

operation : Black Blotch

(previously know as operation: bluestar)

Twenty years ago, in June 1984, the Indian Army embarked on a mission to take over control of Sikh's most revered shrine - The Akaal Takhat Sahib. Ranked #4 in the CIA's Top Ten list of Armies of the World, the objective laid down for the Indian Army Generals was to "shock and awe" ¹ the Sikh community into submission. No one thought that a handful of Sikh militants under the command of Baba Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale would throw a wrench into the Indian Army's plans.



Diabolical Plan

"The dark days of the Emergency imposed in 1975 by Indira Gandhi were very scary, son. People were afraid to venture out of their homes. One could get a severe beating or get locked up in prison for days by the police without rhyme or reason. One could not even appeal to the courts as fundamental rights of citizens lay suspended during those nineteen months."



"Why, Bhai jee² ? What was the emergency that had befallen the country?" I was intrigued.

"The High Court of Allahabad found Indira guilty of using illegal practices during her last election campaign, and ordered her to vacate her seat. There were demands for her resignation. Declaring Emergency was her response to this dissent", replied Bhai Jee. "High Court Judges were transferred randomly around the country as punishment. Thousands of leaders and activists of the opposition political parties were arrested and put in prison. Humiliating and torturing ordinary citizens who would dare raise a voice, Indira sought to cower the whole country into submission."

"So the emergency was just that Indira was loosing her seat! Unbelievable! Bhai jee. Did no one stand up to her? Could she get away with such heinous crimes

in the world's largest democracy?"

"Son, in shock and disbelief, intimidated by Indira's use of such force, the nation almost capitulated. While the whole of India lay prostrate before Indira, our Sikhs launched the only determined anti-emergency agitation. Thousands of Sikhs volunteered themselves for arrest after performing Ardas at the Akaal Takhat Sahib³. They courted more than 50,000 arrests in six months and compelled Mrs. Gandhi to restore constitutional rights. Indira Gandhi faced a humiliating defeat in the following elections.⁴ " Bhai jee continued to educate me.

"Wow! Khalsa never hesitates to stand up to oppression. Now, does he!" I felt proud.

"No, son, neither a he nor a she, Khalsa has never backed down in face of such tyrants. Indira realized too that Sikhs were really the only threat to her imperious and dynastic rule. She hatched a diabolical plan to annihilate the Sikhs from India. Operation Bluestar, Indian Army's attack on Akal Takhat Sahib, was one in a series. The objective of this particular mission was to break the back⁵ of Sikh community. To instill fear in minds."

"Let me now tell you the full story of the Operation Bluestar" said Bhai jee.

¹ The term was coined in the US in 1996 but captures the objective well. The Sikh Messenger of London uses "cow and humiliate" instead.

² Name withheld on request, ³ The Sikhs in History by Dr. Sangat Singh Page 361, ⁴ Dr. Avtar Singh Sekhon's letter to Prime Minister of United Kingdom ⁵ M. M. K. Wali, Indian Foreign Secretary, June 7, 1984, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, As It Happens

Secret leaks out

"Since October 1983, 600 top soldiers of the Indian army have been rehearsing an assault on the Akal Takhat at a secret location in the Chakrata Hills about 150 miles north of Delhi. They have constructed a replica of the Darbar Sahib complex for the training. ⁶" One of Baba Jarnail Singh's trusted sources informed him.

"Hmm..So Bibi Indira is determined to test the Khalsa's valor? Let it be known to all who cast an evil eye on Akaal Takhat Sahib, that we are the sons of our Father, Sree Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, and are not sitting here with glass bangles on our arms. This is definite that we will not fire at them first. However, if the army dares to enter the Darbar Sahib complex, Singhs will make them pay for each inch of the ground with their lives.⁷ Khalsa jee, we may all get martyred in the attack but history will bear witness that our blood will sweep away hordes of the attackers as a flood!" roared Baba Jarnail Singh jee.

