

II/2014

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**Word of the Sabd  
On Khushwant Singh**

**30 years after  
The Days of Infamy**



Grant me this boon  
O God, from Thy Greatness

May I never refrain

From righteous acts

May I fight without fear

hachai subh karman te kaptran na taran  
All fees in life's battle  
With confident courage

Claiming the victory

May my highest ambition be

Singing Thy praises

And may Thy Glory be

Engrained in my mind!

When this mortal life

Reaches its limits,

May I die fighting

With limitless courage!

Guru Gobind Singh Ji



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Dr I J Singh



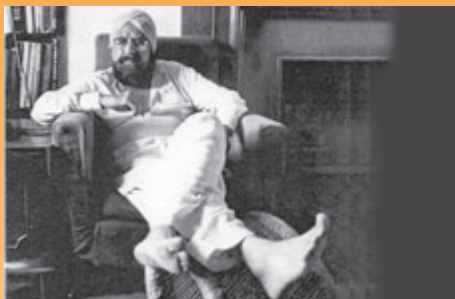
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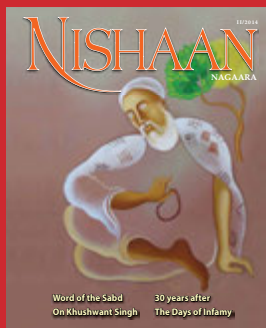
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Painting by Arpana Caur :  
Nanak 2011, 3X4 feet, Oil on Canvas,  
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## The trauma of 1984 : denial will not do

**R**ecently, just before 5th June, I received a few personally-addressed e-mail messages, one atop the other, that have been bothering me. Both correspondents live in India and, from their writing and references that they cite, appear to be dedicated and well-placed Sikhs well educated, too. The topic was 1984; what the Indian government did or continues to do, as well as how the Sikhs have reacted or continue to react.

But all the missives were under the rubric that somehow Sikhs outside of India are making irresponsible statements, telling lies in fact, acting intemperately, and these hurt, harm and undermine the Sikhs living in India, who are quite satisfied and very pleased with things in India today. Some e-mails challenged the right of Sikhs abroad to question India's policies as "interference" in India's internal affairs.

Not unexpectedly and with my eyes wide open, I stepped into the minefield. My position is simple: if, as an American citizen, I am expected to form opinions about Vietnam; racial issues, gay rights, and now the Catholic sex scandals all over the world; or apartheid, killings in Rwanda, Bosnia, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, AfPak, Tibetan and Israeli-Palestinian issues, why must I hold my tongue on human rights and the state of justice in India?

And this is not interference in the internal affairs of India! Any citizen of any democratic and reasonably free nation should have the right and the obligation to form an opinion and express it. There is no guarantee that mine or anyone else's opinions would be correct or popular.

The discussion then zigged to Khalistan: that, as these two readers from India charged, it is primarily a production of diaspora Sikhs and must be stopped forthwith. They went on to say that it brings all Sikhs, particularly those in India, into disrepute and they could be targeted.

I responded by suggesting that Sikhs living anywhere have the right to raise such an issue if they so desired. And why should this bring into disrepute any Sikh citizens of India just because some of their co-religionists raise "foolish" demands and slogans? (In my personal opinion, loyalty to or rejection of the idea of Khalistan is not pertinent here.) Does the burning of churches in India bring into disrepute Hindus in America?

I reminded my correspondents that in the past many American immigrants have raised their voices and funds for what they termed liberating their homeland; for example, Cubans, Jews, East Europeans, people from many African nations, Chinese ... and, of course, the much celebrated Ghadarites who were immigrants from India.

Expatriates from India, largely Sikh, played a defining part in India's struggle for independence ... or have Indians forgotten that? If speaking out is interference in another nation's internal affairs, what do you say to Indian 'diplomats' in North America whose activities include infiltrating Indian immigrant groups and reporting their activities? At times, even acting as agents provocateur, or worse. Denial that it happened - and continues to happen - just won't do.

I also have to add that soon after 1984, during the BJP reign, I received similar e-mails from a very senior Sikh serving-officer of the Indian government. I gave him the same arguments that I present today. But the best part is that when I met him a couple of years later on one of his visits abroad, he sought me out very cordially and his words were reassuring: "Keep writing on this as you do; we can't do it and we need it."

I also understand that India is changing, in many ways for the better. But, to name one issue, don't forget the harassment and denial of visas to Sikhs trying to visit India in the years after 1984. I know this



personally for I, too, have experienced it. Believe me, I understand the pressure on citizens when a country and its government feel cornered by political realities. India's reaction to the events of 1984 is indicative of such a mindset; the problem is that it continues now 30 years later.

I pointed out to my correspondents that this is what freedom of speech is all about. Quick as a whip, one responded that such freedom should not be extended to Cubans because they are under Communism, even though I was talking about Cubans in Miami, and that the case of the Ghadarites was different because India was under the British then.

The other fellow sent me a link in which apparently one Sikh speaker from the diaspora alleged that 20,000 Sikhs had died in 1984 during the orchestrated killings in Delhi and elsewhere. He insisted that it was a lie and rubbished the whole speech as proof that diaspora Sikhs were liars. He reminded me forcefully that this is misusing freedom of speech and Sikhs abroad speaking against India were mixing lies and unsubstantiated charges about India where Sikhs have no problem and that freedom of speech of diasporan Sikhs should be strongly curbed. I reminded him that freedom of speech does not give anyone the right to yell "FIRE" in a crowded theatre. And I asked how and who should do the curbing of the diaspora Sikhs who continue to speak for Khalistan or of 1984-the Indian government?

One writer demanded from me official proof that Brahma Chellany was arrested when he attempted to send reports of the Indian army attack on Harmandar Sahib in 1984. Some reports of that arrest filtered out in the free world press in the mid-1980s. Whether it was at all pursued in the judicial system, dismissed or forgotten in that infamous bureaucracy, I really do not know.

I tried to bridge the gap by suggesting that if an honest investigation of 1984 and related events was held, neither the Indian government nor the Sikh leadership in India would come out smelling like roses. One respondent agreed but repeated his charge that diaspora Sikhs are liars and are making life difficult for Sikhs in India, when everything for Sikhs is hunky-dory there; hence their voices should be curbed. I

have juxtaposed the messages from these two aggressive correspondents because their e-mails came at the heels of each other. I don't understand which planet they are coming from or what exactly their agenda is? I am really at a loss here.

You know and I know that the 'management' required to kill whatever number anyone concedes were killed in Delhi (according to the Delhi Government, about 2700) within 48 hours and this happened in India where weapons are not easy to procure, kerosene used to burn people and property not freely available, trucks hard to get, property lists with addresses and ownership not possible to download (these were pre-Google days, remember?) To put together such a killing spree within hours of Indira Gandhi's death and to have the army and police stand by twiddling its thumbs, or not be deployed at all, requires a level of sophisticated management and organization - and an evil heart.

Therefore, the killings were clearly not spontaneous and random acts. And then to have over 10 Inquiry Commissions but little, if any, progress, documentation or justice?

Is this a measure of a hunky-dory existence that my correspondents are talking about?

First, they challenge our right to speak because they claim it is India's internal matter. Then they pick on numbers of exactly how many were killed? I think the 10 Inquiry Commissions can do it better, if you let them. Whether the number of Sikhs killed in 48 hours is 2700 as the Delhi government admits, or it is over 10,000, as some others might allege, how does it matter if the actual number is a tad smaller or larger? Even the smallest number here is large enough to mandate a serious inquiry and quick action.

And then one of these friends challenges me to document my statement about Brahma Chellaney and cites other factors that might diminish the charge that I made about the lack of freedom of speech in India at a particular time. Will that somehow alter what I have said about the 10+ investigations? Does it diminish the fact that free speech was repressed? Will it somehow erase the fact the killings appeared to any honest observer or reader of the reports as organised and not spontaneous mayhem?



This kind of an exchange I have to label as a serious attempt at nitpicking 1984 to death. I have to club such efforts with those who nitpick at the number of Jews killed in the holocaust. Was it six million or one, or only six thousand? Or did the holocaust even happen? (Try asking President Ahmedinijad of Iran!) Similarly, for the deniers of the Armenian massacre; the Turkish government denies it ever happened. The French government makes it a crime not to accept it.

Ask them where is your evidence when they assert that the numbers of Sikhs killed was so small that they can be safely ignored?

Please! My diatribe today absolutely does not mean that every Sikh living in India is a quisling, a la the Norwegian Major who was a Nazi collaborator during the Second World War. Not all belong to the ilk of Uriah Heep, the iconic sycophant made immortal by Charles Dickens. Or the multiple Lord Haw-Haws of the Second World War. But the handful that are there are hyper-active, with all the resources of the government at their disposal; relentlessly, they manage to serve their masters well.

But I also wish to acknowledge that, being subject to the vagaries of the Indian press and its roller-coaster rides between courage and cowardice, there are limits to what facts those who live in India know and for what they are willing to publicly take ownership.

True, human courage exists in abundance but its supply is not endless and sometimes its exercise may even be foolish or suicidal. And forget not that I am not anti-India.

There is another way to look at the relationship between Sikhs in India and Sikhs living abroad. Sikhs in the diaspora live in societies that are relatively open and free speech is largely, if not entirely, possible and welcome. The Indian citizen is not responsible for what the diasporan Sikh says or does. This should allow the existence of considerable deniability that can be used to push the Indian government towards greater reform, accountability and transparency in the matter of 1984.

But no government should hold its own citizens hostage for what their co-religionists say or do in another country. If it does so, then that is another large and not easily forgivable blot on the government.

Sikhs outside India did not start the cascade of events in 1984. There was no major move for Khalistan outside India before 1984. Before 1984, the lone Sikh activist for Khalistan was perhaps the London-based Jagjit Chauhan and his was a voice in the wilderness. To blame Sikhs in the diaspora and a demand for Khalistan raised abroad for the troubles in India is disingenuous at best.

Who benefits from trying to connect these two issues which are transparently unrelated, but the Indian government? Why should it do so but to find ways to silence the diasporan Sikhs?

Indian Sikhs are easier to control and mould; Sikhs abroad are a problem for them for they turn a spot-light on the shenanigans of the Indian bureaucrats, their masters and their minions. Having lived through the times I can say that before 1984 I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of Sikhs who supported Khalistan, and have room to spare; after 1984, though, I could count on the fingers of one hand the Sikhs that did NOT support Khalistan, with room to spare. You can't blame Sikhs for that sea-change.

Remember that urbanised, educated Sikhs in or outside India were not that fond of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale until 1984. The attack on Harmandar Sahib and the aftermath made him into a martyr. Before you charge Bhindranwale with inciting violence, look at his actual record and report it accurately. Many of his speeches have been translated verbatim into English by Ranbir Singh Sandhu. Read them first, keeping an open mind, and then form your opinion.

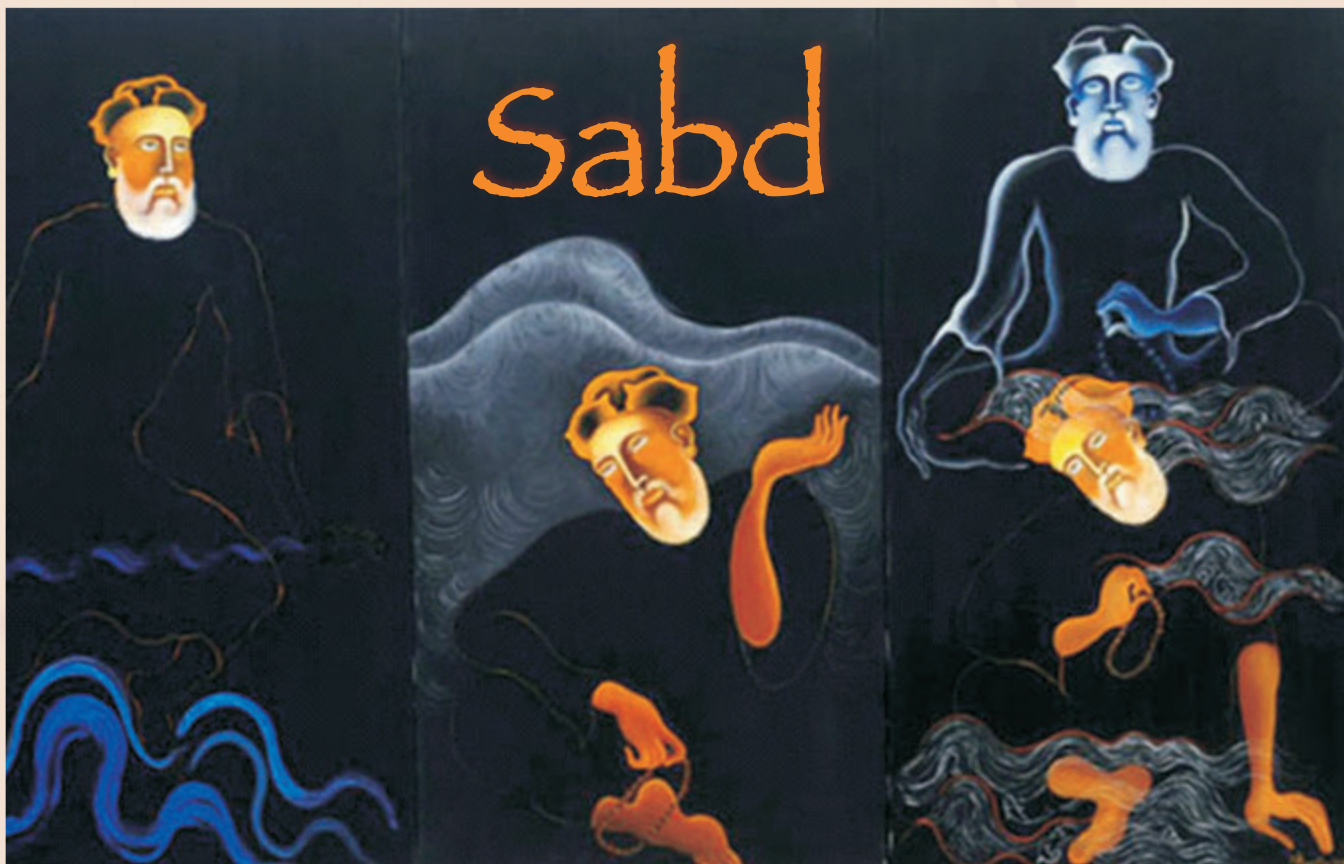
I would personally have no problem letting go of Bhindranwale's memory if a credible and honest inquiry convicted him of the charges against him. But I have one condition: I would like a similarly honest and credible investigation on the conduct of and charges against Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and many other senior politicians and officials of the Indian government.

Let the memory of all of them - from Bhindranwale to Indira, Rajiv and others - hang on the same or nearest tree, if so warranted.

Alternatively, try a "Truth & Reconciliation Commission". Many nations have and so should India, for once, with the emphasis on "Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but." Reconciliation will surely follow.

*Dr IJ Singh  
New York*





In her triptych entitled 'Immersion, Emergence', the renowned artist Arpana Caur depicts Nanak's spiritual quest.

**G**uru Nanak Sahib describes the importance of Sabd in the verse that follows, whose gist is that, without the Sabd, the World would not be the same...

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰ ਪੀਰਾ ਗਹਰਿ ਗੰਭੀਰਾ ਬਨਿ ਸਬਦੈ ਜਗੁ ਬਉਰਾਨੰ ॥  
(Raag Sorath M. 1, GGS. 635-6).

*Sabadh Gur Peeraa Gehir Ganbheeraa Bin Sabadhai Jag Bouraanana //*

Word of the Sabd is his Guru and spiritual teacher, profound and unfathomable; without the Sabd, the world is insane.

According to Guru Nanak, Anhad Sabd keeps ringing day and night (Raag Raamkali M.1, GGS. 879-7). Guru ji gives an introduction of creation or receiving of Sabd in Jap ji Sahib as follows:-

ਜਤੁ ਪਾਹਾਰਾ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਸੁਨਿਆਰੁ ॥ (Guru Nanak Sahib, Jap Ji, GGS. 8-8).

*Jath Paahaaraa Dhheeraj Suniaar //*

Let self-control be the furnace, and patience the goldsmith.

ਅਹਰਣਿ ਮਤੀ ਵੇਦੁ ਹਥੀਆਰੁ ॥

*Aharan Math Vaedh Hathheear //*

Let understanding be the anvil, and spiritual wisdom the tools.

ਭਉ ਖਲਾ ਅਗਨੀ ਤਪ ਤਾਉ ॥

*Bho Khalaag Agan Thap Thaa //*

With the Fear of God as the bellows, fan the flames of tapa, the body's inner heat.

ਭਾਂਡਾ ਭਾਉ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਤਤਿ ਢਾਲਿ ॥

*Bhaanddaa Bhaao Anmrith Thith Dtaal //*

In the crucible of love, melt nectar of the Name,

ਘੜੀਐ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੀ ਟਕਸਾਲ ॥

*Gharreeai Sabadh Sachee Takasaal //*

And mint the True Coin of the Sabd, the Word of God. ਜਨਿ ਕਉ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰਮੁ ਤਨਿ ਕਾਰ ॥

*Jin Ko Nadhar Karam Thin Kaar //*

Such is the karma of those upon whom He has cast His glance of Grace.



ਨਾਨਕ ਨਦਰੀ ਨਦਰੀ ਨਹਿਲ ॥੩੮॥

*Naanak Nadharee Nadhar Nihaal ||38||*

O Nanak, the Merciful Lord, by His Grace, uplifts and exalts them. ||38||

According to Guru Nanak Sahib, Sabd is an outcome of rigour of passing through the Dharam, Gian, Saram and Karam Khands, which lead to Sach Khand. But over and above all, Guru ji emphasises that only those who enjoy Divine Grace of Waheguru can have access to the Sabd.

In the scriptures of most religions, Sabd is recognised as Creator of the Universe (Sabd or Nad in Vedas, Kalma in Quran, Word in Bible, Tao in Chinese scriptures and Sharosha in Zend Avesta of Zarashtustra).

In Gurbani, Sabd is a link which connects everyone and everything with Waheguru. It is also used interchangeably for name of Waheguru, Naam, and Hukum as well. The sabd is a Divine Melody or Sound/Voice of Waheguru or Guru Bani or Gurbani is always resounding but because of our ego and pride we cannot hear it (Raag Sarang Var M.3, GGS. 1234-8).

Guru Nanak Sahib describes the true Word or Sabd as *eternal truth*.

‘Through the True Word one realises the Truth, Through the True Word one sings the praises of Waheguru’ (Raag Prabhati M.1, GGS. 1342-8);

‘The ‘Guru’s Word or Waheguru’s name is the panacea for all the ills’ (Raag Basant M.1, GGS. 1189-7);

‘He is one and the Sabd is His insignia’ (Raag Basant M.1, GGS. 1188-14).

Guru Angad Devji says that ‘Through the Word, Name tastes sweet. This is how the Word is known age after age’ (Raag Sorath M.2, GGS. 602-13);

‘If one searches the township of the body through the Sabd, one gains the nine treasures of Naam’ (Raag Raamkali M. 2, GGS. 901-1);

‘He who loves the Truth, Loves the True Word too’ (Sri Raag M. 2, GGS.33-17).

Guru Amar Dasji says that Creation, dissolution and recreation are from the Sabd (Raag Majh M.3, GGS. 117-8);

‘The practice of listening to Sabd is the true spiritual practice’ (Raag Majh M.3, GGS. 114-10);

‘In the Ironage of ignorance know the greatness of Sabd, By devotion to it pride/ego can be removed’ (Raag Asa M.3, GGS. 424-1).

Gur Ram Dasji says that ‘Inside of man is the Sabd, whereby Waheguru can be realised’ (Raag Sarang Var M.4, GGS. 1250-3);

‘Attuned only to the Sabd, One abides in bliss, day and night’ (Raag Malar M.4, GGS. 1265-8).

Guru Arjan Devji advises ‘O friend sing the praises of Waheguru. Always love the True Word (Sabd).’ (Raag Basant M.5, GGS. 1192-14);

‘Waheguru is the Lord of all places. His sabd rings everywhere’ (Raag Sorath M.5, GGS. 621-12).

Guru Gobind Singh ji salutes the Divine Melody, ‘Nad’ (‘namo nad nade’ - Jaap Sahib verse 48).

Gur Amar Das ji confirms that Satguru (Waheguru) is all pervading and so His Divine Melody, the Sabd.

ਸੁਣਤੇ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਕਹਤੇ ਪਵਤਿ ਸਤਗੁਰੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਭਰਪੂਰੇ ॥ (Raag Raamkali M.3, GGS. 922).

*Sunathae Puneeth Kehathae Pavith Sathigur Rehiaa Bharapoorae ||*

Pure are the listeners, and pure are the speakers; the True Guru is all-pervading and permeating.

ਬਨਿਵੰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗੁਰ ਚਰਣ ਲਾਗੇ ਵਾਜੇ ਅਨਹਦ ਤੂਰੇ ॥੪੦॥੧॥

*Binavanth Naanak Gur Charan Laagae Vaajae Anehadh Thoorae ||40||1||*

Prays Nanak, touching the Guru’s feet, the unstruck melody current of the celestial bugles vibrates and resounds. ||40||1||

Guruji further beautifully links the significance of Hukum/Sabd as immersing a Gurmukh with His Life that makes all the difference in life:-

ਸਵਿ ਸਕਤਿ ਆਪਿ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਾਏ ॥  
(Raag Raamkali M.3, GGS. 920-13).

*Siv Sakath Aap Oupaae Kai Karathaa Aapae Hukam Varathaaeae ||*

He Himself created Shiva and Shakti, mind and matter; the Creator subjects them to His Command.

ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤਾਏ ਆਪਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕਿਸੈ ਬੁਝਾਏ ॥

*Hukam Varathaaeae Aap Vaekhai Guramukh Kisai Bujhaaeae ||*

Enforcing His Order, He Himself sees all. How rare are those who, as Gurmukh, come to know Him.



ਤੇਤੇ ਬੰਧਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਏ ॥

*Thorrae Bandhhan Hovai Mukath Sabadh Mann Vasaaeae ||*

They break their bonds, and attain liberation; they enshrine the Shabad within their minds.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਸਿ ਨੇ ਆਪਿ ਕਰੇ ਸੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਏਕਸ ਸਉ ਲਵਿ ਲਾਏ ॥

*Gurmukh Jis Nu Aap Karae S Hovai Eaekas Sio Liv Laaeae ||*

Those whom the Lord Himself makes Gurmukh, lovingly focus their consciousness on the One Lord.

ਕਰੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਆਪਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਬੁਝਾਏ ॥੨੬॥

*Kehai Naanak Aap Karathaa Aapae Hukam Bujhaaeae ||26||*

Says Nanak, He Himself is the Creator; He Himself reveals the Hukam of His Command. ||26||

Guru ji again stresses all those who enshrine the Sabd in their minds as speakers or listeners are equally pure. The need is to remember Waheguru all the time.

ਕਹਦੇ ਪਵਤਿ ਸੁਣਦੇ ਪਵਤਿ ਸੇ ਪਵਤਿ ਜਨਿ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਇਆ ॥

*Kehadhae Pavith Sunadhae Pavith Sae Pavith Jinee Mann Vasaaeiaa ||*

Pure are those who speak, and pure are those who listen; those who enshrine it within their minds are pure.

ਕਰੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਸੇ ਪਵਤਿ ਜਨਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਇਆ ॥੧੭॥

*Kehai Naanak Sae Pavith Jinee Guramukh Har Har Dhhiaaeiaa ||17||*

Says Nanak, pure and holy are those who, as Gurmukh, meditate on the Lord, Har, Har. ||17||

The Sabd is Guru-Sikhia, as said by Guru Nanak Sahib in Japji Sahib, *mat vich ratan jawahar manik, je ik Gurki Sikh sunee* (the Sabd imports jewels of wisdom.) This was followed by all successive Gurus after Guru Nanak Sahib who thrived on the Bani of their predecessor(s) and were able to listen to Divine Sabd as the original. The very fact that six Gurus were able to directly catch the Divine Melody over a long period of time suggests that the Sabd is always there in the environment, only His Grace is needed to be tuned to receive it.

Sabd, like Naam, is replete in the Gurbani and is not easy to fully discuss this here, but one thing

is clear: Naam and the Sabd are closely linked and inspire each other (*Naam ji ke mann vasaiya waje Sabd ghanere* - M.3, Anand Sahib).

The importance of Sabd is obvious in the Gurbani:

ਸਤਗੁਰੁ ਜਨਿ ਨ ਸੇਵਾਇ ਸਬਦਿ ਨ ਕੀਤੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ (Sri Raag M.3, GGS. 88-9).

*Sathigur Jinee N Saeviou Sabadh N Keetho Veechaar ||*  
Those who do not serve the True Guru, and who do not contemplate the Word of the Sabd.

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਨ ਆਇਓ ਮਰਿਤਕੁ ਹੈ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥

*Anthar Giaan N Aaeiou Mirathak Hai Sansaar ||*  
Spiritual wisdom does not enter into their hearts; they are like dead bodies in the world.

ਲਖ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਫੇਰੁ ਪਇਆ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮੈ ਹੋਇ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥

*Lakh Chouraaseeh Fer Paaye Mar Janmai Hoe Khuaar ||*  
They go through the cycle of 8.4 million reincarnations, and they are ruined through death and rebirth.

ਸਤਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੇ ਕਰੇ ਜਸਿ ਨੇ ਆਪਿ ਕਰਾਏ ਸੇਇ ॥

*Sathigur Kee Saevaa So Karae Jis No Aap Karaaeae Soe ||*  
He alone serves the True Guru, whom the Lord Himself ordains to do so.

ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਚਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਹੈ ਕਰਮਿ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਹੋਇ ॥

*Sathigur Vich Naam Nidhhaan Hai Karam Paraapath Hoe ||*

The Treasure of the Naam is within the True Guru; by His Grace, it is realised.

ਸਚਿ ਰਤੇ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਸਉ ਤਨਿ ਸਚੀ ਸਦਾ ਲਵਿ ਹੋਇ ॥

*Sach Rathae Gur Sabadh Sio Thin Sachee Sadhaa Liv Hoe ||*  
Those who are truly attuned to the Word of the Guru's Sabd-their love is forever True.

ਨਾਨਕ ਜਸਿ ਨੇ ਮੇਲੇ ਨ ਵਛਿੜੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ ਸੇਇ ॥੧॥

*Nanak Jis Nu Maelae N Vishhurrai Sehaj Samaavai Soe ||1||*

O Nanak, those who are united with Him shall not be separated again. They merge imperceptibly into God. ||1||

*Gurbani Eis Jag Mein Chanan,*  
Gurbani is the divine light house ||

*Kirpal Singh*  
Wellington, New Zealand



S.Khushwant Singh : 1915-2014

# Rahul Singh writes on his father, who “lives on ...”



*Khushwant Singh and his family at home in Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi, which is named after his grand father.*

**H**is pet hates were superstition, rituals, astrologers, so-called ‘godmen’ and their like, out to fool the gullible Indian public. “Work is worship, worship is not work”, he liked to say. Also among his aversions were fundamentalists of all kinds and from all religions, including his own, Sikhism (he derisively called them ‘fundoos’).

On 2 February 2014, we celebrated my father’s 99th birthday and his entry into his 100<sup>th</sup> year. Actually, he himself did not know the exact date on which he was born. His father, Sobha Singh (later to be knighted by the British) was not in Hadali that day, the village where they came from, as he was away on work. And his mother could not remember the date, when she was asked later. So, 2 February as chosen by his father, purely for convenience, when my father had to be

enrolled in school. A second date, 15 August, somehow came about (this was before it was designated as India’s Independence Day) because his mother thought it was around the time when he was really born. Hence, his birthday has always been celebrated on two days of the year!

Anyway, this 2 February he wanted only ‘family’ and a few close friends around. Eventually, some twenty people turned up, most of them my friends. Among those who came to greet him was Lal Krishna Advani, the patriarch of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). His presence surprised the others, since they knew how my father felt about the BJP. But the day before, his office had run up my sister Mala, asking if Advani could come to greet him, at my father’s usual drinks time of 7 p.m. She naturally said he was most

welcome. Many years earlier, Advani had asked my father for his support when he was standing for the Lok Sabha election. My father was flattered, though he knew Advani had his sight focussed on the Sikh vote.

In any case, my father signed his nomination papers since, in his usual charitable way, he saw Advani as 'clean, honest and able'. Then, came the destruction of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, following Advani's 'rathayatra'. My father was appalled by the communal poison that was spread and the killings that followed. He became a trenchant critic of Advani. On one public occasion, at Delhi's India International Centre, I seem to recall, both of them happened to be on the same platform.

"Mr Advani, I will never get this chance again," said my father to the obviously discomfited Advani. "You remember, I signed your nomination papers. I did not understand your real agenda. You sowed the seeds of communal hatred in the country. You are a puritan: you neither drink nor womanise. Such men are dangerous."

There was all-round laughter in the packed hall. Nevertheless, Advani remained an admirer of my father, as his presence that evening at his residence testified. I have often been asked why father was so charitable towards people and how he could still have a man like Advani as his friend, after how upset he had been with him earlier. Well, the answer is that my father was always an entirely forgiving soul. He rarely nursed a grudge, at least not for very long.

The well-known artist and architect, Satish Gujral, once asked him for his help in writing his autobiography. My father virtually wrote the entire book, as Gujral's English skills were not particularly good. But when the book was published, Gujral barely acknowledged my father's contribution. My father was certainly hurt but after a few days of grumbling, he put it behind him and moved on. That was the kind of person he was. However, one person he never forgave was Maneka Gandhi – he called her "a chronic liar" – whom he helped with the magazine *Surya*, that she and her husband, Sanjay, brought out after the internal Emergency. It was directed at the Janata Party government that had replaced the Congress after the Emergency in March 1977 and its stories often hit the government with telling effect. Though she had personally supplied my father the details of how she was thrown out of the Indira Gandhi household, after

Sanjay's death in the stunt-plane accident, when those details appeared in print (*India Today* carried advance excerpts) in my father's autobiography, she filed a case to prevent it from being sold for several years, until the Supreme Court rejected her arguments and allowed the book's publication and distribution.

But to return to Advani at my father's last birthday, Advani was at his charming best, wanting to meet all my father's guests and asking them what they did. My father was charmed by him as well and commented later: 'I think it is great of him to still want to cultivate me, despite what I have said and written about him.' And when my father passed away, he was one of the first politicians to arrive at the cremation.

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I wrote in the *Times of India* that my father went as he had wanted – peacefully and with his mental faculties intact. That was, by and large, true. But in his last year or so, he had become increasingly frail, needing help to even walk around in his flat. He had also become incontinent, needing diapers. So, he needed the assistance of two male nurses, twenty-four hours. There was also his increasing deafness. These inevitable old-age frailties bothered him to such an extent that he once asked Lord Meghnad Desai and his wife, Kishwar, both dear friends, to try and procure a cyanide tablet for him! Death, and what comes after death, became a preoccupation and constant topic of conversation. His columns, one in *Hindustan Times* and the other in the *Tribune*, which then appeared in other papers and which he had written regularly for half a century, started to become less frequent. His energy levels had started to decline.

He had been wheezing and coughing for a few days before his end came, a consequence I am sure of Delhi's terribly polluted air, the most polluted of any capital city in the world. He had also been having problems with his breathing, for which our local physician, Dr IPS Kalra, had been giving him a nasal spray. In fact, Dr Kalra had been attending to him constantly for several years, checking on his health parameters, taking blood tests and tweaking his medication, when necessary. My father once even teased him: 'Why are you giving me an extra lease of life!' Though the nasal sprays certainly helped, I feel that the constant coughing and wheezing must have strained and weakened his heart, because it was a heart attack which finally felled him.



However, the evening before he went, I had a few friends over for whom I cooked his favourite golden-friend prawns. He ate a couple of them after he had drunk his mandatory 'Patiala' peg of single-malt Glenlivet (he did not like the smoky single-malts, like Laphroaig). Then, he retired at his usual bed-time of 9 p.m. The next morning, at about 10.30 I walked past his bedroom. Sitting on his usual sofa-chair, he was reading the morning papers and doing the crossword puzzle, a habit which he felt kept his mind alert. I was on my way for a game of golf (when friends would ring and ask for me and if he happened to answer the phone, he would say: 'If he's not at home, he must be on the golf course!').

I had only played four holes when I got a call on my cellphone from our domestic help, Bahadur, to hurry back. "There's something wrong with Sardarsaab," he said. When I got back, my sister was sitting on his bed, rubbing his hands. My father was lying on the bed, apparently asleep. He had earlier complained that he felt tired and had got up from his chair and lain down on his nearby bed. "I've called Dr Kalra," she said. Dr Kalra arrived a few minutes later, checked him and informed us in a low voice: "He's gone." It was a little past noon. Being a religious man, he said a brief prayer from the Guru Granth Sahib, while my sister and I looked on dazed. We had expected this for a long time, but the suddenness of it stunned us. Probably more prepared for this moment, Dr Kalra told my sister to inform close friends and relatives. Since many of the relatives and friends lived in Sujjan Singh Park itself, within a few minutes they were streaming into the flat.

I SMSed the only prominent electronic media person whose cell number I had, Rajdeep Sardesai, the editorial head of the CNN/IBN TV channel. He immediately aired the news on his channel and within about half-an-hour it was on all the news channels. My cellphone and my father's landline began ringing and the calls did not stop for the next couple of days.

We decided to do the cremation that afternoon itself and Dr Kalra arranged for it at the nearby Lodhi crematorium. An aside is called for here. Actually, Zeenat, wife the eminent lawyer Soli Sorabjee and a close friends, had many years earlier persuaded my father that he should have his last rites carried out according to the Baha'i faith that she followed. My father, an agnostic and open to all influences, spiritual or otherwise, immediately agreed. But when my sister

contacted the Bah'i priests to find out the formalities, there were so many complicated conditions laid down, that my sister and I decided that when the time came we would do it the conventional way, but not using wood, since my father had always said that this was a criminal waste of natural resources and contributed to de-forestation.

News about my father's passing away soon reached the highest levels. I got a call from the Prime Minister's Office that Dr Manmohan Singh was planning to come to my father's place at 3.30 p.m. Since the cremation was due at 4 p.m., I requested that the PM come at 3.15 p.m., which he did (Sonia Gandhi came a little earlier).

Another aside is called for here on Manmohan Singh. My father knew him and his wife, Gursharan, for a long time. He was an admirer of them both. Knowing his proximity to them, many people would come to him for favours of all kinds. I once recall, when we were in Kasauli at our family mountain home, one of my father's many lady friends brought a lawyer with her. The lawyer wanted a particular position in the government, which the lady felt my father could arrange by simply putting in a word with the prime minister. At one point during the evening, the lady friend dialled a number on her cellphone and then gave the phone to my father, saying: 'The prime minister is on the line – please speak to him on behalf of my lawyer friend.' My father was aghast. He of course refused to come on the phone and virtually told the lady and her lawyer friend to leave his house. After Dr Manmohan Singh became the prime minister, my father made a vow that he stuck to till the last: that he would never contact the prime minister for any favour, either for his family or anybody else.

Once, Gursharan rang him up to ask if he had sent a letter to her husband, asking for somebody's appointment. The request was on my father's letterhead, with what seemed to be his signature. It turned out both the letterhead and my father's signature were forged! He also liked to relate how Manmohan Singh's brother had once come to him for financial assistance to fight Manmohan Singh's election to Parliament (he lost). After the election, my father got a called from Manmohan Singh handed him a packet: 'I believe my brother asked you for some funds for my election. I am returning you the money,' he said to my astonished father while handing over the packet.

‘Which Indian politician would ever do that?’ my father used to ask those who would query him on what he thought of Dr. Singh.

My father was admittedly upset that his friend, the prime minister, had not taken a stronger stand on the corruption in his government, but he remained his stout admirer and defendant. Here, it would not be out of place to quote part of the condolence letter Manmohan Singh wrote to me:

*Throughout his life, Khushwant Singh worked hard to make it easier for the rest of us to understand and come to terms with the major social, economic and political changes that our country and the world witnessed. His writings, whether as journalist, editor, historian, author or provocative raconteur, never failed to shed light on the human condition. That he did this unfailingly and candidly for more than half a century, while also managing to be humorous and witty reflects on the enormous talent that he had for holding up a mirror to society. There was hardly an aspect of public life that escaped his attention and none that was not the better for it.... while I join you in mourning his loss, I am sure that he himself would want us to celebrate – to celebrate a rich and full life that was devoted to the pursuit of truth and justice. Indeed, Khushwant was a man the likes of whom we will not see again.*

That’s beautifully put and straight from the heart.

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My father made countless friends over the years, during his travels in India and abroad, as well as when he resided in Delhi, Bombay and Kasauli. His habit of replying to virtually every letter he received even if he sent back just a few scribbled, barely legible lines on a plain postcard, widened his circle of fans and acquaintances even further.

He guided, mentored, nurtured, and became ‘agony aunt’ for a number of people, mostly attractive ladies, needless to say! I shall mention those who come to mind – there were many others – who were in and out of his flat: Sadia Dehlvi, Saeeda Hamid (with whom he would recite Urdu poetry, a mutual passion), Humra Quraishi, Kamna Prasad, Sharada Kaushik, Nirmala Mathan, Neel Kamal Puri, Namita Gokhale, Neelima Dalmia, Sarayu Doshi, Sheela Reddy, Kumkum Chadha, Suneet Vir Singh Aiyer, Tavleen Singh, Punam Sidhu, Parveen Talha, Diya Hazra, Soli Sorabjee and his wife, Zeenat, Khan Sahib (whose full name I never got to know, but he would

invariably give my father the most delicious mangoes from his many orchards), Gulzar Sandhu and Nanak Kohli. In addition, his doors were always open, with or without an appointment to Vikram Seth (a ‘genius’ who would one day win the Noble Prize, predicted my father) and M.J. Akbar (a great favourite who had cut his journalistic teeth under my father’s editorship of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, though I am not sure how he would have reacted to Akbar’s recent entry into the BJP).

He had an abiding soft spot for all of them. Maybe, as my father was told, some of them exploited his name for their benefit. It did not bother him. I am sure he is looking down from wherever he may be, keeping a fatherly and kindly eye on all of them.

Despite being a great communicator and attracting all kinds of people my father was essentially an intensely private person. He had a few very close and lasting friends. One of them was Manzur Qadir and his wife, Asghari, in Lahore, in undivided India. But the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 disrupted that friendship. He would often warm towards somebody and then drop that person later, or that person would drop him (and my father would say, with relief: ‘Thank God!’).

Yet, a few remained constant. Ashok Chopra, who published a large number of his books and holidayed with him in Kasauli, was one of them. “He has never ever asked me for a favour” my father would often say. Being a private person he was not given to confiding in others, yet, if he did at all, I suspect it was in Ashok, during their many travels together. Then there was the publisher, David Davidar, whom he publicly defended over the sexual harassment case in Canada, much to the surprise, and embarrassment, of many of my father’s friends and family.

In a special corner of my father’s affection was ‘Bubbles’ Charanjit Singh, the owner of Delhi’s Le Meridien Hotel, who helped in the release of many of my father’s books and who was a constant visitor to his flat. Then, there was Rita Burman, his neighbour, as well as shield and protector against all those who overstayed their welcome at his place or who were not welcome in the first place! In Kasauli, there was resident doctor, Santosh Kutty, and his wife, Leela, along with Brigadier Arjun Menon and his wife, who were always welcomed at ‘Raj Villa’, the family house.

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People often ask me: 'What was it like growing up as the son of Khushwant Singh?' Actually, he became a larger than life figure only when he became the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. That was in 1969. Though he had already written the two works that I believe will be his main legacy as a writer – his first novel, the searing *Train to Pakistan* (written when he was in his late twenties) and his two-volume *A History of the Sikhs* – they had not really made him nationally famous. However, he had earned the respect of the literary and academic fraternity. It was his editorship of the *Weekly* that thrust him into the limelight. Till then, editors had largely been faceless, respected certainly and sometimes honoured but not regarded as up-front personalities. Editors like N.J. Nanporia, B.G. Verghese, Sham Lal, S. Mulgaonkar, Girilal Jain, Frank Moraes, were admired for their learned writing and analytical skills but were mainly distant figures. My father broke that mould and others followed in his wake.

But with fame came the pitfalls. As the circulation of the *Weekly* soared from just 60,000 to a stratospheric 450,000 politicians and celebrities began to take interest. They began to court my father. He basked in their attention and flattery. The adulation had its hazards.

Among those who courted him were the Nehru/Gandhi family, particularly Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son, Sanjay. My father became their admirer. He called Sanjay 'a loveable goonda' and characterised him as somebody who got 'things done' project, a project that never materialised). He agreed with much of what Sanjay wanted to do (who wouldn't?) such as controlling the country's enormous and unsustainable population growth rate, removal of slums, ending social ills like dowry, and so on. He criticised Jayaprakash Narayan for his call for 'total revolution', which he labelled a call for anarchy. But when the 'Emergency' was declared, he became its supporter. My mother, sister and I were appalled and I think that was the only time when we seriously differed with my father. I recall once when I was in Washington, I went to a dinner party hosted by some local Indians. The hosts did not know who I was until talk of the Emergency started and one of the guests said angrily: 'I wish somebody would shoot that Khushwant Singh!'

I think what saved my father from the hubris that strikes many people who start moving with the

high and mighty Nira Radia tapes are evidence of this was the fact that he never took himself seriously, and, secondly, his self-deprecation and huge sense of humour. In the *Weekly* he would prominently carry letters to the editor that criticised him, even abused him. He loved to show the envelope of a letter which he received on which it was simply written: 'Khushwant Singh, Bastard, India' which, unbelievably, was delivered to him. People started sending him jokes, the best of which he published. In fact, he received so many jokes that he put them into a series of *Khushwant Singh Joke Books* that became bestsellers. Whenever he would travel, in India or abroad, he would ask his hosts to tell him the latest jokes they had heard, which he promptly published in his columns. A lot of the jokes were Sardarji *Santa Banta* ones. Once, the highest authority of the Sikhs, the SGPC sent him a formal letter to stop carrying Sardarji jokes. He sent them a reply on his trademark postcard: 'Go to hell'. He did not hear from them again. I remember that he once said that when during the troubled times in Punjab, in the 1980s, people stopped recounting Sardarji jokes he was worried, he was relieved because it showed that the Sikhs were back in the mainstream of the country. They were no longer Khalistani suspects. Laughter was the best medicine for him, a true healer.

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What made him into such an icon?

Apart from humour and self-deprecation, of the main secrets of his success and huge popularity as a columnist and writer was the intimate manner in which he interacted with his readers. He took them into his confidence. He never pontificated or preached, as a lot of journalists do. He just told his readers how he saw life and the people around him. He loved puncturing inflated egos and what he called humbug and hypocrisy, especially over sex. A journalist should entertain, inform and provoke his readers, he liked to say – and also be brutally frank. He did all that. Nothing was sacred to him. His irreverence often outraged many. He once criticised Rabindranath Tagore's writings. There was a big demonstration when he arrived at Calcutta airport and he was reprimanded by the West Bengal legislative assembly. The prudes were also offended by his candour. The image he loved to create of himself as an admirer of good-looking women, even a lecher, was largely a put-on. And he made no secret that he enjoyed his three

pegs of single-malt Scotch whisky in the evening, sharp at seven o'clock.

At the time he was politically quite naïve. I have mentioned the Emergency period. Earlier, his attempt to get into politics (he became for a short while a kind of media spokesman and adviser of the Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh) was a disaster. The two people he admired most were Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa, large pictures of whom adorn his study in Kasauli.

Much of his writing was done in Kasauli, a military cantonment, 6,000 feet up in the Himalayas, in Himachal Pradesh, where my mother, Kaval, had inherited a bungalow from her father, Sir Teja Singh Malik, a successful civil engineer. My father loved the place, its flora and fauna and spent several months of the year there. But about four years ago, he found that he could not take the journey, either by car or train. It was too tiring for him.

However, three years ago, in June, some of us were holidaying in Kasauli. We were attending the Kasauli Week celebrations, an annual event organised by the military-run Kasauli Club (established 1880). My long-time companion, Niloufer Bilimoria, mooted a suggestion to stage a Khushwant Singh literary festival in Kasauli. I first dismissed the idea out of hand. But when we discussed the suggestion with Brigadier Anantha Narayan, then in charge of the cantonment, and his wife, Aparna, much to my surprise they were very enthusiastic.

Their enthusiastic endorsement of the proposal proved decisive. The brigadier in Kasauli is all-powerful. He is not only in charge of the Kasauli Club, but has great influence over the entire region. Apart from providing us complimentary rooms at the club, he persuaded some of the hotels and resorts in and around Kasauli to do the same. Thus, accommodation for speakers and invitees was secured, a major financial worry. The club's large ballroom and the open-air verandah (with a magnificent view of Kalka and Chandigarh below), which together could accommodate over a thousand people, was the venue of the Litfest. We were on our way.

We then assembled a team: Ashok Chopra, head of Hay House publishers; international baker Anand Sethi and his wife Deepa, a former vice principal of Delhi Public School, who live in neighbouring Dagshai; Kishy Singh, motoring expert; and Chandan

Bhullar, events management wizard who has a home in Kasauli. They were all enthused by the idea and pledged their valuable time, gratis. Our aspirations were more modest, focusing on Khushwant Singh and his passions, and of course, on Kasauli. As per my father's wish, the festival was dedicated to the Indian soldiers. And as Kasauli, like most hill stations, is an ecologically fragile region, with massive deforestation, unregulated construction and a severe water shortage, the preservation of the environment became a focus area of the litfest.

The Khushwant Singh Litfest which lasted three days, was a 'big' success and every session was packed. The second fest, held last year, was a bigger one and the third is scheduled for this coming October. Do come. The main theme is "The Art of Story telling". And there will be a special session on Khushwant Singh.

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Going back to the secrets of my father's success, I must add his simplicity of expression. He had the knack of turning the complex and profound into plain common sense. A good example is some tips to happiness that he penned down and which went viral a couple of years ago:

*First and foremost is good health. If you do not enjoy good health, you can never be happy. Any ailment, however trivial, will deduct something from your happiness.*

*Second, a healthy bank balance. It need not run into crores, but it should be enough to provide comforts and there should be something to spare for recreation – eating out, going to the movies, travel and holidays in the hills or by the sea. Shortage of money can be demoralising. Living on credit or borrowing is demeaning and lowers one's own eyes.*

*Third, your own home. Rented places can never give you the comfort or security of a home that is yours for keeps.*

*Fourth, an understanding companion, be it your spouse or a friend. If you have too many misunderstandings, it robs you of your peace of mind. It is better to be divorced than quarrel all the time.*

*Fifth, stop envying those who have done better than you in life – risen higher or made more money, or earned more fame. Envy can be very corroding.*

*Sixth, do not allow people to descend on you for gossip. By the time you get rid of them, you will feel exhausted and poisoned by the gossip mongering.*



Seventh, cultivate a hobby or two that will fulfil you – gardening, reading, writing, painting, playing or listening to music. Going to clubs or parties to get free drinks is a criminal waste of time.

Eighth, every morning and evening, devote 15 minutes to introspection. In the morning, ten minutes should be spent on keeping the mind absolutely still, and five minutes to listing the things you have to do that day.

Ninth, don't lose your temper. Even when a friend has been rude, just move on.

My father wore many hats in his lifetime: Lawyer, diplomat, broadcaster, historian, academic, editor, Member of Parliament, columnist and author. He became arguably the most recognisable literary and journalistic figure in India in his bewilderingly varied career. Though he practised law in Lahore and also taught it, he became disillusioned with it and decided he did not want to be a lawyer. Five years as a diplomat and two years as a broadcaster in All India Radio were also enough for him. He eventually found his metier in writing. The *Weekly*, with its innovative mix of articles, revolutionised Indian journalism. It was a pioneer, with magazines like *India Today* and later *Outlook* following in its wake.

Khushwant's column, 'With Malice Towards One and All', with its trademark Mario Miranda cartoon of a Sardar in a lightbulb, pen and Scotch whisky in hand, became hugely popular and continued in other publications for over half a century, a world record of sorts. He became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1974, courtesy Indira Gandhi, his term was not renewed when he fell out with her.

One of his greatest qualities was his ability to engage with all kinds of people, high and low. One of his favourite poems was 'If', by Rudyard Kipling, as it summed up part of my father's attitude to life:

*If you keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster*

*And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and never and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!*

As I said earlier, my father was an agnostic. Though he studied all the religions, he did not hesitate to criticise or make fun of some of their followers. Above all, his love for humanity shone through. Another poem, *Abou Ben Adhem*, by Leigh Hunt, sums up much of his feelings about religion:

*Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
An angel writing in a book of gold.  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the presence in the room he said,  
'What writest thou?' – The vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'  
'And is mine one?' said Abou. 'Nay, not so,'  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerly still; and said, 'I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.'  
The angel wrote, and vanished. 'The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.*

Abou Ben Adhem was my father, blessed by the Lord.

Rahul Singh





*S. Khushwant Singh in Lodhi Garden, blessed by the lord.*



# Khushwant Singh: One Like no other !

**W**hat is the good life? Is it the life lived in virtue? But what is virtue? It is different things to different people. What usually passes for virtue in our climate either sticks in the throat or is a stimulus to laughter. The line between virtue and hypocrisy is often a thin one, and in this country at least we have made ourselves masters, impresarios really, of hypocrisy: looking out for ourselves all the time but snivelling about the hereafter, our great preoccupation, and the nobility of our intentions.

If there was a Khushwant Singh amongst us he would have described us how he was accustomed to describe his own countrymen: a nation of "sanctimonious humbugs". But then call it our good fortune or misfortune that a Khushwant Singh could not have survived in this more pure environment. For the things he could get away with in his homeland would have been forbidden fruit for him here (Pakistan).

Not that India is some special temple of free speech. As far as I can make out the media there dances as much to the tune of big money as over here, in some particulars perhaps more so. Still, there are things you can say there that in our midst would be an invitation to the code of criminal procedure.

For instance, Khushwant Singh, a cultural Sikh and proud of Sikhism if I may put it that way but no believer in any religion, would openly say that he was an agnostic, someone professing his ignorance about how existence, or the universe or the cosmos came into being, a position diametrically opposed to the tenets of what we call 'revealed religion'. No one can proclaim his agnosticism here. If he did we would have a riot on our hands. Religious zealotry is powerful in India too, but here we have made it into something special.

