

Remembering Operation Bluestar

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NINETEEN YEARS HAVE PASSED AND with time has passed the most horrific period in the present history of the Sikhs. The Akali Ministry in the Punjab passed a resolution condemning Operation Bluestar but the Indian Government does not seem to bother about that. As the month of June comes, the same old scenes in the Darbar Sahib come alive before my eyes. The AISSF (of which I was convenor of the Chandigarh unit) was banned in March 1984 and I was asked by the high command from Amritsar to leave Punjab University, Chandigarh where I was working as a research fellow, and rush to Amritsar. It was a call like that of the military high command for me which I immediately obeyed and joined my comrades there at Darbar Sahib Complex, with about half a dozen active members of AISSF from Chandigarh. Charanjit Singh Talwandi was prominent among those. Time passed very quickly as the Sikh Panth was witnessing a star on its horizon in the name of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale, who had emerged as a symbolic representative of the past Sikh glory and the future hope at the same time.

As the day of the Army attack on Darbar Sahib drew near, the atmosphere became more and more surcharged with valour, heroism and defiance. An Epic battle was going to be fought between the forces of the ungrateful Indian State on the one side and of the sincere spiritual symbolic forces of the Sikh religious values on the other side, latter being publicised as the "evil forces of terrorism" by the Indian State through its sponsored media. The readiness for death with which Sant Jarnail Singh met the forces of the Indian State and the magnetic influence with which he charged the whole body of the Sikhs there, nevertheless, made him the hero of this epic struggle.

I always feel that my providential duty to be there at this very sensitive and hectic period of the Sikh history was to project these events as an eyewitness account in writing for the posterity, a duty in which I have failed so far. Here are very brief personal experiences that I had all along for three days, i.e. from 4th to 6th of June while at Darbar Sahib.

I along with Major General Subeg Singh, Prof. Mohinder Singh Dhaliwal, Gurchran Singh Saidpur, Amarjit Singh Chawla and Rajinder Singh Mehta spent the whole night of third of June near Darshni Deori of Darbar Sahib on its right side in *Parikarma*. Chawla and Mehta left early in the morning of 4th of June around 3 A.M. towards Akal Rest House where they were permanently residing. So four of us remained there. We had been waiting for the Army attack throughout night with arms and ammunition with us, but nothing happened. At 4 A.M. General Subeg Singh and Prof. Dhaliwal accompanied Palki Sahib to Darbar Sahib and I along with Gurcharan stayed behind.

The first Rocket launcher was fired by the Indian Army around 4.40 A.M. General Subeg Singh and Prof. Dhaliwal were returning from Darbar Sahib after listening to daily *Hukamnama*. They had approached Darshani Deori when the rocket launcher hit the Akal Takht building with the loud sound of thundering of the clouds.

Least bothering about what had happened, General Subeg Singh approached me as I was feeling scared and trying to run towards shelter. He took me by the arm and said "come on, Dr. Sahib, let me show you the battle". I accompanied him, and half of the scare seemed to have vanished. He took me towards the narrow street behind Gurdwara Thara Sahib talking all along as if he was not worried about what was going to happen. Both of us sat on the raised sitting stone slates in medieval style on each side of the door of one of the locked houses and he told me that he alone could check the movement of the army from this side of the street, even *if* it was in thousands. I asked how? He told that as soon as he sees the army advancing towards Akal Takht from this street he would hurl a grenade, that he held in his hand and after that he will fire a few rounds from his stengun and if one or two jawans were killed the rest will run back as he knew their psychology. After some time we moved towards Akal Takht. There were two, three more attacks by rocket launchers on and around Akal Takht in the mean time. We stood in front of Akal Takht, General spoke spontaneously: "The best place to die is the highest place of your religion, or the place connected with your ancestors and this place where we are standing is having both the qualities. So this is the best place to die." He asked me not to be scared of the fire as it never hit the man as long as God does not will. He told me that he had fought so many battles in his life and he never had a minor bruise in any of the battles.

These were all new experiences for me and also prophetic words. Then we proceeded towards the main Ghanta Ghar gate and towards Dukh Bhanjani Beri. It was firing all along with nobody on the Parikarma except us. As we came returned in front of the Akal Takht, one, Devinder Singh Fauji was standing at the raised platform of Akal Takht and was saying in a loud voice, "O, Singho, now we are not to eat anything, Guru Gobind Singh and four Sahibzadas are waiting for us with meals, we are to fight, get martyrdom and reach there'. It was very hot on 4th and 5th June and we took charge of the *Deori* on the left side of the Akal Takht where two Nishan Sahibs of *Miri* and *Piri* flutter high. Gurcharan along with one or two of his companions kept themselves self busy piercing the walls with chisel and hammers to make space for fitting the guns, and also fixed some bricks with mud to hide themselves behind for safety. Some unseen force was at work invariably which was prompting every one to do his bit.

