

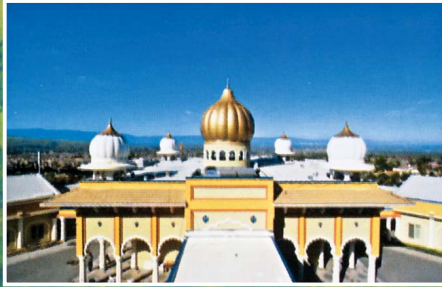
# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**Langar for Humanity  
Lehnda Punjab**

**The Great Empire  
Sikhs of Chicagoland**



*The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley.*



**CHARDI KALAA**  
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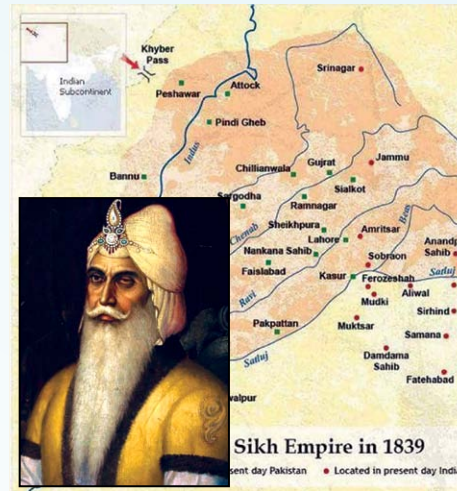


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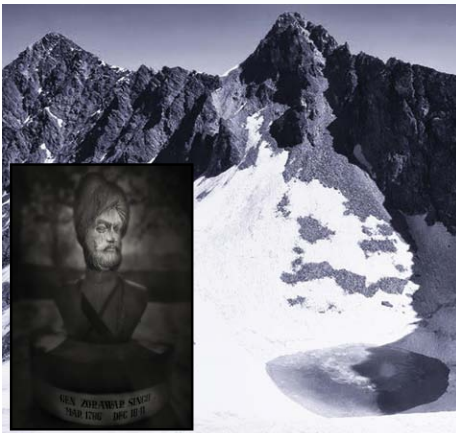
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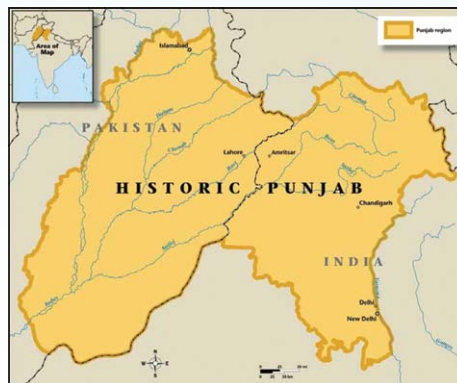
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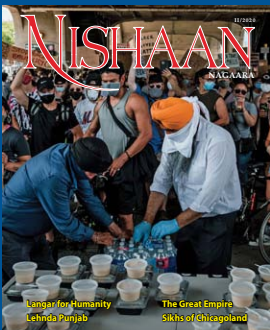


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**Published by**  
The Nagaara Trust  
16-A Palam Marg  
Vasant Vihar  
New Delhi 110 057, India

**Associated with**  
The Chardi Kalaa Foundation  
San Jose, USA

**Printed by**  
Aegean Offset Printers

**Distributors**  
Himalayan Books  
17 L, Connaught Circus,  
New Delhi - 110001  
India

The opinions expressed in the articles published in the Nishaan Nagaara do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of The Nagaara Trust.

## THE SIKH ARDAAS: For Humanity

**B**orrowing from scholars of Sociology, I have often argued that religious traditions and practices are the glue that unite a people and creates a community. People, then, need to elaborate a statement like the Articles of Confederation as the defining document of a community's basic connecting glue. For a religious people, the prayer—*Ardaas*—is that.

The many faiths of humanity agree on that One fundamental, although they continue to quibble over the language, words, their meaning and application, even as they haggle on structure and just about everything else. They vengefully bicker about the Creator: definition, nature, features, functions, biases, language, temperament and the Divine Court from where *He (She or It)* supposedly commands the domain.

Religious faiths generally posit that the Creator nurtures us and that we must unceasingly nurture our connection with Him. Further, that God will save us all. We differ—often violently—on which followers of which faith deserve his largesse, and which ones will or should suffer eternally.

Hence this exploration today on the idea of prayer : *Ardaas*.

In order to function, as a collective assemblage, besides individual prayers, a community evolves, creates and records a common historical narrative of its successes and defeats, hopes, troubles and travails; a recounting of what they have been through and where they hope to be. Prayer connects the past with where we are today and defines a vision of tomorrow. This is how we struggle against seemingly overwhelming odds to survive and thrive.

Christians revere the Lord's Prayer because it is what Jesus is said to have taught his disciples when they asked him how they should pray. It runs like this: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

Some significant and universal features of prayer emerge from this, no matter where in the world a human community exists. Prayer speaks of a Creator. It focuses on human aspirations, needs and insecurities. Possibly, pride is abandoned, hope is lifted, supplication made. The critical place of humility and *Hukum* which in Sikh parlance is acceptance of life and moving forward with grace and trust in a Creator greater than us are emphasised. Thus, begins faith.

Major elements of a prayer seem to be Adoration of the Creator; Contrition, asking for forgiveness; Petition, entreating God for favours; Thanks and gratitude to God; Remembrance, a society's collective memory.

How often do people pray? On that I came across some data, though it remains incomplete and inadequate considering the vast number of human communities that exist.

Some caveats: 'The New York Times' reported these numbers, but from where did they emerge? Which country or culture; ages, men, women or both; education and socio-economic status; finally, how old is the data? Also, many religions, Muslims, Jews and Sikhs, for instance, are not represented. How large was the sample for each category? And a fundamental question—what do people pray for?

*Frequency of Prayer: Some Faiths*

	Daily%	Seldom/Never%
<i>Buddhists</i>	43	29
<i>Hindu</i>	51	22
<i>Catholic</i>	59	13
<i>Evangelical Protestant</i>	79	4
<i>Black Protestants</i>	80	4

The limited data shows how little we know of matters that we might want to know more about.

Now let's segue to Sikhi and the Sikh Ardaas.

The Punjabi word *Ardaas* seems to come from the Persian *Arzdasht* meaning a petition to a superior authority. (A few scholars also assert Sanskrit roots of

the word *Ardaas*, but I leave that untouched here.) In Sikhi, *Ardaas* is rendered to the Creator, individually or as a congregation, usually standing and often with hands folded. The congregational *Ardaas* is led by a designated officiant. The Sikh *Ardaas*, like an invocation or a convocation is often said not only at all religious services or gatherings, wherever held, but also at the start of meetings or conferences; at official inauguration of significant undertakings; to invoke goodwill, support and blessings for important ventures, events or occasions, be it an illness, marriage, bereavement or celebration such as marriage or birth.

Much has been written about the Sikh *Ardaas* yet some fundamentals remain historically unestablished. Today, I lean largely on three sources: The official guide to Sikh Code of Conduct *Darpan Sikh Rehat Maryada* in Punjabi by Gurbax Singh Gulshan, 2005; *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Ed. Harbans Singh, 1992 and the book, *Ardaas of The Sikhs* by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, 2012.

The *Ardaas* is simple to follow and interpret and I will not methodically parse it. In fact, I am likely to get stuck in the first few lines. The authorship of the *Ardaas* engages us first. Most scholars aver that *Ardaas* has three recognisable parts. The first part appears to come almost verbatim from the first few lines of the prelude of the composition mostly, but not entirely, attributed to Guru Gobind Singh (*Vaar Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*) and includes the names and attributes of the first nine Gurus. The addition of Guru Gobind Singh's name to the list of Gurus here likely represents addition by the Panth around that time or later.

Part I starts with a brief preamble *Prithm Bhaugauti Simar ke...* Exactly where does this line come from? If the opening words acknowledge *Bhagauti*, a much-revered goddess in Hindu mythology, what is she doing in a Sikh *Ardaas*? The resulting controversy remains hot and unsettled.

The reference to *Bhagauti* comes with no easy answer but let's try. Some Sikhs assert that her name implies *not* the Hindu goddess but appears as a metaphor for supreme power-Divine Might, Destroyer of all evil or as Sword of the Creator—and should be translated and recited accordingly. But no supporting evidence from history or poetry helps us.

I see this ambiguity as a reference to the beginnings of Sikhi. And that was the Hindu connection. Most early Sikhs, including the first three Gurus (or four

by some reckoning) came from Hindu roots. On becoming Sikhs, they abandoned their Hindu practices. But I would be very surprised, even shocked, if no connection to Hindu roots surfaced in early Sikh literature and practice.

A brief detour might help. Jesus was born as Jew. Early Christian traditions and practices show plenty of Jewish influence during the first four centuries of Christianity and its institutions. Judaic scholars assert that mixed practices prevailed for the first seven to nine centuries, though many Christians tend to minimise that lengthy a time-span of Jewish connection and influence. Remember also that no matter the topic, the effective teacher will teach in the historical linguistic, cultural and philosophic framework of the times or the lesson will not hold. But now, several centuries later, it would be asinine to deny Christianity its independent existence or insist that it is or was a sect of Judaism. Similar logic applies to the historic *Hindu-Sikh* connection and interaction. I have explored this theme at more length elsewhere.

Also remember that the first verse of the *Ardaas* that mentions *Bhagauti* is from the *Dasam Granth*. Its authorship is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, but reputable scholars strongly differ on that singular authorship; the question has never been entirely or clearly authenticated. Certainly, no line from it is incorporated into the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the repository of the Sikh spiritual heritage that Guru Gobind Singh compiled as the final recension of the *Guru Granth*. He pointedly refrained from including any of his own writings in it.

Guru Gobind Singh was a renowned poet and more than 50 poets of Persian, Braj and many Indic languages lived at his campus. What did they do all the time? Most likely, they wrote, recited and enjoyed poetry. And that became the *Dasam Granth*, a mighty heavy tome. It surely has some of Guru Gobind Singh's own poetry, but intermixed with other writings. Parsing the authorship of each and every composition in it has defied our best efforts. I have explored these matters at some length elsewhere.

In fact, *Ardaas* is a tripartite document. Part I sequentially names the eleven Gurus (Guru Nanak to Guru Granth) along with a single line on the special boon associated with each Guru. Part II, briefly and

often in single-line statements, summarises historical struggles and sacrifices that have shaped Sikhi into its modern presence. *These two parts reflect the past.* Part III is open to the attending congregation, to add current events, issues and compulsions that impact the community or individuals in it. Surely then, while Part I up to naming Guru Tegh Bahadur is mostly the composition of Guru Gobind Singh, Parts II and III are likely the works of the Sikh community. This seems to be the current position.

Yet, I wonder! Step back to Part I. In it, each Guru from Guru Nanak to Guru Granth is named, along with a one-line eulogy on each Guru. But these lines, in keeping with the culture and the times refer to each Guru in magical language. A couple of examples: “Focus on Guru Harkishan and all your ills will depart, or meditate on Guru Tegh Bahadur to be blessed with surfeit of worldly riches”, and so on.

Do such ideas run contrary to the Sikh way of life? No Guru seems to have taught thus. So, would any Guru then write similarly about his predecessor or himself in such glowing terms? The Gurus viewed themselves as humble servants of the Creator’s domain. To associate a specific boon with a particular Guru, a specific incarnation of God or a particular holy man, would run counter to the message of Sikhi, then and now.

I think the qualitative and magical attributes of the Gurus in the *Ardaas* are linguistic devices to highlight how Sikhs viewed their Gurus and how deeply they rever them. In my view, they are not necessarily meant for literal rendering.

I also offer you some aspirational, captivating and powerful lines in the second and third parts of *Ardaas*. For Sikhs, powerful boons are requested: the discipline of Sikhi that includes its core concepts and markers of identity (*Naam, Kes, Rahit, Bibek, Visah, Bharosa*). This part almost always includes a line that acknowledges the wish and the ability to ignore and forgive – not dwell – on the shortcomings of others: *jinha ne dekh ke unditth keeta*. The idea is very consistent with my earlier citation of the Lord’s Prayer from the New Testament.

Then, the third part of *Ardaas* often asks for two simple boons: That Sikhs benefit from listening to and reading of Sikh teaching and Gurbani (*Sikh parhdey soondey sarbat laahay vand hovan*) and that

they be blessed with the company of those who love gurbani (*sayee piarey mail jin milian tera naam chit away*).

These words reflect the language and sentiments of ordinary people of a certain time and place. As I said, the qualitative and magical attributes of the Gurus in the *Ardaas* highlight how the Sikhs viewed their Gurus and revered them.

Most importantly, the *Ardaas* always concludes with the wish for the goodwill of *all humanity*, regardless of their religious identity, Sikh or non-Sikh. Clearly this plea for universal welfare and prosperity of all is unusual in the larger religious context where pleas for blessings are most often limited to believers of just one particular faith.

Contrary to common practice, to my mind *Ardaas* is not contractual bartering for wants and needs. It’s not a transactional exchange in which the Creator grants my needs and wants while, I, in turn, meet stipulated scriptural/religious requirements.

*Ardaas*, instead, is an exploration of the human condition (state of mind) at a specific time and place, surely a measure of human yearning. *Ardaas* or prayer at its simplest and most germane remains a reflection of the state of mind.

*Ardaas* is concise, precise and aspirational in revisiting the lessons of the past and aspirations for the future. Sometimes, I want for nothing but there remains a critical need for the mind to be at peace: to centre it, I resort to *Ardaas* to keep me grounded. Major parts of the *Ardaas*, if not its entirety, reflect traits of the Gurus as seen by an adoring people and are the voice of the people in their own language : *norma loquendi*.

The human mind swings wildly, it may be in seventh heaven and moments later plumb to the depths of despair.

This perennially unstable state of the human mind is flawlessly captured by Gurbani (*Kabhoo jeerha oobh charhatt hae kabhoo jaaye piyaaley* p. 1216). For the mind to cease its aimless vacillation and function productively in peace, *Ardaas* becomes the succour.

In a communal *Ardaas* the words resonate as “We the People.” This is how the voice of the people becomes the voice of God.

As they say in Latin: *Vox Populi Vox Dei*

IJ Singh  
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The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted the World. With their characteristic faith and zeal, Sikhs the world over have striven to provide food and support to people at large. The following articles are some examples of the ongoing 'Sewa'.

# Langar for Humanity

Gurdwaras of Delhi have served *langar* to over 125,000 people, every day



As part of the 'Langar on Wheels' programme during the extended nationwide lockdown imposed to mitigate spread of coronavirus, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee volunteers distribute food to migrant workers walking past the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border in their desperate bid to return home on foot. [IANS].

With the spectre of coronavirus looming, India went into 'lockdown' on 25 March 2020 and this continued in most stringent manner over the next many months. The Gurdwaras of Delhi, ranging from the historical Bangla Sahib near Connaught Place and Sisganj Sahib in Darya Ganj, to small Gurdwaras such as at Sujjan Singh Park, geared up to provide *langar* to over 125,000 people every day, over the many months.



Wheat Flour bags are continuously sent by devotees to Bangla Sahib Gurdwara



Preparing the langar in large cauldrons

Images of people in need waiting for food being served became viral with serpentine queues seen outside many Gurdwaras in the capital. HT photographer Biplov Bhuyan visited Gurdwara Bangla Sahib in New Delhi and photographed scenes from its community kitchen, from where

meals are continuously prepared and served to tens of thousands of people.

As Nikhil Lakhwani writes, “the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee has been serving langar to 125,000 people everyday in major Gurdwaras in the Capital of India, with 50,000 at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib itself.”



Massive kadais for cooking dal and vegetables and prashad





*Cooking for the langar*



*Getting ready to serve*



*At the langar hall*

According to the DSGMC, those *sewadars* assigned for *langar sewa* are accommodated in the Gurdwara premises themselves, strictly follow social distancing while preparing the food and covering their face with masks. Along with the community kitchen, DSGMC has also given rooms of prominent Gurdwaras to the doctors and nurses of RML Hospital, Lady Harding Hospital and others nearby.

Preparation of food starts everyday at dawn and by 11 am the food is ready. “While the dinner for people across the city is prepared by 6 p.m. and work for the same starts around 1 p.m. after cleaning the kitchen,” he said. The food is collected from the Gurudwara by the concerned officials of the Delhi government. He said that, in addition, food for around 20,000 people is sent for lunch and for dinner.

*Images from HT and the Internet*

# United Sikhs of the United States



United Sikhs volunteers prepared meals at California's Buena Park Gurdwara to deliver for the homeless in Santa Ana

Tens of thousands of miles away from Delhi, the same spirit of 'Sewa' prevades in America. As reported, "Sikh Gurdwaras are primed to swiftly and efficiently prepare large quantities of food for thousands of people. That's because every Gurdwara has a *langar*, or communal kitchen, where volunteers regularly cook fresh vegetarian meals to serve to congregants and any visitor who comes to the Gurdwara is welcomed."

In March 2020, when most American Gurdwaras paused communal worship services because of the coronavirus pandemic, Gurdwara kitchens were up and running. Sikh *sewadars* (volunteers) in New York City, Los Angeles, Seattle and other cities in the

United States prepared and distributed thousands of meals from Gurdwaras, spearheaded by *United Sikhs*, the humanitarian group organising a global *langar* effort. Volunteers also delivered groceries to those who called in to a dedicated hotline or requested help on a website, adapting the tradition of *langar* to this modern-day pandemic.

"Meeting somebody's food needs and for those who cannot get it, this concept is enshrined in Sikhism," Hardayal Singh, United Sikhs' Director of Advocacy told HuffPost. "Serving humanity is serving God." In New York City, which was epicentre of the crisis in the United States, *United Sikhs* were part of a group of more than 60 charitable organisations that provided disaster readiness, response and recovery services to communities.

In March 2020, they received an urgent request from the city's Office of Emergency Management for vegetarian meals. On 23 March itself, United Sikhs volunteers gathered in the kitchen of the Sikh Centre Temple in Queens Village working in shifts





and wearing face masks and gloves, preparing large quantities of rice, chickpeas, mixed vegetables and *rasmalai*, repeating this days on end, putting together 30,000 meals, then distributing these to vulnerable populations, including homebound seniors and those unable to afford meals. Since then, the Sikh volunteers have been answering meal and grocery requests that come in through *United Sikhs'* hotline, delivering to homes in New York City's boroughs and suburbs.

Meetan Kaur, a United Sikhs associate director based in Los Angeles, said volunteers with her organisation have been making door-to-door deliveries of food and other necessities since mid-March. In Southern California, the Gurdwara Sahib Riverside has been working continuously to meet meal requests from the cities of Riverside and Moreno Valley. This has been spontaneously appreciated, with many Police Departments acknowledging this service by parading their cars, sounding sirens and flashing lights as they drove past many Gurdwaras in symbolic expression.

*Langar* is part of the Sikh principle of equality. The *langar* meal is usually vegetarian, to ensure that people from many different faiths can participate, regardless of religion, race or social class, attendees sitting side-by-side on the floor and served from communal utensils. Gurdwara chefs and *langar* volunteers in the US have to be ready to cook meals every time there is a worship service, regardless of

whether 500 people are coming or just a few. According to Gurvinder Singh, international humanitarian aid director for *United Sikhs*, "literally every time you congregate, you're cooking meals," he told HuffPost. "It's such an integral part of our faith."

It is this kind of experience that has made it possible for Sikh volunteers to quickly set up *langar* after other disasters. Sikhs had earlier set up *langar* in the island of Haiti after that country's earthquake, in New York after *Hurricane Sandy* and in

California after their recent wildfires.

Being Sikh is "not just about the turban and unshorn hair or the prayers," Gurvinder Singh said. "It's also about community involvement, community engagement, community activism. That's absolutely a requirement."

As a result of the global spread of Covid-19, efforts to either pack *langar* for large groups or organise home deliveries of groceries and other essentials were taking place in the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain and of course in India. Gurvinder Singh observed that the group has been getting requests for food through its national hotline from states such as Utah and Minnesota, where there aren't large Sikh communities. In those cases, the team scours its volunteer base for local contacts who could step in. "We may not be able to serve everybody... probably not, but we'll do our best, God willing," he said.

*Extracts from article by Carol Kuruvilla, HuffPost US*



*Images from United Sikhs.org*

How to feed the masses in a protest – or pandemic ?

