# Pariahs

**( A Punjabi Novel, Tankhahiye – English Version)**

**ਏਸੇ ਕਲਮ ਤੋਂ :**

- ਖ਼ਬਰਨਾਮਾ (1983)
- ਰੁੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਦਾਸਤਾਨ (2007)
- ਹਰਫ਼ਾਂ ਦੇ ਆਰ-ਪਾਰ (2012)
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- ਤਨਖ਼ਾਹੀਏ (ਤੀਜਾ ਐਡੀਸ਼ਨ) (2023)
- ਵਿਰਾਸਤੀ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (2020)
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- ਅਮਲਤਾਸ ਦੇ ਅੰਗ-ਸੰਗ (2020)

English

- Amritsar : A City with Glorious Legacy (2012)

**ਹਿਨ੍ਦੀ**

- पेड़ों की दासतान (2012)

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**By**

**Varinder Singh Walia**

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*by :*

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To
Innocent Persons
Who lost their lives
during black days

# In search of the 'Blue Star'

Three decades ago, in order to set right the blue turbans and blue dresses, a Blue Star had appeared on the sky in Punjab. Those were the clear days and the sky being blue, no one had seen the blue star. About midnight the cursed one broke up in the sky and it pulled down the golden domes and towers. There was a spate of saffron turbans in following with the blue star which symbolized a red salute to the saffron flags.

After the "Operation Blue Star", my curiosity had always remained intact to know about the existence of blue stars. It appeared that the blue stars had no existence. An anxiety to this curiosity of mine was enhanced when I read Dr. Kuldip Singh Dhir's book "Space and Man". Dr. Dhir writes: "The colour of cold stars is light red; that of the hot stars, yellow and that of the still hotter stars is 'blue mixed with white'. The age of the stars is quite wonderful. Big and heavy stars, which are white-blue, burn nuclear fuel rapidly and die down in no time."

"The birth of a star is not calm and quiet; it rather is a sort of violent process. The dying stars leave behind their advent for the new stars..."

History does not forgive sin or sinners. When the inflictions get dressed in words, every write-up keeps groaning in the history books. The military attack which proved to be a festering wound for the Sikh psyche, has kept this community conscious of being 'others'. Why did the army attack their own countrymen? Why did sparks come out of the tanks at ambroisal hours? Why was the Blue Star Operation launched on Guru Arjan Dev Ji's martyrdom day? Why did flames continue to come out of the eyes of the devotees? Much of history was etched on the minds of those who died thereat and it could not be erased despite the burning of heaps of dead bodies.

Punjab being the passing-through way of all the foreign invaders in past times, restlessness has ever been the destiny of Punjab. It has been a part of the Punjabi life to suffer tortuously and still come out hale and hearty. To put an end to foreign invaders and aggressors, the Punjabis themselves had to become aggressors thereat. Therefore, militancy had become their normal behavior of their living. The Punjab is called the sword-arm of India. The Punjabis safeguard their frontiers even without receiving any salary. They had never dreamt of fighting their own army. But the military attack was launched when a Sikh happened to be the Rashtrapati - the President of India.

Operation Blue Star was the gravest tragedy for the Sikhs in the twentieth century. In the name of unity and integrity of the country, this action against the Sikhs alienated them with great loss of the sense of belonging. If the eyes of the ruler get bloodstained, such bloodshed is a natural consequence. With the Operation Blue Star, the hearts of those imbued with a sense of belonging were torn apart. The 'Blue Star' operation inflicted a permanent blue spot as never to blur on the body of the Sikhs who have ever been know as patriots.

After the military action, the Blue Star had disappeared in the blue sky. During the elections, our political leaders become space scientists and they try to spot the blue stars and thereby the wounds began to fester again. Those conversant with the scientific phenomenon know that there are countless milky-ways made of the clusters of countless stars. Besides the milky-ways, there are millions of star-lands in the sky hovering about homeless stars and having thus a count thereof is just impossible. The rudderless blue star is also counted among such homeless stars and no one can find their true location.

In the Whitepaper issued by the Government of India, a long list of various meetings held with the Akali leaders is attached. Some secret meetings were held a few days before the Operation



Blue Star. According to the Whitepaper, the first meeting was held on l6th October 1981 in South Block, New Delhi, wherein Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the then President of Shromani Akali Dal and numerous Sikh leaders in Punjab like Surjit Singh Barnala and Balwant Singh besides senior Ministers of the Central Government and officers had participated. Besides those meetings, five more formal but secret meetings from 16th November 1983 to 26th May 1984 were held too in New Delhi and Chandigarh. Two secret meetings were held in private houses in Chandigarh and one in the lounge of the airport there. According to the Whitepaper, the last meeting was held a few days before the 'Operation Blue Star' on 26th May of 1984, in which Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Prakash Singh Badal, Surjit Singh Barnala, PV Narsimha Rao, Pranab Mukherji amd Shivashankra participated in a guest house in New Delhi. Of course, many white lies had been included in the the Whitepaper on many important aspects because of which the land of five rivers was set ablaze. Apart from this, the secret meetings held by the Akali leaders with the Center without taking the Panth into confidence can reveal many secrets.

History can never forgive the governments of the day for such holocaust. It is not possible to construe as why the grammar of a secular country still hangs on to communalism as it has become difficult to distinguish a human being from a soul-self man. Mean politicians try to roar like lions during the elections but when needed, they ditch the common man and disappear. The story of a blue jackal told by Bhai Gurdas can be related to those singing the song of Blue Star. It is a story of an untruthful ruler who had fallen into the ditch of a dyer and turned blue. When it went into the jungle, the clusters of deer saluted him and served him. Dead drunk with power, it began to order about the other jackals. But after it was recognized, it was beaten black and blue and thrown out of the jungle. According to Bhai Gurdas Ji, such blue dyed jackals are not even accepted in the True Court:

A Jackal dyed in a dyer's tub got poised as a great one in the jungle. It began as a ruthless ruler but falsehood revealed him as a radish leaf: The wicked are truly caught in judgement

Time becomes a clever actor and puts history on the desired path of a jester and drives one to grave sins. The strayed intellectual becomes a great villain who moulds a gold ring and puts it in the nose and like a kaleidoscope, creates new spectacles every moment. It tries to appear innocent. History is the museum of all the events where the clever, the wicked, the jesters and the villains are seen in the nude. Even the tips of arrows used by them are also seen in the museums. But many heroes are missing in these museums because they have been marginalized by the time.

At the time of Operation Blue star, I was a student in Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana. When the Sikh-Nirankari bloody clash took place on 13th April, 1978, I was a student in Khalsa College, Amritsar. Some scholarly type students of Khalsa College, who had been compelled by circumstances to take to arms, were my mates. I also had occasions to pass through the meeting places of Naxalites' training schools. During government service, the policies of government, cunningness and trickery were also studied closely. Working as a journalist, I covered training camps of Lashkar-e-Toiba in Pakistan where innocent children were given weapon training. After the attack on Parliament, when India declared most wanted criminals, I interviewed them, and these were published by the Tribune group of papers. Colourful valleys of history, black and dark nooks and corners and dark caverns were also trudged through as those had got engraved on the rocks as edicts. It is not easy to put down such things in writing. Writing can be of any worth if the writer is fully entwined with the happenings but his approach remains unaffected. Becoming a partisan and then writing is the greatest dishonesty and inhuman conduct; it is like deriding history. It is the basic duty of a writer or a journalist to call a spade a spade. Of course, events cannot be presented in a novel as they used to



take place. It is necessary to change time and place and names as these become necessities of compulsion in writing. I have never been a member of a political party or organization. During my student days, the periodical, brought out under my editorship, like monthly Pulangh or editorials in "Punjabi Tribune", under the heading "Beyond the words", give a glimpse of my un-biased Editorship.

Time has done crooked jokes with the history and geography of the Punjab, the land of five rivers. The Sikh community has been struggling ever since its birth. Though no one has escaped the testimony of the witnesses of Chhota Ghallughara and Wadda Ghallughara – the gory Holocausts, but the blood stained ages make our hair stand on their ends. The historians coming with the foreign invaders saw and eulogized their masters through their coloured glint-glasses and put down to writing in accordance with their own point of view. The pens under the vigil of evil souls can never tell the whole truth. Every side has its own truth to be told. Many lapses take place in joining the broken pieces of truth. It is but natural when the pieces of a mirror are joined together, the true reflection of a face gets blurred. Many novels and stories have already been written about the recent black days in the Punjab but some complicated questions have been overtly lurking in my mind and I considered it my moral duty to find a reply thereto in written form.

Those ready to lay down their lives are committed to their national, social and religious concerns. As against this, the paid labour, instead of caring for public belief or philosophy are attached to some sort of allurement. If we look back at the old history, it would be revealed that the paid soldiers are always waiting for some nods from foreign lands to lay down their lives.

Bengalis and Punjabis have written the saga of freedom struggle with common blood. It is also an irony that the cruel swords of time have cut, robbed and beaten these two warring nations. The proud culture, heritage and language of Bengal helped in forging unity

among the people against the then Pakistani rule. When things came to such a pass, the warrior guerilla army stood like a rock. The guerillas of Mukti Bahini had no greed of any kind whatsoever, They were fighting with national spirit and the mighty and fully armed military had surrendered before them.

It is quite certain that compared to paid soldiers, selfless and dedicated fighters have greater sense of sacrifice. Only history decides about such valiant fighters ever ready to lay down their lives. It is not that weapons are necessary for fighting against injustice. The current of rebellion rising in the mind is greater than the sea waves. Pash says:

*When there is no gun, there will be sword.*
*When there is no sword, there will be a long to fight.*
*If how to fight is not known, and we would have need to fight*
*Comrade, we will fight, comrade.*

Despite not knowing how to fight, the Bengali youth felt the need to fight and they taught their own army a good lesson. They were compelled to fight against injustice and cruelty. They tied shrouds round their heads and jumped into the battle field. When they set out barefooted after a few months' training, they learnt the use of a machine gun and cannon. Instead of salary, they had to face the bombing by their own army. Pash had perhaps written these lines for the Valiant Fighters-

Anonymous poets wrote poems of barefoot soldiers in the sticky mud. Losing their lives under the Chinese Flag, the Talibans are mistaken that seventy two fairies are given to them in heaven for fighting and dying in battle field. They don't fight for salary but still sime greed does get reflected. As against this, some people safeguard their lives as a people's property. This poem by Udasi is dedicated to such a selfless fighter as a tribute:

*We wont't have cared for the fairies at all*
*Can't flatter the haughty and proud.*
*I shall very carefully safeguard my life,*
*As it is the trust of hardy labourers*



Born in the community which prided in having their limbs severed one by one, General Shabegh Singh had his hair cut for the honour of his country and remained true to his army discipline. The then Chief of the Army Staff, Sam Maneckshaw, was never tired of singing the praises of his valour. He used to often talk of the Sikhs and Gurkhas: "If any one claims that he is not afraid of death, he would be telling a lie. Of course, if this is said about a Sikh or a Gurkha, it can be taken as true." While undergoing weapon training, such a zeal is found in the guerillas of Mukti Bahini, who did not fight for salary but for the sake of their mother tongue, mother earth and their rich heritage and culture.

The conclusive war between the dedicated fighters of Mukti Bahini and Pakistan's salaried army and, in 1984, at the time of Operation Blue Star, the bloody clash of the Sikh militants with their own army cannot be compared, but still there were some common features between the two. Firstly, General Shabegh Singh had given weaponery training to both the militant organizations. Secondly, the militants, who fought against their own armies were not salaried soldiers. It was with the only difference that during the 1971 War, General Shabegh Singh had been fighting to break Pakistan and, during 1984, he was hoping to receive help from Pakistan to divide his own country. This is a burning question in itself.

In the Sikh faith, Tankhah (salary) is called a religious penalty. Those who work as volunteers without salary were called kings sans crowns. If a Sikh is found guilty of a religious mis-conduct, he is declared a Tankhahiya. If the guilty accepts the punishment willingly, Akal Takhat pardons him. The guilty one, who does not accept Tankhah is excommunicated from the Panth (Faith). During the recent past, some resolutions passed by the Sikh Clergy have been questioned. A time had come when those who imposed Tankhah (fine) were also fined. Some controversial decisions were also taken to expel the Sikh High Priests. Akal Takhat is a great pardoner. This great source of Devotion and Power was built by

the Sixth Sikh Guru (one of the successors of Guru Nanak). Still some lapse on the part of those performing duty at the Holy throne of the Timeless cannot be denied. Here it becomes necessary to make a mention of the self-willed (Sarbarah) Aroor Singh from whom the British Government succeeded in having an edict issued that the Punjabis fighting against the British at Baj-Baj Ghat were not Sikhs. A time came when Akal Takhat issued an edict in accordance with the tradition of Akal Takhat that they were devout Sikhs. There are some instances when many requests for forgiveness received from abroad were accepted. Of course, religious penalty (Tankhah) is not a punishment in any way.

The linguistic discrimination by Pakistan brought the Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims on the same stage. "Every house should be a fortress" was a call given at that time and for the sake of their mother tongue and mother earth, all the communities were organized for the grand struggle. These words were uttered by the creator of Pakistan, (Quid-e-Azam) Mohammad Ali Jinnah, a few months before his death in 1948 that "Urdu shall remain the Offical language" and it had sown the seeds of division of the country and proved an unbending spindle. The Bengalis had taken strong exception to the removal of their language from the currency notes and had accepted it as a great challenge. They disturbed the sleep of Pakistani rulers with their slogans "Hail Bangla". East and West Pakistan were divided on the issue of language – Urdu and Bangla. Despite the common religion, polarization of language ultimately created a wedge between Awami League and Muslim League. This was a clear pointer to the black days lying ahead for Pakistan. When General Ayub Khan took reins of the country in his hands, the Bengalis thought that Army would never leave aside Pakistan and the voice of democracy would continue to be silenced with the power of weapons. Even after winning 168 out of 313 seats in Parliament, instead of making Sheikh Mujib-ur- Rehman the Prime Minister, he was put in jail which infuriated the Bengalis very much.



Bhutto's party, People's Party of Pakistan, could not open its account. The only shortcoming on the part of Mujib was that he was a Bengali Muslim. After the linguistic discrimination, he called upon the Bengalis to fight till the last drop of blood in them.

On the map of the world, on 16th December, 1971 was laid the foundation of Bangladesh at the time of linguistic struggle. On 21st February, 1952, some students of Dacca University Medical College, who were agitating for their language, were martyred. The UNESCO Assembly, after many years had declared Universal Mother Tongue Day on 21st November 1999 after passing a resolution on 17th November 1999.

All the Punjabis have never agitated for their mother tongue with the same zeal as the Bengalis. It is quite ironical that the agitation launched by Bengalis gave them their Bangladesh but the movements launched in the Punjab, kept dividing Punjab. After independence, the land of five rivers was divided into East and West Punjab. Free India got only two and a half rivers (Sutlej, Beas and half of Ravi). When the question of linguistic states came up, it had taken ten years for a Punjabi speaking State to be formed. After Sant Fateh Singh's confront for the Punjabi province, he became the star of the Panth's and the stars of Master Tara Singh began to sink. But he fell from the minds of the Sikhs after he did not fulfill the prayer of immolating himself by making a fire-pit on the Akal Takht. When formation of Punjabi Suba was announced on 1st November 1966, many Punjabi-speaking areas were taken out of it and left in Haryana and Himachal as also Rajasthan. Geographical boundaries of Punjab were further limited by agitation; the main reason behind this being linking Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script with the Sikhs. The common language of the Punjabis was cruelly divided between communities and scripts. The broadmindedness of the river-hearted Punjabis (born in the land of rivers) got limited to blind wells. Because of these divisions, the Punjabis did not get the royal throne of power like the Bengalis in

Bangladesh. According to Samuel Johnson, language is the heritage of nations and, instead of that all, the Pujabis are still feeling proud of it and they appear to not have suffered from any inferiority complex. In order to take care of the proud heritage, some internal or external power has been leading astray the Punjabis, especially the Sikhs, from time to time.

It is also a coincidence that the most important contribution in writing the glorious saga of the Indo-Pak war in December 1971 was made by warriors belonging to minorities. These include Parsis, Jews and Sikhs. The then Army Chief General Manekshaw (3 April 1914-27 June 2008) was born in a Parsi family in Guru Ki Nagari Amritsar. During 636-651 AD, Manekshaw's ancestors had settled in some metropolises along the ports of India due to the persecution of the Muslim rulers from Prussia (Iran-Persia). Major General JFR Jacob (2 May 1921 – 13 January 2016), the then Commander of the Eastern Command, was born in a Jewish family in Calcutta. His ancestors fled from Baghdad and reached India, not tolerating the oppression of the rulers of the time. The Parsis and Jews who settled in the land of India after being displaced from Iran and Iraq have played an unparalleled role for the development and defense of the country despite being a small number. The then Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command, Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Arora (13 February 1916 – 3 May 2005) was a Sikh who hailed from Kala Gujars of Jhelum District (now in Pakistan). Lieutenant General of East Pakistan, Niazi surrendered to General Arora with 93,000 troops. General Niazi signed the surrender document in the presence of General Arora and this historic photo became the headline of the newspapers around the world. Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon (17 July 1943 – 14 December 1971), the only Paramvir Chakra winner of the Indian Air Force (posthumously), was born in a village in Ludhiana, who single-handedly shot down six Pakistan fighter jets. Sekhon and his fellow flying officer Baldhir Singh Ghuman's juggling act of flying the aircraft demoralized the Pakistan Air Force and turned the tide of the war. Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri (22 November 1940-17 November 2018) was born in Mintgumri (now in Pakistan) who has written a new history of the Civil War. Major Chandpuri and his small contingent of 120 soldiers defended the Longewala post in Western Sector, Rajasthan. Facing continuous defeat in the East, Pakistan launched a powerful attack on the middle night of 5-6 December by opening the Western border. The Pakistan Army consisted of 2800 soldiers and about 65 tanks. The valiant unit of the Punjab Regiment gave the Pakistani army a living hell. Longewala became the graveyard of Pakistani tanks. Sunny Deol's acclaimed Hindi feature film 'Border' is based on the unusual battle of Longewala in which the Air Force also played an important role. Major General Shabeg Singh (1925–June 1984) was a hero of the 1971 war who provided armed training to the guerrillas of the Mukti Bahini. It is different that in June 1984, during Operation Blue Star, he left for his heavenly abode while fighting with his own army. It is clear that the minorities contributed the most to the protection of the country's borders.

It is also a strange that many gallant soldiers who were recruited during British India continued to fight for foreigners during the Second World War while being in the same regiment. After the partition of the country, they came face to face during the Indo-Pak wars. General Yahya Khan, the then dictator of Pakistan, has been an associate of Indian Army Chief General Manekshaw. At the time of partition of India, the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, persuaded Manekshaw to stay in the original regiment of the Pakistan Army as a Parsi, but he preferred India. Similarly, Tikka Khan, the Pakistan Army chief before partition, was the junior of General Jacob.

The central Government had honored the heroes of the 1971 war with rank-and-file honours, but the embassies of the two generals, Manekshaw and Shabeg Singh, went awry with the late rulers. Being outspoken, Manekshaw kept venting his anger in semi-

nars or media interviews, but Shabeg Singh, who was usually silent, kept his anger inside. The military fortification of Sri Akal Takht and Darbar Sahib came out of this chaos.

In the novel in hand, "Tankhahiye", besides the concerns connected with Sikhs and the Punjabis, an humble attempt has been made to get to the root of Sikh problem. Some questions have been raised in this, the reply to which is hidden in the dust of the past and the wrap of the future. Was it proper for the militant Singhs to take shelter at Akal Takhat? Had the supreme organization of the Sikhs, Shromani Gurdwra Parbandhak Committee, Shromani Akali Dal and the then Singh Sahiban (Highj Priests) played their assigned roles, the Operation Blue Star could have been averted. The evil mindedness of Government, army and Intelligence Department and their unforgiveable mistakes have been discussed. Still there are some unsolved questions and the reply to these questions is sought by the people from their leaders as, on the basis of which, real Tankhahiyas could be identified.

Every possible effort has been made to examine the facts carefully, however for any oversight, I seek forgiveness in advance.

I am indebted to late Manjit Singh Calcutta, Prof. Joginder Singh Jogi, Harmeet Singh Atwal, Capt. Devinder Kumar Singla, Sardar Beant Singh (Younger brother of General Shabeg Singh), Mehtab-Ud-Din, Dr. Joginder Kairon and my wife, Amrjit Kaur for their cooperation in sending across "Tankhahiyas" to the readers.

**Varinder Walia**



# The Culprits

## ONE

Waiting impatiently for Brig. Shabegh Singh, the Army Chief, Sam Manekshaw was turning about fast the globe lying on the table. Because he had stretched his eyebrows, his forehead had got furrowed.

Shabegh opened the door and saluted, when Manekshaw's finger stopped on the map of East Pakistsan. Having been born and brought up in District Amritsar, both the officers were quite informal with each other. Manekshaw stood up and encircled his shoulder in his left arm. Shabegh always highly appreciated the true love of his boss and was ever ready in laying down his life at the orders of Manekshaw.

Before Shabegh Singh could say, "Orders Sir", Manekshaw led him to the World Map hanging against the wall. Keeping the pointer in his hand on East Pakistan, he said, "By the end of this half year, it should not remain part of Pakistan."

"Madam Prime Minister wanted an attack immediately. She was greatly upset at the large number of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan. Our own people cannot have a square meal daily; who will feed these idlers Parshadas (large chapattis)?"

"But I told her plainly that our Army was not ready for an attack at this time. I told her that the East Pakistan has the same area as France. Indira Gandhi was very much upset at the plain negative reply. I said, "Madam Prime Minister, Monsoon is approaching fast and it is difficult, rather impossible to cross the streams and some water channels of East Bengal as those often become sea during the rainy season. It would be better to wait for a few months and devise a proper war strategy. On Mrs. Gandhi's re-

quest, I told that it may take a month and a half to completely occupy East Pakistan."

"Rightly said, Sir. I am sorry to say that Madam Prime Minister does not seem to have learnt anything from the war with China." Shabegh took the liberty of expressing his opinion.

"After the infiltration, Pt. Jawaharlal had said to General Kaul to throw out the Chinese from our land. Our General, who got promotions and postings only on the basis of his relationships and friendships, was thus thoroughly devoid of sense. He did not have the courage to give an immediate reply that we were not capable of doing so. If he had taken the courage to say, "Mr. Prime Minister, at the moment our Army is not in a position to confront China", we would have been saved from the ignominy of suffering such a humiliating defeat. Bloody cowards." General Manekshaw's mind was embittered recalling the India-China war.

"Pakistan is dealing very cruelly and violently with the people of Bengali origin. Besides goods and property, even the modesty of women is endangered. The Bengali youth are terribly agitated. I wish that they should be provided with weapons and training liberally. The feeling of taking revenge is not less than lava erupting in their minds. Of course, I have all the sympathy for the Bengalis. We Parsis too had come here from Iran after being pushed out." The Army Chief felt that their pain was like that of his ancestors as they had to leave their land with heavy hearts to come to India and many other countries.

In fact, Parsis are those of Persian origin, who in the eighth and tenth centuries, after suffering violence at the hands of the Muslims, had escaped to India and settled in Gujarat, Bombay and Sind. Before bidding good bye to their mother earth, the Parsis had fought bravely against the invaders from the Arab countries for two hundred years.

"The blood of the innocent was also shed during the partition of the country. The story of displacement is blood- curdling as



horripilated. Communalism took the life of lakhs of innocent people. Sir, you are an eyewitness of this bloodshed. There were dead bodies everywhere on the Wagah-Atari border. It is difficult to describe the violation of modesty of our daughters and sisters. Recalling the tragedy of 1947, Shabegh Singh.'s eyes had got tearful.

"Shabeg Singh I wish you to shoulder the responsibility of training the Bengali youth yourself."

"O.K. Sir. I will prepare a blue print and submit it to you very soon." Shabegh Singh stood up and saluted when Manekshah cautioned him, "It should not take more than a fortnight."

Shabegh Singh again said, "O.K. Sir." and left.

After a mention of Amritsar, Manekshaw remembered his parents who had gone by train from Bombay to Lahore (in the year 1900) looking for better business opportunities. The train stopped at Amritsar Railway Station. Manekshaw's mother saw some Sikhs at the platform. She was surprised at their dress. She had never seen a Sikh before. In order to look at the Sikhs from close quarters, the Parsi couple felt compelled to get down at Amrtisar. They found the people of Amritsar of very amiable nature and both of them decided that instead of going ahead, they would make Guru's town as their field of action. After a few days, the couple liked a shop in Katra Ahluwalia near Harmandar Sahib. They set up a chemist's shop there. Manekshaw was born in Amritsar. He received his higher education at the Hindu College of the city. It was also by chance that after being awarded Commission in the Army in 1934, he was posted to 54 Sikh Regiment which had taken part in the World War and many other battles.

## TWO

Sir, here is the blue print."

Brig. Shabegh Singh handed over the file containing details of villages at the border to General Maneckshaw where the Mukti Bahini guerillas had to be trained and sent to East Pakistsan.

"Very well done…You are great, my dear." General Manekshaw patted Shabegh Singh. He was surprised that instead of fifteen days, he had conducted a deep ground study in one week and prepared the report.

"You are true Amritsari." The Army Chief was wonder struck.

"So are you, sir." Shabegh Singh also said in a flattering manner.

"Yaw, we are sailing in the same boat."

"Don't worry sir, have faith in me…Amritsaries never get defeated. Amritsaries have always made sacrifices for the honour and dignity of the country. You have also drunk water of Amritsar. None can beat the Majhails (those of mid-land of Punjab).

"You are right Shahbegh Singh…You are an iron man indeed."

"Sir, if I am an iron man, you are Parsi like Paras (A mythical stone) which turns iron into gold."

Shabegh Singh's quick-wit made Manekshaw laugh heartily. Then after a handshake, he clasped him and said, "Let me turn you also into gold."

"Thank you, sir. But no war can be won with gold. Weapons made of iron only are good. In the Sikh faith, Sarab Loh (All steel) is valued much higher than gold." Said Shabegh Singh out of the proud heritage.

"Then why did you turn Harmandar Sahib into golden temple?" General Manekshaw's question had a prick.

"Sir this is the question of the devotion of the Kings and Emperors. I have no reply to this." Helplessness was clearly reflected in his reply.

"Generally people believe that when the Gurdwaras were of mud bricks, the Sikhs were fully devoted to the faith but…."

Interrupting Shabegh Singh, Manekshaw said, "Let us discuss the blue print first."

"Sir, we should have the Mukti Bahini headquarters at any place between Agartala and Calcutta. Here the city of Comilla of



East Pakistan is very close. Of course Dacca is not very far off from Comilla. In the same manner are Silchar, Shillong and frontier villages where there will be camps from where assaults will be launched at Pakistan's Habibganj, Ramgarh, Brahmanbaria, etc. Sir, Bengali boys are conversant with every inch of the land there. The army from Islamabad knows absolutely nothing about the terrain. They would not dare to come out after the sunset, sir." As Shabegh Singh was giving details, General Manekshaw was gazing at the map.

"Sir, Pakistan has got totally baffled. There has been firing every day, without fail, at the border. Yes, there is firing on the Eastern and Western borders and countless people have been killed. Hundreds of refugees are leaving East and coming to India. The same is the case on the West. Mortar bombs are being dropped in Poonch and border posts. BSF is also giving a fitting reply to Pakistani rangers. Sir, it seems to me that Pakistan can start war any moment.

"We don't have much of time, Sir. In June and July, there are burning furnaces under the earth. In these months even hardy Jats turn into sadhus. Still we should not lose this time. It would be more difficult to get across the border in August. During monsoons, the banks of the Old Ganga and Meghna rivers swell and spread over miles. Leave aside temporary bridges, it is difficult to cross the rivers on small ferries. Paddy crop stands on both the sides of the frontier belt. The vapours rising from the paddy fields and the abundance of mosquitoes would cripple the movement of Paksitani forces. The Bengalis and the Punjabis are used to this sultriness….they don't care for bloody humidity and mosquitoes."

Shabegh's eyes were shining rapidly. He waited for Manekshaw's reply getting tightlipped.

After throwing a searching glance at Shabegh Singh, Manekshaw asked, "What about you?"

"Don't. worry, Sir. I will lead from the front." Shabegh Singh replied quickly.

"But you can't deliver in this form. I mean…."Interrupting General Manekshaw, Shabegh Singh said, "Sir, I am aware that I cannot go there with turban. I will have to go in the garb of a Muslim. Everything is fair in guerilla warfare. Leave it to me. I won't let you down, sir." Brig. Shabegh Singh assured Manekshaw with utmost confidence.

General Manekshaw knew that Shabegh Singh was well conversant with Arabic, Persian, Gorkhali and Urdu languages. After having had his hair cut, even the members of his family would not be able to recognize him. His pronunciation would lead everyone to believe that he was really a Muslim.

Having been born and brought up in Amritsar, General Manekshaw knew what a great sacrifice was it for a true Sikh to have his hair cut.

"I don't have words to praise…." Manekshaw shut his eyes and praised Shabegh Singh and saluted his sense of sacrifice.

"Sir, I am ready to make all types of sacrifices for breaking the yoke around the necks of Bengali refugees and so to take revenge. The Guru would forgive me." Shabegh Singh raised his arms and eyes and said quite humbly.

## THREE

After selecting the Bengali youth for being trained in use of weapons in Dacca, the hardy Jat in Brig. Shabegh Singh began to mumble: 'The horns of buffaloes got entangled – only the one fed with cotton seeds would steer clear.'

At Jabbalpur Cantonment, Brig. Shabegh Singh, sitting with the Gurkha and Madrasi regimental officers, was twisting his moustaches while mentioning the name of Pakistan and getting worked up. His colleagues already applauded his bravery but today, after getting the most dangerous assignment at Dacca, all of them were wonder-struck at Shabegh Singh's zeal.

Brig. Shabegh Singh called those army men as show-type



horses and teased them as they had not taken part in the 1962 war with China or 1965 war with Pakistan. He widened his chest and said to his fellow officers that he was born and brought up in the Majha region of the Punjab where it is quite fashionable to carry a gun on the shoulder or a pistol in the wrap knot around the waist. When he stretched his neck and said, "The caste and creed of the Singhs is strife/as they have sought strife and struggle from their Guru." A Madrasi Brigadier asked him, "Who are these Singhs? And why do they indulge in Danga Fasad (strife and struggle)?" Shabegh Singh smiled and said, "The Singhs, being Guru's Sikhs, had been fighting for the pious war. He clarified that Danga does not mean strife as generally understood. It is struggle for piety. No true Sikh can indulge in strife. Rather it is a Sikh's duty to protect the innocent of every class of society. Shabegh Singh's chest was widening as he was explaining about the sacrifices made by the Gurus and the formation of the Khalsa. "For me the Dacca assignment is like Dharam-Yudha (pious war). It is the occasion to set score for the cruelties perpetrated on Bengalis by the Pakistanis. This is the heavenly sent opportunity for me to settle score with bloody Pak Army."

To start with, it appeared odd to non-Punjabi officers when Shabegh Singh twisted his moustaches or patting his thighs when talking. But after closer ties, they felt that such moves were made to prepare a horse by combing it with hard brush and which always bloomed Shabegh Singh.

"We had a confrontation with Pakistan six years ago. During the 1965 war, if our Government had not retreated, we could have at least taken possession of Lahore. But all is well that ends well. It appears to me that after the commando training, the Bengali youth would be able to have their own independent country." Shabegh Singh, strolling about in mess lawn was determining his battle lines. Because the days of Magha (a month in Punjabi calendar that runs through mid-January to mid-February) were very short, the sun

had begun its journey to shut down. Being the valiant fighter, Shahbegh Singh knew that long nights are more useful to the militants. Weak soldiers are not able to handle their weapons with shivering hands. Therefore when it is freezing cold, the brave soldiers can hve hand to hand fight in the enemy trenches without wasting ammunition. Besides heritage, Shahbegh Singh was confident of his valour that he would be able to instill such a spirit in the Bengalis that they would succeed in their mission by the New Year 1971. Because of the oppressive policies in East Pakistan by the government, people had got agitated. Two years earlier, the popular leader of East Pakistsan, Mujibul Rehman's Awami League had got very high majority in the elections but instead of making him the Prime Minister, baseless charges were framed against him and he was put into jail. Democracy had been killed. Because of the army oppression, the land of East Pakisstan had begun to yearn for freedom.

"Mukti Bahini would cut the chains of slavery, True God would help me" Shabegh Singh prayed shutting his eyes. After strolling for a ten to fifteen minutes, he stopped. Then he turned the toe of his shoe on the mud digging a small ditch in the ground. It came to his mind that he would maul the Pakistan army and pull out like grass knots.

## FOUR

Shabegh's mother was surprised to see him in the commodious bungalow of Military Cantonment, a Muslim of middle age wearing a milky white wrap and a Do-ghora Boski Kurta offering Namaz. After Saltatul Maghrib (West) during the evening namaz, the man said, "I touch your feet, mother" and she got upset. "What is this garb, Shabegh Singh?"

"Mother, if I had not uttered anything and bowed before you quietly, would you have recognized me as your Sheroo? You would have taken me for a Musla coming from Dacca."



"Don't go on bragging. Tell what is this garb? I had prayed at Akal Takhat and got you from the Sixth Guru. Have you forgtooten that you belong to the clan of Bhangu chieftains in which warriors like Mehtab Singh (Year 1740, Sukha Singh & Mehtab Singh severed head of Massa Ranghar, the Military Commander of Amritsar, who desecrated the holy precincts of the Golden Temple) were born. Bhangu Sardars have served Sikh rites till their last breath. How would I show my face now to the True Emperor?" She was so very much upset that her face got deeply furrowed and she turned her face to the other side.

"Don't get annoyed mother. This garb has been changed perhaps in Satguru's Will. Those who had pulled down our Akal Takhat and Darbar Sahib, I have assumed this form to root them out. Don't worry." The old mother was unable to follow him at all but when she was annoyed very greatly, Shabegh Singh told her that he had been assigned an important duty to take revenge against Pakistan and there was not time to give details thereof. He was happy that if his mother, who gave birth to him, got mistaken, the enemy too would be mistaken.

The mother got some satisfaction that her son was preparing to decimate those who had attacked Darbar Sahib. Otherwise too, without getting into the garb of a muslim it was not free of risk entering their territory.

Shabegh Singh's wife already knew that her husband had been selected to prepare Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan. She led him to the other room and whispered to him "Everything else is all right but don't go in for circumcision." Both of them had a hearty laughter.

Hearing their peel of laughter, the mother came into the room. "Tell me, my son, when would you return to the Sikh form? My heart is sinking even now." She put her hand on her heart and asked him. "I don't know when our enmity with these Muslas would come to an end? How much bloodshed was witnessed in

1947? Your father and grandfather had helped many Muslims reach Pakistan safely but how these cruel ruffians had caused harm to us, these rogues. Even the children and old men were not spared. My tongue does not help me to describe the fate of the daughters and sisters.

Though the lion hearted mother had suffered boldly the whole tragic times of 1947 but today her tears stood in her eyes. "If a lion goes to the jungle after shaving his face and head, it would be taken as a jackal and get surrounded by jackals. The Tenth Guru, donning plumes, has granted us a magnificent form that has all the blessings therein. The hair is the stamp and security of Guru." Actually his mother was unable to accept this changed form of Shabegh Singh. Still she reassures herself for the greater task. "The Tenth Master, had become Uch da Pir for the sake of the Panth. Perhaps my son would be thinking rightly. In order to win a war and dupe the enemy, every way has to be adopted.

"Look here mother. I was recruited before 1947. You know very well that the British did not appoint a Tom, Dick or Harry as an officer in the Army. I was the only one to be selected for the Government College, Lahore. We fought in the World War on the side of the Britain. But today I would fight and die for my own country and you should be proud of this."

Mother's heart missed a few beats on hearing "will die". "Don't utter such words, my son. Live long. Enjoy your youth."

To reassure his mother, Shabegh Singh went upto the roof top. Standing near the parapet he said to his mother and wife standing below to see a spectacle. Like the fluttering of wings, he raised himself a little and jumped down. His mother and wife standing below were scared to the bone. Shabegh Singh reached the ground in an eye-wink, he jumped a little and was again steady on his feet. Clasping his mother un his arms, he said, "Lion's mothers should be under no misapprehension. And mother, I am one of the Military



commandos, who gambol in the river like crocodiles and catch their prey with a lightning speed. They find their way even in the forest in flames.

"Am also a Jatti of Majha, my son. Do you remember how before 1947 during the month of Magh, I had alone driven away the dacoits? Then your father taught me how to use a gun. You too had got fond of the gun after looking at me, my son." Shabegh Singh heard his mother and embraced her tightly.

"Go, Guru will protect you. Do you remember, Shabegh when in the war of 1965 you were on the way to Poonch, you received the telegram about your father's death? But you could not attend the funeral. And now if you get a message of my death, don't come back. Finish your task and then return. Mind you, my milk should not be slurred. This way mine and your dad's soul will rest in peace."

His eyes turned moist as he heard his mother. He recalled that on receipt of the telegram, he had positioned himself on a rock on the way and kept remembering his father for quite some time. Instead of going back, he considered it proper to go ahead because his father always used to say that retreat is not for the valiant.

It was his father's desire that his son should become a senior army officer. When he saw his son being saluted, his face turned red and chest widened with pride. But alas, when he died, his son couldn't shoulder his hearse.

"If mother expired in my absence…."

This thought lashed in Shabegh Singh's mind like lightning. Then he tried to console himself and said that the greatest mother is the country. Such an illusion every mother has.

When, after taking permission, Shabegh Singh was getting into his car, his mother, wife and children shut their eyes and prayed for his safety. Instead of saying Sat Sri Akal, Shabegh Singh said Khdua Hafiz and it appeared as if as he had been Islamaised fully.

## FIVE

During the camp held in Siliguri, Shabegh Singh had the new recruits remove stripped pyjamas and loongies and gave them shirts and pants to wear. After a week or so he trained them in passing through the forest fire, to face the high and mighty tides of the Tiesta river and started difficult training for the recruits just as to cross the temporary bridges with wooden beams and rafters carried on their shoulders. Full of zeal, the young men of Mukti Bahini, after jumping down the improvised lofts, were running while holding their rifles and also fired when Shabegh Singh desired the accomplishment of his mission. Dreams sparkled in his eyes and he widened his 56" chest and walked up and down. When one of those boys Shamil fired a bullet and turned his neck back, Shabegh Singh began to hurl obscene abuse at him. Though Shamil couldn't understand the meaning of the abuse but he realized his mistake that one should always look ahead while opening fire. Although five more officers of Brigadier's rank were imparting training to the units of Mukti Bahini, but the way of Shabegh Singh was just unique. After a month's training, Shahbegh Singh had turned the novice boys into gold by putting them in the melting pot. Those, who received training, were joined by Col. Osmani, Major Zia-ur-Rehman and Mohammad Mushtaq, the retired and absconder army men who were helping in preparing the blue print of Mukti Bahini. These army men were given higher ranks and honoured. There was hardly a family in East Pakistan, a child or young man of which had not joined Mukti Bahini.

After the sun set the sky had turned crimson. After the hooter was sounded, a war like situation prevailed. Shahbegh Singh ordered the Mukti Bahini unit to move towards Raiganj from Binnaguri over night. The Bengali boys were conversant with every inch of land there. Carrying ammunition they roared like lions and marched towards Raiganj.



After the alarm was sounded, Major Y.P.S. Bajwa's Charlie Battalion was ordered to move towards Hatiram village during the night. This village was at a distance of about twelve miles from the border. Rumours were afloat like anything that Pakistan could launch an attack any time. Tension was at the peak between the two countries. The army was taking positions after reaching Hatiram. The jawans of Mukti Bahini told the army that their bunkers were weaker compared to those of Pakistan. Pakistani army had caught hold of Bengali boys and had thick layers of mud laid on the bunkers by forced labour so that when cannon balls fall down, much damage is not done. Interrupting, Shabegh Singh said that there was no cause for worry. As soon as their firing started on the border. they would take over the posts of the fleeing Pakistanis. Pointing towards the young men of Mukti Bahini he laughed and said, "You should have the prior rights on the bunkers which you have strengthened by making raising layers of mud." Meanwhile, a message was received that the alarm for start of war was false. Shabegh Singh said that the news may be untrue, but they should be ever ready for war.

Pakistan army had laid mines here and there. Despite repeated cautions by Shabegh Singh, the free lance young men of Mukti Bahini, were galloping towards their destination. Shamil was singing loudly the national anthem of Bengalis, "Amar Sonar Bangla", which Tagore had written in 1905 against the division of Bengal by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy. Suddenly, as Shamil set foot on a mine, there was an explosion in which many were blown to pieces and many got seriously injured. On hearing the explosion, the Pakisani army started heavy firing. The Indian army also opened fire giving a fitting reply. During the firing on both sides, it appeared as if war had started.

In the month of November, India had withdrawn BSF and taken possession of their posts. On the other side, the Paksitan army had taken the place of East Bengal Rifles and East Pakistan

Rifles. There were indications of start of war at any moment. In spite of this, morale of Mukti Bahini was very high because Shabegh Singh stood by them at any difficult time. After the mine blast, Shabegh Singh felt very unhappy. He provided first aid to the wounded and arranged for sending them to the military hospital. For encouraging the young men, who had remained unhurt, he led hem in the front. The boys pleaded with him to remain in the rear but he did not pay heed to them and he advanced rubbing in shoulders with them.

Passing through Hatiram village, Shabegh Singh suddenly signaled to stop. He had spotted the mines buried in the paddy field and thereby they escaped a very heavy loss. They decided to pitch tents and spend the night there itself. Mines were clearly visible after the day break. Cold had increased because of drizzle. Although it was easier to dig trenches after the rain, because the rain was heavy, it appeared difficult to walk through the paddy fields and reach Mohanpur Border Observation Post. When Shabegh Singh opened the map and studied, Sultan Ahmad of Mukti Bahini told him that it was not necessary as he had been to India by that way a number of times. He removed the backpack and beckoned to stop. He was having labored breathing. After resting for a while, he started counting villages of East Pakistan, one after the other, which fell on the way to Mohanpur. Some houses were spotted in the villages where lamps were twinkling.

Heading towards Dacca from the Indian side, changing features of land were observed. Paddy fields were seen on all the four sides. Shahbeg Singh asked in surprise, "Is there no other crop grown here?" The Mukti Bahini commando told him that instead of the crop cycle of wheat and paddy, after harvesting paddy, paddy is again sown. The Jat within Shabegh Singh was trying to gauge the hardships faced by the Bengali peasants. Compared to the large green fields of the Punjab, there were small tracts. Water-logging had damaged the land. Water was seen on all the sides. Water



could be taken out of land after a few digs while in the Punjab wells had to be dug very deep to reach the water level. Because of abundance of water, there were ponds here and there and everywhere. The economy of Bengalis could be assessed by the fishery and paddy. Shahbegh Singh again asked, "I do not see a big factory in this area." The Bengali Muslim said that the Government paid all the attention to the West Pakistan only.

