

NISHAAN

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The Sikhs of Afghanistan
Sikhism in the 21st Century
The Power of Synthesis



Cover: Tahira Kaur draped in her grandmother's traditional Bhog, the fully-embroidered Phulkari.

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American trauma, Afghan tragedy the Sikh situation

Anyone who has carefully examined the phenomenon of terrorism in history should know that the World has been plagued by it from time *homo erectus* began to use terrorism as power, as a lever of controlling inhospitable nature and the human reality around. Thus its inhuman character became a structural part of the phenomenon. Though the face of terrorism has over centuries been changing in response to man's cunning and craft, its basic bestial aspects abide till this day.

What, therefore, happened like a thunderbolt from the blue in America on September 11 was part of the irrational and the absurd in human life. For the American experience at once assumed a metaphysical aspect in addition to other considerations – philosophical, theological, ideological etc. That's why a great amount of new existential anxieties have queered the pitch of the scenario. Those familiar with the Christian Existentialist, Soren Kirkegaard's work would recall the concepts of terror and dread. Man, pitched into the middle of life's dangers could not but turn to religion – or agnosticism. And essentially, this picture of the human condition cannot change.

However, it is also true that the civilised man has acquired powers of the mind and of the spirit to meet the "Grand Absurd" and live authentically. Thus, when a huge calamity – earthquakes, wars, floods etc. – suddenly seems to overwhelm the ground realities, the search for survival becomes ever more insistent and pressing. It is some such experience we are now up against and we have to accept the challenge.

Before we come to the details, it may be of help to understand the terrorism psyche or mindset. Some changes even in this area are bound to occur in obedience to contingencies, but the core concept remains virtually untouched. It is instructive, however, to know that the "Islamic Terrorism" is not confined to the USA, or to Kashmir and other non-Muslim states. Also, except in Northern Ireland, in the Basque region of Spain, as a rule, the Islamic countries themselves are its chief victim. The Islamic-Christian conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosvo and the Muslim terrorist organisations in Egypt, the Sudan, Algeria, Turkey, even in Pakistan, all share that frame of

mind which leads to *fundamentalism* in its lethal forms.

I, therefore, turn first to the terrorist psyche *per se*. For terrorism is terrorism is terrorism whatever the excuses, alibis or arguments.

- ⚡ Terrorism becomes more lethal when it assumes a 'mystical' character.
- ⚡ The terrorist "implosion" is rooted in several things, in childhood Freudian complexes, in the *romance of terrorism* when the youthful imagination is still sexual and 'idealistic'.
- ⚡ A stage comes in the progress of a terrorist when abstractions and hobgoblins possess him, and his actions become wanton and uncontrollable.
- ⚡ Hence the emergence of the terrorist-personality and its compelling kinetics.
- ⚡ Also, an armed vision of reality becomes an independent force, unmindful of the laws of society, or of ethics etc.
- ⚡ Today's terrorism with the new weaponry of instant and massive destruction along with the Orwellian "thought control" would not be easily amendable to known remedies.
- ⚡ The urge for identity and recognition through the media becomes yet another compulsive itch.
- ⚡ And then at some point in that slide individual terrorists begin to feel dehumanised, and a revulsion against themselves sets in. Hence, their voluntary surrender (as in Kashmir and elsewhere).
- ⚡ The cycle of progression and regression continues in varying degrees, and may become an intractable problem for years and decades.

A number of eminent Muslim intellectuals, writers, mediemen have categorically condemned this kind of terrorism. Islam, they argue rightly, does not permit the killing of innocent people whatever the reason or place. In this connection, one writer has quoted the Beatle John Lennon's little poem:

*Imagine there are no countries
It's easy if you try*

Nothing to live or die for.

(No, not even "a paradise on earth" can justify it, not even Kashmir!)

However, the stunning change in the attitude towards terrorism since September 11 only shows that till the US citadel was stormed – the World Trade Centre and the Wall Street being the life-line of American hegemony – the world took little notice of a transparent irony. Yes, the world began not only to sneeze when the White House caught cold, but also to realise the true nature of the menace in question. The fact that American trade and money imperialism had come to occupy the power space or vacuum created by the defeat of British Imperialism in India, in Africa and elsewhere thus became a geo-political reality.

As Guntur Grass, the celebrated German novelist has commented in relation to the September 11 events, terrorism is created by the super rich powers to shape the world, according to their interests and vision. And terrorism will not go away till there's a radical change in the White House attitude, and in the Pentagon, for terrorism is a state of mind, not an object or person (like bin Laden), or a country (like Afghanistan) which can be bombed out of existence. And the American record in this regard is not edifying.

It must not be forgotten that the US Administration has invariably supported fascist type dictatorship from the Latin American tyrants like Peron to Pinochet and in African countries without a thought for their people. The human rights record in these countries and particularly in the Arab monarchies and Sheikdoms, has a grim face to show. But the Americans have proverbially turned 'the blind eye' to primitivism and inhuman codes in relation to women and to non-Muslims in those countries. This structured duplicity in the American mind remains even now despite the new horror, hard to dissipate.

To start with, it may be observed that the Americans having gained hegemony over the globe would be unwilling to care for the abstract virtues of right thought and right duties. Also, they suffer deep down in the Freudian sense from such 'complexes':

No "Vietnam" ever again for America. They would never reconcile themselves to the return of bodies in star-and-stripes bags to their own shores. The Vietnam syndrome is a permanent presence.

There is also a feeling of grief in regard to the Kabul regime – the Talibans having been their own creation during the cold war with the Soviets. And then the history of racial tyranny back home, the decimation of the "Red Indians", and the creation of total inequality to further the

cause of Capitalism in its 19th century raw and brutal form – these ghosts are not easily wished away. America has a heavy conscience, its collective psyche is under siege below the surface of day-to-day cheeriness and *bon-homie*.

I wish, however, to point out that the real American Moment has just arrived – a moment that has changed the picture of the world much in the manner of the Renaissance visionaries. There's a radical America still in American homes and in the remote countryside and the American Adam has now a chance to redeem himself. The Land of Promise should remain a land beckoning the youth and the rest if the American Administration seizes the moment.

It is towards this end that we have to see the altered American reality in the context of Sikh interests – and of their doubts and fears. The assurances of President Bush and others are not enough. Just palliatives. The Sikh community in America would have to educate their own kids and cadres to rise magnificently to the occasion and show the White House and Mayor Giuliani that they are solidly behind them in their war not only against the blight of terrorism, but equally against vicious ignorance.

A shooting war is now on, ten thousand miles away, in bleak and already devastated Afghanistan. The immediate outcome is in little doubt, although the Americans know well that to conquer Afghanistan and install a Government of their choice is a far cry. Even the mighty British Empire finally gave up the idea of subduing the unruly Pashtoons. It had earlier been left to the Army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to hoist the first foreign flag in Kabul. The famed *Koh-e-Noor* diamond was the tribute then paid by the Afghan ruler to the Sikh monarch.

The import of all the above adds to our extreme worries about the fate of thousands of Sikhs settled for centuries in Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Most of them have already left their ancestral homes and property and businesses, moving first to Pakistan, enroute to India, from where they originated, hundreds of years back.

The Sikhs, now living in over one hundred countries world wide, are a world people and even if their numbers in some places may be infinitesimal, their unique form and spirit remains outstanding. They have, through history, faced fateful consequences to keep the faith, such as in the mindless and hateful attacks on Sikhs particularly and South Asians and 'browns' generally in the United States post September 11 and then, post October 7, becoming hapless targets of U.S. bombing in Afghanistan ten thousand miles away from Manhattan.

But, as with Sikhs through their history, this is when the true spirit born people begin to really shine.



JAP(u)ji Sahib

The Psalm Eternal

The Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, opens with a basic credal text called Jap(u), meaning 'meditation'. However, the Sikhs call it *Jap(u) ji* or even *Jap(u) ji Sahib* – 'ji' and 'sahib' being two honorific epithets that are added out of reverence. In the 'index' of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Jap(u) has been indexed as *Jap(u) Neesan*. In the earliest available breviary (*gutka*), dated 1710 AD (manuscript in the Punjab University Library, Lahore), Guru Nanak Dev thus addresses his successor, Guru Angad Dev:

Dear Man! None shall attain my proximity in the Lord's Court without reciting Jap(u)ji. Only he who possesses the pass (neesan) of Jap(u)ji shall be admitted there.

The Sikhs are a religious community, traditionally identified by their unshorn hair (which they hold as sacred), and men by their colourful headgear, the turban. Although the Punjab is their seat of domicile, they can now be found, on account of massive diaspora, in most countries of the world, generally as an infinitesimal minority. Their total population in the world would be around 20 million.

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) founded their religion. A line of nine successor gurus followed him. Of them, the fifth, namely Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), compiled the Sikh scripture - *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708) brought to an end the succession of corporal Gurus and vested the holy book with 'eternal Guruship'. Thus, he made 'the holy Word', the *perpetual living Guru* of the Sikhs. He also infused among them an insatiable zest for freedom and with the baptism of the sword transformed them into an Order of God's own knights-at-arms, known as the *Khalsa*.

Their holy book, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, is a truly pluralist scripture because, besides the works of the Sikh Gurus, it also embodies the works of a number of Hindu saints as well as Muslim Sufi dervishes. It opens with the seminal work of Guru Nanak, the Jap(u) ji that is the basic credal text incorporating the fundamentals of the Sikh faith. It is also considered the prime burden of the scripture.

This is a poetic text consisting of 38 stanzas with two *slokas*, one serving as its prologue and the other as its epilogue. Altogether, it is comprised of 383 lines made up

of 2090 words, not one of which is inapt or superfluous. Altogether this composition is of great philosophical import, it presents neither a discursive nor a logically structured format. On the contrary, it is characterized by a mellifluous poetic form. Its highly inspired verse absorbs the mind of a seeker and brings it tranquility through its placid rhythms.

Mool Mantra or 'the Prime Revelation,' that pithily enunciates the nature and essential attributes of the One God (*Ik Oankar*) prefaces it. This singular Deity (*Oankar*) not only pervades every pore of whatever is, but also transcends even its fullest entirety. He is un-begotten (*Ajouni*), immortal (*Akal*), and self-resplendent (*Sambhau*), yet, is the Essence of Existence (*Sat Naam*). Being the Creator (*Karta Purakh*), and having none higher than Him or even coequal, He is naturally without fear (*Nirbhau*), and without jealousy (*Nirvair*), but ever brims with sovereign grace (*Gurprasadi*).

The *sloka* with which the Jap(u)ji opens, and which serves as its prologue, delineates the trans-temporal nature of this Supreme Existent:

He was in the very Beginning,

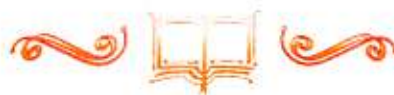
He was when Times began,

He is Now,

And, in Truth, shall always be!

Thirty-eight stanzas or *paunis* (literally: rungs of a ladder) follow this prologue. These vary in size, metric measure, and rhyme scheme. In spite of such structural diversity, the Jap(u) ji uniformly preserves its poetic finesse as well as contemplative profundity. At places, it appears, the author flies into a kind of lyrical ecstasy and goes into inspired repetitiveness—repetitiveness that is the essential requirement in the practice of *Jap(u)* or meditation.

The Jap(u) ji is a work in the *sutrik* tradition. A *sutra* is an aphoristic statement, revelatory in nature, without exegesis or argument and trans-subjective in import. It freely draws its symbols and allusions from history, mythology, and philosophy (*darshanas*). Its *sutrik* style coupled with the vast resource of its symbolism, makes Jap(u) ji a work that is not only profound but also complex in spite of the simplicity and clarity of its language. That is, perhaps, why despite hundreds of exegeses, the Jap(u) ji still awaits an all-satisfying exposition.





The text of the Jap(u) ji, with occasional digressions, outlines the path that a spiritual seeker is expected to pursue in order to achieve his aim. In order to make this aim explicit, the Guru, in the very first stanza of this work raises a question:

How can we, then, Truth attain?

How to rend illusion's veil?

And then goes on to explain 'the how':

Know you this immutable writ-

His Will only shall prevail.

We must live in accord with the Divine Will that has been inscribed into our very being. In order to live thus requires that we identify that Writ. That would be possible only if we can de-alienate ourselves to unite with Him. The Guru provides us with instruction about how to overcome alienation, and proceed step by step so as to have the Beatific Vision of the Lord.

Rung by rung we would thus ascend

To unite with the One—that is our aim.

Here and there, as we proceed through the text of Jap(u) ji, we do come across a few digressions that serve some significant functions. Some of them affirm the dignity of human life, others stress rejection of ritual formalism, and still others embody comments of cosmological import. They do appear kind of parenthetical statements, but they have fundamental reformatory import, often of ethical significance.

According to Guru Nanak, God's language is of 'infinite love' (*Bhakhia bhao apar*). In this very tongue God Almighty must have revealed Himself to the Guru, who would have received that revelation in sublime wonderment (*vismad*). What the Guru thus received, he, in turn, revealed unto the whole world in the tongue of the people. The language of Jap(u) ji is Punjabi of those times. (*According to a UNESCO report, Punjabi is amongst the major languages of the world, 13th in order according to the number of people that speak it*). Before Guru Nanak, Sanskrit alone had been accepted as the authentic medium of divine revelation (*shruti*). However, the priestly class, the Brahmins, had made learning of that language their sole proprietary right. So, it had come to be far removed from ordinary people. No religious ceremony or ritual was possible without the help of a Brahmin. Guru Nanak sought to break the hegemony of the priestly class and make Divine Revelation directly available to the people.

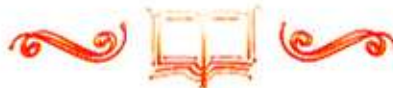
Some pundits, in the arrogance of their learning, raised academic objections against his work. They said, "It is not flawless grammatically". However, retorted the devout

scholars, "Who can ever raise the wall of grammar in the mighty torrent of inspired lyricity?" The pundits called its languages 'a broken tongue'. However, retorted the devout, "Do not his words represent the broken hearts of the people? Doesn't he empathically echo throbbing of the people's hearts?" The pundits said, "His poetry lacks ornamental figures of speech". "But", said the devout, "do you expect royal glory from ill clad people?" Guru Nanak was simultaneously the people's poet and the Lord's minstrel. He spoke to the people in their own idiom. Thus he became the interpreter par excellence of the Divine Revelation for the people. The complexity that one comes across in the Jap(u) ji is very little of its language, it pertains principally to its content that is replete with ineffable mysteries.

Among the ineffable mysteries that it undertakes to allude to are God, His nature and essential attributes, the Word and its inherent creativity, Creation and the nature of the universe, human personality in its sublime state, the nature of ethical values and their polarity, spiritual practices and their mystic import, and the spiritscapes through which the soul of a devout practitioner progresses.

The five spiritscapes, or *Khands* as the Guru designates them, are the paramount mysteries whose ineffability the Guru time and again underlines, and whose barest outlines he could make available to us. These cannot be intellectually understood, because they have been scantily described, and they could not have been fully described because they are experiences beyond the gamut and prowess of our language. What makes the situation worse is that there are no cross-references pertaining to them available in any other place in the entire scripture. The seeker is just made aware of them and of their barest outlines. The rest he has to discover himself through practice - about which there are ample instructions, but their success only a Guru or his word can ensure.

The concluding *shloka* of this work, which is considered its epilogue, seeks to underline three basics one must ever be aware of. First, that man is placed in the lap of nature—the air being his guru, the earth being his mother, water being his father, and day and night being his two nurses that nurture him. Second, that in the cozy lap of nature, man not only lives but also acts. However, his actions are subject to divine judgment. Only through meritorious actions may he attain proximity of God. Finally, but most importantly, it need be realized that they alone pass beyond the travails of life and attain the vision of God, who ever remember the Lord,



practice His presence, and dwell upon His *Naam* (*Naam*, although literally translated as 'name' to imply the Name of God, has a much wider import in Sikh theology. It represents God's creativity and Power as well).

Finally, a word about when this celebrated work was composed. Nothing definite can be said because of lack of unanimity among the various sources of information. Two of the Guru's biographies—the *Puratan Janamsakhi* (ed. H. T. Colebrooke) and the *Janamsakhi of Hafizabad* (ed. M. A. Macauliffe)—place the inception of this work during the Guru's crucial communion with God in Sultanpur. While Sodhi Meharban refers this event to the year 1705 AD, other historians—Seva Ram Singh, Hari Ram Gupta etc—consider that it took place sometime between 1496 and 1499.

Another source, namely, *Pothi Hari ji*, however, considers that Jap(u)ji was not composed all in one go, but in parts on different occasions. *Pauris* 28-38 are said to have been composed during the Guru's visit, in 1539 AD, to Achal Batala where he held a dialogue with the Yogis. Some parts, including *pauri* 22 came to be composed during the Guru's dialogue with Parbrahman. It was even later that the whole text – 38 *pauris* and two *slokas*—came to be completed.

Thus, there is no consensus about the date of Jap(u)ji Sahib. However, do such works really require to be dated? They are eternal. One thing is sure, however, that during the final sojourn of the Guru in Kartarpur, it had become customary for the congregations of his Sikhs to recite Jap(u)ji every morning.

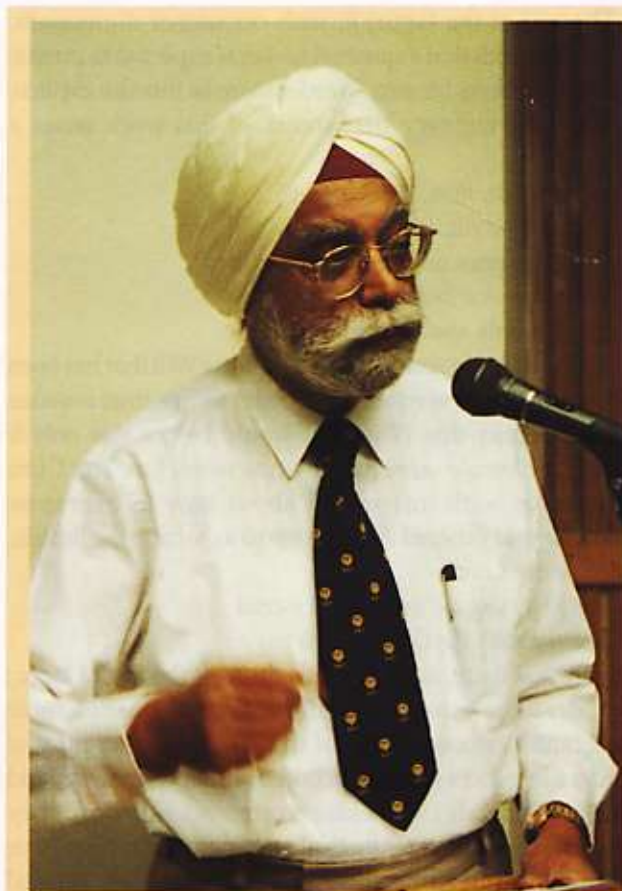
Bhai Gurdas bears testimony to this in his *Vars*:

*Sodar and Arti were chanted (during the evening),
In the ambrosial hours of the morning, Jap(u) was recited*

Var 1: 38

This practice continues with the devout Sikhs.

Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki



In another significant initiative taken by *The Nagaara Trust* towards dissemination of values and traditions of the Sikh way of life was to arrange an expose of the Jap(u)ji Sahib which is the first composition enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and embodies the fundamentals of the Sikh faith. The lectures were delivered by the eminent Sikh scholar, **Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki** at the prestigious

India International Centre, New Delhi during March 2001. In consonance with the Sikh message of Universal Brotherhood, the five-lecture series was presided over by the eminent personalities representing various faiths, including Rev Valson Thampu, Professor of English at St. Stephens College, University of Delhi and Vice Chairman Minorities Commission, Government of Delhi; Maulana Wahid-ud-din Khan the renowned Muslim scholar and President of the Islamic Centre, Delhi; Sardar Bhagwant Singh Dilawari missionary and head of the leprosy home Tapovan at Amravati, Madhya Pradesh, who gave up a promising career in the Indian Foreign Service to 'serve the needy' in consonance with the Sikh values; and the Honorable Ranjit Singh Narula, retired Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the shining light of the Sikh Community for a long time.

The lecture series were received with great enthusiasm and the cassette-set of the lectures is under issue. Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki has also prepared a treatise on the many facets dealt with in the Jap(u)ji Sahib. This is the first of a series of articles on this subject, which we hope to publish with the conviction that this will be of great interest to readers, and will provide clarifications for the uninitiated.



AMERICA'S TAKING THE BRUNT— AND ACTION

SIKHS



Despite calls for tolerance and restraint by the U.S. authorities, at least 200 attacks on Sikhs and 540 on Arab-Americans were experienced in the USA in the week following the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, international human rights watchdog Amnesty International has reported. "Mosques, Hindu temples and community centres have been attacked and vandalised".

In a number of countries, including Mexico, Brazil and Paraguay, Muslims and people of Middle Eastern origin were detained on suspicion of links with "terrorist" organisations, amid fears that they may be victims of arbitrary detention and ill-treatment. Men and women of all ages have suffered abuse and even serious attacks because of their real or perceived religious or national identity. Amnesty International have documented evidence of a backlash against Muslims and people of Middle Eastern or Asian origin or appearance in at least ten countries.

Tragically, however, it was a Sikh, Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was murdered in Mesa, suburban Phoenix in the USA and many others had to face racial slurs following the terrorists strikes. The report highlighted the first worrying indications that the "fight against terrorism" may opportunistically be used to clamp down on civil liberties and human rights. Amnesty International said the horror of the terrorist attacks should not result in other communities around the world being victimised in the name of fighting terrorism.

In Europe and elsewhere, Governments are rushing laws that threaten to curb civil liberties and possibly reduce safeguards against abuses of human rights.

Balbir Singh Sodhi



Resolution on American Sikhs

A number of US Senators have submitted resolutions calling for protection of the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans, including American Sikhs.

Senator Richard Durbin (Democrat of Illinois) introduced the Senate Con-current Resolution in the Senate, which referred it to the Senate, which referred it to the Senate Judiciary Committee on 3 October.

The resolution condemns "bigotry and any acts of violence or discrimination against Americans, including American Sikhs. It calls upon local and federal law enforcement agencies to work to prevent hate crimes against all Americans and prosecute to the fullest extent of the law all those who commit hate crimes.

The resolution, the sponsors noted, stems from a series of attacks on Sikhs following the September 11 terrorist strikes.

The attackers took the simplistic and ill informed view that all those who wear turbans and have a beard must be supporters of Osama bin Laden, who has a similar external appearance.

President Bush reassures the Sikhs



On 20 September 2001, Dr. Rajwant Singh, President of the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, met with President George Bush for 45 minutes. He, along with two dozen clerics ranging from Roman Catholic cardinals in black-and-white collars and a saffron-robed Tibetan Buddhist, were invited to meet the President because the President was seeking their advice on the current situation.

President Bush welcomed Dr. Singh as his "Sikh brother" and said that "his heart goes out to the Sikh community" because of the recent series of attacks on them.

Dr. Rajwant Singh informed the President that the number of attacks exceeded 200. While talking to the President Dr. Singh said, "we have been made targets because of our outer appearance, but still we pray for you, your family, the cabinet and the Nation. We feel that during these testing moments we need to come together instead of being divided."

Bush and his aides became particularly emotional when Dr. Rajwant Singh recited the story of Kulwant Singh. After his 3 year old child was hit with a fire bomb thrown into his house, Kulwant Singh made a statement: "I'll always enjoy my American freedom but I'll do it with a turban on my head."

Dr. Singh said that "this represents the feeling of all the Sikhs and they would even offer their lives to defend this freedom". He urged the President and his aides to help get the word out that Sikhs are from the Punjab and they wear turbans and keep their beards because of their religion, not because of any Arab culture.

The President assured Dr. Singh that he was very serious about protecting the lives of the Sikhs in the U.S.A.

Dr. Singh also expressed that Bush highlight the point that America will seek justice, not revenge (as he had implied in some earlier statements).

At the conclusion, personal secretary of President George Bush singled Dr. Rajwant Singh out of the group and thanked him for coming. He was chosen to make a statement to the press with 5 other religious leaders outside the oval office in the Roosevelt room. He said: "This is what's needed in America today. Even though my community has been attacked because of turbans and beards - people feel we are somehow related or associated with Osama bin Laden, the sense of assurance we have gotten from President Bush is just amazing."

Dr. Rajwant Singh has stated that "this meeting was the result of ten years of work with other religious communities and we must continue to work with them to spread the word of Sikhism and erase ignorance."

President Bush in a message on November 30, 2001 has sent warm greeting to Sikh across America on the 532nd birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. "I am pleased to send warm greetings to the Sikh community across the United States as you celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak."

"America's religious diversity has always been a strength of our country. Across our Nation, members of the Sikh community are proud of their cultural heritage, their ancestry, and their religious beliefs. American Sikhs serve in every walk of life, including our Armed Forces."

"I commend all of you for the dedicated role you play in your community and for sharing the traditions of your faith with your neighbours."

"Laura joins me in sending best wishes on this special occasion."



Though the hate campaign against Asians, particularly Sikhs, in the USA started diminishing after some two-three weeks, Asians still avoid visiting public places, as observed by Dr Livtar Singh Chawla, founder Vice Chancellor of the Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, during his one month stay in the USA.

Dr Chawla said immediately after the terrorist attacks



Worries of 'McCarthyism' in America

Despite all the "assurances" by the U.S. President and resolutions passed by the U.S. Senator to protect the Sikhs and other Asian communities from wanton assault and attacks on them by vicious fellow American (mostly white), the attacks continue. In the suburbs around the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, for instance, two Sikhs were attacked by assailants who shouted at Karnail Singh, "You still here? Go to Allah!", and knocked at him with a metal cane.

This return to "McCarthyism" is the biggest threat to America, not the "terrorists" in Afghanistan who are being blasted by U.S. bombs, which have tragically also killed many innocents.

"McCarthyism" is a defilement of the American value system and has reappeared wolf-like in the USA after 11 September. As written by an Indian professor of law at the University of California and raising the question that Americans should be asking themselves, is "The key question, both legally and morally, is whether the same race-biased measures being considered to enhance security would be on the table if the terrorists attacks had been linked, not to brown-skinned Arabs, but to some racially identifiable and numerically manageable white group?"

If the hijackers had been young neo-Nazis based in Sweden, would we be treating tall, blue-eyed extremely light skinned and fair haired young people with public and private suspicion? Would we be listening for their foreign accents? Peeping over their shoulder to see what they were reading?"

Obviously not. Just as there was no roundup of Irish-Catholics since Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma city bomber, was one".

on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, US TV channels had been showing the picture of Osama bin Laden a number of times each day. It was difficult to make distinction between a Sikh, the Taliban and Arabs who also tie turbans and sport beards because of which Sikh residents became the immediate targets of hate and assault in the USA and for the first one week, they faced lot of hostility from the locals. Dr. Chawla said even ladies had to face the angry looks and taunts of locals.

He said the situation started changing after a meeting of a delegation of US Sikhs with President George Bush. The Sikhs organised a condolence meeting in New York to mourn the deaths of those killed in the terrorist attacks, which was given wide coverage on TV channels.

The US Sikh community also gave a full page advertisement in the *Washington Post* explaining the differences between the Sikhs and the followers of Osama bin Laden. All these factors had led to diminishing of the hate campaign against the Sikhs.

Dr Chawla felt that the terrorist attack had made the American realise the ill effects of terrorism. The US TV channels also showed terrorist camps in Pakistan where training was being given to the terrorists to spread terror in Jammu and Kashmir.

Security at the airports in America had been tightened and now international flight passengers had to report three hours before departure of the flight and two hours before for internal flights. Fear and panic still persisted among the Americans although the situation was slowly returning to normal.



Colonel M. S. Sekhon, of Yuba City, California, currently serves with the U.S. Army "helping protect liberty, justice and equality for all."