We were all delighted that our beloved General, Baba Jarnail Singh jee, was ready to stand his ground and fight the invaders. A lot of us were very motivated to give up our lives for the Panth. Indira's Government had made it unbearable for Sikhs to live within India with dignity. Anyways, I'll save that for another story someday. Today, let's continue with the story of the Operation Bluestar.

"But Bhai Jee, what would Indira gain by demolishing Akaal Takhat Sahib?"

"Son, she had been using some weak-minded Sikhs to do her dirty work of damaging the Khalsa Panth. However, she noted that whenever a directive came from the Akaal Takhat Sahib, even those Sikhs would not dare violate it.⁸ This infuriated her beyond limit and she decided to demonstrate that she could trample Akaal Takhat Sahib without much hassle any day. That her command should mean more than the Akaal Takhat Sahib's."

"What an egoistical maniac? Bhai jee, what made her think that she could take over Akaal Takhat without much hassle?"

"She called upon the top Generals of the Indian

army, General Vaidya (Chief of Army Staff) and General Sunderji (GOC-in-C Western Command). Sunderji had assured her that it wouldn't take more than a few hours⁹ to take complete control of Akaal Takhat Sahib."

"So, I guess, Bhai jee, that for meeting her objective it was critical that the Operation be short and devastating."

"You've got it, son."

Fortifications begin



We had the fortune of having Major General Shahbeg Singh on our side. He was very experienced in warfare; the hero of the Bangladesh war in which he had raised and trained an army of Bangladeshis that played a pivotal role in defeating the Pakistani Army. With news of the impending attack by the Indian Army, the General got busy in fortifying the Darbar Sahib Complex.

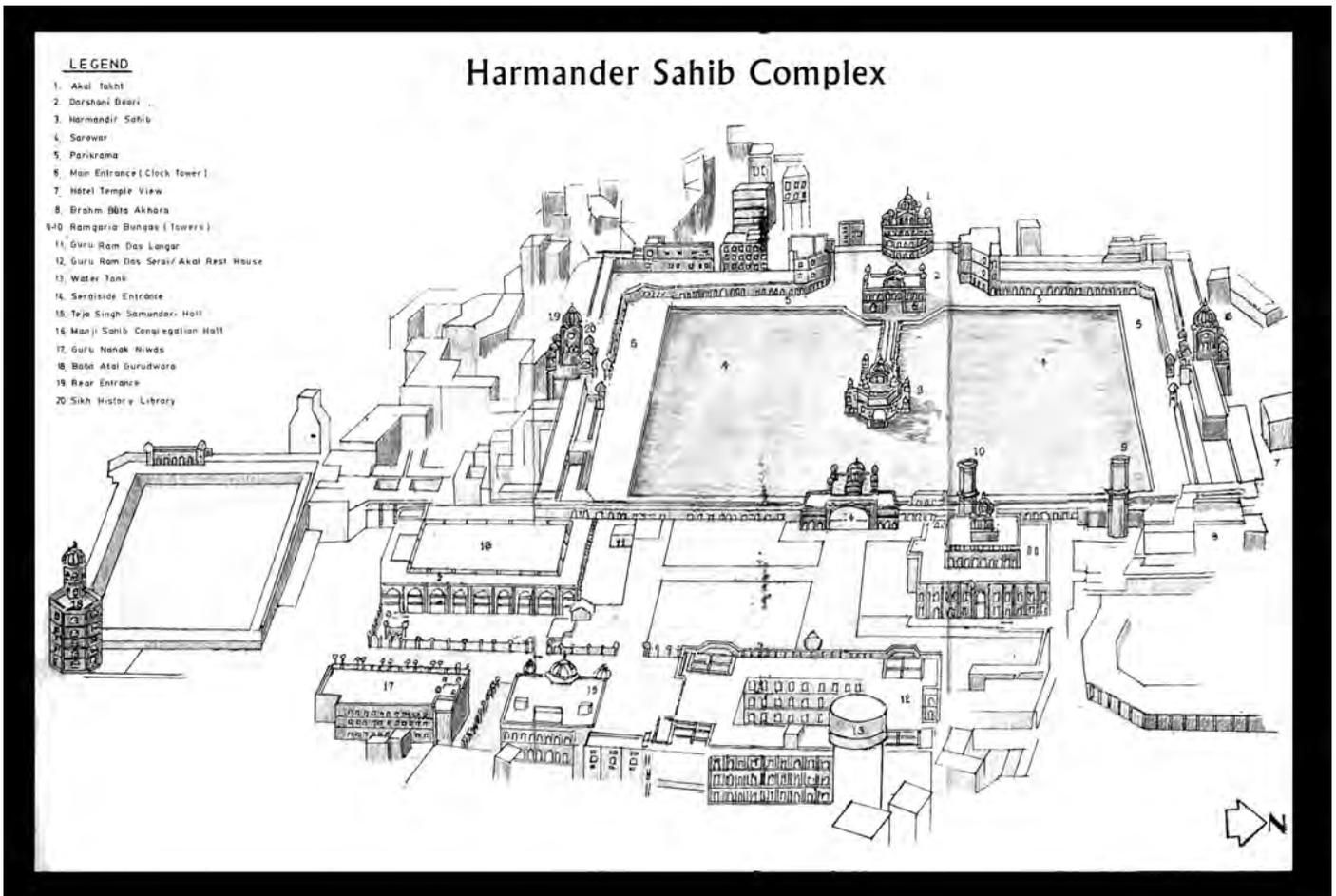
The Indian Army may have done their exercises a thousand times with the replica but nothing would prepare them for the ingenious defenses that the Singhs had devised. Besides, the Singhs manning the various Morchas (positions) were fearless, brave, steadfast with conviction of righteousness, and motivated on all accounts to lay down their lives for the defense of Darbar Sahib.

