



Cover: Rani Jindan posed for this portrait by George Richmond, in London in 1863, shortly before her passing away.

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The Sikh Vision Of WOMANHOOD

Since we highlight in this issue the character and achievements of Sikh women of piety, faith and truth with a view to enfranchising the authenticity of the Sikh vision of ideal womanhood, it's necessary that we understand, first of all, their image in Sikh scriptures before we turn to history and story of their labours and service. Ideally, all women wherever they live, and whatever the period, have certain innate virtues which remain inviolate in given conditions. A woman *is* a woman *is* a woman – mother or sister or daughter – and her “milk of kindness” is not reserved; it's a natal endowment, and thus her largesse remains integral and *constitutive*. So, a Sikh woman *per se* is not unique to that extent. The lyric beauty and charm abide.

However, no human being, man or woman, is exempt from conditionalities and contingencies. The impress of society, of religion, of civilisation would always remain an ineluctable factor. Thus, when we talk of the ideal of Sikh womanhood, we have to link it to the influences that shaped it, above all.

In hymn after hymn in the *Guru Granth*, the woman is regarded as the force keeping the family and the community in moral health,

what with the magnanimities of her spirit, and the generousities of her impulse. Though nearly all the Gurus and saints whose poetry is enshrined in the scriptures apotheosise the woman's centrality but the richness of Guru Nanak's metaphors and images and their abundance in his *bani* are beyond comparison. The sublimity of his vision subsumes everything that constitutes the woman's essence. For one thing, the spousal or conjugal metaphor is an overarching metaphor in his compositions. And this poetic practice later becomes a settled idea in the songs of the Guru's successors. The young woman, always a bride, is shown waiting longingly for her spouse in separation. Clearly, the union or the consummation is a trope for man's union with the Lord. Thus, her position as consort becomes a mark of high distinction.

The morning service in Sikh *gurdwaras* always begins with Guru Nanak's celebrated *Asa-di-Var*, and among other things, it includes the following memorable lines about the woman as such:

*Bhand jammyae bhand nimmyae bhand mangan weeah,
Bhandoh hovai dosti bhandah challai rah,
Bhand moaa bhand bhalleea bhand hovai bandhaan
So kyon manda aakheee jit jammah rajaan.*

A reading of these trenchant lines is presented here:

Conceived by woman and thus born,
He later is betrothed and married to her.
Man seeks her as a friend to continue his
line.

When one woman dies, he brings another
to keep himself restrained.

Why, then, is she denigrated when she gives
birth the royal and the great?

Why Guru Nanak raises her to a high pedestal is rooted in the fact that the woman from Manu's days in particular became an inferior species in the eyes of the *brahmins*, and her denigration resulted, over the centuries, in a total extinction of her personality. The true Hindu saints and sages never indulged in cruel diatribes, and she became a victim of sexual politics and societal oppression. Guru Nanak, as we know, had come to repudiate sacerdotalism, fanaticism and caste-consciousness of the Hindu Establishment quite early in his missionary work. His world-view thus restored the honour which was her divine due. It's ironical, however, that the Hindu mythology in action as in *mandir pooja* is full of goddesses whose worship becomes a matter of daily routine. And till this day the Durga *pooja*, Mata Sheranwali, Vaishnodevi and other women symbolising *shakti*, *bhagati* and a benevolent force are deeply lodged in Hindu consciousness. The pilgrimages to their shrines continue to draw millions of singing devotees. Clearly, there's a distressing hiatus,

a dichotomy here, for in practice, or in daily life, the woman remains subservient, a tool for exploitation. And the awful, cynical institution of *sati* had not quite lost its hold on the mass mind in backward areas of India.

And, finally, I would like to say a few words on the ideal Sikh woman envisaged by Sikh bards, poets and fabulists in their work. Bhai Vir Singh's two romances in prose, *Sundari* and *Satwant Kaur*, and the woman protagonist of his monumental long poem (which bears a strong resemblance to Edmund Spenser's *The Fairy Queene*) constitute a long paean to the Guru-conscious Sikh woman. The widowed Rani in *Rana Surat Singh* whose quest reaches sublime heights represents the human strivings for a union with God. These are, to be sure, *literary* characters, but the idealised images are wholly in tune with the Sikh tenets, thought and edicts.

The woman's transforming effect and her sweet influence have been the theme of countless poems, novels, plays, paintings etc. I quote here the Indian novelist, Raja Rao, whose novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, is the best philosophical novel yet written by an Indian author:

"The truth is however, the woman's purity is her completeness. Make a woman totally a woman, and like Mary Magdalene, she becomes worthy of Christ himself" (in *The Chess-Master and His Moves*).

To All The Beautiful Sikh Women

Why are you crying?" a young naujawan asked his mother.

"Because I'm a woman" she told him.

"I don't understand," he said.

She just hugged him and said,

"And you never will"

Later the little boy asked his father,

"Why does mother seem to cry for no reason?"

"All women cry for no reason" was all his father could say

The little boy grew up and became a man, still wondering why women cry.

Finally he put in a call to WAHE GURU Ji;

When he got on the phone, the man asked

"O WAHE GURU Ji, why do women cry so easily?"

WAHE GURU said, "When I made woman I made her special.

I made her shoulders strong enough to carry the weight of the world;
yet, gentle enough to give comfort....

I gave her an inner strength to endure childbirth and the rejection that
many times comes from her children.....

I gave her a hardness that allows her to keep going when everyone gives
up and take care of her family through sickness and fatigue without
complaining.....

I gave her the sensitivity to love her children under any and all
circumstances,

even when her child treats her very badly.....

This same sensitivity helps her make a child's boo-boo feel better and
share in their teenagers anxieties and fears.....

I gave her strength to carry her husband through his faults and fashioned
her to protect his heart.

I gave her wisdom to know that a good husband never hurts his wife, but
sometimes tests her strengths and her resolve to stand beside him
unflinchingly.

I also gave her a tear to shed, it's hers exclusively to use whenever it is
needed.

It's not her weakness, it is her strength.....

It's a tear for mankind....."

The beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she
carries, or the way she combs her hair.

The beauty of a woman must be seen in her eyes, because that is the
doorway to her heart, the place where love resides.

The beauty of a woman is not in a facial mole, but true beauty in a woman
is reflected in her soul. It is the caring that she lovingly gives, the
passion that she shows and the beauty of a woman, with passing years,
only grows!

Womanhood is the strength of the Panth. She bears our future generations.

She nurtures them because she spends more time with the young.

She can help Sikhi to flourish or she can bring about its demise.

Sikhi is the future for mankind and 'she' is its most important tool for the
future.

Guru Nanak said so over 500 years ago.

Let us now practice giving women their rightful place in Sikhi.

Power to Sikh Womanhood into the next millennium.

Dya Singh
Australia



Sardarni Jagjit Kaur, Lahore 1932.

GURU - KE - MAHAL

The learned Sikh scholar Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha gives the following different meanings attributed to the word Mahal (ਮਹਲ)

- Place where one descends or lands, abode, place of stay.
- ਅੰਤਰਕਰਣ - innerself or conscience.
- Suitable time - ਯੋਗ ਸਮਾਂ
- Place - ਥਾਂ
- ਨਿਰਵਾਣ - Redemption - as in attainment of the Lord's abode.
- Persian 'Halool' - (ਹਲੂਲ) where upon the Guru descends to his successor - into whom the Guru merges. Thus Guru Nanak's successors are also called his 'ਮਹਲ'. Also used as prefix with a numeral to represent the different Guru's in the Adi Granth - ਮਹਲਾ ੧-੨ etc.
- Also used to mean the consort - ਦਿਸਤੀ

It is therefore no mere coincidence that whenever the spouses of the Gurus are referred to as *Guru ke Mahal* or *Guru Mahal*, all the above interpretations, meanings and connotations are decanted as the attributes of these noble and divine consorts of the Gurus, whose roles in the success of the mission of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh have yet to be fully realised.

In a society which was caste ridden to the core, where the woman's status was compared to a 'shudra' of Manu's precept, Guru Nanak fully restored her the dignity and status equal to the male when in *Asa-Di-Vaar*, in his inimitable way he says:

It is by woman, the condemned one, that we are conceived, and from her that we are born; it is with her that we are betrothed and married.

It is woman we befriend and she who keeps the race going.

When one woman dies, another is sought for; and it is with her that we get established in society.

Why should we call her evil from whom great men are born?

It is also from woman that woman are born: there is nobody who is not born of woman.

Nanak, only the one true God is independent of woman.

The contribution of Sikh women becomes obvious if one evaluates the characters and convictions of the Sikh children, youth and grown ups from the days of Bibi Nanaki's realisation of Divinity in Guru Nanak's person, through the ages to the times of Sikh women in Mir Manu's captivity, suffering tortures with the bodies, their

slaughtered young ones strung around their necks - yet unyielding in their faith in their Guru's way of life (Sikhi), reciting Bani and declaring:

ਮੰਨੁ ਅਸਾਫੀ ਦਾਤੀ ਅਸੀ ਮੰਨੁ ਸੋਏ

ਜਿਉ ਜਿਉ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਵਡਦਾ ਅਸੀ ਦੂਣ ਸਵਾਏ ਹੋਏ !

Imagine the disposition of the great Mata Gujari while in captivity with her young grandsons in Sirhind. The moral, spiritual, and psychological strength and support which she must have given to the Sahabzadas, lends divinity to such Guru Mahals. Similarly, but in another context, the call given by Mai Bhago to the 'Chaali Mukate' at what is now called Mukatsar, challenging their conscience to rise to their faith and shaming them for deserting their Guru in his hour of crisis, is an example of exemplary courage of conviction, confirming the exalted status Sikh women had achieved as early as the 18th century. The role required to be played by Sikh mothers in survival and sustenance of Sikh values in the present times cannot but be emphasized.

The leadership, direction and anchor provided to the Panth by Mata Sundariji after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh needs special attention.

The injunction for Sikh women to carry the suffix of 'Kaur' after their first names is symbolic and interpretive of what a woman's role in Sikh ethos is perceived as and consummate of the seven different expletives referred to in Bhai Kahn Singh's encyclopaedia.

Those great women who in destiny, were consorts of the ten Gurus, their *Mahals*, are

- Mata Sulakhani (Mahal; Guru Nanak Dev)
- Mata Khiwi (Mahal; Guru Angad Dev)
- Mata Mansa Devi (Mahal; Guru Amar Dass)
- Mata Bhani (Mahal; Guru Ram Dass)
- Mata Ganga (Mahal; Guru Arjun Dev)
- Mata Nanki (Mahal; Guru Har Gobind)
- Mata Damodri (Mahal; Guru Har Gobind)
- Mata Maha Devi (Mahal; Guru Har Gobind)
- Mata Kishan Kaur (Mahal; Guru Har Rai)
- Mata Gujri (Mahal; Guru Tegh Bahadur)
- Mata Sundri (Mahal; Guru Gobind Singh)
- Mata Jeeto (Mahal; Guru Gobind Singh)
- Mata Sahib Kaur (Mahal; Guru Gobind Singh)

Jap(u)ji:

Stanza XVI

Such men are approved as Representative Men and become master-spirits.

They get honour in the court of God,

And look beautiful in the councils of kings.

Their only guide in life is the constant thought of God.

In whatever they say they try to be reasonable.

They will know that there is no count of God's works.

The fabled Bull is really Law, born of Mercy,

Which in a spirit of harmony is supporting the whole system.

To justify oneself one must understand

How great is the load that the Bull must bear!

There are other worlds beside this earth, and beyond them still others;

And all this load on One Bull! What is the power that support the Bull itself?

The names of creatures of different species and colours

Have been recorded by an ever-flowing Pen.

Who can write the account of them?

And if written, how great must be the account!

How great His Power and His Beauty

And His Gifts! Who could know the measure thereof?

It was by that word that thousand of rivers began to flow.

What power have I to describe Thee?

I cannot even sufficiently admire Thee.

Whatever is pleasing upto Thee is the only good.

Thou alone endurest for ever, O Formless One.

Translated by Prof. Teja Singh

ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਣ ਪੰਚ ਪਰਧਾਨ

PANCH

the 'Spiritually Elect'

Having delineated the concepts of 'Hukam' (ਹੁਕਮ), 'Sunniaye' (ਸੁਨਿਆਏ) and 'Manai' (ਮਨੈ), the author now explains 'Panch' (ਪੰਚ) as enunciated in the sixteenth stanza (ਪਉੜੀ ੧੬) of Japji.

By moulding his life in accordance with the postulates of first fifteen stanzas, the individual achieves the status of a 'Panch' (ਪੰਚ) or a 'realised person' of character, a representative, a 'master spirit'.

In the first half of this stanza the attributes and concept of 'Panch' is enunciated. In the second half the characteristics and perceptions of a 'Panch' are brought out. Such persons perceive the Will of the Guru and are able to view everything around them in a larger context, where is functioning under His Will and His Consciousness and His Eternal Presence.

Panch is a term that signifies the 'spiritually elect'. The Aryans had the tradition of establishing, in each village, a committee of five men of acknowledged wisdom whose function was to adjudicate in all disputed issues that arose in that village. This committee was called *Panchayani*. Later, it came to be called *Panchayatan*, and later still, as *Panchayat*. Every member of such a committee was called a *panch*. As a matter of civil courtesy, every wise and virtuous person came to be given the consideration of a *panch*. In *gurbani*, a self realised individual with nobility of character, has been called a *panch*. Guru Nanak himself, in *Maru Solhe* employs metaphorically the connotation of the 'village elder' for the spiritual elect individual:

ਦੇਹੀ ਲਗਾਰੀ ਉਤਮ ਥਾਨਾ ।
ਪੰਚ ਲੋਕ ਵਸਹਿ ਪਰਧਾਨ ।
ਉਪਰਿ ਏਕੈਕਾਰ ਨਿਰਲਸਮ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਲਗਾਇਆ ।

ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: ੧

In the sublime place of the body village,
Dwell the supreme elect.
Absorbed in the Immaculate One Creator,
In primal *samadhi* they continually abide
- SGGS p.1039

Such individuals everywhere are accorded honour. They preside (ਪਰਧਾਨ) over people's hearts and provide counsel – social, moral as well as political. Such are the "chosen leaders of men" (Khushwant Singh: *Japji* p.17). Such elect ones are those approved unto Him, as well as honoured among their fellow men.

These are God's appointees, approved by Him, who have received the stamp of His Grace. Guru Nanak testifies this in his account of *Dharam Khand* when he says:

ਤਿਸੈ ਸੋਚਨਿ ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਣ ।
ਨਦਰੀ ਕਰਮਿ ਪਛੈ ਨੀਸਾਣੁ ।

ਜਪੁ ਪਉੜੀ ੨੪

There (in *Dharam Khand*) the approved elite
Shine in glory.

They receive the stamp of His approval
Through the gaze of His Grace.

SGGS p.7

Such righteous men, called *panch* in *Gurbani*, have been recognised in other religions as well. About them, a Jewish text says:

When the righteous man is in town,
He is its luster, its majesty, and its glory.
When he leaves it, its luster, its majesty
and its glory depart.
Judar – Midrash, Genesis, Rabbah 68.6

In Buddhism, they are called 'the virtuous' and about them it is said:

The perfume of flowers blows not against the wind
Nor does the fragrance of sandalwood, tagara and jasmine;
But the fragrance of the virtuous blows against the wind;
The virtuous man pervades every direction
-Dhammapada, 54

Such men have conquered their passions:

The earth is upheld by the veracity of such men – those
who have subdued their passions and, following righteous
practice, are never contaminated by desire, covetousness
and wrath.

-Vishnu Puran 3-12

It need be noted here that a *panch* is a graduate of
Dharam Khand and this *Khand* is only the first stage of
spiritual ascent. Hence he has passed just the primary
school of spirituality. Yet, even this is no small achievement.
He has surrendered before the Will of God (ਗੁਰਮ ਰਜਾਈ
ਚਲਣਾ), wishes ever to practice His Presence (ਸਿਮੈਵਿਸਰਨਜਾਈ),
hears His Name (ਸੁਣਿਐ), and has faith (ਮੰਨੈ). However, each
one of these practices, carried out with perseverance, can
lead to higher spiritual states. For example, it is said:

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਮੰਨਿਐ ਹੋਵੈ ਪਰਵਾਨੁ ਤਾ ਖਸਮੈ ਕਾ ਮਹਲੁ ਪਾਇਸੀ ।
ਅਸਾ ਦੀ ਵਾਰ ਮ:੧

Obeying His Will, one becomes approved,
And attains Divine Mansion
SGGS p.471

ਚੀਤਿ ਆਵੈ ਤਾਂ ਸਹਜ ਘਰੁ ਪਾਇਆ ।
ਚੀਤਿ ਆਵੈ ਤਾਂ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਇਆ ।
ਭੈਰਉ ਮ: ੫

When He comes to one's mind, one finds the home of peace.
When He comes to one's mind, one is absorbed
in the Primal Void.
SGGS p.1141

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸਰਾ ਗੁਣਾ ਕੇ ਗਾਥ ।
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸੇਖ ਪੀਰ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹ ।
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਅਧਿ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਰਾਹੁ ।
ਸੁਣਿਐ ਹਾਥ ਹੋਵੈ ਅਸਗਾਥੁ ।

ਜਪੁ

Where royalty and holiness meet,
Listening, the blind discern the way.
Fathomless oceans are fordable made.

- SGGS p.3

ਮੰਨੈ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਮੋਖੁ ਦੁਆਰੁ ।
ਮੰਨੈ ਪਰਵਾਰੈ ਸਾਧਾਰ ।

ਜਪੁ

Men of faith themselves liberate.
And their kith and kin salvage.

- SGGS p.3

The *panch*, however, has passed the first threshold of
his spiritual undertaking and even that earns him approval.
He now qualifies to be a disciple and not just a student.
His curiosity has ripened into discipline. His doubts
subside. He is no longer responsive only to what the Master
actually utters, he begins to empathise even with his silence.
He senses what is left unsaid between the words, and
between the sentences. He is not just learning. He is
absorbing – unconsciously and effortlessly. Progressing on
the path, the disciple becomes the devotee. He is now in
love with the Master. He also receives reciprocal love, which
is out of proportion to the love he has for the Master. Bhai
Gurdas assures us of that:

ਚਰਨ ਸਰਨ ਗੁਰੁ ਦੇਖ ਪੈਡਾ ਜਾਇ ਚਲਿ
ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਕੋਟ ਪੈਡਾ ਆਗੇ ਹੋਇ ਲੋਭ ਹੈ ।

Move but one step to seek the Guru's shelter.
The True Guru will come forward a million
steps to receive you.

- Bhai Gurdas Kabit

Thus, there is assured progress and step by step the
panch, i.e. the disciple-devotee, comes to be in tune with
the Guru.

We may now dwell upon the first four lines of the XVI
stanza of Jap(u)ji Sahib that defines for us progress that a
panch makes.

ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਣ ਪੰਚ ਪਰਧਾਨੁ ।
ਪੰਚੇ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਦਰਗਹਿ ਮਾਨੁ ।
ਪੰਚੇ ਸੋਹਹਿ ਦਰ ਰਜਾਨੁ ।
ਪੰਚਾ ਕਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਦੇਖ ਧਿਆਨੁ ।

ਜਪੁ

The Lord's elect, pre-eminent kind,
Honoured are at the Court Divine,
And they beam at His Royal Gate
Single-pointed they mediate.

SGGS p.3

In fact, each line, each phrase, lends itself to various shades and elaborations of meanings:

ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਨ means 'The *panch* is the one approved (by God).' He it is who receives the stamp of Divine Grace—ਨਦਰੀ ਕਰਮਿ ਪਰੇ ਨੀਸਾਣ ।

ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਨੁ signifies 'The *panch* are pre-eminent among men', the superior, the distinguished, the elite.

ਪੰਚੇ ਪਵਹਿ ਦਰਗਹਿ ਮਾਨੁ has been translated as 'They are honoured at God's Court', 'they receive a place of pride in the Divine Court', 'they are accorded recognition at the Divine Court' and so on.

ਪੰਚੇ ਸੋਹਹਿ ਦਰ ਰਾਜਾਨੁ has caused some problem. Some eminent scholars** have translated ਦਰ ਰਾਜਾਨੁ as 'the door (or court) of (worldly) princes'. However, a *panch* never craves for recognition by worldly princes. Bhai Vir Singh splits ਰਾਜਾਨੁ into ਰਾਜਾ + ਆਨੁ = like princes, and the meaning he derives is 'At the Portal (of the Divine Court) they are received as princes'. In Gurbani, a *panch* is revered far above the worldly princes. One is reminded here also of the Chinese Book of Songs that says

He makes no show of his moral worth
Yet all the princes follow in his steps.

Gurbani considers worldly empires as false stuff.

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਰਿ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀਆ ਕੁੜੀਆ ਨਾਮਿ ਰਖੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ।

ਸਲੋਕ ਮ: ੨

Nanak, false are other empires

Those alone are the true kings

Who are imbued with the Lord's Name

- SGGS p 1413

The term ਰਾਜਾਨ (rajaan) refers here to 'the King of Kings', 'the True King' (*Sachcha Patishah*). The term *Sachcha Patishah* is also employed in relation to the Guru. Bhai Gurdas says:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਚਾ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਹੋਰ ਭੂਣੇ ਸਾਹ ਦੁਨੀਆਵੇ ।

The True Guru is the real king, the worldly
princes are but counterfeit.

- Kabir

Hence, this line can signify that the *panch*, the morally elite, are honoured at the portal of the Satguru, in his court, in ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ, that is the holy congregation.

ਪੰਚਾ ਕਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਧਿਆਨ suggests a number connotations:
i) Meditating the holy name, the consciousness of the *panch* becomes single-pointedly fixed on the Guru. ii) Single-mindedly the *panch* contemplates on God. iii) The *panch* has the same wave length of attentivity as the Guru.

All the connotations, it can be appreciated, are inter se complementary. There is hardly any irreconcilable contradiction between them.

Guru Nanak Dev, in another place, characterises the *panch* as:

ਹਸਿ ਰਸਿਆ ਮਤਿ ਏਕੈ ਤਾਇ ।

ਭਖਤ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ਪੰਚ ਸਮਾਇ ।

ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਈ ਖਸਮ ਰਜਾਇ ।

ਅਸਾ ਮ: ੧ ਅਸਟਪਦੀਆ

Drenched is he in the delight of the Lord's love.
He, the *panch* merges with the Lord of the High throne.
His actions are performed in obedience
to the Will of his Lord.

- SGGS p.411

Obedience to God's Will is the hall mark of the life of the *panch*. When his surrender is complete, and his ego vanished, he dies while still alive. Bhakta Kabir says:

ਜੋ ਜੀਵਨ ਮਰਲਾ ਜਾਨੈ ।

ਸੋ ਪੰਚ ਸੈਲ ਸੁਖ ਮਾਨੈ

ਸੋਰਠ ਕਾਬੀਰ ਦੀ

He who knows how to be dead while still alive
Such a *panch* enjoys solid peace.

