Bilaspur
Block-32

Partition Capital
no food, no water
87 - married 4 children
works in a factory electrical socket
God hasn't written happiness
in our destinies
poor people - earning + eating
want justice
2005 11th August Parliament Protest
18th August promises
no compensation employment, hanging
They're living happily.
What good are we?

we won't get justice
nobody else well.
precedence
we will keep fighting
our children will fight our
battle
we'll never forget
blood on corners
will never get washed
Rajiv Gandhi had blown up to
bits, so he was too
what goes around, comes around.
Not my mother,
everyone else's mother

gauri gill 1984

The other day on the metro to Shadipur, I watched this girl who was standing near the door, facing the corner and listening to her headphones with her eyes tightly shut. She would open her eyes when the song would finish and close them again when the next one would start. There are times when sadnesses need to find each other, unnoticed by one or the other. It doesn't matter that she had no idea this was happening. [There is a monumental silence here. A monumental crime has been committed. A monumental history of violence has been absorbed.] The same day, I decided to take the metro to Dwarka instead of back to Rajiv Chowk. Winter is over. The days are clear with incredibly short shadows at noon. People walk around without their shadows briefly. For a moment this city loses its soul everyday. The metro to Dwarka was no revelation and the sun was setting and casting all kinds of shadows. [This corner of this room of photographs, this photograph of photographs, this frame of absence, these people looking at us, these garlands around a father a son a husband a saint, this uncanny stillness, this fan that doesn't stop, this present moment, these drawings on the wall, this heaviness in these hands, this illegible piece, this printed sheet, this sleeping justice, these markings of a future, this future city, this generation, this contained sadness, this unfathomable grief, this corner of this room in this photograph.] I can't take photographs on moving trains anymore. I would rather not witness the blurs. **Priya Sen**

The walls of Bhaggi Kaur's house are covered with her grandchildren's graffiti. The scribbles and doodles are a contrast to the framed pictures of Kaur's husband and son that hang nearby. 53-year-old Bhaggi lost her husband in '84, while her son committed suicide by overdosing on painkillers three years ago.

That season, in 1984, there were friends from amongst us who had to hide, but escaped being butchered, or watching their families being set to fire. And we were grateful for this mercy, that our beloved friends at least were safe. But the abyss of fear did not spare them, nor it's odour of degradation. Living unobtrusively in a kind friend's home, searching oneself for the validity of identities that so far had been worn carelessly, or for convenience, could no longer be dropped when inconvenient. Not without loss of dignity (which dignity?), not in war-time (but whose war?). **Nilima Sheikh**

Shaheedi Memorial Museum, Tilak Vihar.

In 2005, Gauri and I traveled extensively through Delhi to talk to the survivors of the 1984 massacres. Gauri's haunting portraits were published in Tehelka. This photograph, taken at a protest against the government's failure to act on the GT Nanavati Commission report, captures some of the anger at the Congress and the despair of the protestors. But only knowledge of the circumstances that led to the report allows the photograph to be seen for what it is, a reflection of the naivety of these young Sikhs.

By the time they began their protest in the Delhi summer heat, eight commissions of enquiry had been wound up, and Nanavati's was the ninth. But Nanavati, as a judge of the Supreme Court, was part of a two-judge Supreme Court Bench that commuted the death sentence of the `butcher of Trilokpuri' Kishori Lal, accused of stabbing several Sikhs to death in 1984.

According to the judgment, "We may notice that the acts attributed to the mob of which the appellant was a member at the relevant time cannot be stated to be a result of any organized systematic activity leading to genocide. Perhaps, we can visualise that to the extent there was unlawful assembly and to the extent that the mob wanted to teach stern lesson to the Sikhs there was some organisation; but in that design that they did not consider that women and children should be annihilated which is a redeeming feature."

Nanavati had made up his mind before the commission was constituted, and the sentiments expressed in the judgment were, to say the least, reprehensible. When the BJP appointed him, they already knew what he would conclude. The political class was shielding its' own. The faith of the young Sikhs in the possibility of the Congress or the Indian State coming to its senses made them unwitting actors in the last act of a pre-scripted farce. **Hartosh Bal**

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report.

A person and a photograph periodically stand at a crossroads where uneven and unsettled journeys collide, and disintegrate. The unknown itineraries of selves remain insoluble within the flow of the amnesiac fluid of time that churns and dissolves all matter. This insolubility of the photographic surface gives life its stupendous force to keep in contention the very will to breathe itself. **Monica Narula**

Nirpreet Kaur, then sixteen, saw her father being burned alive on Nov 2 even as the same mob hit her with iron rods. Intent upon revenge, she joined the Khalistan movement, and married a militant. Her husband was picked up twelve days after their marriage, never to return; her mother was arrested on charges of 'sheltering a terrorist'; she herself was arrested in 1988 and released in 1996. She has testified repeatedly against Sajjan Kumar, whom she saw inciting a mob to violence.

Does she usually read this way? Always in the same room?

Is the tiny black object on the trunk (on the steel cabinet) really a bird?

Why exactly am I moved by this image?

There are 48 black-and-white photographs in my new novel, Helium, including this one, on an entire page. Yesterday I showed it (without the original caption) to my father. "Padhai ho rahi hai," he said. "A very humble family…She is trying to locate the past." He doesn't know yet that the photograph carries traces of an atrocity. The caption would have disturbed him. Among other things it would have triggered his own memories of November 1984. Layers of cold ash. In 1984 the two cabinets in the room would have failed to hide the victims. The phone, too, would have been equally helpless (because the cops in Delhi were extremely busy facilitating acts of cruelty). She was not born yet.

When I first saw the photograph I felt its silence. Silence filled the whole space. But, soon a detail broke the silence. Her ear. It made me pause, and I heard the hum of painful stories she must have heard over and over. The same ear, I felt, would have preserved the shape of her grandmother's voice.

Postmemory - that messy archive of trauma and its transference. Outside the house, ironically, the same ear must have detected ongoing shamelessness and injustice. Collective amnesia.

Whenever I revisit the photograph, my gaze is also perturbed by the earring. But, is it really an earring? Perhaps what I see is a slow t(ear). And it refuses to fall down. I make a list of all the objects around her bed. They, too, are listening/ hearing devices. They will outlast her.

What book is she reading? Hope it is not a prescribed text of 'history'.

"Why should young people know about an event best buried and forgotten"—The Indian Censor Board on awarding an 'A' rating to a film on the 1984 pogrom. But this is not the exact reason why the picture wounds me.

Something within its space - and accumulated time - is broken, and will always remain so.

Jaspreet Singh

Taranjeet Kaur's grandfather Jeevan Singh was killed on Nov 1, 1984. "A mob of 400-500 people followed my husband and before he could reach a safe house in Pandav Nagar, they knifed him and left him to die on the rail tracks," recounts Taranjeet's grandmother Surjit, crying uncontrollably. It hasn't been easy since. "I have spent my life struggling, but I want my granddaughter to study hard," says Surjit.

KODAK 400TX 42 KODAK 400TX 43

KODAK 400TX 44 KODAK 400TX 45

KODAK 400TX 46 KODAK 400TX 47

KODAK 400TX 48 KODAK 400TX

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KODAK 400TX 55 KODAK 400TX

It's so difficult to write on the image you have forwarded.

If it all, I could say the following: I do not know or remember what happened that fateful day but stories tumbled out shortly after in their ghastly horrors: stories of incredible brutality. At a personal level, we learned of the harrowing ordeal of a friend who managed to escape a lynching mob on a train from Amritsar to Delhi under a blanket and later, smuggled home in the boot of a car.

The brutality was repeated with equally ferocity in 2002 in Gujarat.

About the photograph of the widows the title that comes to mind is like this: The unbearable starkness of being. **Ghulammohammed Sheikh**

I remember it started in the afternoon.
There was a phone call, on the 1st of November.
My mother called to say that rioting had begun in central Delhi.
My father and I went to fetch her.
The road that seemed deserted had many men on it.
The Gurudwara was being set on fire.
There was a mob of men around it.
They were screaming at each other.
Some wore shiny watches on their wrists.
Some wore running shoes.
Some people had oil in their hair.
Their eyes were red.
It was also very dusty I remember.
But we weren't there for too long.
Abbu took me back home and left again, alone this time.
His eyes were also red.
I ran up to the terrace and clicked pictures of the smoke now visible from our house. They were for my school project on pollution.

I remember pretending to be asleep when my mother told my grandmother about him.
She saw him being set on fire.
He had a white, flowing beard.
He ran towards a bus.
The drive couldn't slow down.
They caught him.
They put a tyre around him and then petrol and then set him on fire.
Later I dreamt about him.

Some other women had come home with my mother that night.
Their families were in Bhogal.
They couldn't reach each other.
They were always praying.
The road was matted with hair.

