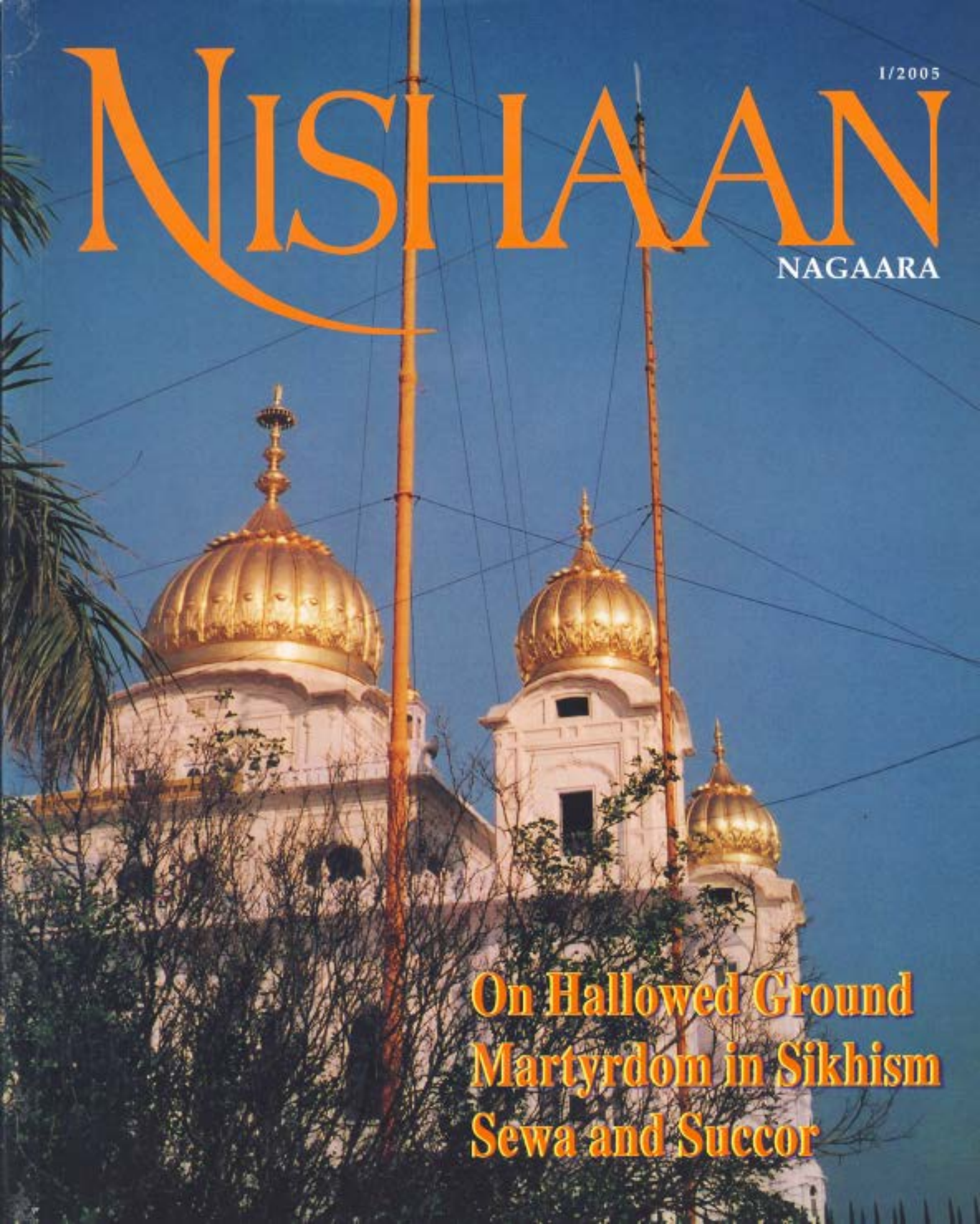


# NISHAAN

1/2005

NAGAARA



On Hallowed Ground  
Martyrdom in Sikhism  
Sewa and Succor



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[Based on "Supreme Sacrifice",  
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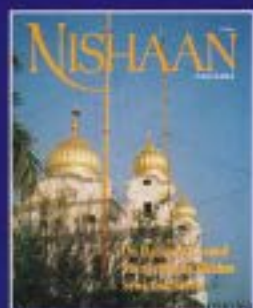
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## The Concept of Martyrdom in Sikhism

The literal and primary meaning of the word *martyr* in English and *shaheed* in Arabic is 'witness'. This acquired its modern connotation during the early days of Christianity when Christians testified to the truth of their convictions by sacrificing their own lives. Later, the Arabic synonym, *shaheed*, also began to be used for "one who dies in witness of his faith or who seals his belief with his death while fighting against infidels".

Sikhism extended the concept, along with its current form and usage, by introducing a new dimension and a universal outlook. It set, thereby, its currency in Indian society which, because of its conformist approach and escapist tendency, had previously remained almost deficient of great heroic deeds of such martyrdom and did not cherish it in that context before advent of the Sikh Movement.

Martyrdom, as such, has been associated primarily with religion and their traditions, originating in some cases from indications given in their respective scriptures. But all religious traditions are not endowed with this great and proud privilege. It does not seem to exist, for instance, in the specific form and usage in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in the Indian context. However, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism, preserve more or less a rich tradition of martyrdom, martyrology, martyr and martyrolatry.

In the case of Sikhism, martyrdom developed with a significant difference. In it, the word *martyr* or *shaheed* diverges from its primary and limited meaning of "testimony". It implies and connotes, on the other hand, a scholastic concept of *martyrdom* or *shahadat* as a selfless heroic deed of sublime self-sacrifice for a lofty and righteous cause with a universal outlook in comprehensive form.

According to Guru Nanak's thought, a true martyr is one who, imbued with *simran* and *seva*, that is the love of God and service of mankind, offers himself to the oppressor for supreme sacrifice in the cause of upholding

truth and defending dharma or righteousness. He does so at all cost, in the face of challenges from any side in order to defend, thereby, right against wrong, justice against injustice and for serving and safeguarding any other allied noble cause. While treading the path of martyrdom, he shuns all pressures and inducements, bears all tortures and torments and expects no material gain or glory for himself, his country or community.

This is so in Sikhism, because Guru Nanak Dev has himself assured that

*Maranu munan suryan haqq hai,  
Jo hoe marani parvanan*

SGGS, (Wadhans, p.579)

Martyrdom is the privilege of the heroic,  
If they die for a noble cause.

Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 A.D.), fifth in his apostolic line, remaining true to this concept and ideal, willingly and patiently suffered inhuman tortures and martyrdom in 1606 A.D. at Lahore, under the orders of Emperor Jehangir (1569-1627 A.D.) for pleading the people's cause, defending dharma and refusing to accept unjust orders. He preferred to submit to the Will of God and suffered in silence, while vindicating the cause of truth and religious freedom, rather than yield to the unjust will and aggressive policy of a bigoted ruler.

His grandson and the Ninth Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675 A.D.), too, laid down his life as a martyr on 11 November 1675 at Delhi under the orders of Jehangir's grandson Aurangzeb (1618-1707 A.D.) "whose efforts", according to Sayad Muhammad Latif, "were directed to converting the whole world to the Mahomedan faith" and who had unsuccessfully urged "the Sikh Guru to embrace Mahomedanism". Guru Tegh Bahadur volunteered to sacrifice his life in order to defend the fundamental rights of the people, to protect their faith and belief and so vindicate, by his heroic action, the freedom of conscience and worship being denied to them. He embodied in himself the undaunted spirit of

supreme sacrifice in the pursuit of such lofty ideals and eternal values by which humanity must always live.

In Sikhism, however, the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur embodies in itself some unique features of martyrdom, particularly in the sense that he passed through a tortuous ordeal and courted a voluntary death not for the salvation of his personal self and followers or for the propagation of his faith and convictions but for the faith of others and for upholding convictions in which he did not believe himself either on doctrinal or on creedal basis.


By doing so, according to the autobiography of his son, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 A.D.), the Tenth Nanak, he "performed a heroic deed and made the supreme sacrifice in the dark-age for protection of other's right to wear the sacred thread and frontal caste-marks." He went to the utmost limit in helping and protecting the good and the men of faith. Without a groan, he gave up his head but neither his ideals nor determination. He suffered martyrdom for the sake of religion and righteousness. He refused to perform miracles to escape a violent death, pronouncing these as unworthy acts which fill true men of God with utter shame. Breaking the pitcher of his mortal frame over the head of the Emperor of Delhi, he departed to the Realm of God. No one else has ever performed such a noble, mighty and glorious deed".

These incidents of martyrdom in Sikh history are unique, unprecedented and unemulated. Guru Arjan Dev's sufferance and demise in Lahore prison exemplified the extent of strength of the spirit and submission to the Will of God, and man's ability to suffer infinite torture with equanimity provided he is "one with the creator". Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution in Delhi showed humanity the necessity to rise above the divide of religions, with premium on human values, man's divine right to live, pray, worship and follow his inner dictates. The Guru thus demonstrated such intrinsic presence of the divine spark and infinite potential in man.

But martyrdom of the *Sahibzadas* in the winter of 1704 surpasses all descriptions. Two hundred years of Guru Nanak's way of life, nurtured, developed and matured by his successors and brought to its zenith in 1699 by the tenth Guru, had transmuted the Sikhs to such an intensity of commitment to the cause of "good" that even the 6 and 8 year old *Sahibzadas* matched, if not transcended, the levels and sacrifices of the earlier martyrs. Over the 200-year evolution of the Khalsa, the very genes of the Sikhs had been totally transmuted.

These martyrdoms marked the pinnacle of evolution of the Khalsa concept and struck decisive blows at Mughal perfidy and the collusive Brahminical society. Some historians are of the definitive view that if the Mughuls had not taken such confrontational attitude to the reformist, socio-religious movement of the Gurus, the Sikhs would not have been transformed into the world's greatest martial race that they then became and the course of history may well have been different.

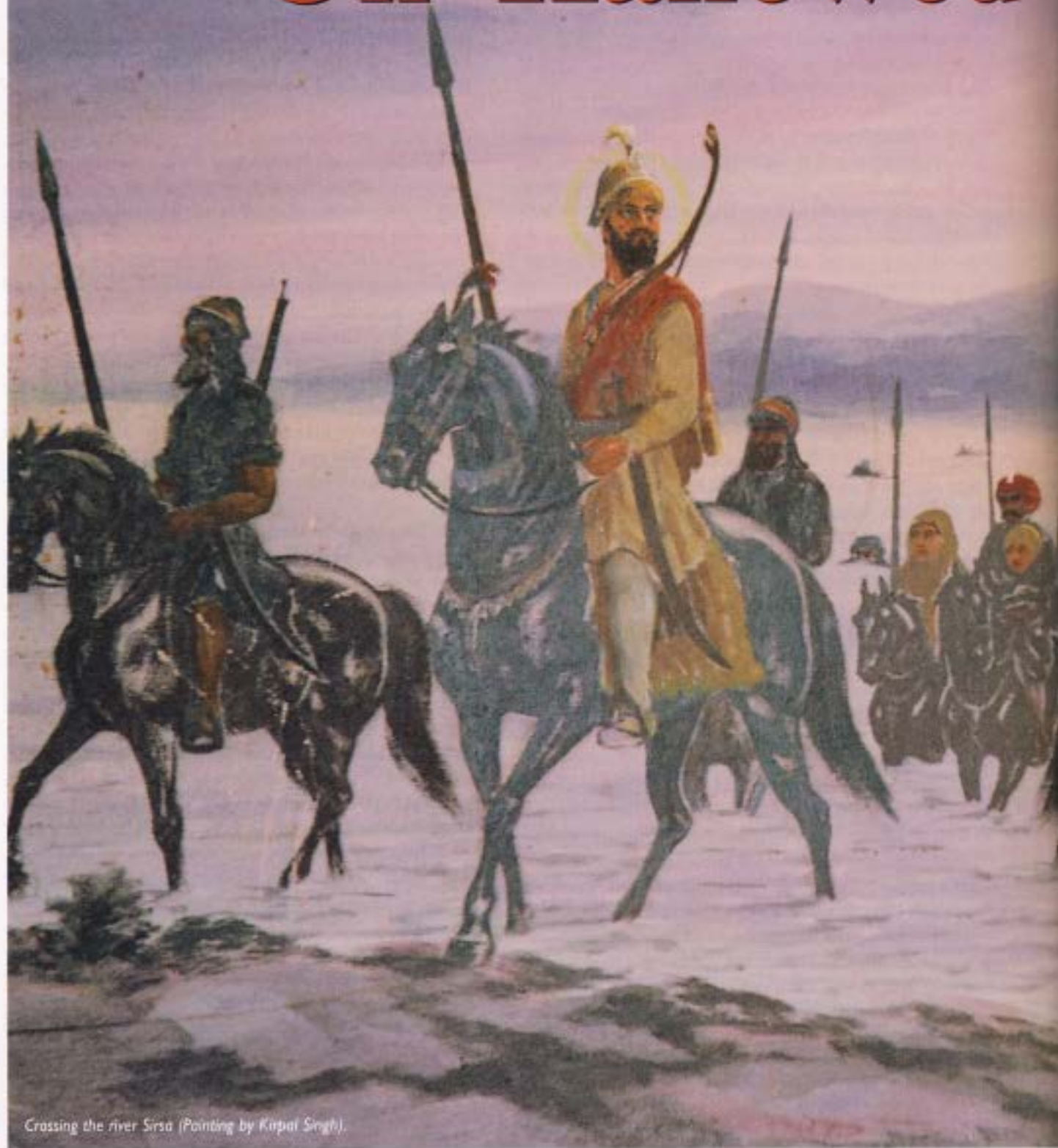
If it is true that "martyrs of a religion usually arise from persecution and that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church", then the Sikh religion is a classic case. "Perhaps the most striking example in India of the effect of a cruel persecution in consolidating and defining the religious life of a country", according to Dr.A.S.Geden, "is that of the Sikhs.... who found themselves brought into conflict with the dominant power of the Mughal emperors and were forced, in self-defence, to take up arms and maintain their existence and religious liberty.... they were confronted with the alternative of acceptance of the formula and creed of the ruling faith or destruction. They refused to submit to either, but endeavoured rather to maintain their freedom and rights with the sword.

