

Sikh State of Mind



Exploring the experiences of the Sikh community involved in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the long-term impacts on mental health.

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Introduction

The anti-Sikh riots of 1984 refers to a series of organised pogroms against the Sikh community across India. This targeted attack led to thousands of deaths and human rights violations. As this was a government prompted genocide, it was distorted by the media at the time and Sikh voices have not been widely documented. The full extent and following consequences are still unknown.

“My dad tells me he can never forget that feeling of fear he went to sleep with that whole week. He told me when the violence broke out in Patel Nagar, even the vehicles that had simple Sikh stickers were being burnt down. So, the young boys were told by their elders to go around and remove all such stickers to save the vehicles from getting destroyed.”



Methodology

- ✿ This research project will be using a qualitative methodological approach, structured as a narrative inquiry acknowledging the dynamic human experience and how stories can provide a primary means of understanding.
- ✿ Semi-structured interviews will be conducted centred around the participants experiences, moving between the internal and external world of the storyteller to develop a rich layer of understanding and information about the Sikh community, uncovering the nuances of their lived experiences while maintaining a person-centred approach
- ✿ The philosophical underpinnings of this research is a combination of constructionism and feminism; the relationship between the researcher and participant is a collaboration creating a sense of power and autonomy for the participants over their narrative.

Translations

Boliyan are couplets that are sung in Punjab, often sung in accompaniment of bhangra dances. A boli expresses typical situations and their emotions and is usually passed down generation by generation orally.

Kirtan is a Sanskrit word meaning "narrating, reciting, telling, describing" of an idea or story, specifically in Sikhi.

Objectives

- ✿ To explore the experiences of Sikh people who survived these attacks as well as the long-term impacts this has had on their mental health.
- ✿ To develop a richer cultural understanding in order to improve counselling and psychotherapy services for the Sikh community.
- ✿ To honour the culture of the participants and centre their voices.

Analysis

The analysis and data collection are simultaneous in that the initial analysis will begin during the first interview through analysis of non-verbal behaviours and adjusting the direction of the interview depending on answers given.

The data will be presented in a poetic form by using the participants words verbatim in found poetry, which honours the cultural practices of boliyan and kirtan.



Related Literature

Ahmed, S. (2010). The role of the media during communal riots in India: A study of the 1984 Sikh riots and the 2002 Gujarat riots. *Media Asia*, 37(2), 103-111.

Jeffery, R., & Hall, I. (2020). Post-conflict justice in divided democracies: the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(6), 994-1011.

Kaur, R. (2015). *Thirty Years Later: A Community Memoir of the 1984 Sikh Massacres*.