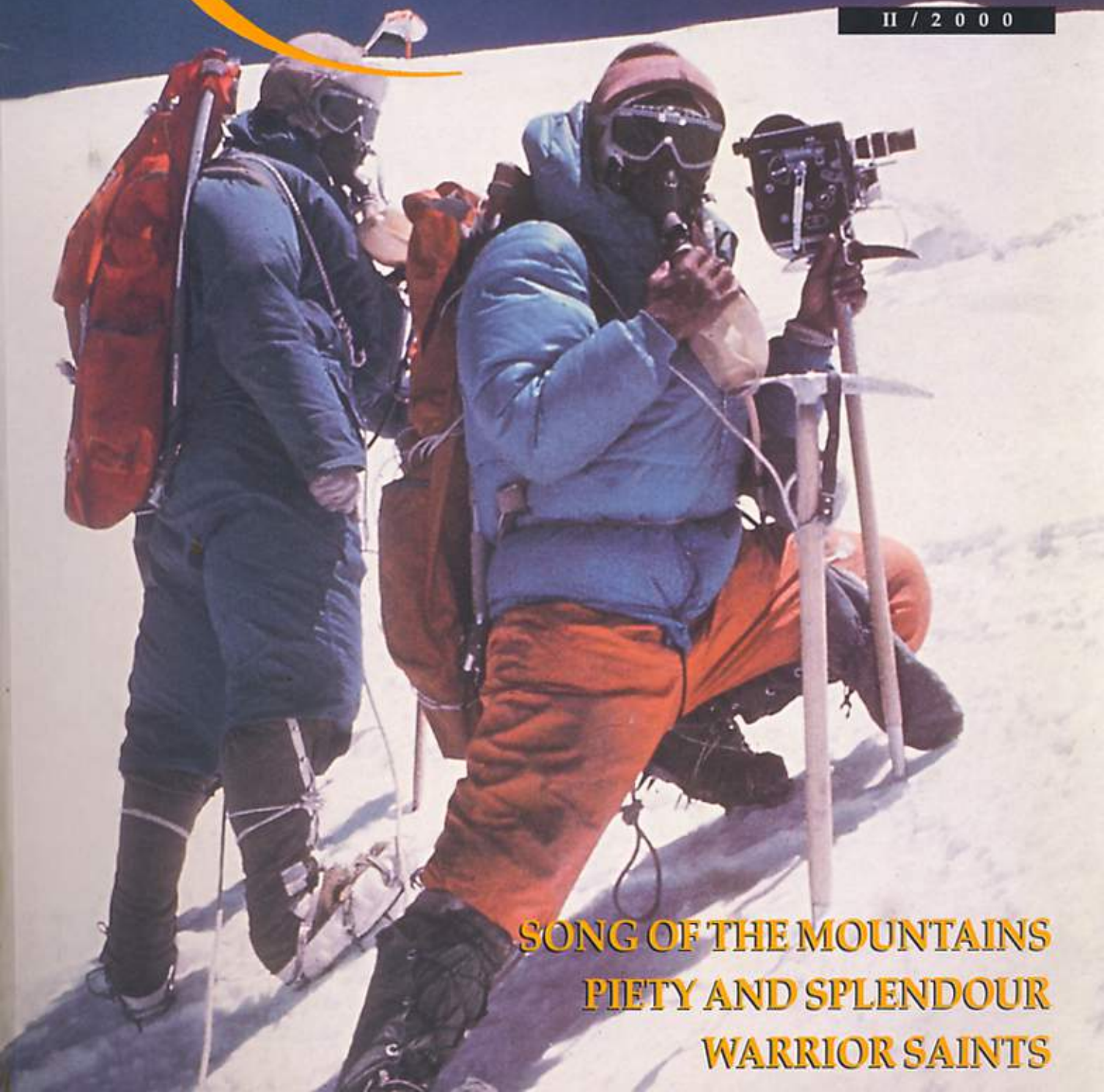


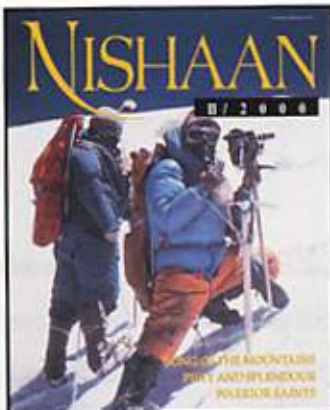
# NISHAAN

II / 2000



**SONG OF THE MOUNTAINS  
PIETY AND SPLENDOUR  
WARRIOR SAINTS**





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**Editorial Director**  
Prof. Darshan Singh Maini

**Executive Editor**  
Pushpinder Singh

**Editorial Board**  
Sikandar Singh Bhayee  
G. P. Singh  
Birinder Singh Malhans  
Hardev Singh  
Manjit Singh

**Editorial Office**  
D-43, Sujan Singh Park  
New Delhi 110 003 India  
Tel: (91 11) 4617234 Fax : 4628615  
e-mail : nishaan@mailcity.com  
website : www.nishaan.com

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*From Our Readers*



**D**uring that dragon-ridden decade of terror, torture and trauma when the Sikh community, with an unparalleled record of chivalry, sacrifice and service in the cause of the nation, found itself suddenly pitched into a battle of nerves, wits and faith, the resultant spiritual siege and a most baffling and agonising sense of desolation and alienation could not but send confused signals. A harassed and hounded people unable to connect, unable to come to terms with the altered reality, appeared for once, to be too overwhelmed to “light out” into redeeming insights. The corporate psyche and the communal mindest could not, therefore, remain unaffected, whatever the nature of response at the personal or individual level. For, to quote John Donne’s famous lines from a sermon, “No man is an island entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main..... Any man’s death diminishes, because I am involved in mankind. And, therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls: it may toll for thee.”

Thus, for an entire unsuspecting community to be put into the dock for the crimes whose *genesis* and *locus* had been carefully camouflaged by the powers of indictment themselves was a shattering experience, with its incalculable reverberations and revulsions and regressions. Indeed, eversince the darkest days of the Sikh oppression under the later Moghuls, nothing of this magnitude had happened if we except the partition holocaust and the Sikh

diaspora, in particular. A unique commonwealth of muscle and spirit, of courage and convictions, of vision and values brought to a pitch of readiness had come to a point in its brief but tempestuous history where as Heidegger, the German existentialist philosopher put it, things get “lighted up” in times of a great communal or racial or national crisis.

In scores of articles around that time, I sought to disentangle the problem, wilfully and wantonly *complexified* by the adversaries of the moment—the Congress and the Akalis—so that all those Commissions of Inquiry set up to determine the character of the events leading up to the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the frightening anti-Sikh, orchestrated and coordinated killings in Delhi and in other states could only flounder in a sea of half-true, *doctored* documents, procured witnesses and suppressed data. Or, where a courageous judge had the nerve to name the Machiavellian thugs, the conclusions and the recommendations were conveniently allowed to wither away into specious pleas. No wonder, the wrongdoers on either side of the burning wall remained unsinged and in fact, continued to make hay of the situation. From the Centre’s White Paper to the summaries of the Reports, it was a most pernicious exercise in doublethink and doubleact.

Despite the heroic efforts of the Human Rights crusaders in India like Rajni Kothari and Asish Nandy,

# The Moment of Justice

and the lionine Patwant Singh and others amongst the Sikh thinkers and the Amnesty International, the Rajiv Gandhi Government, the Congress *netas* and their Akali secret agents and allies managed to keep, by and large, all the implicating facts under wraps, and colour the perceptions of the people at home and abroad. The Sikh *image* was so grotesquely distorted and caricatured, thanks to the State channels, hired agencies and *conditioned* media as to turn nearly all truths into travesties, all surmises into a dark dialectic.

For reasons that take us into the vaster and profounder areas of terrorism *per se*, it is not possible here to go into its dynamics, decline and demise in Punjab around 1991-92, but the dreadful decade has never been really absent from the Sikh consciousness, and the BJP-led NDA government's decision to set up yet another Commission with new terms of reference, though welcome in principle, still leaves many a doubt in Sikh minds. Evidently, it is inspired less by the idea of justice and amends than by political pragmatism. And it is in this context that I wish to make a few suggestions.

Undoubtedly, India's top judiciary is known the world over for its integrity, abilities and a humanist vision, and a retired Supreme Court judge, preferably from the South (to avoid needless controversy) would with a select set of 3 or 4 judges, be in a position to ferret out the full truth, but knowing the ways of New Delhi and the covert

pressures to which it can be subjected to dilute if not scuttle the findings, some voices are beginning to be heard in favour of the *Mandela-type Truth Commission* in Sikh circles abroad. We know that such a proposal is going to cause great concern and heartburn in certain political quarters and the contexts are wholly different—*apartheid* and a century of settled racial oppression and a sudden eruption of anti-Sikh hysteria for multiple reasons— but there is always a time for truth, and a time for equivocation. Now that the heat and the dust of the tormented 80's are settled, we have before us a *moment* of historic breakthrough. The aim of such a Commission, as Bishop Tutu, a Nobel Peace Laureate, affirmed was to “enhance a sense of understanding among peoples”, not to seek revenge, but to bring to book only the guilty who had manoeuvred to remain out of the line of vision and, therefore, the arms of law. The ideal thing, therefore, would be to commission retired judges of the International Court at the Hague, and trust such a team to do the right thing in right time in this regard. What remains, thus, to be done is the creation of such an opinion in this country.

If, however, this proposal is not feasible for one reason or another, it must be stipulated that the findings of the announced Commission would be binding on New Delhi. No room, this time, for legal follow-up complications and political casuistry!

**Prof. Darshan Singh Maini**

Editorial Director



In the annals of mountaineering, the record breaking success of the Indian Everest Expedition 1965, led by Captain (I.N.) Mohan Singh Kohli, will always remain the crowning glory. The ascent of the highest peak in the world by nine climbers, in four successive attempts, had taken India and the world's mountaineering fraternity by storm.



*Hari Pal Singh  
Ahluwalia on  
the peak of  
Mt. Everest,  
May 1965.*

# Song of The

# MOUNTAINS



*Mt. Everest, with Lhotse,  
Lhotse Shar and Nuptse  
(Kandamo Omwori)*



India first took up the challenge of climbing Everest in 1960. Three members of this expedition, (Sonam Gyasto, Colonel N. Kumar, and Nawang Gombu), led by Brigadier Gyan Singh, missed the summit by 200 metres because of bad weather. The second summit party consisting of Lieutenant Mohan Singh Kohli, C.P.S. Vohra and Ang Temba spent two nights at the 26,200 feet high South Col, and were caught in the monsoon, but managed to find their way back to the Base Camp under heavy snowfall and trying conditions.

The Second Indian Expedition to Everest in 1962 was led by Major John Dias with Lieut. Commander Mohan Singh Kohli as Deputy Leader. Three members of the Expedition, Lt. Cdr. M.S. Kohli, Sonam Gyatso and Hari Dang, when just one hundred metres below the summit, were caught in a blizzard and had a miraculous escape. The trio spent three nights at 28,000 feet, two of them without oxygen, a record which has not been matched in the long history of world mountaineering.

The Third Indian Expedition to Everest in 1965 was led by Captain Mohan Singh Kohli with Colonel N. Kumar as the Deputy Leader. Then Captain Avtar Singh Cheema and Nawang Gombu reached the summit on 20th May. Two days later, Sonam Gyatso and Sonam Wangyal got to the top. Two days later, on May 24, C.P.S. Vohra and Ang Kami reached the summit. And then a huge avalanche from the Lhotse face swept across and buried camp IV and with it all remaining oxygen bottles. Instead of calling off the expedition, the team dug out the avalanche debris and recovered all the bottles. On May 29, now for the first time in the history of Everest, three climbers, Major Hari Pal Singh

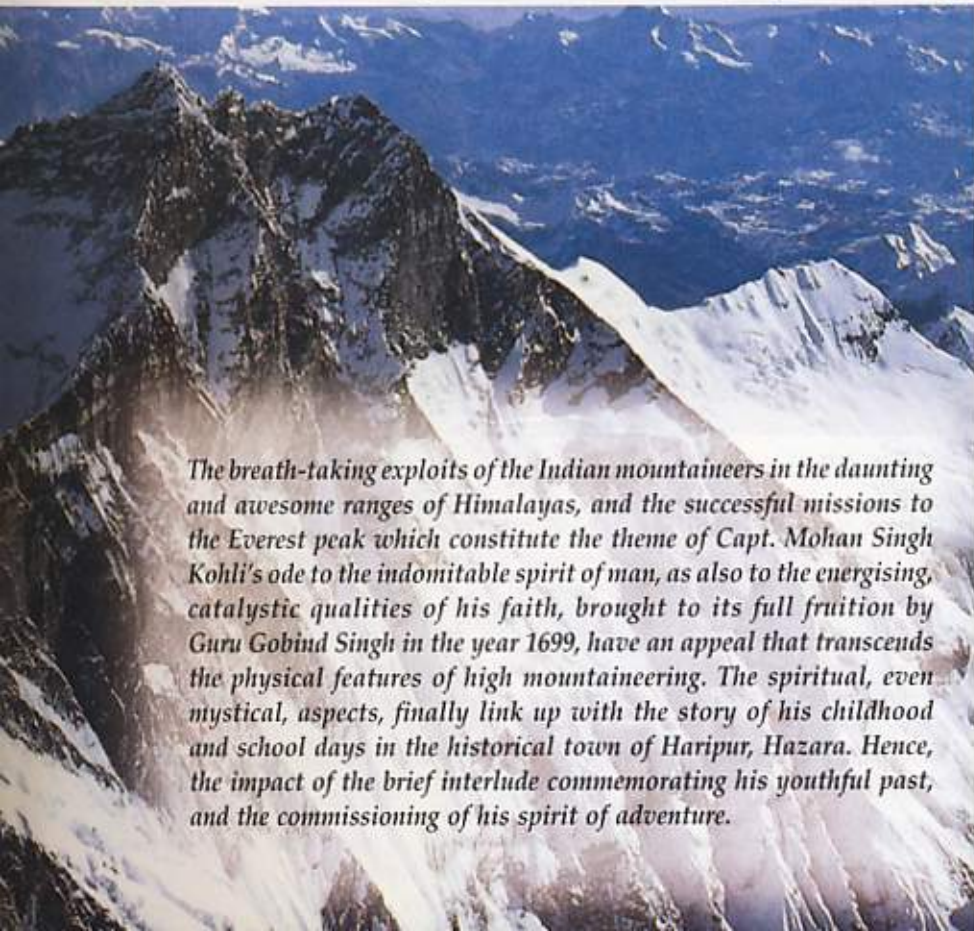
Ahluwalia, Harish Rawat and Phu Dorji reached the summit, setting up a world record by a single-nation team. There was no mishap, no accident during the entire expedition.

The achievement was acclaimed all over the world. The leader and the team received unprecedented honours. Awards of Padma Bhushan for the leader (and Sonam Gyasto and Nawang Gombu), and Padma Shri for the deputy leader and other members who had reached the summit, were announced immediately after the historic ascent. The Arjuna Award, the highest sports award of India, invariably given to individuals, was conferred by the President on the entire team as an entity. As the team returned from Nepal, Palam Airport was packed to capacity; the reception team included the Prime Minister and several Cabinet Ministers. Capt. Mohan Singh Kohli was invited to address Members of both the Houses of Parliament in the Central Hall.

Through courtesy of the Indian Railways the team visited several State Capitals and was accorded warm receptions. Civic receptions were held in Delhi, Calcutta, Bangalore and Hyderabad.

Captain Mohan Singh Kohli, who had participated in both the earlier Indian attempts on Everest in 1960 and 1962, is India's most honoured sportman, recipient of the Padma Bhushan, the Arjuna Award, the Ati Vishist Seva Medal, the IMF Gold Medal, and the Most Eminent Citizen of the Delhi Government award, besides numerous international honours.

He recalls the story of the historic 1965 expedition to Mt. Everest:



*The breath-taking exploits of the Indian mountaineers in the daunting and awesome ranges of Himalayas, and the successful missions to the Everest peak which constitute the theme of Capt. Mohan Singh Kohli's ode to the indomitable spirit of man, as also to the energising, catalytic qualities of his faith, brought to its full fruition by Guru Gobiind Singh in the year 1699, have an appeal that transcends the physical features of high mountaineering. The spiritual, even mystical, aspects, finally link up with the story of his childhood and school days in the historical town of Haripur, Hazara. Hence, the impact of the brief interlude commemorating his youthful past, and the commissioning of his spirit of adventure.*



Our team comprised Colonel Narinder Kumar, Nawang Gombu, Gurdial Singh, Sonam Gyatso, C.P.S. Vohra, A.S. Cheema, Mulk Raj, Sonam Wangyal, H.P.S. Ahluwalia, H.V Bahuguna, J.C. Joshi, H.C.S. Rawat, Ang Kami and B.P. Singh. Lala Telang and Dr. Chakravarty were the two accompanying doctors; Gurcharan Singh Bhangu and Balakrishnan looked after communications. To the 19-member team was added Lt. Bhagirath Rana, the Nepal Government's Liaison Officer.

Despite the two earlier attempts in 1960 and 1962, when our summit parties had missed the summit by a mere two hundred and hundred metres respectively, beaten back by raging blizzards, the resplendent Chomolungma (the Nepalese name for Everest) presented a new thrill, a fresh challenge and an immutable universe of adventure.

Our long trek to the Base Camp, like the previous two, started from Jaynagar, a town on the Indo-Nepal border on 26th February 1965. Bathing in innumerable streams, and gently rubbing ourselves against the fragrant silkcotton and flame-of-the-forest, we made our way



*The Panj Pyaras of Mt. Everest*

(left to right)

**Major Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia** of the Army's EME Regiment, reached the top of the world on May 29, 1965. Less than four months later, during war operations in September, he was injured during battle and virtually paralysed. Since then, despite being in a wheel chair, he has bravely met all challenges, established the Indian Spinal Injuries Centre at Vasant Kunj in New Delhi, the first of its kind in Asia.

**Chander Prakash Singh Vohra** climbed Mt. Everest on May 24, 1965 along with Sherpa Ang Kami. He later became Director General of the Geological Survey of India and was Deputy Leader of the Indian Expedition to the Antarctica.

**Captain (Navy) Mohan Singh Kohli** was leader of the record-setting expedition to Mt. Everest in 1965 which put 9 climbers on the summit. He has played a major and pioneering role in promoting mountaineering, trekking, white-water rafting and aerosports in India. Author of a dozen-odd books, he is perhaps the most decorated and honoured mountaineer in the country.

**Lt. Colonel Avtar Singh Cheema** (then Captain) of the Parachute Regiment, was the first to reach the summit of Mt. Everest on May 20, 1965, along with Sherpa Nawang Gombu. He had earlier done a skiing course from the High Altitude Winter Warfare School in Gulmarg and climbed the virgin peaks of Panch Chuli IV and Panch Chuli V in 1964.

**Gurbachan Singh Bhangu** of the Punjab Police looked after the vital communication operational support of Mt. Everest expedition. In subsequent years he played an important role during the "Nuclear Missions" in the Himalayas, accompanying Captain Mohan Singh Kohli.

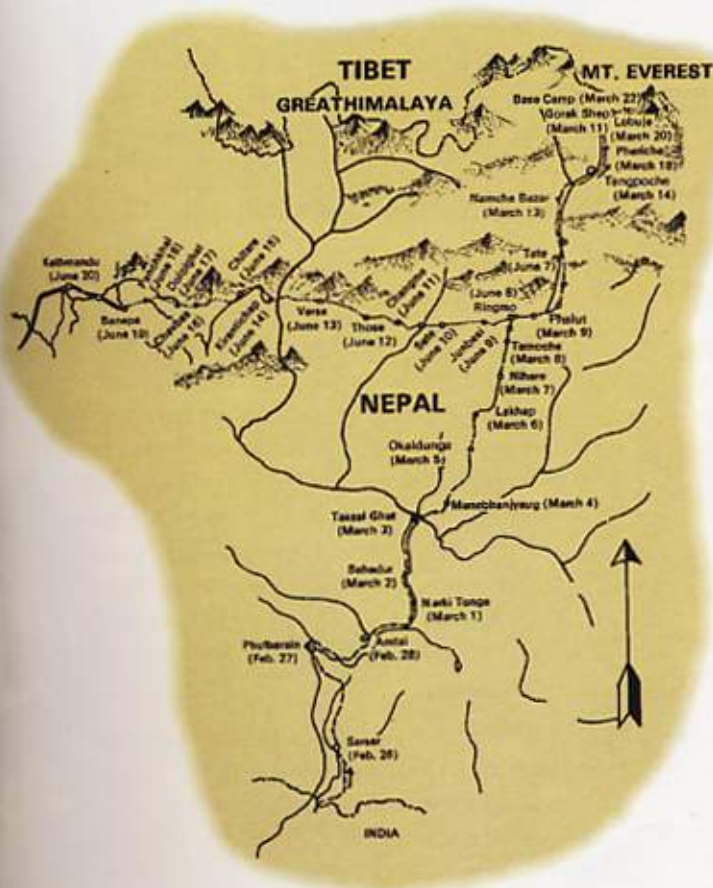


through terraced fields and forests, via the Sherpa districts of Solo and Khumbu with their prayer flags, Gompas and Chortens; all chanting Buddhist prayers. The severe winter was on its last legs and crisp-yellow grass, flowing water and swaying bushes welcomed us to a new world where time stands still.

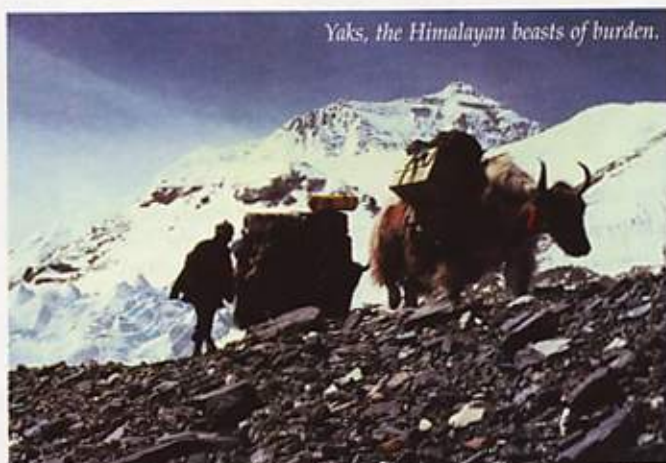
Climbing up and down, and up again, rising higher after very plunge and enjoying cursory glimpses of the high mountains, we reached the famous and heavenly lamasery of Thyangboche on the seventeenth day of our march. In an atmosphere vibrant with the chanting of prayers, the tolling of bells and with occasional blowing of the conch, we settled down in the colourful rest-house for a short period of reorganisation and acclimatisation. We chose the adjacent slopes for our training climbs.

After four days rest at Thyangboche, our advance parties left for the Base Camp, reaching there on March 22. We were now in the great amphitheatre of Everest with Pumori (7,137m), Lightrense (6,698m), Khumbtse (6,641m), Changtse (7,554m) inside Tibet, the west shoulder of Everest itself, and Nuptse rising into the sky in semi-circular grandeur. We were on the Khumbu Glacier with its icy-blue lakes, its glistening smooth towers, its gurgling streams rushing under the ice, huge waves of frozen fury, curtained with incomparable hangings along its exciting course from Labuje to this patch under the shadow of Khumbutse and Lho-La, where we set up our Base Camp.