The widows of Block 32, Trilokpuri, on the morning after the Nanavati Report was released.

Hair was everywhere.
There was hair in food sometimes.
But the patka marks didn't go away.
There was a solution, which could wipe the marks immediately.
No, the only thing that helped was foundation.
The barber down the road claimed to know a technique,
but he charged extra.

Rioting began in Bhogal.
There was a phone call.
The husband had called to say goodbye.
His building was on fire.
The wife collapsed.
Older women surrounded her.
Good news a few hours later.
There was retaliation and the mob dispersed.

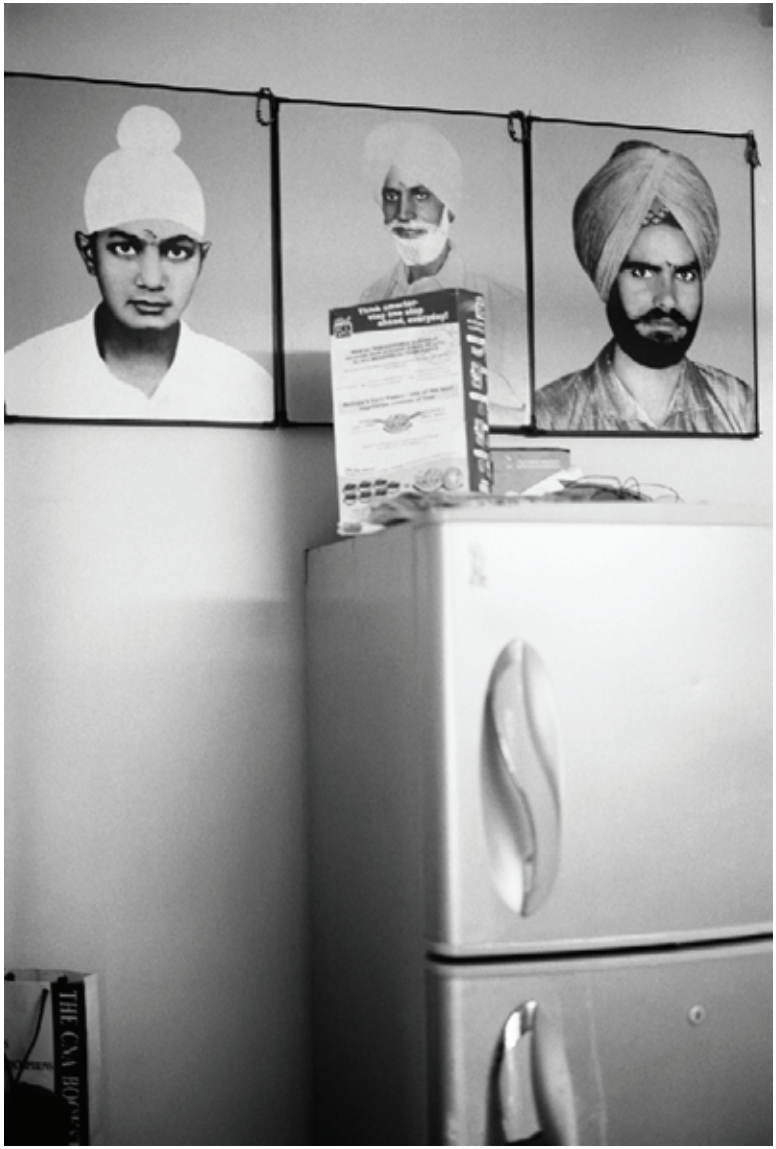
I remember men patrolling the streets.
There was a man on a bike, who drove past screaming.
They are coming for the Muslims now.
We were pushed under the mattresses.
It was very hot.

I remember the tanks.
I learnt a new word, Flagmarch.
One of the tanks opened and a steel head popped out.
I was seven years old.
I was in Delhi in 1984. **Anusha Rizvi**

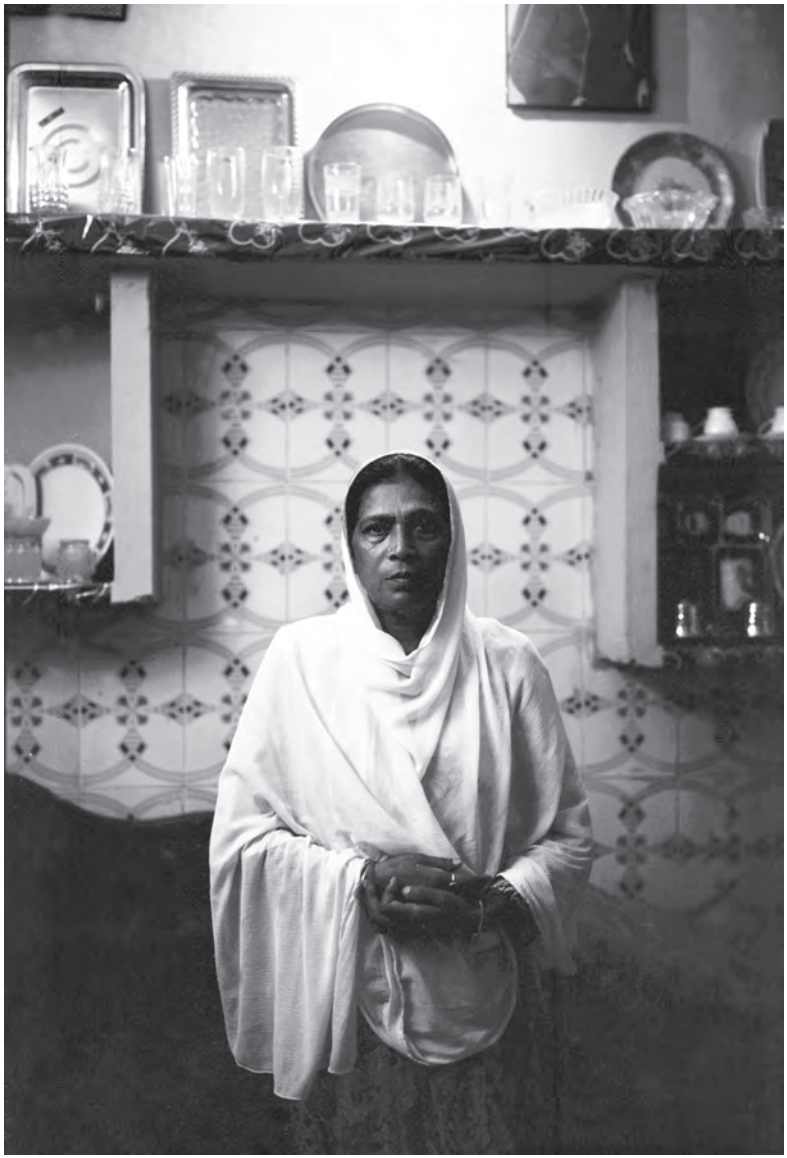
On November 1, 1984, the house of Harminder Kaur was attacked by a mob which was led by Harprasad Bhardwaj, P. Tiwari and Jagdish Giri. They had lynched and killed three members of Harminder's family, including her husband, police constable Niranjan Singh (next photograph). An Additional Sessions Judge finally convicted the accused in March 2007.

"Every Sunday morning the grandfather and the grandson went to the market to do the weekly shopping. It was a family ritual, not something the grandson had been willingly a part of. Every Sunday morning involved a mix of cajoling, screaming, emotional threats, a mini soap-opera. Getting the grandson to go out with the grandfather, over a period of time, became a family ritual in itself. That particular Sunday morning the grandfather had decided to put an end to the every Sunday morning to the family Mahabharata. He was growing old, and decided to start donning the role of the cool, distant patriarch. The sort that people went to, not the other way around. He asked his daughter-in-law to make him a cup of tea, made himself comfortable on the armchair that was placed in the terrace every winter. It was a cool, crisp winter morning with abundant, yet gentle, sunlight washing away the terrace. The sort of winter morning that made the inhabitants of the city love it deeply, even when they were suffering for most of the year. It was the sort of winter morning that all around the year people waited for; the sort of morning that made the heat, humidity and the dust during most of the year bearable. The son brought up the piping hot cup of tea for the father. He sat on the white plastic chair that was placed next to the armchair. They chit-chatted about the goings-on in the neighborhood, and the rising costs of everything. After some time had passed the grandson made an appearance on the terrace. With the nonchalance that teenagers adopt as their second skin, he asked his father and grandfather when they were heading out for the weekly shopping, and if they could hurry up as he had a birthday party to attend to in the afternoon. The grandfather was elated, but hid it. He continued chatting with his son and they slowly started making movements to go to the market. The grandson decided to join the father and the son. As they were going down the stairs, there was a five minute discussion on which bag to take to the market, what to buy and what not to buy. The grandfather could feel his heart swell with pride. He felt that life is just as it should be. Then they heard the door banging loudly…

Three men who lived in that city. Three men whose time to inhabit the universe of death hadn't yet come, but who were forcefully taken there. Three men who could not go to the market that winter Sunday morning." **Subasri Krishnan**



Harminder says, "For 22 years, I travelled alone to the Karkardooma court, fighting to get justice for my husband. I also testified against Congress leader HKL Bhagat. Even though he was acquitted, I am glad that those three men got their due." As one of the few 1984 victims who had the tenacity to fight a long protracted legal battle, she adds, "Truth by its own virtue is sacred. The courts finally saw that. I would like my struggle to be an example."