On the night of 4th June, we remained in the room on the right side of first floor of Deori. It was extremely hot and our clothes got drenched with the sweat, as there was no electricity; its connections had been cut. We were waiting every movement for the army but it never came and we became more and more confident that the army was not going to enter and they were simply firing to threaten the Singhs to surrender.

On 5th June, I had an encounter with Bhai Amrik Singh and Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. The former came to our *morcha* which had been shifted from first floor to the second floor in a room that had a number of windows all around. Shubeg Singh saw the narrow street below and said, "This is a suicidal *morcha*; have you got enough weapons and ammunition, if not, come with me I shall arrange for it." Gurcharan went with him and brought more ammunition. Charanjit Singh Talwandi had come to Akal Takht from the Sarai side and had taken charge of the entrance to the basement where Sant Jarnail Singh had shifted after army's rocket attack. I

exchanged some views with Sant Ji who had come up from the basement and was standing with Charanjit. I do not know what struck Charanjit, he asked me if he could come with us at our *morcha*? I told him “yes,” and in no time he was with us deputing some one else to take his place. He evidently changed the whole scheme in our *morcha*.

On the morning of 5th June I saw Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale surrounded by some of his warrior comrades. He was standing in the middle surrounded by others encircling him. He was distributing double-edged swords to them, what I heard him speak was like this: “tell all the Singhs that none is to raise hands and surrender, all are to achieve martyrdom”. He was looking remarkably unique among his comrades like an exalted leader.

As the evening of the 5th of June arrived, we again began to wait for the army for final assault. In the evening for a few hours the firing stopped; otherwise the whole day witnessed the firing of cannon balls from a long distance. The balls would hit the long erect old *boongas* from where only some dust like material would evaporate doing no considerable harm to them. That showed their strength. As began the fall of the night, with it began the final assault of the army. The incessant firing by the cannons and rocket launchers started directed on the Akal Takht. Perhaps the army had abandoned hope that Sikhs would surrender fearing the sound of cannon balls and thus it decided to give the final blow. Till midnight the army men tried hard to reach Akal Takht and capture it but they were, every time, killed and repulsed by the valiant and gallant defenders at and around Akal Takht. Then there was use of poisonous gas, but to no avail. Eventually, the army had to use its last weapon - to send in the tanks.

Our *morcha* was safe as there was no back door entry by the army as expected by most of us, and we were calm watchers of the action going around us. It was day-break now, we were sitting silently in one of the rooms when I, being considered as incharge of the *morcha*, caught hold of attention of my two companions Talwandi and Dhaliwal, and suggested that we should now leave the place and try to escape. Both of them agreed with me and all of us placed our weapons along with bags of ammunition in a big iron container lying along side, and walked towards the narrow streets by removing a few bricks near the main back door of the *deori* to pass through. From there on, we proceeded to the nearby house by breaking it open and reached silently near army post outside. It was about 11 am. When we saw smoke coming out of the Akal Takht; perhaps it was done by the army to flush out the men in it and then shoot them. At this time perhaps some of them came in front of the Akal Takht and the rest of them escaped from behind it. We were just caught in a fix as to what to do next when we overheard someone say that curfew has been relaxed. We made up our minds to take the chance if we could escape. We had changed our clothes and put on the shoes lying in that house. We got out and mixed with the people going around. We were checked at one point, but we said that we had come to Darbar Sahib for Darshan and were stuck here. Dhaliwal showed his I. card. We were the only Sikhs going in the crowd. They had all come to see the military attack and to help the jawans there. They were returning to their houses. We reached the house of the sister-in-law of Mr. Dhaliwal in the Dharpura bazar where we stayed till 9th of June, as there was no relaxation in the curfew

We left Mohinder Singh Dhaliwal here, and both of us went to village Mahal near Guru Nanak Dev University and from there we reached Jalandhar on 13th evening. Spending a week or so there we reached Ludhiana and later reached Delhi. By the end of July reached Calcutta where we succeeded in reorganising the AISSF upto September. During all this time Charanjit Singh Talwandi worked hard and proved an asset for reorganising of the Sikh spirit - political as well as militant. How difficult it was to move from Amritsar to Calcutta and then to reorganise AISSF in about three months time was not less than a miracle. I had to work as *de facto* president of the Federation during this most difficult period, and Charanjit Singh Talwandi worked as my close aide and helped me all through.