- SGGS p.655

When he becomes one with God, he is sanctified. About such a one, a famous Hadith says:

(He) does not come to approach Me (God) with acts of personal devotion until I love him, and when I love him I become the Hearing with which he hears, the Sight with which he sees, the Hand with which he grasps, and the Foot with which he walks.

Then on, even when he knows less, he is more. He has grown deep roots. He soars on strong wings. He has expanded beyond himself. He has found real freedom through surrender – for surrender is not a type of slavery; it is the doorway to real, authentic freedom, freedom from the ego.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

** such as Bhai Jodh Singh, Dr Sahib Singh, Dr Sher Singh

WOMAN

THE SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE

Next to *bread*, the essential man is centred in his divine love for *woman*. His sexless passion also has *woman* as its *terra firma*. All his glorious hopes and aspirations are bees humming round this flower—*woman*. The Home of Love revolves round her, as a dream beauty. In a great and cultured world, the honour for woman must needs be infinite. I do not think that the ideal honour for woman is as yet in sight. As George Meredith puts in the mouth of Bis Diana of the Crossways, "Men may have rounded *Seraglio Point*, they have not yet doubled *Cape Turk*."

Woman shall be the second best God or the God of the intellectuals on earth. She shall be absolutely free. And it is out of her freedom that we shall yet win new ideals of Home and Art. I tell you as a beloved slave of man she has contributed a major portion of the whole of his culture and civilization. The slavery of woman to man is due to man largely but essentially to the woman herself. Only in motherhood does she become free. A divine sovereignty is then conferred on her. Her intuitive omniscience is more developed than man's. Her spirit of self-sacrifice is real and man's is more or less dramatic and unreal.

The whole of the *Guru Grantha* is the voice of a wedded woman or a maiden pining in love of the Beautiful. Her nobleness in the *Guru Grantha* is infinite, her freedom is of

the highest. Both man and woman as sexes are forgotten in her voice. She becomes the Supreme Reality and a freed Soul. In the freed soul alone is the subordination of one to the other effectively abolished and all disputes hushed.

As Bolshevism is in modern politics so is the modern women's movement in the sphere of woman; both are protests. There is something rotten in the systems of our marriages and social inequalities and the protest is to bring better culture. Much is frivolous futility in such ill-balanced movements. But the balance shall tremble again and woman shall find her real spiritual worth in herself. So far she is still a toy-like thing. In her imagined freedom what is she doing? Aping man. Man himself is yet in his swaddling clothes. Let us look at the modern woman a little and compare that old and this new. She has certainly lost her beauty and has not yet gained her soul. When in that old superb figure of hers the Christ-Braids fell all about her swanlike neck, her face shone in this world like the moon in black clouds. Even that

so-called savage Afridi of the Indian Frontier was moved to sing of "the *bazaar* of the tresses of my Beloved", and in passionate worship of her the most brutal of men found some kind of cultural atmosphere. It was the culture of total self-sacrifice for her sake. In her worship too is all patriotism, honour of a race, war and defence of home and



Young Sikh Woman: in love of the Beautiful.

hearth. What would freedom itself be if man were devoid of woman worship? One wonders what is woman. Man called her wife, but she stood as his daughter before him and she made a Buddha of her father. She was always a mystery to the human race. Her tresses suggested a secret, her eyes that loved made it deeper. The virgin was desired by the young man, he fell worshipping before her, she was the mother and he the son. Her clothes were a Universe in themselves and her soul was sought after from eternity to eternity. It was hidden in the fold of her clothes, it was fluttering of someone's heart in the flapping of her veil-cloth. The national flags are dim shadows of the veil-cloth that flies, as the sister of the nation runs appealing to man—"up and fight, for I am in danger." The other day the eastern wind was flaunting a sun-lit cloud before my eyes. I thought it was the veil-cloth of my mother, and I stood up thinking my mother had come back from the dead. I shed a tear and the sun went past me. The woman's forehead we have for centuries contemplated as our sky aglow with the calm sparkle of the moon. Poets sang and husbands and fathers and all poets in action in this living love of woman, died serving her and her children. The mother mysterious, so noble, divine, so full of love that she drew the whole-souled devotion of humane men for centuries and was still a mystery. She was as mysterious as Nature. A literature was born, an art became alive, a history was made glorious in the defence of her honour and pride. Woman was still a mystery. And for ever concealed was her face in the night of her hair, in the mystery of her clothes, in the appeal of her eyes and in the music of her voice and she was revealed partly to man in her acts of faith, love and noble self-sacrifice. She wore the cross of the whole family as did Jesus, but started no Christianity. Every woman is the Messiah. Her daily life in the service of man gave us the songs of her beautiful soul as the shifting colours of the sky and the changing lines of Nature tell us of Nature's inner person. Woman was thus the inspiration for all the heroic efforts of man to make himself man. Woman is responsible for all his best longings for immortality, for all his religions, for all his arts, and for all his noble wingings above earth and sky. And when I contemplate the modern type of woman that has denuded her head of hair and her limbs of the mystery of clothes and when she has not, by throwing all these cumbersome veils aside, revealed her soul to us, I fall dead with despair—whither is she going? The world has become emptied of human beauty. I wanted to cling to her soul, the immortal portion of her, and she wishes me to cling to her flesh and bone which is precious only because

of her great soul. Otherwise all is mutton, mere mutton. None need quarrel with her experiments with herself. Of course she is absolutely free to do as she chooses, but we are concerned in the decoration of the Temple of flesh where we have worshipped for so many centuries and poured out our soul. And when someone asked me what is the ideal of modern art. I replied "speed". Get into a motor car, free of all encumbrances. Speed! More speed! Bang! Dash against the mountain! And to pieces! There lie the mutton pieces! The end! Discovered! Man a corpse! Woman a corpse! To come to such a discovery is the suicide of all civilization.

In this too, the Guru leads the ideas of the coming world. If Sikhs of today there are who veil their women and enslave them, they are not of the Gurus. The third Guru while giving audience to a Hindu Queen of Mandi when she came all veiled to Him said, "You O mad woman, have come to see the Guru and you cover your face from Him." How can those who call themselves His disciples tolerate anything infringing the absolute freedom of woman. On the other hand, those who free her and ape the Western fashions remind one, as Marie Corelli graphically puts it, "of the poultry yard." That is certainly worse than nursing a peculiar type of womanhood of noble self-restraint behind the oriental veils. Veils often symbolise the beauty and mystery of the concealed and the veiled is more sacred than the unveiled. But if veils accentuate this sex difference or unveiling does the same, both are unholy. Only when man and woman both live above body and mind as freed souls, they represent the culture of live freedom. Live freedom is freed also of sex differences. Stupid, indeed, are those sects who wish to get rid of woman as an obstacle to spiritual progress. Woman is the greatest and truest aid to the maintenance of the true spiritual attitude. Woman's soul crying to the soul of man is the only divine lyric trembling like the music of the Infinite and the Eternal. Man's self-transcendence is as much of him, as his physical indulgence, as his intellectual aestheticism. He is a spirit. It is when the spirit of the Holy Ghost fills him, and his body and *bread*, his intellect and his woman are suffused with his discovery of the personal God in man and Nature that man, the artist becomes himself the highest Art—the expression of the mystery of life. The true artist is the best art, the best culture, the best literature and the best religion.

Prof. Puran Singh
From: *The Spirit Born People*

SIKHS and

The Rights of Women

"Of woman are we born, of woman conceived, to woman engaged, to woman married. Woman we befriend, by woman is civilization continued.... And without woman none would exist."

But the status of women in India leaves a lot to be desired. They continue to be abused, exploited and subjugated. As in other things in India, paradoxes exist here as well: on the one hand a woman can hold the highest political office, on the other she continues to be burnt with impunity for dowry. Not that social reform movements during the 19th and 20th centuries have not tried to improve the lot of women in India, but success has been limited. Indian society still continues to consign women to a subordinate position vis-a-vis men. This, as the world has entered a new millennium! And Sikhism was the first among all major faiths to accord women equal rights.

Only against this backdrop can the significance of this fact be wholly appreciated: that the Sikh Gurus accorded women complete equality with men in all spheres of life over five centuries ago. To Guru Nanak (1469-1569) the founder of Sikh religion and the first of the ten Gurus or "teachers," the inferior position of women in the 15th century was unacceptable. This however was the case with women all over – not only in Brahmanical India but in the Christian and Islamic worlds as well.

In India the condition of women during the medieval period was pitiable. A woman was equated with a shoe: to be discarded and changed at will. The root of all evil and of doubtful intelligence. An ideal woman had to be a door mat, confined to the house and totally subservient to the will of her "master". She was considered a man's slave and, supposedly, the cause of his moral degradation. Society suppressed women with impunity; widow remarriage was unheard of and widowhood a curse. So miserable was the plight of widows, they preferred to commit *Sati*, (self immolation on their husband's funeral pyre) rather than face the innumerable indignities society heaped upon them.

Muslim invaders who came to India treated women no better. They were carried away to be either kept in the harem or sold as slaves. The Islamic *Shariat* sanctioned the *purdah* (veil) and polygamy. It equated the evidence of two women with that of one man. The *Shariat* also prescribed a very simple procedure for divorcing a woman, one which neither recognised a woman's rights nor her dignity.

According to the Brahmanical treatise, *Manusmriti*, education and such other rights were the exclusive prerogative of the high caste, or twice-born men. *Shudras* (the low caste) and women were denied access to education, learning or religious experiences. They had to occupy the lowest strata in society. A woman was not recognised as an individual entity. She had to be dependent upon a male family member at each stage of her life: upon her father during childhood, her husband after marriage, on her son in old age. Always a slave, at the mercy of others for each segment of her existence.

Gautam Buddha too restricted the entry of women to the Buddhist Sangha and the few women who became *Bhikshus* (monks) at that time were considered inferior to male *Bhikshus*. Jainism maintained that women lacked the requisite qualities to attain "moksha" or salvation. Many religious and literary commentaries testify to the prejudices prevailing against women. Tulsidas, a medieval Indian poet and writer, categorised women with cattle, *shudras* and other "dregs" of society. Brahmanical Hinduism denied women the right to read the Vedas and highlighted their inferiority in every sphere. Women were debarred from taking an active

part in religious affairs. Even enlightened religious reformers like Kabir were contemptuous towards women and never tired of underestimating their capabilities. A woman was considered a hindrance for men aspiring to salvation or communion with God.

Nor did Christianity accord equality to women. They got the right to property only in 1882, the right to vote in 1918, and till today women cannot become Bishops of the Church of England. The Women's Liberation Movement was launched officially in the West by Elizabeth Candy Stanton at Seneca Falls, a quiet village near New York as late as 1848 and women had to assert themselves forcefully to get their voices heard. They had to fight every inch of the way to gain even the slightest concession from a male dominated society. Even western philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle were not free from bias in their treatment of women. For Socrates "the courage of a man and that of a woman are not the same. The courage of a man is shown in commanding, and that of a woman in obeying," the implication being that ideally a woman had to be subservient to man.

Aristotle went a step further. "Woman is an unfinished man left standing at a lower step in the scale of development. The male is by nature superior and female inferior. The one is the ruler and the other ruled. Woman is weak of will and, therefore, incapable of independence of character and position."

In striking contrast the Sikh Gurus were refreshingly liberal in their thinking, especially in their attitude to women. To the Gurus a vibrant, progressive society was one where there was no discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and sex. Women had a distinct personality and a significant role to play in society. Far from being perceived as a threat to men the two were complementary to one another. Sikh scriptures categorically state that man and woman together make society a composite and well balanced whole. Sikhism encourages women to be bold and fearless because if they are weak, men will be tempted to exploit them. There is no need for women to be aggressive either. As multifaceted and multidimensional personalities they had to cultivate with pride in themselves qualities like patience, love and the spirit of self-sacrifice—something which all Sikhs whether men or women are expected to have.

The Gurus considered a woman's place in society a true barometer by which to measure whether a culture or civilisation is genuinely progressive. Or, was its progressiveness a mere facade?

Guru Nanak made Sikhism conform to enlightened humanism. He gave a lot of thought to this and was compassionate to the problems of women as is reflected in several passages of the sacred text in the Guru Granth Sahib:

All who live are born of a woman,

It is by woman that order is maintained

Then why call her evil from whom great men are born,

And without woman none could exist.

(Guru Granth Sahib, p.473)

This line of thinking was revolutionary and far ahead of the times. In recognising the superior spiritual and philosophical attributes of women, Guru Nanak emphasised that a happy family was the basis of a strong, enlightened, progressive society and state. And a happy family according to the founder of Sikhism was only possible when women were given respect, helped to live with dignity, and participated actively in all social, cultural and religious affairs alongside men. Guru Nanak rejected the prevalent idea of the time that women were the cause of all "evil", were "unclean" or mere "objects of

lust", to be treated in any manner men considered fit. He, on the contrary, put women on par with men and underscored the fact that since a woman's intellect was in no way inferior to a man's and she was capable of deep insights and understanding of spiritual matters, she was an important link in the achievement of salvation by man.

A woman could certainly attain *Moksha* (salvation) through good deeds. According to Bhai Gurdas, a learned poet who enjoyed the patronage of Guru Arjan Dev the fifth Guru "woman is one half of the complete personality of man and is entitled to share secular and spiritual knowledge equally."

A perfect example was Bibi Nanaki, the elder sister of Guru Nanak to whom he was especially close. He saw her as his inspiration and she admired her brother's bent of mind. Because of her encouragement in his life's mission

*They are not said to be
husband and wife who
merely sit together.*

*Rather, only they are
called husband and wife
who have one soul
in two bodies.*

Subi M. 3. Vaar
SGGS 788

and her faith in his ideology, Nanaki became the first person to be initiated into the Sikh fold by him.

An important woman who stands out in the early Guru period was Bibi Amro, daughter of the second Guru, Guru Angad. Born in 1532 at village Khadur in Amritsar district, she received her early education from her parents, Guru Angad and Mata Khivi. She not only mastered the Gurumukhi script, she understood the true meaning of the *shabads* (hymns) composed by Guru Nanak as well. She sang them in her resonant voice and even after marriage was encouraged to continue with her work of spreading the message of Guru Nanak's Sikhism through *kirtan*, the term for the singing of *shabads*. She was married to Bhai Jasoo, a nephew of Guru Amar Das. In fact, Guru Amar Das gave up the worship of Devi (the Hindu Mother Goddess) and was drawn into the Sikh panth in a large part as a result of listening to Bibi Amro's *kirtan* and her influence.

Right from its inception Sikhism emerged as a simple, practical, egalitarian and progressive religion. Asceticism and renunciation were considered artificial and unnatural and entirely unnecessary. Given God's ordained plan for the universe, marriage was seen as a sacred institution, a bond between two equal partners, not merely a physical union of two individuals. It was seen as a means of strengthening the social structure. Guru Nanak said that "living within family life, one obtains salvation." (Guru Granth Sahib p.661). A strict moral code of conduct was prescribed for men and women in Sikhism where the duties of both husband and wife towards each other were defined.

The ideals of Guru Nanak were consolidated and given a practical shape by Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), the third Sikh Guru. He was a great champion of women's rights who based his concepts on complete gender equality and specified norms for ameliorating the status of women in medieval India.

Guru Amar Das condemned the evil practices of female infanticide, *purdah* (the veil), and the barbaric act of *sati* (self immolation by widows on their husband's funeral pyres), which plagued Indian society. To eradicate these callous practices Guru Amar Das even sought the help of the Mughal Emperor Akbar and requested him to issue a directive banning them.

He encouraged women not to succumb to social pressures by committing *sati* and to face with confidence life's challenges with a positive outlook and dignity, even though widowed. He also championed the cause of widow remarriage and also advocated monogamy.

The institution of *Guru Ka Langar* or the community meal, was given a lot of importance by him.

Every visitor was invited to eat food in the *langar* before meeting the Guru. This was not only a way of extending open house hospitality, but also a way of emphasising a deep commitment to the concept of equality. Men and women sat side by side and ate together food prepared by themselves in a common kitchen irrespective of religious background, social status, and whether of higher or lower caste. Even Emperor Akbar who once visited the Guru at Goindwal ate in the *langar* like any other pilgrim.



Mother and son at the Gurdwara: strength of the panth.

Guru Amar Das stopped the wearing of *purdah* (the veil) by women, and did not allow the queen of Haripur to sit in the *sangat* (congregation) if she insisted on wearing one. He stopped contemptuous references to women as mere child-bearing machines seeing their ability to bear children as a gift bestowed on her by the Creator. "Blessed is the woman who creates life," he wrote, in the Granth Sahib.

During his pontificate he took steps to ensure women had opportunities to lead more meaningful lives which did not confine them to the house but enabled them to actively participate in the Sikhs' social and religious affairs. For the propagation of the faith's ideology, he created twenty-two administrative units called *manjis* or parishes. Of these four were headed by women which was unheard of in those times. In status these four women were equal to modern Bishops because each enjoyed full economic and decision making powers within her parish or *manji*. Thus Sikhism had four women Bishops in the late 16th century - a truly remarkable feat since no other religion could stake such a claim.

The Guru also trained 146 persons as missionaries to preach and carry the message of Guru Nanak to the masses. Of these missionaries, 52 were women. Besides religious instruction, women missionaries educated rural people, especially women, in the basic elements of reading, writing and arithmetic. The work and ideas of Guru Amar Das were remarkable given the prevailing conservative and archaic social climate.

When Guru Gobind Singh created the *Khalsa* on the Baisakhi day of 1699, women were also baptised and initiated into the *Khalsa* fold without discrimination. Mata Sundri, wife of Guru Gobind Singh prepared *Amrit* added *Patasa* (sugar crystals) to the *Amrit* prepared for the first time. It was a high and rare honour extended to her since in other religious beliefs the association of women in ecclesiastical affairs was viewed with disfavour if not hostility by religious establishments.

Both men and women, it was stipulated, had to honour and maintain the five K's (symbols) of Sikhism. Further, at the time of taking *Amrit* a man was given the name "Singh" (lion) and women "Kaur" (princess) to their names. The

suffix "Kaur" is of profound significance since it recognised a woman as an individual who did not have to take her husband's name after marriage. She could use the word "Kaur" after her name from birth to death. According to the *Mahankoshi* (p.353) of Bhai Kahn Singh, an encyclopaedic work prepared in 1926, the word "Kaur" is derived from the word "Kanwar" - the son of a king. His explanation is of immense symbolic significance, which is just the way the Gurus wanted it.

Women were accorded equality not only in social and religious affairs but in matters of war and peace as well including leading an army into battle against aggressors. This gave women in Sikhism a sense of selfworth imbuing them with enormous selfconfidence.

Mata Sundri, the widow of Guru Gobind Singh successfully guided the destiny of Sikhs for forty years after demise of the Guru at a very critical stage in Indian history. She issued *Hukamnamas* (decrees) to the *Khalsa* giving them directions at crucial periods in their history. Four *Hukamnamas* of Mata Sundari to the *sangat* of Sri Patna Sahib are preserved at Gurdwara Sri Harmandar Sahib, Patna.

During the Governorship of Mir Mannu (1748-53) in Punjab when he tried the most brutal means to persecute the Sikhs,

women did not hesitate to fight alongside men, bearing the brunt of Afghan hostilities even as those captured were tortured inhumanly in Lahore jail. Their faith remained unshaken when their children were speared alive and they were made to wear wreaths around their necks woven from the flesh of their slain ones.

Various Sikh women distinguished themselves in the art of statecraft as diplomats, regents, administrators and political leaders during the *misal* period. One such woman was Rani Sada Kaur, mother-in-law of Ranjit Singh, who figured prominently in Punjab politics during the early years of Ranjit Singh's rise. She was of significant help in many of military successes through diplomacy and bold strategic planning. A remarkable woman in the history of the Punjab, she was described as the "ladder by which Ranjit Singh climbed to greatness in his early years." She

*In Savan, bloom my mind,
for the clouds have burst, and the
monsoon season has arrived.
My mind and body yearn but my
Lover is far away in foreign
landsNanak says, the bride is
truly wed when she is embraced
by her Beloved.*

*Barah Mah,
Guru Granth Sahib*

accompanied him on his triumphant capture of Lahore in 1799 and prompted Ranjit Singh to proclaim himself the Maharaja of Punjab.

The house of Patiala too produced some exceptional ladies during the eighteenth century. The most celebrated of them was Rani Sahib Kaur who personally led her forces into battle and defeated the Maratha Holkar in 1793. Another noteworthy person was Rani Fateh Kaur, wife of Raja Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala State. Raja Ala Singh owed much of his success to his wife's diplomatic skills.



A rich legacy: young sikh girl looks to the future.

Sikh women played a prominent role in India's independence movement during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some outstanding women freedom fighters of the Punjab were Gulab Kaur, Kishan Kaur, Amar Kaur, Harnam Kaur and Dalip Kaur. Amar Kaur was an active member of the Inqalabi Party, and took part in the conspiracy for the release of Shaheed Bhagat Singh from jail. She also joined the "Quit India" movement and was arrested on 19 November 1945 and convicted to nine months

imprisonment. Harnam Kaur participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the Praja Mandal Movement in 1932 and 1933. In 1942 she was imprisoned for her role in the "Quit India" Movement.

Contemporary Sikh women are making a mark all over the world as academicians, administrators, entrepreneurs, politicians, doctors, poets and painters.

An important aspect of the rights conferred on women in the Sikh faith was that they did not have to fight for their rightful place in Sikh society: they were given their due voluntarily because of the enlightened ideals of the Gurus.

Absolute equality, however, still eludes Sikh women. Some prejudices still keep resurfacing owing to the patriarchal family system. The British did not help matters either by viewing Sikhs as a part of the Hindu fold since Sikhs had to conform to Hindu personal law. As neither Hinduism nor Islam grants equality to their women, the malaise inevitably crept into Sikh society as well in certain subtle ways. Laws pertaining to inheritance are hopelessly inadequate and seldom implemented. In rural areas outdated traditions are still adhered to and women are denied the right to own agricultural land and other property in their name.

But there is little reason to despair. With their rich legacy backing them, Sikh women are capable of overcoming these obstacles. This does not call for a violent revolution but a keen reappraisal of the present situation, some enlightened thinking and determined action. There is no reason why a movement for women's empowerment cannot elicit a positive response from the religious and political leaders of the community. The leaders must be made to submit to the demands of such a movement.

Dr. Harinder Kaur Sekhon

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PURE Longing



Harimandir Sahib longs for the touch of Thy mothers,
Thy sisters, daughters, and all the others,
Who bow each day to Siri Guru Granth,
Following the path of the Khalsa Panth,
Who enter freely through all four doors,
Except when it is time to clean the floors.

