

‘Operation Bluestar’: The Untold Story

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Eye-witness accounts of the Army Action

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“Operation Bluestar” and “*Ghallughara*”. Two different terms for the same episode – the Army action on the Golden Temple in June 1984. Two different meanings given to the same unprecedented event. “Operation Bluestar” in 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. The unmistakable allusion is to the killing in Punjab of tens of thousands of Sikhs by the Afghan raider, Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1762, after which the word “*Ghallughara*” was coined to become an integral part of the Punjabi folklore.

The contrast between “Operation Bluestar” and “*Ghallughara*” as two different perceptions of the same reality is symptomatic of the wide gap between the official version and the people’s recollections of what really happened at the Golden Temple when the army attacked it in June 1984. Listening to the gripping eye-witness accounts of those who were inside Golden Temple at that time, we felt the need 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 T.V. and the White Paper.

Who are the eye-witnesses to the Golden Temple episode?

1. *Devinder Singh Duggal* – Incharge of the Sikh Reference Library located inside the Golden Temple complex, Duggal is an acknowledged authority on Sikh history. He used to reside in a house adjacent to the Sikh Reference Library, was present there between May 28 and June 6, 1984 and hence (in his own words) “an eye-witness to some of the atrocities committed by the Army during its attack on the Golden Temple”. About fiftyish, Duggal now (1985) lives with his lecturer - wife in Jalandhar, where we interviewed him. His eyes become moist and his voice quivered as he described the assault on the Golden Temple.

2. *Bhan Singh* – Secretary of the S.G.P.C., short, slim, in his mid-fifties, Bhan Singh is a man of few words. He was present in the Golden Temple Complex during the Army attack and was arrested at dawn on June 6, along with Longowal and Tohra, from the Guru Nanak Nivas which now houses the SGPC Office, where we met and talked to him. His account begins from June 3, 1984.

3. *Giani Puran Singh* – one of the priests at Harmandir Sahib.

4. *Girl student* – Grand- daughter of SGPC member, she preferred to remain anonymous. Aged about 20 years, she goes to College at Amritsar. She went to the Golden Temple on May 29, 1984, with her grand-parents and an aunt, to fulfill a vow,

and was there upto June 6. We met her in Amritsar in the house of a widowed victim of the November 1984 Delhi violence.

5. *A.I.S.S.F. Member* – About 25-years old, he would not give his name, son of a police officer, he was visiting the Golden Temple in June 1984 for the Gurbarb and was there from June 1. He was arrested by the Army on June 6 but released in October. He was rearrested soon after and had again been released a little before we met him. Remarkably calm and soft spoken, he said that there were about 100 fighters with Bhindranwale inside the Temple Complex and less than 100 arms, mostly, 303 guns of the World War II. Extremely handsome, he is a member of the All India Sikh Students' Federation.

6. *Prithipal Singh* – A young (24 years) Sevadar at the Akal Rest House, inside the Guru Ram Das Serai, Golden Temple Complex, where mostly distinguished guests stayed. He was on duty throughout the period of the Army Operation. He narrated how he had a hairbreadth escape, **even after being lined up before the firing squad on June 6, after he had been arrested, stripped naked and his hands had been tied behind with his turban.** He showed us the bullet-ridden walls of the Akal Rest House, where we spoke to him.

7. *Joginder Singh* – an employee of the S.G.P.C. whom we met at the Golden Temple.

8. *Surinder Singh Ragi "Patnasahib Wala"* – Head Ragi (singer) at the Harmandir Sahib, we met this young man (about 35 years) outside the Information Office of the Golden Temple. He was in the *Kesari* (Sochre) robes of a priest. He was on duty at the Harmandir Sahib during the Army action. He is an extremely popular singer of '*Shabads*' from the Gurbani and his tapes are on great demand. He spoke to us with great conviction. "The Guru taught us to resist *atyachar* (repression), not to do *atyachar*".

9. *Baldev Kaur* – an Amritdhari woman in her mid-thirties, she had come to the Golden temple on June 2, 1984 for the Gurbarb with her husband (Puran Singh who is now in Kapurthala Jail) and three children from her village Khanowal in Kapurthala district. **She was so calm and fearless when she described her tribulations.** She is facing severe economic hardships, cultivating only two acres of land, having no regular source of income since her husband's arrest more than 9 months back.

10. *Harcharan Singh Ragi* – one of the Hazuri Ragis who sing at the Harmandir Sahib, he is in his late fifties. With serene eyes and flowing white beard, he has an endearing touch. He was on duty at the Harmandir Sahib singing 'kirtans' when the Army shelled it very early morning on June 4. Born into a Hindu Brahmin family, he was orphaned at the time of partition and then adopted and brought up by Amrik Singh, the blind Head Ragi of the Golden Temple who was killed inside the Harmandir Sahib on the morning of June 5. We met him at the Information Office of the Golden Temple, and he lives just above it. **Raminderpal Singh – an innocent boy – one of his sons, is detained at Jodhpur Jail as a 'terrorist'.**

Some of the details of the life in Amritsar at the time of the Army action, were provided to us by the relatives of a few of those who were 'captured' from the Golden Temple after the army operations, as 'terrorists' accused of 'waging war against the State' and who are now being tried under the Special Courts (Terrorist) Act at Jodhpur Jail. It is the Jodhpur detainees who are eye-witnesses to the Army

operations in Amritsar in June 1984, not the relatives we met. But some of their evidence was passed on to their relatives in the course of brief meetings in jail from time to time. We met the relatives of:

(a) *Kanwaljit Singh* – A 20-year-old student of Khalsa College (evening) Delhi, whose father (Satnam Singh) runs a provision store at Lawrence Road, Delhi. Kanwaljit Singh visited the Temple with his friend on June 2, wanted to return to Delhi the same afternoon, but found that the last train had left Amritsar. And so he was forced to stay at the Guru Ram Das Serai inside the Golden Temple Complex. After the Army Action, he was arrested by the army from the Serai and later chargesheeted, with 378 others, as ‘terrorists’ and detained under the N.S.A. We spoke to his younger brother, Inder Mohan Singh, at Delhi.

