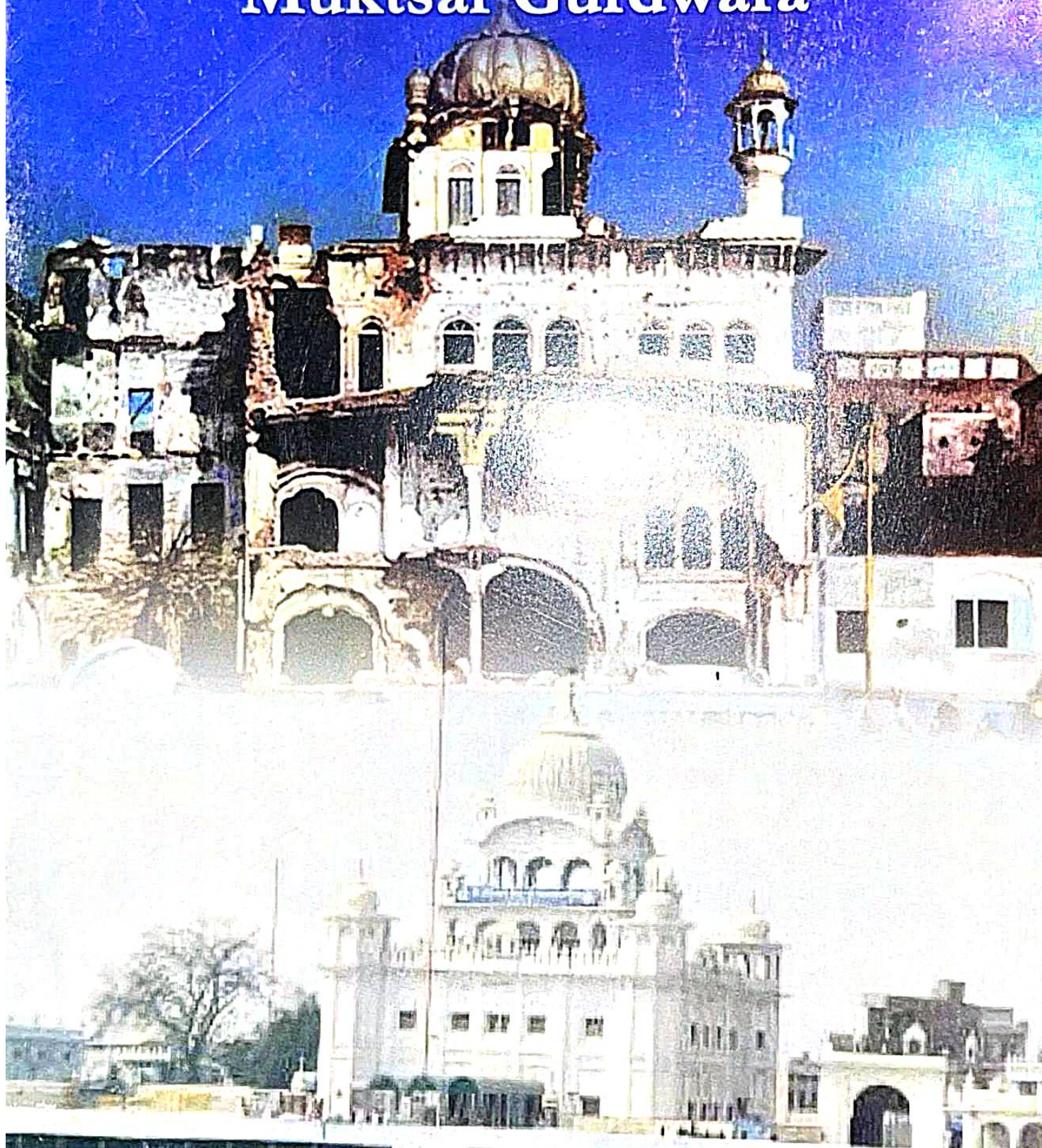


The June 1984 Holocaust in Muktsar Gurdwara



The Sikh Forum

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In the modern era, 1984 remains the darkest year for the Sikhs, when they-not only suffered grievous loss of life and property, but also an irreparable loss to their power and prestige. I would confine this article only to the historical events of 1984 at **Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi, Muktsar**. No political thought or consideration has been taken into account. The details of this account have been provided by eye-witnesses of the event : Bhai Bahadur Singh, Bhai Piara Singh, Gyani Suba Singh, Sardar Bhatia and Sardar Swaran Singh - with confirmation from the available official and unofficial records.

3 June 1984 was the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Guru of Sikhs. The congregation was specially sanctioned for the occasion on the day. In addition to the public functions and sewadars of Gurdwara appointed by SGPC, the others who were present within the precincts of Gurdwara complex were the Head Granthi and families of the employees to whom living quarters had been allotted within the periphery of the Gurdwara. The entire Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi was destroyed in this ugly incident, hence, it remains the focus of this paper. The Gurdwara complex had a boundary wall all around. The complex had eight gates (numbered 1 to 8) along the boundary wall, for the entry into the Gurdwara complex. Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi was next to Gate No. 1. In front of Gate No 1, were the banyan tree and a well-known as Bohad Waala Khuh. In 1984, the main door of Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi was towards Gurdwara Shahidan in the North.

