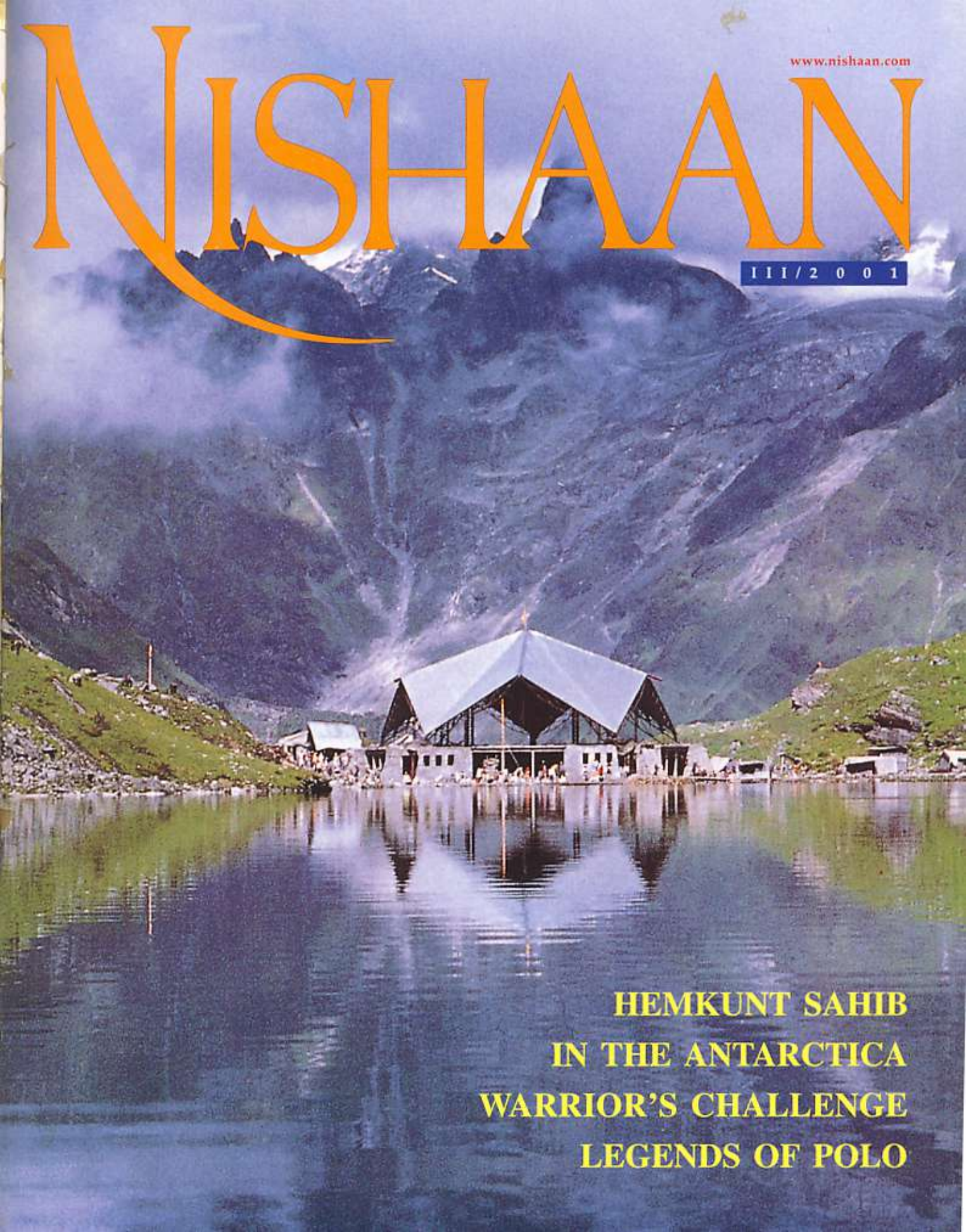


NISHAAN

III / 2 0 0 1



**HEMKUNT SAHIB
IN THE ANTARCTICA
WARRIOR'S CHALLENGE
LEGENDS OF POLO**



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NISHAAN
III / 2001

THE VITALITY OF SIKH IDENTITY

Though the vexing question of Sikh identity *per se* has never quite been free of controversy since the birth of the Khalsa as a distinctive community with its own spiritual culture, *maryada*, symbols and scriptures, unique in so many ways in the annals of world religions, it lost some of its urgency and energy during the ascendancy of the Sikh spirit in the Akali Reforms Movement of the early twenties in the preceding century. After the unwarranted and unseemingly assault of Swami Daya Nand, the fountain-head of the Arya Samaj, the Sikh psyche, already under siege since the loss of the Sikh Empire in 1846, the armed spirit of Sikhism plumed up to maintain the dignity and personality of the *Panth*. And it had a spectacular effect which galvanized the community whose name, word and image began to gain fresh respect.

I do not wish to go into the second fall and decline of the Khalsa—particularly since India's Independence—but there's no doubt that we have, once again, allowed the controversy concerning the identity of a Sikh *qua* Sikh to get embroiled in hopeless polemics. I see this issue becoming more and more complex in proportion to the new challenges facing the community in India particularly since "Operation Bluestar" and the Sikh *diaspora* in its own special way. The Punjabi press and media are carrying articles and discussions which are as despairing as off-centre for the most part.

And since in the premiere issue of the *Nishaan* (April 1999) the directions indicated and the issues projected in our first editorial, we have been endeavouring to keep the hoisted view on line. And the first 5 issues (now available as a handsomely bound, hard-cover gold-lettered volume—a collector's item), have thus brought us to the point where the questions raised at the outset in defence of the journal's *raison d'être* now demand a clearer response from the readers, and a bolder approach by the Sikh writers. For the fact is that the Akalis as a political party, the Akal Takht politics of the *Jathedars* and the SGPC factional fights etc. cannot resolve the issue already mired and abused in many

a distressing way. With the questions of the *sehj-dhari* Sikhs, *muzhabhi* Sikhs, clean-shaven Sikhs (*patit*), *nandhari* Sikhs, *nirankari* Sikhs, *radhaswami* Sikhs and now even the BJP "Sikhs" looming large before our agonised eyes, what should be done to make the issue academic in a wholesome scholarly, dispassionate manner? We in the *Nishaan* are not wanting to give or even find a *definitive* answer, but we do expect to raise the level of discussion to different planes of discourse in any case.

As far as the renegade, splinter Sikh groups or individuals owing allegiance to such organisations as the *Radhaswanis* and the *Nirankaris* are concerned, we need have no real anxiety. In flouting the Tenth Guru's express injunction regarding the cease of the living, consecrated *Gurus* with the apotheosis and deification of the *Guru Granth*, as also showing indulgences of many a hue and form in direct opposition to the Sikh spirit, they have, in any case, forfeited the right. And, in reality, "the faithful ones" of these hybrid creeds, even when sporting the Sikh symbols of the *keshas* and the beard, have seldom claimed the prerogative lost *en route*. No problem there, then. But it's not so easy to dispose of the obtrusive, inescapable issue of the *sehjdhari* Sikhs in particular, of the clean-shaven, in general.

And in this context, I take resort to my own personal experience in relation to some *sehjdhari* Sikhs over the last 50 years or more. Of the scores of devoted and adoring such persons, some of them *Sindhis* who have had a very high sense of their sentiment and commitment, I take up two cases as an extension of our argument. Of those two, Dr. Professor Harbans Lal, a distinguished microbiologist (Texas University) and Professor Emeritus, Guru Nanak Dev University, hardly needs to be introduced to the Sikh readership, or to the Sikh diaspora in view of his outstanding work on Sikhism and in behalf of Sikhism. I came to know him for the first time when I was a visiting Fulbright Professor at Harvard University (1969-70) and was invited by the New York *sangat* to participate in the

500th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev. He promptly picked me up, there and then, and drove me along the Eastern Coast to his University where he was working and living at that time. There is much to say about his American home and wife, much about his magnanimities in general, but I may not stretch the point too far. However, when a few months ago, he visited me here to look up an old ailing friend after a lapse of 30 years, I was deeply touched. And his Sikhism as a considered faith and his scholarship in Sikh studies were now a question of pride for us all. How then to identify him is the agonizing question? I have yet to see a better Sikh amongst those who proclaim their Sikhism as a matter of birth heritage and duty.

The second case I have in mind is of an obscure *seljdhari* Sikh scholar called Ram Chand Bhatiani whom I have known since our Khalsa College Amritsar days of 1936-38. Belonging to a most pious *seljdhari* family of Haripur Hazara (now in West Pakistan), he had imbibed his Sikhism with his mother's milk. And today, at the ripe old age of 80, a disabled, stricken man living quietly in a Delhi colony, he has over 30 scholarly booklets and pamphlets on the Sikh scriptures (all in Gurmukhi) to his credit, and I keep receiving his gifts of love and nostalgia from time to time. Do I dare question his Sikhism? You have to ponder the problem and come up with an answer that doesn't violate the Sikh mind or sensibility.

Let me then return to the primal issue itself after this *detour*. I could set down below many a definition given from time to time by the Sikh theologians and thinkers and by the "Establishment" (the SGPC and collateral bodies), but they are too well-known to need any reiteration here. However, for another relevant reason, I choose to refer to one small book, *Who's A Sikh* (Oxford University Press, 1989) by McLeod, the known controversial foreign scholar of Sikhism. I have had the opportunities to meet with him in Toronto during his stay there, and even when I do not accept a few of his observations and conclusions, I have

never doubted his *bona fides* or his intellectual credentials, something which a section of Sikh scholarship has done with a vengeance. Unfortunately, I have lost both the book and my review (thanks to some visiting friends and borrowers), but I can vaguely recall the tenor of his argument. Similarly, other British, American and Canadian white scholars have augmented our labours and widened the scope of Sikh studies abroad. All of them too have touched on the problem which is the theme of this editorial. We all need to sit in a conclave, if you like, not to resolve the issue, but at least to put it in the right perspective.

Before I conclude, I may refer to a couple of Prof. Puran Singh's opinions germane to our argument. Prof. Puran Singh rightly acknowledges our origins from Hinduism whose better aspects were an organic part of the Sikhism evolved in Sikh scriptures, but then draws the line where its "fossilised doctrines" are concerned. The Sikhs are, he observes, a new species of human beings "bound together by a community of inward sentiment." A Sikh is verily a *sui generis* phenomenon. Guru Gobind Singh in his words "saw what was yet vitals and he returned it with Promethean fire". It must not be forgotten that the Tenth Master acknowledged the beauty and glory of some ancient Hindu scriptures and thought, being a great scholar of Sanskrit and an admirer of *Shakti* in all its godly forms.

Finally, on the question of "Who's a Sikh" involves the essence of Sikhism, I turn to Mohan Singh's poem, *Sikhi* from his pioneering volume of poetry, *Saavey Paltar*. I was his student at the Khalsa College, Amritsar and his Persian classes were a treat. We later became good friends, and I may add that he was a Marxian of sorts (as indeed most of us of that generation were) and yet a great poet with a supreme faith in the future of Sikhism. The poem, *Sikhi*, is a powerful lyric where the metaphor of a tree is used *constitutively* to describe its compulsive energies, growth and flowering amidst all manner of prunings. It's a tree that has struck roots in a rocky soil, and no winds or storms may ever break it.

The Victoria and Albert Museum
Presents

SIKH ARTS AND HERITAGE

Lecture series

March to October 2001

V&A

Visions into
ACTION

Events

The interest in Britain on Sikh heritage and culture inspired by the Tercentenary of the Khalsa has been given fresh impetus by the establishment of a full time post at the V&A Museum, devoted to promoting this hitherto neglected subject.

The highly acclaimed "Arts of The Sikh Kingdoms" exhibition staged by London's world renowned Victoria & Albert Museum in 1999 attracted a record number of visitors and marked the beginning of many positive collaborations between the Museum and the Sikh community.

A cornerstone of those collaborations was the shared aspirations for engaging in ground breaking initiatives, which would leave a legacy for future generations. Those visions have indeed been transformed into real action with the establishment of the *Sikh Heritage Desk* at the V&A.

Based in the "Indian and South East Asian Department" and funded by the *Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust*, the Sikh Heritage Desk came into being in May 2001 as a result of the longstanding discussions between Dr Deborah Swallow (Head of Department and Senior Chief Curator at the V&A) and the Trust.



Main entrance of the V&A Museum, March-July 1999.

Dr. Swallow has stated: "I am delighted that the audience development and outreach work with the Sikh community was so productive and together we have taken some very positive steps towards ensuring that the relationships forged during the Exhibition have continued".

Specifically, the Trust collaborated in the V&A's attendance at the East London Mela during 2001. This event attracted a record 63,000 visitors over a single weekend and was a tremendous success in introducing the museum to the Asian Diaspora of Britain's capital city. Subsequently the Trust volunteered to sponsor the "Vaisakhi card competition" organised by the Education Department, which encouraged youngsters to submit designs for publication by the Museum.

Most recently, the Sikh Heritage Desk has been instrumental in providing administrative support for the



Young British Sikhs visiting the Museum and other milestone events in 1999.

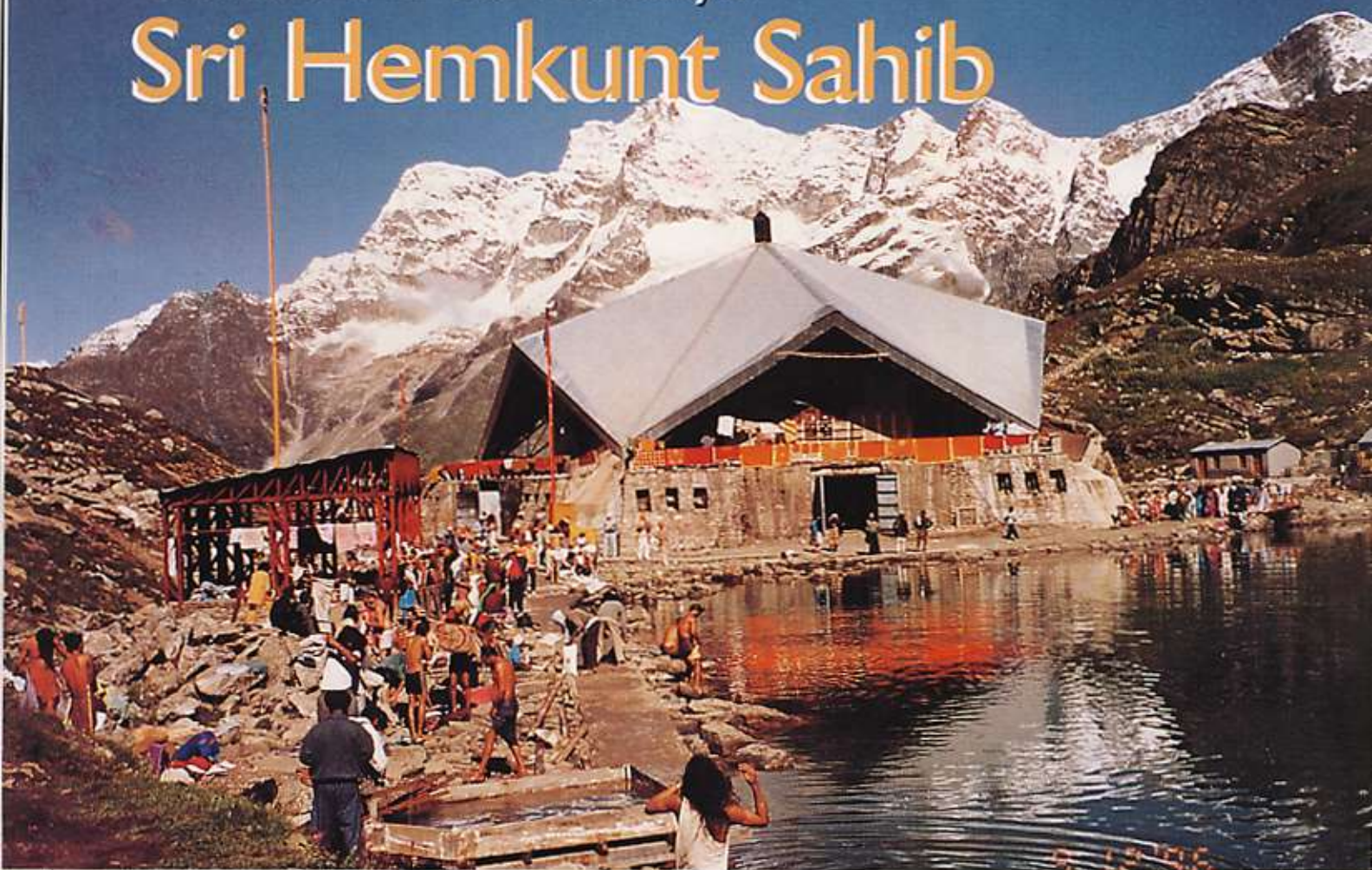
monthly Sikh Heritage Lecture Series which has again received enthusiastic support from the community, attracting full attendance. Another of the responsibilities of the "Desk" has been in co-ordinating arrangements for the Sikh Heritage Day Conference to be hosted by the Museum. With a range of expert speakers the conference will examine contemporary issues of conservation relevant to the Sikh community.

The Sikh Heritage Desk is also at the forefront of planning and organising the "Sarkar e Khalsa Bicentennial Dinner" in September 2001.

Working on long term projects such as the Anglo Sikh Heritage trail and the cataloguing and digitisation of the Sikh collections at the Museum is Heritage Desk will assume pivotal responsibility in ensuring that the progress of the past is consolidated.

Gurdwara in the Himalaya*

Sri Hemkunt Sahib



The Himalaya (Abode of Snow) have always been part of our history and tradition, our thinking and our poetry, our worship and our devotion..... they are the Abode of the Gods."

The greatest mountain range on earth, the Himalayas encompass over fifty peaks of 25,000 feet and higher, full of majesty and beauty, an extraordinary amphitheatre, the world's most spectacular collection of form and shape.

In the Garhwal Himalaya, at a height of 15,210 feet above sea level is Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring a snow-clad mountain amphitheatre with seven pinnacles and at its centre, a fathomless, fresh water lake.

Inspired by the narrative *Bachitra Natak*, whose verses adorn the Dasam Granth attributed to the Tenth Master of the Sikhs, historians and poets, devotees and engineers have willed construction of the Gurdwara at Hemkunt, an abiding testimony of their faith and will and determination to succeed against great odds. For 34 years, from 1967 when the work began, till now, many hundreds of workers, supervisors and sewadars have endeavoured to complete the Gurdwara, a wonderment of structural engineering, its design most worthy of the indestructibility of the faith that it represents.

The Inspiration

In verses compiled in the *Dasam Granth*, there is a narrative that is autobiographical in the form of a dialogue between God and the Guru. It is in this narrative - known as the '*Bachitra Natak*' (the wondrous tale) that Guru Gobind Singh has described his place of meditation:

*Thus I narrate my biography,
Pleased with my deep, devoted and arduous worship of
His name,
He (Waheguru) ordained events leading to my birth, to
take place.*

*A snow clad mountain range with seven pinnacles
(Sapatsring), which is a part of Sumer Parbat,
Surrounds a fathomless, fresh water lake by the name of
Hemkunt.*

*This was the sacred place of my prayer meditation and
worship of my Almighty.*

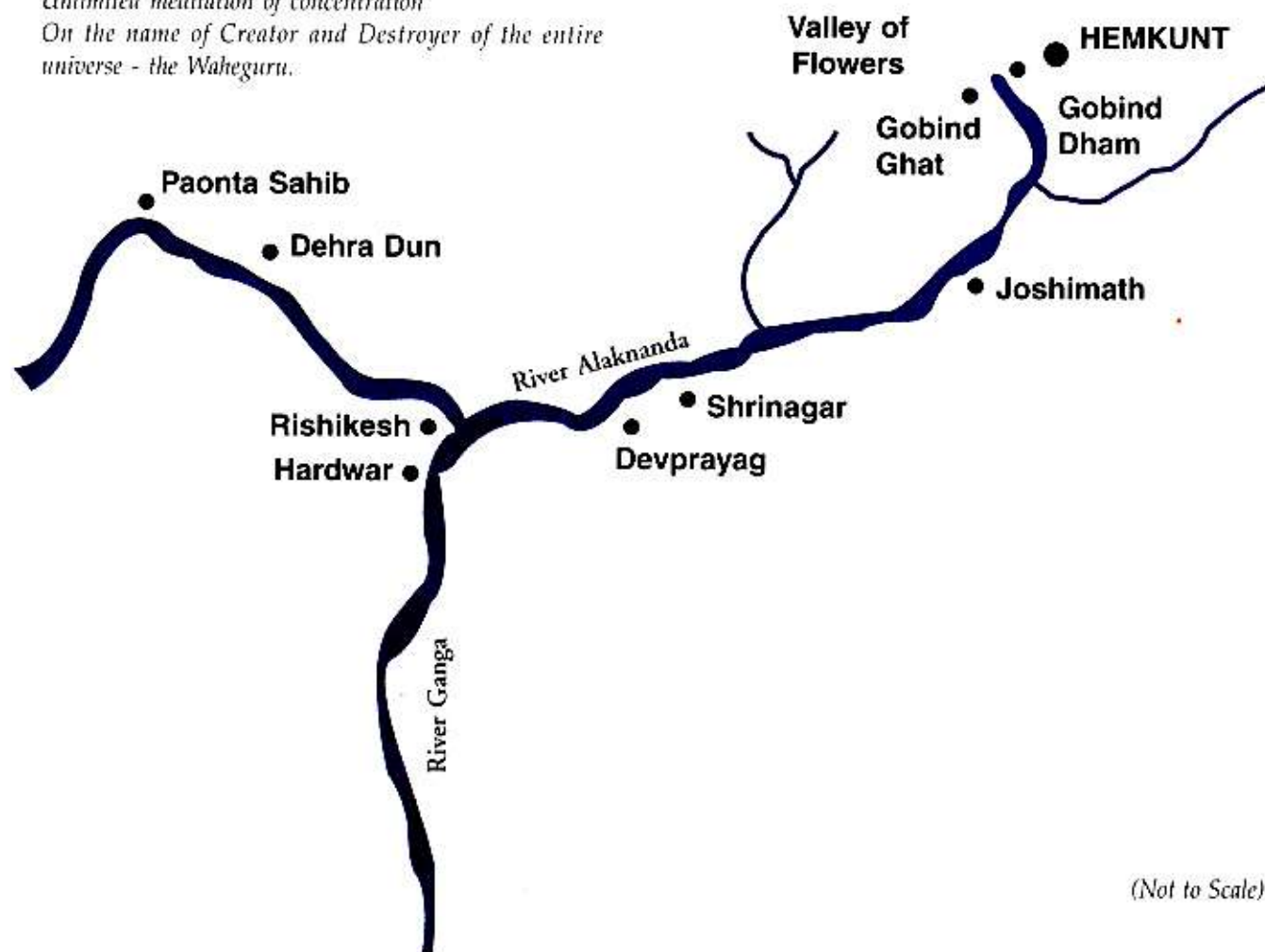
*This place was also visited by Pandava king during his
exile.*

*This is the place where I performed
Unlimited meditation of concentration
On the name of Creator and Destroyer of the entire
universe - the Waheguru.*

*It was due to the earnest prayer and deep desire of Guru
Tegh Bahadur,
That I was summoned out of my deep trance at Sri
Hemkunt Sahib to Waheguru's own kingdom.
And then ordained to be born in this world (Kal Yug),
With a special mission of service to the cause of humanity;
of the poor, the oppressed and the down trodden.*

*I was so deeply immersed in His divine love,
That I did not wish to come away,
But had to bow to His commands and directions,
On which I was ordained to assume the mortal form.*

*While at His feet in Waheguru Ji's own kingdom where
I was summoned from the place of my worship,
He bestowed His affection on me and addressed me as
His Dear son,
And uttered in His Grace that "I call upon you to proceed
to fulfil the holy and sacred mission
Of showing the correct path to wrong doers and to
propagate truth and truthful living.*





Havaldar Modan Singh.



S Madan Singh.



Nanda Singh Chauhan, village headman.



The tree with hollowed trunk at Gobind Dham in which Havaldar Modan Singh took shelter.

*I accepted the orders with folded hands
And in all humility prayed,
That the achievement of the set Aim was feasible only if
I had His blessings.
So these were the terms of reference
With which I was directed to assume the human form.
And this exactly what transgressed between the Almighty (Waheguru Ji)
and me.*

(This translation was done by Col. M. S. Sethi, Commander of the 21 B.R.T.F., who was posted at Joshimath during 1971-1974 and contributed greatly in the mobilisation of construction material to Hemkunt.)

Although the *Dasam Granth* was compiled in 1734, the descriptions of Guru Gobind Singh's *tapasthan* (place of meditation) - **Hemkunt Parbat Sapatsring** - in the narrative '*Bachitra Natak*' drew attention only after a century of its compilation. Kavi Santokh Singh, a mid-nineteenth century historian, was the first person to elaborate on the story of the creation of *Dusht Daman* and his place of meditation (the Guru's *tapasthan*) in his fourteen-volume *Sri Gur Partap Suraj (Parkash) Granth* which was first published in 1843. In the late nineteenth century, Pandit Tara Singh Narottam - a Nirmala scholar and Sikh historian - compiled a descriptive collection of various Sikh *tirths* (places considered holy because they are associated with Gurus) which included Hemkunt.



General Harkirat Singh (extreme left) in front of the old Gurdwara at Hemkunt.



To conserve the old Gurdwara which was constructed in November 1935 with local materials, structure of the new Gurdwara was so placed that the old became part and parcel of the new, falling under the valley truss, towards the lake side.

Bhai Vir Singh, the eminent Punjabi historian, reformer and poet, put together information about Hemkunt, which he collected from various sources like Guru Gobind Singh's *Bachitra Natak*, Kavi Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash* and Pandit Tara Singh Narottam's descriptions in *Sri Guru Tirath*. All this input resulted in the publication of an account by the name of *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* (miracles of the plume-adorned one). Inspired by the many descriptions of the Guru's tapasthan, Sant Sohan Singh - a retired *granthi* from the Indian Army - resolved to search for the place. His search took him from one place to another but yielded no result. This quest for Hemkunt led him to where he noticed pilgrims leaving for a certain pious location referred to as 'Lokpal'. On conversing with the pilgrims, he discovered that the descriptions of Lokpal tallied with the accounts that he had read about Hemkunt. To confirm the information that he had gathered from the locals, Sant Sohan Singh decided to visit Lokpal. According to him,

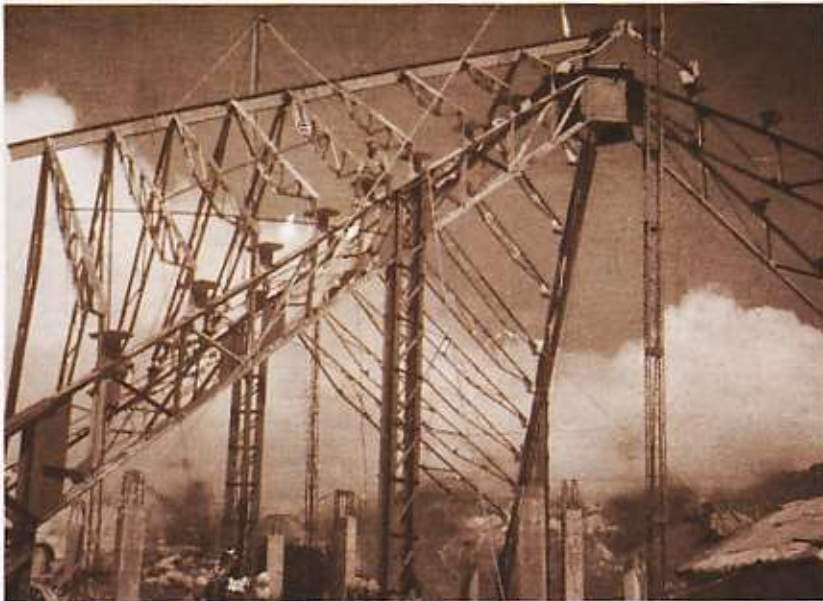
not only did he find the geographical details similar, he also experienced a celestial vision that made him believe that this indeed was..... Hemkunt the tapasthan of Guru Gobind Singh.

