflict transformation. However, recognition of conflict needs to be followed by some form of restitution and reparation as it will work towards the restoration of relationships in the community.

Adam Curle (1971), a British academic, writes about the dynamics and progression of conflict through The Conflict Progression Model. This model is predicated on the premise that conflict moves along a continuum and can change from an unpeaceful relationship to a peaceful one. Curle's (1971) model suggests appropriate approaches to peacebuilding in situations where there is an imbalance of power between parties in conflict. The first quadrant is representative of latent conflict where people are unaware of the power imbalance and cultural and structural violence (Curle, 1971). At this stage, the goal is to educate the masses so that people become aware of the conflict at hand. It is clear that the narrative the Indian government historically perpetuated was one that positioned Sikhs as the enemy but with the analysis of the farmers protests, it is evident that this narrative continues to be perpetuated. Without finding the Indian state guilty of genocide, it becomes extremely difficult to educate the masses and does not allow for Sikhs to achieve narrative legitimacy, posing as another barrier in achieving justice. In India, there is ongoing denial of the Sikh genocide, and the general public is unaware of the genocidal

injustice prevalent which is why at this point, this conflict is at the education stage (Curle, 1971). Before moving into the other quadrants of confrontation, negotiation, and sustainable peace, people need to become conscious so that the situation does not remain one of latent conflict (Curle, 1971). The challenge lies in the question, ‘how can Sikhs achieve narrative legitimacy in the journey to achieve sustainable peace in India?’.

Recommendations

Critique of the Genocide Convention

As I write this thesis emphasizing the need to label the criminal atrocities that have taken place in India against Sikhs as genocide, upon further reflection I realize that the prevention mandate of the convention does not allow for timely action against the potential perpetrators of genocide. The prevention part of the convention seems futile in practice. Proving genocide itself is highly contentious and requires extensive evidence which begs me to ask, how can one prove whether a genocide could have occurred if there was an intervention? If the signatories of the genocide convention act to prevent genocide and this action is successful, then that means there was no genocide that occurred but how do you claim the prevention of one? If there is no genocide, it is legally perplexing to prove the prevention of genocide. Furthermore, the nations states who chose to intervene in an attempt to prevent genocide could be held accountable in the violation of the sovereignty of a nation. Perhaps, the adoption of a warning system as developed by Stanton (1996) can prove to be an advantageous asset to the prevention aspect of the mandate – clearly indicating the potentiality of genocide occurring, leading to the justification of prevention methods. Stanton’s (1996) warning system demonstrates that it is not enough to only prosecute acts of genocide but it is imperative to work proactively in the prevention of genocide.

Prosecuting genocide is not enough, a structural framework that points to early warning stages of genocide is critical for rapid prevention and/or intervention.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

India faces a serious challenge of bringing together highly polarized groups. Prejudice, violence, mistrust, and propaganda continues to plague the country and with the farmers protest, the possibility of relapsing into genocidal violence remains a concern. For effective reconciliation and peacebuilding, Sikh voices need to be heard and acknowledged which can only happen if the practices of democracy are respected. Sikhs have been fighting and continue to fight for their truths to be heard. The trauma carried by Sikhs need to be addressed for healing to occur. Staub (2006) writes that reconciliation requires engaging with a myriad of actors in society. Lederach's (1997) pyramid of peacebuilding suggests that three levels of actors in society need to be engaged in the peacebuilding process. John Paul Lederach introduces a pyramid framework in his text, *Building Peace*. Level one is top level leadership which is comprised of key political and military leaders involved in the conflict (Lederach, 1997, pg. 44). Level two is comprised of various people who are in positions of leadership but whose positions aren't necessarily connected to formal government structures/authority (Lederach, 1997, pg. 44). Level three represents the base of society, comprised of common citizens. All three levels of actors have to engage in the process for effective reconciliation. Lederach (1997) outlines the activities that each level of actor needs to be engaged in to work toward peacebuilding. Level one actors need to initiate change nation-wide by engaging in high-level negotiations that focus long-term peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997). Level two actors play a critical role in the re-establishment of relationships in society which can be done through problem solving workshops, peace commissions, and conflict resolution training (Lederach, 1997). Level two actors such as

religious leaders, academics, humanitarian figures, and community leaders are an effective portal of communication between level one and level three actors, ensuring that the peacebuilding process is not top-down (Lederach, 1997). Level three grassroots actors can engage in local peace commissions, grassroots training, and various workshops that work towards the restoration of relationships (Lederach, 1997).