(b) *Jasbir Singh and Randhir Singh* – Two brothers who went to Golden Temple, separately, on June 3 to pay their respects. As Jasbir Singh was coming out after fulfilling his vow on June 3 at about 1.30 p.m. on the side of the Chowk Ghanta Ghar, he was detained along with other youths by the C.R.P. The C.R.P. made them take off their shirts, tied their hands behind and made them sit on the hot road outside the Information Office. Randhir Singh was staying in a room in Guru Ram Das Serai, belonging to their uncle (a member of the SGPC) from where he was arrested on June 5. Randhir was injured by bullets on his leg. We spoke to their father, Harbans Singh Ghumman, about 55 years, a farmer and former MLA belonging to village Ghummankala, district Gurdaspur.

Piecing together the evidence of various eye-witnesses and also second-hand sources, such as Kirpal Singh, President of the Khalsa Dewan, Amritsar and S. S. Bhagowalia, advocate at Gurdaspur and Vice-president of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (Punjab), the following picture emerges as to what happened at Golden Temple from June 1, 1984. It is really amazing how, except for some minor details, the accounts of different persons interviewed separately tally so closely with regard to the date, the time and the description of incident June 1, 1984: The AISSF, Member Duggal, the girl student, Sevadar Prithipal Singh and Baldev Kaur, **all said that the Golden Temple was fired at by security forces from the out side for the first time on June 1 itself, not June 5 as claimed by the White Paper.**

According to the AISSF member, “At 12.40 in the afternoon of June 1, suddenly the CRP without any provocation started firing, aiming at the people inside the **Parikramas**. There was no firing, from inside the Golden Temple. The firing by the C.R.P. was on the Harmandir Sahib and the Manji Sahib. The firing continued till about 8 p.m.” Sevadar Prithipal Singh added that **the shooting which started from outside, was not preceded by any warning.**

Devinder Singh Duggal’s account is extremely detailed and lucid. “By the end of May, it was widely known that the Army is going to attack the Golden Temple, and on that account there was tremendous tension in the entire city and its surrounding areas. The worst fears of the people came to the surface when on 1st June, the security forces, which had besieged the Golden Temple for months together and had made strong fortifications on the multi-storey buildings all around it, suddenly started firing inside the Golden Temple. The firing started at 12.30 p.m. and continued for a full 7 hours. **What was worse was that Harmandir Sahib was made the main**

target of this firing. I took shelter along with my staff behind the steel almirahs of the Library; one of the bullets pierced through three almirahs and landed on the fourth and we had a narrow escape.”

Duggal continues – **“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 not to fire a single shot unless and until the security forces or the Army entered the holy Golden Temple.** In the evening, when I heard in the news bulletin that there was unprovoked firing from inside the Temple, but that the security forces showed extreme restraint and did not fire a single shot, I was surprised at this naked lie. The very fact that as many as eight persons, including a woman and a child had been killed inside the Golden Temple complex and there were as many as 34 big bullet marks on all sides of the Harmandir Sahib completely belied the Government’s version. I asked Bhan Singh, Secretary, S.G.P.C., to do something to refute this falsehood. He said that nothing could be done because all links with the outside world had been snapped.”

According to the girl student, curfew was clamped soon after the firing started. She confirmed the killings – “Authorities has said none had died, but I dressed the wounds of 3 men who died later in front of me in Guru Nanak Nivas.” That the curfew was lifted soon after the firing stopped is indicated by the AISSF member, who said, “after the firing stopped, at about 8.30 p.m., a group of people (Jatha) courted arrest.”

There is no doubt then that security forces (C.R.P.) fired on the Harmandir Sahib on June 1 itself and the news over the A.I.R. that there was unprovoked firing from inside was a blatant lie. However, most official versions maintain a meaningful silence about the happenings of June 1. For them, as for example, with the Government’s White Paper, the story begins on June 2 with the Government of India deciding to call in the Army in aid of civil authority in Punjab, with the object of “checking and controlling extremist, terrorist and communal violence in Punjab, providing security to the people and restoring normalcy.” How much security the Army succeeded in providing to the people and how much normalcy, they were able to restore, is however, another matter.

June 2, 1984 – Duggal was relieved when “fortunately, on 2nd June, a team of five reporters, including Mark Tully of B.B.C. came there (Golden Temple) and they were told the truth. They were taken around the Golden Temple and shown 34 big wounds caused by the bullets on all sides of the Harmandir Sahib some of them as big as almost 3” in diameter.”

“The 2nd June passed off peacefully,” according to Duggal, because there was no firing and no curfew, while Baldev Kaur said it was ‘quiet’. A large number of Sikhs came to the Golden Temple from the surroundings areas along with their families as the next day, June 3, was Gurburab or the martyrdom day of Shri Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth holy Guru of the Sikhs.

The peace and quiet was only on the surface, because active preparations were afoot to break the peace. Kanwaljit Singh and his friend Manjit Singh from Delhi visited Golden Temple on the morning of June 2 and found that there was no restriction for pilgrims to enter Amritsar or even the Temple. But the exit doors out of Amritsar were being closed. After visiting the Temple, when Kanwaljit went at noon

to the Amritsar Railway Station to catch a train for Delhi, they were told that the last train had already left and that the Flying Mail in the evening would not be leaving. In fact, they were told all outgoing trains had been cancelled. So Kanwaljit and Manjit were forced to return to the Golden Temple and put up in the Guru Ram Das Serai for the night. Thus was Kanwaljit to miss his interview at Delhi with the Institute of Bank Management on June 3 morning and his examination with the State Bank of India the same afternoon.

The AISSF young man said that the C.R.P., outside the Golden Temple was replaced by Army on the night of June 2. Although there was no formal curfew, and all visitors entering the Temple were allowed to come in without any ado, all those who left the Golden Temple on the night of June 2 were being taken into custody. "I did not therefore leave the Golden Temple complex", said the A.I.S.S.F. member revealing his caution.