# The Sikhs Know !

The centuries-old Sikh faith's tradition of nourishing anyone in need has found new energy and purpose in America's epidemic turmoil, writes Priya Krishna in 'The New York Times', with images from her article.



Inside a low, brick-red building in Queen's Village, NY a group of about 30 cooks made and served more than 145,000 free meals in just 10 weeks. They would arrive at 4 a.m. three days a week to methodically assemble vast quantities of basmati rice, dal, beans and vibrantly flavoured vegetables for New York City hospital workers, people in poverty and anyone else in search of a hot meal. This isn't a soup kitchen or a food bank. It's a Gurdwara, the place of worship for Sikhs who are members of

the fifth-largest organised religion in the world, with about 25 million adherents. Providing for people in need is intrinsic in the Sikh faith.

An essential part of Sikhism is *langar*, the practice of preparing and serving free food as enjoined in the Sikh tenet of *Seva*, or selfless service. Anyone, Sikh or otherwise, can visit a Gurdwara and partake in *langar*, with the largest ones, such as the Golden Temple in Amritsar in India, serving more than 100,000 people each day !



Since the coronavirus pandemic halted religious gatherings in most of the United States including Gurdwaras like the Sikh Centre of New York in Queens Village, they instead mobilised their large-scale cooking resources to meet the skyrocketing need for food aid beyond their places of worship.

Some served the protesters marching in outrage over the killings of George Floyd and other black Americans by the police. Thereafter, a dozen or so volunteers from the Queen’s Centre served 500 portions of *matar paneer*, rice and *rajma*, a creamy, comforting dish of red beans stewed with tomatoes, plus 1,000 bottles of water and cans of soda to demonstrators in Sunnyside, followed by *kheer*, a sweetened rice pudding.

“Where we see peaceful protest, we are going,” said Himmat Singh, a coordinator at the World Sikh Parliament, an advocacy group providing volunteers for the Queens Village efforts. “We are looking for justice. We support this.”

Since the pandemic began, soup kitchens have had difficulty keeping up with demand, and

shuttered schools and even fine-dining restaurants using their kitchens to prepare and serve hot meals. But few other places are as well positioned to handle the sheer scale of assistance so immediately required as have the Gurdwaras. Most have large, well-equipped kitchens, a steady stream of volunteers and no shortage of ingredients, thanks to continuous donations from the community.



During the last annual Sikh Day Parade in New York in April 2019, the Queen’s Village kitchen, which has a walk-in cooler, multiple freezers, 50-litre stockpots and a huge grill that can cook dozens of rotis at once and produced upto 15,000 meals in a single day.

The Sikhs’ biggest challenge is not keeping up with demand, but letting people know that they’re there, without making a big show of it or proselytising, which is not as per Sikh tenets.

Sikhism has an estimated 500,000 followers in the United States and 280 Gurdwaras according to *The Sikh Coalition*, a civil-rights organisation in New York City. One of the most visibly distinctive features of the Sikh community are their turbans and unshorn hair.

Unfortunately, Sikhs in America have been often been prey to bigotry, hate crimes, mistaken identity amidst wide spread Islamophobia, particularly since 9/11. Some have said in interviews that before going out to distribute meals, they worried that they might hear ignorant comments, but Santokh Singh Dillon, President of the Guru Nanak Mission Society of Atlanta, said the people he serves are often more puzzled than prejudiced. Most have never even heard of Sikhism. When some find out that the meals are free, “They look at us and say, ‘You are kidding, right?’”

At least 80 Gurdwaras in the United States are now providing food assistance, and for many, the transition has been quick and seamless. This is not just because the infrastructure is already there, said Satjeet Kaur, Executive Director of the *Sikh Coalition*. “The call to action and the responsibility for helping

others is deeply entrenched in the our way of life”. Sikhs are enjoined to donate at least 10 percent of their time or income towards community service.

It took the Gurdwara Sahib of Fremont in California, just a few days after suspending religious services in March 2020, to set up a meal and grocery delivery programme, and soon a drive-through meal pickup system outside the Gurdwara.

The cooks wear gloves and masks, and the kitchen is big enough for workers to stand more than six feet from one another. As at most Gurdwaras, the menu changes regularly, but is typically South Asian and always vegetarian. While these Sikh volunteers, known as *sevadars*, are experts in mass-meal preparation, they are still not accustomed to spreading the word. The Fremont kitchen has produced 15,000 to 20,000 meals a day on holidays like New Year’s Eve, said Dr. Pritpal Singh. But now, the Gurdwara is serving just 100 to 150 people each day but hoped that more people in need would come pick up food. “We could do hundreds of thousands of meals if given the task,” he said.

But with wide spread demonstrations unfolding around the USA, Sikhs are not waiting for people to come to them any longer. Recently volunteers from the Gurdwara Sahib attended a protest in Fremont and handed out several hundred bottles of water as a show of solidarity.

On a recent Friday, Gurjiv Kaur and Kiren Singh asked the volunteers at their Gurdwara, the *Khalsa Care Foundation* in the Pacoima neighborhood of Los Angeles, to prepare meals in the community kitchen that they could take to the protest. The next morning,





they and others picked up about 700 containers of pasta with a garlic-and onion-laden tomato sauce and 500 bottles of water from the Gurdwara, and set up a tent in Pan Pacific Park. Soon, protesters started arriving at the tent with other donations, like medical supplies, snacks and hand sanitiser.

“It is our duty to stand up with others to fight for justice,” said Ms Kaur, a graduating senior at the University of California, Irvine. “*Langar* at its core is a revolution against inequality and the caste system,” the antiquated hereditary class structure in South Asia, which Sikhism has firmly rejected.

In Norwich, Conn., volunteers from five Gurdwaras handed out a few hundred bottles of water to protesters and distributed as many containers of rajma, or kidney beans, and rice on a Main Street sidewalk, a block from City Hall.

At many Gurdwaras in the United States, most of those who show up for *langar* meals are Sikhs, but now that they are catering to a broader population, menus have changed to suit different tastes. In the Seattle area, volunteers at the *Gurudwara Sacha Marag Sahib* are making pasta and tacos in addition to rice and dal. At the *Hacienda de Guru Ram Das* in Española, NM, meals have included enchiladas and burritos.

“I think it is about convenience,” a volunteer said, as the Gurdwara isn’t centrally located. “If we had a food truck parked in front of, say Walmart that said, ‘Free food,’ we could get more takers. But for people to get in their cars and drive over to this place, people aren’t that desperate yet.”

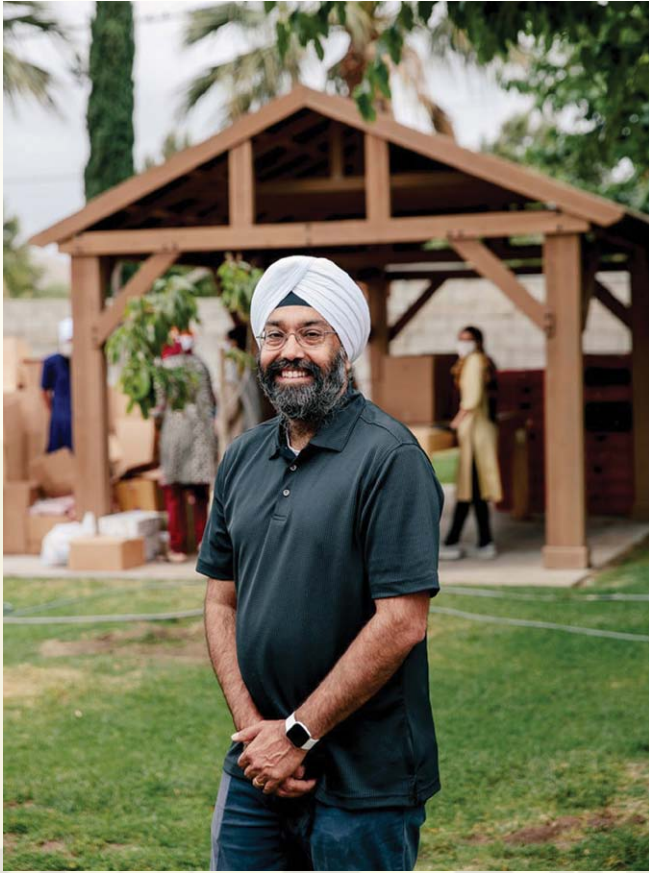
Location is also an issue for the Guru Ramdas Gurdwara Sahib in Vancouver, Wash., as the neighborhood doesn’t have much foot traffic, said Mohan Singh Grewal, the Gurdwara’s secretary. So every other Sunday, volunteers pack up 300 to 400 meals made in the Gurdwara

and drive them to the Living Hope Church, a Christian congregation six miles away, in a more urban part of the city.

One of the biggest challenges for Gurdwaras is that many hospitals, shelters and other charitable organisations they would like to help don’t take cooked food because of hygienic concerns, or accept it only if it meets certain health codes. Many Sikhs have started collecting and distributing pantry items in addition to making meals.

Still, some Gurdwaras are really bustling. In Riverside, Calif., a hub for the Sikh population, volunteers from the United Sikh Mission, an American nonprofit aid group, and the Khalsa School Riverside,





a children's programme, have served 3,000 to 5,000 meals every day at the Riverside Gurdwara. People line up in the drive-through as early as 9:30 a.m., even though it doesn't open until 11:30.

The process is highly systematised. The cooking team shows up at 5:30 a.m. to prepare meals based on previous days' numbers, as well as requests from senior centres, hospitals and nursing homes; another team packs the meals into microwave-safe boxes; and the third distributes them at the drive-through and other locations. The Gurdwara shares information about the free meals through regular posts on large Facebook groups for local residents.

"We didn't just sit there and say we are going to cook and wait for people to come," said Gurpreet Singh, a volunteer for the United Sikh Mission (in photo above). Since the protests, Mr. Singh and others have been reaching out to black organisations, including churches, offering to drop off meals or groceries. They expect to see an increase in people showing up for meals, as thousands have been attending protests in the area.

Groups like *United Sikhs*, an international nonprofit, are helping to get the word out. They have stepped up efforts to identify areas of need, connect Gurdwaras with organisations seeking assistance, provide best practices for food preparation during the pandemic and mobilise Sikhs to help feed protesters. While the pandemic continues, a few Gurdwaras aren't using their kitchens. Tejkiran Singh, a spokesman for the Singh Sabha of Michigan, west of Detroit, said the Gurdwara committee decided it was too risky to start a meal distribution service, especially since Michigan became a hot spot for the coronavirus.

When the Sikh Society of Central Florida, in Oviedo, reopened, services were limited to fewer people and food handed out in 'to-go' containers as they left. But Amit Pal Singh and Charanjit Singh, the chairman and the treasurer of the Sikh Society of Central Florida, also wanted to continue the drive-through and delivery services they developed during the pandemic. "The concept of *langar* is to serve the needy," Before the pandemic, he said, most people participating in *langar* were local Sikhs coming more for social and religious reasons than out of need. The drive-through and deliveries will allow them to put meals into the hands of people who struggle to afford to eat.

"That will mean a lot of extra food for volunteers to prepare, in a city where the Sikh population is still small. But none of that seemed to worry them. "We would love to be in that situation," he said, his optimism vibrating through the phone. "We will handle it!"





# Degh Tegh in Seattle

Before the novel coronavirus appeared, the *Degh Tegh* Community Kitchen in Auburn was already helping people. Run by the local Sikh community, *Degh Tegh* was also its mission: to serve food to and protect the rights of everyone in the community.

Since their opening a couple of years ago, the nonprofit *Degh Tegh Community Kitchen* has served 500 meals every Saturday to local homeless shelters. With spread of the Corona virus, the Seattle-area Sikh community came together to do much more.

The *Degh Tegh Community Kitchen* has aligned with the United Sikhs organisation and A1 Seattle Taxi to provide meals to hospital workers, send pizzas three days a week to the Ray of Hope Shelter in Auburn, drop off bags of food to people in need and provide free taxi and delivery service for the elderly and those vulnerable and without means.

“A core value (of the Sikhs) is to help each other, our neighbours, our brothers and sisters,” said Aman Singh Ghag, a board member at the *Degh Tegh Community Kitchen*. “Fundamentally, it’s why our organisation is here and it’s why we are going to continue to help our neighbours.” Tanvir Singh of the United Sikhs said, “We are a united community and we are always there to help our neighbours in need.”



Tanvir Singh and Dimpy Singh prepare bags of food for people in need



Balwant Singh and Rupinder Kaur deliver bags of food. (Photos Courtesy of Degh Tegh Community Kitchen)

When the *Degh Tegh Community Kitchen* were forced to pause its Saturday meal service because of social-distancing requirements and the stay-home order, the local Sikh community began looking for other ways to make a difference. That has included feeding hospital workers from Everett to Tacoma, “just to give appreciation to the first responders who are out there every day,” the spokesmen said.

“They’re out there working 18 to 20 hours a day, so they need some hot meals”. And a lot is provided, typically serving at least 150 but they recently delivered 500 meals to Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital in Tacoma.

Aman Singh Ghag expressed that while “food banks are great, a lot of people can’t make it to the

food banks.” To reach those people, who are often elderly, a hotline was then created so people could call and have the food delivered. Such a service was made possible because of the alliance between various local Sikh organisations. “We all got together so we could have a broader impact. ....there are some services that (the *Degh Tegh Community Kitchen*) couldn’t provide, like taxi service. All of these services are joint between the three organisations.”

Later, the organisations came together to do something new, making 10–15 bags of groceries for people in need. As far as free taxi and delivery service for the elderly and those in need, there is no limit. “Whoever calls us,” Singh said, “We are there to help, 24x7.”

## From Melbourne to Mohali

The Australian chapter of *Guru Nanak’s Free Community Kitchen & Food Pantry* was launched in Melbourne Victoria on 23 May, 2020 in partnership with Wyndham Park Community Centre and *Lets Feed*. This is a weekly meals and grocery programme, where every week, *United Sikhs* volunteers provide 300 freshly cooked meals and 35 grocery packs to the community centres for distribution amongst families affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and started in West Melbourne, Victoria.

6000 miles away to the west, in the State of Punjab India, the *United Sikhs* were equally active, handing over utility kits for Covid patients at quarantine centres in Mohali to the Health and Family Welfare Minister, Balbir Singh Sidhu. “The present situation (Covid-19) is a war-like situation. Frontline warriors, including doctors, medical staff and the police are playing a very crucial role,” stated Gurpreet Singh, Director, *United Sikhs*, “We will provide such utility kits to all the individuals in every centre in Punjab.”



# The Baba of National Highway 7

In an almost superhuman effort, Baba Karnail Singh Khaira, the 81 years of age head of the *Dera Kar Seva Gurdwara Langar Sahib* in the state of Maharashtra has fed over 2 million people since coronavirus-induced lockdown began in late March 2020 !

The Gurdwara, located on National Highway 7 in Maharashtra state has been providing *langar* to people in the area and continuous travellers since the lockdown began. On the 450 kilometre stretch, this is the only place where a meal is available – and free of cost. Since there is no other *dhaba* or restaurant in the region, buses, trucks, tempos and other vehicles stop at the Gurdwara to partake *Guru ka langar* which is linked with the historic *Gurdwara Bhagod Sahib at Wai*, located around 11 kilometres away in a densely forested area.

Popularly known as Khaira Babaji in the region, he explained that “since the *Gurdwara Bhagod Sahib* is away from the main road, in 1988, this *langar* place came up here as an extension. I was assigned to manage it with the blessings and guidance of Nanded Gurdwara Sahib’s Baba Narinder Singhji and Baba Balwinder Singhji.”

“We have had hundreds of people coming every day and kept cooking continuously food for them... we welcomed all with smiles and folded hands, irrespective of caste, religion... my regular team of 17 *sevaks*, including 11 cooks and other helpers were overworked, but ensured a non-stop supply of fresh, piping hot food,” Baba Karnail Singh said.

Khaira Baba’s youngest brother Baba Gurbax Singh Khaira, 67, who has settled in New Jersey, USA helped with massive donations from the local Sikh community in the United States and Pandharkawada philanthropists



like Pawanjit Kapoor, Salim Jetani and Kishore Tiwari, all these donations having helped *Guru ka langar* to feed people during the lockdown.

For breakfast there is bread and biscuits. All other meals include rice with tuvar dal, aloo vadi and aloo vanga. Weary travellers are also provided with borewell water for their bathing.

Working tirelessly but without counting, Khaira Baba was somewhat surprised when he learned that over 1.5 million disposable plates had been used over the 10 weeks while over 500,000 people took away food parcels from the *langar*.

The gurudwara has also been feeding around 250 dogs, cats, stray cattle and other animals in the area with *chapatis* and *jaggery*.

“It’s the *marzi* (will) of Wahe Guru... We are only his instruments in the service to humanity. There are three vehicles donated by devotees to this *langar*... but my only belongings on earth are the three sets of clothes, I live and sleep here, eat the same food served to the people,” said Khaira Baba.

Although two donation boxes have been kept outside the *Guru ka langar*, the money is never counted.... just used to make arrangements for the *langar*. Khaira Baba personally served *sharbat* to people on 30 May 2020 to mark the 414th anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Sikh Guru.



Amardeep Singh and his

# Search for General Zorawar Singh

Very pertinent in context of the present India–China face–off in Ladakh, Amardeep Singh recalls how the region of Ladakh, Kashmir and Baltistan became a part of present day India and Pakistan. In his journeys, he traced the footsteps of Zorawar Singh, the able General of the Lahore Darbar (commonly referred to as the Sikh Empire by British India) who had annexed Ladakh from the Tibetans and Baltistan from Ahmad Shah. In parallel, Amardeep Singh has also traced the footsteps of General Hari Singh Nalwa, who ‘liberated’ Kashmir from the Durrani of Afghanistan. These frontier regions are today a part of India and Pakistan because of the conquests enabled under Maharajah Ranjit Singh’s leadership. However, the history of these sensitive frontier regions unfortunately stands obliterated from the memories of the present generation.



Hundreds of human skeletons, some with frozen flesh attached to them, can still be found around Roopkund (16,500 feet), a remote glacial lake in lap of the Trishul massif in the Himalayas (*photo above*). The presence of these skeletons was first discovered in 1942 by the Himalayan ranger H K Madhwal.

I was fortunate to be schooled at The Doon School in Dehra Dun an institution that valued the importance of being ‘outward bound’, encouraging us to trek in the mountains. In 1983, when I was seventeen, a group of senior students successfully trekked to Roopkund, even bringing back some stray human bones.



General Zorawar Singh's statue at Fort in Leh (Ladakh)

With a sense of curiosity, I asked my housemaster as to “Why are so many skeletons found around this remote lake?” He replied, “these are believed to be the remains of General Zorawar Singh’s soldiers who were lost in the Himalayas while returning from the Tibetan plateau.”

Who was General Zorawar Singh?

The Indian subcontinent had continuously been invaded, looted and ruled by many dynasties for over a thousand years. It was only with establishment of the Sikh kingdom in the Punjab during the regime of Maharajah Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), that this trend was actually reversed.

Ranjit Singh’s military career can be divided into three phases.

**1799–1809** : Consolidation of the Misl and Sikh forces, leading to the annexation of Lahore.

**1809–1823** : Expansion of the Empire to include Multan, Peshawar and Kashmir. It was during this

phase that Hari Singh Nalwa, his trusted General extended the Empire north–westwards till the Khyber Pass on the Afghanistan border. This was an epic by itself as for 200 years thereafter, no foreign invasion of the Indian subcontinent has taken place from Afghanistan.

**1823–1839** : Consolidation and further expansion. It was in this phase that General Zorawar Singh, operating under military leadership of Gulab Singh (the Dogra minister in Ranjit Singh’s cabinet who was asked to manage the affairs of Kashmir), made expeditionary moves to Ladakh (1834), Baltistan (1840) and Tibet (1841).

By 1839, the British had virtually taken over the entire Indian subcontinent east of the river Sutlej but were now limited by the *Treaty of Amritsar* signed with Maharajah Ranjit Singh that stopped them from making westward advances into the Punjab – and beyond. However, this Treaty also limited Ranjit Singh from taking over territories east of the Sutlej. Thus the only option for expansion of the Sikh kingdom was north westwards, across the Indus into Afghan–held territory and Kashmir, north east of which was the high mountain plateau of Ladakh and beyond, Tibet.

Zorawar Singh was born at Khalur, now in the state of Himachal Pradesh, then part of the Punjab. At a very young age, because of his brilliant leadership, he became a General in Maharajah Ranjit Singh’s Army.



