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**VIVE LE PUNJAB !
THE SIKH WORLDVIEW**

**THE LEGEND OF TAPOVAN
EXHIBITION AT TORONTO**



THE ORDER OF GURU GOBIND SINGH
THE LEGEND OF TAPOVAN
THE SIKH WORLDVIEW

Cover: "The Order of
Guru Gobind Singh"
(Photo: Lafont)

IV / 2000

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Outrage and Apology

When the NDA Government decided to set up a new Commission to go into the traumatic catastrophe of the November '84 massacre of innocent Sikhs involving the events precipitated by *Operation Bluestar*, there was a certain kind of stir in the Sikh Community, and a hope that the gruesome tragedy with its hidden horrors and skeletons would soon be given a free and open airing, and that all the blackguards on either side of the battle line, the Congress Machiavels and the Akali hotheads and Quislings still in business, and some still in power (having changed their parties and politics) would, at last, be nailed down, and brought to book. A political decision or another ploy, it remains to be seen if the Vajpayee government with all its inherent contradictions and complexities would be seen doing the right thing. Meanwhile, the one-member Commission under retired Supreme Court judge, Mr. G.T. Nanavati has initiated the proceedings. And now that the high-sounding announcement has raised the pitch of expectations, its *authenticity* is clearly at stake. In politics, questions of morality and justice are almost always laughed out of court, and the record of the NDA government's faux pas and promises in several areas of national interest and integrity isn't encouraging,

to put it mildly. But having committed itself in Parliament, any retraction or stone-walling is likely to incense the Sikh sensibility now that the talk of autonomy in Kashmir and consequently in other states and devolution of power are a matter of intense concern and argument, and the national imagination is almost on the boil.

These very uncomfortable thoughts are actually a prelude to a signifier that may yet prepare the ground for the smooth functioning of the proposed Commission—the question of State apology to an aggrieved and maligned community which has, thanks to the Punjabi *joie d'être* and high-spiritedness, well by now put that dark decade behind its back. The Khalistan bogey is securely in the bag, for the idea, in the first instance, had no more than a *ghostly* reality which, however, changed into a *ghastly* reality, such being the nature of the outrage, and such being the nature of the Sikh psyche. Thus, the long-due apology from Parliament, side-tracked, derailed several times once again becomes a live issue, for it now connects with another outrage and another apology—the infamous *Emergency* of 1975 which was lately the subject of so many panel-discussions on TV, this being the year of its *carbon* “jubilee”. It's of course, a delicate subject, and that's why I would, first of all, seek to put the question of national *retrospective* apologies in a larger, historical and reflective perspective.

History, as far down as we can go, affirms the fact that state massacres of powerless communities is a plague whose terms lie in the body politic of a nation at a given point of time. And since some of these horrendous happenings become soon enough a part of the abused or alienated community's folksongs and fables, of its bibles and sagas of fortitude and survival, the *racial or communal unconscious* becomes *conditioned* and begins to function in a dark way. In fact, Freud

believed that the *unconscious* had a *structure* which later Lacan elaborated to say that the "unconscious is structured like a language". And when generations and centuries pass into history, certain *psychic wounds* of a corporate nature assume at the conscious, intellectual level a certain pattern and a 'metaphysical' aspect and a *mystique* of suffering (as, for instance in the case of the Jews driven out of Jerusalem millennia ago) become then, an *abiding* condition, and the deep sense of injury becomes a long cry for justice—and even revenge down the corridors of time. "Revenge", wrote Bacon in one of his essays "is wild justice" and no wonder, it remains an active condition of the mind for the emotion is imbibed with the mother's milk. And when persecution of a community becomes a settled state or church or societal 'sport' over centuries, and is further complicated by horrors whose magnitude compels "the imagination of disaster" (as in Nazi Germany) to seek victims and scapegoats, such Freudian concepts as *masochism* and *sadism* assume a deep umbilical aspect and the insensate hatred of a race, a people, a faith has a genetic pattern and energy. And it's not easily dissipated. One could cite examples of this kind of pathology from almost each religion or nation. For no nation or faith can boast of a snow-white history. "Once a man starts opening the *historical rights* of eels, no one could predict where his slippery evidence might run" wrote James A Michener in this historical novel *The Source*. The same is true of historical wrongs. So the point I am labouring to establish is: at what time or stage does such a deep, old injury which has become an *abstraction* deserve to be forgiven and forgotten? Why are generations after generations carrying a huge load of fossilised past when the entire context and the entire world indeed, have moved whole continents away? The *residues* lingering in the corporate seriousness have to be vigilantly taken out of the system even though the ideologues of such lethal views would always continue to rationalise irrational sentiments in the name of one ideology or another, one faith or another.

However, such an argument would not do if the tragic occurrences—holocausts, massacres are still a live issue and the victims are not some forgotten numbers of history, but your own kinsmen, your neighbours, your compatriots even of this hour and are waiting for the day of justice and amends. And since the Emergency of 1975 and the 1984 massacre of the Sikhs in a planned, organised way are grim reminders of the continuing injustice and indignities, an apology by the nation to its own aggrieved victims becomes, more than ever, a moral imperative. Though the villain in each case is the Indira-Rajiv Congress, it's now for the NDA government to seize the moment, and do the country's Parliament proud. Several top Congress leaders in their own way have offered such apologies, out of expediency in most cases, but what remains to be done is to put the matter on the Statute so that this act of apology serves in future to humanise our polity.

The distinguished Harvard neo-Freudian Christian thinker, Paul Tillich, has, in his book, *The Eternal Now*, made a forceful plan for forgetting old communal injuries. As he puts it, "Every growth displays its conquered past some times in the form of scars", but goes on to add, "All life has received the gift of forgetting." And more beautifully, he continues "Forgetting in spite of remembering is forgiveness." And arguing further, Tillich recalls the Greek concept of Kairos or "the right moment." Though his use of the concept has a much larger historical meaning involving moments of change in human consciousness, I use the idea here for a smaller, specific purpose.

Yes, it's "the right-moment" for Parliament to put on record its solemn apologies—in respect both of the Emergency excesses and the anti-Sikh chain of events from Operation "Blue Star" to the holocaust of November 1984.

Vive Le

*The French Role In the Building of
Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Army*



*The Fauji-i-khas (Maharaja Ranjit Singh's "Royal Army") on
parade in Lahore: detail from August Schœffl (Photo : Lafont).*

Punjab!

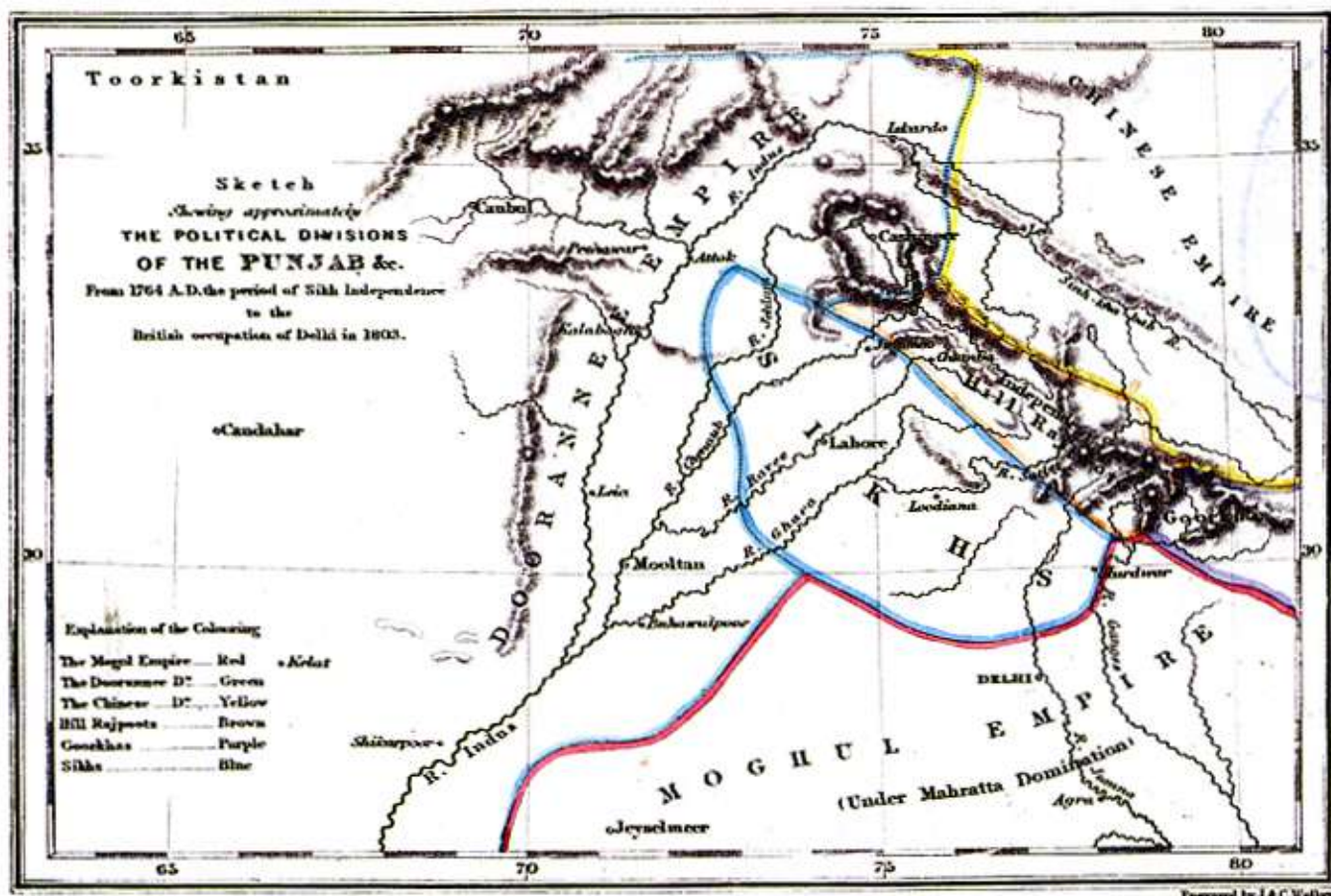


The Making of a Frontier

In 1802 began demarcation of the border between the Marathas and the Sikhs, or to put it more accurately, between the territories under Aligarh (Maratha) and Delhi (Mughal) authority (including the Cis-Sutlej Sikh States), and the ones under Ranjit Singh and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia's hegemony. In this tricky job of negotiating and drawing of the frontier, Louis Bourquien, a French officer of the "Brigades of Hindustan", created by General de Boigne, now under the command of General Perron, was assisted by Ganga Ram, his articulate and amiable *Diwan*. From a Kashmiri Pandit family settled in Delhi, Ganga Ram was most helpful in negotiating with the Sikh States on behalf of Bourquien, and his exertions were to be crowned by a meeting between Ranjit Singh and Perron. The British were extremely apprehensive of a Maratha-Sikh alliance against them and launched their attack before any deal could be struck between the two most powerful Indian independent states. In 1803, by destroying the "French" brigades of Hindoostan, Calcutta brought the East India Company's (EIC) North West frontier to the southern bank of the river Sutlej.

British on the Sutlej : 1803-1809

Ganga Ram went back to Delhi in 1803. Between 1803 to 1807 the East India Company had acquired enough "ceded and conquered territories" to digest and did not care much about its new North West Frontier. Begum Sombre and her "French" brigade at Sardhana continued to control the Doab till her death in 1836, and James Skinner, with his "Yellow Boys" positioned at Hansi, was entrusted with the policy of Haryana and the Sutlej border, which was nothing but Bourquien's policy, implemented by his former associates and officers. Calcutta woke up to these areas only in 1807 when Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I of Russia, during their meeting at Tilsit, decided upon a common drive against British hegemony in India. English diplomatic missions were sent to Iran and Afghanistan to prevent these countries from joining the Franco-Russian coalition. One such emissary was sent to the Punjab, but the only tangible success of Charles Metcalfe during his mission to Lahore was the seduction



Original map included in "History of the Sikhs. From The Origin of the Nation to The Battle of the Sutlej" by John Davey Cunningham (1849).

of a beautiful young girl, maybe a relative of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whom he never married, but who bore him several children. Not really satisfied with the outcome of their diplomatic mission to Lahore, the British suddenly sent a flying column to their NW Frontier under the command of Colonel David Ochterlony, an excellent officer but not a diplomat. Calcutta (and Delhi) did not know exactly what to do in these areas. They then remembered that they had an expert at hand in Delhi, and Ganga Ram was appointed political adviser to Ochterlony during his mission on the Punjab border. Without entering into details of the 1808-1809 negotiations between Ranjit Singh and the British, the settlement arrived at between the two parties was mainly the one which had been elaborated by Bourquien and Ganga Ram, and approved by Perron, in 1802. When the agreement was signed, and Ranjit Singh confined to the northern side of the Sutlej river, Ganga Ram was politely sent back to his obscurity by the Raj.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Plans to consolidate the Punjab Kingdom

After these negotiations which removed the possibility of Sikh expansion eastwards, Ranjit Singh considered the problem of the modernisation of his state, in order to consolidate his position and prevent a coalition of his other neighbours, all of whom belonged to the Dar ul-Islam, and were eager to re-establish their authority on Lahore and the rich, profitable parts of the Punjab. The most threatening ones were from Multan, Sindh, the Derajat, Peshawar and Kashmir, all Mughal provinces ceded by Mohammed Shah to Nadir Shah in 1739, and heavily colonised by Afghan tribes and families in the 1760s. These Muslim powers were backed by Iran, Turan (Central Asia) and Afghanistan. For his own survival, Ranjit Singh needed a better administration in order to collect more revenues and develop the infrastructure of his kingdom. He also needed modern armed forces to counter the threats from within as well as the external threats not only of the Dar ul-Islam, but also the British.

The Modernisation Drive

Sir Thomas Munro and the Duke of Wellington officially attributed the Marathas' collapse of 1803-1805 to their quest for modernisation, but this was part of the anti-French propaganda at the time which



Maharaja Ranjit Singh at "The Court of Lahore" (August Schoeff)

had the supplementary advantage of restricting the newly-conquered or allied states to their traditional system of warfare: the British regiments put at their disposal (and at their expense) a "subsidiary" system of alliances and retained for the next fifty years the monopoly on modern discipline and weaponry. Indian historians like S. Sen (for the Marathas) and S.P. Sen (on the French in India) follow the same discourse, but John Pemble (1976) did justice to this theory, recalling that in 1818, it took only a couple of weeks for the English regiments to end the Pindari war which was entirely conducted by the Marathas with irregular cavalry. With his "one eye", Ranjit Singh saw Holkar and his numerous irregular troops driven upto Amritsar in 1805 by the small army of Lord Lake. In 1822 Ranjit Singh's 3000 "irregulars" failed in Whadni against the few regular troops of Captain Murray. There was therefore no doubt in the Maharaja's mind that his irregular forces were no match for the East India Company's Native Infantry, not to speak of the King's Own who were the main force against the French-trained brigades during the first Sikh War. But keeping in mind the desertion of the Anglo-Indian officers of the "French" brigades of Hindustan in 1803, he had to be sure not to entrust his elite force to such officers of mixed British parentage.

Ganga Ram Joins Maharaja Ranjit Singh

In 1813 Ganga Ram, still in Delhi, received an invitation from Maharaja Ranjit Singh to join him in Lahore. The Maratha Waqils immediately informed Poona that the "*Diwan* of Lewis Sahib" had joined the Sikhs. His first assignment was modernisation of the artillery, but he was also requested to organise and direct a *daftar* (ministry), which quickly became the kingdom's most important such. In 1814, Ganga Ram brought in his son, Ajudhya Prasad, who became the *bakhshi* of the regular units of the Punjab army in 1819. Three years later, Ajudhya was appointed *bakhshi* of the *Fauj-i-khas*, and he was one of the best and most trusted officers of Generals Allard and Ventura. In 1815 Ganga Ram's nephew, Dina Nath, also came to Lahore, and after Ganga Ram's death in 1826, it was Dina Nath who succeeded him as head of the *daftar*, becoming one of the most powerful and influential ministers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the 1830s. Diwan Dina Nath, whom the British nicknamed "the Talleyrand of the Punjab" because of his astute and unrelenting opposition to their occupation of Lahore (1846-1849), was a close friend of the French officers with Ranjit Singh. These connections between France and the Punjab before the arrival of Allard and Ventura in Lahore in 1822 have not been fully analysed. They are however important since they formed the political background of the French presence in the Kingdom of the Punjab.

Military Reforms

In the military field, the matter was no less complex. The "French" brigades of Hindustan had officially disappeared, but James Skinner, who was trained by de Boigne, Perron and Fleury, remained in charge of Haryana and the Sutlej border till his death in 1841. Of course, his cavalry was now part of the EIC's army, but many officers and soldiers of the brigades who were not taken were looking for employment, and they found this in the Kingdom of the Punjab. As soon as the Maratha Waqils at Lahore started sending their reports to Poona (January 1811), we find a number of *Kumedan* being referred to, the Persian military title derived from the French "Commandant" in the 1750s, and by 1812 there was mention of Kumedan Sheikh Basawan, who, along with Ajudhya Prasad, was among the very first local officers to join the *Fauj-i-khas*. Basawan had been trained in the British army, and had fought against the French in Egypt in the late 1790s. His *paltan khas* (*Paltan*, from the French "Peloton") was the first

Punjabi unit placed by Ranjit Singh under Allard and Ventura in 1822, and it is Sheikh Basawan who, as brigadier of the *Fauj-i-khas*, stormed the Khyber Pass with his 5,000 Punjabi troops in July 1839 and reached Kabul, from where they returned intact to Peshawar and Lahore before winter set in.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

All said and done, whatever military manpower was available in the subcontinent prior to 1816 were soldiers and officers who had been trained according to the late 18th century systems of warfare. Just after 1815, British officers and troops, who had been fighting the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in Europe, started moving to India, and among them were some veterans of Waterloo. The British during the preceding 25 years (1790-1850) were hardly concerned to impart more modern technologies to the Indians (or Punjabis) of warfare. It was the luck of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to be informed in March 1822 that two *Farenghis*, "Ulloor" and "Ventoor", had arrived from Persia to Shadara, just across the river Ravi from Lahore. They were not looking for employment, but requested the Maharaja's permission to take some rest at Lahore and visit the city.

Creation and Organisation of the Fauj-i-khas

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Ganga Ram, who had not forgotten the desertion of Anglo-Indian officers of Perron's brigades in 1803, were convinced that Allard and Ventura were not British agents trying to infiltrate the armed forces of Lahore, the Maharaja soon entrusted them with the objective of raising and training a modern army of integrated forces: infantry, cavalry and artillery. It took the French officers three years to organise this *Fauj-i-khas* ("Special"—with the meaning of Royal—Army), also called "*Francesse Campo*" French army, (though Ventura was Italian) and it was immediately baptised "French Legion" by British intelligence. By 1826 the *Fauj-i-khas* was composed of the following units:

Infantry : *Paltan-i-khas*, Colonel Sheikh Basawan.

Paltan Dewa Singh.

Paltan Sham Sota (raised in 1823)

Paltan Gurkha (transferred to the *Fauj-i-khas* in 1823)

Cavalry : *Rajman Sheikh Qamar ud-Din*, later on Lansia (Lancers)

Rajman Daragun Anwal (First Dragoon)

Rajman Daragun Dugan (Second Dragoon, raised in 1823)



Frontpiece of the Military Manual of the Army of the Punjab. Maharaja Ranjit Singh on the left, and facing him are General Allard (second from right) and General Ventura (third from the right).

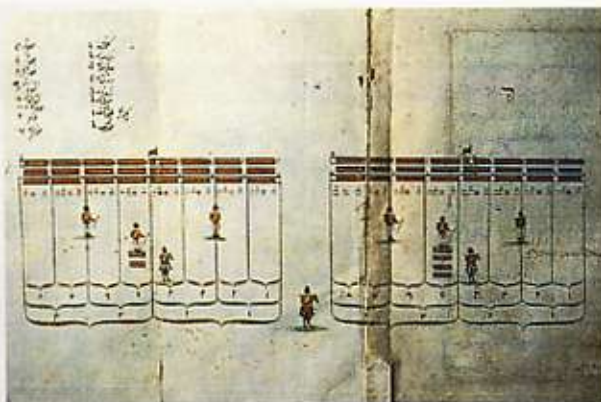
Artillery : Division under Misr Dewan Chand, 40 guns.

Division under Ilahi Bakhsh, 40 guns.

Division under Amir Chand, 12 guns.

Division Mirza Muezzin Ali, 15 guns (artillerie montée).

Division Sultan Mohammed, 15 guns (artillerie montée).



Training and Description

We have two interesting descriptions of the *Fauj-i-khas* in 1826-1827, the first by Dr. Murray who came to Lahore to attend the Maharaja, the second by Claude Martine Wade, the British Political Agent at Ludhiana in charge of spying on the French officers of Ranjit Singh. His Christian name, Claude Martine, came from Major General Claude Martin, of Lucknow fame, who was a close friend of Cl. M. Wade's father and accepted to be the godfather of his little son. Of brilliant mind, Cl.M. Wade, who spoke French fluently, was posted at Ludhiana in 1823, as soon as "Calcutta" was informed that French officers of Napoleon had been appointed by Ranjit Singh to modernise his army.

During his sojourn in Amritsar, Wade could not meet the French officers. He had of course taken the first available opportunity to have a look at their camp and parade, observing that the French Legion "appeared to be a remarkably fine body of men." He also noticed that the French officers had adopted the tricolour flag "as the distinguishing ensign of their Corps." But shortly before his departure, he was suddenly invited to a parade of the *Fauj-i-khas* by the Maharaja. Here are some extracts from Wade's description of that parade:

"In proceeding to join the Raja on the morning of the 12 [June 1827] I observed the plain where the review were held occupied by the whole body of the troops under the command of Messrs. Allard and Ventura. They were formed in one line, the infantry on the right, the cavalry on the left, and had a very martial appearance. On approaching [...] I noticed a French officer [...] whom the Raja introduced to me as M. Allard, adding that he was the cleverest of all his officers.

The cavalry commanded by M. Allard consists of two regiments of Dragoons and one of Lancers. The Dragoons are mostly Sikhs and wear the Sikh turban. The Lancers are chiefly Pathans from Hindustan[...]. There are however two troops of Sikhs in that corps [...].

The Legion of infantry commanded by M. Ventura is composed of four battalions of Sikhs and one of Gorkhas and Purbiahs. [...] M. Ventura put his Legion through several manoeuvres which the Corps executed with a steadiness and precision that would be difficult to excel. Their formation into close columns, their march and deployment into line were performed with such a closeness and accuracy as to surprise the whole party. It was indeed impossible not to admire the high degree of perfection to which M. Ventura had brought his Legion. He was the only mounted officer in the field, and the facility with which he directed the movements of the whole corps evidently showed that he was an officer of skill and ability. With the review concluded by the Legion marching past the Raja in open columns



The military manual of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, dictated by Allard and Ventura in Persian. All the words of command are in French. Illustrations by Imam Bakhsh Lahori. Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar. (Photos: Lafont)



Illustration of a drill in the manual.



Maharaja Ranjit Singh with officers of the Fauj-i-khas and Kharak Singh, Sher Singh, Naunehal Singh.

of grand Division and, after expressing the pleasure I had derived from it, I retired to camp."

The Infantry regiments of the *Fauj-i-khas* remained more or less the same till 1846, their numerical strength fluctuating between 4,000 to 5,000 men. The cavalry, about 3,000 strong in 1823, was down to two regiments (2,000 men, of light cavalry) by 1830, and one regiment by 1833. But when Allard returned from France in 1837 he raised two regiments of Cuirassiers (heavy cavalry) which were posted in Peshawar under the command of Colonel Mouton. The artillery ultimately came under the sole command of Daroga Ilahi Bakhsh. There is no specific mention of the strength of the artillery of the *Fauj-i-khas* in the Khalsa Darbar Records. We can infer from the artillery of General Court in 1837 that one gun corresponded to 37 men (10 to 15 servants per gun, the rest being conductors, workers, grass-cutters etc.), which would give the artillery of the *Fauj-i-khas* a numerical strength of 4,514 men for 122 guns in 1823, but this is a speculation. The *Fauj-i-khas* in its maximum capacity was therefore about 10,000 strong, although this strength fluctuated due to the transfer of artillery units to other brigades and the reduction of the cavalry forces in the late 1820s and early 1830s.



Other Brigades

In 1826 two other "French" officers, Court (French) and Avitabile (Italian), joined the Sikh Army and raised their own brigades, which consisted of the following units in 1837 :

Brigade of General Court

Infantry: *Paltan Baj Singh*
Paltan Budh Singh
Paltan Dewan Singh

Artillery: Division of *Jodh Singh*, 7 guns, 265 men.

Brigade of General Avitabile

Infantry *Paltan Bhup Singh*
Paltan Captain Ford
Paltan Captain Lafont

With each of these regiments being about 900 strong, Court's brigade was approximately 3,000 men and Avitabile's 2,700. These three "French" brigades, with thirteen to fifteen regiments plus their *Dera* of artillery, were the spearhead of the Punjab army, and General Allard was acknowledged as the senior officer of these elite units.



*General Allard, Private Collection, France.
(Photo Lafont)*

*Der Hof von Lahor (The Court of Lahore), by
August Schoeff, c.1850-55, from drawings made in
Lahore in 1841-42, 192"x100". Princess Bamba
Collection, The Sikh Gallery, Lahore Fort.
(Photo: Sidique).*



Colonel Oms Brigade

We must also mention the brigade raised in 1826 by Colonel Oms, whose identity is not clear. Was he a French officer of Napoleon's army who had been fighting in Russia, as he introduced himself to Dr. Murray in Lahore, or was he a Spaniard as most of the British historians believed? What is sure is that Court and Avitabile knew him from Persia, and they did not want to have anything to do with him in Lahore. Ranjit Singh therefore gave Oms the command of a full-fledged brigade whose Headquarters were in Shadara, and Oms took orders directly from the Maharaja. This brigade had five regiments, probably five thousand men, very well trained in 1828 when Oms died of cholera. We do not know anything about the story of these regiments after his death.