June 3, 1984 – According to the A.I.S.S.F. member, "Gurpurab was on June 3. About 10,000 people had come from outside including many women and 4000 of them were young people. Those who were inside were not allowed to go out after 10 p.m. on June 3. The Jathas which had come mainly from Sangrur were not allowed to court arrest."

Bhan Singh confirms: "June 3 being Gurpurab, thousands of pilgrims had come. But suddenly there was a curfew, so the pilgrims and the 1300 Akali workers came to participate in the Dharam Yudh Morcha and to court arrest, could not leave. The Akali Jathas consisted of about 200 ladies, 18 children and about 1100 men and all of them along with the thousands of pilgrims were forced to stay back inside the Temple complex. Most were living in Guru Ram Das Serai, some at Teja Singh Samundri Hall."

The girl student remembers, "On June 3, at 6 o'clock in the evening we came to know that Punjab had been sealed for 48 hours and that even cycles would not be allowed on the streets."

Kanwaljit Singh sent a telegram home to Delhi at 8.05 p.m. on June 3 from the Golden Temple Post Office "Coming after curfew". It means that the curfew was 'reimposed' (Duggal's word) between 8.05 p.m. and 10 p.m.

No one inside the Golden Temple had yet realized the sinister plan of the authorities. Punjab had been sealed. Amritsar had been sealed. The Golden Temple had been sealed. Thousands of pilgrims and hundreds of Akali workers had been allowed to collect inside the Temple complex. They had been given no inkling or warning either of the sudden curfew or of the imminent Army attack. It was to be a Black Hole-type of tragedy, not out of forgetfulness but out of deliberate planning and design.

June 4, 1984 – Duggal's recollection are vivid, almost photographic. "At about 4 a.m. in the early hours of the morning of June 4, the regular Army attack on the temple started with a 25-pounder which fell in the ramparts of the Deori to the left of Akal Takht Sahib with such a thunder that for a few moments I thought that the whole complex had collapsed. I along with my wife were then sitting in the verandah of my house adjacent to the Sikh Reference Library. Recovering from the initial shock, we moved into the room and took shelter in one of its corners. Thereafter,

every second the ferocity of firing increased and it continued unabated till the evening of the 6th June.

As we were on the first floor, and our quarter was open on all sides, our position was very vulnerable. The bullets hit our quarters on all sides and some of them pierced through the doors and landed inside the room. To add to our miseries the power and water supplies had been cut. **Through a slit in the shutter of a window we saw a large number of dead bodies in the Parikrama of the Golden Temple. They included women and children. We could not leave our room. Coming out in the open would have exposed us to sure death.**”

Baldev Kaur’s account of how the Army attack began is similar “Very early on June 4, while it was dark, there was cannon fire from outside the Golden Temple without any warning. Shots were fired from all sides.”

Bhan Singh is emphatic that no warning was given, no public announcement was made by the Army before the shelling of the Golden Temple started on June 4 – “had the army given a warning at least those pilgrims who had come for the Gurburab could go out and then those persons who were simply here to participate in the Dharam Yudh Morcha could go out. But no warning was given to the people. The firing was started from all around the complex with vengeance, **as if they were attacking an alien, enemy country.**”

According to the girl student the shelling started at about 20 minutes past 4 o’clock on June 4 dawn and continued without interruption upto 2 o’clock in the afternoon of that day (June 4), and the evening of June 5.

Her account is extremely graphic – “On June 4 at about 3.30 a.m. we were inside the Harmandir Sahib reciting our prayers. Suddenly, there was a black-out in the whole of the Golden Temple complex. The devotees continued to be immersed in worship. At about 20 minutes past 4 o’clock there was a very loud explosion. We felt that the whole of the Golden Temple complex was shaking. I was alone on the balcony overlooking the lake or *sarovar*. Suddenly something roundish fell in front of me. I was curious. So I gently touched it and pushed it into water. As it fell, there was a big noise and then the water rose and splashed into the Harmandir Sahib. I started reeling, once tilting on one side and again on the other. Someone pulled me inside. The explosions continued. We then realized that the Army’s attack on the Golden Temple had begun.” In a flash she described her companions – “Inside the Harmandir Sahib there were about 50 to 60 persons – some *granthis* (priests), *ragis* (singers), *sevadars* (employees), the rest of them *yatris* (pilgrims or visitors) like me and my family. I did not see any armed terrorist.”

The Army fired from all sides and did not spare any target in the Temple complex which seemed to shelter people. According to Prithipal Singh, the Sevardar on duty at Akal Rest House, deep inside the Guru Ram Das Serai, the Akal Rest House was shelled from the side of Gali Bagh Wali (to the left of the main entrance from the side of chowk Ghanta Ghar) at 5 a.m. on June 4. The bullet marks on the walls, the doors and windows of the side rooms of the Akal Rest House bore silent testimony to the Sevadars, story, as we listened to him in May, 1985 almost one year after the shooting.

The Harmandir Sahib was not spared by the Army on June 4, just as it had not been by the C.R.P. on June 1. According to the girl student, bullets hissed past

her and her grandmother and aunt when they crawled across the bridge on their stomachs in their bid to escape from Harmandir Sahib. She managed to pick up a portion of a shell which had exploded on the bridge near Harmandir Sahib – it was marked 84 mm., and it had two colours, yellow on the upper part and blue on the lower part.

Baldev Kaur's account suggests that there was no immediate counter-fire from inside the Golden Temple complex. The A.I.S.S.F. member said that "there was some stray firing from inside the Golden Temple before the Army's entry into the complex". The girl student provides a comparative picture of the magnitude and intensity of firing from outside the Temple and from inside. "The firing that took place from inside the Golden Temple was negligible. On June 1, there was absolutely no firing from inside. Whereas on June 4, the ratio was something like this – if a thousand rounds were being fired by the Army from outside, then about one or one and half rounds were fired in reply by the armed militants from inside the Temple complex."

Meanwhile, according to Duggal, "the helicopters hovered above and continued to fire from above. Some of these helicopters also guided the firing squads of the Army by making a circle of light around the targets. Immediately after these circles, the canon ball would land on the target, causing havoc. We saw a large number of boys blown to pieces."

