

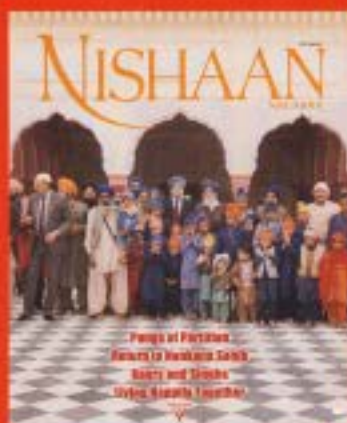
# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



**Pangs of Partition  
Return to Nankana Sahib  
Kaurs and Singhs  
Living Happily Together**





Cover: Visiting Nankana Sahib after four decades, Maj. Gen. Mohindar Singh Chopra (at the centre) with Sikhs of Pakistan.

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# Pangs of **PARTITION** and the Sikh Community

As one ponders the problematics of the trauma and tragedy of India's fateful Partition 56 years ago, and its impact on the destiny of the Sikh Community, my mind gets involved in a web of complexities accruing from that holocaust and mass-migration, admittedly the most horrendous in human memory. It was a time of total darkness, of profound agony whose description, although being chronicled now in the novels, stories, poems and paintings of the period, still outreaches "the imagination of disaster", to recall the novelist, Henry James's phrase which ingests primeval evil or evil at the nuclear level.

In my own subsequent articles, poems and critiques, I too did plunge into that "heart of darkness" to come up more often with weeds and slime than with anything of value or virtue. For, in that "theatre of cruelty", existential angst and philosophical searchings, questionings could not but be enacted. Appalling in dimensions, the Partition tragedy was, then, "a theatre of cruelty" where the besieged imagination had to do battle with all manner of ghosts, with ancestral voices echoing in our collective memory. For the Sikhs, in particular, it was one more moment in their long history of persecution and inhuman ordeals, that compelled the muses to close with the assaults of reality and to worst the forces of darkness, out to destroy them as a distinct ethnic community. This issue is devoted, for the most part, to the resilience of this brave and undaunted community as it stood poised to take a leap over this hump of fate.

In several ways, this issue, as meant to memorialise that horrific time, is going to become a collector's item, for it carries, among other things, one unique narrative – the memoirs of a Sikh Army officer who happened to be entrusted by his British superiors with duties and authority to arrest and then control the terrible situation in the Amritsar area, restore a measure of confidence in that realm of insanity. It was a task that called for the highest amount of self-discipline, insight and vision. Even one false step could endanger the fragile structure of governance to which

the then Punjab had been reduced, following mass migrations of unparalleled dimension, of heinous crimes involving rapes, killings, incendiarism and loot on a mind boggling scale.

He was "the right man, at the right time, at the right place".

This Sikh officer of destiny was Brigadier Mohinder Singh Chopra, who later retired as Major General and an Ambassador after a long and distinguished career. There are, to be sure, other articles and poems that bring out vividly and eloquently this saga of unspeakable and suffering, but the General's *memoirs* would remain an item of special interest to future historians and chroniclers of this tide in the affairs of the Sikhs. Its own insightful narrative, which subsumes many a story of deep human interest, many a cameo of compassion would not be easily forgotten, but its value is a document of rare importance concerning the incompetent and partisan cartography of Sir Cyril Radcliffe, Chairman of the Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commissions, instructed by the British Government to determine the boundaries and borders of the two nations, but which had no true character, no fixed contours.

Radcliffe's handiwork remains intact 56 years on, but Ian Stephens, another Englishman's writings in the immediate aftermath of partition are an eye-opener, giving the reader a more balanced glimpse of character.

In passing, I have mentioned the Partition literature in the Punjabi language – the stories and poems of Dr. Kartar Singh Duggal, of Amrita Pritam and others. To this rich storehouse of the Partition lore, I wish to add a couple of my own pieces to widen the scope of our narrative. I was then a newly married young Lecturer in English in the Punjab Education Department, destined to witness scenes of utter misery, suffering and desolation in refugee camps on the Indian side of the border and that experience deepened during my work in the refugee camp, based in

Government College Rohtak, shattering in nature and still etched in my memory with characters of steel.

My personal tragedy, which I have recorded elsewhere in detail, had, at that time, thrown me off my balance and I only remember to have recovered my mother and my brothers and sisters from the Khalsa College, Amritsar refugee camp after knocking about unwashed, unclean for nearly four weeks, from post to post. It was then that I learnt about the heroic saga of my father's "martyrdom" (as the *Ajit* daily from Jullundur put in an editorial). In order to save his *mohalla*, he had kept an incensed and frenzied mob at bay for as long as his ammunition of 100 bullets lasted and was finally shot down by a sniper when our house was set aflame. Yes, that story became my spiritual lamp-post in that enveloping darkness. I now had to feed and clothe and house a large family on my meager salary. It was a period of self-discovery also, for I realised how one hammer-stroke of history could alter almost everything and reduce millions of families to utter helplessness, destitution and bewilderment. More grievously, it could sever nearly all human bonds and relationships, turning friends into foes, neighbours into strangers. In short, I saw the Darwinian nature "red in tooth and claw". And yet I know of persons who harboured their Hindu, Muslim or Sikh friends to let the communal storm blow over – islands of much love and compassion in the midst of a sea of the suffering.

Of such are the dreams made – dreams of duties, responsibility and human fellowship. As the Irish poet, *W.B. Yeats* puts it, "In dreams begin responsibilities". That is the lesson that I learnt like so many others of such inclinations. Cultures and civilisations are built on such foundations, at the end.

*Darshan Singh Maini*

## Commentaries on the Subject

Many millenniums back, an exodus took place when a people were obliged to leave the land of their ancestors. That mytho-historical occurrence became the foundation of that nation in 1948 and days of remembrance are marked. That nation had a divine leader who took them across the seas, and gave them purposeful direction. These people are noted for their survival instincts and great fortitude.

The Sikh exodus of the twentieth century is being forgotten – unsung, unwept and leaderless. They came to a truncated land but every promise to alleviate their misery was soon denied by the same leaders who had promised it, unmindful of the traumas and tragedy of those by whose sacrifice such "leaders" got the taste of power which they termed as "freedom".

Were Bethlehem to be denied to the Christians, Varanasi to the Hindus, Mecca to Muslims— what would be the state of psyche of the Christians, Hindus and Muslims? Here, now for twenty years the nation called India is being ripped apart so as to construct a place of worship where mythology is being exploited. What about those people who have to virtually beg for permission and visas to visit the place of birth of their founder whose life has been etched in reality.

The world fights for the right of the lands of the founders and fathers which were given after thousands of years by those very people whose founder was crucified by these 'men in exile'.

Who speaks for the Sikhs of the Punjab?

SSB

As recorded by Ian Talbot in his book on Malik Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, the Unionist Premier of the Punjab during the climacteric period 1942-47, Punjab's agricultural wealth and its strategic position as the 'land gate' of the Indo-Gangetic Plains, made it crucial to the viability of a North Indian Muslim homeland. Khizr Tiwana continuously countered the Pakistan demand with his own vision of a United Punjab within a decentralised and federal India.

Now 56 years after the Partition, the two Chief Ministers of the two Punjabs are very tentatively exploring manners and means to lower the "artificial barriers" that divide the two Punjabs. In the months of June-July-August, when a number of *jathas* from Indian Punjab crossed the Wagah border to visit Lahore, Aminabad, Hasanabdal and Nankana Sahib, they were warmly greeted by locals and the press which interviewed them ceaselessly. Pakistani Sikhs (there still are 50,000) greeted their Indian bretheren, all to much media attention. Earlier, the first Pakistani parliamentarians to visit India in years, first went to the *Darbar Sahib*, in Amritsar, as did members of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam who were warmly received by the Akal Takht Jathedar. The Delhi-Lahore-Delhi bus service has resumed, and there were emotional scenes at Wagah as some of the passengers were reunited with their relatives. As Harbans Singh Viridi wrote from Hasan Abdal and Lahore, "there is none who does not hope for light at the end of the dark tunnel".

PSC

Jap(u)ji

# DHIAN: Meditation

## ਪੰਚਾਂ ਕਾ ਗੁਰ ਏਕ ਧਿਆਨ

### Introduction

Almost all Indian religions lay stress on meditation. It takes rank as one of the major activities of religious life – even as its only true activity. It seems to have received approval both from philosophy and theology. Some religious systems have expended a jolt of sophistication of thought about the process of *dhian*. Buddhism, for example, describes four states of *jhana* (Pali for *dhian*). Although Gautam Buddha did not hold *jhana* or regulated meditation to be essential for *nirvana*, yet his own mental evolution culminated comprised the four *jhana*s. The first *jhana* consists in identifying with nature. In the second, mind rises above reasoning and investigation, and there is a sense of joy. In the third, joy disappears, but *sukha* (ease) remains. In the last stage, even this feeling passes away and only a sense of equanimity remains.

In the Sikh thought, *dhian* is considered to be a spectrum of gradual deepening of contemplation, wherein such clear-cut division into stages is not perceivable. Hence it is treated as one single ever-deepening process.

### What is *dhian*?

The Sanskrit term *dhyan* is derived from the root *dhya* which means 'thinking', 'mediating'. *Dhyan* means meditation, thought, reflection, especially profound and abstract religious meditation. *Dhian* is its Punjabi equivalent, just as *jhana* is its Pali, *Ch'an* its Chinese, and *Zen* its Japanese equivalent.

*Dhian* is the meditative exercise aiming at absorption of the mind into itself.

ਕਵਨ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਮਨਹਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥

- ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: ੧

*What meditation would lead mind to be absorbed into mind?*

- SGGS p.943

The *dhian* prescribed in Sikhism is the ultimate one.

ਮੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਕਰਹੁ ਜਿ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਕਰਨਾ ॥ ਮੈ ਪਦ ਰਵਹੁ ਜਿ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਰਵਨਾ ॥

ਮੈ ਧਿਆਨ ਧਰਹੁ ਜਿ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਧਰਨਾ ॥ ਐਸੇ ਮਰਹੁ ਜਿ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਮਰਨਾ ॥

- ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ

*Adopt such a Guru; you would not need another one.*

*Dwell in such a state; you shouldn't have to dwell in another.*

*Enter into such meditation, that you shouldn't need another.*

*Die in such a way, that you won't die again.*

- SGGS p.327

Such *dhian* is the meditation of one God. It is the most supreme of all meditations.

ਸਰਬ ਧਿਆਨ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੁ ਧਿਆਨ ॥

- ਬਸੰਤ ਮ: ੫

*Of all meditations, meditation on the One Lord is the most sublime.*

- SGGS p.1182

An adept in such a meditation is doing nothing but meditating on whatever he is seeing

ਜੇਤਾ ਪੇਖਨ ਤੇਤਾ ਧਿਆਨ ॥

- ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: ੫

*Whatever they see is meditation.*

- SGGS p.236

Meditation, thus, has a perceptual quality. Guru Arjan Dev asks:

ਬਿਨੁ ਪੇਖੇ ਕਹੁ ਕੈਸੇ ਧਿਆਨ ॥

- ਭੈਰਉ ਮ: ੫

*Without seeing, tell me, how can one visualize in meditation?*

- SGGS p.1140

While one can repeat God's Name in one's heart, one can meditate on Him only through one's eyes, just as one needs one's ears to hear His revelations.

ਹਿਰਦੈ ਜਪਉ ਨੇੜੁ ਧਿਆਨ ਲਾਵਉ ਸਵਣੀ ਕਥਾ ਸੁਨਾਏ ॥

- ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮ: ੫

*I recite His Name in my heart, meditate on Him with my eyes,*

*And with my ears I hear His revelation.*

- SGGS p.1204

However, the eyes that can behold God are not the material eyes, but experimental ones.

ਲੋਇਣ ਲੋਈ ਫਿਨ ਧਿਆਸ ਨ ਖੁਚੈ ਮੁ ਘਣੀ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇ ਅਖੜੀਆਂ ਬਿਅੰਨਿ ਜਿਨੀ ਫਿਸੰਦੋ ਮਾ ਪਿਰੀ ॥

- ਵਫ਼ਰੀਸ ਮ: ੫

*I have seen His light with my eyes,*

*But my thirst has not been quenched.*

*Says Nanak, those eyes are different with*

*Which my Beloved can be seen.*

- SGGS p.517

The true spiritual way of life awakens through meditation only. Other modes of religious life, be they rituals, offerings, prayers, or genuflections, they do not come anywhere near meditation. Meditation is the true mode of spiritual life.

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਜਾਗੈ ॥

- ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: ੧

*Through spiritual wisdom and meditation awakens*

*The true way of life.*

- SGGS p.223

Here spiritual wisdom and meditation have been bracketed together. Such juxtaposition of these two concepts is not determined by the prosodic compulsion of rhyming, but on account of a fundamental connection between them. It is through these twin instruments that the Guru enables one's essence to merge with the essence of Reality.

ਗੁਰੂ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਅਰੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਤਤ ਸਿਉ ਤਰੁ ਮਿਲਾਵੈ ॥  
- ਸਵਯੇ ਭਿਖੇਦੇ

*In deep meditation and the spiritual wisdom of the Guru,  
One's essence merges with the Essence of Reality.*  
- SGGS p.1395

Not just *Gian* and *Dhian*, even the celestial music and the Revelatory Word are essentially one.

ਏਕੋ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧੁਨਿ ਥਾਣੀ ॥ ਏਕੁ ਨਿਰਾਸਮੁ ਅਕਥ ਕਹਾਣੀ ॥  
- ਬਸੰਤ ਮ: ੧

*Spiritual wisdom, meditation, celestial melody,  
And the Revelatory Word are one.*  
*They all tell the ineffable story of the One Immaculate Lord.*  
- SGGS p.1188

That is how *dhian* has been identified with the Guru. In fact, *dhian* has been described as the Guru of the spiritual elite.

ਪੰਚਾ ਕਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥  
- ਜਪੁ

*Meditation is the Guru of the chosen ones.*  
- SGGS p.3

This particular line of Jap(u) ji also lends itself to another interpretation, namely:

*The chosen ones meditate single-mindedly upon the Guru.*

And yet another one:  
*In meditation, the chosen ones and the Guru becomes one.*

All the three interpretations are considered valid.

## Who can mediate?

Many people would profess to be practicing meditation. However, most of them seem to be still in fetters.

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਸਭੁ ਕੇਈ ਰਵੈ ॥ ਬਾਧਨਿ ਬਾਧਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਭਵੈ ॥  
- ਸੂਹੀ ਮ: ੧

*Everyone professes of wisdom and meditation,  
But fettered in bondage, the whole world wanders and confusion.*  
- SGGS p.728

They outwardly seem to display spiritual knowledge, meditative postures and purifying rituals, but inside they are infested with greed.

ਬਾਹਰਿ ਗਿਆਨ ਧਿਆਨ ਇਸਨਾਨ ॥ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬਿਆਧੈ ਲੋਭੁ ਸੁਆਨੁ ॥  
- ਗੁਰੂਗੀਤ ਮ: ੫

*Outwardly, they display knowledge, meditation, and purification.  
From within, the canine greed captures them.*  
- SGGS p.267

They are like the heron, which stands in water immobile, as if meditating, but actually stands in wait for fish to prey upon and swallow.

ਉਦਕ ਮਾਹਿ ਜੈਸੇ ਬਗੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਮਾਛੈ ॥  
- ਆਸਾ ਨਾਮਦੇਉ

*Like a heron in water, they appear to be meditating.*  
- SGGS p.485

Such imposters stubbornly hold on to their pretense, but they are actually stuck in the mud of worldly pursuits that are of absolutely of no spiritual benefit to them.

ਮਨਹਨਿ ਜੋ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਤਿਲੁ ਨ ਲੇਖੈ ਪਾਵੈ  
ਬਗੁਲ ਜਿਉ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਲਾਵੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਰੇ ਧਾਰੀ ॥  
- ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮ: ੫

*Stubbornly he acts, but to no account,  
Like a crane he pretends to mediate, but is still stuck in Maya.*  
- SGGS p. 687

In fact, it is only very rare ones who can actually mediate truly. Even sages, who desire to meditate on the Lord, do not necessarily succeed.

ਸਾਧਿਕ ਸਿਧ ਸਗਲ ਮੁਨਿ ਲੋਚਹਿ ਬਿਰਲੇ ਲਾਗਹਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥  
- ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮ: ੫

The Siddhas, the seekers, the silent sages, all seek to meditate, But those who succeed are rare.  
- SGGS p.1226

## Aids to concentration

Curtailment of wants and desires<sup>1</sup>, reduction of mundane activities<sup>2</sup>, restrained speaking<sup>3</sup>, resort to silence and seclusion for some hours daily, discipline of senses<sup>4</sup>, control of passions and anger<sup>5</sup>, saying of prayers, reading of inspiring *shabads* (hymns) from *gurbani* (gurus' works)<sup>6</sup>, and a burning desire to realise the Divine Being within the span of our present life<sup>7</sup> – all these aid concentration.

Avoiding undesirable company<sup>8</sup>, expressing love and mercy for all<sup>9</sup>, reflecting on the benefits of meditation, and regularity of practice are of paramount importance.

*Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki*

<sup>1</sup> ਆਸਾ ਮਨਸਾ ਸਗਲ ਚਿਅਾਏ ਯਗ ਡੇ ਰਹੈ ਨਿਰਸਾ ॥ Renouncing all hopes and desires, remain desireless in the world. - SGGS p.633

<sup>2</sup> ਵੰਦਾ ਯਰਤ ਬਿਧਾਣੀ ਅਊਧਹਿ ਗੁਣ ਨਿਯ ਨਾਮ ਨ ਗਾਇਓ ॥ Life was spent engaged in worldly pursuits but sung no Naam. - SGGS p.501

<sup>3</sup> ਬਹੁਤਾ ਬੋਲਣ ਫਲਸੁ ਰੋਇ ॥ Talking too much is useless babbling. - SGGS p.661

<sup>4</sup> ਚਿੰਦ੍ਰੀ ਪੰਚ ਪੰਚੇ ਵਨਿ ਆਣੈ..... Overpower all the five sense organs... - SGGS p.1334

<sup>5</sup> ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਮਠ ਮਾਨ ਮੋਹ ਬਿਨਸੇ ਅਨਾਰਾਏ ॥ Sexual passion, anger, inebriated egotism and emotional attachment are dispelled by loving devotion. - SGGS p.818

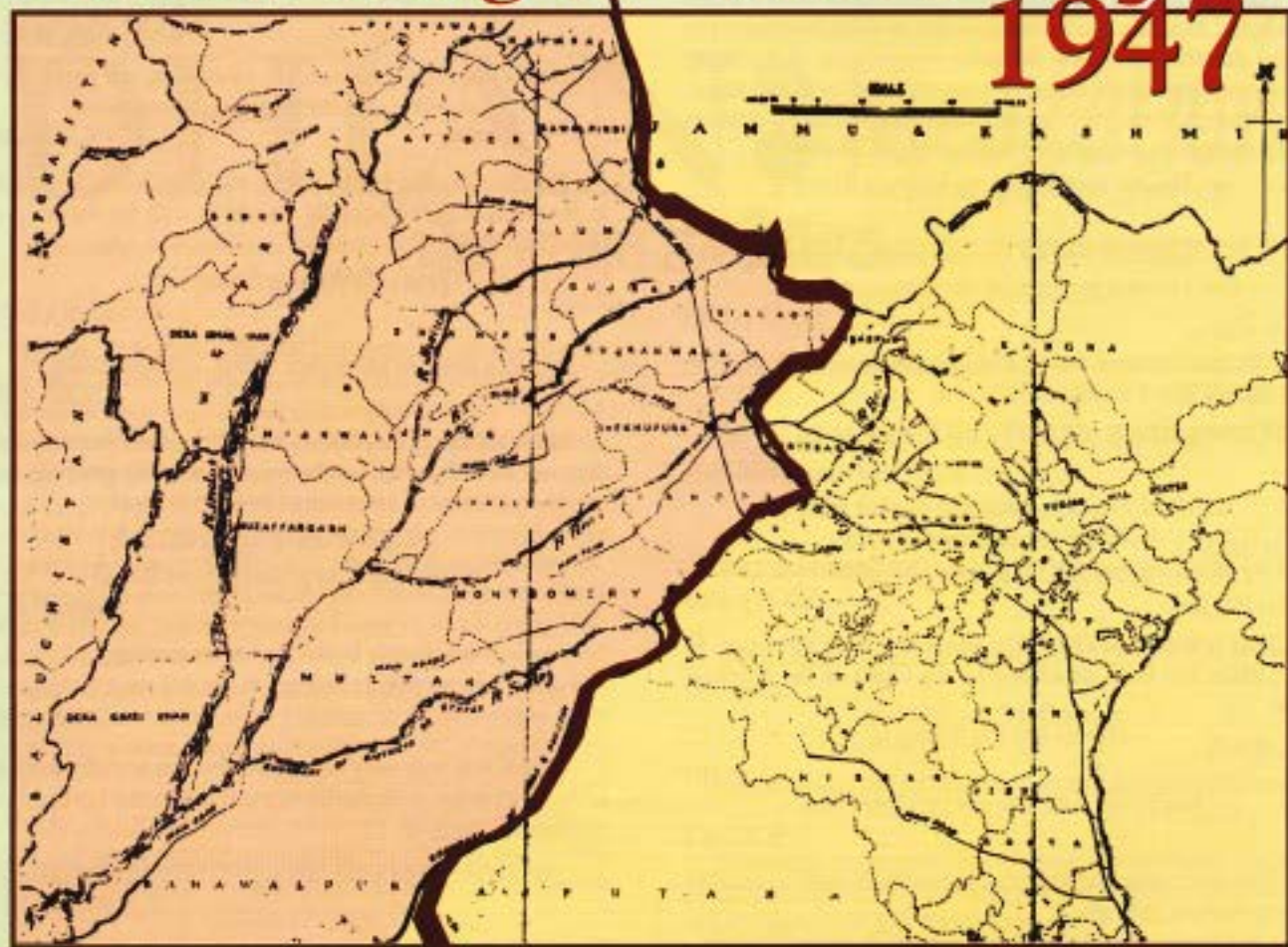
<sup>6</sup> ਆਗੁ ਸਿਖ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਕੇ ਪਿਆਰਿਓ ਗਾਯੁ ਥਾਣੀ ॥ Come, beloved Sikhs of the True Guru, sing his sacred hymns. - SGGS p.920

<sup>7</sup> ਮਨੁ ਲੇਖੈ ਹਰਿ ਮਿਲਣ ਕਉ ਵਾਸਨ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ॥ My mind yearns to meet God, how may I obtain His blessed vision? - SGGS p.1098

<sup>8</sup> ਸਾਠ ਸੰਗੁ ਨਾਮੀਐ ਜਾ ਡੇ ਹੋਇ ਬਿਨਾਸੁ ॥ Do not associate with the faithless, they would bring you to ruin. - SGGS p.1369

<sup>9</sup> ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮੁ ਭਧੁ ਨਿਰਾਕਲੇ ਸਿਸੁ ਕਰੀਮ ਲਿਖਾਯਾ ॥ Compassion, righteousness, and austerity are imperishable, but obtained by preordained destiny. - SGGS p.1101

# Partitioning of The Punjab 1947



The Punjab, the Pentapotamia of the Greek historians, has formed the north-western region of the Indian sub-continent and derives its name from two Persian words *Panj* (five) and *ab* (water), having reference to the five rivers which confer upon the country its distinguishing physical features and are feeders of the mighty river Indus, the great barrier on the north-west and which conferred the name *India* upon the undivided subcontinent.

As Syed Muhammad Latif wrote in his monumental *History of the Punjab*.

From the remotest ambiguity, an interest has attached to the land of the Five Rivers unequalled by that attached to any other land of this great Peninsula. Placed as it is, by Nature in a locality which gives it a crowning position and serving as the

gateway to India, every invader from the North has, by its possession, sought the road to fame....

In prehistoric times it was, presumably, the Punjab that was first invaded by the Aryans from their camping ground beyond the stupendous Himalayas. Here the holy singers composed their Vedic hymns .... the Aryan conquerors were, in their turn subdued by the Scythians of Turkistan, whose hordes, having overrun parts of Asia, found their way into the region of Indus. The Scythic, or Northern, form of Buddhism competed with the earlier Buddhism of Asoka.

Alexander made the Punjab the classic ground of his conquest and it was in the Punjab too that, in after times, the armies of Islam after overrunning Western Asia, Northern Africa and Southern Europe obtained their first footing on Indian soil. Mahmud (of Ghazni) sacked and destroyed the Hindu fairs and subjected the land to every conceivable form of misery and degradation .... the hordes of the Tartar Chingiz Khan, inflicted on the Punjab all the horrors which had been experienced in Hungary, Russia and Germany .... Tamerlane, who had made Samarkand the mistress of Asia, made the Punjab the scene of his military adventures.... the knightly Babur, the hardy Nadir and the Abdali Ahmad Shah, each in their turn, used the Punjab as the base of warlike operations for conquests beyond its classic river." ....Delhi, although the ancient capital of Hindustan, now forms an integral part of this province and is treated as a Punjabi city.

