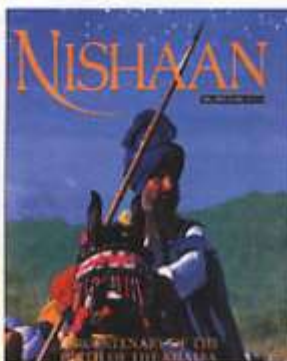


NISHAAN

A Sikh warrior with a long grey beard, wearing a blue turban and a blue robe over a white shirt, holds a long wooden spear with a metal tip. In the foreground, the head of a horse is decorated with a colorful, patterned cloth and flowers. The background shows green hills under a clear blue sky.

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BIRTH OF THE KHALSA



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High Flight
The Sikh Pioneers of Aviation

One can be entirely confident that the 300th year of the birth of the Khalsa very clearly heralds the coming renaissance of the *Panth*. It has been my hope that some better known scribe would have taken up this subject and examined in unbiased manner the situation of a community that has seen better times and suggest a future path to follow, but since such mighty pens have remained silent (except for the occasional wrap on the knuckles for the peasantry-based Akali Dal and its leadership) it would be my endeavour to reach out to my co-religionists and other countrymen.

This is not the occasion to ruminate on what was, or what was not, promised to the Sikhs by the British when they were departing in 1947. That can be debated another time. Today one is much more concerned with the senseless and disastrous era of the '80s and '90s, owing its parentage to the catalytic mind set of a national leader for whom keeping her party in power was more important than the unity and well being of the nation's sword arm and granary.

The Sikhs have been at the receiving end for nearly two decades. This started off covertly at first after the ignominious "Operation Bluestar". And then overtly as in the pogrom against the Sikhs in Delhi and beyond. Overnight, we were suddenly a beleaguered community.

Many of us, without suspecting it, were on our way out, gradually but surely, from positions of trust and power into the wilderness. We felt suffocated, angry and rebellious, but could say little and do even less. We lacked the platform and the print media as an instrument of communication with which we could have made ourselves heard. Our feelings were put into deep freeze, as it were, while the rest of the country conveniently forgot about the Sikhs.

Yes, we are a proud people and the miracle of our birth will always be with us. From that crucible of creation we have evolved into one of the world's most dynamic of communities.

It is now considered "unfashionable" to refer to the concept of martial and the non-martial classes but just ask the officers and jawans in the front lines; yes, these things do matter. The Sikhs have contributed greatly in safeguarding the sovereignty of our country, and so they expect, at the very least, that their sons should be able to serve in the Armed Forces in reasonable numbers. But alas, today even this is being made difficult.

From the days of the *baar* or the Canal colonies, the Punjab has been broken down into small, uneconomical and fragmented holdings of land, thanks to Nehruvian socialism. Thus having been squeezed out from agriculture and the Army, in sheer frustration or hunger, many of our young men took to foreign lands—or country liquor. An obvious political and economic issue began to be dubbed as first, secessionist and then a simple law and order problem. The State, with the full might of its security forces,

The Coming

which included the Army, began the task of "cleansing" and "sanitising" the countryside of Punjab. Gallantry awards were bestowed on many for "flushing out the terrorists" as the term frequently used, much to the relief of everyone in the country. Except, of course, for the Sikhs who were being cornered into their "deserted villages", to borrow a term from Goldsmith.

Thus should we believe that the Sikhs are being much sinned against rather than sinning? Certainly not! Let's face it, if the majority perceive flaws in our personality and certain actions, then it is wise to identify these and take remedial measures. We must remove the misgivings of others towards us. And this is perhaps where we have failed. Excessive adrenalin often propels us towards precipitous action rather than some self-introspection.

So, how do we get about this? Firstly, we must banish our never-ending power struggles within various groups and splinter groups, and forge one Akali Dal as there is one SGPC, but while remaining within the parent body and not outside it. The time for mutual accommodation, amalgamation of all factions and a single undisputed political leadership has come.

Secondly, we must be clear as to who can join the Sikh religion and what is to be its composition. The answer is that everyone is welcome to the fold! Those who wish to, should be graciously brought in irrespective of the SGPC elections. Only the weak and the unsteady fear an ingress to their ranks. If we are any good, there will be no dilution of our culture or ethos. Let the leaders we choose be elected only for their selflessness, clean image and the ability to lead us into the twenty first century—inspire like Moses did in the desert!

This leads to the next pertinent issue, that of the identity of a Sikh. To us, the external symbols are as important as the internal dynamics of the religion we practice. Only the Sikhs are enjoined to wear the turban as an integral part of themselves. Its appearance proudly marks one out in any part of the world and happily, even in the West today, its wearer claims recognition as belonging to a distinctive race. Unfortunately, "convenience" has also brought in the influx of *patkas* or mini turbans, golf caps and even straw hats, much to one's regret. This is an unwelcome trend that the Sikhs themselves urgently need to arrest. And as for those who have shorn their hair, here is something to ponder over: this is not the way we were meant to look when we were founded and so do not waste your time explaining who you are, when they call you anything but a Sikh. It is not to say that you have less love and devotion for Sikhism or are less religious than the majority who keep their *kesh*. But the point made is that, at some stage in life,

Renaissance

Essay

propriety must supersede convenience. We must understand our religion and all that it stands for—an ongoing education in our history and culture would inject a sense of distinctiveness and camaraderie within us. A knowledgeable and religious Sikh is a better Indian too or for that matter, a good citizen wherever he lives.

Our anger at what has happened to us in the last decade and more, should now be directed towards positive activity for the good of the community. We have to do many things urgently—"harness" women power within the Sikhs, bring in more education to our villages, see that the gurdwara and other elections are held regularly (and fairly) and on time for the emergence of new incumbents, inculcate self-discipline within the young and the old and elect as our representatives in the State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha, only those who are capable of speaking up for their people and their legitimate rights: the issues of Chandigarh, river waters, territorial boundary adjustments, punishment of those who instigated the mass killings of 1984 and other sores will eventually stand resolved once the right people enter the State Assemblies and Parliament. And while we are at it, let us create more technical institutes and medical colleges, plus preparatory academies for the armed and para-military forces, so that our youth are assured of employment in this highly competitive world.

On a very personal note, and about which only a Sikh can write, we do need to spend a little extra time on various nuances. For one, let us on holidays (as do the Christians), turn out in our "Sunday best", in neatly tied turbans (not *patkas*) and colourful *salwar kameezes*, then visit the nearest gurdwara. There is little point in fighting *yudhs* for our gurdwaras and then not going there!

Then the matter of our titles: our first names are meant to follow with the suffix "Singh", and unless we are not proud of being called that, we should not ourselves, nor let anyone else, let this be reduced to a single "S"! One is aware that some will term these suggestions as petty, some might even call them communal, but the fact remains that it is only the Sikhs in this big wide world, who have to maintain and preserve a distinctive identity and the emerging trends enumerated earlier, do certainly negate against that.

On the economic front, something has very seriously gone wrong in the handling of our rural economies and our political masters and administrators are certainly to blame for this. It is time for those who wear blue or white turbans in the Punjab or elsewhere, to now forget their differences and petty quarrels and honour the legacy of their ancestors by keeping the fields that they left behind still green and productive.

A virile, outgoing, educated and hard working

community like ours is the nation's *shaan*, its strength, and calls for its just share of the national cake and expects the removal of road blocks in their legitimate pursuit of professional activity. Such a national match must be played on level playing fields. For too long have Sikh civil servants been missing out on Cabinet Secretaryships or for instance, the office of the Foreign Secretary, when other "minorities" have filled such posts. It should certainly be a cause for concern that even till today, 50 long years after Indian independence, not one Sikh officer has been found competent to command the Indian Army, a force that we have so faithfully and professionally served.

As far as religion is concerned, well, that is one's personal matter, and in any case, we bother no one. Certainly, the Sikhs have to shed the pseudo-intellectuals, the sycophants, the greedy opportunists who masquerade as leaders and instead place as heads those men – and women – of vision, with world views, grasp and understanding, those who will not be corrupted by position nor money. There are so very many from whom to choose.

There is now the exciting new dimension of the "overseas Sikhs": no less than ten per cent of the community today permanently reside outside India. The custodians of our temporal and spiritual order must give them the importance due and fully involve them in their diaspora for the synergised strength and well-being of the community.

Let us translate the Guru Granth Sahib into as many foreign languages as practical, let us train and send forth well-versed *parcharaks* and *granthis*, publish wide-ranging literature on our culture and heritage, establish reading rooms or libraries to enhance knowledge in every town and village, identify ourselves in our resplendent form, and behave like the true Khalsa that Guru Gobind Singh had created in his own image.

As the Khalsa moves into the next century and with the world, into the new millennium, we stand at the crossroads of destiny. A glorious renaissance beckons us: let us together help make it so! ❖

Major General Himmat Singh Gill (Retd)

After a distinguished military career, the author has taken to prolific writing, with continuing contributions to newspapers and a number of novels published. A former diplomat, a seasoned defence analyst and a keen surveyor of the politico-religious field in and around India, General Himmat Singh Gill has written extensively about the future of the Sikh community to which he belongs.

THE MOMENT



Sacred autograph of Guru Gobind Singh on a gutka given to Bhai Dharam Singh and now with his descendants at the house of Bagrian.

The evolutionary history of all organisms—individual, tribe, clan, community, race or nation—determines when, where and how such entities come into being, acquire character, identity and name before they are fully commissioned on behalf of a larger humanist dream.

The *being* and the *becoming* are, in reality, a question of time and energy, and the dialectic of this process is predicated upon the nature of the primal impulse in question. For *becoming* involves the massed spirit of a people to overcome the hazards and challenges of reality, a reality often obdurate, intractable and hostile. In that crowning of the impulse lies the secret, the key to the dynamics of its path to recognition—and permanence. To be sure, when we are thinking of large communities with a distinctive religious address, signature and iconography, we may see variations from community to community in their journey even though, in general terms, common features or traits of visionary evolution are fairly evident in each case.

Still, there is, in most cases, a *moment of moments* when the gathered energies, ordeals and ideas reach the *point of criticality*, to borrow a convenient concept from nuclear physics. It is then that the dream nursed over a period of time and travail comes of the age of annunciation and song. It is the moment of epiphany

and illumination, of beauty and poetry, a moment whose hour has come at last. In short, a moment of sovereignty.

In this preamble to the birth of the Khalsa in its *ultimate* form in the year 1699, may be seen the *raison d'être* of the prodigious effort of the Sikh community to commemorate in great adoration and pride, in great style and form the 300th birth anniversary this year. To be sure, all centenary celebrations of this nature and character need a visible fanfare to affirm their momentous importance, but obviously the mere mounting of ceremonies on a grand scale, or the setting up of commemorative mansions and monuments, or the creation of certain foundations and councils etc. will, in the end, remain a splendid and spectacular exercise in which the *spirit* was lost in the *letter*. And that is something against which the Sikh scriptures have laid clear injunctions in soulful and heroic numbers. In other words, the year of the tercentenary ought to become a year not only of our renaissance, or the revival of the entire Sikh thought, culture and heritage, but also of a strenuous, agonising and insightful reassessment of the entire Sikh situation today—of its religious lapses, departures and derelictions, of its heroic but often complex and confused polity, of its place in the modern world, of the problems thrown up by the Sikh diaspora,

OF THE KHALSA

Vision, Values And World View

among several other things. A time of soul-searching and 'spring-cleaning', in short. Both euphoria and nostalgia are legitimate states of a corporate sensibility also, and the historic moment does inveigle the imagination into the pastures of the past, and into the arbours of the future. All that is natural, but when a great community that had once graduated to a position of power and glory, and then lost a good deal of its earned values and insights *en route*, such occasions help create a climate of helpful debate or discourse. We, on the other hand, find a whole swarm of doubts invading the Sikh mind precisely because of the tragic loss of vision among the community's leadership. The Sikh Establishment, like all entrenched power groups of elites and ambitious adventurers, are in the habit of turning everything to commodity—to profit and position. Thus, thoughtful Sikhs are called upon to salvage, refashion and reorient something of the pristine spirit in the context of the millennium in view. And to do so, it is necessary to go back to that moment of moments which as I have said earlier, gave this community its *sui genesis* character.



The Sikh history from the Founder of the creed, Guru Nanak, to the Tenth Guru again may be seen as a very unique journey, unique not in its native energies of will, spirit and sword to meet the assaults of reality—almost all great religions have had to encounter the entrenched orthodoxies of power and idolatry—but in bringing to consummation a dream in an uninterrupted chain of preceptors. For it's the common Sikh belief supported by evidence in word and song that the primal *gyoti* or light is seen embodied in the nine successive pontiffs as a matter of design whose locus lies outside of our reach and understanding. No wonder, such a progression where each successive Guru composed, sang hymns in the name of the First Master had a touch of the divine about it. In sum, the 200-year journey from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh who finally closed the institution of succession, and instead invested the *Adi Granth* with that awesome authority could be regarded as a pre-ordained phenomenon. In "the extinction of personality", and in submission to the imperatives of their inner selves, Guru Nanak's successors affirmed not only the spirit of humility and gratitude, but also the power of the word to become *Word*, of the message to become mandate, of the vision to become incarnate. It was an illumination that proved in action the grand link of God, pontiff and believer, a spiritual bond of Father, messenger and man. It was a divine wheel come full circle.

The passage of Sikhism through fire and flame, through sacrifices and martyrdom, through a sustained, relentless struggle for survival in the face of the massed might of the Moghul empire, and of their local royal Hindu stooges and satraps of all manner is too well-known to need



another recital here. It is well-chronicled in history and *sakhis*, in our fables and folklore, and in our documents and diaries. And this indeed is an archetypal journey—nearly all religions face such ordeals of spirit and will—though in the case of the Sikhs the relative swiftness of events, the transparent annealing of their corporate psyche under stress and strain, and the marks of a community on the upswing, maintaining a state of equipoise and serenity in the midst of storms, and hoisting a flag of the spirit to announce its definitive identity and arrival, was something that no known community in the world has to show. Which reminds me of a little poem in Punjabi called *Sikhi* or "Sikhism" written by Mohan Singh in the early thirties of this century :

Sikhism is verily a tree
That puts out its blossoms
In each place and clime,
—in wastes and wilderness,
in stony and rocky soils:
And the more you prune it,
The more it flourishes
In that majesty and measure.

This brings us, then, to that ultimate hour towards which the community drawing the milk of nourishment from its scriptures and stories has been marching resolutely, waiting, as it were, for its date with destiny. That day is now at hand, and there's a masterful hand to put the seal of finality upon it. To put it differently, we have the classic conditions that the French critic Taine's trinity stipulates regarding the birth of a great idea, or a great book, or a great work of art : the coming together of *the man, the moment and the milieu*. So that day in the spring of 1699, March 29-30 or the 1st Baisakhi 1756 BR (now celebrated each year on April 13), found the Tenth Master supremely primed for the historic mandate, and the conditions and the airs and the ambience ripe for the test and the consummation. Shakespeare uses two visionary ideas in his tragedies, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*—"Readiness is all" and "Ripeness is all"—to describe the state of a heroic soul on trial. In this case, the analogy is chiefly a linguistic extension, though the spirit in agony and triumph and



the *readiness* to give battle to the forces of evil and tyranny he speaks of shows the *ripeness* of spirit to which the Sikhs had been brought by the preceding preceptors. Let it be affirmed, *inter alia*, that this hour of the enfranchisement of the community as a *commonwealth* of the Khalsa was adumbrated in the divine vision and hymns of the First Guru himself. And during the days of the succeeding Gurus, the martyrdom of the Fifth and the Ninth Gurus, and the proclamation of Guru Hargobind of the twin doctrines of *miri* and *piri* or "the temporal sovereignty" and "the spiritual sovereignty" earlier had, in no uncertain terms, spelt out the destined march of the faithful towards a goal perceived in advance. This kind of prescience is vouchsafed to all such as are elected by the Lord to carry His Word, and become the instruments of His Will. The "third eye" is a divine endowment.

So, the intervening two centuries or so could be seen as a period in which the Sikh spirit was born, nursed, imbued with purpose and courage, filled with the lore of *dharma* or moral vision, and then set on the road that looked towards the far horizons in view. The day of *baptism*, of the administered *amrit* by the Master himself, was thus a day that hearkened back to Guru Nanak who had arrived on the Indian scene at a time of utter political and moral chaos in the country. The Hindu society in which he was born had become a moribund body of disparate and demoralised, degraded elements under the onslaught of Islamic rule and monolithic, absolutist theology which put to sword all that came in its way of spiritual suzerainty and territorial lust.



Indeed, to reach down to the grid of the energies that galvanised the engines of soulful and moral action on a grand scale, we may have to interpret the symbolic story of the Tenth Guru's own nativity and its contextual coordinates. Thus the hermeneutics of his composition *Bachitar Natak* or "The Wondrous Drama" (1698) which he wrote in the plenitude of his poetic power and vision, would suggest not only the rationale of his birth, and the story of his previous life, but also a whole range of possibilities posited in it. A ministry of moral and mystic symbiosis is commissioned. A religion now fully armed in spirit, complete with a body of inviolate scriptural verse, theological formulations and a socio-political world-view is set to take off, waiting as it were for the Great Engineer. From the birth of the star over Patna in the year 1666 A.D. and the ordained arrival on the scene of the Sufi Saint, Bhikham Shah, to bless the infant Gobind and pronounce him divine (reminiscent of the Bethlehem Story of Jesus Christ's nativity and the journey of the Magi) to the tempestuous saga of his life and muses we may see the making of a great mission. His sovereignty in the process assumes awesome majesty, and his poetry a magnificence in consonance with the imperatives of his splendid personality. The royal mien, robes and accoutrements reflect how matter impregnated with the spirit of divinity becomes an instrument of mandate and message. However, unlike other prophets and divines, he never claimed the station of God. On the contrary, he condemned all those to hell who called him *Ishwar* or *Akalpurkh*. Talking of the Guru's divine ministry, I am reminded of the



Greek concept of *Kairos* or "the right time". As Paul Tillich in *The Eternal Now* puts it, "All great changes in history are accompanied by a strong consciousness of a *Kairos* at hand". Taken thus, the advent of the Tenth Master had its locus in time and divinity at once.

Before we turn, finally, to the Sikh values, vision and *Weltanschauung* and to the future of the Sikhs as we see it today, a fanciful resurrection of the Great Day that saw the baptism and enfranchisement of the Khalsa as a sovereign community at Anandpur Sahib ("the Abode of Bliss") becomes a part of the grand tapestry. There are several accounts of that fateful day, and it is the imagination of loving and reverence, and the imagination of frolic and revelry that come simultaneously into play.

Imagine then the scene—a cool morning of late March with the spring breezes laden with the fragrance of myriad flowers, and of the good green earth, the schools of birds chirping in happy thankfulness, the aroma of ripe corn and the songs of harvesting, the village belles, "our queens of curd and cream" at their morning chores, the music of the Persian wheels and the splendour of the surrounding Shivalik hills beneath which Anandpur Sahib rests as a place of peace with a distinctive "call"! And Guru Gobind Singh is seated on the *gaddi* in full regalia, sporting a plume and a hawk on his hand, and he surveys the assembled believers and faithful with an eye of keen insight and compassion. And then, amidst a congregation charged with high emotion and a dream of high destiny, the Master rises to announce the birth of the Khalsa in their finished form, and the ceremony of *amrit* is enacted after a symbolic act of trust and sacrifice. For that's the meaning of the 5 goats slaughtered inside the tent to

initiate the five *pyaras* or "The Beloved Five", who had at the Guru's command offered their heads. It was truly a unique order of baptism—a baptism of blood and sword. The steel had, so to speak, entered the spirit of the Khalsa, and given it a keen edge and power. However, the great moral of that symbolic episode was that the new Commonwealth of the Khalsa knew or recognised no distinctions of caste, colour or creed. "The Beloved Five" represented the entire spectrum of the then existing society—from the high-born to the lowly artisans.

This flowering of the Sikh spirit around the time of the *Baisakhi* month—a month of joyous felicities brings forth that *joie de vivre* which is a characteristic feature of Punjabi life, and which springs from a deep-rooted attachment to the soil—to the blessedness



and bounties of corn, milk and curds. It's these virtues which the Master's providential act brought to full fruition. The idea of *sada vigas* or unfailing high-spiritedness thus got structured into the Sikh sensibility.

Since the doctrine of the *consecrated sword* was then apotheocised at the time of the ceremonies associated with the moment of the Khalsa, there has always existed an element of question, of doubt about it in the minds of those outside of the faith. It was made *mandatory* by the Guru himself that the Sikh sword would *only* be unleashed or lifted against those tyrants and evil persons who had blocked all avenue of peaceful resolution. It was to affirm the principles of universal justice and moral law under all conditions and all circumstances. In his historic *Zafarnamah* or "The Epistle of Victory", addressed to the Moghul Emperor, Aurangzeb, a couplet in Persian loosely rendered, reads thus:

When the situation is past all measures and persuasion,

It's thy rightful duty to lift the sword.

In any account of the enfranchisement of the Khalsa as a body of men and women sworn to the highest ideals of the creed brought into being by Guru Nanak, and expanded, expounded and finalised by the later pontiffs and made ready for the charismatic stewardship of the Tenth Master, it is important to understand the drift of moral energies, the humanistic vision and the ultimate goal of God-realisation which the preceding generations of Sikh devotees had imbibed from their history, scriptures, given tenets, edicts, rules of governance, polity and so on. In a most comprehensive way, all these sources got subsumed in a grand metaphor of the Khalsa itself—a term that at once suggested multiple ideas and images of *dharma* and *karma*, and of *sewa* and sacrifice, of commitment and candour, of truth and righteousness, of divine acceptance and submission and, above all, of the mystery and mystique of martyrdom. Thus to sport the insignia of the Khalsa was to proclaim, in a way, the very essence of one's being. For that's how corporate images get laminated into one strong unforgettable *imago* in the Jungian sense.

To be more specific, the moral tradition of Sikhism from which we find both the leaders and the laity grievously alienated today in some ways, particularly since the wave of hedonism and consumerism in the country, there is a whole sum of values strong enough to suggest a residual, inviolate base. For the Sikh Gurus treated the world of the senses as *dharamsal* or "the house of moral conduct". Ironically, while the vile politics of power seems to have soiled the governance of the *gurdwaras* both in India and abroad, the concept of *dharamsal* (a term still in common use in the countryside) abides. And the moral values the concept implies includes, among other things, humility and extinction of *haumain* or ego, pity and compassion, service and sacrifice, hospitality and magnanimity, courage and valour and, above all, a vigilant concern for truth—the highest virtue in Guru Nanak's own words, higher even than right conduct. For truth is God's own attribute and, therefore, a *transcendent value*—supreme, immaculate, inviolate.

"Truth is higher than everything else,
But higher still is the living by truth."

The question of *Rahitnamas* or "Epistles of Conduct" issued or enunciated by various saints, scholars and scribes has to be understood in the

context of their origin and circumstances. Of course, the ethical vision of Sikhism will always remain central in relation to the scriptural values, though it was natural to see certain new proprieties and protocol evolved in the course of history as a kind of helpful grammar. It is in this way that Sikh ethics came to be institutionalised. It may be observed, however, that the Guru vision never permitted or envisaged an institutionalisation which could degenerate into a mindless orthodoxy. For that vision is at once fundamental and resilient, universal and contingent. One



may go on to describe such a phenomenon as an example of *visionary ambivalence*. It appears, then, that the three key principles that emerge as a grid of Sikh moral energies are *Nam Japna* or the recitation of the Name *Kir-karna* or a life of fruitful labour, and *Vand Chhakna* or the sharing of life's fruits and riches and other bounties and blessings.

All other virtues, in a way, stem from this *ethical trinity*.

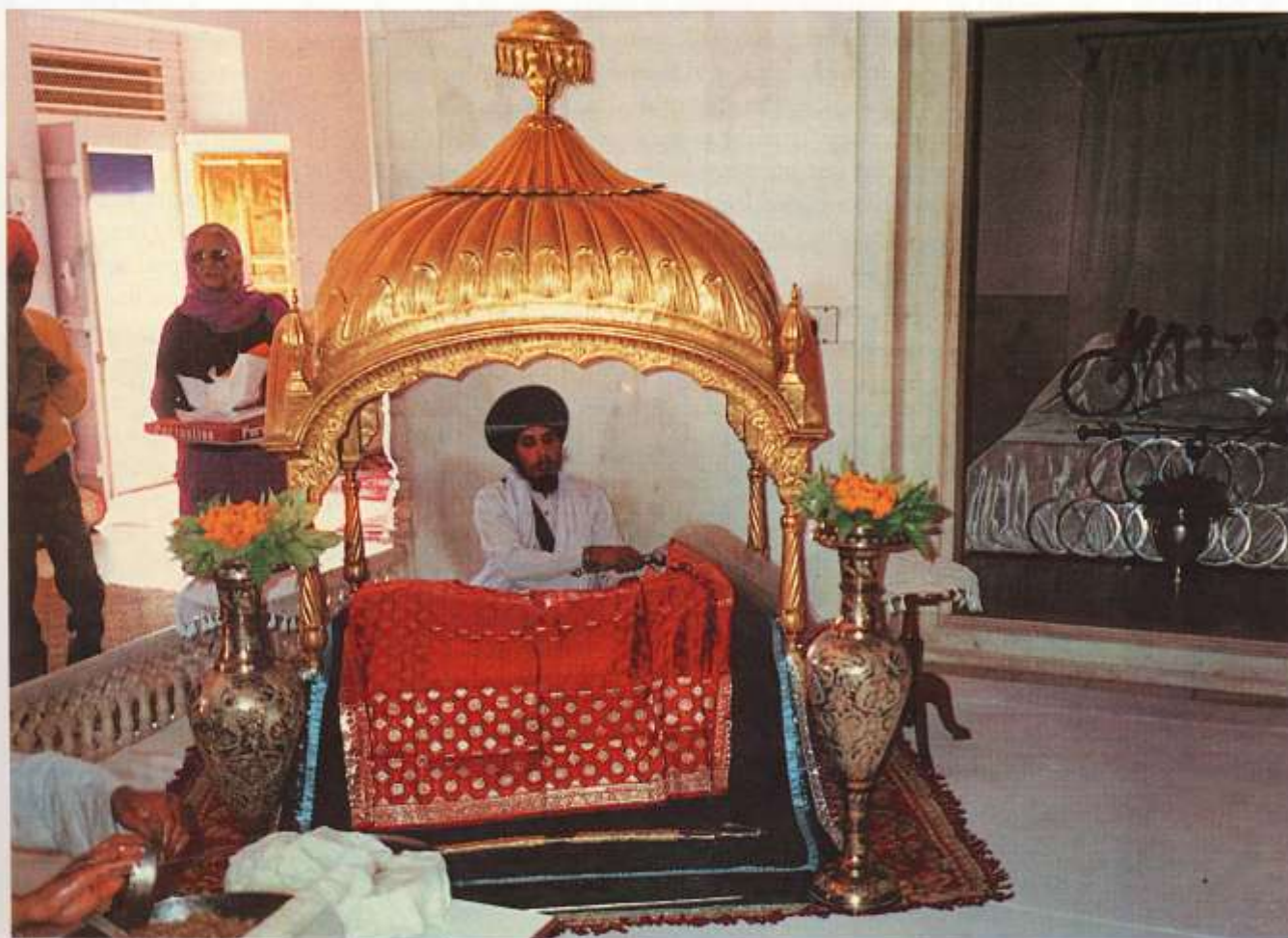
To trace and analyse the moral life of a community is, in a manner, to talk of its origin, evolution and arrival as an organic

entity on the one hand, and to understand its spiritual urges, its existential concerns and its humanistic dreams, on the other. In this interaction of the numinous and the divine lies the locus of all value systems. And where a community has been trained on a diet of vast human aspirations as in the case of

when through the vision and deeds of the Final Master a community's full life—of the senses, of the mind and intellect, and of the eternal mystic longing for the life beyond was given its first full expression.

If the moral values and the Sikh world-view found their

of martyrdom unparalleled in the history of world religions—assumes a meaning beyond meaning. Where a life, a pen and a sword come together to form a paradigm of spiritual power of awesome magnificence, surely a divinity of purpose is at work. And when the ordained mission had been brought



the Sikhs, its moral being or character achieved in action and engagement is integrally related to its world-view. It's thus that the word becomes flesh, or the thought consumed in praxis. In other words, the text of history and the sub-text of faith and belief combine to produce a moral order. And the entire foregoing argument returns us thus to that moment of moments

profound consummation in the life and poetry of Guru Gobind Singh, it only proves that in the Guru's view there was never to be a hiatus between the ideal in view and the action involved. The meaning of his own life—the sacrifice of his own noble father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and the consequential martyrdom of all his four young sons in the name of *dharma*, truth and faith—a quartet

to its logical conclusion, and a *brotherhood* of the faithful established, the Master gave yet another meaningful and far-reaching turn to the great drama. He accepted *amrit*, the water of baptism, from his own commissioned Sikhs, "the Beloved Five". The moment of resurrection of a people fallen and gone astray was thus crowned with a regal act. The Guru and the *Chela*

became an inseparable entity, and the Master's memorable utterance reminds us today of his ministry in this manner:

Khalsa mero roop hai khas

"The Khalsa brotherhood is cast in my own image".

