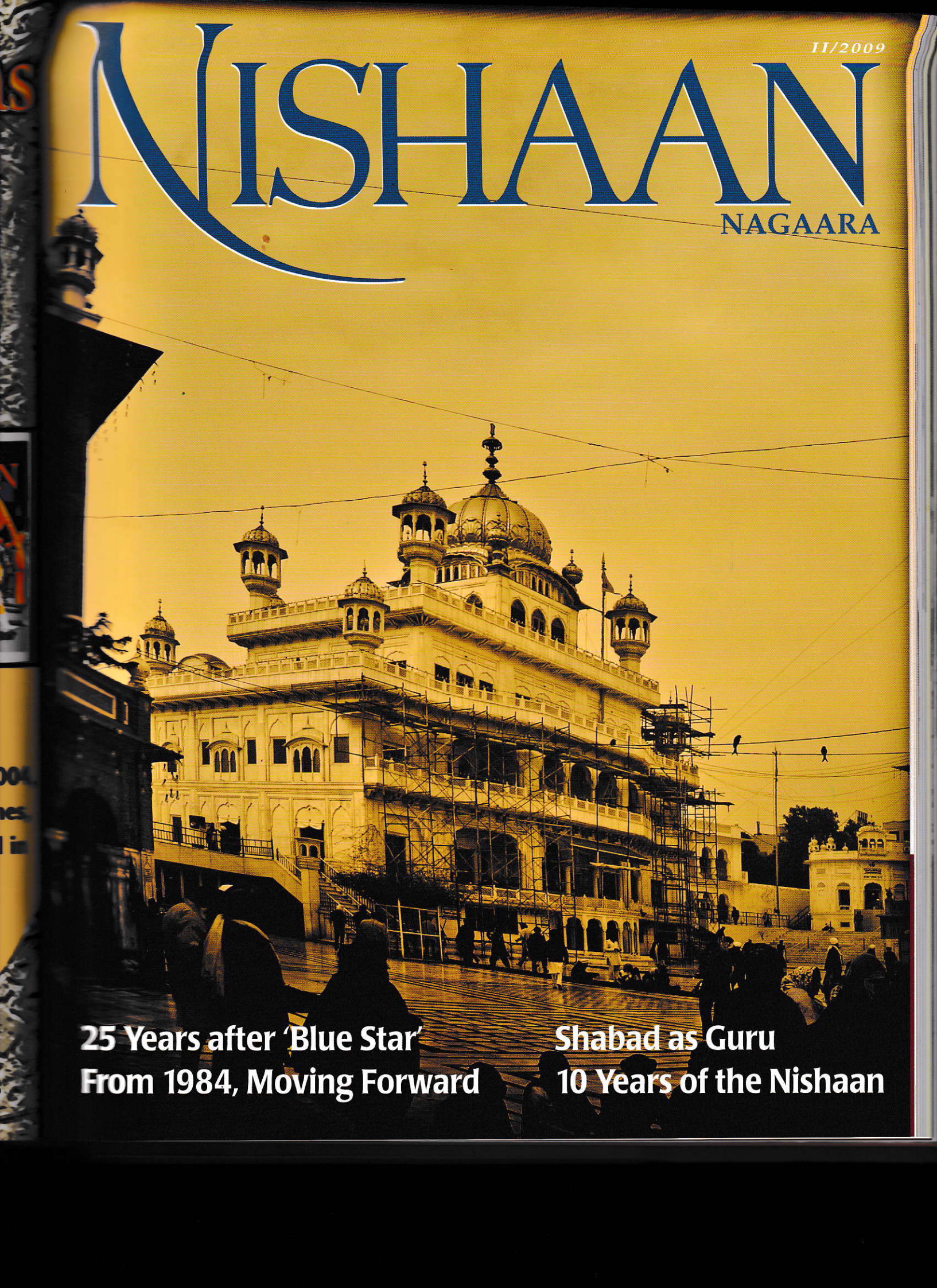


NISHAAN

11/2009

NAGAARA



25 Years after 'Blue Star'
From 1984, Moving Forward

Shabad as Guru
10 Years of the Nishaan

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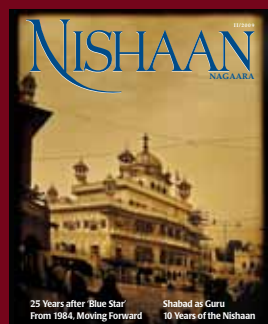


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"Yet that scaffold sways the future".
Photo by Malkiat Singh

Editorial Director
Dr Jaswant Singh Neki

Executive Editor
Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
Bhayee Sikander Singh

Editorial Board
Inni Kaur
Dr I.J. Singh
Dr Gurpreet Maini
Malkiat Singh
Monica Arora

Distributors
Himalayan Books, New Delhi

Editorial Office

D-43, Sujana Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615
e-mail : nishaan@lycos.com
website : www.nishaan.in

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1984 recalled: a 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' needed

Most Indians say that 1984 was a mere blip on the stellar record of the world's most populous democracy.

What a difference 25 years make!

In June 1984, when the Indian army attacked the *Harmandir* (Golden Temple) in Amritsar and 40 other gurdwaras across Punjab, the government was able to ring Amritsar and Punjab with two of the heaviest security cordons ever seen. No one – certainly not a Sikh – was able to cross it. No news filtered out on the fate of the thousands of pilgrims gathered in *Harmandir* for the commemoration of Guru Arjan's martyrdom. Brahma Chellaney, a reporter who was caught in the mayhem, tried to report on it and was instead charged with sedition.

In 1984, the Indian government exerted absolute and full control over all media – press, television and radio. Rumours abounded but not an iota of news filtered out of Punjab.

The world has changed over the last 25 years and how. Recently, Iran has been in turmoil. But, despite its best efforts, the Iranian government failed to put a curtain of isolation around the country. The news filtering from there kept the world glued to televisions day and night.

Thanks to technology that did not exist in 1984 – the ubiquitous Internet, Cell phones, Twittering and You tube – the whole world knew what happened on the streets in Tehran as it occurred. The eyes of the world were upon Tehran, and the government held to some restraint and worldwide embarrassment.

Less than six months after the army assault of June 1984, the Indian prime minister was assassinated and a reign of terror was let loose over innocent Sikhs in Delhi and many cities across India. Once again, Sikhs were

held up as the face of terrorism – in total disregard of the truth. And the world did not know otherwise.

The world has now changed for the better. The iron control that was possible in 1984 can no longer happen. The way the Indian government was able to portray Sikhs as terrorists across the world is no longer possible. The ignorance that most Indians still live in about what exactly happened in 1984 would not exist.

My Indian friends never tire of labeling the period "those bad or unfortunate times" that happened 25 years ago. The ball and chain of the past will only hold us back, they say. The new mantra is that India is now on a fast track of moving forward and even the financial troubles that plague the developed world cannot tie India down.

Already the deniers of history tell us the "troubles" of 1984 lasted only two days in Delhi. The reason that not more than a handful of people have been charged with the wholesale killings of Sikhs over those two days, they claim, is because a really monumental tragedy never happened. Perhaps a handful of people died. In any case it was anti-Sikh rioting – spontaneous because the country's beloved prime minister had been assassinated by Sikhs.

Yes, I too, am tired of listening to the same old litany of distortions. I will not dwell on the history. It is reasonably well established. Within six hours of the assassination of India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in 1984, truckloads of armed thugs materialised in Sikh neighbourhoods. They had lists and addresses of Sikh-owned homes and businesses. They were armed with kerosene and weapons. They went on a spree of killing, burning, raping and looting. No Sikh was safe anywhere in India's capital city and many other towns across the country.

Three days later, as if obeying an unseen commander, the frenzy stopped. Where were the police and army for days? Safe in their barracks, of course. The government admitted to the death of over 2700 Sikh men, women and children in Delhi alone. That comes to about 1300 victims for a 24-hour day or a shade over 50 per hour - almost one per minute.

And all the victims were unarmed. In 1984 trucks were not easily available; kerosene was rationed, requiring standing in lines for ever; and lists of addresses were and still not easily assembled. In those pre-Google days one could not download addresses at the touch of a button.

None in India has ever shown such remarkable efficiency. To put a genocidal killing spree together within hours speaks of a sea change in management skills that has not been seen before or since. That's why I don't label it as *anti Sikh riots*. There was no spontaneity to the violence. Riots they were not.

The next step was monumental in its deception. The new Prime Minister signed an agreement with Sikh leaders promising to hold an inquiry and bring the guilty to trial. There have been over ten Inquiry Commissions in the past 25 years. Only a handful have been arrested for killing several thousand. I think any government that treats its own citizens with such callousness has no right to govern.

Yet, as our friends tell us, we must move forward. The ball and chain of the past will not help us.

So, what is now for us to do?

The past is a prologue to the future. Without our connection to history we become like an untethered balloon floating off to somewhere we may not want to go.

But the past must neither hold us back fixed in one place in time and space.

In our personal lives, there is many a story that would be embarrassing to relive. Often they leave an indelible mark in our lives. Wouldn't it be nice if we could rewind the clock and expunge such times? If it were only so easy!

To move beyond such horrendous sins requires that we face them, acknowledge them and atone for

them. And then we can carry forward with us the lessons learned.

How then to accomplish all that?

World opinion would likely not come to our aid all that readily.

Why?

Because global realities and geopolitics have it that India is the only counterweight to China, the only possible competition to China's growing heft in Asia. Also, we need to keep the Islamic world in check – it sits astride the world's oil resources and has access to a nuclear arsenal as well. India is ideally suited geographically and strategically to help manage that stalemate.

To deny the logic of the injustice done to the Sikhs would be Orwellian. It does not wash. One can't escape the irony in that the India-born George Orwell named his fiction (*1984*) for the year to which India and its bureaucracy gave life.

The Indian judiciary, though not entirely independent, can deliver a modicum of justice.

If that seems too awkward, perhaps a *Truth & Reconciliation Commission* would suffice. But that requires some truth and a lot of honesty, no matter how embarrassing it turns out to be. Many countries, besides South Africa, have tried this route and successfully.

The way of such a Commission need not be embarrassing; it could even be liberating. Many nations – Sierra Leone, Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, Timor and Peru have trod this path. India and Pakistan need to as well.

From such a step, honestly undertaken, neither the Indian government nor the Sikh leadership is likely to emerge unscarred and unscathed.

I think of all the times that we Sikhs have been accused of acting without patience and having gone too far. Now I know that we have been patient long enough and that we did not go far enough.

Now 25 years and 10 Inquiry Commissions later, I would say: *Never let the story die.*

Dr. I J Singh

Ten-year splendour of the NISHAAN





On behalf of the Trust, S Harcharan Singh Dugal introduced the *Nishaan* and assured readers that it





Executive Editor S Pushpinder Singh presents the Premiere Issue of *Nishaan* to Dr. Manmohan Singh.

"will be produced to the highest standards extant, with specially researched articles, supported by informative data and rare illustrations; there are to be four issues a year. The aim of *Nishaan* is to portray Sikhism in its pristine form, on an objective and apolitical plane. The journal will project true Sikh values to the world community who need to be informed of these. The *Nishaan* is not just another magazine, but is intended as the standard bearer for the community in India and all over the world". Indeed, these ten years have seen this vision well realised!

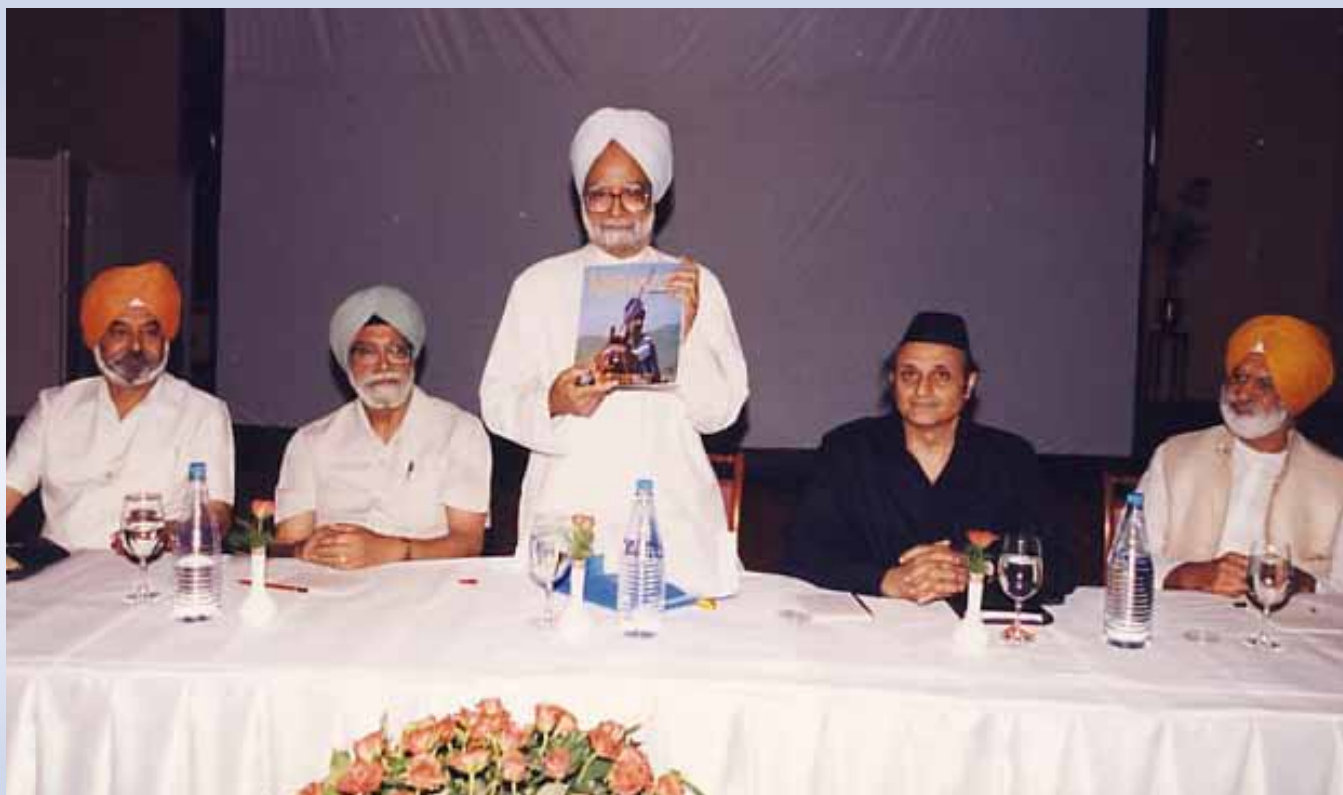
As Dr Manmohan Singh remarked, "The *Nishaan* is to carry the universal message of Sikhism and in laying emphasis on the freshness of Sikh thought and philosophy, which will enable us to lead a life of dignity and self-respect...and which will be of immense help in moulding our destinies in the 21st century".

As the *Tribune* of Chandigarh later put it, "The tercentenary of the birth of the *Khalsa* has been marked by religious ceremonies, congregations, seminars, exhibitions, conferences, baptism programmes, processions and much more. It is this occasion to which the *Nagaara* Trust too owes its birth and also its first publication, named the

Nishaan. It is a classic magazine, printed on glossy art paper with beautiful pictures. The cover itself with a *Nihang* astride his horse is attractive. The Trust, as explained by S Sikandar Singh, is a coming together of like-minded individuals, who thought it prudent to 'preserve, project and propagate' the uniqueness and glories of the *Khalsa Panth*".

The Premiere Issue of *Nishaan* was of 80-pages, studded with beautiful photographs and maps, depicting different facets and emotions of the Sikh way of life, religion, culture, ethos and much more. The idea was to present a quality product to the English-speaking readership.

An audio-visual presentation *Khalsa 300: A Vision Revisited*, also produced by the *Nagaara* Trust depicted "that dramatic moment in history, the birth of the *Khalsa* on 30 March 1699 at Anandpur. The *Vaisakhi* 300 years ago, was the culmination, a fruition of Guru Nanak's mission which was...as radiant as the sun so dazzling...it would transform the world for all time...". The transformation of a negativist and dejected nation by Guru Gobind Singh into one of pragmatism and steel, "with the soul of humanism, with resolution in their hearts and prayer on their lips", is that miracle of 1699.



Dr. Manmohan Singh releases the Premiere Issue of the Nishaan, April 1999.

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki commented, “We are celebrating the third centenary of the *Khalsa*, which has assumed tremendous significance because the *Khalsa* could not, owing to historical recessitude, celebrate the first two centenaries...therefore this, in 1999, is the first occasion that the *Khalsa* has been able to celebrate the centenary of its birth in befitting manner. Such is not only an occasion for celebration, but also for re-dedication to the ideals for which the *Khalsa* was founded.”

Although Guru Nanak, the founder (of Sikhism) was born in 1469, the crucial mystic experience that made him take up the role of the Guru occurred when he was nearly 30 years of age, in 1499. And that was the *Revelation*. Everyday, he would go to the river that flowed by the town, take his *ishman*, come back and meditate. And on this particular date, he went there into the river, but did not emerge. For three days nobody knew where he was and believed that he had drowned. Three days later he emerged and for a whole day was absolutely silent because he had had an *experience*, which he himself records: *drafted to the presence of God who asked him, who commissioned him to take up the task of reminding people of their Creator whom they had forgotten.*

Nanak strove to teach people the joys of sharing: “What I have is not that what I have but what I have been gifted by God. And since everything is gifted by God, if I am more fortunate to have more than others, then others have a claim on this grace of God that has graced upon me. I must share my wherewithal with others”. Now this was a tremendously massive socio-spiritual agenda and it was not possible to complete the mission in any one lifetime. Thus, there were ten Sikh Gurus and not one. And 200 years, two centuries elapsed from Guru Nanak’s revelation in 1499 to the culmination-completion of this agenda. This unique moment occurred on that *Vaisakhi* day, the festival of harvest in 1699. The Tenth Guru chose this date for three reasons: one was that after harvesting, people are relatively free to assemble in large numbers. Also because in the spring season everything is regenerating and so regeneration of the mind would be easier. Thirdly, Lord Buddha got his enlightenment on this day.

It is an occasion, the tercentenary of which we are now celebrating, for us to bask in the sunshine of the glory of the *Khalsa*...”.

An interesting observation by Dr. Darshan Singh Maini (first Editorial Director of the *Nishaan*), was



The future Prime Minister of India speaks on the occasion.

the *Khalsa* as a unified body of the faithful in a flash of the sun and the sword by Guru Gobind Singh. 1799 is nostalgically recalled by the Sikhs as they are inevitably reminded of the *Khalsa Raj* or the sovereignty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; and the birth of the *Singh Sabha* Movement in 1899 created the first renaissance in Sikh history and infused a fallen community with a visionary sense of purpose and design". Perhaps, in continuation of the same tradition, the launch of *Nishaan* is also accredited to the year 1999."

This past decade of the *Nishaan* has been a memorable one. Researching, reading, writing, editing and publishing, hours and days and weeks of sifting and perusing through relevant material, articles, excerpts, speeches and interviews which have become integral with 'behind the scene' activities. A word here, a quote there or a photograph – anything can make or otherwise mar the essence of a piece and must be deliberated upon before being sent to the 'press'.



Dr. Manmohan Singh greeted by Mrs Deep Dugal of the Nagaara Trust, with S.Anup Singh and S. Gobindar Singh Chopra also in the picture.

on "the Mystic figure of 99 which in some spiritual way continues to be a fateful year in Sikh history...the Founder of the Faith, Guru Nanak Dev set out in 1499 on his famous travels across the country and beyond to spread the word of God; in 1599 the Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev began to complete the *Adi Granth* and of course the Great Day of *Vaisakhi* in 1699 saw the Creation of

The *Nishaan* team can proudly proclaim to have maintained the highest standards for their 'labour of love', be it in terms of content or production values. Today, forty issues later, *Nishaan* is going strong but the best rewards remain in the form of an ever-increasing readership base and immensely positive feedback from *Nishaan's* patrons!

The Manmohan Singh phenomenon

– ‘a good man, a great visionary’

In the humdrum of India's politics of the last 15 years, it takes nerves of steel and iron guts to survive the demands on both the physical and mental front for any Indian politician. 'With great power comes great responsibility', and who is better equipped than India's current Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh to explain the adage better. Since his thumping victory in the May 2009 elections of the biggest democracy in the world, his first 100-days in office have been primarily dedicated to few words but more action. Grappling with economic recession on one hand and security and terrorism issues on

the other, the man's plans have encompassed target oriented and innovative measures ranging from selling stakes in state-owned companies, revamping regulations on public-private partnerships, eliminating bottlenecks in infrastructural projects – and even facilitating a new food-security law! His impeccable credentials as an accomplished economist – instrumental in the liberalisation of the Indian economy since 1991 – come to the fore via all these measures.

The vision is to chalk out a path which, in due course could be a template for developing countries worldwide to emulate. The beauty of the scenario lies in the fact that a humble and shy individual is pushing forth these path-breaking agendas in a nation both colourful and diverse. He has the knack and inner strength to transform any weaknesses into strengths and despite being written off time and again during the electoral process, he emerged victorious. His penchant for honesty and a clean record can shame the most distinguished of political leaders, when around one-fourth of the legislatures are facing criminal charges and the reputation of most politicians is cloudy. He comes as a breath of fresh air in this corrupt and polluted socio-political set-up. Moreover, his refusal to



trumpet his own achievements or indulge in petty political games has won him unconditional support and accolades from the masses thereby generating a conducive environment for him to realise his goals.

The icing on the cake of course is his immaculate and flawless background of economics – as an Oxford bred economist, Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, head of the planning commission and as the finance minister of India. "Others have to depend on so many inputs and have to be briefed and have to try and understand. He briefs the others. He's a man who understands the

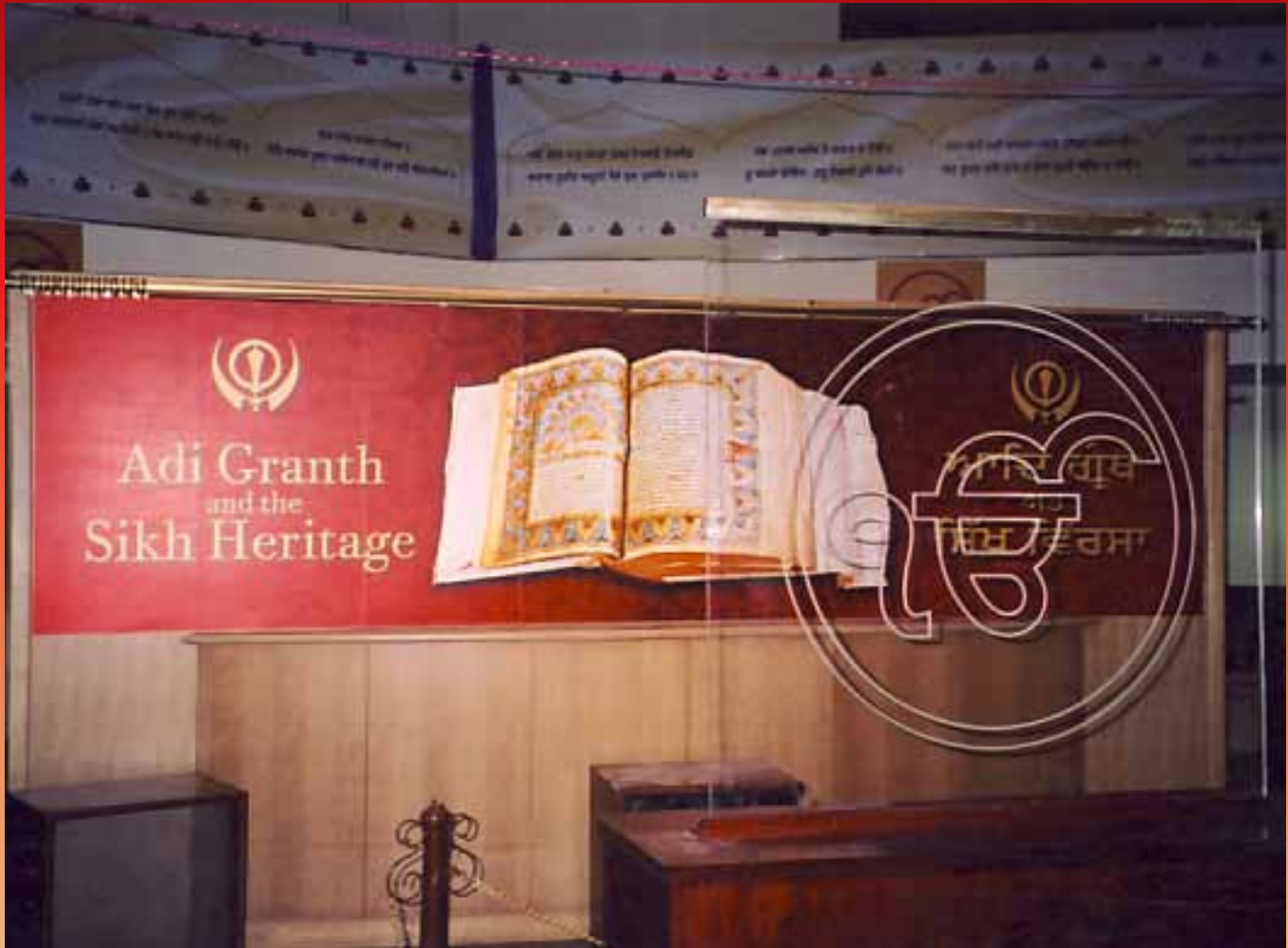
subject better than any world leader today," a very apt testimonial of his potential in the international arena.

A clear cut proof of his negotiation skills was revealed during the signing of the nuclear pact with the United States of America in 2008. Despite the immense internal pressure to scrap the deal, Dr Manmohan Singh remained firm on his resolution as the end result of the signatures lay in elevating the country's status to that of a significant performer in world affairs. A visionary par excellence, Dr Manmohan Singh's plans will go a long way in securing India's future economic prospects.

