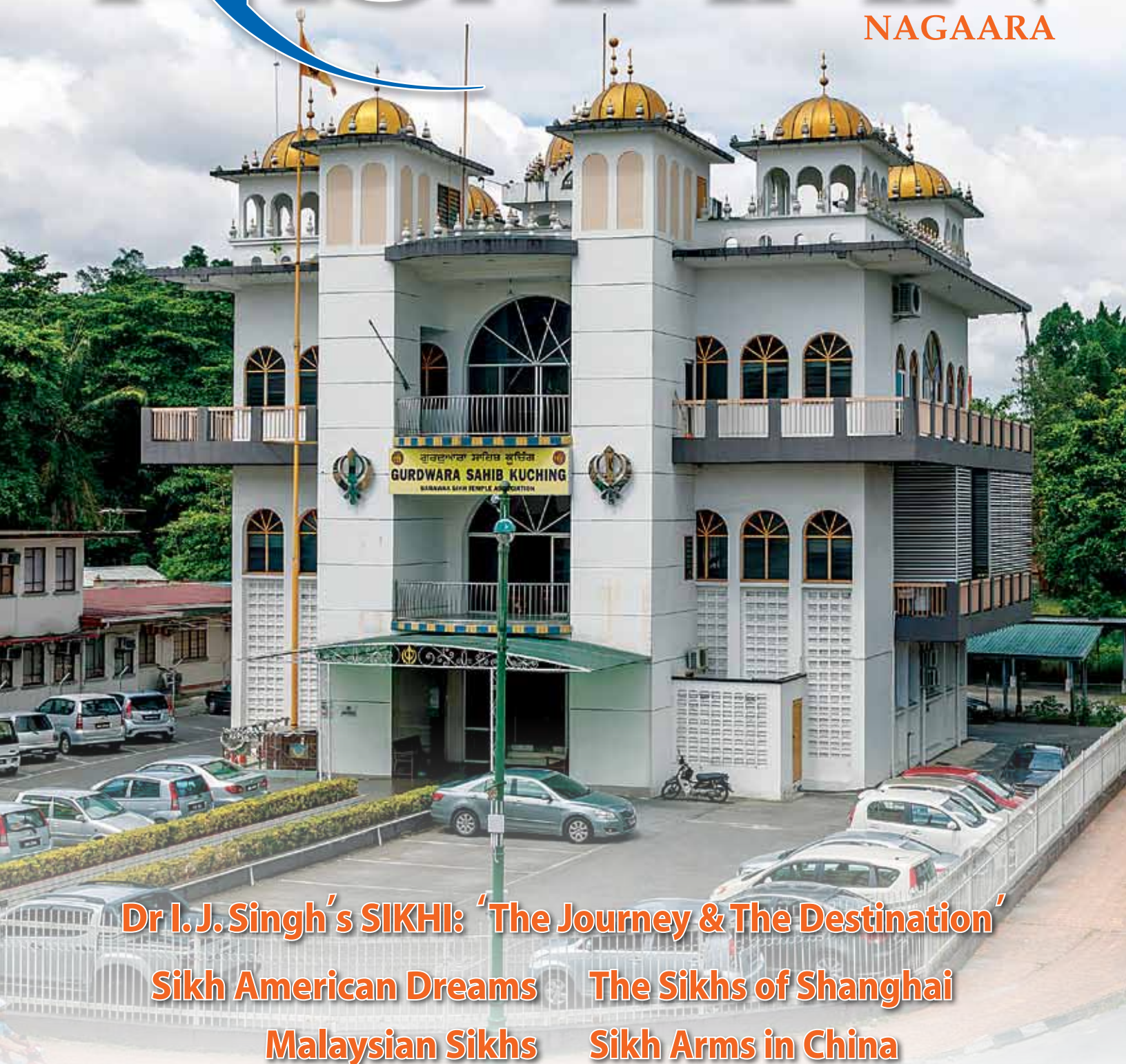


III/2018

NISHAAN

NAGAARA



Dr I. J. Singh's SIKHI: 'The Journey & The Destination'

Sikh American Dreams

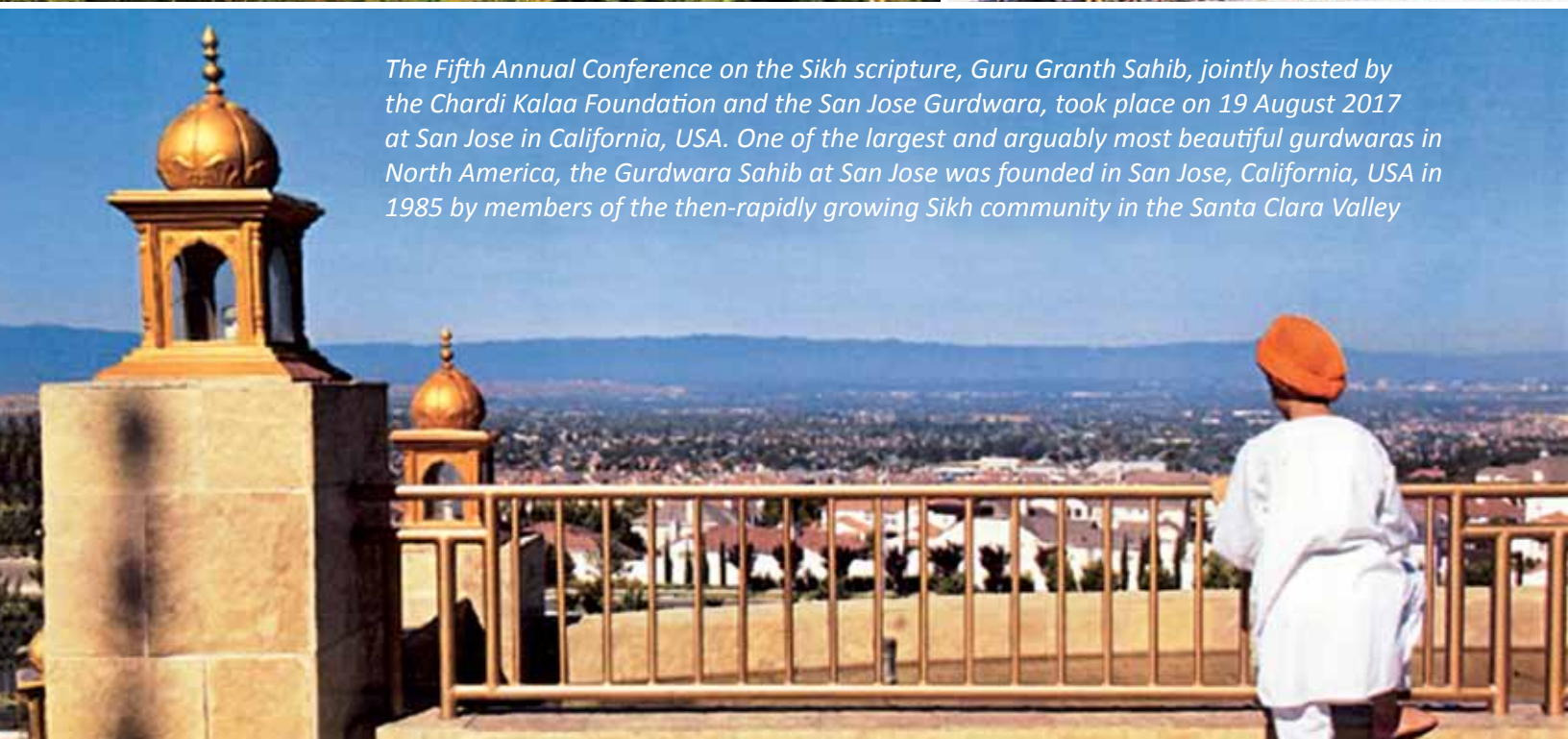
The Sikhs of Shanghai

Malaysian Sikhs

Sikh Arms in China



The Fifth Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 19 August 2017 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley



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Nishaan-Nagaara are honoured as publishers of the venerable Dr Inderjit Singh's sixth book and are also privileged to have him as Editorial Director of the *Nishaan*, illustrated journal of the Sikhs, now in its 19th year of publication. Under aegis of *The Nagaara Trust*, 'SIKHI: The Journey & The Destination' is amongst the several publications undertaken periodically, a small contribution in enriching the legacy of the faith and its proponents, who stand unfailingly by the spiritual values of Sikhism in all its glory and splendour.

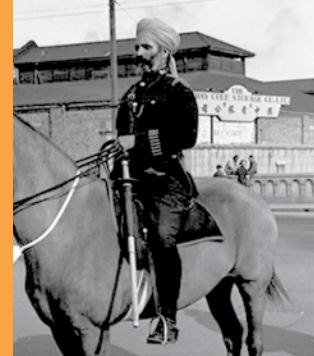


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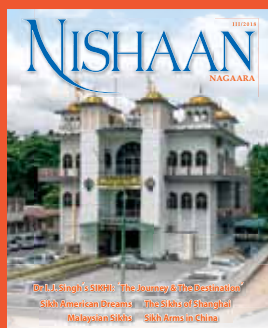
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Cover: Gurdwara Sahib at Kuching (Malaysia)

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CELEBRATING THE SIKH DIASPORA

The world knows that Sikhs are now a global presence. There is no country or continent where they are not. True that they are largely, if not entirely, immigrants from the Punjab and India. They are and remain a small minority wherever they live, even in India.

It often frustrates us as also our non-Sikh neighbours who see us unduly preoccupied with the home (India) that we came from. This doesn't really surprise me? As an immigrant to America I see that all immigrants, be they Italian, Polish, Germans Irish, Jews or Brand X, spend a generation or more with such preoccupations. Home is where the heart is and for a generation the heart still longs for the home it has abandoned, with much energy consumed in trying to recreate it.

It takes a new generation to shift attention to a new home and the realities of a different culture. Only then the realities – new and the old – create a hybrid lifestyle where both systems are valued and even enhanced. In my view our old and new paradigms are now at that stage and often competing. Remember that the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts.

Over the past two centuries Sikhs have created successful settlements in the United Kingdom, and neighboring countries in Europe. (Keep in mind that Britain ruled India for a good two centuries – plenty of time to develop appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses.) Similarly, Indians (and Sikhs) have forged relationships with former British territories etc. – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and elsewhere.

As in any community anywhere, a plethora of journals and related literature analyse Sikhs and Sikhi for its educated readers. The quarterly *Nishaan* is unique in that it is backed and supported by an India-based collective of educated, widely traveled, thoughtful and resourceful Sikhs. The journal, to my mind, is the only one extant to recognise the proverbial dilemma of migrants that I alluded to. *Hence the Nishaan and its raison d'être.*

But the task is not simple nor so easily parsed. The forces that are lined up for battle represent the drive for modernity and change in our connection to a new language, culture, values in an unknown, unsettled environment

against the old, familiar and comfortable ethos. Sometimes a clash surfaces, but it is both necessary and inevitable.

Easy? Absolutely not. Threatening? You bet! And I can understand it well. I came to America a generation ago as a young student and now almost 60 years later I speak as one in the evening of my life. And I see our groans and pains as natural to a people in the adolescence of their journey.

Except for publications in my professional research that have no bearing on the issues here, my writings, largely, if not entirely, emerge from these realities and are intended for conversation, discussion and debate among Sikhs and non-Sikhs, Indians and Americans – in fact, for the larger citizenry of educated lay people. Surely, we need similar forums for dialogue between Sikhs and their non-Sikh neighbours in other countries and cultures as well. When parsing my writings, keep in mind that I am neither a professionally-trained scholar of Sikhi nor a sociologist.

Two issues claim our attention today in this issue of Nishaan.

The issue of *Nishaan* in your hands talks about Sikhs and Sikhi in North America, China, Malaysia and neighboring areas. The saga remains incomplete. There are many more gaps to fill that hopefully readers will point out.

After India, it was Britain, America and then Canada, and now it is the turn of Sikhs in Malaysia who are continuing their contributions as proud citizens of their chosen country, writes Sardar Dya Singh, the acclaimed and pioneer *Gurbani kirtenia* also from Malaysia.

The prominence of Sikhs in Malaysia was recently highlighted with the swearing in of first Sikh Cabinet Minister as also Sikhs in high positions in the judiciary. Many Issues back, the *Nishaan* (III/2000) focused on the first Sikhs of Singapore, including the very first, Bhai Maharaj Singh who had taken on the mighty British Empire and was later deported to Singapore in 1850. His memorial on Silat Road, close to the new Sikh Centre is revered by the community. Much material on Singapore's Sikh history comes from the memoirs of Justice Choor Singh of Singapore who remains a legend in the Island city.

The migration of Sikhs from the Punjab to the South East Asian region actually began during the British colonial period, between the 1880s and 1920s. The first Gurdwara in Malaya was built by Sikh Police Officers in the state of Selangor. Some years later, Ipoh became the centre of this growing Sikh population in Malaysia and the community is today integral with Malaysia's plural society. Many Sikhs hold senior government positions, many in active political positions and today there are lawyers, doctors, engineers, medical specialists – and also sportsmen who proudly wear Malaysian colours.

Politicians and others commonly laud Malaysian Sikh activities, especially their charitable work. Recently, when a tsunami hit the western coast of Indonesia in 2004, Malaysian Sikhs were the first relief workers in the hardest hit town of Aceh. A Malaysian politician later wryly commented that while Malaysian NGO relief organisations were still debating which brand of bottled water to take to the devastated Indonesians, the Sikhs were already there, in their own hired ships taking food and water, medical supplies, and even copies of the Qur'an for the distraught Muslims there.

The *Sikhs of Shanghai*, too, make a fascinating story. History records the contribution of Sikhs in China during early 20th Century, particularly after the Opium Wars, which ended with the Treaty of Nanking and opening of Chinese ports to the West. After China's defeat at the hands of the British in the First Opium War, this Treaty formed the basis for this country's relations with the West for the next century. As the Imperial powers carved out territories in China in the 1850s, Sikhs from the Punjab in India, were to play their part particularly in China's big cities. Interestingly, about the same time, in another part of Asia, the Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49 had resulted in annexation of the Sikh Empire by the British.

Several Indian and Chinese authors have written on the role of Shanghai Sikhs in the fight for India's independence, including the fact that it was a Shanghai Sikh who was prominent in the *Komagata Maru* chapter, which played an important part in India's struggle for freedom.

Earlier, Sikh troops had served with the International Forces in China during and after the 'Boxer Rising', their present Battle Honours reflecting the same. Two of the original battalions of the Sikh Regiment (the XIV and XLVII) distinguished themselves in action that culminated in the relief of Legations and capture of Peking and other cities.

The second issue that is highlighted in this issue of Nishaan is my new (and sixth) book : SIKHI: The Journey & The Destination. It was very generously published by Nishaan Nagaara earlier this year.

My essays are intended for the public domain, for the educated lay-reader, Sikh or non-Sikh. They may read like factoids and sound bites from life, hence experiential pieces, but, I hope, are not any less relevant. My take on issues, I hope, is buttressed by Sikh sources of scholarship and can stand the test of rigorous evaluation.

Indeed we must build bridges with Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike but not at the cost of diminishing Sikh fundamentals (including language) which remain sacrosanct. The essays are meanderings – a pilgrimage – through the rich tapestry of Sikh religion. They are variations on the theme of being and becoming a Sikh. The only pilgrimage is of the mind and the only place is the awareness of the Infinite within each of us. To find this place of pilgrimage we need to travel within us, not outside of us. To travel within is to travel the farthest. Such a pilgrimage is designed to build minds, mould character and develop integrity”.

Two reviews on this book are reproduced here, the first by Laurie Bolger, the conservation librarian at the University Club Library in New York City. The second review by Ravinder Singh Taneja refers to this book as *Akath Katha* and as a challenge “for us to think and re-think our often rigid and impenetrable positions - “a kind of spiritual or philosophical sing-along for those who are also engaged in their own spiritual quest and are ready to ask uncomfortable questions and explore uncharted territory. Both are generous reviewers and I remain grateful.

This book is now in distribution worldwide but Nishaan readers can also get it from the publishers

A companion piece is that on the Sikhs of Yuba City in California where, after overcoming a century of prejudice and discriminatory laws, they have built a haven for themselves in the new world. Didar Singh Bains, fondly known as the 'Peach King' of California, exemplifies *Chardi Kalaa* of the community as they continue their incredible contributions in the new world.

Please keep in mind that the larger world still lies unexplored for and by Sikhs and Sikhi.

I.J. Singh

The star spangled banner of Malaysian Sikhs

“After India, and Britain, then the USA and Canada, now is the turn of Sikhs in Malaysia, numbering over 100,000 to proudly proclaim their colours as truly Malaysian Sikhs. There is now a Sikh Minister in Malaysia’s Cabinet, with even heads of the Police and Judiciary in the offing” writes Sardar Dya Singh.



It fills me with pride that spotlight on the Sikhs has now turned to Malaysia, my home country as I was born and raised there. My first trip out of Malaysia was at the age of 19 and that was to India. Strangely, I felt like an alien tourist then – and still do so even today. The closest I feel about India is as a ‘stepson’... and we need not go into the reasons ! However I do have extreme affection for my fellow Sikh brothers and sisters in India and have a great many of friends there.

On 21 May, 2018, Gobind Singh Deo was sworn in as the Cabinet Minister of Communications and Multimedia in the Government of Malaysia. The 45-year-old Sikh lawyer is part of a new cabinet instituted by the country’s Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who vested power from the incumbent Najib Razak in a closely-watched election earlier this year. Gobind Singh is the first Sikh in South East Asia to be



Map from the Internet

sworn in as a Cabinet Minister and more significantly, in Muslim-dominated Malaysia.

The prominence of Sikhs in Malaysia has recently been highlighted in the wake of investigations on the corrupt practices of ousted Prime Minister Najib Razak. In fact, Gobind Singh was one of Razak's main antagonists and his fearless pursuit of justice has been well recognised. The role of Malaysian Sikhs in the investigation and prosecution of some erstwhile politicians of Malaysia is truly remarkable. The senior police officer leading the raids on various homes and other establishments to find and record all the ill-gotten wealth is Amar Singh, the highest ranking police officer in Malaysia and now being considered for becoming the Inspector General of Police.

The lawyer till recently involved was Harpal Singh, the judge was Harminder Singh, prosecutor being Amarjit Singh of AJ Chambers and with Narinder

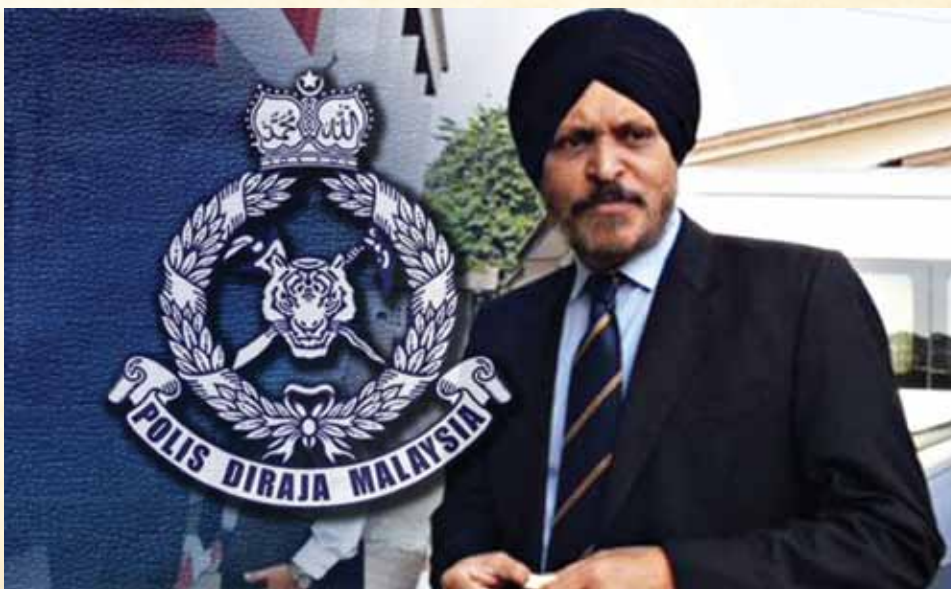


S Gobind Singh Deo with other ministers of the Government of Malaysia

Singh as the Director of Prisons. The Chief of Forensics, if ever required for a post-mortem, is Dato' Dr Bhupinder Singh. This surely must be seen as *karma* of the late Karpal Singh, former opposition leader – and father of Gobind Singh (*more on this later*).

Now let me recall some other famous Sikhs of Malaysia, also recalling that the first Sikhs came to

and settled in old Malaya just after Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign in the 1840s. Some Sikhs can actually trace their antecedents back six generations in Malaysia. My venerable father Giani Harchand Singh Bassian came to old Malaya in the 1930s, stayed for about 4 years as a bachelor and later settled down as a family man. In 1947 he became a British-government salaried Punjabi teacher and later Granthi Sahib. My elder brothers Gurmukh Singh OBE is a renowned Sikh personality



Commissioner Amar Singh of the Malaysian Police



Dato' Narinder Singh, Director of Prisons and various personalities at a function in Kuala Lumpur

in the UK and S Baldev Singh Dhaliwal is a former town councilor in South Australia who, besides our sister the senior most amongst us, were all born in India.

However, being the youngest, I was born in Malaysia and even though I now live in Australia – after ten years in Britain – associate myself very much with Malaysia. I sometimes tease my elder brothers, previously to their consternation but of late with some resigned acceptance, is that the only reason I go back to India is get off the aeroplane, kiss the hallowed ‘dharti’ of my forefathers – but thank God that I was not born there !

Since memories are short, I would like to recall for readers that very historic incident which Sikhs (and Canadians) are very familiar with, that of the *Komagata Maru*. Baba Gurditt Singh, the man responsible for this famous history had gathered funds needed to lease the



Baba Gurditt Singh on board the 'Komagata Maru' in 1914

ship *Komagata Maru* while he was working in Serendah, a small town just north of Kuala Lumpur, raising cows and selling milk. (Today, Serendah is famous for its *Rawang barfi*). An ‘Ardaas’ for this fateful and greatly significant journey was conducted by Baba Sham Singh of the main police Gurdwara Sahib in Kuala Lumpur. The ship *Komagata Maru* was leased at Singapore but later sailed from Hong Kong to Vancouver in 1914.

