

"Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strayed into politics by an accident but I have been a lifelong student of politics and I have always believed that politics is a purposeful instrument of social, political and economic change. Politics which departs from that path and becomes a servant of narrow, parochial, silly, things loses its wider societal role.

We are today debating a great national tragedy, a great human tragedy. This is not an issue which should divide this House. This is not an issue where partisan politics should have an upper hand in analysing those traumatic events of 1984: the death of a Prime Minister, a revered and beloved leader of our country in her own courtyards, by two bodyguards; and this whole mass tragedy that befell Delhi and other cities.

Our collective effort has to be to find pathways where we ensure that such tragedies whether in Delhi or in Gujarat never again take place in our country. Therefore, I am not standing before this House to score any partisan points. What happened in 1984 was a grim national tragedy and it brought us all to shame. Both the assassination of Shrimati Indira Gandhi and subsequent events leading to anti-Sikh riots and all those ghastly happenings should have never happened. They are blots on our national conscience. On this, there is no difference of opinion on any side. But the question arises: "Where do we go from here?"

Twenty-one years have passed; more than one political party has been in power; and yet the feeling persists that somehow the truth has not come out and justice has not prevailed. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to find ways and means where we could accelerate the processes which would give our people a feeling that they do appreciate justice in this massive State of India. I wish the debate had taken that tone. But the debate has been on narrow, partisan lines and I respectfully say to the House that that does not serve its purpose.

The Sikhs are a very proud community. They have a glorious past. Our gurus have bequeathed to us a living philosophy which is more relevant today than it ever was. That the Sikhs have made a phenomenal contribution to our freedom struggle is also known. Anybody who goes to Port Blair would find how many people who went to prison or who were sent to the gallows happened to be Sikhs.

Came the partition, the Sikh community suffered the most. The Canal colonies of erstwhile Punjab which were blooming with prosperity were the creations of the Sikh peasants.

They were all loss to the Sikh community. Many of them migrated to this part of the Punjab. Lakhs and lakhs of people became homeless. I have seen people seeing their daughters, their children being killed before their very eyes in those ghastly days of the partition. That trauma still haunts me. It is a credit to the Sikh community that did not allow that tragedy to depress them.

Then came the Independence of India and there arose a new Punjab on the ashes of old. When the history of that period is written, the making of the new Punjab, the role of two individuals will shine in the annals of history. That was Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon. What Punjab is today is largely the creation of these two great men of our country. I do not want to score debating points against my friends in the Akali Dal and I say to them with all respect, while they were all agitating to divide Punjab, the Punjab Government, inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru and with people like Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon at their help, wrote a glorious chapter in the history of Punjab. The Green Revolution is the creation of Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru, late Shrimati Indira Gandhi and Sardar Pratap Singh Kairon in Punjab. If we are trying to drive a wedge between the Sikh community and the Congress Party, we must never forget that fact.

Then came the events of 1980s. Who is to be blamed and who is not to be blamed, I am not here to apportion blames. But for a time it appeared that Punjab had fallen on evil days. Wherever I used to go, people used to tell me.

ਪੰਜਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਲਗ ਗਈ।

' We saw that period when serious attempts were made to divert the attention of this brave community which has contributed so much to the development of our country, which even to this day, defends many of our national frontiers that are on the borders. People, many of them outside our country, tried to drive a wedge between the Sikh community and the mainstream of national life. The terrorist elements, aided and abetted by forces from abroad, sought to disrupt our unity, our polity, our society and whatever we say or do in this House or outside I think, it would be a sin against our nationhood if we try to sow the seeds of discontent among the youths of Punjab. Punjab is a border State of our Union. The Sikhs have been its valiant protectors through centuries.

If you try to create a wedge between the Sikh community and the national mainstream and thereby my worry is – may be it is not your intention – that you are creating a situation where that ugly phase when terrorism held sway in Punjab might not once again come back. That will be no service to Punjab. That would be no service to India or our nation. I have seen those ghastly days. Several young Sikh men used to come to me and say : 'Uncle, I want to go abroad, I want to study abroad; but I do not get a visa'. The image of the Sikh youths was transformed into the image of terrorists. I have myself experienced in that ugly phase of Punjab and our history where Sikhs were suspect everywhere. Wherever they went across the border post of one country to another, there was speculation that 'Attention, terrorists are entering our country'.

Well, it is a tribute to this community and it is also a tribute to our national mainstream that that sad chapter when terrorism held sway over the minds of the young people is a thing of the past. But we must not forget that our borders are valiantly guarded by our soldiers. But there is such a thing as the struggle for the minds of our people and if I say from this House, lies to create a feeling of disaffection once again. In this age of instant communication, what you say here, what you say in the media, reaches outside. I shudder to think what will young people in Punjab see when they hear our Members of Parliament talk the way we talked. They will once again feel insecure about their future. That is not good for Punjab. That is not good for the Sikh community. That is not good for India.

Therefore, in the name of national unity, I appeal to all the hon. Members not to say or not to do things which will widen the gulf between the Sikh community and the rest of the country. It is a tribute to the community that it has come out of that trauma. Punjab once again is on the move. Once again the Central Government, the State Government and the people of Punjab will work together to create a bright new future of the youth of the State. But we all have an obligation to contribute to that process. Nothing should be done which weakens the faith of the Sikh youth that their future is in strengthening the nationhood.