The "French" Cantonments in Lahore

The entire Punjab army was nominally under the command of the Maharaja, but due to the feudal system of the land, and because of the political and familial rivalries in the country and the Darbar, Ranjit Singh could not rely on most of them for the internal security of the State. His personal bodyguard, the *Gorcharras*, were irregular cavalry, and the great feudal chiefs, be they the Sikh heads of the various *Misls*, the Dogra brothers of Jammu or the Muslim chieftains of the Punjab plains, had their own troops whose fidelity to the Sarkar was not always assured. The *Fauj-i-khas*, and later the other "French" brigades, were raised by the Maharaja as an instrument of power for the State as against various external military powers which could raise their head

against the Sarkar, as indeed happened after Ranjit Singh's death in June 1839. Besides the fact that Allard took orders directly from the Maharaja, and from nobody else, the very locations of the military cantonments around Lahore clearly show the precautions Ranjit Singh took to prevent a "coup d'état" from his own troops. The French brigades were positioned in a circle between the city and the other military forces: the *Fauj-i-khas* at Anarkali, Court's brigade at Naulakha, Avitabile's brigade at Buddha-ka-Ava (between the Lahore Fort and the Shalimar gardens), Oms's brigade at Shadara, controlling the only boat-bridge, the ferry and the ford on the other side of the river Ravi.

The Campo-i-mualla

The other regular units of the Punjab army had been formed into a huge military component called the *Campo-i-mualla*, some 25,000 strong, whose headquarters were partly at Mian Mir (later transformed by the British into their own Cantonment), partly at Nawakot, on the road to Multan with Tej Singh as commander of this proteiform corps in the 1820s. In 1833 Ranjit Singh, highly satisfied with the discipline and the efficiency of the *Fauj-i-khas*, decided to transform the *Campo-i-mualla* on the pattern of his French-style brigades. That was a huge task, considering the number of senior and low rank officers needed to discipline these soldiers already trained according to their own system of warfare. Ranjit Singh probably asked the *Fauj-i-khas* to part with a number of their own officers and men (that was the time of the lowest ebb for Allard's cavalry), and most probably some of its *Dera* of artillery, but no assessment has been made of these transfers. We know one case of refusal, but highly significant: according to L.H. Griffin, the Maharaja's first

Model of the city of Lahore, ordered by Henry Lawrence in 1848 and sent to London.

The ramparts of the city were rebuilt by Ranjit Singh (c. 1810-25), and the gates were fortified with the latest innovations of the time. The ramparts were demolished from 1851 onwards. Courtesy Ahmed Nabi Khan, Lahore.





French colonels in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
Courtesy I.H. Nadiem, Director of Archaeology, Northern Circle,
Government of Pakistan. (Photo: Sidique.)



Ventura. Private collection, France. (Photo: Lafont)

decision was to entrust the command of the new *Campo-i-mualla* to Ajudhya Prasad, one of the most senior officers of the *Fauj-i-khas*, whose first cousin Dina Nath was a rising star in the Government of the Punjab. Griffin says that Ajudhya declined this high honour and important command for the simple reason that he did not want to leave the *Fauj-i-khas*. Ranjit Singh accepted that reason and kept Tej Singh as commander of the *Campo*. One of the consequences of this decision of 1833 was that in 1846 Tej Singh was appointed-Commander-in-Chief of the Punjab army, with the result in consequence that Ajudhya Prasad, then commanding the *Fauj-i-khas*, was "abandoned" during the night in Ferozeshah along with his brigade, which had just won the day against the English army.

The Formation of Divisions

The modernisation drive of the Punjab army was followed by its reorganisation into major units called Divisions and the creation, on 16 December 1836, of eight Generals: up to then the highest grade was that of Colonel. Allard, at that time, was in France where he had taken his Indian (Hindu) wife and their five children. Ventura, Court and Avitabile were all promoted to Generals. The *Umdat ut-Tawarikh* registered the protest of Ventura for being given the same grade as his other Punjabi colleagues since, as he said plainly, he had been the instructor to them all, a protest which the Maharaja readily acknowledged, replying that Ventura would be soon given the title of "Great General". It does not seem that this title, more or less equivalent to Commander-in-Chief, was ever created by Ranjit Singh, but the Maharaja paid him an official visit the following day at his headquarters in Anarkali and offered him a jagir of Rs. 5,000 for his daughter Victorine. Five days later (21 December 1836), an official proclamation was read in each and every city of the kingdom and in front of every regiment, declaring Ventura "Faithful and devoted". Three months later (March 1837) Allard, true to his salt, returned from France to Lahore. He was immediately promoted to the rank of General by the Maharaja and resumed the command of the *Fauj-i-khas*. Ventura left for Europe, and the matter subsided.

French Arms, French Colonels

Allard had been appointed by King Louis-Philippe as *Agent de France* (Ambassador) to the Government of the Punjab. Perhaps one of the secret messages that Allard gave to King Louis-Philippe on behalf of Ranjit Singh was the need to send some more officers to train the new units. Allard in Paris received numerous letters from senior and junior military officers offering to join him in the Punjab. Fearing a provocation, he always wrote back that he had



Cuirassier of the Fauj-i-khas.



Carbines of the Cuirassier Regiment, Fauj-i-khas.

no instructions from Lahore for enrollment to the Punjab army. Still, English spies in Paris reported to London that Allard was on a recruiting drive, that young officers were submitting their resignation to the French Government and that they were secretly sailing to the Middle East in order to join him. All the British posts between Marseilles and Bombay were put on alert in order to arrest any French traveller who could be an officer in disguise. But it does not seem that the French Government had any specific scheme to send large scale military manpower to Ranjit Singh.

When Allard returned to Lahore, he brought with him 205 huge cases containing the necessary equipment for his Cuirassier regiments (500 cuirasses, 2000 arms, a model park of artillery (the latest French improvement in this field) and two million detonating caps, the latest device for replacing the flint for muskets and pistols. But no new staff came along with him to

Lahore, and only a few officers like Colonels Mouton, Laroche, de Facyeu (and his son), and a two Lafonts, managed to reach Lahore and entered the service of the Punjab by 1838. Some of them are represented in the centre of August Schoefft's grand painting "Der Hof von Lahor", otherwise known as the "Darbar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh".

Creation of a Mountain Division

Another reference to some "French" influence in the development of the Punjab army comes from the still unpublished "Mémoires" of General Court. The French officers had circles of friends inside the



Lahore Darbar and among the gentry of the country, and a strong friendship developed between Court and Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu, to such an extent that Gulab Singh entrusted the education of his eldest son, Udham Singh, to the French General, not a small proof of confidence from the one later nicknamed the "Fox" of Jammu. Court had been educated in Casale, in the Italian Alps where the French and the Austrians had often fought for the control of Northern Italy, and he had been later a cadet of the Special Military Academy of Saint-Cyr. He wrote in his "Mémoires" that he raised and organised "une division de montagne" (a mountaineering division), which might (or might not) be the one which was later engaged in the

conquest of Ladakh under the command of General Zorawar Singh. In 1830, when Jacquemont was extremely well received and treated by Gulab Singh in the area of Jhelum, Khewra and the Salt Range, he had with him a detailed map of Kashmir which had been drawn by General Court.

The Fauj-i-khas in 1837

There are several descriptions of the Punjab army after this last modernising drive. One of them is by a British officer who came to Lahore in March 1837 with Lord Fane, Commander-in-Chief of the British army, to attend the wedding of Prince Nao Nihal Singh. An impressive review of the Punjab army took place. Henry E. Fane, Aide-de-camp to his uncle, was present: "We found them drawn up in line, extending two miles on the banks of the river, consisting of twenty eight battalions of infantry and six of cavalry; altogether 18,000 men exceedingly well clothed and armed in the European fashion... On the right of the line was General Ventura's brigade, consisting of eight regiments of infantry, which he put to two movements,



Infantrymen in the Fauj-i-khas. The infantry units were mainly Sikh and Gurkha regiments, dressed with the French (tricolour) insignia, Napoleon's eagle and the French flag with the motto 'Wah Guru ji ki Fateh'. Court Collection, Musée Guimet. (Photo: Lafont)

both of which they executed with equal steadiness and precision with our men [] [Their] discipline is really wonderful [...] Generals Ventura and Allard have been now, for many years, in the Maharaja's service [...] To them, and to Monsieur Court in the artillery branch of his service, he owes principally the really advanced state of equipment and discipline to which his forces have been brought". Another testimony comes from Lord Auckland, Governor-General of British India, and his *Etat-major* when they met Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Ferozepur in December 1838. This time, the "French brigades" with their French Generals were in Peshawar to counter the imminent threat of an Afghan and Iranian invasion of the Punjab. The 25,000 men (and 150 guns) which Auckland and Fane passed in review were of the *Campo-i-mualla*. Although impressed by the modernisation of these forces and the precision of their manoeuvres, Auckland and Fane immediately noticed the weakness of these new units : not enough trained officers to command them, and therefore a defective chain of command in case of real action. Still, the mood of the Governor-General and his *Etat-major*

when they returned from the review was clearly expressed in Emily Eden's letter dated 6 december 1838 (first published in 1866) : "All the Gentlemen went at day break yesterday to Ranjit's review, and came back rather discomfited. He had nearly as many troops out as Sir G. R. had, they were quite as well disciplined, rather better dressed, repeated the same military movements and several others more complicated, and in short nobody knows what to say about it, so that they say nothing, except that they are sure the Sikhs would run away in a real fight. It is a sad blow to our vanities....." In 1839 British intelligence estimated the total strength of the Punjab army to be 150.000 men, of which 71.000 belonged to the *Fauj-i-ain* (regular troops, "French brigades" and *Campo-i-mualla* all included).

Anarkali :the Cantonment at Lahore

In 1822 Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave Allard and Ventura the tomb and garden of Anarkali as their residence and headquarters of the *Fauj-i-khas*. They built there a new house with wings surrounded by a colonnade, with a beautiful "salon ovale" and rooms profusely decorated with paintings and gilded mirrors. Part of the building was their residence, part served as the HQ of the *Fauj-i-khas*. Outside Anarkali, they developed a "Champ de Mars" (parade ground) where they used to train their regiments. Regular training was going on there for the artillery of the *Topkhana*, and the Maharaja personally attended the manoeuvres whenever he could. All around the parade ground, the cantonment was developed, nicely designed with residences for the officers and barracks for the men. The banks of the Ravi were turned into a long garden, the "Jardin du Soldat", and the road leading from the City gate to Anarkali quickly developed into a thriving "modern" bazar. These French cantonments were so comfortable and so well-designed that in 1846 the British Resident, Henry Lawrence, settled into Allard and Ventura's house (hence the name "The Residence", still used today), and the occupying British troops were later garrisoned in the barracks of the *Fauj-i-khas* themselves.

The regiments had specific uniforms of French / European designs. Their flag was the French tricolor flag (blue, white, red) of the Revolution and Napoleon's empire, with the Sikh motto "Wah Guruji-ki-Fateh" embroidered on it. Each unit also had Imperial Eagles. Allard and Ranjit Singh created the military Order of Guru Gobind Singh whose cross and great cross were based on the design of the *Légion d'honneur*. As Jacquemont observed, Allard was the only one to grant promotions in his brigade, and all the words of command were given in French. Allard and Ventura translated into Persian a French military handbook for the infantry, a copy of which is preserved in the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum at Amritsar, and a French handbook for the cavalry, of which no copy seems to have survived. An officer's mess was opened in 1825, and a medical service was created : Ranjit Singh, while attending a firing rehearsal of the *Topkhana* at Anarkali, expressed his surprise on seeing surgeons and physicians waiting in readiness as long as the firing exercises went on.



The *Khilat* (dress of honour) given by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to General Allard.

Renovation of the Artillery

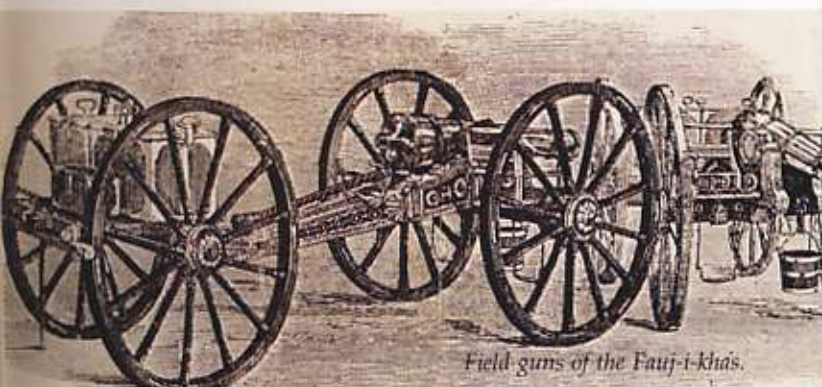
General Court was a former cadet of the Special Military Academy of Saint-Cyr (class of 1813), a brilliant mathematician and an excellent engineer besides his other academic achievements in history and archaeology which won him the reputation of being the *Aflatoun* (Platon) and the *Bocrates* (Socrates) of the Punjab. Beyond the command of his brigade, his main task was renovation of the Punjab artillery, for which he had specifically been invited from Persia by the Maharaja on Allard's and Ventura's recommendation. Court, in his unpublished "*Mémoires*", says that he translated into Persian the "excellent book" of Duturbie on artillery, which according to him became the handbook ("*manuel*") of the Sikhs who learnt from it how to produce shells, hollow cannon-balls and incendiary bombs. I have not yet found a single copy of this Persian translation, but the French edition, a comprehensive *traité* with illustrations, remained the standard handbook of the army and the military academies in France till the 1850s. From Jacquemont, who was in Lahore in 1830, Court acquired new formulas for casting guns as well as precious information concerning the iron deposits in Mandi for the same purpose.

Court's Artillery in 1831

We have numerous testimonies of Court's contribution to the renovation of the artillery of the Punjab, many guns captured by the English during the two Sikh wars bearing his name or the names of his assistants. Soon after his arrival in 1827, he started making shells, for which he was awarded Rs. 5,000, jewels and other gifts by Ranjit Singh, and he worked with his Punjabi colleagues, one of them being Lehna Singh Majithia, to develop the Idgah foundry which produced both heavy, light and field guns mounted on carriages of excellent quality. The old guns, of indifferent efficiency (by 1830 standards) and irregular calibres, were one after the other sent to Idgah and recast to proper standards. In 1831, three to four years after Court had taken over modernisation of the artillery, Alexander Burnes witnessed a training of the horse artillery in Lahore: "We met his Highness at an appointed hour on the parade ground, with a train of fifty-one



General Court: the most scholarly of the French officers of Ranjit Singh's army, he collected coins, miniature paintings and manuscripts. He patronised Imam Bakhsh Lahori and wrote his *Mémoires* (under publication). As a military officer he modernised the artillery units of the Punjab army. This portrait is a detail of August Schoeff's *Darbar of Lahore*. The original is at Lahore, in the Princess Bamba collection at Lahore fort. (Photo: Lafont)



Field guns of the Fauj-i-khas.



A gunner of the Fauj-i-khas. The Top Khana, commanded by Ilahi Bakhsh, was attached by Maharaja Ranjit Singh to the Fauj-i-khas. Court Collection, Musée Guimet. (Photo: Lafont)

pieces of artillery which he had assembled on the occasion. They were brass 6-pounders, each drawn by six horses. The command was taken by a native officer, who put them through movements of horse artillery and formed line and column in every direction. The evolutions were not rapidly performed, but the celerity was considerable; and no accident in overturning or firing occurred throughout the morning. There were no wagons in the field, and the horses and equipment were inferior. The guns however were well cast, and the carriages in good repair. They had been made at Lahore, and had cost him 1000 rupees each". The Maharaja added that he had "100 pieces of field artillery, exclusive of battering guns and mortars". This is a clear indication that, contrary to what is still claimed by some British historians even today, Ranjit Singh did not wait for Lord William Bentinck's gift of four English guns in 1831 to start modernising his artillery. Concerning the "horse artillery", the main creation of Court for the Punjab army, another witness wrote about a six-pounder field gun in 1839: "It was thrown out on the ground, dismounted from its carriage, taken all to pieces, remounted, men on their horses, and again in full gallop, in the space of five minutes".

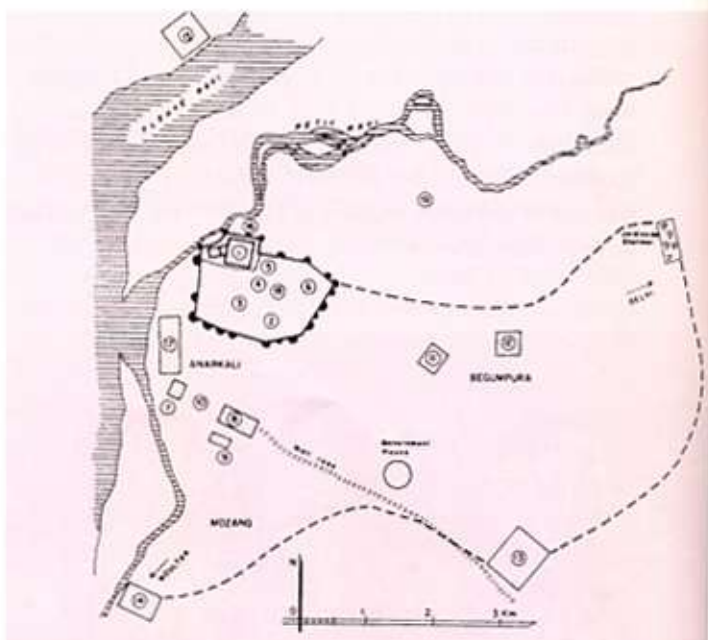
Court's Artillery in 1839

A little-known, but very detailed description of Court's artillery was written by Lieutenant Barr, himself an artillery man, when he witnessed a firing exercise of Court's gunmen in Peshawar in 1839:

"On our arriving in front, [the men] saluted, and the general (Court) directed the native commandant, a fine soldier-looking man handsomely accoutred, to put them through their drill. This they performed with great credit, their movements being executed with a celerity and precision that would have done honour to any army. The orders were given in French, and the system of gunnery used by that nation had also been adopted. At the conclusion of the exercises, we walked down the line and inspected the ordinance. The two guns on the right of the battery were six-pounders, and were the same that Lord William Bentinck had presented to Ranjit Singh at Roopur. The rest were cast by himself from their model, and appear almost equally good. The precise number of pieces we saw I forget, but I think nine, including two small mortars for hill service. We then tried some of his fuzes, which are very good, and burn true, and his portfires are also tolerable, but when compared with those in use with every other part of the Sikh army, admirable; as with the latter, they are nothing but cases filled with pounded brimstone indifferently rammed down. All the shots were formed of beaten iron, and cost one rupee each; and the majority of the shells were composed of pewter, which he told us



Fortifications built by the Sikhs in Lahore, seen in the present day (Photo: Lafont).



Lahore: disposition of the cantonments around the capital, (1) being the Fort or Citadelle.

answered uncommonly well. When it is considered that all we saw was the work of the general's own knowledge, and we reflect on the difficulties he has had to surmount, it is a matter almost of wonder to behold the perfection to which he has brought his artillery. Both the appointments and the accoutrements [of the men] were kept in high order, and formed a pleasing contrast to the artillery that were present during the inspection on the first of April".

Modernising Fortifications of the Punjab

Last but not least, the French officers helped to consolidate and modernise the fortifications of Lahore, Amritsar and other cities and forts of the kingdom. In Lahore, right from 1822, they worked with Fakir Nuruddin for completing the bastions protecting the twelve gates of the city. The model city of Lahore shows the complexity of the defences of the capital of the Punjab as they stood before the British razed them to the ground in the 1850s (the present day "Circular Road"). What remains of the Sikh ramparts and bastions north of the Lahore Fort today shows a low type of defence different from the Fort of Aligarh built by de Boigne for Sindhia in the late 1780s. Allard and Ventura repaired and modernised the Fort of Phillaur, which became the HQ of the *Fauj-i-khas* on the Anglo-Sikh border in 1825. They also helped to complete the Gobindgarh Fort at Amritsar, and till the late 1960s one could still read on one of the walls the inscription in French "Ronde de l'Est". Avitabile repaired and modernised the Fort and the city of Wazirabad, on the Chenab, when he was Governor of that area. Court and Avitabile rebuilt the Bala Hissar of Peshawar in 1834 and built the ramparts of that city in the following years. In 1837 Allard, appointed Military Governor of the Peshawar province with Court as his assistant, was instructed by the Maharaja to survey and modernise all the forts of his N-W Frontier, including Jamrud, and he took great care to clear the road between Peshawar and Jamrud to facilitate the quick movement of troops with horse-drawn artillery.

Conflict between the Ancients and the Moderns

This review deals with the modernisation of the Punjab army, not with the role of the *Fauj-i-khas* and the other "French brigades" in the field, from Naushera in 1823, when Ventura convinced Ranjit Singh to fight the Afghans before sunset, till the battle of Ferozshah in December 1845 when, during the night, the British issued orders to burn their papers and took the preliminary steps for their surrender to the *Fauj-i-khas* the next morning, and the battle of Chillianwala on 13 January 1849, where the Topkhana of Ilahi Bakhsh played havoc on the British army. In



Painting showing a group of Akali warriors.

conclusion, we must examine the two concepts which clearly went side by side, in a conflicting way, since the days of 1805 when Ranjit Singh decided to introduce the first regular units in his army, the next logical step being in March 1822 when he entrusted Allard and Ventura with the full modernisation of part of his troops.

Cavalry against Infantry: Sword versus the Gun

According to tradition, the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab had been won by the Khalsa and the cavalry of the twelve *Misl* fighting in their manner of "strike and retire" tactics against Mughal, Persian and Afghan forces which were vastly superior in number and equipment. That remained the dream and the leitmotiv of many Sirdars and officers who found themselves more and more sidelined by the increasing number of regiments of regular infantry. The very displacement of the cavalry by the infantry units from 1805 to 1839 seemed to them a suicidal move, and they much admired the *Gorcharras*, Ranjit Singh's irregular horseguards of noble stock and grand families, dressed in chain-armour with feathers, brocades, jewellery and pashminas. The English ladies and gentlemen, who in the 1830s were reading Walter Scott's novels from Ludhiana to Calcutta, enjoyed the display of the *Gorcharras* who

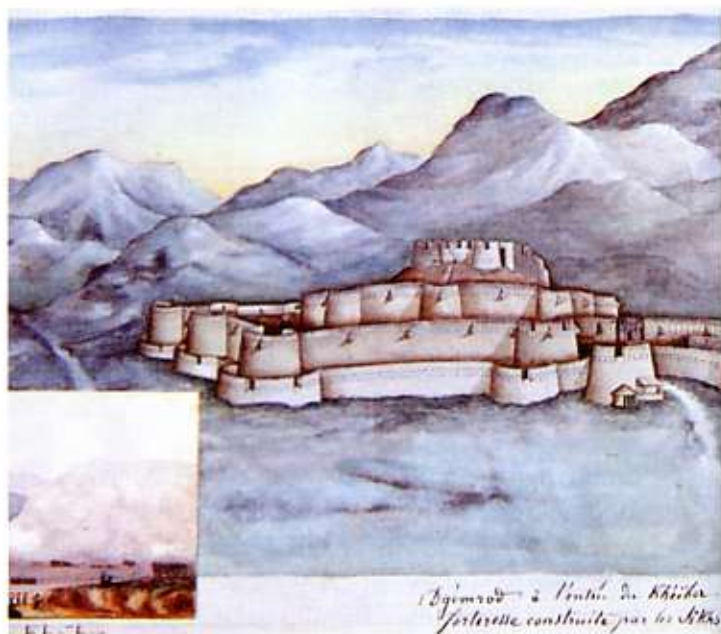


A splendid figure of a Sikh horseman, both rider and mount in armour.

reminded them of the Crusaders and Ivanhoe. But the fact is that no action was won by these irregular units, cavalry or infantry, during the First and the Second Sikh wars, although they were numerically much stronger than the regular regiments of the Punjab army, not to speak of the thirteen to fifteen regiments of the "French brigades" with their *Dera* of artillery.

The Peshawar Question

On the other hand, Ranjit Singh and his most astute advisers knew that conquest was one thing, while consolidating these conquests to turn them into political units of one single kingdom or Empire, was quite the other. They understood the political changes in the Punjab, from the early days of the kingdom when the core of the people between Gujranwala and Lahore were Sikhs and Hindus, till after the conquest of Multan, Kashmir, the Derajat and Peshawar when the ratio of the Muslim population came to an approximative equality with the other communities of the State. Ranjit Singh very quickly noted, in 1823, the uncommon ability of Allard to negotiate with the Muslims chieftains along the Indus. The number of Muslims in Allard's cavalry was the reason why, in 1825, the *Fauj-i-khas* was entrusted with the policy and control of the Anglo-Sikh border on the Sutlej. After the conquest and annexation of Peshawar by Court in 1834, the province was first under the command of Court and Avitabile (Ventura was ill and on leave, Allard was on his way to France). In 1835, Ranjit Singh grew over-confident and thought he could call back first the *Fauj-i-khas*, and then



Fortress of Jamrud, painted by Imam Baksh Lahori, Musée Guimet (Lafont)

his other "French regiments" to Lahore, sending other units to Peshawar. There was soon increasing unrest in the Province, culminating in the Afghan attack on Jamrud and the death of Hari Singh Nalwa in 1837. After the relief of Jamrud by Allard and the bombing by Court of Ali Masjid and the other Afghan positions in the Khyber Pass, Allard was reappointed Military Governor of Peshawar with Court as assistant, Avitabile being given the administrative command of the province. Peshawar remained under the command of the French till after the assassination of Maharaja Sher Singh and Prime Minister Raja Dhyani Singh in September 1843, when all hell broke loose in the kingdom.