According to Bhan Singh, "they (the Army) treated the inmates of the Complex as enemies and whenever there was any person wounded on account of the firing, no Red Cross people were allowed to enter, rather the Red Cross personnel had been detained beyond the Jallianwallah Bagh," – more than a kilometre away from the main entrance to the Golden Temple from the Chowk Ghanta Ghar side. In accordance with the U.N. Charter of Human Rights, the Red Cross is permitted to go in aid of the wounded right inside the enemy territory, but in Amritsar in June 1984 the Red Cross was not allowed to enter the Golden Temple – a respected and hallowed part of our country – in aid of Indians under attack from the Indian army. It only means that the attack was so brutal and the battle scene so grisly, that there was much to hide from public scrutiny, even if it be that of a neutral agency called the Red Cross. This also explains perhaps why Press Censorship had already been imposed, the last of the journalists were hounded away and the Press was not allowed inside the Golden Temple upto June 10 when they were taken on a guided tour of the Complex for the first time since the Army Operations began almost a week before.

June 5, 1984: The firing and counter-firing continued. Harcharan Singh Ragi saw his guardian and mentor – the old completely blind Head Ragi of the Golden Temple, Amrik Singh being shot by a bullet and dying inside the Harmandir Sahib at about 6.30 a.m. on June 5.

This was the respect shown by the Indian Army to the Harmandir Sahib! The White Paper issued on July 10, 1984 adopts a holier-than-thou attitude – "Specific Orders were given to troops to use minimum force, to show the utmost reverence to all holy places and to ensure that no desecration or damage was done to the Harmandir Sahib..." (Para 10) and once more "In spite

of this (machine-gun fire from Harmandir Sahib on the night of June 5) the troops exercised great restraint and refrained from directing any fire at Harmandir Sahib.”

All this is propaganda. We have recorded the truth – the Harmandir Sahib was fired at by the C.R.P. on June 1 and there were 34 bullet-marks on it which were shown to Mark Tully of the B.B.C. the next day. When the Army attacked the Golden Temple at dawn on June 4, The Harmandir Sahib was the target of the destructive shelling and on June 5 two Ragis – one Amrik Singh, blind 65-year-old – a singer of devotional songs, and another Avtar Singh were killed by bullets right *inside* the Harmandir Sahib. Perhaps the White Paper was doing an exercise in sarcasm and irony when it stated: “the troops exercised great restraint and refrained from directing any fire at Harmandir Sahib.”

Meanwhile, the girl student and her companions had managed to come away from the Harmandir Sahib, crawling on their stomachs across the small bridge. They were bundled into a room on the ground floor of Akal Takht. They kept sitting there, having nothing to eat and no water to drink, to continue, in her own words, “Helicopters were encircling the temple from above. After the helicopters completed their circle, at about 11.30 a.m. on June 5, the huge water tank inside the Temple complex was fired at. The tank could not be broken even after the initial 10 shells hit the tank. Then one bomb hit the tank after which it burst and all the water gushed out. The fighters who had taken their positions beneath the tank were killed.

“They continued the firing till the evening of June 5 and then it was about 8.30 p.m. It was completely dark when they entered accompanied by very heaving firing. The blasting was so severe that I thought I had reached some other world.

“We were 40-50 persons huddled together in the room, including women and children, even a child of six months. In the next room were the pilgrims who had come on June 3 to celebrate Gurburab but they had been trapped.

“The upper portion of the Akal Takht had been fired at by the Army and completely destroyed. Pieces of the Guru Granth Sahib were flying in the air and littering the ground. The place seemed to have been transformed into a haunted house.

“Then the tank entered. It had powerful searchlights. I thought the ambulance had come to attend to the dead and injured. But it had turned out the opposite. The tanks went riding past us. From the tanks the announcement came, loud and clear: “Please come out, God’s blessing are with you. We will reach you home absolutely safe and sound.” There were some among us who were frantic for some water, they came out in the open. In the morning I saw the dead bodies lying on the Parikrama. This was the worst kind of treachery.”

The A.I.S.S.F. Members’ narration of the events of June 5 has a somewhat different emphasis – less personal reflection and more of detached observation. “On the 5th June at about 8 p.m. the Army entered the Complex through the Ghanta Ghar side under a heavy cover of fire. The road was blocked. Nobody was allowed to come out of the Complex. The Army entry was not preceded by any warning or announcement asking people to surrender. “There was some stray firing from inside the Golden Temple before the army entry into the Complex. But the real resistance began only after the Army entered the Temple. The order from Bhindranwale was to use limited firearms with discretion. There were only about 100 people to fight and

there were less than 100 arms consisting mostly of 303 rifles used in the World War II, 315 guns and a few stenguns. When the army entered, the ammunition was nearly exhausted. "After mid-night, at about 1 a.m. one armoured carrier and 8 tanks came inside the complex. The tanks had powerful searchlights and they came down the stair-case, and the Army surrounded the Langar building." Even 11 months afterwards, we could see the marks of the tanks on the Parikrama.

Duggal's account is also informative. By the evening of June 5, he and his family had managed to move to the house of Giani Sahib Singh, the head priest of Golden Temple, which was about 25 yards away from the house he had earlier taken shelter in. In Duggal's words, "The night between 5th and 6th June was terrible. The tanks and armoured carriers had entered the Golden Temple Complex. The firing was such, that its ferocity cannot be described. In the early hours of June 6th, we learnt that the holy Akal Takht had been completely demolished in the firing. As devoted Sikhs, we were extremely shocked. Tears flowed through the eyes of everybody there. All through the night we heard the heart rending cries of the dying persons."