In those holiest hours when it is such
A beautiful time to serve and touch
The marble where the saints have walked,
Why must those gilded doors be locked
To women alone, the Guru's daughters,
Cleansed by Thy Word and Thy Holy Waters?

The women of Bibi Bhani's line,
And those descended from Mata Sahib Kaur's time,
Gather as one to utter this prayer:
"O compassionate Guru of infinite care,
Let all Sikhs enact this holy rite,
As all are immaculate in Thy sight."

Answering The Guru's Call

From the Head Jathedar had come the call,
For women to wash the floors
Of the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar,
The Golden Temple, whose four doors
Face the four corners of the world,
As open as heaven's gate,
Except in the earliest hours of the morn,
When women are made to wait
Outside while men alone clean the dust
Left by the holy saint's feet.
Yet now, his call had come to us,
This sacred rite to complete.

From the West, we made the trip
To the holy nectar tank.
Bowed our heads, took a sip and a dip
And humbly gave our thanks
For this chance to honour the God in all,
Regardless of race, gender, or caste.
By answering the Jathedar's call
We truly felt that at last
Women would be honoured as in Nanak's song
Of Bandh Jameesai,
And she who had been separated for so long
Would be bathed in the Guru's ray.

Fireworks burst over the water that night,
During the reading of Kirtan Sohila,
In honour of this, the very first time
That women would perform this seva.
And so with hearts glad and spirits high,
We dressed in our best for the occasion.
Walking down from the Nivas, we felt we could fly,
No doubt, no hesitation
Entered our minds as we bowed our foreheads



And welcomed the cool marble's kiss.
We felt that the hand of destiny had led
Us to this experience of bliss.

The Jathedar met us before the closed gates
Shortly past the hour of midnight.
We sat down with the other women to wait
Across from the men who had come that night
To wash the floors with milk and water
Making the Temple new again,
To once more embrace the Guru's sons and daughters
Freeing them from their pain.
Yet, this was to be a night unlike any other
For hundreds of years before,
Instead of men seeing only their brothers,
Women had come to wash the floors.

Our actions were taken as a threat
To all of the men sitting there.
Instead of with love, our gestures were met
With cold and hostile stares.
One by one, they arose and gathered aside
In a tight and angry knot
Over by the right-hand nishaan sahib.
All was well, we thought
Because we were with the jathedar
Who surely would be treated with respect.

Yet even this courageous sevadar
Was unprepared for what happened next.

With loud and angry shouting voices
The mob burst like a dam,
Surrounding us in a sea of chaos
So it seemed that every man
Except those who had come to support us
Was raising his voice or fist.
Never before had we experienced
Such intense hatred as this.
They screamed out the battle song,
"Bole So Nihal!"
As if to them alone it belonged
And not to Gursikhs all.

As a group, the mob tried to push us back,
We held on and stood our ground.
Locking our arms against the attack,
Our strength became profound.
"You Americans broke the Rehit," they screamed,
"You stir up controversy."
The very fact of our unwavering presence seemed
To increase their hostility.
Since most of us couldn't speak Punjabi,
They threw their words with force
At the Jathedarji, Amarjit Kaur, and Bibiji,
Trying to change history's course.

Then as a crowd, they rolled to the side,
There seemed to be no relief
We sat down by ourselves in relative quiet
And recited the song of peace.
At 1 am, with an air of elation,
Men passed through the small door, one by one.
We were left in isolation,
The floor washing had begun.
Yet we knew we had answered the call,
At this moment in time and space,
To serve the delivery of a higher law,
Returning women to a state of grace.

How long we sat there, we did not know,
It seemed like eternity.
Then the jathedar opened the door and said, "Go!"
We crossed the threshold to destiny.
As we walked upon the causeway silently,
We could not turn back anymore.
A soft orange light glowed mysteriously
In front of us, through the temple door.
What lay ahead of us might be trouble,
Yet our purpose could not be denied.
We bowed our heads on the threshold of marble
And quietly went inside.

Off to one side, waiting for direction,
We were completely ignored.
The men continued their preparation,
They had already washed the floors.
The Jathedar said, "You came to do seva,
What are you waiting for?"
So we picked up whatever happened to lie there,
And went out through the side door.
We cleaned the railings with what we had,
With love, we polished the brass.
When a few kind men handed us some rags,
We felt we had come home at last.
Looking out over the water at 1:30 am,
I saw the face of the clock,
And wondered if any other women
Would ever take that same walk
Down the long causeway again
For the seva of cleaning the floors.
Would there be a time when both women and men
Passed together through that small door.
Amarjit Kaur spoke to some of the men,
Saying that they had made her sad this day,
For they had made her feel that she was a woman,
And not a Gursikh in all ways.

Then we sat inside by the Guru's bed,
When everything was done.

Thinking of the times ahead
When all Gursikhs would be one.
Looking through the Guru's eyes,
Each soul has the face of God.
Eventually, others will realize
That the differences they focus upon
Keep them from the experience
Of seeing the God in all.
Yet for now, in our way,
We had made a difference,
By answering the Guru's call.

Gurukim Kaur Khalsa
Phoenix, Arizona

***Petition To the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib
Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,
Seeking The Restoration of Women's Rights to
Equally Participate.***

We the undersigned call for the implementation and daily observance of the resolution passed by Jathedars of four Takhts and Shriomani Parbandhak Committee in 1996 recognising Sikh women's equal right to perform Seva at Harmandir Sahib.

Sikhism has always not only preached but also more importantly, practiced women's entitlement to equal and same consideration, respect and justice. About 500 years ago, more than half the manjis that Guru Amar Das Ji appointed were to women. This position is equivalent to Granthis in Gurdwaras today. These women were put in charge of the proliferation of Sikhism, the sangat issues and the administration in their communities. Throughout history, Sikh women have always stood side-by-side joining in every Panthic Seva.

It pains us considerably that there is even an issue of Sikh women not being able to partake in early morning Seva and Keertan Seva at Darbar Sahib. This denial of Seva is completely against the very fabric and core of Sikhism. Imagine turning away Mata Sahib Kaur (the Mother of Khalsa), Mata Gujri Ji (the wife of Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji, the mother of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the grandmother of 4 Sahib Zaadeys), Mayee Bhag Kaur, and the countless Sikh women throughout our history that have planted the seed and inspired love for Sikhism in our children. In Ardaas we daily speak of the Sikh men and women who have given their ultimate sacrifice for the Seva of the Panth.

In 1996, after great pressure and petitions a group of American Sikh Women were 'allowed' to join in the early morning Seva at Harmandir Sahib. However, this has only been a one-time 'event'. There has still not been any Sikh woman 'authorised' to partake in Keertan Seva at the Darbar Sahib.

It is urgent and imperative that this denial of Seva to women be immediately rectified in order for the Harmandir Sahib (the throne of Sikhism) to truly exemplify and put in practice the teachings of our Gurus. We the undersigned, therefore immediately seeked the daily observance of Sikh Women's equal right to early morning Seva and Keertan Seva at Darbar Sahib.

Harpritam Kaur
New York, USA

The life and times of



Lahore City seen from Shahdara.

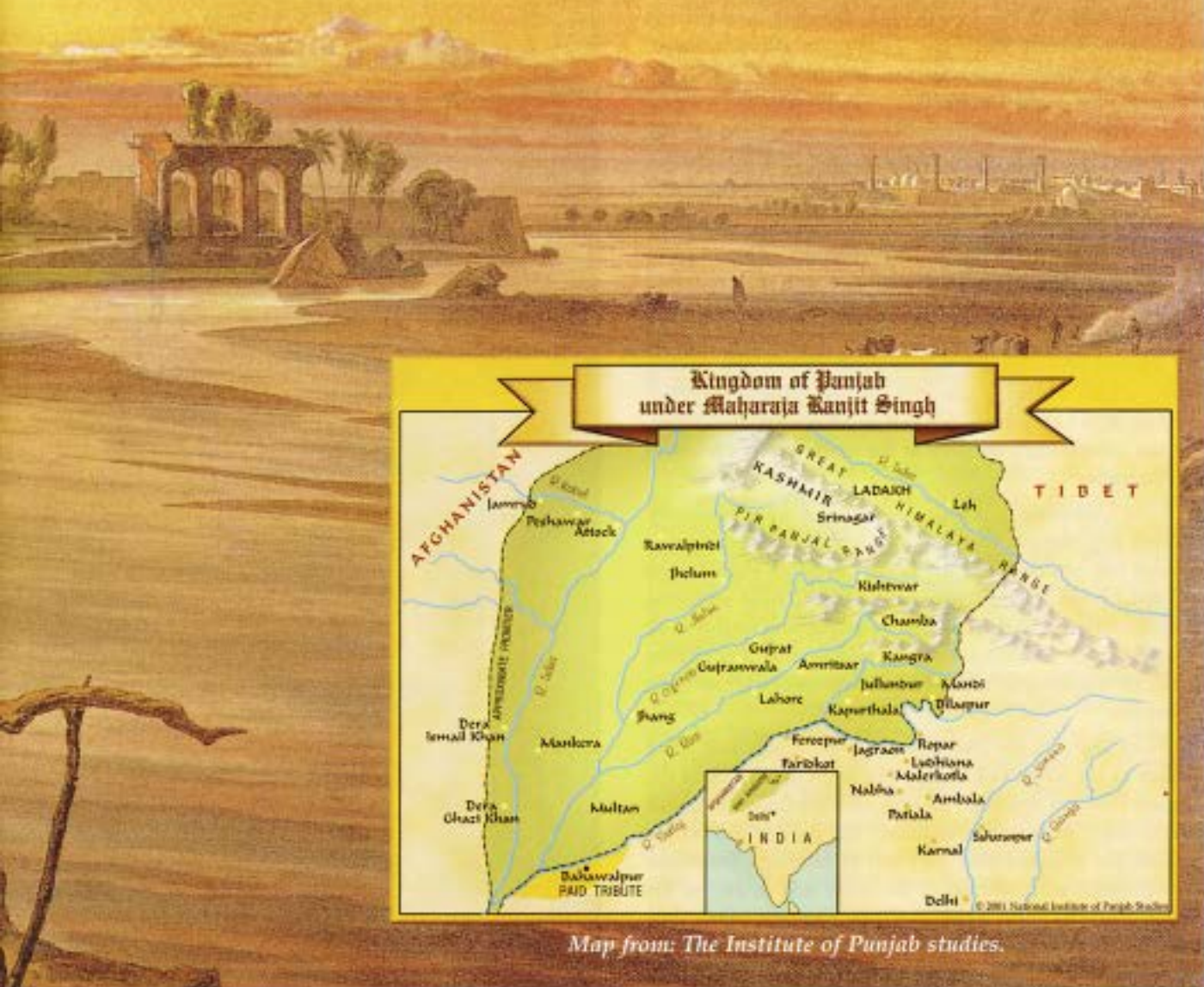
Chromo-lithograph from a sketch by William Simpson.

Published in Simpson, W., *India Ancient and Modern* (London, 1867) plate XXIII.

Rani Jindan, the youngest of Ranjit Singh's wives, gave birth to Prince Duleep about ten months before the Maharaja's death. After the assassinations of Rani Chand Kaur, Raja Sher Singh and Kunwar Partap Singh, she managed to get the consent of the Sikh leaders for the enthronement of the child Duleep. She then ruled the Punjab as Regent

on behalf of the young Maharaja Duleep Singh from 1843 to 1846. Her ability and intelligence were remarkable. She did not observe Purdah, worked as an active counsellor for the military Panchayat, attended the court regularly and even commanded the Sikh Army for a time. The British saw her as a threat to their supremacy. Taking advantage of

Maharani Jindan



Map from: The Institute of Punjab studies.

private court disputes and conflicts, they managed to imprison her. Her son Duleep was taken away from her and sent to England. The Rani herself was first imprisoned at Sheikhupura and then at Chunar in Benaras. Soon she escaped to Nepal, but later returned to Calcutta and then to England to be with her son. Even there, she

could not meet him more than twice a week. Her life is a poignant example of an untiring warrior who drove herself relentlessly despite great hurdles. Jindan sowed the seeds of patriotism in her son and in the Sikh soldiers whom she commanded. Her courage and her dreams came to an end with her death at the young age of 46.

The role of Maharani Jindan in the politics of Lahore in the 1840s is extremely polemical, as was her tumultuous life. Destiny and her innate personal courage, made this young woman, the youngest queen of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, an important participant in the politics of her time. In 1843 Lord Allanbrough wrote to the Duke of Wellington "The mother of the child Duleep seems to be a woman of firm ideas" while Lord Dalhousie wrote "She is the only person in Punjab who has valour and foresight." She staked her claim to the Regency of Punjab simply on the basis that she had given birth to a son ten months before the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. (Maharaja Duleep Singh was born on 6th September 1838). The murder of Maharaja Sher Singh and his only son Kunwar Pratap Singh had created virtual political anarchy in Lahore.

Amidst this chaos, Jindan tried her utmost to put her son on the throne. She was hemmed by foes of all shades, intriguing courtiers, dissenting employees and untrustworthy officials attached to the throne. The magnitude of the problem did not deter her, but instead filled her with undiminished courage which, with her diplomatic demeanour, helped to overcome her adversaries. But soon after she had smoothened her internal problems, she had to stand up to a new enemy, who in addition to being powerful was also extremely shrewd: the East India Company which very much coveted the Punjab, the last independent territory in the north western frontiers of Hindustan.

Lord Dalhousie and John Henry, who were extremely shrewd Englishmen, soon initiated a vilification campaign against her, which made the Khalsa army of Punjab turn against Jindan, though for short while. These spurious allegations were levied against her by people paid for this work and when J.D. Cunningham protested against this vicious policy, he was abruptly removed from service of the East India Company.

From 1843, till the December of 1846, Jindan had ruled Punjab as the Regent of Duleep Singh. In the words of the English Resident, she was "the only effective bulwark against British policy in the whole of India." She did not observe the purdah, she presided over the court proceedings, held close consultations with officials of the army and inspected the troops. Lord Dalhousie wrote "Rely upon it. She is worth more than all the soldiers of the state put together." He further wrote in the same letter, "She is the only person having manly understanding in Punjab."

Jindan Kaur was born in 1817, in Chahad Village, district Sialkot where her father Manna Singh was zamindar. Jindan Kaur was married to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1835, and passed away in 1863 in Kensington, England. Her last words before she died were for her son, who was not allowed by the British to be with her, even in her last moments. She had pleaded, "Do not let my bones rot in this inhospitable country. Take them back to India." The most damaging allegation rumoured against the Maharani is that she personally invited the British



Maharani Jindan, as regent of her young son Maharaja Duleep Singh, provided able leadership and resisted British designs against the Sikh Kingdom.

From: Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Lahore

to Punjab. The basis for this are some letters she wrote to the English resident of Lahore Henry Lawrence and Governor General Dalhousie. But the critics of the Rani forget that these letters were written under unusual circumstances and for varied purposes, after the British had established their supremacy over Lahore.

The English wanted to keep Duleep Singh and the Khalsa army free from the Rani's influence because the soldiers had a propensity to be rebellious. On the other hand, some members of the royal family like Rani Gul Begum, Rani Daya Kaur, Tara Singh, Multan Singh, Rani Dukantu and her son Sahdev Singh were left alone, simply because they posed no threat to the English.

Clearly the main aim of the Maharani was to make her infant son the ruler of Lahore. Earlier, in 1841 Maharani Chand Kaur had sought British help to put her on the throne and subsequently, Sher Singh took steps to disinherit Chand Kaur taking help of the English to do so and in return granted them all land beyond the Sutlej. At the same time another adversary of Jinda, Kunwar Pishora Singh tried to bribe the English to his favour. During the political turmoil, following death of Ranjit Singh, a group favourably disposed towards the English had managed to gain power in the Lahore court. Bhai Ram Singh, the Sandhawalias and Gulab Singh were the most active members of this group. Later opportunists like Jawahar Singh, Lal Singh and Teja Singh also joined this group, but rivalry between members further compounded the problem. The Dogra secretly harboured a vendetta against Jawahar Singh and Lal Singh. His aims were to punish the Sikh army, to determine the nazrana, to place Kashmir and the area on the left bank of river Sutlej under the British and to make Lahore a permanent base for the British army.

On 21 January 1845 Bhai Ram Singh sent a message to Major Broadfoot: "I am ready to get written allegiance from Raja Gulab Singh. In return for your help, we will give you cash of fifty lakh rupees, a part of the region on the southern bank of the river Sutlej (which was actually under the Lahore court) and some area in the northern part of the Punjab empire."

In May 1845, Gulab Singh blatantly told Jindan to invite the British but the Maharani silenced him. In reality she still hoped that one of the Sardars would bring peace to the court until the coming of age of her son.

After Jawahar Singh paid with his life for his vicious manipulations, Rani Jindan managed to secure support of the Army. With great grit she started to look after the affairs of her people and the army, discarded the purdah and moved about fearlessly.

Sohan Lal Suri, the historian at the Lahore court in his book 'Umdat-ut-Tawarikh' has written that the Rani was against taking on the British militarily, but when the lawyer Rai Krishna Chander informed her that the English wanted to occupy that territory of the Khalsa nation on the other side of

the Sutlej, the entire court got surcharged with anger. The anti-English group demanded military action against them, but the Maharani tried to talk them out of it: "A military offensive against the British can harm the government of Maharaja Duleep Singh." Both Diwan Dina Nath and Faqir Azizzudin ratified Jindan's view, but the Dogras prevailed and thus the first Anglo-Sikh war ensued.

The period immediately after 1846 was generally peaceful. Although there was no direct confrontation, it was amply clear that the English felt threatened by Jindan and it was a matter of time before they marginalised her. This mindset was revealed in the "Treaty of Bhironwal", one of the first terms of which was to remove Jindan as regent and divest her of all power. During this time Lord Hardinge was camping on the bank of the river Beas. From there, on 7th December 1846 he wrote a letter to Fredrick Curry who at Lahore was negotiating another treaty. In this letter he gave him strict instructions. "In order to maintain English supremacy over Lahore, Rani Jindan is to be stripped of all power. Moreover while formulating the treaty no negotiations should be carried with the Maharani." However on 14th December the Maharani countered that the English should limit their military strength in Lahore to two regiments of infantry, one regiment of cavalry and one battery of cannon. The governor-general, not unexpectedly, rejected the proposal.

The 18th December 1846 treaty of Bhironwal, put a seal on the Rani's fate. However she soon overcame despondency and decided to challenge the English directly. Contemporary sources reveal that she was in constant touch with freedom fighters at the forts of Sheikupura, Benaras and Chunar and by 1857, was exchanging correspondence with freedom fighters based in Nepal.

The Maharani, with the help of these disparate groups started to make plans for ousting the English. First of all she recalled how throughout history, the Punjabis were at the forefront and had put up strong resistance against all invaders from Alexander and then Abdali, Ghazni and Babar.

However the English were politically very astute and Maharani Jindan Kaur's movements came to be closely monitored by the political agent. She was also denied the right to look after her son Duleep Singh's jagir. On 10th June, 1847 by an order, the political agent prohibited the durbar Sardars from meeting the Maharani and also imposed curbs on Jindan's charity dispensations. Despite protests the English remained impervious and imposed further restrictions on her interaction with the durbar sardars.

After failure of the conspiracy against the English, the maharani concluded that the English could be removed from the Punjab only through countrywide revolt but needed the help of powerful sardars, the army and support of the common people. To pursue this she sent her personal attendant Jawai to meet Dewan Raj of Multan. The Dewan was not favourably disposed towards the English and gave an enthusiastic

response to Jindan's plans. The Dewan remained true to his word and shortly thereafter rose in revolt against the English. During the Multan revolt, Fredrick Curry, resident at Lahore, informed Mr. Elliot of the maharani's link.

After some months, Tej Singh, traitor to the cause of Punjab was rewarded by the English and made the Maharaja on 17th August, 1847. Young Duleep Singh disdainfully refused to apply the tilak on Tej Singh's forehead and only on orders of the English, Nidhan Singh instead performed the tilak ceremony.

On 19th August, 1847 the Maharani was arrested and interned in Sheikhpura fort. An evening before, Gulab Singh Attariwala and Major Lawrence, on the pretext of hunting, took Duleep Singh away to the Shalimar Gardens and kept him there for the entire night. "Weeping, he (Maharaja Duleep Singh) was torn away from his mother and taken to the Shalimar Garden. His mother was dragged out by her hair." The Maharani remained in jail from 20th August, 1847 till the 6th May 1848, a period of extreme misery for her, humiliation further aggravated when her monthly income was reduced and interaction with the outside world completely stopped. These strangulating restrictions failed to break Jindan's spirit and she wrote a caustic note to Lord Lawrence. "Why do you want to take the possession of my kingdom by underhand means? Why don't you do so openly?"

Lord Lawrence's reply incensed the Rani but her determination could not be diminished; she accepted the challenge and fermented plans for war against the English.

The military campaign against the English was to be led by Sardar Jawahar Singh, Kahn Singh and Ranjit Singh. In order to make this successful, messages were sent to Mukerian, Jammu, Peshawar and Ferozepur, so as to make such uprising simultaneous. Unfortunately the leading conspirators of this uprising were arrested and some later executed.

Subsequently a wave of terror swept the capital as a massive combing operation was unleashed by the British. On 16th May, the Rani was sent first to Ferozepur and then on the 23th May, to Banaras, imprisoned and forbidden to correspond with anyone in the Punjab. Despite efforts of the English to keep imprisonment of the Rani under wraps, the fact was soon out and spread like fire in the Punjab. "The Rani's imprisonment has hurt the pride of those soldiers who under the leadership of Raja Sher Singh, were marching against Diwan Mulraj of Multan." Even those who were not supportive of the Rani, now adopted a favourable attitude towards her.

Raja Sher Singh Attariwala also declared: "It is well known to all inhabitants of the Punjab, to all the Sikhs and those who have cherished the Khalsa and in fact to the whole world at large, that the *firangis* have treated the widow of the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh with oppression and undue violence. They (the English) have broken the treaty and have imprisoned the Rani, and even conspire to send her away from Hindustan."

The Amir of Afghanistan, Dost Muhammad also wrote in the same anger.

All pleas for justice were dismissed by the Governor-General, "The action taken by the Lahore government is justified" pronounced he.

The British reaction was not unexpected, and was manifestation of the prevailing times. The revolt which had surfaced in Multan now spread to Lahore and other parts of the Punjab. Raja Sher Singh had now made an alliance with Diwan Mulraj and Ganga Ram, the lynchpin of this political upheaval being Rani Jindan and it was only logical that the English would refuse all her demands and keep her imprisoned.

But such adversity could not suppress the Maharani's sanguinity. Though physically she was a thousand miles from her battlefield (the Punjab), was stripped of all resources and surrounded by a ring of enemies, she never let the odds daunt her and kept the banner of resistance flying.