Convinced of the location, he decided to build a gurdwara with Bhai Vir Singh's assistance, in awe and significance that the place held. For this purpose, he was joined by *Havaldar Modan Singh*, an NCO from the Survey Department of the Indian Army. In the year 1935, they went to Hemkunt to build the gurdwara for which they hired the services of a contractor by the name of Ganga Singh Bhandari. During the construction process, the two Sikhs were assisted by the village chief Rattan Singh Chauhan, his son Nanda Singh Chauhan and other local dwellers. The construction of the gurdwara, measuring ten feet by ten feet, was completed by November 1935 and was so placed that it marked the tapasthan of Guru Gobind Singh in his earlier birth. After the installation of a copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, gifted by Bhai Vir Singh, the gurdwara at Hemkunt was established as one at the highest place in the world.

In this gurdwara, Sant Sohan Singh and *Havaldar Modan Singh* performed devout service to the *Waheguru*. After the demise of Sant Sohan Singh, *Havildar Modan Singh* was entrusted with the responsibility of the gurdwara. At times, when he would come down to Gobind Dham, he would take refuge in the hollowed-out portion of a tree against the onslaught of bad weather and wild animals. This tree still stands in the courtyard of Gobind Dham and is much revered by the pilgrims. During winters, when *Havaldar Modan Singh* descended to the plains, he would tell enthralled devotees about the gurdwara at Hemkunt and the significance that it held. Such was the magic of the descriptions and tales, that it did not take much time before pilgrims were drawn to Hemkunt.



Erection of the steel structure over the old Gurdwara building.



Steel trusses being raised over valley beam in 1972.

Amongst the initial jathas (group of pilgrims) was the one brought by Master Karm Singh. But since there was no marked path to this place, the journey was a tough ordeal. Each of the pilgrims had to be led by hand through the relentless terrain, with the help of the village guides, amongst whom was the village chief's son, Nanda Singh Chauhan. At one time, this tedious journey used to last almost a month. With an increase in the number of jathas, there was an urgent need to establish a proper pathway. This was done with the help of the locals under the supervision of the contractor, Hayat Singh Bhandari, and under Nanda Singh Chauhan who by then was well versed with the route. The increase in development led to a spurt in other developmental activities like the construction of *dharamshalas* etc. along the pilgrim route. In the month of March 1960, Havaladar Modan Singh established a seven member trust - the Gurdwara Hemkunt Management

Trust - which was to take on various responsibilities connected with the seven gurdwaras along the route from Hardwar to Hemkunt. These are the gurdwaras at Hardwar, Rishikesh, Shrinagar, Joshimath, Gobind Ghat, Gobind Dham and Gurdwara Hemkunt.

In time, the Trust felt the need to build a bigger gurdwara in place of the initial single-roomed building and were in the midst of deciding who should undertake the construction when one of the Trust members encountered General Harkirat Singh, Engineer-in-Chief of the Indian Army, who was on a pilgrimage to Hemkunt. He outlined the expansion plans to the General and asked for his suggestions. As the General was one who could envisage a project with regard to the future, he suggested a plan which would accommodate a congregation of upto 400-500 people. This, he felt, would be an apt number because the gurdwara was fast gaining recognition and with the improvement of the road, would attract a large number of pilgrims in the times to come. Sensing the truth in the suggestion and recognising his far sightedness, the Trust decided to entrust the responsibility of designing the gurdwara to the General.

The Design –from Conception to Realisation

The Gurdwara, the house of prayer of the Sikhs, is recognised throughout the world not only as a prominent symbol of the Sikh faith but also for its distinct style of architecture. Although certain gurdwaras adapt an architectural identity similar to the style prevalent in the country in which they are built, on the whole they are unified in terms of architectural characteristics. The gurdwara at Hemkunt, however, is singularly unique. Its location in the lofty Himalayas, at a height of 15,210 ft., makes it the only gurdwara to be built at such an altitude. Its design, which was done keeping in mind the location and



S Manmohan Singh Siali.

climate, makes it the only pentagonal gurdwara in the world. Further, the gurdwara located at Hemkunt - *the tapasthan of Dusht Daman* - imparts a high degree of respect and awe.

The gurdwara at Hemkunt symbolised yet another aspect.... that of human effort, dedication and single-minded courage. It stands as an epitome of the human spirit that battles against the greatest of odds so to achieve its objective. The objective, here, was the building of this gurdwara and the obstructions were the severe terrain and the harsh climate, which human spirit - that of all the people behind the project, overcame.

The design process involved detailed site and climatic surveys and rigorous analysis for the requirements which were indeed tough parameters. The architect, S. Manmohan Singh Siali, worked on an inspired design that conformed not only to the dictates of the site and climate but also to the faith itself. The resultant design was a harmonious blend of crucial factors. The success of the design can also be attributed to the



Boarding of astrolite, being laid over steel trusses in 1974.

farsightedness of Gen. Harkirat Singh who was instrumental in suggesting several design factors with respect to the future.

Initial Design Concept

When the Trust decided to build a bigger gurdwara in place of the single-celled unit, the initial design concept was proposed by S. Beant Singh of Chandigarh. This concept was apparently designed with passing knowledge of the site and the climatic conditions. When General Harkirat Singh was shown this design by one of the Trust members for an appraisal, he immediately detected the impracticability. He felt that the concept was lacking not only in terms of satisfying the site and climatic constraints but also in terms of its size and capacity.

The proposed design which gave primary consideration to the religious aspect was averse to the demands of the extremely difficult site and the climate which were by far the most important factors. The heavily contoured site presented major construction constraints such as its location in the seismic zone, being prone to snow avalanches and high velocity winds and the presence of the Hemkunt lake itself which should have been the primary factors that governed the design. The first design would not have been able to withstand the prevalent site conditions and was also not large enough to host a congregation of the number of people envisaged. It was the suggestion from General Harkirat Singh that proved to be yet another crucial design factor. A man of rare vision, the General felt that with the growing passage of time the number of pilgrims and visitors would swell to hundreds at a time - a prediction which was to come true. Clearly, this initial design was inadequate.

Agreeing with the opinions of General Harkirat Singh, the Hemkunt Trust entrusted him with the responsibility of finding an architect who could accomplish the project keeping in mind all the important factors.

The General then selected an architect Manmohan Singh Siali from the Military Engineering Service whom he felt had the experience of handling a

multitude of projects and, being a Sikh, with the repertoire of initiating architecture for gurdwaras, had the right approach to handle a project of such dimensions. However since the architect was working for the M.E.S., he required official permission to take on an independent project. The permission was duly accorded.

The gurdwara at Hemkunt posed a complex design problem because it had to tackle the immediate issues of the site and yet conform to Sikh traditions. An experienced architect, Manmohan Singh knew that the **foremost** thing to do was to visit the site for an in-depth analysis of the site and environmental conditions to predetermine the problems that would be encountered during the process of design.

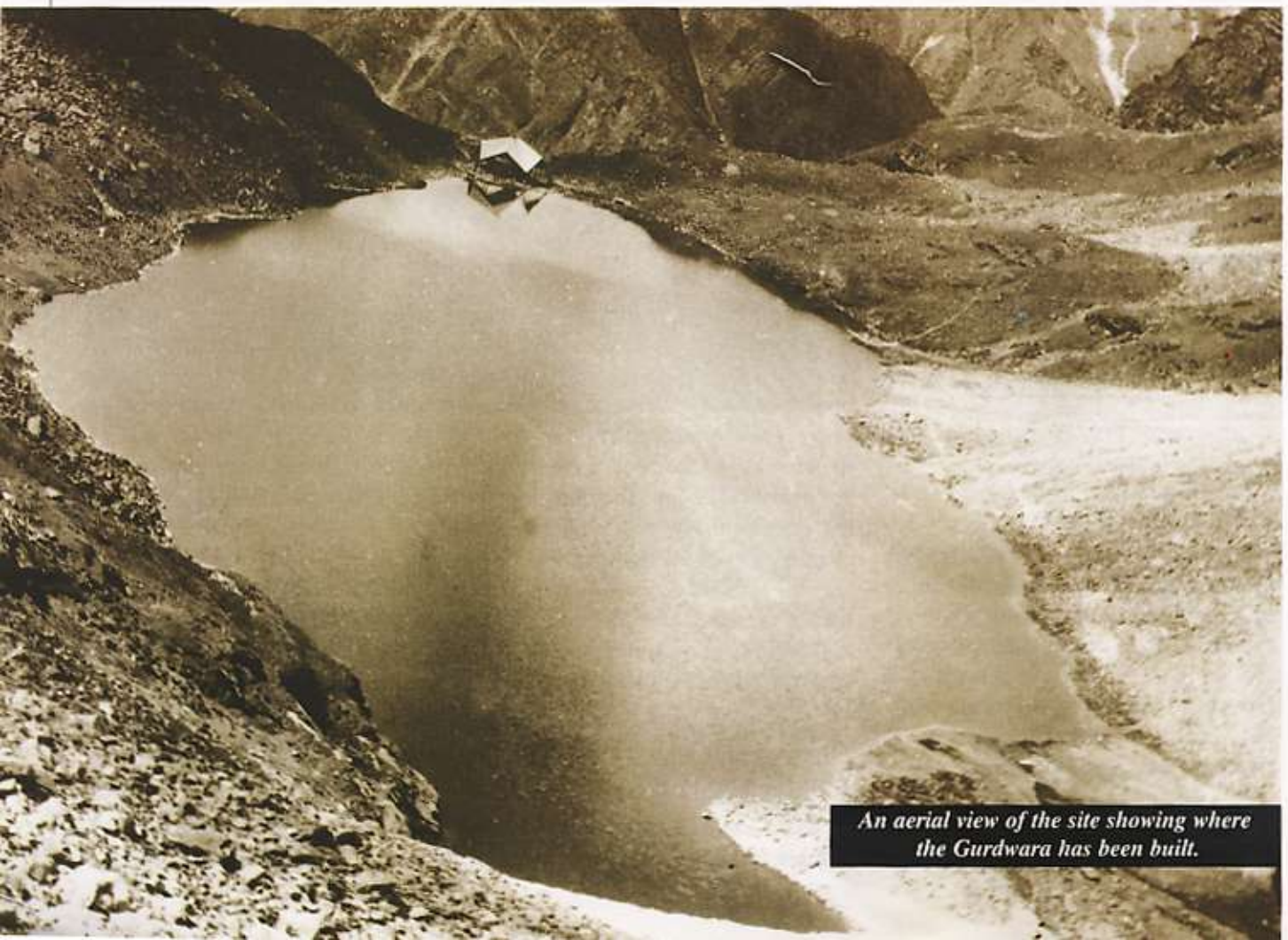
The Site

A team of architects and engineers, headed by the principal architect Manmohan Singh Siali, visited Hemkunt in the month of October 1965. Data concerning factors like the terrain, climate, level of the lake, soil type, snow load, scale of seismic forces and so on had to be made

available, compiled and analysed since the site could not be visited again and again. This site posed a plethora of problems, and major issues that the zone was prone to were:

- Snow avalanches and slides as it was surrounded by snow-laden mountains. Heavy snowfall was a common occurrence and thus the building would have to be designed to carry a certain snow load.
- Earthquakes, measuring 6.5 - 7.5 on the Richter Scale, being in a seismic belt.
- High velocity winds.
- Flooding because of rise in the level of the Hemkunt sarovar.

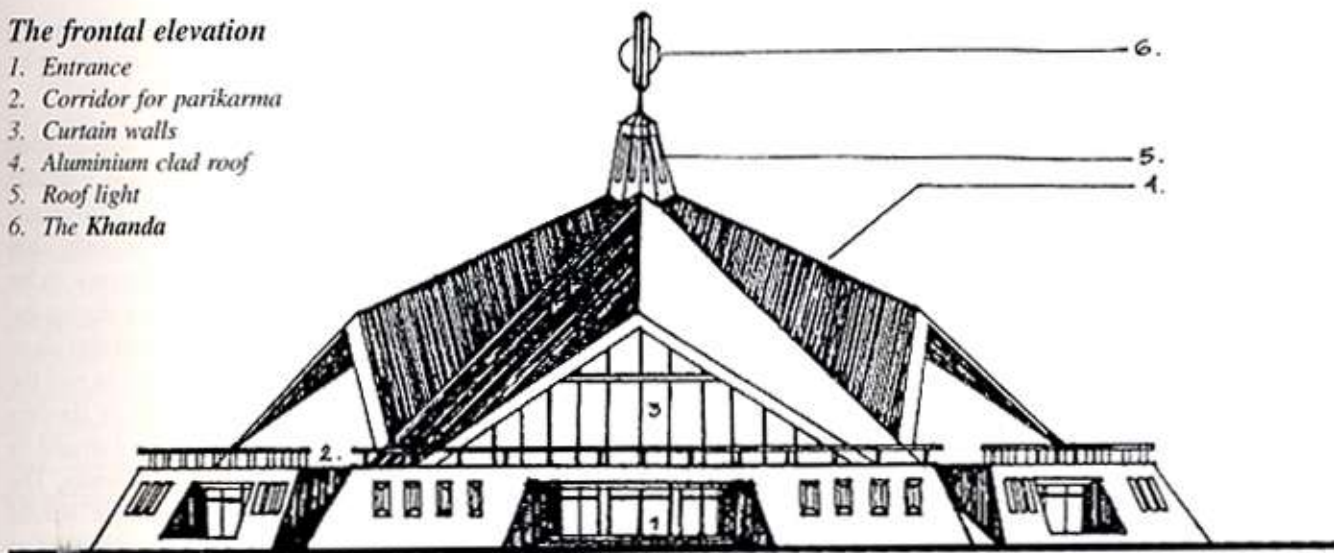
Amongst the various things that had to be worked out and assessed was the land where the gurdwara could be sited and built. For this, a survey plan was drawn up. The Survey of India then prepared what was to become the first ever site survey of an area located at this high altitude. A difficult terrain, the survey plan revealed that the level



An aerial view of the site showing where the Gurdwara has been built.

The frontal elevation

1. Entrance
2. Corridor for parikarma
3. Curtain walls
4. Aluminium clad roof
5. Roof light
6. The Khanda



of its closely placed contours ranged between 4150 m. to 4175 m. above sea level. The siting was a crucial factor not only because the gurdwara had to be designed so as to be guarded against all the climatic conditions but also in order to accommodate 400 - 500 people, a very substantial number. Besides, which, the architect was keen that gurdwara be sited in such a way that the people inside could keep in view the picturesque surroundings of Hemkunt lake. Another factor to keep in mind while siting was that the initial gurdwara, which marked the *tapshila* of *Dusht Daman*, had to be incorporated within the new design.

Translation of Concept into Form and Geometry

Manmohan Singh knew that for the design of the gurdwara to be viable, its foremost characteristics would have to be its ability to withstand the elements of nature - in this case the onslaught of snow avalanches and landslides, occurrence of earthquakes and high velocity winds plus flooding. But since the gurdwara was a religious building, there had to be an equal emphasis on the religious aspect of it and also a necessary attempt to incorporate visual beauty of the surroundings.

The primary conceptualisation was to design the gurdwara in the form of a jewel, encompassing the *Guru Granth Sahib* and opening out visually to the peace and sublimity of the surrounding snow-laden landscape. Architecturally different from other gurdwaras, it is interesting to note how the concept and other factors have been interwoven with the functional aspects of the design, so as to evolve a holistic design.

The Roof

The form of the roof is a juxtaposition of the conceptual as well as the functional part of the design. The design of the roof, with its valleys and ridges is well suited to the particular climate that is prevalent in this area. Such a design can bear snow load extremely efficiently. But the beauty of the form of the roof lies in its ability to be able to translate the concept into reality. The concept of the jewel covering the *Guru Granth Sahib* was metamorphosed into the form of the roof. As the roof is made of aluminium sheets with astro lite backing, it captures the different hues of the sky as it changes through the day and through the seasons.

Glowing like a radiant gem, the roof is an effective and aesthetic rendition of the architect.

The Plan Form

The overwhelming climatic conditions at the site of Hemkunt dictated the octagon - a derivation of the circle (a polygon of "n" sides) - as the most stable form that the plan could adopt. But the Hemkunt Trust negated the form of the octagon because it did not relate to the Sikh tradition of thought and belief in any way; it was after all a religious building. The roof form is different from the type of form that is usually seen in a typical gurdwara. But it was necessary to adopt this form due to the climate and not much could be done to alter it. In this case, the concept of the jewel was woven in with dexterity. The challenge, however, was to adopt a suitable plan form which would be a blend of both the Sikh religion and the dictates of the environment.

After numerous discussions on various possibilities, a compromise was reached with the form of the pentagon



Trishakti: Foreman, Architect and Sewadar.



Sewa from the U.K.: Bibi Tarvinder Kaur of Coventry at Hemkunt.

which, with some structural alterations, did justice to both. The pentagon, a five sided form, can be associated with the number 'five' - a number of religious significance in Sikhism. The pentagonal plan form makes the Hemkunt Gurdwara unique. The plan was meticulously worked out to be structurally viable after due strengthening of the structural members, done by running a continuous ring beam that bound the structural members at various levels, done separately for the R.C.C. and steel structures.

The gurdwara has since withstood avalanches, land slides and earthquakes, remaining intact and is a standing testimonial to the grit of its design team.

The Crucial Aspect of Siting

Siting of the gurdwara, as has been emphasised before, was crucial, keeping in mind the various factors involved. In a zone as difficult as this, the surrounding visual beauty was secondary. With it being highly seismic and prone to avalanches, wrong siting could have proved fatal for the building. A number of aspects had to be meticulously studied to avoid that mistake - wind direction and wind force, path of the avalanches (although some are unpredictable), maximum depth of the accumulated snow and the rise in the level of the Hemkunt lake during

the monsoons. All these studies would also dictate the type of building materials to be used for the construction of this shrine.

After a thorough analysis, it was decided that the gurdwara would be sited near the Hemkunt lake and placed in a direction parallel to the nearest rising hillock. This positioning allowed the gurdwara to be shielded by that particular hillock during the occurrence of avalanches. It would also allow the new design to envelop amidst its wall the old gurdwara that had been built by *Havildar Modan Singh* and which included amidst its premises the *tapshila of Dusht Daman*. The proximity to the Hemkunt lake would facilitate the innovational requirement of diverting a portion of the lake to inside the gurdwara for the purpose of *ishnaan* (sacred bath) in private, for the ladies.

Planning the layout

The layout concentrates on the gurdwara itself, thus giving it the emphasis it deserves. A levelled platform, where one arrives, leads downwards to the front steps of the gurdwara. Along the line of the main axis is the *Nishaan Sahib* and a resting room which echoes the geometry of the gurdwara itself. As one walks past the right side of the gurdwara, one comes upon the Hemkunt lake on the sides on which are built temporary structures where the men change for their *ishnaan*. Facilities for the ladies *ishnaan* are housed inside the gurdwara itself, in the ladies *paona*, where the lake has been ingeniously diverted to form a bathing area.

The roof design was complex. The design was approved after a study was done about the snow load, wind forces and easy facilitation for snow to slide-off without causing undue pressure on the roof. A combination of ridges and valleys gave the roof its spectacular look. The valleys at the five corners culminated into chutes so that the snow that accumulates atop the roof can slide off easily. The load for which the roof was designed worked out to be one tonne per square foot. A pentagonal ring or collar secured the topmost joint. The *chandwa*, over the *Guru Granth Sahib*, was later suspended from the valley beam.

Elevational Treatment

Simple geometric lines accentuate the design in the form of its elevation. With emphasis on the lofty height of the roof, the elevational treatment of the design causes it to be harmonious with its surroundings especially because of the addition of the curtain walls on the upper level. The design visually includes and mingles the exteriors within the interiors. The addition of the roof light and the *Khanda* mounted on the apex of the former, further enhance the verticality of the elevation. The *Khanda* distinguishes the shrine as a gurdwara. The contrast in the building materials used also adds to the overall effect. The architect used the combination of corrugated aluminium sheets on the roof to team up with the rubble masonry of the lower floor and the glass clad walls of the upper floor. *Deodar* wood lines the interiors of the *darbar* hall to emphasise, as the architect puts it, its existence amongst the natural environment.

The Structure

The structure basically consists of two sections floorwise, the lower one of R.C.C. and the upper one of steel. It was designed in such a way that the latter was independent of the former thus imposing no additional load. It was the steel structure that was more important because it had to take additional pressure and impact of the snow load and the avalanches. But the lower floor too had to brave the seismic forces, hence the foundation along with the columns were bound with R.C.C. beams all around and additional diagonal bracings were used to secure the foundation, the plinth and the roof. The external wall of ground floor were kept tapered not only to mitigate the form of the hills around but also to withstand the seismic forces. The roof was also strengthened with the help of ties along with the pentagonal ring that bound them all in place, as one piece homogeneously.

Sequence of Construction

Putting up of the steel structure was the initial step as it involved both considerable time and skill. After a certain stage, though, the steel and R.C.C. modes of construction were simultaneous.

Transportation of the steel plates required for the foundation of the structure was an incredible task by itself. The foundation plates, measuring 6' by 4' and weighing upto 1 tonne each, were considered by Colonel M.S. Sethi, Task Force Commander of B.R.T.P., who realised the challenge that the size of the plates would pose during the latter course of the traverse. The heavy load of the plates had to be borne manually for nearly a distance of 15 kms. and from 4,800 ft. upto a height of 15,210 ft. And that too, over a narrow and difficult bridle track which was composed of steep slopes, occurrence of steps, hair pin bends and rickety timber bridges. Col. Sethi devised a design based on the improvisation of a zig of the bends - that of 'L' shaped angle irons which were to be bolted to the plates on both the lateral sides while keeping the plates in vertical position. Two long G.I. steel pipes (one on each side of the plate) were tied to the extended portion of the 'L' of the angle irons. This arrangement permitted 8 to 10 men on either side of the plate to put their shoulders to the pipes raising the plate from the ground by about 18 inches and moving ahead,



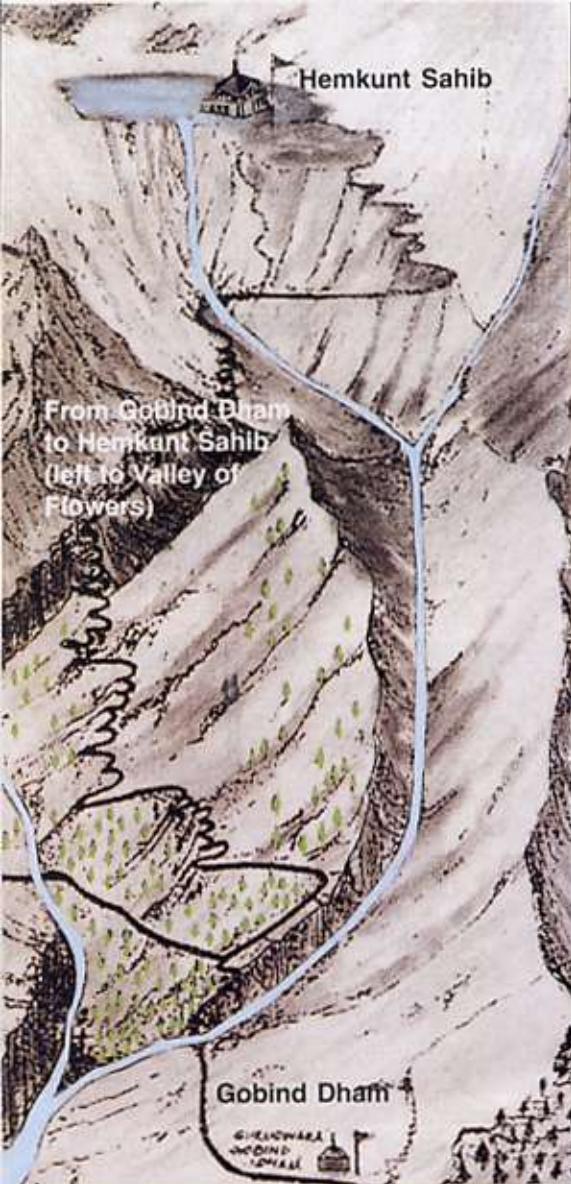
Glazing being done along the corridor.

enabling the carriage of the five plates to their destination, which needed to be installed as the foundation plates to the steel structure. A reserve of another twenty men followed behind for replacement after short haulages. The task was completed in about ten days time.

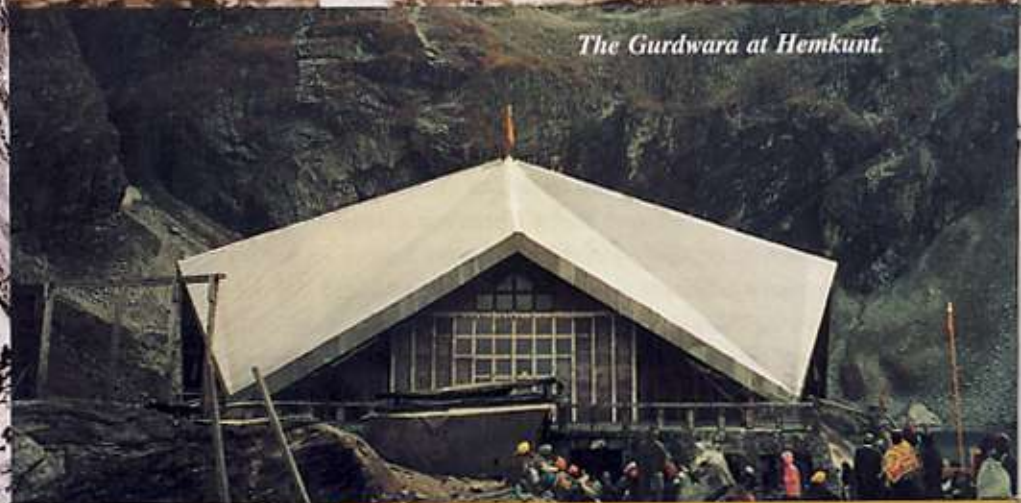
Mockups of the Structure

Based on the concept, the structural plans were drawn up by Mr. C. P. Ghosh an engineer from M.E.S. and Prof K. A. Patel from the School of Planning and Architecture. The tedious journey from Gobind Dham to Hemkunt decided the criteria for the design of the structure. A detailed study was done to adapt the sizes of the structural members and the transportation of materials in accordance with the terrain. Since the lengths of the turns (zigs) varied from 3-6 m., therefore, the sections were worked out in such a way that their lengths did not exceed 2-2.5 m, to ensure practical negotiation around the bends. Keeping this in mind, a contractor from Delhi was commissioned to manufacture these. In order to have a near perfect assemblage of these sections at Hemkunt, a mock-up of the steel structure was erected at Gurdwara Rakabgunj in Delhi. The sections were then modified, duly numbered and then taken to Hemkunt.

The completed Gurdwara at Hemkunt Sahib is great testimony of the faith of man—which indeed can move mountains.



The Gurdwara at Gobind Dham.