*The Punjab is the home of Sikhism, which loftily invoked the diety of the one and omnipresent God and appealed alike to the mullah and the pandit.*

*Here did the Sikh confederacies rise under warlike leaders resulting in the establishment of the doctrine that the Army and State of the Khalsa were the substantive power of the Punjab. For the first time in History, the Punjab reversed the tide, its warriors conquering lands westwards through the Khyber Pass to establish hegemony over Afghanistan right upto the River Oxus.*

*In the later 1840s, the Khalsa Army waged a fierce war against the all-conquering British but were betrayed by those who professed to be their leaders and so the Punjab was the last kingdom to be annexed by this World Empire, and remained thus for one hundred years when the British prepared to leave India but schemed also to partition the land of the Five Rivers.*

### Towards a Civil War

For over two decades, from 1921 to 1942, the Punjab had a Unionist Government, devoted to the non-communal governance of the United Punjab, domiciled by "home grown" Muslim leaders who were strong enough to control, or greatly influence, policies of the Muslim League. These leaders, particularly Sardar Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab from 1937-42 and his successor, Nawab Malik Sir Khjzar Hyat Khan Tiwana, Premier of the Punjab from 1942 till 1947, had developed the Unionist idea (that of a United Punjab, with the unionist party open to members of all communities under Muslim (PM) leadership because of a majority in numbers).

At the end of 1942, with the demise of Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, the Ministry continued uneasily until the General Election of 1945-46 "which was fought on the most bitter communal lines. Only eight or nine Muslim Unionists survived, the defeated Hindu Unionists were absorbed by the Congress Party while the Sikh Unionists joined the Panthic Party". The land of Five Rivers, so full of vibrant culture and which provided the backbone of India's defences, had reached the worst possible political situation, so long avoided, where almost all Punjabi Muslims were

on one side and virtually all non-Muslim Punjabis (Sikhs and Hindus) on the other, their political actions controlled under orders from outside the Punjab. No longer could the three Punjabi communities ignore that the idea of Pakistan, so far treated as a matter external to the Punjab, which had now become (literally) a burning issue, the province of 30 million inhabitants being sucked into the vortex of all-India political strife. The tragedy was that PMs became Muslims, the Punjabi Hindus fleeing to the anonymity of the Hindu mass which, in sheer numbers gave them some sanctuary while the Sikhs alone retained their identity and political independence. A makeshift coalition was formed between the Panthic Party, the remnants of the Unionists, and the Congress, under Malik Sir Khizar Hyat Khan Tiwana, taking office in March 1946, but "cordially hated by the Muslim league oppositions."

During the rest of 1946, the Coalition Ministry managed

to keep the Punjab in order, keeping the Muslim Leaguers at bay but news of communal disorders on an unprecedented scale in Bombay, Calcutta, Noakhali, Bihar, Western part of the United Provinces and the North West Frontier, caused great alarm. The Coalition Ministry however was energised into taking strong action to nip any trouble in the bud and disturbances in Amritsar and Multan, early in the summer, and Ludhiana and Rohtak later in the year, were quickly suppressed. However a

'civil war' atmosphere was now developing through the Punjab and all these communities began preparing for an armed struggle which seemed inevitable.

The Punjab Public Safety Ordinance was promulgated in November 1946, as the Punjab Government felt that 'private armies' might create an explosive situation in the communal strife, with the Muslim League National Guards and the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSSS) growing in strength even as the Sikh's Akali Sena had been disbanded in 1940 but could, of course, be revived quickly. In January 1947, the Muslim League National Guard and RSSS were banned under the Criminal Amendment Act, becoming the signal for a Civil Disobedience movement by the Muslim League. The weak Ministry were forced to compromise with the Muslim League a month later but



*Arrival of the Cripps Mission at Delhi, July 1946; Lord Pethwick-Lawrence to the extreme left, Sir Stafford Cripps in the centre, with Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck to his left.*



the extreme arrogance of the demonstrators, and their contempt for law and order, was greatly alarming.

At about the same time, His Majesty's Government in London announced their intention of leaving India latest by June 1948 and transferring power to a successor Government or Governments. The Muslims were now getting ready to "siege" the whole of the Punjab for a Pakistan-to-be while the non-Muslims, particularly the Sikhs whose homeland the entire Punjab was, were determined to resist, by force if necessary.

The Coalition Ministry was shaken by the Muslim League's Civil Disobedience Movement and the Premier suddenly resigned on 2 March 1947. The Governor invited the Muslim League to form a Ministry and, alarmed by the implications, the Congress and Panthic Sikhs held a massive meeting in Lahore the next evening. On the morning of 4 March, rioting broke out in Lahore, stalling further political moves and on 5 March, the Government of India proclaimed Section 93, vesting charge with the Governor. The prospects were discouraging, for between March 1947 and June 1948, there would be a political vacuum with the frightening prospect of communal fighting in the State, officials inevitably driven to taking sides and the services disintegrating.

During March 4-20 starting with Lahore, the rioting spread to Amritsar, Multan, Rawalpindi, Jullunder and Sialkot cities. Worst of all were the massacres of defenceless, hopelessly outnumbered, non-Muslims in the rural areas around the Rawalpindi, Attock and Jhelum districts of Rawalpindi Division, very heavy casualties in Multan district and much burning of property in Multan city and Amritsar. Some order was restored after 21 March but serious rioting and burning was witnessed in Amritsar during April 11-13, with some repercussions in Lahore.

Trouble spread along the Mewat in Gurgaon district, south of Delhi in late April but from 10 May onwards, the communal 'war of succession' began in earnest in Lahore and Amritsar, with incendiarism, stabbing and bombing. Serious incidents occurred in various districts, particularly Gujranwala and Hoshiarpur and village raiding began especially around Amritsar, Lahore, Ferozepore, Jullunder and Hoshiarpur. There was revival of disturbances in Gurgaon with 140 villages burnt and very heavy casualties. In between phases a relatively quick period was used by the communities for warlike preparations, weapons procured, bombs manufactured and drills. From mid-May onwards, a 'civil war was on in earnest, with each community intent upon doing the maximum damage to the other and such mass terrorism made control by troops and police most ineffective.

The officially reported casualties till 2 August totalled 4632 killed in both urban and rural areas of the Punjab, with some 2573 seriously injured, but those were clearly incomplete, especially for Gurgaon district.

There were bitter criticism of the British administration who "were able to crush without difficulty the disturbances of 1942 but failed to deal in the same way with the disturbances of 1947". In their defence, the British opined that while the 1942 disturbances (mostly in the United Provinces and Bihar) were initiated by a single political party against the Government then engaged in war against Germany and Japan, those of 1947 were initiated by the communities against one another at a time when the Government was to transfer power to "an unknown successor or successors within short time". The Muslims



Leaders of India after a meeting at Simla: at the centre are Master Tara Singh talking with Maulana Azad. At the back are Mohd. Ali Jinnah, Liaquat Ali, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalchari.

wanted to secure a more favourable position at the time transfer of power (for instance in the Rawalpindi Division the underlying idea was to eliminate the non-Muslim population and at Lahore, the Muslims wanted to scare away the non-Muslims and so on). In 1942, attacks were concentrated on Government property and personnel, in 1947 little attention was paid to the Government but the "two nations" fought one another in the streets, in the markets, in the fields and in the villages".

There were many accusations of British officials being callous and incompetent but these were denied by E.M.Jenkins, Governor of the Punjab who stated in his Memorandum issued at Lahore on 4 August 1947 that "In fact, nobody who has not lived through the last six months in the Punjab can conceive of the dangers we have escaped. To take a Province of thirty million people noted for their pugnacity, to whip these people into a communal frenzy,

to tell them that the authority, which has held the ring for nearly a century is going almost immediately to divide their province into two parts by a boundary driven through an area homogeneous in everything but religion, and to convert its two principal cities into frontier towns, these are surely no ordinary operations and if the critics thought that they would not be attended by disorder, the critics were wrong. It is largely owing to the steadiness and impartiality of the British officials that the Punjab has got through as well as it has".

In concluding his Memorandum on the "intolerably difficult situation", Jenkins stated that "the future is unknown and it would be idle to speculate upon it" but that "the grouping of forces and the problems to be solved will be entirely different from 15 August and that neither



*Master Tara Singh with other Sikh leaders of the time.*

improvement nor deterioration after that date will prove anything whatever".

Sir Cyril Radcliffe was ready to announce the award of the Punjab Boundary Commission by the evening of 9 August, but the Viceroy felt it desirable to hold it back, while Lord Ismay gave his opinion that the earlier it was published, "the more the British would have to bear the responsibility for the disturbances which would undoubtedly result" and felt it would be best to defer it to 14 August. However, Sir Evan Jenkins, the Punjab Governor, pointed out that there were administrative advantages from early publication and telegraphed the Viceroy about the "most serious" situation in the Boundary Area, asking for Army reinforcements, additional Police and possibly an air force tactical reconnaissance squadron and "for the earliest possible advance information of the Boundary Commission award". A few days earlier, Jenkins had reported that according to intelligence gathered by the

Punjab CID, and particularly that obtained after interrogation of an ex-member of the Indian National Army (who had been at the Japanese spy school at Penang and later infiltrated into India by submarine), there were Sikh plans to wreak havoc after the Boundary Commission's award had been announced. Plans included attacks on certain headworks, wrecking the trains carrying the Pakistan Governmental staff from Delhi to Karachi and then assassination of Jinnah during the celebrations in Karachi on 15 August.

Field Marshal Auchinleck tried his best to get reinforcements to meet the Punjab situation but had, however, wanted the units out of necessity to be mixed, particularly for the North-West Frontier. On the matter of Sikhs in the Army, Auchinleck was asked about their "loyalty", as there was a proportion of Sikhs in nearly all the Units of the Punjab Boundary Force. Those of the Governor General's Bodyguard whose loyalty was doubtful, "should not attend the 15 August parades".

### **The most horrific transmigration in history**

The frenzy of hatred fanned by the Muslim League, particularly in Western Punjab, stung the Muslims to terrorize non-Muslims in towns and villages, coercing them to leave their ancestral homes in panic and to flee eastwards in the general direction of India. Murderous attack by armed gangs, mass butcheries, arson and rape in an atmosphere of bitter hatred soon resulted in the mass migration of millions, unparalleled in the history of mankind. In the beginning, such movement was mainly from the districts of Rawalpindi, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Mianwalli, but this soon spread to the rest of Western Punjab. On 20 August, thousands of non-Muslims were butchered in Sheikhupura and, shortly, passenger trains on their journey to East Punjab were being stopped, the men butchered, women and young girls kidnapped, children slaughtered. The Karachi Mail was thus ravaged, followed by trains from Pind Dadan Khan and Chakwal where more than 12,000 passengers were killed. The police force had completely disintegrated and the civil administration, so far virtually run by the British officials, were nearly paralysed. Far worse was the active participation in these atrocities by uniformed personnel of the Pakistan Army, particularly some units of the Baluch Regiment. Soon, in East Punjab, acts of revenge were perpetuated by civilians against Muslims and so also began mass migration in the other direction. In an emergency meeting of the two Governments at New Delhi on 7 September 1947, it was decided that:

"The situation in the Punjab has developed in such a way that mass movement of Muslims from East Punjab and non-Muslims from West Punjab has become inevitable". "The Governments of India and Pakistan have therefore decided that movement of these people from East to West Punjab and vice versa will have first priority .... with the greatest of speed and fullest measure of security".

It was obvious that no evacuation was possible without adequate military protection, with law and order in the two halves of Punjab having ceased to exist.... "

### Dilemma for the Sikhs

That the Sikhs were utterly opposed to partition of the Punjab is well recorded in history, the *Panthic Pratinidhi* board fully supporting Sir Khizr Hyat Khan's Unionist Party which had rallied against the Muslim League's relentless pressures for creating Pakistan. The British Cabinet Mission which visited India in the spring of 1946 were impressed by the arguments marshalled by the Sikh leaders but could not reconcile these with the extremist stance of the Muslim League and duplicity of the Congress Party. The Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh stated that he was for a **united** India but if Pakistan was conceded he was for a separate Sikh state with the right to federate with either India or Pakistan. The Sikh state would comprise the entire Jullundur and Lahore divisions, together with Hissar, Karnal and Simla districts of the Ambala division, as also the districts of Montgomery and Lyallpur, with an approximate boundary along the River Chenab.

On March 22 1946, the Shiromani Akali Dal passed a resolution stating *Sikhistan* to be its political objective. It said: "Whereas the Sikhs being attached to the Punjab by intimate bonds of holy shrines, property, language, traditions and history claim it as their homeland and holy land which the British took as a trust from the last Sikh ruler during his minority and whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand of Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of danger of absorption of the Hindus on the other, the executive committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal demands the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural, economic and political rights of the Sikh population and their important sacred shrines and historical gurdwaras with provision for the transfer and exchange of population and property".

The British Cabinet Mission had at first presented a tentative plan which envisaged a three-tiered constitution consisting of a Union (empowered to deal with foreign affairs, defence and communications), with groups of Provinces dealing with such subjects as may be delegated



*Village on a truck: refugees with charpoys and bicycles and little else than hope, on a civilian truck.*

to them and if individual provinces, vested with residency powers. The proposals were cautiously received by the Congress and Muslim League but rejected by the Sikhs who described these as "dextrous manoeuvring". Master Tara Singh wrote to the Secretary of State for India of the "wave of dejection, resentment and indignation" that had run throughout the Sikh community. He asked: "If the first consideration of the Cabinet Mission's recommendation is to give protection to the Muslims, why should the same consideration not be shown for the Sikhs"?

Sir Stafford Cripps made a lengthy statement to the British Parliament on the Cabinet Mission's work in India. Regarding the Sikhs he said: "It was a matter of great distress to us that the Sikhs should feel they had not received the treatment which they deserved as an important section. The difficulty arises, not from anyone's underestimation of the importance of the Sikh community, but from the inescapable geographical facts of the situation. What the Sikhs demand is some special treatment analogous to that given to the Muslims".

Even as the Congress appeared willing to work on the Cabinet Mission's proposals, the Muslim League rejected the plan in toto and called for "direct action", this being the immediate cause for outbreak of violence in different parts of India. In September 1946, massive Hindu-Muslim riots flared up and six months later, in February 1947, the Attlee Government announced that it would relinquish



Mass migration of nearly ten million people from West Punjab to the East and East Punjab to the West had most of the unfortunate refugees fleeing by road, carrying pathetically little of their belongings on bullock carts, tongas, horse back or in their own hands.

power in India by June 1948 at the latest. Lord Louis Mountbatten was to replace Lord Wavell as Viceroy and arrange for the speedy transfer of power, the British hoping that a sense of urgency would engender responsibility and compel the rival parties to come to some sort of understanding.

Even while these political games were being played out, the communal violence that had been unleashed in mid-1946 blew up into the proportion of a civil war. The earlier sporadic communal riots had been goonda-dominated and localised affairs but the mass Hindu-Muslim killings of 1946-47 were master minded by scheming politicians and executed by organised gangs armed with automatic weapons and explosives. The Sikhs initially tried to remain neutral, often succeeding in providing succour and safety to both Muslims and Hindus as in Calcutta 1946, but being the most prosperous people amongst the Punjab peasantry and having been nurtured in marital traditions, were considered by the Muslims as their main obstacle towards achieving their Pakistan. The Sikhs who owned the best agricultural lands in West Punjab "would have to be dispossessed".

The Muslim League-inspired killings in Noakhali and Tipperah in Eastern Bengal in October 1946 had repercussions in Bihar where the Hindus took their revenge. Inflamed by this, Muslims of Hazara District in the North West Frontier Province, wreaked their vengeance on the comparatively few Sikhs there and such killings soon spread to the districts of Rawalpindi, Cambellpur and Multan in the Punjab. Sikhs became the main victims of the March 1947 riots, being easily identifiable, the Hindu and Muslim less easy to tell apart. Amongst many others similarly affected, the Sikh village of Kahuta in Rawalpindi District (now centre of Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon programme) was totally destroyed by ravaging Muslims, and Lord Louis Mountbatten, who visited it in April 1947 likened "the destruction as though as any produced by fire-bomb raids in the war." The communal bent of the Punjab Police was another important factor in the programme, with nearly 75 per cent of them being Muslim.

The March 1947 riots became a drastic challenge to the Sikhs, whose own semi-organised *Akal Fauj* or *Akal Sena* were seen only as paper tigers. The Sikh's humiliation, especially when their martial prowess was in question, steeled their hearts and their mood darkened to fight back and save the community from Muslim aggression. On Baiskahi day (13 April 1947) Master Tara Singh and, 280 jathedars vowed at the *Akal Takht* (Amritsar) to sacrifice their lives if necessary for the community and only then began to organize self defence *jathas* in towns and villages,

to arm them with swords and spears and some firearms if possible with help from the Sikh princely states. Members of the defunct Indian National Army were recruited to guard the Golden Temple and other historic gurdwaras. The Muslim League had, however, long begun to build up stocks of weapons and bombs, as early as from December 1946, to be obtained mainly from the North West Frontier Province, as also the tribal areas and Bahawalpur. This secret fund (*sandug*) was also used to purchase jeeps, trucks, rifles, machine guns, ammunition, hand grenades, steel helmets, iron jackets etc. The Sikhs, on the other hand, tried to get arms from the Princely States of Patiala, Kapurthala and Faridkot, so as to reinforce the *jathas* traditionally armed with only kirpans and spears and mounted on horses. The *jathas* greatest asset however, was their organisation and very soon, an operational system was in place, with designated leaders, mobile headquarters and military-like tactics. It was these Sikh *jathas* which, in the vacuum of a complete breakdown of law and order, steered the defence of Sikhs (and Hindus) from murderous assaults of the Muslims.

It was not a question of retaliation but *survival* even as the Punjab Governor, Sir Evan Jenkins, warned Mountbatten that division of the Punjab on communal lines was disastrous because in every district, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were totally mixed up.

On 14 June 1947, Lord Mountbatten's press attache wrote: "We are in the heart of Sikh country here, and the prevailing atmosphere is one of tension and foreboding ... they [the Sikhs] see that the partition of India means substantially and irrevocably the partition of the Sikhs, and they feel themselves to be sacrificed on the altars of Muslim ambition and Hindu opportunism .... No juggling of the Boundary Commission can prevent their bisection. They react accordingly and their leader's hopelessly outmanoeuvred in the political struggle, begin to invoke more primitive methods ... tough weather lies ahead of us ..".

Sir Penderal Moon wrote to Lord Ismay from Bahawalpur on 27 June 1947 thus: "I write with reference to our conversation a few weeks ago regarding the Sikhs. Feroz Khan Noon made, I understand, a direct approach to them, indicating that the Muslims would grant them special concessions if they would throw in their lot with Pakistan, but he met with a rebuff.

This was to be expected. The Sikhs are still smarting from the injuries inflicted on them by the Muslims in the Rawalpindi division. Temporarily they've been thrown off their balance. But an influential section of them (including Master Tara Singh and Gyani Kartar Singh) know, in their heart of hearts, that they must come to a settlement with the Muslims if the Punjab is to be spared disaster. Hence, though one must not look for any immediate results, there is yet hope that with patience and perserverance the Sikhs will be brought to the view that Eastern Punjab—which must in any case be formed—should join Pakistan. If this is achieved, then the civil war, not to mention administrative complications, which must inevitably follow an attempt to draw a frontier between two National States somewhere in the middle of the Lahore Division, will be averted.

Meanwhile what steps are to be taken?



*All forms of transportation were used to take the refugees away from their hearths and homes to the sanctuary of their "new" country: Chevrolet trucks and tongas jostle for space on the dusty roads near the Beas.*

Certain Sikhs, in touch with both Baldev and Tara Singh, are going to formulate, informally and entirely privately, the Sikh conditions for joining Pakistan. If these offer, as I believe they will, a possible basis for negotiation, certain Muslim League leaders will be informly approached. The Sikhs are anxious that it should not leak out that any such negotiations are afoot or contemplated.

It will considerably facilitate matters if it can be so arranged that the new Eastern Punjab has the strongest possible Sikh complexion and does not therefore, include Gurgaon, Hissar, Rohtak and Karnal. The Sikhs have already put this demand to Congress who hesitate to accept it. I would suggest that this Sikh demand should be encouraged and conceded. You can doubtless be of assistance in this regard. If the Sikhs are taken out of Hindu clutches—as they want to be—and put in a more or less independent position on their own, they are much more likely to gravitate in the end towards their natural alignment with the rest of the Punjab and Pakistan.

The next step would be to indicate that it is optional for this Sikh Eastern Punjab to join either Hindustan or Pakistan and that there is no presumption that it must join one rather than the other. The Sikhs will probably make this clear themselves, but if they ask for some pronouncements to this effect from HMG, it will probably be advisable to accede to their request.

Please forgive this unasked for effusion. My excuse is that without a Sikh-Muslim pact there will be chaos in northern India”.

A “just and equitable” division of the Punjab on the basis of number and property was mooted and the continuing dilemma of the Sikhs aroused the sympathy of many British parliamentarians. As stated on July 15, in the House of Commons: “The British leave had the happiest possible relations with the Sikh community and, of all the martial races of the world, the Sikhs probably had built up the greatest reputation. The only situation which could mitigate the plight of the Sikhs was that the Boundary Commission should so define the boundary that the maximum portion of the Sikhs should be included within one conglomerate whole”.

However, the partisan attitude of some other Britishers, particularly Sir Francis Mudie, Governor of West Punjab (now Pakistan) was to the contrary and was revealed in his note of September 5 1947, regarding the desirability of evicting Sikh colonists from Lyallpur: “I am telling everyone that I don’t care how the Sikhs get across the border; the great thing is to get rid of them as soon as possible. There is still little sign of three lakh Sikhs in Lyallpur moving, but in the end they too will have to go”.

When on 15 August 1947, India celebrated its independence and Pakistan was born, millions of Punjabis had been displaced, and hundreds of thousands were murdered. Horrible atrocities were committed, gaunt and starving foot-convoys of refugees were mercilessly attacked, trains stopped and passengers slaughtered. “Never in the history of the world was there a bigger exchange of population, attended with so much bloodshed”.

The final tally: Hindus and Sikhs who had left West Punjab, and the NWFP totaled 4,351,477 against the 4,286,755 Muslims who left East Punjab.

The new Dominions were bewildered and no one knew about the exact nature and extent of the problem, whether the migrations were permanent or whether the refugees were eventually to return to their ancestral homes. However, by the winter of 1947, it had become apparent that the migration was, in reality, a permanent transfer of population, the largest in history.

## Sir Cyril Radcliffe

Sir Cyril John Radcliffe, “the man who divided the sub-continent by the stroke of a pen”, was appointed Chairman of the Punjab and Bengal Boundary Commissions in June 1947, with instructions to devise, and hand over to Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India, the boundary-maps which would divide 400 million people along religious lines, abruptly breaking the millennia of bonds. “His unpractised cartography would precipitate the greatest movement of populations in human history, a migration stupendous in its scale” : Some 10 million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs crossed the hypothetical border, west to east and east to west while nearly a million lost their lives, most murdered in the savage butchery of partition.

“Radcliffe’s last-minute recruitment to this impossible task was yet another instance of the British Government’s profound confusion, escalating throughout the 1940s over what to do with India. Equally, it was symptomatic of the vagueness surrounding the idea of Pakistan, and what exactly it would, in practice, amount to.



*Muslim refugee camp near Humayun’s Tomb, Delhi September 1947.*

“Radcliffe’s credentials for the job of dividing India did not arise from special knowledge of the country : it was precisely lack of this that was seen as an initial guarantee of impartiality”. Cyril Radcliffe had served as Britain’s Director General at the Ministry of Information during the critical War years (1941-45), responsible for Government propaganda and censorship. “So manifest was his commitment to protecting the name and authority of His Majesty’s Government that by 1945 he was acknowledged as the most reliable and formidable doorkeeper of the Establishment”.

Called to the Bar in 1924, Radcliffe had displayed a forensic brilliance and after the War, became Vice Chairman, General Council of Bar from 1946. What clinched his appointment for India in June 1947 was his age : at 48 he was considered the most likely of his peers to be able to function in the heat and dust of an Indian summer. “On 10 June 1947, on representation from the Viceroy of India, the Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Listowel, made enquiry of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, who took soundings and learned that Sir Cyril Radcliffe was prepared, subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions to undertake the task”.

As it later transpired, Radcliffe had accepted his appointment under the mistaken impression that he would simply have to adjudicate disputes arising over the definition of boundaries in Bengal and the Punjab. The claims on both sides were extravagant and member-judges of the Punjab and Bengal tribunals were so aligned themselves to politics that they simply undermined the judicial terms. However, on his arrival in India, Radcliffe discovered that the responsibility for actually drawing the borders would be his—on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim 'contiguous majority areas'. He was also asked to take into account 'other factors', but neither these nor the actual unit to be partitioned were ever specified.

To compound his difficulties, Radcliffe discovered that, although he had been led to believe that he would have at least six months in which to complete his job, in fact he was given exactly 36 days!

Even more stressing for Radcliffe was his having to work "to the rhythms and pressures of Mountbatten", with whom he possessed 'reverse virtues'. While Mountbatten "luxuriated in phosphorescent self-publicity", Radcliffe cultivated reticence and secrecy. Mountbatten was forever in pursuit of the thrill of action; Radcliffe was a fastidious intellectual.

Mountbatten was also a man in a hurry, had his tryst with destiny to keep (later paraphrased by Nehru): he gave just ten weeks for India to become independent, for India to be carved out and Pakistan created, for India's finances to be divided between two claimants, for the Indian Army to be dismantled and two new Armies to be created, for the provinces of Punjab and Bengal to be divided. This last issue was the most devastating: a man-made frontier had to be demarcated among the mixed Muslim-Hindu-Sikh population and the delineation had to satisfy both the countries. Clearly impossible, hence the need for a man of Radcliffe's skills, possessing a legal "ice-cold intelligence".