The persecution in fact ensured the effect of welding a community and organisation, in its origin purely religious, into a nation of saint-soldiers. The *Sant* also became a *Sipahi*. 

With inputs from  
Dr.Harnam Singh Shan



# On Hallowed



Crossing the river Sirsa (Painting by Kripal Singh).



# Ground



Fierce battles for Anandpur Sahib were fought between the Sikhs and Moghuls over the years 1700 to 1704. The vastly larger and besieging Moghul armies had been bested by the far smaller number of Sikhs defending themselves and the camping Moghuls suffered in the heat of summer followed by monsoons. They wanted to withdraw from this endless war without losing face and eventually sent two emissaries — a Maulvi and a Brahmin who swore by the Quran and the Geeta — that if Guru Gobind Singh agreed to leave Anandpur, he and his followers would be allowed to go unharmed. The Guru knew this was a ruse but decided to put their word to trial, got some carts loaded with rags and animal bones and had these covered with silk and velvet cloth.

No sooner had these cart loads travelled a short distance from Anandpur fort, there was a sudden attack by Mughal soldiers, who were, however, dumb-struck by the contents. After a few days, the Mughals apologised and sent the Guru a copy of their holy Koran signed by Aurangzeb, along with his letter, promising safe passage once the Guru left the fort. Guru ji's Sikhs then pleaded with him to accept Aurangzeb's assurances. On their repeated requests, Guru Gobind Singh agreed to leave the fort and did, just after midnight on 20 December 1704.

Winter was at its severest, as Guru Gobind Singh departed from Anandpur along with Mata Gujri, his four sons and the five beloved ones (*Panj Pyaras*). Other Sikh soldiers followed in small bands. As they reached banks of the river Sirsa, they said their morning prayers and *Asa di Var* at dawn. Although Gurujī was aware of the risk of attack by the treacherous Mughals, he maintained the routine of morning prayers. Thereafter they crossed the river at first light.

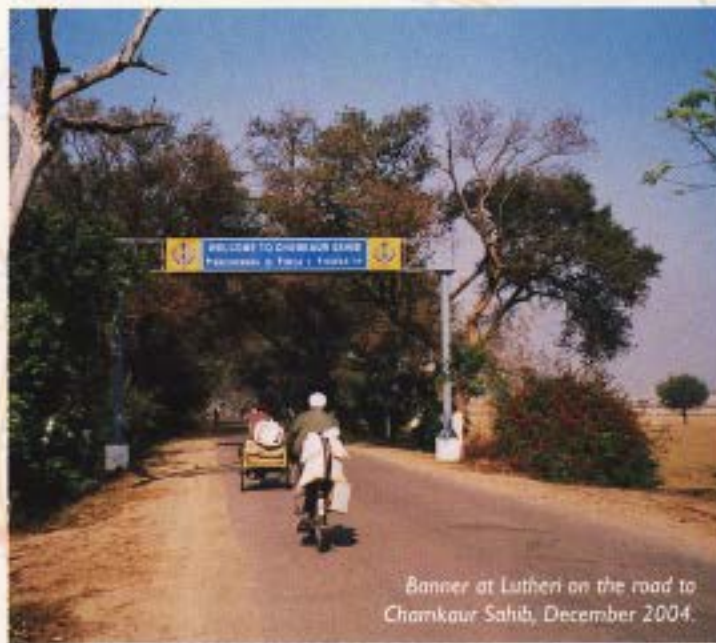
The two younger sons of Gurujī, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh, however, had got separated from their father while crossing the river Sirsa. With Gurujī's revered and elderly mother, Mata Gujri they then traversed across the scrub jungle hills, going south-west.



When the Mughal forces discovered that Guru Gobind Singh and his followers had left Anandpur, they rushed after them on horses. The Guru had already crossed the Sirsa river, but some of his companions were still on the river bank and fierce battles were fought at dawn, the Mughals unable to distinguish between friend and foe and killing some of their own in utter confusion. The valiant Sikh rear guard had stemmed the advancing Mughal forces.

Bhai Uday Singh held the Mughals at bay single handed, scores of them being beheaded by the fearless warrior before he became a martyr on the battlefield.

Sahibzada Ajit Singh was about to cross the river when the Mughals closed in. Bhai Jiwan Singh thundered down on his charger, rushing at the Mughals with his spear. Under impact of his fierce attack, the Mughal soldiers dispersed. Back on his horse, Baba Ajit Singh, swiftly crossed the river with lightning speed and was soon beyond their reach.



Banner at Lutheri on the road to Chamkaur Sahib, December 2004.

Bhai Jiwan Singh too checked the Mughals, rushing fearlessly into their midst, displaying unique spirit in spite of the heavy odds against him. Ultimately, he also fell a martyr.

The battle was resumed, the Mughals being under the impression that after the loss of Bhai Uday Singh and Bhai Jiwan Singh, morale of the Sikhs would be low. But the few Sikhs left behind still went at them so furiously and suddenly that they had to retreat post haste, fleeing for their lives, amidst victorious *jaikaras* of Sikhs. A memorial was built here much later, in tribute to the valiant deeds of the brave Sikhs and martyrdom of Bhai Uday Singh and Bhai Jiwan Singh.

The Mughals had lost that battle and returned completely exhausted. Guru Gobind Singh had been watching the valour and fighting spirit displayed by his brave Sikhs. After crossing the Sirsa, along with Sahibzada Jujhar Singh and a few Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh proceeded further towards the town of Ropar. Sahibzada Ajit Singh had also joined them by now but the residents there hesitated to offer any shelter. Thereupon, Guru Gobind Singh, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, along with the forty brave Sikhs, set up their camp in an open and uncultivated piece of land. Very quickly the place looked like a small army cantonment (marked today by Gurdwara Dam Dama Sahib). Temporary stables were also provided for the horses. Some residents of Ropar sent rations for the warriors and fodder for the horses.

After the day's ferocious and exhausting engagement with the Mughal forces, the Sikh soldiers fell asleep after *rahras sahib*. The next morning Chaudri Budhi Chand, a zamindar of the town, who was a dedicated devotee of Guru Gobind Singh, came to know of Gururji's arrival and humbly requested Gururji to shift his forces to his house which was on a slight rise and built like a small fortress, providing some defence against attack by the Mughal armies in pursuit. Even in those dangerous times, when Sikhs were being hounded by the Mughals, there were numerous fearless and devoted Sikhs of the Guru who did not hesitate to put their lives in danger, offering refuge and protection.

Gururji directed his Sikhs to shift camp to Chaudhri Budhi Chand's fortress, *Chamkaur di Garhi*. Arms and weapons, as also other equipment, was loaded and transported to the small fortress and under direct command of their Gururji, the Sikhs were again ready for battle.

Learning of the Guru's presence at Chamkaur, Nawab Wazir Khan assembled an army of many lakhs and moved to Chamkaur. With drum beats he announced that if the Guru surrendered along with his companions, they would be spared. Guru Gobind Singh responded by unleashing arrows on the besieging Mughals.

One General Nahar Khan put up a ladder along one of the fortress walls and tried to climb up. As he raised his head, Gururji dispatched him immediately with an arrow. Then a General Ghani Khan came forward. Gururji aimed his *guri* at him, who instantly fell dead. Sitting at a strategic point, Gururji directed the grim battle, keeping Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh on his side. Sikh warriors were posted on all four corners while Bhai Madan Singh and Bhai Ganda Singh guarded entrance of the fortress. Preparations were made for the



expected major onslaught and the Sahibzadas too were ready for battle.

Although their numbers were miniscule compared with the massive Mughal army, morale of the Sikhs was incredibly high, the very presence of Guru Gobind Singh infusing a spirit of invincible courage, ready to face the enemy with determination and limitless courage. The Mughal cavalry were galloping closer and raising much dust, but calm and composed, Guruji carefully planned his strategy.

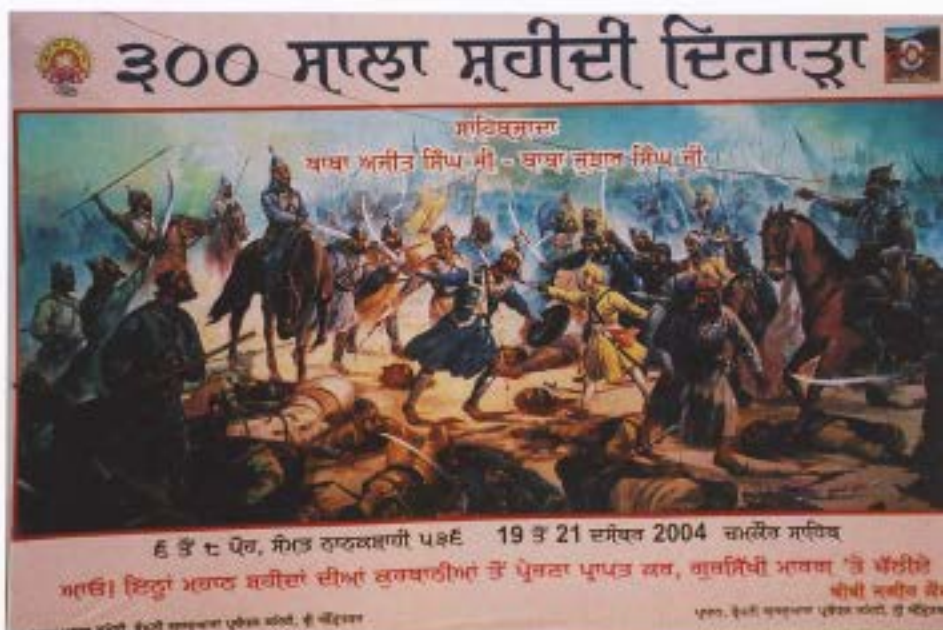
The fateful battle of Chamkaur took place on 22 December 1704, with murderous attack from the many thousands of Mughals. As the battle began, Guru Gobind Singh started directing bands of five Sikh soldiers into the Mughal hordes, one after the other, proclaiming *Sat Sri Akal* as they entered the battlefield.