U.S. Ambassador visits Bangla Sahib

The US Ambassador to India Robert D. Blackwill came to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib to express solidarity with the Sikhs, some of whom had to face ethnic violence in parts of the USA after the September 11 terrorist strike. He said the US President had made it clear that his government would not tolerate violence against any ethnic group, including the Sikhs. These were federal crimes and the culprits would be prosecuted according to law, the Ambassador said. Recalling his meeting with a World War II veteran on the gurdwara premises, Mr. Blackwill said it was a striking evidence of the Sikhs having always fought for right causes.

To reflect the US commitment to strictly deal with those indulging in violence, Mr. Blackwill read a statement by Mr. Richard M. Romley, Attorney of Maricopa County where Mr. Balbir Singh Sodhi, an American Sikh, was murdered.

"On Tuesday, September 11, America was attacked. On Saturday, September 15, America was again attacked, not by foreign terrorists but by an American citizen. The attack resulting in the brutal murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi was an attack upon America's most fundamental freedoms... Mr. Sodhi was killed for no other reason than because he was dark skinned, bearded and wore a turban. He was killed because of hate. We Americans must stand together as one in our resolve to hold accountable those who commit crimes that shame our nation. Frank Silva Roque will bear the brunt of lawfully," Blackwill quoted Romley as having said.

Earlier, the US Ambassador paid his obeisance at the gurdwara and was presented "siropas". He also held a meeting with prominent Sikh leaders.

Referring to the apprehensions in the minds of Sikhs about the reports of ethnic violence in some Western countries, S. Tarlochan Singh, Vice-Chairman of the Minorities Commission, said the US Government should use television and other media to educate its citizens about Sikhs sporting beards and turbans because of their faith. He said that Sikhs, whose population in the USA has grown to half a million in the past decades, had always stood by that country.

Thanking the US Ambassador, Union Minister of Food and Chemicals S. Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa said Sikhs were united in their fight against terrorism. Members of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee gave a memorandum addressed to the US President calling for steps for the protection of Sikhs.



Top: U.S. Ambassador Robert D. Blackwill, who was honoured with a siropa at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib on 20 September, is flanked by S. Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, Cabinet Minister and S. Avtar Singh Hit of the DSGPC.

Bottom: Ambassador Blackwill at the press conference outside the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara Complex, with S. Tarlochan Singh, Vice Chairman Minorities Commission making a statement.

Statement by The Core Group, New Delhi

The most unfortunate backlash against visible minorities in the United States has made the Sikhs living there particularly vulnerable because of the distinctive appearance of the community and the mistaken belief that, somehow, they are part of the "new enemy" exemplified by Osama bin Laden's physical appearance.

The majority of Americans are, regrettably, ignorant of other cultures and countries at the best of times, and their "shooting from the hip" attitude continues to dominate their psyche. However, this is a twin-edged weapon and can be turned to advantage.

- * What are the immediate steps to be taken?
- * What should be the longer term strategy?
- * What "genuine help" can be expected from the Indian Government?

We believe that it is the Sikh community in North America that must assume full responsibility to bolster itself both immediately, and in the long term, with every possible moral and material support from the community of India.

Obviously those at the center of the scene in the USA are best qualified to carry out these counter actions but a few suggestions include:

- Maximise media (both print and electronic) publicity emphasising that the Sikhs are a distinctly independent and separate race from the Arab/Afghan ones and have willed to share the same American destiny as the many other communities have.
- As citizens of America for over a century, Sikhs have been entirely integrated, and contribute to the American way of life as scientists, senators, progressive farmers, entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers and so on. This must be highlighted in a series of leaflets, booklets, community talks etc. by the Sikhs throughout the USA.
- References to be made to the historic aspects as well: the American War of Independence was being fought about the same time as the Anglo Sikh Wars in the mid-19th century and some American Generals were part of the Sikh Army in 1846 and 1849. The only time in history that the Afghans were subdued and kept in control was during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign when, in fact, part of the Afghan state was permanently taken over i.e. the North West Frontier including Peshawar and the city of Multan, both now important centers of Pakistan after the partition of 1947.
- The thousands of American (white) Sikhs in the United States must become the visible link with the two communities; this is their "moment of truth" and they should be energised to take the lead.

It is our sincere belief that this present crisis should be converted into an opportunity for the future.

The Sikh Communication Council (Sikh Com) has been recently started at San Francisco, with S. Jagot Singh as convener, and a number of Sikh business executives as active members. They have been pro-active in portraying a positive image of the Sikhs in America, being interviewed on CNN and inspiring articles and advertisements in the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, Newsweek and so on. Most of the visuals in this issue are from Sikh Com.

FELLOW AMERICANS!

We are the Sikhs, a distinct religion and community from India.

At this time of trial and tribulation, we stand alongside our fellow Americans in the fight against terrorism, in any form and location, for all times. In our daily prayers we invoke goodwill for all Humanity and the well being of Mankind.

Perhaps owing to mistaken identity, some Sikhs have been unfortunately targeted as belonging to the groups responsible for the horrendous tragedy in New York and Washington on September 11. We appeal to our fellow Americans to clearly differentiate between the Sikhs from India and the people who have committed these atrocities.



Issued in the Public Interest by:
THE CORE GROUP

The Sikhs of Afghanistan



Land locked, in the strategic crossroads of history and geography, bordered on the north by the former Soviet Union (now Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan since 1991) and separated from them by the Amu Darya (ancient Oxus River), to the south-east by the Indian sub-continent (Pakistan since 1947) and on the west by Persia (Iran) the Afghanistan of today has a population of some 20 million, a fifth of whom (some 4 million) are "permanent" refugees living in Pakistan and Iran especially after the 1979 military invasion by the Soviets. The Soviets left in 1991 after a decade of humiliating experiences and grievous losses. The civil war that erupted in its wake brought the extreme Islamic fundamentalists ("Taliban") into power, their genesis and support owed to Pakistan. For over five years, the Taliban have controlled most of Afghanistan except for the small north-eastern part under the embattled Northern Alliance which held on tenaciously for years. Kabul, the capital, has a population of just under a million and about half the Afghan people are of Pashtun ancestry, followed by Tadjik, Uzbek and Hazara, mostly farmers and nomads

Most of the Afghans are muslim but there have been visible minorities, particularly the Sikhs who have lived in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni and Jalalabad for near five centuries, since the visit of Baba Nanak to the country in 1520 AD.



Fiercely independent, the peoples of Afghanistan have fought to remain that way since recorded history began, having been part of the Persian Achaemenian empire of Cyrus the Great with a brief occupation by Alexander of Macedonia. Some Hindu influence came by way of the Persian Sasanians but by 870 AD Islam had become firmly entrenched. The Mongols under Genghis Khan invaded Afghanistan in 1219 and in the early 1700s, the Persian Nader Shah took control, followed by Ahmed Khan Abdali. The west to east invasions (into India) were finally stopped, and reversed, by the Sikhs who under Maharaja Ranjit Singh went through the Khyber to occupy Kabul and then fortify the frontier.

The Imperialist designs of Great Britain and Russia gave coin to the famous "Great Game" and there were three wars with Britain, in 1839-42, 1878-80 and 1919, after which the "modern era" was ushered in by King Amanullah Khan. He, too, had two eminent Sikhs in the *Loya Jirga* who played a vital part in retaining the traditional values of the community even as the Afghan elders were being forced to wear modernised dress with caps.

It is wonderful how Sikhism has developed and remained in its pristine form in this fiercely independent and highly Islamic country. The genesis goes back nearly five hundred years back to when Guru Nanak, in his fourth *udasi* (journey) came from Bukhara to Afghanistan in 1520 AD. It was at Kabul that he met with Emperor Babar. The bigoted Emperor had had various religious leaders arrested who were forced to work with grindstones in jail. Guru Nanak went to meet them but

the jailors put him into the same situation. Miraculously, the grindstones suddenly started to work by themselves. When this electrifying news reached Emperor Babar, he rushed to seek blessing's from the Guru who asked him to release all the religious leaders, which was immediately done.

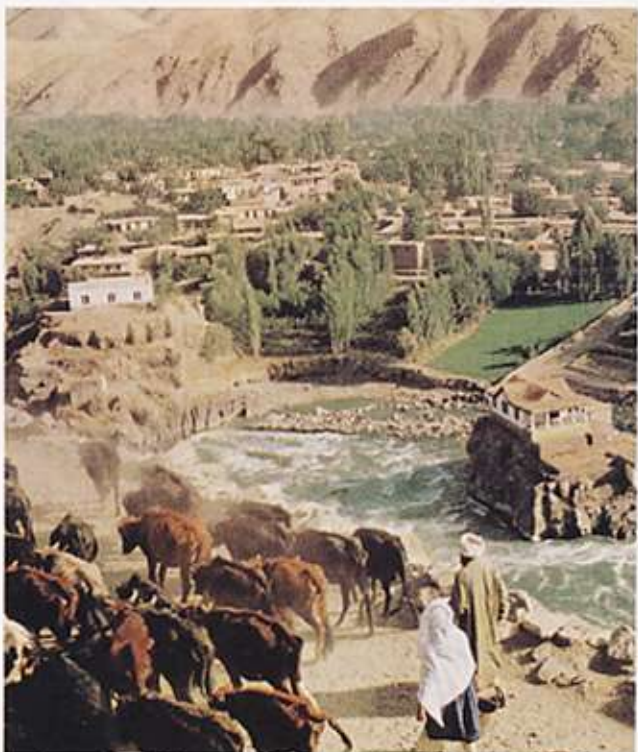
On another occasion, Baba Nanak, along with Bala and Mardana, wanted to enter a mosque in Kabul but the Mullah forbade them. As they stood outside, the mosque itself began to move, and like a horse, galloped around the city! The Qazi



One of the great poets in the court of Guru Gobind Singh was Bhai Nand Lal "Goya" of Ghazni. A great scholar of Persian, he became a devout Sikh and was a superb exponent of Sikhism in Afghanistan. Alongwith the Gurbani of the Guru Sahib, "Goya's" compositions, alongwith those of Bhai Gurdas ji, are the only such included and sung as *keertan*.



View of Kabul, before the Soviet invasion.



An Afghan village scene, before the civil war.

The Pashtoons (Pathans) speak Pushtu, the Tajiks speak Persian, strong and warlike tribes, tenacious in their independence, but honest and forthwith, ready to die for their beliefs and honour. In this environ, their acceptance of and co-existence with Sikhism, its growth and sustenance for nearly 5 centuries is great testimony to the remarkable tenacity of this faith.

During the second half of the 20th Century, the population of Sikhs in Afghanistan was 50,000, a small percentage of the 20-million who inhabit the country, however remaining in their pristine form, gainfully employed, trading in dry fruits, speaking Pushtu, Persian and Punjabi, proud of being Afghan Sikhs. Wherever they are settled, there has been either a historical dewan or Gurdwara established, some 70 throughout the land, mainly in Kabul, but also in Kandahar, Ghazni, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif.



The distinctive turban-tying styles of the Kabul Sikh is seen in this picture by Pamela Contable.

Those in Kabul include *Gurdwara Har Rai*, located in Shor Bazaar, the oldest and in the main business centre. Over 150 years ago, this was the house of a devotee, Bhai Gonda who was also bestowed a *manji*.

Gurdwara Khalsaji in the old quarter of Kabul was built to commemorate the place where Bhai Gurdas had pitched his tents when he visited Kabul for buying horses during the time of Guru Har Gobind.

Gurdwara Karte Parwan is at the local mohalla, in the suburbs of Kabul which also has a high school building attached with it.

Gurdwara Baba Siri Chand stands as the memorial to Guru Nanak's eldest son who visited Kabul and reciting the Gurbani, cured the Afghan King's son who was previously ill.

Two miles from Ghazni is *Gurdwara Kotha Sabib*, sacred to the memory of Guru Gobind Singh's devotee Satwant Kaur, while there are another two historic Gurdwaras built in the memory of Bhai Nand Lal Goya at Ghazni.

At Aksra, on the road from Kabul to Tashkent is *Gurdwara Kotha Sabib*.

In southern Afghanistan, there are historical Gurdwaras at Chaman, and Lohgarh while there is an especially sacred one at *Mazar-e-Sharif* in the north.

Even during the severe Taliban rule when radical Sunni Muslims had decreed that non-muslims wear yellow to distinguish themselves, when they demolished the historic Buddha statues in the central province of Bamian claiming these were un-Islamic and idolatrous, relationships with the Sikh minority remained relatively smooth. The Taliban considered the Sikhs, too, as "people of the book", revering their sacred text and following strict moral codes. Stated Inder Singh Majbol, a Sikh pharmacist in Kabul and head of a local Gurdwara "We too are Afghans the Taliban don't bother us and we continue to worship according to our religious beliefs".

implored Guruji to forgive him and begged for his dispensation.

Guru Nanak had earlier spent time in Arabia, visiting Mecca and Medina and had acquired deep insight into Islamic philosophy. In Afghanistan, he neither propagated Hindu nor Buddhist religious doctrines but rejoiced in the unique philosophy of universal brotherhood in the environs of Afghanistan.

Baba Nanak counselled the Muslims to follow him on his right side and the Hindus on his left, symbolising himself as *Aughah* and made them recite *Satnam*, the true name of the God of Mankind. Guru Nanak's followers in Afghanistan have since upheld his message, the concept of one God and have always led virtuous lives.

Guru Nanak travelled extensively throughout Afghanistan, from Mazar-e-Sharif in the north ("Tomb of the Saint", as it is believed that this is where Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet was buried, and is marked by the resplendent turquoise-domed mosque). Guru Nanak stayed here for 40 days during the Navroze mela, and sermoned in Pashtu. He went to Kandahar in the south, then Jalalabad in the east, to Khost, extolling the glory of God.

Ninety-eight kilometres from Kabul and sixteen from Jalalabad is Sultanpur, which had perennially suffered from severe shortage of water, the sole supply being controlled by one Abdul Ghaus. Guru Nanak struck at the ground twice with a stick and lo ! immediately gushed water from an underground spring, and this continues till today. A bridge over the canal at Sultanpur is called after Baba Nanak, and at the *Gurdwara Chashma Sahib* at Sultanpur, Afghan Sikhs have gathered in large numbers on every Baisakhi for solemnising marriages and for other occasions.

Guru Nanak went further to Kandahar where he met Sufi Yaar Vali Khan and thence proceeded to Khost Chamkauri. Guru Nanak left behind many devotees wherever he went and these men and women were some of the first initiates into Sikhism — in Afghanistan or anywhere in the world.



When Guru Amar Das established twenty-two Manjis, those of Kabul and Peshawar were given to Alayyaar, a Muslim who was a horse trader by profession. Another devout Sikh, Bhai Paro propagated the teachings of the Guru in Kabul and Peshawar, and these Manji Sikhs regularly sent *daswandh* (1/10th of their earnings) to the Guru as offerings. There are instances where one finds strong bonds between Afghan Sikhs and Guru Arjan Dev. When the Afghan Sikhs came to meet the Guru, they encamped at a little distance from Guru's camp, as they were late and felt awkward. When the Guru learnt of this, he along with Mata Ganga rushed to their camp carrying *langar* for them. The Gurdwara, Pipli Sahib, was built here to commemorate the occasion.



Kirtan in Gurdwara Khalsaji, in the old quarters of Kabul.

The Sikhs of Kabul actively donated for and participated in *kar-seva* of the Harimandir Sahib at Amritsar. During the time of Guru Har Gobind Sahib, the sixth Guru, Bhai Gurdas was sent to Kabul to buy the finest horses. Of these, "Dilbagh" and "Gulbagh", which were snatched by the Nawab of Lahore and were later freed by Bidhi Chand of the Royal stables, had been donated by Bhai Gurbaksh and Tara Chand of Kabul. Guru Har Gobind also sent Bhai Alamat to Kabul to spread the message of Sikhism.



Afghan Sikhs, mostly in Army service, at a Baisakhi Mela at Jalalabad in the 1950s. The two senior officers are Dr. Bhagat Singh and Dr. Saran Singh.

Baba Ghonda Singh was sent by Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru to Kabul who presented him a 'Manji', which was eventually brought to India and is now preserved at the Gurdwara in Greater Kailash II in New Delhi.

The Kabul Sikhs maintained their linkages with Guru Tegh Bahadur and presented him a tent exactly like the royal tent of Emperor Aurangzeb. Guru Gobind Singh, after establishing the Order of the Khalsa, sent a special *Hukamnama* to the Kabul Sikhs.

The Hukamnama

An authenticated *Hukamnama*, issued by Guru Gobind Singh, to the Sangat of Kabul on Jeth 26th 1756 Bikrami (23 May, 1699 or soon after founding of the Khalsa), enjoins the Sangat to receive Gurbani at *Amrit Vela*, maintain the five 'Ks', abstain from 'Kutha' meat and tobacco in any form and shun those who practice female infanticide or are followers of Ram Rai. Many pilgrims from Afghanistan visited Anandpur Sahib regularly, for *darshan* and to accept the vows of amrit.

During the Gurdwara Reform Movement in the early part of the twentieth century, a large number of Sikh scholars and priests visited Afghanistan to counsel the Sangat. Amongst them were the renowned Akali Kaur Singh and Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha the latter being personally honoured by King Nadir Shah at the Royal Palace. Doing parchar were other well known Sikhs including Baba Gurbaksh Singh Bedi, Baba Sarwan Singh Bedi, Baba Pran Singh Bedi, Baba Prem Singh, Giani Avtar Singh and Master Udham Singh.

ੴ ਸਿਰਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਸਹਾਇ

ਸਰਬੰਤ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਾਬਲ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਖੇ ਗਾ
 ਤੁਸਾਂ ਉਤੇ ਅਸਾਡੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਹੈ
 ਤੁਸਾਂ ਖੰਡੇ ਦਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪੰਜਾ ਤੋਂ ਲੈਣਾ
 ਕੇਸ ਰੱਖਣੇ ਇਹ ਅਸਾਡੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਹੈ
 ਕੱਛ ਕਿਰਪਾਨ ਦਾ ਵਿਸਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਨਾ
 ਸਰਬ ਲੋਹ ਦਾ ਕਤਾ ਹੱਥ ਰੋਖਣਾ
 ਦੋਨੋਂ ਵਕਤ ਕੇਸਾ ਦੀ ਪਾਲਨਾ ਕਰਨੀ
 ਸਰਬੰਤ ਸੰਗਤ ਅਭਾਖਿਆ ਦਾ ਕੁੱਠਾ ਖਾਵੇ ਨਹੀਂ
 ਤਮਾਕੂ ਨਾ ਵਰਤਨਾ
 ਭਾਦਨੀ ਤਬਾ ਕੰਨਿਆ ਮਾਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਜੋ ਮੇਲ ਨਾ ਰੱਖੇ
 ਮੀਟੇ, ਮਸੰਦੀਏ, ਰਾਮ ਰਾਈਏ ਕੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਨ ਖੇਸੇ
 ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਪੜ੍ਹਨੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜਪਨਾ
 ਗੁਰੂ ਕੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਰੱਖਣੀ

ਸਰਬੰਤ ਸੰਗਤ ਚੁੰਪਰ ਮੇਰੀ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਹੈ ।
 ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ ੧੦
 ਜੇਠ ੨੬
 ਸੰਮਤ ੧੭੫੬



The famed mosque at Mazar-e-Sharif.



November 2001: Tanks enter Kabul, passing horse-drawn tonga.



Scenes of fighting over the past two decades. The damaged palace in Kabul.

After Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs slowly but steadily built their base in the heart of the Punjab. They were attacked, plundered and killed but their faith was never shaken, rather it became stronger with adversary. Twelve *misl*s were formed which began administering the Punjab. The dynamics created by these *misl*s resulted in the emergence of Ranjit Singh. Born on 13 November 1780, the young lad of 19 took over the Lahore Fort on 7 July 1799, thus beginning an era of prosperity and great strength for the Sikhs.

The Kingdom of Punjab was equal to France in size but with the British and Afghans as its neighbours, demanded strong leadership and astute diplomacy. So as to regulate and consolidate his empire, Ranjit Singh had correct relationships with the British from 1809 onwards but with the Afghans, the policies varied as and when the Afghan rulers changed. By 1838, Ranjit Singh had annexed Kashmir, Multan and Peshawar, earlier Afghan territories. Ranjit Singh realised that the true barrier between the west and his kingdom could only be the *Sufed Koh*, the Suleiman mountains. It was thus imperative to extend his boundaries till these ranges. But Ranjit Singh never planned any occupation of Afghanistan. The British offered a tripartite treaty, signed on 26 June 1838 with the Sikhs and Shah Shuja of Afghanistan's Sadozai tribe. Under this Treaty the British and the Lahore Durbar were to help Shah Shuja gain the throne of Kabul. In return the treaty confirmed in perpetuity to the Lahore kingdom, the former Afghan possessions of Kashmir, Attock, Hazara, Peshawar, Bannu, Kala Bagh, the Derajat, the province of Multan and others. Shah Shuja also disclaimed the title of himself and his heirs (and all the Sadozais) on the territories lying on either bank of river Indus occupied by the Maharaja. During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule there was considerable trade between Afghanistan and the Lahore Durbar, the Sikhs of Kabul becoming a prosperous community doing successful business in Afghanistan.

After Ranjit Singh, the tentacles of British imperialism extended their reach well into Afghanistan, and several wars were fought. The Sikhs had long settled in the region of North West Frontier Province when the partition took place in 1947. The King of Afghanistan assured the Sikhs at that time that their lives would be safe in that country and so many Sikhs from the North West Frontier Province and other parts of the newly created Pakistan migrated to Afghanistan where they continued to live and play a positive part in that nation's life till the traumatic last decades of the 20th century.

Since 1980, a large number of Afghan Sikhs have moved to India as an unhappy consequence of the wars and strife. There are 11,684 Afghans registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in New Delhi but some 30,000 names have remained unrecorded. Lives of the Afghan Sikhs have changed; their journeys from palatial homes to small single room flats or even worse is a story of much anguish. To make things still worse, even the UNHCR has recently stopped their subsistence allowance.

Yes, at the moment the Afghan Sikhs are in some crisis, but as the word *crisis* comes from a Greek medical analogy of a 'turning point', they are confident that this moment of crisis will soon become a moment of opportunity for the Afghan Sikhs and, with the support of their brethren the world over, they will soon return to their hearths and live as gracefully as before.



Out of Afghanistan

a small Sikh population. "Our people have been getting a raw deal in Afghanistan for a very long time now", says Manohar Singh, president of Khalsa Diwan's Afghan Hindu-Sikh Refugee Association that operates out of a busy building in Old Mahavir Nagar.

He talks about the many waves of migration of Sikhs from Afghanistan that preceded September 11: "Our people had moved from areas in the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan after Partition, but in 1978 when the Communists took over Kabul, several Sikhs left Afghanistan; then 1992 saw another wave of refugee migration following the killing of Najib; after the Taliban took over, many more Afghan Sikh families began to leave". The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon then triggered off another wave of migration among what remains of the Sikh community in Afghanistan.

According to a report on ethnic cleansing in Afghanistan, published by a coalition of human rights organisations under the International Campaign to End Genocide earlier this year in Washington D.C., Afghanistan had a population of over 50,000 Sikhs before 1992. Over the years the number dropped to a few thousands (the Khalsa Diwan had put this figure at around 20,000). Under the oppressive Taliban regime, this number further declined. "Today there are just about 1,500 Sikhs left in Afghanistan", says Manohar Singh.

An Afghani Sikh woman, Rita, who managed to leave Afghanistan a few months ago along with her family, is now in Amritsar. She says she is happy to have reached the "land of her Gurus".

Given the persecution they faced under the Taliban regime, Sikhs in Afghanistan had begun the process of moving out for quite a while now. "The families have been applying for visas to Pakistan, and then in Pakistan there is a long waiting period again before the Indian home ministry clears their entry to India", explains Manohar Singh.

Taranjeet Kaur doesn't know how old she is, but her mother thinks she must be around ten years old. She was born, says Jaan Kaur, her mother, soon after the Soviet-backed Najibullah Government in Afghanistan was overthrown in 1992. "Those were days of great trouble", recalls Jaan Kaur in her hesitant, broken Hindustani. In the violence that followed, the family's comfortable house in Hilmand, in eastern Afghanistan, became the target of an attack. The casualty of that attack was her 13-year-old elder daughter Paranjeet. Almost a decade later, the only memory of that daughter is a discoloured photograph stuck on the cracked, yellow wall of her present home in Delhi's Old Mahavir Nagar. Today, Jaan Kaur has more pressing worries—like the safety of her husband who, if he is still alive, should be somewhere in Kandahar.

The labyrinthine bylanes of Old Mahavir Nagar are crowded with incomplete families like Jaan Kaur's. Most of the cubby-hole dwellings here are populated by Afghan Sikh women and children, who had been sent out of Afghanistan earlier with promises that the men would follow suit quickly, after winding up business in Kandahar and other Afghan towns which still have



The process of clearance is a long drawn out one. Among other things these Sikh Afghans have to be verified first and only then will the approval come through. "On paper we are assured that the process will not take more than two months. In reality it can take up to two years", he adds. As part of their function as a representative body, the Afghan Hindu-Sikh Refugee Association and the Khalsa Diwan have to liaise between the various authorities. "It is very difficult and we have to keep assuring families here that their husbands and other relatives in Afghanistan will reach India safely. But it is a long journey and no one is quite sure what the outcome will be". And in the process, this small and once prosperous community has been reduced to living a life stripped bare of everything including very basic human dignity.

Gulab Singh had left his wife and two daughters in Delhi over a year ago. He had gone back to wind up business matters in Hilmand and Kandahar. The plan was that he would return to India soon. "We are still waiting for him. Now I don't even know where he is", she says. In Hilmand, Gulab Singh had a grocery shop. Like most others from his community he was a small businessman, and even after the Taliban took over, these small businesses were fairly stable, at least in the towns of Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Khost and Ghazni - areas where small pockets of Sikh families lived.

Nand Kaur is Jaan Kaur's neighbour in Old Mahavir Nagar. Like Jaan Kaur, Nand Kaur speaks very little Hindi. Their primary language is Punjabi. In the absence of any education for girls in Afghanistan, both Jaan Kaur's daughters are completely illiterate and understand no Hindi at all. Even after a year in India the girls have not begun any form of education. According to Jaan Kaur, "It is too late for them ... now it is time to look for their husbands, not send them to school".

Nand Kaur is waiting for news of her son, Talwar Singh. He left Kandahar soon after September 11 and is now holed up in Pakistan waiting for clearance. Nand Kaur is just back from a visit to the UNHCR office in Jorbagh. Not that she will get much help from there, feels Manohar Singh. According to the Khalsa Diwan, Sikh refugees are actually "nowhere" people in India. They are not top priority with the UN body because they are of Indian origin. "So the

Amritsar and Kabul

There are close connections between the cities of Amritsar and Kabul which go back nearly four centuries, encouraged and sanctified by the Sikh Gurus.

During their visits to Afghanistan, those of Guru Arjan Dev being followed by Guru Har Gobind, strong trade and commerce links were established, and encouraged, between Amritsar and Kabul. Guru Har Gobind sent his emissaries to Kabul for the purchase of the finest horses while Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Dumi Chand visited Kabul to receive gifts of horses and arms for the Guru. Over the centuries, Amritsar has become one of the main wholesale markets for Afghan farm produce, which till the late 1980s was flown to Raja Sansi airport by regular *Ariana Afghan Airlines* flights from Kabul. The main produce of Afghanistan includes delicious melons, dry fruit and other fresh fruit which are cultivated in small patches, wherever possible.

In the heart of Amritsar, close to the Golden Temple, is a busy street, the bazaar *Mai Sevan*, the name bestowed by Guru Arjan Dev in recognition of the volunteer *Jatha* which came from Afghanistan to participate in construction of the *Durbar Sahib*. Amongst them was the noble lady, Mai Sevan who was later appointed as the head of the *Manj* (district) of Kabul, one of the 22 *manjis* (districts) nominated for administering the Sikh faith. The area in Amritsar where the pilgrims from Kabul camped is now commemorated by the *Gurdwara Pipli Sahib*.

thinking there is that since they have reached India they can now fend for themselves", he explains. But actually these people are wretchedly poor, more so because the bread winning male members are often still in Afghanistan and the women have no education or skills to speak of. The Khalsa Diwan runs a small school where classes include vocational training in sewing and a few crafts. The school also provides some elementary literacy training and a basic computer course. "But it is a drop in the ocean".