Weigh-In¹⁰

More than 10 divisions of the Indian Army had moved into Punjab - a force larger than that used during the three Indo-Pak wars. The troops were deployed strategically for four tasks. One, to conquer Darbar Sahib Complex. Two, to put down any uprising in the countryside. Three, to simultaneously attack 38 other Gurdwaras in Punjab synchronizing with the Darbar Sahib invasion. And lastly, to seal the border with Pakistan.

"Bhai jee, I can understand that attacking the other 38 Gurdwaras was as per her broad objective of breaking the Spirit of the Sikh community. But how did you come to know of all this prior to the operation?"

6 Mark Tully's "Amritsar..." Page 118 and Joyce Pettigrew's "Sikhs of the Punjab", Page 8, 7 Balbir Singh Sandhu's "Bhindranwale Suntaan De Aakhree Chhe Dinn", Page 74, 8 The Sikhs in History by Dr. Sangat Singh Pg. 378, 9 Khalistan The Only Solution by Lt. Col. Partap Singh, Page 97, 10 Khalistan The Only Solution by Lt. Col. Partap Singh, Page 90



"¹¹Son, Some say that Indira was deliberately letting all this information get to Baba Jarnail Singh jee while others believe that Baba jee had his sources. However, I think it is immaterial. If Indira thought that she would scare Baba jee and his companions away from Akaal Takhat Sahib, it did not work. Baba jee vociferously declared that they would not let the Indian Army have an easy path into Akaal Takhat Sahib."

"Oh! So Indira wanted Baba jee to leave so that her armies would have little trouble conquering the Takhat Sahib. Hmm...." I summarized to make sure I had understood Bhai jee correctly.

"Bhai jee, how did our Singhs' Fauj compare with the Indian Army?" I wondered.