Painting of General Zorawar Singh with Gyalpo, the King of Ladakh

In 1834, General Zorawar Singh led an expedition to Ladakh, moving via Kishtwar, Dachin, Marwah, Warwan, crossing the Lanvila pass at 14,500 feet. At Suru and then in the Leh valley, his forces constructed various forts for defence and administration of the region.

In October 1835, Zorawar Singh returned to Kishtwar but on getting reports of rebellion, he immediately turned back and this time took a shorter but more arduous route via the Umasila pass at 17,300 feet into Zaskar and Leh, which he reached in ten days. An army crossing at these heights, especially in winter months was unthinkable and unknown in annals of world military history. The incorporation of Ladakh into Maharajah Ranjit Singh's kingdom is of great and strategic geo-political importance for present day India.



*General Zorawar Singh's fort at Leh, Ladakh*

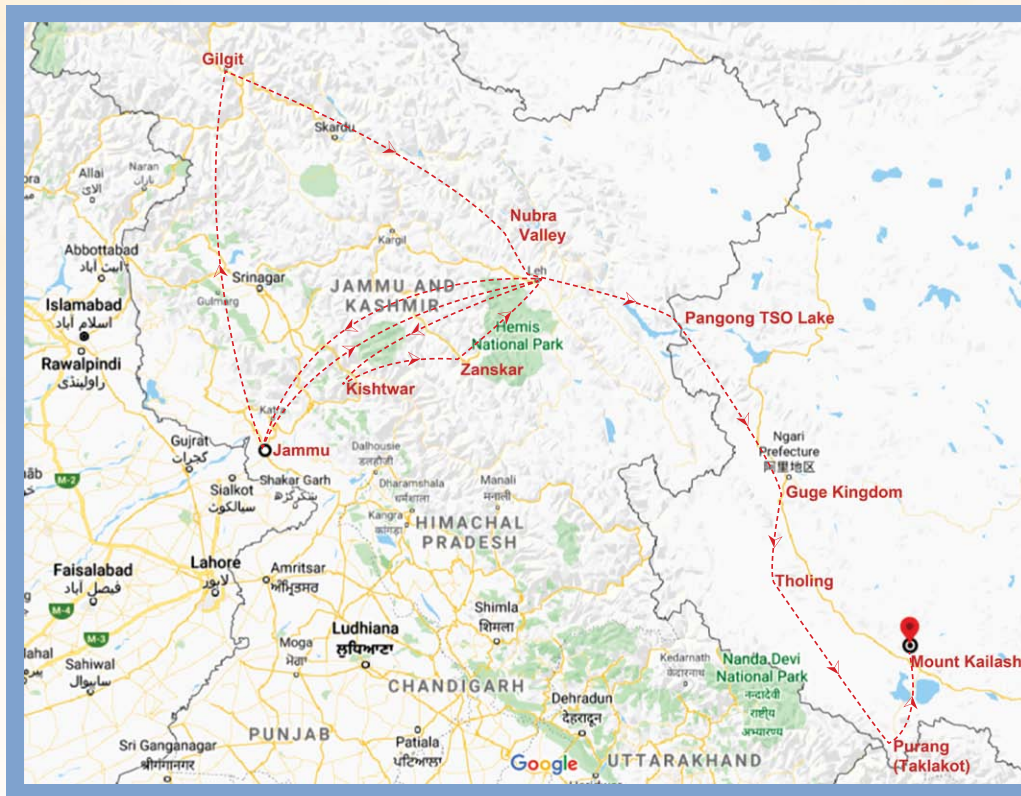
If not for the success of Zorawar Singh's conquest, this area could well have been a part of Communist China following its invasion of Tibet in 1950.



*General Zorawar Singh's fort at Leh, Ladakh*



*View of Skardu in Baltistan*



### Routes followed\*

1. Jammu to Leh in Ladakh via Lanvilopax and return to Kishtwar
2. Kishtwar to Leh via Umorilepose via Zanskar valley and return to Jammu
3. Jammu to Beltirton (Gilgit) for Nubra Valley via Leh
4. Leh to Pangong Tso then Guge Kingdom for Tholing and Purang, to Mansarover and Mount Kailash, finally his last battle at Taplofert, where lies his grave

\* (Based on the hand drawn map by the author)

In 1840, Zorawar Singh led an expedition to Baltistan, which is arguably one of the most rugged mountainous regions of the world, situated west of the Karakoram range and south of K2, the world's second highest mountain. Since 1757, Baltistan had been under the rule of Ahmed Shah Durrani of Afghanistan and if not for this expedition, Baltistan would today have remained part of Afghanistan. Very interestingly too, Baltistan is where the Dards live along with Balti people. Dards are of European origin, believed to be descendants of the soldiers of Alexander The Great (327 BC) and considered unusual with their fair skins and blue eyes.

After conquering Baltistan, General Zorawar Singh returned to Leh via the Khapalu–Chorbat–Nubra valley route. The Nubra valley is a high altitude cold desert at 10,000 feet and on the historical Silk Route from China to the West.

In 1841 General Zorawar Singh turned his attention to 'Roof of the World', which led him to Western Tibet. Crossing the Pangong Tso lake at 14,300 feet, on the Ladakh–Western Tibet border, he travelled via the Guge kingdom, Tholing, Purang to Mount Kailash and the holy Mansarovar.



Flow of Sutlej River at Guge kingdom, West Tibet



Nubra Valley, Ladakh

At the Purang Valley, which is separated from Mansarovar by the Gurla Mandhata range, the Sikh forces ascended the Gurla pass to reach Dogpacha. Here they were caught totally off-guard by the Tibetan forces. After a fierce hand to hand battle, however it was victory for Zorawar Singh, whose soldiers also captured the Tibetan army flag, today in proud possession of the Indian Army.



Gurla Mandhata range, Tibet  
(along the vital Aksai Chin Highway 219)

After reaching Mount Kailash and the Mansarovar, General Zorawar Singh's army turned southwards towards Taklakot, where a battle was fought with the Tibetan forces at the high altitude Mayum pass (17,000 feet).

In those operations lasting three and a half months, some 550 square miles of Tibetan territory had been taken by General Zorawar Singh's Army.



Lake Mansarovar & Mount Kailash, Tibet



Roof of the World: looking towards Lake Mansarovar & Mount Kailash, Tibet



In July 1841, GT Lushington, the British Commissioner at Kumaon in India learnt that extensive territories in Tibet had been captured by the Sikhs. The British were now alarmed and decided to send Captain JD Cunningham to the Sikh Darbar in Lahore to discuss the matter as this was seen as a “threat” to British India! The Lahore Darbar remained evasive of Cunningham’s queries, thus letting General Zorawar Singh have more time to complete his task.

By now winter was fast approaching and General Zorawar Singh decided to move to Tirthapuri and prepare for the offensive in the coming summer months. While the General had everything going his way, having sealed the Mayum pass before the arrival of winter, he still made a miscalculation. He did not take into account that forces from Lhasa could also reach the area via the Matsang pass, south of Mayum pass which was negotiable even in the winter months. This was a fatal mistake. In the freezing winter months, as General Zorawar Singh’s forces became somewhat complacent, the Tibetan forces came through the Matsang pass and caught them off-guard. High altitude

battles in the severe winter months against a large Tibetan force were then fought. During the night, the weather turned worse, with a heavy snow storm. Many soldiers were frost bitten and died because of lack of warm clothing.

On 12 December, 1841 General Zorawar Singh was hit by a bullet on his left shoulder and subsequently passed away at Taklakot. Even though the morale of the forces was broken, it was only by January 1842 that the last fortifications, under the command of Basti Ram (serving under General Zorawar Singh) abandoned their positions. With him, many soldiers crossed back from the Tibetan plateau but just 242 of them reached Askot in the Kumaon Hills, which was under British rule. From here they continued their journey to Ludhiana in the Punjab and returned to the Sikh kingdom, after crossing the river Sutlej.

After the battle, General Zorawar Singh’s severed head was carried to Lhasa where it was placed at a thoroughfare for public viewing. The Tibetans however recognised the great valour of General Zorawar Singh and built a Chorten (Cenotaph) at

*Pang Gong tso in Eastern Ladakh, where Indian and Chinese armies are facing each other in the summer of 2020, some 180 years after Zorawar Singh’s Army had captured the areas.*





'Singh-ba-Chorten' the cenotaph of the Singh warrior at Taklakot, Tibet

Taklakot in his memory. Even today, the Tibetans call it *Singh ba Chorten* or Cenotaph of the *Singh Warrior*.

Of his soldiers who were taken into captivity, Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, who served as Tibet's Secretary of Finance from 1930–1950, writes in his book, *TIBET: A Political History* "Over three thousand soldiers were killed in the course of the foray. Seven hundred Sikhs and two Ladakhi ministers were taken prisoners. The remainder of the defeated army then retreated.... those prisoners wishing to return to their country were allowed to do so..... One third of the Sikhs and Ladakhi prisoners however elected to remain on in Tibet. The Sikhs were soon resettled in warmer regions of southern Tibet by the government and many later married local Tibetan girls. The Sikhs of Tibet are known to have introduced the cultivation of apricots, apples, grapes and peaches the country."

So then what on the skeletons at Roopkund lake? Are these of the retreating soldiers accompanying Basti Ram, who may have lost their way and perished at the high altitude?

A recent expedition to Roopkund lake by a National Geographic team retrieved some 30 skeletons but their carbon dating has placed the time of their mass death to the 9th century AD.



The pistol of General Zorawar Singh is amongst the private collection of Sukbinder Singh of the UK

So, while the mystery of Roopkund, through scientific investigation has negated it's linkage to the Tibet expedition of General Zorawar Singh, however that curious conversation with my former housemaster at The Doon School in 1983 had sub-consciously led me to visit these remote places, tracing the footsteps of General Zorawar Singh. A journey performed over thirty years has made me realise that 'not all who wander are lost'!

***Text and photos from Amardeep Singh***

As Indian and Chinese forces face off in Ladakh in the summer of 2020, the author looks back on

# That Great and Heroic Empire



Lahore was the capital of the Empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, that rare strategic visionary and victor in the midst of falling, failing, vanquished, vassal and semi-vassal rulers of South Asia. It was a success needing neither corroboration nor endorsement from anyone. No Western foreign trader or aspiring ruler dared to mess with his realm. He lost a few tactical battles but invariably emerged victorious in war and ended as unconquered, a feat achieved neither by any indigenous ruler before him nor those who succeeded him.

Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), was a victor because of a rare geo-strategic vision of security, intrusion and recurring foreign invasions of Indian territory. Another unpleasant reality it may look to some, as none of the numerous indigenous rulers of his time, or those

in succeeding generations, across South Asia, could effectively stop the British juggernaut during their rule or unite the subjects or neighbours in vicinity to effectively counter the outsiders like the French and the Portuguese.

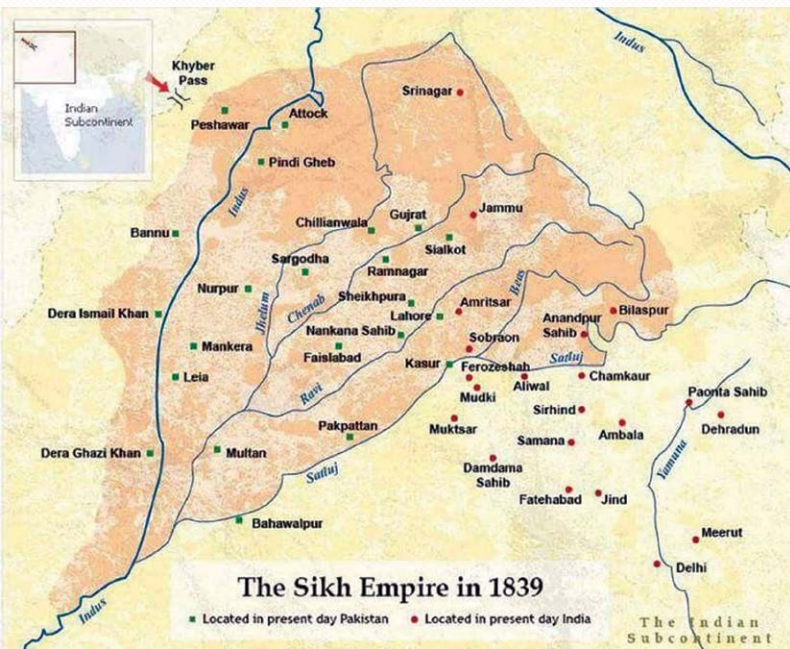
The astute Ranjit Singh had certainly learnt the lessons of history fast: the magnetic attraction of the Indian soil to suppress the simple subjects, marked by loot, pillage, plunder and occupation by the foreign invaders. Understandably, going on the offensive was the best defence for Ranjit Singh, Misldar of the Sukerchakia Misl.

Being a landlocked state, the threat to his realm loomed large from the south (Delhi), west (Kabul-Kandahar) and north-east (Kashmir and beyond, including Kashgarh in today's Sinkiang). Hence, to stop the British advance to the Punjab from the south, the *Treaty of Amritsar* was concluded on 25 April, 1809, thereby making Sutlej the river frontier. The British were stopped and remained there until the Maharaja's demise.

Thereafter, followed Kangra, Multan, Kashmir, Attock, Afghan territory and Sindh, one by one. What's important is that Ranjit Singh rose from nowhere to establish a "kingdom large in extent and rich in fame", a ruler who checked foreign invasions and the traditional, aggressive ruler-cum-looters. In the process, however, Ranjit Singh attracted criticism from several quarters. Indeed, he can be criticised only as warfare and conquest were his forte.

But one has to recall that first half of the 19th century was an era of war and bloodshed across South Asia, wherein everybody was fighting everybody else. There were regional rulers galore, all in disarray, facing the Western foreign 'trader rulers' and the Delhi Durbar was in veritable decline. The subjects were on the verge of ruin and subalterns were on the run, from region to region.

The choice for Ranjit Singh, therefore, was limited. Either stand, fight and perform or retreat,



escape—and so perish. Ranjit Singh chose to fight and, therefore, stood out in the chapters of post-Mughal history as the only indigenous ruler who remained unconquered. He stopped all foreign invasions and took the battle to the enemy camp, from the Punjab to Kashmir and beyond; from the Sutlej to Sindh; from Kandahar to the borders of Persia. The Lion's reign constituted a glorious, inimitable period of the sole indigenous ruler of South Asia.

The question is: how and why did Ranjit Singh depart unconquered? Not humiliated, disgraced or vanquished? It's owing to the ruler's fair-mindedness, objectivity, impartiality and the ability to rise above narrow clan, community, caste, communal or other negative characteristics which usually afflicted the numerous princely rulers of Hindustan. A glowing tribute to Ranjit Singh came from a German, Baron Carl von Hugel: "Never perhaps was so large an Empire founded by one man with so little criminality." However, there was another serious criticism against him in that "he created a Sikh kingdom but took no steps to prevent British dominion." Yes, theoretically correct but not practically. History shows that no landlocked country can aggressively take on a naval power with an army. Afghanistan is an exception, although it too cannot go on the offensive, except for defence or a counter-attack.

## The Present Scenario

Now, what would have been Ranjit Singh's take on the 73 year-long road traversed by an independent India? A job the Lion of Lahore is best remembered for? Defending his country and stopping foreign invasions? Surely, Ranjit Singh would have been sorely disappointed to see a complete reversal of his deeds, a recurring Indian failure to protect its own acclaimed territory from foreign invaders, owed to the weak, vacillating, compromising policy of the ruling class.

In 1965, the Haji Pir pass was re-taken by India from the enemy after a bitter, bloody battle. Since J&K had acceded to India back on 26 October, 1947, Haji Pir, being part thereof, belonged to India. Yet, whereas India was the owner, Pakistan was the forced occupant. Hence, post-1965, the 'return' of Haji Pir to Pakistan constituted a submission of one's own land to the foreign invader by India's ruling class. Would Ranjit Singh have accepted that? Anybody else, but surely not him!

Again in 1999, when India was deprived of its Kargil heights and thereafter counter-attacked to re-capture it at the expense of hundreds of soldiers' lives, what would have Ranjit Singh said?

And what about 15 June 2020, when the Indian Army lost 20 soldiers in Ladakh's Galwan valley? What can one say about the fall of Indians deep inside their own territory before the criminal, cunning, congenitally lying invaders of the Communist Party of China's ruling class?

Fairly and squarely, therefore, India's successive ruling class is culpable for repeated catastrophes during the past 73 years. Regrettably, one has to confess that faulty border management, failure to preserve territorial integrity and ceaseless appeasement to foreign invaders constitute the hallmark of Indian history. Post-1947 India makes Ranjit Singh's Empire look even greater and more heroic than ever. Ranjit Singh would have enjoyed his glorious *numero uno* status in the eyes of the common Indians, including one hailing from the homeland of Subhash Chandra Bose, who surely must have taken his cue from the one and only Indian Maharaja to fight and vanquish foreign invaders.

**Dr Abhijit Bhattacharyya**  
Commentator and Author

## Maharaja Ranjit Singh named “the world’s greatest leader”



Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the 19th century ruler of the Sikh Empire was named the ‘Greatest Leader of All Time’ in a recent poll conducted by ‘BBC World Histories Magazine’. Over 5,000 readers voted in the poll, where Maharaja Ranjit Singh was praised for creating a new, tolerant empire.

Second place went to African independence fighter Amilcar Cabral, while Britain’s war-time Prime Minister Winston Churchill was at number three for his quick decisions and sharp political manoeuvring. Further down the list, American President Abraham Lincoln was at four followed by British monarch Elizabeth I as the highest ranked woman leader.

The nominations were sought from global historians, including Matthew Lockwood, Rana Mitter, Margaret MacMillan and Gus Casely-Hayford, who were to select as their “Greatest Leader someone who exercised power and had a positive impact on humanity”. The resulting top 20 included some of the most celebrated leaders in history across the globe from the UK, the US, to Asia and Africa, including the likes of Mughal Emperor Akbar, French military leader Joan of Arc and Russian Empress Catherine the Great, but the list was topped by Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

“Though perhaps not as familiar as some of the other names on the list, Ranjit Singh’s overwhelming success in our poll suggests that the qualities of his leadership continue to inspire people around the world in the 21st century,” stated Matt Elton, Editor of ‘BBC World History Magazine’ “And, at a time of global political tensions, it’s telling that Ranjit Singh’s rule is interpreted as representing ideals of tolerance, freedom and cooperation”.

Described as ‘Lion of the Punjab’, Ranjit Singh’s rise to power came after a period of economic and political uncertainty in the sub-continent. It was noted that by early decades of the 19th century, Ranjit Singh had modernised the Sikh Khalsa army, embraced western innovations without abandoning local forms and institutions, unified the fractious misls or states, stabilised the frontier with Afghanistan, and reached a mutually beneficial detente with the British East India Company.

“He, however, was more than a mere conqueror. While the Indian subcontinent was riven with imperial competition, religious strife and wars of conquest, Ranjit Singh was, almost uniquely, a unifier: a force for stability, prosperity and tolerance,” the BBC emphasised.

Ranjit Singh’s name was nominated by Lockwood, who is assistant professor of history at the University of Alabama, as a modernising and uniting force, whose reign “marked a golden age for Punjab and north-west India.... this golden age would not survive him. After his death in 1839, Ranjit Singh’s empire of toleration unravelled. The British invaded, the Sikh Empire collapsed and instability returned to the region,” noted Lockwood.

“Though certainly an imperialist, Ranjit Singh represented a different, more enlightened, more inclusive model of state-building, and a much-needed path towards unity and toleration. We could still benefit from his example,” he added.

# Lehnda Punjab



Partition of the Punjab: boundaries as in 1947 (from the internet)

## Dr Tarunjit Singh Butalia's Journey Home

Imagine the joy of visiting the shrine of Baba Farid in Pakpattan, where your ancestors served Baba Farid more than 750 years ago, imagine the ecstatic feeling of stepping on the land of Guru Nanak Sahib where he was born and passed away, imagine visiting the Gurdwara in Lahore's Chuna Mandi where

Siri Guru Ram Das Sahib was born, imagine praying at the Gurdwara where Guru Arjan Sahib was martyred, getting goose pimples when visiting Gurdwara Shaheed Singh Singhnian near Lahore railway station, where Sikh mothers were garlanded by Mir Mannu with the decapitated bodies of their own children.