In his second term as the first Sikh Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh has the next five years ahead to perform. As a visionary for overseeing the country's growth to its optimal potential, his policies so far have been stepping stones in this well-intended journey towards growth, development and productive reforms. He says "Our vision is not just of economic growth, but also of a growth which would improve the life of the common man" – words that pertinently define the man and his mission.

*Adapted from NEWSWEEK
(Photo of Cover)*

My Guru and I



A Spiritual Journey

Spiritual journeys are never ending and rarely progress in a straight line. They are more like a meandering spiral into the core of one's being, bringing us back to the same spot again and again, only to reveal a deeper shade and meaning of the Truth that is perpetual and omnipresent. The Truth is already homogenised in us, much like butter in milk and flint in wood. It takes constant "churning" to draw it out.

Such indeed, has been my journey with the Guru – so far.

My first history and discovery of the fact, that one of our ancestors became a *Khalsa* during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, quite possibly at the *Baisakhi* of 1699, made a powerful impression on me. Though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this story, the connection to the tenth Master was a special source of pride.

In Singapore, where I spent my early childhood, Sunday Gurdwara was a weekly ritual. We kids had to sit through *Punjabi* class, which at the time felt like undeserved punishment. But the pain of having to endure *oorraahs* and *airraahs* was considerably eased by the prospect of *jalebis* during *langar* and the afternoon at the beach that would follow.

Although I did not pay much attention in class, the constant repetition (*muhamni*) of the alphabet must have made an impression on my brain somewhere. Years later, this rudimentary knowledge of the Punjabi alphabet enabled me to teach myself *Gurmukhi*, opening the door to the many-splendoured and wondrous world of *Gurbani*.

It was not until I came to Delhi to live with my grandparents that I had my first encounter with *Sikhi*, which came through an accidental meeting with Sant Sujan Singh, a well known exponent of *kirtan* and *katha*. He possessed a mellifluous and forceful voice and performed *kirtan* accompanied by a large *jatha* playing on traditional instruments like the *dilruba*, in a style that was a unique blend of classical, *qawwali* and folk elements. The *sangat* sang along. *Kirtan* was interspersed by eloquent and moving sermons on Sikh teachings and the life of the *Gurus* – delivered in beautifully spoken, chaste Punjabi.

I was barely fourteen, impressionable and becoming vaguely conscious of an inner yearning. Sant ji and his *jatha* were a captivating presence in their *gol pugs* (round turbans) and *cholas* (robes). The ambience of the *sangat* just blew me away and I became a regular and eager participant. This association lasted until Sant ji's death in 1970.

I did not know this then, but much of what I absorbed – Sikh ideology, belief and practice – had strong *Nirmala* antecedents that could be traced to Sant ji's relationship with his mentor Baba Nand Singh ji, better known as the founder of the *Nanaksar* movement. *Baba ji* – as he was always referred to – was a product of *Nirmala Akhara*, having spent time under the tutelage of *Nirmala sants* like Baba Wadhawa Singh and Baba Harnam Singh Buchowale.

The association with Sant Sujan Singh was transforming. I became a practicing Sikh, rising early, doing my *nitnem* and *simran* before heading off to school. At every opportunity, I would show up at his establishment in Karol Bagh for an opportunity to chat with him. From him, I imbibed a lifelong love for

kirtan and an intensely devotional approach to *Sikhi*. Above all, he connected me to Baba Nand Singh ji in a mystical relationship that remains central to my life.

When I ponder over how blessed I am to know Nanak as Guru, I cannot help thinking of Sant Sujan Singh and Baba Nand Singh ji as links in that spiritual lineage. At the same time, my schooling in Delhi and later in America (where I arrived in 1976) exerted a different – and opposite pull on me. Reason became the altar of worship and questioning the mode of inquiry. The influence of Western thought and philosophy encouraged me to be audacious, to question authority and to free myself of self-imposed immaturity.

The clash of Faith and Reason led me into a blind alley for years to come, causing me considerable angst. To make matters worse, there was no *sangat* around me, making it easier to drift away from the moorings of the traditional *Sikhi* I had learned in Delhi.

In due course, I shed my Sikh identity and dropped the daily *Nitnem* regimen.

Marriage in 1983 was the turning point and the start of my journey back.

Unlike me, my wife grew up in a home where all the *banis* had to be committed to memory and the *Japji* recited as the minimum daily requirement. Her mother would withhold breakfast until this requirement was met by all the children.

My wife brought with her a *Bir* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which she installed in the only bedroom in our apartment. Sleeping on a raised surface (bed) in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* was unthinkable to her, so she slept on the floor instead. My suggestion that the Guru would not be offended if she slept on the bed was met with a scowl.

I might add that my wife is a devout Sikh, very rooted in the Punjab. She is also very blunt and will call a spade a bloody shovel. She was not impressed by my 'western' mode of thinking and put me on notice, telling me in no uncertain terms that I needed to show the right measure of respect to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. She also made it clear that I had gone astray and needed to mend my ways. She would say, "*Bandeh bano*". That was shorthand for telling me to adopt the Sikh identity again. After years of freewheeling, that message was shock therapy.

But her devotion also rekindled feelings that had gone dormant. Listening to her read *bani* everyday inspired me. With her help, I began to learn *Gurmukhi* and started a daily practice of reading.

That was 25 years ago.

Learning to read the *Gurbani* was no ordinary process. The language was very foreign to me, quite unlike the colloquial Punjabi I was used to. The idiom, rooted as it is in the agricultural landscape of Punjab, was just as unfamiliar. The correct pronunciation (*uchcharan*) was also a challenge.

I relied (still do) on commentaries (*santhiyas*), in Punjabi, English translations and any recorded *katha* I could lay my hands on. In order to get the articulation right, I listened to recorded readings of *Gurbani*. Gradually, I came to understand the text (*akhri arth*).

Gurbani beckons me like a lover, to look beyond text into the mystical meaning hidden behind the words; to go past the literal to the allegorical interpretation of *bani*. The Guru's poetic expressions and captivating melody compels me to read-and-reread the text over and over again, in an effort to find the "key" or the spiritual sense (*antreev bhav*). Yet with every reading, something remains unsaid, making me conscious of the transcendence and mystery of *Waheguru*.

Sounding the words through different modulations, speed of reading, with pauses at the prescribed place and identifying with the different moods, transports me out of myself to an experience that is timeless (*ekstatis*). The reverberation connects me to the Divine through the medium of "Nanak, the Guru", because, by his own admission, these words were spoken to him by God (*jaisee me aaveh khasam ki bani*). It leaves me with a heightened sense of awe and wonder (*vismaad*). My engagement with the Guru is devotional, exegetic and mystical. Mysterious are the ways of the Guru.

Somewhere along the way, I began to feel inside me the pull of the *Khalsa Rehat* and the desire to embrace it. I had sported a "clean shaven" look for close to 20 years, but being mistaken for a non-Sikh (Hindu, Hispanic or Arab)-or called *lalaji* as well-had always irked me. The trauma of Operation Bluestar made me want to assert my identity. But I did not act on those feelings.

But now, through some magic, a mystical pull and an inner voice that only grew stronger, urged me to become a *Khalsa*. Towards the end of 1995,

another chance meeting provided the impetus to make the transition. One evening in December 1995, I found myself seated across a familiar Sikh on a commuter train in New York, both of us heading home to Long Island. During the conversation that ensued, I learnt that he had recently published a book on *Sikhi*, a collection of essays entitled *Sikhs and Sikhism: A View with a Bias*. I entertained a rather dim view of most Sikh writers in English. I felt that they were, for the most part self-styled scholars (usually retired from other professions) of *Sikhi*, writing sloppy and archaic English and interpreting *Sikhi* in an idiom that made no sense and connection to contemporary life. I suspected this book to be from the same genre. My response, as I recall, was unnecessarily snooty.

But Dr IJ Singh, gentleman that he is, graciously invited me over for a cup of tea, handed me a copy of his book and asked me to review it for him. Perhaps it was his way of telling me that if you think Sikhs can't write English, how about showing us what you can do.

This was a turning point and the initiation of a friendship that I cherish.

Dr Singh was the catalyst I need to pull the trigger on becoming a *Khalsa*. He nudged me, ever so gently, to move in that direction. I remember surprising him by becoming a *Khalsa* on Baisakhi day in 1966. He was expecting the conversion to happen, but not with the alacrity I showed.

Dr Singh also introduced me to writing. By inviting me to collaborate with him on essays and book reviews, he helped open a new creative dimension in my life. For a while, I hesitated, thinking that it was a bit presumptuous of me to write about the *Gurbani*, especially when I was critical of other non-scholars. But writing, like reading and *vichaar*, is another way of creating meaning.

An authentic Sikh life is truly a lifelong apprenticeship to the Guru. This journey is best described by the Guru himself in *Japji Sahib*: it is an alchemic process of self-transformation, where psychological lead (*manmukh*) is converted to spiritual gold (*gurmukh*).

In this process, the Guru is indeed the Philosopher's stone (*paras*).

Ravinder Singh Taneja

Looking back with Angst 25 Years after 'Blue Star'



Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale with the Sangat at the Golden Temple Complex.

April 1980

The Akali Dal government led by Prakash Singh Badal is dismissed from office.

June 1980

Congress (I) wins Assembly elections and forms government under Darbara Singh. Between August 1980 and September 1981, the Akalis lead seven major agitations in Punjab and 25,000 agitators court arrest. The Akalis submit a memorandum to the prime minister listing their 45 demands and grievances, which is ignored. In March, 1981, an educational conference called by the Chief Khalsa Diwan in Chandigarh supports the separate Sikh nation theory. Ganga Singh Dhillon threatens to take the issue to the United Nations.

9 September, 1981

Lala Jagat Narain, the editor of the *Hind Samachar* group of papers is murdered.

19 September, 1981

Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale is arrested from his Chowk Mehta *dera* on charges of conspiracy to murder Narain. Police firing in Chowk Mehta claims 17 lives. It is followed by shoot-outs in Punjab towns which result in five deaths.

28 September, 1981

Bhindranwale is released from jail under directions from the prime minister.

15 October, 1981

Compelled by the angry mood of Akalis, Mrs Gandhi meets a high-level delegation in Delhi. Akali leaders Prakash Singh Badal, Harchand Singh Longowal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Balwant Singh and Surjit Singh Barnala have a 'satisfying' round of talks and express total 'confidence' in Mrs Gandhi's capacity to help the Sikhs and Punjab.



Akali leaders (Ravi Inder Singh, Balwant Singh, Surjit Singh Barnala) with Congress leaders (Home Minister PC Sethi, Defence Minister R Venkataraman and S Buta Singh) at New Delhi.

31 December, 1981

Akalis discover that the prime minister is only buying time. While the negotiations are underway, Mrs Gandhi summons Congress (I) chief ministers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan to discuss the crucial water issue. The prime minister amends her order of 1976 and decides to give a little more water from the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej to Punjab.

5 April, 1982

After a total lull for the next six months Badal, Tohra, Barnala, Balwant Singh and Ravi Inder Singh meet the prime minister again. But Akali hopes are again belied and they return to the agitation.

6 May, 1982

Mrs Gandhi lays the foundation of the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal at Kapoori in Patiala. Akalis began their morcha.

4 August, 1982

The *morcha* shifts to Amritsar and turns into a *dharamyuddha* with Akalis courting arrest each day.

11 October, 1982

Akalis lead a demonstration outside Parliament. Four are killed.

January 11, 1983

A host of mediators shuttle between Delhi, Chandigarh and Amritsar. Negotiations begin after former Union external affairs minister Swaran Singh persuades Akalis to resume talks. The Akali leadership meets a Union Cabinet sub-committee consisting of Energy Minister Shiv Shankar, Defence Minister R. Venkataraman and External Affairs Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao in the Punjab governor's house in Chandigarh.

18 January, 1983

There is another round in Chandigarh but no breakthrough results. Badal comments: "What is the point of talking endlessly when the Union ministers have no power to decide? We shall not go to meet anyone. Let Mrs Gandhi know this."

8 February, 1983

But a month later, following a stony silence from the Akalis, Mrs Gandhi formally invites the Akalis to tripartite talks in Delhi. The other party to the negotiations are opposition leaders. There are six rounds of talks on 22 February, 1983. Mrs Gandhi also involves the chief ministers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan as well as state-level opposition leaders.

13 February, 1983

Mrs Gandhi announces acceptance of three major religious demands of the Akalis. *Gurbani* is to be broadcast from All India Radio, the all-India gurudwara act is to be passed and the walled city of Amritsar is to receive 'holy city' status. The Akalis, however, term the concession 'a fraud'.

March 26, 1983

The prime minister announces appointment of Justice Sarkaria to review Centre-state relations. The Akalis welcome it, since their one major demand is to give more powers to the states; nevertheless, they increase the tempo of the agitation.

4 April, 1983

The Akali '*rasta roko*' agitation, a total success otherwise, claims 21 lives. A judicial probe is ordered into the police firing after all the major Opposition parties press for it.



Rasta Roko !

How the Punjab was (nearly) lost

There was a chance – a flicker, really – to solve the Punjab impasse (in February 1984) but Bhajan Lal, the Haryana chief minister, killed it. It was when the Akalis leaders had come to Delhi to participate in the tripartite talks. At the instance of central officials, the Janata Party president Chandra Shekhar invited the Akali leaders to dinner at a friend's house. The Akalis comprised Prakash Singh Badal, G. S. Tohra and Balwant Singh. Chandra Shekhar also invited the Haryana leaders, Bhajan Lal and Devi Lal. Both sides were surprised to meet one another under the same roof since Chandra Shekhar had told neither whom the invitees were.

Bhajan Lal spoilt the show because he took an intransigent stand and continued mounting the old line that Abohar and Fazilka be given to Haryana for

Chandigarh as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's verdict stated. Devi Lal, however, was in a compromising mood and was open to an alternative formula. In fact, it was Bhajan Lal's attitude at that time which led to the Akalis' withdrawing from the talks ultimately.

When Chandra Shekhar later complained to Pranab Mukherjee, a government representative for the Punjab problem, against Bhajan Lal's attitude, Mr Mukherjee expressed his regrets and said that Bhajan Lal had not been told to be tractable. He requested Chandra Shekhar to arrange another meeting between the Akalis and the Haryana leaders but it was too late. If the Punjab problem ever reaches a point of no return, history will blame Bhajan Lal because that chance meeting with the Akalis could have prepared the grounds for a settlement.

However, the real blame lies with Mrs Gandhi who put up Bhajan Lal nearly one year earlier when the Akalis had accepted a compromise formula but were told at the last minute that they must also accept Mrs Gandhi's arbitration in case political parties, including the Congress (I), did not agree on the future of Chandigarh on the one hand and Fazilka and Abohar on the other. There more opportunities of a similar nature came in Mrs Gandhi's way but she spurned them at the last minute.

True, the Akalis had been raising their demands since but that is because Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale has caught the imagination of the Sikhs and it is he who now calls the shots. But, it is a hypothetical question whether the moderate Akalis would have won the day by asserting themselves. It is obvious that they had no leverage to do so, at least not after the *morcha* in which 80,000 Sikhs courted arrest. Mrs Gandhi was not willing to give them a face-saving formula, much less concede to their demands.

By that time the Akalis had even agreed to refer to the Sarkaria Commission, dealing with centre-state relations, the Anandpur Sahib resolution, which demands for Punjab and other states all subjects except defence, foreign affairs, currency and communication. Sant Hachand Singh Longowal, the *morcha* leader, could not have done more. I feel bad as an Indian and as a Punjabi because Mrs Gandhi's procrastination has divided the Hindus and the Sikhs, who were two sides of the same coin. No one can visualise the future trend of events but the state and the country will have to pay the price of what Mrs Gandhi has done because the moderate Akalis, who could have brought about an agreement at one time, are in no position to do so now. And they are being forced to take an extremist stance to save their leadership.

It is sad to see them helpless but that is a fact. Today, they are not influencing the events; the events are influencing them. To what extent they are prisoners in the hands of the extremists can well be judged by their burning of Article 25 of the Constitution which, according to them, clubs the Sikhs with the Hindus. Privately, some of the moderate leaders have said that they were opposed to the burning of the Constitution. Apparently, they have no gumption to say 'no' lest the extremists take advantage of that.

This has been the tragedy of leaders like Prakash Singh Badal, Balwant Singh and Surjit Singh Barnala. Even when they have been forced to take some of the steps under the pressure of Bindranwale, they have preferred to keep quiet lest the movement looks divided. They have been riding two boats at the same time for too long.

I recall when I visited some Punjab villages last year, in the wake of the police excesses in trying to find terrorists, I found that those



Divide – Destroy – and Rule

who had been accused of heinous crimes were honoured in *absentia* in the villages of their birth, and in recognition of their "heroism" their relations were given *saropas*. I saw photographs showing Gurcharan Singh Tohra, president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), honouring the people who had been charged with murder and rioting, for instance. I was pained to note that even the leaders among the moderate Sikhs were indifferent in condemning violence and what the extremists had done.

Political considerations do weigh with parties and leaders but when they do not speak out against the injustice they give the impression of being with the lawless and acting in a manner which gives them only political dividends. Sikh history is littered with examples of protecting the weak and even opponents like those who preached violence against them. Those who have compromised with it have not served their cause or that of their religion. A murderer is a murderer, whether he is a Sikh or a Hindu or a Muslim.

Kuldip Nayyar



...and after 'Blue Star'

On 2 June 1984, two unprecedented things happened in the Punjab. First the Army was called in to assist the civil authority to restore law and order in the whole State. Subsequent events showed that "assistance to civil authority" was in fact a euphemism for the entire State being placed under virtual army rule. Second, to put the matter beyond doubt, a serving General occupying the second highest post in the Western Command was appointed Advisor (Security) to the Governor and in due course was given charge of the Home and Justice portfolios.

Immediately afterwards the Army launched an assault on the Golden Temple complex with large numbers of troops backed up by tanks and artillery. There was ferocious fighting with the terrorists inside lasting three days. *India Today* has estimated that 200 or more army men were killed and about 1,000 extremists. No encounter of such a magnitude had ever taken place in free India, pitting the Army against a section of its own people. Never before had a shrine of such importance been turned into a bloody battlefield in this manner.

The impact of this on the Punjab, and indeed on the country, is somewhat analogous to crossing the sound barrier. In a sense nothing is the same any more; everything needs to be reassessed. The first strand is what might be called the assertion of Sikh sub-nationalism. It must straightaway be clarified that the word "sub-nationalism" does not connote something anti-national. On the contrary, it describes a perfectly legitimate phenomenon within the nationhood of India. Unity in diversity in our country

cannot possibly mean a homogenised nation, but rather one in which diverse sub-nationalities exist in harmony within the larger entity of the nation.

The Sikhs perceive themselves as a separate people. Arguments to prove that they are but a sect of the Hindus are of no avail, for it is their self-perception that matters. The Sikhs have been trying to obtain recognition of their distinct identity for decades. They peacefully struggled for a homeland within India and got Punjabi Suba. But this did not satisfy their aspirations because they found to their chagrin that, given the population arithmetic of the new State, their pre-eminent party, the Akali Dal, could not hope to govern on its own. There could not have been anything more frustrating than to have won a Suba and then not be able to run it. The ruling party for most of the time has been the Congress, which in Punjab means mostly Hindus supported by some Sikhs.

The underlying objective of the struggle thus was political power. But the actual demands of the recent Akali morcha were rooted in the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973. Among other things this asked for a curtailment of the Centre's jurisdiction to a few subjects like defence, foreign affairs and communications. This untenable demand fortunately went off the agenda with the appointment of the Sarkaria Commission. Other demands were relatively minor. Some were religious; and there were the three well-known ones – Chandigarh, river waters and territorial adjustments. All of these were easily negotiable and were in fact all but settled several times. If a settlement could have been reached the Akalis would probably have called off the morcha. But political power would still have eluded them and consequently the struggle would not have ended. Wisdom would have lain in settling not only the stated demands but also the unstated one for power.

Federal India has in the past displayed considerable ingenuity and flexibility in accommodating demands from regional

groups. The reshaping of State boundaries on linguistic lines provides the most striking example. The constitutional engineering that went into Article 370 and Articles 371A to 371F is especially remarkable in the present context, for these Articles make special provisions for the peculiar problems of individual States. What makes accommodation of the Akali demands, stated or unstated, difficult is that they emanate from a religious group. Our sad experience with Muslim sub-nationalism in undivided India has made us averse to countenancing Sikh sub-nationalism in any form. For instance the demand for a homeland state had to be couched in linguistic terms before it was conceded. The Muslim case was different for the colonial power was still present, to create mischief or be blamed by both sides for their failures. If we fall in the Sikh case there will be no such alibi. Sikh sub-nationalism must therefore be accommodated, of course squarely within the Constitution, if necessary by incorporating a new article for Punjab in the "371" family.

'Operation Bluestar' has pushed Sikh sub-nationalism to the wall. Khalistan sentiments were previously entertained only by the lunatic fringe. Today they are being expressed by masses of angry and confused Sikhs. "*Khalistan Zindabad*" has become a more popular slogan. There is a near vacuum of moderate leadership and such leaders as are still around want to swim with the current. The pre-Bluestar option of a negotiated accommodation with Sikh sub-nationalism is thus ruled out, at least for the present.

But all is certainly not lost. For one thing, secessionist rhetoric does not necessarily reflect a desire to secede. We have the Tamil precedent where the secessionist plank was readily given up once the DMK had acquired power. Secondly, for the vast majority of the Sikhs, the Khalistan idiom is only a way to express their deep resentment. They would welcome an opening which would enable them to remain with honour in the family fold of India. In the long run there is no alternative to a negotiated accommodation. Bluestar has thus introduced grave distortions, but not disturbed the basic logic of the need to cope with Sikh sub-nationalism.

The second strand is the Bhindranwale factor. Bhindranwale arrived on the Punjab scene only a few years ago like a comet from outer space. Before his arrival Punjab had the usual bedlam of competitive politics but no violence. After his arrival the air became thick with hatred and violence, literally so because thousands of tapes of his speeches were played all over

the State. And soon organised terrorism stalked the land. The people of Punjab, and more especially the Hindus, lived in fear for months. The people of India were aghast at the Government's apparent paralysis in the face of mounting terrorist activities.

Bhindranwale constantly harped on Sikh grievances but his precise objectives remained unclear to the end. His militancy had tremendous popular appeal. So much so that Akali leaders, normally sober men, were forced to adopt populist postures in order not to lose their following. They were either mesmerized or plain frightened to express any kind of denunciation of either the killings or the misuse of gurdwaras. In the people's eyes it was Bhindranwale's virulence rather than the moderation of the Akalis that came to reflect the true face of Sikh sub-nationalism.

It is widely believed that initially it was the Congress (I) that built Bhindranwale up as a sort of counter to the Akalis. Evidently he acquired a degree of autonomy after some time. But he did receive inexplicably soft treatment at the hands of the Congress (I) government, both before and after the imposition of President's rule. Two examples should suffice to establish this. One was his release after having been arrested in the wake of Lala Jagat Narain's murder. The other was the large-scale connivance of authority in permitting the entry into India, and further into the Golden Temple, of a veritable arsenal of high-grade weapons. Thus it would seem that a Frankenstein was created and maintained, first to serve as a counter to the Akalis, later to defame the very idea of Sikh sub-nationalism, and still later to serve as a hate object to be annihilated at the right moment in a sort of cathartic operation.

'Operation Bluestar' became inevitable after the first two purposes had been fulfilled and the state was set for the third.

Frankenstein was duly killed and his destruction has drawn plaudits from the "mainstream" public. But there is already a move to exalt Bhindranwale as a martyr who died defending the Golden Temple. If this should succeed his spirit will have survived. And there are many more angry young Sikhs after Bluestar than before. Consequently the menace of terrorism may continue to bedevil us. More importantly, does the annihilation of a Frankenstein of one's creation come anywhere near touching the essence of the Punjab problem? The real Punjab agenda still awaits attention.

Nirmal Mukarji
(In the *Indian Express*)

Reconstructing the Army Action: 'Operation Blue Star'

Shekhar Gupta, then with INDIA TODAY (now Editor-in-Chief of Indian Express) was in Amritsar during those fateful days in June 1984. His article which appeared in the magazine on 15 August 1984 is reproduced, along with the drawings that were published alongside.

On the morning of 1 June, briefing room of the Indian Army's II (Strike) Corps was brimming with excitement. The Western Army Commander Lt General K Sundarji and his chief of staff Lt General Ranjit Singh Dayal were briefing a stunned gathering of senior officers on the *Operation Blue Star* plan. It is now known that the operation was subdivided along two specific coordinates:

Operation Metal: To prise extremists out of the Golden Temple and to neutralise Bhindranwale, the task given to Maj Gen. K S Brar's 9th Infantry Division.