A day's rest and we were up on the ice-fall. The glittering smooth towers threatened to tumble down with fearful thunder, huge unshapely blocks rumbled and screeched and came shattering down at will. Frightening crevasses yawned, tons of debris closing in as fast. It was a fantastic jungle of ice; phantoms playing their unearthly game. This was the first awesome visage of entry into the sanctuary of Everest.



The 1965 Expedition's Route.



Yaks, the Himalayan beasts of burden.

Although we had twice been before to Everest, the everchanging icefall is always a new challenge, a new problem. Four days of hard work, and we were on top of the ice-fall; that was on March 27, the earliest ever an expedition had got to the Western Cwm.

Beyond the bizarre labyrinth of the ice-fall, whose savage wilderness presents a constant danger to life, lies the gently rising and placid slopes of the Western Cwm, always disturbed by the peeling of avalanches from the steep slopes of Lhotse. While the parties moved up the Western Cwm to establish the Advance Base at 6,493m



and Camp III at 6,981m, at the foot of Lhotse, roped teams of members and Sherpas ferried loads to the top of the ice-fall. Although each trip to this tottering chaos meant real hazard and its successful completion a great relief, dozens of members and Sherpas every day, willingly and cheerfully, carried loads and returned with a warm glow of achievement on their faces to the "crampon point", where hot flasks of tea and warm-hearted companions awaited them. Soon ferrying loads up the ice-fall became a routine, and its hazards were forgotten. Sherpas and members carrying 50 lb. each on their backs were moving up and down enthusiastically, singing songs, returning to base in the afternoon in long strides.

After about a week of ferrying loads up the ice-fall, we moved up to face the challenge of the Lhotse face, the second major hurdle in the climb to Everest. Directly ahead of the Western Cwm, at

supported by Gurdial Singh and myself moved up to the Advance Base. A team of 14 strong and selected Sherpas accompanied us. It was the first time in the history of Everest that a summit attempt was being launched so early in season. The weather seemed fine and the Lhotse face, usually windswept with frenzied gusts of driving snow, now looked serene and peaceful. There was no plume on Everest and our hopes were high.

Braving the weather on the morning of April 27, we moved up from the Advance Base (6,493m) and, on the following day, to South Col (7,987m). As is usual with the South Col, the winds were blowing furiously. For Avtar Singh Cheema and Wangyal this was their first visit to



*The traditional route to Mt. Everest, from the Nepal side.*



*Mohan Singh Kohli at Thyangboche.*

the end of a gentle slope and barely five miles from the top of the ice-fall rises the steep face of Lhotse crowned with its 6,978m high rocky summit. On the right is the almost vertical Lhotse-Nuptse wall. To the left is the south west shoulder of Everest. In between lies the *Valley of Silence*.

The good weather held on and our first ferry reached the South Col on April 16. Two days later, another ferry repeated this performance. As usual, ferries to the South Col rummaged around the "highest junkyard in the world"; and the luckier ones returned with hundreds of feet of cine film left by the Americans, as also oxygen regulators, strips of tent fabric (which they used as scarves), and most surprising of all, Hari Dang's wallet containing a couple of hundred rupees in Nepalese and Indian currencies from the 1962 Indian Expedition.

We were now poised for the crucial phase. The morning of April 20 was clear and our first summit party consisting of two pairs—Avtar Singh Cheema and Gombu, Gyatso and Wangyal—

this famous place. We spent almost two hours pitching tents in the strong gale. The old empty oxygen bottles came in handy for anchoring the guide ropes of the tents. Cold gusts of wind hit us in our faces, rocking us and sending a chill down our spine. We soon crawled inside our tents with a sigh of relief. Gurdial Singh, Dawa Norbu and I were in one tent and the "four summiters" in the other. The wind raged through the night and we hoped that the following day would be quieter.

The wild flapping of tents went on ruthlessly and unabated till the next morning. There seemed no chance of our moving up that day. Perforce, we waited for another day, spending most of our time lying inside the tents and imbibing lot of fluids. There were a few minutes of respite from winds, and we were out



rummaging. We found some cheese and Ovaltine tins at the 1963 American camp-site. The cheese had turned sour but the Ovaltine came in handy.

The second night was also spent under the fury of strong winds. This continued till the morning and any remaining desire on our part to spend one more day at the South Col was finally squashed by the 9.15 a.m. weather forecast announcing bad weather for the next three days. We considered it prudent to withdraw, and were soon clirning down the slopes of Lhotse.

The wind gathered speed every day after we left the South Col. The wind continued to howl and roar but the days of forced rest and long wait at last came to an end. The turmoil of winds, which blew in relentless fury with no respite for almost three weeks, stopped on the morning of May 14. Indications of fair weather were given in the weather forecast by All India Radio. The time had now come for us to move again.

May 16 was chosen for our upward move. Summit parties had been announced the day before. Instantly, the camp that had been restive for the last two weeks sprang into activity. Gombu and Avtar Singh Cheema, as the first summit pair, held important discussions with "Brigadier" Thondup, our cook, about menus suitable for their highest climb. C.P.S. Vohra and Ang Kami were to be the third summit pair, Rawat and Bahuguna, the fourth and B.P. Singh and Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia the fifth. There was no oxygen left for more parties, and even the chance of the fourth and fifth pairs would depend on how smoothly the first three parties succeeded in their mission.

The morning of the 16th May dawned clear and the ice-fall glittered in bright sunshine. One last look behind and Avtar Singh Cheema with Gombu were off and up the ice-fall. Next day the Sonams moved up. Warm send-offs were going to be a regular ritual with the base campers. They knew, as soon as they had finished seeing off the four summit parties, they would have to get ready to receive and welcome those who had already gone up. Prayer flags were fluttering everywhere. Sonam Gyatso's prayer wheel was continuously turning round on the red medical tent, assuring us that all would be well. Owing to the shortage of oxygen and because of the successful wireless contact of the Advance Base with various camps, including the South Col. I dropped the original intention of going to South Col as a "support" and, instead, thought it better to stay at the Advance Base.

Gombu and Avtar Singh Cheema moved up from the Advance Base to Camp IV, from there to the South Col, reaching there on the 18th along with their supporting Sherpas led by Phu Dorji. The South Col was inhospitable, as usual, but the winds were less furious than they had been in April.

The next morning was calm, clear and bright. Taking advantage of the weather, the summiters left early in the morning. There was powdery snow in the couloir above the South Col, and the summit party sank knee-deep. By and large, the going was good. The South Summit was visible. So was the hump below it. Nearer and nearer, till finally it

*The highest mountain in the world : with Tibet's plateau beyond.*

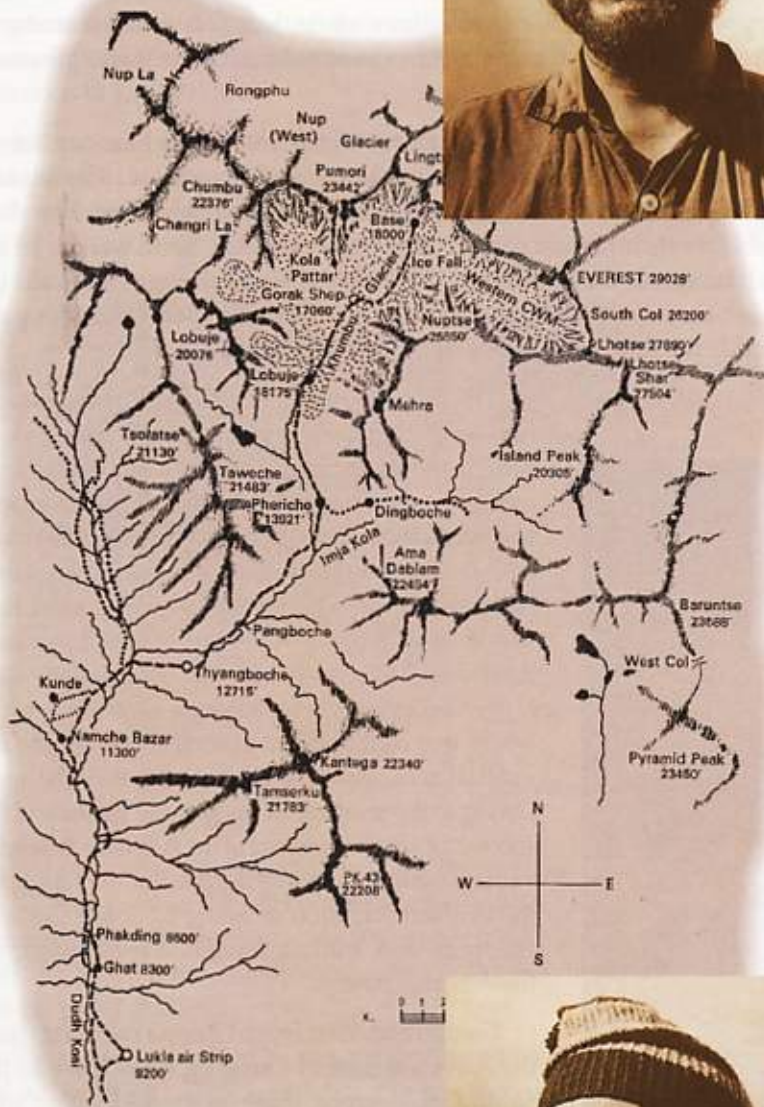






loomed directly ahead. They continued ascending higher and higher and then they were on top of the hump. A little below, taking shelter from the winds, two men went into action to pitch a tent. After 90 minutes of great effort a red coloured two-man drawtite tent was erected. So, here was a tent at no less a height than 8,155m, the highest ever camp on Mt. Everest.

May 20, the D-Day crept upon the two sleeping climbers at the last camp. Avtar Singh Cheema got up at 3 a.m. and hailed Gombu. Indeed,



Gurbachan Singh Bhangu.

a good morning it was to be. Having had some hot coffee, and having put on all the necessary paraphernalia, including the crampons, the pair finally left at 5 a.m. armed with their gear and two oxygen bottles each.

The summiters were moving steadily and, without difficulty, reached the well-known Hillary Chimney, and were seen above it. A few steps cut and there lay before them the final summit ridge. Hearts thumping, not so much with exhaustion, they climbed up foot by foot on the last lap to success till they sighted an American flag-pole pitched by Jim Whittaker and

The route to base camp.



B.P. Singh.



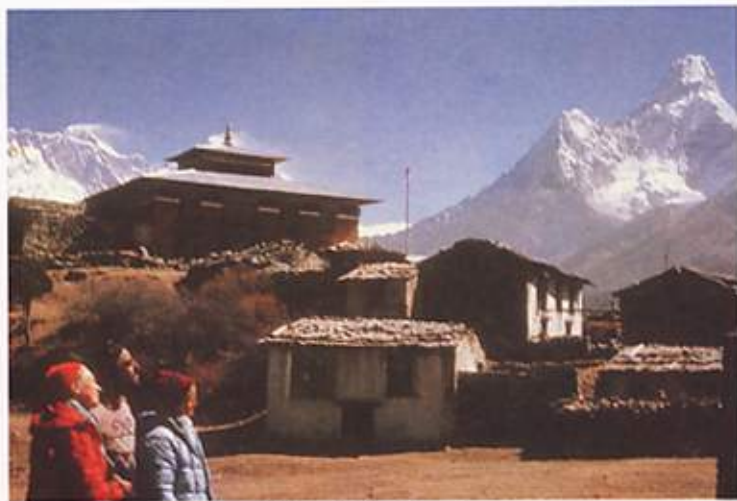
Nawag Gombu on May 1, 1963. Ten feet below the top, they stopped and undid their rucksacks, took out their cameras and the various flags they had carried and then climbed together. The Tricolour was on the top of the world at 9.30 a.m. on that May morning.

Sonam Gyatso and Sonam Wangyal had, in the meanwhile, moved to the South Col from Camp VI. Their ascent was uneventful. They could see Gombu and Cheema descending from Camp VI which they had left at 2 p.m. Gombu and Cheema had faced a terrifying blizzard during their descent, but had pressed on. At South Col they were welcomed by both the Sonams. Cheema's oxygen mask was damaged by the wind. Sonam Gyatso's fur cap had blown off his head.

Next day, the two Sonams moved upto the last camp at 8.25 a.m. Gyatso had a select band of three Sherpas with him. This was his third time on that ridge. The weather had been fine during the night, but had rapidly deteriorated. It had become very windy and snow-fall had started, notwithstanding the prayers of Sonam, a very pious man.



*Siropas (Khadas) for the leader.*



*Thyangboche Monastery.*

The following day, May 22, the Sonams left Camp IV at 6.45 a.m. The weather had improved considerably but they were going slow on account of Sonam Gyatso's pain. The South Summit was reached at 10.20 a.m. They plodded on, and finally stood on the top at 12.30 p.m. It had taken them six hours from the last camp. This pair, in contrast to the first one, had been clearly seen just stepping on the summit by Kumar from the Pumori Ridge. We thus knew of their success almost as they reached the top. The Sonams performed the summit ritual, hoisted flags, placed scarves, statues and sweets on the top.

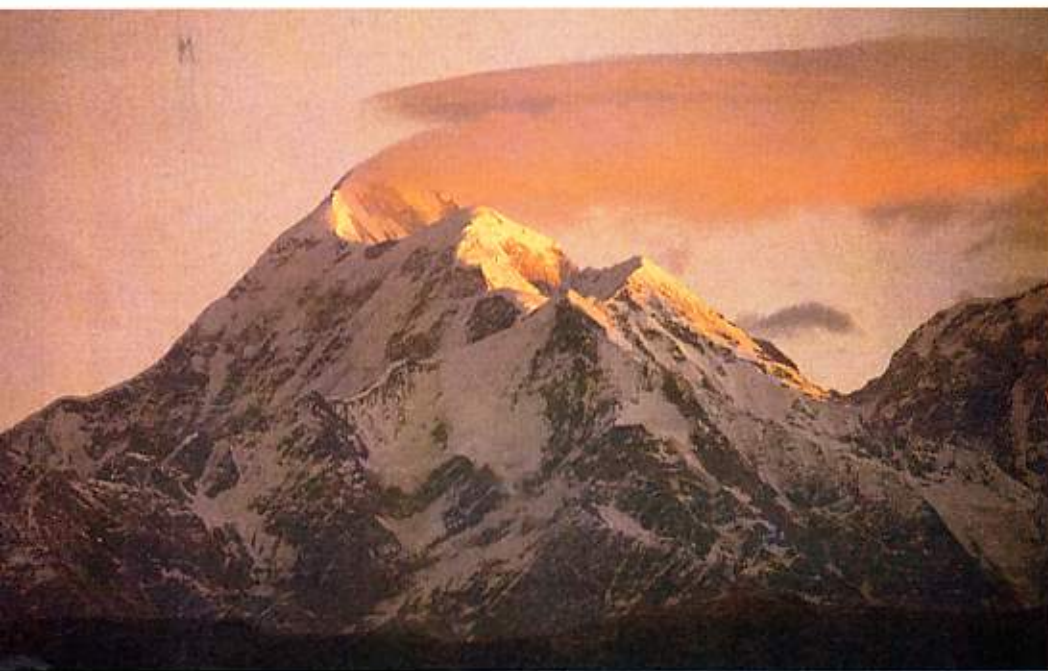
Chander Prakash Singh Vohra and Ang Kami could not move up to the South Col from Camp IV, as there was snow on that day. The Sonams had not been seen or heard of till as late as 3 p.m. We were naturally getting anxious. Vohra and Kami got on the wireless and tried to contact Camp VI. They failed. They scanned the summit ridge. They could not see the second pair. We were all praying for their safety, and at about 6 p.m. came the voice of Wangyal on the walkie talkie. He confirmed the second party's success. He also assured us that both of them were just fine.

Things moved like clockwork after this. Vohra had a slight sore throat; otherwise both members of the third party were fit. Fried chicken, rice and fruit juice formed the summiters' diet.



The Himalayas ('Abode of Snow'), Karakoram ('Black Rock') and Hindu Kush ('Mountains of the Moon') are the mightiest ranges in the world. These great walls of rock and ice contain over seventy peaks of 8000 metres (25,000 ft) and over, a fact that aptly merits an extended definition of the epithet "the Third Pole". The Himalayas, as described "are not only near to us but also very dear; for they have always been part of our history and tradition, our thinking and our poetry, our worship and our devotion.... according to our mythology, they are the abode of the gods".

## ABODE OF THE GODS



Sunrise on Trishul, at 23,360ft.

The very names and legends of the Himalayan mountains show how deep their influence goes. Among the Garhwal peaks is Swargarohini, "the Path to Heaven", Annapurna ("Goddess Giver of Food"), Kedarnath, Nanda Devi and Trisul. Other peaks are more generally associated with the abode of gods. Thus Deo Tibba, Devistan, Nanda Kot, Panch Chuli, Manaslu, Gosainthan and Chomolhari. To the Sherpas, Mt. Everest is Chomolungma, "Goddess Mother of the World"; and to the Sikkimese, Kangchenjunga, "The Five Sacred Treasuries of the Snows" representing salt, gold and turquoise, holy books and wealth, weapons, and crops and medicines. Cho Oyu is "the Turquoise Goddess".

Hundreds of pilgrims make the arduous journey every year to the holy cave of Amarnath in Kashmir, others visit the famous temple of Badrinath and Gaumukh (the source of the Ganga) in the Garhwal Himalayas, and still others Manasarovar and Kailas further beyond. At the eastern extremity of this vast mountain barrier is Brahmakund which is also known as *Dos Pani* or *Prabhu Kuthar*, the latter after the legend of Parasurama who had opened a passage for the mighty Brahmaputra through the hills with a blow of his *kuthar* or axe.

Such is the veneration for the Himalayas that one of the earliest problems that faced mountaineers was to overcome fears of the unknown disasters that might befall the local people if the gods were disturbed in their Olympian sanctity.

Many peaks have lovely descriptive names: Dhaulagiri, the "White Mountain"; Nanga Parbat, the "Naked Mountain" (naked perhaps because of its sweeping eminence in a somewhat isolated massif); Bandar Punch, the "Monkey's Tail"; Mrigthuni, the "Deer's navel"; and Machapuchare, the "Fish Tail".





*The majestic peak of Ama Dablam (22,494 feet).*

In the Karakoram is the Siachen ("Great Rose") Glacier, east of Gasherbrum, one of the longest in the world, so named because of the wild roses growing near its snout. The Sia Kangri takes its name from the glacier, at whose head it stands. It means "the Ice Mountain of the Rose".

The Himalayas and Karakoram are full of majesty and beauty, Siniolchu (22,610 feet), about the Zemu glacier, near Kangchenjunga, is often described as the loveliest mountain in the world with its razor-edge ridges separated by flanks of fluted ice.

Nanda Devi is a rare treasure within its magnificent 'Sanctuary', described as standing within "a vast crater-like ring, seventy miles in circumference, the average height of which is some 20,000 feet. On this ring are twelve measured peaks over 21,000 feet high, while there is no known depression less than 17,000 feet; except on the west, where the Rishiganga river, rising at the foot of Nanda Devi and draining some 240 square miles of ice and snow, has in the process carved a stupendous gorge".

Perhaps the most splendid pyramids of ice are those which surround the Baltoro Glacier in the Karakoram. Baltoro in Tibetan means 'giver of riches', and what riches of nature do we have here! The crumpled glacier itself is about 36 miles long and fed by petrified rivers carved in ice cascading down the sides of an extraordinary

amphitheatre described as the "the world's most spectacular Museum of Shape and Form".

Along the northern fringe of the glacier stand the Baltoro "cathedrals" of red granite, rising thousands of feet sheer above the valley floor. Behind them, the imposing Muztagh Tower, a mighty rock buttress thrusting into the sky. And then in a great arc, some of nature's greatest monuments: K2, the sublime monarch of Karakoram; the triple-headed Broad Peak; Gasherbrum I (the 'Hidden Peak'); Sia Kangri; Baltoro Kangri ('The Golden Throne' because of its shape and veins of gold). Within this horse-shoe the Godwin Austin and Upper Baltoro Glaciers sweep down from K2 in the north and Baltoro Kangri in the south, and make a junction at "Concordia", at the foot of Gasherbrum, to form the "Grand Canal" of Baltoro, a tremendous vista of creeping ice, which ends at Urudkass ('fallen stones') at 13,300 feet where the cold ice gives way to the green of an adventurous meadow.

Of meadows, perhaps the most famous is the Bhyunder Valley near Kamet in Garhwal. As Smythe described the scene: "We saw that we had entered the kingdom of flowers. Barrenness was replaced by beauty ... as we descended, the flora became more and more luscious, until we were wading knee deep through an ocean of flowers, ranging in colour from the sky blue of the poppies to the deep wine red of the potentillas, ... to us the Bhyunder Valley will always remain the *Valley of Flowers*. It is a place of escape for those wearied of modern civilisation".

[Excerpted from *Himalayan Endeavour* by George Verghese]

*Hemkunt Sahib, sacred to the Sikhs, overlooks the Valley of Flowers, the sacred lake at 15,000 feet circumscribed by seven magnificent peaks.*





For them, the night passed blissfully; the weather gods, who had been rough with the Sonams, had now smiled and they started on their climb at 6 a.m. on a bright morning. Vohra wrote in his diary "while I was climbing the rocks, my oxygen ran out. I had to climb about five metres without oxygen. It was a revelation". He wondered if anybody would ever climb Everest without oxygen.

The elixir of life flowed again, and they were on their upward move. To their joy and relief they saw both the Sonams coming down the ridge. Both looked exhausted. They explained the final climb to Vohra and Kami, and continued down to the South Col.

#### *The Headlines.*



The third summit party reached Camp VI at 10 a.m. It was early in the day. The South Summit looked near and it was tempting to start for the top right away. The view was breathtaking. The Sherpas dumped semi-full oxygen bottles at Camp IV and went down to the South Col without oxygen.

Next day, May 24, was to be a glorious one. Both CPS Vohra and Ang Kami got up at 1.30 a.m. Both, however, decided that it was too early yet and promptly dropped off to sleep. At 4 a.m. they were again up, heating juices and packing rucksacks. They left at 5 a.m. and had a fine day. The wind had died down and they continued their climb, sometimes wading in soft snow, sometimes struggling on rock. At 9 a.m., they were on top of the South Summit.

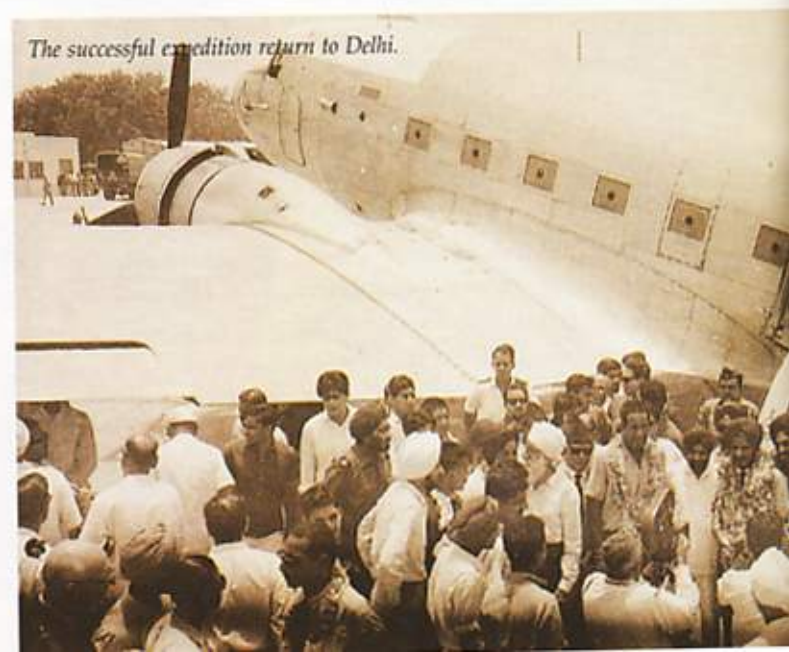
They passed the rock Chimney and were now on the summit ridge—Vohra's cherished dream on three Everest expeditions. Both duly climbed to the summit and stood there at 10.45 a.m. Vohra had carried a movie camera and set about taking shots, while Ang Kami tied flags to the pole.