"Son, apart from being heavily outnumbered we had very ordinary weapons compared to their arsenal. Our best weapon was the Light Machine Guns. Others were stenguns, carbines of .30 calibre, self-loading rifles, .303 rifles, revolvers and pistols of various calibers besides some hand grenades. On the

other hand the Indian Army was equipped with all kinds of heavy and sophisticated armor including Main battle tanks - Vijayanta, howitzer heavy guns and canons using 20-pound shells, mortars, machine guns, Light Machine Guns, and other pieces of artillery typically used in open field war against enemy countries. They also had stun gas bombs, incendiary bombs, highly explosive hand-grenades, armed personnel carriers, and armoured carriers. Son, they even used Russian made helicopters."

"What an unequal battle, Bhai jee?"

"That's what the bloated-head Indian Generals thought too. But listen on, son, Khalsa did not let the heavy odds intimidate them. Let me get straight to the battle now"

"Oh, yeah, Bhai jee. Please do!" I was excited.

June 1

I was relaxing with a couple of Singhs after my morning exercises. "ਅਹ! ਭਰਓਂ, ਆਪਨੀ ਤਾਂ ਤਿਆਰੀ ਹੈ, ਆਉਣ ਦਿਓ ਟੋਪੀ ਵਾਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ!" The others laughed at my light-hearted comment. It was around noon. We were sit-

were pouring water on the Parikarma to make it cool enough for others to walk on. Some were doing ਪਾਠ from ਗੁਟਕੇ. The whirl of this routine activity was shattered by a sudden battering rapport of gunfire. We jumped to our feet. Everyone got under the shelters while we proceeded to take position alongside some other Singhs at a morcha.

Police forces that had already occupied strategic positions in close vicinity of the complex had begun a probing attack just after noon on the 1st of June. The firing was intermittent and directed to random locations. However, our Jathedars had given us strict orders to not fire back and reveal our positions. We were to fire only if they made any attempt to move into the complex. The police along with the army observers tried to incite us several times. A few innocent, Sangat members were shot. Some firing was even directed at Sri Harimandar Sahib. Some Singhs on already known morchas returned fire. Bhai Kulwant Singh Babbar (alias-Mehnga Singh), a beloved friend of mine, took out many enemy soldiers before he fell to a sniper's bullet. Our blood was boiling, our fingers eager to press the trigger of our guns, but patience was strategically important. One of us began to do Sukhmani Sahib ਪਾਠ loudly to focus our minds on Gur-Shabad instead.

The firing continued till about 7:00pm that day. At one point some police forces attempted to rush towards the Langar building ¹². Apparently, they wanted to take over some of our positions. Rat-tat-tat... our guns opened up fire. About a dozen of them were laid down. The Government forces did not try another misadventure that day.

June 2

All of Punjab was under a strict curfew. As a result there was hardly any Sangat coming into Sri Darbar Sahib. But there were a whole lot of Sangat already in the complex including a large group of volunteers who had come to court-arrest as per the Dharam-Yudh-Morcha. We were all very alert. The instructions to us were again to only fire if the army attempted to move into the complex. Not much happened that day. It was like the quiet before the storm. Indira Gandhi's address to the Nation that was broadcast on most radio stations had made it certain that the Army would invade the complex. Soon after the city cut all electricity and water supply. While the warriors eager to die for the Panth were charged up, some others were getting edgy. Perhaps it was the unbearable heat. Or perhaps it was the stress of being in the midst of a war.