No wonder, one recalls with awe that memorable couplet:

Wah, Wah, Guru Gobind Singh

Apey Gur Chela

(All praise be to Guru Gobind Singh,

The Preceptor's also an acolyte.)

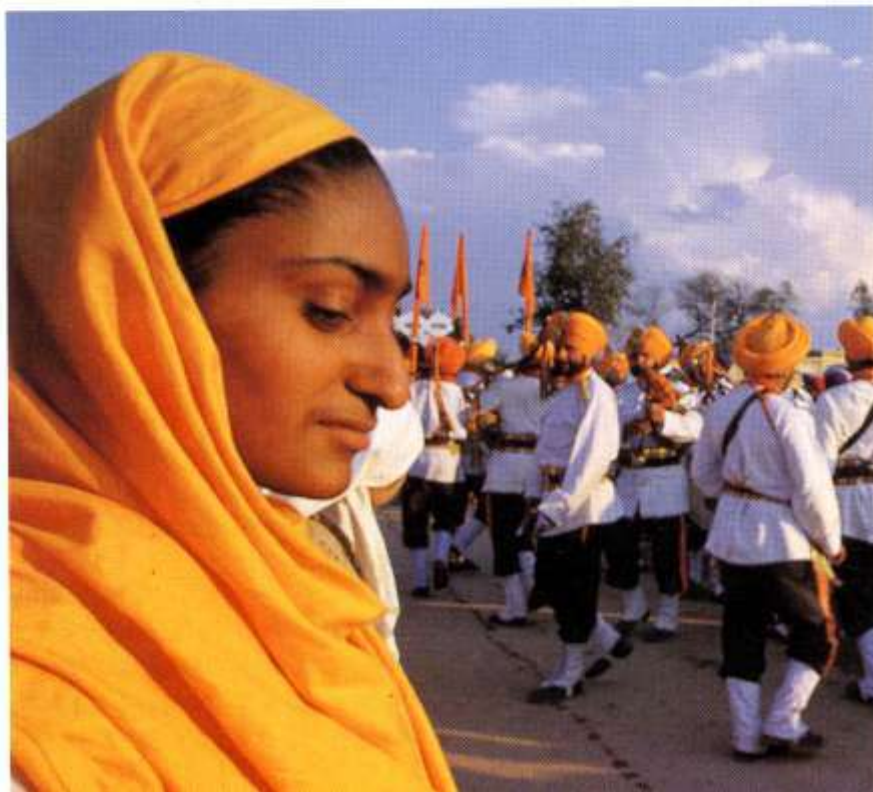
And, finally, when we talk of the Sikh *Weltanschauung* or world-view, in a way, we are only summing up in a portmanteau German expression all that the Khalsa fraternity stands for—from its origin and tempestuous history to its visionary voyage through the Sikh scriptures, hymns, discourses and works of exegesis. The encyclopaedic character of the exercise involves a very large extended discussion. However, for our purposes here, the Sikh world-view implies a few major, definitive and unvaried features of the community: its creed and culture, its polity and praxis, its style and stance, among other things.

To begin with, the reality of this world-view is grounded in two other realities of a higher nature—the reality of God and *the reality of the world* as we see it. It becomes necessary to emphasize the latter, since the Sikh scriptures in consonance with some aspects of Hindu thought do speak of this world as *maya* or illusion, as "a dream" and "a bubble" (as in the soulful numbers of Guru Tegh Bahadur, to quote only one example), but a deeper and wider reading of all such references in the hymns of the Gurus, and in those of other divines does suggest certain subtle variations. There are, indeed, clear statements within the sacred texts to treat human life as something unique and rare, and the world of nature, earth and animals as a place of wonder, enchantment and beauty. It is

because divinity suffuses the given reality of this world and, indeed, is created by the Lord as "playground" for His own great *lila* or pleasurable game. No wonder, then, the sacred and the profane are equally worthy of our adoration. In fact, Guru Nanak regarded the human body as "a temple of God", and if we abuse it or desecrate it, it only shows how far we have travelled from the spirit of Sikhism.

Similarly, woman *qua* woman has received a most compassionate, soulful and reverential treatment in Guru Nanak's hymns, as indeed in the *bani* of the later Gurus, for she symbolises the eternal principle of creation. And woman, the spouse, is a recurring *constitutive* metaphor in the *Adi Granth* where man's relation with his Maker is conceived in corresponding terms and idiom. So the man-woman relationship has a divine, mystic base, and any affront to woman as such is an affront to the Lord Himself. That's why *anand-karj* or marriage in Sikhism is regarded as a fulfilment and a consummation in more than one sense.

A world-view that comprehends the sublimity of human relationships is necessarily egalitarian, democratic and socialistic in essence. It regards equality of men, equality of religions and equality in the eyes of law as fundamental values whatever its uniqueness—and Sikhism has a distinct character—that uniqueness is never used as a means of aggrandisement, of aloofness, of proselytization in a militant manner. This could best be illustrated when we consider the composition of the *Adi Granth* by the Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev. It carries scores of hymns from Muslim sufi poets, Hindu divines, Harijan bards and *bhaktas*, and the languages used cover a vast variety



of dialects in addition to the classical languages and vernaculars. This order of catholicity of the spirit and mind remains a singularly unique phenomenon in the world of religious scriptures or literatures.

Again, Sikhism, though recognising the 'royalty' of the human spirit does not recognise any kind of social hierarchy, any kind of elites. Guru Gobind Singh's own example, and his hymns, brimful of compassion for the lowly and the dispossessed, show what the achieved Sikh world-view can suggest to a world driven by conflicts, clashes and schisms of all manner. The Sikh scriptures again are full of what in the German language is called *Weltschmerz* or "world-pain".

It remains, in the end, to ponder the future of Sikhism in the century ahead of us. It is true, apostasy in Sikhism has been, of late, on a large scale, what with the Sikh *diaspora* and the new forces of global "culture" mentioned at the outset. At the same time, it is also true that some of the Sikh scribes who predicted "the demise" of Sikhism in its original form by the end of the century now remain to regret the rashness of their view. For, it is now being realised even abroad that not only is Sikhism a vibrant world religion with a distinct identity, but is also a faith that has endless possibilities for mankind.



And this point brings up the question of Sikhism and modernity. It has often been averred by the new generation of Sikhs in India and abroad that the Sikh image, practices and symbols militate against its acceptance in its present form. There's only some element of truth in it, for this thesis is not sustainable in so many other ways. Besides, there is, so far as India is concerned, no other community more wedded to the spirit of modernity than are the Sikhs. Their very life-style, their whole-sale acceptance of western scientific farming, technology, education and the conditions of an advanced industrialised, entrepreneurial society would be able to sustain the Sikhs amidst all manner of challenges. There is an organic, inherent energy in them, and all we need is to adapt ourselves to the requirements of the changing world without losing

our true heritage and our vision. How best this could be effected is a matter that requires a vigorous insightful debate and deliberations. Among the vexing and complex problems that continue to bedevil the Akali party politics, and cause painful embarrassment to the community in India and abroad are the problems of the office and jurisdiction of the Akal Takht Jathedar, and the question of mandatory edicts, orders and punitive actions associated with that high office. The effects of authority, of late, compels us then to ponder the problem in agonising earnestness. In sum, the moment of celebrations is also the moment of reassessment, readjustment and redefinition.

Assuredly, the moment of the Khalsa is best suited to give the coming generations a direction, an agenda and a machinery for action. The dialectic of the moment compels us to do so ☪

Dr. Darshan Singh Maini

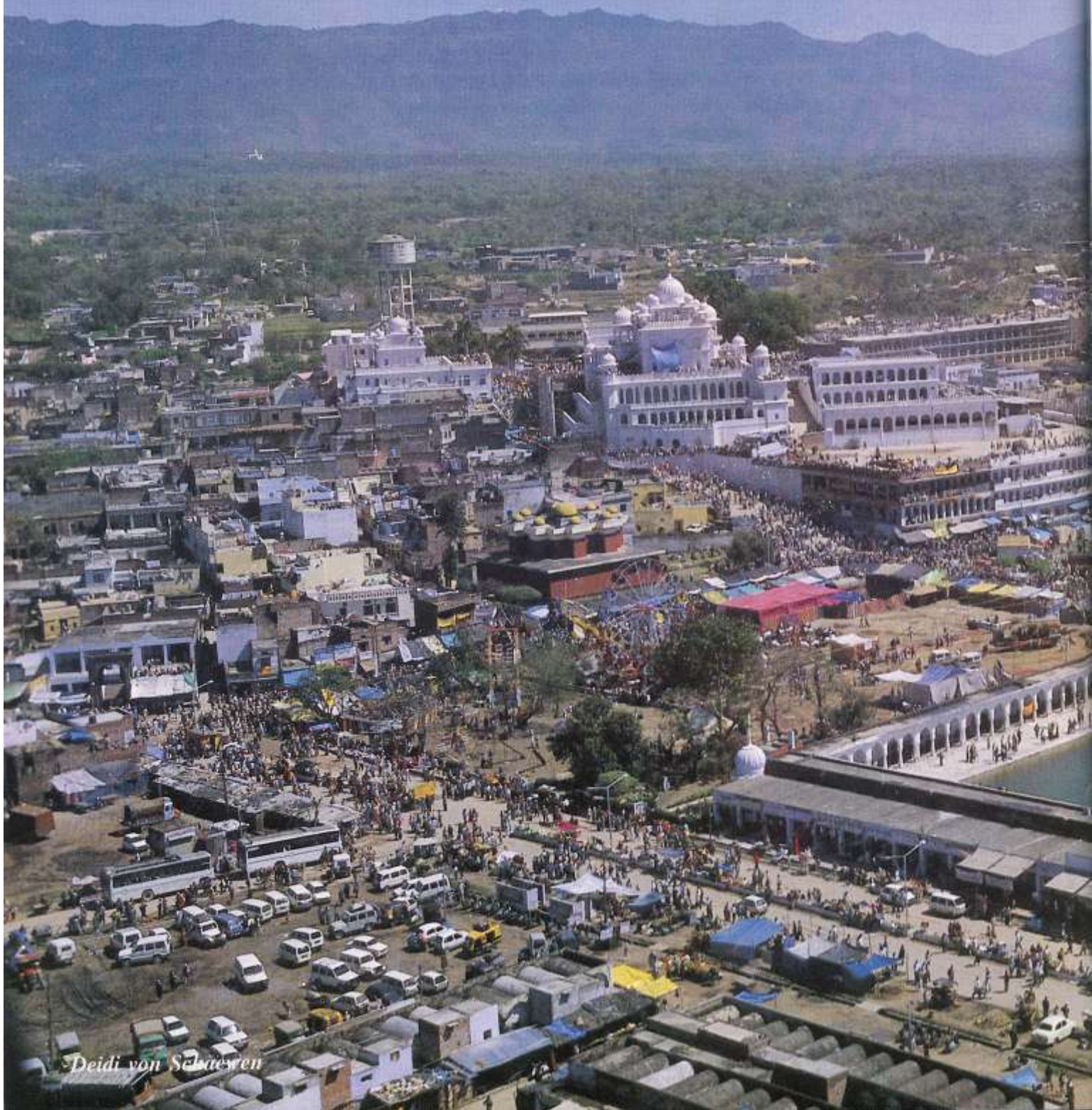


Dr. Darshan Singh Maini, formerly Professor of English with the Punjabi University, has written extensively for a variety of journals, magazines and newspapers in India and abroad since the early fifties. His work includes scores of paper, literary essays, poems, reviews, critiques, columns and commentaries.

Dr Maini was a Fulbright Visiting Professor at New York University (1988-90) and a permanent member of the Henry James Review editorial board.

Abode

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF



Deidi von Schwenen

of Bliss

ANANDPUR SAHIB

Heritage

Anandpur Sahib, the revered Abode of Bliss, is one of the most sacred places of the Sikhs. Located in a valley on the lower spurs of the Himalayas, with the Sola Singhi range towards its north-east and the ancient Shivaliks on the south-west, Anandpur Sahib is surrounded by picturesque undulating countryside, with the holy Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib, the birth place of the Khalsa, sitting imposingly above. The historic town of Anandpur is flanked by the Charan Ganga river towards the north. Towards the west and through the narrow valley, flows the mighty Sutlej, the eastern most of the five rivers which give the Punjab its distinctive name.

The course of the Charan Ganga has changed and no longer flows south westwards from Anandpur Sahib.

In historical significance, Anandpur Sahib is next only to the holy city of Amritsar, and was founded in 1664 by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs.

It was here in Anandpur on the Baisakhi day of 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh ceremonially initiated five Sikhs from different social backgrounds to form the brotherhood of the Khalsa or 'pure ones' and in turn asked them to initiate him, reiterating the insistence on absolute equality amongst all Sikhs.



Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib, overlooking the settlement of Anandpur Sahib.

Keshgarh Sahib, as seen from a street of the historic town.



It was here in Anandpur on the Baisakhi day of 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh ceremonially initiated five Sikhs from different social backgrounds to form the brotherhood of the Khalsa or 'pure ones' and in turn asked them to initiate him, reiterating the insistence on absolute equality amongst all Sikhs. Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib located on a high mound marks the site and sits overpoweringly over the entire settlement. Numerous other sites connected with the lives, achievements and campaigns of the Tenth Guru and his followers exist in and around the historic settlement of Anandpur. The form of the town too reflects the social, political and cultural realities of the times.

Anandpur is located about ten kilometers north west of the town of Kiratpur, which was founded by the sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind. One of the reasons for the selection of the site of Anandpur could have been the 'extraordinary disposition of Nature'. But later on the same site proved useful for the purpose of fortification during the time of Guru Gobind Singh.

Anandpur Sahib was originally called Chak Nanki by Guru Tegh Bahadur who named it after his mother. Located on flat land bordered by the Charan Ganga, Gurdwara Bhora Sahib and Sis Ganj mark the oldest part of the historic settlement. A series of low hillocks form a protective concave shape towards their northern and eastern side, marking the residence of the Guru. The coming of the Guru to the land of Anandpur resulted in the migration of Sikhs from all over the country. Thus the town began to flourish as a place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs as well as Hindus, especially as the route to Naina Devi passed through the town. Suraj Mal, elder son of Guru Hargobind, also came and settled in the town,

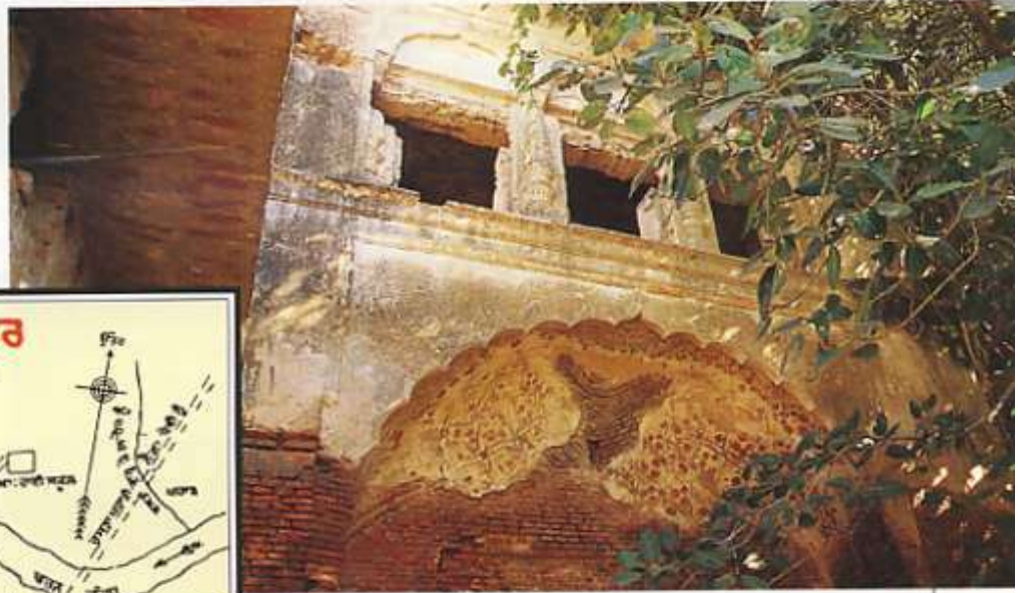
although at a distance from Guru Ka Mahal, residence of the Guru.

Manji Sahib Gurdwara, set on a hill overlooking the Ramlila Chowk in Badi Sarkar Mohalla marks the site of the residence of Suraj Mal. The remains of a fortification, series of gates and enclosures testify to the original site and character of the haveli. A 'Cho' or seasonal stream then flowed through the settlement, separating the residence of the Guru from that of Suraj Mal. In the nineteenth century this 'Cho' became a bazaar and is still referred to as *Cho Bazaar*. Telu Shah's serai on *Cho Bazaar* in Badi Sarkar Mohalla was used by pilgrims on their way to Naina Devi.

Guru Ka Mahal today comprises Gurdwara Bhora Sahib where, in a



Bhora Sahib Gurdwara sits amidst the historic residential quarter.

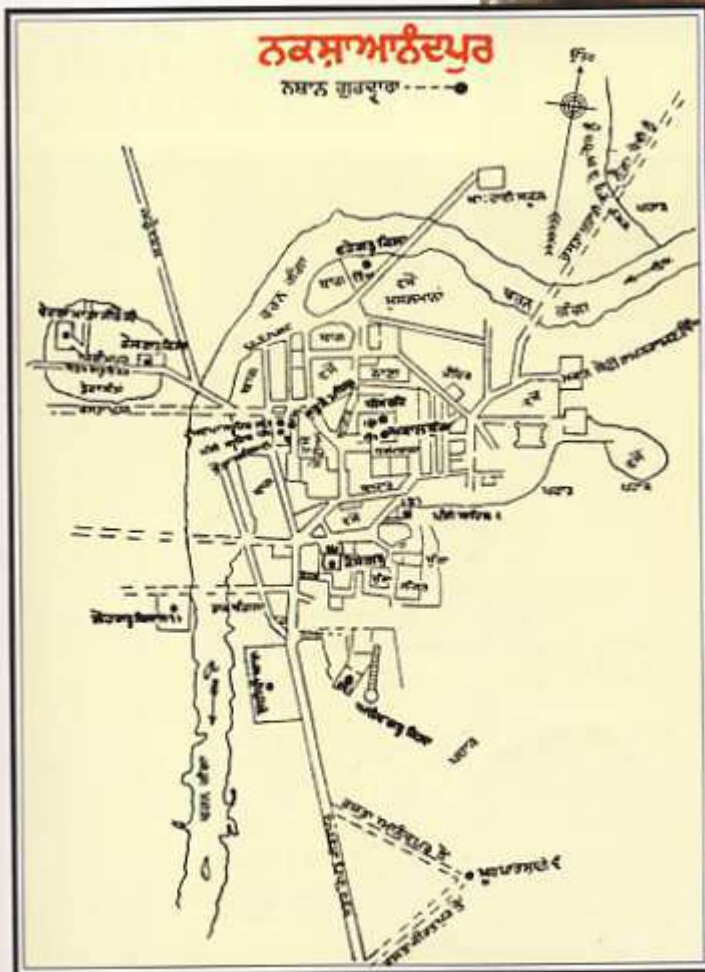


Remains of the historic Manji Sahib.

small room in the basement, Guru Tegh Bahadur used to meditate; Gurdwara Thara Sahib, a place from where he preached to his followers and where the Kashmiri Pandits requested his help in ending the persecution of Kashmiri Hindus at the hands of the Governor of Kashmir, Iftikar Khan. Unfortunately, historic buildings which stood on both these sites were removed to make place for new Gurdwaras. Adjacent to these sites is Gurdwara Sis Ganj and the Akal Bunga. From historical records, it is evident that the site of these two Gurdwaras was originally a garden attached to the residential quarters of the Guru.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Chandni Chowk of Delhi on 11th November 1675, when his son Gobind

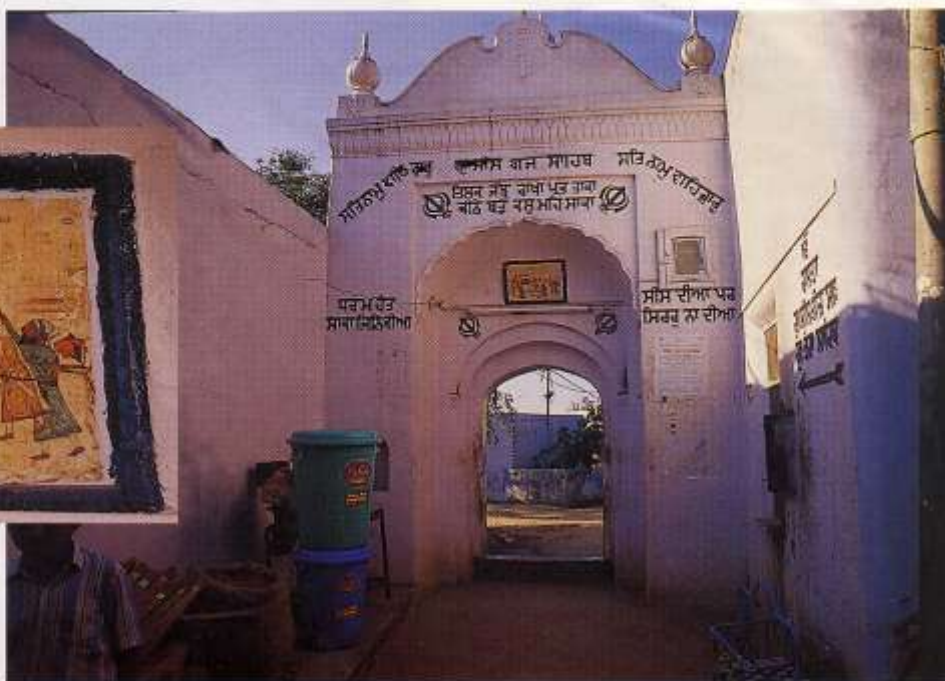
Old map of Anandpur, showing the Gurdwara and historic sites (from the Mahan Kosh).



*Original gate to the Sisganj Gurdwara
from the main market street.*



Detail of the panel on the gate.



Rai was merely nine years of age. The Gurdwara Sis Ganj at Chandni Chowk at Delhi marks the site where the Guru was martyred. The head of the Guru was brought back by Bhai Jaita to Kiratpur, where Gurdwara Bavangarh now stands. After hearing the news of his father's demise, Gobind Rai left for Kiratpur accompanied by his grandmother, and mother, his uncle Kirpal Chand and a large Sangat. The head was brought back to Anandpur Sahib in a palanquin.

*Paintings on the
front facade of the
innermost core of the
Sisganj Gurdwara.*



A fresco depicting the scene can be seen on the gateway to the Gurdwara Sis Ganj on the old market street. This gateway most probably marks the main entrance into the Gurdwara complex. Gurdwara Sis Ganj marks the site where the head was cremated. It is believed that the innermost core of this Gurdwara gateway was built under the supervision of Guru Gobind Singh himself. The facade of the innermost core is embellished by two sets of frescoes with floral patterns. One set appears to be of the Sikh School of Painting (from the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh). Opposite the front facade of Gurdwara Sis Ganj stands the historic building of Akal Bunga. The Akal Bunga marks the site from where Guru Gobind Singh addressed a large crowd after the cremation, instilling in them a sense of courage and the will to fight injustice.

It can be said that this site symbolises the moment at which the young Guru decided to follow the footsteps of his grandfather Guru Hargobind, who transformed a peaceful sect of devotees into a military order, instilling great courage to fight injustice. The Akal Bunga building is a unique stone structure, built in the seventeenth or eighteenth century with frescoes on the soffit of the arches of the building. A gateway attached to the Bunga faces the side of the Gateway built on the old bazaar street further establishing the link between Sis Ganj Gurdwara, the Akal Bunga and the main market street of the historic township of Anandpur.

A distinct historic layer of the town and its environs from the times of Guru Gobind Singh are the string of four forts built around the central fort of Anandgarh. These four forts, Lohgarh, Holgarh, Fatehgarh and Taragarh, form a kind of notional ring around the Anandgarh, which housed the army and residence of

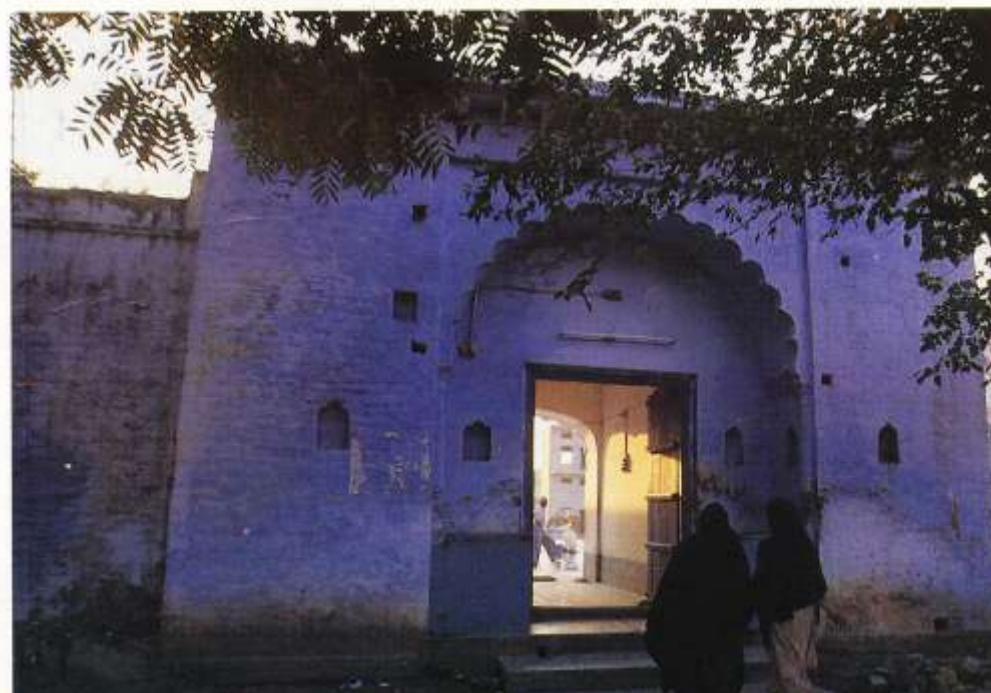


Elevated view of the Akal Bunga, with Keshgarh Sahib sited far behind, on the hill.



Detail of the fresco on the soffit of the arches of the Akal Bunga.

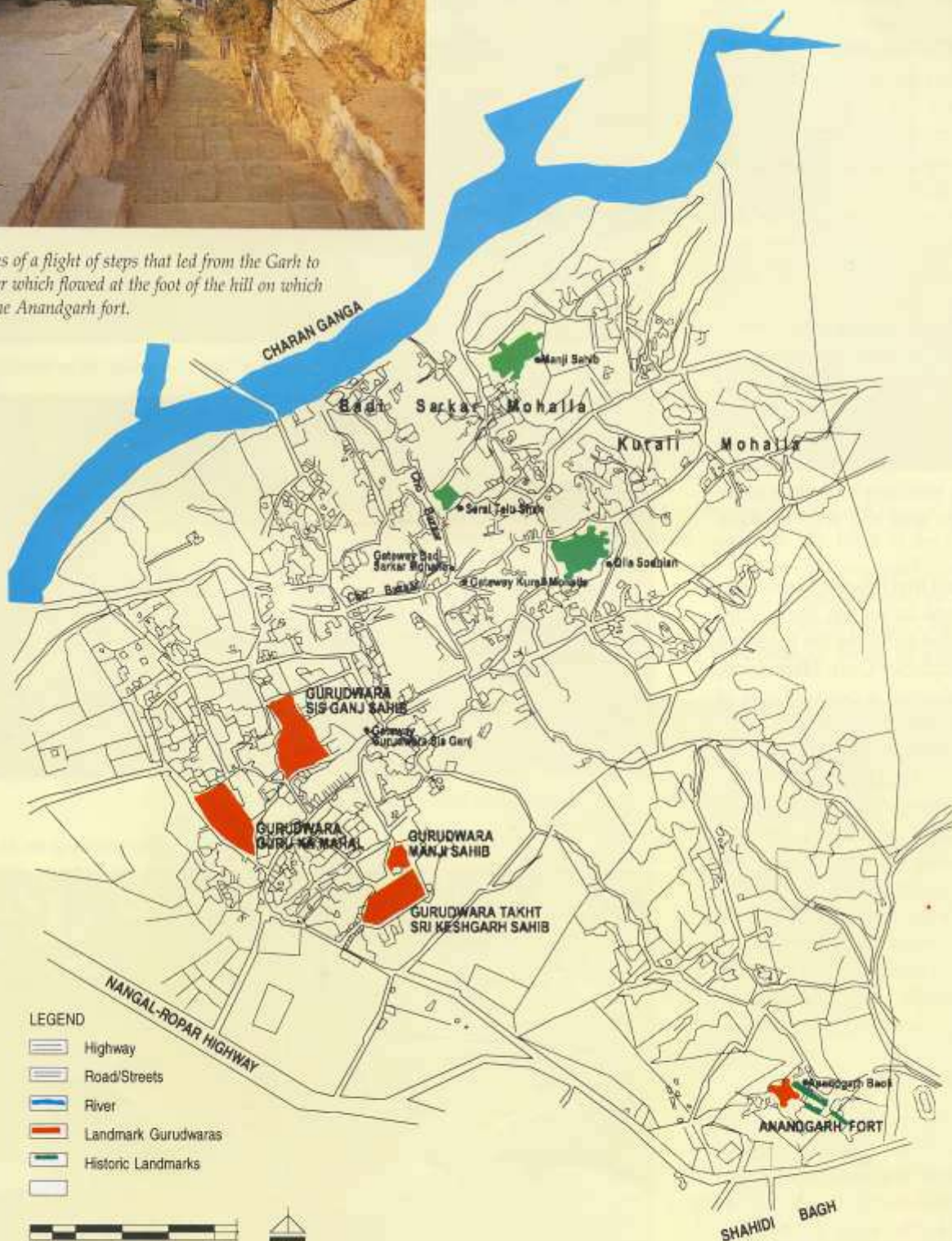
The original stone gateway of the Akal Bunga.