On the left edge of the Gurdwara was the Nishan Sahib of Sarb Loh metal, which the Maharaja of Nabha had imported from England by spending Rs.70,000 to celebrate the birth of his son,

Hira Singh. To erect it, a multi-storied building, known as Attari, was constructed. This Nishan Sahib was supported by the Attari by attaching iron rods to it. No wires were used for support - as is normally done these days.

The holy sarovar, the site of the battle field, was behind the Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi. In between these were the steps of lime stone. In between the steps and the Gurdwara were a baradari in one corner and the counter for Karah Parsad on the other. The counter was close to number 1 gate, between the well and the Banyan tree on one side and gurdwara in the backside.

In 1984, curfew was imposed by May-end, and the BSF was deployed all around the Gurdwara Complex fully armed with modern weapons. On the houses adjoining the boundary wall they had made bunkers wherefrom they kept regular observation on the entire Gurdwara complex and the area around. The 'warriors' of the sikh students Federation were stated to be positioned, with obsolete weapons at attari and the baradari with which they could not hold against any attack from the well-armed BSF. Most others were young Sikh boys from neighbouring villages who, having been hounded out by the police due to their assumed past connection to Bhindranwale, had taken shelter in Gurdwara complex to save themselves from 'encounter killing'. Indeed illegal encounter killings was the talk of the town.

On the morning of 4th June - the date of army attack on Sri Harimandar Sahib complex (along with thirty other Gurdwaras) Sri Muktsar was also targeted. According to Bahadur Singh, who was then on Sentry duty in the Gurdwara complex : it was announced at 2.40 am, that. 'Whosoever was in the Gurdwara complex must surrender immediately; otherwise the firing was going to start.' Exactly one hour later; at 3.40 am, the guns started firing from Gate Number 4 which is on the other side of the holy water tank (sarovar). The first round of the artillery gun hit the Attari. Thereafter it was such a devastating firing that it created havoc. Bahadur Singh remembered seven rounds having been fired that set ablaze the whole complex.

First of all fell the attari, then the Baradri and next was the

counter subsequently with the following gun fire. Then the rounds fell on the Gurdwara. The Gun fire was so intense that the entire Gurdwara collapsed. The girders of the Gurdwara and Baradari melted in the fire. The Birs of Guru Granth Sahib were also destroyed in the fire. New Birs later brought from Sri Amritsar were installed in place after the matter settled and a new Gurdwara complex constructed through kar-seva.

The new Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi now faced towards the water tank; earlier it faced other side towards Gurdwara Shahidan. There are two Nishan Sahibs' now; one at the previous site where the old Nishan Sahib has been re-erected by attaching it to the main building with the help of iron rods in place of the old attari which was devastated in the fire; and the second one towards Sarovar close to the new gate of the Gurdwara.

The fighters of Sikh Student Federation left the Gurdwara complex even before the first round was fired. The few who were left behind were the visitors who had got stuck within the complex due to the curfew and did not have time to go.

Bahadur Singh further stated, "When the first announcement was made, I was on duty with my spear. I started helping the family staying in the Gurdwara complex to get out of the complex by making them jump over the boundary wall. The present Jathedar of Akal Takht was then the Head Granthi of Gurdwara Tuti Gandhi Sahib. I helped him along with his family to cross over the wall. But when I was about to jump across, I was caught by the soldiers. They also fired a burst behind the Jathedar; who however escaped. A buffalo of Dharam Singh Patwari, which came in the field of fire, was killed. During this period, a carpenter named Gulu, standing in front of his house, was shot by the soldiers. His last rites were performed later in the day behind Tamboo Sahib Gurdwara in the dera of Nihang Sikhs.

After the gun fire was over, the soldiers charged the entire Gurdwara complex with MMGs, LMGs and assault rifles. A fighter from the complex threw a grenade at the charging soldiers, killing one and injuring another. Another fighter jumped out from the hiding and tried to pick up the weapon of the killed soldier, but

fell to the burst of fire from an LMG. The firing continued till morning. No one knows how many fighters or soldiers were killed as soldiers were very fast at taking away the bodies of the dead and wounded. What did they do of those wounded is not known.

The firing stopped at day break. All those who were arrested were ordered to lie down on the boundary floor (parikarma) of the sarovar laid with white stone. The construction of Tamboo Sahib was in progress those days. Construction was being done through free service (karsewa) duly organized by Baba Harbans Singh and Karnail Singh Kar Sewa Wale. They were then in their dera outside the periphery of the Gurdwara complex. They were also brought in the parikarma and thoroughly questioned, but were however, released after the officers got a phone call from Delhi.