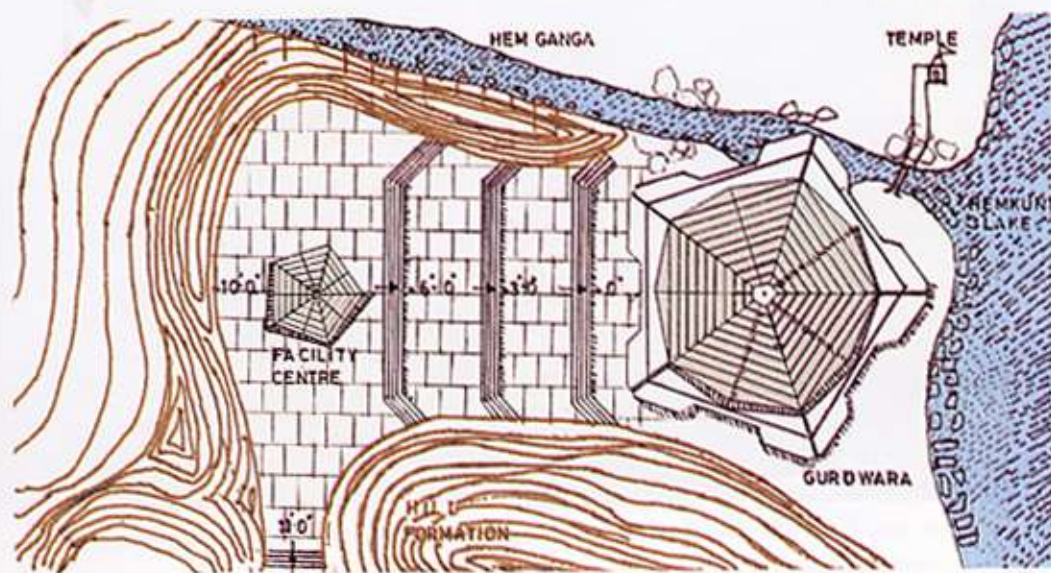


The Gurdwara at Hemkunt.



The faithful, pilgrims and high-altitude trekkers, climb the near-vertical last 6000 feet to Hemkunt Sahib from Gobind Dham ("the abode of Gobind"). It is here that they will have spent the night in the Gurdwara before undertaking the final ascent at dawn which can take from 3 to 5 hours. They will have skirted the entrance to the "Valley of Flowers", a dale of exotic and rare flora including the Himalayan blue poppy and rare varieties of primula and orchids, which were discovered by R L Holdsworth, english master at The Doon School in Dehra Dun in the 1930s and whose students have trekked to Hemkunt Sahib regularly on their mid-term breaks.

Seen here are Amarinder Singh, on reaching Hemkunt Sahib, and Premjit Singh in the icy but crystal-clear waters of the lake.



Layout of the site: the Gurdwara is placed in a direction parallel to the nearest rising hillock, allowing it to be shielded during any avalanches. It has also allowed the new design to envelop, amidst its wall, the old Gurdwara which included the tapshila of Dusht Daman. Proximity to the Hemkunt Lake allowed the innovation of diverting the waters to inside the building for ishnaan in private.

The Hemkunt Press

A leading publisher of school-level text books and illustrated children books for general reading, the Hemkunt Press was established in 1948 by Sardar Bhagat Singh, an educationist with a flair for writing. His son, Sardar Gurcharan Prakash (GP) Singh, a member of *The Nagaara Trust*, who did his post graduate course in printing management from Rochester Institute of Technology in New York, joined his father's work in 1963.

GP's elder son, Deepinder Singh did his B.Sc. in Business Administration from California State University and joined the business in 1990 while the younger son Arvinder Singh did his B.Sc. in Marketing & Finance from the University of California, Berkely and also joined the Company in 1992.

An allied concern, *Hemkunt Publishers Private Limited* was established in 1991, which publishes a score of new titles every year, besides reprinting some 150 existing titles.

Photo shows GP Singh with his grandson, Nishan Singh, whose name, we like to believe was inspired by this Journal!



A Sikh Lady's Footprints in the Antarctica



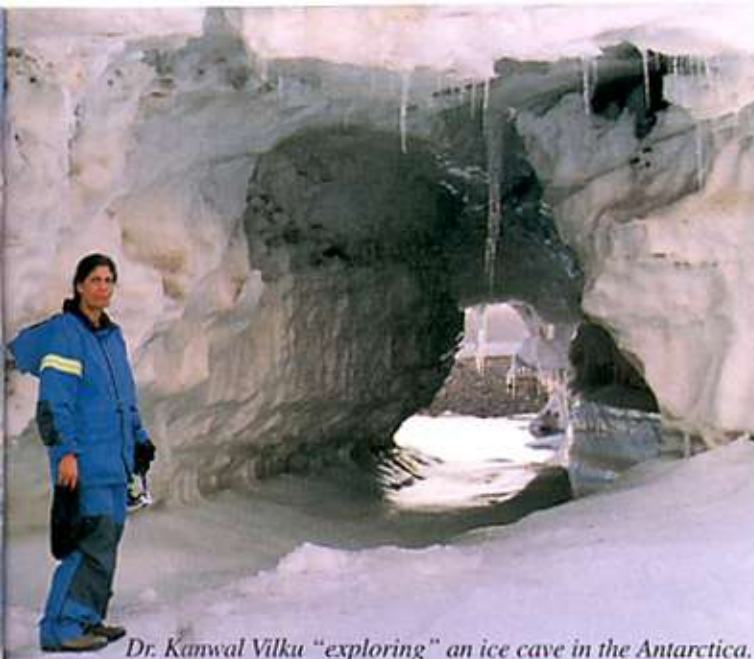
Walking some 12 to 15 kilometres every day, Kanwal climbed every nunatic (hill peak) and glacier in the vicinity of Maitri.

Dr. Kanwal Vilku is the first Sikh-or for that matter Indian- woman to have spent 16 months in the wilderness of ice and glaciers on the edge of finistera. She was the only lady member of the Indian expedition in 2000-01, the "big sister" of the team for she was 52 in a team whose youngest member was of her son's age, 25 years.

A devout and modest child of a Sikh family settled in Jabalpur (M.P.), fate would place her one day amongst the greatest women adventurers of this country. When the moment of choice and decision came, with the Guru's blessings, she took the step that has placed her now in the league of honour, with an imminence of major national awards.

It is my conviction that nothing is more auspicious than the *moment* when you take an immediate decision that paves avenues to the so-called greener pastures of *destiny*. I recall one such hot and humid morning in August 1999. I was half seated on my chair with stethoscope hung around my neck in a CGHS (Central Govt Health Scheme) dispensary at Karol Bagh, New Delhi, requesting the queueing patients to come one by one, when the dispensary clerk interrupted me, showing a letter "Dr Sahib will you like to go to the Antarctica?" Engrossed in examining the patients, I asked the clerk to come later.

On being relieved of the pressure from crowding patients, I glanced through the letter which was from the Dept of Ocean Development, Govt of India, seeking volunteer doctors to participate in the 19th Indian Antarctica Scientific Expedition. I consulted a colleague doctor present in the dispensary who was as ignorant as I was, and displayed some indifference to the issue. I mulled over the problem for a while, then asked the clerk to draft out a letter on my behalf, volunteering to participate in the expedition, unmindful of what was in store for me.



Dr. Kanwal Vilku "exploring" an ice cave in the Antarctica.



With the Ecoureuil helicopter used by the Expedition.

Today, in reflection, I cherish that moment and thank the Almighty, again and again, Who gave me the wisdom to take this decision.

The following evening, over a routine telephonic conversation with my husband who was at Chandigarh, I informed him of this decision of mine somewhat hesitatingly. He was flabbergasted, "Kanwal, mind you, you are 50 plus, don't you think it is too much for you to accept? Do give it considered thought. However, in case you can manage, you have my affirmative nod." It was the approval of an Army husband who had had an exhaustive and varied exposure to difficult areas with adverse climates all through his career of almost three decades. I reassured myself that I had not done any aberration. After all, I too had a decade's exposure to snow-bound high altitude areas of the J&K including Ladakh and Dras, freezing at -20

degree Celsius with postings at Himachal Pradesh and the North-East too under my belt.

Soon enough, I started collecting data about the Antarctica, as well as about the expedition through books and the Internet. However, scepticism always hovered in my thoughts and I wondered if I would actually be selected, being a woman, that too at 50 plus. By the way, the Antarctica winter expedition team has been traditionally an all-men domain. As the days passed by, the thought took a simmering but rear place in my mind.

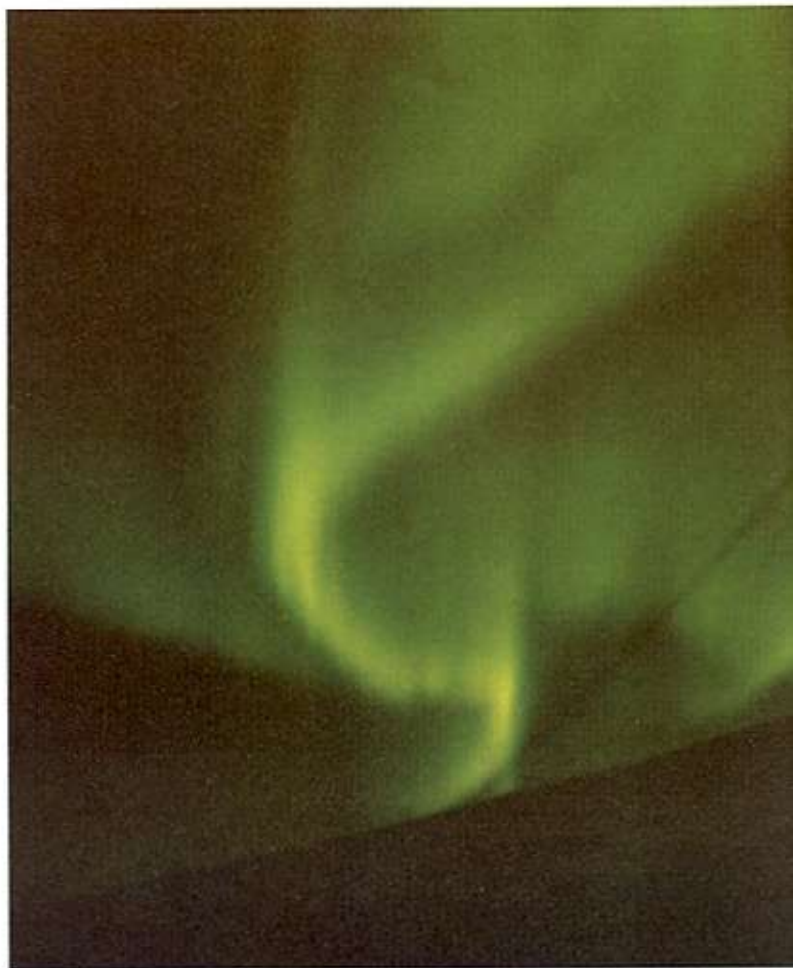
In the last week of November 1999, as the D-day approached, the possibility started bugging me once again. I learnt that the expedition team had already been given final shape and that I had figured nowhere. While the team had concentrated at NCAOR (National Centre for Antarctic & Ocean Research) at Goa for final preparations, coordination and briefing, I was cooling my heels with a tinge of disappointment, wishing that I could have been a male in the twenties!

Then came the pleasant surprise, taking my feet off the ground when, on 2 December 1999, I received a telephonic call from the Dept of Ocean Development informing me of my nomination for the expedition and asking me to rush to their office to complete the formalities. I hurriedly informed my family at Chandigarh to muster together and wrap up things for me. The next couple of days were marked by hectic preparations and packing, collection of all possible information about Antarctica, a blend of encouragement and apprehensions expressed by friends and relatives plus helpful and cautious tips from husband and children.

On 6 December 1999, I bade adieu to my family at the Delhi airport, where I was handed over my passport, visa and air ticket. I joined rest of the team waiting for me at Mumbai and we all flew to Cape Town via Johannesburg in South Africa. For the first time in two decades the expedition was launched from Cape Town. In the past, it always started from Goa, involving a 21-day sea voyage. After a two days halt at Cape Town for rest and recouping, the expedition team boarded a specialized ice cutter ship, the German *Magdalena Oldenroff* on 9 December amidst much fanfare organised by the Indian High Commission in South Africa. To my good luck, a Peruvian lady geologist joined our team, but only for two and a half months. Nevertheless, good company! The ten-day sea voyage, the first for me, was full of excitement, watching whistling whales competing with the ship, the horrendous roughness of the sea while crossing the roaring 40s and the furious

60s, the ship literally swinging 30° to 40° either side for two consecutive days, subjecting one to sea sickness. This is where the cold waters of Antarctica and the warm waters of the Indian Ocean meet and coupled with wind speeds as high as 250 kms per hour, skew up the water to breath-holding heights. Alongside these scary sights, the gliding of an albatross in these winds, its wing spanning mammoth 7 feet was a soothing sight for one's eyes. Then came the Antarctic waters with floating giant icebergs. Their grandeur can hardly be described in words. These icebergs have at times been very deceptive and are known to have crushed ships ruthlessly, but they do offer an oasis to seals for enjoying sunbathing. Finally, our ship anchored at the Indian bay on the ice shelf, and the helicopters on board flew us to our final destination, *Maitri*, the permanent Indian Antarctic station.

The first step on the Antarctica "Wonderland" really excited me as if I were landing on a different planet altogether. Here is a land of splendour and malevolence. The continent with a spread of 14 million square kilometers of which 98 percent is ice and snow covered, up to the depth of 4 kms at places, is embraced from all around by another 18 million square kms of frozen sea during polar winters and 2 million square kms during summers, thus naming it the 'Pulsating Continent'. During polar winters some 700 human beings from all over the world live here in exclusive company of the lone native, the "Emperor Penguin," which have free access to the continent, five times the size of India. Pinnacle after pinnacle of ice give it unparalleled grandeur, with its mixture of vastness, loneliness and dangers. The rainbow colours of the sky offer some relief but can change like quick-silver. The penguins waddling about, full of their own importance in white shirtfronts and black tail-coats are beautiful, interesting and funny. And just as well, since they smell and don't sound very melodious. On seeing human beings approaching, they give an inviting call flapping their wings, mistaking you for a member of their own fraternity. The reason is that their eye membranes afford them blurred vision out of water. The visiting birds include the skua, slightly bigger than a hen but human friendly. It does not mind picking up food if you choose to offer one from your hand—but only if it is non-veg! It ventures into the Antarctica only during summers and surprisingly comes to the same very spot for laying a couple of eggs and hatching them. Another startling fact about the bird is that it takes care of only one of them, leaving the other to the mercy of nature. I also learnt that 'Tern' also migrate to this Continent from the Arctic after traversing a whopping 25000 kms. However, I did not get a glimpse of this enduring wonder.



Above: "Southern Lights", as are called the aurora australis seen in the Antarctica.

Top Right: Dr. Kanwal Vilku on the 'Snow Cat' scooter, with the Expedition ship at the background.

Middle Right: Temperatures can fall to as low as minus 80° celsius.

Nature is very rich in this part of the planet. The dancing lights in the sky during polar nights, ("Aurora") caused by the movements of charged particles in the upper atmosphere, as a consequential attraction of these particles towards constantly shifting South Magnetic Pole, are a treat to watch. The magnanimity of the Continent in littering garnets and tourmalines all over lures anyone and everyone. The carving of snow by furious winds, an air bubbles trapped under ice in various shapes, is an artist's paradise.

In the Antarctica, only one festival is celebrated by all, which is 'Mid-Winter Day'. This marks the arrival of the first light, although for 4 minutes only, yet after prolonged darkness, is most welcome! Unbelievably the sun rises in the north and sets in the north itself. We received greetings from all over the world including from President Bill



Above: Kamwal with the painting she made of Guru Nanak Dev ji: a 4-year fine arts diploma holder, she did over 40 paintings during her 16-month stay in the Antarctica.

Clinton. Apart from this common festival, we celebrated all Indian festivities plus birthdays and wedding anniversaries of each one of our team members.

Having acclimatized in my new home which was to be so for the next 16 months, we got on to business. *Maitri* is a small prefab structure on the Schirmacher range and accommodates only 25 personnel. This station was constructed in 1989, consequent to the submerging of the earlier station *Dakshin Gangotri* constructed on the ice shelf for a period of six years. Apart from living quarters, the station has a rich library of books, a video cassette library, kitchen, anteroom, a small Gym for workouts and a clinic with pathological, X-ray, an ECG machine, a small OT and

other essential infrastructure. In front of our station was a beautiful lake "Priyadarshini", which apart from offering scenic ambience, is also a feeder for drinking water for the station. Water is pumped out with special heaters submerged deep in the lake, as the lake freezes during winters. It also offered a glittering platform, with air bubbles trapped under the water, for us to take a stroll over it occasionally.

Apart from professional commitments, irrespective of one's age, sex and status, he or she is obliged to perform all station duties in rotation which includes cooking, house-keeping, clearance of snow ingresses, burning of garbage and human waste, ferrying of rations and other stores from nearby dumps and so on. I was no exception. Despite being the eldest member of the team, my active participation in all these activities earned me a niche for myself – "mother of the 19th Indian Expedition".

For communicating with home, we were initially on e-mails and audio telephony. Unfortunately the terminal developed some problem and soon we were out in the cold! To our good-luck, the telephone facility was restored in about 45 days time, but one had to be content with the rationed airtime of only 6 minutes a month.

After an initial two months stay, I was offered the option of returning to India as the authorities of DOD and NCAOR had their own apprehensions whether a woman at 52 would be able to withstand the vagaries of winter at the Antarctica. For them it was a critical decision, as the only time when the Antarctica was accessible was within these 3 summer months. That is why the ship remains anchored for this period at the Indian bay adjacent to the ice shelf. Once the ship leaves, one is stuck till the next summer. To be honest, the very thought of such a challenge rejuvenated me, and I was determined to face the winters at Antarctica. I conveyed my irrevocable decision to all concerned. God helps those who have faith. Every moment of the stay at Antarctica was a big one for me but what is life without challenges? For almost 9 months in a year, the Antarctica is cut off from the rest of civilisation.

However, let me confess that 16 months at this frozen and isolated continent for a medico, was not a cakewalk! There were towering challenges. Apart from hostile weather, where the mercury dips downs to minus 70 degrees Celsius with wind speeds of over 250 km per hour, three major factors play a paramount role.

- Firstly, in an emergency, neither can a casualty be evacuated to any part of the world, nor any help received from any quarter, particularly during polar nights. The doctor is on his or her own. As a medico you have to perform all functions, as an anesthetist,

a pathologist, a radiologist, a surgeon and—you name it.

- Secondly, the psychological well-being of a person assumes greater dimensions over physical ones. The cycle of six months' continuous darkness and six months continuous daylight at the South Pole disturbs one's routine. Fortunately at *Maitri*, which is at a latitude of 70 degrees, we had almost three months unceasing darkness and three months continuous daylight. The balance was a blend with varying durations. This when added with total isolation from family and civilization, takes a toll of a person's emotional and behavioral pattern. Consequently, it does harm to one's physique too.
- Thirdly, it is absolutely mandatory on part of the doctor to keep him or her at an optimum level of physical and mental fitness to be able to look after the rest of the team effectively and efficiently.

Handling of the emotional turmoil of team members was the bigger challenge for me. The long polar nights, isolation from family and friends, continuous interaction with the same handful of team members and perhaps vicinity to the magnetic South Pole hits the psyche of a person. The doctor has to remain on her toes perpetually. All eventualities have to be expected and the age-old formula of preferring preventive cure to a radical one is never more true. And so we resorted to regular counseling, both formal and informal. A person has to be kept occupied constructively and adequate entertainment be provided. The station had catered for all such aspects reasonably well with all members overtly or covertly engaged in educative and other talks of common interest with sufficient endowment of health, hygiene and nutrition.

As far as positive aspects are concerned, the continent has an abundance of oxygen and is devoid of any bacterial growth because of the peculiar climatic conditions prevailing over the continent. I thanked God that the common ailments were not seen. What there were, were caused due to lack of minerals in water, as it is in a snow-melted form and deficiencies of vitamins because of consumption of frozen and processed food. These deficiencies have to be supplemented with timely add-ons. Dental problems are quite prevalent in this region. The escalation of dermatological problems, if an individual is carrying any, are very common, as the Antarctic is a very cold and dry desert. Apart from these some cases of hair loss have also been noticed. By and large, a doctor has to tackle accidental injuries and those caused by the cold which include chilblains, frostbite, etc. During my 16



Kanwal with her husband, Lt.Col.Karamjeet Singh, meeting the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Their daughter Priya has graduated in engineering and son Supreet Singh is a BCA student.

months stay, between a colleague doctor and myself we managed a suspected spinal chord injury, a crush and a burn injury and operation of a sebaceous cyst, apart from routine ones. One has to exercise utmost care, as at times the cold injuries assume critical dimensions leading to inescapable amputations.

Apart from professional duties, I, for one, felt very close to nature and to God. This literal hibernation lent me an opportunity to pursue my one time hobby of sketching and painting. I obtained some old canvas from the stores, cleaned them, mustered brushes and paints including those from expiry-date medicines to make different colours and did about 20 paintings. These were moments of aesthetic joy, keeping my spirits on the upswing. One portrait of the First Sikh Guru Nanak Dev is reproduced here. My four years of formal diploma in Fine and Applied Arts came absolutely handy.

I also resorted to long treks when the weather Gods permitted. Often the destination was the Russian station *Novalazarevskaya* that was about 4 kms away. The Russians had been very friendly and we used to exchange visits. To get over seclusion, I also practiced meditation and learnt about its miraculous power of rendering effective cure to both mental and physical ailments. Reading books and listening to music added variety to life at this, the loneliest continent.

Having gone through the roughs and toughs, depressive and exciting moments through those 16 months, I returned to the motherland on 22 March 2001 and a happy reunion with my family after exactly 472 days.

I wish to share my conviction that age and sex are no barrier if a person is determined to pursue his or her goals

Research in the Antarctica

Braving belligerent blizzards and crevasses with mind-freezing temperatures in the frozen Antarctica, International scientists have made a significant advance in the research work aimed to help humanity control the future environment.

Amid temperatures that dip to minus 89 degree centigrade and blizzards measuring upto 200 km per hour, the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research has flagged off 20 expeditions to the pole during the last two decades with the last originating from Cape Town in South Africa, curtailing the travelling time from 25 to nine days.

After establishing a permanent station named "Maitri" amidst the icy terrain a permanent global positioning system has been set up as a reference station for what geologists call "geodetic" studies. The observatory has provided precise values of relative movements of the tectonic plate.

It has been found that the Indian plate moves five cm north and north-eastwards annually.

Automatic weather stations have been set up in remote areas which are providing radiation budget estimation on a yearly basis. The budget is required as an input for mass balance studies towards global climate changes research.

The AWS has recorded various surface energy flux with

an annual energy loss estimated at 45 watt per sq. m.

To tap wind energy in the cold region which has prolonged spells of days and nights, a wind turbine has been designed and made operational. A permanent digital seismometer has also been set up to monitor seismic disturbances of the Atlantic plate. An earthquake measuring 3.5 on the Richter scale was recorded at Maitri station in September, 1999.

A state-of-the-art brewer spectrophotometer has also been inducted in the meteorological observatory. The spectrophotometer has yielded continuous total ozone and sulphur dioxide profiles over Maitri. An ozone hole was recorded as early as August 2000 which was a deviation from the ozone depletion observed from September during earlier years. Scientists have found strong indication of global warming through the experiments at Antarctica.

The south Gangotri glacier in Antarctic pole is shrinking by seven metres per decade, which is an indication of global warming. Though the ice-sheet is melting on the surface, fortunately there is no ice-melting at lower levels. The role of the southern ocean in regulating atmospheric carbon dioxide content, which is about 30 per cent higher than the pre-industrial era, has to be fully understood to develop future plans so as to control global warming.

in all sincerity. Indian women have tremendous latent potential. What they need is the right environment wherein they can unleash their untapped capabilities.

Now, when I recall the entire episode, I thank God Almighty in perpetuity, whose invisible hand emanating all His blessings was always upon my head. I also express indebtedness to all my friends and family whose good wishes stood by me in the testing times at the Antarctic.

Today, I stand with towering pride that I belong to the great adventurers and explorers in the Sikh roll of honour. The believers carry out their resolve, not in words alone, but also indeed and action, entirely in tune with the Sikh thought. I owe my success to the roots from which I derive my existence.

Dr (Mrs) Kanwal Vilku was born on 28 October 1948 and has been a resident of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. She did her B.Sc. and M.B.B.S. from Jabalpur University in 1967 and 1972 respectively. During the course of her assignment with the Central Health Services, she also completed her Post Graduate Diploma in Blood Transfusion & Immunohematology from the PGI at Chandigarh in 1962.

Kanwal is married to an Army Officer from the Regiment of Signals and in the company of her husband, was fortunate to serve in high altitude, snow bound and difficult areas of Kashmir including Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and the North East of India. This exposure inspired her to volunteer for the unique mission in Antarctica.



She was selected as Medical Officer to participate in the 19th Indian Antarctic Scientific Expedition Team, which was launched from Bombay on 7 December 1999 and returned on 22 March 2001.

12 Indian women had visited the Antarctica prior to her but all of them stayed there for a brief period of some two months while Dr (Mrs) Kanwal Vilku spent approximately 16 months in this, the toughest of continents on Earth.

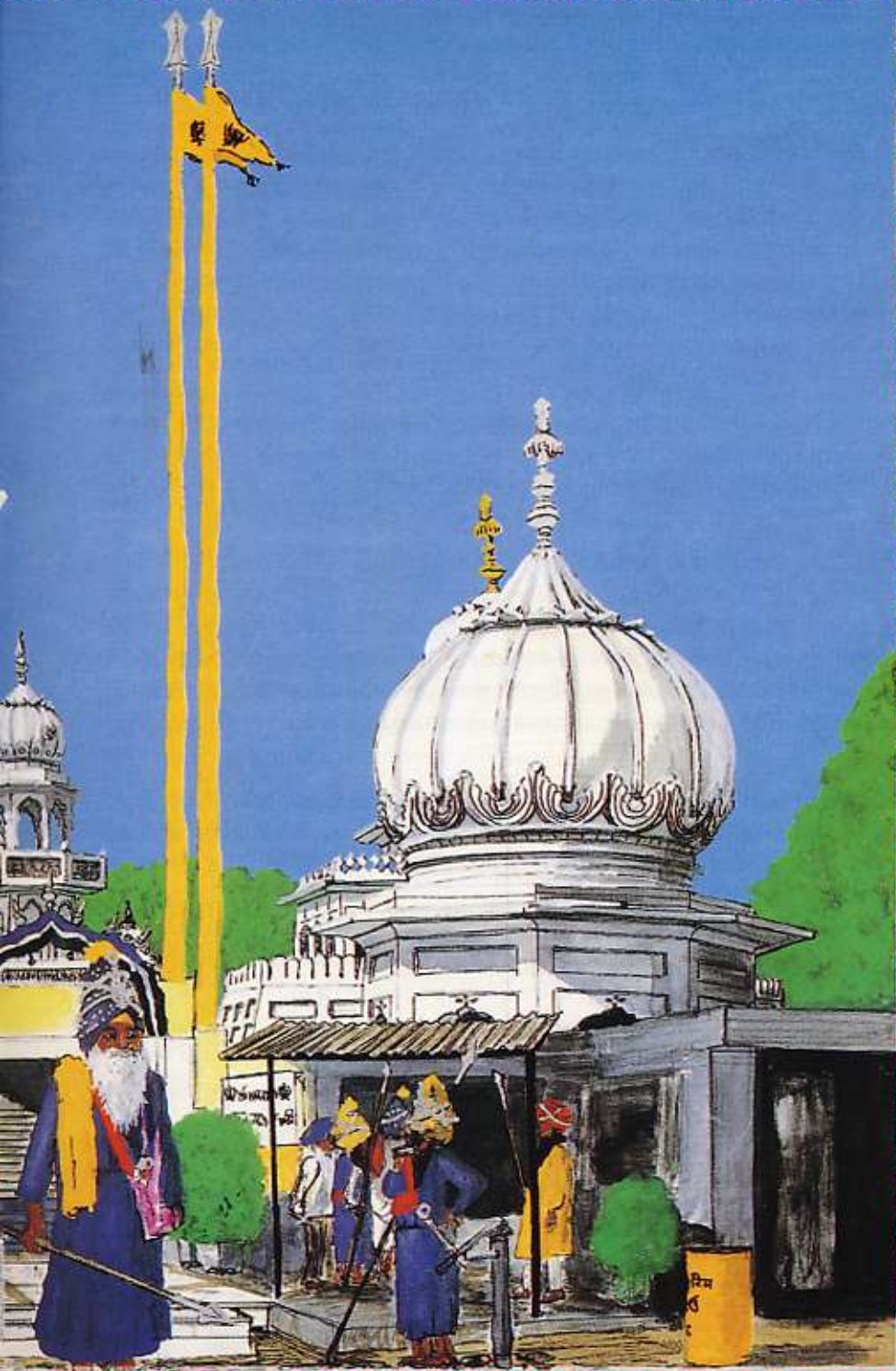
Dr (Mrs) Kanwal Vilku is presently serving as Chief Medical Officer with the CGHS dispensary at Ashok Vihar, New Delhi.

