

Amrit Wilson of the New Statesman wrote: 'On 4th June, a day of pilgrims for Sikhs when thousands had gathered at the Golden Temple, army tanks moved into the Temple Complex, smashing into the sanctum and shooting everyone in sight. Those left alive were then prevented from leaving the building, many wounded were left to bleed to death and when they begged for water, Army Jawans told them to drink the mixture of blood and urine on the floor. Four months later no list of casualties or missing persons had yet been issued. Then came the army occupation of Punjab with frequent humiliations, arrests and killings of Sikhs by soldiers.'¹⁷



'Some 3,000 dead, including many who were only unconscious, were piled high in trucks and removed.'

★ AMRIT WILSON, NEW STATESMAN, 16TH NOVEMBER 1984

In an effort to destroy a crucial part of Sikh heritage, the army, set fire to the Sikh Reference Library after it had been secured. Irreplaceable copies of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikhs' holy scriptures; archives of documents from periods of Sikh history and even artefacts from the lives of the Gurus were reduced to ash. The Toshakhana, treasure house of the Golden Temple was systematically looted.

The government of India has always maintained that the army action was a 'last resort' necessary to flush out terrorists. But according to Retired Lt-General S.K. Sinha of the Indian Army: 'The Army action was not the 'last resort' as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would have us believe. It had been in her mind for more than 18 months. Shortly after the Akali agitation of 1982, the Army began rehearsals of a commando raid near Chakrata Cantonment in the Doon Valley, where a complete replica of the Golden Temple complex had been built. Another training involving Aviation Research Centre Commandos, was given in the Sarsawa area and Yamuna bed in helicopters converted into gunships.'¹⁸ This was long before any "militants" were inside the complex.

A Soldiers Account

"On the morning of June 6, the Golden Temple complex was like a graveyard. Bodies lay all around in buildings, on the Parikarma and in the Sarovar. The sun was shining and the stench from the bodies was becoming unbearable. The civilians who died, about 1500 of them, were piled in trollies and carried away. A lot of them were thrown into the rivers. The battle was a tragic one. I couldn't eat anything. Food made me sick. I used to just drink lots of rum and go to sleep. I am glad now to be relieved of my duty in Amritsar."¹⁹

R.H. Greenfield of the *Sunday Telegraph*, (June 10, 1984) wrote: "Mughal emperors and British governors alike tried military solutions to the Sikh problems and succeeded only in adding to the roll of martyrs cherished by the proud and prickly people. Sikhs also have long memories. They have never forgotten or forgiven the day in 1919 when General Dyer ordered his troops to open fire in the sacred city of Amritsar and Mrs. Gandhi may well have cause to rue the day she did the same."

Less than 5 months later, his words became reality.



Aftermath of a peaceful demonstration against Operation Bluestar, New Delhi 1984.



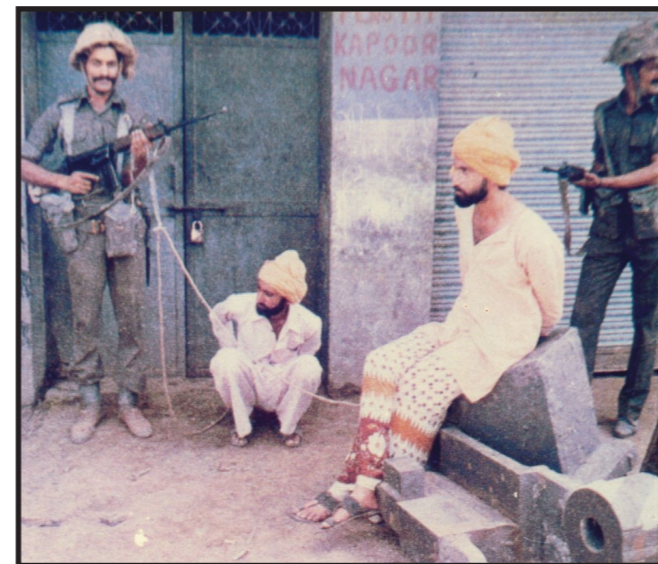
17. Amrit Wilson, New Statesman, 16th November 1984.
18. Sant Bhindrawale did nothing wrong by defending the Golden Temple. Retired Lt-General S.K. Sinha, Spokesman (June 1984) p28-29.
19. Probe India, August, 1984.