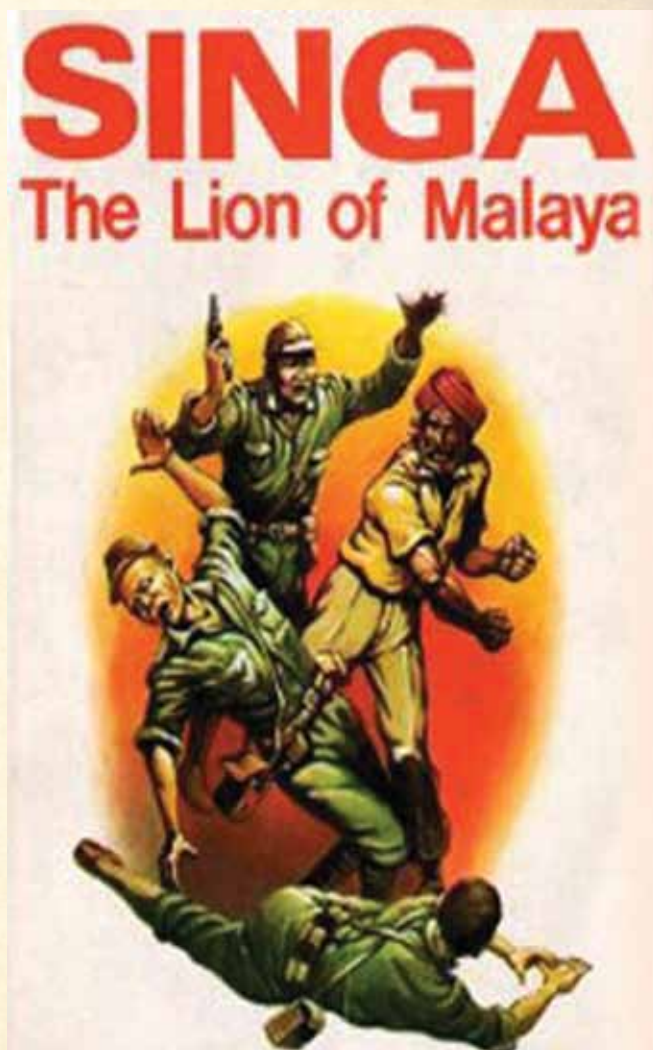
I have met Baba Sham Singh who still holds the distinction of having been the longest serving Granthi Sahib at any Gurdwara in Malaysia : from 1912 to 1964, a period of 52 years !



The person who arguably has had the most impact on Sikhs and influenced Sikhi direction in Malaysia is, without doubt, Sant Baba Sohan Singh (*see image above*). Mention Baba ji's name to any Malaysian Sikh and they will instantly remember him with great reverence and affection. For about 35 years, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, Baba ji influenced Sikhs throughout Malaysia, which then also included Singapore. He was responsible for *Granthi Samelans* in the 1960s when most Granthi Sahiban in Malaysia would visit Malacca every year, where Baba ji resided, for weeks to hold discourses on Sikhi and Gurmat. Issues impacting the Sikhs and Gurdwara *maryada* would be discussed and resolutions passed, which were then relayed to various Gurdwara Committees. Baba Sohan Singh was also responsible for initiating and establishing the Sikh 'Naujawan' movement in Malaysia, some 55 years back which is known today as the **Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia**. His *Barsi* is marked every year in the third weekend of May,

at this coastal town of Malacca where he lived for most of his life, faithfully attended by upto 30,000 Sikhs.

Gurcharan Singh 'Singa', the *Lion of Malaya*, was a fearless fighter during World War II, whose exploits in sabotaging Japanese installations and escapes from near death incidents remain legendary, with many books written about him. He went on to become personal ADC to the first Prime Minister of independent Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman in 1957. 'Singa' tragically died in a car crash in the 1960s.



Stepping back a little in time, in fact the first Royal Bodyguard of Sultan of the northern state of Kelantan comprised 22 Sikhs, specifically recruited to protect the Sultan from marauding Thais in northern Malaya. This was back in the late 1890s, but their contribution is well remembered.



Platoon of Sikh recruits after completing basic training at the Police Training Centre in Jalan Gurney

During the Second World War when the Japanese invaded peninsula Malaya in late December 1941, military history records that the only vigorous battles fought by the fast retreating British-Indian forces were those by the 5th battalion Sikh Regiment (*XLVII Sikhs of lore and mentioned in another article in this Issue*), particularly the battle of Niyor where the 5th Sikhs distinguished themselves and inflicted major casualties on the Japanese. This was one of the highlights of the entire Malayan campaign, an action then reported immediately by the BBC: “The Sikhs have exposed the vulnerability of the advancing Japanese soldiers and shown our own troops that they were as good, if not better, than the enemy”. This formation was awarded the ‘Battle Honour of Niyor’, which is marked every year by the Regiment in India.

There are many other prominent Sikhs, but mention must be made Karpal Singh, the ‘Tiger of Jelutong’, the one man the ruling party of independent Malaysia was most fearful of. He was a reputed lawyer and a key opposition politician from the island of Penang, being jailed numerous times for his outspoken views on injustices and corruption of the ruling party. He died in a suspicious car crash in 2014, at the peak of his career. Karpal Singh was father of the now first Sikh Cabinet Minister, Gobind Singh.

There have been numerous other prominent Sikhs in Malaysia over the last 130 or more years, some having accumulated phenomenal wealth (the legendary Jagat Singh was actually banished from the north-western



Sikh Officers at the Malaysia Warriors’ Day parade in Kuala Lumpur



Jagjit Singh represented Malaysia at International Conference in Geneva



Harjit Singh, the Malaysian TV news person

state of Perlis because he owned a large portion of the state itself and because he (the Sultan) owed him so much money, besides some suspicions of the British that he was a German sympathiser! Many Sikhs hold or have held very senior government positions, some in active political positions and today there are top lawyers, doctors, engineers, medical specialists – but also sportsmen who proudly wear Malaysian colours.

Of late, it has become even more commonplace for politicians and others to laud Malaysian Sikh activities, especially for their charitable work. Recently, when a tsunami hit the western coast of Indonesia in 2004, Malaysian Sikhs were the first relief workers in the hardest hit town of Aceh. A Malaysian politician later wryly commented that while Malaysian NGO relief organisations were still debating on which brand of bottled water to take to the devastated Indonesians, the Sikhs were already there, in their own hired ships taking food and water, medical supplies, and even copies of the Qur'an for the distraught Muslims (*see images top right*).

Malaysian newspapers regularly report on activities of their Sikhs, be it some barrister defending a high profile client, high ranking Sikh public servants commenting on new government initiatives, a Sikh surgeon making a medical breakthrough, even as politicians Karpal Singh and Gobind Singh regularly appear on TV news for their views on governance – or former ruling party misdemeanours! Harjit Singh has been reading news on prime time TV in both Malay and English languages for the past 40 years!



Malaysian Sikhs in relief work at Aceh, Indonesia

The recent change of government in Malaysia augurs well for the country, hopefully leading to an effective two party democratic system with a strong rule of law. The Sikhs are always at their best when presented with a level playing field. We wish them well. *Waheguru meher karey.*



The writer Dya Singh, beside being an author of the contemporary religious book 'Sikhing Success and Happiness', is also globally acclaimed pioneer gurbani kirtania from Malaysia.

United Colours of Malaysian Sikhs



Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid with the Sikh community in Kuala Lumpur during Vaisakhi celebrations at Gurdwara Sahib Sentul



The Malacca team were champions at the inaugural Sant Baba Sohan Singh ji Under 21 Hockey Tournament at Bukit Serindit grounds



Sri Dashmesh Pipe Band (Malaysian Sikh Band)



20-year old Sikh girl, Ms Kiranmeet Kaur represented Malaysia at the Miss Universe 2016 finals at Manila in the Philippines.



Coat of arms of the Pipe Band



Third-generation Sikh-Malaysian, Police Commissioner Amar Singh seen inspecting his force

Gurdwaras in Malaysia

“Let a 100-flowers bloom” : there are over a hundred Gurdwaras in Malaysia, both in the Peninsula and in Sarawak. Around 40 are in Perak state itself where a large proportion of Malaysian Sikhs reside.



Laying foundation for the Gurdwara at Penang



Gurdwara Tatt Khalsa Diwan (image above) is the largest Gurdwara Sahib in South East Asia. Located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, at the border of Chow Kit market in Kampong Bharu, the gurdwara is spiritual centre for both local and foreign Sikh communities. Foreign workers, who work in the business area comprise 30% of the congregation, who find comfort in the company of their brothers and sisters.



In 1922, the then British administration officially allocated an area for the Sikh community in Jalan Raja Alang, for construction of the two-buildings standing on 1.5 acres of land in the heart of this major commercial area, which was funded entirely by members of the community. A school with about 500 students and 20 teachers began in 1970 but then closed for lack of students as heavy city traffic meant that a 5 minute journey became two hours of crawling which made it impossible for students to reach their school on time.



(Left) : Gurdwara Sahib of Johor Bahru. Sikhs settled in the State of Johor in the late nineteenth century and were mostly engaged with the Police Force or as the Johor Sultan's Guards. The present site was gazetted as a temple reserve in 1921 upon which was constructed the first Sikh Gurdwara there. In 1957 the second Gurdwara building was constructed as a two storey building and the 1980s, it became necessary to construct a new larger Gurdwara Sahib building to cater for the growing Sikh population ; the present Gurdwara Sahib was opened in 1992.



Gurdwara Sahib at Kuala Pilah was opened in 1937 by Sikh policemen of which there were some 19 in Kuala Pilah during the 1930s.



Gurdwara Sahib at Kuching in Sarawak which was opened in 1982 (*see cover*).

(Left) : Sikhs have been living in Labuan since the 1860, many originally engaged with coal mining and the police but later generations have been successful in various fields and the handsome visage of the Gurdwara Sahib at Labuan evidences prosperity of the Sikh community in Labuan.



The Gurdwara Sahib at Pusing



Gurdwara Sahib at Rawang is located close to the railway station. The original Gurdwara was built in 1938 but the current building dates from the seventies.



The Gurdwara on Jin Kubu is one of three in Sarawak and is located in the shade of a 100-year-old angsa tree.

Punjabi Education in Malaysia



Back in the 1960s, some 200 pupils sat for the PMR Punjabi Language paper and 47 for the SPM paper. Both the government and the community have actively taught and promoted the language, and over 80% certainly received some sort of formal or informal education in their own languages.

The 1970s and 1980s then saw a drastic change in decline of the teaching and learning of languages, the reasons being many and varied.

Among them were the

The Punjabi language has been taught in Malaya (Malaysia) from the very time Punjabis were brought to this part of the world by the British in the second half of the 19th century. The schools that existed then were either of English or Malay medium, thus early migrants including the Chinese, Tamils and Punjabis had to organise their own language classes.

The Sikhs, whose social, cultural and religious lives are centered around Gurdwaras, soon began Punjabi language education there too, the emphasis being on reading and writing, the aim being recital of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Formal Punjabi education started when the Government established vernacular language primary schools early in the 1900s. Children received 6 years of education in their mother tongue and were then transferred to Secondary schools where the medium was either English or Malay. There were about 14 such Punjabi language primary schools in Malaysia in the 1960s plus about 70 private Punjabi language schools.

Education Policy of the Government, the lack of economic profitability, few trained teachers, suitable books and others.

By the 1990s, only about 20% of the Punjabis in Malaysia could read, write and speak in their mother tongue: 40% could actually speak while the other 40% could not even speak Punjabi properly !

From 1980 onwards, fewer and fewer pupils took the Punjabi language paper in SRP and SPM. This decline was so alarming that the Education Department did not set the PMR papers in 1993, 1994 and 1995. However after repeated requests from some Punjabi organisations, the paper was resumed in 1996.

This 'decline' sounded an alarm among community leaders and associations. Punjabi teachers in Government Schools organised a seminar at Genting Hotel (Genting Highlands) in mid-August 1988, hosted by the National Union of Teachers together with International Federation of Teachers Union

KPPK/IFFTU. Besides, a number of Punjabi associations organised similar seminars so as to find a solution. The challenges were many, including finance, limitation of books, teachers, facilities and so on. The 20th century ended with decline at its rock bottom with no solution in sight.

A community can certainly organise and overcome problems including education if it has backing of the government and perhaps functions under one national organisation. Given the situation it indeed was a difficult task as the community was very decentralised. There are about 100 Gurdwaras in Malaysia, and like elsewhere, the community was divided into so many groups, thus teaching depended on their capability, availability of facilities – and teachers !

The *Khalsa Diwan Malaysia* (KDM) is an organisation which then took up the challenge – and succeeded! This oldest of Indian organisations, founded in 1903 played the role as main body taking care of social, cultural, academic and religious needs of the community. With setting up of numerous Gurdwaras and a number of other Punjabi organisations, the role of KDM later reduced and the organisation became less active, but did not lose its vision nor the mission assigned to it. The educational wing foresaw the decline of learning and teaching Punjabi language in Malaysia, and so positive steps were taken in 1998-99 to rekindle teaching and learning of the language, not just advocating or propagating the importance of learning Punjabi, but building a viable infrastructure and network to cover the entire country which would withstand the test of time. A visionary meeting was held at KDM on 15 June 2000, when formation of the structure was explained and launched. This was truly a historic day.

Khalsa Diwan Malaysia (KDM)

The *Khalsa Diwan Malaysia* (KDM) was established on 27 December 1903 at Taiping. It was at that time the only organisation of the Sikhs for various functions such as establishing Gurdwaras, Punjabi Education and ‘Dharam Parchar’. Other requirements of the community including cultural, social, sports and general welfare matters were also part of their charter.



As Sardar Santokh Singh (President Khalsa Diwan Malaysia (1999-2013) and Chairman Punjabi Education Trust Malaysia 2000-2013,) said in his inaugural message, “with kirpa of Waheguru the KDM aims to fill the vacuum visible in the Panth, mainly in the field of education, parchaar and granthis. We have embarked on the mission nationwide with a vision. We intend to have an infrastructure that will withstand the test of time ... after my visit to the Punjab in November 2003 and subsequent meetings with the SGPC and Chief Khalsa Diwan at Amritsar, I am of the view that Sikhs outside India have to stand on their own feet and solve their problems in their own countries. Lets look inwards, unite and achieve our aspirations. We, the Sikhs outside India, have unique and peculiar problems as per the country of our adoption and only we can overcome them. We Malaysians are lucky to have a very supportive Government and are free to worship and preserve our culture – as well as fulfil our own needs”.

“In Malaysia, we have the *Sikh Naujawan Sabha* (SNSM) that caters for the youth of today who are energetic, intelligent and independent. They truly are our future. Then we have the *Malaysia-Singapore Sikh Sports Council* (MSSSC) that is involved with physical aspects such as sports. We also have the *Sant Sohan Singh ji Memorial Society* with programmes towards preaching and training of priests. We have a host of other bodies looking into the social and cultural needs of Malaysian Sikhs. We even have a political body. Through coordination, we reduce over-lapping of activities, thus making optimum use of scarce capital and resources. A coordinating body of all associations and societies is in order”.

Heralding Dr IJ Singh's 'SIKHI: The Journey & The Destination'

SIKHI: *The Journey & The Destination* is the sixth book in Dr Inder Jit Singh's repertoire of compilations on his beloved subject, Sikhi which term in fact has been increasingly used by the author himself, eulogising a simpler and easier format for the tenets of this glorious and much venerated faith.

Residing in the United States for several decades, the author's conversational style and simple approach are an instant draw for readers from all ages and all walks of life for there is a story, an observation, some musing or simply a great piece of writing to be savored amongst these myriad essays.

The book is an erudite collection of some 36 essays on topics ranging from 'Evolution And Sikhi' to 'What Sikhism says about Gender, Sex & Related Issues' to 'A Life Of Doubt, An Act Of Faith' and even an essay on 'Turban of the Sikhs' and much else. The inspiration behind this assortment of wide ranging subjects and enunciations is that the Sikh faith is not merely a spiritual quest but also a way of life, whose ideals and principles are to be imbibed in everyday living rather than being observed as dictat.

As the author elucidates in the Preface: *To me, Sikhi is a way of life that is unique, universal, timeless, and a thinking person's message that is most powerfully expressed through its teachings and practices. At the Republican Convention in 2000, Condoleezza Rice said, "We are a people forged not from common blood but from common purpose." She was speaking of America and Americans, but she may as well have been referring to Sikhs.*



Dr. I.J. Singh

Look at Sikhs and Sikhi; their strength emerges not so much from common heritage, genes, culture, language, cuisine, and music, but from the universality of the message that shapes them. If the message is universal and timeless, as I believe, then it must resonate with me today as it did with Sikhs in the time of the Gurus; if it is timeless, it must speak to me now 550 years after it was first elaborated as it did to countless Sikhs then. To paraphrase Isaac Newton, like a child I revel at the seashore picking up pebbles of ideas and sometimes a pretty one lands in my lap. The baubles that entice me are the principles, dicta, worldview, and practices of Sikhi.

As I said, if in India Sikhs exist as a reality within the larger Hindu and some Islamic worldviews, in America, we are again a small drop but in a vast Judeo-Christian sea. Now the allegories, analogies, similes, and metaphors are different. Our principles and tenets are not changeable, but we must re-explore and reconnect our interpretations to a different world, so that we can make sense of each other. Remember that neighbours need to know each other.

In short, ideas like who are we, what are we, why are we the way we are – will never be fully settled, but should never cease to be raised.

Having lived outside India for almost a lifetime, in my essays I might cite Guru Granth to support a point of view, and then in the next moment lean on Shakespeare, TS Eliot, Bob Hope, or even an obscure scientist to negate or push a point.

Why? Because examples and metaphors must reflect the lives we live, and that's how my life has evolved.

I must alert you that you will engage with many themes within this slim collection. These are independent free-standing essays, not sequentially connected chapters, but also not totally disconnected from each other. For example, four contiguous essays dwell on the management models that we have inherited from the past, and how they may or may not serve us today. Sometimes my views will provide more unsettling questions, rather than handing us cookie-cutter answers.

I come to you from years in academia – teaching and research in anatomic sciences. My research output obviously went to peer-reviewed journals and, as expected, each report was chockful of references, and end-notes etc., which are the hallmarks of such writing. My initiatives on and about Sikhi come from a different perspective. They are intended for the public domain, for the educated lay-reader, Sikh or non-Sikh. They may read like factoids and sound bites from life, hence experiential pieces, but not any less relevant. My take on issues, I hope, is buttressed by Sikh sources of scholarship and can stand the test of rigorous evaluation.

However, a couple of longish essays in this collection adhere largely to the academic style. It is hard to walk away entirely from a life-time of habits and training.

Not so long ago, a visibly upset Sikh reprimanded me for leaning on parallels from secular literature and teachings of other religions; he claimed that they divert focus from the mystery, mysticism, and magic of Sikhi and reduced them to models of common sense. He and his cohorts were not pleased with my riposte that, in the words of Thomas Paine, “I can offer you nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense.” I aspire to nothing more in a healthy discussion. I would certainly be disappointed and shocked if the Gurus offered something against common sense. Since we, as finite mortals, will always be incomplete in our understanding of the Infinite Reality, our arguments will never be able to entirely demystify the creation.

This is my sixth collection of essays on Sikhs and Sikhi outside the Punjabi and Indian ambience. Some over-riding themes, particularly on our sense of self, and an equal place on the table of this society, frequently continue to pop up. Keep in mind the Americanism that “if you do not have a seat at the table, you are probably

on the menu.” Yes, I have visited these themes in the past, yet they recur often, in one form or another. Questions like who we are, what we are and why we are the way we are have engaged me in the past and continue to do so again and yet again. Life remains an unfinished business; so do the questions.

My grand purpose is not so much to overload us with facts and factoids on Sikhi to memorise, but to lay down a road map for a path of conversation and exploration. The best one can do with an idea is to run with it. Agree or disagree, but do not become disagreeable, and keep the process going, with me and with others.

*Some readers will have a feeling of *deja vu* – of having already read parts here and there. Yes, they might have had an earlier encounter with some essays that I have posted on the Internet. But those were earlier incarnations – incompletely formed. Now they come to you in slightly more mature form – yet, unfinished as life is – since I have had the benefit of time and of many readers, particularly when they vehemently disagreed with me. You will notice some mutually contrary ideas next to each other. In defence, I lean on Walt Whitman: “Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes.”*

Remember that the past is history; writings are a mirror pointing to where we are today. With traditions we can touch history. Yet, history is full of “cunning passages and contrived corridors,” while mirrors are legendary for distorting reality. A good mirror can also be brutally honest. Together history, traditions and mirrors enable us to come to terms with where we are, how we got there, and give life to the future of our dreams.

My reading and writing habits are not quite as focused as I wish but their randomness brings forth a richness in content. What makes a good book? How many self-help books can we devour in a year or a lifetime? Should books, like friends, be few and well chosen? I offer you one criterion to judge a book. Reading books is not meant to see how many we can get through but which ones got through and into our lives. That's the measure of a book's life and longevity.

Remember that it is in discussion and debate that we define our goals, sharpen our focus, and hone our skills.

Reproduced are two essays from this fine collection, and Nishaan encourages its readers to obtain a copy of the book to keep as an inspiration from Dr IJ Singh.

THE BIG TENT



The past often looks rosy. Or so we think when we step back into the past, where childhood was innocent, while homes and neighbourhoods seemed idyllic. Many modern commentators on Sikhism, too, seem to fall into a similar time warp, but they do have a point.

When the Gurus walked the Earth, Sikhs seemed idealistic and unmatched in the pristine purity of their faith. The message of the Gurus attracted both Hindus and Muslims - members of the two dominant religions of the day in India. Even during the immediate post-Guru period, our gurdwaras were usually teeming with both Muslims and Hindus.

Our relations with non-Sikhs were largely non-controversial and non-confrontational. I say this despite the many armed conflicts in history with either Hindu or Muslim foes, when many of our allies also came from the same two religions.