Radcliffe got together the maps and volumes of the 1941 Census of India (regarded by most as totally inadequate; prepared as they were during the worst years of World War II, these random maps were even lacking the required scale). He mapped out the boundary at the pace of 50 kilometres (30 miles) a day, to meet Mountbatten's deadline, and thus created Pakistan with insufficient and incorrect data. Radcliffe submitted his plans for the division of India to Mountbatten on August 13, 1947 but the Viceroy deliberately kept them under wraps, not just fearing for its consequences but most conscious of ceremonial protocol, not wanting any dispute to mar the grand celebrations he had planned for the August 14-15. More diabolically, the cynical delay conveniently shifted responsibility for the



*Mass movement of refugees from the 'Far West' of Punjab had to be by train, with thousands crammed inside the compartments and an equal number on the roofs. The refugee specials however ran the gauntlet of attack by hoodlums, most of which were repulsed by the limited armed escort on the train but when the goondas were supported, or their attacks planned, by the West Punjab police or even the Pakistan Army, terrible massacres took place, with ghost trains steaming into India with thousands butchered, thus evoking some retaliation.*

**On facing page:**

*The quickest and safest means of migration was by air, but this was limited by the small fleet of aircraft available (mostly Dakotas of the RIAF, civil airlines and some on charter), few aerodromes and the high costs. Seen here are non-Muslims awaiting evacuation from Multan to Ambala.*

consequences of partition from the departing Britons to the bewildered, incoming local self-Governments.

Partition came on 15 August 1947; the actual line of the boundary was announced on the 17th. "The Punjab exploded—it was no case of isolated incidents, it was civil war, accompanied by complete breakdown of the civil administration. Armed bands made for the lines of refugees and slaughtered, raped and robbed ...."

### The Trauma of August 1947

Even as most other parts of the Indian subcontinent marked 15th August 1947 as the coming of Independence and end of the British Raj, the Punjab was plunged into a horrific and terrible situation as it went through the traumatic amputation of its land: **partition**. As Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India and himself a key player in the events that brought about such tragedy then said "Nearly the whole of India celebrated the coming of independence but not so the unhappy land of the five rivers. In the Punjab, both in the East and the West, there was disaster and sorrow. There was mass murder and arson and looting in many places ... streams of refugees poured out from one place to another".

The Government of India, with Mountbatten as the Viceroy, were clearly unable to understand the passions and fury unleashed by their policies which was to result in the killings of nearly a million, loot, arson and rape and the forced migration of some ten million human beings, almost entirely Punjabis, both Muslim and non-Muslim. But it was not in the Punjab where all this began. The catalyst was in Bengal where, almost exactly a year earlier, on August 16, 1946, the great Calcutta killings took place, followed by equally horrific communal mass murders and arson in Noakhali which then spread to Bihar. Each disaster produced a reaction in different parts of the country. Spreading north-westwards, for a time Rawalpindi in the Punjab became the worst affected area in the country. And all this, very much during the British Raj, long before the question of partition had been decided. A year was to pass but even as August 15, 1947 loomed near, there still was uncertainty about the exact line of demarcation which resulted in further deterioration in the situation. The capital of undivided Punjab, Lahore, was to pay a heavy price in the madness with its citizens and residents killed in large



numbers, entire areas burnt down with an almost complete breakdown in civilisation. Its twin city of Amritsar, less than 40 miles away on the Grand Trunk Road was to suffer in similar manner.

After August 15, 1947 the situation deteriorated even further and the mass migration, in both directions, began. Millions of men, women and children left their ancestral homes, fleeing for their very lives, from towns and villages first all over the Western Punjab, then the North West Frontier and eventually from Sind. The just established Central Government of India hardly possessed the means of administrative machinery to tackle the situation, itself under re-organisation, the Armed Forces under division and communications in disarray. There was an ominous absence of news, with virtually no contact with West Punjab and spreading disturbances in East Punjab. Eventually, All

India Radio began broadcast messages for refugees and a special news bulletin for East Punjab. Major cities were cut off and even vital centres such as Amritsar and Jullundur had telephone and telegraph lines down. The railways had a preponderance of Muslim drivers who had left for West Pakistan. Restoration of communications in East Punjab was given high priority, important towns linked with Delhi by telegraph and telephone while 'hot lines' were established between Delhi and Lahore.

Governments of the two Dominions slowly realised the imperative need to establish direct liaison, the Punjab Boundary Force having now been wound up. The Prime Ministers and other Ministers paid frequent visit to towns of East Punjab, and Lahore, to review the situation at first hand and set the machinery of evacuation into motion.

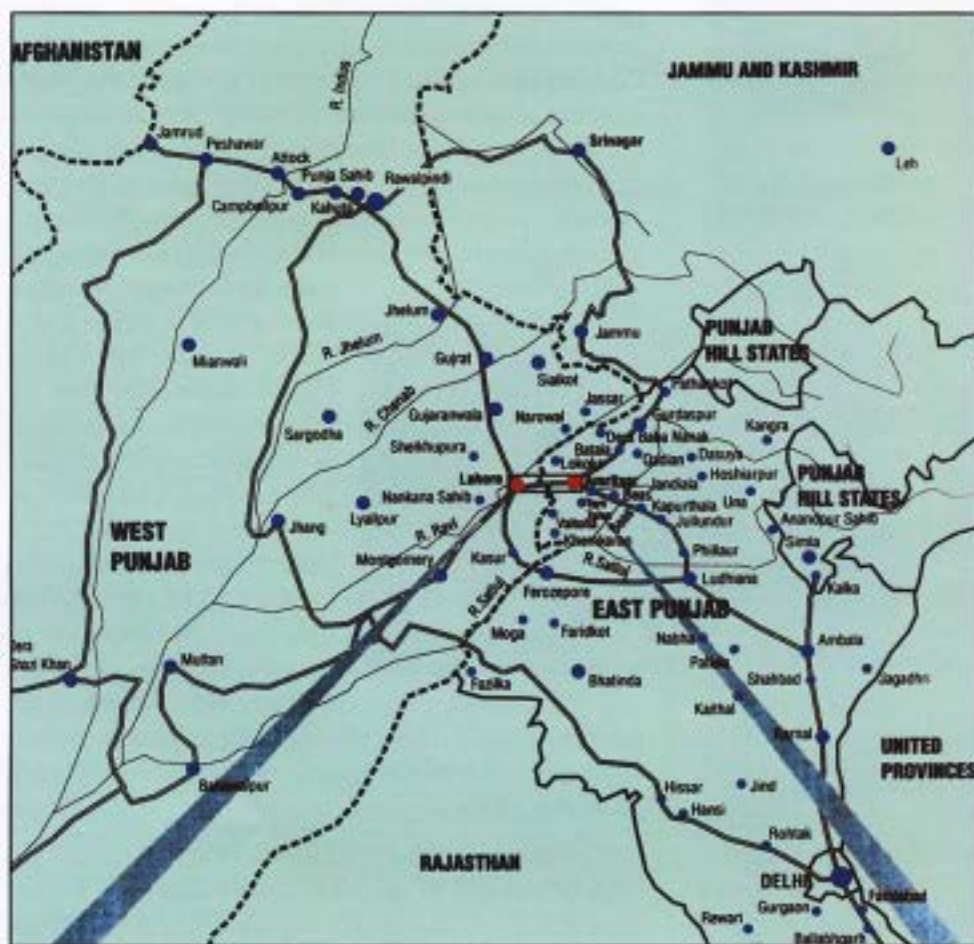
The Joint Defence Council was established to take over responsibility from the PBF even while arrangements for the evacuation of refugees from West to East and vice versa was being worked out.

On August 29, the Joint Defence Council, meeting at Lahore, decided to abolish the Punjab Boundary Force from the midnight of August 31 even as the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, the Defence Minister of India and a Minister of Pakistan began to tour the disturbed areas in both West and East Punjab.

*(Extracts from "1947: A Soldier's Story")*

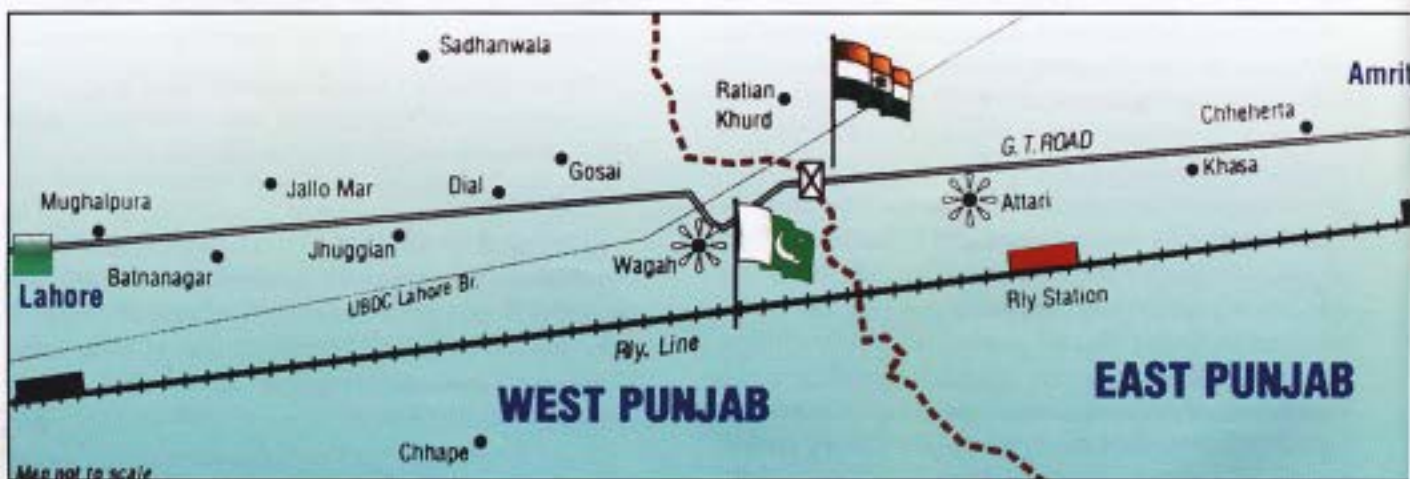


# A FORCED Frontier



The crazy partition line between western and eastern Punjab zig-zagged through farms and open fields and plunged India into its greatest and worst communal crises, raising new barriers of fear, and hostility between the major communities in India, which has tragically persisted ever since.

Amritsar in 1947 looked like a bombarded city, being battered by riots and arson for months on end. Along the Grand Trunk Road between Amritsar and Lahore were miles upon miles of refugees, simultaneously going eastwards and westwards carrying their paltry belongings, forlorn and desolate. During this holocaust, tens of lakhs of people were forced to migrate from one part of the



Punjab to the other. The Hindus and the Sikhs from West Punjab moved along oneside of the dusty roads, the Muslims from East Punjab in opposite direction along the other side. Every now and again, a goat or some cattle would wander across the road and then there would be desperate rescue attempts to get it back. Lack of food or fuel led to the consumption of even barks of trees upto to a height of over 10 feet, as high as a person standing on the shoulders of another could reach. These poor, innocent and ignorant people of the Punjab paid the terrible price of India's "independence".

Such were the scenes when I arrived as the Border Brigade Commander (123 Infantry Brigade) at Amritsar in early October 1947, to witness the horrors and sufferings of refugees, the butcheries in trains and along the roads and canals. There was little semblance of law and order existing at that time. The problems facing us were colossal. We had to squarely face these, restore security and solve what seemed hopeless logistic problems. Many refugee camps were established by us at Amritsar, their inmates had innumerable tales of woe, all subdued by a sense of hopelessness and utter despair.

***The Attari- Wagah Border :  
an unlikely frontier***

*Brigadier Mohindar Singh Chopra established the new international border at Attari-Wagah on 11 October 1947. The Joint Check Post was marked by a few painted drums, two flag masts and a rubble of stones astride the ancient Grand Trunk Road which stretched from Calcutta in Bengal to Peshawar in the North West Frontier, a distance of some 1500 miles (2400 km.). The boundary between India and Pakistan here nominally followed the division between Lahore and Amritsar Districts whose principal twin cities were less than 40 miles (64 km.) apart.*

The women and young girls coming from West Punjab were particularly vulnerable, with attacks by *goonda* elements who abducted them at will and there were many gruesome stories of kidnapping and rape. Thousands of refugees were murdered, injured or maimed for life with unbelievable cruelties. This surely was the greatest man-made crisis in history. Masses of non-Muslims streamed out of towns and villages of what was now hostile country, fleeing from their homes to escape the fury of maddened mobs. The endless columns moved slowly with their meagre belongings carried on their shoulders. One





*Clockwise from left:  
Brigadier Mohindar Singh Chopra, Commander 123 Infantry  
Brigade at Amritsar personally escorted muslim refugee convoys  
along the Grand Trunk Road from the Beas bridge to the Attari  
border, as also along other routes. He is seen helping a refugee tie  
his bullock under the "jua".  
The Brigade Commander addressing the agitated and worried  
citizens of Amritsar.  
Jathedar Udhom Singh Nagoke and other leaders urging the  
necessity of preserving law and order and the need to impart  
military training to young men, with desirability of providing  
arms to villagers on the border.*

witnessed the stamp of terror on their faces and desperation to cross over to the safety of India. Frenzied acts of destruction took place. Those who escaped the mob fury in West Pakistan and came safely to India narrated their woeful tales of looting, murder and rape.

I visited Khem Karan, a border town in Amritsar District, accompanying Sir Chandu Lal Trivedi, then Governor of East Punjab. It was terrible to see the exhausted refugees. They sprawled everywhere, along the roads, in makeshift camps, in school buildings, in private houses, in fields and on the streets. This town was flooded with refugees who had trekked from Multan and Montgomery. Refugees said the water wells and ponds enroute had been polluted with the carcasses of slaughtered cows. There was an acute shortage of drinking water on

the way, which was now being sold at exorbitant prices. Many pregnant women would give birth on the roadside or in the trucks proceeding to Amritsar.

These refugees told tales of unprecedented cruelty, their villages surrounded by Muslims from nearby villages who killed all the men, burnt their homes and took away their women and livestock.

Some convoys which came from Montgomery for instance, were fairly well organized because they had amongst them a sprinkling of retired army personnel who provided safety and security with whatever means they had.

It was over these refugee columns coming on foot from Pakistan entering India at Khem Karan, that I undertook many air flights to assess the extent of the mass of humanity



**Left:**  
Tens of thousands at the Hall Bazaar in Amritsar, late 1947.

**Below:**  
Brigadier Mohindar Singh Chopra, Commander 123 Infantry Brigade, leads marching columns through the roads and lanes of Amritsar, the confidence-building flag marches applauded by a grateful civilian population.

stretching unbroken for 15-20 miles. Group Captain Mehar Singh (affectionately nick-named "Mehar Baba" in the Indian Air Force) would fly me in an Auster or Harvard and whenever possible, we dropped food parcels with cooked chappaties and vegetables in sealed bags.

Hundreds of separated women were recovered by our troops from Pakistan. These had to be soldiers other than Sikhs and Dogras under my command as they were not permitted to enter Pakistan, just as those of the Baluch Regiment were not allowed to come to India, as they had earlier played havoc in Sheikhpura. When the rescued girls were brought back to the safety of Amritsar, some parents were in hysterics at the re-union, while others actually refused to accept them back as they had lost their "pureness" (through no fault of their own). In fact such parents were to be blamed for cowardice in abandoning these girls at the mercy of the *goondas*, and escaping themselves. However, many of our jawans of the Indian Army later did a most honourable thing, volunteering to marry these unfortunate girls.

I listened to the narrowing tales and appeals for recovering the abducted girls from various places, now in hostile Pakistan. Every day some desperate parents would come to my office in the Cantonment imploring us to locate their women-folk. I would send British officers, a few still under my Command, to carry out such humanitarian work.



They would travel deep into Pakistan, some as far as Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Peshawar, to rescue these unfortunate girls and bring them back hundreds of miles, to their families.

My Brigade's prime responsibility also was to see the Muslim refugees safely across to Pakistan. In early October 1947, I was with my troops, escorting a large Muslim convoy from Beas to Amritsar and on to the Wagah border. Nearing the camping ground at Amritsar, there was great

excitement, with hundreds of local citizens shouting hysterically and waving swords and spears: "they would not spare a single life of this Muslim convoy proceeding to Pakistan". The situation was explosive and desperate, I was told that a refugee train of non-Muslims coming from Sialkot had been stopped, passengers butchered and all the young girls abducted. I stood on top of a bullock cart and at the top of my voice shouted "Jo Bole So Nihal-Sat Sri Akal". There was silence and I appealed to the crowd to listen to me, which they did. I stressed that if they killed this lot of unfortunate Muslims, there would be further retaliations and revenge. Two wrongs did not make one right and, moreover the Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru had given explicit instructions that those Muslims who did not want to stay in India should be allowed to go away unmolested. Miraculously, the crowd listened to my appeal and slowly dispersed.

Sir Mohd. Zafarullah Khan, the vociferous representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, wanted his personal belongings from his home town, near Qadian, recovered and sent to Lahore. This message was conveyed to me through his brother-in-law, Brigadier Nazir Ahmed my opposite number in Lahore commanding 114 Infantry Brigade and who belonged to my old Regiment (the 6/13 Royal Frontier Force Rifles). All his household goods, furniture and books in the library were loaded in three 3-ton trucks and sent to Lahore safely, delivered and the receipts taken. And yet, I understand this gentleman denied having received any of his belongings from India, making false statements to the General Assembly at the United Nations that he could not remove even "a stitch from his house"!

Numbers of refugee camps to accommodate the several lakhs of displaced people were established at Amritsar. One can well imagine the organisational and administrative problems that were to be sorted out. Providing shelter, clothing, blankets and food for lakhs, as well as onward transportation was a monumental task. I was very ably

assisted by my wife, Jagjit Kaur and her team of volunteers, who did a herculean task of collecting garments, jerseys, and blankets in thousands, all of which she got donated from charitable organisations and citizens for distribution to those in the refugee camps. Often late at night, we would visit refugee camps and the railway station to provide some succour to the refugees.

Canteens were started by the army wives, to dole out tea, biscuits, bread and other food to the refugees coming in road convoys or on trains. In my jeep, I always carried a bagful of roasted grams and *gurr* for distribution.

These were the fateful days just after partition of the Punjab but I must record the commendable and great spirit of the people of Amritsar who rose to the occasion and came forward with support of every kind, moral and material.

Of course, essentially, my Brigade had the onerous responsibility of protecting the vast and open country from raiders in West Pakistan, a Brigade in name but of nearly a Divisional strength in terms of infantry battalions and supporting arms, including armour. This

was the most unnatural international border in the world.

It would not be out of place to mention two landmarks, literally, established by me during the events leading to partition. The first was the Referendum that I had earlier carried out in Sylhet in Eastern India and, establishment of the border check post at Dawki on the Shillong-Sylhet road. Just months later, I had to establish the new major frontier border check post at Wagah-Attari on the Amritsar-Lahore road. In fact, the brass plate marking this event was still in place decades later when severe fighting erupted in September 1965, with the Indian Army launching a major offensive into West Pakistan from the very same Wagah border post.

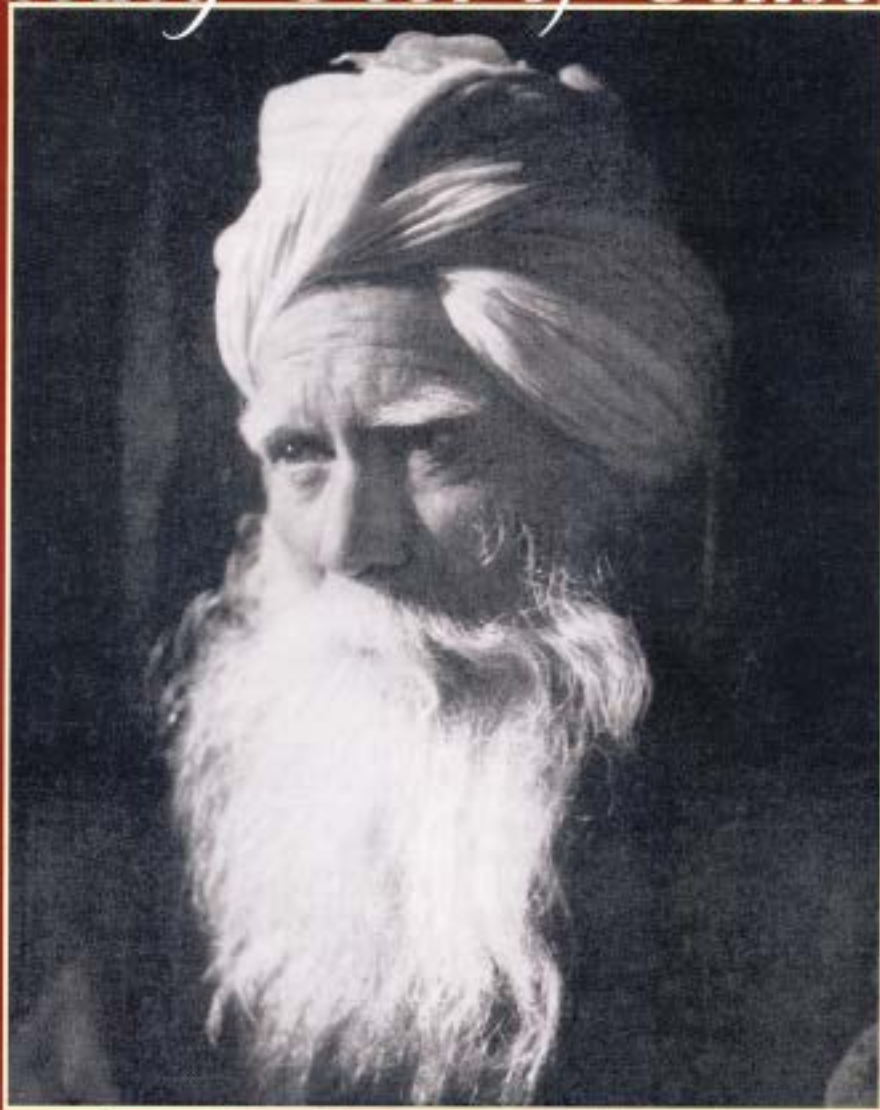
*Major General Mohindar Singh Chopra*

(As recorded for the archives of Khalsa College, Amritsar)



*Group photograph taken on the occasion of visit of the Hon'ble Defence Minister to 123 Infantry Brigade at Amritsar. L to R (sitting): Choudhry Ram Singh (S.S.P. Amritsar), The Hon'ble Sardar Swaran Singh (Home Minister East Punjab), Lt. Col. R.V. Karve, The Hon'ble Sardar Baldev Singh (Defence Minister), Brig Mohindar Singh Chopra (Brigade Comdr) Major P.G. Ganapathy, S.B. Sardar Narinder Singh, (D.C. Amritsar). Second Row (standing): H.C. Sarin I.C.S. (Private Secretary) and officers of the Army.*

# *A Heavy Debt of Conscience*



## **An Editors Offering**

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### **Some Months After Partition**

**J**ournalists, or at least editors, owe the two Punjabs a heavy debt of conscience, never fully repayable. It is largely because of us that the extremity of the disaster at Partition-time was not fully known. We stopped many hideous details of unimagined suffering from getting into print.

Admittedly the Government wanted this and (with threats) pleaded that we should; admittedly also some news-channels collapsed in the confusion. But spontaneously, of our own free initiative and judgement, most of us suppressed important facts deliberately tucked away others under quiet headlines at the bottom of an inner page, or tore up entire despatches from our staff correspondents.

Faced again with the same tremendous sort of problem, without hesitation I should act in the same way. It was so big that it overbore ordinary traditions of work; the higher duty to afflicted fellow humanity alone counted. By conduct unprofessional in the narrower sense we editors in India and Pakistan (I believe) saved more lives and limbs and checked further destruction, probably in the Punjab, certainly elsewhere; for during the weeks of crisis great risk existed that the madness would spread infectively, plunging both new Dominions into total chaos.

But our choice lay between evils. Tampering with truth can never be good, must always yield some bad result. By preventing readers in other provinces from realising at the time the full appalling horror of the Punjab's calamity, we have involved ourselves personally in the lot of the dispersed refugees, becoming sharers in responsibility for their still pitiable anguish, for the sometimes unsympathetic or even callous attitude towards them from their countrymen on both sides of the new frontiers.

With that professional burden much in mind, I have four times during 1948 – in February, April, October and December – made occasion to visit the broken Punjab, so recently undivided India's sturdiest Province. Here and in subsequent articles are recorded opinions on the latest journey, sprinkled with memories of earlier ones. There are bright items, but in general I found conditions less reassuring, recovery less solid, despite 16 months having passed since partition than I had hoped.

### The Significance of Amritsar

The trip this time was limited to East Punjab and the Amritsar area only – now thrice visited. That north-western most corner of the Indian Union, I consider crucially important. It may swing the scales between weal and woe for the whole subcontinent.

And Amritsar is its most significant town. It epitomises the Province's general sense of neglect, of under-estimated urgent needs, wrecked lives, shattered economy. Over 40% of the older densely populated walled city was smashed in the riots, a catastrophic figure little appreciated. Unequaled by any place in India or Pakistan of similar size, including horribly stricken Lahore. It compares with some of the worst percentages for war-blasted cities in Europe or the Far East.

As Amritsar often feels forgotten by its own provincial authorities at Simla or Jullundur, so does East Punjab by the Central Government in Delhi. Both occupy an outer limb of territory, easily disregarded by preoccupied people. Amritsar is however very conscious of being but 20 miles from a new international frontier, of having suddenly become an endangered border town – as is East Punjab of being an endangered border Province. Should there be invasion, an enemy would first thrust this way.

Amritsar is additionally significant as the main cultural focus of the Sikhs: and contentment for that catastrophically uprooted small community is a big problem for East Punjab, as indeed for all India.