Shabegh Singh liked the rows of coconut trees on the banks of the rivers. But still the adage "Wheat here and wheat there ripening in all its grandeur" stirred within him the desire to envision the spectacle. After getting across the harbor area, twinkling lights of Dacca were beckoning to welcome. It was intended to carry out the reconnoitering of the following week. Shabegh Singh narrowly escaped falling down as he was drawn deep into thoughts. The furrows on the sticky mud had lengthened the path. As every step had to be taken very carefully, the destination appeared to be far away. Still the local knowledge of the Mukti Bahini recruits was of great help. Somehow or the other they reached the Border Observation Post where Bravo Battalion had been posted. Newly promoted Captain Davinder Kumar Singla suddenly had back ache. He had to keep awake for many nights. When his Commander ordered him to infiltrate Pakistsan area to replace O.P. officer posted there, he forgot that he had a backache. Blood began to rush in the veins of the young officer. Capt. Singla had to take control of the Observation Post for the first time and therefore he was fully zealous. Saying "OK Sir" to his Commander, he saluted and took leave of him.

During the cold freezing night of 5th November, Capt. D.K. Singla, riding a one tonner, reached near the border. After crossing the Tiesta river, in spate after the heavy rain, he infiltrated East Pakistan. To reach Mohanpur BOP, Mukti Bahini jawans helped him. A small bunker had already been waiting for him. Abundance of mosquitoes and very small size of the bunker had upset him and

he had to spend the night without a wink of sleep. Next day, the Commanding Officer reached there and apprised him of the targets on the Pakistsani side. Shabegh Singh, who cut jokes with death also reached there. He had already reconnoitered that area. Pakistan had got an inkling about army taking over from the BSF and brisk firing started from across the border. Having had no experience of battle fighting, it was a terrific sight for the Mukti Bahini young men. Some of them began to run back but Shabegh Singh, pointing his Stein gun at them, turned them back, "Bastards, we are fighting to the last for you and you are fleeing the field like jackals. Shame on you." Shabegh Singh's thundering voice could be clearly heard in the din and noise of firing. He warned them: "If you run away under fear, you won't be rewarded with sweets on going there at the rear." With the encouragement by Shabegh Singh, young major Sikandar, accompanied by 25 soldiers, marched towards East Pakistan. They seemed to have absolutely no fear of death. The other batteries of the army did likewise. Towards the evening hunger started torturing Major Sikandar. Provisins for them were scanty but their morale was very high. In order to stop the firing on Capt. Singla's BOP, the neighbouring OP officer, Capt. M.P. Singh started firing in reply and turned the tide of the attack. Meanwile Capt. Singla took over his BPO. Jawans of the Indian army were firing very sparingly so that the enemy should have no inkling of their positions. So much so that even lighting a cigarette or making fire of any kind was not permitted. During shelling, some particles hit a Mukti Bahini jawan and he groaned throughout the night biting his lips and disturbed other jawans' sleep also. Despite having had no sleep at all, Shabegh Singh kept singing "Those in love, never go to sleep".

## SIX

Braving all odds, Shabeg Singh had reached the land of Dacca along with Muhammed Shaifuddin, a valiant guerilla of Mukti Bahini.



Shabeg Singh was looking like a pure Bengali Muslim in a fringed lungi and a photoa (kurta) of silk.

As a seasoned soldier, Shabeg Singh used to understand and remember a map of streets, markets and buildings at first glance. Being a scholar, he learned to speak Bengali within days.

'Aas sarb pratham Dhaka University Jawar Ichha Ache' (First of all my desire is to go to Dacca University) said Shabeg Singh to Mohammad Shaifuddin in Bengali.

``Odare jwar kono labh hove ni. Ek mas ki bondo ache. Sena purbe sothike barobad kore dieke' (There is no point in going there sir, because it has been closed for a month. The government has completely destroyed the University of the East called Oxford)', says Saifuddin. Safuddin's voice was seeming heavy in grief.

On being compelled by Shabeg Singh, Saif-u-din took him to Dacca University which presented a spectacle of ruin. In fact, the University had become the hub of rebellion and its activities had become an eye sore for the government. The Pakistan Government wanted to totally destroy this epicenter of earthquake. After going round the University in the Nilkhet area, Shabegh Singh said to Saif-u-din that a spark is good enough to destroy the strongest government but lava was rising out of the University which could even cause hill slides. Shabegh Singh remembered the bloody incident of February 1952, when several students of Dacca University, Jagannath University and Dhaka Medical College were shot dead for protesting and demanding that Bangla should be given official language status in East Pakistan instead of Urdu.

On the pretext of going round the University, Shabegh Singh wanted to see Gurdwara Nanakshahi but he was hesitating to express this. After going round the University, both of them reached the Gurdwara. They touched the holy dust which had received Guru Nanak's foot print. Shabegh Singh was overjoyed. His soul was intoxicated.

"I had heard the Gurdwara had a lot of land" Shabegh shared his illusion."

"Sir, the University has been built on the Gurdwara land'.

After Saif-u-din had given this reply, Shabegh Singh's eyes got blood stained. This reply had flared up the fire within him further. Standing very seriously in front of the Gurdwara, he offered Ardas in his mind. After shutting his eyes, Shabegh Singh imagined Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Dacca. During his first Religious Journey (Udasi) of the East, Guru Nanak had reached Dacca via Kamrup (Assam). Then passing through Attok, he reached Jagan Nath Puri where he had recited "Gagan mai thal….." (Sky is the salver in which are lighted the lamps of the sun and the moon and the stars twinkle like diamonds…..and explained to the congregation the true import of the holy verse.) At the time of bowing in front of the Gurdwara, he recalled Guru Nanak Dev's hymn. "If you want to play the game of love, come to my lane with your head held on your palm." "It is quite wonderful. The Baba had exhorted the devotees to place their heads on their palms before entering his lane." And thus he had made use of his pen against cruel rulers like Babar. After the martyrdom of the Fifth Guru, two swords of Miri (worldly or political) and Piri (Divine) were needed. This was the journey from pen to sword, on the first step of which is inscribed Guru Nanak's name. Shabegh Singh felt offering his thanks to Baba's blessings that he had appeared before his door with his head on his palm. He was trying to connect Guru Nanak's words with the uprising in Dacca University. "The University has been built on Baba's land. Probably, the rebels too had Baba Nanak's blessings. "Kings have turned into tigers and their henchmen, into dogs. Yes, it was a rebellion against the rulers of the day. Such words of the mendicants mix with dust the mighty empires." Shabegh Singh was fully absorbed in such thoughts.

Life always throbbed in Dacca University but after the genocide of March 1971, there was the silence of graves. In the garb of



Operation Searchlight, horrendous violence had been done against the students. The beacon light of education, appeared to be dark from outside but fire had still appeared to be hidden under the ashes.

Some girl students in burqa had courageously refused to let their hostel rooms searched. This had enraged the uniformed men who had come fully armed in military vehicles but had got baffled. The soldiers driven by madness set the hostel on fire and after the melee that followed, the girls left their belongings inside and ran outwards. Some girls, who had remained inside, got burnt. The girls, who succeeded in running out began to be devoured by the army men. They were taken prisoners and were led to their bunkers. They were ravished and raped collectively and the news appeared in papers. The government began to take media under their control. After the mass killing of students, professors and intellectuals, lava had begun to erupt here and there in East Pakistan.

The fire of revenge flaring up in the hearts of the armed guerillas of Mukti Bahini had driven them to attack the army. The guerillas forced the army to remain confined to their bunkers after sun set. Bengali Muslim guerillas succeeded in taking part in big events. The Pakistani army was dominated by Punjabis. All the higher ranks were held by the Punjabis. Therefore, the Bengalis greatly hated not only the Urdu speaking countrymen but more so, the Punjabis. Shabegh Singh told them the difference between the East and the West Punjab as to how the people of both the regions had shed each other's blood during 1947 partition riots.

After every successful action by Mukti Bahini, Shabegh Singh's chest widened with pride. Indian Army was proving cover-fire to Mukti Bahini at important positions. In order to avoid the allegation of crossing the international borders, the Indian Army, after helping the Mukti Bahini, returned to the Indian territory immediately.

Shabegh Singh had thought it unwise for India to entangle with Pakistan, rather unnecessary. But when he learnt about the atrocities committed against the Bengalis, he began to treat it a Dharam

Yuddh (Holy War). He saw that the Army had burnt down village after village in East Pakistan. After imagining the pain suffered by the Bengalis, he, according to Guru's exhortation, had got ready to be cut into pieces while fighting for the holy cause.

## SEVEN

Under the visionary policy of Sam Manakshaw, the army was deployed in large numbers on the borders of the Eastern and Western sectors. Although Manekshaw had prepared to sound the war horn on December 4, he sincerely wanted Pakistan to take the initiative so that the image of India in the whole world including the United Nations does not become aggressive. Being an Ambarsaria, it was embedded in his blood that he should not take the initiative and not leave the second. Manekshaw anyway considered 'Four' as 'lucky' for himself as many achievements in his life were associated with this number. Pakistan had learnt about the preparations of the Indian army through its intelligence. For this reason, on December 3, Pakistan attacked many important locations in India, including Amritsar, Pathankot, Srinagar, Jodhpur, Ambala and Agra, through fighter jets. From here, the flying officers of the Indian Air Force, who were already prepared, flew and many scenes of 'dog fight' were seen in the sky. Fire started to rain from the zenith due to several sorties from both sides simultaneously. The fighter jets flying like vultures created an atmosphere of terror in the Indian sub-continent. The army under the command of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Arora started shelling from three directions simultaneously. The Indian army from West Bengal, Tripura and Meghalaya attacked East Pakistan at once. The precise targeting by the Mukti Bahini guerrillas trained by Shabeg Singh to destroy military bases in East Pakistan was proving effective. Due to the coordination of Indian water, land and air forces, there was chaos in Pakistan.

Facing defeat on every front, Pakistan suddenly attacked the Longewala post in Rajasthan by opening the Western border on the



middle night of December 5-6. Under the leadership of Major Kuldeep Singh Chandpuri, only 120 soldiers bravely fought Pakistan's locust swarm. A small army unit led by Major Chandpuri destroyed 2,800 Pakistani soldiers and about 40 tanks despite the pitched battle. Longewala post became Karbala for Pakistan Army due to the bravery of Major Chandpuri and his platoon. The Air Force also played an important role in this victory. Thus, the dream of the dictator Yahya Khan of Pakistan was shattered that East Pakistan could be saved by opening the border of the Western sector. Pakistan, which came in a bluff, tried unsuccessfully to blow up Srinagar's airport by smoke bombing through Saber jet fighters. Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon, who had gone home to get married a few days before the outbreak of war, got the news of the air strikes, so he immediately decided to re-schedule his leave and attend duty. The newly-married bride begged Sekhon to stay for a few more days with folded henna-dyed hands, but he did not listen. Sekhon was gesturing with his hand as if flying a plane, saying that 'I'll be back in no time.' Without caring about the tears in his wife's eyes, he left for Srinagar. As it was the middle of December, Srinagar airport was completely shrouded in fog. It was a matter of risking one's life to take-off. At this time, Flying Lieutenant Baldhir Singh Ghuman and Sekhon's juggling act of flying the plane came into play. After seeing Ghuman 's taking his aircraft to air, Sekhon also tried to take-off, a Pakistani fighter plane suddenly attacked. Sekhon narrowly escaped. Sekhon got greatly exasperated and chased two Saber jets of Pakistan and destroyed them. He repeatedly entered Pakistani territory and attacked. He destroyed six Pakistani Saber jets. Then Pakistan planes followed Sekhon. Sekhon, who was never scared of death, had to land his plane after being hit by a shell near Budgam. In the meantime, his wife who wore the rangala chura (the colourful bangles worn during wedding rites) was confident that her better half would surely return home. Keeping his promise, Sekhon returned home, but was wrapped in the tricolor. During the

last flight, Sekhon had said that even if his plane fell victim to Pakistan's shelling, he would die on his own soil. Before getting martyred, he had broken through the Pakistan Air Force. Army soldiers wanted to correct the mistake of not occupying Lahore after capturing Burki during the invasion. As if the Lahore throne was inviting them where once Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to sit.

Pakistan pleaded with its friend China, but in the difficult time it also did not cooperate. A panicked Yahya Khan pleaded for help on the phone to US President Nixon. Nixon tried to come on Pakistan's back by pushing the 7th fleet towards the Bay of Bengal. Surrounded on all four sides, General Niazi asked Pakistan Army Chief Ayub Khan to send more troops to Dacca. The Mukti Bahini fighting under the command of Shabeg Singh, being fully aware of all the local areas and it had really become a death threat for the Pakistan Army. All the requisitions of General Niazi had no effect on the health of Yahia Khan and Ayub Khan. The defense of West Pakistan was more important to them than the East. The leader of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made a complete mess by doing childish actions in an important meeting of the United Nations. He shocked everyone by shredding the agenda of the meeting. On the other hand, his Indian counterpart Swaran Singh, with a cool mind, stood up for India well regarding the situation in East Pakistan. In the United Nations meeting, Swaran Singh said that Pakistan's army is blindly torturing in the East, due to which nearly one crore refugees have come to seek refuge in West Bengal and other neighboring states, due to which India's economy is in shambles. On the other hand, Bhutto, tearing the paper apart, shouted that instead of wasting time in the United Nations meeting, he would go to Pakistan and prepare to win the war. General Manekshaw had a full eye on this meeting. After Bhutto threw a tantrum at the United Nations, Manekshaw gave orders to intensify the attack. The 7th ship, sent by the US in the Bay of Bengal had gone after the snub of Russia.



When Russia reached India's back, the side of the war was reversed. The spirits of the Indian army were high and its roaring tanks surrounded Dacca from all sides. The 14th of December had already proved doomsday for Pakistan as 28-year-old Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon single-handedly shot down its six fighter jets. The Indian Navy had made it tough for Pakistan by blowing up the Karachi port. On the other hand, an emergency meeting was called at the Raj Bhawan in Dacca, in which General Niazi and Governor Malik were also present. On receiving its tip-off, four planes of the Indian Air Force suddenly bombed and blew the roof of a part of the Raj Bhavan. Frightened Governor Malik immediately resigned and took refuge in a luxurious hotel in Dacca. Taking advantage of the criticality of the occasion, Major General JFR Jacob reached Raj Bhavan to meet his Pakistani counterpart General Niazi. He also took the 'Surrender Document' with him. He told General Niazi that his army was completely trapped and it would be better if he surrendered. General Niazi got angry at this. While speaking English, he switched to Urdu. Hot arguments reached extreme limits, then he came directly to Punjabi and came down on abuse. Although General Jacob did not understand the insults uttered in Punjabi, he understood that Niazi was speaking in a complete huff. Inshallah! We will fight till the last drop of blood. Niazi spoke in two parts. Jacob asked, "How is your boss Tikka Khan? He Was My Student Before Partition". In fact, both of them got a commission in the British Army and fought the Second World War together. As time went by, they fought against each other during the War of 1965 and now Tikka Khan had the complete command of East Pakistan. Referring to his old association, Jacob said that Tikka Khan was called 'Toka Khan' by his old colleagues and 'Takua Khan' by many. Jacob said with a wry smile, Niazi Sahib, even Tikka Khan's pure Punjabi was barely understood by me. Today, even your Punjabi is not up to par, but I want to tell you clearly that you have only half an hour to sign this document. I will come back

in 30 minutes and if you agree to surrender, we will be bound by the Geneva Accords to provide you with all protection and assistance. Yes, if you don't obey, you will be left to your fate. Remember many of your soldiers are living here with their families. If the matter is left to the Mukti Bahni, they will take revenge for the rapes of their daughters and sisters.

Niazi had fallen into the hands of General Jacob's clear warning. After a little fidgeting, he suddenly fell silent. He looked into Jacob's eyes and then started moving the paper-weight on the table. After looking at the roof for a few moments, he gave up. Before his eyes, scenes of brutality shown by Pakistani Punjabi soldiers to Bengalis and their women began to circulate. A shiver ran down his spine. Niazi said that he is ready if the surrender takes place in a closed room. Seeing Niazi getting tired, Jacob spoke in a slightly louder voice, "General Sahib, the place of surrender will only be the Race Course road. Preparations for this ceremony are already complete. I will come again after half an hour. You may get an estimate of your own pros and cons." Jacob came straight down on the threats.

General Jacob, being a soldier, was also feeling sorry for Niazi. He thought at that time,'If I were in Niazi's place, what would be going through my mind?' After half an hour, when Jacob returned, Niazi was sitting very depressed. Half an hour ago he was teasing General Jacob by uttering why I should not put Lahore in a saucer for you! General Jacob was no less. He said he would think about Lahore later, for now I have come to take Dacca.

## EIGHT

For the people of East Pakistan, 16th November 1971 was a day of great fortune when fully discredited General Amir Abdulla Khan Niazi, in a function held in the Race Course ground of Dacca and sitting beside General Jagjit Singh Arora signed the surrender papers. A little earlier, before giving an interview to BBC, Niazi



was showing his arrogance that tanks could pass over his chest but he would never show his back. Meanwhile, Yahya Khan sitting in Rawalpindi was boasting on the radio. He was saying that just because we retreat temporarily on one issue does not mean that we have lost the war. Inshallah! (if God wills) Our army is continuously winning in air, land and sea. We will win the war eventually.

Yahya Khan was still not ready to accept the truth even though Indira Gandhi was speaking on All India Radio that now Dacca has become independent and has become the capital of independent Bangladesh. The activists of Mukti Bahini had raised hell all around. They had scaled the high wall of Pakistan Radio and captured it. There was a turmoil in Dacca. The people had unitedly stood up against the government. Because of the loss of courage, the army men were running in all directions to save their lives. They had never imagined that Niazi, who bragged of scaling the sky, would go down on his knees in front of the Indian Army and would tarnish the history of Pakistan.

After the historic surrender, the Mukti Bahini commandos, fully joyous at their success, carried General Arora on their shoulders and jumped in gaiety. The young Indian soldiers riding on the Pakistani tanks were enjoying by dancing Bhangra. Turbaned Sardars were being hailed and praised. Tears of joy were flowing down Shabegh Singh’s eyes as he stood nearby. The entire media was focused on General Arora or the turbaned soldiers. Without turban, Shabegh Singh appeared only to be merely a part of the general crowd. “Turban has a different identity and glory”, he turned emotional. Shabegh Singh felt envious of General Arora. He thought that the picture of General Arora and General Niazi signing the papers of surrender would become history and he may not even receive a marginal reference. Still the jawans of Mukti Bahini would remember him on the land of Bangladesh as the one who left his foot prints in the snake infested anthills and he was none else than General Shabegh Singh. “General Arora might have signed the pa-

pers but the thumb impression on the hearts of Bengalis was mine. I had myself decided to make a sacrifice of my personal glory." Then reassuring himself he said, "Had his identity not been like that of the Bengali Muslims, the innocent people would not have been fortunate to have their own house. Had there been no Mukti Bahini, there would have been no trace of Bangladesh. In fact, Geneal Shabegh Singh, citing the instances of bravery in the Sikh history, had been encouraging the Mukti Bahini and on hearing him, the tenderfoot boys got prepared to have their head severed. Though the Bengalis were quite expert at home in bursting crude bombs, but they needed courage to explode those.

If there is pain in the heart, the courage and the way to explode bombs could be inculcated willingly. In order to instill the spiri of fighting and carrying your head on your palm, he exhorted the young men of Mukti Bahini "The fear of death does not scare the valiant fighters."

When General Manekshaw reached Dacca, he congratulated the victorious Mukti Bahini and embraced them. When Manekshaw remembered the old days spent with Ayub Khan, he told General Arora, "Yahia Khan bought a red bike from me. He gave half the country instead of what money he had promised to give. He patted the officers and men down to the soldier and gave light blows of affection and thus expressing his boundless joy. Manekshaw recognized Shabegh Singh from a distance as he was surrounded by soldiers, hugged him heartily by saying: "I am proud of you, dear Shabegh." After the accolade received from the Army Chief, Shabegh Singh's body and mind had bloomed boldly. Mujib-ur-Rehman promised to Shabegh that whenever he came to India, he would visit his home to express his gratitude. "There is someone who recognizes me." Shabegh shut his eyes and thanked God. Counseling himself he said, "This is a matter of great satisfaction for those who work behind the scene because of the success of the play. There have been hundreds of thousands of valiant unnamed fighters in the world, who do not find a mention in history.



Shabegh Singh's concentration was broken by the groaning of the Pakistani soldiers. The Mukti Bahini jawans, after the arrests, had started torturing Pakistani soldiers. They were abusing them in Bengali. This was the consequence of the war that started between the Bengali and Urdu speaking people. A Bengali, Mohammad Sidiqui, furious with rage, was telling the soldiers to speak Bengali otherwise he would kill everyone. Shabegh Singh was enjoying the abuse hurled in Bengali. There may be any language, the vocabulary of abuse is the same. When General Arora seated General Niazi and his Begum in the car, the soldiers of Mukti Bahini climbed up the car roof. The Indian army provided the security cover and saved them with great difficulty. Furious boys, calling Niazi a butcher, were demanding his custody. Under the resolution of General Convention, besides providing security to the prisoners, India had to provide them with free medical facilities, food and lodging. In some areas around Dacca, fighting was still going on because the orders of surrender had not yet reached them. When they heard, "You have been surrounded from all sides. Lay down your arms, they felt them caught by a large number of wolves. The Mukti Bahini soldiers caught them here and there and butchered them. The local people got on their dead bodies and jumped. The soldiers, who were caught, were being given heavy blows. Some were spitting on them and giving a vent to their feelings.

After the surrender, the Indian army men, standing in the tanks and open vehicles, were going round Dacca to express their joy. People stopped them on the way here and there and garlanded them. The people of Dacca had spared no effort to welcome the Indian army. Women were raising the veils of their Burqas to get photographed with the Indian army men. Many were obtaining their autographs. Because of being without uniform, Shabegh Singh had missed this public welcome. Still jawans of Mukti Bahini were inviting him to their homes for throwing parties. They considered him the real leader of the fight for freedom. This was the first home or

civil-war of the world after which any army had laid down arms before the adversary publically. In a meeting organized in Dacca, Mohammad Suleimani of Mukti Bahini had especially thanked Shabegh Singh. Speaking on the occasion, Shabegh Singh said, “One who has no home or hearth is not honoured. He thanked Muki Bahni for the honour conferred on him and ended his speech. Own house, yes own home has been provided to the tormented, for which the nation had to be engaged in a long struggle. “The homeless really get no honour anywhere.” This heart-rending thought escaped Shabegh’s mind.

## NINE

Six and a half feet tall Lt.General Amir Abdulla Khan Niazi, whom, during the Second World War, for fighting against the Japanese, the senior officers of the British army called him Tiger, was sitting scared to the bone like a wet cat in a small room in Jabalpur Cantt.

After the formation of Bangladesh, Shahbegh Singh had been promoted from the post of Brigadier to that of Major General. Putting a stamp of approval on his bravery, President V.V. Giri had honoured him with Ati Vashisht Sewa Medal. Shahbegh Singh opened the door patiently and said to General Niazi, “May I come in?”

General Niazi stood up from the chair and said, “Please come in, Shahbeg” and welcomed him with open arms. After formal handshake, General Niazi said mildly, “I am your war prisoner. Please don’t address me as General.”

“Sir, you are my senior and according to the Army decorum it is my duty to respect the rank. Both of us are the British Army recruits and had the country not been freed, I would have worked under your command according to seniority. This is he turn of time that India got divided into two…..”



“Of course, this is the turn of events and today I am at your mercy.” Niazi interrupted General Shahbeg Singh.

Then looking towards the ceiling he said, “When you address me as General, I feel humiliated in my mind. You do not let me read newspaper. It is quite certain that there would be a storm raised against me in Pakistan. When you free me, I am not sure, how would my countrymen treat me?”

Though prisoners of war were not provided with newspapers, still Shabeg Singh kept Niazi informed of the plots being hatched against him from time to time in Pakistan. Hamid-u-Rehman Commission had been appointed against General Niazi to look into the complaints of their misbehavour like rape, etc. with thousands of local women, smuggling of betel leaves and other serious crimes. The Bengalis deserting the army was a major issue to be probed. There were also complaints that the Punjabis living like a family had cut indecent jokes and were pained thereby that they had rebelled. Punjabi officers often scolded their Bengali colleagues and said, "You get the same salary as us, but you don't know about food, drink, living... why don't you understand?" Seeing you eating dal (pulse) and rice with your hands makes you feel bad." The limit was reached when a drunken Lahori officer put off a Bengali Captain's checked lungi in the bar. Such types of bullying the Bengali officers had become a daily task. Due to the dominance of Punjabis in the army, the Bengali soldiers used to live under pressure. Pakistan understood that because of such lapses, the country had been divided and Bangladesh had come into being.

“Who would listen to me when I return home that General Yahia Khan had himself ordered me to surrender? General Tikka Khan had also played an wicked role in this.”

“Doesn’t matter, General. Trust in God. Everything would be all right.” Shabeg Singh tried to console him.

“Yes, my younger brother Beant Singh has especially come from Bajpur to see you.”

"I know why does he want to meet me. Only as how have you encaged a Pakistan panther?" Niazi had been cut to the quick.

Looking at his true Sikh form, Lt. General Arora had appeared before General Niazi's eyes, in front of whom thousands of Pakistani Army men had surrendered.

"Sir, we are from village Khayala near Amritsar. Of course the full name of the village is Khayala Nand Singhwala. Nand Singh was my grandfather who had founded the village. We are from the family of Sardar Mehtab Singh, who alongwith Sukha Singh of Mari Kamboke, had gone to Darbar Sahib and severed the head of Massa Rangar with his javelin. The history of a century reappeared before his eyes. After a little pause, he said, "My farm house is near Ichhogil, a few miles away from your village."

"I do remember, during the 1965 war, our forces had reached the Ichhogil canal. After the possession, whatever came handy was looted by the people of Amritsar, So much so that they even untied the chains of cows and buffaloes tethered to their pegs. But people of our area were bewitched by the fragrance of your Basmati and they had brought bagful of seed. Even today the Basmati of Khayala and its surroundings is famous in the world. The commission agents pay for the standing crop."

Though Beant Singh was talking of Basmati, this had revived the wounds of 1965 war. Instead of getting tormented any more, Niazi tried to divert attention and talked in a lighter vein.

"Beant Singh, you Jats are very clever. How have you divided Pakistan? You did not get your own home till today, but you have proved two hearths to us. This would not have been possible without the Sikhs."

Though General Niazi was very vocal while jesting, which appeared from his injured state of mind, but Shabegh Singh respected his rank did not take such a liberty. He said, "You are a Lt.General and I just got promotion as a Major General and that there should be no lapse in showing hospitality to the guest as that is my moral duty."



Hearing "Guest?" and words like "Lt. General", General Niazi turned more serious. During the Court Martial in the British Army, the spectacle of a junior officer tearing off the uniform and removing the badge appeared before his eyes.

General Niazi was to be handed over to Pakistan along with other soldiers under the Shimla Pact and Shabeg Singh was feeling pity again and again. In order to take him out of the pitiable lot, Shabeg Singh said to his brother, "Like you, General Niazi is also a great admirer of Warris Shah."

As soon as he said this, General Niazi said jocularly, "Now we will have to make do by singing Heer only. We won't get a uniform on reaching the country." Then he got ecstatic and related a line from Heer:

Waris those who smeared scent bottles, have no need of army ranks.

General Niazi had begun to sing Heer while in his village Ballo-Khail (Mianwali) and he had gone with his mate Mushtaq to the place of birth of Waris Shah, Jandiala Sher Khan to participate in a poetic symposium. When Allah Mia Khan read out a line from Heer –

Though Lahore looked like a bow
The beauty was high and unrivaled
Line of collyrium was enchanting
Cuttak of Punjab marched on India

This was sung by keeping hand on the ear which intoxicated the entire ceration. Niazi had become a true devotee of Waris Shah. In the family functions of the Regiment, he used to sing Heer tunefully to the delight of the listeners. This art of Niazi had won the heart of Gulbarg's Syed Bukhari and Shamili Begum of Sialkot. The army colleagues of Niazi often joked with him, "Though Waris Shah got nothing after writing Heer, singing his lines had made many Heers to elope. Beant Singh, admiring the high toned voice of General Niazi, asked him to sing more lines of Waris Shah.

You are like my younger brothers. Therefore I would fulfill your desire. Now listen to a few lines about the Jatts.

Beard of Sheikhs, scythe of butchers
Sitting in the village council meeting
Warris Shah all these Jatas are thugs
Really they are thugs of the Chenab

Niazi sang the lines of Heer so as to lodge a mild complaint about the defeat at the hands of Mukti Bahini in East Pakistan.

He repeated the line "Jatas are thugs" as if scratching the core of his heart which had brought a strange intoxication on Niazi's face.

"General Niazi, you have not laid your arms before a Jatt but Jagjit Singh Arora, who belongs to a Khatri community."General Shahbeg Singh smiled and responded:

"In fact, Cheemas, Randhawas and Sandhus are on your side also in good number" said Beant Singh humorously.

"For us, those wearing turbans and having flowing beards are all Jatts – chips of the same block."

"Have you not read Qazi Noor Mohammad's comments about the Sikhs, sir?" Shahbeg's brother seemed to have got irked about the terse comment about the Jatts.

"You have the liberty to tell us, my younger brother and feel happy. A prisoner of war has to eat whatever is served and has to listen to whatever is told also." The pain of defeat was still there in Niazi's words that were coming to his lips again and again. Taking strong objection to the derisive comments about the Sikhs by the Mughal raiders, "Don't call them dogs, because they are lions. How can the valiant fighter be a dog who fights courageously in the battle field roaring like a lion. They will teach you such a lesson of fighting in battle to the applause of everybody. They never kill a coward and do not stop the fleeing one. They are not debauches nor take to larceny. …"

"That's all now. It is time for the General's relaxation."



Shabegh interrupted his younger brother. He knew how a defeated soldier, and he, who had been awarded Military cross, during the British rule and after the creation of Pakistan, had been awarded "Hilal-e-Jur'at" would feel in his swollen heart. A soldier is well aware of the pain of another soldier.

Agile like a panther, General Niazi had been playing with fire throughout. Even at the age of fifty five, he had the zeal of a new recruit. He had himself asked for the posting in East Pakistan while the officers claiming to be far superior had made some lame excuse to get rid of the dangerous turn. He was fond of playing with fire. He knew that Bengali officers could revolt in East Pakistan and they had the full support of the Indian army. After Qaid-e-Azam, he wanted to bring out his name in letters of gold in history. Bragging with the fellow generals, Niazi used to claim that he would do away the distance of thousands of miles between East and West Pakistan in a few days' time. While assuming airs, he used to say, "India's dream of capturing Dacca can be fulfilled only after my death." Indulging in high bragging he had also said that he would go across the Hooghly and the Ganges and capture Delhi and link the East Punjab with the West Punjab. Niazi's companions used to make fun of him calling this "Niazi corridor theory".

Niazi belonged to a village of thick Hindu population in District Mianwali and he had grown up playing with the boys of Lalas (Hindu businessmen). Still it was not understood why he hated the words Hindu or Hindustan. After the bloodshed during the partition, he had begun to hate the Sikhs also. He had been turned a bigot after the bloodshed between the Sikhs and the Muslims. This hatred increased manifold after the formation of Bangladesh. But today, after meeting Shabegh Singh, he felt hatred and love for the Sikhs evoking within him. When Shabegh Singh told his brother, "Lets go. It is time for the General to relax", Niazi felt like talking to his heart's content. He had begun to like the respect shown to him by both the brothers. It was perhaps because after returning to his

country, he had had to become the object of his hatred for rest of his life. Those days had gone when the soldiers returned from war and people, standing on both sides of the roads, welcomed them and hailed their victory. Niazi said to Shabegh's brother, "Alas, there is no one capable of rendering any service".

"Why do you think like this, Sir? You are our guest. Order us for any service."

"Not guest, but prisoner of war," said Niazi looking into Beant Singh's eyes and smiled.

"Sir, besides President Yahya Khan and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, your senior officers had deceived you." General Shahbeg's words were full of sympathy.

General Niazi's eyes turned red with anger. He said in nervousness that when we were fighting the last war in Dacca, Yahya Khan was enjoying with his with his Bengali friend Shamim and others in his newly built bungalow. General Shahbeg, if Yahya Khan had not entangled in wine and women, East Pakistan would not have been lost from our hands. It was our first military dictator Ayub Khan who ignored the seniority of three Generals and made a drunkard Yahya the head of the army. After eight o'clock in the evening, he used to drink a full bottle of alcohol. Ayyub was superstitious that an incompetent army chief like Yahya would never pose a threat to him. Ayub was aware of this lunar habit of his General. That is why he had verbally ordered the officers that before executing any order received by General Yahia Khan after eight o'clock in the evening, he must be cross-checked the next morning. General Shahbeg Singh If I get a chance, I will reach home and expose one and all. Before the Inquiry Commission, I will clearly say that if America has debauchery President like Yahya, he too cannot win any war. Brigadier level officers used to arrange women for him. One can't count his concubines. Yahia Khan's very near & dear Akhleem Akhtar had caught red-handed the Singing Empress Noor Jahan while she was privately enjoying with



him. Akhleem was called 'General Queen' by all. Even the common people got big positions at her beckoning. One day, intoxicated Yahia ordered an army officer in the midnight to bring a cassette of Noor Jahan's new song 'Meri Chichi Da Chhalla Mahi Lah Lia, Ghar Ja Ke Shikayat Karangi'. The concerned officer got opened the shop by picking up the shopkeeper from his house. If there are such leaders, then only God is the guardian of the country, General Shahbeg Singh, you don't know, Shamim was famous in the military circles as the "Black Pearl" who was also made the ambassador of Austria by Yahya Khan. When Shamim was sitting on Yahya's lap, your army crossed the river Meghna and reached Dacca.

"I know everything. You are right. Yahya Khan and Tikka Khan were not even like the feet of your generals. Our generals were busy pulling each other's legs while your army thought of nothing but war. General Shahbeg you will remember how bravely our army repulsed the surprise attack of the Mukti Bahini on the Kamalpur outpost." General Niazi said firmly.

I remember General Niazi. I myself was leading the Mukti Bahini at that time. Your young Captain was fighting every attack head-on like a fire-ball.

"Shahbeg ji, he was Captain Ehsan Malik of the Baloch Regiment, about whose bravery General Manekshaw wrote to the Government and recommended to give him a Gallantry Award. This is professionalism," General Niazi praised his army with a broad chest.

"Yes, I remember that on the recommendation of General Manekshaw, Pakistan Govt. conferred Captain Malik the title of 'Sitara-e-Jurat' (i.e. Bold Star). It is our tradition to praise the enemy even if he shows bravery." General Shabeg Singh said proudly.

"Our Generals were busy in beating me, due to which the game got worse." Remembering the defeat in the war, General Niazi thought. Your General Jacob did not do less with me. He had blatantly misled me that we were surrounded on all four sides and there was no other option but surrender. I later came to know that

he was a Jew who was carrying out an age-old enmity against Muslims. “I know all this. You are right. If I had been given more arms and ammunition and reinforcement, history would have been quite different. The history of brave nations is not written with pen but by guns. Mr. Bhutto did not want Mujib-u-Rehman’s government to be frmed. Finding the game slipping out of his hand, Bhutto had even proposed that there should be two Prime Ministers, one in the East and the other in the West Pakistan to which he would have no objection. …but one of my fellow Generals did not want me to win. Had I won, it would have been compulsion to appoint me the Army Chief.” Niazi heaved a deep sigh and shared his pain

“If Pt. Nehru had shown due respect to Quid-e-Azam, India would not have been divided. Nehru feared that Jinnah should not stake his claim to the Prime-Ministership. Therefore, a separate country suited him. People are simple minded but a politician, to serve his own interests, tries to separate water with a stick.” General Niazi was talking from the core of his heart.

“Of course, General Niazi, if India had not been divided in 1947, who would have thought of the separate existence of Bangladesh?” Shabeg Singh submitted humbly.

“But General Shabegh, if Russia had not helped the Bengalis and China had stood by us, you can think of the consequences. Indira Gandhi paid stormy visits to foreign countries, gathered sympathy and support for Bengalis while Bhutto had torn the copy of the agenda in the United Nations, thus turned even the friends into enemies and got his country into pieces.”

“Sometimes one language entwines different communities into the same thread and sometimes it severes the blood relationship with the fellow devotees of the same faith. Pakistan was created in the name of religion but the Bengali Muslims preferred their language. They wanted from the very beginning that instead of Urdu, Bengali should be the national language of Pakistsan. Bengali



Hindus would have zealously claimed this. But I fail to understand from where the Sardars have sprung up? General Shabegh Singh, the Sikhs following the Hindus, unnecessarily nurtured enmity with Muslims.”

“On the other hand, despite the common language, the Punjab was divided into many parts. This division took place because of the religious division. Water is life but if there is a flood, the same water causes havoc.”

“What has been the fate of your Punjab? Why had your Akalis asked for a separate province? How vast was the Punjab? What did Sikhs gain by having Punjabi Suba, which I call a Subi? It is all a game of chess, nothing else. The boundaries of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign touched Kabul-Qandhar and what have the Sikhs got today?”

Having been born and brought up in the common Punjab, General Niazi was fully conversant with the geographical and physical features of this land.

The Punjabis have divided rivers, thank God, not the Sky,, the Sun, the Moon and the stars.

“More dangerous than this is the division of your Army. If the hedge begins to devour the farm, only God save the country! You are not aware that your fellow Generals, in order to defame you, have written many books.”

“I know everything about those people, Genral Shahbeg. One can be Major General Farman Ali, who, dancing to the tune of our senior politicians, had joined the plots for making Bangladesh a reality. I have got solid proof that he was providing secrets to your Commander-in-Chief, General Manekshaw. The other can be Major General Shaukat Raza, whom, because of his cowardice in high position, I had dismissed him from the Divisional Command. There may be many others too nurturing grievance against me. Let me reach Pakistan; I will deal with them, one by one.

## TEN

General Niazi sat behind the window of a room in his flat and kept gazing outside. He felt irked at the barbed wire fixed on all sides. Observing the Indian soldiers moving around day and night, many types of thoughts worked in his mind. He thought as what was the need of such a strict vigil ? Had there been a way to escape, what was the need to surrender? Still observing the soldiers moving around, he felt life throbbing. But today, construction of a wall around Niazi's flat had begun suddenly, which made him furious. Thus enraged Niazi said to the sentry standing outside that he should call General Shabegh immediately.

"I do realize your annoyance, Niazi sir. I value your feelings. But this wall is being constructed for your security." Shabegh told him before Niazi could say anything.

Niazi asked in surprise, "My security?"

"Yes, General. Two Pakistanis were held in the Cantt. area yesterday. They had come here to attack you." As soon as the reason for the construction of the wall was disclosed, Niazi got absolutely annoyed.

"This must be a conspiracy hatched by Bhutto, General Tikka Khan or General Yahya Khan. They are afraid that as soon as I reach Pakistan, they can be exposed. Certainly the plot to divide Pakistan was hatched by General Yahya Khan in Bhutto's native place, Larkana.

"General Shahbeg, who knows more than you that despite having a very small army, rather insignificant, we fought like lions with empty bellies. Our soldiers chased you upto the border with India many a time. Would that I had the permission to cross over the Indian border and we would not have been spending our days here like prisoners of war. We would have attained martyrdom or changed the map of Asia. Your soldiers, with the help of Bengali people, buried alive our soldiers near the positions they had taken. Still our morale was high. But with the evil designs of those like



General Yahya Khan, Bhutto and General Tikka Khan, our hands and feet were tied in the army discipline. What can one do when shackled in fetters? I have a grouse against your General Jacob who had misled me to surrender. Afterwards, showing his cunning design, he had revealed to the media how he had won over Niazi by sweet talk and made him agree to surrender. He had himself admitted that if Pakistan army had fought for a few days more, history would have been different.

"Yes, General Niazi, you got defeated because destiny and circumstsances were not in your favour." General Shabegh Singh was trying to apply ointment to panther's wounds. But the wounds were deepening with medication.

After heaving a long and deep sigh, Niazi, telling him about his background, said that his ancestors were the Pathans of Afghanistan, who had come from Ghazni and Qandhar areas and settled in India-Pakistan. But Niazi Pathans were mostly in Mianwali District which is spread on both sides of the river Indus. Then he widened his chest and said "The Pathans have always been looking eye to eye with death. The question of surrender does not arise, if there were not orders from above. I was told that if we did not surrender, India would capture West Pakistan."

"History bears witness, Geneal Shahbeg, that the Niazi Pathans never bowed before the enemy. If you find some different in my word and deed, go into the blood stained history. Babar had himself written that before invading India, he used to himself supervise the arrangements for the army passing through Niazi territory. I tested ammunition myself. Even today Niazis are well known in the world for friendship and enmity. Sher Shah Suri's best General was a Niazi. I mean to say that most of the Brigadiers and Generals of the Army were of Niazi descent.

"…..Or Sikhs," said General Shahbeg Singh with pride. He even wanted to say as to how Hari Singh Nalva had captured Khaibar pass and closed the way of invaders and taught a lesson to the

Pathans. His name figures above the founder of the Mughal dynasty, Chengiz Khan. Both had a unique war strategy and no such instance is found in history. In order to silence their children, Afghan mothers mentioned Nalva's name to scare them. For the sake of decorum, he hesitated from gleaning more pages of history.

"My grandfather was a great admirer of the Sikhs. He used to say that there was not much of a difference between the Sikhs and the Pathans. Both fight for their faith risking their life. They were true to their word but they entangle themselves in strife for no reason."

Hearing the praise of his community from General Niazi's mouth, General Shabegh had gone deep down in the ocean of thoughts.

"What is the matter, General Shahbeg? I feel as if you are hiding something from me."

General Niazi leaned towards General Shahbeg and asked.

"There is nothing, General Niazi. If I reveal the cause of my sadness, you will be unhappy."

"No, I will not, General Shahbeg. You can say without hesitation."

"I have full sympathy with you and it appears to me that your release is going to be very soon. We will part in a way not to meet again ever. When streams and rivers part with, they seldom meet again.

"Is this the only thing or there is something more to it?"

"I am not very much enthused about release. But I do not know about the conditions in which my soldiers, imprisoned in Meerut Cantt, would be living, poor ones? Of course you have kept me with all the love and affection and I will always remember this even after returning to my country.

The eyes of both of them had got tearful. After keeping quiet for some time, Shabeg Singh turned emotional.

"General Niazi, as your seniors deceived you, there is no difference here also. You fought valiantly. There are no two opinions about this. What have I not done for my country too? After cutting my hair, I got into the garb of a Muslim or a Bengali Hindu. For intelligence, I moved about in rickshaws and probed every nook and corner of East Pakistan. What did I get? Being an army officer, I have always been sympathetic to you. Only an army man can have an idea of the psyche of a army man. Had luck disfavoured me, I would have been killed or had been your prisoner of war."

"Had you been our prisoner of war, we would not have treated you like a guest in this way," said General Niazi with a smile.

"Although you are saying in the lighter vein, but I know what would have been our fate? Of course, it is the foremost duty of every army man to die for the country. Otherwise the army men do not have personal enmity with anyone. Why are they cared for like a son-in-law?" General Shabeg Singh said getting serious about the uniform.

"Not like a son-in-law but like a sacrificial goat. An army man believes as to the imminent day of Bakr-id." General Niazi said combing his hair with his fingers.

"You have not yet told me the real story as to why a daredevil soldier like you is still nurturing the pain of an infliction caused to you?" General Niazi fired another question.