HISTORIC GURDWARAS OF THE SIKHS

DAMDAMA SAHIB



B. S. Matharu
1989



Damdama Sahib, also known as Talwandi Sabo (29° - 59'N, 75° - 5'E), a small town 28 km southeast of Bathinda in the Punjab, is sacred to the Sikhs as the seat of one of their five *takhts* or centres of highest religious authority. Damdama Sahib, place of repose where the Guru had some respite after a period of continuous turmoil, was visited successively by Guru Tegh Bahadur while travelling in these parts in the early 1670s, and Guru Gobind Singh who stayed here for over nine months in 1706. Tradition also recounts a visit by Guru Nanak during one of his journeys across the country. In the earlier half of the eighteenth century, the place became a cantonment for the Sikhs as well as a seat of learning. It gained renown especially under Baba Deep Singh Shahid. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee approved, vide Resolution No. 32, dated 18 November 1966, Damdama Sahib as a *takht*, adjured the *Khalsa* to keep this *takht* in mind as they did in the past while saying their *ardas*, and recommended to the Punjab Government amendment to the Gurdwara Act so that the *jathedar* of the *takht*, like those of the other four *takhts*, could be counted as an *ex officio* member of the Shiromani Committee. Several shrines, *sarovars* and *bungas* survive as relics of its historical past.

Gurdwara Manji Sahib Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Patshahi Nauvin, also called Darbar Sahib, is a flat-roofed rectangular room, marking the site where Guru Tegh Bahadur is believed to have stayed and preached. Daily gatherings for religious prayers, *kirtan* and discourses take place here. Sacred relics including two swords, one muzzle-loading gun, a seal and an old copy of the Guru Granth Sahib are preserved here in a domed cubicle behind the sanctum. Another relic, a mirror, said to have been presented to Guru Gobind Singh by the *sangat* of Delhi, is displayed in the hall. Of the two swords, one is believed to have belonged to Guru Gobind Singh and the other, heavy and double-edged, to Baba Deep Singh. The muzzle-loader is believed to be the one that Guru Gobind Singh received as a present.

Gurdwara Manji Sahib Patshahi IX is another shrine dedicated to Guru Tegh Bahadur. About 100 metres to the west of Darbar Sahib, it marks the spot where he used to sit supervising the digging of the tank, Gurusar. Guru Gobind Singh also sanctified the site by a visit during his stay at Talwandi Sabo. The present building, constructed by the Sant Sevak Jatha, Bunga Mastuana, is a marble-floored hall with a circular tower topped by a domed pavilion at each corner. The Guru Granth Sahib is seated on a canopied seat of white marble, tastefully carved, in a square sanctum marked off by marble-lined pillars. Above the sanctum are two storeys of square rooms overtopped by a lotus dome. The gold-plated pinnacle has an umbrella-shaped finial with a *khanda* on top.

Gurusar Sarovar, a bathing tank, 130x90 metres, with a 10-metre wide marbled pavement around it, was excavated originally by Guru Tegh Bahadur. He is said to have inaugurated the work by digging the first few sods and carrying the earth in his *doshala* or rug. Guru Gobind Singh is believed to have had the tank desilted and deepened. The lining and marble paving are works recently carried out.

Gurdwara Nivas Asthan Damdama Sahib Patshahi X, a multi-storeyed octagonal tower, adjoining the Darbar Sahib, marks the apartments of Guru Gobind Singh. According to *Sakhi Pothi*, when Guru Tegh Bahadur arrived at Talwandi Sabo, he halted at the base of a huge ant-hill, which he saluted as he alighted. Questioned by the Sikhs accompanying him, he explained, "A grand temple, nine spears in height, with golden pinnacles will be erected on that spot by the great one who comes after me. Let my shrine be at the foot of his temple." The Guru Granth Sahib is now seated in a domed room at the top floor of the tower.

Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, adjoining the Darbar Sahib on the east, marks the site where Guru Gobind Singh held his daily assemblies during his stay. Guru Tegh Bahadur had called Talwandi Sabo *Guru ki Kashi*, predicting that "many scholars, philosophers, theologians, copyists with elegant hand, students and devotees will adorn the place." The prophecy came true when learned Sikhs poured in from far and near to be with Guru Gobind Singh. Among them was Bhai Mani Singh who came from Delhi escorting Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devan, the Guru's consorts separated from him after the evacuation of Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh had Bhai Mani Singh prepare a fresh copy of the Guru Granth Sahib under his own supervision. The spot where this work was carried out is still shown to pilgrims. Copies continued to be prepared here from this recension. One such copy preserved here is believed to have been prepared by Baba Deep Singh Shahid himself and contains 707 leaves excluding the list of contents spread over 29 leaves. It was from here that the Guru issued his commands and letters to far-flung Sikh *sangats*. The place became in fact a centre of Sikh learning. This character it has maintained ever since as the home of what is known as Damdami Taksal, or the Damdama School of Learning.

The present building of the **Takht Sri Damdama Sahib**, constructed during the 1970s under the supervision of Sant Seva Singh of Sri Keshgarh, is a spacious high-ceilinged hall, with a pavilion, at either end. The *takht* (throne) proper is a 2 metre high square platform lined with white marble and marked off with numerous columns in the southern part of the hall. This is the sanctum sanctorum on which the Guru Granth Sahib is seated. After the evening service the Holy Book is carried to the old Manji Sahib in a procession of hymn-singing devotees. The interior of the sanctum is decorated with reflecting glass pieces of varying colours set in geometrical and floral designs. Over the sanctum, above the half roof, is a domed square room topped by a tall gold-plated pinnacle and an umbrella-shaped finial, with a *khanda* at the apex. Octagonal towers at the hall corners have also domed

pavilions above them. All these domes are lined with glazed tiles in white, light yellow and light blue colours.

Gurdwara Mata Sundar Ji ate Mata Sahib Devan Ji, to the southeast of the *Takht Sri Damdama Sahib*, marks the place where the holy ladies lived during their stay at Talwandi Sabo in 1706. The Gurdwara comprises a square domed room with the *Guru Granth Sahib* seated on a platform in the middle of it.

Gurdwara Likhansar is a square hall, including a domed sanctum within it, at the southeastern corner of the *sarovar*, holy tank. According to Bhai Kuir Singh, *Gurbilas Patsahi X*, there used to be a pool of water here at the time of *Guru Gobind Singh*, who sitting here sometimes would have reed-pens for the writers made and then throw them into the pool. Once, Bhai Dalla, the local chief converted a disciple, entreated him to explain why he ordered thousands of pens to be cut and thrown away. To quote the *Sakhi Pothi*, the *Guru* said: "Thousands of Sikhs will hereafter study the holy texts in this place and then pens will come into use. This is our Kashi (seat of learning); those who study here will cast off their ignorance and rise to be authors, poets and commentators."

Gurdwara Jandsar, half a kilometre to the northwest of *Takht Sri Damdama Sahib*, marks the place referred to as Jandiana in old chronicles. Here *Guru Gobind Singh* used to disburse largesse to his warriors. The Gurdwara now comprises a domed sanctum, with a small *sarovar* adjacent to it.

Tibbi Sahib is an open space close to a pond known as Mahalsar. Here *Guru Gobind Singh* trained his Sikhs in mock battles. The site continues to be the venue for the traditional *Hola Mahalla* and *Baisakhi*.

Nanaksar, an 80-metre square *sarovar* half-way between the *Takht Sahib* and *Gurdwara Jandsar*, was till lately a natural pond called *Nanaksar*. It was so named in the belief that *Guru Nanak* had stayed on the bank of it during his visit to Talwandi.

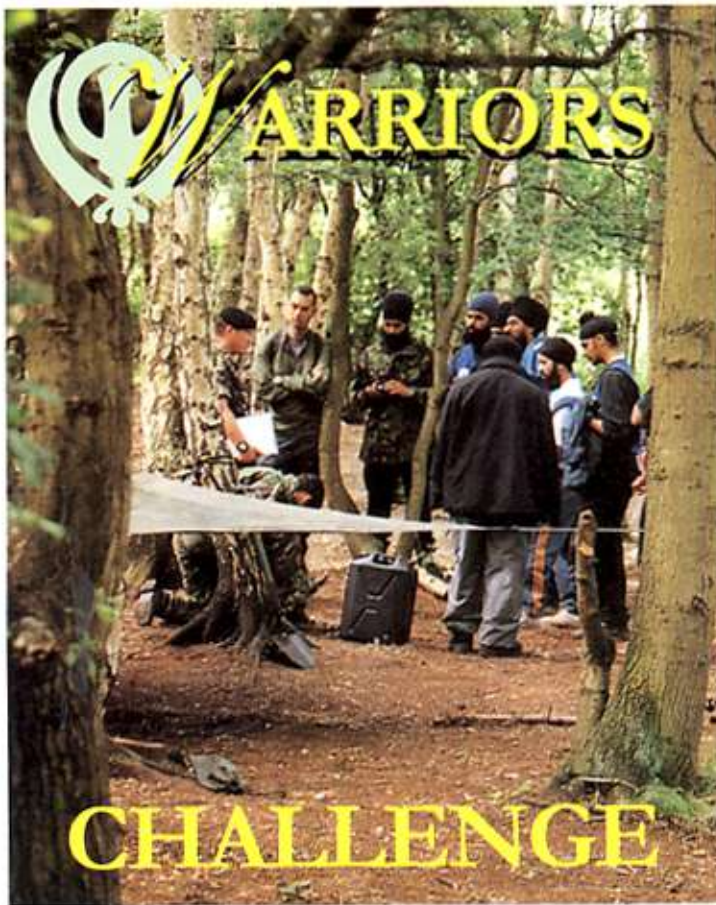
Burj Baba Deep Singh, a 20-metre high tower with a dome at the top adjoining the north-east corner of the *Takht Sahib*, was constructed by *Baba Deep Singh* of *Shahid mist*, who remained at Talwandi to look after the shrines after *Guru Gobind Singh* had left the place to resume his travels. He is also credited with the sinking of the well which still supplies drinking water to the complex.

Samadh Bhai Dall Singh, a small domed shrine standing a bare 30 metres to the south of the *Takht Sahib*, marks the site where *Chudhari Dalla* or *Dall Singh* after he had received the vows of the *Khalsa* at the hands of *Guru Gobind Singh*, was cremated.

Thara Sahib Bhai Bir Singh ate Dhir Singh, a small room in the vicinity of *Burj Baba Deep Singh*, has recently replaced a platform (*thara*, in Punjabi) which marked the place where two *Ranghreta* Sikhs, named, according to local tradition, *Bir Singh* and *Dhir Singh*, father and son respectively, offered themselves as targets for the *Guru* to test a muzzle-loading gun presented to him by a Sikh. According to *Bhai Santokh Singh*, *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, *Chaudhari Dalla* once boasted about the loyalty and courage of his soldiers. *Guru Gobind Singh* asked him to provide a couple of his men as targets so that he could test the range and striking power of the new weapon. The strange demand stunned *Dalla* and his men out of their wits and none of them came forward. The *Guru* thereupon called out the two Sikhs who were at that moment busy tying their turbans. They came running, turbans in hand, each trying to be in front of the other in order to be the first to face the bullet. *Dalla*, astonished at the Sikhs' spirit of sacrifice, was humbled.

Bunga Mastuana Sahib, established in 1923, by *Sant Atar Singh*, is not a historical shrine as such but a prestigious institution for training young scholars in the theory and practice of the Sikh faith. It is a vast complex comprising dormitories, rows of cubicles, a dining hall, an agricultural farm and a magnificent *gurdwara* with a large assembly hall.

All these shrines, other than *Bunga Mastuana Sahib*, are under the management of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee*, which took over control in 1963 from the family of the custodian, *Captain Ranjit Singh* of *Shahzadpur*.



An instruction in outdoor survival techniques, 30 June 2001.

Anyone travelling to the city of Lichfield, set in the heart of England cannot but notice the imposing cathedral which towers above the skyline. Although but a few miles away from the bustling metropolis of Birmingham, this is a serene city, quintessentially British.

The casual visitor, least of all the eclectic mix of cultures which represent modern Britain and especially its Sikhs, would perhaps not be aware of a regimental monument housed in the cathedral. There, amidst serenity is the remembrance to those of the Staffordshire Regiment who had fallen at the battles during the Anglo-Sikh Wars of 1846 and 1849. Atop the marble monument are some of the Sikh battle standards, fraying at the edges but still a poignant reminder of a shared past which was not so long ago.

On 30 June 2001, these battle standards assumed contemporary significance over 150 years after the Staffordshire Regiment of the Imperial British Army had encountered the Khalsa armies on the battlefields of the Punjab, Sikhs once again were amidst the Regiment's personnel at Whittington, Lichfield, not in hostile action but carrying out a joint exercise in recruitment!

The army had titled this day as "Warriors Challenge" and that is what it precisely turned out to be. Undaunted by vehicle breakdowns some 100 miles from the final destination, some 54

young Sikhs turned up at the Lichfield Army Training Regiment to join in the days activities.

The event was laid on by the regional commander Lt.Col.Lawrence Anderson, in co-ordination with the acting officer commanding of the Army Training Centre, Major Tim Saunders. The purpose was to allow the very people who represent such a rich pool of talent for the British armed forces to get an exposure, albeit briefly, of what army life promised. The mix of potential recruits was intriguing, ranging as they were from undergraduates, including one from Oxford, to some 16 year-olds who were just recovering from GCSE exams.

Most of the youngsters turned up in casual outdoor wear whilst a noticeable few donned the conspicuous "chola" with their *Sri Sahibs* at the side. Some of the ladies even sported "keskis" and dupatee.

In the brief introductory session, a representative of the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust set the theme. The Trust, as part of its work in preserving Sikh heritage and promoting Anglo-Sikh history, has been instrumental in liaising with the Army for staging the event and it immediately became clear that this was not some public relations-inspired photo opportunity. The issue of greater Sikh representation in the British Forces had been at the forefront of the Trust's inaugural "Portrait of Courage" lecture at the Imperial War Museum in October 2000 given by the noted military historian from India, Pushpinder Singh and this day was in continuation of that same process.

This initiative was serious and focussed. The aim was to vitalise and reconnect the Sikhs with that inalienable part of their psyche, which had moulded them into legendary soldiers: *Warrior Saints*. The motivation was also clear. It came not from policy documents and consultants imploring diversity in recruitment. The foundations for Sikh representation in the British Army had been laid in the battlefields of the two World Wars where they had been gallant and steadfast, fighting on foreign shores. It was now time to start building on those foundations before they decayed through a strange mix of apathy, ignorance and "political correctness".

As the groups dispersed to take-on the various tasks, excitement became immediately discernible. A group of relieved non-participants, including Sikh community representatives accompanied by the regional Commander Brigadier Andrew Meek, followed on behind. Assault course, weapons handling,



Warrant Officer Makand Singh of the British Army (left extreme) with the potential warriors at Lichfield.



Pushpinder Singh with the Officer i/c Training at Lichfield.

outdoor survival, communications, climbing course and field medical rescue all provided a variety and an interesting array of activities, which each group tackled with gusto.

By lunch time the spirits were soaring higher than even at the start, as the teams started to interact amongst themselves and rapport with their Army instructors and team leaders started to take hold. As the Sikhs mingled with experienced serving officers, the enthusiasm was evident. These were young British Sikhs who represented a potential valuable intake for the British Army. Their

impressions and concerns were both legitimate and relevant and the Army demonstrated a clear desire to engage and listen. Issues like those of the turban as essential uniform and other religious and cultural concerns will need to be resolved but are certainly not intractable challenges. They merely require sensitive handling together with an appreciation that it is the *faith* of the Sikhs which makes them such formidable soldiers.

30 June 2001 came to a close with inter-team sports where again the Sikh youngsters excelled. But it was not just a matter of physical ability and exertion. It was also about spirit and courage. In one particular instance the assault course presented a challenge of 3 consecutive gymnastic horses. The idea was to vault over them one at a time, with perhaps a few strides in between. One Sikh, in flowing *chola* decided to conserve energy and from the top of one box attempted to leap directly onto the other. He very nearly made it and undoubtedly, with more training, he will but it was more than a physical leap. It demonstrated a leap of imagination and character. Some of the Army instructors gasped at his audacity but his actions were clearly borne of the same audacity and bravery which saw Naik Nand Singh of the Sikh Regiment leap from bunker to bunker in Burma when winning the Victoria Cross. The resolve displayed in that memorable citation of over 50 years ago was evident this day in Whittington.

Another rather exhausted and clearly out of shape Sikh was struggling to negotiate the final lap of the assault course. He looked to his teammates for a signal, which would allow him to retire hurt, but with a clear conscience. What he got instead was a volley of encouragement invoking the Lion spirit of the Sikh Khalsa to never give up. As he collapsed at the finish, it had clearly done the deed.

Presentations were made to the winning team and the individual who had negotiated the assault course in the fastest time. In his closing address, Major Saunders commented that it was clear to him and his staff that the participants had demonstrated a spirit and enthusiasm that upheld the martial tradition of the Sikh nation. They were encouraging words but even more importantly, were based on objective professional observations and entirely correct.

Finally Lt.Col. Anderson stepped forward and suggested that the Sikhs too may wish to show their appreciation of the Army Staff with the customary three cheers. Even as he cleared his throat for the first words,



1. Sikhs in the Indian Armed Forces today number over 200,000, in all arms. Seen here are those with the Air Force, Parachute Regiment and Special Forces (Commando).
2. The Indian Army Aviation Corps has long been commanded by Sikh Generals. Seen here is the Director General (right) with Lt. Col. A.S. Sidhu, Army Chief Test Pilot and Gp. Capt. Roger Wedge, RAF Attache.
3. Subedar Major Sahib of the 5th Sikhs, presenting kirpan and sarapa (ceremonial scarf) to Lt. Col. Robin Hodges, CO 1st Kings, both battalions being formally affiliated in 1990.
4. General Sir Michael Walker, Chief of General Staff, British Army, was earlier senior NATO Commander in Bosnia.
5. General Walker with Sikh war veterans at Leicester's gurdwara.

Brigadier Sebastian Roberts, commanding the Irish Guards and the Army's head of communications has, said: "This is hugely interesting area. But there would be problems starting a regiment from scratch.

"We can't take a regiment out of the frontline for years to let it get up to strength. The idea of starting off with a Sikh Territorial Army unit is one which we would look at."

Major General Julian Thompson, who led the Commando Brigade during the Falklands War before retiring in 1986 said: 'This is a brilliant idea. The Sikhs are bloody good soldiers.'

A Sikh Regiment of the British Army?

Proposals for raising of a “pure” Sikh Regiment (the Royal Sikh Regiment) in the British Army has created a lively debate, both in the corridors of Whitehall (Ministry of Defence headquarters in London) and St. James’ Palace (formal residence of the Prince of Wales) as well as the daily press in England.

Prince Charles, as Colonel-in-Chief of a number of British Army Regiments, has taken keen interest in ethnic minority recruitment and has lobbied for a distinct Sikh Regiment with various senior British Army Generals, including Sir Charles Guthrie while he was Chief of Defence Staff. Such a unit would be similar to the Scots, Welsh and Irish Guards or the Royal Gurkhas, three battalions of which are included in the order-of-battle.

Mohan Singh Gill, one of a group of former servicemen campaigning for such a regiment, said: “The Army has a shortfall in recruits and we have young men to fill that. The support of the Prince is most welcome, he is a forward-thinking man. We have a warrior tradition and – just look at our record” !

Harbinder Singh Rana, Chairman of the *Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust*, said: “We have a legacy of military achievement with this country. I could give the Army hundreds of (volunteer) names tomorrow”.

There are currently only six Sikh officers and 18 other ranks out of the British Army’s 105,000 personnel. As interesting statistics, there are some 35 “pure” Sikh battalions in the Indian Army’s order-of-battle, almost equal to that of the entire British Army of today. Besides, there are well over another 100,000 Sikh soldiers in other arms, including the Cavalry, Artillery, Engineers, Signals, Armoured and Mechanised Infantry, Commando and Army Aviation Corps, apart from the Navy and Air Force.

Therefore the point made by a British Army officer “Why should we limit Sikhs to one regiment? There are huge opportunities in all sorts of fields for them in the Services”, is absolutely pertinent.



Sikh ladies watching demonstration at the Regimental Centre.



Gymnasium of the Army Training Regiment, Lichfield.

a resounding “*Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akaal*” was sounded from amongst the ranks. It was totally spontaneous but nevertheless awesome! The same immortal battle cry of the Sikhs had been heard in Gallipoli, Flanders, Neuve Chapelle, Ypres, Monte Casino, Mandalay and many other battlefields where the Sikh soldier had made unparalleled sacrifices. How wonderful and fitting that it should be heard again, in the recruiting grounds of Britain.

Harbinder Singh Rana

The author is Projects Director of the Maharajah Duleep Singh Centenary Trust who wishes to thank Nirmal Singh Dhese, Amandeep Singh Madra and Harjit Singh (British Organisation of Sikh Students) for their assistance in staging the event.

GENERAL CHANDA SINGH

When Nadar Shah was returning to Kabul after looting Delhi, his trail was way-laid by Sikhs and a large portion of the loot was seized and taken back. On coming to know about this loss Nadar Shah enquired from his guides about the Sikhs as to who they were and where they lived. He was told that they lived on horse-back and had no known settlements. Nadar Shah remarked that one day they would surely rule this land. His prophecy proved to be true, and Sikhs became rulers of Punjab soon thereafter. Horsemanship had become a part of their lore and way of life.

Sardar Bahadur Singh of village Sursingh in District Amritsar used to supply quality horses to equip the cavalry of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He also used to provide financial help whenever needed, and for that reason was given the title of "Shah" by which suffix the members of the family are still known. General Chanda Singh, the grandson of Sardar Bahadur Singh, was born at village Sursingh now located close to the Indo-Pak Border, on 23 November, 1864. He grew up with well-bred horses and as a young boy started participating in equestrian games like horse racing, picking up small objects off the ground from a galloping horse at full speed and tent pegging. Riding was a part of his life and young Chanda enlisted himself in the 16th Bengal Lancers at Jullundur in 1882. Polo was becoming popular in Indian cavalry in those days, and Chanda Singh was assigned the task of training polo ponies and in this way he started playing polo and was soon inducted in the Regimental Polo Team.

Maharaja Rajinder Singh of Patiala was a patron of the sports. He introduced polo in his State in 1891, and got released from the Indian Cavalry two young polo players, Chanda Singh and Hira Singh for induction to the Patiala polo team. They both eventually rose to the rank of Generals and become legendary polo players. Maharaja Rajinder Singh put his State on the sports map of the world by providing a first class polo ground at Patiala (plus



the highest cricket ground in the world at Chail, and brought the legendary "Ranji" to the State.) Patiala's polo team soon won laurels in winning the Beresford Cup at Simla for three consecutive years (1896, 1897 and 1898) and then created a sensation in 1898 when they defeated the famous Jodhpur Polo team at Ambala.

The fame of Col. Chanda Singh soon spread all over the world and Comte Jean de Madre, the great French enthusiast of polo having read of him in European papers, came to India in 1908 and visited Patiala to watch Col. Chanda Singh's play. He was so much impressed by his game that he requested the Patiala Government to permit Col. Chanda Singh to visit Europe and to play for his polo team *The Tigers* in Europe. His request was acceded to and in May 1909, Col. Chanda Singh proceeded to Europe where *The Tigers* won the English Polo Championship at Ranelagh and Roehampton. Col. Chanda Singh was playing as a back in these matches, and got considerable publicity for his superb game. "*The Tatler*" commented about him as probably the greatest polo back in the world Chanda is a wonder. This is no exaggeration. "Chanda the Polo wonder has come to England to play for *The Tigers*" were exclaimed in the British Press.



Simla, 1899: H.H. Maharaja Rajinder Singh, Col. Chanda Singh and Col. Sewa Singh after having been awarded the Medal and Bar of the Tirah Campaign by Lord Curzon, Governor General of India.

H.M. King Alphonso of Spain himself a very keen polo enthusiast, after reading the accounts about Col. Chanda Singh sent his household Ministers to Paris and requested Chanda Singh to visit Spain for participating in the game there. Both Comte Jean de Madre and Col. Chanda Singh left for Madrid and on the evening of their arrival the King called Col. Chanda Singh and personally requested him to play in his team—which he gladly agreed to. Polo championship of Spain commenced and the King entered his team with Col. Chanda Singh playing as back. The King's team won the championship and the King was greatly pleased with Col. Chanda Singh. The King asked him to bring his family and settle in Spain and that he would be pleased to grant him a noble rank with enough provision for him and his family. The Colonel thanked the king for his generosity but politely declined the offer saying that he was already in the service of a King—at Patiala—and it was owing to his patronage that he had come to Europe. *The Tigers* team again won the Championship in France and England and Col. Chanda Singh was always the shining star. On his return to Patiala, Col. Chanda Singh was received with great enthusiasm by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh who had now succeeded Maharaja Rajinder Singh to the throne.

Capt. Thakur Singh, the younger brother of Col. Chanda Singh, had also now joined the Patiala polo team. He was also a great horseman and in 1911 during the Coronation Durbar of King George V at Delhi, took part in King Emperor's Cup Race. 34 competitors had entered this race but only two of them could complete this gruelling event, full of big hurdles: Captian Thakur Singh won the race. The King came down from the Royal stand and personally presented the Cup to Capt. Thakur Singh.

Col. Chanda Singh was again invited to England in 1914 by the Earl of Rocksavage to play in his team but when Chanda Singh reached England, the War with Germany had broken out and he had to return to India. In 1916 the Govt. of India awarded him with the Order of British India (O.B.I. 1st class) and the title of Sardar Bahadur. In 1918 at the time of Dussehra Durbar, Col. Chanda Singh was promoted to the rank of Brigadier by the Maharaja and in April 1919 to the rank of Major General and was appointed as G.O.C. of the Cavalry Brigade. In 1919 he was awarded the '*Most Excellent Order of the British Empire*' in recognition of his long and distinguished services. In 1920, Polo Championship of India was held in Delhi in the presence of Edward Montague, the then Secretary of State for India. The finals between Patiala and Jodhpur was won by the Patiala team by 4 goals. The Cup was presented to Gen. Chanda Singh by Mr. Montague. Again in the winter of 1920 H.R.H the Duke of Connaught visited India and the polo championship of India was held in February 1921. The Patiala and Jodhpur teams again met in the finals and the Patialas won by 4 goals again. The Cup was presented by the

Duke of Connaught to the General. In December 1921, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) came to India and visited Patiala in January 1922. He played polo and went for pig sticking too. Gen. Chanda Singh, who was very dexterous in this sport accompanied him and they bagged 12 pegs that morning.

