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Front Page :: Comment :: Submit :: Jobs :: Polls

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- Politics
- People
- Community
- Outreach
- Minority Report
- Book Review
- Multimedia

- North America
- Europe
- India

- Editorials
- Columns

- On My Mind
- Kaur Values
- Sikh Rhyme-n-Reason

- Op-Eds
- Letters
- Cartoons

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- Recommend Us

 **The Widow Colony - India's Unsettled Settlement**

North America

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San Antonio, Texas, USA - Every day, for the past twenty-one years, they see each other. They are stuck there together, reliving the past. Every day is 1984.

[Click here to see trailer]

"We didn't know what we were in for," says Harpreet Kaur, Director of 'The Widow Colony - India's Unsettled Settlement.' When she and

husband, Producer, Manmeet Singh, arrived at the first settlement in Tilak Vihar, on the west side of New Delhi, they could easily see the vastness of the Widow (Vidhva) Colony. "The yellow flats settlements stick out like a sore thumb," recalls Kaur, "We stood on top of one of the buildings, and as far as we could see were these yellow buildings."



The yellow flats of the widow colony in Tilak Vihar, New Delhi.



Director, Harpreet Kaur (far right) with three sisters orphaned in the Sikh massacre of 1984, New Delhi.

"We thought we were going to set up, interview and leave." But when they taped their first interview with Gurdeep Kaur, it was unimaginable what they heard. "When Gurdeep Kaur started talking, we started balling. Her strength and pain, we really felt it. We were then prepared to listen the most horrifying stories."

The film takes the viewer to the areas of Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri, Sultanpuri and Mongolpuri, the same localities that suffered the major brunt of the Sikh killings. In November of 1984, government-organized mobs went on a barbaric rampage to take their murderous revenge on Sikhs for the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 30. Conservative estimates say that over four thousand Sikhs, mostly men and some women and children, were butchered and burned alive during four days of lawlessness in Delhi alone. Left behind were thousands of widows and children.

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The trauma of 1984 still haunts them today.

'The Widow Colony' is a seventy-three-minute film that documents personal stories of women, in their own words, of what happened in November 1984, and how they have been surviving since then. The film takes an in-depth look into the lives of the widows of the Sikh men who were killed in the massacre. It unearths the sad and deplorable condition of most of these widows and their children living in the widow colonies of Delhi. It reveals their suffering, their battle for justice and their struggle for survival in India.



Surjeet Kaur, widowed in the Sikh massacre of 1984 in New Delhi.

They were not willing to talk at first, says Harpreet Kaur. Many people had come and interview them, but nothing happened. They found it very painful to talk about the horrific killings and the gang rapes they witnessed. Indian culture is still very backward in the way they treat widows and rape victims; they are outcast from society.

"How do you comfort them? We didn't know what to say or how to thank them," says Harpreet Kaur. They did find the strength to talk and relive their experience. Four weeks later, Harpreet and Manmeet had forty hours of footage. Kaur had interviewed eighteen widows and some youths whose fathers were killed in the pogroms. That was October 2003.

The footage sat on the shelf until Harinder Singh of the Sikh Research Institute (SRI) stepped in to raise funds and find sponsorships to finish the film. SRI also provided assistance with script writing and fact checking. Editing for 'The Widow Colony' was done by Shootz Productions. The Editors team at the Texas studio had worked with renowned director Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation on award-winning Holocaust documentaries. The documentaries were created from the multitude of video testimonies from Holocaust survivors that have been documented and preserved by the Foundation. 'The Widow Colony' has the same feel, graphics and music as the Holocaust documentaries, says Kaur.



The final product is a gut-wrenching tale of what has become of the survivors of the 1984 pogroms against the Sikhs of New Delhi.

Along with the testimonies of the widows, supplemented with imagery of the killings and the destruction that followed after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the film conveys the intensity of the tragedy that occurred twenty-one years ago.