Gurdeep Singh of village Maujewala, about 60 years of age. had come to pay obeisance at the Gurdwara on the eve of Guru Arjan Dev Ji's martyrdom day, had a cloth bag under his arm pit. When the soldier asked him to raise hands; the aged person first did not understand the meaning, but when one of us explained him what to do, did raise his arms above his head. As he raised his arms, the cloth bag fell from his arm pit and he tried to grab it with the second hand. The soldier probably thought that the person is going to throw a hand grenade; he fired an LMG burst direct on to the head of the old man. The old man's skull was partially blown to pieces and he died instantly. We were immediately ordered to lie down and we stuck our faces to the ground. The Nihang of karniwala was also killed in the similar manner.

As the day dawned, the floor became iron hot due to direct hot sun rays in that month of June (Asadh). Our bellies started burning with heat. We were feeling very thirsty. If we requested for water we got kicks in turn. The whole day we went through this extreme torture and the dryness affected adversely causing sickness to many. We could not do anything except to remember the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev and the situation was put through on this day. We remembered that if we were put in a boiling pot, or made to sit on heated iron plate or burning hot sand

was put on our heads, could we stand that torture ? We faced solace that we were not among the dead and got much less than Guru Arjan and sang in our hearts,

“ਤੇਰਾ ਕੀਆ ਮੀਠਾ ਲਾਗੈ

ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਪਦਾਰਥੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਮਾਂਗੈ”

However, our hearts were still waiting for the unknown.

The entire day passed in burning heat and facing tortuous questioning. In the evening, out of about 400 Sikhs encircled, 62 were separated who were taken to nearby B.Ed. college where we were in a room. There were no light, water or fan in the room. These 62 people included 6 employees of Gurdwara. Other people either the devotees who visited the Gurdwara for paying obeisance or some youth had taken refuge after having been hounded out by the police. These included S. Lal Singh an old man of 70 years, and Gurpal Singh child of 12 years. We were all hungry and badly feeling thirsty. We were all locked such a small room where we could barely breathe. Faced by extreme heat and thirst, the Storekeeper of the Gurdwara, Baldev Singh had died in parikarma itself, we also awaited such death in this dingy room.

Second day again they started questioning us about our past and present activities and the activities of the persons inside the complex. The hunger and thirst had made us so weak that we were not able to speak. Seeing this state and to meet the requirement of questioning they gave us two dried loafs of bread each. Due to the pointed bonnets at us, it became extremely difficult to eat. We were then put in the prison and case number 162 was filed against us on 7 June 1984, under provisions of 307/201, 435/295A, 322/353, 156 and Arms Act 25 54/59 and remand obtained. I got the copy of the charge-sheet alongwith the list of all the individuals who were listed in the charge-sheet. The arrest was shown on 17/6/84 and the first police remand was obtained upto 25/6/84 after which this remand was extended upto 1/7/84 for which we were shown as very clever and hardened criminals and the truth was entirely hidden.

They tortured us even beyond the breaking point. One

Thanedar, Amar Singh was full of evil and hatred. He made false cases against us and tortured and tormented us incessantly. He spoke too foul degrading words worse than at dogs. He tied cloth on our eyes, attached wooden nameplates and photographed us many times. Sometimes he would place rifle grenades or other lethal weapons and got us photographed. We even requested that we do not know how to handle the weapon and have seen these weapons for the first time but it was of no use as he neither cared about us nor heard us. He wrote what he wanted and got our signatures and thumb impressions by force. This he was to use against us in false cases. The 70 years' old Lal Singh was shown as driver of Bhindranwale and was charge-sheeted for this case as well even though he did not know driving and held no such license. Another Sikh Army Officer also spoke very rudely but a Rajput Officer who was stated to belong to Sikligar community had lot of sympathy and realized the entire situation and treated us humanely.

The food given to us in the jail was too bad and not worth eating. The bread loafs were mouldy and of the size of camel feet. The dal used to be just broken dal with a few grains here and there. At one time, one of the inmates Harinder Singh got so annoyed that he threw the plate with dal-roti in the air. It spread all around, the plate hitting the ground with a bang. A sudden calm spread everywhere. Harinder Singh was a very brave young man who was never afraid of death. This event caused fear psychosis among the officials and they started giving us better food.

We had the worst time like this for over six months, till our case started in the court and we were shifted from Muktsar to Fardikot Jail. There, the SDM, Rajan was a very good person and we had better days than Muktsar Jail. DC Faridkot was Sardar Sidhu who knew the facts and the treatment given to us earlier. He too had sympathies with us. We faced the court and remained in jail but nothing criminal was proved against us and all the 61 persons were released by the Barnala Government after 18 months and 11 days of ceaseless torture and hellish life. During this period, the families of some of us had even performed their last rites. When we came out, we came to know that Jaskaran Singh

of Rupana, Harminder Singh and Darshan Singh of Muktsar were martyred in encounters and Waryam Singh Khapianwalli was tortured to death. Others may have also been killed but I do not have much knowledge."

This version of Bahadur Singh was also corroborated by other direct witnesses of the event; Gyani Suba Singh, Gyani Balwant Singh Rasia and others.

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