The Polo championship held in honour of the Prince was played in Delhi. The Patiala and Jodhpur teams again met in the final and the latter this time won by one goal after a very hard and contested game. The Patiala Polo team comprised Maj. Jaswant Singh, Col. Joginder Singh, Capt. Thakur Singh and Gen. Chanda Singh at the back. Gen. Chanda Singh played this tournament at the age of 58 with a handicap of 9 goals which is probably a world record for that age. In 1924 the Patiala Polo team won the Beresford Cup Polo tournament and the Viceroy's Staff Cup handicap Polo tournament at Simla. This was the last tournament played and won by Gen. Chanda Singh. The Patiala team again comprised Maj. Jaswant Singh, Col. Joginder Singh, Capt. Thakur Singh and Gen. Chanda Singh. The Beresford Cup bears the name of Gen. Chanda Singh



*The Viceroy's Staff Cup Polo Tournament, Simla-1912. Won by the Patiala Polo Team.
(L to R: Capt. Thakur Singh, Col. Chanda Singh, H.H. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh,
Thakur Banai Singh of Jodhpur and Col. Joginder Singh.*

18 times and that of his brother Capt. Thakur Singh 11 times. Never have two brothers participated in so many Polo Championships anywhere in the world.

The well known Polo player Col. T.P. Melville writes in his autobiography:- "It reminds me of many more important battles of the great struggle we had with the Patiala Team for the Beresford Cup at Simla. It was the time when Chanda Singh, their back, was at his zenith, and there have been few better players and few finer gentlemen. I only wish the younger Sikh generation more closely resembled him." Gen. Chanda Singh retired in 1935 having put in more than 45 years of service. He continued riding till the age of 84. He expired peacefully on 29 November, 1950 at the age of 86, deeply missed by his numerous friends and admiring Polo players in India and abroad.

Rosita Forbes, who travelled widely in India for 20 years and wrote *India of the Princes*, was in Patiala in 1938 when Maharaja Bhupinder Singh was seriously ill also wrote "The oldest A.D.C., General Chanda Singh, who in 1921, at the age of 55, was still playing first-class polo in the famous team captained by the late Maharajah, led us into the garden.



*At the Polo Ground Compeigne, France - 1911.
L to R: Col. Chanda Singh, Hon'ble W.S. Buckmaster,
Marquis de Vilavija, Comte Jean de Madre, Maj. Shah
Mirza Baig, H.H. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.*



*Polo Championship of India for H.R.H. The Duke of
Connaught's Cup, Delhi -1921. Won by Patiala Polo Team.
L to R: Gen. Chanda Singh, Capt. Thakur Singh,
Maj. Jaswant Singh and Col. Joginder Singh.*



*Winners of the Beresford Cup Open Polo Tournament,
Simla-1906. Won by Patiala Team.
Sitting L to R: Col. Chanda Singh, Gen. Pritam Singh
Standing L to R: Col. Sewa Singh, Capt. Thakur Singh.*

"Illness should be only for the old," he said sadly, and in the same breath, "I am nearly seventy-three and have never been ill."

"But then I never go in a motor car and I can still ride fifty miles a day."

He showed us his horse waiting under a tree. "I ride everywhere, to the palace, to my house, to the club. There is plenty of time and I am not in a hurry."

To distract his mind from what was happening inside the palace, which was crowded with doctors from Delhi and Europe, he told us of his youth in the service of the dying Maharajah's father.

"In those days there were no politics, no papers, and no business. His Highness just gave orders and his Ministers—there were only two of them—saw that they were carried out.

"We occupied ourselves with sport. There must have been 500 horses in the stables.

"Every day we would get up at five and ride out thirteen miles into the country to pig-stick. We'd get back by eleven and have our special 'Patiala pegs', double strength, at the club, and then somebody's say: 'What about a game of rackets till lunch?'

"So we'd all play squash, and in the afternoon after His Highness had signed his name to a few letters, there was polo.

"Each of us had his sixteen ponies in those days, and we always ended up with roller-skating before dinner."

The old man, who spoke of such relentless sport as if it were the only natural way of living, strode along, spare as a reed, hard as whipcord.

Typical of the tireless Sikhs, warriors born and bred, to whom soldiering is the only possible career, he wore the steel bracelet that originated as a shield, the comb as a symbol of cleanliness, for no Sikh may cut hair or beard, and the small sword ordained by their Prophet as a symbol that man must always be ready to fight.

His snow-white beard curled up to his ears.

When talking of his family, he never mentioned a woman, for in Patiala wives and daughters are rigidly secluded behind Zenana walls. When they move from one great house to another, an immense crimson cloth is tied over the carriage, and, in the case of royalty, sealed, so that no eye can possibly see so much as a movement within.

The tradition of military service in the family did not end with Gen. Chanda Singh and his brother Capt. Thakur Singh but continued. Gen. Chanda Singh had five sons. The eldest Fateh Singh was also a good polo player and captained polo team of 1st Rajendra Patiala Lancers which



Reproduction of the painting commissioned by the Nishaan, is the handiwork of Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala (presently Governor of Uttaranchal Pradesh) who uses his painting talents to exercise his imagination in relief and recovery.

Col. Chanda Singh on 'Miss Haig' in England, 1909.



won the Viceroy's Staff Cup at Simla in 1929, '30 and '31. He retired as a Brigadier. The second son, Teja Singh served in the Indian Military Engineers and retired as a Major. The third son, Hon. Capt. Anup Singh was also a good rider and polo player. He was also an expert roller skater which also had been introduced in Patiala by Maharaja Rajinder Singh who constructed a world class skating rink in Baradari Garden. Capt. Baghel Singh, the fourth son, was a dashing horse rider and won many races and trophies, very fond of keeping good horses. He retired after serving in the Burma Campaign during the Second



Sardar Bahadur Gen. Chanda Singh, O.B.E., A.D.C.
1864-1950

World War. The youngest son, Col. Roopender Singh was in the II Lancers and retired after serving in Indian cavalry.

Brig. Fateh Singh's son Capt. Amarjit Singh lost his leg in an accident and thereafter served as a Recruiting Officer. Now the youngest grandson of Gen. Chanda Singh, Col. Gurdeepinder Singh is also serving in the II Lancers of the Indian Army and is an upcoming officer. Horse riding has been imbibed by the fourth generation of Gen. Chanda Singh through his grand daughter Surjit Kaur whose son Jasjit Singh is a good horse rider. He recently won horse races at different places and participated in National Tent Pegging at Jaipur. Jasjit Singh is now active in reviving and organising the grand sport of Polo in Patiala in this the new Millennium.

A POLO COMEBACK

The *Patiala Tigers* will forever remain part of polo history and lore, which once received royal patronage in the former princely state of Patiala. This is hopefully making a comeback with the holding of the first *Punjab and Sind Bank Tercentenary Polo Tournament* in temporarily prepared grounds in the Aviation Club compound during 2000.

It was the *Patiala Tigers*, the polo team formed by Maharaja Rajinder Singh, which put Patiala on the world's polo map. Maharaja Rajinder Singh, who started polo in Patiala in 1891 even married his English stable manager's daughter, Florence, and made it a point to make the princes' learn the game. The princes' went on hitting the ball all the way up to Nabha and back in the morning before breakfast.

Five years after their inception, the *Patiala Tigers* went on to win the Beresford Cup at Simla for three consecutive years in a row from 1896 to 1898. The core of the team was the legendary Chanda Singh, whom the Maharaja got released from the 16th Bengal Lancers for the purpose. Under Maharaja Bhupinder Singh's patronage the game flourished further with the team winning a number of memorable victories against arch-rivals Jodhpur. The last such match in 1922 proved to be the turning point in the history of the game in the principality. Though initially ahead, the *Patiala Tigers* lost the game in last "chukkar"; Maharaja Bhupinder Singh is said to have been so livid at the loss that he reportedly threw mallets of the players into a fire!

The present scion of the Patiala royal family Captain Amarinder Singh, is proud that the *Patiala Tigers* at their peak had a combined handicap of 40 goals – a world record!

Although no team from the state participated in the 2000 fixture, nostalgia resulted in some top teams of the country taking part in the tournament, held under official patronage. Punjab Polo Association Vice President Major General U.S.Sidhu (Retd) said that the Government used the opportunity of the Tercentenary to revive polo in the city and the states for which six teams had been invited for the tournament with four of them – 61st Cavalry, Vikram Sodhi's *Anandpur Sahib Tigers*, "Yuvraj" Vikramaditya's team and industrialist Naveen Jindal's team-were in the fray. Besides a competitive match, there were exhibition matches everyday.

Major General Sidhu said that as the polo ground in the heart of Patiala had become unsuitable for the task because of the construction of a gymnasium on it, the polo association had taken some area on loan from the Patiala Aviation Club and prepared its own playing field.

Major General Sidhu said as the ground for the tournament was taken on loan it could not be said whether this would become a regular feature. He however, said if the ground was leased to the association it could hold a tournament at least every alternate year. Patiala could then be developed as a polo centre owing to its proximity to Delhi as foreign teams did not want to participate in the Bombay and Calcutta circuits. He said polo could certainly be used to promote tourism in Patiala.

Reviving the tradition

Polo players from the erstwhile Phulkian States of the Punjab, and various Rajasthani States, carved a niche of immortality in this, the King of Sports during the early decades of the twentieth century.

The game is now confined to just a few countries who keep up the spirit and style thanks to efforts of the very few. The reasons are many and obvious. In the frenzied pace of metropolitan life, the horse is seen as an anachronism, even if its beauty and nobility remain unrivalled.

The world went through two devastating wars in the last century and vital place of the horse in mobility was eclipsed by heavily armoured mechanised vehicles. Cavalry regiments lost their steeds well within the first half of the century and the horse now remains the mount only for ceremonial duties and functions, and that too with few armies, including the British, Indian and Pakistani. Special police forces use the horse, exemplified by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as also in many other parts of the world.

Polo has continued to be played in India, almost entirely because of the unbridled enthusiasm and drive of some individuals and the Indian Army, which is unique amongst armed forces of the world to retain a horsed-cavalry regiment, the 61st Cavalry. Together with the mounted President's Body



*Dr. Pawan Deep
"Tony" Singh at
the President's Body
Guard polo ground,
Delhi.*

The word *polo* is derived from the Tibetan *pulu*, meaning a ball, although the game itself probably originated in ancient Persia where it was known as *changar* (a mallet). It was during the British Raj in India that the game evolved and developed its present form, status and character and was introduced into England by Cavalry officers in 1868. The grounds were then all in the London area: Hurlingham, Ranelagh and Roehampton and, soon enough, polo became a highly fashionable game, an integral feature of the 'season'.



The polo season is confined to the winter months in India but enthusiastically followed in Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay apart from the Rajasthan cities.



Because polo is played at a more or less continuous gallop, it is necessary to change and rest ponies and therefore the game is divided into periods, or "*chukars*" of 7½ minutes duration. The big tournament matches are divided into six *chukars* and the smaller contests into four. There are four players in a team, being numbered 1 and 2 (forwards), 3 and back, the latter's duty being mainly defence and marking the opposing No. 1. There is no "off-side" rule and "riding off" an opponent is all part of the game but owing to hazards inherent in a fast-galloping stick-and-ball dual, the umpires are strict about the manners of bumping, zigzagging and 'crossing'.



In this picture, taken during the Baroda Cup (12-Goal tournament) are (left to right) Billy Sodhi, Gurpal Singh, Prabhjit Singh Bedi, Dr.Pawan Deep Singh and Colonel Rupinder Singh Brar, playing for the PBG against 61 Cavalry which team included Major Jitender Singh Ahluwalia and visiting polo players from Argentina.

Guard (PBG), they present a magnificent spectacle at Republic Day parades in January and special ceremonial occasions, again in New Delhi, escorting dignitaries visiting India's capital.

The Polo season is enthusiastically followed by both professionals and enthusiasts alike, the teams playing in New Delhi's *Jaipur Polo Ground*, also doing the circuit at Calcutta's famed maidans, in Bombay and Bangalore.

The traditions forged by the grand polo players of Patiala are now emulated by a band of extremely talented Sikh polo players in Delhi, and Jaipur (Colonel Kuldip Singh Garcha) Playing numerous of tournaments, Colonel Rupinder Singh Brar and Major Prabhjit Singh Bedi of the President's Body Guard, have often teamed with Major Jitender Singh Ahluwalia and Gurpal Singh Sandhawalia of the 61st Cavalry and Dr.Pawan Deep Singh ("Tony") Kohli for various Trophies.

A HOMAGE IN CELLULOID



Thakur Ranvir Singh's film on Guru Gobind Singh

Whenever invited by the local Singh Sabha to their Gurdwara on Gurpurabs, I was awed by the exhilarating spirit of the spirit and unyielding nature of the Sikhs. Was it moulded by the teachings of their Gurus and the path they had shown? I wanted to know. I was always fascinated by the heroic deeds of the Tenth Guru whom many have eulogised in their writings. However, I must confess I did not know enough about Guru Gobind Singh ji.

A Granthi once visited our house to talk about my illustrious ancestor, Sant Pipa and to visit his "Samadhi", the last resting place, about 80 kilometers south-east of Kota near the Gagron Fort. Pipa ji was Raja Pratap Rai Chauhan of the Kingdom of Gagron who had renounced his throne at the age of thirty to lead a life of the ascetic. He placed his younger brother Kalyan Rai on the throne and achieved fame in due course as the sage of Western India. Later, Guru Arjun Dev incorporated one of his "Shabad" in the Granth Sahib and, being the twenty-ninth descendant of Kalyan Rai, I feel immensely proud that the words of wisdom of Pipa ji have been given a place of such honour in the holy Granth Sahib.

That day, the Granthi and I talked about Guru Gobind Singh ji which opened a new vista for me. I started reading numerous books by eminent writers and scholars on the life and times of the Tenth Guru. Only then did I realise the tremendous importance of his to humanity. I was awestruck

by his dazzling personality, the greatest of versatile geniuses, whose multifaced personality excelled in every mission that he undertook. The world knows him as the "Saint-Soldier", but he was far more than that, the supreme manifestation of man with a divine soul and a lion's heart.

It is very difficult for anyone to comprehend the greatness of the Tenth Guru unless one studies his life story very carefully and objectively. This nation and our society owe him incalculable debt, but very few own to it and recorded history has not done justice to his stature. Perhaps the fault lies with the Sikhs too! They made him a "Punjabi" and housed him in Gurdwaras, like an icon. Actually, he is the Guru of all of mankind, the Guru of humanity who championed the cause of downtrodden and infused a new life into the downcast and defeated society when the Moghul rule had turned bigoted and barbaric. The times were cruel and harsh and Guru Gobind Singh then came as the saviour.

While learning about him, as a film maker, I started imagining, with numerous images flashing across my mental screen, got more and more involved with the subject and saw a possibility of doing a film like "The Message", the life of Prophet Mohammed. However, I realised that it was not going to be an easy task, yet the urge to present the inspiring story of the great Guru was very strong in spite of my limited

resources. I plunged into the project with the Guru's name on my lips and hoped for the best.

First, it took me some time to convince the highest Sikh religious body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC) to give necessary permission to make the film. When I produced the script written by famous Sikh writer Kartar Singh Duggal, it helped to move closer and when they learnt that I was a descendant of Sant Pipa, the SGPC realised that my desire to present the life of the Guru was genuine. They granted the much needed permission and extended all the cooperation. Thereafter our film caravan moved on.

Filming on locations can be very exciting. You meet all kinds of people, visit exotic places and learn a lot. This film too provided ample opportunities for all that. We travelled for 8000 kilometers through 7 states following the footsteps of the Guru, but there were restrictions. Most of the location work was time bound. For instance we could go to Hemkunt Sahib only in late July or early August or film the birth celebrations in Patna Sahib only in December or January.

It took us four days from Delhi to reach Hemkunt Sahib, high up in the Himalayas and four days to get back for just two hours of filming. Then there was a descendant of Rai Kalha Khan of Raikot, now living in Lahore who has a "Ganga Sagar" gifted to his ancestor by the Guru Sahib. It took us some months to convince him, after scores of phone calls to have his sentiments on tape. He did that but could not send the video tape directly to Delhi in case it was confiscated by customs. Eventually, it was carried by some one to London who in turn sent it to us from there with one of his friends.

The Guru Sahib fought 14 major battles in his short life and it would have cost staggering amounts to recreate those battles. However, some symbolic scenes had to be incorporated and for that we needed cannons. That was tough because to really fire the cannon (which are only show pieces now) we needed "experts"—and a licence. Finally, it was Akbar Khan, who had dummy cannons made for his serial "Akbar the great", who helped us out, as these were still stored in Jaipur. We got a special effects man and filmed the cannons booming.

Although we had the necessary permission from the SGPC and their guide along with us, there were many Gurdwaras in various states which do not fall under the jurisdiction of the SGPC and it was there that we had to convince the trustees or Granthis that our aim was to spread the gospel of the Guru. They were apprehensive about a non-Sikh making a film about "their" Guru. So days would pass without any decision, and we had to return only after they were convinced about our sincerity. We never met more hospitable and warm people than at the Sikh congregations. We would always be served first before they ate.

We had approached Vajpayee, the Prime Minister to appear in the film and I had the privilege to meet and brief

him. The script was asked for, which was wetted by the Ministry of HRD and approved. Ashok Tandon, the press attache kept us on standby. Alas, the Government fell, then came Kargil and eventually elections. Twice cameras were ready to go to his residence, but the Prime Minister was caught in some urgent matters. Finally, the PMO advised us to go ahead without him but conveyed his blessings of I.K.Gujral, Sunil Dutt, Dr. Abid Hussain, Lt.General S.S.Grewal, Vinod Khanna, Shatrughan Sinha, H.H.Shankracharya of Kanchi and many luminaries to appear in the film.

In spite of all the co-operation and help from everyone, we still had limitations. Religious Council of the SGPC laid down strict guidelines and conditions and the Institute of Sikh Studies examined every word of the script. We could not use any imagination or dramatise anything. All the main personalities were depicted in paintings and if the live action was given more footage, the paintings would get sidelined, so we had to edit out most of the docu-drama. Then I had to decide whether to make it in a modern idiom.... people being interviewed, fast editing and an intellectual exercise or make it a straight forward film for all ages which could appeal to people everywhere. I chose the latter approach.

Making this film, which took me nearly four years, has been an eye opener. How little people know about this divine personage! Guru Gobind Singh ji was really the founder of an ideal secular and socialistic democratic society, which is now the basic principle of our constitution. He created the Khalsa brotherhood, the most amazing mass movement ever

*Raag Dhanasari**

Pipa Bhakt (b.1426 AD)

In the body, God is present
The body is His temple
In the body is the place of pilgrimage
Of which I am the pilgrim
In the body are the incense and candles
In the body is the holy offering
In the body the oblation
After searching in many regions
It is the only body
I have found the nine treasures
For me there is no going away
For me there is no coming back
Since I have appealed to God
He who pervades the universe
Also dwells in the body
He who seeks shall find Him there
Saith Pipa: God is the primal Being
The True Guru shall reveal Him.

* Included in the holy Granth Sahib, advocating the search of Param Tatva (Supreme Being) within oneself.

Thakur Ranvir Singh in Celluloid

The art of film-making and the problematics of production have always been a challenge to the creative imagination if the producer-director has indeed a vision to hoist—of man and society, of the complex geometry of human relationships, of familial agonies of cultures and civilisations. Such a person needs to have an acute sense of history, and of the power of the great moments in it. This task becomes all the more demanding if the film in question concerns the life and glory of a charismatic leader. And if it's the story of great religious mentors, a prophetic personality, the sheer magnitude of the enterprise compels admiration.

Considered thus, the immortal saga of Guru Gobind Singh's heroic deeds and visionary heights would naturally tax any producer's imagination given the enormous hurdles in the way. Of course, Hollywood and Bollywood both have made successful mega-size feature films of some of the Christian, Jewish and Hindu divines, of gods and goddesses, but in the case of Muslim and Sikh religions, the obvious injunctions regarding *impersonation* in any form rules out the question of making feature films with a cast of known actors and actresses. Thus, to bring to life in a 3-hour film which simulates the scenes and the sites connected with the Tenth Sikh Master can only be the handiwork of a producer who has had a wide experience in the field of film-making, documentaries etc. And such a film is Thakur Ranvir Singh's film which is about as remarkable as would be possible, given the hostility and the mindset of the Sikh Establishment. Two and a half Cheers, for this Rajasthani devotee of the Guru!

I've watched the film and I wish to record some of my impressions, not as a critique, but as a tribute.

As one's eyes get riveted to the scenes from the Guru's birth in Patna to the last days of the Master at Nanded (Sri Hazoor Sahib), the picture develops into a balanced discourse comprehending a variety of techniques. Thakur Ranvir Singh's Hollywood background and experience thus add to the effectiveness of the film which at times, does develop into a poem in celluloid.

We're, however, not quite happy to find political characters like S.S. Ahluwalia, MP or the two Bollywood film stars, Sunil Dutt and Vinod Khanna making their comments and observations. Obviously, the Thakur, in his pragmatic way, wanted to enhance the commercial value of his venture. There's no need to extend the argument. One can understand the producer's point of views if not defend it on aesthetic and moral grounds. Such diversionary scenes however only disturb the purity of the poetic statement.

The use of the narrator in saffron robes, however, is a well-known fictive and cinematic device where the story requires an *indirect* form of fabulation.

The music rendered by the Singh Bandhu is soothing and renders the graph of Guru Gobind Singh's awesome deeds in the best tradition of Sikh musicology.

The *Nishaan* considers it a matter of pride to carry Thakur Ranvir Singh's illustrated article which, we trust would catch the eye of the Sikh diaspora, having already aroused a devotional sentiment in the Punjab towns and countryside.

DSM

accomplished. The outside world is also ignorant about his literary genius. He wrote prolifically and constantly in scholarly Sanskrit, Persian, Brij Bhasa, Hindi and Punjabi and left behind a rich treasure of masterly writings.

His military genius first shone in the battle of Bhangani in 1686 when he won the battle with his motley crowd of 2000 comprising tillers, cooks, carpenters and such non-combatants against the might of a professional Moghul army of 20000—and he was just twenty years old. He fought on for his convictions, relentlessly against the then mightiest Empire of the world.

Others in history have fought mostly for their crown and domain, but this man of God fought for others, for us and sacrificed every member of his family to uphold honour and Dharma. In his short of life span 42 years, Guru Gobind Singh ji was able to change the course of Society and that of history. Such souls are born only when suffering and plight of the people reaches its nadir and when they are desperate for succour. The *Kalighdar* came as a guiding light to lead us out of the darkness. We bow to him and hail him as "Dusht Daman", destroyer of the wicked.



Even a casual look at the itemised summary of Thakur Ranvir Singh's cinema career in multiple capacities as director, writer, producer etc. is staggering enough, but when you come to know that this son of Rajasthan had had a brush with the Air Force, with the film industry in the UK, and an impressive association with Hollywood and its great stars like Yul Brynner and Trevor Howard before returning to India in 1982, you cannot but salute the energies and the spirit that galvanises him. Documentaries on historic palaces and forts, on wild life, on the marine world, on the Air Force, on Indian arts and artisans etc. alone make up a singular corpus of creativity.

And to crown it all in 1998-99, he wrote, produced and directed a 3-hour long film on "Guru Gobind Singh" which has had a successful run on the TV, and in the Punjab towns and countryside. We are reproducing the Thakur's article with some comments and a picture of the scene from the film itself. And we hope the enterprise that inspired Thakur's muses would be admired by the Indians including the Sikh Diaspora. He has some more ambitious films to make yet, and we wish him success in his worshipful labours.

An
Adventurous
Yankee
in
Maharaja
Ranjit
Singh's
Court

The Memoirs of
Alexander Gardner



Even as the bi-centennial of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's coronation is being celebrated with great fanfare, I thought of reviving that bloody and shameful page of the Empire's history which had become a theme for the tragic muses, and for a corporate nostalgia at one time. My aim here is limited to touching upon the story of an American 'soldier of fortune', Alexander Gardner, who has remained a marginal, somewhat obscure player in that theatre of king-killing, palace intrigues and betrayals in most Sikh chronicles. While the great French and Italian generals and other foreign officers—over one hundred in the Maharaja's pay from time to time—have received a fair amount of commentary, the lone Yankee, a witness, a participant, a close watcher and chronicler had somehow not received his due, though his brief 63-page memoirs entitled *The Fall of Sikh Empire* published half a century after the catastrophic events, written in lucid, graphic and picturesque prose, gives the reader some unique insights into the feudal Sikh psyche, as indeed into the darker side of the great Maharaja's declining years. His narrative is, in that respect, more suggestive and oblique, though close enough to the pulse of events and to the pulse of the principal protagonists. In the words of Sir Richard Temple, Gardner had a very high opinion of the Maharaja's greatness as a ruler, but "he abstains from noticing—perhaps he even throws a veil over the King's vices which were scandalously overt and destructive of respectability in the State".

Since I owe the title to Mark Twain's celebrated dark romance and fantasy, "*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*", it may in order to dramatise Gardner's story as a Yankee (who unlike Twain's Hank Morgan, remains a Yankee only in name at the end of his journey), dying in Srinagar (Kashmir) at the ripe old age of 90 like a Sikh-Dogra grandee, an amusing raconteur with some traces of his native wit. His wanderlust, a typical American itch till today, and a theme of many a song and story, somehow brought him to the Lahore Darbar just when the Maharaja, old and in ill-health, was losing hold over the Empire he had built and extended through his remarkable deeds of valour, insight and governance, Gardner's portraits of his masters and minions are striking enough to become a part of "the swelling theme".

In his "Introduction" The Right Hon. Sir Richard Temple, a high-ranking officer in the British Army serving in the region at that time has recorded his admiration for Gardner's narrative, and vouched for their veracity. And, indeed, had he gone back to his obscure American home after a long stint as "a soldier of fortune", he could have, as Sir Richard observes, carried with his a whole pack of romantic tales of adventures of Oriental harems etc. to keep

a Desdemona enchanted in the manner of the Moor, Othello. But no, he never could charm the American belles, and lingered on to hold a little 'court' in Jammu and in Srinagar, and regale his audience of the natives around.

Now to turn to Gardner's own account which is deeply engrossing in its own way. "I went to Peshawar in the month of August 1831.....", that's how he commences the narrative of his arrival in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court and very soon, he impressed the Sikh monarch with his skills as a soldier, as a mechanic good at making guns and soon is made "Commandant of Artillery" in the Maharaja's forces, a position he occupied for several years. And finally, he was transferred to the service of the Prime Minister, Raja Dhyani Singh, and later promoted Colonel under Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Dogra satellite ruler after the First Sikh War.