Remember that at the end of Guru Nanak's life, his Hindu followers wanted to cremate him the Hindu way; Muslims honoured him by wanting to bury him

by Islamic rites. Each community erected a monument to his memory and both markers still exist in a unique tribute to the founder of Sikhism.

Having come mostly from Hindu ancestry, Sikhs remained culturally closer to them; Hindu-Sikh mixed marriages were common and no one labeled them 'interfaith unions;' they were not known to require or endure two different religious rites and wedding vows.

In gurdwaras, no distinction was ever made between a Sikh and a non-Sikh. It was not uncommon to find Muslim or Hindu musicians, wearing caps or scarves, performing *kirtan* (singing of the liturgy) or conducting a reading from the Guru Granth. Often non-Sikh artists and performers came to gurdwaras to showcase their talents and pay their homage to the Gurus who were unexcelled patrons of classical Indian musicology.

No function in the gurdwara, and no office in it, was ever closed to our non-Sikh brethren. Large communities of people, such as the Sindhis, were Sikhs to all intents and purposes, except that they rarely



took on the *baana* (external visage) of the Khalsa, with the unshorn hair. Absolutely everyone was welcome in the gurdwara - irrespective of their religious label, or whether one was a recognisable Sikh or not.

Less than fifty years ago, the eminent thinker Kapur Singh opined that the religion of Punjab, even of Punjabi Hindus, was Sikhism, whereas Hinduism was merely the culture of all Punjabis, no matter what religion they professed. Unmistakably, every religion of the world, when in Punjab, has been touched by the faith and practice of Sikhi, and by the universality of Guru Granth. This is true of both Hinduism and Islam, perhaps even Christianity.

Now, things have changed at an alarming pace.

Look at any gurdwara in India or abroad. There are hardly any Sindhis or Punjabi Hindus that come by; certainly, *raagis* and lecturers who are non-Sikh or non-recognisable Sikhs are rarer than hen's teeth. (*Raagis* are professional experts of Indian musicology and singers of Sikh liturgy.)

It may never have been quite as Edenic as I described it here, but it was never as hellish as it seems to have become. There is more than a grain of truth in what was. Why and how has it changed? That's my mandate to explore today.

Let me start with a set of givens.

The message of Sikhism and of Guru Granth is entirely inclusive and there is not a line in it to justify excluding or expelling those who come to it. *And a good*

starting definition derived from the Guru Granth is that a Sikh is anyone who calls himself or herself one. It is not my or anyone else's business to judge another, so, we should refrain from labeling people as good or bad Sikhs.

All those who call themselves Sikh, then, are on the same path, though not always at the same place on the path. This includes the *amritdhari* who lives the life of one, also the *amritdhari* who falls considerably short; the *keshadhari* who visibly looks like a Sikh but does not necessarily follow all the requirements of the faith such as initiation by *amrit*; the *sehajdhari* who lives the lifestyle that he should, and the one who does not; also, one who merely looks like a Sikh and yet is unaware of any of the requirements of a Sikh life; and the one who is clearly an apostate and proudly flaunts it.

A brief note of clarification of the terms used here: *keshadhari* Sikhs are those who maintain the Sikh tradition of long unshorn hair, all *amritdhari* Sikhs are *keshadhari* but have also been initiated into the order of the Khalsa, *sehajdhari* Sikhs, in popular understanding are Sikhs that do not maintain the tradition of long unshorn hair. This here is an oversimplified descriptive.

The house of the Guru and Guru Granth is for sinners, and not reserved for only perfect Sikhs. So, it is best to not judge others, lest we be judged.

So, what is now driving so many non-Sikhs, and some who do not quite look like Sikhs out of the Sikh circle? There are perhaps as many reasons as there are analysts, but let's probe a few.

Let's come at it a tad tangentially.

Christianity now has over 250 denominations and sects; many refuse to recognise the others as Christians. Some prohibit their members from attending services in the other's church or marry someone from another denomination. Many variations exist in Christian practices worldwide. Yet, they all derive their inspiration from the life and teachings of Jesus.

Sikhism is now about 550 years old, and we should not expect less, however much we regret it. With time, perhaps some divisive interpretations of the message

are inevitable in living traditions. All living things and organisations, even those that originate from the same starting point, show change; to some, it is for the better, others find them regressive.

During the first 400 years of its history, there were not yet clear-cut distinct lines drawn between Jewish practices and their Christian adaptations. (Some scholars extend the period of mixed Judeo-Christian practices to the eighth century.) Another very strong movement, 'Jews for Jesus,' existed that celebrated Jesus as the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for. The movement, now considerably smaller, still lives.

From that time on, Jewish and Christian thought have diverged considerably and progressively, and now it would be asinine for one to claim that Christians are Jews simply because Jesus was one, or that Jesus is the Messiah that the Jews have been waiting for.

Similarly, one can argue for overlapping of Hindu and Sikh practices in the early years. But over the last century, largely due to the rise of the *Singh Sabha* movement, as well as a better educated clergy and laity, it would now be very shortsighted not to recognise that the two religions show a growing divergence in theology and its interpretation, and consequently in their practices.

This process of erecting fences between Sikhs and their neighbours has been further hastened by domestic Indian as well as international political realities.

When India became independent in 1947, Punjab, the Sikh homeland, was essentially partitioned into two nations. Sikhs bore the brunt of the economic loss, as well as that in human lives. The great majority of Sindhis, who straddled the divide between Hinduism and Sikhism, were lost to Sikhs. Also, for the first time in a millennium, Hindus - the largest majority in a free India - felt the power that comes with freedom.

Each community became engrossed in its own realities; fences between them were a natural corollary.

The successive governments of free India learned to cater, even pander, to the majority that was Hindu to capture their vote banks. Remember that political

systems and politicians value and depend on headcounts. In such power play, minorities became further marginalised.

This is not the time or the place for an exhaustive exploration of these divisive political realities, but the events of 1984, when the Sikh minority was targeted, and events of Godhra, and others like it that were aimed at Muslims and Christians, were a predictable result. The killings at Godhra by Hindu mobs in 2002, also appear to have been organised and abetted by the government in power at that time and claimed several thousand Muslim lives.

How would minorities react when they see themselves so besieged? Obviously, by circling the wagons to protect themselves. The result: an inevitable alienation from others, though it is contrary to the message of the Guru Granth.

In the diaspora, too, Sikhs remain an even smaller minority than in India, even though there are almost a million in North America alone. Our turban and unshorn hair attract the most attention. More so in the past, but even now, we are, often challenged by prospective employers on our bearded and turbaned visage. Not unexpectedly, at times, the attention is grossly negative and absolutely misplaced, particularly post-9/11.

The Sikhs appear divided between those who continue to follow the dictates of the faith and those who have chosen to abandon them, whatever their reasons for doing so. Ideally, this should not become a divisive matter in the Sikh community, particularly where the gurdwara is concerned, for it historically remains equally open to all, even to non-Sikhs.

The problem arises when the spokesmen for the community, who have abandoned the markers of their faith, are unable or unwilling to defend the traditions and practices of the faith when they represent us to the outside world. And, then, that impacts the whole community.

If, then, these people are not given an equally visible place in community leadership, they see it as discrimination and an insult. The other side of



the argument is that a minority, finding its practices under siege, wants to put on the stage, in the gurdwara and the world, only those who at least look like role models.

I would request my turbaned brothers, and also those on the other side of the divide – those not so attired – not to be so thin-skinned. Let's see if we can work through this complication.

How to resolve this is the question. Either all those who wish to potentially lead us from a gurdwara agree to defend the teachings of what is our code of conduct (*Sikh Rehat Maryada*), even if they personally fall short of it, or the conflict will continue to escalate.

If they can openly support our historic teachings and religious requirements in spite of any personal failings of their own, then there should be no reason for conflict between those who are *keshadhari* (maintaining unshorn hair), and those who are not.

If such a modus operandi seems impossible, then what?

A not so attractive, but perhaps inevitable alternative again comes to me from the Jews. They

are divided largely into Conservative, Orthodox and Reform congregations that have fundamental differences among them, depending on the size and structure of the community, on what a Jewish lifestyle is. Hence, the respective synagogues of the three are separate, yet when a question arises that is important to the whole Jewish nation, most of them speak with one voice.

This does not mean that even on matters of substance they do not differ; for example, there exist Jews

that do not approve of a Zionist state of Israel.

Much as we dislike the idea of sects within Sikhism, they do exist; just look at Namdharis, Radhaswamis and followers of Harbhajan Singh Yogi, for example. All religions acquire some sects with time.

I can see, with time, our diaspora Sikhs fissuring along a line that separates those that are *keshadhari*, whether *amritdhari* or not, and those that are not recognisable Sikhs, whether they are *sehajdhari* or apostate. Or perhaps, it would be a tripartite segmentation: *amritdharis*, *keshadharis* but not *amritdharis*, or unrecognisable Sikhs, whatever their reasons for it.

Perhaps, then, we will also be able to work with each other in matters of discrimination in the work place, and even have some gurdwaras that are happily intermixed, depending on the structure and size of the community.

The umbrella or tent of Sikhism is large and capacious enough to accommodate all those who are on the same path – like the many runners who are at the starting line at a marathon – no matter where on it they are at a given time. And this is how I see the message of the Guru Granth and Sikh historical tradition.

SIKH AMERICANS: A Lament



After close to 60 years in the USA, two thoughts drive me today: a Sikh American's lament ... or delight, and some ideas towards a more perfect union.

Over 25 million Sikhs around the world celebrate the day in 1699 that Gobind Rai, the 10th Founder-Guru of Sikhi, appeared at a massive conclave of Sikhs, flashed a naked sword – and demanded a head.

After some trepidation, one Sikh offered his head. The Guru took him into a tent. Moments later, the Guru reappeared alone with a bloody sword and demanded another head. Surely, many looked away or slunk away. The process was repeated until five volunteers had materialised.

The Guru then initiated them into the final form (Khalsa) of the Sikhs and then they initiated Gobind Rai, transforming him into Guru Gobind Singh.

Doesn't this remind you of the idea of "servant-leader" that finds much currency and resonance in management schools today? It was the final step in the evolution of the Sikh movement started by Guru Nanak in the 15th century.

From this modest beginning, a nation was formed: an egalitarian community transcending divisions along caste, class, colour, gender, race, or nationality.

A slew of scholars and critics have elaborated on this skimpy outline over the past 300 years and many will continue to do so till the end of time. I come to you from a radically different direction today. I am an American who is also a Sikh. My goal here is to largely sidestep much of our journey as Sikhs but more to define a place for Sikhs and Sikhism within the larger framework of contemporary American society.

An oft-told Christian parable speaks of a good man. At death he knocked at the pearly gates confidently expecting to be welcomed. He described his productive life to St Peter. "First show me your scars," demanded St Peter.

"Scars? Why! I have none; my life was happy and successful," replied the man. St Peter countered sharply, "Do you mean there were no struggles in your life, no hard choices to make between good and evil?"

A life without scars? Like a non-life! Like a soldier who has never tasted the challenge, bitterness and agony of war or defeat!

..... or Delight !



Almost 60 years ago, ‘The Murry & Leonie Guggenheim Foundation’ awarded two fellowships to Indian students for study in the United States. Luckily, I landed one. Finding another Sikh in New York then was like eyeing a sugar crystal in a ton of sand.

Beards were rare in America then. I guess many on the street overlooked my turban, but connected my beard to the enemy *du jour* – the bearded visage of Fidel Castro of Cuba – hence, deserving to be hassled. I suppose it did not register on most Christians that Jesus always appeared to be long-haired and bearded. Since then, I have spent time in situations in this country where racial or religious identity was a potent determinant of acceptance or bewilderment, even rejection.

There were discriminatory laws in place in the early 20th century. *The Asian Exclusion Act* presented hurdles to Asians wanting to own land or become citizens until 1946. Immigration laws were eased only during Lyndon Johnson’s presidency in the 1960s; inter-racial marriages were finally and fully recognised across this nation only in 1964. The first Sikh to serve in the US Army, Bhagat Singh Thind, was granted American citizenship three times. The first time was

in 1918, but it was rescinded days later because he was “not a Caucasian.” Same story the following year. In 1935, he was granted citizenship based on Congressional action that guaranteed US citizenship to veterans. It was never challenged. Also keep in mind the targeting and profiling of Sikhs in the United States post-9/11. Some of it continues.

In 1960, when I came here, there were perhaps three recognisable Sikhs in New York. I went to graduate school in Oregon where I was the only one for years. Now there are a tad less than a million in North America.

Home is where the heart is. At times, the heart is caught betwixt and between; one never knows when or for how long. Remember that it takes a lot of living to transform a wedding into a marriage, or a house into a home. A mind at peace is at home anywhere, any time. The whole world is alien when the mind is not at peace (*Munn pardesi je theeyae subh des paraaya*, Guru Granth p. 766.)

President Trump has made a central policy issue of life as an immigrant; the first President in memory to drive a wedge between immigrant and non-immigrant Americans.

All immigrants are dreamers, their lives full of scars and hopes, whether they landed with Columbus or only moments ago. Yes, being an immigrant is to feel homeless at times, and that may last a while.

Early on, I changed my academic direction, supporting myself by a job at night. I was young then. Some Trumpian assumptions were also common in the pre-Trump era. A major canard: immigrants work on lower wages, robbing Americans of their rightful opportunities. I lived this when I was looking for a night job; the minimum wage was \$1.50 an hour. The manager offered me \$1.25. I accepted, though I would have been happier with the legal rate. My job:

to mix chemicals in 50-gallon drums. Two weeks later, a beaming manager summoned me when he realised that I was a graduate student in a doctoral program at the medical college. He doubled my salary and all was copacetic.

From the day I landed here, *the American Dream* has been my preoccupation, as it is of all immigrants from anywhere. After a while, I began to wonder what exactly we mean when we talk about being and becoming an American. More of this a bit later.

Soon enough, my fellowship started and now a different canard surfaced. One that homed in on how much educational aid America gives worldwide. There is more than a grain of truth in this but it deserves some clear-headed parsing with sensitivity.

I had to point out that: India educated me through college, and it cannot afford to educate every Indian. India is a poor but over-populated country; America brought me here on a fellowship. It cost America only a couple of years of support for me to become a useful, productive tax paying citizen for the rest of my life. India got nothing out of me for the years of education it gave me; true that India didn't have opportunities available for everyone. Still America's investment in me was relatively small, but the long-term benefits went entirely to America; so, think carefully who exactly is subsidising whom? And yes, I remain grateful to America for the opportunities.

So now, President Trump disses immigrants as people who shirk hard and honest work, are deeply into crime, rapes, drugs, illegal businesses, financial shenanigans, while bleeding social services and remaining unconnected to American values like paying taxes.

Imaginative ploy by a sitting president but obviously untrue, ill-deserving further analysis.

After a lifetime of academic research, I prefer my thinking to be at least somewhat data-driven. I don't want to overwhelm you with numbers and cite only three items from a recent *New York Times* column (17 June 2017) by Bret Stephens.

Crime: According to the Cato Institute, non-immigrant American-born citizens are incarcerated three times more than legal immigrants, and at twice the rate of illegal immigrants.

Education: Only 17 percent of finalists at the 2016 Science Talent Search were children of American born parents. At the Rochester Institute of Technology, only 9.5 percent of graduate students in electrical engineering were non-immigrant citizens. Immigrants start businesses at twice the rate of non-immigrants. Just look at Silicon Valley.

Out of Wedlock Births: For non-immigrant mothers, 42 percent; for immigrant mothers, 33 percent.

A nation's greatness depends on its defining values. Clearly, America's enviable status stems from its positive, forward-looking traditions, and inclusive attitudes.

To a nation of immigrants, *identity, integration, and assimilation* are core concepts that deserve exploration. I am not advocating identity politics, but immigrants bring culture, language, cuisine, music, and traditions, worldview and energy that enrich this nation. Their spirit fires up the American metabolism and its productivity. They should be nurtured. They make America great, way beyond the Trumpian political slogan. Hence, I would make a place for identity.

Without question, I support integration. On the other hand, assimilation speaks of blending beyond recognition such as homogenisation in a blender. And that would rob the host culture of the richness, energy, imagination, and diversity that immigrants bring. I recognise that we think of America as the "melting pot." But look again. Would it not result in loss of the many unique ways and markers that immigrants contribute to the rich table of this nation?

A flood of immigrants – about 18 million Europeans – came to America between 1890 and 1920. Israel Zangwill celebrated them in his Broadway play titled *The Melting Pot*. This is how this defining expression entered our national dialogue. But in a melting pot,

the units blend irretrievably together. The individual identity of each item is lost – homogenised. This reminds me of a hostile takeover, not a model of cooperative, synergistic interaction.

This is not how America is. In this land, each wave of immigrants has added inestimable value to society. The creativity, vitality and energy of this culture come from its immigrant roots. A melting pot in which immigrants contribute none of their traditions, language, culture, music, and cuisine would leave the host society poorer.

The Melting Pot was not America's motto before the Broadway play of the same title. *E Pluribus Unum* was.

Alternatively, one could look at America as a rich tossed salad of many ingredients, each with its identity intact. But sometimes, a salad gets tossed a tad too vigorously to the detriment of smaller components. That has been the fate of Sikhs, especially post-9/11 because of mis-identification as Muslims.

A mosaic would be an excellent metaphor for contemporary American society. Mosaics give life to shards that have little or no value alone but collectively make an enchanting piece where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. But a mosaic is also a static model – one that does not reflect the dynamism of American life, as a young listener once reminded me.

A multi-instrument orchestra, on the other hand, seems exactly reflective of contemporary American society. An orchestra that has dominating sounds like the strings and the mighty pianos, but it also features identifiably lesser instruments like the cymbals or the triangle. And the mighty voices quiet down when the smaller instruments speak. None are drowned in a cacophony.

Each has a place and a seat in the orchestra. When well and wisely led, an orchestra can make heavenly music.

This is how I view contemporary American society. Sikhs, too, no matter how small a minority, have a

seat at the table – a place and a part in the national orchestra.

What I would like to see is for immigrants *neither* to be walking away from what they brought to enrich this society *nor* to refuse the embrace of this host society, but to become equally comfortable in both worlds.

The lot of a minority is never easy. And Sikhs would be a minority no matter where they lived in this world, even in India. So, there are days when I hear the multi-instrument orchestra in my soul, and “the world's mine oyster” as Shakespeare said. Then there are days that are not so kind. So, I remain particularly sensitive to our place in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation such as this; the triangle and cymbals, among the powerful strings and pianos, are always on my mind.

In Sikh belief, as in many spiritual traditions, the “Word” is God. Sikh scripture – the *Guru Granth* – opens with an alphanumeric devised by Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith over 500 years ago.

“*Ik Oankar*,” he said, joining the first numeral, “one” with “*Oankar*,” a word from Sanskrit that stands for Creator or Doer. *Ik Oankar* then postulates One God – not a partisan Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh God, but one that embraces all creation. To experience God, one needs to discover unity in the diversity of creation.

If I can see the oneness in the creator and creation, there is absolutely no room left for distinctions in race, caste, creed, gender, color, or national origin. Differences between “them” and “us” vanish. Equality, liberty, fraternity, and justice are inherent in that oneness. And, then, as the Sikh scripture says, “I see no stranger.”

Sikh celebrations reconnect us to these ideals.

This nurturing and celebrating of unity in diversity is how I understand this nation's motto, *E Pluribus Unum* that defines us. One from the many it says, and it's our way to a more perfect union. It emphasises an equal place at the table for the diversity that comprises this society.

This is how I see Sikh presence in this country – small but significant.

Fear of the stranger has, at times, produced discriminatory laws. But as FDR said in a different context, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Emerson reminds us, “A nation, like a tree, does not thrive well till it is engrafted with a foreign stock.”

The idea I am pushing is integration, not homogenised assimilation, and definitely not pockets of isolation either.

Such were the values of this nation’s founding fathers. The inscription “In God We Trust” on our currency, and “One Nation under God” in our Oath of Allegiance would not find approval in their eyes. In fact, these words were added only in the 1950s during the Joe McCarthy days. Jefferson reminds us: “It does me no harm if my neighbour thinks there are twenty gods or that there is none.”

This tells me that much as it is possible to be a good Christian and a good American, or a good Jew and a good American, or even an atheist and a good American; it is similarly possible to be a good Sikh and a good American. These are not mutually exclusive ideas.

Let me conclude with a brief story: it was a day or two after 9/11 and I was one of the few people walking about wearing a turban in New York City. I fell into conversation with a bright, educated “white” American. Well-to-do, his briefcase was better than mine, his suit more expensive.

We talked a while about Sikhs in America. I reminded him that Sikh workers helped construct the Panama Canal over a hundred years earlier in 1901-1904. And that The West was not opened by the likes of John Wayne alone; in fact, much was owed to the Italians, Irish, Chinese, Japanese, Indians (from India) including Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He was well-read.

“Tell me,” finally he asked “Your people have been here a hundred years. Why did they not leave their religion back home when they came here?”

I was taken aback but recovered. So, I asked, “Your people have likely been here over 200 years. Tell me, when they came here, why did they not leave their religion back home? No Native Americans here between you and me! In terms of history, the difference is not even a drop in the proverbial bucket. In many ways, aren’t both you and I really just off the boat?”

It was his turn to be thoughtfully silent. Then he said: “You have a point. Let’s have a cup of coffee.” We did and remain friends now, so many years later.

To understand the meaning of diversity, we need to see “us” in “them” and “them” in “us”.

Unity of faiths and peoples is created by the Creator, but cultivating this unity and its awareness is not the craft of heaven – it is our sacred duty here on Earth.

