
India's Genocidal Legacy and Contemporary Complicity: From Punjab 1984 to Ukraine, Gaza, and Beyond

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Introduction

Genocide is not only about direct killings but also about systemic state policies that destroy communities, erase cultures, and enable mass suffering. The **United Nations Genocide Convention (1948)** defines genocide as the deliberate intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. India's actions in **Operation Blue Star** and **Operation Shanti** in 1984 against the Sikh community exemplify genocide by this definition.

Four decades later, India continues to demonstrate a disturbing continuity: enabling global genocides by helping **Russia in Ukraine**, arming **Israel in Gaza**, and contributing to the deaths of innocents worldwide through its role in the spread of **fentanyl precursors, narcotics trafficking in Africa, and substandard medicines**. This essay contends that India must be recognized both as a **perpetrator of genocide domestically** and a **global accomplice to genocidal violence and systemic mass killings abroad**.

The Sikh Genocide of 1984

Operation Blue Star

In June 1984, India launched **Operation Blue Star**, deploying tanks, artillery, and troops against the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar. The operation destroyed Sikh religious institutions, including the Sikh Reference Library, and killed thousands of pilgrims, many of them women and children. The deliberate targeting of Sikh sacred space and identity marked an attack on the community's spiritual foundation.

Operation Shanti and Pogroms

After Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984, the state organized pogroms under **Operation Shanti**. Thousands of Sikhs were burned alive or hacked to death in Delhi and other cities. Police either stood idle or aided mobs armed with electoral rolls, iron rods, and kerosene. Investigations by **Human Rights Watch** and independent commissions confirm state complicity. Survivors rightly call this the **Sikh genocide**.

Transnational Oppression against the Sikhs:

India's campaign of transnational repression against Sikhs must be understood as a continuation of the Sikh genocide that began in 1984. While the pogroms and mass killings within India marked the most visible phase of that violence, the effort did not end with physical extermination. Instead, the Indian state has exported its machinery of intimidation across borders, targeting Sikh activists, journalists, and community leaders in the diaspora. Surveillance, harassment, smear campaigns, and even assassination attempts abroad reveal a deliberate strategy to silence dissent and erase calls for justice. This ongoing transnational oppression mirrors the same intent as the genocide: to break Sikh political will, erase their distinct identity, and punish the community for demanding recognition and rights. By extending these actions beyond its own borders, India demonstrates that the genocide of Sikhs is not just a historical event but an evolving project of repression that now spans continents.

Weaponization of Water by Indian Government:

Recently, the Indian government had weaponized water as a tool of collective punishment against the people of both East Punjab (in India) and West Punjab (in Pakistan), deliberately mismanaging river flows and creating devastating floods. By releasing excess water from dams without warning and failing to maintain proper infrastructure, the state has caused massive destruction of homes, farmland, and livelihoods across Punjab. This policy of flooding is not a natural disaster but a man-made assault, targeting a region already struggling with agrarian distress. Such actions amount to an extension of genocidal intent—destroying the economic base of the Punjabi people, displacing families, and rendering them vulnerable to poverty and disease. Just as past genocides aimed to erase Sikh identity and weaken Punjab's strength, today's weaponization of water continues that legacy by turning a vital life source into an instrument of destruction.

Meeting the Definition of Genocide

The acts of 1984 align with the Genocide Convention's criteria: killings, serious bodily harm, destruction of religious institutions, and conditions calculated to annihilate a community. India has never acknowledged this genocide, allowed impunity and reinforced a political culture of violence against minorities.

The Normalization of Genocidal Politics

The impunity of 1984 set a precedent. Later pogroms—against Muslims in Bombay (1992–93), Gujarat (2002), and the wave of lynchings in the 2010s—were built on the same logic: state-sanctioned mass violence presented as “national security” or “public order.” Genocide became a **normalized instrument of political consolidation**.

Complicity in Global Genocides

Ukraine: Shielding and Financing Russia

Since 2022, India has purchased vast quantities of discounted Russian oil, resold refined products abroad, and abstained from UN resolutions condemning Moscow's invasion. By economically sustaining Russia, India indirectly finances war crimes committed against Ukrainian civilians. This constitutes complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity.