Staub (2006) agrees with Galtung (2001) and writes that reconciliation is a process of healing for both victims and perpetrators of violence. Staub (2006) outlines reconciliation in the Rwandan genocide and comes to the conclusion that polarizing narratives cannot exist when reconciling. Research suggests that meaning making is integral towards healing and establishing the truth is necessary for victims and survivors (Staub, 2006). Tutu (1999) writes that reconciliation needs to be predicated upon a shared narrative. In India, polarizing narratives exist which continue to divide people – making it extremely difficult to form a collective memory. The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) such as the one established in South Africa can allow for the establishment of truth (Tutu, 1999). In such deep-rooted conflict, there is harm done by all sides which does not justify actions of genocide but demonstrates the need for every party to be heard (Staub, 2006). In India, the genocide was one-sided and preceded by direct, structural, and direct violence. However, there is a possibility that the perpetrators would speak to their trauma by referring to the rise in Sikh militancy. I would like to clarify that in no way does this justify committing genocide against Sikhs but the consideration of trauma to all sides of the conflict is necessary (Staub, 2006). In Rwanda, the top level of leadership affirmed the necessity of constructing a shared narrative through “trauma workers, journalists, commissioners of the Unity and Reconciliation Commission, government leaders, and others” (Staub, 2006).

Justice requires the establishment and acceptance of truth. In order to build peace, proper classification is needed which is why I have been continually emphasizing the need for labels throughout this paper. Seeing the reignition of an anti-Sikh narrative through the farmers protest demonstrates the urgency in resolving the trauma of Sikh communities and raises questions. In India, the top level leadership has not expressed a desire to label the Sikh genocide and understand the historical events that led to genocide. In order for the Indian government to consider working towards the establishment of a TRC, the events of 1984 need to be recognized as a genocide through international law. For future research, I would like to explore how a shared collective memory could be co-created without primary approval from the governments of strong states.

In the Rwandan context of post-genocide peacebuilding, research shows that the creation of a national identity aids in the reconciliation process (Colomba, 2013). However, in this context, the overarching Hindutva identity has resulted in the genocidal ideology of divisions and polarization. Perhaps, this suggests that although the citizens of a country need to be a part of a national identity, there needs to be a recognition of distinct identities as well. Sikhs faced discrimination for their ethno-religious differences and were subsequently labelled as the enemy within the nations border – stripped of the title as an Indian citizen. For this context, I believe that post-genocide peacebuilding must dismantle the hierarchy of groups created by the state and highlight the diversity of different groups in India rather than consolidating the overarching Hindutva identity.

I would suggest that the next step after the establishment of a collective narrative would be the reconstruction of relationships through restorative justice. At the Unity and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda, survivors expressed what they needed in the process of reconciliation

and healing (Staub, 2006). Similarly, if a TRC was established in India, survivors would be able to express what they need to heal. I believe that by only concentrating on an adversarial linkage between victims and offenders, we would miss out on the restoration of relations. Therefore, I believe the next step after the TRC would be to engage in practices of restorative justice.

Restorative justice “involve[s] the victim, the offender, and the community in a search for solution which promote repair, reconciliation, and reassurance” (Zehr, 1990, p. 181). Restorative justice is proactive rather than just reactive. It comes from a holistic approach and understanding of life and relationships which reaches beyond simply the issue of violating a written law. Peace underlies the framework of restorative justice and the entire community plays a role which is what India needs.