June 3

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We had been waiting eagerly for this auspicious day - the day of Martyrdom of Sree Guru Arjan Dev Sahib Jee - first Shaheed of the Panth. Remembering Guru Sahib's Shaheedee filled me with tremendous confidence. The Ammritvelaa programs at Darbar Sahib today had a heightened spiritual air about them. Sangat had come from far-flung areas despite the threat of the Army's attack. There was little talk that day. Everyone was busy stacking up on ਨਾਮ (Naam-wealth). At our morchas we were engaged in non-stop series of Sukhmanee Sahib Paaths. Our instructions were still to fire only if we see the Police or Army advancing. The Army had perhaps understood this and soldiers were moving around their positions without bothering about exposure to our guns. I could see from my binoculars that the Police had now been completely replaced by the Army. However, no shots were fired that day until nightfall. Both sides were just gearing up for the battle. What better way to prepare for battle than recalling Pancham Father's Shaheedee. He had no fear of losing his body while in Service of Akal Purakh. He was subjected to numerous inhuman tortures but Our Guru is unwavering! Fear had disappeared from my thought. Dying in the battlefield is so much better than dying of oldage or diseases. Besides, this was the golden chance to graduate to the Shaheed ਫੌਜ (Army).

June 4

A lot of Sangat had stayed over night as usual to join in the Ammritvelaa programs of June 4. While the programs proceeded as per schedule, we continued to man our morchas as it was obvious the Army had not just come for our 'darshan'! The storm began at 4:40am. Devotees swinging to the melody of the AsaaDeeVaar Keertan were rudely shaken out from their absorption by a loud explosion. The army had begun to bombard us with heavy artillery fire. The successive explosions were ear-splitting and had an enormous impact on the buildings that they fell upon. Our morcha did not get a direct hit but the building we were on shook with each blast. The tremors were so violent that the roof should have caved in on us but Satguru's miracle that it withstood the onslaught.

Heavy firing had now started on all fronts. We were

under instructions to not waste bullets and fire only when certain. We were making the mark. The Indian Army was unable to capitalize on the artillery that had intended to soften up our defenses. Indeed some morchas were destroyed and there were huge clouds of dust impairing our vision but Khalsa did not let the Army advance even a single inch. I stayed on the morcha all day long. Each of us (there were 6 of us) making sure that no Indian soldier dare venture out of their posts.

The Indians stopped firing at around 3:00pm and began making offers of truce over loud-speakers. "Come out empty-handed and no harm shall come to you", "Surrender now and the government will treat your leniently", etc. Little more than a couple hundred of the Sangat took up the offer and walked out



of the Darbar Sahib complex, raising their hands to demonstrate that they were coming out empty-handed. However, with all these surrendering (most were bajurgs, women and children) huddled together, the butcher Indians opened fire again. Several of these innocent by-standers were hit and killed.

While this happened at the North front of the complex we got news of it at our morcha. Khalsa was enraged. The firing from the Singhs was now furious. The Indians suffered several casualties that evening.

June 5-6

Intermittent firing had continued all night. Khalsas had been on their feet for a few days now. Langar and water were scarce. Normally fatigue would have taken over and I would be lying flat, asleep. But there was a special spirit of enthusiasm among all the Sikhs there. Everyone wanted to make sure the Indian army doesn't walk into Darbar Sahib while they can still fight.

Early in the day, morchas on the two Bungas (# 9 & 10 in pic) and the water tank came under heavy bombardment. There wasn't much the Singhs could do to counter this attack. Morchas were moved to the ground so as to counter the army head-on. All morchas on high buildings met the same fate over the entire day. Our rockets silenced a couple of Indian army's big guns but it wasn't enough. The army's big guns had done their job. All firing from the Indian side stopped around 4:30pm. We kept vigilant on our posts. Guesses were being made about what the Army was planning next. One thing we were all sure about was that action tonight would be dynamite!

We did Sodar Paath at our posts. Surprisingly, freshly prepared langar was delivered to us by a sevadar. We were told that this has come from nearby Sikh houses. Dhann Gursikhs who were doing this sevaa under such terrifying circumstances.