The Mughals and Sikhs fought it out, even as arrows were unleashed at the Mughals from the fortress. The fierce and uneven battle went on for over two hours, with hundreds of Mughal soldiers slain on the battlefield. The first batch of five Sikh soldiers had slaughtered hundreds of Mughals before being martyred. The second and third batches followed in quick succession, displaying similar feats of marvellous courage against impossible odds.

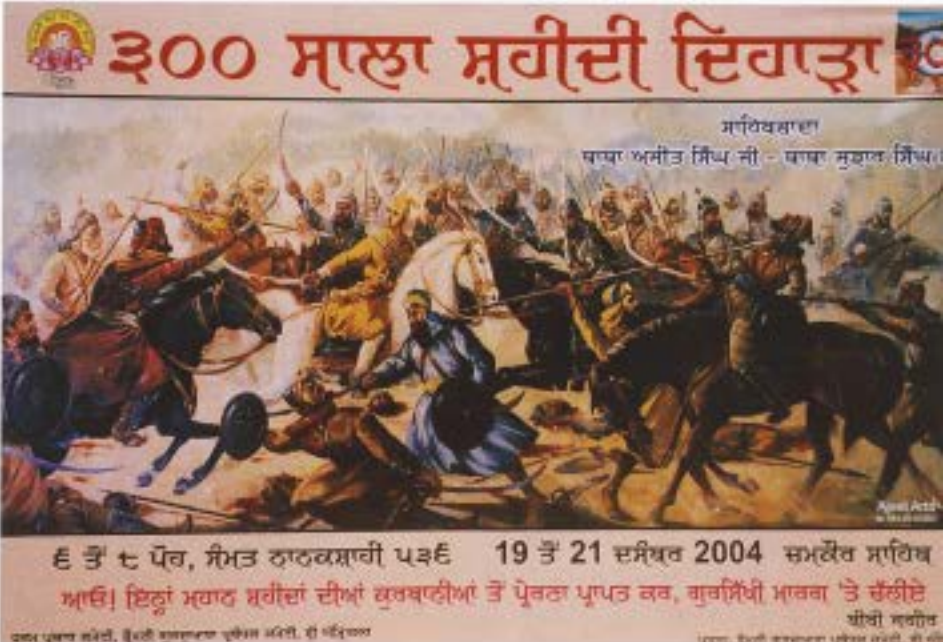
Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind ordered his army to surround the fortress. The situation was getting grimmer by the hour. The remaining Sikhs pleaded with Guruji to withdraw from the fortress along with his sons. As if the Guru had not heard their entreaties, he drew their attention to the splendid manner in which his warriors were fighting. When the Sikhs repeated their request, Guruji asked them, "Which sons are you referring to? All of you are my dear sons", and they so resolved to stand by their Lord till the last.

Then Sahibzada Ajit Singh sought his father's permission to go the battlefield. Guruji gave him his blessings and sent a batch of eight Sikh warriors with him.

As the 19-year old Sahibzada Ajit Singh and his companions came out of the gate of the Chamkaur fortress,



Paintings depicting the battle of Chamkaur on 22 December 1704, 300 years later.

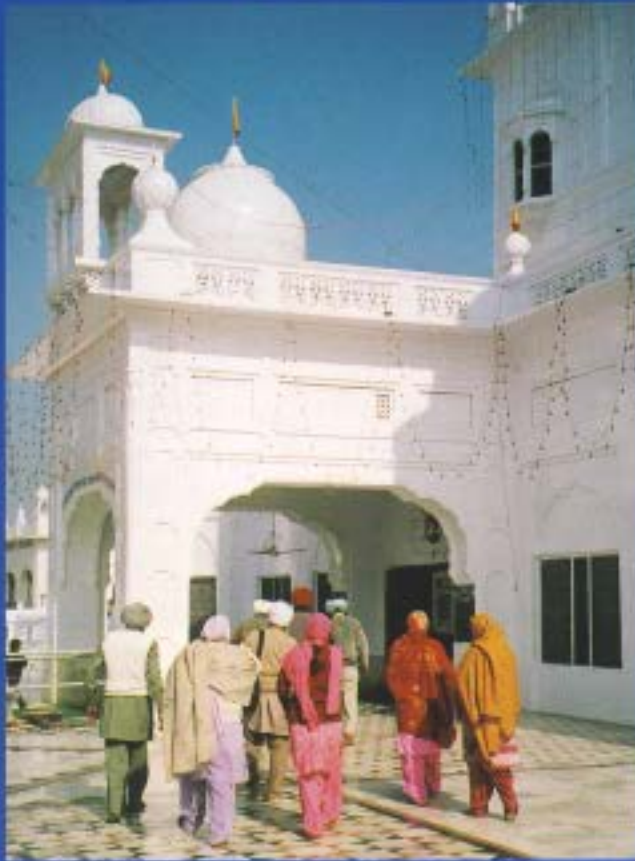


their clarion call, *Sat Sri Akal* resounded over the battlefield. Mughal soldiers surrounded the young Sahibzada from all sides. The brave son, however, held them at bay till, running out of arrows, started wielding his swords. Riding on his horse, the Sahibzada charged into the Mughal soldiers challenging them, warding off attacks but his horse was grievously injured. The Mughal soldiers then closed in on him, and the Sahibzada became a martyr on the battlefield.

Guru Gobind Singh was watching the brave fight that his valiant son had put up against his adversaries. As the son sacrificed his life, Guruji exclaimed *Sat Sri Akal* and bowed his head to the Almighty.



# Gurdwara Katalgarh Sahib at Chamkaur.



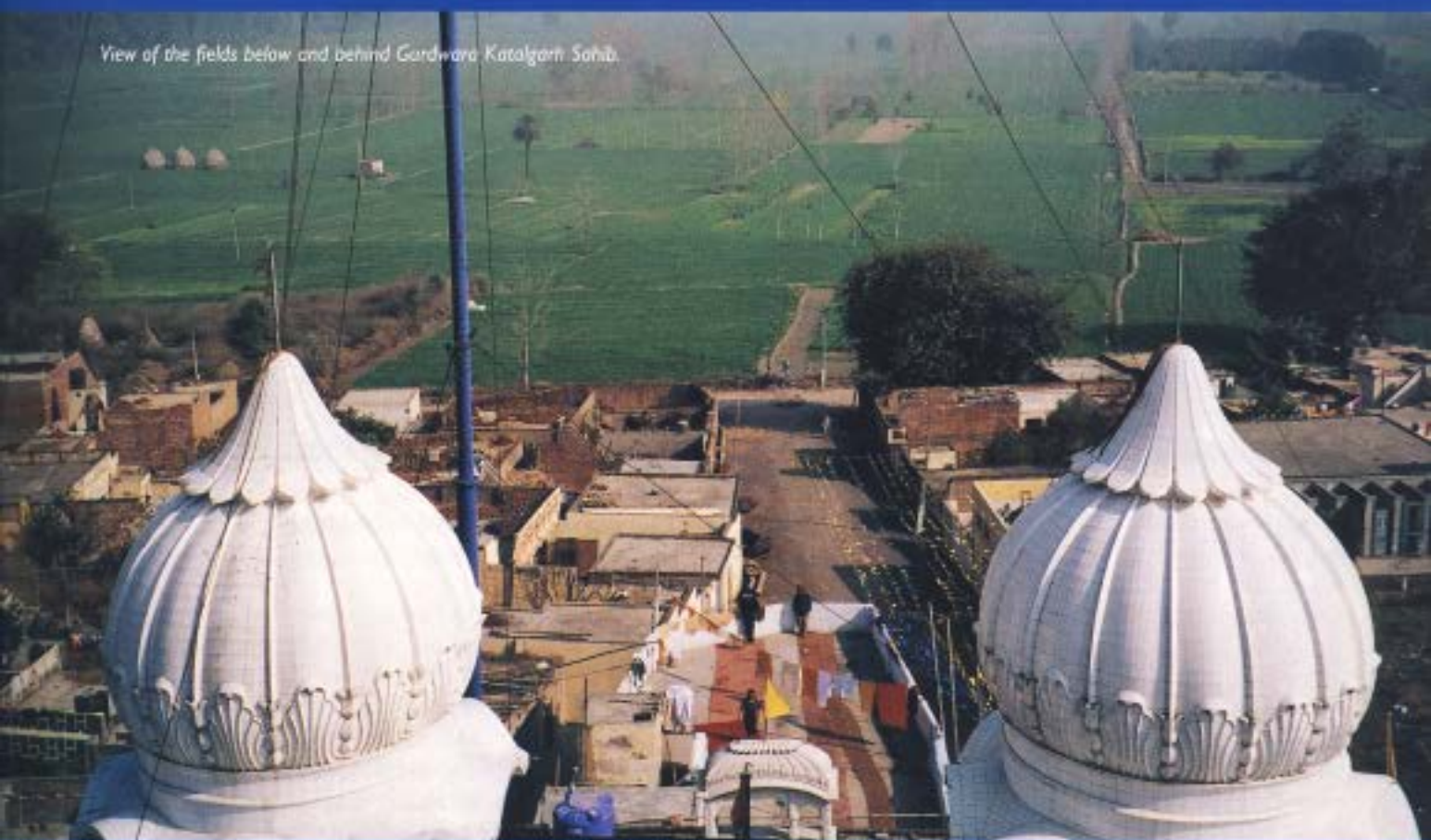




*Gurdwara Dam Datta Sahib, at Chamkaur.*

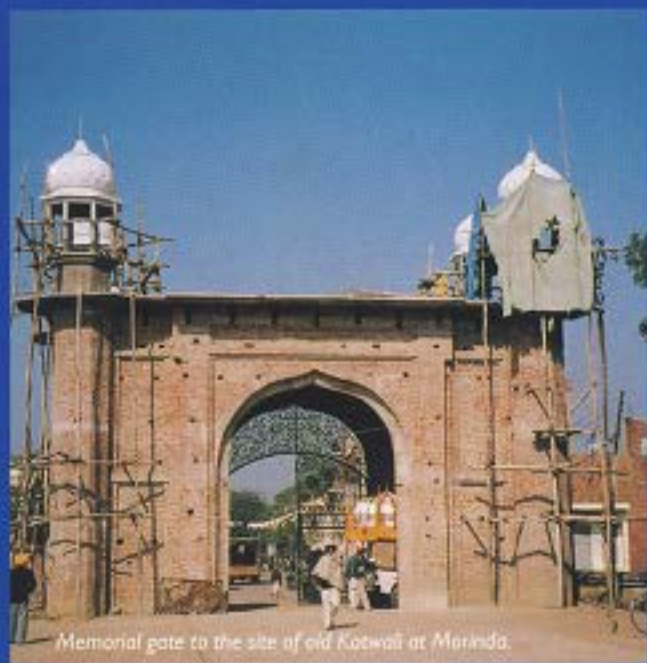


*Walking up to Gurdwara Shaheed Burj Sahib.*



*View of the fields below and behind Gurdwara Katalgom Sahib.*





Memorial gate to the site of old Kotwali at Monnda.



Gurdwara Sahib at Monnda.

On seeing his elder brother's bravery, the younger brother, Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, just 15 years of age, beseeched his father to let him follow in the footsteps of his brother. The Guru blessed him too and sent five Sikhs with him into the battlefield. Sahibzada Jujhar Singh challenged the Mughals who were amazed: Guru Gobind Singh had offered his second son also for martyrdom.

As the Mughals advanced, the Sahibzada and his five Sikhs fought with all their might. As the sun set, Sahibzada Jujhar Singh also attained martyrdom, Guru Gobind Singh



Gurdwara Sahib at Thanda Burj, Fatehgarh Sahib.



Hoarding at Monnda.

again prayed to God that he had repaid for life with his honour.

Guru Gobind Singh then addressed his devotees in the fortress. "There is no other course but to fight the enemy bravely. Each drop of blood shed by us will lay firm foundations for the future. Streams of blood will flow like rivers as your comrades wreak vengeance in the times to come. For his protection, a devoted Sikh has only faith in God Almighty, his Guru, the *Sadhi Sangat* (Sikh congregation) and in himself. This conviction sustains him through all





Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib was built on the site of the infamous Kotwali at Sirhind where the younger Sahibzadas were bricked alive and martyred.

situations. We have to struggle and strive, accept the challenge and face the enemy. We have to stick to our faith even at the cost of our lives”.