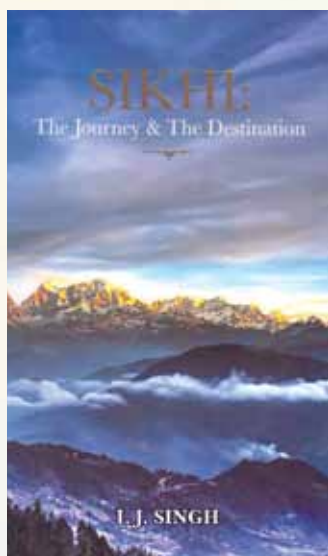
I cannot think of a better formulation of the concept of *E Pluribus Unum* than the awesome poetry of Sikh scriptural writing. I offer you one example out of many, a citation from the Akal Ustat, attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Sikh Master. In translation, it goes thus:

*“As out of a single fire, millions of sparks arise;
But fall back in the fire, to come together again.
As out of a single stream, countless waves arise;
And then return to the water.
So, from God’s form, emerges all creation;
To return to the One again.”*

Ergo, this essay today, is not quite a lament, not even a rant. I raise my voice for a *clarion celebratory call*. I remain dedicated to defining our place at this society’s table – who we are, what we are, why we are the way we are. I have to be at the table to be sharing, giving and partaking of its offerings. As is well said, “*If we don’t have a seat at the table, we are likely on the menu.*”

The central idea is that totality is greater than the sum of the parts. And there is a core of American values that unites, defines, and enriches us.

Laurie Bolger on I. J. Singh's Book, "connecting the dots"



with the time-bound aspects of the contemporary Sikh diaspora into his occupation – or, one could say, his life's true vocation! Throughout the pages of all of his five previous books, the author has taken evident intellectual delight and visceral joy in the challenge of "connecting the dots," and this sixth compilation of essays is no exception.

Many, if not most, other authors of essay compilations have their own "pet" topics they feel comfortable writing about, and stick exclusively to

them. Not I.J. Singh! As is the case with his five earlier books, *Sikhi: The Journey & The Destination* lavishes upon the reader a mind-blowingly diverse smorgasbord of themes and ideas relating to Sikh life in the modern diaspora. Similarly, this work, like its antecedents, is in no way a rigid catechism or an uninspiring "How-To" manual of what to believe and how to behave. There is no spoon-feeding, nor mental coddling; no black-and-white "carved in stone" answers are ever provided. As they make their way through this volume, readers must always think for themselves, and thereby actively engage in the contemplation and inquiry – the *Vichaar* – that is an intrinsic part of Sikhi.

The Foreword and Introduction that begin the book are written by two distinguished and prominent India-based Sikhs: Dr. Mohinder Singh (Professor-Director, National Institute of Panjab Studies, New Delhi) and S. Tarlochan Singh (ex-M.P., and Former Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, India), respectively. Highly laudatory of I.J. Singh and the products of his prolific pen, these brief but enlightening sections are well worth reading. Following the Introduction is a short section of Acknowledgments, written by the author himself.

Subsequently, the reader should definitely not be tempted to skip I.J. Singh's Preface. Besides being a source of interesting autobiographical information – giving the reader a fine opportunity to understand how the events of his life history catalyzed his deep and abiding interest in exploring Sikhi through his writings – the author provides a wonderful exposition of his personal mindset, particularly highlighting his strong and abiding predilection for frank discussion and vigorous debate. He also discusses the methodology he uses to write his essays, and the reasons he thinks they are meaningful and needed by his intended audience of both Sikhs and non-Sikhs. Here, I.J. Singh not only situates himself firmly in the modern American Sikh

diaspora, but also ensconces his sixth book into context among his previous five works. The evolution of his thought processes and the means by which his new ideas build upon the foundations of the preceding ones are much in evidence in this prefatory section. Both those readers who are new to his writings and those who are already familiar with his formidable oeuvre will particularly appreciate the Preface as an “appetiser” to prepare one’s mind for the sumptuous literary banquet to follow.

So much could be said about every essay in this book! Here follows a discussion of seven of them that I found of particular interest.

His own Sikhs honored Guru Gobind Singh as *Mard Agamra*, a peerless man, I.J. Singh explains in Essay III, ‘Guru Gobind Singh: The Man Non-Pareil.’ Although this essay describes the many reasons why the Tenth Sikh Master was quite extraordinary, this essay focuses on Guru Gobind Singh not as disconnected from the Sikhi of Guru Nanak (the first Founder-Guru), but as an integral part of the progression of ten human Gurus who worked towards a common goal: mentoring a community under “virtual siege” to form “a human development movement” and forge a borderless Sikh nation with a defining ideology, philosophy, and core of common ethics. In this essay, I.J. Singh cogently lays out the four transformational events of Guru Gobind Singh’s legacy: the initiation rite of *Amrit Sanchar* as a defining marker of Sikh identity; the taking up of arms when necessary to defend freedom; the investiture of Sikh spiritual primacy in the Guru Granth Sahib; and the establishment of Sikh temporal authority in the Sikh Panth. The end result was “a revolution via evolution,” the author explains, which has enabled Sikhs to go forward into the changed realities of the future with wisdom and determination.

In Essay XIII, ‘Translating Gurbani: Pitfalls & Pleasures,’ I.J. Singh posits that, although numerous English translations (and online search engines) of the complete Guru Granth Sahib already exist, there is nevertheless the need for new initiatives to translate the Sikh scripture in user-friendly terms that are relevant to the Sikh “globally connected existence of a nation without walls.” The *norma loquendi* of Sikhs in the 21st

century diaspora is no longer Punjabi, or any other Indic language, I.J. Singh asserts, and the legends of Indian mythology are now alien to a new generation. How else can Sikhs understand the Guru Granth Sahib and adopt it as a blueprint for daily living, without new undertakings to translate its mystical poetry and capture its lofty message? Even if a translation will always be inadequate in some way, and the original text of the Gurbani must ever be kept on hand, the struggle to make sense of “what the Guru really meant” is an intrinsic part of the lifelong path of a Sikh.

The Indic religions proclaim that freedom from the recycling of one birth to another is the goal of human life, I.J. Singh explains in Essay XXIV, “Reincarnation/Transmigration: Re-visited & Re-explored.” Although reincarnation and transmigration retain an enormous presence in Indian culture-at-large, and seem to come across as major themes in the Guru Granth Sahib, should they remain pivotal to contemporary Sikhi? When we persist in focusing on what will happen after our death, we will undervalue our life here on Earth, the author warns. When contemplating the metaphorical poetry of the Sikh scriptures, the cultural context of the Guru period must always be kept in mind. “Death is a veil, like birth, through which we may not see,” he reminds us. With this pragmatic mindset, reincarnation and transmigration are reinterpreted to mean that after death, every living thing becomes part of the greater biological life cycle. Rather than ruminating on end-of-life questions, the author posits that a better use of our energies would be a concentration on the eternal challenge posed by Guru Amardas, the third Sikh Guru: “What footprints will you leave in the sands of time?”

No exploration of Sikh identity can fail to include a discussion of the Sikh turban. In Essay XXIX, ‘Turban of the Sikhs,’ I.J. Singh analyses the debate surrounding whether the turban is an intrinsic, Guru-promulgated part of Sikhi, or whether it was a requirement initiated in the 20th century by the Singh Sabha reform movement, and formalised in the Sikh Rehat Maryada (the code of Sikh conduct and conventions) only at that time. Some naysayers remain unconvinced by accounts of the events of Vaisakhi 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh created the discipline of the Khalsa – the community of initiated, committed

Sikhs – and mandated that the long, unshorn hair of a Sikh (known as Kesh, one of the five Kakkars, or Sikh articles of faith) was to be covered by a turban. Others believe in the historical evidence of Kesh and the turban being consistent external markers of the recognizable Sikh male, starting from the latter part of the Guru period and continuing for over 300 years, right up until present times. Hewing closely to his signature penchant for “connecting the dots” throughout time and space, the author illuminates and expands the turban debate with an unusual example of binding traditions that became enshrined into law: the events leading up to the adoption, in 1947, of the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which limited the office of the U.S. President to two consecutive terms. By showing how laws evolve from and reflect a history of the shared values of a free people, I.J. Singh buttresses his argument for the Kesh and the turban being at the innermost core of Sikh identity.

In Essay XXXI, ‘Ged Outta Da Box Awreddy’ (the whimsical title playfully pokes fun at a stereotyped *Noo Yawk* accent), I.J. Singh discusses what is truly a major hallmark of his writing style, his proclivity for exploring the Guru Granth Sahib – and Sikhi as a whole – using not only references from Gurbani itself, but also from contemporary diaspora society. To the author, supporting his own opinions using an impressive panoply of non-Sikh sources (the Bible, William Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde and Albert Einstein would be a typical assortment), is a very natural and desirable offshoot of the universality and timelessness of Sikhi. With a personal worldview shaped over many decades by both Sikh and non-Sikh texts and traditions, he heartily rejects the insular mindset held by many people that any validation of Gurbani concepts must come only from Gurbani itself. According to the author, Gurbani and modern society-at-large are not “hermetically-sealed cocoons” existing in isolation. Fostering the idea of universal connectivity, and examining one’s own faith through the lens of frank interactions and open dialogues with the outside world perfectly jibes with the ways the Gurus themselves lived and taught, I.J. Singh opines. Why shouldn’t the Gurus’ contemporary followers – today’s Sikhs – continue that tradition of dynamic

exploration and receptivity? This in no way demeans or threatens Gurbani, he believes; on the contrary, it strengthens and emphasizes Sikhi’s timeless meaning and universal relevance.

After almost 60 years of living in the United States, I.J. Singh is most certainly a Sikh-American. Essay XXXIV, ‘Sikh Americans: A Lament ... or Delight’ is therefore a very appropriate addition to this book. This essay, which includes many interesting personal details of his early years in the U.S., examines the place of Sikhs and Sikhi within the immense framework of contemporary American society. The varied cultural practices and traditions that immigrants bring to America greatly enrich this nation and should be recognised and nurtured, the author stresses. While indisputably supporting integration, he questions the idea of the “melting pot,” which might result in homogenized blending beyond recognition of the diverse components that immigrants bring with them. Should America, then, be characterised as a tossed salad or as a mosaic, I.J. Singh wonders. After examining the relevancy of these metaphors, he settles on that of a multi-instrument orchestra, which can make beautiful music when wisely led. According to the author, Sikhs must continue to actively define their “place at the table” of contemporary U.S. society. By embracing “the core of American values that unites, defines, and enriches us,” one can – and should – become both a good Sikh and a good American.

While Sikh teachings denounced the evils of sexism right from the inception of the faith, Sikh practices have unfortunately not always reflected this Guru-ordained viewpoint. I.J. Singh laments this dichotomy in Essay XXXVI, entitled ‘What Sikhism says about Gender, Sex & Related Issues,’ which is the final piece of the book. While women’s rights were severely curtailed in traditional Hindu and Islamic societies, in contrast, from its very preamble, the Guru Granth Sahib unambiguously states that God has no gender, and refers to the Creator in its hymns as both Father and Mother. The Sikh scripture acknowledges that all birth is a result of sexual activity, and posits that the relationship between the genders should mirror the sanctity that exists in the human-Divine connection. However, just as America generally reflects Judeo-

Christian values, even though separation of church and state is mandated by law, India, while a nominally secular country, largely espouses Hindu values. In the author's opinion, within this vast, engulfing sea of Indian/Hindu practices, Sikh teachings are not thoroughly internalised and integrated into the daily life of many Sikhs. "Not that it is unique to us," I.J. Singh ruefully admits at the close of this essay, "but there is an awful, yawning gulf between all that we preach and what we practice."

The thirty-sixth essay ends this delectable mind-feast, which is unfortunate for two reasons. Firstly, because the captivated reader would surely not want this marvelous book to be at its close! Secondly, unlike all of his previous five works, *Sikhi: The Journey & The Destination* has no Glossary. This is its biggest drawback, as some essays, admittedly, do need additional explanation for non-Sikh readers, or even for Sikhs who may not have in-depth knowledge of certain aspects of their faith. To be sure, this shortcoming is mitigated somewhat by the ease with which anyone can look up any topic on the Internet. However, when one has insufficient prior knowledge of a given subject, one runs the risk of not being able to discern when one is being misinformed by what one reads. Too often, in one's search for background material to elucidate a particular concept, one is easily taken in by something written by a very authoritative-sounding author – who, in actuality, really doesn't know what he or she is talking about. Of course, the most delightful remedy for this problem would be to find and peruse the Glossaries of I.J. Singh's other works – and, of course, to read the entirety of those works themselves, too!

This issue aside, *Sikhi: The Journey & The Destination* is "vintage" I.J. Singh. This book's panoply of adroitly-dissected ideas will provoke, engage and gratify any reader who is fortunate enough to delve deeply into its pages. With his impressive range of knowledge of non-Sikh religions and cultures, and his highly articulate writing style, for which he is so very justifiably celebrated, I.J. Singh has penned a most worthy successor to his five other books: *Sikhs & Sikhism: A View With a Bias* (1994, 1998); *The Sikh Way: A Pilgrim's Progress* (2001); *Being & Becoming a*

Sikh (2003); *The World According to Sikhi* (2006); and *Sikhs Today: Ideas & Opinions* (2012). After living almost 60 years in America, the author has few peers when it comes to keeping one's finger firmly on the pulse of today's Sikh diaspora. His insightful commentary and subtle, trenchant wit consistently excite and delight the reader's mind. Might there be a seventh book of essays in I.J. Singh's future? Let's hope so!

In conclusion, I'd like to undertake a dot-connection of my own. Guru Nanak, the First Sikh Master, traveled far and wide, accompanied by his faithful Muslim companion, Bhai Mardana. During a voyage, the two hungry and tired men sought food and shelter in a village one night, but received only rude and unkind treatment from its inhabitants. The next night, in another village, they enjoyed lovely courtesy and hospitality. About the first group of villagers, Guru Nanak remarked, "May these people stay comfortably here in this village forever." For those who lived in the second location, the Guru wished, "May the people of this village scatter everywhere." In explaining his words to a confused Bhai Mardana, the Guru reasoned that the undesirable characteristics of those that lived in the first village should remain limited to one place, while the wonderful qualities of the second village's inhabitants should spread far and wide, to benefit as many other people as possible.

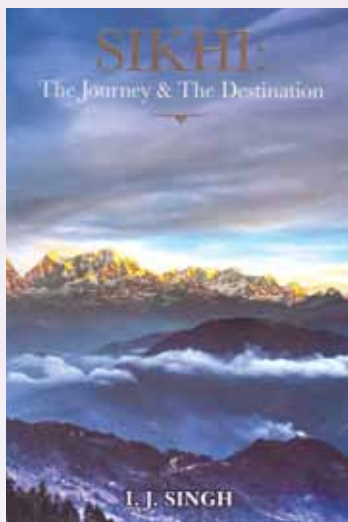
So, just as with the Guru's beautiful wish, my hope for *Sikhi: The Journey & The Destination* is that it be disseminated as globally as possible, not only to Sikhs, but also (and especially) to non-Sikhs, as well. While this splendid book certainly deserves a warm and hearty welcome from the Sikh community, every feasible action must be taken to ensure that it does not remain exclusively within these confines, but that it is enabled to go forth into the world-at-large, to spearhead the desperately-needed efforts of education and outreach aimed at sharing the message of the timeless and universal faith of Sikhi. Now that would be wonderful, indeed!

Ravinder Singh Taneja reviews I.J. Singh's AKATH KATHA

The dictum that *Sikhi*, like life, is both the journey and the destination has been the central motif of I.J. Singh's writings. Indeed, *Sikhi* has defined the ongoing dialectic of his immigrant experience. He arrived in the United States as a student in 1960 and was faced with issues of identity and assimilation – issues that are at the core of every immigrant experience. He was, by his own admission, ill-equipped: he was a Sikh by default, that is, a Sikh by birth and had known *Sikhi* only through osmosis in India. That began a lifelong journey of engaging with *Sikhi*, during which he discovered the “possessive power” and “alluring beauty” of *Sikhi* and embraced it with the enchantment that a child might feel in “discovering a new electronic game.”

What started out as a personal quest (and remains so) with an emphasis on doctrinal matters and issues of identity has evolved into a wider concern for the community and its place on the world stage. As his engagement with *Sikhi* has deepened, one can discern, is more rooted in the framework of Sikh teachings and his concerns broader and societal. Not surprising. A Sikh does not climb the inner mountain alone but is anchored in *Sangat*. Community matters become important, if not paramount.

Writing became the navigational tool of choice, a form of ‘self-indulgence,’ to measure his progress along this journey. For those who have followed his writings, one can discern the visible bias of an “ordinary Sikh,” evident in his first book, *Sikhs and Sikhism: A View with a Bias* (1994), give way to a sense of pilgrimage in second book, *The Sikh Way: A Pilgrims Progress* (2001). In the subsequent *Being and Becoming a Sikh* (2003), *The World According to Sikhi* (2006) and *Sikhs Today: Ideas and Opinions* (2012), one discerns that the



pilgrimage, like all personal odysseys, is never ending, never linear and never to a specific location.

Not surprising, then, that he should choose to title his sixth collection of essays, *Sikhi: The Journey & the Destination*. In this book, he returns to familiar terrain – *Sikhi* – in all its dimensions. That is the nature of spiritual journeys: one returns to the familiar only to see things anew and discern deeper shades of meaning. Writers are also possessed by a single great idea and *Sikhi* is *akath katha*, a story that can never be completed. And so, it is that I.J. Singh returns – over and again – to write about that which cannot be grasped.

Starting with ‘Living in Punj-Lish/Eng-Jabi’ and concluding with ‘What Sikhism says about Gender, Sex & Related Issues’ the 36 essays cut a wide swath across Sikh history, politics, culture, religion and practice.

The cheeky title of the opening essay, *Living in Punj-Lish/Eng-Jabi* belies the more serious issue of the decline of Punjabi, brought about, in large measure, by Sikhs themselves, who “openly reject Punjabi as the language of the unschooled, uneducated herd.” The neglect of Punjabi in favor of Hindi and English is driven by Sikh pragmatism and a desire for upward mobility but has left Sikhs with a transactional and shallow relationship with their mother language. This decline of Punjabi is an ominous sign and portends the eventual disappearance of a culture - a danger that Sikhs should wake up to.

In *Guru Gobind Singh: The Man Non-Pareil* he wonders aloud if Sikhs haven’t squandered the legacy of the Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh left us with defining markers of identity, a sense of self-empowerment, a scripture and the notion of collective leadership. I

doubt that anyone would question I.J. Singh's assertion that Sikhs have created a "mess of pottage." There is no question that Sikh institutions are a mess; that we suffer from a lack of leadership; that we must find ways to carry forward the vision and mission of the Gurus.

The dangers posed by our indifference to Punjabi and squandering of the legacy of our Gurus is matched by the Indian State's sustained vilification of the Sikhs through a "clear political strategy" that "branded Sikhs as anti-national." This is a leaf out of Donald Trump's "fake news," where governmental and political machinery, abetted by a docile press can create "fake" news for political ends.

A cluster of essays address concerns that are perennial and universal: The purpose of life, the pursuit of happiness, the Ego (*Haumae*) and the meaning of *Hukam*.

In speaking of *Haumae*, I.J. Singh tells us, rightly, that the common understanding of the term as Ego in English is misleading and that it may be more appropriate to think of it as narcissism – a condition characterised by a "grandiose view of one's own talents and a craving for admiration, as defining a personality type." *Haumae*, according to this view, has "two powerful ideas inherent in it," the ego as a sense of self and the ego "run amok." It follows that uprooting and destroying *Haumae* - as is commonly understood - would be impossible without dying. Instead, we need to tame its tendency for narcissistic behavior. In short, a disciplined ego.

Whether this squares with the description of *Haumae* in Gurbani is left to the reader to decide.

A disciplined ego becomes the basis of a good and purposeful life. But to what end? In the essay, *The Purpose of Life*, it is argued that, if there is indeed a purpose to life, it should be self-evident and not require us to "lean" on religion to figure it out. But, ironically, the author does just that: lean on *Sikhi* to formulate his sense of what human purpose may be. The purpose, simply put, it is to be a *Jeevan Mukh* (liberated from the narcissistic demands of the ego) and live a productive, selfless life "attuned to a perspective that is bigger than the self."

A purpose driven life, then, is a life lived in consonance with *Hukam*, which, along with *Haumae*, forms the foundation of Sikh teachings. Indeed, *Hukam* and *Haumai* are like two highly charged polar opposites that share a symbiotic relationship. In *Hukam: What it Is and what it Ain't* *Hukam* (loosely translated as "order" or "edict") requires that we live and rejoice in the Will of God even if it cannot be fully comprehended. What this means is that we come to terms with our inherent limitations as humans while continuing to live boldly and purposefully, exercising whatever free will we have.

In *Chasing Happiness*, a historical survey of the universally pursued but little understood thing we call happiness, is examined. Beginning with Aristotle's prescription of "pleasure, honor and self-sufficiency," the essay zig-zags through the views of sociologists, behavioral scientists and psychoanalysts and eventually settles on "moral joy, the glowing satisfaction we get when we have surrendered ourselves in some noble cause or unconditional love," as being the ultimate yardstick for happiness. In *Sikhi*, this would equate to a life where *Haumae* lives in accord with *Hukam*. Happiness would be a natural concomitant.

Moving to broader community concerns, I.J. Singh offers a vision of the future in *Sikh Mils: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Drawing on the idea that the Sikh *mils* existed as a loose confederacy, he envisions a similar association that could link the global presence of the Sikhs into a nation without borders: "I can see Sikh *mils* – Singaporean, Kenyan, Thai, Punjabi, British, American or Canadian among others, cognizant of their own interests and convening in a Sarbat Khalsa in the larger interest of Sikhs worldwide."

But I.J. Singh is also keenly aware that there are problems with calling a Sarbat Khalsa and issuing a Gurmata in the current political climate in India, "that would work against such a convention." He rightly recognises that the "mechanisms of convening the Sarbat Khalsa as a means of deriving a Gurmata were designed for a different world." We must continue to find mechanisms that are appropriate for our times.

The lead in defining such a framework must come from scholars and intellectuals within the community. But

in *Reshaping Ivory Towers into Towers of Learning*, he laments the “progressively widening gap” between the scholars who run Sikh Studies programs in North America and the Sikh community: Sikh scholars, who tend to write for each other in highly specialised journals, have not bridged the gap to become public intellectuals in the mould of Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking, Noam Chomsky – individuals who were serious scholars and domain experts but with the knack to reach out to the average person. This is a call to our scholars to step out of their ivory towers.