June 1984¹

The event that triggered the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister took place 5 months prior. Code-named Operation Bluestar, began on 1st June 1984. Up to 150,000 Indian army troops were sent to the northern Indian state of Punjab, the Sikh homeland, equipped with helicopter gunships and tanks.



Forty other Sikh shrines were simultaneously attacked. On the false pretext of apprehending 'a handful of militants' lodged inside the Golden Temple, the Indian Army unleashed a terror unprecedented in post-independence India. It took the use of Vijayanta tanks to win the fight for the army. These let loose a barrage of highly explosive shells, which destroyed the Akal Takht, the temporal seat of the Sikhs.



Farm workers rounded up after Operation Bluestar.

Eyewitness to Temple Executions

The Shiromani (Temple) Committee secretary Bhan Singh was in the temple complex at the time of Operation Bluestar. He witnessed soldiers, commanded by a Major, lining up young Sikhs along the hostel's corridor to be shot. When Bhan Singh protested, the Major flew into a rage, tore away his turban and ordered him to either flee the scene or join the 'array of martyrs'. Bhan Singh 'turned back and fled, jumping over the bodies of the dead and injured'. Hundreds of young Sikhs, innocent pilgrims from the villages, were killed in this manner.

Ranbir Kaur, a women school teacher witnessed the shooting of another group of 150 people whose hands had been tied behind their backs with their own turbans.⁴

'It was a virtual massacre. A large number of women, children and pilgrims were gunned down.'

★ THE GUARDIAN, 13TH JUNE 1984

'For five days the Punjab has been cut off from the rest of the world. There is a 24-hour curfew. All telephone and telex lines are cut. No foreigners are permitted entry and on Tuesday, all Indian journalists were expelled. There are no newspapers, no trains, no buses – not even a bullock cart can move. Orders to shoot on site were widely carried out. The whole of Punjab, with its 5,000 villages and 50 major cities, was turned into a concentration camp. The rules were what the Indian army and its political decision makers decided.'

★ CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 8TH JUNE 1984



The Akaal Takhat after the Indian Army attack.

'The army went into Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence.'

★ JOYCE J.M. PETTIGREW²

1. This publication is a reproduction with amendments of 1984 Sikhs' Kristallnacht (Parvinder Singh, May 2009)
2. The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence (1995), Joyce J.M. Pettigrew, p 8.
3. The Punjab Story (1984), Amarjit Kaur, Arun Shourie, Lt-Gen J.S. Aurora, Khushwant Singh, p 13.
4. Reduced to Ashes - The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab (2003), Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agrawal and Jaskaran Kaur The Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab, p 38.

A singer at the Golden Temple, Harcharan Singh Ragi, his wife and their young daughter came out of their quarters near the information office on the afternoon of June 6. They witnessed the killings of hundreds of people, including women, and would themselves have been shot if a commander had not taken pity on their young daughter who fell at his feet begging him to spare her parents' lives.⁵

Associated Press correspondent Brahma Chellaney had managed to dodge the authorities to remain in Amritsar during the Operation Bluestar. One attendant at the city's crematorium told him that there was not 'enough wood to burn the dead individually'.⁶



The Akal Takht of fire. June 6th 1984. Courtesy of Sophie Baker.

News of the attack on the Golden Temple quickly spread despite the curfew. Thousands of people in the surrounding villages gathered to march to Amritsar to defend the Golden Temple. At Golwand village in Jhubal, a crowd of several thousands gathered, under the leadership of Baba Bidhi Chand, and began to march the 25 kilometres to Amritsar. Helicopter patrols spotted them and sprayed them with bullets without warning. Within minutes hundreds were dead or wounded.



The Indian Army opened fire on innocent Sikh victims.

Media Reports

Mary Anne Weaver's report in the *Sunday Times* (UK) 'Thousands of people have disappeared from the Punjab since the siege of the Sikh's Golden Temple here seven weeks ago. In some villages men between 15-35 have been bound, blindfolded and taken away. Their fate is unknown.'⁷

The Guardian (UK) reported the following: 'A Sikh doctor drafted from the Government hospital to Jullunder to conduct post mortem examinations said that he had seen the bodies of two Sikhs who had been shot at point blank range, their hands tied behind their backs with their turbans. His colleagues had reported others, some of whom had been machine-gunned. This doctor headed a team that conducted 400 examinations. He said that most bodies were riddled with bullets and bore bomb wounds.'⁸

According to *The Times* (UK) 'The same doctor told journalists that bodies of victims were brought to the mortuary by police in municipal refuse lorries reported that of the 400 bodies, 100 were women and between 15-20 were children under five. One was a two month old baby. The doctor said that one 'extremist' in the pile of bodies was found to be alive; a soldier shot and killed him.'⁹

The Guardian went on to report: "Another police official told reporters that a lorry load of elderly Sikhs, who surrendered on the first day of the military operation, were brought to the main city police station and tortured there by the army. The old men shrieked, but I helplessly watched all this from my office window."¹⁰



Sikh with his hands tied by his own turban by soldiers. According to eyewitnesses, summary executions soon followed.

