

1984: Why is Government mum over missing Archives & Artefacts?

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THE SIKH MANUSCRIPTS AND archives taken from Sri Harmandar Sahib are in the news being the bone of contention between the Defence Ministry and the SGPC. Then Defence Minister A.K. Anthony denied in Parliament that the Army possessed any manuscripts or article taken away from Harmandar Sahib during Operation Blue Star in 1984. Countering the claim, SGPC President Sardar Avtar Singh Makkar characterized the statement as a lie and demanded the resignation of the Defence Minister.

Following questions emerge out of this controversy.

1. Did the Army in 1984 collect and take away the archives and artefacts?
2. Did it return any or all of these documents and articles to SGPC?
3. If SGPC did not receive these documents and articles, who has their custody?

As these questions are important for Sikhs as well as the Ministry of Defence, it is pertinent to know the facts.

In an article '6 June 1984 - Events Observed in Person', written by Brig. (retd.) Onkar Singh Goraya appeared in '*Sewa Lehar*', May 2008, has following to say:

"I spoke to Sardar Bhan Singh, Secretary and Sardar Abhilashi Singh, Deputy Secretary, SGPC in 1984. They said, "It is very important to save the Sikh Archives and Treasure (*Toshakhana*). We wonder if something remained in such a heavy shelling." I had seen the *Toshakhana* some months ago, but did not know who looks after the treasure and how? They explained to me this: "There are four locks on the front door. Keys of these locks are with four different persons." Situation was such that it was not possible to find out the person having these keys. I took Sardar Bhan Singh and Sardar Abhilashi Singh in my jeep and came to Darbar Sahib. Toshakhana is situated above the Main Gate (*Darshani Diodhee*). To reach it one has to climb through narrow steps. Upstairs we saw that the outer door had fallen on ground. Due to firing by tanks the outer room was burnt. In the rear wall there were three shutters which were locked with two locks each. The shutters had the marks of bullets and bayonets used by the Army soldiers, but none of the shutters was broken. To ensure that no person is hidden behind we searched around. As we looked through the window glasses we saw four doors which had copper plates with gold plating. I was told that these doors were presented by Maharja Ranjit Singh for Harmandir Sahib but were not installed due to some reason. These were affected by fire. There was a jewel studded *chandni* presented by Nizam of Hyderabad to Harmandir Sahib. This was completely burnt. The other items of Toshakhana included many gold, silver, jewel and diamond studded archival articles which were lying behind the shutters. We have seen through holes that the articles appeared safe, though the glass cases were broken. It was not right to open these at this time as we did not have the keys. My first job was to take care of Toshakhana. I wanted to place the guard for the security at the earliest so that loot does not start. Keeping the situation in mind I preferred Sikh guards for the safety. There was

only one Sikh battalion in Amritsar, viz., 2 Sikh Light Infantry. Col D D Singh was the Commanding Officer of this battalion. I rang him up and asked him to send a guard of one JCO and ten jawans.

The Guard arrival took 20-25 minutes. Meanwhile, I looked towards Akal Takht through a window. Top floor had collapsed and was burning. A militant came out of the cave below Akal Takht, dragging himself on his hands. It appeared that either one or both of his legs were broken. A black dress commando had aimed the sten gun on him. He was saying something to him, which could not be heard because of the distance. The fighter pointed towards his chest. The commando fired a burst which killed him instantly. This scene is still fresh in my eyes till date.

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

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

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This writer contacted Brig. (Retd) Onkar Singh Goraya on phone to confirm what he has written. He confirmed that whatever he has written was 100% true. Brig Goraya was then Col Administration of 15 Infantry Division, stationed at Amritsar, and responsible for all administration during the Operation Blue Star.

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

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

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

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