Everest was indeed having a variety of snacks. The previous parties had placed chocolates and sweets there. This party offered cuisins. Ang Kami spotted the Thyangboche monastery and was thrilled.

On the morning of May 25, a huge ice-avalanche from the Lhotse face swept over the unoccupied Camp III, burying the tents and equipment eight to ten feet deep, twelve precious oxygen bottles with them, and the chances of the last summit pair.



*CPS Vohra got to the Summit...*



*The successful expedition return to Delhi.*



Ahluwalia, B.P. Singh and Bahuguna, with their support Sherpas, spent the whole day probing the avalanche. Fortunately, towards late afternoon, they succeeded in digging out the twelve oxygen bottles. There was jubilation. The third summit pair that day returned to the South Col and reported the latest position regarding oxygen bottles. We now had about 30 bottles—sufficient for not only four but five persons to attempt the peak.

On the morning of May 26, the fourth summit party, with their Sherpas, left for Camp IV. They were in high spirits and made Camp III in good time. A short distance up the Lhotse face, BP Singh suddenly developed some heart strain and in prudence, returned to the Advance Base. The others carried on to Camp IV and the next day to the South Col. Phu Dodi had in the meanwhile come up to the Advance Base on the 26th and made the South Col on the following day.



...on May 24, 1965.

True to the weather forecast, the morning of May 28 was fine. Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia and Phu Dorji on one rope, Rawat and Bahuguna on the other, accompanied by seven Sherpas, moved up to the last camp. They carried an extra Indian Ordnance Factory light-weight tent and two sets of sleeping bags and airmattresses. Ahluwalia was doing some cine photography en route. They moved fast along the Southeast Ridge, and passed through the 1962 Indian Camp, and the site of the American Canip. They had a short rest, some coffee, and Phu Dorji bagged an extra bottle of oxygen from the American camp; soon they were at the last camp.

With the help of the Sherpas, they levelled a platform for another tent. A Walkie-talkie contact was established in the afternoon. They were informed that the weather was likely to deteriorate in the afternoon of May 29 and were advised to leave early next morning.

The next morning was clear, though not calm. They were all up at around 3 a.m., melting snow and preparing liquids. At 5.30 a.m. they were on their way. Unfortunately, Bahuguna had developed an itch all over his body and had to spend a miserable night. He now discovered that Rawat's chances might also go down. He detached himself from the rope and asked Rawat to carry on. Bahuguna descended to the South Col and the same day to Camp IV, where Dr. Chakravarty was staying in support.

Rawat continued alone for a while but later he roped up with Phu Dorji and Ahluwalia. They dropped one bottle each, and at 8.45 a.m. they were on the South Summit. Going down the 300 foot descent from the South Summit, they had a glimpse of the summit hump and the flags fluttering. They felt excited and rushed on to the chimney and soon were above it. The footsteps of the previous parties were still there. When they were just a few feet below the summit, they walked arm-in-arm and reached the summit together.

HPS Ahluwalia took some pictures. To their great disappointment, the "huge" cine camera, carried by the trio all the way to the summit, refused to function. Ahluwalia placed his wrist-watch and a photograph of Guru Nanak on the summit. Rawat placed an image of Goddess Durga, and Phu Dorji placed a silver locket containing the Dalai Lama's photograph.

As should be the case with any adventure, our expedition had never intended to set any records. We had gained from experience of our predecessors and climbed, as it were, on their shoulders. As usual with any expedition, we tried to put the maximum number of people on the top with a reasonable margin of safety, and we were blessed with good luck, ever so essential at Himalayan heights. The great adventure was over but the memories will endure for always.





# “BECAUSE IT IS THERE”

*“Because it is there” was George Mallory’s classic reason for climbing Mt. Everest. In 1924, Mallory and Irvine were on the final climb to the summit of the world’s highest mountain when they disappeared in the mist, never to be seen again. Over 40 years later, Major Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia recalled Mallory as he got to the top.*

*Excerpts from his book “Faces of Everest”, and the fourth summit party on Mt. Everest.*

On 14 May 1965, the plume on Everest had vanished, the wind had died down and the weather improved. The time had come for us to move to a higher camp. The summit parties were announced by Mohan, as the leader was affectionately called by his team mates. Gombu and Avtar Singh Cheema were the first party followed by Gyasto and Wangyal. The third pair would be CPS Vohra and Ang Kami followed by Rawat and Bahuguna, and the last would be BP Singh and myself. It was also decided that the summit pairs would be moved at two-day intervals. This would avoid crowding at the last camp. The first



*Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia and Phu Dorji on top.*

Why Everest? Because it is the mightiest. It takes the last ounce of energy, a brutal strength with rock and ice which once taken up cannot be given up even when one’s life itself is at stake. With the peak climbed, there is joy and a sense of achievement, exaltation, triumph, of a battle won, which is very difficult to describe. The physical conquest of a mountain is, I think, only part of the achievement.

More than that it is a sense of fulfilment, of satisfaction of that deep urge within every man which impels him to rise above his environment. It is part of the eternal quest for adventure, the passing for exploring the hazardous and the unknown. The experience is not only physical, it is also intensely emotional and even spiritual.

summit party would make an attempt on the 20th, the second on the 22nd, the third on the 24th, and the fourth on the 26th.

The fourth summit party comprised BP, Bogie, Rawat, Dorji and myself. The 25th morning was bright but chilly. Inside our tents, we were brought the fearful news that there had been a huge avalanche over camp III. Forgetting the tea, Mohan and I rushed outside. What we saw was a frightful sight. The camp, with its colourful tents—luckily unoccupied at the time—had been completely wiped out and nothing was visible except a huge expanse of white. But while there was no loss of life, we had lost something as precious. The cylinders of life-sustaining oxygen which we had carefully conserved and stored in the camp had now been buried under the avalanche. And with them too, it seemed, were buried the hopes of our summit party reaching the top. The leader had



no option except to call off the final assault as without the oxygen it was doomed to failure. Could we search for the cylinders, we asked? Such a search seemed both pointless and hopeless as whoever had heard of bottles being dug out from under a huge mass of snow? But if we were so keen about it, we might as well make the effort, he said. He gave us four sherpas to assist with the search, and our Nepalese Liaison Officer Rana also accompanied us.

There was no trace whatsoever of the camp when we reached the site after a two-hour trek—there was no recognisable landmark. It was all—white barrenness. The avalanche had poured over our camp in a tide of whiteness. Everything had disappeared under the snow. Only the jet black rocks of the Lhotse Face protruded from the thick white blanket. The icy winds of the South Col howled at us without respite and lashed our faces. It was a massive avalanche, and we were lucky that we were not in camp when it struck. Without wasting much time, we organised ourselves and started digging with the hope that we might find some oxygen cylinders, if not the rest of the equipment. Doubt and determination kept up a running battle in my weary mind.



*Last summit party before the final climb.*

We kept digging but there appeared to be no sign either of the equipment or the oxygen cylinders. It was tough going. Mind and body fought desperately to conquer fatigue and bitter cold, and to win the race against time. Towards late afternoon, after digging for six hours, I was worn out and depressed. I glanced at the Sherpas. They too were downcast. We looked at each other without a word and continued digging. The minutes seemed like years but eventually time—that relentless enemy—entered our calculations. We could not go on like this much longer.

And it was at this crucial stage that I happened to glance at the Sherpas once again. They were praying. And at that moment God seemed very near. I began to pray. "If not you, Oh God, who will help us?" I began digging again. Suddenly my axe struck an oxygen cylinder. My prayer had been answered and the miracle gave me new life. Slowly we unearthed a few more cylinders. It was, at this stage that I felt a fierce determination flow back into me—nothing could stop us from reaching the summit.

We left the advance base camp on the morning of 26 May, and when we reached camp IV at a height of 25,000' it was still warm and sunny. We spent the night there and set off for the steady climb to the South Col at 10.15 a.m. Someone has called the South Col "the highest rubbish heap in the world," and the sites of the Swiss, the British and the Americans were all easily recognisable because of the refuse lying around. Phu Dorji and his party caught up with us at South Col. Since BP complained of a pain in the chest he returned to the advance base camp with Vohra and party who were returning after the summit climb.

It was 11.30 when we reached our camp site at 27,930' just below Razor's Edge. Wind speed had shot up to about 100 km. per hour as we tried to pitch our tents. Phu Dorji and I were in one tent, Bogie and Rawat in the other. At our evening meal, the steam-heated chicken was not easy to munch. In the cold our jaws worked slowly and I took nearly an hour to get through a few pieces of chicken.

I left on Everest a picture of Guru Nanak,  
and Rawat a picture of goddess Durga.

Phu Dorji, who accompanied us,  
offered the mountain a relic of the Buddha.

Some years earlier Edmund Hillary  
had buried a cross under a cairn in the snow.  
These offerings are not symbols of conquest  
but of trust and reverence. Climbing a mountain  
peak is loving it and constantly wondering  
if it will let you come nearer and closer.

When at length you reach the peak,  
you are overwhelmed by a deep sense of joy  
and thankfulness.

It is a joy which lasts a lifetime.



Although there was just space for one tent, since our summit party constituted two ropes, we had to make space for another tent. Here again, like at camp IV, our tent could not fully rest on the ground. We tried to anchor it as best as we could but it kept lifting up from one side with the force of the wind. While my sleep was disturbed to some extent, Phu Dorji kept snoring. To him the lifting of the tent from one end probably felt like a rocking bed which he seemed to enjoy.

After a night's rest, it was 5.30 a.m. when we began the ascent on Razor's Edge. Phu Dorji and I led, with Rawat and Bogie following a few minutes later. The wind was blowing at tremendous speed and there was not much foothold on Razor's Edge. Lashed and buffeted by the wind, I found it difficult to keep my balance. We dug our ice axes in and

path we had left behind. I thought of the Abominable Snowman but Phu Dorji was more realistic. When the figure came nearer we discovered it was Rawat. Waving and panting, he reached us where we sat under the base of the South Summit after repairing the leaking pipe.

The foremost thought now in my mind was whether we would be able to climb Hillary's Chimney and come back to this place safely after achieving our goal, or would it prove an insurmountable obstacle and rob us of success when it seemed within our grasp? Descending vertically for about 35' we came to some rocks and a narrow path that led us to the Chimney—an almost vertical obstacle between rock and snow cornice, which I had dreaded ever since I was selected for the expedition.

In fact, negotiating the Chimney proved to be a most hazardous affair. Since I was at the rear of the rope and quite far away from Phu Dorji when he made his final attempt, I could not see the exact holds which he took. Rawat not being able to push forward from the same place, had moved slowly to the left over a big boulder and thus ascended the top of the Chimney. Being in the cover I could hardly see him moving up but tried to follow him. Not realising that I had gone too far left, when I stepped over the big boulder, it started rocking. I knew that with a little more pressure on it, the boulder would fall down along with me and I might possibly also bring down the other two climbers, in which case nobody would be able to stop us during a fall of 8,000'. I must have wasted at least fifteen minutes or more trying to push myself forward.

We now found ourselves perched on an ice platform. From here the slope slackened gradually and there was rock to the left and snow to the right. We followed the path between the two. The climbing was not steep now. There were only humps of rock or snow and often a mixture of both. Breathing, which had never been easy, became even more difficult. We would take a deep breath but it would shorten into a hiccup and we gasped for breath. Would the ascent never end? Each step now was a totally exhausting effort.

The humps undulated endlessly. Sometimes there would be only rock, sometimes a snowy rock or a shoulder of snow. I kept asking myself how much longer and how much farther. Maybe it was far off, maybe we would have to turn back without reaching it. On every climb one is assailed by these doubts, and there comes a time the mind and body dwell on the sheer bliss of going downhill again. I was in such a state. Yet, another part in me urged me to go on. It couldn't be more than a few feet now—perhaps fifty or even less. But the slope led on and on. Heavens, was there no end? And then, suddenly, there was an end—no more little humps, only a white little dome curving slightly above us. Incredible! It was the summit of Everest.

Yes, we were there. Linking arms, we climbed the last few feet together. The tricolour planted by our first summit party was



*The leader with Avtar Singh Choema and Nawang Gompu.*

tightened the ropes but the wind was merciless and kept lashing at us while the cold penetrated to the very marrow of our bones. The going became tough and there were moments when I felt like giving up the struggle. The main ridge had now ended but our path was hardly less hazardous. As we took a turn to the right, we were faced on the left with an unbroken wall of slate rocks. Pressed against the loose, black slate, we clung to whatever handhold or foothold we would manage as we moved across like tiny flies against all that immensity. Below us was a straight fall of some 10,000' into Tibet!

Greatly relieved, we would now have continued the ascent but Phu Dorji spotted a lone figure that was trudging towards us up the rocky part of the



flying, tattered but jaunty. There were other flags too and some souvenirs and offerings left by the summit parties which had come before us.

After spending half an hour on the summit, as we began our descent, I thought what a coincidence it was for us to have chosen 29 May for our climb. That was the day on which Hillary and Tenzing had stepped on this very summit, the first time ever, 12 years before to the day.

Of all the emotions which surged through me as I stood on the summit looking over miles of the panorama



*Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia.*

below us, the dominant one I think was that of humility. The physical in me seemed to say, "Thank God it's all over." I thought of all the Everesters who had gone before and those who would follow us. The British, the Swiss, the Americans, and my own countrymen. I thought of the few who had tried and triumphed, and the many who had tried and failed. On our way down the pressure in my oxygen bottle had reduced considerably and I was running out of oxygen. The wind had arisen from a hum to a moan and then to a roar. Around Razor's Edge

## Beyond The Himalayas

In search of the ancient silk route, Major Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia, led 20 members of the *Central Asia Cultural Expedition*, the mission "one of peace, friendship and brotherhood" in 1994.

The journey had been conceived and planned for eight years before it became reality on 17 May 1994, the first leg from New Delhi to Tashkent of what was to be a 12,000 km. journey.

When Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia had stood on the summit of Mt. Everest on 29 May 1965, he could see "forever"—gazing north towards the Tibetan plateau and south towards the plains of India. The northern side, the Tibetan plateau was mysterious, a forgotten land. He imagined the historical figures from the hoary past, who had unravelled the mysteries of the Silk Route that spanned two civilisations. Deep in his mind, as he literally stood on top of the world then, he resolved that one day he would also follow the Silk Route and reclaim the lost glory of the ancient times, which went back for over two thousand years, when adventurers, conquerors, traders, philosophers, academicians and poets had journeyed across this desolate and inhospitable terrain, drawn by the magic, the mystique of the Silk Route.



*Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia and the President of India, Dr. K.R. Narayanan in 1999.*

HPS Ahluwalia's dream came true just under 30 years later. From Tashkent, in five Indian-made vehicles, Hari Pal Singh and his intrepid team drove through the historic cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, still alive with the legendary stories of Timurlane, of Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great.

The magical trip took the expedition to Tian Chor or "Heaven Lake" in Sinkaing, skirting the Tien Shan Range, thousands of kilometres eastwards and then southwards to the Tibetan Plateau and finally to Lhasa. From the capital of Tibet to Shingatse, the second largest city in Tibet, to Gyantse. The first view of Mt. Everest's northern face was seen on the road to Tingri before the expedition finally entered Nepal on the last lap to Delhi, and home.

[A visual account of the Expedition has been put together in the book with the above title and published by Kamlesh Shah from Cuffe Parade, Mumbai].



my oxygen ran out again. I began to pant convulsively. Snow coated my goggles. My legs would not move and they were lifeless.

I would take a step and feel as if I had run a mile. We descended very slowly, stopping to fight for breath. The wind raged over the ridge from the gulfs of vast space on either side. Hands and feet went numb. It was a terrible and, at times, frightening experience. The effort was agonising as I began to gasp—I thought my lungs would burst. I crawled over Razor's Edge, in the teeth of this fiendish gale, sometimes collapsing on my belly. Phu Dorji was in the same plight and could not help me. But we spotted the tents of our last camp; they were no more than a hundred yards away. We thought we might attract Bogie's attention if we shouted "Bogie, oxygen! Bogie, oxygen!" But our cries went unheeded as Bogie had already left for the lower camps. As Phu Dorji and I lurched and floundered down the long slopes, Rawat kept supporting us. At each step we had to take a long deep breath. Phu Dorji took the lead and with much difficulty I made it to the last camp. I can never forget how my companions helped me in those crucial moments. Companionship and friendship are vital factors on a mountain. You can never forget a man who has shared a rope with you.

*Major Hari Pal Singh Ahluwalia*



*Mandip Singh Soin, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, converses with Captain Mohan Singh Kohli during the Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of the Himalayan Environment Trust in New Delhi on January 23, 2000. Mandip Singh has trekked the Himalayas extensively, climbed many peaks and written periodically about the mountain environment. He is presently Honorary Local Secretary of The Himalayan Club.*



*Mountaineering legends of all-time at New Delhi in January 2000 : standing, left to right, are Reinhold Messner of Austria, Junko Tabei of Japan (first woman on the peak of Mt.Everest), Captain Mohan Singh Kohli. Seated are Maurice Herzog of France and Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand.*



*Mountaineers of the future with the legendary Sir Edmund Hillary : young Aman Singh and Adil Singh Sethi flank Sir Edmund during the recent Himalayan Environment Trust meet at New Delhi. Behind them are their grandfather, S.Mammohan Singh Bawa, formerly Director General Police (Haryana) and mother Arshiya.*



**M**y Himalayan destiny was written the day I was born, on December 11, 1931, a child of the mountains at Haripur Hazara, a unique town situated in the northern tip of the Himalayas, in the North West Frontier Province (now in Pakistan).

The town and the devout Sikh family in which I was born, were living symbols of what devotion to faith and prayer—*vishwas* and *ardaas* – could play in a man's life. The awesome beauty and challenging relationship between nature and humanity, man and mountain, was also part of the spirit of Haripur. Man,

In between the folds of the Kaghan hills there are lush green pastures where cattle are taken for grazing by the local peasantry. The Indus, known as *Sindh* here, and its tributaries like the Dor, Siran, Haro and Kunhar are all very close to Haripur.



Captain Mohan Singh Kohli  
of the Indian Navy.

living in close proximity to nature had to be strong to face the moods of nature and challenges, of both mountains and men. I was to imbibe this spirit of Haripur as a small child, exercise and play games of endurance to become strong and tough to survive in the harsh and hazardous environs.

Haripur had many claims to historic fame. The town was founded in 1822 by a great general and mountaineer of the Sikh Durbar, Hari Singh Nalwa, with whom my wife Pushpa's family also traces connections. Nalwa also practised the Sikh principles of tolerance of all faiths, getting a mosque, a temple and a gurdwara built when he founded Haripur. Years later, courtesy Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haq, I was allowed to pay some visits to Haripur along with my father and my children. The gurdwara and the temple had disappeared, years after our family had to leave our beloved town in the mountains during the traumatic partition of India.

Haripur is perched between the towering mountains of the Hindu Kush some 1650 feet above sea level, part of the hilly Hazara district of the North West Frontier Province. With the river Dor, a tributary of the Indus, flowing just two kilometres away and its channelised waters running through all the streets of the town, Haripur possesses one of the most exciting scenic views in the world. The town is surrounded by the Kaghan hills adorned with lush green pines, providing excellent opportunities for climbing and adventure. The more adventurous people of Haripur often crossed these hills to reach some villages beyond.

The town is about 80 kilometres north of Islamabad, and 30 kilometres from Punja Sahib, "Hassan Abdal", sanctified by the visit of Guru Nanak. The hilly portion of Hazara has a number of popular hill stations like Nathiagali, Doongagali and Kalabagh, situated along the border of Kashmir. The well-known hill station of Murree is on the same Kaghan hill ranges.

Hari Singh Nalwa had occupied the North West Frontier Province after a series of pitched battles with the local Pathan chieftains. There is an erroneous impression that Hari Singh named the town after his own. In fact, it was named after the name of "Hari" the God Almighty, and the eighth Sikh Guru Harkishen. It enjoys the unique privilege of being the only town



chosen by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to commemorate the extraordinary exploits of Hari Singh. Though Abbottabad was headquarters of the Hazara district, most of the battles fought by General Hari Singh Nalwa were in the vicinity of Haripur.

Hari Singh, besides being a most remarkable commander, was also a brilliant town planner. Historian Surinder Singh, who was with me at the Khalsa High School, gives a beautiful description of Haripur.

"The township covering about five square miles had the most remarkable and unique water distribution system.

Hari Singh got an upstream diversion made from the Dor for a storage tank from where seven small streams were drawn covering the entire town like the fingers of a hand moving serpent-like through the entire length and breadth of the town; and thereafter watering the fields of the adjoining villages. The water reservoir and the distribution system was popularly named *Rangila* after the surname of a civil engineer of Hari Singh Nalwa. Roads were laid on both sides of the streams which were generally about two to three feet deep and six to ten feet wide. Generally bazars were laid on one side and residential areas on the other side. Soon schools, temples, gurdwaras and mosques came up by the side of these streams. Since there was a gentle slope and the town being near the foothills, a number of water mills were also established on these streams. The daily bathing, a very common practice among non-muslims, actuated Hari Singh to get bathing ghats laid alongside the streams running through the town. At numerous places, platforms were raised over the streams for rest and recreation of the public. These streams, besides serving as a source of fresh water, also presented pleasing sights to the weary eyes, and helped in bringing down the temperature in summer months. This indigenous water supply system was in no way inferior to the

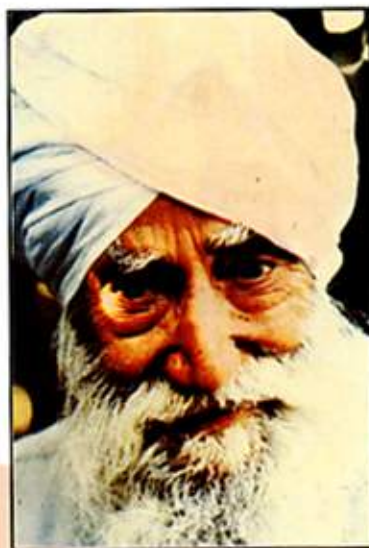
present day piped water system which was not known to the early nineteenth century people".

Puran Singh, often called the Tagore of Punjabi poetry\*, also hailed from Hazara, and had received his early education at Haripur during 1890-93. I recently came across his description of the town. "Haripur has a beautiful green little market place where the people of Tanol, Khanpur as well as from the Amb villages, which are outside the British administration, come for all kinds of purchases and sales. To Haripur come grain, jaggery, wool and ghee and out goes salt, cloth, dyes, trinkets and toys. Pretty little canals, cut out of the Dor river race about the town. The borders of

Haripur are draped with a voluptuous profusion of jasmine flowers and gardens full of prunes, apricots, mango and mulberry trees. The cool shades of the gardens and flowing canals make Haripur a paradise in hot summer".