*Gurdwara Janamasthan Chauthi Patshahi in Chuna Mandi, Lahore. Birthplace of 4th Sikh Guru, Ramdas Sahib, enshrined in this simple and elegant Gurdwara Sahib*

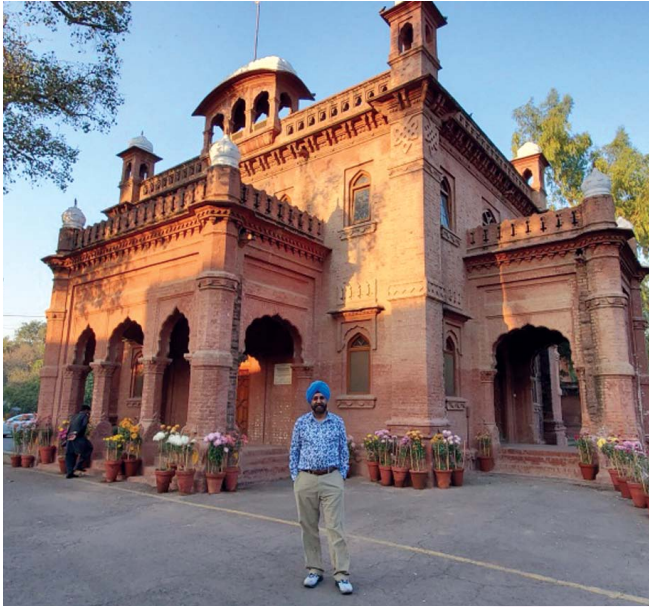
Imagine walking at the Lahore Fort where your ancestors served about 200 years ago in the army of the Lion of Punjab, imagine discovering your maternal ancestral home late at night in Lahore, to see your maternal grandfather's name outside

the house waiting for someone to come back and reclaim its identity.

Imagine visiting Aitchison College in Lahore, where your grandfather and father studied, and imagine the circle of life that leads back to your ancestral home



*Hazuri Bagh Baradari (built 1815 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to commemorate acquiring of Kohinoor diamond) in front of Alamgiri Gate (built in 1674 by Emperor Aurangzeb) at Lahore Fort. The Baradari was built as a two storey structure, but top storey has since gone*



Gurdwara at Aitchison Chief's College on Mall Road Lahore, established in 1886 and designed by famous architect Ram Singh. Author's great grandfather Bahadur Singh Butalia (1903-1916), grandfather Capt. Ajit Singh Butalia (1924-1931) and father Major Karamjit Singh Butalia (till 1946) attended this famous school

through which your paternal grandparents walked out in 1947 never to return but you kiss the door walking back inside as a way to honour the promise of goodness of humanity.

The list goes on — but you get the point. It was a roller coaster of sad, poignant and moments of hope and loving kindness for me.

I was born in October 1965 in East Punjab (*Chardah Punjab*) at a time when my father and several of my uncles, who were in the Indian armed forces were at war with Pakistan. I grew up being told that Pakistanis were “evil”, no exceptions and with prejudiced stereotypes, that Muslims were “unclean”. I now realise that I was being indoctrinated in the patriotism of hate. Patriotism of hate is the love of your country based on the hate of another country – in this case Pakistan. The Islamophobic comments by family and friends were casual and usually said with humour to rub it in. I traced most of these prejudiced feelings to the bloody 1947 partition of the Punjab by the British, which drew an arbitrary line through the heart of Punjab dividing people who had lived together, parting *Lehnda* (west) from *Chardah* (east).

These were my thoughts as I landed at *Allama Iqbal International Airport* in Lahore. The taxi driver who picked me up asked if this was my first visit to Lahore. As soon as I said “yes” he quipped “*jinae Lahore ni vaikhya o jamia nahi*”. At that moment, I knew that I had been re-born!

The hospitality of Pakistanis was overwhelming. Restaurants would not take money, Uber drivers refusing fare, “Sardarji” said with love and affection, the trolley guy at the airport shouting “give way to Sardarji” in perfect Panjabi. The examples can go on and on. The one I remember most fondly is



With Civil Engineering students at University of Engineering Technology (UET), Lahore. Author graduated in Civil Engineering from Punjab Engineering College, Chandigarh, which was part of UET Lahore before partition in 1947



when I was chatting with a Maulvi while both of us were eating kulfi at the famous Yusuf Faluda shop in Gawalmandi of Lahore. When I got up to pay, the halwai informed me that the Maulvi Sahib whom I was talking with had already paid my bill and left. I was being drowned in hospitality and kindness: nowhere else in the world have I experienced such respect. If it were up to my hosts, they would even have lifted me up on their shoulders!

I was expecting to see women in burqas but was surprised to see that most women were not covered head to toe in burqa, unlike what much of the western media portrays about women in Pakistan. Some women had covered their head in public with a chunni or scarf but faces were not covered. I met many women on my trip and found them to be inquisitive, balanced – and very perceptive.

Some of my most interesting conversations were with people such as the Uber driver, restaurant cook, guard, waiter and best of all, *Bacha*, the mighty old Pathan outside my hotel who polished my shoes, all people making a living to raise a family with dignity of labour. I did not meet any person, not one, who bad mouthed the country of my birth. Instead I heard a sense of appreciation that India had progressed

significantly and they hoped that Pakistan would also do the same.

But in my conversations, I heard something much deeper. I heard the common person talking about how Pakistan had learned valuable lessons from its experiment with Islamic fundamentalism and that religious nationalism was not the way for their country. I reflected on their comments which sent shivers down my spine as I thought of the bigotry prevalent in the world's oldest and largest democracies of the world. Both India and the United States have to imbibe lessons from Pakistan's tryst with religious fundamentalism.



Having dinner with friends Jahandad Khan, Sameer Shafi and Azal Shafi in Lahore



The Haveli Naunihal Singh located near Mori Gate inside the Walled City of Lahore is magnificent and was built in late 1830s by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for his eldest and most favorite grandson then Prince Naunihal Singh as his residence. This haveli is considered as one of the finest examples of Sikh architecture in Lahore and is the only Sikh-era haveli in South Asia that preserves its original ornamentation and architecture

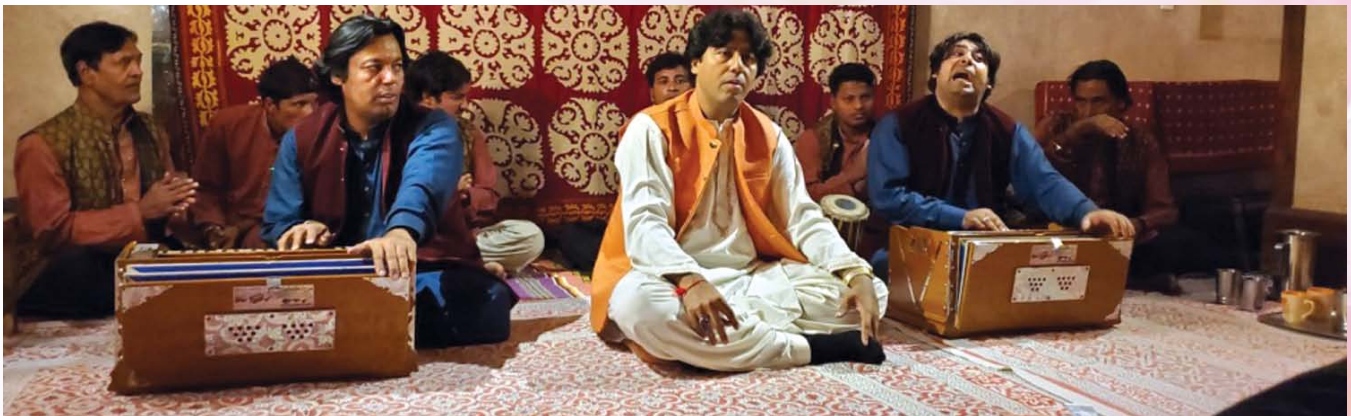


Jogis at shrine of Madho Lal Hussain on the outskirts of Lahore

## Baba Farid

More than 120 hymns of Baba Fariduddin Ganjeshakar are enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, holy scripture of the Sikhs. As Sikhs, we consider his Bani as also the Word of God. Visiting his shrine in Pakpattan last December made me ecstatic.

My journey there was made more meaningful because history has documented that my ancestors visited Pakpattan in 1256 AD and held a one year long *langar* (community kitchen) there, for which Baba Farid blessed the family with the honorific title of *Bhandari*.



Mehboob Fareedi Qawal of Baba Farid Shrine Pakpattan sings at Harsukh (Haveli of Peace for all), the Lahore home of Jawwad S Khawaja, former Chief Justice of Pakistan



Impromptu qawwali kalam of Baba Farid “turiya turiya ja Farida turiya turiya ja” being sung in the shrine courtyard of Baba Farid Ganjshakkar in Pakpattan

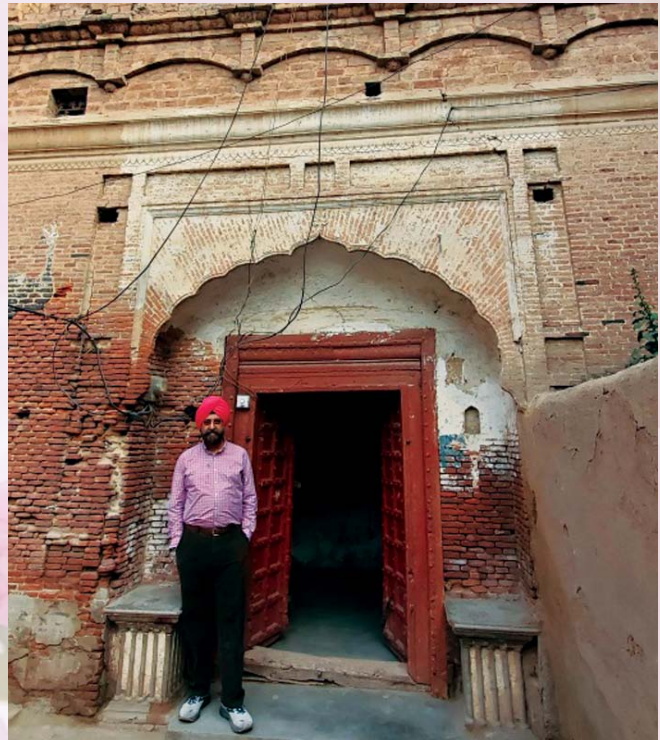
I listened to the qawalls there in an open courtyard, loudly singing a *shalok* from his Bani: *apnarae giraewan mai sir niva kar dekh* (look humbly into your own self first).

Then was time for *langar* which we were graciously invited to partake. We sat on the floor in lines on mats (as at Sikh Gurdwaras) and were served a simple meal by volunteers just as my ancestors had more than seven centuries back. We ran short of plates and so I ate with our driver Nawaz : some of my fellow Indian family and friends would have been mortified to see me eat out of the same plate as a Muslim !



Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Gujranwala near the Clock Tower. The author's ancestral home in Gujranwala is immediately to right of the Gurdwara

As a child, my grandmother would relate to me the same story many times: how during the bloody partition on 1947, they had left our ancestral haveli (mansion), which had a black peacock painted outside it, in village Butala near Gujranwala, never ever to return.



Author's grandparents stepped out through these very doors in 1947 never to return to their ancestral haveli at Butala Sardar Jhanda Singh village. He returned after 72 years

Last December when I reached our village with mixed emotions of joy and sadness at the same time, I was perplexed. There were three havelis of the family. I was keen to visit the one in which my grandparents lived. And then I saw on the front wall of one of the havelis: a fading black peacock made of black bricks! My heart ached and reminded me of my grandmother's stories and her warm touch. My grandparents had walked out from these very doors 72 years ago, never to return.

I was here to complete the circle of life: so with tears in my eyes and prayers on my lips, I kissed the door floor beam and entered within. The haveli is very well maintained and is now an Islamic school for girls, a place normally where men are not allowed in. The Mullah of the village accompanied me in an interfaith spirit into the building for a guided tour.

While visiting my family ancestral home, I pledged to not let the hate of the partition eclipse the love of humanity. Hate is like taking a poison pill that kills you but not does nothing to the object of hate.

I have learned this lesson late in life but better late than never.



Visiting the courtyard of Bedi Mahal at Kallar Bedian near Rawalpindi, which was haveli of Baba Khem Singh Bedi, built in the late 1800s. The haveli is a time capsule: it has remained closed since 1947, which is why it is so well preserved. The Author's great grandmother Sardarni Harbans Kaur was daughter of Baba Khem Singh Bedi

## Nankana Sahib

My visit to Nankana Sahib was immensely emotional. Reading from Guru Granth Sahib installed at the Gurdwara where our founder Guru Sahib was born was indescribable. At Nankana Sahib, I tried to talk with the local Sikhs there in Punjabi but was astonished to learn that they only spoke in Pashto or Urdu. Later I found out that most Sikhs who now live in Lehnda (west) Punjab around historical Gurdwaras are not Punjabi Sikhs, but are Afghani Sikhs who

migrated, when the Taliban ravaged Afghanistan. It was a sad feeling that I had to communicate with my faith's brethren in Urdu and not our native language, Punjabi.

## Kartarpur Sahib

And then came the visit to Kartarpur Sahib : what an amazing interfaith gift of Pakistan to the Sikhs! I could not imagine such a beautiful place of worship where Guru Nanak Sahib settled after his extensive travels, farmed here, and passed away here. The complex is huge with the old central shrine kept as it was.

I entered the Gurdwara Sahib and went upstairs to the worship hall. Half way through the service I realised there were no Muslims inside the central



Author in front of Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib wearing a traditional shalwar kameez with Peshawari chappels



Taking vaak at Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib



At the cremation site, Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur



Interment site alongside Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur

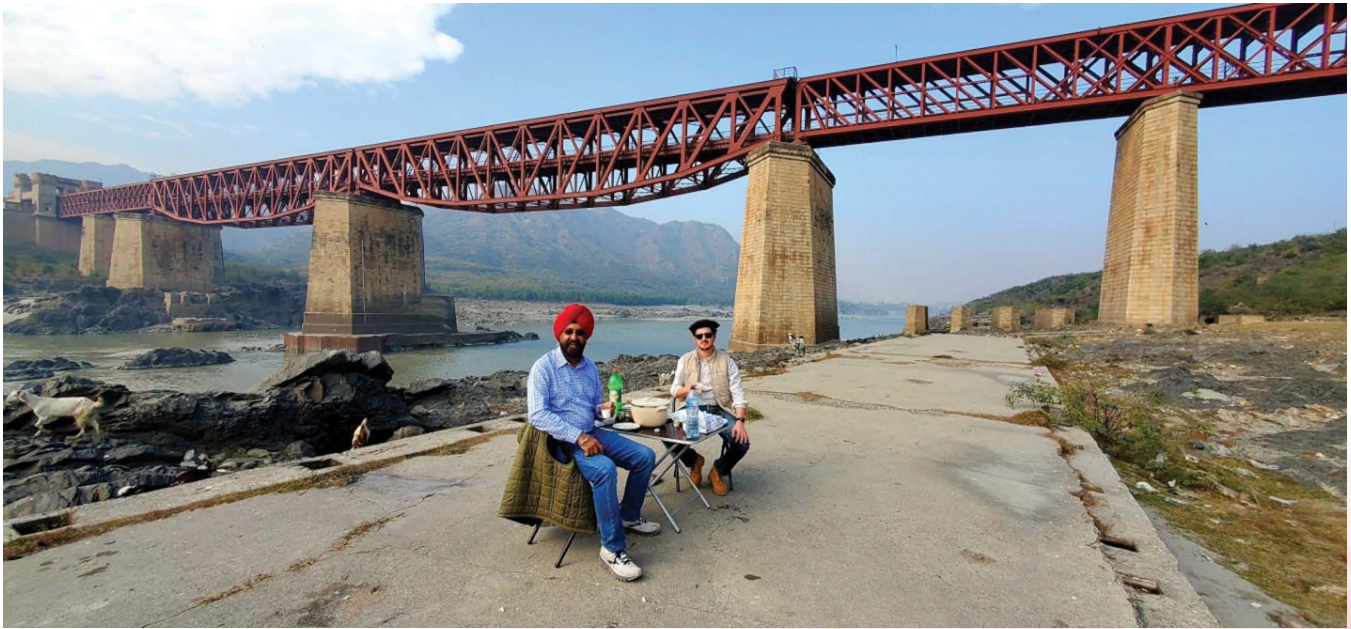


shrine. On the way out, I approached the Sikh guard and inquired. His response floored me: “no Muslims allowed inside the central shrine”. I could not believe it ! I responded that this was not what Guru Nanak Sahib wanted. He responded that Muslims took too many photos upstairs, to which I responded that some Sikhs who were upstairs with me were no better, were intrusive in taking photos and videos walking around in between people.

I felt that this was being used as an excuse to exclude Muslims from entering the central shrine. I now realised why my Muslim friends accompanying me from Lahore had politely volunteered to stay outside: they probably knew about this bigoted rule and hence complied with which I was unaware. The solution is simple: don't allow photography inside the central shrine as is the rule at Darbar Sahib in Amritsar and many other historical Gurdwaras in the “other” Punjab.



Samadh Akali Baba Phoola Singh located on River Kabul in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa near Nowshera (Peshawar District) which marks the place where the famous Akali Warrior Baba Phoola Singh was martyred on 14 March, 1823. Author's ancestor Sardar Ganda Singh Butalia fought here at the battle of Nowshera in 1823 against the ruling Afghans, the Sikh Army being victorious



Picnic near Attock, at confluence of the mighty rivers Indus and Kabul, with the 1884 steel bridge in the background. Jahandad Khan and Tarunjit Singh Butalia sit by the river bank, having lunch on the very land where their ancestors fought against each other in early 1800s. "This time the competition was over sagg, maaki di roti and lassi"!

I walked out of the central shrine making a pledge to myself that I would not return here till people of all faiths, including Muslims, were allowed equal access as were Sikhs, so drawing a line in the sand of my own conscience.

There after I partook of and served *langar* and then headed to an exhibition hall. I was thrilled, to see the writing of Afzal Saahir in Gurmukhi in artistic style, one of the finest Panjabi poet of West Punjab. I had met him just a few days ago at Lahore's famous *Pak Tea House*. Walking through the exhibit a huge *Kara* (a bracelet which is one of the five articles of our Sikh faith) on sale caught my eye. I could not take my eyes off it. I bought the new *Kara*, removed the one I had worn for over 30 years and put on the new one.

I then offered my old *Kara* of 30 years to my friend Jahandad Khan who had accompanied me on the trip. I offered it to him as a symbol of our friendship and brotherhood knowing well that our ancestors, the Tanoli and Butalia clans had fought many battles in the early 1800s, on the opposite sides. This was my way of making peace with the past that can still haunt us emotionally. Jahandad graciously accepted the *Kara* and put it on.

We all believe in stories, some good and some bad. We become the stories that we believe in. If you

believe in stories of hatred and revenge, that is who you will become. If you choose to believe in stories of love, forgiveness, compassion, and humility, that is what you will develop into. So let us be careful in what stories we believe in.

Having been reborn in Lahore and with my journey coming home to *Lehnda* Punjab ending, as I boarded my return flight, I felt that I was leaving a part of my heart behind. which is what home is : a place where your heart lives.

Borders are man-made arbitrary lines that exist but matter only if you believe in them. Let the Punjab be no more divided into Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab. The line between *Chardah* and *Lehnda* Punjab cannot break our kinship which goes back to aeons, and this is where our hope and future is.

**Dr Tarunjit Singh Butalia** has deep ancestral roots in what is today's Pakistan, going back about eight centuries. He visited *Lehnda* Punjab for the first time in late 2019. The author is presently the Executive Director of **Religions for Peace USA** and is on the Board of the **Parliament of the World's Religions, North American Interfaith Network, and Sikh Council for Interfaith Relations.**



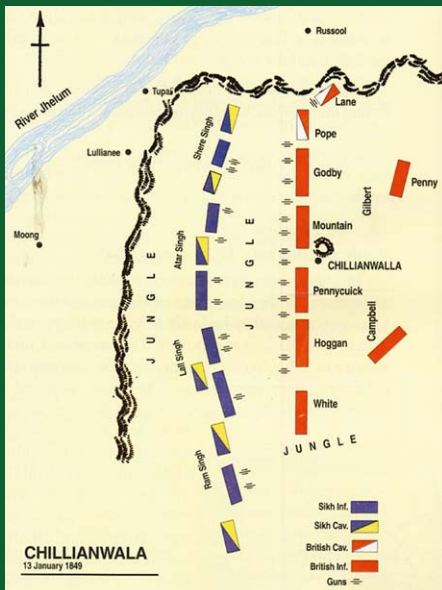
# Visiting the battlefield at Chillianwala



Dr Tarunjit Singh Butalia also visited the battlefield of Chillianwala, on east side of the River Jhelum. It was here, some 170 years earlier, that the first battle of the Second Anglo-Sikh War and was fought, on 13 January 1849 when the Sikhs took heavy toll of the British Forces. But once again, as in the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1845-46, the Sikhs failed to drive home their advantage, and once more, fate and destiny had conspired against a victory for the Sikhs, bringing to mind the bard Shah Mohammad's words: *We won the battle but lost the fight*'.