Only a handful of Sikh families have been able to come into India after the US attacks and even these include only those people who had already been issued Pakistani visas before the attacks began. "Though my son had been issued a visa, he was still reluctant to leave Kandahar because we have a lot of land there and leaving all that behind to come to India and live like this was not an appealing idea", explains Nand Kaur. But then the WTC strikes happened and a numbing fear psychosis rippled through Afghanistan. "My son knew then that he just had to get out of there, and very quickly". A number of people like Talwar Singh are now stranded in Pakistan.

The apex Sikh body for religious affairs, the Amritsar-based Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) is working with the National Minorities Commission to bring these Sikhs



The Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha at New Delhi's Greater Kailash II.



The historic manji at the Gurdwara at Greater Kailash II.

safely out of Pakistan. According to SGPC secretary, G.S.Bachan, as many as 230 Sikhs have moved to Pakistan, after September 11 and are waiting for visas to enter India: "There are families in Peshawar, Panja Sahib Gurdwara [in Hasan Abdal some 45 km from Rawalpindi] and Lahore. I have specific information from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad that over 45 of them have been granted travel papers to enter India and are expected to cross over from Wagah either by the Samjhauta Express or on foot".



Nanak Singh, President of the Afghan Sikh Welfare Society and General Secretary, Khalsa Sewadar Jatha, Sri Chashma Sahib.

Talwar Singh, like other fleeing Sikhs, left Kandahar by road. Nand Kaur doesn't know the details of his journey but she knows that he reached the Chaman border post in Pakistan about a week later. "He is now in the Panja Sahib Gurdwara and will have to remain in Pakistan for sometime more", she adds vaguely. All she knows is that he will probably have to remain in Pakistan for a long time. Nand Kaur also has a daughter. The girl is married to a land-owning family in Kandahar. "I don't

know how she is, if she is still alive or if her husband is. There has been no news. But then she is a girl, so this is her fate".

And until Talwar Singh, Gulab Singh, and others like them arrive, the incomplete families of old Mahavir Nagar will wait out their lives silently in their new cubby-hole homes. There is little else then can do.

(With contributions from Rupali Ghosh and Gajinder Singh)



True grit: Afghan Sikhs reshaping their lives



Afghan Sikhs at ardas: Gurdwara Sri Guru Arjan Devji, better known as the 'Kabuli Gurdwara' at Mahavir Nagar of West Delhi.

In the old Mahavir Nagar and Tilak Nagar of West Delhi live thousands of Afghan Sikhs, the first wave of whom came to India through Pakistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 but till the late 1980s the number of refugees remained just a few hundreds. It was only after 1992 that the massive exodus began even as the Najibullah regime were embattled with various Islamic groups. Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus were all caught in the crossfire and first the women and children were evacuated, the men remaining behind till the last.

Of the Afghans who have come to India and are living mostly in the west Delhi area, 5405 are Sikhs followed by 3200 Hindus, 1950 Tajiks, 863 Pashtuns, 113 Hazaras and a few others. Just 160 Afghan Sikhs live in other Punjab cities including Amritsar, Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Panchkula.

Typically, Amreek Singh, like many other Pushtun-speaking Sikhs was a wealthy businessman in Peshawar prior to 1947.

He had a fledgling family business that involved trading links on the other side of the border in Afghanistan "which was quite close and we had several relatives there who were eager to give us shelter after August 1947. So instead of coming to India, we found ourselves in Afghanistan", echoed Sardar Manohar Singh, member of another such family.

Many Hindu and Sikh families from Quetta and Peshawar settled down at Kandahar; Ghazni, Jallalabad and Kabul. "We had to start our business from scratch", says Ram Singh. It took 20 years of hard work before they could reach close to their earlier living standards. "By the early 1970s, we had managed to recreate some of our earlier prosperity", he says.

But more trouble awaited them. In 1979 another catastrophe struck - the Russian backed Najibullah Government came into power, and their first targets were the affluent Sikh and Hindu families. "We were forced to sell off our property at throwaway prices and became refugees once again. Some moved to Delhi and once again started a small business with whatever money they had", says Manohar Singh. It took another 20 years to reach the earlier standards of life.

Others like Amreek Singh still decided to stay back in Afghanistan. They were perhaps not as well off as Manohar Singh but were living a comfortable life. Then came the devastating years when the Russians were forced to retreat from Afghanistan. In the chaos that followed, the Sikhs and Hindus lost trade. Amreek Singh, had to sell his shop and his days of poverty were back again. He took laborious jobs to feed his 15-member family. "There were days when we fed ourselves at gurdwara langars", he recalls.

Ethnic strife was at its peak during 1992-1995 and the innocent Hindus and Sikhs were targeted. "Many families like ours left without selling their belongings. Various armed factions occupied our houses and took possession of our properties. We crossed over to Peshawar and finally reached Delhi", says Amreek. It is estimated that some 10,000 Afghan Sikhs left during that period.

After landing in Delhi, Amreek Singh realised that as none of his children were educated, there were no jobs for them. "We never realised the importance of education in Afghanistan as the males continued with their family businesses. There was no need for looking for jobs", says Sardar Manohar Singh, who now heads the *Khalsa Diwan Welfare Society of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus*.

Though physically strong, thousands of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus could not find appropriate work during their initial years in India. Fortunately, those Afghans who had migrated earlier came to their help. "The migrants started working in shops and factories owned by better-off Afghans. We gave them higher salaries than the others to ensure their families could afford at least two meals a day".

With the rapidly changing political situation in their homeland, Afghanistan, they now yearn to return and pick up their lives after the lost decades.

[With contributions from Chetan Chauhan]



KABUL DI SANGAT*

*Te Afghanistan Da Sankhep Dtehas**

Authored by Sardar Khajinder Singh Khurana, the Afghan Sikh who is also Secretary of the Afghan Hindu Sikh Welfare Society in New Delhi, the 146-page book which was first published in May 2001, has verily become the reference source on Afghan Sikhs and vital reading material after the September 11 attacks in



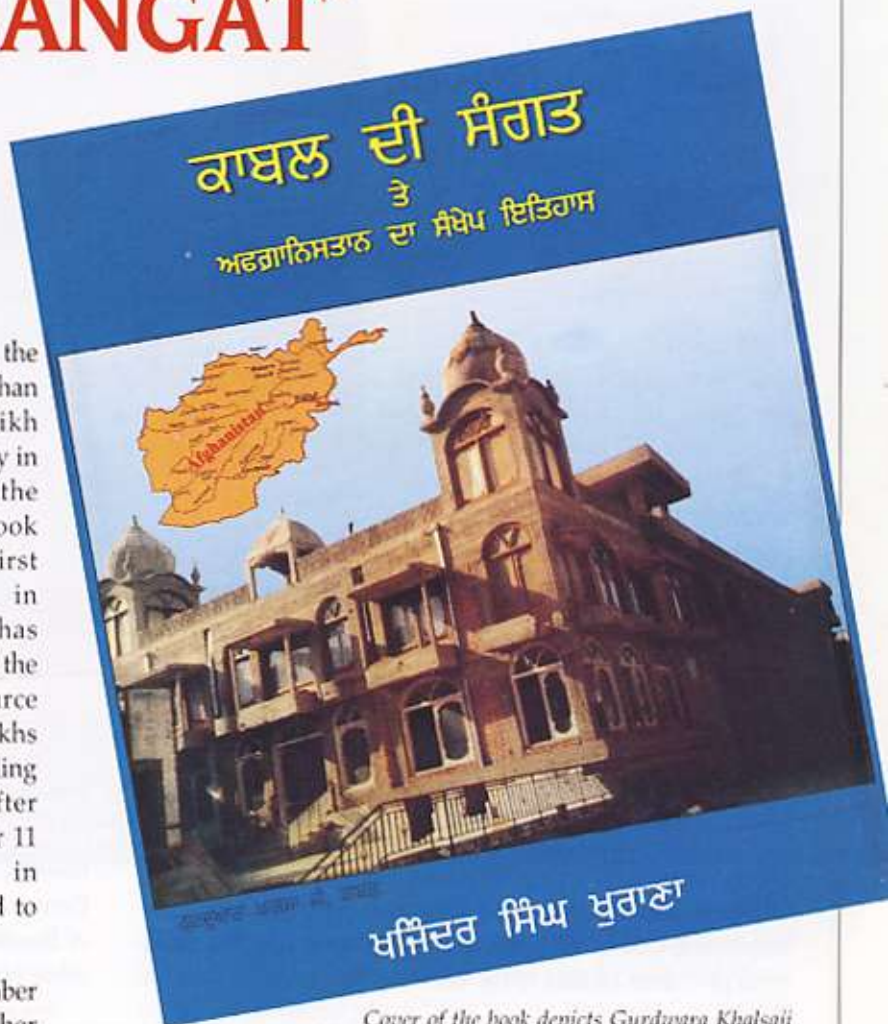
America when the world's focus rapidly shifted to Afghanistan.

Khajinder Singh was born in Kabul in December 1957, a fifth-generation Afghan Sikh whose father S.Mohar Singh ran a successful, traditional business in the dry fruit trade. His distinguished uncle, S.Jai Singh (who adopted the surname *Fani*) was perhaps



S. Jai Singh "Fani"

the most articulate and nationally-known Afghan Sikh, becoming a Member of the *Wuluse Jirga in P a r l a m a n* (Parliament) at the young age of 27 years. Highly educated, speaking six languages fluently, including Pashtu, Farsi, Urdu, Punjabi,



Cover of the book depicts Gurdwara Khalsaji in the heart of Kabul.

Hindi and English, Jai Singh was very close to King Zahir Shah who had considered him as Afghanistan's Minister for Commerce. Tragically, Jai Singh passed away, suddenly, at a young age, in 1978.

His nephew, and author of the book under review, is also well-versed in the six languages and after schooling, at the Nadriya High School in Kabul, did a Secretarial Course with the Peace Corps, later working with the U.S. AID in Kabul till the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Khajinder Singh left for India in 1980, and settled down in New Delhi in the traditional family business but kept up regular visits to Kabul till 1992 when the civil war turned nasty. He married Rajinder Kaur from Amritsar, and has two sons and a daughter.

**The Sangat of Kabul and a Short History of Afghanistan*

146 pages, illustrated, available from D-42 Greater Kailash II Enclave, New Delhi 110048

"The Teacher of Mankind"

There have been prophets in the world who have taught and propagated religion. Saint Guru Nanak was not only the founder of the Sikh religion, he was a great poet, philosopher, humanist and a powerful social reformer. Rabindranath Tagore called him *the teacher of mankind*.

A teacher like Guru Nanak is a guide not just of a single religion but to all humankind. Swami Vivekananda said of him, "The Guru's superb love of mankind is amazing. He opened his arms to embrace not only Hindus but also Muslims". At this time when war is raging in Afghanistan (and Kashmir), the important teachings of Guru Nanak come to mind. A lot of what he said was meant for us to attain peace and serenity in our lives. The most important thing he said was 'God' and he preached through-out his life and 'God is One'.

Some of his teachings were that one should not live on others' earnings; there can be no untouchability; all are God's children; kindness, contentment, patience and truth are important; God loves those who feed the hungry and those who give their clothes to the needy.

Nanak said that one need not become a *sanyasi*, sacrificing one's family to please God. Those who practice devotion, whose mind is pure and who have sympathy, patience and honesty, are in no way less pious than a *sansyasi*. He considered that all human beings were high-born; no one was low. He stressed, "Do not ask about one's caste; those whose devotion is accepted by God are good people. God appreciates those who have conquered the "I" and "greed". Nanak washes the feet of those who devote their minds on God, the source of truth".

The doctrines taught by Guru Nanak are the foundation of the Sikh religion, which has spread not only in India but all over the world. The main philosophy of the Sikh religion is that Nanak, who propagated a firm faith that there is only one God, taught that Hindus, Muslims and people of all religious denominations are children of the same God, that they should develop love and brotherly feelings; that external dress and decorations do not represent any religion and that superstitions and meaningless principles and



practices come in the way of understanding the formless God. Remembering Him and praising Him with a pure heart is the road to salvation.

In this religion that began in the name of the 'disciple', the teacher has the highest place, a place of reverence. This 'teacher', does not wish to be called God. He calls himself the disciple of the 'first teacher'. Influenced by the school of devotion of Kabir, Namdev, Beji Jayadeva, Ramananda and others and having assimilated the philosophy of Sufism and Islam. Guru Nanak gave a new form to his religion. He composed *Bani*, the gem of religious doctrine, and incorporated this in *Guru Granth*

Sahib. The basic source of the Sikh religion is the *Mool Mantra* or the first sacred verse and all of Nanak's verses start with this *Mool Mantra*.

Sikhs revere the *Granth Sahib* but do not worship with flowers, vermilion and turmeric. The sacred text contains the verses and auspicious words composed by the Ten Gurus of the Sikh religion but, too, contains the compositions of other Hindu and Muslim scholars and devotees.

To those who are greedy and amass wealth, Nanak said, "Remember, only the merit that you earn by giving charity will follow you to the other world. Your sins keep pushing you down to your doom. The wealth that you have amassed will not only trouble you throughout your life, it will be an obstacle in your journey to the other world. Somebody will inherit the wealth you have amassed. You will be destroyed, just as the cruel ancestors of yours were".

Nanak said, "God is compassionate. Confession is atonement for sin. Distribute all the wealth that you have looted to the poor in the name of God. Be determined to follow the right path, God will forgive you". For those who are thieves and brigands, he said, "However bright brass may be, the hand that scours it turns dirty; no matter how many times you wash it, the dirt remains".

Always, Guru Nanak said, "I am not God, I am not even his incarnation. I am only a prophet spreading His message".

A Deva Raju
(From : The Times of India)

"Peshawar taken..... Kabul Occupied"



Extracts from the chapter "Peshawar Occupied" from S. Kartar Singh Duggal's book on Maharaja Ranjit Singh, **THE LAST TO LAY ARMS** is re-produced as very pertinent to understand contemporary times in Afghanistan.

Since Anang Pal's defeat at the hands of Mahmud Ghazni in the early eleventh century, India suffered a ceaseless incursion of invaders from the north-west. They came in unhindered hordes, indulged in pillage and arson, destroyed temples and shrines, slaughtered young men and made slaves of charming young maidens carried away with them. This was repeated for over 700 years. It remained for Ranjit Singh to stem this tide. It was under Maharaja Ranjit Singh that a united and powerful Punjab carried the battle to the very homes of the plunderers and occupied their land. He made repeated assaults and completely demoralised the erstwhile aggressors. The Punjabi soldiers came to be dreaded by the Afghan masses. Remembering the fearsome onslaught of Hari Singh Nalwa, the Pathan mothers frightened their erring children by telling them "Haria Rawada". This was, perhaps, the greatest achievement of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Sikh warrior is respected by the Pathan even today.

Ranjit Singh was, no doubt, a man of destiny, but the times too were in his favour. Opportunities offered themselves and he availed himself of these unerringly. An ambitious soldier, he wanted to consolidate his power,

carrying those he had already vanquished with him. As far as possible, he never made an enemy of his foe after he had been defeated... ..more often than not, he allowed those whom he defeated to continue where they were as long as they accepted his sovereignty and agreed to pay tribute. When he annexed territory, he granted a suitable *jagir* for the maintenance of the deposed ruler. He never made any distinction between the Hindu and the Muslim. He was, in fact, more liberal in his dealings with the non-Sikhs.which made him universally respected by the Hindus and the Muslims, the Punjabis and the non-Punjabis.

The fact that Fateh Khan had not shared the spoils of Kashmir with Mohkam Chand's forces had annoyed the Maharaja and he was looking for an opportunity to teach him a lesson. Finding Fateh Khan preoccupied in Kashmir, he sent out a force which occupied Attock. Its Governor, Jahandad Khan, was granted a *jagir* and retired. Fateh Khan hastened towards Attock. The Maharaja sent reinforcements under Fakir Aziz-ud-Din and Diwan Devi Das. Soon thereafter, a stronger force followed under Diwan Mohkam Chand. The Afghans were defeated in a fierce battle fought at Haidru on 13 July 1813. Vanquished and humiliated, Fateh Khan returned to Kabul, entrusting Peshawar to his brother,

Yar Muhammad Khan. Attock opened the gates for Peshawar to Ranjit Singh's forces.

An opportunity came his way when Fateh Khan was assassinated in 1818 followed by turmoil in the entire region. The Maharaja lost no time and led out an army under his own command. At Attock, he forded the swollen river followed by his forces. Ranjit Singh occupied the forts of Jahangira and Khairabad, defeated the Khattak chief, Feroz Khan, and proceeded towards Peshawar without encountering any opposition. The *Durbar* forces occupied Peshawar on 20 November 1818, its Governor Yar Muhammad Khan fleeing to Kabul through the Khyber Pass.

It was a precarious perch, the occupation by the Maharaja's forces of the city of Peshawar, and Ranjit Singh was well aware of this. It needed a strong garrison to be maintained in the region if he wished to retain his hold over the province. The Maharaja could not afford this for he had other priorities. He, therefore, entrusted Jahandad Khan of Attock with the additional charge, and, receiving a *nazrana* of just 25,000 rupees from the citizens of Peshawar, returned to Lahore. Peshawar was neither looted nor was anyone in the town harmed. Nevertheless, the Punjabi forces had hardly returned to Lahore when Yar Muhammad Khan retrieved Peshawar, driving away Jahandad Khan.

Ignoring the loss of Peshawar for the time being, Ranjit Singh concentrated on the trans-Indus territory and subdued Mankera, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Tonk that belonged to the Afghan rulers.

Meanwhile, an interesting development took place. Dost Muhammad Khan, one of the Barakzai brothers who had parcelled out Afghanistan among themselves in the uncertain conditions after Fateh Khan's assassination, sent his emissaries to the Lahore *Durbar* offering an annual tribute of 1,00,000 rupees if he was allowed to occupy Peshawar. The Maharaja accepted the offer and sent a force under Prince Kharak Singh and Missar Diwan Chand to finalise the deal.

In 1822, when the tribute from Peshawar was not received, the Maharaja deputed Fakir Aziz-ud-Din to collect it personally. Yar Muhammad Khan who had succeeded Dost Muhammad Khan in Peshawar was not unwilling to honour the commitment but the fact that Peshawar had become a permanent tributary of the Sikhs seemed to outrage the Afghan people who raised the cry of *jihad*. The Afridis, the Yusufzais, the Khattaks and the tribals from Swat and Bannu massed together along with the *ghazis* and *mujahids*.

A fierce fight took place in which 2,000 soldiers of Ranjit Singh's army perished, including Akali Phula Singh, the

renowned warrior, but Naushera went into Sikh hands and this marked complete annihilation of the Afghan power. The Maharaja's forces marched into Peshawar. With a view to them teaching a lesson, the city was this time given to plunder and sack. However, the Maharaja had still not made up his mind to annex Peshawar, ...content to have it as his tributary. He appointed Yar Muhammad Khan as its Governor, again and the province divided into five districts to secure better administration.

As a mark of respect to the memory of Akali Phula Singh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a *samadhi* raised at Naushera on the banks of the Kabul river, which continues to be a place of pilgrimage for devout Sikhs in the sub-continent.

Then, a religious fanatic Syed Ahmad who styled himself a divine, appeared amongst the turbulent tribals whom Ranjit Singh had to deal with. He belonged originally to Bareilly, and had been recruited as a mercenary by Amir Khan, a Rohilla Chief. After the fall of his master, Syed Ahmad took to an adventurous life, proclaimed himself a divine and started preaching hatred towards non-Muslims, especially Sikhs, amongst the illiterate tribals. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and wrote a book called *Taqwiyyat-ud-Islam*, with the idea of propagating his doctrine of hate. Amongst his followers were the Nawab of Tonk, the Amir of Talpur and a host of tribals in Kandahar and others amongst the Yusufzais. The Barakzais of Peshawar, who were tributaries of the Lahore *Durbar*, and the Sikhs of the Punjab were their particular targets.

Raising the cry of holy war, Syed Ahmad's followers clashed with the Maharaja's forces a number of times but each time they were severely beaten. A clash occurred near Attock where Budh Singh Sandhanwalia took a heavy toll of Syed Ahmad's followers and drove him towards the hills. Another clash between the Khalifa's followers and the *Durbar* forces took place near Peshawar. Prince Sher Singh and General Ventura (who happened to be in town to take possession of the renowned horse Leili which the Maharaja had set his heart on) inflicted a crushing defeat on the fanatical host.

Soon thereafter Prince Sher Singh and General Ventura returned to Lahore, appointing Sultan Muhammad Khan Barakzai as Governor of Peshawar in place of his brother, Yar Muhammad.

Syed Ahmad clashed with Hari Singh Nalwa and Allard once again in June 1830 when they drove him away. However, the moment they were gone, the Khalifa's followers fell on Peshawar, removed the Governor appointed by the Lahore *Durbar* and declared the Khalifa the Sovereign of the State. He even struck a coin with the

inscription Ahmad, the Just, Defender of the Faith, the glitter of whose sword scattereth destruction among infidels.

Syed Ahmad continued to be a thorn in the side of Ranjit Singh until May 1831 when a force under Prince Sher Singh put an end to his threat, finishing off the fanatical divine. In the words of Alexander Gardner, a witness on the scene:

Even as I caught sight of the Syed and the maulvi, they fell pierced by a hundred weapons. Those around them were slain to a man and the main body dispersed in every direction.

As regards the belief that Syed Ahmad was a Khalifa appointed by God. Alexander Gardener has this to add:

I was literally within a few yards of the Syed when he fell, but I did not see any angel descend and carry him of Paradise, although many of his followers remember afterwards that they had seen it distinctly enough.

It is said that the news of the death, in action, of the Khalifa was received with great relief in Lahore and illuminations and rejoicing were observed in Multan, Kashmir and Attock, apart from the capital. Guns were fired to mark the occasion, both Hindus and Muslims joining in the celebrations.

Tired of repeated troubles on the north-western frontier, the Maharaja made up his mind to annex Peshawar and appoint his own Governor even though he would have a maintain a fairly strong garrison to maintain law and order in the region. On the other hand, Dost Muhammad Khan, the most resourceful of the Barakzai brothers who had established his rule over Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad, wished to retrieve Peshawar from Ranjit Singh's vassalage. He sought British assistance in his design. But the East India Company had already entered into a treaty with the Maharaja and declined to oblige Dost Muhammad Khan in spite of the fact that their agents at Kabul and Ludhiana had advised him to do so.

Shuja-ul-Mulk, who had sought refuge with the British after the Maharaja had wrested the Koh-I-Nur from him, still had the ambition to reclaim power. He sought assistance first from British who did not encourage him and then applied to Ranjit Singh who dictated the following terms:

- ❶ The Shah must give up his claim on Mankera, Multan and Derajat which had come under Ranjit Singh's influence.
- ❷ The Shah must undertake to pay the expenses of the troops accompanying him on the proposed expedition.
- ❸ The Shah must agree to an annual nazrana of 101 horses to the Lahore *Durbar*.
- ❹ The Shah must prohibit killing of kine throughout Afghanistan.

- ❺ The Shah must ensure that no Brahmin and Khatri is ever molested in the territory under his control.
- ❻ The Shah must return the sandalwood portals of Jagannath which were at that time in Ghazni.
- ❼ The Shah must depute one of his sons to remain with the Lahore *Durbar* with a contingent of 500 horse.

While the Afghans were busy fighting among themselves. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had already made up his mind to annex Peshawar, despatched a force under Prince Naunihal Singh, assisted by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and Generals Ventura and Court. Peshawar was occupied on 6 May 1834, even though the Barakzai brothers had offered to pay heavy tribute.

The Sikhs occupation of Peshawar infuriated the Afghans once again. Once again they raised the cry of *jihad*, Dost Muhammad Khan leading them. Hearing that the Afghans had moved towards Peshawar, the Maharaja mustered 35 battalions of regular Sikh infantry. Dost Muhammad soon appeared to be willing to negotiate a treaty of friendship. Accordingly Fakir Aziz-ud-Din and Harlan proceeded to Dost Muhammad's camp. Dost Muhammad is said to have taunted Fakir Aziz-ud-Din for advocating the cause of a *kafir*. The Fakir argued with him, quoting from the Holy Quran that it was Dost Muhammad and not the loyal servant of God-fearing King who was erring in the eyes of God. Defeated in argument, Dost Muhammad took the royal emissaries into custody. However, Sultan Muhammad Khan who given custody of the hostages, double-crossed him and came to the Maharaja along with Fakir Aziz-ud-Din and Harlan.



Kartar Singh Duggal.

The Maharaja now ordered several measures to ensure a firm hold over Peshawar. He asked Hari Singh Nalwa to take charge of the province. He had another fort constructed. A strong garrison was stationed at Peshawar and General Avitable was given charge of the military administration. The Barakzai brothers were granted *jagirs* and retired.

Hari Singh Nalwa was not content sitting in Peshawar. He wished to extend the frontiers into Afghanistan. By 1837 he had seized the fort called Bala Hissar (in Kabul) and constructed a fortress at Jamrud.

(The fort at Jamrud, at the entrance to the Khyber Pass has remained then as guard against invasion ever since).



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Duleep Singh
Centenary Trust*

*"Bringing History
& Culture Together"*



Bi-Centenary of the Sarkar Khalsa

Gala event at the V&A, London

The year 2001 marks the bi-centennial of Ranjit Singh's accession to the throne and so as to make this a significant year in the history of the Sikhs, the *Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust* (MDSCT) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) held a gala dinner at London on 1 September 2001 to celebrate the occasion.



Top to bottom:
 The Golden Throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh,
 flanked by Sikh warriors (actually Sikh Oxford dons).
 T. Sher Singh (centre) with S. Inder Singh Uppal and a
 guest.
 Ms. Paula Ridley presenting book to S. Joginder Singh
 Vedanti, with Harbinder Singh Rana at the rostrum.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled the Punjab for 38 years, till 1839, with the Sikh Kingdom being the last to remain independent before the expansionist British occupied it, but only after the fiercest wars were fought in 1846 and 1849.

The Sikhs formed the bulwark of the British-Indian Army for virtually a century thereafter and protected the British Empire's interests, from East Africa to East China, winning universal admiration and awe for their gallantry on the battlefields of France and Flanders, Mesopotamia and Palestine in the Great War, and North Africa, Italy, Greece, Burma, Singapore and Malaya in the Second World War.

The MDSCT, which was formed in the U.K. during 1992, promotes an appreciation of the heritage shared by Britain and by Sikhs in Britain and elsewhere. It maintains close interaction with the V&A Museum where too the Sikh Heritage Desk was formalised in 2001. In 1999, the V&A hosted the *Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* exhibition which evocatively portrayed the rich cultural and artistic heritage which flourished under Ranjit Singh's patronage.

The special event on 1 September 2001 was hosted by the MDSCT with kind permission from the Board of Trustees of the V&A Museum and was attended by 300 guests, British and Sikhs, with members of the Sikh diaspora coming from India, Malaysia, Canada and elsewhere.

Members of the *Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust*, including Harbinder Singh Rana, Daljit Singh Sidhu, Parminder Singh Bal and the others, with Ms. Paula Ridley, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Ms. Deborah Swallow and Ms. Susan Strong of the V&A were charming hosts for the evening which was compered by Ms. Navninder Kaur of the Kent Police, as Master of Ceremonies.

The key note address, titled "The Power of Synthesis" was delivered by Fakir Syed Aijazuddin from Lahore (see following) which inspired the guests with its message of brotherhood and statesmanship of the highest order. The distinguished speaker is the direct descendent of the three famous Muslim brothers, who served in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Court at Lahore two centuries back.

The "Lifetime Achievement Award" was presented to S. Pushpinder Singh of *The Nagaara Trust*, New Delhi and Executive Editor of the *Nishaan* for his contribution in researching on, recording and publishing aspects of the Sikh military traditions through history.