In one of the memorable battles, 24 soldiers of Hari Singh, who included my ancestors, died fighting against innumerable odds atop a hill near Haripur. These brave soldiers had defied several thousand Muslim tribals of the area fighting to the end on the summit of the beautiful peak facing Sarai Salah village. This summit became a place of pilgrimage for the members of my family. On every anniversary of their martyrdom we went to the *Martyrs' Summit* to pray for their souls and recall with pride how they had fought and died. With the passing of years this annual pilgrimage became imprinted deeper and deeper in my mind.

Of the many stories about martyrs one came to have a special significance to me. It was about a woman who was thrown into a well in Haripur. She invoked the help of the martyrs, and was miraculously saved from drowning. I too began to believe in the divine power of the martyrs in times of trouble as my guardian angels. Of course, my belief in *Wahe Guru* became stronger. It was during these climbs



**Sardar Sujan Singh Kohli**  
(11 November 1886 - 21 April 1992)

**F**ather of Capt. Mohan Singh Kohli, a legendary figure of Haripur, he played a prominent role in the Akali Movement and was known to have faced the fury of over 10,000 strong unruly mob in Haripur. He was instrumental in inspiring and encouraging his son Mohan Singh to accept formidable challenges. In March 1947 Hazara was wracked by communal riots but Mohan managed to complete his matric exam. Under a shower of bullets, and along with his father and brother they then escaped to Delhi. After four months of wandering from "Pillar to Post" they returned to Haripur, but were caught in the biggest ever holocaust. On August 26, 1947 Haripur was on fire, and Mohan Kohli embarked on the biggest challenge of his life—survival during the partition of India.

\*See separate article "Puran Singh, Walt Whitman and The Sikh Ethos" by Prof. Darshan Singh Maini.



to the *Martyrs' Summit* and crossings of the river Dor that I developed my love for the outdoors and mountaineering.

Each visit to the *Martyrs' Summit* was full of excitement, thrill and discovery. When I was ten, I started climbing the summit independently, just with a couple of friends and without any adult accompanying us. Each time I crossed the main river and a couple of adjoining rivulets, I felt a sense of great achievement and exhilaration. A climb to the *Martyrs' Summit* involved about two to three hours steep ascent. We passed through various shrubs and feasted on wild fruits en route. Occasionally, we came across Ashoka's stupas. Reaching the *Summit* was a moving experience with congregations of over a hundred persons chanting prayers. The *Summit* was unusually levelled in a perfect circular shape. Before moving down some *perhsad* (offering) was left behind. There was a common belief that after everyone had left, the martyrs would appear and partake of the *perhsad*, the sacred food offering.

General Hari Singh Nalwa had built Haripur as a model, a unique town. To provide a permanent defence to the town, a fort was constructed with a moat around it named Harkishengarh after the eighth Guru. When Baron Higl visited the Hazara territory on December 23, 1835, he found Haripur a flourishing town, humming with much activity. Around the town a wall, four yards thick and 16 yards high, was built. Four gates were constructed for entry into the town. Drinking water was provided by digging a number of wells. A shrine named *Shahid Ganj* was constructed in memory of all those who had laid down their lives for the liberation of Hazara. A permanent *granthi* was employed to ensure uninterrupted *kirtans* and *path*. A *mandir* called *Ganesh Giri* was also built. A large mosque was constructed for the Muslims. These were concrete steps for real integration of the people of all religions. Nalwa, thus, won the hearts of all sections of people.

Hari Singh Nalwa, was not only the bravest of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's generals, but also an able administrator. During the years he ruled Hazara (1822-1837) he reduced the unruly tribes of the area to submission through vigorous measures, and consolidated Sikh power which remained paramount in northern India until the British conquest. Haripur, criss-crossed by several water channels and with its many meadows and orchards, became one of the prettiest towns in the country. Every year, during spring, the town smiled with a profusion of flowers : violets, pink and white tulips, blue and white irises.

Hazara's proximity to the international borders of Afghanistan, Russia and China was an important feature. In the north beyond the Indus and the Kaghan hills was "No Man's Land" where the writ of the British Government did not run. Although Haripur remained peaceful, there

were sporadic outbursts of lawlessness in the countryside. On the whole, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs lived in amicable harmony, respected each other's places of worship and joined together in festivities. The major Muslim festival of Id attracted large crowds from the neighbouring villages and Haripur's population swelled from 10,000 to over 100,000. Hindus and Sikhs celebrated Diwali and Holi with great enthusiasm.

Haripur had three boys' schools — the Khalsa School, the Sanatan Dharam School and the Government School. The Khalsa School was considered the best and amongst its students was Ayub Khan, later to become the Army Chief and then President of Pakistan. I was lucky to study in this school which had a dedicated and highly respected team of teachers headed by Headmaster Mohan Singh who was a brilliant educationalist. He left an indelible impression on the students. His eldest son, Mahinder, who later joined the Indian Administrative Service, rose to the position of



*The famous Haripur fort.*

Secretary to the Government of India. Mahinder's younger brother, Surinder became a well-known historian.

I spent fifteen challenging but happy years in Haripur. Life was somewhat primitive, but had its own charms. There was no electricity, and we used kerosene lanterns. There were no taps in our homes, so we bathed in the river, water channels, or hauled water from one of the many wells in the town. Even during the hot summer months, the well-water could be icy cold, and in winter months reasonably warm.

Hindus and Sikhs constituted only about five per cent of the population of the North West Frontier Province. Muslims were in majority. Although in towns like Haripur the population of non-Muslim minorities was a little higher, a sense of insecurity kept us on our guard all the time. In order to be able to defend ourselves, we laid special stress on physical fitness. I was a very thin, wiry and a shy child. But the desire to excel at games had impelled me to undertake rigorous physical exercises. Toughening and cultivating endurance was an obsession.



To build up my physique I drank gallons of milk and consumed vast quantities of milk products like butter, ghee, yoghurt and buttermilk. I played hockey, football and volleyball. Hockey was my favourite game. I became captain of my school eleven during my last two years in school.

Though Haripur had complete communal harmony and peace, a few Muslim teenagers often indulged in teasing and chasing Hindus. In encounters outside the town they would force us to say the Muslim prayers. For some reason they were soft towards Sikhs, and maybe the respect enjoyed by Hari Singh Nalwa had continued down the generations!

My two other close friends in the class were Ayub Khan, the *khan* of Sarai Salah, and Harbans Lal, who later headed the Pharmaceutical Department of the Texas University in the USA. Known as Bhai Harbans Lal, he is widely respected as a Sikh leader. He has recently computerised the *Guru Granth Sahib* and is also credited with creating



Visiting Haripur after partition are S. Sujan Singh, his son Mohan Singh and daughter-in-law Pushpa, on the banks of the River Indus.

the computer language for *Gurmukhi*. He has been President of the Indian Scientists Association in the USA, and has a number of pharmaceutical inventions to his credit.

During World War II, Haripur became an important area for defence recruitment and also an important centre for organising large-scale supply of dried apricots for the Army. I joined this project during two or three summer vacations to augment our family income.

Blessed with good physical strength and health and an exacting daily routine, I developed a lot of self-confidence. There was perfect peace in Haripur and life was most enjoyable. Little did I know then that fate had quite a different future in store for me, a Himalayan destiny written for this ordinary and happy child of the mountains.

Life in Haripur, like in all habitats close to nature, was based on abiding myths and realities which ultimately became legends. We lived between town legends and family

legends: the rugged nature and the proximity of the so-called "No Man's Land" where lived the Pathan tribals like the Wazirs and Mashoods in mountain areas like Yogistan and Waziristan. Even the British might had failed to subjugate these fierce, freedom-loving tribes. They were born free and were determined to remain free at all costs. Only the name of Hari Singh Nalwa was a word of terror for the Pathan mothers and children. When their babies refused to sleep, we were told, Pathan mother's would say to quieten the howling child, "Chup Haria Rakle" (Silent, Hari Singh Nalwa is coming). A certain element of violence was part of our life. Like the many tribes at constant vendetta with one another, we, the Sikhs of Haripur, also were attuned to challenges of natural and social violence from the Pathan population, Muslims by faith and violent by nature.

I learnt from the stories told to me by my father and other elders and peers that we, the Kohlis, were held in some awe and respected as "the Kings of Haripur". Both the Muslim and non-Muslim population of the town knew that we were a very old and honoured family. My father, Sardar Sujan Singh, had maintained his personal archives and wrote in his diary about our ancestors and the family legends. The hero of the family was Sardar Kuldip Singh who lived between 1669 and 1714, and was administered the *Amrit*, equivalent of baptism, by the great Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh himself. That made the family very special among not only the people of Haripur, but also the entire North Western Frontier Province. I was always curious to find out where the baptism of Sardar Kuldip Singh took place. All that I could find out indicated that it must have taken place at Anandpur Sahib. That was the place where the great warrior Guru of the Sikhs had set up his headquarters in the North. The sword gifted by Guru Gobind Singh to my ancestor was the most valuable family heirloom for many years. It was lost in the loot of Haripur during the 1947 communal explosion. As I look back at my life and that of my ancestors, I sometimes feel that the sword and the baptism steeled our genes to produce the indomitable courage and faith in our family.

Martyrs formed a strong part of the legacy of the Kohlis. A trip up the Hill of Martyrs was an annual ritual for the males of the Kohli clan. None but the male Kohlis and their male offsprings, not even women who had married into the clan but belonged to other families by birth, were allowed to participate in the ceremonial uphill climb to the Hill of the Martyrs or the *Shaheeds*. I think my first encounter with a life of Himalayan climbing began then in Haripur, when I was just a child. From then onwards my life was to move from peak to peak. But I did not know it at the time as I was a child and now that I look back, many experiences



and fantasies come back and I begin to understand the story of my own life. It is like a rediscovery of my life and its events.

When the Second World War came to an end, the agitation for independence restarted all over Hazara and the rest of the country. In the NWFP, the red shirt movement, *Khudai Khidmatgars*, led by the Frontier Gandhi, was in the forefront. The Muslim League also stepped up its crusade for creating Pakistan. Haripur, with a very large population of Muslims in the surrounding villages, became a centre of all activity. Communal tension started building up. The peace and tranquillity of Haripur, established by Hari Singh Nalwa and carefully nurtured for over 100 years, appeared to be falling apart.

It was about the same time that the slogan of Khalistan also started gaining ground. Towards the middle of 1945, a communication was received at the Khalsa High School that a convention of the All India Sikh Students Federation would be taking place at the Golden Temple, Amritsar. Bhai Harbans Lal and I decided to attend. We were not even 14 then, and happened to be the youngest participants in the convention. In fact, the two of us were the only delegates from the NWFP. We were too young to understand politics at that stage. The only doctrine that I understood was that if the Sikhs were to survive as a community, they must exercise some political power. The same doctrine was used by the Muslim League. One of the persons who had impressed me during the convocation was Sardar Amar Singh Ambalvi. He was Secretary-General of the Shiromani Akali Dal. For Bhai Harbans Lal and me, this was the farthest we had travelled so far. We enjoyed this exposure which also gave us some self-confidence.

Later that year, Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh, then considered the brain-trust of the Sikh community, visited Abbotabad. On their way back they stopped at the Khalsa High School, Haripur to meet Bhai Harbans Lal and me.

Towards the beginning of 1947, the situation in Haripur deteriorated drastically. The political events were now moving quite fast. The creation of Pakistan appeared a certainty. Every day we heard of riots, looting and deaths in one part of Hazara or another. In early February, riots spread to Haripur. Every day three to four persons were stabbed in various parts of the town. I was in a fix. Indeed, with a deteriorating situation it was not at all safe to continue in Haripur.

My father was a deeply religious man. He saw to it that his children never missed their daily prayers. My father, like his father before him, took a leading part in singing hymns (*kirtan*) at the local Gurdwara. I too inherited his

love for religious music. At the age of ten, I started playing the harmonium and chanting *shabads* or devotional songs before large congregations.

Linked to my strong faith in God and the teachings of our Gurus is a deep-rooted belief in fate. My experience in life was reinforced by my belief that whatever happens is pre-ordained. If it is in one's destiny, a person in the jaws of death will come out safe.

With such strong faith in God, my father declared with great optimism, "Let us continue till the end of the matriculation exam". I shared the optimism of my father and cheerfully accepted the decision.

Then the bombshell dropped. It was during the last week of February. Agitated over some flimsy incident, I do not remember what, a mob had entered the adjoining street, attacking families indiscriminately. About 50 persons, including children and women were mercilessly butchered. There were rumours of hundreds of killings in the surrounding towns of Hazara. This triggered an immediate exodus from Haripur. We were once again facing a dilemma. Exams were only a week or two away. My father went to the Gurdwara and offered *Ardaas*, a special prayer invoking blessings of the Almighty. My father narrated to me several situations in his life, when under severe dangers, he offered *Ardaas*, and invariably got out of the catastrophes. *Ardaas*, whenever offered in hundred per cent seriousness and with full concentration in God, never fails. I too developed this belief from my father. Our decision was to stay on in Haripur till my exams were over. With deep-rooted faith in fate, I knew that in any case death or matriculation was pre-ordained.

Each day during the matriculation examination at Haripur was a traumatic experience. Challenges and tensions of the day mounted higher than those of the previous day. When I left home for the examination centre, all my family members prayed ardently that I return home alive. Strengthened by faith and the power of prayer, I had concentrated on appearing in the examinations.

Finally came the day when I returned home safe and alive after doing my last paper. There was a moment of relief all round. God had been kind, the ordeal was over.

Without wasting any time, we packed all our valuables including the historic family sword, some cash and a change of clothes for every one of us. I remember, despite all the ordeal, I had absolutely no hatred against the Muslims of Haripur. My father ascribed this to some misguided Muslims belonging to some surrounding villages. I had been all along mentally prepared for all types of eventualities and took the ordeal in my stride. We were now all set to say good bye to Haripur.



A devout Sikh, a mountaineer climaxing as an Everest, a sailor, a policeman in the mountains, a doyen of civil aviation, a prolific author and a mesmerising raconteur! He is Mohan Singh Kohli — just 'Mohan' (one who enchants) to his mountaineering mates — known worldwide as Captain (IN) M.S. Kohli !

The surname 'Kohli' has an echo of *Koh* meaning mountain in Persian. To the mountains of his birthplace Haripur Hazara in the northernmost (NWFP) tip of the Himalayas (now in Pakistan), he owes his passion for climbing which, with the passage of time, became a metaphor for his irrepressible ascendance to the apex in every field of life. The Martyrs' Peak dominating Haripur, which he climbed time and again as a five-year old, became a symbol of faith and courage which culminated



in his successfully leading nine brave Indians to the top of the world — Mt. Everest — in May 1965. From the enviable height of glory where destiny and his absolute surrender to the will of *Wahe Guru* have placed him, he looks back today with a sense of contentment, gratefulness and bliss, over seven decades of his chequered and distinguished life. Indeed a paragon !

After obtaining his post-graduate degree in 1953 from Delhi University, Captain Mohan Singh Kohli was commissioned with the Indian Navy. In 1962, he was deputed to the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and then came a seven-year stint with this elite force during which he did several missions of vital national importance and introduced mountaineering to it. Spanning 36 years, his distinguished career has distinct landmarks : the Indian Navy, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, the Indo

Tibetan Border Police, Air India and an international bank in Hong Kong.

The crowning glory of his career endeared him to the entire nation and lovers of adventure across the world : he led the Indian Everest Expedition in May 1965, placing nine men on the summit, a record which remained unbeaten for 17 years. This achievement beyond compare was a sequel to his earlier epoch-making exploits in the mountains—Saser Kangri and 13 other major Himalayan expeditions involving 18 close brushes with death and three nights of survival in the death zone at 28,000 ft. just below the summit of Everest in 1962.

His is an impressive array of awards and honours in recognition of his distinguished services to the nation. He is a recipient of the Padma Bhushan (1965), Arjun Award (1965), Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (1968), IMF Gold Medal (1968), Honorary Commissioner of Boy Scouts of India (1968), Special Award for Flying Over Antarctica (1978), Most Distinguished Citizen of Delhi Award (1995) and Order of the Khalsa for Most Prominent Sikhs of the World (1999).

## BORN TO BE A PARAGON

Captain M.S. Kohli has authored several books including *Last of the Annapurnas*, *Nine Atop Everest*, *Indians On Everest*, *Trek the Himalayas*, *The Himalayas – Playground of the Gods*, *Air India in Australia*, *Mountaineering in India*, *The Sky was His Limit* (co-authored with B.N.Mullik) and the *ITBP Memorabilia*. A couple of more books are underway.

Captain Mohan Singh Kohli, following his participation in the recently-held Millennium Mountaineers Meet in New Delhi, has given a new dimension to his identification with mountaineering, a passion he discovered bubbling in himself as a child. Admittedly, he is a celebrity among the admirable galaxy of living mountaineers in the world: Sir Edmund Hillary, Reinhold Messner, Maurice Herzog, Junko Tabei and Sir Chris Bonington, among others.

Associated for long with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, he is today one among the legendary pioneers crusading for the preservation of Himalayan Ecology and Environment. Captain Mohan Singh is the Founder Chairman of the Himalayan Environment Trust (HET), the Legend Museum, the Gangtok Conservation Project and Outward Bound India.

JC Malik





## *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*

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*How do I describe  
The joy I feel  
When I go to my Guru  
To seek the answers that I need  
The Hukamnama of the day  
Sends me in a tizz  
For I can hardly believe  
That's the thought for the day.*

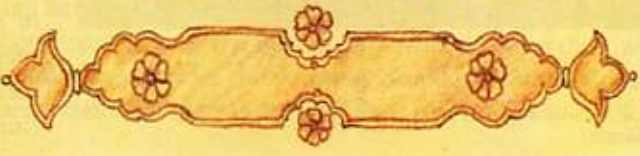
*I have gone in anger  
I have gone in despair  
I have gone in confusion  
But its always been there.*

*The paper is not sacred  
Neither the ink holy  
But the words hold a mystery  
For those that seek.*

*This Divine Book  
Has revealed so much  
That this head bows  
On having received so much.*

*Inni Kaur Bawa Dhingra*

*Inni Kaur Bawa Dhingra is a devout Sikh lady living with her family at Fairfield, Connecticut in the USA, and has published a volume of her verse "Pearls of My Soul", including the one on the Sikh sacred scripture.*





# Piety and Splendour

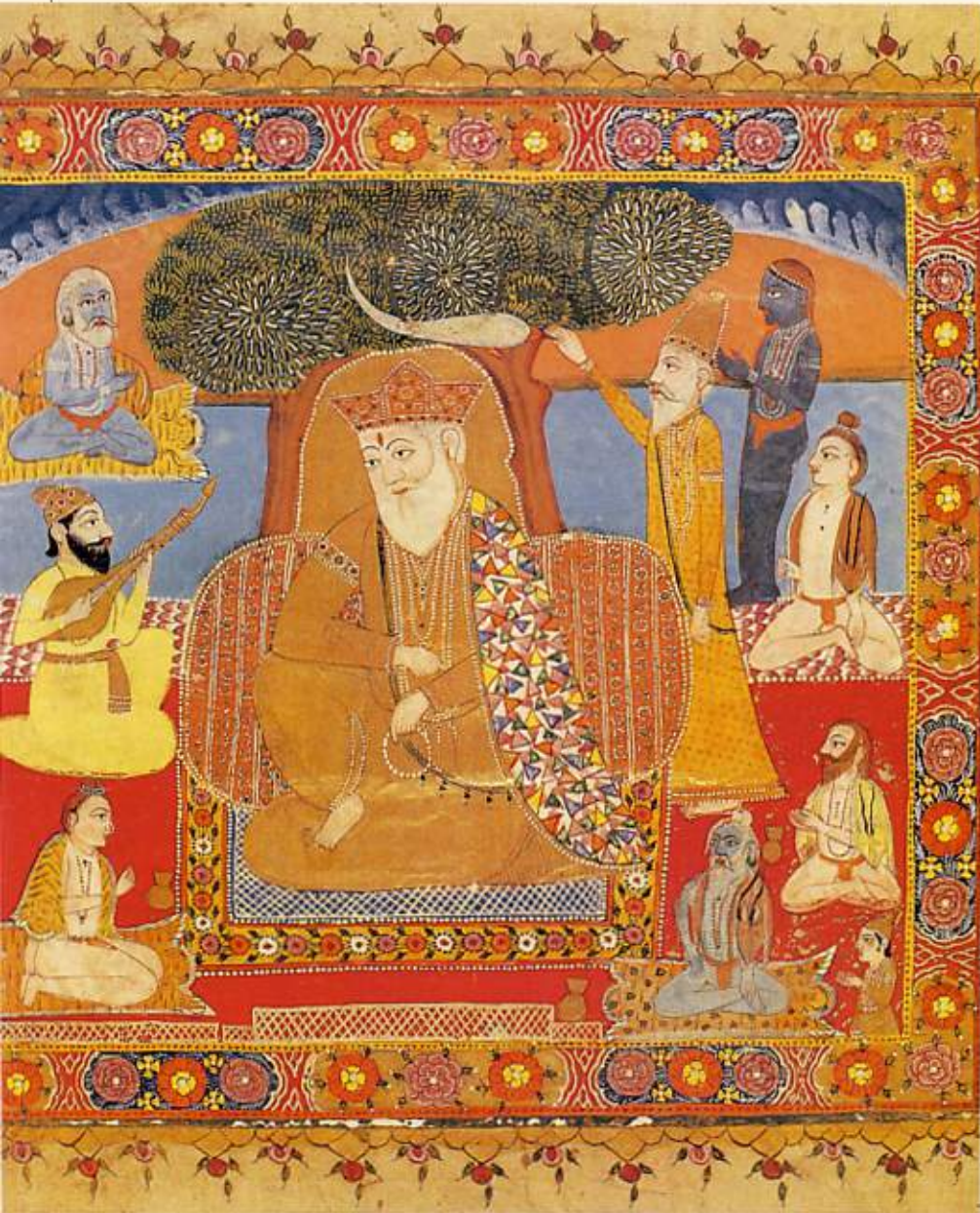
As part of the celebrations of the tercentenary of the founding of the Khalsa, the National Museum at New Delhi, mounted a major exhibition during March-April 2000, PIETY AND SPLENDOUR: SIKH HERITAGE IN ART.

Conceived and guest-curated by Professor B.N.Goswamy, the exhibition was among one of the most prestigious events that the Museum has ever organised.

The exhibition was designed to draw attention to Sikh Art: broadly defined, art made for the Sikhs and by the Sikhs. But religion, being the very marrow of Sikh society, shines through it in countless ways.

Strange as it sounds, a major work on the arts of the Sikhs is yet to be written. The exhibition, therefore, together with the book which serves as its catalogue, constitutes an attempt at exploring some significant aspects of the heritage. The substance of the show consists of paintings, because it is in them that contexts are most clearly established, and attitudes reflected. However, there are other riches in it: manuscripts and drawings, fine arms and glittering jewellery, textiles of different description, medals old and new. More than two hundred objects featured in the show.