The Maharani's faithful servants were instrumental in maintaining a link through letters between the Rani and the other freedom fighters like Diwan Moolraj, Sardar Chadat Singh and Raja Sher Singh. The most memorable letter was the one sent to Raja Sher Singh, which reached him on 8th March 1849 at Rawalpindi, after the battles of Ram Nagar and Chillianwala. This reflected the Maharani's pride in Sher Singh's uncommon bravery. She wrote, "your valour has filled me with pride. People will infinitely talk of your bravery. If the tree has to fall it must be wrenched from the roots. Similarly in order to ruin the *firangis*, you must use the same tactics which they have used against us and somehow make an effort to push them out of Lahore.... the most important thing is that you should not let your determination weaken.do your utmost to provoke the Hindustanis against them...."

This reveals the mindset of the Rani at the time when the fate of her beloved Punjab was in the balance. The Governor-General now ordered the Rani to be locked up at the fort of Chunar.

But Rani Jindan quickly outsmarted her captors and escaped. To add insult, the Rani left behind a letter in which she had written: "You put me in a cage but I have escaped to freedom. I categorically told you not to trouble me. Now you will see what the effect of this will be on Punjab... don't think that I sneaked out of the fortbefore leaving the Chunar Fort, I had left a message to that effect with the European security man."

The daring escape of Jindan created much consternation with the English. Even Lord Dalhousie (who received the news at Simla) was stunned: "Jindan's escape from such a well-secured fort as Chunar is indeed a matter of great shame."

Rani Jindan managed to reach the borders of Nepal. Once there, she sent her personal attendant to the Nepalese Prime Minister Rana Jang Bahadur, and requested political asylum in Nepal. On getting a favourable assurance she entered

Kathmandu on 29th April 1849. Unfortunately as soon as she reached Kathmandu, news came that the anti-British uprising in Punjab had been quelled and that Lahore had become part of the British Empire. Jindan's main concern now was the safety and future of her son, Duleep Singh. Forced by these fears she sought an appointment with the English agent in Kathmandu who sent her assurances about the well being of her son and of her being granted a pension, but refused to meet her personally.

British efforts failed to weaken Jindan's resolve. Her determination paid off when the Nepalese King decided to give her an official royal welcome on 8th March 1850, the news of which incensed the incumbent British resident.

In the month of September of the same year (1850) Jindan's correspondence with the prisoners at the Allahabad fort ceased to be a secret, and some of her letters were seized.

The Rani gave permission to Gurdial Singh to use the property given to him by her to instigate a revolt in Peshawar. The Rani gave instructions about her property to Narayan Das and to her lawyer Ishwar Singh who was based in Calcutta, with another addressed to the former General of Amritsar: "You make everyone in the Majha aware of the revolt in Peshawar."

To Raja Sher Singh she wrote "Despite being a woman I have succeeded in escaping from the Chunar fort. You are a man. If you want to escape, well and good so join the local Sikhs against the British."

The Maharani also wrote to Raja Lal Singh, in which she asked him to get in touch with Sardar Mohammad Khan, Pir Ahmed Khan, Amir Dost Mohammad Khan and persuade them to raise the banner of revolt against the British.

While still in Nepal, Jindan's covert activities were exposed. The Governor-General reacted almost violently and ordered his Resident at Kathmandu to lodge a very strong protest with the Nepalese. The Rani was also categorically warned from re-entering India, and was threatened with imprisonment if she attempted to do so.

Jindan sought the help of her agents in Patna and Amritsar, and finally succeeded in contacting her son in London. Soon mother and son started to exchange letters. This secret correspondence was made public by the Urdu newspaper 'Koh-i-noor' in its 5th April, 1856 edition.

Now a change of heart overtook the British. The new Governor-General Lord Canning made a complete departure from the previous policy: "In my viewpoint it would be more appropriate if the Rani was allowed to meet her son without any restrictions." To execute the matter he passed on the changed policy draft to the Court of Directors, but before any decision could be taken, the massive 1857 uprising took place in northern and eastern India. The Rani once again tried to revive her political ambitions. With the help of her trusted attendants, Chet Singh and Jauwala Singh of village Singhapura, Amritsar and Mian Mullah of Gurdaspur, she tried

to fan the already glowing embers of dissent in Punjab. The main catalyst of this particular conspiracy was Chet Singh, who with great courage helped the Rani to escape from Nepal.

However this conspiracy was soon discovered and all the three associates of the Rani were arrested in 1859 and the British unleashed a wave of cruel punishments.

In order to divert the attention of Jindan from the Punjab, Duleep Singh was encouraged by the English to correspond with his mother and he eventually persuaded her to leave India for England. This clever plan was worked out during 1860.

Jindan reached Calcutta in April 1861 where she was finally united with her son Duleep. While in Calcutta, Duleep Singh was felicitated by some Sikh soldiers who were returning home from a campaign in China. This alarmed Lord Canning and he ordered the immediate departure of Duleep Singh and his mother for England. Duleep Singh's request for visiting the Punjab was turned down. Mother and son set sail for England on 4th May 1861 and reached London in July. The "exile" in England, however, finally vanquished the proud Jinda. She aged prematurely, lost her eyesight and on 8th August 1863 passed away at the young age of 46 years, in a corner of the Avingdon House.

The last two years of Jindan's life, which she spent in England were extremely heart breaking. The only redeeming feature of her last years was that she managed to inculcate in her son, the love for his motherland and his religion. Even though Duleep Singh was allowed to meet her only two days a week, she did her very best.

Before death claimed her, the Maharani had pleaded with Duleep Singh, "Please do not let the ash of my body mingle with the dust of England. Please perform my last rites in Punjab. This is my last desire." After six months Duleep Singh was given permission to take his mother's remains to India. However on reaching Bombay, he was instructed to perform the Rani's last rites in Bombay itself, and was not allowed to go to Punjab. Thus the last rites were performed in 1864 at Nasik, on the bank of river Narmada. After 60 years, on 27th March 1927, Duleep Singh's daughter came to Nasik and took her grandmother's remains to Lahore where she commemorated them in the form of a samadhi, next to that of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Historians have not done justice to the life and times of Maharani Jindan Kaur, having based their writings on English records, which deliberately painted the Rani as a morally depraved person.

The saga of Maharani Jindan Kaur fills one with pride. She was a woman whose spirit the mighty British Empire could not crush. She faced seemingly insurmountable odds, which plagued her life, with remarkable fortitude. Jindan Kaur had the capacity to muster remarkable courage in the face of great adversity.

Letter



From Malaysia

Dear Sangat,

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa || Waheguru ji ki Fateh ||

All of us agree that the Sikh position on women is the best there is. Woman is equal in all aspects with Man. We have had women in all spheres of Sikh activity, from being Panj Pyaras, Granthis, Ragis, Sewadars, to Presidents of Gurdwara Management Committees (even the SGPC).

Almost all of us would also agree, however, that apart from the above public positions and duties (which the women carry out wonderfully), the private lives of Sikh women are no better than the others. In fact, given our public and scriptural stand on the position of woman, we are worse off than the other communities in the daily and practical treatment of our women.

Sikhs have been talking about this dichotomy since the time of Guru Nanak ji. However, very little has been achieved in removing this divide between theory and reality. Very little has been done to even enhance the quality of life of the Sikh woman.

The problem is that most women do not have the knowhow or information on how to enhance their quality of life. When women's groups get organised to address this lack of awareness, they face stiff resistance from the endangered specie the MEN. If they cannot stop these awareness movements, they resort to negative propaganda to tarnish these putations of those involved.

So dear Sangat ji, we can talk about this phenomena until the men come home. Nothing will happen until ALL women get together. And all enlightened men do not support this awareness campaign. Remember, it is the woman who rocks the cradle. If we want to see Sikhi flourishing, we need to empower our women and let them actually enjoy the position given to them by Sikhi. They will become our biggest missionaries, starting at home.

The Malaysian Sikh women have got together to spearhead this movement. We have set up the *Sikh Women's Awareness Network (SWAN)*. We are working with the Ministry of Women and Family Development Malaysia to

achieve our vision of enhancing the quality of life of every Sikh woman and making her proud to be a Sikh. Our motto is *Woman First for Family First*.

As a start, we have identified the following areas for development:

- ❖ Awareness campaign - through seminars and workshops
- ❖ Resource management
- ❖ Education and Training
- ❖ Counseling services
- ❖ Spiritual awakening
- ❖ Family bonding

Our immediate target groups are:

- ❖ Single mothers
- ❖ Teenagers
- ❖ Young mothers
- ❖ Housewives
- ❖ Widows and divorcees
- ❖ Grandmothers

We are already collecting information for our database on single mothers. We have also held our first Awareness Workshop :

"Legal and Health Awareness Workshop for Women" on 29 September at the Seminar Room, Sikh Centre Malaysia, Gurdwara Sahib Sentul, Kuala Lumpur.

The Speakers were Gurmit Kaur and Dr Kamaljit Kaur.

We hope to replicate this, and other workshops around the country.

We invite interested Sikh women in Malaysia to join us.

Together we can move mountains.

Sat Guru Dyala

*Rajinder Kaur
Kuala Lumpur*

U.S. SIKH WOMEN

Claiming a Historical Leadership

What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and everything nice? Not quite. With the emerging group of U.S. Sikh women community leaders taking a front stage in community organizing, we can keep nice and throw out the rest!

The closest I have come to explaining this emerging phenomenon to myself relies on a historical spiritual event we are connected to, baptism of the Khalsa. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh Ji prepared the amrit nectar for the newly born Khalsa. Mata Sahib added sugar wafers to the nectar in a steel bowl; sweetness joined strength in the form of *Amrit*. I see a potential emergence of this sweetness encased by strength in the form of second generation Sikh women, raised in the United States, vigorously pursuing their positions in law, business and community organizing while tightly preserving their tender connection to their spiritual roots. These women are claiming their spiritual given seats of leadership in the Sikh *Panth*.

Whether these women are pursuing a law clerkship in Baltimore, organising student groups on the Columbia campus, defending asylum cases for Kashmiri torture victims, or directing special projects in an international aid non-profit agency they take a serious interest in walking the Sikh path not as a by-product of who they are but as a priority. Staying connected to Sikhism is an integral part of their day to day lives in the United States. These women not only question cultural traditions that contradict Sikh philosophy, they actively eradicate the contradiction by consistently attempting to align their professional and personal day to day actions with the Sikh faith.

They are stepping out onto this path and want their community to join them in this spiritual journey; a process that is revealing itself through post-September 11th community organising, a focus on historical roots, and empowerment for all community members wrapped up in a faithful gaze on the future of Sikhism for Sikhs in America.

These four leadership profiles reveal the current attitudes, ideas and steps that Sikh women are taking to ensure that a wide open space is created in the community organising arena for any young Kaur inspiring to claim her seat as well. These profiles are not representative of the entire community but do tap into a "rising up" attitude that will benefit the collective.

Supreet Kaur

Connection To Faith

Remember those summer days with toes curled up near the edge of the pool? How we would watch some of the swimmers creep into the water inch by inch as cautious as can be while others cannon balled into the water letting everyone know they had arrived. It comes around to your turn and you are deciding how you are going to approach this body of water. Supreet Kaur has decided to come to the edge, survey the landscape, focus on her point of dissent, and has met it head on springing in the air, cutting through the water flawlessly and gracefully.



As an engineering and political science college student attending Columbia University, President of the Sikh Student Association on campus, and a Resident Advisor, this young Kaur has taken her life reins into her own hands. She faithfully relies on her Sikh spiritual roots to guide her. As a youth growing up, Supreet has challenged specific family dynamics rooted in Punjabi culture requesting her parents pay attention to the Sikh script laid out for women. This script ensures an equal position for men and women.

At 17, Supreet attended a *Sikh Network* workshop on human rights and reflects on the experience and how it impacts her today. "This workshop stirred a sense of pride in me. It shook something up in me. It was very emotional. I went from inheriting Sikhism to actively participating in it." This consistent layering of thoughtful analysis and desire to push her own limits has resulted in Supreet embracing her spiritual connection. In turn, this connection plays out with everything Supreet encounters.

Sikh Americans

Like many young Sikhs in America, September 11th presented a struggle in alliance for Supreet; she was forced to pick between her alliances towards her country, the United States, and her faith, Sikhism. In her mind, these loyalties were consistent but hate crimes against Sikhs and the spreading intolerance for anyone who did not "look American" unrelentingly divided her loyalties. Supreet recalls her shift in thinking on the day of September 11th. "My first thought was how can we help with the relief efforts at the Towers? I have to organize the Sikh students on campus to get in line for blood donations. But then after a phone-call from a friend informing me that a Sikh was attacked downtown and a Sikh cab was lit on fire, I had to start thinking as a Sikh. "How can I help Sikhs?" You can guess the response; Supreet went out and did just that.

She is an active part of the *Coalition* as a member of the *Justice Watch Team*, which tracks and pursues redress for bias attacks against Sikhs, most of which fall under three categories: *hate crimes*, *employment discrimination*, and *airport profiling*. Not surprising since Supreet regards Guru Gobind Singh Ji as her mentor and aspires to be like him.

U.S. Sikh Women

"As Sikh women, we have to reclaim ourselves; understanding our roles in history and developing a sense of empowerment through this history and setting an expectation to take a leading stance." Supreet Kaur's introspection and commitment to a Sikh path aligns her thinking to empowerment issues for women.

She does see the United States fostering an environment that allows Sikh women to analyze the Sikh community through personal experience. "The space to rethink culture allows Sikh women to create new roles for those who are claiming personal autonomy. This combined with roles from our history will empower us. But we need encouragement."

Voicing the concern of many Sikh women, Supreet sees community contradictions and wants them to end. "If a man cuts his *kesh* by trimming his beard, he is looked down upon. If a woman actively chooses to not pluck her

eyebrows or shave her legs, she is ostracised from the community." According to Supreet, when both Sikh men and women claim their true spiritual roots and not collapse under South Asian and American cultural influences there is a positive chance to step forward in a unified way. We can easily expect great things from this young Kaur who welcomes challenges in the Sikh community as honoured guests in her home.

Ajeet Kaur

Formulating A Dialogue

Recalling Mata Khivi, Guru Angad Ji's wife, who was revered for taking her social charm and transforming this into skills that served the Sikh *Panth*. Mata Khivi helped create and maintain *langaar*. She ensured the freshest ingredients were used and created a loving atmosphere for all who entered the Guru's home.

Traces of Mata Khivi's life journey are visible in Ajeet Kaur's life path. Her dynamic personality has been channeled into professional opportunities and community activist work that serves the *Panth*. Ajeet currently serves as the Director of Special Projects at *Cross-Cultural Solutions*, a nonprofit organization that sends volunteers abroad to provide humanitarian assistance with Volunteer Work Programmes. An American University graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and Interdisciplinary Studies in International Business and Negotiations, Ajeet's training has prepared her as a primary community voice.



Recent events tested Ajeet's mental resolve to exercise this voice and start critical dialogues between the Sikh community and the broader American society. Witnessing the second plane crash into the second World Trade Tower, her former place of employment, Ajeet claimed this national September 11th tragedy as her own. She transformed it into evidence of her strong personal will.

As a Sikh American, she experienced a second dose of terror through the immediate backlash that targeted Sikhs in the USA. She resolved to do something about it and became Media Director for the Sikh Coalition. Relying on her intuition, Ajeet senses the average person's hesitance towards Sikhs. As the *Sikh Coalition* Media Director, she

leverages these opportunities as openings into an honest dialogue about who Sikhs are with the broader community. "Today, when someone sees a Sikh man with a turban and beard, they get nervous. We can help start the conversation and say, yeah, what is up with that turban, let talk about it." Ajeet sees herself and other Sikhs participating in community work as "Teachers, Educators, Messengers."

Dialoguing Within The Community

Ajeet not only understands the need for sharing messages between communities but also messaging amongst Sikhs themselves. Rolling up her sleeves to assess the internal community gaps, Ajeet says, "For Sikh women, gaining our voice in social and political spaces and having these voices received not as threatening voices but as human voices will be our biggest challenge." For the other half of the equation, Ajeet says, "Sikh men need to encourage us and help us gain our own voice; to be heard, to be helpful, and active in the community."

As a Sikh counselor for a New York Sikh camp, Ajeet Kaur drilled down even further into messaging that breaks the silence amongst Sikh girls coming of age. This summer, Ajeet engaged the female campers in the following observation. "Look at the guys. Look how tight they are. Why are the girls so divided? We need to say, you are my sister and I am going to be here for you." She states a lot of barriers amongst Sikh young women and men can be broken by simply talking about what is uncomfortable.

Ajeet states that community members can also break the silence around issues such as domestic violence within the Sikh community. "We (women) are raised to believe that a husband is a God; this is residual thinking from Indian culture. We need to start talking about this. It is also very hard for women to leave relationships. It becomes a matter of honour and probably has to do with self-esteem as well." Ajeet Kaur advises young Kauras, "support each other, love each other. Do not be intimidated by each other. Take the time to get to know one another."

Harsimran Kaur Dang

Personal Voice

"I want to work with people. We should do it for the people. I am drawn towards people issues." How to work for the people, become a better person while doing it and keep others consistently in mind is a consistent desire for Harsimran Kaur. This passion to give of herself to people has rung true from a young age. Reflecting on her early activist work at Haverford College in Pennsylvania, Harsimran recalls, "I was following my heart, starry-eyed and idealistic." She has just completed her J.D. at George

Washington Law School and has entered into a clerkship with Justice Alferd Nance of the Circuit Court of Baltimore City. Harsimran values the feedback she receives from Judge Nance and states she is fortunate to gain exposure to litigation work.

Harsimran still listens to a personal voice that leads from her heart. Currently, she acts as a regional director of the *Sikh American Association* in Washington, D.C. Fighting on behalf of the Sikh community against hate crimes, Harsimran exercises an active connection



with this same personal voice that has led to past and present social activism work. It is also the same voice that sees her activism work as a natural part of being a Sikh.

Assessing the post-September 11th environment for Sikhs, Harsimran states, "Sikhs acting as conscious and active citizens by writing editorials in the newspapers or local political participation will help the situation. The paradox that US-based Sikhs have faced with participating in community service involves the desire to help as an American yet evaluating the level of safety in a situation for a Sikh. Having to make a choice between *sewa* and safety has been a difficult one."

Meeting other critical challenges such as the Sikh community resisting full assimilation into mainstream America is a next step which Harsimran recognises as a necessary one. She draws this wisdom from her own journey as a young Sikh woman facing two cultures. Grounding herself in a spiritual framework that reconciles her own value system, Harsimran says, "Sikhi makes you a better person. Promoting the rights of others helps you become a better person."

Seeking Understanding

Harsimran explains her desire for a deeper questioning of her spiritual connection to Sikhism. "As we get older and are coming of age, trying to figure out what to do, I want to understand why I am making the choices I am making." This deeper questioning has led Harsimran to a current point of really understanding her personal connection to Sikhism. Harsimran states, "I really want to explore that promise towards God and access my own spirituality."

This thoughtful Kaur has also tapped into redefining

current community gender roles while keeping the Sikh spirit alive in the current community context. "Today, a good Sikh woman does not have to know how to make good rotis." This re-scripting from cultural to spiritual definitions becomes an essential part of the Sikh community process of empowerment. Harsimran states, "We have to be careful and not fall into South Asian cultural trappings and choose to maintain our spirituality over these culturally defined roles."

She also wants to see more women actively involved in organizations like the *Sikh Coalition* and the *Sikh American Association*. Acknowledging that "women do have a voice and it is up to them to use it while men can recognize the way gender creates barriers for women and help women to find ways around it." With this dedicated Kaur leading the pack, Sikh women are guaranteed a wide-open space in the community-organizing arena.

Harmeet Kaur Dhillon

Self Reliance

"We have come to understand what we expect from a hero on the big screen and in society but what do we expect of unspoken heroines? Today's, community heroines go unnoticed, unannounced, and actually prefer the anonymity." Harmeet Kaur falls into this category although you would never know because she is playing out her role as a humble leading lady. Unexpected life experiences brought Harmeet to a place in life that challenged her; tested her will – and she has succeeded.

As an advocate and survivor of domestic abuse, Harmeet's painful first marriage taught her to trust herself, "I entered into my first marriage trying to please my family. From this, I learned how to trust my own instincts and be independent; do not let other people expectations trap you into something you don't want to be in." Devoting a substantial amount of legal expertise and time to supporting the *Battered Women's Network* in Santa Clara, Harmeet not only seeks justice for women experiencing domestic violence but also has a desire to protect young Sikh women from this experience by encouraging self-reliance.



Securing a professional education, a fulfilling career, and financial independence are some of the pearls Harmeet encourages young Kaur to string with their own hands designing a life that is self-selected and self-made. "If she cannot earn a living, she is a prisoner to her marital circumstances."

Her own hand-strung life would not be complete without the satisfaction derived from community work centered on post September 11th civil and human rights advocacy and staying connected to Sikhism through community service and family. She states, "I enjoy the equality, simplicity, lack of clergy, lack of ritual, and sound rationale that Sikhism offers." Harmeet actively identified with Sikhism as a young child stating that her parents consistently showed her the value of spirituality, family, and basic human decency.

Community

In a detailed discussion about Sikh women taking a more active role in community politics, Harmeet Kaur acknowledged the lack of female representation within the community organising arena and stated that she hopes to see more. Harmeet says, "The feminine perspective is unique and can represent the underdog. Most women are less linear and are more comfortable being creative and flexible with problem solving. It becomes challenging to work with some men who are competitive whereas most women enjoy a win-win solution for everyone involved."

Like many of her peers, Harmeet wants to see women take a more active role in Gurdwaras around the country, ensuring that a woman's perspective is considered and valued. Assessing that gender roles adopted from Indian culture are imposed by men and self-imposed by women in the Sikh community, Harmeet hopes that Sikhs look to their spiritual heritage as a blueprint for living a life based on equality and compassion, "The sense of entitlement that Sikh women today have for equality is good." Collective decision-making is a prized ideal of the *Khalsa Panth* that ensures harmony in the process and results that impact all members of the Sikh community.

Meeta Kaur
New York

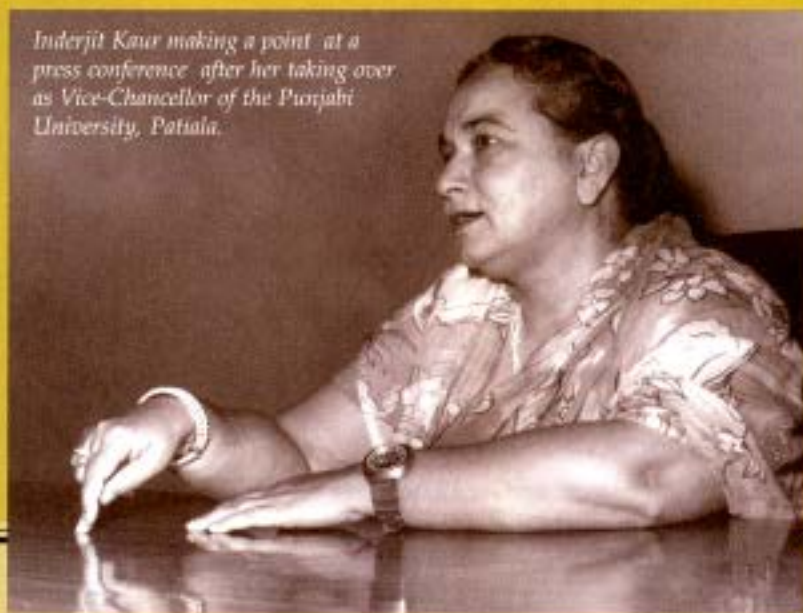
Meeta Kaur is an emerging writer and reporter learning the craft of critical commentary, political analysis, investigative reporting, short-fiction, and poetry. She also supports community organising efforts in ending domestic violence within the national Sikh community and hate crimes against the national Sikh community.