Translating Gurbani: Pitfalls and Pleasures and *The case for transliteration of Gurbani* are related subjects whose importance cannot be overestimated. Given that Punjabi is no longer the common language amongst Sikhs in the diaspora, the need for further translations – and transliterations – of the Guru Granth Sahib are imperative. But most efforts in this sphere remain individual accomplishments.

It is difficult to write about Sikhi and not touch on reincarnation and transmigration – a subject that is tackled with some out-of-the-box thinking in *Reincarnation/Transmigration: Re-visited & Re-explored*. Ideas of reincarnation and transmigration, along with *karma* (which serves as the fuel for this system) are central to Indian thought but have been reduced to a literal accounting of one’s *karma* (lit. actions). I.J. argues (correctly) that Sikhi does not take such a transactional view of one’s action; instead, life is to be seen as a series of potentially transforming moments.

In *Sikhi: Creationism, Evolution & Related Matters*, the divide between science, especially Darwinian evolution and the Semitic religions is contrasted to Sikhi’s ability to coexist with scientific ideas; indeed, Guru Nanak’s cosmology is strikingly modern. Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, speaks of the emergence of human consciousness in very evolutionary terms.

No discussion of the Sikhs can be complete without acknowledging the discussion and debate around Sikh identity – especially in relation to the external markers, of which unshorn hair (and the associated turban) is the most prominent and the most debated. In *Turban*

of the Sikhs, a historical survey is undertaken, and the different arguments considered. The conclusion is one that this reviewer heartily endorses: “Whether or not we can produce a single document of unassailable authenticity... unshorn hair managed by a turban lie at the core of Sikh identity.” What is important is not documentary evidence but how Sikhs view themselves. A Khalsa is the archetype that sits deep in our collective consciousness.

I.J. Singh’s journey in *Sikhi* is inextricably linked with his passage as an immigrant. The immigrant experience is a curious admixture of loss and gain: a familiar environment and identity recedes and gives way to a new and unfamiliar one. The adjustment to a new one is a complex process that reshapes identity in fundamental ways. In I.J. Singh’s case, we see the process played out in the backdrop of Sikhi.

In *Sikh Americans: A Lament ...or Delight*, we get a feel for the distance that the author has travelled. From being a “lone Sikh” in parts unknown 60 years ago, trying to sync his Sikh identity with his “American Dream” we see the emergence of an assertive American-Sikh demanding a place at the table and seeking to “define a place for Sikhs and Sikhism within the framework of contemporary American society.” That is a quantum leap!

The value of this book, and I.J. Singh’s writings in general, is that it challenges us to think – and rethink - our often rigid and impenetrable positions. He has a knack of framing questions in a meaningful and challenging way. He instructs without being preachy and without laying claims to infallible truth – a refreshing change from the usual scolding tone of Sikh writers. The book - like his previous ones - is a kind of spiritual or philosophical sing-along for those who are also engaged in their own spiritual quest and are ready to ask uncomfortable questions and explore uncharted territory.

SIKHI : The Journey & The Destination is available from the publishers in New Delhi (nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com), SINGH BROTHERS at Amritsar (singhbrol@yahoo.co.in) and the author in New York (ijsingh99@gmail.com).

Sikh American Dreams

Punjabis in America have had to overcome a century of prejudice and discriminatory laws to build a new haven for themselves in the new world. Nowhere is this more evident than in Yuba City, California, where the community remains in *Chardi Kalaa*



Didar Singh Bains, the 'Peach King' of California

As the legend goes, Didar Singh Bains arrived in Yuba City in 1958 at the age of 18 with only \$8 in his pocket – which was then enough for him! A young immigrant from India with humble origins, he believed that in the US “money could grow on trees.” In the course of his lifetime, that youthful optimism has proven true — at least figuratively !

Back then though, Bains was a young Sikh farmer who thought farming was next to godliness. He was raised in a small farming village in the Punjab. In 1948, when Didar Singh Bains was a boy, his father left for the USA, following the footsteps of his great-uncle who had eventually settled in the Yuba City area in the 1920s and talked about the available work opportunities and chances to improve their livelihoods. After his father left, Bains started farming in his village to provide for his mother and younger brother until he grew old enough to make his way to California as well.



Jawala Singh Bains with family (circa 1966). He originally came to Canada in 1907 and arrived in Yuba City in 1930. He took seven years on an arduous journey from Mexico to reach California and became a US Citizen in 1964. (Photo courtesy of Sarbjit Singh Thiara.)

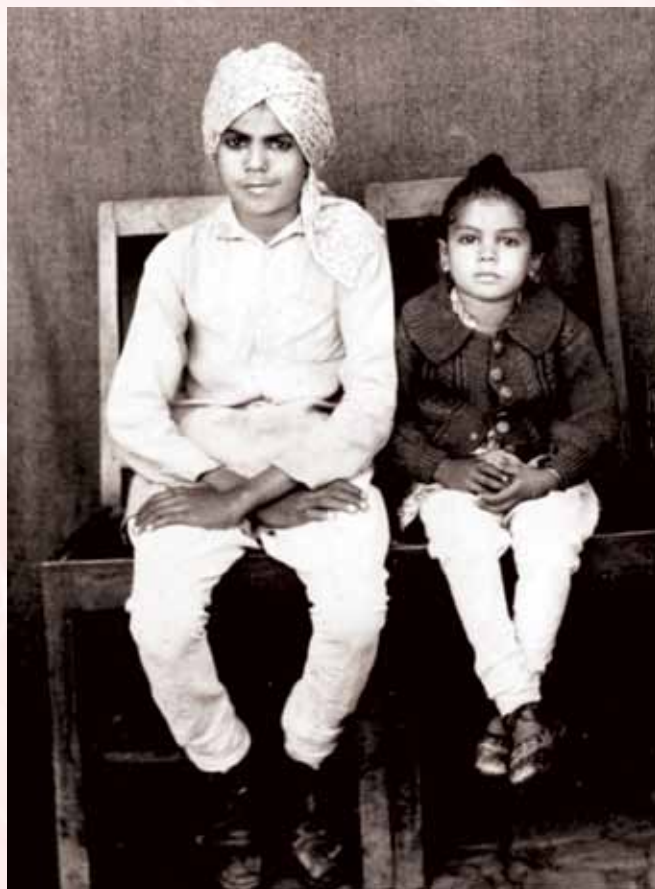
Yuba City suited the family. “They chose this region because they felt there were adequate amounts of water, fertile soils and the climate with four actual seasons — and the geography, it reminded them of being back home,” recalls Bains’ son, Karm Singh.

Just like his great-uncle and father before him, Didar Singh Bains started as a farm labourer, driving tractors, irrigating and pruning orchards, earning below minimum wage at \$0.75 an hour. Acclaimed for doing the work of four men, he soon became a foreman. But his dreams of one day owning his own farmland and harvesting his own fruit would have to wait until he had saved some money. In 1962, his mother, Amar Kaur, joined her son and husband. Accompanied only by Didar’s younger brother, who was 13 at the time, she was one of the first Punjabi women to arrive in Yuba City.

Ever since the first Punjabis emigrated from India to California at turn of the 20th century, this population has carved out a prominent role in the economy, culture and identity of Yuba City, despite decades of laws that had prevented immigration, citizenship and land ownership for Indian Americans. Most Punjabis here practice Sikhism — a religion they say manifests in their proclivity for hard work and entrepreneurship — and the Yuba-Sutter area boasts one of the largest Sikh populations in the USA, estimated to be over 15,000. These Punjabi Americans are business owners, farmers, scientists, teachers, real estate agents, government officials, politicians, engineers, doctors, dentists and developers.

“You name it, we’re there,” Karm says. “Sikhs are hard-working and adventurous people and they’ve moved to all parts of the world. It’s their independent spirit and strength in their faith and hard work that has made them successful.”

Soon enough, back in the Punjab, Yuba City became a desired destination where



Didar Singh Bains as a child, with his brother Jaswant Singh

Punjabis of all faiths knew they could find friends and family thousands of miles away from their homeland. They could prosper while maintaining their cultural identity, which for Sikhs is celebrated most visibly



Sikh parade in Yuba City: the largest outside India

each November with some 100,000 people attending one of the largest Sikh parades outside India. This city, rooted in agriculture, is an unassuming place where the American Dream, elusive to so many, is alive and well.

As for Didar Singh Bains, in 1962 he bought his first piece of farmland, kept adding and adding through the years, and the 78-year-old now owns 40,000 acres in 13 counties and is the largest peach farmer in California — and perhaps the largest in the world!

“I’m very happy,” he says. “I think I did the best I possibly could for my family and I hope they appreciate it. I’ve truly been blessed ”!

Shared set of values

In 1499, Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in the Punjab region, which encompassed parts of northern India and Pakistan, and he traveled extensively to spread his message. “He was a very distinct preacher. The ideas he brought were very progressive,” says Dr Jasbir Singh Kang, vice president of Rideout Medical Associates and medical director of Yuba Sutter Hospitalist Group. A Sikh follows three golden rules: *meditation, dignity through honest and hard work, and sharing one’s earnings with the needy*. “Spirituality is achieved through selfless service,” Kang emphasises.



Dr Jasbir Singh Kang moved to Yuba City in 1991 and two years later co-founded the Punjabi American Heritage Society

Sikhism is today the fifth-largest religion in the world with about 25 million followers, with some half a million Sikhs living in the US (estimates vary as the Census does not record religious affiliation.) Those who migrated here did so for better jobs, to flee natural disasters or famine, escape violence or religious persecution, pursue education or to join family. In their adopted home, they have found a nation whose values resemble their own.

“American core values, including those enshrined in the Constitution, are entirely consistent with Sikh values — emphasis on equality is huge, merit of working hard and being able to succeed, and to achieve the American Dream,” says Dr. Nicole Ranganath, a historian in the Middle East/South Asian Studies Programme at UC Davis and curator of the *Pioneering Punjabis* Digital Archive. “There’s a very strong tradition of fighting for social justice and human rights.”

Sikhs in California were America’s first significant South Asian community, although in India they have comprised a relatively small percentage of the population. The 1849 annexation of the Punjab by the British in India propelled people to seek economic opportunities elsewhere. Soon after the 1857 ‘mutiny’ by the Bengal native army (part of the East India Company), the disbanded Sikh troops were re-recruited to form new regiments of the British Indian Army as also the colonial police force, many thousands of which then served the British Empire mostly in the far east, including China, Malaya, Burma, Hong Kong and Singapore. Many of the intrepid amongst them went much further, across the Pacific to set up homes in California and in Canada.

In the early 1900s California, Punjabi labourers, students and professionals worked on lumber mills, the railroad and in agriculture, which made use of their traditional farming experience. Punjabis originated from the Indus Valley — regarded as the cradle of civilisation along the fertile floodplains of the Indus River — and this ancient society was among the first to employ modern farming techniques. Immigrants settling in the Sacramento Valley were reminded of their Punjab, “land of the five rivers.”

But California's Alien Land Laws of the early 1900s largely prevented Asian immigrants from owning agricultural land or possessing long-term leases (and were finally invalidated by the state Supreme Court in 1952). Additionally, immigration bans stalled the influx of non-European immigrants and kept Indian families separated for decades.

Immigration was first stopped with the Immigration Act of 1917, which halted newcomers from Asia, and then with *US v. Bhagat Singh Thind* in 1923, which made Indians (and other Asians) ineligible for citizenship as they were not considered "white people." Not until the Luce-Celler Bill of 1946 were Indian nationals already in the country able to become naturalised American citizens, and the law set a quota of merely one hundred Indian immigrants to be allowed into the US annually. Punjabi-run businesses proliferated in Yuba City and the peach industry especially grew, Ranganath says.

That's how Davinder Singh Deol's father came to California in the early 1950s, when she was a child. Deol, who is now a vice principal in the Yuba City Unified School District, says virtually all the men in her village entered the lottery—and her father got lucky! But the policy deeply damaged families, she says, as it kept them separated. Over the next decade, her father sponsored his wife, daughter, parents and siblings to come over. In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act removed the quota rule, and more Punjabis soon rejoined their families.

When Kulwant Singh Johl moved to Yuba City from India in 1970 aged 20 years, he ruminated long and hard over whether to remove his turban and cut his unshorn hair. A month passed before he took out a pair of scissors, believing that doing so would improve his job prospects and allow him to blend in with his new surroundings. "It was a very hard decision to me," he says. He didn't send a photo of himself back to his



The Punjabi American Festival is celebrated with gusto each May in Yuba City



Every November, some 100,000 people attend the Sikh parade in Yuba City. (Photo courtesy of Ranjit S. Kandola)

parents in India for five years, worried they would disapprove of their son with short hair and a shaved beard, going against the tradition of baptised Sikh men. After Johl arrived, he attended Yuba College and Chico State, earning a degree in agricultural science. He now works as an agricultural pest control adviser and took over the 1,000-acre family farm, which grows peaches, walnuts, almonds, prunes and pomegranates.

Johl was not the first of his family to emigrate from Punjab. In 1906, his grandfather Nand Singh had arrived in the Yuba City area, leaving behind his wife and infant son. “When [my grandfather] came here, my father was 2 years old and they never met each other again,” Johl says. Nand was able to purchase farmland in 1946.

Meanwhile in 1947, the Partition of India may have marked independence from British rule, but was accompanied by a widespread bloodbath. Partition divided the subcontinent, separating the Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. (Punjab was split

into two provinces now in two different countries, with Muslims relocating to Pakistan and Sikhs and Hindus fleeing to India.)

In the aftermath, sectarian violence erupted and Punjab became the epicentre. Up to 15 million people were displaced in what remains the largest human migration in history, and more than one million people were massacred within that year. “The Punjabi people paid the heaviest price for India’s freedom from British rule and the wounds from the partition have not yet healed today,” Ranganath says.

During the 1970s, many Sikhs felt the Indian government was being too heavy-handed with its policies, instead of using peaceful, democratic means to address their grievances. Then, in the 1980s, a Sikh leader named Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale came on the scene, was made a political factor by the then ruling government, which in June 1984 culminated in the very controversial attack on him and his followers who were in the Golden Temple complex. In retaliation, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was later assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. In what has never been formally acknowledged, this was followed

by a genocide against the Sikhs, resulting in thousands murdered. This in fact, is what possibly spurred another wave of Sikh immigrants to different parts of the world, in the 1980s particularly to the United States and Canada.

Embedded In Yuba City

Punjabis enjoy living in Yuba City for the same reasons as do their neighbours: a family-friendly, small-town feel; affordable cost of living; good schools and abundant outdoor recreation, with nearby Sutter Buttes and Feather Rivers, “The Sikh community is very embedded here and is very much a central part of our community,” says Rikki Shaffer, CEO of the Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce, which covers two counties and four cities.

While Shaffer cannot pinpoint exactly how many of the chamber’s 601 members are Sikh or Punjabi — the organisation, of course, doesn’t track members’ religious or ethnic backgrounds — she says these residents play an important role in the region’s

economy, including the three main industries of agriculture, medicine and military (Beale Air Force Base is also located in Yuba County.)

“One of the things that sticks out to me is their open-door and welcoming policy to anybody,” Shaffer says. “Anybody can seek help from a Sikh temple.” For example, a gurdwara is where a person of any faith can get a free meal three times a day in the communal kitchen. The annual Nagar Kirtan Sikh parade in November is also a major boost to the area, with the 100,000 people it attracts. “Every hotel is booked out,” Shaffer says. “They’re very welcoming to the entire community to come and be part of that fantastic celebration.”

Along its five-mile route, the parade passes the Sutter County Community Memorial Museum — which houses a permanent exhibit on local Punjabi history — to the city’s main gurdwara, built in 1969. On a recent afternoon, as Dr. Kang drives to the Gurdwara, he talks about his decision to leave India in 1986 at age 23. His



Jaikara Juniors of West Sacramento Gurdwara

father was a successful veterinarian and they had a comfortable life in a good city, but the turmoil of the era threatened his freedom of speech and safety.

“I always read about JFK and Lincoln, and they were heroes to me,” he says. “I have no regrets on coming here.” After completing a residency in internal medicine in Chicago, he moved to Yuba City in 1991 at the behest of a mentor who told him to go where he was needed. A couple years after arriving, Kang cofounded the Punjabi American Heritage Society and then the Punjabi American Festival, which occurs each May. He has become a leader in the community and vocal activist on the ways in which Punjabis contribute to the region. “I don’t think personal success is all that important,” he says. “It’s how it translates to your family and community that really matters in the long-term.”

Hitpal Singh Deol came to Yuba City in 1974 at 19 years old for an arranged marriage to Davinder. “I knew how to read and write, but I wasn’t fluent in speaking English, because I never had to,” he says. He did farm and factory work until saving enough cash to purchase his first *Subway* 25 years ago. He now owns a total of three in Oroville and Gridley.

“Literally, I think all Subways in California are owned by Punjabis,” Kang says, laughing, during a recent lunch of Thai food with his friends Deol and Johl. “Quite a few,” Deol acknowledges. Same goes with convenience stores, gas stations and other food chains. Trucking companies are the next frontier, they say. The men agree that a desire exists among Punjabis to work hard enough to become their own bosses.

“The work ethic and the drive to succeed is the big factor in being able to do what I have done so far,” Deol says. “That’s true of most immigrants, it doesn’t matter which country you’re from. You’re giving up your own country, your own home, for that success. If you don’t have that drive, then it doesn’t make sense to move to that new country.”

While cultural tensions remain, Deol says they have grown less frequent. One time a Subway customer emphasised that he only wanted white stuff on his

sandwich, trying to stir up trouble. Deol asked if he wanted “wheat - the brown - bread” or “black olives.” He says the customer laughed and still comes in today. “I think it’s all on how you handle a situation,” Deol says.

Another time at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, someone told Deol’s family to go back to where they came from: “He’s just ignorant. He doesn’t know,” recounts Deol, who is Sikh, saying that he doesn’t take things personally. Sikhism, adds Kang, teaches its followers to be confident and strong, and ignore petty comments. “Otherwise,” he says, “we couldn’t be here if we worried about such little things.” The mainstream community, he says, “has very much accepted us as part of them.”

That’s partly due to Yuba City’s Punjabi Americans becoming more civically involved. In 2009, local resident Kashmir Gill became the first Sikh elected as mayor anywhere in the US, and in 2014 Preet Didbal was likely the first Sikh woman in the nation elected to a city council, and now serves as vice mayor. State laws have also helped ease decades of discrimination and prejudice, including one that protects workers who wear turbans and other religious attire or hairstyles. But there remains room for progress, says Karm, son of





The Bains' peach orchard in Yuba City

Didar Bains. Punjabis are in the early stages of working with city and county officials and law enforcement to launch 'Yuba City United,' an outreach campaign he says aims to remind residents of different ethnicities, nationalities and religions that "We're all one."

"It's all one big community," says Prem Hunji Turner, who grew up in Yuba City and now lives in Sacramento. Her mother was Hindu and her father was Sikh, and before Yuba City's Hindu temple was built in 1996, the family would visit a gurdwara. Turner's father came over in 1948, then worked as a peach and walnut farmer. At 99 years old, he donated \$100,000 to local charities, before passing away earlier this year. Her late mother arrived in 1952 and in her 50s studied the English language at a community college. Shortly thereafter, she became the city's first real estate agent of Punjabi descent, running *Hunji Realty*.

For the first generation of immigrants, the goal was to survive and for the second to achieve economic success for their families. For the third generations and beyond, the focus is on living a full life. Kang wants his three children – who are studying medicine, filmmaking and finance – to explore the

world, have new experiences and figure out what they want, which might even mean leaving Yuba City. Simply having this option to pursue their own dreams available to his children means Kang has attained what he came here for: the American Dream. His friends feel the same.

"I haven't found a Sikh saying anything bad about America," Kang says. "They love this country better than anything else."





Becoming the “Peach King”

Around four decades ago, Didar Singh Bains – whose first name means “visionary” in Punjabi – thought of starting an annual Nagar Kirtan Sikh parade in November to commemorate their holy scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and to integrate his Sikh community into the larger Yuba City community. “First and foremost, there was that wish for acceptance,” says his son, Karm. “We look different, we have different religious beliefs. But in our religion, we believe in one God and we are all children of God.”

But his father’s peers pushed back, worried the celebration would fall victim to verbal altercations, disruptions or even violence. My dad was like, “There’s one way to find out,” Karm says. Bains, with both his farming operation and role in the parade, which grows every year, has brought international recognition to the Punjabi Americans of Northern California.

While Sikhs are supposed to refrain from being “proud”, Karm says it’s hard to not be proud of his father’s accomplishments, which has had ripple effects for the entire extended family – who are involved in agriculture, growing peaches, prunes,

walnuts and almonds, and maintaining a diversified land-development portfolio, including commercial, industrial and residential landholdings. Bains and his wife, Santi, raised three children, who are now grown with their own children.

“All of this with God’s grace,” Karm says. “We’re just here as stewards of the land to tend to [the fields] for the time being. We’re really fortunate and grateful for the opportunities this country has given us.”

During an inaugural visit to the Gurdwara in West Sacramento in 2014, Governor Jerry Brown recognised Bains as the “Peach King” of California, and referenced the millions of dollars he has donated to nonprofits and schools in the US, Canada and back in his homeland of India. And, this past November, the Yuba City Council held a special meeting and reception to honor Bains as a community leader for his “incredible contributions” and for “enriching our cultural heritage.”

“That was hands-down,” says Karm Singh, “the proudest moment of my life.”