5. Operation Bluestar: The Untold Story (1984), Amiya Rao, Aubindo Ghose, Sunil Bhattacharya, Tejinder Ahuja and N. D. Pancholi, p 13.
6. The Sikh Struggle, Ram Narayan Kumar & Georg Sieberer (1991), p 265.
7. Sunday Times, 22 June 1984.
8. The Guardian, 13 June 1984.
9. The Times, 13 June 1984.
10. The Guardian, 14 June 1984.

One resident of Amritsar gave an eyewitness account to the editor of the *Sikh Messenger*, a British publication. 'On the night of the 5th, the aged and chronically ill father of the couple next door finally expired and on the morning of the 6th the army gave our neighbours special permission to take him to the crematorium. Even before reaching this site, they could smell the stench of putrid and burning flesh. On entering the crematorium grounds they saw a sight that literally made them sick with horror. Grotesque piles of dozens of bodies were being burnt in the open without dignity or religious rites like so many carcasses. The bodies had all been brought there by dust carts and from the number of carts; the attendant estimated some 3,300 had so far been cremated.'¹¹



Soldiers in the circumference of the Golden Temple.

'Prisoners of War'

With dead bodies lying all around, the vast lake of the Golden Temple Complex was transformed into a thick red of profuse blood. No attempts were made to provide assistance to the injured or dying. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*:

'On Saturday, medical workers in Amritsar said soldiers had threatened to shoot them if they gave food or water to Sikh pilgrims wounded in the attack and lying in the hospital.'¹²

People were killed like that. No medicine was provided, in fact no medical aid was administered at all. Many people died in the camps. Neither water nor medicine aid was provided and you could not even donate blood for the injured in hospitals as it was stated that they were POW's and hence no blood transfusions were permitted. The Army detained volunteers of the Red Cross who wanted to help the injured at the nearby Jallianwala Bagh.¹³

G.K.C Reddy commented that 'Operation Blue Star will go down in history as one of the biggest massacres of unarmed civilians by the organised military force of a nation'. Further, he added that 'the word unarmed is used deliberately as the disparity in arms on the two sides was so great that those resisting army invasion of the temple could hardly be termed armed.'¹⁴

Indian MP, and President of the Janata Party Subramaniam Swami published an article soon after the massacre inside the Golden Temple to say that the government had been master-minding a disinformation campaign to create legitimacy for the action.¹⁵ This did not go unnoticed by informed foreign correspondents; 'The Government is now energetically insisting that the Sikh insurrection in the Panjab was a deep-seated conspiracy of a certain foreign power or when pressed, claims that some of the terrorists were trained in Pakistan. This is the first time that such a claim has been made, and it smacks of Mrs Gandhi's playing the familiar old Pakistan card for all it is worth.'¹⁶

Citizens for Democracy, a respected Indian civil liberties group headed by the distinguished former Supreme Court Judge, V.M.Tarkunde, published a report called *Oppression in Punjab* (1985). According to its findings on the police and army atrocities, "it was a terrible tale of sadistic torture, ruthless killings, fake encounters, calculated ill-treatment of women and children, and corruption and graft on a large scale." It also noted that "despite all the oppression of the Sikh community there was no incident of a communal riot even in villages where the Hindus were in a hopeless minority".



Pilgrims, including women and children, were 'dragged into the corridors of the Golden Temple and shot'.

11. The Sikh Messenger, 1984.
12. Christian Science Monitor, 8 June 1984.
13. The Tragedy of Punjab (1984), Kuldeep Nayar & Khushwant Singh, p94.
14. Army Action in Punjab: Prelude and Aftermath (1984), G.K.C. Reddy, p 49.
15. Creating a Martyr - Imprint (1984), Subramaniam Swami, p 7.
16. Daily Telegraph, London, June 15, 1984