Darshan Kaur at her home.

Darshan Kaur gave testimony against HKL Bhagat, whom she saw arrive in Trilokpuri in a 'cream colored car' and who told the gathered crowd that 'when a big tree falls, the earth shakes' and 'not a single child of a sardar should survive'.

She was later brought 25 lakh rupees, which was put on the table in her home as an offer for her to take back her statement. She refused, "Bring back one of the twelve family members that I lost and I will consider your offer."

"The government has not asked any questions. 5000 Sikhs were killed…why? They filled trucks with dead men and dumped them on the hills. One political party killed, the other patted them on the back." Her life changed, "I had to work and could not look after my children. Two of my three sons are unemployed today. I was given work in Guru Tegh Bahadur hospital in Dilshad Gardens; I would leave at 5 am, get there at 8 am. Sometimes I had night duties. After some years they gave me work in the local dispensary, now I work there from 8-2 pm…

…I have seen nothing of life. I have only cried. All the widows here have heart problems. But still, you may have noticed that none of us is a beggar. I trekked 35 kms to work everyday but I have not begged."

Grandfather lies on his right side, eyes closed. Sleepless.
In another second he will open his eyes, and look at the camera.
He will offer us water, and ask us about the weather outside.
He will ask us if we had trouble finding the house, and we will say - not at all.
He will show us an album of pictures of his sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters - now no more.
He will tell us about an evening contained by police FIRs, case files, and newspaper reports.
He will talk about the time he last slept. **Iram Ghufran**

Houses in Tilak Vihar are packed together in a manner that induces a pressing claustrophobia. Doors are often left open, letting passers-by like us peer inside Widow Colony's small rooms, where the paint is peeling and walls are thin.

Yuganta

"Involuntary insomnia" - That's the name the senior doctor used to describe her condition to the young volunteers who accompanied him on his monthly trips. "Brought about by a traumatic memory of sleepfulness" he would explain "the patient finds herself unable to sleep and remains in a constant shell shocked state incapable of distinguishing her dreams and nightmares from reality". He seemed to have got it almost right except for the involuntary bit. No, her wakefulness was her own choice and she still recalls clearly the last night she had slept - twenty nine years ago - the night before young Abhi had come to her seeking her blessings as he left for Connaught Place, that labyrinth with its gol chakkars of deceit and violence. She can recall very little of what happened before that save for fragments of a story she had heard when Abhi was still two months from being born. Now she only recalls future memories - which unlike the past do not visit those who sleep at night. In some of them Abhi and Uttara return home from work and sit with her drinking tea and exchanging stories of their day - which she would insist on hearing till the end despite their ordinariness. The other women in the colony merely referred to her condition as Subhadra's curse while the kinder ones alluded in hushed tones to her burden or sometimes "our burden". They didn't seem to get it either - this was no curse - just a price that one pays for the consequences of stories half heard and memories half told. And if it was a curse then it was not hers alone but 'our curse' because Subhadra was keenly aware of the conspiring wakefulness that all the other women in this widow's colony shared with her. **Lawrence Liang**

When not packed in unventilated rooms, children here spend the day playing in a park outside.

Tilak Vihar. When I was younger I could take it. A family of five orphans, two to thirteen. For six years, when each month began I went to buy rations for the month, clothes and shoes, from the poor shops of the survivors, little tin shops on the road and on wheels. Till 'Nishkaam' found them a foreign sponsor. Rawel Kaur of Gamri village whose husband had a successful tailors shop. She saw him and two teenage sons burnt in front of her. So many like her.....now, many decades and a bypass later, I don't have the courage to go. After all I'm not Phoolkaji. But the tears refuse to dry up. **Arpana Caur**

The grandchildren of 1984 victims living in the west Delhi colony of Tilak Vihar survive under the shadow of a past they have not witnessed.

In 1984, I happened to be in Kashmir - which remained calm during this episode - so I had no direct encounter with the Sikh pogrom. The harsh reality of those horrific days sank in only when I did a community project with Sikhs, in Gurudwara Seesganj in Chandni Chowk, in 1991, when a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pundits happened from Kashmir. This, though, was not for the first time that the Pundits were forced to move out of the State. History tells us that in the 17th century, when Emperor Aurangzeb held sway over Mughal India, extreme desperation over the plight of Kashmiri Pundits caused them to send a delegation led by Pundit Kripa Ram, in May 1675, to Anandpur Sahib. They wished to seek help from Guru Tegh Bahadur and his son, Guru Gobind Singh. It was this incident - involving the sacrifice which Guru Tegh Bahadur made to save Kashmiri Pundits - which made us engage Kashmiri migrants of the post 1990 exodus, to express solidarity with the victims of 1984, at Gurudwara Seesganj. Why Seesganj? Because the great Guru's head, severed from his body by Mughal killers, lay buried there. The rest of the body lay in Gurudwara Rakabganj, near the Central Secretariat in New Delhi. As a token of our homage, we marched through the streets of Delhi to the Gurudwara, carrying with us a long scroll with 500 thumb impressions of rural Kashmiri Pundits. We had also brought along water from the Satisar Spring (Jhelum) to wash the wounds, as it were, of the sufferers of the 1984 carnage. Pundit Kripa Ram, known in his later life as Kripal Singh, finally became a Sikh Pracharak. Tears welled in our eyes that day in Gurudwara Seesganj as we paid our humble tribute to Guru Tegh Bahadur. **Veer Munshi**

Widows Colony, Tilak Vihar.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KODAK 400TX 55 KODAK 400TX

I knew a young man in his twenties in November 1984. He was tall, had a loping gait, and a way of speaking that would alternate between short, staccato bursts of words, and long, perfectly formed sentences. He was studying to be a doctor, in his last years at medical school, and I thought that he was the most intelligent man I knew at the time. I was impressionable, I was sixteen.

When you are sixteen - twenty-five, or twenty-seven can look very far away. You have none of the assurance that a young man in his twenties can have. When I look at this picture, I see that assurance in him, as well as its absence in me.

I idolized this man. He was my then girl-friend's elder brother. I remember that he gave me a book by D.D.Kosambi to read, and that he would sometimes take me and his sister with him on his ornithological field trips (he was an avid bird man) in the Jahanpanah forest. He taught us how to be quiet in a forest, and how to speak about things that we felt were too big for sixteen year olds. He gave me a universe.

In November 1984, this young man, his sister, and his widowed mother came to live for a few days in our house in Old Rajendra Nagar after Indira Gandhi was killed. They were Sikh, and I did not want to lose the girl I thought I loved then, or her brother, to a mob. On the way home from school, I had seen a mob of men catch hold of a Sikh man, yank off his turban, throw a rubber tyre around his waist and then set it on fire. A policeman watched them do this. From that day on, I have never trusted any person wearing a uniform.

I, who had barely started to take a razor to my chin, shaved the young man's full beard, so that he could 'pass' as someone who would not be taken as being Sikh on the street. He had taught me many things, I taught him how to shave. There was a mess of black hair on the white tiles of our bathroom's floor. His face changed. It became smaller. Much smaller. And I saw him change. I saw the brightness in his eyes dim as he saw his new, naked face in the mirror.

Something changed that day. I grew up. He lost something that he never found again. It took a few years, but eventually, he was no longer the man I knew before that November shave. He dropped out of medical school, became a recluse, stopped reading, stopped the bird walks, stopped talking to me or to his sister, became hostile and suspicious about everything.

A few years ago, I read a small item in a newspaper about a man who's body was found, months after he had died. He had been living alone, in a locked up house, and had apparently stopped eating. A friend called me in the middle of the night, in another country, to tell me what I suspected. It was the man who showed me anatomy charts, read Thomas Hardy and taped bird calls.

In my mind, he is the last casualty of 1984. And I have never forgiven this city for it.

Shuddhabrata Sengupta

Garhi, New Delhi.

HARPREET SINGH, 28
Family lived in Nand Nagar, where his father was killed by a mob and he was thrown into a fire. He burnt his hands and legs.
Education: Dropped out of second year, BA.
Occupation: Currently does not have a job.

INDERJIT SINGH, 21
Lived in Vinod Nagar. His father was attacked, chased onto a nearby highway and killed. Inderjit, the youngest of three brothers, was eleven months old when he was taken from his mother's arms and left to die. He was found after three days.
Education: Class X.
Occupation: Drives a school van.