Whole sections are designed to invite the viewer to 'enter' the world of Sikh art and thought, through carefully chosen artefacts. There are, thus, Guru Nanak's Encounters, being episodes taken from some of the finest painted leaves of the Janamsakhi that have survived; Portraits of the Gurus, especially those of Guru Nanak, drawing attention to the manner in which artists across time, and working in different styles, have tried to envision them; a number of fine arms, including some associated with Guru Gobind Singh's hallowed name.



Guru Nanak with followers  
and other Holy Men.  
(Himachal Pradesh State Museum, Simla)



Large sections deal with the arts as they flourished at the Sikh Kingdoms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some remarkable works, previously unknown or unpublished, having been brought together.

There are thus different themes that run through the exhibition, taking a distant cue from those that feature in ardas, that finely phrased 'humble petition', which is recited at the conclusion of Sikh devotions. Piety figures among them, of course, as the title suggests, but also woven into the show, are themes of splendour and valour and humble earthiness, which merge into the principal theme on the one hand and provide counterpoints on the other.

Two Hundred and Fifteen art objects were drawn from various sources such as the National Museum, Crafts Museum, the Sanskriti Museums and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, the Sheesh Mahal Museum and Quila Mubarak at Patiala, Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum at Amritsar, Himachal Pradesh State Museum Simla. Also the private collections of C.L. Bharany, Brigadier Sukhjit Singh MVC, Maharaja of Kapurthala, Bhayee Sikandar Singh of Bagarian, Mrs. Mona Bharat Singh and Sardarni Kanwal Ajit Singh of Chandigarh and Harish Chander of Chamba.

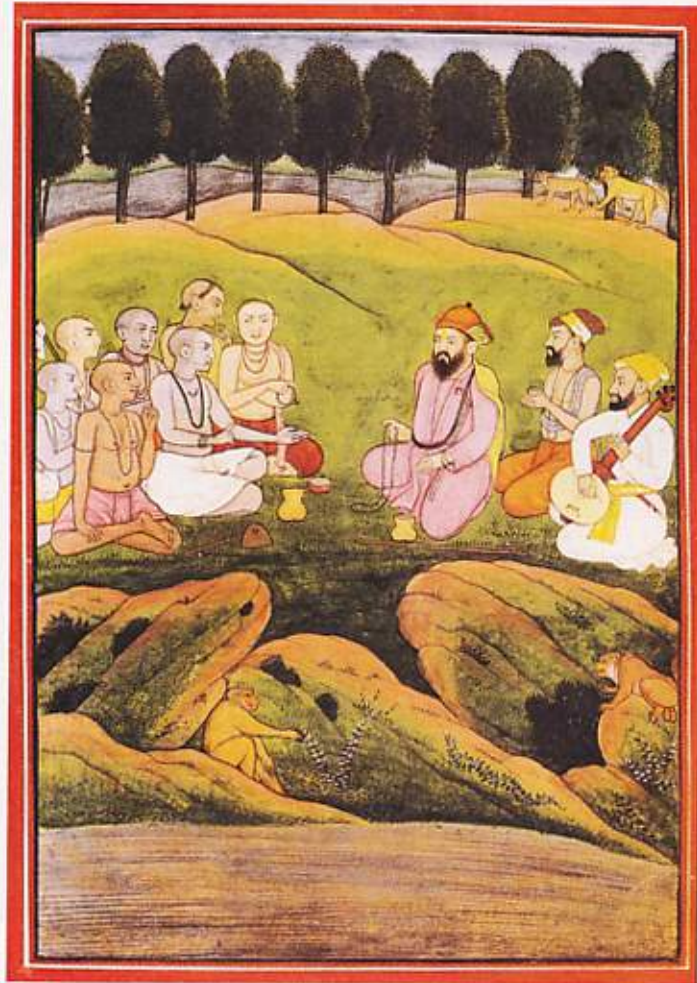
We publish here some selected works, together with notes on them written for the catalogue by Professor B.N. Goswamy, published with the same title.\* Clearly not meant to be seen as a connected account, these 'entries' will at least give the reader an idea of the riches in this highly significant show.

#### Guru Nanak with a Group of Sadhus (Pahari, end of 18<sup>th</sup> century)

Earnest conversation seems to be in progress. While Guru Nanak, dressed in that recluse's cap with upturned flaps and a simple robe, which one sees so often in this series, is seated at left, a *kamandalu* by his side, arm-rest under the left armpit, right hand holding a *mala* of beads, Mardana and a devotee perch close to him on the ground, the rabab-player beginning to move his fingers along the stringed instrument. Just across from the group is a superbly conceived group of shaven-headed *sadhus* of all ages and descriptions, the chief of them, ash-besmeared, extending his hand as if making a point in disputation. But, characteristically, Guru Nanak fixes the speaker with his gentle gaze, aware that it is his own words that will triumph in the end.

The occasion or the episode is difficult to identify, but the inscription at the back seems to suggest that the place is meant to be seen as Rameshwaram – 'set bandar', it says, possibly meaning 'the port with the bridge', or *setu bandha*, "Adam's Bridge" - , on the southern-most tip of India to which place Guru Nanak did travel, according to traditional accounts. But there is no town or architecture in sight. The scene is set on a grassy piece of land fronting which is a series of beautifully coloured boulders, just at the edge of a quiet riverbank. At the upper edge of the space, a row of stylised trees rises tall but, beyond them, also flows a river, equally quietly, as if suggesting that the group is seated on a river island. The light is somewhat dim as if dusk were approaching. An air of remarkable stillness pervades the painting, despite the streaks of rich colour that run through it and some scattered monkeys who hold their playfulness in check, as if aware of the moment.

\*Courtsey : *The Tribune*, Chandigarh.



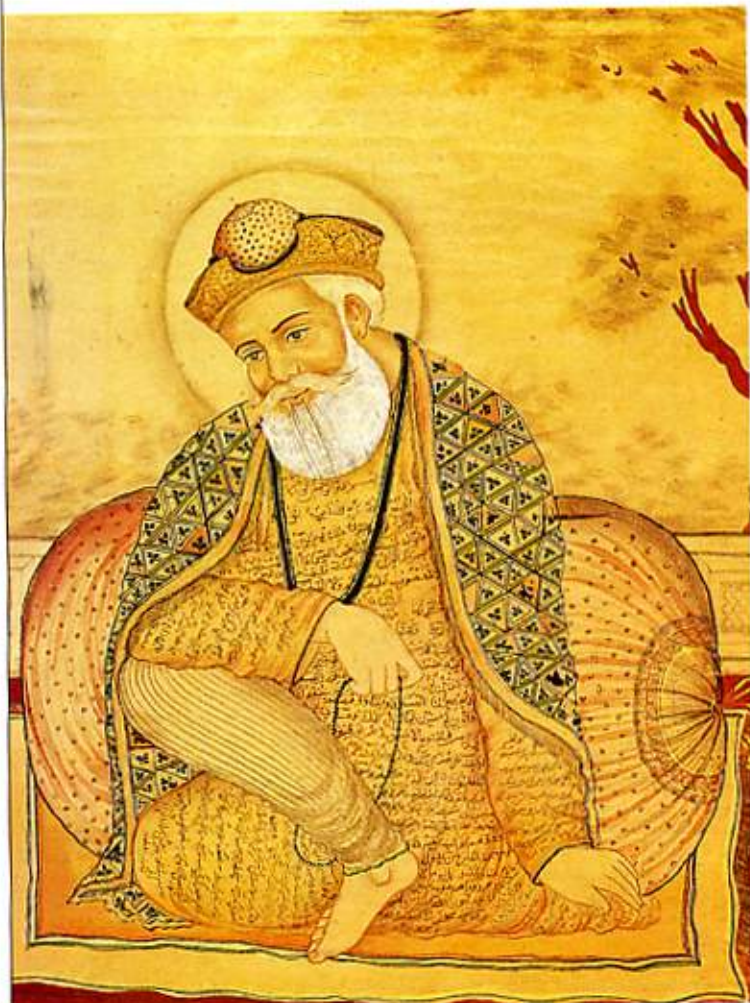
Guru Nanak with a Group of Sadhus; folio from a *Janamsakhi* series.



### Guru Nanak dressed in an Inscribed Robe (Panjab; end of 19<sup>th</sup> century)

At first one does not even notice the wonderful new detail, for the image, the stance, are all too familiar from other works that one has seen before. Guru Nanak sits, meditating, immersed in thoughts of the Formless One: on a small carpet spread out on a terrace with a tree rising behind it, left leg tucked under, and the right one bent and brought over the left knee. There is the serene, aged face with a full, grey beard: over the loosely worn robe a finely patterned wrap is thrown across the shoulders; tight striped *paijama*-trousers cover the legs; and the slightly inclined head, with a surround of a finely drawn nimbus, is covered with a cap with a high flap and a domed top. One sees nothing unusual about the work, till

one's eye lands upon the robe. The robe is inscribed all over with calligraphy, the entire front in Arabic characters, in *naskh* script, with verses from the *Quran*, and the sleeves and a part of the hem of the robe, with the Guru's own great composition, the *Japji*. While the Quranic verses begin with the usual invocation, "*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*", from the *Japji* prayer can be read not only the opening passage, but also those moving, intensely poetic, words: "*Ad sach, jugad sach, hai bhi sach, Nanak hosi bhi sach ....*": "God as Truth there was in the beginning, at the very beginning of Time; Truth it is that exists, and nothing will survive but the Truth, says Nanak ...." Quite suddenly, as one realizes what the painter has done – taken the holiest of words from different faiths and wrapped the great Guru's noble figure in them – the work rises, from being only a competent 'portrait', to another, altogether higher level. It is more than likely that the painter is availing himself here of a *Janamsakhi* account, according to which Guru Nanak was given in homage, while visiting Baghdad, a cloak on which verses from the *Quran* were embroidered, and which is believed to be still preserved at Dera Baba Nanak. But one notices that the words are not from the *Quran* alone, including as they do those from the *Japji*, and they are calligraphed, rather than embroidered.



Guru Nanak dressed in an Inscribed Robe.  
(Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh)

Much of the background in this work remains uncoloured, as in so much of the work being turned out at this point of time by Punjab artists of no great distinction, but, unlike much of that work, it is very lightly tinted. One can see all kinds of factors at work: European influences on the ways of seeing and

rendering, the coming in of watercolours, new material in the form of smooth, machine-made paper. But there is some meticulousness in the drawing and, as one has seen, the palpable presence of thought.

### Maharaja Ranjit Singh with princes and noblemen (Punjab, Lahore; c. 1850)

This richly coloured work with the air of an oil, and bearing the name of Imam Bakhsh as its painter, is essentially meant to be regarded as a record of the past, a memory. The mere fact that both Kharak Singh and Sher Singh are designated in the inscriptions as "Maharaja", as is Gulab Singh, provides firm indication of this, for during





*Maharaja Ranjit Singh with princes and noblemen.*

the life time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, these titles could possibly not have been used. It is also doubtful if the work is indeed in Imam Baksh's own hand – that painter's reputation might have induced someone else to ascribe it to him – for one associates greater fluidity of line with him. But as an image – kingly and rich, peopled with men of rank and power – it holds great interest. The old Maharaja, his stance reminding one of Emily Eden's portrait of him, is in complete command here, as he fixes with his gaze the men seated or standing in front of him. The air of majesty is reinforced by the elaborate golden nimbus behind the Maharaja's head, and the golden throne – one recognizes this at sight – on which he sits. There is much glitter that the painter sets out to capture through the richly coloured clothes – it is interesting to see everyone wearing socks on their feet, incidentally – the elaborate jewellery, that everyone wears. But the characters are all cast in a conventional framework. The faces are familiar, having become, over time, part of the 'mythology' of the Sikh court of Lahore and the aspect of all the figures is entirely true to the iconographies established. The group is placed on a carpeted terrace with a marble balustrade at the back, from behind which highly stylised cypresses rise in a long row.

#### **Maharaja Narinder Singh of Patiala in Procession (detail) (Panjab, Patiala; c. 1850)**

This uncommon painting – large for a 'miniature' – shows not the procession of a Maharaja, as one might initially expect, but a Maharaja *in* procession. An enormous, dense phalanx of men—riders on horseback, accoutred soldiers, footmen in neat uniforms – moves in slow, measured steps from right to left, keeping pace with a group of exquisitely decorated elephants ridden by princes and men of rank. The dark, smoky forms of the elephants, barely relieved by gold-worked caparison, rise like a cloud till the eye reaches the pre-eminent elephant, supporting a dazzlingly scalloped *howdah* in which may be discerned the figure of the Maharaja, Narinder Singh: nimbate, grave and dignified, not shown over-sized, and seemingly oblivious of the panoply of power that surrounds him. A rank of men wearing blazing red turbans walks very close to the royal mount, like the most trusted of men keeping a close eye; a virtual forest of vertically held lances, and differently inclined ensigns of royalty held aloft by another group of unseen soldiers, creates one more shield for the royal rider. The entourage



is extremely detailed: the serried ranks, the individuated faces of men in the crowd, the glitter of the uniforms, the minutiae of weapons and saddles and flywhisks. With all this, however, the procession is still not the Maharaja's. For here he is a follower. This one realizes only when one sees the painting with care. For, well ahead of him and his immediate companions, at a slight distance, is yet another file of elephants. On the back of one of these, also under a domed howdah, as if riding in state, is the sacred scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, neatly covered with a textile, with a devout attendant waving a *chauri*-flywhisk over it. It is the Holy Book that is being moved, taken around: *this* is the Master, then, that the Maharaja is following. Despite all the rank and circumstance, he is simply *in* a procession, bringing up, like a devotee, the rear. The point made is sharp, and the impact stunning. There is much else to divert the eye in this exquisitely crafted painting, but one's mind goes back again and again to the elephant with the Holy Book, for that is where the spirit of the work resides. Only hesitantly does one return to all the other details that the work is packed with, but clearly there is much to see. The walled city in the distance, the file of men walking along a ridge, some of them with falcons on their hands, the range of carriages that move along – elegantly carved state chairs and horse-driven phaetons and palanquins borne on shoulders – are all brought in with great care. Equally finely articulated are the characters of the men who form the Maharaja's immediate entourage. Clearly, many of the persons could have been identified at sight by those who knew them – the prince on elephant-back, looking much like the Maharaja himself; the noblemen and high officials also on elephant- or horse-back – for each of them is closely studied.

*Maharaja Narinder Singh of Patiala in Procession (c.1850). (Sheesh Mahal Museum, Patiala)*





As in fact are a large number of lesser persons whose portraits remind one very sharply of the studies of common men that one knows were done in such large numbers at Patiala. The work cannot unfortunately be ascribed to a painter that one knows, but almost certainly it is in the hand of someone who owed allegiance to the Jaipur-Alwar style while being well aware of the work of the Pahari painters active in Patiala.

### Lahore City and Fort

The work is remarkable as much for its uncommon size as for its quality. But it is not easy to 'read' it, for much patience, and closeness of attention to detail, is needed. Like most topographical renderings of its kind, at least from India, the image is not meant to be viewed from one fixed angle: it has to be turned slowly, or one has to go around it oneself, for the perspectives to fall in place, for one to be able to make sense of the conception. There are things here which are viewed straight on,



Lahore city and fort (C.1825). (Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar).

frontally, others by moving to the right or left; some things are seen at the eye-level, others from a height, affording a balcony-view, as it were. But, once these initial strategies of viewing are worked out, there is much information, and delight, that this delicately coloured painting yields. There is no specific focus or moment, time of day or occasion, that the painter sets out to capture here: it is intended to be a generalized, abstracted, view of the walled city of Lahore and the tenor of the life that one sees in it. Inside the walled city, there is busy activity, much coming and going, the painter wishes us to see. In the streets, men walk about, riders move on horseback, state elephants are being led, carts and asses carry goods about. Inside their open-fronted shops, men are busy plying their trades: perfumers, goldsmiths, money-lenders, bow-makers, cloth merchants. At one place the painter also introduces the face of a woman – the only woman who figures in the entire painting, one





**Sword (detail of hilt):**  
Steel blade and hilt  
with gold overlay  
(Arms Gallery, Qila Mubarak,  
Patiala)



realizes – in the balcony of a house, meant to be seen by the viewer perhaps as a courtesan in her 'kotha', upper-storey place of business. Public buildings and private dwellings are all densely compacted, and present a card-board like aspect. Suddenly, from this one moves on to the area 'above', inside the fort, where the spaces are far more open. Here, a well-laid out garden, with regular parterres of flowers, courtyards and colonnades, a stable with only the hind quarters of the horses tied in them showing, swing into view. Interspersed throughout all these, of course, are the great old monuments – mosques and mausoleums and other domed structures – which dot the city. Perhaps the most pleasing, and skilfully rendered, of all vignettes in the work, however, are those brought in outside the walled city, where the Ravi flows. Here, a wonderfully organized, and colourful, encampment makes its appearance; stacks of firewood occupy spaces round some structures; a group of camels sits huddled together; a range of wooden stakes standing in water hug the bank of the river. Nothing in the painting is quite like what it must have been in life, but obviously much is close to the poetic, if bustling, image in the painter's mind.

#### Sword (detail of hilt) Panjab, end of 18<sup>th</sup> century (?)

The weapon is richly ornamented, with carved figures overlaid with gold both on the hilt and along the entire length of the blade. The curved blade is not marked by any rib, only narrow grooves having been incised along the edges. On the hilt, the short quillon ends in small, somewhat flattened knobs to one of which a curving piece is attached, like an elephant's trunk, to form the knuckle guard; the grip is fashioned in the shape of a leaf; the pommel is a circular disc with a smooth knob serving as a finial. All over the blade, there is rich carving, with gold overlay, combining figurative and floral work. On one side is rendered, close to the hilt, the revered figure of Guru Nanak, seen seated, with his two companions, Bhai Mardana with his rabab and Bhai Bala, flanking him. Continuing along the blade but separated from this group, through intervening motifs like a seated lion or a running deer, are four other, similarly seated, figures in the company of devotees. While initially these appear to be repeats of the figure of Guru Nanak and his companions, they can be seen to be different, and are probably intended to be representations of the Gurus who followed in apostolic succession. On the other side of the blade are hunting motifs, with figures of animals in combat roughly in a forest setting.

The hilt of the sword is, again, sumptuously decorated. On the grip, accommodated within the leaf pattern, on one side, is the standing, crowned figure of a Hindu deity, possibly Krishna; on the other is carved, in equally low relief, the figure of the Goddess, shown seated on a throne, carrying in her hands a *trishula*-trident, a *pasha*-noose and a flower. On the inside of the pommel-disc is discernible, among others, the figure of Ganesha, remover of obstacles, presiding deity of all new enterprises. Above and below, and along the quillon, are animal and bird figures – tiger, hare, deer, peacock, etc. – carved with gold overlay of the same kind.

#### Shield (Punjab; 19<sup>th</sup> century)

This finely crafted shield, with very elaborate patterning on it, is said to have belonged to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. His own image, in fact, figures at its centre, within cartouches that alternate with the predictable four bosses: one sees him twice, on horseback, face in three-quarters profile, beard flowing, holding the reins of his galloping mount in one hand and a *rumal*-kerchief in



the other. The other two equestrian figures are visibly different: one is a much younger person, and the other bearded, somewhat older. As a guess, these could be renderings of Hira Singh, the Maharaja's great favourite who appears on so many paintings with him, and the heir-apparent, Kharak Singh. The shield is almost completely filled with arabesque patterns and floral decoration, done on brass in relief. A circular band, filled with floral work, runs round the central part. A broad outer band features, within eight cartouches, other figural work: scenes of hunt and combat and equestrian skills. One sees, thus, two wrestlers; a soldier on horseback aiming his lance at an object on the ground, as in tent-pegging; a warrior taking on two pouncing lions; a lion and a dragon in combat; two camels fighting; a horseman, sword raised, slaying an adversary; and the Goddess on tiger-back attacking the demon, Mahishasura. The carving is of refined workmanship, and in some of the imagery one can sense the craftsman looking back over his shoulders towards Mughal work on the one hand, and Pahari on the other. On the inner side, the shield is lined with fabric, the knuckle pad specially padded.

**A Block Printer at Work (Punjab; c. 1875)**

Related to, but not belonging to a known series from which many studies of artisans come, is this meticulously done painting of a block-printer at work. He would be described, in local terms, as a *chhimba*, or *chhipa* – *chhapegir* or *chhipi*, sometimes – and Ibbetson placed him, painting with a broad brush, in the broad category that covered dyers and tailors, etc. But the block-printer whom the painter renders here has the bearing almost



**Shield :**  
*Finely crafted shield of steel, with relief work in brass and gold overlay (Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar).*

*A Block Printer at Work, Punjab; c.1875.*





of a man of rank, the face marked by much dignity, and the general air around him that of refinement. As he sits – not on the floor, one notices, but on a striped *satranji*-floorspread – with a low table in front on which the cloth to be printed is spread out, wearing a shirt with a side-slit opening close to the neck and a finely tied turban, he cuts a strikingly handsome figure. The manner in which the craftsman sits on his work-table is extremely well-observed, judging from the way the one visible foot is bent and pressed against the thigh. It is, however, to the tools of his work, his materials, and the work he is doing, that the painting is dedicated, one recalls. There is a considerable, colourful range: dye-soaked pads lying in wooden frames, wood-blocks of varying sizes and shapes, earthen vessels holding water and other fluids. The block he is using to print with, the printer holds firmly in his right hand as he presses down firmly, the other hand holding the cloth in place. On the cloth, there are rough markings of horizontal rows along which the printing is to be done, a detail that the painter does not miss as he ‘records’ the work and the artisan. The painting has a precise, clean look: well-observed, rendered with respect for the craft and the craftsman.

**Portrait of Deep Singh, seated  
(Punjab, Patiala; c. 1875)**

Bare in the upper part of the body, the lower clad only in a simple *dhoti*, Deep Singh sits, cross-legged, hands clasped and resting in the lap, body inclined slightly forward. The head is singularly well rendered: broad forehead, deep-set, slightly tired, eyes, small ears,

lips firmly pressed together, neatly tied beard with a parting at the chin. On the head is a turban worn slightly tilted towards one side. But it is the face that is truly arresting. It is a thoughtful face, serious but not grave, kind in some ways, informed by an awareness of the world that he is part of. Deep Singh is barely dressed in this study of his, and yet there is no sign of self-consciousness on his part that one sees on this account. One is constantly struck, in fact, by the dignity that belongs to the men – simple, ordinary men whom one might expect to run into on the street – who people this world of sketches that the painter has brought into being.

*Portrait of Deep Singh, seated  
(Sheesh Mahal Art Galley, Patiala).*



**Piety and  
Splendour**  
Sikh Heritage in Art



*B.N. Goswamy, distinguished art historian, was till recently Professor of Art History and the Punjab University, Chandigarh. A leading authority on Indian art, his work covers a wide range, and is regarded, especially in the area of Pahari painting, as having influenced much thinking. He has written extensively. Among his publications are: Pahari Painting: The Family as the Basis of Style (Marg, Bombay, 1968); Painters at Sikh Court (Wiesbaden, 1975; reissued New Delhi, 1999); Essence of Indian Art (San Francisco, 1986); Wonders of a Golden Age (Zurich, 1987); Pahari Masters: Court Painters of Northern India (Zurich, 1992); Indian Costumes in the Collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles (Ahmedabad, 1993); Nainsukh of Guler: A great Indian Painter from a small Hill State (Zurich, 1997); and Painted Visions: The Goenka Collection of Indian Painting (New Delhi, 1999). Professor Goswamy has been responsible for major exhibitions on Indian art in Paris, San Francisco and Zurich, and has taught, as Visiting Professor, at the Universities of Heidelberg, Pennsylvania, California (at Berkeley and Los Angeles), Zurich, and Texas (at Austin).*

*As Commissioner of the Exhibition Piety and Splendour, Prof. B.N. Goswamy has endeavoured to bring a deeper understanding of Sikh history and culture.*



# Puran Singh, Walt Whitman And The Sikh Ethos:

By Darshan Singh Maini

Walt Whitman is "the Guru's Sikh born in America."  
Puran Singh.