Departure of the French Generals

General Allard died in Peshawar on 23 January 1839, but his death was for a time concealed from Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was too weak to be informed of the demise of his friend. Allard is still buried in Lahore, and his tomb is protected by the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Pakistan. Ventura resigned in 1843, a few weeks after the murders of Sher Singh and Dhyani Singh, after delivering a very thoughtful speech in the Darbar. Avitabile and Court left a few months later. Only the French colonels stayed for a while, until the influential Pandit Jalla in his "anti-foreigner" drive persuaded Raja Hira Singh, the young Prime Minister, to dismiss all the remaining French officers from the army in June 1844. Even Dr. Honigberger was suspected by the Pandit of making "non-explosive powder" for the Khalsa, an accusation Raja

Dina Nath had no difficulty in proving false... but such was the mood in the Punjab Government in 1844. The Panchayats took over command of the troops, including the *Fauj-i-khas*. The officers were merely allowed to resume the training of their men when war loomed imminent between Lahore and Calcutta in 1845. After the Punjab army started moving to the Sutlej in the last months of 1845, the soldiers of the *Fauj-i-khas*, under the very nominal command of Ajudhya Prasad, boasted that under their French Generals they had not suffered a single reverse in twenty-three years of active service. But the French Generals were not there anymore. François-Henri Mouton, just returned from France, was the only French officer who served in the Punjab army during the first Sikh war, and being a mere colonel and a foreigner, he had of course no authority on the conduct of the operations.

The First Sikh War

Without going into details of the First Sikh War, since the present subject is the modernisation of the army, it is clear that the Government of the Punjab, purposely or not, took a number of wrong decisions which proved fateful for the issue of the war. Though the "French" units, more than any other regular units of the Punjab, were to bear the brunt of the fighting, the Government appointed General Tej Singh, of the *Campo-i-mualla* fame, as Commander-in-chief of the Punjab army. The overall command of operations on the front, to be fought by regular regiments of infantry, was given to Lal Singh, the former Commander of the *Gorcharras*, the irregular cavalry of the State...! At Ferozeshah, Lal Singh deserted the camp during the night along with all his cavalry and artillery, without even informing the *Fauj-i-khas* that he was going back to Lahore. At Sobraon, Colonel Mouton recorded in his "Mémoires" the discussion he had with Tej Singh on the necessity to attack the enemy immediately, and on the danger of entrenching the army on the British side of the river, with only a single loose bridge connecting the troops to their mainland and reserves. He then testified to the total absence of command and coordination during the fight, and Tej Singh's desertion before the end of the battle. Mouton charged the attacking British column at the head of his regiments, had one horse killed under him and managed to save most of his



Uniforms of the *Fauj-i-khas*
(1) Regular Infantry, (2) Artillery and (3) summer dress of the Infantry.

men during the retreat. The "French units" of the Punjab army did their duty, like many other regular ones (Mouton speaks very highly of Sher Singh Atariwala and young General Hukum Singh) with outstanding honour and tremendous loss against the elite regiments of the British army, King's Own and EIC'S, whom they decimated with their firing power and bayonets. But their officers had no say in the conduct of the operations, and there was definitely no overall command on the Punjabi side of the battle front.

The Second Sikh War

The same conflict between the two concepts of warfare erupted again during the Second Sikh War. After the victory at Chillianwala, where the Topkhana of the *Fauj-i-khas* commanded by Ilahi Bakhsh took such a prominent part in winning the day for the Khalsa, and after Sikh reinforcements had joined the Punjab army, the Sikh *Etat-major* discussed the strategy to be followed. Colonel Kahn Singh Rosa of the Dragoons proposed an attack on the English camp the same night with all available forces. The proposal was unanimously rejected by the *Etat-major*. Kahn Singh then offered to attack the enemy at dawn, an offer which was turned down by



At the Battle of Moodkee, 18th December 1845 (Engraved by J. Harris).

Chettar Singh, the Commander-in-Chief, a real *cunctator* who suggested a move towards Gujarat and then Lahore. Colonel Kahn Singh, losing his temper, rose to his feet and accused Chettar Singh of being afraid of the British. There was a scuffle with drawn swords. Other officers intervened and Kahn Singh left the meeting, shouting loud and clear that Chettar Singh was "a bastard and a coward". The only other officer who backed Kahn Singh was Rosa and left the meeting with him was Jowahar Singh Nalwa, the son of Hari Singh. We all know what happened subsequently at the battle of Gujarat.

But who was Kahn Singh Rosa, who advocated such a daring night attack against enemy forces? He was one of the most dashing cavalry officers trained by General Allard right from 1822, in the real spirit of the Dragoons and Hussard regiments, an officer close to Ventura when he commanded the *Paltan-i-khas* for a short period. He was one of the heroes of Ferozeshah in December 1845 and he commanded the regiments of Dragoons in Peshawar in 1848. According to Griffin (1865), "Kahn Singh was one of the first to join the national party [in 1848]. He was a man of great bravery and an admirable cavalry officer. His influence on the army was great. Through the whole campaign of 1848-49 he fought with the greatest gallantry, and he and Sardar Jowahar Singh Nalwa were perhaps the most dashing officers among the Sikhs".

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

To modernise or not? These two conflicting concepts concerning re-organisation of an army, differences between the defenders of a traditional system of warfare versus the proponents of modernisation of the armed forces on French/European pattern, were not specific to the armed forces of the Punjab between 1822 and 1849. In fact, the question whether Ranjit Singh was right or wrong in trying to modernise his army can be asked even today to any Government, from Europe to Asia and Africa. The decision to acquire the latest systems of warfare and military training for troops, especially when they are engaged in permanent military operations inside and outside the frontiers is moot. The move towards modernisation, always an expensive drive, means reduced money for the traditional units and their equipment, and the rise of new cadres of soldiers and officers with a strong "esprit de corps" to whom a threatened military establishment is usually hostile. Even a defeat, as was the case of the Punjabis in 1846-1849, is no justification to question the right of a State to modernise its armed forces. One hundred years later, the French lost the war against the Germans in May 1940 mainly because they had neither the armoured corps, nor the firing power, nor the air force cover and offensive expertise of their enemy. Were the heavy expenses for modernising the French armed forces just before WW II a correct or wrong step of some of the pre-war French Governments? It can of course be argued that

this money was not enough, and too late. But considering the invasion of France in May-June 1940, whatever the amount of money spent in modernising the French forces, it was in fact, wasted. The only other option was *not* to modernise, and have some more of the conventional infantry forces who would not have even sustained the first onslaught of General Guderian's *Panzerdivisionen*. As a matter of fact, that had been indeed the approach of some other pre-war French Governments!

But we must return to the Punjab. After Sobraon, besides the regular units who had not been engaged in the war, most of the irregular forces of the army too were intact, with their full equipment, not having fired a shot during the war: eighty-thousand officers and men with the *Gorcharras* at the top. General Lal Singh, one of their highest and most resplendent commanders did not even try to stop the British advance towards Lahore. And the record of the irregular forces during the Second Sikh war, where there were so many opportunities for guerilla warfare and "resistance" strategy, were no better than during 1845-1846.

On Conclusion

This article deals with the contribution of French officers to modernisation of the army of the Punjab. It would require another article of considerable length to describe the military operations in which the "French brigades" were involved from 1822 to 1849, and still another one to paint the family life of these officers along with their cultural activities in the land. To conclude the present study, let us state that whatever the French Generals did in the country, they did it under the orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, under his strict supervision and for the welfare of the State. Being members of the *Darbar*, they worked closely with the other Ministers and high dignitaries of the kingdom with whom they more often than not developed a sincere friendship: Prince Sher Singh and Prince Nao Nihal Singh, the Dogra brothers, Fakir Aziz ud-Din and Fakir Nur ud-Din, Raja Dina Nath with his powerful connections, Generals Hari Singh Nalwa and Sher Singh Attariwala... the list would be endless of the political-cum-friendly relations with these most important families of the kingdom. We must emphasise the fact that the French Generals were *servants*, not *masters* of the State. Some of their suggestions, like the conquest and annexation of Sindh, or the conquest of Peshawar and Kabul, were not accepted right away by the Maharaja. But when they were ordered to annex and administer Peshawar, they did so without reluctance, Ranjit Singh acknowledging in full *Darbar* that, with the sole exception of Hari Singh Nalwa, none of his other high ranking officers

was willing to serve in this most dangerous province. Allard, as political adviser (with Fakir Aziz ud-Din) of the Sarkar concerning relations with Calcutta, always advised restraint with firmness, strongly advising Ranjit Singh, right from 1826, to annex Sindh. The Maharaja took this decision too late because when he did, the British had thwarted his move (1832). The conquest of Sindh would have given the Kingdom of the Punjab (with the exception of parts of Baluchistan, but with Kashmir and Ladakh) more or less the size and the shape of the present day Pakistan, extending from the borders of China and Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean. Ultimately, and that was their main "raison d'être" in the Punjab, the French Generals, with the help of their Punjabi staff, carried out the training of officers and men who were admirable soldiers. The trust between them was mutual and total, especially after General Allard obtained from Ranjit Singh the return of the beautiful *Sonhari Masjid* (Golden Mosque) at Lahore to his Muslim soldiers and officers, paying from his own pocket the regilding of the resplendent domes which still dominate the Kashmiri Bazar of that city today, 160 years later.

In 1977, when two descendents of General Allard were honoured with *saropas* by the Head Priest in the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar, it was with the perceptive and touching observation that the *saropas* were given "in memory of what your ancestor had done for the Punjab".

Jean-Marie Lafont

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His numerous publications include *La Présence française dans le Royaume Sikh du Penjab. 1822-1849*, (EFEO, Paris, 1992) for which he was awarded the Prix Giles 1995 by the French Academy. He was working editor of and contributor to *Reminiscences: The French in India* (INTACH, 1998). His most recent publication is *INDIKA: Essays in Indo-French Relations 1630-1976* (Manohar-CSH, 2000)



Jean-Marie Lafont and Lt. General(R) Gurbir Man Singh

The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms at ROM*



*The Ten Gurus c.1800, Una Sahib
Gouache on paper, Lally and Marlene Marwah Collection (Ontario)*

**The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada,
May 27 to August 20, 2000*

On May 27th 2000, *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* exhibition opened at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), at Toronto, in Canada. The first comprehensive exhibition of Sikh art and heritage in the country, this exhibition was curated by the Victoria and Albert Museum's own curator, Susan Stronge, and was first seen at this internationally renowned museum in 1999, and then at the celebrated Asian Art Museum of San Francisco later in the year.

At the opening in May, the ROM's Currelly Gallery was filled with members from Toronto's South Asian and non-Asian communities. These individuals, spearheaded by the Sikh Foundation Canada Inc. of Toronto, had come together to celebrate their own achievement in having raised over a million dollars in order that this exhibition could be realised at the museum. With the *jaikara* "Bole So Nihal" raised by retired Major General Trevor Morlin of the Sikh Regiment, the crowd instinctively responded: "Sat Sri Akal", and so began the opening festivities. The colourful and vibrant Montreal Bhangra group led the guests to the entrance of the exhibition where they performed the traditional dance with gusto, and then proceeded into the exhibition itself.

The ROM's installation of the Exhibition has been unique in that it further contributes to the telling of the Sikh history by including additional books, coins, and over fifty paintings from Sikh Canadian collections, American collections, and the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum.

A piece that has become particularly emblematic of the Canadian installation of this exhibition is the *Golden Temple Loyal Address Casket*. Cared for by the ROM for over sixty years, this magnificent piece has been on extended loan to the museum from the British Royal Collections since 1939, when, it is believed, this was sent for safekeeping during World War II. Address caskets of this kind would have been presented to the British monarch during the time of the British Raj in India. Inside, a scroll would have been placed proclaiming the colony's allegiance to the Crown.

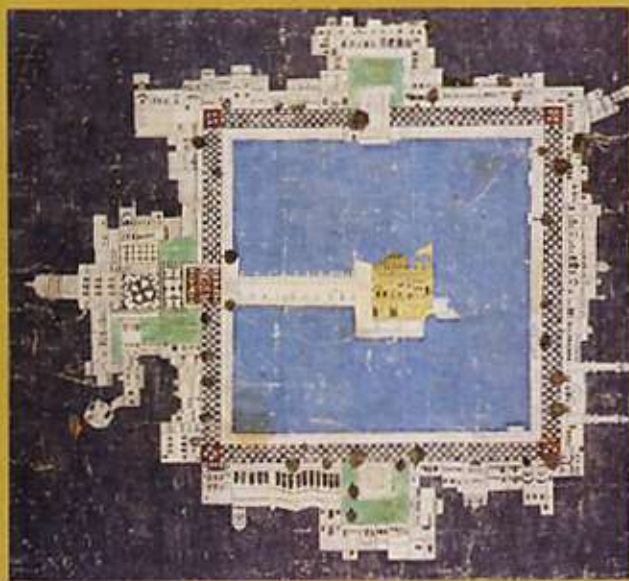
The importance of this piece is the fact that it functions as a model which is virtually an accurate representation of the Golden Temple, Sikhism's most sacred edifice. Made of ivory with wood inlay, and gilded silver, this piece sparkles in all its majesty. The interior is ornately decorated in Kashmiri floral designs.

Guru Amar Das (g.1552-1574)
Mid-late 1800s
Gouache on paper
Sabi and Amrin Marwah Collection (Ontario)



Museum exterior banner.





Golden Temple plan

1900s

Gouache on fabric

Harry Mann Collection (Ontario)



Ten Gurus

Late 1800s/early 1900s

Oil on fabric

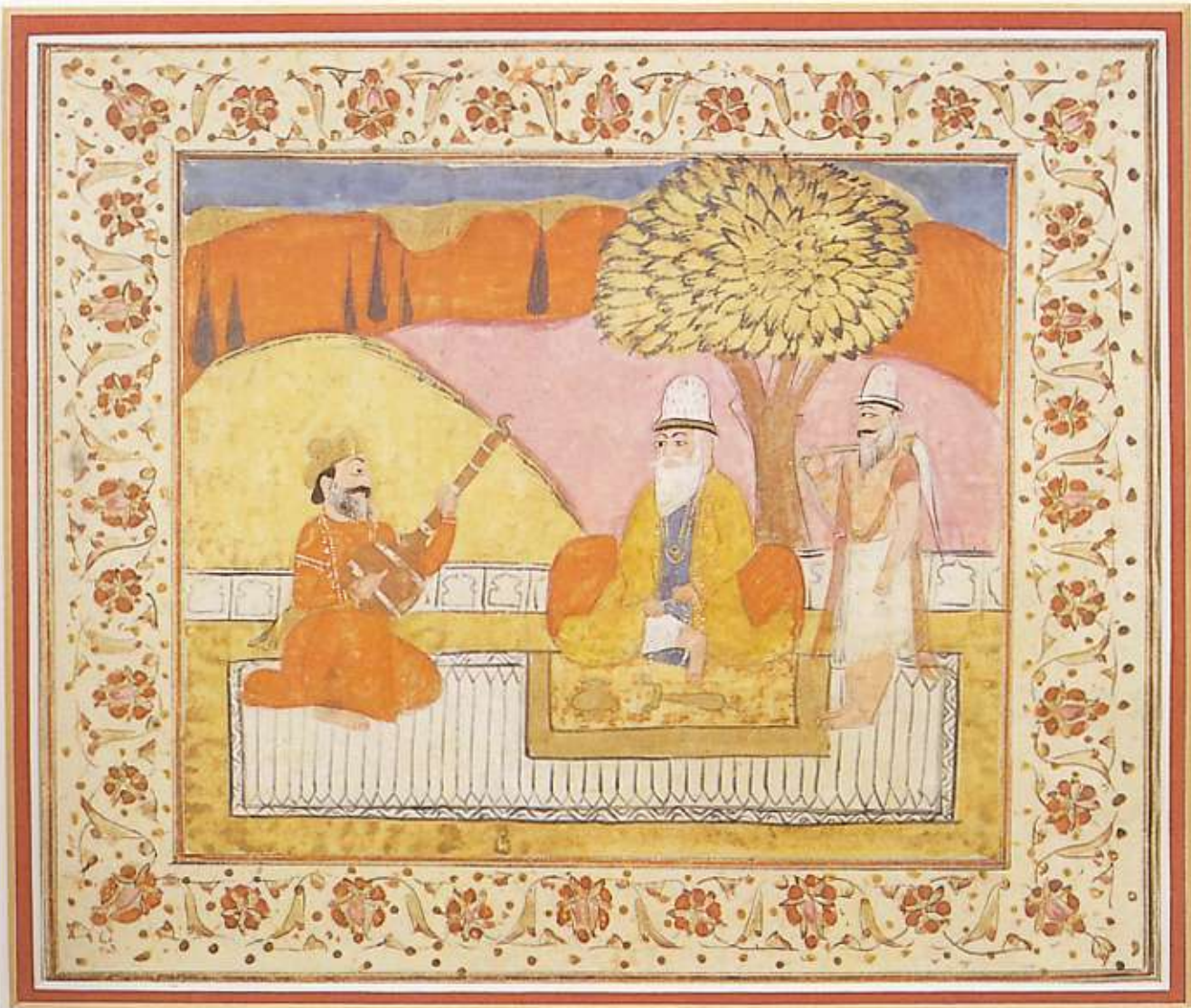
Harry Mann Collection (Ontario)

Symbolically, the Golden Temple or *Harmandir Sahib* represents the major precepts of the Sikh faith. Despite the main entrance being at the end of a causeway, the *Harmandir* has entrances on all sides of the building to welcome all individuals, no matter what their caste, gender or creed. The site of the *Harmandir* was specifically preferred as it was the lowest point in the surrounding area, there by symbolising Sikhism's strength in humility. This precept is further emphasised by the building's gradual decline towards the rear steps where at this lowest and most humble point of the devotee immerses him/herself in the sacred pool.

An important piece from the Sikh Canadian collections, is a *Janam Sakhi* dated to 1777. The life and travels of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, have been chronicled in these manuscripts. While these events are known to be factual, they were written by disciples and followers after the passing-away of the Guru, and are usually told in the form of parables. *Janam Sakhis* are generally illuminated with paintings that depict these particular events in the Guru's life, and are written in the beautiful *Gurmukhi* script and other regional languages. *Janam Sakhis* are the first records in which Sikh subjects were represented through art, and as such are the first forms of Sikh art.

Before his cease in 1539, Guru Nanak appointed a successor to carry on the spirit of his teachings. He chose his devout follower Lehna, and renamed him Guru Angad- "Ang" means limb. By choosing this name for his successor Guru Nanak implied that Lehna was "of my own flesh" and therefore part of him. Thus began the tradition of successive Gurus, which continued the teachings of Guru Nanak, and established the strong faith of the community. The succession of living Gurus lasted for 200 years, culminating with the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, who passed on the guruship to the sacred scripture *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The depiction of all ten Gurus seated together in a circle with Mardana and Bala has become distinctively iconographic. A nimbus behind the head of each Guru symbolises his spiritual and temporal sovereignty. This presentation captures the belief that the spirit of Guru Nanak continued from one Guru to the next for more than two centuries. The scene commemorates the culmination of the Gurus combined teachings.



Guru Nanak, Mardana and Bala; 1700s; Front piece of a historic Granth Sahib; gouache on paper; Lally and Marlene Marwah Collection (Ontario)

There are no portraits painted of the Gurus during their lifetimes, but in the late 1700s and the 1800s the arts flourished under Sikh rule in the Punjab, and the Gurus came to be represented by certain attributes that made them easily identifiable. For example, Guru Nanak is frequently depicted as an elderly, learned sage; Guru Har Krishan is the only Guru depicted without a beard as he had a premature childhood death from smallpox; earlier representations of Guru Gobind Singh show him seated with attendants, although he is more often seen in an equestrian style portrait symbolising his great creation of the distinctive Sikh identity and cohesion—the *Khalsa*.

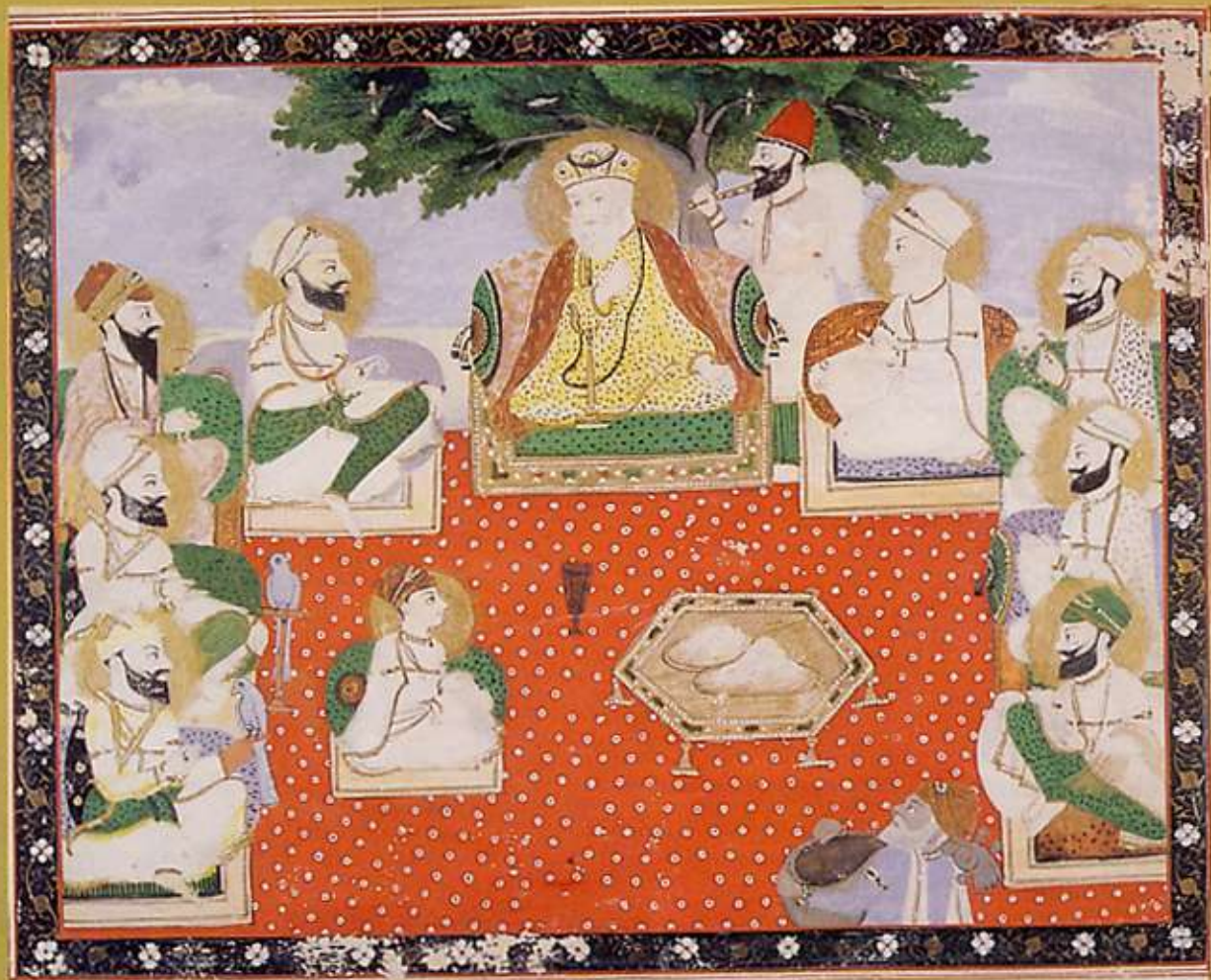
The depiction of Guru Nanak in paintings consistently represents his teachings that all faiths are equal and lead to the same God. He is rendered by artists in “Hindu” dress while wearing a “Muslim” style cap, and often seen with his two

travelling companions that are understood to have been with the Guru throughout his life—the Hindu attendant Bala and the Muslim minstrel Mardana. Bala can be identified as the individual beside the Guru holding a fly whisk or *chauri*. Interestingly, Bala only begins to make a greater appearance in paintings after the 1800s when Sikhism had gained a strong following among the Hindus. Therefore the concept of Bala as the Hindu counterpart to Mardana is considered by some to be a later invention by scribes to reflect this growing following among the Hindus.

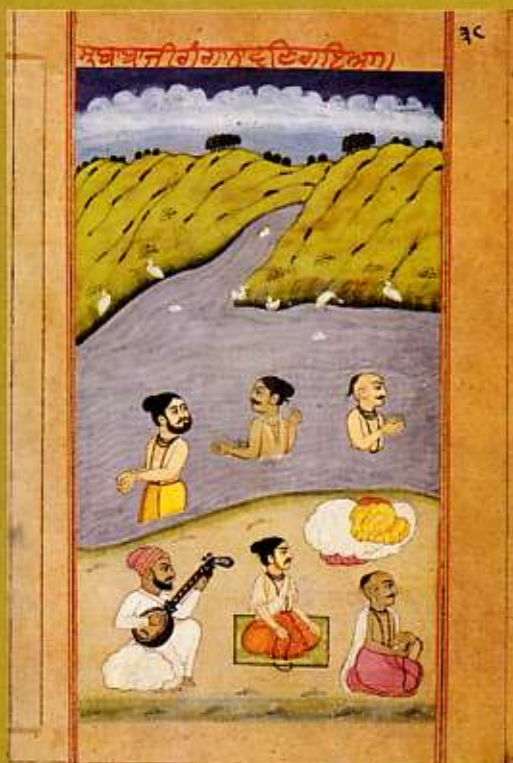
Mardana, the minstrel, is well-documented through early paintings as a constant companion of the Guru, and is identified by his *rebec* or stringed instrument. Mardana used the *rebec* in accompaniment to the spiritual poetry of Guru Nanak. These songs have



Rani Jindan Kaur with her son Dalip Singh ; 1840; Lahore; Company School; Watercolour on paper; Suresh Bhalla Collection (Ontario)



Ten Gurus; c. 1850; Gouache on paper; Suresh Bhalla Collection (Ontario)



Guru Nanak's teaching on rituals
1800s; Illustrations to a *Janam Sakhi* manuscript
Gouache on fabric
Sabi and Amrin Marwah Collection (Ontario)



Guru Amar Das (g.1552-1574)
Mid-late 1800s; Gouache on paper
Lally and Marlene Marwah Collection (Ontario)

evolved into the hymns of the Sikhs, and have been documented in manuscripts known as *pothis*. Excerpts from *pothis* can be found in the Sikh sacred scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*.