Madam Vice-Chancellor

"Are you a feminist?" was the question posed to the first woman Vice-Chancellor.

"Not the bra-burning kind," was her retort!

Inderjit Kaur making a point at a press conference after her taking over as Vice-Chancellor of the Punjabi University, Patiala.



She is a woman—charming and sweet and accomplished and finds no conflict in being both. She still has that smile when she speaks but there is still steel in her. Inderjit Kaur Sandhu carries the eight-odd decades of life's experience quite lightly. Her pleasant demeanour and old-world courtesies are often used self-deprecatingly to cover the fact that she is a well-educated, modern lady with formidable experience, and one who has held two of the top positions in India.

The media hailed her as the first woman Vice-Chancellor in north India, though she is more modest: "there might have been someone in the south, but I do know that I was the only woman VC in north India". After her successful innings as Vice-Chancellor, she went on to become Chairperson of the Staff Selection Commission at New Delhi, the highest all-India recruiting agency for the Government of India.

Colonel Sher Singh was delighted when his first child was born on September 1, 1923. He celebrated his daughter's birth as much as others did the birth of a son. He was an unconventional man who had not followed his father in service of the Maharaja of Patiala at the Durbar, but had chosen a more difficult career that took him and his family to remote regions, including the North West Frontier Province and Peshawar. The family (there were five children, two

sons and three daughters) divided their time between Patiala and the "family station" postings.

As she grew up, Inderjit Kaur studied at Patiala's Victoria Girls School. She was subsequently educated at Lahore, where she did her BT at RB Sohan Lal Training College. She earned an MA in Philosophy from the Government College, Lahore. This was done as a resident student, since her parents never lived in Lahore, but wanted the best facilities for their daughter, who became one of the first girls from Patiala to be so well educated.

Before the result of her exams was out she was teaching at the Government College for Women, which she had joined on December 16, 1946.

At time of the Partition, there was an enormous influx of refugees from the area that became Pakistan. Inderjit Kaur became an activist and helped form the Mata Sahib Kaur Dal, of which she was Secretary. The organisation rehabilitated over 400 families at Patiala. Food and clothes were collected from families in Patiala and distributed. They even sent out four truckloads of such material to persons in Baramulla, where the Patiala forces had come to the rescue of the Kashmiris. She was also instrumental in setting up the Mata Sahib Kaur Dal School at Patiala, for mainly the refugee children who could so study. She also organised self-defence training for women refugees and took an active part, topping the shooting competition.

She was from the first batch of students who did their Masters in Punjabi. She was the lone woman on the governing council of Khalsa College, Amritsar (1950-1953).

From GCW, she was to move, ten years later, as Professor of Education at the State College of Education at Patiala, followed by a stint the Basic Training College, Chandigarh (1958-1967). By this time she had married Giani Gurdit Singh, an eminent Punjabi writer who was a member of the Punjab Legislative Council (1956-1962). They have two sons, Roopinder Singh, born in 1960, and Ravinder Singh (1961). The elder son is Assistant Editor of *The Tribune* at Chandigarh and the youngerson, a New York-based businessman.

This was also the time when Giani Gurdit Singh's most famous work was published, his book *Meri Pind*, which won two UNESCO prizes and is till today recognised as a landmark in contemporary Punjabi literature.

Although Chandigarh had its allure, Patiala too had a claim on its daughter and in 1972, Inderjit Kaur took over as Principal of the college where she had started her career. Within a span of three years, she added a science wing to the college and the strength of the students increased exponentially. She is particularly proud of the manner in which co-curricular activities were encouraged and the *gidda* revived. Taking the college girls to participate in the Republic Day parade with the *gidda* troupe gave the traditional Punjabi folk dance national exposure.

The Guru Nanak Quincentenary Celebrations were held on a global scale by the Punjabi University at Patiala in 1969, when the *Guru Nanak Mehima Kirtan Darbar* was organised at the GCW. It was much appreciated, especially by foreign scholars, who were provided with translations of *shahads* from the Gurbani in the form of beautiful booklets.

She sought a transfer to Amritsar to be with her husband while he was there. She became principal of the Government College for Women, Amritsar. Here the college had good infrastructure and she could concentrate on improving its academic environment.

Inderjit Kaur returned to Patiala as Vice-Chancellor of the Punjabi University, Patiala, a position that she held from 1975 to 1977. During this period, her husband moved to be with her, just as she had done earlier. Giani Gurdit Singh fondly remembered that he had moved a resolution while being member of the Punjab Legislative Council, demanding and proposing a Punjabi University so many years earlier!

The night before she took charge, there was an altercation in the university and some students came to the guest house in which she was staying. One of them

Miles to go: A graduation photograph of Inderjit Kaur.



was bleeding profusely. "Madam, we know that no action will be taken against the student who beat me up, he is from the king's party," said the aggrieved boy. "How can there be a king's party when there is no king?" asked the designate Vice-Chancellor. The tension evaporated into laughter and the students soon dispersed to the dispensary for first aid.

It was such an approach to managing affairs that was hallmark of her tenure. "I am very happy that we were able to publish a large number of books and have more students finish their Ph.Ds during that time," she says. Her colleague, Hazara Singh, who headed the publishing department of the university, often said: "Madam managed to get us to do a lot of work—and we did it willingly. All very satisfying." No wonder, Dr M. Santappa, Vice Chancellor of the University of Madras, once remarked at a VCs' conference that he was surprised that more books

had been published from the university at Patiala than from his own university. "Madam, how can you do it?" he wondered aloud. It was a fact, well documented.

She is well remembered for the gesture in allotting a higher category of house than was meant to Professor L. M. Joshi. When some protested, they were told: "I have given the house to his books. He had no space to keep them in his old house. When you have so many books, I will give a bigger house to you too."

The unique positions that Inderjit Kaur held required her to represent the country at various international conferences. She attended the Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities at Wellington, New Zealand, and represented India at the International Conference of the Executive Heads of Universities held in Boston, USA, where she was among the only three women university heads in the world, something she handled with élan.



Madam Vice-Chancellor: Reading the convocation address at the Punjabi University, Patiala.



Intellectual inputs: The family with eminent Sikh intellectuals at Government College, Amritsar. From left: Ravinder Singh, Partap Singh, Giani Gurdit Singh, Sardar Hukam Singh, Ashok Singh Bagrian, Bhai Sahib Bhai Ardaman Singh of Bagrian, Dalbir Singh, Inderjit Kaur, (unidentified), Sirdar Kapur Singh ICS, Roopinder Singh.

Academic responsibilities were not neglected, neither was her own work. She delivered the 1976 Guru Nanak Lecture at the University of Hull in England, on "Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Nanak IX" and also spoke at the School of Oriental Studies, London, during the same trip. She lectured at various universities during her foreign tours.

She resigned just before her term ended in 1977, because of political differences with the government that then came to power. This was followed by a two-year sabbatical in Chandigarh.

Inderjit Kaur was appointed chairperson of the Staff Selection Commission, New Delhi in 1980 for a five-year term. Anticipating good times ahead, the staff distributed sweets when they heard that a woman was to head their organisation. They were surprised when they found that the boss could be tough as a nail, albeit kind and helpful when it came to personal problems.

She is credited with streamlining the examination process, making and sticking to schedules for results and laying down of norms for objective evaluation that remain in use till today. She administered with tact and firmness the vast network which often depended on the goodwill of state governments for conducting examinations. At times there were more than a hundred thousand candidates for a single test.

As an example, the commission handled 6.7 lakh applications for examinations during 1983, out of which 4.6 lakh candidates were for the clerical grade examination alone. In all, the commission provided candidates for over 20,000 vacancies. To interview such candidates, she had to fly to various regional centres of the commission and, at times, was travelling 20 days a month!

She was a leading votary of the objective type of examination system and, in 1983, delivered a keynote address at a workshop-cum-seminar on objective tests held at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). Interestingly enough, her predecessor at the Staff Selection Commission, Mr Hamid, had then taken over the AMU as Vice Chancellor.

She was Chairman of the Staff Selection Commission in Delhi till 1985, after which she moved to Chandigarh and retirement where she devotes time to her family and her gardens. She can now well afford to rest on her great laurels.

**H. Kishie Singh
Chandigarh**

This excellent thesis explores the presence of the feminine in Sikh conception and perception of the Transcendent Reality. Sikh scriptures, transitional writings of the Sikhs and their modern secular literature constitute the sources for the investigation. Within these extensive parameters, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh closely analyses feminine imagery, tone, and symbolism, and in so doing recovers a holistic pattern of imagining and experiencing the sacred which can serve as a mode of empowerment for women.

The book is divided into eight chapters which approach the Sikh vision of the Transcendent from historical, scriptural, symbolic, mythological, romantic, existential, ethical, and mystical perspectives. Each of these discloses the centrality of the woman, and enables the author to reverse what she regards as the one-sided androcentric hermeneutics which has prevailed in Sikh scholarship. The author maintains that the Sikh Gurus and poets did not want the feminine principle to serve just as a figure of speech or literary device; it was rather intended to pervade the whole life of the Sikhs. Her work bolsters the claim that literary symbols should be translated into social and political realities and gives expression, too, to a powerful new voice in religious studies, whose fresh treatment of a religious tradition that has been relatively neglected in scholarly literature which will give new direction and authenticity to feminists worldwide.

NIKKY-GUNINDER KAUR SINGH

The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent



The book's cover depicts Rani Raj Kaur, taken from an edition of *Rani Surat Singh* (Amritsar: Khalsa Samacar, 1967). She is seen wearing Sikh symbols: Guru Nanak's formulation of the *ik oan kar* is inscribed on the medallion worn round her neck, and Guru Gobind Singh's symbol of the *khanda* decorates her head-band.

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh is an Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Colby College, Waterville. She has contributed chapters to a number of books, and is the author of numerous scholarly articles, as well as monograph entitled *The Guru Granth Sahib: its physics and metaphysics*.

Mother

THE INFINITE MATRIX

*bhandau hi bhandu upajai
bhandai bajh na koi
Of woman are all born
Without woman none should exist*

The *Puratān Janamsākhī* records that the *Japu* was the first expression of Guru Nanak's vision of the Transcendent articulated in the Divine Presence, is the opening text in the *Guru Granth* and has become the morning prayer for the Sikhs. The *Mul Mantra* or the Creed Essential at the outset of the *Japu* begins with the celebration of *Ikk Oan Kar* — the singular metaphysical ground of all that exists.

The *sloka* or finale to the *Japu* is full of vibrant and concrete images. Structurally, the *sloka* is crucial to the theme. It carries the Nanakian insight forward, and reads:

*Air is the Guru, water the Father,
The great earth, the Mother of all.
Day and night are the female and male nurses,
With the entire creation playing in their lap.*

Apparently, there seems to be in the *sloka* a contradiction between the Singular One of the *Mul Mantra* and the several elements — air, water, earth; between the Beyond-gender Absolute and Mother and Father, female and male nurses; between the spaceless, timeless, birthless, non-dual reality and a creation playing in the lap of duality — of day and night. But these two statements, the *Mul Mantra* and the *sloka*, in fact fulfill each other. As Guru Arjan (Nanak V) says in a hymn in the *Granth*, “ikkasu te hoio ananta nanak ekasu mahi samae jio — from the One issue myriads and

into the One they are ultimately assimilated.” Unity becomes plurality, and plurality eventually becomes unity.

In the epilogue to the *Japu* is the presence of equivalent female and male images. One gender is not appropriated over the other, and the feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent finds an equal expression with that of the masculine. The line that concerns us most is the second one:

*mata dharti mahatu.
The Great Earth is the Mother of all.*

This line is pregnant with meaning, and it offers a wealth of significance for all cultures.

I will explore how powerful and significant the female figure in Sikh literature is. In fact, there is a sense of the primacy of the female nurse over the male, for *dai* (female nurse) precedes the *daia* (male). The male thus appears to be her consort rather than the other way around. Regrettably, it has been more usual in sacred art and literature for women to be shown as merely the consorts of the male. The millions of Hindu goddesses (with the exception of Durga and Kali) are imaged as consorts to the gods. The *sloka* imagery is radically different from this norm. My objective is to analyse the rich imagery relating to the Mother in Sikh scripture and thereby counterbalance

the male exegesis. Whenever one image is isolated and prized over the rest, there is an implicit reversion to idolatry. To continue the one-sided androcentric hermeneutics would surely be a distortion of Guru Nanak's seeing of the Transcendent One.

I will therefore proceed to analyse in some detail the very verse ignored by Sikh scholars — "*mata dharti mahat*." Clearly, it is a celebration of "Mother," the Infinite Matrix, exploring the theme of Mother in both her female gender and her feminine dimension in the context of the Sikh tradition. While "female" refers to her gender, her biological being, "feminine" refers to qualities conventionally associated with women, both essential to comprehending the full import of the maternal reality in Sikh sacred literature.

The "Mother" engenders several questions: How does Nanak's image of the Mother form the Infinite Matrix? How would this female image then inform our worldview? How would that in turn transform our ethical values towards our neighbours and our planet? How would our ethical ideas enable us to perform in our everyday interactions? How would those relationships conform to the values of our sisters in the West? While these issues constitute the backdrop of the chapter, the theme of Mother as the Infinite Matrix have been explored in terms of three categories:

- Ontological • Epistemological • Soteriological

Under this threefold rubric, we shall analyse the images pertaining to Mother employed in the Sikh scripture, coming across images such as *garbha* (womb), *joti* (light), *kudarati* (nature), *mati* (wisdom), and *nadar* (grace). Images are valuable, for they integrate the intellectual component with aesthetic, axiological, and emotional components.

In the woman's womb resides the embryo. Images of *garbha* (womb) and *agni* (heat and warmth) have been used interchangeably in the Guru Granth, both underscoring the principle that sustains the fetus for nine months. Such images boldly affirm the glory of womanhood — something at the heart of all contemporary feminist thinking in religion. In a hymn in *Rang Asa*, Guru Nanak reiterates twice how by the Divine Will life initiates in the womb:

*pahilai paurai raini kai vanjaria mitra
hukmi paia garbhasi ...*

*kahu nanak prani pahilai paurai hukmi paia garbhasi
In the first stage of life, o friend,*

*you by the Divine Will lodged in the womb...
Says Nanak, in the first stage of life, the creature
by the Divine Will lodged in the womb.*

In another hymn, the world *garbha* is substituted by the *agni* which generates life: "*agni bimb jal bhitar nipje* — in the warmth [of mother's womb] are we inseminated." Conception and birth are from women. In *Asa di Var* Guru Nanak says: "*bhandi jamiai bhandi nimiai* — Of woman are we born, of woman conceived." In the Sikh worldview the female is thus crucial to the origin of life. She is the matrix out of which everything that originates and evolves.

The crux of the mother-child relationship is harmony: it is a state where there is no opposition, no conflict, no suggestion of fear, or possibility of hostility. Guru Nanak does not equate the Transcendent One with the Mother alone (for the One is both Mother and Father, Sister and Brother...), yet he sees perfect harmony between the Transcendence of the One and Its manifestation — *kudarati*. This harmony between the Transcendent and *kudarati* provides a theological foundation for our society in which the Divine, humanity, and nature are linked together rather than tiered into hierarchical levels with humans in the middle distorting and oppressing the life-support system.

The cosmos originates from the Infinite Matrix; it is a spontaneous unfolding and blooming of the Infinite, of which it is the finite form. There is no hypothetical or contingent relation between the Transcendent and Its *kudarati*: they are one, totally non-dualistic. The life-energy circulating amongst the beings of the world is communicated by each to all within the comprehensive Oneness of the Metaphysical Reality. The result is the healing and harmonious mother-child relationship. Just as a mother would care about his or her needs and requirements, "the Transcendent ponders over Its *kudarati* and sustains it — *kudarati bicare dharan dhare*."

mata mati pita santokh.

Mother is wisdom; father, contentment.

The identification of *mati*, wisdom, with the mother, the female, in the above line by Guru Nanak seems to me to be the quintessential characteristic of Sikh epistemology. But scholars and commentators have not paid sufficient attention to this. This aspect of Sikhism has suffered neglect in the western traditions as well.

A Painter Paints



Manu Saluja
1998
The Art of Manu Saluja

On Saturday afternoon this past June 15th, a prominent audience of Sikhs gathered at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C. for to hear scholars lecture about the state of their cultural heritage. In the evening they returned for a gala dinner to raise funds for the Smithsonian's newly conceived permanent gallery of Sikh art.



Mrs. Basant Kaur Chabra

As guests filled the main rotunda, the portrait artist Manu Saluja was among them. Wearing a striking green and pink silk sari, she blended in effortlessly with the elegant tableau of professionals in their suits and tuxedos. But more than any other guest, she had reason to be a bit nervous. Arrayed in the center of the room was an exhibition of her oil paintings—11 portraits in all. Her paintings have deep, rich colours and radiant skin tones. People walked over immediately, milling around the images of Sikh men, women, and children on canvas. While some leaned in closely to admire the way she had captured the folds in a *pugari* (turban), the glint of a ruby, or the embroidery on a shawl, others stayed back to enjoy the

overall compositions. Her moment of nerves over, she could enjoy the rest of the evening, mingling, dining and dancing to bhangra music.

Back in her studio in New York City, Manu relaxed in the clothes of a professional painter: t-shirt and blue jeans. "A painter paints, and here's the proof," she said, pointing to the stains on her clothes. The proof is actually all around



Simran Chabra

her. The materials of her projects occupy every corner of the room: pencil sketches, oil soaked rags, 3 coffee cans filled with bouquets of brushes, rolls of canvas, half a dozen head studies in oil and two portraits in progress. The cliché of the artist-as-day-dreamer does not apply. She is nothing if not serious, informed, and diligent. She is an example of the stoic philosopher's advice, "Live first to desire your own good opinion."

Her devotion to her craft has yielded over 20 painting commissions in less than four years. In the world of an artist, that's a career. Her work hangs in prestigious institutions and in the homes of prominent families. In 1999

she was unanimously selected by Columbia University to paint a posthumous painting of Professor Jeannette Fleischner. The life-size portrait is on permanent display at Teachers College in Manhattan. Some of her Sikh clients include Ishar Singh Bindra, sponsor of the Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair of Sikh Studies at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York, and Sonny Singh Chabra, President and

growing up quickly as Americans, they decided to stay. With so many relatives still living in Kanpur, Srinagar, Delhi, and Punjab, Manu and her family have made countless visits to India over the years. Her parents live on New York's Long Island.

Her first formal art lessons were in classes she began at



Mr. Ishar Singh Bindra

CEO of the AMC corporation in New York City. Sardar Gurpreet Singh commissioned portraits of his parents, Dr. and Mrs. Harbans Singh, the latter a finalist in *The Artist Magazine's* 1999 portrait competition. Her paintings have appeared in *House Magazine* (Sept/Oct 2001), and the *Graphis New Talent Annual* (1998).

Born Manveet Kaur Saluja, she is the middle child of Doctors Maan Singh and Iqbal Kaur Saluja. Her parents moved to the United States after their marriage in 1965 in India—her father is from Kanpur, her mother from Kashmir. They expected to stay for a 4-year medical residency and then return home. Circumstances changed, and after all three children were born in the U.S. and began



Mrs. Kuljit Kaur Bindra

age 11 near the local high school. When it was time to decide on a university, she matriculated at Barnard College, in Manhattan, where she majored in psychology. In 1993 she graduated *magna cum laude*, winning Barnard's *Ida Markevich Lawrence Award* for her research in social psychology. "I was exploring a more conventional career path. But when I was looking at 8 years of graduate work for a PhD, I realized it was not what I wanted. I'm grateful for the education I received, it taught me a lot about how to work, how to think. But I remember looking ahead and wondering, 'At the end of my life, will I regret never becoming a painter?' And my answer was a resounding 'yes'."

She traded the world of research and grant proposals for picture making. "I read a great quote the other day. Something to the effect that the most common advice given to artists is to have something to fall back on. And the merit of that advice is that in following it, it saves you from the rigors of an artistic life."

She studied for six years with John Frederick Murray at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She worked from live models studying the forms of the human figure, and the basics of light, shadow and composition. Her first success was a stunning self-portrait (see page 37). Set against a somber burnt umber background, she used a purple chunni with gold trim to frame her face. "I wanted the design to lead the viewer's eye within the painting. I was pondering who I might have been had I grown up in India. After that painting, I knew I wanted to be a portrait artist."

I first met Manu in May of 2001. That February I had been invited to speak at Hofstra University. Mr. and Mrs. Ishar Singh Bindra had recently endowed the *Chair of Sikh Studies* there, and I was the keynote speaker. I was staying at their house, and in their living room they had portraits of themselves on the wall. The likenesses were astounding. Not only had the artist captured accurately the details of the faces, but their character and spirit were embedded in the paint. When they told me the artist was a young Sikh woman, I immediately asked for her name and number. Later, I invited Manu and her husband to visit me in Canada.

We set a date, and a month later they arrived. We spent two days together, our conversation delving deeply into the topics of Sikh history and art.

I was surprised when she told me that over 60% of her commissions have come from the Sikh community. "I didn't anticipate work from Indians. I was getting calls from Sikh families I didn't know." Sikhs all over North America have come to Manu for portraits. "They're excited to have a very personal piece of art they can pass down to grandchildren and great grandchildren, something that captures them in the way that no photograph can."

The commissions signal both the quality of her work—the referrals keep coming—as well as a rise in the appreciation and need for art in the Sikh community itself. "All my portrait work is fulfilling but I admit feeling special pride when I paint a Sikh." She has added the noble imagery of today's Sikhs to the tradition of portrait art. I encouraged Manu to take things a step further.

In the grand tradition of western painting, Sikh themes are rare, and rarer still is the paint brush held by a Sikh woman. For a future project, we discussed in particular a painting of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Ranjit Singh is almost always depicted as an older man in the sunset years of his reign (1799-1839). He is typically shown with a white *dari* (beard), a *chuttra* (umbrella) or *nimbus* (halo) over his head, wearing a modest, light coloured kurta-pajama, surrounded by his court members, eyes diverted from the viewer. Often he is seated in profile, conveniently hiding his blinded left eye, the result of childhood small pox.