Operation Shop: To raid extremist hide-outs all over the state and to mop up terrorist remnants from the countryside. (*The Indian Army had moved in an additional four Infantry Divisions from strategic reserves throughout India for this purpose. Ed.*)

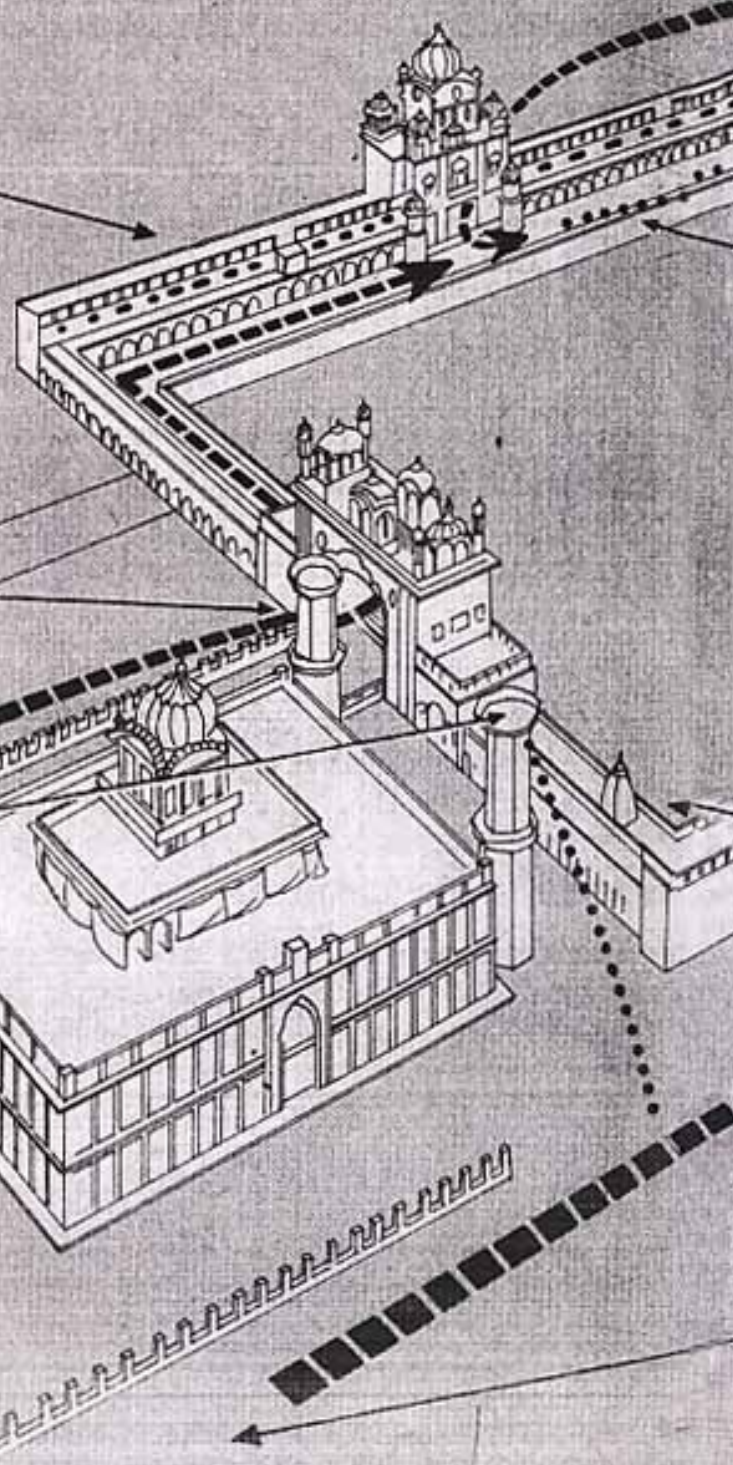
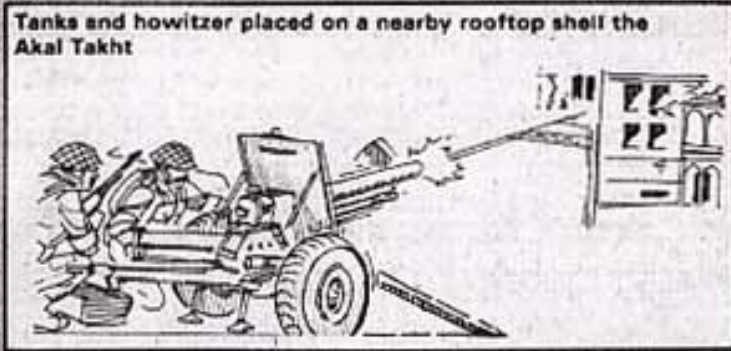
Thereafter was to be launched *Operation Woodrose*, under which army units were to move into the border areas, taking over pickets routinely held by the BSF. As far as possible, the pickets were to be held in at least a company strength. Plans had been carefully made out on each operation and with it all, barring *Operation Shop*, more or less over now, it would be time for the top brass and defence analysts to dissect the operations.

Obviously, in months to come a lot of discussion at the College of Combat at Mhow would revolve around *Operation Metal*. A major debating point would be the large number of casualties on both sides and damage to the *Akal Takht* and the question whether some of this was avoidable. Preliminary investigations, however, suggest that there had been a certain amount of underestimation of the fighting ability and the intensity of motivation among the religiously charged men around Bhindranwale. Together with lack of specific intelligence on the weaponry inside the temple and unexpected, last minute hitches, this must have at least partly contributed to the high casualty rate.

On 3 June, Temple as the first units of the army began the siege of the Golden Temple, the Generals still felt strongly that it would be possible to overawe the extremists with a show of strength and prevent large-scale bloodshed. But first indications to the contrary came when the defenders refused to be quietened with the bombardment of their highrise pillboxes atop the Ramgarhia Bungas, the 18th century brick towers and the water tank behind Teja Singh Samundari Hall. Knocked out by artillery fire on the morning of 4 June, the battlements were found to be manned again the following morning, forcing the army to use a heavy tank, firing from a distant locality near the Sultanwind Gate which provided a clear view to them of the fortification on the water tank.

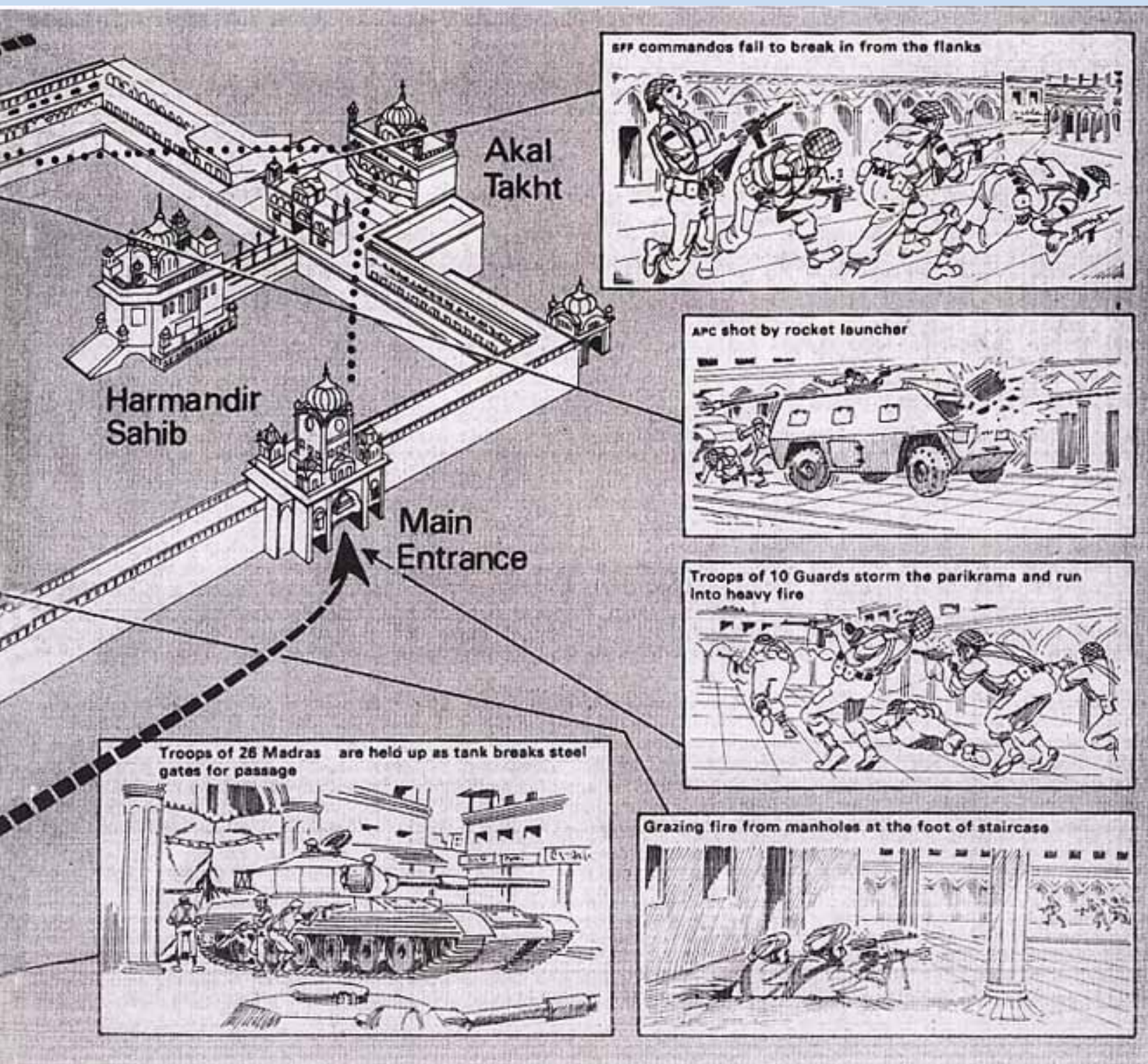
It was at this stage that the commanders accepted the inevitability of an infantry assault into the temple. According to original plan, 10th Guards commanded by Lt Colonel Israr Khan were to break into the *parikrama* from the main clock tower gate. To join up simultaneously were the troops of 26th Madras, brought in hastily from Jalandhar, from the *serai's* side. In view of the 'plunging fire' from the battlements on the *parikrama* and the clock tower, the Guardsmen were to approach the gate following tanks and then spill over inside the *parikrama*, clearing rooms and battlements held by the extremists. Similarly, the *Madrasis* coming from the other end were supposed to clear the other side. And while the infantry did this, the commandos, not of the regular army but from the Special Frontier Force (SFF), an outfit run by the Cabinet Secretariat at Chakrata, also called the RAW's Establishment-22 (set up post 1962 to train Tibetan refugees in guerrilla warfare) were supposed to assault the temple and the *Akal Takht* and deliver the *coup de grace*. But in spite of the specialised gear, weapons and bullet-proof jackets, the SFF-men, who were the only ones to have rehearsed the raid thoroughly, found the fire from the *Akal Takht* too daunting and, failing to break into the *Akal Takht*, asked for heavy tank support.

Complications had, meanwhile, arisen elsewhere also. While the commanders waited impatiently, the *Madrasis* were seemingly taking too long to get to the *parikrama*. But as it later turned out, it was not for want of trying. The steel gate at the entrance facing the *serais* had proved to be stronger than anticipated and a tank had



to be used to knock it down. Again just as they stepped in, the *Madrasis*, commanded by Lt Colonel Panikkar, ran into heavy fire and suffered casualties. They again ran into stiff resistance from terrorists who had taken a deadly position inside a strategically placed *piao* (drinking water stall). The problem was compounded

as the troops of the 26th Madras and a company of 9th Kumaon, originally held as reserve, got mixed in the darkness on the steps leading to the *parikrama*, leaving the officers with the frustrating task of first separating their respective troops while the extremists inflicted casualties.



With the commandos failing to break through at the *Akal Takht*, the generals resorted to an old-fashioned infantry assault and reserves were being summoned in the form of 7th Garhwal who were in fact, part of the 15th Infantry Division (which had mounted the invasion of Pakistan from the Wagah border on 6 September 1965). Brigadier

AK Diwan, deputy GOC of 15 Div had come to coordinate transfer of his Division's troops to the operation but found himself in the *parikrama*, under heavy fire.

The Infantry was facing its most daunting challenge from the machine-guns sited nine inches above the ground along the *parikrama*. The defenders had

correctly guessed that the troops would first neutralise the rows of rooms on the two floors of the *parikrama*. Recalls an officer: "Shahbeg (Maj. Gen. Shahbeg Singh of Bangladesh fame) had shown shrewd judgement in siting the machine guns nine inches above the ground to cover the area with what we call as the grazing fire. He knew the regular Indian army drill for such an operation where troops are taught to crawl and throw grenades into the rooms one by one – the machine guns would have slaughtered crawling troops." Fortunately, the officers decided that the space in and around the *parikrama* was too narrow for the men to crawl around. They thus decided to hide behind the pillars and spring out occasionally to throw a grenade into a room. This explains the high incidence of bullet injuries in the legs. Among the first to be wounded in the Guard's assault was company commander Major Jasbir Singh Rana, a Sikh. Later, the *Madras* lost young Lieutenant Ram Prakash Ruparia to a sniper's bullet. Ignoring the *Akal Takht* for the moment, Brar asked the infantry to clear the first floor of the *parikrama*. The approach and the ends were effectively guarded by the extremists hiding in manholes placed right next to the staircases. The troops were ordered to improvise assault ladders, which they did.

Still trying to avoid a massacre, the commanders pressed the troops into a desperate bid to lob gas-grenades into the *Akal Takht*. The SFF commandos were again asked to somehow reach close enough to the building and lob canisters containing "CS" gas, supposed to be slightly stronger than ordinary tear-gas. There were three reasons the move did not succeed.

- The gas-grenades can be launched only at very short distances. The cost of getting that close, in terms of casualties was prohibitive.
- With most of the entrances and windows heavily sandbagged it was difficult to aim a canister inside the building.
- A stiff breeze also diminished the gas grenade's effectiveness.

With the move failing and the infantry pinned down by effective fire from the *Akal Takht*, the temple and parts of the *parikrama*, it was now time for frontal assault. It was in one of these that the Kumaon Rifles Major Mishra, along with seven other ranks, was killed a few yards from the *Akal Takht* entrance. Facing the daunting prospect of moving over the heap of their bodies, a batch of volunteers from

the Madras Regiment, led by a young captain, stormed into the building. They were the first troops to have 'contacted' the *Akal Takht*. Of the ten volunteers, seven died in the narrow passage as they ran into a large body of extremists, two crawled back severely wounded and only the captain returned unhurt much later, after trying to retrieve an injured junior commissioned officer (JCO).

By this time Brigadier Diwan, who had almost by coincidence found himself inside the temple, had taken charge of the affairs. A decision was now made to use harsher methods and armoured personnel carriers (Skot 0764 APCs) of a mechanised infantry battalion were called in, but the APCs had trouble coming down the steps from the entrance into the *parikrama*. A *Vijayanta* tank of the 16th Light Cavalry (the Indian Army's senior most regiment) had to be summoned to break the marble steps. "This too was a tricky operation," recalls an officer, adding "our fear was that if the tank rolled down or got bogged down, it would block the only good entry point we had for armoured vehicles." The tank had to be used carefully, breaking a step at a time, reversing, and then repeating the process.

But even when the APCs finally made it to the *parikrama*, the move did not make too much difference as the extremists fired from a Rocket Propelled Grenade launcher (RPG-7), knocking out the lead APC and wounding Captain Hardev Singh in it. A decision was made to abandon the APC and while alighting, the driver was shot in his eye and killed. Alongside, yet another novel trick was being tried to 'neutralise' the *Akal Takht*. The commanders brought in another heavy tank with its bright, blinding xenon lamps to momentarily blind defenders in the *Akal Takht* while the troops closed in. In conventional warfare, the lamp is used only for a few seconds at a time to light up a target as filament burns out in just two minutes. The tank had to be replaced each time the filament was burnt and the intervening delay reduced the effectiveness of the move. Later, as the night wore on, xenon lights were used in short spells.

The commanders were now faced with a terribly difficult situation. Dawn was not far away and, as a senior officer recalls, once the place was lighted, each of the nearly 800 troops inside the *parikrama* could have been picked out by snipers. This is when an entire squadron of tanks were brought in. The tank-men were initially told to use only the 'secondary armament', meaning thereby the machine-gun mounted on the turret. Later, however, the main 105 mm cannon was used repeatedly.

Simultaneously, an artillery Colonel was asked to take a 3.7 inch howitzer (meant for mountain warfare) atop a tall building overlooking the *Akal Takht*. Officers explain the howitzer was chosen for shelling since it can fire straight on, horizontally, promising greater accuracy at close range. Initially the artillery men tried to mount the gun atop the building of a nationalised bank. But in spite of generous help from scores of civilians it proved impossible to haul the heavy artillery piece up with ropes. Later another building was chosen. To ensure that the aim was accurate, the gunners first fired smoke shells, then the real fireworks began.

As shelling continued, troops lay sprawling, firing intermittently. By the morning of 6 June, resistance had diminished and there was guesswork among the commanders as to what had happened to Bhindranwale and his key lieutenants. At 11 am, officers recall, there was a dash made out from the Akal Takht building. Nearly 25 men sprinted across, probably trying to reach the temple building. But most of them were mowed down. A few threw away their weapons and succeeded in jumping into the holy tank. They were killed there.

The suicidal break-out made the generals guess that Bhindranwale had by now died or had escaped. Yet, till the evening, stray firing continued. It was later discovered that a handful of survivors inside had been keeping the army's attention diverted with stray sniping to gain time to throw weapons, cash and valuables in a well behind the *Akal Takht* building. Later in the day the troops caught a wounded youngster, perhaps a temple *sewadar* (worker), crawling out of the *Akal Takht*, who first reported that Bhindranwale was dead and Shahbeg Singh seriously wounded. He later took the jawans to the *Akal Takht* basement where Bhindranwale's body was found, in the heap of about 40 bodies.

Away from the main theatre of operations a body of troops near the *serais* was grappling with another problem – over a thousand pilgrims, including many women and children were trapped inside the rooms. A majority of these were part of a *jatha* that had come from Sangrur to court arrest as part of the ongoing *Akali morcha*. The rest included SGPC employees, labourers and pilgrims who had come from far away places on 3 June, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev. Survivor's accounts vary but it seems that panic gripped everyone and the army's warnings over megaphones often got lost in the din of gunfire and shrieks. Many pilgrims died as Bhindranwale's men threw

grenades to prevent the *Akali* leaders from surrendering. Later, as the army got sniped at from a number of rooms in the *parikrama* and the *serais* the troops just threw grenades into the rooms. "People were dying on both sides", recalls an officer, adding, "and there was no time to find out who was inside a room." Some of the pilgrims also died of thirst. It is believed that of the 765 civilians who died inside the temple complex, over 50 per cent were pilgrims. The dead included 55 women and 15 children.

While brains at the Staff College and College of Combat would now be going into the finer points of the operation, a few facts stand out prominently.

- There was certainly an underestimation of the extremist's armed strength and fighting ability. A clear indication of this is that only a 50-bed field hospital had been organised in Amritsar while the casualties crossed the 500 mark.
- There had been a lack of coordination among the army, the civil authorities and the police. This is obvious from the fact that the troops did not know about the small exit behind the *Guru Nanak Niwas* through which over 150 persons, including many key extremists of the *Babbar Khalsa* faction, escaped.

The army's argument here would be that active coordination with the police would not have served the cause of secrecy which was of paramount importance. In any case, as an officer explained, this was the most unusual and undoubtedly the trickiest operation ever carried out in the history of India's security forces. And if such an operation did not leave a trail of ponderables, what else would?

(Editorial note: *The irony of using special units of India's Army to attack the holiest of holy shrines of the Sikh faith has perhaps escaped most people. The SFF (or Establishment 22) which were to spearhead the assault, were Indian-officer led Tibetans, trained and armed post 1962 to infiltrate and attack Chinese targets in Tibet. The 9th Infantry Division from Meerut, part of II Strike Corps were trained for an offensive deep into Pakistan. The 15th Infantry Division, garrisoned in Amritsar, had led the offensive into Pakistan in September 1965 and got as far as the Ichhogal Canal. Maj Gen Shahbeg Singh, who was killed along with Bhindranwale and thousands of others by the Indian Army in the Golden Temple, was a hero of the 1971 Bangladesh war, having organised the Mukti Bahini guerilla forces which played such a vital part in that 'Lightning Campaign'. General Shahbeg had, in fact, earlier received gallantry awards from the President of India.*)

Extracts from

'Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle'

by Mark Tully & Satish Jacob

The ominous eve

On the night of 3rd June, Punjab was cut off from the rest of India and movement inside the state brought to a standstill. Rail, bus

to a joint army/police network on the FM band of our transistor radios. Troops were clearly being deployed for a major operation, but just how major I did not appreciate at the time. I heard an officer reporting that the artillery had reached its position but I could not believe that the army would use heavy guns in an area as congested as the old city of Amritsar. I thought that soldiers of the artillery must be being used as infantry to seal off the Temple. I was to be proved wrong.

Early the next morning we were bundled into a Punjab Government Roadways bus which, judging by its state of dilapidation, was not intended for use beyond Amritsar city limits. We started off on our long drive down the Grand Trunk Road to the border of Haryana. We stopped for about five minutes at a hotel near the Golden Temple where a journalist had left his tape

recorder. There we were able to hear intermittent small arms fire and the occasional whoof of a mortar. Every alley had been sealed off by troops and we were stopped three times by army road blocks before we even left the city.



Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and followers in the parikrama of the Darbar Sahib Complex.

and air services were stopped, telex and telephone lines cut and the Pakistan border sealed. The Golden Temple was not the only gurdwara to be surrounded. On the same night the army surrounded thirty-seven other gurdwaras where they believed Bhindranwale's followers had sought sanctuary. In Patiala the army attacked the Gurdwara Dukhniwaran Sahib with tanks, where twenty people were killed, but doctors at Patiala hospitals say that at least fifty-six people died. The army was disappointed by the number of terrorists they captured and killed in the thirty-seven gurdwaras. Either Bhindranwale's men were not as widely spread as the army had been led to believe or most of them had left before the soldiers came.

Because all communications had been cut on the night of 3rd June, no news of what was happening in Punjab was reaching the outside world. Journalists were told to stay in their hotels; so we spent most of the day sitting on the lawn of the Ritz Hotel listening



An ominous emptiness

As the sun rose I saw a spectacle I had never expected – the Grand Trunk Road was empty. During the five and a half hours it took us to drive to the border I did not see a single civilian vehicle, not even a bullock cart. The shops in the villages we passed through were all closed and most of the villagers were in their homes. The only trains I saw were troop trains. At every important road junction we were stopped by an army check-post. Our escorting officer was a lowly Sub-Inspector and so he had the utmost difficulty in persuading army officers unused to these sort of duties to let us pass. He succeeded in the end and we finally crossed the Punjab/Haryana border just before midday. Punjab was cut off from the rest of the world in preparation for the final assault which was to start that evening.”

H.E. shells into the shrine

The Vijayanta was the Indian army’s main battle tank, being an Indian-built version of the Vickers 38-ton tank. When the orders came, they opened up with their main armament. Photographs of the shattered *Akal Takht* indicate quite clearly that the Vijayanta’s 105 mm main armament pumped high-explosive squash-head shells into the shrine. Those shells were designed for use against ‘hard targets’ like armour and fortifications. When the shells hit their targets, their heads spread or ‘squashed’ on to the hard surface. Their fuses are arranged to allow a short delay between the impact and the shells igniting, so that a shock-wave passes through the target and a heavy slab of armour or masonry is forced away from the inside of the armoured vehicle or fortification. Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, who studied the front of the *Akal Takht* before it was repaired, reckoned that as many as eighty of these lethal shells could have been fired into the shrine. The advantage of a tank’s main armament is that it fires with pinpoint accuracy.

The effect is impossible to imagine. As shockwave after shockwave rocked the building, the gallant defenders must have feared it was going to come down on top of them. Deafened by the explosions, they were driven to the back of the building by the flames and falling masonry.

The effect to this barrage on the *Akal Takht* was devastating. The whole of the front of the sacred shrine was destroyed, leaving hardly a pillar standing. Fires broke out in many of the different rooms blackening the marble walls and wrecking the delicate



From: India Today

decorations dating from Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s time. They included marble inlay, plaster and mirror work, and filigree partitions. The gold-plated dome of the *Akal Takht* was also badly damaged by artillery fire.

Eyewitness accounts

The White Paper admitted that seventy people including thirty women and five children died in that incident of 6 June. According to Bhan Singh, the survivors were made to sit in the courtyard of the Guru Ram Das Hostel until curfew was lifted the next evening. He said they were not given food, drink or medical aid. Some people, according to the SGPC Secretary, drank water which had poured out of the tank the army had blown up and had formed puddles in the courtyard. Karnail Kaur, a young mother of three children, who had come with sixty-five other people from her village to join in Longowal’s agitation, said, “When people begged for water some *jawans* told them to drink the mixture of blood and urine on the ground.”

The army then shot some of the young men they had brought out from the Teja Singh Samundari Hall. “I saw about thirty-five or thirty-six Sikhs lined up

with their hands raised above their heads. And the major was about to order them to be shot. When I asked him for medical help, he got into a rage, tore my turban off my head, and ordered his men to shoot me. I turned back and fled, jumping over bodies of the dead and injured, and saved my life crawling along the walls. I got to the room where Tohra and Sant



Longowal were sitting and told them what I had seen. Sardar Karnail Singh Nag, who had followed me, also narrated what he had seen, as well as the killing of thirty-five to thirty-six young Sikhs by small arms fire. All of these young villagers were only visitors."

The 'Black Hole'

Inside the Guru Ram Das Hostel, where the rooms were crowded with pilgrims, conditions were reminiscent of the Black Hole of Calcutta ill fame. The school teacher Ranbir Kaur and her husband had locked themselves into Room 141 with the twelve children they were looking after. Ranbir Kaur said: "We were all huddled together. We didn't know what was happening. The noise was terrifying. We had not been out of the room for more than twenty-four hours and we had no food or water. It was a very hot summer night. I told the children that we must be ready to die. They kept on crying."

Early on the sixth morning the army came into the Guru Ram Das Serai and ordered all those in the rooms to come out. We were taken into the courtyard. The men were separated from the children, but I managed to get back to the old women. When we were sitting there the army released 150 people from the

basement. They were asked why they had not come out earlier. They said the door had been locked from the outside. They were asked to hold up their hands and then they were shot after fifteen minutes. Other young men were told to untie their turbans. They were used to tie their hands behind their backs. The army continuously hit them on the head with the butts of their rifles.