"Unnecessary investigations on flimsy grounds are being made against me also. It seems yours and mine fate have been made by God as one. What you are going to face on return to Pakistan, its trailer can be seen from the enquiries being conducted against me. There are many like General Tikka Khan in India also. I do not want to bore you with greater details. I only want to tell you that while taking over charge as a Brigadier, I had sent to the headquarters the details of the unfair expenses incurred because of which he had to repay the amount and get humiliated. Being senior to me, today he is a Lt. General and without any solid reason, he has made false allegations of selling canteen wine and after the formation of

Bangladesh, carrying with me some goods. Everyone in the world knows that I do not drink. I wish to suck the blood of such a corrupt general. Government said nothing to that corrupt officer, who had been driving about here in your Mercedes. But the entire wrath has fallen on me."

"I fail to understand in which century the Sikhs would talk sense? You remain unaware of the serpents lying in your lap." Niazi struck once again the iron on the anvil.

## ELEVEN

Niazi had been wonder-struck seeing Genral Shahbeg Singh in turban.

"In my introductory meeting, I had misunderstood that you were my co-religionist….." Before Niazi could complete his sentence, Shahbeg Singh said, "Even today I consider you my religionist. As regards enquiries, you know we are sailing in the same boat. As regards the first point that there is no difference in the disposition of the Sikhs and the Pathans, as you have said before – the woman abducted may have been of any Nathumal, they burn their own tail." Both Generals had a hearty laugh.

"Just have a look at newspaper clippings, General, giving details of enquiries being conducted against you by Pakistan Government. You will know after reading that in this matter both of us are really co-religionists and sailing in the same boat.

"I too feel that when I return to Pakistan, my government would dismiss me. Your government is also honing the knives to slaughter you."

"Yes, General Niazi. The only difference is that the boat would be changed. Your boat would be jostling near the Chenab and mine, in the Beas." Silence prevailed between the two Generals for some time.

"A Jattt and a camel never give up boisterous behavior. If we can divide Pakistan, we will see how can India remain integrated?" Shabeg Singh was absolutely vexed.



"I too would not go on suffering atrocities silently. I am a Pathan soldier. I shall fight unto the last. Let my government do whatever it wants but I am proud of my Pathan brethren. They would be fair to me. They know that a Niazi head can be severed but not bowed. They would never believe that it was my own decision to surrender. If God wills, Bhuto would get a punishment, which would be remembered by the world. In the roots of trees, when serpents make their anthill, even the birds do not make a nest on those trees. Certainly, Pathan brethren would be waiting for me." Saying this Niazi winked his eyes quickly.

"You have rightly said, General Niazi, if a soldier turns rebellious, he is like an atom bomb. By dismissing Kapur Singh, ICS, they have already had a taste. If a community has been tagged as "Criminal", where was the time for fairness. Kapur Singh was a highly learned person with penmanship of highest order. His writings exposed the Indian psyche. I am a soldier, who cuts jokes with death, a Jatt, I will write this history with a gun, which would be remembered by the coming generations." Shahbeh Singh heaved a long breath and got up to rise, when Niazi shook hands with him and said "Khuda Hafiz".

## TWELVE

General Shabeg Singh, completely disillusioned with the rulers, reached Coonoor, a beautiful town in the Nilgiris district surrounded by lush valleys and mountains near Ooty (Tamil Nadu). The smell coming from the tea gardens took away all the fatigue of the journey. When he reached the luxurious bungalow in Coonoor, Field Marshal Sam Manakshah welcomed him with open arms.

"Welcome my dear General Shabeg Singh. There was no problem in reaching here?" Manakshah said expressing his love.

"No sir, after landing in Coimbatore, the taxi driver did not let me know when he reached Coonoor. I have never seen such scenic beauty anywhere in India."

"Let us sit in the lawn." Manakshah motioned him to sit on a chair. The warm sunshine and the enchanting shadows of the trees were presenting a unique sight.

"Shabeg, if you had been drinking wine, the evening here would have been more beautiful." Manakshah quipped.

Sir, I find the feeling of 'Naam Khumari Nanka Charhi Rahe Din Raat' more delightful, Shabeg Singh's cheeks blushed while saying this.

"Now tell me, General Shabeg Singh, how did you come to meet me after so long?"

"Sir I heartily used to meet your good-self every day but distance is too much. Anyway, one should not be far from the heart." Shabeg Singh said, placing his right hand on his heart.

"I also wanted to meet you very much. Where do you find loving and loyal companions like you these days, with whom one can talk from the heart."

"Well said sir. Without you, I can't share my inner feelings and emotions with anyone else."

"General Shabeg Singh..." these words were in the mouth of Manakshah that Shabeg Singh said,“Sir, it is not right to call a dismissed soldier as General.

"I am deeply saddened that the government sacked a combative General like you. The world believes that without your strategy and courage, the war of terror could not have been won. I tried hard to explain to the Prime Minister too, but it did not reach her ears. I don't know why the great soldiers were maltreated like you." Manakshah expressed sympathy with Shabeg Singh by touching his eyebrows and mustache.

"Sir, what has been badly done to the best soldier in the world like you? On the one hand you were awarded the post of Field Marshal and on the other hand you were deprived of all the facilities. Why is minority treated like this? Shabeg Singh's words were full of bitterness.



General Manakshah smiled and said, "You know I am a braggart and when I start telling the truth, I don't look ahead." A frail lady journalist came to me for an interview. She recalled before me that at the time of partition Muhammad Ali Jinnah had himself told me to stay in Pakistan. Like most Parsis, I declined Jinha's offer, preferring to stay in India. The journalist girl asked the question - If you were in the Pakistan army, then who would have won the war of 1971? I replied in a lighter mood 'Pakistan'. Apart from other things, the journalist exaggerated my these words spoken just in jest, which made Mrs. Indira and the Defense Minister angry with me. I didn't care either.

"Sir, although you said it jokingly, but I tell you seriously that if you were the army chief of Pakistan, the war could not have been won. If General Kaul were to coordinate with the Navy and Air Force chiefs, the flip side would have been reversed. I am not saying this for the flattery of you, Sir. It is absolutely clear that the Navy's Operation Trident could not have been successful without your guidance. If the submarines and ships of Indian Navy did not blow the Karachi port, what would people like me have done? The Air Force also did a great job. The credit of coordination with everyone goes to you." Shabeg Singh, who usually speaks in a measured tone, was not going to stop today. During the conversation of the two Generals, various scenes of the 1971 war were being repeated. After hearing his praise, Manakshah got into jovial mood.

“Shabeg Singh ji, apart from all this, the debauchery of Pakistani Generals also gave us an advantage. When our army was fighting head to head, the Generals of Pakistan were drowning in wine & women, due to which we won the war in thirteen days.

Manakshah suddenly remembered something, then he jumped up and down sitting on the chair. “General Shabeg Singh one day Mrs. Gandhi called me to the office. She did not speak for five minutes. Breaking the silence, I asked why you are silent, then she told me in a fit of anger that you are the reason. I asked in surprise,

'Me'! He said, 'Yes'. Then Mrs. Indira started saying that everyone has told her that you are plotting to overthrow me. Hearing this, I stood up and asked, are you sure that I can do this? She replied in the negative. I explained to Mrs. Gandhi that the first thing is that this is not the Pakistan of which Pandit Nehru used to say that we do not change the clothes so much as the rulers are being changed there. Secondly, we are Parsi people with loyalty in our blood. We never make holes in the plate in which we eat. I spoke a little irritated and Mrs. Indira got upset.

"Sir Mrs. Gandhi is credulous. She likes only the flatterers.

"You are right Shabeg Singh. If it was not so, she would not have treated us like this." Manekshaw said with a cold sigh.

"Actually, the rank of field marshal cannot be taken away, that's why she called you for a clarification. If you were in my place, the dismissal letter would have reached home." Shabeg Singh said.

"When I was the head of the Eastern Command, I fell out with Defense Minister Krishna Menon. An inquiry committee of three generals was constituted against me. I was acquitted of all charges. If Menon's orders had been complied, I would have been at home before you."

"If you had sat at home, then Bangladesh war would never have won." After a short pause, Shabeg Singh spoke again, "Sir rightly said that Pakistan was defeated only due to the debauchery of its Generals. Tikka Khan's condition was like that of Nero who was playing the flute even after seeing Rome burning. And in India there were true Generals of character like you", said Shabeg looking into Manekshaw's eyes.

Manekashaw repeated the old saying, "When I was ordered to immediately attack East Pakistan, I had already made it clear that I fight only to win the war, not to lose it." Then Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram also urged me to understand the crunch of time but I stuck to my stand. Later I had a one to one talk with Indiraji,



I again said that the weather is not favorable for war. Our guns and tanks require major repairs and anyway there will be a danger of getting stuck in the swamp during the rainy season. Mrs. Indira got upset because she was not used to hearing 'no'. I used to be a little open with her. I said, Madam Prime Minister, I know that people with long and sharp noses are famous for obstinacy and my nose is even longer and sharper than yours. Instead of getting angry, Mrs. Indira started laughing.

"Sir, it was because of your courage that Indira went on the back-foot, otherwise the big ones would have knelt before her." The stubborn lady is one to pick up a hammer even to kill a fly, she doesn't listen to anyone. Her ego-inflating 'spoons' had taken up big positions despite being unfit. Even at home, she used to dictate everyone. That is why she started living in Delhi with her two sons and Feroze Gandhi remained in Lucknow. Being a traditional mother-in-law, she even showed Maneka the way out of the house. Sir, you are the first person who dictated his terms to wage war with Pakistan. That's why everybody holds you in high esteem." Shabeg Singh was building bridges of Manekshaw's compliments and was lashing out at Indira Gandhi's arbitrariness.

"This is sad part of an iron lady... Ok General Shabeg Singh you freshen up before dinner."

Saying "Ok sir" Shabeg Singh went to the bedroom.

After talking to Manekshaw, Shabeg Singh's heart seemed to have softened considerably. He started to make a plan which was to give a sharp turn to the history once again.

## THIRTEEN

"Is it not my personal grouse which I wish to turn into a national conflict?" A question arose in Shabeg Singh's mind like a windstorm.

-What would my colleagues think that a General who could practice sword- battle in a big conflagration, has deviated to a devious path?

-Not devious but difficult. Who has shown me this path? Are my own companions not responsible for this? Has anyone come to my help? Did anyone protest against my unfair dismissal? Repeatedly requested the Defence Minister's son not to be unfair to me. There is hardly any example that a war hero been treated in such an undignified manner anywhere in the world. Why a General, who has been honoured by the Rashtrapati with Ati Vishisht Sewa Medal is publically humiliated? Becaue I had again tied a turban on my head ? While I was giving light to my nephew's pier, my junior came to hand me dismissal letter. Shame! This is the reward given by the Indian Government for my patriotism. I will burn down the entire country.

-No. no. You should wreak vengeance against those only who have dealt with you in an evil manner. What is the fault of the entire country? Shahbeg again took up soliloquy.

-This country had given promotion up to the rank of Major General. Shahbeg Singh was ambling and consoling himself and then succeeded in bowing before His Will. After some time he felt a sensation and he said to himself that he would certainly take revenge for this humiliation. Weevil does get ground with grain.

Shahbeg had got annoyed when Akali Dal had launched a Morcha (agitation) – "What do these duffers know as to what is a Morcha (Bunker)? Had Sant Longwal been with me in Bangladesh, I would told him what is a Morcha after all? If the trench is not pucca, it becomes the grave of the living soldier. How the Pakis had done rapes and ravages in Dacca University. They had undressed grown up girls and burnt their dresses. These bastards did so that no time was wasted in committing mass rape with ease. In fact they wanted the genocide of Bengalis. This is what happens to weak morchas. Mukti Bahini had paid back with deafening explosive.

-There is no place for anything raw or unworthy. Could Bangladesh had been formed with make believe bullets? Sohini had drowned mid-stream because of the earthen pitcher. Who could make the Akalis understand that the morchas should be firm, like the cast iron. And if sand bags are stacked outside, the enemy is made to lick dust.

-It seems Sant Bhindrawala has got a spark. Only the fuselage has to be ignited. If the Sant agreed with me, I will challenge the corrupt Generals to come forward and confront Shahbeg Singh, nay General Shahbeg Singh. I am the General in the Army and the Sant is the General of the nation. Parents have given him the name of Jarnail Singh. Pakistan is already waiting to take revenge of 1971 – just a pointer is needed. High hospitality was not shown to General Niazi for nothing.

-But what would the history say that Shabeg Singh was the one who had played the pivotal role and today he would seek help for dividing his own country. My country? Own country never metes out step-motherly treatment. General Niazi, sitting in Pakistan would think aright that the Sikhs can think sensibly after the passage of long time.

-Doesn't matter, history might forgive me for my doing so. But I should not change my resolve. I will disclose that in the formation of Bangladesh, mere uniform was not the wonder. In fact without this, the Sikhs could fight better, that too without salaries - only Gurus' blessings are required.

-I should not think like this. Guru's house where devotional singing is performed all the quarters of the day, should not be made the battle arena.

-Why? .Why not. Every means adopted to protect Guru's house is fair. Everything is fair in love and war.

-It was becoming very difficult for Shahbeg Singh to control the wandering in his mind. Talking to himself, he came out of the Guest House Serai of the Shromani Committee and moved towards Harmandar Sahib so as to pay adulation at Gurui's House and bridle the wild horse. Though he had been to Darbar Sahib umpteen num-

ber of times but today he was observing surroundings of Darbr Sahib from a different angle.

…Oh! the wide vestibules of Darbar Sahib have no door. It is so very dangerous from the security point of view.

Then it came to his mind that Guru Ram Das had built open vestibules so that the people from all classes of socity (four varnas) can pay adulation without any distinction of caste.

-Of course, Guruji did not know that enemies too could come from all the four directions. Had there been a proper fortification, Abdali and those of his ilk could not have come near here.

-No, the blessed souls fully absorbed in meditation do not think of these things that anyone is looking at them with an evil eye, Shabeg Singh mumbled. They had made it the center of meditation and not a fort. Such souls are fearless and not ill-disposed towards any one. They are free of malice and pure. History bears witness that whosoever looked this side with evil design, got decimated.

-After Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom, there came about a new turning in history. Amritsar became the pivot of devotion and power. Baba Nanak too had challenged the Lodhis wither a sharper pen than the sword. In his sixth incarnation, had Nanak not turned his followers into saint-soldiers? Why had Guru's forces clashed with the contingents of Mukhlis Khan near Gumtala. Only for catching hold of the falcon (Baaz)? No, not it was not the battle for the falcon but for the crown.

Someone had incited Mukhlis Khan that – "Today the Sikhs have caught your falcon, tomorrow they would grab your crown also. The Mughals had regarded this great challenge (to their authority). Had Mukhlis Khan not been killed, he would have attacked the Guru with his army on te charge of catching hold of the falcon.

-Shahbeg Singh, if Darbar Sahib is not properly fortified, not only the Indian Army but even Punjab Police would enter and arrest us. What will happen to our community? Akal Takhat's sanctity is not polluted by weapons. Rather weapons have been worshipped here. Followed? The Sixth Guru used to exhort the congregation that if they wanted to be given some presents to him, they should be horses and weapons. Guru Sahib had sent the greatest scholar of his time, Bhai Gurdas, to Kabul to buy horses.



After the turmoil in his mind for many days and nights, Shahbeg Singh succeeded in consoling himself that if they had to fight against the government, they would be justified to wield all types of weapons. Guru Gobind Singh had also said in the Zafarnama (Letter of Victory):

When all means have been tried and failed
It is quite fair to hold the sword ultimately

He thought that by building Lohgarh, Guruji had taken the first step towards fortification of the city. How grand the sardars, in their best, riding the galloping horses would have looked at that time. His eyes got shut imagining the magic spectacle.

Does not matter. If Guruji had not provided doors on the porches so that there was no hindrance for any visitors or any one wanting to go out, let the army also come. One gets the benediction of the type as is the intent of the visitor. Cut them short, the bastards. I have made use of weapons like toys throughout my life.

## FOURTEEN

While doing circumambulation of Hardmandar Sahib, General Shahbeg Singh scrutinized every position from security angle. Around the Darbar Sahib, Guru Bazar, Papranwala Bazar, Katra Ahluwalia, Gali Baghwali and Chowk Prag Dass and Baba Sahib. Upon all the tall buildings, CRPF had earmarked strategic points.

After doing the round, Shahbeg Singh sat down cross-legged in front of Akal Takhat to listen to the ballads sung by the Dhadi Jatha. He was confident that after the creation of Bangladesh, the flatterers, who called Indira Gandhi, Goddess Durga, could instigate her to attack Darbar Sahib. His old colleague had given him an inkling that a model of Darbar Shaib had been built at Chakrata

and army was being trained there. Being an ex-serviceman, he was thinking of the severe fighting between the two armies because of which his concentration was being disturbed. He questioned himself, "Would the Guru's endeared army be able to confront the mighty Indian army?" At the time of talking to self, two squirrels were grappling there with each other.

He had never imagined that the army of our own country could march on the religious places to crush their own people. Compared to the army, the Sikhs had meager weapons but were ready to lay down their lives. Then to reassure himself, he thought that because of their determination and bravery, the Sikhs had been fighting unequal battles and creating unique history. Mercenaries would not be able to stand against the valiant fighters, ever true to their word and deed. And if they withstood for twenty days, there would be a new record of the twentieth century as to how a handful of Sikhs confronted the largest army of the world. The History of Saragarhi bears witness to this. In fact, the foundation of the Sikh community is laid on martyrdoms.

Meanwhile the words of the ballad singers attracted his attention. The bards began to recollect the supreme sacrifices made by the Singhs- devout Sikh men and women- When the bards beat the twin drums held in their hands, Shahbeg Singh's blood began to circulate rapidly in his veins. Before singing the ballads of the valiant fighters of the eighteenth century the singers remembered the great souls who had conceived the sketch map of Harmandar Sahib. Singing the praise of the geographical features of the great city, the chief bard said in order to give a crushing reply to the foreign invaders, the Gurus had made this holy city a centre of devotion and power. When the entire country was in a deep slumber, the valiant fighters, defying death, took a sip of water of the holy tank out of the cupped hand and confronted the enemy like lions. That is why the foreign invaders had tried to fill the holy tank, the source of power. Those who came to Amritsar with the evil design of demolishing Harmandar Sahib, got decimated themselves. "Mannu is our scythe, and we are Mannu's fodder. As we are cut, we increased two-fold or more." The brave community flourished. Just imagine, Khalsa Ji, just in the center of the old Punjab "Guru Ka Chak" was founded. Such a power was dissolved in its holy tank that after having a dip into it and listening to the divine words, one got free of the cycle of birth and death. Guruji has said:

"I do not frighten anyone,
nor do I fear anyone"
"Death cannot frighten the Khalsa.
"And death cannot deviate him"

This expression had reassured Shahbeg Singh somewhat. It appeared to him as if the bards had read his mind and gleaning through the golden pages of Sikh history.

"Dear Khalsa, recalling the atrocities committed by Zakria Khan, the hair stand at ends. This dark night of cruelty was very long – seventeen hundred thirty four to seventeen hundred forty five. Zakria Khan had resolved to decimate the Sikhs totally. O dear devotees, bring to mind the martyrdom of Baba Bota Siongh and Baba Garja Singh, who after taking bath in the Amrit Sarovar – the holy tank – in order to declare the throbbing existence of the Sikhs, had set up a post in village Noor Din and started collecting tax. Baba Bota Singh wrote down a note for Zakria Khan and sent it to Lahore through a traveler. A poet has written –

Bota writes the letter holding a stick
On the way he has set up an octroi post
Anna for bullockcart and one paisa for an ass

Zakria Khan had turned furious after reading the letter. He sent a contingent of a hundred armed men to the octroi post. In the hand to hand fight, before attaining martyrdom, both the Singhs killed thirty Mughal soldiers. This had dealt a heavy blow on Zakria Khan's pride. He used to brag that the Sikhs had been rooted out. Gone mad with rage, Zakaria Khan captured Darbar Sahib at

Amritsar and handed over its possession to Massa Rangar of Mandiala. Massa Rangar made Darbar Sahib a center for pleasure seeking. Some tiding of this activity somehow reached Sukha Singh and Mehtab Singh who had taken shelter in Rajasthan. The news about violation of sanctity of Darbar Sahib pained the Sikhs deeply. They resolved to teach Massa Rangar a lesson."

"Dear Khalsa Ji, Bhai Mehtab Singh Mirakotia and Sukha Singh of Mari Kambo Ki, put some pebbles in a bag and planned to reach Fauzdar (Military Commander) Massa Rangar on the pretext of paying tribute. They tethered their mighty horses to the Jajube tree "Ilaichi Beri" (at the entry gate of Golden Temple) and severed the head of devilish Massa Rangar who was sitting in Darbar Sahib and started talking to the air. Dear congregation, the inheritors of those who had been pierced through by javelins, carried his head to Budha Johar in Rajasthan. When the severed head of the devil was thrown at the feet of Sarbat Khalsa – Assembly of the Pure – the slogans of "Boley so Nihaal" disturbed the sleep of the Mughals. Dear congregation, whosoever tried to violate the sanctity of Sri Amritsar, the community washed of all his trace."

After the deployment of CRPF in Amritsar, the tone of the bards had turned too severe. The bards were trying fearlessly to boost the morale of the congregation.

"Dear congregation, Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom had instilled a new spirit in the Sikh community. The Sixth Guru donned two Swords – one of Miri (political) and the other, Piri (religious) and thus formed a combination of devotion and power. A saint soldier has the divine power. One who is well versed in the use of weapons and understand hymns, his community cannot be enslaved. The Sikhs are given initiation by sipping water stirred by a double edged sword in a steel bowl. Gurus beloved army does not take a step forward without arms – "Worship all-steel. Bow and hold weapons." One who is not conversant with use of arms, for them they are not more than mud toys. Faith can be secured with the help of weapons.



The ballads sung by the bards' group and listening to the references made to the Sikh history had pleased Shahbeg Singh immensely. Hearing the name of the killer of Massa Rangar, from his village, he felt elated as if an electric current had passed through his body. His face bloomed uniquely. At the end of the programme, he beckoned his companions to go to the vault under the Akal Takhat.

## FIFTTEEN

Shahbeg Singh could not control his laugher, as he watched some boys carrying reversed rifles on their shoulders.

"Where have these 'Chirimars' (sparrow-hunters) come from?"

Shahbeg Singh asked Bhai Jagjit Singh who was going with the boys in a sarcastic manner.

"Bhai Mota Singh had ordered me to lead these young men to meet you." Bhai Jagjit Singh said making an innocent face.

"They do not know how to carry weapons. How would they use them?"

Joga Singh also reached there from the Serai side. All of them welcomed him with Fateh –Victory - with folded hands. Then the slogan of Bole So Nihal was raised, the echo of which reached far and near.

General Joga Singh had served as a constable in the police and was a crack shooter; he could kill the flying birds with his slingshot. After absconding, he took shelter with Sant Bhindrawala and he was given the responsibility of acting as Area Commander. After a very short time, despite very strong security, he had blown up blood thirsty Sukha Singh with a bomb. Then his aim was the DGP, who could not go out for a walk because of stomach ache and thus was saved. The Sant felt very happy and made him a General directly. After the formal victory, General Shahbeg Singh had said to Joga Singh jocularly, "According to the rank, this humble one should salute you. I am a Major General, that too dismissed and

you are a 'full General'. This the great blessing of God that you reached the rank of a General from a sepoy while the Government of India has sent one like me to sit at home."

Joga Singh, who was well known not only in the Punjab, but throughout the country as being the crack shooter, said to General Shahbeg Singh with folded hands, "It seems this humble servant has erred somewhere. I am your errand boy. The Sant has given me the title on your recommendation."

"I have only the sole objection, Joga Singh…."

"May I know, sir..." said Joga Singh interrupting him.

"The only one grouse is that you were a constable in the Police and you should have been given promotion of the same department. I mean, you should have been made SSP or DGP and I would have had no objection. By making a full-fledged General, have I not been demoted?" Everyone laughed as General Shahbeg Singh said this.

"Sir, you had yourself observed that the Punjab Police has nothing with it. Therefore, everyone should be imparted military training. If military training is imparted, then what is the harm in snatching army ranks? Different country should have a different army also. Guru's beloved army. "Shall make one confront one hundred and twenty five thousand." All right when history is recorded, this would certainly be mentioned that after taking shelter with the Guru, an ordinary soldier becomes equal to a General in the army. With the Guru's kindness, even the Sant has learnt to fire assault rifles. Ever since you have given the imported revolver, the Sant has not taken it off his body."

"Come with me to Akal Guest House, Joga Singh. Something important has to be discussed. Ask these Singhs to relax in their rooms meanwhile."

"Okay Sir." Joga Singh left with General Shahbeg Singh.

As soon as taking seats in the room, General Shahbeg Singh



opened his mind that he apprehended that the Indian army could attack Harmandar Sahib and Akal Takhat Sahib at any time. Therefore, caution your companions to stick their positions like the army men and should stand guard throughout the night in relays.

Although the room was bolted from inside, Shahbeg Singh whispered to Joga, "I am confident that Sant Longowal has told his valiant fighters that when there is an arm attack, no one should open fire."

Joga singh confirmed Shahbeg Singh's misgiving that Sant Longowal has told the armed young men that they are not in a position to have a conclusive confrontation and therefore arms should be used only in self defence. This was the reason that Sant Bhindrawala, called him a Sant in Teja Singh Samundri Hall to ridicule him. Confrontation between both the saints increased ultimately to the extent that they became blood thirsty of each other. Living in the upper storey room of Guru Nanak Niwas, he used to go to the roof top to hold his court. Permanent position had been made at the four corners of the roof at the instance of Shahbeg Singh. Then he got sand bags stacked behind the cement grills so shat if needed, these too could become safe positions. Above the water tank in Guru Ram Das Serai adjoining Akal Guest House was the big "Positiion". The staircase leading to the top of the overhead water tank ran internally. Therefore, it was extremely easy to carry weapons there. A budding young man of eighteen, Alam Singh, known as "Dhai ser" – two and a half seers--, had begun to live there permanently, as if the water tank was his night shelter. Living there he had learnt bomb making from ex-army man Bhagat Singh. Ordinarily, no one had an inkling that the water tank was capable of ushering in doom's day. All the high and low buildings on the eastern side of Darbar sahib were within the range from the overhead tank top. Such fortification was done atop Ramgarhia Bungas, Langar Hall, Baba Atal and other high rise buildings.

## SIXTEEN

Evenings had never been so horrific. Earlier, Amritsar city used to throb only after the evening had set in. Guru's town had been granted a boon that there shall never be a night there but what has happened so very suddenly to make the city lifeless. At this time the militants were polishing their weapons. This was the time when the streets and lanes began to look deserted. It was never known in which lane or turn, the havoc would be caused.

Wazir Singh never missed an adulation at Harmandar Sahib at the close of every day during the last thirty five years. Despite his kinsmen's asking him not to risk his life, he insisted and went to the Gurdwara. Everyone of his kinsmen remained worried to the bone till he returned home. Nobody partook of food till he returned. If anyone stopped him from going to Gurdwara, he expressed his wrath vociferously, "All that is within His command shall take place. And why people like me should have any fear? Recite Guru's Name, and nothing shall happen." Such a discussion had become a daily affair. Even the police men marked the evening visitors to the Gurdwara with a vigilant eye but Wazir Singh had never bothered. He was confident that Guru was with him all the time and no harm shall be caused to him.

Wazir Singh had come home long back after closing his shop. It was the time for closing the Holy Book but he was not stirring to go to Darbar Sahib. Members of his family were not only surprised at his sitting silently but upset also. Ultimately, his wife asked him, "Are you not going to Gurdwara today?" He replied quickly, "No. I will never go to render this service now."

"I don't know where have I erred because of which this service has been taken away from me." When his wife and children asked him the reason for this, tears started flowing down his cheeks. His wife sent the children to the other room and asked him and he said to her that two youngmen had forcibly untied his beard set with fixer and ordered me, "Bhapaji, if you want to render service to



Mahraj, keep your beard flowing. Wazir Singh, more than humiliated was horrified. Earlier he used to call the boys "Babbas" respectfully. He had never imagined that the boys of tender age can behave so crudely with a man old enough to be their father.

"Forgive me, God," Wazir singh rested his forehead on both hands.

"Which God are they serving…for whom are they working…impudent…God shall never forgive them."

What had Wazir Singh said to himself in his mind, was not known?

## SEVENTEEN

In order to blunt the rise of Sant Bhindrawala, Dictator of the holy fight Dharam Yudha, Sant Longowal, had already raised an army of one lakh soldiers read to make supreme sacrifices.

With his hot speeches, Bhindrawala had turned the hot blood into his disciples. The Akali Dal viewed this as dangerous to itself lest the protest should slip out of their hands and be led by Bhindrawala. This fear had led to the formation of raising the army of those who defied death. Standing in front of the Akal Takhat, they were made to swear to live or die for the Panth: I, offering my services to the Panth, swear by Waheguru that my head from now on would be for the Panth (Sikh faith).

The rift between the two saints was clearly visible to the devotees coming to Sach Khand Harmandar Sahib. The factionalism rising in the Panth, was venoming the holy precints of the corridors as there was fear and panic. The groups of tigers and lions were always ready to suck each others' blood. The devotees in India and abroad were terribly upset over the tortures inflicted on the guilty.

The murder of the crack shooter of Sant Bhindrawala, on the eve of Vaisakhi, the situation had turned explosive. Time was groaning under the panic and wild instinct. This spell had begun with the

killing of DIG Avtar Singh Atwal on the door step of the entrance on the Clock Tower side. When there was firing within the complex, the shopkeepers outside pulled down their shutters and fled. The police had to run helter-skelter around. Common devotees were afraid of paying obeisance. This strife within the Panth was inviting some big trouble.

Every organization had its own side of the picture claimed to be true. The test thereof was hidden in the lap of history.

In order to cut down these heart rending happenings, an appeal issued by the Five Sikh High Priests at the Akal Takhat Sahib, there were strict directions against opening fire in the Darbar Sahib complex, inflicting tortures or slogan mongering against one another. In the orders issued on 30th April, 1984, the Singh Sahiban had directed that such unfortunate happenings should be put an end to in every way, as such incidents violate the sanctity of the holy place like Harmandar Sahib. "Manage common kitchen, sing Gurus' praises, control your tongue." In this appeal, Tegh (sword) was missing which was strongly opposed by the militant organizations. Thereafter, the Akal Federation opened a front against the Singh Sahiban. The Federation, claiming to safeguard the Khalsa tenets, citing historical references, tried to prove that in the Guru's house, while there are places for meditation and rendering service, there are forts also to confront the evil doers. History bears witness that the opponents of the Panth had been reformed after passing a resolution at Akal Takhat. In reply to the Akal Federation, a hidden threat was issued. The Federation had questioned that it was against the Sikh tenets to put any restrictions on firing in the Darbar Sahib complex. During the time of Sri Guru Hargobind, wearing two swords of Miri and Piri, weapon training was imparted in front of Akal Takhat and the holy atmosphere of Darbar Sahib. Therefore the weapon training and trial of weapons did nto violate the sanctity of Darbar Sahib. The Akal Federation also argued that in the light of the old traditions, reforming such opponents would be in accord



with the Sikh traditions. The Federation had resolved to tear into pieces the appeal to make peace in the Harmandar Sahib complex. The Federation warned that such orders would prove to be critical of glorious acts of frying the masands (wayward priests) and beheading Massa Rangar. The Federation stated that the traitors, hiding in the Panth, are the inheritors of those who, at the time of hot battles being fought, instead of ammunition, were putting mustard in bags. Therefore going on talking of non-violence and peace would be fatal to the interests of the Panth. According to the exhortation of the Tenth Master, Adi Shakti, the Sword, is the real power and in accordance with the Guru's decision "Sword, double edged and one edged, javelins, arrows and guns; are all our Pirs" ; therefore we are exhorted to take to arms.

The open defiance of Sikh High Priests by the armed militants, instead of solving the issue, has caused utter confusion which made the knots tied in minds, more stringent.

## EIGHTEEN

Fiery speeches were being made in Darbar Sahib in front of large congregation. In the scorching heat of the month of May, the hot speeches had created war like conditions. The congregation, full of enthusiasm, was raising slogans of Bole So Nihal again and again. There were white-dress intelligence people also in good numbers. They passed on information to their seniors every minute. They included some adept journalists also, receiving a monthly payment from the Inteligence agencies. Such journalists were not doing yellow journalism but red journalism. Their news spat venom. Some journalists sent the government-sponsoed news in their own names without even reading.

Because of the repeated sloganeering, speeches were being interrupted. Before calling the next speaker, the stage secretary made an appeal with folded hands to keep restrain so that the chain of thoughts of the speakers was not broken.

"Respected congregation, I quite understand your feelings and sensitivities. But excitement without restraint leads one astray. Your huge gathering can stir the Kumbhkaran-like sleeping Delhi if it takes to the right direction. Therefore, it is my humble request that the views of the speakers should be listened to patiently.

After calling Bhai Jagat Singh to the stage, whispering started among the CID officials. His fiery speech was beckoning to the ensuing battle. It had become a big problem with the intelligence agencies to identify him. He had returned from Pakistan a few days earlier. Earlier he used to tie a pointed turban. Therefore, his round turban had confused everyone.

His words smelt of explosives. It appeared from the speech that "There are heavy forces on both the sides."

"Respected Congregation, this land blessed by the Gurus, Pirs, Mendicants, Sadhus and Saints is undergoing the jungle-raj. Honour and modesty of daughters and sisters are endangered. Khalsa ji, the jungle had its own way of working. No one goes in deep slumber in jungle. One who sleeps is like a dead-being. Think of the stormy ways of Ahmdshah Abdali when the Singhs could have a few winks on the horsebacks. For minority communities, hand to hand guerilla fight is the best stance. Do you know why a peacock sleeps on the highest branch of a tree? As the evening sets in, the dancing peacock make that branch his night shelter as it keeps swinging with the blowing of wind. While such swings cause sleep, warn against deep sleep also."

"Respected congregation, this is not the time to be lethargic. Wake up and raise the slogan to "keep awake". Keep your loins girded up all the time. If you go in slumber, the next generations would not forgive you. The Brtish, after conquering the Punjab, took with them Dalip Singh, the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh so that the son of the Lion of the Pujab could be brought up like kitten. Khalsa ji, the British had carried your turbans, plumes and swords to England, which are kept in the London Museum. In



the bullet proof boxes are imprisoned your honour and dignity. Khalsa Ji, our honour could not be anyone's maid or slave nor can it be shackled. Wake up and in order to preserve the independent existence of the Khalsa, offer our body and mind to the Guru."

After Jagtar's fiery speech, the last speaker was Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. The stage secretary said, "Before Santji's speech, the Victory slogans should echo in the sky so that the blood frozen in the veins of today's Zakaria Khans should melt.

"Dear Congregation, "The saint soldier Sant Bhaindrawale, who awakened the naion gone into slumber, was raising the slogans "The Khalsa shall rule". Saint Bhindrawale began his speech:

"Repected congregation, sitting in the court of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, purify your tongue and say "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguruji ki Fateh! This humble servant was born on 2nd June 1947. The greatest agony of the partition of the country was suffered by the Punjabis, especially the Sikhs. I was just two months old or so at the time of the partition. After the blood of lakhs, the land of the Punjab and silvery water of the Ravi turned red with blood. Besides the Britishers, our own cunning leaderrs were also responsible for the partition of the country

"My journalist friends call me a worshipper of violence. I have always been telling them that we are certainly not in favour of bloodshed but if because of the cunning mindset of our leaders, peace is widowed, blame should not be cast on others. Khalsa Ji, we never initiated but also did not hesitate to take the next step. Government has already given us the title of "Extremists". We read Gurbani and teach also. If protecting the honour and modesty of our daughters and sisters and putting the wayward on the right path makes us extremists, I have no objection to be called an extremist. We are not the inheritors of the one who works the spinning wheel but those who ride the pinions. Mahatma Gandhi can be the Bapu of those wearing caps, our father is the keeper of the falcon. Those who went to the gallows cheerfully were called rebels. Khalsaji,

we have liberated cap and sacred thread in 1947. Now we have to get freedom for our turban. It cannot remain under the thumb of slavery. Punjab is the land of Dullas and Bullahs. The Sikhs can't ever brook anyone's dominance. Under every brick of Harmandar Sahib, a hundred heads are buried. Read your glorious history and feel proud thereof. We do not worship such a peace, the devotion to which might result in the decimation of the nation. A few days back, I had read a statement by the Congress leader Bir Davinder Singh that if the Sant is thirsty of blood, he would present himself alongwith his family. One should ask this white heron as who has stopped him? As far as I am concerned, he can come with the whole family. We would accord them such a welcome as would be remembered by his future generations."

"Gurbachna, DSP, having had a joy ride of the Taksal vehicle, is challenging us. One, who swims in the Singhs' blood, shall not be forgiven at any cost. Khalsa Ji, we are daily receiving complaints of police highhandedness and my ears have begun to ache reading them. Bring in a complaint when matters go out of hand otherwise take spot decisions. One scarecrow hanging near the fields protects the entire crop.

"The birth day of this humble servant falls after a few days. One who is born has to die also ultimately. Death of body is not death actually but if the conscience dies, one is not sheltered in the divine court. Martyrdom day of the Fifth Guru Arjan Dev Ji is drawing near. He sat on the hot plate in the scorching heat of June-July, he had hot sand poured on his head. He remained calm and composed only because the martyrs accept their death beforehand. If the life is devoted to a true cause, howsoever hard it may be tortured, it does not feel hurt. Khalsa Ji, I am challenging the Delhi government that it may deploy any number of troops, it cannot arrest me while I am alive. If any one reaches me after my death, what would he gain from earth?"

"Khalsa Ji, I am being accused of being a congressman. Behind this are the white herons and blue peacocks. Taksal buses are



being burnt down. Still we are called congressmen. The licenses of our weapons are being cancelled and still we are agents of the Center. Khalsa Ji, if anyone can prove that during the last ten years, I had drunk a glass of water in the house of a congressman, this humble servant may be hanged in front of the Clock Tower."

"Because of the callousness of our conscience-seller leaders, our heritage is being wasted in dust. No one is found burning a lamp or an incense in the memory of the martyrs, who got their heads severed to write our history. Memorials are not merely built of stone and lime. If he maryrs are kept safe in our minds, the history of nations becomes glorious. I am told that dung cakes have been laid on the memorials of martyrs who kissed the gallows. If information is given by them about the Five Beloved Ones' background I would slave for them throughout. The martyrs expect us only that we should give a vigil on their heritage so that the future of the country can be saved from breaking into pieces."

"Khalsaji, the Brahminical adherents have made our life a hell. This nation, seeking good of one an all, has no other go than to fight and die. Those imbued with the mindset of a martyr, are ever ready to die for honour and dignity because they have got it in their heritage to look straight into the eye of death. If we can make ninety per cent sacrifices for the sake of the country, what is there that we cannot do something for the sake of our nation? The symbol of glory and splendor of Khalsa's grandeur, the Akal Takhat (Throne of the Timeless) cannot bow in front of the worldly throne.

The Center had let loose the horse of Ashawmedh Yagya across the land of the Punjab and no valiant fighter could be found to rein it. When the fearless fighters of the Taksal caught hold of the reins of the horse, the entire country became our enemy."

"I want to caution my brethren in the community that they should stop hatching up conspiracies in collusion with the rulers of Delhi. Such people had earlier also worked for the doom of the Khalsa Raj (Sikh rule) and the same people are now planning to

sink the ship of the community. One roar by Hari Singh Nalwa shook the hills of Kabul and Qandhar but this national hero was ditched by our own people and acted in a suicidal manner. Khalsa Ji, we respect all religions but if someone exceeds all limits of decency, what should we do to him? We wish that there should be rule of piety everywhere so that the ones like athiests dare not raise their heads. A Hindu, should be a true Hindu, A Musalman, a true Muslim and a Christian, a true Christian. In this lies the welfare of society. Excesses committed by those like Bhajan Lal are understandable but what should be done to a mimic like Zail Singh, Zakarias like Darbara Singh and Indira devotees like Swaran Singh? I want to tell the enemies of the Sikh faith with beats of a drum that they might set up their lodging in the sea, Panth would still reform them. History bears witness that the nation had been digging the enemies out of their graves and settling scores. False propaganda is being carried out against me that the Sant has kept a pitcher in his room, out of which a chit is taken out daily and a hit list is prepared. Khalsa Ji, I am a simple minded mendicant. I do not know any tactics or cunning devices. I utter the names of the enemies of the Panth from the stage. The lovers of the Panth themselves pick up their duties.

"Khalsa Ji, the Taksal had begun the task of putting an end to gurudom in which we have met with success. No physical guru can squeak today. We had no personal enmity with Narakdharis (Nirankaris) but how could a true Sikh tolerate that a fake guru, riding in a palanquin on the Khalsa Birthday should enter the Guru's Home (Amrtisar) like a raider. How can we brook that in order to challenge the Word Guru, some so called might have a canopy over him and be served with a whisk and, in comparison with Five Beloved Ones, may have seven stars. In order to stop the hypocrite, the Sikhs made a sacrifice but our own people, instead of nabbing him, they helped him go beyond Shambhu Border under security umbrella. This humble life of mine is entrusted to the Panth. May



Guru be kind enough to the Nirmal Panth (pure religion) of Guru Nanak and I will fight unto death defending the Harmandar Sahib. I wish to caution the followers of Brahmin faith that in future they should not burn torches and take out processions else they would face the consequences. We have also identified those who tied cigarettes to the swords carried in the processions. A befitting reply will certainly be given when the time comes."

"At the end, I appeal to my Akali brethren that they should not agree to anything less than the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. If they do so, it would be my duty to keep the congregations informed of the reality – then it would be do or die.

"I put my lion-like valiant fighters in my lap and did not squeak. Many conspiracies to ambush me have been exposed. Our brethren are now thinking that it is because of me that the crusade is getting out of their hands. Therefore, they are going to Delhi again and again holding tail of the calf. Let them have any number of joy rides of government helicopters, I have certainly no objection but I wish to make it clear here that this time I would not let the morcha be called off by sipping juice.

"Just remember the freezing cold nights of December-January, which Guru Gobind Singh who sacrificed his all, spent in the forlorn jungle of Machhiwara. The white falcon of the Guru sporting plume had flown sky high for the last time and the blue horse had breathed its last. Still, the Tenth Master, beseeching to convey his message to the dear One that bare land is better than the furnished mansions. The forest is a vast school. To put an end to Jungle rule, jungle laws would have to be acted upon. Guruji has prepared his Khalsa to face all eventuality; Sikhs have been turned into Singhs. The jungle begins to tremble with one roar of a lion. There is no need to be perturbed. We have done the enumeration. If Harmandar is attacked, don't keep waiting for an order or direction."

Though General Shahbeg Singh was listening to the speech patiently, his eyes were turning round to assess the situation. He was trying to assess the feelings aroused in the minds of the Sikhs.

## NINENTEEN

Calamity had befallen the town blessed by Guru Ram Das. The CRPF personnel hiding in position at the top of high rise buildings on all the four sides of Darbar Sahib came out and came near Brahm Boota Akhara.

When the CRPF personnel objected to a wall being erected by the Shromani Committee, the exchange of hot words on both sides led to firing. Firing continued for seven hours causing a great havoc. While running helter-skelter, people were striking against one another. The movement of devotees in the sanctum sanctorum stopped. The surroundings of Harmandar Sahib was wrapped in the sheet of fear.