Every corner of this country of ours is blessed with the memory of our Gurus. You go to Ponta Sahib, you go to Nanded Sahib, you go to Assam, every inch of this land has been made sacred by having been touched by the great Gurus. They taught us to respect all religions. They taught us practical secularism at a time when religious bigotry and persecution were the order of the day.

So, my request to our friends from the Shiromani Akali Dal is, by all means criticise the Congress Party. Competitive politics has a role in any democracy. But please do not say things which will drive a permanent wedge between the valiant Sikh community and the national mainstream.

Sir, I said, we all have been searching for truth, as to find out what happened in 1984 events. Eight Commissions had looked at the situation. We were still not satisfied. A ninth Commission was appointed. The circumstances under which it was appointed have already been explained by my friend Shri Gurudas Dasgupta. We were not a party to the setting up of that Commission. It was set up by the previous Government. Well, we have a Report and there are still people who feel that the whole truth has not come out, but I think one thing is quite clear. This was not a

Commission appointed by the Congress Government. It was a Commission appointed by the NDA Government. We had no hands in the choice of who will be heading this Commission of Inquiry and the very fact that this Commission has unambiguously, categorically stated against all the whispering campaign that has been going on for the last 21 years against the top leadership of the Congress Party. They have finally nailed the lie and they have shown that all these canards which have been spread about the involvement of the top leadership of the Congress Party in those dastardly acts were totally untrue.

We had never any doubts about that. After all, who can forget the relationship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with the Sikh community, who can forget the love and affection that Indira Gandhi bestowed on the Sikhs? I have personally been a recipient of that love and affection. I know how much late Rajiv Gandhi used to grieve over what had happened, the tragedy that had befallen on the Punjab, and how hard he worked to reverse that adverse tide. The first thing that he did on becoming the Prime Minister was to pay attention to this Punjab problem and we had that Rajiv-Longowal Accord.

I recall Sardar Balwant Singh, who was at that time the Finance Minister of the Punjab Government - my classmate, my friend of 40 or 50 years - who was later on murdered by the terrorists. He narrated to me a story of how the Accord came about. I think, I should share that with this House. He mentioned to me that even after the broad outline of the agreement had been reached, Sant Harcharan Singh Longowal was uncertain and perplexed. Then, he said 'let me turn to Guru Granth Sahib'. Therefore, the two of them went up, they opened up the page and the message that came on that page was:

* होए इकतर मिलु मेरे भाई। डुबीधा दूर कराहु लिव लाई।*

Translated, it says: "Come and join together, O my siblings of destiny; dispel your sense of duality and let yourselves be lovingly absorbed in the Lord." Santji said 'that resolved my doubts'. That is how the Rajiv-Longowal Accord came about.

I appeal to this House that let us put behind this bitterness; let us stop looking at that grim national tragedy through partisan spectacle; let us work together to find new pathways, so that such tragedies will never take place.

Hon. Members have referred to several issues arising out of the Report of the Nanavati Commission. As I said earlier, it was hoped that the various Commissions of Inquiry would be able to establish beyond a shadow of doubt as to who were really to be blamed for the violence and the rioting that followed the assassination of a great Prime Minister that Shrimati Indira Gandhi was. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. Fingers had been pointed at individuals, but seldom has there been a proof beyond a shadow of doubt in the Reports of the Inquiry Commissions. Consequently, the search for truth has to continue. The Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry is only the latest attempt in that direction.

I am not going to find fault with it, but as in the case of some of the previous Commissions, doubts still remain and I acknowledge that fact. Most Government officials and police officials who have been examined by the Commission for their role have retired from the Government. Action against some of them was taken then, and subsequently as well. Many have since retired, and it is not possible normally to act against them after such a long gap of 20 years. Nevertheless, our Government will consult the Law Ministry to bring the guilty to book to the maximum extent possible.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many political leaders were also subjects of examination. Here too, the Commission has clearly stated that: "There is absolutely no evidence that Shri Rajiv Gandhi or any other high ranking Congress (I) leaders had suggested or organised attacks on the Sikhs."

In the case of some others, it has said that it is probable that they may have some involvement in some of the incidents, and that there is evidence to that effect. The Commission is in itself not certain, however, of the role of these individuals. As the ATR says, Governments cannot act when the Commission itself is uncertain of these issues. ... (Interruptions) Please listen to me. ... (Interruptions)

However, there is something called perception, and there is the sentiment of the House. The Government respects and bows to that sentiment. Therefore, keeping in view the sentiments expressed in the House today, our Government assures the House that wherever the Commission has named any specific individuals as needing further examination or specific cases needing re-opening and re-examination, the Government will take all possible steps to do so within the ambit of law. This is a solemn promise and a solemn commitment to this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the most important issue is the need to rehabilitate the families of those affected by that national tragedy. Twenty years after the event, it may be considered late in the day to be saying this. However, if there have been any shortcomings in this regard, it is our solemn assurance that we will make sincere efforts to redress these shortcomings.

We will try to ensure that widows and children of those who suffered in this tragedy are enabled to lead a life of dignity and self-respect. It will be our honest attempt to wipe away the tears from every suffering eye.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what happened, I say once again, was a national shame, a national and a great human tragedy.

I appeal to this House, "Pray do not politicise a human tragedy. Let us march on; let the nation march on."