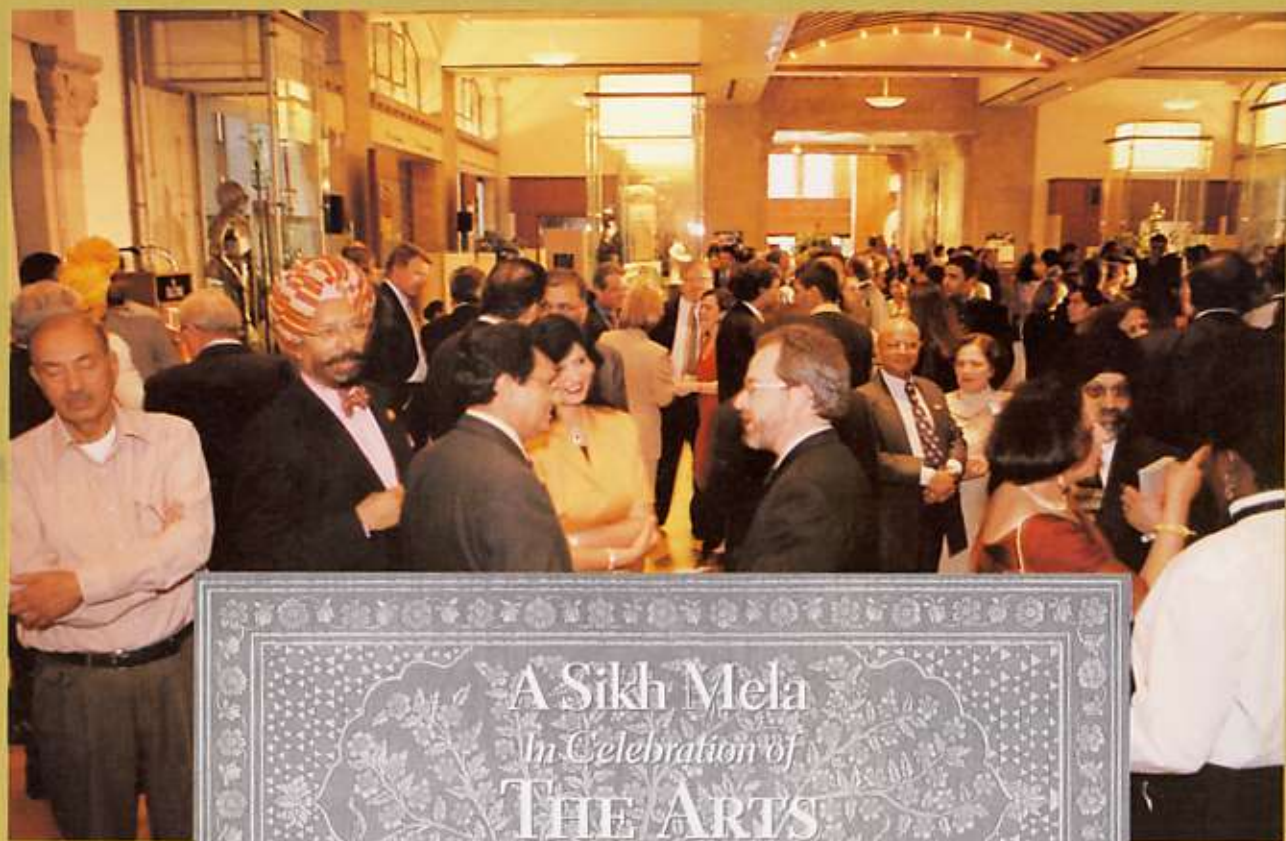
Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the living Gurus, established the *Khalsa* or the Fellowship of the Pure in 1699. Within a hundred years of establishment of the *Khalsa*, the Sikhs had become a powerful and cohesive force. Nine Afghan invasions in the century had brought warfare and turmoil to the region. The Mughal empire was fast declining, and peace in the Punjab was far from sight.

The strength of the Sikhs culminated in the leadership of the young warrior Ranjit Singh who through marriage combined two of the strongest *Khalsa* armies into one force. Proclaiming himself Maharaja of the Punjab in 1801, Ranjit Singh's authority developed in the plains of Northern India and eventually stretched to the Punjab Hills, as far west as Afghanistan and as far northeast as Ladakh. During his reign (1801-1839), the Punjab saw a relative peaceful era in which the arts and economy flourished.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his court were enormous patrons of the arts. As with most eras of peace, the arts developed and prospered, and under Ranjit Singh the court knew no religious boundaries. The maharaja's court or *darbar* included individuals from Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Christian artists alike—and the Golden Throne of the Maharaja was no exception. These beautiful and lasting works of art ranged from miniature paintings of the Pahari Hills to textiles and metalwork and ceramics. The Maharaja ordered restoration of the *Harmandir Sahib* and covered its turrets in gold, thereby giving it the name of the Golden Temple.

The opulence of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was in direct contrast to the man himself. A quiet man, of modesty, Ranjit Singh was often depicted seated on a simple chair in humble surroundings. When hosting guests and foreign visitors however, the Maharaja represented his authority by using his Golden Throne, and his court was adorned with vibrant carpets and textiles.

As the succession of power in the Punjab shifted from the Mughals to the Sikhs, the ownership of the famed jewels known as the Koh-i-Noor diamond and "Timur Ruby" was also passed onto the Sikh Maharaja. Other treasures of the court included wooden cabinets beautifully inlaid with ivory and tortoise shells, ornately decorated jade objects and ceremonial weapons, and jewels and medals embedded with emeralds and diamonds. Today the Koh-i-Noor diamond and the "Timur Ruby" are amongst the holdings of the Royal Collections of Britain.



A Sikh Mela
In Celebration of
THE ARTS
OF THE SIKH KINGDOMS



In celebration : Montreal bhangra group at the Sikh Mela in Toronto; fashion show by Gurdev Kaur Arora, the famous Canadian fashion designer and "The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms" opening night (top).

is spurned. Third, it gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man, indicating thereby that it should be of the same character as the loving nature of God. For, "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout." This clearly prescribes the methodology of deeds. Fourth, it unambiguously points out the direction in which human effort should move, and the yardstick with which to measure human conduct. This sets the goal for the seeker, or Godman. Fifth, it shows the gracious interest of God in human affairs and activities. An important attribute of God is that He is 'Guru' or Enlightener who gives both knowledge and guidance, i.e., spiritual experience is noetic. The Guru's God being a God of Will, one feels confident that one is working in line with His altruistic Will. For, God is perpetually creating and watching the world with His Benevolent Eye. And, He rewards every effort to become divine. For that matter, it gives man hope, strength and optimism.

Implication of 'God is Love'

Here it is necessary to stress that the definition that God is Love, is extremely important for determining the category of Sikh religion. For, all systems in which God is Love, are life-affirming, and there is an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. And, as in the case of Abu Ben Adam, love of one's fellowmen, is the primary and essential counterpart of the love of God. But, in life-negating systems, there is a clear dichotomy between the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. And *sanyasa*, asceticism, monasticism, withdrawal from life, pacifism or *ahimsa* and celibacy are the normal modes of the spiritual path. Sikhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity belong to the first category. Jainism and most other Indian systems belong to the second category.

In fact, differences in approach to life are due to the basic difference in the spiritual experience. In the second category of systems like Vaisnavism and Vedanta, God has been defined as *sat-chit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss). This is far from being a dynamic concept. Stace has made a detailed survey of the description various mystics give of the nature of their spiritual experience of the Ultimate Reality. They all give blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary consciousness and ineffability as the nature of their spiritual experience. No mystic mentions love as the characteristic of that experience. The distinction is not arbitrary, but real. Huxley says, "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no me any more and a kind of *sat-chit-ananda* at one moment without *karuna* or charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about love).... I had an inkling of both kinds of *nirvana* — the loveless being, consciousness, bliss and the one with love, and above all, sense that one can never love enough". He also says, "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment in the rest of the world — this is perfectly expressed today in powerful slang, in the phrase 'dropping out'. It completely denies the facts, it is morally wrong, and finally of course, absolutely catastrophic." "Absolutely Catastrophic". Hence, the religious system laid down by the Gurus is radically different from the earlier Indian systems.

Consequent Differences with Other Religious Systems of India

As it is, the Guru's concept of God is quite different from the concept of many of the quietist mystics, or from the Indian concept of *sat-chit-ananda*. We find that Guru Nanak's system follows strictly his spiritual experience and his view of the Attributes of God. And as a Godman, he seeks to follow the line of expression of God's attributes in the world of man. Consequently, in the empirical life, this concept has important implications which stand emphasised in the *bani* and life of Guru Nanak. Hence, Guru Nanak's system and its growth are entirely different from his contemporary religious systems and their growth.

First, it means, as already pointed out, the reality of the world and the life-affirming character of Sikhism. For, God is not only immanent in the world. He also expresses His Love and Attributes in the empirical world, and casts a Benevolent Eye on His creation. But in Vedanta and other Indian systems, the world is either *mithya*, an illusion, a misery, or a suffering. Second, Sikhism being life-affirming, this, inevitably, involves an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This constitutes the foundation of the *miri-piri* doctrine laid down by Guru Nanak in his *bani*. In other words, Guru Nanak's system is a whole-life system like Islam and Judaism, which also combine the spiritual and the empirical lives of man. Third, in consequence of it, monasticism, *sanyasa*, asceticism, pacifism and withdrawal from life are rejected, and a householder's life is accepted as the forum of spiritual activities and growth. Logically, monasticism and celibacy go together, and Guru Nanak categorically rejected both of them. Obviously, God's qualities of being 'Shelter to the shelterless,' 'Milk to the child,' 'Riches to the poor,' and 'Eyes to the blind,' can be expressed by the Godman only by being a householder and participating in all walks of life, and not by withdrawing from them. The fourth difference follows as a corollary to this and to the rejection of celibacy, namely, equality between man and woman.

In contrast, we find that in life-negating systems, and more especially in the Indian systems, the position on all these four points is essentially different. For them, life is far from real or an arena of spiritual endeavours. The spiritual path and the worldly path are considered separate and distinct. Whether it is Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaisnavism or Nathism, asceticism, monasticism, *ahimsa*, *sanyasa* or withdrawal from life into *bhikshuhood* is the normal course. In consequence, celibacy is the rule, and woman is deemed to be a temptress. Dighambra Jains believe that a woman cannot reach *kaivalya* (spiritual summit), and has first to achieve male incarnation. In Buddhism, woman *bhikshus* are deemed second grade compared to male *bhikshus* who are considered senior to them". A male *bhikshu* is not supposed to touch and rescue a drowning woman, even if she were his mother. Sankara calls woman 'the gateway to hell'. Both Ramanuja and Shankaradeva (a liberal Vaisnava saint) would not admit a woman to be a Vaisnava. The latter stated, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight



destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of woman". Bhagat Kabir, we know, is considered a misogynist and calls woman 'black cobra', 'pit of hell' and 'the refuse of the world'. It is well-known that even today in Catholic Christianity, a woman is not ordained as a priest. Against this, Guru Nanak not only sanctioned a householder's life but stated as to, "How can a woman be called impure, when without woman there would be none".

All this has been explained to stress that the basic perceptions about the nature of the spiritual experience and the ontological Reality being different, the spiritual paths, under the two categories of systems, become automatically divergent.

Further, the acceptance of a householder's life has important empirical and socio-political implications. Except for Guru Harkrishan, who died at an early age, every Guru married and led a householder's life. By way of demonstration, this step was essential, otherwise, the entire Indian tradition being different, Guru Nanak's system would have been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted. We are well aware that it is the Naths who questioned Guru Nanak as to how incongruous it was that he was, wearing the clothes of a householder, and at the same time claiming to follow the religious path. Guru Nanak's reply was equally cryptic and categoric, when he said that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path. For this very reason, the Guru did not make his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse, his successor.

Regarding the fifth important difference about the goal of life of the religious man, Guru Nanak has made the position very clear in his Japuji. After putting a specific question as to what is the way to be a *sachia* or a true man, the Guru, while clearly rejecting the method of observing silence, coupled with continuous concentration or meditation, replies that the right method and goal are to carry out the Will of God. And, God being Love and the Ocean of Virtues, His Will is Altruistically Creative and Dynamic. The Sikh goal of life is, thus, to be active and live a creative life of love and virtues. The goal is not personal salvation, or merger in Brahman, but an ever active life of love. It is in this context that Guru Nanak gives the call, "If you want to play the game of love, then come to my path with your head on your palm; once you set your foot on this way, then find not a way out and be prepared to lay down your head". For him, life is a game of love. It is significant that the same advice was given by Guru Arjun to Bhai Manji who was then a Sakhi Sarvarya and wanted to be a Sikh of the Guru. "You may go on with the easy path of Sakhi Sarvar worship, because Sikhism is a very difficult path, and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me". Exactly, the same call for total commitment and sacrifice was given by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi Day, 1699, when he created the Khalsa and administered *amrit* to the *Panj Piaras*.

The goal being different, the sixth implication is as to the method to achieve that goal. In Sikhism, the emphasis is on the methodology of deeds. Guru Nanak has made this point very clear when he says in *Japuji*: "Man's assessment in His court is done on the basis of one's deeds" and "It is by one's deeds that we become near or away from God". In order to stress the fundamental spiritual importance of deeds, Guru Nanak says, "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living". In fact, when the Guru defines the *gurmukh* or the superman, he calls him: "One who always lives truthfully".

Essentials of Sikh Life and Its Differences with Other Systems in Matters of Social Responsibility

The basic difference between a whole-life system and a dichotomous system is that in the former, every field of life of operation of God, is also the field of operation and responsibility of both the Godman and the seeker. This is the broad approach. Having defined the nature of God and the goal of man, the important issue is what are the essentials of the religious life. In the context explained above, Guru Nanak has fixed specific duties and responsibilities of the religious life. The first is of accepting equality between man and woman. Guru Nanak clearly states, "Why downgrade woman, when without woman there would be none". And "It is she who gives birth to great persons". When the Third Guru created *manjis* or districts of religious administration, women were appointed in charge of some of them. The second responsibility is of maintaining equality between man and man. This was a direct blow to the social ideology of *Varn Ashram Dharma* which gave scriptural sanction to the hierarchical caste system. Guru Nanak found fault with that ideology saying, "The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste", and "One cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing; real Yoga lies in treating all alike". He demonstrated the primary importance of treating all as equal by taking, after his enlightenment, Mardana, a low cast Muslim, as his life companion. This meant a total departure from the then existing religious prejudices, not only against lower castes, but also against Muslims who were regarded as *malechhas*. He made it clear that any one wanting to join his society, had, at the very start, to shed all prejudices against inter-religious or inter-caste dining and social intercourse. The revolutionary character of this step could be gauged from the fact that a Ramanuja would throw the entire food as polluted, if any one cast a glance on it while he had been preparing or eating it.

The third social responsibility, Guru Nanak emphasises, is the importance of work. This too, we find, was something opposed to the then prevalent religious practice. Evidently, other worldliness, *sanyasa* and monasticism excluded the religious necessity of work and sustaining the society. In fact, the Naths who were then the principal religious organisation in Punjab took a vow never to engage themselves in any work or business. But Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split (i.e., turns a Nath Yogi) and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others. The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world, and then is not ashamed of begging at the door of the householders. The fourth social responsibility Guru Nanak stresses is about the sharing of wealth. He states, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves". "Man gathers riches by making others miserable." "Wealth cannot be gathered without sin, but it does keep one's company after death." All this clearly condemns exploitative collection of wealth. The story of Guru Nanak rejecting the invitation of Malik Bhago, a rich person exploiting the poor, but accepting the hospitality of Lalo, a poor labourer, illustrates the same point as stressed in his *bani*.

Thus, the twin ideas about the brotherhood of man and the sharing of wealth to eliminate poverty and maintain equality in society are stressed by Guru Nanak. Even after his missionary tours, Guru Nanak took to the role of a peasant for the last 18 years of his life. It is significant that till the time of the Sixth Guru, when social and military duties of the leadership and organisation of the Sikh society

became quite heavy and absorbing, every Sikh Guru had been doing a vocation or business to support his family.

The fifth social responsibility, where Guru Nanak radically departed from all the contemporary religious systems, including Sufism, Santism and Christianity, was his approach towards injustice and oppression of all kinds in society. He made a meticulous study of injustice and corruption, aggression and incongruity in every field of life. He pointed out the greed and hypocrisy of Brahmin priests and Mullahs, the 'blood thirsty corruption' and injustice by lower and higher-rung officials in the administration, the misrule, oppression and irresponsibility of the local rulers, their inability to give security, fairplay and peace to the people, and brutal and barbaric butchery of the people. All this was not just idle rhetoric, but a diagnostic assessment of the prevailing turmoil and conditions in the society, which the Guru felt, needed to be changed. It needs to be emphasised that in Guru Nanak's ideology, there was nothing like private or personal salvation. Just as God of Love is benevolently looking after the entire world, in the same way, the Godman's sphere of activity and responsibility is equally wide, and is unhedged by any self-created barriers. This is, as we shall see, a fundamental difference between a salvation religion catering for individuals, and a universal religion catering for the spiritual well-being of society as a whole.

Here it is very relevant to give, as recorded by Bertrand Russell, the contrasted approach of St. Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian gospel and author of *City of God*. Russell concludes: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned, not with saving civilisation on expelling the barbarians or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants. Seeing that these were the preoccupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition". Whereas Guru Nanak meticulously points out every dark spot in the religious and socio-political life of his times, St. Augustine is simply unconcerned with socio-political conditions of his period. For, "Augustine's *City of God* (426) attacked both Christians who expected the world to get better and pagans with a cyclic view of history. Augustine did not believe that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthly city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."

Another important fact is Guru Nanak's criticism in *Babar Vani* of the brutalities and massacres perpetrated and misery caused by the invaders. He condemns them in the strongest terms and complains to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong. This hymn has an extremely important lesson, which many of us have missed. For, anything which is within the sphere of His creation and the responsibility of God, is certainly within the sphere of responsibility of the Godman. The hymn has four implications: first, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God; second, that as the Master and God of Love, harmony has to be maintained by His Will; third, that, as the instrument of God, it is

the spiritual duty and responsibility of the Godman to confront all kinds of injustice; and, fourth, that, as such, resistance to oppression was a task and a target laid down by the Guru for the religious society he was organising. Because, it is Guru Nanak who defines God as 'Destroyer of the evil doers', 'Destroyer of demonical persons', 'Slayer of the inimical', and 'Protector of the weak'. Such being the God of Guru Nanak, it is equally the responsibility of the Godman, *gurmukh*, or the Sikh to carry out His Will which is just and altruistic.

In short, in Guru Nanak's system to ensure equality and fair play and to react against injustice and aggression, become the religious duty and responsibility of the Sikh. Since the dawn of civilisation, the greatest oppression and injustice have undeniably been done by the rulers, the State, or the Establishment who have possessed all the instruments of power and coercion. It is impossible for individuals to confront such power. This leads to two important inferences. First, that in a whole-life system like Sikhism, which combines spiritual life with the empirical life of man and accepts the *miri-piri* doctrines, the religious man must, as a religious duty, resist and confront injustice, wherever it takes place. Second, that such a religious man should not only be cognizant of such injustice, but also organise a society that should be in a position to face the challenge of such injustice and oppression. This follows logically both from Guru Nanak's *bani* and his system. This also explains why from the very beginning of his mission, he started organising the Sikh societies at places which he visited and how the societies were logically linked and developed by his successors into the *Panth*. These aspects are very significant and important about his society and religion. It is obvious to every student of the *Adi Granth* that so far as the ideology is concerned, it had been completely laid down in the *bani* of Guru Nanak. But what was lacking was the presence of a properly motivated and responsible society that should be in a position to successfully discharge the responsibility of reacting against injustice and oppression prevalent in his times.

There is another important and related issue. Having cast on his society the responsibility of confronting injustice, again it is Guru Nanak who eliminates the hurdle of *ahimsa* or pacifism that stood as a bar against the religious man or a religious society trying to confront socio-political aggression. Among Vaisnavas, Jains, Buddhist Bhikshus, Naths, or Radical Saints like Kabir, *ahimsa* is deemed to be a cardinal virtue and meat eating is a prohibition. These religious persons are all from life-negating systems, with personal salvation as the ideal. But a society that has to accept the social responsibility of confronting injustice cannot remain wedded to the hurdle of *ahimsa*. For, reason and force are both neutral tools that can be used both for good and evil, for construction and destruction. That is why Guru Nanak says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin", and that "there is life in every grain of food we eat".

Role of Later Nine Gurus

In a country, which for over 2000 years had been trained in religious systems involving clear dichotomy between spiritual and



empirical life, and which had accepted *ahimsa* as a fundamental value and individual salvation as an ideal, it was no easy task to create a mature society with the new motivation of religious responsibility of always fighting injustice and oppression in all spheres of life.

It is very significant that Guru Nanak laid the foundations of every institution that was later developed and matured by his successors. By starting the institution of *langar* (common kitchen) and taking Mardana as his life companion, he gave a heavy blow to the divisive institution of *Varn Ashram Dharma*, pollution and caste. He created a separate Sikh society with their own *dharmasalas* as centres of religious worship and training. He sanctified the role of the householder as the medium of religious expression and progress, and made it plain that work was a necessity of life, and idleness a vice. He emphatically made it clear that to fight injustice and oppression is an essential duty of the religious man and the religious society. For that end, while he created a new society with a new ideology, he also removed the hurdle of *ahimsa*, so that his society could discharge its socio-religious responsibility without any unwanted inhibitions and impediments in its path. And since the new society had not yet been fully organised and developed, and had yet to be properly oriented to enable it to discharge its responsibilities, he also created the institution of succession. It is very significant of the social and societal aims of Guru Nanak that after passing the succession to Guru Angad, when he found him to be living a somewhat solitary life, he reminded him that he had to be active since he had to organise a society or *Panth*.

In the time of the Second, Third and Fourth Guru, four important steps were taken. Through the creation of 22 *manjis* or districts of religious administration, the Sikh society was organised into a separate religious *Panth*. But, the most important and difficult part of the task was the creation of new motivations and the acceptance of the new life-affirming religious ideals of Guru Nanak. For, these were radically new in their approach, implications and goals. The stupendous nature of the task of the Gurus can be judged from the fact that even today great Hindus, like Jadunath Sarkar, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and Christians like McLeod, Cole, Toynbee and the like, all coming from pacifist traditions and conditioned by them, find it difficult to understand the spiritual role of the Sixth and the Tenth Master.

The Third Guru created new institutions which had the dual purpose of weaning the Sikhs away from the old Hindu society and of conditioning them in new values, ideals and practices. For example, while Guru Nanak had bypassed his recluse son, Sri Chand, for the same reasons, the Second and the Third Guru avoided persons of ascetic tendencies from entering the Sikh fold. The institution of *langar*, with the dual purpose of feeding the poor and of eliminating the caste and status prejudices and distinctions, was strengthened. Finally, the important religious centre of Darbar Sahib and the town of Amritsar were founded and developed for the periodical meetings of the Sikh society and visits of the Sikhs to the Guru. The object of all this was to establish a separate historical identity of the Sikhs and to wean them away from the traditional society, its centres of pilgrimage, and its religious practices and rituals. Not only had they to be trained in the essentials of a new religious system, but they had to be taken out of the strangle-hold of the Brahmin priests claiming to be the sole medium of religious growth, practice and interpretation.

Then came the stage of the Fifth Guru who created and installed the Sikh Scripture as the revealed and final doctrinal authority. The

system of *daswandh* (giving 10% of one's earnings for the cause of the community) was organised. Sikhs were initiated into trading in horses, so that the transition to the next stage of militancy could become smooth. As the instrument of God on earth, the Sikhs called their Guru, 'True Emperor.' In the time of the Fifth Guru, the Sikh society had become 'a State within a State', and had developed a social identity which had caught the eye of the Emperor, who considered it an unwanted socio-political growth. By his martyrdom, the Guru not only strengthened the faith and determination of the community, but also sought confrontation with the Empire, leaving instructions to his son to begin militarisation of the Sikhs. In the process, the Sixth Guru even recruited mercenaries to train his people. This phase of martyrdom and confrontation with the Empire was continued by the subsequent Gurus till Guru Gobind Singh did, as recorded by his contemporary Kavi Sainapat, the epitomic work of starting the institutions of *amrit* and the *Khalsa*. Having felt that the *Panth* had become mature and responsible enough, the Guru created the *Khalsa* in 1699, and requested the *Panj Piaras* to baptise him. It is significant that at that time all the Guru's sons were alive, meaning thereby that Guru Nanak's mission had been completed and thereafter the succession was not to be continued. And finally, the Guru made Guru Granth Sahib the Everlasting Guru of the Sikhs.

Let us have a rapid look back to find out if the five tasks indicated by Guru Nanak had been accomplished. First, the Sikhs had been formed into a distinct new religious society with a Scripture of its own, being the full repository and complete and final guide of the Sikh ideology and its way of life. This separateness was made total by Guru Gobind Singh's *Nash* doctrine of five freedoms - *Dharam Nash*, *Bharam Nash*, *Kul Nash*, *Karam Nash* and *Kirt Nash*. This means freedom from the bonds of old religions and traditions, of earlier superstitions and prejudices, of earlier acts and of restrictions in choice of trade or calling, or in professional mobility. The Tenth Master made a complete break with the earlier traditions and societies. Second, it was a society of householders, rejecting all kinds of otherworldliness, idleness and monasticism. Third, it was a casteless society with complete fraternity among its members. Men from the lowest and Sudra castes rose to be its leaders. The contrast is evident from the fact that while the Sikhs have never had Brahmin leaders, in India after Independence in 1947, the Prime Minister and practically every Chief Minister was a Brahmin. Four, it was a society which was fully earthaware; and habits of work, production and service became ingrained among its members. Begging was considered a disgrace in its social ethos. The fifth social responsibility discharged by the Sikhs was to free the country from the curse of a thousand-year wave of invaders from the North-West. Though the Sikhs were subjected over the years to the worst persecution in Indian history, yet they suffered it and emerged triumphant. They have been trained to react against wrong, injustice and oppression. A society had been created with the ideal of a *Sant-Sipahi* (Saint-Soldier).