On a valiant Singh, standing guard at Baba Atal, CRPF showered bullets in such a way as if there was not one militant but the entire battalion. Hundred of pigeons flew towards the sky out of the nine storeyed building. Blood flowed down like a stream out of the pierced body of the Singh. Pigeons, the messengers of peace, fluttering in the smoke of explosives were flying in such a way as if they would not come back. The feathers of pigeons falling on the hot blood of the young man appeared as if the butcher had just slaughtered a chicken. In the melee that followed, the scarves of many women and turbans of many men had scattered here and there. The firing on both sides had caused a big turmoil. The paramilitary forces opened fire so that the war policy and ammunition stock of the militants guarding the Darbar Sahib could be estimated.

After eleven persons had been killed in the firing, Sant LongowaL, after booking lightning calls, tried to get in touch with President of India, Giani Zail Singh but in vain. A little after the evening prayer (Reh-ras), the 32 hour curfew was clamped in the



Holy Town which used to keep awake all the 24 hours, deep silence was broken by the hooters of the police CRPF vans. Next day, the outraged Sant Longowal, said in a press release that after 222 years of the attack by Ahmedshah Abdali, the Center had started war with the Sikh community. This has deflated the claims of the secular Congress. He said that in this hour of great emergency the entire congregation, including the ex-servicemen and daredevils should be ready for the supreme sacrifices.

The cremation of Mehanga Singh of Babbar Khalsa, killed in the CRPF firing, was done at Manji Sahib (Golden Temple premises) while the cremation of the disciples of Bhindrawale was done at outside the langar building, after which the dark clouds of mutual confrontation darkened still further. Different pyres burning in Darbar Sahib complex once again exposed to the world the alignments once again.

## TWENTY

Despite extreme confrontation, Shahbeg Singh's mother, Pritam Kaur, served drinking water for hours sitting on the wall adjoining Akal Takhat flank. Being Shahbeg's mother, all the militants greeted her with "Fateh!" bending double.She caressed the heads of all of them and prayed, "Live long. May Guru Ram Das keep you ever in high spirits! With the honour and respect shown to her by the leading militants, she felt overjoyed and her frail body because of old age felt a sensation. "Reciting Dhan Guru Ram Das and Dhan Guru Hargobind Sahib" she would serve drinking water for many hours. When she found that Sant Bhindrawala and her son Shahbegh breathed together, her old body also felt abloom. But as the month of June had set in, some strange thoughts began to occupy her mind. She felt as if the Sixth Master had got annoyed with her. She would start muttering, "My plumed Guru may never be cross with me, even though the entire world may turn against me." Armed young men were seen moving around hurriedly as if they could not

see the mother serving drinking water. She began to feel small within herself. To know the cause of such a development she was mad to see Shahbeg Singh who had been requesting his mother for many days not to serve the drinking water for some days. However, she was not ready to have a break in the duty she had been performing for years. Today, despite everyone's stopping her, she went to Akal Takhat to meet her son. General Shahbeg Singh made her mother to swear that she would not come to Harmandar Sahib from the next day. She directed his wife Rakhwant Kaur, sister-in-law (brother's wife) Jagjiwan Kaur and nephew Rana that they should immediately go with mother to the village. This brought sadness in mother's eyes. General Shahbeg Singh, ever in high spirits, too appeared to be disappointed. Mother asked her son the reason of his sadness. Shahbeg Singh said that Army could attack Golden Temple any moment for which they are fully prepared. On the mother's insistence, Shahbeg Singh revealed that Pakistan had not responded to face the Indian Army. Mother began to ridicule the Muslims at this.

"We should not talk ill of any community, mother, and if one has to praise, one should not praise too much. Sometime one has to feel belittled also. Then she forgot what she was saying. Making his mother understand with all the love and affection, he said,

"It is of no use today, may be of use tomorrow. Of course, no community can be bad as a whole. Recite God's Name. Guru would help."

"We don't have much of time to talk, mother. Go to village just now; it is already late. For God's sake, don't come tomorrow for rendering service. If Guru wills, service could be rendered later on."

"All right, my son, as you say." Mother left with her daughters-in-law and grandson. After walking a little distance, mother looked back and saw that Shahbeg singh as also eying her with compassion as if it were the last meeting.



## TWENTY ONE

The Granthi (priest) of Harmandar Sahib, Giani Puran Singh was depositing his shoes in the shoe store towards the Serai when because of firing of hundreds of bullets, there was a turmoil caused in the entire Shromani Committee complex. He moved towards Harmandar Sahib risking his life in the shower of bullets where he had to sit in attendance (Tabya) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. As soon as he got seated, the priest recited the couplet of Baba Farid

'Looking at the swans swimming, herons too got thrilled. Herons got drowned heads down and feet up'.

Shahbeg Singh felt satisfied that in such an environment of turmoil, divine signing was continuing uninterrupted at Sachkhand Sri Harmandar Sahib though the recitation of the high priest showed some bitterness.

After the firing sounds, Shahbeg Singh, in order to assesse the position, asked a University professor to associate with him. He got panicked and started perspiring.

"Don't get perturbed, dear Professor. Nothing will be gained without jumping into the battle field. You have been counseling the Sant for such a long time but with just a few shots, you have begun to perspire."

"No, General. A teacher's pen is his rifle"

"You have no need to be taught. You are very well versed in History. Who knows better than you as how many poets and writers had taken hold of guns to bring in revolution?"

Holding Professor by the arm, Shabeg Singh took him round the positions made from the eastern flank of Harmandar sahib to the western flank.

What happened, Professor? You were perspiring so very profusely. May I tell you one thing? The bullet on which your name is engraved, only will strike you, even if you may hide in an underground vault. If your life span is not over, you will escape even the shower of bullets. You should follow also what you teach. Become a saint-soldier, as exhorted by Guruji."

The Professor, who used to lie prostate while coming to Harmandar Sahib and going back, ran away saving his life as if death was chasing him with a sharp axe.

## TWENTY TWO

The mania of journalism did not appear to be less than the religious mania. The Pressmen, who had come from Delhi and far South, riding the shoulders of the local journalists went to see Sant Bhindrawale. Despite countless barriers, they reached Akal Takhat but they had to face many difficulties before getting in. Sant Bhindrawale was exhorting to his armed disciples to fight till the last drop of blood. To keep the militants in high spirits, Bhindrawale said that no Sikh could tolerate the violation of sanctity of Harmandar Sahib. General Shahbeg Singh, Bhai Amrik Singh and Harminder singh Sandhu were also sitting there. After the speech concluded, the journalists were called in. Replying to their questions, sant Bhindrawale said after the CRPF attack on Darbar Sahib, it is impossible for the Sikhs to live in India. They were in the mood of now or never. After the press meet, Shabeg Singh assessed the position whereby government security arrangements had been made on the top floor made behind the parapets. A month earlier, some army officers had come in mufti on the pretext of paying obeisance and to inspect the positions. General Shahbeg Singh had recognized one of them. It had struck him at that time that the Punjab can be handed over to the Army.

## TWENTY THREE

After the secret meetings between Akali Dal and the Center, when no tangible result could be found, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held a meeting with her selected advisers. In the meeting, the views of the leading personalities in the opposition, who had been inciting for some real action in the Punjab to find a solution, were also weighed. Some viewed that time had come to teach the Akalis, who held rallies every other day, a lesson. Earlier they agitated for Punjabi Suba, then, against the emergency and now holding the "Dharam-yudh Morcha" and disturbing peace. Some held the view that the root cause of the trouble was personal enmity between Darbara Singh and Giani Zail Singh. As talking on these lines had no meaning at this time, Indira Gandhi did not pay heed to them as if she had not heard anything. After calling off the meeting, the Prime Minsiter stopped one of her special advisers. Both of them were discussing as to how the military action could be kept secret from Giani Zail Singh as he was the Supreme Commander of all the three forces?

After the Akali Dal had issued a call to launch "Non-cooperation" movement from 3rd of June, it gave an excuse to the center to take military action. Indira Gandhi's mind had been poisoned deeply to crush the rebel Sikhs for non-payment of water and electricity bills, loans and land revenue apart from sending grain out of the Punjab. This was the peak of the rally organized by the Akali Dal and an urgent need was felt to confront this immediately. Ultimately, the Punjab was handed over to the Army. Addressing the nation over the All lndia Radio and Doordarshan, the Prime Minister had extended an open invitation to the Akalis to sit together to remove any misgivings.

"Such a play acting had never been seen or heard earlier at the Prime Minister's level. While speaking, Indira's words and eyes were not in tune. It was the body language itself.

"Knife in the underarm, and uttering Ram-Ram." Pritam Singh said after viewing the TV programme.

Although the Prime Minsiter had not mentioned at all the handing over of the Punjab to the Army, the entire Battalion of the Bihar Regimen had been ordered to take over the strategic positions built by the CRPF. After some time the Akashvani telecast the news that Army had been ordered to assist the Civil administration.

Addressing the press conference hurriedly, Sant Longowal said, "Double-standards of the Prime Minsiter have been exposed to the world by appointment of Lt. Gen. Ranjit Singh Dayal as Security Adviser to the Governor. It is for the first time in free India that instead of the Civil Administration, the entire government machinery, Police and Border Security Force have been placed under the Army order by a royal proclamation."

As soon as Akashvani broke the news about handing over of the Punjab to the Army, many devotees left Darbr Sahib. They included those who defied death as their "Heads were a security with the Panth".

General Shahbeg Singh said to Baj Singh of Ghanupur Kala that he should leave immediately. His marriage date had been fixed after a few days. Before leaving, Shahbeg Singh said, "Baj Singh, God forbid, if Darbar Singh is attacked, go to Pakistan and try to meet General Niazi."

After the news was telecast, journalists assembled at Akal Takhat in good numbers. No journalist had sent a word to be published about Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom. Most of the journalists, instead of going to Guru Nanak Niwas or Guru Ram Das Serai, were going towards Akal Takhat. The editors sitting in air conditioned rooms had been terribly forcing them to seek an interview with Sant Bhindrawale or Shahbeg Singh and send sensational news. Such a race was more pronounced with the News Agency reporters because they had to send dispatches at short intervals. The PTI journalists faced trouble if any news was broken by UNI. In this race, some journalists did not desist from misreporting. They did not bother that thousands of pellets coming out of every word would injure the psyche of numerous people.

After giving an interview to the Press, Shahbeg Singh beckoned Sant Bhindrawale to get aside to discuss something. He showed him the Army which had taken positions. Sant Bhindrawale was wonder struck. His blood began to boil. Judging the explosive situation, those coming towards Akal Takhat began to be stopped. Some people of doubtful nature moving about there faced fisticuffs also. Meanwhile, two journalists reached there but some boys wearing long cloaks and keeping Stein-guns on their shoulders stopped hem on the steps of Akal Takhat. Senior journalist, Harjit Singh had wordy duels with the boys that they too had started physical search of the CRPF. He was claiming his closeness to Bhindrawale and showing off but the boys did not budge. Finding he situation going out of control, the English journalist, Dinesh, who had come with Harjit, began to make humble requests. He wanted to send special reports throughout the night and thus dominate the coverage. When he pleaded very humbly, the boys got off his way.

From the military point of view, Shahbeg Singh, after leaving the holes for the machineguns converted all the doors, windows and ventilators with bricks and cement into strategic positions. As there was no air at all, senior journalist Dinesh was feeling suffocated. After viewing the army taking positions, Bhindrawale and Shabeg Singh came down when the journalists stood up and greeted him with "Fateh". Some disciples of Bhindrawale were insisting that he should proclaim creation of Khalistan when the Pakistani army would cross the border and come to their help. While talking to the journalists, the Sant's mind appeared to be somewhere else. Dinesh's direct question drew his attention. "Sant Ji, have you heard the address to the nation by Indira Gandhi?"

"No. I don't bother over such things. Of course she would have addressed her own nation. The Sikhs are a separate nation." After a conclusive reply by Bhindrawale, Dinesh fired the next question – "Do you think Army can enter the precincts of Darbar Sahib?"

"I don't think Government would commit such a grave sin. If it does, we will deal with it sternly. Are we wearing bangles?"

Dinesh's third question was still in his mouth, when imposition of curfew was announced. Arti was being performed in Harmandar

Sahib at that time. Hearing the announcement of curfew, Dinesh was so much upset that he began to cry bitterly. Sobbing deeply, Dinesh said, "I wish to live longer." Harjit encouraged him and brought him out of Clock Tower where the Public Relation Department vehicle was making announcement of curfew. The APRO, sitting in the vehicle, requested Harjit Singh that he should drop them at his house on Taylor Road.

On Shahbeg's direction, the boys began to oil and clean the weapons.

An emergency meeting was held at Akal Takhat to review the position, in which Sahbeg Singh said that his disciple, Babli Brar (Lt. General Kuldip Singh Brar) has been given the Army command. He also said that he had been Babli's Instructor at Dehra Dun Military School. "I know about his caliber." Shahbegh Singh said haughtily.

"Of course, Bulbul is your neighbor, Santji."

"My neighbours!" Bhindrawale asked in surprise.

"He belongs to Patto Hira Singh which is not far off from your native village, Rode. He is of the same gotra as you are."

"Babli cannot talk to me looking into my eyes. During training, a little pressure from me caused his urination. During the 1971 war, we were heading together towards Dacca. He could not take a step without asking me. I had taught him how to get across the Brahmputra river. Crossing the river in spate, he had given a heavy blow to the Baloch Regiment of Pakistan, after which he was honoured with Ati Vashisht Sewa Medal.

## TWENTY FOUR

The devotional singer Bhai Nirmal Singh began the prelude of the hymn in Harminder Sahib:

They become enemies of saints and love the evil-doers. They have no joy here and hereafter; they are born again and again.

Sant Bhindrawale and his associates were ready to confront



the Army but Sant Longowal and his armed companions did not want that there should by bloodshed of any kind in the precincts of Darbar Sahib. Curfew had been imposed in the entire province. Telephone lines were snapped. Foreign journalists had been ordered to leave the Punjab immediately. Some journalists, not caring for their life, remained in their hotel rooms. Local journalists were also warned against sending any dispatch to any foreign radio, agency or newspaper. Akashvani and Doordarshan were giving only Governemnt version. BBC was giving patched up news of the Army surrounding Darbar Sahib and the activities inside. What to talk of Lahore Radio, it was giving exaggerated news of the befitting reply to the Army. In all, curfew had separted the Punjab from the entire world. People inother countries wer worried about the safety of their near and dear ones living in the Punjab. All means of communications had ceased to exist. The horns of the vehicles of the army men could only be heard.

Some daredevils of Akali Dal had shed their cloaks and worn bushshirts and pants, passed by the Serai on the back side and become part of crowd. They had demolished a part of the wall at a point and arranged the bricks in the gap so that in case of need, it could be shifted from there.

There was a crossfire between Army and the boys, which made one guess that Army would have to confront the boys stringently. The shower of bullets made from the ventilators and manholes of marble had felled many soldiers of the army coming down the steps from Clock Tower side. After loss of valuable lives of commandos, General Brar besieged Darbar Sahib complex and ordered strengthening the attack. The positions made at Ramgarhia Bunga and water tank were proving to be most powerful. Lt. Gen. Brar, who had called a meeting of the two Army brass at Divisional Headquarters and took a decision that the war could not be won without tanks and helicopters. As the assessment by the Army had proved wrong, positions and stances were changed again

and again. The Army had stored its ammunition in Jalianwala Bagh also. Jalianwala's western door was thrown open so that military action may not be interrupted in any way. So many changes had taken place in 65 years. When General Dyer had showered bullets, the other doors of Jalianwala Bagh were shut. People did not find the exit and heaps of corpses were formed there. The door lying shut was opened today after many years. A new turn to history had been given by keeping the back gate shut or open.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had got built twelve Gates on the ways leading to Harmandar Sahib so that in the event of foreign invasions, the gates could be shut. Along the four-walls were dug deep canyon, in which, foreseeing some danger, water was released. Today, the guns placed in these gates are hurling fire balls. In order to keep the lights on in darkness at Akal Takhat and Harmandar Sahib, balls of dazzling light are being fired so that Military action may not be hindered in any way.

At the time of making announcements of curfew over the Public Relations Department vehicles, despite the directions to keep within the four walls, people had ascended their house tops and were frowning at the blue star risen in the sky. Its sharp light had blinded the rulers.

Sant Longowal, along with other Akali leaders had come out of their rooms and reached the safe rooms of Teja Singh Samundri Hall. Other devotees, who had come from far off villages to observe Guru Arjan Dev Ji's martyrdom day, had also reached there. A lady, Surjit Kaur, was groaning with thirst. Because of the exit of Jathedar Jhabar and his associates from the Darbar Sahib complex, some disciples of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale had come in their place and they had taken in their possession the discarded weapons. Sant Bhindrawale had sent some of his very close friends-disciples from Akal Takhat so hat the Akalis and the leading leaders of Shromani Committee could be dissuaded from surrendering themselves. They included Harmandar Singh Sandhu also. He had been



married in the Darbar Sahib complex a few months earlier. Instead of stopping the Akalis from surrendering themselves, he himself joined them and got seated with them.

In order to torpedo this scheme of Akali leaders, the militants exploded a hand grenade. After the explosion, dark smoke scared everyone. Bibi Surjit Kaur was confronting the Akali leaders that if they could not give her water to drink, they should shoot her. "I can't bear thirst any longer." She had been groaning continuously. The Morcha Dictator of Akali Dal was helpless. No one had grappled with him like this earlier. The Morcha Dictator who had staged the Morcha for river waters also was unable to provide a few draughts of water to Surjit Kaur. The words like Morcha and Dictator were proving hollow to the military. The snapped telephone lines of the Serai were got reconnected for a little while so that the Akalis could be contacted and taken out safely. These phones were in their rooms which they had left much earlier and had come to this safe place.

A powerful grenade had driven a big hole in the overhead water tank and water flowed down looking like a waterfall from a high hill. With the grenades falling over the positions taken above the overhead water tank, bricks and cement mortar and the sandbags were torn to pieces. The boys began to descend the stairs in a melee. They passed by the peeping holes with the speed of lightning so that they could escape the target-shooting of balls and bullets. The water got wasted and flooded the gutters but in the adjacent building, poor Surjit Kaur was not destined to get two draughts of water.

After getting down, the boys reached the hall, where the Akalis and the senior leaders of Shromani Parbandhak Committee were reciting Waheguru, Waheguru. Bihari, Madrasi, Rajput, Dogra and Kumaon Regiments had coordinated and launched a joint attack on Darbar Sahib complex from the Serai side. The tanks came down the steps leading to Darbar Sahib and reached the Parikarma (cir-

cumambulation). Guns on both sides fired on the Akal Takhat and, besides some towers being blown away, there were large holes in the dome. One ball, tearing through the wall, fell into the Akal Takhat. Gunner Lakhwinder Singh shut his eyes and said to himself: "I would have come here to offer thanks for having been promoted. What a sin I have committed! It would have been better if I had not enrolled myself. Forgive me, True Emperor." Sant Bhindrawale had come down from the third floor to the second floor. After conquering the position of offence above the tank, the soldiers of the Madras Regiment bolted all the doors from outside in Guru Ram Das Serai where, besides militants, common devotees had entered. Because of being bolted from outside, no one could come out. Many army men had been killed in the machine gun firing from atop the tank. Therefore, they thought that there armed boys only in the rooms. The army men threw hand grenades inside through the ventilators becaue of which, besides militants, many other devotees too were killed. Some breathed their last because of suffocation by the gun-powder smoke. Other half-dead devotees, when they were taken out after some time, they were made breathless by beating them with rifle butts.

Pitched battle was being fought between Akal Takhat and the entrance gate to the causeway leading to Golden Temple. Because of the bombardment from all the four directions, many army men, including their officers, had been devoured by death. It had become extremely difficult to carry the wounded from the corridor because of heavy firing. Gas bombs were being thrown by the army at the Akal Takhat so that the severe attacks being made from inside could be curbed and Sant Bhindrawale and Shahbeg Singh were captured alive. The direction of wind being towards it, gas was causing much damage to the army. Because of firing blindly from the causeway gate and Tharah Sahib, they were facing great difficulty. The divers of the army had been directed in advance that they should swim and enter the Har Ki Pauri (back-



side of the sanctum sanctorum of Golden Temple) but ultimately they were stopped from doing this because in the two-side firing, Darbar Sahib building could be damaged which would have brought bad name to government. At day break, some boys firing bullets stepped out of Akal Takhat swiftly and they jumped into the Sarovar (The Holy Tank) with their weapons. They were hopeful that they would be able to swim across to take shelter in Darbar Sahib as the army was hesitant in firing. Heavy firing on the swimming boys killed them in the Sarovar itself and the water in the tank turned red.

## TWEENTY FIVE

Though a rugged Jatt (farmer) might become a recluse fearing the hot winds of June-July, today the Sant and the armed soldiers were moving around in the scorching sun. The thundering of guns at dawn had started hurling fire balls. A widow, Bishni, who had come from Jagraon for thanksgiving having been blessed with a grandson, had collapsed in the due to sun stroke as she was midway from Akal Takhat to Golden Temple. Her daughter-in-law, carrying her son, five weeks old had got lost in the crowd. Another bomb struck the dome of Akal Takhat and the entire building had shaken. General Shabeg Singh was worried that if a spark fell on the heap of explosives stored in the basement the entire building would be reduced to rubble and the militants entrenched in their positions would also be decimated.

After the ball had struck, the pieces of the dome flying over here and there in smoke had spread panic all around. In order to blind the militants, infra-red light balls were hurled on them. Dead bodies, emitting foul smell were rotting in the corridor. In such a horrible situation, there was no one to pour a little water in Bishni's mouth. There was so much confusion that no one thought that they were passing over the dead bodies or a groaning devotee. The helicopters flying above were directing the gunners to aim rightly.

Despiting two-way firing, the Head Priest of Akal Takhat, Giani Pritam Singh performed all the religious rites till the morning of 6th of June. The Granthi of Harmandar Sahib, Giani Mohan Singh, the whisk holder and the Ardasia Singh (prayer leader) remained present on duty. The Holy Book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib was ceremonially opened and devotional singing (Kirtan) was done. A little while after the Ardas, a hymn singer was injured in firing. A blind tabla-player said gratefully, "Thanks Waheguru that I am blind. Such a horrible spectacle may not be seen by anyone, O God!"

After having a wash, Sant Bhindrawale and Bhai Amrik Singh decided to come out of Akal Takhat. Pritam Kaur, wife of Rachhpal Singh, PA of Bhindranwale, was patting her few-month-old baby on her shoulder. Rachhpal Singh motioned to his wife to be behind the pillar. In the meantime, a bullet pierced the chest of Pritam Kaur also after tearing the child. Rachpal Singh tried to run and reach her and was killed on the way. Shabeg Singh, who was seriously injured, crawled to Bhindranwale. He said humbly, 'Sant ji, now this servant is going after completing his given service. Saying this, he died in the saint's lap.

After some time, Bhindrawale and Bhai Amrik Singh's bodies, pierced with bullets, were also lying in the verandah. General Shabeg Singh's body lay a few steps away.

An Army General, at the loss of valuable lives of commandos, had got perturbed. Although he was personally aware of the General Shabeg Singh's military caliber and capacity, he had never imagined loss of commandos in such a large number. He was saying that loss of elite commandos in such large numbers had not been suffered even during the war with Pakistan. The Army General had bragged in front of his associates in a meeting that his men would physically lift and bring out Bhindrawale before dawn.

Next day, the President Giani Zail Singh reached Darbar Sahib to assess the loss sustained. Helplessness was quite visible in the eyes of the Supreme Commander of the the Army.



Some army men had removed some precious articles from Darbar Sahib to decorate their own houses to be kept as souvenirs. The army men had looted the houses of many employees of the Shromani Committee. The stinking dead bodies were laden in the rubbish-vans and carried to the cremation ground where oil was sprinkled on them and collective cremation was done. When the Municipal staff refused to touch the stinking bodies, the army gave them wine to drink and liberty to carry away the valuables on the bodies of the dead.

## TWENTY SIX

Today, the first citizen of the country was wandering helplessly in the vast Rashtrapati Bhavan, having three hundred and forty rooms. Giani Zail Singh, who came in a panic, took off the rose hung on the milky-white achkan and threw it away. The walls of the palace seemed trembling due to the thunder of the pheasant-winged clouds. Zail Singh was just scared. Opening the gate, he started walking towards the Mughal Garden, and the security umbrella started walking alongside him. Giani Zail Singh signaled the bodyguards and ordered them to retreat. He wanted to talk to himself today. He was in the mood of searching for what he gained and what he lost in life. The strong storm had badly damaged the flowers of the Mughal Garden. He also seemed to have lost the talisman of the musical fountains and the enchanting twinkling lights. The scattered trees and flowers were giving him an autumn feel. Giani, who used to stroll many hours in the Mughal Garden, that day returned to his bed room after only a few minutes. Then he sat on the chair for a long time. He lay down on the bed after he felt fatigue in the neck. He had already refused for food. Sleep was not even close to him and he was still staring at the ceiling. He remembered his native village Sandhwan in Faridkot district. He used to spend the night counting the small wooden beams of the roof until late at night when his mother forcibly woke him up to study. When

the father tried to get into the ancestral business, he could not bring himself to operate the saw and hammer-chisel. "Jailya" if not to read or die, at least learn to make tipcat. If you sit idle with your hands on your hands, you will die of hunger all your life... Your father is not a landlord who will feed the idlers. Get lost of my sight." Bapu's words had pierced his heart. After eating, he went out of the house and spent the night in the Gurdwara Sahib of Kotakpura. The Clergy Singh recited the sentence 'Aukhi ghaari na dekhen dei apna birdu samale. (Aware of His innate nature, the Lord lets not His slave see the difficult hour)' Jarnail Singh's (Zail) was mesmerised while pronouncing the sacred sentence. Zaila had such a love for the holy Sikh temple that he stayed there. His family members came to the Gurdwara too find him and began to urge Zail to return home, but he refused to obey. Seeing his love for the holy place, the family members returned to Sandhwan leaving him there. Zail started to learn from the Clergy to read the Holy Book. Seeing his perseverance, a saint from Ghugiana got him admitted in the Missionary College of Amritsar by giving him financial support. The childhood memories made Giani Zail Singh so emotional that he got up and started walking around the room. While doing kirtan in the missionary college, when he said 'Hum kukar tere darbar.. Bhaukahe agai badan pasaar. (I am a dog at Your Court, I open my snout and bark before it.)' When he recited the words, the Clergy Singh hugged and blessed him and said,"My son, God always gives him abundantly, who serves His sacred place i.e. Gurdwara sahib." Remembering this scene, Gianiji's eyes filled with tears. Before ordering the Blue Star, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had kept the President completely in the dark. "Am I really the Chief Commander of the Navy, Army and the Air Force? How the Army attacked Guru Ghar without my permission?" How could I see the destruction of Akal Takht Sahib? God! What sin was committed by me due to which I got such a stain which will not be washed away even in the next life. True King, please forgive my sins."



This condition of Giani Zail Singh actually got worse after listening to Bhai Gurdas's words, 'Kuta Raj Bahaiya Phir Chaki Chate' ( If a dog is seated on the throne even then it will (like to) lick the flour mill) sung by Hazuri Ragi Jatha after the dignity of Darbar Sahib was restored.

I did not even care about my life while suffering the torture of Faridkot king. With the support of the Guru, I grinded happily for five years in jail. After going to jail, I became Jail (Zail) Singh from Jaila. Guru gave me everything that I never dreamed of. But unfortunately, even sitting in the position of President, I could not stop the desecration of Guru Ghar. If I had only resigned, at least I could have forgiven myself.' After gritting his teeth for a while, Giani Zail Singh puts himself in the court of his own conscience.

'Despite being a non-Jatt, it was Indira who put me on the throne of the Chief Minister. By doing so, she had offended so many party leaders. What quality was there in me apart from loyalty to Congress? I was the one who introduced the Saint Bhindrawale to Sanjay Gandhi so that the Akalis could be completely wiped out from Punjab! What was the need for me to fall into such a trap? It is true that I have memorized more Gurbani than the Akalis but how much was it necessary to use it as a weapon to kill the opponents? While I was playing the religious card, Darbara Singh took a different path. What was the benefit of locking horns with Darbara? He became the Chief Minister and I became the Home Minister at the Centre. All the police of the country were under me and then what could Darbra do? When we have been entangled in land warfare, only the strong one shall win. When the the case of river waters was being withdrawn from the Supreme Court, Darbara Singh had said with confidence that withdrawing the same case is tantamount to suicide for Punjab. If I were a true well-wisher of Punjab, instead of inciting Indira, I would have agreed with Darbara Singh. A day after giving the statement, Darbara Singh lost the Chairmanship of the Punjab Pradesh Congress. Even then

I worked to add fuel to the fire. In the Dhilwan bus incident, when the terrorists made six Hindu bus passengers stand in a row and riddled with bullets, Darbara Singh had to be removed from the throne of the Chief Minister. Actually, the incident was only an excuse to remove him. But the calm and peace didn't prevail even after imposing Presidential rule. May be with Darbara Singh's strictness, the situation would have come under control. But how could I forgive the one who had laid thorns under my feet? It is politics to give a good fight to the enemy who has come down. I was at the height in the center. At least in the case of Punjab, Indira used to trust me with closed eyes. Well, as I defeated my opponents, I climbed the ladders of power. In the intoxication of power, I never thought that how much loss Punjab is being caused by personal enmities. Darbara Singh became completely out of the mainstream Congress and the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan were opened for me. It should have been that I would have got out of the narrow politics of Punjab then, but I did not want to see my opponent in the chair of the Chief Minister.' Giani Zail Singh felt embarrassed by his first infamous statement to the press after assuming the office of President, saying, 'I will follow every command of my leader (Indira Gandhi). If she says pick up the broom and clean, I will become a cleaner. At present my leader has made me the President and I am extremely happy. Naturally, it was Indira Gandhi who took me from the floor to the throne. Still, by making such a childish statement, I had greatly hurt myself, my nation and the dignity of the office of the President. Well, I was so overwhelmed by the favor that such words came out spontaneously... Then Giani Zail Singh remembered Indira Gandhi's second appearance when she came to the Rashtrapati Bhavan the day before the Blue Star. . "During the official visit, she did not even let me know that any military action is being taken on the Darbar Sahib. If you had trusted me like before, I would have found some way or the other by which the snake would have died and the stick would have also been



saved. Surrounded by flatterers, the lady had gone out of mind. People rightly say that a wise enemy is better than a foolish friend. She didn't even have a braid that a little intelligence might be hidden in it. By raising an army on the Darbar Sahib, he destroyed his house. She has planted thorns for her next generations too. Had there been a conversation through me, the Saint would have left the Akal Takhat Sahib and gone to Mehta. What was the need for this intervention? The wounds of this military operation shall stay fresh from generation to generation. I don't know which new Bangladesh she was going to build! Who knows that the Queen of England might have put oil on the fire! Those were not the few who gave her the title of Durga? God knows that if my suggestions had been taken from me, this would not have happened.'

Giani's mood was steadily deteriorating. He was pacing around the room, frowning. Then he collapsed on the chair with a thud. His mustache was trembling in anger. Sometimes he was biting his upper lip and sometimes his lower lip in his teeth. "Who will save you from your own fate", his lips parted. God, I have committed a grave sin. God bless you What I knew was that I would end up trapped in the vert cycle, created for the enemies. The past began to pass before Giani Zail Singh's eyes like a movie. He remembered the period from seventy-two to seventy-seven when he, as Chief Minister, took away the sectarian agenda of the Akalis by constructing the Guru Gobind Singh Marg. During the Emergency, the Akalis disturbed Indira Gandhi's sleep by putting up so many morchas, so her son Sanjay Gandhi asked Giani to 'do something'. After the Sikh-Nirankari bloody clash of Baisakhi 1978 in Amritsar, chants of the Saint began to be heard in the pantheon ranks. With one blow of the Saint, many lamps were extinguished. Akalis had stopped speaking. Two years later, when Indira Gandhi regained power, Giani became the Home Minister of the country, but he was not in favour of becoming Darbara Singh as the Chief Minister. It was coming to his mind again and again that 'by quarreling with Darbara Singh, he

has disturbed his own peace more than Punjab's, muttered Giani Zail Singh. Deep in thoughts, Giani Zail Singh reached Chowk Mehta. In the murder case of Lala Jagat Narayan, the arrest was made on the terms of the Saint, after which Punjab was left in limbo. The bloody incidents that happened one by one began to haunt him. When the boys hijacked the plane and took it to Lahore, my name was dragged by accusig that I was present in that hotel during the first press conference of Dal Khalsa. I also paid the bill for the press conference. When I, as the Home Minister, gave a statement in the Lok Sabha that the Saint was innocent in the murder of Jagat Narayan, then the opponents started a war against me. It is also true that I made every sincere effort to solve the Punjab issue by becoming an arbitrator between the Saint and Indira Gandhi. It was an utmost difficult task to get a letter from her to the Saint for a conversation. The Saint had clearly said that if Mrs. Gandhi wants to come and meet at the Gurdwara, then he is ready for a conversation. My rivals did not want the Punjab issue to be resolved through me. Whose damage was done? God knows I wanted to pour water on the burning Punjab at that time. After giving a statement in the Lok Sabha, the way was paved for the release of the Saint from Ferozepur jail, but he came out and announced that he would weigh the killers of Nirankari Baba and Jagat Narayan with gold. After this statement, the enemies started attacking me again. Regardless of anyone, I still wanted to solve the Punjab issue, but Darbara Singh started putting thorns in my path. Darbara Singh is a bigger culprit than me. If he didn't take the steps, I would have solved the problem by pinching. But the knots given by hand sometimes do not open even with the mouth. He wanted to end his life by banging his head against the wall. He was angry with himself, 'Why did I become Indira's broom bearer instead of being the flag bearer of the nation? I was never short of anything with the blessings of Guruji. 'Why did I, a man of the community of workers, get stuck in the mire of politics?' Giani remembered his father Kishan Singh, who



always encouraged him to work hard and earn only with the help of ten nails, 'Oi Jailiya, remember Bhai Lalo ji. Baba Nanak rejected Malik Bhago's Brahm Bhoj (rich banquet) and accepted Bhai Lalo's Kodhra (Kodo millet) bread. Why? Because that was real labor earned bread." Giani wished again,'I wish! If I had accepted my father's request, I would not have had to see those days. In the evenings, our lodge at Sandhwan was more peaceful than the vast building of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.' He leaned back against the chair and threw his head back. He sat in this posture for a long time.

## TWENTY SEVEN

After the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by Sikh bodyguards, Giani Zail Singh had to cut short his official visit to Oman and reached Delhi. It was a testing hour for the country. After hours the newspapers were trying to give the latest information to the readers by printing summaries. Like the rest of the leaders, Giani Zail Singh went straight to AIIMS where Indira Gandhi was taken seriously injured. A wave of mourning ran across the country. When the BBC broadcast the news of the Prime Minister's death, the fans of Indira Gandhi got angry and started shouting slogans. Crowds joined everywhere. Meanwhile, President Giani Zail Singh took the initiative to return Mrs. Gandhi's favors by swearing in Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister. After a while, several Congress leaders led the protesting crowds and dragged the Sikhs out of their cars and houses and put tires around their necks and set them on fire. Such a frenzy of death in the streets and markets of Delhi did not happen even during the Mughal rule. The new Prime Minister's childish statement, 'When a big tree falls, the earth trembles' added fuel to the fire. The rioters had liquor bottles and diesel cans in their hands. From the infants to the elderly, they were burnt alive. Sikh majority settlements were surrounded and their daughters and sisters were gang-raped in front of their families.

The police were not only mute spectators but were also leading the crowd at many places. Across the Yamuna, the slums of Sikligars were also blown up. Even those who gave shelter to the Sikh victims in Sultanpuri, Mangolpuri etc. were not spared. The provocative slogans of 'Khoon Ka Badla Khoon' (an eye for an eye) from the crowd in the Teen Murti House could be heard clearly even by the Doordarshan viewers. No response was being given even when the victims dialed the Pollice Helpline number 100. Despite the belated deployment of paramilitary forces, the CRPF or BSF were nowhere to be seen. The army could have arrived from Meerut that night but no provision was made for it. When the army came, collosal damages had taken place. Rumour-mongers were active… it was wrongly circulated that a long train, loaded with dead bodies, has reached Delhi from Punjab. Poison has been added to the tanks. Such organized rumours made people wild. The anti-Sikh riots widened the gap between the new Prime Minister and the President. And in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Giani Zail Singh was feeling helpless. He was under pressure to resign. He could not sleep peacefully for three nights. God blessed me with the status of the President of India but what did I gain from it? At one point even Giani's family started forcing him to resign. Old friend Harbhajan Yogi stopped Giani Zail Singh from doing so. Yogi said that if he resigns from the post of President, then the Sikhs will become a victim of secession forever. Giani Zail Singh accepted Yogi's words. A few days later, Congress Lok Sabha member KK Tiwari, while speaking in the Lok Sabha, called Rashtrapati Bhavan a 'den of terrorists', so for Giani Zail Singh, it was like a big fuss. Giani Zail Singh insisted and forced Tiwari to withdraw from the Congress. Tiwari was thrown out of Congress and Giani, from Rajiv Gandhi's heart.

'I will show Rajiv my strength.' Giani tried to belittle Rajiv by pocket vetoing the Indian Postal Amendment Bill. But compared to the humiliation of Giani by Rajiv and the Congress, this step was very insignificant. His conscience was tormenting him. Waking up



suddenly from sleep became his body's habit. "It seems that I will leave the world only by keeping the pain like a mountain on my chest", he closed his eyes while talking to himself.

## TWENTY EIGHT

Gharinda Police Post is almost equi-distant from Amritsar and Wahga. Although Wahga is a Pakistani village, our Attari Check Post is known by this name. Before Partition, people used to go to Lahore on cycles or tongas from Amritsar. There were very few cars or scooters.

After the creation of Pakistan, the people in the border areas, especially the black marketeers, could cross the border without any fear. They sometimes participated in the marriage ceremonies of one another. The 553 kilometer long dividing line between India and Pakistan is known as Radcliff Line. Radcliff was an English man by whose name this border line is known. It is said that he had absolutely no knowledge of this area, but still he was asked to draw up this ugly line which has so far stung hundreds and thousands of people.

The people of this area have countless fond memories to relate. Swarna, the Lambardar, related the tales of his kinsmen in Pakistan. Tota and Toti were twin villages, separated by Redcliff Line. After the partition he crossed to Toti from his native village Total to broker compromise in the family of his old friend Mohammed Din and his brother Afzal. He addressed the wives of both of them "Bhabi Jan". Both the Muslim brothers regarded the Lambardar as their third brother. Whatever decision he gave in domestic affairs was considered as gospel truth. The amity of their families for three generation could not be broken even by Radcliff Line.Swarna used to cut jokes with the ladies of this family. Once Afzal's wife, Tania Begum, asked abruptly as to how these villages were given the names of Tota and Toti. After this there had been peals of laughter till the evening. Ultimtely, both the families began to abuse Radcliff

who had separated Toti from the Tota. With the strengthening of border posts, people's visits had reduced greatly. Still the cattle, while grazing, often crossed the border and the grazers, while chasing their cattle, seldom knew as to when they had reached a foreign country.

Both the countries often sent their spies through Wahga border. Amritsar and Lahore Cantonments were regarded as very important from war point of view. The notorious smugglers were beaten black and blue in Gharinda police station near border. On one side of the barrier was written "Come and meet dear" and on the other side, "When will you meet again". Even the biggest smuggler or spy, when given a few shoe beatings, he bellowed like a male calf. The policemen said to him – "You bastard, a bit louder. Your uproar has not yet reached Wahga. We will continue the shoe beating till your cries reach Lahore.

After the dominance of militants in the Punjab, most of the smugglers had given up this work. After increase of vigilance at the border, the remaining business also had come to an end. Many black marketeers had shaken hands with the militants. Their connections with Pakistanis, helped the militants as they were greatly anxious to go to Pakistan after Operation Blue Star.

## TWENTY NINE

Azan (Call for Muslim prayer) across the border could be clearly heard this side. In the same way Reh-Ras (Evening prayer of the Sikhs) could be heard on that side.

"Here is Pakistan – hardly two or two and a half furlongs. I would have gone to Lahore more than Amritsar. Lahore and Amritsar are equi-distant from where we are sitting."

Tara, the smuggler, sitting in the upper storey of his house in the border village Dauke, had been talking endlessly and the boys, who had to try to cross the border after a few days, were listening to him silently. This village, situated near Atari, is surrounded by



Pakistan on three sides. Being the moonlit night, every inch of the border could be clearly seen from Tara's house top.

"God has created full moon night and dark night for us only," said Tara with a broader smile.

"Tara Singh and stars, just like you, O patriarch!" Baz Singh uttered a crisp sentence.

During moonlit nights, Tara used to impart training to those desirous of crossing the border. The lights of the upper storey room having been switched off, he showed across the zero line the BSF soldiers and Pakistani rangers on patrol duty. He taught them how to cross the border deluding the BSF men positioned there. Near about Amavas (Dark moonless night) he encouraged them to cross the border without any fear.

"If you move with astronomy and pace of wind, you will get through all the dangers in the wink of an eye. Tara, the smuggler taught them the important point to cross the border.

"Looking at that star, you can walk straight away. Elephant grass is your best friend. When the wind blows vigorously, you took can move ahead swiftly. The soldiers patrolling the border shall take it that the sound from the elephant grass is not that of anyone moving therein but the blowing of wind. In this way no one will have any doubt. When the wind slows down, you too can slow down. If you walk in the slowed wind, the sound of your soft feet shall reach far off. Don't shriek even if a serpent sniffs you or a scorpion bites."

There is need to escape the vision of a few BSF men. After crossing the zero line you need not fear the Pakistan Rangers. They know that after the attack on Darbar Sahib, boys are coming in large numbers. After reaching there, raise the slogan of 'Bole-so-Nihal". Pakistani Rangers would lead you immediately to their post. After a brief search, they would lead to the real 'place'.

"What is your name, Bhau (brother)?" Tara asked a young man going to grow moustaches.

"Sir, Baz Singh."

Tara remembered his younger brother after seeing Baz Singh. He had been killed many years ago by BSF men crossing the border. This incident had taken place when they had just begun smuggling. Now he does not remember as how many times he had been to Pakistan. Sometimes the mares of smuggler, very much used to the profession, carried goods without riders. Earlier I knew everyone of the BSF men and Pakistani Rangers. Those days, we could buy the entire Check Post. Money circulated to the top. The officers did open auction of Check Posts. While crossing border, they came up to the zero line to see me off. Pakistani Rangers met me with open arms because my bag used to be full of wine or betel leaves. I did not feel that I was going to another country. To me, the BSF men and Pakistani Rangers were the same people."

"Before the Military attack on Darbar Sahib, going across the border was a child's play. I had myself left hundreds of persons that side. But now the BSF has strengthened the patrolling. Officers and jawans have also been transferred. Smuggling has totally stopped now.

It appeared that Tara wanted to disclose everything in one breath.

Now he helped the boys cross the border on the basis of his own experience.

The boys used to be in a hurry to reach Pakistan. Tara's upper storey room worked as a beacon light. The boys hiding in the elephant grass, kept an eye on the lantern in his upper storey room. If Tara suspected any risk, he blew off the lantern. The boys understood.

## THIRTY

The Sun was about to set. Birds were flying in rows to their nests. On the arrival of new jawans the BSF jawans were returning to their barracks.