Only ten Sikhs were left in the *Chamkaur* fort and they requested the Guru that in view of the critical situation, he must leave the fort. Five beloveds (*Panj Pyaras*) passed a resolution that the Guru should leave the same night. The Guru and *chela*, both in one, bowed before their decision, but laid down the condition that while departing from the fortress, he would openly challenge the enemy and not leave stealthily.

Guru Gobind Singh decided to take some of his companions with him. He dressed Bhai Sangat Singh, who bore some resemblance to himself, in his own dress, placed the *kalgī* on his turban and seated him where he had been before.

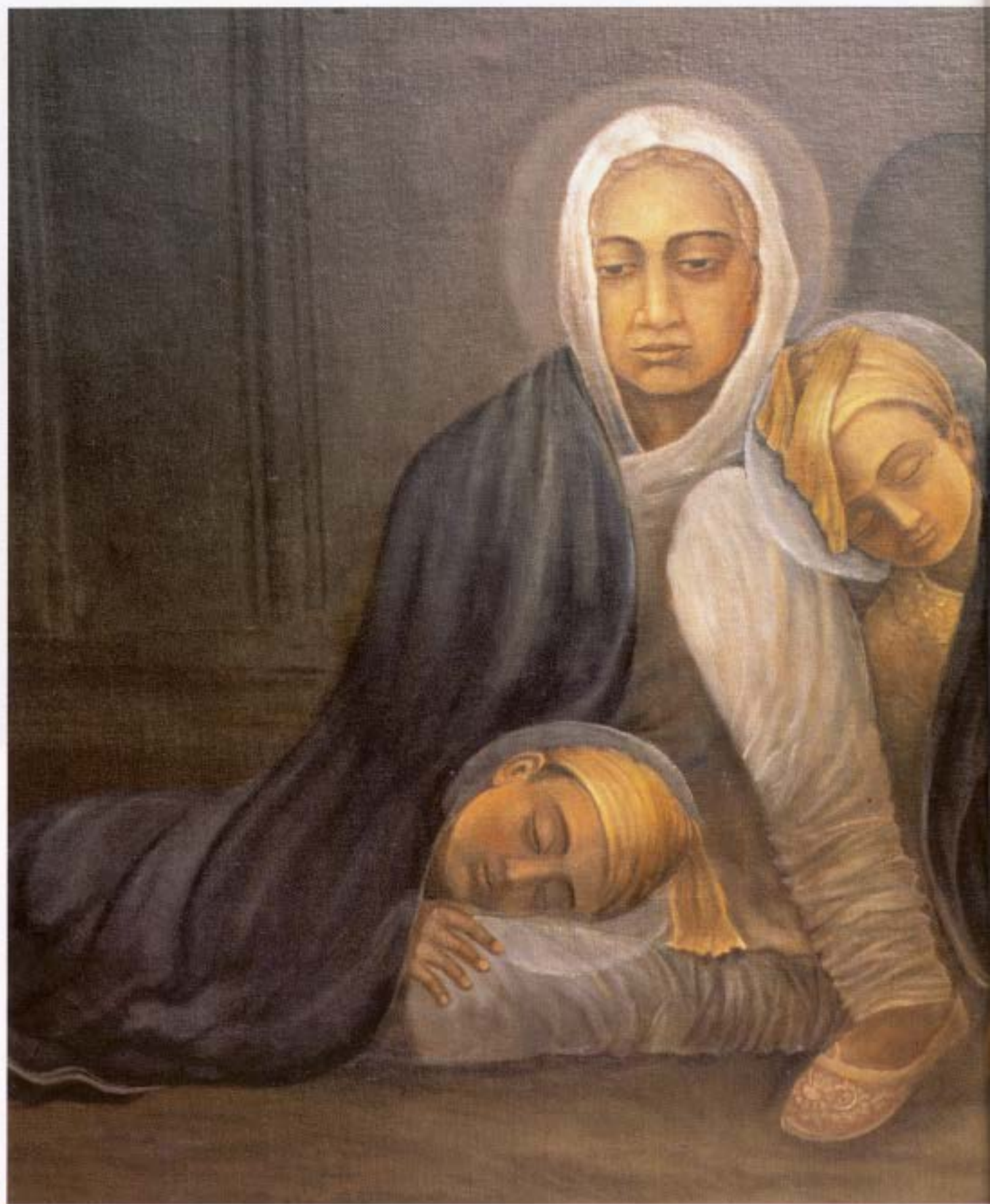
The Guru then clapped his hands and loudly proclaimed that the ‘Peer of Hind’ was now on his way. As these words resounded in the dark night, Mughal soldiers rushed after the

Guru, a torch bearer leading them in the darkness. Guru Gobind Singh shot an arrow and the torch went out. Unable to find their way, the Mughal soldiers were stumped. Guru Gobind Singh covered a long distance by day break.

The seven Sikhs who were left in the fortress were intent to sacrifice their lives. As dawn broke, the Mughal soldiers launched an all-out assault. The handful of Sikhs flung open the gate and rushed forward with their swords unsheathed. *Sat Sri Akal!* They engaged the enemy in the grim final struggle. Innumerable Mughals were slaughtered before they too became martyrs on the historic battlefield of Chamkaur. One of the seven Sikhs who laid down their lives at Chamkaur, had the plume attached to his turban and the Mughals thought that Guru Gobind Singh was also among the seven and conveyed such tidings to their Generals.

However, Guru Gobind Singh had long since reached the ravines of Macchiwara, having travelled through wild jungles in the night.









## Martyrdom of Younger Sahibzadas

Through the din of battle, on the banks of the River Sirsa, other members of the family of Guru Gobind Singh had got separated. The two younger sons Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh, accompanied Guruji's revered mother Mata Gujri, passing through thick forests and difficult hilly terrain.

After an arduous journey Mata Gujri along with the two Sahibzadas, reached the hut of a Muslim water carrier, Kuma. He requested Mataji to bless his humble cottage by staying there. Since it was getting dark, she decided to stay there for the night with her grandsons.

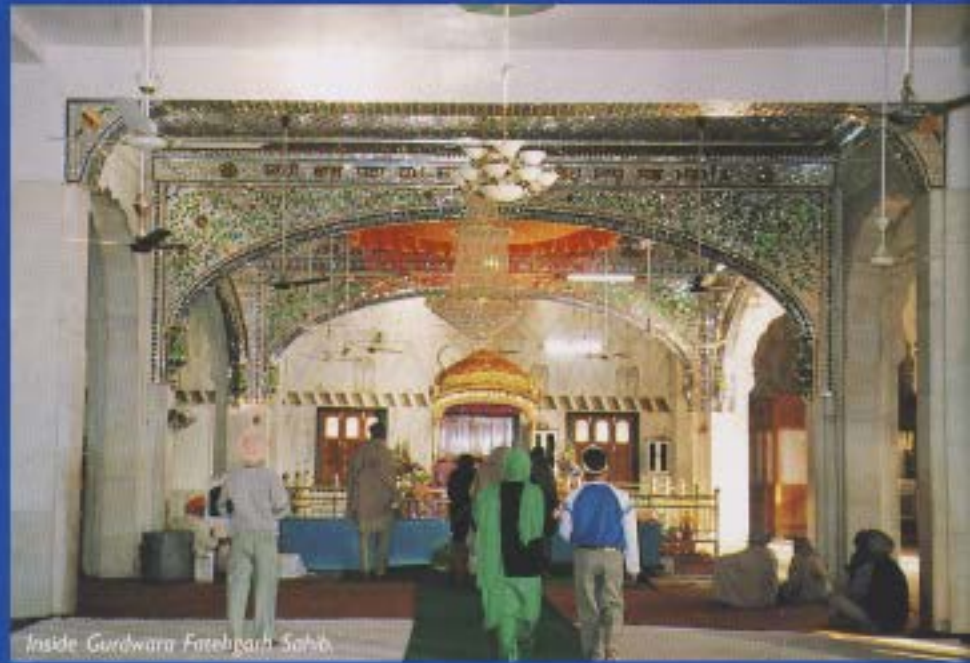
However and most ominously, the Guru's old domestic servant, Gangu arrived the next morning and requested Mataji to go with him to his village. He assured her that their whereabouts would not be known to the Emperor's officials and they would be quite safe there. After walking the entire day, they reached village Kheri in the evening. However, the treacherous Gangu had instead headed straight for the Kotwali at Morinda, saying that he desired to convey some confidential information. Gangu revealed that Guru Gobind Singh's mother and his two young sons were hiding in his house. The Kotwal was pleased to get such news, called his constables and sent them with Gangu to apprehend them.

Even as they were being taken away, Mata Gujri embraced the two young Sahibzadas who were full of spirit and quite ready to go. A crowd had collected outside, Gangu's house, who was standing aside with downcast eyes, people cursing him for his betrayal. Onlookers were captivated by the divine looks and the graceful bearing of Mataji at this time of agony.

On arrival at the Kotwali in Sirhind, Mata Gujri and the two Sahibzadas were lodged in a nearby tower, a bitterly cold room for the night. The little grandsons listened to heroic tales of bravery and sacrifice from their affectionate grandmother, founding of the faith by Guru Nanak, the unique martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh heard about the episodes from Sikh history related to them by their revered grandmother. On the ideals established by the Gurus, the two Sahibzadas assured Mata Gujri that they would stand by their faith and follow their illustrious father. Mataji admired her grandchildren's courage and determination. They then recited the sacred evening Sikh prayer, *Rahnas* and *Kirtan Sohila*. Meanwhile, at great risk to his life, one of the Guru's devotees, Bhai Moti managed to send milk for Mataji and the Sahibzadas.

The next morning, police took the two young boys to the Nawab's Court. Mataji embraced her grandsons, blessed them

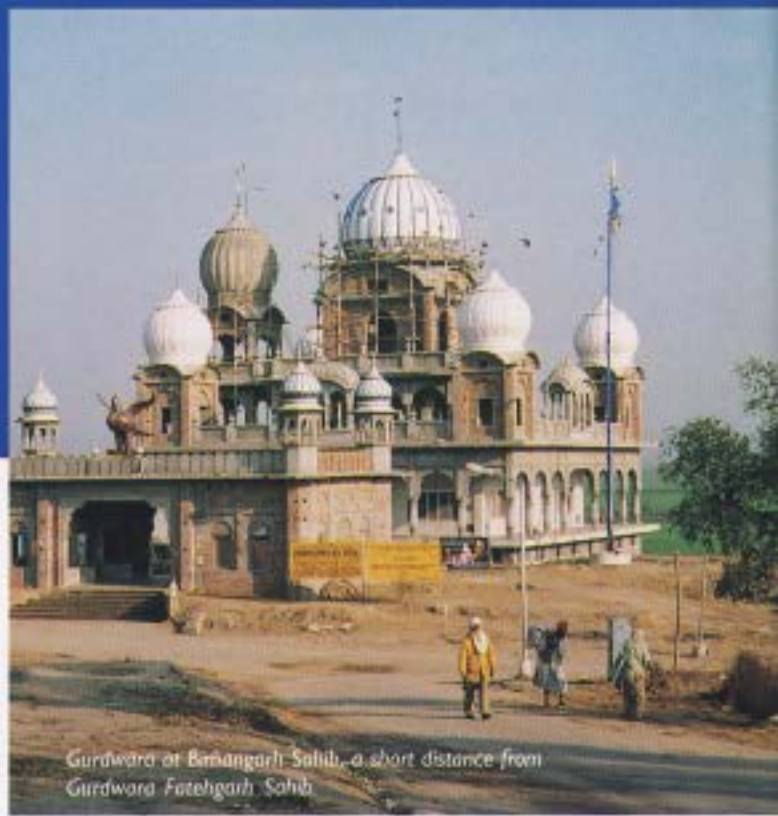




Inside Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib



The Phik Sahib which marks the wall of martyrdom, with continuous prayers being recited



Gurdwara or Birangarh Sahib, a short distance from Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib

and asked them to uphold the sacred traditions of the Gurus. The two Sahibzadas pledged to do so and departed cheerfully, walked to the court boldly along with the constables. As they reached the court, they noticed that the main gate was closed and there was only a small opening for gaining entry to the Court. The Sahibzadas stepped forward and went inside without bowing their heads.