Manmukh to Gurmukh : the Guru's Concept of Evolution of Man

Here, it is necessary to state the *manmukh-gurmukh* concept, which is essential for understanding the Sikh worldview. As the Gurus say, over millions of years life has evolved into man from a tiny speck of life. The Guru says, "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births, an insect, for several births a fish and an antelope." "After ages you have the glory of being a man." "After passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human

form." "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom." "O man, you are supreme in God's creation; now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny." At its present stage of development, man is, without doubt, better equipped than other animals, in so far as he has a higher sense of discrimination. But, as an ego-conscious being, he is still an animal, being a *manmukh*. This implies that whatever be human pretensions, man is basically and organically a self-centred being. His psyche is governed by an egoistic consciousness, that being his centre of awareness, control and propulsion. Because of his present inherent limitations of ego-consciousness, it is virtually impossible for man to avoid conflict, aggression, and wars. But the Gurus clearly hold out hope for man. There are four stages of evolution or development. The Guru says, "God created first, Himself, then *haumain*, third, *maya* (multifarious things and beings) and fourth, the next higher stage of the *gurmukh* who lives truthfully". The Gurus clearly say that it is human destiny to reach the fourth stage and to meet God, or to be a *gurmukh*, or one who is in tune with the fundamental Reality or Universal Consciousness, God, *Naam*, or Love. His ideal is not merger in God or salvation, or union as an end in itself. Being the instrument of, or in touch with God's Altruistic Consciousness, he is spontaneously benevolent, compassionate, creative and loving. It is very important to note that the *gurmukh* or superman is not a quietist, he 'lives truthfully.' He lives as did the ten Gurus. For, Guru Nanak was called just a *gurmukh*. This is the next higher stage of evolution towards which life is striving and not towards darkness and death as materialist scientists would have us believe. Nor does Sikhism accept any concept of the basic sinfulness or fall of man from grace. It only indicates the constitutional weakness, immaturity or imperfection of man at his present stage of the evolutionary process or development. Hence, it gives us an ideology of optimism and hope, invoking and exhorting us to make moral effort.



Survey of Higher Religions

Before we draw our conclusions, let us make a brief survey of some religious ideologies of the world and find the place of Sikhism among them. There are four clear religious ideologies that are current today.

Dichotomous Religions

First is the category of religious systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Nathism, Vaisnavism and Vedanta, in which there is clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life. Monasticism, *sanyasa*, otherworldliness, celibacy, yogic meditation and *ahimsa* are the common but important features of this category. They hold out no hope for man, except by withdrawal from life and yogic or one point meditation. In each case, it is a path of personal salvation without any involvement in the socio-political affairs of man. Practically, all the Indian religions, except Sikhism, belong to this category.

Judaism

Second is Judaism which has a long and chequered history. Basically, it is a system in which there is no dichotomy between the

religious life and the empirical life of man. Prophet Moses who got the revelation, was both a religious and political leader. His Torah or Commandments and Laws prescribe and govern the entire gamut of the spiritual and temporal life of the Jews. It is a system that prescribes rules governing the conduct of prayer, rituals, sacrifices and their socio-political life. The renowned Hillel, when asked to explain the 613 commandments of the Torah, replied, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary, go and learn it." In short, it is basically a life-affirming system. It makes no distinction between the spiritual and the socio-political life of man. The Torah governs every aspect of it. As to the means of resistance, Judaism recommends the use of force by saying, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth", and indicates rules for a righteous fight. But, over its long history including the period of the prophets, this aspect of its principle has, to an extent, been altered, or changed at least by some sects of the community. At the time of the Babylonian attack (Sixth Century B.C.) on Palestine, Prophet Jeremiah strongly recommended non-resistance or pacificism. He asserted that the attack was God's punishment to the Jews for their non-observance of His Laws. His assertion was something like Mahatma Gandhi's statement that

the Bihar earthquake was a punishment to the Hindus for their practice of untouchability.

However, over the centuries thereafter, many religious sects of Jews like Essenes, Kabbalists, Hasidists, Therapeutics, and even some Pharisees accepted the principle of non-resistances, pacificism, withdrawal and otherworldliness. Even monastic and celibate cults appeared among Jews, discarding both the world and the use of force. This important change, in a basic religious principle, we believe, came about in this religion in later parts of its history, when Judaism was unable to cope with challenges from the socio-political environment, and their religious fervour had been exhausted. Practically, all these otherworldly sects appeared after the destruction of the First Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, when thousands of Jews were driven out as exiles and slaves to Babylonia. We wish to stress that these fundamental changes in Judaic ideology, including otherworldly or monastic sects, appeared only during the lean period of Jewish history. This happened about eight centuries after the revelation of Moses, and after the heydays of Jewish life in the times of David and Solomon. But, it is very significant that despite the presence of somewhat pacifist or otherworldly cults and sects in Judaism, and despite about 2500 years of suffering and travail, the idea of Zionism, a virtual revival of earlier non-pacifist ideals, strongly reappeared in Judaism in the last century. And it is an important fact that Einstein, who says that his life was spent 'between politics and equations' was a staunch Zionist. So much so, that when Israel was formed he was offered its presidency. However, apart from this apparent doctrinal ambivalence in its ideology, Judaism is a highly exclusive religion, not quite universal in its character, affinities and approach.

Christianity

The Judaic heritage of Christianity is undoubted. As in Judaism, in Christianity, too, there is, in principle, no dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. For, Christ emphasises both loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbour as oneself. But like Buddha, he also emphasises the pacifist principles,

'resist not evil' and 'turn the left cheek if hit on the right'. Religious history demonstrates that pacifist religions almost invariably become otherworldly, even if they were life-affirming in the beginning. Because of their religious pacificism, the Christians declined to take up service in the Roman army. In fact, historians like Gibbon and Sir James Frazer have mentioned Christian otherworldliness as one of the major causes of the fall of the Roman Empire. It is obvious that Christianity, which, like Judaism, was a religion of householders, showed, by the beginning of the 4th century AD, clear monastic trends. Increasingly, monasteries and nunneries appeared as a significant development in the Christian religion. This life of monasticism, asceticism and nunneries led, on the one hand, to otherworldly quietist mysticism, and, on the other hand, to corruption and malpractices in the Catholic Church.

Consequent to this schism in the life of the Christian Church, ultimately arose the Reformation, causing a major blow to the supremacy of the Church and its role as the guiding moral force in the life of the Christian society. Lutheran and Calvinist reforms not only shattered the universal character of the Church, but also brought about its subordination to the national State. In addition, because of Luther's leanings towards the feudal princes, he took a very hostile and feudalistic stand against the rights of the peasantry. This landslide in the fortunes of the Church caused its gradual waning as a major moral influence in the socio-political life of the Christian societies. After the rise of science, which was considered to be the new elixir, it came to be believed that it would, in course of time, cure most human ills. The net result is that in the last 300 years, Renaissance, scientism, empiricism and secularism have virtually eliminated religion from the moral life of man in the West.

Toynbee says, "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to the parochial Western secular state was given a positive form borrowed from the Graeco-Roman civilisation by the Renaissance." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Christian society." Since the loss of supremacy of religion in the Christian society, Western life has lost its moral moorings. Nationalism, communism and individualism have been the unstable offsprings of this broken home. "Together with Darwinism, secularism and positivism, they have dehumanised the Western culture, reducing liberalism to a self-serving, highly competitive individualism." By relegating religion to the background and having lost the moral springs of the Western culture, either utilitarian ethics has been accepted as an expedient substitute or a reductionist search has been made to find appropriate ethical elements in the life of the animals, or in the material base of man which is considered to be its fundamental constituent. And this search has finally come to the dismal conclusion that all ethical life is 'a defence mechanism' or a 'reaction formation' to the impacts of the environment. After the Second World War, a third of the population of the world was living under the Communist system. As the century is closing, these countries find that despite the myth of dialectical movement and synthesis, the system has been unable to make any synthetic values or devise a system of ethics which is able to maintain cohesion within these societies. And it is the existence of this moral vacuum that

made the Foreign Secretary of the Soviets proclaim that 'universal values should have priority over class, group or other interests.' The warning remained unheeded, and the Russian Empire has collapsed, purely because of its inability to build internal cohesion. At the ethical plane, this decries, in a way, the validity of Darwinism, and its struggle for existence, and Marxism with its dialectical movement of class struggle. It involves equal condemnation of economic wars, cut-throat competition, consumerism and increasing disparities in capitalist societies.

From the point of view of internal cohesion, the position in the capitalist countries of the West is no better. Mounting numbers of divorces, broken homes, drug addiction, alcoholism and individualism have created such a situation in North America, which made the Christian Church raise a strong voice saying that secularism was a common danger and needed to be eliminated as a social force, and that Christianity should seek the co-operation of other religions to combat its evil influence. Christianity had given to the empirical life in the West its cohesion, strength and elan; the divorce of religion from politics and the empirical life, has left secularism a barren institution without any hope of a creative future. This is the tragedy both of communism and capitalism. It is this tragedy with its dark future that the North American Churches wanted to avoid. But in the temper of the times, this voice of sanity was drowned in an exhibition of suicidal egoism of the European Churches who felt that "Secularisation, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas. Hence, secularisation is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they considered to be superstition. So, we should ally ourselves with secularisation and see it as the work of God." Later, it was again repeated: "We do not feel that we have anything lacking. And so we are opposed to a dialogue unless it is for the sake of testifying to Jesus Christ." "That was it. Then they passed a resolution saying that under no circumstances should multi-religious dialogues be undertaken because multi-religious dialogues put Christianity on the same level as other religions, and this is unacceptable. So, because the European Christians had that point of view, the World Council of Churches has not been able to engage in multi-religious dialogues for quite some time."

This is the state of affairs of the moral life of man in Western countries that lead the dominant culture of our times. Recently, however, some priests in Latin America have raised a voice for an integrated and composite culture of Liberation Theology, invoking the Bible in support of a revolutionary struggle to help the poor. Father C. Torres states, "The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin." Theologian Moltmann says, "Political theology wants to awaken political consciousness in every treatise of Christian theology. Understood in this way, it is the premise that leads to the conclusion that, while there may be naive or politically unaware theology, there can be no apolitical theology." He concludes, "The memory of Christ crucified compels us to a political theology." But these are still minority voices in the Christian world.



Islam started with a full-blooded combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is this combination that swept everything before it and created an epoch which is unrivalled in its achievements. It is a religious system and culture, which is, in many respects, more comprehensive and unified than the parochial culture of the city states of Greece. It is hardly complimentary to the Christian world of the West that while today it seeks to fashion many of its cultural institutions on the basis of Greek classical models, yet these, but for the interlude of the Islamic epoch which preserved most of the Greek thought, would have been lost to posterity. Never was the concept of human brotherhood advanced, in thought and deed, on a scale as during this epoch. It speaks volumes for the liberalism of Islamic culture that the heydays of the Judaic literature, philosophy and thought synchronise with the countries and periods of Islamic rule. Not only were some of the Jewish classics written, but Maimonides, the king of Judaic philosophy, also flourished and wrote during the Muslim rule. As against it, under Christian rulers, the Jews suffered periodical massacres, persecution and the segregated life of the ghetto. Admittedly, the Muslim rulers were, by comparison, quite liberal towards the followers of other religions. Islamic contribution to the scientific thought of the day was significant. But far more important is the contribution of men like Al Qushairi, Al Ghazali and Arbi to the religious thought of man.

There is, however, little doubt that mystic quietism and otherworldliness of Sufis is a growth that appeared during the time of later Caliphs, when they indulged in luxurious and un-Islamic living. It has happened in the case of Judaism and of Islam, both whole-life religions, that in times when religiously sensitive souls found it difficult to face the social or socio-political challenges, they withdrew themselves into the shell of quietism, otherworldliness, monasticism and asceticism. Sufi sects appeared all over the Muslim world, but they never posed a challenge to the oppression and misrule of the Muslim emperors or kings. In this respect, the Jewish prophets were quite bold in their criticism of Jewish rulers, including David and Solomon.

It is very significant, and shows the lofty spiritual status of the Sikh Gurus and the basic ideological affinity between the two religions, that a Sufi saint like Pir Buddhu Shah fought and sacrificed two of his sons for the cause of Guru Gobind Singh. But it was the Sikh Gurus and not the Sufis who challenged the growing Mughal tyranny. This instance demonstrates that although as an organisation, Sufis had become otherworldly and failed to confront the major challenge of societal oppression in the Muslim empires, yet when the Sikh Gurus had actually taken up the challenge and the ideological struggle was on, the Sufi saint made it clear that, considering the tenets of Islam, on which side should be the sympathies of a pious person.

There are, however, some scholars like Iqbal and Abdus Salam who believe that like the otherworldliness of the Christians, as in

the case of the Roman Empire, Sufis also became a significant cause of the decline of the Muslim cultural supremacy in the world. For, there is considerable truth in Dr. Mohammad Iqbal's couplet : "Whether it be the facade of a great republic, or the domain of a glorious empire, if its polity is divorced of the religious component, the system is reduced to sheer Changezian barbarity and tyranny." Thoughtful and saner elements in the Muslim world seem to be disillusioned with the bankrupt Western Secularism, and are trying to revert to a reformed and composite culture of Islam.

Religious History and Creation of the Khalsa

In our brief survey, we have indicated four categories of religious systems. The Indian systems are all dichotomous. To the second category belongs pacifist Christianity which, though it originally suggested the love of one's neighbour as oneself, has gradually but ultimately reduced itself to sheer Secularism, Individualism and Consumerism, bereft of any religious component. To the third category belong Judaism and Islam which started with a full-blooded combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life, but ultimately, under pressure of circumstances, bifurcated, on the one hand, into otherworldliness or mystic quietism, and, on the other hand, into the pursuit of worldly gains and sheer animal survival.

Sikhism belongs to a different or a fourth category of the religious systems. For the purpose of understanding, clarity and comparison, it will help us if we recapitulate the salient features of Sikhism. The Gurus say that the Basic Reality is creative and free. It has a Direction and a Will. It is the Ocean of Values, Destroyer of evil-doers, Benevolent and Beneficent. That Reality is Love and we can be at peace with ourselves and the world only if we live a life of love and fall in line with the Direction of that Reality. Though ego is God created and man is at present at the ego-conscious (manmukh) stage of development, it is his destiny to evolve and reach the stage of Universal or God

consciousness and work in line with His Altruistic Will, i.e., achieve the gurmukh stage of development, when alone he can 'be spontaneously moral' and 'live truthfully'. At the present, or the egoistic stage of his development, man cannot avoid conflicts and suicidal wars. It is a futile search to try and find the moral base of man either in the animal life or in the material constituents of man. Nor can reason, which is just a tool of the egoistic psyche, like any other limb of the individual, devise and give man a helpful ethics. God or the Basic Reality, which is Love, can alone be the source of the moral life of man. Ultimately, it is only God or Naam-consciousness, involving a link with the Basic Fount of Love, that can lead to truthful living. That is why the Guru says, "Naam-consciousness and ego-consciousness cannot go together." The two are contradictory to each other. It is a hymn of fundamental significance. For, ego-consciousness means man's alienation from the basic Force of Love. And, greater the alienation or isolation of man from his spiritual and moral source, the greater would be his drive towards destruction. Secularism as an institution represents that egoistic isolation. This trend, the Guru says, is inconsistent with the paths towards link with the Universal Consciousness, the



spring of moral life. The Gurus have given a lead to man in the field. Ten Gurus or ten *gurmukhs*, lived the life of God-consciousness. In one sense, it is the life of one *gurmukh* completing a demonstration and furthering the progress of life and its spiritual evolution and ascent. Guru Nanak's thesis involved the integration of the spiritual life of man with his empirical life. This integration has to enrich life and society. Because of the earlier cultural and religious tradition, it took ten lives for Guru Nanak, the *gurmukh* or *Sant-Sipahi*, to demonstrate his thesis and role, and discharge his social responsibilities.

These socio-spiritual responsibilities involved not only the creation of a society motivated with new ideas, but also the completion of the five tasks Guru Nanak had indicated as targets before himself and his society. With every succeeding Guru, the ideal of *gurmukh* or *Sant-Sipahi*, as laid down and lived by Guru Nanak, unfolded itself progressively. It is a path of love, humility, service, sacrifice, martyrdom and total responsibility as the instrument of God, the basic Universal Consciousness moving the world.

A question may be asked as to why there have been ten incarnations of Guru Nanak in Sikhism, while in other religions there have generally been only one prophet. To us, four reasons appear quite obvious. First, in a society in which dichotomous religions stand deeply embedded and established for over three thousand years and which claims to have contributed asceticism and monasticism to the cultures of the rest of the world, it was not easy for a whole life religion with its *miri-piri* concept to be acceptable and take firm roots in one generation. Second, the Sikh ideology did not involve individual salvation, or a *gurmukh* just living truthfully, but it also involved compulsively the creation of a society motivated with new aspirations and ideals. And this new orientation and conditioning could be done only by the process of creating a new ideology, embodying it in a new scripture, organising new institutions, socio-religious practices and centres of the new faith, and inspiring people, by the method of martyrdoms, into accepting a new ethical standard of morality and values. For as Ambedkar and Max Weber have stated, the Hindu society cannot be reformed from inside, and rid itself from the unjust system of caste and untouchability, because the *Varn Ashram Dharma* has the sanction of *Shashtras* and scriptures; and a Hindu while making caste distinctions and exhibiting caste prejudices never feels any moral guilt or abhorrence. Instead, he feels a real sense of religious and moral satisfaction that he is observing his *Dharma* and *Shastric* injunctions. Hence, the inevitable necessity of creating a new ideology and Scripture with a new religious and socio-moral code of conduct. Third, even if the ideology and institutions had been there, the Sikh society would, like some reformed societies, soon have reverted to the parent society, if it had not successfully achieved the social targets discussed above, including those of creating a fraternal society of householders, of dislodging the political misrule, and sealing the North-Western gate of India against the invaders.

The fourth reason appears to be very important. Our survey of the major religions of the world shows that revealed systems which start with a combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life and even with clear social objectives, over a period of time, either shed their social ideals and become pacifist, otherworldly, or a salvation religion, or become dichotomous, bifurcating, on the one hand, into monasticism, and, on the other hand, into either political misrule and tyranny or sheer secularism. Sikhism does not stand any such danger of ideological decline or bifurcation, because of its gradual and firm ascent and

unfolding. It shows the prophetic vision of Guru Nanak that he not only profusely and clearly defined all aspects of his life affirming and integrated ideology, but also detailed the targets his society had to achieve. He laid the firm foundations of the institutions and the socio-religious structure his successors had to develop and complete. Guru Nanak defined his God not only as the Ocean of Virtues, but also as a *Sant Sipahi* or the Destroyer of the evil-doers; and the ideal he laid down for the seeker was to be the instrument of the Will of such a God. Guru Arjun gave instructions to his son to militarise the movement and thereafter, as was explained by Guru Hargobind to Sant Ramdas, his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. While Guru Arjun, the first martyr of the faith, had confrontation with the empire and gave orders for militarisation, the subsequent five Gurus manifestly proclaimed and practised the spiritual ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*. So, whatever some votaries of pacifist or dichotomous ideologies or other outsiders may say, to students of Sikhism or a seeker of the Sikh ideal, there can never be any doubt as to the integrated *miri-piri* or *Sant-Sipahi* ideal in Sikhism. Because in the eyes of a Sikh, any reversion to ideas of pacifism, personal salvation or monasticism would be a manifest fall from the spiritual ideology laid down by Guru Nanak, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, and openly, single-mindedly and demonstrably lived by the ten Gurus, culminating in the creation of the Khalsa, with *kirpan* as the essential symbol for resisting injustice and oppression. The *kirpan* essentially signifies two fundamental tenets of Sikhism, namely, that it is the basic responsibility of a Sikh to confront and resist injustice, and that asceticism, monasticism, or escapism, of any kind is wrong. Thus, the *kirpan*, on the one hand, is a constant reminder to the Sikh of his duty, and, on the other hand, is a standing guard against reversion to pacifism and otherworldliness. The extreme sagacity and vision of the Sikh Gurus is evident from the thoughtfully planned and measured manner in which they built the structure of their ideology and the Sikh society, epitomised in the order of the Khalsa. That is also the reason that so far as the ideology and ideals of the Sikh society are concerned, there cannot be any ambiguity in that regard. Hence, considering the manner in which the lives of the ten Gurus have demonstrated the Sikh way of life, the question of its bifurcation or accepting pacifism or otherworldliness does not arise. And this forms, we believe, the fourth important reason for there being ten Gurus and the closure of succession after the Khalsa was created.

Conclusion

The summary of the Sikh ideology, in the background of the religious history of some higher religions, makes the viewpoint of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh position very clear. The Gurus emphasise that at the *manmukh* stage of man's development, man is constitutionally incapable of avoiding injustice, wars and conflicts. Because, man is basically egocentric and stands alienated from the Fundamental Force (God) which is Love. So long as he does not link himself with the Flow of Love and fails to work in unison with it, his problems of clash, disharmony and tensions will continue. The diagnosis of the authors of *Limits of Growth* is also the same, namely, that unless man is able to shed

his egocentrism, there appears little hope for peace and happiness in the world.

The state is an instrument devised by man to curb the basic egocentrism or wickedness of individuals and power groups. But, politics divorced from the Fundamental Spiritual Force, or moral brakes creates the situation that the State or Establishment is seized by individuals and groups, who openly use and employ all the enormous means of the modern state for the satisfaction of their egocentrism, working to the detriment of the masses and the poor. And the more backward or poor a country, the greater the oppression uninhibited secularism can do with the power machine of the state. The result, logically and unavoidably, is that the gap between the downtrodden masses and the oppressive elites goes on widening. This happens both within a state, and among the various national states. We wonder if anyone who is acquainted with recent history, can contradict this observation.

Rationally speaking, secularism is incapable of reversing the present trend, or finding a solution of the existing malady. The causes for this failure have been stressed by the Gurus. Reason being a tool or limb of the egocentric man (*manmukh*) and being unconnected with the Universal Consciousness or spirituo-moral base of man, it can never make the individual spontaneously altruistic. Hence, any search for a humanitarian ethics through empiricism, communism or secularism is doomed to failure. The hopes which science in the first decades of the century had raised, stand tragically shattered.

To us, materialism and morality seem a contradiction in terms. Similarly, dichotomous or life-negating religions are equally amoral in their social impact. It is because of the Indian religions being dichotomous that the unjust secular institution of *Varn Ashram Dharma* and caste could continue in the Indian society, and also have the approval of its scriptures. The study of the three Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam also furnishes the same lesson. The moment any of these societies became otherworldly, or showed dichotomous tendencies, the moral strength of the society to face the challenges of life became minimal. Or vice versa, the society became dichotomous, when it failed to face effectively the challenges of life. And, ultimately it is the moral stamina of a people or culture that by and large determines its survival. This is evident from the known history, both of Judaism and Islam. But for the subordination of religious institutions to the national state, following the Reformation, the triumph of secularism and scientism to erode the Christian ethical base from the Western life would never have been possible. The ethical field today is in complete disarray. Since religion is the only source which could furnish the moral sap to maintain social cohesion, and Christian elan being at its lowest ebb, the twentieth century has witnessed the worst slaughter and butchery of tens of millions, both at the international and the national levels. Hitler, Stalin and Hiroshima are phenomena of the twentieth century secularism. The nations of the world are spending on arms a thousand billion dollars each year. It is this dismal spectacle that had, on the one hand, forced the Soviets to talk of the 'priority of universal values over the class or group values', and, on the other hand, led the North American Churches to suggest co-operation with other religions in order to fight the common danger of secularism. For the present, either out of their ignorance, or for other reasons, the European Churches have overruled the American view. But,

the problem remains and stands highlighted by thinking persons. Decades back, Collingwood wrote: "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me: and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which He establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion, the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of the theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it". This statement presents the view that unless reason and religion are combined, or the spiritual life is combined with the empirical life of man, his problems will remain insolvable. Reason is incapable of devising or creating a moral force. Hence, the inherent incapacity of secularism to create any worthwhile values, much less universal values. The fall of the Russian Empire has made this clear.

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak emphasised that unless the spiritual component enriches the empirical life, man's problems of conflict, war and disharmony will remain. The solution lies in working in consonance with God's Will or the Basic Force of Love and Altruism. The brotherhood of man cannot be a reality without accepting the Fatherhood of God. For the Gurus, the Fatherhood of God or Force of Love or Universal Consciousness is not an assumption, but a reality. For them, it is a true and most indubitable experience, spontaneously leading to activity. It is an experience far more real than the sensory perception of external phenomena or the construction of a pragmatic or utilitarian ethics, or the assumption of a dialectical movement raised by human reason. The Gurus exhort man to follow the path of altruistic deeds to reach the next evolutionary stage of *gurmukh* or God-man. It is a worldview of combining the spiritual life with the empirical life of man, thereby breaking the alienation from which man suffers. It is a worldview of total responsibility towards every sphere of life, the God-man's sphere of responsibility being co-terminus with the sphere of God. At a time when most of the higher religions have either become dichotomous, or are withdrawing from the main fields of social responsibility, and human reason feels frustrated, the Sikh Gurus express a comprehensive worldview of hope and eternal relevance. At the same time, it is important to state that, far from being exclusive, Sikhism is universal in its approach, always anxious and willing to serve and co-operate with those who aim at harmony among beings and welfare of man. For, the Gurus prayer to God is that the world may be saved by any way. He may be Gracious enough to do. And, Guru Nanak proclaimed that his mission was, with the help of other God-men, to steer man across the turbulent sea of life. This fundamental ideal stands enshrined in the final words of the daily Sikh prayer,

"May God bless all Mankind".

