

## Research Article

### The Making of a Monster: The Perpetrators of the 1984 Sikh Riots

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#### Abstract

Our in-depth understanding of atrocities and their perpetrators stems from extensive research on the Holocaust. Since then, we have been able to ascertain the roles of authority figures, society, and environmental factors in determining the behaviour of atrocity perpetrators. It is found that violators of human rights are more often than not ordinary people. Thus, it becomes important to study this perceived ordinary nature of perpetrators because it might help us prevent genocides in the future. In 1984, the Sikh community of India found themselves on the receiving end of a genocidal war. Even after years, they have been unable to cope with the trauma and suffering. This paper aims to understand the psyche and attitudes of the ordinary individuals who decided to murder the people they had grown up with. The paper will provide an overview of the Sikh genocide, the events that led up to it, the tumultuous environment in which it was set up, the role of superior figures, and how it affected the perpetrators.

**Keywords** Sikh riots • genocide • Indira Gandhi • atrocity perpetrators • mass murder

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On 31 October 1984, the then Prime Minister of the Republic of India was shot and assassinated by her two bodyguards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh<sup>2</sup>, who belonged to the Sikh religion.<sup>3</sup> The act of vengeance that followed was grim and horrifying. A state-sponsored brutal attack was launched towards the Sikh community in different parts of India, especially in the capital, Delhi. The genocide was extremely violent and swift and was carried out by the civilian population. The first three days of the violence were some of the worst mass murders India had witnessed in the post-partition era. Afterward, the violence slowed down and ceased.

According to the Nanavati Commission Inquiry, 2146 Sikhs were brutally murdered in Delhi, and 586 of them were killed in other parts of the country. A specific peace-loving ethno-religious group, the Sikhs, were systematically targeted and burnt, maimed, or tortured to death. The then-ruling party, Congress, to which Indira Gandhi belonged, had a strong influence in fanning the genocidal fire. It has been suggested by many sources that the Congress party and the police were complicit in these acts of violence.<sup>4</sup>

This paper provides an in-depth overview of the Sikh genocide that occurred in 1984 in India. The impact of this incident was felt even by the Sikh diaspora living abroad. It will briefly examine how these riots were organised and orchestrated by the state with the help of ordinary people living ordinary lives. Most of our research on ordinary people as atrocity perpetrators comes from studies based on the Holocaust. Through studies based on the Holocaust, this paper will examine how these riots were organised and orchestrated by the state with the help of ordinary people. The studies indicate that to understand extraordinary violence perpetrated by ordinary people, we must dissect the social influences and psychological processes that play a key role in the actions of an individual.<sup>5</sup> This paper will also attempt to identify the effect of authority on motives,

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<sup>2</sup> Crossette, Barbara. 1989. "India Hangs Two Sikhs Convicted in Assassination of Indira Gandhi." *The New York Times*, January 6, 1989, sec. World.

<sup>3</sup> Nanavati, Girish Thakurlal. 2005. "Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry." MHA. Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>4</sup> Chakravarti, Uma. 1994. "Victims, 'Neighbours', and 'Watan': Survivors of Anti-Sikh Carnage of 1984." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29 (42): 2722–26.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, Stanley. 2001. *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

belief systems, and the psyche of the individuals who were complicit in this act of violence.

## **The Etymology of Genocide**

The term 'genocide' can be traced to Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer who combined the Greek prefix *genos*, meaning tribe or race, and the Latin suffix *-cide*, meaning killing, in 1944.<sup>6</sup> Lemkin was able to highlight the importance of differentiating between mass killings and individual killings and why the former needed to be researched exhaustively. He persuaded the world to view the Holocaust as an extreme form of mass murder or, as he called it, a genocide. Lemkin argued that it is imperative to prohibit individuals from carrying out the complete and total destruction of an ethnic group or a way of life thereby causing immense suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Frank Chalk summarised Lemkin's definition of genocide as 'the coordinated and planned annihilation of a national, religious, or racial group by a variety of actions aimed at undermining the foundations essential for the survival of the group as a group'.<sup>8</sup> The destruction of this nature is a crime under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention).<sup>9</sup> It is important to establish wrongful intent for a criminal conviction in the case of a mass murder.<sup>10</sup> Intent here refers to the wilful act of damage towards another person or community. The word 'intent' is relatively tied to criminal culpability.<sup>11</sup> It is, therefore, necessary to understand the term 'genocide' and 'intent' to navigate this paper.