While it is true that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was at the height of his power in his later years, we must not forget



Dr. Harbans Singh

his legendary reputation as cunning soldier. Ranjit Singh consolidated the *misl* clans, taken Lahore and established his rule as the first Sikh monarch of Northern India—all this by the age of twenty-one. He was one of the only rulers to conquer large portions of Afghanistan and hold them for any length of time. Yet Ranjit Singh the warrior, the "Lion of Punjab" has hardly ever been depicted.

"To show him with compelling realism, I've prepared the composition as faithfully as if I had a flesh and blood client—as if he had posed for the portrait himself." Yet there was little direct visual reference material for her idea—no photographs or drawings of him as a younger man exist. "As a realistic artist, it's crucial to understand the subject sculpturally. I couldn't rely on anything arbitrary. The objects in the portrait—his armour, clothing, throne—all

must be arranged and lit with great care. For this kind of painting, I had to physically replicate his costume, battle accoutrements, and environment."

In July 2001 Manu flew to London, and, with generous introductions by Harbinder Singh Rana (of the *Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust*) she met with influential scholars and top museum curators. Her first stop was The Victoria & Albert Museum to see Ranjit Singh's throne. "Having only seen photographs of it in books, his golden throne was thrilling in person. The intricate scalloped and



Mrs. Harbans Singh

floral design is simply gorgeous. I spent hours sketching and photographing it from every angle I thought useful for the painting."

Next, she headed across town to the Wallace Collection, where she met arms expert David Edge for a behind-the-scenes tour of Sikh arms and armour. "I was permitted to take pictures of Sikh armour and weaponry including one of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's shields, a turban helmet worn by Sikh soldiers, and their swords, khandas, breast plates and arm guards."

In between her regular portrait commissions, Manu spent the year in a whirlwind of preparation, assembling her props, commissioning armour, and a miniature version of Ranjit Singh's throne. Once the items were ready, she held several photo sessions with a Sikh model. When I saw

her this past September she had created several colour sketches in oil to fully work out the painting's proportions and design. Her commitment to the project has been inspiring.

Since her exhibit at the Smithsonian, Manu's work has caught the eye of art collectors like Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany of *The Sikh Foundation* in Palo Alto California. February 2003 marks the foundation's 35th anniversary and opening of the *Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery*, a permanent collection of Sikh art at the *Asian Art Museum* in San



Manu and the portrait of Professor Jeannette Fleischer

Francisco, California. Dr. Kapany has invited Manu to speak as one of five women representing the vanguard in contemporary Sikh art.

For now she is submerged in the task of completing the paintings of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When asked if she's concerned about historical accuracy, and what the reaction of Sikhs will be to the painting, she answered, "Ranjit Singh has transcended into mythology, he embodies our strength and ideals as a people. It will be exciting to see an image of someone so revered that's never been done before, imagined at an earlier stage of his life, with different challenges still ahead. Only art can do that."

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A SIKH Au Courante*

We all want to be modern. There is nothing quite so distressing as to be told that one is behind the times or is clueless about the world in which he or she operates. It is worse than being poor, fat or ugly. But what is it to be modern? What does being modern mean? Let me illustrate my concerns by two little tales.

Not so long ago, a young Sikh technocrat and I were passing the time of day over a cup of coffee. He is a bright MBA and a good man but not a recognizable Sikh. All of a sudden he blurted out: "We Sikhs have a very practical and logical religion with an incomparably attractive and modern worldview but our external appearance is not consistent with that modern framework." He was pointing to the turban and bearded visage of the observing Sikh male.

Another incident is from a few years ago when I was single. Some kind friends tried to set me up with a Sikh lady in a different town and gave me her telephone number. She was a bright, young, professionally educated Sikh - a psychiatrist.

We talked a few times on the telephone. Here, we both thought, might be some possibilities. Naturally, we wanted to meet face to face to see what kind of chemistry might result. We hadn't yet met and didn't know what the other looked like. One day, we were on the phone chatting about the logistics of meeting, when she abruptly inquired: "Are you a modern Sikh?"

I knew what she was about but decided to play it for what it was worth. To me, the antithesis of being modern is to be primitive. So, my response turned out to be somewhat tactless but not entirely pointless. I countered that I never ever left the house without clothes, could coherently converse on a variety of subjects including religion, politics and sex, and knew which fork to use with which plate at dinner; therefore, I was not exactly primitive. She thought my response was aggressively, if not

offensively, unresponsive; she had wanted to know if I was keshadhari, long-haired Sikh or not. I thought a crew cut would not necessarily endow me with the so-called characteristics of modernity, anymore than long hair would automatically transform me either into a sage or a savage. Needless to say we never met.

I must confess that in both encounters - with the lady psychiatrist and the MBA - initially I was somewhat taken aback but, upon reflection, realized that perhaps this is how most of the world thinks of us. I see that many Sikhs also seem to reason similarly; that says something for our sense of self and the self-imposed psychological burden that many Sikhs seem to carry. The question, of course, is less how others view us, even though that is extremely important but, more significantly, how comfortable we are with whatever we have chosen to be.

My cohorts in both encounters insisted that Sikh philosophy and precepts were modern. (Did they really know enough of Sikh tradition to so assert or were they only mouthing the words? I merely raise the question here.) Nevertheless, if I accepted their protestations then the unassailable definition of modernity for a Sikh would be to understand and live by the very modern tenets and postulates of Sikhism. And would that not, I wondered, include the lifestyle of a Sikh, including one's appearance as one? It seems to me a very clear outcome of their logic on the modernity of Sikhism.

But in common parlance - in proposing such a conditional definition of modernity implied by my friends - we usually mean only the principles of Sikhism that should govern our everyday reality: trade, family and at most the ethical framework of our existence. But in such reasoning both of my friends have created a rift between the postulates of Sikhism and their historical manifestation in the individual Sikh with his articles of faith, including the unshorn hair. This dichotomy states that other rules of

*In French (pronounced o kuran) meaning up-to-date, especially in the knowledge of current affairs.

the game - such as the ones that dictate our outer garb - are an entirely different matter and perhaps irrelevant and immaterial. In this view, the external appearance of the male Sikh is not consistent with the ways of the world, as we know it, hence not in keeping with the times. Seriously, I have come across several fresh arrivals from India who said to me: "On the phone you leave a different and more modern impression. But I see that you look like a traditional Sikh, something we didn't expect after so many years." I wonder what they were really thinking.

There are several ways to explore this paradoxical situation and many levels of objections to such an attitude that seems to select some rules as applicable while branding others as extraneous. Qualitatively, there are at least two kinds of argument that I can muster to dismiss such reasoning.

One can sensibly suggest that the Sikh appearance was not decided by a people after some sort of a referendum but was willed to them by their Guru. Surely these articles of faith are not at all like corporate logos that are redesigned periodically by a professional team of consultants after a survey and market-analysis of the current trends and fads.

Now, one can choose either to walk the path of the master or not - that choice is always available. But to walk while continuing to quibble full force reminds me of the adage "faint heart never climbed a mountain." (Or was it faint heart never won a fair lady, but let's not be sexist.) To sit around and second-guess the Guru's intention and how he might have decided if he had lived in this 21st century is a game with no rules or one where every player makes his own rules.

It reminds me of many students who protest that the rules and requirements of the course that I teach are onerous, unfair and demanding, but this protest occurs during midsemester usually after a harrowing and hopeless test and is primarily limited to those who are floundering. That's when the rules no longer appear convenient or helpful to the learning process but loom as a hurdle to their graduating. Students look only at the fact that the rules impose hardships on them or set them apart from other friends who may not be in a similarly demanding program. On the other hand, I am aware of the role my students are destined to play as health professionals and I must design the rules of the game that will prepare them for such responsibility. Inconvenient the rules may be but are they necessary? If necessary then they are also eminently fair. To demand less would not be doing justice to the professional choices these young people have made in life.

I am not unmindful of the social isolation and the

economic repercussions that many Sikhs fear their appearance might produce. The other side of the coin raises an interesting issue: what insecurities in me suggest that life would be so much rosier if only I looked like John Doe? If such attitudes reside in me and govern my outlook in life it must be difficult indeed to look in the mirror. Life has taught me that no matter what I look like there will always be some who will not like me while there will be others who will accept me as I am. For many, I will always remain too short or too tall, too fat or too thin, too dark or too pale, too this or too that. No matter how smart I am there will be millions who will be smarter and just as many who will not be. No matter how rich I am and so on, ad infinitum. Whether it is in personal relationship or in social and professional interaction there is always a glass ceiling. But is it the result of our own inadequacies or those of others? Perhaps a little of each.

If I truly feel uncaged and free only when dressed in a particular manner then the problem lies primarily in my head, not in others. No one can make me feel small without my consent. So to look for an excuse or explanation in the demands of society is really not meaningful. Also, such demands can never be settled in full. My sense of self must be pretty feeble if it depends primarily upon my button down collar, wing tip shoes, blow-dried hairstyle or, most importantly, the opinion of others. I know the requirements of the corporate culture but my bonus is finally determined more by my production figures and only minimally, if at all, by my spit-shined shoes.

I know full well the pitfalls in taking the road less traveled. I also know that Sikhs are a minuscule minority in any part of the world, even in the Indian culture, except perhaps in the Punjab. I know the situation is not likely to change. I am also convinced that Guru Gobind Singh, when he ordained the Khalsa, never had any expectation that there would ever be more Khalsa than there are people of other kind in the world. We are ordained to remain a minority. We have to learn to rejoice in this and not try to metamorphose into a brown sahib. For instance, there will never be more of any kind of people in this world than there are Chinese but that is no reason why everyone has to look Chinese or ape their very rich culture.

The five symbols of our religion, including the long unshorn hair, become articles of faith only when their magic and historical impact become integrated into our lives and embedded in our psyche such that they define us. Otherwise they remain symbols that can be discarded as and when the spirit moves us. As articles of faith they become a part of the self and good people will fight and die for them but not abandon them. As symbols they will

always leave us uncomfortable and ill at ease. Symbols have a price; they can be bought and sold in the marketplace. As articles that define faith they acquire value which is often greater than life itself; they can't be weighed and measured in the market, nor do they become shop-worn. Then the question of their being with the times or not becomes silly as would a question that demands to know the price, justification or relevance of any part of the self.

Parenthetically, I wish to leave with you one thought. Look closely at these five articles of faith in Sikhism. You will see that they have undergone transformation with time, some more than others. I have attempted a fuller discussion on this elsewhere and it is not pertinent here.

Even though, and perhaps especially because they were so few, the challenge for Sikhs was always to remain undaunted and to walk the razor's edge of their faith with courage, confidence and a smile. In other words to live life fully, not by half measures. That was, perhaps, the meaning behind Guru Gobind Singh's challenging call for a head on Vaisakhi 1699. This is maybe the lesson that emerges from the sacrifices of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and countless Sikh martyrs that history has honored. This is what Guru Nanak may have meant when he challenged his followers to walk with the head in the palm of the hand. I would think that to be able to put your head on the line for principle is an utterly modern concept that only a free people can adopt.

To live free is to be modern. This implies the courage to be distinct and to walk the different beat of your distant drummer. Look back, perhaps not so many years in your life, and what do you see? During adolescence when life was driven by raging hormones, the most powerful urge - not always clearly seen - was to define one's own self by being different from everyone else. (I know that this drive was also accompanied and backed by another - to belong to a pack, which emerged from the fear of being alone.) The sense of self - indeed our identity - developed out of the complex interplay of these competing desires and directions.

We spend our defining years learning to become individually distinct. In selecting what we wear or carry, we spend our teen years trying

to make a unique statement. I am my own person, we want the world to know. It doesn't matter if the world thinks it's ridiculous but dyeing pink a swath down the middle of the head makes me unique, so that's what it will be. I want to be alone on my path but not lonely, so I look for a ratpack that travels together, where each enhances the other's emerging individuality. I also search for a badge that stamps me as exclusive - a limited edition - by joining exclusive clubs and secret societies.



Maternal uncles lift the bride before her Doli: a beautiful tradition which continues in the 21st Century.

In Sikhism, the Guru gave us the gift and the courage to stand out and yet to belong to a rich, powerful and eloquent tradition. I can't imagine a more fittingly modern idea. The question is how to model our lives so that our difference makes a statement. And then the question is what kind of a statement do we wish to make.

We are an integral part of society and so are integrated into it. Being like others defines the niche to which we belong - a space that is carved out of a shared history. By attaching ourselves to the timelessness of a heritage we become free of the restraint as well as of the tyranny of changing customs and changing times. Would the slavery to fad and fashion not make us prisoners of our time? And in the process would we not lose the sense of our heritage that makes us different and unique?

It is not always easy, even the concept isn't so easy to grasp. But I think the most expanded version of being in tune with the times would be - being the right person at the right time in the right place for the right reason.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh

*Dr. I.J. Singh,
New York*

the Sikh Coalition

the voice of a people

September 11, 2001 is a day most of us wish we could forget, "the pain, the suffering, the despair and utter helplessness. But for others, 9/11 was the fire to motivate formation of what is now the leading Sikh-American advocacy organization," **The Sikh Coalition**. Many of us were unable to comprehend the emotion of the tragedy itself. All I can remember is sitting on my roof in silence for hours staring at the smoke from the Pentagon. There was not enough time to register the shock of the day when the first hate crime against a Sikh occurred. On the night of the 11th, a close Sikh friend of mine said over and over, "this will hit our community hard, the Sikhs will suffer the most." I did not believe him at the time, but he was right. Every time I checked my email, another incident against a Sikh-American occurred; then it was a friend from camp, a cousin, even my own sister.

Amidst all the chaos and confusion, the Sikh community lacked a unified voice; especially a voice that represented the generation of Sikhs who were born and raised in the United States. Within a week of the attacks, young Sikh-American professionals and students in Washington, DC and New York began organizing. Late night meetings and conference calls were held to address the discrimination and hate against the community.



Congressman Mike Honda received "The Sikh Coalition's Outstanding Leadership Award." Coalition members Amandeep Singh Sidhu (left) and Gurpreet Singh Dhillon (right) thanked the Congressman for his support.



Susie Ahn from Congressman Mike Honda's office accepted The Sikh Coalition's Dedication to Service Award on behalf of Congressman Honda's entire staff.

"We knew two things had to be done immediately [after 9/11]; outreach to the Sikh community and outreach to the government and media," said Amandeep Singh Sidhu, Director of Regional Affairs for the Sikh Coalition. Sidhu, 24 a former IT consultant and a current law student, along with ten other young Sikh-Americans in the Washington, DC area, became the Sikh American Association (SAA), an affiliate-member group of The Sikh Coalition. SAA members along with other Coalition members in New York became community mobilizers, professional lobbyists, and educational consultants.

SAA's motto is *Education, Awareness, and Advocacy* and this has defined their work following 9/11. Gurpreet Singh Dhillon, 30, an IT consultant and the Coalition's Legislative and Governmental Affairs Director, and Harsimran Kaur Dang, 27, a third year law student at the George Washington University and Advisory Board member of SAA, along with Sidhu and other SAA Board members, would spend the Sundays following the attacks driving back and forth to every Gurdwara in the Washington, DC metropolitan area to educate the community on how to handle bias incidents and where to report them. "Each week in Gurdwara we were hearing a different story of an incident of bias or

violence against someone in the sangat," recalled Sidhu. "We needed to give our community tools for their safety," said Dang.

In fact, safety for the community was Dang's primary concern. She and others assembled information packets that were distributed to the sangat during the Gurdwara visits. Talking points for the media, tips on how to talk to neighbours, sample letters to send to teachers, and resources on where to turn when a bias incident occurred, were among the many items included. "Hearing stories of people attacked, and even killed, was what motivated me to continue outreach to the sangat," said Dang.

Simultaneously, Coalition members were donning business suits and using their professional skills to walk the halls of Congress appealing for assistance. Amrith Kaur Mago, an undergraduate student at the George Washington University and an Advisory Board member of the Sikh American Association, and Dhillon first went to the Capitol to confront Congressman John Cooksey for his racist remarks regarding racial profiling of those who wear turbans. Afterwards, they visited the office of Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois, Mago's elected legislator. "We explained the reason for our visit to the receptionist and within minutes Senator Durbin's Chief Counsel came and met with us," said Mago. They were then brought into the Senator's office to discuss their concerns directly with him. "We had to start out with the basics of Sikhism first and then explain the situation [hate crimes against Sikh-Americans]. I did not think that he would be that receptive, but he was very friendly."

Senator Durbin, along with Representatives Chris Shays (R-CT) and Mike Honda (D-CA) sponsored a resolution condemning hate crimes against Sikh-Americans. "The resolution is a clear commitment from our government that it will not let terror tear America apart," said Dhillon. Through community mobilization efforts, the Coalition was able to gain 168 Congressional sponsors to the resolution, marking a truly historic moment. Senate Concurrent Resolution 74 represented the first time Congress had recognized the Sikh-American community in a piece of legislation as a distinct and integral part of the fabric of America. "For Sikh-Americans, the passage of this resolution will begin to restore the sense of security that has been lost as a result of the many backlash attacks," said Amardeep Singh, Director of Legal Affairs for the Coalition. Soon after the resolution was introduced, Amrith Kaur worked with Senator Durbin's staff to arrange a visit for the Senator to the Sikh Religious Society Gurdwara in Palatine, IL.

Advocacy efforts did not stop at Congress. Coalition members reached out to the Attorney General's Office, the



Mr. Ralph Boyd - Assistant Attorney General of the United States, United States Department of Justice (DOJ), was a special guest at the dinner and addressed the audience. Mr. Boyd is the second-highest ranking official in the Department of Justice and has played a crucial role in reaching out to Sikh, Muslim, and Arab Americans and other victims of post 9/11 backlash, in addition to prosecuting those individuals engaged in hate-crimes against the affected groups.



Dr. Navinderdeep Singh Nijher (right) was presented The Sikh Coalition's Service to Humanity Award. Dr. Nijher was recognized as a "9/11 Hero" by Newsweek Magazine for setting up the first medical triage centre at ground zero immediately following the attacks.

Department of Transportation, the Department of Justice, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Through the efforts of the Coalition's legal counsel, the Coalition was able to secure a partnership with federal agencies to investigate and prosecute hate crimes through an online database called *Justice Watch* where victims can report hate crimes. The reporting system can be viewed at <http://www.sikhcoalition.org/ListReports.asp>.

Sikh-Americans were suffering from multiple forms of discrimination after 9/11, particularly men (and women) who wore turbans. Illegal airport profiling became a major



Dr. Jeremy Wu, Department of Transportation, Director of Office of Civil Rights, seen accepting The Sikh Coalition's Outstanding Leadership Award on behalf of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. Norman Mineta is the Secretary of the United States Department of Transportation (DOT). Secretary Mineta worked with Sikh representatives soon after 9/11 to develop official Department of Transportation/Federal Aviation Administration Air Travel Guidelines detailing proper and respectful handling of Sikh air travelers during security checks. Dr. Wu has worked closely with Sikh representatives to address ongoing travel concerns of Sikhs. His office is responsible for ensuring that the civil rights of all travelers are respected by airport and airline security personnel.



Mark Keam, Legal Counsel for Senator Richard Durbin. Mr. Keam accepted The Sikh Coalition's Dedication to Service Award on behalf of Natacha Blain and Senator Durbin's entire staff for their tremendous receptiveness and guidance throughout the efforts.

issue in the months following, and still remains a concern. Sidhu was one of the many who have been targeted. On a business trip with a colleague after 9/11, Sidhu had gone through all of the security checkpoints as well as being randomly searched at the airport gate. Security guards boarded the flight after all of the passengers had boarded and requested he deplane with them. "After hearing my voice - that of an American clearly native to this country - the agent was extremely apologetic for the inconvenience and eventually admitted that I fit an established profile and that the airline was exercising its rights under law.

Although I was able to explain myself and avoid further complications, I worry about the Sikh-American who perhaps hasn't been in the United States his or her whole life, or perhaps does not speak English very clearly," said Sidhu. He was eventually allowed to re-board and later received an apology letter from the airline. Since 9/11, over forty-seven airport profiling incidents have been reported. However, The Sikh Coalition believes they represent only a fraction of the actual incidents that have, and continue, to take place.

Coalition members worked with the Department of Transportation to develop a set of guidelines for airport and airline security purposes. The guidelines can be viewed at <http://www.sikhcoalition.org/LegalCenter.asp>. Since the development of the guidelines, there has been a decrease in the number of incidents but they have not been completely eliminated. In late June, three Sikh families from Grand Rapids, Michigan, were traveling together to visit family friends in Richmond, Virginia. At the airport in Michigan, all eleven members of the party, - including adult Sikh men with turbans and beards, three adult women, and children ranging in age from 4 to 17 - were randomly selected for additional scrutiny by airline and federal security agents. All eleven had their checked luggage subjected to random x-ray screening; all eleven were the subject of random requests for additional search at security checkpoint; both Sikh men were asked to remove their turbans, although they refused and explained the reasons why; all were pulled aside at the gate by airline officials for random search there as well, including the four-year old daughter of one family. A similar incident occurred in Richmond, Virginia, when nine of the eleven were returning home. Again, airline ticket agents "randomly" selected all nine in the party. They complained and the response was that two of them were randomly chosen by mistake and were free to go to the gate. A formal complaint has been filed with the US Department of Transportation and the Sikh Coalition is assisting in possible legal action.

Employment discrimination against Sikhs has also been on the rise. Most notably, the legal team of the Coalition has been working on the case of Amric Singh, a Sikh fired from the New York Police Department (NYPD) for wearing a turban. Since late February, the Coalition has gained media coverage of the case, created an online petition to support the case (visit: www.petitiononline.com/SikhNYPD/petition.html to sign), and most significantly have influenced the Los Angeles and Washington, DC police departments to accept and welcome Sikh police officers.

Whenever the Coalition stretched out a hand, it seemed as though there was a hand waiting to be held. "We felt the need to honor and thank all the heroes of our community,"



Senator Richard Durbin received a standing ovation from the capacity audience at the Banquet. Senator Durbin was the first champion of The Hate Crimes Resolution and received The Sikh Coalition Outstanding Leadership Award. Senator Durbin was one of the three original sponsors of the Resolution calling for protection of the civil liberties of Sikh Americans. His office was also recognized for their efforts in helping gain Congressional support for the Resolution.

said Amandeep Singh Sidhu. The Coalition decided to host an awards banquet in May in Washington, DC. Senator Durbin, Congressman Shays, Congressman Honda, and Department of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta each received the the Sikh Coalition Outstanding Leadership Award. Ernest Baynard and Susie Ahn from Congressman Honda's office, Natacha Blain, Chief Counsel to Senator Durbin, and Len Wolfson from Congressman Shay's office, received the Coalition Dedication to Service Award. Deborah Barfield, a reporter from Newsday, and Deborah Kong, a reporter from the Associated Press, both received the Coalition Excellence in Journalism Award. Paul Igasaki, Vice Chairman of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Karen Narasaki from NAPALC, both received the Community Outreach Award. Dr. James Zogby from the Arab American Institute and Deepa Iyer from the Department of Justice and South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow, each received the Coalition Spirit of Fellowship Award. Blane Workie from the Department of Transportation received the Outstanding Service Award. Dr. Navinderdeep Singh Nijher, a Sikh physician who helped set up one of the first triage stations for victims at the World Trade Centre site and who was also featured as a hero in Newsweek magazine, received the Sikh Coalition Service to Humanity Award. In addition, special guests Ralph Boyd (Assistant Attorney General) and Jonathon Chace from the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division addressed the audience.