The Frescoes of GuruHarsahai



This article is based on some accepted facts, some oral family history and some conjecture. There are likely to be gaps and maybe some mistakes. If any reader comes across these, please inform the author.

A Pothi claimed as containing some parts of the *Bani* of Guru Nanak Devji, a *Mala* (rosary) purportedly used by him and the *Padam*, belonging to him, which find mention in many *Sakhis*, came into the possession of the succeeding generations, and eventually to Meherban, son of Prithi Chand who was the eldest son of Guru Ram Das.

In time, these holy relics found a permanent place at the Pothi Mala in GuruHarsahai, about 25 km south of Ferozepore and many devotees thronged to the place for darshan of the *Pothi* and the relics every year at Baisakhi.

This *Pothi* first finds reference in the writings of Bibi Lakshmi Bai Devi Bedi, a descendent of the family of Guru Nanak. She was a scholar who wrote a number of granths.

The *Pothi's* importance can be gauged from the fact that it is mentioned in the writings of prominent scholars of the *Gurbani* including G.B. Singh's *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Dian Prachin Biran* (1944) where it is the first manuscript to be mentioned. It has also been discussed in Giani Gurdit Singh's *Ithas Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, which also has photographs of some important sections from the manuscript; and lately Gurinder Singh Mann's *Making of Sikh Scriptures* (2000).

The account of GuruHarsahai is associated very intimately with one family, the Sodhis, descendants of Guru Ram Das, through his elder son Prithi Chand.

Prithi Chand declared and called himself "Guru" and his descendants have continued this practice till today. All the branches of the Sodhi family in GuruHarsahai—except one—are still insisting on being addressed as Guru!

Meharban, son of Prithi Chand, was an intellectual in his own right. He is considered to have written a most exhaustive account of the life and times of Guru Nanak besides writing a number of other religious *goshtan* (treatise). His son, Harji, also has a number of religious writings to his credit. Meharban's family controlled the affairs of Harmandir Sahib for about 60 years and eventually shifted to Mahamdiapur, south of Lahore.

There is some dispute about when the family moved to the area of GuruHarsahai. There is one account that a Sodhi Kaul, descendant of Prithi Chand, met Guru Gobind Singh at village Dhillwan, in Lakhi Jungle (thus named as the area, south of Ferozepur, was supposed to have one lakh trees) and gave him white clothes to replace the blue ones the Guru had been wearing earlier. There is also mention that the Sodhi Kaul

Editorial Footnote: On authority of Bhai Gurdast 1st, Prithi Chnad's family were ostrasized by the Sikh Gurus. However, in Panthic tradition, the descendants who rejoined the fold after taking amrit were duly accepted.



Fresco on wall and around door in the Pothi Mala.

had his grandson, Abhey, baptised by the Tenth Guru. Guru Gobind Singh was in this area in 1705 and hence the arrival of this family in GuruHarsahai would have perhaps been earlier around the late 1690s.

According to Dr. Gurinder Singh Mann, who holds the *Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair in Sikh Studies* at the University of California, Santa Barbara, an old manuscript, *Guru Kian Sakhian* (1797) gives the name as Kanwal Nain.

According to the family's oral history, the arrival of the family here is placed around 1725-40. By then turmoil in the region in the following decades was rampant with the invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali. Family history has it that the Brars in the Moga area and Muslims to the west had been engaged in hostilities for long and that they finally decided to invite the Sodhi family to live between the two so as to bring about peace.

The head of the family at the time of the move into the area was Jiwan Mal. The legend is that he was offered all the land that could be covered by horseback in one day. There is no proof that such an act actually took place, but it is certain that a lot of area was handed over to him, mostly jungle and scrub land where he and his successors then established a number of villages. The extent of the land holding can be gauged from the handwritten order of the then British deputy commissioner

of Ferozepore, when land settlements were carried out after the British had taken over the area. After imposing a deduction of 25 per cent, the land left with the family was 50,000 acres.

Oral history has it that when the family's caravan reached a hillock, a halt was called and a good look taken around to decide on the future habitation. An inviting clump of thick trees was seen about a couple of miles away and it was decided to make this the permanent place of residence. But fate intervened. A camel carrying oil used for religious purposes shied and some oil fell on the hillock. This was taken as an omen that the place of residence should be the hillock. The clump of trees was then designated as the resting place after life and is now the site of the *Samads* (Dera Sahib) of the family.

The new habitation was named after the son of Jiwan Mal and given the name of Kot Harsahai. When Harsahai came to the *Gaddi*, by common usage the name was changed GuruHarsahai and has remained such since then.

The family led an uneventful life there till about the early 19th century. The early buildings to come up would have been *kutchas*. Habitation of followers and domestics came up around the main living complex of the family.

The holy relics formed the basis of the continued influence of the family in religious matters. The living complex that came up, over a period of time, came to be known as the Pothi Mala and this continues to date. The Pothi Mala came to full glory during the time of Gulab Singh, who was prominent in the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As Dr. Hari Ram Gupta writes in his book: "Punjab on the Eve of the First Sikh War":



Fresco on the wall showing Guru Nanak and his sons. (Top, left to right) Sirichand; Guru Nanak; Bhai Bala. (Lower, left to right) Lakhmichand; Bhai Mardana (note the Pothi Mala on a small chowki in the centre)



Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib Ji.



Frescoes on the wall.

Gulab Singh was a Sodhi Khatri to which caste the last seven Gurus of the Sikhs belonged. His family exercised great religious influence during the Sikh rule. They always accompanied the Sikh army on expeditions during Ranjit Singh's period. Their disciples could be found both in the Cis-Sutlej areas as well as across the Indus in the Derajat, Bannu, Kohat and Peshwar areas.

"Gooroo Golab Singh of Kot Hursuhace which adjoins the territories of Jumaloodden Khan of Mamdot to the south of the Sutlej has got an order in his favour with regard to his claim for two villages Nidhanuh and Jhung. This is exceedingly displeasing to the Khan but his Agent being helpless has said the villages shall be surrendered." (Abstract of Intelligence from the Punjab Lahore 11 Feb 1844.)

The Pothi Mala building got its embellishments during the time of Gulab Singh. The entrance lobby and the main rooms on the first floor housing the relics and also the Guru Granth Sahib, had exquisitely decorated roofs with coloured glass pieces and small carved, coloured bits of wood. The walls of the main room of relics were resplendent with frescoes of Hindu mythology and contemporary Sikh themes on separate panels. A langar was run in the Pothi Mala and the state of Patiala donated the village of Kot Guru for help in the running of the langar.

The holy relics were kept in personal charge of the head of the family in a room within the Gurdwara where the Guru Granth Sahib was ceremoniously kept. The relics were only taken out for public viewing on the festival of Baisakhi when large numbers of disciples gathered. The relics were however never taken out of the main Pothi Mala complex.

A big gathering took place every Baisakhi when the relics were displayed. The Gaddinashin, wearing saffron coloured choga and headdress, sat with the relics in front of him and the devotees filed past paying obeisance and making offerings of money. Langar was served to all. The day after Baisakhi, the venue of the gathering shifted to the Dera Sahib where respects were paid to the Samads of the forefathers. It was all a very festive occasion with buntings, hawkers and large number of people around. The devotees would come dancing from the railway station to the Pothi Mala, including those from the Frontier areas with their typical form of bhangra and adorned with coloured handkerchiefs.

But all this changed with the partition of the country in 1947 when a large number of followers from the area north of the Indus were forced to flee their homes. Thereafter, most of them decided to settle down at Faridabad, south of Delhi.

Their state of penury made it difficult for them to travel to GuruHarsahai and the then head of the family, Jaswant Singh, decided that these disciples should not be denied the opportunity to pay their respects. He thus started taking the relics to Faridabad for this purpose but, tragically during one such journey by train, when the entire first class compartment was occupied by him and his family, the Pothi and Mala were stolen, never to be found again. Now only the Padam remains with the family.

The Sodhi family had followed the practice of primogeniture in passing on inheritance, and this was formally recognised in the Punjab Government's Gazette dated July 1909. At times certain land were allotted to the relations for use during the lifetime of the head of the family but these reverted to the next head of the family on death of the previous one.

A peculiar set of circumstances arose that negated this policy of primogeniture. Bishen Singh had three sons from his first wife but they all died young. As he was getting on in age, he decided to allot some land to his brothers. But then he got married again and had two sons who survived. Bishen Singh died in 1910 when his sons were still under 10 years of age and the estate was placed under a Court of Wards till they came of age. The land allotted to the brothers by Bishen Singh was not taken back and the land remaining in the name of Bishen Singh was then divided between the two brothers, Jaswant Singh who had come to the *Gaddi*, and Karam Singh, when they came of age and were found to be fit to manage their affairs.

The railway came to GuruHarsahai around 1908 and passed about 3 miles from the Pothi Mala. Bishen Singh then donated some land for the setting up of a *Mandi* near the railway station and this came to be called Bishenganj. A rest house was constructed nearby for the family for their use while waiting for the train. There was also a custom that a new bride should only reach the Pothi Mala under starlight—and so the rest house near the station was used to pass the hours of daylight.

Jaswant Singh joined the Sikh mainstream after he was baptised and was subsequently, elected Member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly on the Shiromani Akali Dal ticket.

The decline of the Pothi Mala and waning influence of the family started during the time of Jaswant Singh because of various factors. Around 1928 he decided to shift out of the Pothi Mala to a lavish modern house, constructed about a mile away, where he entertained lavishly, with guests including the Governor of the Punjab, and indulged in his passion for shikar. This was soon followed by the stopping of the *langar*.

Though he was a man of towering personality and charm who inspired respect and a certain awe, and who could afford to wear his heart on his sleeve, Jaswant Singh was a weak man who could not control his only son who went astray.

The loss of the *Pothi* and the *Mala* put the seal on this process of decline. Jaswant Singh was advised to form a trust for the Pothi Mala and all the lands but was always dissuaded by his family. Ultimately there were no lands left, even the lavish kothi of Jaswant Singh has been sold, and the Pothi mala building is now in a state of very advanced decay requiring considerable funding for repair and renovation: regrettably the frescoes too will soon be lost.

The grandson of Jaswant Singh has now constructed a house in front of the Pothi Mala. The daily display of the Guru Granth Sahib was discontinued by him long ago fearing that the SGPC might want to take over the Pothi Mala. The huge crowds that used to visit GuruHarsahai during Baisakhi for viewing the relics and paying respect to the Dera Sahib, have now dwindled down to very small numbers, and even for them there is no arrangement for accommodation.

Another family institution that should be mentioned is the Beri Sahib. Kahan Singh, brother of Gulab Singh, was a very religious man and widely venerated. He had done a lot of *tapasaya* in the *bhora* (underground chamber) of the Pothi Mala. During one of his morning walks, while cleaning his teeth with a *Beri Datun* he threw the piece



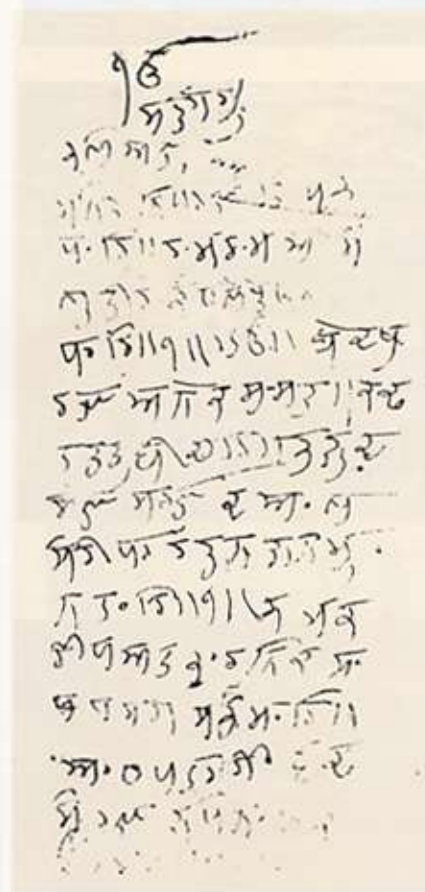
Photographic records of the frescoes at the Pothi Mala.



Roof decoration.



Soldier of the times.



A page from the Pothis of Guru Nanak Dev.

away. This grew into a *Ber* tree which is believed, over time, to answer the prayers of supplicants.

Over time, this *Ber* tree became venerated and people of all religions came seeking boons. With the permission of Jaswant Singh, a devotee put up a small room next to the tree to look after it. This eventually increased to include display of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The heavy flood of 1953 saw the *ber* topple. It did not revive, but the public placed the pieces of the *ber* tree in a special room where the veneration continued. After the death of Jaswant Singh, his *samad* was also made here.

A trust, known as the Baba Kahan Singh Beri Sahib Trust has since been formed. The complex has now been enlarged and made more fitting with a *langar* area and the renovation of a sweet water well that had been dug following the efforts of the mother of Jaswant Singh and Karam Singh. The *Beri Sahib* is now a venerated place. Donations of money, grain and free labour are always forthcoming, especially after each harvest. It is quite common to see newborn babies being brought here for blessing—as also new tractors when they are purchased!

The *ber* is particularly known for the removal of warts on the offering of prayers and a broom (to show humility) and salt (to show the grace of mixing with all irrespective of caste creed, religion and status). There is daily *kirtan*, continuous Akhand Path followed by *langar* for which the local women come as voluntary service.

The stories of miracles performed by members of the family abound, but only one, for which the author has been able to find a witness, concerns Jaswant Singh. He was visiting his followers in the North West Frontier Province. Some Pathans also gathered to see what was happening, and one of them asked if the "Pir of the Sikhs" could show his powers.

Jaswant Singh is said to have thrown the stick he was carrying to some distance and asked one Pathan to bring it back to him. The Pathan exerted all his force but could not pick up the stick. A Sikh as then asked to bring it back and he did so without any difficulty at all.

While the head of this family continued to be called "Guru", from around 1750, all the members of his family became Khalsas, adhering to the other Khalsa symbols thus denoting that they were followers of the true Sikh religion. The frescoes in the Pothis Mala also show paintings of all the Ten Sikh Gurus.

A record of the frescoes has been prepared photographically by some individuals and will eventually be the only evidence left of the once beautiful and significant Pothis Mala complex.

Harinder Singh Sodhi

The author retired as Brigadier in the Indian Army and has written a number of books including "Operation Windfall", "Top Brass", and "India: Must it Burn and Splinter?" He belongs to the GuruHarsahai Sodhi family, and is a son of Karam Singh Sodhi.

The author would like to thank Roopinder Singh; Giani & Mrs. Gurdit Singh and Gurinder Singh Mann for their active help and advice.



The generation after Karam Singh (1902-1977) (left to right) Amritbir Kaur, Brig. Harinder Singh (the author), Mohanbir Kaur, Mehijit Singh, Justice Savinder Singh and Tejbir Kaur.

The Legend of *Tapovan*



Bhagwant Singh Dalawari dressing the patients at Tapovan.

One is always intrigued by the phenomenon of saintliness when it becomes a transparent, moving reality before one's eyes. Somehow, the stories and *kathas* about or around such persons, though a part of our religious consciousness in the making, remain, in general, close to fables and myths, what with the modes of narration and the worked-up idiom or style. At the popular level, this kind of hagiography goes down well with the congregations everywhere, and over a period of time, interpolations, embroidery and sentiment make such stories stranger than fiction in most cases.

To be sure, some authentic, recorded narratives do survive in nearly all cultures and church or temple sermons, but we tend to be highly sceptical when someone living and known to us is played up as a saint for our times. A Mother Teresa is such a rare example in real life as to compel the imagination of adoration, but it's also a fact of life that small-time, home-grown, street-saints are still there to vindicate our faith in the goodness of man. And, here and there, we do find a godly person working obscurely in some remote place to bring a bit of sweetness and light into the lives of the abandoned and the forsaken, the stricken and the slighted of the earth. And when the recognition comes, slowly but ineluctably (as, for instance, in the case of Bhagat Puran Singh) we marvel at the miracle, and bow our heads before the power of the spirit's plenitude.

My story today concerns one such person, Bhagwant Singh Dalawari, whom I have known as an urchin since our days in that winding, narrow, Byzantine street called Anderkot in the timber-town of Jhelum (now in Pakistan).

The younger brother of my closest childhood friend and schoolmate Kartar, he was frequently in my path, and despite the fog of nearly 70 years, he has remained an image of dusky innocence, quietness and affableness. This was in stark contrast to the image wilfully created by Kartar, that of a street brawler, ready to jump into any argument or fray. He has now gone to his heavenly abode, did turn into a Gandhian recluse in the twilight years of his life, but Bhagwant, who remained out of my vision or view after the partition in 1947 for almost 50 years, emerged from nowhere, as it were, to be styled as "the saint of Tapovan".

And I realised the full beauty and truth of his graduation to saintliness when one evening some years ago, he suddenly materialised along with a couple of worthy admirers, and suprised me with his presence: a *presence* that one felt on the pulse, in the blood, and in one's having consciousness. I had, I sensed, seen one of God's great souls on a sojourn in the realm of the mortals. I had heard about him and his *sewa* in a leprosy *ashram* in a Maharashtra town, but it had not dawned on me that our urchin from Anderkot had in his "pilgrim's progress" arrived. He had achieved a kind of earthly, deeply human *nirvana* while still in worshipful labour. He had heard, whilst in Chandigarh at a seminar, about my obscure and long illness, and he had come like a dove from heaven at my door. Such experiences leave one in some awe.



Bhagwant Singh Dalawari praying with patients at Tapovan in the evening.

Dressed in immaculate white from the scarf on his head to the robes below, an image of utter humility and godliness, he touched my feet, his "Bhapaji", as he called me. I was blessed, and for days and weeks I could hear the flutter of his "wings", so to speak. Later, we exchanged letters and books and articles, and I came to know some parts of his "fairy-tale" transformation.

After the partition, he had moved to New Delhi, and in course of time, joined the External Affairs Ministry at a junior level. His assignments took him and his family to countries abroad, and then in his early forties, when he was holding a responsible position in our Paris Embassy, he had, one morning, an epiphanic experience, a clear, uncoded message from his Maker to get out into the wide world of the suffering, poor and the destitute. And right there and then, he gave up his diplomatic job—and returned home to make Tapovan his last port of call.

And there he has lived in the midst of his beloved "lepers" like the famed Father Damien in the Congo, and served them with all the energies of his body and soul till this day. No wonder, he was honoured with the *Bhagat Puran Singh Award* in Amritsar a couple of years ago.

And I wrote a poem on his visit to my place—"The Ministry of Pain", and dedicated it to that noble missionary. My latest volume of verse, *The Aching Vision* (WW, Calcutta, 2000) carries this 2-page poem, and helps sustain my faith as an "orained priest" in the service of pain.

The ministry of pain

(for Bhagwant Singh Dalawari)

There's no pain but leaves
A sable scar behind,
And from lyric love
To the deep, dark pit,
It brands its signature on bone.

And that pain groping for relief
Turns to song and story and fable,
Or, in retreat, to a whorehouse
Of broker'd, pander'd thoughts.
There, the sirens and the ravens
Hold then a mocking concert
To annul the fury of an affronted heart.

Thus I sought to deal with
The dialectic of unearned pain,
A wretch'd old paltry thing
Now cover'd in rags of doubt.
A monarch had learnt to lose
His imperial theme and sway
And become, at the bend of days,
His own sad country clown!

Yes, I've trodden that path
Of fire, flint and ice,
And I've arrived where
The strumpet truth seeks to hide
Its wanton head in silken shame.

And then, and then, 'the Thunder spoke'
Not in trumpets, or to the roll
Of drums, but in soft, sweet
Accents of a human dove
That had suddenly descended
On my deserted, darken'd door.
Robed in the Lord's white scarf
And in the glory of His grace,
He deliver'd the word within
The Word: no code, no key,
But a sword naked as the sun.

He was, I remember, a brother
Of yore who rose from
The debris of fifty years or more,
To tell me how as God's kids
We all played marbles
In that winding lane back home,
A whole world of dreams ago.

Thus was I initiated into
The ministry of pain and ordain'd
A priest at the fall of a feather,
To wear the raiment of peace,
Though I wonder and wonder
If I'm indeed a vessel
Fit for this long ordeal of faith!

Darshan Singh Maini

Darshan Singh Maini

Missionary Spirit



Guru Nanak blessing a leper at Goindwal.

Religion, particularly the Christian and Sikh faiths, should be given the credit of ordaining a spirit of compassion to relieve the pains inflicted upon mankind because of disease or natural calamities, vice or any other affliction. Guru Nanak Devji, the first Guru of the Sikhs, gave a *mool mantra* in the shalok :

"*Vich duniya sev kamaye tan dargah beisen paiye*" (as we serve the needy in this world, only then would we be in the presence of God).

Guru Nanak Devji diagnosed that much of the suffering of the poor and down trodden was because of the lack of a spirit of compassion in society or the rulers. To a very great extent the Guru Sahib ascribed this to the notions propagated by vested interest that all the sufferings and inequalities inflicted upon mankind had been earned by the sufferer from his "evil deeds" in previous lives. It was this perverted concept which led to degeneration, an unjust and blighted system of caste and the concept of unsocial ability amongst certain society of our country. In order to eradicate the basis of the theory of unsociability, the Guru Sahib prescribed a code of conduct called *sangat* and *langar*, that is community kitchen and dining, and the congregation for worship of God without any distinction of caste and creed. The Guru Sahib described this concept in the oft-repeated shalok :

"*Manas ki zat, Sabhe eke Pehchanbo*"

Successive Sikh Gurus gave practical shape to this cardinal feature of Sikhism by establishing free *langars* and organising missionary work. It is said that during the time of the Fifth Apostle, Guru Arjan Dev, there appeared a terrible epidemic of cholera at Lahore and other cities in the Punjab. According to reports by officials, the epidemic came from Haridwar as a result of unhealthy sanitation created by the lacs of pilgrims who had gathered there for sacred bath on the occasion of a *Kumbh Mela*.

In these times there was practically no treatment for cholera and the plague with any system of medicines, so the patients inflicted with the deadly diseases were segregated and practically thrown out of family to ward off spread of the disease.

At that hour of crisis Guru Arjan Dev himself moved amongst the cholera-stricken persons and not only provided them with whatever medical relief was available but also set-up *langars* for them. Arrangements were made by the Guru Sahib for the cremation or burial of those who had died. The same was done by Sikh missionaries at Delhi when cholera and small pox broke out in the city. At that time, the Eighth Guru, Harkrishan was staying at Delhi when the emperor Aurangzeb had called him to answer certain misconceptions created in his mind about the Sikh *Dharma*. People suspected that the Mughal emperor had evil intent and therefore Swai Raja Jai Singh kept the Guru in the safety of his own bungalow at Delhi. During this period of crisis, a small band of Sikh missionaries with the Bala Pir, as the child Guru was being addressed reverentially by the residents of Delhi, organised



The healing touch of Guru Angad Dev.

relief work for the disease stricken people. Guru Harkrishan provided inspiration to his followers by moving amongst them and administering to them sanctified water from the sarowar at great personal risk and, ultimately, was afflicted by the deadly disease. The same tradition was continued by the successive Sikh Gurus, Teg Bahadur Sahib and the Tenth Master, Gobind Singh. The *Seva Panthi* Sants, the followers of Bhairi Kanhaiya, have carried on this noblest mission of the Sikh faith with great dedication for nearly three centuries thereafter.



Bhai Kanhaiya (1648-1718)

"An apostle of peace in service to humanity"

Postage stamp issued in honour of Bhai Kanhaiya.

Bhai Kanhaiya, the blessed disciple of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib and Guru Gobind Singh, is an epitome of humility, devotion and loyalty to his Guru and service to mankind without any discrimination of religion, caste or region.

He was born at village Sodhra near Wazirabad on the banks of the river Chenab in 1648. Despite being the son of a rich

When some Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh that Bhai Kanhaiya was serving water to the enemy, Guru ji called him and sought his version. Bhai Kanhaiya submitted:

"With thy grace my Lord, my eyes are so enlightened that I see nothing else but your divine spirit prevailing everywhere and in all, since I served none else but only myself, my lord."

The British historian, Macauliffe in his Volumes V and VI on the Sikh Religion wrote "A man called Kanhaiya used with absolute impartiality to draw water both for his Sikhs and enemy". He also writes about the reaction of Guru Gobind Singh to this act of Bhai Kanhaiya. The Guru mused on his reply and ordained that Kanhaiya was a holy man.

Guru Gobind Singh had thus blessed Bhai Kanhaiya and gave him a jar of ointment to be applied on the wounded soldiers. This inspired a group of volunteers who later worked



Guru Arjan Dev serving lepers at Tarn Taran.

merchant, Kanhaiya had an inborn inclination to serve the needy and down-trodden. He had little interest in the trade and when his father expired, requested his brothers to take over such responsibility and set out to find his Guru who would guide him on the path of service.

He came to Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib and got the opportunity to serve him for three months. With his blessings, he established a "Dharamshal" at Kehwa near Attock. He spread the message of "Universal Brotherhood" as espoused by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. When Guru Gobind Singh was engaged in battles with the forces of evil, Bhai Kanhaiya moved to Anandpur Sahib and took over the responsibility of serving drinking water to soldiers wounded on the battlefield.

Attired in white clothes with a white flag on the left side of his belt, he carried a leather bag (*mashk*) on his shoulders and served water to the wounded without discrimination between friend and foe.



Guru Harikrishan providing solace to the cholera stricken in Delhi

under the guidance of Bhai Kanhaiya which thus became forerunners of the Red Cross movement which Sir Henry Durrant (1828-1910) founded about 150 years later.