The Nawab's Court was in session. As the two Sahibzadas stepped inside, they greeted the courtiers with their salutation *Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*, the hall resounding to their exclamation, those present greatly impressed by their fearless behaviour.

Dressed in saffron shirts with *kirpans* worn round their waists, the fair Sahibzadas looked sweet and innocent.





Gurdwara Jyoti Sarup Sahib where  
Mata Gujri and the young  
Sahibzadas were cremated.



The jyoti remains eternal.

Nawab Wazir Khan addressed them in affectionate tones. "What bright and brave faces! Islam will be proud to have you in its fold. Just recite the *kalma* and we shall welcome you in our midst. You will get anything for the asking".

The two Sahibzadas dismissed the offer. "We care not for worldly wealth. We shall not renounce our faith at any cost".

Addressing the Qazi the Nawab then said, "Have you observed the insolent behaviour of these boys! Don't regard them as innocent. They are the rebellious sons of a rebel. They will have to be punished".

The Qazi told the Nawab that, according to Islamic Law, the two boys were not guilty of any crime and could not be held responsible for their father's actions.

The Nawab however observed 'They are rebels too. Haven't you heard their rude statements'. The Qazi answered, "But they have not committed any crime".



Nawab Wazir Khan was taken aback at the Qazi's unexpected reply.

Nawab Wazir Khan again tried to persuade the boys and said, "You are still young and innocent. It is your time for enjoyment and fun. If you listen to our advice, you will enjoy life in this world to your heart's content and be blessed with glorious life in Paradise".

Sahibzada Zorawar Singh responded fearlessly. "We

The two Sahibzadas then said, "We don't need any advice from you. Listen carefully. Until this tyrannical regime is completely wiped out, we shall go on fighting".

Dewan Sucha Nand addressed the Nawab, "Sir, killing the serpent and feeding his young ones would not be wise. When these young kids grow up, they too will rebel against the Government. They must be punished and on no account should be released".

*View of the green fields of Punjab countryside from top of the Gurdwara Thanda Burj where Mata Gujri and the young Sahibzadas were imprisoned.*



are fighting against tyranny and injustice. We are the sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the grandsons of Guru Tegh Bahadur and descendants of Guru Arjun Dev. We shall follow in their footsteps. We are ready for any sacrifice for the protection of our faith".

One of the Hindu officials Dewan Sucha Nand, walked up to the Sahibzadas and asked them, "If you are released where will you go?" Sahibzada Zorawar Singh replied "We shall go to the forests, gather a few Sikhs, get some good horses and then come and face you and your allies on the battlefield". On hearing this, Dewan Sucha Nand observed, "Do you know that your father has been slain"? Both the brothers reacted, "No one can kill our respected father, he will never fall into your hands".

The courtiers were amazed at the lack of fear or anxiety on the young faces even though it was now a matter of life and death. The Nawab again said to the Qazi, "You have heard the impertinent answers given by them to Sucha Nand. It would not be safe to release them. They are sure to continue the banner of revolt, like their father, when they grow up".

The Qazi had also listened to the conversation that took place between Dewan Sucha Nand and the two infant sons of Guru Gobind Singh. After some deliberation he pronounced his judgement and ordered that they be bricked alive in a wall. The Sahibzadas heard the sentence without dismay but the courtiers recoiled on this harsh judgement. The Qazi advised the Nawab that the boys be

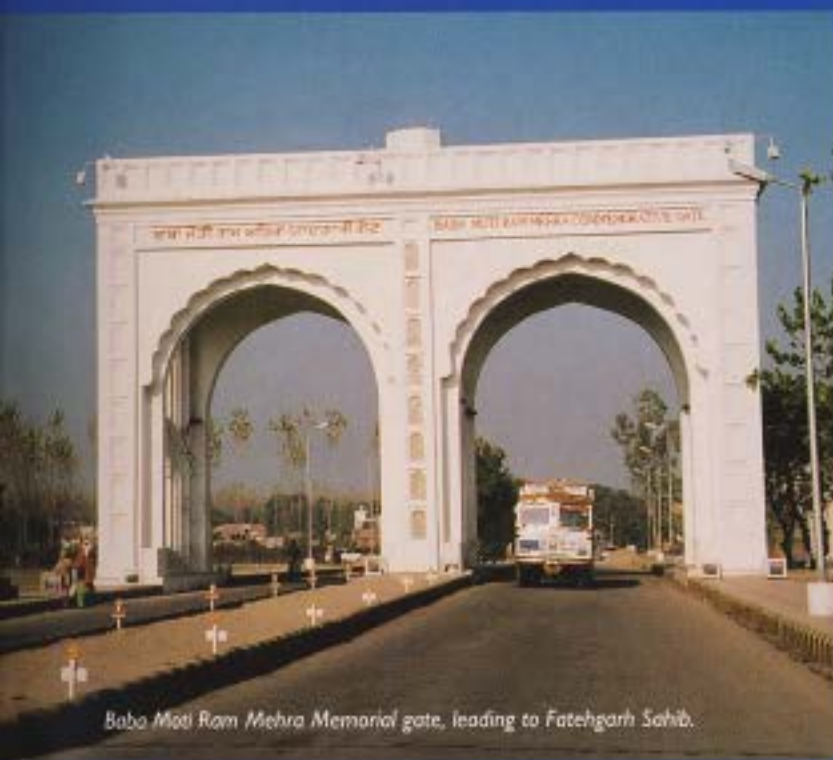


Nawab of Malerkotla for carrying out the deed since his brother had met his end at the hands of the Guru and he could now have his revenge by getting his sons buried alive.

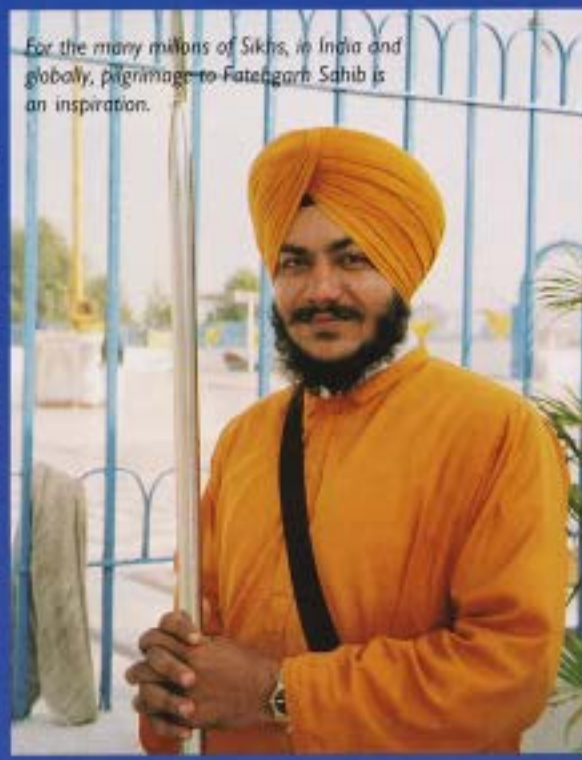
Nawab Wazir Khan addressed Sher Mohammad Khan, the Nawab of Malerkotla and conveyed the Qazi's orders to him "Your brother lost his life at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh. Here is an opportunity for you to wreak your revenge. The Qazi has sentenced these two sons of Guru Gobind Singh to

grandsons for their courageous and bold stand and said, "You have rightly upheld the dignity and honour of your revered grandfather and your valiant father. May God ever abide with you".

Next morning the Sahibzadas were taken to the Nawab's court. The Nawab asked them again, "I hope you have made up your mind to embrace Islam, otherwise, as you know, you will be bricked alive". The



Baba Moti Ram Mehra Memorial gate, leading to Fatehgarh Sahib.



For the many millions of Sikhs, in India and globally, pilgrimage to Fatehgarh Sahib is an inspiration.

death and has further ordered that they be bricked alive. We are handing them over to you for doing the needful".

After some pause Sher Mohammad said in faltering voice to the Nawab, "This is cruelty! My brother was killed on the battlefield. These innocent boys are not responsible for his death. If we have to take revenge it shall be against the father. God save us from this sinful act". Saying this he remarked in a mournful tone, "O Allah, this is cruelty".

Thereafter the Nawab ordered that both the boys be sent back to the tower (*Thanda Burj*). He directed his officials to arrange for executioners who would brick them alive, in between two walls, which would be constructed immediately.

The Sahibzadas returned the tower and gave an account of the proceedings to their grandmother. She embraced her

Sahibzadas proclaimed fearlessly, "We shall never given up our faith, whatever may be the consequences. Death has no meaning for us".

The Nawab was speechless at their determined and firm reply. One of his officials said to the Nawab, "Sir, the two royal executioners of Delhi, Shisal Beg and Vishal Beg, are present in the court for hearing of their case. They are prepared to carry out your orders for bricking these boys alive but they should first be granted pardon. The Nawab called them, "Your request for pardon has been granted on condition that you quickly brick these two sons of Guru Gobind Singh alive within a wall".

The Sahibzadas were brought to the spot where a wall was being raised. Both of them were made to stand side by side. The Qazi arrived and again tried to persuade them to accept Islam and not give up their lives. Even



the executioners tried to prevail upon them but the boys were unflinching in their determination and told the executioners, "Raise the wall fast and so bury the Mughul Raj quickly. Don't delay for a minute". Thereafter both of them started reciting *Japji Sahib* while the wall was going up, brick by brick.

The wall went up higher until it reached their chests. The Nawab and Qazi approached them and said to them in affectionate tone, "There is still time for you to save your lives, just recite the *kalma* and the wall will be pulled down immediately".



*Martyrdom of the young Sahibzadas.*

"We shall never give up our faith, death does not frighten us".

Tears flowed from the eyes of onlookers, as they observed, "Blessed be the mother who gave birth to such children".

The executioners became nervous: "They are now so nearing their end. There is no need to raise the wall further. Why not cut short their agony by beheading them? It is already getting dark".

The wall was pulled down. They brought the unconscious Sahibzadas out, laid them flat on the ground and, in an instant, martyred them.

People in the crowd were aghast, sighing in dismay, "What cruelty! How shall they answer, for their crime in Allah's Court".

The two Sahibzadas had attained martyrdom. Mata Guji, who was sitting in meditation in the tower, too breathed her last. The messenger who came with the news of the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas found that Mataji had attained salvation.

There was great commotion in the town of Sirhind, with pent up fury at the atrocious crime. People were unanimous in predicting that

this heinous act heralded doomsday of the Mughul Empire. They admired the incredible courage and steadfastness of the brave sons of Guru Gobind Singh, "What determination at this young age! They did not flinch from their faith in spite of several allurements by the Nawab and Qazi".

The same evening, Dewan Todar Mal, a jeweller went to Nawab Wazir Khan's court for permission to cremate the dead bodies of the two Sahibzadas and Mata Guji. The Nawab agreed on condition that the Dewan paid for the required piece of land by spreading as many gold *mohurs* as would cover the entire place. The Dewan accepted the terms and brought bagfuls of gold coins. He marked the site and spread coins on the land selected for cremation. The two martyred young sons of Guru Gobind Singh were cremated along side their loving grandmother.

There is no parallel in the annals of human history to the martyrdom of such young boys. Sahibzada Fateh Singh was less than six years old (born 1699 and Sahibzada Zorawar Singh just over eight, born in 1696). They laid down their lives in December 1704, bricked alive but unflinching in their faith before tyranny of the Mughul Empire.

Guru Gobind Singh was in the forests of Macchiwara when news of the martyrdom of his infant sons reached him. On hearing this, he pulled out a plant with the tip of his arrow, symbolising that this tragedy heralded uprooting of the Mughul Empire in India.

To the Emperor he was soon to write: "It matters little if a jackal, through cunning and treachery, succeeds in killing two lion cubs, for the lion himself lives to inflict retribution". Guru Gobind Singh then addressed his followers: "I have sacrificed four sons for the survival of thousands of my sons who are very much alive".