## **Operation Blue Star and the Sikh Riots**

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations. 2024. "United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect." United Nations. United Nations. 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Irvin-Erickson, Douglas. 2017. Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide. JSTOR. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>8</sup> Chalk, Frank. 1989. "Genocide in the 20th Century." *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4 (2): 149–60.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. 2024. "United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect." United Nations. United Nations. 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Sayre, Francis Bowes. 1932. "Mens Rea." *Harvard Law Review* 45 (6): 974.

<sup>11</sup> Greenawalt, Alexander K. A. 1999. "Rethinking Genocidal Intent: The Case for a Knowledge-Based Interpretation." *Columbia Law Review* 99 (8): 2259.

To answer the questions of what led to the mass killings of the Sikhs, whether there were any provocations, and what the perpetrators' motives were, there is a vital need to explore the events that culminated in the assassination of Gandhi. Born to the first prime minister of independent India, Indira Gandhi became the prime minister herself in 1966.<sup>12</sup> She was widely celebrated and viewed as a tough leader by the Indian masses. She is credited for leading India to victory in the 1971 war against Pakistan and turning India into an emerging nuclear power.<sup>13</sup> As a leading Indian journalist puts it, 'Indira Gandhi was a formidable, complicated woman, an ambitious alpha-female, steely, tender, cripplingly insecure led India to victory against a war'.<sup>14</sup> Lovingly referred to as Mother India, she was viewed as a strong maternal figure.<sup>15</sup>

However, she was in constant tussle with the democratic ideals of the nation. In 1984, she became increasingly frustrated with the agitation in the northern state of Punjab. Punjab is a prosperous farmland state with the highest concentration of Sikhs. Sikhism is a relatively new religion founded by Guru Nanak Dev in the late 15th century.<sup>16</sup> There are 30 million Sikhs in the whole world, of which 24 million live in India.<sup>17</sup> Members of the Sikh community visit the gurudwara to pray where people of all religions are welcome. Sikhs have a very unique and distinct racial identity. The men adorn a beard, moustache, and unshorn hair, a colourful pagdi, or a turban.<sup>18</sup> The men use Singh as their last name or middle name, and the women use Kaur.<sup>19</sup> This makes them easily identifiable.

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was at the heart of the crisis in Punjab in 1984. Bhindranwale was a charismatic and popular leader of the Sikh separatist movement.

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<sup>12</sup> MANAS. n.d. "Indira Gandhi." MANAS. Accessed February 2, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ghose, Sagarika. 2017. "19th November 2017: 100 Years of Indira Gandhi. She Was the Mother of Every Indian Supremo." *The Times of India*, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Gupte, Pranay. 2012. *Mother India: A Political Biography of Indira Gandhi*. Penguin Global.

<sup>16</sup> Barwiński, Marek, and Łukasz Musiaka. 2019. "The Sikhs – Religion and Nation. Chosen Political and Social Determinants of Functioning." *Studia Z Geografii Politycznej I Historycznej* 8 (December): 167–82.

<sup>17</sup> S. Jutla, Rajinder. 2016. "The Evolution of the Golden Temple of Amritsar into a Major Sikh Pilgrimage Center." *AIMS Geosciences* 2 (3): 259–72.

<sup>18</sup> Chilana, Rajwant Singh. 2005. "Sikhism: Building a Basic Collection on Sikh Religion and Culture." 45 (2): 108–16.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

He was a controversial figure hailed as a saviour by the extremist Sikh groups of Punjab and a troublemaker by the government of India. He was an orthodox Sikh who demanded a homeland called Khalistan for the Sikh population separate from India.<sup>20</sup> He urged the people to return to the ideals and teachings of Sikhi (Sikh religion) and promised the masses that he would bring back the glory days that existed in Punjab during the reign of King Ranjit Singh.<sup>21</sup> His popularity was rising steadily and hence, Indira Gandhi viewed him as a threat that needed to be eliminated. Amid rising tensions, Bhindranwale moved to the Golden Temple with his armed troops after fruitless negotiations with the government of India.<sup>22</sup>