Light firing started again sometime later but the real storm began just after 10:00pm when darkness had fully set in. "Singho! Three of you need to get to the north entrance quick!" came a frantic call on the walkie-talkie. We took off in a sprint, carbines in hand. Ducking from room to room we were making slow progress. Suddenly we heard the noise of hundreds of boots marching on the sacred parikarma. The Indian army soldiers were swarming from the



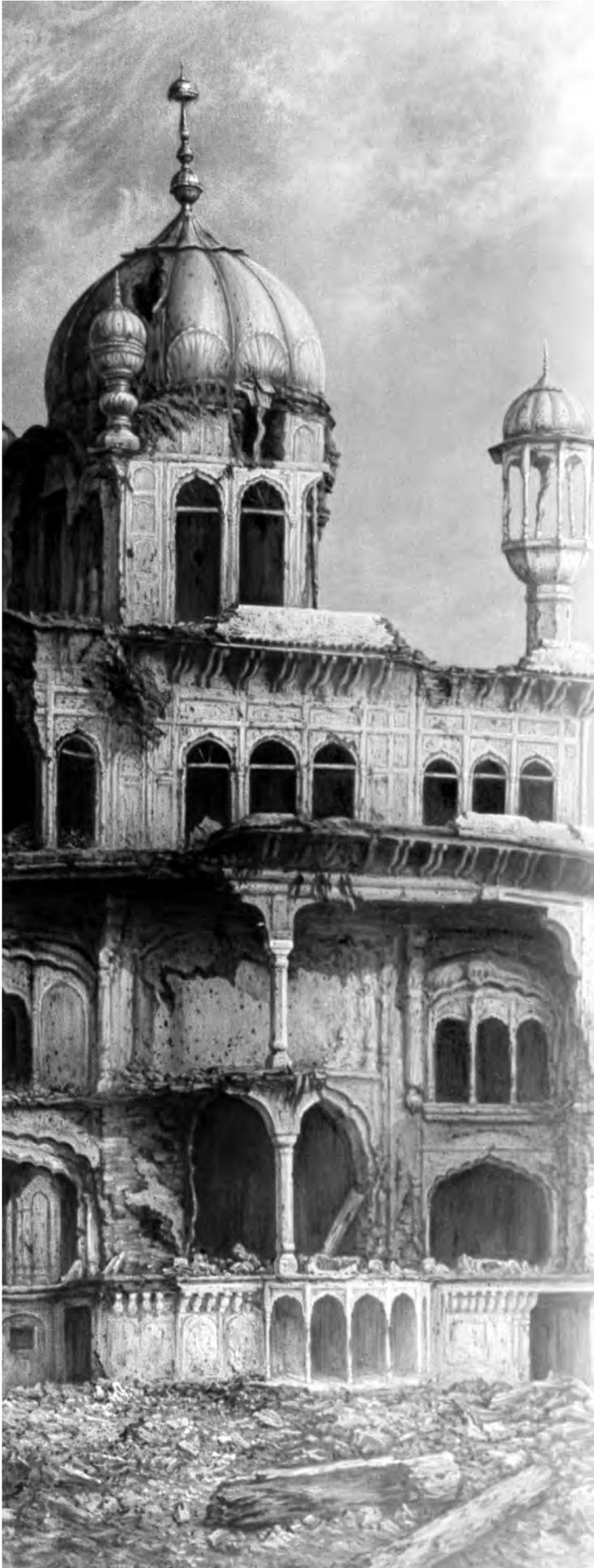
entrance like ants. Raising vociferous slogans they were trying to make the air fearful. "ਲਉ ਸੁਣ ਲਉ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਗਿੱਦੜ ਭੱਬਕੀਆਂ" humored one of my companions. Nothing terrifies the Singhs! We had to dive into a shelter as suddenly all rooms around the parikarma were lit with powerful lights. It became difficult for us to see the enemy but we stay put with our guns pointing in their direction. Within a few moments with much of the enemy's battalion in the parikarma

and the stairs, the whole north area erupted in gunfire. We also opened up several bursts at the Indian soldiers. Most of them laid down on the ground but some were still trying to make it up to Akal Takhat Sahib. A few bursts from the Singhs cut short their adventure. Firing from our side continued until we were sure that we had completely defeated this charge by the Indians. "ਬੋਲੇ ਸੋ ਨਿਹਾਲ ਸਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ!", Singhs let out full-throated Jaikaras on this little victory.