Khushwant Singh would talk of wine, women, Scotch-woch in his writings, often in a deliberately provocative manner. About curviness – I need not be more explicit – he could go into raptures. He liked his three doubles of an evening, consumed almost in military fashion, the sacred ritual started on the dot at seven in the evening



*Khushwant Singh outside his home in Sujjan Singh Park, New Delhi.*

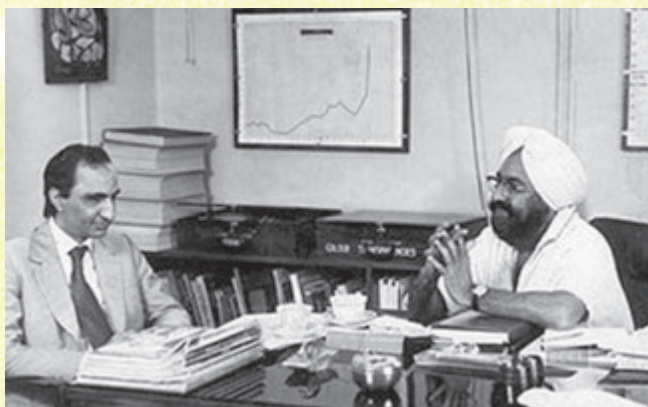
and finishing precisely at 8.30, a strict regimen someone like me of weaker mettle would be hard put to follow. Try saying this in Pakistan.

I sometimes mention the stuff – note the euphemism again – when I write about the cup that cheers (the noble art of euphemism striking again) but mostly in a roundabout manner and even then I can almost feel my editorial masters, a mistress too, getting a serious attack of the jitters. I need hardly add that they are all certified members of the liberati yet their fears, sometimes imagined, keep getting the better of them.

But this is about Khushwant Singh and his iconoclasm, not Pakistan and its conformism. And the first thing about the Sardar, before all else, is that he was a most engaging writer. You started reading him and were hooked. In this respect, if I may draw a parallel, he was similar to Somerset Maugham, a writer sadly out of fashion these days but once upon a time very popular. I read a good deal of Maugham in my teens. Nothing that he wrote was ever dull. Khushwant Singh was never dull.

He knew this himself. How could he not? I remember reading an essay by him wherein he was frank about his own accomplishment as a writer in English but confessed that there was one person superior to him:





Ved Mehta, the author from New York, with Khushwant Singh at his 'Illustrated Weekly' editorial office in Bombay

Nirad C Chaudhary whose acclaimed masterpiece is the memorable *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*.

Making fun of humbug, puncturing sanctimoniousness was effective when the writing reputation had been established...to begin with by the widely-read novel '*Train to Pakistan*', then the *History of the Sikhs* (in two volumes) and last of all the newspaper column which was to remain his signature tune until nearly the end.

And there was the candour, the outspokenness first about himself and then only about others. In this if he was like anyone it was Montaigne, the French author who almost invented the essay form and whose essays down the ages have been surpassed by none. Montaigne was open about his shortcomings and foibles, one of his many endearing qualities, but not to the extent Khushwant Singh made a cult of openness.

Which other man would openly admit that his wife of 60 years had had a long love affair with someone else? That this was no passing fancy but had lasted almost twenty years. And then who would have the serenity, the strength of soul, to come to terms with such a thing? He would say all this on television (Karan Thapar's interviews of him remarkable in this respect).

I admit that the openness when it came to bodily functions could be jarring. Of what general interest would be the size of....? Well, you get my meaning. Khushwant Singh could be a great one for such stuff, which, to put the best construction on it, was his way of making fun of Indian prudery. In the land of the Kama Sutra, as in Victorian England or indeed our own virtuous republic, certain things are not said openly. Much like a laughing Buddha, or an epicurean philosopher, for whom happiness and pleasure would be the highest good, for our Sardar no such constraint existed.

And yet Khushwant Singh for all the joke-cracking was no ribald figure. An intently serious man, there were many passions that resided in his heart and about these no man could be more passionate: tolerance, humaneness, humanity. Bigotry and fanaticism he couldn't stand. The rape of the environment, the cutting of trees, he couldn't abide. Indian superstition, indeed sub continental superstition because we in Pakistan are no less than anyone in this department, he made fun of.

Not only in relation to his openness but also in the humanity of his ideas he was the Indian Montaigne. If any Pakistani resembles his iconoclasm and had a similar sense of fun – at the expense of the pompous and the seemingly upright – it was Ardeshir Cowasjee.

Of Khushwant Singh's seriousness there was no better reminder than his daily routine: up at the crack of dawn, making tea for himself and his guards (this was during the Khalistan uprising when he was on the hit-list of Sikh militants and he had been provided with official bodyguards), regular exercise, then to work, a light lunch, a 45 minutes' siesta no more, again work, some tennis, then at seven in the evening open house to anyone invited or the self-invited, drinks for everyone, and for himself the three military Patialas and that was it, before dinner time when guests were expected to leave, and if any did not Mrs Singh, the same lady who for twenty years had put a bulbous pair of horns on Khushwant Singh's head, made sure that they did.

Khushwant Singh would say that he never got drunk in his life and there is every reason to believe him. And he would say that he was too shy and timid to make passes at women. But the carousing and womanising reputation was taken for granted by those who did not know him well, perhaps because he took a perverse delight in not correcting that image, no doubt as part of the lifelong shock and awe tactics he employed towards the humbuggery and sanctimoniousness of his countrymen.

He had no fear of death but he had a horror of a helpless man's death, nurses putting bedpans beneath him as he liked to put it. No man could have his wish more fully granted, for when death came it was in his sleep without pain.

If this be not the good life, what is? Khushwant Singh took pride in being of no religion but it is hard not to imagine that the gods would have awaited his arrival, and that he already would be at their table, Falstaff summoned specially for the occasion, regaling them with dirty jokes and the sound of bawdy laughter.

Ayaz Amir



# Game, Set and Match !



*Khushwant Singh at the badminton court seen with Leander Paes*

**A salute to Khushwant Singh for adding to our humour quotient. He managed to make us chuckle, smile, guffaw and often break into peals of laughter**

**O**ur beloved Santa and Banta owe a lot to the bespectacled sardarji, with his untidy turban, sitting in a bulb and scrawling through sheets of paper every day: Khushwant Singh, of course made the *Santa-Banta* jokes popular indeed by carrying them as a tailpiece in his weekly columns and then compiling them in best-selling books that adorn the kiosks at bus stands and railway stations.

A couple of years back I was introduced to a visiting Gujarati, married to a Punjabi lady who ran her own little Indian restaurant at Innsbruck in Austria as 'a Punjabi poet'. Continuing the

conversation she said, "I know another Punjabi writer." She went on to repeat "Singh" several times, failing to recall the first name. Then she said, "Oh! That joke writer."

Not being a great fan nor for that matter from the inner circle of Khushwant Singh, yet I was taken aback and almost offended on his behalf. "Do you mean Khushwant Singh?" I asked. "Oh! Yes she said tapping me on my arm: "His name is Khushwant Singh!" I went on to elaborate as politely as I could that he was no mere joke writer but an Indo-Anglian fiction writer, columnist, connoisseur of poetry and had also written



a well-appreciated *History of the Sikhs*. She was not even listening to me for it was the joke part of Khushwant *oeuvre* that interested and suited her. She wished to know no more.

Such is the charisma of Khushwant that he had something to offer every reader and they can take the pick and create their own image of the man who had humour flowing out with the ink of his pen.

The most widely read columnist, his column is translated widely into different Indian languages. Many admire him, a lot more despise him and there are some who scorn at him. Yet everyone reads him and often with delight. He remains the most readable of writers and his style is straightforward yet elegant.

A reader of his from the 1970s, when he published some of his brilliant translations of short stories of writers like Qurratulain Hyder, Amrita Pritam and Dalip Kaur Tiwana, translated some fine Urdu poetry and also wrote funnily shocking pieces on the rosy backsides of monkeys. The first meeting with him came when he was visiting Chandigarh when Mrs Gandhi was out of power.

My colleague Kishwar Rosha (now Desai) and I were cub reporters and decided to visit him in the guest house where he was staying even though our paper wanted not a word on this 'Mrs. G's man'. After the morning meeting, we reached the guesthouse and knocked at the door of his room. He was relaxing for when he opened the door he was in a pair of shorts and no turban. Offering us chairs, he said, "I did not know that two young girls were visiting me or I would have been better dressed." "Oh! Don't worry", Kishwar said, "We are quite used to it." The man who liked to shock others was quite shocked for a few seconds till he joked about this statement. Decades later, he had his punch at this comely writer when she was pondering whether to marry Lord Desai or not? "Oh! Go ahead," he is reported to have told her, "if nothing else, you will become a Lady."

This is Khushwant for you: Witty, winsome and controversial. He knew the pulse of popular readership and used the skill in his columns which had the ingredients that Somerset Maugham said were the essentials of good story writing: Religion, sex, mystery, high-rank, non-literary language and brevity.

## Some Classics



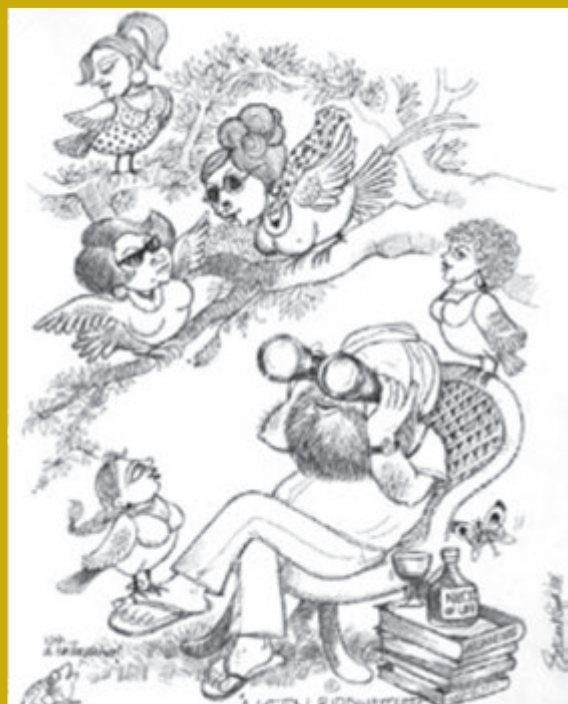
The signboard read 'Dr. K. Singh's Clinic' and sure enough old man Khushwant Singh is there in a doctor's garb, examining a patient truly down and out. His prompt diagnosis is: "A case of chronic Humouroglobin deficiency" and the prescription is: 'Make him read my Santa-Banta Jokes three times a day.'

The traffic sign says 'Go slow on curves' and there is Khushwant Singh riding a huge pen with four wheels in great hurry. The catch here is that the curves are not those of the road but of the female form.





Yet another finds him in the garb of 'Sardar' Omar Khayyam, with a goblet in one hand and a pen in the other, sitting with a mandolin by his side in a



tent which is held up by books and more books. The literary journey of the writer has inspired the Khushwant Singh Litfest at Kasauli. It is indeed a very interesting brush with the pen by Chandigarh-based artist Satwant Singh who made some 50-odd humorous drawings all in the honour of the bearded man in a bulb. This portfolio of caricatures is the prized possession of prolific painter Satwant, who has shared a long relationship with this lucid pen starting a long time ago when he was but a schoolboy. "I had enjoyed reading Khushwant Singh's short stories while still at school and the account of his grandmother touched the core of my heart." Later, Satwant followed the popular syndicated column *With Malice towards One and All* and always found them interesting.

"I was particularly moved by his humour and I started making caricatures of him. I sent him a couple which were not very flattering but to give the old man his due, he could both make a joke and take a joke." Khushwant wrote to Satwant saying that he would like to meet him when he came next on his way to Kasauli.

The meeting led to more interaction and more drawings which came together in an exhibition in 1996 titled 'Satwant on Khushwant'! Khushwant came to open the show and his remark that stays in the memory along with the other things he said is: "I am tickled to death." The drawings by Satwant probe the many layers of Khushwant's psyche and writing as well as highlighting the popular branding he did of his column, literally rushing in where angels fear to tread, upsetting ever so many by his unsavoury remarks and talking with passion about liquor and women even though he was but a moderate drinker and faithful to a fault to his beautiful and sought-after wife.

In one of the drawings, he has Khushwant saying 'I love CATS' and the cats lounging on the carpet of his living room have faces of pretty women. In another column in which he expressed a death wish he also added that nothing gave him greater joy to admire a pretty face, tickle a quick intellect and enjoy a swig of leisurely whisky in the evening! Satwant has sketched showing him as the 'Nathkhat Penwala' stealing the clothes of politicians, selling *Jokes Makhni* at 'Khushwant da Dhaba'.

*Nirupama Dutt*

# Khushwant Singh: 'The last Pakistani on Indian soil'

**I**t is difficult to evaluate the legacy of writer, journalist and an icon of our times Khushwant Singh who passed away in March 2014 after leading a full life that many would dream of leading. Singh was immensely popular in Pakistan. For the past two decades I have spotted his books — legit and pirated — at almost all bookstores in every city. His writings had an impact and inspired generations to emulate his incomparable style. His larger than life stature in India was equally recognised in Pakistan.

Khushwant Singh was born in Hadali village (now in Pakistan), lived in Lahore and until his last never disowned his roots. Such was his worldview that Partition and the ensuing bitterness did not change his empathy for Pakistan. This is why many Pakistanis were his friends and he gave them due attention, respect and time. A photograph of his best friend from pre-Partition days, Manzoor Qadir (jurist and Pakistan's law minister under Ayub Khan) was displayed prominently in his living room.

It was Singh's stature in the world of Indian journalism that is perhaps unprecedented for its influential relationship with readers. As a critic of the establishment, Singh guarded his intellectual independence. His proximity to Indira Gandhi and a brief period of closeness aside, he remained a fierce commentator





on all things political and cultural. Singh for example returned the honours awarded to him after Gandhi's operation at the Golden Temple in the 1980s. Over time, his column 'With Malice Towards One and All' became a regular window of refreshingly fresh and iconoclastic commentary. Singh's attitude to Pakistan was always irksome for the rightwing Hindus and often he would get hate mail, which was a source of amusement to his expansive spirit. Of course Singh came from a privileged background and things were easier for him compared to a lot of writers and journalists across the region. But he did give up a career in law and diplomacy to become a writer. And a prolific one at that.

The personal anguish of Partition provided the impetus and inspiration for Khushwant Singh's best-known and perhaps most poignant novel: *Train to Pakistan* (1956). Its direct language, wry observations and powerful imagery set the tone for post-Independence fiction in the subcontinent. The novel recounted amity that existed between Sikhs and Muslims in a Punjab village Mano Majra, only to be upturned by the violence of Partition. For a novel dealing with such a problematic theme, Singh remained upright and refused to underplay his staunch faith in humanism. In his obituary for Manzoor Qadir, he wrote: "My closest friend of many years lay dying; I could not go to his bedside. His wife and children were only an hour and a half's flight from me; I could not go to see them. I could not ring them up nor write to them. And when he died, I was not there to comfort them. They are Pakistani, I am Indian. What kind of neighbours are we? What right have we to call ourselves civilised?"

Singh's style evolved as it became more barer, sharper and at times utterly irreverent. Nearly a 100-odd collections of his columns, short stories and novels were published making him arguably the most widely read English writer of our times. After his debut novel, Singh's books *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), *Delhi: A Novel* (1990) and *The Company of Women* (1999) made their mark on the literary scene. Loved or hated, they were not ignored and it is difficult to keep track of the editions that came out. A candid autobiography, *Truth, Love and a Little Malice* (2002) was also hailed as refreshingly unconventional and displayed how Singh never took himself seriously, a trait that is not so common among writers and journalists in the subcontinent. Such was

his brand and his dedication to letters that even in his 90s he was working on books.

His last novel, *Sunset Club* was published in 2010 at the age of 95. It is a peculiar book for its honesty outlining the concerns and reveries of octogenarians. Other books include *Absolute Khushwant: The Low-down on Life, Death and Most Things In-between* (2010) with Humra Quraishi and a collection of profiles, *The Good, the Bad and the Ridiculous* (2013). This was his last book and will always be remembered for outstanding insights into the lives of eminent personalities of our age including Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi, Amrita Sher-Gil, Begum Para, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, M.S. Golwalkar, Mother Teresa, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and Phoolan Devi.

His penchant to say things the way they are can be assessed from this excerpt when he talks about Nehru, India's first prime minister: "... What I admired most about him was his secularism. He was a visionary and an exemplary leader; the father of Indian constitutional democracy, of universal adult franchise, the five-year plans, giving equal rights to women, among other things. He was better educated than any of his successors, with the exception of Manmohan Singh, and spent nine long years in jail reading, writing and thinking about the country's future."

"But being human, Nehru had his human failings. He was not above political chicanery. Having accepted the Cabinet Mission plan to hand over power to a united India, he reneged on his undertaking when he realised Jinnah might end up becoming prime minister. He had blind spots too. He refused to believe that India's exploding population needed to be contained. He refused to see the gathering strength of Muslim separatism which led to the formation of Pakistan. He failed to come to terms with Pakistan and was chiefly responsible for the mess we made in Jammu and Kashmir. He was also given to nepotism and favouritism."

Perhaps the most readable account on the *History of Sikhs* remains the two-volume collection that he wrote. In his trademark style Singh took the readers through centuries of evolution of the Sikh order — from spirituality,



Raza with Khushwant Singh

fusion of cultures and beliefs to the later espousal of martial values. In the process he did underscore the importance of 'prophet' and monotheism derived from the Islamic/Sufi influences. In his accounts of Mughal rulers and the gurus, Singh remained dispassionate and fair.

In another book, *The End of India*, Singh was forthright in countering the Hindu extremist narrative in these words: "The feeling that Hindus had been deprived of their legacy and humiliated by foreigners had deep roots. For eight centuries, Muslim dynasties had ruled over the country, and many Muslim rulers had destroyed Hindu temples ... this was not peculiar to the Muslim rulers of India. In almost all ancient and medieval societies this was the norm. Hindu rulers too, for instance, had persecuted Buddhists and Jains and destroyed their places of worship."

A key factor that made his English writing unique was his ability to use the idiom, verses and sensibility that he had picked up from his native Punjabi and Urdu. Singh belonged to the era when Urdu language was taught and imbibed in North India as a language of culture and even commerce. English was an official requirement but knowing

one's literary heritage was essential to 'education'. Both India and Pakistan have abandoned this worldview and the English and vernacular worlds have drifted even further.

Khushwant Singh's self-confessed agnosticism enabled him to poke fun at the religious extremists and those who followed rituals blindly. A voice of reason connected him with millions across the subcontinent who had (and continue to suffer) the crimes and misdemeanors committed in the name of religion. Despite his affinity with the Sikh identity, Singh opposed the idea of Khalistan.

One of Singh's book *Sex, Scotch, and Scholarship*, projects the persona he wanted to cultivate in the public domain. Not unlike Manto, Singh's references to sex and raunchy behaviour were more academic than a lifestyle choice. For Manto it was a subject of psychological lives of his characters and for Singh it was to shock the Indian middle-class readership that until a few decades ago remained locked in Victorian mores.

It was a privilege to have met Khushwant Singh on a couple of occasions in Delhi courtesy my friend Sadia Dehlvi. Singh's living room had a kalma sign and several symbols of what may not be commonly found in non-Muslim homes. I will always remember his affection and wrote about these meetings in my book, *Delhi By Heart* published last year.

Khushwant Singh represented an era, a century of upheavals that transformed India from a colony to an independent nation, created Pakistan and also braved challenges of modernity, nationalism and rise of religious extremism. His honest voice and scathing literary style are much more than journalism or plain 'fiction'. They give us insights into the workings, ebb and flow of a civilisation and above all remind us that humanity can survive even in the most trying of circumstances.

There shall be no one like the scotch-loving Sardar. Well before his obituaries he had mocked himself:

*"I would like to be remembered as someone who made people smile. A few years ago, I wrote my own epitaph: 'Here lies one who spared neither man nor God; Waste not your tears on him, he was a sod; Writing nasty things he regarded as great fun; Thank the Lord he is dead, this son of a gun'."*

Raza Rumi



# Khushwant Singh on Hadali



*Hadali, near Jhelum, where Khushwant Singh's family originally came from.*

I am told I was born in a tiny hamlet called Hadali, lost in the sand dunes of the Thar Desert some thirty kilometres west of the river Jhelum and somewhat the same distance southward of the Khewra Salt Range. Hadali is now deep inside Pakistan.

I have hazy recollections of my childhood years in Hadali. The village consisted of about three hundred families, most of them Muslims of Baluch extraction. They were enormous men, mostly serving in the British Indian army, or having retired from it. A fair proportion of the viceroy's bodyguard came from Hadali. Till recently, a marble plaque on a wall alongside the railway station master's office stated that Hadali had provided proportionately more soldiers from its population for World War I than any other village in India. There were about fifty Hindu and Sikh families engaged in trade, shopkeeping and moneylending. My ancestors—I can only trace them back to my great-grandfather, Inder

Singh, and his father, Pyare Lal, who converted to Sikhism and became Soheli Singh—were tradesmen. They had camel caravans which took rock salt from the Khewra mines, and dates, the only fruit of our desert homeland, to sell in Lahore and Amritsar. They brought back textiles, kerosene oil, tea, sugar, spices and other items to sell in neighbouring towns and villages. Later, my grandfather and father got into the construction business. They laid a part of the small-gauge rail track and tunnels on the Kalka-Simla railway. We were the most prosperous family of Hadali. We lived in a large brick-and-mud house with a spacious courtyard enclosing a buffalo shed and had a well of our own. The entrance was a massive wooden door that was rarely opened. It had a small aperture to let people in. A number of Hindus and Sikhs served us as clerks, and hired Muslim camel drivers took our wares to the markets. Our family's prosperity was ascribed to a legend.

It is said that one year, when it rained heavily on the Salt Range, floodwaters swept down the rocky ridge, carrying with them a Muslim holy man named Shaida Peer who had climbed on to the thatched roof of his hut. By the time he floated down to Hadali, he had nothing on him except his loincloth. My grandfather, Sujan Singh, gave him clothes, made a but for him near the Muslim graveyard and sent him food. Shaida Peer blessed him: 'I will give your two sons the keys of Delhi and Lahore. They will prosper.' And prosper they did—my father as a building contractor in Delhi; and his younger brother Ujjal Singh as one of pre-Partition Punjab's biggest landowners. He later became a Member of the Legislative Assembly and, after Independence, finance minister of Punjab and still later its governor. He ended his career as Governor of Tamil Nadu. We Sikhs and Hindus of Hadali lived with the Muslims in an uneasy but peaceful relationship. Though we addressed their elders as uncles or aunts as they did ours, we rarely went to each other's homes except on marriages and deaths.

Nothing very exciting happened in Hadali. Life had a soporific routine. My grandmother rose well before dawn to milk the buffaloes and put the milk in an earthen pot over smouldering embers of pats of buffalo dung. She went out into the open with neighbouring women to defecate. She pulled up a couple of buckets of water from the well and bathed herself under starlight as she mumbled the morning prayer, Japji. She spent the next half hour churning butter and buttermilk, reciting her prayers as she did so. Then she woke me up. I was allowed to defecate on the rooftop where the hot sun burnt up everything exposed to it. I washed myself. She combed my long hair and plaited it: being Sikhs we did not cut our hair. I got out my wooden takhti (slate) smeared over with yellow gaachnee (clay), my reed pen and earthen soot-inkpot. She got a bundle of stale chapatis left over from the previous evening's meal and wrapped them in her dupatta.

Desert winters could be very cold and the days very short. There was more to do and less time to do it in. But the real winter lasted barely forty days. After a brief spring, the long summer was upon us. It became hotter day by day with temperatures rising to 125° F. We hardly ever had any rain. Our *tobas* (ponds) were filled with brackish rainwater coming down the Salt Range. Some of it percolated into the wells. Only a few

of these wells, which were brick-and-cement lined, yielded potable water fit for human consumption. For some reason brackish wells were referred to by the male gender as *khaara khoo*; those which yielded sweet water were known by the diminutive, feminine gender as *mithee khoee*. Most of us had pale yellow teeth with a brown line running horizontally across the upper set. This was ascribed to the impure water we drank. No matter what time of year it was, my grandmother spent her afternoons plying the charkha while mumbling Guru Arjan's Sukhmani—the Psalm of Peace. My memories of my grandmother are closely linked with the hum of the spinning wheel and the murmur of prayers.

We were used to living with dust-raising winds and spiralling dust-devils, but haneyree or jhakkhar were something else. They came with such blinding fury that there was little we could do besides crouching on the ground with our heads between our knees to prevent sand getting into our nostrils, eyes and ears. There were times when so much sand was blown that the rail track was submerged under it, and no trains ran till it was cleared. But it purged the air of flies and insects, and for the following day or two the air would be cleaner and cooler. After the evening meal we went to our rooftops to sleep. My grandmother, who had already said her evening prayer, *Rehras*, recited the last prayer of the day, *Kirtan Sohila*. She rubbed clotted cream on my back. If her gentle ministrations did not put me to sleep, she would tell me anecdotes from the lives of our Gurus. If I were still wide awake, she would point to the stars and reprimand me: 'Don't you see what time it is? Now *chup* (shut up)!'

The nicest time in the summer was the early morning. A cool breeze blew over the desert, picking up the fragrances of roses and jasmine that grew in our courtyards. It was the time for half sleep and fantasising. It was all too brief. The sun came up hot, bringing with it flies and the raucous caw-cawing of crows. The blissful half-hour that Urdu poets refer to as the *baad-e-naseem* (zephyr of early dawn) came to an end all too suddenly.