I have been writing on the subject of the Whitman-Puran Singh affinities and correspondences from time to time, but it didn't quite occur to me that this relationship between two of the greatest poets in their respective tongues had a certain dimension which so far as I know, had no parallel in the history of world poetry. I shall later touch upon the aesthetic of poetic influence per se, as my argument proceeds, but before I come to do so, I wish to refer briefly to an unusual visit that opened up for me, strikingly and visibly, the passage of poetry from soul to soul across the spaces of time, race, continent and culture.



During the Spring semester of 1989 when I happened to be teaching a graduate course (that included Whitman) at New York University, I received an invitation from the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association to address the poet's annual birthday celebrations at the Whitman House in Huntington, a small, sprawling, picturesque town at the end of a suburban line in Long Island. A 90-minute train ride through a green and wooded country in the company of the year's Whitman Poet-in-Residence, Stanley Kunitz, a poet of the Eliot era and a Pulitzer Prize winner, was indeed a ride into a territory of shared



perceptions and revelations. With 84 winters on his noble head, he still carried his dynamic muses with so much ease and grace and civility. And thus we arrived at our place of pilgrimage — an early 19th century, colonial house in which Whitman had opened his eager eyes in 1819 on a wondrous world, and uttered his first “barbaric yawp.” The great house had all been done up for the occasion which provided for day-long festivities and funfare.

It wasn't, thanks God, an academic affair with its seminar airs and donnish powwow etc., but simply a carnival of country song and dance and costume an affair, chiefly, of period parades, Yankee drums and bugles, and a ritualistic occasion for senatorial and mayoral tributes, recitations, orations and addresses. All in all, it was Whitman's Paumanok brought back to life with so

much town gaiety and revelry, and with so much obvious pride and adoration. For Huntington had become a massive metaphor for the greatness and glory of America. No wonder, the town had turned up in colourful skirts and scarves to honour its noblest son.

But before we joined the jolly crowd on the spacious lawns outside, we were conducted through the rooms of the Whitman House and shown the Whitman relics, manuscripts and memorabilia, preserved with so much loving care. And to break bread with some of its officials and trustees under that roof was to return poetry to its roots, to corn and meat and milk, or to what Stanley Kunitz called “body-language”. Nothing really conveys to you the power of a poet so fully as when you breathe the air from where he drew the manna for his verse. Whitman's spirit pervaded the place, and the experience left one with a feeling of fulness and felicity.

And, finally, I turn to my brief address from which I reproduce below a reconstructed summary :

That I stand here on this happy and hallowed piece of land this fine June morning to add my voice to a swelling song in praise of Walt Whitman is a privilege I had not looked forward to, though my troubled affair with America's greatest poet had started some 30 years ago. In a manner of speaking, I was already an inmate of the poet's vast, human estate, having so journeyed much in its realms, and I could even imagine in my mind's eye this place in Paumanok where the young Walt had imbibed “the milk of wonder”, and learnt to translate later the poetry of things, persons and places into breathless catalogues of words and images. Yes, I feel no stranger here in your midst, and, if I may say so, my “ticket” is quite in order. And yet, as I have said earlier, it's a very special occasion for me, made more so by the generosity of the Whitman House authorities. To make this occasion very special for you as well, I propose to place before you a poetic phenomenon so unique in its meaning and dynamics as to almost defy all ordinary canons of criticism. In fact, as you would soon see, the idea and the idiom have little place in Western metaphysics, religion and aesthetics. However, the concept of reincarnation as a poetic experience is not being offered as a serious critical idea, but as an Oriental way of seeing things. And, it's in this context that I bring up the name of Punjab's supreme poet, Puran Singh.

The story of Whitman's unique and profound relationship with India which finds its freest and fullest expression in

*Prof. Darshan Singh Maini at  
New York University, 1989.*





his splendid poem, "Passage to India," has been the theme of countless essays and dissertations and scholarly discourses, and I can only add that India had truly become a major metaphor in his verse. Something in the Indian way of looking at the human reality appears to have set the wires singing in his blood and bones. But I do not know if many of you are aware of the fact that as far back as the first quarter of this century, Puran Singh had begun to explain and chronicle his idea of poetic reincarnation in relation to Whitman and himself. Basically, it's a Hindu concept which we find subsumed in Sikh thought as well. Though scattered references to such a belief can be found in Puran Singh's critical writings from the start, it's only in an unrevised manuscript called "Walt Whitman and the Sikh Inspiration" (which, incidentally, I edited for the Punjabi University in 1981), that this idea is aired with full solemnity and illustrations. And this is how the argument runs.

Clearly, Puran Singh whose whole life and thought had taken a sharp turn when someone had put a copy of *Leaves of Grass* into his youthful hands in Tokyo in the year 1901 was seeking to transcend the concept of poetic influence, and suggest something far deeper and far higher. To him, Whitman appears as a poetic prophet whose spirit has mysteriously passed on into his own, and who leads him into those sanctuaries where kindly and kindred souls disport themselves in mystic delight and companionship. In other words, Puran Singh is suggesting in addition to the idea of reincarnation, the idea of apostolic succession. It may be

pertinent to add here that this concept — the passage of the same soul through new births or "vestures"—is authenticated for Puran Singh in the story of the ten Sikh Gurus. Let me explain. It's the belief of the Sikhs that the spirit of the Founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, is housed in the bodies of the successor Gurus, and that the  *jyoti*  or the divine light continues to manifest itself again and again till its mandate is done. In a loose way, Puran Singh seems to be saying that Whitman only preceded him to become his "Guru" and his "Master". And to extend the theme, he goes on even to aver that Whitman was "the Guru's Sikh born in America."

That this is not too fanciful a thought to bear scrutiny, Puran Singh quotes several lines and passages from the *Guru Granth* and *Leaves of Grass*. Even if we take his enthusiasm as something tending to Oriental excess, we are left with the impression that he had had some rare glimpses of the American *camerado*. "We have," he writes, "taken strolls in each other's company in the

gardens of the Beautiful." Such then is the force of his belief in Whitman's lineage and heritage that, in a transferred, metaphorical sense, all this seems to connect the American poet with the essence of Sikhism. Everything about Whitman — his God intoxication and mystic fervour, his egalitarian vision, his radical ethics, his love of the human body, and of all sentient beings, his celebration of the road, the sword and the steed, his faith in the new forces of science, electricity and technology, and, finally, even his leonine face and flowing locks and patriarchal beard — does suggest strongly such a conclusion. And I



leave the matter there. But let Puran Singh speak again, and put the seal upon his argument: "I find the poetic spirit of Walt Whitman identical with the Sikh spirit. It is not so much mental similarity as the psychic unity of the soul-consciousness underlying the Sikh literature and *Leaves of Grass*."

There are, however, a couple of points that I could not take up in my Huntington speech, and which to my mind need to be brought in if only to examine Puran Singh's views in the light of some recent theories regarding poetic influence.

I refer, in particular, to Harold Bloom's influential work, *The Anxiety of Influence* in this regard. Interestingly enough, Professor Bloom too was there that year at New York University, and occupied an apartment in the building where I lived. I never took up the subject of Puran Singh's strange

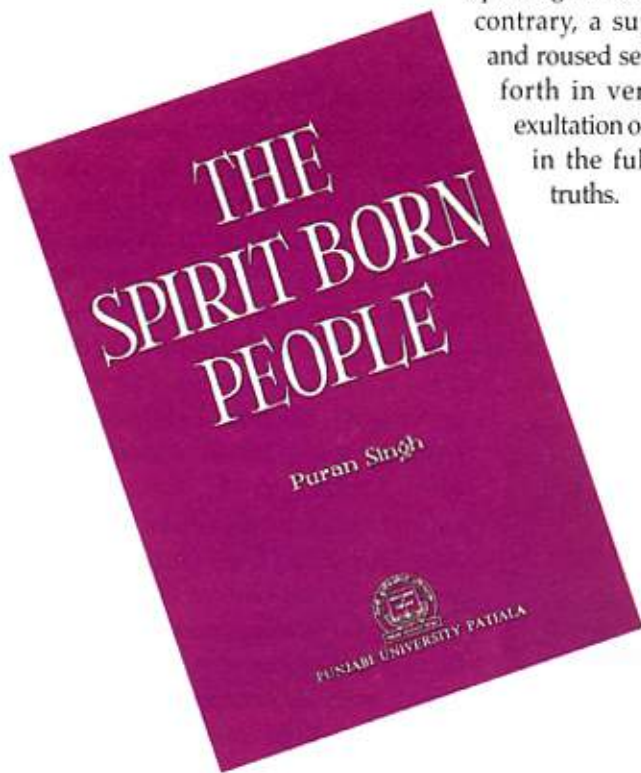




unorthodox views in any serious way with him, though I tried to see thus the differences and the departures in the two approaches to the same problem. Professor Bloom's recondite and involved theory is basically an extension of T.S. Eliot's view that all great poets are indebted to their poetic predecessors in an integral and constitutive manner, or that an "individual talent" can only find its truest voice within a given culture and "tradition". Adding a whole Freudian polemic to this idea, Professor Bloom offers the view that a strong poet is obliged to destroy or repudiate his poetic "pater" in order to

precisely what he was trying to put across. For instance, in one of his critical volumes, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry* (Kegan Paul, London, 1926) while recording his soulful tribute to his "beloved" Walt, "that singular flower of America" whose verses are "light as the songs of the birds," he announces his poetic credo in these words: "We love our poet rather than his poetry; our artist rather than his art." Later, he begins to equate the poet *qua* poet with "the Guru, the Master, the Buddha, the Christ," and talks of him as "the incarnation of Logos".

Thus, both for Puran Singh and Whitman the poet was a person possessed in whom the word became message in the very act of creation. Nor was the poet, in their view, a mere vessel, a neutral zone agitated by a passing breeze—He was, on the contrary, a supremely active and roused sensibility issuing forth in verse in, the full exultation of its powers, and in the full beauty of its truths.



create an "imaginative space" for himself. And strangely enough, there is in Whitman himself a passing proof, when he says in *Song of Myself*: "He most honors my style/ Who learns it to destroy the teacher."

Clearly, the Bloom theory cannot fully explain the kind of spiritual succession Puran Singh posits between poets born in wholly different cultures, and writing in radically different tongues. In the Sikh poet's view, then, there is no slaying of one's poetic progenitors, but, on the other hand, a conscious surrender before a Master or a Guru. It's an act of commitment so profound as to need another kind of epistemology and grammar.

To be sure, Puran Singh's position is singular enough to raise questions and doubts, but as one widely familiar with Western thought and classics, he knew

There is, finally, yet another aspect that needs to be adjusted within his poetic philosophy. Even as he regards Whitman as his Guru, he's also calling him a friend, a comrade, a town buddy who shares ambrosial airs and drinks with him at a common tavern. At times, he calls out his Walt from across the Continents—a call from the Punjab plains to the American prairies where the great dreaming heart of America still beats in song and story. It's as though having heard Whitman's rough and ready call, Puran Singh answers back in the rich and rugged and dulcet accents of the Punjabi tongue. It's the deep calling unto the deep, or, the wild unto the wild. In this kind of playfulness the *Guru* and the *chela* or, the Master and the acolyte, become one; all distances are dissolved, all marks of identity cast aside. And poetry surely is divine playfulness. In fact, that's its genesis and its rationale.





# WARRIOR SAINTS

Three Centuries of the Sikh Military Tradition

Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh

Collated and elaborated by the Editors of Nishaan



From Francois Balthazar Solvyns  
(Paris, 1808-12).

*'If you cherish the desire to learn the art of war, face them on the battlefield. When they hold the mighty sword, they gallop from Hind to Sind. Nobody, however strong and wealthy, dare oppose them. If their swords strike a coat of mail, the coat itself becomes the enemy's shroud. Each one of them is built like a rock. In grandeur, each one of them excels fifty men.'*

Qazi Nur Mohammed's, Jang Namah (Battle Chronicles), 1765.  
Quoted by Arjan Dass Malik, *An Indian Guerrilla War* (Wiley Eastern Ltd., New Delhi, 1975).





Rattan Singh Bhangoo, 1830  
(*Khalsa Samachar*, 1962)

The saga of warrior saints in Sikh chronicles is long and spectacular, and for this reason, it often swings between inspired stories and recorded facts. Their fabulous and awesome exploits verging on the miraculous have, thus, become a part of Sikh lore, *Katha* and martial songs. With new modes of historical research and new perceptions, scholars have, of late, endeavoured to use hagiographic material in a critical manner, and increasingly moved on to modern modes of historiography. The volume, *Warrior Saints*, shares something of these thoughts and techniques, though its chief concern is to illustrate the grand story with rare pictures and reproductions, keeping the text to the essentials.

Though, the putative heroes in this unique tradition arrived on the scene after the advent of Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru, who initiated the concept of “the consecrated sword”, the genesis of this heritage can be easily traced back to the radical vision of the First Preceptor, Guru Nanak. Thus, the authors of the volume, *Warrior Saints*, have, in the introductory pages, sought to highlight the *quality* of the *inputs* and the evolved ethos of the symbiosis of piety and heroism. It’s against the backdrop of such earlier values engendered in the process that the two scholars have resurrected these pages of Sikh history to understand the dialectic of faith, vision and arms to be seen in action till our own times.

Thus to Guru Nanak and his immediate successors. The first Sikh Guru was a man of gentle ways and iniquities, warm wit, yet he was willing to speak out passionately against the inequalities of his time—wanton aggression, the debasing caste system and the culturally-embedded violation of women. A significant portion of Guru Nanak’s writings which distinguish him from the myriad of north Indian saints of his era, are his poetic rage against the prevailing social ills.

Maharaja Sher Singh mounted on an elephant alongside Raja Hira Singh, commander of the Royal bodyguard. (Lithograph by L.H. de Rudder).





For Guru Nanak a life of piety involved a willing and joyous commitment to the ideals of social reforms and justice.

*'A truly holy person, battled in the open field  
with his mind perfectly in control and his heart poised to love all the time.'*

**Guru Granth Sahib, p.1256**

A significant portion of his poetry and utterances testifies to his humanist and radical impulses, a fact that distinguishes him from the schools of saints and bards then in labour. Indeed, the sense of outrage compels Nanak's imagination of indignation and righteousness to raise his voice against the oppressive ethos of the times. His great song of compassion, *Babarvani*, is a profound example of the muses in arms, a cry of a heart in pain and protest against the maurading forces of Babur, the first Mughal.

The Founder Guru had started his mission at the age of thirty with a simple statement *'There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim'*. He was neither decriing Hinduism, the faith into which he was born, nor Islam, but stating that in God's eyes, such distinctions are meaningless. In an age plagued by social tyrannies, Guru Nanak's philosophy of complete equality across class, gender, race and faith was extraordinarily modern.

Men and women, untouchables and princes, Muslims and Hindus, were all welcome into Guru Nanak's fold, and lived and ate together as equals at the *langar*, or community meal, which he initiated, and which remains at the heart of the Sikh faith and practice till today. Guru Nanak's crusade was against fanaticism, intolerance, and domination whether in the home, the community or the nation. In sixteenth century India, however, many looked upon his revolutionary teachings as blasphemy.



*Hari Singh Nalwa.*

*The 1st Sikh Infantry in 1860  
(the Granthi in white).*





Later Sikh Gurus were able to consolidate the following of Guru Nanak, creating their own places of worship, and practices and observances that continue till today. Guru Nanak's great song of war and peace *Babarvani*, as we have observed earlier is easily one of the greatest "war poems" of its kind in the world. "Poetry is in the pity", wrote Wilfred Owen, a British poet of the First World War, and seldom has the convergence of song and suffering and a humanist vision been so complete, so compelling:

*'Having attacked Khurasan, Babur terrified Hindustan.  
The Creator Himself does not take the blame,  
But has sent the Mughal as the messenger of death.  
There was so much slaughter that the people screamed...  
This priceless country has been laid waste and defiled by dogs,  
And no one pays any attention to the dead.'*

**Guru Granth Sahib, p.360**



Subedar Major  
Bahadur Mial  
Singh.

Under Babar's son and heir Humayun, and then Akbar, a wise politician and tolerant leader, the Sikhs sought to establish a community based on spiritual endeavour in the framework of family life. The test of the Sikh attitude towards religious intolerance became an imperative of the moment as Jahangir, the son of Akbar, ascended the throne in 1605.

During the reign of Jahangir, the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev (1563-1606), helped build a transparent sense of communal identity, a thing unique in form and character.

In a harsh and lawless age, when neither neighbours nor rulers could be trusted, the people of Punjab had to rely upon themselves for their own security. Martial arts

flourished, as is evident in historical accounts of wrestling matches and shows of horsemanship. In his writings, Guru Arjan Dev freely used the military metaphor and images of righteous force to articulate spiritual values.

*'The greatest merit of a soldier is not to show  
His back to the enemy.*

*A hero obtains for himself bliss might of his arms.  
If he conquers, he obtains the sovereignty of the earth,  
If he dies celestial happiness in his portion.*

*Fight for him whose salt you have eaten.  
Give your life for the [divine] Sovereign and  
Great shall be your fame in the world'.*

Guru Granth Sahib, translation  
by Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion,  
Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*  
(Clarendon Press Oxford, 1909).



Akali Jai Singh and his pony,  
Kaler Singh, at the  
Delhi Durbar of 1903.





No wonder, the Punjabis flocked to Goindwal, where Guru Arjun Dev had set up a community of faith and honour. The Guru's popularity became a threat to the Mughals. In his memoirs, the Emperor Jahangir wrote,

*'At Goindwal, on the bank of the river Beas, lived a Hindu, Arjun by name, in the garb of a Pir or Sheikh. Thus many innocent Hindus and even foolish and ignorant Musalmans he brought into his fold who beat the drum noisily of his self-appointed prophethood. He was called Guru. From all sides, worshippers came to offer their homage to him and put full trust in his word. For three or four generations, they had warmed up this shop. For a long time I had harboured the wish that I should set aside this shop of falsehood or I should bring him into the fold of Islam'.*

Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, translated by Dr. Gopal Singh, *History of the Sikh People* (World Book Centre).

Guru Arjun Dev was arrested in Lahore in 1606 by the Mughal authorities, and brought before the Emperor. On May 30, 1606, before a huge crowd, the Guru was subjected to almost unimaginable assaults on his body with boiling sand and irons that finally killed him. The Jesuit missionary, Father Jerome Xavier, who had witnessed the torture of Guru Arjun, wrote:

*'He [Jahangir] gave every day new torments to this Saint. He ordered to give him much torture. He took away his food, he did him a thousand and one dishonours. In that way their good Pope died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments and dishonours.'*

Extract from Fr Jerome Xavier's letter dated Lahore September 25 1606, translated by John A D'Silva. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* Ed. Dr Ganda Singh (Today and Tomorrow's Printers and Publishers, 1974).



Major H. Pearse, soldier and traveller  
(William Blackword & Sons, Edinburgh, 1898)



Man of the 45th Sikhs  
in Delhi during  
manoeuvres, 1886.





The martyrdom of the fifth Guru was a turning point for the Sikh community. The mandate of Guru Nanak, so whole-heartedly lived by Guru Arjun Dev, had roused the most powerful force in the land. But far from crushing the Sikh community, as had been intended, the devastating loss of the Guru awoke a fighting spirit in the community that would never die.

Guru Arjun Dev had foreseen the troubled times the Mughal Empire had in store for the growing Sikh community and, in an act that would later prove seminal in the evolution of the faith, he had his son, Har Gobind (1595-1644), instructed in the military arts from a young age. Before his martyrdom, Guru Arjun Dev installed Har Gobind as his successor.



*— Led by the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh soldiers marching during  
the Mesopotamia Campaign, 1918.*

Immediately upon becoming the sixth Guru, Har Gobind laid the foundation-stone of the *Akal Takht*, or Throne of the Immortal God, which, to this day, faces the Golden Temple built by his father. The Guru used this building to minister to secular matters; an early expression of defiance, Guru Har Gobind's throne was even higher than that of Emperor Jahangir. Guru Har Gobind also built *Lohgarh*, the first Sikh fort.

With the creation of the Akal Takht came the first Sikh standing army known as the *Akal Sena*, Army of the Immortal, whose purpose was to defend Sikhs against foreign aggression. The hand-picked troops of the Akal Sena was no more than a local police force. However, under Guru Har Gobind, the Akalis fought four major battles against the larger and better-equipped armies of the Mughal Empire. Before these encounters,



the Mughal armies were widely regarded as invincible, but Guru Har Gobind and his Akalis inflicted humiliating losses in each successive battle. This left the Sikhs and the Mughals as committed adversaries, a stance which did not end until the Mughal power was finally destroyed in Punjab a century and a half later.

As the Sikhs consolidated their forces and their military strength grew, local rajahs, fearing for their own seats of power, became threatened and grew hostile to the Sikhs.

The 'warrior-saint' ethos, the role of the Sikh as a fighter against oppression, was crystallised by Guru Har Gobind.

Gradually, under his guruship and that of his successor, Guru Har Rai (1630-1661), a Sikh court began to emerge.



*Sikh despatch riders at The Battle of the Sommes, 1916.*

Mohsin Fani, a contemporary of Guru Har Gobind observes:

*"The Guru has seven hundred horses in his stables; and three hundred cavaliers and sixty artillery men were always in his service."*

The Dabistan or The School of Manners, Translated by David Shea and Anthony Troyer (Allen & Co., London, 1843).

The Akalis of this period were distinguished from other

Sikhs in that they carried weapons and practised martial traditions. Most important in their personal armoury were two swords, which are now seen in the symbol of the Khalsa. These swords, instituted by Guru Har Gobind and called *miri* (worldly) and *piri* (spiritual), symbolised the new Sikh standing on military engagement as an appropriate, even necessary, aspect of a balanced spiritual and worldly life.



The 'warrior-saint' ethos, the role of the Sikh as a fighter against oppression, were crystallised by Guru Har Gobind. Gradually, under his guruship and that of his successor, Guru Har Rai (1630-1661), a Sikh court began to emerge. Relations with the Mughal rulers were fractious, but just about manageable. The eighth Guru, Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664) died of smallpox while still a boy and appointed as his successor his uncle, the poetic recluse, Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675). It was this ninth Sikh Guru—like Guru Arjun Dev, a man of gentle and artistic sensibility—who would provide the final and unquenchable fuel to the Sikh military tradition.

Aurangzeb was now on the Mughal throne. In his climb to power, he had killed his brother, Dara Shikoh, and imprisoned his father, Shah Jehan, in 1658. In that peculiar phenomenon of human psychology, Aurangzeb's crimes seemed to inspire an upsurge of religiosity within him, and he took to Islamic orthodoxy with a vengeance and a paranoia that required everyone else to do so as well.