Anandpur Sahib, 1999

Remains of a flight of steps that led from the Garh to the river which flowed at the foot of the hill on which stood the Anandgarh fort.



Note : Drawing derived from 1958 Ward Map
Source : Municipal Office, Anandpur Sahib
Drawn by : C R C I, New Delhi

Guru Gobind Singh. Newly built Gurdwaras mark the sites where the forts existed. Anandgarh fort, however, still has the historic baoli which is believed to have come into existence at the time of the fateful siege of the fort during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, when the army had no means to fetch water from the river that flowed at the foot of the hill on which it was sited. A sewadar of the baoli told us that the baoli used to be 'kuchi' but was built upon and given a

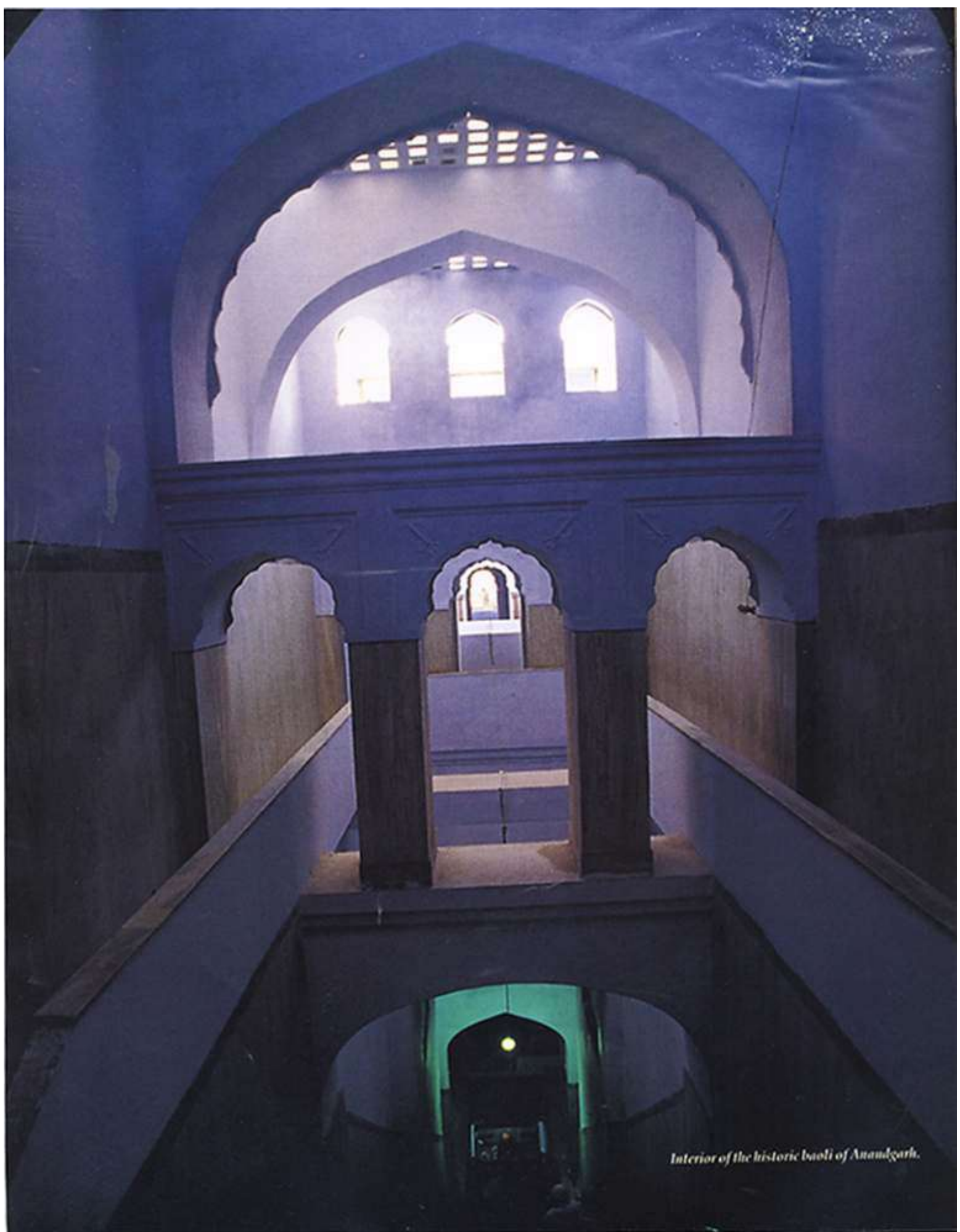


Anandgarh, the present fort was built on site of the historic fort in the 1930s.

distinct form by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in the mid eighteenth century. The elaborate brickwork in the form of arches, internal pavilions, steps leading to a circular well and vertical brickwork or retaining walls that now descend into the baoli are unique features of this built structure. The principal construction material was brick with lime mortar and lime plaster. The baoli, like other historic buildings associated with the Gurus and people of their times, is one of the last remaining reminders of the towering men and women who shaped the destiny of the Sikhs. Very regrettably, most have either been bulldozed out of existence or changed beyond recognition by well-intentioned, but ill-informed, custodians: the baoli for example, is now clad with marble.

Shahidi Bagh, a large grove at the foot of the hill towards the south-eastern part of the settlement, is the site where many of Guru's followers died defending the fort in times of war. Today, Nihang Sikhs congregate at the site, especially during Hola Mohalla, when thousands of them camp here with their horses.

Between Anandgarh and the river lies the main settlement. After the end of Mughal rule in Punjab, the town of Anandpur flourished, its associations with Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh ensuring that it became a sacred pilgrimage site for the Sikhs. The continuing presence of the Sodhi descendants



Interior of the historic baoli of Anandgarh.

*Anandgarh Gurdwara
and Gateway as seen
from Shahidi Bagh.*



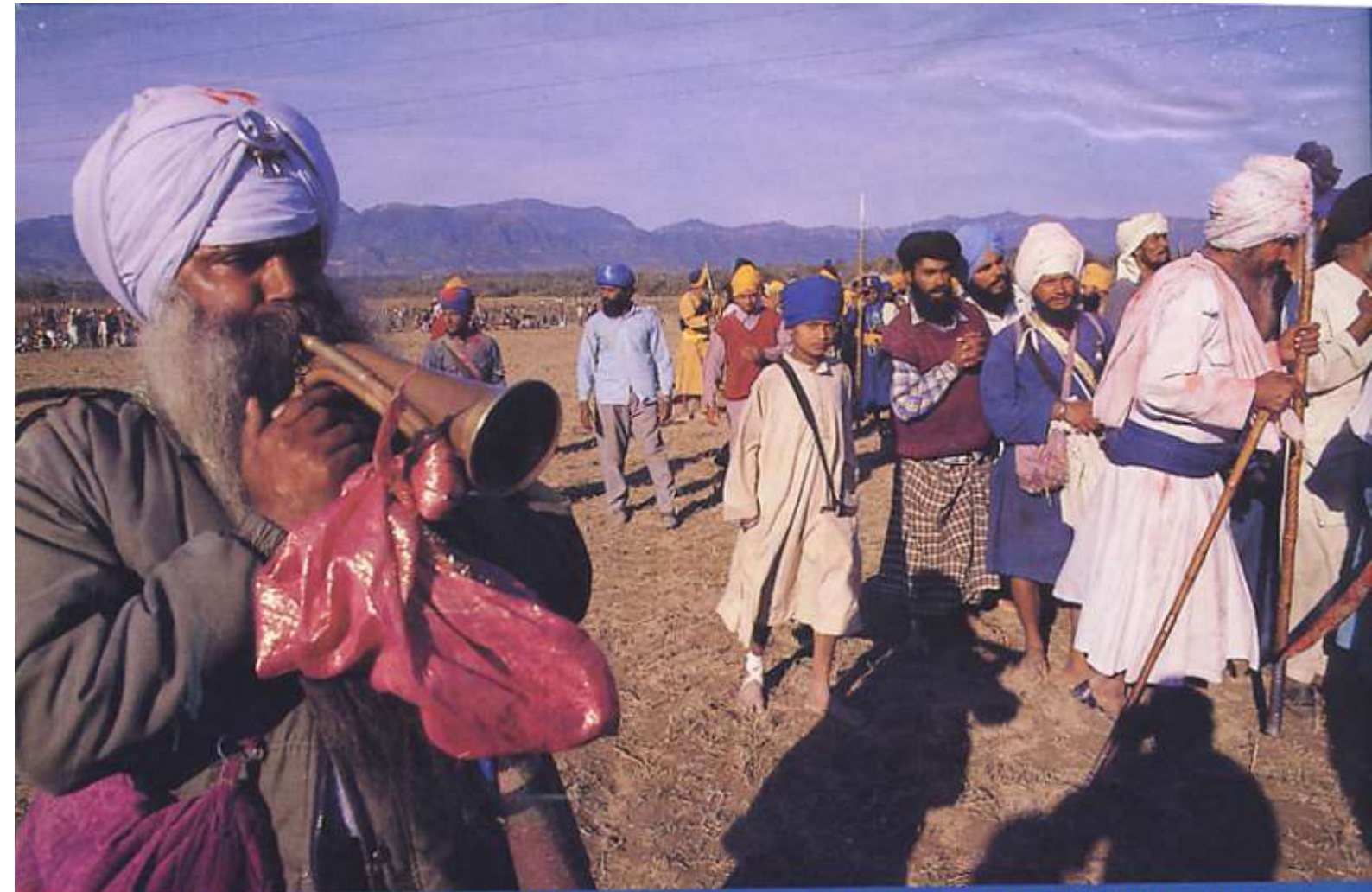
of Guru Hargobind in the town and its location on the route to Naina Devi further bolstered its associational value. The ruins of the city, sacked in 1704, were assigned to Budh Singh, a follower of Guru Gobind Singh, who passed it on to Maharaja Ala Singh of Patiala. In 1764, Sodhi Suraj Mal's

grandson Nahar Singh acquired the area and a hill fortification named Manji Sahib, which was associated with Suraj Mal. Other Sodhi families moved into the town, leading to the creation of four Sarkars, namely the Badi, Dusri, Tisri and Chauthi Sarkars (of which the Badi Sarkar was

presumably the most influential). Each Sarkar had its own fortified palace, a delineated settlement and a group of followers. The Sarkars each held court and maintained elephants, horses and soldiers. The families were much respected and patronized by the Sikh Community.

*Gateway leading into
Kuruli Mohalla.*





The Hola Mohalla procession culminates in the river bed of the Charan Ganga where 'Gatka', the traditional martial art of the Nihang Singhs is demonstrated.



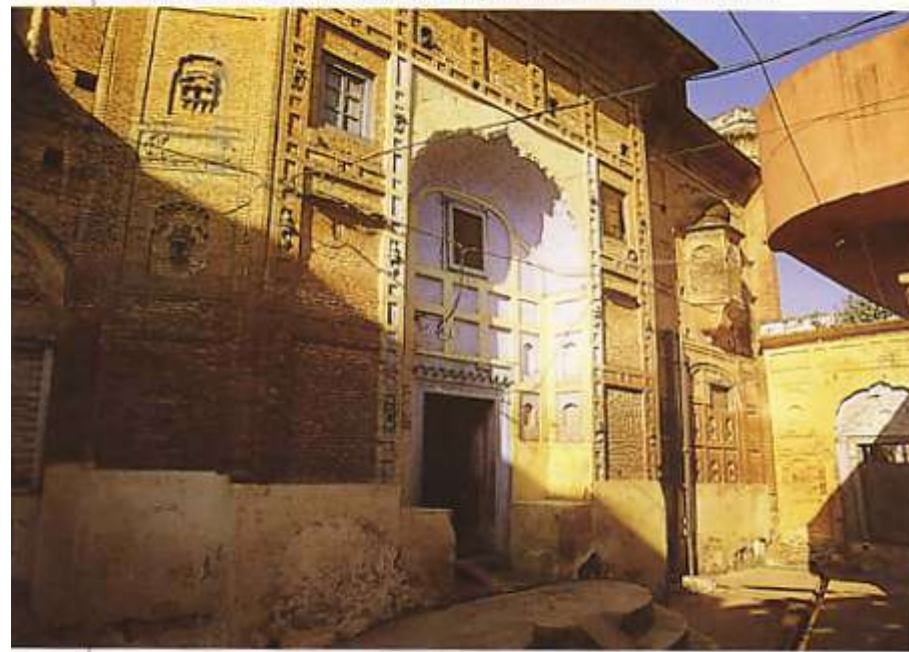


Tent pegging and horsemanship skills are the last displays by the Nihang Singhs in the Hola Mohalla. [All pictures by Raghu Rai]



Through the nineteenth century the town continued to grow, reflecting both the growing prosperity of the Sodhis and the more settled political conditions of the period. The Mohallas came to be known by the name of the Sarkars. Each Mohalla was entered through a gateway leading into a market street with single-storied shops. These continuous market streets are interrupted at intersections by a chowk or open space which has a 'thara' or a platform for community interaction. These platforms still exist on the part of *Cho Bazaar* that runs through the Badi Sarkar Mohalla. Large Ficus trees can still be found on the platforms. A hierarchy of streets leads from the market streets deeper into the residential areas, which comprise inward-looking houses built around courtyards. A distinct feature of these houses is a single Deori or a gateway that leads into the house. The ground floor of the structure has practically no windows in many cases and in some, only a few ventilators, both for reasons of privacy and security. The buildings are

Elaborate brickwork on the front facade of a haveli in Badi Sarkar Mohalla.



built predominantly with brick with mud and lime mortar, cut or dressed stone being used in many structures. In most cases, stone has been used up to a height of about four feet; in some cases such as the Akal Bunga and its gateway, a few wells and the gateway and bastions of Qila Sodhian, dressed stone has been used for building almost the entire walls. However the roofs are of brick or wood.

One principal market street of the old town leads from the Ropar-Nangal

Qila Sodhian: the only surviving example of a fortification in Anandpur Sahib.



Remains of a Sodhi house depict elaborate brickwork, which can be seen on a few remaining old havelis.

highway through the old city to Cho Bazaar street, which ends at Qila Sodhian. A unique feature of this junction is the presence of three gateways, two of which are at the mouth of a major market street. The street leading to the Qila Sodhian through the smaller of the two gateways has a residential character, while the one through the larger gateway leading to Badi Sarkar Mohalla runs through a thriving market which still has the ruins of a few nineteenth-century shops. This street culminates in Ramlila Chowk, an urban space with a *thara*, a well, numerous temples and the gateway

of the twentieth-century house of Badi Sarkar.

Overlooking this chowk, which was the major urban space of Anandpur, is the hillock with the Manji Sahib on it.

In recent years the town of Anandpur Sahib has outgrown the limits of the old town. Even so, the historic core still reflects the socio-political scenario of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries inspite of the



Choa Bazaar street with its nineteenth century shop.

Marble clad exterior of Anandgarh Baoli.



densification which has happened in the large open spaces which formed the baghs or gardens.

In the absence of any Master Plan for the entire city and guidelines for the historic town responsive to its setting, the town has begun to change and appears similar to any other in the region. Historic buildings associated with the Gurus have either been demolished or have been willfully defaced by covering their centuries-old brick structures with marble. Even the Anandgarh Baoli is not spared this crude treatment. The custodians of such sites have yet to realise that the past must be

conserved and not reinvented: the material remnants of our history reflect the mood, forms and functions of those times. To rebuild them in inappropriate materials or obliterate them altogether is to insult the memory of the Gurus who built them. For one, the proposal for an eighty-foot wide road between Keshgarh and Anandgarh—as the local planning authority has planned—is to destroy the delicate balance between town and topography that has uniquely characterised Anandpur. In order to retain the serene ambience of the historical town of Anandpur Sahib, both its natural setting and its historical structures must be preserved. That is a challenge of the Khalsa's fourth century ☯

Text and photographs (except where otherwise mentioned) by Gurmeet S. Rai.

Gurmeet S. Rai (b.1966) is a conservation architect based in New Delhi. She has worked in the field of conservation in the Punjab for over five years, has extensively documented historic buildings in the state. Managing trustee of the Punjab Heritage Preservation Trust, she is pursuing the idea of a complete data base of historic buildings of the Punjab and to work towards dissemination of information on historic buildings as well as on their preservation.



THE GIFT OF TRUTH

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰ
ਖਾਨਿਰਭਾਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰਾ ਮਕਾਲਾ ਪੁਰੀ
ਮਾਨਸੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਹਰਮਸਾਇ ॥ ਜਪੁ ॥
ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚਾ ਹੋਰੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ
ਕਹੈ ਸਾਂਤੀ ਸਦਾ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਸੋਚੈ ਸੋਚਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ
ਸੋਚੀ ਲਖਵਾਰਾ ਚਪੇ ਚਪਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ
ਲਾਇ ਰਹਾਇ ਵਰਗਾ ਚੁਖਿ ਮਭੂ
ਨਉਤਰੀ ਜੇ ਬੰਨਾ ਪੁਰੀ ਆਭਾਰਾ ॥
ਸਹਸਿ ਸਿਆਣਪਾ

The Need For Truth

What is more important in life than knowing and being able to follow the truth?

Truth about the physical world, so that we may know and use physical laws to design medical wonder drugs, as well as technologies on which airplanes, computers and telephones are based. Truth about human health laws that allow us to eat good food, exercise our muscles, and reject crippling drugs, such as tobacco. Truth about our social interactions with others so a caring society can exist. And most importantly, truth about our spirituality, so we can be in a state of bliss, or *anand*, under all conditions. In the absence of truth, we fumble and stumble. Con-artists and pseudo-holymen exploit us and burden our lives. Indeed, truth lightens our loads in this journey through life, while falsehood burdens us with heavy loads, making this journey one of misery.

How is Truth revealed? How is the veil of falsehood ripped?

Even though human beings have been on this planet for several millions of years, the period of the 15th to

18th centuries was a very remarkable period in human history. Two great concepts were developed and implemented during this period. These concepts answered the question: How is Truth revealed? How is the veil of falsehood ripped? These concepts were the *scientific method*, developed in Europe, and the *Sikh method* gifted to humanity by the Sikh Gurus in India. The scientific method allows us to distinguish between truth and pseudo-truth in the physical world, enabling us to design seemingly magical technologies and come up with medical breakthroughs. But these technologies are not based on magic — they are based on universal physical laws.

The scientific method, so important to our lives, still does not provide any answers related to human values: love, caring, nurturing, helping others have no place in this method. Indeed, the history of Europe in the twentieth century shows that many men who were highly trained in science and technology participated in unimaginable crimes against fellow humans. Nazism and Communism were products of highly advanced scientific societies, but incredibly barbaric crimes against fellow humans were committed under the patronage of these philosophies.

The Sikh method tells us not only how to find truth in the physical world, but also in the social



ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

One Supreme Being. He is Truth.
He is the Creator. Without Fear.
Inimical to None. Beyond Time.
Not Incarnated; Self-Created.
The Enlightener. Realized by the
Grace of the True Guru.
Guru Nanak



and spiritual worlds. The Sikh method goes well beyond the scientific method in providing humanity *with truth*. It is a path unbound by geography, nationality, race, creed, or time. It is a path that unburdens our lives and makes this life a blissful journey.

One does not have to be a scientist by profession to be influenced by the outcome of science and technology. It is important to be aware of how the scientific method works, since there is perhaps no one living today who has not, to some extent, been touched by the scientific method. The television and radio we enjoy, airliners and cars we use, high yield farm crops we eat—everything has been touched by this method. The scientific method is based upon the following *articles of faith*:

- The physical world is governed by scientific laws that are constant in time and space.
- The laws are revealed by careful observation of Nature.
- All intellectual discourses must submit to what is observed in Nature.

This last article of faith has been very difficult for intellectuals of various times to accept. There have been times in history when “pundits” and other intellectual giants held great power. Elaborate intellectual thesis were woven by these powerful men and presented as the truth. Those who questioned these “legends” were tortured or even eliminated. But, in the long run, truth has always prevailed. Indeed, how can truth be defeated by fantasy and how can it be subjugated to intellect which has no connections with reality? Understanding and use of the knowledge gained from the scientific method has led to almost magical technologies. But an inevitable outcome of science has been that this has also exposed pseudo-scientists who claimed what amounted to virtual magical powers. Thus,

despite all of the benefits of science, it does not provide us answers to questions regarding human values and choices.

The Sikh Method

Significantly, the scientific method can be regarded as consistent with the Sikh method. Unlike many other faiths, Sikhism is not at odds with science. Indeed, this is needed to provide direction to science and technology. The Sikh method addresses the issue of truth in our physical, mental, social, spiritual world. It provides us a lifestyle whereby the body, mind and spirit are in coherence, since truth—not superstitions and legends—are kept at the centre. The Sikh method should not be accepted just because someone has said so, but because it stands the test of experience. Let us look at the building blocks of this method.

What The Search Is For : Anand

Who does not want to be happy? It may be argued that at some level, all of our actions are taken to provide happiness. The problem is that often, such actions end up in bringing misery. *Anand*, the state of bliss—beyond the cycle of joy and sorrow—is what the seeker of truth is promised. In this state, the ups and downs of life do not create ecstasy and despair. How is one to reach this state?

The *mool mantra*—the core message of Sikhism—declares the Creator to be *Satnam* : Truth. Truth is beyond the grip of space and time. This truth is manifested to us as *hukams*, or laws. The laws that the scientists have found are but one small part of this Truth. The scientific laws govern the physical universe. They are capable of producing wonderful technologies, but are not capable of generating the state of *anand* for humans. The *hukams* that the Sikh path reveals go well beyond the physical universe. In resonance with these *hukams*, one enters into the state of *anand*.

The Big Obstacle : Haumai

Haumai, or “I-am-ness”, or ego, is what prevents humans from being able to decipher Truth of the Creator. Just as a scientific experiment in which the detector



has too much “identity” and so produces misleading results, our *haumai* interferes with our interaction with the Creator’s laws and misleads us into choosing burdensome paths.

The Great Haze : Maya

As we participate in the wondrous world the Creator has bestowed upon us, we perceive the world through the maze of *maya*. Unless the human being is enlightened, this web of illusion can lead him or her down what seems to be a blissful path, but which turns out to be a path filled with misery. There are many people who make their living exploiting the web of *maya* to trap innocent victims. Elaborate illusions are stitched together to ensnare humans into this *maya*. The degree of entrapment in *maya* is the influence which determines why some people view all obstacles with a cheerful

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Truth is the highest virtue; Higher still is true living.
Guru Nanak



view, while others view them as profound tragedies.

On a physical level, *maya* can cause us to do miserable things. Surprisingly often, we do so willingly. Men and women mutilate their bodies, believing this can lead to a joyful life. Tattoos, body piercings, and circumcisions are committed, destroying the beautiful natural body which the Creator has given us. People give up healthful foods, refuse to cleanse their body, smearing ashes and dirt on themselves. Others lead a gluttonous lifestyle, bloating the body. Diseases follow.

On a social level, *maya* can cause us to participate in and create social customs and taboos to degrade others. These customs can generate hatred against others who are not of the same race or caste. People who do not look like us, or belong to our group are

to be degraded. This could produce a short-lived feeling of euphoria just as a hit of cocaine does. But, as in the case of cocaine, the end results are miserable for the person with hatred in his or her heart.

On an intellectual level, *maya* can cause us to believe in superstitions and falsehoods. Even in the face of evidence to the contrary, people cling to such superstitions and legends. Once again, while these superstitions give temporary comfort, in the long run, they load us with heavy burden which we then carry in our journey through life. On a spiritual level, *maya* causes us to stray from the path of truth and search for spirituality in meaningless rituals, holy baths and mindless chants. The essence of spirituality—becoming a Universal being—is lost among the prattle.

Guru

A Guru is needed to shine light so that the web of illusion is ripped and the true blissful path is revealed. The benefits of walking on this path are felt right here in this life. The Sikh path is not one where misery is to be endured for some unprovable distant life in some far-away heaven. Sri Guru Granth Sahib embodies the essence of the ten Sikh Gurus and is the timeless Guru enlightening humanity. This Guru does not collect a list of *dos* and *don'ts*: which foods to eat, in which rivers to cleanse our sins, which rituals to fulfill. It describes how our thoughts and actions are to be brought into resonance with Truth to reach *Anand*. This path involves extending our ego to fill the entire Universe. From the duality of me and you, us and them, one is able to see that there is no duality and all creation is just the work of *Waheguru*—the Wondrous Guru.

The Sikh must also seek company of other enlightened people. Through the love and caring of such men and women—in the *sangat*—one's own behaviour and lifestyle becomes more universal.

Jap and Simran

Jap is the exercise that a Sikh participates in to make the *hukams* a constant part of his or her living. Resonance with *hukams* is not sought during just some part of the day. Just as we are unknowingly aware of Earth's pull on us—gravity—at all times, so should we be in resonance with *hukams* at all times. At first, *jap* may involve subtle reminders at various times of the day. Gradually, the reminding becomes involuntary. One does not walk the path of truth because another human being is watching. One walks this

path because it produces a state of anand. The Sikh realizes that the *hukams* (laws) of the Creator are always in control. In resonance with these *hukams*, our life is unburdened. *Simran* (remembrance) of *Nam* or True Word gradually brings us to a state where even in our unconscious state we are in tune with Truth.

Charhdi Kala

The Sikhs greet all with the salutation *Sat Sri Akal*—"Truth is beyond Time". This belief is central to the Sikh faith. It sustains the Sikh through hard times and good times. Temporary propaganda and intellectual "punditry" can create a smoke-screen whereby Truth seems to be diminished—but how can such punditry alter the fundamental truth?

During the dark ages in Europe, misguided theologians interpreted scriptures with rigid tunnel vision and even concluded that the Earth was flat and the Sun revolved around our world. Thinkers and scientists who showed that Nature's Truth was otherwise were tortured and even burned at the stake. But all of this suppression and intellectual hot air did not flatten the Earth nor did it make the Sun revolve around us!

If the Sikh is on the path of Truth, then belief in the timelessness of Truth produces the state of *Charhdi Kala* in this universal being. The state of *Charhdi Kala* or

ਤੈਸਾ ਹਰਖੁ ਤੈਸਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੋਗੁ ॥ ਸਦਾ ਅਨੰਦੁ ਤਹ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਓਗੁ ॥

As is joy, so is sorrow. Always in bliss; never in woe.

Guru Nanak

unbounded optimism, makes discriminatory laws appear like challenges for character development. Just as an athlete faces hardships to develop his or her muscles, so do obstacles strengthen the Sikh's character.

Five Privileges

The five privileges with which the Sikh has been blessed represent the beliefs which the Sikh must strive to embody within himself or herself.

Acceptance of Nature's Beauty: Kesh

Maintenance of *kesh* has been identified as the special privilege of the Sikh. Of course, this is a privilege that all humanity should enjoy. Acceptance of one's own self and one's own natural beauty is a step to encourage acceptance of another of the Universe's *hukams*. Why did great Indian sages, the Buddha, Jewish prophets, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and Native American Chiefs accept this wonderful gift from the Creator? Women, the nurturers of humanity, whom Guru Nanak describes as the originators of life, have always enjoyed this privilege. Why should men not enjoy this privilege also?

Acceptance of the *kesh* represents a level of self-acceptance that is often quite demanding. Anyone who accepts his or her own natural beauty is also able to extend this concept to acceptance of others and acceptance of Nature's beauty. For the last several centuries, advances in technology along with lack of a universal value system have caused man to wreak havoc on Nature's beauty. Once beautiful lakes are now polluted ponds; thick forests have been stripped of trees; mighty rivers have been dammed, causing famines and deforestation. The effects of these assaults on Nature is felt not only by non-human species, but increasingly, also by humans. Rejection of body mutilation can create a state where the mutilation of Nature is also not tolerated.



Nurturing of Nature's Bounty: Kangha

The *kesh* that the Creator has bestowed upon us are to be taken care of. It is important that we do not leave this wonderful gift in a state of neglect. With the *kangha*, the Sikh takes care of the *kesh*. It reminds the



Sikh that he or she is a steward of Nature's bounty. It is our responsibility that Nature is not demeaned.

Coherence Between Thoughts and Action: Karha

It is often not so hard to accept the validity of truth of a concept. It is far

more difficult to have the resolve to bring actions into harmony with thought. Most of us know the importance of honesty and truthfulness, the benefits of good, healthy food, regular exercise, meditation, and prayer. But the maya of life ensnares us into taking actions that are in contradiction with our pure thoughts. The *karha* represents the resolve we must have in our life to bring harmony between thoughts and actions. The unbroken circle of the *karha* represents the integrity of our physical, social, intellectual and spiritual being.