Giani Puran Singh, a priest at the Harmandir Sahib and also an eye-witness remembers – "At 7.30 p.m. on 5th (June) I went to Sri Akal Takht where I met Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale with whom I had a long satisfying talk while shots were ringing outside. Gyani Mohan Singh, whose duty was to conduct REHRAS (Evening Prayer) had not been able to reach Harmandir Sahib, due to the shooting. I then came down from the Akal Takht and joined some "Singhs' in a morcha and enquired of them whether Gyani Mohan Singh had passed that way. As per the tradition the 'Rehras' at Akal Takht starts 5 minutes later than at the Harmandir Sahib, but that day *Paath* at the Akal Takht had already started. Upon this I rushed towards Harmandir Sahib amidst gunfire, stopping for a breather at the Darshani Deori. On reaching I started the recitation. Meanwhile, Gyani Mohan Singh also reached the place. We were about 22 people in the Harmandir Sahib, some devotees and others the employees of the Gurdwara. By the time the *Paath* was over the firing outside became more intense. 'Sukhasan' of Guru Granth Sahib was done and then taken upstairs. At 10.00 p.m. the tanks started entering the complex and the barrage of shooting from without become more intense as heavy armour began to be used. At this stage an armoured carrier entered and stood beside the Sarovar. The lights on this carrier, when switched on, bathed the whole complex in bright light. We were viewing all this perched in the main dome of Harmandir Sahib and thought that probably the fire brigade had come to get water for extinguishing fires raging throughout the city. But we were proved wrong when this vehicle came down to the *Parikrama* and started firing. From both sides the tanks started closing in, from clock tower to the Brahm Buta the tanks set fire to all rooms while desperate people collected water from the Sarovar to extinguish the fires. Loud cries and wails of both women and children rent the air. A vigorous battle ensued and the Darshani Deoris of Clock Tower and Atta Mandir along with the Serais (rest houses) was in Army control by 10 o'clock, the next day (June 6). The 40-50 youth who had been holding the forces fought bravely till either they were killed or the ammunition was exhausted. From about 10 in the night till 4.30 the next morning we were on the roof of Darbar Sahib."

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Official version – fact or fiction?

These accounts of what happened at the Golden Temple on June 5 are in marked contrast to the White Paper or the Army's common charge sheet to the 379 alleged 'terrorists' captured from Golden Temple now detained under N.S.A. at Jodhpur.

According to the White Paper: "All Commanders were instructed to continuously use the public address systems for a number of hours at every suspected hideout of terrorists to give themselves up in order to prevent bloodshed and damage to holy places before the use of force for their apprehension." Was this actually done? Our eye-witness accounts prove that it was not.

Regarding Golden Temple, the White Paper is also specific, "During the afternoon and evening of June 5, 1984 repeated appeals were made to the terrorists over the public address system to lay down their arms and surrender and to others inside the Temple to come out, to prevent avoidable bloodshed and damage to structures in the Temple Complex. In response to this appeal 129 men, women and children came out and they were handed over to the civil authorities."

Is it possible to believe this version? We have seen how the army started shelling the Golden Temple without any warning or public announcement from the early hours of June 4. They continued this firing throughout June 4 and 5. The militants also fired in reply but they were no match, either in terms of numbers of men or in amounts of arms or ammunition. How could the Army make 'repeated appeals' during the afternoon and evening of June 5 when intense fighting was going on and how could 129 persons come out during this raging battle?

The Army's version, as revealed by its chargesheet to the 379 alleged 'terrorists' detained at Jodhpur Jail, is even more incredible. On June 5, when they were supposed to have been deputed for duty outside the Golden Temple, the Army had the information that "the extremists/terrorists led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale had collected men, arms, ammunitions and explosives within the Golden Temple and had also made other preparations to 'wage war' against the Government of India' with the intention to establish a State independent of the Government of India to be known as Khalistan". Or in other words, Khalistan was to be established at the Golden Temple and if the A.I.S.S.F. member is to be believed, by about 100 fighters equipped mostly with 303 decrepit guns of World War II, a few 315 rifles and some stenguns.

According to the Army's Chargesheet and also the White Paper, in response to the Army's repeated appeals to the Terrorists to lay down their arms and surrender, they opened intensive firing from inside the Complex. "They were shouting anti-national slogans." This was a battle, not a demonstration. How could the 'terrorists' engage in shouting anti-national slogans at a time when they were allegedly using automatic and semi-automatic weapons, grenades, explosives, etc? Even if they did shout these slogans, how could the slogans be heard over the din and noise of rattling stenguns and automatic rifles?

The White Paper also describes how the library was allegedly gutted on the night between June 5 and 6 – "Troops were able to enter the area around the *Sarovar* through the northern *deori* and the Southern library building. Terrorists were in control of the Library building and fired from there, at this stage, the library caught

fire – the Army fire-brigade was rushed but their attempts were failed by the machine-gun fire from the terrorists.” A perfect brief of the Army!

But according to Duggal who was incharge of the Sikh Reference Library, and who cared for it, the Library was intact when he last saw it on June 6, evening while leaving the Temple Complex. However, he was in for a terrible shock when he was brought back to the Temple complex by the Army on June 14. Let us listen to Duggal’s tale of sorrow as well as courage: “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. 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 building were in good shape in spite of the Army Attack. Taken to the Library’s ruins, I was asked by the Army Col. to take charge of the Library. I asked him as to where is the Library. **He said that I had no option but to sign a typed receipt to the effect that I have taken over the charge of the library. I refused to oblige him saying that I would not tell such a big lie.**”

The White Paper is very emphatic that “Troops were particularly instructed not to wear any leather items in holy places and to treat all apprehended persons with dignity and consideration.” What was the reality? The reality was this:

June 6, 1984: “At 2 a.m. on June 6, says Prithipal Singh, Sevadar, at the Akal Rest House, “the Army people came to the Rest House. They tore off all my clothes, stripped me naked, my kirpan was snatched, my head gear (patta) was united to tie up my hands behind my back. They caught me by my hair and took me along with five others – who were all pilgrims – to the ruins of the water tank; there we were made to stand in a line all naked for an hour or so; we were told, “don’t move or you’ll be shot.” They kept hitting us with the rifle butts. Then a Major came and ordered a soldier, shoot them, then shouted at us, “You must be Bhindranwale’s *Chelas*? You want Khalistan? I said “I am here to do my duty. I have nothing to do with all this.” “Six of us were in a line facing the Major, when a Pahari soldier started shooting from one end, killing four of us (with 3 bullets each). As my turn was coming, suddenly a Sikh Officer turned up and ordered, “Stop shooting”. Thus I was saved. The Sikh Officer was told, “these people have ammunitions.” At that he ordered them to lock us in a room. Two of us were locked up in a room in Guru Ram Das Serai, but we did not talk nor did I ask the other man’s name. On 7th June the door was opened at about 8 or 9 in the morning. We had gone without water. The floor was covered in blood. I was allowed to leave.” This was, then, the ‘dignity and consideration’ which the White Paper had claimed was shown to those apprehended by the Army.