GURPREET SINGH, 24.
Elder brother of Inderjit
Education: Class X.
Occupation: Drives a school van.

GURBAKSH SINGH, 27.
Inderjit Singh's eldest bother
Education: Class XII.
Occupation: Drives a school van.

RACHPAL SINGH, 20.
Born six months after the riots. His family lived in Shakarpur. Rachpal Singh has been told his father, two of his father's brothers, and his grandfather were killed. There was a family function at the house and they were the first to be attacked. The rampaging mob went about attacking the family and their relatives saying they were celebrating Indira Gandhi's assassination.
Education: Doing his BA.

VIKRAMJEET SINGH, 26
Family lived in Ajit Nagar. Grandfather attacked and then killed, when his father tried to intervene, he was burnt to death.
Education: Graduation.
Occupation: Was working for a few months at a call centre and was forced to leave when his mother had a paralytic attack.

AVTAR SINGH, 25
Family lived in Trilokpuri, Block 13. Father and uncle killed after tyres were placed around their necks and set on fire.
Education: Class IX.
Occupation: Works as a driver.

MANJIT SINGH, 20
Was only a month old at the time, does not know where the family lived. Has been told seven members of the family were killed while traveling in an autorickshaw driven by his father.
Education: Class IX.
Occupation: Driver. Mother has brain tumour and is on leave from her NDMC Class IV job.

SARABJIT SINGH, 27
Family lived in Uttam Nagar. Father was killed by the mob.
Education: Class IX.
Occupation: Unemployed for the past three years after being thrown out of a job in Guru Harkishen Public School. Harjinder Singh Khanna, the Malviya Nagar representative, asked him how long could they keep invoking the 1984 riots.

RAJINDER SINGH, 24
Family used to live in Malkaganj. Has no idea about what happened as his mother refuses to talk about those days.
Education: Class X.
Occupation: Driver.

august 2005

….A mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, respect, desire, security, welcome, repulsion, withdrawal and fear. An account of all the doors one has opened and closed would tell the story of an entire life. The gestures that make us conscious of security and peril are rooted in a profound depth of being.

Extrapolated text from a passage by Gaston Bachelard in Poetics of Space, by Ranbir Kaleka

1947. My father was twelve. A not-so-young boy in loose pants, he searched through a mountain of letters with no specific address, for one from his father, still to cross over a border jaggedly new. It must have been there, but he never found it.

Later. I am the genie in Aladin's lamp. I search through Anarkali, Darya Ganj, Central Vista Mess, Jodhpur, Sikanderabad, Jama Masjid, Sarita Vihar for single lanes he has lost.

Then I will carefully build this perfect city and fly back with it balanced

In the centre of my palm

Then I will say, release me from the lamp. I have a memory I do not have.

But I already know my wish cannot be granted.

Memory is only a tangled skein

I could sit down to untangle. But forgetting

is a palimpsest

where leftover scraps of skin cling to one another.

Like my face inside my father's eyes

And his eyes inside my face. **Paromita Vohra**

Surjit Singh, 34, says, "I remember it clearly. As Indira Gandhi's body burned on TV, my father was being burned after he had been put on fire by an angry mob. My father would give his old clothes to needy people in the colony. One of his killers was wearing something that he once used to wear." For the longest time, Surjit says that he would feel petrified when he heard a loud noise in the distance. As his daughter Mahima Singh, four, now plays in his lap, Surjit adds, "I run a small taxi company and have limited means, but I am going to make sure that her childhood is much happier than mine."

Ranj se khoogar hua insaan to mit jaata hai ranj
mushkilein mujh par padin itni ki aasaan ho gayin

When a person is gets inured to grief, grief disappears
So many calamities befell me that they became easy.

Yoon hi gar rota raha Ghalib to aye ahl-e jahaan
dekhna in bastiyon ko tum ki veeraan ho gayin

O people of the world, if Ghalib were to keep on weeping
Just watch how desolate these towns will become. **Ghalib via Saleem Kidwai**

Born on October 1, 1984, Manjit Singh was just a month old when their house in Mangolpuri, his father, grandfather and three uncles were all burned, their bodies never found. Fate dealt other cruel blows: his mother died of a brain tumour. "I stopped going to school when in Class 9, as someone had to run the house." He took up work driving a school van and is now a driver with a family in New Delhi. "Nothing can make me forget the fate of my family", he says. But he has learnt to move on. The community of 1984 victims is his one unfailing source of succour and comradeship.

Children of Widows Colony

Barthes said that we give captions to photographs 'to sublimate, patheticise or rationalise the image'. Does this image of two curious kids playing with a new kind of toy demand a caption? Is there any thing in it to be rationalised?

The matter-of-fact caption in the Outlook (October 2009) reads like a poem by Brecht:

Tilak Vihar in West Delhi acquired an unenviable title after the '84 survivors were given tenements here: Widows Colony. When not packed in unventilated rooms, children here spend the day playing in a brown park outside. Malkit Singh (left), though, is allowed to stay in - "It is important for future generations to know" - when his grandmother Bhaggi Kaur recounts the horrors: of how she found her husband's body in a canal, of how her brother's head was put in a TV carton and a knife put through it.

The 88-word caption has five emotional triggers: 1984. Horrors. Survivors. Widows. Children. If I had not known the disturbing context of the picture, I would have rather enjoyed looking at the two faces of the brothers as a single one with a visible third eye looking at you.

Let the children play. They are survivors. They'll know. **Amarjit Chandan**

Tilak Vihar in West Delhi acquired an unenviable title after the '84 survivors were given tenements here: Widows Colony. When not packed in unventilated rooms, children here spend the day playing in a park outside. Malkit Singh (left), though, is allowed to stay in - "It is important for future generations to know" - when his grandmother Bhaggi Kaur recounts the horrors: of how she found her husband's body in a canal, of how her brother's head was put in a TV carton and a knife put through it.

I was born in a village called Tral, which is still inhabited by a good number of Sikhs. But I was adopted by another family from a village which had just one Sikh family, in Bijbehara. Chattar Singh was a bachelor and lived with his mother on the banks of River Jhelum. His home was on the way to school, and I guess, he was fond of boys. There was no Gurudwara then. As of date there is a big Gurudwara on the highway when we enter the town Bijbehara, but there is no Sikh family in the town. But I remember those school days, how we passed his gate every day, and how he would offer some little apples while cutting dry twigs for wintry days. He had an everlasting never forgettable smile on his face. What a thin but energetic body he had. He died in his eighties.

Kuldeep Singh was the son of an official from another village, a little naughty boy during my teens, yes, eighth class it was. One day he took me to the school toilet, ah, those lovely memories. That one little 'standing', got exposed to whole school, I don't know how, but that gave me a big blush, and that actually emboldened many other students and teachers to touch me, to abuse me…

I never met Kuldeep after his father got transferred, but how can I ever forget his tender bearded sweet face, and his wonderful desire for me. How he knew that I won't say no to him?

There was hardly any other chance to meet a Sikh but I attended the marriage of my office colleague at Chattisinghpora during the 80s. It was winter time, and I remember how he arranged chicken and rum for us. Great time. 1984 riots in Delhi had little impact on Kashmir politics, and there was no one against the Sikh community, since it was India specific, but I remember, our canteen manager Chamber Singh would crack jokes about President Giani Zail Singh.

Coming to Delhi in 1992, I met Sheba Chhachhi, and she immediately pointed out the fact that there is no Inder sound in Kashmir so how come you are one?

True there is no sound INDER in Kashmir, it is Yender, (from Yantra, perhaps), the sound Inder is from Punjab.

Later Sheba told me how I a non-Sikh (name forgotten) performed boldly as a Sikh immediately after the riots in Delhi. This person would come out with a pagri and beard and walk all day in Delhi.

But this guy started smoking as a Sikh man on the streets, which Sheba's father disapproved of, she told me.

I don't know what others feel about it, but I can't forget what Sheba told me at her home.

I am still looking at the image you emailed to me for some comments, surely I will write something on the image itself.

There is one innocent look in the eyes of the boy, I almost want to enter the image and write a little child poem on the wall behind him, only for him.

Yes, I would love to draw some funny toys for him on the wall, something that would give him some reason to laugh. **Inder Salim**

The walls of Bhaggi Kaur's house are covered with her grandchildren's graffiti.

In 1984 I was still in school. We lived in Saharanpur. The devastation that followed Mrs. Gandhi's assassination was my very first direct encounter with mob-violence.The larger import of the carnage and its' aftermath was received mostly through media. I remember Rajeev Gandhi's justification in his speech on television that 'when a big tree falls the earth shakes'. **Sonia Khurana**

The scribbles and doodles provide a contrast to the framed pictures of Kaur's husband and son that hang nearby.