Little happened in Hadali to relieve the tedium of our daily routine. There was a murder or two every other year. But since murders were confined to the Muslims, we never got over excited about them. Once a year there were tent-pegging competitions on the open ground near the railway station. Competitors



lined up on their horses and, at a given signal, galloped towards the stakes waving their spears and yelling *Allah Beli Ho* (Oh Allah is my best friend). After piercing the stakes they waved their spears triumphantly for all to see. They often raced passing railway trains and kept pace with them till their horses ran out of breath.

I returned to Hadali three times after shifting to Delhi. The first time, to be initiated into reading the Granth Sahib. My elder brother, a cousin and I were made to read aloud the Japji in front of the congregation and asked to swear that we would read at least one hymn every day. I went there next when practising law in Lahore. I drove to Hadali with a friend whose cousin was the manager of the salt mines. As we pulled up near the railway station tears welled up in my eyes. I resisted the urge to go down on my knees and kiss the earth. I walked up to the Dharamsal and to the house where I was born. A man who was risaldar in the viceroy's bodyguard recognised me and spread the news to the village. By the time I left, there was a crowd to see me off.

My last visit to Hadali was in the winter of 1987. The partition of India in 1947 had brought about a complete change in its population. Not a single Sikh or Hindu remained. Our homes were occupied by Muslim refugees from Haryana. Our family haveli was divided into three equal parts, each shared by Muslim refugees from Rohtak. A new generation of Hadalians who had never seen a Sikh were then in their forties. I was uncertain of the reception they would give me. My only contact with this generation was through meeting a few young soldiers taken captive in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 in the prisoner-of-war camp at Dhaka. I had sought them out and written to their parents that they were safe and in good health. I drove from Lahore and reached Hadali early in the afternoon. Village elders awaited me on the roadside with garlands of silver and gold tassels with the words *Khush Amdeed*—welcome—inscribed on them in Urdu, I did not recognise any of the men whose hands I shook. I was escorted to the High School ground where a dais with the Pakistan flag over it had been put up. Over 2,000 Hadalians sat in rows on chairs and on the ground. Speeches in badly pronounced, florid Urdu were delivered acclaiming me as a son of Hadali. My heart was full of gratitude. I sensed that I was about to make an ass of myself; I did. I started off well. I spoke to

them in the village dialect. I said that just as they looked forward to going on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, coming back to Hadali the time of the *Maghreb* (evening prayer) of my life was my *Haj* (big pilgrimage) and my *Umra* (small pilgrimage). And as the Prophet on his return to Mecca as Victor had spent his first night wandering about the streets and praying beside the grave of his first wife, I would have liked nothing better than to be left alone to roam about the lanes of Hadali and rest my head on the threshold of the house in which I was born. Then I was overcome by emotion and broke down. They understood and forgave me. I was escorted to my former home with the entire village following me. Fireworks were let off; women standing on rooftops showered rose petals on me.

The Rohtak families, living in what was once our home, had done up the haveli with coloured balloons and paper buntings. The elders of the village who once knew my father had a feast laid out in my honour. There was little that I saw of Hadali that I recognised. The sand dunes which had been the playgrounds of my childhood years were gone. A canal had greened the desert. The *tobas* had become swamps full of reeds. The marble plaque commemorating the services of the men who had fought in World War I had been removed. I left Hadali a little before sunset, aware that I would never return to it again.



Extracted from the book '99 unforgettable fiction, non-fiction, poetry and humour' edited by David Davidar and Mala Dayal



# Khushwant Singh's final journey, by Train to Pakistan



Iconic photograph of refugees clambering on a train to Pakistan, August 1947.

**K**hushwant Singh's final journey was by train, to Pakistan. He did not require documents to cross the border. Ashes do not need visas.

He was cremated in New Delhi on 20 March 2014. A portion of his ashes were interred under his favourite tree in the garden at Sujan Singh Park. Some will be taken to his home in hilly Kasauli. The rest were given to me by his daughter Mala for interment in Hadali (now Distt. Khushab in Pakistan), where he was born ninety-nine years back.

There is no direct train link anymore between New Delhi to Lahore. I caught the Shadabti

Express that took me to Amritsar. It is a six-hour journey, time enough to refresh my familiarity with Khushwant's works. These included his autobiography *Truth, love and a little malice* (written prematurely at the age of 87), his evocative translation of *The Japji* and *The Rehras* – the morning and evening prayers of the Sikhs (published last year), and *Death at my doorstep* – a cemetery crammed with obituaries he had written of people he had known but not always liked or admired. He dismissed Lord Mountbatten as 'Lord of Baloney', back-handed Sanjay Gandhi as the 'Young Dictator', lauded his mentor Manzur Qadir as 'The Role





*Fakir Syed Aijazuddin holding the urn with Khushwant Singh's ashes at the Wagah border*

Model', and movingly described Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's final days 'From the Death Sentence to the Gallows'.

To travel from New Delhi to Lahore now, one has to go to Amritsar, catch the Samjhota or Friendship Express, change trains again at the Wagah/Attari border, and then complete the journey to Lahore in yet

another train. The goodwill inherent in the train's title evaporates even over the short 42 kilometre distance between Amritsar and Lahore.

I took the less troublesome route and walked across the border at Attari/Wagah. No officials on either side of the divisive white line seemed interested in the contents of the stainless steel urn I carried. Whatever attention Khushwant would receive would be at his birth village of Hadali, some 250 kilometres northwest of Lahore.

There, he is still a household world in a community consisting entirely of Pakistani Muslims. Hadali, in Khushwant Singh's days, "a tiny hamlet with less than 300 families", is now a congested compression of almost 50,000 souls. Its most prominent building would appear to be its Government Boys' School. Its spacious dusty grounds were overrun by six hundred boys in identical uniforms (like some detergent advertisement) with differing shades of dirt.



*His last painting*





Art historian Fakir Syed Aijazuddin at the school in Hadali where Khushwant Singh was enrolled as a child. The ashes were covered with a marble plaque that read: "This is where my roots are. I have nourished them with tears of nostalgia".

The main school hall is still, according to the bearded headmaster, as Khushwant left it as a young pupil in 1920. Khushwant Singh visited it sixty years later. He remembered the high roof supported by sagging timbers, the chapel-shaped classrooms on either side, and the rugged plaster. It was too much for him. He recalled afterwards: "Overcome by emotion, I broke down."

Could there have been a better location for the marble memorial plaque I had brought with me? A niche was gouged out of the external wall of the school hall and the marble slab grouted in it. His grey ashes were merged and lost within the wet grey cement. The commemorative inscription read: 'In memory of Sardar Khushwant Singh/ A Sikh, a scholar and a son of Hadali (Punjab).'

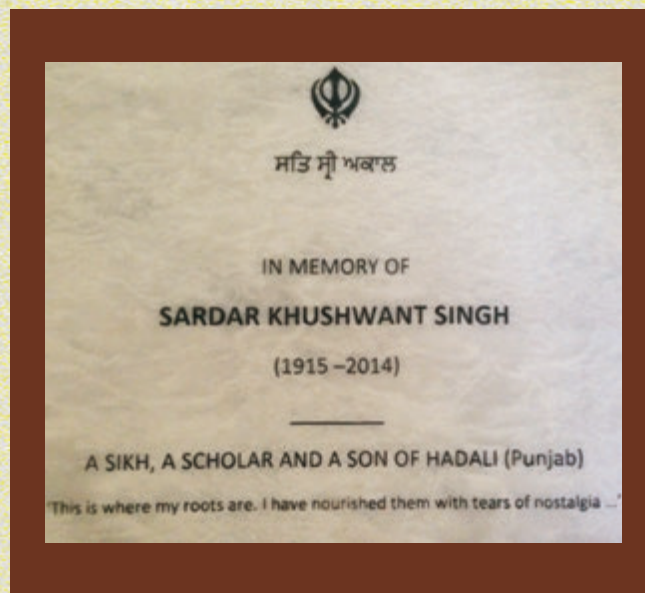
After the mason had applied the finishing touches, rounding the corners carefully with his fingers, I read the opening lines from Khushwant Singh's translation of the *Japji*: 'There is one God. He is the Supreme Truth. He the Creator is without fear and without hate.' I ended with the *Shloka* or Epilogue, one line of which would have been requiem enough: 'The toils have ended of those that have worshipped Thee.'

While I was reciting these verses, I knew Khushwant would not have objected. He was only an arm-chair agnostic. Which truly believing agnostic would have laboured as he did to translate the *Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*?

Which agnostic would have straddled the spiritual divide and translated with such understanding Allama Iqbal's epic remonstrance *Shikwa* as well as God's riposte *Jawab-e-Shikwa*?

Which self-respecting agnostic would have, in the final year of his long life of ostensible disbelief, translated the *Japji* and the *Rehras* with such feeling and sensitivity?

Khushwant Singh did not need to make peace with his Maker with such gestures of conciliation, no more than he needed to be a literary *enfant terrible*. Khushwant Singh was above that. He had outgrown his time, overwhelmed his contemporaries with his expansive humanity.



If there was anything he never outgrew it was his affection for Hadali. It was of this cradle, this crucible of his life that he wrote: "This is where my roots are. I have nourished them with tears of nostalgia."

And those are the closing lines you can read on his memorial plaque at Hadali placed there on 22 April 2014.

Fakir Syed Aijazuddin



Khushwant Singh's reaction....

# .... in the aftermath of 'Operation Bluestar'

*Khushwant Singh was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974. Ten years later, on 8 June 1984, in an act that reflected his acute distress and pain following the Indian Army attack on the Golden Temple, he drove to Rashtrapati Bhavan and returned the framed citation to the President of India. This is an articulation of his trauma that ensued:*



*Khushwant Singh seen in discussion with Indira Gandhi, at the Prime Minister's office*

**T**he reactions of the Sikhs (to the Army action in Punjab) should not have taken anyone by surprise. Harmandir and the Akal Takht are their most sacred shrines. To the simple minded Sikh peasant the army were the attackers. Bhindranwale and his men its defenders. When they heard that the Granth Sahib (regarded as the 'living' symbol of the Gurus) installed in the Harmandir had been pierced by a bullet and over a thousand handwritten copies and originals of hukumnamas had been reduced to ashes, a ragi hit by a bullet while singing, and that scores of women and children were amongst the thousands of innocent pilgrims killed, they were outraged.

Virtually to a man, the 14 million strong community felt as if it had been slapped in the face. What added

to its anger was the jubilation with which Hindus greeted the news of the killing of Bhindranwale and his followers. In Amritsar, Hindus entertained the troops with tea, cigarettes, aerated water, sweetmeats and liquor. There were similar celebrations amongst Hindus in most parts of northern India. The Government controlled media - All India Radio and Doordarshan - added to the anguish of the Sikhs by emphasising the heroism displayed by the Army and spreading canards with the help of the two news agencies (PTI and UNI) and planting stories in the subservient

Press. Through the tarnished images of Bhindranwale and the Akalis it sought to blacken the face of the entire community.

It was put out that the troops had suffered heavy casualties because they were under strict orders not to fire at the Harmandir even if they received fire from it and that is why the shrine was totally undamaged and no one seeking sanctuary in it had been hurt.

People present there at the time had a different tale to tell, which was later confirmed by those who visited the shrine. Bhindranwale forbade his men from entering the Harmandir to fight and there was no firing on the Army from it. Nevertheless the Harmandir bore upwards of 300 bullet marks, whether fired by the Army or Bhindranwale's men no one will ever know. A blind ragi



Amreek Singh, singing the gurbani, was hit by a bullet and died leaving a pool of blood invisible on the red carpet on which he had fallen; cluster of flies on the coagulated blood lent credence to the ragi's slaying. The carpet was quickly replaced. First reports, all issued by Government agencies, admitted the deaths of 13 women and some children. The same agencies then denied that any women or children had died. When faced with the contradiction, a third version was floated, that the women and children had been killed by a grenade thrown by Bhindranwale's men!

It was put out (by Government agencies) that a large number of women, including prostitutes and European hippies, were found in the Temple complex. Some women were pregnant— others presumably were able to avoid pregnancy because of the large numbers of condoms found in the debris! This was followed by yet another canard that quantities of opium, heroin and hashish were unearthed by the troops. The story made the front pages of all newspapers. Two days later, an amended statement was issued to the effect that the narcotics were discovered in a house outside the temple complex; This was published on the inside pages where it passed unnoticed by the majority of readers who only read headlines.

Attempts to further blacken the reputation of Bhindranwale were even clumsier. It was first suggested that he had committed suicide. Then MK Dhar of *The Hindustan Times* had it from most reliable sources (almost certainly No. 1, Safdarjang Road) that he had been slain 'by his own comrades'. This made banner headlines on the front page of his paper. When the post-mortem report revealed that Bhindranwale's body was riddled with bullets from head to foot, no more was heard of his taking his own life, or being murdered by his men.

Since no self-respecting Sikhs could be found to give the Government a clean chit, frightened rustics were hauled before TV cameras and made to repeat statements prepared by officials to the effect of the Army action had brought peace to the Punjab. This was obvious when the helpless Kirpal Singh, Jathedar of the Akal Takht, was shown nervously reading from a slip of paper placed in his hand. Virtually the only Sikhs who came forward to state publicly that the Government action was justified were members of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Congress party and aspirants for Governor's posts, like Harbans Singh (of Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan and Dr. Gopal Singh Dardi, who eventually became Lt. Governor of Goa, Daman and Diu). It was common knowledge that likely supporters were summoned by the PM's secretariat and ordered to appear before TV cameras or issue statements to the Press.

By this time, the stunned community manifested its resentment in whatever manner could. At eight different

cantonments spread all over India 4000 Sikhs soldiers deserted their regiments and tried to get to Amritsar. They were intercepted by the local police and the army; in the clashes, scores of men were slain. In Delhi's Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, agitating young boys were shot and killed by the police. Two Sikh members of the Lok Sabha, both belonging to Mrs Gandhi's party, resigned their seats and party membership. So did several members of the Punjab Legislature.

A Sikh diplomat posted in Norway sought political asylum in that country; a senior officer of police posted in Maharashtra resigned his post, sent an angry letter to the President and before the authorities could nab him, went underground. Distinguished men of letters, including Dr. Ganda Singh, eminent historian, and Sadhu Singh Hamdard, editor of *Ajit*, returned the Padma Bhushans awarded to them a few months earlier. The most venerable figure in Punjab, Bhagat Puran Singh, popularly known as the bearded Mother Teresa for his life-long dedication to the service of lepers, mental defectives and orphans, the afflicted helpless, returned the Padma Shri awarded to him.

Mrs. Gandhi sensed that she had made a grievous error of judgement. She was not big enough to admit her mistake but nevertheless decided to visit the Golden Temple. From the accounts of people who accompanied her, she was appalled at the sight. She had been assured that resistance would be overcome swiftly and damage to buildings would be minimal. Whatever anger she felt against the people who had misinformed her, she decided to take the line that the Government had no alternative except to send in the Army, and that the Army had done the best of an unpleasant job. Government media and a subservient Press toed her line. Day after day Doordarshan showed distant shots of the Harmandir (close-ups might have given the lie to the official propaganda that the central shrine was undamaged) and only after the *The Telegraph* of Calcutta and *The Hindu* of Madras published pictures of the Akal Takht showing the entire facade wrecked, did TV decide to show it as well.

The sustained propaganda of falsehood yielded dividends. It came to be generally accepted that those who accepted the Government point of view were patriots, those who did not communally biased, supporters of Bhindranwale, Khalistanis and traitors.

Three months after *Operation Blue Star*, no one really knew exactly how many people had lost their lives in the fighting in the Golden Temple and 40 other gurdwaras invaded by the Army, or had been killed on the roads and fields trying to get to Amritsar. By their own admission, the Government spokesmen conceded that the



figures cited in the White Paper on Punjab released by the Government were grossly underestimated. The White Paper gave the number of soldiers and officers killed as 92. Rajiv Gandhi later stated 'that upwards of 700 Army personnel had been slain. There can be little doubt that if a zero were added to the official figure of 516 of civilian/terrorist casualties, we would be close to the actual number of lives lost—it was certainly in the vicinity of 5000 dead.

It will take some time before we hear of the extensive looting carried out by the Army. Before the action started, many homes adjoining the Golden Temple were ordered to be evacuated and occupied by soldiers. When the owners were allowed to return, their TV sets, radios, fridges, clocks—almost everything movable—had disappeared. In the Temple complex itself, there are over a dozen shrines, each with its *golak* (metal pitcher) for offerings made in cash. It would be safe to estimate that at any time these *golaks* would contain over Rs. one lakh in cash. Besides these, there were the offices of the SGPC, the Akali Dal and the Istri Akali Dal, each with liquid cash for day-to-day requirements, The SGPC disburses over a lakh of rupees a day towards its *Guru ka langar* and for the Sunday services rendered by hundreds of *sewadars* and hired labourers. After the Army action, not a counterfeit coin was found in the *golaks*, or in the offices of these organisations.

Indeed, it is pretty certain that in order to cover up the traces of such plunder, the offices of the SGPC were deliberately set on fire to destroy their account books. It is also more than likely that the archives housing handwritten copies of the Granth Sahib and the *hukamnamas* were likewise set alight under the impression that they were account books.

The most galling aspect of the Army occupation of Punjab was the reign of terror let loose in the countryside. As the police, accompanied by Army jawans, combed village after village looking for arms and terrorists, they subjected every young Sikh (never a Hindu) to third degree methods to extort confessions. Some were let off after a beating. Others were locked up in police stations and prisons for further questioning. There they continued to rot because it was virtually impossible to find out where they had been taken to.

Ultimately, some private people in the then leaderless Sikh community decided to come to the help of their

co-religionists. Amarendra Singh of Patiala set up a committee under the chairmanship of retired Justice VM Tarkunde to organise the defence of Sikh civilians under detention. The *Sikh Soldiers Legal Aid Committee* was set up, with eminent jurists like Nani Palkhiwala, Soli Sorabji and retired Chief Justice RS Narula, to organise legal representation for Sikh soldiers to be tried by courts martial. It was an uphill task to find out who they were, where they were detained and the offences for which they were charged.

As a result of the Punjab Press Regulations, no newspaper or magazine published in the State was willing to accept a simple paid advertisement asking relatives and friends of people killed, wounded, detained or missing, to communicate with Amarendra Singh or the Sikh Soldiers Legal Aid Committee. Ultimately, such an announcement was carried by a weekly Gurmukhi paper, '*The Punjabi Digest*', published in Delhi.

The impact was spontaneous. The paper was flooded with letters in Gurmukhi, Hindi, Urdu and English, with tales of horror which surpass belief that such things could happen in a civilised society. It was found that a batch of 23 boys between the ages of four and 12, picked up from the Golden Temple complex were lodged in Ludhiana Jail and listed under three categories of terrorists: (i) very dangerous, (ii) dangerous and (iii) potentially dangerous. When a writ of habeas corpus was moved in the Supreme Court on their behalf by Srimati Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, they were quickly transferred to Amritsar.

A 40-year old German woman Anna Bayarak of Munich, wife of a Sikh, Hardial Singh, who happened to be in Amritsar to visit her husband's relatives, was picked up by the police and lodged in Ludhiana jail. Her passport was torn up. An old man sitting in the veranda of his third floor apartment reading a newspaper had his skull shattered by a bullet; a man who had spent the

last many years of his life cleansing the *parikrama* at night had vanished into thin air; no trace could be found of two young sisters visiting the Harmandir. Villagers trekking towards Amritsar were ordered off the tarmac road and as they proceeded on their journey through the neighbouring fields, Army men took pot shots at them, killing amongst many others, an old woman in her 70s. The number of people reported missing by their relatives (and presumed dead) ran into hundreds.



Some of his famed books

Khushwant Singh



# 30 years after the days of Infamy

## 'Oppression Bluestar' Recalled

The author Gunisha Kaur, after graduating from the Williamsville North High School in 2002, has been a human rights activist. During her years as an undergraduate student at Cornell University, Gunisha focussed her study on genocide and has been actively involved in several written works as well as presentations throughout the USA and Canada.

In her book entitled 'Lost in History: 1984 Reconstructed', she writes on the traumatic events in India during the summer of 1984, seeking to create awareness about the Punjab situation in the last quarter of the twentieth century, which has culminated in this book. Two chapters are reproduced with the author's permission.



Fortification created above the parikrama abutting the Dukh-Bhanjani Beri (tree) near the entrance to Sri Harmandir Sahib, pre-Operation Blue Star

*B*odies were being brought in municipal garbage trucks around the clock since early 6 June. We have been really busy. To add to our woes, we don't have enough wood to burn the dead.

Thus wrote Brahma Challeaney of Associated Press of America (citing an employee on duty at Amritsar's crematorium)

On 1 June 1984, the Indian Government commenced Operation Bluestar, a full-scale assault on 40 gurdwaras throughout the Punjab. Although complicit in the broader transgressions within Punjab, the government primarily focused its attention on the most venerated and historically significant of gurdwaras, the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar.

Within the same complex and across from the Darbar Sahib resides the Akal Takht. The two institutions, originally constructed over 400 years ago, have continued to serve as the centre of Sikh polity, decision-making

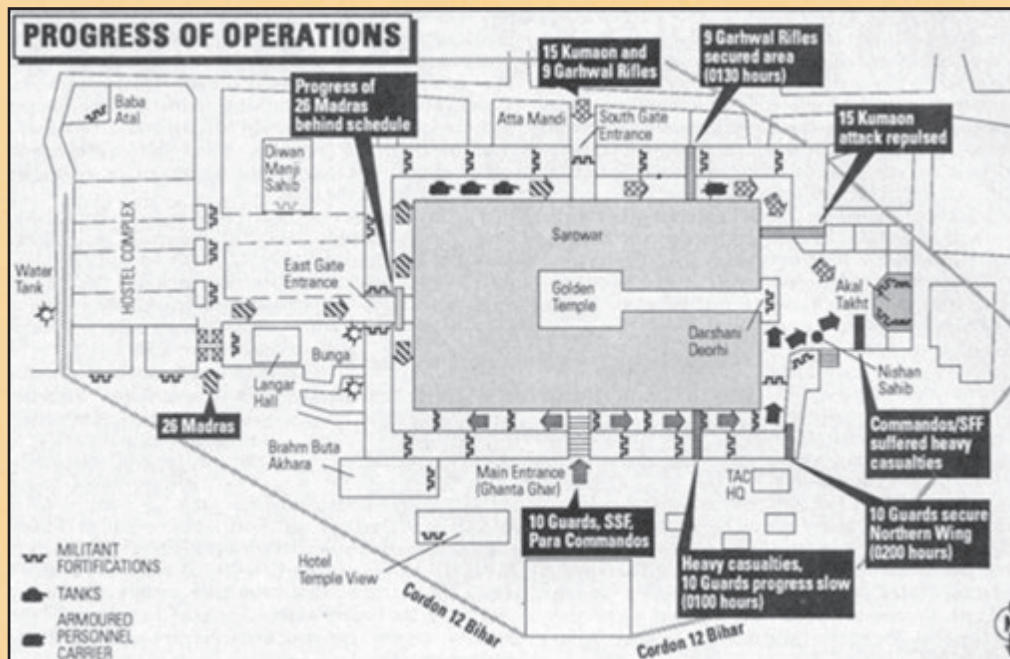
and temporal power. Historically, the Darbar Sahib has also played a central role in the spirit and soul of the Sikh Nation. Notorious invaders from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Ahmed Shah Abdali and Nadir Shah, who attempted to conquer the Sikhs, had targeted this place in particular. For hundreds of years, assaults on the Darbar Sahib of Amritsar have been perceived as assaults on the Sikh religion and people as a whole. For example, while the government claims that 'Operation Bluestar' aimed to weed out terrorists and recover illegal arms and ammunition from the Darbar Sahib, many Sikhs construe the aggression differently:

*'Operation Bluestar' is the Government's term, connoting a necessary military operation to flush out terrorists and recover arms from the Golden Temple; the implication being that it was an unavoidable cleansing operation, an act of purification. Whereas 'Ghallughara' is how the Sikhs of Punjab remember the episode, connoting aggression, mass-massacre and religious persecution.*





Indian army troops and armoured personnel carriers at the Golden Temple in June 1984



Graphic image showing 'progress' of operations during 'Bluestar', Amritsar, June 1984

Upon reviewing the details, the notion of mass-genocide does not seem far-fetched. According to Inderjit Jaijee, for instance, Major General Kuldeep Brar, Lieutenant General Ranjit Dayal and Lieutenant General Krishnaswamy Sunderji began planning the army assault on the Darbar Sahib approximately 6 months prior to June 1984. Furthermore, several months before the invasion, the masterminds of the Operation had army units simulate the attack on a replica of the Darbar Sahib constructed at Chakrata in the Garhwal Hills. Certainly this planning disproves the suggestion that *Operation Bluestar* was a spontaneous reaction to immediate threats.

Additionally, it seems evident that Prime Minister Gandhi's timing of the attack was no accident. The timing of the assault, within the first few days of June, coincided with the days during which Sikhs around the globe commemorate the martyrdom of their fifth Master, Guru Arjan. Among his many accomplishments, Guru Arjan is renowned as the architect of the Darbar Sahib and hundreds of thousands of Sikhs annually flock to this site in order to pay obeisance during the June commemoration.