Two young Sikhs, Sardul Singh and Maluk Singh, who had gone to the Golden Temple to mark Guru Arjan's martyrdom day, were not released when the army entered the hostel. An elder from their village wrote to the Sikh President of India, Zail Singh, about their experiences. In his letter the elder, Sajjan Singh Margindpuri, said:

"The young men and some other pilgrims were staying in Room Number 61. The army searched all the rooms of the Serai. Nothing objectionable was found from their room. Nor did the army find anything objectionable on their persons. They army then locked up sixty pilgrims in that room and shut not only the door but the window also. Electric supply was disconnected. The night between 5th and 6th June was extremely hot. The locked-in young men felt very thirsty and after some time, loudly knocked on the door from inside to ask the army men on duty for water. They got abuses in return, but no water. The door was

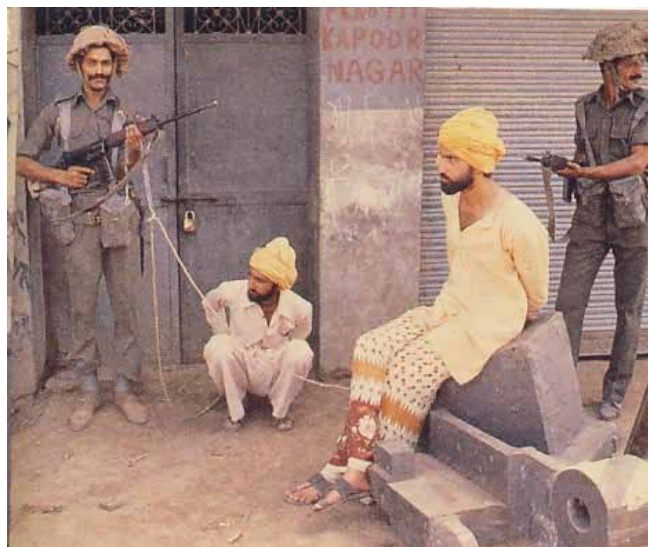


not opened. Feeling suffocated and extremely thirsty, the men inside began to faint and otherwise suffer untold misery. The door of the room was opened at 8 am on 6th June. By this time fifty-five out of sixty had died. The remaining five were also semi-dead.

The five survivors of that night of horror were then arrested by the army and taken away to interrogation camps. So were Ranbir Kaur, her husband, and the children in their care. Two months later, three of the children that Ranbir Kaur had been looking after were released after a well-known social worker had filed a petition in the Supreme Court in Delhi. Ranbir Kaur was released at the end of August. She rejoined the three children who had been released but no one could tell her what had happened to the other nine."

Ugly visage

About the army's handling of their mission to 'flush out the terrorists', is to be asked whether their behaviour towards the innocent people was disciplined and humane? Eye-witnesses from both complexes have been quoted as saying that the men who surrendered then had their hands tied behind their backs and many of them were shot. A deputy superintendent of police who saw the dead bodies, and a doctor who conducted post-mortems told Brahma Chellaney, the Associated Press correspondent who managed to stay



on in Amritsar throughout the operation, that several of the Sikhs who were killed had their hands tied behind their backs. We have photographs which show prisoners with their hands tied behind their backs and a post mortem report which shows that at least one of them was shot. Nevertheless the Indian government

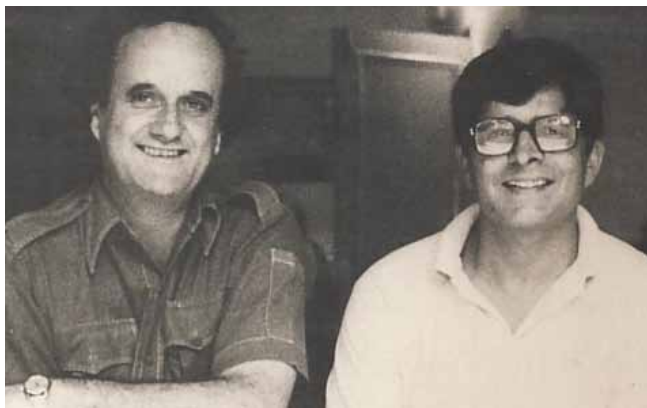
consistently denied those allegations. The government even went so far as to bring criminal charges against the Associated Press correspondent for his reporting. In the tense and ugly atmosphere of the battles in the two complexes it also seems highly likely that some 'prisoners' were shot. A senior officer confirmed to Satish Jacob that "the soldiers were in very foul temper because of the casualties that Bhindranwale's followers had inflicted on them and it was very difficult to control soldiers in that sort of mood."

Subhash Kirpekar, correspondent for the *Times of India*, who also managed to stay in Amritsar, witnessed an example of the ugly mood of the army when curfew was relaxed on 6th June. He saw, "some *jawans* kicking some of the eleven suspected terrorists as they knelt on their bare knees and crawled away for questioning. One of them alleged that he had been tortured during the interrogation."

So, Amritdharis are 'dangerous' ?

Senior officials and army officers had always accepted that there would be some excesses when the army was deployed throughout Punjab. "Very few army officers are trained interrogators, which means inevitably some will resort to unofficial methods of extracting evidence." That was why many officers were very unhappy about their task. They realised that soldiers acting as policemen could destroy the army's reputation for fairness and integrity, which they valued very highly. They were also afraid that the population of Punjab would turn against them with potentially disastrous consequences. As that senior officer explained, "Punjab is bound to be a battlefield if Pakistan ever tries it again and here we will need the civilian population to be on our side." Army Headquarters was much less sensitive. An update was published in the July 1984 issue of *Batchit*, an official magazine circulated throughout the army to keep officers and men informed of current operations.

"Although (the) majority of terrorists have been dealt with and (the) bulk of the arms and ammunition recovered, yet a large number of them are still at large. They have to be subdued to achieve the final aim of restoring peace in the country. Any knowledge of the 'Amritdharis' who are dangerous people and pledged to commit murder, arson and acts of terrorism should



The authors, Mark Tully & Satish Jacob

immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from the outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. In the interest of all of us, their identity and whereabouts must always be disclosed."

'Amritdhari' means baptised. So the instruction meant that all orthodox Sikhs were to be treated as suspects – hardly the best way to retain the affection of the people of Punjab. The then President of India, Gyani Zail Singh, was an orthodox Sikh as was the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh, along with tens of thousands of serving armed forces personnel (Ed.)

After two months, the army was ordered to pull back. Soldiers were still held in reserve to assist the paramilitary and the Punjab police, but they stopped 'combing' the countryside for terrorists. By then they had arrested nearly 5,000 people. Three thousand of them had been released again. Terrorism had not been eradicated. That, the army realised, was not to be expected, but the terrorists no longer had it all their own way. The law was amended yet again. This time the aim was to make it easier to secure the conviction of those the army was still detaining. The government issued an ordinance which made further inroads into India's tradition of respect for liberty, and turned on its head the fundamental principle that a man must be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Under the Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Act, in areas like Punjab which were declared 'disturbed', anyone found at places where firearms were used to attack or resist members of the law-enforcing agencies was presumed to have committed an offence unless the contrary was shown. Under the Act special courts were set up in Punjab to try offenders.

It was a sullen Punjab that the army 'controlled' for the next seven years. During 1984-1991, official figures give the number of Army troops engaged in various operations as "28 regular brigades", or more than the total force deployed during the 1971 war against East Pakistan.(Ed.)

Death toll 4th – 6th June 1984

Akali Dal supporters who had come to court arrest	1,700
Pilgrims who had come to mark the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev	950
Priests, <i>sewadars</i> and other Temple employees	80
Employees of the SGPC, resident in rooms at The Golden Temple complex, and their families	300
Bhindranwale's followers	500
Babbar Khalsa and other groups supporting Longowal	150
	<hr/> 3,680

According to eye-witnesses about 250 people surrendered in the temple complex and 500 in the hostel complex after the battles were over. The White Paper says that 493 people were killed and eighty-six injured. These figures leave at least 1,600 people unaccounted for. It would obviously be



Major General Shahbeg Singh, 'Hero of Bangladesh', 1971.

wrong to assume that they were killed in the battle, but there must be a big question mark over the official figures of civilian casualties in the operation, a figure which is appallingly high anyhow for an operation conducted by an army against its own people.



The General's body dragged out of the rubble on 6 June 1984.

Pictures from The Guardian, Surya India, Illustrated Weekly of India

Extract from:

Bhindranwale Martyr of the Sikh Faith

by Justice Dr. Choor Singh Sidhu of Gray's Inn,
Barrister-at-Law,
Retired Justice of the Supreme Court, Singapore

Truth has been a casualty in all accounts of the much maligned Sant. Justice Choor Singh's monograph attempts to put on record, for the benefit of future generations, what Bhindranwale stood for and what he was fighting for. It also seeks to clear his name of the ignominy heaped on him by the disinformation promoted by the Government's Ministry of Information. It attempts to show that Bhindranwale never uttered the word 'Khalistan' in any of his speeches and had nothing to do with it. Bhindranwale's demands were limited to economic and political autonomy for the Punjab and integrity of the Sikhs as an identifiably distinct religious community, totally separate from the Hindus.

The Sant regularly and vocally challenged the notion that Sikhs are part of Hinduism. Particularly galling to him was the fact that Sikhs are classified as Hindus (along with Buddhists and Jains) in Article 25, Section 2b of the Indian Constitution.

Cynthia Mahmood in 'Abstracts of Sikhism'

Bhindranwale's most crucial demand, on which he kept articulating, was that the Government should fulfill the promises made to the Sikhs at the time of partition of India in 1947 on which the Sikhs acted to remain in India. It was the solemn promise of autonomy which persuaded the then Sikh leaders in Punjab to opt for India, the promise which Nehru and his colleagues in the Indian National Congress soon reneged.

Since then the periodic Sikh demands for a measure of autonomy have resulted in Sikhs being subjected to "unequal laws, religious and social bigotry and the destruction and desecration of their religious places of worship". In addition they have been branded by officialdom as terrorists, trouble-makers and secessionists. The Sant wanted a semi-autonomous Sikh State in the Union of India, where the Sikh community could protect and preserve their identity and their cultural and religious values in a Hindu-dominated India.

Similar sentiments and the fear that Sikhs may be overwhelmed and absorbed into the Hindu fold, were expressed by Khushwant Singh in 1966. "The only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create a state in which they form



a compact group where the teaching of Gurmukhi and the Sikh religion is compulsory, and where there is an atmosphere of respect for the traditions of their Khalsa forefathers."

Bhindranwale was most unfairly portrayed by the Indian media as a fanatical hoodlum who was wreaking havoc in Punjab from the sanctuary of the Golden Temple but no one bothered to consider why he was doing so. Hidden in the morass of disinformation and negative propaganda is the truth: *Bhindranwale believed in the unity of India*. Unfortunately he embarked on enforcing Sikh rights by out-dated 18th century methods – by the sword – in an era of battle tanks and helicopter-gun ships. It produced disastrous results. His method was wrong but his demand for a semi-autonomous Punjab was historically true and justified. Given the Government's barrage of disinformation, which produced the negative climate of opinion against the Sikhs and himself, Bhindranwale was the most misjudged and least understood Sikh on the Indian political scene.

Gurcharan Singh Tohra, President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandik Committee, governing body of the Golden Temple, and Harchand Singh Longowal, President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, the political party of the Sikhs, were both weak men. They were unable to stop Bhindranwale and his militants from occupying the Temple and

fortifying it. While this was going on, Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, mischievously caused the negotiations between the Government and the Sikhs on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution to be protracted. This was because she wanted to portray the Sikhs as unnecessarily troublesome and committed to undermine national unity. She manipulated the media so as to project the Sikhs as villains. A ruthless campaign of misrepresentation and disinformation was mounted against them. The procrastination tactics were thus calculated to influence public opinion against Sikhs in Punjab, while she bought valuable time to prepare the military for a “final solution” to the vexatious Punjab problem.

Bhindranwale has been condemned for fortifying a religious shrine. The world did not consider that the Golden Temple was seriously fortified as a defensive measure only when Indira Gandhi threatened to invade it. How could a true Sant of the Sikh faith and Head of the Dam Dami Taksal allow the *parikarma* of the most sacred shrine of his Guru to be desecrated by the trodding and trampling of the Indian army's boots? It is common knowledge now that the army had built a model of the Golden Temple at Chakrata in the Himalayas, and reportedly carried out several rehearsals of the impending military assault.

As Bhindrawale received intelligence of Indira Gandhi's diabolic plan, he strengthened the fortifications of his Guru's shrine. Obviously as a “saint-solider” Bhindrawale's motivation was to prevent desecration and trampling of the Golden Temple. He was prepared to meet the might of the Indian Army.

Bhindranwale followed the tradition set 200 years earlier by another ageless martyr of the Sikh faith. In 1762 when the tyrant, Afghan invader Ahmad Shah Abdali, arrived at Amritsar to destroy the Sikh shrine, he found Baba Gurbax Singh with 30 Sikhs ready for battle and defend the shrine. Armed with only *Kirpans* they were absolutely no match against Abdali's hordes and guns. They offered symbolic resistance and earned martyrdom when Abdali blew up the *Darbar Sahib* with gunpowder.

Bhindranwale's defensive fortifications were spiritually motivated; those steeped in the Sikh tradition and religion will find it difficult to fault him. This perspective has generally been missed by most observers. Different cultures have different perceptions. Non-Sikhs can never appreciate the supreme, reverence, absolute loyalty and passionate commitment of the Sikhs for their *Darbar Sahib*, the proud and indestructible symbol of their living faith.

The Indian Government had no right nor justification, to attack the Golden Temple with heavy battle tanks and artillery. The Golden Temple is not just for Sikhs but all mankind, the holiest of shrines and a living spiritual institution. There were other far less destructive ways of dislodging Bhindranwale and his loyalists. ‘Operation Blue Star’ was reportedly Indira Gandhi's spiteful method of delivering a *coup de grace* on the “troublesome Sikhs” who had remained a thorn in her side, ever since that infamous ‘Emergency’ of 1975.

Without doubt, Indira Gandhi's ‘Operation Blue Star’ was motivated by sheer malice; it was well planned and well rehearsed. It was calculated to hurt Sikh pride and to undermine their will permanently. Many writers have reached this conclusion. According to Khushwant Singh, “Most (Sikhs) had no interest in politics of any sort. And it was they who felt that the Government had used Bhindranwale as an excuse to give the entire Sikh community a bloody punch on their nose”.

Dr Indarjit Singh, Editor of “The Sikh Messenger” of London, wrote: “The slaughter of young Sikhs brought in from the villages in the surrounding countryside shows that it was an attack directed at the fabric of Sikhism; in short to give the irksome Sikhs a bloody nose, humble them forever and remove the threat of any further revolt”.

Lest the above quotations be considered biased outbursts of angry Sikhs, the following comment of Dr Joyce JM Pettigrew, a Scottish anthropologist who spent much time in the Punjab doing independent research on the Punjab problem is significant.

“The initial crime (Operation Blue Star) was celebrated and indeed had been planned for a year beforehand. The Darbar Sahib complex, a place of great beauty, the spiritual and political centre of the Sikh way of life and of the Sikhs as a whole, their historic home through centuries of persecution from the north and west, had its sanctity shattered. The army went into Darbar Sahib not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence”.

Mark Tully has also commented adversely on ‘Operation Blue Star’ in his subsequent book, ‘No Full Stops in India’. “Operation Blue Star, the Indian army's clumsy attack on the Golden Temple at Amritsar in June 1984 shook the foundations of the Indian nation. It deeply wounded the pride of the Sikhs, the most prosperous of India's major communities. It strengthened the cause of those Sikhs campaigning for setting up of a separate Sikh state – Khalistan – and gave them a martyr – Sant Jarnail

Singh Bhindranwale, the fundamentalist preacher who had fortified the Golden Temple Complex and died defending the shrine. It caused Sikh soldiers to mutiny. It led directly to the assassination of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and to the worst communal violence since the partition riots of 1947. What particularly hurt the Sikhs psyche – a phrase I must have heard a thousand times – was the attack by battle tanks on the Akal Takht, one of the two most sacred shrines in the complex. The Akal Takht symbolises the temporal authority of God, while the Golden Temple itself symbolises His spiritual power”.

And again, “India is not alone in the world facing terrorism, but ‘Operation Blue Star’ and the military rule that Indira Gandhi imposed on the Punjab thereafter, went far beyond anti-terrorist tactics. There have never been any significant political protests in India against the brutal tactics used by the army and para military police in curbing uprising or other challenges to the central government’s authority whether in the remote tribal states of the north-eastern hills, in the Punjab or in Kashmir. It is surely because politicians know that they have the ultimate sanction – the power to declare war on a section of their own people – that they do not feel bound to look for political solutions to problems. If Indira Gandhi had not known that she could always use the army to suppress the Sikhs, she would never have allowed the situation in Punjab to deteriorate so far that she was obliged to mount a military operation against the Golden Temple”.

Bhindranwale knew, well before the actual invasion of the Temple, the probable date on which the army would commence its attack. He could have, together with his defiant loyalists, left the Temple if he wanted to. But Bhindranwale considered it his religious duty to resist the entry of an armed force into the Golden Temple with all the Sikh loyalists at his command. Bhindranwale once more proved to the world that Sikhs do not hesitate to lay down their lives in defence of their sacred shrine. He was reviving their pride and reminding them that the spirit of past Sikh martyrs’ was very much alive. Bhindranwale also demonstrated that Sikhs do not run away from a fight, no matter how impossible the odds against them. Bhindranwale told a foreign journalist, “We have lived like lions and will die like lions”. True to his word, Bhindranwale and his men did not buckle under the blistering artillery and cannon fire of the Indian Army’s tanks. None of them surrendered. They fought to the last man with limitless courage and gave a credible account of traditional Sikh valour against far superior arms, including armour and artillery.

As written by Dr. Saran Singh, Editor-in-Chief of the Sikh Review, “Those in power seem to forget, time and again, that you can kill men but not the ideas that drive them to a higher destiny. Lenin, the diehard non-believer is credited with the axiomatic statement : “The harder you strike at religion, the deeper it strikes roots.” Those who have even a nodding acquaintance with history of the Sikhs know how determinedly they defend the truth, honour and freedom of faith – ideas that are embedded in the foundations of Amritsar.”

No amount of killing Sikhs can make them abandon their historical claim, to a semi-autonomous Sikh state, which is based on justice. Bhindranwale gave his life for the fulfilment of this historically rightful demand. As Dr. IJ Singh wrote, “Bhindranwale undeniably showed Sikhs how to die with dignity and honour. But in his short life he never raised the slogan for an independent Khalistan, though he has now become the inspiration for its struggle.”

The result of Indira Gandhi’s monumental blunder owing to her maladroitness handling of Bhindranwale was succinctly spelled out by Khushwant Singh: Mrs Gandhi lost her cool. She listened to advice of people who knew little about the Sikhs and the veneration in which they held the Golden Temple. She was grievously misinformed about the strength of Bhindranwale’s men; she was told that they would lay down their arms if there was a show of strength, and if they fought their resistance would be overcome within a matter of hours. She put the state of Punjab under army rule and ordered it to take Bhindranwale dead or alive. “Operation Blue Star” was launched on 4 June 1984 when thousands of innocent pilgrims were inside the precincts of the temple paying homage to its founder, Guru Arjan Dev on anniversary of his martyrdom. Instead of a couple of hours as anticipated, the Operation took five days. And far from surrendering in the face of show of strength, Bhindranwale and his men fought with fanatic zeal to the very last. The death toll was horrendous. The army lost several hundred jawans, the defenders and innocent pilgrims caught in the cross fire accounted for another three thousand dead or so. The Akal Takht was wrecked; the temple archives reduced to ashes. The Sikhs felt deeply humiliated and became vengeful. Mrs Gandhi was not big enough to admit that she had blundered. She had a White Paper published giving the history of her negotiations with the Akalis, the reign of terror let loose by Bhindranwale and details of ‘Operation Blue Star’. The White Paper was dismissed by most people as a whitewashing exercise.

After ‘Operation Blue Star’, Mrs Gandhi (and those connected with the army action) were marked for destruction by Bhindranwale’s supporters. Many conspiracies hatched to

get her were foiled. No one had suspected that she would meet her end in her own heavily guarded home at the hands of men sworn to protect her. On the morning of 31 October 1984 two of her security guards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh who had earlier taken vows at the Golden Temple to avenge its sacrilege, pumped pistol and sten-gun bullets into her body. A couple of hours later she succumbed to her injuries at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi.

Her gory end was followed by a vicious pogrom of the Sikh community in towns and cities of Northern India in which between five to ten thousand innocent Sikhs perished, thousands of Sikhs homes looted and hundreds of crores worth of Sikh property destroyed. Thus ended the sixteen year rule of the most powerful woman monarch of recent times.

Equally damning is the comment of a foreign academic on 'Operation Blue Star' and its aftermath.

What people heard from government sources after Operation Blue Star was that the band of extremists who had illegitimately taken over the Golden Temple Complex had been effectively subdued in a successful military operation that was carried out with full respect for Sikh religious sentiments. But what they saw in the photographs that quickly made the rounds in the Sikh community, passing from hand to hand with shocked horror, was the Akal Takht with a gaping hole in its dome, its walls pock-marked with bullets, the pavement in front soaked with blood and littered with bodies. They saw the Sikh Reference Library in ashes, the rooftops of Amritsar smoking. With all of this physical destruction, however, in a way it was the Indian government's continual denial of substantial harm that was the most psychologically damaging aspect of the entire event. Sikhs felt they were not taken seriously, and the militancy, at that point still nascent, got an enormous boost. Sikh militants would force the government to take them seriously, to pay attention.

India and the world were, of course, brought to rapt attention when Indira Gandhi was assassinated five months after 'Operation Blue Star'. And the post-assassination backlash against the Sikhs brought another shock, as Hindu mobs abetted by police slaughtered thousands of innocent Sikhs in cities across India. Again, significantly, this massacre was accompanied by ridicule. Sikh corpses, twisted as they burned in the streets of Delhi, were said to be "dancing the bhangra (a Punjabi folk dance)". As one woman described it. "It was not only the sight of humans on fire that was horrific, but the terrible asynchrony of this vision with ongoing radio commentary that was painting a wildly different picture. Was one going crazy? One doubted one's own perceptions". As an anthropologist

working in Guatemala noted, "Terror's power... is exactly about doubting one's own perceptions of reality". An Indian commentator said that the radio bulletins during the riots "could have been coming from another planet."

Indira Gandhi had strutted about as an Empress for 16 years, obsessed with winning elections, completely oblivious of her duty to rule justly. She pandered to the vast Hindu vote. It did not matter if in the process she trampled on the rights of others, such as the Sikhs. The Sikhs kept demanding their promised autonomy. In her arrogance, Indira Gandhi decided to teach them a lesson and silence them forever. With tanks and artillery she ruthlessly destroyed the Akal Takht, the Throne of the Timeless and the seat of Sikh sovereignty on this earth. By this unpardonable sin Indira Gandhi invited divine wrath and retribution. She perished in violence, the same violence of death and destruction which she wantonly unleashed on thousands of innocent devotees. She failed to realise that God is the defence of the forsaken, the honour of the humble, pride of those who have been laid low, the strength of the weak and the final Arbiter in all human affairs.

The Akal Takht has risen from the ashes, phoenix like, and stands as tall and resplendent as ever. Sikhs believe and history shows that as in the past, those who have taken part, even remotely, in the destruction of the Akal Takht, have no trace left of them on this earth. Sikhs also believe that martyrs do not die; they are immortalised and become *Amar Shaheeds* (Living Martyrs), forever young. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his loyalists who laid down their lives in defending the Akal Takht against the might of the Indian army earned glory for themselves, their Panth (nation) and their race. They have joined the long line of *Amar Shaheeds* who are alive in the hearts of the faithful and are lovingly remembered, every morning and evening, in the *Ardaas* (prayer) of every Sikh, all over the world.

*Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong,
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong –
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above his own.*

J. Russell Lowell (1819-1891)

On Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale

Mark Tully and Satish Jacob have given a picturesque description of Jarnail Singh in their book, 'Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle'.

Bhindranwale soon became a dominant figure in the Dam Dami Taksal. Standing an impressive and lean six feet tall, his looks went with a prophetic role. He had a strong nose and deep-set eyes which almost disappeared when he broke into a toothy grin, and yet had a sinister quality which meant his audiences waited for the Sant to smile first. There were a few white hairs in his thick black beard by the end of his life. Bhindranwale always wore a blue or saffron turban tied in tiers, not in the jaunty fashion of a Sikh layman. He also wore the traditional Sikh loose knee-length shirt, under which were the shorts prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh. As the Guru instructed, he wore a dagger in a belt slung over his shoulder. Whenever I saw him he carried a more modern weapon too, a revolver, in a bandoleer stuffed with live ammunition.

Jarnail Singh became the favourite of the head of the Taksal, Kartar Singh. His break came when Kartar Singh was fatally injured in a road accident. Bhindranwale's

teacher was such a fanatical Sikh that he refused to allow doctors to cut his hair so that they could operate on him after the accident. Before Kartar Singh died he made it clear that he wanted Jarnail Singh, not his own son Amrik Singh, to succeed to the leadership of the Takshal. So Jarnail Singh became a Sant or Saint, and head of the Dam Dami Taksal. He adopted the name Bhindranwale as many of his predecessors had done, after the village of Bhindran. Amrik Singh was studying at university and wanted to remain there. He later became Bhindranwale's right-hand man and President of the All India Sikh Students Federation, whose members were responsible for many of the atrocities committed in Bhindranwale's name.