Hindu-Sikh relations have become strained. This is a disquieting new phenomenon of rapid growth. It was non-

existent, or at least indiscernible, when I visited East Punjab last spring. As yet it seems confined to politicians, the press, and Government servants; it has scarcely reached the masses, who intermingle amicably. But its implications are dangerous. Genuine and natural Sikh fears of cultural subversion by the bigger community lie at its root – though rivalries between Sikh political groups may have artificially fed it.

The Sikhs' case for special magnanimous treatment has been argued editorially and by correspondence in *The Statesman*: it needs no recapitulation here. The tension might be eased by prompt decisions. It must grow with delay.



*The truncated Punjab.*

On the map East Punjab looks surprisingly small, almost as much so, beside the Indian Union's other provinces, as West Bengal. And its disadvantages of size are worsened by other geographic snags. Straddling its centre stand the separate territories of the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU); against its northern flank presses the newly created hilly entity of Himachal Pradesh; and (unlike West Punjab) it had to begin life with no established capital city or centralised Governmental machine.

Such an ill-knit little Province, even if well led, might find difficulty in making its weak voice heard amidst the

clamorous many nowadays demanding attention in New Delhi. Well led however it scarcely seems to be.

That verdict, from one who has not put it to test at the provincial headquarters of Simla or Jullundur, must seem presumptuous and may indeed be unfair. No other Cabinet in India or Pakistan has had to face quite such extreme difficulties.

Nevertheless, viewed from Amritsar or New Delhi, which is all that time allowed me to do, the East Punjab Government has unmistakably lost ground, administratively and politically during the last eight months.



*Guardians of the Faith: Nihang Sikhs.*

Reasons are diverse. For example there is the vital matter of food. Leaders, provincial as well as Central, last April proclaimed faith that sound management and a good harvest had assured ample supplies for an afflicted people. Prospects in West Punjab or the NWFP then seemed much gloomier. Now the favourable contrast with Western Pakistan has practically vanished and savage criticism is heard in Amritsar of scarcity and high prices. Few parts of the subcontinent have lately suffered such shortages. That there should be a continuing all-India dearth, 3½ years after World War II ended, is bad enough; that it should so heavily

hit the impoverished inhabitants of riot-ravaged areas is held inexcusable.

As elsewhere, corruption in the Governmental organisation, especially at lower levels, is alleged, notably in such matters as civil supplies, permits and appointments. No hasty visitor could hope to gauge the truth of such charges. But their relative frequency is important, as an index perhaps of basic reality, certainly of the public mood – and they are very frequent nowadays in East Punjab.

Several instances are adduced of the Ministry being less decisive, less harmonious than last spring. This, so far as I could judge, does not originate particularly from the Province's newly developed Hindu-Sikh differences – though those doubtless are a factor – but has more complex basis. Sharp comment is however voiced by Sikhs about confusing utterances from provincial leaders on the status of the Punjabi language.

Especially by middle-class East Punjab refugees, Authority seems continuously reviled nowadays for inefficiency. Governmental or Congress prestige generally seems to have sagged. This again spills over from the provincial towards the Central field. Inflation, trading facilities, grants for resettlement, supplies of building materials or cloth, policy towards Pakistan, the course of the Kashmir affair – all are roughly denounced. There is adverse comment, too, on one topic specially affecting the Province. Progress with the great hydro-electric undertakings in the Himalayan foothills has seemed laggard, disappointing public expectation. Yet it would be no exaggeration to say that on these being finished quickly, and their benefits spread equitably between the communities and classes, depends the peace and prosperity of this whole region, politically and strategically so vital to India.

Contiguous to East Punjab, unconnected with the Indian Union except through it, is Kashmir, till a few days ago scene of the world's strangest war. The former, overwhelmingly Hindu-Sikh in population, holds such terrible memories of recent barbarities that few unescorted Muslims yet feel able to wander there freely. Kashmir, on the other hand, despite some Hindu-Sikh immigration near Jammu, remains predominantly Muslim.

Thus there are extreme communal contrast. Yet both have affinity in this; they have suffered horribly – and are conscious that others have not. Sharers in experience of affliction, they might become sharers too in the dangerous new thoughts which affliction breeds. Whatever the details may be of international or inter-Dominion settlement now being organised, Kashmir has already been so much battled





*Sikh students in Amritsar, 1948*

over, wrangled about politically, and economically shattered, that for years it must remain a devastated area, morally and physically. Standards of living among its peasants, even before the fighting, were wretched. Russia lies not far off.

Communism is a recurrent topic of talk nowadays in East Punjab. There seems no strongly active local movement, though doubtless disciplined party emissaries exist. Rivalries within the Congress, growing Hindu-Sikh antagonism, the Sikhs internal dissensions, the aims of the Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj, or RSS doings attract livelier popular notice. But reflective folk remember that the Province is full of demobilised soldiers with overseas experience. What they are thinking on modern social problems is a puzzle. Another, worse one, is what may result from the bitter frustration of literate urban refugees. Their mind-shaking experiences and their consequent habit of critical dis-respect for Government may prove a dangerous political seedbed.

All this makes glum reading. Passages from an editorial in this newspaper early in December (1948) can be perhaps bear reprinting here, for they suggest a remedy.

"Possibilities for ampler, speedier aid to East Punjab as a whole, not merely to Sikhs, and not cultural but material, merit, we would urge, urgent attention from the Centre. To classify the Province as temporarily the most important, because potentially the most dangerous in the Indian Union, and to allot it prior rights for financial aid, building materials, food and cloth, and the maximum resources in intellectual capital, expert advice and technological skill might prove sound statesmanship, yielding rich dividends in contentment and cohesion to the benefit of all – from Wagah to Cape Comorin or Dibrugarh".

There are also some "bright items". These, to my eye, were the cheerful refugees of the poorer sort, agriculturists or artisans; and the Province's students and schoolchildren.

Despite all that has been written and said on the dark aspects of the tragic 1947 partition, it remains true, I think, that no other countries but India and Pakistan could have survived such gigantic uprooting of population, or shown such resilience afterwards. That was mainly because of the adaptability, patience and fortitude of their humbler inhabitants. And India's, broadly speaking, proved the better. They were more capable of self help, less so of mendicancy. Among the unsophisticated sufferers, the cultivators, petty traders, craftsmen, can be found cause of optimism. Despite cruel and prolonged adversity, many of



*Cheerfulness in adversity: the Sikhs look ahead.*

them retain a wonderful balance and good humour – and unlike their Pakistani counterparts they very rarely beg.

Education throughout East Punjab was appallingly disordered by partition. Lahore had been its undisputed centre, and apportionment of that city to Pakistan created a host of organisational perplexities. Added to these were the destruction of buildings and fittings by riots, the vast migrations of pupils, the impoverishment of parents, chaos in the book trade.

But reconstructive efforts are gallant and impressive. During my few Amritsar days I saw the Guru Ramdas High

School, the co-educational Sri Ram Ashram High School, the Government High School, the Hindu College, and the Khalsa College. They function under novel difficulties, but with vitality. At the Government High School a shockingly high percentage of pupils proved to be refugees, many of them orphans. On a windy December morning some were shivering in scanty clothes. All these places contain fine human material, sturdy types physically, on the whole remarkably well mannered, with attractively eager minds. Because innocent victims of tragedy, they deserve the utmost humanitarian aid.

Pleasantly, little communal segregation exists. At the Hindu College the ablest question asked me was by a Sikh



*Chardian Kalan! In ever buoyant spirits.*

student. At the Khalsa College it was a Hindu student's pertinacity and charm that induced me to face a discussion group. There and at the Government High School, I also saw some splendid athletics and physical culture. The Khalsa College's reputation remains outstandingly high in this. Besides plenty of brain, East Punjab's youth has brawn, a very necessary endowment on that part of the map.

Since the tragedies of the 1947 partition, Sikh-Muslim estrangement throughout that region has seemed almost total. People of those two Faiths, even if close friends from childhood, have hardly been able to meet except under

military or diplomatic safeguard. A visitor still finds segregation along the two sides of the new frontier most remarkable, a dismally conspicuous practical exhibition of the two-nations theory.

Between Hindus and Muslims there was never any similarly complete sundering. Some Hindus, during all but the very worst times, have lived and moved with fair contentment and security in the modern parts of Pakistan's bigger cities. I met several as long ago as last February in Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi. The converse was true of Muslims in Indian cities.

But so intense was public feeling that the mere notion of an unescorted Sikh unharmed in north-west Pakistan seemed fantastic.

Reciprocally complete antagonism towards Muslims in the dominantly Sikh areas of East Punjab was assumed. But last April (1948), staying at a Sikh village in Tarn Taran tehsil in Amritsar district, I discovered exceptions. Certainly three Muslim men – and, according to report, several more, with womenfolk – were in that small area alone, remote from any official aid, yet so far as I could ascertain confident, happy, and well liked by their neighbours.

I write about this, thinking that publicity for it might help to recreate kindly feeling between the communities. I mentioned a young Muslim wrestler; also an intelligent, humourous greybeard; and recounted in full the pleasant take of the handsome lad, with a Sikh friend's forearm amicably drapping his shoulder, who was the village's guest. A former resident, he had left for Pakistan with his parents during the preceding autumn's turmoil; but young Sikh fellow-villagers, remembering his good company, had asked him back for his holidays. On the acceptance they brought him by road from the frontier. And there he was enjoying a stay with old friends.



*Smiles on the face of Muslims, protected by Sikhs at Tarn Taran.*

Soon afterwards I myself went to Pakistan as holiday-maker a month among the Pathans, to give mind and pen a rest remote from newspapers. So I did not see the criticisms of my article.

Perhaps I had commended too strongly. But it seemed wrong indeed, an international disgrace, that whereas to my knowledge some Muslims could dwell unharmed among remote Sikh villagers in East Punjab, not one unescorted Sikh, according to general belief, would be safe anywhere throughout West Punjab, even in the towns.

A Muslim contributor to *The Statesman's* correspondence column in May, writing from Rawalpindi, suggested that I had been duped at the Tarn Taran village. Safety for Muslims among Sikhs throughout East Punjab was to his mind unimaginable. "I belong to Amritsar district and know what happened there", he observed. Editorials in at least two Pakistani newspapers were similar.

Ours photographs may mollify such sceptics!

Meanwhile, wandering in remoter Pakistan, ignorant of controversy, I had made further unexpected and heartwarming discoveries – this time of Sikhs. The ugly general proposition that none existed in the plains of the West Punjab or NWFP was evidently valid. But in Pakistan's far hills, scarcely reached by the new hatreds surging below, little groups of Sikhs remained. Of course they had no alternative; movement eastwards to India over such distances, except in military convoy, would have been suicide. But the notable thing was their confident, well-protected air where they were. I found such groups at Saidu Sharif, capital of Swat; at Pir Baba village, in Buner, easternmost province of Swat; at Drosh, in Chitral. In Drosh and Pir Baba I went to the Gurdwaras, and found all well.

There were even a few Sikhs living among Afridis in the upper Khyber. These I was urged not to call on, lest that draw attention to them from unpredictable Muslim strangers travelling to or from Afghanistan. With the local Afridis, I was reliably told, they were safe. Many more, as is widely known, live on in the Afridi and Orakzai fastnesses of Tirah – from which such as I are debarred for supposedly still dangerous British imperialism. With Afridi friends, I strove to exploit this paradox, urging that where they allowed Sikhs, they might now allow me – but to no avail.

Some of these little remote Sikh communities, for instance the Chitral one, have I believe since moved. Departure by Government convoy was under discussion during my stay. They were plainly unhappy at the thought of it; but business had flagged, and to revive it seemed impossible without supplies from their agents on the plains,

the Sikh or Hindu traders of Peshawar, Rawalpindi or Lahore, all had vanished eastwards long ago to India.

Other groups however I understand stay on. Most remarkable of all were the Sikhs of Pir Baba, a famous holy place in Swat which Muslim devotees, some doubtless fanatical, visit from all over northwestern Pakistan. Yet about 40 Sikhs lived placidly almost within a stone's throw of the shrine, worshipping regularly at their Gurdwara. That was certainly proof of Swat State being well administered.

At all these places, at Dir, and at several points along the Pathan country from the Khyber to Pishin, I also, less surprisingly, met Hindus. Like the Sikhs, they seemed unafraid, and reasonably content.

These are old tales. Except for my summer holiday they would have been told long ago. Our charming illustrations would have appeared on time, making the original article



*Sikhs of Swat, in 1948.*

easier for Pakistanis to believe, instead of weeks later in a booklet.

But the sweetness of both – the tales and the picture – are such that they can perhaps stand belated publishing. Moreover now, just back from another East Punjab tour, I may augment them with something fresh.

Revisiting that same pleasant Tarn Taran area on 19 December I got new and ampler evidence of Sikhs' kindness to Muslims. The smiling sturdy faces of boys in the last set of illustrations, the genial elders and confident women, selected for photographing among the many Muslims I met that day should suffice as proof. They were at Kang village. The leading local personality there, Bhai Narayan Singh, glows with pride in describing his fellow-villagers' staunch safeguarding of a helpless minority throughout the troublous times. And I am told that other villages in that tehsil, notably the one from which the eminent leader

Jathadar Udham Singh Nagoke takes his name, have also a fine record.

### Reconciliation, through pilgrimage

Pakistan, since the spring of 1948, when rough words were written, has made pleasant gestures of reconciliation to the Sikhs. In June (1948) a jatha of escorted pilgrims from Amritsar was specially invited to the deserted shrine at Dera Saheb, in Lahore, for the annual celebration. That initiative on her part was deeply appreciated. The even more important pilgrimage to the holiest Sikh shrine of all, Nankana Saheb, followed in November and spread happy ripples of goodwill through both the Dominions.

Some Sikhs believe that Muslim sentiment towards them has so bettered that they could now move unharmed in West Punjab freely, like other travelers. All that is needed, they say, is a beginning: matters would then proceed



*Pilgrimage to Nankana Sahib in 1948.*

smoothly. that seems the view of Sardar Sampuran Singh, lately India's popular Deputy High Commissioner in Lahore. He recounts a pleasant episode of Muslim villagers' hospitality to him when, alone on one of his journeys was diplomat, his car broke down in a remote rural part of the Province.

He may be right. Nevertheless, were I travelling with any Sikh friend in West Punjab or the vale of Peshawar, I must admit that, remembering what I learned of Muslim ideas about Sikhs there last year. I would feel distressed were he to wander off alone.

### A Day in Qadian: Remembrance of Nankana Saheb

From Amritsar, 40 miles nearer Pakistan, is Qadian in East Punjab. Holy little city of the Ahmadiyya sect of Muslims, it has languished since partition time in very un-Muslim circumstances and under much unkindness. All

but a staunch 300 or so of the Faithful left. In their places are about 12,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees.

Through narrow streets, between buildings once housing Ahmadies, now crowded with the fugitives from Pakistan, I reached an open space.

Two Sikhs sat at a tea-stall, a third unidentified figure moving dimly within. This subcontinent contains many handsome sorts of people. None, I consider, quite equal in beauty of the young rural Sikhs. The effect is achieved by uniquely bold use of clashing colours and the delightful soft beards of early manhood, not yet large enough to obscure fine features.

These two were grand specimens. The glorious pagris and shawls, the colourful lungis clasp strong legs skirt-like to the ankle, the flashily pointed Punjabi shoes, the huge lithe physique would have enchanted a painter.



*Some Sikhs at Qadian.*

They had arrogance. They eyed the intruding strangers coldly. Suddenly however the hard faces lit with pleasure. Another figure had hurried up behind me. Successively they rose and hugged him, shoulder to shoulder. Round capped, wearing typical patchwork quilted waistcoat, he reciprocated with warmth.

He was a Muslim, the shopkeeper, hastily returned to greet intimately these well-linked clients.

A month before, a Statesman representative visiting Qadian had cautiously recorded: "The atmosphere in which the Muslims now live is better. But their disabilities need to be removed. Gradually the inimical attitude of the population is changing to toleration. Muslims hope that this will one day be converted to friendliness".

That day seemed to have dawned.

What I had just witnessed was indeed not typical. That became evident from many sad things learnt during the afternoon, but its charm did not thereby lessen. Since the calamities of 1947 I had seen no such startlingly delightful proof, even at Taran Taran, that Sikhs and Muslims can still be affectionate. Here in this hallowed place it had special quality.

Generously combined Hindu-Sikh hospitality enabled me to make this visit to Qadian during Christmas Week.

The place has since had other visitors after its own heart, of its own Faith: the limited number of earnest Ahmadiyya pilgrims who, under police protection, were enabled for

– Sirhind. But time and space prevented travel for officiated editors is difficult.

### Sorrow may give strength

Throughout an interesting day I had vividly in memory a previous tour, on the Pakistan side of the new frontier, done last April – with Muslim officials' ready help. I then went to explore the plight of 35 or so custodians marooned beyond Lahore with the holiest shrine of Sikhism – Nankana Saheb.

Though the Sikhs' circumstances then were perhaps even unhappier, and their voiced grievances fewer,



*Faces of the Faith: warrior, granthi, student.*

the first time to go there for the annual December 26-28 festival.

I admit that I went with friendliness faintly tinged with prejudice – which however vanished when I was there, from sheer pathos. Ahmadies are a heretical sect of Islam, numerically not of predominant importance. Total adherents throughout the globe perhaps do not much exceed a million. Some of their doctrines seemed strange, and I would have preferred Sunni orthodoxy, as exemplified familiarly in the Pathan country, bigoted perhaps, but understandable and comradely, or in its more sophisticated Delhi and Ajmer form, blent with congenial Sufi mysticism.

So I went wishing, that, rather than Qadian, I were visiting that other renowned Muslim shrine of East Punjab

resemblances between the two holy places were many and striking. Chief was the conspicuous dearth of ordinary worshippers, the aching emptiness, the sense of waiting, of hope, and (if I mistake not) of faith fortified by humbling affliction.

Like those Sikhs at Nankana Saheb, the Ahmadiyya custodians seemed almost pathetically pleased to have callers.

Qadian is an attractive spot, distinguished from miles away across the fields by its single great white minar. Its winding inner streets and rosy walls of little bricks, though not old, have "atmosphere", perhaps from sanctity. The two mosques, both with curious southward extensions, are notable structures.

I was conducted to the famous graveyard of the devout,



*Sikh women at prayer: reciting from the Guru Granth Sahib.*



*Honour for Ian Stephens by the Sikhs of Amritsar.*

shown the free kitchen, the guest rooms, the gardens – some of whose fruit-trees had been lopped for firewood during last winter's Hindu-Sikh boycott – and hospitality plied with sweet cakes and tea. At several points had been pointed out to me massive closed metal doors or barricades raised in 1947 against siege. In the distance, beyond the zone to which the Ahmadies nowadays normally confine themselves, had been glimpsed the big white house of the community's foremost public personage, Sir Zafrullah Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan.

The Ahmadiyya spokesmen agree however, as did the Sikhs at Nankana Saheb, that little or no riot-damage befell their holy places.

Lingering consciousness of danger is emphasised at both localities by the custodians being familyless. Women and children were withdrawn across the new frontier soon after partition. I was proudly shown in Qadian the little community's only remaining "child", a boy of about 10.

### **Faith across the frontiers**

To steadfast guardians of forlorn Punjab shrines, as to the dispersed many throughout a very religious land who hold such places dear, 1948 has been a distressful time – but certainly less so than '47. And the year just dead ended with heartening achievement. Two-way pilgrim-flow, limited but significant, has begun across the new frontiers.

Qadian seems to have got no share. Her pilgrims for the December 26-28 Urs festival were from the Indian Union only. But Sirhind, further East, through the Indian Government's care, received pilgrims in fair number from Pakistan too. This was gracious response to Pakistan's praiseworthy initiative last June in inviting Sikh pilgrims to Dera Saheb and later to Nankana Saheb.

For lacerated faithful hearts, such kindly Governmental deeds have been balm. Bigger movements than the token pilgrimages of 1948 ought to be practicable before long, especially now that "cease-fire" in Kashmir has so auspiciously fostered inter-Dominion goodwill.

But it may be questioned whether the full pilgrim-traffic of earlier years will be resumable. International boundaries stand where none ever did. Simple devotees for a particular ceremony in their former scores of thousands could hardly be got through the new papery formalities. Partition of what was India before freedom has caused diverse losses of liberty. The likelihood of some permanently lessened frequenting of much reversed holy places in the two Punjabs must unfortunately be faced.

*Ian Stephens*

*[From The Statesman  
of January 1949]*

# A Half Century Back, Readers Response

## From India and Pakistan

Sir,

I have read all of your articles about East Punjab, and particularly the one about the Muslim shrines there. I also earlier read, when in Aligarh, your articles about the Sikh shrines here in Pakistan.

First let me thank you, Mr. Editor, for the trouble that you are taking in a task quite unconnected with you, but which is helping the two communities.

It is of course a fact that until these two communities understand each other, it is impossible for the two Dominions to come really nearer, in spite of thousands of successful inter-Dominion Conferences.

In my opinion it is not a misfortune that both the Sikhs and Muslims have got their holy places in the wrong side of line. On the other hand that provides a good occasion for the two communities to come together.

The start now made has been good with the Sikhs visiting their holy place of Nankana Sahib and Muslims visiting Sirhind Sharif. But there is need for increasing the number of such pilgrims. I hope that the two Governments will develop this opportunity.

I assure you that I myself, and many like me, eagerly await the time when Sikhs will again be able to wander freely in the streets of Western Pakistan's cities.

Yours etc.

*S. Hasnain Ahmed Naqvi  
Peshawar, 9 January 1949*

Sir

You have rightly earned the gratitude of the Sikhs, whose suffering and present difficulties you have so sympathetically and clearly portrayed in your special articles.

But you give little by way of advice, or the outlining of a plan, whereby Sikh fears can be dispelled and the injustices they are facing be removed. You stress on Sikh-Hindu and Sikh-Muslim understanding, which is outside the pale of Sikh demands. The Sikhs have suffered, which you admit, but they are much concerned with Hindu and Muslim suffering, of which, too, you also so feelingly write.

In short, yours seems a more or less humanitarian viewpoint, which cannot solve the problems as interpreted by the Sikh leaders, who are considered communal and chauvinistic by others. Yours silence on such matters as the Sikh cry that they are being discriminated against, that there is no Sikh Governor, no Sikh Ambassador, and insufficient gazetted holidays for Sikh festivals is rather puzzling. Were one to take your humanitarian

advice seriously, the Sikhs might lose the best part of their platform, which is to uphold their separate entity as a community, and to fight for their recognition as such by the Government and the Hindus. They might even lose their two main distinguishing features, the beard and the *Kesh*, since Guru Nanak did not ordain this in the Granth Sahib, it being a later innovation of the great Guru Gobind Singh.

All this would be the logical outcome of your approach to the Sikh problems, which seems different from what the exponents of the Sikh cause hold.

Yours etc.

*Hindustani*

*New Delhi, 12 January 1949*

Sir

Permit me to thank you for the noble service you continue to render by your articles to the cause of goodwill between the Sikhs and Muslims.

It was to a considerable extent owing to your sustained efforts last year that the visit of Sikhs to Nankana Sahib and of Muslims to Sirhind and Qadian became possible. I earnestly believe that frequent visits like these to holy shrines will pave the way for ultimate friendship. Your services have been very widely appreciated, as is obvious from the many letters you receive.

Nearer home, too, you were not found lacking. In many Editorials last year you tried successfully to diagnose the intricate Sikh problem and suggested some remedies. The subsequent voluminous correspondence from your readers brought forth interesting views. Many people thanked you for your sincere efforts, while one chose to suspect you of following a policy of "divide and rule," apparently forgetting that you cannot now, by creating a gulf between Hindus and Sikhs, make way for the rule of a third country.

That writer even pretended to believe that there is no tension between Sikhs and Hindus, however, small. Such wishful thinking is dangerous. A pigeon cannot, by closing his eyes, save himself from the fatal jaws of a cat. It is a distasteful fact that there is tension between Hindus and Sikhs. We should dispassionately examine its reasons.

In my opinion the most important is the communal mentality of the Government servants, right down from near the top to petty constables and peons. They were recruited on a communal basis, and were working with a communal mentality in the old set-up. They have not changed; and the same old spirit has become even more intense due to the virtual disappearance of the third community—the Muslims. Any pronouncement of

secular policies by Ministers has no meaning for Sikhs until the official machinery which implements these policies in practice is persuaded to eschew communalism.

The lamentable role of the vernacular Press, the refusal to adopt Punjabi as the Province's language, the language policy of the AIR, the apathy and even hostility of people of neighbouring Provinces to Punjabis in general and to Sikhs in particular—these factors to a great extent explain the loss of confidence amongst the Sikhs for the majority community.

Tensions will remain until the communal virus permeating the Services has been wiped out, and until the majority community is prepared to deal with a hard-hit but brave minority magnanimously.

Yours etc.  
*Sodhi Surinder Pal Singh*  
New Delhi, 13 January 1949

Sir

Through its campaign for restoration of Muslim and Sikh holy places The Statesman has been doing valuable service to both Dominions. Some of your correspondents seem, though in a subdued way, to question your motives. The effort itself however, motive apart, is laudable, and many of us feel thankful to you.

Permit me, however, to express my disagreement—and I believe I voice the strong feelings of many—with the manner of your conducting this campaign. Your Editorials, your Special Correspondent's reports, your display of news, all indicate that you place the case of Muslim holy places in East Punjab on an equal footing with that of Sikh shrines in the West. But there is no analogy and you have either missed or avoided inherent differences, probably to strengthen the Sikh case. The Statesman is within its rights if it falls in love with the Sikhs. But justice requires that prominence be given to the differences between the Sikh and the Muslim demands.