As in years past, Sikhs filled the complex to maximum capacity during that Gurburab of 1984 when Indian government forces arrived and placed them under siege. A deliberate and calculated massacre ensued, a murderous affair perpetrated by a government against its own citizens.

Joyce Pettigrew eloquently explains the underlying purpose of the army invasion:

*The army went into [the] 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.*

SM Sikri, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, elaborates in describing *Operation Bluestar* as a "massive, deliberate and planned onslaught on the life, property and honour of a comparatively small, but easily identifiable, minority community."

In order to give an accurate account of what transpired during these dark days, some testimonies presented in a report by the Citizens for Democracy, entitled *Oppression in Punjab*, will be shared here. This report, which was banned in India, aspires to, "tell the truth, the as-yet untold story and in the process to correct the government's version as put out by the Army, the Press, the Radio, the TV and the White





*The Generals examine an OT-64 SKOT-wheeled APC which was disabled by an RPG fired during the Army's assault on the Golden Temple.*

Paper.” Founded by Jaya Prakash Narayan, a Hindu who stood as a civil rights leader of great national prominence, the Citizens for Democracy has served as one of the most reliable human rights organisations in India. This organisation reconstructed a detailed account of what transpired inside the Darbar Sahib by documenting and evaluating accounts from survivors of *Operation Bluestar*.

The contents of the accounts of various survivors resonate closely in regards to key details, which indicates the likelihood of their accuracy. Yet these accounts differ sharply from the official version as published in the Indian government’s White Paper. By comparing the content, mechanics of data collection and inherent bias of two reports concerning the same event, it seems apparent that the White Paper is a government cover-up in which propaganda is employed in order to censure the extent of the atrocities. In the interest of space, only a handful of survivor accounts from *Oppression in Punjab* are presented here. The first documented eyewitness to the attack on the Darbar Sahib is Devinder Singh Duggal. The equivalent of a head librarian, Duggal was responsible for overseeing the Sikh Reference Library, a large structure located inside the Darbar Sahib complex. According to Duggal, the army opened fire on the Darbar Sahib on 1 June and not on 5 June, as the government’s White Paper claims. He recalls that the government forces opened fire around 12:30 p.m. and continued firing for seven hours. When asked if there was firing in response from within, Duggal stated:

*Not a single shot was fired from inside the complex. When I asked some of the boys, as to why they did not answer the firing, they replied that they were under strict orders of the Sant [Jarnail Singh] not to fire a single shot unless and until the security forces or the Army entered the holy Golden Temple.*

Contrary to Duggal’s account, All India Radio, the only radio station in the country at that time, reported to the contrary. On the evening news, this government-owned station reported that there was unprovoked

firing from inside the complex and that the security forces had shown “extreme restraint” and did not fire a single shot in response. The evidence however, demonstrates that on the first day, at least eight people died within the complex and 34 bullet holes damaged the exterior of the Darbar Sahib.

According to Duggal, 2 June passed relatively peacefully, with no curfew and no firing from either side. During this time, the military reopened the doors and allowed a large number of Sikhs to enter the Darbar Sahib complex.

Even while filtering the Sikhs into the complex, the army again sealed the exits, not allowing the innocent civilians an opportunity to leave. The governmental forces began to prepare for their assault the next day by cordoning off the borders of Amritsar and imposing strict curfew. Unwarned, unaware and unprepared, the masses collected inside the complex oblivious to the merciless violence that would claim over 10,000 lives!

At approximately 4 am on 4 June, the army attack recommenced. Duggal reports that, “Thereafter, every second the ferocity of firing increased and it continued unabated till the evening of the sixth of June.” Through a window, Duggal vividly recalls seeing piles of dead women and children on the *parikarma*, again calling into question the ethics of a force recklessly claiming the lives of thousands of innocents.”

According to a member of the All India Sikh Student Federation, Just a couple of hundred Sikhs had joined Sant Jarnail Singh to help defend the Darbar Sahib complex with a motley of obsolete arms, most of which dated back to World



War 2. A young female student who survived the massacre of June 1984 testified that on 4 June "If a thousand rounds were being fired by the army from outside, then about one or two rounds were fired in return by the armed militants from inside the Temple complex."

These accounts contradict the government's version in the White Paper, which incredulously claimed:

*A large quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives was recovered, including automatic and anti-tank weapons. A small factory for the manufacture of hand grenades and sten guns was also found within the precincts of the Golden Temple.*

Once again, no evidence has been offered to even suggest the presence of such weapons let alone factories, and no investigations have been commissioned to gather such evidence. In short, no proof has come forth that would lead one to reasonably believe such allegations.

This is not to say that the Sikhs did not have any weapons, but rather that the scale and sophistication of these weapons was grossly exaggerated in order to justify the invasion.

The brunt of the resistance by the Sikhs began after the army charged into the Darbar Sahib complex on 5 June. Survivors have recalled that around 1 a.m. an armoured carrier and eight tanks entered the Darbar Sahib complex. These military vehicles destroyed the precious entrances through which they came and the marble ground on which they drove. Army officers announced from inside the tanks: "Please come out, God's blessings are with you. We will help you reach home absolutely safe and sound." Those who were dehydrated and exhausted came out into the open, hoping to be returned safely to their families and homes. Instead, witnesses testify that many who surrendered were shot down at sight.

Ram Narayan Kumar and Georg Sieberer describe this injustice in their work, 'The Sikh Struggle':

*The army which had suffered a heavy toll in three days of battle went berserk and killed every Sikh to be found inside the temple complex. They were hauled out of the rooms, brought to the corridors in the circumference of the Temple, and with hands tied to their back were shot in cold*

*blood. Among the victims were many old men, women and children.*

Brahma Challaney of the Associated Press of America reported that large number of innocent Sikhs were killed in barbaric manner. Some officers went around and used the Sikhs' turbans to tie their hands behind their backs, while other officers made rounds among the captives and executed each at point blank range." The Indian government has emphatically denied these statements, but they have been invariably corroborated by eye-witnesses and post-mortem reports.

This element of the Indian Army's attack on the Darbar Sahib parallels accounts of the murderous and unethical excursions of invaders of the past. Aristotle openly and directly criticised Alexander for killing innocents after victory had already been attained. The fact that *Operation Blustar* also entailed assaults on 40 other gurdwaras in Punjab simultaneously calls into doubt the government's justification that *Operation Bluestar* was simply an effort to flush out Jarnail Singh and alleged militants from the Darbar Sahib.

The sheer scale of the assault indicates that the government's objective was likely something other than that which it claimed. As Cynthia Keppley Mahmood points out:

*The key problem was that the scale of the assault was disproportionate to the actual threat that the band of militants posed to the Indian state. There were about two hundred armed insurgents at the Complex on that day, but the army responded with some 20,000 troops who used, among other things, tanks and CS gas in the attack on the Temple.*

The times and dates given by various survivors correspond to those given by Devinder Singh Duggal. Notably, none of the survivors in question had previous contact with one another, yet the harmonising testimonies of each (including Joginder Singh, Giani Puran Singh, Baldev Kaur) confirm veracity of the accounts collected by the Citizens for Democracy; the cohesiveness amongst their stories suggests that their accounts are among the most accurate pieces of evidence and memory for critical examination. The unimpressive series of numbers and figures advertised by the Indian government do not stand up against the consistent and unified accounts of those who experienced and witnessed *Operation Bluestar* at first-hand.



# 30 years after the days of Infamy

## The True Colours of 'op. Bluestar'

*Truth, it is well known, is the biggest casualty in war and few may be aware, or though aware would not like to admit that a war is on — an undeclared, unilateral ruthless war — against many tens of thousands of innocent, defenceless men and women in far away villages of the Punjab from where their voices do not reach the rest of India.*

*Citizens for Democracy, 1984*

While the government claims that 675 terrorists and civilians were either killed or injured during attacks on the Darbar Sahib and other Sikh gurdwaras, conservative estimates by reputable sources and survivors come to a minimum of 10,000 casualties. Joyce Pettigrew reports that a senior police officer in Punjab assessed the number of casualties as closer to 20,000. Yet these figures seem remarkably conservative when one logically approximates the number of people present in conjunction with the eyewitness testimony that only a few thousand people survived the assault.

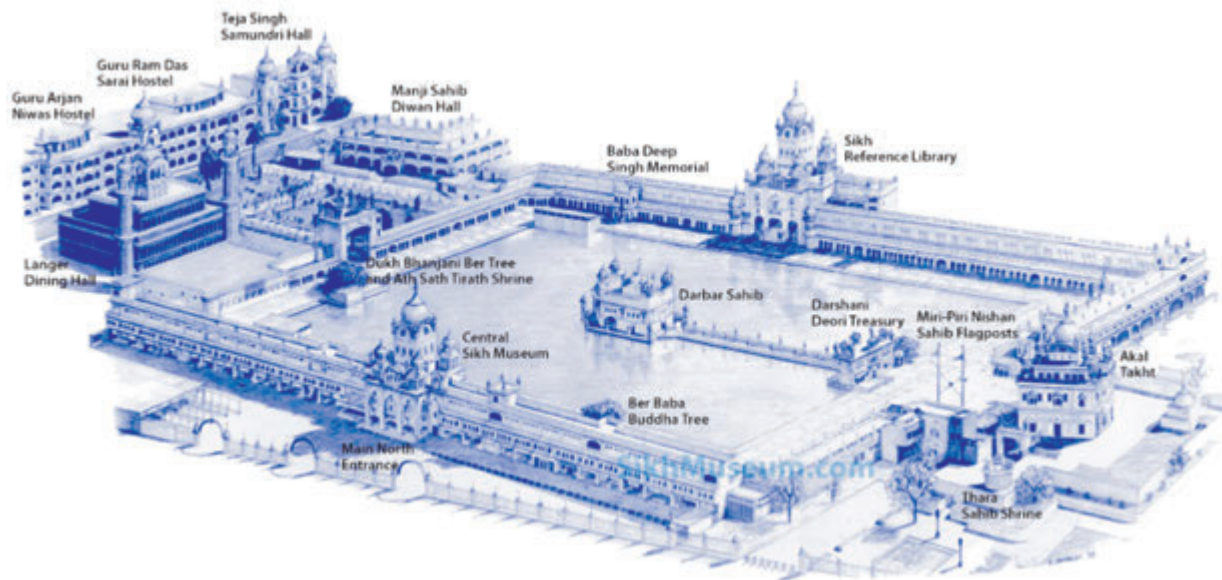
During many Gurpurabs, the Darbar Sahib complex is crowded with people. Attendance at such events easily exceeds 100,000 devotees and the anniversary of Guru Arjan's martyrdom is among the most well attended Gurpurabs. Any person who has attended this Gurpurab will be able to confirm that during this occasion there is hardly any room to move as there are so many people inside the complex — one survivor described it as a sea of people, where each devotee is literally swept through the complex by the crowd. Based on an estimate of how many people are typically inside the Darbar Sahib during Guru Arjan's Gurpurab, combined with the observation that only a few thousand survivors emerged from the area after the attack, *Operation Bluestar* likely claimed up to 10,000 lives!



*Indian Army troops with weapons along the parikrama at the Golden Temple, June 1984*

The number of casualties during *Operation Bluestar* is just one inconsistency amidst an ocean of discrepancies between the government's official report and the accounts of survivors. One reason for such divergence is the lack of media reporting. In the days leading up to *Operation Bluestar*, the central government imposed press censorship in Punjab and barred domestic and international reporters from Amritsar. Therefore, few reliable independent sources have had the opportunity to knowledgeably and accurately depict the siege in Punjab. For the most part, the citizens of India, as well as the international community, could only learn about the situation in Amritsar through an investigative report commissioned by the government titled the *White Paper*. Independent persons and organisations that sought the truth were charged with sedition, labeled as anti-national





**Indian Army's battlefield, June 1984**

terrorist sympathisers and thrown into jail. These actions are suggestive of sinister play and further indicate the likelihood that the *White Paper* served to cover the truth rather than to disseminate it, making it crucial that the falsities of such propaganda are exposed and the truth uncovered.

In order to further conceal the extent of its brutal assaults and grave human rights violations, the Indian government broadened its exile of all media outlets by barring access to any and all organisations seeking to provide humanitarian aid. Social interest groups such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Human Rights were denied entry into Punjab and, as a result, were extremely limited in their abilities to evaluate and respond to the atrocities of *Operation Bluestar*. In a lecture at Cornell University, the former Attorney General of India, Soli Sorabjee, stated that humanitarian organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch long continued to be restricted from entering areas in Punjab to investigate human rights violations.

Under conditions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which India is party, United Nations representatives are permitted access into all member countries to investigate claims of heinous crimes such as genocide. Additionally, according to the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, the Red Cross is permitted to aid the wounded inside a battle zone, even if it is within enemy

territory. The Congress Government's banning of such non-partisan organisations suggests that the need to cover up the unlawful actions taking place in Punjab superseded the need to provide relief for the wounded soldiers and victims.

Owing to the lack of official, independent and unbiased reporting in Amritsar in June 1984, history must be reconstructed by comparing the *White Paper* alongside the eyewitness accounts of survivors. This narrative begins with the reasons for the assault on the Darbar Sahib.

One of the greatest myths regarding the events of June 1984 was the number of arms present inside the gurdwara. The *White Paper* repeatedly refers to the supposed large stockpile of weapons inside the Darbar Sahib, elaborating that it was only with such weaponry that the alleged terrorists could have defended the complex as intensely as they did. In addition to rifles, Sten guns, explosives, grenades, and mines, the government claims that the Sikhs had automatic and anti-tank weapons. On the other side, interviews with those who witnessed *Operation Bluestar* and those who frequented the Darbar Sahib have revealed no knowledge of a massive quantity of arms or the existence of "grenade and Sten gun factories." Reputable human rights workers and newspapers have also challenged claims by the *White Paper*. For example, the reputed London-based publication, *The Economist*, reported, "Even the tally of captured weapons, fewer than 200 guns of all kinds



does little to bolster the government's allegations of a massive anti-national conspiracy against the Indian union." Not only is the quantity of weapons in question, but the apparent danger of these arms is on trial as well.

Iqbal Singh of the University of Chicago states:

*It is hard to conceive that 200 weapons, some of-First World War vintage, could even remotely be a challenge to [the] world's fourth largest armed forces composed of a million soldiers, thousands of tanks, aircraft and modern artillery.*

A pamphlet published in 1985 by the Committee on Human Rights, *The Turning Point: India's Future Direction*, further explains the potential unreliability of these numbers that were gathered from official sources:

*With the passage of time the imposing picture of the arms buildup within the Temple has now begun to shrink in size. The heaviest arms which are claimed to have been recovered are light machine guns. Poised against the heavy tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery of the Indian army, they would appear as toys. But one cannot be sure about the authenticity of even that. After all, it is no problem for the government and the army to find an assortment of arms to make an exhibit when care had been taken to keep everyone out who could report on arms being brought by the army and para-military forces from outside to make out a case after their action.*

Another important question concerns the magnitude of resistance alleged by the Army, a query also posed by the then President of India. With heavy surveillance and searching of every person and vehicle that had entered the vicinity of the Darbar Sahib for over a year prior to the attack, it seems that it would have been quite difficult for the supposed terrorists to sneak a large quantity of weapons inside the complex. Ajoy Bose of *The Guardian*, reported on the civil liberties violations in his article *The Legacy of Fear*. Bose tells of the soldiers that searched not just civilians entering the complex, but even tractors and bullock carts along the highways and streets. The government has yet to account for the flaw in its logic that massive quantity of arms was brought into the complex during a period of exhaustive and meticulous surveillance.

The President of India during *Operation Bluestar*, Zail Singh recalls in his memoirs:

*In anguish, I asked Mrs. Gandhi (as to) what were our intelligence agencies doing all those months, when arms*

*build-up was supposedly going on in this religious place. ... It was ironical, I supposed, that innocent people had to pay with their lives for the dereliction of duty by the security forces and the intelligence organs of the Government. Mrs. Gandhi had obviously no plausible answer.*

When no answer could be given as to how the alleged terrorists had acquired such arms and ammunition for which they were charged, the government offered theories that accused the terrorists of snatching these from police officers or raiding arms dumps! More intricate allegations included claiming that the supposed terrorists had acquired arms from some foreign country, most likely Pakistan. Yet even these explanations do not account for how the purported quantity of arms entered the complex.

Another problematic difference between the government's story of *Operation Bluestar* and the civilians' accounts is the alleged protection of alleged terrorists by the Sikhs. According to the government's White Paper, numerous suspected terrorists were hiding inside the Darbar Sahib complex. The government maintains that all attempts to convince the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to turn over the wanted men had failed. However, records of this appeal by the government show little evidence of such threat present in the Darbar Sahib.

Subramanian Swamy, a respected member of the Indian Parliament, wrote that the Congress Government repeatedly claimed that hundreds of terrorists had taken refuge in the gurdwara, but that the government had only appealed to the SGPC to turn over 40 men. Moreover, Swamy complained that these requests had been made only once, over a year and a half before the events in June 1984. Further, among these 40 men named in the appeal, 18 could not possibly be inside the complex, as they were either dead or had moved on to Canada, Germany or Pakistan. The remaining 22 alleged terrorists, according to Swamy, also could not be located inside of the complex by the SGPC's screening committee. Swamy tells of how PC Sethi, a member of the Lower House of the Parliament, later admitted to these facts and, at another point, Swamy states, "Since then, no further lists have been sent to the SGPC, and yet the government keeps declaring that criminals are hiding in the Temple complex.

The charges against Jarnail Singh were minor, the most serious among them accused him of giving





*The Sikh Reference Library burning after its contents were ostensibly removed by the Army in June 1984*

“inflammatory speeches.” In fact, the warrants for his arrest were only produced after *Operation Bluestar*, after he had already been killed. This seems to support evidence of a pattern of propaganda and intimidation used by the government: charge an individual with a fake crime, attempt to arrest him, and when the innocent does not cooperate, declare him to be a criminal for evading the police. The Committee on Human Rights wrote against the injustice of attacking and killing innocent Sikhs when there were no allegations against them and no reasonable attempt had been made to apprehend the alleged terrorists:

*The most disturbing thing about the entire operation was that a whole mass of men, women and children were to be killed merely on the suspicion that some terrorists were operating from the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras. There had been no judicial verdict of guilt against definite individuals who had been taking shelter in the Golden Temple. ... Thus such a major military attack resulting in the massacre of largely innocent people was undertaken on mere suspicion which had been created by the statements of police and the government themselves.*

The *White Paper* also reports that commanders were instructed to use the public address system for

several hours in areas where the alleged terrorists were suspected to be hiding. This measure would have allowed the army to avoid the bloodshed and destruction of the Darbar Sahib, yet in the aftermath one learns that the commanders reported that they were reluctant to take such measures. The President of India commented in his memoirs that appeals to surrender were not made and innocents were not warned:

*I asked the Government whether they had issued a warning on the loudspeakers to the people inside the complex to come out, to which they replied in the affirmative. Later, I came to know that no such warning had been issued by the authorities and the Operation had been launched suddenly.*

Adding to the image of destruction presented both by the survivors of the assault as well as rare pictures of the razed buildings taken after the attack, the President of India explains the extent of the damage he witnessed with his own eyes:

*The gold sheet covering the walls [of the Golden Temple] was pock-marked and those portions had just been replaced, as repairs to them were not possible...even pieces of gold-sheet covering the dome had fallen off... I sent a letter to*



*Mrs Indira Gandhi telling her about the grave dimension of damage that had occurred to the Akal Takht and the Golden Temple.*

A considerable amount of damage must have been incurred so as to cause the gold plating to fall off. Devinder Singh Duggal observed that the Darbar Sahib bore some thousand bullet marks.

The *White Paper* also claims that on 5 June, the alleged militants set fire to the Sikh Reference Library, which contained hundreds of irreplaceable and priceless original manuscripts and scriptures. The government's report also states that the army's fire rescue squad was unable to help put out the fire owing to the machine-gun fire by terrorists. Yet the library's caretaker, Devinder Singh Duggal, remembers the structure being intact when he last saw it on 6 June, when the complex was entirely under the control of the army. He recalls:

*On 14th June 1984 I was arrested by the army and taken inside the Golden Temple, where I was shocked to see that the Sikh Reference Library had been burnt down. The entire Golden Temple Complex presented a very, very painful look. It bore at least 3 lakhs of bullet marks. The Akal Takht was in shambles. Guru Nanak Nivas, Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Guru Ram Das Serai and the langar buildings had been burnt. When I left the complex on the 6th all those buildings were in good shape in spite of the Army attack.*

Based on his account, the Sikh Reference Library was reduced to ashes after 6 June. By this time, all Sikhs inside the complex had been arrested or executed. This leads one to deduce that the military destroyed these buildings after they had been evacuated and secured. Looting, plundering and demolishing this treasure-house of the Sikhs also suggests that *Operation Bluestar* had less to do with weeding out alleged terrorists than with assailing the very spirit of a peoples.

The government also played the morality card, claiming that, "No women or children were killed in the action by the troops." Instead, the *White Paper* attributed the casualties among the Sikh civilians to the alleged militants. Human rights reports harshly condemned army brutality, eyewitness testimonies of civilian executions at point blank range, photographs of women and children lined up with their hands tied behind their backs, and corroborating accounts of esteemed human rights activists such as Ram Narayan Kumar and Georg Sieberer, the government's claim

that no women or children were killed by the action of the troops is yet another falsity concocted to cover up the harsh reality of *Operation Bluestar*.

Several prominent journalists reported that in addition to the men and women that perished in *Operation Bluestar*, children between the ages of two and 12 were arrested subsequent to the Operation! The government identifies these targets as "infant-terrorists." The story of four-year-old Rinku began with the disappearance of his mother and murder of his father by the army. Orphaned, jailed and tortured by the government, when asked why his stomach was so big, Rinku replied, "Because I eat clay."

Of the 39 children documented to have been captured during *Operation Bluestar*, three were subsequently classified as "dangerous terrorists." This was the sad state where children, as young as two years of age, understood and experienced the same fear as their parents and grandparents including the horror of being apprehended, tortured and ultimately eliminated. Undoubtedly, this was one of the most disgusting chapters in modern Indian history.

In order to retain popular support while attacking a house of worship that held a special place in the Sikh psyche, the government stated that it had respected the Darbar Sahib and had inflicted the absolute minimal amount of damage. The *White Paper* states, "From the commencement of the planning stage of this operation ... strict instructions had been issued to preserve the buildings." The *White Paper* also notes that the "utmost reverence" was upheld when occupying the religious sanctuary and that the army exercised extreme restraint and paid great respect to the Sikh faith while capturing the alleged militants.

All these claims are clearly refuted by photographs taken by army personnel who participated in *Operation Bluestar*, and illustrates blatant infringements of respect within the gurdwara complex (consumption of tobacco and alcohol, wearing of shoes). As journalists were unable to observe or report on such events, only recently have such offenses been uncovered and brought to light. As India's reputable weekly magazine *India Today* suggested, the government's *White Paper* might more precisely be labeled *Operation Whitewash*.

Not only did the Indian Army neglect to record names of those killed during *Operation Bluestar*, it also disrespected the lifeless bodies by dragging



them around and throwing them into trucks for “disposal.” The overflow of bodies resulted in mass cremations. Not enough firewood was available to provide proper cremations on an individual basis, so corpses were piled up and burned in stacks. As the cremations were undocumented, the government failed to produce a list of those killed and families of the victims went uninformed. No count was kept and the bodies were burned to destroy any evidence of the mass-scale genocide.

The Citizens for Democracy’s report, *Oppression in Punjab*, summarises the brutality of the Operation:

*A number of responsible men and women who were inside the Golden Temple throughout the Army action, described to us how innocent people were slaughtered — first letting them enter the Complex and then imposing the curfew which prevented them from coming out : thousands were thus caught unawares; finally when the survivors were asked to surrender they were shot in cold blood; our photographs would show how the hands of men were tied at their back with their own turbans, some of whom were then shot. The post mortem reports show how the bullets had pierced their bodies. The eye witnesses witnessed the use of gas by the Army, the pile of dead bodies on the ‘parikarma’, the arrival of tanks which some of them thought were the ambulance, the hovering of helicopters at night, with search-light on targets which were strafed the wanton destruction of the Akal Takhat, the Research Library and the Museum ... The facts have been exposed that the Army’s ‘restraint’ we heard so much of and have proved conclusively that the White Paper is after all not so white. We learnt for the first time with amazement that the Red Cross was not allowed even to enter the Complex to attend to the wounded, many not allowed any water to drink then died of thirst; on 7th June, 28 people were pushed inside a room without any ventilation and locked up, and when the room was opened, 14 of them*



*Akal Takht : target of H.E. shells fired by artillery and heavy tanks*

*were dead. Bodies were left to rot inside the room and then burnt. This was independent India’s Jallianwala Bagh!*

The mercilessness detailed in the above paragraph demonstrates that the alleged militants were not the only targets of *Operation Bluestar*. If they were, the Indian government would have employed another method to remove them from the Darbar Sahib without compromising the lives of countless civilians. Former President Zail Singh wrote in his memoirs that he asked Mrs Gandhi why it had not been possible to give a prior warning of the attack so that the innocents may have had the opportunity to leave safely; why a curfew could not have been imposed to stop the movement of innocent people into the complex once the government had given the army license to attack; why religious leaders could not have been asked to make an appeal to the Sikhs to protect the sanctity of the Darbar Sahib by surrendering; why the Operation had been carried out on a day when it was obvious that the greatest number of Sikhs would have gathered. President Singh recalled, “I told her that if notice had been given to those pilgrims over radio, television, and loudspeakers, a majority of them would have come out, including some extremists, to surrender.”