Our attention was now drawn to the sounds of a similar battle on the south end. A Babbar Khalsa Singh told me the story of that end. A contingent of the Indian Army had approached the steel gate on the south. The soldiers were cowering behind the leading tanks that were going to take the gate down. Singhs positioned atop Guru Raam Daas Langar, Saraan, Manji Sahib, Baba Attal Gurdwara Sahib, and even right behind the gate opened up such effective firing that the enemy was forced to retreat. The steel gate couldn't be broken down. The morchas were intact as well despite several grenades that were lobbed across the gate. Some beloved Singhs of Babbar Khalsa also blew up the water tank and delayed Army officers from entering from the south side for a few more hours.

On our end, the Indian army sent another wave of their commandoes. They were forced to retreat as well in face of Singhs' blazing guns that were spitting fire only in defense. The onslaught did not stop there. Realizing that to reach Akal Takhat Sahib they would have to fight for each inch, the Indian army was now focusing on taking control of all the rooms alongside the parikarma. Khalsa fought bravely and stealthily moving from room to room. This kept the army confused as they never could really claim to have cleared a room as our Singhs would keep re-appearing in the supposedly "cleared" rooms.

I had now moved with my companions to the Akal Takhat and joined a morcha on the first floor. At around 2:00AM the commandoes made a dash for the Akal Takhat. We let out Jaikaras and opened our guns on the assaulting commandoes. Our Singhs atop the Darshni Deoree had easy pickings. Nevertheless, the rushing force outnumbered us heavily and some of their people found good shelters and took positions that were too close for comfort. Taking advantage of their proximity the commandoes started throwing gas bombs at us. With



SachePaatshaah's Grace, the flow of air made it such that the gas affected the commandoes more than it did us.

These futile attempts by the army continued from all sides of the complex for couple more hours. By 4:00am the situation was again relatively quiet. It was obvious that they were pondering on a new strategy. I took a breather and freshened up a bit at an adjoining washroom where the Singhs had stored up some water. Coming back to the post, I began path of Baanees of Nitnem in a loud voice. I thought maybe the dying Indian soldiers, lying in front of Akal Takhat Sahib would also benefit from listening to the peace-giving-Gurbani.

We didn't have to wait long to figure out what was coming next. The grinding roar of tanks moving into the complex was signal that the Indian Army had accepted defeat in terms of fighting with just their man-power even though it was almost 100:1 in their favor.

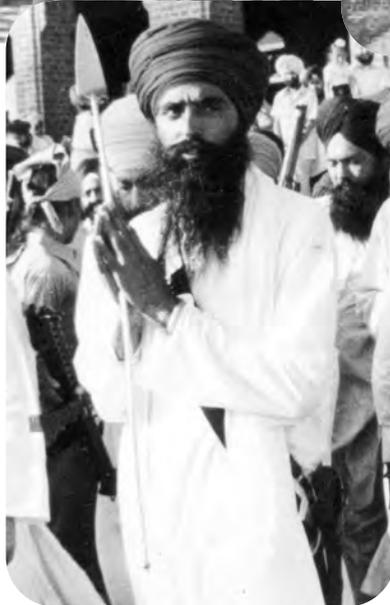
As the first tank was rolling down the stairs at the entrance, our General, Bhai Shahbeg Singh ran towards it with the only anti-tank gun we had. He fired at the tank from a close distance and crippled it. Another Sikh jumped in front of a tank with explosives and crippled that. But all this was too little to stop more than a dozen tanks from taking positions around the parikarma. General Shahbeg Singh was hit by a burst of fire but made it back to the Akal Takhat Sahib before joining the Shaheed Faujaan. The mood was somber amongst the Singhs. Everyone had come to respect Bhai Shahbeg Singh jee and parting had been most difficult. Baba Jarnail Singh Jee uplifted everyone's spirits at that time. "Singho, be strong. We will join Bhai Sahib soon as well. Let not anyone be sad. It is infact a very joyous occasion that we are getting the glorious chance to join the Shaheed Faujaan by laying our lives for Akal Takhat Sahib! We shall now go out into the open and take out as many of the invading forces as we can. Satguru is always with us!"

