

Tactical Bravery and Strategic Impact: The Role of Rajasthan's Soldiers in the Kargil War

As 26 Jul approaches, the nation pauses to commemorate Kargil Vijay Diwas, a solemn tribute to the extraordinary courage and sacrifice of Indian soldiers during the 1999 Kargil War. Beyond the headlines of tactical victories and reclaimed peaks, lie personal stories of grit and sacrifice that shaped the strategic outcome of the conflict. This war was not only a test of India's military resolve, but a defining moment that reshaped operational doctrines and reaffirmed the vital importance of junior leadership in modern warfare. This war forged legends, men of grit, and stories of valour. Among these stood two indomitable warriors from Rajasthan, Subedar Bhawar Lal and Havildar Sis Ram Gill whose sacrifice during the Kargil War serves as a searing reminder of courage in the face of enemy fire.

Both these soldiers were from modest roots in Rajasthan, but their courage towered above the lofty peaks they fought to reclaim. Their final acts of gallantry, leadership, and selflessness in the face of hostile fire are not just tales of war but stories that should be remembered by generations.

Subedar Bhawar Lal

Subedar Bhawar Lal was born on 25 Dec 1956 in Village Thebri of Nagaur District in Rajasthan. His parents' names were Bhura Ram and Chuki Devi.¹ His profound interest in joining the armed forces was evident from a young age. He joined the Indian Army and was enrolled in the 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES on 15 May 1976. Married to Gogo Devi, Subedar Bhawar Lal had one son Tiloka Ram Bhakar. During the Kargil War, Subedar Bhawar Lal was part of an attack on Tololing Top that overlooked Dras village and directly dominated a long stretch of the Dras-Kargil Highway.

The Tololing Heights was the deepest penetration beyond the Line of Control (LoC) by the Pakistani intruders. As the Kargil War progressed, the capture of Tololing became essential to flush out the Pakistani intruders. 56 Mountain Brigade was given the task to capture Tololing. Tololing and another feature named Point 4590 were among the vital peaks for India. On 22 May 1999, 18 GRENADIERS launched their first attack on the Tololing top. The Battalion made several attempts and was able to encircle them in the span of two weeks. During the attempts to recapture the Tololing Top, 18 GRENADIERS also lost a valiant officer, Major Rajesh Singh Adhikari, on 30 May 1999. The responsibility to capture the Top was then assigned to 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES.²

To recapture the Tololing Top and the surrounding features, a multi-directional attack plan was approved by Major General (later Lieutenant General) Mohinder Puri, General Officer Commanding 8 Mountain Division. To ensure that the plan was a success, it was absolutely necessary to have adequate artillery fire units for each assaulting Battalion, since the multi-directional attack should begin at the same time; otherwise, the enemy would guess the direction

of attack and take appropriate action.³ However, later it was decided to stagger the attack and ensure adequate artillery support for all assaulting troops. 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES was tasked to capture the Tololing Top by 0600 hours on 13 Jun 1999. Subedar Bhawar Lal was part of this attack led by Major Vivek Gupta.

The success achieved on the eventful night of 12-13 Jun 1999 would not have been possible without the great heroism of the junior leaders and soldiers of 2 RAJPUTANA RIFLES. On night 12-13 Jun, Subedar Bhawar Lal was leading his Platoon to capture Tololing Top. As they closed in with the objective, the enemy brought down heavy fire on them. The leading section of his Platoon suffered three casualties and the attack was stalled temporarily. At this juncture, Subedar Bhawar Lal took the lead and kept exhorting his section to move ahead. 50 m short of the enemy position, he got a burst of Light Machine Gun fire but unmindful of his injuries, he moved ahead with his men. Seeing their Platoon Commander hobbling selflessly forward, the soldiers were motivated and in one final assault snatched the Tololing Top from the enemy.⁴ Shortly after, Subedar Bhawar Lal succumbed to his injuries at the base of the enemy position. The enthused section could destroy the enemy position only due to the excellent leadership of Subedar Bhawar Lal.