S. Daljit Singh, trustee MDSCT delivered his talk on "Celebrating Milestones" while S. Harbinder Singh, Projects Director MDSCT spoke on "Transformations".

The Vote of Thanks was delivered by T. Sher Singh of the Centennial Foundation, Canada.

THE POWER OF SYNTHESIS



Text of speech by Fakir Syed Aijazuddin, OBE, at the Annual Dinner 2001 by the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust, marking the bicentenary of Sarkar-E-Khalsa, at Raphael Cartoon Court, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1 September 2001.

First of all let me express my appreciation to the Trustees of the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust for inviting me to be your keynote speaker tonight. The occasion as you know is the commemoration of the bicentenary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's formal acknowledgment in 1801 as the master of Lahore. That event might have gone unnoticed, had it not been for the imaginative and tireless efforts of the Sikh community, both in India and here in the United Kingdom. I was honoured to be a speaker at a similar Bicentennial function in New Delhi earlier this year that was presided over by the Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee. And I am equally honoured to be here in London tonight.

That trip to New Delhi demonstrated two truths for me; the first, that it was still possible for Indians and Pakistanis to talk in a common language on the same subject without disagreeing. The second, that it is still natural for an admixture of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, of Britons, Indians and Pakistanis, to sit together, to eat together as we are doing tonight, without any communal overtones. Occasions like these remind us that not only is it natural but it is vitally necessary for us to continue the effort to coexist in peace, and in a spirit of mutual accommodation.

The Raphael Cartoon Court as the locale for tonight's Annual

dinner is an inspired choice and an inspiring one, for 'the genius of Raphael,' an art-historian once wrote, 'was a unique power of synthesis that enabled him to merge the qualities of Leonardo and Michelangelo, creating an art at once lyric and dramatic, pictorially rich and sculpturally solid.'

Raphael may have been inspired originally by the two great masters of the Italian Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, but he emerged in time with a masterful identity of his own. If you look about you, you will notice that Raphael's cartoons reflect brilliantly that very 'power of synthesis'. A fertile synthesis between artistic colour and sculptural form, between the warp of painting and the weft of tapestry. A miraculous synthesis between the man Jesus and Christ the Saviour. And the divine synthesis between the God that is in Man and the God that is in God.

If I extend that analogy to Sikhism as a faith, I can recognize that as the newest religion in the subcontinent, it too illustrates 'the power of synthesis'. It drew its inspiration from two senior predecessors - the two major religions in the subcontinent, Hinduism and Islam. It synthesized what was good in their teachings and has emerged over the past five hundred years with a unique, forceful identity of its own.

If it has succeeded, it is because Sikhism concerns itself with God, and emphasises that part of God that is apparent in Man. Had Sikhism been only about rituals and symbols or conventions, it would exhausted itself at the death of its founder Guru Nanak, just as had Christianity been only about miracles, it would have been entombed with the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth, without the prospect of a resurrection.

Tonight, surrounded by Raphael's glorious cartoons, I would like to talk to you about another equally productive synthesis that took place two centuries ago, a confluence between governance and religion. The man responsible for that synthesis was Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whom we have gathered tonight to honour as Sarkar-e-Khalsa, the king who ruled as a commoner.

My very presence here is the byproduct of that historic confluence, for how else could I explain why I, a Pakistani Muslim, an art-historian cum chartered accountant, should be speaking to you about a Sikh Maharaja, Ranjit Singh? During the next twenty minutes or so, I hope to provide you with some answers.

One natural qualification I suppose is that I come from Lahore, once the temporal capital of the Sikh kingdom. For many of you, Lahore evokes an image of a famous cannon, better known, thanks to Rudyard Kipling's novel, as Kim's gun. It had been cast in 1757, and although formidable by the ballistic standards of the time, it was fired only twice. Today, it stands silent, marooned on a traffic island, a 'vain monument of strength'.

Lahore is equally, if not more, famous for its historical monuments. Its horizon, on a clear day, is dominated by the Badshahi mosque, the second largest in Asia, completed in 1765 for the emperor Aurangzeb. Nearby stands the white domed samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, built after his death in 1839. These monuments, forming two sides of a square known as the Hazuri Bagh, connect the evening of the Mughal Empire with the brilliant morning of Sikh power, the kingdom founded by Ranjit Singh.

At first glance, no one looking at the Sikh ruler would have suspected him of possessing an imperial potential. Like Napoleon Bonaparte, he was deceptively short in height. Those of his opponents who were careless enough to mistake a lack of height for a lack of stature soon paid the price. I am reminded of a remark made about another diminutive leader, the late Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. "Be careful," a politician who knew him warned. "He is as deep below the ground as he appears above it."

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's roots lay as deep beneath the ground as his arboreal personality spread wide above it. He was born in 1780, in an age when the cordite smell of revolution permeated the air. A year after his birth, a freedom-fighting American force supported by the French captured Yorktown and set into motion the American War of Independence. Before Ranjit Singh was twenty years old, in France Napoleon had overthrown the

Directory. It was an age of transition. It was an age of ambition, and of opportunity. And Ranjit Singh had a surfeit of both.

With inimitable skill, as the head of the Sukerchakia misl - one of numerous confederacies jostling for supremacy in the Punjab - he gradually expanded his slender patrimony, until by 1801, he emerged as its acknowledged head. He executed a treaty with the neighbouring British in 1809 by which they acknowledged his sovereignty. And by the end of a reign lasting almost forty years, through a combination of conquest, coercion and conciliation, he had extended his hold over a vast area that spread from the Sutlej in the east, to Jammu and Kashmir in the north, eyeball to eyeball with the hostile Afghans in the mountainous west, and to the fertile Panjnad in the south.

By the time the British Governor General Lord Auckland visited him in December 1838, there was no ambiguity; Auckland knew that he was not only negotiating with a counterpart. He was talking to an equal. To mark his visit, Auckland presented Ranjit Singh with a painting of the young Queen Victoria, done by his sister Emily Eden and based on this official coronation portrait of her by Sir George Hayter.

During that visit, Ranjit Singh had deflected Emily Eden's attempts to sketch him. He knew that his attributes were not physical. Ungainly, pockmarked and one-eyed, he had more handicaps than an international polo player. But what Nature denied him with one hand, Fate rewarded him liberally with the other. He may have been illiterate but he was shrewd, intelligent and prepared to learn from the best teacher in life-experience.

His success remains in many ways an enigma. It defies rational analysis. Like another unlettered leader closer to our own time - President Ronald Reagan - Ranjit Singh too learned his lessons in statecraft on the job. Dr Henry Kissinger, in his book *Diplomacy*, once asked a conference of historians at the Library of Congress 'how so un-intellectual a man [as Ronald Reagan] could have dominated California for eight years, and Washington' for another eight, and 'how a president with the shallowest academic background was able to develop a foreign policy of extraordinary consistency and relevance.'

Kissinger as you know never asked a question to which he did not already know the answer. He identified two key ingredients of leadership: 'a sense of direction and having the strength of one's convictions'.

A third ingredient to the success of such untutored leaders as Ronald Reagan and Ranjit Singh lay in their selection of the right man for the right job. It lay in their ability to choose subordinates whom they would allow to out-perform them, but never to outshine them. Maharaja Ranjit Singh compensated for his own deficiencies by surrounding himself with men of talent. He was in a sense a parallel to the Christ of Raphael's cartoons. He was a fisherman of men. Casting his net among the various religious communities he had under his protection, Ranjit Singh drew from

amongst them a trawl of supportive courtiers.

The most flamboyant amongst them were unquestionably the Dogra brothers. Raja Dhian Singh, the ablest of them, functioned as his quasi-chief minister. He managed the complex politics of the kingdom with a dexterity that must have exercised all the six fingers on his hands. His insatiably ambitious brother Raja Gulab Singh later bought the territory of Kashmir with money that he had pilfered, so it was said, from the Sikh treasury in the Lahore Fort. His furtive negotiations with the British behind the back of the Sikh durbar are a case study in real politik and real estate. He purchased the state of Kashmir for the price of a song. The echoes of that contentious refrain have hung over the sub-continent ever since, and were heard again most recently at Agra.

Certainly the most unassuming amongst Ranjit Singh's courtiers were the three Muslim brothers: Azizuddin, Imamuddin and Nuruddin. I am aware that talking about one's ancestors might be regarded almost as ill-mannered as talking about one's children. My only justification for doing so is that the lives and careers of these three Muslim courtiers supply perfect examples of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's radial attitude towards religion, and of the fine balance he needed to maintain between the various ethnic communities which jostled, often abrasively, at his court.

The eldest of these brothers - Azizuddin - began his career as an apothecary and very soon his myriad talents secured him a place close to the person of the maharaja. Being fluent in Persian, the lingua franca of 19th century diplomacy, must have helped. He articulated the maharaja's thoughts, translating his policies into diplomatic exchanges, and negotiated skillfully on his behalf with visiting foreign delegations. He became, as he put it, the maharaja's 'parrot of sweet sound'. For Azizuddin, an avowed Muslim, maintaining such a precarious position in a Sikh court could not have been easy. He had to camouflage his prodigious talent beneath a self-effacing humility. Protective of the Maharaja's interests and in turn enjoying the Maharaja's protection until the very end, he was an unusual servant of the Crown, a Cardinal Wolsey who survived, a Wolsey who managed to serve his God as faithfully as he had also served his king.

A second brother Imamuddin became the keeper of the Sikh Treasury at Govindgarh, another position of trust, but it is the life of the third brother - Nuruddin, my lineal ancestor - that I would like to cite as another credential for my presence here tonight.

Between 1810, when his name first appears in historical records, and the moment of his death in 1852, there is no single event of significance in that turbulent period of Punjab's history that did not include Fakir Nuruddin, either as an active participant or as an informed witness. He served as the administrator of Lahore until the death of the maharaja in 1839. During the bloodthirsty decade that ensued, and particularly during the minority of the young Maharaja Duleep Singh, he

served with creditable integrity, becoming a member of the Regency Council for the juvenile maharaja.

And when Duleep Singh's mother Rani Jindan was exiled from the Punjab, he was trusted enough both by the British and by her to accompany her caravan of elephants on the first stage of her exile. Incidentally, she was the only Rani of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to have been painted from life, and that too by a British artist George Richmond.

The association of our Fakir family and the Sikh community fortunately did not terminate with the end of the Sikh raj. Nuruddin's son - Fakir Zahuruddin - served the young Duleep Singh as a tutor and accompanied him into exile at Fatehgarh. My father Fakir Waheeduddin wrote a popular biography called *The Real Ranjit Singh*, and I in my generation through my own books have tried to perpetuate that connection. Every year, on 10 March, on the anniversary of her death, I visit the grave of Princess Bamba Sutherland, the eldest daughter of Maharaja Duleep Singh. She died and was buried in the city where her grandfather Ranjit Singh had once ruled.

Princess Bamba returned to the Punjab, but she could not reverse her family's history. That is a device, though, available to us historians. Let me take you back in time, therefore, from her life as a displaced princess, through the middle age of her father as the disappointed ex-Maharaja Duleep Singh before his final departure from England, to his promising youth when he was still a favourite of Queen Victoria and a decorative member of her court, to his hope-filled childhood as an heir-apparent unaware of what the future held for him, and still further back to the glittering court of his father Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sarkar-e-Khalsa.

This painting by August Schoefft once hung here in the Victoria and Albert Museum. While its gregarious composition, crowded with over a hundred figures, reminds one initially of the work of the British artist William Frith, it has a kinship also with Raphael's famous painting *The School of Athens*. In that particular painting, Raphael had aggregated a veritable encyclopaedia of Greek philosophers. As one art analyst put it, on the same canvas Raphael 'distinguished the relations among individuals and groups, and linked them in formal rhythms.'

Similarly, Schoefft distinguished the relations among his subjects, locating them in their political context. He put the ruling family of Ranjit Singh - the fulcrum of the Sikh state - in the main group, making them the epicentre of attention. He collected the European mercenaries like the Frenchman Jean Francois Allard and the Italian Avitabile and contrasted the international diversity of their origins. He contained, as Ranjit Singh had done, in one simmering group the Muslim feudatories like Sultan Mohammed Khan from Multan. And by subtle placement, Schoefft made each of his figures identify his own role in the politics of his time. Like Raphael through the benign figures of the Greek philosophers in

his painting, Schoefft allowed each of his volatile personalities at the Sikh court to reveal 'the intention of his soul.'

Having portrayed the majesty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's political governance, Schoefft in a separate painting caught also 'the intention' of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's soul. He depicted the maharaja at Amritsar listening to a recital from the Holy Granth, using the Golden Temple in the background. For dramatic effect, he showed the maharaja wearing the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond on his arm.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had already passed away when Schoefft visited Lahore in 1840 and made his sketches for this painting. He must have heard, as we have done from the court chronicle, that moments before Ranjit Singh died, he had signaled that he wanted to donate the priceless diamond to the Hindu temple of Jagganath at Puri. This final act of piety went unfulfilled. The coveted stone passed through the hands of his successors and ultimately into a less deserving treasury - the secular Armoury in the Tower of London, to become part of the British crown jewels.

Similarly, the golden throne that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had commissioned for himself but rarely sat upon found its way after the collapse of his kingdom through the East India Company to the Victoria and Albert Museum (see picture in this issue). Its very emptiness today suggests that after him, there has been no one small enough in height or large enough in stature to occupy it.

When I began this evening, I had spoken of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's reign as being a synthesis between religion and governance. Practised in its purest form, such a synthesis could be equated with secularism, and I know that there are many who would like to regard the maharaja's reign as a model of secularism.

I believe that Ranjit Singh's open-minded, unifocal approach to all religions was less an official policy than a consequence of it. However desirable secularism may be as a virtue, it is nonetheless a virtue born of necessity. The natural instinct amongst men and therefore amongst manmade religions is to live within themselves, not with each other. It is ironic that the very challenge that confronted Maharaja Ranjit Singh a century and a half ago has manifested itself again for different reasons and in different locations all over our globe: how does one govern a multi-religious, pluralistic society?

That challenge is being addressed by all of us daily. It is being addressed in the domestic multi-religious diversity that is India. It is being addressed by the monotheistic majority that is Pakistan. And it is being addressed here in the United Kingdom by the mirror images of the very same religious communities that once populated the Punjab.

Your country, Great Britain, is gradually crowding with ethnic communities, the first immigrants of which were born beyond its seas. The descendants of those Punjabi-born Sikhs, Muslims

and Hindus of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time are now British-born citizens of this country. The challenge he faced of integrating them into a manageable, cohesive, egalitarian community within the perimeters of a state two hundred years ago has taken on a 21st century ethnic complexion.

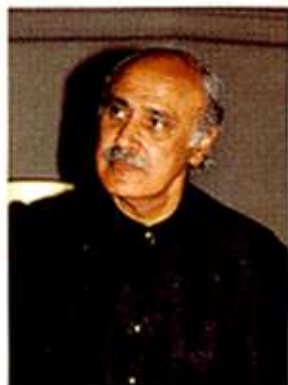
Someone asked once how the Japanese as a people manage to remain so ultra-polite. The reply he received was that when you have so many people crowded on one island, you learn to be polite. Modern secularism though is more than a matter of politeness. It is a matter of being tolerant not when you have to be, but because you want to be. It is a matter of recognizing and acknowledging a common God in every Man. That is not an easy task for the ordinary mind to comprehend. It takes even an even greater mind to inspire fellow men to co-exist as social and spiritual equals.

In 1848, a document was published in Europe, far away from the turmoil then agitating the Punjab. That document, issued in an age of monarchies, spoke daringly of the equality of Man. That document was the Communist Manifesto, issued by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Had it been published a decade earlier, while Maharaja Ranjit Singh was still alive, and had a Persian translation of it been available in the Punjab at the time, Ranjit Singh would undoubtedly have asked Fakir Azizuddin to read it out to him.

I believe he would have found nothing in it that he did not already know. For as the Sarkar-e-Khalsa, a leader among equals, Ranjit Singh was familiar with its message. During his life he had tried to enjoin the sort of equality they were now advocating. He had already tried to put into practice what Marx and Engels in their generation had only begun to preach.

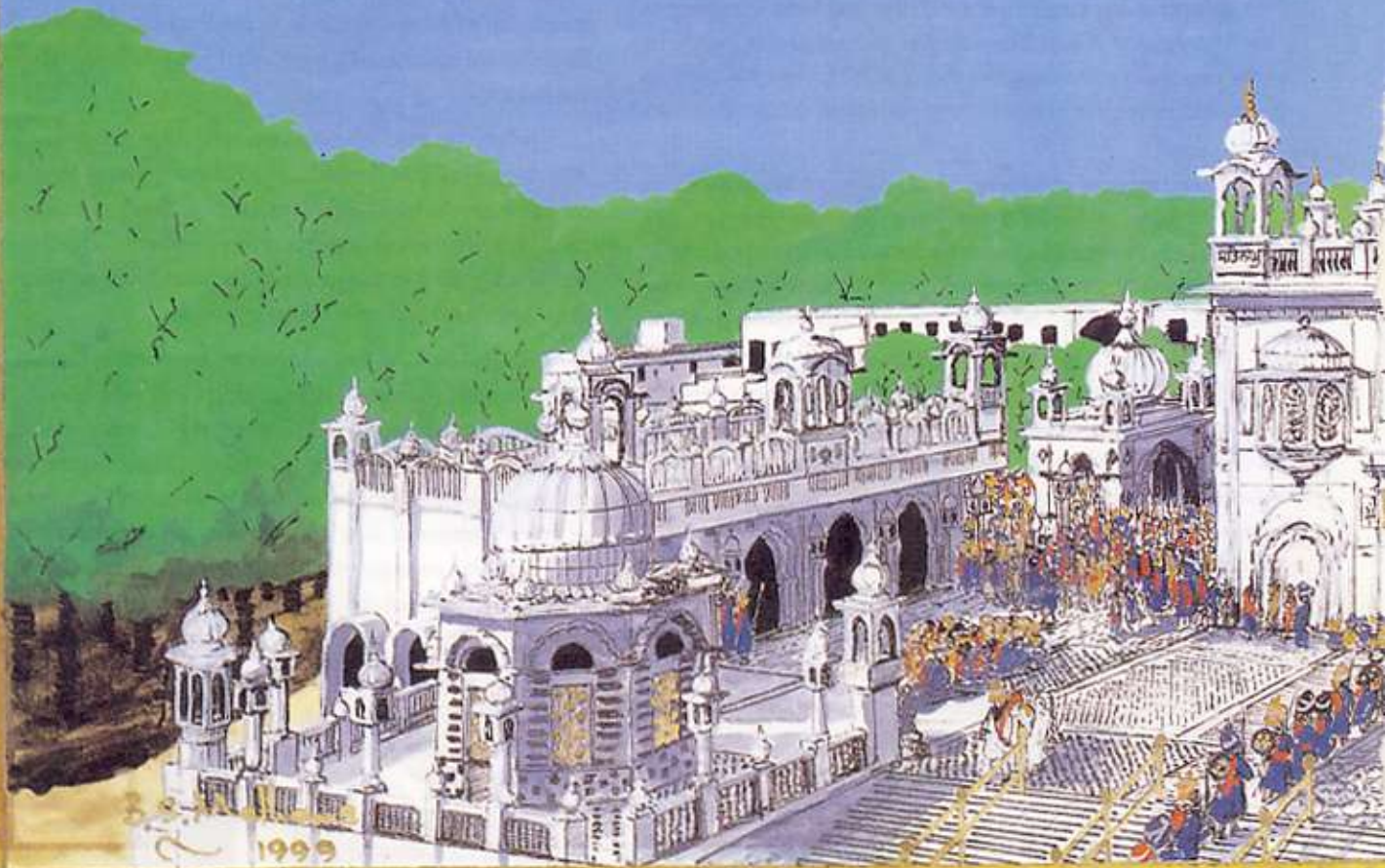
Let me conclude this address by once again thanking the Trustees of the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust for their generous invitation to speak to you tonight. It is not often that one has the opportunity to pay homage before such a distinguished gathering to the memory of one of the noblest sons of the sub-continent. And it is even rarer for someone to be asked to be what his ancestor was a bicentennial ago, to be the Khalsa-e-Sarkar's 'parrot of sweet sound.'

Fakir Syed Aijazuddin's lineal ancestor Fakir Nuruddin was administrator of Lahore till 1839 and later served as a member of the Regency Council for the young Maharaja Duleep Singh. Fakir Syed Aijazuddin, who did his chartered accountancy from England & Wales, now lives in Lahore.



HISTORIC GURDWARAS OF THE SIKHS

HAZUR SAHIB





Nanded (19°-10'N, 77°-20'E), one of the important centres of Sikh pilgrimage situated on the left bank of the River Godavari, is a district town in Maharashtra. It is a railway station on the Manmad-Kachiguda section of the South Central Railway, and is also connected by road with other major towns of the region. The Sikhs generally refer to it as Hazur Sahib or Abichal Nagar. Both these names apply, in fact, to the principal shrine, but are extended in common usage to refer to the town itself. Hazur Sahib is a title of reverence, meaning Exalted Presence; Abichal Nagar: *Abichal* = Immortal, Everlasting and *Nagar* = Town or City. The town ranks as one of the *takhts*, or seat of religious authority and legislation for the Sikhs.

Nanded, which was visited both by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, claims several Sikh shrines of historical importance.

Takht Sachkand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Sahib. At the time of Emperor Bahadur Shah's march towards the south via Rajputana, Guru Gobind Singh accompanied him with his own disciples and followers. Crossing the Tapti in mid-June and Ban Ganga on 13 August, the two camps arrived at Nanded towards the end of August 1708. Bahadur Shah, after a brief halt, crossed the Godavari and proceeded on to Golkonda, but the Guru stayed behind at Nanded. Here he converted a Vaishnavite Bairagi recluse, Madho Das, also known as Lachman Dev, who after initiation into the *Khalsa* fold, received the name of Banda Singh. To Nanded came from the Punjab two Pathans, on the trail of Guru Gobind Singh. They had been hired by Wazir Khan of Sirhind, who felt threatened by the conciliatory negotiations going on between the Emperor and Guru Gobind Singh. These Pathans, the name of one of them is recorded as Jamshaid Khan, dissembling as interested listeners, started attending the evening *divan* or service. Finding the Guru alone in his tent one day, they fell on him inflicting a stab wound. Before the blow could be repeated, the Guru despatched one of the Pathans with his own sabre. His companion fell under the swords of the Sikhs who had meanwhile rushed in. Guru Gobind Singh's wound healed, but it broke out again as he was stretching a powerful bow. Bestowing the succession on the Granth Sahib and thus ending the line of personal Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh passed away on 7 October 1708.

Guru Gobind Singh had desired one of his Sikhs, Santokh Singh, who supervised the community kitchen, to remain in Nanded and continue running the Guru ka Langar. A number of other Sikhs also decided to stay back. They built a small shrine in memory of Guru Gobind Singh and installed the Guru Granth Sahib in it.

Around 1823, Raja Chandu Lal, Diwan of Hyderabad state, had the management of the shrine made over to the Udasis. He also secured for the shrine an endowment of about 525 acres of land. In 1832, Maharaja Ranjit Singh built on the site a two-storeyed *gurdwara*, with a golden dome. During this time, Sikh artisans and workmen came to Nanded in large numbers, and many of them settled here permanently. Additionally, the Nizam enlisted a troop of Sikhs in his army. With this influx of Sikh population, the Udasī influence receded. Sikhs assumed the responsibility for religious services in the shrine at Nanded, whereas the administration was taken over by the Nizam's government. The control of the main shrine and other *gurdwaras* at Nanded was transferred to a 17-member Gurdwara Board, with a 5-member Managing Committee constituted under the Nanded Sikh Gurdwaras Act passed on 20 September 1956 by Hyderabad state legislature.

A *chakra* (quoit), a broad sword, a steel bow, a steel arrow, a *gurz* (heavy club with a large spherical knob), a small gilded *kirpan* and five gilded swords are on display in the sanctum of *Takht* Sachkhand as Guru Gobind's relics.

Gurdwara Hira Ghat Sahib is on top of the left bank of the River Godavari about 9 km northeast of Nanded town. This is the spot where Guru Gobind Singh first set up camp on arrival at Nanded. As the tradition goes, one day Emperor Bahadur Shah who came to call on him presented him with a *hira*, or diamond. The Guru cast it into the river. Bahadur Shah felt offended. He thought that being a *faqir* the Guru did not know the value of the stone. The Guru invited the Emperor to look into the water. The latter did so and was astonished to see heaps of diamonds lying at the bottom of the river. Cleansed of his pride, he bowed at the Guru's feet. On that site stands Gurdwara Hira Ghat.

Gurdwara Mata Sahib, also on the river bank is half a kilometre southeast of Gurdwara Hira Ghat. It marks the place where tents were pitched for Mata Sahib Devan, Guru Gobind Singh's wife, who had accompanied him during his journey to the South. While the Guru stayed at Hira Ghat, the *langar* which was supervised by Mata Sahib Devan was established here. Subsequently the *langar* was looked after by Baba Nidhan Singh. The *langar* continues to this day and is run by the Nihangs under the overall control of Gurdwara Board *Takht* Sachkhand. The building in which is installed the Guru Granth Sahib was constructed in 1976-77. Other buildings are older. Among them is the *angitha*, memorial on the cremation spot, in memory of Baba Mit Singh Nihang who died here on 2 Kattak 2001 Bk (17 October 1944.)

Gurdwara Shikar Ghat Sahib is situated on top of a hillock, about 300 metres from the left bank of the River Godavari. Guru Gobind Singh used this site as a starting point for his hunting (*shikar*) excursions. A legend has grown up that the Guru emancipated here the soul of one Bhai Mula who had been under an anathema since the time of Guru Nanak that he would continue in the cycle of birth and death until released by the Tenth Nanak. This was accompanied when Guru Gobind Singh killed a hare at the place marked by Gurdwara Shikar Ghat.

The old shrine on this spot was rebuilt in 1971 by Sant Baba Jivan Singh and Baba Dalip Singh who also constructed the approach road as well as the bridge over the River Godavari. The building, a simple, but elegant, monument, is at

one end of a huge walled compound which also encloses a bathing tank. The square-shaped *gurdwara* is mounted over by a lotus dome with decorative domed pavilions at the corners and small solid domelets on all four sides. The entire exterior, including the domes, is lined with white marble slabs. The hall, where the Guru Granth Sahib is seated on a canopied throne of white marble, has a marble floor, with walls panelled with marble slabs and a ceiling of pure-white glazed tiles. The shrine is managed by the Gurdwara Board *Takht Sachkhand*.

Gurdwara Nagina Ghat Sahib is on the left bank of Godavari to the southwest of *Takht Sachkhand*. The legend connected with this shrine bears close similarity to that of Gurdwara Hira Ghat. Here, it is said, Guru Gobind Singh flung into the river a jewel presented by a Vanjara Sikh, proud of his rich offering. As the Guru asked him to look into the water he merchant saw, to his amazement, heaps of glittering jewels, far superior in excellence to the one he had offered.

The present building of the *gurdwara* was constructed by Gulab Singh Sethi of New Delhi. It was completed on 13 April 1968. The main hall has a canopied throne of white marble where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The shrine is administered by the Gurdwara *Takht Sachkhand*.

Gurdwara Baba Banda Bahadur Ghat Sahib marks the site of the hermitry of Madho Das Bairagi, renamed Banda Singh after he had received the *Khalsa* rites. Guru Gobind Singh reached the place on 3 September 1708. Madho Das was not then present. He sat on the Bairagi's cot and asked the Sikhs to kill some of his goats for food. Madho Das was furious at this profanation of his monastery and burnt with the desire to chastise the strange visitor for his temerity. But no sooner had he set his eyes on the Guru than all his anger was gone; so was his sorcerous will of which he was greatly proud. He fell at the Guru's feet and submitted: "Myself I give unto you; I am your *banda* (slave)." Banda Singh was admitted to the vows and insignia of the *Khalsa* and was sent on 5 October 1708 to the Punjab by Guru Gobind Singh, accompanied by a few chosen Sikhs.