Like the letter "V" of English alphabets, three jawans sat down at a distance of half a kilometer from one another. Such positions were adopted that if an infiltrator succeeded in duping two jawans, he came in the firing range of the third jawan. When these jawans manned the posts, generally till the end of duty, they sat in the same position. Besides, two or three gypsies patrolled the zero line.

He stated that a soldier taking position behind the tree could be easily cut. Sitting in the elephant grass, one must be vigilant about flying gypsies.

The boys had to get across border that night. That is why they were very attentive to what Tara was saying.

During the dark and silent night, they have to tread the unknown path.

Reciting Waheguru, they began their outing from different directions. The BSF as also given special directions to be more vigilant during the dark night (Amavasya).

Baz Singh looked towards the sky. The border being deserted as far as the eye could see, it seemed quite horrible. He was reminded of his childhood. When his mother asked him to open or shut the door, he would say – "I feel afraid mother". Mother rebuked him – "Even your own house is eating you up?"

Now the pitch dark was hissing like a cobra. He failed to understand how so such boldness had come in him.

Suddenly weather turned bad. The stars disappeared. The leading marks had been covered by small clouds. The lantern burning in Tara's upper storey room also got invisible. Baz Singh got so much upset that he thought of going back. He recalled what Tara had said. "Never turn back, boys under any circumstances because there is more danger in doing so. BSF people, sniffing human beings, could open fire any moment. In such a situation, it is better to move ahead because Pakistani Rangers would not fire at you.

With the sharp wind blowing, cold has increased. He, sitting in the elephant grass, waited for the star to shine. But he had been

told by him not to sit in panic for long because a coward does not know when the day breaks. After the disc of the Sun is seen, there would be nothing but death. Neither here, nor there.

Baz Singh began to crawl on his elbows. The rustling sound of rosewood leaves scared him. He felt as if a man was standing behind a tree aiming at him. Then it appeared to him that he heard a gun fire and he had collapsed on the spot. But it was all his misgiving. He crawled ahead. He thought his companions might have crossed the border and he had lagged behind. Thinking of this he hurried towards Pakistan.

"Hands up;!" As the thundering voice entered his ears, he was stunned. He placed his bag on the ground and raised his hands.

With black and twisted moustaches and black uniforms, the Pakistani Rangers appeared to him to be ghosts. When he felt certain that he had entered the Pakistani border, he was reminded what Tara had said, "As soon as you spot the Rangers, raise the slogan "Bole-so-nihal". He did so. Pakistani Rangers understood him.

"What is your name?" One of the Rangers, though had asked him very humbly, but still he had not been able to compose himself.

"B…a…z ..S …i…n…g…h." He told his name in a lingering tone.

"Don't be afraid, brother. It is not India, where you'll be shot. You are among your own people.

Baz Singh heaved a sigh of relief onhearing this.

"Your bag appears to be familiar," asked one of the Rangers.

"Yes, sir Tara has sent hooch for you." Baz Singh was made bold to say this.

"Bravo! This was badly needed in this frozen cold night."

The Ranger said to Baz Singh, "Perhaps this is your first trip?"

"Yes, please, I have risked my life for the first time to come here."

"Don't worry, in the future trips, crossing the border would seem to be a child's play.



Fire! Hearing the bullet fire, the Pakistani Rangers held their rifles and ran towards the zero line.

They directed Baz Singh to wait there only. On hearing the bullet fire, Baz Singh had understood that one of his associates must have been shot dead. He thanked God in his mind that he was sitting safe and sound. He thought that he had to see such days when your own people seem to be others, and the enemy, your own.

"The person shot dead could be Sukha Singh. Like him, Sukha also insisted that he would cross the border by himself without anyone's help," thought Baz Singh.

Meanwhile two of their companions were seen crossing Pakistan border. Pakistsani Rangers accorded them warm welcome. Baz Singh felt assured that the person shot dead must be Sukha singh. Both the companions confirmed this.

Baz Singh was terribly shocked at Sukha being shot dead. He was the lone brother of four sisters. "He has lost his life for nothing, poor man." Baz could hardly speak he was so very much overwhelmed. His second brother, Satnam Singh, who had gone to Darbar Sahib to pay adulation, was shot dead in firing. Sukha was such a decent person that he never entered into heated discussion about political affairs. Of course, he wanted to go to Paksistan to avenge the death of his brother. Baz Singh was being eaten up from within thinking of his innocent sisters and parents. He thought as to how would Sukha's parents bear loss of their second son? Lost in such thoughts, Baz Singh, sitting in the Rangers' post began to doze and he lay down on the ground. He was awakened by the first hymn of the Holy Book read out by the priest in the Gurdwara. He felt as if he was still in his own village. But when the Pakistani Rangers came in front of him, the spectacle of the night appeared before his eyes as to how he had crossed the river of fire.

When the new Rangers came on duty, one of them addressing the Sikh young men said, "Aslam-e-Lekum". The boys replied, "Sat

Sri Akal" instead of saying "Wa-alekum-….."The other Ranger understood that the boys had come across the border for the first time. That is why they could not address in the Islamic way. He said, "Waheguru-ji-ka-Khalsa…." And the boys replied happily, "Waheguru-ji-ki-Fateh!"

Feeling greatly surprised at chaste Punjabi of the Rangers and warm hospitality, Baz Singh said – "We ourselves do not speak such a nice language, Bhaji (brother)."

"The difference between this side and that side is only that of a line drawn. Language, disposition and eating habits, we are all one in our way of life.

"All right, boys, all well in your families?" There was so much sense of belonging in the Ranger's words as if he was one of their parted near or dear one.

"What can be said, brother? Better, don't ask." Baz Singh turned emotional as he said this.

"Relax for some time, sardaro, and then we would talk."

Baz Singh recalled the past time as he read the sentiment behind his words when he was a student of the fifth class and his blood began to boil when he read in the text book about the atrocities committed by the Mughals against the Gurus. He pierced the eyes of the pictures of the Mughals with the needle of his compass. This comforted Baz Singh a lot as if he had taken revenge against the tyrants. But today, the same Muslims appeared to him to be God's own incarnation.

Meanwhile, some senior Pakistani officer appeared. All the Rangers saluted him and reported about the Sikh boys.

The senior officer gazed at the boys.

"Who of you is from the Intelligence Agency? Disclose clearly yourself. It is in your own interest."

Hearing the authoritative voice of the officer, Baz Singh dreamt to do something that appeared to be smashed. He had never thought that a Pakitani would deal with them in such a manner."



"We do not belong to any Agency, sir. We have sought shelter with you. We wish to take revenge against India with your help." Baz Singh's companion, Vasakha Singh said in one breath.

The office again asked him, "Revenge for what?"

"The rioters had roasted my eight year old nephew in the burning gas like a partridge. What was the fault of the innocent child?"

Tears flowed down Vasakha's eyes abruptly while talking about the naked dance. His throat got paralyzed and he was unable to utter a word.

"We saw the bullets being showered during the Operation Blue Star. My devout elder man went to pay adulation but did not return. I had never stirred out of Amritsar. Now I have come to another country for a mission." This was Bakhtaura's reply.

Anger was turning and twisting within Baz Singh. He felt his whole body burning like an oven. He said – What a horror, God! Ours is the province of rivers but I have seen with my own eyes people dying for a drop of water. Continue curfew! Horrible!! Who can bear to see the modesty of their daughters and sisters being violated in front of their eyes. Of course, General Shahbeg Singh had told me that if Darbar Sahib was attacked, I should go to Pakistan.

"Relax! Relax!!" Listening to them, the Pakistani officer mind was filled with compassion.

"Oh! Your own army, attacked its own people. I had never heard or read about such a military action in the world," said the officer raising a spark in his eyes.

"Get some milk, etc. for the boys, dear. Don't you see how tired are they? Poor boys." As soon as the officer said this, three or four soldiers ran together.

"Only one should go. Are you going to carry a mountain?

Milk was brought in the large tumblers with bracelet bases.

"We get milk boiled in large pans in such glasses in Amritsar also," said Baz Singh.

"There is no difference between Amrtisar and Lahore, sardara," said the officer with a sense of belonging.

As soon as milk was drunk, the officer said, "Now move to the right place."

Though the boys did not follow which was the right place, they nodded their heads in agreement.

The boys were asked to get into the armored vehicle. The panes of the car had been painted black carefully. There was a partition also behind the driver. Therefore, one sitting behind could neither see outside nor in the front. The boys, who were desirous of seeing the Pakistsani roads and surroundings, were greatly disappointed. They failed to understand as to why they had been deprived of the spectacles outside? They tried to ask the Pakistani gun men sitting with them but they were not communicating with the boys. Meanwhile the vehicle reached a fort like building, the salwar-qameez clad six feet tall boys opened the door. The vehicles entered immediately.

When the boys alighted, the Sikh boys welcomed them with "Waheguru-ji-ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji ki Fateh.

After drinking water and taking some refreshment they were asked to take bath. After taking bath, the Sikh boys living in the fort-like building began to chat with Baz Singh and his companions. When they talked, the salwlar-qameez clad tall boys remained with them like their shadow. Though these Muslim boys appeared to be simpletons, in fact they were the employees of ISI The Sikh boys, who had come earlier, addressed them as "Munshi Ji". Munshi had got mixed up with the Sikh boys as if they were neighbours. The fact of the matter was that they noted all the movements of the Sikh boys and sent their report before evening set in to their seniors. There was hardly a chance if two Sikh boys could share a secret.

Sant Bhindrawale cassettes were playing on the deck. Lisening to the Sant's speech, the boys' biceps were throbbing.



"Say brother, are you going to Amritsar tomorrow?" A boy asked.

"Have you any doubt?" The boys, whose moustaches were beginning to show, replied at once.

"Then should I read the newspaper of the day after tomorrow?" The former asked him sarcastically.

"I will print tomorrow's newspaper just now. You may read this supplement, 'the militants made 30 passengers of a bus to get down and stand in a row and shot them dead'.

"The news which you would be reading a day after, I have given you today itself," said the former twisting his moustache.

He laughed so loud after listening to the news that the entire hall echoed

"We are proud of your words and deeds. Are you going to parch these grains for the first time?"

"Bhau, if possible see my mother in Ghanupur Kaley," said Baz Singh casually.

"Yes ask his mother for the milk bottle which her son had forgotten before leaving." All of them began to make fun of him.

"Dear brother, forget about the relationships when you are treading the path you have chosen."

"He is yet a new bird. He will understand everything gradually." A person of middle age tried to make him understand.

"Remembering mothers and sisters make us shaky. Just look into the eye of the fish!" The goatee bearded boy said firmly.

Baz Singh could not sleep throughout the night. He kept turning and twisting.

"Where have I got entangled where even the blood relations turn minus?"

"It is an extreme. Remembering your parents even has become a sin here. Who can save you when you have yourself been got caught?"

Then addressing himself, he said, "If I remained tangled in the

warp and woof of relationships, even the Munshi would start making fun of me.

The next moment he felt that the boys had interrupted him rightly, "The way I have chosen to tread, the web of attachment of relationships stands like a mountain on the way."

"I have reached here risking my life. If I have not been struck with a bullet, this life is the trust of the nation. Sukha was killed while crossing the border. He did not remain of any use to his family or to the nation. Would he have ever thought that he would go to die on the "No man's land" ?

After some time, he got again fed up with the environment and he felt that before getting caught in the arraignment, he should flee from there and should lead his life with his family as before.

"Going back would be more hazardous than coming. Earlier there was the danger of BSF but if a step was taken without their approval, the Pakistani Rangers would roast. Is it easy to get out of this fort like building? His mates had told him that whenever one has to go to India for some "action", the Pakistani Rangers help in crossing the border safely."

Thinking of all this, he did not know when he was gripped by sleep. In the early morning, he was awakened by the reading out of Japuji Sahib (Morning prayer).

"You should get up early in the morning, the celestial hour. If we kept sleeping, the nation's destiny too would slumber."

"OK, brother" With these words Baz Singh took hold of towel and soap and headed towards the bathroom.

## THIRTY ONE

Baba Harbhajan Singh alias "Harh" (Flood) having thick mustachios and Adonis Zoravar Singh daily went out with the Munshi in an imported vehicle. Baz Singh tried to ask his associates about Harh and Zoravar Singh's going out but he could not gather courage. It came to his mind that his world was as if limited to four



walls. One day he asked Jagga as to why Baba Harbhajan Singh suffixed "Harh" to his name? Jagga laughed and said that the Baba's real name was Harbhajan Singh but his surname Harh was given to him when he went to Pakistan. It is said that whenever the Baba went for an "action", there appeared pools of blood on the place of incident. And this name was given. Now he is known to one and all as Baba 'Harh' only. Baba Harh had been there for many years. Pakistanis were always guided by him. If anyone had some problem, Baba 'Harh' solved it in a jiffy. Baba is a big go getter here. Of course, Baba took care of everyone.

"But why are we not permitted to go out? Why is there so much security outside our gate? What danger do they fear from us?" Finding Jagga opening up, Baz Singh put many questsions.

"Baba says that security arrangements have been made for our safety. It is suspected that men of many agencies in India move about here. They can buy anyone of you also." Jagga explained to Baz Singh in detail.

Meanwhile sugar canes, fresh jaggery and metal pitchers full of sugarcane juice, all laden in a trolly reached there. The smell of fresh jaggery reminded Baz Singh of his own fields. He shut his eyes for a moment and viewed the spectacle of his house. He was reminded of his mother, who always gave a piece of jaggery to him after meals. Jagga jostled Baz Singh and broke the home spectacle.

"Which thoughts are you lost in, Baz Singh?"

He restrained himself from telling Jagga that the fragrance of the hot jaggry has reminded him of home.

After dropping the bundle of sugarcanes in front of the boys, Munshi said, "Suck and make merry."

Sucking the sugarcane, Baz Singh could not restrain himself. He said to Munshi, "Wonderful! There is no difference between things here and there. The seed of this sugarcane seems to be excellent." Munshi said, "Sardarji, it has also come from your side."

Showing his curiosity he askd him, “Is farming a gainful work here or not? In our side, the farmers is regarded a separate species.”

Though Baz Singh had not yet moved about in Pakistani fields, he could realize that the same winds blow on both sides and crops grow in abundance on both sides.

Gauging the depth of Baz Singh’s questions full of curiosity, Jagga said, “Work hard, brother and you too would have joy rides in car like the patriarch.

Baz Singh had now begun to understand what Jagga said. He said, “Entrust me with some duty. I am ready to do everything.”

“You have been here only for ten days. You cannot fire an air gun and you have begun to dream of firing a cannon” said Bhilo.

“Brother, I know how to fire double-barrel gun and revolver. Hunting is our family hobby.”

“Baz Singh, there is hell of a difference between hunting a man and an animal. When one fires at a man for the first time, one is dazzled. Forget these small toys for the time being. Imagine that you are holding a Mouser or AK-47 and your enemy stands in front of you. What would you do in such a situation?

Baz Singh began to perspire imagining such a situation. He thought that once he had shot a pigeon with an air gun. It turned around and had fallen down. As soon as it fell down, the pigeon gathered courage, fluttered its wings and flew towards the sky. Baz Singh had not chased the pigeon because he would twist its neck. But he felt compassion for the injured pigeon as he did not know how far would be fly carrying with it the pain of the pellet. It would have been better if the pellet had not struck it and if the aim was right, the pigeon should have died. Baz Singh ensured even killing insects that they should die properly, and not groan.

Today, when Baz Singh said to Jagga that if he had a AK-47 in his hand and his enemy may stand in front of him, he had turned speechless imagining this.

Munshi was listening to their questions and answers. Before



Baz Singh could say anything, he said, “Sardarji, Baz Singh would observe your skill and then will be his turn. He has been here only for a few days. He will learn if you teach him something.”

Baz Singh was tightening his jaws in anger in his mind, “Who do these bastards think of me? After receiving training for four days, they think of having become valiant fighters killing en mass.

“Munshiji, if you press the trigger of AK-47, many bullets are fired at once and one of them at least can hit the target. Just give me the pistol, out of which only one bullet issues and tell me who should be the target; if I miss it, change my name….”

“Stop it. While shooting the target, one should have the courage also.” Jagga said again sarcastically.

“Am I less than anyone in any way? Tell me who has to fall down like the lightning?”

Munshi felt reassured that after a little training, Baz Singh can swoop on any one like a falcon. He foresaw possibilities of Baz Singh becoming a mighty militant. A spark needs to touch the fuselade.

As a matter of routine, the Munshi sent his report on Baz Singh in the evening to his masters. Next morning, two middle-aged tall men reached the building in Pathani suit. Munshi introduced the newly arrived boys. Looking at Baz Singh’s robust body, they said, “Sardarji, you seem to have drunk the milk of a buffalo having white extremities. …Allah has blessed you with mighty youth.” After taking tea, etc. those people led Baz Singh to a separate room. He was asked about any trouble or service. Baz Singh said abruptly, “This building appears to be like a jail, sir. Its walls appear to be ready to swallow me. I have come here for some purpose but there seems to be no chance yet of serving the purpose.”

“Sardarji, we wish that you should get training for a few days and move ahead towards your destination. Munshi has enlightened us about your daredevilry.”

“Yes, I have seen death from very close quarters. Before death swoops upon me, I wish to swoop over it.”

After this conversation, the Pathans felt assured that Baz Singh did not belong to any Indian agency but was a simple and emotional Sardar. They promised that they would take him on an outing in the evening. "Please tie your zig-zag coloured turban with a plume, from which no one would know that you have come from India. With God's Grace, near the Chhanga Manga camp in Kasur, we will introduce you to other mates also.Your Ferozepore city can be seen clearly from there."

Baz Singh was overjoyed with the Pathans' promise. He looked towards the sky with longing eyes and began to wait for the evening. A vehicle arrived for Baz Singh, as promised. Although the door panes were black, one sitting inside could see everything clearly outside. After so many days, it was the first time that he was going to envision the Pakistani surroundings.

After a drive of about two hours, they reached a very big farm house. This farm house built in the fields appeared to be the property of a leading estate holder. Here he met Baba Harh's companions and felt overjoyed. There was no habitation as far as the eye could go.

"What is your name, brother?" The boy sporting a thick beard asked.

"Baz Singh."

"It is a wonderful name. If I show you the victim, will you swoop like Guru's falcon?

"Order me, Sir, what is required to be done by me."

After taking tea, etc. the senior sardar asked Baz Singh, "Let us test your marksmanship."

The boys led Baz Singh to a room. About a dozen boys with robust bodies were incarcerated. Their heads were shaved off on which was engraved in Shahmukhi (Persian script of Punjabi) "I am an Indian spy".

The boys told him that they were the RAW agents, who had been nabbed near our camp. Their heads were shorn off tht if they try to flee from here, the general public would stone them to death.



One of the boys said, "Baz Singh, we learn your target shooting is perfect. We are going to help this spy flee. Chase him after five minutes and grant peace to his soul. Right?"

Baz Singh nodded in consent. He thought that a reply after thinking would be considered a great weakness.

Seeking compassion in God's Name, the RAW agent began to beg most humbly. He mentioned his small children and promised that he would never step forward towards Pakistan. But his pleadings had been eaten away by winds. The other boys had panicked terribly. The room was then locked from outside.

"Now run away towards the gardens, Death will chase you exactly after five minutes. There were only six bullets in Baz Singh revolver. If you escape, we will re-think about you.

Shedding tears, the boy fled through the wilderness.

"Now, Baz Singh, your first test."

Holding a revolver, Baz Singh began to chase the boy with some divine power. Pakistani security men were on guard duty everywhere, far from the farm house.

After a few minutes, the boy, going to be the victim and Baz Singh disappeared and everyone fixed binoculars on their eyes. They began to ridicule the Indian spy at his labored breathing. Then a bullet fire was heard and the boy collapsed on the spot. Everyone reached the spot where the incident had occurred. They appreciated Baz Singh for the situation report about target shooting. It was just by chance that out of six bullets, only one could be fired and that too hit the boy on the head and struck his head where "Spy" was tattooed. The inscription had got blood soaked.

The boy was groaning for water but everyone was busy in congratulating Baz Singh. In a few minutes the boy, groaning in pain, breathed his last.

"Baz Singh, you have taken the minimum time to meet with success. You have fully economized on ammunition also. Bravo!"

"Lets move, my boy, and carry this dog's corpse to the room where other bastard pups have been locked."

The Pathan was in a mood to celebrate the occasion. Though Baz Singh appeared to be whole from outside, but he had been shaken very deep within. This was the first occasion in twenty five years that he had shed human blood. The deceased's words uttered ten minutes earlier were echoing in his ears in which he was begging in the name of his small children, unmarried sisters and widowed mother.

The officers of the ISI were undersanding Baz Singh's silence. To break it, an officer beckoned to the waiter. He brought in a bottle of wine and a glass. Baz Singh said, "I had heard that drinking was forbidden in Islam."

"Does your faith permit it? It all goes on these days. One satisfies one's needs stealthily, especially when there is a joyous occasion. This too has been procured from across Wahga from your people."

"One glass would do. We are intoxicated with His Name." Baz Singh asked for a cold drink. The Pakistani officer was saying "Cheers". The Sikh boys were giving him company having cold drinks.

"Bravo, Baz Singh. There is rejoicing in the jungle because of you."

After the bottle was emptied, all of them went to see the dead body of the spy in the "Camp jail". After the door was opened, the others boys who had also been arrested, panicked all the more. They felt as if someone has got his turn for target shooting.

"What is your name, baldy?" ISI officer asked one of them.

"My master, my name is Sher Singh."

"Wonderful! The name is Sher Singh but deeds are those of a fox."

He stood still looking at the ground. His face had turned pale with fear.



"You can come out now."

As soon as he said this, he prostrated at his feet and begged for his life.

The Pakistani officer dragged him to the other room.

"O, being a Sikh, you are spying for India – didn't you feel ashamed, you dog?" The Baba also joined in cursing him.

"I have committed a grave sin. I have not only deceived you but my own nation also, sir. Forgive me. I shall never tread this path in future, even by mistake."

"If you remain alive." Baz Singh snubbed him.

Baba told Baz Singh that Sher Singh also, like him, on the pretext of taking revenge, had got mingled with them. "In the beginng he performed wonderful acts. Afterwards an Indian spy, held near the camp, revealed that he used to send messages across Wahga through him. When was hanged upside down, only then he confessed.

Baz Singh felt that Sher Singh was being harassed to warn him. He was being made to realize as to the fate of a "Double agent".

Baz Singh asked them as why his life had been spared till then? "Give me the revolver. Let me finish him also."

"No, time has not reached yet for settling his account."

## THIRTY TWO

Sleep was eluding him. Night was hissing in the wild. Wind appeared to be lamenting passing through the tree branches. Sometimes it appeared as if the strange sounds were singing his accolades. Again sleep grabbed him suddenly. In his dreams also he was chasing swiftly his victims. While running he was about to open fire when he fell off the bed with a thud. He was hurt on his left flank without leaving any sign. Later, even by trying his best, he was unable to have a wink of sleep. He was unable to understand the language of trees at midnight. It was not known why Baz Singh

was feeling terribly afraid? He felt like awakening the Baba lying with him but he restrained himself. He thought that those who did not tire of praising his target shooting at night what would they think of him now? Lost in such thoughts, he did not know when the day had broken and he heard Babaji reciting Japuji. "Waheguru, show Thy compassion." Baz Singh began to recite His Name in his mind.

"Baz Singh, are you feeling joyous over yesterday's achievement?" asked the Baba.

"No, Babaji, sleep is just eluding me," said Baz Singh hesitantly.

"Because you have pressed the trigger of the revolver for the first time. ..After some time you will forget the number of your victims. Just look at me; I used to come to know through newspapers only as to how many had been shot dead yesterday. Look here my brother, so long as I had been going on "action", the headlines of every newspaper had mention of my name. Now the name itself has become so important, that thousands of our companions indulge in name dropping." Baba was enumerating his deeds widening his chest.

Feeling agitated in his mind, Baz Singh was thinking that red sand storms would follow his name and who would care for Baba?

Meanwhile another mate of Baba came there brushing his teeth with a twig. "Yes Baz, how did you spend the first night?"

"Excellent, dear brother," said Baz Singh half-heartedly.

"Your name, brother?"

"What would you gain from name? You can name me the way you like."

"Baz Singh, we will change your name also. When you go out on "actions", your name will be Lion or Tiger, etc. so that after any incident, the rascals should not harass your family" said the person caressing his beard.

"In the world of newspapers, my name is Babbar Jaswant Singh."



"O! You are the Babbar!! The Punjab Police trembles on hearing your name."

"Don't get emotional, Baz. God seems to have destined you to serve the Panth greatly."

"All right, I'll leave now. Shall return late at night."

"May I accompany you? Have not yet seen Pakistan properly." Baz Singh pleaded with him.

'No, you cannot go just now. Today we have an important meeting,' said Babbar.

On hearing this Baz Singh felt himself very small.

"Don't feel small, you too would be going with us. You will be valued here on the basis of your daring deeds." Babbar cleared to him the main point.

"As you order," consoling his mind, Baz Singh thought that he would be able to have sound sleep on this pretext.

"Baz Singh was sitting with himself after a long time. As he was looking on, dark clouds appeared on the sky. As the weather turned pleasant, he remembered his mother. "Mother must be running about collecting odds and ends." Her work increased as the sky got overcast. "How will mother take care of the entire household? I wish I had been there today." Mother must be feeling loneliness, like a tree in the wilderness. How she used to dream about him in his childhood? "My son would grow up, will become the support stick of his old mother. She used to sing – "My young Baz would serve the elders when he grows up." Why have I chosen the lethal path? Who knows, police may be harassing her, the poor woman. I wonder if the bastards have taken away Bapu in my place. It is likely. No, I should not think on these lines now. One has to lose something to gain some other thing." Talking to himself like this, Baz Singh did not know when sleep had overpowered him.

Baz Singh was still living in the world of dreams when someone jostled and awakened him. He felt perturbed a little. He felt as if the Punjab police had swooped upon him. A robust bodied im-

pressive Sikh said to him in a thundering tone, "Baz Singh it is early dawn (celestial hour) now. Get up and recite your daily hymns." Baz Singh was reassured hearing this that it was not the Punjab Police but a devout Sikh (Guru-oriented) who has come to unite him with God. Then he laughed at himself as to how he had thought that the Punjab Police had nabbed him when he was relaxing in Pakistan. "Just possible, some weakness might be abiding stealthily in a corner of my mind" said he to himself. "I am Guru's Baz (falcon) and such a thought should not have come near me."

Baz Singh got up to take bath. The impressive Sikh again reminded him that whenever he got an opportunity, he should repeat God's Name. This gives one success in one's mission. On being asked, the Sikh gave his name as Santokh Singh. He told Baz Singh that it was his job to enlighten the visiting Sikhs about the glorious history of the Sikhs, full of sacrifices. He awakened the Sikhs in the morning to get up and do the daily recital of hymns and taught them the correct pronunciation.

It was absolutely necessary to give complete information about the tenets of the Sikh faith. During this training, the discrimination being made against the Sikhs was fully brought out. It was also imparted as to how the community had suffered deceptions right from the Gurus' times. Special emphasis was given to those pages of history wherein the Muslims had made sacrifices for the Sikhs. On the recommendation of Pir Budhu Shah, the tale of valour of the soldiers was related. This lecture made the blood boil. Fellow-feeling with Muslims was further strengthened. The names of cruel Muslims were omitted from this history.

"How much difference is there in imparting knowledge of history? Why do our historians hesitate in gleaning through these pages? All these Congressmen and Akalis are the two sides of the same coin. The difference lies only in the colour of their turbans. With a few showers of time, the light blue colours are dissolved and turn white. Baz Singh, new Sikh leadership is required. These old people



would never let the new generation come forward. The masked leaders don the crown during the elections. Remove their pyjamas and there would be khaki knickers underneath." Said Santokh singh cursing the traditional Akalis.

"To my mind, first of all, we should do away with the ones who call themselves Panthak (Servants of the faith). They are eating up the roots of the community like termite", said Baz Singh turning emotional.

The entire community may be washed away, but they do not wake up from the Kumbhkarni slumber. If their dog gets a scratch, they consider it a danger to the Panth. Their children go abroad to study but they shout from house tops about Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiat. I pity the simple congregations (masses) who say that they have to affix the stamp on Baba Nanak's scale. Baba's scale had distributed the entire stock in the storehouse to needy persons. Nanak had left his hearth and home for the sake of the world but the entire life of our leaders is spent in bringing up their families." Santokh Singh was talking continuously and Baz Singh was listening to him without even winking his eye. "Baz Singh, you must have been very young, when the Akali Dal President had given a ticket to his car driver to contest election to the Lok Sabha. The congregation had returned him also with heavy margin of votes. After this glorious victory, the President had bragged "If he puts a party ticket around a dog's neck, it too would win." One should ask the unlettered person that instead of sending him to Lok Sabha, a dog should have been sent. How nice would it have looked! At least it could mark its attendance by barking.l"

"I do not remember this, Jathedar Ji but when Tota Singh had asked for a ticket for election to the Lok Sabha from Faridkot, the President of the Akali Dal had made fun of him saying, "Parliament is not a zoo where parrots and sparrows are needed."

"I wonder if you remember or not, when Kikar Singh had recited a verse in the Lok Sabha causing belly aches.

"Verse and that too in the Lok Sabha!"

"Everyone was making fun of him. The voters would ask him during the next electins, "O 'Goonge Pehalwan' (mute wrestler), were you sent to Parliament to observe silence?" When compelled to speak in the Parliament, the driver-turned-MP uttered anything that came to his mind. He forgot that he was delivering a speech in the Lok Sabha or reciting a verse in a poetic symposium. When he said, "Nehru dug canals and installed tube wells, Shastri wielded weapons and killed kings. Indira got everyone circumcised and fixed loops." Though the Prime Minister could not understand anything at that time, but her disciples made her understand the meaning and she became a staunch enemy of the Akalis."

## THIRTY THREE

After a long and tiring journey, the sky high mountains were reached. Ultimately the convoy of vehicles reached a deserted valley. This was the region between Rawalpindi and Peshawar. The senior officers of Pakistan, on deputation with ISI, had reached here with the Sikh boys. Therefore the valley had been especially chosen for laying mines, preparing and exploding crude bombs and to impart training. Because it was a very dense forest, it was impossible even for an American or any other country's satellite to detect it.

"Bring some refreshment. Rats must be jumping in the Sardars' bellies now," said Fakhar-ud-din as soon as he alighted.

"Doesn't matter, Sir. You too have been with us with empty stomach. One cannot think of belly in such a mission", said Baz Singh.

Suddenly the valley turned horrible with the firing of bullets and explosion of hand grenades. Baz Singh was terribly shaken. The officers, who had accompanied them, looked at the faces of the boys and said sarcastically, "It was just a trailor."

Pointing towards the distant hill, the officer like person asked,



"Young man, if this hill has to be removed from the way, how much time would it take?

Dilavar, whose moustaches were trying the grow, said, "It is a huge hill, like a phantom. If it has to be cut by Farhad's axe, it would take life time.

"All right, now keep looking ahead", that person said to the boys in such a way as if some magician, wielding his magic wand was trying to show some miracle.

As soon as the wires of the huge battery lying nearby were connected, the valley echoed. The hill was broken into pieces and disappeared. Large plants were clearly seen flying in the air and then falling on the earth.

"Wonderful! Bravo!! Great one, you have done the job of years in a jiffy," said Baz Singh in surprise.

"No, brother. Laying explosive mines is not a job of days but months. Of course, the button can be pressed in th wink of an eye. It is not easy to play with explosive. Therefore rather than zeal, wisdom is requird," said the officer.

"Is laying explosives a very big task? Entrust me with this service. I will go to lay on the other hill," said Baz Singh arrogantly.

"Dear brother, don't regard this hill a simple hill. Regard this as the Secretariat of Chandigarh where the ministers' herd and other high officrs sit. Regard the grass grown on the hill as the security men who keep vigil on people like you round the clock. If you have to lay mines in such a situation, how long would you take?"

Baz Singh was totally hushed. Dilavar said, in his place, "Kindly teach us your tactics; Baz Singh keeps unnecessarily beating the bush.

The boys had to be imparted training in this valley for two weeks continuously. Then the boys had to be selected as to who had to become a human bomb and who has to cause explosions in buses."

"Come on, Sardars, will show you another miracle. This Afghan

boy appears to be of tender age but his marksmanship is unrivalled in the world," said Fakhar-u-ddin poionting towards the iron bodied boy.

Clad in Salwar-qameez, the Pathan boy took a Chines revolver out of his carton and asked, "Do you wsant to pierce the eye of a crow flying above that hill or a bullet is required to pierce the navel of the deer jumping there?"

"Target both." As soon as he said this, the quick boy shot at the target in the wink of an eye. The raven, turning and twisting, was falling on the ground while the deer, after being shot at, got hidden in the forest baiting for breath.

"Miracle! It is a miracle!! Bravo, you Afghan lad." The Sardar boys were delighted.

"You, sardars, learn from him the target shooting and teach him how to tie turban like you. Then you will see if any mother's son would dare stand against the two communities." Fakhar-u-din pointed towards the future relationship.

"Now take hold of your revolvers and practice target shooting. A Gandhi cap was hanging in the firing range along with turbans of different colours. Enemy is enemy. It can appear in any garb in front of you."

That being the first day, the Sardars were shootng not many targets.

"If this Afghani had fired as many bullets as you have done, the entire jungle would hve been emptied by now," said Fakhar-u-ddin giving a jolt to the Sardar boys.

"Doesn't matter, sir. It will take a day or so. We are not going to fire fake bullelts now," said Baz Singh, feeling rued a bit.

## THIRTY FOUR

The migration of young men from India was not stopping. It seemed difficult for Pakistsan also to look afer these hordes. The Indian government had begun to blame Pakistan on this issue. The



Dera Baba Nanak border had begun to be considered very easy compared to Wahga border.

Surain Singh, who had already formed a federaion of educated and militant boys, accompanied by his twenty or so loyal workers had to cross the border. In this group, there was a woman also with Kuljit Singh Sehmi. He called her his wife. When Surain Singh suggested to Sehmi not to take his wife Dalbir Kaur with him, he said that she was wanted here and could be arrested any time. "Dalbir would be more secure after crossing the border" all were in agreement with Sehmi's logic.

Carefree river, the Ravi, followed a serpentine course in this region, now in India and now in Pakistan again and again. Though there were boat check posts at many places, it was a gigantic task to keep complete vigilance in the mist. Many had misgivings about Dalbir Kaur. "All of them may not be thrust into the jaws of death because of this lady." – If someone made a firing sound orally, she would begin to shriek. "As willed by Satguru (True Lord)". With these words all of hem set out along swirling ways and entered the wilderness of Dera Baba Nanak. Dalbir Kaur did not lose her heart at all, treading the difficult and uneven path, to the surprise of everyone while the robust bodied Jagjit Singh Boxer got tired after walking two and a half miles. As he was wanting for breath, Boxer's tongue glued to his palate and he sought permission to relax a little bit. Citing the example of Dalbir's great courage, everyone made fun of the Boxer. Bagga said sarcastically that when his mother said to her sister-in-law (husband's younger brother's wife) that the sparrow had come under the dung, the aunt got surprised and said to her that she had heard the saying about a camel getting buried under the hill but she could not accept that a sparrow could be so callous that when a buffalo passed dung and she may not fly away. Finding Boxer bating for breath again and again showed that mother used to say rightly. Boxer, sir, if you continue to lie half dead

like this, the BSF would have no difficulty in nabbing the lethargic like you.

Reciting God's Name they crossed the Ravi where water was shallow. The Pakistanis welcomed from the other side raising their hands. A Pakistani brought to this bank a bamboo raft on which all of them crossd the river in turn. All were surprised and asked as to how the Lady had crossed the river.

These farmers of Pakistan had come to irrigate their fields early in the morning and the Sikh boys crossing the border was a routine spectre for them. One of them, smuggler Mohd. Akram cheered Dalbir Kaur with "Sat Sri Akal". Akram had participated in many marriages in India and he knew how to greet the Sikhs. Later on, with the help of Pakistsani Rangers, they left for the Chhanga Manga Camp. Sehmi and Dalbir Kaur were given a separate room.

The ISI officers separated Surain Singh from others to lodge complaint that the spirit that prevailed earlier in the first band to attain martyrdom in the battle field was not found in subsequent bands. They also objected about bringing in Dalbir Kaur. They said that some Sikh boys preferred to bathe at the water pump in the open rather than in the bath room. They said that the boys should be counseled to remain in discipline because bathing in this way wearing kachhehra (A special type of underwear of devout Sikh with long girth) was not the culture of the region. Exhort them to act like gentlemen and commit no mischief. They should keep in mind the purpose for which they had come here. According to them, the local people had no knowledge that the boys had come from across the border to be trained. Although Suain Singh had impressed the Pakistanis very much, despite his pleadings, he was told not to visit Bulle Shah's Samadh a little away from Chhanga Manga. When he mumbled Bulle Shahs Kafis (prosody), he felt intoxicated. He had learnt all the prosodies by heart. Bulla's Kafi about Shariat (Islamic law) was sung:



Nimaz in furnace and rozas in mud
Kalima has been tainted black
God is found within oneself, Bulla
The people are just going astray

When this entered the ears of the ISI officer, he felt terribly annoyed. Although Bulla Shah is a very popular Sufi poet in the Indian Punjab, the Pakistani bigots still regard him a rebel. This duel policy of Pakistanis distressed Surain Singh. It came to his mind that if their co-religionists consider this devotee of the faith a rebel, their love for Indian rebels is not their willingness but ill-will.

## THIRTY FIVE

Nimma was rebuking Sikh leaders loudly and by name. Instead of consoling, Baz Singh grappled with him furiously, "You fool why you are licking the bland rock reciting elIgies of these leaders. For us, they had died long ago. Also, by crying on the Pakistani territory, do not dissolve sour water. What will our hosts say?"

Satta tried to explain the reason for Nimma's deep annoyance. He said that Jita had gone to Nimma's village some days earlier where he came to know that the police had taken his old parents, young brothers and sisters and the cattle heads to Police Station. His sister's marriage had been fixed a few days later. Nimma wanted to participate in the wedding. But High Command had restrained him from doing so.

Naunehal, who, in his student days participated in many meetings of Naxalbaris, cited the Russian Revolution to console Nimma. "Just see Nimma, a Russian guerilla had shot dead his pregnant wife because Tzar's desperate soldiers were chasing them. Before shooting her, the soldier had sought his wife's permission. The brave woman had said, "Don't delay even for a minute lest my mind should change." He knew that if he did not do so, because of him, all the guerillas would become the target of the soldiers' bullets. While doing so, the guerila couple must have thought of the

future of their son to be born, as they had determined. But they preferred their nation and the country."

"Elderman, you are citing the examples of sky high Tora-Bora Peak. The Sikh history is full of such sacrifices. Just see the sacrifices made by the Sikh women as recalled in the Ardas (Prayer). They had their children cut to pieces but did not utter a word to mourn."

Jita's satire changed the topic of discussion. Nimma, who had been suLking a little earlier, sat still and composed himself. But on his compsed face, the flames flaring inside were visible clearly.

Take the case of getting the country freed of the white men. Do you think Gandhi got you the freedom? If I had the power, I could stop currency notes bearing Gandhi's bare head photograph offered before Guru Mahraj.

Recalling the days spent with Baz Singh in a room in Harmandar Sahib complex, Jita stated that he had the inkling of Naxalbri background from a an inscription on the wall. Baz Singh had written on the wall "Saffron salute to the martyrs", reading which the Singh, keeping in touch with the intelligence agencies, was alarmed. While talking he tried to probe Baz Singh: "Do you remember patriarchs when that boy had put a direct question to you that red salute to the martyrs was written on the walls but the journey from 'red salute' to 'saffron salute' reveals that you must have had close association with naxalites." Baz Sngh had not understood anything at that time but today he is not having any hesitatin to admit his Naxalbari background.

"Look here, at that time also the Akali Government had put to death many Naxalbari boys while we had left our home and hearth to fight and die for the people. But when our community faced danger, we took shelter with the Guru. Sikhi too exhorts to sacrifice yourself for others."

"But what good have these Akalis done to the people so far? After the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, Kanpur and Bokaro, did anyone



fight the cases of the afflicted? They sold the entire community and went to beg from the descendents of Nehru-Gandhi. Where were Longowal and Marjivrai (Death defiers) at the time of Operation Blue Star?" The bread and butter of these Akalis is connected with the biers of those who made sacrifices. Who was the top leader, who, during the burning fire, had not sent their sons abroad. Making the sons of the poor, like him, the Marjivrai, they struck a bargain with Delhi. Millions of curses on those who begot them." Nimma had got worked up again.

## THIRTY SIX

About one hundred and fifty boys were shifted to the big Forest Guest House in the Southern Waziristan Hills in Pakistan. This is Wana Town spread over twenty square miles, which is known as Tribal area. It is a thick jungle on the Paksitan-Afghanistan border where a long wall has been built. Mostly tribal chiefs rule over here. They are always armed with modern weapons. For them taking life or giving life is a child's play.

The journey from Lahoe to Waziristan is long, tiring and risky. The reason for the sudden shifting of the place was the anti-Pakistan propaganda. The Indian government alleged that it had solid evidence that Paksitan gave weapon training to boys to take revenge of Bangladesh. Pakistan Government had challenged India that they could send their senior ministers to verify this. The ISI had suggested to its government that why the Sikh boys, from whom not much is expected, should be put behind the bars for face saving. After the tour of the Indian Home Minsiter had been decided upon, suddenly headlines appeared in many newspapers: "Five Sikh young men were caught last night crossing the border." In the next few days, the number of those arrested rose from five to eight. Surain Singh and others failed to understand as to why the number of militants was decreasing among the Sikhs?

Only those militants were left in Waziristan from whom Paki-

stan had high hopes. Neither Surain Singh and others thought it proper to enquire about the decreasing number of Sikhs in the camps nor the seniors of ISI thought it necessary to explain this.

Meanwhile, the boys put in jails regarded this action a great treachery against the Sikhs.

"Just tell us why have you put us in jail? Earlier you told us that we were special guests of Pakistan and serving us was our religious duty. Are you showing your hospitality or trying to torment us? Is this called hospitality in your culture?"

The Jailer was trying to mellow them down but the Singhs were not ready to listen to any logic. Attempts were made to give them all facilities, the comfort of which they were enjoying even after crossing the border. Pakisan Governemnt had issued directions that there should be no let up in their hospitality. In the jail, they met half-mad prisoners of war also: they were arrested in the 1971 War. Although their voice was heard on the radio after the war, after Shimla Pact, Paksitan had backed out clean that any prisonor of war was languishing in its jails. Many had embraced Islam in jail so that their co-religionsts should treat them well.

Deputy Jailer Nasib Khan did not like liberal treatment of the Sikhs. He always tried to find ways and means of tormenting them all the more. He would pilfer the things sent by Sikhs from outside and would distribute to those among the Muslim prisoners. When Nasib Khan was complained against to the Jailer, he, giving a vent to his feelings in front of the senior officers, bemoaned that the Sikhs had killed many members of his family during the partition. His father's sister was converted to the Sikh faith and had lavaan (marriage) with the a Sikh. His father had been cursing the Sikhs till his last breath.