POND OF TRILOKPURI - 1984

When will you clean up
the pond in Trilokpuri quarter
with the dead
afloat, suspended, sunk in its water.
The stink travels across seven seas
to seek my soul,
make it a pond of Trilokpuri.

The pond is a memory ancient.
People of religion performed
rituals, magic, charms with its water,
submerged here a god or goddess
who died for want of followers.
People of ordinary doings
stopped here,
drank a mouthful or two and carried on.

This Friday November 84
god Indira descended to see what went on,
drowned in the pond in deep shame.
Then Lord Shiva swooped down.
He let go Parvati's hand
broke into a fierce tandava dance.
The holy Ganga drifted off his head
ended up in the pond.
The river suffocated;
something like religion
lay dead in my heart.

When will they clean up
the Trilokpuri pond?
Hard to console the soul within
harder to face the world you live in. **Ajmer Rode**

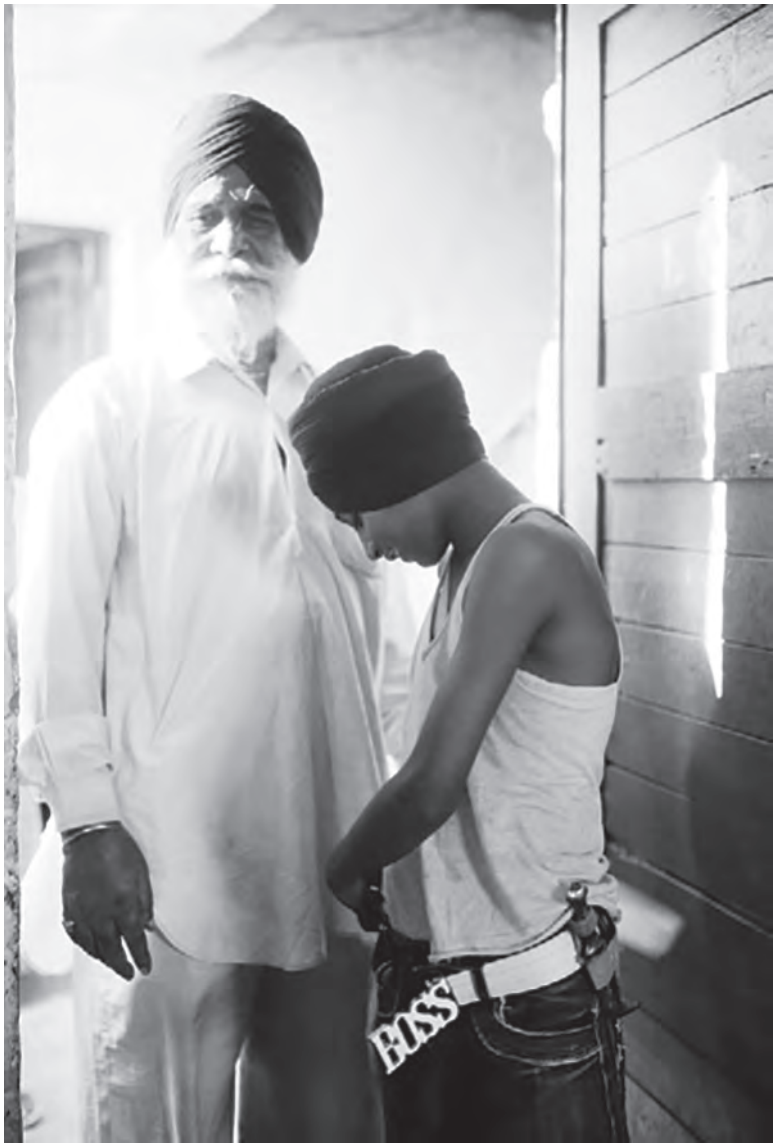
(Translated by the author from the original in Punjabi, Leela, 1999)

53-year-old Bhaggi had lost her husband in '84, while her son committed suicide by overdosing on painkillers three years ago.

Ganga Kaur, with her son, Ramandeep. Ganga's mother, Attar Kaur, lost her husband, brother in law, and four nephews. She gave testimony against five men. Ganga says, "Every time November returns we remember. This history will only die with us. My Uncle Darshan Singh, who was a priest, was killed with wood from the ironing table strapped to him. When he was writhing they said, 'Watch him dance'. They scared the neighbors into identifying us. They were told identify Sikhs or we will kill you. Police had told us to stay indoors to be safe. They had us killed. I remember one woman called Thakri Kaur who gave birth while running, from fear.

Gopi Kaur testified against Sajjan Kumar whom she saw at the head of a crowd near her home in Sultanpuri, with police following behind. "As he passed in front of our house, we said, 'Please save our people' but instead to our horror he told the crowd to kill us." Her husband was killed. Their sons were hidden under the bed, after their hair was cut. Later, she says, " I never knew how to take a bus, had never stepped out of the home. I was given work as a water woman in Kailash Nagar and would first be dropped by my brother, then my son. In the bus, I used to go crazy crying right until Daryaganj."

Late in his life
when he was taken
ill, I was in charge
of my father's
bath by the village well. In
the middle
of the wash he suddenly stopped and said,
Alpasankhi, the
Sanskrit word for
piss, and we had to
walk over as to
not do that in the
bathing area. *Alpasankhi* done,
we returned
and - father
of my father's f
ather - turned by a new
hurting tenderness
asked me, do you wash it
there after bath?
Then he showed
me how to pull
the foreskin back. **Vivek Narayanan**

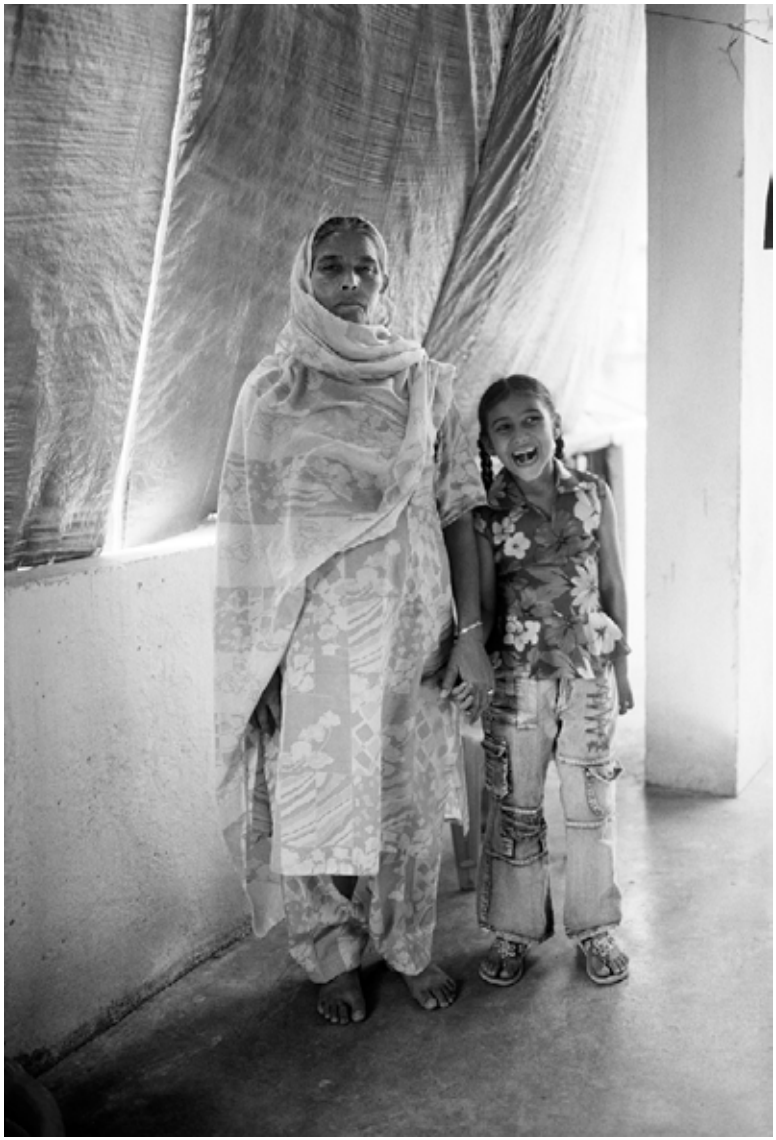


Ajit Singh, now 70, was playing cards when he heard that Indira Gandhi had been assassinated. He woke up next morning to find that his house had been set on fire. "People were throwing stones at the rising flames," he says. Now living in a bleak two-room house with his grandson (right) and others, he asks, "We are Indian citizens, aren't we? Why haven't we been given justice?"