The division of the Punjab was achieved through Sikh votes, and subsequently the Sikhs marched out of the western half, leaving behind their shrines in the care of Pakistan. They have chosen to become strangers to their holy places and any facility the Pakistan Government may give them to visit their shrines cannot be free from the limitation inherent in the fact that they are aliens.

On the other, 4½ crores of Muslim are nationals of the Indian Union. They look upon Sirhind, Qadian and various other places in East Punjab as holy. The few who were left behind in these places have been living a life of virtual imprisonment. The demand of these custodians of Muslim shrines for freedom of movement and association is surely very different from the Sikh demand for facilities of pilgrimage to Nankana Sahib. We resent that this Muslim demand should be put, probably in a spirit of bargaining with the Pakistan Government, on an equal footing with the Sikh demand. Our safety and freedom are the Indian Government's concern. We expect our Government to do its duty by us.

It does not speak well for the inhabitants of East Punjab or for the Indian Government that Muslims of the Indian Union should have to be provided with police escort before they can venture to visit their holy places well inside the Indian border. We should appreciate it if you could do something to educate public opinion in East Punjab on these lines.

Yours etc.  
*Ali Bin Abdul Qadir*  
Bhagalpur, 29 January 1949

Sir

Your admirable series of articles under this heading—at once evidence of your intellect and broad human sympathies—deserve praise and thanks from the people of E. Punjab and the Sikhs in particular. Sometimes sympathy has more value than gold.

"Broken Punjab" is a singularly appropriate expression for this tragic province, whose miseries, but for your notable efforts to discharge belatedly a "journalist's debt," would remain untold. Your articles' achievement will be solid if they focus the attention of callous powers—that be in this province, which is slowly and painfully picking up its broken threads of life.

Except to the myopic, it is clear that discontent in E. Punjab is real, distress genuine. The people have paid dearly for other's experiments in nationalism combined with a Bourbonish dislike for learning anew. Rightly and in time, you have emphasised that the afflicted province is likely to be both a seedbed of Communism and a gateway for it.

The Akalis have been one of the forces against disruption. But the Sikh community's political frustration might reduce their effectiveness to a dangerously low level. To make them willing and contented partners in India's polity, inhabiting as they do a dangerous outer bastion, seems commonsense and the need of the moment. Sikh-Hindu tension is not confined to leaders, students, servicemen, as you seem to think.

In E. Punjab today Hindu communalists, under the garb of nationalism, are treating the Sikhs in a manner which is making them disillusioned. Such a state of affairs must be remedied. Coercion, far from being a cure, might aggravate it. To question motives is not wisdom. That was done in the case of Muslims. A more realistic and conciliatory policy than the Congress pursued in 1937 might have prevented Pakistan. No movement worth the name rises out of trivial causes.

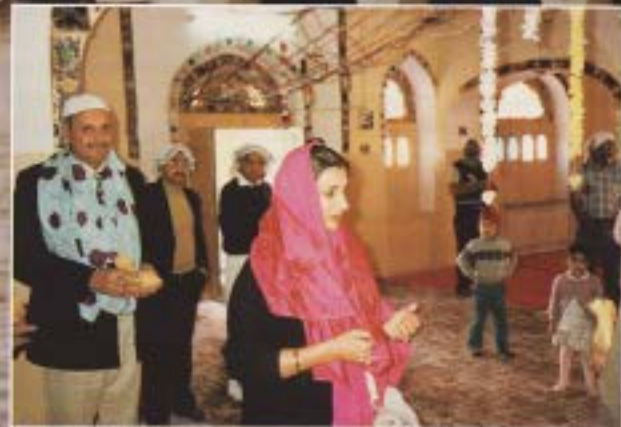
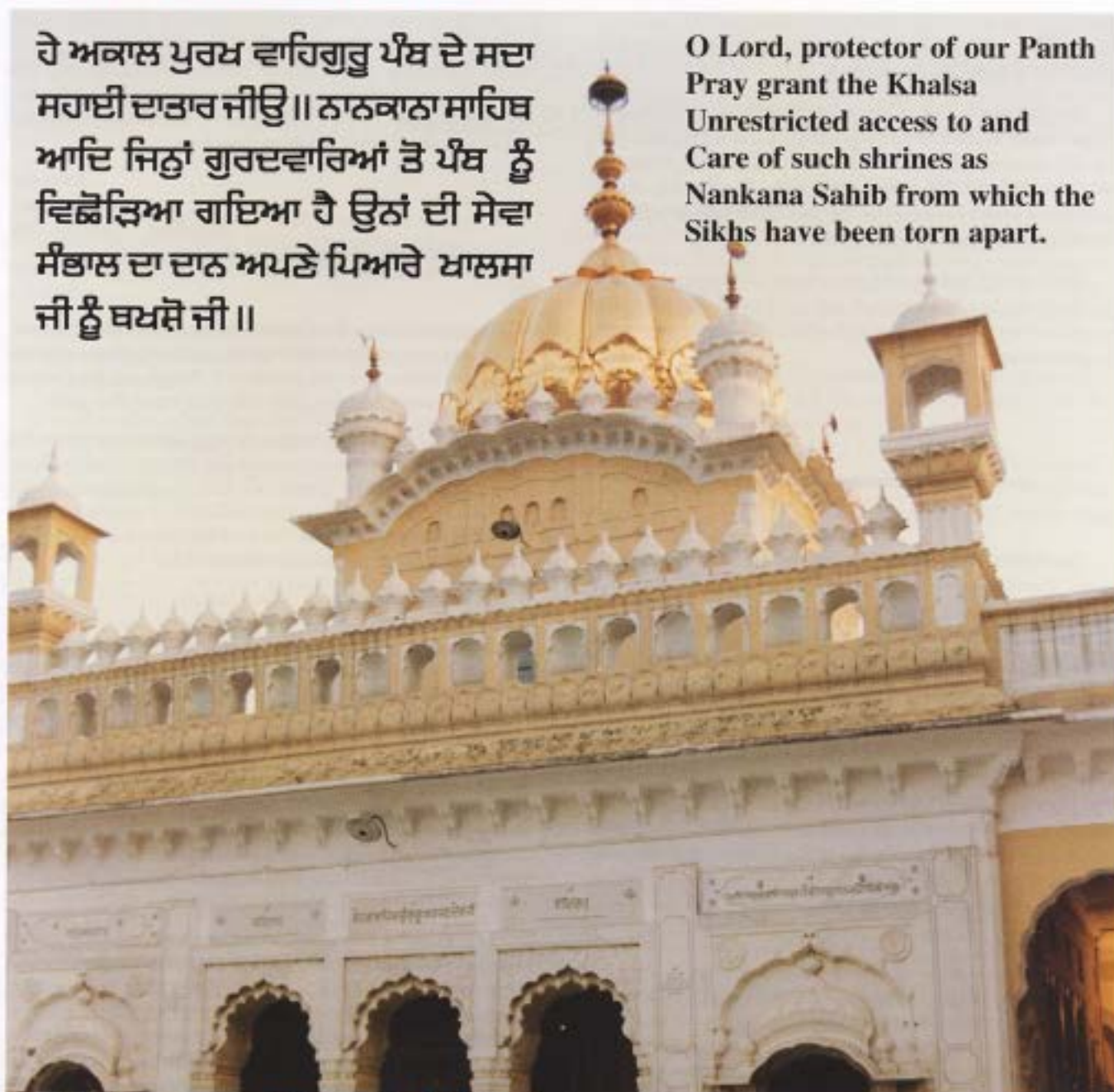
Economic rehabilitation, too, is urgently required; but cross-purposes, party intrigues and a cantankerous Administration are jamming progress. The choice of a suitable capital would help, and there is none other more so than Amritsar, as Mr Joshua Fazlud Din recently pointed out in your correspondence columns. If any place in the interior is made the capital, rehabilitation of the area near the border will be impeded. In addition to saving the crores of rupees which would be needed to build a new capital, industry and trade would get new confidence that would go a long way to restoring the normal economic functioning of the ruined province.

Yours etc.  
*Sarup Singh*  
Amritsar, 30 January 1949



ਰੇ ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਸਦਾ  
ਸਹਾਈ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਜੀਉ ॥ ਨਾਨਕਾਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ  
ਆਦਿ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰਦਵਾਰਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ  
ਵਿਛੋੜਿਆ ਗਇਆ ਹੈ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ  
ਸੰਭਾਲ ਦਾ ਦਾਨ ਅਪਣੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਖਾਲਸਾ  
ਜੀ ਨੂੰ ਥਖਸ਼ੋ ਜੀ ॥

O Lord, protector of our Panth  
Pray grant the Khalsa  
Unrestricted access to and  
Care of such shrines as  
Nankana Sahib from which the  
Sikhs have been torn apart.



At Nankana Sahib and Dera Sahib; four decades after 1947

# The Half-Shut Door in Punjabi writing

Not long after Partition of the Punjab, I brought out a collection of poems, called *Band Darwaze* (The Shut Doors), then a collection short stories in 1976, which was entitled *Dhoya Hoya Booha* (The Half Shut Door). To my mind, the two titles reflect the unending agony of the people of the Punjab on either side of the border. Over fifty years ago, we left our hearths and homes in the hope that we would return after the communal frenzy, which had overtaken the land of the five rivers, would abate. Over five decades have gone by, but we find that the doors continue to be sometimes shut and at other times still half-shut.

I remember my old grandmother forbidding my mother to purchase an oversize basket, three years after the Partition, saying, 'How will you carry it when we return to our village back in Rawalpindi?' The poor simple lady did not know that there was no going back. Far from going back to live where one was born or brought up, it is not possible even today for an ordinary citizen to go across the border without fulfilling untold preconditions that make it well-nigh impossible to undertake even a short-duration visit to one's erstwhile neighbours and friends. It is easier to go to Poland or Peru than to Pakistan, our next door neighbour. The blame cannot be apportioned. The responsibility lies equally with the people on either side.

It is cruel indeed. And it is more painful for people with sensitivities: writers, poets and artists. There has been a spate of literary and artistic activity on the Partition of the Punjab. Satish Gujral painted a cow stabbed during the communal riots. It haunted the Punjabis for several years. There are novels narrating the tragic saga, including those by leading fiction writers like Nanak Singh. There are a large number of short stories, subtle and perceptive, telling of the harrowing experiences of uprooted humanity on either side of the border. There are plays, both short and full length, on the trauma of the refugees and their rehabilitation. But, perhaps the most significant writing relating to the partition of 1947 is found in Punjabi verse.

It was the heart of a mother, in Amrita Pritam, that shed tears of blood immediately after the Partition at the insensate massacre of innocent men and women on both sides of the border. I have it on the testimony of the poetess herself who at the time was a refugee from Lahore, heading for Dehra Dun, in search of an asylum. 'Those days, as it was, you had to wade through blood and walk over dead bodies to reach the railway station', said the poetess, 'and you needed all

the luck for the train to take you to your destination without bloodshed or rape at the intermediate stations. The night was dark.' She continued to relate that she was alone in an overcrowded compartment, full of homeless people, who had walked through the shadow of death. The Muslims were massacring the Hindus and the Hindus were hungry for Muslim heads. It was as if all decency and all good-neighbourliness was sinking around her. Suddenly the poetess found her lips moving and, with tears gushing down her face, she invoked Waris Shah, the great bard of Punjab:

Today I ask Waris Shah  
Speak from your grave;  
Open a new chapter  
In the Book of Love.

A daughter of the Punjab once wept;  
You wrote her long story for her.  
Today millions of daughters weep,  
Waris Shah, they're calling you.

Oh friend of sorrow  
Look at the Punjab,  
The village square heaped with corpses,  
The Chenab flooded with blood!

Someone mixed poison  
In the five rivers,  
Their flow  
Watered the Punjab.

Poison has sprouted  
From the fertile land.  
Look how far the red has spread,  
Curse how far the red has spread!

Poisoned air  
Floated into the jungles  
Turning all bamboo flutes  
Into snakes.

Biting everyone's lips  
Their tongue tips rose up  
And quickly all parts  
Of the Punjab turned blue.

Song is crushed in every throat;  
Every spinning-wheel's thread is snapped;  
Friends parted from one another;  
The hum of spinning-wheels fell silent.

Oars have left all boats  
And float in the current.

Peepal branches with swings  
Lie broken.

Where is the grave where love songs  
Used to echo, where is the flute?  
All Ranjha's brothers  
Have forgotten how to play the flute.

Blood keeps falling upon the earth,  
Oozing out drop by drop from graves.  
The queens of love  
Weep in tombs.

It seems all people have become *kaidos*,  
Thieves of beauty and love.  
Where should I search out  
Another Waris Shah?  
Waris Shah!  
Open your grave;  
Write a new page  
In the Book of Love.

It is easy to write about a traumatic experience, like the Partition of the Punjab, and the consequent dislocation, torture and misery it inflicted upon the affected people. And yet it is not so easy as it appears. Many of the writers and artists, who attempted to write on this theme seem to have been carried away so much by what they had witnessed that they lost all sense of balance. The tendency is to hold one side, or the other, totally responsible for the holocaust. If the writer was a Hindu, he laid the entire blame at the door of his Muslim neighbours and if he happened to be a Muslim, he held the Hindus or the Sikhs totally responsible for all those shameful happenings. Mercifully, I have been spared this charge, both in India and in Pakistan. I have a major novel, called *Ab Na Bason Eh Gaon* (I'll Live in This Village No More), relating to the Partition and the subsequent three wars, fought with Pakistan, until the liberation of Bangladesh. It attempts to give a lie to Jinnah's two-nation theory. I have a number of short stories about the uprooting of the refugees, their eventual rehabilitation and the entire gamut of the emotional ups and downs they underwent, in between. I, too, have some tender poems, bemoaning the cruel gulf created on the basis of religion, which should unite, and not alienate, people. I quote:

A vessel here overflows with tears,  
A pair of eyes there are riveted on threshold,  
Again the moon has come down  
Leaving the stars behind.

And in the apron of the moonlight  
Are found tied messages of the love-lorn.  
Held by the hauteur of her people,  
Bound by the borders of her country,

Restrained by the taboos of her religion,  
Helpless Heer sheds tears of blood.  
The eyes on that side are wet.  
The eyes on this side are drenched  
The eyelids flutter and remind  
Someone remembers someone.

Rather than getting closer, whether it was Liaquat Ali Khan coming to Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru going to Lahore or Zulfikar Bhutto making a trip to Simla, every such attempt found us drifting further apart. In a period of over 50 years, we have fought with each other three bloody wars, if not four. And yet when the Pakistan forces surrendered to the Indian Army, in Dacca, in 1971, it brought tears to the eyes of a Punjabi neighbour, this side of the border, on finding his neighbouring country defeated and humiliated. Sohan Singh Misha, winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977, has depicted this sensitive moment with a remarkable feelings of tenderness:

Strange is the story of this enmity  
If I were to tell a stranger, he wouldn't believe it.  
When your armies  
Surrendered arms to our armies.  
It was a sad day indeed  
And something to feel sorry about.  
You must have shed tears  
It was so natural  
But why did tears gush out in my eyes?

However, it was left to the late Mohan Singh to write, perhaps, the most poignant and the most beautiful poem portraying the spiritual agony away, saying how God in all his benevolence comes to the poet when he is young. But the poet has nothing to ask for. God visits the poet again in his middle age. The poet still has no use for God's grace. He asks, 'Why opt for an unknown tyrant in place of the known tyrants here?' And then comes a time when the poet is old, his end is near, he himself goes to God and asks: .

I come to you, my Lord  
With a beggar's bowl in my hand  
At the day's end I ask your blessings  
For the severed limbs of the Punjab!  
Let its towns flourish manifold  
Peopled with hearts without rancour!

The Punjabis uprooted from West Punjab have indeed done well. It is seldom that one comes across a refugee who is not better off than what he was in the undivided Punjab. And yet their hearts bleed when they remember their homes and their playing fields. They long to go back, if for nothing else, to have one wistful look at what they had left behind. It continues to be reflected in their poetry, fiction and other works of art.

Dr. Kartar Singh Duggal

Faith and Resilience of The

# SIKH AFGHAN



*Inside Gurdwara Karte Parwan, the only Gurdwara which remains intact in Kabul today : most of the Sikhs (and some Hindus) in Kabul are staying within this complex which includes the main Gurdwara Sahib, musafirkhana, Guru Nanak Dharmak School and a dispensary.*

Sikhs have been working and living in Afghanistan for over five centuries and, till the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, were spread throughout this ancient land, a strategic crossroads of history and cultures. This land locked country of south-central Asia is now bordered by Tajikistan to the north (after dissolution of the Soviet Union), by Iran on the west, Pakistan on the south-east and, via the narrow tounge of land, the Wakhan corridor, with China in the north-east.

The land was part of the Persian empire of Cyrus the Great, then conquered by Alexander III and later was part controlled by the Maurya Empire of northern India and Selencid Satrapy which forged a unique fusion of Greek and Indian cultures. The Kushans propagated Mahayana

Buddhism in the first century AD and Hindu influence entered Afghanistan via the Persian Sāsānians till, in 870, Islam entered some parts of Afghanistan but it took 250 years to capture Kabul. In 1001 after defeating and killing Raja Jai Pall (Kabul Shan) Afghansitan came under Sultan Mahmood's Islamic rule and then started the invasions of India. Genghis Khan and his Mongols invaded Afghanistan in 1219 but the dissolution of his empire resulted in the rise of independent principalities which existed partly within the Mughal empire of India and the Safayid of Persia till the early 1700s when Nader Shah of Persia took control, later succeeded by his chief bodyguard Ahmad Khan Abdali (Durrani) who consolidated Afghanistan as one country.

## Of times past: nostalgic memories of Sikh Afghans



(Above): The original Gurdwara Khalsaji in Kabul.

(Right): Kirtan at Kabul : (left to right) S.Tara Singh, S.Jowan Singh, S.Jai Singh Fani, S.Narain Singh Fani.



(Above): Celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji at Jalalabad : S.Jai Singh Fani, then Member of Afghanistan's Parliament, is seated on the vehicle's bonnet.

(Right): Nagar Kirtan by the local Sikh sangat of Khost : their language is pashtu, they dress like pathans and have complete faith in the Guru Granth Sahib.

After 1773, the empire floundered because of recurring tribal and family feuds plus the imperialist designs of Russia and Great Britain who sparred for over a century in their "Great Game". The Sikhs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh reversed the historic trend of invasions, going westwards into Afghanistan, occupied Kabul in the 1820s, then secured the north-west frontier and established strong fortifications on the Khyber (maintained today by Pakistan's Army) before the three Anglo-Afghan wars culminated in the Treaty of Rawalpindi in 1919 which gained for Afghanistan its formal "independence".

However, political instability continued and in 1928, civil war broke out. King Nadir Shah ruled Afghanistan

till 1933 and he gave all minorities, including Hindus and Sikhs, equal rights in religion freedom, but was shot dead by a student in school. In 1933 his son Zahir Shah became king who ruled Afghanistan very peacefully till 1975, for 42 years. His relationship with the Hindu and Sikh community was excellent. His family had studied in Dehra Dun and a prominent Sikh spiritual leader, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi's family was very close to them and they had great respect for Baba Nanak.

In 1975, his cousin and sisters husband carried out a coup, ousted him, and with the help of leftist parties, backed by the Soviet Union, brought in the start of communist rule. In 1978, the leftists, with Soviet



*Gurdwara Katha Sahib at Ghazni*



*At the Chashma Sahib Gurdwara : there has been no water in the tank ever since the Sikh sangat were unable to freely visit the holy site. 500 years back, on his return from Mecca, Medina and Baghdad, Guru Nanak Dev ji visited Afghanistan. Many Gurdwaras were later established at Kabul, Julalabad and Sultanpur. The Gurdwara Chashma Sahib or Chauha Sahib, is of great significance because it was here that Guru ji brought into being a spring of pure water to alleviate water problems of the local population.*

*Afghans of the area have implored the Sikhs to carry out ardaas and prakash of the Guru Granth Sahib and pray for the water to return to Chashma Sahib.*

*The Singh sangat are awaiting the right time to do so.*

support overthrew the Government. In December 1979, Soviet armed forces entered Afghanistan and bolstered a new Marxist regime which was resisted by armed tribals and as the might of a super power was countered by the clandestine might of another (U.S.-led, Saudi-funded), Pakistan became the frontline state in a vicious cold war which turned hot for over a decade when the Soviets withdrew, shortly before the USSR itself disintegrated. Meanwhile, over 4 million refugees, a fifth of the total population of Afghanistan, fled to Pakistan and Iran and have remained there even though the Taliban regime was dramatically ousted by the U.S.-led coalition forces in late 2001.



*(Top): Unveiling the portrait of S. Jai Singh Fani at the Sikh Central Museum, Darbar Sahib, Amritsar.*

*(Middle): Inside Afghanistan today : carrying the Guru Granth Sahib inside Gurdwara Khalsaji in Kabul's old city, on 12 December 2002.*

*(Above): Ghazni Sikhs in front of the Singh Sabha Gurdwara in the town. Through the Taliban rule, about 50 Sikh families lived in Ghazni, most of them becoming amritdhari in 1999, during the tercentenary of the birth of the Khalsa.*

The peoples of Afghanistan are of diverse races, half of whom of Pashtu ancestry followed by Tadzhik, Uzbek and Hazara. Most people are Muslim, but there are small numbers of Hindus and Jews and, distinctively, Sikhs. Main urban centres outside the capital Kabul are Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Ghazni and Kunduz.

Till the 1990s, there were some 65 Gurdwaras, in virtually every main city and town of Afghanistan, 11 of them in Kabul, the capital. The Sikhs played a big role in Afghanistan's economy, running factories, businesses, were into the textile trade and governance. During the terrible years of civil war and Soviet occupation, but mostly after 1992 when the Mujahideen took over, there began mass migrations, of Muslims, Hindus - and the Sikhs. Najibullah



*Inside Gurdwara Bhair Nand Lal, at his birth place in Ghazni.*

was succeeded by Saptullah Mujadadi for six months (whose ancestors the Pirzadas had lived at Sirhind, near Fatehgarh Sahib some centuries earlier) but shortly, over a dozen Mujahideen Groups took over. Kabul was savagely divided into individual areas of control, *gali* by *gali*, with kidnapping, looting and rape while the Shia versus Sunni internecine war took its toll.

Aftershocks of the Babri Masjid demolition in India had a direct impact in Afghanistan when some Gurdwaras were attacked and burnt in Kabul and Jalalabad. Looking down from the historic fort of Bala Hisar in Kabul, the tallest structures in the city were the Gurdwaras which were caught in vicious crossfire. In 1992, the Sikhs went to Defence Minister Masood for permission to take the historic and holy *manji sahib* of Guru Har Rai as also many holy birs of the Guru Granth Sahib away to safety. The Pakistani authorities opened their borders to the Sikhs and all safely transited to India, mostly to Delhi. By 1993, only a thousand



*Celebration of Baisakhi and Guru Nanak Gurpurabs by Sikh Afghans at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in New Delhi have been a regular feature since 1993. Pictures show the Panj Pyare leading procession, an anand karaj ceremony and a band of young Sikh Afghan children. Traditionally, the Khalsa Sevadar Jatha of Chashma Sahib in Afghanistan used to solemnise mass marriages of some 250 to 300 Sikh Afghan couples at a time which practice is now continued at Rakabganj Sahib.*



*Manji Sahib at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha at Greater Kailash II, New Delhi which was brought from Gurdwara Guru Har Rai Sahib in Shor Bazaar, Kabul via Pakistan in 1992. This Manji Sahib had been given by Guru Har Rai Sahib to a devoted Sikh, Bhai Gonda ji, for prachar in Kabul.*

Sikhs remained back in Afghanistan, with 15,000 moving to Delhi, another 15,000 to Britain, 10,000 to Germany, 7,000 between Canada, the USA and Russia and 3000 in Holland. 90% of Sikh properties and businesses were sold in distress or were forcibly occupied by the Mujahideen and the warlords who also indulged in drug trafficking.

## Is Kabul Dying?

Returning to Kabul after a 27-year absence, Khaled Hosseini, a well-known author, rode through the clogged, rubble-strewn streets of the city where I grew up, and thought of the young man's words in *Kabul, dying once is not enough*. And I thought of my father, who two years ago, after hearing that the Taliban had blown up the giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan, shook his head and muttered, "Afghanistan is dead". But that was before September 11, before the Americans stormed in and drove out the Taliban. That was before liberation and before Afghanistan got a new lease on life. Now, after seeing Kabul, I am left to wonder: is Afghanistan dying again?

When the Taliban fell, Afghans around the world rejoiced. In December 2001 a United Nations sponsored conference in Bonn resulted in the formation of an interim Government. A month after, the international donor community gathered in Tokyo and pledged nearly \$5 billion over five years to rebuild the country Afghanistan was reborn.

But the hopes and dreams of those days are a distant memory in the Kabul of 2003. Security is the most urgent problem. It is tenuous at best outside Kabul: Taliban forces are regrouping, and disarmament is a distant dream. Afghanistan last year was once again the world's leading opium producer. One child in four still dies before the age of 5. Major roads remain unbuilt. Women are still harassed and threatened. The provincial warlords battle one another while scoffing at the Central Government.