The motto of The Sikh Coalition is "the voice of a people," and the dinner truly confirmed this. The Coalition has become the leader in representing the needs of the Sikh-

American community - a unified voice that represents the interests of all Sikh-Americans who can interact and work professionally with those outside of the community. They have spent the summer working with other Asian/Pacific Islander groups in Washington, DC, handling new law cases, and organization building.

It has been one year since 9/11. On the first year anniversary, Harpreet Singh, Director of Community Relations for the Coalition, recited gurbani at an interfaith service at the United Nations. In Washington, D.C. kirtan could be heard at the National Cathedral. As Sikh-Americans, every part of our identity has come under attack and we have felt vulnerable. In the past year, we have had to reassess our values, our identities, and ourselves. 9/11 has forced us to create a new identity: a Sikh-American identity. We are finally acknowledging that we are not only Sikhs, but also Americans, and that we are not only Americans, but also Sikhs.



Congressman Christopher Shays addressing the audience at the Awards Banquet. Congressman Shays was an original co-sponsor of the hate crimes resolution in the House of Representatives, along with Congressman Mike Honda.

The Sikh Coalition and its member organizations have shown the Sikh community that such an identity does exist. In a matter of a few months, the Coalition has given a face to the Sikh-American community with the government and the media. The members of the Coalition are intelligent, well spoken and most importantly, they are incredibly passionate and committed. With few resources and no full time staff, the Coalition is in desperate need of support from the community. Please take a moment to learn more about their work by visiting their website www.sikhcoalition.org.

Naina Kaur Dhirra

The author is a senior at The George Washington University in Washington, DC where she is studying International Development.

NRI GROOMS

DESERT WIVES



Harjit Kaur brought up her four children, two daughters and two sons, against all odds after her husband had passed away. Her life in Sheron Nigah village in Amritsar with just a few kanals of land at her disposal was extremely tough and challenging. Besides rearing children, she had to till her land just to survive. In this backdrop, when a match for her daughter, Rajwinder Kaur, came from a family whose son was settled in the Yemen, Harjit Kaur thought that the back-breaking struggle in life was about to wind up.

Rajwinder Kaur thus married to Sukhdev Singh, son of Hazara Singh of Khuda Cheena village in Gurdaspur district in 1991. After some time, Sukhdev Singh left for Yemen leaving his wife with his family. The life became tougher for her with each passing day in her pregnant condition. According to her, everyday confrontation with her mother-in-law eventually forced her to live with her own mother in Sheron Nigah. Here, she continued to receive letters from her husband. But when she gave birth to a daughter, nobody came from her in-laws house. Her husband, however, sent her 200 dollars.

That was the last of her happiness. The next five years were spent in agony by Rajwinder Kaur and her mother. Both had no clue what was happening either in Yemen or in the house of the husband. "We came to know very late that my mother-in-law had organized my husband's re-marriage at Amarkot in 1998. He went back with the second lady on my passport," revealed Rajwinder Kaur.

Her mother, who was already finding it hard to make two ends meet, had to start yet another struggle in her life. She approached Bimla Dang and Raj Verma of the *Punjab Istri Sabha* to seek justice for her daughter. Both crusaders chased the Batala police and eventually got a case registered.

Batala SSP, Alok Nath Angra deputed DSP Satinder Singh to deal with this case. He made all-out efforts but since the boy had escaped to Yemen nothing was coming as relief to the girl. There are no laws that could enforce extradition of the boy. However, the court has declared the boy a proclaimed offender. "While that serves the boy and his family right, it actually brings no relief to Rajwinder Kaur", says Raj Verma, who has been pursuing the case on a day-to-day basis.

Meanwhile, Bimla Dang and Raj Verma have gathered information that Sukhdev Singh allegedly murdered somebody in Yemen for which he had been sentenced to jail. The second woman too gave birth to a daughter.

According to the Punjab Istri Sabha, Punjab is full of such cases. As per a survey, in at least 60 per cent cases NRIs have deserted their legally wedded wives. Most of these girls are left with the parents of the boys so as to serve them. Here, it may be recalled that Kuljit Kaur and Aman Kaur, two sisters, were married to two NRI brothers in Nawanshahr but were never taken abroad by their husbands. The in-laws had literally imprisoned them in their house till they succeeded in fleeing after three years and more of their marriage. These girls have also been fighting their case in court for the past seven years.

The case of Balbir Kaur, a daughter of Gurdial Singh of Thalla village in Phillaur, only reiterates the issue. She was married to Jaswinder Singh, son of Prehland Singh, in 1990. Her husband left her with parents and returned to the UK. For the next two years, he never returned. Meanwhile, Balbir Kaur continued to serve her in-laws oblivious of the doings of her husband in the UK. It was as late as 1994 that she and her family learnt that he had remarried in the UK in 1992. The victims, Balbir Kaur and her family, have now registered an FIR against the boy and his family.

The case of Sukhwinder Kaur, daughter of Shingara Singh of Mander village in Nawanshahr, speaks volumes about the menace of deserted wives. She was married to Kanwaljit Singh, son of Tirath Singh of Chhachhrari in Nawanshahr, in 1994. The NRI groom, for a change, had escorted his wife to the UK, one year after the marriage. She stayed with him for the next two years but he brought her back in 1997 by misleading her. He took away all her travel documents and passport on the sly and returned to the UK without informing her. The girl and her family had no option but to register cases against him and his family.

This issue was raised with Ujjal Dosanj, when he became the Premier of British Columbia and was visiting Punjab. He too was fully aware of the menace of NRI grooms deserting their legally wedded wives. In fact an overwhelming number of such grooms belong to Canada. Ujjal Dosanj continues to assert, "As there are no laws that can effectively nail such grooms, it would be best for Punjab to hold the families of the grooms accountable for indulging in illegal weddings of their boys. Unless there is a social boycott of such weddings, the unsuspecting hapless girls from Punjab will continue to be cheated."

Reaching out to America

S I K H *Awareness Tour*

The Sikh Awareness Tour with Dr. Navinderdeep Singh Nijher in the first week of September 2002 was an unqualified and resounding success. Spending a total of 8 days on the road, we spoke in 14 different cities and in front of 20 different organizations and communities. Nearly 20 television stations, 8 newspapers and 8 radio stations interviewed us and carried Dr. Nijher's story.

The audiences represented the enormous diversity of America. We spoke before Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce representing the business community, Jewish and Christian audiences, townhall gatherings, African-American gatherings, Senior Citizens and many more groups. In each setting, Dr. Nijher was able to connect with and captivate the audience, leaving every setting with a standing ovation and more importantly, a newfound thinking about Sikh Americans.

In every situation, the mainstream American audiences had a wrong impression about Sikhs and their appearance before the presentations. We found that Americans still equate the turban and beard with Muslims and Middle Easterners. They still do not know that Sikhism is a distinct religion and are surprised to hear people with dark skin and a turban speak perfect English with no accent, and somehow believe that a turban is a negative.

In connecting with audiences, Dr. Nijher immediately established himself as a Sikh American, telling people of his education through the American school system and of his participation in everyday sports and activities. With no hint of an accent, Dr. Nijher came across as every other American child growing up in America. He made it a point to tell people that he is no different from many other Sikh children attending school in this country. He then proceeded to relate the events of September 11th.

One major point emphasised was that at ground zero he was working in a secure area accessible only by security clearance. Not once did the FBI, NYPD, FYPD or anyone else question his turban, his nationality, his appearance or his loyalty to America. And yet that same tolerance and acceptance of diversity at ground zero did not carry forth to the streets of America, as witnessed by the hate and harassment directed at the Doctor and the rest of the Sikh community nationwide.

Using the pulpit to discuss his appearance, the doctor used the opportunity to educate fellow Americans, stating that 99% of people in the US wearing turbans are Sikhs. Stating that Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world, founded on the same principles that the American constitution was founded upon. He made it clear that Sikhism is not associated with Islam or Hinduism and emphasised how Sikhs are a productive part of everyday society in America.



It was clear after his speaking engagements that the audience walked away with a new respect for Sikhs. Dr. Nijher challenged the audience to step forward when they see an injustice being committed against fellow Americans of the Sikh faith. The audience responded extremely favourably, many wanting the Doctor to return and speak again, or to speak before other groups. In the end, we had more than a dozen invitations to speak to groups across America.

In our travels, we also had an opportunity to visit with many Sikh communities across America. The doctor challenged Sikhs across the country to become more proactive and integrate with

society in order to educate and help dispel myths associated with Sikhs. As an example, Dr Nijher said every Sikh parent with a child in school can start by visiting the teacher and principal numerous times during the year, using the opportunity to get on a first name basis with the teachers and educate them about the child's religious upbringing.

The doctor also said that with fire and police stations



everywhere in America, Sikhs could pay frequent visits to the public safety officials, bringing them food and establishing goodwill in the community. Again, teachers and public safety officials are all influential members of the society that if educated, can help dispel myths.

This tour was the first professional "Press Tour" of its kind for the Sikhs in the US. To some Sikhs the benefit of such a tour was not apparent in the beginning and comments ranged from "what is the need since there is no problem in our town" to "what benefit would we get" to "why does this tour need so much money". Our visits during the tour made it abundantly clear

that there is a serious misconception regarding Sikhs in the USA. As to the "benefit," more than \$850,000 worth of media coverage was obtained regarding Dr. Nijher's story across the country on television, newspapers, magazines and radio. As an example, a 4-minute spot (equal to eight 30-second commercials) during the noon news at KNBC TV Los Angeles would cost approx. \$125,000 - which we got for FREE since we knew how to position and create the story around Dr. Nijher. Also we were able to get an unedited, live 4-minute story versus the typical 90-second edited story.

Then there was the cost of the tour. To speak at 20 gatherings in 14 cities in 8 days required precise planning and coordination of plane flights, hotels, cars, media editorial sessions and speaking engagements. Prior to the tour, a month was spent planning and contacting different organizations and media. While the press tour was in progress, behind the scenes people were working the fax machines and e-mails to various media requesting information as well as handling telephone inquiries, dealing with last minute schedule changes, and media relations. Typically a press tour of this magnitude costs \$80,000 to \$100,00. We were able to do it for approximately \$25,000. At the end, creating more than \$850,000 of benefit for approximately \$25,000 in costs is a great financial return!

Of course this tour would not have been possible without the financial support of the Sikh community. We would like to thank the Sikh communities in and around the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, Stockton, Los Angeles, Washington DC and Boston for their kind financial support, which made this tour possible. *The Sikh Coalition* and *The Kaur Foundation*, both of Washington DC, worked closely with us to make the East Coast tour successful. Thanks also to *Sikhpoint.com*, *Sikhnet.com* and other Sikh websites for their support in informing everyone about Dr. Nijher's tour (for complete coverage of the tour visit *Sikhnet.com*).

As for Dr. Navinderdeep Singh Nijher, he is a true Sikh American hero. His actions at ground zero on September 11, 2001 speak for themselves. His actions to educate America about Sikhs go above and beyond the call of duty. Dr. Nijher took all of his remaining vacation for the year, 10 days, to do this tour. Married just a few months ago, the doctor and his wife put aside a honeymoon in order to take advantage of this opportunity for the Sikh community. He is now back finishing his surgical residency in New York.

Finally, we would like to thank Mr. Ed Vasquez for all his hard work and dedication to the Sikh message. Sleeping an average of 4 hours per night, Mr. Vasquez accompanied Dr. Nijher and was the media architect responsible for the whole tour, making sure that Dr. Nijher's message was heard loud and clear across America.

Dr. Nijher did his part. The time has come for others in the Sikh community to step forward and continue these education efforts. Many people have positive stories to tell that can be used to further educate Americans and portray Sikhs in a positive light.

May we all remain in the spirit of *Chardian Kalan!*

THE WORLD'S Most Visible Minority

With their distinctive turbans, beards and ceremonial swords, Sikhs have dubbed themselves the world's "most visible minority."

And after the Sept. 11 attacks last year, Sikhs in the United States found themselves among the most vulnerable as well. Four days after the attacks, a Sikh Balbir Singh Sodhi was gunned down and killed at his Arizona gas station in an act that prosecutors have called a hate crime.

And hundreds of other Sikhs have said they were harassed, singled out by officials, or even assaulted because people linked them to Osama bin Laden's Islamic al Qaeda network, which Washington has blamed for the attacks.

But the Sikh community has responded to the attacks not only by mourning their lost family, friends and colleagues, but as a wake-up call to educate other Americans about their culture and religion. "They identified the enemy and the enemy looked like us," said Mandeep Singh Dhillon, a Sikh American lawyer in California. "It wasn't that people's attitudes had changed, it was that they didn't know," he said. "Even though we had lived here for generations the people around us didn't really know who we were."

Galvanized by those incidents, many of the near one million Sikhs in North America, including Dhillon, have made a concerted effort to create educational materials, forums and other ways to enlighten Americans about who they are — a sea change for a religious group that doesn't seek converts.



People Don't Know "Who We Are"

The Sikh Coalition, one of several community organizations created in the aftermath of the attacks, has documented to date at least 235 incidents of hate crimes, harassment or abuse in the United States since September 11, 2001.

"We are certain there are many more than that," said the group's media director, Ajeet Kaur Anand, whose office was in the World Trade Centre.

While the number of incidents spiked immediately after the attacks and have waned somewhat, *the Sikh Coalition* has since created a permanent network focused on education and awareness, she said.

The issue, said Vijay Singh Chattha, is *visibility*.

"The Indian community thought if they work hard, do their own thing, and don't bother anybody else, everything will be fine," said Chattha, who is helping to organize an exhibition of Sikh artifacts at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington.

"People just didn't know who Sikhs were."

In 2002, the group's fundraiser for its Smithsonian exhibition, had raised almost \$500,000. The year before, when the Sikh Heritage Society began working with the museum, they raised \$40,000.

"Last year our goal was to create an exhibit space," said Chattha. "After 9/11 the whole community got together and we thought a better idea would be to create an entire Sikh gallery."

The first exhibition is set to open at the museum in December 2002.



World's Fifth-largest Religion

Sikhs first immigrated to the North American continent from their native state of Punjab in India, more than one hundred years ago, settling first in the Western United States and Canada. The current community was given a big boost from migratory waves in the 1980s.

Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion. Its 22 million adherents across the world follow the teachings of the ten gurus, their writings enshrined in the sacred Guru Granth Sahib.

Sikhs believe in the universal god, and advocate living a holistic way of life that emphasises community service, said Navtej Singh Khalsa, executive director of SMART, a Washington-based Sikh media and resource organization.

Because one of main teachings of Sikhism is that everyone should be equal, Sikh men are enjoined to take name "Singh," which means lion, and Sikh women "Kaur," or princess, in an attempt to circumvent India's caste system, which is often distinguishable by family name.

Sikhs traditionally wear the turban as the way to neatly keep their hair, which should not be cut, said Khalsa, who has explained this and other basics of Sikhism to Department of Transportation and other government officials, including Washington area police departments, since September 11.

As security has been heightened, some Sikhs have been asked to remove their turbans at airports, which Khalsa likens to asking "a nun to disrobe."

Sikhs also traditionally carry a kirpan, or ceremonial sword, as a hallmark of their faith. Since Sept. 11, part of Khalsa's job is to explain to governmental officials that this is part of their religious tradition, and their right to carry one has been upheld by the courts.

He has also advised fellow Sikhs that the kirpan, which can be anywhere from a few inches to up to 3 feet (a meter) long, should be put in checked baggage when flying.

"Our mission is to do (this) all over the country," he said. The group produces brochures, media packs and pamphlets for Sikh families such as one called "Helping Sikh Children Deal with Bullying."

Mandeep Singh Dhillon, a Silicon Valley corporate lawyer, has approached California schools and several other states about providing them with a curriculum that can be used by teachers to explain Sikhism.

He is also creating a 15-minute film of sixth and seventh grade Sikh Americans, shot over the summer at a Sikh youth camp he has run for the past ten years.

"It's easy for us to explain ourselves to people around us," he said, "But it's important for us to have exposure in places where we don't live."

Compiled from various email inputs from New York and Washington, DC.

TURBANS OVER THE USA



From the highest in the landthe way it is: In the picture above former President of the USA, Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton with the family of Sant Singh Chhatwal, at New York in 2002, while in the streets of the NY, the following happening took place..... and continue so, with America's nerves taut after 9/11.

A turbaned man spotted climbing out of a subway maintenance hatch recently caused a terror scare after witnesses assumed he was up to no good. But after two hours of panic, cops determined he was just a legitimate Transit Authority worker who happens to be a Sikh.

Before authorities figured it out, they roped off a section of Battery Park, delayed some 9/11 memorial events and brought the 4, 5 and 6 trains to a halt.

NYPD detectives and bomb-squad units combed the area for possible terrorism. It turned out the turban-wearing New Jersey man was just doing the job he does every day: climbing into the small hole in the sidewalk to inspect the subway power substation.

"It went too far. There are a lot of turban-wearing men in this city, and it shouldn't have gone this far," said Gurdev Singh, the 16-year Metropolitan Transportation Authority worker. Singh, 51, said he finished his midnight-to-8 a.m. shift and climbed out of the hatch at Bridge and State streets and headed home to Parsippany, N.J. He wasn't in his uniform, he said.

Cops said a maintenance worker in an office building at One Battery Park Plaza on State Street saw Singh and alerted security guards at the nearby federal bankruptcy court and American Museum of the American Indian that he was "suspicious."

Guillermo Vargas, a security guard there, said cops were notified - although they routinely see MTA authorities using the same hatch. He said it was the right thing to do, "as you can't be too careful these days."

NYPD traced the license plate that the jumpy maintenance worker saw and quickly tracked down Singh. They confirmed with the MTA that he was supposed to be in the hatch.

But at the same time, NYPD was down in the dark stairwell where they found a box and treated it as if it were a bomb. They immediately closed the area and the subways. Police said they regretted the misunderstanding, but added that it was understandable since people are on edge since Sept. 11.

"The guy was coming up a ladder out of subway grating with a turban on his head. What would you think?" one cop said.

"I'm a little bit upset, but they were doing their job," Singh said.

"There's nothing wrong with that. But people think every turban guy is a terrorist. It doesn't look good for my community."

Singh said he never before was mistaken for a terrorist or faced racial hostility, even when he worked on the subways at the World Trade Centre after the terrorist attacks.

Singh said he will never stop wearing his turban - taking it off only to wear his bright-blue TA hard hat when at work underground.

A few hours after the cops let people use the park again, another MTA worker - without a turban - who was unaware of the terror scare climbed down into the same hatch. Nobody looked twice.

*Joe McGurk and Philip Messing
via Jagpal Singh Tiwana*

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

SIKHS IN AMERICA - A 9/11 STORY

The TV programme MISTAKEN IDENTITY is seen through the eyes of the lovely 23-year American host Amanda Gesine from Greenwich, CT, who discovers the plight of the Sikhs in America after 9/11 and what happened after the terrorists attacks. Sikh Americans became targets of racial profiling because of their mistaken identity, simply because they wore turbans and beards for religious reasons. Like mainstream America, she never had a Sikh friend at private school or college, and knows nothing about them.



Amanda Gesine

In the 56 min 48 sec. TV programme, MISTAKEN IDENTITY the young American host and anchor woman takes on the mission to "explore who are my Sikh neighbours". Innocently she starts to learn and explains to mainstream America, non-Sikhs, and worldwide TV audiences — "Who are Sikhs? What is Sikhism?" She visits Sikh gurdwaras (temples), discussing the history of Sikhs and Guru Nanak's universal teachings, and explores the history of the early Sikh settlers over a hundred years ago and what Sikh entrepreneurs have contributed to the American economy.

"Once we started researching," Amanda stated, "I discovered the violent backlash on the Sikhs, because Americans had no idea about this hardworking entrepreneurial community. After reading about the senseless shooting and murder of Balbir Singh Sondhi in Mesa, Arizona on 15 September 2001 and all those 290 reported hate crimes, physical assaults and verbal abuse against Sikh men, women, and children, I really became very concerned. At this stage, I realised that so people in my community and in mainstream America knew nothing about their Sikh neighbours."

"How many of Americans and non-Sikhs wonder who are those men walking tall and proud with turbans on their heads and neatly tied beards and moustaches. Most of us think of them as the Maharajas of India!

"When I visited the gurdwaras (temples), I started interviewing young Sikh boys (with patkas on their heads) and girls with long uncut hair, I realised how they were being treated. They shyly confessed, with no hate in their hearts, that they were being harassed in ugly verbal terms and pushed around roughly in school because they were considered brothers of the terrorist enemy of America.

This is the first TV programme after 9/11 that is a celebration of "cultural diversity-where young people like Amanda are questioning the Attack on America. "Who is to blame?"

"It is important to have this TV programme shown throughout the USA and Canada - we are taking this opportunity to contact PBS KVIE 6 to review and negotiate showing this highly professional docu-drama TV programme which will be telecast worldwide, within the next few months."

It is filmed in spectacular colours, presenting how young America is looking at events happening in the country. It is the "first ever TV programme that shows young America trying to inform and educate mainstream America and remove the sense of ignorance about one ethnic group living in America for over one hundred years". It offers a unique example of how a young host and anchor woman sensed a deep concern and respect for one proud hardworking ethnic group - composed of some 500,000 Sikhs living in USA.

"After September 11, we need to cherish life - because it can be gone in one instant," Amanda stated. "It is so important to appreciate friendships and relationships we are lucky to have. Americans can no longer stay and hide behind in their home front."

"In fact, there is this huge world cultural heritage in our own country - and it is filled with so much prejudice and racial profiling. When I travel with my parents and friends, I can see it in different cities and towns in America - where people have never seen colored skinned person or a man with a turban. We need to know more about our neighbours in order to live in peace and harmony in America and the world."

"We look forward to hearing from you ... as this first TV programme will be one of many — focusing on the cultural tapestry of the American population" said Amanda. ☺

Scheduled for participation in the International Documentary Film Festival (IDFA) in Amsterdam (Nov 28-Dec 2, 2002); NATPE 2003 in New Orleans (January 25-29, 2003) and MIP-DOC (the documentary buyers market in Cannes (March 22-23, 2003) and MIP-TV in Cannes (March 24-28, 2003), and invited to several film and TV festival competitions in Norway, Birmingham-UK, including Sundance in January 2003.