According to Naik Digendra Kumar, MVC, Subedar Bhawar Lal, who had killed 5 enemy soldiers during the attack, was hit by bullets on his forehead, and he could only say—"Digendra, I am going to eliminate the enemy". Bhanwar Lal's father, Bhura Ram Bhakar recalls what his son had said while leaving for Kargil, "For the protection of the country, only soldiers get the chance to sacrifice themselves. Now that the opportunity has come, I will not back down and I will protect the borders of the country by risking my life."⁵

Havildar Sis Ram Gill

Havildar Sis Ram Gill was born on 16 Jul 1961 in Vishanpura village of Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan. His parent's names were Sardara Ram and Suraji Devi. After completing his schooling, he joined 8 JAT REGIMENT of the Indian Army on 06 Dec 1971 at the age of nineteen.⁶ Havildar Sis Ram Gill was married to Mrs. Santara. He had two sons, Vijay Singh and Kailash Singh and a daughter, Dimpal. During the Kargil War, Havildar Gill was part of 8 JAT REGIMENT which was tasked to capture feature Majnu close to the LoC at 17,000 ft. on 08 Jul 1999.

West of the Kaobal Gali, beyond Zoji La Pass, was in the area of responsibility of India's 28 Infantry Division. Here too, it was important to ensure that the attempts of the enemy to intrude into the territory on the Indian side of the LoC were nipped in the bud. Hence, vigorous patrolling was carried out and operations were launched to dominate the LoC and the areas across it by observation and fire.⁷ In one such operation by 8 JAT REGIMENT, Havildar Sis Ram Gill was assigned the task of leading a team for the domination of a 17,000 feet high feature close to the LoC over extremely difficult and rugged terrain.

On 08 Jul, 1999, Havildar Sis Ram Gill led from the front and scaled a steep cliff with his team, using special mountaineering equipment. The approach of his team was detected by the enemy who opened up machine gun and mortar fire and then brought down effective artillery fire on his team. Undaunted, Havildar Gill continued to move forward with his team. He was severely injured in the leg. Disregarding his own injury, Havildar Gill retained command and control and motivated his men to fire back at the enemy position. Havildar Gill maintained a calm demeanour, took careful aim and repeatedly fired his sniper rifle at the enemy position. He was successful in killing 6 enemy personnel and injuring another four.⁸ His men also extracted a heavy toll. Despite being grievously wounded, Havildar Gill refused to be evacuated and continued to lead his men to accomplish the assigned mission. At 0300 hours on 09 Jul 1999, Havildar Gill succumbed to his injuries and made the supreme sacrifice.

Legacy Etched in Stone and Spirit

The battles of Tololing and Majnu Top weren't just military objectives, they were crucibles where Indian soldiers turned the tide with courage, not just combat strength. The sacrifices of Subedar Bhawar Lal and Havildar Sis Ram Gill embody the essence of the Indian Army's unshaken and unmatched gallantry. For their conspicuous gallantry and outstanding leadership against heavy odds, both Subedar Bhawar Lal and Havildar Sis Ram Gill were awarded Vir Chakra posthumously.

The stories of Subedar Bhawar Lal and Havildar Sis Ram Gill reflect more than individual acts of gallantry. They represent the operational backbone of India's hard-fought victory in Kargil. Their leadership in the most adverse terrain and hostile conditions demonstrates the vital role of junior command in warfare. As India continues to refine its mountain warfare doctrine, the legacy of these Bravehearts serves as a living template for operational resolve, battlefield improvisation, and moral courage. In marking Kargil Vijay Diwas, we do not just remember a war won; we reaffirm a doctrine shaped by blood, honour, and an unyielding commitment to safeguarding the nation's frontiers. Strategic foresight demands that we not only commemorate such sacrifice but also internalise its lessons tactically, operationally, and institutionally.

¹ Anuj Chhangani. "भंवरलाल भाकर ने छुड़ाए थे दुश्मनों के छक्के, बंकर पर चढ़कर खदेड़ा था घुसपैठियों को", *Patrika News*, 26 Jul 2019, <https://www.patrika.com/nagaur-news/bhanwarlal-bhakar-becomes-martyred-for-the-country-4892161>

² Y M Bammi, "Kargil 1999, Impregnable Conquered" *Natraj Publishers*, 2002

³ Amarinder Singh, "A Ridge Too Far: War in the Kargil Heights 1999", *New Delhi: The Variety Book Depot*, -17, 2016.

⁴ Gurmeet Kanwal, "Heroes of Kargil", *New Delhi: Army Headquarters*, 2002.

⁵ "Bhanwar Lal Bhakar - Jatland Wiki," *Jatland.com*, 2023, https://www.jatland.com/home/Bhanwar_Lal_Bhakar.

⁶ Gandhi, 'S.S. Portraits of Valour: India's Highest Gallantry Awards and Their Recipients', *The Defence Review*, (Ed 2006).

⁷ Kargil, India, "From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report, New Delhi, 15 Dec 1999", *Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications*, 2000

⁸ Gurmeet Kanwal, "Heroes of Kargil", *New Delhi: Army Headquarters*, 2002

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