It was almost a relief when the Taliban took over in 1996 as far as law and order was concerned. But there was intolerance of other faiths, the Hindus being forced to sport tilaks and wear yellow badges although the Sikhs were distinctive enough. Worship in the remaining Gurdwaras was allowed but the Nishaan Sahib had to be discreetly flown. However in the safety of India's sanctuary, the Afghan



*S. Khajinder Singh Khurana has been recently elected President of the Afghan Hindu Sikh Welfare Society, New Delhi.*

Sikhs still had very much to fend for themselves, there being little or no help forthcoming from the various societies, or Gurdwara Prabandhak Committees. The resolute Afghan Sikhs soon organised themselves, started schools and settlement areas, such as in Tilak Nagar, Manohar Nagar and Vikas Puri and a number of Gurdwaras, *Guru Nanak Durbars* including Gurdwara Guru Arjan Dev at Mahavir Nagar were established while the main Gurdwara in south Delhi's Greater Kailash II, the venue for *nagar kirtans* and many marriages solemnised, has become the epitome for dignified service, a thriving symbol of resolute faith and resilience of the Sikh Afghan.

*Khajinder Singh*

## Offensive operations by U.S. forces

In early July 2003, in an operation code named *Harzen Denial*, U.S. forces in Afghanistan launched an offensive against the Al-Qaida and Taliban in Paktika and Khost provinces, southeast of the capital Kabul "to prevent the re-emergence of terrorism", despite the fact that no Al-Qaida activist has been apprehended in the past 18 months. Some 11,500 foreign troops, mostly American were involved, the purpose of this operation also being to "deny sanctuary for anti-coalition groups, (including loyalists of warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), prevent further attacks on NGOs, coalition forces and equipment", stated a U.S. official at the Bagram headquarters. Complicating the situation were reports that Pakistani forces had intruded 45 kilometres into the nebulous frontier areas in the Nangarhar and Kunar provinces and a *Loya Jirga* representative from Jalalabad was put in charge of collecting tribal forces to oppose them.



# Back in Afghanistan

What is the kind of life for those Sikhs who have returned to their home country after the Taliban has been removed and the Americans set up a new administration in Kabul? Ms. Aunohita Majumdar of the *Times News Network* visited Afghanistan and wrote a series of articles which appeared in the *Times of India* in mid-June 2003. Some excerpts:

Eleven year old Ajit Kaur wants to study English, prefers to wear trousers, play outside with her friends and roam her neighbourhood. Instead, she sits inside a dark, low ceilinged room in Kabul's Karte Parwan area, clutching her pink dupatta so it doesn't slide off her head. Even after 18 months of practice covering her head, she still hasn't got used to it. Besides, "people here comment if you play outside the house", she says.

Ajit is the daughter of Tirloch Kaur and Tirlok Singh, who claim to be the first family of Sikh Afghans to have returned to Kabul from India. Tirloch and Tirlok, like others who returned from India, are among the 200 voluntary returnees. The remaining 12,000 odd refugees will return depending partly on whether New Delhi decides to extend their residence permits, which were to come up for renewal in July 2003.

Tirloch and Tirlok Singh returned because they could not find work in India and developed psychosomatic disorders because of the heat and humidity of Delhi.

Returning to Afghanistan was the cure that Tirlok needed. He now works in a cloth shop and his wife Tirloch is happy though the family lives out of a room in a building adjoining the Gurdwara in Karte Parwan. Rents in Kabul have skyrocketed making proper housing unaffordable.

Ajit's playmate, 13 year old Gurmeet, returned after 10 years in India where they stayed in Karbala in Delhi. What she misses most is her school. "Studies here are not good", she says of the school run by the Gurdwara that she attends. During the Taliban rule, Hindu and Sikh families weren't encouraged to send their children to schools run by the regime. Though there is no bar now, the two communities are loath to enroll their children in Government run schools, as the fear lingers. "Social acceptability of the minority communities which was lost during Taliban, has to return first", says Raminder Singh, spokesperson of the Hindu and Sikh communities who represented them in the *Loya Jirga* that elected Hamid Karzai as President.

The Karzai Government is taking steps to restore equal rights to minorities. While this correspondent was speaking to Raminder Singh, he had two visitors – officials of the commission appointed by Karzai's Government to draft the new Constitution. The officials were meeting with him to discuss ways in which to ascertain the needs, rights and safeguards for the minority communities.

Raminder Singh, who lived in Delhi's Vikaspuri for five years, returned to Kabul to find his house occupied by a member of the dominant Panjshiri community, a fate of many refugees from the minority communities.



At a classroom at the Sikh School in Ghazni in June 2003 : teachers (seen above) with their students (below).



As for Tirloch Kaur, her only worry is her daughter. "We are used to the restrictions that living in Afghanistan imposes. But this girl grew up in India. What do I do with her? The only answer is to get her married in India", she says of Ajit who has only fond memories of Delhi, notwithstanding its harsh summer.

Raminder Singh is the last person who should be complimenting the Taliban. The regime forced him to flee to India from Afghanistan and he finds himself homeless and jobless on his return. Yet, he feels that there was greater security under the Taliban. "This Government does not have full control. There are gunmen running around. They settle issues using the gun. President Hamid Karzai had promised he would disarm these people in six months. Nothing has happened. The forces of the international community stay at checkpoints on the main roads, they do not come inside our narrow lanes to enforce order", he says. In recent months, there has been a deterioration in the law and order situation in some parts of the country, especially in the south. Following the killing of a Red Cross official in Kandahar province in March, several NGOs have stopped visiting the districts.

The mandate of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is limited to Kabul, the fledgling Afghan police force and the national army are still under training, and the coalition forces led by the US have shifted their focus to civil and humanitarian affairs.

The UNHCR chief of mission in Afghanistan Filippo Grandi terms the "underfunding" of the security sector by the international community "a scandal". He says that while large parts of the country have no security problems, factional fighting like between the troops of Rashid Dostum, the independent warlord in Mazar province and other militias does affect the average Afghani. Also, the work of the NGOs is hampered by terrorist elements of the Taliban and Al-Qaida who have been regrouping in the south and are bent on destabilising the Government by targeting aid workers.

Afghan foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah says the Al-Qaida still has the capacity to carry out operations despite being on the run, but he dismisses as an exaggeration recent reports that there has been a reversal in the overall security situation.

Recently Afghanistan's Central finance minister Ashraf Ghani spent a week in Herat, the first cabinet minister to visit the province in two decades. Even more unusual was the task Ghani was attempting: to secure Governor Ismael Khan's compliance with the directions of the National Security Council (NSC) to transfer Herat's customs revenue collection to the Central Government.

The provinces, under the control of the private armies of the independent warlords, have thus far stayed largely outside the ambit of the Karzai Government's authority. Without the security

apparatus to bring them under its ambit, the Government has had an uneasy relationship with the virtually autonomous commanders who have to be persuaded, rather than ordered, to fall in with the Central Government's directives.

The Herat visit was indicative of the uphill task the Government faces in spreading its authority throughout the country. Some analysts feel the slow process has eroded the gains of the momentum generated by the establishment of the Karzai Government in Kabul. Others feel that the spread of control can only be gradual in a situation where the entire state is being rebuilt from scratch.

Foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah described the Herat visit as a major step but agreed that the success of the Government in extending its reach and authority was limited, terming it one of the "shortcomings" of the Karzai Government.

Herat may have been a minor success but any optimism was dimmed by the much less successful attempt by the Afghan Government to bring on board Rashid Dostum, the famously independent warlord of Mazar. Dostum's forces continue to engage with other armed groups in the region, making the area perpetually unstable. Dostum had reneged on an earlier promise to relocate to Kabul as security adviser to the Karzai Government.

## BOOK REVIEW

# HIJRAT – *The Life of Afghan Sikhs*

Gurumukh Singh Sehgal has emerged as a significant novelist writing about life in a particular region, in this case the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) as it existed before the Partition.

His two earlier novels *Nation Vichhre Neer* and *Luarhgi* are vivid narratives of the Pathan way of life in the region, their customs and traditions, their entertainment and food habits, friendship and hostility, revulsion at civil society and faith in natural justice. Now his third novel *Hijrat* (migration) published by Wellwish Publishers of Delhi, goes further into the region, being located in Afghanistan from 1947 till the rise of Taliban in the mid-1990s.

As the title indicates, this novel is about the migration of a people (Sikhs), who in the wake of Partition preferred to move to Jalalabad and Kabul from Luarhgi, in the NWFP rather than migrating to India. How they came to grips with life there and how ultimately they had to migrate, in utter frustration, to India after the rise of the Taliban, is the theme of this novel. A joint family of frontier Sikhs, called Khatrans, is safely led across the Afghan border by Malik Annat Khan, a powerful Pathan chief, since he has very cordial relations with the family and does not want any communal murders by the Muslim League followers in his fiefdom. The family's elder, Manak Singh, has his sister-in-law Pritam Kaur married to Kartar Singh, a powerful Sikh businessman of Jalalabad. So the entire family of four brothers and two cousins along with their wives and children arrive at

the house of Kartar Singh, affectionately called Bhajaan. He is a man of generous disposition and is known for his extremely impressive appearance in the entire town.

The new arrivals soon rent a separate place and start doing their own business. After having surmounted the initial hurdles, they strike roots in the new soil, though a kind of insecurity persists. Though the Sikhs were relatively financially well off in Afghanistan, yet they have had to live a life of second-rate citizens. The Afghans dominated life both physically and politically without any regard for the rule of law. The Sikhs have remained a community of survivors against great odds.

Then in the nineties of the last century, the Taliban swept the country and Islamic fundamentalism became the dominant state ideology, which turned too uncomfortable for the Sikhs to sustain in such a dogmatic environment. Ultimately, as a minority, they were forced to migrate to India and those who stayed behind, led a life of non-entities. After half a century, the terror and fear psychosis of the Partition days revisited them.

Gurumukh Singh Sehgal has first-hand knowledge of the life patterns and cultural mores of the people in that region. The characters are made to speak their local dialect (Hindco) and at places Pashto and Persian, which has added to the verisimilitude of the narrative.

## The Gurdwaras of Kabul, seen here damaged during the 1990s

The Afghan Hindu Sikh Welfare Society organised a photo exhibition of Historic Sikh Gurdwaras in Afghanistan which were badly damaged during the past decade of wars, Kabul being ravaged in turn by the Mujahideen, Taliban and U.S. bombing.

This exhibition depicted the travails of the Hindus and Sikhs caught in the cross-fire of wars that have blighted Afghanistan since 1979 and culminating in the US led attacks against the Al Quida and Taliban in late 2001. Many historic Gurdwaras, dating back to the 17th century were damaged, some very badly, and thousands of Hindus and Sikhs became refugees in India and other parts of the world.

These rare photographs were received from Afghanistan and displayed for a few days at the Library Hall adjacent to the Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, E-Block, Greater Kailash, Part II, New Delhi.



*Gurdivara-Khalsaji at Kabul, before 1992....*



*....and seen damaged, above.*



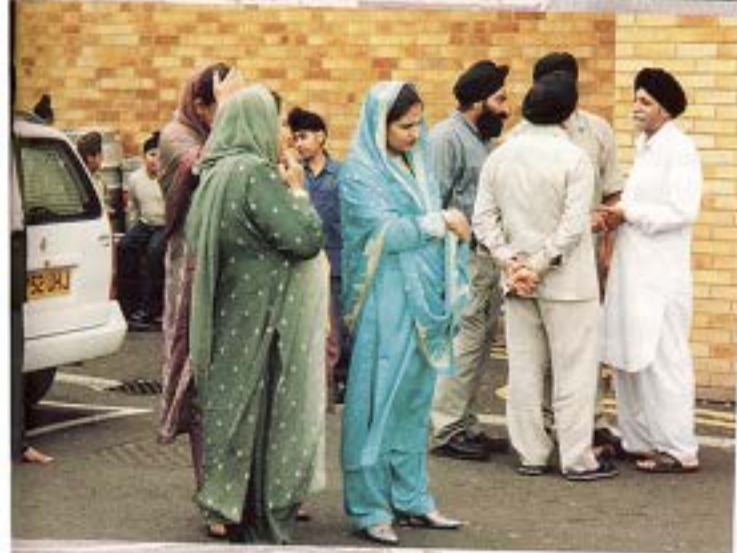
*(middle): S. Khajinder Singh points out details to S. Tarlochan Singh, Chairman of the Minorities Commission. (left): Gurdwara Guru Har Rai Sahib at Kabul seen damaged after 1992*

## From Shor Bazar to Southall – The Sikhs of Afghanistan now in England



(Above) Overlooked by the Bala Hisar, there are eight Gurdwaras in the Shor Bazar area in heart of Kabul, which were caught in the crossfire of fighting .

(Below) The Gurdwara at Southall, in West London.



There are seven Gurdwaras in Southall, West London, the Guru Nanak Darbar being established off Havelock Road (where the new Gurdwara Sri Gurn Singh Sabha was formerly opened in April 2003) and managed by the Sikh Afghans of the U.K. The Sikh Afghans are a distinctive community, their resolution and discipline of faith in strong contrast to the declining appearances of other Sikhs from other parts of the world who have lived in the U.K. much longer, and are economically better off.

These pictures were taken on a Sunday in late June 2003, when many hundreds of Sikh Afghan men, women and children congregated at the Guru Nanak Darbar, with devotion and resolution even as the U.K. authorities are pressing them to return to ravaged Afghanistan inspite of the desperate situation there (see box "Is Kabul Dying"?).

# LIVING HAPPILY TOGETHER



*Bhagwant Singh Dalwari, at home in Tapovan with Justice Ranjit Singh Narula and other satsangis.*

## IN RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND UNIVERSAL PEACE

*Living Happily Together* is so indelibly inscribed in my psyche that it seems to have come to me with a spiritual spoon in my mouth at birth. Ever since I remember coming into adult consciousness, never has a thought come to my mind that as a human being I am any different from others. Born in Jhelum, now in Pakistan, 72 years ago, I have spent all my life in peace and harmony with all kinds of people. Even when I was not aware of my spiritual heritage and spiritual consciousness, I had it ingrained in my heart that all human beings are equal and all mankind is one brotherhood. My school bench-mate Sarfaraz Khan, the son of a Muslim Magistrate in British India, smiled and laughed and played with me and also quarrelled with me as a fellow student, not as one from a different religious denomination, but as my equal human companion. Despite the horrendous killings and alienation of the partition days it never brought me a feeling that the whole community, the whole group, the whole sect of any denomination could be dubbed as evil merely because one of its members had behaved in an inhuman way.

When I joined the Foreign Service, after migration to India, it was a real treat to work as a team in the Ministry or abroad with *no feeling* whatsoever about one's origin of religion, State or background. In over twenty years of service in India and abroad, not once did I feel that my colleagues from different States or different economic backgrounds were, in any manner, less or more Indian.

But the reality of Religious Harmony being directly related to Universal Peace appeared in my heart, and my whole being became the symbol of *Spiritual Universality* when my religious consciousness manifested spiritual splendour within myself. In 1970, the fact of having been born in a Sikh family and yet belonging to the whole world dawned on me when I began to be attracted by the words and lives of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, the founder was so universal that both Hindus and Muslims claimed him as their Prophet. Guru Gobind Singh emphasised spiritual oneness with defiance against tyranny and bigotry. Guru Arjan's willing sacrifice for human solidarity strengthened my dissolution in *Truth and Love* of the one God, of all religions. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom for the sake of human rights and freedom of worship for all so impressed me that under the guidance of Guru Granth Sahib - the universal Sikh Scripture containing the messages not only of six Sikh Gurus but also of Hindu and Muslim saints including the so-called untouchable bhaktas like Kabir, Ravidas of U.P., Naamdev of Maharashtra, Jaidev of Bengal and Baba Farid, a Muslim saint of Punjab - I began to lead a life of practical religious harmony and universal peace even when I was a serving Foreign Service Officer. While serving in Egypt, an old Muslim lady, on her death-bed, told her children to call me for her last meeting. In Paris, where during my time, there were no gurdwaras I used to pray in Catholic churches and go to the Ramakrishna Centre in Gretz, 50 kms away, to feel the universal harmony in spiritual unity.

Later, I discovered in my scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, that we had been specifically commanded to treat everyone equally and become the good friend of all, to have no divisions among human beings, to show equal respect for women, to consider everyone our equal, to remember the One Lord of us all, by whatever name people call *Him* and, above all, to display in our conduct that the twin essential aspects of religion (self-annihilation through 24-hour remembrance of Lord and the deeds of piety and purity) remain so throughout our lives. These cardinal virtues were so essential - and yet so universal - that when I came to learn of the universal prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, it seemed to me like a dictation from my own scripture. Let us savour this:



*Christian-Sikh dialogue in Mumbai.*

*“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;  
Wherever there is hatred, let me sow love  
Wherever there is injury, pardon;  
Wherever there is sadness, joy;  
Wherever there is darkness, light;  
Wherever there is despair, hope; and  
Wherever there is doubt, faith  
O divine master, grant that I may seek so much  
- to be understood as to understand;  
- to be consoled as to console; and  
- to be loved as to love .  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and  
It is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.”*

This prayer further enthralled and reinforced my deep commitment to this universality of religions and service of Man. My inner voice dwelt on two concepts: *There is only one religion* – that of truth, and *there is only one caste* – that of humanity. That is why my Scripture specifically declares that *there is one and the same sermon* for all, whether one is a Brahmin, a Khatrī, a Vaish or a Shudra. Discrimination on the basis of caste is severely condemned.

My heart developed the inclination to live in tune with the concepts of Guru Granth Sahib, and of the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, a highly revered Catholic saint. While I was serving in Paris, in addition to my diplomatic, consular or commercial work, I became a member of the *Petits Freres Des Pauvres* (Little Brothers Association for the Poor), a French charitable society for serving old French people in their homes. My distinct bearded and turbaned appearance did not come in way of my love for them. It was a divine treat not only for me, but also for the old French couple, when I helped the paralysed Frenchman to walk some distance on Saturdays or Sundays. Since I had developed a compulsion to ask the old people to think of Jesus all the time so that they would never feel lonely, I received more love than I gave. In fact the 94-year old French single lady blessed me when she said: “You have restored my faith in Christ which I had lost.” And the widow of the paralysed Frenchman was delighted when I attended his funeral, and later took her every month to the cemetery where he was buried.

This unique experience of spiritual unity of man charted a new course for my life. I witnessed the divine glow on the face of a young Pakistani doctor when I suggested to him to be regular in *Namaz*, the Muslim prayer, and return to Pakistan to serve his poor countrymen after completing his studies. He gave me a warm smile when he said his parting good-bye: “*Khuda Hafiz*, I shall never forget that in a non-Muslim country, a non-Muslim reminded me of my Muslim religious duties.”

God decided for me that the time had come to leave my service and experience on a wider scale the concept of *Living Happily Together* with the downtrodden through religious harmony. I thought that merely reciting the name of God was not enough; it must be translated into whole-time service of humanity. I had experienced the truth of love and peace in religion through my Oneness with the elderly French people but I had no training to serve the sick. I did not know which service I should take up. Gandhiji’s book: *My Experiments with Truth*, came to my help. I took to my heart Gandhi’s advice in the *Introduction* that to see God face to face one had to love the meanest creation as oneself.

I became a little apprehensive however, to realise that I could, in terms of my beliefs, never consider anyone as being mean. God solved my problem. During the half-awake state at night, I noticed the picture of a leprosy patient. I learnt leprosy work at the Christian Medical College, Vellore and afterwards, leaving my job, came to this leprosy treatment-cum-rehabilitation centre at Amravati, started the late Dr. Shivajirao Patwardhan.

Today, I literally live the *reality of religious harmony and universal peace*. I came to Tapovan, the name of the centre, in October 1979, and in these past 24 years, I have been *Living Happily Together* with more than a thousand leprosy patients. The reality of this experience is profound because none of the inmates – in the management or among patients – is a Sikh. Most of them are Maharashtrian Hindus, and some are Muslims and Christians but for me every inmate is either my son or daughter, my brother or sister, and my father or mother. The beauty is that they too regard me as their own and we live like a family.

I have had various opportunities to participate in interfaith dialogues and since 1980 must have attended over 20 such meetings. The former Bishop of Amravati, Rt. Rev. Joseph Rosar too has been a close friend in fostering the spirit of religious harmony ever since I came to Amravati. I was born in a Sikh family, I am recognised as the representative of the Sikh religion, but I humbly and mildly protest by correcting that I belong to *all* religions and anyone who lives *truth*, remembers the Lord 24 hours and practices universal love is my co-religionist whatever be the label. I firmly believe that the core of religion is *Love* - love without discrimination, love without expectation, love in the name of one God of all, and love as the *direct representation of divine presence*.

The guidance that I have received from Guru Granth Sahib is so direct, and so unambiguous that I cannot help being universal. In fact, I cannot live my religion without loving and respecting all religions. Many times, I believe that for others it may be a kind gesture to foster religious harmony and peace. But for me, *this is my religion*. I have prayed in a London mosque, I have prayed in temples, I have prayed in churches and gurdwaras. But I have experienced the same devotion, the same love, the same truth and the same divinity. We have no personal or human Guru now, but my perpetual Word Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, specifically directs me to pray to God to save all human beings *whichever path they take to come to your refuge*. That is why I firmly declare that all religions are mine, all prophets are mine, all prayer houses are mine, and all methods of prayer are also mine. But when one ceases to love, one is merely blowing the trumpets of empty religion and throwing away the core.

Look at my heritage. Where would you find the instance of the most important shrine of one religion having had the distinction of its foundation stone being laid by a divine personality of another religion? *The foundation stone of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs was laid by a muslim divine, Hazrat Mian Mir.*



*At the Guru Nanak Medical Centre in Nehru Nagar, New Delhi.*

Where would you find in the religious text of one religion, the sacred divine messages of the saints of other religions who would strongly promote their own prophets? In Guru Granth Sahib, there are the offering of six Sikh Gurus, but also of 16 highly respected saints of the Hindu and Muslim faith whose offerings are there given the same status and same recognition, because every word of Guru Granth Sahib is our Guru. Namaz and Pooja, Allah and Ram, Hindu and Muslim are so prominently mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib that this scripture becomes the treasure of all religions automatically. The core is *living the commands of God*. Many times I have said at interfaith meetings that perhaps the Sikh Gurus did not meet Christian saints, otherwise we would have had some Christian hymns in our scripture too.

When we all believe that all religions stress love and peace, fraternity and equality, harmony and unity, how come we find ourselves in such strife and disunity? Where do we fall and why do we indulge in divisions, hatred, ill-will wholesale condemnation, murders, carnage, massacres, sexual crimes? I venture to suggest the causes of our inhuman and foolish aberrations:

- ❶ We parade religion, but do not practise it and politicians particularly create vested interests in terms of vote-banks, racial superiority, commercial exploitation and human upheavals.
- ❷ We pay lip-service to equality but continue economic exploitation of the underprivileged sections on religious/racial lines.
- ❸ We develop real or imagined wrongs done by some community, group, country, etc.
- ❹ We regale ourselves with majority—minority imaginary conflicts, forgetting our own religious principles.
- ❺ We foolishly believe that our prophet or Guru or Swami will be pleased with hatred for and condemnation of

other religions and killings of people other than those of our own religion.

True, such people are in a minority, but they have perseverance to parade untruth or truth, project loot as *lok sewa*, personal interest as common welfare and, above all, political chicanery as religious fervour.



With the lady patients of Tapovan.

We recently had an inter-faith rally in Amravati conducted by the Police Commissioner, Ankush Dhanvijay, and it was a remarkable success. I later wrote an article in *The Hitavada* of Nagpur referring to my 24-year "*Living Happily Together*" with leprosy patients and mentioning a *bhajan* which I sing with the patients. I am sure, it is relevant for this paper.

*Mujh mein Ram tujh mein Ram sab mein Ram samaya  
Sabse karlo pyar jagat mein koi nahin paraya*

- *jitne hain sansar mein prani sab mein ek hi jyoti  
Ek bagh ke pushp hain sare ek haar ke moti  
Na jaane kis karighar ne ik mitti ka banaya  
Koi nahin paraya .....*
- *Ek baap ke bete hain ham ek hamari maata  
Daana paani dene wala ek hamara daata  
Na jaane kis moorkh ne ye larna hame sikhaya.  
Koi nahin paraya .....*

(God is in me, God is in you, God is in everyone. Let us love everyone because God resides in every heart. The same light shines in all the people of the world, and they are all the flowers of the same garden as also the pearls of the same necklace. But we know not how He himself creates all from the same clay. We are all the children of the same Father, the same Mother. The same gracious Lord is giver of everything to all of us. But we know not which fool teaches us to quarrel.)

My article ended with the remark: *That fool is the politician.* We have now become pastmasters in scams, criminal politics and political criminality and have brought shame to our countries and our religions. In fact, when I am asked to discuss "religious harmony and universal peace - a reality", I have a strange sense of shame. The reality is so obvious but when religion itself becomes a hypocrite's pastime, a politician's gimmick, a businessman's trick, then the discussions alone will be an exercise in futility. Let us see why we make no headway. Conflicts go on rising, massacres continue, exploitation is on the increase and all this despite the increase in the number of prayer-houses and pseudo-saints. The fact is that

- We parade Gandhi on 2nd October and 30th January, but have no desire to follow him in practice.
- We pour out sweeties from our mouths, but we do not know the truths of our own religion and certainly not of other religions, although the core is the same.
- We have lost our moorings and mortality is at the lowest ebb. Without mortality religion is an empty slogan.



Bishop of Amravati and Catholic sisters visiting Tapovan.

- We are unwilling to sacrifice even our illegal privileges and we are unwilling to observe the rule of law.
- Our legislators themselves are usually an unruly lot. They indulge in crime, they exploit the poor and amass illegal wealth. They make rules which they do not want to follow.