"If I have the power, I would cut these Sikhs to pieces and throw them in the Ravi," said Nasib Khan while gnashing his teeth and complaing to Mohammad Tiwana. The Jailer had not liked this about Nasir Khan. "The wise people change with the changed



times." Tiwana was explaining the point to his junior in chaste Punjabi. But Nasib Khan could not follow anything and he tried to find one pretext or the other to torment the Sikhs.

"Now, the Sardars!, Partake of potato-pranthas. No fire has been burnt in the entire country because of Ramadan. We have lit fire in a special hearth have fried dainty pranthas in pure ghee."

The hot tea served with pranthas during Ramadan fasting had won over the hearts of the Sikh prisoners. They had a feeling of attachment with Tiwana and they forgot the excesses committed by Nasib Khan.

"There are many members of your communites across the Wahga border also." The Jailor's eyes turned moist when a Sikh prisoner said this in an ordinary way.

"Leave it, Sardars. What a topic have you touched!" said the Jailor. He sat quietly for some time. Then heaving a deep sigh, he said, "The line of Wahga is like a line drawn in water, Sardars. Such lines can divide the land but cannot lacerate the fragrance of earth." Turned emotional, Tiwana cleanly forgot that he was an officer of Pakistan's high security jail and sat with the foreign prisoners.

"I fail to undersand that before partition, your leaders did not agree with the Quid-e-Azam? Had they agreed, we would not have these days. We would have made merry joyfully." Saying this Tiwana began to gaze at the thick banyan tree, the beard of which having gone into the earth and the girth of the cluster of trees had expanded much.

"Look at the patriarch banyan tree carefully. Understand its mystery." Tiwana was behaving like a school master.

"For me, Sardars, this banyan tree is no less than a mendicant. Look at its beard. No one is allowed to touch any of its branches here. The whole tree gives a safe night shelter to many birds. Everyones attention was drawn by two birds necking each other. "Mendicants and trees have no caste. They welcome everyone."

After taking a few steps, he touched the flowing beard of a Sikh lad affectionately.

"God is witness here, I like people with unshorn hair very much, like this mendicant tree." Tiwana, whom Muslim prisoners feared extremely, sat completely mellowed today.

The interest of Sikh prisoners was growing in the the way Tiwana was talking. Tiwana's heart appeared to be like the rivers flowing vigorously in monsoon, the waters of which broke the banks and was spreading in the pits.

When the Sikh prisoner was told again by the Jailor that there were many people of his gotra in the East Punjab also, he got emotional like a suppurated ulcer. He had already sent oher employs here and here so that he could unfold his mind with the Sikh prisoners. Meanwhile a boy started reciting Reh Ras (evening prayer of Sikhs). Tiwana took his handkerchief out of his pocket and covered his head.

"Sodar Raag Assa Mo. 1. Ik Onkar Satgur Prasad. ……..

Which is the door where you sit to look after everyone. Countless instruments are played by countless ones. Countless are the meters, nymphs, and singers? Air water and fire sing your Name in he Dharmarja's court.

Tiwana listened to the entire recitation with utmost attention like a devout Sikh.

Such words were heard by his ears after a long time. He was delighted. He shut his eyes. After some time he again began to scatter. "I was born before partition. My mother was the daughter of Sikhs. She had expired five years earlier. She used to say that her first husband and her in-laws'family had gone from Jandiala Guru to Nanakana Sahib for paying obeisance when the riots started. The rioters had killed all the men. But my mother escped from there somehow. She came in contact with my father and they had their nikah. Although my mother's name got changed from Mohinder Kaur to Fatima Begum but she continued to remember her family,



the victim of riots, till her last breath. A few days before death she had got a Nitnem Gutka through me from Gurdwara Dehra Sahib. To start with, she recited hymns stealthily but one day when I told my father, he said that she should recite loudly. As my mother recited, her face turned radiant. When this lad recited, I remembered my late mother.

"I fail to understand even today whether I am the son of Mohinder Kaur or Fatima Begum?"Tears welled up in Tiwana's eyes. Words were not cooperating with him. He said Khuda Hafiz (May God protect you!) and left.

## THIRTY SEVEN

The four walls of the jail irked the Sikh prisoners very much.

"We have got stuck in which type of mud?" Satbir Singh, who hailed from village Bhai Roopa of Malwa, heaved a deep sigh, and asked Surjit Singh Majhail.

"Elephants never get caught in mud; rather they play with it," said Majhail consoling the Sikh from Malwa.

"Any clue about the Saint? I had heard that some military men took him in their jeep immediately after Operation Blue Star and helped him cross the Wahga border." Satbir said again showing curiousity.

"Santokh of Damdami Taksal said that the Saint is in high spirits and will appear before the congregation in course of time. Some had seen him on Pakistan TV also. We do not know anything more than this, brother," said Majhail winking his eyes.

"If he is in Pakistsan, what is the need for him to hide? With his coming to the fore, there would be deliverance from the four walls of the jail and some further order also. Now I feel that the body has lost all strength. Eating and sitting idle has reduced us unfit even to play rural hockey, not to talk of firing assaults.

With the sudden arrival of Baz Singh and his associates in the jail, bloomed the faces of Sikh prisoners. After formally enquiring

about health, etc., came the turn of complaints. The Sikh prisoners were envious of Baz Singh and others because they were moving about in the outer environment while they were compelled to be confined to the very tall walls of jails dying bit by bit.

## THIRTY EIGHT

Blood stained news still coming daily from the Punjab worried the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi so much that sleep eluded him.

He was reminded of the huge crowds turning violent after his mother's assassination, shouting slogans "Blood for blood".

He thought that those burning in the fire of revenge do not sleep peacefully, nor do they let others breathe peacefully. If the revengeful activities do not stop on the roads, the blood begins to flow towards the throne.

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the emotional and childish statements made by Rajiv Gandhi – when a large tree falls, the earth trembles- had proved him to be a novice politician. This statement had pierced through the souls of thousands of innocent Sikhs who were tortured to death during the anti-Sikh riots. This chapter proved the hollowness of the claim of secularism when in the largest democracy of the world, burning tyres were put around the necks of the Sikhs. Before the assassination of his mother, addressing a press conference in Chandigarh, he had praised Sant Bhindrawale as a religious leader which showed the double-faceted policy of the Congress.

After occupying the Prime ministerial chair, Rajiv Gandhi realized his wrong utterances. In order to apply ointment to the wounds of the Sikhs, he had begun to praise them. To wash the dirty blot on democracy, the means of dialogue was chosen so that some peaceful solution to the Punjab problem may be found. In this direction, the first step taken was to appoint Arjun Singh, a seasoned politician of Madhya Pradesh, as Governor of the Punjab. On 14th March 1985, just fourteen days after the appointment of the new Governor, HS Manchanda - the President of the Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee fell victim to the shower of bullets in broad day light and made the ITO crossing to bleed profusely. Merely a year before the murder, his welcome to ban the All India Sikh Students' Federtion had cost him very dearly. This sensational occurrence had drowned Rajiv in deep worry. The slogans like "Blood for blood" began to torment him. Before starting dialogue with Laldenga, he was getting restive to find some solution to the Punjab problem. The biggest problem was to choose either the traditional Akali leadership or the militants. Veteren Congress leader Arjun Singh also wanted to find a solution to the problem at the earliest so that he could get appointed as a Minister in the Cenral Government in some important ministry. He did not find it free of risk to move about in the flaming State of the Punjab.

Immediately after taking over as Governor Punjab, he invited, first of all the son of a former Chief Minister to Raj Bhavan. The daughter of the family of the former Chief Minsiter was married in a Rajput family and Arjun Singh was keen to take political advantage of this relationship. After the initial discussion in the Punjab Raj Bhavan, the son of the former Chief Minister, introduced Arjun Singh to some professors of Universities, who were more proficient in politics than reading or teaching. The son of the former Chief Minister, wanted to remain in hiding. He did not want that in the process of helping a dialogue with the Center, he should create some trouble for himself.

This group of professors, who claimed to be big players of the Sikh politics, began to dance like puppets of Arjun Singh. They persuaded Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, the President of Akali Dal, to have dialogue with the Center. Sant Longowal relied more on Surjit Singh Barnala and Balwant Singh, these learned men had ample influence on him. To gain a lead over others, Arjun Singh told the mediators if Sant Longowal writes a letter to Rajiv Gandhi condoling his mother's death, negotiations would open immediately.

An Akali leader, dreaming of ruling the Punjab, brought a letter drafted in English when Longowal asked the editor of a Punjabi newspaper, sitting close by, to read the draft. After reading the text, the editor suggested that after writing this letter, the Sikh community shall never forgive Akalis. The plan of the ambitious Akali Minsiter came to a nought.

Beant Singh, the President of the Punjab Congress, had, through his village friend, established contact with a relative of Longowal whom he had once introduced to Rajiv also.

Besides the traditional Akalis, the Center had established contact with the close ones to Bhindrawale but were lodged in Jodhpur jail. These militants, held under National Security Act after the Operation Blue Star, had been arrested from Harmandar Sahib. The activists of the banned All India Sikh Students' Federation had brought the militants to Delhi on the pretext of negotiation in connection with Manchanda Murder case. The militants flying in the Air Force Dakota aircraft were told they would be enabled to discuss with Rajiv Gandhi so that some solution to the Punjab problem could be found.

The Jodhpur jail built with Rajasthani stone turned hot like a furnace in summer. The Sikh militants had been locked in separate cells so that they should not be able to talk to one another. They had been shackled. In such circumstances, they had never thought that they would ever fly in the aircraft and go to talk to the Prime Minister. During their imprisonment, they had never seen the Sun God because the Special Court in the jail had four walls were in the interior.

On reaching the Security Force's guest house, the Punjab I.G. KPS Gill asked them what would they would like to have, the militant leaders said in the lighter vein that if the same could be had in three and a half rupees. Gill had followed that they were paid this much in Jodhpur jail daily and they had to make do with this petty sum.



After four secret meetings, it appeared to the militants that their government was going to be formed in the Punjab very soon. Rajiv Gandhi was sitting ready to accept any of their demands. It was kept secret from these Federation leaders that parallel talks were going on by the Prime Minister with the Akalis. Those close to Rajiv Gandhi were weighing behind the scene the conditions for a compromise. The Federation leaders were non-compromising but the Akali leadership, besides some demands in the Anandpur Resolution, was limited to wrest power. It was the first condition of the militant leaders that Rajiv Gandhi should appear before the Akal Takhat and pray for forgiveness for the Operation Blue Star. They wanted the release of the Sikh prisoners, incusion of the Punjbi speaking areas left out of Chandigarh, in the Punjab and to procure security cover to the Sikh militants in Pakistan. They wanted an immediate announcement of this. Only then could they think of the compromise. When Akali Dal got an inkling of this, they softend their stand and made up their mind for a compromise. After these tactics of Akali Dal, Sant Longowal was not in a mood to compromise. His innerself was telling him that both the Congress and power hungry Akalis wanted to use him. Still, at the instance of Arjun Singh, the Sikh intellectuals and those aspring to wield power succeeded in taking him to Delhi but they began to be diffident in meeting the Pime Minister. The Sikh intellectuals hit upon a plan to delude the innocent Saint. They took two lines out of Gurbani (Sikh scripture) and made out chits. To deceive the Sant both chits had the same wording. Sant Longowal picked up a chit and he took the writing to compromise with Rajiv Gandhi a divine command. He had got badly trapped in the net of the selfish clique which wanted to grind its own axe.

On the other side, the militants sitting in the guest house waiting for the compromise, suddenly watched the television and found that after signing the Punjab Pact, Sant Longwal was sweetening his mouth by tasting Gulab Jamun offered by the Prime Minister.

After seeing this spectacle, one militant switched off the TV in anger. When KPS Gill came to the guest house, they said in a mixed tone of anger and complaint, "You have got the poor Saint killed." Gill was terribly surprised to hear this as to how they got an inkling of the compromise. But when he looked at the switched off TV, he understood all.

Even a month had not passed after the Punjab Compromise when the militants shot dead Longowal at a little distance away from his village Gidriani near Sherpur in a religious function. After a few months, Arjun Singh bade adieu to the Punjab and went to Delhi. This was a new phase of the cunning step which gave Punjab, instead of peace, a thrust into the furnace. After victimizing Longowal, the traders of power were enjoying the wielding of power while putting floral wreaths around his photograps.

## THIRTY NINE

"Does there appear any let up in the looking after of the Sardars?" the President of Pakistan, Zia-Ul-Haq asked Adviser, Minu Bhandra.

"They are enjoying thoroughly under your rule, sir. I have told everybody that the worthy General was born and brought up in Jalandhar City, had given me strict instructions that there should be no laxity in he service rendered to the Sardars."

"Very good. But be careful that this help should be commensurate with India and should remain unperturbed. Be careful in giving them arms and and ammunition. Keep in mind that Lahore is also included in the map of Khalistan. It is commonly known among the Sardars: "One, who has not seen Lahore, is not born. They consider Nankana their Mecca-Medina."

"Sir, your goodself had cautioned me earlier also about this. There shall be no laxity in this regard."

Bhandara was a Parsi who had studied in Oxford and his bungalow being next to the official residence of the Army Chief, he had relationship of love with the high echelons. Immediately after taking reins of powr in his hands, Zia-ul-haq had appointed him his Adviser. Minu Bhandara had been running a wine factory in the Pakistani hill station, Murree. Despite drinking having been banned for Muslims in the country, Bhandara's factory was earning a profit of crores.

Although Zia-ul- Haq's government had announced that if a Muslim is caught drinking wine, he should be lashed publically, the bear and wines manufactured in Bhandara's factory lent colour to the joyous gatherings of non-Muslims. Bhandara was staunch follower of Quaid-e-Azam, who had announced that after the creation of Pakistan, followers of all the faiths would be free to worship in their temples, mosques, churches and Gurdwaras. Jinnah was in favour of making a patriotc verse written in Urdu by a Hindu as national anthem of Pakistan, but it was rejected after his death by the bigots. Being the adviser of the President on minorities, Bhandara had developed a deep amity with the Sikhs also. He had established closeness with the Sikh militants, including the hijackrs.

In the President's military brain, excellent plans were made. With the help of Minu Bhandara, he had already converted ISI officials as "devout Sikhs", and they had become adept at Khalsahi adages. He knew quite well how to distort history. Nobody could distinguish these Sikhs from the Muslims. Their real identity was hidden even from the Sikh boys who had come from India. Some disguised Singhs had crossed the border with their help and had succeeded in winning the confidence of top leaders. Their masters, living in Pakistan, relied more on the reports of these "Singhs". On the other hand, such fake Singhs gave fiery speeches to Sikh militants and incited their emotions.

"The freedom which the Punjabis had attained after the ignominy of seven hundred years, that was lost with the kindness of Dogras in fifty years. We need to be careful about the machina-

tions of these Dogras. Iqbal has said, "If you do not understand, you will be doomed my countrymen – even your tale will not be told in story books. The devout Sikh, instead of reading Hindustan in Iqbal's couplet, was reading "Qaum" (nation).

## FORTY

Talking of the barbed wire being fixed on the Pakistan border, Hamid kept the back of his hand on his lips and began to make goat calls. "O Sardars, thanks to your kindness, today India has to spend millions of rupees to fix the border fencing. But Pakistsan has decided that she would not put any such obstacle in your way. You can come unhindered to the lofty door of Baba Nanak any time you like. Certainly, you will be able to cut this wire easily like a string."

Hamid wanted to maintain the courage of Sardars. Four years after the Blue State Operation, the decision of the Government of India to fix barbed wire to seal it had compelled ISI to devise other plans. When Jagat Singh of Jandiala Guru tried to cut the wire to reach India, because it was electrified, he clung to it. His shriek had torn to pieces the peace of the graves on the border. After this occurrence, flag meting of BSF and Sutlej Rangers was held, wherein Pakistani officers had to hear plain speaking. But Hamid Gul was assuring the Sardars that for passing under the wires on the border, long and wide tunnels shall be built whereby there would be no difficulty in going or coming across the border. Hardev Singh Babbar sitting there realized this that after the wire is fixed, crossing the border would not be an easy task. Interrupting Hamid Gul in between, Babbar suggested that because the eyes of all the intelligence agencies of India would be fixed on the border, some alternative route should be found. Many young men had already lost their life crossing this border. "Gone are the days when myself alongwith four Babbars had carried the full volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib with true Guru tradition from India to Pakistani territory. Joginder Singh was sprinkling water ahead of the Holy Book.



Shingara Singh carried the Holy Book on his head and he himself followed him waving the whisk. It was a miracle that they had brought the Holy Volume walking bare footed and reciting His Name. Now you cannot bring even a handbook of hymns on this way. In my opinion we should now choose the Nepal way where a passport is not required to go to India."

Hamid valued Babbars knowledge and planning. "How much education have you had, Sardar?" He asked him in an ordinary way.

"Have had more experience than education, my master. My village is Narli, just along the zero line. While grazing buffalos, we did not know when we entered the Pakistan boundary. From my village, Kasur is far nearer than Amritsar."

"What you say is absolutely right, Sardar. We should now follow the Nepal way." Hamid immediately ticked Babbar's plan.

"Our Amritsar friend Kanwarjit Singh sits in Thailand. He had been trained here before going. He has estsablished deep connections with the Thai Sikhs. Besides funds, they provide shelter also generously. He had told me that in Patunam Bazar of Bangkok, some persons of Chinese origin prepared passpors. If a small error had been left in the Indian Passport, the entire lot is closed, which is dumped in the store. The officrs sell these rejected passports to the agents." Hardev Singh was explaining in deails the new method to the ISI officers.

"But Sardar Sahib, so long as the Immigration stamp of India and Thailand is not affixed, the passport cannot become valid. How would you fly with this passport?" Gull washed off his plan.

"This is what I wanted to explain to you that this is an extremely easy job. Our Amritsari Babbar has toured around the world on the fake passport."

"Really? How come?"

"I will explain to you, sir. The people of Chinese origin are famous for their calligraphy. When a Sikh from India lands at

Bangkok airport, many of the people there try that he should go to the Gurdwara directly. Our people there, on the pretext of verification, carry the passport to Patunam Bazar. The Chinese people immediately fake the signatures of the Indian Immigration officers on the passports which are later returned to the concerned traveller. Later on, after greasing the palm, the entry stamps are got affixed for Bangkok and the passport is made valid. Of course, you cannot go to India on such a passport because the computers there can immedialy detect this fraud. But when there are real stamps and signatures on the passport to enter Thailand, you can make use of this to enter any country. Besides, there are agents in Nepal also who prepare passports by giving local address."

"You have a wonderful brain, Sardars!" Hamid Gul was wonder struck.

"I am afraid, the Nepal and Thailand route is more dangerous than Wahga and Dera Baba Nanak sector, sir." Javed Malik, sitting with one leg upon he other, had his plan scrubbed.

"What do you mean? Please explain in detail, dear Malik?" Hamid Gul raised his eye brows and asked.

"Excuse me, Sir. I fear that the young Sardars deviating from their path had perhaps gone for a massage by the Thai girls." The hidden leg-pulling by Malik though, made everyone laugh heartily. However, Hamid, getting serious, said, "Your will have to be careful while following this route that for the Indian Intellgence officers, Nepal and Thaland are favourite postings. Therefore, the night clubs and casinos of these counries, especially the beaches, should never be visited, not even in cognito. The easier the entry in these countries, the more unsafe."

"Yes, you are right. Amrtisar's Babbar had also cautioned me about this again and again that anyone going to Pakistan via Bangkok should take every step very cautiously."

Surinder Singh Chhotepur, who had been listening to the entire conversation very carefully, made up a plan in his mind immediately



that without taking his companions into confidence, establish direct contact with Ambarsaria Babbar would call his family first of all to Paksitan. His wife and children, fearing police arrests, had already left the Ludhiana house and had taken shelter at Delhi in Nirvair Singh's house. He has received a message only yesterday through London that Nirvair has been picked up by the police on the way and tortured severely. They found a doctor's prescription in his pocket for medicines required for the wife of Chhotepur. The police had interrogated him by hanging him head down but he did not reveal anything at all that the medicines were for Chhotepur's wife which he was going to buy from a chemist. Toni, who had come to have an interview with Nirvair Singh held behind the prison bars, had been explained in two minutes that he should give a message to his family to move away here and there. He said that despite so much violence, he has not given an inkling of Chhotepur's family but it should be ensured that after more torture, he should break down. Chhotepur's deposit in trust should reach him safely and then take it that the Guru has saved my honour.

After receiving the message, Chhotepur could not have a wink of sleep. Thank God Hardev suggested the Nepal-Bangkok route. If he shared this with his family or some companion, they would have ensured its failure at any cost. Possibly they could silence him after severe warning as to what would the wife and children do by coming to Pakistan. If fake passports had got to be made after so much effort, the young men should reach there on these passports, who, after training, would reach India to give a practical shape to some violent activity.

## FORTY ONE

After the Rajiv-Longowal agreement, Barnala government was formed in the Punjab. It was the environment as if in scorching heat a small cloud had been formed and drizzled. Celebratins were going on.

From the cremation ground of Amritsar to the Punjab Civil Secretariat, red carpets appeared to have been laid. Some people were thinking that the carpets had been spread upside down. The entire spectacle appeared to be an optical illusion.

At Lahore, in the ISI headquarters, Maridke, the high officers sitting with the leading Sikh militants were devising plans to destabilize the Barnala Government. Bubby of Khalistan Commando Force was jumping and talking – We shall not let the government of traitors succeed at any cost. By receiving the price of martyrdoms, the Akalis have stabbed the Panth in the back.

Taking advantage of the explosive situation, the ISI officers raised the point that the militants should also reach Chandigarh to give a 21 gun salute to Barnala government. It may be that of Sardars V/S the Ghadaars (traitors). You too should play some fire works. It was decided in the meeting that Baz Singh should be enabled to cross Wahga Border with his mates and cause some explosions.

## FORTY TWO

"You are very lucky, Baz, as it has been decided to entrust you with the responsibility of a big action."

"Which action, patriarch?" Baz Singh's eyes were full of curiosity.

"You will go to Indian Punjab tonight. We will give you the whereabouts of the Singhs there. You will introduce yourself saying "Babbar Sher". Then those Singhs will arrange for ammunition for you and you will hijack a bus to help the holy act of sending those having caps to God's feet."

Baz Singh's bosom friends (Hindus) - Babby, Satta and Jugnu moved before his eyes. "Oh, if they are in the bus by chance, what would I do?" He was still lost in thoughts that Baba, disturbing his concentration, he said, "Baz Singh, what multiplications and divisions are you lost in?"



"Nothing, just…." Baz Singh left the sentence incomplete.

"Will you capture the fort or it seems an onerous task? Say just now. Don't make us feel small," askd Baba expressing his misgivings.

"No, sir. It is a child's play for me. Everything will be all right. Don't worry."

It came to Baz Singh's mind that let AK-47 come in his hand. First of all, he would decimate the village Numberdar who had had his father thrashed in the police station after the voting.

"You will be area commander of Hargobindpur area." Hearing the word Commander, it elated Baz Singh so much. No one had become even a soldier in his family and he had become a Commander ab initio. Wonderful!"

"Can you do some larceny if need arises? The movement cannot work without money. This money is not required by us but will serve your purpose." Baba taught the second lesson also.

"We will help you cross from this side and further Tara singh will come to receive you at the fixed point."

"This much lesson is enugh for the first trip."

"Of course, identify the new boys. Because of increased recruitment, your own rank will increase. Now it is up to you that you will rest as Area Commander or get promotion to become a General?"

They were still chatting when a young man came there and everyone received him with open arms.

"Bravo, lion! Your name has been highlighgted by all the newspapers of the world. You have raised our head high with pride. Your success will be celebrated today.

"Zora Singh, the real work has still not been done by you."

"Which one, patriarch?" Zora Singh felt as if someone had hurled a hand grenade at him.

"The same, the bastard SSP, who could not be subdued by you." Baba said winking his eyes.

"What can I say, patriarch? Ever since Jagat Singh SP got injured in a bomb explosion, the officers have been running office from home. The bastards do not stir out in fear. What should we do, tell me, in such circumstances?" Zora Singh said feeling a little helpless.

"Incite the workers in their offices. If this does not work, have your own men fixed in the police. These officers are lifeless – At the time of recruitment, have your way and send in the list of your own men. Jit Singh, DIG, is sympathetic to us. With CRPF's IG, Prakash Chand Biharia, we are negotiating a compromise. He owes a great debt of gratitude to us – bcause we spared his life. He used to brag a lot in the past. Now he has become so docile. Arrange to have your own men recruited. They will be very useful. Then you will be able to act even very close police network." Baba taught the formula.

"Countless policemen are already cooperating with us, Babaji. Have just to caress the head. Governement arms will also be procured by a little encouragement.

"Bring in Jhatka meat for the Sardars." The ISI officer ordered the cook loudly.

"Babaji, I fail to understand that poor Gurjit had broken jail and killed many people before reaching here. But you have sent him again to India immediately. You could have allowed the poor man to relax for some time." Talking of Gurjit, Zora Singh appeared to have turned a bit emotional.

"Zora Singh, the paths we have chosen to tread, emotions have no place there," Baba's attitude was a little tough.

In the manner in which Gurjit had broken jail and come out, the needle of suspicion had begun to move around him. When he reached Pakistan we had received him very warmly. But later on, in his absence, we, after taking a decision in a meeting, had decided to send him back to India. Many were of the opinion that it was possible that the intelligence agencies of India had facilitated his jail break. You are not aware of the cunning ways of the Indian intelligence agencies. Firstly, the boy whom they nab is done away with straightway. If some rare ones are locked in, they are brain-washed and sent out this side. If such people get sold, they can destroy our movement. This is the reason that Gurjit has been entrusted with the job of bundling the IG of Jalandhar Range into the train. If he had not been sold, he would return after doing our job and we would appoint him the General of the newly formed Force. And if sold, he would not come back.

The paths which we have chosen, one has to look with suspicion ones own shadow lest it should be of someone else. By doing so you will never suffer defeat in life. Putting Gurjit to test will alarm everyone. Am I right?" asked Baba.

"Yes, sir I am in full agreement with you. It is not known when a little cloud may overcast the sky and cover the sun and your own shadow may also disappear." Zora Singh, who had left Ph.D. in Punjabi incomplete, and joined the movement, replied in a literary way.

"All right, Zora Singh, take some rest. Then we will chat."

"All right, Babaji."

## FORTY THREE

A foreign vehicle raising dust was seen from a distance. The clouds of dust had made the entire environment dusty.They were the officers of Pakistan's Military Intelligence. Babaji stood up to salute in the manner the army men do.

"Welcome, sir."

Baba led them to a room. Bolting from inside was clearly heard. Zora Singh, Baz Singh and other companions waited outside. Zora Singh knew the purpose of these officers' visit here but many questions were arising in Baz Singh's mind. After fifteen minutes or so Baz Singh was called.

'Mr.Baz Singh, we are giving you a Chinese revolver for your

security. Tuck this in your waist knot." The Military Intelligence Officer said that the international price of this revolver was over fifty thousand rupees. "For the time being we do not want to overload you with bigger weapons. Babaji must have told the way to procure more weapons after reaching India. If you keep the weapon dearer than your life, it is your best best friend. If you get a little lax, it proves to be a dangerous enemy." The Military Intelligence Officer cautioned Baz Singh.

"It is exhorted in Islam that the valiant soldier, who gets martyred in the battle field, is provided with 72 hurs (fairies) in heaven. Look here, Sardar. Life just comes and goes. One who sacrifices himself for the nation is honoured in the other world also. A coward is given no place even in hell. We are spending our own capital and stand by you to provide you with your own house. Besides your friendship, we are not going to gain anything else. May Allah grant you your own free country like us and then we would make merry together. We and you are believers in one Allah and both are dead against idolatory. We have many things in common, Sardar." After giving a long lecture, the Military Intelligence man bade "Shabakhair" to him and sought permission to leave. After their arrival, the dust which had settled, again got raised by the leaving car and he disappeared in a few moments.

"Baz Singh, don't get greedy to meet your parents so soon. Getting caught in the net of relationships, may not lead you into the hands of he khaki dogs. Your house would have been under sharp vigile of the spies. Don't be tempted to make phone calls also. Our phones are generally tapped. Even one of your own ones can also cause your arrest, in order to win the prize. The essence of the matter is to keep your object in mind. We will meet you for a month only through newspapers. We will pay the price of your head much more than the Indian governemt may fix. After the Mughals, it is the first time that the price of Sikhs' head is being fixed." In order to see off Baz Singh at the border, Baz Singh called the armymen.



The revolver tucked in his waist knot made him realize that he was the real Commander. The heart is really deeper than the sea. It is not known what all lies at the bottom. Baz Singh felt that he could get anything in the world with the help of this revolver. "I should commit a big dacoity with the help of some other companions and collect a big heap of notes. This money can be spent to buy more weapons. A ramshackle house can be turned into a palace." He felt that he had won the right to dream as he chose.

"This time we will send you through the Ravi. Weather is bad today and despie the boat check posts of BSF, it is extremely easy to get across the river."

"All right, we will experiment this also today." Baz Singh was getting bolder.

While leaving, one of Baba's companions got the opportunity to say, "Brother, if you get a chance, pay a visit to Pandori and give the message of welfare to Babli that I am all right and we shall meet very soon."

Neither the boy gave any details about Babli nor did Baz Singh think it proper to unfold anything. He only said, "If God Wills, the message shall be conveyed."

## FORTY FOUR

In the Sharifpura Mohalla opposite Amritsar Bus Stand, lived over seventy years old Gurmukh Singh Sindhi with his wife. The residents of the Mohalla had never suspected him that the house of the old gentleman could be the heaven for the militants. Khushwant Singh of the adjoining lane had, during interrogation, enumerated secret activities of Sindhi and he had come on the Police radar. Police wanted to avoid sympathy for nabbing the old couple. The RAW officers were pesent at the time of interrogation. Khushwant had revealed that the militants taking shelter in Paksitan, contacted Sindhi via Vancouver. The residents of Amritsar were absoluely not aware of the big bungalow near Thandi Khoohi that the RAW

office was functioning there. The bungalow being in the midst of other bungalows, such a suspicion was a far cry. The IPS officer of the Punjab Cadre, Sanjit Sharma, was on deputation with RAW and lived in the left flank of the bungalow with his family. In order to keep his identity a secret, he did not talk to the neighbours. The RAW staff also frequented the bungalow like members of the family.

The information regarding Baz Singh having crossed the border was given by Baba Harh to Sindhi through Rippi sitting in Vancouver so that all the arrangements could be made. The intelligence agencies were tapping the phone calls made directly from Pakistan to India to escape as Vancouver route had been found.

After receipt of important information received from Khuswant Singh, RAW had begun to tap Sindhi's phone. In order to give information about Baz Singh, Rippi phone up Sindhi, "Patriarchs, I am the dust of your feet speaking." Dust of the feet was Rippi's own code word. About Baz Singh crossing the border, he told Sindhi that the "deer" had jumped across the drain. He will go first of all to the pre-determined spot. After fixing the date for marriage,he will have the marriage palace booked." Sharma, listening on the parallel phone, had understood that the deer jumping over the drain meant that some militant had infiltrated into India but the pre-determined spot was not understood by him. The date of marriage and booking of the marriage palace he had understood that the militants had infiltrated and they have been entrusted with the job of making someone the target of bullets at the fixed place.

On the basis of the information furnished by the officr of the RAW the Sindhi was picked up when he was on the way to Darbar Sahib in the early morning. After interrogation, he only revealed that the militants met him in Darbar Sahib and obtained information received on phone. He did not know anything beyond this. Khushwant could throw light on this, but he had been dispatched by the police last night. Caught in the dilemma, Sharma leaked out the uncofirmed



news to a news agency's own reporter about the infiltration so that the security agencies could receive information immediately through published news.

## FORTY FIVE

"A blood-thirsty militant has reached India. Red Alert in the border belt."

Baz Singh got alarmed after reading the headline in a Gurmukhi (Punjabi) newspaper. "Oh! How has reached the news here of my coming to India? He composed himself. In order to hide himself from the patrolling policemen, he tried to hide his face on the pretext of reading the newspaper. Then it came to his mind that if he kept hiding behind the newspaper for a long time, the policemen would take him to the police station on suspicion. He tried to engage the police man standing close by in talking. "It is very hot, Bhaji, your uniform is drenched with perspiration. Just use this newspaper for airing a little."

"Thanks, gentleman. It is the daily routine. Now we are on twenty four hour duty. Airing is a far cry; just tell me what is given in the newspaper today? Let me hear about the "weather" from you." Baz Singh read out the news appearing about himself.

"I don't know from where this wretched time has come. While coming on duty, wife and children look at me as if seeing me for the last time. Standing here, there is great worry for home. Such days had never come that the policemen should themselves be terrified. What harm has been done by the petty servants like us? Had no land, so got recruited. And we are obedient servants." The policeman went on talking as he had turned emotional.

"I agree with you, brother", said Baz Singh taking a sip of tea.

Greeting the policeman with "Fateh" Baz Singh went his way.

Baz Singh realized today how beneficial was the training received in Pakistan? He was told that he must read the newspaper whenever he found time. Had he not read the newspaper today,

how could he know that the intelligence agencies had already come to know about his reaching India?

"I would have to proceed further cautiously. Before my reaching India, if a news appears, it is very clear as to how deep infiltration of secret agencies has been made in the militant lines. One cannot trust even a tree – a snake or serpent could come out of an ant hill and sting."

Baz Singh thought it proper to proceed by chanting his stance. He reached the farm house in the cluster of trees in village Sursingh when the boys took hold of their weapons and surrounded him.

"My masters, the police have destroyed my house. They have carried my parents, children and cattle to the police station. Kindly help me." Instead of introducing himself directly, Baz Singh had concocted a tale.

"Aren't you a spy?" One of the boys after looking at him from top to toe, asked him.

"Recite God's name, patriarchs. Friendship with khaki dogs? Oh God! You can go to my village and verify yourself, if you do not believe me."

"Sit down, drink some water and then we would X-ray you' he said to the boy sitting in position atop the scaffolding, "Look around through the binoculars lest he should be leading a police party."

All of them cleaning the weapons with pull-through appeared to be commanded by the boy. Baz Singh greeted with "Fateh" from a distance and uttered the Code Words "How are the lions?" On hearing this the boy dropped his weapon and got alarmed. Directing the other boys to stand guard vigilantly, he led Baz Singh to the tube well room.

"Come in, patriarchs! I have been waiting for you for many days. Where have you been so long?" He asked him in a curious tone.

"What can I tell you? When I read in the newspaper just on arrival here that dangerous militant had entered India, I considered



proper to move cautiously. This news seems to have been leaked by some one among ourselves. I think no one should now have an inkling about me here. I cannot trust anyone as to who is what?"

"You are right, Jathedar ji." He came out of the room and called the boys to serve water, etc.

Introducing Baz Singh, he said, "Bhaji is related to me, as it has transpired."

## FORTY SIX

The militants were getting more courageous with every passing day. On the other hand, the morale of the CRPF and Punjab Police was declining. The militants pasted a hand-written poster in every part of the city and this became headlines in the newspapers the next day. The entire state machinery would stand still. Buses stopped plying. Attendance in offices got nominal. Curfew like conditions prevailed towards the evening. Once the vehicle of the Jalandhar Range IG got out of order on the way and he stood on the roadside for a long time to get a lift. There was wilderness all around. He had left behind his own escort as he had to attend a meeting. The driver of a police van passing by beckoned to him and instead of stopping, he accelerated and sped away. In order to give a fillip to the movement of the militants, the newspapers were proving to be extremely useful. A time came when the boys absolutely fearlessly carried the press notes to the newspaper offices. It was desired that the press notes should be published as true copy without any subbing. It was threatened directly that the body would be cut into as many parts as the words in the text are omitted. Even the leading journalists had got terrified. Many so-called journalists had given up the profession. Others pleaded with their editors on phone to publish the text without any change. Even the tough journalists stood up meekly when a militant would enter their office, as if an electric current had passed through them. A journalists of the age of over fifty, addressed the boys as "Baba Ji".

Many leadng journalists of some newspapers considered it proper to befriend the boys in such circumstances. They aso counseled the militants and suggested to them to wrest decent coverage. If a press note was not published, they deemed it to be the negligence of the editors. Passing the buck would save their lives. And later the boys began to threaten and scare the editors directly. Some journalists as part of their professionalism instigated the militants against their own mates. Some leading English newspapers and reporters of agencies had come closer to leading militants. The newspapers of Delhi and other places had got a good opportunity to carry interviews with militants and thus increase their circulation. Leading journalists had been killed during those days. The journalists began to become news themselves.

Some journalists were publishing such news and increasing their importance while some were working for the intelligence agencies. They were collecting money from agencies and militants separately. Their bread was buttered on both the sides. Such journalists, at the instance of the agencies, succeeded in getting such statements from the militants as needed by the government. The people of agencies had infiltrated the militant ranks. Government agencies were aware that so long as there is no infiltration among the boys, the war against militantism shall not be won.

## FORTY SEVEN

The Punjabi journalist, Jaspal Jassi, after learning about the killing of Bikar Singh of Bhindrawale Tiger Force in a police encounter, had jumped with joy. He called his son and asked him to ring up the police to confirm the news. Jaspal's eldest son, Jasbir, was a press photographer. Jasbir failed to undersand the reason for his father's joy after learning about the killing in encounter. This militant Baba was extremely close to his father. Then why his father, instead of feeling sad, was delighted at his death? This militant was so very close to him and why, instead of getting tearful, he seemed to be overjoyed? When he asked the reason for this, Jaspal insisted on disclosing the name of the militant killed in the police encounter.

When the Police control room confirmed the news of encounter, Jaspal's joy knew no bounds. He told his son that the deceased had give a big poster for his companion's Martyrdom Function. He handed him wads of uncounted notes, as before.

"Thank God, I had not sent this advertisement to be published. If it had been published, I would not have got a commission of more than 15 per cent but today, with the killing of Bikar, it is saved by 100 per cent. Come on, open the imported whisky bottle, my son." Jaspal addressed his son as "Bira" affectionately.

"Bira, we are wonderfully lucky. Babbar's Disha left with me in trust his bag full of notes but got killed near Chamkaur after two days. You have bought so very big cameras with those notes, Bira. How could your new studio have been built had Disha not died? God gave carrots with a knife too. After the third peg, Jaspal was opening up widely.

"What more could God have given us, Bira? On the one hand, the militants trust us so much and on the other, the police. Just tell me, when we were not in the press, even a two-paise worth sepoy could scare us. Today how much respect is given to us upto Supdt. of Post level. This wine we are drinking is out of ill-gotten income. The police officers, with whom we had yearned to shake hands, now send us crates of wine."

"Don't say ill-gotton. Say, the income of bastards. They get clues from us and the wretched ones have filled their houses. We should fear God, Bhapaji. And, Bhapaji, our job is not that easy. We pick up money from the hood of a serpent. How many journalists are there having become victims of the militant's bullets or nabbed by the police?" As soon as Jasbir said this, Jaspal Singh turned furious.

"Are you talking of Surinder or Pritam? Both of them were

fools. The lines on their palms were ominous. Though Surinder, being a favourite of the militants, got killed and Pritiam, because of being a police informer, lost his life. Bira, both these nincompoops did not know how to create a balance in life. Now tell me, have we even suffered a scratch till now? If the militants desire, they are exhorted to be righteous. If the policemen seek some minor information, they are not denied. We serve our end, Bira. It is not the time to displease anyone."

"Though we are connected with small newspapers, Bira, just see how the leading journalists of Delhi and other important places dance to our tune? How we receive their phone calls. What do we do for them? We only get interviews fixed. The boys also feel happy as their photographs appear in the papers and the journalists too feel elated. The boys, wo were good for nothing for us, the journalists yearn to interview them. That Jaitley, the reporter of such a big news agency, after interviewing Baz Singh of Retaul, was jumping with joy. The photographs taken by you, Bira, appeared in the newspapers under your name. And you got wads of notes in addition.

"But my dear father, this Jaitely-Shetly give exaggerated news. They ask the boys to pose holding weapons." Bira had just uttered these words, when Jaspal got terribly furious. "Do you feel any trouble taking photographs? The monthly salary of a government servant would not be equal to the money that you get for taking four pictures."

'You have forgotten the days, Bhapaji, when the boys of the Tiger Force blindfolded us and led us to an unknown place. To me it appears, that place would be close to Daburji Manawali. It may not be twenty kilometers away from Amritsar but they took us there after motoring for a hundred kilometers. When we reached there, the militants opened fire to welcome us. Jaitley could not control his urine. The militants laughed over this. May tell you the truth, Bhapaji, I too had loud heart beats, but I did not lose heart.



When bandages were removed from our eyes, Baz Singh said that it was a salute given to them and then we heaved a sigh of relief. After the interview, the policemen shadowed us trying to know the venue of the meeting. I told them that the van had taken so many turns around that we did know which place it was. Also, those, who are blindfolded, how can they know about the venue? Of course, after my speaking truthfully, SP City let us off for becoming informers. When we were coming back after the interview, Jaitley continued to humbly request me that I should not disclose to any one about my passing urine. But when the rascal, after publishing of his interview, was bragging, I felt like revealing his reality to everyone."

"This Baz Singh, my son, is a hen which lays golden eggs. Maintain friendly relations with him."

"Bhapaji, Baij Singh is very cruel also. Even over a minor suspicion, he does not restrain from killing his own mates. Just keep minimum distance with him.

"But he should be grateful to you, Bira. You had got him publicity to start with. Othrwise who knew which sort of bird was Baz Singh? "

"But it was our need also, Bhapaji. After Jaitley's reports had been published, other journalists also begged us to let them have interviews with the underground militants. He had got the bareface photograph with great difficulty. When Jailtely pleaded hard for the unveiled face photograph he had laughed and said that along with others, his girl friend (class mate) would also see his photograph."

He had turned emotional talking of Chhindo.

Recalling the old days, Baz Singh said that Chhindo had challenged him many a time that if I were a man, she was ready to elope him anywhere he wanted. Yes, she was ready. She said that she would partake of food even kept in a shoe. "Only I did not have the required courage. How would the daughter of a leading land-

lord make do with a pauper like me? And to speak the truth, when her father and brother came out with two barrel guns on their shoulders, the entire area got panicky. Ultimately, she was married in a high family." Caressing the AK-47, he was trying vainly to hide from others the moisture in his eyes. Then he heaved a deep sigh and said, "After her marriage, I had spent many sleepless nights."

"The militants are also from amongst us, Bira. Many have been made by the policemen or journalists like us. Every militant has a separate tale – sold like hot pakauras (fries). You can sell on a cart, if you like."

## FORTY EIGHT

After the press conference in GO Mess of Jalandhar, Inspctor General Gill tucked the beer bottle to his lips and gulped in no time. After emptying the bottle, he asked a pressman, "Yes, Mr. Mehta, what were you saying?"

The awe-inspiring voice had brought perspiration on Mehta's forehead. The pressmen also got scared at the style of his drinking bear.

"Sir, what I meant was….." Mehta had not yet completed, when Gill blurted, "I will tell you the meaning. Didn't you want to say that there is police rule in the morning and the militants rule at night. Come with me tonight; you can see for yourself whose rule is it?"

No one had talked so sternly with the press in the past. Gill had crushed militancy in the North-East. Twisting his moustaches, Gill again asked, "Will you come, Mehta?"

'No, Sir. My mother is confined to bed. There is no one except me at home to nurse her. Mehta folded his hands, trembling inside. But some journalists had agreed to witness "Operation Night Dominance".