In November 1675, nine-year-old Gobind Rai, son of the ninth Sikh Guru, received a parcel smuggled out of the Mughal court. It contained the head of his father. Guru Tegh Bahadur had been approached for help by the Hindu Brahmins of Kashmir when Aurangzeb threatened to have them killed if they did not convert to Islam. The Guru advised the Brahmins to tell the Emperor that they would convert if Guru Tegh Bahadur would do so.

Knowing full well the likely outcome, Guru Tegh Bahadur and three disciples then set off for the Mughal court in Delhi to defend the religious rights of the Brahmins. They were arrested, and when they refused to forsake the Sikh faith, all four were executed. The sacrifice of their own lives by Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples for the religious freedom of others imprinted on the tenth Sikh Guru the ideal of the fearlessness in the face of tyranny. He wrote of his father:

*'For their forehead marks and their sacred threads [Hindu symbols]  
He wrought a great deed in this age of darkness.  
He made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of men of faith.  
He gave his head, but uttered not a groan...  
A deed like Tegh Bahadur's, none had dared before.  
At the departure of Tegh Bahadur,  
The world was wrapped in mourning.  
Laments of grief filled the land of the mortals,  
But in the sphere of the gods, shouts of adoration rang out.'*

**An extract from Guru Gobind Singh's *Bachitra Natak*, Dasam Granth**

In losing another of their Gurus at the hands of the Mughals, the Sikh people were thrust into both retreat and near revolution.

The Sikh militia, with its relatively marginal role in Sikh society, needed repositioning as a mainstay of Sikh philosophy and way of life. This revolutionary transformation was made by Tegh Bahadur's son, the prolific poet, warrior and the final living Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) ☞

*Photographs from : "Warrior Saints"*

*Published by I.B. Tauris, Publishers, London, New York; Timeless Books, New Delhi.*

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*Sikh soldier in France, 1915.*



*Mounted Sikhs in Khurram Valley, early 1900s.*



# W

## ARRIORS FOR THE TRUTH:

### A SUPPLEMENTARY VIEW

Knights of the Lord (*Gosaaen Daa Pehalvanaraa*  
M.5)

History has many martyrs for the cause of good, or of the dynamics of redemption, upliftment and liberation from social, economic, political and theological oppression. But to organise these elements for the betterment of man's lot with total commitment, to infuse every individual with this spirit is a special feature of the Sikhs. Whereas Guru Nanak Dev called upon the nation to take up the challenge with single minded, commitment, stating:

ਜੇ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਨਦਾ ਚਾਉ ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ  
ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ (ਮਹਲਾ ੧)

Guru Gobind Singh declared that the culmination of Guru Nanak Dev's mission, advent of the Khalsa, should produce such humans who would be committed to the transformation of the social ethos, while being rooted in the divine:

ਧੰਨ ਜੀਓ ਤਿਹਕੇ ਜਗ ਮੈ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ  
ਚਿਤ ਮੈ ਯੁਧ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ (ਪਾਤਸਾਹੀ ੧੦)



*Naik Nand Singh, VC.*

Describing the arrival of Guru Nanak Dev on the world scene, Bhai Gurdas compares it with the roar of the lion on hearing which the deer run away. So did the weaklings of ignorance and oppression take to flight on the emergence of the great guru.

ਸਿੰਘ ਬੁਕੇ ਮਿਰਗਾਵਲੀ ਭੰਨੀ ਜਾਇ ਨ ਧੀਰਿ  
ਧਰੇਆ, ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਕਲਵਿਚ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਆ  
(ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਪਉੜੀ:੨੧)

So apt and so expressive is this metaphor, so poignant and encapsulated is its concept, which epitomises the premonition of the emergence of the Khalsa, of the saints who became warriors for the truth,



*Sikh troops capture Japanese positions during the advance in Burma, 1945.*



Lt. Darshan Singh of the 1st Sikhs in Burma during the Second World War.



Ishar Singh, VC (far right) marching through Whitehall with three other highly decorated Sikhs.

Thus, essence of the Sikh way of life is the commitment to one's belief. Every individual, a microcosm of the Sikh faith, has to imbibe this element. The cause, the obligation and the ideal are above the individual, and the individual is a sacrifice to the cause.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib says :

ਜਬ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਉਧ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਬਣੇ ਅਤਹੀ ਰਣ ਮੈ ਤਬ ਜੂਝ ਮਰੋਂ (ਪਾਤਸਾਹੀ ੧੦)

The genesis of this concept of soldier-saint begins with Guru Nanak Dev. He stood up against the tyranny of polity, of theology and of the caste system. He protested against Babar's brutal invasion, and offered himself for arrest. He protested to the Almighty when the country was being ravaged and said :

ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕੁਰਲਾਣੀ ਤੈ ਕਉ  
ਤਰਸ ਨਾ ਆਇਆ (ਬਾਬਰ ਬਾਲੀ - ਸਹਲਾ ੧)

Submitting to aggression or oppression is unacceptable to the Sikh way of thinking. Man must stand up for his rights and values, his freedom and percepts. For this he must have the necessary means and equipment to protect these percepts and fight for them. For a Sikh, the wearing of arms is an article of faith, of fundamental human values. The spirit of the French revolution in the 18th century had a forerunner in Sikhism's movement of the 16th and 17th centuries. An individual in society must be responsible for, and be a champion, not for the self, but of a cause, of society.

The Tenth Guru said:

ਯਾ ਕਲ ਮੈਂ ਸਭ ਕਾਜ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਨਕੇ ਭਾਰੀ  
ਭੁਜਾਨ ਕੇ ਭਾਰੀ ਭਰੋਸੇ (ਬਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਨਾਟਕ ੫ : ੧੦)

"In contemporary times, the Kirpan rules, thus have faith in your own strength."

and warned that :

ਖੜਗ ਹਾਥ ਜਿਨ ਤਜਹੁ ਖੜਗ ਧਾਰਾ ਸਹੇ (ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ)  
"He who foresakes the sword, suffers the might of the sword."

Guru Nanak knew that in the Indian tradition and environment, mere declaration of intent and enunciation of a set of doctrines were not enough. The quicksand-like ethos of the Indian majority tends to suck in, and choke any upright, emergent-evolutions and revolutions. They were absorbed, and then decimated over the years. No wonder, various precursor movements of thought and theology in India ran into all manner of impediments. A social organism, committed to the cause that the great Guru stood for, and his successors built upon had to be created, evolved and made fit, not just for survival, but for creating those individuals who were willing, and capable of fighting for those values. Every individual organism of such a society, and thus every Sikh, was to be self-contained, with all the elements of a kingdom of heaven on earth, and with zeal and commitment to lay down life for his values. Every Sikh would be a *Sant* (saint), every Sikh a *Sipahi* (warrior). To prepare for this, the very soul would have to be forged steel. Hence, the call given by Guru Nanak Dev for embarking on such a faith with resolution and irrevocable commitment.



Thus, the society of disciplined God-fearing soldiers of the divinity, warriors of the Lord had to be structured.

By the time of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Nanak's seeds of *Kirt Karo, Naam Japo, Vand Chhako* had become a reality.

The Sikhs became men with humble souls, but with heads held high. A vibrant society started to function, with Amritsar as its Centre. Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom defines the ultimate steeling of the spirit of man. But this mission would have been incomplete, had he not directed his son, Guru Hargobind, to don the twin swords of *Miri* and *Piri*. Hereafter, the declaration was a call for action; "one shall neither fear nor frighten". The liberated soul of the nation must be fearless. The statement, "Fear no one, frighten no one" was immortalised later by the illustrious Ninth Guru.



Archbishop Desakinis with Sikh troops at Salonika, 1945.

In the evolution of the concept of *warrior-saint*, the Baisakhi of 1699 marks its culmination. The Tercentenary celebrations in 1999 saw the consummation of Guru Gobind Singh's dream.

There have been, since then, countless number of Sikhs, upholding the *sant-sipahi* ethos, the warrior-saints incarnate. History is resplendent with examples of so many—be they minstrels, or workmen, farmers or scholars or saints who demonstrated skills with the sword in battles, living up to the dictates of the Great Guru. To name some, Bhai Mani Singh, Baba Deep Singh, Bhai Gurdas Singh, Banda Bahadur, Sardar Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, "Nawab" Kapoor Singh, Bhai Babak, Mamaji Kirpal Chand, all from the 17th and 18th centuries and then Akali Phula Singh, Bhai Ram Singh—the twentieth century Singhs who fought for liberation of the community's institutions, and those who led the struggle for India's independence. They were all a product of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh's vision and creation. We must remember those simple

Sikhs who, though exploited by the malicious, motivated polity of the day, stood firm in their cause and convictions in the dark eighties of the last century, a decade of terror now behind us. Earlier, in 19th century, the exemplary courage and bravery of the handful of Sikhs at Saragarhi had proved the point in a striking manner.

With this backdrop, Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh's book, *Warrior Saints*, is a superb pictorial documentation of the great heritage and traditions of Sikhs, capturing their style and visage in this role since the middle of the nineteenth century, in particular.

While most pictures and paintings depict the style of the individual, others show the collective soldiery in their grace and silent strength. The image of Sikh soldiers singing *kirtan* in Flanders in 1915 (page 117) demonstrates the faith that lives amongst them. Their commitment to their Guru and their unassailable faith in the Divine Will is reflected in the inseparability of the Sikhs from the *Shabad*. Credit goes to the two young Sikh authors who compiled this book, recording in a splendid manner the superb image of Sikh soldiers marching to war with the *Guru Granth Sahib* being borne ahead, and leading them during the Mesopotamia campaign in 1918 (pages 124-125). A true portrayal of the Sikh essence of life—with his Guru to guide and lead. The Sikh fears nothing. Death becomes only an event in his unity with eternity.

Perhaps no other photograph is more aptly captioned than the one on page 155 where the Archbishop Desakinis of Greece is shown greeting Sikh soldiers "who were wearing both their military and religious dress in interesting contrast to other figures in the image, who are either military or religious in their dress and role".

The hundred or more images selected for the book are, in themselves, extremely powerful, but this book also treats us to an excellent accompanying narrative that not only puts it in its historical context, but also invokes the very essence of the Khalsa's *Chardee Kalaa*, or the spirit buoyant ☪



# Pictorial History of The Sikh Martial Tradition

I recently discovered that the authors had deliberated agonisingly over the choice of title for the above book. Why, one is entitled to ask, when the final choice appears so obvious and apt? Therein lies the answer. The authors have at no stage in their work opted for anything that was in anyway predictable or convenient. Even for the title they were eager to extend the boundaries in search of one that encapsulated the unique perspective which unfolds from their opening page of the book. Their final title, suitable as it is, was thus a concession to the publishers who recognised its marketing potential.

There are no shortages of publications by Sikhs on Sikhs, and as one delving often, albeit amateurishly, into these texts, I am acutely aware of their fairly standard nature. In eschewing objectivity in favour of easy explanations, the authors have almost magically interpreted the exacting and objective demands of modern-day Sikhs. The result is a book that promises to set standards for the future.

The hundred or so images, are in themselves extremely powerful, but this book treats us to an accompanying narrative that not only puts them into historic context but also invokes the very essence of the Khalsa's *Chardee Kalaa*. The authors have resisted the temptation of viewing the martial tradition as some "macho" extension of Sikhism. Instead, they have carefully and rationally articulated the inalienable connection between *Baani* and *Baana* that is so often overlooked or understated.



*Parmjit Singh.*



*Amandeep Singh Madra .*

This is a truly fascinating book, but not because the subject-matter itself is new or innovative. What makes it a compelling reading is the ease and clarity with which the authors have made the hitherto elusive transition between communicating the ideals of the Khalsa and the resultant heroic deeds of its valiant Sikhs.

A Sikh soldier bereft of his spiritual heritage is no soldier at all. It is the legacy that begins with *Ek Onkar* of Guru Nanak's teachings and ends with the *Nische Kar Apni Jeet Karon* of Guru Gobind Singh—a dream that instils the martial qualities as well as the ideals of justice and equality. This in my opinion, is the central message of the book, and one that in itself makes worthy reading, and qualifies for a

large readership.

From the forts of Chamkaur and Anandpur, and from the trenches of Europe to the jungles of Burma, this book paints a remarkable tableau of Sikh courage. Even more remarkably, it defines those epic deeds without resort to any mythical exaggerations and romantic notions of valour. Instead, each episode has been meticulously researched to stand rigorous critical analysis.

It would not be sufficient to regard the book as just a celebration of the Sikh martial tradition. As we stand at the threshold of a new century, it is also a celebration of the emergence of two Sikh scholars who hold such great potential for the future of the *Panth*.

**Harbinder Singh Rana**



# A TRINITY OF COMMANDERS

The Indian martial history harking back to the dawn of civilization and celebrated in song and story, in folklore and fable, was soiled en route for various reasons—inner erosion of the Indian corporate spirit, repeated foreign assaults and the degradation of the native princes and the consequent disintegration of kingdoms and empires, the perfidious colonisation of the national mind, and the dissipation of the culture of dharma, heroism and pieties till the advent of the Sikh soldiery and the instituting of an armed ideology of valour and virtue, of command and compassion during the Mughal period and beyond changed the entire picture. And this saga of service and sacrifice, of glory in arms, of stupendous exploits on land, in water and in the air, unparalleled in its magnificence and magnanimities, became, in course of time, a settled phenomenon of many a form and facet. Thus the line extending from the tempestuous times of the soldier-prince and guru—the Tenth Sikh Master, to the nostalgic days of the sovereignty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh never lost its direction or verve either during the British Raj, or in the days of the rejuvenated, reprimed armed forces of Independent India. Our capsuled story of the three great Sikh soldiers—Rear Admiral Pritam Singh Mahindroo (Navy), Lt. General Harbakhsh Singh (Army) and Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal (Air Force)—has, we trust, all that poetry which we find in the history of arms, wherever the spirit of chivalry abides, in the countries of the East or of the West. Together, the three men of chronicled fame constitute a symbol of the finest tradition in the annals of modern arms. Their voyage “home”—taking of “the ferry” in the glorious year of the tercentenary celebrations of the Khalsa nativity and initiation—thus brings their story full circle. It was a consummation, an arrival and a departure, amidst a gun-salute and a roll of drums.

## LT. GENERAL Harbakhsh Singh (1913-1999)

General Harbakhsh Singh was unquestionably one of the most resolute military commanders of India during the twentieth century.

Born on 1 October 1913, he was among the first batch of officers commissioned from the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in 1934 and his military career of nearly 35 years was acknowledged for his distinguished service of exceptional order at various levels of command.

After serving for a year with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, he was transferred to the 5th Battalion of The Sikh Regiment (47th Duke of Connaught's Own Sikhs) with whom he served on the North West Frontier of undivided India and then went to Malaya when the Indian Army moved two Divisions for the defence of the peninsula in 1941. The 5th Sikhs were part of 22nd Brigade of the 9th Indian Division defending the vital RAF aerodrome near Kuantan. Wounded in action during the severe fighting against advancing Japanese forces, Captain Harbakhsh Singh was amongst those who spent some years as a PoW in Singapore till the Japanese surrender in August 1945. *Still carrying the bullets in his body, Harbakhsh rejoined* the Sikh Regiment and, promoted to Lt.Colonel in 1947, commanded the elite 1st battalion during the historic battle of Shelatang in the Srinagar Valley in November 1947, which turned the tide against the enemy raiders.

In 1948, he took over 163 Infantry Brigade which he led on an independent mission to destroy the enemy strongly established in Pahalgam. After a long and arduous pursuit along high mountain ridges and thick forests, the enemy base at Tithwal was captured, thereby recovering some 6000 sq.miles of Kashmir. Harbakhsh Singh had, in a lightning move, secured all territory from Handwara to the



Lt. General Harbakhsh Singh,  
when Commanding IV Corps in NEFA.



Kishenganga over the Nasta Chusn pass and Tithwal after fighting aggressive battles. He was awarded the Vir Chakra for gallantry and outstanding leadership.

In the years that followed, Harbakhsh Singh took over the famous 5th Infantry Division (*Ball of Fire*) and attended the Imperial Defence College in London in 1958. Thereafter, he held almost all important and key command plus staff appointments in the Western Army till the debacle in the East in October 1962 had him take over the beleaguered IV Corps in Tezpur. Here the ignominious events that followed in



*Sikh troops manning defences in NEFA, November 1962.*

November could well have been reversed had he been allowed to continue as GOC.

As Major General Prem Khanna, who was later to gallantly command the 5th Sikhs in Chhamb during 1971, recorded: "Lt.Gen.Harbakhsh Singh assumed command of IV Corps on 24th October 1962, just after the debacle of Namka Chu and the fall of Tawang. He planned the "Fortress" concept with Sela and Bomdila being prepared as impregnable defence localities, like a knife sticking into the sky. Dirang Dzong was completely rejected, as being akin to a "death well". The steep spurs rising from Jang to Sela would have become the graveyard for the Chinese. Sela with a Division less Brigade, and Bomdila with a Brigade Group were to be strongly held, independent of each other with no reliance on road maintenance when cut off and only to be supplied from the air. The outflanking Chinese would rapidly have cut off themselves and then it would be as to "who was behind whom"! With winter setting in, the Chinese troops would either withdrew or be forced into surrender or perish in large numbers.

All of General Harbakhsh's preparations were nullified when, in a surprise move by Nehru and Menon, Lt.Gen.B.M.Kaul was sent back to IV Corps on 29th October. General Kaul allowed Sela to be weakened when

GOC 4 Division obtained his clearance to move his headquarters and the 65 Brigade down to Dirang Dzong. Harbakhsh had strongly resisted such a move and had asked the GOC to keep his headquarters within the Sela fortress, but Kaul did otherwise. The Chinese disrupted the Indian command and control at will and laid road blocks with impunity. Rudderless, the troops were devoid of information and direction from the Divisional headquarters. The 4th Division (*Red Eagles*) was thus sacrificed and this

*(Then) Brigadier Harbakhsh Singh, leading 163 Infantry Brigade to capture Tithwal, 1948.*



was the main reason for the debacle of the Indian Army in N.E.F.A."

Harbakhsh Singh was a gallant and brave soldier, adept in the handling of troops in changing battlefield scenarios and in strategic and tactical thinking. With vast battlefield experience he was a versatile leader of that era, motivating troops under his command to achieve desired goals. Removing him from command just before the imminent battle of Sela was perhaps the most crucial and unwise decision of the 1962 conflict, a decision that caused the humiliating debacle. History could well have been different had Harbakhsh continued with the IV Corps.

Less than three years later, as GOC-in-C Western



Command, he personally directed the desperate battles in the Punjab during September 1965, with a weak 4th Division and the 2nd Armoured Brigade stoutly holding their defences in the Khem Karan area against Pakistan's crack 1st Armoured and 11th Infantry Divisions even when the Indian Army Chief, General J.N.Chaudhary,



*After the victory at Asal Uttar, 1965.*

had suggested withdrawal to the Beas river, thus virtually surrendering the Punjab! The tables were turned, and Asal Uttar became the graveyard for Pakistan's Army.

Amarinder Singh of Patiala, who served as ADC to General Harbakhsh in 1965 recalled:

"The Western Army offensive across the Punjab border which started at 4.30 a.m. on September 6 went well till Pakistan counter attacked 4th Division on the XI Corps left flank at Khem Karan. The 4th Division, comprising 62nd and 7th Brigades, a strength of six Infantry battalions, had not quite recovered from the drubbing it had received in 1962 at the hands of the Chinese and lost two-and-a-half battalions in a matter of hours, less through enemy action more by desertion, and was virtually overrun. The situation on the 7th afternoon was grim, while the Division fell back to the village of Asal Uftar and

hurriedly prepared a defended sector based on the surviving three-and-a-half battalions and the 2nd Armoured Brigade.

On the 9th, Pakistan's crack 1st Armoured Division, whose deployment was not known to us, attacked the Division. Their operational order was captured by us. The plan was to attack and overrun the weak 4th Division while a strong combat group was to cut the lines of communication of both 4th Division, 7th Division on the Barki axis and finally to cut the GT Road at the Beas Bridge, effectively sealing off XI Corps HQs and Corps troops at Raya, and the LOC of 15th Division in one sweep. The situation was extremely grim and as a consequence New Delhi panicked.

Having returned to HQ Western Army at Ambala from 4th Division at midnight and after a visit to the operations room, the Army Commander retired for three hours rest before leaving at four o'clock the next morning. The instructions to me, his ADC, were not to awaken him unless it was urgent. At 2.30 a.m. the Army Chief, General J.N.Chaudhary, called and spoke to the General and after a heated discussion centered around the major threat that had developed, the COAS ordered the Army Commander to withdraw XI Corps to hold a line on the Beas river. General Harbakhsh Singh refused to carry out this order. The next morning, 4th Division stabilised the position and when the COAS visited command headquarters at Ambala that afternoon, the crisis was over and the subject was not discussed. Had General Harbakhsh carried out these orders, not only would have half of Punjab been under Pakistani occupation but the morale of the Indian Army would have broken, and India could have well been defeated by Pakistan in 1965.

The words once used to describe Field Marshall Lord Wavell, seem apt when describing General Harbakhsh Singh: "He was essentially a soldier's soldier, and takes an assured place as one of the great commanders in military history".

As the Last Post was sounded and the pyre lit, the smoke curled its way into the heavens and the bugle sound reveille, transporting the General to Valhalla, to join the ranks of the many great warriors who once trod this earth, the words of Sir Walter-Scott from *The Lady of the Lake* came to one's mind:



*Lt. Gen. Harbakhsh Singh congratulating (then) Major Ranjit Singh Dyal after the capture of Haji Pir, 1965.*



*"Soldier, rest thy warfare is o'er.  
Dream of fighting fields no more;  
Sleep the sleep that  
knows no breaking,  
Morn of toil, nor night  
of waking".*



## REAR ADMIRAL Pritam Singh Mahindroo (1917-1999)

It has been said that old soldiers never die ... they just fade away. Sailors, when they pass into maritime history, continue to sail and navigate the ethereal seas. As Admiral Pritam Singh Mahindroo did when he passed into history in October 1999.

This legendary mariner commanded destroyers and cruisers, and brought home our first aircraft carrier, the *INS Vikrant* in 1961. Thirty-six years later, the *Vikrant* passed into history at a solemn decommissioning ceremony, presided over by the 80-year Rear Admiral Mahindroo. "Peter" as he was affectionately known was *guru* to many of us, writes his colleague Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh.

In his obituary on Admiral Pritam Singh Mahindroo his erstwhile colleague and later Governor of H.P. Vice Admiral Rusi Gandhi wrote "I was lucky to have served alongside Peter at sea on more than one occasion, and we both commanded ships together on two very happy and memorable occasions. Peter, as Flag Captain,



*The legendary mariner.*



*The carrier INS Delhi, flagship of the Navy.*

always stood up for us young Commanding Officers, entertained our rather self-opiniated feelings about ourselves, but always shrewdly brought us down to earth. One of Peter's endearing qualities was that he was not rank conscious and would often join the fun ..."

Born in Amritsar in 1917, Pritam Singh left the Punjab early in his teens for Bombay where he joined the I.M.M.T.S. *Dufferin*, gaining an "Extra First Class Passing Out Certificate" in 1935, to become a Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Indian Naval Reserve.