Marking martyrdom of the Sahibzadas three hundred years later, in December 2004, there were many hundreds of thousands of Guru Gobind Singh's sons gathered at Chamkaur Sahib and Fatehgarh Sahib, site of the epic battles and martyrdom.

The Mughal Empire has long disappeared into the dust. ☪

[Based on "Supreme Sacrifice",  
Issued by Dharmic Ekta Mission New Delhi]



December 2004

# Shaheedi Samagam Chamkaur Sahib



A January 2005 scene : langar at Gurdwara Katalgarh Sahib, Chamkaur.

**T**he three-day tercentenary observance of martyrdom of the Sahibzadas and Mata Gujri began on 24 December 2004 with religious fervour and *Akhand Path* at Jyoti Swarup Sahib at Fatehgarh Sahib.

On first day of the *Shaheedi Jor Mela*, many lakhs of devotees thronged Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib and Gurdwara Jyoti Swarup Sahib. General S F Rodrigues, Governor of the Punjab, paid obeisance at Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib, devotees holding *nagar kirtans* and reciting Gurbani. It was estimated that more than 25 lakhs visited the gurdwaras during the 3 days.

Religious spirit was manifest and for the first time, no shops, stalls, conferences or community kitchens were allowed on the roads, nor loudspeakers nor games, only with pure Gurbani relayed from the Gurdwara Sahib.

The Governor inaugurated an exhibition organised by the district administration and visited various stalls at the exhibition. Later he released a special issue of the bi-monthly magazine, *Yuv Chetna* dedicated to martyrdom of the Sahibzadas.

Hundreds of *langars* were organised by all sections of society and by overseas Sikhs. The District Cultural Society, in collaboration with the district administration, organised *dhadi* and *kirtan darbar* at the main pandal and an *akhand path* was also started there. Free bus services were provided for women and senior citizens from naka points to the Gurdwara Sahib. Main attraction of the mela was the light and sound programme, *Sirhind ki Dastan* organised by the Public Relations Department.

Devotees from all over the country and abroad paid their obeisance at Gurdwara Katalgarh Sahib to commemorate the 300th year of martyrdom of the Sahibzadas, Chamkaur Sahib being decorated with saffron banners, flags and hoardings, depicting the Khalsa faith.

The five historical gurdwaras there, Katalgarh Sahib, Ghari Sahib, Damdama Sahib, Tari Sahib and Ranjitgarh Sahib, were the centre of activity, with *panth* and *kirtan* from dawn to dusk.

Lakhs of devotees, on trucks, buses, motor cycles and cars, continued to visit the town throughout the day. A *nagar kirtan*



by Nihang Sikhs on horses, carrying traditional weapons, sports events and martial arts were organised by the SGPC.

Presentation of the *Ganga Sagar* and weapons were exhibited at *Katalgarh Sahib* amidst beating of drums from elephants and Nihangs riding horses were witnessed on the concluding day of *Shaheedi Samagam*.

Thousands of devotees had a glimpse of *Ganga Sagar* brought by Rai Aziz Ullah Khan, an MP from Pakistan. "I belong to the family from Raikot to whom Guru Gobind Singh had gifted *Ganga Sagar* 300 years ago. I am humbled by the welcome and respect shown by the devotees. *Ganga Sagar* will also be exhibited during *Shaheedi Samagam* at Fatehgarh Sahib and at Raikot in Ludhiana."

Major Singh, a Nihang, wearing a 35 kg turban, was centre of attraction during the procession. He took four hours to dress up and has been wearing this turban at every religious function held in the Punjab since 1997.

The Nihang procession was led by Surjit Singh of the Buddha Dal which began their march from Ranjitgarh Sahib. The Nihangs, who belonged to different organisations in Punjab, passed through various parts of the town and reached the sports stadium to exhibit their riding skills and gatra.

Thousands of devotees participated in another procession which began from Katalgarh Sahib Gurdwara and passing through all historical gurdwaras.

Braving inclement weather and intensive cold wave, more than 30 lakh pilgrims visited the *Shahidi Jor Mela*.



Guru Ka Langar near Gurdwara Jyoti Sarup, Fatehgarh Sahib.



Lakhs of devotees travelled to Chamkaur Sahib in December 2004.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has announced the setting up of a super speciality hospital for children at Fatehgarh Sahib, a tribute to the younger Sahibzadas. The hospital will be equipped with the latest equipment, qualified and experienced physicians, surgeons and consultants.



# PLAYING HAVOC WITH HERITAGE

Even as lakhs of Sikhs from all over the world congregated at Chamkaur Sahib to pay tribute to the two elder Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh and other *Singhs* on the historic 300th anniversary of their martyrdom, they also witnessed how the SGPC has virtually obliterated the great historical monuments associated with the battles fought by the Guru, his Sahibzadas and followers.

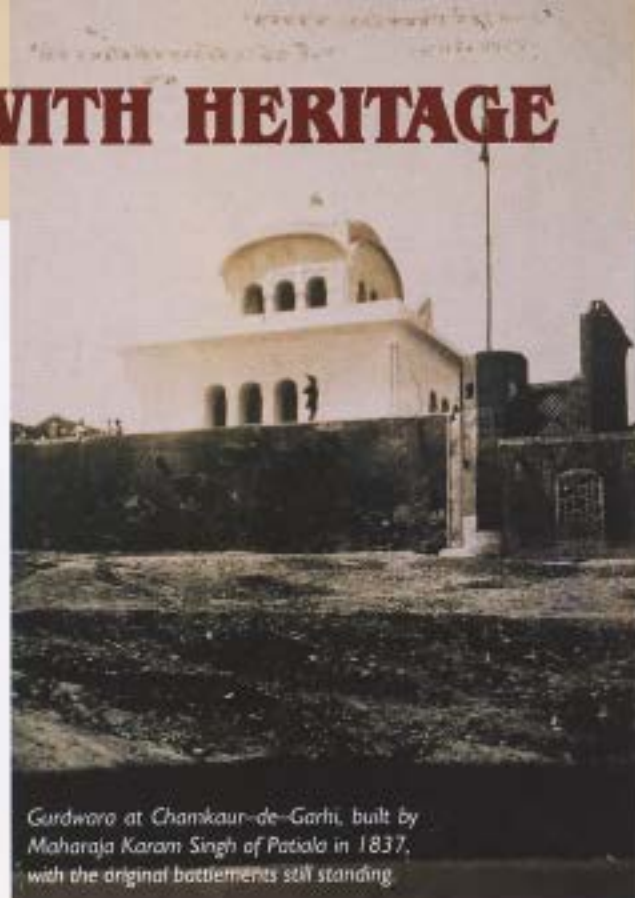
Historical buildings, including *Chamkaur-de-Garhi*, also famed as *Kachhi Garhi*, from where Guru Gobind Singh, his two elder Sahibzadas and other "Singhs" fought great battles against the armies of Mughals and Pahari Rajas, have been removed from the scene over the years and instead replaced by modern Gurdwaras, made of marble.

For most Sikhs visiting the historic land, it was disappointing when they were not able to see any structure in the town where Guru Gobind Singh spent those two most crucial days – December 20 and 21 – in 1704. There is no trace of the field where the battle was actually fought as Gurdwara *Katalgarhi Sahib* has come up there. Some opined that instead of *Katalgarhi Sahib*, it should be re-named as Gurdwara *Shahastim*.

No trace of the original history of the Guru's period has been left by those who were made the custodians of Sikh heritage. All old buildings surrounding the original Garhi have been demolished to build this new gurdwara. "Future generations will never forgive those who have played such havoc with Sikh heritage", lamented a Sikh historian.

The Garhi belonged to Rai Sahib Chaudhary Roop Chand and his brother Chaudhary Jagat Singh. They were Rajputs, who had migrated to the Punjab from Amber near Jaipur in 1134. Their elders were granted rights over 65 villages in the Chamkaur Sahib belt by rulers of that time.

Chaudhary Roop Chand's descendants –



Gurdwara at Chamkaur-de-Garhi, built by Maharaja Karam Singh of Patiala in 1837, with the original battlements still standing

Mohinder Singh, his son Bhup Chand and his grandson Arjan Singh – now live a short distance from Gurdwara Garhi Sahib. Mohinder Singh is from the sixth generation of Roop Chand. Mohinder Singh's brother Krishan Kumar and his son Bhim Singh also reside here. Seventy-year-old Mohinder Singh says that Chaudhary Roop Chand was a regular visitor to the Naina Devi temple, a short distance from Anandpur Sahib. On his way to Naina Devi and back, Chaudhary Roop Chand used to pay his respects to Guru Gobind Singh, at the Anandpur Sahib fort.

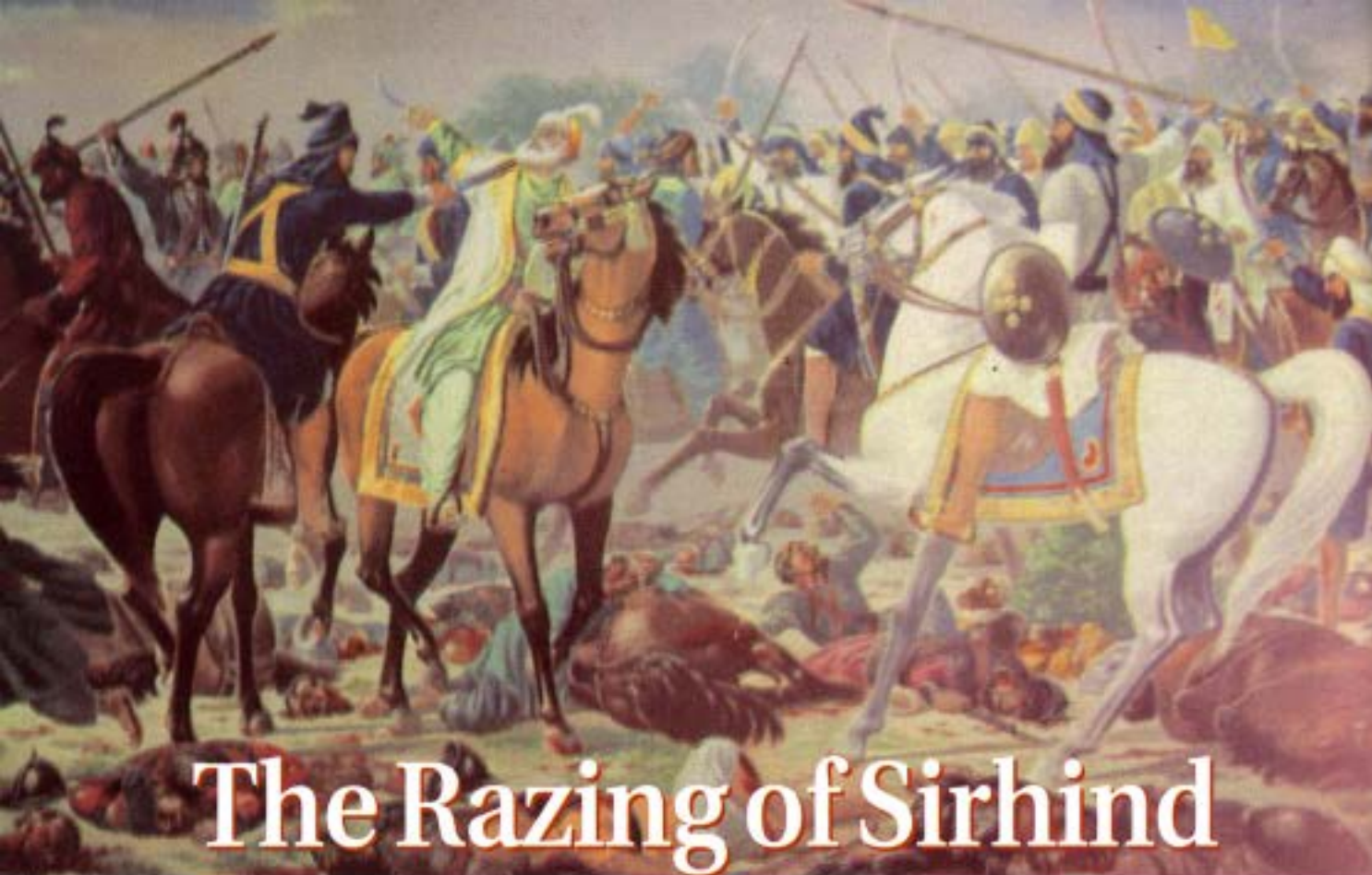
"Historians have not done justice with our elders and a wrong picture has been painted of them", they say. Chaudharys lost the ownership of 65 villages in 1852 when the land of these villages was allotted to *muljims* (serfs) by an officer, Kala Rai. But this town even now has a significant presence of the Chaudhary families.

