



## I Accuse-: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984

*Jarnail Singh*

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## I Accuse-: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984 Jarnail Singh

The unanswered questions, the justice delayed, the unbearable memories?the three days of 1984 when over 3000 Sikhs were slaughtered, have indelibly marked the lives of thousands more who continue to exist in a twilight of bitterness and despair. It was outrage at this state of affairs that led Jarnail Singh, an unassuming, law- abiding journalist, to throw his shoe at home minister P Chidambaram during a press conference in New Delhi. He readily acknowledges that this was not an appropriate means of protest, but asks why, twenty-five years after the massacres, so little has been done to address the issues that are still unresolved and unanswered and a source of anguish to the whole community.? ? Who initiated the pogrom and why? ? Why did the state apparatus allow it to happen? ? Why, despite the many commissions and committees set up to investigate the events, have the perpetrators not been brought to book? ? I Accuse is a powerful and passionate indictment of the state's response to the killings of 1984. It explores the chain of events, the survivors' stories and the continuing shadow it casts over their lives. Because, finally, 1984 was not an attack on the Sikh community alone; it was an attack on the idea at the very core of democracy?that every citizen, irrespective of faith and community, has a right to life, liberty and security.

## I Accuse-: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984 Details

Date : Published December 31st 2009 by Viking Penguin (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780670083947

Author : Jarnail Singh

Format : Hardcover 165 pages

Genre : History, Cultural, India, Nonfiction



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## **From Reader Review I Accuse-: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984 for online ebook**

### **Reetika Gupta says**

I just had little information of what had happened in 1984, sikhs will killed , no arrests were made , many died etc etc but didnot have even slightest idea of what victims had gone through at that time & after that.. I had goosebumps literaly when i read the painful stories of incocent people who were killed to avenge the killing of our late prime munister and that perpetrators were and will never be punished. Everyone should read this book to get aware of real terrorism that prevailed in 1984...

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### **Sherin Punnilath says**

This was a journal of heart-wrenching events from a series of incidents that should have never happened in a secular country.These tales of state-sponsored daylight murders are extremely disturbing and are often unbelievable.

However,I would have appreciated it more ,if it had some more points of analysis or different views.The language also felt sometimes as a word to word translation from Hindi/Punjabi.

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### **Vishnu Varma says**

A clear-cut narration of events during the 1984 Anti-Sikh massacre that took place in Delhi. Indeed haunting and tells us in very simple words how vested interests of a political party took law into their own hands.

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### **Tarun Sachdeva says**

More was expected from this book by Jarnail Singh. The narrative and editing has been below standard despite being written by a journalist himself.

But more than that, one should focus on the intention of the book. The incidents reported in the book really shake you to the core. I really feel ashamed being part of such a society where such a large scale state-sponsored pogrom went rather unnoticed to the other sections of the society.

And more than that, it has been 30 years now but still there is very little or no justice for the victims and survivors of that massacre. Though around 5000 people lost their lives then but the plight story and misery of the survivors didn't end there as they still seek justice today.

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### **Harshit Gupta says**

A book that should have been written earlier than this. Though I Accuse is not a perfect account of 'all the sides' of the violence, it definitely tells you about the suppressed side in detail. And since the book throws

light on many such issues that have not been known to many, and even suppressed to great extents at the time it all happened, the book is a 'should-read' even with the disappointing editing and a bit too emotional author, that for a journalist.

The book says a lot that the shoe could not say.

(Jarnail Singh is the journalist who threw his shoe in P Chidambaram's press conference)

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### **Simar Arora says**

because the truth needs to be told....!!

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### **Nandakishore Varma says**

31st October 1984. I am unlikely to forget that date, ever. We were having semester exams; and coming out of the exam hall, the news hit me like a sledgehammer - our Prime Minister had been assassinated.

Being a leftist, I was none too sorry at Indira Gandhi's passing. She had proved herself to be dictator during the Emergency declared in 1975. For two years, she had ruled India as a dictator, curbing all civil freedoms and ruthlessly eliminating all opponents. But in India, we had never expected our head of state to be gunned down in cold blood. This is what happened in all those banana republics in popular thrillers - but not in our beautiful, democratic country. Oh no. Never...

But it happened - and much worse. Indira had incurred the wrath of the Sikh community when she had authorised Operation Blue Star, during which soldiers invaded the Sikh holy shrine, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, and killed the separatist leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In the process, the shrine was heavily damaged and many Sikhs lost their lives. Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguard had shot her dead at point blank range in retaliation.

After Indira's death, we in the south did not get much news, other than there had been some violence against Sikhs: but we didn't take it very seriously, because the Sikh community was virtually nonexistent in the south and except for a few minor skirmishes in Kochi (and a brawl between a Sikh student and the KSU - the student wing of Indira's party, the Indian National Congress - in our college). In those days, we only had the national news channel Doordarshan controlled by the government, which was carefully blanking out the carnage happening in Delhi.