The Golden Temple of Amritsar, India, is a major pilgrimage centre for the followers of Sikhism.<sup>23</sup> Every year, millions of Sikhs travel to the city of Amritsar to pray and worship at the Harmandir Sahib Gurudwara (Golden Temple). Jarnail Singh fortified the gurudwara with his supporters. In response, Indira Gandhi swiftly launched an army attack code-named Operation Blue Star that lasted from June 1st to June 8th, 1984, to evict Bhindranwale from Harmandir Sahib.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the operation coincided with the remembrance day of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Singh, the fifth guru of Sikhs, which meant that many pilgrims had congregated at the gurudwara.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, 700-800 Indian army men, 500 militants including Bhindranwale, and 5000 civilians were killed.<sup>26</sup> Official Indian government figures reported 575 civilian deaths, but independent reports believe the estimate is much higher, up to 3000.<sup>27</sup> The United Kingdom is considered to be complicit in the operation too, but they have since

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<sup>20</sup> Hundal, Sunny. 2009. "Operation Blue Star: 25 Years On." *The Guardian*, June 3, 2009, sec. Opinion.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Jutla, S. Rajinder. 2016. "The Evolution of the Golden Temple of Amritsar into a Major Sikh Pilgrimage Center." *AIMS Geosciences* 2 (3): 259–72.

<sup>24</sup> Das, Deb Zyoti, and Bhanu Singh Rohilla. 2020. "Operation Blue Star & the Course of India: Through the Legal Filter." *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

<sup>25</sup> Taneja, Poonam. 2013. "Why 1984 Golden Temple Raid Still Rankles for Sikhs." *BBC News*, August 1, 2013, sec. Asia.

<sup>26</sup> Das, Deb Zyoti, and Bhanu Singh Rohilla. 2020. "Operation Blue Star & the Course of India: Through the Legal Filter." *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

<sup>27</sup> GOV.UK. 2014. "Statement on the Indian Operation at Sri Harmandir Sahib in 1984." GOV.UK. February 4, 2014.

maintained a stance that their role was merely advisory in the entire operation.<sup>28</sup> Their actual role, however, remains unclear.

Operation Blue Star is remembered as ‘teeja ghallughara’ (the third holocaust) by the Sikh community.<sup>29</sup> A macabre scene had unfolded at the threshold of Harmandir Sahib, the holiest shrine. The attack led to the damage of certain parts of the holy gurudwara, which hurt the sentiments of the Sikhs.<sup>30</sup> This shook the faith of millions of Sikhs worldwide. The attack was perceived as an insult and threat to their religion. They were brimming with anger and fraught with sadness. The Sikhs were enraged by the deaths of innocent Sikh pilgrims, the damage to the holy Sikh manuscripts, and the desecration of the sacred Akal Takht (the throne of the timeless God).<sup>31</sup> Many innocent pilgrims were caught in the crossfire. Most people believe that a tragedy of this magnitude could have been avoided if Indira Gandhi had negotiated with Bhindranwale efficiently and reached a settlement, but she acted with haste.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the Sikh community developed a deep-seated hatred and anger towards Indira Gandhi who was viewed as the mastermind behind this operation. The wounds that the survivors of Operation Blue Star experienced were not even healed when another tragedy came knocking at their door. In the early morning of 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards as revenge for the desecration of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.<sup>33</sup> This was the catalyst.

### **Genocide Perpetrators: The Making of a Monster**

The evening of 31 October, 1984 was marked by bloodshed, brutality, and severe violence. More than several Sikhs became the target of fury and hatred. Sikhs are a racially visible minority in the country because of their turbans. As a result, many Sikh

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Singh, Pritam. 2021. “Wounds That Never Heal: Remembering Operation Bluestar.” *The Wire*. 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Balbir K. Singh. 2016. “Unjust Attachments: Mourning as Antagonism in Gauri Gill’s ‘1984.’” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2 (2): 104.

<sup>31</sup> Jutla, S. Rajinder. 2016. “The Evolution of the Golden Temple of Amritsar into a Major Sikh Pilgrimage Center.” *AIMS Geosciences* 2 (3): 259–72; Das, Deb Zyoti, and Bhanu Singh Rohilla. 2020. “Operation Blue Star & the Course of India: Through the Legal Filter.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

<sup>32</sup> Singh, Pritam. 2021. “Wounds That Never Heal: Remembering Operation Bluestar.” *The Wire*. 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Bryjak, George J. 1985. “The Economics of Assassination: The Punjab Crisis and the Death of Indira Gandhi.” *Asian Affairs* 12 (1): 25–39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30171983?seq=8>.