Gill wanted to dominate overnight. The Punjab government had also made a special request to the Centra Government for



Gill's services. Instead of wasting time in playing golf, as the previous officers did, he wanted to do something and assert his importance.

During the pitch dark night, Gill's own driver heard firing far off and got scared so much that he lost control over the car steering. The vehicle got into the ditches. Gill's head struck against the car ceiling and his turban just escaped falling down. Pilot and Escort vehicles squeaked and a big accident was averted. A journalist's neck twisted. The journalists, who had got a bit tipsy, still wanted to go ahead. They did not want the pressmen to call them cowards. But senior journalist, Tomar intervened and said, "We will go ahead a little more and then return." Earlier the pressmen prepared news about police encounters from the press notes delivered at doorsteps but today they were faced with the difficulty of crushing militancy.

When DGP Ribeiro came to know about Gill's action, he chastised him thoroughly. Fuming with fury, he said to the SSP sitting with him, "How does this bastard Ribeiro know how to deal with Punjabi militants? He does not know that diamond cuts diamond. Only Jatts can throttle the Jatts. He thinks that as he had subdued Shiv Sainiks in Bombay, he would bring in peace in the Punjab also. Had he shaken hands with the extremist in Assam, he would have known the reality."

"Connect me on phone to the Home Minister at Delhi." Gill directed the operator.

"Sir, you should go round the Punjab immediately. In such circumstances, the militants cannot be curbed." Gill threw such a spark about Ribeiro towards the Home Minister, giving him free hand. The Minsiter said that for big action, he should keep in tourch with the Center. This raised Gill's arrogance sky high.

Ribeiro had realized that Gill's obstinate nature would turn even common men as extremists although Ribeiro's "bullet for bullet" statement had given a big jolt to his reputation which was the re-

minder of "an eye for an eye". Rebeiro was born in Goa and before the Portuguese possession, his ancestors were Hindus. Then all the Hindus had to adopt the Christian faith per force. His father served in the Post Office and none in his family had ever worked in the Police. They were the people who kept miles apart from the Police. But because of having been selected in the IPS he had to undergo Police training. Dealing with the prevailing conditions, he had learnt all the intricacies of police action. In the capacity of the Bombay Police Chief, his stern handling of he extremists and drug addicts had made him known as a dare-devil officer. The anti-social elements called him Bulldozer and Butcher and many had given up black marketing under compulsion. But he had no knowledge of the Punjab and the militants there. Immediately after taking ove as DGP, he received a wireless message that Mukha, the policeman, had been freed by resorting to extensive firing blindly and all the seven members of the police staff had been killed, when they had come to the court for hearing. "It seems the extremists have taken this action to scare me," said Ribeiro.

He ordered his personal security officer to bring in cars so that they could proceed to Jalandhar immediately. It had got dark of night. His PSO suggested that that was not the time to travel. But Ribeiro rejected his view and said that he would leave immediately. He wanted to reach there during the night and give a message to the militants that Police was ready to confront them boldy. Otherwise also, after such an incident, he wanted to boost the morale of his force.

Inspector Lachhman singh was chasing those who had helped free Mukha. Without caring for his life, the police cordoned off the fields near Phagwara. Lachhman had been recruited as a sepoy but fighting the militants he had been promoted as Inspector. After the two-sided firing, Mukha and his companions had been killed in the fields. Ribeiro reached the scene with heavy Police force, appreciated Lachhman Singh and congratulated him and announced his appointment as DSP on the spot.



Although Ribeiro had endeared himself down to the lower ranks, but he began to feel upset over Gill's self-willed activities. One day Gill exceeded all limits, when he went to the extent of saying to Ribeiro's wife that Jatts and only Jattas can put end to Punjab's militancy. After some time Gill was made the DGP and Ribeiro was made the Adviser to the Governor and given the powers of a Cabinet Minister. After becoming DGP, Gill recruited healthy village boys as SPO and handed them guns. Despite Ribeiro's objection to this, the recruitment continued. Ribeiro was of the view that without proper training, such armed young men could become a danger to the police. Gradually black cats began to infiltrate the militants' cadres. The newly trained young men holding weapons were like a match box in the hand of a monkey which posed a danger for the entire jungle to be set on fire. But when in Jalandhar PAP complex, an ex-policeman, Labh Singh, self-styled General had attacked and injured his wife, he had lost heart. He realized that it is not easy to confront the Punjab militants.

## FORTY NINE

Sucha Singh, sitting sad on the terrace of his well, was thinking that God sitting in the villages had been kidnapped. After the incident that took place in the adjoining village he felt like jumping into the well. Dying appeared to be much easier than living.

"No, if I have to die, I will kill some before I die," Sucha Singh tried to reason with his mind.

Calamitous conditions prevailed in the villages during the last few days. By making Batala a separate Police District, Government had decided to destroy the center of militancy. The villagers were being grinded between the two stones of public extremism and government extremism. Last week, Gurtej Singh of Babbar Khalsa abused the police over the Gurdwara loudspeaker after which

the CRPF besieged the entire village. Uniformed young men, were enquiring about Gurtej whom nobody in the village knew. Turbans were rotting in dust. The slogan "Take care of your turban, O Jatt' appeared to have breathed its last. Daughters and sisters of the village were being abused openly. If anyone squeaked in front of CRPF, he was stunned by beating with the butt. On the complaint of a Minister of Barnala Government, Ribeiro complained against CRPF but KPS Gill ensured that no harm was caused to the officials. Fed up with Police excesses, Minister from Amritsar, Harbhajan Singh Sandhu, had torn the uniform of a Police ASI and snatched his revolver. Ribeiro had ordered filing a case against him instantly. Of course the weak government headed by Barnala, had left nothing for Ribeiro to do and he was repenting having asked for Punjab posting. On the basis of complaints made in the Lok Darbars held in villages, Ribeiro had suggested to the Central Government that in order to establish peace in the Punjab, some reasonable demands of the Sikhs should be accepted. At this he had to be ridiculed by Arun Nehru and Fotedar, who always shadowed the Prime Minister. Rajiv liked Gill's suggestions more that instead of wasting time in holding Lok Darbars and ascertaining public opinion, the neck of the militants should be squeezed. In the Lok Darbar held in Fatehgarh Churian, a woman shrieked and said that the Police, after demolishing her house, even carried home the bricks. The infuriated woman said, "I am Nachhatar's mother. If he has done anything, bring him before me and shoot him but let us live in peace." Evidently the conditions had got so bad that the people were finding it difficult to live. Otherwise which mother could, instead of praying for long life of her son, begged for her son's death?

After becoming DGP, Gill had got complete liberty. Black Thunder had made Gill a Super Cop. After making the militants, who had taken shelter in Darbar Sahib, to surrender, he was being applauded everywhere. In the Amritsar International Hotel of the Punjab Department of Tourism, the senior journalists, especially brought from



Delhi and Chandigrh were lodged at government expense. They were daily taken to Golden Temple under Police escort under live coverage. After this people had begun to compare the action taken after Black Thunder with Operation Blue Star. Operation Black Thunder had exposed to the world the black deeds of the criminal minded youth taking shelter in Harmandar Sahib. People were prasing Gill's farsightedness. After the military action, the incited people started rushing from Lohgarh side and other sides towards Harmandar Sahib in large numbers but people sitting at home were watching Black Thunder on their TV because of which the rumours remained at a low key. Leaving aside one or two incidents, peace prevailed on all sides.

Because peace had not been established even after the Punjab Compromise, Barnala Govrnemnt had already collapsed. Rajiv thought that because all the previous compromises had failed, Gill had broken the backbone of the militants with one stroke. He praised Gill highly in every meeting.

After the Black Thunder, Gill started roaring all the more. After one roar, the entire state of Punjab was stunned. In order to prove their existence, the uprooted militants started making senior Police officers their target. After killing of a senior IPS officer, they got ample publicity. The militants, set free by Barnala Government, had become a big headache.

On the other hand, the Alam Sena had infiltrated and started killing top militants. Some cats, reared by the police, had begun to mew at their masters. Chaos had begun to bring in darkness in all the houses. The militants were irked at the absence of jungle in the jungle rule. After Harmandar Sahib, no other safe shelter could be found by them. It was not free of risk to live in farm houses too. Ultimately, they had to turn to the people's houses.

After getting a clue of militants' taking shelter in Garib Singh's house in village Kotli, the DSP of Batala, Capt. Gobind Ram, reached there with a heavy police contingent. The militants had fled from

there before his arrival. This had infuriated Gobind Ram. Turned mad with anger, Gobind Ram said to Garib Singh, "Where have you sent your sons-in-law?"

"We do not know, sir. If you could not find out, how can these humble people know?"

"I have got a confirmed news that they have been partaking of meals here for nearly a week. Did you bake the chapattis?" Gobind Ram asked the lass in a thundering voice.

"Sir, if someone forcibly enters your house, what can be done?" The college going girl had said mildly.

"We too have come forcibly.

"Will you give us what we ask for? Take everyone with you. So long as they undergo genocide, there will be no peace in Punjab. Change the seed of these bastards. Teach them the lesson of amity in such a way that they should forget their Guru's name and remember me." Sunder Ram had been thundering continuously. When Garib Singh's family was being pushed into the Gypsey, his neighbour, ex-serviceman Karnail Singh, came forward to protect them. The rest of the village had got panicky. Introducing himself, the ex-serviceman said that he had fought three wars for the sake of the country but…before he could complete his sentence, Sunder Ram ordering the tearing off his legs said, "Now you can fight the fourth war."

In the emergency meeting of the Panthak Party, it was decided to take revenge from the butcher police officer.

Karam Singh of Babbar Khalsa gave advertisement in the newspapers and challenged Sunder Ram that he would wait for him the whole night at Basarkay bridge. He should come, if he had the guts. Such news and advertisements in the news papers had become very common. Though this encounter was averted somehow, the militants did not leave him alone till the last breath. He was injured in the first attack but his son died on the spot.He got himself transferred to PAP Jalandhr. The responsibility to kill him was



taken upon himself by Jugraj Singh of Khalistan Liberation Force. After renting a room in Dogar Basti, he opened a Dhaba (wayside restaurant) opposite PAP complex. To hide his identity, he wore a long shirt and wrapped a sheet around his waist. Jugraj succeeded in convincing the people that earlier he owned a truck and after running into loss, he had to open the dhaba. Nikku of tender age went inside to deliver tea and snacks inside and, because of this, he knew the policemen very well. Being of tender age, no one suspected him for being a dangerous militant. Jugraj sent word to the organization that all the arrangements had been made but the lack of "flour" was irking as it had not yet reached the mill. "Flour" was the code word for explosive and mill meant Pakistan. On receipt of flour, bombs were prepared but conveying it inside posed a difficulty. Many senior officers, including Sunder Ram, had gone to Jalandhar to see the Star-night. They could not get a golden chance like this to plant a bomb there. Wearing the uniform of a commando, Jugraj Singh entered the complex. Fitting a bomb in a cooler very carefully, he came out with the lightning speed.

After the end of the Star-night, redlight Ambassador Cars blowing hooters returned to the complex when Nikku pointed to Sunder Ram with a torch to alight. When he occupied his chair, there was torch light again. Immediately after getting an indication, Jugraj pressed the button of the remote. After a terrible explosion, PAP was covered with a thick black cloud. Many rooms were turned into heaps of rubble. Sunder Ram and four other officers were killed on the spot. This occurrence had made the beginning of the ultimate fight against the militants.

## FIFTY

Being a non-Sikh, Chhinda Pandit could not be suspected by CRPF or Punjab Police. He put weapons in gunny bags and buried in the fields. The militants dug out the weapons there led by the clue. Then the militants used Chhinda for sending top secret mes-

sages from here and there. Chhinda was proving more useful than the collegiate girls Amro and Sarbjit. He bade "Ram Ram Panditji" to CRPF people and "Sat Sri Akal" to Punjab Police adeptly. Therefore they offered Chhinda tea, etc., also. A CRPF official asked him about some militant, he poined towards the left insead of the right. The poverty at home had compelled Chhinda to tread this difficult path. Otherwise, what could he have gained from such a group which was bent upon decimating his own community. After the massacre, many Hindus were leaving the Punjab to settle in other states. After abducting Kharaiti Lal of Verka, the fear in their mind had multiplied. After release by paying a hefty ransom, Kharaiti disclosed that at the time of changing the place, the boys blindfolded him and made him carry on his head the bag full of weapons. One night, the militants jocularly said that there was a ditch ahead and, jumping over which, the bag had fallen down. All of them laughed heartily at this.

Chhinda's father was a confectioner in a small town, Jhabal, and his earning barely met the needs of the family. The banias and Jatts of the area celebrated their marriages with great pomp and show. The poor confectioner remained terribly worried over the marriages of his daughters growing up like chinaberry. The confectioner's son did not want to die as a confectioner. He wanted to marry his sisters with all the grandeur. When heard his class mate Jagga's name in a bank dacoity, a strange wave arose in his mind. This was the biggest dacoity of the country so far in which five militants had looted crores of rupees. He got restive to meet Jagga. Not to speak of five crores, even if he would get five lakhs, he could easily marry off his sisters. Next moment when he read the news of the militants killing his own kinsmen with bullets, he got scared thinking of Jagga. Then he thought, "No," he has been his class mate and both of them had family relations visiting each other in sorrows and joys. Talking to himself, he was going on when someone placed his hand on his shoulder and he got scared. A



person, whose face was covered with a scarf, asked him, "Are you Panditji?" On hearing the word Pandit, he got terribly scared.

"Come with me. Jathedar has called you." Panditji began to recite "Ram-Ram". The boy led Chhinda to the jeep standing at a distsance of two furlongs. He thought of the penury of his house, sisters of marriageable age and old parents. He began to think that if something happened to him, the house would be ruined. His father had couselled him many a time to go to settle in some other province but he had not agreed. It was not a child's play to open a shop at an unknown place. And because of bloodshed, the property in the village would hardly fetch much sale proceeds. In fact people had kept an eye on the property of non-Sikhs. Chhinda, wonder-struck, was following the boy when suddenly hearing firing in the air from the jeep, he fell down. He shouted, "Help, help…". Then he heard a peal of laughter from the jeep which unnerved him all the more. Then a loud voice said, "You are not going to die, Pandit. No one can touch you so long as I am here." On hearing this, Chhinda said, "Is it you, Jagga?" He had a mixed feeling of fear and joy and then tightening him in his clasp he said, "You are more than my life, Pandit" said Jaggar removing scarf from his face. Handing him a packet, Jagga said, "Give this little bit to your sisters and seek forgiveness for me because I could not come at the time of Rakhri. You know, Pandit, if I had come, the Police would have harassed your family making searching enquiries." Saying this his eyes got moist.

"Tears do not look well in the eyes of a valiant fighter like you."

"What can I do, Pandit? I am reminded of my sisters, brothers and the elders. I don't know in what condition would they be, poor ones?" Saying this Jagga's eyes turned red with rage. I don't know what these bastards, the policemen, get committing atrocities on the unarmed and helpless people. Let them come towards me, I would empty the entire Stengun in their chests."

"I know, Jagga, what has your family undergone? You are not being made to carry this burden of iron for nothing." Holding his Stengun, the Pandit said.

"Now you can slip away to the right or left, Pandit. If a wild dog sees you, you will be torn apart," said Jagga pushing him back lightly.

Getting back, he said, "Have no worry, Jagga, I would certainly trace your family."

He had just reached his house, when the police party began to give hard knocks at their door. When Pandit saw through the crevice, he was scared to the bone. Handing the packet, received from Jagga, to his sisters, he, jumping over the parapets of the adjoining house, disappeared. Meanwhile the girls opened the door and the policemen entered the rooms hurriedly. The Inspector, standing near the young girls began the question-answers. Looking at the envelop held in the hand of a girl, he asked her what it was? The girl had no reply. She did not know what to say in reply? He was surprised that the police had been coming to the Pandit's house and enquiring about their welfare by why their way of talking so much awe inspiring today? The Inspector asked the girls about Chhinda and they said that he was at home. They did not know when he, jumping over the parapets of the adjoining houses, had disappeared. When the policemen could not find the brother, they ordered the girl and her old mother to get into the van. The entire village was surprised. Some had begun to suspect the Inspector that he had an eye on the young girl. The Pandit reached Jagga, hiding here and there, on the third day. Thank God Jagga had told him about his temporary shelter so that he could be contacted if needed. Jagga had thought that in looking for his family, his old mate would be helpful. When the Pandit, panting for breath, reached the farm house in the desolate jungle, all of them got alerted. Gazing from a distance, Baz Singh said that it seemed to be a devil being chased by the police party. He ordered his companion that the Pandit should



be killed on the spot and his dead body thrown into the river flowing nearby. By chance, Jagga recognized his bosom friend and asked his companions not to fire.

"Jathedar, sir, he is Pandit from my village," Jagga told Baz Singh. On hearing the word "Pandit", Baz Singh began to suspect him also. He said in an angry tone, "What do we have to do with Pandits? And also, how he could have an inkling about our place?" Jagga said humbly, "Jathedarji, he is more than my brother. I had told him about this place."

On hearing this Baz Singh jumped and said to Jagga, "You will get all of us killed, Jagga. This Pandit does not resemble us in form or wisdom. His path is different from ours."

"Let us listen to Pandit, Jathedar. He may be in some trouble." Makhan singh standing close by said to Baz Singh, "No goat enters the cluster of lions for nothing. Something unforeseen must have happened." This mellowed Baz Singh. Jagga served water to Pandit and heard his tale. It came to the clever mind of Baz Singh as to why the services of the Pandit may not be made use of for carrying weapons as no one would suspect him. After mutual consultation, it was decided that Pandit would remain with them because going back was not free of risk for him. Pandit worked for many days carrying weapons or messages of the militants but when he came to know that Police had misbehaved with his sisters and mother, he requested Jagga that he would himself take revenge from the Inspector. Jagga said that only Gita look nice in his hands and not dangerous toys but Pandit was insistent that he would himself wipe out the Inspector. He felt like decimating the entire family of the Inspector. "Come with me Jagga. I will show you that I too have drunk water of the same village.

## FIFTY ONE

Pala Mental pointed his assault towards his own companion Jagtar Singh Jaura and pressed the trigger half-way when he turned

pale. Though Jaura had pierced the bodies of countless people, today the assault turned towards him had unnerved him.

"What is this Mental? Have you gone off your head?" As Jaura shrieked, other companions also began to beg with folded hands to save him. They all used to have wordy duels but today, finding that Pala had turned furious with rage, everyone had got scared. The title of "Mental" was linked with Pala when he studied in Khalsa College. Those days, while carryhing his double barrel gun on his shoulder, he rode his motor cycle through the crowded bazaars of Amritsar and the people gave him the way saying, "Pala Mental has come." During altercations, 'Pala Mental' used to subdue Jaura asserting his Jatt disposition but today it seemed as if some spirit had overpowered him and he was challenging Jaura vociferously, "Come here, O carpenter, I will tell you how to create trouble with Jatts." Though Jaura himself was a blood-thirsty militant but, being unarmed, he folded his hands in front of Pala. Throwing back his spit over his left shoulder, he said, "Say Bapu first of all, then only shall I forgive the bastard. When striking both the hands, Jaura said, "Forgive me Bapu", Pala grinned and showed him the assault opening it, in which there was empty magazine only. Jaura began to abuse Pala naming his mother and sister and an after him. He caught hold of Pala in no time and floored him. All the others sided with Jaura, who was giving blows to him with a mix of anger and fun.

Hearing the din and noise, Baz Singh also came out of the tubewell room. The boys, who had been merry making loudly, calmed down on seeing him, On being asked by Baz Singh, they mentioned the mischief begun by Mental.

"Never aim a weapon at your own people though it may be empty. If evil days prevail, a dog can bite one riding a camel," said Baz Singh calming down the surcharged atmosphere.



## FIFTY TWO

Baz Singh came down on his knees and placed his hands and left ear on the ground. Remaining in this posture for some time, he ordered his clique to move to some other undisclosed destination. Shaking dust from his knees, this escaped his lips: "Let us go Baz Singh after the flying falcons," said Baz Singh who had been a great admirer of Pash during his student days.

"Jathedar, I have seen many bowing at mother earth, but keeping ear so long on the ground, I have not seen before."

"You will understand these mysteries when you come back after going across Wahga. Followed?" said Baz Singh shrugging his shoulders.

"Still something should be known to us," said Jaswant Singh humbly.

"Have you ever seen sleeping dogs? They lie down with their ear fixed to the ground. With a little movement, they raise their ears. God has given lot of wisdom to the mute animals. There is no harm if a good thing is learnt even from animals. This is the native formula to listen to foot sound. One should be alert always. Have you followed or not?"

The spectacle of Baz Singh changing his place used to be quite different. After the sun set, carrying assault on his shoulders and carrying on his head the pouches of ammunition, the militants looked like a caravan.

Earlier, Baz Singh and others halted at one farm house for days together. But this week they had changed the place thrice for the reason that they had picked up the brother-in-law (sister's husband) of DSP Prminderjit Singh. Baz Singh knew that to free his brother-in-law he would search every nook and corner of the area. The brother-in-law of the DSP was a very useful person because, in lieu of him, Baz Singh wanted to free his companions from the police net.

Baz Singh had passed orders that people should kill their dogs by poisoning. There was a severe warning that if the barking of a dog was heard from any house, its owner would be killed before it.

"The responsibility for doing away the khaki dogs is ours and that of the pet dogs is of the owners. The atmosphere of "Lanes should be desolate for Mirza to roam about" was desired by Baz Singh.

"Dear Jathedar, we are caught in what sort of a web really? Those for whom we are fighting are in deep slumber," said Baz Singh, taking hold in hand the pouch of hand grenades, after stumbling.

"If the guards of a nation go to sleep, it is doomed to die today or tomorrow." And the wisemen say, "Those who keep awake have female calves and those asleep, had male calves.

Satta addressing Jagga said, "You have yourself got caught. Who can help you escape? Just tell me, had anyone called you by writing a letter saying, "Come here brave man; Delhi cannot be conqurred without you. With a small hurt, you have sat down quietly after making so much noise. Always remember the adage – "Earning by effort, and death by reason."

"Your father and grandfather had been under the debt of Inder, the shopkeeper. Today with a little roar, he has placed before you wads of notes."

The simple words uttered by him in the ordinary course caused havoc for him and his eyes got tearful.

"A mad woman is treading the path to the cremation ground." Preet of middle age added fuel to fire.

"Lead has permeated his legs, Jathedarji. Tell him to go back to his village. His mother may be waiting for him with a bottle of milk in her hand" This caused a peal of laughter stirring the bellies.

Looking at a distsant fire, Baz Singh ordered everyone to stop their idle talk.

"Billa, just see if khaki dogs are basking fire beyond the peepal tree." Billa's sight was sharper than that of an eagle. His companions were of the view about him that he can count the feathers of the flying birds. Everyone stood strong footed at his place. Billa climbed the tree and surveyed the surroundings after which he came down and said, "Babaji, five or six persons seem to have irrigatged their fields and are now basking around fire. To me it appears to be a family which lives at the tube well. Either they are valiant fighters or some helpless creatures of God. This watch is for lovers or thieves or daredevil people like us."

Baz Singh asked his advance party to go ahead and inspect the place. Five quick footed boys, including Jagga, fixing their fingers on the triggers of Assaults laid the siege in no time.

"Raise your hands" said Jagga stepping ahead of others. Looking at the Babbas, a woman shrieked but Billa silenced her with a frown.

"Who are you there?" asked Jita authoritatively.

"We are a Sikh family, sir. Our house is in that village. It was our turn for irrigation today. The crop had withered as it could not be irrigated last time. Daughter's marriage has been fixed in February. The Commission agents have stopped lending money these days…"

"We have not asked you to relate your own tale," said Jagga silencing the grey bearded man.

Jagga wanted to take revenge from the companions for the humiliation by coercing an elder person. Hearing about the daughter's marriage, Billa's brain began to gallop. "Bake chapattis first of all, Bibi, the 'army' has been hungry since morning" said Billa to the panicked woman of over fifty.

"I will prepare tea, etc., Babaji – but chapattis can be had at home only," the woman said folding hands before a boy of the age of her son.

"All right, prepare tea; will take meals at your place," said Billa saving the situation. The head of the family looked at his wife bitterly. Perhaps he was saying in his mind "The foolish woman has unnecessarily invited trouble by mentioning 'home'.

The woman had just put the kettle on burning fire, Baz Singh and others also reached there. All members of the family stood and greeted him with "Fateh!" "Sit down please. What are you doing here at midnight?" Baz Singh asked the elderman.

"The same trumpet and the same tune. Have been connected with farming for generations, sir."

"Don't you feel afraid sitting in the desolate wild at this time?

"Where should we go? Helplessness has sucked us, otherwise why a well-fed and well-to-do person would sit in the wilderness? One has necessarily to exert to bring up the family."

"It may be a wilderness for you, elderman but for us, it is no less than heaven, your shrubbery.

"Look here, Jagga, enemy may come from any side, he will be caught in our radar from a distance of many miles. No binocular is needed here. Even if the army comes in armoured vehicles, we would tear it to pieces from the top of the mamti (upper portion of the house).

Baz Singh's eagle eye judged immediately that this place was more secure than any other place. The words escaping the old man's lips showed that they had been sitting in the wild under compulsion and made Baz Singh realize that the place was safe. The old man was cursing himself and his mind.

"Go home and bake twenty five to thirty chapattis. Be quick, feeling terribly hungry.

Mother, who had been working in the fields along with other member of her family was dead tired, got worked up at the new calamity and said, "There is no energy left in the body, dear. I was just looking for a cot and you have brought in the new trouble." Baz Singh jumped furiously, "If the kettle boils, it would burn its own brims. If you consider the service of the Singhs as a trouble, you will fall into such a slumber that you would never get up again." Looking at Baz Singh's blood shod eyes, the elderman got after his wife, "Foolish woman, the service in the kitchen is rendered only by the fortunate ones."



The old woman tried to stand up keeping her hands on her knees when Baz Singh again thundered: "Don't creep. Run up. The army has been hungry since morning. And also listen to me properly, if anyone heard that that the Singhs has encamped here for two days, your family would be decimated."

"What are you talking of, sir? If we do so, we will burn in the fire of hell," said the old man in a trembling voice.

"Fire of hell…." Baz Singh lips throbbed. He used to hear these words quite often in Paksitan. When a Muslim had to be assured of what one opined, it was said, "Sir, if I deceive you, may Allah burn me in the fire of hell!"

Baz Singh said to Billa that by way of precaution, he should go with the family for meals. Though Billa had been terribly tired of walking, but he was delighted on being ordered. He also wanted to hve a glimpse of his daughter of marriageable age about whom the matriarch had made a mention. Billa was following others on the footpath, doing some planning in his mind. Amavas being so near, the thick stars, according to their capacity were trying to throw some light. After coming out of the fields, they had just entered the periphery of the village when a barking dog headed towards them. Billa pulled his revolver out of his waist knot and killed it. The families began to shriek. On the other side, Baz Singh and others, hearing the firing, ran towards the village. Billa was shrieking and asking, "Which dog's dog was this?

"We had announced long ago that if anyone did not kill his dog, we will kill the owner…just tell us, patriarch, which bastad owned this pup so that we can set him right."

"It was ours, sir. We committed the mistake. Forgive us, sir." The hands of the oldman were trembling. Meanwhile Baz Singh also reached there. When they came to know that Baz Singh had killed the dog with a bullet, every one began to praise his target of shooting.

"I wish this khaki dog had belonged to Kehar Singh", Baz Singh had pointed towards blood-thirsty S.P. who used to be called Kaher (calamity) Singh because of his barbarity.

"Bravo, Billa. Earlier, dogs used to tear off cats, but the reverse has happened today." After Jagga's sarcasm, everybody laughed. "Let us search the old man's house also. He may not have hidden khaki dogs."

"No sir, we are not like that."

"If you had kept this dog, you could keep other pups also."

"No, sir, this was a very faithful dog. We were moving about leaving behind our home and hearth trusting it."

"Doesn't matter. Now our Billa would safeguard your family,' said Jagga again sarcastsicaly looking askance at Billa.

"An earthen lamp was twinkling in a hole in the wall of the house. Although its light was dim, all the members could be recognized in its light. With everything lying at sixes and sevens, the poverty of the house could be easily guessed. To remove any misgivings, which lie like a nest in the disposition of a militant, Billa began to search the house. Billa asked the old man to open the lock of the box. "Baba this contains some items kept for my daughter's dowry, nothing else." The hands of the oldman were trembling. But Billa was insistent on getting the lock opened. Meanwhile Jagga got hold of a book written in Urdu. He asked the old man about this book with great curiousity. All the members of the family were so much scared as if death stared in their eyes.

…..Nothing, Sir. Urdu was in vogue in our times….Words were not cooperating with the old man. The boys could not understsand the reason for the entire family getting unnerved. Baz Singh, taking hold of the book, understood that it was Qur'an Sharif. While in Pakistan he used to learn the meaning of Ayats (verses) of the Qur'an. When Baz Singh said to his companions that it was Qur'an, the entire family turned pale.



"Oh, are you a Muslim? You looked like a Sikh with your flowing beard," Joga removed the assault from his shoulder directed to entire family to gather in a corner. "Such a deception! What your real name, oldman?"

"Sir I am Akram son of Salim. After the disturbances, our family had gone to Pakistan but my love compelled me to stay on here. What sort of cast or creed could be of those like us? I am Amar Singh now for the entire village. I read the Qur'an Sharif when I remember my parted brother or deceased father….Of course, now I am a devout Sikh of the Guru." As a proof of his being a devout Sikh, he showed the bracelet he had around his wrist. Billa thundered at this.

"Is this bracelet worn around the right or the left wrist?"

"Billa was in the process of pressing the trigger of the aimed assault when Baz Singh pulled him up and said, "No, Billa. Forgive him. They have been suffering from the tides of time for so long." At Baz Singh's saying so, all the companions were surprised. The members of the family heaved a sigh of relief.

"Go home, girl, and bake chapattis quickly." In order to get rid of the entire environment, Baz Singh said to the man's daughter. All the members of the family, including the old man, began to exert for showing hospitality to the guests who had forced their entry. Lying on a cot in the sitting room, Billa asked him for forgiving the old man. Before he could reply, Baz Singh's eyes turned moist.

"Countless of our brothers and sisters are sitting in Pakistan like this old man. Some Sikhs-turned-Muslims had requested me again and again that before returning from India, they should get me "Gutka Sahib" (a handbook of hymns of the five compositions of Gurbani)."

There was a sudden lightgning at midnight as if it had inscribed some message on the dark clouds. "Come and sit with me, patriarch."

When the old man tried to sit on the ground, Baz Singh said that he should sit with him and talk.

"Don't hesitate, you are our own. Your daughter Chhinder is our daughter and sister also; we will meet all the expenses on her marriage." After Baz Singh had called Chhinder his adopted sister, all the hopes of Billa were dashed.

"Did you experience any difficulty after becoming a Sikh, patriarch?"

"No, sir. Allah Ta'la has been fully Gracious. But there has ben difficulty in marrying off the children."

"In what way?"

"Look here, our daughters were married in well off families. But while marrying the sons, no Sardar offered his daughter and ultimately we had to marry them in low castes."

"There is no low caste amongst the Sikhs. Guru Sahib has removed all the the distinctions and barriers." Baz Singh, listening to what the old man was saying, reached in his mind the houses of Muslims in Pakistan converted from the Sikh faith. Coming across Sikhs after a long time, he was being drawn towards them automatically. Finding an opportunity he opend his mind to him that though he daily offered Nimaz, but as soon as he enters the mosque, Satnam Waheguru is uttered through his mouth.

Baz Singh reached his BA class in his imagination wherein the professor was lecturing about the long lost old civilizations to trace their remains.

## FIFTY THREE

Reaching Ekta Bhavan, the tall and slender girl introduced herself to Com. Bishna as Puja Saini. Bishna, who, because of fiery speeches, dominated the headlines of the newspapers, had been bowled over on seeing the pretty and well featured girl.

"I am doing Ph.D. in Sociology in Punjabi University. The title of my thesis is "Rise of militancy in the Punjab and its consequences". Being an educated and vocal Communist leader, you can help me." After saying this, Puja lowered her eyes.



Com. Bishna had been bowled over by the untouched chaste girl at first sight. "Don't worry, madam. I am ready to help you in every way." Meanwhile Com. Tony brought in tea. Taking hold of the glass from him, he handed it to Puja and said, "Take tea first of all, madam."

"Please don't say "Madam" to me – I am much younger than you. I would like it very much if you call me Puja."

"I too have not got old, madam, but if you like it, I would call you Puja. Hearing the word "Madam" again from Bishna's mouth, the comrade sitting close by could not restrain his laughter.

Some comrades appearing in the hit list of the militants had begun to live in Ekta Bhavan with their families. Decision about living together had been taken after many comrades had been killed. The office had been turned into a fortress.

Armed comrades stood guard in turn outside Ekta Bhavan day and night. Some policemen also remained with them. It was extremely difficult for the militants to scale the walls of such a fortified place. Conditions being bad, visits of common people had been prohibited. Of course fearless and vocal Bishna promised to help the girl in all the circumstsances.

When it is a deluge, one cannot know whether there is a ditch or a scorpion – one should be cautious at such a time." As soon as the girl steppd out, Com. Bisha cautioned her. With a little hesitation, Bishna said. I have done my doctorate on these ditches and mounds. Don't worry. And worry is like the bier, with difference of a little vowel sign." Caressing his pepper and salt beard, Bishna looked at her in such a way as if he had conquered a fort.

Being a whole-timer, Bishna had dedicated himself to the Party. After doing his Ph.D, he had got a lecturer's job in the University but after consulting his comrades he preferred Party to the service. Red lines of high dreams sparkled in his eyes. When he raised a slogan during college days, all the students came out. Girls sacrificed themselves unto him at his fiery speeches. His junior, Renu,

who worked shoulder to shoulder with him for the Party, had fallen in love with him. One day she opened her mind without hesitation to Bishna. Being an idealist, Bishna could not accept her marriage proposal. "This unmatached marriage will not be acceptable to society." Bishna told Renu very clearly. This enraged Renu furiously. "In what way would it be unmatched, I should also know?" After keeping quiet for a couple of minutes, Bishna said, "Look here, Renu, for proposing to a poor man like me, I am grateful to you but the world would laugh at such a marriage that a Brahmin girl has chosen a down-trodden boy. Renu turned furious on hearing this. "What sort of a comrade are you? This is a parochial approach. I want to ask you if the teachings of Marx and Lenin are confined to books only? Bhagat Ravidas was a great revolutionary who has no rival. Should a follower of him suffer from such an inferiority complex? A million curses."

Standing like a solid rock in front of Renu, Bishna was feeling melted in his middle age. With Puja's getting up, his eyes remained fixed at her upto the exit door but her shadow too. He began to mumble Zauq's couplet:

"Suffering silently, one may learn from me
Groaning within, one may learn from me

His companions sitting with him had understood his pain. "Comrade, your tea has got cold like lemonade and you have not yet taken a sip even." Bishna felt embarrassed so much on hearing this as if he had been caught stealing something. After finishing his tea in two draughts, he went towards the barber's shop. He had to accompany Puja to Jhabal the next day where a comrade family had thwarted many onslaughts by the militants.

"Comrade, an elephant remains in water for a long time, but if after coming out, it lies down in mud, his bathing for hours comes to a nought. Lost in the ditch of his thoughts, Comrade Tony wanted to drag Bishna out. But diverting his attention appeared to be difficult.



Next day, Puja reached Ekta Bhavan at the appointed time. Bishna was busy in reading the newspaper. She had not recognized Bishna at first sight because he had got shaved properly his hair too. Bishna looked through the mirror his old mate Lahba, who had been smiling mischieviously.

"Shah Mohammada Beauty is transitory
Nor does hair remain black for ever"

"You have got a good hair cut, but how would you hide your old age? The arrow shot by Lahba struck his chest.

"Go and do your work. The wretched one has come face to face early morning."

To escape the leg pulling by his companions, he occupied himself with newspaper reading. When Bishna looked at Puja, he stood up quickly and welcomed her. Puja too smiled in surprise at Bishna's changed form. Though Bishna was on the hit list of the militants, he had begun to go here and there with Puja without caring for his life. Puja wanted to go to Serai Khas to meet Bibi Amarjit Kaur also. She was known as the "Lioness of the border belt". Despite her husband having been killed, had been challenging the militants for the last one year. After that, she wanted to meet the leftist professors of the University, who had conducted research on 'Militancy'."

Bishna has today left security people in Ekta Bhawan. Puja's real name was Paramjit Kaur. His brother had been picked up by the police from their house and later on he had been done away in a false encounter. Although the militants had been after Bishna for many days, because of heavy security, he could not be dealt with. Ultimately, they renamed Paramjit as Puja and put Bishna on her trail. Both of them were sitting in the University Café when Puja said, "Shall be back in two minutes" and left. This paved the way for the boys standing at a distance. In the winking of an eye, they started showering bullets at Bishna. The attack was so fierce that he could not handle his revolver tucked in his waist knot. Another Mirza was killed in the University. A turmoil was caused in the

University. The assailants disappeared, no one knew where, in a matter of minutes and complete silence prevailed all around.

## FIFTY FOUR

Blue-clad Nihang's small band carried a CRPF soldier to his camp.

"Reform him with a thick stick." the Nihang Singh, sporting a high domed turban, said to his mate. The CRPF man was begging with folded hands. He did not know as to what his fault was..

On getting a clue of the young man having been taken prisoner, the CRPF had besieged the camp. The Nihangs too, fully armed with their weapons, went up to the roof tops. Situation had turned so critical that with any side pressing the trigger, there could be heaps of corpses. As the Nihang Chief Phoola Singh had friendly relations with the senior officers at the Centre and in the State of Punjab, he, along with government security, had been licenced for many arms.As soon as the Nihang camp was besieged, information reached the highest level. In order to control the situation, some senior officers of the the Punjab Police and CRPF were sent to the Nihang Camp appointing them as arbitrators. Baba Phoola had been confronting the militants valiantly. He was the first person in the Punjab to have the courage to lodge a report against the top militant Sakhira. In order to settle some old score, Sakhira had showered bullets on Phoola, in which two of his companions died on the spot and he himself was injured. Sakhira was known for firing blindly and border belt police dreaded him. After the report was filed, Phoola had become a beloved of the high Police officers. The Punjab Police and the Central Govt. had made up their mind to help him in all circumstsances. A senior minister of the central Government had told him that he should regard himself a Supdt. of Police. With this appreciation, he began to assume airs and considered himself a king. When he passed through the Nihang camp in his red-light Ambassador car, the gypsies carrying machine guns escorted him



and took position on the roofs and sides. Taking advantage of this, he captured some Deras and Gurdwaras. Whether a senior officer or a leader, no one could squeak in front of him. But when the CRPF men had besieged his camp, he lost his mental balance.

The Police officer appointed as an Arbitrator was led by his personal body guard inside. After touching their feet, the Baba was asked the reason for his annoyance. Before Baba could speak, Sukha the Nihang, speaking stammering Hindi, said, "Your soldier, the bastard, was sucking a female ass (smoking) in front of us." When the officer did not understand the meaning of sucking an ass, the Dera head told him that the CRPF man was smoking a cigarette in front of the Dera which enraged the beloved army of the Guru. The officers laughed after understanding the meaning of the Khalsa jargon.

"They had turned more furious when women were passing by and this Qutab-u-ddin (dog) began to urinate. He should thank God that the Singhs had not severed his head." The Nihang chief gave a vent to his ire in one breath.

"No, forgive this foolishman, Babaji. We will direct everyone in future how to keep liaison with your army." The Dy.Supdt. of Punjab Police tried to clinch the issue by making the promise.

"Bring my shoes here. Let us help the officers go round the camp." A Singh ran inside to bring out Baba's brocade shoes. Baba led the officers into the room, under which was the basement of the same dimensions.

"Get me the pan of hemp to enthrall the officers."

"No, Babaji, will have the benediction of this cold "drink" some other time. Now we are in a hurry."

"We have got imported also. Have two pegs with roasted meat."

"No, Babaji, some other time," said the officers folding their hands.

"Oh yes, Babaji, I forgot to tell you one thing. A bag of husk

has been received for you from Ganganagar. When should I send it?"

"Send it immediately. I have a misgiving that before reaching us your jawans would finish it. An attractive object is grabbed wherever kept." All of them laughed at this.

"Babaji, my gypsey would convey this in our trust in an hour's time. Now let us go so that the congregation of devotees can go home." With these words, the officers felt relieved and began to stir out.

"Oh, Babaji we were leaving this here kept in our trust," said a Punjab Police officer humbly.

"What is that, my Lord?" Asked Baba in surprise.

"You have wielded the rod rather too much on our man. We can take him with us now, if you permit." The Punjab Police officer said to the CRPF man in the Nihang Singh's jargon.

"Yes, on one condition. This mad man should not tread the path to the cremation ground." Baba said sternly.

"If you order, Babaji, we can send him back to Bihar."

"No, no. There is no need to send him out. By now he would have been straightened like a spinning needle."

"The Baba has been unnecessarily pampered. Left to me, I can shackle and move him round in the city." After Phoola had talked so highly, the enraged young police officer had said tersely.

"No, dear brother, Phoola is a very useful person. We have been able to scale the militant's walls because of these people. A thorn is needed to pull out a thorn."

After feeling relieved of this tussel, Baba Phoola sat down his back resting on the holster. He shut his eyes and went into the lap of the past. After passing twelve classes, Phoola had become the highest educated boy of his village. His father wanted him to become a Patwari (Revenue official). Being well off, his father had bought him a Bullet motor cycle. The Dandy had fallen in love with Sandip, a village girl. The girl also adored him. But being from another community, Sandip's parents did not agree for the marriage at any cost. Rather her father, with the help of a related Sub Inspector, had inflicted shoe beating on him in the police station. After a few days, the girl was married in her own community. Because of the infamy, Phoola decided to leave the village.



Trying every way, Phoola reached the camp of Baba Harbans Singh Nihang. After sieving dust for many months, Baba made Phoola his personal attendant. He got closer to the Baba gradually. The Dera head informed Phoola about the high moral conduct of Nihangs and about the adage in villages "The Nihangs have arrived; open the doors without hesitation."

"The conduct of Nihangs is much higher than that of the sadhus and yogis. The Nihangs, besides being sadhus, are soldiers also. Therefore in the eighteenth century, whichever house they went to, people welcomed them warmly. Phoola, the yogi had become Ranjha, who had nothing with him, a pauper. The Nihangs are the darling army of the Guru." Phoola listened to the words of Baba Harbans Singh with rapt attention. After becoming his attendant, Phoola became the driver of Baba's personal car. Though the old mates of the Baba felt irked with Phoola, still Phoola had got so very close to the Baba that he made him his successor while still alive. Then there was no limit. Phoola began to exert to establish his own separate rule in the Nihang camp. After a few months, Baba Harbans Singh died mysteriously. Nihang Singhs blamed Phoola in suppressed tone but there being no proof, they regarded it as God's Will. As the Government was quite enthusiastic about Phoola's "Turban tying ceremony", the mystery of death deepened all the more. The conditions had turned so explosive that no Nihang uttered a word.