The headquarters of the Dam Dami Taksal is in a comparatively new Gurdwara in the village of Chowk Mehta, some 30 miles from Amritsar. Behind its high walls, young Sikh boys from the age of seven are taught to defend their faith with arms and reasons. Much time is devoted to learning the scriptures by heart. Over the years the Taksal has come to be recognised as which teaches the essence of Sikhism. It has upheld Sikh "orthodoxy" for 200 years.

Justice Choor Singh of Singapore

A staunch upholder of justice, the legendary Justice Choor Singh of Singapore passed away on 31 March, 2009 at 98 years of age. The judge, reputed to be Singapore's "toughest," was a self-made man (see Nishaan III/2000).

He started out as a law clerk, and went on to put 47 years in public service, the last seventeen on the bench of the Supreme Court between 1963 and 1980. Justice Singh presided over civil and criminal cases in the High Court and the Court of Appeal, and delivered more than 100 judgments. He also earned a reputation for handing down capital sentences, which earned him the 'Hanging Judge' label. "I'm satisfied that I've made no mistake and that I've done my duty according to law," he said. It is perhaps significant that records of the Malayan Law Journal indicate that no judgement of the Court of Criminal Appeal delivered by Justice Singh was ever overturned by the Privy Council, then the highest appeal body.

After Justice Choor Singh retired, he spent his time playing golf and writing on history of the Sikhs in the Far East.



Choor Singh was four years of age when he came to Singapore from India with his mother and sister. His father was already here, working as a night watchman in a godown near Boat Quay. After his early education at Pearl's Hill School and Outram School he completed his secondary education at the Raffles Institution in 1929.

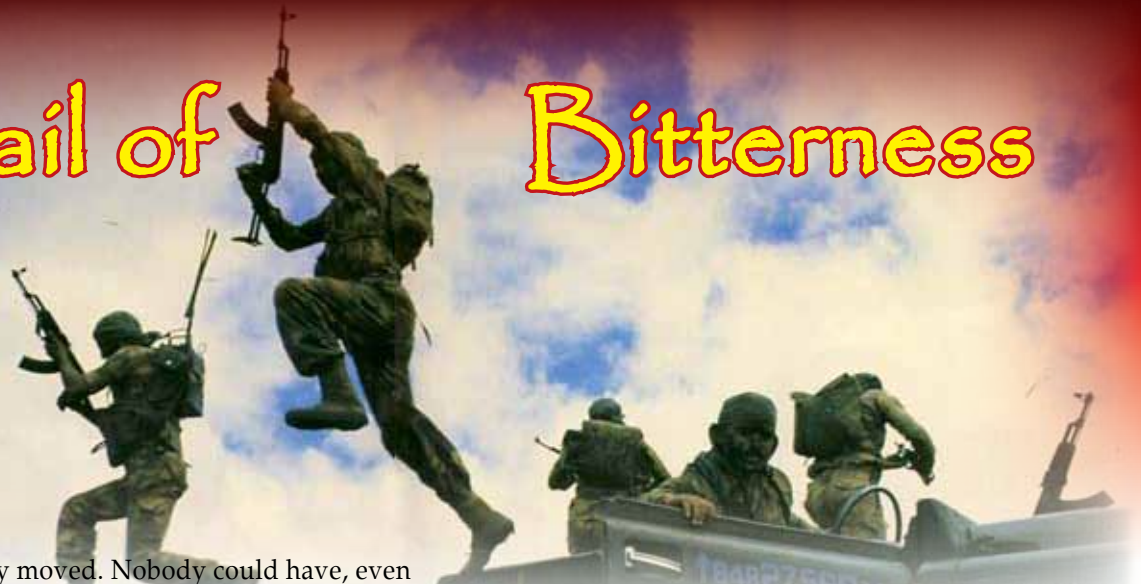
After a three-year stint as a clerk in a local law firm, he joined the civil service and was posted to the official Assignee's chambers, but already he had loftier ambitions. Determined to be a lawyer, he spent his free time reading law books and diligently put money aside for a law education in England.

Then came a change in the education policy, which enabled him to enroll in Gray's Inn as an external student. He became a district judge in 1960 and a Supreme Court justice three years later.

His self-composed epitaph reads:

"I have done my duty to the State, to my community and Faith, I leave now as ordained by my fate."

Trail of Bitterness



Nobody moved. Nobody could have, even if he or she wanted to. The stengun-and-the automatic rifle toting, battle-dressed army men made sure of it. In a swift operation, they had descended on the hapless village under cover of darkness and, within minutes, rendered the residents immobile. Completely. "Stay where and as you are. And don't even move a muscle." The command was delivered in gruff, no nonsense tones to every person present in the village at the time. The more spirited ones, those inclined to demur, soon learnt that even a hint of resistance could be painful. The slightest protest, indication of defiance invited a rain of blows delivered by rock-hard fists and descending rifle butts. Such tactics put an end to all defiance. And in no time at all, the village of Khudda Ali Sher, on the outskirts of Chandigarh, was forced into a state of suspended animation as the late night invaders – officers and *jawans* of the Indian army – fanned out into its lanes and bylanes, in search of a dangerous quarry – suspected Sikh extremists.

There were nine vehicle loads of them. Men in full combat attire. Grim faced men not willing to brook any nonsense. They arrived at the village in seven trucks and two spotlight-fitted jeeps around 11.45 p.m. on 5 June, 1984 – around the time when 'Operation Bluestar' was raging at Amritsar's Golden Temple. There were about 500 of them. And they came with their own list of names of "suspects." They first sealed off the village. After immobilising the villagers, the army men rounded up a few of them and took them to the village *maiden* (open space). There the names on the list were read out one by one – and the villagers were asked about their whereabouts. And again, their interrogation was conducted ruthlessly.

The slightest suspicion that the villager was concealing the truth, the slightest hesitation in replying to an enquiry was an invitation to brutal manhandling. But then, the men in uniform had come with a purpose. They were not willing to tolerate

anything which would prevent them from doing so. After checking the identities of persons whose names they had on their list, they were able to establish that only one was present in the village. The suspect's name was Gurdyal Singh, a 32 year old Red Cross employee and son of a former-village *sarpanch*. And it did not take long before the army men had him in their custody.

A villager took a detachment of *jawans* to the suspect's house. The inmates, including the Sikh youth's aged uncle, were roughed up. The house was thoroughly searched. "Nothing incriminating was found," say eye-witnesses. Yet, Gurdyal Singh was taken into custody by the army men. His only fault, say villagers (a large number of them Hindus), might have been that he used to make appeals on the gurdwara loudspeaker for donations to the Amritsar gurdwara. And used to call upon Sikhs to attend protest meetings at various gurdwaras in Chandigarh. For this, Gurdyal Singh paid a heavy price, indeed.

He was taken to the village *maidan* by his captors. Encircled by a ring of soldiers, all of them with their backs towards him, their guns pointing outwards towards where the villagers lay immobile. "He was beaten into unconsciousness," says a villager: "Hit with rifle butts, booted feet till he could not take it any more." His last words, before losing consciousness, were "*Sat Sri Akal*," delivered to his uncle, who could only watch the army operation helplessly.

At the end of the one-hour operation, Gurdyal Singh's inert form was loaded into an army vehicle. And the 'intruders' departed. The last information about him was that he had survived the ordeal – but was languishing in police custody. And, for the people of Khudda Ali Sher, the army's "anti-extremist" operation has left behind a trail of bitterness.

Ajit Parmar



From: The Guardian

Special Relationship with the Sikhs ?

The Sikhs, who have always enjoyed a special relationship with the Indian Army, now resent its presence and performance in Punjab, while the Hindus feel somewhat secure. The Sikhs feel that the raids, searches and large-scale arrests, often indiscriminate, following 'Operation Bluestar' have added insult to injury.

The army's role in Punjab can be divided into three phases – 'Operation Bluestar' in the Golden Temple, the subsequent "mopping up" of terrorists from the countryside - 'Operation Woodrose' - and the process of interrogation in army camps dotted all over the State.

One day, perhaps, the truth will out on what really happened in the Golden Temple between June 3 and 6. Today rumours are afloat in Punjab. There are eyewitness accounts of those who survived the battle but it is still very difficult to piece together a coherent

and a credible version. For truth lies buried under human passions and Government propaganda. The Sikhs believe stories of massacre in their holiest shrine in the first week of June 1984 as gospel truth. The army has denied any kind of torture in discriminate killing or even beating up people during or after its operation.

After talking to several eyewitnesses and other sources who, have been reliable in the past, my investigations reveal that in addition to the army casualties, about 800 people died in the Golden Temple and not 540 as declared by the Government. A large number of those killed in the temple were innocent pilgrims. 3 June was *Panchami*, anniversary of the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, a day when a large number of pilgrims were expected to visit the shrine in Amritsar. In addition, there were *jathas* – there was one large group from Sangrur – of people who had gone to Amritsar to court arrest.

Retired Subedar Santokh Singh from Rayya village in Amritsar district who served with the famous 15th Punjab Regiment for 28 years (the highest decorated unit of the Indian Army), was one of those who died in the temple. His family told this correspondent that they had word about his death after one and a half months. He had gone to settle the marriage of his daughter and decided to visit the Golden Temple on his way back. His son, Ajit Singh, a lance naik in the army, went to every jail in the State in search of his father. A man from Moga who was with Santokh Singh in the Guru Ramdas Sarai wrote to the family about his death after being released from Jail.

I talked to a number of people who were in the Golden Temple and have subsequently been released. None of them says that he or she heard any announcement by the army asking the people to surrender on 3, 4 or 5 June. Most of the casualties in the Temple occurred in the early hours of 6 June. The stories of pilgrims who survived are more or less similar.

To reconstruct events based on their narratives, it appears that at about 4 am on that fateful dawn they were asked to come out of their rooms in the sarai either by army jawans or their own jatha leaders because the army wanted to count the number of people and search them. When a large number of people present had gathered in the open space on the ground floor of the sarai, grenades were thrown at them from above. Most Sikhs believe that jawans threw the explosives at them deliberately as the troops had by then occupied the sarai building. But other sources feel that extremists could have lobbed those grenades at the waiting pilgrims to prevent surrender of the Akali leaders, Sant Longowal and G. S Tohra, besides the pilgrims.

After the grenades exploded the troops are believed to have fired wildly: the place was strewn with bodies of men, women and children. According to several eye-witnesses, jawans then went around throwing grenades into rooms in the sarai where scores of people were locked inside. The wounded cried out for water; there was neither water nor medical help. Scores of people locked inside. The wounded cried out for water; there was neither water nor medical help until 12 hours later.

Many Sikhs believe that women at the Golden Temple were molested and raped by the *jawans*. After talking to a number of women who were in

the jathas and have subsequently been released, I found no evidence to substantiate this charge. It is true that some women devotees were kept in army custody longer than others but none from the *jatha* from Sangrur, whom I met, alleged either molestation or rape or even being beaten up by the troops in their custody.

The mopping-up operations – raids, searches, large-scale arrest of innocent people – have humiliated and angered the Sikhs. But they were in many ways unavoidable, in the difficult circumstances the army faced. The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee has recently released a list of 173 people “missing” since the army operation. Their relatives have approached the SGPC for help but according to Bhan Singh, secretary of the SGPC, “the army authorities and other Government officials have provided no clues”.

Then, there have been many cases of army highhandedness as at the Punjabi University in Patiala. Students, who had gone to see the Vice-Chancellor at his residence on the night of 24 July to protest against the payment of hostel rent when the university was closed, were accosted by the army on their way back in the campus. They were forced to crawl on their knees at gunpoint, even though they were accompanied by the Dean of Student Welfare and a hostel warden who explained the reason for their visit. Three of the student leaders, who were taken away by the army to their camp in the campus, told this correspondent that they were released after three hours of severe beating, during which they were asked to give an undertaking in writing that they would not take part in student politics. Agitated students and teachers went on a strike the next day. The trouble subsided when senior army officers apologised to the students and to the Vice-Chancellor for the unfortunate incident.

Though villagers around Dhariwal in Gurdaspur district did not complain of loot or molestation, the troops have been criticised for the treatment of the detenus held in their custody. Barring women, almost everyone who was in the army custody complained of torture, some more than others. That prisoners were held blindfolded and with their hands tied with ropes has been corroborated by many.

“Another method of torture was to wake us up at night. On the first night I was told that there would be a bell every half hour when we would have to stand up. The first two nights were terrible and I was



From: Surya India

India Army personnel bulldozing bodies in the rubble of Akal Takht.

beaten with sticks when I did not wake up. On the fourth day I asked my cell mates why there had been no bells ringing every half hour the previous night. They started laughing. They said that I had been jumping up in my sleep. It was a new discovery for me how a human being adjusts himself to difficult conditions....”.

For India at large, the deployment of troops in Punjab had become “unavoidable”, an action which was greeted with relief, for a feeling had been created in the months preceding June that the administration in Punjab had collapsed. Every day newspapers reported killings of a dozen people by the terrorists and both the Punjab and the Union Government appeared to look on helplessly. During the last four months, the army’s brief has been to free the State of terrorists a task which is as complex as it is difficult and one for which the army is ill-equipped. The roots of terrorism lie in political, economic and socio-cultural factors and not just in a breakdown of law and order.

In any case the troops are unable to distinguish between whom is a terrorist and whom is not. As a result, the innocent tend to get harassed. This accentuates the alienation of the Sikhs which in turn breeds more terrorists.

Moreover, being trained to fight an enemy rather than tackle a civil disturbance, the troops may tend to give the due process of law the go by. (It does not follow that the police adhere to the rules of the game or ensure the rights of citizens).

But the indefinite policing of a State by the army is fraught with danger. And the more the troops play this role, the more unpopular they are likely to be. While it would be unfair to castigate a whole force for the behaviour of individual officers this how people judge the performance of the army. This is not to under rate the services rendered by the army nor to discredit the force. But accountability and discipline for which it has been known must be ensured.

Neerja Chowdhury

(From: The Statesman, 10 October 1984)

Anger and Alienation



Independent India has, for the first time, witnessed a mutiny on such a large scale. The entire Sikh community, 15 million strong, feels alienated. There is an atmosphere of suspicion, distress, hatred. The Sikh feels betrayed. Gory memories have been imprinted on his mind. "Emotions have exploded". I don't see when peace can be restored? With so many amongst us hurt and in pain. Indeed, the situation is frightening. More so, because of the sense of alienation that is cutting deep into the Sikh psyche.

Only Zail Singh could go to the Golden Temple, when corpses were strewn all around, with a rose in his button-hole. It was like a bridegroom going to the Nigambodh Ghat. Naturally, he (the president) has been isolated from his own community. I received over 100 telegrams and scores of telephone calls from as far off as New Zealand, Australia, London, Toronto and New York. The Sikhs there are very angry with Zail Singh.

Several groups of Sikhs came to me following the army action in Amritsar. The women just broke down and cried. They were so upset. My Hindu friends, on the other hand, have been ringing up

to accuse me of betrayal. "You want more Hindus to be murdered. Why don't you resign the Rajya Sabha seat." But why should I leave parliament? The Maharaja of Patiala has resigned and so have all the Akali Dal MPs. Even some IAS officers have turned in their papers. Being in parliament, I can put forward my point of view. It is only reasonable that I represent the community in parliament. For as it is, the entire Sikh community has been isolated and Punjab lies in a coma. No self-respecting Sikh is going to talk to this government. By rushing into action without weighing the pros and cons—as well as they should have been – the government has succeeded in polarising the differences between the two communities.

The Sikhs have been forcibly subjected to a sense of total alienation. For while every Hindu thinks that the government's decision was right, the Sikhs feel oppressed and bitter. It is difficult for the Sikh to forget the damage inflicted on the *Akal Takht*. I'm glad that my Sikh brothers are not accepting the government's charity in repairing the *Takht*. In fact, they have plans of leaving the *Takht* as it is – a relic which the generations will see and it will be put down in history as an act committed by a Hindu government against the Sikh



community. This is why I criticised the government and the ruthless manner in which the army conducted the operations. And since then, I haven't changed my stand one bit. No temple or religious place ought to be a hideout for criminals, the Golden Temple being no exception. But, I continuously warned, inside parliament and outside, storming the temple would cause a bloodbath. That is exactly what happened.

About 100 commandos, preferably Sikhs, could have carried out the operation. For, obviously, we were after one man (Bhindranwale) only. I do not believe that the cold-blooded killings of Hindus bus passengers were done by Sikhs. I'm quite certain these were acts by Pakistanis. Anyone with a turban and a beard can look a Sikh. Now, it is confirmed that Pakistani agents were in Amritsar. This is also bolstered by the fact that the killing of cows and putting their heads in temples is repugnant to the Sikh community. I cannot believe that Sikhs could have indulged in such acts. But I have been against the Akali agitation and Bhindranwale's senseless terrorism. The point however, is that the government allowed the temple to become a fortress. The extremists freely carried stenguns and anti-tank missiles into its precincts. Surely, they didn't carry them in their pockets. The government is to be blamed for escalating the situation—not willingly of course, but out of negligence. Why couldn't limited action have been ordered? Innocent lives could have been saved. Violence for violence is no solution.

The figure of the dead (militants and jawans) is well over 1,000 – not what we are being fed with. Why couldn't they have closed down the *Guru-ka-langar*, cut off water and the electricity supply? The terrorists' food-stocks would have lasted for a fortnight at the maximum. But now, I foresee martial law in Punjab for the next 60 days. Mrs Gandhi is left with nobody to negotiate with. There is literally no Sikh leader. Only a very angry people, who won't talk to her.

My appeal to all Sikhs now is to reaffirm their sense of being Indian. Any lasting feeling of alienation will give impetus to the demand for Khalistan, which will be suicidal. We must not succumb to it. We must realise that the Akalis misled people about their demands and the burning of the Constitution. And that Bhindranwale was a man with very little learning, who became a megalomaniac. I feel no sympathy for him. Ninety five out of 100 Sikhs who went to the gurudwara to pray were least affected by Bhindranwale. Only our president Zail Singh – a supporter of Bhindranwale – thought he could build the man up against the Akalis.



President Zail Singh at the Golden Temple.

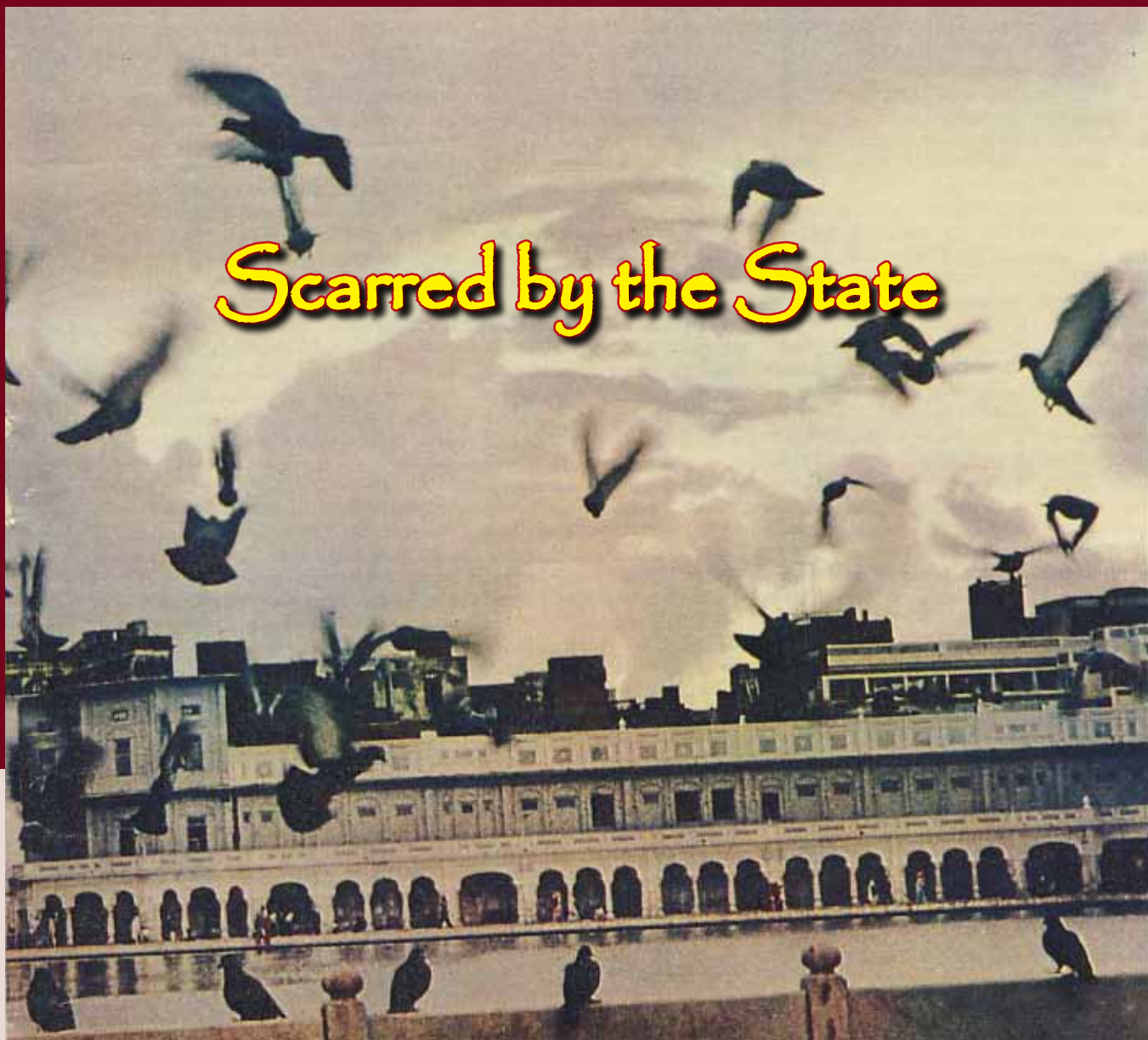
But the tactics failed. He (Zail Singh), who left no occasion to quote the *Gurbani*, now dare not appear in front of his own fellow beings. And what I fear now is individual attempts at assassination.

Mrs Gandhi, mercifully, is well guarded. Zail Singh, who has become the special target of the wounded Sikhs, must also be guarded well. Indeed, the president is in a pitiable state. He is neither trusted by his own community nor by the government he heads. RK Dhawan is constantly breathing down the president's neck lest he (Zail Singh) open his mouth. Indeed, Zail Singh is a prisoner in the presidential palace. All this is so depressing. The suspicion, the hatred. We are in this situation today because the government did not do things it should have.

Persons on the spot did not have the presence of mind. The intelligence set-up failed. For, Mrs Gandhi's network supplies information, depending on her (Mrs Gandhi's) mood. Thus, she is continuously fed with incorrect stories. She will undoubtedly get the Hindu vote now – but what she has done is hardly an act of patriotism.

A general feeling of relief should have followed Bhindranwale's death. Instead, the government ended up conferring martyrdom on a man who did not deserve it. You will, from now on, see the horrendous results on the rest of the country. The Sikhs may comprise only two per cent of India's population, but it is they who are the major producers of food. Ten per cent of the army consists of the Sikhs. Besides, don't forget, Punjab is a border state. That is why I feel all is not over. Both Sikhs and Hindus should ask for forgiveness from each other.

Khushwant Singh
(In *Probe India* / July 1984)



There were other victims of 'Operation Blue Star'—little children, some only two years old, who got rounded up and went missing in the countryside, throwing over 1,800 suspected terrorists into jail. Since then, 39 children have been languishing in two Ludhiana jails, learning bitterly that the authorities are sometimes no kinder than the terrorists who have plagued India's heartland for the last three years.

There is four-year-old Rinku whose father died during the army operation and whose mother has been missing since then. Like the rest of the 'infant terrorists', Rinku had to go through a grueling interrogation. When asked where his mother was, he replied, 'I do not know'. Asked where his father was, he said "Killed with a gun." Why his stomach was so big: "Because I eat clay". Then there is the earnest 12-year-old Bablu who calls Bhindranwale his *chacha*. He insists that he be included among

the terrorists and tried. There is Zaida Khatoon, a Bangladeshi woman who stopped to get food for her five children at the Golden Temple and ended in jail.

Their ordeal began in early June when they were picked up around the Temple and packed into camps in Amritsar and Jalandhar. Initially the army did not know what to do with the children. Some of the lucky ones were locked up with their parents, but they all faced the same charge: breach of peace under Section 107 and arrest to

prevent commission of cognisable offence under Sections 107 and 151 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). They were finally sent to Ludhiana.

And then the nightmare began. Two central agencies, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) began their questioning. There were long, intimidating sessions. The children cried and begged to be sent home. But it went on for days. Their little finger prints were taken and IB sleuths set about verifying their bona fides. One interrogating officer admitted that not many officials were moved by the children's cries.

The children continued to be locked up in a dingy old jail in the sprawling industrial city. Some were moved to a newer maximum security prison outside the city. Of the 39 children, 10 were with their parents, mostly their mothers. Another 15 were students of the Damdami Taksal, an institution founded by Guru Gobind Singh to train children in music and Gurbani, which was last headed by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. These students, all of them ardent Sikhs, had been camping in the Golden Temple complex, and some had learnt to use arms. Three of them have now been classified 'dangerous terrorists'.

Sadly enough, in their interrogations, the CBI and IB have shown little regard to any civil liberties or laws protecting young children. All the children have been booked for violating prohibitory orders under Section 144 or Section 107/151. It is a fact that they were picked up from the Golden Temple or at best are said to have surrendered. But these offences are bail-able and

in fact these sections are merely prohibitory, used by law enforcing agencies to stop processions and strikes. The authorities have paid no heed to the Children Act, 1960 or the East Punjab Children Act, 1949 or even the Reformatory Schools Act, 1976.