To lay down one's life for one's principles is now a thing of the past, but unless we are prepared to sacrifice our life for righteousness, we can become only drawing-room debaters. Gandhiji did not preside over seminars and issue deliberately vague statements when people were killing each other. He did not evade issues. He was in the thick of rioting mobs and was willing to lay down his life - which he did. We confuse illegality with political benefits. We talk of conversion-debates when people of one religion kill those of others. We hide behind slogans and we often



indulge in double-speak. Gandhiji paid, with his life, for his faith in his convictions. We are after power, but talk of religion and peace. Godse murdered Gandhiji with a gun, we murder his principles with our political and selfish lip-service.

A kinder atmosphere could be created if we all begin to practise the concepts of our religion because essentially, all the religions preach love and peace. It is only the bigots who themselves have not understood their religion, and it is only the exploiters who do not wish to lead righteous lives who preach hatred, and since we are all ignorant about the real values, we are misled. In reality, religious harmony and universal peace are two sides of the same coin but because of hiatus in what we say, what we do, we cannot live happily together. Guru Nanak had emphatically preached *sachon ure sabaku uppar sach achar* (truth is the highest but higher still is truthful conduct). If we all live the truth of our religions we can manifestly prove that *religious harmony and universal peace* would become a reality.

Let us not forget that there is another dimension to the problem of universal peace. That is of poverty. If we really wanted to solve the problems of poverty, we would have been doing our religious duty of looking after our down-trodden people, but what we witness is not only our aversion towards the poor, but our deliberate disinterest in raising their standard of living. We go on creating more poverty by usurping their rights and exploiting their ignorance and innocence. Religion becomes then only a tool for exploitation, because its basic mortality is missing.

We love prophets, we love religion, but only externally. Now even religion has become a five-star culture. We now concentrate on external cosmetism, external celebrations, external extravagant ostentation. We believe that bigger the car in which a holy man travels, the bigger the house in which he lives, the more spiritual he is, but depriving the poor people of the faith of the pious and the pure. We cannot deny that even safe drinking water is not available to most people. We cannot deny that most people do not have two meals a day. What kind of religions do we preach and practise which does not ensure even drinking water and two square meals to our people? What peace do we talk about? And what religious harmony? If we had practised the reality of religion, there would not have been starvation deaths on the one hand and mountains of foodgrains being

eaten by worms on the other. Again, we would not have been involved in five-star ostentation in the face of humiliating poverty of our people. Indeed, the rulers too deny the poor their due and exploit them in the name of religion and *sewa*, whereas, in reality, they themselves live a life far removed from that of the people. The seminars and conferences also become meaningless with repetition of empty slogans of peace.

Where is the connection between religious harmony and excruciating poverty? Where can the peace come from when the stomach is empty, a poor woman is humiliated and raped, and the exploited bonded labour is crushed even by those who have temples and other prayer-rooms in their homes? What kind of universal peace and religious harmony can we achieve in such an environment? Religion means morality and integrity of the highest order.

In conclusion, let me retell the story of Guru Nanak, who chose to stay with Bhai Laalo, a poor artisan of low caste, and was so upbraided by high-caste Brahmins. Malik Bhago, like our present exploiters, was aghast when Guru Nanak's detractors complained that he had broken caste rules and stayed with low-caste person. Malik Bhago ordered Guru Nanak to join the public meal he had arranged for all holy men, but Guru Nanak refused to join and, when pressed, pointed out that his wealth was collected by exploitation of the poor and

contained their blood, while the food of the honest and poor Laalo was pure.

We witness the same spectacle today with ostentatious marriages, birthdays and political bashes while the exploiters talk of religion and peace. Our black money runs to thousands of crores. Our poor people sleep on footpaths, mostly without food or safe drinking water. Indeed even the devil can quote Scriptures, but unless we have our internal commitment and internal purity, we cannot make *religious harmony and universal peace a reality*. This reality of *living happily together* would only mean the *living happily together* of the Elite. If we want this reality to belong to all the people, then our hearts must change and we must decide to do unto others what we want to be done to us. Peace cannot come with external religious words when the poor can collect only the crumbs thrown by ostentatiously rich exploiters.

*Bhagwant Singh Dalawari*  
Tapovan, Amravati 444602, Maharashtra



*Bhagwant Singh Dalawari singing the praises of the Lord, with the old and terminal cases in Tapovan.*



## SAN FRANCISCO'S NEW "KAPANY GALLERY OF SIKH ARTS"

Sikhs have made their home in North America for more than a century now. For much of that time, it has been a struggle.

But in this "new world" - a land of pioneers - Sikhs have proved their mettle. They have overcome every hurdle put before them and they stand tall today as full-fledged citizens of the United States and Canada.

They are long past the survival mode. They participate in every segment and at every level of society. There is no area in which they haven't excelled or made their mark as outstanding citizens.

It is time therefore for them to turn to other things, to shift their priorities. As their children grow up, it is time to concentrate on preserving their traditions and culture, to share their riches with their fellow citizens, and to pass on the torch to the new generations.

And, it is this task that *The Sikh Foundation* - located in the legendary Silicon Valley, specifically in Palo Alto, California - has taken on with vigour, under the leadership of Dr Narinder Singh Kapany.

Dr Kapany is no other than the man known as the "Father of Fibre Optics", who was named by *Fortune Magazine* in its special New Millennium edition in 2000 as one of the six "unsung heroes of the Twentieth Century".

Under his stewardship, *The Sikh Foundation* has done something unprecedented: it has managed to survive and flourish for thirty-five years, while serving the community in a myriad of wonderful ways, all with the goal of

establishing Sikh centres of learning and culture within major mainstream institutions.

On 5 April 2003, Sikhs from far and wide gathered in San Francisco to celebrate the successes of *The Sikh Foundation* by commemorating its 35th anniversary in a unique way: by opening the first permanent Sikh Arts Exhibition in North America.

The receptacle for this exhibit, the famed Asian Art Museum, is not new to San Francisco. It has been around since 1966, but hitherto at another location. It had already, in its previous incarnation, acquired a reputation as one of the world's foremost collections of Asian Art.

With more than 15,000 artworks on display, covering a span of 6000 years of history and as many as 40 Asian countries and cultures, the museum was bursting at the seams and begging for a more deserving arena.

Mercifully, it was granted its wish.

A 1917 creation of designer George Kelham, the San Francisco Main Library boasted a magnificent granite, Beaux Arts exterior, matching the other buildings in the surrounding Civic Center park.

But, unfortunately, the 1989 San Francisco earthquake did serious damage to the structure, as it did to many others in the area.

The City chose to re-design the area a bit while considering repairs. And, in doing so, displayed at least two strokes of genius. First, it decided to move the Asian Art Museum to the old library building, granting the library

a new complex to be built next door. And, secondly, it gave the job to Italian architect Gae Aulenti.

If you haven't heard of Aulenti, it is probably because it's a woman. Oddly, even though the world of architecture has produced many female geniuses, the loudest accolades are mostly reserved for eccentric males.

Certainly, Aulenti is one who should be heard about more often. She designed, for example, my favorite art

gallery in Paris: the Musee d'Orsay. There, she turned an old train station into a magnificent exhibition space, while preserving the integrity and intricately detailed riches of the original structure.

Well, she has performed the same miracle with the new Asian Art Museum.

And the re-incarnation of this marvel has also heralded the opening of the Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery of Sikh Arts, named in honour of Dr Kapany's charming and engaging wife.

It is only appropriate that this "First" should take place on the West Coast of North America. Ranging from the scenic Canadian Province of British Columbia in the North, to the rich valleys of the State of California to the South, the span is home to approximately 300,000 to 400,000 Sikhs. It is this area which has put forth in the past the first Asian to join the US House of Representatives, Congress-man Dalip Singh Saund who was a Sikh-Californian.



*Kartar Singh sings the Sikh "national anthem".*



*Amrita and Rabindra Kaur Singhs, the twins from England during the morning seminar.*



*Dr. Emily Sano, Director of the Asian Art Museum giving a welcome speech at the evening banquet.*



*Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany with Willie Brown Jr., Mayor of the City of San Francisco.*



*A group of Sikh Americans from the Sikh Dharma Organisation at the evening banquet at San Francisco on 5th April, 2003.*



*Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and Mrs. Satinder Kaur Kapany with honoured guests at the Grand Hall of the Asian Art Museum.*

And, of course, Ujjal Singh Dusanjh, who not too long back became the Prime Minister of British Columbia, the land which only nine decades earlier had shamefully turned back the *Komagata Maru*. And, Harbance Singh Dhaliwal, who became and continues to be a senior Minister in the Government of Canada ...

Therefore, the event to mark this grand opening was too important to merely rush through over the course of a mere evening.

The day began with a Seminar on Sikh Arts held in the pristine Osher Hall of the Asian Art Museum. Chaired by Dr Forrest McGill, Chief Curator of the Museum, the morning proved to be a feast for the mind and soul: six excellent speakers who spoke on various aspects of the role of the Arts within the Sikh firmament:

Dr Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Colby College, Maine (USA) and the talented translator of the "Verses of the Sikh Gurus", which were first, published by *The Sikh Foundation* in collaboration with Harper Collins under the title, "The Name of My Beloved" (later republished by Penguin Books, India).

The internationally-acclaimed British artists, the twins Amrita and Rabindra Kaur Singh, whose extraordinary creations are poised to re-visit North America later this year for exhibitions, first in Riverside, California and then in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada;

New York based portrait artist, Manveet Kaur Saluja, who is currently in the thick of a project aimed at capturing Sikh giants on canvas, starting with the inimitable Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh;

Shivi Kaur Singh, a doctoral candidate on the Arts of North India at the Punjab University, Chandigarh.

Painter Arpana Caur was unfortunately unable to make it to the event. But all was not lost: Dr Mary Ann Milford briefly stepped into her shoes and provided a fascinating interpretation of Arpana's body of work to date.

Contrary to modest expectations, the turnout for the seminar was phenomenal: the hall was packed through the morning with well over 300 attendees, with standing room only throughout. Understandably, because the talks and the accompanying visuals kept the audience glued to the seats.

The morning thus proved to be a tough act to follow, but somehow Chintan Singh Ahuja (the *Foundation's* Marketing Manager) and Jasbir Singh Sethi (General Manager), along with an army of dedicated volunteers, managed to make the evening's gala a spectacular success.

The Grand Staircase which rises from the main foyer on the main floor, the Grand Hall at the top of the stairs -

for once, in a world of misnomers, each of them genuinely deserves to be called "grand" - and the stately loggia which overlooks the one and leads into the other, have been meticulously preserved and enhanced by the state-of-the-art renovations and additions.

The Grand Hall was the venue for the black-tie gala at 6.00 pm. The general century-old ambience, the meticulous table-settings, the sumptuous food, the colourful attire, all added to the grandeur of the evening, and more.

The highlights of the evening were many: the Sikh and American national anthems sung by young children; San Francisco's Mayor, Willie Brown Jr.'s key-note address; the warm welcome by public relations office of the Governor of California.

Then there were the brief but enlightening comments concerning ongoing projects and future plans presented by a representative from each of *The Sikh Foundation's* partners: Dr Emily Sano, Director of the Asian Art Museum; Dr Deborah Swallow, Director for Collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, England; Dr Paul Taylor, Chief Curator for the Sikh Heritage Gallery of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.; Dr. Dan Aldrich, Sr. Counsel to the President, University of California; Dr Gurinder Singh Mann who holds the Chair in Sikh Studies at the Santa Barbara Campus of the University of California; Dr. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh.

The icing on the cake was, of course, a visit to the new Sikh Arts Gallery. It dazzles you the moment you enter the floor designated for South Asia. First, the intricately-carved Sikh war-helmet grabs you with its masterful blend of gold and silver. You glance left to see, towering above you, the grand wall-sized standard from an 18th century Sikh confederacy (misl). My favourite, of course, is the ivory-inlay jewelry box belonging to Ranjit Singh, Emperor of Punjab.

I savoured the many delights in this gallery - it is a relief to see these treasures preserved and displayed so well closer to home. Closer, that is, than the land I left far behind aeons ago, but praying that one day, each and every major museum will have a designated gallery to give at least a sampling of the many riches from our past and the creations of those who help preserve the wealth of our history and culture.

**T. Sher Singh**

[T. Sher Singh, a Barrister & Solicitor based in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, is a member of *The Sikh Foundation's* Board of Trustees. He currently heads "The Spinning Wheel Film Festival: A Celebration of Sikh Films" which is scheduled to be held at The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada, on October 17, 18 & 19, 2003. For info on the Festival, please visit [www.spinningwheelfestival.com](http://www.spinningwheelfestival.com)]

Youth and women – the two important energies critical to building of a vibrant and self sustaining people - remain woefully neglected by the ‘representative leaders’ of the Sikh Community.

“Kaur and Singhs” is a timely and path-breaking effort initiated by a dedicated volunteer group to unfold the Sikh way of life to young minds, to provide an atmosphere where kids can begin to imbibe the Sikh culture of ਸਚਿਆਰ (“Sachiyar”) – truthful living which is the core of Sikh philosophy; through *Sangat, Pangat* and *Kirtan*.

# KAURS AND SINGHS



## “Knowing” The Sikh Way

Within our community there is serious concern regarding the present situation where youth and “Sikh Society” in general are showing lack of feelings for “Sikh” values, traditions and identity. We are well aware of the situation and are all talking about it, but little is done. Everyone has a theory to enlighten us with and a commandment to give about this. Park yourself with a person who is concerned and in moments you would have traversed through series of specific actions we can take for improving our predicament. You will be able to guess, from the way the person speaks to you, that the individual has gone through this monologue many times, perhaps often talking to one’s self. Trying to convince oneself by mere talking so to speak.

When we go wrong in religion we “blame” others, the SGPC, the DGPC, the leaders and the *Parcharaks*, thus absolving ourselves of any guilt and responsibility. It makes us feel that we are a part of the solution and not the problem. While all this happening, water is running down stream. The effect is being felt and the results are already there. I am reminded of what one German humorist said:

*"The clew to our destiny, wander where we will, lies at the foot of the cradle": Richer.*

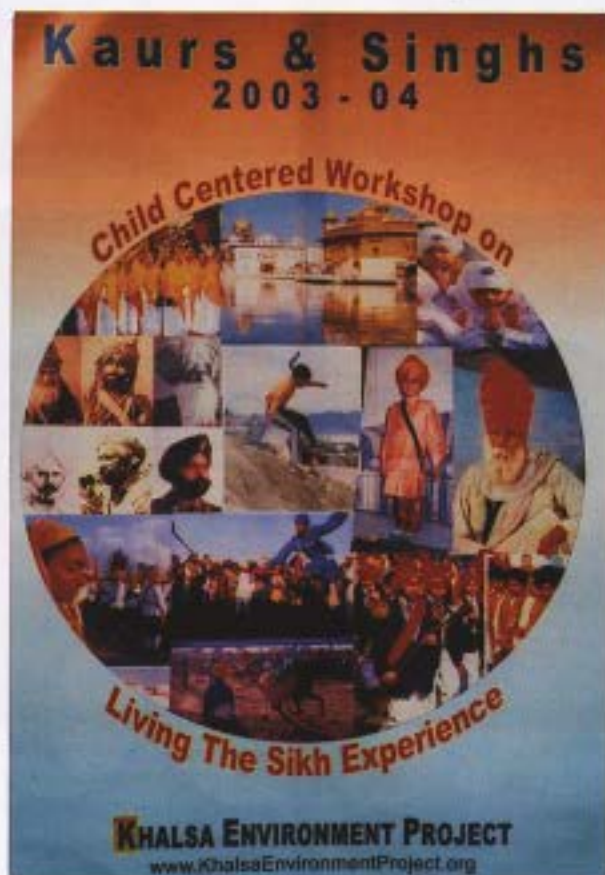
The present is the result of what our past was and tomorrow is what today will bloom into.

Guru Nanak in the Japji says,

ਅਧੇ ਬੀਜਿ ਅਧੇ ਹੀ ਖਾਹੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਆਵਹੁ ਜਾਹੁ ॥੨੦॥

*Japji, first Mahal*

*As we sow, so shall the results be for us.  
God ordained, we live in transmigration.*



### Youth is "The Critical Mass"

There are two important energies which are needed to build a vibrant community – youth and women. *Women are the torch in which the flame of youth is lit.* To neglect or ignore their importance is for us, as Sikhs, disastrous and dangerous, but that is what we do today. It is obvious how much disregard we show for our women. Our youth are actually no better off. We don't want to give room to our youth; we want to hold on to everything till the grave. *Stagnant waters rather than a fresh stream.*

I was witness to a programme in one of the local Gurdwaras where children were organising the *Diwan* for the evening. They were doing the *Kirtan*, *Paath*, the

*Ardas* and also gave talks on important topics. The Gurdwara Management, despite fervent requests, did not agree to the children sitting at the *tabyat*, in service of the Guru Granth Sahib and doing the *Ardas*. Mere children from 4 to 14 years of age and we are scared! This is how we want to hold on to power, as though the children would take the *Golak* and snatch the Gurdwara Management! How do we then expect youth to be proud of their heritage or be ready for tomorrow? Actually we don't really care about religion or about Sikh life; we care about ourselves and what we can hold on to at all costs. The present state of Gurdwara affairs is an apt reflection of our emptiness. *We are a little people, with small hearts, expecting big results.* But this is not how we were, this not what our past attitude was and this is not what made the Khalsa what he became and what he is! *Failure to respect our legacy and acknowledge our debt to yesterday is not going unpunished. We have to equip and allow the youth to live their religion, to experience it and live comfortably in it- to be connected with its inner reality and abundance.* If we can do this, then to sustain the Khalsa approach is not a conflict between that which is happening and what should happen. The friction has gone and harmony would prevail.

A Sikh is a natural being. What ever Guru Sahib tell us in the Guru Granth Sahib are universal truths and not relative laws, connecting us to the Universe – to nature and its creator. In my opinion although people of all ages can experience such nature, it is children and the youth that are the best equipped to experience "Sikhi" and live it. It comes naturally to them as they are not far removed from it; the younger they are, the more easily they can live "Sikhi". Youth has all the energy needed for dedicating themselves to search and to enquire and realise life in its entirety. It is the time when the tank of the car is "full" and wherever the car is directed it will move swiftly and surely. *The momentum of youth can override one's entire life pattern and dictate it, on its terms.* Youthful energy can be "very" productive in the search of truth. It needs to be understood that the Gurmukhi marg has to do with complete acceptance, total submission to the Guru; it deals with searching for truth, seeking it with untiring zeal and dedication. To question is to ask is the fundamental pillar on which a Sikh way of life exists. A Sikh is born out of questioning, out of enquiry. Guru Nanak in the Jap(u)ji puts forth some of the most potent questions of life; to live in those questions is to live in an inner enquiry of reality, is to live in the awareness of "Guru Nanak – Guru Gobind Singh". All this can be done only when one is willing to put everything one has at stake. It is relatively easier to do this at the time of youth and in the prime of life. Says Sheikh Farid:

ਭੈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੀ ਮੈ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਜਾਨੀ ॥  
ਜੇਬਨੁ ਖੋਇ ਪਾਛੈ ਪਛੁਤਾਨੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

794 G.G.S.

*I have not realised my master, if I lose the youth, I will regret it in hindsight.*

794 G.G.S.

ਜਬ ਕਿਸਤੀ ਸਾਥੋਂ ਔਰ ਸਾਲਿਮ ਬੀ, ਤਬ ਸਾਹਿਲ ਕੀ ਤਰੰਨਾ ਕਿਸਕੇ ਬੀ ॥  
ਅਬ ਐਸੀ ਸਿਕਸਤਾਂ ਕਿਸਤੀ ਪਰ ਸਾਹਿਲ ਕੀ ਤਰੰਨਾ ਕੌਨ ਕਰੇ ॥

*When the ship was intact and complete, there was no wish to cross the sea. When the ship is old and broken who will want to go across in it?*

### “Becoming” and “Being”

Times are changing, the language, the attitudes and pressures on man are also changing. The need to adapt to this change while keeping our external form and inner inspiration is critical. The inner inspiration is perfection and our outer form is transcending time. *Change or “becoming” is related to permanence or “being”.* In the material world everything changes and nothing is permanently the same; in fact the only thing permanent in the physical World is change. The Khalsa is amidst changes around us, we need to adapt to this change while remaining what we are. Like wood which, when changing from hot to cold does not cease to be wood. A stone remains a stone when it traverses a distance, steel changes its shape and yet remains steel. *Change takes place through us and not in us.* We need to not only adapt to but be able to mold into with ease and dexterity. From riding a horse, the Khalsa has moved into driving automobiles with ease and dexterity, from using oil lamps, adapted to the use of modern lights. To not be ready for change and to not adapt to this is something which will lead to wastage of energy and resources. We need to identify that which is an eternal part of us and will not change and that which is not, and this is the art of religious existence. We have already adapted to this, in a way. *“Being”, on the other hand is permanent. The Jyot of the Khalsa, the attitude of acceptance of life and the form of the Khalsa is our being.* Guiding life through its changes and inspiring movement while remaining eternally unchanged, is the Guru in us.

There is a problem when an individual does not adapt to change and suffers then from a source of insecurity and complexes. Then the person tries to “show” as much change as possible and in doing so loses his or her sense of identity and character. There is no comfort in such an existence, but only pressure which takes its toll in the awareness of that which is eternal in an individual. The attitude is no longer natural but what we try and make of it, editing God and the Guru. The result is a person with guilt, trying to justify what has happened. This stems from not knowing one’s identity, not being rooted in the self, someone who is unaware of his or her being. The understanding of religion and the fact that an individual benefits from it, is to be recognised. This will make us honest in our approach, not living half truths when there are none.

In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, India was being swept by changes through modern education and rationalisation of thinking. It was important and critical for

### The young Kaur and Singhs – and some of their parents



us to prepare for this. Sant Attar Singh (Mustuana Sangrur) understood this more than others and he prepared an option for the community. In the early 20th century, such an institution was created where modern education and spiritual living could be lived together and in Harmony. *His aim was to create an awakened Khalsa who would and could interact with and influence modern society.* This is the only way we can bring change in attitudes to life. Sant Teja Singh was sent to Harvard for learning child psychology and child education. In that day and age professors came from England to teach physics and the sciences. A huge infrastructure was created and a self sustaining organisation was established. Everything was in place, yet, for a very casual reason the attempt failed and Sant Attar Singh abandoned the organisation. Sant Attar Singhji was exceptional and his insight so apt. A major opportunity was lost, for no where else was such an attempt made. There was nowhere as much resource available anywhere else. Our present state would have been different had such a programme been successful. We would have had



young Khalsas inspired by the spirit and inspiring others around us. A revolution of light, of freedom.

This is the need of the hour. An educational programme which addresses the requirements of the Khalsa is not possible within the present national structure of education and wherever included in the curriculum, has been poorly implemented. The present schools run by the D.G.P.C. certainly have the infrastructure, but teachers there are doing a "job" teaching "divinity" and the pressures of such a school do not let this all important issue get addressed as it should.

We need to give our children *Sangat*, but why not in Gurdwaras? I have a 12 year old son and I know that I can take him to a Gurdwara and he will go, because I tell him to, but he relates to very little there; his present "life culture" is far removed from the present Gurdwara culture, specially when the Gurdwara is not evolving with the times. Sikhi is love for the Guru, Sikhi is *amrit* and its living, but how do these children get an expression to be themselves, to be Sikhs

and little Khalsas? Our children grow up in an environment where even their own language is not spoken and the majority community around does not know them. Even as babies, they are exposed to ayahs and attendants who do not speak or know their language and culture. As parents we are so far removed that we don't speak "Punjabi" at home. The children see movies and TV serials which laugh at their identity and give a poor picture of the "Sikhs". We the parents do not have enough time to teach them and even if we do, how do we get them to meet their peer group of other Sikh children? We expect children to be better Sikhs than we are, even in this environment. Where is the one place a child can go, ask, talk, see and know what is his or her religious identity? It is not happening at the Gurdwaras, nor is it happening in the schools or at home. When we took up this issue this was a common concern and was voiced by others. Friends would call and discuss this. One could often hear troubled voices, "what are we doing about the kids?"





S. Rajbir Singh at the "Kaur and Singhs" workshop ....

One possibility is to run parallel programmes, locally, where young adults and children can feel the presence of "Sangat" and come to know who they are. Where, in relaxed atmosphere they can question and ask without being afraid. Exposure to their religion in a comfortable environment is the first step to becoming familiar with their "being".

This is how "Kaur and Singhs" was born, a "Sikh culture workshop" for children from 4-16 years of age. A local activity. Where the kids feel at home. The programme has an enrollment and annual curriculum which includes Sangat, camps and other activities like Kirtan classes, Gatka programmes, exposure to handicrafts and horticulture of the Punjab, arts, open discussions, lectures, and exposure to personalities amongst other things. Audio visual presentations and computers are used in a way that the children can easily absorb them. In time, it is expected that the youth will be able to run such workshop programmes on their own, building bridges within the community and connecting to their Guru and themselves.

We have just started this programme\* in a very small manner, but the response has been overwhelming. It is heartening to see there are other parents like me who want to give Gurmata the attention it needs. One of the volunteers told me, "I am full of tears since the morning; this was my dream for so long." Little Khalsa boys and girls playing together in an interactive environment, is inspiring for us all. True to our Khalsa style we even had two young Khalsas fight it out with their fists! One can feel energy and the enquiry in the air. In the open session a 14 year old boy told us, he was not happy with his life. At the same time a four year old told us, "I am happy with life". One of the young girls was a poetess and another 10 year old was a philosopher, talking to us about thought. Yet another was a psychologist, psychonanalysing unhappiness of others. So many of them came to the podium and said, how and why they were proud to be "Sikhs". Does it not move something in us when one of our little one stands up, on their own and says what "pride" they have in the Guru? A little girl said being a Sikh



.... and some of the teacher volunteers.