The Gurdwara Banda Ghat, as it is commonly known, is a single flat-roofed room with a seat for the Guru Granth Sahib. It is controlled by the Gurdwara Board *Takht Sachkhand*.

Gurdwara Mal Tekri Sahib is to the north-east of *Takht Sachkhand*. The place derives its name from an old mound known previously as Chakri Mal or Mal Tilla. According to local tradition, Guru Nanak, while journeying in the South, visited the spot and discoursed here with a Muslim faqir, Lakkar Shah, who lived on this mound. Guru Gobind Singh is believed to have unearthed an old treasure hidden in the mound and distributed part of it to his soldiers at Gurdwara Sangat Sahib burying the remainder again here.

The Sikhs established on the site a Manji Sahib. The present *gurdwara*, built after a judicial decision upholding the Sikhs' claim to the land given on 7 December 1929, consists of a single flat-roofed room with an all-round verandah, inside a fenced compound. In the centre of the room is installed the Guru Granth Sahib, attended by a *granthi* provided by *Takht Sachkhand*. Not far from the *gurdwara* is the grave of Faqir Lakkar Shah.

Gurdwara Sangat Sahib, probably named after a Sikh *sangat* which existed at Nanded prior to the visit of Guru Gobind Singh, is near the riverbank towards the eastern end of the old town. It is said that the treasure unearthed at Mal Tekri was brought here and distributed by the Guru, not in counted number of coins but in shieldfuls.

The *gurdwara* is an old flat-roofed room with a low dome. Some old weapons are displayed on a platform in the centre of the room. They include a shield believed to be the one with which the treasure was distributed. The Guru Granth Sahib is installed in the narrow space between the centre platform and the wall.

Bunga Mai Bhago Ji marks the site of Mai Bhago's residence. It is a large room within the compound of Gurdwara *Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib*, to the east of the central shrine. Besides the Guru Granth Sahib, some old weapons, including large-sized muskets and a mortar, plus a palanquin are on display in the room.

Angitha Bhai Daya Singh ate Dharam Singh. Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh were two of the Panj Piare. They survived the action at Chamkaur and came out of the fortress with Guru Gobind Singh. From Dina, they were sent to deliver the Guru's letter, *Zafarnamah*, to Emperor Aurangzib. They rejoined the Guru as he was travelling to the South and reached Nanded where they later died.

The *angitha*, or place of cremation, is marked by a small room within the compound of *Takht Sachkhand*, behind Bunga Mai Bhago. Some old weapons are displayed on a platform in the centre of the room.



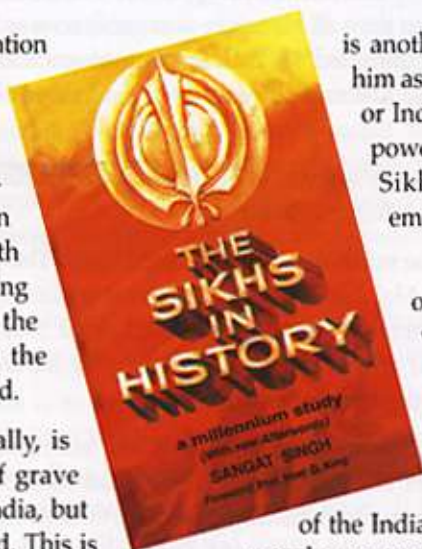
Sikhism in the 21st Century

Text of speech by Dr. Sangat Singh at the fifth annual *Khalsa Darbar* of the Sikh Council of Central California in July 2001.

We are concerned with the Sikh situation as of today, especially in the context of Indian independence, the Sikh diaspora mainly in the U.K. and North America – Canada and USA – where the bulk of our people have chosen to settle, especially since the 1960s, with special reference to the situation arising since the events of post-1984 era and the post-third centenary celebrations on the spread of the Khalsa all round the world.

Sikhism, we must realise empirically, is presently passing through a period of grave crisis. This is not only in the Punjab, India, but also in the diaspora – all over the world. This is not the first time that during the last three centuries of the Khalsa that such a situation has arisen. At one time in the 18th century, after the great holocaust, few Sikhs were reportedly left: in the words of Rattan Singh Bhangu, the Sikhs gathered together to offer the prayer, "O Nath (God), if you don't look after the Panth, who will look after the (Guru) Granth"? We know the answer to that as history provides us, but the problem which the community faces today is altogether different.

There are a number of forces that confront Sikhism today. One, it is for the first time in history that Sikhism stands in direct conflict with a reviving Hinduism (which is another name for Brahminism), underpinned by state power. Though this threat started in third quarter of the 16th century, the era of Guru Amar Das, in modern context it is traced to the rise of Mohandas Karamchand (M.K.) Gandhi, the real father of Hindu nationalism. It



is another matter that the Hindus love to acclaim him as father of Indian nationalism, or Indian ethos or Indian secularism of their own brand. In 1947, power unabashedly fell in to their hands and the Sikhs were made to feel irrelevant in the emerging constitutional framework.

Two, by the 1960s, when the Sikhs started on their course for diaspora, these very forces were underwritten by forces of the "left," within India and outside, to cause schism and so gain in the process.

Three, numerous *Sants* and *Sant Babas* who have always constituted a strong arm of the Indian National Congress, and constitute a half-way house towards Hinduism, have not lagged behind, particularly since 1994 in India as well as in the diaspora, especially Britain and North America, where they exercise a big clout with the support of Indian intelligence and the "left."

Four, weakening of the forces of Sikhism especially after the fanning of militancy in the Sikh masses at the instance of the ruling Congress in India. The infamous "Operation Bluestar" and genocide of the Sikhs in November 1984 and thereafter, spread of apostasy as a reaction cowardice among some Sikhs, impact of the left, cessation of existence of an Akali or Sikh party in the Indian polity since 1996 and proliferation of nefarious, inspired setups abroad, are some of these factors.

Last, but not the least, comes the assault of "Westernisation" on Sikhism all over the world. This, in combination with various other factors singly or in combination, is of great alarm to the Sikh faith.



One of the end results has been to cut emotional links with the home country and settle in the diaspora, especially the countries with Western democracies, which serves as a pointer to the shape of things to come in the 21st century.

Such dichotomy of interests between Sikhism in Punjab and Sikhism outside especially Britain, Canada and US is likely to emerge as a major factor in the 21st century. Already views are being heard that Sikhism shall dwindle in India and find an expression in the Western hemisphere in this new century, as has happened with the virtual elimination of Buddhism in India and its spread to the outside world.

II

One must understand the basic factors that brings Sikhism into direct confrontation with Hinduism, or what is really Brahminism. Brahminism is a unique institution. No where else in the world, or no other religion of the world, actually creates human divisions, inequality, prejudices, distinctions or discrimination between various sections of society. In Hinduism, these distinctions and divisions are endemic. These relate not only to man's place in life, or society, but also affect his mental, material or spiritual station and advancement. This is what is known as *varnashramdharma* with its in-built inequalities.

Guru Nanak struck at the roots of *varnashramdharma* when firstly he advocated human and social equality. Secondly, he spoke of oneness and the universalism of God, the same for all sections of society. Three, he disowned the concept of God's taking human birth or a series of births or *avatarvad*. Guru Nanak en-joined the populace to *shabad*, the word, or *gur-sabad*, God's word and not to himself or any other Guru. This unity of human spirit and its freedom is the root of Sikhism. This stands in conflict with the Brahmin's concept of his higher place in life, and is not acceptable to him religiously or culturally. This, despite the fact that Sikhism, especially in the Guru period, was able to penetrate some sections of Brahmins, who then played a constructive role. Once a Sikh seeks to make a compromise with Brahminism, he falls from Guru Nanak's mission and grace. It is this that makes Brahminism's stand of hatred against the Sikhs or Sikhism. Brahminism did not spare even Guru Nanak: he was an ordinary, normal person but was described as *bhutna*, devilish in character, un-rhythmic or without rhythm (*betala*) in life, for his advocacy of universal humanism, irrespective of caste, and actually elevating the lower castes.

One should highlight the Brahminical moves against Guru Amar Das in Akbar's Court, of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, conflict with Guru Hargobind, or expulsion of Sikhism from Punjab to Kiratpur Sahib and Anandpur

Sahib, the fall of Amritsar and major double-faced shrines in to the hands of Brahminical collaborators, Minas, for some six decades. The Brahmins however, followed a policy and approached Guru Tegh Bahadur when faced with religious presecution, and later complained to Guru Gobind Singh when the ruler of Bassi Pathana took away their women. They knew very well that it was only Sikhism at the time, which alked of religious freedom or freedom of conscience and human dignity. Nonetheless, one must gainfully go through Guru Gobind Singh's battles against the hill chiefs in the pre-Khalsa period. That is critical in perspective.

What were the causes that made the hill chiefs so scared of the Khalsa? The principles of Khalsa, spelled out so explicitly in the *nash*, destruction and freedom, doctrine: that the people had been freed from their family origin (*janamnash*), creed (*dharmanash*), rituals (*karmnash*), duality (*bhramnash*), and occupation (*shramnash*) of their previous births? This *nash* doctrine, though very explicit and being practised in the Sikh world was not being put, in so many words, as a starting point for the Khalsa in its journey towards the higher goals of a saint-soldier to achieve a transformation of society on a wider scale. Guru Gobind Singh in the *Zafarnamah*, referred to that basic conflict when he talked of hill chiefs being idol worshippers, whereas he really wanted them to disown those practices.

The Brahmins, according to one version, were willing to be in the forefront of the Khalsa, but wanted the lower castes to be excluded. This was of course rejected. The objective of Guru Gobind Singh was to bring about a fusion of all sections of society, without any discrimination. That was reflected both in character of the Khalsa and its constitution. Guru Gobind Singh's objective was to bring about a social revolution and this was considered an affront to Brahminism and so of Sikhism. The hill chiefs led by Ajmer Chand at first approached the imperial rulers at Delhi and later Emperor Aurangzeb himself when camped in the deep south, on false pleas. They sought to bring about a clash between the nascent Khalsa and the Mughal rulers, leading to an epic struggle, which caused irreparable damage both to Mughal rule and the Sikh principles. Gainers were the wily Brahmins.

We talk of a decadent, decrepit, Brahminism during the medieval ages – a Brahminism that lay low, prostrated itself right from the induction of Islam down to the latter half of nineteenth century, gave away its womenfolk to the Muslim rulers and nobles, and later temple girls to the British. But such a Brahminical situation would actually be misreading history. During these several centuries, Brahminism firstly, kept its *varnashramdharma* closing itself into a shell, but maintaining social inequalities: secondly, despite its



subservient collaboration at first with the Turks or Mughals and later with the British, they kept control, rather regained control, over temples, at the cost of the lower classes; thirdly, they gained a fuller control, shorn of state apparatus over their religious places in the latter half of the 19th century and finally, went on fiddling with their religious texts, making them more and more dependent towards themselves. For instance, at first they placed derogatory references to Buddhism in the Vedas, Puranas, Shastras, Smritis, etc. Later in these very works they referred to the incoming of Guru Nanak, as if he was coming in the same strain, of a divided Hinduism. There could be no more dishonest people than Brahmins in history.

The position of Sikhs, who now have begun aping Hindus in keeping their castes or in giving away their daughters in marriage to them or other outsiders, falls apart. Firstly, they are doing so in express violation of commandments of their Guru; secondly, it is the impact of widespread cowardice as well in infiltration among them. Children going astray because of variousisms amongst them is one thing; the benign cooperation and blessing of their elders is quite another. We must be aware of these distinctions, so that we at least know as to where we stand. There is no scope for befooling ourselves in the matter.

III

When did the Sikhs or Khalsa develop ambitions of sovereignty or political ambitions in founding a state?

Some people talk of Guru Hargobind's founding of the concepts of *Miri* and *Piri*, while others go back to Guru Nanak whose Sikhism presented a whole life philosophy. We must make a distinction between political rights and sovereignty. What Indira Gandhi did in the 1970s with the assistance of her pseudo leftists through the National Council for Educational Research & Training (NCERT) or her cronies was a calculated mis-representation of Sikh concepts. A Sikh was as well politically conscious as he was socially, economically or spiritually. This was in sharp contrast to existing Hindu (and to some extent Muslim) practices. It is generally understood that Guru Gobind Singh made **nationalism** the religion of the Khalsa while Hindus were bereft of that concept. The Sikhs thus emerged as a **nation** in pre-modern times.

It must be understood that, what Guru Gobind Singh had in mind in 1699 was a social and humanitarian revolution impinging on all sections of society although imperial campaigns against the Sikhs caused some delay. Guru Gobind Singh's *Zafarnamah* to Aurangzeb is within such parameters. In the ensuing civil war following Aurangzeb's death, the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh sided with Mughal Prince Muazzam, later known as Bahadur

Shah. That clearly conveys that Guru Gobind Singh, till then, had no ambitions for Sikh sovereignty. Neither had he when he accepted *khillat* from Bahadur Shah in June 1707 at Agra, or when he subsequently spoke with Bahadur Shah on the issue of righting the Punjab wrongs. What Guru Gobind Singh wanted was a just society, a just social order.

It was Bahadur Shah's reluctance to accede to Guru Gobind Singh's demands that made him part company, which led to two developments. One the Nawab of Sirhind, seemingly in complicity with Bahadur Shah hatched a conspiracy to assassinate Guru Gobind Singh; in this they eventually succeeded. Two, and as against that, Guru Gobind Singh commissioned and entrusted Banda Singh Bahadur to undertake a political mission to the Punjab to right the wrong, and then establish sovereignty.

It was during the last months that Guru Gobind Singh also held widespread talks with Bhai Nand Lal and others who were present at Nander during Guru Gobind Singh's last days. He spoke of conferring on his Sikhs, hailing from poorer sections of society, sovereignty and rulership of the land : that would make them remember the Guruship of Guru Gobind Singh (*in garib Sikhian haun diou patshahi; yad karen ih meri guriaee*). It was not long before Banda Singh Bahadur achieved these two objectives in a short time. Another factor that comes to mind is that Banda Singh Bahadur enforced the Khalsa *rehat maryada* or code of conduct, that of an egalitarian social structure which remained effective till at least the 1760s if not later, as confirmed by William Irvine and Qazi Noor Mohamad.

IV

Right from the beginning of embodiment of the Khalsa (1699), Brahminical Hindus associated themselves with the Mughal administration, going to the extent in Bahadur Shah's times, of discarding their hair on their head and face with some of them committing suicide in shame. In the process, they claimed a position of respectability in the declining Mughal empire, so as to pursue their anti-Sikh crusade. Secondly, a section of them – the Handalis or Niranjanias – started a regular campaign to make additions or alterations in Sikh scriptures, mainly the *Adi Granth* or *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, so as to distort them, and thus the Sikh philosophy. Thirdly, towards the same end, Brahminical Hindus launched a regular campaign to distort Sikhism and the Sikh theme. The process started with Sohan Kavi's *Gurbilas Patshahi 6 of 1718*, Colebrook's *Walayat Wali Janamsakhi* of 1734 which reprehensibly showed Guru Nanak wearing (from his childhood to his old age) the one and the same type of cap. The objective was obviously to depict that Sikhs wore "caps" not "turbans". Then followed Koer Singh nee Bishan Dass



Vaishnav's *Gubilas Patshahi* 10, (1751) who, in changed circumstances, regarded Sikh victory in the ensuing struggle by much distorting Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa, by bringing in deities and blessings of Hindu gods and goddesses. He wanted the Hindus to orient themselves accordingly to emerge as beneficiaries. Kesar Singh Chibbar, another Brahmin, in his *Banasavli Nama* (1769) further elaborated on the devi myth and said that the era of Sikh sovereignty was nothing but that of *ram raula*, chaos or anarchy. Further, Sarup Das Bhalla (1784) or Bhai Santok Singh (1823-43) and Bhai Gurdas II, completed the process. The era of Sikh *mists* (1765-99) and that of Ranjit Singh and his successors (1799-1849) saw the era of Brahminical ascendancy, despite which Brahmins seemingly playing second-fiddle to the Sikh rulers. They played upon their weakness. This era marked a failure of the Akalis to throw up a Sikh character or create an institution. When the Sikhs lost their sovereignty after the first Anglo-Sikh war, the first element that had its tail up (in the words of contemporary Shah Mohamad) were either the sons or the servants of Brahminical Sahukar money lenders. That caused a big schism and was a portent of things to follow.

Sikhism emerged post-1849, or in the "modern period" of their history, as completely shattered, shorn of confidence or knowledge as to what constituted Sikhism. It was left to English sources to impart earnestness on them. First was Capt. J.D. Cunningham, who at the cost of dismissal (and death at a young age in dire circumstances) gave the Sikh people (in 1849) their first, complete history. Two, Lord Dalhousie straightaway recruited Sikhs in large numbers in the army and made *amrit*, the Sikh baptism, as compulsory for the Sikh Regiments. That helped to give right contours to Sikhism and came of much assistance to the Sri Guru Singh Sabha movement later. Three, and concomitant was the British decision to treat Sikhism as a separate religion, as distinct from Hinduism or Islam in an all-Indian context. It were these three elements that remained pristine for another 100 years notwithstanding a move by a section of urban Punjabi Hindus which Swami Dayananda exploited, giving an anti-Sikh orientation to the Arya Samaj and his revised, posthumous edition of *Satyarth Prakash* – published against his expressed wishes to omit all unsavoury references to Guru Nanak and Sikhism. Punjabi Hindus of the past century have proved even more zealous in this approach than their so-called founder!

Importance of the Singh Sabha movement in the Punjab from the late nineteenth century cannot be over emphasised. The contribution of Prof. Gurumukh Singh in making this a mass movement among the Sikh people and spreading the message of Sikh Gurus without any

distinction was noteworthy. The Singh Sabhas kept in contact with the Sikh masses and gave them necessary guidelines. Prof. Gurumukh Singh was ably assisted by Bhai Jawahar Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh Giani and Bhai Maiya Singh. They brought Sikhism back on the rails, so to speak and bolstered it from the deadly embrace of Brahminical Hinduism. Giani Ditt Singh by a single martyrdom of Bhai Taru Singh made the Sikh community to respect their *keshas* and go in for Sikh baptism en masse. His influence and contribution was tremendous. But the act of his withdrawal from the congregation at the time of distribution of *karah parshad*, because of his origins from the lower classes, though a reflection of the times, cast a slur; this was unbecoming for the congregation who otherwise spoke very highly of the mission of Bhai Ditt Singh Giani.

In similar vein were later contributions of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Gurdwara Reform Movement, when every participant in the Gurdwara reforms was administered *amrit*. The high water marks was the "Golden Temple Key Affair," when not a single Sikh stood up against the leadership. The leadership, however, failed to take stock of the situation, and make an assessment at the damage done, at M.K.Gandhi's intervention, in Sikh affairs following the Nankana Sahib matter. The mistakes committed at first by Kharak Singh and later by Master Tara Singh in the post-1930 era were stupendous. It was a great misfortune for the Sikh community that it could not throw up educated leadership. The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Act paved the way for the leadership to pass into hands of the uneducated class, without much foresight or wider outlook.

By 1925, when the Sikhs started to re-assert their identity, the Hindus were involved in Hindu-Muslim riots and so started the movement to make their eldest son a Sikh, follower of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh in true sense of the term. This was certainly a great gain for the Sikhs. Already, in the words of Prof. Puran Singh, the whole of Punjab lived in the name of Guru Nanak. But there was failure of Sikh leadership after 1925, in its inability, firstly to take stock of the situation and delineate the odds that faced the community; secondly, to maintain unity and not to fall in the trap opponents had laid out for them; and, lastly, to throw up a new leadership commensurate with the times and the issues that confronted the Sikhs in face of the British decision to quit India and grant it independence. One of the ill conceived impacts of that thoughtlessness was the action of Sikhs in Calcutta to throw in their lot during in the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1946 "Muslim Direct Action Day". That showed the direction



in which the Sikhs had travelled during the two decades, as this was done aimlessly. That compounded an earlier failure in direction given by the Sikh leadership and was one of the major factors causing confusion at the final stages of 1947.

A Punjabi Hindu intellectual, who spoke with verve on my work, *The Sikhs in History*, when its 3rd edition was released in early 1999, later told me that he regarded Master Tara Singh's a fit case of "Hindu infiltration into Sikhism" as he did not achieve anything in 1947 when it had been possible to do so, and later frustrated the Sikh community with one *morecha* after another. He probably had in mind Tara Singh's failure to administer *aurit* to the Akali partisans and volunteers. Incidentally, Tara Singh had once spoken of Nehru's Gangu Brahmin heritage, when Jawaharlal Nehru had gone to the Darbar Sahib at the Congress Session at Amritsar in 1956, but failed to elaborate upon it later.

In my opinion I believe that when Tara Singh went in for Sikh baptism around 1904, at the hands of Sant Attar Singh ji, he was really sincere. So were members of his family. Tara Singh remained in the background during the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj affair, and let the leadership remain in hands of the Sikh League and the Gurdwara Reform Movement. But he was an important factor in pursuing a different course, and partially derailing Baba Kharak Singh's efforts. Tara Singh emerged at the top in the 1930s with the help of Hindu Congress leaders, was indebted to them, and had a lop sided assessment of Sikhism. Being only a simple graduate, he could not match the highly erudite and sophisticated Bar-at-Laws well versed in their respective cultures who then headed the Congress or the Muslim League.

I may be wrong, but this factor provides another angle for consideration. The consequences of Sikh leadership failures in 1947 in the face of Gandhi's and Nehru's stances, are there for us to review.

V

This brings us to the changes wrought on 15 August 1947. Hinduism, for the first time in a millennium, had the rare distinction to get double liberation. It was not only liberated from the Britishers, but also from the Muslims, in at least three-fourths of the area of undivided India. The creation of Pakistan was not inevitable. Jinnah, till the very last wanted a *modus vivendi* with the Hindus, however safeguarding the Muslim interests. M.K.Gandhi, who had earlier over-arched various brands of Hindu nationalism in Maharashtra, Bengal, Punjab, etc. now wanted to achieve his heart's desire and to be acclaimed as "father of Indian nationalism"—which he certainly was not! He however

welcomed that M.A.Jinnah was being spoken of as the father of a brand new nation, Pakistan. The Sikhs who had constituted the third constituent for any transfer of power just a short while earlier, were never consulted, "not worth consultation" because of the foolhardiness of Sikh leadership, which had not only marginalised themselves, but had also become virtually irrelevant.

M.K.Gandhi's diatribes against the Sikhs are well recorded. So far, not much has been known about the Gangu-Brahmin heritage of Jawaharlal Nehru, which was passed on to his family and inevitably to the Congress Party. Key events and dates begin in 1675 (appointment of Gangu Brahmin as a cook for the Kashmiri delegation which called upon Guru Tegh Bahadur, eventually leading to his martyrdom); 1704 (martyrdom of two younger Sahibzadas and Mata Gujari on Gangu Brahmin's handing them over to Sirhind authorities after taking away their wealth, gold ornaments etc.); 1716 (grant of Jagir to Raj Kaul, son of Gangu at canal (*Nehr*) at Andha Mughal in Delhi, after which he jettisoned Kaul and assumed the surname of Nehru from *nehr* (canal) on which this Jagir was located. In 1780s Baghel Singh of Karor Singhia Misl failed to identify successors of Raj Kaul who rather chose to have their Jagir confiscated. Nehruvian sources are silent on this. A new fury was joined in August 1947 on Jawaharlal Nehru's assumption of Prime Ministership of independent India, with Gandhi's blessings, which meant that Sikhs were now on a steep downhill journey. Gandhi's desire to have Sikhism treated as part of Hinduism was an important part of his strategy. Here are the facts:

- ❖ The Sikhs were struck off from the constitutional or national framework in 1949.
- ❖ Nehru adopted an-anti attitude towards both Sikhism and Punjabi language, admitting that he was not consistent or he did not follow the truth on Punjabi language. Following the thousand generations, or whatsoever, of Brahminism, Nehru chose what suited *varnashramdharma*, with its in-built inequalities.
- ❖ A large section of Punjabi Hindus then adopted the stance of a ruling race and deliberately disowned their mother tongue, Punjabi. Nehru, in line, then denied Punjabi Suba or a Punjabi-speaking province even though Tamil Nadu, as an example, had been formed.

When his daughter Indira was forced to concede Punjabi Suba post the 1965-war, she did not do so clearly on the basis of known demarcations, but soon contrived a "Shah Commission" to give the type of award that suited her narrow interests. Punjab in the process lost out even more – there is still no capital of the Punjab since Lahore was lost in 1947!

This period also saw the distortion of Sikh studies. The



assistance of some Christian missionaries at Baring Union Christian College, Batala, in Punjab came quite handy. Another group that fell into the trap were the pseudo-leftists who gained top positions in universities and so helped in the process. Partap Singh Kairon, Punjab's Chief Minister, was one to deliberate on this fact.

Another feature during this period was the increased migration of Sikhs to the U.K. and Malaysia, Fiji, and later East Africa. The Sikhs also went to Gulf countries and West Africa on their way, eventually, to the West.

Adoption of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 was a landmark, but did not reflect the vulnerable Sikh situation in the Indian Union or the known, if latent, hostility of those holding the levers of power.

Sikhs were the only people to stand up against Indira Gandhi's diabolical emergency. This caused them great harm. Indira decided to isolate Sikh from the national mainstream so as to make it difficult, if at all, to stage a political come back. Introduction of militancy in Sikh polity was Indira's ploy. There were various "actors" who actually declared Khalistan: but they were shortly afterwards brought back in India for collaboration against the Akalis in the Gurdwara elections in 1979.

Indira's insidious conspiracies eventually led to *Operation Bluestar* and the follow-on *Operation Woodrose* when the Sikhs in Punjab were assaulted and massacred. The mass murder of Sikhs of genocidal proportions on Indira's death few days before her plan, *Operation Shanti*, was to subject the Sikhs to mass scale massacre (as Buddhists had been massacred by Shankaracharya), was a pointer of the things to follow.

There was also a nefarious plan inspired by the police and intelligence agencies to cause maximum damage to the foundation of Sikhism. Drugs came quite handy. Major reduction of Sikhs from army recruitment was nigh. Every Sikh, from President Giani Zail Singh down to the simple man-in-the-street was branded either a terrorist, a potential terrorist or one looking like a terrorist. Zail Singh continued to play the nefarious game, as did the leftists who danced to the Congress tune for loaves and fishes. Sikh organisations, heavily infiltrated in Britain and North America under auspices of Indian intelligence agencies, sought to "capture" control of Gurdwaras, especially after 1984. Wisdom eventually dawned upon the three people but this took some time.

An important and consequent fallout of this was the deliberate decision of the Sikh community, especially in U.K. and North America, to detach themselves emotionally from India. The existence of democratic set ups in these countries was an added advantage. This was the second

time after the Buddhists (in the first millennium) that an indigeneous community deliberately decided to move away, settle abroad, and begin new lives. It was indicative assessment to their very existence at the hands of Brahminical forces in India.

This period also saw efforts to waylay the few Sikh Chairs in North America and appoint tainted people who could do maximum damage to Sikhism. For instance, was Totonto University a captive organisation? The University of British Columbia removed their "tainted fellow" but this caused no gain to the Sikhs, as status of the Chair itself was reduced. In many places, established Sikh Chairs are manned by men of questionable antecedents and integrity.

The *Institute of Sikh Studies* at Chandigarh, with their colleagues in California have sought to defy the Government of India's inspired onslaught, headed sometimes by Western collaborators or their henchmen who had been bought to distort Sikhism, promote schismatic sects or project it as part of Hinduism. Some scholars like Giani Bachittar Singh, Justice Gurdev Singh, Dr. Trilochan Singh and others wrote profusely, exposing the hypocrisy and mercenary character of such elements, as well as giving a correct exposition of Sikhism in accordance with teachings of the Sikh Gurus. These elements did work independently, were not aligned with the *Institute of Sikh Studies*, and represented a wider spectre of traditional non-academics who rose in defence of Sikhism.