Some of the children from Tilak Vihar study at Guru Harkrishan Public School. Teachers mention increased difficulty with learning, perhaps because of inadequate resources at home.

september 2014

For the anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, Gurpreet remembers the times spent with her husband at Anandpur Sahib. The mock battles, the swordsmanship, the horse riding displayed by the Nihangs, the sparring of gatká by young handsome boys, Nihang Singhs large size kasherra always made her laugh. She looked forward to attending Kirtan at one of the darbars. The thrill to coquettishly look for, in front or behind, the only man she knew intimately. Now, she watches as her daughter copies maps and flags of different countries from an atlas given to her by her late father. **Rashmi Kaleka**



Gurmeet Kaur (left) lost her husband Gyan Singh on November 5, 1984. Her voice chokes as she remembers the hour when her husband left the Durga Puri gurudwara where they had taken shelter: "I remember that he was bare-footed when he had gone back to see what was left of our house, thinking the violence was over. The next thing I saw was his dead body." For Gurmeet, the seven lakh rupees that she has been given in compensation since, is far from enough to make up for a loss which, she says, made her life unbearable forever.

The dupatta veils her body and her head. The voluminous curtains with the flower motif are half-drawn, ready at a pull to envelope her in greater darkness; behind them lie thick wooden doors - their glass slats painted dark - to close out the world. She, this woman of no name, stands at the doorway between light and dark. Outside, tantalizingly within reach, is a world full of light and air and space. She is looking not outside but inside, into dark deep recesses: a silhouette, and no more.

There is resignation in the tilt of her head, but also the merest hint of something else. On that wintry day in 1984, a day more conducive to gup-shup and huddling under warm razais than the terrifying eruption of insanity, she saw more than ten members of her family killed.

Afterwards, she and two other women from her neighbourhood filed an affidavit against Jagdish Tytler, political VIP. Her lawyer was shot at at the very first hearing; the bullet had been meant for her. Nevertheless, it found target: she withdrew the case. Twenty-five years later, in 2009, a CBI inquiry gave Tytler a 'clean chit'. The woman is no longer interested in such semantics. She doesn't even remember who Tytler is. "How do I know who the killers were, the violence left me numb."

The merest hint of contempt in the tilt of the head and the half raised shoulder belies her amnesia. **Meenal Baghel**

ELEVEN STARS OVER ANDALUSIA

8. O water, be a string to my guitar

O water, be a string to my guitar. The conquerors arrived,
and the old conquerors left. It is difficult to remember my face
in the mirrors. Water, be my memory, let me see what i have lost.
Who am I after this exodus? I have a rock
with my name on it, on a hill from which I see what's long
gone…
Seven hundred years escort me beyond the city wall…
In vain time turns to let me salvage my past from a moment
that gives birth to my exile…and others'…
To my guitar, O water be a string. The conquerors arrived,
and the old conquerors left, heading southward, repairing their
days
in the trashheap of change. I know who I was yesterday, but
who will I be
in a tomorrow under Columbus's Atlantic banners? Be a string,
be a string to my guitar, O water! There is no Misr in Egypt,
no Fez in Fez, and Syria draws away. There is no falcon in
my people's banner, no river east of the palm groves beseiged
by the Mongol's fast horses. in which Andalusia do I end? Here
or there? I will know I've perished and that here I've left
the best part of me: my past. Nothing remains but my guitar.
Then be to my guitar a string, O water. The old conquerors left,
the new conquerors arrived."

Fez: (Arabic Fas) also means "ax"

Poem by Mahmoud Darwish, version by Agha Shahid Ali (with Ahmed Dallal) via Anita Dube

The woman in the picture was one of the witnesses to the presence of Jagdish Tytler at the scene of the killings in 1984. More than ten members of her family were killed before her eyes. A son rescued by her neighbours and the grandchildren survived hidden in a nearby house. She was among the threew omen from hemeighbourhood who filed an affidavit naming Tytler. At the very first hearing her lawyer was shot at; the bullet was meant for her. She withdrew the case. Today, age has erased memories, or perhaps, she prefers to forget. She says she cannot even recall who Tytler is, "How do I know who the killers were, the violence left me numb".

Voter's lists, Trilokpuri. You can call them up on the Internet today: names laid out in a clean, innocuous grid. Sanjay, son of Dharam Veer; Gulabo, husband's name Kirpal Singh. In 1984, someone took the lists and had them photocopied, or cyclostyled, and waited while the machine whirred, and this person demanded unsmudged copies, because the work was of some importance. Ink was used, and then there would be a need for chalk, to mark 'S' on the houses of Sikhs.

If you lived through 1984, you cannot forget. We were in the other group, my siblings, my family, in the houses that did not need to have 'S' chalked on their doors, the safe houses, the ones that belonged to Others. S for Sikh, and the other S in invisible ink for Safe. Overnight, they had made for us a new alphabet, borrowing the old one from Partition, from Krystallnacht, from a thousand other pogroms.

They had time to create their spontaneous massacre. Time to buy chalk, to cyclostyle voter's lists, to organise the necessary supplies. Block 32 alone took massive concrete pipes, cleavers, scythes, kitchen knives, scissors, lathis, machetes, kerosene.

The end product of all of this organisation, this careful, unspontaenous massacre, was bodies and blood and then, decades of amnesia and an unspooling list of things left undone. FIRs that the police had not filed.

Cases against politicians that never went through the courts. Eyewitness accounts and testimonies blanked out and erased.

In Trilokpuri, in 1984, a young girl, found in one of the houses, said, "Please take me home." The journalist who reported this said she stepped over corpses, and she said, standing on bodies in her home, "Please take me home."

The official memory of 1984 is a blank, erased slate, a Godrej steel cabinet of wiped tapes where no voices speak, reel after reel of exposed film, commission reports that said nobody was to blame, nobody would be blamed.

But we remember Trilokpuri. In the other history, the one written in dark blood on bone-white cold winter pages, we remember the girl who was home and couldn't go back home.
Nilanjana Roy

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report in New Delhi.

I was loitering around in the cricket field when news came of Indira Gandhi's assassination. The match was cancelled. We heard the next day in the dining hall of our boarding school that Moti Mahal had been burnt down. Moti Mahal was everyone's favorite lunch joint. Dehradun was full of Sikhs. We didn't know what happened to them. Afterwards Moti Mahal reopened. The traces of arson that remained excited our imagination. The smell of burnt human flesh was not strong enough to drown the aroma of butter chicken. **Mahmood Farooqui**

Her neighbours describe her as 'ever-smiling', but tears roll off Pappi Kaur's eyes easily as she tells you how she had to hide under a heap of corpses to escape the rampaging mobs. "I was only fifteen when eleven members of my family were killed. We were told some had survived, but we have waited 25 years, and no one has returned." Now she works in a one-room factory making electrical sockets. "I kept waiting for justice and a better future," says Pappi, "now I'm working to make one for myself."

Sometimes, the city takes your finest feelings and puts it in the recycle bin and hit ‘empty’ without a moments hesitation. **Sarnath Bannerjee**

After having driven his auto-rickshaw all night, Gurdayal Singh (left) arrives outside his home in Tilak Vihar, only to repair parts of his three-wheeler. He says, "My father and two brothers were both killed in the '84 riots, and here I am, uneducated, trying my level best to make ends meet." Pointing to the houses around him, Gurdayal goes on to draw this comparison: "When there's a train accident, passengers are given Rs. 15 lakhs in compensation. All we get are these houses that will fall apart any day. And we had lost everything, our families, our money, our property, everything."

A few years ago, I was watching TV with a friend. India had just won the first 2020 cricket world cup. During the match against England, Yuvraj Singh had hit six sixes in one over. He was a hero. The cameras were in the team bus, wanting Yuvraj. He stood before them and began to jerk his pelvis, performing sex.

My friend said, "That is stunning."

Years later, we learned the circumstances of Yuvraj's astounding display in that match. It had followed a flurry of angry words exchanged between him and the England captain, Andrew Flintoff. In an interview, Yuvraj revealed what had been said.

"After I hit him for two boundaries in the previous over, he said, 'Fuck you'. And I said, 'Fuck you'. He then said, 'Excuse me?', and I said, 'You heard what I said'.

"He said 'I will cut your balls off', so I said, 'You see this bat in my hand? You know where I'm going to hit you with this bat.'"

Yuvraj added,

"It got me really worked up. I got really angry and just wanted to hit every ball out of the ground; and sometimes, it's good for you and sometimes it backfires, but that day, it backfired on them."