In Delhi, where a large number of Sikhs lived, a major ethnic cleansing took place under the leadership of the Congress party. With the active collusion of the police, they systematically humiliated, tortured and murdered around three thousand Sikhs, with the active collusion of the police. Many women were raped for days on end. We came to know all this quite a bit later - by then, Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi had become the Prime Minister with the biggest mandate the country had ever seen. When asked about the ethnic violence against the Sikhs, he made the now-infamous remark: "Well, when a big tree falls, the ground shakes".

I was twenty-one years of age when all this happened. It was a bitter coming of age for me. The India of my dreams, where all communities lived together in brotherhood, was dead forever.

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In this book, the author (who survived the massacre as an eleven-year-old) recounts the trauma of those days. It is gruelling reading: especially how senior Congress leaders such as Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and H. K. L. Bhagat openly led the mobs in the state-sponsored murder, and how the police openly colluded with the mobs by disarming Sikhs and allowing them to be attacked. It is all written from eyewitness accounts, and extremely believable. The President, Giani Zail Singh (a Sikh) was prevented from doing anything and even attacked: P. V. Narasimha Rao, the Home Minister, turned a deaf ear to all entreaties and allowed the Congress mobs to murder the Sikhs with impunity. It rankles all the more because most of the survivors were forced to lead substandard existences, with the men falling into drug habits and the women being forced to do menial labour; while the perpetrators joined the cabinet as ministers!

This book is written in 2009, after Jarnail Singh gathered some notoriety for himself by throwing a shoe at the union minister P. Chidambaram during a press conference. It was an unprecedented action from a journalist, and he was properly taken to task for it. Here, he regrets the action but explains what drove him to it.

Even after 25 years (now 33), there is no justice for the victims - the only silver lining being that the accused leaders were not given party tickets and Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister (a Sikh himself), apologised publicly. During this time, however, every effort at bringing the culprits to book has been thwarted by hook or by crook. And the Congress has asked the Sikhs to forget, forgive and move ahead - easier said than done for people who have witnessed their entire families being burnt alive in front of their eyes.

We witnessed a similar carnage in Gujarat in 2002 - this time it was Muslims. The man who allowed it to happen by closing his eyes became the Prime Minister of India in 2014 with a resounding electoral victory. The status of ethnic minorities is more precarious than ever.

The Sikhs may have moved on, but India has not.

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### **Sangeetha Kodithala says**

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Jarnail Singh's researched account of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. Gives narratives of various families that were adversely affected because of the massacre. Factual, but a bit unstructured and incoherent.

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### **Tushar says**

Merely just 176 pages, this book has the power to move its reader. Having read Durbar and other books on Independent India, I had no high hopes from this book but I was happy to be proven wrong. The book introduces us to a completely new perspective of 1984 rioting and genocide. I have read enough to understand that they were planned by the ruling party then, but the way this portrays it, pretty good. Youngsters these days should read these kind of books instead of looking up to the paid media for views and opinions. Yes, there has been no relief for the widows and orphans and probably it's too late for any. The saddening part is that this has happened in our own country. From 1984 to Ayodha, Hindus have repeated what was done to them in ancient history. No lessons have been learnt from history, unfortunately.

This book is a must read,a short read it may be but it will open your eyes to hundreds of lives you thought did not exist.

Well written.

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### **Tessy Jose says**

To someone like me who only knew that Indira Gandhi's assassination led to anti-sikh violence, but not much of details at all, this was without doubt an eyeopener to the pain inflicted on a whole community for the faults of two ! Once more history proved that human beings are capable of forgetting every last shred of humane behavior in them . It makes me wonder, does an average human being really hate his neighbors and colleagues so much in his day to day life such that all he is waiting for is just a trigger, a reason to go burn , rape and kill ? That an average joe is willing to take a life - slice down people , sling a burning tyre around a man he has probably known all his life and then jeer ...jeer at it all. This unusual and blood curdling behavior could be seen in other communal atrocities we have seen before and after this incident as well ..bombay, ayodhya , godhra and many many others. And worst of all, nobody ever seems to get punished but definitely enjoy a list of favors for having been 'true sons of the soil'. So does it really mean that all that keeps us from turning into animals and tearing innocent people into bits is just a unfortunate event or an unfortunate comment on something testy ..or perhaps just a rumor . Do I really live in secular country ? or an even better question , do I feel safe - I would be foolish to.

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### **Shanks says**

The book is truly an eye opener in terms of the accounts of individuals who went through the horrendous atrocities committed in collusion with the state. Jarnail Singh's frustration and pent up anger at the injustice meted out to the community as a whole come out starkly in every page of the book.