Tarunjit Singh Butalia with local villagers at the Chillianwala Memorial, December 2019



## The Epic of Chillianwala, 1849

In an amazing coincidence (?), the battle of Chillianwala was fought in almost the same area where Porus, with his elephants, chariots and archers, had fought Alexander's cavalry 2175 years earlier.

The map shows positions of the opposing armies of the Sikhs and British, east of the River Jhelum. A detailed description of the battles was written by Lt Gen Kirpal Singh Randhava and published in Nishaan's Premier Issue April 1999.

## Pioneer Aviators of the Sub Continent



## Celebrating the Century of Dalip Singh Majithia

**O**n 27 July 2020, Dalip Singh Majithia turned 100 years of age, the eldest, veteran Indian Air Force officer of the Sub Continent extant. His is a story of faith, courage and adventure, joining the Indian Air Force in 1940 even as the Second World War was raging in Europe and the infant air arm was striving to expand.

After getting his wings, he flew a variety of obsolescent biplanes with which the Indian Air Force was then equipped, including the Wapiti, Hart and Audax, thereafter multi-engined Atlantas on maritime

patrol in the Bay of Bengal, finally Hurricane fighter bombers, with which he went into action on the Burma front and later on watch and ward duties along the North West Frontier. After the Second World War was over, and serving in various staff duties, Dalip left the Air Force in August 1947 to join the family business – but continued his passion for flying! The saga of his continued romance with aviation is exemplified by his pioneering flight to the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, landing at Kathmandu's parade ground on 23 April 1949.



In 1944, Dalip Singh flew Hurricanes over the rugged mountain terrain of north western India



In 1949, Dalip Singh Majithia flew his Beechcraft Bonanza to Kathmandu Valley.



## The Majithias

Dalip Singh Majithia is the son of S Kirpal Singh whose father was the Hon'ble Sardar Bahadur Sir Sundar Singh (in painting) whose contribution to the community during his times can only be described as 'magnificent'. Sardar Sundar Singh was gifted with clarity, sincerity and vision to prioritise the challenges before the Sikhs in the late 19th and early 20th century, which is even more relevant in the present times. He had five sons, the eldest S Kirpal Singh having two sons including Dalip Singh, the focus of this article.



S. Kirpal Singh



Young Dalip Singh at Karachi Flying Club with Gypsy Moth in June 1940

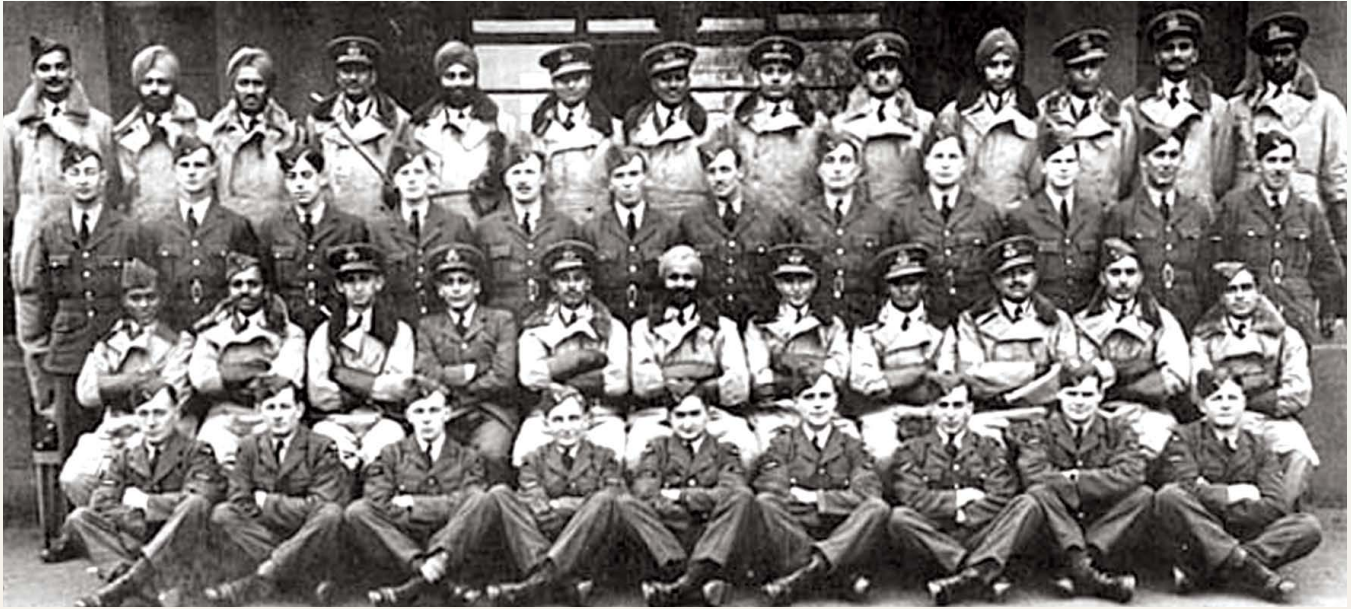
## Early Years

Dalip Singh Majithia was born at Simla on 27th July 1920 in a highly distinguished family of the erstwhile undivided Punjab. His grandfather was the venerable Sardar Bahadur Sardar Sir Sundar Singh Majithia who had schooled at the Aitchison College and Government College, both at Lahore. Sardar Sundar Singh later became Honorary Secretary of the 'Chief Khalsa Diwan' on its formation in 1902 and remained so till 1920. In 1926 he was knighted and was thereafter appointed as Revenue Member with the Governor's Executive Council of the Punjab, playing a leading part in forming of the conservative Khalsa Nationalist Party. From April 1937 he was Revenue Member of the Punjab Executive Council in Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan's cabinet of the undivided Punjab.

Dalip Singh's mother was from the Patiala Royal family and they also had a home in Simla, 'Skiplin Villa', near the Christ Church, where he was born. He did his early schooling at Khalsa College, Amritsar before moving to the Government College at Lahore where he completed his BA, just a year after Arjan Singh (later Marshal of the Air Force) had gone on to train at RAF Cranwell along with Prithipal Singh, the last cadets to join as regular commissioned officers in the IAF.

Meanwhile, Dalip's uncle Surjit Singh Majithia had been commissioned as a pilot officer in the Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (IAFVR) on 8 November 1939, just months after start of the Second World War, doing his flying training at RAF Habbaniya (Iraq). Young Dalip Singh was enthused to do the same.

Actually he had originally wanted to join the Cavalry, but was 'persuaded' to opt for the Air Force instead. After a few 'introductions', Dalip was interviewed by Gp Capt Bussell of the RAF and following medical tests, received a letter accepting him for service with the IAFVR. He proceeded for preliminary flying at the Karachi Flying Club and well recalls that massive tower at Drigh Road originally built for docking of the R.101 airship.



*The IAFVR 'X' Squad on eve of moving to England in 1940.*

## The Pioneers

Increasing numbers of young Indians were now joining the IAFVR, all assembling at the Air Cadet Training School at Lahore (Walton). Amongst those commissioned on 1 August 1940, along with Dalip Singh Majithia were Minoo Engineer, Anantha Ananthanarayanan, Vasudeo Bhide, Vernon Shib Bonaijee, Arthur Chako, HN Chatterjee, Yeshwant Malse, Chaman Lal Mehta, Pirojsha Reporter, Surinder Singh, Harbans Singh Thapar, Victor Srihari and Teja Singh Virk who were followed in November 1940 by Om Parkash Mehra (later Chief of the Air Staff), Rajendra Singh, Paljor Namgyal (of Sikkim), Jagdish Chandra Verma, Ganamuthu Daniel, David Bhore, Krishna Agerwala, Keki Motishaw, Arvind Moolgavkar (later Chief of the Air Staff), Jagjit Singh, Mohammed Asghar Khan (seconded from the Army, and later Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force).

These magnificent men were followed some months later by Padam Singh Gill, Gyan Dev Datta, Mohd. Mukhtan Ahmed Cheema, Mohan Suri, Piyara Singh, Murat Singh Aulakh, Rafiq Bukhari, Malik Nur Khan (later CAS, Pakistan Air Force) and Kartar Singh Saund. Two months later came Codanda Cariappa, Narendra Lali, Cowas Lichmore, Murkot Ramunny, Sahebjada Imtiaz Khan, Samuel Bobb, Venkat Reddy, Dinshaw Edujje, Pritipal Singh, Iqbal Singh, Krishna Wagle, Chinglepet Amarendra, S. Bambawale, Cherala

Rao, Vicoo Billimoria, Guru Charan Singh Babra, and the last to be commissioned in the flying branch on 11 March 1941, Maurice Barker. Many of these pioneers were later to reach very senior ranks in the Indian (and also Pakistan) Air Forces.

But we go back to Dalip's first service training flight which was on 5 August 1940 in a Tiger Moth at Walton airfield in Lahore with Sgt Hart and later Flt Lt Frogly from the Royal Air Force as his pilot instructors, leading to his first solo on 22 August after 15 hours of instruction. Dalip Singh Majithia's flying skills were quickly recognised, him being awarded the 'Best Pilot of the Course Prize' by Sir Henry Craig, the Governor of the Punjab, in July 1940.



*At the Walton Flying School at Lahore, Dalip Singh was awarded 'Best Pilot' of the Course with Tahapar Singh as 'Best in Ground Subject' of the Course*



*Armstrong Whitworth A.W. 15 Atalanta, formerly with Indian Transcontinental Airways, now seen in Service markings.*

Soon thereafter, twenty four of the batch were selected to form the IAFVR 'X' Squad, proceeding by ship to the UK for conversion training on fighters, bombers and coastal patrol aircraft with the Royal Air Force. These included 'Chacha' Manmohan Singh and Hari Dewan, Mohindar Singh Pujji, Shivdev Singh, Kali Chaudhary, Mian Mohammad Latif, Tarlochan Singh, Rustam Dastur, Ali Raza Khan Pasha, Eric Pinto, Satyapal Shahi, Ranjan Dutt and others.

It was now time for operational flying training and in December 1940 young Dalip moved to No.1 Flying Training School at Ambala for advanced flying on the Westland Wapiti IIA, logging many hours including night flying, thereafter on the Hawker Audax and Hart with which the IAF's sole squadron (No.1) was then equipped.

There were to be many cross country flights including those from Ambala to Delhi and back and soon enough, dive bombing and low level bombing practice with the Hawker Hart. On 11 April 1941 young Dalip had his first professional interaction with the legendary Sqn Ldr Meher Singh (popularly 'Meher Baba') while ferrying a four-engine Atlanta from Drigh Road (Karachi). However, he continued to log

flying hours mostly on the Wapiti and Hart.

Gaining proficiency, Dalip then undertook his first long distance flight to the deep south of India, in a Hart which he flew from Ambala, with refueling stops at Jhansi, Kamptee, Secunderabad and then finally reaching Madras, which station he was to return to for operations during war. On the return flight, he flew back to Secunderabad, on to Poona, to Juhu (Bombay), to Ahmedabad to

Bhuj and finally Karachi, where he had first learnt to fly. A true sub-continental odyssey!

### Coastal Defence Flights

As the war in Europe grew ever more grim, the specifically appointed Chatfield Committee recommended that in addition to the regular air forces for the defence of India, Volunteer Flights were to be entrusted for coastal defence and maritime patrol. There were to be six Coastal Defence Flights, all stationed at major ports along the Peninsula. Dalip Singh



*Sqn Ldr Meher Singh at the parade at Ambala before taking command of No.6 Squadron. Aircraft types at the background are (right to left) Vultee Vengeance, Audax and Hurricanes*

was posted to No.1 Coastal Defence Flight (CDF) at Madras in July 1941 flying the Atlanta on maritime patrols over the Bay of Bengal, alternating with the Hart for more 'warlike' purposes including dive bombing. Dalip converted to fly the Atlanta four-engined monoplane which he soon grew very fond of. This first British four-engined cantilever monoplane, had entered service in 1932 with Imperial Airways, being chiefly employed on long routes from Britain to Africa as also to and within India. The Atalanta carried 17 passengers with a crew of three and was powered by four Armstrong Siddeley Serval III engines, flying regular domestic services from Karachi to Calcutta.

Two Atalantas then serving with Indian Transcontinental Airways were requisitioned by the Government in the emergency. Armed with one moveable machine gun, the Atalantas were operated for routine maritime patrol in the Bay of Bengal, also exercising with the Navy and on convoy escort duties. On 1 January 1942, Dalip logged his longest endurance sortie in an Atalanta over the sea but to also keep his proficiency in more aggressive manner, he practiced low level attacks on ships flying Harts.

With the relentless Japanese advancing in South East Asia and having overrun Burma, the war was getting very close to India and flying increased in March–April 1942, maritime patrols continuously carried out by the Atalantas of No.1 CDF including search for Japanese warships that were now roving the Bay of Bengal. By this time, the Atalantas had been modified to carry bombs as well and on 21 January 1942, along with Pilot Officer Cariappa, Dalip scored direct hits on a target at sea.

### Great expansion of the IAF

However, by mid-1942, the end was nigh for the Coastal Defence Flights which had, for two years, fulfilled their desperate tasks with stout heart but little hardware, covering large geographical areas of the Indian peninsula, flying thousands of hours of escort and patrol.

The new AOC-in-C India, Air Marshal Sir Richard Pierce had reviewed the war situation and made plans for the Indian Air Force more suited to their flair and abilities, promising the young Service "the best single engined aircraft which the

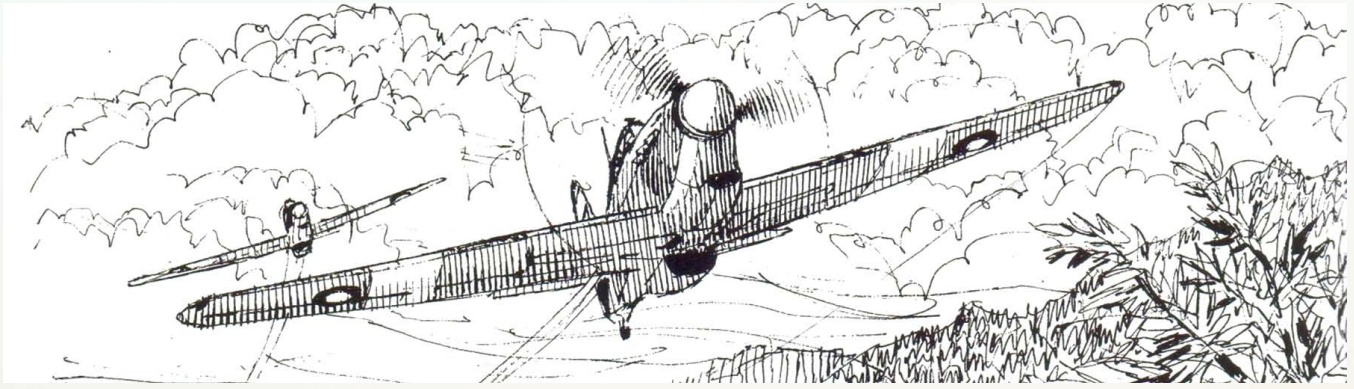


*Sqn Ldr Meher Singh, CO No.6 Squadron IAF with his Hurricane*

Command could then provide", which were to be Hawker Hurricane fighters and Vultee Vengeance dive-bombers. However, the biggest change of all: the new IAF squadrons were to be all-Indian, commanded by the young officers who had done so well with No.1 Squadron in the first Burma Campaign, flying obsolescent Lysanders in the face of superior Japanese fighters.

A signal from Air Headquarters India Command on 11 November 1942 notified AHQ Bengal, the various Groups and Squadrons that the Coastal Defence Flights were to be disbanded on 30 November 1942. The IAFVR personnel were posted out to form the new IAF squadrons then being equipped with more modern combat aircraft for the imminent campaigns in Eastern India and Burma.

Three new squadrons of the Indian Air Force, including No.6, were formed on 1 December 1942, their pilots and airmen weaned from the Coastal Defence Flights which were disbanded a day earlier, on 30 November.



Artist's depiction of IAF Hurricanes over the front during the Second Arakan Campaign

No.6 Squadron was established at Trichinopoly under the command of Sqn Ldr Meher Singh and with personnel and assets of Nos.1 (Madras) and 2 (Bombay) Coastal Defence Flights plus from No.104 General Reconnaissance Squadron RAF. The Squadron was equipped with the Hawker Hurricane IIB, becoming the third IAF Squadron to get the Hurricane after Nos.1 and 2 had been so-equipped. It was assigned the role of tactical reconnaissance, message dropping, air-to-ground strafing.

No.6 Squadron was to have been commanded by Sqn Ldr RHD Singh but he had met with an accident and was thus medically unfit. Sqn Ldr Meher Singh who then was at the Staff College in Quetta, was given command of No.6 Squadron – and the rest in history! Meher 'Baba' was already a flying legend, an extraordinary aviator, with a natural sense of precise navigation and infinite courage. He commanded enormous respect, even reverence, not only amongst the Indian officers and men but too, with the British personnel who served under him. With Sqn Ldr Meher Singh were Flt Lt Haider Hussain of 'A' Flight and Flt Lt Mansukhani of 'B' Flight, other officers including Flying Officers Dalip Singh Majithia and MM 'Minoo' Engineer.

Earlier, Dalip's last flight with the Atalanta had been in October 1942, thereafter converting back to single-engine aircraft, first on Harvards at No.151 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Risalpur on the NWFP in December 1942 in preparation for conversion to the Hurricane fighter bomber, making his first solo flight on type on 13 January 1943.

Gaining his proficiency, Dalip strenuously trained on the Hurricane for air combat, dog fighting

ground attack and formation aerobatics. He took part in formation display at Delhi on 21 March 1943 and thereafter air-to-ground firing practice from Bhopal. His 'dream' posting was in April 1943 to No.6 Squadron flying the eight-gun Hurricane IIBs and commanded by the legendary Meher Baba, soon being declared 'fully operational' on type. (*In his monograph 'Up in the Air – a Celebration of Flying' privately published, Dalip Singh has dedicated the book to Air Commodore Meher Singh DSO who was his mentor and inspiration*).

The Hawker Hurricane was one of military aviation's most outstanding machines, founding a new era in fighter evolution, becoming the first interceptor monoplane of the Royal Air Force. It was the first combat aircraft to exceed 300 mph in level flight and had extraordinary versatility, awesome (for its age) firepower and the superb Rolls Royce Merlin engine. More than 300 Hurricane IIBs, IICs, IVs and XIIIs were eventually supplied to the Indian Air Force between 1942 and 1944, this aircraft type becoming backbone of the service in the Assam and Burma campaigns.

After operational training at No.151 OTU Risalpur, No.6 Squadron flew east to Allahabad and thence to Bairagarh (near Bhopal). At Bairagarh, the Squadron worked hard, with stress on low level photo reconnaissance and air-to-ground firing. Intensive training continued in central India, flying from various airfields at Saugor, Bhopal, Jhansi and Bidar, carrying out tac-recces, strafing bombing, before the squadron moved in November 1943 to Chittagong thence to Cox's Bazar – and the war against Japan.

## 'Eyes of the XIV Army'

No.6 Squadron flew their first operational sortie on 30 November 1943. They were to be in the thick of the Second Arakan Campaign continuously for the next six months, achieving great distinction and earning the sobriquet. 'Eyes of the XIV Army'. The Hurricanes of No.6 Squadron, flying high and low, taking vertical and oblique photos, would fly with two aircraft as a tactical pair, each sortie being a dual affair, the 'Leader', who took photos and did the recce work and his No.2, the 'Weaver', protecting the leader's tail. No.6 Squadron's Hurricanes were to become a familiar sight over the Arakan.