Bhai Kanhaiya went back to Kehwa, when Guru Gobind Singh left Anandpur Sahib and continued to serve the people and devoted his remaining life to preach and practice teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

Bhai Kanhaiya had created a unique movement of *Sewa Panthis* which literally means "people devoted to the service of humanity". From Bhai Sewa Ram (1658-1728) to Sant Tirath Singh, the present head of this mission, who is the 12th successor to Bhai Kanhaiya's *Sewa Panthi* mission, these sons of God have carried on the legacy of Bhai Kanhaiya in commendable manner. Establishing a number of Gurdwaras all over the country, they preach the message of universal brotherhood, and are simultaneously devoted to the welfare of mankind by opening a number of charitable dispensaries, hospitals and educational institutions.

Gurnam Singh Rekhi

The *Bhai Kanhaiya* Award

The *Sewa Panthi* Mission, founded by Bhai Kanhaiya, is now organised under the banner of '*Sewa Panthi Addan Shahi Sabha*' whose present head, Sant Tirath Singh instituted an award for individuals and organisations which serve mankind in the spirit of Bhai Kanhaiya's mission. The award carries a cash prize, a citation, and a shawl. In view of growing aggression, hatred, violence and social indifference towards human suffering and human values, the mission of Bhai Kanhaiya as enshrined in the *Guru Granth Sahib* has become all the more relevant.

*na ko bairi nahin bigana
sagal sang ham ko ban aiyee*

While instituting the award, it was stated that religion, region, caste, creed, political ideologies and affiliations or even nationality would have absolutely no bearing with the deliberations of the Award Committee on which eminent persons like Dr. Manmohan Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh, Justice Ranjit Singh Narula, S. Bhag Singh, S. Balwant Singh, S. Gurnam Singh Rekhi, S. Satyajit Singh Majithia, S. Harbans Singh have been nominated. The objects of instituting an award in the name of Bhai Kanhaiya, are summed up as :

- ✱ To remind the community and others about the significance and sanctity which Sikhism—the philosophy practised as a way of life by the Divine Masters — attaches to the missionary spirit.
- ✱ To identify, acknowledge and appreciate the services which blessed souls render with the grace of God for the mitigation of sufferings of less fortunate human brethren with love, compassion and assistance.
- ✱ To encourage the spirit of universal human brotherhood and fellow-feeling so as to check rampant egoism, aggression and social indifference to human values.

The First Award

The first *Bhai Kanhaiya* award was given, most appropriately, to Bhagat Puran Singh Ji of Pingalwara, Amritsar (posthumously). There could not be finer recipient than this sage of Pingalwara, who devoted his entire life in the service of the helpless and forlorn. Hundreds of unbearable lives were made worth living at 'Pingalwara' which became the metaphor for help in a world full of misery. As S. Khushwant Singh wrote, "Bhagat Puran Singh was no ordinary mortal but undoubtedly the most beloved and revered man in northern India. I once described him as the bearded Mother Teresa of the Punjab. Mother Teresa had the backing of the powerful Roman Catholic Church, the international press and innumerable foundations to give her money. Bhagat ji had nothing except his single-minded dedication to serve the poor and the needy and yet was able to help thousands of lepers, mentally and physically and handicapped and the dying. His name shall be written in letters of gold in the pages of history of the Punjab".

The Second Award

Murlidhar Devidas Amte, who is better known as 'Baba Amte' was conferred the second Bhai Kanhaiya Award in 1997

which he emotionally accepted as 'blessings from the house of Guru Nanak'. Born on 26 December 1914 Murlidhar was a diffident and rebellious young man who even after obtaining a degree of law in 1936, opted to serve where he was most needed. After actively participating in the "Quit India Movement" in 1942, he decided to tread a path of service for the care, cure and rehabilitation of leprosy patients with the Maharogi Sewa Samiti at Warora in Chandrapur District. Baba Amte's deep concern embraced national integration, peace, justice, uplift of the downtrodden and neglected sectors of the society, rural development, ecology, love of nature, conservation and restoration of the environment. He was subsequently honoured with the Gandhi peace prize by the Government of India in 1999.



The third awardee, Bhagwant Singh Dalwari addressing the congregation at New Delhi.

Presented with love and respectful regards to Sardar Bhagwant Singh ji Dalawari of Vidarbha Maharogi Sewa Mandal, Tapovan, Amravati (Maharashtra) at the presentation ceremony of the third Bhai Kanhaiya Award on Wednesday April 5th, 2000 at New Delhi:

The Guru's blessed, loved and dedicated to selfless service of mankind, Most respected Bhagwant Singh Ji Dalawari:

The philosophy of service together with worship has great significance in the Sikh religion, observed by you with such a remarkable devotion for which you deserve gratitude as well as felicitations. When with the grace of the Guru, Bhai Kanhaiya Ji attained the sublime condition of:

*None to me is my foe or alien,
Friendly to all, I am*

He served with selfless and indiscriminate love entire mankind for which the Tenth Guru not only embraced him with love but also gave cloth for bandages along with a box of ointment with following blessing.

*He will also create his Mission
Which will eradicate evil
thinking of Many*



*Bhagwant Singh Dalawari
with the aged and terminal cases.*

"In the footsteps of the divine masters"

The citation for Sardar Bhagwant Singh Dalawari

Such was the founding of the Mission that followers of Bhai Kanhaiya are blessed to be addressed as *Sewa Panthis*. The institution of Bhai Kanhaiya Award is their humble endeavour to encourage this spirit of service and your participation in the ceremony is commendable and we extend our heartiest greetings on the occasion.

This day is very auspicious and significant for all of us when individuals remain in petty, selfish pursuit in this materialistic world but we have the pleasure to have the audience of a selfless and dedicated servant of the Guru's house who is engaged in the service of leprosy patients for the last twenty years in the Vidarbha, the Maharogi Sewa Mandal at Tapovan in Amravati which was founded by Dr. Shivaji Rao Patwardhan.

The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee at Amritsar had honoured you with the *Bhagat Puran Singh Award* for serving at Tapovan Ashram whereafter you also founded the *Guru Granth Sahib Charitable Society* with the award money.

The Tapovan Complex has arrangements for the treatment and complete care of about 1200 leprosy patients. It has its own dispensary, a high school, two primary schools and provisions for rehabilitation of cured patients through opportunities of self-employment.

Dalarwari ji, only you are really aware of God's beneficence on you. You were born in Jhelum (now in Pakistan). After graduating from the Punjab University at Solan in 1951, you worked in the Rehabilitation Ministry before joining the Indian Foreign Service. Whereafter you were on diplomatic assignments in Egypt, China, Belgium, Guinea and France besides discharging the responsibilities towards work and the family after seeking voluntary retirement in 1979, you dedicated your life to the service of leprosy patients. Living among these patients, you consider them as your teachers. From your personal experience, you have concluded that these patients are more civilised, religious and tolerant than are healthy



*Bhagwant Singh Dalawari at the
Guru Gobind Singh Niwas, Tapovan.*

human beings. They accept their place in life as God's will.

You have great admiration for Dr. Shivaji Rao Patwardhan whom you give credit for starting the Vidarbha Maharogi Sewa Mandal.

Your deep humility is reflected in the 'non-deplume' of *Naukar Paapi* ("The Sinful Servant") which you prefer to use instead of your name in all your

correspondence.

We pray to the Almighty to bless Dalarwari ji of Tapovan with a healthy and long life, love always for the Guru's Name, devotion to service, high spirits and success in every endeavour. We wish that Tapovan always remains a centre of service and place of comfort for suffering people.

*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa
Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh"*

Spirit of THE SIKHS

We are honoured to carry this article by Bhagwant Singh Dalawari
(or Papaji as his loved ones call him) written specially for the *Nishaan*

The "*Nishaan*" represents one of the finest journals that has come about for disseminating information on Sikh history, Sikh traditions and Sikh institutions and it is ordained that its readers, both in India and abroad be pleased with the fare. Indeed it is particularly important that non-Sikh readers read it and so get to know as to what Sikhism really is and as to why so many distinguished foreigners have seen it as the "future religion of Mankind". Even more wonderful is the picture of Man that our Gurus have presented in perfection—the *KHALSA*, not for the Sikhs alone, but for all humanity. I am personally enamoured of our Gurus' universality and our Gurus' love for all but even more is the institutionalised universality of Sikhism which proclaims that Sikhism belongs to all, irrespective of any label of religion.

A Brahmin can really benefit from the words of the Guru Granth Sahib as to how he can become better Brahmin entrenched in the *Brahma*. So can a Muslim learn to be a better Muslim through the wisdom of the Guru Granth

Sahib. And the beauty is that 16 *Bhaktas* speak from this holy Granth in terms of the love of the Lord through their own methods, through their own form of concept of God and through their own system of worship. The core point

is *naam* around which a disciple is supposed to revolve his life. And that *naam*, the basis of all that exists representing God, denotes love, truth, purity and equality of all human beings. It is, therefore, all the more important that the adherents of Sikhism show in their life the quality of human being blessed by the Gurus to show *sachon ure sabkau uppar sach achar* (that although the truth is the highest, higher than

truth is the truthful conduct). That is why I wish to write of the Sikh character in terms of the sayings of Guru Granth Sahib, and Bhai Gurdas, the great theologian, whose words are the key to understanding of the Guru Granth Sahib.

The remarkable facet of Sikhism is that it does not rely on dogmas, nor does it concern itself with the imaginary or real prospects of *karamkand bhakti* in this world or the next. The philosophy dwells on the perfection of life and



Bhagwant Singh Dalawari at the durrie-making unit in Tapovan.

character and the service of Mankind aimed at the good of all with (*sarbat da bhala*). Eradication of vices, living in righteousness with love for all, selfless service and the remembrance of the Lord in every breath constitutes the syntheses of Sikh character. And it is this character that was built by the teachings, traditions, deeds and guidance of the Gurus. The spectacular ingredient is that the Gurus themselves showed such character and then expected their Sikhs to live it.

Our basic philosophy envisages living in full the bounties of the Lord, enjoying them in their entirety with the presence of the Lord at heart. The sixth ashtpadi of the *Sukhmani Sahib*, our religious text, talks of almost every human activity, comfort, enjoyment, relationship or bliss along with the words "with whose grace", signifying that while we enjoy all the benevolence, we must remember the ONE with whose grace we have been given this life. Three marvellous texts depicting the kind of Sikh that Bhai Gurdas envisages are breath-taking. It is true that we have been called *sant-sipahi* but the heights to which a Sikh is supposed to soar shows the vision of our Gurus. That is why even when we were referred to as *dogs* by hostile historians, they could not help praising the qualities of valour, respect for women and the fallen enemy as also for the sterling character. Although our Gurus wanted peace and happiness for all, vested interests in the form of foreign and Indian rulers did not let them be in peace, but when the Guru had to fight, he had even Muslims on his side showing how he was beloved by all. And Bhai Kanahaiya who served the soldiers fallen in battle without discrimination of friend and foe, received acclaim from Guru Gobind Singh for having attained such equanimity that he saw the Guru himself in every human being.

When we talk of the Sikh character, the first and foremost thing that strikes us is the "conquest of death". While we have been rightly celebrating the birth of the *Khalsa* in its 300th year in 1999, we must keep note of the fact that what Guru Gobind Singh did on that day was already envisaged for this path by Guru Nanak. Let us relish Guru Nanak's thought

*Jau Tau Prem Khelan Da Chhao
Sir Dhar Tali Gali Meri Aao*

(If you wish to play the game of love, keep your head on your palm, and then come to me)

and

*Itt Marag Peir Dhireeje
Sir Deeje Kaan Na Keeje*

(The moment you take the first step on this path, be clear that you would not hesitate to lay down your life).

Guru Nanak in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, p.1412

Shaheed Bhagat Singh is well known as a martyr in the cause of Indian Independence and it is said that he and his companions often used to sing this verse:

*Sarfarooshi Ki Tamana Aaj Hamare Dil Mein Hai
Dekhate Hain Kitni Takat Bazoo-E-Katal Mein Hai*

(My heart today yearns to give my head; let me see how much strength there is in the hands of my slayer).

I sometimes wonder that though Bhagat Singh knew very well that when he was engaged in a violent struggle for freedom, death could always visit him, but the dramatic suddenness with which on Baisakhi Day 1699, Guru Gobind Singh asked for the heads of his disciples did not deter his Sikhs from willingness to die for him. We were born out of the conquest of death, when the nucleus of the *Khalsa* the *panj piare* Bhai Daya Singh, Dharam Singh, Himmat Singh, Mokham Singh and Sahib Singh, offered themselves to be beheaded by their Guru and actually saw the sword drenched in blood. This fearless defiance of death is the cornerstone of our philosophy. This means that we would live with self-respect and dignity and will never bow to insolent might. Indeed Guru Gobind Singh gave amrit to the five and took amrit from them to streamline the perfect form of democracy—*Aape Gur Chela* (The Guru and the disciple are one).

When the concept of *sant-sipahi* is properly understood, it is clear that the Sikh, in day-to-day life, lives like a pious, spiritual person, free from corruption, selfishness, inclination towards personal gain, self and power as distinct from devotion to society. In addition, whenever there is tyranny, he would, if necessary, take up arms to defend the weak and defenceless even at the cost of his life. Savour this understanding in the words of Bhai Gurdas (*var 38, pauri 4*) - *Soena rupa lakh.....*

"Even if there is gold and silver in lakhs of maunds and lakhs of stores treasure it, even if there are pearls and precious diamonds, even if there are lakhs of kingdoms and innumerable territories, even if there is the possibility of *Ridhi & Sidhi* (the knowledge of the hidden and truth in one's words), even if there is embellishment with various ornaments, even if there are lakhs of *Parjaat* trees and *Kamdhen* cows (stated in *Puranas* to meet every demand from their masters) and even if all kinds of desires can be met including *Char Padarth* (yearnings, spirituality, wealth and salvation) and even if there are all kinds of temptations for greed, a *Gursikh* will never be attracted because *Sadhsangat* (the company of the holy) has elevated him to greater heights."

Let us pause and meditate on the above text. Let us examine ourselves. Can we be called the *khass roop* (special form) as *Khalsa* of Guru Gobind Singh, who said *Khalsa mero roop hai khas* (*Khalsa* will be my special form). The attributes mentioned above would certainly belong to a

saintly figure but the word used is *gursikh*, not a saint. In other words, the Guru's Sikh is supposed to be in such great grip of the Master that worldly greed and selfishness never touch him. Let us see now how Guru Gobind Singh wanted that he should be a soldier of righteousness at the same time.

Deh Siva Bar Mohe Bhai..... (Chandi Charitar)

"My Lord, grant me this boon. Let me never shirk away from good deeds. And never should I be afraid of the enemy of righteousness when I have to fight him. I will be sure that victory will be mine. Let me teach myself and let me have this need that I should go on singing your praises. And when I am to leave the world, may I die fighting in the battlefield of righteousness."

It is well known that Guru Gobind Singh bequeathed the *gaddi* of Guruship on the Guru Granth Sahib at Nanded in 1708 but did not include any of his own works in this Granth. In a way, perhaps as a mark of humility, he wanted to show that the Granth compiled by Guru Arjan Dev along with the sayings of Guru Tegh Bahadur, which Guru Gobind Singh included, would now be known as the Guru Granth Sahib without giving himself or his sayings the status equivalent to Guru Granth Sahib. The Guru Granth Sahib is our perpetual Guru and let us look at the qualities of a Gursikh in terms of Kabir's words:

*"Soora Sau Pehchaniye Jo Larre Deen Ke Het
Purja Purja Kat Mare Kabhoo Na Chhade Khet."*

(We must recognise as the brave one, the person who fights for the downtrodden and even if he is cut to pieces, never leaves the battlefield)

Guru Granth Sahib, p.1105

It is obvious that we should be examples of the kind of *sant-sipahi* that our Gurus envisaged because all people do not read, all people do not get attracted to audio-visual displays. But surely, they interact everywhere with ordinary Sikhs in the world and if the Sikh character is in accordance with the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, there is bound to be interest in learning more about the attributes of Sikhism.

The principal message of Guru Nanak, *naam japna*, *wand chhakna* and *dharam kirt karni*, i.e. Recitation of God's Name, Sharing of one's income with the poor and Engaging oneself in honest earning, is well known but less known is the fact that these attributes come out of deep commitment to Guru's Word in day-to-day life.

Let me talk of Bhai Gurdas again (var 12, paudi 2).

Kurbani Tina Gursikhan.....

(I am sacrifice unto the Gursikhs, who are up at *amritvela* -the ambrosial hour around 4 a.m.- bathe both in water and in *amrit-bani*, then get entrenched in *jaap* with total

concentration, go to the *satsang*, listen to Gurbani, get intertwined with the Guru's Word, celebrate Guru's anniversaries with love and devotion and bloom in *simran* and *seva*."

It must not be forgotten that the determination to do right and defend the right even at the cost of one's life comes only from a life of spiritual devotion to the Lord. And God's grace alone provides such strength. Then the strength to defend the defenceless and resist tyranny is not the strength of a violent, uncontrolled mind. It is the basis of righteousness that the Guru bestowed on the Sikhs. Recall what Guru Gobind Singh says about the definition of the *Khalsa*:

*Pooran Jot Jage Ghat Mein
Tab Khalas Tahen Nakhalas Jaane*

(The *Khalsa* is the one in whom the light of the Lord burns in full measure; if not, he would be known as impure)

Sarab Loh Granth

It was this Sikh character which enabled us to survive many onslaughts; we had to offer many sacrifices, our kin were bricked alive, sawn alive, burnt alive and our sisters faced many atrocities including the dismemberment of their children, but no one surrendered nor accepted defeat. Even after apparent adversity Guru Gobind Singh wrote the *zafar nama* (epistle of victory) in total defiance of tyranny and treachery.

Our external living, our good positions and our influential status are certainly wonderful attributes of the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh but our standing to live the life of saint-soldier receives strength from our internal commitment to live first as a saint, then suffer to be a soldier in the fight for righteousness.

Let me now turn to some ordinary qualities that a Sikh must possess on the basis of instructions of Guru Granth Sahib:

*Mann Ka Sootak Lobh Hai Jehva Sootak Koor
Akhi Sootak Vekhana Par Tria Par Dhan Roop*

(The real pollution of the mind is greed and of the tongue, falsehood; pollution of the eyes is a lustful look at women other than one's wife or a covetous look at others' wealth).

Asa-di-Var, GGS, 18th chhaka

Pandits had frightened gullible people with all kinds of superstitious beliefs about penals of life and death, but Guru Nanak dwelt on the reality in one's conduct. Alas! There still are people who are victims of this *karamkand* bhakti and beliefs.

Our faith demands that there be complete equality of all human beings. Guru Gobind Singh emphasised that there is only one caste that of entire humanity.

Guru Ram Dass ji's words:

Khatri Brahman Sood Vais, Ko Japae Har Mantar Japaini

(Whether one is Khatri, Brahman, Sudra or Vaish, anyone can recite the name of the Lord.)

Guru Ram Dass in GGS, p.800

But the tragedy is that we still have caste consciousness and have even set up gurdwaras both at home and abroad on the basis of caste.

In the dark days of prevailing customs, it was Guru Nanak who raised woman to equality with man, but even here, we have not lived the principle, because the treatment of a girl child or a woman shows a hold of backwardness. Guru Nanak said:

So Kiun Manda Aakhiye Jit Jamme Rajan

Asa-di-Var, GGS, 19th chhaka

And finally, let me share with the readers some historical and some present examples of the Sikh character. When Banda Bahadur was caught and 100 Sikhs were being killed everyday, the mother of a young child, also among them, received pardon from the ruler on the plea that his son was not a Sikh. "My mother is a liar and, therefore, not my mother. I must be treated just like my brothers. I am a Sikh", said the young boy and preferred to be killed.

There is a story of Dalla, who, after Guru Gobind Singh had to leave Chamkaur, suggested to the Guru that he could have called him and his band of soldiers to help the Sikhs. The Guru repeatedly told him that it was the will of the Lord that the things happened the way they did and he should not worry about the past. But Dalla went on boasting about the prowess of his band and insisted that if he had been called, things would have been different. Just then, a Sikh came and offered a country-made gun to the Guru. The Guru told Dalla to ask one of his followers to come forward so that the gun could be tested. Dalla could not get even one follower to agree because everyone said they were not prepared to die without any fight and just for the whims of the Guru. Dalla himself said the same thing. The Guru then asked him to call one of the Sikhs from the Guru's camp and two Sikhs, father and son ran to obey the Guru. Both of them claimed that the call was first heard by him. And both of them were prepared to die for the Guru, just like the *panj piare* who had responded to Guru's call on the Baisakhi Day of 1699. This is the manner of those who lived the word of the guru in thought, word and deed.

Guru Arjan in a hymn emphasises: *Sabkau Meet Ham Aapan Keena Ham Sabna Ke Sajan* (I have made everyone my friend and I am the friend of all). There is this story of a German in a Gurdaspur prisoner-of-war camp, who later became the Captain of a passenger ship. A Sikh travelled with his family on this boat and, to his surprise, the Captain sent a message to find out whether the Sikh family was quite comfortable. This happened at every port of call and when the family was about to disembark at the next port, the Sikh thought that the Captain might have known him and he should pay a courtesy visit to him. No, he was a complete stranger, but he told the Sikh why he took pains to ensure the comforts of the Sikh family. He saw, he said, seeing in every Sikh the face of that Sikh Subedar, in charge of his cell in the Prisoners of War Camp during the Second World War who had been a great humanitarian. The German had some terrible stomach trouble and the doctor

said that he should live only on milk, but in the camp, the quantity required could not be procured. The Subedar, he said, would bring to him a vessel full of milk everyday until he became well. The Subedar later told him that he had recently bought a cow for his children but he saw that the German's need was greater.

Twenty years ago, a Sikh diplomat in Paris decided to serve old people in their homes on weekends. After some time a French lady, Mme Coiral, told him that he was a marvellous Christian. When the Sikh told her that although he loved Jesus and had been telling her to remember Jesus to get rid of her loneliness, he was not a Christian. Touchingly, the lady told him in French: "But, in any case, you have restored my faith in Christ." That

again is the Sikh character.

I hope and I pray that our *Nishaan* will become not only a means to disseminate authentic information on Sikh history, philosophy, arts, traditions and culture but also present examples of Sikh character. There is no doubt that those who have embarked on this unique programme must be sincere, devoted Sikhs of high calibre and would be wishing well not only the Sikhs but the entire world in the light of equality, liberty and fraternity that our religion projects. I feel proud of the philosophy of our Masters, enjoining catholicity of approach in love, truth and humility in dealing with all of mankind, but must do my best to show that philosophy in action. I must live as a *sant-sipahi* in *charhdi kala* and serve humanity in the remembrance of the Lord of all.

Bhagwant Singh Dalawari

Tapovan, Amravati 444602 (Maharashtra)



*Bhagwant Singh Dalawari with
Justice Ranjit Singh Narula
on a visit to New Delhi.*

The poems in question have different settings, styles and genres, and have little in common except one thing: the perennial theme of quest and arrival, a theme that forms the matrix of primeval Indian thought. However, the seminal impulse in each case connects the two narratives, and is derived from Sikh scriptural and historical contexts.

Whilst in "Tree and the Sage", the opening lines of the invocation poem draw their inspiration from the concluding pauris of Guru Nanak Dev's splendid, awe-inspiring paean to God and His wondrous world in *Japji*, and then moves on to varied skeins of ancient Hindu, Buddhist thought and dialectic, Dr. Kulwant Singh Gill's poem remains on course to tell the great story of the Tenth Sikh Master from the birth of the star over Patna (with the opening canto devoted to the manifestation of earlier mentors and prophets in the world) to the last visionary days at Nanded. It's an impressive and felicitous rendering in english of the spirit that shaped the heroic personality, deeds and poetry of Guru Gobind Singh.

Dr. Harbhajan Singh, an acclaimed, erudite, scholar-poet whose corpus of writings has large philosophical, metaphysical dimensions offers in this great poem a rich fare to the imagination of inquiry and discovery. The tree of the narrative, in the autobiographical mode, becomes, as the story proceeds, an expanding, holistic symbol. No wonder, the seeker is on a long voyage of knowledge beyond the self, and the metaphors of *marg* and boat assume a constitutive character.

The translation is pleasing, expressive and evocative, on the whole. It may, finally, be added that Dr. Harbhajan Singh received in 1994 the prestigious Sarswati Samman award instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation.

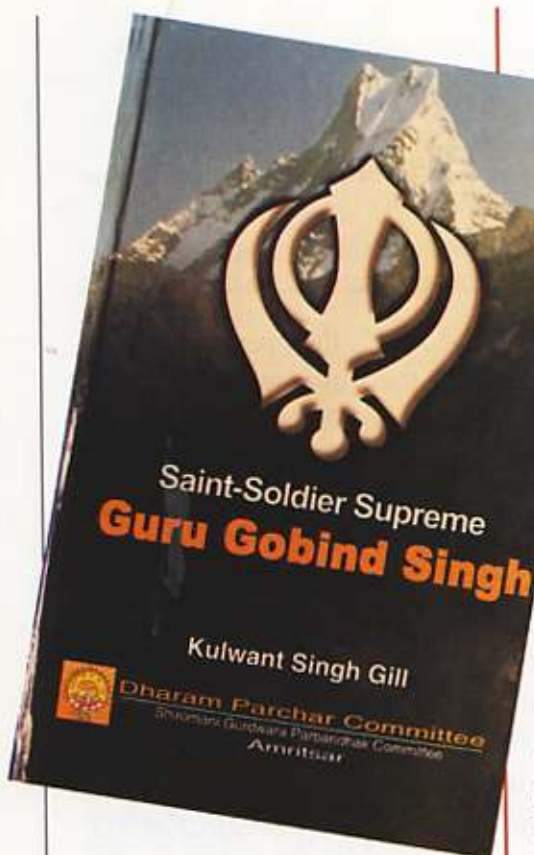
The extracts reproduced here are from the following poems:-

Tree and the Sage

(Original Punjabi ਗੁਰੂ ਤੇ ਸਿਮਰੀ, 1992, by Harbhajan Singh translated by G.S. Rahi and Rita Chaudhry, and published by Ajanta Books International, Delhi, 2000).