men were identified at one glance and subsequently beaten to death in public places such as bus stands and railway stations. Delhi became the centre of this genocidal conflict. According to Singh, hundreds of Sikhs were attacked and burnt alive, and their houses were ransacked and destroyed.<sup>34</sup> The Sikh women were also sexually assaulted by these atrocity perpetrators.<sup>35</sup> This mass murder was well-orchestrated and organised. The attack was so swift and deadly that many did not even get a chance to flee the state for their safety. A mob of perpetrators made their way to Sikh dwellings. Instead of killing Sikhs on the streets, they were now being hunted in their own homes. In a gut-wrenching scene, 95 Sikhs were trapped in a housing complex and burnt alive.<sup>36</sup> The women of the household experienced profound grief and trauma as they lost their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons in front of their own eyes. The necklacing method, an inhumane torture method, was widely used where burning tires were thrown around the neck of the victims by the murderers to make the death slow and painful.<sup>37</sup> Many expressed grief over neighbours turning against each other.

Most of the atrocity perpetrators were ordinary Hindus from the lower economic class who widely looted the affluent Sikh homes and their businesses.<sup>38</sup> The Hindus are a majority group in India. They were enraged by the death of their Hindu Prime Minister who was viewed as a motherly figure. Hindus and Sikhs had resided together peacefully for centuries. Most of the attackers knew the victims personally. According to Chakravarti, the killers belonged to the same neighbourhood and localities, and many of them refused to help the ailing families.<sup>39</sup> As Tirell has put it, genocidaires are ordinary and very much like us.<sup>40</sup> The attackers knew the victims well and vice versa. This is

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<sup>34</sup> Balbir K. Singh. 2016. "Unjust Attachments: Mourning as Antagonism in Gauri Gill's '1984.'" *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2 (2): 104. <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0104>.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Bryjak, George J. 1985. "The Economics of Assassination: The Punjab Crisis and the Death of Indira Gandhi." *Asian Affairs* 12 (1): 25–39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30171983?seq=8>.

<sup>37</sup> Baweja, Harinder. 2018. "The Decision to Re-Investigate the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots Gives so Many Victims Hope." *Hindustan Times*. January 11, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Bryjak, George J. 1985. "The Economics of Assassination: The Punjab Crisis and the Death of Indira Gandhi." *Asian Affairs* 12 (1): 25–39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30171983?seq=8>.

<sup>39</sup> Chakravarti, Uma. 1994. "Victims, 'Neighbours', and 'Watan': Survivors of Anti-Sikh Carnage of 1984." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29 (42): 2722–26. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401905?seq=1>.

<sup>40</sup> Tirrell, Lynne. 2016. "Perpetrators and Social Death: A Cautionary Tale." *Metaphilosophy* 47 (4/5): 585–606. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26602384?seq=3>.

exhibited in Chakravarti's paper in which a victim exclaims, 'No one was from outside; they were all from here'.<sup>41</sup>

The just-world hypothesis poses that people often assume that victims deserve their suffering because they have earned it.<sup>42</sup> In the case of the riots, the ordinary perpetrators believed that all Sikhs deserved a fate like death. Many attackers allegedly felt that the Sikhs might come for them after they had already killed the leader.<sup>43</sup> Often such rationalisations are employed to justify the killings of many. The assassination of the Prime Minister who belonged to the Hindu community by two Sikh men served as a catalyst for rampant violence and destruction.

The local leaders of the Congress party were complicit in the attack as they instigated the mob to avenge the death of their Prime Minister and supplied weapons and inflammable material.<sup>44</sup> In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt refers to the term 'banality of evil' to describe ordinary people, without an individual agenda, who commit atrocities only to satisfy authority.<sup>45</sup> The authority in this case was represented by a handful of Congress supporters who wanted to avenge Indira Gandhi's death. The police were not swift in taking action.<sup>46</sup> According to the Nanavati Commission, the police did not record First Information Reports (FIRs) and witness statements.<sup>47</sup> The Sikh families residing in Delhi were located through electoral polls that were distributed amongst the mob.<sup>48</sup> This was a huge lapse in the security and safety of the citizens as

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Staub, Ervin. 2003. "Steps along a Continuum of Destruction: Perpetrators and Bystanders." Edited by Ervin Staub. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.

<sup>43</sup> Chakravarti, Uma. 1994. "Victims, 'Neighbours', and 'Watan': Survivors of Anti-Sikh Carnage of 1984." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29 (42): 2722–26. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401905?seq=1>.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*; Nanavati, Girish Thakurlal. 2005. 'Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry.' MHA. Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>45</sup> Reicher, Stephen D., S. Alexander Haslam, and Arthur G. Miller. 2014. "What Makes a Person a Perpetrator? The Intellectual, Moral, and Methodological Arguments for Revisiting Milgram's Research on the Influence of Authority." *Journal of Social Issues* 70 (3): 393–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12067>.