Tac/Recces were flown all over the battlefield, particularly over Maungdaw, with strafing of enemy rivercraft, even as the Army battled the Japanese as war raged in the Buthidaung – Singhyn and Maungdaw areas. An interesting entry in Dalip's log book is on 12 December 1943 when in Hurricane he flew a low level tactical reconnaissance to determine elephant grazing grounds near Maungdaw ! As for his flying assessment, Dalip's ability was rated as 'above the average'.

After the intensive operations in war under leadership of Sqn Ldr Meher Singh (awarded the only DSO in the Indian Air Force) No.6 Squadron moved back to Ranchi for conversion to the four cannon-armed Hurricane IIC in 1944 and air to ground firing and dive bombing practice.

## To the Frontier

Dalip Singh was now posted to another Squadron also flying Hurricane IICs, No.3 Squadron commanded by Sqn Ldr Prithpal Singh, with the responsibility of 'watch and ward' duties on the turbulent north west frontier of India.

No.3 Squadron was based at Kohat with a semi-permanent Flight at the advanced landing ground at Miranshah, whose command Dalip recalls with particular nostalgia. At this frontier

post the Hurricane IICs were wheeled into the Fort at dusk, out of harm's way so to speak from snipping tribesmen, and wheeled out at first light. The Hurricanes flew low level patrols over the rugged hills, carrying out reconnaissance as also leaflet dropping to warn dissident tribesmen of retribution which occasionally followed in the form of 250 lb bombs or strafing by 20 mm cannon.

Hurricane detachments also took part in exercises in other parts of India, including 'White Horse' in Dehra Dun during the winter of 1944. With him as part of the Miranshah Flight was Flying Officer Asghar Khan who had schooled of the RIMC at Dehra Dun. Both intrepid flyers remained close friends. In early 1947 with the clouds of partition overhanging the sub-continent, Dalip had prophesied that if there was to be a new country—and a new Air Force—Asghar Khan would definitely become its Chief. He did! They remained good friends even though separated by the Radcliffe Line.

## Back to the Burma front

In January 1945 Dalip was posted back to the Burma front, this time with No.4 Squadron, flying Hurricane IICs from various advanced landing grounds including Bawli Bazar and many airstrips on Ramree Island. The Arakan offensive had now begun, the objective being



*Dalip Singh Majithia, Detachment Commander of the Hurricane Flight at Miranshah Fort in the NWFP. On his right is Asghar Khan (later Chief of the PAF)*



Sqn Ldr Dalip Singh with Hurricane Mk.IIC of No.4 Squadron, IAF on the Burma Front

to capture the Maya peninsula and Akyab, contain the Japanese in the Arakan and prevent them from crossing the Arakan Yoma and interfering with advance of the XIV Army. No.4 Squadron operated in direct support of the land forces and bombed Japanese strong points at Haparabyin and Ratheduang.



Dalip Singh and squadron mates on a beach airstrip during the campaign

As the XIV Army pushed the Japanese forces southwards and moved towards Rangoon, No.4 Squadron also followed suit and kept moving from one advanced landing ground to another. From Cox's Bazar the Squadron moved to various *kutch*a airstrips including Hove, Indian Dabiang (satellite of Akyab) and finally Kakpanu on Ramree Island. The airfields were all temporary ones, with some airstrips made of impacted sand. At Cox's Bazar however, there was a tarmac and runway with dispersals, taxi tracks and parking bays covered with PSP sheets. At Hove, the airstrip was prepared hard ground but the taxi tracks and parking bays were soft sandy ground covered with thick bamboo matting. At Indian Dabiang, the airstrip was actually on the beach, two miles long,

accommodation for the officers being in bamboo *bashas* with deep trench latrines.

Enemy targets were engaged with bombs and strafing by cannon. Operations in the month of February 1945 was particularly concentrated, Dalip flying some 30 operational sorties from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> of that month when he suddenly developed total numbness in his right arm, perhaps owing to severe strain. His fellow officer, again Ft Lt Asghar Khan, volunteered to fly Dalip Singh to the Command Hospital in Calcutta in a Harvard two-seater and later, under medical advice he was evacuated to England for treatment at a specialist hospital.

Recovery was fast and three months on, Dalip was cleared for flying, returning to India in a Sunderland flying boat in August 1945. This was about the time the Japanese had surrendered. He re-joined No.4 Squadron at Ranchi and shortly thereafter, alongwith Asghar Khan, flew in a Harvard from there to Allahabad on to Lucknow, then Delhi to Lahore, Rawalpindi and finally to Peshawar, where he was posted as Sqn Ldr (Operations), under the AOC Air Commodore Coe. His flying passion unabated, Dalip converted to the Spitfire Mk.VIII at Peshawar on 12 November 1945.

In the following months, No.4 Squadron was selected to be part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF), re-equipped with the Spitfire Mk.XIV and moved to Japan in April 1946 based at Iwaquni, alongside RAF and RAAF fighter squadrons. Dalip was posted to the headquarters BCOF at Melbourne in Australia, getting there in an adventurous flight that took him first to Colombo, thence via Cocos Island to Perth in Australia, onto Sydney and finally Melbourne. It was during his posting at Australia, that Dalip met the lovely Joan Sanders (whose father Colonel William George Sanders was with the British Indian Army) but this romantic story will be recounted elsewhere!

In 1947, Dalip returned to India, got married to Joan on 18 February 1947 at the family home in Gorakhpur, where there were large land holdings and considerable business interests. He was now persuaded to leave the Air Force to look after the family business which he did – but his flying passion remained unabated.



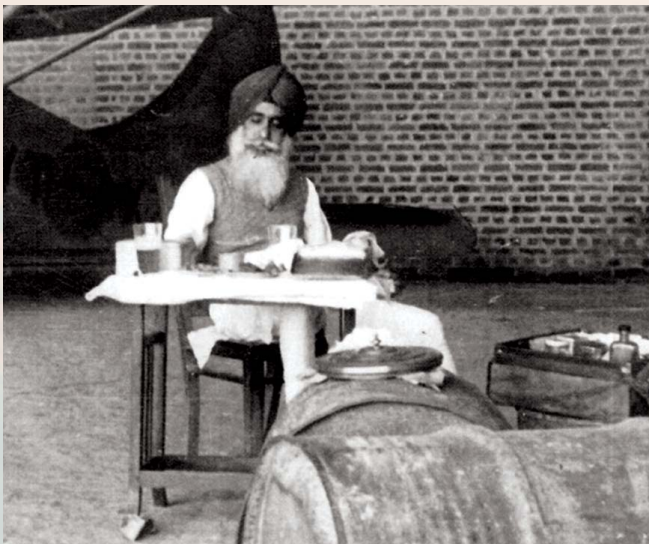
Still in uniform: Surjit Singh Majithia with his nephew Dalip Singh Majithia. The uncle was later Deputy Defence Minister of India and still later, India's first Ambassador to Nepal

Fortunately, even while he was in the Air Force, Dalip had obtained a private pilots licence which he continued to keep valid. The enormous family land at Sardar Nagar included an air strip with a number

of L-4 and L-5 light aircraft purchased after the war from the US Army, to which soon were added two Beechcraft Bonanza four-seater cabin monoplanes. It was in one of these that Dalip made that historic flight to Kathmandu on 23 April 1949, in Bonanza (VT-CYQ) to be received by his uncle Surjit Singh Majithia, then India's first Ambassador to the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal.

Dalip Singh Majithia's passion for flying continued for the next three decades, making his last recorded flight in command on 16 January 1979, again in a Beechcraft Bonanza which aircraft still remains with the family, frequently flown by his cousin S. Satyajit Singh (son of S. Surjit Singh Majithia) who has carried on the tradition of the flying Majithias into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Another of Dalip's great passion is golf, this intrepid golfer gaining so many holes-in-one !

The 'Armada' at the Majithia aerodrome at Gorakhpur (now a major Indian Air Force fighter base) had peaked with some half a dozen aircraft including a Gulfstream G150, Cessna Citation J2+, Beechcraft Super King Air B200C and B200 King Air C90A, B-58 Barons, Bonanzas and the veteran L-4 and L-5. While *Saraya Air Charters* are active with the earlier mentioned aircraft, including for medical air evacuation, some of the others are now awaiting their C ofA – and a dignified resting place at an appropriate Aviation Museum, hopefully soon in Patiala.



'Big' Uncle Surendra Singh Majithia in the hanger with L-5 at the family's Gorakhpur airfield

## Honouring the Centenarian !



In celebration of Dalip Singh Majithia's centennial year, he was invited to the IAF Museum at Palam where these evocative photographs were taken of him with appropriately painted Hurricane and Lysander, juxtaposed with those taken some 75 years earlier, the same types at IAF airfields in north western India (courtesy Air Vice Marshal Vikram Singh)

[With extracts from *Vayu Aerospace Review*]



Santokh Singh Bains writes on

# The Sikhs of 'Chicagoland'



Chicago, popularly known as 'Windy City', is the third most populous city in the United States, famous for its bold architecture. This city is an international hub for finance, culture, commerce, industry, education, technology, telecommunications and transportation and home to several *Fortune 500* companies, including Boeing, Caterpillar, Exelon, Kraft Heinz, McDonald's, Sears, United Airlines Holdings and Walgreens. The city's O'Hare International Airport is one of the busiest airports in the world.

The first Parliament of the World's Religions event was held in Chicago in 1893 and over the next century, many important religious leaders like Pope John Paul, Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Bhai Manjit Singh and Harbhajan Singh Yogi (3HO leader) have visited Chicago from time to time.

As per the 2010 census, the population of Chicago was 2,695,598, with 71% of Chicagoans being of the Christian faith. While 22 % have no religious affiliation, 7% identify themselves with

other religions (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs). It is estimated that there are some 10,000 to 15,000 Sikhs in *Chicagoland* (Chicago and its suburbs). When compared with the total population, the Sikh numbers appear to be negligible but the fact is that they are now a very visible minority and mainstream Chicagoans regard Sikh doctors, engineers, professors, and lawyers with much respect.





In this article, we focus on 10 eminent Sikhs from diverse spheres living in different areas of Chicagoland and their profiles make for most interesting reading.



**Dr Mohanbir Singh Sawhney** is amongst the most eminent of Sikh American professors in the United States, being the McCormick Tribune Professor of Technology and Director of the Centre for Research in Technology & Innovation at the Kellogg School of Management (the top-ranked business school

in USA) at Northwestern University in Chicago. He is a globally recognised scholar, professor, author, consultant and speaker in the spheres of business innovation, technology marketing and new media.

Dr Mohanbir Singh's areas of expertise encompass Entertainment Marketing, High-Tech Marketing, Information Technology, Marketing Management, Media Marketing and Technology. His research and teaching focus on advanced digital marketing, engagement marketing, business innovation and enterprise analytics. He has pioneered concepts like the Innovation Radar, e-Hubs, Innomediation and the Sentient Enterprise.

He has authored six outstanding books including *Fewer, Bigger, Bolder: From Mindless Expansion to Focused Growth*, which was published by Penguin in 2014,

and widely appreciated. He is the co-author of three captivating books: *The Seven Steps to Nirvana: Strategic Insights into eBusiness Transformation*; *Techventure: New Rules for Value and Profit from Silicon Valley*; and *Kellogg on Technology & Innovation*. He has also co-authored *PhotoWars* which is a strategy simulation game.

He has written numerous articles for various academic journals and managerial publications, his trade articles appearing in renowned publications like *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Business Week* and *inancial Times*. His research has been covered in prominent journals like *California Management Review*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *Management Science*, *Marketing Science*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*.



Over the years, Dr Mohanbir Singh Sawhney has won several awards for his teaching and research including the 2006 *Sidney Levy Award for Teaching Excellence* at the Kellogg School; the 2005 runner-up for Best Paper in *Journal of Interactive Marketing*; the 2001 Accenture Award for the Best Paper published in *California Management Review* in 2000; and the *Outstanding Professor of the Year at Kellogg* in 1998 and again in 2008 and 2009.

In 2011, Dr Sawhney received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata and in 2012, was named among the “50 most influential thinkers of Indian origin”. In 2016, he received the *Thought Leadership Award* from NASSCOM India. He advises several global firms and governments, including the Governments of Oman, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh on e-Government strategy.

Prof. Mohanbir Singh Sawhney holds a Ph.D. in Marketing from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania; an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata; a Master’s degree in Arts from the University of Pennsylvania; and a Bachelor’s in Technology in Electrical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.



**Dr Chirinjeev Singh Kathuria** is often described as “the space age Sikh gentleman who is out to set his mark both on the earth and in space!” This 57-year old Sikh American’s story is a suitable matter for a Jeffrey Archer thriller, being an amazing

investor, physician, businessman and philanthropist, his exciting success story seems like several success biographies put together.

He was born in 1964 at New Delhi, his father being an engineer and his mother a doctor. He arrived in Chicago when he was merely eight months old, thereafter grew up in Chicagoland’s DuPage County. He was valedictorian of the Class of 1983 at Downers Grove North High School, earned his Bachelor of Science and Doctorate of Medicine degrees from Brown University. He also received an MBA and a

Master’s degree in Public Management from Stanford University.

He also studied Space Exploration along with Economics and Business. “I saw Neil Armstrong land on the moon and could never forget it,” says Chirinjeev Singh. However, his childhood dream of becoming an astronaut was shattered when NASA rejected him. Quoting a Chinese proverb, he says: “Our greatest glory lies not in never falling but rising every time we fall.”

In spite of some failures, he proceeded to write a saga of triumphs in various spheres, proved himself to be a keen space explorer and a successful information technology entrepreneur. He is internationally known as a telecom and medical technology tycoon.

In 2005, he became the co-founder of *PlanetSpace*, a privately funded Chicago-based rocket and space travel project which had bid for NASA’s Commercial Resupply Services contract with Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Alliant Techsystems.

Dr Chirinjeev Singh Kathuria also co-founded *American Teleradiology NightHawks Inc* which was merged with NightHawk Radiology Holdings Inc; the combined company went public on NASDAQ. Dr. Kathuria was a director of X-Stream Networks Inc, an internet service provider, which was sold to Liberty Surf Group S.A. and subsequently went public on Paris Stock Exchange. He helped set up the first US Investment Bank office in India and served as Manager of the Investment Bank Division for Morgan Stanley.

Chirinjeev Singh has been deeply involved in space exploration, being the Founding Director of MirCorp, the first commercial company in the world to privately launch and fund manned space programs. He was instrumental in sending Denis Tito into space on a Soyuz spacecraft as the *First Citizen Explorer* in the privately managed space programme.



Wanting to set his mark on public life, he decided to run as a Republican for the US Senate from Illinois in 2004. Addressing a gathering, he had said:

“I want to give back to the country what it has given to my family. With my turban and my beard. I am an American first.” He surprised many conservatives with his pro-business and pro-free market views, although the eventual winner was Barack Obama, later President of the USA.

Dr Chirinjeev Singh Kathuria is the Founder and Chairman of Ocean Biomedical Inc which is a Rhode Island based company, this company announcing groundbreaking discovery in the global effort to eradicate malaria. Dr Kathuria said “The malaria vaccine platform is also particularly important in the search for a vaccine against future coronavirus pandemics that threaten humanity.”



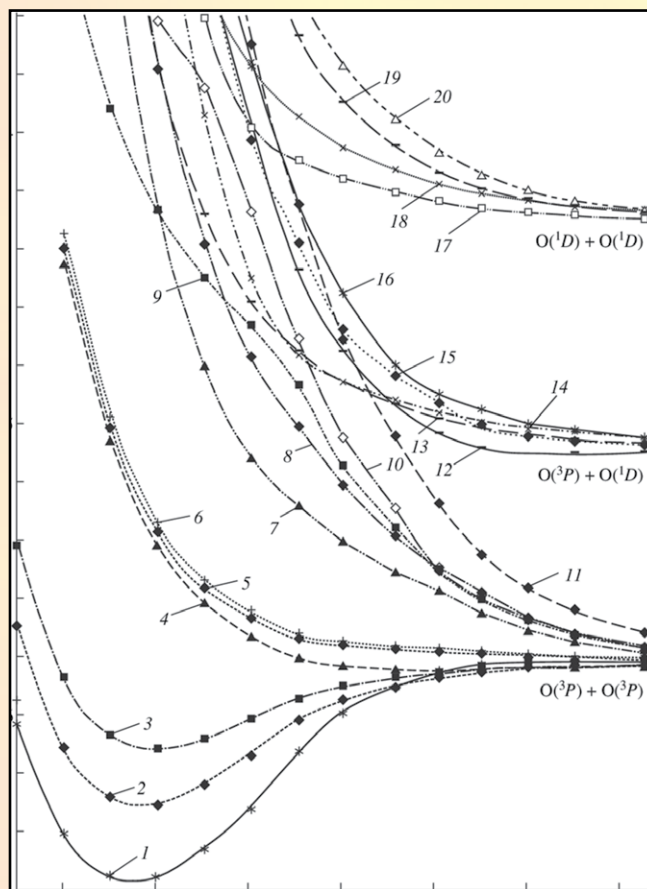
### Dr Balwant Singh

**Hansra** was born at Kamalpura village in Ludhiana district of the Punjab and after primary education at his village, studied upto eighth class at Balbir High School in Faridkot, thereafter did his high school from Guru Har Gobind Khalsa High School. He

studied for two years at GHG Khalsa College but completed his B. Sc. in Physics and Mathematics from Government College in Ludhiana. After his Bachelor’s degree in Teaching from GHG Khalsa Training College at Guru Sudhar, he taught at the Khalsa High School, Hans.

Arriving in the USA as a student in 1959, he got admission at the George Williams College in Chicago from where he got the Master’s degree in Education, then a teaching job at the YMCA High School, Chicago. After receiving a grant from the National Foundation for further studies, he obtained MS degree from Arizona State University, and moved to Chicago’s YMCA Community College. After studying at Loyola University he moved to the University of Illinois at Chicago, and while still teaching, secured an MS in Chemistry. Thereafter, he enrolled at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee where he finished his Doctoral Studies (Education Administration).

Dr Hansra worked as an Assistant with Dr Robert Millikan’s team on calculations based on their collected data using formulas and then plotting to draw energy curves that were approved for publications. (Dr Robert Millikan was a Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry). Dr Balwant Singh Hansra taught at the YMCA College till 1982, thereafter, got a similar teaching position at Richard J. Daley College (under City Colleges of Chicago) in south-west Chicago. After a satisfying teaching career spanning 36 years, he finally retired in 2000.



By now he was also involved in a very small group of the Sikh community organised as the *Sikh Study Circle*. Dr Balwant Singh Hansra had been actively involved with establishment of the Palatine Gurdwara (*Sikh Religious Society*) and remembers that *Satsang* was organised in Palatine Gurdwara building for the first time on 30 September 1979, the Gurdwara Sahib getting its first Granthi Bhai Mohinder Singh in 1980. Dr Hansra has served the Sikh Religious Society from time to time in various capacities (Treasurer, Religious

Secretary, Sunday School Teacher and President). At present, he is Chairman of the Constitution Implementation Committee.

From 1993 to 2009, Dr. Hansra served as a trustee of the CPWR and currently is on the Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Chicago. He has represented the Sikh faith from time to time at many interfaith gatherings and also had the opportunity to meet with Black Civil Rights leader Dr Martin Luther King Jr. in 1961.

Dr Balwant Singh Hansra is married to Avtar Kaur Hansra, together attending the World Parliament of Religions event in Cape Town, South Africa in 1999; Barcelona, Spain in 2004; Melbourne, Australia in 2009; Salt Lake City, Utah, USA in 2015 and Toronto, Canada in 2018.



### **Rajinder Bir Singh**

**Mago** was born and brought up in pre-partition India and got his degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Punjab University (Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana campus) in 1968. In 1971, he immigrated to the USA. After a brief stay at

Cincinnati in Ohio, he moved to Chicago in 1972 and has remained in Chicagoland since then.

One of the earliest pioneers of Punjabi culture in the Midwest region of the United States, he is the co-founder and past President of the Punjabi Cultural Society of Chicago, and also on the permanent board of governors of this non-profit organisation. He helped establish an annual Vaisakhi cultural programme in Chicago known as *Rangla Punjab* and with the help of PCS team, he also started *PCS Chicago Bhangra and Gidha Competition*. As he states “our focus is on promoting Punjabi culture amongst our next generation and community building.”