Joy of Seva: Kachha

Two very important concepts the Gurus have given us are those of *sangat* and *pangat*: *sangat* to create a caring, loving community; *pangat* to share our wealth—not just material wealth, but also spiritual wealth. A most important means of sharing is *seva*, or volunteer work for the good of all. The *kachha* is an embodiment of this volunteerism and joy of physical activity. The Sikh should not just be engulfed in intellectual discourse and debate—he or she should get out there and participate in physical activity. To feed people, to build houses, to participate in blood drives, to help people afflicted by natural disasters.

The *kachha* is also a reminder to restrain our physical desires—not to usurp what is not ours.

Awakened Inner Warrior: Kirpan

It is easy to participate in a philosophy that is based upon "self-improvement" where one lets others carry their own burdens. The Sikh philosophy invites the Sikh to participate more actively in the world around us—often at some risk to one's own self. The Sikh may often find himself or herself in a situation where he or she sees the fellow human suffering under an unjust burden—the burden of racism, casteism, or sexism. Often he

may see people being conned by powerful forces—political, religious, social—controlled by self-centred interests. Advertisements may be used to promote tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; social institutions may propagate traditions to keep women subservient and insecure.

Most young children have a clear sense of outrage when injustice is being committed. However, as they grow older, they kill their inner warrior and conform to the motto, "Be afraid of the strong and intimidate the weak." The *kirpan* exhorts us to keep our inner warrior awake and to take a stand against injustice. Sikh history is replete with men and women who have taken great pains to take a stand.

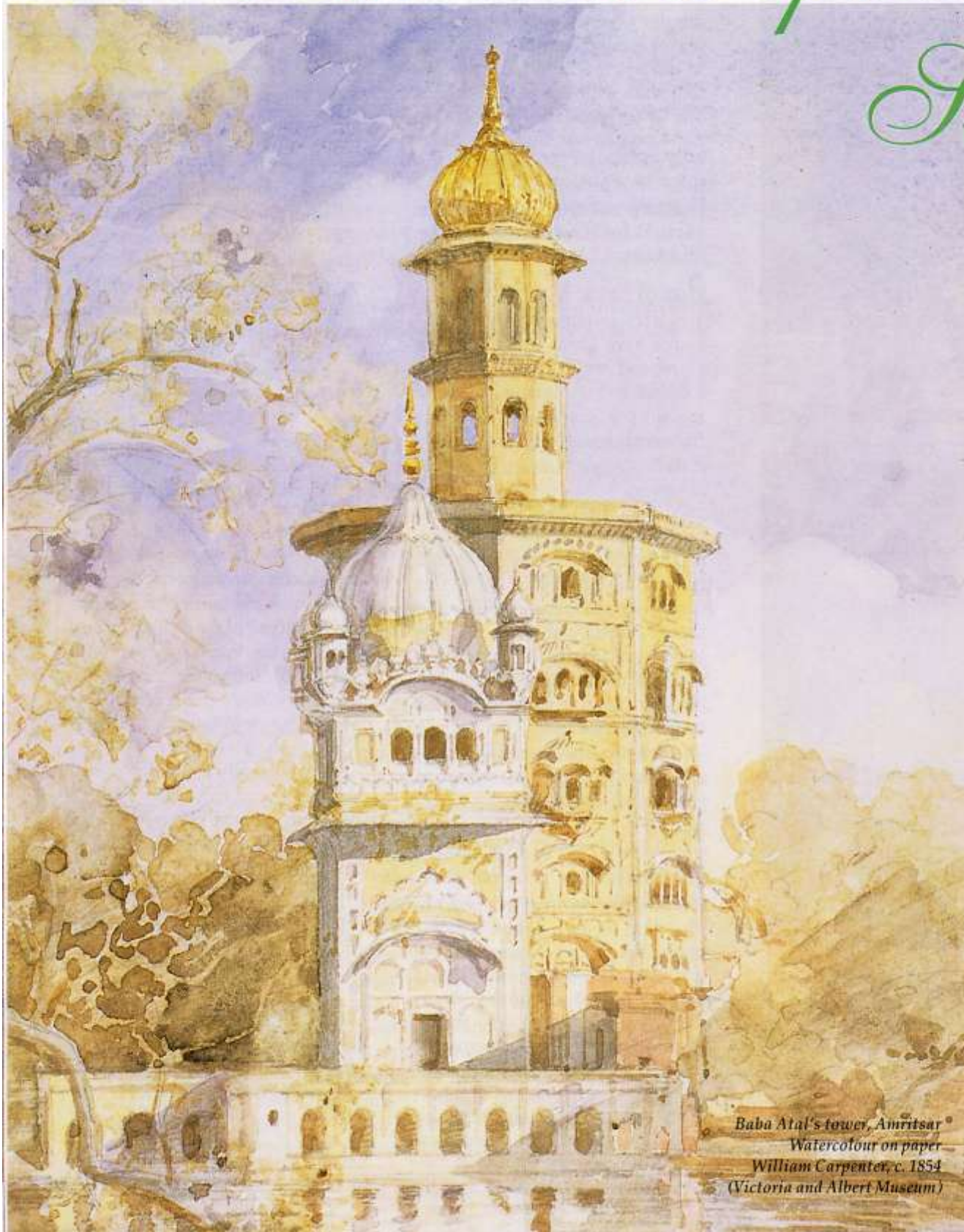
A Path for All Time and Places

The Sikh path is not a path to be followed blindly. It is a path of Truth and brings its follower into *anand*. It is not a path of the Punjab, or of the U.S.A., or of Canada or of England. It is valid at all places. It is not a path of the medieval age or of the twentieth century or of the coming millennium. It is timeless. It is the path with validity for the young and old, for man and woman. This special year—1999—the tercentenary of the Khalsa—is a reminder of how acutely humanity needs this path. As science and technology provide humanity a greater ability to concoct and build more powerful webs of maya, the need for the Sikh path is critical. The Sikh path is as relevant today as it was centuries ago. Indeed, it may be argued that its need today is greater, since the haze of maya has only thickened ☯

Jasprit Singh and Teresa Singh

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The Arts of the Sikh



*Baba Atal's tower, Amritsar
Watercolour on paper
William Carpenter, c. 1854
(Victoria and Albert Museum)*

Kingdoms



From March 1999, the world famous Victoria and Albert Museum in London celebrates the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa with the first ever international exhibition of the cultural heritage of the Sikhs. The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms tells the story of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors in the Panjab through the paintings, textiles, weapons, jewelry — and much more — produced throughout the 19th century.

Ranjit Singh's reign began a new age in the Panjab. Throughout the 18th century, the region that was still nominally part of the Mughal empire

The Golden Throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Gold on a wooden core. Probably Lahore, c.1818 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

The Golden Temple : Albumen print By Felice Beato, c. 1858-60 (Victoria and Albert Museum)



had suffered the repeated invasions of Afghans and Marathas. The young Sikh chief unified the quarrelling misls and led his army into Lahore, the historic capital of the region, where in 1801 he was proclaimed Maharaja of the Panjab. Under his dynamic leadership, Sikh territory was extended into the Hindu kingdoms of the Panjab Hills, absorbed the province of Multan and stretched across Kashmir over the Himalayas as far as western Tibet. His astute military leadership brought peace, and his tolerance meant the most talented members of different religions were able to take key positions in government. In this atmosphere, the arts flourished and Ranjit Singh's court became the most magnificent of its time in the subcontinent. The rich diversity of a court in which art was made for and by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Europeans, has led to the unusual approach of showing cultural history through works of art. By including the later courts, the exhibition also presents one of the most comprehensive pictures ever of the Sikh kingdoms.

Fragment from a carpet Wool pile with cotton warps and silk wefts: Mughal, Lahore or Kashmir, mid-17th century (Victoria and Albert Museum)





Order of Merit: Enamelled gold set with emeralds and a portrait of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Lahore, c. 1838 (Victoria and Albert Museum)



Man's robe: Embroidered wool and silk. Kashmir, c. 1850-70 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

The exhibition opens with the Sikh religion and includes paintings of the Ten Gurus. There were no contemporary portraits of these inspirational men, but by the 19th century the artists of the Panjab had developed a series of conventions that allowed most of the Gurus to be instantly recognisable: Guru Gobind Singh, for instance, was usually depicted as a majestic figure on horseback, jewelled and holding a falcon, with a golden halo encircling his head. The section also includes a series of rare photographs of the Harmandir, taken in about 1860. The monument whose appearance was transformed during the reign of Ranjit Singh was also recorded by local artists who painted delicately coloured studies lightly touched with gold.

The artistic heritage of the region now divided between India and Pakistan is explored in the section leading on from this: the great Mughal tradition, centred on



Turban helmet: Watered steel overlaid with gold. Panjab, probably Lahore, first half of 19th century (Kapany collection)

Lahore, suffused all the arts of Panjab, while in the Hills vividly distinctive schools of painting flourished in the remote Hindu Kingdoms. Both these influences are explored in paintings, textiles and metal work as the essential introduction to the primary focus of the exhibition: the court of the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The fascinating personalities of the court are seen in miniature paintings, with the maharaja's famous Golden Throne at the centre of the display. Given his renowned simplicity of style and dislike of personal ostentation, the throne is a paradoxical symbol of his presence yet at the same time evokes the tolerance for which he is equally remembered: the throne of the Sikh maharaja was made by a Muslim goldsmith, Hafez Muhammad Multani, its decoration echoing some of the motifs on the domes of the

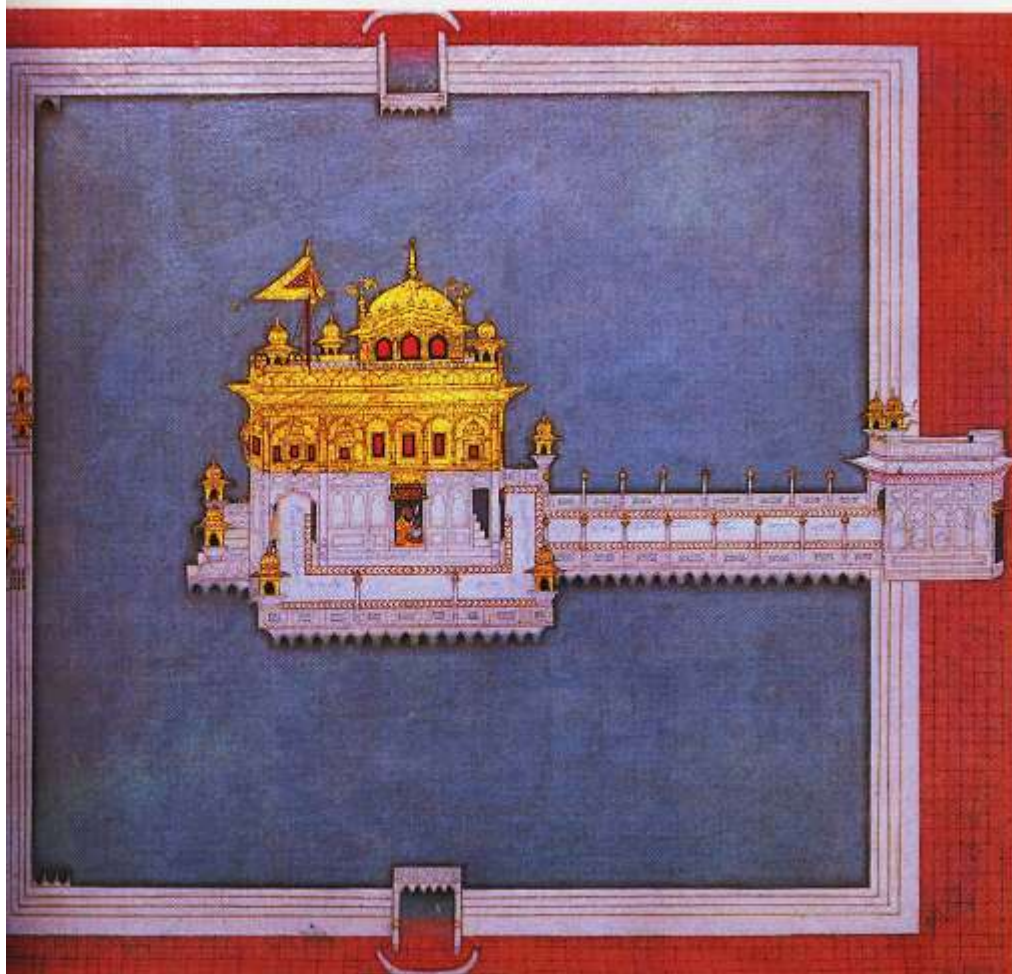
Harmandir. Near the throne, some of the maharaja's most prized possessions are displayed, including one of the most spectacular jewels from his treasury, the enormous rose pink gemstone of a kind called *Spinel* that had once belonged to the Mughal rulers of India.

The exhibition also includes examples of the beautiful, softly draping cloth woven in Kashmir and used as deluxe tent linings and floor coverings as well as for shawls. These were exported far beyond the Sikh court and were valued as much by ladies in Europe as by Ranjit Singh's Sikh sardars.

Ranjit Singh's military strength is reflected in the exhibition by an important section featuring pieces from the Sikh armoury. A suit of armour in Mughal style reflects the



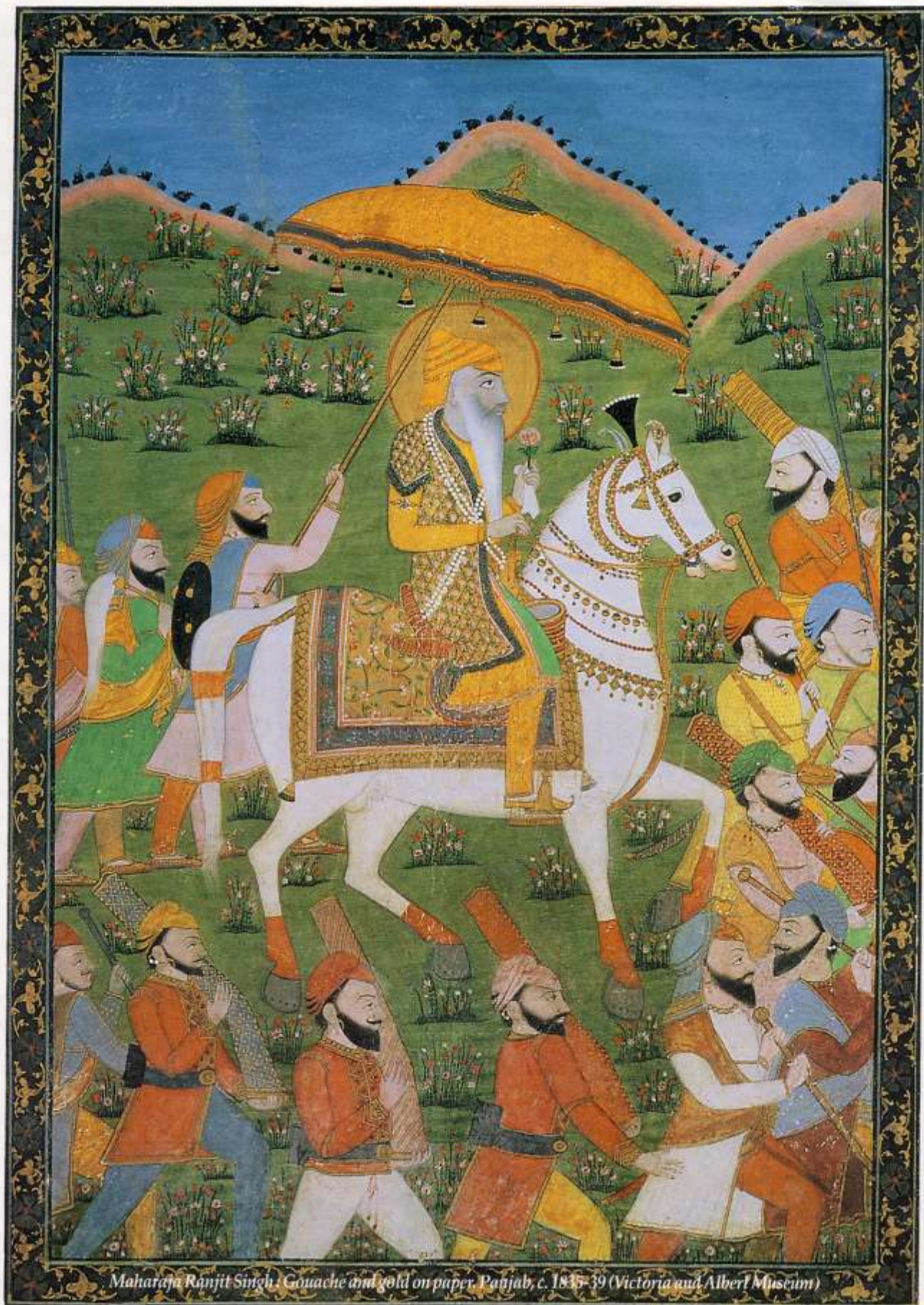
Duleep Singh: Carte de visite by J E Mayall London, 1860 (Victoria and Albert Museum)



eclectic nature of the court: the steel helmet is inlaid in gold with the unmistakable figure of the Hindu God Ganesh, the God of good fortune and remover of obstacles, suggesting it may have been made for a Hindu general. The Sikh ownership of an important group of helmets cannot, however, be doubted: the long topknot of hair determines their characteristic shape, made by the region's skilful armourers from high quality watered steel, finely chiselled and decorated with a tracery of gold, or from heavily gilt copper.

European visitors came to the court during the reign. The important role played by the former generals of Napoleon whom the maharaja employed to reorganise his army is shown through the paintings they commissioned from court artists; the English, who came mostly on official embassies to investigate at first hand the 'Lion of the Panjab' left their own

The Golden Temple: Gouache and gold on paper. Panjab, c. 1840 (Kapany collection)

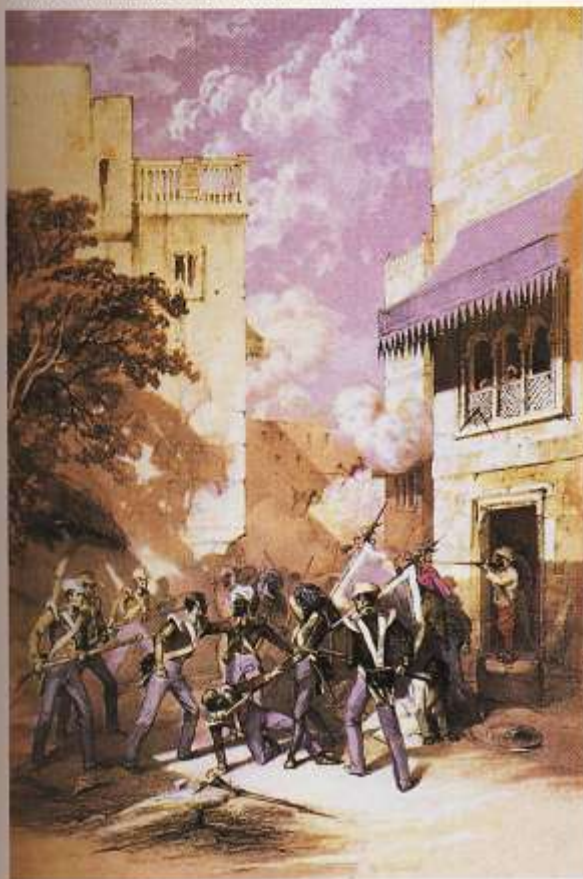


Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Gouache and gold on paper, Punjab, c. 1835-39 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

mark in paintings of the maharaja and his closest associates. Their own, equally exotic appearance, was recorded by the court painters.

After the death of the great ruler in 1839, rulers followed each other in rapid succession until Ranjit Singh's last son, Dalip Singh, took the throne. Eight years old at his succession, his appearance is poignantly recorded in water colours of the period. As the British, ever keen to increase their territory, moved the army to the borders of the Sikh kingdom and squabbles continued between rival court factions, war became inevitable. The first of two Anglo-Sikh wars ended with the signing of the Treaty of Bhairowal, an event recorded by a court artist and showing the small figure of the maharaja among the group from the

An incident during the siege of Multan: Plate from 'Mooltan, during and after the Siege' by John Dunlop, lithographed by A Maclure and published by Wm S Orr, London, 1849. (Victoria and Albert Museum)



Sikh court, the British languidly sitting in chairs before them. By 1849 the second war had been fought and lost, and the imperious young Governor-General, Sir James Broun Ramsay, 10th Earl and 1st Marquess of Dalhousie formally annexed the Sikh kingdom to the British Empire. The deposed maharaja moved first to the exile in India, converted to Christianity, and then came to England where he entered society at the highest level.

He was invited to stay with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight where he played with the royal children, was photographed by the prince and his librarian, a pioneer photographer, and was sketched by the Queen. The famous portrait painted by Frans Xaver Winterhalter is on loan from its permanent home at Osborne for the London showing of the exhibition.

Back in the Panjab meanwhile, the artistic vitality of the region continued as the natural rhythms of life returned. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, the Lahore court had nurtured the arts, providing a market for the work of silk weavers, embroiderers, metalworkers and wood carvers at their various traditional centres, and employing artists from all over the kingdom.



A Sikh Sardar: Water colour and ink on paper Lahore, c. 1835-45 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

After annexation, the focus of patronage changed - the smaller courts on the other side of the river Sutlej now came to the fore, Patiala in particular providing the encouragement and protection for artistic endeavour to thrive. The exhibition ends with an exploration of the continuing traditions after annexation. Through the patronage of Sikh courts in the 19th century, the cultural traditions of the Panjab were able to survive into the 20th century.

The exhibition will run at the V&A from 25 March to 25 July 1999 and part of it will travel to San Francisco's Asian Art Museum where it will be on from 22 September 1999 to 9 January 2000. A book of the same name accompanies the exhibition and features contributions by leading authorities in the field.

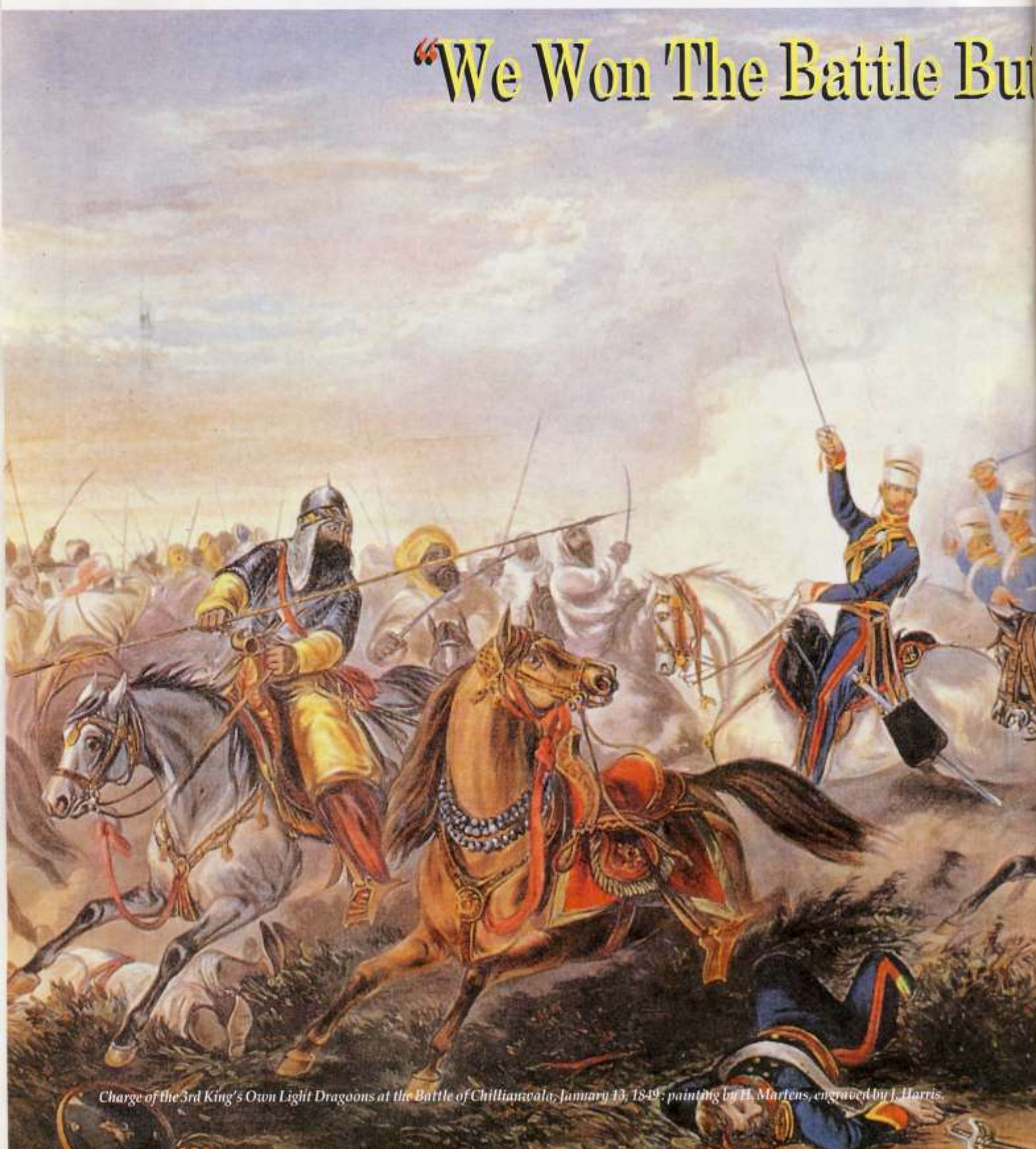
Susan Stronge



Susan Stronge has been in the Victoria & Albert Museum's Indian and South-East Asian Department since 1976. She

specialises in the arts of the courts of India from the 16th to the 19th centuries and is the curator of the "Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms" exhibition.

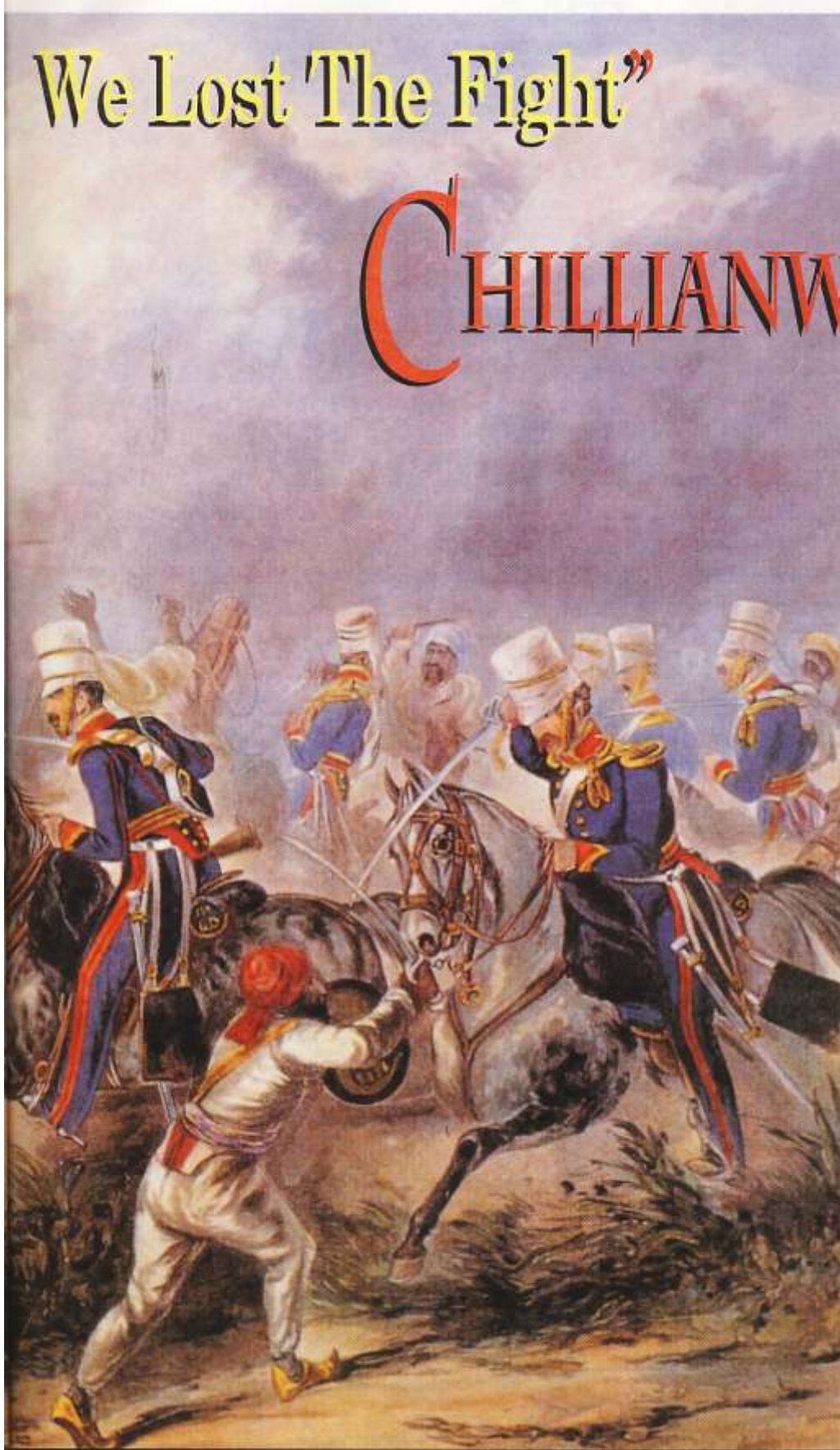
“We Won The Battle But



Charge of the 3rd King's Own Light Dragoons at the Battle of Chillianwala, January 13, 1849: painting by H. Martens, engraved by J. Harris.