Bhan Singh picks up the thread of the story at about 4 a.m. on June 6. “I was arrested, along with Sant Longowal and Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, early morning on the 6th. We were encircled by the Army people, throughout the day from 4 a.m. till 5 p.m. when Sant Longowal and Jathedar Tohra were taken to the Army Camp, but I along with many others was kept inside the compound of Guru Ram Das Serai. We were taken away to the Army Camp at about 9.30 p.m.” Even on this point of arrest of Longowal and Tohra, the White Paper has a totally different version – “At 1.00 a.m. on June 6, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and Shri G. S. Tohra

surrendered near Guru Nanak Niwas with about 350 people. The terrorists opened fire at them and also lobbed hand grenades to prevent surrender. As a result, 70 people were killed including 30 women and children.” Even Longowal is on record that he and Tohra were arrested at 5 a.m. from Guru Nanak Niwas (where the S.G.P.C. office is now located) and kept there in Army custody the whole day. Neither he nor Bhan Singh talk about ‘surrendering’ to the Army, nor do they refer to the killing of 70 people including 30 women and children, by terrorists at the time of their surrender. Should we believe Bhan Singh (and Longowal) or should we blindly accept the White Paper’s version?

On the morning of June 6, as the girl student opened the door of their small room and “came out to fetch water, what did I see but piles of dead bodies, all stacked one over the other? At first I instinctively felt that I wouldn’t manage to go out. All I could see was a ceaseless mount of dead bodies. It seemed that all the persons who were staying in the Parikrama, not one of them had survived... The Army said later that they did not go inside the Golden Temple wearing boots. But I have seen some of the dead bodies of the Army men in uniform – they were wearing boots and belts.” The White Paper is contradicted once more.

The girl student’s narration continues. It is an amazing and astonishing account of how she accidentally met Bhai Amrik Singh, President of the A.I.S.S.F. and Bhindranwale’s close associate. She had not met him before, but once he told her his name, she recognised him at once because his pictures had come out in the papers. How Amrik Singh gave her some water in a bucket which she gave to her relatives and acquaintances, but she could not bring herself to drinking it because it was red, mixed with blood. How Bhai Amrik Singh sent her a message urging her to leave the Temple Complex at once with her group in order to escape being dishonoured, or being shot dead as ‘terrorists’ by the Army personnel, and also to survive to tell the true story of what happened inside Golden Temple to the world outside. She recounts, in breathtaking detail, how she picked up the courage to first come out of the Complex and then bring out her relatives and acquaintances.

To quote her own words – “So I decided to try to find the way out. There was a man lying dead. I had to place my foot on him. My foot touched sometimes somebody’s hand, sometimes somebody’s body. I had to move in this fashion. There is a staircase next to the Nishan Saheb (outside the Akal Takht) and next to it there was an iron gate, which had got twisted because of the shelling. I pulled the gate and came out, there was nobody. The place was deserted. The doors of the houses were shut and locked from outside. I was in a haze. For I saw the locks and yet I kept shouting for shelter. Then I came to my senses, realizing that the inhabitants had locked their houses and gone away. Then I broke the mud patch in the wall of a house and entered it. One of the doors of this house opened out into the Golden Temple. I went back to temple through this door. I found a wounded man who relayed my message to my grandmother through other wounded persons, that I had managed to come outside, she should also come out. By then the room in the Akal Takht building, where I had taken shelter with my grandmother, was already in flames. The 20-25 people in that room came out with much difficulty and reached the place where I was. The house had been sprayed with shells and bullets and there were gaping holes in the walls. We found a water tank in that house which had escaped destruction, unlike the water tank in the Golden Temple Complex. First we

all drank water from the tank. We met an injured man who had also taken shelter in that house. He asked us to go with him to his house. We accompanied him. He made us change all our blood-soaked clothes; some we washed clean.”

The narrations of Bhan Singh, Harcharan Singh Ragi, Giani Puran Singh and the girl student tear apart the White Paper that the Army had been instructed ‘to treat all apprehended persons with dignity and consideration’, and also that ‘no women and children were killed in the action by the troops.’

Bhan Singh remembers – “On the 6th morning when hundreds of people were killed or wounded, everywhere there were cries of those people who were wounded and injured, but there was no provisions for their dressings and there were no Red Cross people within the complex... Many young people aged between 18 and 22 years were killed and so were some ladies. A lady carrying a child of only a few months saw her husband lying before her. The child was also killed on account of the firing. **It was a very touching scene when she placed the dead body of the child alongside her husband’s body.** Many people were crying for drinking water, but they were not provided any. Some had to take water out of the drains where dead bodies were lying and the water was red with blood. The way the injured were quenching their thirst was an awful sight which could not be tolerated. The Army people were there, moving about mercilessly without showing any sign of sympathy with those injured or wounded. Those who were under arrest were not provided any facility of water or food or any other things of that sort. The clothes of those who were arrested were removed and they were only left with shorts – their turbans, shirts, etc. were all removed and heaped together. Such a brutal treatment was given to them, as if they were aliens and not the citizens of the country to which the forces belonged.”

Harcharan Singh Ragi similarly recounts – “My quarters are on the first floor above the information office and it was unsafe, with the firing going on endlessly, to stay there. Four members of the family of Narinder Pal Singh, the Information Officer who also lived on the same floor as us and we five took shelter in the basement of the Information Office building. On the 6th June, between 12 noon and 5 p.m., the Army announced that people should come out. This was the first announcement given since the Army operations began. All of us in the basement volunteered arrest and the Information Officer and myself showed our identity cards as employees of the S.G.P.C. **As we were coming out, we saw that hundreds of people were being shot down as they came out. We saw many women being shot dead by the Commanders.** I also would have been, but for my little girl, Jaswinder Pal Kaur (Anju), rushing to the Army Commander and begging to save her father’s life.”