Very quickly he made his mark in the service as an accomplished navigator and a practical seaman. Peter was specially selected over the heads of many to be appointed Navigating Officer of the newly-acquired Frigate H.M.I.S. *Godavari* which was commissioned in England in 1942. Peter on the bridge at the pelorus compass had the honour of navigating and leading out of Scapa Flow the huge wartime British Fleet, with the King of England on board, and the Royal Standard at the main.

By the end of the Second World War, Peter was well known in the Service and he was in the first list of reserve officers to be selected for a regular commission in the Royal Indian Navy.



In 1949 Peter was appointed XO of the INS *Rajput*, the 11<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla Leader which was commissioned in England, and later escorted the INS *Delhi* on its historic voyage to Indonesia, carrying the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter and two young grandsons. Peter's professionalism, practical horse sense and his fair but firm discipline was admired and noted by his peers. Shortly after his stint with INS *Rajput*, Peter was appointed Commander of the cruiser INS *Delhi*, which once again he served with distinction, and earned much praise at the Spithead Review of 1951.



*On commissioning of the INS Vikrant with Mrs. Vijaylakshmi Pandit, High Commissioner in the U.K.*

From INS *Delhi*, Peter went as the first Indian D.S. to the Wellington Staff College where he did so well that he took over from the British Chief Instructor. This was a feather in Peter's cap (turban) as it now singled him out, not only as a good seaman, but also as an able and thinking administrator.

Peter's next sea command was the Fleet Flag Ship INS *Delhi*, where once again he showed his prowess as a great Captain and ship handler. Cool, calm, with a measured

command of voice, he handled situations both on the bridge and the quarterdeck with great aplomb. But Peter's finest hour was yet to come.

The first Indian Naval Aircraft Carrier, the INS *Vikrant*, was being refitted at Harland and Wolf Shipyard in Belfast, North Ireland. As this was our first venture in Naval Carrier Aviation, Lord Louis Mountbatten, a great lover of India and the Indian Navy, advised Prime Minister Nehru and others that the *Vikrant* should be commissioned with a British Royal Naval Captain having carrier experience and that the Indian Commanding Officer should understudy him for a period.

This was totally unacceptable to Naval H.Q., and the CNS (Admiral R.D.Katari) appointed Peter to command India's first carrier. This was the biggest test of Peter's career, and it would be an understatement to say that he emerged with flying colours. Admiral Sir John Treacher, a distinguished naval aviator himself, who helped to work up our aircrew both in England and Malta, and a close observer for months at sea on the *Vikrant*, had this to say of Peter: "Performance par excellent". High praise indeed !

Shortly after his command of the *Vikrant*, Rear Admiral Pritam Singh Mahindroo was selected for Flag Rank but because of the vagaries of short three-year tenures, he retired without ever having commanded the Fleet.

One particular incident is recalled by Admiral Satyindra Singh to illustrate Pritam Singh's mature and non-flamboyant leadership, graphically recorded by his Secretary, the then Lieutenant Hugh Gantzer in the naval archives; "Every year, ships of the Royal Navy, the Pakistan Navy, the Royal Ceylon Navy and the Indian Navy used to meet in Trincomalee for joint exercises. We particularly looked forward to the JET hockey matches. As usual, we were pitted against Pakistan.



*The aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant leaving Malta harbour, enroute to Bombay, 1961.*



Till half time no goal had been scored. Suddenly, a Pak player rushed forward to the halfline, the ball almost glued to his stick. Finding no team mate to pass the ball to, he panicked, and took a swipe that sent the ball to the goal from outside the D. The back and the goal-keeper stepped aside grinning, letting the ball roll past in mock courtesy. We filled the air with derisive laughter, but our laughter turned to abject dismay when the soccer-trained British referee blew a shrill, sharp "goal". The Pakis went wild and their players jammed the goal mouth for the rest of the game. We refused to challenge the referee's obviously ignorant decision.

When the match was over, we trooped back to our ships, but the Pakis took out a triumphant procession through the streets of Trincomalee. And that night they circled our ships with their boats, and blaring through loudhailers, hurled the choicest Urdu (Punjabi?) abuses at us. And from their ships, searchlights lanced out and criss-crossed us in searing contempt while more abuses thundered and boomed across Trincomalee Bay.



*Captain of the INS Delhi.*



*Signing out : de-commissioning of the INS Vikrant, 1997.*

Around midnight, the Sikh sailors of *INS Delhi* came in a delegation to their captain. They wanted to lower boats and tackle the Pakistanis. I saw them approaching and knew that they meant business. But the moment they reached the Commanding Officer's door, it opened, and Captain Pritam Singh Mahindroo stood before them. He was dressed in shorts and a shirt, and his hair was tied in a knot at the top of his head.

A Sikh sailor who worked in my office said: "They are humiliating us, sir. This is war"! Captain Mahindroo looked at his men, listened to the yowling invective of the Pakistani sailors. And then he said: "Dogs do not humiliate men". He paused, smiling grimly. "When the time comes to fight as warriors, I will lead you" and then his lips curled in contempt. "For tonight", he said softly, "let the dogs bark".

So there was no war, and the Pakistani Commander apologised the next morning. We later learnt that in every Pakistani ship, the sailors had locked their officers below deck and taken the law into their own hands.

Peter's ashes have been immersed in a river, tributary of a bigger river, which finally carries its waters to the ocean. This is what Peter would have liked. As President John F.Kennedy said in 1962: "We are tied to the ocean, and we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch it, we are going back from whence we came".



## AIR MARSHAL Lal Singh Grewal (1924-1999)

In the everlasting scheme of the universe, the cycle of birth and death is perpetuated: but some men leave deep furrows behind for posterity to record, and for others to aspire. Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal — “Laloo” to his near ones — was one such person created by the Almighty for the benefit of generations to come.

As Air Vice Marshal Surjit Singh Malhotra writes; “Personal sentiment apart, I would like to remember some of his lesser known, yet significant achievements — the major ones have been recorded and applauded for long. He was ten years older than me and eleven years my senior in service. I first met him in June 1953 when I had just reported for flying training at No.1 AFA, Begumpet, just before he was to leave for the Fairchild Packet Conversion course in the United States. By then his reputation as a fighter, transport and bomber pilot was reverberating in our flight offices and class rooms.



*Lal Singh Grewal as a Flying Officer.*

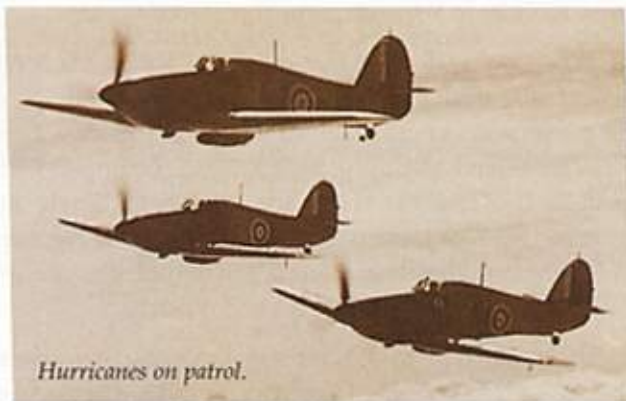
Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal (LSG) was born in Ludhiana on 9 March, 1924, and after graduation from Lahore joined the fledgling Indian Air Force's Initial Training Centre at Walton in Lahore in late September 1942. He was commissioned a year later at Ambala from where he proceeded for operational training to Risalpur, and then to the Burma front flying Hurricane fighter-bombers first with No.9 Squadron, and then with No.10 Squadron, upto the end of the Second World War.

In a rare interview with Keith Flory of *The Statesman*, the Air Marshal recalled his more than 100 operational missions flown out of Cox's Bazar, Bawli Bazar and Ramree Island. Operating Hurricane IICs, they supported troops on the ground, escorted Dakotas on supply drops and flew some interdiction sorties in strikes behind the Japanese lines.

Although the IAF had just a few squadrons at the time, the young air arm more than acquitted itself. “We



*Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal being honoured by the President of India.*



*Hurricanes on patrol.*



had to work a little extra, prove ourselves in a competitive spirit. Our airmen looked up to us. I think we were a little better than the others!" "And with Squadron Commanders like Arjan Singh, Baba Meher Singh and Asghar Khan (who later rose to positions of both military and political power in Pakistan) around, it was indeed a good show that they put on.

LSG recalled: "I was in a squadron commanded by an officer of the RAF, a most accomplished pilot. Squadron



*The B-24 Liberator heavy bomber.*

Leader R.F.T. Doe was a veteran of the Battle of Britain with 20 confirmed kills", On his tunic he sported the DSO, DFC and Bar. "We learnt a lot in Burma. It gave the IAF valuable experience".

Once, when LSG was about to take off, Doe pointed out that he was not carrying his jungle-survival kit. "What will you do if you are shot down"? The reply had the RAF officer momentarily stunned. "I will join the Indian National Army"! However once the humour sank in, Doe appreciated the joke, and was to recollect this for decades, whenever LSG met Doe in the U.K.

In 1946, LSG joined the IAF's Display Flight, under the legendary "Baba" Meher Singh, equipped with Spitfire Mk.VIII's which carried out flying demonstrations to enthuse India's youth, all the way from Kohat in the North West Frontier to Trivandrum in Travancore-Cochin.

When it was decided that the Royal Indian Air Force should raise an air transport element, LSG was handpicked for conversion to multi-engined aircraft at Chaklala, near Rawalpindi and Mauripur, near Karachi. Equipped with Douglas C-47 Dakotas, under Sqn.Ldr.Shivdev Singh, the fledgling No.12 Squadron was moved in haste to Agra on 13 August 1947, thereafter flying in and out of the tragically-partitioned Punjab with refugees and officials.

The moment of truth came some months later, when Dakotas saved the Vale of Kashmir for India. The raiders



*Converting to the Fairchild Packet in South Carolina.*

were already on the outskirts of Srinagar. At dawn on 27 October 1947 LSG and a handful of Dakotas flew troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. Sikh Regiment, into the dusty airstrip at Srinagar, unknowing whether this had already fallen to the raiders. The rest is history, including the incredible flying effort of the Dakotas in and out of Poonch through 1948, the besieged town being held against great odds by Brigadier Pritam Singh and his gallant band of defenders.

When the pioneers of the "new" Air Force decided to raise a heavy bomber force, LSG was chosen as the Flight Commander of the newly raised No.5 Squadron at Kanpur, equipped with the 4-engined Consolidated Vultee B-24 Liberator, scrapped by the US Army Air Force and RAF after the Second World War. After doing his heavy bomber course with the Royal Air Force at Scampton, LSG took over the arduous task of converting IAF aircrew to the "big boys"!

In 1954, then Wg.Cdr Lal Singh Grewal was selected to induct the first tactical transport aircraft for the IAF, the Fairchild C-119G Packet and spent several months on a conversion course with the United States Air Force in South Carolina. LSG was the first to convert, followed by "Chandu" Raje. The revolutionary aircraft with rear-loading clamdoors (popularly referred to as the Flying Boxcars) was to become the backbone for the airlift of heavy supplies, including armoured fighting vehicles to airfields in Ladakh and other difficult mountainous





frontier areas. LSG pioneered Packet operations to Chushul, near the Chinese border and evolved special landing and take off techniques in the ultra-high altitude areas.

In 1963, in wake of the disastrous frontier war with China, LSG was hand picked to establish the very sensitive Aviation Research Centre (ARC), which he did most effectively, being Director of Operations for several years reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office and Cabinet Secretariat.

LSG's dedication to duty is well illustrated by a single example—and there were so many! In the early sixties, the Indian Air Force was receiving large numbers of new aircraft types from Britain and France, including Mysteres, Hunters, Canberras, Gnats. The frequency of courier flights to Europe were high and the usual round trip from Agra via Delhi to the U.K. and back took seven days. Most air-crew would prolong these on one excuse or the other. Then Wing Commander Lal Singh Grewal was aware of this tendency and so, as to set an example, flew one important courier himself, being back at base in just 70-hours even after availing the mandatory 24-hours off from flying duty.



*The Fairchild C-119G Packet, or "Flying Boxcar".*



*In conference with senior Army officers in Kashmir.*

Air Vice Marshal S.S.Malhotra continues: "After six years with the ARC, LSG reverted to the Indian Air Force, following an honourable and distinguishable career graph through challenging staff and command appointments which included command of an operational base, Director of Air Intelligence, Air Officer Commanding J&K, Deputy Chief of Air Staff, AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command and finally, as Vice Chief of Air Staff before he retired on 31 December 1980, after 38 years of distinguished service.

LSG was a man of many talents: not only did he work out the long term flying training plans for the Indian Air Force to exploit the instructional and standardisation potential of IAF aircrew, but was deeply religious, highly interested in astronomy and promoted the advantages of homeopathic cures.

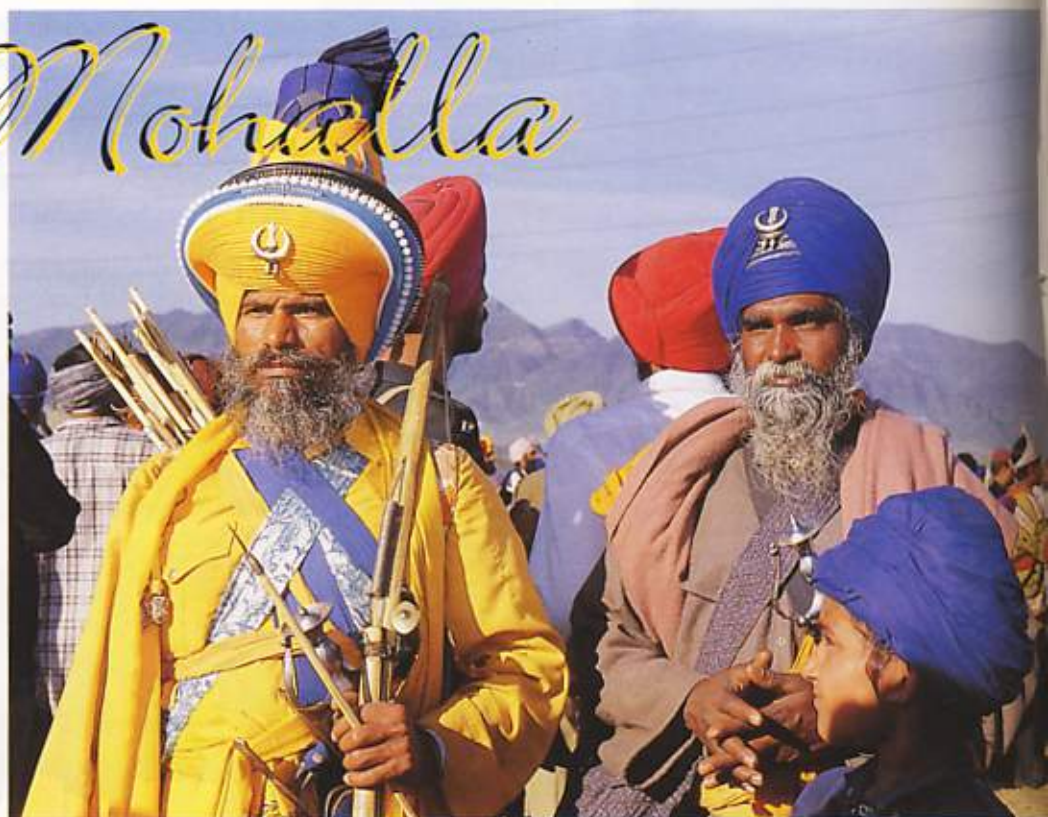
Professionally, Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal was perhaps the tallest and most versatile aviator of his days, having flown 34 types of aircraft — fighters, transports, bombers, helicopters, light, medium and heavy— aggregating 9483 hours, all accident free. He lived an austere, healthy life, and met his *Akal Purukh* amidst his near ones".



# Hola Mohalla

**H**ola Mohalla is celebrated at Anandpur Sahib every year on the day after Holi, the Hindu festival of colour and frolic. This practice was started by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib after the battle of Nirmohgarh, and the Hola Mohalla was first organised on Chet Badi 1, Samat 1757 (1700 A.D.). On this day, mock-battles were held between groups of Sikh soldiers dressed in colourful attires associated with the Nihangs today, as military manoeuvres and exercises.

According to the Puranic myths, Holika, sister of the demon-king Harnakash, was under the protection of Lord Shiva. At the behest of her brother, Holika tried to burn alive her own nephew,



Prahlad, who was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Divinity intervened. Instead, Holika was burnt to death, and Prahlad was saved. The Gurbani cites this incident from mythology as an example of protection and survival of the good through His Grace. A festival of colour was celebrated all over in the Indian social scene. Holi of the Brij associated with the legendary Lord Krishna and his 'raas' was well known.



Guru Gobind Singh in his own unique style, in the words of Dr. Dhram Singh ..... demythologises ....these myths and re-interprets them with a view to relating them to the contemporary social reality. According to these Puranic myths, the intervention of divine incarnations of god/goddess as was imperative to restore righteousness in human affairs. Instead, we find that the Guru creates a new myth: belief in the inherent potentiality of each man and woman—high or low—to perform as Chandi, Rama, Krishna et al, did as per this Akal Purakh's will. In the Sikh spirit, the Guru had created the Khalsa, a living reality, a new 'myth'."



The Holi festival in the Indian scene eventually lost its purpose. Holika is burnt on the day of the Holi just like Ravana is consigned to flames at Dusshera each year. However, the good and the truthful are still being subjected to endless ordeals. There was no thanksgiving to the Lord, but frivolities and vulgarities were committed while playing Holi. In fact, by the end of the 17th century, such festivals had become an exercise in sheer fun and levity.

After the Baisakhi of 1699 a new nation, a new panth, the Khalsa had been given the symbol of the *Khanda*; the community of Sikhs had become an instrument of His Will for the protection of the poor and for the upliftment of the *Sant*.

Guru Arjan Dev had seen a new meaning in the joys of the festival of colours. In *Raag Basant*, the Guru observes that in doing service to the saintly and the pious, one experiences the joyfulness and buoyancy of the Festival of Holi.

*Pictures by Deidi von Schaeuwen  
taken at Anandpur Sahib*





❖ Going through the Premiere Issue of the *Nishaan* we were deeply impressed by the fascinating account of intellectual development of the Khalsa in respect of the vision and values of the past, and present, as are brilliantly displayed. A marvellous piece of artistic heritage of the Sikhs is also exhibited ("Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms").

I owe a special debt of gratitude for your devoting ten pages of your dignified issue on the *Saint of Pingalwara*, Rev. Bhagat Puran Singh Ji.

**Dr. Inderjit Kaur**  
President, All India Pingalwara Society,  
Amritsar 143001

❖ Gur fateh!

The *Nishaan* is an excellent publication and the quality of the print material is what I appreciated most. It makes it a worthwhile collector's item!

Congratulations for a most timely and much needed quality publication for the Sikhs.

**Ranjit Kaur, Melbourne, Australia**

❖ My name is Jaswinder Kaur and I am writing on behalf of Sukdev Singh, who is my husband and founder of the Sri Dasmesh Band. We live in Malaysia. I help to organise and coordinate the activities of the Sri Dasmesh Band and the Sri Dasmesh Keertan Jatha.

We had the pleasure to read the Sikh community's new illustrated journal the *Nishaan*, via his cousin in Melbourne, Ranjit Kaur, who is the editor of the *Sikh Link*.

We toured London and San Francisco during the recent Vaisakhi celebrations, and are inspired by people who are into community work as we have a long way to go in the field of community development. We in Malaysia are active in various fields.

The *Nishaan's* approach, we are convinced, has the Guru's Hand, bringing and igniting people all over the world to wake up and hear the real call of Vaisakhi. The real work is out there. Shahbashi! We are proud of you. We look forward to a spirited working relationship with yourselves.

**Jasminder Kaur**  
Sri Dasmesh Community Centre  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

❖ Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fate of the Sikh nation has been closely linked with that of the British. The unique life of Duleep Singh personified the imperial grandeur, intrigue and violence of that era. The ramifications of the annexation of the Sikh Kingdom continues to resonate even to this day.

# FROM OUR READERS



As a nation which is barely three hundred years old, the Sikhs have a history remarkable for the richness and depth of it's spiritual, cultural and martial heritage. This site aspires to be a gateway into the shared history that continues to live even today.

The new URL for the Maharajah Duleep Singh Centenary Trust is :

<http://www.mdsct.org.uk>

❖ I saw a reference to the *Nishaan* and thought that I should write to you.

I once talked with an elderly person in Reno, Nevada some 15 years ago. He was from the House of Lords, a parliamentarian in London at the time when India's independence was being debated. He told me that every day they would collect and read all types of newspapers from India. However, there was no Sikh newspaper to learn of the Sikh views on independence, only Hindu and Muslim newspapers.

Till today, there is no Sikh newspaper from New Delhi which gives the Sikh perspective on national, international matters or on Indian parliament bills, their pros and cons. Sikh demands, needs, views are not addressed as they should be. It will be good idea to start some newspaper to let the world know about the Sikh views on national and international matters. Sikhs should have intelligence on all matters of national life with answers for various situations. There should be editors, reporters and commentators to write about the Sikh views.

That Member of Parliament also told me that the the British Government waited for the Sikhs to state what they wanted, to retain links with Britain and keep the north of India semi-autonomous. Sikhs then numbered nearly 35% of the Army. After 5 to 10 years the British would have left the northern parts of the sub-continent for the

Sikhs. However, the Sikhs never seriously considered this.

**Dr.S.S.Bajwa**  
Porterville, CA 93257, USA

❖ Stumbling upon the *Nishaan* as it were, celebrating the "Tercenary of the Birth of Khalsa", at a kiosk displaying artifacts of Sikh heritage of the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, a dear friend of mine, aware of my writing for *The Sikh Review* and *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, was thoughtful enough to bring back a copy for me.

If the Premiere Issue is anything to go by, the future bodes well. The quality of contributors, the presentation, the printing and newsprint are all *par excellence*.

**Bhupinder Singh Mahal**  
Dundas, Ontario, Canada

❖ In the West there is mounting interest in the Sikh religion because of the publicity given by the BBC World Service Radio and TV. They also have a web site on Sikhism.

A suggestion : put at least one article of the *Nishaan* on the BBC website.

By the way if anyone from this Baltic Republic wishes to come to India especially with a view to having a "conducted tour" of the Sikh World, is there any organisation or agency who could cater for this ?

**Ausra Leoskaite - Singh**  
2012 Vilnius, Lithuania

(By the way Ausra in my language means "Dawn". Our Lithuanian language which is derived from Sanskrit, has many words that are similar to Punjabi. It is most intriguing and interesting. I shall send a contribution for the next issue of *Nishaan*).

❖ I have gone through the *Nishaan* which has really interested me and I congratulate you for bringing out such a beautiful and informative journal for the Sikh community.

**S.N.Prabhakar**  
"Crossword" New Delhi and Mumbai

❖ I have gone through the first issue of your magazine, *Nishaan* and was delighted to note that right from the title page to the last it is elegantly produced and nicely and wisely edited. The articles and other information are studded with rare pictures, superb by any standard.

It requires a lot of acumen to bring out such a majestic magazine and of course huge funds too. You have added new dimensions in the realm of Sikh publications with this proud presentation.

It is good luck for all of us that this journal is receiving the patronage of Dr.Darshan Singh ji Maini, a jewel among Sikhs.

**Sarup Singh, Chairman,**  
Alag Shabad Yug Ludhiana