However in terms of it being a truly good book I am not so sure. It's more of a narrative of series of interviews Jarnail has conducted over a period of time. The context, the events leading up to the massacre are not clearly elucidated. The emotional pitch of the book is so high that a logical clinical analysis of events is lost. Would probably have been better to make it a chronological story instead of the six parts it's made to currently.

Guess it's not the first book you should pick up to learn more about 1984.

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### **Rajat TWIT says**

The 1984 violence against Sikhs is a blot on India's face and indeed, the travesties faced by hundreds of Sikh families were shameful for our society. That is why, when i started reading this book, expectations were high to learn some important facts, detailed information about culprits and analytical study of the genocide. But rather i found painful stories of the victims and a very general(rather a vague) view of the whole incident. By the title "I accuse" and introduction that this phrase by a French novelist, is considered as an iconic expression against injustice, I had hopes that author is going to discuss many relevant points important for a democracy. Our basic foundation of Constitution was challenged in this incident and Government should be questioned for it. As author is a journalist, the expectation was high for an introspective study of the gory

incident. Sadly, the book has missed a great opportunity and has rather provided us with a below than average account of incident with very little examination of the pogrom.

And of course, the most irritating portion was the last chapter when Mr Jarnail Singh were all into self-appreciation and went on writing so much from his personal life that one starts thinking seriously about Penguins motive to publish it. Mr Singh is redundant and kept on revealing incidents from his life, which is of no importance to the issue.

Though i have not read it, but will suggest readers to prefer "When a tree shook Delhi" by Manoj Mitta and H S Phoolka on the same topic. Those interested in the Military intrusion in Golden temple should read Mark Tully's "Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's last battle" or K S Brar's "Operation Blue Star: The true story". A book meant for serious issue like this need not to have wasted so many pages in stupid discussions as have done in this book. There is absolutely no reason why a person should read this book, other than finding painful stories of victims, which was not the purpose of the book. Sorry Mr Khushwant Singh, but I differ from your view point about this book. I felt sad not only about wasting my time by reading it but also to find that such delicate matter was handled so poorly. If this book is by a journalist, then we are in dire need of better professionals in this field!

PS: I read the book When a tree shook delhi, though even that book is not a great read but still is far better than this book. Difference could be known after realizing that many incidents in both book are same, yet the Tree shook Delhi was better to handle it. Got for that book rather I accuse.

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### **Bigsna says**

Remember the journalist who threw a shoe at PC Chidambram at a press conference a few years ago? That journalist, Jarnail Singh, is the author of this book. He was just an 11 year old kid, a resident of Lajpat Nagar, when he witnessed the vicious violence against Sikhs in Delhi in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination.

Many books have been written on the incident and the long pending justice that is still awaited by its victims and survivors more than 30 years later. I have not read most of those books, but there is something very emotional and personal about this one. For Jarnail Singh, this is too close to heart. The book has some editing issues, but those are minor and can be overlooked; the larger sentiment is well delivered. The narration of first person accounts is simple but direct. It is difficult not to picture the carnage, the brutality and inhumanity of the unimaginable attacks. Men turned to monsters.

More than 30 long years later, the victims' families continue to live in the *long shadow of the attacks*, their lives upended, their futures ruined, relegated to peripheral rehabilitations, survivors still struggling to survive, though many have succumbed. It serves as a reminder to everyone who was not directly affected, that the victims still live on in obscure existence.

The administration's evident involvement and yet painfully slow and reluctant action to bring justice is outrageous. Khushwant Singh writes in his foreword to the book, that *it is a must read for all those who wish that such horrendous crimes do not take place again*.

And yet we see more examples of the same things happening today. Human life continues to hold little value in the face of what is manufactured belief, asserted boundary, wrenched legitimacy.

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### **Anshul Goel says**

Unfortunately or shall I say fortunately, I was not that aware of the scale, methodology and aftermaths of the carnage that gripped the entire sikh community. After reading the book, I had no option but to hang my head in shame on the methodology of how the event took place in the national capital. The book describes how well that genocide was planned and executed under the aegis of the Congress party. The book also draws attention to how the no. of affected parties can never be only the count of the lives lost in the genocide of this scale. These are manifolds, when it is looked upon in entirety. The writer, a journalist, who threw his shoe at P. Chidambaram, describes how he along with the other thousands of widows, orphans, princessess turned beggars, hopes-in-men turned drug addicts await justice which has and will elude them forever, for the nation has lost the vert basic essense of its existence, people and their happiness.

Would give a 3.5/5.

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### **Neo B. says**

To be honest, I had not read any book on the antisikh violence of 1984, so some of the facts stated in the book, if true, were an eye opener for me.

I have given the book four stars due to the sensitive nature of the subject the book attempts to address. The author manages to do that quite well.

I read the book in one go, even though it was a bit disturbing to read about the depths we, humans, can plummet to in order to fulfill some false ideals.

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