After leaving Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh arrived at Chamkaur Sahib on 20 December 1704, and camped in a bagh (garden) that belonged to the Chaudhary family. At that place now, Gurdwara Damdama Sahib has been built. From the bagh, the Guru and his men shifted to the Garhi for battle preparations. In the battle, that continued for two days, the two elder Sahibzadas – Ajit Singh (16) and Jujhar Singh (14) – attained martyrdom along with three – Bhai Mohkam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh and Bhai Sahib Singh – of the first *Panj Piaras*. [2]



Original Gurdwara Sahib (at Fatehgarh Sahib?) is seen in this old picture kept at Chamkaur.





# The Razing of Sirhind

In the summer of 1710, after crossing the Sutlej, the Sikhs led by Banda Singh Bahadur arrived at Kiratpur. Wazir Khan tried to block the arrival of the Majha and Doab Sikhs moving towards Sirhind with the help of Nawab Sher Mohammad of Maler Kotla, but his forces were decisively defeated by the Sikhs at Ropar. His three brothers, Khizar Khan, Nashtar Khan and Wali Muhammad Khan were killed and he himself was wounded. The Sikhs had won the day but without loss of time, they hurried southward to join their leader as soon as possible. While the northern Sikhs were fighting against the Afghans of Maler Kotla, Banda Singh marched upon Bancor which offered no appreciable resistance and which fell before him. Banda Singh was highly pleased to learn about the glorious victory at Ropar and marched out a few miles from his camp, the memorable link-up taking place between Khara and Bancor on the Ambala-Ropar road.

Reinforced thus, Banda Singh prepared for the final assault so as to punish Wazir Khan and lay waste the town of Sirhind, where the two innocent Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh had some years before been bricked alive by Wazir Khan at the instance of Sucha Nand Khatri and through the treachery of Gangu Brahmin, the servant companion of the Guru's mother and the two Sahibzadas.

The holy Sikh crusade against the condemned city of Sirhind and its Governor was now reaching its climax. Preparations for the attack on Sirhind were soon complete, infusing great spirit in

the Khalsa. Fearful, the Nawab of Sirhind got the nephew of his Hindu Wazir, Sucha Nand to infiltrate along with a thousand men into Banda Singh's camp pretending loyalty to him but actually planing to assassinate him at the earliest possible opportunity. Banda Singh, a man of simple faith, had given them trust and integrated them into his force. In the meantime, Wazir Khan concentrated every possible defensive measure for the protection of Sirhind - and himself. He had combined four or five noted *faujdar*s and *zamindar*s with himself and collected as large a number of men as he possibly could and then proclaimed *Jehad*, or religious war, against the *kafirs* or infidels. A large number of *ghazis* or religious warriors from far and near responded to the call and in a few days innumerable religious volunteers, in addition to the regular forces of his own and his allies, were concentrated at Sirhind. Wazir Khan collected large stores of cannon balls and gun-power and mobilised a long train of artillery and elephants to confront the Sikhs. According to Khafi Khan, Wazir Khan had a force of 15,000 men to which were added another 5000 *ghazis*.

Banda Singh Bahadur had no artillery and no elephants, nay, not even the required number of horses for his men. Only a few of his men possessed matchlocks. Long spears, arrows and swords were the only weapons of war that the Sikhs were equipped with. However, indomitable courage, an unsurpassable asset of Banda Singh and his devoted Sikhs, made up for their meagre resources. He mostly depended for success upon the spirit that



he knew would be infused in the minds of his men at the very sight of the city associated with the cold-blooded murder of the young sahibzadas of their Guru. The exact strength of the Sikh force cannot be ascertained, but their leadership was in the hands of tried and devout followers of Guru Gobind Singh. Wazir Khan came out to meet the *Khalsa* with his large force and an innumerable host of *jehadis*. Both the armies came face to face on the plains of Chappar-Chiri on 12 May, 1710.

Banda Singh Bahadur entrusted command of his Malwa Sikhs to Bhai Fateh Singh, Karam Singh, Dharam Singh, Ali Singh and Sham Singh and himself occupied a place on a mound nearby to watch and direct movements of his army. As soon as the battle began and the Nawab's artillery opened fire, many brigands and irregulars, for whom only the lure of booty had brought them there, took to flight. The next to desert were the one thousand men of the treacherous nephew of Sucha Nand, which temporarily caused a little confusion in the Sikh ranks. Banda Singh then rushed forward and personally led the attack. The Sikhs were very encouraged by this bold movement of their leader and with the loud cries singing God's praises, they fell in compact ranks upon Wazir Khan's army, advanced swords in hand against their line-up of elephants and brought some of these down. The defenders were unable to withstand the fierce and repeated attacks of the Sikhs and many of them were killed in the battlefield. Sher Muhammad Khan and Khwaja Ali of Maler Kotla were also killed, and complete confusion abounded in the imperial ranks. Wazir Khan made no attempt to escape, but tried to rally his men. At last he met Baj Singh face to face and struck at him with his spear. Baj Singh caught hold of it and wounded the Khan's horse in the forehead. Wazir Khan then drew his bow and hit Baj Singh, on the arm and drawing his sword tried to slash at him. Fateh Singh, who was waiting nearby, gave Wazir Khan a sharp cut from the shoulder to the waist and he fell down, mortally stricken. However, according to Macauliffe and the author of *Sunaj Prakash*, Wazir Khan was killed by Banda Singh with the arrow given to him by Guru Gobind Singh.

As soon as Wazir Khan fell, his army panicked and fled. Wazir Khan's body was tied to a rope and dragged through the streets and tied to a tree for the vultures to feast upon. *Akhirat-e-Daur-e-Munilla*, dated 13, May 1710, recorded that "the battle began in the morning and lasted until late afternoon. Wazir Khan was wounded by arrows and bullets and then fell dead. His son and son-in-law also perished. His son fled to Delhi with some members of the royal family, leaving behind the hoards of wealth accumulated by his father. On seeing the fall of Wazir Khan, the imperial army took to flight leaving behind their horses, arms, tents, cannons and other implements of war which were taken over by the Sikhs".

Wazir Khan's head was stuck upon a spear and lifted high up by a Sikh who took his seat in the deceased's howdah. Wazir's troops on beholding their leader's head trembled and fled in dismay and despair. The Sikhs fell upon them and there was terrible carnage. Blood flowed not only in the battlefield but along a wide track up to the city of Sirhind. Khafi Khan writes that in the course of flight, not a man of Wazir's army escaped with more than his life. Horsemen and footmen fell in droves under the swords of the Sikhs who pursued them into Sirhind.



The Sikh battle was against tyranny, not another faith: seen here is entrance to the mausoleum of Ahmed Shah (Sheikh Ahmed Mujaddid Alif Sani), the most magnificent of such buildings which remained untouched during the razing of Sirhind in 1710 and remains standing, in 2004, as it did before the battle.

Wazir Khan's army was totally routed. The victorious Banda Singh and his Sikhs were masters of the field. They ascribed victory to *Wah Guru*, the Almighty and their loud and joyous shouts rent the air. They now fell upon the city of Sirhind which was about ten miles from the field of battle and reached the city by nightfall. The gates of the city were closed. The cannons mounted on the walls of the fort commenced bombardment. The Sikhs laid siege to the place. Sucha Nand, the Hindu *Peshkar* of Wazir Khan, was one of the principal objects of the Sikhs. Severe fighting took place on 13 May and the Sikhs succeeded in breaking open some gates. On 14 May, Banda Singh's troops entered the town and the enemy was put to the sword and entire streets were pulverised. The Sikh crusaders were much energised by the haunting murder of the young *Sahibzadas* of Guru Gobind Singh. The memory of that ghastly act naturally ignited their fury. The victorious Sikhs, could not be restrained and so the city of Sirhind was ravaged and razed to the ground with unrelenting severity, the Sikhs wreaking vengeance on this city of evil. ☞



# SHAHADAT

## Concept and Tradition of Martyrdom in Sikhism

Martyrdom or *shahadat* is the high tragedy of supreme sacrifice made for one's faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to one's own passionate adherence to it. Implicitly, a martyr or a *shahid* is one who by courting martyrdom bears witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Implicit in martyrdom is one's willingness to withstand aggression or persecution and meet death or, short of that, suffer privation for upholding that commitment and any other righteous and noble cause.

The term martyrdom has roots in the Greek word '*martyr*' which stands for 'witness'. There was, it seems, no equivalent of the word 'martyr' or martyrdom in any of the Indian languages until Sikh traditions adopted the word '*shahadat*', borrowed from the Arabic, which also means testimony or affirmation. It seems difficult to believe that there was no concept of martyrdom in Indian tradition until Sikhism took this term from a Semitic tradition. During and following the Aryan invasions of India, both the invader and the invaded might have fought against each other, believing strongly in the truth of their struggle and showing their deep commitment to the cause of that truth. However, there is no specific Indian word in pre and post-Aryan era available to refer to one who fought and died for such a cause, or for certain values.

The pre-Vedic and non-Vedic indigenous faiths, Jainism and Buddhism, also suffered persecution at places at the hands of Aryans: the Aryans believed in the truth of the revelatory Vedas and the natives including the *śramanic* traditions of Jainism and Buddhism, might have been committed to whatever their faith. Many followers of the indigenous religions might have suffered privation and even death for their commitment to a faith they believed in, but there was, as it appears today, no term to denote this. However, on the other hand, there has been in India a tradition of self-inflicted suffering with a view to purifying one's own inner self or to awakening the conscience of the oppressor tyrant. There have been numerous instances of self-destruction by many holy men for the purpose of checking the tyrant from committing evil. In fact, the concept of *satyagrah* used as a political weapon by Mahatma Gandhi during the twentieth century has also its seeds in this background. However, this kind of sacrifice cannot be called martyrdom or *shahadat* in the true sense of the term: it contains some elements of martyrdom, but lacks the major element of suffering

persecution and getting killed at the hands of the tyrant.

Ancient Indian history is also replete with examples of many a struggle taking place between Good and Evil. The presence of the human element, suffering and supreme sacrifice by the human were, of course, the central motif in that struggle. But we also find that intervention by the Divine must invariably take place on behalf of the Good, thus minimising the significance of human suffering and sacrifice and giving credit for everything to the Divine. The tradition of self-inflicted suffering and torture and the divine intervention in all the struggles fought for the sake of truth and values are the two most important reasons which perhaps explain for the absence of any Indian equivalent for *shahid* or *shahadat*.

At the time the Sikh faith originated, there were two prominent religions – Hinduism and Islam – prevalent in India. No doubt, in the pre-Aryan India existed an organised religious life based on its own philosophy of life as shown in the Rig Vedic reference to the *śramanas*. The Aryans soon dominated the Indus Valley civilisation but the acculturation between the two ethnic groups gradually gave birth to a world-view dominated by the Vedic tradition. This world-view favoured life-negation and world-negation, and religion became devoid of any social context. The divorce from social reality reduced religion to a set of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals. The voice of truth got lost in the din of clashes of the mutually contradictory philosophical doctrines expounded by numerous sects and sub-sects that had emerged. The practice of renunciation resulted in the moral degeneration at the individual and social levels. The social structure was horizontally divided into four different caste groups. Sexism existed as a system of marginalisation of woman. This sexist discrimination against her became all the worse when she happened to belong to the so-called lower caste or lesser privileged class in society.