The Need for Culture in Conflict Resolution Practices

When doing this research, I wanted to explicitly outline a path moving forward that would resolve decades of violence the Sikh community has faced. However, I realize the naivety of this notion and rather hope to put forth a discussion about conflict transformation as a whole. As emphasized by Moses (2013), the destruction of culture leads to the destruction of a group, leading to genocide. When thinking about this ethno-religious conflict, I realize that understanding culture is imperative when transforming conflict, especially in instances of genocide. By utilizing culture in the practice of conflict resolution, it works to strengthen group identity which essentially serves as a way of genocide prevention. How important are our differences when dealing with conflict and how can we implement our differences into conflict transformation training? What role does cultural conflict transformation play in communal violence? In the journey of building peace in India between the Sikh community and the state, I would recommend methods of conflict transformation that draw from the knowledge of Sikhism,

as this would allow for a meaningful way to resolve conflict and demonstrate a renewed respect for the Sikh ways of knowing and being. The importance of culture within conflict transformation training is described in John Paul Lederach's book. The main argument of the book *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (1995) is that our understanding of conflict transformation "must respect and draw from the cultural knowledge of a people" in order to approach conflict resolution training successfully (Lederach, 1995, p. 10). Lederach suggests that conflict transformation is both personal and systemic, thus promoting a more holistic view of transformative peacemaking which "empowers individuals and nurtures mutuality and community" (Lederach, 1995, p. 21). This broad framework of peace building is vital to Lederach's perception of conflict transformation training. Incorporating culture into conflict transformation not only creates conditions of positive peace but also is a form of genocide prevention itself, prohibiting the emergence of 'otherness'. From this, he concludes that it is necessary to blend cross cultural boundaries alongside training in order to ensure sustained restoration (Lederach, 1995, p. 23).

Justice and peace are inextricably intertwined and cannot be separated in the process of conflict transformation. Simply classifying the communal violence as genocide will not ensure justice if there is no peace and peace cannot occur without justice. What happens once the Sikh genocide is finally recognized in the international community? Justpeace ethics serves as a multi-dimensional framework of ethics that focuses on building the "capacity to respond wisely to the diversity and complexity of life" (Sawatsky, 2008, p. 7). The framework provides a "vision of how [parties in conflict] want to live together" as well as "suggestions about how [to] do so" (Sawatsky, 2008, p. 9). Justice must be co-created and the path to justice cannot involve the same behaviour that we aim to resolve. Sawatsky (2008) suggests that relationships are central. If

people are able to draw from their own particularity that respects their intersectionality and lived experiences but also address common connections between them, that leads to the transformation of conflicts (Sawatsky, 2008). Another core principle of justpeace ethics is interconnectedness (Sawatsky, 2008). This links directly to the virtue of empowerment because once we acknowledge the interconnectedness of us all, this creates “space for the inclusion, participation, and voice(s)” for those whose power has been limited or constricted (Sawatsky, 2008, p. 21). When addressing this communal violence in India, it is important to not only focus on the legal violation but also rediscover our roles in an interconnected community. Sawatsky’s (2008) framework is an effective humanizing theory in which relationships are central and differences are embraced rather than rejected. In the Sikh genocide, differences were highlighted and used to create conflict, but this framework values all intersectional identities by placing relationships at the centre and acknowledging the role of power in conflict. Utilizing the justpeace ethics framework when thinking of building peace allows for building the capacity of empathy and actively focuses on interconnection, nonviolence, needs-focused action, and empowerment – contributing to conditions of positive peace (Galtung, 1964; Sawatsky, 2008).

Conclusion

The detailed historical study is examined for the way in which an image of the ‘enemy’ was constructed and framed in dominant Indian media discourse. The analysis reveals a pattern of dehumanizing language that was applied to the Sikh community at large, effectively mobilizing an ethic-terrorism narrative that set the stage for genocide. The ethnic narrative in the context of the Sikh genocide reveals that such a dehumanizing discourse has political force and can lay the foundation for the language and actions of eradication. This paper contributes to the scarce work on the topic of the 1984 Sikh genocide and connects it to the contemporary

conditions of violence by drawing upon the farmers protest in India and revealing the pervasive narrative of ethnic terrorism. The paper answers the four research questions and concludes that the events of 1984 do constitute as a genocide according to the Genocide Convention.

Furthermore, the continued denial of genocide does not allow Sikh communities to achieve justice. Moreover, the narrative of ethnic terrorism against Sikhs is ever present in India, raising concerns about the potential of a modern-day genocide. The analysis and discussion add a unique perspective to understanding protracted conflicts against targeted identities and raises questions about the efficacies of peacebuilding.

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