We Lost 'The Fight'

CHILLIANWALA 1849



By sheer force of his personality Maharaja Ranjit Singh, born in 1780, became the unquestioned ruler of the Punjab from 1799 to 1839, his kingdom being the last bastion to hold out against the British—a symbol of their incomplete conquest of India.

Relying on unconventional statecraft and dazzling display of daring and courage, he wielded his warrior nation to extend the Empire from the Sutlej to Kabul in Afghanistan and from Ladakh to Iskardu and Tuklakote in Little Tibet.



Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab.

Every invasion of India till then had been from west to east, across the Indus, from 2000 BC onwards, when the Aryans came in. For the first time in history, an Indian, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, went westwards, crossed the Indus River in 1826, going right onto Kabul. The British followed him, but with his assistance. In the south, he acquired the Cis-Sutlej States.

Deciding against an open confrontation with the British, Ranjit Singh chose to enter into the 1809 Treaty with them by which he forfeited his claim to the Cis-Sutlej States, but retained control over his existing territories south of the Sutlej, where he had the right to continue policing them with his troops. The British in turn agreed not to interfere north of the Sutlej. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was no fool to sign the Treaty of 1809. He was quite clear about his inability to push his empire across the Sutlej and against the British whose resources were far greater than his own. His future lay westward.

Ranjit Singh avoided going to war with the British at the cost of accepting their protectorate over the Cis-Sutlej territories. This compulsion made him all the more determined to modernise his armed forces along European lines for which he hired a number of European officers, the most notable of these being two former Colonels of Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, Jean Francois Allard and Jean Baptiste Ventura, who trained and reorganised Ranjit Singh's cavalry and infantry respectively. Ranjit Singh, impressed by the stocky Gurkhas of Hazara District, also enlisted them into the Sikh Army. The British inherited

these from the Sikhs, including their typical rifle-green uniforms which were designed for Ranjit Singh's Army!

The intrigues and the battles for succession

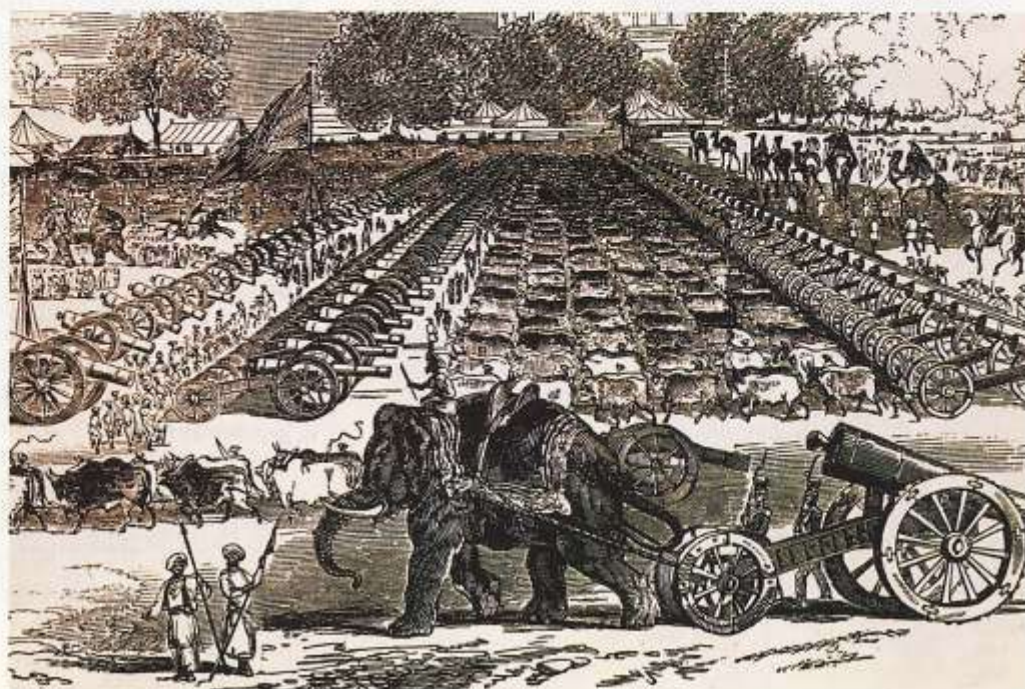
The splendour and greatness of the Sikh Durbar ended with Ranjit Singh's death on 27 June 1839. He left behind seven sons, born of different women but none capable of ruling his Kingdom. Court intrigues, betrayals and assassinations attended his succession and the Army became an uncontrollable and dissatisfied centre of power, eager for war.

The royal family, with no worthy successor to carry on Ranjit Singh's tradition of greatness, the nobles of the Sikh Durbar and the Council of Ministers sensing an opportunity for self aggrandizement began playing Ranjit Singh's family members against one another in a bitter struggle for power.

The court intrigues were dominated by two factions, the more influential being the three Dogra brothers, Gulab Singh, Dhyan Singh and Suchet Singh. Dhyan Singh's son Heera Singh, a great favourite of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, came close to becoming a Dogra-Sikh ruler himself. Though not always in accord, one or the other of these Dogras managed to be in effective power at Lahore, allowing their kinsmen to set up an almost independent Dogra principality in Jammu and Kashmir.

The other faction comprised the Sikh aristocracy, such as the Sandhawalia brothers, who resented Dogra influence. Both these factions engaged in a not so subtle power struggle, and used the royal claimants as pawns in their fight for the Sikh Durbar. There were others however whose loyalties were unquestionable like Fakir Azizuddin, Ranjit Singh's able advisor on foreign affairs and the Kashmiri Brahmin Dina Nath who handled revenue and finance.

The war of succession ended in 1845 after Ranjit Singh's youngest son, Dalip Singh, a mere boy, ascended the throne, under Rani Jindan's regency. Despite political instability, the Sikh Sardars and their soldiery undertook noteworthy campaigns, distinguished by their daring and courage. The first of these was into Little Tibet and the second into Afghanistan, to lend a hand to the British to overcome the rebellion of Dost Mohammad.



*Line up of Sikh Army guns :
drawn by horse, bullock,
camel and elephant.*

Earlier Campaigns

Earlier, a wedge had been driven into Tibet in 1834 with Gen. Zorawar Singh's annexation of Ladakh. Ranjit Singh forbade a further thrust to avoid conflict with the Chinese Emperor but with no reaction from the Chinese, his son Nau Nihal Singh had permitted Gen. Zorawar to move on and take Iskardu. Gen. Zorawar captured Garo in June 1841 with one column marching eastward along the Kumaon Hills to cut off British contact with Lhasa. Gen. Zorawar then took Tuklakote on 29 August 1841 annihilating the Tibetans. The Sikhs had pierced the heart of Tibet, going right upto Rudok.

The British protest to the Lahore Durbar was politely warded off. While these exchanges were going on the Chinese mustered their armies to defend Lhasa and isolated Zorawar Singh and his men at 12000 feet in bitter cold and in desperate straits. The Sikh Army, hungry and cold, tried to fight its way out but the gallant Zorawar fell on 12 December 1841 and his men were butchered in cold blood after they had laid down arms on Chinese

assurances of being permitted to return unmolested. The Chinese reoccupied their Tibetan possession however with Leh still flying the Sikh Flag.

By the spring of 1842, Sikh reinforcements reached Leh, and forced the Chinese to retreat and they reoccupied Ladakh. The column heading for Garo reached the boundary in August 1841 while another encircled a Chinese force sent from Lhasa and decimated it, taking the Chinese Commander prisoner. The Sikhs had made up for their winter defeat but learnt a lesson as well: campaigning in winter in this region was tough. On 17 October 1842 the Durbar Envoy signed a Treaty with the representative of the Chinese Emperor at Lhasa, making the boundaries of Ladakh and Tibet inviolable but open to trade.

In the meanwhile, common British-Sikh interests in Afghanistan made Sher Singh, another son of Ranjit Singh, order Gen. Avitabile to move from Peshawar to the relief of the British. The Sikh troops recaptured Ali Masjid beyond the Khyber and relieved Jalalabad.

Amir Dost Mohammad was given Kabul's throne.

The First Sikh War

The First Sikh War between the Lahore Durbar and the British was marred by the treachery of a few influential figures of the Durbar, but the battles fought are a testimony to the bravery, fighting skills and sense of sacrifice of the Sikh soldiery. In successive battles their heroism in the field stood out and despite the odds against them they came close to shattering British supremacy in Northern India.

The British, wanting to fish in the troubled waters of the Punjab, had increased their force from 17,000 to 40,000 men by the autumn of 1845. A stormy meeting of the Durbar on 17 November 1845 took note of British intentions of aggression. Their army, poised on the frontier, waited for the Governor General and the Commander-in-Chief to cross the pontoon bridge on the Sutlej.

The Durbar, preparing to resist, divided the army into seven divisions of eight to twelve thousand men each. Four were ordered to proceed against the British advance positions at Ropar, Ludhiana, Harike and Ferozepur, one each to man the North Western Frontier at Peshawar and Attock and in the south along the Sindhu. One was kept in reserve at Lahore.

The British asked for an explanation of these troop movements and were clearly told that they were meant to counter British preparations. Further, the Durbar sought the return of Suchet Singh Dogra's treasure, which was



A Sikh nobleman, wearing Indo-Persian armour on horse with decorated quilted coat.

enormous, in fact cart-loads, which the British had appropriated. They also reiterated their right, often denied in practice, to free passage for the Punjab Armed Constabulary to the Durbar's possessions across the Sutlej.

The British rejected the Durbar's contention and severed diplomatic relations. The two States were close to war, and the call to arms was out. Chiefs and peasants left their homes to join the forces. According to the bard Shah Mohammad:

*"Sons of Sardars, handsome, dashing, debonair –
leapt to battle as Lions leap out of their lair"*

Crossing the Sutlej

The stage was set. The Sikh Army crossed the Sutlej between Harike and Kasur on 11 December 1845, its aim being to cut off Gen. Littler's force at Ferozepur from the British forces advancing from Ludhiana and Ambala under Lord Gough and Lord Hardinge. The act of crossing the Sutlej remains as debatable a point today as it was then. It centres around whether the Durbar troops had crossed over into their own territory or was the crossing tantamount to a violation of the treaty of 1809 and consequently amounted to an act of war.

On December 13, Lord Hardinge declared war, accusing the Sikhs of invading British territories "without a shadow of provocation."

Treachery

The Sikh Army, consisting of five divisions numbering 50,000 men and 108 guns was assembled on the right bank of the Sutlej. They were to invest Ferozepur, where Maj. Gen. Littler was caught unawares with 7500 men and 35 heavy guns. Two divisions under the command of Lal Singh, a Brahmin from the Gandhara Valley and the Sikh Army C-in-C, took position at Ferozeshahr village, ten miles above, to intercept the main British Army marching from Ambala to relieve Ferozepur. The other commander was Tej Singh, again neither a Sikh nor a Punjabi, nor true to his adopted country which was Ranjit Singh's Punjab. He was a Gour Brahmin from Sardhana, Meerut, and had been placed in the position in 1845 during the infant Dalip Singh's rule.

Before moving onto Ferozepur – as he should have done – Tej Singh secretly informed the British Agent at Ferozepur, John Nicholson: "I have crossed with the Sikh Army. You know my friendship with the British. Tell me what to do?" Nicholson advised him not to attack Ferozepur and "to halt as many days as you can and then march towards the Governor General".

The other player in this sordid tale of treachery was Lal Singh. On 13 November 1845, a sketch map was sent by him to Sir Henry Hardinge, the Governor General, and Gen. Hugh Gough the C-in-C who joined him at Ambala Cantonment. It showed the entire battle plan of the Sikh Army under Gen. Lal Singh. It included the proposed deployment of forces for the attack and the cavalry charge, the position of the foot soldiers for accuracy of fire, the placement of guns, and finally the method of attack. The stratagem had a touch of the late Maharaja Ranjit Singh's French generals including shades of some of Napoleon's battle plans. There could have been no worse treachery in history.

Battle of Mudki

True to his promise, Tej Singh encircled Ferozepur in a bold sweeping move, but did not attack. His retort to the impatient Sikh soldiers was that his status and dignity demanded that he only engage with the Governor General himself, implying that anybody below that rank would be a slight to his position. The British C-in-C and the Governor General arrived at Mudki, twenty miles from Ferozepur. There they were met by the smaller Sikh detachment under Lal Singh who commenced the attack but in accordance with his original design quickly deserted command leaving his soldiers to fight the British. Unable to stand up to the superior numbers of Gough's infantry, the Sikhs nevertheless offered stubborn resistance but lost the battle and were compelled to withdraw.

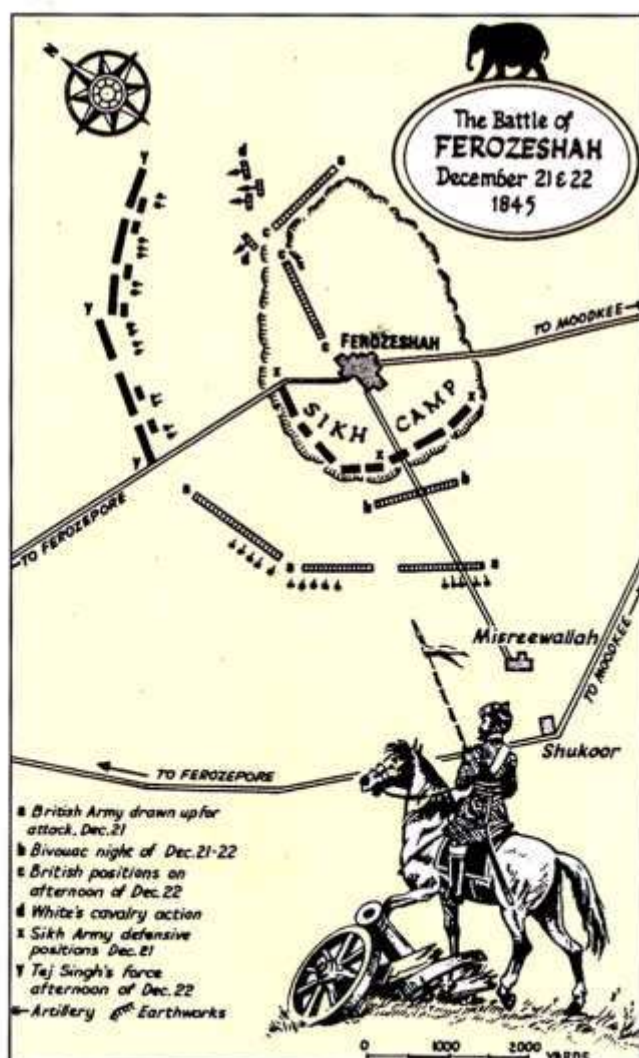
The action at Mudki though not significant militarily gave the British their first experience of the fighting qualities of Sikh soldiers. British casualties were heavy and they required reinforcements from Ambala, Meerut and Delhi. Lord Hardinge voluntarily joined the C-in-C as his second-in-command. Tej Singh with his now numerical superiority, was supposed to take Ferozepur after overwhelming Gen. Littler, a task not too difficult. Instead he deliberately allowed Gen. Littler to slip out and join forces with Gen. Gough and Lord Hardinge at Ferozeshahr.

The Battle of Ferozeshahr

After the Mudki setback the Sikhs moved to and entrenched themselves around the village of Ferozeshahr, ten miles from Mudki. Sir John Littler who had affected a junction with the main body of the British Army four miles from the Sikh entrenchments, now decided upon an immediate attack.

The British had suffered
terrible casualties with every
single member of the
Governor General's staff
either killed or wounded.

That frosty night "the fate of British
India trembled in the balance."



The Battle of Ferozeshahr, December 21 and 22, 1845.

The British artillery mounted a steady barrage of fire followed by an infantry attack, gaining a foothold in the Sikh entrenchments. The Sikh infantry drawn up behind its artillery guns retaliated with fierce musketry fire and the British were hurled back with heavy losses. The next British charge succeeded in wresting advantage from the Sikhs, the contest continuing with greater determination throughout the night earning it the appellation "night of terror". The position of the British grew graver as the night wore on.

The British had suffered terrible casualties with every single member of the Governor General's staff either killed or wounded. That frosty night "the fate of British India trembled in the balance." Sir Hope Grant, one of the British Generals bloodied in the Anglo-Sikh Wars recorded: "Truly the night was one of gloom and foreboding and perhaps never in the annals of warfare has a British Army on so large a scale been nearer to a defeat which would have involved annihilation. The Sikhs had practically recovered the whole of their entrenched camp: our exhausted and decimated divisions bivouacked without mutual cohesion over a wide area." Lord Hardinge sent his son back to Mudki with a sword awarded to him for services during the Napoleonic campaigns with instructions that in the event of a defeat, all his private papers were to be destroyed.

An entry in Robert Cust's diary reveals that the British generals had decided to lay down arms: "News came from the Governor General that our attack of yesterday had failed, that affairs were desperate, all state papers were to be destroyed, and that if the morning attack failed all would be over; this was kept secret by Mr. Currie and we were considering measures to make an unconditional surrender to save the wounded..."

However in the morning, the Sikh soldiers were once again betrayed by their leaders. First Lal Singh fled the battlefield. Then Tej Singh with a large force from the Sutlej did not even attempt to repulse the British. Having exhausted their men and munitions the British had neither fight in them nor were they a match for the Sikhs. Treacherously, after firing a few rounds Tej Singh retreated. He had intentionally delayed his arrival and not appeared on the scene till he had seen Lal Singh's forces dispersed.

The battle of Aliwal, north-eastward of Ferozeshahr, on 29 January 1846 was more of an extended skirmish against mostly Dogra irregulars and a prelude to the final action at Sabraon two weeks later.

Battle of Sabraon

On the left bank of the Sutlej at Sabraon the Sikh Army had established itself in a strong position. The British decided to delay the attack until they had received reinforcements from Delhi. It was again typical that Tej Singh did not make a move to capture the stores on which the British were relying to win the war. This despite the fact that the Sikh Army was 37,000 strong, with 67 guns, compared to the British force of a mere 15,000 men.

The British massed their heavy artillery on commanding positions opposite the Sikh entrenchments which were under the command of Tej Singh. The fire spread death and destruction and though the Sikhs continued to fend the attack the British soon began closing in on them. After a keen contest over every inch of ground, Sabraon was lost.

Once again Tej Singh deserted the army and even cut the boat bridge which linked the Sikh forces to the opposite bank of the river leaving them to perish under deadly showers of shrapnel as they tried to swim across.

Describing the battle at Sabraon as the "Waterloo of India", Lord Gough paid great tribute to the Sikh soldier: "Policy precluded me from publicly recording my sentiments on the splendid gallantry of our fallen foe, or to record the acts of heroism displayed not only individually, but almost collectively, by the Sikh Sirdars and the Army: and I declare, were it not for a deep conviction that my country's good required the sacrifice, I would have wept to have witnessed the fearful slaughter of so devoted a body of men." General Sir Joseph Thackwell who witnessed the battles wrote, "for though defeated and broken, they never ran, but fought with their talwars to the last and I witnessed several acts of great bravery in their sirdars and men". Lord Hardinge, who saw the action, wrote "Few escaped, none it may be said, surrendered. The Sikhs met their fate with the resignation which distinguishes their race." This was a major British victory



Charge of the British cavalry through the breaches at Sabraon, February 10, 1846.

against a people afflicted with internal treachery and treason and was the beginning of the end of the Great Sikh Durbar.

The British Governor General of India, Sir Henry Hardinge laid down stiff terms, including cession of the districts of Kashmir and Hazara. Within hours, Gulab Singh Dogra accepted the conditions and so ended, nominally, the First Anglo-Sikh War.

The traitors Lal Singh and Tej Singh were "immortalised" in doggerel verse, to quote a historian punning on their names:

*Laloo lost the blush of shame,
Teju lost his lustre,
By turning their backs in the field
They turned the tide and the battle yield.*

The Second Sikh War

As British Regiments were now garrisoned in Lahore, it was obvious the conspirators had succeeded in their aims. The Sikh Army was disbanded and a convention entered into for the administration of the Government by a Council at Lahore under a British Superintendent during the minority of Dalip Singh, the youngest of Ranjit Singh's sons. The country between the Beas and Sutlej, comprising the districts of Jullundur, Hoshiarpur and Kangra, was transferred to the British. Retaining suzerainty, they sold the valley of Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra for a paltry five million rupees.

The disgusted Sikh soldiers whose regiments had been disbanded, realised the extent of their betrayal, and the feeling of revenge mounted. The sense of outrage of the disbanded Sikh troops and patriots was to be the root cause of the Second Anglo-Sikh War. In the forthcoming battle of Chillianwala the Sikhs, now under able and upright commanders repaid the debts they owed and this time treachery did not quite work for the British.

In the British view there was to be no war in the next decade. Lord Hardinge, the British Governor General had ordered a reduction in the army but as subsequent events proved, this belief was ill-conceived. The first to challenge British domination was Diwan Mulraj, the Sikh Durbar's Governor of Multan and Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala at Hazara. Chattar Singh's son Sher Singh Attariwala followed his father's example and also threw his forces against the British.



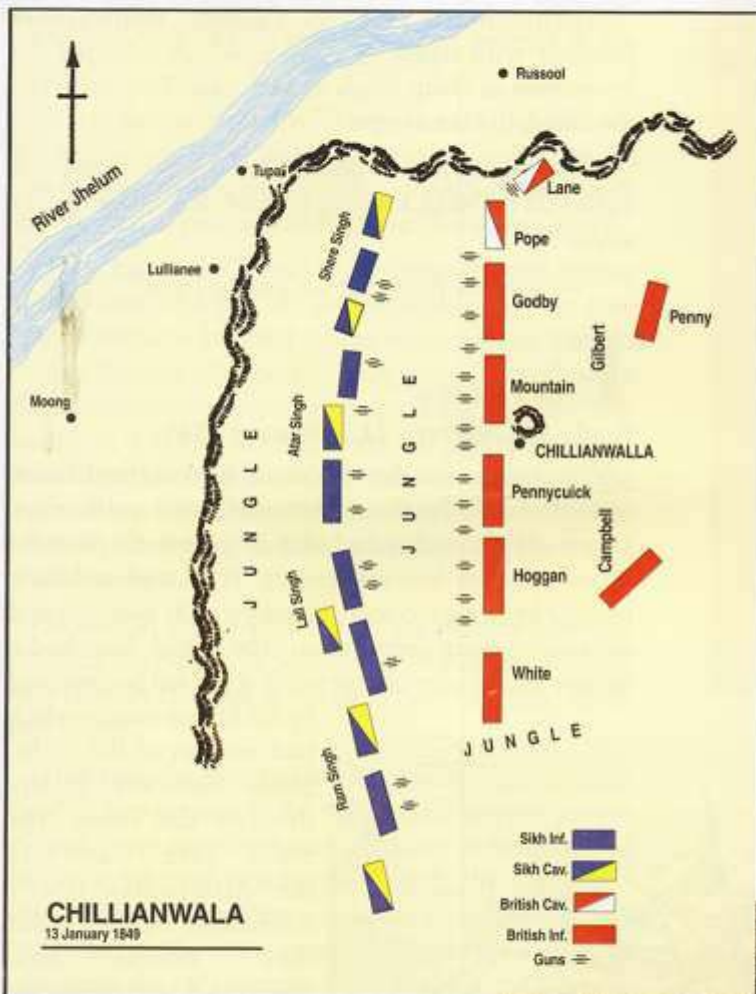
The Ghorchura, a horseman of the Sikh irregular cavalry.

On hearing of Lord Gough's advance on Lahore, Sher Singh Attariwala in a tactical move, sent covering troops through the fords towards the river's left bank, for delaying the enemy's advance and sending early warning. To cover this manoeuvre, Sher Singh deployed heavy artillery on the left bank of the Chenab: a stratagem which was overlooked by Lord Gough as he led the British advance party to attack the troops of the Sikh advance guard who were now retreating on Sher Singh's orders. The British came under fire of the Sikh guns on the right bank and it soon became evident that the British position had become untenable. Under cover of their artillery, the Sikh infantry and cavalry carried the day. The Sikhs captured British guns and the colours of a British regiment, this victory at Ramnagar giving a much needed boost to their morale.

Stunned by the defeat, Lord Dalhousie took the initiative in his own hands and directed his General Staff to prepare a blanket attack on the Sikhs before they could strengthen their positions. The main action plan of the British was to prevent a union of Chattar Singh's army from Attock and that of Sher Singh's. However, in the meantime the British had defeated Mulraj at Multan and felt adequately rejuvenated to face the now united army of Chattar Singh and Sher Singh Attariwala.

Battle of Chillianwala

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



Battlefield of Chillianwala,
January 13, 1849.

Sher Singh displayed exceptional skill by judiciously selecting his position which was protected on the left by a low ridge of hills intersected with ravines and the main stream of the Jhelum, the right being posted in different villages enclosed by a thick jungle.

On 13 January 1849 the British launched their attack. Their artillery advanced to an open space in front of the village of Chillianwala and opened fire on the Sikh artillery. The Sikhs replied with a vigorous cannonade. As the fire ceased the British drew up in order of battle and charged at the enemy's centre in an attempt to force the Sikhs into the river. The assault was led by Brigadier Pennycuik. For the Sikhs, the conditions were made to order. Scattering into the brushwood jungle they began their hit and run tactics, their snipers taking a heavy toll of the British cavalry and infantry. Those that got through the brushwood and the ravines were easily repulsed in the hand-to-hand fighting with the main body of the Sikh troops.

Brig. Pennycuik leading the Brigade in the front fell as did his son Ensign Pennycuik who was mortally injured while trying to protect the body of his father. Four British guns and the colours of three British Regiments fell to the Sikhs and the British registered nearly 3000 dead or wounded in the area around Chillianwala. A testimony left by a British observer says: "The Sikhs fought like devils, fierce and untamed... Such a mass of men I never set eyes on and as plucky as lions: they ran right on the bayonets and struck their assailants when they were transfixed".



Fallen men of HM's 24th
Regiment at Chillianwala.

It is in the destiny of the Sikhs
to face tribulations time
and again and to rise and be
resurrected even stronger.

But, once again, as at Ferozeshahr, the Sikhs failed to drive home their advantage. Having suffered considerable losses themselves they were not aware of the magnitude of the punishment they had inflicted on the British. It then poured incessantly for three days – which kept the Sikhs separated from their quarry – and on the fourth day as the sun shone again, the British had pulled out and retreated across the Chaj to the banks of the Chenab.

The Attariwalas sent George Lawrence, who was their prisoner, with terms for a truce, which included the investment of Dalip Singh as Maharaja. This, however, the British did not accept.

Once more, fate and destiny had conspired against a victory for the Sikhs, bringing to mind Shah Mohammad's words :

"We won the Battle but we lost the Fight."

The Finale –

Battle of Gujarat, 21 February 1849

The Attariwalas then advanced towards the Chenab and entrenched their forces between Gujarat and the river. However by now they had only 59 guns to the 66 of the British and far less manpower. They repeated their mistake by firing too soon, betraying their positions and exhausting their ammunition. The British launched a cavalry and infantry charge which could not be contained

by the Afghan cavalry which had reinforced the Sikhs. Sheer numbers finally decided the issue. The Sikhs gave way and the Attariwalas finally surrendered their army and their swords near Rawalpindi, completing the end of the Sikh Durbar.

In the maze of all the machinations that went into the terms of the surrender, Maharaja Dalip Singh was made to hand over the legendary Kohinoor and step down from his illustrious father's throne, never to sit on it again. As a veteran summed it up: "Aaj Ranjit Singh mar gaya". "Today Ranjit Singh has died."



The battle of Gujarat.

Spirit of the Khalsa

However, from the ashes and dust rose a proud nation whose gallantry and steadfastness against fearful odds soon filled the ranks of the new Indian Army, first pursuing British interests and then Independent India's a century later. As always, they had proved their loyalty and gallantry to the salt they swore by, being bestowed more gallantry awards than any other peoples in the region.

It is in the destiny of the Sikhs to face tribulations time and again and to rise and be resurrected even stronger. This is the spirit which gave birth to the Khalsa and made warriors out of people who never let themselves down.

They fought the British to the bitter end but having handed over their swords like the soldiers of yore they became Britain's foremost troops winning more Victoria Crosses than any other people. They made military history when twenty-one of them, from one single unit (the 36th Sikhs), in a single day, received the highest military decoration that Britain could bestow on soldiers of the Indian Army. This was on 12 September 1897 at Saragarhi, a feat of gallantry and sacrifice unsurpassed in the annals of military history.

To this day their erstwhile foes, the Pathans faithfully maintain the Saragarhi Monument in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, a tribute to their then foes, the 21 Sikh heroes.