Against the tradition, no representative of the Sikh institutions attended the Turban ceremony. Phoola nurtured this grouse in his mind. Being the insider of the household and knowing everything, it was a child's play for him to demolish Lanka or to get anyone

decimated by the Police. Many blood thirsty boys of Phoola's college days joined his band. Carrying the assault rifles given by the govrnement on their shoulders, the boys had taken upon themselves the personal security of Phoola. The old and aged Nihangs were leaving gradually. Phoola had got some case registered and got the Nihangs beaten mercilessly. He used to get out of the dera after heavy gun fire. This used to be the direct challenge for any one to come forward to enter the fray.

Scraping his memory, Phoola had got so deeply thrust in his past that he forgot that he was the head of an institution. Phoola began to miss his friend Sandip badly because of whom he had to leave the village in disgust. As he was reminded of the Police Inspector responsible for the shoe beating, he left his bolster suddenly and stood up as if the bombers of the neighbouring country had started bombardment. He kept his finger on the triggr of the assault as if the Inspector, who had thrashed him ten years ago, stood in front of him.

"Get me the phone, Bhola," said Phoola in a thundering voice to his loyal bodyguard. He poisoned the ears of the Senior Intelligence Officer for the Inspector having connections with the militants. After phoning up, he again sat down against the bolster. He thought of bringing Sandip to the Dera so very seriously that his face bloomed.

"Run here, Bhola," Phoola thundered like a cloud. Bhola failed to understand what had happened to the Baba. He had never seen him yearning like this.

"Listen to me, Bhola, what I am going to say and no one, not even some shadow, should have an inkling of this.

"Truly, as you say." Bhola bowed like a courtier and replied.

"A girl namded Sandip is married in village Thathian. I have come to know that her husband, Billu, works for the Jagera group. Bring them to the camp on one pretext or the other."

"I will go and return in a jiffy, Babaji." As Bhola was about to



set out, Phoola emphasized to him that even Sandip should not know where was she being taken.

"But Baba Ji, if she did not yield with love, then?" Baba said handing him the police uniforms taken out of the trunk and asked him to convey that the boss had called him. Of course, keep best of relations with both of them so that no doubt arises.

"As is rightly said by you." Bhola left for Thathian with the uniformed companions.

When by the Sun set, Bhola was entering the Nihang camp with both of them, Sandi asked him, "Where are you going. This is not the police station"

"The high officer is camping here only. Such an enquiry cannot be conducted in offices" replied Bhola most humbly.

Getting in, Bhola saluted in the Police style and informed the Baba about Sandip and Billu's arrival. Baba ordered Billu to be imprisoned in the third room from the front. Baba ordered Sandip to apper before him. Sandip recognized Phoola immediately. There were Phoola, Sandip and long silence in the room.Breaking the silence, Phoola opened his arms for Sandip to come into his clasp. "How did you imagine, Phoola, that you can dare misbehave in this manner with a married girl?"

"Not Phoola, say Baba Phoola – I am now the head of the Nihang Dal." The cloud of Baba's arrogance burst.

"Don't bring bad name to Babas and Nihangs, Phoola – you will be guilty of committing sins," Sandip shouted. Mellowing a little, Phoola rminded Sandip of old days. He reminded of the vows taken to live and die together. But Sandip remained totally unmoved.

"I have married Billu according to Guru tradition. Better forget me now, Phoola."

"If you do like this, I will have to use force. This basement is very deep and even your sceam would not come out of the deep ocean. Don't compel me to use force, Sandip. Your intransigence can become the cause of Billu's death." After the threat to the

husband, Sandip was stunned. Her words hardened. Helpless, Sandip kept striking her head against the walls, but she could know nothing about her husband's destiny.

CRPF and Punjab police personnel were standing guard out side the Nihang's camp. They included the youngman, who had been kidnapped and brought to the Nihang Camp by Phoola's men. After having done his work, he came out expanding his chest as if he had conquered the fort of Chitor. As soon as he took a bit of opium out of his pocket, the policemen standing around him stepped ahead and begged for benediction with joined hands.

## FIFTY FIVE

Fattu Dhinga, wanted in connection with more than one hundred killings was killed in an encounter near the airport. Govt. had announced a reward of ten lakhs for his head.

Reading the news about his death, he was scared.

"Fattu Dhinga killed in the encounter with Police? Is it my news?" He asked the Police personnel sitting with him.

"Yes, it is yours," said the Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI).

Fattu Dhinga was cut to the quick while reading the news about himself. He asked the ASI if he was dreaming. Instead of giving a reply, the ASI said to the head constable standing near him, "Sajjan Singh, strike the rifle butt on his biceps so that he can come to know that it is not a dream but a reality.

Meanwhile the SP entered the room. The employess saluted him in a disciplined way.

"Bravo, take away the live martyr." The SP's face was blooming.

"Yes, sir." The ASI replied bowing his head.

Fattu Dhinga could not undrsstand as to how the news about his getting killed in an encounter had been published while he was alive? He also failed to understand the attitude of the policemen similar to the guests.



Though during his days as an extremists, he had considerd death as a big fun, reading about himself he had understood what was death for the first time.

"Members of my family must have been stunned after reading the news of my death. I had never thought so while firing on others. Is it possible that the blind marksmen of the Police would do away with me?

The real name of Fattu Dhinga was Wassan Singh. Many people knew him by his village name. His mate, Satbir Singh Satta would call him 'Ekalvya". Satta said that once a dog had opened its mouth to bark, Ekalvaya had shot his arrows and filled its mouth with reeds. The dog could not bark. When Fattu Dhinga was asked to give a reply to the comments made by the Congress Leader Sushil Bhatia of Amritsar, he went to his place and aimed at him in such a way that the bullet passed through his jaw. The doctors sewed his mouth for many days. When the stitches were removed, Bhatia fell at the Sant's feet. The Sant said, "If Fattu Dhinga had been told to to finish you, he would have pierced your chest but he was ordered only to shut your mouth." Frightened Bhatia turned so very pliable that if the Sant sent a message through a crow only, he would immediately get the militants released. picked up by Police. When the Sant was in Chowk Mehta, he visited him at least once a week and asked for any service. When people were in deep slumber, Bhatia used to leave his bungalow at 2 or 2.30 AM to meet the Sant. After meeting the Sant, he would return to his bungalow in Amritsar before the people get up. This relationship continued till the Operation Blue Star in Amritsar. After his death, he never uttered a bad word about the Sant. This was all Fattu Dhinga's miracle.

But when Fattu Dhinga's handicapped father was picked up from home by the Police, he began to set him free at any cost. Then a Police decoy proved to be of use; he had been moving within the militants' lines. He assured that if he appeared before

them, Police would not kill him in an encounter. But reading the news of his death today, he felt as if he had faced great treachery.

In order to understand the mystery of the news, Fattu Dhinga, was about to ask when the Policeman interrupted him,

"Yes, according to the Police records, you have been killed in an encounter. This news has become the headline of all the newspapers. The head constable standing with you, because of killing you in encounter, would be promoted as ASI. We will send the reward money to your family somehow or the other. After scoring out the rcord, your family will be relieved of the daily harassment.

He was just trying to unravel this mystery when the police officer told him that thereafter there would be police officer with them in plain clothes. "Dining and wining will be like those of the police. The rest you will come to know gradually. Take it that today you have had new birth."

## FIFTY SIX

Fattu Dhinga had been allotted a quarter to live in the PAP complex with his family. A guard was also posted outside his house. Riding in the black paned closed vehicle he tried to locate his old mates. In order to trace Baz Singh he was sieving dust of Mand. To start with, Fattu Dhinga was given an AK-47 rifle without a magazine. But gradually reliance on him increased so much that he began to be shown the honour of a police officer. There was a time when he needed some niche or corner to save his life but today he had begun to determine others' fate. He began to move in the higher police circle. He began to talk to his wife Surjit authoritatively like the police. He had no need to hide anywhere or flee after a bank dacoity. He received the reward by killing an old mate. When he had picked up Daya Singh Babbar, the violence being committed on him could not be tolerated by him. Despie blind violence, when Daya Singh did not reveal anything about himself, Fattu Dhinga appeared before him in desperation. The hard hearted Daya Singh



melted as soon as he saw him and he began to divulge everything about himself. His eyes met Fattu Dhingas whose life he had once saved. Fattu Singh had fallen in his own eyes so much that he got a vertigo. He went to his quarter immediately. He realized that he had committed treachery against his companions and the punishment for which he would certainly have to undergo, if not now, in the next birth. He had got fed up with this life. He felt as if he had been turned into a circus tiger. He did not know when Daronacharya had asked for his thumb as Guru-dakshina (treacher's fee). He began to yearn to return to jungle to roar so loudly that every leaf should begin to tremble. He began to plan to get rid of the ring masters of the police. Ultimately he sent word to Baz Singh that if the militants forgive him, he can kill the the senior officers in the police lines by causing bomb explosions. This was discussed threadbare in the Babbars' meeting whether to rely on what he said or not. One of them said that black cats like Fattu Dhinga should never be trusted. But the messenger assured them that he had broken down badly and was buried under the burden of his sins. If he proves right, there would be no better means than him to cause this occurrence in the police lines.

After receiving the green signal from the old mates, he was over glad. He told his wife to go to UP along with the children. The wife understood his move. Fattu Dhinga had absolutely no inkling of this that Surjit had got friendly with the neighbouring Inspector. The wife told him husband everything. He already wanted to pull out the thorn like him in his way. He informed his seniors of this and they picked up Fattu Dhinga immediately from his house and took hold of his weapons. He smelled a rat that the entire action had been taken at the instance of his wife. Now it was Fattu Dhinga's turn to bear violence whom Daya Singh was viewing through the bars of adjoining cell. His face was being nailed.

## FIFTY SEVEN

After the declaration of elections, Baz Singh got beside himself – we will see who goes to cast his vote?

"After the elections were cancelled last year, the Akalis had learnt a lesson when 26 candidates had been decimated. Who will endear himself to death now?"

"Yes, Jathedarji, we are camping in the wilderness like the ghosts deviated from their path. How can we let them enter the corridors of power?" said Jagga tersely.

"You are right, Jagga. We did not launch the rally or take positions. We were only taking care of the positions left behind by them. Better late than never. The Akalis have shown their wisdom by announcing the boycott of elections. But the Congress wants to use every means to humble the Sikhs. Barnala already had the taste. Send a statement from my side to all the newspapers, Jagga, if indelible ink was found on anyone's finger, his wrist would be severed by us."

"All right, Jathedar" Jagga began to look for the letter pad of the organization.

After the statement was published, it seemed as if the candidates had been stung by a scorpio. Despite security umbrellas, many candidates dared not start their election campaigns. While crossing the red lines (Lal Doras) of villages, they found death staring at them. When knocked, no one opened the door. Despite the presence of army, their morale had declined.

"Tell the boy if there is a party flag atop any house, or even a flag staff, it should be burnt down."

" The decision to fight elections under the polic or army protection would cost very dearly to Congress. When all the religious organizations representing the Sikhs had announced a boycott, such elections would be like murdering democracy." Ranjit Singh said furiously.



"We should appeal to the people that the Akali Dal fighting elections is actually a daldal (marsh) and Panth should desist from getting caught in it. Giving a vent to his pent up feelings in the common meeting of radical and soft-hearted Akalis, Darshan Singh said, "Who would have anything to do with those who change colour like chameleon? If they do not get into shreds, change my name. Those who give up the Sikh interests will be neither here nor there. Those traitors would not be able to hide their faces."

Another hot headed Ranbir Singh, showing his ire against those who had rebelled against the community, said, "The second rate people are contesting elections. They have no one to support them. If they are killed, there is no one to mourn them. They are digging their own graves. We will see how many votes will be got cast by the Gill army. The bastard is the hanger on of Narsimhan Rao."

Confusion had crept among the militants after the decision appearing on the letter head of the Bhindrawala Tigers' Force by Gurbachan Singh Manochahal. This statement had been made by the intelligence agencies over the fake signatures of Manochahal and its denial had appeared in the newspapers of the following day.

Voters were not stirring out of their homes at the time of elections. With the encouragement given by police, some people had come out in the urban areas and caste their votes but there was complete silence in the rural booths. Santa singh's Nihangs and policemen in plain clothes were getting fake votes cast.

"Sajjan Singh, I have stamped one hundred and fifty slips today." A policeman was boasting in front of a companion, widening his chest.

At the time of counting under the armed surveillance, the votes cast in the booths were mixed up so that the identity of the voters could be kept secret. Countless boxes were found empty when a polling agent said sarcastically, "These boxes appear to be the buckets of the blind well."

The appeals made by the Congress and the Police to cast

votes appeared to have had absolutely no effect on the voters. Surjan Singh Joga of Indian People's Front obtained only 394 votes and was elected as an MLA. When he was jumping in reverse with joy Joga's friend said to him jocularly, "There are more votes in our Mohalla (complex) than these.

"After winning 86 seats out of 117, Congress had created a new history. Congress is the only Party which had won most of the votes after the formation of Punjabi Suba. We have secured sweeping win in the Lok Sabha elections." Beant Singh, the Punjab Congress Chief said expressing his joy.

The Akali Dal (Kabul) dreaming about forming the government had to make do only with three seats. His old mates, making fun of the Captain, were saying that the Maharaja's chariot has not been able to cross the Shambhu border. How could he win the Mahabharata?"

The Captain had bragged that his Party would win a minimum of 73 seats and form the government. I think he would have given this statement after having a Patiala peg. If the tongue jumbles, the number changing from three to seventy that is not an unsual thing." Another Akali quipped. The leaders of the Panthak parties, who had given a call for boycott said that the results of the election showed that democracy had been throttled openly. We will certainly not recognize the government which secured only twenty per cent votes under the shadow of guns." The radical leaders of the radical party had clearly indicated towards the exercise of the future.

Santvir Singh commenting sarcastically about the Akali Dal President(Pheruman) Mahant Sewa Das, said that although Shromani Akali Dal has been divided into many parts, Pheruman Dal never suffered disunity because the Mahant has not even his own relatives its member. The press people do not publish our statements but the Mahant dominates all the newspapers. Pehaps after reading the Mahant's statement, people had come in large numbers



to cast their votes because he had appealed that although his party was not fighting the elctions, peace loving Punjabis must take part in the elections in a big way."

After being sworn in as Chief Minister, Beant Singh had said, addressing the press, that his government would estsablish peace in the Punjab at all costs. A pressman asked him, "You had promised during the elections that after the formation of the Congress government, Chandigarh and other Punjabi speaking areas would be merged with Punjab. You had also promised that Punjab would receive Yamuna water also. Will you fulfill your promises?"

"The government was formed only six days back Ask me when six months are completed." Beant Singh had said tersely.

The pressmen were whispering among themselves that if Chandigarh had to be given to Punjab, what was the harm in implementing the Rajiv-Longowal Pact? Mark my word, Gill would not be controlled as he had been given complete liberty by the Center. The reins of a puppet government are in some other hands."

"Despite the Congress government having been formed, police rule is continuing in the Punjab. Might is right here where Ministers have no power. If a political leader squeaks (speaks), he is threatened by the scare of extremism." The old Congressman Surinder Uppal was saying that.

Another Congressman said that after the bomb explosion in District Patiala, Tarjit Singh, DSP, had to face ridicule when the suspect boy picked up by him had to be freed immediately. The DIG had ordered from Chandigarh on wireless "The bushel of wheat which which you have taken away, leave it back at the proper place. Such people cause explosions to scare us." This was the consequence of the network spread by the Secret Service that it wsa becoming difficult to control the government terrorism of which the political leaders and civil administratin were terribly afraid.

"If Gill is not stopped from acting on his own free will, no one would care for us. It is not understood why Beant Singh is afraid of

him? Possibly he thinks that his government would not have been formed without Gill's kindness. Of course Gill has established direct contact with Narsimha Rao also after Rajiv Gandhi." A Minister shared his woes with a friend on whose insistence, the SHO of the area had not been transferred.

The strongholds of the militants were crumbling one by one. Still some organizations, like the lamp before being blown off, were busy in justifying their existence. The killing of the Chief Minister by a bomb explosion at the main gate of the Secretariat had caused a big turmoil. Lest the mind of the human bomb, Dilavar Singh, should change, the militants sitting in the car parked at a distance, held its second remote in their hands. One bomb had been fixed in the Chief Minister's car. After the explosion, countless questions had arisen although the one promising to maintain peace at all costs had paid his price.

## FIFTY EIGHT

After the red alert in the Punjab, the border had been sealed fully. Even a sparrow could not flutter at the border. One door being closed, one had to compulsively knock at the other door. The militants' attention had now got fixed on Pakistan at the Rajasthan border about which the security agencies were not yet very much vigilant.

A news had appeared in a Hindi paper "Rajasthan Patrika" about the arrest of one Boota Khan smuggler from Jaiselmer. He had been arrested by the police with two kilos of RDX and heavy cache of arms. The Punjab newspapers had paid no attention to this news. The importance of the news seemed to have been reduced by the long distance. If a country-made pistol had been recovered from the Punjab, the news would have appeared on the first page. Of course the vigilant IPS officer of Punjab Police Headquarters, S.K. Mina, after reading the news, decided to send his loyal DSP Rajinder Singh to Jaiselmer. Mina, the Punjab cadre officer, actually hailed from Rajasthan and read the Rajasthan Patrika first of all. From it he got the fragrance of his soil.

Having been quite experienced and adept, Rajinder Singh thought the decision to go to Rajasthan as meaningless. "What is the use of swallowing the sand of the desert?", he asked himself. Because orders had to be obeyed per force he proceeded to Jaiselmer half-heartely where in a building in the the wide wilderness, Buta Khan's enquiry was in progress. The officers of the Intelligence Bureau from Delhi, RAW, Military Intelligence and officers of the seceret agencies of Rajasthan Police were interrogating Buta Khan. Even after a grueling enquiry and thrashing, Buta Khan had not given in. After everyone had grilled him, Rajinder Singh got a chance to interrogate him – "The Punjab Police is considered No. 1 in interrogation. After its thrashing even a jackal confesses that it is a lion," said the RAW officer sarcastically.

After the shoe beating, Buta Khan's bones had already become porous. As Rajinder Singh entered the room, Buta Khan was shaken on hearing the footsteps. Rajinder Singh looked into the scared eyes and said "Aslam-u-lekum, Khan Sahib" and it appeared to Buta Khan as if he was dreaming. Buta Khan was caught in the cluster of grilling questions, and in his eyes the loneliness sandy Rajasthan was clearly visible. Before Rajinder Singh could put any question to him, he felt scared and said, "I do not know anything."

"Khan Sahib, I have not come here to thrash you." Rajinder Singh said humbly.

"Have you come to help me get free?"

His wonder-struck eyes were looking for something in the blank. After the sweet words of the dandy wearing a beautiful turban of the DSP, he had felt some relief. It appeared to him that someone was dressing his festering wounds.

"Sardar Ji, I am not a common courier or labourer. I had never done smuggling for money. Of course, crossing the border has been my hobby. It is in the blood of the Pathans to invite troubles." Tell-

ing about himself, Buta Khan's wounded body stretched and after saying "Oh" he proceeded further. "I have done Mech.B.Tech from Government Engineering College, Jaiselmer. At a distsance of thirty kilometer from the border lies our farm house spread over three hunded acres." Khan disclosed that his daredevilry and liking for roaming about had taught him to play with fire. Although Rajijnder Singh had nothing to do with these things, he wanted to become a good listener and get into the Khan's mind. He also realized that during the talking with a sense of belonging, sometimes the accused makes a big disclosure. Because of Rajinder Singh's responding continusoulsy, Khan was not keeping quiet.

"When my father told me that we belong to Dera Ghazi Khan, a keen desire arose in my mind to go there. I had never thought of becoming a smuggler. Once I brought a revolver for myself and my friends also demanded it. Then I don't know when my name was included in the list of smugglers." In order to curb the pain arisen in the body he got silent for some time.

"Sardar Ji, the Pathans of Pakistan hold the Sikhs in high esteem. When the country was divided, the Pathan Chiefs did not let the Sikh brethren to leave their native land. This region is ruled by tribes and the Sardars are fully secure there. I have toured around in Pakistan extensively, and therefore besides Urdu, Hindi and English, I know Hindko also spoken in the Hindukush hilly areas and Seraiki in the adjacent areas and Punjabi too. You can talk to me in Punjabi. Words of all languages figure in my conversation." With these words Buta Khan tried to stretch his neck and pain in the body again rose up.

"Yes, I was going to say that the Pathans of Pakistan regard the Sikhs as their co-religionist brethren. Those who believe in one God are co-religionists indeed. There are three temples in Dera Ghazi Khan, which lie locked now. Idolatory is prohibited in Islam. Gurdwaras are in a better state."



Buta Singh disclosed that he had been to Dear Adam Khel also near Peshawar where an open market of weapons is held. Right from a pistol to rocket launcher, machine guns and mousers, etc. are manufactured there. Pakistan rule does not prevail in this region. The adept artisens of this city surrounded by hills, manufacture and sell weapons. They can make a duplicate of any weapon. Right from an old man to a child, all manufacture sheel weapons. A big business of printing fake Indian and foreign currency is also done here. On the occasion of marriages and other happy occasions, the fireworks arms ammunition are used openly. Buta Singh said that he had gone round the Khaiber Pass which links Pakistan with Afghanistan. It is the place from where foreign invaders used to invade India but Hari Singh Nalua had put a stop to this.

"I met there the biggest arms dealer, Haji Munawar Afridi. He is General Niazi's friend. Afridi said that General Niazi still remembers General Shahbeg's hospitality. It is for this reason that when arms and ammunition goes for the Sikhs, it is sold in half the rate.

Rajidner Singh was wonder struck on hearing this. After listening to the whole tale, he wanted to come to the real point for which he had traversed a long distance to Jaiselmer.

Buta Khan had been arrested on the basis of solid proofs. The Intelligence agencies had got the parallel line of his phone and listened to all his talking. Paramjit Singh Pamma used to talk to Buta Khan using the code word "Tiger". Buta Singh did not know that those who had come to buy weapons were the Sikhs from the Punjab or some others. Pamma had asked him as to when would his men throw an invitation? With these code words, enquiries would be made about weapons.

When the DSP asked about the details of the telephonic talk, Buta Singh had disclosed that those coming for the supply appeared to have come from a long distance. They had phoned up from the PCO twice on the way. For the first time they said, "When will the invitation be given?" and Buta Khan was perplexed. On his enquiry

they pronounced "Kad" as "Kab" and he was assured that the right persons were coming. The vigilant DSP had guessed that those making the phone calls were Sikh militants, who, because of the Punjab border having been sealed, were facing trouble in procuring weapons.

After getting a solid clue, Rajidner Singh said "Khuda Hafiz" and came out. When Rajidner Singh came out of the Interrogation Room, Kishore Sharma, a senior officer of I.B. again punned, "Anything worthwhile?" "Of course, sir," said Rajinder Singh in a victorious tone.

"Could not hear anything outside. The sound of interrogation of the Punjab Police reaches upto Delhi." He again said sarcastically. Instead of giving the full details, the DSP said only this that the supply had been received for the militants of the Punjab. All of them were wonder-struck on hearing this.

'I will have to leave early, Sir" with these words, Rajinder Singh sought permission to leave.

While on the way to Ganganagar from Jaiselmer, Rajinder Singh was thinking that Buta Khan was being mauled unnecessarily. Had he known as to who were the people who had come to receive supply of arms, why would he have got thrashed? If the interrogators had some knowledge of psychology or at least Punjabi, they would have got an indication about the supply of arms. Everything is not obtained by thrashing a person. If ghee cannot be taken out with the straight finger, it should be twisted. Rajinder Singh was stopping at every PCO on the way and making enquiries. Ultimately the PCO owner at the Punjab border opened the knot of supply of arms. He disclosed that on the night of day before yesterday, three burly Sardars had phoned up Jaiselmer and England. Then they were enquring about some Punjabi Dhaba (wayside restaurant). The PCO owner thought that they had come to obtain some narcotics or opium which was easily available at the Rajasthan government outlets. After getting the details, Rajinder Singh had



bloomed up on the basis of which he could reach his destination and merit rewards and honour.

## FIFTY NINE

On the basis of the phone calls made from Ganganagar to Amritsar, Rajinder Sngh nabbed militant Jagir Singh. He was being grilled at the Mal Mandi Interrogation Center. Wearing the cloak of decency in the other province, the Deputy, who had obtained important information, was bent upon enquiring because there was no one there to question him. Before getting torn apart, Jagir had made it clear that the ammunition had been asked for by Baz Singh.

Jagir Singh had been given the title of "Flying serpent" in the militants' lines, who was creeping like a earth worm after shedding its skin. His bones and ribs had been crushed. "I need Baz at all costs. You know all his hideouts. Don't become too much clever. I know how to make the pretenders talk. Get into the black-paned gypsey and take me round your hideouts. If you fail to entrap Baz, take it that you will be wiped out."

After the rounds of the farm houses in Chabba, Gohalvarh and Naushehra Pannua, police got nothing. After ordering the gypsey to go back to Mal Mandi, Jagir again was terribly upset. On reaching the Interrogation Center the Deputy ordered Jagira to be made a peacock. After making him lie down on his belly, the soldiers joined their backs and mounted his back. The soldier ahead leaned and gripped his arms and raising his legs, he turned him into a peacock. The third sepoy was beating his feet with a staff. His shrieks were dying in the wilderness around the Mal Mandi. After being beaten with the staff, Jagira was groaning with extreme pain. "Stop now, brother". After the Deputy's order, the lashing stopped but his crying was continuing. After doing violenc, the tired policemen were wiping their perspiration. "Stop wailing and now show how a thrilled peacock dances." After becoming a peacock Jagira's swollen feet were not fit to take strides. After a few strides, he stumbled and fell

down. The water in Jagira's eye appeared to have dried after weeping bitterly. "If I know the whereabouts of Baz Singh, what objection should I have in divulging it, Sir? Such a tyranny had not been inflicted even by the Mughals." After these unpallatable words escaped Jagira's lips, the enraged Deputy passed a new order – "Make the bastard a cock now. Let me see how far does his crowing go?

"Sir will the whole chicken do or roasted one?" Moving his tongue on his lips the ASI Prem Prakash asked. Jagira had fallen at Deputy's feet and begging the alms of his life but alms are not given in interrogation centers. After two days' interrogation, he had come to know the difference between whole and roasted chicken. While preparing roasted chicken, hot bars were put on his body and small cuts were made on his body. Salt was smeared over them and that was called whole chicken.

"I will make more cuts. Now try to bark at me, you seed of a dog! I will tear you off like a log, the bastard." The Deputy was jumping in his chair. In fact, Rajinder had been recruited as a sepoy and he had specialized in making the leading militants talk and he had been promoted to the rank of Deputy. He became senior to his seniors by jumping like this and he was dreaming of becoming a Supdt. of Police. If he succeeded in tackling Baz Singh, President's Award was the minimum, certainly. Unaware of Jagira's wails, the Deputy was lost in his own world.

## SIXTY

Mand area, spread along the river Beas over many miles had been the pleasure resort of snakes and scorpions. Although the determined Punjab farmer irrigating his fields at night also had been trampling underfoot the hoods of snakes, still they had not headed towards this area. Of course some poor Muslims connected with the Mahigiri tribe of Uttar Pradesh had turned towards this side for some decades where they were growing stum-sticks, bumpkin, water



melon, radish, melons, etc. and making do. Finding a high level tract, they, after a very hard labour, and clearing the place of reed grass and reed, had built small mud houses. Tying the branches of trees and sticks with the twine and they had conrived boat like gadgets. Their women did some fishing by throwing hooks. The young lads, depending on these contrivances, cast their nets and went across the river from one bank to the other and put into their baskets. They sold the fish at Hari Ke Pattan.

These Muslims living with their families had never thought in their wildest imagination that a rival to them could be born in such a horrifying area.

The sudden target shooting had disturbed his sleep. They did not understand anything. They only had axes, spears and small weapons with which they could not confront the sudden swooping falcons. Ultimately, Baz Singh and his companions reached the mud houses, which had been built in a very nice manner. The migrants were quite upset.

"Who are you?"

"We are Muslims from U.P., Sir. We grow vegetables, etc. and make do," said Mohd. Latif, an old man, most humbly.

"It's good you have disclosed so; otherwise, we would have dispatched you taking you for bhaiyas (labourers from easter UP and Bihar)

This brought in a mild smile on the pale faces of the migrants; but it proved to be short lived. Jagga and Pala Mental went round the little hideouts and came out. They informed them that although those houses can be entered into by leaning, there can be no safer place than this in the entire area.

"To me, these hideouts are like the cattle stockade." Baz Singh said jocularly to Jagga. For the official dogs reaching here is not a child's play.

"You can see for yourself, Jathedarji,how comfortable it is inside?"

"You are right, Jagga. There can be no safer place than this. If, in the monsoon months, the river gets into spate, water cannot reach these dens."

Taking a wad of notes out of his bag and handing it to Mohd. Latif, Baz Singh said, "Go back to your country. Punjab is no longer safe for you."

"If any one of you opens his mouth about us…." Jagga started warning them before they could lift the luggage.

After their luggage was packed in dirty rags and gunny bags, they left in search of new houses again. This was the first time that Baz Singh was looking at himself as one of those migrants. His eyes were chasing the migrant families which had been uprooted. They disappeared behind the high grown elephant grass. Baz Singh glanced at the Rangoli drawn outside mud houses and he was overwhelmed. "We should not have disturbed the peaceful life of these hard- working people. Keep this Rangoli safe because no one will come to this desolate place now to spread colours." Baz Singh took pity on the uprooted people who were leaving.

Our condition is like this old adage – 'Chewed the calotropis crocera while dying and ultimately fell for her husband's elder brother. Did we want to depart like the owls'?

"Form teams of twos and fours, go round the entire Mand for once so that ample information is had about the area. We will meet somewhere after an hour." With these words, Baz Singh, with his two companions, Jagga Singh and Kashmir Singh, waited there. After the appointed time, when no one came back, Baz Singh got worried. Some lost the way and some halted to relax on the way. Then all of them reached there one by one panting for breath and Baz Singh asked for the report. Surjit was still panting for breath. The owner of a hundred acres had never gone round his fields but ploughing the unirrigated land, his tongue had stuck to his palate.

Baz Singh rebuked Jagga looking at the pitiable lot of the boys and said that he should himself have a round now and see for himself the condition there. The reubuke silenced Jagga. Then reasoning with others, Baz Singh said, "No doubt, no place safer than Mand can be found." They should regard this place the headquarters of their organization.

"While we are here, the animals dare not come here. The policemen cannot think for seven births to enter this hideout. With the support of Gurbani, move about as you like. Counsel your heart, "Mangoes grow on acias/and sugar bubbles on neem tree."

As directed by Baz Singh, they started moulding the entire village according to their needs. They wrapped some weapons on polythene bags and buried and marked them. After two days or so, Jagga and Bishna, picked up the Nambardar of Pandori, Tehal Singh. "We have brought you here, Tehal Singh ji, to look after us. Wipe out the perspiration on your brow." Tehal Singh got scared all the more understanding Baz Singh's hint. The police was trying their best to free their informer. Information had reached Chandigarh and Delhi. Both the sons of Tehal Singh were grappling with the police. After a week, the boys made it clear to the police that they would themselves have their father freed and they should get aside.

Tehal Singh's life was in a fix and the boys were ready to pay the ransom asked for. Baz Singh severed the arms of Jagdish Singh with the axe left by Mahigir Muslims. Hearing the agonous groaning, the migratory birds flew away. They had come after flying for thousands of miles to the Mand area spread over river bank. "The bastards had killed Dr.Butter firing these guns." Baz Singh was roaring like a lion. He told Jagga and Kashmira that they should throw him in the Beas river in this condition. Before hurling bleeding Jagdsih Singh into the river, Baz Singh again threw a challenge, "You regard yourself the swimmer of seven quays. No go to the quay without your arms." After being thrown in the river with a thud, his legs were seen moving rapidly in water and the rude waves swallowed him in no time.

Tehal Singh was extremely terrified at the sight and folded hands begging for his life.

"I will set you free now, Tehal Singh, on the condition to present the severed arms to your friend Surinder Singh."

I will sell my land and the cattle and make a heap of notes here. Take pity on me." Tehal Singh was pleading continuously.

"No, Tehal Singh. If you are forgiven so soon, the soul of my brave companion in heaven would suffer agonously. Just recall Tehlu how you have got arrested the hero of the nation by doing he job of an informer. You are the eyewitness of he violence done to him. I want to hear from your mouth as to how these dogs had mauled Hira. Tell me, otherwise, I would cause your death worse than that of Jagdish." Baz Singh said pressing Tehal Singh's throat.

"I will tell you, patriarch. You have rightly said that I had become an informer and got Hira nabbed. I did not know that the police people would do so much violence to the poor man.

"Don't call "Poor?" a martyr. Actual poor are you, crying caught as you are in this marsh. Then what happened to my friend?"

"Thrashing Hira, Surinder Singh got so much tired that he could not wield his staff any more. Then he began to pluck Hira's dishebeled hair so furiously that his hands turned red. He was asking him again and again the same thing as to why he had shot dead his son? As Hira asked for water, Surinder's wrath increased more and more.At last he fainted and collapsed." After saying this, Tehal Singh remained silent.

"Why have you got silent now, traitor? Tell me truthfully otherwise….."

"Don't get furious Babaji, I will tell you everything. Then after burying the unconscious Hira in a ditch dug in the fields and ran a tractor over it and sowed paddy."

"Stop it now, dog!" saying this Baz Singh gave such heavy blow on his face that Teha Singh's four front teeth were uprooted.

"Take away Surinder's entire family, hand and feet tied. Wherever you find a policeman on the way, shoot him. Kill the mad dogs choosing one by one." Baz Singh's eyes had got blood shot.

"Shake the parapets of Delhi," said Jagga Singh with fury at the top.



## SIXTY ONE

With attacks on the policemen and their families increasing with every passing day, Mand became eye sore for the Punjab police. But every Police officer dreaded to get caught into the arraignment of Mand. Immediately on taking over as DGP, KPS Gill had acquired bullet proof tractors.

Senior Police officers inspectd the Mand region at short intervals. Befdore the helicopter was sighted on the head, Baz Singh and others went into their hideouts. They had kept grass and stalks on the roofs to create a confusion. Still Police was finding no difficulty in locating them. When the helicopter flew at low height, Jagga insisted that he would come out of hideout and fire at it. But Baz Singh always stopped him from making any such childish move. "How can you shoot the helicopter with AK 47 to crash. Such a move on your part will divulge our location.

Before riding the bullet proof tractor, the policemen had some drinks. The press had been called to the Mand mausoleum so that the operation could be lauded in the papers.

Judging the danger hovering over the head with his falcon eye, Baz Singh had decided to depart immediately. After the killing of two militants in the first attack by the Police, Baz Singh had come to know that they would not be able to confront the bullet proof tractors which were moving ahead like a phantom tearing through the elephant grass. Before getting out from there they wanted to do away with Tehal Singh who was still begging for life.

"No, Tehal Singh, if you are not buried alive, Hira's soul would never let me sleep peacefully.

Jagga tied Tehal Singh's hands behind his back. The others

dug a four feet ditch and began to wrap him in four feet high dense reeds but he was not stopping crying and wailing. After gagging him with a cloth, he was buried there and Baz Singh went his way. The rattling tractor moved ahad crushing his head.

## SIXTY TWO

Mand had been besieged fully. No way could be found to get out of the arraignment laid by the Police. Baz Singh and others did not have so much ammunition to break the siege and escape. Instead of confronting, they tried to spend the night in the gorge surrounded by thick bushes. Jagga had been caught in the police net already. He had told the Police that Baz Singh was stil hiding in the Mand area. Police wanted to nab him alive and obtain information about the training camps in Pakistan.

The gorge had been besieged by bullet proof tractors and gypsies. With headlights of vehicles on, the deserted Mand got illuminated. Death stared Baz Singh and his mates in the eyes. They had no alternative but to confront or surrender. Bhola began to fire madly with his AK-47 but Baz Singh had stopped him from doing such a foolishness. Still the firing had revealed their hideout. The Police siege was shrinking. Annoucement was being made continuously over the speaker fixed on the gypsy that they had been surrounded from al sides. They assured that if they raise their hands and come out, they would not be harmed.

With the helicopters flying over the Mand area to get information about every inch of the area, it was clear that one could not remain in hiding for long. The ammunition buried by them under the china-berry tree was far away from them. If the hand grenades were handy, confrontsation could be had for some time. The noose of death appeared to be tightening around their necks. Baz Singh though that if the Police hurled the grenade, the khud would become their common cremation ground. No one in the family would know as to which mortal remains were of whom? Doing cremation would be difficult. Instead of burning in such a cremation, self surrender would be better.



Baz Singh was still caught in a dilemma that Bhola and others, having had nothing to eat or drink for two days, jumped out of the gorge. They took off their heads the scarves tied thereon and indictated for surrender. Baz Singh who led his companions widening his chest, was compelled to follow them. Their game was over. Those, who victimized others, had become victims themselves.

After taking them around the Mand area to recover arms, Police led them to Amritsar for interrogaton. As soon as they reached Mal Mandi, Baz Singh was suspended, head down, from the ceiling. The Police had not registered his arrest because he had to be shown as killed in encounter after the interrogation. Police did not want to run any type of risk by keeping such dangerous militants alive. If one agency thrashed them, the other seated them in the chair and passed electric current through them

After obtaining sensational news, ASI Surinder Singh was assigned the duty of taking back Baz Singh to Mand. The ASI seemed to have gone mad with joy. He thought he would kill Baz at the same place where his informer was buried alive and done away with.

The gypsey carrying Baz Singh turned to GT Road at midnight. Surinder Singh, sitting next to the driver, was feeling as if the soul of Dharmaraja had entered his body. Recalling Tehal Singh's horrible death, Surinder Singh began to gnash his teeth. He pulled Baz Singh, sitting on back seat, by the hair when the driver lost control over the steering. He averted the gypsy clashing with a tree along a road.

Baz Singh, after having his bones broken, thought as to what more violence would Surinder singh do than the Mal Mandi Interrogation. Therefore after plucking of his hair, he said fearlessly, "Remove my chains and see how much strength is there in your arms." The ASI giving a blow on his face, said, "I will fulfil this cherished desire of yours on reaching Mand."

The sepoy sitting with Baz Singh also gave blows and subdued him saying, "Don't go on talking rot, otherwise you will be beaten black and blue, the bastard."

After reaching Mand, the ASI led him to the place where Tehal Singh had been killed. Removing his chains, Surinder Singh said, "Here you are Baz Singh, fly like falcon."

Baz Singh, after looking longingly at the Beas river flowing by the side, shut his eyes. The Punjabis had taught a lesson to Alexander on the bank of this river and he, instead of going ahead, had returned towards Greece. He thought that after the false Police encounter, the river would continue to flow merrily but for him it will be like "Death's day is doom's day." A winking of the eye shall decide between life and death. Like the bursting of the bubble, life's gave would be up.

The DSP's authoritaive words diverting Baz Singh's attention were, "Say, if you have the last desire in life."

"Let me recite Kirtan Sohila (Last prayer of the day)."

"I will read your Kirtan Sohila."

"Surinder Singh, the butcher like activities of the Police have compelled us to take to arms. No vakil, no dalil and no appeal (There is no counsel, no argument and no appeal). Baz Singh said ruefully having been stopped from reciting the hymns.

"Are you a roving sadhu? In the river Beas, not water but blood has been flowing because of you. How many innocent people were cut to pieces and hurled in the river? Chengiz Khan, sleeping in his grave, must be getting startled hearing about your misdeeds."

"I don't fear death even a little bit, brother. If not this world, let it be the next." Hearing the word "Brother" from Baz Singh's mouth, Surinder Singh mellowed down a little and said, "Do the rcital, brother. If I do not fulfill your last desire, you will become a ghost and cling to me."

After reciting the hymns, when Baz Singh prayed for "Sarbat da Bhala"(Good of all), Surinder Singh asked him, "Baz Singh, had



you followed the principle of "Good of all" you would not have faced these days. Why did you not think of "Good of all" at the time of killing the husbands of women or turning the children as orphans?

"You are also a Sikh, brother. You also must be praying for "Good of all". You have caused mourning in every house to get promotion. There is not much of a difference between two of us. If we are extremists, you are uniformed terrorist."

"You did not desist from spreading violence even in Gurus' places. There was absolutely no effect on you of the appeal for peace made from the Akal Takhat.

"Surinder Singh, finishing the enemies of the Panth was our religious duty. With Massa Rangar in Darbar Sahib for being reformed, the sanctity of Darbar Sahib was not violated; rather it is restored."

"Baz Singh, that was Dharam Yudha, pious war. You have shed blood at every inch in the Punjab to quench the thirst of the vampires. I don't regard such heinous crimes as pious or permissible in the Sikh faith. Today I am talking to you not as a Police officr but a Sikh. Even the hired killers have some principle. Guru Gobind Singh, sporting plumes, must be cursing you because he had created the Khalsa to put an end to tyranny and you have shown scant regard to the Sikh ethos. Baz Singh, jolt your soul and ask. Is it part of Sikh ethos to shed blood of the unarmed and the innocent? Near Mand at Dhilwan Bus stop, those like you had killed six innocent Hindus and had torn to shreds the amity of centuries. This was the blackest day, Baz Singh for the community which always prayed for the "Good of all". Suring Singh was giving a vent to his feelings.

"After the Operation Blue Star, why had the Hindus danced, jumped joyously and distributed sweets?" Surinder Singh kept quiet for some time after Baz Singh's reply.

"I too have studied Gurmat (Gurus' faith), Baz Singh. There is

hell of a difference between Chandi and Chandal (Goddess and the menial). Chandi is the goddess who destroyed the tyrants in the war of piety and the Chandal is of demonic instincts; his thirst is quenched with the blood of the innocent.

"The Police too is not without demonic bands." Baz Singh retorted.

"You have driven holes in the plate out of which you had your meals. If the policemen had violated their modesty, you too did no less. Now, what do you think of the Jathedars? Did those, who preached fearlelssness and no enmity in their daily prayers, act in accordance with the Sikh exhortation? In my opinion, had they conducted themselves fearlessly, the history would have been quite different. Baz Singh, who would grant salary impose punishment) to such 'waywards'.

After this unique exchange of views in Mand, the conscience of both of them had been jolted.

"The common people are really being ground between two grindstones." Baz Singh said to himself.

Surinder Singh too semed to have changed somewhat. He visualized the sins in in his conscience, as he lay in deep slumber.

He gave up the idea of slaughtering Baz Singh and burying him with Tehal Singh. Instead he decided to shoot him so that his end comes without much pain. Surinder Singh was surprised at the compassion being shown to Baz Singh. Hardening his mind, Surinder Singh said, " It is time, Baz Singh, to fly and soar high."

"Don't worry brother. It is the time of changing the cloak. You should obey the orders received from above. Don't fire a bullet on my back. Such a news should not be published that Baz Singh has been killed while running away. You also know that I am staring at death at the last moment also. A time comes for the 'Baz' (falcon), the king of birds, when it sheds the old feathers and grows new ones- to have a longer flight. Press the trigger quickly lest your hands should tremble. "If you got a human birth again, will you shed the blood of the innocent?" Surinder Singh put the last question before the firing of bullet.

"I am confident that not only I, you too would not do so, Surinder Singh. In my opinion an armed battle fought by the saint-soldiers is the pious battle. If I have a next birth, I shall not fire blindly. This is my word for all the births."

After the firing, the fluttering birds soared high in the sky but Baz Singh recalled at the last moment that the flour-dough sparrows moulded by his mother could not fly.