Then there were numerous scholars in the West like Prof.Noel Q.King of California University, Arthur W.Helweg of Western Michigan, Karen Leonard of California-Irvine, Cynthia Mahmud of Philadelphia, Owen W. Cole in U.K. and numerous others in North America as well as Britain who have wanted the "tainted" men to see reason and truthfully pursue the study and exposition of mankind's new religion.

Some new chairs have come up during the Tercentenary celebrations of the Khalsa and the Sikhs have great expectations from them.

VI

Sikhism in the Punjab today is reeling from one shock after another. Parkash Singh Badal's coming into power in February 1997 with all the fanfare and expectations has proved to be a major disaster. Earlier, in February 1996, the Shiromani Akali Dal had ceased to be a Sikh party, but one could hardly think that Badal would ever drop the issue of human rights, or the truth in the form getting of a Truth Commission. He had joined the Congress in 1956, when Akalis themselves had wound up the Akali Dal as a political entity. Later, he had joined Sant Fateh Singh's Akali Dal, had expounded on Sikh issues during the hey days



of state militancy but one did not think that he would jettison the main, vital aspects, as he almost immediately did. Suicides by Sikh farmers in the post-1994 era is a terrible indictment. The issue of police atrocities, though on a lower scale, and Badal's siding with the nefarious police under the influence of his ally Punjab's Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) was another black mark. The national BJP leadership has continued to espouse its pre-1984 philosophy, without much change in its Hindu outlook. Badal has not got any where, on any issue agitating the Sikhs nor indeed the Punjabis, but has chosen to jettison the main matters just to keep himself in power. The thousands who were held under TADA, many of them on trumped up charges, continue to languish in jails, if not having died. The only notable feature was Badal's falling out with Tohra, whose alignment with leftist Harkishan Singh Surjeet, his political mentor, is well known. Badal's current administration casts its shadow over his Panthic credentials, if there are any.

The spread of apostasy among the Sikh youth in efforts to distance themselves from militancy since 1994, associated in official parlance with Bhindranwale and pressures from police and para-military atrocities, has found new proliferation, notwithstanding the medium of *ardas* which encapsulates Sikh history and recollects the heroic role of the common man. One increasingly finds Sikh *kesdhari* parents, even holding high offices in the SGPC or Akali Dal, or state legislatures with their grown up children being *patit*, or clean shaven. This shedding of *keshas* in the Malwa is estimated at 80 per cent, except in certain pockets like Bathinda where the efforts of Giani Kewal Singh, Jathedar Damdama Sahib, reportedly has had positive results. It is the womenfolk there who have become active agents in persuading their menfolk to shed drugs and live within the Sikh principles. Apostasy in Doaba and Majha is equally alarming. The urban areas too are getting adversely affected. The apostasy which was estimated at 50 per cent in the college-going Sikh youth in 1999 is now reported to be over 60 per cent. The situation in the diaspora, especially U.K., Canada and USA is not inspiring either.

Another issue that agitates the mind is spread of Sants or Sant-Babas, apart from the *Nandharis*, *Radhia Soamis*, *Sant Nirankaris*. Then there are *Ramgarhias* who despite their orientation to Sikhism continue to owe fealty to *Vishwa Karma*. There were 4-5 Sants in the Malwa, a couple of them in Doaba and one or two in Majha, all of them aligned to the Congress. Since 1994, with the spread of apostasy in Punjab, their number has proliferated and shown mushroom-like growth. According to one estimate, there are now 250 "hardcore-Sants" or Sant-Babas in the Punjab alone, plus members of the Sant Samaj, who are

operating in the Punjab villages. They are doing so as agents of the Congress, with a few exceptions. According to another estimate, their number is far larger, as new *deradars* do not owe fealty to their earlier mentors.

One thing is quite clear. These Sants do not preach the Sikhism of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's *Shabad* or *Gur-Shabad* – the "Word". Unlike Sant Attar Singh, who marshalled the Sikh people in 19th and early 20th centuries in form with the teachings of Sikh Gurus, and administered them *amrit*, the present lot actually constitutes a halfway house towards Hinduism; they have no faith in Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh, nor Sikh Rehat-Maryada, the code of conduct, and have their own individual rigmale-like rituals which attaches a person to themselves; and invariably, they are visiting foreign countries from where they collect funds which they use to increase their clout among the Sikhs in Punjab, and mislead the people there. As a flashback to the 17th century situation of Sikhism, the position of Sant-Babas is no better than that of Minas, Dhirmalias, Ram Rajyas or Handalis, etc.

These days, Sant Samagams in the names of known and not so well-known Sant-Babas are proliferating in the Punjab. Regular jathas, some of whom have formed organisations and who are influenced by lucre, partake in these. The Jatha gets paid for the number of times the main *kirtaniya* mentions some Sant-Babas, for instance. Sant Nand Singh ji Maharaj Kaleranwale etc. this has become standard practice. Some of these Sant-Babas are now mentioned more than even Guru Nanak!

Although the SGPC has now, after the Supreme Court's Judgement of March 2000 declaring Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhism with Guru-ship conferred on *Guru Granth Sahib* as the only legitimate Sikhism, got powers to curb these Sant-Babas, it has so far not shown the will to move in the matter. The political leaders either participate in these Sant Samagams or extend their patronage: they seek to please everybody as "they have to fight political elections in Punjab!"

I would appeal to the Sikh community in the diaspora not to fall in their trap, or get out of the embrace of these Sant-Babas shorn of spiritual content. They serve as agents to mislead one away from pristine Sikhism.

The role of Jathedars, whether of the Akal Takht or the other two Takhts in Punjab, or of numerous head granthis, prachars or the President and numerous members of the SGPC too, has not been exemplary. The continuous acrimony over the office of President of the World Sikh Council, the organisation enmeshed in questionable funds from the diaspora, calls for dire action, at least removal of some of the Jathedars themselves. The Sikhs had enough of such dubious characters.



Another notable feature of this period has been blossoming of the forces of Hindutva : BJP (earlier Jan Sangh), Rashtriya Swymsewak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and so on who aim to throttle Sikhism with its embrace. The alignment of the Akalis with such forces, and their decision to even change the character of the Akali party into a Punjabi party (which could be understood in certain circumstances) and completely shedding of Sikh character, could, firstly, be compared to Tara Singh's alignment with such forces like Ram Rajya Parishad in post-1947 era, and secondly, reflects a sign of desperation at the absence of an alternative. Their only hope lies in the continued weakness of such forces, but the Akalis have shown a lack of awareness and intellectual dialecticism to safeguard their vital interests. The Congress, as earlier, has to continue to pursue its "Gangu Brahmin" heritage, with the presence therein of some thoughtless Sikhs.

Duplicity is writ large in the existing Sikh character of the Punjab – whether in political, social, cultural, or economic fields. Frankly speaking, one need not expect such characters to do any good for the Panth. The religious hierarchy is very much in the hands of political elements having clout in the SGPC. The leftists – Communists Naxalites, even agnostics and others – who have had hey days in SGPC and infiltrated their partisans both in the religious and administrative hierarchy too, are near completely abandoning the Sikhism of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh. There is degeneration all around.

The situation in the diaspora, especially U.K., Canada and USA is also serious. The spread of apostasy among the Sikhs in the UK during the 1960s was a matter of course, except in certain sections, especially those coming from East Africa in the 1970s. They reflected a new middle or higher class, which had earlier mastered the English language. The second generation in the UK or North America is seeking to meet the onslaught of modernism heroically. There is a section of leftists, Marxists and some wayward people, who are causing the greatest harm to Sikhism by discarding their *keshas*. There is also a section of society where both husband and wife are working, and have no time for instance to do the plaits, or do the hair and teach young boys how to tie their turban. Such children when they grow up will not know much – if anything – about Sikhism or the *Sikh maryada*, code of conduct, and will be written off from the faith. The saving grace is that a section of Sikh youth in the diaspora is participating in summer camps and learning about the principles of Sikhism. Also, the medium of *ardas* ties them to pristine Sikhism, to Darbar Sahib and the Akal Takht, with a universal presence and outlook. Their parents earlier during their presence abroad broadly did the same. The Sikh community is more in need of convent schools or

weekend schools at Gurdwaras to imbibe Sikh principles as part of forming their character.

VII

We have briefly spoken of Sikhism in the 21st Century. Those of the people who are born now in the beginning of this millennium shall certainly reach the last decade of this century, some of them even crossing it. Those who were born in the middle of the 20th century shall be there around the second quarter of this century. If not reach the middle of it. Those who are in their sixties or seventies, shall play their role in the first quarter of the present century; and so on. It is important to keep this in mind when reviewing the state of Sikhism among the present generations, and the type of teaching they should be imparting to their offspring.

I have mentioned about the state of Sikhism in the Punjab, the extent of apostasy in rural and urban areas, the sorry state of religious, cultural, and political leadership which is so enmeshed in its material problems, and pondering to self or ego, that Sikhism for them counts for nothing. The SGPC, its membership, even up to its President, the Granthis upto Jathedars, leave much to be desired. The Tohra-era brought in Hinduistic *bhagva* colours for the *nishan sahibs* and *saropas* in place of the Sikh *kesri* colour prevalent at Nander and Patna Sahib. My efforts in the post-Tohra era to have such things corrected have evoked no response. There is an urgent need for placement for right type of persons both in the SGPC and the so-called clergy including Jathedars. That is not yet in sight. Also, the quality of Sikh leadership has deteriorated from the 1950s to reach its nadir in the 1996-97 elections to the SGPC and Punjab assembly. These have gravely hurt Sikhism.

The position in other parts of India, where the community is confined to urban areas is fortunately much better. But impact of the events of 1984 and the aftermath, is visible all around. The situation in Madhya Pradesh where the Sri Guru Singh Sabha movement is strong is, however, encouraging. So is the situation in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka or Maharashtra except Nander or Hazur Sahib where the local administration has had a hand in Gurdwara administration, and where some Brahminical practices are prevalent. These need rectification. So probably in the case with Patna Sahib. In Calcutta, the Sikh Federation has done a good job, with emphasis on student culture. It must be understood that Sikhism, confined mainly to the Punjab-Delhi before 1947, has spread out to other parts of India after partition. This was so except in Northeast India where Sikh community has continued to exist for the last two centuries, without much interaction with the SGPC.

Nowadays, Gurbani is being telecast, thanks to the



mushroom-like growth of TV stations, from Darbar Sahib, Hazur Sahib (Maharashtra), Gurdwaras Bangla Sahib and Sis Ganj in Delhi, and from some other Gurdwaras such as those in Mumbai. There are also some telecasts from Sant-Baba elements. A common complaint heard from the youth is lack of knowledge about *Gursikhi* and *Gurmat* among parents, and their failure to impart it through *sakhis* during their growing up years. The religious hierarchy is concerned simply with performing of their duties, with emphasis on the collection of funds. There is general absence of pre-1947 type of *dharma*, religious education via dedicated teachers and granthis.

The practise of youth camps, prevalent in Madhya Pradesh or West Bengal, has got discontinued in the Punjab. The All India Sikh Students Federation as a nursery of Sikhism has virtually ceased to exist. There is no sign of movements for religious revival. Only a few institutions are there to look after Sikhism and these, though welcome, are not sufficient.

In urban and semi-urban areas the Sikh youth is indulging in inter-religious marriages, and there is likely to be further decrease amongst the Khatri and Arora segments. Caste has taken Brahminical roots among Jats who look down upon Mazhbis. There is stand-off between these two sections both urban and ruralites, which has got accentuated. The Mazhbis are also likely targets of the Bahujan Samaj Party, and schedule caste partisans who, too, have a negative approach in misrepresenting Sikhism.

The forces of Hindutava have gained sizeably in the Punjab countryside particularly among the gentry who represent that they have passed through an atrocious phase sine 1984 and the only way left now for them was to merge their children among the massive Hindu fold, so making them indistinct from the general body of Hinduism and so serve for "safety". The failure of all sections of Akalis to face, much less meet, the challenge is glaring. The successful blackmailing of Akalis by the BJP for another Rajya Sabha seat in May-June 2001 is an example. The Sikh population is likely to indicate a sharp fall in the Punjab. The forces of Hindutava are on the rise. The forces of pristine Sikhism lack consciousness or alertness to countermand the situation. In the words of Prof Noel Q. King of California University "there are no barriers against such type of forces destroying Sikhism from within". That is what is happening in the Punjab of today.

My estimate of apostate Sikhs in the UK, Canada and USA is about 40 per cent of the population. Of course, there are second and subsequent generations of Sikhs in Britain and North America while the USA and Canada too, at the moment, have first-generation Sikhs. Fortunately the institution of *gurnat* camps during summers has had a

strong position impact. Such camps are playing a very useful role in keeping the youth in harness. Such elements also have developed a strong connections with white Sikhs of the 3HO in USA and one of the direct impact of such *gurnat* education or training is the dropping of caste or village names by some of these young Sikhs.

The main causes of apostasy have been the failure of parents to keep the Sikh insignia of their children where both parents have been working: the impact of communists and pseudo-leftists who migrated from India and their alignment with the Indian National Congress (and later with Indian intelligence agencies) the inability of parents to find suitable matches for their children; the designs of some extraneous elements; and the impact of "modernism" have made them lose their identity. Women with "bobbed" hair whose children from their childhood fail to learn how to tie their turbans or do their plaits, are not likely to do so as they grow. The continued merger of some of such elements in the general body after losing their identity, is on the cards.

There have been welcome cases of some coming back to the manifold of Sikhism. This is a welcome development, but has been confined to the more elder Sikhs, with few exceptions.

As the 21st century advances, we shall see the coming of a new generation of Sikhs in the UK or North America who have little interaction, unlike their elders, with "back home". They are likely to act independently. They shall have no emotional links with the Punjab. The Jathedar Sahib of the Akal Takht and President SGPC shall need to be men of wider vision for which there seems little chance at the moment because of continued subservience of Sikh leadership of all hues, the activity of forces of Hindutava, and of the Indian intelligence agencies who have infiltrated with the Sikhs in the UK and Canada, though not to that extent in the USA.

Sikhism is under attack at the hands of the Brahminical juggernaut, and history has shown that no where, including the case of once powerful Buddhism, has it been successful. The juggernaut came into violent conflict with the followers of Kabir who was a bitter critic of Brahminism, and a powerful factor at one time. In the post-Kabir period Brahminism forced them to fall within its framework. The Brahmins were not much bothered about Kabir's teachings or philosophy because it, itself is such a humpty-dumpty rigmarole consisting of so many hotch-potches of contradictory doctrines including agnosticism and nihilism that it did not mind the existence of another degressive sects.

Now, for the first time it has come into confrontation with another minority, the Sikhs, and actually has tacit



support of all sections of Hindu society. The declaration by some advocates of Hindutava in the presence of Tarlochan Singh, Vice Chairman, Minority Commission in January 2001 about the independent character of Sikhism is not worth the paper written on: Hindus can change their option at anytime when they feel the need to. People have spoken of evil designs of Hindutava forces towards Sikhism, which to them is no longer a material factor.

Some such signals from India, from various types of forces of Hindu resurgence with state support, putting Sikhism on the defensive would prompt the Sikhs in the diaspora to assert their individuality – and independence – to emerge as the leadership of Sikhism. This is not idle talk: some people talk of some devices for the present leadership in India to see reason and look towards the diaspora for real Sikhism.

One would like some revivalist organisation like the Singh Sabha International at Roseville, California, and the institution of *gurnat* camps during summer for Sikh youth in the diaspora especially the UK, Canada and USA, to be greatly strengthened. One would like such organisations to promote Sikh principles and imbibe the Sikh spirit. The hardcore in India shall always be there to lend them credence.

I do not claim infallibility. I have come to these conclusions in great torment. I wonder if the process in India can be reversed, and the community throws up a process that may lead to revival of Sikhism. But keeping in view the structure of present day people, and various forces at work, I see little reason and wonder if I can be proved wrong.

To put it succinctly, the present day Sikh leadership in the Punjab, in the words of Giani Sant Singh Maskeen, is arrogant, oriented towards self (*humanain*) and politically oriented, using religion only as a tool to achieve the objectives which stands free. The rise of spurious state-inspired militancy did the maximum harm to destroy the religious or ecclesiastical order which was already dysfunctional. The Sikhs paid a great price to remove one Mahant (Narain Das) from Nankana Sahib. Now there is an all-round proliferation of such modern-era Mahants. Who will come forward to remove them? The common man is not oriented towards that; the state of apostasy makes them prone to confusion and misdirection. The rise of communist influence, and now Hindutava, glaringly completes the cycle. Let people pay more attention to this, debate it fully, the pros and cons and find out what Sikhism is and where it is headed. The intellectuals or educated ones take part in seminars and read papers, but their impact is *nil*. Life circle goes on as it were, on a downhill

journey for Sikhism in Punjab. There is absence of *Parcharaks* in the field.

I am encouraged to learn that some Western scholars like Professors Arthur W. Helweg, Karen Leonard and Noel Q. King in North America have spoken of the renewal of Sikh faith in the new world. This has been the case in Britain. Let us hope that the Sikhs of America, Britain and Canada will show the way ahead.

Dr. Sangat Singh
Author of "The Sikhs in History"

Dr. Sangat Singh (b. 1932) did his M.A. in History (1953), and Ph.D. (1964), from Punjab University. He was a member of the policy planning "think tank" in the Indian Foreign office. He was an alternate member of the Joint Intelligence Committee, the supreme policy planning body of the Government of India, for two years each in the early and late 1970s. In between, for three years, he was Director, Strategic Studies, in India's Defence Ministry.

Dr. Sangat Singh joined the Ministry of External Affairs in early 1960s following Nehru's China war, as a Sinologist specializing in guerrilla warfare. This was shortly overtaken by his numerous, high profile, stints as an analyst on Pakistan, and a significant one on Iran. He spent his last decade in the foreign office dealing, inter alia, with disinformation. He was known for his incisive analysis.

Dr. Singh is a keen observer of contemporary events and gained a rare insight into the ongoing developments in Punjab.

Dr. Sangat Singh has widely traveled in all parts of the world and already has half a dozen works to his credit.



(Above): Dr. Sangat Singh being offered siropa by Thandi Sahib, with Dr. Ranjit Singh Rajpal, President of the Sikh Council of California, at the podium. S. Charanjit Singh Bath is to the left.

Living Our Values

We are rightly proud of our forefathers and their spiritual and moral mentors, our Gurus and, of course, we are convinced that our way is divine. We were the ones who had the courage to take on the invincible Mughals and finally seal the North Western part of India from centuries of invasions and onslaughts. Rightly, we are concerned today with our degeneration and are sad about that lost glory, but then are heartened by recalling our sacrifices, our resistance against evil, our refusal to bow before insolent might and in our defence of those being tyrannised. We are rightly anxious that our past glory should return, our weaknesses should be eradicated and our existence should be honourably accepted. Indeed, we are the nation's pride, those, finely-knit citizens called the Khalsa, created by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

But have we ever analysed that all our glory, all our importance and all our righteousness has stemmed from the teachings, ideals, words and deeds of our great Gurus who had the vision of the greatness of humanity and who, one after the other, laid down the vital rules of human and spiritual conduct which no tyranny could break and no force could destroy? Until we do such analyses and come out of the shell of external cosmetism and dwell on our basic values, I am afraid we will continue to suffer, devoid of internal strength.

Amritvela remains the great source of my internal and external devotion and I am amazed at the extraordinary inspiration transmitted from Harmandir Sahib every morning through the radio waves (and electronically) which builds up hope on the one hand and systemetises the great contribution for humanity made by our Gurus. Their teachings are embodied in our perpetual Guru, the holy Guru Granth Sahib, but we have yet to understand that this is not only a holy Scripture but a FULLY PERFECT GURU capable of guiding and leading us back to our lost glory. The shabads which are sung in the morning have to do with the character of the Sikhs that our Gurus wished would have total devotion, nay surrender, to the Lord. But they also show us how our Gurus, even at the zenith of their own glory, sacrificed themselves before God in order to receive His love and strength to do what they did.

I have often quoted Guru Nanak's verses:

*Khatian jamme khatte kar nit khatian vich pahe
Dhote mool na utre je sau daovan pahe
Nanak bakhse bakhshich nahe tan pahce pahe.*

(M. 1, page 149, GGS)

(I was born in sin, I go on sinning and will always be in sin; I can never be washed of the sins, even I am washed hundred times says Nanak: If the Lord chooses to forgive me, this will be His grace, otherwise I am entitled to punishment).

But what Guru Nanak has conveyed, through the voice of the singers, is astounding. I refer to the shabad *Manjh Kuchaji Amawan Dosare* (M.1. *Kuchaji*, p. 762, GGS). Here is a broad translation so that we can analyse the depth of humility, of grace, of inner strength and absolute surrender to which he goes in order to be one with God.

"Manjh Kuchaji I have no accomplishments whatsoever but am burdened with countless sins".

"How can I then approach my husband to receive His love. There are others, each better than the other; who then would then think of me? Those who are in love with their husbands, are enjoying themselves under the shades of mango-trees. Regrettably I cannot develop such qualities, whom then can I blame?"

*"Your qualities are countless, I cannot name them. I cannot reach even one majesty of yours, I am sacrifice unto You for all times to come. My husband Lord gave me gold, silver, pearls, rubies and I became engrossed in them. I went on turning *kacha* houses into *pucca* ones and lost myself in such glories that I forgot to sit beside my giver-Lord."*

*"Now my youth is over. My hair is grey; I am about to depart for my in-laws' home; what face shall I show them? I went into deep slumber of *maya* and lost my way. I was separated from the Lord and went on gathering only *dukh*. My Lord, You are the embodiment of all virtues while I am meritless, but I pray to you. You spend all nights with the faithful ones, wont you given me, the separated one, just one night?"*

Imagine, the *Jagat-Guru*, as Guru Nanak is known, the founder of our religion, the picture of such humility and the most soft-spoken spiritual mentor who has woken up the entire world, begging of the Creator to forgive his sins! Surely Guru Nanak does not suffer from all these inadequacies, but in fact lays down rules for the conduct of his followers. It is for us to analyse ourselves in the light of the above shabad and the nuances that this emits:

- ❖ Are we prepared to surrender our all to the Lord?
- ❖ Are we prepared to believe that we are meritless and therefore not qualified to appear before the Lord?
- ❖ Are we prepared to believe that others are better than us?
- ❖ Do we believe that we can't blame others? We have to analyse ourselves about our inability to be worthy of Lord's grace is due to our own callous behaviour?
- ❖ Do we believe that instead of clinging to the Lord for grace and protection, we have become haughty, self-centred and are engaged in I-am-ness?
- ❖ Have we not perfected our materialistic life forgetting the Giver?
- ❖ Are we not like the gambler who has gambled away his *javani* and now finds darkness all round?
- ❖ Do we believe that we have wasted our lives in useless pursuits of ego and worldly pleasures;
and finally:
- ❖ Are we prepared even now to recognise our faults, beg the Lord for his graciousness and mend our ways, recognising that he is all virtue and we the virtueless?

Even this shabad alone could change our lives, if we listened to the message and lived it. The fact remains that we all want to get rid of our degeneration but we do not go to the source of *Amrit*, *Amritvela*, adherence to the Sikh way of Life. As Bhayee Ardaman Singhji of Bagarian has written, published in the *Nishaan* of 1/2001, our lives are supported by Gurbani. The Sikhs in political, spiritual, economic or any other fields pray that our pristine glory returns but we are not even prepared for our lives to be guided according to the Gurbani. Let us reflect:

- ❖ When we talk of the bravery of our soldiers, why can't we realise that it was the *Amrit ceremony* that so electrified the Sikhs that they were prepared to lay down their lives at the command of the Guru?
- ❖ When we talk of the sacrifices of various martyrs like Bhai Mati Das, Sati Das, Bhai Dayala and others, why

don't we realise that these came about as a result of their adherence to the Guru's commands in life?

- ❖ When we talk of other's onslaughts on us and others' trickery to mislead us by hook or by crook, why don't we realise that we have never had such formidable odds as we had during foreign rule *but we came out more determined to be Sikhs of the Guru's design?*
- ❖ When we talk of our heritage, why don't we realise that this is built on deeds, not words? And what is there, now, hindering us from pursuit of the real goals of Gurbani?
- ❖ When we deplore our degeneration, why don't we realise that our separation from Gurbani is the main cause of our downfall?

Once more, I refer to the same shabad of Guru Nanak. We are so thoroughly engrossed in *ego* and internecine quarrels that we do not behave like the Sikhs of Guru Nanak – Guru Gobind Singh. We are unabashedly hankering after power and self-projection. We are always considering ourselves better than others. We have lost the sense of purity and magnanimity in terms of our values. Can we not develop, at least for the sake of the well being of our community, a sense of devoted even self-annihilating contribution in the cause of righteousness? For the umpteenth time, I state that our major problems result from our unwillingness to live the life of the true Khalsa.

I reiterate that no power on Earth can subdue a Sikh, provided he lives the life of a Sikh. Guru Nanak himself had stated.

*Jau tau prem khelau ka chhao
Sir dhar tali gali meri aao
Itt marag peir dhinveeje
Sir deeye kaan na keeye*

(M.1, page 1412, GGS)

(If you want to play the game of love
Come to me with your head on your palm,
Remember the first step on this path may lead
You to even lay down your life).

Guru Gobind Singh administered *Amrit* only on our promises to lay down our lives for the cause of righteousness. How can we blame others for our degeneration? The fact is that we have deviated from the *Path*. No one has dictated to us not to live the Sikh way of life as Bhayee Saheb of Bagarian has written. I see no excuse for our blaming others. The pristine glory of Sikhism cannot be brought back merely by reiterating our values.

We have to Live Them !

Bhagwant Singh Dalawari

REDISCOVERING THE MAGIC OF PHULKARI



The history of civilisation in Northern India has been one of constant cultural fusion. However, except for very recently, people lived the same lives as their immediate forebears; sometimes even as their distant forebears. It is in the last fifty to sixty years that changes have been rapid enough to be disconcerting, the tangible remnants of our past disappearing with disorienting swiftness. A major casualty of such change has been the *phulkari*, an art and a craft practised for centuries by women of the Punjab.

Phulkari is the generic term for embroidery work done on coarse cloth with just one stitch, the darning stitch. When the embroidery is sparse and a great amount of background material is visible, it is called a *phulkari*. When, however, it is embroidered all over and the embroidery becomes the cloth itself, it is called a *bagh*. In their own category are the *chope* and *suber*, sparsely embroidered but in the double running stitch so that the pattern appears the same on both sides. Throughout her life every girl in the Punjab has laboured at this embroidery, a labour of love, for the *phulkari* was never sold but was made for personal use. As a young girl of seven or eight she would learn the stitch from her mother, first the simpler motifs and then an understanding of the sanctity of the whole. For traditionally, the embroidery on the *phulkari* was not mere decoration but rather harmony in effect between the work and the cloth. The bare spaces on the cloth formed an essential and pleasing pattern so that the rich background was a perfect foil for the geometrical motifs displayed upon it. Even as she followed tradition, the young artist learnt to experiment with and individualise her own artistic abilities, so that *phulkari* patterns were as infinite in number and appearance as the personalities that devoted themselves to the art. Simpler *phulkaris* were given away to dependants, so that the *phulkari* was to be seen adorning women of all levels during the bright, cold winter months. That is until mill-made textiles for the not-so-rich and shawls, usually from Kashmir, for the wealthy replaced this resplendent wrap.

