

Pogrom continues by other means as witnesses die

From page 1

Rishi remained bed ridden for 25 long years after being thrown into a burning truck during the 1984 genocide and kept waiting for an opportunity to record his statement against Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, involved in killings of Sikhs, but never got it.

It was not easy to depose as a witness, not even 25 years after the pogrom. In fact, the mental torture continued unabated. When he landed in Delhi this year, his passport was seized and he was not allowed to return to the US. He was illegally detained, harassed and accused of speaking against the Indian government in the United States.

"He was under a lot of pressure to change his statement against Tytler," activist advocate HS Phoolka, who has represented 1984 victims in courts, said.

Legal counsel Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, also fighting the cases of the victims, said in the US that Surinder Singh's demise was a "great setback to the Sikh community". Surinder Singh had recorded his statement before the CBI along with Jasbir Singh, another witness, after an expose thwarted the agency's bid to let Tytler off the hook.

Men like Surinder Singh and Gurcharan Singh are dying. When Gurcharan Singh died, he was half-burnt half-alive and had spent 25 years watching Akali Dal and Congress governments come and go, commissions of inquiry being appointed and wrapped up, and had witnessed that the world cared no more. When he died on February 17, he was still fighting on the frontline trenches of human rights and was preparing to again try and appear on February 19 before a Delhi court, ready to say again that yes, he did see Congress leader Sajjan Kumar, leading the bloody mobs.

THE CASE OF SURINDER SINGH

In November 1984, Giani Surinder Singh was at the Pul Bangash Gurdwara in Delhi where he witnessed Jagdish Tytler ordering the killings of Sikhs. As a result of instigation and orders of Jagdish Tytler, three Sikhs, namely, Bhai Badal Singh Raagi of the Gurdwara, Thakur Singh, a retired police inspector and Amarjit Singh Bedi's servant were killed. On the instigation of Jagdish Tytler, Gurdwara Pul Bangash was also set on fire and 36 copies of Guru Granth Sahib were burnt to ashes.



After his statement to the CBI in India, Giani Surinder Singh had said he was receiving threatening and harassing calls and messages and had then come to the United States. After this, his wife and daughters were harassed back home and his house No. 9, 10 New Block Aruna Nagar, New Delhi was seized by men backed by Jagdish Tytler and his wife and daughters thrown out of the house. Police had even threatened to put his wife behind bars, Giani Surinder Singh had alleged. After this the CBI asked him to give a statement about the November 1984 events before the CBI officers on December 23 and December 24, 2009 in New York, USA. "I appeared before the CBI on said dates and was subjected to interview which lasted for more than fourteen hours over a period of two days."

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—WSN

THE CASE OF GURCHARAN SINGH

In a damning front page report on Jan 30 this year, India's The Asian Age newspaper had quoted Gurcharan Singh as narrating: "Sajjan Kumar told the rioters: 'Is mohalle ka ek bhi sardar zinda nahin bachna chahiye. In kutton ko saza deni hai (Not even a single Sikh here must escape alive. These dogs must be punished).' He had come there specific ally to direct the rioters, who were mostly from surrounding villages and bastis, but led by one of his henchmen, Kirpa Ram," Gurcharan Singh had alleged. Then only 17 years old, the frightened young man had heard the Congressman's thunderous speech from the edge of the restive crowd that had collected near his home that morning.



dent of the gurdwara," Gurcharan Singh had said, recalling the worst morning of his life.

The killers did not spare any male Sikh. Gurcharan's uncle, who was visiting from Khurja, was hacked to death. His father was beaten mercilessly and left only because the attackers thought he was dead. "They thrashed my brother, Tejinder and me and flung our bodies onto a truck that they had just set on fire," he said. The two brothers were later dragged out from the smoldering vehicle by some young boys who had managed to hide from the killers.

Gurcharan Singh escaped with his life, but only just. He relived the horror and pain every single day of the rest of his 24 years confined to his bed and completely dependent on the meagre care his poor family could ill afford. He decided to break his long silence despite his own suffering, but had little hope from the Indian justice dispensing system. "When they flung me into the burning truck I called out to Waheguru three times and I believed He (God) saved me for a purpose. Now it is up to Him to bring the guilty to book," he had said. —WSN

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