And now let us listen to the girl student once more – “On June 6 in the evening, they announced a relaxation in the curfew for one hour. Meanwhile, we went through some devious lanes and managed to take shelter in a house which was some distance from the Golden Temple. The Army people announced that everyone should come out. So we came out.

“There were about 27-28 persons with us, 5 of them ladies, some elderly men, the rest young boys. The Army made all of us stand in a queue. There were 13 boys out of which three I claimed to be my brothers. I did not know them from before. I merely wanted to save them. I don’t know why, perhaps because they thought 3

boys were part of our family, but the Army released these three boys. They went away. Out of the remaining male youths, they picked out four and took off their turbans with which they tied their hands behind their backs. Then the Army men beat these 4 Sikh boys with the butts of their rifles till they fell on the ground and started bleeding. They kept telling the boys all along, "you are terrorists. You were coming from inside. You were taking part in the action. You will be shot." **These boys were shot dead right in front of me. They looked completely innocent. Neither they seemed to know how to use a rifle, nor they seemed to know the meaning of 'terrorism'. They were shot before my eyes. Their age was between 18 and 20 years.** I did not know who they were – circumstances had brought us together by chance. Whenever I recollect that scene, I seem to lose my bearings.

"Then they (the Army people) surrounded me and started questioning me. I told my grandmother not to speak a word to them as they were speaking only with bullets. I asked them whether they had come to protect us or to finish us. I said my grandfather was a Colonel in the Army... The Army man... incharge then asked his colleagues to leave me and my family members. He told me to go away quickly. And so we were saved."

Giani Puran Singh narrates – "At 4.30 a.m. on June 6, Guru Granth Sahib was brought down, *Prakash* done and the *Hukumnama* taken, the *kirtan* of Asa-di-vaar started. This *kirtan* was not done by the appointed Ragi Jatha (Hymn singers) but by members of Bhai Randhir Singh Jatha, one member of which Avtar Singh of Parowal was later martyred inside Darbar Sahib. The official Jatha of Bhai Amrik Singh had been martyred at the Darshani Deori the previous day. Bhai Avtar Singh was hit by a bullet which tore through the southern door, one of which is still embedded in the Guru Granth Sahib which is there since Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time. Time passed and at 4.00 p.m. on June 6, some poisonous gas was spread and the Akal Takht captured, if not for this gas, the forces could not have been able to gain the Akal Takht. At 4.30 the commandant, Major-Gen. Brar spoke from a speaker on the Southern Deori that all living people should surrender. All those who had come face to face with the forces had been eliminated. We (I and Gyani Mohan Singh) asked all the 22 within the Darbar Sahib to surrender and told the commanding officer that two priests had stayed behind and if need be, he could send his men for them. He did not agree with them and called aloud on the speaker that we should come out with raised hands. We decided against this because if we were shot on the way it would merely be a waste. We were in the Darbar Sahib till 7.30 when two soldiers and a sewadar were sent to fetch us. While on our way out I stopped to pour a handful of water in the mouth of the wounded member of the Jatha, who asked us to send for help. I promised to do so provided I remained alive. Gen. Brar, meanwhile announced over the loudspeaker that nobody should fire upon us. The moment I stepped out of the Darshani Deori, I saw the Akal Takht ruined and the rubble was spread all around. Hundreds of corpses were lying scattered. We were 'wished' by Gen. Brar who told that he too was a Sikh. He then enquired as to what did we propose to do. We told him that we wanted to go to the urinal and then be allowed to go to our residences. He allowed us to go to the urinal and then we were questioned of the whereabouts of Santji and were told that he would not be harmed. We told them that they knew better as they were in command. We were questioned, whether any machine gunnists were operating from Darbar Sahib to which we said that they were welcome to inspect the premises themselves. Five persons accompanied us to

the Harmandir, one Sikh officer and 3-4 others. When we started the Sikh officer insisted that we lead because if firing started from within, we would face them, moreover we would be shot if someone shot from within. When we reached the Harmandir, a search was carried out by them, picking and searching below every carpet but not sign of firing was traced. Meanwhile, the wounded member left behind had passed away. His body was placed in a white sheet, brought out and placed alongwith various others lying outside.”

According to the A.I.S.S.F. member, “On 6th June at 5.30 p.m. we surrendered before the Army. 199 surrendered before us. We were made to lie down on the hot road, interrogated, made to move on our knees, hit with rifle butts and kicked with boots on private parts and head. Our hands were tied behind our backs and no water was given to us. We were asked, ‘how many people were inside? And ‘where are the arms and ammunition?’ At about 7 p.m., we were made to sit in the *parikrama* – near the Army tanks. There was firing from the side of the Akal Takht and many were injured.” This is yet another convincing evidence of the ‘dignity and consideration’ shown by the Indian Army to those captured, after the action was over.

June 7, 1984: Giani Puran Singh’s account throws light on how and when Bhindranwale was killed: “Time passed away and, at 7.30 a.m. on 7th we were taken out of the complex and informed that the bodies of Santji, Gen. Subeg Singh, Bhai Amrik Singh, had all been found. When asked as to where were the bodies found, the reply was that Santji’s body was recovered from between the 2 Nishan Sahibs while Amrik Singh and Subeg Singh’s bodies had been found behind the Nishan Sahibs. The news carried by the media said that Santji’s body had been recovered from the basement in Akal Takht. We were not shown these bodies but were led to our residences by the military. The head priests who also came there were informed that the bodies of Santji and others had been found. In fact, if the bodies had been found, we would have been called for identification, but instead we were threatened to be shot lest we tried to go near the rooms where they had been kept. Moreover, if found, the body would have been embalmed or taken to Delhi and kept for some time before finally disposing of it.