When Sikh Americans faced a barrage of hate crimes after 9/11 due to ‘mistaken identity’, Rajinder Bir Singh Mago arranged Sikhism orientation and sensitivity training for the FBI, Police, Transportation Security Administration and State employees. To create awareness about Sikh Americans and the Sikh faith amongst mainstream Americans, he encouraged

Sikh Chicagoans to attend the 4th of July functions and to participate in Thanksgiving Day parades and Memorial Day parades.

Rajinder Bir Singh Mago helps organise inter-religious events at the Palatine Gurdwara from time to time, is regularly invited to speak as a Sikh representative at various interfaith gatherings at different places in Chicagoland region. He is Trustee Emeritus of the Council for Parliament of World’s Religions, served on the CPWR Board from 1993 to 2010 including as its Vice President. Rajinder Bir Singh Mago was an Executive Board member and Vice President of *Apna Ghar*, a domestic violence service agency and a shelter home for women from the South Asian region.

He is President of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago and represents the Indian American community in the coalition. He was Executive Secretary of the Asian American Advisory Council to the Illinois Governor Jim Edgar during his both terms in office.

Mainly owing to his efforts, Sikh Chicagoans were able to get the month of April designated as *Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month* in the State of Illinois. The Illinois State Governor had signed the bill into law at a ceremony held at the Palatine Gurdwara grounds.

**Shiva Singh Khalsa** was born in 1949 at Brooklyn, New York. His early life was imbued with values which were akin to Sikhism even though his parents were not Sikh and were first generation immigrants to the United States. Growing up at an orphanage in England, Shiva Singh’s father had



## “Sikh Awareness & Appreciation Month”

On 3 August 2019, the Illinois Governor JB Pritzker signed a new law designating the month of April as *Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month* in the state of Illinois. This historic event took place at Palatine Gurdwara grounds where a mini outdoor office of the Governor was set up as per official protocol and tradition.



despised the British racial system but courageously served in the World War. He was sent to New York city to open an office for his Radio Communication Company for liaison with Greek ship owners after the Second World War. Shiva Singh's mother was a very devout Greek Orthodox lady and deeply believed in one universal Creator for entire humanity. Gentle and kind in nature, she was also fearless.

In the mid-60s, Shiva Singh attended the State University of New York at Binghamton and was introduced to other faiths through classes in Kundalini Yoga taught by Harbhajan Singh Yogi (popularly known as Yogi Bhajan). Realising that the Sikh way of life was the ideal path for him, he partook *Amrit* in the late '70s and has since lived his life as a Khalsa Sikh. He was together with Yogi Bhajan for over 35 years, his spiritual mentor and beloved teacher.

In Chicago, he successfully ran a HIV prevention programme for the Asian community. For ten years, his working career was in the field of health care; he worked as the Project Manager for two nursing homes where he was involved in providing traditional meals and language/religious activities for residents of the South Asian Community. Later, he managed a Home Health Company for several years and presently devotes some time for teaching exercise and meditation to seniors at Weiss Hospital Senior Center.

Shiva Singh Khalsa helped found the groundbreaking Rogers Park Inter-religious Partners, a group of 18 faith traditions in the Chicago area, and has been involved for many years with the Parliament



of World's Religions. He also enthusiastically attended the Parliament's event at Salt Lake, Utah, USA, in 2015 and spoke about the Sikh faith, doing *langar sewa* for thousands of participants over the four days.

After the 9/11 tragedy, he was invited to represent the Sikh community at numerous interfaith events, and invited to educate law enforcement officers through Chicago Police Superintendent Terry Hillard's Multicultural Crimes Forum.

His wife **Shabad Kaur Khalsa** earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia College in Chicago, and vividly remembers her visit to the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 2014 which she considers as "truly magical". She also visited important gurdwaras at Goindwal, Anandpur Sahib and other places in Punjab, and felt really inspired by having *darshan* of Guru Gobind Singh's weapons and Bhai Kanhaiya's leather water sack.

Their son Amar Dev Singh studied at Miri Piri Academy in Amritsar from 2012 to 2014. Now 20 years old, he is a rising junior at the University of Illinois at Chicago; majoring in Psychology and Political Science. He is Vice President of *Spirit Rising Foundation* and a certified yoga teacher.



Thakar Singh Basati with US Senator from Illinois Dick Durbin at Asian American Coalition Dinner in February, 2020

**Thakar Singh Basati** was born at Kambala village in the Mohali district of Punjab, his parents being simple farmers with firm belief in Sikh values. After primary education at his village, he studied at Khalsa High School in Lambian. In 1970, he joined the Khalsa College in the Pre-Medical course. He married Rajinder Kaur and had a daughter, all of whom then arrived in the USA with a mere \$ 12 but soon settling down at Hammond in the state of Indiana, Rajinder Kaur worked as a Graduate Registered Nurse while Thakar Singh got the job of a X-Ray technician. They moved to Illinois in 1981, where Thakar Singh worked as full time CT technician for almost 5 years. Determined to become a businessman, he opened the *Punjab Gift Store* near Palatine Gurdwara, the oldest and largest gurdwara in the entire Midwest region of the United States.

He had been a proficient Bhangra player in India and his interest had not diminished so started teaching Bhangra to Sikh youngsters in Palatine, and helped organise various Punjabi cultural shows. When the *Punjabi Cultural Society* was formed. Basati became its Founding President and he again played a significant role in launching *Global Punjabi Milap* (GPM), formed in 2003 to promote Punjabiya in the Midwest region

of the USA. The GPM has succeeded to a great extent in bringing together many Sikh and Muslim residents of Chicagoland for promoting and celebrating their common cultural heritage and ethos. From time to time, the GPM has highlighted topics like *Punjab di Saanjh*, Legend of Waris Shah, Baba Bulleh Shah, *Riwarz Punjab De*, on Baba Sheikh Farid, Singapore-based Amardeep Singh's magnificent book *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan*, and others.

In 1991, Thakar Singh Basati again became a CT technician, later entered the field of real estate, working full time with Prudential Properties, soon starting his own real estate company *Vaan Realty* for Americans residing in the western suburbs of Chicago. He has taken the lead in organising 'Get to know your Sikh Neighbour' events, including turban tying demonstrations and conveying the significance of the *dastaar* for Sikhs.

Thakar Singh Basati is married to Rajinder Kaur Basati, a Registered Nurse, who is a Supervisor (Mental Health) with Illinois state. They have two daughters and one son: Navreet Kaur (a lawyer), Navraaz Kaur (a high school teacher specialising in Garden Therapy for providing behavioral help, and a documentary movie maker), and Dr Sukhraaj Singh who is an engineer.



65-year old **Amolak Singh**

**Jammu** is a prominent Sikh journalist of Chicagoland, Editor of *Punjab Times*, a popular Punjabi weekly published from Palatine, a suburb of Chicago.

At the partition, Amolak Singh Jammu's parents had moved to Sirsa district where he schooled then went to college in Chandigarh, got his MA (Punjabi), M.Phil and LLB from Punjab University in Chandigarh. He worked with the *Punjabi Tribune* in 1978, was with them that for more than 20 years. Moving to the United States in the late '90s, he began publishing and editing the *Punjab Times* for about 20 years, this Punjabi weekly started on a very modest scale but gradually the paper march gained momentum.

In 2003, the California edition of *Punjab Times* was started from San Francisco. As Amolak Singh felt the need to have a third edition of the weekly, the New



York edition of *Punjab Times* was launched in 2009. *Punjab Times* is now the only Punjabi weekly in the United States with three separate editions, and the largest circulation among all Punjabi weeklies published in the USA.

Owing to various ailments, Amolak Singh began using a wheelchair in 2007, which did not dampen

his spirits and he continued to work enthusiastically. His wife Jaspreet Kaur takes care of various aspects of the office administration and the actual publication of the Weekly and is Assistant Editor of *Punjab Times*. They have a son of 38 years who works for Apple and is presently posted in California.



Lakhwant Singh Komal with Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

**Lakhwant Singh Komal** is regarded as one of the most popular Sikh activists of Chicagoland. An extrovert, he has been a suitable counsellor, translator,

guide and advisor to many Sikh immigrant individuals and families arriving from India. Besides helping them to tide over initial difficulties and problems, he also comes forward to help them in finding suitable jobs. A compassionate person, he has been actively engaged in numerous worthy causes for the Sikh community.

To spread awareness about Sikhs and Sikhism, Komal has been inviting student groups from various colleges and universities to visit Devon Gurdwara in Chicago where he usually is the keynote speaker, frequently invited to speak on the Sikh faith at important educational institutions in 'Chicagoland'. Because of his efforts, Sikhism has been formally included in the syllabus of Theology at North Park University in Chicago. When the *Sikh Council of North America*, an important national body of Sikhs, was established in Houston in 1986, Lakhwant Singh Komal became the General Secretary (Chicago region) of this umbrella organisation of Sikhs. He has served the *Sikh Religious Society* since 1972 in different capacities.



When the *Punjabi Cultural Society* was formed in Chicago more than 25 years ago, Lakhwant Singh Komal was its first Chairman. Ever since its inception, he has been an active supporter of various events promoted by PCS from time to time.

He has been honoured with several community service awards including *The Pride of India Gold Medal* by NRI Institute. He is a recipient of *Community Service Award* from Asian American Coalition of Chicago. In 2003, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley



awarded him for outstanding services rendered by him to the people of Chicago. Lakhwant Singh Komal has three MA degrees, is holder of prestigious Principal's Certification. After 34 years in the field of education under Chicago Board of Education, he retired in 2004.

Lakhwant Singh Komal is married to Raj Kaur, resides in Skokie, a suburb of Chicago, they have two sons and four grandchildren.



**Dr Pavitar Singh** was born at Myitkyina in Burma (now Myanmar) the second eldest of the eight brothers. He attended a Christian high school in Rangoon, was a student at the University of Rangoon where he studied Biology. He

received his MBBS degree in 1966 from the Institute of Medical College, Rangoon, then migrated to the United States and did his internship at Somerset Hospital in New Jersey.

He pursued his residency at Cook County Medical Hospital, Chicago, in Internal Medicine, Nuclear Medicine and Radiology. After completion of his residency, he worked as a Junior Attendant in the Radiology Department of Cook County Hospital. In 1972, Dr Pavitar Singh joined Rush Copley Hospital in Aurora, a suburb of Chicago. His primary practice was in General and Interventional



Radiology, he became head of his department in 1981 and maintained this position for 35 years until his retirement in 2007.

As a devout Sikh, he played a significant role in renting a hall at Lombard in Chicagoland; Sunday services were held here for a large congregation. In 1970s, a parcel of land was purchased at Palatine. In 1972, the *Sikh Religious Society* (Palatine Gurdwara) was incorporated as a not-for-profit religious organisation and a place of worship. The construction for the Gurdwara began in 1979 and was completed in 1981.

Dr Pavitar Singh was a co-founder and board member of the Palatine Gurdwara with other board members including three other Sikh Burmese doctors (Dr. Surjit Singh Patheja, Dr. Robert Singh, and Dr Daljeet Singh).

By 2011, the Sikh community in the region had grown significantly and many Sikhs of Wheaton and surrounding areas felt the need to establish another Gurdwara. A pre-existing place of worship was, therefore, purchased and converted into a Gurdwara, now known as Wheaton Gurdwara or the Illinois Sikh Community Centre which has proved to be a boon for Sikhs residing in the many suburbs of Chicago. Dr Pavitar Singh is the first and present President of this important gurdwara. About 350 to 500 Sikhs attend Sunday services at this Gurdwara.

Dr Pavitar Singh is married to Jasbir Kaur, and they are proud of their two sons and one daughter who are highly educated, practicing Sikhs. Ravneet Singh, MA, MS, PhD is a business consultant; Simerneet Singh, JD, MBA is a businessman and Savneet Kaur, MBA is a businesswoman.

**Sarwan Singh Raju** was born at Bolina Doaba village in Jalandhar district of Punjab, did his primary education at this village, thereafter studied at Guru Tegh Bahadur School at Hazara village, got his BSc degree from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, then did Mechanical Engineering at Guru Nanak Engineering College in Ludhiana.

He migrated to the USA in 1975, attended Manhattan Technical Institute, New York and then moved to Chicago in 1977. He worked for 15 years, designing hard video cameras for CT scanners, MRIs and ultrasounds for several major medical companies of the United States and Europe. In the sphere of



Sarwan Singh Raju with Secretary of State of Illinois Jesse White. Raju's famous posters depicting the Sikh soldiers' contributions in two World Wars are seen in the background

Telecom and Marine Industries, he worked with several companies like Charles Industries, Emerson and Westell for almost 20 years and is presently working as a Senior Mechanical Design Engineer at Honeywell.

To connect the new Sikh generation with their unique religion and glorious heritage, Sarwan Singh has endeavoured to bring several Sikh families together, thereafter continuing to play a significant role in organising Sikh youth camps.

Memorial Day Parades were started in Chicago long back in 1870 and this parade is now considered as one of the largest Memorial Day Parades in the USA. Thanks to the efforts of Sarwan Singh and his close friends, Sikh Chicagoans started participating in Chicago's Memorial Day Parades from 2011 and since then, Sikh Americans from Chicagoland have regularly participated in this important annual parade with a colourful float, flags, posters, banners and a walking unit to honour Sikhs' participation with honour in both the World Wars.

Very shy of publicity, Sarwan Singh Raju generally remains away from the media. While working with great enthusiasm for any Sikh cause, he is usually conspicuous by his absence at the inevitable photo sessions !



# Gurdwaras of Chicagoland



## The Palatine Gurdwara

The oldest and largest gurdwara in the Midwest region of the United States, this is spread over some 16 acres of land and has two big car parking lots. The Gurdwara building has a Main Dewan Hall, Sukhasan Hall, Langar Hall, modern kitchen, Gurmat School, office room, medical centre, senior's centre, meeting centre, library and residence for the Granthi Sahib.

The Gurdwara is managed by the *Sikh Religious Society of Chicago*, a not-for-profit religious organisation. *Satsang* was organised at Palatine Gurdwara for the first time on 30 September 1979 and welcomed their first regular Granthi in 1980.

**The Devon Gurdwara** is the only gurdwara situated within the city of Chicago, located at West Devon Avenue, also known as 'Little India'. Established some 25 years ago, this was registered as a non-profit religious organisation with Businessmen Balvinder Singh and Balwant Singh Hansra as the co-founders, the former having graciously offered the second floor of his business premises for establishing the Gurdwara. Lakhwant Singh Komal, Shiva

Singh Khalsa, Jaidev Singh Bhattal, Surinder Kaur Saini and some other Sikhs played important roles during the initial years.





**The Wheaton Gurdwara** (above) was established after buying a pre-existing place of worship, located on Creekside Drive at Wheaton, a suburb of Chicago. This Gurdwara (also known as *Illinois Sikh Community Centre*) is a real boon for Sikhs residing in Wheaton and several other suburbs of Chicago, “being progressive and with a calm and peaceful atmosphere.” About 350 to 500 persons attend Sunday services at this Gurdwara. Dr Pavitar Singh is the first and present President of this important Gurdwara.

**The Rockford Gurdwara** (generally known as Nanaksar Sikh Temple) is located at the corner of Kishwaukee Street and 3rd Avenue in Rockford city. The Gurdwara was established in 2015 after converting a 30,000 square feet which had earlier served as a Baptist church and then later closed down.



As Daljit Singh, had of the Gurdwara stated, “though there are very few Sikh families in Rockford, Sikhs from Huntley, Elgin, Naperville and some other places visit Rockford Gurdwara on Sundays, the Gurdwara also having rooms for meditation, conferences, and lectures on religious themes. In late 2015, also created next to Rockford Gurdwara was

America’s first recognised centre for the immersion of ashes, situated on banks of the Rock River. The Nanaksar Sikh Temple issues official documents to people immersing ashes amidst recitation of *Ardaas*.

## And the author, himself !

**Santokh Singh Bains** was born at Siliguri in West Bengal where he had his early education and then did his B.Com (Hons.) from St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata, continuing to complete his MA (Economics) from MMH College, Ghaziabad.



At New Delhi, he actively worked for *The Spokesman Weekly* for some time, covering many important events of Sikh interest, also interviewing several Sikh artists and other important personalities. In 1975, he joined Punjab & Sind Bank in New Delhi and as a banker, also worked at Siliguri and Dehra Dun. While actively engaged in the banking sector, he continued to write articles on various topics of Sikh interest, his articles appearing from time to time in *The Sikh Review*, *The Spokesman Weekly* and *North American Sikh Review*.

In 1997, he moved to the USA. After working for various companies in Chicago, he retired recently and this is his first article for the *Nishaan Nagaara*. His book *Sikhs, Sikhism and the World* was published by Sunbun Publishers of New Delhi in 2019.

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# The blessed Father and his three illustrious sons

This article recounts a unique phenomenon, that of a brilliant father and his three illustrious sons who immensely contributed to the Sikh cause in particular and humanity in general. This providence is very rare to find, they were so blessed.

At the fountainhead was the saintly personage of their father, Master Hari Gulab Singh, who was born in 1905, the only son of S Kesar Singh, who himself was such an elevated soul that the epithet of *Bhagat* was prefixed to his name. Bhagat Kesar Singh was a very popular and upright businessman of Quetta, capital city of Baluchistan, where he had migrated to from his native village of Murid (District Jhelum) in 1896. After India's partition, and spending a year in Narnaul then a few months in Amritsar, the family finally settled in the princely state of Kapurthala in 1949. And that is where I had the chance to undergo his private coaching.



Master Hari Gulab Singh

Master Hari Gulab Singh taught at the Government High School in Kapurthala where with his devotion to duty, deeply religious temperament and saintly personality, he became a most popular member and it was here that he came to be reverentially addressed as 'Masterji'. After *Ardaas* every morning at the State Gurdwara, he would often recite a randomly picked *Vaak* from the holy Granth in an enchanting melodious voice. Master ji lived for only 51 years and passed away in 1956.

He was blessed with three sons, each of whom excelled in their professional and academic lives, bringing laurels to the family. The prodigal son certainly

was the celebrated Professor Jaswant Singh Neki, an institution in himself. A man of many parts and diverse accomplishments, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was not only a psychiatrist of international standing, but also a prolific writer, metaphysical poet and leading scholar of religious studies. He was a devout Sikh with unwavering faith in the Almighty.



Dr Jaswant Singh Neki

Jaswant Singh Neki was born on 27 August 1925 at village Murid in district Jhelum (now in Pakistan). He did his schooling at Khalsa School in Quetta and thereafter joined the Forman Christian College at Lahore for his Pre-medical studies. He continued his studies in medicine at King Edward Medical College, Lahore but because of the partition, had to leave Lahore and so joined the Medical College at Amritsar where he completed his degree. In 1954 he got his Masters in Psychology and later went for his Postgraduate studies in Psychiatry from the All India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore.

He was outstanding in his profession and soon became Professor and Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at AIIMS, New Delhi (1968-1978). In recognition of his merit, he was chosen to take over as Director of the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh (1978-1981). No surprise then that he was subsequently selected by the World Health Organisation as a renowned consultant.

Jaswant Singh Neki was a person of many attributes. He began writing poetry at a very young age, his first published poem 'In Praise of Guru Gobind Singh' was written in *Braj Bhasha* which appeared in the *Khalsa Samachar* in 1937 when he was just twelve

years old. He was awarded the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1978 for his work *Karuna Di Chhuh Ton Magron* and thereafter had over a dozen published collections of poetry, beginning with *Asle to Ohle Tak* in 1955 till the ground-breaking autobiographical, *Koi Naon Na Janne Mera* (2000) and *Gyan Geet* (2015).

His contribution to religious studies was also most impressive. He became Professor of Eminence in Religious Studies at the University of Patiala and on several occasions, represented Sikh Religious Thought at the World Parliament of Religions and at Spiritual Seminars of UNICEF.

In his role as advisor to the *Dharam Parchar Committee* of the SGPC and as General Secretary of the *Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan* in New Delhi, he was an active participant in contemporary Sikh affairs. Not many people know that *Memorandum on the Punjabi Suba*, which was submitted by the Shiromani Akali Dal to the Government of India as well as that submitted by the S Hukam Singh (Speaker of the Lok Sabha), was virtually drafted by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki.