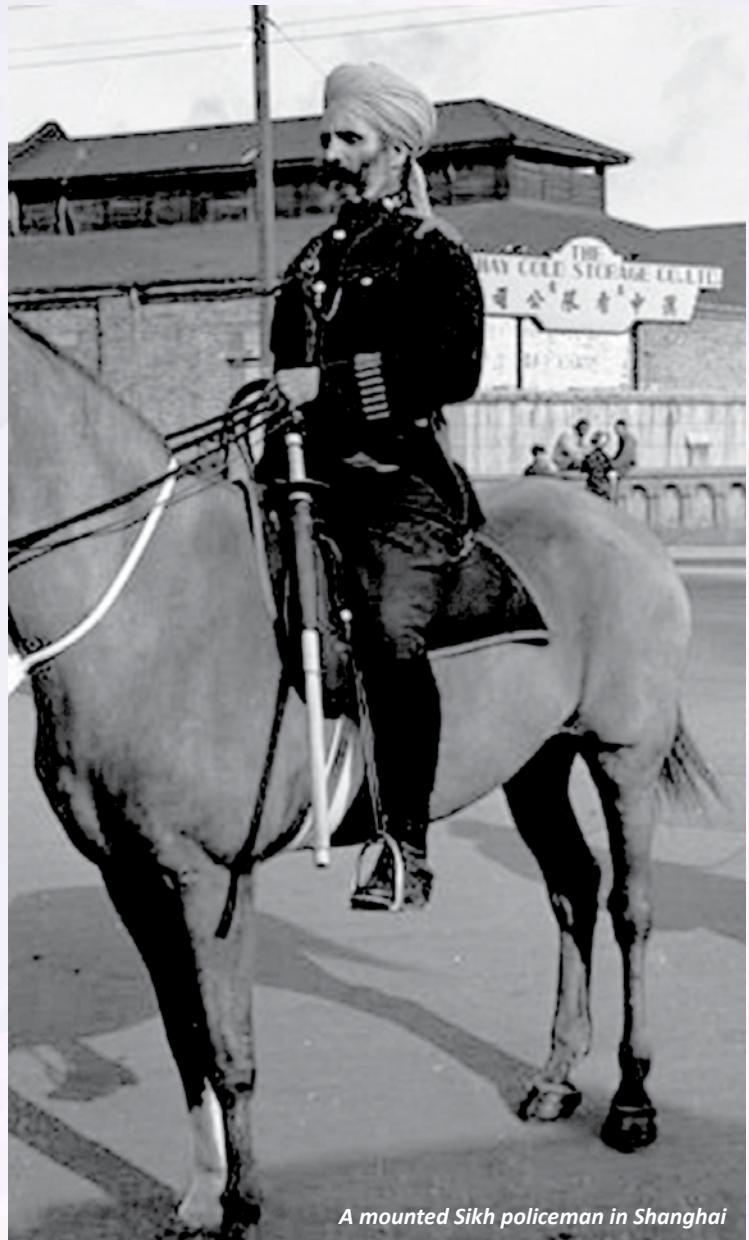
Sena Christian

The Sikhs of Shanghai 上海

History records the place and contribution of Sikhs in China during the early years of the 20th Century, particularly after the Opium War, which ended with the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 and opening of Chinese ports to the West. After China's defeat at the hands of the British in the First Opium War (1839-42), the Treaty of Nanking, signed on 29 August 1842, formed the basis for this country's relations with the West for the next almost a century. As the Imperial powers carved out territories in China in the 1850s, thereafter Sikhs from the Punjab in India, were to play their part particularly in China's big cities. Interestingly, about the same time, in another part of Asia, the Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49 had resulted in annexation of the Sikh Empire by the British, so the fate of the two Asian nations were in a sense, juxtaposed.

In 1851, another revolt, called the 'Taiping Rebellion' broke out against the British and other Europeans and to quell this, the British recruited Sikh troops from the recently disbanded Khalsa Army to serve 'overseas'. The Taiping rebellion was arguably the world's bloodiest civil war, lasting for 13 years from 1851 to 1864, which virtually toppled the Qing Dynasty and resulted in the death of 20 million people, more than the entire population of England at that time. It is also considered by many historians as the awakening of China, which over the next century culminated in the Long March and takeover by Mao Tse-tung and start of the Communist era, inexorably taking the country to near superpower status today.

At turn of the 20th Century, the Boxer Rebellion, also known as the Boxer Uprising was a pro-nationalist movement by the 'Righteous Harmony Society', which was against the so-called foreign influences on religion, politics and commerce. In June 1900, 'Boxer' fighters threatened foreigners in Beijing and forced them to seek



A mounted Sikh policeman in Shanghai

refuge in the Foreign Legation Quarters. An initially hesitant Empress Dowager, urged by conservatives of the Imperial Court and supported the Boxers then declared war on foreign powers. For 55 days, the Boxers laid siege in the heart of Beijing. On 4 August 1900, soldiers of an eight nation alliance moved from the city of Tianjin to Beijing to relieve the siege. Upon arriving at Yang Tsun, they were attacked by Chinese rebels and

in the ensuing Battle of Yang Tsun, intense fighting took place between an Indian Army unit, the 24th Punjabis and a regiment of Americans, “who raced each other over a plateau of 5000 yards, exposed to a fierce hail of shell and rifle fire, to occupy a formidable entrenched position.” Eventually, the Sikhs and Americans reached the entrenched Chinese and order was given to charge with bayonets. The 24th Punjabis and the 14th American Regiments then occupied Yang Tsun lifting the siege eventually leading to the occupation of Beijing.

The Chinese government was forced to sign the ‘Boxer Protocol’, which forced implementation of the terms including payment of compensation to the affected nations.

Some years later, at the start of World War I, British-Indian troops, largely Sikhs, were part of the Garrison of Tianjin and took part in the Siege of Tsingtao. In August 1914, the Japanese entered the war and immediately sent a Division to capture the German port of Tsingtao. The 24th Punjabis and two contingents of the 36th Sikhs were also sent from Tientsin in September to capture the city. Tsingtao fell on 7 November.

However, a new element now emerged and for several decades thereafter, various gangs, particularly the Ch’ing Pang (‘Green Gang’) took over Shanghai, only occasionally “bothered” by local police. This secret society was a massive criminal organisation comparable in many respects to the Sicilian mafia, and considered as the true power in Shanghai, its various factions dominating practically all aspects of criminal life, including vast profits of the illegal opium trade, the gambling rackets, prostitution, weapon smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, murder, etc. Increasing numbers of Chinese police officers in the city became its clandestine members. The French Concession was forced to make a secret deal with the gangs, who offered protection against the warlords outside of Shanghai in exchange for their non-

prosecution. Corruption among the Chinese police force became widespread and rampant.

It was at this juncture that the British inducted large numbers of Sikhs as policeman for law enforcement. Presence of these handsome stalwarts was almost immediately effective in controlling the Chinese secret societies and deterring criminal activities. Increasing numbers of Sikhs were recruited by the British to serve in China, not only as police officers but also for traffic management, riot control and included a sizeable horse-mounted force. Between 1925 and 1930, the Ward Road Gaol predominantly housed Chinese prisoners and was controlled and run by the British and Sikhs, the majority of warders being the latter. Conditions inside Ward Road Gaol were not considered good as silence was enforced at all times, overcrowding was rife, and being the largest prison in the world, it earned the dubious title of an ‘Alcatraz of the Orient’.



Photo of British Sikh, French, German, Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, Russian soldiers, part of the international force in Shanghai.

Sikh forces were largely deployed in major ports including Shanghai, where European trading companies had set up their presence by the early twentieth century. Sikh policemen became a standard feature in the International Settlement and this force, steadfastly policed the International Settlement at Shanghai until the Japanese occupation in 1943.

Harchand Singh Bedi

The 'Hong Tou A-Sans' of Shanghai'



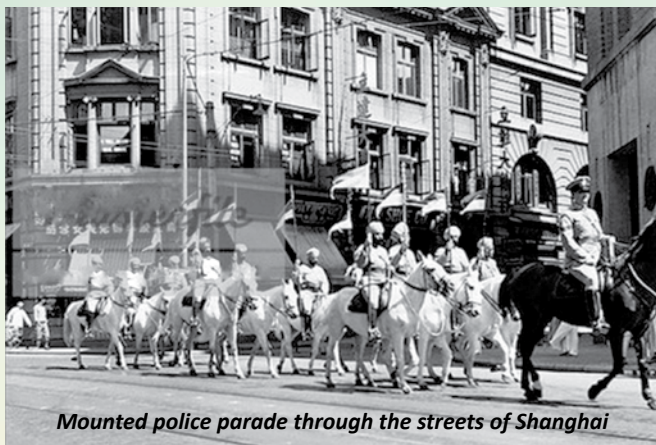
The Chinese referred to Sikhs as *Hong Tou A-San*, being a reference to their red turbans ('Hong' means red in Mandarin while 'Tou' refers to the head). Sikhs, armed with heavy batons were employed as riot police in the rough-and-tumble streets of Shanghai. The British police instructor, William Ewart Fairbairn, a pioneer in close-quarters battle and riot police tactics, found the Sikhs to be very effective at quelling disturbances, perhaps owing to their *gatka*-derived skills.

The Sikhs, standing tall and tough had a sobering effect upon the usually slimy gangsters of Chinese populace.

The British recruited increasing numbers of Sikhs to police the international settlement at Shanghai, known as the Shanghai International Police. The force was initially composed of Europeans, mainly Britons but after 1864 some Chinese were recruited, the force being expanded over the next 90 years, which included sizeable number of Sikhs from 1884. This force eventually reached about 800 men, almost all Sikhs, who were very effective in keeping the generally lawless elements of the population under effective control. The Chinese had little respect neither the etiquette to understand the rules and regulations of the administration, and would spit and urinate anywhere.



The tall and imposing Sikh policeman had a sobering effect on the sometimes unruly Chinese populace



Mounted police parade through the streets of Shanghai

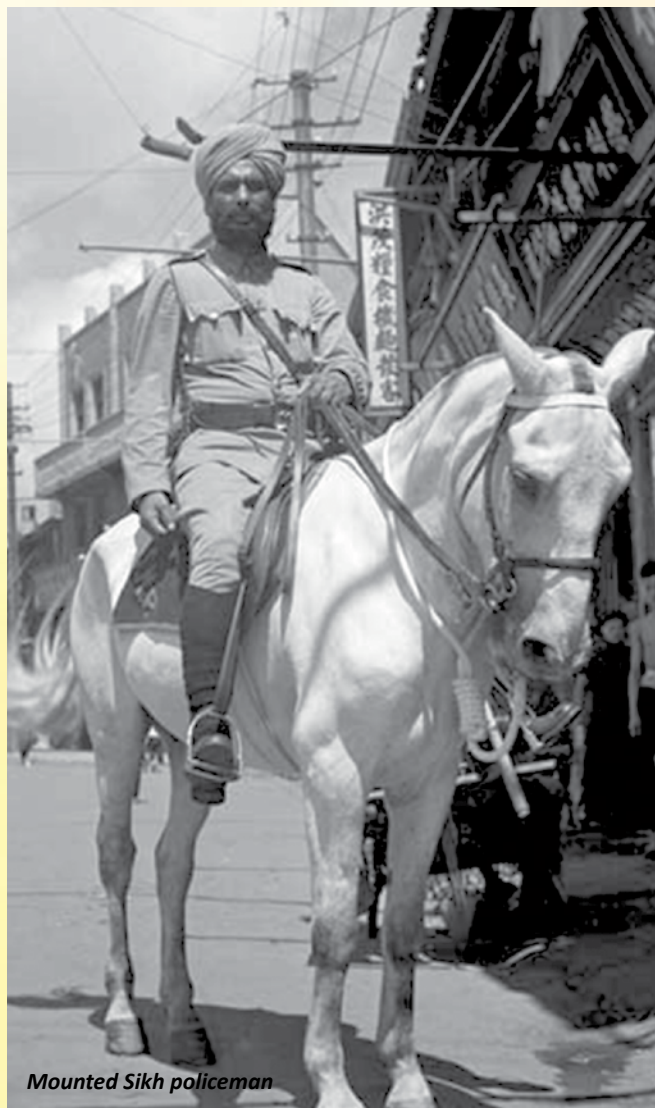
The rickshaw riders would ride like wild and often cause unnecessary traffic chaos. A Sikh policeman would often catch hold of two of such unruly riders, lift them up and bang their heads together, which was enough to put fear into the Chinese. When gangs of unruly Chinese gathered creating nuisance with loud arguments, the appearance of a single majestic looking Sikh in his red turban was enough to send the mobs fleeing. It was apparent the British had given their Sikh police a free hand in dealing with Chinese, and the Sikhs did not take this lightly. The police had no sympathy for the unruly elements of the Chinese, who were seen as nothing more than opium smokers, involved mostly in gambling or opium gang activities.

By the 1890s, there was a growing community of Sikhs in Shanghai, the first Gurdwara being built in the city in the same year, according to records being in a building at 326 Dong Bao Xing Road. This Gurdwara was also visited by Dhyani Chand, the Indian hockey wizard who came to the gurdwara in 1932, and wrote, ...“The atmosphere in the city was quite tense due to the Sino-Japanese clash over Manchuria. We were told to keep within bounds and avoid any trouble spots. We visited a small Sikh temple on the outskirts of the city. It was said to be the oldest Gurdwara in Shanghai. The Gurdwara had suffered much damage in clashes between the Chinese and Japanese soldiers. As we came out of the temple, Japanese soldiers eyed us with suspicion. We had lunch on board our ship and sailed for Kobe at about 4 pm.”

The records of the Gurdwara at this site are still available on some Chinese sites.

At this time of agitation for India's independence, many Sikhs were headed for Shanghai on their way to Vancouver and a number of Sikhs from Shanghai joined the ship *Komagata Maru* alias *Guru Nanak Jahaz* as it was renamed by Baba Gurdit Singh on their way to the West coast of USA and Canada.

In the first decades of the 20th century, there were an increasing number of Sikhs in China, especially at major hotels in Peking and Shanghai and Wenzhou, where they served as guards and concierge handlers and their turbans gave special aura. One Sikh working in Peking today says “Sometimes when really elderly, over 70-years-old, Chinese walk by, they are very happy and tell me that they remember seeing Sikhs like me on the streets in their youth”



Mounted Sikh policeman

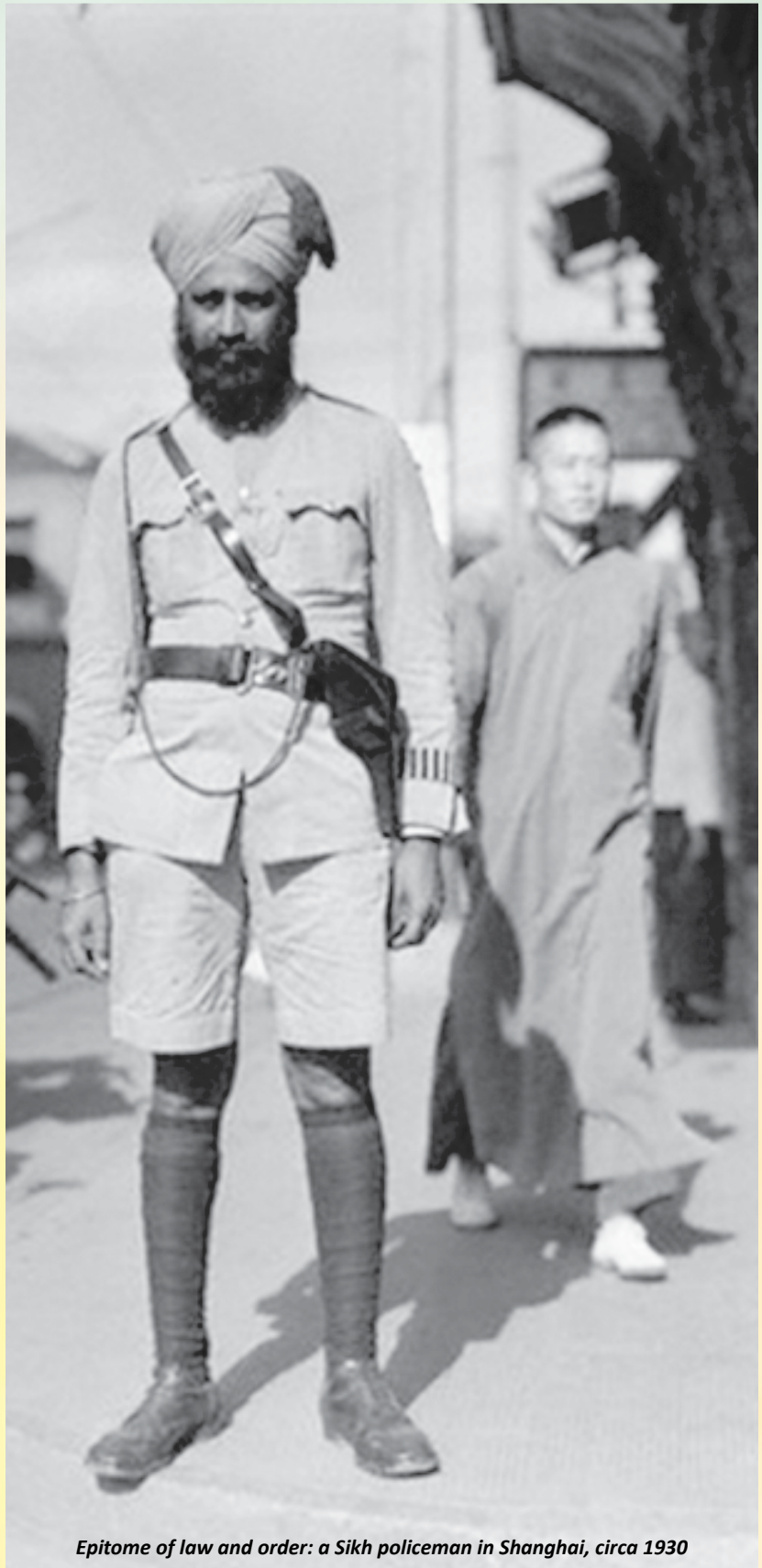
Sikh troops had earlier played a major role in lifting the siege of Shanghai and Peking at the turn of century. By 1930s there were said to be two more Gurdwaras in Shanghai. More Gurdwaras came up, one in Canton and other places. Many Sikhs married local Chinese women and settled there. However, when the Communists began taking over, many families left China by way of Singapore and Penang. Many Guru Granth saroops were carried by these families back from China, but a fair number of Sikhs who were Chinese state citizens stayed back and appeared to have lived here peacefully until 1963.

In the 1940s, a Sikh from Ipoh/Taiping had gone to China and volunteered to join the Kuomintang army to fight the communists and was promoted to the rank of a colonel by Chaing Kai Shek. He spoke Chinese very fluently and on his return married a Chinese lady.

In 1963, there still were some 1200 Sikh families living in China. However in the decades that followed founding of the People's Republic of China, the country's Sikh population gradually reduced. Following the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 most left and few were left by turn of the Century.

Gurdwaras in Canton and the other cities thereafter closed down, followed by those in Shanghai. In late 1963, the *Straits Times* carried an article about the last batch of Sikhs, about 260, many with Chinese wives who had left Shanghai for India, returning by air via Hong Kong. They reportedly carried the last of Saroop of Guru Granth Sahib from the last Sikh Gurdwara in Shanghai.

Gurcharan Singh Kulim



Epitome of law and order: a Sikh policeman in Shanghai, circa 1930



Shanghai Sikhs—in the fight for India's Freedom

A Sikh police officer directs traffic on the Sichuan Road Bridge over Suzhou Creek in Shanghai in the early 1900s. (Courtesy Historical Photographs of China)

Cao Yin, a Tsinghua University history professor, has written a new book, *From Police to Revolutionaries: A Sikh Diaspora in Global Shanghai*, which highlights this important chapter in the city's colonial past. As he states, “without learning the Sikh story, we cannot fully know the Shanghai story”.

He starts with the events leading up to one Inspector Buddha Singh's assassination by a fellow Sikh policeman in 1927. Buddha Singh had joined the British-administered Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) in 1902 and quickly ascended in the official hierarchy due to his loyalty to pro-British policies, a quality that angered many Indian nationalists within his department and the city. Ultimately, one of the SMP's former officers, a fellow Sikh who believed Buddha Singh was a “bad man,” shot and killed him.



On the river-front : Shanghai Banking Corporation ('HSBC') and the offices of the North-China Daily News, one of the Settlement's several English-language newspapers at the time

Budha Singh was one of the hundreds of Sikhs who had migrated from India to work for the SMP, which policed Shanghai's International Settlement from the early 1850s. While the first group of British expatriates settled in the port city in 1843, it wasn't until two decades later that they formed an alliance with the Americans to set up the International Settlement. In 1885, the SMP started recruiting Sikhs, the members of this group from India landing in Shanghai either via Hong Kong, where they were already working for the British, or straight from their homeland in the north Indian state of Punjab. They were employed as an effective—and by reputation—mightier alternative to the Europeans and Chinese in the SMP.

The story of the Sikh diaspora, of their life and times in Shanghai until they left in large numbers in 1945, is the subject of Cao's doctoral thesis-turned-book. In tracing the existence of the Sikh community in Shanghai, he found that they are now either a neglected or a forgotten chapter of history — which is what prompted him to research into the topic.

“I'm interested in highlighting the transmission and transnational circulation of population, ideas, materials, and commodities,” Cao says as he sits in

a centuries-old building that now houses a café near Shanghai's iconic Bund area. “So I decided to research about Sikhs in Shanghai, and try to find a connection between Sikhs in Shanghai and those in other parts of the world. It's a global history story.”

The Sikh history in China is not a mainstream topic, usually being limited to academic papers and personal projects. The men, highly recognizable by their red turbans — a part of the uniform for Sikh policemen back then — later migrated west seeking better economic prospects. There are currently an estimated 25 million Sikhs worldwide, with most of them based in India, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. But port cities like Shanghai and Hong Kong, Cao says, hold a significant place in their trajectory, as these were often the first stops in the group's global migration.

“What made Sikh migration [in Shanghai] special was that many of them actually served in the colonial police force while their Indian and Chinese counterparts were indentured laborers, miners, craftsmen, and merchants, and so became the subjects being policed,” he writes in this book, with excerpts that follow:

Bibek Bhandari interviewed Cao Yin in early 2018 :

How does the book challenge the history of Sikhs as it is commonly understood?

One main objective of my study is to challenge national history. We learn history, and all the national histories emphasise national pride, that our nation existed from the very beginning to the present, and it's a very coherent narrative — but it's also wrong. That's why we discriminate against others and have negative attitudes toward people who look different from us and speak different languages.