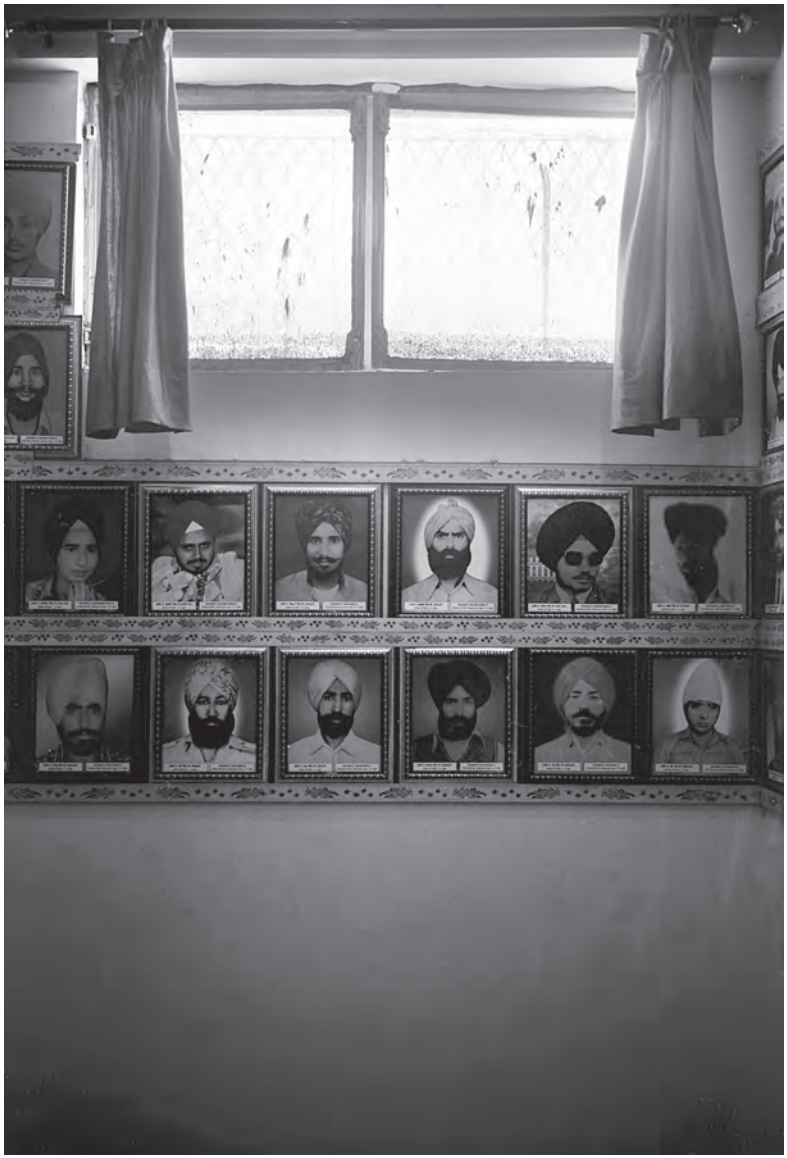
But in a way, we knew all this already, even as we sat in front of the TV that day. We could see the blind rage of castration on the cricket field, and all the wounds of history. Yuvraj's triumphant phallus was not his alone.

My friend pointed at him, jerking on the screen.

"That's our nationalism now, you know? We don't have an idea of India anymore. There is no content to our nationalism. There is only that jerking pelvis.

"Don't think it's about desire, because desire requires imagination. Its ego ideal is a nuclear missile. It is just lurid masculinity, and women are a scandal for it. It has no sensuality. It has no language." **Rana Dasgupta**

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report in New Delhi.



Shaheedi Memorial Museum.

Mohan Singh lost eleven members of his family in Trilokpuri. "If a man does not have food, he can't exist. And if he has no knowledge, he will continue to suffer. There is a lot of ignorance here which outside forces have taken advantage of – they have made us cry for their own purposes. All of the leaders have done this.

There was an ishara from the rulers, and help from them in the form of kerosene, weapons and white chemical powder used by the military in wartime. Men were given alchohol and told to burn. Depots were opened to give kerosene, powder and knives. The police said, 'Do what you have to do fast: killing, stealing, raping'.

All night our sisters sat in the parks, with their little children who had nothing to eat or drink. They had even removed the handles of the hand pumps. Mothers used their dupattas to filter the filthy drain water, which they gave to their children. This continued until the third afternoon, when the army came.

Later, in the camps, some NGOs and Gurudwaras helped us. There were honest people; they helped with compassion, they gave clothes, cooking vessels, rations. College girls came and hugged people with lots of love, and would write witness accounts."

A ‘Manworn Plain’, the British called this tract of land south of the Walled City, wrinkling their noses, not wanting to build anew where so much history had played out. Worn out by happenings. Stuffed with centuries of human-scale events, big, small - love, greed, cruelty, overweening ambition.

I remember spires of black smoke in the sky that day in 1984. A sick, helpless feeling that terrible things were happening out there. Rumours. Guarded news. The smell of burning.

How does one assimilate monstrous events like this? And move on? It may have happened before - many times, perhaps - in the Manworn Plain. But is that reason to gloss over the terror and the co-ordinated cruelty? The important thing, surely, is to remember. Among the teacups and the photographs, to remind oneself that this was unacceptable history. Not just the ebb and flow of human existence but a colossal injustice. It’s important to keep this memory alive. **Pradip Kishen**

Block 30 Trilokpuri. Harbhajan Kaur had four sons. Two of them, Baljit Singh, 19, (middle row) and Ranbir Singh, 12, (top right) were killed in front of her eyes. The third son, Ranjit Singh (top left), was hit on the head and died years later after recurring bouts of illness. Kanwaljit Singh, the fourth, was away and today he is an alcoholic. Her husband, Sohan Singh (middle row, left), survived hidden in an overhead loft. He died a few years earlier. She lives in the same house with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren, Ranbir Singh, named after his uncle, and Komaljit Kaur. They are among the few Sikhs who stayed on near the Shaheedi Gurudwara. Located in Trilokpuri's Sector-32, it witnessed some of the worst violence of the carnage. "My sons were killed, what else could they do to us? Police disarmed us and the mobs killed us. The sorrow would have been less if we had been allowed to fight the mob. And now where can I go? Someone has illegally occupied the flat allotted to us in Jehangirpuri. Living here we still walk among murderers but we will not be cowed down. Once they taunted my grandson about his hair, I told them I will cut their hands off. No one has dared again."

The portraits stored with mosquito repellents shout a silenced reality..things got stored wherever they found a space, with over-hung clothes, time got ripped and the sewing machine rusted with legs of blood oozing of the nation's neglect..So how do we sleep with closed doors? For the hinges creak of screams, hidden beneath the shrouds. **Manmeet Devgun**

Taranjeet Kaur's grandfather Jeevan Singh was killed on Nov 1, 1984.

Heavy curtains drawn with anxious hands
Peeping eyes gently decipher the forlorn streets
Brick laden hands round the corner
Tearing the chimera of a familiar neighbourhood

Now a silver ghost
It surfaces through the acetic grog
Vulnerable as a naked lie
And grips the betrayed past
Where to and where from
The wilted ages of history
Reminisce the sunken eyes and quietly
Settle into a void with no drift

Little by little she prods
Limbs stretched with time's fate
Endures and bespeaks the stories of her tryst
And the void that she daily wakes up with
And wishes to hear the laughter
That ran and echoed through her skin. **Gurvinder Singh**

One of the 'widows of 1984' recounts her story. She did not wish to be identified.

Lessons

Jangpura-Lajpat Nagar, 1998

'How we beat those motherfuckers, I tell you. After they killed Nndraakandhi. Each and every sisterfucking Sardar we could find. Now they are walking around so proudly, but we taught them a lesson in '84. We went into the shops, we went into their houses, we found them where they were hiding, we rooted them out from cellars, from cupboards, from the attics where they hide their business ledgers and we turned them into chutney. Sisterfuckers.' He is a thin, short, under-fed man in his late fifties, a sweaty, ratty little animal of a white-haired man, and it's a wonder he can pedal the cycle-riksha with me sitting in it. But the memory seems to give him energy. As he takes me from Jangpura Extension to Lajpat Nagar Market he points to the auto repair shops, the little dhabas, the families walking in the lanes. 'You know, you how they have beards and this hair?' While pumping ahead, he turns around to me, grinning. He mimics a beard on to himself and he tugs it, jerking his head upwards, nearly hitting an oncoming scooter. 'They were very useful in those two-three days, the beards and the hair! We grabbed them by the beard, by the hair, and we let them have it!' By the time we reach the market, he is extremely happy in the new camaraderie he has formed with no help from me. I don't look like any kind of Sardar but I feel like grabbing him and telling him I'm a cut-Surd and that I'm now going to kill him. What I do is pay him his seven rupees and walk away.