A comparison of the *White Paper’s* claims with survivor accounts demonstrates notable discrepancies that must be reconciled with a sensible and, where possible, scientific methodology. In considering the available evidence, the inconsistencies between the narratives of the perpetrators and victims beg the question: how much faith should one place in any account of 1984? We can begin to answer this question by recognising the potential motives that would drive the government’s version and the survivors’ accounts of the army attack. Further, by critically dissecting and analysing the logic and consistency of the statements from both sides, we can perhaps hope to uncover the truth about *Operation Bluestar* that has lain concealed for decades.

*Gunisha Kaur*



# Insidious politics of the '80s

## The Triumvirate behind 'Operation Bluestar'

Following are extracts from an article by Hartosh Singh Bal, political editor at 'The Caravan' which appeared earlier in that magazine.



**T**he Darbar Sahib of Amritsar is central to the Sikh faith. The Sikh *ardaas*, or plea to God, which is recited at the end of the morning and evening prayers, and on every religious and social occasion, birth, marriage and death, contains the lines: *Sikha nu Sikhi daan kesh daan rehit daan bibek daan purosā daan naam daan Sri Amritsar Sahib de ishanan* (Bestow to the Sikhs the gift of Sikhism, long hair, the correct code of conduct, divine knowledge, firm faith, belief, the divine name and a dip in the sacred pool of Amritsar).

Since the traumatic decade of the '80s, the number of pilgrims to the Darbar Sahib has increased rapidly. The queues to enter the shrine now extend beyond the causeway; but the sense of quiet calm remains, though it is at odds with the holy shrine's history. Perhaps no

place of worship so central to a major religion in India has seen as much strife within its premises.

The sarovar was constructed in 1581 by Ram Das, the fourth Sikh guru. The tank was lined and the shrine completed by the fifth guru, Arjan Dev, in 1601. By that time, the Sikh congregation had grown large enough for the Mughal emperor Jehangir to see Guru Arjan as a threat to his sovereignty. He was arrested in 1606, and tortured to death when he refused to convert to Islam. This first martyrdom in their incipient faith would become the paradigm for Sikhism's relationship with the durbar in Delhi.

The sixth guru, Hargobind, donned two swords to represent a change in the nature of his leadership—he would be not only a spiritual guide to his disciples (*piri*),



but also a preceptor in their temporal lives (*miri*). The weapons form Sikhism's central symbol, the *khanda*—a pair of linked swords. The guru ensured the same symbolism was reflected in the architecture of the Darbar Sahib. Across from the causeway, facing the central shrine which represents spiritual authority, he constructed the Akal Takht, the timeless throne, from where he administered justice like any temporal authority.

Once the line of living gurus ended with Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, this authority over the Sikhs came to be vested in the *jathedar*, or custodian, of the Akal Takht. Through the eighteenth century, as centralised authority broke down in the Punjab, the Sikhs grew in strength. Dispersed, led by various men, groups of Sikh warriors would gather periodically at the Akal Takht to plan and direct their course of action. Those seeking to contain them would target the Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht.

Each person who has desecrated the shrine occupies an oversize space in the collective memory of the community. Every Sikh can recount the story of Massa Rangar, who was appointed the *kotwal* or ruler of Amritsar in 1740 and proceeded to host nautch parties in the Harmandir Sahib, having first removed the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, from its place. He was beheaded by two Sikhs, Mehtab and Sukha Singh, who claimed to be revenue officers coming to deposit a large sum of money.

Even better known is the story of a defender of the faith, Baba Deep Singh. In 1757, the Afghan emperor Ahmad Shah Abdali, having sacked Delhi for the fourth time, was waylaid by a Sikh contingent near Kurukshetra. Angered, he left his son Taimur Shah behind as the governor of Lahore to take care of this menace. Taimur demolished the Harmandir Sahib, but the seventy-five-year-old Deep Singh led a contingent of five hundred Sikhs to take back the complex. By the time he neared Amritsar, their number had swelled to five thousand. Clashing with a much larger Afghan army, Deep Singh was injured by a blow to the neck, but continued to fight his way to the Darbar Sahib, eventually succumbing to his injuries by the sarovar. On the parikrama, the spot where he is believed to have fallen is marked by a portrait of him carrying his decapitated head in one hand, still holding a sword aloft in the other.

The martyrdom of Baba Deep Singh resonates through Sikh history. Two centuries later, in June 1984, when the Indian Army went into the Darbar Sahib on orders from prime minister Indira Gandhi, it was to disarm and dislodge Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who according to tradition was the fourteenth head of the Damdami Taksaal, an orthodox Sikh seminary once headed, it is said, by Deep Singh. In the mythology of a faith where the stories of Massa Rangar and Deep Singh arouse intense and contrary emotions, Sikhs memorialised both Bhindranwale and Gandhi in accordance with the roles they had assumed—one the defender, the other a desecrator.

The trajectory of those two lives, both of which ended violently thirty years ago, intersected for the first time in 1977, when Bhindranwale assumed charge of the Damdami Taksaal, and Gandhi was swept out of power after the 'Emergency'. Nowhere was Gandhi's decision to suspend the constitution as strongly contested as in Punjab, and no party resisted it with quite the ferocity of the Akali Dal, which represented Sikh interests in the state. Over the next seven years, Gandhi, Bhindranwale and the Akali Dal would lead three fronts in a battle in which they faced off, realigned with and schemed against each other until the very end.

By the time the Congress returned to power in the state in 1980, Bhindranwale was well on his way to becoming a popular icon, accumulating so much power that the Akalis, whom he was supposed to be undermining, ended up turning to him for help. He became the dominant political force in Punjab: by 1983, he was running a parallel state from within the Darbar Sahib complex, dispensing rough justice before adoring supplicants. Even the policemen in Punjab tasked with arresting him were reduced to seeking his protection.

'Bluestar', the military operation to remove Bhindranwale from the Darbar Sahib, ended this regime—but at the cost of thousands of lives, and the credibility of the Indian Army, which subsequently had mutinous troops for the first time in the history of independent India. Although the action has been examined in close detail over the years following the attack, the lack of planning and intelligence, and the hurry to carry it out, have never been properly explained.

In February 2014, the declassification of intelligence documents in the UK revealed information about a commando operation inside the Darbar Sahib that was planned but never executed. Given this evidence, I revisited several people who had witnessed the events leading up to 'Operation Bluestar'. In light of these interviews, it is possible to assemble a more coherent picture than ever before of the Gandhi family's political calculations, which were central to the nature of the final operation. The dismal story of 'Bluestar' had been set on its tracks by Sanjay Gandhi, but it now appears that its disastrous conclusion was the work of his brother Rajiv, who swept to power with the biggest mandate in Indian history following his mother's assassination. 'Operation Bluestar' was not just Indira Gandhi's last battle; it was the first, and perhaps the most disastrous, of Rajiv's blunders.

By the time the smoke cleared over the Darbar Sahib, thousands of innocent bystanders had died. Bhindranwale lay murdered, and the Akal Takht, where he had set up his final defiance of Delhi, stood shattered. The operation was soon followed by the



assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, and the organised massacre of thousands of Sikhs by Hindu mobs, led mainly by Congress politicians. In Punjab, militancy against the Indian state reached levels unprecedented in the years before 'Bluestar'; it took a decade for a semblance of peace to return.

Over the last thirty years, the debate over 'Bluestar' has played out between two extreme points of view: that of radicals in Punjab and abroad, who dwell on the Congress's role while overlooking Bhindranwale's complicity, and that of people in the rest of India, who tend to focus on Bhindranwale with little sense of the Congress's contribution to the tragedy. Many Indians may believe the events of that June can be consigned to the history books, but their memory remains alive in Punjab. Many Sikhs continue to view the operation, and the figure of Bhindranwale, in a markedly different light from the rest of the country. Without understanding how such distinct perspectives came to exist, it may be impossible to come to terms with the history of Bluestar.

Just a short distance from the Darbar Sahib, a narrow stairwell leads up to the residence of Baba Ram Singh, a general secretary of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Following 'Operation Bluestar', Ram Singh, who was a close associate of Bhindranwale, had been imprisoned by the Indian government. Right away, he dismissed the arguments about 'Bluestar'. "Everyone agrees today that it was a mistake." Instead, he said, he wanted to set the record straight on Bhindranwale. He was upset not because the rest of India saw him as little more than a violent fundamentalist, but because so much uninformed hagiography surrounded his life among Sikhs. "What can be done?" he said. "It is a fact that his name sells."

Ram Singh entered the Damdami Taksaal in 1967, once he had finished school. At the time, he said, Jarnail Singh, the young man who would become Bhindranwale, was already studying there, having come to the Taksaal as a child, the youngest in a family of seven brothers. Gurbachan Singh, the head of the seminary, "had himself brought him to the Taksaal, after asking his father."

Jarnail Singh, born in 1947, was from the village of Rode in Faridkot district, and his family had long been associated with the seminary. Ram Singh came from a similar background. This was no coincidence. The Green Revolution had brought prosperity to rural Punjab, but it had also exacerbated inequalities among Jatt Sikhs, the predominant landowning community in Punjab state, as differences in landholding sizes multiplied into differences in wealth and status. Both Bhindranwale and Ram Singh's families had to struggle for a living. (This was also the background of many of the young men

who took up arms against the Indian state in Punjab after Bhindranwale's death.)

According to tradition, the Damdami Taksaal traces its lineage back to the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh, who while living at the Damdama Sahib gurdwara committed from memory text of the Guru Granth Sahib, and taught a select band of Sikhs the correct forms of reciting and understanding the holy book. The Taksaal developed a reputation for spreading the orthodox understanding of Sikhism; until the SGPC established a number of missionary colleges in recent years, it remained the source of many *jathedars* and *ragis*—singers—at major gurdwaras. It provided room for many young men, whose families were attracted to the organisation by the thought of having one less mouth to feed. The training that awaited them was rigorous. "We started by learning the proper recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib," Ram Singh said of his extensive education. "We would learn the meaning of each word in the text, the meaning of each verse, and then would move on to the study of Vedanta. The whole process would take seven to ten years."

By the time Ram Singh arrived at the seminary, Jarnail Singh had become, for the time being, a part-time resident, because Gurbachan Singh insisted that he return home to be married and live as a householder. The young man left reluctantly, married in 1966, and made ends meet by working his meagre share of the family land.

Jarnail Singh was not one to forgive an affront; perhaps those in Delhi who attempted to make use of him never understood this. In the society he was born into, the merest slight could trigger a cycle of bloodshed descending through the generations. This was a culture mediated by the idea of honour; a man who could not stand by his word and back it up with violence did not count for much. Journalists who saw only an unsophisticated rustic in Bhindranwale overlooked the fact that his bluntness of speech and overbearing manner appealed to the Sikh peasantry.

Without his theological training, however, his manner would not have been enough to appeal to the orthodox. Whenever Jarnail Singh visited the seminary, Ram Singh recalled, he kept to himself, speaking, eating and sleeping very little. "His mastery of the recitation of the gurbani and the daily prayers stood out."

In August 1977, Jarnail Singh was called back to the Taksaal. Gurbachan Singh's successor, Sant Kartar Singh, had been killed in a road accident. Even as a part-timer, the appeal of Jarnail Singh, Kartar's favoured disciple, was so strong that he was chosen to head the Taksaal over Kartar's son, Bhai Amrik Singh, who went on to become one of his closest associates. The Taksaal had once been located at Bhindran village in Sangrur district. Like a number of his predecessors, Jarnail Singh, the impoverished farmer who could not afford fodder for his



cattle, took on the name of that village, and became Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, head of one of Sikhism's most prominent seminaries.

Less than a year after Bhindranwale was appointed to his chair, he became enmeshed in a religious battle which would gain him attention both in Punjab and in Delhi, and establish a pattern of action that would be repeated in subsequent years; first an outbreak of violence apparently instigated by his rhetoric, then his taking refuge in the Darbar Sahib complex, and eventual acquittal by the authorities.

On Baisakhi day in spring 1978, a heterodox Sikh sect known as the Sant Nirankaris took out a procession through the streets of Amritsar. Baisakhi is of special importance to Sikhs: on this day, according to the faithful, Guru Gobind Singh founded the *khalsa*, the term he used to denote all baptised Sikhs who keep the symbols of the faith. The Sant Nirankaris believed in a living guru—blasphemy to orthodox Sikhs—and their procession on this day amounted to an act of provocation.

The ruling Akali Dal had permitted the march in spite of being aware that it would anger the orthodox. Sure enough, at an impromptu meeting called by Bhindranwale and his supporters near the Darbar Sahib, Bhindranwale made a fiery speech against the Sant Nirankaris, stoking tempers. He led a march towards the procession with kirpans drawn; but the Sant Nirankaris were armed, and shot down thirteen men marching with Bhindranwale.

This earned Bhindranwale the attention of the Congress party in Delhi. In his book *Tragedy of Punjab*, co-written with Khushwant Singh, the veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar describes how this came about. Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, "knowing how extra-constitutional matters worked," suggested a "sant" be put up to challenge the Akali Dal government. Two Sikh priests were shortlisted for the task, and the final selection left to Sanjay. One did not look "the courageous type." The other was Bhindranwale. Sanjay's friend, the MP Kamal Nath, told Nayar, "Bhindranwale, strong in tone and tenor, seemed to fit the bill. We would give him money off and on, but we never thought he would turn into a terrorist."

A few months after the Baisakhi clash, a new political organisation called the Dal Khalsa held a press conference in Chandigarh. It would soon become clear that the group's purpose was to support every demand made by Bhindranwale, and to take the overtly political positions that he did not. The Dal Khalsa allowed Bhindranwale to maintain the fiction, meant largely for the media in Delhi, but meaningless for an orthodox Sikh, that he was a man of religion who had nothing to do with politics.

Outside Punjab, the conventional understanding of the alliance between Bhindranwale and the Congress assumes the party was making use of a small-time preacher for its own

ends, and propelled him to a position of significance by doing so. But as head of the Taksaal, Bhindranwale already had a certain standing among orthodox Sikhs; with or without Congress support, he was anything but small-time. In truth, the arrangement was one of mutual convenience, and lasted only as long as it served Bhindranwale's interests.

By January 1980, when Indira Gandhi was voted back into power, Bhindranwale had grown in stature and influence. During the election, he canvassed for some of the Congress candidates in Punjab, and once even shared a dais with Gandhi.

But the denouement to the story of the Baisakhi clash made it evident that he was a difficult man to keep in check. Just days after election results were declared, Gurbachan Singh and his followers were acquitted. Immediately, Bhindranwale's rhetoric against the Sant Nirankaris escalated, and in April, Gurbachan Singh was assassinated at his residence in Delhi.

When Bhindranwale's name appeared in the police report, he sought, for the first time, shelter in the Guru Nanak Niwas within the Darbar Sahib complex.

Bhindranwale stayed within the sanctuary of the Darbar Sahib until Zail Singh bailed him out. The home minister stood up in parliament to declare that Bhindranwale had no hand in the murder of the Nirankari chief, thus ending the possibility of a trial.

Once she returned as prime minister, Gandhi dissolved several state governments ruled by her opponents, including that of Punjab. This was one of several major mistakes on the path that led to 'Operation Bluestar', as it changed the dynamics of the state's politics. Bhindranwale quickly became a problem for the new Congress chief minister, Darbara Singh; and Zail Singh, unwilling to loosen his grip over the state's politics, attempted to control Bhindranwale for his own purposes.

The Akalis, pushed out of power, came to seek help from their foremost opponent. The party was ruled by a triumvirate with differing political approaches. Of these men, Bhindranwale hated Parkash Singh Badal, and found little common ground with the ostensibly non-violent Harchand Singh Longowal; but Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the SGPC head and the third and most hard-line of the Akali leaders, was instrumental in creating an alliance between his party and Bhindranwale, and matters improved steadily between them over the next few years. From a battle over religious issues between Bhindranwale and the Akalis, the conflict now became a game of political one-upmanship, in which the target was the Indian state.

Bhindranwale was now persistently defying Delhi and getting away with it, and this added to his mounting



popularity among Sikhs. Eventually, as arrest from Chowk Mehta seemed inevitable, Bhindranwale set the date and terms for his own surrender, specifying that a baptised Sikh take him into custody. When he was arrested on 20 September, the police clashed with his followers at the spot, and seven people died in the resulting firing. Less than a month after his arrest, on 14 October, Zail Singh once again declared before an agitated parliament that there was no evidence of Bhindranwale's involvement in Jagat Narain's murder. Bhindranwale was released from custody. For the second time, he had been declared innocent without being subjected to due process.

President's Rule was imposed in October 1983, and the likelihood of military action against Bhindranwale grew. Bhindranwale, on the pretext of a quarrel with another armed group in the Darbar Sahib, vacated the Guru Nanak Niwas, located at the southern end of the complex, and moved into the Akal Takht.

According to PC Alexander's memoir, Gandhi made up her mind to summon the army on 25 May, relying on the reassurances of General AS Vaidya, chief of the army staff. Vaidya explained that he would move troops into different locations in Punjab simultaneously, surrounding gurdwaras occupied by extremists and cutting off their supplies and movement. A similar siege would be mounted around the Golden Temple, with a large number of troops. Alexander writes that Gandhi "repeatedly told the general that in any operation no damage should be done to the temple buildings and particularly to the Harmandir Sahib." Vaidya assured her that there would be "a maximum show of force, but a minimum use of it."

Vaidya met with Gandhi again on 29 May, and suggested some changes in the plan. They would ensure that the temple would not be damaged—but they would need to enter it. This proposal was the result of Vaidya's meeting with Lieutenant General K Sundarji (GOC-in-C Western Command) with direct command of operations. Alexander writes that Vaidya convinced Gandhi that he had weighed the pros and cons of the plan with his senior colleagues; they had all agreed that a siege would prolong the operation and destabilise the surrounding countryside. A quick entry and surprise attack was the best way to deal with the men inside.

A week later, on the night of 5 June, Lieutenant Colonel Israr Rahim Khan commanded the first troops that stormed the Darbar Sahib complex. Khan reported directly to Major General KS 'Bulbul' Brar, who was in overall command of the operation controlled by Sundarji. Khan, who retired as a brigadier, at first said he had little to add to Brar's account of the operation, published in his 1993 book *Operation Bluestar—The True Story*. I said I wanted to hear a view from the ground, from a soldier who was

actually part of the operation. Once he began to speak, it was evident he remembered the action as though it had taken place yesterday. "From our debussing area, near Jallianwalla Bagh, a short distance from the Darbar Sahib, we were to approach the Darshan Deori, the main entrance. We were in the open, and 'they' were all secure, with their weapon emplacements in place. There was not an inch of ground in the gully outside the Darshan Deori that was not covered by the firing."

Shahbeg Singh's plan of defence for the Darbar Sahib was so effective that, three decades later, Khan recalled it with something like admiration. The complex was guarded by an outer ring of emplacements positioned on the vantage points of its high buildings—the Hotel Temple View on one side, and the *gumbads*, or domes, on the other—and an inner ring on the parikrama, within the temple itself. At the Darshan Deori, Khan and his men descended the stairs into the complex unaware of loopholes in the walls that had been turned, he said, into 'weapon pits.'

The army was hemmed in at close quarters, in a heavily built-up area, which meant that there was no way collateral damage could be avoided. "I read somewhere that Mrs Gandhi was told there would be no casualties. No person in the right frame of mind would give such an assurance to the PM." If there were any expectations that the security forces would meet no resistance, they were rendered utterly false. "They knew," Khan said. "How can you build brick and mortar key emplacements overnight? It was beautifully planned. You could not close up anywhere near the temple without being hit by a bullet."

"The commandos were grouped with me. A company each of the Special Frontier Force and 1 Para Commando was grouped with 10 Guards. We were to give them safe passage through the parikrama, until the periphery of the Akal Takht, and they were meant to capture Bhindranwale from the Akal Takht. So I grouped them, with my leading company going ahead. We entered first and made place for them to enter. We gave them a safe corridor through the parikrama till the end. There were twelve rooms in a row; we kept clearing, room by room by room." Every room was manned.

By 1 am, Khan says, his company had captured the northern wing of the parikrama and opened it up to the Special Forces, but they were unable to make headway. "The moment they would close up near the Akal Takht they would come under heavy fire. They were very badly mauled. So they would fall back on the parikrama, and get in touch with Bulbul to tell him that they had lost so many men."

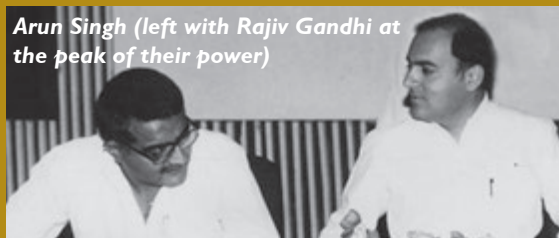
"Then I don't know what transpired between the special forces and Bulbul, that they found no other way. They were scared that after sunrise, all of Punjab would surround the Golden Temple. So whatever had to be achieved, had to be achieved before dawn. They decided on rolling down three tanks inside, and eventually used the main gun of the tank.



During his interview with *The Caravan*, Dhawan re-confirmed that “Arun Singh was involved in it, there was no question about it, but he was acting through Rajiv,” he said. “The main thing was that he was in touch with General K Sundarji. Sundarji had overestimated himself, and he was acting through Arun Singh.”

(Ed: Was ‘Operation Bluestar’ in 1984 the pre-cursor of many adventures planned by Arun Singh with General Sundarji? In 1987, the former was now de-facto Number Two in the country after Rajiv Gandhi had become Prime Minister while Sundarji was Chief of the Army Staff. Three years after Bluestar, was planned ‘Operation Brasstacks’, ostensibly a massive army exercise in the Rajasthan desert but one that could have cloaked a full-scale invasion of Pakistan but one which was ‘discovered’ by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and stopped at virtually the last moment.)

Arun Singh (left with Rajiv Gandhi at the peak of their power)



It pierced through the dome, and there were gaping holes. That was a horrific sight. My own assessment now is that if the main gun of the tank had not been used, perhaps the Sikh psyche wouldn’t have been hurt so much.”

Almost every commitment that Vaidya made to the prime minister went unkept. The operation took at least a full night; it resulted in the decimation of the Akal Takht; and the casualties far outstripped any estimate Gandhi had been given. There are still no credible explanations for why no intelligence on the situation was available or forthcoming to the army. Neither are there answers for why the army did not ask for more time to plan, especially as an operation at the Darbar Sahib had been under consideration since February.

In 1984, the day marking the martyrdom of Guru Arjan fell on 3 June, two days before ‘Operation Bluestar’ began. The choice to begin hostilities on 5 June was highly problematic, because a curfew had been imposed around the complex days before the attack, effectively trapping a large number of pilgrims, who had nothing to do with the militants, inside the temple.

Over the years, evidence has emerged of crimes committed within the premises by Indian security forces. Brigadier Onkar Goraya’s 2013 book, *Operation Bluestar and After, An Eyewitness Account*, provides, for the first time, some clarity on the number of pilgrims inside the complex during the operation. Goraya, head of the Admin branch of the 15th Infantry Division posted in Amritsar, was tasked with “lifting civilian casualties, disposal of the dead and evacuation of the wounded to the hospitals, apprehending the militants, guarding them in make-shift jails in the Cantonment, and arranging for their logistics.” He placed the casualties, based on the number of bodies disposed, at seven hundred, and stated that another 2,200 persons were rounded up and interned.

Even by the most exaggerated count, Bhindranwale’s men numbered no more than 250. Were they all counted

among the dead, with another hundred from other militant organisations included for good measure, it would mean that, even by the most conservative estimate, the operation resulted in the deaths of over 350 people who had anything at all to do with Bhindranwale. Considering that many people slipped out of the complex through the numerous doors leading to alleyways surrounding it, it is safe to say the number of people inside was far higher than the three thousand or so accounted for by the numbers of those dead, injured or captured.

The scene within the complex after the operation was gruesome. Goraya writes of the stench of rotting bodies in the June heat: the task of disposing of them was so onerous that the municipal workers who eventually cleared them away did so only because they were permitted to strip the bodies of their belongings. The bodies of Bhindranwale and Shahbeg Singh were recovered from the basement of the Akal Takht on the morning of 7 June, almost two days after the operation began. Bhindranwale’s body was identified by his brother and quickly cremated in the presence of a few officers and jawans.

Goraya’s book confirms an allegation of long standing: that security forces shot at least a few men in cold blood. Evidence has already been published of at least one execution: a 2006 book by Harminder Kaur contains the post-mortem report of a young man shot through the chest with his hands tied behind his back. Goraya’s story strengthens the claim that there were multiple killings of this kind. “On 7th June, around mid-day, I saw about 90 detainees sitting on the hot marble floor of the southern wing of Parikrama,” he writes. “They were naked except for the long underwear and their hands were tied behind their backs.

On 23 June, when Indira Gandhi visited the Darbar Sahib for the first time after the operation, Goraya was at the tail end of the group surrounding her as she walked around the parikrama. As she looked at the Akal Takht,





*Hoarding near the Golden Temple at Amritsar, 30-years after 'Op. Bluestar'*

Goraya claims, she said to General Sundarji beside her: "I didn't ask you to do this."