The long, agonising inquisition apart, the children have been clubbed with known terrorists, criminals and anti-social elements. Under the law, children – younger than 16 years old in the case of males and 18 in the case of females – cannot be detained either at a police station or in a regular jail, and the lofty laws that protect and respect the child have all been violated. Children are supposed to be kept in special institutions or reform schools but the Punjab Government has hardly been bothered as the central agencies continued with their gruelling, and often callous, investigations. Confessed a CBI officer: "These are all fine ideas for newspapers and preachers. We had on our hands suspected terrorists and would-be terrorists."

Last fortnight, some relief seemed to be on the way at last. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the well-known social worker, petitioned the Supreme Court to help the children. A division bench consisting of O. Chinappa Reddy, A.P. Sen and E.S. Venkataramiah directed the Ludhiana district judge to remove the children from the jails and lodge them in a better place, at the cost of the state. The Punjab Government was also directed to trace their relatives and file particulars to the court. Ironically enough, the same day these orders were issued, a Ludhiana magistrate remanded four children arrested from the temple on June 6 to judicial

custody till further orders. The youngest of these children, Jasbir Kaur, is only two years old, her sister Charanjit is four, and her brothers, Harinder and Balwinder are six and twelve. These children are charged with disobeying the prohibitory order under Section 144 of the CrPC.

On 1 August, eleven senior opposition leaders had demanded that the detained kids be either released or at least segregated. But it was only after the Supreme Court directive that the authorities began acting. Within five days, the parents of six children were located from districts as far away as Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh, Hissar in Haryana and Nainital in Uttar Pradesh. They had gone to the Golden Temple to pray when they were caught in the army cross-fire. District Magistrate K.R. Lakhanpal had earlier sought the governor's approval to release the children but had not met with any success. Said he: "We were alive to the human problem but somehow in this charged atmosphere quick releases could not take place. The children had to be cleared first by the intelligence agencies."

Most critically placed are those children whose parents face various charges. While District Judge Jai Singh Sekhon is for total segregation, the administration has not yet agreed. "They have to be with their parents only and since the parents cannot be kept out of jail, they remain where they are," said Lakhanpal. Their fate, as well as the fate of those in Category C, the most dangerous, depends upon the Supreme Court. Meanwhile 39 little beings continue to pray for freedom every day.

Gobind Thukral
(In *India Today*, 30 September 1984)

All Have Lost

The climatic events in Punjab with the army moving into the Golden Temple complex for dealing with the extremists shook the nation more than anything else since the outbreak of the 1971 Bangladesh war. Finally, relief at the ending of a reign of terror by the lawless elements entrenched there was mixed with sadness at the enormity of the bloodshed. Let us salute the memory of the brave men of the armed forces who died in action. We also grieve for the dead on the other side who were misled to the suicidal path of violence.

The responsibility for the carnage lies squarely on those who, by their homicidal orgies and brazen defiance of the law of the land, forced the Government of India to think the unthinkable at act. And while regretting the heavy cost in blood and tears, it must be remembered that the government was being blamed widely for ignoring a direct and persistent challenge to its authority in the most sensitive border state of India for the last two years. Had the extremists heeded the warning given by the security forces – they were given ample time to come out peacefully – not a shot would have been fired to disturb the peace of the holy place. And all these precious lives would have been saved.

It is natural for our Sikh brethren to be anguished by the happenings in Amritsar. They should know that their sorrow is shared by the rest of their countrymen also, regardless of creedal and political differences. How we wish that events in Punjab had taken a different turn, a turn towards peace and amity, thus obviating the very need for an action of the kind undertaken on 5 June. But let nobody think that it was an attack on the Sikh community or their religion. Not at all. Lt. Gen. R. S. Dayal, in charge of the army operations in Punjab, was truly reflecting the sentiments of the entire nation when he said: "We went in not in anger but with sadness. We went in with prayers on our lips and reverence."

It was a relief to know that the great shrine itself – *Harmandir Sahib* – was not damaged in the fighting. To ensure this the security forces had to suffer heavy casualties. The nation is grateful to them for the sacrifice. Symbolising a glorious facet of our history and tradition, the Golden Temple is the pride of India. And it will ever remain so.

The fact that the military operation was conducted under the overall command of a Sikh General and that the officers and other ranks who went into the temple complex belonged to different faiths, including Sikhs, testifies to the secular credentials of the action. Among the other places of worship searched for arms dumps in the army operations were four Hindu temples and a mosque, according to a report. Surely, they would not have been selected for the raid just to put up a show of

even-handedness. In the inflamed atmosphere in Punjab the possibility of clandestine activities being carried on in these places too could not be ruled out. Religious fanaticism has a chain effect.

The government can be faulted for allowing things to reach this tragic climax. But it is just as well that even at this belated stage the salutary principle that no religious place shall be misused for harbouring fugitives from justice or for carrying on a campaign of violence has been firmly upheld. When the Saudi government used armed forces against a group of fundamentalists entrenched in the Grand Mosque of Mecca, the Islamic world did not consider its action as a violation of the holy place or an affront to Islam. To give a different analogy, when the police in Delhi fired upon a mob of Sadhus violently agitating against cow slaughter some years back, nobody took it as an attack on Hinduism. The non-discriminatory character of the principle of maintaining law and order has to be stressed in this context.

There was also the crucial question of dealing with a threat to the integrity of the nation. The dangerous dimensions of the extremist activity in Punjab can be seen from the kind of weapons used against the security forces when they went into the Golden Temple premises.

The efforts to curb violence in Punjab and elsewhere must continue. But simultaneously the process of reconciliation has to be started. The Sikh masses have to be won over by a convincing demonstration of the government's bona fides in removing their grievances. After what has happened in Amritsar and elsewhere, the Akali leaders may find it difficult to come back to the negotiation table for quite some time. They need not be pressed for this. The purpose of healing the wounds can be served better by a unilateral declaration from the government accepting, and initiating steps to implement, those demands of the Akalis which are widely recognised as reasonable.

There is no escape from giving Chandigarh to Punjab. It has to be done sooner or later. Why not do it here and now? (Haryana may be given sufficient funds to build a capital of its own.) Once this is done, a way can be found to settle the territorial and river water issues also on a reasonable basis.

The opposition parties and the press have, by and large, made the right response to the June crisis, keeping the larger national interest in view. Now it is up to the ruling party to play fair. Let there be no attempt to make political capital out of the success of the army in the specific task assigned to it. There is no victory here to crow over. In a sense, all have lost.

Ravindra Nath

(In *The Week*, 17-23 June 1984)

25 years after 'Blue Star'

Memories, memories ?



1984 was the year when India lost its innocence. Army troops stormed the holy of holies, Golden Temple, proud regiments raised the banner of revolt, the Prime Minister was shot dead by her bodyguards and thousands of innocent people were butchered in the national Capital itself. But memories of those days have become grainy today. In Doordarshan archives, black and white footage provides pictures of the chaos: blood on the Golden Temple's marble floors, heavy tanks rolling around Amritsar's narrow lanes—and heaps of dead bodies. 'Operation Blue Star' launched at dawn on 3 June 1984 was a watershed in the history of post-1947 India.

Fast forward and even today, a burning train, a rowdy crowd and street violence in the Punjab makes all of India nervous. Dalit Sikhs angry over a killing in Austria, went on the rampage. The army was called out and India began wondering if Punjab was sliding into violence all over again.

Why does the Punjab erupt every now and then? In 2008, it was the Dera Sacha Sauda crisis. This year, it's the Dera Sach Khand. Is this Punjab's way of dealing with traumas not yet past? Has the collective psyche forgiven and forgotten 'Operation Blue Star'?

"Punjabis have moved on. But 'Operation Blue Star' does exist in the collective memory of people. When they visit the Golden Temple, all memories come back," says Rana Nayar, who belongs to Amritsar and was in the city during the gun battles. He credits the 'Punjabi spirit' for overcoming the 'trauma' of the army operation. "Our history is full of such incidents. The people of Punjab have great resilience."

The state's collective memory is one of violent attacks. Its folklore is a bloody series of events—on Diwali 1736 the Mughal Army attacked the Golden Temple; on Baisakhi 1764, Ahmed Shah Abdali raided it; Amritsar's Jalianwala Bagh massacre was also on a Baisakhi day. But 1984 was different. It was a battle between the Indian Army and Indians. Those who killed thousands of innocent people were caught in the crossfire and died, their bodies disposed off without sentiment and draconian measures applied.

Amritsar resident Surinder Singh was praying at the Temple with his family that day. He lost his wife and son in the firing, was arrested and sent to jail. "I was arrested on 7 June. I never saw my wife and son again," says Surinder, who now works as a volunteer at the Takhat Hazur Sahib.

Punjab has many *Surinders*, still reeling from their personal loss. But political observers insist that the Punjab



has healed 'somewhat'. Harinder Singh Khalsa was *charge d' affairs* of the Indian mission in Norway in 1984 and resigned from the IFS in protest against 'Operation Blue Star'. He now believes that a huge change has taken place under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. "Operation Blue Star is a part of the emotional sensitivities and this wound can't be taken out of that, but as far as alienation of the Sikhs from the country is concerned, it has definitely decreased," says the former diplomat.

Khalsa adds that the "mistrust between Hindus and Sikhs was easily palpable at that time but now people have moved ahead. However, at the same time they have not buried their past, both sides have learnt to live with it".

Those who controversially then supported *Blue Star* agree. Vinay Goel, a Jalandhar-based lawyer, was a student in 1984 and organised a blood donation camp for injured army men. He believes "an element of fragility in peace still remains." But he insists, "at the same time they have also learnt to take care of one another's sentiments."

Goel is one of many who discern a cautiousness in the way Punjabis deal with *Blue Star*. "Even today, people don't talk about it freely and openly. No one can joke about it," says a senior government official. "While it shows that they have moved on, it also means they can't deal with it."

Today, the Punjab has new issues to deal with, not least the conflict between upper caste *Jats* and lower caste *Dalits*. But these, says Rana, are "a social problem". The politics of Punjab's bloody history may be another matter altogether.

Shobhan Saxena, Yudhvair Rana & I P Singh
From TNN



Perspective

From 1984, Moving Forward

1984, the year that George Orwell wrote about so sagely and so movingly. It may have become the watershed that changed the relationship which Sikhs have identified with the political entity that is India, perhaps forever. Now, 25 years later, how do Sikhs – particularly those in the diaspora – come to terms with it? It is a topic that will not go away, nor should it; it truly deserves debate and discussion. India is arguably the largest democracy in the world. In India, governments have come and gone. In Punjab too, governments have come and gone, and Sikhs have led some of them. How, then, do we come to terms with the quarter century of comatose?

What do we expect from the world community, and particularly from India, now that Punjab appears to be at peace? Remember, though, that peace is a state of mind. I don't know that Punjab has attained it, but an uneasy truce now persists there while hostilities have ceased.

Much has changed in India and the world since 1984. India now has a government headed by a Sikh, Manmohan Singh, an internationally acclaimed economist respected for his integrity and scholarship; the former president, Abdul Kalam, is a first-rate nuclear scientist, the father of the Indian nuclear programme and a Muslim, the ruling political party is headed by Sonia Gandhi, who was raised Roman Catholic. A Sikh General, JJ Singh, headed India's army, the third largest in the world. These are all remarkable 'firsts' in modern India. For the first time in its young history, the governing structure of India is multi religious, as it ought to be in a secular democratic nation.

Yes, much has changed in India and the world, but just as much remains tied to an unhealthy past. I will not dwell on any detail on the events of 1984 and the continuing saga of injustice. It has been almost 25 years since the government-inspired carnage of

Sikhs erupted, not just in the capital city of New Delhi, but also simultaneously in several cities across India. Within hours of the assassination of Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi, armed mobs in trucks, carrying lists of Sikh-owned houses and businesses, appeared in cities of India, including New Delhi. What followed was the systematic carnage of thousands of Sikh men, women and children. The army was not deployed to maintain order. The police stood by watching, even encouraging the mayhem. Credible witnesses labelled it 'attempted genocide by a government of its own people'.

Why the charge stuck is not surprising if you know the socioeconomic realities of India in 1984 and since. Arms – guns and all kinds of ammunition – remain strictly controlled. Licenses to carry weapons are neither freely available nor easily accessible because they are so expensive and require the filing of a zillion papers with a multitude of bureaucrats. Kerosene that was used to burn houses, businesses and victims is rationed; it is not freely available in the marketplace. Trucks are hard to come by. Lists of property owners cannot be downloaded in an instant; such a service does not exist in India. Then how is it that a poor country, not previously known for its organisational efficiency, could muster hordes of people within hours of Indira Gandhi's death and start them on a rampage? This speaks of awesome efficiency that is still not visible in much of Indian society.

Three days later, the carnage petered out as suddenly as it had begun, as if the job had been completed to the extent that it was desired and directed. Canny observers suspected the hand of the then government in the killing of Sikhs across India. After much stonewalling, the Indian government admitted that in Delhi alone about 2,800 Sikhs were killed in the 72-hour period, but labelled the killings as 'random acts of violence', spurred by the death of Indira Gandhi at the hands of her two Sikh bodyguards. Other sources put the number at over 4,000.

Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother Indira as the prime minister, continued to deny that any human rights violations occurred in India, while reputable organisations like Amnesty International documented horrendous violations in Punjab and other parts of the country. Six months later, under national and international pressure, Rajiv Gandhi signed a memorandum of understanding with Sikhs that agreed to an inquiry into the killings of 1984. Justice might happen, we thought.

One inquiry commission followed another only to leave the nation dumbfounded. There were the Thakar Commission, Mishra Commission, Jain Commission, Bannerjee Commission, Nanavati Commission and perhaps others that I do not remember. Twenty years saw government-appointed inquiry commissions. Each started hopefully, only to end up with its report being buried. None of the reports was released to the public until now. None identified any major or minor characters that might have committed any crimes against Sikhs. It is as if thousands of people mysteriously self-destructed in three days. In 2001, five men were indicted – for killing over three thousand people within three days in the capital city of the country! This bespeaks unparalleled levels of incompetence and of dishonesty by the judiciary and the government or, alternatively, of an efficient killing machine, the likes of which have rarely been seen in this world before this. This places India in the dubious company of the Nazis who killed over six million in a much larger and systematic attempt to totally exterminate the Jews during the Second World War, and of the later example of killings in Rwanda that claimed over a million.

In the meantime, evidence has been mounting against the continuing denial of justice and against some of the prominent leaders of the pogrom against the Sikhs. The majority of Sikhs in the diaspora remain deeply touched by what were clearly the genocidal policies of a government against its own people. A comprehensive report, *'Reduced to Ashes'*, was published two years ago by a team that a non-Sikh human-rights activist, Ram Narayan Kumar, headed. One of his colleagues on the report, Jaskaran Kaur Grewal, a Harvard-trained lawyer, released an update *'Twenty Years of Impunity'*. Also in 2004, a *S-based* young college student Gunisha Kaur, published *'Lost in History: 1984 Reconstructed'*, a brief but sensitive portrayal of the events.

The last commission, led by Justice Nanavati, was fortunate to come into being as times were changing. The report was ready but to a government headed by the political party that masterminded the killings, its release was awkward. I have to commend the prime minister, Manmohan Singh, for mustering the courage to release it.

The problem was that the Nanavati report found credible evidence of criminality against two and perhaps three stalwarts of the ruling party – Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and Dharam Das Shastri. In fact,

Jagdish Tytler was a minister in the Congress-led government, in charge of building bridges with non-resident Indians. The irony is that survivors of 1984 never wavered in their affidavits and evidence exists that these men were the ringleaders in directing the carnage. In the past, all evidence against them was ignored. I suppose this was a war of attrition, with the hope on the part of the Indian government that soon enough evidence would become lost or tainted and the perpetrators would be freed.

In the troubled days of the 1980s, the security forces of the Indian government killed thousands of Sikhs in Punjab, many in fake encounters, all without trials and in the name of 'national security'. I recall that, in a debate in New York, the Indian government spokesman chided us for raising this issue. He boldly asserted, "You Sikhs in the diaspora do not know the facts in Punjab. We have killed not one innocent Sikh. Everyone shot by the police was a terrorist." When I recovered from hearing such an outrageous statement, all I could do was compliment him on the efficiency and training of the Punjab police who could shoot a Sikh terrorist without the need to question him or give him his day in court. And I wondered aloud why the Delhi police could not find any killers of Sikhs in so many years. "Don't the police forces of Delhi and Punjab operate by the same laws and by the same training manuals?" I asked. He walked out of the panel.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's equivalent of the FBI, finally admitted staged encounters as well as illegal, undocumented and mass cremations of hundreds of Sikhs, but corrective actions have yet to be initiated. Even though directed by the Supreme Court of India to do so, the CBI failed to investigate any killings. The insurgency in Punjab ended over a decade ago, but as yet no attempt has been made at a complete accounting of the dead and maimed. Human-rights activists, like Jaswant Singh Khalsa, who protested too loudly or investigated too vigorously, disappeared; their tortured bodies surfaced just as mysteriously, sans explanation.

To me, the Nanavati report is something like the canary that coal miners carry down into the mine shafts with them. The canaries warn them of unsafe air; the report speaks of the health of the Indian nation and the safety of its citizens. This canary has sung its song. Is there a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel? Actions must follow words. And that is the onus on the government.

In the 1990s, Yugoslavia and South Africa, both emerging from a period of horrendous violations of the civil rights of their citizens, chose to confront their past by appointing "truth and reconciliation commissions". Without taking such actions, a government risks losing its credibility internally with its own citizens, and externally with the international community. Also, due to neglect, the historical record is lost or tainted. We need a serious attempt to capture and preserve history by giving the victims a voice, and to shift the focus of human rights in India from rhetoric to the healing power of truth and reconstruction.

I know that, over the past two decades, Sikhs in the diaspora have established six chairs of Sikh studies at various universities in North America. Their primary mandate is to explore Sikh existence in all its aspects: scriptural, religious, historical and even contemporary. Yet, these programmes have, for a variety of weak and insufficient reasons, continued to neglect the most cataclysmic historical event of the 20th century from the Sikh point of view; I have discussed this aspect elsewhere. The early Sikh tradition speaks of monumental courage against overwhelming odds. I would ask our Sikh scholars to take courage from that early history and from Sikh tradition. Our oral history needs to be preserved, as the Jews have done with theirs.

The events I talk about today are painful, but they are all the more significant because India is the largest democracy on earth and, along with Israel, perhaps the only other functioning one in their part of the world. India's and neighbouring Pakistan's nuclear capabilities make this an area ready to explode. India's human-rights record is horrendous and has been documented in numerous reports by Amnesty International and other agencies. Keep in mind the victimisation not only of Sikhs, but also of other minorities – Christians and Muslims—as well as low-caste Hindus. Remember the killings of thousands of Muslims in Gujarat just three years ago with the active collusion of the government, and with little hope of justice? There is more than ample reason for the world to pay attention to the fissiparous internal structure of India.

Why is it then that India appears to be protected by the hand of God? Despite our many efforts, we have not been able to draw much critical international attention to India and how it treats its own citizens.

Some nations, like some people, appear to have all the luck. They can do the most outrageous things, totally muck up everything and everyone around them and yet come out smelling like a rose; it is as if angels hover over them. Others barely think an evil thought and all opprobrium falls upon them. Retribution is unfailingly sure and swift.

Some individuals, too, have this non-stick coating. Remember Ronald Reagan, the ultimate Teflon-coated president? No smear stuck to him, nothing tarnished his nobility – not even his misadventures all over the world. His predecessor, Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, had more than his share of good character, intentions and intelligence, yet his was a failed presidency. Anything he did, however well intentioned, came to haunt him and diminish him.

Teflon coating is not a trait limited to products of the US political machine. In India, despite character lapses and policy failures, MK Gandhi had so much of this protection that he became, and continues to be, revered as, Mahatma. Similarly, Jawaharlal Nehru – a vain politician with unrealistic policy ideas – is remembered as the architect of modern India. His charisma was such that he was able to promote a family dynasty of political heirs who progressively decimated India's democratic institutions.

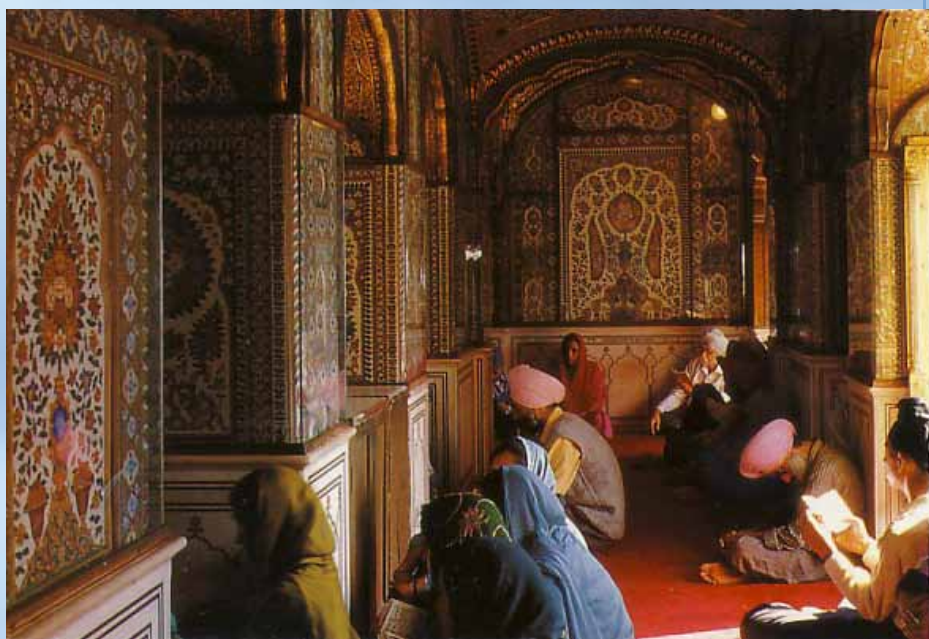
Some of my friends think that India, as a nation, must also have this Teflon coating, or shall we call it the protective hand of God? India's record on human rights is atrocious. The Indian government and bureaucracy have acquired a reputation for corruption that is second to none. India has been inconsistent, belligerent and hostile towards the neighbours.

India's long standing repression of minorities, particularly in the Punjab and Assam, would do Pol Pot of Cambodia proud, although admittedly, the numbers were much larger in Cambodia. Moreover, for many years the nominally secular India's multi-religious fabric was

ripped apart by the government that promoted and enshrined Hindu values and ethos (*Hindutva*) as official state policy. For instance, over 22 million Sikhs, adherents of a 500-year-old religion, are not even recognised as a separate religion but are banded under the Hindu laws for legal purposes in the Indian Constitution.

Much of what I say has been documented by Amnesty International, many citizen's commissions, even in Indian governmental reports, incomplete and rarely honest as they are. I should add here that Amnesty International and similar organisations are not allowed to conduct free inquiry.

Why is it that, when India acquires nuclear power or uses its formidable army to suppress its minorities or threaten its neighbours, no world organisation or nation takes much notice?



There has never been much call for economic or other sanctions against India. Why is it that, when India engages in unfair trade practices, the world community and particularly the United States do not hold it accountable? Why are India's egregious violations of human rights conveniently swept aside? I remind you of the nuclear treaty that the United States and India just signed. How many nations like Iran and North Korea would be salivating for such a deal?

Sure, there has been some notice. Many United States senators and congress people approved nonbinding resolutions and letters that are highly critical of India's human-rights record or its nuclear policy. But the United States government has made no concerted effort to force India to change direction and become more human and humane. Nor has any significant criticism of India come from any of the other major powers or the United States.

In world affairs, India often shows a pesky independence. What gives India its Teflon coating ? It seems that India's good fortune may rest on a different set of global realities.

In Asia, several nations have economies that are far more vibrant than those of India or China. I am pointing to Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia. But they are infinitesimally small when compared with the giants of Asia – China and India. China is larger, more populous and militarily stronger than India. In the post-Soviet world, if any nation has the potential to rival the United States, it is China. It is also highly competitive and flexing its growing muscle, whether in the global economic marketplace or in space exploration. Its neighbours – from Korea to Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and even India – understand this. To the United States, China has always been and is likely to always remain a competitor, even militarily.

In Asia, only one nation has the potential to become a challenger to China – India has the human resources, the infrastructure and a motivated middle class, but aspiring to become a power rivalling China is a different matter. India cannot achieve this without help. India understands this and, in the heyday of the Soviets, nurtured the Soviets' friendship to enhance its own global ambitions. But now, as the sole superpower, the United States is the only nation that can play India's protective 'nanny'.

It is not that the United States is overly fond of India's moralising arrogance on the world stage or of its growing power, but it is a matter rooted in the bitter reality of geopolitics – à la Henry Kissinger. The United States needs to nurture a rival to China that is both economically formidable and militarily strong. As long as the Indian economic engine keeps chugging along, its sins will be forgiven. The United States never again wants a bipolar world, where China becomes the only major superpower in Asia that can challenge US hegemony in the world, as the Soviets used to do. A strong, vibrant India can keep China in its place. Such a goal is also in India's own interest.

Pakistan does not have the infrastructure, the population or the resources to fill India's shoes. It is too small and fragile. Even more importantly, it is an Islamic state with nuclear technology, which it has tried to share with its Islamic neighbours. Can you imagine our troubles if the Muslim nations of the world came together in the name of religion ? It would change the realities of the Middle East and of global

politics in a trice. How secure would our oil supplies or our lifestyle be then ?

The cause of the United States in the world is not necessarily democracy, justice and human rights, notwithstanding George W Bush's claims to the contrary. Geopolitical realities and the balance of power are what drive us. Few US allies, including Pakistan, ever had a democratic notion in their heads. In contrast to many developing nations, India shines like a star, even though it acts at times more like a glorified banana republic than a government of the people.

So, to my Sikh friends, and other minorities in India, who are frustrated daily by India's divisive and discriminatory policies and who constantly wonder how the United States can close its eyes to India's sins against humanity, I would say – welcome to the reality of the world at this time!