Law Gardens, 2003

'You don't understand. They needed to be taught a lesson, these cunt-son mias. There was no choice, it had to be done. You know we have a whole area here at one edge of Ahmedabad where no one goes? Where police even couldn't go earlier? We call it mini-Pakistan. Well, a few of them got sent to the Pakistan below ground, but not enough. What happened was just like a few small firecrackers. If we'd been serious, it would have been much worse. We should have sent more of them to their watan, which is under here.' The fat man, who couldn't even kill a mouse, stamps his fancy chappal on the thick lawn. I look at the man's paunch pushing out the long, embroidred silk kurta. I notice his churidar-type pajama has a little tear in the seam near the ankle. A few feet away, there are people dancing marriage ras-garba and fingering the young newlyweds. 'Ei, Nitinya! Now do that Salman Khan dance mimicry na? In front of your mother-in-law? Do, na?' The man next to me puts his hand on my shoulder for balance, slips off his chappal and raises his churidar leg to examine the tear. 'Arre, re, re. Will have to send that to the tailor. My good tailor was a mia but he's run away after last year.' There's no point my telling this man that I'm a Muslim or anything like that. He's a relative by marriage and he knows exactly who I am. He puts his leg down and slaps my back. 'But the hell with these cunt-son Pakistanis you love so much. Tell me! We haven't met since way before that Eden Gardens test in '01! Were you at the stadium when Harbhajan fucked the Australians with that hat-trick?' **Ruchir Joshi**

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report in New Delhi.

I see this photograph as a seamless spilling over and spilling across. There is the event that the camera records and within that and beyond that there is a narrative in which the image gets embedded almost destinally. This is the ontological duality of the photograph. The event is created by the young boys, the narrative, perhaps, by the photographer. As one reflects upon the immediacy of the event, one asks oneself a question: how does one rise from an event with the sense of a quiet narrative. The sediments of memory are beginning to suddenly move…

The photograph opens onto a foreground in an over the head view and then quietly spreads out horizontally. There is a preponderance of heads and faces. This is primarily a gathering of young men. In fact, most of the rallyists are pubescent boys. Their beards are barely beginning to bristle beyond the softness of boyish down. They carry with them the energy of a spectacle which harbours the intensity of a troubled masquerade. Their dramatic ritual is about to unfold before a poster that uncertainly hangs as a condemned effigy with a weak and traumatizing iconicity…

In most cases, the top-knots of the boys could be seen to have firmly settled on their foreheads unlike the other Sikh youth one has known. This is an unambiguous proclamation of who they are and where they come from. It silently whispers to me the signs that underline their unsettled marginality. In the midst of the young crowd, there is one who has no top-knot to show, whose head is unadorned and who has no access to cultural proclamations anymore. He is in a state of agitation. He is trying to say something but I wonder if he is very coherent. His is the energy of an alienated signifier. I feel concerned as a parent who has been dead long since but whose gaze refuses to die in a state of endless deflection, waiting at thresholds. I am momentarily overwhelmed by the perpetually dislodged. These young boys have perhaps never seen the home their parents or grandparents once built. They have perhaps not even met them except in creased photographs that bear marks of time and frozen identities…

With a little effort one could see a lone woman in the distance with her head covered. What could she be doing there? Perhaps she has come there in anxiety and in anger. And there are two old men in the background with proper turbans who have possibly turned up to keep her reassuring company…**Madan Gopal Singh**

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report in New Delhi.


KODAK 400TX

There is a habit of damaged souls and collective psyches to proscribe an event to a date and time, in order not to deal with the darkness inside. Date and time somehow sets up a false suture, in that we allow ourselves to believe that those two specifics will somehow suffice instead of real justice or giving real voice to what happened. 'Date and Time' may have a cathartic aspect, but it absolves us. You see, without date and time, we are forced to realize that we are still responsible for those who survived; their cause is our own, as are their terrors. Generations died, generations within a family, children lost their parents; entire families were wiped out forever. In civilized nations this is called genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing. In India it's called the 'aftermath of the Sikh riots'. How insidious a term is that, how duplicitous and what further proof does anyone need that we are still a society in denial at best, and a vengeful one at worst.

We will never forget. The victims stand beside us as family gathered under our shelters.

Zarina Muhammed

When a contradiction is impossible to resolve except by a lie, then we know that it is really a door. **Simone Weil via Jeebesh Bagchi**

Sikhs protesting against the Nanavati Commission report in New Delhi.

Jis tann lãgé soee jãné

In 2005, when I heard Nirpreet Kaur relate her story, she had to have a psychologist present in the room. For us, it was too much to fully absorb. I did not know what to do with the weight of her words. We urged her to write a book, I hope she does someday.

There is a kind of silence around 1984, which may follow from an impossibility of comprehension of the violence, and the terrors of reliving it. Perhaps the stone-deaf silence that has been the State's response to witness accounts makes the futility of summoning a voice stark. At the time, there were no 24-hour television channels, internet or social media; what we have are only invaluable eyewitness accounts, notes and photographs. Photographers who documented the massacre that November were terrified that their photographs would be made to disappear from photo-labs by the all-powerful Central Government. Images did disappear. Those that survived may now be used as evidence, or to relive the emotion. At a street exhibition of photographs organised in 2012 by the activist lawyer HS Phoolka, many of the visitors wept even as they used their cell phone cameras to re-photograph the images on display.

In 2005, after the release of the Justice Nanavati Commission Report on November 1984, and later in 2009, to mark the 25th anniversary of the pogrom, I visited Delhi's resettlement colonies, and took photographs in Trilokpuri, Tilak Vihar and Garhi, as well as at protest rallies in the city. These photographs appeared in the print media then.

The photographs in themselves are now a kind of artifact, since they were mediated by the mainstream media, and had a certain valence in that context. I wondered how they might be viewed removed from that context. To trigger a conversation about 1984, in early 2013 I asked some artist friends, who had lived in Delhi in November of 1984, or have since or prior, or who see themselves as somehow part of this city, to write a comment alongside each photograph. It could be a direct response to the image, or a more general observation related to the event; it could be abstract, poetic, personal, fictional, factual or nonsensically true in the way of Toba Tek Singh's seminal words on the partition.

Last month, in September 2014, I returned to Tilak Vihar. I met with Darshan Kaur and other widow witnesses; saw children from 'impacted' families play and recite at the Guru Harkishan Public school; and went into the Shaheedi (Matyr) Memorial Museum - where the only visitors were the family members of those in the photographs.

‘Jis tann lãgé soee jãné’, a Punjabi saying goes. Only she whose body is hurt, knows. But perhaps it is also for those of us who were not direct victims, to try and articulate the history of our city – and universe. A world without individual stories, accounts, interpretations, opinions, secrets and photographs is indeed 1984 in the Orwellian sense.

The photographs from 2005 first appeared in Tehelka (with Hartosh Bal); and from 2009 in Outlook (with Shreevatsa Nevatia). The corresponding captions are roughly as they were inscribed in the published reports.

Text responses are by Jeebesh Bagchi, Meenal Baghel, Sarnath Bannerjee, Hartosh Bal, Amarjit Chandan, Arpana Caur, Rana Dasgupta, Manmeet Devgun, Anita Dube, Mahmood Farouqui, Iram Ghufran, Ruchir Joshi, Rashmi Kaleka, Ranbir Kaleka, Sonia Khurana, Saleem Kidwai, Pradip Kishen, Subasri Krishnan, Lawrence Liang, Zarina Muhammed, Veer Munshi, Vivek Narayanan, Monica Narula, Ajmer Rode, Anusha Rizvi, Nilanjana Roy, Inder Salim, Priya Sen, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Gurvinder Singh, Jaspreet Singh, Madan Gopal Singh, Paromita Vohra.

To: gauri.gill@gmail.com
Subject: 1984

SHO Sharma - He had started
Hybraqnt - rand on lips.
friends had become enem
Army had saved us
Nanavati - give justice
Darshan Kaur
State is silent, as if
nothing happened!
Guilty have been made
guilters
children haven't ever been
given father's love.

widows
2

Pappi Kaur, 15 years old.
Police sent the mob
cut people open
burnt people alive
took some Sardars are dancing
cut their eyes, doctor took the
eyes out

"spent 3 days, 3 nights in corpses"
torches, beautiful women.
get out of here
nobody was ready to help
they were all ready to kill
took us into camps

family saved - with
25 yrs., nobody has come back

Jeebesh Bagchi, Meenal Baghel, Sarnath Bannerjee, Hartosh Bal, Amarjit Chandan, Arpana Caur, Rana Dasgupta, Manmeet Devgun, Anita Dube, Mahmood Farouqui, Iram Ghufran, Ruchir Joshi, Rashmi Kaleka, Ranbir Kaleka, Sonia Khurana, Saleem Kidwai, Pradip Kishen, Subasri Krishnan, Lawrence Liang, Zarina Muhammed, Veer Munshi, Vivek Narayanan, Monica Narula, Ajmer Rode, Anusha Rizvi, Nilanjana Roy, Inder Salim, Priya Sen, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Gurvinder Singh, Jaspreet Singh, Madan Gopal Singh, Paromita Vohra