Rajiv's close school mate and later key adviser, Arun Singh, "had gone to the Golden Temple and got footage," Dhawan recalled. "She was horrified. Arun Singh was there, Rajiv was there, Arun Nehru [Gandhi's nephew] was there. She said she had been let down. Indira Gandhi was opposed to the Army action till the last minute," Dhawan repeated. "It was convincing by the army chief and this trio that eventually changed her mind."

Other evidence supports his claim that many of the decisions leading up to 'Bluestar' were guided by Rajiv, Arun Nehru and Arun Singh. Sanjay Gandhi had died in 1980; by the time of the Asian Games in 1982, it was Rajiv who had begun to deal directly with Punjab affairs. Most dialogue with the Akalis was carried out under his supervision, in tandem with the two Aruns.

Rajiv toed the party line and publicly shielded Bhindranwale for so long that, as late as 29 April 1984, he told reporters in Chandigarh that Bhindranwale "was a religious leader and has not shown any political affiliations so far." By this time, violence in the state had escalated dramatically: in the first half of 1984, before 'Operation Bluestar', nearly three hundred people were killed.

The 'corporate managerial talents' of Rajiv's team, as the intelligence officer MK Dhar put it, were new to Indian politics, and marked by their total immaturity. In his book *Open Secrets*, Dhar writes that in one meeting to discuss security for the Asiad, "Rajiv even spoke in favour of using 'terrorising tools to destroy the terrorists.'" He struck Dhar as largely impatient and intolerant in his decision-making.

An inexperienced team such as this may have been spooked by premature doubts. A senior journalist who

was part of Mark Tully's team in Amritsar told me of a conversation that, in hindsight, was extraordinarily sensitive. "I used to meet Bhindranwale regularly and he would agree to do so since I was from the BBC," he told me. In May 1984, the journalist asked Bhindranwale what he would do if the army came in. "I remember his answer: 'We are not amateurs.' Pointing to the fields, he said, 'Travelling on foot by the fields it is one hour to the border at Khalra. (General) Shahbeg has organised a guerilla movement before, and Pakistan has offered to let us operate from across the border.'"

"I made one mistake," the journalist said. "Arun Singh is my junior from college. When I went back to Delhi I went to meet him and Rajiv and ended up telling them what Bhindranwale had said. I am not sure what impact this had."

That well may have been one reason for the hurried nature of the operation. Whatever the motives for the rush into action, Nayar confirms Dhawan's assertions about those who instigated it. "When I was the Indian high commissioner in London in 1990, Arun Nehru came to stay with me," he told me. Nayar asked him who had taken the decision to go ahead with Bluestar. "He said, 'Phuphi was very opposed to it' that was Mrs Gandhi. But, Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Singh were very much in favour of it. He did not take his own name, but at the time he was very much with the other two."

When I repeated this conversation to Dhawan, he opened up further. "Arun Singh was involved in it, there was no question about it, but he was acting through Rajiv Gandhi," he said. "The main thing was that he was in touch with General Sundarji. Sundarji had overestimated himself, and he was acting through Arun Singh."

"As long as Mrs Gandhi was there, Arun Nehru was in the thick of what was happening between Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Singh, and he was himself part of it," Dhawan continued. "At that time, to my knowledge, the trio was functioning together. Arun Singh—from the beginning, two to three months before 'Bluestar'—was insisting on the army action. At that time Arun Nehru, Arun Singh and Rajiv Gandhi were all one, sharing all the things."

Dhawan said the trio felt that as a result of a successful army operation against Bhindranwale, "they would be able to win the elections hands down. That was weighing in their minds as the elections were shortly due." I asked him if they expressed this viewpoint to Indira Gandhi. His answer was terse. "Definitely."

I asked if he would say, then, that 'Bluestar' was the first big blunder of this coterie. "Of course it was," Dhawan said. "It was a big blunder, for which Mrs Gandhi had to pay a very heavy price."



## 30 years after the Days of Infamy



## Justice denied...and the lessons of history

There are several reports on 'murky British connections' to the Indian government's attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984 which have now fueled demands for full disclosure in UK and India. Prime Minister David Cameron ordered a review when documents released to the public after 30 years revealed that India had sought, and Britain had provided, assistance for the Operation. The review stated that the documents had been released "inadvertently" and claimed that though the sale of Westland helicopters was being discussed at the time, there was no record linking the two matters.

In parliament British Foreign Secretary William Hague tried to play down British involvement. A British Sikh peer described his statement as "smug and condescending" and questioned why Britain was involved in the Amritsar operation at all. It is unclear why India sought British help in the operation. Not only were the British the former colonial masters of India, they were responsible for the notorious massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, very close to the Golden Temple, in Amritsar, in 1919.

In December 2013 three men and a woman, all Sikhs, were jailed in London for the attempted murder



of an elderly Indian tourist in 2012. What was initially taken for a mugging gone wrong was revealed to be a case of revenge arising from India's storming of the Golden Temple in 1984. The victim was retired Indian Lt Gen Kuldip Singh Brar, who was visiting London, who had, in June 1984 commanded the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which mounted 'Operation Blue Star'. The militants inside the temple were said to be Sikh separatists, led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was killed in the operation. But how Sikh militancy arose in Indian Punjab is part of the dark underbelly of India's 'democratic' politics.

### Inciting Sectarianism

In their book *Amritsar*, Mark Tully and Satish Jacob described how separatist extremism in Punjab was the product of divisive politics in the pursuit of power played to its self-destructive end by India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay, with the connivance of acolytes like Zail Singh, Congress Chief Minister of Punjab in the 1970s and later president of India.

After Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay were soundly defeated in the 1977 elections following their Emergency rule in India, they looked for ways to break up the coalition that had ousted them. According to Tully and Jacob, on the advice of Zail Singh, Sanjay looked for a religious leader to promote in Punjab so as to discredit the regional Sikh party, Akali Dal. He chose Bhindranwale from among many little-known preachers and thereafter the Congress party promoted Bhindranwale to incite dissensions among Sikhs and even created a political party advocating a separate Sikh state, as a most cynical means to project him.

The coalition that had defeated Indira Gandhi itself collapsed in 1980, and she returned to power. But extremism in Punjab could not be put back in the bottle. Tully and Jacob concluded: "It was Indira Gandhi's Congress Party which launched Bhindranwale, and it was Indira Gandhi's government which allowed him to usurp its role in Punjab."

Faced against Brar in *Operation Blue Star* was another Indian Army officer, Major General (retd) Shahbeg Singh, who was military advisor to the militants. Ironically, Shahbeg Singh had once been Brar's instructor, and both had fought in the 1971 Bangladesh war. Shahbeg Singh was credited with organising the 'Muktibahini' (Bangladeshi liberation force) and successful insurgency operations in East Pakistan, easing the way for the Indian army's invasion and subsequent victory over Pakistan.

He, too, was killed in *Operation Blue Star*. The other Indian Sikh war-



**Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale on the parikrama at the Golden Temple**



hero, Lt General Jagjit Singh Aurora, who accepted the surrender of Pakistani forces in Dacca in 1971, severely criticised the attack on the Golden Temple and violation of human rights in the Punjab.

Some months after the Golden Temple attack, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. In the days that followed, thousands of Sikhs were killed in Delhi and elsewhere in attacks allegedly orchestrated by Congress politicians while the Congress government allegedly turned a blind eye.

### Revenge, but no justice

The organised killing of Sikhs and the alleged complicity of the Congress government in 1984, was in some manner of the same nature as the killings of Muslims, and alleged complicity of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Gujarat in 2002.

Asked about the killing of innocent Sikhs in 1984, Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv, who succeeded her as prime minister, was reported to have cynically said that "when a great tree falls, the earth shakes". This incredibly insensitive remark has come to symbolise the disregard for innocent lives and the failure of the Indian authorities to bring to justice the Congress politicians accused of organising pogroms against Sikhs.

Despite various investigations, accused Congress politicians such as HKL Bhagat, Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and Dharam Das Shastri, continued successful political careers, becoming members of parliament, and ministers. One accused Congress politician, Lalit Maken, was assassinated in 1985. Bhagat and Shastri have since died. Fresh proceedings are on against Tytler and Kumar.



Generals Brar, Sundarji and Vaidya in the Golden Temple complex following 'Operation Bluestar'

General A S Vaidya, who was chief of army staff at the time of the Golden Temple operation, was assassinated in 1986. Two Sikhs were executed in India for his killing. Brar's would-be assassins in London are Sikhs who would have been children in 1984. However, this was not the first time that Sikhs have tried to avenge 'decades later' a massacre committed in India, in far-away London. On 13 March 1940 in Caxton Hall in London, Udham Singh, a Sikh from Amritsar, shot dead Michael O'Dwyer, who had been Governor of Punjab at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. The British later executed Udham Singh.

While Brar's assailants have been branded as 'extremists', Udham Singh is memorialised in India as a *shaheed* (martyr) who acted to avenge the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. His remains were brought back to India in 1974, taken in procession through Delhi to his village in Punjab, where he was cremated with full state honours. His funeral pyre was lit by Zail Singh, then chief minister of Punjab. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi paid her respects.

Louis Fenech argues that the memorialisation of Udham Singh reflected the political ambitions of the Congress Party, with Zail Singh maneuvering against both competitors within the Congress and the rival regional party Akali Dal. As the Akalis stood for greater autonomy for Sikhs, by associating themselves closely with a Sikh martyr like Udham Singh, the Congress attempted to beat them at their own game.

Those perceived to have wronged Sikhs tend to be hunted down in revenge even years after the event. The fomenting of extremism in Punjab by the Congress for political gain, insurgency and counter-insurgency with countless human rights violations and pogroms against innocent Sikhs, are crimes that have gone unpunished. That denial of justice continues to infect a deep wound, to which British involvement in Operation *Blue Star*, given their colonial history, added fresh salt.

Sarmila Bose



# Crystallisation of the Diaspora

A US-based scholar Prof Verne A Dusnerbary has stated that the Sikh diaspora began identifying themselves more with their community, rather than region and country, after the 1984 pogroms in India that resulted in killing of thousands of Sikhs following assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Working on the Sikh diaspora since 1970s, he has said that such was the impact of “suffering and dishonour” because of, first ‘Op. Blue Star’ in June and then the pogrom of November 1984, that it transformed widely-spread Punjabi expatriates into becoming Punjabi Sikhs.

Dusnerbary, professor of anthology, at the University of Hamline, USA, who is studying dynamics of Sikh diaspora, opined that “Sikhs around the world now come together because of the trauma of 1984. Before 1984, Sikhs residing in foreign countries did identify themselves as part of Punjabi, Indian or South Asian diaspora. But the traumatic events of 1984 helped crystallisation of the notion of a Sikh nation among them. Sikhs residing abroad have begun identifying themselves as Sikhs first and then as Punjabis, Indians or South Asians.”

The professor said, “The 1984 incidents has gelled the notion that they have something in common as Sikhs and brought them together around their feelings, appearance, suffering and dishonour. Before 1984 these people (Sikhs) identified themselves in various ways. However, the crisis of 1984 has made them to assert as Sikhs.

Prof Dusnerbary was in Patiala to attend the three-day 2nd Punjabi Diaspora Conference organised by the Punjabi University’s department of Punjabi. Dusnerbary, whose doctoral



‘Panj Piare’ lead procession in Manhattan on the annual ‘Sikh Day’ parade in New York

dissertation is on ‘Relationship between Punjabi Sikhs and gora (English) Sikhs,’ has written two books on Sikhs ‘*Sikhs at Large: Religion, Culture and Politics in Global Perspective*’ and ‘*Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Things*.’ He, however, said that the current moot point was to study whether 30 years after the 1984 incidents the notion of Punjabi diaspora was again overshadowing the feeling of Sikh diaspora. “Now 30 years later, the question is whether it is still the way in which people are identifying themselves or are they now beginning to identify with the Punjabi Diapsora? Whether they feel that spirit of Punjabi language, common literature and films that unite them,” he asked ?

Amaninder Pal Sharma



# 30 years after the Days of Infamy

## Lord Indarjit Singh seeks “an International Enquiry”

Lord Indarjit Singh is widely known in the UK for his contributions to the ‘Thought for the Day’ broadcast on BBC Radio 4, urging religious tolerance in gentle, measured tones, but his influence extends far beyond the breakfast table. This tireless campaigner has been demanding an apology from the British government over its possible involvement in the 1984 attack by the Indian government on the Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar.

A practising Sikh, Singh co-founded the *Inter Faith Network* for the UK in 1987 to promote better relations between religions, and in 2008 he became the first Sikh to address a major conference at the Vatican. He set up the *Network of Sikh Organisations* in 1995, co-ordinating pastoral care for Sikhs in hospitals, prisons and the armed forces. The Prince of Wales, Anglican bishops and the Metropolitan Police are among those who have consulted him, and he has advised the government on race relations. In October 2011, he was made a crossbench life peer in the House of Lords, the first member to wear a turban, taking the title ‘Baron Singh of Wimbledon’.

Born in 1932 in Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan, his parents moved to the UK even as he was a baby. Singh’s father, a doctor, had been involved in the Indian independence movement and was “virtually exiled” to East Africa; after studying in Britain he decided to move his family there rather than returning to India.

Lord Indarjit Singh now lives in the detached Victorian house in Wimbledon, southwest London, that he and his wife, Kanwaljit Kaur, bought in 1974. Forty years after the Singhs moved in with their two young daughters, the home feels lived-in but well-maintained, and various decorative objects attest to the couple’s broad tastes: an engraving of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest Sikh shrine; an ancient Greek-style plate; a painted Alpine scene; and a Japanese print.

Indarjit Singh met his wife in India, when he was working there as a mine engineer, and they moved to England in the mid-1960s, first to Birmingham, then London when Singh was offered a job in civil engineering. He later studied for an MBA and moved into local government. Kanwaljit, in turn, has worked



*The Sikh peer feels strongly on the revelation about UK government’s possible involvement*

as a primary schoolteacher, a headteacher and a school inspector. In 2011 she was awarded an OBE for services to education and interfaith understanding.

Over tea and homemade samosas, Indarjit Singh recalls his childhood in Birmingham where, in 1939, the Indian population was estimated at just 100. “My parents had a very tough time. They wouldn’t give my father a hospital job so he set up his own practice as a GP. He was a very determined chap, but the patients didn’t come too quickly. My mother even had to pawn some of her jewellery for essentials like bread and milk.” At this, he breaks into laughter, his eyes almost disappearing as his face creases. “But they came through it all, and the practice grew and grew.”

He is serious in his beliefs but quick to laugh at life’s absurdities – even the absurdity of prejudice. The Singh brothers were the only non-white pupils at the local



grammar school. "Everyone knew that Britain was top and everybody else was down there," he gestures to the floor. "There was a history teacher who looked directly at me in class and said 'They come over here, they get educated and they go back to India to harass us'." Did that upset him? "No," he says, "it was par for the course. We knew it was wrong but it was the game being played. It was snakes and ladders and your ladders had broken rungs."

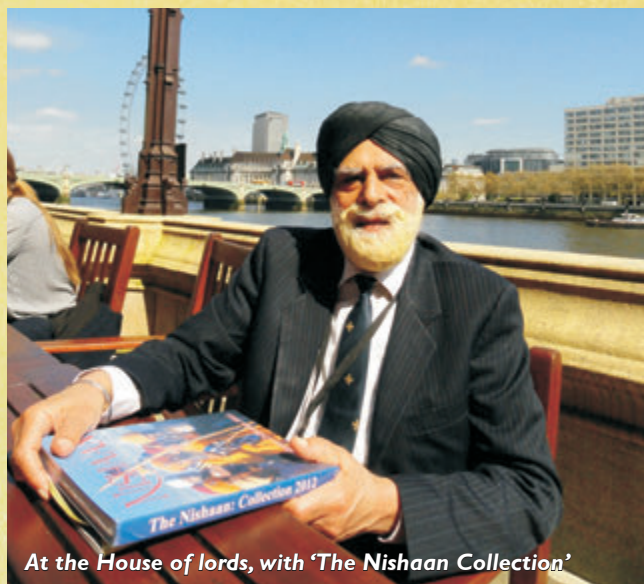
After graduating from Birmingham University in 1959 with a first-class degree in engineering, Singh applied to the Coal Board to become a mine manager. However, at his interview he was squarely informed that "miners in this country wouldn't like an Indian manager". So he decided to leave home for India, a country he barely knew.

At that time, relations between various communities in the sub-continent were deteriorating. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs had lived together harmoniously for centuries. But that changed with the Partition of India in 1947, when Pakistan was carved out as a Muslim land and bloodshed ensued as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs found themselves on wrong sides of the new borders. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had promised Sikhs "an area and a set-up in the north where in [they] may also experience the glow of freedom", but no such provision was made. Sikhs felt increasingly marginalised.

"When I went to India, Sikhs had no voice," says Indarjit Singh. "There was no Sikh press and if you wrote complainingly to the papers you were ignored. Being British, I thought 'This is unfair, I've got to do something about it'." A smile spreads slowly across his face. "If I wrote to the papers as a Sikh, there wasn't a chance they'd print it, so I decided to write as my next-door neighbour in England, Victor Pendry, and my letter to the *Hindustan Times* was published. It had a huge ripple, especially in the Sikh community. My wife had heard about Victor Pendry before she met me."

Indarjit Singh co-founded the *Inter Faith Network* for the UK while still working full-time, and in 1989 he became the first non-Christian to be awarded the UK Templeton Prize "for the furtherance of spiritual and ethical understanding". He wrote regularly for the *Sikh Courier* from 1967 and when, in 1983, its owner didn't like Singh's proposed articles on communal violence between Sikhs and Hindus in India, Singh left to establish a new publication, the *Sikh Messenger*, of which he remains editor.

Tensions in the Punjab came to a head in June 1984 when India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, ordered the army to storm the Golden Temple complex and remove



At the House of lords, with 'The Nishaan Collection'

Sikh separatists, with co-ordinated raids on more than thirty gurdwaras in the Punjab. The attack fell on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, founder of the Golden Temple, when thousands of pilgrims were gathered. Official estimates put civilian deaths at about 400, but independent reports claim many thousands died. Four months later, Gandhi was assassinated by two Sikh bodyguards in an act of vengeance, and anti-Sikh pogroms swept across India, killing thousands more.

It is now almost 30 years since the attack, an anniversary that has brought fresh information. A document released by the British government, under the 30-year rule, has revealed that Geoffrey Howe, the then foreign secretary, had sent an SAS officer to India in the months before the attack to advise Indira Gandhi's government on its tactics.

The revelation led David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, to order an inquiry and the Foreign Office has accepted Singh's offer of support. "I would like the authorities to take the opportunity to try and bring closure on something that is creating continuing suspicion between the Hindu and Sikh communities," he says. "I want an open, international inquiry into those events – then you can punish those that are guilty on either side and give a sense of closure."

For all his mild-mannered charm, Lord Indarjit Singh is not one to back down – and his drive is that of a much younger man. "It's always worth having a say and keeping to your principles," he insists. Three decades after the attack on the Golden Temple, he will be doing that more than ever.

Griselda Murray Brown and Kiran Stacey





# Fauj-i-Khas at Saint-Tropez

## Maharaja Ranjit Singh's legacy in southern France

**W**as this General Jean-François Allard's descendant I was meeting on the southern coast of France? The gleam in his eyes and the warm smile of 12-year-old Jean-Tropez Allard spanned all temporal and spatial gaps. I was probably his age when I first heard about the intriguing French General who trained the *Fauj-i-Khas*, the formidable royal brigade of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Allard had fought heroically for Napoleon, so after the crushing defeat at Waterloo, the veteran left France, went through Constantinople, Persia and Afghanistan, and eventually landed in Lahore in 1822 to find employment in the Sikh kingdom. The Maharaja took an instant liking to the "foreigner" and soon entrusted him with military, diplomatic, and administrative affairs. Both militaristically and politically, Allard was an illustrious figure in the glorious Sikh kingdom. He also had a keen aesthetic and commercial acumen, so he promoted the Kashmiri shawl trade and helped

the Punjab to import French weapons and wines. To this day he is remembered as Maharaja Ranjit Singh's "favourite European officer."

It is his private life that I find most fascinating, and although it has inspired works of fiction such as *Adventures of an Officer in the Service of Runjeet Singh* by HML Lawrence (1845), the personal life of the General has been neglected in historical documents. Allard was 37 when he came to the Punjab and married a young Hindu princess, Banu Pan Deī (about 25 years his junior) from Chamba in the Himalayan foothills. They made their home in Lahore and had several children. In a painting by Imam Baksh (now in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University), we see the Allard couple, their five children and their toys, and two maids standing on each side of the frame. The women have their heads covered, but they are not veiled. While the maids are in the Punjabi *salwar-kameez*, Madame Allard is dressed in an Indian-



A view of the Lahore Fort and the waterfront at St Tropez



General Allard with his family. (By a Lahore painter; Punjab, ca. 1834. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University)

European outfit with an elegant shawl draped around her. Her eyes are dark and beautiful, and she has lovely thick curls on either side of her face. The scene captures their life in their Anarkali home in Lahore. A former Mughal palace, Anarkali was given by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to General Allard and his associate, the Italian-born General Ventura.

Many travellers lavishly describe Allard's house and generosity. The style of the residence combined "the splendours of the east with the comfort of European residence" writes German physician Karl Alexander A.Hugel(*Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, 1845, pp. 283-4). Likewise, the English Alexander

Burnes recalls: "The walls and roof of the apartment were entirely inlaid with small pieces of mirror. Champagne usurped the place of tea and coffee. M. Allard is the Maharaja's general of cavalry; and we had the trumpets of his division in attendance during breakfast" (*Travels into Bokhara*, 1834 p.106). However, these narratives barely say anything about his married life. Interestingly, Allard with "one wife" is regarded as an anomaly by the French botanist Victor Jacquemont: "The only part of the house that remains solitary and looks deserted is the *zenana* of Monsieur Allard, where he has but one wife." This citation is from the most resourceful historian on the French in



Princess Banu Pan Dei

India, Jean-Francois Lafont (*Indika: Essays in Indo-French Relations 1630-1976*, Manohar, 2000). Lafont specifically laments the lack of information on Banu Pan Dei and her parents, for as was customary in the Punjab, the birth of a girl was not recorded (*Indika*, p.217). What we know for sure is that General Allard brought his family from Lahore back to his birthplace, Saint-Tropez, in 1835. After getting them settled, he returned as the ambassador of France to the Court of Lahore, and was appointed as the Military Commander of Peshawar by the Sikh sovereign. Unfortunately, in Peshawar, Allard died of a heart attack in 1839. According to his wishes, his body was brought to Lahore, where he was buried next to one of his daughters who had died in 1826. Banu Pan Dei with her five children and the two Punjabi maids continued to live in Saint-Tropez. She never returned to India. She died in 1884 and was buried in the garden with another of her daughters; subsequently, her remains were moved to the family grave in the Saint-Tropez cemetery, right by the sea.

The General's wife was probably the earliest Indian diasporic woman in France. How did the young princess from the north Indian hill state of Chamba create her social-cultural world and subjectivity in the village nestled along the French Riviera? The life of this wife, mother, and widow in Saint-Tropez holds enormous significance for our own globalised situation. How did she and the General navigate their





Nikki with the new-generation Allards at St.Tropez

inter-generational, inter-religious, inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-linguistic world? The search for answers to these questions took me to Saint-Tropez.

Saint-Tropez today is of course very different from the rural fishing and farming village of Allard and Banu Pan Deï. It took us two hours to drive down a mere fifteen miles from its neighbouring town of Ste-Maxime. The entire coast is a magnet for sun-worshippers, swimmers, sailors, and super-yachts. While the glistening waves rippled rhythmically, the sky buzzed with helicopters transporting the rich and famous. Coco Chanel and Brigitte Bardot who came to enjoy its summer breezes made the tiny town of a few thousand famous, and now it attracts international superstars with countless others enthusiastically following them. Cannes and Monte Carlo are only a few miles away. In its extended vista, the Mediterranean sea and the sky come together to form an exquisite spectrum of blues. With its perfect light, this haven for painters from Paris has grown into a bustling town with temples of fashion such as Armani and Battaglia boutiques. Its once pristine harbor is a Chanel catwalk.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of contemporary Saint-Tropez, we come upon the Allard house, the *Banu Pan Deï Palace*. This was the home where the Indian princess lived for most of her life. Though converted into a luxury hotel with all its consumerism, it still retains its exotic flavor with the décor of the residence given to the General by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The reception room of the hotel is dominated by the iconic painting of General Allard with his dark mustache and flowing grey beard. His image evokes the agreement made by the Sikh Maharaja's European generals that they would wear their beards long, refrain from eating beef or smoking tobacco in public, and take care not to offend the Sikh religion. The floors of the Pan Deï palace are covered with brightly coloured *durees* — conjuring women sitting together in the Punjab weaving vibrant arabesque designs while humming folk songs. The sculptures of Hindu deities, Buddha images, and Rajput decorations add to its multicultural mosaic. There is also a floating palace, a luxury 'Pan Deï annexe' moored in the sea nearby, all set to whisk away jetsetters to their choice of destination. Actually it was climbing up the marble staircase of her former house that wound the clock back for me: this site of imagination, at once physical and virtual, connected me with Banu Pan Deï — young, middle-aged, elderly. What were her thoughts and feelings as she walked up and down the floors of her home over the years separated from her husband and her homeland?