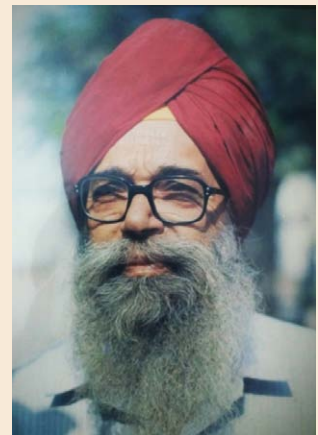
For his literary work, he won many prestigious awards including the *Sahitya Akademi Award*, *Shiromani Sahitkar Award*, *Sarvotam Sahitkar Award*. For his work on religious studies, he received the *Order of Khalsa* and *Shan-e-Khalsa* awards. For his professional work, he was awarded the Senior Commonwealth Fellowship.

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki also was Editorial Director of the *Nishaan Nagaara* journal for a number of years before he passed away on 11 September 2015.



Dr Jaswant Singh Neki with Dr. Manmohan Singh,  
then Prime Minister of India

Master Hari Gulab Singh's second son Parkash Singh followed a different trajectory but an equally distinguished one. Born on 2 May, 1927 at Dalbadin in Baluchistan, Prakash Singh did his schooling at the Khalsa High School, Quetta and passed his intermediate from Government Inter College, Quetta. He graduated from the FC College Lahore and got his Masters degree from the Punjab University.



Professor Parkash Singh

Possessing excellent command over many languages including Punjabi, English, Urdu, Persian and Hindi, he was appointed as Secretary Shormani Akali Dal in 1948. During 1949-53 he worked as co-editor of Urdu Dailies *Ajit* and *Parbhat* and in 1952-53 also worked as District Public Relation Officer at Bathinda. Till 1957 he was Secretary of the UP Sikh Pratinidhi Board and also served as Editor of the *UP Sikh Gazette*.

In 1957 he began his teaching career at the Khalsa College Mumbai as a Professor in Divinity. He moved to Amritsar and became Information Officer at the Golden Temple Complex from 1958 to 1966. During that period he was also Editor of *Gurmat Parkash*, the monthly magazine published by the SGPC.

He joined the Khalsa College at Amritsar in 1966 as Head of the Sikh History Research Department. He left this in 1980 to join the Shaheed Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar as its Principal, this prestigious institute run by the SGPC, and retired from this college in 1987. Not taking any rest, he went to Haldwani in district Nainital in now Uttarakhand, where he was Director, Guru Tegh Bahadur Public School for a year and four months.

The Board of Governors of the Khalsa College, Amritsar then offered him Professorship of Divinity, a post he held till 1995. Soon enough he joined *Bhai Vir Singh Gurmat Vidyalaya* of the Chief Khalsa

Diwan, Amritsar as its Principal and remained so till October, 2001. During his peripatetic career, he had enriched a variety of institutions on which he left an indelible mark.

During these years he produced many classic literary works including

- *Guru Nanak and His Japji*, 1969
- *Community Kitchen of the Sikhs*, 1994
- *Mool Mantra Mahima*, 1980
- *Jap Vichar*, 1981, 2000
- *Nitnem Sateek*
- *Continuing Influence of Bhai Vir Singh*, 1972
- *Brief Life Sketch of Guru Tegh Bahadur*
- *The Sikh Guru and the Temple of Bread*, 1964
- *Shaheed Baba Dip Singh*
- *The Saint Warrior Guru Gobind Singh* 1967

He passed away on 26 January 2002.

Master Hari Gulab Singh's youngest son, Sewadar Singh Jogi, a worthy sibling and philanthropist is also known for his unique academic achievements.

He did his Matriculation from the Khalsa High School Quetta and some years later graduated from the Panjab University Chandigarh. He then joined as a paramedic with the Punjab Health Department, sought premature retirement in March 1978 to pursue his scholarly yearnings. From October 1978 to October 1987, he worked



as Assistant Director at Dr Balbir Singh Sahet Kendra, Dehra Dun, was associate editor of *Panchbati Sandesh*, the quarterly journal of the Kendra, thereafter settled down at Kapurthala, to become an active social worker.

He was office bearer and member of many official committees and NGOs and Trustee of *Bhai Ghanayyaji Charitable Trust*, running the *Unique Home*, an exemplary institution for taking care of newly born but abandoned girls. He collected Rs 33 lakh single-handedly for building of this *Unique Home*,

which was supplemented by his personal donations.

Dr Sewadar Singh Jogi remained a regular visitor to Sukhjeet Ashram, a home for mentally retarded children, helping the institution in multifarious ways. He was at one time the 'champion blood donor' of Kapurthala, having given his blood 54 times at the PGI Chandigarh. He also provided financial assistance for three renal transplants, three open-heart surgeries and one case of cancer.

Equally active in the academic domain, he translated Omar Khayyam's *Rubayat* into Punjabi from Edward Fitzgerald English version along with the original Persian version. About this book, S Khushwant Singh in his weekly column *This Above All* wrote "He has done a most wonderful job."

The saintly father Master Hari Gulab Singh and his three gifted sons will always have a special place in the galaxy of Sikh scholars, and remembered forever by Sikhs and the academia.

**Dr Gurbirinder Singh Aujla**

The author, who retired as a Director-General of Police, Punjab in 2007, started his career as a college lecturer in English. His latest book is on his father, Suchet Singh Aujla, who after unsuccessfully attempting to get into the then elite Indian Civil Service, served the erstwhile Kapurthala State as a Deputy Superintendent of Police and later rose to become Inspector General before opting out of civil services and join the Praja Mandal Movement.



## 36 Years Later

# The trauma of 'Operation Blue Star' lingers on



In June 1984, the Indira Gandhi government in India ordered a military assault on the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, codenamed 'Operation Blue Star'. Launched by the Indian Army, this was ostensibly aimed at 'flushing out' Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his associates from the holy shrine. Over three decades later, the calamitous event continues to be perceived in diametrically opposite terms by the Indian state and mainstream media on the one side and the Sikh community and its diaspora on the other. This difference in perceptions persists despite senior Indian politicians confessing in recent times that the Operation "was a blunder."

A report published by the *Citizens for Democracy* titled *Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab* (which was banned in 1985), well sums this up: "The contrast between *Operation Blue Star* and *Ghallughara* [holocaust] as two different perceptions of the same reality is symptomatic of the wide gap between the official version and the people's recollections of what really happened at the Golden Temple when the army attacked it in June 1984. Listening to the traumatic eye-witness accounts of those who were inside Golden Temple at that time, we felt the need to tell the truth, the as-yet untold story and in the process to correct the Government's version as put out by the Army, the Press, the Radio, the TV and the White Paper."

### Lingering Trauma

Sikhs worldwide commemorate the days 1-8 June as *Ghallughara* (meaning 'holocaust') week. The earlier Ghallugharas had included looting, plundering and atrocities committed against the Sikhs in the 18th century. Thousands of innocent women and children were slaughtered in those pogroms by invaders from *outside* the sub-continent.

Notably, the global Sikh community, which includes not just 'hardliners' or 'radicals' but the overwhelming majority of Sikhs around the world, including those who have "moved on", acknowledge the fact that *Operation Blue Star* has had an indelible impact on the Sikh psyche and resulted in deterioration of the situation in Punjab in the decade 1984-1994. Apart from terribly hurting Sikh sentiments, the military assault proved to be a catalyst for more militant violence which was to come in the Punjab over the next decade.

Following this bloody military campaign, Captain Amarinder Singh, the present Chief Minister of the Punjab, had at the time resigned from Parliament and the Congress Party to register his protest.

As the 'Operation' unfolded, thousands of pilgrims who had come to pay obeisance on the Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjan Dev (the fifth Sikh Guru) on 3 June, found themselves stranded in the Darbar Sahib, many being killed in the attack. Yet, this was not just about the loss of lives of innocent pilgrims, but also the damage caused to the Sikh's temporal seat of the Akal Takht, which enraged the entire community.

The differences in the government's version and that of the Sikhs are evident from the figures of casualties and the damage caused to the Darbar Sahib. The official casualty figure of 492 seems grossly underestimated as thousands of pilgrims were stranded in the complex at the time of the military action. There is not an iota of doubt that the Sikhs, as a community, had faced numerous upheavals even before *Operation Blue Star*, but have refrained from feelings of victimhood. However, it is highly insensitive of the peoples of India to not acknowledge the pain and trauma caused to the Sikhs by this cataclysmic event.



## Transparency, Storytelling Myth-Busting

In recent years, there have been numerous demands for declassification of important documents pertaining to '1984'. In Britain, the first turbaned Sikh Member of Parliament, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, has sought an inquiry into the role of the then Margaret Thatcher government in the Operation. Declassified documents have revealed that London had provided assistance to the Indian government in planning of the campaign.

Some Indian lawmakers too have demanded a declassification of documents related to the Operation and the bloody Sikh massacres that followed the assassination of Prime Minister of Indira Gandhi later the same year.

It is also essential to have a narrative, which counters the myths peddled regarding not just the Operation, but also the events preceding and succeeding it. This narrative should be fact based and not born out of any hate against a particular community.

One of the important developments in recent years has been attempts by some members of the Sikh civil society to document history of the tragic events relating to 1984. On the one hand, diaspora-based Sikh research organisations, like the *Sikh Research Institute* (SikhRI), have done a remarkable job in documenting the events of the ill-fated year in an academic manner, and apart from this, Sikhs are trying to fill the gaps left by mainstream media in India. Some organisations like *The Wire* and *The Quint* have given space to the Sikh perspective, while several Sikh media publications and channels are countering this silence over the events of 1984 in other circles.

Significantly, some of these channels were banned on 6 June. Even in 2015, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) government in Punjab, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ally, had requested New Delhi to ban "provocative" Sikh channels, websites and social media pages!

## The Importance of memorialisation and documentation

The initiatives of Sikh diasporic organisations and the Punjabi media to memorialise the events of 1984 and present the Sikh perspective are very important because for very long, most could not get over the trauma, while many who occupied government and military positions during the operation now have better visibility to put forward their views after retirement.

It would be fair to say that discussions on 1984 have not taken place within echo chambers. Individuals from different political persuasions have been given the opportunity to present their views. There has been an attempt by Punjabi media to interview senior politicians, bureaucrats, army officers, and journalists, some of whom had interviewed Bhindranwale himself.

Many Punjabi TV channels have been interviewing eyewitnesses and apart from the tragic events in the first week of June, have also got an opportunity to highlight some important events, which have so far not been given enough attention. While it is tough to express the overall damage caused by the attack, there are a few critical facts that have hardly gotten any mention in the national media and have received attention only as a result of Punjabi civil society and media narratives.

Firstly, few people know that apart from the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar, thirty-seven other Gurdwaras in the Punjab were simultaneously attacked, many of the assaults led by tanks of the Indian Army!

Second, in the mainstream media, the excesses committed on pilgrims who were found alive during and after the operation have never been given much attention. Ordinary people were treated like prisoners of war. According to the eyewitness account of one Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) member, as mentioned in '*Report to the Nation: Oppression in Punjab*': "They (the Army) treated the inmates of the Complex as enemies and whenever there was any person wounded on account of the





firing, no Red Cross persons were allowed to enter, rather they were also detained beyond the Jallianwalla Bagh (more than a kilometre away from the main entrance to the Golden Temple from the Chowk Ghanta Ghar side).”

Then at end of the Operation, over 375 men and women, trapped in the Golden Temple when the Indian Army entered on 6 June, were arrested and imprisoned in Jodhpur jail for many years and only released between 1989 and 1991.

But even more incriminating have been the claims made by Brahma Chellaney in his daring reports for the Associated Press after the Operation. According to him, ‘several’ young Sikhs had been shot point blank by security forces with their hands tied behind their backs. The report quoted medical sources who had conducted their postmortems.

Third, an even more tragic matter that followed *Operation Blue Star* was *Operation Woodrose*, in which the army launched a brutal campaign in Punjab’s countryside under the pretext of detaining suspected militants. Thousands of innocent Sikh youth, particularly *Amritdhari* Sikhs, were tortured and murdered. This has received scant attention in mainstream narratives, [even though an equivalent of nine Indian Army Divisions were employed for these Operations, more than those engaged during the 1971 Indo-Pak war in the West! This was inadvertently admitted much later by a Governor of the Punjab, himself a retired Indian Army Lt General: Ed.]

Fourth, during the Operation, the Sikh Reference Library within the Golden Temple Complex was burnt down and its contents lost or confiscated by the central agencies. Priceless Sikh

reference material, pictures and even handwritten manuscripts of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib perished, lost for all time.

Fifth, several army officers involved in the operation were given gallantry awards in 1985. This most insensitive decision drew widespread criticism from the Sikh community, and there are demands from Sikh politicians, such as S Tarlochan Singh and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, to withdraw the awards, considered as being reprehensible.

### Between closure and moving on

Memorialisation and documentation of the events of 1984 from a Sikh perspective become all the more important because even large sections of the “liberal” media either justify the military action or speak about “moving on” without any efforts towards reconciliation. A good example of this is this documentary by *BBC Hindi*, where there was no effort to give space to a Sikh perspective!

While there will never be any closure as far as *Operation Blue Star* is concerned, by and large the Sikh community has tried to move forward. There are also sections of the Indian civil society which have not just expressed solidarity with Sikhs, but have also played a role in keeping those memories alive.

However, and perhaps the best way forward today would be to set up a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which covers the painful period beginning 1984 and under which, the oral history of the events would be meticulously recorded using survivor accounts.

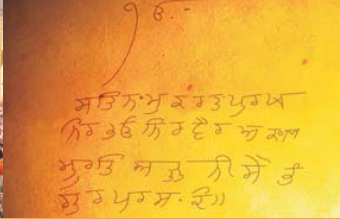
Without dialogue between individuals with different views, acknowledging the trauma of the Sikh community and moving away from the Indian state’s prism of looking at events, genuine reconciliation appears implausible in the near future.



### Tridivesh Singh Maini

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Commentator and Writer  
Assistant Professor, Jindal  
School of International  
Affairs, OP Jindal Global  
University, Sonapat.

*(All pictures from the  
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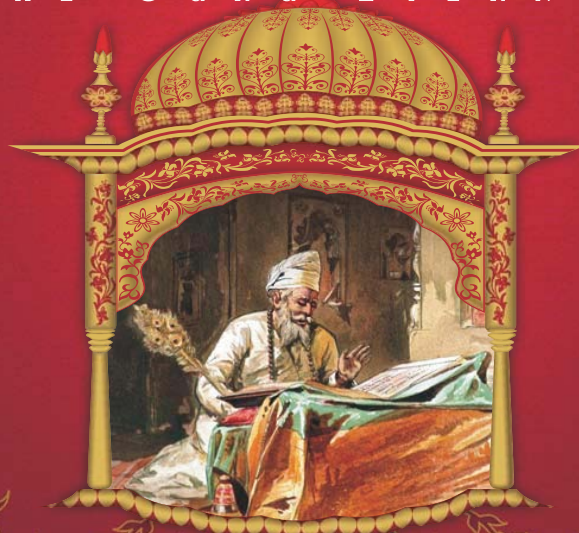


# ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ।।

*The Book is the Abode of God.*

# Guru Granth Sahib

THE GURU ETERNAL



With Message from Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India  
Dr. Mohinder Singh

Marking the tercentenary of the Gurgaddi Divas of Guru Granth Sahib in 2008, this volume was brought out to highlight distinctive features of the Sikh scripture.

This book features the history of the compilation of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Pictures of various Gurdwaras and ceremonies covered by India's leading photographers.

A photo montage on the morning and evening ceremony of the *Granth* at Harimandir Sahib.

A look at the world's smallest and biggest *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Important *Banis* of all the contributors to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, along with their translations.

Paintings contributed by the most renowned artists and other collections from around the world.

The first ever camera photograph of the Golden Temple by William Baker.

Glimpses of rare *Guru Granth Sahib Birs* from different repositories in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and U.K.

Pictures of *Mool Mantra* in the hand of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh in different rare *Birs*, *Hukamnamas* and relics of the Sikh Gurus.

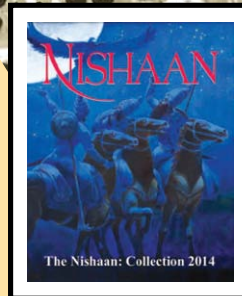
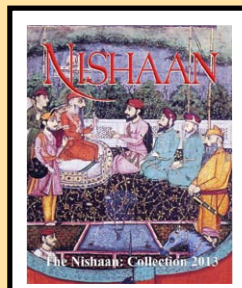
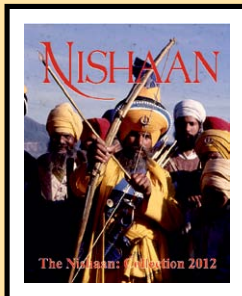
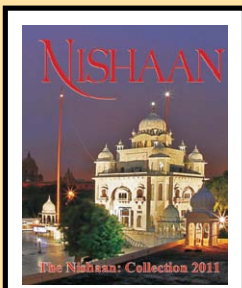
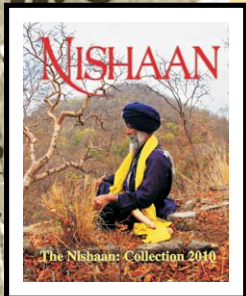
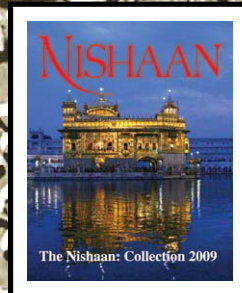
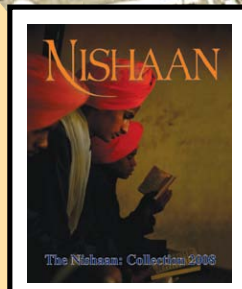
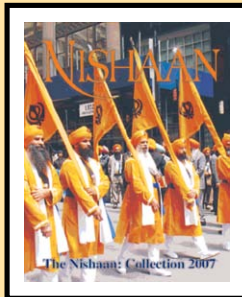
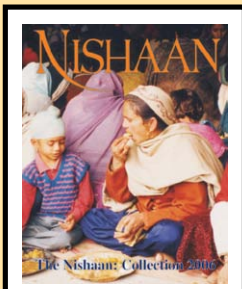
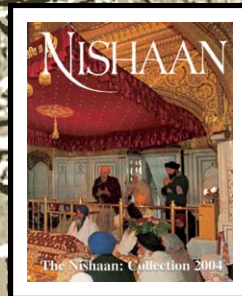
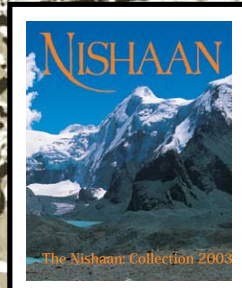
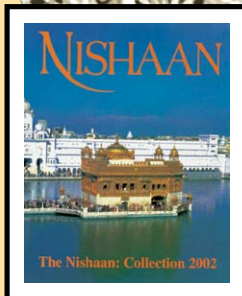
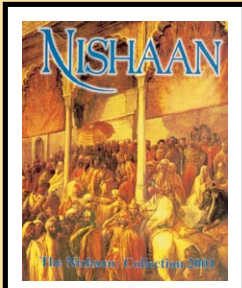
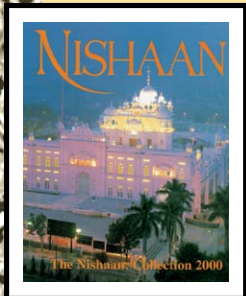


HIMALAYAN BOOKS

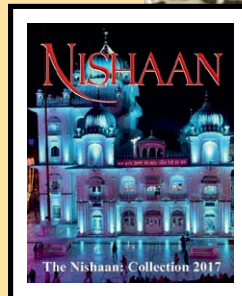
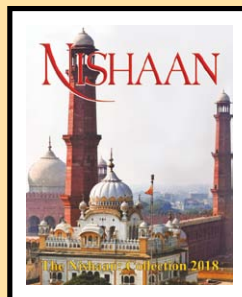
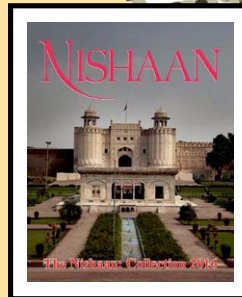
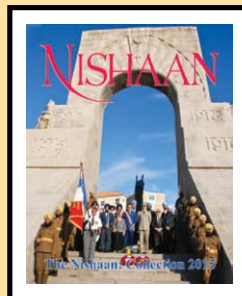
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