That's why I wanted to challenge this and highlight that our histories are shared by others. Without knowing Indian history or the history of some other country, we cannot fully understand our own history. That's why I studied the Sikhs. Without learning the Sikh story, we cannot fully know the Shanghai story. And without knowing about Sikhs in Shanghai, we



One of several Western warships that showed the flag in Shanghai during the early decades of the 20th century

cannot have an accurate account of modern Chinese history.

Oral history is one way to document the past, but it's lacking in your research. Was obtaining oral histories a challenge?

There is no oral history of the Sikhs in Shanghai, nor did they have their own written literature, because most of them were illiterate when they came here. That's the weakest point in my book: I didn't use oral history from their descendants, either, mostly because of financial limitations. But we need to be cautious in handling oral histories because they're too subjective. And if we include them as serious historical records, this might mislead one's perspective on the issue.

For most of my book, I used archives and official records. But they have their own biases [too] because they are all from the perspective of the colonial authorities rather than the Sikhs. So I have to admit that it's problematic — but so far, I can't find a better solution.

Is the Sikh community's association with imperialism one of the reasons they are not discussed much today?

The Chinese scholars didn't study them because we didn't have the knowledge. And the Indian scholars didn't pay attention because of the imperial existence. Most Sikhs came to Shanghai with the British to police the local population. They are part of the British imperialism in China, and [to some] that gives them a negative impression. They didn't want to be reminded of this, and so they deliberately tried to forget the Sikhs' past. This is the opposite of the Indian national history framework, which claims Sikhs were oppressed by the British and were not collaborators.

Many Chinese referred to the Sikhs as "black devils": Why was there such a negative perception, and has that changed over time?

Many Chinese identified themselves as inferior to the white race but higher than the black race. They supposed they had the potential to be equal to the



A Chinese and a Sikh officer from the SMP pose for a photo in Shanghai, 1930. (Courtesy of the Billie Love Historical Collection)

white race, and they applied this ideology in their attitudes toward Sikhs. On the one hand, they thought the dark-skinned Sikh people were inferior, but on the other hand, the Sikhs were employed by the British to police the local population. So people the Chinese perceived as inferior coming to police them added some fuel to their negative attitudes.

In China and other parts of the world, people have this attitude and stereotype about Sikhs. People don't



The Shanghai Sikh was high profile, making his way into popular culture like this drawing by famous Shanghai cartoonist Schiff

know much about them, apart from the fact they wear turbans, and they're often confused for Arabs.

Sikhs in Shanghai have been portrayed in movies and comic books like the "Adventures of Tintin" series, often in stereotypical ways. How does this distort history and reality?

All these movies and novels have included the Sikhs, but only as part of the landscape. They are not the main characters; they are just objects to highlight the exotic characteristics of Shanghai's International



Harnam Singh, a Shanghai Sikh and Ghadr activist who was on board the Komagata Maru to Vancouver in Canada and was later jailed in the Lahore conspiracy trial. He was acquitted but put under surveillance and interned in his house.

Settlement. In some of the movies I've watched, the Sikhs just stand in their red turbans and say nothing, they're like trees on the side of the road.

This is the problem. Both in China and in the West, Indians in Shanghai have been portrayed as props in an

exotic landscape, and the audience supposes that they have contributed nothing to the modernisation of this Chinese city.

What are some of the contributions the Sikhs have made in Shanghai?

They changed the colonial police force in Shanghai, as well as those in Hong Kong and Singapore. Along with Europeans and Chinese, they comprised one-third of the SMP. Sikhs were used as the main force because Europeans were too expensive, and Westerners didn't trust the Chinese. So [Sikhs] tried to modernise the policing practice in one of the most modern cities in China.

Apart from that, Sikhs contributed much to the nationalist revolution : both the Indian revolution overseas and the Chinese nationalism movements in the 1920s and '30s. In Shanghai, they tried to overthrow the British hegemony and did a lot to end British interests here. But this part has been deliberately ignored in the national history, as Chinese history has always highlighted that we Chinese heralded our own nationalist revolution. Meanwhile, the Indian side always tried to highlight the importance of the Indian National Congress in [overthrowing British rule], while neglecting the contributions made by overseas Indians, including the overseas Sikh population. So they have been forgotten by both sides — that's why nobody tells their story.



Cao Yin at a café in Shanghai, January 2018

Based on the interaction of Cao Yin by Bibek Bhandari of the 'Sixth Tone'

Meena Vathyam writes on

“Old Shanghai”



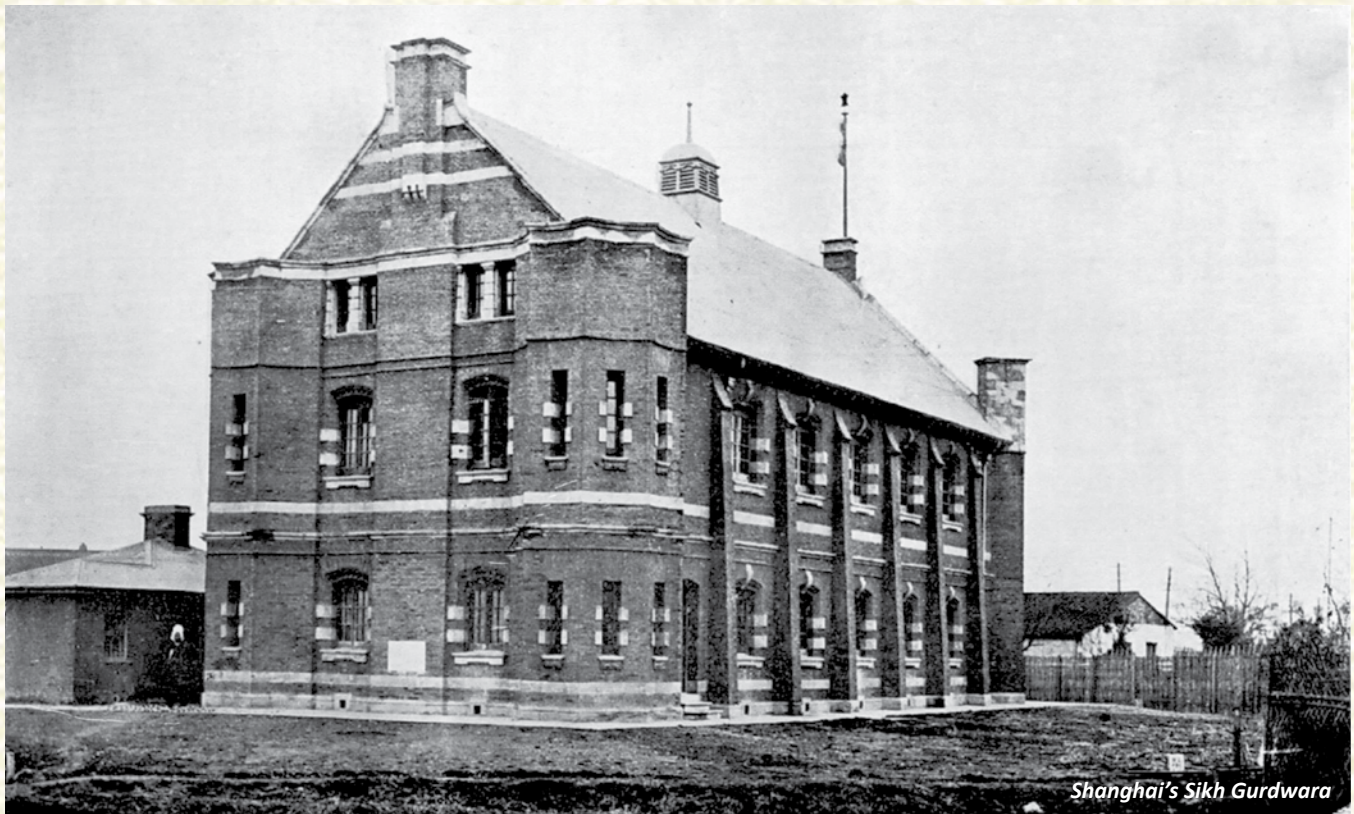
Sikh policeman on point duty at a bridge in Shanghai

The Sikh policeman was ubiquitous in Old Shanghai, seen in photographs of street scenes, depicted in cartoons, and we hear about him from old Shanghainese and Shanghailanders, who remember their parents threatening them with “Hong tou Ah-San” if they misbehaved. But who was he? Where did he live? However, what did the Sikh himself think? Where did he go when he wasn’t patrolling the streets?

Sociologist Meena Vathyam began asking those questions, and her research led her to British and Chinese sources. Wanting to find the one perspective that was missing — the Shanghai Sikh himself — she started the Sikhs in Shanghai Facebook page and blog, and has since uncovered a trove of information. Here, Meena shares her continuing journey to document and discovers one of the least documented groups in Old Shanghai.

In October 2010, my family headed to Shanghai, a very modern and cosmopolitan city with a layered history and a tumultuous past, one which I had little acquaintance with in my comfortable and cushy life back home in the USA. We were in Shanghai for my husband’s two-year secondment, and foremost in our minds was to ease our kids’ transition, be it cultural, social or educational. When our lives fell into an acceptable and familiar pattern, I had more time to learn about Shanghai itself through the several expat clubs, bustling markets, exciting nightlife, the famous landmarks, and fast-speed trains.

Still, it was the city’s history that was the most captivating. Desirous to learn more, I bought a cheap city guidebook that listed various historical spots including a former Sikh gurdwara on Dong Bao Xing



Shanghai's Sikh Gurdwara

Road. The guide did not include any further details on the gurdwara and frankly, I was quite surprised to hear of its existence. Shanghai, I had learned, was controlled by foreigners prior to 1949. The foreigners had split the treaty-port into prominent sections - quite like a pie - as a result of international treaties following the Opium wars. There was the French Concession, the International Settlement (an amalgamation of the British and American Concessions) and the Old Chinese city where the native Chinese had been pushed in their own country.

The International Settlement included the Indian connection, one that seemed vague and was less explored. Pre-1949 Shanghai, commonly referred to as *Old Shanghai*, had a thriving, albeit small Indian community, largely Sikhs from India who policed the International Settlement. Their statuesque yet imposing appearance topped by fine turbans never ceased to amaze the foreigners and natives alike.

In line with the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' which had met with resounding success in British India, the International Settlement's administrative body, the



LIFE magazine carried on illustrated feature on Shanghai and its Sikhs in the first decades of the 20th century

Shanghai Municipal Council, recruited Sikhs (mainly from the then-British Indian state of Punjab) to patrol its traffic during 1884-1885. With increasing demands for security, the number of Sikh policemen employed by the Shanghai Municipal Police grew and the uniformed Sikh policeman carrying a stippled baton soon became a regular sight in the International Settlement. The Shanghai Municipal Police Sikh contingent rose to 524 numbers in 1940. Apart from policemen, there were Sikh watchmen, dairy farm owners and others who were eking out a living in Shanghai. Yet despite their high profile, the Indian community was small (2,341 Indians in Shanghai in 1935) relative to other major foreign communities in Old Shanghai. Nevertheless, they played a vital role, especially in raising Indian nationalism through sedition and revolts (*see reference to the Komagata Maru incident in this Issue*).

What interested me (and still does) was their social and cultural interactions within their own community, as well as with the native Chinese (who resented the interlopers and derogatorily labeled them *Hong-Tou-A-san*, a slur that included a reference to their red turbans) and other foreigners that lived in Old Shanghai. This aspect has not been very well documented, and I was keen to find information to piece together their sojourn to Shanghai and other British-dominated cities in China, establishment of gurdwaras and their day-to-day social patterns. I was interested more in the human aspect, the stories that would identify the players in the Shanghai Sikh network, the addresses where the Sikh policemen and their wives would have resided, their living conditions, the schools the Sikh children would have attended, the fields where the Sikhs must have played hockey (a preferred sport) !



Shanghai Sikhs at one of their institutions

Unfortunately, I did not have well-defined clues on how to start the research process, even though I had by now begun exploring digitized newspapers and university libraries for visual images. It was therefore pretty opportune when I met Professor Robert Bickers of the University of Bristol, an authority on China and Old Shanghai who happened to be at a book relaunch organised by another Old Shanghai history doyenne, Tess Johnston. On his advice, I made a trip to the Shanghai Archives and commenced the task of reading the several spools of tapes that stored the history of Old Shanghai's Indians.

Almost 99 percent of the reports on Sikhs were through the eyes of the British and later, after 1949, the



The venerable Rabindra Nath Tagore seen on his visit to Shanghai in 1924



The Dong Bao Xing Road Gurdwara in Shanghai today

Chinese. Both viewed the Sikhs with a jaundiced lens and hence the image that was deliberately constructed was of an Indian community, especially the Sikhs, that was either undisciplined or the hated enemy. Neither of these images fit my childhood perception of the hard-working, boisterous, and fun-loving Sikh. As someone born and raised in India, the image and information I was garnering was of full contradiction with my own knowledge of a kindhearted community that has given India some of its best soldiers, freedom fighters, sportsmen, singers, farmers, and so much much more.

Apart from Sikhs, there also were the Parsees, like the Tatas, who established successful businesses in China. Their journey, specifically that of businessman and philanthropist Sir Jamshed Jeejeebhoy, is better known and well researched. Like the Sikhs, Parsees had their own place of worship in Old Shanghai, a fire temple that was later destroyed. Less, however, is known of the Talati family from Tientsin (Tianjin) or the Lalcakas/Lalkakas who were prominent citizens of Old Shanghai and members of the Freemasons.

‘Stray Birds’

The title of the anthology, *Stray Birds*, refers to a poem by the Rabindranath Tagore, whose bust graces a corner of Maoming Road. The Nobel laureate visited Shanghai three times in the 1920s, forging warm friendships with Chinese literati, including the poet Xu Zhimo – perhaps the most famous example of Chinese-Indian ties.

*Stray birds of summer come to my window
to sing and fly away....*

*O troupe of little vagrants of the world,
leave your footprints in my words.*

The Sikhs had other gurdwaras, not just in Shanghai but in Tienstin, too. Sparse information is available on the topic. In Shanghai, the Sikhs had several gurdwaras. Makeshift spaces were also converted for worship. The most well-known gurdwara in the records was constructed with Sikh funds in 1907, on land allotted by the Shanghai Municipal Council still stands on Dong BaoXing Road.

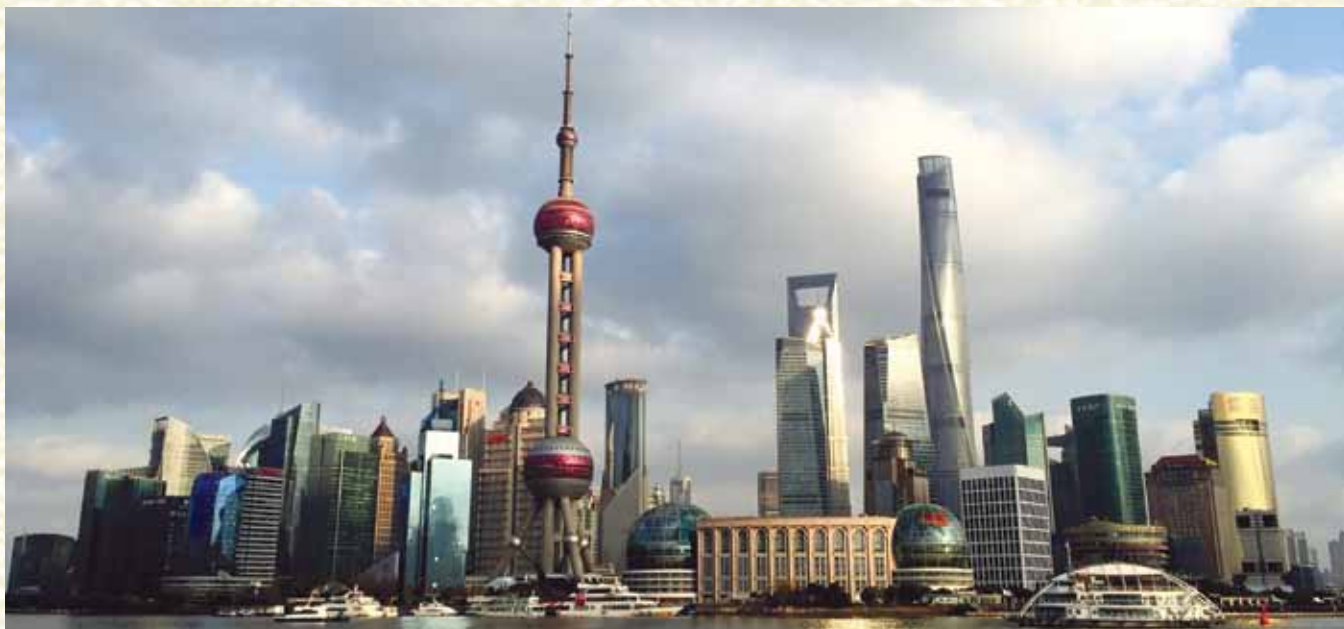
During one of my visits to the Dong Baoxing Road gurdwara, I was lucky to be invited in by the old *ayi*, one of the residents. I had full view of the tattered and dilapidated state of this building where the Shanghai Sikhs would have once held prayers, celebrated festivals and special days. This gurdwara was also a witness of the rising anti-British sentiment among the very divided Malwa and Majha Sikh community and harbour for *Ghadr* freedom fighters to publish and preach pro-Indian independence literature.

The former Dong BaoXing Road Sikh gurdwara's tiles were muddled and the roof bore marks of damages. The place smelled of filth and decay. It is no short of a miracle that the former gurdwara has survived the strands of time (including bombing in WWII and government-backed heavy pilferage in 1960s) and demolition in the name of development.

The history of Shanghai Municipal Police ends in the Shanghai Municipal Council records when the Indian police unit was disbanded in



A Shanghai Sikh policeman photographed with American soldiers after the defeat of Japan in 1945. Soon thereafter, with the Chinese Civil War reaching its climax and take over by the Communists, the expatriate community began leaving China, including majority of the Sikhs in Shanghai. [LIFE Magazine]



The famous Shanghai skyline today, one of the world's most advanced cities – and growing

1945, after the Japanese surrender. The majority of the Shanghai Sikhs and their families were repatriated to India in the late 1930s and during World War II. Only a handful remained after the 1949 Communist takeover, those who had started considering China as home, some with Chinese wives and children. The 1962 India-China war put an end to any such sentimentality, yet it was only in 1973 that the last Shanghai Sikhs finally read the writing on the wall and headed to India via Hong Kong, a fact that again has eluded historical documentation.

Much of the historical overview of Shanghai Sikhs is through a western gaze which tends to patronise the narrative but conclusively remains a dominant perspective. Till the Sikhs themselves provide an in-



Seven decades after the new China emerged, Shanghai has grown to become one of the World's great metropolises, attracting investments and talent from all over the world. In this picture a Sikh Student is among the finalists awarded the prizes for the best Business Students

depth understanding to complete the missing links and pieces, the journey of Shanghai Sikhs will remain mysterious. So, hoping to augment the Sikh slant, I started a Facebook page where Sikh families connected to Old Shanghai themselves could come forward and offer a perspective that was different from what has been coined and considered as their history in China. It has been a slow process. Those who have come forward have provided rich information and images that are available for anyone to view. Still, some have been reticent and not fully ready to share their family history for public consumption.

It's been five-plus years since my curiosity was piqued by a city guide book. Since then, I have interviewed people, rummaged through newspapers, books, Shanghai and British national archives, genealogy websites and fortunately, despite the unsystematic approach much of the Shanghai Sikhs' journey has unraveled though the minute details will perhaps always remain ambiguous and intangible. Like the history of Old Shanghai itself.

Meena Vathyam is a sociology graduate, former software programmer, writer and a homemaker. She was a resident of Shanghai for two years, where she extensively researched the Shanghai Sikhs, which she plans to chronicle shortly.

Bivash Mukherjee and Xu Qin write on

The Sardars of Shanghai



As the Imperial powers carved out the future of Shanghai after the Opium Wars in the 1850s, a sizeable part of that history was played out by the Sikh community there. Brought in by British India to lord over the local populace, the Sikhs - with their tall, well-built stature, beards and turbans - were a familiar sight on the streets of Shanghai in the 19th century and the early 20th century. Then they were called *Hong Tou A-Sans*.

Hong Tou was a reference to their red turbans but there are many versions about how 'A-San' got entangled with it. Some argue it sounded close to the local dialect for "Aye, Sir." Others say 'A-San' is a derivative of the English phrase "I see," while a guide at the Shanghai Public Security Museum thought it was a Shanghai dialect for No. 3, possibly a reference to their status in the police force after the Westerners and Chinese.

A visit to the museum on Ruijin Road South finds a life-size wax figure of a Sikh policeman standing at entrance on the first floor. Elsewhere on the three floors of the museum are other sepia-stained pictures of Sikh policemen controlling the bustling traffic. Records have it that the Shanghai Municipal Council first began to recruit Sikhs sometime in 1884 during the Sino-French War (1883-85). Sixteen Sikhs - one inspector and 15 constables - were enlisted and stationed at the Gorden Road (today's Jiangning Road) police station. That number had grown to 634 in 1934, reducing to 557 in 1940 and 465 in 1942, when the Japanese occupied this city in China. It made business sense as they were paid considerably lower than their European counterparts but slightly better than the Chinese. Ma Changlin's



'Shanghai in Foreign Concession' notes that the Sikhs were not only "easy to train and control" but were also "inclined to obey instructions and were very disciplined."

As more new recruits made their way to the city in the following years, they were taught English and Shanghai dialect by the Municipal Council. By 1886, some of them were also asked to man traffic in and around the international settlement and patrol the streets. The settlement covered most of Huangpu and Hongkou districts and some areas of Zhabei and Baoshan districts.

Outside the force, the Sikhs found jobs as bank guards, security men on the wharves, at the city's warehouses and the big business hongks or as commissionaires at hotels, restaurants and nightclubs, according to British journalist Ralph Shaw, who lived in Shanghai from 1937 to 1949. Shaw also says that "every other Sikh had a sideline - money-lending... the Sikhs loved money. They lent it but at such exorbitant rates of interest that their debtors, who were plentiful, were likely to remain insolvent for the remainder of their natural lives."