Then came the struggle for India's Independence. With less than two per cent of the population, no other people willingly gave their lives and sacrificed so much as did the Sikhs, whether at Jallianwala Bagh, the conspiracy cases, the *Konia Gata Maru* episode or banishment to the Andaman Islands. In the same vein, it was the destiny of a great unit, the 14th (Ferozepur) Sikhs to be landed straight into battle in Srinagar in October 1947, to stem the tide and uphold India's right and so save Kashmir. It must have given great pride to the spirit of Ranjit Singh that his soldiery, which ultimately formed the Sikh and Punjab Regiments, have won more laurels in battle than any other segment of the Indian Army.

Destiny continues to pursue the Sikhs even in the late twentieth century, in the same manner as it did their forefathers. They have risen from the desecrated temple of their Gods, the holiest of the holy, the Golden Temple, assaulted by a modern army with tanks and artillery. They have also risen from the ashes of their brethren whose corpses littered the streets of India's capital Delhi, all of this as recently as 1984.



Raja Heera Singh.

A difficult people to understand—and not everyone understood them—led a seasoned British Commanding Officer of the Sikhs to write a small introduction for newly commissioned British Officers assigned to Sikh units in India, "There cannot be a more horrendous people when honour is at stake. Yet! Put your arms around the man and hug him like a brother and apologise. Before you have finished, he has melted like butter in the hot sun and is ready to take on the world for you."

Ranjit Singh is no more but the spirit of the Khalsa continues to live, not only in the battlefields of valour, but in the ability of these people to reach the highest levels of excellence in every sphere, all over the world ♀

Lt. Gen. Kirpal Singh Randhawa
PVSM, AVSM, (Retd.)

Sources of the illustrations in this article are *The Illustrated London News*, *The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, and *The Fateh Foundation*.

150 Years After The Battle Of Chillianwala

The 150th anniversary of this epic battle was marked by a memorial lecture at New Delhi's Imperial Hotel on 13 January 1999 while six thousand kilometres away to the West, on the lawns of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea, wreaths were laid by the successor's of HM's 24th Regiment of Foot (later The Royal Regiment of Wales). At Chillianwala itself, now part of West Punjab in Pakistan, the memorial to the fallen from both sides is being maintained by the local administration.

The Sikh Nation in the first half of the nineteenth century encompassed not only the 'land of the five rivers' but continued westwards, beyond the mighty river Indus, into Afghanistan and also included Kashmir and "little" Tibet before the Second Sikh War and annexation by the British changed the geopolitical map of India.

Many books have been written on the Sikhs, the Kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1845-46 and 1848-49 with one of the earliest

accounts by Capt. Joseph Darcy Cunningham in his *History of the Sikhs* which appeared in 1849. A more contemporary account of these wars is by Hugh Cook who recorded that



At the memorial to the fallen of the 24th Regiment of Foot at Chillianwala. The obelisk is at the centre of the lawns of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea, London.



At the Chillianwala Memorial lecture on 13 January 1999 in the "Imperial Hotel" New Delhi, Justice Kuldip Singh, formerly of the Supreme Court and presently President of the World Sikh Council giving the keynote address. Sardar Patwant Singh, Chairman of The Fateh Foundation is on his left.



Guns captured by the British during the epic battles of Chillianwala and Waterloo are now displayed together at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea.



Lt. General Kirpal Singh Randhawa on his visit to the obelisk on the mound at Chillianwala.

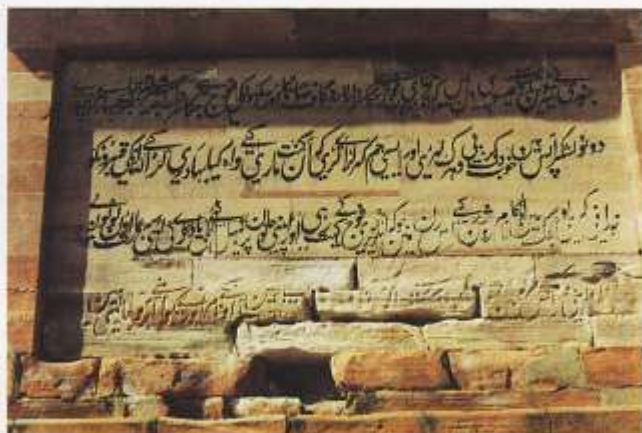
the British Army had many a hard fight in India during the two hundred years of the Raj but never against tougher opposition than during the Sikh Wars when, on one fateful night in particular, the Governor General felt that "the fate of India trembled in the balance".

With looming defeat, the British were aware that this could destroy the Empire but, instead of administering the *coup de grace*, the strong Sikh forces mysteriously withdrew from the battlefield. They had, in fact, been betrayed by the Dogra Generals in command. The British, evidently conscience stricken for having dealt with such traitors, nevertheless had won the war.

Recognising the martial qualities of the Sikhs as a fighting race, the British recruited most of the men of the disbanded Khalsa Army as foundation of the famous Punjab Frontier Force and the Sikh Regiments, who were to distinguish themselves in war and peace as backbone of the British Indian Army for the next century. British and Sikh troops were to forge a formidable combination in battlefields all over the world.



General Randhawa with Ch. Muhammad Iqbal of Chillianwala at the memorial in West Punjab.



Detail on one side of the obelisk. Translation from the Urdu: "In this battle fought on 13 January 1849 A.D. where British forces were led by Lord Gough and the Sikh Army by Rajah Shere Singh, both sides fought valiantly and fearlessly and countless were killed in action. May God illuminate their souls with divine light and their names shine in the world."

In his *Handbook on Sikhs*, Captain R.W.Falcon wrote "The new creed (the Sikh) has a more ardent revolutionary spirit ... the Sikh is a fighting man and his fine qualities are best shown in the army, which is his natural profession. Hardy, brave and of intelligence; too slow to understand when he is beaten; obedient to discipline; attached to his officers; and careless of caste prohibitions, he is unsurpassed as a soldier in the East and takes the first place as a thoroughly reliable, useful soldier. The Sikh is always the same, ever genial, good-tempered and uncomplaining; as steady under fire as he is eager for a charge—equal of any troops in the world and superior to any with whom his likely to come into contact".

Captain Falcon urged that the pristine qualities of the Khalsa be maintained not just for its own sake as well as for its part in producing the finest material for the Regiment, an immense strength to the Army. He rounded up by stating that "wherever you go (for recruiting), you will be delighted with the fine stamp of Sikh met and with the friendly welcome and ungrudging hospitality".

Now, for more than half a century after 1947, British and Sikh Regiments continue their alliances, epitomised by that between the 1st King's Regiment and the 5th Sikh Regiment, their officers and men having regular reunions, both in England and India, the one as recently as in mid-1998.



Regimental alliances between the British and Sikhs will continue into the next millennium: here General Peter Davies of The King's Regiment (Manchester and Liverpool) inspects the Guard of Honour presented by the 5th battalion, the Sikh Regiment who were raised in 1901 as the 47th (Duke of Connaught's Own) Sikhs.

The Sikhs have been pioneers in flying be it in military or civil aviation, as pilots or engineers, virtually from the dawn of flight. Even as the Twentieth Century is at an end and the new Millennium is to begin, Sikhs remain at the forefront of aviation activities



Earning the IAF's first gallantry award was Hawái Sepoy Kartar Singh Toungue, seen in the rear cockpit of a Wapiti IIA army co-operation biplane. Painting by Derek Bunce depicts the action in Waziristan.

History records that man's first heavier-than-air flight took place on 17 December 1903 at Kitty Hawk in North Carolina, USA. The man was Wilbur Wright in a machine that had two wings attached with criss-crossed wires, a tail, an engine driving a propeller but little else other than a great dream. The contraption flew a few feet above the ground for a few hundred yards. Just over six decades later, man had walked on the

HIGH FLIGHT



The Sikh Pioneers of Aviation

moon, and man-made machines have gone beyond the solar system. Still, in the few years just after 1903, the Americans were still less enthused about powered flight than were the Europeans and by 1909, many pioneers had built and flown their own aeroplanes. They were mostly French, followed by a few Germans, Dutch and Englishmen.

The first Indian, or indeed Asian, to procure aeroplanes was the then young Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh who was following aviation developments with



*Hardit Singh Malik,
the first Indian to fly in action.*

keen interest. The Maharaja sent his Chief Engineer to Europe for an on-the-spot study and then ordered three aeroplanes including a Bleriot monoplane and Farman biplanes, these aeroplanes arriving in the Punjab in December 1910.

The Sikhs have been pioneers in flying ever since, be it in military or civil aviation, as pilots or engineers, virtually from this dawn of flight. Even as the Twentieth Century is at an end and the new Millennium is to begin, Sikhs remain at the forefront of aviation activities, be it with the Indian Air Force, Naval Air Arm, Army Aviation Corps, or the air wings of the Coast Guard and Border Security Force. Many are with International Airlines, as Boeing 747 "Jumbo" commanders, flying distant intercontinental routes from Chicago to Bombay or as Captains of Airbus A.320s, operating in South-East Asia. Quite a

fighters and himself be seriously wounded in the air, was an outstanding personality, Sardar Hardit Singh Malik, whose life and times were so extraordinary and his achievements so varied, that it is most meaningful to dwell upon his pioneering career.

Born on 23 November, 1894 in a distinguished Sikh family of Rawalpindi in the Punjab, Hardit Singh was educated at an English Public School (Eastborne College), from where he went to Balliol College at Oxford. Graduating with honours, his scholastic achievements were matched by his sports prowess, getting his blues in cricket and golf. When the Great War broke out in 1914, he was at his second year at Oxford and practically all his British colleagues volunteered to join the fighting services.

Following a personal interview with General Henderson, Commanding the

'solo' in a Caudron after just 2½ hours instruction. Hardit Singh was posted to Filton, near Bristol, flying the Avro 504, the BE 2C, the Sopwith Pup, the Neuport and finally the Sopwith Camel, the most advanced fighter at this time. At Filton, RFC pilots were taught combat tactics, including the famous *Immelmann turn*, Hardit Singh getting his wings in under a month. Posted to No.28 Squadron, equipped with the Camel, the formation soon flew out to St.Omer in France, then to an airfield in Flanders near the village of Droglandt. Here Lt. Hardit Singh Malik first met the new Commanding Officer, the legendary Major William G.Barkar who had come from Canada as a cavalryman in 1915, joined the RFC in 1916, flew two-seaters and fighters, becoming an ace many times over. Barkar was considered the greatest all-rounder pilot of World War One, and he personally initiated



Hardit Singh Malik in his Oxford blazer.

number are with the Royal Malaysian and Singapore Air Forces, others in East Africa.

However, the very first Indian to fly, join the Royal Flying Corps, get his wings, go into aerial combat on the Western Front, shoot down German



Lt. Hardit Singh Malik, in service with the Royal Flying Corps.

Royal Flying Corps, Hardit Singh joined the RFC as a cadet at Aldershot early in 1917, the first Indian, and Sikh, in any flying service in the world. A specially-designed flying helmet was worn by Hardit Singh over his turban. Hardit Singh was selected for fighters and went

Hardit Singh into the art and science of aerial combat, leading him into the first actions including those against the legendary "Red Baron", Manfred von Richthofen's Staffel. In one major dog fight with over 100 British and German fighters scrapping over the battle lines,

Hardit Singh shot down his first German Fokker and was to go on to notch another eight aerial victories in the weeks ahead before he, himself, was wounded in action but survived in amazing circumstances.

After months in hospital, Hardit Singh rejoined the service, now renamed as the Royal Air Force, flying the Bristol Fighter, probably the best fighter of the war, with No.141 Squadron at Biggin Hill, a specialist unit for defending London from raiding Zeppelins and Botha bombers.

As described then, "One of the first to be posted to the new squadron was Lieutenant Hardit Singh Malik, a Sikh from Rawalpindi a keen cricketer and golfer, Malik was one of the most popular officers at Biggin Hill. He staunchly refused to part with his turban and somehow managed to fit over it an outsized flying helmet, earning

man's chequered career included assignments as Trade Commissioner in London, Hamburg, Washington and Ottawa, becoming Prime Minister of Patiala State, later Indian High Commissioner to Canada, and Ambassador to France. After retirement in 1956, he returned to his first passion, golf, becoming India's finest player ever, even with the two German bullets still embedded in his leg. Hardit Singh Malik lived till he was nearly 91, passing away in November 1985.

The next singularly important landmark in India's tryst with aviation was when, in November 1929, the Aga Khan offered, through the Royal Aero Club, a special prize of £500 for the first Indian pilot who would fly solo from England to India or vice versa. "It must be a solo flight completed within six weeks from the date of starting. The Prize will remain open for



hope. Man Mohan Singh took off from Croydon airport, south of London, in a Gypsy Moth which he called "Miss India", and Aspy Engineer followed the same route while J.R.D. Tata, also in a Gipsy Moth, started his journey in the reverse direction. After Croydon, Man Mohan Singh flew on to Lympne, Le Bourget (Paris), Dijon, Marseilles, Rome, Naples, Catania, Tripoli and Sirle. From Gaza, he flew eastwards to India, with young Aspy Engineer trailing a day behind. Man Mohan Singh finally landed at Drigh Road, Karachi on 12 May, 1930, thus winning the historic air race. Aspy Engineer landed the next day and although he was second, owing to a technicality, was eventually declared the winner which Man Mohan accepted heartily. Even though Aspy was awarded the Aga Khan prize, Man Mohan Singh was richly honoured by the Parsi community at Bombay for his magnanimous gesture.

The genesis behind the foundation of an air arm for India goes back to the appointment of the Skeen Committee in 1925 which eventually recommended in 1928, amongst other things, that "Indians be made eligible for commissioning in the Artillery, Engineers, Signal, Tank and Air arms of the Army in India".

In the competitive combined examination for admission to Sandhurst, Woolwich and Cranwell in November 1929, the highest-scoring candidate (Prem Singh Gyani) opted for the Artillery while those topping the list



the affectionate nick name of "flying hobgoblin" from the ground crews. Besides Malik the Sikh, the original fighter pilots of Biggin Hill included men were from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Argentina, as well as the United Kingdom".

After the armistice, Hardit Singh was posted to another Brisfit Squadron, No.11, at Nivelles near Brussels before he finally returned home after the War, a hero in his own right. Hardit Singh Malik was to later join the prestigious Indian Civil Service. As a postscript, this remarkable

one year from January 1930". Three contestants entered. They were an enthusiastic JRD Tata (who later founded Tata Airlines, forerunner of Air India and was to become a pillar of the Tata Group). Man Mohan Singh, a civil engineer graduating from Bristol who had learnt to fly in England, and a young Aspy Merwan Engineer (later to be Chief of the Indian Air Force). Flying in single-engined, light aeroplanes with simple instruments and without radio aids, the three adventurous young men set out on their long journey with faith and

for the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell were Bhupinder Singh, followed immediately by his cousin, Amarjit Singh. Also qualified were A.B. Awan, H.C.Sircar, Subroto Mukerjee and J.N.Tandon and these first six Indian cadets proceeded to England in September 1930.

A.Singh and B.Singh belonged to a well-known Sikh family of Sargodha in the Punjab, Amarjit having studied at the Government College Lahore and Bhupinder at the Lahore Christian College, both being great sportsmen at home and who were to make a mark in hockey and tennis while at Cranwell. After getting their "wings" in July 1932, they were the pioneers who formed "A" Flight of No. 1 Squadron of the Indian Air Force on 1 April 1933. Tragically, both were killed in an air accident six months later during an air exercise near Hyderabad-Sind.

Over the next six years, a trickle of Indian cadets were sent to the RAF College at Cranwell and, after commissioning, slowly augmented the fledgling Indian Air Force. Amongst them were Aspy Engineer, K. K. "Jumbo" Majumdar, Daljit Singh, Narendra, Henry Ranganadhan and Mehar Singh. By April 1938, No.1 Squadron IAF had been expanded to three Flights and were located together, for the first time, at Ambala even as the last of the Cranwell-trained pilots were to shortly augment its strength.

In India of the late twenties, there remained many sceptics who were dubious of India's ability to raise and run an efficient air force. The key to an effective fighting air arm would not only be the aviators but aircraftsmen, mechanics and technical tradesmen who would constitute its backbone. The establishment of an

IAF was timely but "it takes more than pilots to create an Air Force" an all-important connecting link would be the technical inspectors and senior NCOs and these would have to be British as "we should feel dubious of Indian aircraftsmen".

Some British advisors however felt that there were select Indian artisans of considerable proficiency in wood work and metal work, the best coming from the Punjab as "most Sikhs made quite

good mechanics and there is one tribe of Punjabi Musalmans which supplies nearly all the regimental armourers for regiments of the Frontier ... but the average Indian mechanic is very casual and untrustworthy" ... "the care of aeroplanes demand meticulous attention to detail and a conscience which will leave nothing to chance. The lives of airmen depend on the thoroughness with which aircraft are kept in perfect flying trim".

To the good fortune of the future Indian Air Force, amongst the first to apply were a number of well-educated, highly motivated and patriotic individuals who sacrificed better emoluments in order to join what they felt was an important contribution to a future free India. One of them was Harjinder Singh, from Hoshiarpur, then studying at the MacLaghlen Engineering College, Lahore but for some time obsessed with joining the air force. Undeterred by the RAF Selection Board which first insisted that they only wanted "unqualified and untrained apprentices", Harjinder Singh finally had his interview, along with other engineering students and was amongst the first nine to be selected in November 1930. They were asked to report to the RAF Aircraft Depot at Drigh Road in January 1931 as members of the Indian Followers Corps of the RAF in India.

Hawai Sepoy Harjinder Singh was to eventually become an Air Vice Marshal of the Indian Air Force and in the early 1960s, lay the foundations for a civil aircraft industry, based at Kanpur.

The infant, and tiny, Indian Air Force first "cut its teeth" in operations on the North West Frontier in 1938 and then also gained its first gallantry award. A bombing



First Indian cadets at RAF Cranwell.



IAF Wapiti IIA being serviced.



The infant IAF on parade at Drigh Road (Karachi).

attack was to be carried out by Flt.Lt. Peter Haynes, with Hawai Sepoy 1st Class Kartar Singh Tounque as air gunner/bombardier. (See painting on pages 54-55)

Coming from a farming family of Lyallpur, Kartar Singh had schooled at Ropar, had done mechanical & electrical engineering at the Victoria Diamond Jubilee Institute at Lahore, getting his diploma in 1933. Applying for the Indian Air Force, he had joined a batch of 80



Sqn. Ldr. Dalip Singh Majithia and Hurricane IIC.

apprentices in February 1934 and spent two years at Drigh Road (Karachi). As No.65 Hawai Sepoy 1st Class, Kartar Singh was given the trade "Fitter-Armourer" but soon qualified as an air gunner as well, and went with 'A' Flight to Peshawar in 1936.

On this memorable day's single sortie, Peter Haynes flew level and steady as Kartar Singh switched on the Mk.IX bomb sight, calculated terminal velocity, fed in speed and heading on the compass, completed calculations and released the 112-lb RL bombs over the Pir of Ipi's fortress. Being in the rear cockpit, Kartar Singh could

well observe the great accuracy of the bombing, which was pin point. He was the first in the IAF to be Mentioned-in-Despatches for "Operations in Waziristan 1937-38".

September 1938 saw the entry of the last batch of Indian cadets to RAF Cranwell (there were no entries in 1937), with Arjan Singh, Prithipal Singh and Kailash Bahl joining the College in September 1938. Bahl was withdrawn in July 1939 but Arjan Singh and Prithipal Singh completed their training by 22 December 1939, the course having been shortened by six months because, in September 1939, war had been declared against Germany, the second great war of the 20th Century.

Flight Cadet Prithipal Singh, a tall, strikingly handsome Sikh from Aithison College, Lahore was one of the finest sportsmen at Cranwell, playing in the Cricket XI, Hockey XI and setting numerous records in athletics. His compatriot, Flt.Cadet Arjan Singh, equally striking and well built, "played magnificently in the defence" in hockey for Cranwell and was awarded Blues in Athletics, Swimming and Hockey. Air Vice Marshal John Baldwin who was Commandant of the RAF College during this period, was mightily impressed by these Indian Flight Cadets who would, soon enough, prove their mettle in action during war operations, hardly three years from the time they left Cranwell.

In the decades to come, the Indian Air Force's first Air Chief Marshal, Arjan Singh would return to Cranwell as the Chief Guest of Honour to review two passing out parades, the College repeatedly saluting one of its most brilliant products.

In, September 1938, "C" Flight of No. 1 Squadron IAF with its Wapiti IIA army co-operation in biplanes moved to Miranshah, under Flying Officer "Jumbo" Majumdar, with Flying Officer

Mehar Singh on his first of many tours of duty on the North West Frontier. The high standards set by "A" Flight a year earlier in the same area and their exemplary performance was difficult to emulate but Jumbo was determined to do even more operational flying. "C" Flight in fact flew nearly 400 hours monthly, Mehar "Baba" (as he was affectionately titled by Aspy Engineer) achieving a scorching hundred hours himself in the first month. On one of his sorties, Mehar Singh and his air



Flt. Lt. M S Pujji and Hurricane IIB.

gunner Ghulam Ali had a nasty experience when, during a strafing attack on tribesmen in a particularly wild valley near Shaidar, not visited by the Army since 1890, his Wapiti was hit by bullets and fuel pipe damaged. With great skill and verve, Mehar Singh force landed the biplane with bombs still attached, up-hill on a semi-flat spur on a mountain ledge. It was late in the afternoon, Mehar Singh and Ghulam Ali extricated the Lewis gun, took refuge in a cave even as hostile tribesmen searched for them. At nightfall, the airmen walked back without maps, evading the hostiles and returned safely.

On 1 August 1940, when the Battle for France had been lost and Battle of Britain was imminent, there were almost one hundred Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (IAFVR) personnel that reported to the Selection Board at Ambala and were commissioned on the very same day. Of them, 24 were hand-picked for secondment to the Royal Air Force and within four weeks, they had sailed from Bombay on board a P&O liner being used as a troopship to England. The 24 Indian officers, to be known as the IAFVR "X" Squad, were mostly between 19 and 25 years old, having had elementary flying training at various flying clubs in India, a large number of them from Walton, Lahore. The senior most amongst them was the redoubtable Man Mohan Singh who had "won" the Aga Khan Air Race ten years later and pioneered many other flights to other parts of the world and in India. Affectionately known to the IAFVR as "Chacha" (Uncle), Man Mohan was, at 34 years old, the most mature and experienced flyer in the Squad. The Indian contingent had, in fact, arrived at the height of the Luftwaffe's blitz against England and in the midst of what was to be immortalised as the Battle of Britain. The 24 Indians were shortly moved to a Flying School some miles south of Glasgow, in Scotland. After four weeks, the IAFVR 'X' Squad was split into two, young Shivdev Singh being amongst those who started advanced flying training near Liverpool where, once again, the Luftwaffe carried out a bombing raid. After a few more months of training, the Indian Pilot Officers were posted to various RAF squadrons and Shivdev Singh found himself posted to the famous No. XV (heavy bomber) Squadron flying the Short Stirling four-engined bomber aircraft, the very first to be so-equipped in the RAF.



At a conference of IAF Squadron Commanders in 1943, at New Delhi.

Hard flying training followed and Shivdev Singh's "extraordinary performance" got him onto an operational tour very quickly. Raids over Germany included night attacks on the German submarine pens at Kiel, the bombers flying through heavy ack ack fire with searchlights lighting up the night sky. Raids on German industrial centres in the Ruhr were equally tough and Shivdev's Stirling once got battered

from flak, losing an engine, with flight controls damaged.

Of the 24 Indian pilots who had volunteered to serve with the Royal Air Force in Britain, six did not measure up to standard and were assigned other general duties. Of the 18 who then flew with the RAF, seven were selected as fighter pilots, two of them, Ranjan Dutt and Mohinder Singh Pujji, distinguishing themselves.

In Pujji's words, "I was posted to No.253 Squadron RAF, flying Hurricane IIB fighters from RAF Kenley, which is a couple of miles south of Croydon. We were a mixed bunch, with pilots also from Poland, America, Canada and Australia. Equipped with twelve machine guns, our Hurricanes were extensively flown day and night, to intercept German bombers and reconnaissance aircraft.

"I was later attached with No.43 Squadron, flying Hurricanes from Martlesham, the RAF fighter squadrons being switched from base to base every few weeks, but remaining in the Greater London area. Later, we converted to



Air Marshal Shivdev Singh.

the Spitfire Mk.V and I was promoted to Flight Commander. Our operational task now included fighter sweeps over occupied Europe and we made low-level attacks on enemy targets when we were not required to provide fighter escort to RAF bombers. During these operations, I was involved in many dog fights with Luftwaffe fighters and my total tally was two Messerschmitt Me 109s confirmed as shot down and three damaged".

Shivdev Singh, who was to have a most distinguished career in the IAF, rising to Air Marshal and becoming Vice Chief of Air Staff, in characteristic modesty, attributed his fame "to mistaken

Meanwhile, back in India, the IAF was being expanded to seven Squadrons and modernised with Hurricane fighters and Vengeance dive bombers. No.3 Squadron IAF, commanded by Sqn.Ldr. Prithipal Singh and flying Hurricane II fighter-bombers from September 1943 to January 1945 became mainstay of the North West Frontier Watch and Ward duties. For four years, with brief interruptions for conversion training or special duties for training with Army units, it carried out the W&W task and its experienced pilots became a pool from which were drawn many IAF officers to command or stiffen the new IAF squadrons in the years of great

immaculately maintained and the Squadron was adjudged the smartest unit during the IAF's 10th Anniversary parade and flypast at Ambala on 1st April 1943.

No.6 Squadron's efficiency, enthusiasm and excellent performance evoked numerous messages of praise which was to result, in November 1943, in its selection for the coming campaign in Burma, the first squadron of the newly-equipped Indian Air Force to go to War of the Second Arakan Campaign, achieving great distinction and earning the sobriquet "Eyes of the XIV Army".

Before the 1943 winter campaign began, in which Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse had "ordained" that the Indian Air Force was to go into battle with their new Hurricanes and Vengeances, he called a meeting of the seven IAF Squadron Commanders in New Delhi, four of which were ready to go into the front line, the others then converting to their new aircraft. Interestingly, of these seven Squadron Commanders of the Indian Air Force, five were Sikhs: S/L Arjan Singh (No.1 Squadron), S/L Surjit Singh Majithia (No.2 Squadron), S/L Prithipal Singh (No.3 Squadron), S/L Dalip Singh Majithia (No.4 Squadron) and S/L Mehar Singh (No.6 Squadron). The C.O.s were ordered to fly in their own aircraft from wherever they happened to be and report at Air H.Q. for the opening of the conference by the AOC-in-C. All got the signal in ample time to act on it, except for Sqn.Ldr.Mehar Singh, commanding No.6 Squadron. As recorded, "He was taking his boys to the front at the time and had only received the signal at nine o'clock on the night before he was supposed to report to Delhi. He took off at 10 p.m., on a moonless night to fly alone and without wireless aids to Delhi. He flew at fourteen thousand feet, landed at Allahabad to refuel and reached Willingdon airport, nine hundred miles



At the IAF's 10th Anniversary at Ambala, 1943: Squadron leaders Prithipal Singh, Mehar Singh, Arjan Singh and Surjit Singh Majithia.

identity, that with Chacha Man Mohan Singh" whose long and varied flying experience had resulted in the latter's immediate command of a Sunderland flying boat with RAF Coastal Command, hunting German submarines during the battle for the Atlantic. Tragically, 'Chacha' Man Mohan Singh was to be killed in action in January 1942 while gallantly rescuing Dutch civilians in the distant port of Broome, north-western Australia.

expansion. Nos. 3 and 4 Squadrons were re-equipped with the Hurricane IIC in January and June 1943 respectively but the third IAF formation to fly Hurricanes was No.6 Squadron under redoubtable Sqn.Ldr.Mehar Singh who was its commanding officer for over two years from December 1942 till end December 1944.

No. 6 Squadron had a very high serviceability record, their Hurricanes

from his starting point at 4 a.m. He was at the opening session of the conference that morning with all the others, as if nothing had happened. It was a magnificent flight. Sir Richard described it later, as "a feat of which any air force in the world would be proud".

In his classic account of the War in Burma "Defeat Into Victory", Field Marshal Sir William Slim describes his visit to No.6 Squadron and its C.O. Sqn.Ldr.Mehar Singh who were keeping up steady patrols with Tactical-Reconnaissance Hurricanes: "I was impressed by the conduct of a recce squadron of the Indian Air Force. Flying in pairs, the Indian pilots in their outmoded Hurricanes went out, time and again, in the face of overwhelming enemy fighter superiority. I looked in on the Squadron just at a time when news had come in that the last patrol had run into a bunch of *Oscars* and had been shot down. The Sikh Squadron Leader, an old friend of mine, at once took out the next patrol himself and completed the mission. His methods, rumour had it, were a little unorthodox. It was said that if any of his young pilots made a bad landing he would take them behind a *basha* and beat them! Whatever he did, it was effective, they were a happy, efficient and very gallant squadron".

In April 1944, No.6 Squadron notched a scorching 620 hours of operational flying, when the Kaladan and Mayu valleys received increased attention. Flt.Lt.Mohinder Singh Puji, one of the Flight Commanders who had earlier been with the RAF over France and the Middle East, flew as many as six sorties a day, clocking 61 operational flying hours in one month.



IAF Hurricanes, first of No. 6 Squadron under 'Baba' Mehar Singh and then No. 1 Squadron under Arjan Singh, played a major role in the Arakan and Burma campaigns.