Gardner was born in 1785 in North America on the shores of Lake Superior, close to the Canadian border, his father having been a Scottish immigrant to the then-British colonies, who took part in the American War of Independence, according to Sir Richard. From his mother's side, he had English blood in his veins, and later, the adventurous son wrote handsomely about his mother's personality, values and spirit. We further learn that Gardner, to begin with, endeavoured to secure a position in the Russian Army, but he somehow lost that opportunity, and then in his wide peregrinations and search for fresh fields of adventure, he managed to reach Herat in Afghanistan with many a tale of his encounters, escapes and duels *en route*. It was from that mountainous wild region, redolent of ancestral voices of war and valour, that he joined the forces of the Afghan chieftan, Habibullah Khan who had been a sworn enemy of the ruler Dost Muhammad Khan in Kabul. That was to be his final "port of call" in the seas of high adventures and high romance before he finally entered the Punjab of the Sikh ascendancy and glory, and was sent from Peshawar by his Afghan patrons to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore. Something, one feels, must have sounded a bell in his mind to bring him there—the land of the Five Rivers—where he could, at last, prove his skills and his mettle as a great soldier, as a mechanical hand, as an insightful watcher of the royal scene, as well as an "insider" who had the ability to remain afloat amidst palace politics, factional loyalties and viciously divided ranks in the end. The manner in which he went wholly "native", taking to the new court milieu, new religions, new cultures and tongues etc. with ease and *aplomb* only proved that there were extraordinary elements of courage, ingenuity and adaptability in his American make-up. He had left far behind his Puritan-Settler rigidities in the land of his birth, and carried only a baggage of endowments

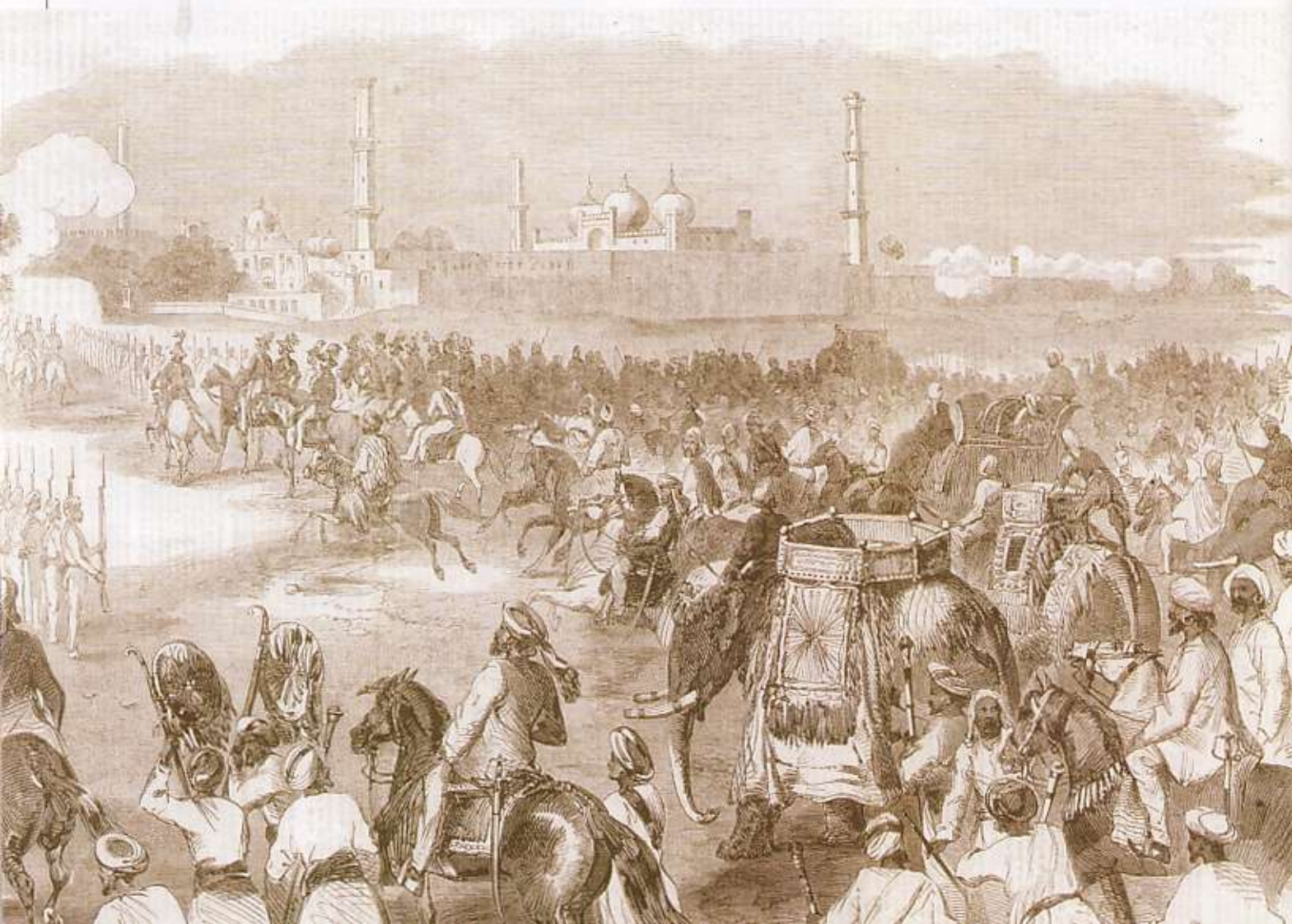
from “the Promised Eden” to test their truth in the fabled East. And the tales of the fabled and fabulous Indian warriors, princes and potentates must have charmed his ears whilst he was sojourning and fashioning his future in those hostile, unsettled kingdoms and principalities that lay in his way. He had heard much about “the Lion of the Punjab”, of his meteoric rise to glory, of his magnanimities and civilities and, above all, of his keen sense of the European martial ethos and their strategies of warfare, command, discipline and regimentation.

The unlettered Maharaja had been, from the start an open admirer of new, innovative, “modern” methods of licking the wild and loose soldiery of the day into a first-rate fighting machine, capable of carving out new empires, and carrying the royal flag to far-flung regions. And, no wonder, he intuitively perceived the ground realities and sought to keep the powerful Imperial British forces in India away from the lands he had won to establish the first Sikh

Kingdom. Ranjit Singh’s mind was nimble and supple enough to understand the virtues of creating a cohesive, well-organised, well-commanded force under French and Italian generals, although as a most-shrewd monarch, he also knew how to keep the diverse elements in his kingdom united as much through the forte of his character as through the native methods of *largesse*, patronage and “small change” of power to the more recalcitrant feudal lords around him. Again, as a devout Sikh, he had imbibed the virtues of catholicity, accommodation and respect for other faiths, and these traits helped advance his image as a most benevolent ruler. He did have many an infirmity of character, as hinted at by Gardner in a guarded manner in his compact narrative—but his many-splendour’d personality had the power to retain those energies that help create a kinetic, dynamic vision of the world.

And it is to the name and fame of this unique Sikh monarch that Alexander Gardner responded with his own

Procession of Sikh Chiefs and others at Lahore, on the occasion of a Darbar held there.



characteristic cunning of mind and hand. He was, thus, seeking to harmonise the warring elements in his own character. As his narrative proceeds, we watch the rise of "Gardna" (as the Sikh soldiery called him), in the midst of insurmountable contradictions and challenges. The Lake Superior Yankee had not moved to "the Wild West" of the land Columbus had providentially discovered while in search of the fabulous land of India, but he moved out in the reverse direction to gather fortunes and fame.

Indian historians and readers are fairly familiar with some of the American visitors to our Western shores—in merchant vessels, in fishing boats, in pirate ships etc. during the 17th-18th centuries, and some fine accounts by the American scholars themselves are available to give authenticity to their tales of travels in India. For instance, the celebrated American novelist and romancer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, a navigator, left an account of his own adventures and exploits in these parts. But on the whole, the American reader in general, knew next to nothing about India, and if he had vaguely heard of that land of pearls, tea, coffee and spices, he was apt to regard it as some part of the finisterra. Alternatively, most of them had also heard of a land of snake-charmers, cows and elephants, beggars and magicians and so on, and thus seen India as a strange, exotic land on the one hand, and a hopelessly primitive place on earth at the other.

It was only in the mid 19th-century that the India of the Vedas and the Hindu epics of the *Gita* and Sanskrit classics came to be known through the enchanted Transcendentalists like Emerson and Walt Whitman. Whitman's famous long poem, "Passage to India", has still a deep and abiding interest and it was Whitman's poetry that inspired Puran Singh a magnificent singer of the Sikh spirit and of the Punjab landscape. (The *Nishaan*, in one of its earlier issues, has carried my article on the deep affinities between the two poets from two different continents and cultures.) Thus, India remained in the American eyes, in general, a remote, obscure country which almost never engaged their imagination.

It is not, therefore, surprising that Alexander Gardner's small book, a vivid and striking account of the Sikh Kingdom during its period of decline and fall remained out of the line of their vision, or, for that matter, even of the line of vision to be seen in the work of American and Indian historians. This "find" then, is a remarkable event and its reprint (National Book Shop, Chandni Chowk, Delhi [1999]), now freely available, a matter of considerable gratification.

The day Alexander Gardner was presented to the Sikh monarch in the Shalimar Gardens at Lahore, an interesting

Foreign officers who served with Maharaja Ranjit Singh

General Ventura	Italian	Infantry
General Allard	French	Cavalry
General Avitabile	Italian	Infantry
General Court	French	Artillery
General Harlan	American	Infantry
General Van Cortlandt	English	Infantry
Colonel Ford	English	Infantry
Colonel Foulkes	English	Cavalry
Captain Argoud	French	Infantry
Colonel Canora	American	Artillery
Colonel Thomas	Anglo-Indian	Infantry
Lieut-Col. Leslie, <i>alias</i> Rattray	Anglo-Indian	Infantry
Colonel Mouton	French	Cavalry
Colonel Hurbon	Spanish	Engineer
Colonel Steinbach	German	Infantry
Captain de la Font	French	Infantry
Captain M Pherson	English	Infantry
Campbell	Anglo-Indian	Infantry
Garron	French	Cavalry
Gordon	Anglo-Indian	Cavalry
De Fasheye (father and son)	French	Cavalry
Alvarine	Italian	Infantry
Hommus	Spaniard	Infantry
Amise	French	Infantry
Hest	Greek	Infantry
De la Roche	French	Infantry
Debuignon	French	Infantry
John Holmes	Anglo-Indian	Infantry
Vochus	Russian	Infantry
De l'Ust	French	Infantry
Hureleek	Greek	Infantry
Fitzroy	English	Infantry
Barlow	English	Infantry
Martindale	Anglo-Indian	Infantry
Jervais	French	Infantry
Moevius	Russian	Infantry
Bianchi	Italian	Infantry
Dottenweiss	German	Engineer

Medical Officers

Dr. Harvey	English
Dr. Benet	French
Dr. Martin Honiberger	Austrian

Chronology of personalities and events in the Kingdom of the Punjab From the death of Ranjit Singh to the British annexation

Sovereigns

- I. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, died June 27, 1839.
- II. Maharaja Kharak Singh (son of I), deposed, and subsequently poisoned, November 5, 1840.
- III. Maharaja Nao Nihal Singh (son of II), killed, Nov. 5, 1840.
- IV. Maharani Chand Kaur (widow of II and Regent); murdered by order of No. 5, June 1842.
- V. Maharaja Sher Singh (son of I), murdered by No. 15, September 15, 1843.
- VI. Maharaja Duleep Singh (son of I), deposed, March 29, 1849.

Prince, Ministers & so on

- VII. Kashmira Singh (son of I), killed by the Sikh army, July 1843.
- VIII. Peshora Singh (son of I), murdered, August 1844.
- IX. Partab Singh (son of V), murdered by No. 15, Sept. 15, 1843.
- X. Chet Singh (Minister to Kharrak Singh), murdered by XI, October 8, 1839.
- XI. Raja Dhyani Singh (Prime Minister), murdered by XV, September 15, 1843
- XII. Raja Gulab Singh, afterwards Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir.
- XIII. Raja Suchet Singh, killed by the Sikh army, March 1843.
- XIV. Hira Singh (son of XI), killed by the Sikh army, December 21, 1844.
- XV. Ajit Singh, Sindhanwalia & Lehna Singh, Sindhanwalia (brothers) killed by the Sikh army, September 1843.
- XVI. Pandit Julla (Secretary to XIV), killed by the Sikh army, December, 21 1844.
- XVII. Jawahir Singh (uncle of VI), killed by the Sikh army, September 21, 1845.
- XVIII. Maharani Jindan (mother of VI), banished.

the dogra brothers

and amusing incident involving the Maharaja's shrewdness as a swift evaluator of new-comers and Gardner's own native courage, gallantry and sword-skill, is set down by the narrator to describe his own initiation.

"A certain Nand Singh, an officer of the Maharaja's cavalry, rode his horse intentionally against me and endeavoured to jostle me into the ditch, which was deep and filled with running water. I touched the rein of my good steed, gave him half a turn, pressed him with my sword-hand the veriest trifle on the loins, and in an instant Nand Singh and his horse were rolling on the ground. I calmly expressed a hope that the fallen man was not hurt, and was treated with much civility during the remaining time that I was kept waiting".

It is now the time to let Gardner speak for himself. His style is picturesque, vivid and muscular on the whole, though I did not find much evidence of the Yankee idiom or humour in it. One imagines that had he in his days of retirement in the Kashmir Valley, taken up the task of doing a major work of a scholarly nature—something that he seemed capable of doing—we would have had a collateral account of the Sikh Raj from an admirer and perceptive recorder to match the chronicles of other European and Indian historians. But his account, alas, remained a relatively brief, though striking, essay. Still it is not the work of a journeyman *reconteur*, but that of a man whose literary sensibility and sense of history were sharp enough to sketch the scenes that we see dramatically described in *The Fall of Sikh Empire*.

The narrative starts on a sudden note as though the memoirs had been put to pen and paper in a kind of urgency. There is no past landscape, no build-up, no backward glance. The titles of the chapters are striking and dramatic, and it is not clear if they were his own handiwork, or more likely that of one Major Pearce, who later helped arrange, place and finalise the present text. In the opening chapter entitled, "The Lion of the Punjab", we find him telling the story of his call to the Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in a brief, laconic manner. He is soon a Colonel in the pay of Maharaja Gulab Singh, the Dogra chieftan. The little portrait of his new master is not very flattering. He was, to quote Gardner, "in reality, a very leech, sucking their life-blood, the shameless trader of their sons and daughters, the usurer, the turn-penny, the briber and the bribed."

Gardner seldom stays long enough to sketch out an event of military glory or catastrophe, but usually he has the ability to make the scene memorable and significant. Thus, he described the death of the great Sikh General, Hari Singh Nalwa,

who had "fallen bravely at the head of his Sikh troops under the sword of the Afghans". Similarly, he describes briefly how he was commissioned to make the Maharaja's paddle-boat which became later "the only steamer built for the Sikh army". His skills as an American artisan and an all know-how man proved of immense value to him in the Maharaja's court. After all, there was something of Morgan Hank, Twain's yankee in King Arthur's court, even in our American "hero", though his engineering skills, unlike Morgan's, are too modest to have much meaning as against the large metaphorical meaning of the huge inventions made by Twain's hero.

The events of foul assaults and assassinations, of the Dogra treachery etc. follow in rapid succession, and in some cases, Gardner was not only an eye-witness but a participant in this tragic drama which had the macabre nature of the Jacobean Tragedy in England.

Gardner was on the Sikh side with the Maharaja's select troops in the First Sikh War, and later eye-deep in the events of blood-bath during "the defence of Lahore". Prince Sher Singh, crowned the realm's king in a hurry is seen by Gardner as an ugly, ruthless, lawless person, who had even given a licence to his murdering soldiery for the loot and pillage of his own people.

At this time, Gardner had already, as mentioned earlier, joined Gulab Singh's forces. He describes the treachery of Tej Singh and then goes on to the exploits of Gulab Singh,

"who roared out to Sher Singh demanding his surrender". And adds, our American chronicler, "Seventeen of my party were blown to pieces, part of the bodies flying over me... I managed to fire the five guns, and literally blow them into the air".

In the chapter entitled, "Horror on Horror's Head"—an obvious echo from Shakespeare tragedy of king-killing, *Macbeth*—we learn how events in swift succession brought about the fall of an empire built in a moment of the ascendancy of the Sikh spirit, and lost in a matter of 7 years or so through a tragic flaw in the character of the feudal Sikh Chieftans—the perennial lust for power which continues to plague the Sikh polity even today after a lapse of over 150 years: Gardner's story tells graphically the fate of the guilty and the faithless—of the biters bitten, of the killers killed, a mayhem of such proportions as to agonise "the imagination of disaster" till this day.

In this tale of "royal" horrors in which revenge is the refuge of all renegades, in which the shameful act of *sati* (the young royal widows primed for this is a highly offensive crime in Sikh thought) thus, is indeed a plateful

for the depraved the degraded. And one inset portrait in miniature—of Maharaja's youthful Dogra "weakness", Hira Singh son of Raja Dhyani Singh—is something to muse and mull over. This is what Gardner writes:

Hira Singh was indeed but a poor copy of his fathers, whom he in vain attempted to resemble. His character was compounded of many conflicting qualities, Crouching and mean to his superiors, silent and suspicious with his equals proud, supercilious and arrogant to his inferiors, subtle and deceitful to all. Too much puffed up to return, or even notice, the salutations of better men than himself, reared as the lapdog of Ranjit Singh and his dissolute companions with a smattering of English, Persian and Sanskrit and pretending to a perfect knowledge of all the three languages. Clean, neat and showy in person, like his father, but too effeminate to resemble him truly, unstable, and, as it seemed, not daring to walk, stir, sit, rise, eat, drink, sleep, or speak without—what? A trifling sign a careless nod, or some such sufficient guiding taken from his mysterious jailor, his familiar spirit, his preceptor, master, father and brother, inferior and superior, Pandit Julla".

This, indeed, is a masterly piece of writing, the art of portraiture in literature having the quality of a Renaissance painting executed by an artist whose eye could catch each little mannerism of such royal pets and freaks.

Gardner has also a few trenchant strokes to display in his hurried sketch of that ravishing charmer, Rani Jindan, mother of Prince Duleep Singh, but he seems to use discretion in adding colour to the outlines:

Towards the close of his narrative, he describes in a vein of painful reminiscence the betrayal of the Khalsa armies by its own "secret agents", its *harem* Quislings like Lal Singh and others. This is the battle of Mudki:

"Lal Singh ran at Mudki; he preferred the embraces of Venus at Lahore to the triumph of Mars; and was, as all Brahmans are, held in the highest contempt by the Sikhs. He fled, hid himself in a haystack and skulked off from the Army....."

And Gardner's wonderful gallery of the portraits in the Hall of Shame comes to an abrupt close here.

It is now the time to recognise Alexander Gardner's insightful, truthful and dispassionate account for a re-assessment of the principal character in that pageant of the princes we seem still to celebrate—often so heedlessly.

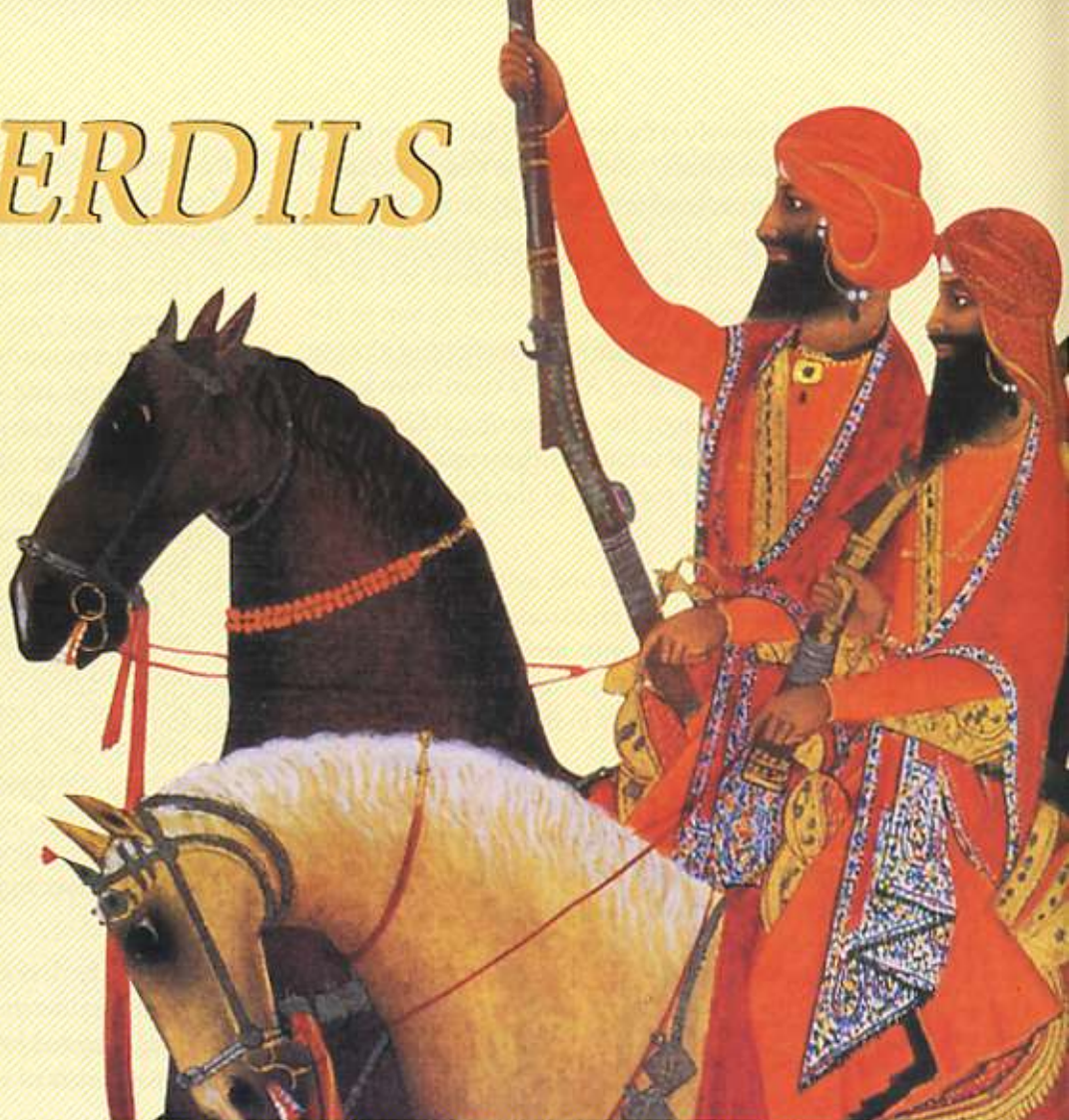
The *SHERDILS*

Sheranwala Bagh, outside the city boundary and gates of Gujranwala, was where young Ranjit Singh used to practice his swordmanship and horse riding. Earlier it was while playing with his friends in this forest that Ranjit Singh had killed a tiger (*Sher*) and thus the garden was bestowed with the name *Sheranwala*.

After Ranjit Singh became the Maharaja, the bodyguard of elite troops under his direct command were given the title of *Sherdils*, whose *raison d'être* initially was protection of the *Durbar Sahib* at Amritsar.

The *paltan* distinguished themselves in the many battles fought to safeguard the Kingdom and then in extension of its frontiers, particularly in the fighting on the Afghan frontier. Jiwan Singh who distinguished himself in battle, became adjutant of the *Sherdil* *paltan* for his bravery at Tonk on the Waziristan border. For his gallantry and distinguished services in the second Kashmir campaign, which led to the defeat of Raja Gohar Man, Jiwan Singh was later appointed as *Kumedan* (Commandant) of the *Sherdils*, which formation also got to be sub-titled as *Jiwan Singh's Paltan*, and fought most bravely and gallantly throughout the Anglo-Sikh Wars (1846 and 1849).

On annexation of the Punjab by the British, the *Sherdils* were honoured to be retained as a composite formation and in fact Jiwan Singh continued to command them in the rank of a colonel. Three of his brothers also served with the



Lahore Life Guards, 1838 (The British Library)

Sherdils, the last of whose successors continued to draw pension until after the partition of India in 1947.

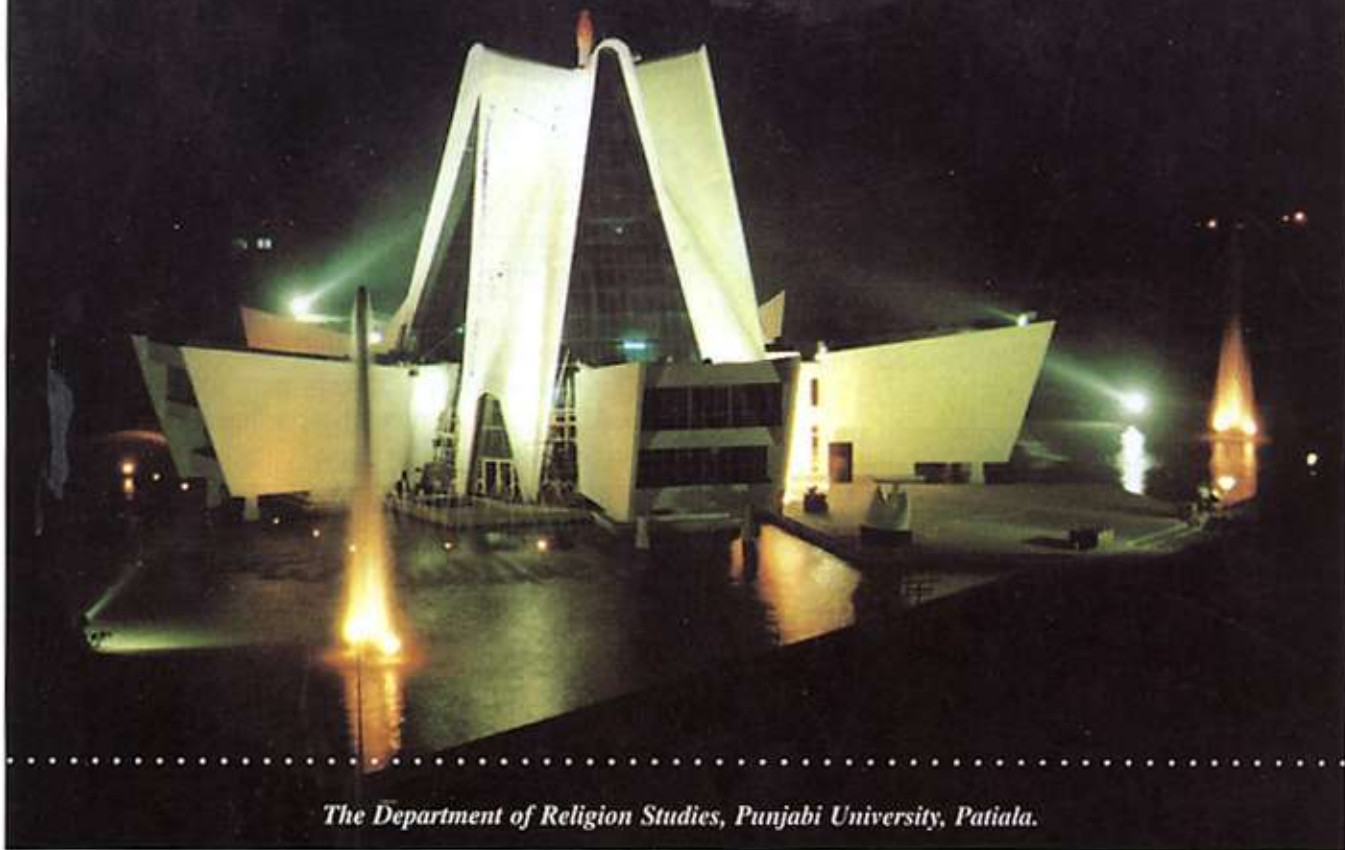
In the years after 1857, the units of Punjab or Sikh Infantry which had been raised some years earlier were "regularised" under John Lawrence's Punjab Administration and the *Sherdils* became the 19th Punjab Infantry who were to serve in various campaigns on the North West Frontier, Persia and Russia.