Unique Emblem of the Akal Takht

A fact, reiterated in the Guru Granth Sahib is that the Gurus enjoyed both Temporal and Spiritual powers, but it was Guru Hargobind Sahib who made this very explicit in the emblem shown on the banner in the painting, and to the left.

The circle denotes that the domain of the Akal Takht is the entire world and that the two *Kirpans* denote *Miri* (sovereignty) and *Piri* (spiritual leadership) of the world. This throne of *Akal* is the only such that claims both the Spiritual and Temporal authority.

The contemporary historian Mohsin Fari writes that while ordaining Guru Hari Rai as the Seventh Nanak, Guru Hargobind ji observed that Guru Hari Rai should maintain an army of 2200, but not engage in any warfare.



This painting was designed to depict the composite army of Sikhs and Muslims who were carrying the emblem and flag of the Akal Takht and protected the entourage of the child Gobind Rai. The two falcons are the ones presented to Gobind Rai during his journey to Kalanaur.

When Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh after administering, and himself partaking the *Pahul* (Amrit) of the double-edged sword or *Khanda*, he added the *Khanda* to the already existing emblem of Akal Takht to complete this as it is today, seen on the right.

Dr. Kuldip Singh, M.S. (Pb.) F.R.C.S. (Edin), D.M.R.T. (London), F.R.C.R. (England), M.A.M.S. (India)
 Ex. Prof. & Head Radiotherapy CMC Ludhiana (1973-76), Retd. Professor & Head (1982-87)
 Department of Surgery, PGIMER, Chandigarh, Ex President Institute of Sikh Studies Chandigarh (1992-98)
 Founder Trustee: Satya Mey Jayate Mission Trust Regd.



MUSICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE Guru Granth Sahib

The *Gurbani Keertan* today has been commercialised to such an extent that, barring a few, most singers are only concerned with making quick money. Their limitations to experiment within the prescribed vastness of the Guru Granth Sahib is camouflaged with the excuse that the *sangat* does not prefer to listen to *keertan* in *raags* as prescribed by the Gurus and thus it is easier to convey the message of *Gurbani* in catchy tunes. This shallow argument poses questions like: "What does Guru Granth Sahib, our eternal Guru command us on the subject of *keertan*? Why is it that the Gurus chose *raags* to classify *Gurbani*? What is the relation between *shabad* and *raag*? Do we need the aid of experimental music to propagate the message of Guru Granth Sahib? Have our *keertanis* experimented with the vastness of *raags* and *taals* as prescribed by Gurus? What impact will experimentation have on the future generation of Sikhs?"

Hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib are in poetical-metric forms; associated with them are *raags* and *ghars* (beats/*taals*). Does this mean that Gurus have left no scope for experimentation with the music to accompany the *shabads*? The indication of *raag* and *ghar* (beat) with every *shabad* implies that the Gurus had a definite motive behind fixing a framework. This framework was not set to limit the ability of the human mind to experiment with music but to act as an aid in spiritual development. A simple mathematical permutation and combination on notes of any *raag* will indicate that each *raag* offers thousands of tunes to experiment with.

Complementary

Poetry (the form in which *gurbani* is written) and music (*raags*) are two sides of the same coin. They are independent and yet complement each other. Music versifies and provides melody, uniformity and cadence to poetry. The factor that binds music and poetry is their metrical-form (*ghar* or beat). Music (*raag*) is based on sound (swar-notes) and a combination of notes produce distinct musical effects. Poetry is determined by word (*shabad*), which communicates a message to the mind. Music (*raag*) on the other hand conveys a feeling to the heart and striking the right balance between mind and heart. Therefore, when

the poetic *gurbani* is complemented with *raag* (music) and bound by *ghar* (beat), the resulting effect on mind and heart can become a catalyst for spiritual transformation; the *raag* conveys a feeling and *shabad* a message. Every *raag* is capable of touching the heart with feelings of joy, sorrow, detachment, etc. Upon studying the structure of the Guru Granth Sahib it can be seen that *shabads* relating to common themes are generally placed under each *raag*. When the board themes of *shabads* are overlaid with feelings conveyed by these *raags*, there emerges a reason behind grouping of *shabad* under a broad classification of thirty one *raags*.

Common Themes of *shabads* placed under *raags* of Guru Granth Sahib are

- ❖ *Sookhi* – Being away from home: the soul being away from the House of Lord and the joy meeting the true "husband".
- ❖ *Bilaaval* – Beautification of soul, happiness.
- ❖ *Gound* – Separation, union, surprise.
- ❖ *Sri* – Maya and detachment.
- ❖ *Maajh* – Yearning to merge with the Lord, giving up of negative values.
- ❖ *Gauri* – Principals, serious, thoughtfulness, composed.
- ❖ *Aasa* – Hope.
- ❖ *Gujari* – Prayer (*Pooja*).
- ❖ *Devghandhari* – Merging with spouse, self-realisation.
- ❖ *Bihaagra* – Yearning due to separation of soul and happiness, meeting the Lord.
- ❖ *Sorath* – Merits of God.
- ❖ *Dhanasari* – Mixed theme.
- ❖ *Jaisree* – Separation.
- ❖ *Todi* – Maya, separation.
- ❖ *Bairagi* – motivation to sing praises of the Lord.
- ❖ *Tilang* – Many words from the vocabulary of Islamic origin are used, in this case, beautification.
- ❖ *Raamkali* – To give up the life of a wandering Yogi.
- ❖ *Nat Naryayan* – Joy of meeting the lord.
- ❖ *Maali Gaura* – happiness.
- ❖ *Maru* – Bravery, profound philosophy.

- ✦ *Tukhari* – Separation and union with the Lord.
- ✦ *Kedara* – Love.
- ✦ *Bhairav* – Man's state of hell.
- ✦ *Basant* – Happiness.
- ✦ *Sarang* – Thirst to meet God.
- ✦ *Malhaar* – State of separate and united soul.
- ✦ *Jaijawanti* – Detachment (*Vairag*).
- ✦ *Kalyaan* – Prayer (*Bhakti Ras*).
- ✦ *Vadhans* – Detachment (*Vairag*).
- ✦ *Prabhati* – Prayer (*Bhakti*).
- ✦ *Kaanra* – Prayer (*Bhakti*).

Feelings communicated by the music of raags:

- ✦ *Soohi* – Joy and separation.
- ✦ *Bilaaval* – Happiness.
- ✦ *Gaund* – Strangeness, surprise, beauty.
- ✦ *Sri* – Satisfaction and balance.
- ✦ *Maajh* – Separation, beautification.
- ✦ *Gauri* – Seriousness.
- ✦ *Aasa* – Making effort.
- ✦ *Gujri* – Satisfaction, softness of heart.
- ✦ *Devchandhari* – No specific feeling but the Raag has a softness.
- ✦ *Bihaagra* – Beautification.
- ✦ *Sorath* – Motivation.
- ✦ *Dhanasari* – Inspiration, motivation.
- ✦ *Jaisree* – Softness, satisfaction, motivation.
- ✦ *Todi* – This being a flexible Raag, is apt for communicating many feelings.
- ✦ *Bhairaavi* – Sadness (Gurus have, however, used it for the message of *Bhakti*).
- ✦ *Tilang* – A favourite raag of Sufi muslims. It denotes feeling of beautification and yearning.
- ✦ *Raamkali* – Calmness.
- ✦ *Nat Naryayan* – Happiness.
- ✦ *Maali Gaura* – Happiness.
- ✦ *Marru* – Giving up of cowardice.
- ✦ *Tukhari* – Beautification.
- ✦ *Kedara* – Love and beautification.
- ✦ *Bhairav* – Seriousness, brings stability.
- ✦ *Basant* – Happiness.
- ✦ *Sarang* – Sadness.
- ✦ *Malhaar* – Separation.

- ✦ *Jaijawanti* – Victory (detachment indicates a victory of spiritual plane).
- ✦ *Kalyaan* – Prayer (*Bhakti Ras*).
- ✦ *Vadhans* – Loss (*Vairag*) - that is why *Alahniya* is sung in this raag when someone passes away.
- ✦ *Prabhati* – Prayer (*Bhakti*) and seriousness.
- ✦ *Kaanra* – *Bhakti* and seriousness.

It is clear that the Gurus used raags to increase the delivery power of *shabad* to our minds by invoking complementary feelings in our hearts through usage of the prescribed raags.

Another interesting aspect of the raag and Gurbani classification is understood by studying daily timecycles. A raag has a preferred timing associated with it. There are morning raags, evening raags, etc. The timings of raags also complement the changes in human moods and heart during a twenty-four time cycle.

Upon classification of thirty-one main raags used in Guru Granth Sahib based on the prescribed raag timings, we find that no raags fall under the time zone 12am – 3am, because one normally sleeps between 10pm – 4 am.

Timing of raags:

- 6 am – 9 am: *Bhairaavi, Devchandhari*
- 9 am – 12 pm: *Sarang, Suhi, Bilaaval, Gujri, Gond, Todi*
- 12 pm – 3 pm: *Vadhans, Maru, Dhanasari*
- 3 pm – 6 pm: *Maanjh, Gauri, Tilang, Tukhari*
- 3 pm – 9 pm: *Sri, Basant, Malli Gauria, Jaisree, Kedara, Kalyan*
- 9 pm – 12 am: *Bihaagra, Nat Narayan, Sorath, Malaar, Kaanra, Jaijawanti.*
- 12 am – 3 pm: No raags from the Guru Granth Sahib.
- 3 am – 6 am: *Asa, Raamkali, Bhairav, Parbhathi.*

Same raags have seasons associated with them as seasons also denote feelings.

Seasonality of raags:

- ✦ *Basant raag* can be sung at any time in the season of *Basant*. *Shabads* with the theme of happiness are clustered under this raag in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- ✦ *Malaar raag* at any time in the rainy season, *Shabads* with the theme of separation are clustered under this raag in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Gurus also indicated the beats associated with the poetry of every *Shabad*. In the Guru Granth Sahib seventeen

ghars (*taal* - beat) are mentioned. These seventeen *ghars* denote the following beats:

- Ghar 1 – *Dadra taal* (there is 1 *taali* and the beat has 6 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 2 – *Rupak taal* (there are 2 *taalis* and the beat has 7 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 3 – *Teen taal* (there are 3 *taalis* and the beat has 16 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 4 – *Chaar taal* (there are 4 *taalis* and the beat has 12 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 5 – *Punj taal* (there are 5 *taalis* and the beat has 15 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 6 – *Khut taal* (there are 6 *taalis* and the beat has 18 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 7 – *Mut taal* (there are 7 *taalis* and the beat has 21 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 8 – *Asht Mangal taal* (there are 8 *taalis* and the beat has 22 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 9 – *Mohini taal* (there are 9 *taalis* and the beat has 23 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 10 – *Braham taal* (there are 10 *taalis* and the beat has 28 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 11 – *Rudra taal* (there are 11 *taalis* and the beat has 32 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 12 – *Vishnu taal* (there are 12 *taalis* and the beat has 36 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 13 – *Muchkund taal* (there are 13 *taalis* and the beat has 34 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 14 – *Mahashani taal* (there are 14 *taalis* and the beat has 42 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 15 – *Mishr Baran taal* (there are 15 *taalis* and the beat has 47 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 16 – *Kul taal* (there are 16 *taalis* and the beat has 42 *mastras*.)
- Ghar 17 – *Charchari taal* (there are 17 *taalis* and the beat has 40 *mastras*.)

Within the rules of Indian classical music, unaccountable *raags* can be created. In fact, any music (non Indian and non classical) can be classified under some form of *raag*. Hence it is misconception that *raags* are something highly classical and beyond man's understanding. In fact, any form of music can be classified into a *raag*. But in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Gurus have gone into such depths of poetry, music and metrical forms as to lay the framework that is best suited to convey the feelings and message of the *shabad* simultaneously to the human mind.

When each of the prescribed *raags* offers unaccountable permutations and combinations of musical composition, then why is it that modern *keertanis* are not experimenting **within** the prescribed framework of the Gurus?

Are they camouflaging their limitations with the excuse that the *sangat* prefers only catchy tunes?

The Gurbani says:

"Among all *raags*, that one is sublime, O Siblings of Destiny, by which God comes to abide in the mind." (SGGS page: 1423)

Clearly, only that *raag* is prescribed by which feelings of spirituality are aroused.

The Gurus have not prescribed catchy musical tunes that may dominate the *shabad*. The essence of *keertan* lies in effective delivery of the inherent message of the *shabad*, using *raag* and *taal* as a medium.

The medium must not dominate the essence.

This is where our modern day *keertanis* are making the mistake of experimenting beyond the prescribed framework of the Guru Granth Sahib and singing *shabads* in catchy tunes. At the end it is the tune that remains in the mind and not the message.

Music is twice blessed, yet one must guard against misuse of the inherent power. For while it can be effectively used for constructive *keertan* by operating within the prescribed framework of Guru Granth Sahib, on the other hand it can also be used for arousing distractive feelings by the use of tunes (as explained earlier, any form of music can be classified into *raags*).

It is interesting to note that the main object which has caused the current day deterioration in quality of *keertan* is the most widely used instrument 'Harmonium'. But the harmonium is not an Indian instrument. Over one hundred years ago, the Europeans brought the harmonic to India. The air box of this European instrument was experimented upon by Indian musicians to develop a new instrument that was then named harmonium. This instrument is not best suited for Indian classical music.

According to Indian classical music, the human ear can recognize twenty-two musical notes in an octave. The harmonium only offers twelve discrete keys in an octave. Only string instruments offer the ability to play all twenty-two notes in an octave, by pressing the string at midpoints. It is for this reason that earlier Indian Music was played with the accompaniment of only string instruments. In fact

if one sees the old picture of Harmandir Sahib, one only finds string instruments being used by the *keertanias*.

Instruments

Although the harmonium offered a compromise to Indian classical music and should never have been used in the Indian system, it gained rapid acceptance because it was very easy to learn and use. Learning a string instrument requires close to four to five years professional training but the harmonium can be learnt in less than two months!

This was a great blessing to aspiring Sikhs who also wanted to be able to do *keertan*. While there is no harm in using a harmonium and we must also accept its contribution in making it easier for the masses to learn *keertan* thereby helping them start their spiritual journey, however it also caused the biggest deterioration in the tradition of *keertan* singing.

The professional *keertanias* were now finding it hard to keep pace with the rapid generation of new breed of amateur *keertanias*, who did not go through the years of rigorous training, using the string instruments. Materialistic desires lead them to shorten their classical period by quickly moving to the harmonium. Over generations this trend led to complete elimination of string instruments from the Gurdwaras. Lack of dedication that crept in because of the ability to learn *keertan* in just two months also led *keertanias* to soon start doing *keertan* in catchy filmy tunes.

Arguably, our modern day *keertanias* should be given a one hundred percent score for having the ability to experiment with music. But unfortunately, this experimentation with catchy tunes is causing more harm than good to *keertan* tradition as they have stopped experimenting within the prescribed framework of the Guru Granth Sahib.

An instrument that was supposed to attract Sikhs to the Gurbani has now become the very reason for the downfall in the present day standard of *keertan*. It would have been fine for the harmonium to be adopted, but not at the expense of compromising on the string instruments. The harmonium should have acted as a stepping-stone for budding Sikh *keertanias* to quickly acquire musical sense and move forward to experimenting within the prescribed framework of Guru Granth Sahib. Instead they have chosen this short cut.

The reason for citing the above example is to show the long term pitfalls associated with the unchecked experimentation. Modern day experimentalist *keertanias*

need to be cautious and introspect. The first equation that needs to be answered is:

What is attracting the youth to this new style of *keertan*?

In all probability, it is the music that is attracting them because *keertan* is being done in a modern day, highly dramatised form.

Haunting

I have heard the *shabad* – “*Mittar Pyarae Noon...*” in which thunder, lightning and sounds of wild animals complement the *shabad* to project the scene of Machiwarra jungle. The only reason one would get attracted to such style of *keertan* is because of the music. Like any MTV “Top of the Charts,” such music can not last long in the minds of the youth, nor can the message get effectively delivered to their mind.

On the other hand, perhaps youth is getting attracted to this style of *keertan* because effective english language translations are being provided. If that is the case, then the translations can also be provided while doing *keertan* in the prescribed framework of the Guru Granth Sahib. After all, there are thousands of tunes that can be created from each of the prescribed *raags* and these tunes need not be highly classical in order to cater to popular taste of the youth. Even the Gurus did not allow the dominance of classical music over the *shabad*.

Our Gurus support forwardness, but where should we draw the line? Who knows, next there could be an experiment with *Jaap Sahib* being sung in the Rap style! Will *Jaap Sahib* in Rap style lead to the feelings of spirituality?

The future of *keertan* lies in the hands of present day *keertanias*. They definitely need to look at ways of improvising and attracting the youth, but not at the cost of further deterioration of *keertan*. Our *keertanias* should first make the effort to acquire full knowledge of the musical framework of the Guru Granth Sahib and then adopt from within it, to attract the youth, not on a short-term, but on a long-term basis. I believe that if our *keertanias* make an earnest effort to implement the commands of the Guru Granth Sahib in their singing style, then the ‘pied pipers’ of pop music will not need to walk the streets to attract the youth, they will automatically get attracted the Gurdwara.

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From : “Amrit Keertan” Chandigarh

THE GURU'S GRACE

ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮ: ੩ ॥

ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਈ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਫਿਰੀ ਫਾਵੀ ਹੋਈ ਭਾਲਿ ॥ ਸੋ ਸਹੁ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਨ ਦੇਵਈ ਕਿਆ
ਨਾਲਿ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਈਐ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਉਰ ਧਾਰਿ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ
ਘਰਿ ਬੈਠਿਆ ਸਹੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਜਾ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਕਰਤਾਰਿ ॥ ੧॥

*Lost in doubt, I roamed the whole world and the search frustrated me. But the Lord blessed
me not with peace and tranquility: how could I force His will? So I contemplated Him, by the
Guru's Grace, enshrining Him deep in my mind. Says Nanak: and I found my God within my
home when His Grace was upon me.*

Wandering through many paths
Studying various philosophies
I search for answers
To calm my restless soul.

*I feel intellectual
My ego grows
But the answers that I seek
Elude me still.*

*In a distance memory
I recall a vision
Of my grandfather
Sitting in meditation.*

*He beckons me
And points the way.
Follow the House of Guru Nanak
For the answers that you seek.*

*I feel unsure
Can I go back?
Will I be accepted?
Will I ever find peace?*

*I hear my grandfather's voice
Reciting the Japji Sahib.
I feel reassured
And begin my search.*

*I have recited
The Mool Mantar before
But had never focused
On the meaning of the words.
The words resonate
I feel their power
Age-old barriers
Come crumbling down.*

*I make a commitment
To study the Japji Sahib
For I feel
It is the key to my search.*

*My days and nights
Are filled with this Divine Poem
I feel a serenity
Like never before.*

"Kiv sachiara hoiai kiv kurai tutai pal.
Hukam rajai chalna Nanak likhia nal."

These words haunt me
I feel a change within
I hunger for the knowledge
Of what **Hukam** means.

I know I am on to something
I feel a new energy.
The desire to know
Supersedes everything.

I journey far and wide
To places unknown.
In the arms of Japji Sahib
I feel secure.

In the realm of "Dharam Khanda"
The question is asked
What is the purpose
Of your coming into this world?

I journey into "Gian Khanda"
Yearning for the Divine Truths
The questions that I had
Vanish in the breeze.

In the realm of "Saram Khanda"
I understand what **Hukam** means
And my head bows
To the House of Guru Nanak.
In the realm of "Karam Khanda"
I become an ocean of love
The past, present and future
Have no meaning at all.

What can I say
About the realm of "Sach Khanda"

The Shabad and I
Walk in ethereal silence.

The serenity is intoxicating
I am in bliss
My search is over
I am a Sikh.

I go before my Guru
With some trepidation
To beg for forgiveness
For having left this noble path.

I await my Guru's **Hukam**
With awe and reverence
Tears flow uncontrollably
At the **Meher** bestowed.

Surrounded by this bliss
I sit in silence
Time has lost its meaning
Everything is aglow.

The faces of my children
Dance before my eyes.
And before I know it
I have another request:

My Guru
Keep my children close
And watch over them
If they wander off
Bring them back to the fold.

For they, like me
Belong to the House of Guru Nanak
May they find the peace
That has been bestowed on me.

Inni Kaur

VITABIOTICS

30 years of pioneering research



One of the fastest growing major VMS companies, London-based Vitabiotics has manufactured innovative health care products for over 30 years. The company has developed a unique range, designed to support the human body in its own natural processes, each product targeting an area of increasing medical and scientific interest.

Vitabiotics was founded in May 1971 by Dr KT Lalvani (London) and Dr Horst Meyer (Hamburg) as a result of their joint research at the University of Bonn. The company first launched Oralcer, the licensed mouth ulcer brand. This effective treatment incorporated a novel use of vitamin C and was granted a British patent. In 1978, Vitabiotics developed Omega-H3, the comprehensive multivitamin, which is now exported all over the world.

In later years, the innovation capabilities of Vitabiotics under Chairman, Professor Arnold H Beckett, OBE, BSc, PhD, DSc, who had been a technical advisor to Vitabiotics for over 15 years on the research and the development of new products. Beckett, Professor Emeritus of Medicinal Chemistry, King's College, University London, has published over 450 research papers and some 95 postgraduate students have obtained their doctorates under his supervision.

In the last few years, Vitabiotics has made a huge investment in new products, marketing and on-going research. Clinical trials include the role of nutrients in the management of the menopause, premenstrual syndrome and antioxidants in short term immune system response.

The company Medical Director is a member of the Royal College of Physicians and a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Molecular Biology, Oxford.

Dr Kartar Lalvani, Vitabiotics President & CEO, is a pharmacy graduate from London, whose qualifications include a doctorate degree in pharmacology from the University of Bonn.

Dr Lalvani sees the area of nutritional therapy as one of increasing importance as, he says, traditional medical views on the role of vitamins and minerals are undergoing a dramatic change. "Research in recent years has established that optimum nutrition plays a far more fundamental and long term role than ever imagined", said Dr. Lalvani.

Over the last ten years Vitabiotics has grown into an international organisation, with joint ventures in as diverse locations as Hong Kong and Moscow and offices in London and Indonesia. Vitabiotics currently works with 80 countries worldwide and over 60% of its business is in export. In 2000, the company was awarded a prestigious government backed Export Award for Smaller Businesses for its outstanding achievement in conquering new export markets around the world after demonstrating consistent yearly export growth as high as 30%.

In 2002, Dr Kartar Lalvani says, Vitabiotics' mission remains to strive to respond sensitively to consumer needs, researching and developing scientifically proven, nutrient based health-care solutions of a quality and efficacy suitable for world health-care markets.