A former Gurdwara - now a residence and a community health clinic in Shanghai's northeast Hongkou District - is the only reminder of the Sikh legacy in the city. The Sikh Gurdwara at 326 Dong Bao Xing Road, a red-walled structure with elongated doors and large windows, is dwarfed by new high-rise complexes and the overhead Metro Line 3.

In the book 'Annals and History of Hongkou District,' it is written that the gurdwara served as a place for the Sikhs to get together and practice their religion. Built in the early part of the 19th century, it was known among the locals as Yindu Miao (Indian temple) and is protected as a cultural relic under the supervision of the Hongkou District government.

"It's a miracle that it survived the furious bombing during China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-45) while all the neighbouring structures were destroyed," observed an official with the Hongkou District's Cultural Relics Museum. The Gurdwara was officially registered as an immovable cultural relic on 16 December, 2003, giving it much-needed protection in an era of change. In its original formation, it covered a total floor space of 1,500 square meters.

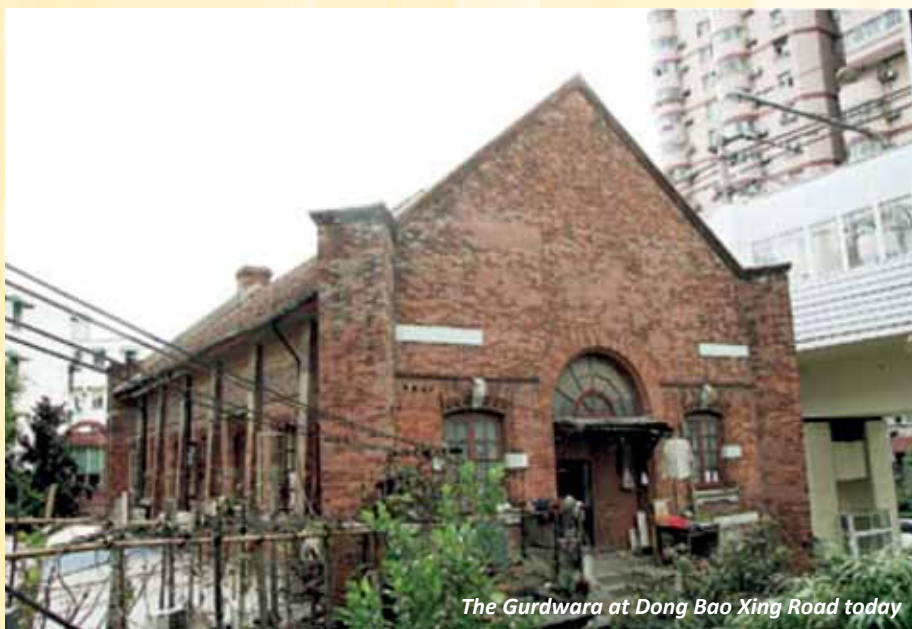
The gurdwara has survived the passage of time. However,

preservation is still by no means easy. "Funds are a big problem - to restore it needs a large amount of money, including a big part for the relocation of the current residents," says a museum official. "Many other factors have also to be taken into account before we even apply for government aid for its restoration as a heritage structure, such as its historic value, economic value and international appeal."

Meanwhile, "our restoration of the old Ohel Moishe Synagogue on Changyang Road has been a huge success. It has not only recorded the history of Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II, but it has drawn visitors from home and abroad. It is on the itinerary of every Jewish traveler," she says. The temple is currently home to six or seven families who have lived there for over three decades, which makes further preservation and restoration "almost impossible," says the official. An elderly resident living in the temple is aware of its historical significance. "I know it was called Yindu Miao. I have been living here for more than 30 years." But, she says living conditions are "really bad."

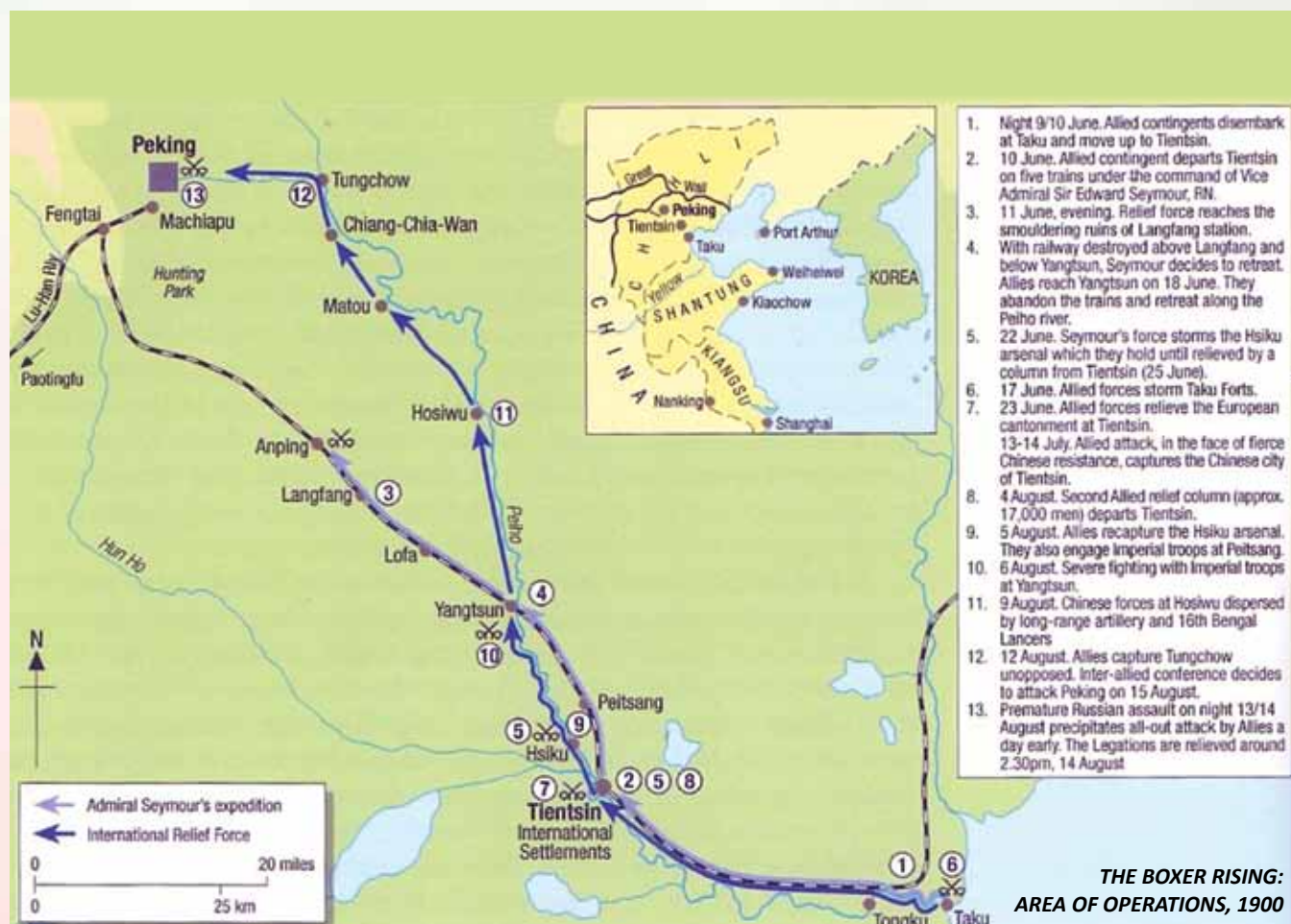
"The rooms are only separated from each other by a thin cardboard. There is no privacy here. I would love to move out and relocate elsewhere."

[Courtesy: The Shanghai Daily]



The Gurdwara at Dong Bao Xing Road today

Sikh Arms in China



Two battalions of the Sikh Regiment, the XIV and XLVII, served with the International Forces in China, during and after the 'Boxer Rising' in the first years of the 20th century, which are now part of their Battle Honours.

At outbreak of the Boxer Rising in China in the summer of 1900, troops were also dispatched from India to China to join the international forces engaged in relieving the legations besieged at Peking and in suppressing the rebellion.

The Boxer Rebellion in China in the very first years of the 20th Century was an officially supported peasant uprising that attempted to drive out all foreigners from China. The name was given to a Chinese secret society group that practiced certain callisthenic rituals in the

belief that it made them impervious to bullets. Targetting mostly Christian converts and missionaries, Boxer bands then attacked all foreigners, killing Europeans, and so a combined allied force was put together who soon seized the Ta-ku forts on the coast to restore access from Peking to Tientsin, finally capturing Peking and so lifting the siege.

Forces from Japan, Germany, Austria, France and Great Britain were involved and troops from the Indian Army were then stationed in China to ensure continued peace.



Officers of the Sikh Regiment in China - circa 1900

The XIV ('Ferozepors') Sikhs, under Colonel Hogge, moved from Nowshera by train on 7 July for Bombay. The Regiment embarked on the 'SS Formosa' at Bombay on 12 August and sailed to Shanghai via Singapore and Hong Kong. The XIV Sikhs disembarked on 6 September and went into camp just outside the International Settlement. By this time the besieged legations at Peking had been relieved and there was very little further fighting.

The Regiment then joined the 2nd Brigade, which was at that time garrisoning Shanghai. Conditions there were peaceful and the Brigade remained in station until April 1901, the seven months spent in this city being a most pleasant period with excellent facilities for sport and games, while hospitality abounded.

By the spring of 1901 it was decided to reduce the British forces in China and the 2nd Brigade was disbanded. However, the XIV Sikhs were amongst those regiments selected to continue in China and were transferred farther north in the country.



Detachments of XIV Sikhs in China

The Regiment left Shanghai by sea for Taku and then proceeded by train to Yangtsun, where their responsibility was for protecting the Peking-Tientsin railway, which was at that time a British responsibility. The Sikhs were split up into small detachments over a large section of the railway and were employed in patrolling the railway line with occasional expeditions after the bandits. The XIV Sikhs finally left China on 29 July 1902, sailing from Taku on the Royal Indian Marine ship *Clive*.

Within a decade, the XIV were to distinguish themselves during World War I, being the only Sikh Regiment committed in the Dardanelles, as part of the 29th Indian Brigade tasked for operations against the Turks during the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.

XLVII Sikhs in China

On 13 June 1904, the very recently formed XLVII Sikhs were detailed for service in North China. Two months later on 26 August 1904, orders were received that the regiment was to move to Tientsin and Lutai as a relief of the 21st Punjabis. The whole regiment was sent on special China furlough for three and a half months, except those retained at Depot for necessary duties like browning of rifles, etc after which they re-assembled at Sialkot and prepared for the impending move. The regiment was to move by rail from Sialkot to Bombay and thence by sea to China. Accordingly, on 15 March 1905, the advance party, consisting of one officer, one Jemadar and twelve NCOs and men left by RIMS *Hardinge* for Hong Kong alongwith the 129th Baluchis and 41st Dogras.

On 6 April 1905, bulk of the Regiment entrained at Sialkot for Bombay, arriving at Sasson Docks on 11 April. On the same evening, the Regiment embarked on board RIMS *Dufferin* for China sailing via Singapore and Hong Kong before reaching Taku on 1 May. A, E and F Companies were detailed to go to Lutai and balance of the regiment was to be stationed at Tientsin. On 2 May, these companies disembarked at Sin-Ho, a small port upstream of the River Pei-Ho and moved to Lutai arriving there the same night. The main body continued its journey in the same ship arriving at Tientsin on

3 May. The strength of the regiment deployed at the two places was Tientsin : 7 British Officers, 9 Native Officers (JCOs) and 520 other ranks and Lutai : 3 British Officers, 6 Native Officers and 263 other ranks.

During its three-year stay in China, the battalion fought hard and maintained law and order in the



Dressed in winter clothing, and shoes, soldier of the XLVII Sikhs on guard duty at Tientsin

area. The companies at Lutai were constantly changed over, thereby giving all a chance to serve with the battalion headquarters. It used to take two days of foot march to cover the distance between Tientsein and Lutai. Apart from their operational tasks, the XLVII Sikhs also concentrated on improving the efficiency of soldiers in personal skills, laying emphasis on weapon training, especially on the newly introduced Maxim Guns. It also got an opportunity to learn the new signaling equipment which had been introduced in the army at that time.

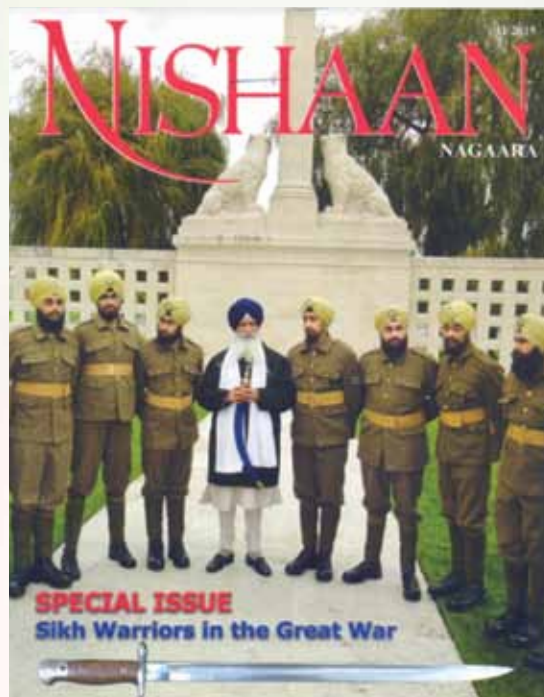
Such was the tremendous impression created by the XLVII Sikhs that at their farewell inspection parade, Brigadier General WH Walters, Commander of North China Forces, was moved to state, "Speaking to you as a regiment, I can quite truthfully say that you are excellent in every respect, and that you cannot be surpassed by any unit of His Majesty's Army. I want to thank every man for the manner in which you have helped me...which I will never forget."

Even more interesting was the German Army praise of the XLVII Sikhs, being continuously in the observation of the German Army Headquarters in China, Field Marshal von Waldersee reviewed them on the race course in Shanghai



German sailors and marines attacking Chinese troops on the railway track during the Seymour Relief Expedition. Note the Chinese soldier's turbans and standards that resembled those of the Sikhs !

(Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library).



and expressed his unbounded admiration for their splendid physique and soldierly bearing. Just over six years, later, as the XLVII Sikhs worsted the German soldiers opposite them in France, "they were able to persuade the Germans more feelingly of their worth!"

The XLVII Sikhs embarked on RIMS *Dufferin* on 15 April 1908 for their return to India, arriving at Karachi on 12 May 1908. From Karachi, the regiment moved to Dera and from there in 1910, moved to Jullundur where they became part of the 8th Jullundur Brigade of the 3rd Lahore Division and were there at outbreak of the First World War, being pitched into battle in France, Flanders, Mesopotamia and Palestine till the Allied Victory in November 1918.

All this is enshrined in history (see Nishaan Issue II/2015 for comprehensive coverage of the XLVII Sikhs gallant role in the First World War, their incredible bravery in northern France, Flanders and thereafter in Mesopotamia and Palestine.)

Sikh soldiers in action, China 1900

Some images of the actions that culminated in the relief of Legations and capture of Peking and other cities in China



Bivouac outside the Hsiku Arsenal : Sikh troops from Tientsin for the relief of Seymour's Column. Also seen are members of the Weihaiwei (1st Chinese) Regiment wearing straw-brimmed hats. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library).



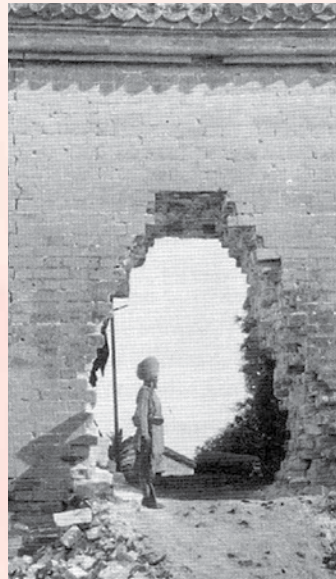
Sikh troops outside the Liama Temple, Peking



Sikh cavalry of the Bengal Lancers in action, from a drawing by Frank Feller. The Lancers were an important arm of the allied force and were well suited to the open low-lying land of northern China, participating in several of the punitive expeditions following the relief of Peking. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library).



"Almost the first to enter Peking was Captain Soady and his detachment of Sikhs. On reaching the top, Captain Soady unwound his turban and waved it as a signal to the rest of the British soldiers, who opened the inner gate." (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library).



Entrance created by blasting wall of the Imperial City by the Royal Engineers, later guarded by a Sikh soldier.



Sikh cavalry with allied troops attacking Liang-Hsiang, a walled city located 18 miles south-west of Peking. The force consisted of 800 Germans and 45 troopers of the 1st Bengal Lancers. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library).

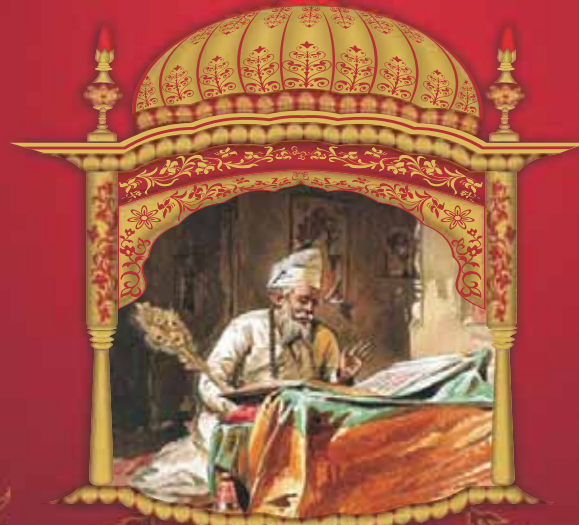


ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ।।

The Book is the Abode of God.

Guru Granth Sahib

T H E G U R U E T E R N A L



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

To mark the tercentenary of the Gurgaddi Divas of Guru Granth Sahib in 2008, this volume is being brought out to highlight some distinctive features of the Sikh scripture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

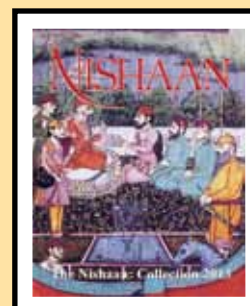
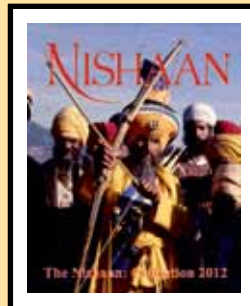
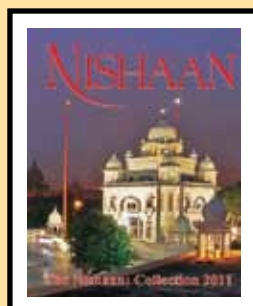
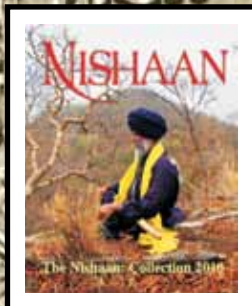
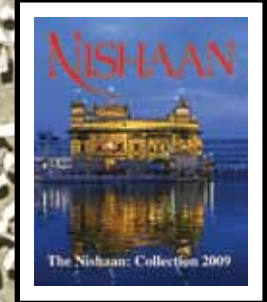
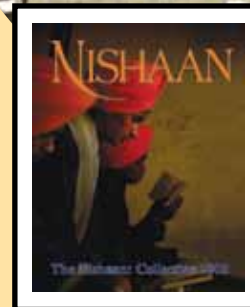
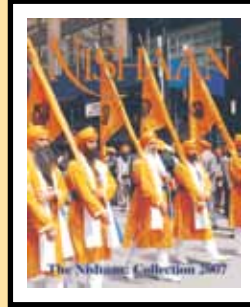
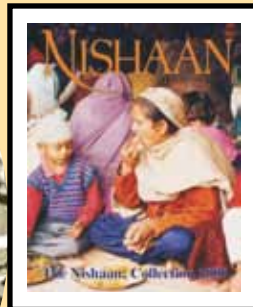
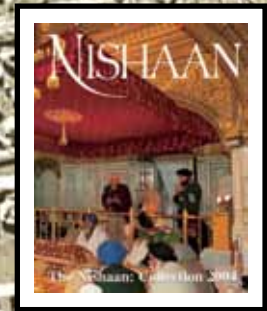
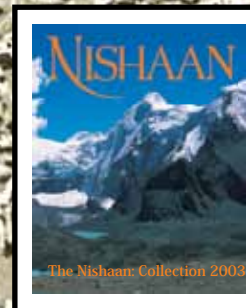
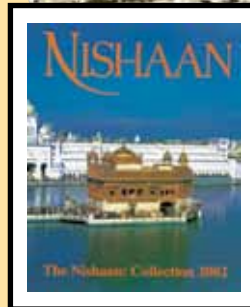
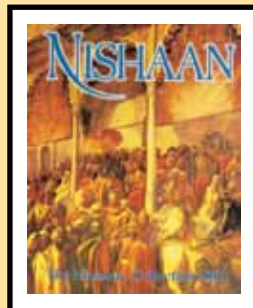
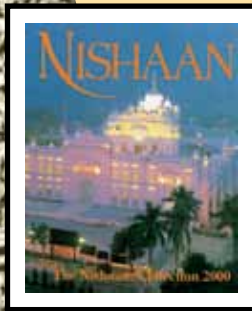


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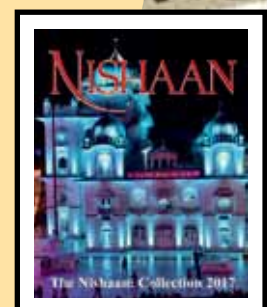
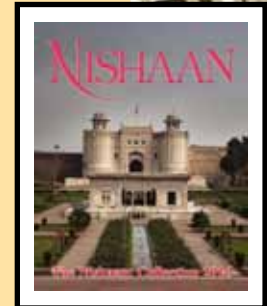
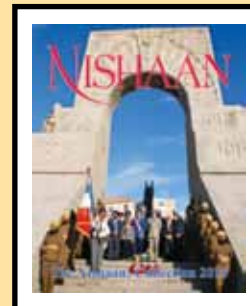
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