After duty on the Persian-Afghan cordon in Seistan, the 19th Punjabis ("*Sherdils*") were moved to support the White Russians against the communist Bolsheviks, thus bringing to them the rarest of honours. After the Great War, the 19th Punjabis did further overseas tours in Palestine and Iraq.

In 1922, with re-organisation of the Indian Army, the 19th Punjabis became 1st battalion of the 14th Punjab Regiment, their new badge being a five-pointed star representing the five rivers of the Punjab. In 1923, the 1/14 Punjab (*Sherdils*) were amongst the first battalions to be selected for "Indianisation" and one of the first King's Commissioned Officers from Sandhurst to join them was 2/Lt Ayub Khan (later Field Marshal and President of Pakistan).

In August 1947, the 1/14 Punjab were allocated to the new Army of Pakistan and in the re-organisation of 1956, became the 5th battalion, Punjab Regiment, proudly retaining the epithet of '*Sherdils*' till today.

Sikh Studies in India



The Department of Religion Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.

The study of Religion in the "traditional way" is as old as Religion itself. In this sense too the study of Sikh religion got underway during the Guru-period itself. The Gurus used to explain *gurmata* in their daily congregations. So did the *mahants* and others like Bhai Gurdas in the areas to which they were so deputed. Guru Hargobind mended fences with the Udasi tradition and thereafter the Udasis also became volunteer-preachers of Sikh tenets. When Guru Gobind Singh sent five Sikhs to Kashi for the study of Sanskrit and Hindu literature, it marked the beginning of a comparative study of Religion. These Udasis and Nirmalas produced a good deal of exegetical as well as historical literature.

However, the study of Religion as an academic discipline at the university or college level is quite a recent phenomenon. It was in the mid-60s of the 20th century that the Kothari Commission, set up by the University Grants Commission, made decisive recommendation in favour of Religion's inclusion in the academic curricula in

Indian colleges. A Seminar was held at Bangalore in 1967 on the "Study of Religion in Indian Universities" and scholars from several Indian universities as well as from abroad participated which also stressed the need for the study of Religion for the cessation of all mistrust and misunderstandings being spread in the name of Religion, and to bring about amity and harmony in human social relationships.

The credit for introducing Religion as a subject of study at the college and university levels in India goes to the Punjabi University, at Patiala. It established, in 1966, a department named the *Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religion Studies* as it was started in the year of the Guru's birth tercentenary and is also incidentally housed in a building named after him, which was the first ever, and still remains the only set-up of its kind in India. To begin with, it embraced five major religious traditions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. However, as the time passed, several other traditions such

as Jainism, Judaism, Confucianism, and others formed part of the curriculum. Keeping in view the cultural milieu of the region, it was imperative for the University to lay special emphasis on the study of Sikhism.

Although Sikhism, being the youngest of the world's major religions happens to represent the highest stage in the evolution of human consciousness, yet the lack of authentic works required by students and teachers was quite obvious. The tercentenary of Guru Gobind Singh's birth in 1966, no doubt, inspired many scholars who mainly belonged to allied disciplines like history and literature, to publish several titles on the life and teachings of the Guru. Soon after its establishment, the Department of Religious Studies also organized an international seminar on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak to celebrate the quincentenary of his birth in 1969. It provided the teachers of the Department an opportunity to interact with people working in this discipline all over the world. However, this was just a beginning as the lack of authentic reading material for the students and research and reference material for teachers and scholars was still acutely felt.

The work in the area of Sikh studies at Punjabi University was primarily aimed at providing text books and reference works. The text books for students of Religious Studies at undergraduate and postgraduate levels studied Sikhism alongside other traditions which encouraged a comparative approach. Such an approach was, and still is, the need of the hour because understanding the faith of others is essential to better understanding of one's own faith. Secondly, it gives place to interfaith dialogue which we cannot avoid in modern-day world of religious pluralism. Standard reference works were also the need of the hour to facilitate an objective and interpretative study of the Sikh faith in the modern context. To fulfil this need, the University completed two stupendous projects - the English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib and the preparation of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism. If these reference works were primarily aimed at English-knowing readership in India and abroad, the University also prepared the *Guru Granth Vichar Kosh* which gave scriptural verses under different thematic divisions and the *Tuk-Tatkara*, a concordance of the Guru Granth Sahib besides sponsoring another long-term project of *Nirukt* which unfortunately could not be completed because of the death of Dr. Balbir Singh, the younger brother of Bhai Vir Singh, who had started it. These reference works have been of immense help to scholars familiar with Punjabi language. The university has also completed the Hindi *Shabadarath* of the Guru Granth Sahib on the pattern of the *Shabadarth* published by SGPC in Punjabi.

Celebration of these two Centenaries created a new awareness among scholars and academics the world over to learn more about Sikhism. Thus arose the need and demand for a class of scholar-missionaries who could provide the required basic information to this audience in the latter's language and in modern scientific medium. To meet the need for such educated and english-proficient Sikh missionaries, the Guru Nanak Foundation (New Delhi) in consultation with Punjabi University set up the Gurmat College at Patiala. The curriculum of the college was so devised as to produce competent missionaries. Unfortunately, the object got sidelined as products of the college preferred academics and it is still an open question whether entry into academics has been to the benefit of either.

However, the Gurmat College and the various Departments in the University have not yet been able to build up a new, distinct school of thought in Sikh studies. As an institution, the university has contributed in producing text books for students and a lot of research and reference works. Among the stalwarts who put Sikh studies on track are: Ganda Singh, Gurbachan Singh Talib, Harbans Singh, Taran Singh and Piara Singh Padam. Work on Sikh thought and English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib by G.S. Talib and Harbans Singh's work as a chronicler of Sikh history and editor of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism constitute a milestone in the history of Sikh studies. Piara Singh Padam's work in locating and publishing old manuscripts is praiseworthy. Among others who have been working in the field of Sikh Studies are Prithipal Singh Kapur, Kirpal Singh (who has since shifted to Chandigarh), Bhagat Singh (History), Jodh Singh, Gurnam Kaur and Dharam Singh (Philosophy). Of these Prithipal Singh Kapur is presently the Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism and Kirpal Singh's work on the partition period is the best in this field. Jodh Singh, a product of the Guru Nanak Chair at Banaras Hindu University, has rendered the *Dasam Granth* and Bhai Gurdas into Hindi and has translated part of the *Dasam Granth* into English in collaboration with Dharam Singh who has also produced works in the field of liberation theology and Sikh social philosophy. Dr. Gurcharan Singh, Darshan Singh, Harpal Singh and Shamsheer Singh are also active in this field.

The University at Amritsar has produced scholars like Piar Singh (author of the controversial book *Gatha Ad Sri Guru Granth Sahib*), Madanjit Kaur, Balwant Singh Dhillon, et al. Most of their work is in the form of textual study of the Sikh scripture. The Department of Sikh Studies there has also produced some good reference materials including the works, in Punjabi, which are enlogistic of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

The 1969 celebrations of Guru Nanak's birth quincentenary was productive in a number of ways. One, it provided an occasion to many upcoming and established authors to publish rich corpus of literature on the Guru's life and teachings. Second, it resulted in the setting up of the Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar and of Guru Nanak Chairs at several universities at different universities in India. The ones in Assam and Bengal did not start whereas the one at Banaras Hindu University functioned only for a while. Luminaries like Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib and Dr. Attar Singh served there for brief durations. As it is, it is only the Guru Nanak Dev Chair at Madurai Kamraj University which has been active till date. Dr. N. Muthumohan, a Tamilian, by birth and progressive thinker by training, has been doing commendable work in the southern parts of India. Maintaining close interaction with mainstream Sikh scholars in the Punjab, he has held at Madurai - and one at Calicut - several seminars on Sikhism and has been running a postgraduate diploma in comparative religion with special emphasis on Sikhism. His latest book on *Sikh Social Thought* is being published by the Punjabi University. The main objective of this Chair at present is to familiarise the South Indian youth with the fundamentals of Sikhism and with this end in view, he has got a number of literature (some books entirely and some in parts) translated into Tamil.

In the eastern region, Professor Himadri Banerjee of *Visva-Bharati*, Calcutta, has also been doing commendable work. Though a man of history, he has done a yeoman's job in tracing out sources in Assamese, Bengali, Oriya and Hindi languages dealing with various aspects of Sikh history and faith. He has presented and published papers on the main features of such writings in different languages at various seminars and has also translated some of these into English.

Chandigarh, "the city of retired bureaucrats and educationists," has however, remained active in various literary and cultural activities. Unfortunately, Sikh studies did not pick up here as did some other fields. Even the Department of Guru Nanak Studies at Punjab University has failed to produce either any young scholars or any significant research work. The Institute of Sikh Studies, a private venture undertaken by a few well-meaning retired bureaucrats, did try to focus on highlighting the distinct nature of the Sikh faith through lectures, magazines and books. Unfortunately, the demise of its founder resulted in the transfer of the Institute into hands who were given more to polemic and condemnation than any serious constructive work. Still the Institute has been able to take a distinct stand and bring together certain intellectuals who have responded positively to various events and issues affecting

the Sikh religion and community. These institute personalities form a separate school in themselves and amongst them Daljit Singh has produced quite a number of meaningful books.

Delhi's Guru Nanak Foundation remained active in the field for a while but with the departure of its Director, Mohinder Singh, it went into an inertia. Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan and Gobind Sadan are active these days, with Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, Mohinder Singh, Mohinder Kaur Gill, and others active in the field. Dr. Neki's work on Sikh thought especially on the concept of *ardas*, is well-known. Beyond northern India, Surjeet Kaur Chahal, who is a teacher at Poona University, is also doing significant work, especially on Sikh ethics. She is perhaps the only Sikh scholar who has done some work in the field of bio-ethics.

As it is, there are five major journals devoted to Sikh studies being published from Patiala, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Delhi and Calcutta. However, of these only *The Sikh Review* from Calcutta has been coming out fairly regularly. It has a worldwide circulation, perhaps more than any other journal. The second journal that is published regularly is the Chandigarh Institute's *Abstract of Sikh Studies*. From Delhi comes *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion* by the Guru Nanak Foundation and *Khera* by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan. The former came out quite regularly as long as Mohinder Singh was the editor, but not any more thereafter. The *Khera* which Dr. Mohinder Singh now edits on behalf of the Bhai Vir Singh Sadan appears at rather irregular intervals. *The Journal of Sikh Studies* (Guru Nanak Dev University) contains a number of quality research papers but appears generally behind schedule. There are also some journals in Punjabi such as *Nanak Prakash Patrika* (Patiala), *Gurmat Prakash* (Amritsar), *Sisganj Patrika* (Delhi), *Sachkhand Patrika* (Nanded), but evidently their readership is the Sikh community alone. And since April 1999, a major Sikh international quarterly called the *Nishaan*, published by the *Nagaara Trust*, has been serving an evolving manner of Sikh needs.

There are immense possibilities in the field of Sikh Studies, but there is an apparent lack of genuine and committed scholars. Most of the new entrants into the field do not look beyond their doctorate degree. There are very few students who opt for the English medium and the works written in Punjabi fail to go beyond Sikh readership. The reason obviously is the lack of opportunities in the career market in this field, and the upper layer of students generally opt for professional courses. The Punjab Government must find time to get the Guru Nanak Chairs at Banaras and other places revived so that the Sikh message of equality and love, peace and harmony, social justice and economic equity is spread throughout India.

The SIKH Thought

The basic aspects of Sikh thought are naturally the same as those of other world religions and, as may be expected, their treatment by Sikhism is, in the main, on the lines of the Hindu and Buddhist speculative thought. Wherever Sikhism differs or departs from these lines of thought, it does so, as a rule, not by introducing new terms or concepts but by underlining an already familiar concept, or by amplifying or interpreting it otherwise. This is as it should be, for thus alone is it possible to effect a new advance of expansion in the cultural and religious horizon of mankind and it is thus that all great cultures and civilizations have emerged and developed.

The Universe

In Sikh thought, the final duality between the Matter and Spirit is denied. The basic Sikh thought is strictly monistic :

“From One the Many emanate, and finally into the One the Many submerge.”

All that exists, whether in the form of phenomena and appearances, as Becoming, or as Numenon and Reality, as Being, is, in fact, the Spirit and the Mind. The individual mind, the numerous forms of life and the inanimate matter are all Spirit in different forms. Out of its own impulse and initiative of the Spirit a process of involutions occurred for some limited purpose, the precise nature of which is beyond human comprehension. All we can say is that such is its nature and such its pleasure. The fraction of the universe in its initial form, which the modern theorists, such as Abbe Lamatre call the Primaeval Atom, resulted from the involutory impulse of the Absolute Spirit, God. In this Primaeval Atom was originally concentrated, in a super-dense state, that which expanded and disintegrated, through an antithetical evolutionary impulse, for thousands of millions of years of the human mind and finally into the universe as it is today. This eruptive, Missionary impulse, whereby the Primaeval Atom has issued into the innumerable forms constituting the universe, has reached its highest point, up-to-date, in the creation of man and man, therefore, is the point in creation from where the inverse movement of evolution may take a further leap towards the Spirit.

These two processes of involution and evolution, *apasarpani* and *upasarpani* as the profound ancient Jaina thought speculated, constitute a double but simultaneous movement, and thus creation of the universe is an involution-cum-evolution process, a descent and an ascent. The universe, thus, is nothing but God-in-Becoming. “The Formless has become all the innumerable forms, Himself. He, that is beyond the attributes, inheres. Nanak declares the doctrine of the One Absolute Being, that is Becoming, for the One indeed is the Many.”

The main doctrines of Sikh theology are grounded in this view of the Ultimate Reality and its nature.

Genesis

With regard to the coming into being of the Primaeval Atom, the Sikh doctrine is that the process was instantaneous, caused by the Will of God. “The forms become in consequence of the Divine Will. Comprehension fails at this stage of understanding of the Divine Will.”

After thus stating this beginning of the becoming the further statements made in the Sikh scripture about the creation and evolution of the universe, are remarkably akin to the picture which has now been adumbrated by scientific speculation after considering the data revealed by the recent advances in Observational Astronomy and probes into the heart of Matter.

One of the basic hymns in the Sikh scripture, which may be called the Hymn of the Genesis, reveals:

“For millions upon millions, countless years was spread darkness,

When existed neither earth nor heaven,
But only the limitless Divine Ordinance.

Then existed neither day or night, nor sun or moon;
The Creator into unbroken trance was absorbed.

Existed then neither forms of creation, nor of speech;
Neither wind nor water;

Neither was creation, or disappearance or transmigration.

Then were not continents, nether regions, the seven seas,
Nor rivers with water flowing.

Existed then neither heaven or the mortal world
or the nether world.

Neither hell or heaven or time that destroys.”

.....

“As it pleased Him, the world He created;
Without a supporting power the expanse He sustained.”

.....

“None His extent knows.

Of this from the Master, perfectly endowed comes realisation.”

Man

Paul Tillich identifies man's basic predicament as existential estrangement from his essential being, estrangement which is expressed in anxiety about meaninglessness of life, gnawing awareness of alienation and incurable lack of wholeness, as his existential dilemma: "my bedstead of anxiety, strung with strings of pain and my cover quilt of alienation is my existential predicament. O, my God, take note of it and have mercy upon me."

Paul Tillich, the modern Western man, was not aware that, in the Sikh scripture, not only has the human predicament been noted, but the way to its cure has also been pointed out: Let man take refuge in God and proceed to cure his incurable sickness through identifying himself with God's purposes; "How else can man secure abiding peace and wholeness except through refuge in and communion with God?"

Man being the highest-yet point in the process of creation, where the evolutionary impulse has apparently near-exhausted its initial momentum, it is man on whom now the responsibility rests for consciously revitalising this impulse for a further evolutionary leap.

"Thou art the very essence of God. Therefore, know thyself as such."

"You have received this gift of the human body and it is from here that the further upward movement towards God-realisation starts. Therefore, now make an all-out effort to reach the Goal and do not waste human life in frivolities."

It is the involution-cum-evolution which is responsible for the creation of the universe, and which after reaching the point of human consciousness, has reached a stasis, and the man is thus a voluntary diminution of the infinitude of God, for some obscure but limited purpose, as, indeed, all forms of existence, represent a diminution of God. Since God is truth, knowledge, bliss, light, harmony and immortality, the involuted forms of creation are so much less of all these. Man being the stage at which the evolution has emerged into self-consciousness, man is capable of knowing that he has reached a particular stage of the creative process, and he is capable, volitionally, of taking steps to evolve upwards to the next stage. This is the stage of the *brahmajñani*, or the God-conscious man, and it is this notion of evolution, the premonition of which finds expression in the later 18th and early 19th century West European literature in the form of the concept of 'the Superman.'

"Lo, I preach to you the Superman; Superman is the meaning of the earth," said Nietzsche. Again, "Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman..... what is great in man, is that he is a bridge, and not a goal."

Sikhism agrees with this except, that Sikhism declares that 'the meaning of the earth' reaches far beyond the stage of the Superman, and Superman is only an interim stage 'a bridge and not a goal.' Sikhism endorses Nietzsche that the sphere of the activity of the Superman, and of the higher-still goal of the evolution, is 'the earth', in the sense that it is on this earth that a perfect human Society of God-conscious men, a psycho-social perfection, is the ultimate objective of the impulse of God, which has originally given rise to the process of creation. In contradistinction to all those and previous philosophies and religions, which taught that the ultimate goal of man was either absorption into God, or entry into a supramundane Kingdom of God, wherein there is abiding propinquity to God, Sikhism urges man to divinize the whole of humanity on this earth by transforming mind, life and matter, through a conscious effort and will, and with the aid of the spiritual technique of the *Namyoga*, which is capable of taking along the whole psyche of man to a level of existence, undreamed of before, where pure knowledge, limitless harmony and divine bliss would prevail. This indeed would be a Society of godlike-beings, and the ultimate purpose of the divine impulse of creation is the establishment of this Society of human deities in the terrestrial spheres of the universe. It is the teaching of the Sikh Gurus that the supreme duty of man is to make an all-out effort towards this divine goal, and the Sikh Gurus not only point out this goal, but also reveal the way towards it. "Hail, the Guru, a hundred thousand times, hail, for He reveals the secret of transforming mankind into deities and that, too, in an instant."

God

The Sikh concept of the Ultimate Reality is more akin to the Judaic notion of an Almighty Person than to the Aryan concept of an immanent neutral Principle. The basic formula of Sikh dogma is the opening line of the Sikh scripture which characterised the Ultimate Reality as follows :

"The One Becoming-Being. Truth. Numenon. Creator. Person. Without fear of another. Without animosity towards another. Beyond Time. Form. Unborn Self-expression. Light. Contacted by human mind through (His) Grace."

Maya

The doctrine of *maya* has been basic to the Hindu and Buddhist speculations from the very beginning. The best known work, apart from the omniscient *Mahabharata*, in which the term, 'niaya' (relative truth) is employed as a philosophical concept, is the metrical treatise, *Karika*, by Gaudpad, where-in, unlike the *Mahabharata* (*Bhagwadgita* XVIII. 6 1), the term is not taken for granted, but is explained and defined. Since this name, Gaudpad, was borne by the teacher of the famous philosopher of Hindu monism,

Samkara, the author of the *Karika* may be the same person who might have lived at the end of the 7th century. This work, *Karika*, is usually printed with the *Mandukya-upanisad*, and for practical purposes, is regarded a part of it. In language and thought, both, it bears a remarkable resemblance to Buddhist writings of the *Madhyamik* School, and the criticism of the Hindu orthodoxy that the monism of Samkara, in which the doctrine of *maya* is embedded is, in reality, crypto-Buddhism, not without substance. In the *Karika*, the world of appearances is compared to the apparent circle of fire produced by a whirling lighted torch. This striking image first occurs in the *Maitrayana Upanisad* (VI. 24). It also occurs in the Buddhist Mahayan scripture, the *Lankavatarsutra*, which purports to be an account of the revelation of the true Religion of Gautama, the Buddha, when he visited Ceylon and there gave discourses to the King of the island, Ravana, and his wife, Mahamati. This represents a well matured phase of speculation in Buddhism, as it criticises the Hindu schools of philosophy of the Samkhya, *Pasupat*, as well as other schools. It includes a prophecy about the birth of Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist savant of the 4th century A.D., and it mentions the advent of Guptas which marks the renaissance of Hinduism in India. It also alludes to the fresh incursions of the Hunas into northern India, which incursions destroyed the Imperial Gupta dynasty at the end of the 5th century A.D. Throughout the Hindu speculative and religious literature ever since, this doctrine of *maya* is admitted as in some way an independent principle of the process and ontological structure of creation. True, the subtle Samkara asserts that the principle of *maya* is *aniravacani*, that is, it can neither be said to exist nor not to exist. A is neither A, nor not A. Whatever else this statement may mean, it does concede that *maya* has a positive existence.

Sikhism denies the doctrine of *maya*, thus conceived. As ignorance and nescience have no positive existence, they merely being the aspects of the self-limited involuted Spirit, likewise, *maya*, as such, has no positive existence. It is merely a way of saying that the individual consciousness perceives the Reality only in the form of partial knowledge, which is there on account of involution. As the darkness is merely a negative aspect of the light of the sun, similar is the case with ignorance and nescience.

"What is there positive to which we can give the name of *maya*? What positive activity is the *maya* capable of?"

The human soul is subject to the pleasure and pain principle in its very nature, as long as it operates on the individuated plane of consciousness.

Again, "*Maya*, in the form of a snake, entwines to render human mind immiscible with the real, and the more it is

accepted at its face value, the more it misguides. Rare indeed is such a man who overcomes and casts it away." Further, "what is *maya* except a befooling magic trick? Yea, a dry blade of grass afire, a passing shadow of a summer cloud, a momentary flooding after a tropical rain, for him who is out of communion with God."

What do these dissertations on *maya* mean in the Sikh scripture?

Maya is the antithesis of *moksha* in Hindu thought. But *maya* is not the antithesis of the Absolute Reality. There is no incompatibility between the *brahma* and *maya*, for the former is not opposed to the Many. It is *advanda*, non-dual, that is, it has no opposite being outside all classification. To be precise, 'classification' is exactly *maya*. *Maya* noun of Sanskrit is derived from the root *matr*, 'to measure to form, to build, to lay out a plan', the same root from which Graeco-Latin words, 'metre' 'matrix', 'material' and 'matter' are obtained. The fundamental process of measurement is division. Thus, the Sanskrit root, *dva*, from which we get 'divide', is also the Latin root of 'dus', and the English, 'dual.' To say, then, that the world of 'facts' and 'events' is *maya* is to say that the words, 'facts' and 'events' are terms of measurement rather than the real itself, *per se*. 'Measurement' is setting up bounds of all kinds, whether by descriptive classification or by screening. Thus, the 'facts' and 'events' are as abstract as lines of latitude or feet and inches, metres and centimetres. This is not to be confused with the "Idealism" or "Monism" of the Western philosophy, for all concrete things are not, in reality, illusion, unreal, or just, the One. They are not unreal and, illusory, because *maya* is not non-existence; it is a wrong mode of apprehension. It is not 'One', because 'One' is a thing, a mode of measurement and, therefore, itself *maya*. To join the 'many' into 'one' is as much *maya* as to separate the many from one. The world, as we perceive it, is made up of surfaces and lines, of areas of density and vacuity, but the '*maya*' concept of the Sikh scripture says that these forms and appearances, these things and events have no "own-being", *svabhava*; they do not exist in their own right, but only in relation to one another, like "the spark of a dry blade of grass", or like "the fleeting shadow of a summer cloud." Concretisation and formalisation is *maya*, when the human mind attempts to comprehend and control that which impinges upon his consciousness. This is the unreal world of Buddhism, the world of 'name and form', *namarupa*. When the Sikh scripture says that "*maya* is a snake which entwines human consciousness, and whosoever takes it at its face value, him *maya* misleads and confuses", it means that man confuses his measures with the world so measured, of identifying money with wealth, fixed convention with fluid reality. The Sikh doctrine of *maya* points out the impossibility of

grasping the actual world in the verbal net of man's mind and the fluid character of those very constructions he thus artifacts. This world of *maya* escapes both the comprehension of the philosopher and the grasp of the pleasure-seeker, like water from a clutching fist, "like the fleeting shade of a summer cloud."

This interpretation of the concept of *maya* in Sikh terminology has far-reaching consequences in so far as it pulls the Hindu mind out of the slough of indolent introspective pre-occupation, and subjectivism, generated by the belief that the whole world of the appearances in which man is born to pursue his socio-political life, is no more real than a phantasmagoria in the minds of the gods above. By giving a foundation of solid reality to the world of appearance, this re-interpretation of the concept of *maya* conforms to a sense of reality, a feeling of urgency and an objectivity to the whole frame of mind of man, which is necessary for the all-out effort to speed up the evolutionary process through the human will, and this is the core of the precepts of Sikhism, as a way of life.

Ethics

The fact that religious experience, *per se*, is non-moral, has been known to Hindu thought from the very beginning. In the West, it has been recognised clearly only in recent times. It was Dr Otto who in his *Idea of the Holy*, about a half century ago, made this point finally clear. In the Judaic religious tradition, for all practical purposes, religious life and ethical conduct appear to have been made identical. The Ten Commandments of Moses are ethical precepts. In the Koran, it is these ethical commands which are presented as the essence of religion. Western scholars are sometimes shocked at the stories narrated in the ancient Hindu texts, of the conduct of gods that does not conform with strict ethical standards, and about which the narrator of the story expresses no moral horror and passes no censorial judgement. From this, the Western reader erroneously concludes that ethics has no place in the Hindu religious practice and tradition. This is far from the truth. From the very beginning, it has been recognised that ethical conduct is the very foundation on which the life of a religious man must be based. The rules of conduct of the Buddhist *shramans*, the formulary of conduct of Jain *bhikshus*, the daily rules regulating a Brahmin's life, bear ample testimony to the fact that the relation of ethics to religious experience is well recognised and established, though a man with secular sovereign status is exempted from moral censure. This moral exemption, however, is more judicial rule rather than a moral precept. The case of non-human gods, though is obviously on a different law. In Sikhism, while it is recognised that the religious experience belongs to a category of values which has a unique status and ontological

structure in its own right, it is, nevertheless, insisted that without strictly ethical purity of conduct there is no possibility of any advance in the religious experience. A religious life, not strictly grounded in ethical conduct, or a religious discipline which ignores the ethical requirements, is considered as a highly damaging error. "The seed of the teachings of the Guru cannot germinate except in the field of ethical conduct, constantly irrigated by the waters of truth." "A man of religion is ever characterised by ethical deeds, honest living, sincerity of heart, and a fearless passion for truth." "Nanak maketh this emphatic declaration, let all men ponder over it. Ethical conduct is the only true foundation of human life on earth." Sikhism, thus, lays a stress on morality which raises the moral law to a higher and absolute status such as was not so in the Hindu and Buddhist thought.

The Buddhist and Brahminic systems appear to assume tacitly that morality is a means to felicity and that it is not obedience to a law which exists in its own right as demanding obedience, what Immanuel Kant called, the Categorical Imperative. It is true that by them moral conduct is regarded as governed by the cosmic law, called, the law of *karma*, which means that good deeds bring good results and evil deeds bring evil results. "The evil deeds I did in past lives have now become impediments and misfortunes for me." Sikhism, however, raises ethical conduct to a higher and more independent, absolute status, and makes it as the true expression of the harmony of human personality with the Will of God. All ethical conduct, therefore, is not merely conducive to good results such as happiness, but it is primarily, an act of establishment of concord between the human personality and the Person of God. Since this concord is the highest end and the goal of human existence and endeavour, it is, therefore, the basic ingredient of the highest activity of man which is religion. Thus, Sikhism while recognising that the order of Reality which is revealed as numenon to the human experience does not fall under the category of ethical experience, it unequivocally emphasises that the two cannot be divorced or separated, and that the nature of the numenon is such that its realisation is impossible without ethical conduct. The ethical category and the numenal category are distinct, but are structurally and inseparably joined.