Martin Niemoller, a German Lutheran pastor who was incarcerated by the Nazis during the Second World War, said: "In Germany, first they came for the Communists and I did not speak up, for I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak up because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the homosexuals and I did not speak up because I was not a homosexual. Then they came for the Catholics and I did not speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came up for me, but by then there was no one left to speak up."

We are talking of matters that happened over two decades ago. Isn't it time to move on and not become prisoners of our past? To move forward we must have the past behind us. Confession and atonement must precede redemption. The first step of confession was taken when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh offered the nation's regret and apology in the Indian parliament; atonement and justice still wait. We must continue to collaborate with museums to establish appropriate exhibits, and with universities to reserve the historical record as well as relics of oral history, recordings, visual artefacts, correspondence, reports and personal recollections. We must ensure that the material is available to researchers of any beng – even those who continue to deny that such atrocities even occurred.

Years from now, historians will reconstruct history from what we said and did today.

Dr IJ Singh
(In New York)



Priceless losses : the 'missing' artifacts

Priceless Sikh manuscripts and archives taken from Harmandir Sahib by the Army in June 1984 have again become the bone of contention between the Defence Ministry and the SGPC. Defence Minister, AK Anthony, recently denied in Parliament that the Army possessed any manuscripts or articles taken away from Harmandir Sahib during 'Operation Blue Star' in 1984. Countering the claim, SGPC President Sardar Avtar Singh Makkar characterised the statement as 'a lie' and demanded resignation of the Defence Minister.

Following questions emerge out of this controversy:

- * Did the Army in 1984 take away the archives and artifacts ?
- * Did it return any or all of these documents and articles to SGPC ?
- * If SGPC did not receive these documents and articles, who has their custody?

As these questions are vital for Sikhs (so to preserve their history) well as the Ministry of Defence (to keep their credibility) it is pertinent to know the facts.

In an article '6 June 1984 – Events Observed in Person', written by Brig. Onkar Singh Goraya (Rtd.) which appeared in 'Sewa Lehar', May 2008, was recorded.

"I spoke to Sardar Bhan Singh, Secretary and Sardar Abhilashi Singh, Deputy Secretary, SGPC in June 1984. They said, "It is very important to save the Sikh Archives and Treasure (*Toshakhana*). We wonder if something remained after such a heavy shelling."

I have seen the *Toshakhana* some months ago, but did not know who looks after the treasure and how. They explained to me thus: "There are four locks on the front door. Keys of these locks are with four different persons." Situation was such that it was not possible to find the persons having those keys. I took Sardar Bhan Singh and Sardar Abhilashi Singh in my jeep and came to *Darbar Sahib*. *Toshakhana* is situated above the Main Gate (*Darshani Diodhee*). To reach it, one has to climb up through narrow steps. Upstairs we saw that the outer door had fallen on the ground. After firing by tanks, the outer room was burnt. In the rear wall there were three shutters which were locked, with two locks each. The shutters had the marks of bullets and bayonets used by the Army soldiers, but none of the shutters was broken. To ensure that no person was hidden behind we searched around. As we looked through the window glasses we saw four doors which had copper plates with gold plating. It was told that these doors were presented by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for Harmandir Sahib but had not been installed owing to some reason. These were new affected by fire. There was a jewel-studded *chandni* presented by Nizam of Hyderabad to *Harmandir Sahib*. This was completely burnt. The other items of *Toshakhana* included many gold, silver, jewels and diamonds studded articles which were behind the shutters. We had seen through chinks that the articles appeared safe, all though the glass cases were broken. It was not right to open these at this time as we did not have the keys. My first job was to take care of *Toshakhana*. I wanted to place guards for security at the earliest so that looting did not start. Keeping the situation in mind I preferred Sikh guards for this.... there was only one Sikh unit in Amritsar, the 2nd Sikh Light Infantry. Col D D Singh was the Commanding Officer of this battalion. I rang him and asked him to send a guard of one JCO and ten *jawans*.

The troops' arrival took 20-25 minutes. Meanwhile, I looked towards *Akal Takht* through a window. Top floor had collapsed and was burning. A militant came out of the cave below the *Akal Takht*, dragging himself on his hands. It appeared that both his legs were broken. A commando dressed in black aimed his sten gun on him. He was saying something to him, which

could not be heard because of the distance. The fighter pointed towards his chest. The commando fired a burst which killed him instantly. This scene is still vivid in my eyes.

On arrival of the guard, I ordered the JCO, a *Naib Subedar* to place a sentry, one each at the Main Gate (*Darshani Diodhee*) where the stairs began, and another at the burnt room. Both were to have weapons and ammunition. No one, neither any army personnel nor a civilian was to be allowed to enter. If any one tried he would be fired at. I explained to the *Naib Subedar* that this was a very precious treasure of the Sikhs. If it was looted it would bring very bad name to the Army. I feel proud that these *jawans* neither touched anything themselves nor allowed anyone to come near.

On return to 15 Div HQs I gave the entire report to the GOC. He appreciated my work. But I was still not satisfied. I wanted the *Toshakhana* to be opened and checked, so that representatives of SGPC could be satisfied that nothing of the *Toshakhana* was damaged. After taking permission from Gen. Jamwal, I appointed a Board of Officers under presidentship of a Colonel, with two officer members from Punjab Government, one officer member from District Administration and two members of the SGPC, Sardar Bhan Singh and Sardar Abhilashi Singh. Within the next two or three days they opened and checked everything and found all to be correct. After doing the paper formality, it was locked and stamped. This way the Army was saved from serious blame. After some weeks it was handed over to Darbar Sahib Administration in the same condition."

On further research, this writer was also informed that all the documents of Sikh Reference Library were also returned with due receipts that had been obtained by Army and CBI. These were also duly signed by representatives of SGPC.

Having found the answer to missing relics, documents and articles, the question now remains as to where have these articles gone? One source even reported that some SGPC officials disposed of these to archive collectors dealers. How far it is correct needs to be investigated.

An inquiry committee is certainly needed which must include independent sources to ascertain facts. These facts are vitally important, to be investigated without delay and without any interference from the SGPC, the Army or CBI.

Dr Dalvinder Singh Grewal

25 year after Blue Star

"Past is passe, development is in"

In Rhode, the native village of radical Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the words 'let by-gones be by-gones' comes as a precursor to any conversation even remotely related to politics.

While the frequent use of the idiom could be attributed to change in priorities of a development hungry village, one is left a tad confused seeing graffiti supporting the Naxalite movement on a wall behind a roadside stall selling posters, stickers and literature propagating Bhindranwale's extreme Right ideology.

Amarjeet Kaur, an elderly resident, clears the haze a bit, "Historically, the village has swung from the extreme Left in the sixties and seventies to the extreme Right in the next two decades. Now, all parties come here asking for votes and the villagers are also divided along party lines. They vote for the Congress as well as the Akalis," she explains. And the minute you mention Bhindranwale, she dismisses the topic, "I have been married in this village for nearly 50 years now and has seen him here only once when he was alive. Why talk about him now?"

Sukhjot Singh one among the crowd that has gathered by him, adds, "The issue of Khalistan and Bhindranwale are long dead. For us, development is the only issue."

"We have suffered enough for being Bhindranwale's village. The police never let us in peace during those days (of militancy). They would *gherao* the entire village and line up the villagers. They were horrific times," reminisces an old man as he walks away. Others take turns recounting stories of "those times".

But what about the propaganda material on Operation Blue Star? "On the ground, the situation is different. If this village has had one Bhindranwale,



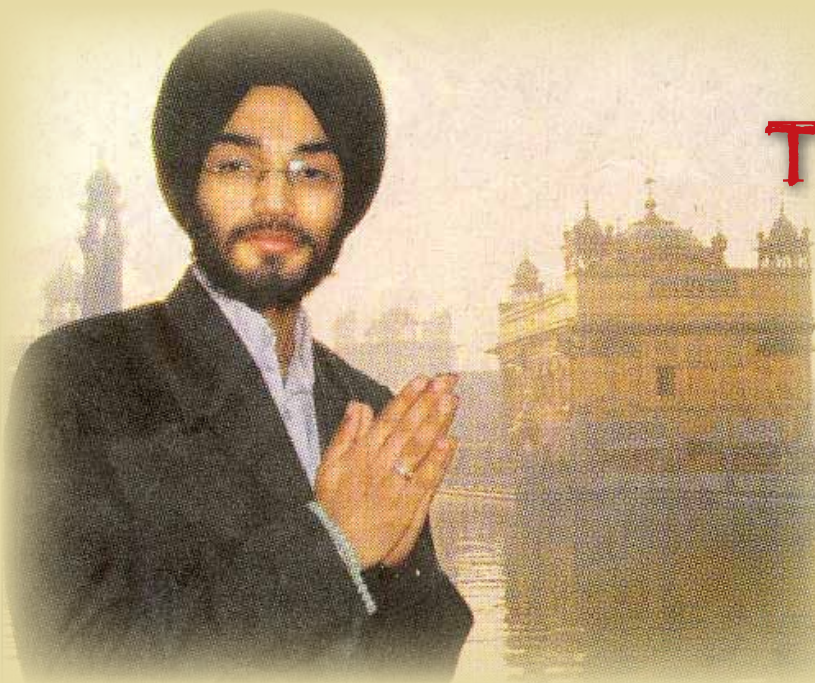
then it was under the effect of a Marxist-Leninist wave too," insists Harjit Singh, another resident, as the others nod vigorously.

However, for the per record of the *panchayats* that form the village four are at present led by Akalis and the fifth by a professed follower of Bhindranwale, someone points out.

The group is visibly disinterested by now. As one moves on, hoping to meet some residents who would see the irony and help one gain some perspective, a young resident comes for the rescue, "We vote for whoever promises development, be it the Akalis or the Congress."

Another irritated 20-something lists out the new priorities, "The water here is unfit for drinking, health services are poor, the veterinary hospital does not even have a doctor. We want these problems sorted out first."

Then, almost instantly, he points towards nowhere in particular and wants us to know, "Bhindranwale's family lives on the outskirts of the village, on the periphery." Perhaps so does his ideology.



The Shooting Star

Ishmeet Singh : An Incomplete Life

It is hard to believe that the “Voice of India” star, Ishmeet Singh, is no more. Like a shooting star, he came and went...in the blink of an eye!

As I heard the shocking news, floodgates of recent memories opened and tears flowed unabashedly. In May 2008, there was a vibrant buzz at the IIGS’s 68th International Sikh Youth Camp, held in Khandala, near Pune (India).

Ishmeet was coming to camp!

During the evening *divan* (service), I found myself sitting next to a young 19-year-old, with a look of cheerful innocence on his face. I can vividly recall how his jaw dropped when I asked him if he sang *ghazals*, Bollywood songs or whether he was a classical singer. Bewildered, he looked at me as if to say, “Which planet are you from?”

I kicked myself for showing such ignorance when I saw him smothered by campers who were simply ecstatic to have him in their midst. I explained to him that I did not watch Indian TV at all and his smile told me that I was forgiven.

Over the next few days, as I got to know Ishmeet, I saw what a special young man he was. Not because he had just won the Star TV contest and become the “Voice of India”, or because he felt that the award was a special gift from Guru Nanak, on whose *prakash utsav* (birth anniversary) day he received the award. Also, not because right after he won the award, he promised that his first album would comprise of *shabads* or because he took his role as an icon for Sikh youth seriously.

Ishmeet to me was really special simply because his success had not gone to his head and at heart, he remained the sweet, simple boy from Ludhiana with the love of *Sikhi* swelling in his

heart. He saw himself as blazing a trail for his young Sikh brothers and sisters, who he hoped would follow their dreams, achieving great successes while proudly displaying the *Khalsa* form and spirit. He felt that he had been given a great responsibility – to inspire and coax the best out of Sikh youth.

Ishmeet had a freshness about him. He became a part of the camp routine, performing melodious *kirtan* in his velvet smooth voice during the morning and evening *divans*. He sang from the heart; sat through the lectures and avidly participated in discussions.

During an afternoon session, when the rest of the younger lot were discussing about what they would be looking for in a mate and answers like “someone who respects my parents” or “someone who is well educated and independent” were unconvincingly bandied around, Ishmeet’s “I am looking for a beautiful *sardarni*,” brought peals of laughter and approving pats on his shoulder.

Had he found his beautiful *sardarni*? He did not want to shatter the mystique. But something told me that there was a young *Sikhni* out there who had already stolen his heart.

Every evening after *langar*, the courtyard of the campground rang out with the beat of Punjabi songs and popular Bollywood numbers. The campers sang and swayed with him as he broke into familiar rhythms.

Ishmeet never hogged the show but passed the mike around, encouraging everyone to take his or her turn to sing. The joy of singing with a celebrity shone on the young faces of the campers. I am sure there were some who dreamed of following in his footsteps. Suddenly it seemed that there was no glass ceiling – even in the bright and glittery world of music and show-biz.

A fellow camper or an acquaintance would constantly chase him for a photograph or an autograph.

Girls ran in circles around him and young boys clambered all over him, tugging, hugging, touching and hoping that a speck of his charisma would rub off on them.

Never even for a moment did Ishmeet show an iota of annoyance. When someone commented on his patience, he said that it was only because of those who loved him that he had tasted fame and glory. Otherwise, he would be like so many potential talents out there – unrecognised and forgotten on the wayside.

“Was everything hunky dory on his road to fame?” I asked him in a private conversation. Ishmeet already had lucrative playback singing assignments, was brand ambassador for products and had bagged offers to anchor TV shows and star in TV serials; life was looking good.

A cloud passed over his sweet countenance, when he heard my question. “It is very lonely at the top *didi*,” he said to me.

“Lonely?” I queried, “With thousands of fans and adoring masses?”

“Yes lonely”, he repeated.

“Lonely because those who are close to you become jealous of your success. You become a stranger to your friends because you do not inhabit their world anymore. They shut you out and move on because they view you as a celebrity and no more a part of their everyday lives”. He said that his days were spent in rigorous recordings and evenings found him exhausted. As he lay in bed, missing the warmth of hearth and home and musing on what his friends in the neighbourhood were doing, he was too tired to call them.

And when he did, there were uneasy spells of silence rather than the chatter of real conversations between buddies. If he talked to them about his world, they would think he was showing off, he observed and they did not share their stories because he was in a “different league” now. Slowly, the connection broke and awkwardness crept in.

Ishmeet believed that the joy of knowing that his people rallied behind him kept him going. If his Sikh community had showered him with affection, Ishmeet too had touched everyone with his special brand of warmth. His ready smile was like a beam of sunshine, stirring everyone around him.



I met him again at another camp held in Dehra Dun and we chatted about his plans for the future. He was going to the *Darbar-e-Khalsa* in Los Angeles in the end of 2008 and later on a tour of the USA.

Plans and dreams that were snapped suddenly! Plans that were washed away by the tears of the community! His sudden and tragic death by drowning has left millions of his fans with a deep sense of loss.

Our children had finally discovered a *Sardar* heartthrob, someone who was handsome and charming and in show-biz; someone who was giving the turban a positive image, a role model for the youth, an inspiration for all. And now...

Haunted by a staggering number of unanswered “whys”, we will replay his music over and over again to fill the gaping hole of our bereavement.

The other evening, when I sought solace for the peace of his departed soul in *Baba Ji's* room, the *vaak* on page 751 of *Guru Granth Sahib* spoke of a life touched by grace; of a life well lived:

Precious is human life; only the pious are granted it.

And, through Grace, body and mind are both comforted by His Love.

Having traded in Truth, thou depart fully accomplished;

Surrendering to His Will, received art thou with honour in His Court.

Jessi Kaur

The world continues to undergo an existential anguish while dealing with the mystery of life, its very meaning, purpose and goal. Speculation about the nature of Reality and methods of propitiation in order to achieve inner peace, tranquillity and freedom from suffering are endless. The human mind is constantly in a flux, whether under stress or at peace. Beliefs founded on faith have been prevalent in all cultures since ancient times, but every new era brings fresh challenges and the mind is forced to reckon with new existential problems. All wars begin and end in the mind. Historically speaking, there was no period of time when the world was not troubled due to interfaith or intrafaith conflicts, values and disputes.

Teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib bring us face to face with all new dispensations which cause disharmony. Disharmony is contingent upon the beliefs people deem important and the dynamics that feed them. The time is right for the dissemination of the Guru's teachings widely, in order to bring peace and harmony in the world.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib teaches about One Ultimate Reality within our own self, which is all pervading in the entire cosmos. This revelation transcends all previous revelations with the objective of reconciliation between differences and disputes, bringing humanity close to the Truth. The Creator of the universe is beyond all ethnic, social, national or religious divisions, but all creation is subject to His order. It is the duty and responsibility of every man to know his Creator, abide by His Will and lead life as per divine Laws ingrained in his conscience.

Every country has its own Prophets. All faiths based on religion are valid but as children need age related knowledge to keep them interested and stimulated, similarly, adults thrive on fresh knowledge and perspectives. A message received in the old and middle ages may not work in the 21st century. With the growth of human intelligence and knowledge of the cosmos, all information requires changes and modifications to 'keep

up with the times'. All previous messages contain the truth but they may not be able to fulfill the needs of the period through which we are passing at present.

Every religion believes in its own superiority and also in its exclusive right to impose its version of truth upon others. Fundamentalists abound in every religion; there is no dearth of self-serving corrupt elites in every society, who cynically advance their interests and steal resources from common people. All revelations have to be interpreted with reason and logic. Blind faith in orthodoxy is not justified. Being esoteric in nature, the religious ones can easily be exploited by politicians, clerics and despotic regimes.

Shabad as Guru



Experiencing the Light

Almost all major world religions believe that the universe welled up from the sound of one word. This is held true by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and all their prayers are invoked with this word. *Logos* (word), a term used in Greek Philosophy, describes divine reason and will imply in the order of the universe. It was adopted in later Judaism and used by Christian writers to define the role of Jesus Christ as the "Word of God", the active will of God and an

embodied revelation of it to mankind. According to the Holy Koran, God created the world by using the word "Kun" (be).

The number of languages spoken on our planet is estimated to be more than 4,000 but in the entire universe, there must be an infinity of languages. During the last two decades, by participating in various Interfaith dialogues and taking part in all the three Parliaments of World Religions, I have come to realise that no faith is willing to accept any deficiency in their beliefs. Primarily this is due to the conditioning of people's minds from childhood towards their faith and secondly due to the political power accrued from it. They claim that their faith is built on the "Word of God" as revealed by their prophet or messenger of God. They are unable to realise that faiths were based on the need of the time which was appropriate for the conditions prevailing then. As civilisations have moved

from their original inhabitants to new environments, they need a new orientation of their beliefs which can help them to live in peace and amity.

Some people are ready to give up their faith for money. Abuse of religion to dominate and gain more political power is rampant. It is not easy to comprehend God, the Father of all creation, One, Eternal, Incomprehensible, Formless, without physical features, who is Transcendent and immanent, Indwelling in every heart, manifesting in the whole Cosmos. Man is capable of understanding only through his mind and the five sense organs but God is beyond these two faculties.

As per the teachings of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, God exists in His Primal Void but whenever He wants to manifest, He does so as a brilliant conscious Light, known as *Noor*, *Jyoti* or *Parkash*. This Light permeates in all directions and forms the creative power of all Creation. All these three states are known as "*Shunya*", "*Nirankar*" and "*Ekankar*".

God creates five different elements of nature by the word "*Onkar*". The *Jyoti* (light) of God and the sound of the word *Onkar* are the two ground substances of God known as "*Veda*" (light) and "*Nada*" (word), which pervade and vibrate in the creation. Our mind can only comprehend the physical or material component which is visible to the eyes and is comprehensible by the Intellect. The matter can be converted to energy and energy back to matter. God is the Creator and Destroyer of the Universe as per His Will.

The *Jyoti* or light of God is totally invisible to man because it is eclipsed by the "*Haumain*", "*I am ness*" or Egoism of man. It is only by the Guru's Enlightenment, that the darkness of the mind can be lifted. God's light shines in all our hearts and is the indwelling spirit of all Creation. Nothing is hidden from God. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent in Creation. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva represent three *Gunas* (powers) of the Lord as Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution. God is unattached but gazes at His Creation with delight. He wishes the Creation to live in peace and amity but rare are those who know this mystery. Our minds are obsessed with the illusory *Maya* (play) of the world and our Egos with our selfhood. Ignorance of the Lord and intricacies of existence, along with the meaning and goal of life elude us.

"*Nada*" is the divine sound of the Lord, which remains vibrating and produces various words of different languages. This is how we express our feelings. All Scriptures are composed of words but couched in enigmatic, allegoric or metaphoric language. The scripture

of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is the most comprehensive and contains mystical knowledge of the Creator, nature of existence and life's meaning and goals. All knowledge of "*Veda*" and "*Nada*" are contained in it, which can dispel all ignorance and reveal the path of realising God.

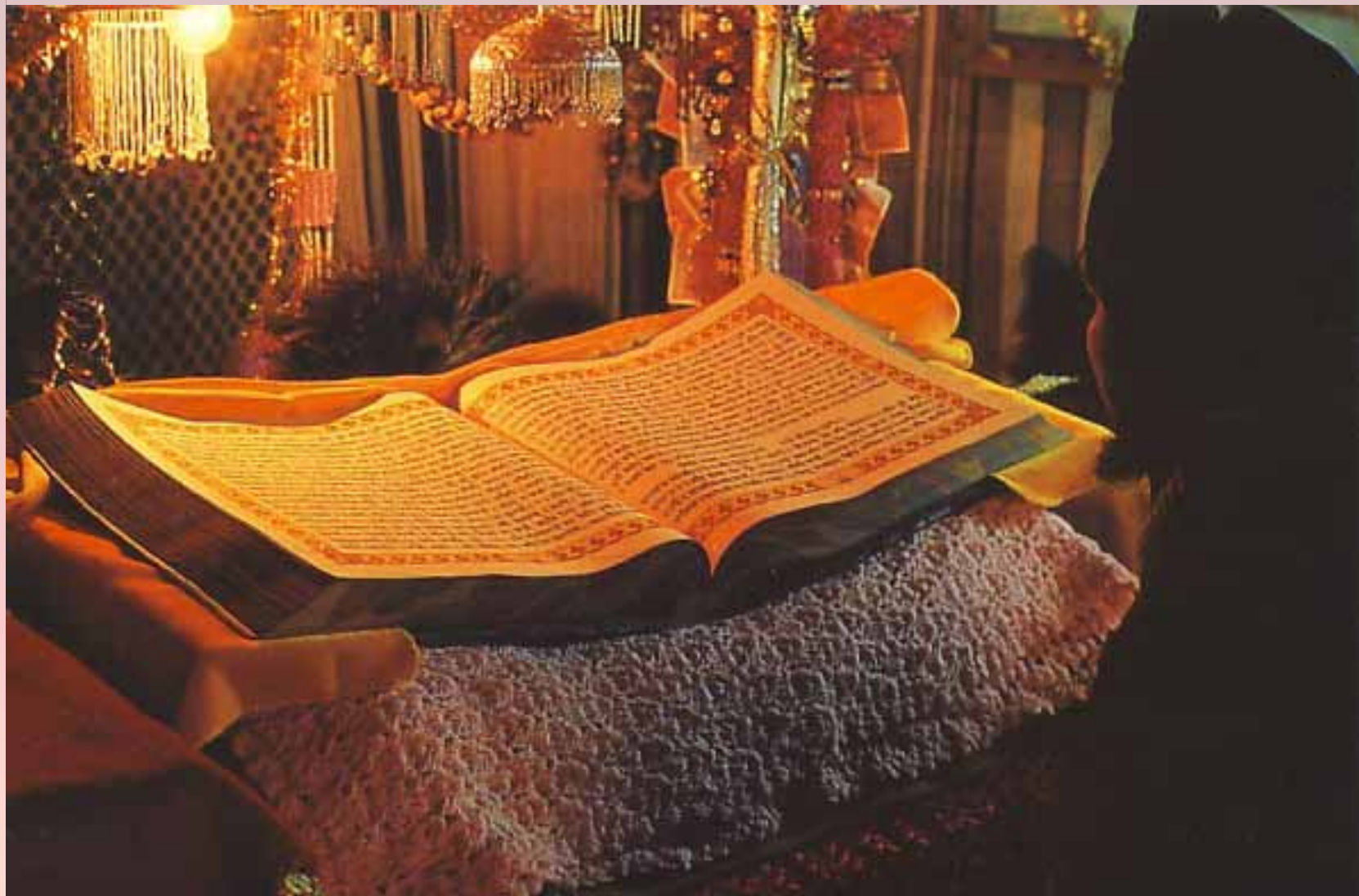
This brings me to the subject of "*Naam*", which is the most fundamental and comprehensive system of meditation and universal appeal. It is based on shared experiences of saints from many cultures. By this process, a totally ignorant and blind person can become fully Enlightened, in complete harmony with oneself, with others and with God.

The basic constituents of the Conscious Light of God and celestial music are enshrined in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and drinking the Nectar of inner bliss occurs when the inner soul unites with the all pervading spirit of the Lord while singing the glory of God in the company of true saints in holy congregations.

The constant repetition of *mantra* has been used to concentrate the mind on an object of meditation in Hinduism and Buddhism. Many such *mantras* have been used in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and all of them are based on some attribute of Reality. God in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* has been defined either with the numeral One or with *Sat* (truth). This numeral is being wrongly interpreted as an adjective of *Onkar*. It is used in the whole text, indicative of the Unity of the Creator and as a noun. Unmanifested God is nameless and formless and cannot be defined by any definition, being beyond any description.

Some Western theologians have defined God as "Unmoved Mover" or "Logical Uncaused Cause". There are many other definitions suggested. In *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* the mantra "*Waheguru*" has been used, which is a unique term meaning "Lord of Wonderment" which creates a feeling of wonder, ecstasy, limitlessness and a vista of imagination of One manifesting in countless forms. This syllable is capable of illuminating the mind and can be accepted universally fostering unity and understanding of the Prime Being.