The *phulkari*, *bagh* and *chope* were all associated with the rites of passage through life. When a child was born, the maternal grandmother started the embroidery with appropriate and auspicious prayers. If it were a grandson she would commence the *vari da bagh*, a fully embroidered *bagh* which took years to complete and which was given to the bride of this future groom. In the northern and western parts of the Punjab, a *suber* was started for the granddaughter, and a *chope* in Patiala, eastern Punjab and the Doab. During the marriage ceremonies, *phulkaris* were used at different times. At the *vatna*, or ritual bath, several married women who were related to the bride or groom in their respective households would hold a *phulkari* over the young boy or girl, while singing songs associated with the occasion. Relatives were presented with *phulkaris*, during marriages, by the parents of the groom and the bride, the latter taking many *phulkaris* with her to her new home, along with the skills at embroidery she had acquired already. As the bride was dressed she was wrapped in her *chope* or *suber* by her mother. And when she left for the groom's house, she was presented with her *vari da bagh*. Every year thereafter, at *karva chauth* when married women wore their best clothes and fasted and prayed for the longevity and health of their husbands, the *bagh* was worn. And at the very end, the *bagh*, auspicious till the last, was used to wrap the body at the time of final rites. As sanctified offerings, *phulkaris* were used to decorate the sides of gurdwaras, and for the canopy above the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book of the Sikhs.

Today simulated designs are to be found on cushion covers, table cloths and dressing gowns, however hideous in their transformation from the personal and sacred to the commercial and the mundane. If this craft is seen merely as an outlet for creative energies, there is much the modern world can offer in replacement. Nostalgia too can very well be satisfied with charming records of a beautiful past. If, however, the past is crucial to our identity, then a major effort needs to be made to preserve this heritage.

The Inheritance

By virtue of its geographical location in the northern reaches of the sub-continent, the Punjab has been, for over 2000 years, a region of cultural amalgamation. Numerous tribal cultures of Central Asia as well as Greek, Buddhist and Muslim influences have interacted with traditional Aryan India. Some migrations were slow, meandering and peaceful, others sudden and violent, but until the British decided to invest the Punjab in the last century after the Anglo-Sikh wars, the scene was always a volatile and changing one.

Because of this unsettled background and because of

the harsh tropical climate in which fabric rots easily, very few *phulkaris* have survived beyond a century, making it difficult for us to be sure of the origin of this craft. Further, the primary use of the *phulkari* was personal and so *phulkaris* do not have names or dates by which we can identify them. The first authentic, professional account of the *phulkari* was published in 1888, in the "Journal of Indian Art", London Vol. II no. 24. The writer, Mrs. Flora Annie Steel, was the wife of an I.C.S. officer, and was later to become a celebrated novelist on Indian themes. We can only look to the social historical background prior to that date for hypothesis on origins of the *phulkari*. Mrs. Steel states that the authentic *phulkari* had purely geometric designs, a statement which points to three possibilities of origin for the *phulkari*. These would be a tribal, primitive origin which was naturally metrical, a sophisticated Hindu-Buddhist origin with metrical learnings or a later Islamic and purely geometric origin, also metrical and derived, perhaps, from Sufi tradition. It is however more probable that the tradition had tribal origins and absorbed the other two aspects in turn, giving the technique, symbols and motifs a Punjabi identity. For as Mrs. Steel observes, "The distinctive feature of the original *phulkari* work, uncontaminated by exotic amendments, is the stitch, which is purely and simply a darning stitch, done entirely from the back. It is a curiously distinctive work, following the track of certain peoples and tribes with unvarying certainty, modifying itself to new conditions, and so becoming of positive ethnological value". Observing that the Islamic influence appeared stronger in Hazara and the neighbourhood she says "It is worthy of remark" that Mr. (later Sir Denzil) Ibbetson in his "Punjab Ethnology" remarks that the very fact where we find this *bagh* work at its best was originally peopled by Hindu Jats, who were afterwards conquered by Muhammadan tribes. Curiously enough the modification in style is just what might be expected under such circumstances. The fabric became finer, the labour in consequence infinitely greater; while the embroidery ceases to be a decorative adjunct, and becomes the cloth itself. At the same time, the distinctive stitch, the distinctive merits, which had caught the stranger's eye, remain. It is free work in servitude, and while in Rohtak at the present day the Jat woman works for herself, in Hazara and the neighbouring districts the fine work is all done to rich orders, and most big houses keep dependants constantly embroidering". It had already become fashionable to employ women to work on *phulkaris*.

At about the time Mrs. Steel made these observations, the commercial element was introduced for the first time, making the *phulkari* into a decorative art. Fairs and exhibitions in the US and England propagated a



fashionable movement of fabrics from India. Commercial orders were placed, with colour schemes changing to suit new fashions and pictorial designs taking over. Degeneration was immediate as, unlike in the west, in India colours are sacred, each representing a specified quality or association. Surface decoration led to a trivialisation of design, and finely worked stitches were a major casualty, Sir George Watt and Percy Brown writing about "Punjab Embroideries" in the official catalogue of the "Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art 1903" mentions that a Ludhiana dealer showed them *phulkaris* ready for export to America, embroidered to designs patterned by a European trader. They observe that "the design was not Indian at all and the stitches of embroidery were fully an inch in length" where Mrs. Steel had found that "the *phulkari* stitch at $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in length was considered proper, the needle making three or four at each interaction and nipping up the portions of the field at the exact positions required".

By the turn of the century Hazara and the neighbouring areas produced what were considered their finest work. Instead of khaddar, a finer cotton called 'halwan' was used, and, very often, specially skilled women were hired to embroider the *phulkaris*. Since the counting of threads was extremely difficult because of the fineness of the cotton, double running stitch was often used to outline the pattern, especially on *bags*. In East Punjab, khaddar continued to be used although silk now became the accepted thread. As for further south, we read that "It seems indubitable that wherever the stalwart Jat tribes of the south eastern plains came from, with them came the original *phulkari* workers: for the art, almost unchanged, lingers still in its best form among the peasants of Rohtak, Hissar, Gurgaon, Delhi, and to some extent in Karnal. Rohtak may said to be its home and here the Hindu Jat thrives thickest".

Several writers have sought to connect *phulkari* with the *gulkari* of Iran or to find references to the stitch in writings as early as Ban Bhatt's "Harishcharitra" (608 A.D. approx.) where in a description of Harsha's sister, Rajshri's wedding scene, the author says "some people were embroidering flowers and leaves on the tem of the cloth from the wrong side". The Kangra valley paintings of the 1780s too show umbrellas with geometrical designs similar to those on *phulkaris*, but they are not *bags* or *phulkaris*. Another possible origin is in the carpet making tradition in the so called Turkish stitch where nothing shows on the reverse side and all is on the design side. Using only the upper warp threads, the lower warps are woven into the weft. The counting of threads in *phulkari* work may therefore stem from a carpet making background of long ago, as might the use of wool for embroidery amongst

peasants of certain areas of the Punjab.

Embroideries, *phulkaris* and *baghs* were collected at the Punjab Government Museum, Lahore by Mr. J.L. Kipling during the early part of this century. At partition, a half share of the assets, now in the Museum at Chandigarh, were transferred, but unfortunately with incomplete records. An attempt to photograph the older *phulkaris* at the Lahore Museum with authenticated dates should, however, be made to establish definite older design motifs.

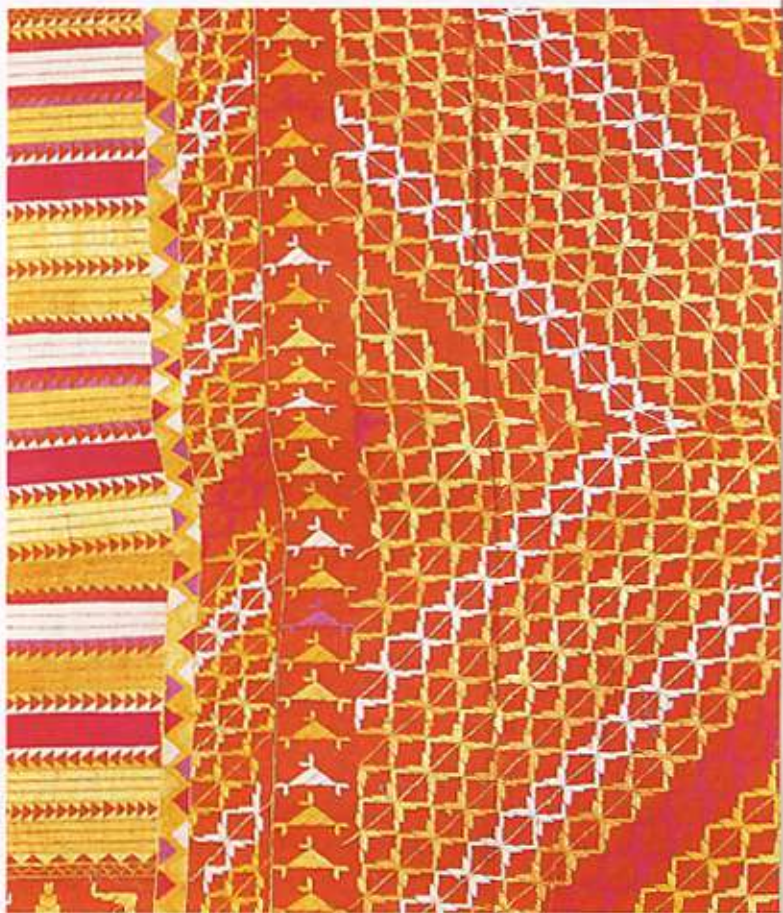
Materials & Techniques

"In judging *phulkari* work, invariably look at the back and classify merit by the smoothness and regularity of the stitches. It may also be set down as an axiom that in so far as the pattern changes from pure geometrical lines so far has it deviated from the ancient art, which was essentially a diapering, not a flowering in silk. The colours of the ground work are best confined to two, viz. different shades of madder browns and indigo, while the silk should be either yellow, or white or green. Crimson is admissible in indigo grounds, but it is modern": Mrs. Flora Anne Steel, "*Journal of Indian Art*".

The fabric most often used for all *phulkaris*, *baghs*, *chopes* or *sheeshedars* was 'khaddar' i.e. hand woven coarse cotton. According to the 1903 gazette for the Phulkian states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind, khaddar was then available for Rs. 1.00 per yard with a width of $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ yards and in bolts of 40 yards. In the wealthier homes of the Punjab a finer cotton called 'halwan' was used fairly often and, very occasionally silk as well.

The khaddar was first spun at home on *charkhas* by the women of the house and the cotton thread given to the village weaver, the *jhulaha* to be woven into the usual bolt length of 40 yards. The cloth was then dyed either by the women, at home, or given to the dyer, the *rangraz*.

The background colour of the *phulkari* could be red, yellow, white, indigo, black or, very rarely, green. It was most often, red and, before the introduction of factory manufactured aniline dyes (towards the end of the last century), the shades of red differed from district to district depending upon the dye source, the mordant used and, especially, upon the water of each area. The water of the river Jhelum, for example, contained minerals which gave a peculiar brilliance to the colour red, when red cloth was washed in it. Shades of red, therefore, ranged from brown in parts of Haryana to brilliant red where the Jhelum flowed. The Hazara area and most of northern Punjab used white quite often, while indigo and black were preferred by Muslims,



Yellow was common to all of Punjab and green a rarity anywhere.

Red dye was obtained from several sources but mostly from "Manjheet" the Indian madder plant. The root of this plant, a creeper, was the source for red while other parts gave other shades of colour. It was also obtained from the bark of the 'lodh' tree, from the flowers of the 'tun' tree, from lac, the barks of the kachnar and kikar trees, and several other plants and trees. The barks, because of their higher tannin content gave a browner red.

Yellow dye was obtained from turmeric, saffron, pomegranate and several other plants and blue from indigo and chaukanda. Of the mordants used, alum was the most common. However lime, salt and sulphate of iron were used as well.

The needle preferred for embroidery was a long one so that the cloth could be nipped at a number of places for one pull of the thread. Japanese, German and British needles with long eyes were quite easily available by the end of the 19th century.

Most parts of the Punjab used silk floss known as 'pat' for embroidery. However Mrs. Steel reports that Rohtak and Hissar where khaddar was used, would dye wool or cotton for thread as well.

The silk floss was bought mostly from itinerant peddlers, usually nomadic tribal women, who also sold small mirrors, cheap toys, hairpins, needles and other items for women and children. The price of the floss depended upon its quality. At the beginning of this century, for example, it was sold for Rs. 1/- to Rs. 2/- per tola, (a tola being the equivalent of 11.65 gms). The floss was already dyed at its place of origin which could be Afghanistan, Kashmir or Bengal. The best quality however was Chinese, and this was dyed at Amritsar or Dera Ghazi Khan according to a report by W.M. Hailey in 1903. The silk floss was bought in small quantities because of the expense involved as each *phulkari* might require 15 tolas and a *bagh* double that amount. At the beginning of the century and earlier, Rs. 30 or Rs. 60 was, for the normal villager, a large amount to spend all at once on a *phulkari* so that the buying of floss was usually need based. Intermittent and erratic buying from different peddlers and consequently from different lots led to several shades of the same colours being used on the same *phulkari*. Shading in the embroidery itself was however not part of the art of *phulkari*.

By the beginning of the 20th century, vegetable dyes had been replaced by aniline dyes to a very large extent. The latter made the dyeing process simpler and so less time consuming. They imparted a brightness to the silk, and most importantly, changed the traditional palette by

introducing many new shades. This was, as Mrs. Steel observed, a detrimental change, no matter how inevitable.

Technique

Whether the work in hand was a sparsely embroidered *phulkari* or a fully worked *bagh*, the embroidery was always done from the reverse of the patterned side. The stitch used was the darning stitch and so visual effects were created by changing the direction of the stitch which made the silk floss catch the light from different angles when the *phulkari* or *bagh* was worn. This was especially effective with geometric designs. The embroidery was done whenever time could be spared from everyday chores and duties so that it took many years to become accomplished from the first attempts which were usually begun at the age of 8 or 10. Patterns learnt and reproduced but with endless variations reflecting the individuality of the worker. Most importantly however they were not drawn or delineated before hand except sometimes when temporary lines were used on *baghs*. Towards the end of the last century when *phulkari* patterns also began to include pictorial depictions of everyday life, the method of embroidery remained the same. Two or three widths of khaddar made up a full *phulkari* or *bagh* and were either stitched together before embroidery was started or afterwards, depending upon local custom.

As the time available was unpredictable and village environments fairly grimy, a piece of cloth protected the patterned side at all times of embroidery. When the piece was ready it was packed away with the same protection. This was essential as *phulkaris* and *baghs* were preferably not washed so as to retain the sheen and clarity of colour. After the monsoon they would be dried in the sun to get rid of damp and fungus and thus prevent rot.

Patterns, Motifs and Colours

"Symbolism is the root of all ceremonial ritual. It preserves strengths and makes the many ceremonies relevant to any age and time. If the language of symbols begins to evade us or if we choose to shun them, all ritual and tradition will become meaningless, and the tested philosophy of a culture will disappear": Anand Coomarswamy, Collected Works.

Tribals respect and use nature's bounty in all aspects of their lives, passing this knowledge on by its practical application in food gathering and in their social structure. When the change to agriculture takes place, a distancing occurs as fewer plants and animals are known. As villages grow and become towns this distancing is amplified. The *phulkari's* motifs show a tribal origin but its later guise is a village craft. In towns, large and small, the *phulkari* motifs

now merely remind us of their origin.

In its symbols and motifs tribal art is also an instrument of communication with the realm of the spirit. This other world, the ancestral power of the tribe, helps those here on earth as they seek protection from all the hazards of existence. The key to the geometrical patterns of the *phulkari* is not completely possible as it would mean analysing a language that was once spontaneous and intuitive more than ten centuries ago. They are mandalas in the true sense for all enclosures are holy, taking on specific strength as squares, rectangles, diamonds, stars, frets etc. In ritual precision these are sacred as they express the inner urge of wish fulfillment. The Punjabi psyche has produced an infinite number of unique 'moving' mandalas by repeating the inner pattern within the usual enclosure and as a feat. It is only sacredness which makes generations follow the difficult stitch, done from the reverse, with the magic of ritual keeping them in continuous touch with their ancestors. Just as every individual has his own rhythm, so does every culture, and this has given a 'rhythm symbol' to the *phulkari*.

Of the many cultural fusions that took place over the centuries in the Punjab, the motifs of the *phulkari* point towards an acceptance of the magic diagram drawn on the floor with rice powder, a form of sacred, art practised by women only. Called 'likhan' in Himachal Pradesh, 'alpana' in Bengal, 'rangoli' or 'chowk purna' in Uttar Pradesh, 'kolam' in Tamil Nadu and 'satia' in Gujarat, the diagram contain geometrical motifs to be found on the *phulkari*.

Straight lines are always expressive of activity and are also means of communication and conjuring, their significance always closely linked with the nature of the zone which they connect. Serrated edges in rhythmic ascending, descending or horizontal directions give further life to the straight line. This movement suggests the potential of vibrating phenomena such as musical scales and the colours of the spectrum.

Traditionally the dot is the centre, the static vibrant symbol of immortal creation. The moving dot traces a line, the start of dynamic movement. The triangle follows the dot when the straight lines are joined together in an expanding configuration giving the three human characteristics of 'sattava', 'raj' and 'tam'; the three time characteristics of past, present and future; and three pleasure characteristics of 'satchit', and 'ananda', the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva) and their triple powerful female counterparts, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Kali. The triangle is the base of the yogic, 'kundalini' process. Resting on its base, the triangle pointing upwards represents Shiva, man, mountain and fire, all ascendant. A

triangle pointing downwards represents Durga, woman, water, the source of creation. Two triangles superimposed and forming a vibrating hexagonal star constitute the 'Sri-Chakra', the union of man and woman. Creative activity and a symbol of the soul. Further it stands for the two worlds – the physical one of birth to death, and the ultimate hereafter.

A dot expanding into four sides evolves into a square which represents, in this life, togetherness in totality. The circle symbolises eternity, as also air, sky, sound, the universe, speed and equitable tension. The circle, 'chakra' represents the cycle of life and death, rebirth, the laws of life, 'karma', creation and re-incarnation, and the cyclic rise and fall of everything including the sun. The activities and movements in the four directions – north, south, east and west – are subject to the sun, while the 'swastik' in representing the sun symbolises the amalgamation of man and the world, the four extensions to the sides of 'swastik' are four hands, as the blessing 'mudra' of Vishnu.

Again four dots at the four corners symbolise creation, with the horizontal and vertical lines symbolising man and woman, their togetherness generating creation. The four aims and reasons for human existence at the personal and community level are also represented here namely 'artha', the acquisition of wealth; 'karam', gratification; 'dharma', duty; and 'moksha', emancipation.

Sound is significant in the Punjab religions for in Hinduism the origin of everything is in 'OM', for God and all spiritual power originates in this powerful holy sound. The Sikh Guru's gave it the even more powerful ultimate connotation EK OM KAR in expounding it to meaning the One Supreme Ultimate God, the Infinite One, the Absolute, not subject to cyclic life and death. *Phulkaris* have the ॐ or ॐ embroidered as the first auspicious symbol in a corner or at a prominent place.

Some of the other prominent geometrical figures besides the triangle, square and line are the rectangle, diamond, arrowheads or chevrons, different types of crosses, two triangles forming, like an X-shape, the small hand held 'damroo' and zig-zag lines indicating lightning or water depending on their rhythm. Some motifs are oval, circular, series of spirals, or coils of varying rhythms, composed of small straight lines gradually turning in the direction sought, to create the effect of a curve.

The eight-sided lotus, its petals symmetrically in an octagon, symbolise the spatial emanation of the One to many i.e regeneration. Sometimes it is creation in its widest sense, generated from the dot, the primordial seed of the cosmic waters, with the lotus as the earth itself. At other times it is that of the other plane which reveals itself in the



depth of the heart through contemplation, as vast as space, in which takes place the rediscovery of our interior reality. For the body is compared to the root of the lotus plant feeding on mud and water, but the pure flower unfolds towards the vastness of the sky. The lotus as a symbol is common to the Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Egyptians, the Aryans and the Indus Valley civilisation at Mohenjodaro. The earliest representation in Mohenjodaro is that of the goddess carrying a lotus in place of a neck and head. The eight petalled lotus takes on the symbolism of numbers, for "this is the centre when Brahma dwells, the visible manifestation of this occult activity at the intersection of the earth with heaven". Metal water bowls from sepjuq times in Persia have had the lotus motif at the centre surrounded by the planetary signs on the rim pointing to a solar significance. Mosque domes also have the lotus form on them. The earliest written account of the eight petalled lotus flower are a graphic representation in the 'Vishnu Dharam Ottara Purana' a supplement on painting of the Vishnu Purana dated at roughly the second half of the fourth century A.D. by Stella Kramrisch. Here the worship of the Sun-God is prescribed through an eight-petalled lotus flower drawn on the ground. Vishnu Dharam Ottara Purana also makes the point that to understand painting, the disciplines of dance and music have to be mastered, as all are interlinked, pointing to things seen and the associated intrinsic rhythm of everything in the universe. Thus the eight-petalled lotus, the four-sided square, the three sides of a triangle, the sequated five or seven intervals in the star, the sharp wave of the fire etc. all have a scale similar to music made in the visual by dance, and frozen in analysis by painting.

Of the common birds and animals depicted on the *phulkari*, the elephant, vehicle of rain God Indra, symbolises water, strength, prosperity, wisdom and memory. It is also the protector and servant of Lakshmi. The bull is the vehicle of the God Shiva, the destroyer of illusion, friend of farmers and another symbol of the Earth Goddess as Mother. The horse is vehicle of the Sun, Moon, Sukra, and Venus. It is the symbol of the universal monarch, of strength, speed, loyalty and of the sexual instinct. The parrot is the vehicle of Kamdev, the God of love, of passions and romantic atmospheres.

Colours

Red is blood and fire, a reminder of the ancient blood sacrifice that connoted renewal, new life and a sacrifice of the self for creation at all stages – at birth, at marriage and at death. The Mother Goddess is red, the principal colour of creation and activity. Fire has been man's companion for centuries, symbolic and useful at camps and settlements

for cooking, warming, producing tools, and ultimately at cremation. Fire is celebration at its most beautiful and colours of fire—yellow, orange and red – are the colours of joy, when the blood races in the body as the hearts of men and women beat faster and faster, as their blood whirls round to the beat of dancing. And fire is symbolically one with cyclic renewal in nature as old grass is burnt off for new tender shoots to come through, the emotions and desires with 'inner' fire as the tantrics attempt a transmutation; of the woman creating life in her womb; and of the body cremated with the soul separating itself from the worn out dress of the weary body. Analogously, fire of the stomach 'cooks' food consumed to give energy for life and emotions till he dies for then fire consumes him on the funeral pyre, a never-ending cycle. Burning fire is also the symbol of psychic energy, passed on in the Punjab from generation to generation by the visibly graphic 'fire flower' – the *phulkari*. *Phulkari*'s in red and yellow, are the colours of fire, of life, of birth, of marriage, and with green, of renewal and their cycles in harvesting, as also the colour of the 'blazing' intellect. Red is the colour that enchants Gods and Goddesses and with gold, it's the predominant colour of the Goddess of wealth, health and prosperity, Lakshmi.

After red the most prominent colour is yellow, symbolic of gold, an image of solar light, personifying wealth and prosperity with divine intelligence and illumination. Yellow is part of the fire, an auspicious colour, symbolising the Indian spring – *Basant* – when everything is fresh and colourful. *Rag Basant* symbolises the Lord's love for his creation in spring.

The silk 'pat' used gives a sheen to the *phulkari*, the sheen symbolising time. This sheen is interchangeable with white and silver, corresponding to the moon indicative of peace, symbolic of Saraswati, purity and knowledge. Saraswati is equated with the 'veena', the full moon, the jasmine flower, the dew and a garland of pearls. Knowledge of the self, to understand our true nature.

Blue is symbolic of fullness, like the vastness of the sky, security and happiness, the darker being calmer. Mythologically and spiritually blue symbolises omnipresence, besides a host of other associations.

Green is the colour of vegetation, of earthly growth representing sensations and pleasure, being the connecting link between black and red. Black is fertilised land, decomposition, death and mineral life, for black is time, wherein all phenomena begin and the symbolism of Mahakali. This dynamic alternating dualism of existence is illustrated by coal and diamond, fire leaving charred remains and black clouds raining clear water. There is no

antithesis in colour for all colours combine to be part of the spectrum that starts and ends in white, the same changing phenomena of 'maya', of this world.

Another prominent colour is a shade of pink, a near-violet pink, commonly called 'shocking pink'. This shade is in close association with emotional red, representing flesh, sensuality and full of earthly emotions and their aristocratic indulgence.

Series

Phulkari 'rhythm-symbols' can be divided into five distinct series by their motifs and layout, rather than by background or motif colour or use.

First Series

Where there are purely geometrical designs on the main sheet with a 'rhythm-symbol' derived purely from geometrical figures like triangles, squares, diamonds etc. all in even rows, each individual motif outlined or not, with an overall fret of triangles, squares, diamonds, waves zigzags or chains, and separate borders, and or side borders



that have geometrical motifs derived from vegetation, birds, or animals. Extremely sophisticated, mathematically precise and perfectly balanced designs are done on a background sheet of mainly Indian red or indigo, and very rarely of green, yellow or white. Three patterns of infinity. This series encompasses mostly *baghs* such as 'bawan', 'chand', 'vaider bagh', 'dhoop chaun', 'lahirya', 'pachranga', 'satranga', 'dariya'.

Second Series

Geometrical designs again in the main sheet with a 'rhythm-symbol' derived from birds, animals or vegetation, all again in even rows, each motif individually outlined or not, again with an overall fret of triangles, squares, diamonds, waves, zigzags or chains and separate end borders, and/or side narrower that have geometrical motifs derived from vegetation, birds or animals. Again extremely sophisticated, mathematically precise and perfectly balanced designs that include mirror-work in button-hole stitch and tantric designs, all done on backgrounds of mainly red, white, indigo and very rarely of green or yellow. True patterns of infinity: in this series it is mostly 'moi', 'mirchi', 'nakoon', 'cowrie', 'kauah', 'suraj mukhi', 'genda', 'gobhi', 'belan', 'thirma', 'sheesha dai', etc.

Third Series

This is the simplest, where the least amount of work is attempted for there are just a few 'bel-butas' in different combinations, but occasionally complete borders, e.g. 'til patra', 'nilak', 'suber', 'saboo' etc.

Fourth Series

Here the main design is done in golden yellow and consists of large triangles, the tips inwards, gradually becoming smaller, in two parallel rows running the length of sheet, called *chope*. Frets consist of squares, diamonds and triangles running along the edge of the length of the sheet, with no border of any kind whatsoever at all, but with other colours filling in. Background colour of the sheet is red only but the size is larger than all *phulkaris* or *baghs*. Again this is a mathematically precise and perfectly balanced design. The fourth series refers to *chope*, *buber*, and *ghunghat bagh*.

Fifth Series

Besides incorporating the normal motifs and symbols from design of the first, second, third and fifth series designs the unique addition in the 'Darshan Dwar', are the arches, arcades or doorways lining both sides of the centre, lengthwise. The mathematical precision and perfectly balanced designs are again repeated as in the first, second, third and fourth series. Background sheet colour

can be red, or yellow only. This series is a mixture of *bagh* and *phulkari*, patterns with temples in the 'darshan dwar'.

Sixth Series

Outline of humans, animals, birds, fishes, insects, vegetation, jewellery, trains etc. not in proportion to their physical size, nor in rows or squares, but loosely in a vortex, is the compelling 'rhythm-symbol', balanced by the normal geometrical frets of triangles, squares, diamonds, waves, zigzags or chains, and separate narrow end borders and / or side borders that have geometrical motifs derived from vegetation, birds or animals. The main outline motifs are embroidered with folk style simplicity and freedom. Background sheet colour can be red, indigo or black, yellow or white. This refers to *chamba work phulkari* and *sainchi phulkari*.

Geometrical motifs are the original repertory as symbols filling the void of all that is not within reach, the unknown psychic something which manifests itself in drives, wishes, volitions, attention, meditation, capacity for work, for enjoyment. This would be expressed in degrees of intensity which must be postulated, and hoped to be achieved, be it mere with fulfilments, a feeling of security or the realisation in his life of a state beyond it. A few flower and vines patterns were possibly of an earlier age but the vast majority appear to have come about in the 18th and 19th centuries. Another phase appears to be the late 19th century commercialisation when *phulkaris* came to be made for trade according to what the market in the United States of America or England demanded, as noted by Mrs. Flora Anne Steel, and later by Sir John Watts in his note for the 1903 "India Exhibition" in Delhi. About this time appeared the 'picture' *phulkari*, wherein though the emotional attachment was there, the sacredness was disappearing, for the 'picture' *phulkaris* lack the 'rhythm-symbol' of the geometric designs, and form a vortex instead. Thus in *phulkari* motifs the archetype comes alive by relating the metaphysical with the everyday for without myths and symbols there can be no psychic depth to the origins of a community.