At the beginning of June, after an incredible operational tour, No. 6 were withdrawn from the front. Squadron Leader Mehar Singh was awarded the only DSO to an Indian of the Air Force.

Mehar 'Baba' remains perhaps the greatest legend of the Indian Air Force. His extraordinary, and inspired flying skills and leadership were at their most brilliant during the traumatic months before partition of India in 1947 and then immediately thereafter, during the Kashmir operations of 1947-48. To chronicle these would fill many volumes.



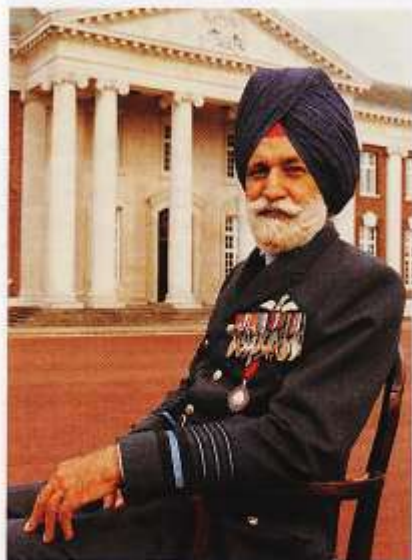


No. 1 Squadron of the Indian Air Force was to be in the thick of the vital battles of 1944, returning to war and glory under command of Sqn.Ldr.Arjan Singh. The "Tigers" had earlier been based at Kohat, operating Hawker Hurricane IIBs when during December 1943, the C-in-C Indian Army Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck visited the RAF Station and also inspected No. 1 Squadron. He was

most impressed by its standard and spirit and when Sqn.Ldr.Arjan Singh advocated the intense desire of No. 1 Squadron to go back into battle, keenly supported by the RAF Station Commander, he gave his acquiescence. Within a week of this request, No. 1 Squadron was ordered to move immediately to Imphal on the Manipur front where massive buildups were taking place on both sides of the Assam-

Burma border. The next fifteen months were to be breathless with action and epoch marking in the already chequered history of the Tiger Squadron.

No. 1 Squadron reached Imphal (Main) on 3 February 1944 and were thereafter to remain in action for a record 14 months, taking vital part in the fateful siege of Imphal followed by the trans-Chindwin and trans-Irrawaddy offenses. Once again,



Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, DFC on a visit to RAF Cranwell.

No. 1 Squadron IAF shared the base with their old colleagues-in-arms, No.28 Squadron RAF, both being Tactical Reconnaissance Units (Tac/R), co-operating closely with the Army.

No.1 Squadron under Sqn.Ldr. Arjan Singh commenced operational flying immediately, with sector reconnaissance flown on the 5 February, carrying out offensive, tactical and photographic sorties to observe Japanese movements on the Chindwin, beyond Tiddim, and as far east as the Myitkyina-Mandalay railway, much valuable information being obtained by the Squadron.

The siege of Imphal was finally broken and the Japanese 15th and 31st Divisions began to disintegrate and while still resisting, were definitely on the retreat. However, in the Pael area and the area south of Imphal, the Japanese 33rd Division hung on grimly to their positions but on 2 July, the Japanese actually discontinued their Imphal operations, and concentrated on forming defensive lines to check the Allied advance. Following opening of the Imphal-Kohima road, No. 1 Squadron's Hurricanes were involved, in addition to the tasks referred to, in reconnoitering the Japanese lines of communication in

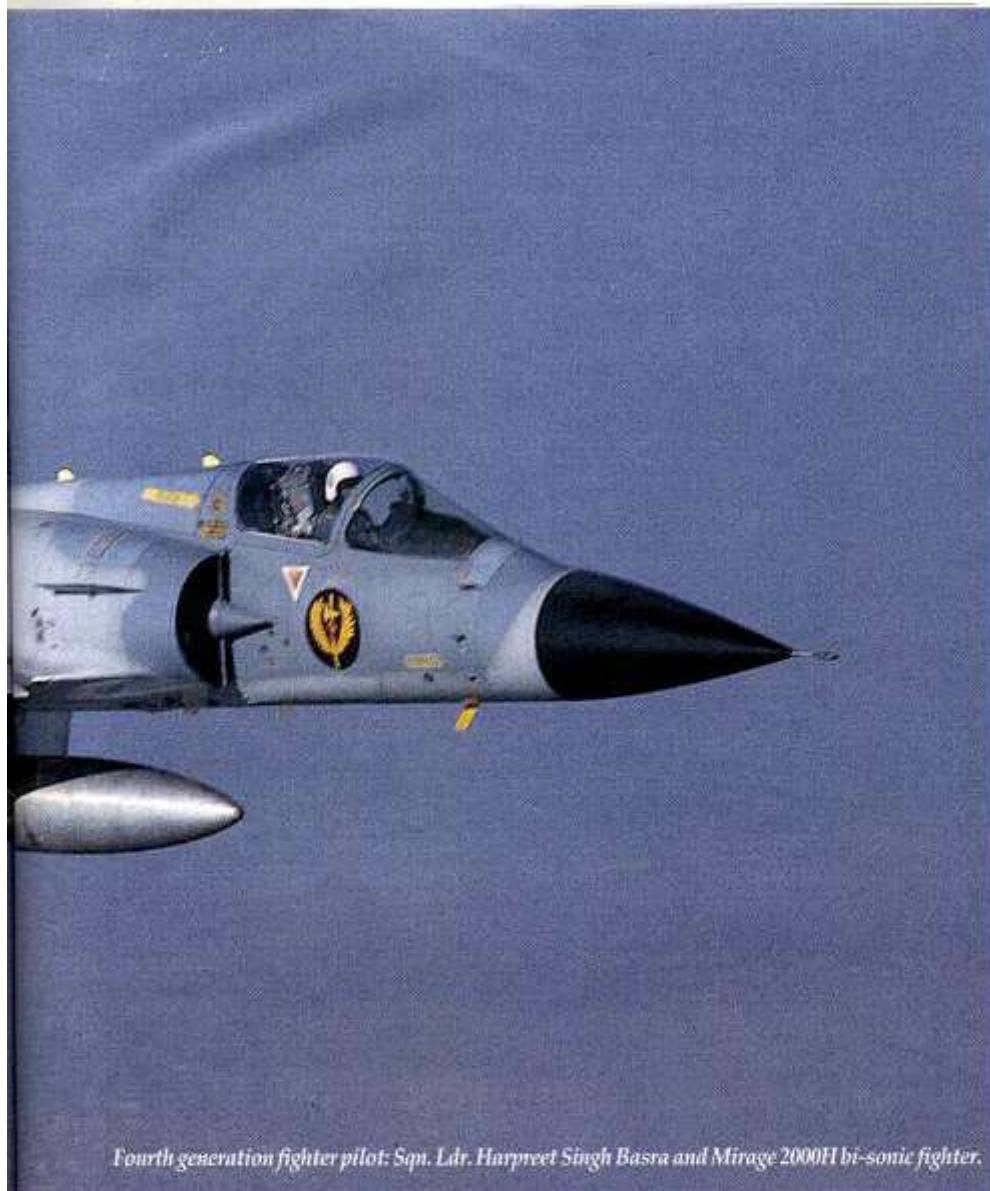


use by the retreating troops and attacking them. Sqn.Ldr. Arjan Singh's leadership had a distinct style: quiet courage, no flamboyance, firmness but with a ready smile. After the Japanese had been thrown back, in a great and signal honour to Arjan Singh and indeed the Indian Air Force itself, the Supreme Commander Lord Louis Mountbatten, personally flew into Imphal and in the presence of Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse and the assembled Squadron at the airfield, pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on Arjan Singh's tunic. In the few words of the Supreme Commander "He had done a great job".

Twenty years later, Arjan Singh was to be appointed Chief of Air Staff and led the Indian Air Force during the September 1965 war. After retiring in 1969, he served as India's ambassador in several countries and became Lt. Governor of Delhi. Most active on the Golf Course, he is still regarded by many as simply "The Chief".

The next Sikh to be Chief of Air Staff, after Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, DFC was Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh (1981-84), a highly regarded fighter pilot who had taken part in the J&K operations in 1947, raised and commanded No. 1 Squadron with the new French Mystere IVA fighter-bomber in 1957 and repeated such a pioneering task in 1963 when he raised and commanded No.28 Squadron with Russian MiG-21s, "the First Supersonics".

These are myriad examples of legendary flying Sikhs in the Indian Air Force and, indeed, in the air arms of other fighting Services in India. Flying Officer Lal Singh



Fourth generation fighter pilot: Sqn. Ldr. Harpreet Singh Basra and Mirage 2000H bi-sonic fighter.

Grewal joined the last IAF formation raised during World War II, No. 10 Squadron, with whom he flew Hurricane IICs in the Arakan in 1944-45. After the war, and



Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh in a MiG-21 cockpit.


conversion to multi-engine aircraft, he was amongst the first to fly troops into the Vale of Kashmir in October 1947 and, in November 1948, formed No.5 Squadron, the IAF's first heavy bomber unit with B-24 Liberators. In 1963, and the aftermath of the frontier war with China, Lal Singh was handpicked to establish the Aviation Research Centre (ARC) for special operations, about which very little has still been revealed. Air Marshal Lal Singh Grewal later rose to be the Vice Chief of Air Staff.

There have been other Sikh Vice Chiefs of the Air Force, including Air Marshals Shivdev Singh and Air Marshal Prem Pal Singh. The

present (April 1999) Vice Chief is Air Marshal Pritam Singh "Ben" who, in 1982, had formed the IAF's first dedicated formation aerobatic team the *Thunderbolts*, flying Hunters.

There have been many brothers who served together and distinguished themselves in the Indian Air Force and these include Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, Vr.C (currently Director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis at New Delhi) and his brother Group Captain Charanjit Singh, Vr.C who, flying Canberra bombers, carried out the deepest penetration missions of the September 1965 war.

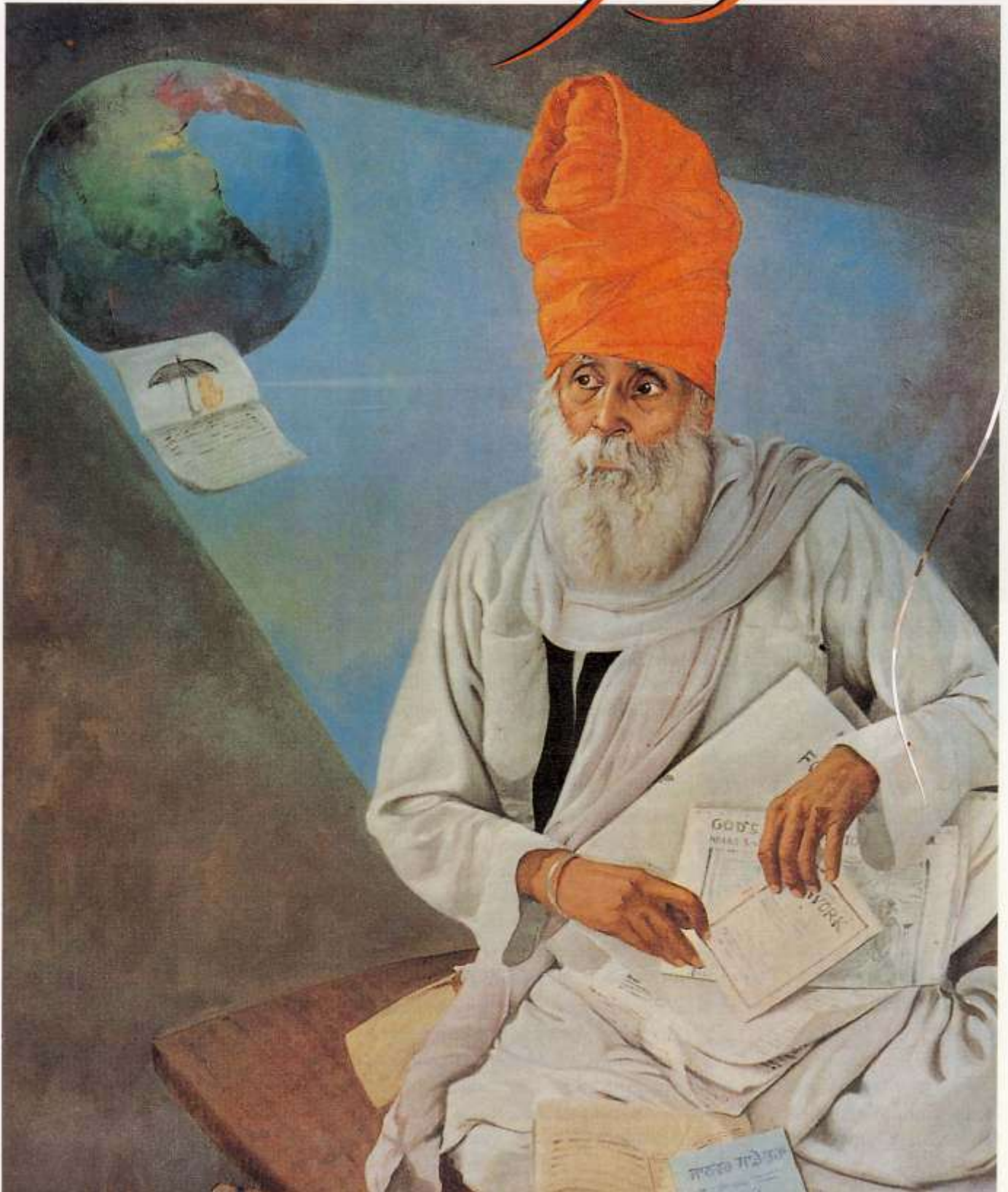
There are father and son combinations too: Air Marshal Ranjit Singh Bedi flew MiG-21s with his son, a young Flying Officer in 1992 and today, in 1999, Air Marshal Darshan Singh Basra is AOC-in-C Southern Air Command in Thiruvananthapuram while his son, Sqn.Ldr. Harpreet Singh Basra has been flying the frontline Mirage 2000H bi-sonic multi-role fighter.

Some of the highest gallantry awards have been won by Sikhs of the Indian Air Force. The first, and only Param Vir Chakra, was won by Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon, then flying Gnat fighters with No. 18 Squadron in December 1971. Based with the detachment at Srinagar for air defence of the Valley, Nirmaljit was at operational readiness when the airfield came under attack by six enemy Sabres. Despite the extreme vulnerability, Flg.Offr. Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon took off while under attack, and immediately engaged a pair of the attacking Sabres. In the sharp and intense air combat engagement, he secured cannon hits on one Sabre and set another on fire. Completely outnumbered, his aircraft repeatedly hit by enemy fire, the Gnat went out of control while at treetop height and he was killed in the crash. Nirmaljit, whose father Warrant Officer Trilok Singh had just retired from the IAF, was posthumously awarded the PVC .

(Excerpted from Pushpinder Singh's forthcoming "History of the Indian Air Force")

THE SAINT OF PINGALWARA

BHAGAT



PURAN SINGH



Entrance to Pingalwara (above) and the way it began (below).



Dr. Bibi Inderjit Kaur took over as Life President of the All India Pingalwara Society in 1992. Getting her MBBS Degree in 1967 from Patiala Medical School, she first worked as a gazetted doctor and then joined her father's clinic at Sangrur. The first spiritual interaction with Bhagat Puran Singh was in 1975 and was a turning point in her life. Like a devoted daughter, she looked after Bhagatji in his failing health and their common concern for the poor, the handicapped, disabled and mentally retarded strengthened the filial bond between the spiritual father and the devoted daughter.

At Pingalwara, in Amritsar and elsewhere in the area, the wondrous legacy of Bhagat Puran Singh lives on. We share some first-person accounts of the multi-dimensional personality, one of the true saints of our times.

As Prof. Pritam Singh of Patiala wrote, "Throughout his life Bhagat Puran Singh remained a living legend in the Punjab, the modern version of Bhai Kanahayya the founder of *Sewa Panthi*, our precursor of the Red Cross."

Bhai Kanahayya was a Sikh of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who outlived his Guru and joined the entourage of Guru Gobind Singh. The Bhai took upon himself the duty of providing drinking water to the Guru's camp. In one of the Sikh-Mughal skirmishes, he was also seen offering water to the injured enemy. The Sikh soldiers were furious and dragged him to the Guru for suitable action. To their amazement, the Guru not only blessed him for his true perception of the Sikh faith but also gave him healing ointment for the benefit of those who needed it the most. Since then, the *Sewa Panthi* Sikhs have been known for their humanitarian services,

which transcend all barriers of colour, caste, creed and country.

Bhagat Puran Singh represented, in practice, the same spiritual and moral values that Bhai Kanahayya imbibed under the guidance of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. A visit to his Pingalwara (the refuge of the handicapped) which was conceived and founded by him in Amritsar, shows how the compassionate soul of this saintly person had spread its protective wings over the many hundreds of unfortunate persons suffering from incurable diseases and with no one to look after them. The Pingalwara provides an asylum to the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded, the completely deranged, the derelict, forsaken women and abandoned children. For such people, Bhagatji's unique institution remains a charitable hospital, rather a nursing home, with free medicines, boarding, lodging and clothing. Any person, coming from any part of the country, whom society had thrown out of its pale, was sure to find a welcoming godfather. For Bhagatji, all persons suffering from physical or mental ailments were human beings in distress needing immediate succour.



Pingalwara serves one and all, without thought of creed, community or race. There are some 650 inmates at the various wards, with over ninety per cent of them from outside the Punjab, largely from central and eastern India and even Bangladesh. Where does the help come from? In the words of one Pingalwara volunteer, "We just keep doing our work and as long as the Sangat is there, we will never lack for anything".



The main ward at Pingalwara, housing the epileptic and mentally ill, a rehabilitation centre for abandoned women, where they are given vocational training like candle making, embroidery, stitching and sewing. On the upper floor is a school for mentally retarded children of 2-12 years age. In keeping with Bhagat Puran Singh's sensitivity against wastage of natural resources, there are solar arrays for heating purposes and power generation while horse-drawn tongas bring children to school.



"The hands that serve are holier than the lips that pray" was Bhagatji's maxim. Volunteers at the langar kitchen: over one thousand are fed four times a day: daliya at 0600, milk at 0900, lunch at 1130 and dinner at 1800 hours.

He was once asked whether he had any religion-wise record of inmates of his Pingalwara: his reply was that he had never cared to know, but could tell with certainty that non-Sikh inmates far outnumbered their Sikh brethren.

"And what about the religion-wise ratio of the contributors"?

"Perhaps 90 per cent or more among the contributors are Sikhs, but, everyone is God's child".

Time was when Bhagatji used to go about seeking those who were shelterless so he could provide some succour. In fact, that is how he started his life of service at Lahore. He had adopted a forsaken, spastic child and for the next 14 years, a tall, lanky, poorly dressed person with unkempt beard moving about in streets, with a growing boy clinging to his neck, became a familiar scene for the people of Lahore. Since then, the situation has changed tremendously. The inmates of Pingalwara in Amritsar are now provided with better perches than human backs: the wards of the spacious, double-storeyed building overflow with patients. Bhagat Puran Singh would share the same food as was provided to all inmates and more often than not, sleep on the floor using the same blankets.

The Bhagat never married: his decision to remain single was deliberate because the avocation that he had chosen required total dedication. No marriage could have survived the stresses and strains that he had to undergo during his life.

"Who was responsible for driving you to this life of a roving mendicant"?

"God himself", he said and continued thus; "Born as Ramji Das, in a rich money-lending Hindu family of Village Rajewal, near Samrala in District Ludhiana, I was to receive a revelation early in life. Once, going to my village on foot, I was forced to spend a night in a Hindu temple, which I voluntarily swept-clean and washed, but when it was time for a meal, the priests ate in my presence without bothering to share even their left-overs, even though they knew that I would sleep with an empty stomach. As luck would have it, I had to spend another night in similar circumstances at a way-side Sikh Gurdwara. I was a total stranger there, did not belong to their faith, but was served, without discrimination, a wholesome meal which was rounded off with a glass of milk. This contrast in the attitude of the two sets of people living in their respective places of worship, planted in my young mind the seeds of the Sikh faith, from which I learnt the lessons of social service, self-sacrifice and dignity of human life. My contact with the Head Granthi of Guru Arjun's Dera Sahib Gurdwara at Lahore, Bhai Teja Singh convinced me to dedicate my entire life to that most satisfying avocation in the world—alleviation of human suffering, howsoever small the measure of one's

contribution. I have swept the excreta of patients with my own hands and do so, even now, I have picked up waste paper and fruit-skins from the roads and do so even now; I have carried mud and bricks on my head for the buildings of Pingalwara. I have begged food for the inmates from door to door and do so even now; I sit outside the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras in sun and rain and collect money for my Ashram. I do not feel ashamed for all this. In fact, I get in return affection and respect. I have no personal demands but my demands for Pingalwara are unending and enormous. Much of my time is taken by other activities relating to the inculcation of social and ecological awareness among our people and that requires money, which I collect from the public. My demands, howsoever heavy, have always been met generously by the public because people are confident that behind my craze for collection is an unselfish and noble cause. Mine has been a full and meaningful life — a Guru directed journey, through the service of humanity”.

Meeting Bhagatji was always an instructive experience. Full of energy and upto date with ideas culled from books and newspapers, he had a socially relevant advice for everyone. “Plant trees, do not cut them” and then would

“Produce less children”, “Do not throw fruit skins on the road” — the list of such Do’s and Don’ts went on and on.

Bhagat Puran Singh was a voracious reader. He employed three readers to provide him with cuttings of socially useful and informative writings from national newspapers and journals and reproduced them on any sort of paper in his own press in the form of handbills, booklets, pamphlets, for free distribution. Books published by him, such as the biographies of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and the English translation of the Japu of Guru Nanak, some of them as many as 500 pages, were distributed free, in spite of the fact that the amount spent on them ran into lakhs of rupees. “Money comes to me in small amounts from so many people. I give it back to them in the form of character-building and nation-building literature”, explained Bhagat Puran Singh in justification of such expenditure.

It is not easily possible to sum up a multi-dimensional institution that Bhagat Puran Singh surely was. Had the Bhagat been a little more exposed to the clinical standards of cleanliness and business management and had the information media of our country been a little more observant of the constructive and inspiring voluntary servants of society, instead of over-indulgence in the game



Old-style printing presses work continuously at Pingalwara : there are 19 such machines, deliberately kept thus to maximise employment.

follow an informed lecture on the economic and ecological advantages of trees. “Always travel by train; avoid bus travel”, and then he went on to tell you how deleterious to health carbon monoxide exhausts are and painted an alarming picture of the steeply mounting toll of human lives in road accidents; “Beware of the impending doom of our beautiful world by nuclear and chemical arms”, and you heard from him a horrifying description of the devastating prowess of the malignant fission of the atomic nucleus.



Women and girls, abandoned and hopeless, brutally thrown into trains that terminate at Amritsar or brought by trucks coming from all parts of India, find asylum at Pingalwara : seen here, Sunan from Madhya Pradesh, Molina from Bangladesh and others. “It is a sacred task to raise their morale, infuse new spirit and confidence, to live as self-respecting people”.

of inflating and deflating by turns, there is every reason that Bhagat Puran Singh’s name should have been the common property of the whole world, such became that of Mother Teresa.

As written elsewhere, “The sage of Amritsar was to the unattended here which Mother Teresa was to the poor orphans of Calcutta. The difference was, of course, resources — and media exposure”.

BHAGAT PURAN SINGH'S VITAL CONCERN ON ECOLOGY

Bhagat Puran Singh's dedication to the service of the sick, the disabled and destitute is universally acknowledged, but lesser known is his pioneering concern on ecology, for survival of not just homo-sapiens but of all creation on this planet. Bhagat Puran Singh was a pathfinder who raised an impassioned cry about jeopardy looming over the earth, while most carry on in the euphoria of ignorance. He had foreseen the dangers emanating from indiscriminate industrialisation, the so called "boons" of modern life.

In one of his pamphlets (in Gurumukhi) *The Knull* which he distributed free and would insist that people read between its lines, he wrote that the reckless pursuit of technology for its own sake would devastate all the treasures of this earth and ruin it completely within a lifetime. The pamphlet gravely warned against inordinate use of modern transport run on hydro-carbons and exhorted people to travel on foot or by bicycle. Bhagatji would advise his followers to cultivate a habit of walking regularly for 8½ miles a day so as to keep healthy and physically fit.

Bhagatji regarded the earth as a holy shrine of the Lord, after Guru Nanak's concept "Within the Universe, Earth was created to be a Shrine", and polluting its atmosphere was an act of sacrilege. He perceived the presence of God pulsating through every insignificant factor of this planet. His passion for the protection and safety of the earth had evolved into a sort of new religion that verily cherished the well-being of all His spirit of care was so extensive that it encompassed everything – sensate or insensate – on earth. Besides his fellow beings, he would feel equal kinship for the birds, the beasts, the trees, the flowers, the hills, the blue sky, the dancing rivulets and all that the human eye could see. He would be anguished at the sight of a wood-cutter chopping branches of a tree. He once gave a large sum to a cutter who threatened to axe down the trees grown by his mother.

His major apprehension was the gradual extinction of present civilisation through indiscriminate felling of trees. Written on a wall of the Pingalwara Complex, he warned that the green forest cover in India was being reduced at the rate of ten lac and fifty thousand hectares every year. If such process of hewing the jungles continued, India would turn into a vast desert by the year 2010. Such realisations created horrifying imagination. Bhagatji explained through his numerous pamphlets and posters, that the toxic waste produced by industry and poisonous fumes of fuel and chemicals was taking earth to the brink of extinction.

Dr. Inderjit Kaur



Ambulance "donated by the Sikh Community of Hong Kong", alongside horse-drawn tonga at Pingalwara; Bhagat Puran Singh urged the people to walk, bicycle or take animal-drawn carts instead of driving in motor vehicles whose ever-increasing output of hydrocarbons would have severe health and economic effects on mankind.



Dr. Inderjit Kaur, with inmates of the female ward at Pingalwara.



The Pingalwara Trust also runs a number of Primary Schools in and around Amritsar for the children of slum dwellers and the very poor. One such is some 4 kilometres away from Pingalwara near the village of Masoolpura and the slums close to the Punjab Mandi Board where over 100 children of 5 to 8 years are given free schooling and two meals a day.

V.N.Narayanan, then Editor-in-Chief of *The Tribune* and later of *The Hindustan Times* wrote about Bhagat Puran Singh with great reverence.

"He looks like the rishies of old and the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh — a veritable combination of courage and compassion, a total embodiment of unselfishness and service. Bhagat Puran Singh is what India's distilled wisdom and rich heritage are all about.

There he sits, at the entrance of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, with loads and loads of paper around him. In front of him is a brass vessel as nondescript as the man's physical appearance. Visiting devotees to the shrine stop, pay silent obeisance, put some cash into the tray and move on. Bhagat Puran Singh neither seeks nor acknowledges their greetings.

The money piles up, but the sage notes it not, but along comes a seeker and the sage welcomes with open arms.