The term "*Khalsa*" was used by Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji, when a new *Panth* (way) was created as per the dictates of the Lord. This word is very significant after the term *Waheguru*. The word "*Khalsa*" has been defined as Personal Property of the king, lover of God or Purest of the Pure. The creation of *Khalsa* took two centuries of great trials and tests. This is our sacred heritage.



The true *Khalsa* is one who has surrendered his body, mind and soul to the Guru. He has transformed himself from a *manmukh* state to become *Gurmukh* and shed off all vices by the practice of *Naam* and merged his soul with the Lord, by singing the glory of the Lord, in the holy company of the saints.

A *Manmukh* is a person who is boastful of his position, status, belonging to a high caste or as a great Poet, *Pandit*, *Yogi*, *Sanyasi* or *Gyani*. He is dual minded and full of doubts, misgivings and having all the vices of lust, anger, deceit, greed, attachments and jealousy. Such a man has no true knowledge of his Creator or the true purpose of his life and discovers it only by coming in contact with a true saint of God or becoming a member of the congregation of the perfect Guru. It is only after a *manmukh* becomes a true *gurmukh* that he can call himself *Khalsa*. It is only from a true Guru that one can learn the process of contemplation and meditation when he partakes of the true Love of God

with celestial music resonating in his heart by listening to the holy hymns while uttering the True Name of God.

True religiousness is based on controlling the mind. Without controlling the mind, nobody can follow this path. It requires Grace of God, which is either pre-destined or received through the blessings of the Guru. Name is the path. Name is the Grace. With Name, the inner mind blossoms like a lotus and when dyed in the love of the Lord, the entire time one enjoys feelings of ecstasy and the mind stops wandering.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is an abode of God where His Name and glory vibrate in every word. When our mind is in tune with it, our consciousness gets illuminated with the presence of God within and without. To share this experience with others and promote amity among people of other faiths is the serious duty of all Sikhs.

Dr Sangat Singh Syalee



The Governor of Tamil Nadu, S. Surjit Singh Barnala and District Collector Gagandeep Singh Bedi at Cuddalore during the post-Tsunami relief sewa in December 2004.

A Subaltern Reading of Sikh Scriptures

Modern historiography poses a paradigm where the multiple aspects of actuality are homogenised and presented as a coherent whole. The whole is envisaged from the high pedestals of the ideals of modernity. Modernity conceives history 'from above' or through the modern ideals such as state, nation, reason, democracy and so on. The rationale of modernity has amalgamated the 'real' (i.e., what is perceived to be 'real' in the context of modernity such as state, nation etc.) and the actual in the quest for attaining the ideals of modernity in the present. The discontinuities in the actuality have been tied together, with the help of the 'real', to make an appearance of linearity. In the process of knitting together, the multiple elements of actuality are ascribed the status of meaningfulness or meaninglessness. The aspect of actuality which does not fit into the form and content of modernity is marginalised as meaningless and thus they are termed with the prefix 'anti'. After the advent of post-modernism, the fragments have come to the fore. The centre has been deconstructed to give way for the understanding and affirmation of the peripheries. Particularly, after the arrival of post-colonialism, the colonial understanding of the third-world countries has been revisited. The colonial construction of third-world history has been re-read to give meaning for the locality. This sort of revisiting necessitated the emergence of Subaltern studies in the historiography.

The word, subaltern, literally means the subordinate position. Etymologically, the word was used in the military to denote a junior officer of the military. With the entry of Gramsci into the cultural studies, the word got a new perspective. In Gramscian parlance, it refers to the people/groups/communities, who are outside of the hegemonic power structure and of political representation. In another sense, it refers to the mode of historiography in which the history is constructed from below, that is, from the events of the base levels of society rather than from the rationally-elitist understanding of them.

Though the subaltern studies are reaching their zenith in the manner of historiographical studies, theoretical understanding of the Subaltern Religion is still in the making. With this presumed difficulty, I venture into the attempt to locate the subaltern underpinnings of the Sikh Scriptures.

Subaltern Religiosity

According to Gramsci, a subaltern person has a contradictory consciousness against the hegemonic structure which he/she inherited and absorbed from the past. This consciousness may remain passive or active within the person, according to the situational reality. But when the contradictory consciousness is organised and kept active through sharing it among the fellows of the same consciousness and by the organic intellectuals of the concerned community, it unites the subaltern people, critically and coherently, as the agency to participate in the transformation of reality. It is the same process which is also witnessed in the subaltern religions. The organic intellectuals and their fellow-subalterns of a particular epoch organise the contradictory consciousness available in that period to make it a subaltern movement against the hegemony present before them, through the religious or spiritual means by way of assertion of their distinctly alternate identity. This is how the subaltern religiosity is to be perceived. Quoting Felix Wilfred's article on *Subaltern Religious experience*, Patrick says that subaltern religiosity is a religious experience and it is derived from a condition of being marginalised or being subjugated or being dominated. He further says that 'subaltern religiosity is characterised chiefly by the contradictory consciousness that emerges out of a superimposition of the religious elements of the dominant group onto that of the subordinated groups. Subaltern religions counter this superimposition by resistance and assertion of their own distinct identities.'

Here, it must be mentioned that the subaltern question is not only related to the problem of identity alone. Rather it involves the problems of both class character as well as the identity of the particular group. That is, it involves the class character of the suppressed masses on one hand and the subordinated cultural identity of those very masses on the other hand. The subalterns feel the domination of the hegemonic power over them; they feel the non-equal recognition of their distinct identity on par with the dominant identity; they experience the sufferings of the exploitation of the dominant group in the social realm. As a subordinated group, the subalterns realise the superimposition of interests of the hegemonic identity or the unequal recognition of their subjectivity in relation to that of the dominant identity. Due to this, the subalterns experience contradictory class

consciousness from that of the dominant, although they lead their routine life with them, and at the same time, they feel the suppression of their actual identity. In other words, the problems of class and identity are interwoven in the affairs of the subaltern people, though in some cases these two aspects get blurred not to be identified as distinctly as visible in the other cases. Thus the subaltern religion, as said by Sathianathan Clarke, is a 'site of contestation in which the subaltern communities reconfigure their own subjectivity.'

In his book, *Religion and Subaltern Agency*, Patrick proposes three basic aspects of a subaltern religion. He treats the subaltern religious phenomenon '(i) to be one that emerges out of a subordinated condition of a group of people, (ii) to be characterised by the contradictory consciousness and (iii) to be serving as active agency in constructing the subjecthood for the said people.' The present paper is an attempt in this direction to look into *Guru Granth Sahib* as the source of subaltern movement of Sikhism. As the title of this paper suggests, this article tries to enunciate the subaltern nature of Sikh scripture through the study of its concepts, not taking into account the history of the Sikhs.

Bhakti and Beyond

It is said that the *Bhakti* movement originated in the southern part of Tamil Nadu and travelled towards the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Early *Bhakti* was having democratic and populist characteristics. In its avowed criticism of caste structure, in its composition of saints (the women and the men of the so-called low-castes), in its use of regional language and music as the sources to reach out to people, in its character to attribute earthly qualities to the idea of God and in its denial of *Vedic-Sanskritic* authority, the early *Bhakti* movement was democratic in its approach against the dominant grand narrative of that time. Against the dominant *Vedic-Sanskritic-Elitist* grand narrative of the medieval period, it proposed the local-subaltern-mass culture to counter the hegemonic discourse. But with the institutionalisation of *Bhakti* through temple culture and during the course of philosophisation of *Bhakti* in the later period, the *Bhakti* movement lost its steam as the source of the subaltern movement. It reached its nadir, as a subaltern movement, when it began to mimic the *Vedic* social system and *Vedantic* tradition together with the infusion of feudal ideologies into its fold.

The Post-colonial writer, Gayatri Spivak, in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" identifies two aspects to classify a group as subaltern. For her, the subaltern is denied access to both mimetic and political forms of representations. That is to say that the subaltern were denied even the right to mimic the dominant discourse of that time. Against the denial of mimetic and political forms of representations, the *Bhakti* movement, with some of its revolutionary content, focused on mimicking the hegemonic discourse of that time in order to be considered as equals by the 'superior' identity. There is no doubt that the early proponents of the movement had the contradictory class consciousness, which is needed for a movement to be subaltern. But, later on, when it came to the level of praxis, the *Bhakti* movement began to aim for mimetic representations of its hegemonic power-structure rather than trying to found an originally alternate system. By claiming the sacred status to language and its text on a par with Sanskrit and *Vedas*, in its inclusion of *puranic* Gods in the new warp into its fold or of its own Gods in the warp of *puranic* structure, the *Bhakti* movement emulated the model of the *Vedic* culture and thought-patterns rather than trying to locate an alternative of its own organic nature. Even the temple entry movements of the modern period were all for the mimetic representation of the hegemony.

However, in Sikhism, we find that they constructed their own place of worship, the Gurdwara, rather than trying to mimic the hegemony through temple entry. In other words, we can also say that the *Bhakti* movement emulated the model of Sanskritisation of its masses as a means to negotiate with the hegemony and to realise its subjectivity. The *Bhakti* movement did not try to create a distinct subjectivity of its own which is original in nature. In their negotiation with the hegemony, that is, the *Vedic-Sanskritic-Elitist* tradition, the *Bhakti* traditionalists carved out their subjectivity by way of mimicking the model of the hegemony.

But in the case of Sikhism, it carved out its distinct alternate, which is also original, against the *Vedic* and *Sanskritic* traditions. While *Bhakti* failed in its mission as a democratic and populist movement to create a distinct subjectivity of its own, Sikhism addresses this issue with the dialectics of the devotional and the ethical. The dialectic is allowed to unfold in *Guru Granth Sahib* as developing into working out a social philosophy on ethical foundation with a clear

commitment to the point of view of the common toiling masses, says N Muthumohan. The dialectic between the devotional and the ethical, which is subaltern in nature, is the point of culmination in Sikhism as it is this dialectics which enabled the *Guru Granth Sahib* to realise its own original/organic subjectivity against the Vedic-hegemonic and the Mughal-hegemonic powers.

In this attempt to carve out a niche of its own, the *Guru Granth Sahib* did not try to mimic both the hegemonies present before it. Rather it operated within this double-consciousness and spoke in-between the two hegemonic narratives from the space of the subaltern. In its dialogue against Vedic hegemony, *Guru Granth Sahib* did not posit an alternate, mimicking Sanskrit. Rather than proposing a language as sacred to counter the dominant Sanskrit, it achieved an original alternative by the inclusion and organisation of various regional dialects, which were used by the marginalised, into a new synthetic language called Punjabi. Valerie Kaur says that "As a hybrid language (enriched by the intellectual tensions and dialogue), Punjabi became a counter-hegemonic language (and as a language of border-thinking) to rupture the grand narratives." In the recognition of various marginalised languages of that age, the Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib* operated as the organic intellectuals, to use the Gramscian phrase, to organise the subaltern masses who have the contradictory consciousness against the two hegemonies present before them. Through the use of devotion and ethics, the Gurus and the *Guru Granth Sahib* constructed an originally alternate subaltern identity against both the hegemonic powers, such as the casteless egalitarian society, the Gurdwara, the five external identities, *Sangat*, *Langar* and the *Khalsa*.

A Subaltern Reading of the Concepts of Sikhism

It needs to be mentioned here that the Sikh subaltern consciousness needs to be located as a contradictory consciousness against the two hegemonic powers of the late medieval period. On the one hand, Vedism with its *Varna-ashrama dharma* was professing and practising social hierarchy in terms of castes and elitism. On the other hand, the Mughal rulers were operating with all their might as despots. It is to be mentioned here that the ten Gurus

of Sikhism were the organic intellectuals in human form to organise the subaltern masses against the two dominant hegemonic structures of that period. With the installation of Guruship on the *Guru Granth Sahib* by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the *Guru Granth Sahib* attained the status of the 'Organic intellectual' of the Sikh community. It helped the Sikhs to maintain their distinct identity which is an alternate to the then existing dominant identities of the *Vedic-Brahmanic* and the ruling Mughals. With the transfer of Guruship from the organic gurus to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the status of 'Living Guru' was bestowed on it and so it continues to be the Organic intellectual of the Sikhs.

On the other hand, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is full of expressions of such contradictory consciousness that existed among the Gurus, saints and the common masses against the hegemonic discourses of that period, namely the *Vedic-Sanskritic-Elitist* and the *Mughal-Despotic-Elitist*. They were all engaged in the midst of these double consciousnesses, to use DuBois' terminology, and expressed their contradictory consciousness in between the two hegemonic meta-narratives. This in-between space is of the subaltern masses that were supposed to be low in their caste status, the women, the suppressed, the exploited, the ruled, the poor, the hungry and so on. Here, the in-between space does not indicate the conciliatory position in between these two hegemonies-rather it is the space where the subalterns identify their distinct and contradictory consciousness apart from the two; the space is to be understood as the feeling of the non-belongingness of the subaltern masses from that of the *Vedic-Brahmanic* and the ruling-elites, though they are historically situated amidst the said two hegemonic narratives. *Guru Granth Sahib* is full of expressions of such in-between subaltern contradictory consciousness. The Sikh scriptural hymns as well as the tradition not only sympathise with but also stand by the victims of these social evils, says Dharam Singh. In one place, the *Guru Granth Sahib* expresses thus:

*The greatest of all sufferings is separation
from God.
Another is suffering of hunger and poverty
Next is the suffering from the tyrant
– aggressor* (G.G.S, P.1256)

Then this contradictory consciousness takes the religious turn to become a critical consciousness for emancipation. This is how the subaltern religiosity

is born in Sikhism. The following *shabad* from *Guru Granth Sahib* expresses the religious tenor of the subaltern contradictory consciousness:

*The people wailed in their agony of suffering
Didst Thou feel no compassion for them?
If a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,
Little would be there to complain.
But if a ferocious tiger falls upon a herd
of kine
Then the Master be called to account*
(G.G.S, p. 360)

This is the origin of the subaltern religiosity in Sikhism. Now we shall turn our attention to look into the various aspects of subaltern moments in the Sikh Scripture through the analysis of its concepts.

The *Japuji Sahib*, the first book of *Guru Granth Sahib* which is said to be encompassing the ideals of Sikhism, denotes the idea of God as *Ikonkar*, *Nirbhai* and *Nirvair* among other aspects. The principle of *Ikonkar* underlines the undisputed unity of all beings of the actuality in relation to the concept of God. This unity is achieved through the affirmation of the multiple elements of actuality. The said unity is not akin to the homogenisation of multiple aspects. Rather it affirms the distinctness of the other in relation to the principle of God; it denotes the inter-relatedness of the various moments of reality.

Ikonkar also reveals the immanent manifestations of the concept of God in space and time. Though the principle of God is transcendental the idea of God participates in historical time and space. The participation presupposes the organic nature of the immanence of God and thus the idea of God involves itself in the emancipatory moments of reality. Thus the principle of *Ikonkar* precludes the possibility of the subaltern nature of the idea of God, as a participatory organic principle of emancipation in time and space. This notion of immanent aspect of the idea of God is opposed to the purely transcendental nature of the God-concept where it is considered to be beyond time and space.

The ideal of fearlessness (*Nirbhai*) is another subaltern attempt to pierce through the barriers erected by the dominant. The ideal of *Nirbhai* has sociological connotations. This ideal is a tool to revisit the forgetfulness of the one's identity and to affirm the existence through the means of justice. The ideal of fearlessness means the salvific remembrance

of one's forgotten identity owing to the dominant and oppressive forces of history. Symbol of the sword, which is also one of the external identities of the Sikhs, substantiates this aspect. The sword helps to realise the salvation of borders and peripheries and brings them on par with the centre. The importance of the sword in the religious life of the Sikhs portrays the contradictory consciousness that serves as the corner-stone for the realisation of authentic existence. At the same time, the importance accorded to the sword, in the history of the Sikhs, also encapsulates the critical consciousness that exists among them, as the subaltern masses, for emancipation from hegemonic discourses.

It is essential to note that Guru Hargobind brought the ideal of sword to the fore in Sikh thought. He identified two swords, namely, *Miri* and *Piri*. The former meant to keep oneself safe from the evils of worldly reality and the latter to protect one's own spiritual aspects. In propounding the ideal of *miri-piri*, the question arises as to whether it is possible to keep the realms of worldliness and spirituality as two water-tight compartments. As such, the concept of *miri-piri* allows the interplay of both. One without the other will be a meaningless exercise, according to Sikhism. The concept of *sant-sipahi* also addresses this aspect. In this concept, the *sant* is sensitised to the social environment and the *sipahi's* actions are spiritualised, says N Muthumohan. This emphasis that, the binaries are allowed to interplay and here we find the exact moments of subaltern religiosity in *Guru Granth Sahib*. By combining both of these aspects, which served as the binaries in the erstwhile philosophies of *Vedic* tradition, the Sikh Gurus have allowed the secular emancipatory dialogue on the basis of religious identity. The emancipatory religious identity of Sikhism is against the dominant discourses of that time, namely, the *Vedic-Vedantic* elitism and the Mughal rule.

Subaltern religiosity is a state of border-thinking. Border-thinking, according to *Walter Mignolo*, is "thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies." This sort of border-thinking can be witnessed all over the Sikh Scriptures.

*Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised,
But in unison One reality formulates (G.G.S, P.387)*

Miri-Piri and *Sant-Sipahi* are the concepts which derive their meaning from the dichotomies but still when it comes to praxis, they do not remain as dichotomies. In another sense, in the subaltern border-thinking, the emancipation is conceived in terms of dichotomies; however, in the realm of praxis, the dichotomies interplay to form a whole.

The subaltern religious aspect of Sikhism is to be understood together with the concept of *Nirvair*, which means without enmity or foe-less. The *Guru Granth Sahib* says that

"Water and earth in one spot has He placed

Neither inimical to the other" (G.G.S, p.1235)

The subaltern movement symbolised in Sikhism through the ideals of *Khalsa* and sword is to be understood in relation to the *Mulmantra* which speaks about the enmity-less God principle. The emancipatory subaltern religiosity does not allow the other to remain its 'Other' in the practical realm. The creation of a separate and alternative identity does not allow the repression of the 'Other'. But, it proposes an alternative model where there is no enmity among the differing identities. The Sikh scripture, says Dharam Singh, advises one to love the other as the image of God.

None is alien or enemy,

Rather the entire mankind is my own

(G.G.S, p. 1299)

This is the peculiarity of subaltern religiosity and this aspect is witnessed in the idea of *Nirvair* in the *mulmantra* of the Sikh Scripture.

This sort of *de-othering* the 'Other' can be explained further by the Sikh notion of *Nam-Simran*. *Nam-Simran* means the repetition of names of the idea of God. It is not the mechanical repetition of the same name as in the case of *Om*. In Sikhism, it is considered as the communion between the idea of God and human by way of repetition of the attributes and manifestations of God by the humans. "Each repetition confirms that the subject is not a closed I, but constantly opening up to the other", says Gurbhagat Singh.

During creation of the *Khalsa*, Guru Gobind Singh declared the ideals of *Gursikh* and *Sikhguru*. In the Indian tradition, the Guru is kept above the status of the disciple. In other words, if one tries to understand the relationship between the Guru and

the disciple through post-modern terminology, it can be said that the Guru is the centre whereas the disciples lie in the periphery. The power of knowledge operates between both these principles to ascertain the power-relation in the traditional mode of approach. In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh affirms thus:

*"There shall be no difference between me and them.
God and God's servant are both one."*

The above verse explicates the idea of *Gursikh* and *Sikhguru*. Here the traditional power-relation between the Guru and the disciple, as that of the subject and the predicate, is put aside. Rather, "Guru Gobind Singh transforms this equation and the predicates are made into co-subjects". In other words the centre and the peripheries are rid of the power-relations based on knowledge and possibility of the disciple becoming the Guru is highlighted. In this particular regard, inversion of the power-relation happens. Though the tension between the correlation of the spiritual and the temporal / the Guru and the disciple is very much alive in Sikhism, the attempt at synthesising them, in the ideals of *Gursikh* and *Sikhguru*, allows the possibility of intermingling / equating of the differing identities which were veiled by the wall of separation of the power of knowledge. That is to say that the subject is not a closed one rather it is open-ended; it constantly opens up to the other without losing its distinctness.

Further, *Khalsa* is an alternative social model against the hierarchical principles of *Varna* system. *Khalsa* symbolises the unity of subaltern masses of various linguistic, regional and caste bases. It is "a broad mobilisation of masses from below and institutionalisation of this mobilisation and their resistance to the unjust order." During the process of institutionalisation of the subaltern religiosity too, Sikhism emulated a model of its own origin rather than trying to mimic the hegemonies. This aspect is witnessed in the formation of *Khalsa*.

To summarise the above-discussed aspects, it can be said that *Guru Granth Sahib* is an expression from the in-between space of the double consciousness that were made possible by the Vedic and Mughal hegemonies of that time. Essentially, the in-between space is of the subaltern moments which are embedded with the contradictory consciousness against the two dominant power-structures. Against these hegemonic powers, *Guru Granth Sahib* proposes an emancipatory narrative which reconciles the dichotomies in the realm of praxis. Further, as an emancipatory subaltern identity, it visualises the whole as a realm of differing identities by way of *de-othering* the 'other' into co-subjects. In its institutionalisation of the subaltern movement, the

organic intellectuals of the Sikh subaltern masses were original and they founded the alternatives which are not mimetic in nature.

Dr. M.P. Terence Samuel

Research Associate (UPE – Project)

Department of Guru Nanak Studies

Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai 625021

E-mail: terence_mp@yahoo.com

Completed Ph.D in Philosophy did Doctoral Research leading to the award of Ph.D, on Nietzsche's idea of 'Superman', in the Department of Philosophy, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Ph.D thesis was entitled "Nietzsche - A Study on His Ubermensch". Also completed P.G.Diploma in Sikhism and Comparative Religion which is conducted by the Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai. From then on, was inspired by the ideals of Sikhism, mentor Dr N Muthu Mohan who is also the Professor and Head of the Department of Guru Nanak Studies.

Presently working as a Research Associate in the UGC - UPE (University Grants commission - University with Potential for Excellence) Project in the Department of Guru Nanak Studies of the School of Religions, Philosophy and Humanist Thought, Madurai Kamaraj University, since March, 2007. The topic of present research is "Social Alienation of Minorities and Majority Response in Indian context - A Historical and Existential Study" which deals with the issues of Religious Minorities in India.

Has presented 8 research papers on Sikhism in the regional (3) /national (2)/ international (3) seminars so far. Also has published two articles on Sikhism, in Tamil, in a book and in the proceedings of a seminar.

Sarb Sanjhi Gurbani

Guru Arjan Dev's elder brother Prithi Chand was extremely jealous of the Guru. Qazis and Pandits of his time also bore enmity to the Guru for having compiled the *Granth*. They came together to complain to Emperor Akbar at Delhi that Guru Arjan Dev had compiled a book in which the Muslim priests, prophets and Hindu gods were spoken of with contempt. Akbar listened to them and said that he would look into the matter during his next visit to Punjab.

In the beginning of 1605, when Emperor Akbar was at Batala district in Gurdaspur, Punjab, he sent for the *Granth* and the Guru. The Guru did not go himself and instead sent the *Granth* with Baba Budha and Bhai Gurdas. Baba Budha, who had written the *Granth* assured Akbar, "There is nothing against any religion. On the contrary, it contains hymns of Muslim and Hindu saints."

Akbar ordered the *Granth* to be read at random in the presence of learned Qazis and Pandits. As recorded by S Mangal Singh in his book 'Bab Budha Sahib', page 202, edition 1916, the hymn read by Baba Budha on the first opening was by Guru Arjan Dev in Persian language. The translation reads as follows:

Infusing His light into the dust, God has made the world,

The sky, earth, trees and water are God's creation.

O man, whatever the eye can see is perishable.

The world is an eater of carrion (another's right), neglectful of God and greedy.

Like a ghost or beast the world kills and eats forbidden fruit.

Restrain thy heart, or the Omnipotent will take thee to hell.

When Azrail shall seize you, of what avail shall patrons, brothers, courts and mansions be?

The pure God knows your condition,

Nanak: pray to the holy man to guide you.

(SGGS, P723, line17)

Akbar was satisfied and impressed as the hymn echoed his beliefs and said that it was a very proper hymn. The Qazis and Pandits said that the hymn was specially selected for the Emperor's hearing and wanted another hymn to be read. Akbar agreed with them and this time again it was a hymn by Guru Arjan Dev:



O man of God, O creature of the Boundless Lord, give up thoughts of the world and do not be involved in its strife.

Become the dust of the feet of the absolved mortals and treat yourself like a traveller.

Such a saint is approved at the Lord's door.

(SGGS, P1083, line21)

The Emperor was highly pleased, but the complainants said, "Bhai Gurdas had repeated from his memory. The Emperor must have the *Granth* read to him by someone who knows the Gurmukhi script."

A man named Sahib Diyal, who could read the *Granth* was summoned. Akbar himself turned over the leaves of the *Granth* and told him to read the hymn, which he selected. This time, it was a hymn by Bhagat Kabir which may be translated as follows:

First God created His light and from it were all men made.

From God's light came the whole universe. Then who is good or bad?

(SGGS, P1349, line 25)

Hearing this hymn, the Emperor said, "This *Granth* is worthy of respect. I have heard nothing except the love and devotion to God. I find neither praise nor slander of anyone in this *Granth*". He was displeased with the Guru's slanderers and enemies. He made an offering of 51 gold coins to the *Granth Sahib* and awarded robes of honour to the custodians of the Guru and promised to see him while coming back from Lahore, where he was heading.

The Qazis and Pandits hung their heads down in shame.

Sawan Singh Gogia