Saint-Soldier Supreme:

Guru Gobind Singh by Kulwant Singh Gill, and published by Dharam Parchar Committee, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 1999.



Canto II Glow in the East

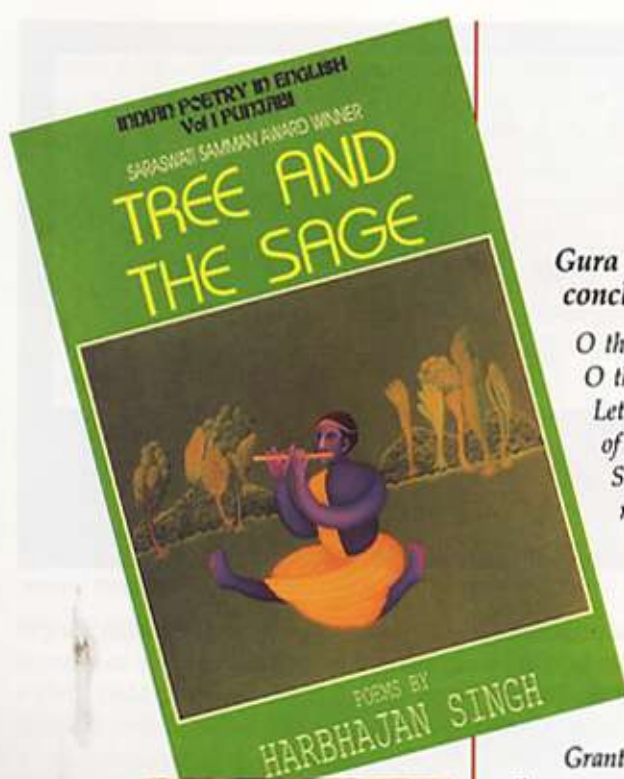
Patna—
Pataliputra of yore,
Repository of spiritual
splendour,
Of many a religious lore,
Sanctified by
The Buddha's presence
sweet,
Hallowed by
Guru Nanak's lotus feet,
Washed by the Ganga,
Kissed by the Sone,
Confluence of cultures
Searching spirit's sojourn,
A seat of learning
Life's 'hows' and 'whys'
Where sages would repair
To know and understand
The mystery
Of space and skies,
Known for
Tolerance of opinion,
Catholicity of faith,
True marks indeed
Of the spirit seeking race
Lo—

In this city is born
Nature's finest spirit
Worthy to adorn
Nanak—the Darvesh's thro
To keep it intact
To maintain its sancity
With blood and bone.
On the eastern horizon
A star was seen
That surpassed the heavenly lamps
In its unusual sheen.
Bhikhan Shah—
The venerated Muslim divine
Spotted the star,
Startled at its unusual shine.
Towards the East
The Muslim **magus**
Did his silvery head bow
To show his shocked disciples,
To make them know
The spirit of God abides
Where He needs
Men of God
Are above cults and creeds
As the ruddy sun opened his eyes
To spread his golden might
Patna was appalled

In strange, celestial light
To convey a heavenly message
To fear—stricken mortals,
To pay obeisance to the gods
To take the holy dip
In its ambrosial waters
To escape from sorrow's grip.
By its vibrant waves.
The epiphanous moment arrived to show
Lord Krishna's vision
In the smiling playful child,
Doubts disappeared
As clouds before the wind,
For the child was no other than
The young Guru Gobind.
Raja Fateh Chand Maini—
Patna's rich feudal lord
Found marital bliss
In a God—loving consort
Blessed with magnificent mansions
Fields and forests wild,
Prayed to the Almighty
Day and night
For the gift of a child.
The childless couple
Each morn to the Ganga would retreat
To seek succour
At the pious Brahmin's feet.
The pious pandit
To the childless couple would advise
To purify their hearts
And doubts revise.
Obscured by
The screen of sin
And dark desire
The self sees not the Self—
The Supreme in effulgent attire.
Purified in heart
The Queen on her couch sat
Repeating the sacred syllables :
'Thou art That'.
On light foot came
The child Guru Gobind
And whispered in the queen's ear :
'Mother! I have come! Thy son dear'.
All desires of the couple
Were set at rest,
They spent their life
As persons blest.
As followers of Guru Nanak's house,
Worshipper, of Lord's name
They regained a niche
In the Sikh annals
And won the spiritual fame.

Prologue

Master mine !
Beggard that I am
Bereft of Spiritual bounty,
Release
This slave to Socratic page,
Bound
To Faust—like curiosity.
A slave
To the ever-questing intellect
Failing to decide
To shuffle the printed pages
Or
Thy mystical naam recite
Lost
In the maze
Of this worldly lore
That reduces
Man to a sod
I am
Like the rain-bird
Thirsty and pining for
A heavenly drop,
And humbly pray
For
Thy succour and prop.



Gura Nanak's Japuji, concluding pauni's*

O the supreme Clime
O the supreme Time
Let my life be the meditation
of a tree

Soil be my mother, water be
my sire*

I wish I could imprint
fragrance on the pages
of breeze

My speech may rustle
like the green leaves

O the Mahamaun

Grant me the language of
silence

Which the soul perceives
Long before it reaches the ears

Let my dwelling be, O God,
A bit deeper in the earth
A little higher in the sky
Write me not into geography
Nor I be confined to history

Wipe off the longing to abide
In maps and books
Like the dust from leaves
The tadagi that shackles my world
Let me break it off and go beyond

God grant me a little more of
meditation
Breathing like the gentle breeze
Wherafter, O the Benign
End me like the oppressive humidity
The way you choose

Tree and the saga

"Never fold your shade as you leave
home

Do not banish the ones sitting in
shade
Delusion or illusion, whatever it is
Leave it undisturbed
It is needed

Journeys under the blazing sun

Are never-ending
Sweat clinging to the bodies is never
dry

Sweat may disappear
But its stickiness persists
Its odour lingers in the breath

Life is like the baptism of fire
It is a wound every moment
The wound may heal
But its scar remains
And the urge to rub the scar stays

It may be high noon when you leave
home
But leave a deeva lighted in the niche
The guest may need it any time

Man is never free of the dark
Darkness may vanish
But its fear persists

Do not close the door
Do not arrest the flowing rivers
Whatever is and as it is
Let it be so
Let your faith and love live
Even where you may not be."

Antika

Quest
Is no book wrapped under covers
That reaches a pre-destined end
To be a complete whole

It is an endless dialogue
Emacipation eludes
Ever after attaining the Guru
The roving feet remain locked in
journeys

And the journeys have no end

Antika is possible only without ant

Much remains unsaid
Even after much has been said
After a full life lived fully
The urge to live still lingers

This urge for more
Is the real antika



'BLIND MEN OF HINDOOSTAN'

REMEMBERING OPERATION BLUESTAR

'Blind Men of Hindoostan' is the title of a book authored by a former Indian Army Chief, the late General Krishnaswamy Sundarji, published in 1993. On the dust jacket, it is stated that Sundarji makes a fictional Prime Minister, his Cabinet and the three service Chiefs discuss the nuclear issue, but comes up with a chilling 'fact', harder to believe than is fiction: India has no coherent nuclear policy and, worse still, does not have even an institutionalised system for analysing and throwing up policy options!

I decidedly selected this title for my article as I perceived it was nothing less than acute myopia that led the leadership—political and military—to plunge into an action of disastrous proportions - I refer to "Operation Bluestar" - in June 1984.

We lost a Prime Minister, a Chief of Army Staff, and had a major mutiny of the Sikh troops. Over five thousand lives were snuffed out in a ghastly fashion in the Capital and many other towns. What is more, over three hundred Gurdwaras, where Sikhs and Hindus collectively worshipped, were desecrated, damaged and destroyed.

A whole community was alienated.

Many volumes have been written on this and connected subjects, both by Indians and foreigners. We, of course, have the Government's white paper which is anything but white and at best, a pathetic attempt to cover up both sin and crime. It evaded more issues than it tackled. We have many pages in Khushwant Singh's latest volumes of 'A History of the Sikhs' particularly his chapter titled 'A fatal miscalculation'. And to quote a few lines by him: 'But the government, for reasons best known to it, first let leaders of the ruling party help Bhindranwale to build himself into a leader, allowed its police

and paramilitary forces to turn a blind eye to the smuggling of arms into the temple and then ordered its army to storm it with tanks and heavy guns.....". We also have Mark Tully's volume 'Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle'. Lt Gen K.S. Brar who was actively involved in the operation has also written a volume which he terms as 'Operation Blue Star: The True Story'.

There is a very pertinent volume of the monthly magazine SEMINAR (April 1985 titled 'Using the Army'), which carries articles by a galaxy of civil and military authors like KF Rustamji, Lt Gens ML Thapan, EA Vas and SK Sinha and Jaswant Singh now Indian Minister for External Affairs. Senior Lawyer and activist Nandita Haksar has a very searching article and there is a very succinct summing up of the Punjab problem by author and publisher Romesh Thapar in which he brings out what he terms as the 'badly manipulated and short-sighted political management by the rulers.'

On the military side, there is a valuable volume 'Threat From Within' by Lt Gen VK Nayar, a distinguished soldier and paratrooper who has served with distinction both in the western and eastern sectors, and later became Governor of Manipur. Nayar was the Additional Director General of Military Operations at Army Headquarters in 1984. He records his views with rivetting candour and unusual freshness.

In his first chapter, 'Punjab - an Overview' Nayar starts by stating that "Punjab is a sad story of missed opportunities". He goes on to say that the basic reason for the situation deteriorating has been instead of being treated as a national problem, it has been handled as a problem of a political party with its parameters dictated by their coloured perception, with a number of people having vested interests.... At best, the situation was confined to terrorism without dealing with its causes and realising the effects of these actions.

One doesn't have to be a Nostradamus to make a realistic appreciation of a situation and its attendant fallout. But see what the fall out has been for the nation!

In a nutshell, the discernment of the problem was not there, certainly not from the national point of view. He also mentions about the infighting within the ruling Congress between Zail Singh and Darbara Singh and in keeping with Indira Gandhi's policy of keeping the Chief Ministers on tenterhooks and not permitting them to function effectively. He said that he was amazed at the lack of realisation of the actual situation and concern for the Punjab and its people.

General Nayar also records that it was in November 1983 that some of them in the Army informally started taking cognisance of the situation in the Punjab. All available information (not intelligence, as we were not privy to it) was collected and a view was taken. The outcome highlighted two main issues, first that the manner in which the situation was being handled would only make it worse and may result in it being dumped on the Army. Second, the army's involvement would have its ramifications within the army and thereby the need to warn against and prevent it.



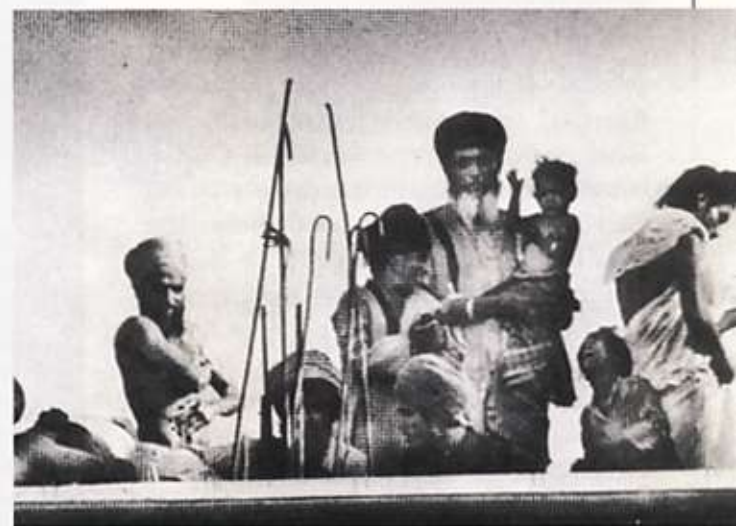
Reciting prayers from the Granth Sahib on the eve of the Army assault on the Golden Temple, June 1984. (Photo : Sondeep Shankar)

It was therefore the Army's professional and patriotic duty to convey its views to the Prime Minister as any level lower than that would not be effective. We were firmly of the opinion that the army should not be involved and if inescapable we should be consulted before a decision was taken.

The logic and force of our arguments failed to get any response. The total response was, "you have told me !" This raises a vital question. Should the Army keep silent on such issues of national importance, particularly when the service interests and the interests of its men are involved ? Nayar emphasises that the Service and its head must convey its views to the Prime Minister on issues of national interest, irrespective of whether at that point of time we are involved or not. We owe it to the nation and to our men.

Sadly and regrettably, over the years there has sometimes been pliable military leadership who are willing to play the game. Which leaves attendant room for political lobbying which can have deleterious results. The likes of Sam Manekshaw who had the courage to take on not only the entrenched bureaucracy but also tell Indira Gandhi that the timing proposed by her in 1971 (Indo - Pak war 1971) was not suitable to the army and insisted on what he considered a more suitable time, are rare. Why 'create a situation' is the ethos of many of our top brass. Here I quote an incident of World War I. Admiral Fisher reporting on Admiral Jellicoe's failure to destroy the German Fleet at the Battle of Jutland stated that "Jellicoe had all the qualities of Nelson except that he does not know when to disobey"!

Major General Afsir Karim a paratrooper, a course mate of Lt Gen Brar, a former Editor of *Indian Defence Review* and now a member of the current National Security Council Advisory



Silhouetted against the evening sun, men and children near the Akal Takht on 2 June 1984. (From "The Punjab Story")

Board, in his review of Brar's volume says that one wishes Brar's attempts to explode what he calls certain 'myths' had been more convincing. Karim emphasises that Operation Bluestar has been considered a failure for the following reasons: The Akal Takht was damaged beyond recognition even before Bhindranwale and his followers were killed or captured. Major collateral damage was caused to the Temple complex and there were a large number of civilian casualties as a result of frontal assault on a constricted space.

Karim has a very telling observation to make regarding the assessment of the number of weapons in the Temple by the police. It is intriguing, he says that if the police (and the government) really believed that the militants had only two hundred odd weapons and the majority of which were 12 Bore

guns and .303 rifles, where then was the need to call in the Army?

It needs to be mentioned here that two centuries earlier, the Golden Temple had been the target of attack on the Diwali day in 1736 by the Mughal Army. It was a massacre of such great magnitude that people remembered it for a long time as the 'Bloody Diwali'. When Ahmed Shah Abdali had raided the Temple, he too had chosen the Baisakhi Day to launch his attack in order to inflict the maximum casualties on the Sikhs who gather in large numbers to commemorate the Birth of the Khalsa. The Jalianwala Bagh massacre at Amritsar also took place on the Baisakhi Day. The invasion of the Temple on 5 June 1984 was on the martyrdom day of Guru Arjun Dev. How such unmitigated thoughtlessness was shown beats all reason, logic, thinking and sense of proportion, and much much more.

Many today who have held the highest positions in the Army condemn "Operation Bluestar" in no uncertain terms. General Roychowdhury, a very recent former Chief of Army Staff has stated in his interview in a national daily (on 27 April 2000) when asked whether right steps had been taken to tackle the problem of militancy in Punjab, replied; "No, certainly not. I don't think that right steps were taken. "Operation Bluestar" was totally unwarranted and a mistaken step. The party in power at Delhi at that time had taken the step more on political considerations."

General Sundarji passed away last year, but left behind a partially-completed autobiography titled 'Of Some Consequence: A Soldier Remembers'. He had planned to write 105 episodes, but lived only to write 33. It is his wife Vani who writes that "Operation Bluestar" changed Sundarji and his laughter was all but gone. And it is Vani who briefly also talks about "Operation Brass Tacks" which brought India and Pakistan to the precipice of War in 1986. There are many other subjects which remain uncovered for those looking for the inside stories.

**Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh
AVSM**

[This article was contributed to the Nishaan by the distinguished, retired, Admiral in end June 2000, just some weeks before he passed away, in New Delhi.]

In Memoriam

Rear-Admiral Satyindra Singh

A distinguished naval officer: born at Lahore, on 23 May 1920; married 1942 to Haridarshan Kaur (two sons), passed away at Delhi 18 July 2000.



Satyindra Singh not only played a part in the Indian Navy's transition from coal-fired ships equipped with rudimentary weapons to modern warships powered by gas-turbine engines and armed with sophisticated missiles, but was also closely involved in honing the country's military and counter-intelligence capabilities.

He also wrote the first definitive history of the Indian Navy and for over two decades regularly published informed analyses on military, security and intelligence matters in Indian and overseas newspapers and journals.

For 11 years, till retiring in 1977, Satyindra Singh held senior appointments in the military and intelligence wing of the all-powerful Cabinet Secretariat and later the fledgling Joint Intelligence Committee, the JIC, established in the early 1970s as the nodal body for collating information gathered by covert security agencies and drawing up six-monthly security projections for the government with a 30-day warning of imminent hostilities.

Satyindra Singh was born in 1920 in a Sikh military family in Lahore, now in Pakistan but then a part of India. His grandfather was a junior commissioned officer with the famous 23rd Sikh Pioneer Regiment who was awarded service medals for campaigns in China, Abyssinia and Afghanistan from 1860 to 1880. Singh was schooled locally and graduated from the well known Foreman Christian College in Lahore in 1939.

Two years later, at the height of the Second World War, he joined the Royal Indian Navy Volunteer Reserve - popularly known as the "Wavy Navy" after its wavy stripe symbol denoting waves - as sub lieutenant and was posted in the southern port city of Madras before being transferred to naval shore establishments at Calcutta in the east and Bombay in the west. After independence, Singh was absorbed into the Indian Navy and two years later despatched as assistant naval attache to the Indian High Commission in London, where he served until 1951.

After returning home Singh attended the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington in southern India and went on to serve aboard several warships including INS Delhi (formerly HMS Achilles), INS Mysore (ex-HMS Nigeria) and the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (ex-HMS Hercules), all of which have been retired. Singh joined the Cabinet Secretariat in 1966, serving in its military and intelligence wings before transferring to the newly created Joint Intelligence Committee as Member Secretary.

He retired in 1977 to write the navy's history - published as *Under Two Ensigns: the Indian Navy 1945-1950* (1985) and *Blueprint to Bluewater: the Indian Navy 1951-1965* (1991) - and extensively on security matters.

Kuldip Singh
From: The Independent, London

It is said, "Religion did not create man, man created religion". Religion is the spontaneous and innate urge of man towards ultimate freedom from the throes of existence. It is the outer manifestation of man's hunger for the Infinite.

Every discerning man knows that if his mundane happiness increases by arithmetic progression, his unhappiness multiplies by geometrical progression. He cannot find lasting joy in material pursuits, and so gets inclined to go beyond the confines of the finite to reach out to the Infinite.

He is inwardly unhappy, today at least as much as ever before. Even though modern technology has placed immense power in his hands, he still feels quite helpless—so much that he feels impelled to pray to some higher power for help. This is not so much a confession of weakness as the proof of his belief in some power higher than his own. Prayers seeking divine help for mundane things are only crude prayers. Brave souls do not make selfish demands from the divine. They love

The need to Believe

Experience and Belief in the face of God

God and seek His love. However, weak souls as well as brave ones, affirm through their prayers, that they are *believers*.

It appears that modern man has lost faith in traditional beliefs and institutionalized religions. Yet, his enhanced materialistic pursuits have landed him in an ever-worsening predicament. Though he seems to have discarded God in Heaven, his longing for heaven has not ceased.

He still receives "intimations of immortality". He still wonders, 'Is there a plan behind the daisy, the hummingbird, the whale, the world?' He still inquires, 'What is the grand mystery behind things, or beyond things?'

There is no doubt that modern science has fractured man's beliefs in traditional dogmas and institutionalized religions. It has also provided him with new questions about the grand mystery. He now wonders if the universe is bounded or unbounded; whether anything exists beyond the limits of knowledge where galaxies recede faster than light. It appears, the horizon of mystery is larger, farther and faster than the horizon of knowledge. This mystery is indefinable. There is nothing at all with which it can be compared. Language is utterly inadequate to express it. Our puny mind cannot comprehend even the cosmic finitude—how can it comprehend Infinitude? Yet, it is there—very much there!

Of all the disciplines of science, physics has pushed the frontiers of knowledge more strongly than any other branch in recent times. The physicist is much ahead of his other scientific fellows in accepting the all-encompassing mystery of the universe that people refer to as God.

Einstein declared that his most awe-inspiring experience was to see and contemplate the unknown which taught him "that which is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty..."

George Davis suggested that God cannot be avoided by the common atheistic assumption that nature somehow sprang unassisted out of nothing and continues to operate without any conscious guidance.

An episode in the life of Charles Boyle, the fourth Earl of Orrery, provides an interesting anecdote. He had a working model of the Solar system built in his castle. This was perfect, extraordinary clockwork. There was the brass sun in the middle and smaller globes representing the various planets revolving around it and the moons of the planets revolving around them. Lord Orrery had an atheist friend who thought that the universe sprang up on its own and was automatically maintaining itself without intelligence of any kind. One day Orrery brought him over to his castle to show him his wonderful machine. When he saw the flawless operation of the model, the atheist was struck with wonder and asked, "Where has it come from? Who made it?" Orrery simply replied, "Nobody made it. It just happened". "How could that be?" asked the atheist, "How can such intricate machinery create itself?" Orrery said, "I will tell you who made this planetary system, if you will tell me who made the infinitely bigger, more wonderful and really exquisite solar system up in the heavens".

Around three decades ago a conference was organized in London by David Bohm, a professor of theoretical physics, in which several international scientists of diverse disciplines held a dialogue with J. Krishnamurthy, a well known mystic. Out of the deliberations of a series of conferences of that type arose a book *Mind in Nature*. What the scientist prefers to call 'mind in nature', the mystic would call 'immanence of God'.

Science, the great iconoclast, has lately tended to approximate belief in a maker. What it has threatened are the organized religions and mind cramping dogmas. What it has reinforced is the belief in a Creator.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, over half a millennium ago, made a similar approach from the pulpit of a faith. He said:

*A believer does not follow one given path or
another, given Byway,
His concern is Dharma alone.*

Dharma, here, stands for 'Cosmic Law'—its other connotations such as 'innate nature', 'righteousness', 'duty', 'virtue', 'faith' and 'social law' are all subsumed under it. We cannot see *dharma*. But St. Augustine has said, "Faith is to believe what we don't see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe". In the realm of the natural, seeing is the bases of believing. In the realm of the supernatural, believing is the foundation of seeing.

The Chinese sage Lao Tzu has said:

*When the highest type of men hear Tao,
They diligently practice it.
When the average type of men hear Tao,
They half-believe it.
When the lowest type of men hear Tao,
They heartily laugh at it.*

So, barring the lowest type of men, everyone is a believer, or at least half-believer. In believing rests of the secret of worthwhile effort and valuable exertion. Man was not made to question, but to believe and adore. Faith is the subtle chain that binds him to the Infinite.

Why is it then, one might ask, that we believe so much and experience so little? Are our heads so bloated and our hearts so empty? When love and belief combine, spiritual experiences begin to sprout. Believing is the gateway to spiritual ascent, and love is the unerring guide. Belief is above religious truth. It is a necessary precondition for the awakening of higher states of consciousness.

Guru Nanak affirmed this when he said:

*Believing causes mind to awaken to higher consciousness,
The knowledge of all spheres and realms it brings.
One who believes, never is slapped on the face,
No longer is he required to accompany
the Messenger of Death.*

SGGS p.2

Guru Angad Dev, the second Sikh Guru, assured us further:

*All spiritual praxis, contemplation and
austerity included,
Emerge out of believing
All other activities are of no use.*

SGGS p.954

Those who follow the path of faith do so not from any visionary plan. They do so from an innate irresistible impulsion pursued by them till the day they are able to attain their goal of getting fully in tune with the Infinite.

Such persons are endowed with high spiritual sensitivity. They can deliberately sacrifice their mundane attainments at the altar of their ideal.

No one can find happiness by hankering after it. Elusive like the blowing wind, is vainglorious mundane accomplishment. A Napoleon flounders, a Kaiser is humbled,

a Hitler commits suicide. Human vaunting has no value. There undoubtedly is some unknown power on whose sufferance we exist and function and survive—and without whose assent we cannot move even a step. So we consciously, or even in spite of ourselves, pray to this Power for help and strength. And we believe that we will be heard.

Pascal said, "It is natural for the mind to believe and for the will to love; so that, for want of true objects, they may attach themselves to false". Let us, then, beware of belief in counterfeit stuff, for the Bhagavat Gita says:

*Man is made of this belief
As he believes, so he is.*

How wonderful it is then that every morning and evening, in every Sikh gurdwara, the Lord is supplicated for the gift, *inter alia*, of belief (*visah*) and trust (*bharosa*) for every Sikh individually, and for the whole Sikh community and collectively.

During disintegrating times, *faith* begins to degenerate and traditional beliefs tend to fossilize. Age-old symbols lose their vitality and get reduced to empty forms. A diffuse rebelliousness erupts. Since it tends to spread randomly, and has an amorphous texture, it may soon begin to lose its vitality and vigour.

Does something like this not seem to characterise our spiritual predicament today? In times of such an upheaval, people feel 'rootless'. They become confused about values and take to destructive activities. That seems to be our pervasive dilemma in the new millennium. Pseudo-religions, then, begin to mushroom to fill the 'vacuum of faith'. They make use of remnants of traditional values as their protective encasement. However, there is a great chance that behind that encasement they also shrink and crumble. This is bound to happen because they cannot satisfy the quest of the human spirit for the Infinite. Exclusivist, jealous, and aggressively proselytizing religions are particularly likely to lose their hold. A genuine pluralist attitude begins to take shape. This appears to be clearly an emergent trend today. For such a trend a genuinely pluralist scripture can become the mainstay.

Perhaps, the only pluralist scripture that any world religion has given mankind is the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In its representation is given to both the Aryan and the Semitic traditions. In it are preserved devotional works of as many as thirty six spiritual masters belonging to a number of different communities. It presents the distillate of the spiritual wisdom of as many as five centuries. It is thus the most valuable source of pluralistic quest for the world today.



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