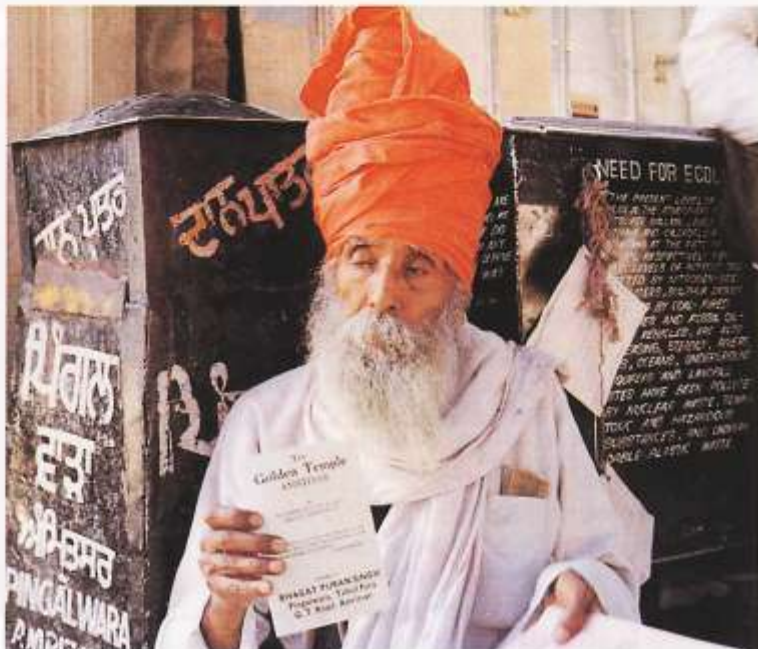
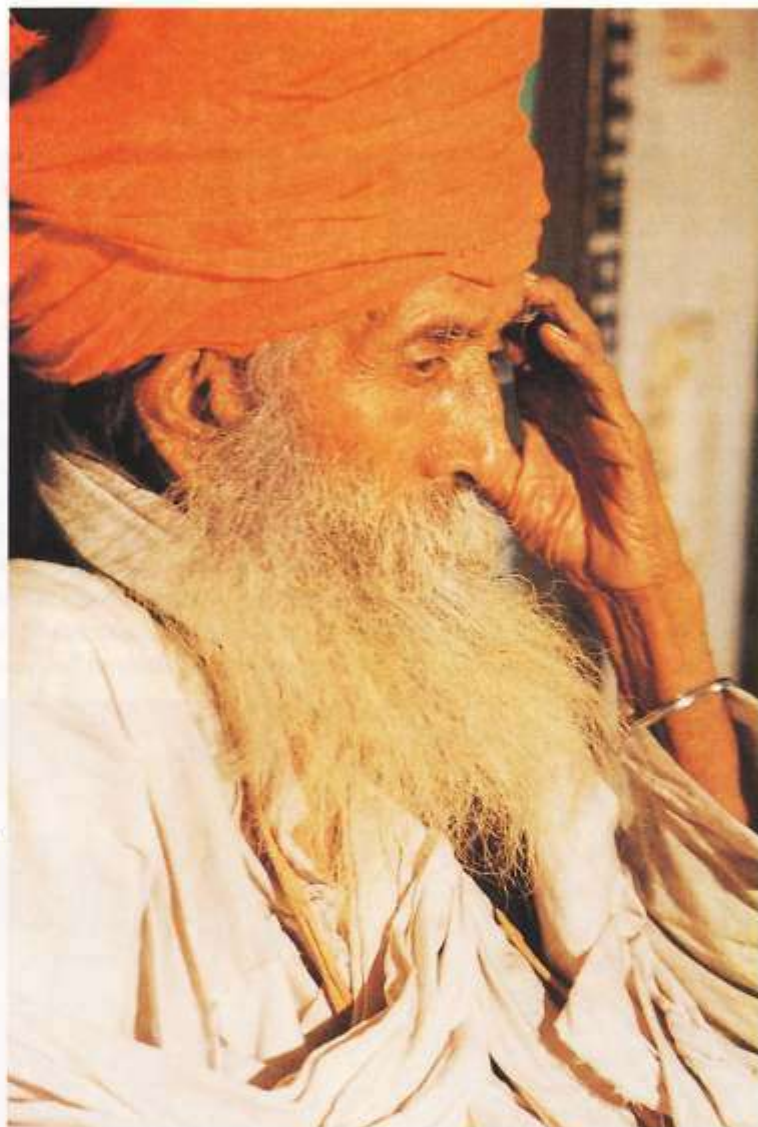
TOUCH OF ETERNITY

There is spontaneous rapport and the generation gap is closed. You wonder what this wizened old man has — if anything at all — to say and minutes later there is another kind of wonder : how is it that this frail man of near ninety is so well versed in ecology, environment problems, the Tehri dam, Narmada and deficit financing. The words of Guru Nanak in *Var Asa* flash through the mind :

"He who attains humility through love and devotion to God, Such a one may attain emancipation".

He is gentle, soft and sublimely uncritical of anything around him. To him, all of God's creations are sacred, be they animal, vegetable or mineral or whatever. He collects, as he walks along the streets of Amritsar, pebbles, horse-shoes, peculiarly shaped stones, and a lot else ...

The picking of pebbles on the street is very symbolic. After all, for close to seven decades Bhagatji had been picking up human pebbles cast away by a cruel destiny or an uncaring society. God helps those who help themselves; Bhagat Puran Singh has vowed to help those who cannot help themselves.



He is the saint of our times. Contemporary history has few names (I have Mother Teresa on my mind when I write this) which can boast of such relentless service to humanity as that of Bhagat Puran Singh. *"Binu seva phal kabhu na pawasi seva karni sari"*. Talking to him is enlightening. He has very simple remedies for almost all the nation's ills. All perfectly practical and easily enforceable – but in a nation of Bhagat Puran Singhs.

A few public-spirited Indians in the USA started a movement to recommend the Nobel Peace Prize for Bhagatji. He would be the last person to be enthusiastic about it. He knows the difference between the emancipated soul and the Good Samaritan, the difference that would explain why Martin Luther King's non-violence struggle was worthy of the Nobel Award, and why it was unworthy of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha and Ahimsa.

Meanwhile, the saint went on unworried by the mess caused by our leaders to the country.

Bhagat Puran Singh would echo Guru Nanak Dev ...

*"I have learnt by the light shed by the Master, perfectly endowed;
Recluse, hero, celibate or sanyasi –
No one may expect to earn merit
Without dedicated service –
Service which is the essence of purity".*

This was written in 1991. When V.N.Narayanan last met Bhagatji, at Chandigarh's PGI, he was in deep coma "I was admitted to his bedside as in a trance I moved my hand towards him and thought his own hands moved up to touch mine. It was the touch of the Lord himself".

COSMIC BOND

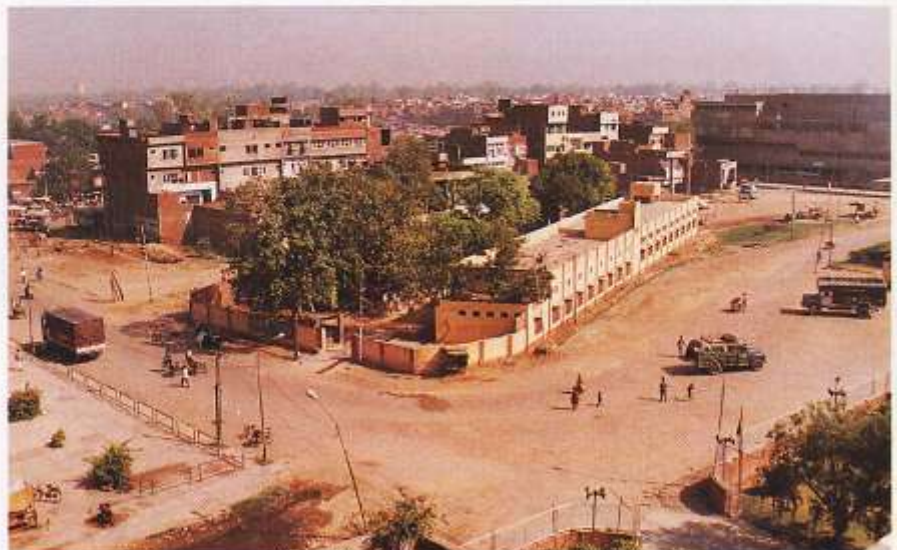
Some associations are dictated by cosmic design and these then channelise future ideologies and perceptions in a definite manner. My association with Bhagat Puran Singh was one such. I cannot assign any tag or title to it, but this was a strong bond.

He was Bhagatji for rest of the world, but for me, he was Babaji, a name which I had affectionately coined for him at an early age.

I was into my teens when first taken to meet Bhagatji by my grandfather, while visiting Ferozepore. Being so young, I interpreted religion in my own terms then and had scant respect for any other interpretation. So grandfather redefined the personality "He is an unusual social worker". This was different, and now I was interested. After school, I was taken to meet the gentleman. Both *Bauji* and this unusually dressed Sikh person were sunning themselves in the verandah and were engrossed in deep discussion. He was tall and thin, wearing a freshly washed and ironed white khadi kurta and loose pyjamas. A kirpan slung from a black strap contrasted starkly with the whiteness, as did the saffron *parna* loosely wrapped around his head. It was lesser in length than a *pagri*, but being coarse in



At the Ram Talai ward, now renamed after Mata Mehtab Kaur.



View of the Mahan Singh Gate, now called the Piara Singh Ward.

material, gave the appearance of a mountain-sized pagri on top of his frail head, with a flowing white beard beneath it.

I was still not impressed until he pinned me to my seat with his sharp grey eyes and started conversing with me in English.

"So, what do you aim to do in life?"

"Become a surgeon," I said shortly.

"But I hear that you write well".

I simply shrugged my shoulders.

"This world needs more writers, who can make other people aware of what is happening around us and what all needs to be done".

I heard him quietly and respectfully.

"What about marriage", he questioned.

"You tell me Babaji, why haven't *you* married"? was my retort. I was very anti-marriage then.

"Of course I am married — but to my work".



Bhagat Puran Singh and his Piara.

"What kind of work"? I asked, but then I had no inkling of what ever he was doing.

Babaji then suggested that I walk with him to the Gurdwara, where people were waiting to donate something for his institution "Pingalwara" (literally, a house of pingalas, or the handicapped).

Along the way, whenever he saw a stone or a piece of broken glass on the road, he would pick it and leave it at one side, "this might hurt someone's foot or puncture a vehicle's tyre".

And if he saw paper left on the road, he would pick that up too, saying that it could be recycled.

He abhorred the use of plastics and environment polluting vehicles. He said this without hesitation, to whosoever visited him, whether it was the Chief Minister of Punjab or Khushwant Singh or whosoever.

There were heaps of clothing of all shapes and sizes, which he was collecting for the inmates of Pingalwara. "There are women who have been abandoned, raped or are widows, even unmarried mothers. They come and stay in Pingalwara till I can find a substitute home for them", Babaji stated. Each one in the crowd was eager to have a word with him, or give him donations for the Pingalwara, and he personally wrote out the receipts. I watched the scenario quietly. It was slowly seeping into my conscious mind this man's stature belied his appearance.

When the crowd around him receded, he continued with his advice :

"You must take up writing seriously. Secondly, you must marry, but marry a puran Gursikh". I nodded my head slowly. This first meeting with him affected me greatly and left an indelible impression of what true service towards humanity and society really meant. The magnitude of his endeavour, undertaken single-handedly, was to strike me with much greater force, but many years later.



Babaji reading one of his sermons on a wall near the Darbar Sahib.

I learnt that Bhagat Puran Singh was born a hindu and was named Ramji Das in his childhood before his mission rechristened him and remodelled his personality. Growing up in village Rajewal in Ludhiana district, he belonged to a well-to-do family. He was deeply influenced by his mother's ideology at a very tender age, and imbibed her generosity, warmth and high principles, which multiplied with age and lifted his stature so as to place him somewhere between the soul and the over-soul. Ramji Das was preparing for his entrance examination to college, when by a single stroke of fate, his father Chhibu Mal died and the mother and son were left virtually penniless. They left for Lahore and took shelter in Gurdwara Dera Sahib. Ramji Das got employed as a helper in the Gurdwara langar. Sikhism was not new for him as he had leanings towards this faith from a very early age. He soon became a Sikh and was named Puran Singh, a name he hugged and whatever it represented metaphorically, all his life.

Bhagat Puran Singh's mother, Mehtab Kaur continued in frail health for sometime but soon passed away. Puran Singh was left alone. He was passing through a void, when he saw an abandoned child left on the steps leading to Gurdwara Dera Sahib. The child of four was mentally and physically handicapped and suffering from diarrhoea. Puran Singh felt an overpowering surge of love and pity for the child, picked him up, washed him, fed him and then named him Piara (loved one). Thus started a long journey of service rendered to humanity, self-sacrifice, the establishment of Pingalwara (home for the handicapped) and a continuous effort to instill social and religious values in humans at large without alienating them as different sects. He practised his ideas zealously, even as he satiated his hunger for all-encompassing knowledge by reading books on all sorts of subjects at different libraries. This pattern continued until India's partition left him homeless again and he left Lahore for Amritsar in 1947.

As a refugee, carrying Piara on his back, he camped at the Khalsa College, where he helped other refugees suffering from a cholera epidemic. After the camp was wound up, Bhagatji found that Piara had brothers and sisters, old or

the fold of Pingalwara. As a result the number of wards or Pingalwara's sub-branches, increased : the Ram Talai ward, Mahan Singh Gate ward, Pandori Waraich branch and the one at Goindwal Sahib came into being.

Throughout my schooling, and later in college, Bhagatji and I kept in touch with each other. Invariably there would be the local Pingalwara representative standing at our gate, bearing a note from Babaji along with some books just published by the Pingalwara press, which he wanted me to read and then react on.

I would go through the books dutifully and then write to him. He would never, or hardly ever, write himself but instead would select passages relevant to the theme he had in mind from different sources and then bring them together in the form of an article, and publish it at his press.

Some years on, when I was writing for Chandigarh newspapers, my contemporaries would refer to Bhagatji as an "eccentric genius", but factually, they are eccentrics like him who make the world a better place.

In the years that followed, we met just three or four times again, but kept in touch and met again many years later, after I had got married and settled in Delhi.

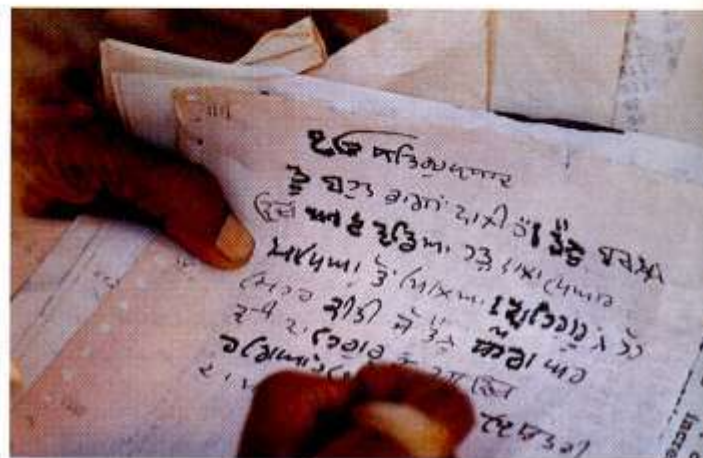


Bhagat Puran Singh's writing material : a Kalam and ink in a tin pot....

disabled like him, who too had become dependent on him. So the foundation of Pingalwara was unconsciously laid, with some help from others but continued to be nomadic in nature for sometime.

The land where the present Pingalwara stands (near the main bus stop in Amritsar) was purchased in the early 1950s with some help from the Ministry of Rehabilitation. Bhagatji's dream started unfolding here. The main wards were built here, while with aid from various institutions and individuals, other wards came to be added over the next years.

At all times, Bhagatji would be serving the helpless, the sick, the mental wrecks, the lepers, welcoming them into



....Babaji writing for Reema.

Television had by now entered our lives in a big way. Subconsciously, I had nurtured the idea of making documentary films for quite sometime and there was also a fixation in the mind that if I switched from the print media to T.V. journalism, I would embark on this career by first making a documentary on Bhagat Puran Singh.

In the summer of 1992, I called Babaji and told him that I wanted to meet with him. By this time, the idea of making a documentary film on Bhagat Puran Singh was taking clear shape and I was engaged in working out plans with my director and rest of the team. We would have to work day and night to finish the work as per schedule, as it was within a very tight budget.

For my groundwork, I reached Amritsar to meet Babaji, to take his formal permission and to have a general idea of what I wanted to capture on camera.

As was my habit, I touched his feet in deep reverence. This time I found he had aged considerably and took some time to place me.

"It's Reema, Babaji From Ferozepore"

He blessed me fondly and introduced me to those around him. "meri beti hai...."

But then everyone he introduced was his son, his daughter, sister or brother. But the place that Piara Singh occupied in his heart, no one else could. This crippled, deaf and dumb person was his most precious being and it is because of him that Pingalwara owes its identity "If I go anywhere, Piara becomes very sad and refuses to eat anything", Babaji confided laughingly.

Babaji took me on a tour of Pingalwara, called out to each inmate with great affection and told me about each person's background, their problems, and as to how he was trying to deal with them. He then asked a veteran worker in Pingalwara to show me the rest of the place.



Babaji and Reema in Amritsar, 1992.

"I am not young any more, and grow tired very fast", he said in a breathless voice.

"I have made you tired", I said apologetically.

"No, no, I have to go to the Gurdwara Sahib and sit there till the evening". He then gathered Piara in a hand-cart which is now being pushed by sevaks, and went to the Harmandir Sahib, where he sat surrounded by large black trunks which carried his messages scrawled in white paint.

A steel *bata*, a hollow utensil, was placed next to him for donations which the Sangat would willingly make for the Pingalwara.

In return, Babaji would distribute books, pamphlets, or

broad sheets which were printed on recycled paper, covering a wide range of subjects ranging from religion, the environment, to pollution, politics, family roles, the society and so on.

He would invariably be at the Golden Temple till late evenings and only return to the main Pingalwara building at night. Babaji never slept more than four to five hours a day. The zest for goodness and service to humanity was pursued with single-minded determination, which was incredible for his (or any) age. I then told him the purpose of my visit and he laughed.

"A film on me why? I am doing no great work, just a duty, fulfilling a vow which my mother had taken from me".

His humbleness, his modesty made his stature even more daunting. It was incredible that he gave himself no credit for the herculean task which he was undertaking.

Soon, I brought my team and carried out the filming for three days and nights, all the while trying not to tire Bhagatji. We managed to cover all the wards that he had opened, and met all kinds of inmates who were living there.

We also traced Babaji's personal history after his arrival in Amritsar in 1947, along with his very personal thoughts about his childhood, his mother, his self-education. I do not know whether we were able to do justice to this great man's life. How I wish he was alive so that he could see what had been made on him, and tell me how I could improve upon this. One can only pray that the institution which he literally carved out of his body and soul, will progress from strength to strength and so keep this superhuman's spirit and memory alive ☪

Reema Anand

Reema Chadha (nee Anand) was born on 4 June 1964 and went to school at St. Joseph's Convent, Ferozepore. After college in Jullundur, where she got her Masters degree in English Literature, she taught at the Institute there and started regular contributions to newspapers from the early 80s. Her selected poems were published in three volumes in 1980, '82 and '87. In 1989 she married Amit Singh Chadha, a Constitutional & International Lawyer from Harvard. They now have three children and live in New Delhi.

Reema first met Bhagat Puran Singh when she was 13 and was overwhelmed by his devotion to humanity. In 1988 she started to plan a documentary film on Bhagatji which was completed in 1992, just a few weeks before he passed away.

Sikhs in the South Pacific

With over a century of migration beyond the South Asian Sub Continent there are now some two million Sikhs permanently settled around the world.

This is the first of a series on the Sikh Diaspora....

The Dominion of New Zealand, an island nation in the South Pacific some 1000 miles (1600 km.) south east of Australia, is a member of the British Commonwealth, with a mixed population of about 3.5 million. The two main islands — the North and South — are separated by the Cook Strait and its geographical isolation has resulted in its charming cultural, social and economic characteristics.

The vast majority of New Zealanders are of British-origin, while the original, indigenous, Maori inhabitants number some ten per cent. The balance are Pacific Islanders, Chinese and Indians, there being a comparatively large number of Sikhs amongst the latter.

Similar to the Punjab, New Zealand has a developed market economy, largely based on agriculture, small-scale industries and services. Agricultural produce such as cheese, butter, apples, pears, meat and wool are the main export items while the raising of sheep and pasture feeding is a major activity. Another activity shared with India and the Punjab is the great interest in field hockey and cricket, while New Zealand's small, but well trained and motivated army fought alongside Indian troops with great distinction in both the First and Second World Wars. In fact, the 2nd New Zealand and 4th Indian Divisions were regarded as the "best" Divisions in the Commonwealth.

The earliest known Sikh settler to arrive in New Zealand was Phuman Singh, who came via Australia in 1890 and was thereafter joined by his brother Bir Singh. The brothers were from the Moga area in the Punjab and while Phuman Singh eventually married an English nurse, Bir Singh married a local Maori woman and their

descendants are well known in the community.

Thereafter, Sikh settlers arrived in various waves, some of whom had at first gone further east in the South Pacific, mainly to Fiji, while others were from Britain, East Africa, Singapore, Canada and Malaya. More recent settlers are directly from India, and are mostly professionals.

Sikhs in New Zealand today number some 8000, spread through the North and South Islands, but are concentrated in the Auckland area, followed by Hamilton, Wellington and parts of the King County and Bay of Plenty. There are two gurdwaras in the Auckland area, one in Bombay (a market gardening area south of Auckland), the oldest one being in Tauranga while the one at Wellington is reputedly the southern-most Gurdwara in the world's Southern Hemisphere.

Profiles of well known Sikhs in New Zealand make interesting reading:

Narindarpal Singh Bhalla was born at Kamoke village, District Gujranwala, West Punjab. At the time of partition his family moved to Hoshiarpur and in 1950 he joined his father in Singapore. His first career was in teaching. Thereafter, from 1966 to 1987, he served in the Singapore



Narindarpal Singh Bhalla

Armed Forces, retiring as a senior army officer. Concurrent to his military posts, he served as Honorary Aide-de-Camp to the President of the Singapore Republic for 12 years. Narindarpal first emigrated to Canada before deciding to settle in New Zealand, where he now plays an active part in community work. He has been



Dr. Anoop Singh Bedi

The vast majority of New Zealanders are of British-origin, while the original indigenous, Maori inhabitants number some ten per cent. The balance are Pacific Islanders, Chinese and Indians, there being a comparatively large number of Sikhs amongst the latter.



Ganges Singh Birk

a counsellor, translator, guide and advisor to the numerous Punjabi families that have arrived in Auckland. Between his visits to hospitals and prisons in the greater Auckland area, Narindarpal finds time to sit on the governing boards of two schools, and is a Counsellor of the Auckland School Trustees Association. He is currently the Treasurer of Singapore Club in Auckland.

Ganges Singh Birk, QSM, JP was born 5 December 1936 on board the ship SS "Ganges" while at sea, even as his parents were migrating from India to Fiji. Thus his name! Ganges' early education was in Fiji and in 1955, he passed his Senior Cambridge University Entrance Examination. During the latter part of 1960 he migrated to New Zealand and established his own business.

However, from 1965 to 1993 he was employed by Alcan New Zealand Limited, retiring as Department Manager. He was also a director of Alcan Fiduciaries Limited, and managing director G.B. Singh & Co. Limited.

Ganges Singh has been actively involved with a large number of Community groups and was made life member for the Northern Distribution Union, New Zealand Indian Central Association and Pukekahi Indian Association. His contributions and services have been recognised with the award of the Queen Service Medal (QSM) in 1991 (first Punjabi/Sikh to be awarded such a Royal honour in NZ). He is a Justice of Peace and marriage celebrant. Ganges Singh has received merit awards from the NZ Indian Central Association, Fiji Association 1991, and is a founder member of the New Zealand Sikh Society.

Ganges Singh and his wife live on a farm at Pukekohe, south of Auckland. They have three children and four grandchildren.

Dr. Anoop Singh Bedi was born on 7 October 1937 at Rawalpindi. His early education took him to the RIMC, Dehra Dun and later to the Lawrence School, Sanawar. In 1958 he joined Khalsa College, Amritsar where he took a degree in Agriculture.

After a brief stint as a farmer and an aviator at Jullunder, Anoop moved to Edinburgh in Scotland to continue further studies in the field of Agriculture. In 1964 he took M.Sc. and in 1967 took a Ph.D, both degrees in the faculty of Agriculture from the same University.

Early in 1968, Dr. Bedi was offered the position of Scientist with the then Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in New Zealand and so moved "down under"! His primary field of research was potatoes.

In 1979 he resigned from his position as head of Potato Research to establish his own Seed Company, developing and fostering potato production from "True Potato Seed" (TPS), a revolutionary method of growing potatoes from TPS which significantly reduced production costs and was particularly suited for developing nations of the world.

Anoop has always held the view that developed nations should conduct trade with developing nations and should give aid only when it was critically essential. With this philosophy in mind, he has devoted his energies to fostering trade with India and moved into the field of import and retail. At one time he and his wife ran a total of 11 stores throughout New Zealand, offering to the public of New Zealand handicrafts and products produced by the cottage industries of India.

Dr. Anoop Singh Bedi now resides in Wellington, even while his two daughters are currently working in India, learning about their heritage and wisdom from the land of their forefathers.

Dr. Harbans Singh Aulakh was born in village Aulakh Uthar, District Lahore on 15 October 1940. His early schooling was at Amritsar whereas for his tertiary education he attended Khalsa College, Amritsar (1956-62). In 1976 he was awarded his Ph.D in Economics by the Punjab University, Chandigarh.



Dr. Harbans Singh Aulakh

Dr. Harbans Singh Aulakh lectured in economics at the Khalsa College Amritsar, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar before joining the United Nations Development Programme as Assistant Director and Head of Economics Division (UNIN) at Lusaka, Zambia. He served in this capacity from 1979 to 1988.

In early 1988, Dr. Harbans Singh took over as Chief Economist with the Electricity Supply Association of New Zealand and from 1995 onwards has been with the Ministry of Commerce, Government of New Zealand, Wellington.

Dr. Harbans Singh Aulakh now resides in Wellington, his son and two daughters being graduates in medicine from New Zealand but working in Australia.

Dr. Harbans Singh Aulakh is a devoted Sikh and a firm believer in the Sikh way of life, having been instrumental in establishing the Gurdwara in Wellington.

Santokh Singh Bhullar was born on 20 June 1940 at village Mahmudpura, District Amritsar. His early schooling was at Mahmudpura and Patti. For university education he proceeded to the Khalsa College, Amritsar (F.A.); Government College, Ludhiana (B.A.); and Punjab University, Chandigarh (M.A., LL.B.). In 1968



Santokh Singh Bhullar

Santokh Singh Bhullar was admitted to the Bar in the

Punjab and practiced law prior to migrating to New Zealand in 1970.

In order to practice law in New Zealand, he had to complete a portion of the New Zealand LL.B. This he did extramurally while working full time in a Taumarunui Law office. In 1976 he was admitted to the Bar and became the first Punjabi/Sikh to have been admitted as Barrister, Solicitor and Notary Public in New Zealand.

Santokh Singh Bhullar has been actively involved in the organisation and establishment of the New Zealand Sikh Society and with the establishment of the first Gurdwara at Hamilton in 1977. He also served as President of the New Zealand Indian Central Association and remains actively involved with Community groups and offers his professional services to the needs of the community.


To commemorate the contribution made by Sikhs to New Zealand's Society, Santokh organised the 1990 Celebrations as well as researched and compiled a history of New Zealand Sikhs to coincide with the 1990 celebrations.

Santokh Singh is married to Kirpal Kaur and they have three children.

The community is proud of *Sukhi Turner*, who was elected the Mayor of Dunedin at her very first foray in 1995 defeating an incumbent Mayor Dunedin for the first time in 27 years. She was re-elected as Mayor in October 1998.

Sukhi was born on Baisakhi Day, 13 April 1952, her father being Squadron Leader Jasbir Singh Gill of the Indian Air Force, and her mother, Premjit Kaur, being "the home maker". After schooling at the All Saint's Anglican School at Naini Tal, Sukhi went to Bombay University for a year before moving to Bethany College in West Virginia, USA on an Exchange Scholarship, from where she graduated with a BA (*magnum cum laude*) in History and Political Science.

That year, Sukhi met and soon married New Zealand's star cricketer Glen Turner and now has two children, daughter Natasha and son Shaan. While Glenn pursued his cricketing career Sukhi devoted time and energies to "babies, nappies and travel", and settling permanently in Dunedin from 1982, soon also developing a small home-help business and marketing her own blend of spices.

Having a keen interest in politics, "especially in politics of change", Sukhi was dismayed at the negative effects of the restructuring of New Zealand Society in the '80s and '90s and so joined the Green Party of Aotearia in 1993. She became Vice President Federation on University Women — Otago Branch during 1993-95 and was elected to the Dunedin City Council in 1992 



Sukhi Turner

The NAGAARA Trust

and its NISHAAN

The Nagaara Trust has been born out of the deep sense of faith of like-minded persons who are committed to preserve, project and propagate the uniqueness and glories of the Khalsa Panth.

Nagaara: from the Persian word for a war drum, connoting a proclamation.

The clarion call of the Universal Brotherhood of Mankind raised by Guru Nanak is verily the quintessence of the vedantic, biblical, koranic and bhakti (sufi) traditions. The successive alchemy of sacrifice for social equality and generation of self-confidence to oppose tyranny over the next two centuries made Guru Gobind Singh transform an oppressed people into fearless saint-warriors on Baisakhi Day, three hundred years ago. The principles of virtue and valour, combination of fearlessness and divinity are unequalled and need to be reinforced with all vigour as the world enters the new millennium.

The Nagaara Trust would endeavour to provide an understanding of the Sikh philosophy, via all means of communication, through specific seminars, recitations, audio-visual presentations, plays and ballets, animated production for the very young and, eventually, a world class *son et l'umiere* show.

In the age of information technology and instant communication reaching anyone, anywhere, with an array of satellite-transmitted television, the internet, e-mail, and still more technology marvels in the offing, the world has truly become "a global village". Still, in all this, the impact of the print media remains unique, considering its permanence of reference and record.

It has long been felt that the Sikh community, in all its diaspora, needs a rallying medium. One of the key means is publication of a high-quality magazine, to give that recognition and direction so vitally needed. An intelligently planned and well produced illustrated Journal, would be a most effective manner of reaching out to the community all over the world, an instrument of inspiration and a standard to exclaim the aspirations and achievements of the Sikhs who have distinguished themselves in the arts, music and scientific endeavours. They are amongst the world's leading surgeons and economists, builders and aerospace engineers, computer scientists, writers and artists, hoteliers, sportsmen, diplomats and so on, apart from their forte of agriculture and soldiering.



Nishaan: again from the Persian, literally a flag, a banner, a symbol of distinctiveness.

Appropriately, and symbolic of this endeavour, the Nishaan is being launched by The Nagaara Trust on the Tercentenary of the birth of the Khalsa as a specialist publication whose clear aim would be to continually focus on aspects of the community's success, perpetuate traditions and thus reinforce the faith. The Journal would particularly seek to inspire those who are wavering in their confidence of belonging to this special order as also to project aspirations of the community in the coming millennium.

The Nishaan will essentially be about the people, places and events that have shaped the history of the Sikhs and which will continue to guide its destiny.