The context to the anti-Sikh pogroms is provided by subject experts: Rajinder Sachar (former Chief Justice of Delhi), Harvinder Singh (human rights attorney), Kuldip Nayar (journalist and former MP), Patwant Singh (author and historian), Madhu Kishwar (social justice activist and writer) and Jaskaran Kaur (author and executive director of ENSAAF). They focus on the incalculable loss of human life and the justice that has been denied to



Indira Bhai, widowed in the Sikh massacre of 1984 in New Delhi.

these victims for over two decades. The three main accused were awarded cabinet positions in the Indian government in May 2004. And the recent apology by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh failed to acknowledge the State's responsibility for the pogroms. Twenty-one years and eleven commissions later, the Indian Government still has not delivered a single conviction.

"There is no denying that in all these years of analysis and discussion that has surrounded this issue, we have forgotten about the survivors and their need for rehabilitation. While the world has moved on marking the massacre as a chapter in history, these widows have been in mourning since then, and will only be able to move forward when they see the perpetrators of their crimes punished," states Harpreet Kaur.

It is a deplorable condition these women have been living. They work every day to provide a meager existence for themselves and their children. The children of 1984 are now young adults. They can't afford an education and they are jobless. They are passing their days under the influence of drugs that are handed out free and in broad daylight.



Children of the widows of the 1984 Sikh Massacre in New Delhi. These youths live in Tilak Vihar.

"'The Widow Colony' is a movement do something," says Harpreet Kaur about her documentary. "Someone from here [US] has to take a lead on this issue, in India it is not possible. The world is not aware of this problem. This is where media can be so powerful. If people see something that is thrown at them constantly, like the Holocaust, they can't forget it so easily. The world should see how a country touting to be the largest democracy can commit such horrible crimes against its own people. [With raised awareness] someone can put pressure on the Indian Government. Even non-Sikhs can realize what happened and make it a part of their agendas. [There must be a] push for legal justice."



Harpreet Kaur, Director, 'The

Widow Colony' started Sach Productions in 2001 to use the film media to further the Sikh cause. Based in San Antonio, Texas, Sach Productions has become a media source that specializes in creating films on contemporary cultural, political, religious and economic issues relating to South Asia. It focuses on contentious issues not usually addressed in mainstream media in hopes that audiences develop awareness and initiate change.

When 'The Widow Colony' premiered in India last year, the guest list was a virtual who's who of Indian Sikhs. "The widows attended," Harpreet points out, "They were so happy to see their story told. Some of the youths also attended and were also very pleased to see the final product."

In February this year, 'The Widow Colony' made its North American debut. Socio-political leaders, human rights activists, community leaders and civic organizations came together for the US premier in Los Angeles. Sikhpoint.com hosted the screening. A panel discussion followed. The panel provided insights on several critical issues: justice, documentation,

rehabilitation, healing, memory, and activism. The reaction of the hundreds of people who came to see the film was that of disbelief. Harpreet Kaur recalls that many people came to her wanting to know how they could help.

In response, SRI is establishing a rehabilitation, documentation and education fund called the Widow Colony Project Fund. The fund will finance the further documentation of video testimonies. It will also finance a rehabilitation effort to help the youths of 1984 become more employable through education and help them with job placement.

This year, 'The Widow Colony' will be submitted to several film festivals in the US and Canada. The next screening of the documentary will appear at the Indian Film Festival in Los Angeles next week. After film festivals and private screenings in major cities, 'The Widow Colony' is projected to be released on DVD in November 2006.

Note: Director, Writer and Cameraperson, Harpreet Kaur, graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a degree in Communications. She worked as a news reporter in the Metro Washington DC area and produced a show with County Cable Montgomery, which she hosted and directed. In the last four years Kaur has directed several educational documentaries. The Widow Colony is her biggest project. Producer Manmeet Singh is a Financial Analyst and has a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering. His key responsibility is to focus on pre-production planning, coordinating post-production activity and managing Sach Productions.

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*For more information, see the following web sites:
www.thewidowcolony.com
www.sachproductions.org
www.sikhri.org*

Front Page

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