Meeting her descendants was indeed a surreal experience. Little Jean Saint-Tropez' eyes sparkled with the magic and mystery of six generations of his forbearers. His grandfather, Mr. Henri Allard, wears a mustache just like the Sikh and Napoleonic Generals. Henri is the Vice Mayor for the town of Saint-Tropez. Profoundly proud of his heritage and extremely well versed in world history, he has written a semi-fictional account of his ancestor's life, *Le Généralissime* (Herve Chopin, 2013). Over the years, Henri has been actively involved in maintaining and promoting Sikh-French relationship. He and his family live in a second home that belonged to Banu Pan Deï. A mimosa tree planted by her enriches the atmosphere. The Allards have succeeded in retaining the rustic beauty of Pan Deï's original farmhouse bought by her in 1843, even though the many acres of her property extending to the sea have been taken up by multi-storey apartments, markets and restaurants. I felt greatly honoured for being welcomed by three generations of the Allards: Henri and his wife Mimi, their son Frédéric (an officer





Formal portrait of Jean-François Allard

in the French Navy) and his wife Amance, and their two sons Jean-Tropez and Sixte. Under a lush grapevine and hanging lamps, we shared a sumptuous meal prepared by Mimi with Punjabi ingredients and spread on exquisitely embroidered French linen. They were reviving the warm hospitality of the Allard home in Lahore. The sound of trumpets did not accompany us, but the familiar sound of the cuckoo bird so idealised in Sikh literature did – bridging the miles between the Punjab and Saint-Tropez.

Henri shared many memories that have been passed down through the generations. He thinks the reason Allard moved his family to France in 1835 was to protect his young wife from the grisly custom of *sati* practiced by the women of her clan. In fact, two years after the death of her husband, Banu Pan Deī decided to convert to Catholicism and informed the Queen of France of her decision. King Louis-Philippe and the Queen recognised General Allard's services rendered to France during his Indian sojourn, and offered to become her godparents. Though they could not attend the baptism ceremony, they sent her two gorgeous vases as gifts. Her close family friend, General Ventura, was present at the occasion. Later that evening Banu Pan Deī hosted a reception at her house. Her descendants believe that her objective in converting

to Catholicism was to unite with her beloved husband in heaven. But I wonder if it was a subconscious act of *sati* on the part of the Hindu princess. After all, her conversion was a renunciation of her own identity after the death of her husband, and an immersion into his spiritual realm. The two Punjabi maids followed their lady, and also converted to Catholicism.

I am grateful to Henri Allard for sharing some of the letters that the General wrote to his family from the Punjab. He would write to his wife in Persian – but in the Roman alphabet; he wrote to his children in French. And each letter is absolutely fascinating. They reveal his profound sensitivity, his multicultural perspective, his passionate love for his wife, his dedication to his children, his closeness with his extended family, his wit, and his amazing attention to practical details. In spite of his long absence, in his correspondence he is very much in tune with all members of his family, and seems to be fully present among them. He has great respect for the Punjabi culture, and urges his wife and children to keep up with its language and dress codes. The two maids were brought to France so that Banu Pan Deī could maintain her linguistic familiarity, and the children could learn Punjabi from their caretakers. One of the maids, I am told, left France after marrying an Algerian and received a handsome dowry from Banu Pan Deī. The second remained in Saint-Tropez, and at her death bequeathed everything to the Allard son she had taken care of in his infancy.

General Allard wanted his wife to retain her religion too. Though they followed two different faiths, a touching personal comment affirms their religious partnership: "We will pray by your religion and by mine to overcome together many difficulties as always" (letter from Peshawar dated 25 August, 1838). Sadly, this letter was written barely five months before his death. He addresses her as 'Nini', his life and heart, *jane dil*. The romantic writer is desperate to be back with his beloved Nini, and is constantly pining for her, his very life — "*ah ah meri jan!*" He thanks her for the letters she sent him, and even congratulates her for becoming skilled in her writing, repeatedly using the Arabic term *mubarak*. The General is also concerned about his wife being well dressed, and wants to know what sort of clothes she is wearing in his absence. He endorses her choice to dress in the style most natural to her, which was to keep her head covered in the Punjabi/Kashmiri style rather



than in French bonnets. He informs her, "I asked a Parisian merchant to send you a grand *doshale*. Here people make shawls and *dupattas*..." (25 August 1838). The General seems to be well aware of the subtle distinctions, as *dupattas* are lighter in fabric and more diaphanous than shawls, and *doshalas* are double-sided, with two shawls stitched together to enhance their embroidery and beauty. He wants his wife to have the very best. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did revive the Kashmiri shawl industry which had declined terribly during the Afghan occupation, but Allard was instrumental in bringing the Sikh shawl to France.

Likewise, the letters he addressed to his children express his abundant love and care. He vividly remembers what they promised to do for him, and humorously remarks that his son Poulou's writing is "like the scratches of a cat" and needs improvement. He performs his fatherly role by exhorting them to "not annoy anyone" and to "obey their aunt Olivier." His goodbyes are heart-wrenching: "Kiss your good mother, your aunts, and your cousin, as I myself kiss you from all my heart" (in this letter dated 25 August 1838, the first part is addressed to his wife in Persian, scripted in Roman; the second to his children is written in French). The General who commanded the indomitable *Fauj-i-Khas* is so very tender. Pouring out his heart, he fosters love between and among the members of his nuclear and extended family.

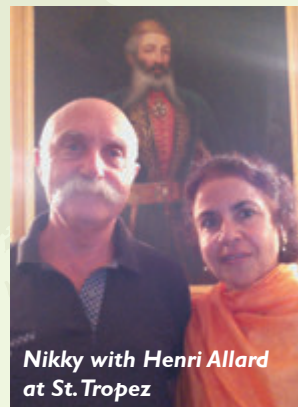
The Maharaja was emotionally effusive as well, so this shared trait may have contributed to the mutual fondness between the Maharaja and his General. In fact, when Allard proposed to take his family back to France, the Maharaja was extremely distraught, and only after much reluctance gave him leave for two years. At the time of Allard's death, the Maharaja's own health was quite fragile, so the loss of his cherished officer was kept from him for some time. The General's letters offer a unique lens through which to view his personality, and the intercultural relationships established during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. From a wider angle they can even offer useful information to South Asian scholars engaged in different fields of historical, social, economic, and political research.

During my visit, the Allard family escorted me to a nearby square. In honor of its native hero, it is named after General Allard. This was once the garden of Banu Pan Dei. A well, which happens to be a popular trope in Punjabi romances, is located in it. In order to draw water, young women of the Punjab came out of their

homes and gathered at the well where they gossiped. It was also at the well that they met their lovers. Did the General's beloved widow come to this French well with an aching heart? We many never know. Nevertheless, the historically layered landscape puts us intimately in touch with the past. In the centre of the square blooming with flowers and trees is an imposing bust of the General—a graphic memorial of the French and Sikh historical bond. With the two orders on his uniform, the *Legion of Honour* awarded by Napoleon and the *Order of Guru Gobind Singh* given by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Tropezian forged a vital connection between the East and the West. It moved me to witness people coming to see and take pictures of his bronze icon. A living materiality, the sculpture links viewers with the object, and inspires new ways of experiencing the self, society, and history.

The energetic descendant of Allard and Banu Pan Dei is now keen to install a monument of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Allard Square. I applaud Henri Allard for his aspiration, which should attract the attention of the global Sikh community. I am sure that Sardar Tarlochan Singh, who has indefatigably worked for decades to promote Sikh culture worldwide, will help make it a reality. The presence of the Sikh Maharaja in the middle of the French Riviera will anchor a pluralistic past in the present. With Henri's visionary accomplishment, the local and national history of Saint-Tropez will project an even stronger international image. The juxtaposition of the General and the Maharaja in these public works of art will bring to life the words of King Louis-Philippe contained in a letter that was personally delivered to Maharaja Ranjit Singh by General Allard: "Although long distances and oceans separate the Kingdom of the Punjab from that of France, there is no bar to the love that binds our hearts together." Memories not only preserve the past, they give meaning to the present, they shape our future. The future of a genuine global society rests on such heartfelt intercultural encounters.

**Dr. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh,**  
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**Nikky with Henri Allard  
at St. Tropez**



# The 'Fauj-i-Khas' circa 1914



Sikh troops in Bethune, northern France, October 1914. When the 'Great War' began, India rallied to the defence of western Europe from German invasion and sent an Expeditionary Force to northern France and Flanders. The rest is history (to be covered in a following issue of Nishaan)

## A Reversal of Arms

Less than a century after the *Fauj-i-Khas* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh Army were trained by their French instructors in the Punjab, Sikh troops were predominant in the Indian Expeditionary Force that landed in France in late September 1914. They were then rushed to the front in northern France even as the formidable German Armies were poised to make their final offensive to capture the Channel ports and thus destroy what was left of the British Expeditionary Force and the French armies.

Excerpts below are from the book *Neuve Chapelle : The Jullundur Brigade in France & Flanders : 1914-15* to be released on the centenary of that great battle which was fought by Sikh troops against the German and Bavarian forces in this small but strategic town in northern France.

Reported on 26 September 1914 as the troops disembarked from troopships at Marseilles :

*First came a detachment of Sikhs, for the greater part head and shoulders above the spectators. They received the plaudits of the crowd with the imperturbable smiling composure of the Oriental. The police guarding the road were swept aside, the ranks were rushed, men and women shook the sepoy's by the hand, and young girls showered flowers upon them, pinning roses in their tunics and in their turbans. Tricolours*

*were distributed with prodigal favour, old ladies with bitter memories of 1870 pressed forward the better to admire these handsome, bearded men, and it would be difficult to conjure up anything more touching than the sight of those frail women patting the bronzed giants on the back and calling down blessings on their heads.*

Then, less than a month later, the magnificent conduct of Indian troops was recorded for posterity by Field Marshal Sir John French who, in his dispatch dated 20th November 1914, said "On the 28th October 1914, especially the 47th Sikhs and the 20th and 21st Companies of the Sappers & Miners, distinguished themselves by their gallant conduct in the attack on Neuve Chapelle, losing heavily in officers and men.

As Sir James Willcocks, commanding the Indian Corps later wrote, *The 47th Sikhs were raised in 1901 and have no battle honours on their colours. Throughout its service in France, this magnificent Regiment never failed to answer all calls. Its reputation would be secure and its right to fight shoulder to shoulder with the best British troops would be established, if based only on the record of Neuve Chapelle, but this action was only one of many in which the 47th distinguished themselves.*

The history of the Indian Army contains few nobler pages than that of the 28th October 1914.





*The Memorial under construction at Amritsar, which consists of a small gurdwara in precincts of the Golden Temple*

## A Memorial to 'Operation Blue Star'

In Kuldeep Nayar's write-up 'Playing with fire in Punjab' which appeared on the editorial page of *The Tribune*, he has expressed extreme apprehension "of monstrous consequences" on the proposed memorial to 'Operation Blue Star'. This very unfortunately emanates out of the fear psychosis of the unseen, which is an utterly ill-conceived notion of

aparalysed vision. Looking through the prism of the Indian State he has committed a huge error in judging veracity of the horrors of 'Operation Blue Star'. India's secularism certainly becomes a fig leaf when history is allowed to melt into mythology, pessimism overpowers thinking minds and the link between head and heart is either totally diminished or turns into crude distortion of factual reality. The existence of true religion and genuine politics alone can tide over the social crisis created by crafty demagoguery leadership of Society. Right thinking people ought to present their views in the right historical perspective, sans distortions of any kind. Secularism does not mean that minorities in India should abandon all their theo-political aspirations.

It appears as if Kuldeep Nayar is somehow nursing a sense of grievance, either against Akalis led by the Badals or even nurses some inherent malice towards the Sikhs. Otherwise, why would a person of his repute look only through the prism of the Indian State and pen down such contemptuous and venomous write ups, which are not only despicable in substance but also contain seditious metaphors!

Kuldeep Nayar has called upon the Akalis to explain their conduct on the issue of SGPC instituting a proposal to construct a memorial to 'Operation Blue Star' carried out by the Indian Army in June 1984. Kuldeep Nayar seems to be "horrendously shocked" as no Sikh organisation

or person of consequence from the Sikh community condemned the honouring of "a killer" and laying of the foundation of the memorial to 'Operation Blue Star'. He also stretched his wild imagination in that the Akalis are creating a Frankenstein which will one day, according to his figment of imagination "devour the peaceful citizens of Punjab". One must really feel



pity for Kuldeep Nayar who has twisted an event of simple foundation laying ceremony in the precincts of the Golden Temple, surely in accordance with the religious ethos and traditions of the Sikhs, to frighten people of “monstrous consequences.” How can such a person comprehend the intensity of aspirations and philosophy of the spirit-born people, the Sikhs, who draw their strength and inspiration from their glorious heritage, history which is replete with countless acts of unparalleled bravery and sacrifices in the cause of freedom of worship.

Actually, Kuldeep Nayar, or for that matter anyone sincerely concerned, needs to study all aspects of the 1984 tragedy very carefully with an unbiased and unprejudiced mind. One must take a holistic view with some objectivity in mind. Kuldeep Nayar’s insensitive commentary is unpalatable. No one should be allowed to take advantage of the geo-political dispositioning of the Sikh community after August 1947. The pain of partition inflicted upon the psyche of the community over the following decades is still fresh and continues to hurt. Although such wounds may lie consigned in the sub-conscious, they never heal, rather they remain a cause of unfathomable pain for all times to come. Then someone like Kuldeep Nayar revisits the unhealed wounds with contempt and cruelty. His completely unwarranted suggestion, for example, of scrapping the Sikh Gurdwara Act is an example which speaks of extreme parochial and communal prejudice, no less.

There seems to be no rationale in his writing except to malign the institutional glory of the SGPC. Besides, his mischievous attempt to provoke the BJP to withdraw support to the Government led by Parkash Singh Badal is devoid of wisdom, and does not qualify to be placed within the realm of sanity.

All rightful thinking people of India, including Sikhs, would want that the circumstances which eventually led to ‘Operation Blue Star’, together with the subsequent tragedies in Delhi and elsewhere, need be revisited with honesty.

Despite the tragedies, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, then President of the Shiromani Akali Dal agreed to come forward and negotiate a settlement with the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and signed an accord. The vulnerable sant was assassinated not long afterwards. The government of India thereafter overlooked almost every clause of the ‘accord’.

If such unity among the Sikhs on issue of the Memorial could cause such an enormous sense of disquiet to an Indian writer of the stature of Kuldeep Nayar, who claims to be secular to the core, then one must ponder over what constitutes Indian secularism. Memorials are set up to remember those who died in tragic circumstances. There are thousands of commemorative memorials the world over which pertain to important events of history. So, why such a hue and cry over the memorial to ‘Operation Blue Star’, where thousands of innocent Sikhs, including men, women and children, were killed during the attack?

India’s secular ethos should be understood and followed in a much wider perspective. Kuldeep Nayar’s kind of mindset has the potential to radiate serious aspersions on the secular polity of India. Perusal of such a disdainful hubris in examining the intensity of the 1984 nightmares, could, in the long run, prove detrimental to the larger interests of the country.



*Bir Devinder Singh*  
*Former Deputy Speaker, Punjab*





# Urging constitution of a fact finding commission on 'Operation Blue Star'

## The Sikh Forum Resolution

In a largely attended conclave on 28 June 2014 to commemorate 30th Anniversary of 'Operation Blue Star', which was addressed by eminent speakers including the veteran journalist Kuldip Nayar, senior diplomat KC Singh former BBC journalist Satish Jacob, the respected writer Hartosh Singh Bal and S Harcharan Singh of the Indian Express Group, the following resolution was unanimously passed:

"The Government must constitute a Truth/Fact Finding Commission to determine the background, reasons, motives and the nature of assault on Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib coded 'Operation Blue Star' on 3rd-5th June 1984, being the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev ji when thousands of innocent pilgrims including women, children, and elderly people were present in the premises of the Golden Temple.

Respected observers, journalists, researchers, political commentators, human rights activists have considered the 'Operation' as totally unjustified and brought out the extent of loss to life and damage. Use of the Army including resort to tanks and artillery to flush out the so called militants, has been described as either misconceived or misjudged or deliberate manipulative political measures !

Many eminent personalities have unequivocally condemned the action and recommended corrective action. The community and society at large yearn for a final closure of this sordid episode after collection of all authentic details including concurrent attack on other Sikh shrines on the same day, causing large number of casualties.

Vested interests continue to propagate disinformation and thereof provoke sense of alienation and communal tension, detrimental to social and national interest.



More recently, the British Government has declassified details of correspondence with the Indian Government from which it transpires that a specialist team was asked to advise on possible solutions. The opinion was that the action contemplated was disproportionate to the ground situation and instead suggested a swift commando operation to flush out the small number of militants in the Akal Takht complex. This advice was not accepted which resulted in this terrible tragedy. These observations need to be clarified by the Indian Government.

In keeping with standard procedure, all documentation, should be declassified by the Government of India after 30 years as has been done by Britain. The Sikh community is known for its national allegiance has been waging constant struggle over the past 30 years for an authentic factual compilation of relevant data but unfortunately, nothing has come of this and the community continues to harbour great resentment.

The Sikh community all over the world feel it imperative that the truth be brought out in public domain, the perpetrators and motives be identified and measures to heal the wounds initiated apart from justice provided to the innocent victims for maintenance of peace, harmony and socio-political integrity.

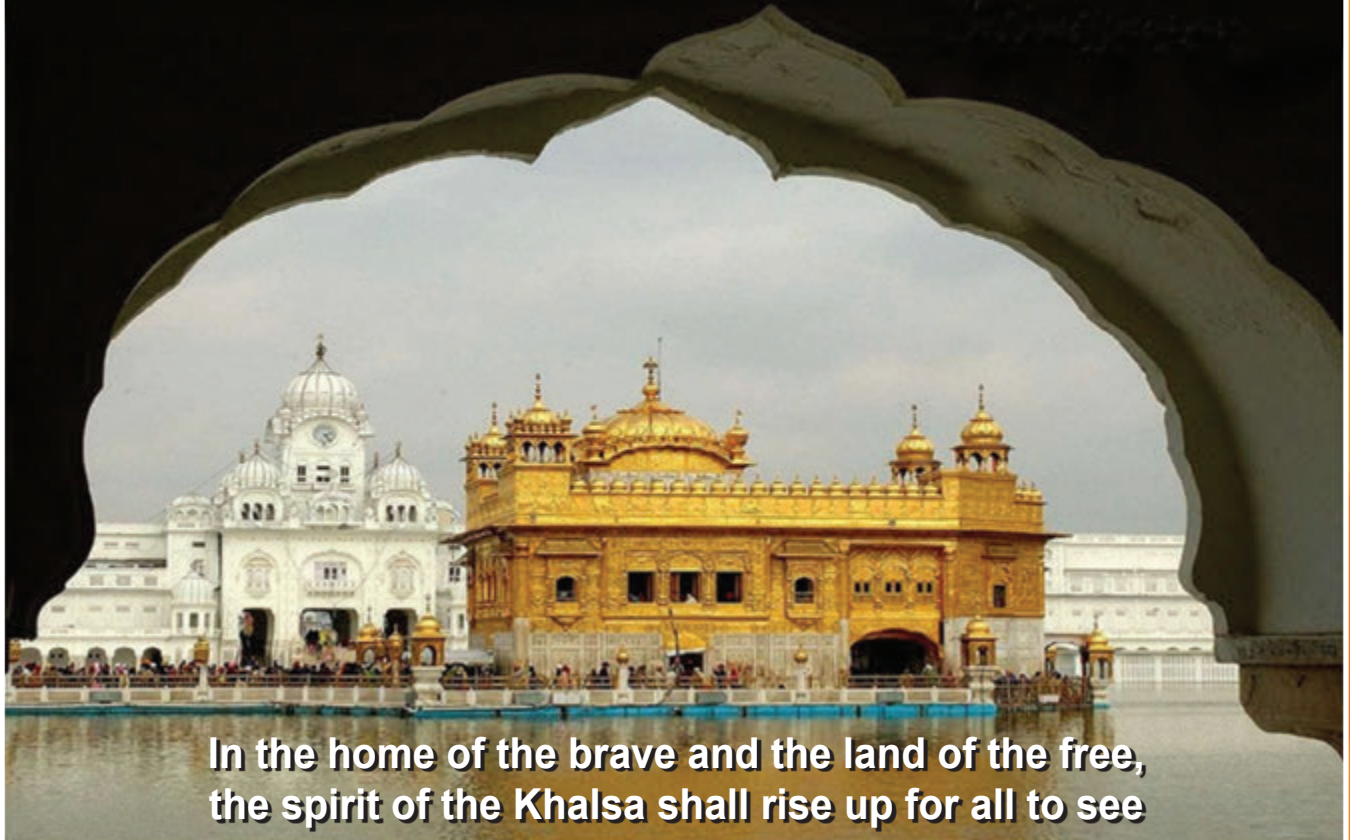
We are sure that the Prime Minister would appreciate sensitivities of the issues involved, domestically and internationally, and would do the needful to constitute a 'Truth/Fact Finding Commission' at the earliest.

*(Letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi was written on the same date, 18 July 2014)*

**The Sikh Forum**



# The Chardi Kalaa Foundation



In the home of the brave and the land of the free,  
the spirit of the Khalsa shall rise up for all to see

## Strategies for True Happiness – Naam Simran

- ❖ Naam Simran – leads to a state of equipoise and Chardi Kalaa, transcending pleasure and pain

ਕਬੀਰ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸਿਮਰਨੁ ਜੋ ਕਰੈ ਸੋ ਸੁਖੀਆ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥ Kabeer,  
whoever meditates in remembrance on the Lord, he alone is  
happy in this world.

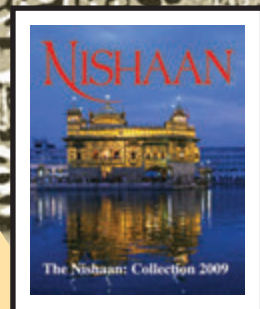
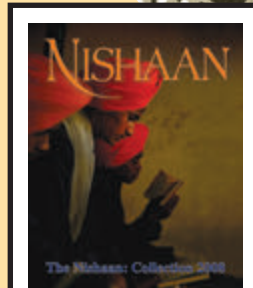
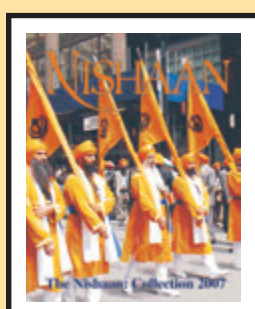
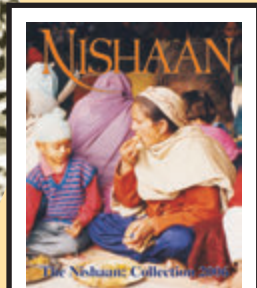
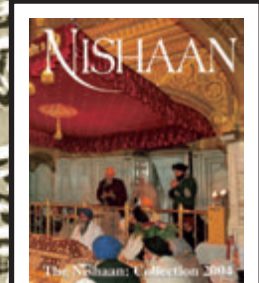
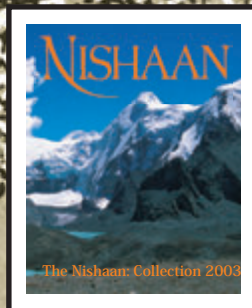
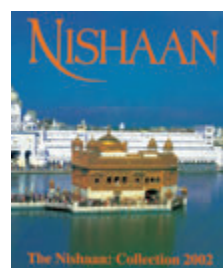
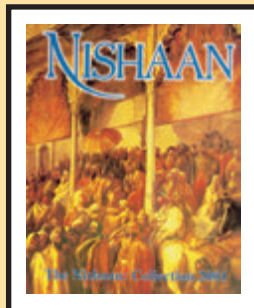
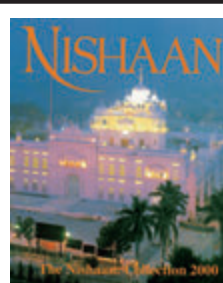
ਇਤ ਉਤ ਕਤਹਿ ਨ ਡੋਲਈ ਜਿਸ ਰਾਖੈ ਸਿਰਜਨਹਾਰ ॥ ੨੦੬ ॥

Protected by the Creator Lord, he shall never waver, here or here-  
after ॥ 206 ॥ - Kabeer, SGGS pg.1375

<http://www.chardikalaa.com/>

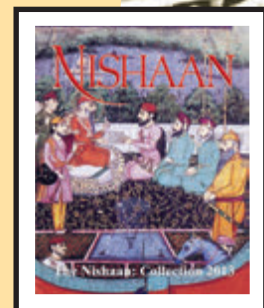
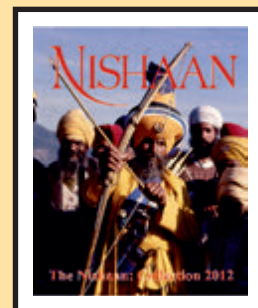
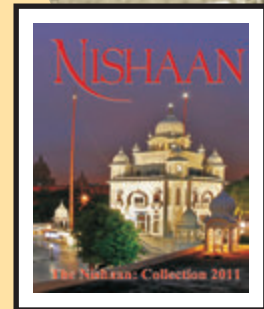
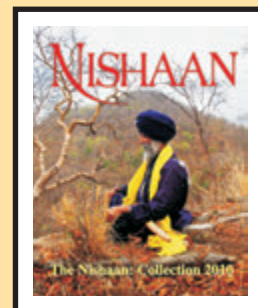


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