<sup>46</sup> Singh, Balbir. 2016. "Unjust Attachments: Mourning as Antagonism in Gauri Gill's '1984.'" *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2 (2): 104. <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0104>.

<sup>47</sup> Nanavati, Girish Thakurlal. 2005. "Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry." MHA. Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>48</sup> Singh, Balbir. 2016. "Unjust Attachments: Mourning as Antagonism in Gauri Gill's '1984.'" *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2 (2): 104. <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0104>.



these voter polls often mentioned the religion of the individual. Many families were shattered, wives widowed, and children orphaned.

### **Why Do Ordinary People Commit Atrocities?**

'A very small minority of the perpetrators are indeed sadists and psychopaths, but most perpetrators are ordinary and law-abiding citizens who commit their crimes on orders of the state'.<sup>49</sup> It is important to understand the various factors that motivate individuals to commit crimes, including the state's role and other external influences. External environments and social forces have a very strong role in influencing and determining an ordinary perpetrator's behaviour. The identity processes as described by Moshman are critical in understanding the nature of group violence that unfolded on the fateful night of 31 October 1984.<sup>50</sup>

- Dichotomisation - The 'us' vs. 'them' feeling strengthened through religious groupings of Hindus vs. Sikhs. Indira Gandhi was a Hindu and the assassins were Sikh.
- Dehumanisation - The Sikhs were viewed as immoral traitors who were responsible for the death of the beloved, mother-like figure.<sup>51</sup> Chirot and McCauley talk about the perception of moral inferiority of the victims of atrocity perpetrators which helps them rationalise their actions.
- Denial - This was explained by Bandura's moral disengagement theory in which harmful behaviours were justified as morally correct behaviours that served a worthy cause.<sup>52</sup> The mass murder of Sikhs was viewed as revenge against the assassination and a way of protecting the community.

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<sup>49</sup> Smeulers, Alette. n.d. "Perpetrators of International Crimes – Alette Smeulers."

<sup>50</sup> Moshman, David. 2011. "'Ordinary Men,' Ordinary Children, and Extraordinary Violence: Commentary on Wainryb." *Human Development* 54 (5): 301–6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26765015>.

<sup>51</sup> Chakravarti, Uma. 1994. "Victims, 'Neighbours', and 'Watan': Survivors of Anti-Sikh Carnage of 1984." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29 (42): 2722–26. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4401905?seq=1>.

<sup>52</sup> Bandura, Albert. 2016. "Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves." *Psycnet.apa.org*. Worth Publishers. 2016. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-43532-000>.

It has become quite apparent that authority plays an important role in genocide. In this case, Congress played a huge role in instigating the mob and giving orders for the complete annihilation of the Sikh population. Milgram's obedience experiment and the Stanford prison experiment attempt to explain the influence of authority on an individual. In Milgram's experiment, the subjects administered electric shocks at the behest of perceived authority.<sup>53</sup> Milgram was able to establish that people can be influenced to commit atrocities under the guise of obeying orders from their superiors.<sup>54</sup> The Stanford prison experiment conducted by Zimbardo revealed a grim reality of the immoral impulses that every individual possesses, which only come out under extraordinary circumstances.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it can be argued that every person has the potential to commit crimes under the right conditions. Gandhi's assassination brought about a surge of emotions, and this precise emotional outburst provided a conducive environment for the tragedy to unfold.

Staub talks about a continuum of destructiveness in which it becomes increasingly difficult to return to perceived normalcy after committing a destructive act by the perpetrator.<sup>56</sup> For example, hurling abuse is a small act that has the potential of snowballing into causing physical harm to the other person. However, it is unclear if the attackers in this case were able to employ their moral compass while making these atrocious decisions. There was an erosion of personal agency even if it was unintentional.<sup>57</sup> This is where the role of a group as a whole comes into focus. The killings were not committed by one person alone but rather by a group as a whole. The group was functioning as a murderous unit together. Groupthink behaviour is typically employed where authority is not questioned and irrational decisions are made.<sup>58</sup> Such

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<sup>53</sup> Reicher, Stephen D., S. Alexander Haslam, and Arthur G. Miller. 2014. "What Makes a Person a Perpetrator? The Intellectual, Moral, and Methodological Arguments for Revisiting Milgram's Research on the Influence of Authority." *Journal of Social Issues* 70 (3): 393–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12067>.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Konnikova, Maria. 2015. "The Real Lesson of the Stanford Prison Experiment." *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker. June 12, 2015. <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-real-lesson-of-the-stanford-prison-experiment>.