Experience shows the way.

inspired her to give away everything she had to others. Different colours and different hues of the same light.

I end with the words of a 12 year old.

"I have a question, how do you peg yourself to Guru?" Hasn't he started the Japji?

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੁਰੈ ਰੁਟੈ ਖਾਲ ॥

"Kaur and Singhs" searching together will find the answer with the Guru amongst them.

Rajbir Singh

\* Inaugurated on 9 July 2003, at Sujjan Singh Park in New Delhi, "Kaur and Singhs" plan a series of nine one-day workshops. The response from the children has been overwhelming! Already nearly two hundred children have enrolled, with many more waiting to join. The workshops are being conducted by selected and committed volunteers who have pertinent teaching experience to sustain the child's interest while interacting with them to excite the inquisitive minds.

Inauguration of

# Guru Gobind Singh Chair

at the University of Mumbai



*The University Convocation Hall by George Gilbert Scott in the decorated French style of the 15th century.*

On 23 April 2003, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra Sushil Kumar Shinde, Dr.B.L.Mungekar, Vice Chancellor of the University of Mumbai, who presided over the function and the special guests, were welcomed by S.Kulwant Singh Kohli, the Working President. "This is an important day for the Sikhs of this great metropolis, when one of the oldest and most prestigious seats of learning namely the University of Mumbai, is installing the *Guru Gobind Singh Chair* in its Department of History".

The Government of India had earlier made a grant of Rs.50 lakh for the purpose and the Government of Maharashtra not only set up a Special Committee for celebrating the tercentenary of the Khalsa Panth in 1999, under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister, but also chalked out comprehensive programmes for the celebrations to continue in befitting manner. The Maharashtra Government has decided to allot a plot of 2000 sq.mtrs at Goradia Nagar, Ghatkopar to the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Mumbai, for the purpose of raising a permanent structure to be known as the *Guru Gobind Singh Bhavan*. "I am sure

that both these projects, the *Guru Gobind Singh Chair* and *Guru Gobind Singh Bhavan*, will go a long way in fulfilling our cherished desire for propagating the ideals for which the great Guru lived and sacrificed all, including his life".

Chief Minister Sushil Shinde continued: "I am neither a historian, nor a scholar, and therefore do not claim any competence to address such an August assembly on the philosophy or historical significance of the life and work of the Great Guru. His achievements and outstanding mark as a leader, warrior, scholar and symbol of supreme sacrifice, are too well known to bear any repetition.

In one of the Seminars organised by this Committee, His Excellency, Dr.P.C.Alexander – former Governor of Maharashtra – spoke about the Khalsa and I quote some references from his speech:

*One cannot find a parallel to Guru Gobind Singh in any other religious literature. Just think of that very complex personality – soldier, warrior, general, saint, scholar, poet, philosopher, born in Patna, with all his great achievements in*



Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde, Chief Minister of Maharashtra is welcomed by S. Kulwant Singh Kohli, Dr. Bhalchandra L. Mungekar and S. Tirok Singh Bhurje, President Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Mumbai.



Distinguished guests and invitees at the handsome Sir Cawasjee Jehangir Convocation Hall of the University of Mumbai.



The Vice Chancellor of the University of Mumbai, Dr. Bhalchander L. Mungekar, the Chief Minister Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde and S. Kulwant Singh Kohli on the dias.

Punjab, passed away in Nanded at the age of 42. To combine so many achievements in that short span of a life and to establish the great religion that Guru Nanak had nurtured on a sound, solid basis, that would continue on its own without human mortals to be Gurus at the head of it. To have that vision of reestablishing the Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru, even to think of that, to have the concept of nominating not an ordinary mortal but an immortal book as the Guru for eternity. These are the things which I find extraordinarily unique in the personality of Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh is one of the greatest saviours of mankind. He was a genius of the rarest type. He saw things hidden to other men. His ideas flashed into the future. Against the political and religious background in the country, on 30 March, 1699, at Anandpur Sahib at the foot of the Shiwalik Hills, he made declaration of war in favour of human rights. He had anticipated seventy-seven years earlier, the ideal of the declaration of Independence by American Colonies against the British Government, issued on 4 July 1776, and the French Revolution by ninety years. It was a declaration of war for civil liberty and political freedom of individuals against the Government's organised oppression and tyranny.

While creating the Khalsa on that day, the Guru declared that all men were created equal by God, that all were brothers, and all were born free. No king, no ruler, no chief had any right to keep people in bondage. The country did not belong to the king. The king belonged to the people. The ruler enjoyed power which was given to him by the people to guide them along the path of virtue and happiness of all. If the king was bad, people must rise in revolt. He asserted that without political liberty, religious, intellectual, social and economic freedom could not be achieved. Political freedom could be won by armies. It was the duty of the people to create armies from among themselves to fight oppression, tyranny and injustice. The Khalsa created by Guru Gobind Singh was to form one of such armies.

"There is a very strong bond of union between Sikhs everywhere and the people of Maharashtra. The very fact that Guru Gobind Singh chose to be in Nanded in the last few months of his brilliant life and that he chose to declare The Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru for all of his followers in the future, are enough to establish the golden threads of union between the peoples of Maharashtra and Sikhs all over the world.

I wish every success to the Chair in its laudable objectives, for which it is established and assure the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of full support for our educational institutions and other institutions.

I pray to the Almighty to bless this Chair to let it serve as a lighthouse for entire humanity and brighten our way from darkness to light, from despair to hope and from sorrow to eternal happiness".

**Kulwant Singh Kohli**  
Former Sheriff of Bombay

## Honour for Australian Sikh

S.Manjit Singh Aujla, settled in Melbourne since 1979, is recipient of the Centenary Medal awarded by Queen Elizabeth II. The Medal has been given to him for "services to the Australian Indian community through migrant welfare".

Manjit Singh Aujla is a Justice of the Peace, Marriage Celebrant, Migration Adviser and Registered Interpreter and Translator who took up community work in Melbourne after taking retirement from the Public Transport Corporation. Since 1983 he has kept himself involved with numerous social welfare and religious organisations and devoted his time in the service of the Australian Indian community, providing advice in immigration matters, all *gratis*. Neither has he confined himself to his local Taylors Lake area in community service but has spread his operational area to Melbourne. He was involved in building a Gurdwara and developing the Sikh community there, giving it a feeling of belonging.

He was congratulated for the Centenary Medal by Minister for Citizenship and Multi-Cultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave, MP. The services rendered by Mr.Aujla has also been fully eulogised and recorded in the Victorian Parliament by the MP, Mr.Seitz.

## Sangat follows the Nanakshahi Calendar

Despite an appeal by the Punjab Chief Minister, Capt.Amarinder Singh, to observe the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev according to the "national calendar", the Sikh sangat of Patiala and elsewhere sided with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on the issue by deciding to hereafter observe the martyrdom day on June 16, as according to the *Nanakshahi Calendar*.

No functions were organised in Patiala as well as in other parts of the district to mark the martyrdom day of the Guru on 4 June. *Nagar kirtans* and all-night religious functions attended by *rugis* were, instead, organised on June 16 to mark the occasion. While the Gurdwaras seemed to have sent the message across to the Sikh community effectively, people also forwent a time-honoured tradition of holding "*chhabeeels*" which is the hallmark of the day.

A visit to the Dukhniwaran and Moti Bagh Gurdwaras in the city showed that there was no special rush. The people visiting the Gurdwaras said it had been conveyed to them that henceforth all religious functions would be organised according to the *Nanakshahi Calendar* and that they had come as a matter of routine only.

The Sikh sangat at Phagwara did not observe the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev even though the Punjab Government had declared it a holiday as per the national

calendar. According to the *Nanakshahi Calendar*, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev falls on June 16.

None of the 20-odd local Gurdwaras observed the *shahedi divas* nor were *chhabeeels* organised. Even the Gurdwaras managed by the non-Akalis did not observe the martyrdom day and chose to go with the mainstream Sikh sangat by deciding to celebrate this on June 16.

## PSGPC to Implement Nanakshahi Calendar

Accepting the authority of the Akal Takht and the SGPC, the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) has resolved to implement the *Nanakshahi calendar* in Sikh shrines of Pakistan. This was stated by S.Harpal Singh Bhullar, president, International Bhai Mardana Yagdari Kirtan Darbar, in a fax message received in Amritsar.



The *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)* leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of the four-member Pakistani Parliamentarian delegation of *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam*, introduces his delegation members to the Akal Takht chief, Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti at the *Darbar Sahib* complex in Amritsar on 15 July 2003.

## New Akali Dal Draws Up Constitution

Leaders of the new Akali Dal, formed on 19 July 2003 under the presidentship of S.Ravi Inder Singh have chalked out the programme and constitution of the party after being administered '*amrit*' at Gurdwara Gurplah Sahib, near Nangal on 6 August. According to the constitution, only a baptised Sikh could become an office bearer of the party. Seventy five main members of the newly formed Dal were also served '*amrit*' at the Gurdwara.

Keeping in view the alleged "hegemony" of Prakash Singh Badal over the SAD, the meeting decided that no

president of the party could continue for more than two years and would have to take a break before being re-elected president. It was also decided that neither the party president nor any of his family members could contest any other election. The party president would be morally bound to the 10 member religious Akal Council headed by Baba Sarabjot Singh Bedi.

He stated that a 21 member working committee of the new Akali Dal would be announced at *Harmandir Sahib*. It had decided to divide the Punjab into three zones: *Patiala*, including Ropar, Ludhiana and Fatehgarh districts, *Bathinda*, including Ferozepore, Sangrur, Mansa and Muktsar districts, and the *Amritsar* zone comprising the Majha area.

## Second Language Status for Punjabi and Urdu

The Central Government has granted second language status to Urdu and Punjabi in Delhi State, this declaration greatly benefiting both the languages.

Dr. S.S.Noor, writer and professor of Punjabi at Delhi University, has stated that Delhi has a high percentage of Punjabis and in many schools Punjabi is taught as a second language but there are not many people who find jobs teaching the language in educational institutions. Dr. Rawail Singh, Secretary, Punjabi Academy, was of the opinion that it is a "wise decision" on the part of the Government to grant such status to Punjabi and Urdu.

Mr. M.M.Abidi, Secretary of the Urdu Academy, also felt that the decision to grant this status was a "good decision". "Most students opt for professional courses. They wonder what career they will choose by learning this language which has a vast syllabus. If people are not made to understand the benefits of such learning, Urdu would die as a language", he added. He went on to say, "If Urdu and Punjabi are related to a job related curriculum, this problem of unemployment would be solved".

## Sikh Forum wants NHRC to Review '84 Riots Case

Taking a cue from the Gujarat riots case, *The Sikh Forum* has asked the National Human Rights Commission to take up the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case in which Congress leader H.K.L. Bhagat was charged. In a letter to the NHRC chairman Justice A.S. Anand, *The Sikh Forum* regretted that the Delhi Government did not file any appeal in the case and the victim's wife, Ms. Darshan Kaur, was forced to approach the Delhi High Court against additional sessions Judge Manju Goel's order passed on 20 December 2000. The Forum wanted the NHRC to recommend that the state Government adopt

the appeal filed by Ms. Kaur, which is now pending in the Delhi High Court.

Ms. Kaur had told the court that the Congress leader had instigated the riots in which her husband was killed in East Delhi's Trilokpuri area. According to *The Sikh Forum*, which represents victims of the 1984 riots, 310 people were killed in Trilokpuri alone in two days following the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Darshan Kaur withstood the rigorous cross-examination by a battery of lawyers of Bhagat and had clearly stated in the court that Bhagat had given orders "to kill Sikhs". In spite of the said statement, the judge acquitted Bhagat on technical ground of defective investigation and minor contradictions. *The Sikh Forum* stated in its letter to the NHRC. "We firmly believe that to check the menace of mob violence, the role of the NHRC is very material and important".

The letter maintained that Ms. Darshan Kaur had a strong case. "She had identified Bhagat in court and had been consistent in her statement. It is very unfortunate that the state Government has decided not to file an appeal against the judgement of acquittal in such a case".



Indian Army Chief Gen N.C. Vij honouring the two Sikh soldiers of the Corps of Engineers who saved the lives of at least 200 passengers of the Frontier Mail when it caught fire near Ludhiana in July 2003.

## NHRC Directive to Punjab Government

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on 8 May gave the Punjab Government 10 weeks to file its responses in cases relating to people's disappearances and illegal cremations by the police. The case has been before the NHRC since January 1997 following a 1996 direction of the Supreme Court empowering it to deal with the issue.

The petitioners, the *Committee for Information and Initiative on Punjab*, had sought a comprehensive inquiry into the fate of thousands of persons who had "disappeared" in the State.

## SAD is Happy

When two kids fight, they wipe the slate clean and become friends again. When two politicians decide to bury the hatchet of past differences, they continue to nurse their respective grudges. The exchange of laddoos is meant to mask the bitterness, not banish it from their new-found politically expedient respect for each other. Both S.Parkash Singh Badal and S.Gurcharan Singh Tohra have been in politics long enough to understand the importance of creating politically expedient differences and the illusion of unity as and when necessary. Unity is the flavour of the season and hence the sharing of laddoos. The two leaders can be expected to avoid the pitfall of taking each other's offer of friendship at face value. Akali unity is a concept that defies description. If the exchange of laddoos means the end of the faction war between S.Tohra and S.Badal, the halwai deserves a reward for inventing the recipe for lasting political unity – that too among the constantly quarrelling factions of the Akalis, they end up making three factions with the peace-maker being forced to head one of them! In any case, the two veteran politicians of Punjab represent only their factions of the badly splintered SAD that is said to have united for fighting the Congress – the common "enemy" of the Panth and Punjab.

In times of political war these splinters cause pain more than injury to the larger cause of political unity. That "pain" is usually enough for the Congress to keep coming back into power, for "healing the wounds" as it were. The Congress is the proverbial bad penny that becomes acceptable currency after every spell of Akali misrule. The unity of two Akali factions is not going to set the rivers, that remain in Punjab, on fire. It is incapable of striking even a spark of hope. It is barely skin deep. All it means is that S.Badal will now have one more voice, and a powerful one at that - it used to be heard across the state not too long ago – when the police come knocking at his door with a warrant of arrest. In real terms the Tohra-Badal unity is a mirage that will mislead none. There are already rumblings of protests from both sides about the "loyalists" not being taken into confidence. The Akalis, even otherwise, have a record of coming together in moments of adversity for saving their personal turfs and not for the larger cause of *Panthic* unity or the economic growth of Punjab. These factions fall apart when the dominant one, usually headed by S.Badal, comes into power.

(Editorial in *The Tribune*)

At the second hearing in as many years, the NHRC chairperson, Justice A.S.Anand, brushed aside the Government's claim that it needed five more months to inspect and translate the records in CBI custody. He told the Government counsel, R.S.Suri, that the State had the resources to work at a much faster pace.

After the NHRC took over the issue, the CBI investigated the disappearance of a human rights activist, Jaswant Singh Khalra, and found that he had been abducted by the infamous Punjab Police under directions of the then Senior Superintendent of Police, Tartan Taran, Ajit Singh Sandhu. Armed with this report, the petitioners approached the Supreme Court.

The CBI report, according to the Supreme Court's order of December 1996, showed a "flagrant violation of human rights on a mass scale" in Punjab. The report said that 585 bodies had been positively identified, 274 partially identified and 1,238 unidentified. Last year, the Government was asked to file its responses in relation to the identified bodies. It has, so far, filed 217 affidavits. The CIIP has in the intervening years identified 228 of the unidentified and partially identified bodies.

Mr. Justice Anand directed them to submit the names of these persons immediately, and also told the Government to file responses in relation to these names.

## Where are the Precious Books?

In a petition filed before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, directions were sought for the return of "all manuscripts, religious books and other articles" allegedly removed during *Operation Bluestar* from the Sikh Reference



*Sikh youth displaying their martial art skills during a 'Shastra Vidya' competition, recently organised by the Guru Nanak Sikh Society of Trans-Yamuna at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, East Delhi.*

Library at the *Darbar Sahib* in Amritsar during June 1984. The petitioner – Satnam Singh of Tarn Taran – had earlier claimed that the articles, about 16,000 in number, were stolen by the CBI before being taken away to Delhi. He had added that the articles, as per Defence Minister George Fernandes own words, were in CBI's custody. Quoting newspaper reports, the petitioner had asserted that two CBI officers, part of a team involved in the alleged removal of the articles, had confirmed the action. Arguing on the petitioner's behalf, Ranjan Lakhnpal had submitted that several Punjab leaders, including Simranjit Singh Mann, had also demanded the return of the articles. Taking up the case, a Division Bench of the high court, headed by the Chief Justice Justice B.K.Roy fixed August 21 as the next date of hearing after counsel for the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) sought time for being implicated as a petitioner.

## Bhaur for New Ways to Propagate Sikhism

Jathedar Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, a former acting SGPC president and an Akali stalwart, has underlined the need for new methods for propagation of Sikhism to usher in a renaissance in the Sikh religion and to bring back those who had got weaned away from the faith. He was addressing the 86<sup>th</sup> "Jor Mela" at the historic Palahi village on the concluding day. The three day "Jor Mela" was held to observe the fifth battle fought by the sixth Guru Hargobind, against the Mughal rulers at Palahi village in 1634.

Jathedar Bhaur told the congregation that he was not satisfied with the traditional ways of propagation of Sikhism, as confined to the Gurdwara. The emergence of godmen like Baba Ashutosh and Piara Singh Bhaniara, the episode of Talhan, the distribution of trishuls and lathis were stage-managed to erode Sikhism, which championed the cause of humanity, he said. He also held that TV satellite channels were responsible for diluting spiritual values. He attributed the present plight to the penchant for taking religious preachings casually.

The Punjab Social Welfare Minister, S.Joginder Singh Mann, while addressing the congregation, eulogised Guru Hargobind as author of the concept of saint-soldier. Sikhism stood for the well being of one and all, added Mann. Both Jathedar Bhaur and S.S. Mann were honoured with siropas. Noted 'Dhadi' singers included Swaran Singh Maheru, Jawala Singh Patanga, Jaswant Singh Josh and Ram Singh Raftar.

## Bhindranwale Declared Sikh Martyr

Nineteen years after he was martyred fighting the Indian Army inside the *Golden Temple* on 6 June, 1984, militant Sikh leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was, on 6 June 2003, officially acknowledged as a "Sikh martyr" by the apex Sikh clergy and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

The jathedar of the Akal Takht performed a special prayer service in memory of Bhindranwale at the *Darbar Sahib* Complex and later conferred a *siropa* upon his elder son, S.Ishar Singh. The jathedar also similarly honoured Bhai Manjit Singh, the brother of Bhindranwale's lieutenant Bhai Amrik Singh, who was also killed during *Operation Bluestar*, when over 20,000 men, armoured fighting vehicles, helicopters and aircraft of the Indian armed forces assaulted the holy site.



S. Ishar Singh, with *siropa*, at the centre.

Later, addressing a congregation of Sikh devotees, the jathedar called upon all Sikhs to "zealously guard the tradition of sacrificing one's life for the Sikh Panth as established by Sant Bhindranwale". The proclamation was along expected lines after the SGPC had already listed the day as his martyrdom day in the new Nanakshahi Calendar that was officially released last Baisakhi.

However, notwithstanding the new position adopted by the SGPC and the Akal Takht, Bhindranwale's followers at the Dam Dami Taksal (the seminary once headed by Bhindranwale) have shown no signs of relenting from their earlier stand. They believe, and have for the past 19 years consistently perpetuated the statement that "Bhindranwale is alive and will make a reappearance when the religion is again threatened by outside forces".

Later, at a separate commemorative function at the Manji Sahib Dewan Hall in the Complex organised by the hardline Sikh group Dal Khalsa, speakers paid rich tributes to Bhindranwale and his followers, demands were also raised for "a befitting memorial for the great martyr". Speakers also called on the SGPC leadership to install a portrait of the militant Sikh leader at *Darbar Sahib's* museum of Sikh history.

Jagjit Singh Chohan, Simranjit Singh Mann and Wassan Singh Zafarwal, the three greatest proponents of Khalistan, were present at the Akal Takht for the function. While Dr. Chohan insisted "that the recognition accorded to Sant Bhindranwale has come 20 years too late", Zafarwal, who is believed to have directed much of the terrorist violence in Punjab, said, "This occasion must be observed as a day of protest by all Sikhs". S.S.Mann, now a MP from Sangrur, said "it is imperative that we understand the ideals for which Sant Bhindranwale sacrificed his life, and we must carry forward his mission".

SGPC president Kirpal Singh Badungar, a member of the usually moderate Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal faction), stated, "The Akal Takht and 125 other Sikh shrines were destroyed by the Indian Government. The wounds suffered by the Sikhs are very deep and will not be forgotten easily".

## Sikhs Still Targeted in USA

The shooting of a Sikh in Arizona, in what is widely seen as a hate crime, has once again highlighted the prevailing prejudice against people wearing turbans in the United States. "We condemn hate in all forms" stated Dr. Rajwant Singh, national chairman of the Sikh Council on Education and Religion (SCORE), saying he wanted to take the case to the White House to highlight the issue of targeting and intolerance of Sikh Americans, who number 500,000 in the U.S., since 9/11.

"We were concerned about the increase in discrimination in our neighbourhoods, on our jobs and against our families since 9/11", Rajwant Singh was reacting to the recent attack on Avtar Singh Cheira, 52, in north Phoenix, Arizona, in an apparent hate crime.

Cheira, a truck driver who has lived in the U.S. for the past 18 years, was shot at twice by men in a red pickup near Ninth Street and Bell Road in north Phoenix, police said. The Indian immigrant was wearing a turban as he waited for his family to pick him up from work at around 9:20 p.m. that night. Minutes before the shooting Cheira said he heard a voice say: "Go back to where you belong to". Cheira was hit twice in the legs with bullets from a small-calibre gun. His youngest son found him and called an ambulance.

"There is no doubt this is a hate crime", said Phoenix police detective Tony Morales. "To think that this kind of ignorance is still out there and can fuel such an ugly racist action is just appalling".

The shooting is the second in the area targeting a member of the Sikh community since the September 11, 2001 attacks. On September 15, 2001, Balbir Singh Sodhi, 49, was fatally shot at his Mesa gas station, also in Arizona.

## US Sikhs Join Demand for Hate Crime Legislation

The Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) has joined over 500 religious leaders across the United States, in their demand for the passage of a national legislation on hate crimes. "We are proud to join with others in this efforts to create greater support for this very important legislation", said SCORE National Chairman Dr. Rajwant Singh.

"We will send a clear and committed message against hate and persecution". Since September 11, 2001, American Sikhs have endured "an increasing level of hate crime and religious intolerance", he said, adding that a letter will be sent to the Congress with the message that the inter-faith community supports the national hate crime legislation, the letter sent to Congressional leaders in both houses of Congress.

## Amarinder Invites Pak Punjab CM

In an impassioned invitation extended to his counterpart in Pakistan's Punjab, the Chief Minister of India's Punjab, Capt Amarinder Singh, has invited him and his Cabinet colleagues to visit Chandigarh in the first week of November, if possible. Capt Amarinder Singh has also expressed a desire to visit Pakistan's Punjab.

The invitation has been extended through the Ministry of External Affairs with Capt Amarinder Singh sending a demi-official letter to Mr Kanwal Sibal, Foreign Secretary, with the request to get the letter formally delivered to Mr Pervez Elahi, Chief Minister of Punjab in Pakistan.

While inviting Mr Elahi and his colleagues to Chandigarh, Capt Amarinder Singh has expressed concern over the "artificial barriers" that divide the two Punjabs. Capt Amarinder Singh has requested Mr Elahi to "let me know when it would be convenient for you to come to Chandigarh. The best time would be after the first week of November. After your visit, perhaps, I could then, along with my colleagues come to meet you and the people of the Punjab."

Though Capt Amarinder Singh has not made any mention there seems to be bigger purpose of inviting Mr Elahi to Chandigarh. Pakistan is interested in importing wheat from Indian Punjab. Recently, Mr Lal Singh, Punjab Food and Supply Minister, had sought permission of the Union Government to export two million tonnes of wheat to Pakistan through Markfed. Another purpose seems to pave the way for opening the Wagah border for promoting trade with Pakistan, Afghanistan and certain Arab countries.





The icon of Sikh might Maharaja Ranjit Singh, has found a rightful place in Parliament House, New Delhi with the Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee unveiling the 22-foot high statue of the Maharaja on 21 August. The statue created by eminent sculptor Ram Sutar, was installed in the Parliament House some time back.

All Parliamentarians, including the PM, the Lok Sabha Speaker and other dignitaries later witnessed a special multi-media light and sound presentation on the life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, following the unveiling ceremony of the statue, which was presented by the Chandigarh-based film maker and theatre person Harbux Latta, entitled, "Sher-e-Punjab".

Earlier, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had unveiled the portraits of Master Tara Singh and freedom fighter Baba Kharak Singh, the architects of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) respectively, in Parliament's Central Hall on 21 August. "These portraits are the first of any Sikh leader to be exhibited in the Central Hall of Parliament", the Chairman of National Commission for Minorities, Mr Tarlochan Singh, stated.

*The photograph shows:  
Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during unveiling of the statue of Sher-e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Parliament House, New Delhi, on 21 August 2003 alongwith (L to R)  
Sr. Tarlochan Singh, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Sr. Prakash Singh Badal, Shri P.M. Sayed, Dr. Najma Heptulla, Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Speaker Shri Manohar Joshi, Deputy Prime Minister Shri L.K. Advani, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, Sr. Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa and Sr. Vikramjit Singh Sahney.*