Gaza: Arming Israel's Genocidal Campaign

In Gaza, Israel's destruction of homes, hospitals, and civilian infrastructure increasingly meets the legal threshold of genocide. India supplies drones, munitions, and military technology to Israel. Far from neutrality, this represents **material complicity** in the killing of Palestinian civilians.

Beyond Geopolitics: Transnational Practices That Kill

Bottle of Lies

India's role as a major global supplier of generic pharmaceuticals has been marred by the widespread export of substandard and adulterated medicines, a practice meticulously documented in Katherine Eban's investigative book *Bottle of Lies*. The book exposes how several Indian pharmaceutical companies, while presenting themselves as providers of affordable life-saving drugs, engaged in systematic fraud—falsifying data, manipulating quality tests, and shipping unsafe products to markets such as the United States. These substandard medications, ranging from antibiotics to critical drugs for transplant patients, not only undermined patient health but also eroded trust in the very systems meant to ensure safety. By prioritizing profit over human lives, India's pharmaceutical industry, with lax regulatory oversight and complicity at multiple levels, jeopardized the health of millions and revealed the devastating global consequences of corporate negligence and state tolerance of malpractice.

Fentanyl Precursors in the U.S.

Investigations by U.S. agencies and global watchdogs have identified **India as a key supplier of fentanyl precursors** shipped to North America. These chemicals fuel the opioid crisis, which kills tens of thousands of Americans annually. Though marketed as legitimate chemicals, their diversion into illicit markets makes India a direct contributor to mass civilian deaths.

Washington DC [US], September 25 ANI: the US Department of the Treasury's office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has imposed sanctions on two Indian national along

with India based online pharmacy, KS international traders, for their role in supplying hundreds of thousands of counterfeit prescription pills laced with fentanyl and other illicit drugs to victims across the United States. (The Tribune)

Narcotics in West and Central Africa

Reports from **UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)** highlight India's role in the supply of cheap synthetic drugs and pharmaceutical narcotics routed through West and Central Africa. These substances devastate local populations, creating addiction epidemics, destabilizing societies, and killing innocents.

Fake and Substandard HIV Medicines in Africa

Investigative reports and WHO monitoring have exposed cases where **Indian pharmaceutical companies supplied substandard or counterfeit HIV medicines** across Africa. Thousands of patients, already marginalized by poverty, were deprived of effective treatment, leading to premature deaths. India profited economically at the expense of the most vulnerable, amounting to **health-based structural violence** with genocidal consequences.

A Pattern of State Behavior

The evidence paints a consistent pattern:

- **Domestic perpetration:** Sikh genocide (1984).
- **International complicity:** Supporting Russia in Ukraine, arming Israel in Gaza.
- **Transnational profiteering from death:** supplying fentanyl precursors, narcotics, and substandard medicines.

In all these contexts, India demonstrates willingness to sacrifice human life for political, economic, or geopolitical gains.

Conclusion

India's actions must be understood not as isolated mistakes but as part of a coherent trajectory of **state-enabled mass violence**. In Punjab in 1984, India carried out genocide against Sikhs. Today, it sustains genocidal regimes abroad while spreading death through narcotics and fraudulent medicines.

This dual role—**perpetrator at home and accomplice abroad**—demands urgent international accountability. Without recognition and justice, India's practices risk normalizing genocide and mass killing as accepted instruments of state power.

The lesson of 1984 is clear: when perpetrators go unpunished, their crimes echo across borders and generations.

When the International Criminal Court brings to justice leaders responsible for the genocides in Ukraine and Gaza, it is equally important that leaders who acted as accomplices also be held accountable. Genocide does not occur in isolation; it requires networks of support, supply, and complicity. By providing political, military, or material backing to aggressors, accomplices share responsibility for the resulting crimes. No nation or leader should escape accountability simply because they stand behind stronger powers. Justice must be impartial and universal, applying equally to those who commit crimes and those who enable them.

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