The White Paper’s version of these events is distorted and not convincing. For example: “By the morning of June 6, the troops had effectively engaged all gun positions at the Akal Takht and were able to enter the Akal Takht. Room-to-room engagement commenced till it was cleared by 12.30 p.m. on the afternoon of June 6, except for resistance continuing from the ground floor and basements... On the afternoon of June 6, 200 terrorists surrendered including 22 from Harmandir Sahib.” Giani Puran Singh who was one of the 22 has clearly said that the 22 persons who had surrendered from inside Harmandir Sahib were ‘some devotees and others the employees of the Gurdwara.’ Thus were no armed terrorists inside the Harmandir Sahib, a fact corroborated by the girl student. There is only an apparent discrepancy in the number of people inside the Harmandir Sahib – 50 to 60 persons – cited by the girl student and the same figures – of 22 persons – given by all other eye-witnesses and also the White Paper. The fact that the girl student, accompanied by 27-28 persons left the Harmandir Sahib on the afternoon of June 4 amidst the firing and took shelter in the Akal Takht explains the discrepancy in figures.

The White Paper also claims that “On 8th June 1984, the terrorists hacked to death an unarmed army doctor who had entered a basement of the Akal Takht to treat some casualties.” Giani Puran Singh’s account gives an accurate description of this incident: “There were 4 Singhs in the basement of the BUNGA JASSA SINGH RAMGARHIA who were giving a tough fight to the forces. They had also pulled down 3 personnel of the army who had ventured close – one of them was a so called doctor. They were swiftly put to death. The authorities wanted these people to surrender but they wanted some mutually responsible person to mediate. I was then asked to mediate, but first of all I asked the army officers of a guarantee that none would be shot, only arrested and later law would take its own course. They were not ready for this and wished me to talk to their Brigadier who too was noncommittal. They then asked me to inquire if the three army personnel were alive. The reply received was that no live personnel was there in the base – At this the Brigadier asked me to leave and that they would themselves deal with them. These men in the basement fought the whole day, that night and also the next day, when Giani Zail Singh came to visit the ruins of Akal Takht. Some thought that they had also aimed for Giani but it was not so. These people did not know that Giani was coming. If they knew before hand, they would definitely put a bullet through the ‘tyrant’ but they were totally cut out from the out side world. A colonel of the commandos attempted to flush out these men in the basement with a gun and light arrangement but as soon as he entered the basement, a burst of LMG wounded him and it was later learnt that he had succumbed to the injuries in the hospital. Two cannons were employed to fire at the Bunga, gaping holes were formed on the *Parikrama* end, but the men within were safe. I saw from the roof of Harmandir Sahib that two grenadiers had been put on the grenade shooter and a continuous barrage of grenades was being poured, but they still survived. Burnt red chilly bags, chilly powder and smoke grenades were thrown in; one of them came out to be greeted with a hail of bullets while the others finally were silenced on the 10th June, 1984.”

The White Paper’s figures of the number of people killed or injured at the Golden Temple during the Army operations, seems to reflect gross under-estimation. The White Paper’s figures of the casualties on account of the Operation Bluestar alone are:

- (1) Own troops killed 83
- (2) Own troops wounded 249
- (3) Civilians/terrorists killed 493
- (4) Terrorists and other injured 86
- (5) Civilians/terrorists apprehended 592

Our eye-witness accounts point out two unmistakable facts:

(a) There were thousands, perhaps ten thousand people, consisting of pilgrims, S.G.P.C. employees, Akali volunteers came to court arrest, and terrorists present inside Golden Temple complex when the Army started firing at the Golden Temple on the dawn of June 4, 1984.

(b) The battle lasted nearly 56 to 60 hours from 4 a.m. on June 4 to about 4 p.m. on June 6. The firing was almost incessant and continuous and, despite the White Paper’s several claims, had no constraints. It was a most fierce battle.

Therefore, not hundreds but thousands could well have died during the operations, and thousands maimed or injured. The girl student had seen stacks of dead bodies piled up all over the *Parikrama* very early on the morning of June 6. Joginder Singh estimates that at least 1500 dead bodies were lying on the *Parikrama*. Bhan Singh saw hundreds of people dying before him on June 6. Harcharan Singh Ragi saw hundreds of people including women and children, being shot down by Army commandos, as they came out to surrender on the after-noon of June 6, outside the Golden Temple on the Ghanta Ghar side. We may hesitate to accept exact figures, such as A.F.D.R. Vice President S. S. Bhagawalia's estimate of 2009 killed including about 400 Hindu Bhaiyyas, or the AISSF members estimate "that 7 to 8 thousand people were killed", or Surinder Singh Ragi's confident assertion that 'during the army operation at least 7000 people were killed on the *Parikrama* and another 1000 dead bodies were recovered from various rooms." These are all impressions. There is no reliable estimate because the Press was not allowed.

Nevertheless, the clear conclusion emerges that hundreds and hundreds of people were killed during the Army Action on Golden Temple in June 1984 most brutally. It was indeed a mass massacre mostly of innocents. The post-mortem reports (see Annexures* 7 & 8) speak of the Army's brutalities in very clear terms.

1) Most of the dead bodies had their hands tied behind their backs, implying that they had not died during the action, but, like Sevdar Prithipal Singh's temporary companions, lined up before the firing squad, all of them must have been shot after being captured alive and

2) At the time of the post-mortem, the bodies were in a putrid and highly decomposed state – they had been brought for post-mortem after 72 hours, implying a totally callous attitude towards the injured and the dead.

Even after June 6, many died due to negligence, while under the detention of the Army and many others were killed in Army camps. According to the AISSF member: "On the evening of the 7th June 1984 I was brought to the Army Camp and locked in the Arms Rooms with 28 persons. It had no ventilation and there was no water. 14 died of suffocation including Sujjan Singh, a member of the SGPC." According to the former MLA, Harbans Singh Ghumman, 37 Sikh youths were killed in one of the Army camps at Amritsar between June 16 and 18, 1984. He had been personally concerned about this incident at that time as he had learnt that his youngest son, Randhir Singh, was also being detained in one of the military camps at Amritsar.

□