Future of The Patterns of Infinity— The Phulkari

The situation concerning the future of these fabulous patterns of infinity on the *phulkari* is now much worse as there are added problems to what was recorded over one hundred years ago in 1888 by Mrs. Flora Annie Steel. These are poor workmanship, use of aniline dyes that lacked not only fastness but resulted in garish shades of colour, and awful designs to meet trade requirements. Poor workmanship was because *phulkaris*, *bagh* etc. were produced for sale rather than for sacred personal use. The

tendency already "was to embroider 2 inch long diapers instead of the ¼" or ½" diapers" in the darning stitch and further to use design motifs that would cover the background easily and quickly. The replacement of vegetable dyes by commercially manufactured aniline dyes resulted in a new lot of garish shades of coloured threads, instead of the mellow pastel shades of natural vegetable dyes. Perhaps the worst aspect was to thrust 'Europeanised designs for commercial purposes' for meeting export demands, which had no basis in Punjabi psyche nor any origins or evolution from the patterns of infinity.

This situation came about because of the loss of impetus and rhythm of life as originally evolved in the tribal set up, which had continued into the semi-settled rural form of village life in spite of the troubled three centuries preceeding Maharajah Ranjit Singh's reign. Therein geometry brought order and structure to the seeming chaos of nature. Thereafter the laws of expression, based on interpretation and improvisation let the form remain at an archetypal level to be called upon and activated by a master craftsman. Still, there was systematic loss of the original tribal virtuosity over the last hundred and twenty five years, as the Industrial Revolution eventually produced synthetic dyes and other mass produced goods, even while the basic structure of Punjabi society became polarised, firstly into a middle class and workers grouping at the beginning of the century and later with smaller land owners and increasing numbers of Government employees swelling the ranks of the middle class, with workers also striving for middle class status. There is tremendous purchasing power in the middle class group, but for mass produced goods only, with the impetus of origin and the link with nature fast disappearing. What was a way of life soon became museum show pieces, but separate studies are now being conducted to understand the art form and to preserve it.

Although pride was for virtuosity, admiration was for self-reliance, dexterity and artistic ability in the old village life. However, money-buying power being in the ascendant, with the monotony of every life, the spirit became a casualty instead of improving with more time available. Television has become largely an option to while away one's time.

Losing an original thread of thought and culture is traumatic and has resulted in frenetic, vacuous movements in art and thought over most of the world, an overwhelming wave, with nobody able to ride it. Craftsmanship and creative people are still part of the ancient lineage in India but some crafts are in danger of losing their impetus totally and become monotonous repetitive designs while others

disappear altogether. The *phulkari* has too been a victim and appears to have lost its sacredness and ritual use for few weddings in the Punjab now take place that drape a bride according to such time-honoured customs.

The following remain sources of *phulkari* and *baghs*:

- ✧ A few embroidery schools in the Punjab, part of their work being sold through *Phulkari*, the Punjab Government's emporium in New Delhi.
- ✧ Some homes in Haryana villages.
- ✧ A few commercial shops in Patiala, that have *phulkaris* done to order.
- ✧ Itinerant Rajasthani women moving about in towns and hawking these. *Phulkaris* are now being embroidered in Rajasthan and Gujarat to be sold in Punjab towns!

Currently the number of designs being embroidered as carried out in this survey amounted to about five or six, with the vast majority being of only two or three designs as compared with over three hundred different designs of the old *phulkari*. This is because of either blind copying, or, as these were easier to do because the weavers did not know of the infinite possibilities. A lot of *phulkaris* and *baghs* have rotted away because of climatic conditions.

Urgent steps need to be taken to revive the craft since the sacredness impetus appears to have very nearly disappeared :

- ✧ The Central, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Government's should coordinate and set up museums at as many locations as possible, and at their agricultural universities as already were started at the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana by Dr.M.S.Randhawa some years ago.
- ✧ As the original impetus has tapered off, this craft can best only be copied to start off a possible revival. For this, a catalogue of all possible designs in colour either to scale or actual size is a basic necessity, with an introductory explanation of the sacred and ritual aspects given in Gurmukhi, Hindi and English. These should be distributed at subsidised rates to all embroidery schools and Block Development Centres that have women's welfare schemes.
- ✧ Television programmes, explaining the colour significance, of the sacredness of the ritual by portraying the occasions should be telecast on the regional and national networks. Songs connected with *phulkaris*, with appropriate music for the designs of the different regions of the old Punjab.
- ✧ In these television programmes and books, the emphasis should be on the virtuosity, the personal touch and useful occupation coupled with the sacredness of ritual.



- ✧ A research project on vegetable and synthetic dyes through scientific analysis by either spectrophotometry or high pressure liquid chromatography. After scientific analysis, the dissection of symbol and motifs and quantification can then be done. This can be done at any major museum that is set up for *phulkaris* in collaboration with the Governments of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. It would then be possible to date the *phulkari*, its area wise origins, distribution and design characteristics of the symbols and motifs. Incorporated in this research project should be the location of older *phulkaris* as follows:
- ✧ From the those Britishers who once served in India and who may have been presented *phulkaris* on their retirement, or departure from the old Punjab.
- ✧ From the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and from the British Museum, London, who would have considerable collections with the advantage of definite dates of acquisition in most cases.
- ✧ From the museums in Pakistan.

An essential question remains : is it necessary to remind people of their lost sacred rituals? Is folk art not just a form for decorative purposes but a part of the psyche of the Punjab, land of the five rivers? The relevance of such sacred cloth was not decorative but part of the rites of passage through life when archetypes came alive by relating the metaphysical with every day life? Have we reached such

a stage in the land of the five rivers, from the non-ego tribal set-up, to the civilising and cultural ego, on to the non-ego of personal salvation, that we are confined to the mindless, soulless, monotonous drudgery of an age of mass production?

Let us hope otherwise!

Birinder Singh Malhans

The author, (born 1939) studied at The Lawrence School at Sanawar in the Simla Hills and later at the Government College, Chandigarh.

After some years with the tea industry in Assam, he became an Orchardist in Himachal Pradesh and Convenor of INTACH's Simla Chapter. As an artist of renown, his first show of paintings was at Chandigarh in 1976 and he has done hundreds of pen-and-ink drawings on heritage structures, monuments and buildings. In 1999, he was commissioned to do six paintings of the five Takhts and Darbar Sahib for the Bank of Punjab's Millennium Calender, currently being re-published in the Nishaan.



Earlier in 1982-83, he had carried out detailed studies and research on the art of Phulkari, its historical antecedents, heritage significance and infinite variations, along with Miss Jasbir Singh.

Re-Discovering the Phulkari

The Punjab was destination for some children of the Vasant Valley School of Delhi, who set out to study the rich heritage of the State and learn the intricacies of various arts such as phulkari embroidery, parandi making, nada making, pankhi making, juttie making and working on the charkha. Artisans from surrounding villages brought along their work, expertise, and patience and came to teach their handicrafts to young city-children, more conversant with using their hands to punch in matter on a computer, rather than create beautiful patterns with a needle and thread.

I was fortunate to be able to learn one of the arts that the Punjab is renowned for - phulkari embroidery. The meaning of phulkari is in two words - *phul* meaning flower and *kari* meaning craft and hence the flower craft. The work is extremely intricate and, of course, like all handicrafts of the Punjab, strikingly colourful and vibrant. For numerous artisans, it is a life occupation and a lot of time, energy and effort goes into the making of these works of art, many of which get passed down from generation to generation as family heirlooms.

The women who had come to teach us wasted little time in adjusting themselves to their new surroundings, a large Community Centre. By the time we reached the work hall to get acquainted with the artisans and their various art forms, it had been transformed into a colourful handicraft centre.

Large, robust and gaily dressed women sat in groups, chatting as their needles flew in and out of their cloth. Watching them work with their colourful threads made it look so easy and effortless but as I sat down to try my hand at this seemingly facile craft, I realised, looks could be deceptive.

I soon realised that not only was the embroidery not all that simple, neither was it the first step. Before moving onto the actual embroidery, the cloth being used has to be prepared. Phulkari work can be done on many types of cloth: but it looks the best on silk.

The first step, of course, is cutting the cloth to the desired size. This done, the pattern to be embroidered has to be imprinted on the cloth for guidance. For large pieces of cloth with a constant pattern, wooden blocks



are used for this purpose, but since we were working on small pieces of cloth, our preparation process was different. Small sheets of plastic were held over designs already imprinted on the larger cloths, and with a needle, dots were closely pierced out on the plastic, following the pattern's outline. This plastic sheet was then held taut over my cloth piece and a mixture of black colour and kerosene was rubbed over the plastic sheet with cotton wool.

The colour seeped through the holes and on removing the plastic, I saw that my cloth had a neat dotted pattern imprinted on it.

There are two basic types of patterns embroidered—one is, of course, floral designs and the other—known as *Paranthi Phulkari*—consists of square shaped patterns which when embroidered closely together, are elaborate and look stunning.

Then, of course, comes the embroidery itself. We used special thread which is rather thick, brightly coloured and glossy. Never having been exposed to embroidery, the artisans patiently taught us the basics that came naturally to them. Threading and holding the needle the right way, learning how to make small neat knots and then starting the actual work. Phulkari embroidery consists of small, neat uniform sized stitches all going in the same direction in a line. Starting from one side, a stitch is made by picking up a minute bit of cloth from first one end and then another. Learning the basic technique was not tough, getting it perfect was. The stitches had to be the same size, in the same direction and very close to each other. But soon, my hand got set and it was then that I started really enjoying my work... it was the first time I was exposed to phulkari work. Not only how to make it, I hadn't even seen it before. Hence, when I first saw a bedcover covered with phulkari embroidery, I was held spellbound. The details, the intricacies and the colour were all amazing but what struck me most was the amount of hard work and effort that had gone into the making of every perfect stitch which all added up to make that bedcover look as splendid as it did.

Later, as I sat down, to work on my own piece of cloth, I appreciated this effort even more. After half an hour of work, I had just managed to make a row of stitches (and I despairingly realised they were not the same size) and my back was totally stiff. I shuddered to think how long it would take me to complete a large piece of work like the bedcover I had seen.

But practice makes perfect, and though I didn't become anywhere perfect, my hand soon got set and my work started looking more like it was supposed to. My stitches were neater and

the artisan prices depending who was guiding me didn't have to keep correcting my blunders any more.

My work started progressing faster and I was filled with an amazing sense of satisfaction as I watched the patterns on my own small cloth develop into colourful designs similar to those the artisans were producing. My work was easier and my hand was moving almost mechanically.

I now got a chance to interact with the artisans and this was an experience as wonderful as learning the art itself.

For most of the artisans, their handicraft is their life occupation and most of their day goes in working on them. Most of them know more than just one art and they train almost 500 children in a year. But household work and handicrafts is not all these skilled women can do. They can accomplish tough, tedious jobs such as working in the fields just as well. They have learnt their art from their elders or have taken training courses. Like themselves, their children are all educated but do not want to follow the same track as their parents. They, instead, want to pursue new careers and new opportunities such as medicine and engineering. And, even though this is a promising thought, it makes me wonder whether due to this trend, these amazing handicrafts will not fade away.

The artisans I talked with live in Patiala. They live in large houses surrounded by their fields and are content and manage very well with the amount they make. They sell their handicrafts at various prices depending on the amount of effort and work that has gone into each individual piece.

The two artisans I interacted with — Bibi Harpreet Kaur and Bibi Preetam Kaur — gave me a lot of very interesting information about *phulkari* embroidery. Traditionally *phulkaris* are embroidered with silk thread and on rare occasions white cotton thread is also used. However, some contemporary *phulkaris* are stitched with synthetic embroidery thread. The dense areas of stitchery, sometimes covering the entire ground cloth, are mainly composed of the characteristic *phulkari* stitch which resembles a satin stitch but only on the front side. It is usually embroidered from the reverse side on handwoven coarse cloth known as *khaddar*.

Wedding *chaddars* are called *phulkaris*, but the category extends to any embroidery that is predominantly composed of the *phulkari* stitch. The trousseau, made by the bride's family, contains *phulkari* table-cloths, bedcovers, cushion covers, *dupattas* and *kurtas*. The suber *phulkaris* of 2½ by 1¼ yards are intricately embroidered wedding *chaddars* displaying an infinite variety of compositional designs. Most wedding *chaddars* are embroidered on red *khaddar* cloth even if it is completely concealed by the stitchery originally madder root, flowers of the 'flame of the forest' trees and bark of the acacia trees provided the natural red dye in the Punjab.



In villages in the Punjab, the wedding *phulkari* is embroidered by the bridegroom's family. Before the bridegroom leaves his home for the marriage ceremony he gets ready and the *phulkari* is held over his head as a canopy by four relatives. The groom drapes the *phulkari* over his shoulders during the wedding procession to the bride's home where he then ceremoniously presents it to her.

In some areas the bride's family embroiders a wedding *phulkari* on black *khaddar* which she wears during the religious ceremony. The bridegroom's family makes the red *phulkari* and it is placed over the *doli*, a palanquin used to carry the bride in the procession to her husband's home. The bride then wears the red *phulkari* for several days.

Listening to these cheerful women, I felt there was one very important lesson to be learnt from them. Despite the fact that they all had some problems in their lives, they were content and happy with whatever they had been given. They all felt that God gives everyone a share of difficulties, but they were confident they would soon pass and they were determined to bear them as cheerfully as they could.

Interacting with the artisans was an extremely enriching experience. I not only learnt more about them and their lifestyles, it also made me realise how large and how diverse our country is. There are so many different arts, and handicrafts in various parts of the country of which we are totally unaware. Apart from these arts, there are also so many different kinds of people — from different backgrounds, leading totally different lifestyles — whom we are alien to. We are people of the same country, but we are yet so different... and it is this difference which often creates an awkward gap between us. A gap which exists until we decide to bridge it.

I live the life of a city girl and they of village folks. There is almost nothing common in our lives, not clothes, language, pastimes or even food. And even though their lifestyle is as alien to me as I am sure mine is to them, there is the one thread which binds us all, and which overcomes all other differences: we are all children of the same land. Very similar to a piece of *phulkari* embroidery in fact, in which a myriad vibrant colours merge to form a stunningly unique pattern.

Taarini Chopra
(Courtesy: Vasant Valley School)

STATE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

The Panthic Morcha

On 5 August 2001 Akali leaders announced formation of the *Panthic Morcha*, headed by Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi of the *Gurmat Sidhant Parcharak Sant Samaj*.

This is a conglomeration of Akali factions, including the *Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal* of S. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the *Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar)* of S. Simranjit Singh Mann and the *Panthic Dal* of Bhai Jasbir Singh Rode. The Morcha has the support of former Jathedar Akal Takht, Bhai Ranjit Singh and former Speaker of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, S. Ravi Inder Singh, all of whom were present at the press conference where the formation of the new outfit was announced.

An 11-member committee to run the affairs of the Morcha was announced later at Amritsar, while a conference under the banner of the new Morcha was held at Fatehgarh Sahib.

Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi announced that the Morcha would adopt an "open-door" policy, with all those who wished to "defeat" the Congress and the SAD-BJP combine, welcome to join. The Morcha was **not** a parallel party to the *Shiromani Akali Dal*, headed by S. Parkash Singh Badal, but aimed at protecting and preserving Sikh traditions and tenets and functioning under the guidance and leadership of the Akal Takht. Formation of the Morcha was necessitated because "our own



Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi (centre) at the Akal Takht.

people" had discarded the very constitution under which the Akali Dal was formed in 1920 and over a period of time, had forgotten the spirit of the Moga convention. "It is ironical that rather than religion dominating politics it is the other way around, thanks to the leadership of S. Badal". S. Tohra said the Morcha would articulate on the aspirations of all Punjabis wanting a "true" Panthic party, adhering to the principles of the original Akali Dal that had been given a "go-by" by S. Badal.

Enunciating the objective of the Morcha, he said this would give a "clean, corruption-free and transparent administration". The Morcha would maintain "equidistance" from both the Congress and the SAD-BJP, both of whom were responsible for the spread of corruption, unemployment and poverty, had denigrated the Akal Takht, showing disrespect and disregard to the appointed Jathedar, given up Panthic thought and worked against Sikh traditions. Despite all the respect and support given to Badal over the many decades, he had "betrayed the Panth".

The Morcha would work for the restoration of Panthic sentiments and thoughts and lay stress on "Punjabi Ekta" in the true spirit of the Moga conference resolution where the SAD was projected as a "Punjabi party".

"We believe in strengthening Punjabiat".

Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi said that he had accepted the "convenership" of the Morcha till the Baisakhi of 2002. The political goal of the Morcha was no different from that of the SAD, though the latter had regrettably "gone astray". The Morcha would launch an enrolment drive and eventually have *one nishaan, one saavidhan, one pradhan*. The endeavour would be to recreate the "original" Akali Dal of 1920. It was unfortunate that wrong leadership had diluted the original Akali Dal's philosophy and objectives, he stated.

Panthic Morcha's massive "ros" march

The *Ros* (protest) march by the Panthic Morcha and the Sant Samaj from Tarkhanmajra village (Fatehgarh Sahib) to Chandigarh on 17 October was a massive show of strength with a large number of people joining the march on trucks, cars, two-wheelers and bicycles, sporting saffron flags. The procession passed peacefully through Morinda, Kharar and SAS Nagar before reaching Chandigarh amidst elaborate security arrangements.

The highway traffic coming from Ludhiana, Ropar and Fatehgarh Sahib via Morinda to Chandigarh had to be diverted at a number of points forcing the motorists to take different routes.

The procession, led by former Akal Takht Jathedar, Ranjit Singh, SHSAD leader Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi of the Panthic Morcha and S.Prem Singh Chandumajra, the former Member of Parliament, moved with brief halts en route and reached Morinda at around 1 p.m. Different religious and social organisations and businessmen had put up stalls to distribute "parshad", biscuits and soft drinks. Allaying the fears of the police that some protest would be held at Chanduan (Morinda), where incidents of sacrilege were



S. Ravi Inder Singh (centre) leads the bicycle-march into Chandigarh.



Over a lakh Sikhs assembled at Chandigarh.



Various members of the Panthic Morcha at the Chandigarh grounds where a memorandum was presented to the Governor of the Punjab.

reported, the procession passed through peacefully. School children waving saffron flags welcomed the procession as the participants chanted hymns.

Some of the spirited lot however raised slogans against the ruling Badal regime.

The presence and support of Mr Kanshi Ram, the BSP supremo, not only surprised organisers of the protest march taken out from Fatehgarh Sahib but also added much strength to their campaign against the Badal Government, initiated on the issue of sacrilege of *Guru Granth Sahib*. Mr Kanshi Ram, President of the BSP, appeared on the stage in dramatic manner and extended his support to the protest march.

Addressing the gathering before the departure of the march, he strongly criticised the Badal Government for its failure to protect the sanctity of religious places or to take any action against Baba Bhaniara. He said what could not happen during the rule of Mughals, the British and the Congress, happened during the rule of so-called "saviour" of the *Panth*. The criticism of the Government by the BSP supremo and support to the *Panthic Morcha* was termed as a clear indication of forming an alliance in the coming Assembly elections.

The march started from Gurdwara Jyoti Swarup Sahib after the *ardas* performed by Bhai Ranjit Singh. By the time the march started, there was an ocean of vehicles and the public, which had come from all over the state, was far more than initially expected.

Addressing the gathering, Bhai Ranjit Singh rejected the judicial probe, they had no faith in the Government. He said, that in 1978 when a clash took place between Nirankaris and Sikhs, the Nirankari Baba was arrested under Section 302, but he was not taken to jail. In spite of repeated assurances by Badal that he would be awarded severest punishment, he was given VIP treatment instead.

“Similarly Baba Bhaniara would not be given any punishment, rather he is enjoying the hospitality of Badal in jail”.

Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, President of the SHSAD, alleged that Badal, by using his influence, had got Badungar acquitted from the present Jathedar of Akal Takht in spite of the remarks made by Bada Bhaniara that Badungar had been visiting his dera.

Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi, convener of the *Panthic Morcha*, stated that they had made Badal the Chief Minister hoping that interests of Sikhs would be safe in his hands but “he failed miserably even to protect our Guru”.

He said that thousands of Governments could be sacrificed for the Guru.

Akalis and the Anandpur Resolution

The ruling Shiromani Akali Dal brought up the issues of the Anandpur Sahib resolution, 1984 riots and *Operation Bluestar* with an eye on the forthcoming elections at its conference at Baba Bakala on the occasion of “Rakhar Punna”.

Leaders of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee, the Sarb Hind Shiromani Akali Dal

and the SAD (Amritsar) also made speeches, virtually converting their conferences into pre-election rallies.

While S. Amarinder Singh, President of the PPCC, announced that the Congress would constitute a judicial commission headed by a sitting judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court if voted to power, the SHSAD and the SAD (Amritsar) passed a re-resolution urging the release of all Sikh youths languishing in jails.

The joint conferences re-solved to contest all 117 Assembly seats. The leaders of both parties announced that S. Ravi Inder Singh would be the next Chief Minister if voted to power. The ‘Panthic Morcha’ would also endeavour to end the nefarious ‘police raj’.

Leadership of the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal touched upon the issue of forging complete Panthic unity in the wake of the next Assembly elections. S. Ranjit Singh Brahmputra, Senior Vice President and Cooperation Minister, said the doors for Panthic unity were open, but this could not be done on pre-conditions.

S. Balwinder Singh Bhunder, General Secretary of the SAD and Rajya Sabha member while mentioning the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, said that the SAD was the first political party in the country to raise the issue of greater autonomy for States and amendment of the Constitution. He said that when the SAD raised this issue in the eighties, a canard was spread that the Akalis wanted a separate Sikh state. However, when the SAD-BJP Government sent the Anandpur Sahib resolution to the Constitutional Review Committee, no party raised its voice against it as “everybody now wants more autonomy for the States”.

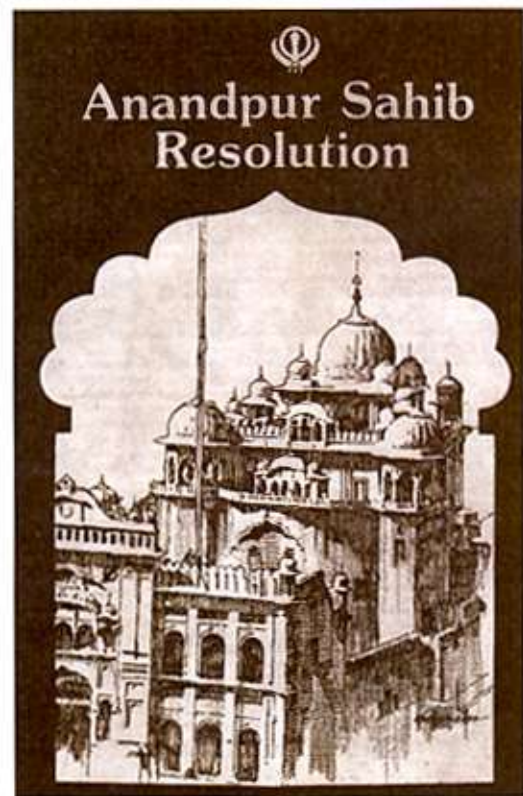
Intach to conserve treasures of Darbar Sahib

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), “awakening from slumber after much criticism over the decay of murals, wall paintings and frescoes inside the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple and Baba Atal,” has finally given its nod to conservation work by the Indian National Trust for Architecture and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).

In view of the resolution passed at the last executive meeting of the committee, SGPC Secretary Gurbachan Singh Bachan has written to Vice Chairman INTACH, S.K. Misra clearing conservation work. Bachan has also asked the trust to initiate conservation and preservation work at the earliest as untrained hands have already caused much damage to the age-old artworks in the shrine.

The SGPC, charged with managing of the Gurdwara affairs, had come under direct criticism from various art lovers and conservation bodies for paying scant regard to the peeling off plaster and vanishing wall paintings at the Golden Temple. Even INTACH had taken strong notice of the “callousness” of the SGPC, saying the Golden Temple showed obvious signs of neglect and the casual attitude adopted by the authorities concerned.

“Following this, the INTACH had offered its services for the conservation work required to preserve these priceless works of





Census of Sikhs in Delhi

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) has strongly contested the low representation of the community in 2001 census figures released by the Census Commission. Of the Delhi's total population of 13.3 million, the census states that there are 599,557 Sikhs, 1,338,297 Muslims and 117,701 Christians.

A member of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, S.Manjit Singh, has alleged that the census figures, showing a decline in the population of Sikhs in Delhi, were part of a "conspiracy". In a letter addressed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, S.Manjit Singh stated that "it is really painful that the authorities involved in the census have deliberately tried to belittle the strength of the Sikhs in Delhi... it is a planned conspiracy to deprive the Sikhs of their various rights. It is a known fact that the maximum concentration of Sikhs in the world is Delhi".

The letter stated, "In 1979 there were nearly 1.1 million Sikhs in Delhi when the estimated population was about 8 million. The population of Sikhs, according to our information, has also increased substantially. But I am pained to inform you that the present census figure gives a figure of only 5.9 lakh Sikhs in Delhi. This is concocted and is a deliberate move to undermine the strength of Sikhs".

"There is great resentment among the Sikh community over this deliberate act. I request you to look into this serious matter, otherwise the Sikhs in Delhi will strongly take up the issue which will have serious repercussions". In a statement, S.Manjit Singh said the main reason behind the Punjab problem was the "biased census". If the wrong was not undone, the Sikhs would protest through dharanas, file a petition in the court and involve Singh Sabha Gurdwaras to conduct census of their own to prove the "insidious intentions of the authorities."

An immediate consequence of the Census 2001 "under representation" of the Sikhs in Delhi has been the reaction of the Lt. Governor Vijai Kapoor who has reportedly questioned the Delhi Government's earlier decision to grant second language status to the Punjabi language in the Capital region, citing that "the Sikhs constitute 4.51% of the total population of Delhi".

In a sharp retort, S. Paramjit Singh Sarma of the Delhi Sikhs Gurdwara Management Committee, stated that "the granting of second language status to Punjabi was earlier opposed on ground of financial liability, now other excuses are being given". The motives seem to be part of a deeper conspiracy particularly as Punjabi is not the language of the Sikhs alone but that of the entire Punjabi community which included Hindus, Muslims and Christians!

artists, which had fallen prey to the on-going *kar seva* (voluntary services), devoid of any expertise. Our headquarters then wrote to SGPC officials over this and after a period of about a year, we have received a positive response", said Dr.Sukhdev Singh, Convenor Punjab Chapter and Member, Governing Council, INTACH.

He had taken up the case at the meeting of the Governing Council held in New Delhi recently and the council had given its approval and had even appointed Ashok Upadhyya, Senior Conservator, Indian Conservation Institute, Lucknow, who had already made a preliminary study of the conditions of the paintings and murals.

"He would take up the work with expertise, drawing assistance from local skilled and unskilled workforce", said Sukhdev Singh. He also added that in his earlier studies, after which a detailed report was prepared by the trust, he had highlighted an urgent need to preserve the monuments.

The worst affected artwork is at Baba Atal Gurdwara near the Golden Temple, where more than 200-year-old paintings have virtually worn off. "The INTACH, which has carried out numerous works like this, will study the miniatures in detail before maintaining these to their original style and essence", added Dr Sukhdev.

Gurbachan Singh Bachan attributed the delay in taking the decision to the administrative process. "As the matter was highly sensitive and required a lot of deliberations, it took time. We found that the INTACH possessed requisite techniques and skill and as such was the institution fit to study and then carry out the preservation work here".