In this way, the Sikh thought fuses the Hindu thought and the Semitic tradition on the subject of ethics and religion.

Free Will

European philosophy and theology have been much exercised on the subject of the 'free will', while the Hindu tradition has considered this subject as of minor importance. The explanation for this lies in the analytical understanding

of the concept by both the traditions. In European thought, an individual is conceived of as a permanent fixed entity, basically separate from the rest of the world which is his universe. It is argued that without freedom of will there is no moral responsibility, there can neither be guilt nor punishment, either in society or hereafter, before the throne of God. This problem has not much troubled the Hindu thought which considers that there is no such thing as a completely free and stable entity, called, 'the individual', and secondly, the Hindu argues, that if the human will is not free then what does the term, "freedom", mean? What instance shall we bring forth with which to contrast the supposed determination of human will? Our notion of "freedom" is inalienably derived from our own experience to which we give the name of "will." Whatever, therefore, we may mean by "freedom", it is ultimately in the terms of our own 'will', that we give meaning to it. Thus interpreted, to say that human will is free, is an axiom, as well as a tautology. There is no meaning in the thesis that human will is not free, for, "free" is that which is like unto the human will. The trouble, however, arises when we give to the expression, "free will", a meaning which we have not derived from our experience of our 'will', but which have been superimposed by our intellect. Thus, we like to think that, "free will" is that power of volition of the human individual which is totally uncaused and unconditioned. The concept of 'self-caused inevitability' and 'freely chosen determinism' would appear as puzzling, if not altogether nonsensical to the Western mind. A little reflection, however, will show that such a "freedom" does not, and cannot, in fact, exist, and further, that, if it did and could exist, it will destroy all foundations of 'moral responsibility', 'sense of guilt', and justification for 'punishment' either here or hereafter.

To begin with, there are the facts of heredity, the environment, and the subconscious mind. There is not much doubt that the individual is the product of his heredity, the inner mechanism of which the science of biology has discovered recently in the fertilized germ-cells and its genes, which make all the organic cells that make up the body including the brain and the nervous system. This pattern we inherit from our parents and our ancestors and it is certainly a determination of the choices that we make in our lives from time to time. Psychology has revealed to us that subconscious layers of human mind as the seat of instincts, emotions, and intuitions, for those who faithfully follow the dogma of the Church Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.) which anathematised the doctrine of transmigration, in the race during evolution of millions of years; or, accumulated, for those who hold the doctrine of metempsychosis as fundamental, accumulated in the course of untold numbers of previous births and rebirths of the individual. They are certainly a determinant throughout a

man's life in the matter of his choice and the conduct that follows it. Again, from outside, the social environment is active in continuously influencing and moulding the individual's mind, and thereby his power of choice and conduct. These three factors, the physical, the environmental and the hereditary, are there as a fact, and their powers of influencing the human power of choice cannot be denied. In this sense, there cannot be a 'free will', as an uncaused and unconditioned factor which solely determines as to what choice, in a given situation, an individual will make. But, even if there were such a "free" will, it will entail disastrous consequences. If a man's actions are not free, when they can be shown to be casually chained to his character, the sum total of his heredity, past experiences and environment, then the only circumstances in which it would be proper to call a man "free", would be those in which he acted independently of his received character, that is, of his habits, desires, urges, and perspective on life, and all the rest. But, if this agent of 'free' action, is not to be equated and identified with that which is subject to particular desires and urges, which is circumscribed by a given environmental and circumstantial set-up, which is devoid of character, motives, persistent interests and the like, then who is this agent of 'free' choice, the 'he'? Such a notion of 'free' will completely dissolves the agent of action; a person with such a 'free' will is a completely disembodied and unidentifiable entity. Such an entity can neither be blamed nor praised. Indeed, such an entity would be truly like the "Superman" of Nietzsche, "beyond good and evil." Nor can such an entity be held responsible for what it does, for it would be clearly unreasonable to hold an individual responsible for his actions, if we did not think there was a cause and effect connection between his character and his conduct. When we can show that there is no such connection, as, for instance, an act is committed as a result of coercion, we do not normally hold him responsible. The reason is not that the one act is 'uncaused' and 'free', while the other is 'determined.' In one case, the cause lies in the character of the individual over which he has, in some sense, control while in the other case, he has no such control. As we gain new knowledge about the kinds of causes that affect conduct, we change our mind about the kinds of behaviour for which we should hold men responsible.

The recent shifts of stress in the science of Penology in the modern world, and the ancient wisdom of the East and West, which iterated that an individual is ultimately responsible for nothing, must be appreciated in the context of this analysis, and not in the superfine frame of reference of 'determinism' and 'free will.' "A man reaps only what he sows in the field of *karma*," declares the Sikh scripture. It simultaneously says that, "Say, what precisely is it that an individual can do out of his free choice? He acteth as God Willeth." And the *Bhagavadgita* asserts that, "God sits in the heart of every creature with the consequence that all revolve

in their set courses, helplessly tied to the wheel of *maya*” That man is free to choose and act to some extent, and to the extent that he is so, to that extent alone he is morally responsible and subject to praise and blame, is a true statement. That there is no such entity, and no such entity is conceivable, which is wholly ‘uncaused’ and ‘undetermined’ and further that in the ultimate analysis, the whole area of individuality can be linked to a cause of causes which are supra-individual, is also a true statement and these two true statements are not self-contradictory or incompatible with each other, constitutes the Sikh doctrine on the subject.

This brings us back to our immediate experience that seems to carry its own certitude with it, that, in some sense, we are ‘free’, for we have the notion of ‘freedom’ as the core of this experience. Sikhism, while implicitly taking note of the three factors which determine the powers of human choice, lays stress on this fourth factor, perpetually present and operative in the human mind, which possesses the autonomous power of choice. This autonomous power is the divinity in man, according to Sikhism and it is this core around which the whole human personality is built. It is, at heart, “the source of all human misery, as well as the panacea of all his ills.” “How may man demolish the wall of nescience that separates him from God? By being in tune with the Will of God. And how shall we know the Will of God? Nanak answers: “It is embedded in the very core of human personality.” It is this autonomous power of free choice which is given to every human personality, and by virtue of which the effects of the other three determining factors of human choice are interfused and thus, the act of free human choice gives birth to a new event, which is not wholly determined and which is not a mere combination and aggregational consequence of all these four factors, but which is a new event, unique in nature, and potently capable of giving rise to other similar events in the future. It is this power of free choice that is included in man’s original heritage which has the capacity to go beyond this heritage, and thus, within the limits given, a human being is free to shape his own destiny. Nor are the other three factors, his received character, the environment and the subconscious mind, merely accidental and fortuitously superimposed upon the individual, for they too are the fruits of his past *karma* of uncounted previous births and thus, they are self-determined, self-caused, result of free choices earlier made. When and why and how did an individual make the first free but wrong choice? This question relates to the First Things and, therefore, *exhypothesis*, the individual comprehension fails at this point: “the son observeth and knoweth not the birth of his father.”

Karma

The doctrine of *karma* is not the same as the doctrine of pre-destination of the Christian theology. *Karma* is, in a

sense, fate, self-caused inevitability, not pre-destination, for within the limits given (and these limits constitute the *karma* inherited from the previous births), a man is free. This *karma* is not ‘fate’, because all the time we are making our own *karma* and determining the character of our further status and births. The doctrine of *karma* as understood in higher Hinduism, and as expounded in Sikhism, merely teaches that our present limitations are traceable to our acts of autonomous choice in our past lives and as such, our *karma* is a source of rewards and punishments which we must enjoy and endure, but this idea differs from the idea of ‘fate’, as commonly understood in European thought, in as much as it is not inexorable, for all the time we are making our own *karma* within a context, the core of which is always free and autonomous.

Evil

The existence of evil, it might be said, is the main reason for the keen interest in religion and, therefore, the explanation of evil is the chief problem of theologies and religious philosophies. Whether it was God who created evil and whether evil is due to misuse of the gifts of free will, are problems which constantly occur and recur in almost all religions of the world. But the presence of evil, as a de-tranquilliser and disturber of the composure of the human mind, cannot be ignored or argued away, so much so that perceptive minds regard it as the preponderant characteristic of the existential human situation.

The main trend of Hindu thought on this problem is that since the world itself is unreal, the existence of evil in it is not of greater concern to the individual than the world itself. He asserts that the proper course for the human soul is to seek *mukti*, liberation or unison with God by renouncing and discarding this vain show of appearances, called the world. The Hindu, thus, is not very much concerned to prove that evil does not really exist in the world, or to explain why God allows it to exist. Since the world itself is no more than a phantom and an insubstantial dream, the evil itself cannot be of a more enduring substance and, at any rate, it is of no direct concern to the man of religion.

Sikhism cannot and does not adopt this view, because Sikhism does not accept the ultimate dichotomy of matter and spirit and does not accept as an independent entity, the principle of illusion, *maya*. Since Sikhism postulates that religious activity must be practised in the socio-political context of the world, the problem of evil is very much a real problem to Sikhism as it is to the European thinker. Sikhism, therefore, returns almost the same answer to the problem of evil which the European pantheist gives, namely, that since God is all things and in all things, evil is only something which is a partial view of the whole, something which appears as such, when not seen from the due perspective.

Sikhism asserts that there is no such thing as the independent principle of evil, as some theologies postulate, although there are things in this world which are evil. This antithesis of evil and good, according to Sikhism, is a necessary characteristic of the involution syndrome involved in the process of creation of the world. Evil and good appear at one stage of this involution-cum-evolution and they disappear when the process of evolution culminates into the unitive experience of God, just as the white ray of light splits into its variegated spectrum while passing through a prism, and again gathers these multichromatic hues into its all-absorbing whiteness when it becomes itself again. In the final stage of things, "all evil transmutes itself into good, and all defeat into victory." When a complete perspective is granted to man by the Grace of God, all evil melts into its source which is All-Good." There is no independent principle of evil in the universe because God is All-Good and, "nothing that proceeds from All-Good can be really evil, and there is naught, which proceeds from any other source but God."

But this Sikh metaphysical speculation on the ontological status of evil, does not supply a clear cut answer to the problem of evil as man encounters it in his everyday experience and life.

Ours is a time of upheaval-political, social, religious, and moral; our most urgent problem is to forestall the catastrophe that menaces us, catastrophe of total destruction, and unprecedented unrest and violence. The causes of the present troubles and future dangers can all be traced back to the lack of any root-principles, generally agreed in philosophy, religion and politics. Everywhere, old class structures of society have been undermined by the advent of democracy. European hegemony and overlordship in Asia and Africa have yielded place to independence or partnership. In religion, the simple faith in the ancient theologies and in their sacred writings as the explanation of the universe and as the foundation and sanction of morals, has been shaken by the impact of modern science. Civilisation has been disadjusted, and confusion prevails. General consensus is that the present age is mostly concerned, not with the world of ideas, but with the world of things, material things that we make and use, sell and buy. Though physical sciences, technology and economics are of immense value to mankind, it is not anywhere in that world that we may hope to find the solution to our problems, and that solution, whatever it might be, lies in the world of ideas. Men's actions are determined by their ideas and not vice versa, as fanatical Marxists fondly hope and obstreperously assert. Right ideas are those that lead to good actions, and good actions are those that are known to lead to welfare. Wrong ideas are those that lead to opposite results, suffering and disaster. Welfare means everything

worthwhile, material, intellectual, moral and spiritual welfare.

To discover wherein welfare consists and to find ways to attain it, constitute a continuous enquiry, discussion, study, meditation and argument. Thus, the ancient problem of evil is reopened, and the explanation of it that monotheistic theologies give, namely, to argue it away at the transcendental level, appears unsatisfying; the two world wars of our times, for instance. If God is omnipotent and benevolent, why are there wars? The answer that the ontological status of evil is negative and non-existent, or the answer implicated in the Book of Job, constitute an impressive argument and a magnificent poem, respectively, but in the face of the concrete evil, the latter appears a sterile philosophy and the former an evasion, but no straight answer. In the case of a dualistic theology that concedes two real and positive opposing powers, good and evil, it would appear that if God has created a maleficent power, the power of evil, of negation and denial, then God is not All-Benevolent, but if this power is co-equal and co-existent then God is not All-powerful. The problem of evil may be a mere abstraction, but there are problems of evil everyday in tangible and concrete situations and they raise not merely the philosophical questions about the status and origin of evil, but also what is the moral imperative for man, in dealing with evil situations, in day-to-day life.

Sikhism takes direct and full cognizance of this aspect of the problem. While it denies evil an ultimate status in the structure of Reality, it squarely faces the concrete existence of evil in the day-to-day life of man, as well as the agents of evil in human affairs.

"The cannibals say ritual prayers of Islam, and the assassins strut about as practising Hindus..... All concern for human decencies and respect for ethical conduct has disappeared and the evil rules supreme."

Sikhism calls upon all men of moral perception and spiritual awakening to oppose the agents of evil, the evil-doers and their aides singly, through appropriate Organisation, to oppose relentlessly, till the end, till this evil is destroyed or contained. The Light of God, that shone through the Sikh Prophets to guide mankind is unambiguous and uncompromising on this point :

"O, God of Benedictions, this blessing above all, we do ask of You: the will and tenacity to tread the path of good promoting actions and fearlessness in opposition to the agent of evil." "The Light of Sikhism is for the supreme purpose of urging men to destroy and extirpate evil-doers."

But, since according to Sikh metaphysics, the evil is just a passing phase, a phenomenal occurrence, neither there in the beginning nor there at the end and, therefore, having

no substance or real existence, why should any man of understanding bother to oppose it or to destroy or contain it?

Sikhism answers this question. The ancient Hindu insight into the scientific laws governing character formation tells us that, "what a man does, what he attitudinises, that he becomes." To tolerate evil, to co-exist with it and not to confront it, is to accept and compromise with it. Such acceptance and compromise are anti-virtuous passivity and negative life style and the destiny of ethical and spiritual negation is hell. A negative personality is a naked personality. In the absence of a proper covering of virtue and merit, there is no more frightful fate that can overtake man: "On its predestined march towards hell, a naked soul looks truly frightful."

Jacob Boehme in his *Signatura Rerum*, tells us, "What is evil to one thing that is good to another. Hell is evil to the angels, for they are not created thereunto, but it is good to the hellish creatures. So also heaven is evil to the hellish creatures, for it is their poison and death."

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) wrote in his *Heaven and Hell*:

"No punishment is from the Lord, but from Evil itself; because Evil is so joined with its own punishment that they cannot be separated."

By co-existence and non-confrontation with evil things, man is utterly degraded from his essential humanity, and becomes a hellish creature, and thus, his punishment is great.

"Fall and rise, rawness and ripeness are known and seen hereafter in the next world."

Numenon and Samsar, or The Reality and Appearance

Samsar is the principle of change, which determines the world of phenomena and in Hindu thought and in some other systems of metaphysics, it has been argued that on this account it is unreal. It is presumed as axiomatic that the real must not be infected with change. The basic formula of Sikh dogma, with which the Sikh scripture opens, is proceeded by the exegetic statement that "all change, all evolution, all that is characterised by the time-process, is ultimately real."

The Numenon, the order of Reality, which is revealed to the human mind through gnosis, therefore, is not something which is fundamentally different and away from the phenomenon, altered in the gnosis is not that what really is, but it is the mode of perception and the quality of prehension of the individual, which is transformed, thus revealing the

vision of the numenon. It is this very mundane and the material world and the phenomena which is fresh and differently apprehended and recognised by the human consciousness, a consciousness that is enlarged and uplifted. Sikhism, therefore, is in agreement with the aphorism of the great Buddhist philosopher, Budhagosa who declared, that "yas-samsaras tan-nirvanam", that is, "the flux and the Absolute are the same."

"This world of fleeting appearances that you see, is, in fact, the true face of God and as such, it is revealed to the consciousness of emancipated man."

Kapur Singh

Sirdar Kapur Singh, (2 March 1909 - 14 August, 1986) is regarded as one of the greatest scholars of Sikhism. He was an intellectual of high calibre and a restless, introspective and thinking personality; a philosopher and logician, with specialisation in comparative, abstruse and exegetical study of Aryan and Semitic religions. He was a linguist known for his equal command over many modern as well as classical Asian and European languages.

Sirdar Kapur Singh who joined the elite Indian Civil Service, was also an administrator with quick grasp and a tight control. Later, as a Member of Parliament, he was known for his intelligent parry and sharp thrusts, a most eminent protagonist for an honourable political status for Sikhs within the Indian Union. He was an individualist, both feared and respected by friend and foe alike. Sirdar Kapur Singh was verily an exciting and multi-dimensional personality.



Born in a middle class peasant family of rural Lyallpur district, now in Pakistan, S.Kapur Singh topped the list of successful candidates in the subject of Philosophy of the Master of Arts degree examination of the Punjab University in 1931.

In 1934, he earned a Tripos from Cambridge University in England, and also passed the Indian Civil Service Examination. While serving with the Indian Civil Service, he had the audacity to interact with M.K.Gandhi, and developed close relations with the Sikh Leader Master Tara Singh. In 1941, under orders of the Government of India, whose employee he then was, all copies of his book "The Hour Of The Sword", based on the "Panth Prakash", of Rattan Singh Bhangoo, were ordered to be confiscated.

His "Parasharprashna", a thesis in English on the status and significance of Sikhism, is considered to be the hall-mark of Sikh scholarship. He wrote some wonderful romantic-philosophical-satirical poems in Punjabi, and a book titled "Hasheesh" with Punjabi poems, was published in 1986 for private circulation. He was the first person to translate into Punjabi the Buddhist Classic "Dhhammapada". He was a prose stylist of distinction and published more than 200 papers in English and Punjabi.

He lectured in various universities, and before highly intellectual audiences, and toured all over the world. He lived at Chandigarh in the Punjab, during his last years.

An Appeal



Sikhs and the Caste System

Humanity is the universal brotherhood lovingly created by God. It is the essence of all religions and all ages. If one aspires to reach out the Divine by spiritual ecstasy, one must free oneself from the shackles of circumferential thinking to become a part of the brotherhood so dear to the Almighty. Theosophy envisages living together in this world in harmony, always looking for ways to achieve the common good, be it your own family or the others around you. Brotherhood is rejoicing in the success of others and partaking their sorrows. To be meaningful, the awareness of 'brotherhood' must be cultivated in one's ownself first before it can spread out amongst others.

"There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman.
There is one God and we are all his Children."

Guru Nanak Dev Ji

In search of *Akalpurkh*, the need for knowledge of the path to be traversed is irrefutable and the knowledge can come only from the Guru.

Kumbhe badha jai rahai Jai bin kumbh na hoi !!
Gyan ka badha mann rahai Gur bin gyan na hoi !!

Guru Nanak Dev Ji

The Guru says, just as water can remain contained only in a pot, it is knowledge alone which can harness the mind. And without a Guru 'knowledge' is not possible. Implicit faith in the Guru is imperative to keep your mind on the right path.

Off and on we visit Gurdwara Sahib to pay obeisance to the Guru. Such homage can be meaningful only if we develop full faith in the precepts laid down by the Guru. Let us see what the exalted ones sermon in relation to the caste system.

"Nanak uttam neech na koe"

Guru Nanak Dev Ji

"Void is caste, void is prestige based on it"

Guru Granth Sahib P.83

"The pride of caste leads to multifarious evils"

Guru Granth Sahib P.1128

"Distinction of high and low caste, colour,
hell and heaven are misleading"

Guru Granth Sahib P.124

"Manas ki jat sabhe ek hi pehchanho"

Guru Gobind Singh Ji

Guru Gobind Singh ji initiated Sikhs as the '*Khalsa*', administering '*Amrit*' to them. The exalted one further consecrated Sikh males with the name of '*Singh*' (Lion) and females with the name of '*Kaur*'.

It is abundantly clear that the Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, unequivocally and consistently rejected the very concept of casteism in any form whatsoever.

Although centuries have passed, the Sikhs, alas, have not been able to totally free themselves from shackles of the caste system, outright condemned by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Ultimately the creation of the '*Khalsa Panth*' made the final break with the caste ideology. The spirit of equality

and brotherhood prevailed in the *Panth*. A large number of leaders of the times like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Akali Phula Singh, Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala, Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthla, Master Tara Singh, S. Baldev Singh, S. Swaran Singh, Justice Teja Singh, Bhagat Puran Singh of Pingalwara and many others shunned the use of caste distinctions with their names. But today, it is indeed sad that we continue to take pride in our caste! The community is receding into the darkness of fleeting materialistic pleasures and distancing itself from light and glory.

Undoubtedly, with educational progress particularly amongst the urban population the intensity of discriminatory practices have become less pronounced, but still by and large the family legacy, endogamy, ignorance, acquiesce by the religious bodies and above all the misplaced 'ego' continue to sustain casteism becoming a hurdle to attainment of the goal so lovingly cherished by the Gurus i.e. the blooming of the 'Khalsa Panth' in this world.

On taking 'Anrit', a Sikh becomes a 'Singh' or 'Kaur' which then becomes his or her surname declaring to the world that he or she is now a member of the 'Khalsa Panth'. On declaring oneself a 'Singh'/'Kaur', all caste distinctions become redundant and superfluous. They vanish. In this context I would humbly express that the practice of mentioning one's caste after the nomenclature 'Singh' is absolutely contrary to what the Gurus contemplated.

A movement must be started to enlighten the Sikhs in this respect and if necessary, a *Hukamnama* from the Akal Takht Sahib could be issued if the *Panth* prays for such a *Hukamnama* from that august of temporal authority. People embracing the Sikh faith should be baptised and initiated at the Akal Takht Sahib. Sarab Khalsa could adopt as a *Gurmata* that no Sikh should use the name of caste as an additive. Sikhs have to consolidate themselves into one well-knitted force exuding an exalted sense of collective identity and brotherhood. Sikhism demands that individualism be eliminated from oneself for it leads to egoism which in turn disturbs the social ideal of Sikhism. The Gurus worked to eradicate the inequalities inherent in the caste system and achieved a complete break from the past. Let us raise ourselves to the expectation of the Gurus.

Introspection and retrospection helps a person to correct his path even if it be in a small way. Any extent of correction is welcome. Every Sikh should introspect. Alone at the morning ambrosial hours, one should try to understand and analyse the emotions that arise in oneself when one

thinks of his caste. The foremost feeling which comes is that one belongs to a particular section of the Sikhs and the rest seem alien. The other emotion that involuntarily grips a person is the imaginary superiority of oneself over other members of the, community. Egoism takes over. A '*deerag rog*' as described by Guru Nanak Dev ji. Are these emotions worth holding on to? Do they have any intrinsic value? If you dispense with your caste symbol, would you be a loser in any way? Think, think and enlightenment shall come with His grace.

A man is judged not by his caste or creed but by the deeds that he performs in life. All human beings who believe in Him are one. Ravidas a cobbler, by the Divine awakening came to be known as 'Sant Ravidas' and his bani found place in the sacred Granth Sahib. Ravan a brahmin by caste and all powerful king of Lanka had to bite the dust because of his misdeeds and the fire of egoism burning within him.

The Guru sermons;

"God is like sugar spilled in the sand.

It cannot be picked by an elephant.

Renounce thy lineage, caste and false honour

And be an ant to pick and eat the sugar"

Guru Granth Sahib P.972

Ponder brothers, ponder. I appeal to you in all humility to boldly make a small but significant contribution towards the creation of the 'Sikh Panth' as visualised by the Gurus - a brilliant star in the firmament of humanity.

*Discard the caste additive from your name
to become*

*An elevated soul and the beloved of the Guru
Time is here and now.*



Joginder Singh, IRS (Retd)

Know Your Mother Tongue!

ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਬੋਲੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਸਿਖੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਲਿਖੋ

A lesson from Tagore to Balraj Sahni

Those days I was a teacher at Shantiniketan. One day I went to invite Rabindranath Tagore for the annual Hindi Samelan, when he started a discussion with me. During the course of our conversation he asked, "Besides teaching what else are you doing over here?"

"I write stories in Hindi which are published in the leading Hindi magazines. During my stay here, I have written a lot and also earned a good name for myself."

"But your mother tongue is not Hindi. You are a Punjabi. Why don't you write in Punjabi language?"

I felt that Tagore was a narrow minded, provincial man; at that I did not realize that an artist must first be nationally known in the true sense of the word, before he is internationally acclaimed.

"But Hindi is the national language. It is the language of the entire nation. Why should I write in any provincial language, when I can write for the entire country?" I said.

"I write in Bengali, which is a provincial language; yet, not only the people of Hindustan, but people all over the world read what I write."

"I am not a great writer like you. I am just an insignificant writer."

"It is not a question of greatness or smallness; a writer has a relationship with his own birthplace, his people and his language. It is only from them that he can receive the warmth and feeling of being one of them."

Tagore continued: "I do not agree with you. The Punjabi literature or the Bengali literature is very old. Can you look down upon that language and call it outdated or backward, the language in which great poets like Guru Nanak have written?"

And then he recited a few lines of Guru Nanak's which I now remember by heart. But at that time, I was absolutely unaware of them. Those lines were:

*Gagan Mein Thaal Ravi Chand Deepak Bane
Tarka Mandal Janka Moti.
Dhoop Malyachal Patwan Chamwar Kare
Sagal Banraya Phulanto Jyoti.*

Literally translated the four lines mean:

Nature in its own way offers arti (prayers)

To God the creator of the universe

The sky is the thali (tray)

The sun and the moon are the diyas (candles)

The stars are the pearls

*The fragrance from the Malyachal mountain is the incense
The breeze sways like the chawar (fan)
And the entire flora blossoms luminously.*

After reciting these lines, Gurudev said "I would also like to tell you that I am trying to translate a few parts of Guru Nanak's great epic into the Bengali language. But I feel I will not be able to do justice to him."

Sahni: "But this is the religious language of the Sikhs," I said. "I am referring to literature which is far above the religious communities and institutions. This kind of literature is not available in the Punjabi language. This is the reason why Punjabi is a decadent language."

Tagore: "A century ago, the intelligent Bengalis who had been educated in the English medium, used to say the same things about the Bengali language. It is not difficult to popularise your own language. Bankim Babu (Chandra Chatterjee) had given the Bengali language thousands of new words. Even I have enriched the language with another thousand words. I established the Bengali language," he said proudly. "Today this language has its own expressions and manifestations amongst the languages of the world. It is not in any way inferior to any other language."

I remained quiet, but I was not convinced by this discussion. As far as I knew, most of the Punjabi writers wrote in Urdu or Hindi. Punjabi was just Gurumukhi—a script which was only used by the Sikhs, because it was connected to their religion. I did not even know to read or write it. When Hindustan was fighting for independence, it required one national language. The Congress was making tremendous efforts to make it the national language and encourage its growth and popularity. I did not think it proper to argue, so I told Gurudev the purpose of my visit. He accepted the invitation. I got up to leave.

I had barely reached the door, when Gurudev spoke words which troubled my heart for many years. But one day, suddenly, I realised that these words had much truth in them.

He said: "A prostitute, even after amassing all the wealth of this world, cannot command respect. Similarly, when you spend your entire life writing in another language, neither your own people will accept you as one of them, nor will the people in whose language you have been writing. Before trying to win over outsiders, you should first win over your own people."

This was Gurudev's style. He would never lose his temper; he knew how to control himself. He was never afraid to speak the truth, knowing that one day, truth would win, bloom and flourish.