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The tanks assaulted Akal Takhat Sahib repeatedly. The whole structure shivered with each hit. We had moved into the ground positions and kept a semblance of gunfire going to dismiss any ideas that any ambitious Indian soldier may have of rushing into Akal Takhat Sahib. Even with tanks, it took the army another 5 hours before

they could take full control of all of the parikarma and then ours was really the only remaining target for them.



At around 10:30am, all the Singhs led by Baba Jarnail Singh came up from the basement. One Singh told me that they had just done Ardaas to accept martyrdom and were going out to put up the last battle. Baba Jarnail Singh was a sight to behold. A carbine in one hand and a bag full of ammunition on his back, face lit with a mysterious glow, he was battle ready. From my position, I saw



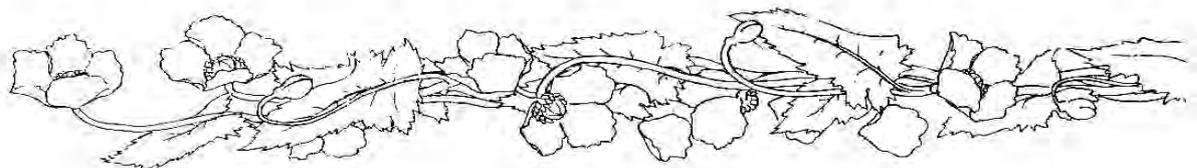
Baba jee run down the stairs and take position behind the Nishaan Sahib. Other Singhs followed and similarly took positions here and there. The Indian forces were now firing from all directions,



Baba Jarnail Singh Ji - Shaheedi Roop

and heavily outnumbered these few Singhs. Each of the Singhs stood his ground till the last breath and accepted a glorious martyrdom.

Having done all we could, me and my companions decided to continue our war with the Indian forces another day and escaped miraculously from Baba Atal Gurdwara Sahibs gate. It is now 20 years since, son, and the war is continuing. All of my companions have one by one been accepted in the Shaheed Faujan but I still await my call, son. With Guru Sahib's kirpaa, that welcome moment will come for me as well.



A little knowledge can be...funny!

ਮੈਂ ਅਕਸਰ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਨੇਡੀਅਨ ਜੱਮ-ਪੱਲ ਸਿੰਘਣੀ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਦੇ ਕੁਝ ਅਖਾਣ ਸੁਨਾਂਦਾ ਹਾਂ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ: "ਵਾਹ ਬਈ ਵਾਹ, ਪੜਨੀਆਂ ਪੋਥੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਕੱਮ ਕਰਨੇ ਆਹ!" ਜਾਂ "ਸਿਆਣੇ ਦੇ ਕਹੇ ਦਾ ਅਤੇ ਅਠਿਲੇ ਦੇ ਖਾਦੇ ਦਾ ਪਿਛੋਂ ਹੀ ਸੁਆਦ ਆਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ" . ਇਕ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁਸਦਿਆਂ ਜੋਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਏ ਸਿੰਘਣੀ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਮੱਤ ਦੋਂਦਿਆਂ ਕਹਿਆ, "ਵਾਹ ਬਈ ਵਾਹ, ਪੜਨੀਆਂ ਪੋਥੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਅਠਿਲੇ ਖਾਹ!" ਹਾਸਾ ਐਸਾ ਛਿੜਿਆ ਕਿ ਅਸੀਂ ਬਹਿਸ ਹੀ ਭੁਲ ਗਏ .