<sup>56</sup> Staub, Ervin. 2003. "Steps along a Continuum of Destruction: Perpetrators and Bystanders." Edited by Ervin Staub. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Dudai, Ron. 2006. "Understanding Perpetrators in Genocides and Mass Atrocities." *The British Journal of Sociology* 57 (4): 699–707. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2006.00132.x>.

<sup>58</sup> Lee, YiLin. 2015. "Groupthink as a System of the Decision Making Process." *Nyu.edu*. 2015. [https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych\\_opus/groupthink](https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/groupthink).

groups hardly take into account the personal opinions of group members but rather adopt a herd-like mentality. Groupthink can be extremely dangerous and toxic in certain situations. Such crowds are pathological and abnormal.<sup>59</sup> An individual completely loses a sense of themselves but gains power and invincibility.<sup>60</sup> This leads to the diffusion of responsibility that is directly correlated with highly risk-taking behaviours that increase the aggressive tendencies of a group.<sup>61</sup> The violators feel no direct responsibility for the gruesome act they have committed. Thus, we can hereby prove that atrocity perpetrators are indeed ordinary people who have the potential to commit heinous crimes against individuals in specific circumstances. Their motives, behaviours, and attitudes are an amalgamation of social and environmental influences.

## Conclusion

The victims of the Sikh genocide are still waiting for justice. The government of India has, to date, refused to acknowledge the Sikh riots as a genocide. Even after years since the massacre, only thirty people have been convicted despite the widespread participation of ordinary civilians.<sup>62</sup> Such attitudes led to a rise in discriminatory practices towards the Sikh community. Many women were widowed, and kids orphaned. This created a vacuum in a patriarchal society where men were the sole breadwinners of the family. The women had to find work outside their home, and children were left unsupervised. This led to drug use by Sikh teenagers due to the absence of supervision and to cope with their trauma.<sup>63</sup> Such aftereffects of genocide are extremely discerning and difficult to comprehend. The generational trauma permeates through the victims to their kids who were not even born at that time. The Sikh genocide serves as a warning

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<sup>59</sup> Behtaji Siahkal Mahalleh, Vahid, Hazlina Selamat, and Fargham Sandhu. 2017. "Review on Psychological Crowd Model Based on LeBon's Theory." *TELKOMNIKA (Telecommunication Computing Electronics and Control)* 15 (2): 763. <https://doi.org/10.12928/telkomnika.v15i1.6114>.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Beyer, Frederike, Nura Sidarus, Sofia Bonicalzi, and Patrick Haggard. 2016. "Beyond Self-Serving Bias: Diffusion of Responsibility Reduces Sense of Agency and Outcome Monitoring." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 12 (1): 138–45. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsw160>.

<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2014. "India: No Justice for 1984 Anti-Sikh Bloodshed | Human Rights Watch." *Human Rights Watch*. October 29, 2014. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/29/india-no-justice-1984-anti-sikh-bloodshed..>

<sup>63</sup> The Quint. 2022. "Riot Ep 2: How Widows' Colony in Delhi Never Recovered from the Trauma of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots." *Www.youtube.com*. 2022. <https://youtu.be/-ysMODI6WGk?si=TLsAA9pOV11EFcuA>.

to the masses that the ones in the majority will always have more power and control in society. We are ordinary people. We are not killers but under the right circumstances, even ordinary people can become one. Under the right circumstances, we can display our darkest sides unintentionally.

It is important to consider the role of religion here. Religion has become an integral part of every society. It is responsible for the demarcation of communities into 'us vs. them'. Understanding the role of religion in turning ordinary people into atrocity perpetrators is crucial. The role of groups as a whole must be exhaustively researched. It will help us eliminate herd mentality and groupthink behaviour. It is important to hold the perpetrators accountable. We should view them as criminals who have committed a crime instead of monsters that only exist in movies and books. The state also has an important responsibility to uphold. They must protect their citizens no matter what group they belong to and collaborate with the police to ensure peace. International authorities must keep the states in check to prevent any violation of human rights. In the end, atrocity perpetrators must be punished for their role, no matter how small. Atrocity perpetrators might be ordinary people, but that does not mean they can get away with murder.

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