The doctrine of life-negation and world-negation brought in its wake moral and ethical bankruptcy in socio-religious terms and subjugation in political life. The Muslims who came to India as traders in the south soon turned invaders in the north-west and then conquerors and rulers of India. It was Babar who invaded India in 1526 and caused much death and destruction, unleashing inexpressible atrocities and oppression on the natives. During the Guru-period, Akbar has been the sole exception of being a liberal king. The pendulum swung toward bigotry and



intolerance, coercion and oppression during almost all other regimes. There was as early as the Sultanate period an attempt for the complete imposition of the *shari'at* rule, and the royal chroniclers tried to give Islamic garb to any politically expedient action. In later years, destruction of places of worship of and imposition of the protection tax (*jiziat*) on non-Muslims and the forcible conversion into Islam were common features of the Mughal rule even though all this distorted the social structure as envisioned by their prophet. Such oppressive policies resulted in persecution of non-Muslims, creating among masses a sense of discrimination and hatred. Even though the Sufis did make attempts, quite feeble though, at creating an atmosphere of inter-religious tolerance and goodwill, the entry of Islam into India has on the whole been marked by an ugly recurrence of religious intolerance and persecution.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, happened to be an eye-witness to Babar's invasion and the suffering caused in its wake. He protests in his hymns, collectively known as *Babar Vani*, against this uncalled for death and destruction. But the truth that Guru Nanak had received from God, the truth he had been sharing with mankind in general and the truth he himself lived stood for the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of entire humanity: there was no place for such tyranny and oppression, injustice and violence by man against man. That is why the Guru raised his voice in protest and wanted others to follow this path because this was the path of truth and love. In another of his hymns, Guru Nanak wants those desirous of treading the path of love to be ever ready to "sacrifice their head."

Thus, from its very infancy Sikhism has stood for truth, for righteousness and exhorted its followers to fight against those who subvert the truth. The Sikh scripture, on the whole, articulates the general framework of structure within which the ideal of social reformation is to be realised. It is also normative in that it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers. These latter together constitute the Sikh way of life and one such constituent prescribed is that this world being the dwelling-place of God must be transformed into *Sach Khand*, where the values of equality, love, justice and dignity should prevail; the devotees must neither put others to fear nor own to anybody's fear and they must not shrink from making the supreme sacrifice in a holy cause. The death of heroic men is holy, should they lay down their lives for a righteous cause, says Guru Nanak. At another place in the scripture, Kabir reiterates the same idea in a little different way as he says:

*gagan damana bajio pario nisane ghao.  
khet jo mandio surama ab jughan ko dau;  
sura so pahichamini jo lare din ket het,  
purja purja kati marai kahabu na chhade khetu.*

The hero, entering the field,  
Fights on without quailing,  
Know that man to be a true hero  
Who fights in defence of the defenceless;  
Hacked limb by limb, he still not flees the field.

SGGSp, 1105

Guru Gobind Singh, in one of the concluding verses of his *Charitra Ukti Bilas*, seeks the divine blessing to ever do noble deeds and be able to lay down his life for the sake of righteousness.

*deh sixa baru mohi ihai sabh karman te kabahun na taron,  
na daro ari so jab jai laron nischai kari apuni jit karon  
ar sikhaho apane hi mana ko ih lalach hau gun tau ucharo,  
jab av ki audh nidan banai ati hi ran mai tab jugh maron.*

Lord, Grant me this boon:  
Never may I turn back from righteousness;  
May I never turn back in fear when facing the foe;  
May I ever instruct my mind to chant Thy praises;  
And when the end arrives,  
May I fall fighting on the field of battle.

To stand up to a righteous cause, to stand up in defence of the hapless and defenceless, to be willing to make even the supreme sacrifice for the sake of a cause held dear by a fellow citizen, all this requires a lot of courage and fearlessness. The scripture repeatedly exhorts man to be fearless and give up cowardice.

Thus, in Sikhism, one is required to be brave and courageous enough to stand up against all kinds of injustice, oppression and highhandedness. One must be willing to suffer privation and even meet death fighting against these and such other evils, with no personal motive or interest attached to that fight. In fact, true martyrdom, in Sikhism, lies in the willingness to suffer without flinching. Sikhism prefers non-violent resistance to begin with, but if all peaceful means fail to make the oppressor see reason, the resort to sword is also justified. Guru Nanak and his successors prepared their disciples for this with a view to erecting a social setup where values of equality and love, justice and tolerance, compassion and self-respect prevail.

History provided first such opportunity in the Sikh tradition when Jahangir ascended the throne of Delhi. He succeeded Akbar (1542-1605) who was known for his liberal religious policy and the Sikh chronicles also refer to his amicable relations with the Sikh



Gurus. However, Jahangir was not liberal and tolerant, rather he was under the influence of the orthodox clergy. He soon got alarmed by the growing influence of Guru Arjan Dev, as he wrote in his Tuzk:

*So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by the Guru's ways and teaching. For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic or that he be brought into the fold of Islam.*

He goes on to add that:

*I fully knew of his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his property be confiscated and that he should be put to death with torture.*

Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions of the world, tends to accept the plurality of faiths, acknowledges the validity of all of them and rejects the claim of monopoly over truth by any particular religion, whichever. It states quite unequivocally that revelation is not religion-specific, region-specific or person-specific. It stands for the freedom of man to practice the faith of his choice. This ideology of the Sikh Gurus was contrary to that of religious intolerance and persecution followed by Jahangir and later on by his successors, especially Aurangzeb.

Clearly, this was the time for Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606) to bear witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Guru Arjan Dev stood for the religious freedom of man and refused to renounce his faith when so desired by the ruler of the day. He willingly offered himself to suffer any privation and even meet death for upholding his principles. As a contemporary Christian missionary records, this 'good Pope' died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments, dishonours" heaped on him by a fanatic ruler. Thus, Guru Arjan Dev became the first martyr of the Sikh faith. Let this be stated here that the main cause of the martyrdom of the Guru was the religious policy of Jahangir, while the designs of Chandu and others were only contributory factors.

When Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the ninth Guru of the Sikh faith, assumed spiritual leadership of the Sikh faith in 1664, India was ruled by Emperor Aurangzeb. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzeb was an orthodox Muslim who had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne: he had to imprison his father and kill his brothers to get the crown. He followed a fanatical religious policy to appease and please the Muslim orthodoxy. He decreed "to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teachings" (1669) and imposed *jizya*, a tax non-Muslim population had to pay for permission to live in an Islamic State (1679). There were many more such edicts which aimed

at humiliating the non-Muslims. Though Aurangzeb had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other. Guru Tegh Bahadur could not bear the persecution of others and he seems to have made up his mind to resist the Emperor's policy of religious persecution and even to lay down his life to redeem the freedom of belief.

The decisive moment came in 1675 when some Kashmiri pandits waited upon the Guru at Anandpur. They had come to him to complain against Iftikhar Khan, Aurangzeb's satrap in Kashmir, who was making en masse conversions to Islam through use of force. The Guru listened to their woes and resolved to take upon himself the onus of defending their right to religious practice and belief. He advised them to tell the authority in Delhi that if the Guru was converted, they would all voluntarily accept Islam. Resolved to challenge the royal policy of religious exclusivism and intolerance, the Guru set out for Delhi on his own. Although the Guru was heading to Delhi, the authorities arrested him on the way, put him in chains and brought him to Delhi. His refusal to renounce his faith resulted in his public execution in Chandni Chowk on 11 November 1675. However, before beheading him, three of his devoted followers were also tortured to death before his eyes.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was deliberate and conscious and he took this decision of his own. The authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such: the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening resolve amongst people, the determination to suffer hardship and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. It was a peculiar situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The religious history of mankind provides no other example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own.

In Indian history and folklore, Guru Tegh Bahadur has always been remembered as protector of the Hindu faith – a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticising the Hindu religious symbols of *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider as an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. On the other hand, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. The Sikh advice to a Muslim has throughout been to become a good Muslim and for a Hindu to become a good Hindu. Had the contemporary



political situation in India been the other way around, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of Muslim religious freedom.

The Guru remained in perfect poise throughout his resolve and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can well be imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's eyes. This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise. Interestingly, even the New Testament (John 12) while referring to Jesus's mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt "troubled" and Jesus himself called that period "an hour of suffering".

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples who courted death along with him became the next martyrs of the Sikh faith. The sacrifice made by Guru Tegh Bahadur is without any parallel in human history. Guru Gobind Singh, his son and spiritual successor, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* (V: 1416), also testifies to it as he refers to the martyrdom of the Guru as an act unparalleled in history:

*Their tilak and janju the Lord saved;  
Great deed the Guru performed in the kaliyuga;*

... ..

*For dharma's sake he performed this deed;  
He gave away his head, but not his resolve;*

... ..

*Breaking the body pitcher on the Delhi king's head,  
Left he for the Realm Celestial;  
None else performed the kind of deed  
As did Guru Tegh Bahadur.*

The tradition of martyrdom in Sikhism was climaxed with the sacrifices made by Guru Gobind Singh and especially the martyrdom courted by his young sons. Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed his entire family (including father, mother and sons), his own life and in fact everything that belonged to him. In his fight against the oppressive and unjust policies of the Mughal government and the fanatical attitude of the hill chiefs, the Guru sacrificed many of his Sikhs whom he held as dear as his own sons. Still he had no complaints and expressed complete contentment in the will of God. For example, one day when the Guru was passing through the Lakhi jungle area after leaving Chamkaur, he lay on the bare ground all alone and sang a hymn – *mitra piare nu haal murida da kahina* – expressing his satisfaction and contentment in the will of God.

All four sons of Guru Gobind Singh courted martyrdom

even before they were majors: the elder two, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, were aged 18 years and 14 years respectively, when they laid down their lives at Chamkaur fighting against the Mughal forces supported by the hill chiefs who had pursued the Guru, violating the sacred vows they had taken to the contrary. These young boys were trained from their childhood to stand against injustice and oppression and be ready to sacrifice their lives whenever need be. It was also as part of this training that two years earlier, Sahibzada Ajit Singh was deputed, on 7 March 1703, when he was barely 16 years of age, to take out a party of about 100 horsemen against the Pathan chieftain of Bassi, near Hoshiarpur, to rescue a young Brahman bride forcibly taken away by him.

The younger sons of the Guru, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, were bricked alive under orders of the Nawab of Sirhind: the young boys, barely eight and six years of age, were betrayed to the Mughal satrap of Sirhind by an old servant of theirs who escorted them this way as they got separated from their father and other members of the family after leaving Anandpur. These young boys remained unflinching in their faith and without any wavering of mind preferred death to giving up their faith when forced to make the choice: a lesson they had learnt from their parents, their heritage. Their passionate commitment to their faith even at such a young age and the stark contrast of the cruel death meted out to them at their tender age makes their martyrdom all the more significant and unique. No other such example is found in the religious history of mankind. Their grandmother who had been escorting them, faded away from life as the news of the martyrdom of the young ones reached her while still in captivity.

The post-Guru period in Sikh history also has a long tradition of martyrdom as the Sikhs suffered privation and even met death but remained committed to the truth of their faith, to the values their Gurus stood for. In the period following Banda Singh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1716, the Sikhs were hounded and prices levied on their heads. The invading Afghans and the local Mughal government did their best to liquidate the Sikh community and their religion. Stories of the Sikh persecution are many but not a single instance of a Sikh wavering in the commitment to his faith. That is why when their *sanctum sanctorum*, the Harmandir at Amritsar, was demolished several times, the Sikhs quickly rebuilt it and assembled there every *Diwali* and *Baisakhi*. The more they were tortured and oppressed, the more powerful and determined they became and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, had become political masters of the land of Punjab, an unparalleled story of political power coming out of martyrdom. ☪

Professor Dharam Singh





# MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM

**Our Glorious Heritage - and Present Degeneration**

ਪਹਿਲਾ ਮਰਣੁ ਕਬੂਲਿ ਜੀਵਣ ਕੀ ਛਡਿ ਆਸ ॥  
ਹੋਰੁ ਸਭਨਾ ਕੀ ਰੇਣੁਕਾ ਤਉ ਆਉ ਹਮਾਰੈ ਪਾਸਿ ॥

ਮਾਰੂ ਵਾਰ ਮ:ਪ੍ਰ

*First, accept to die, shed the longing to live;  
Become the dust of feet of all, then come to me.*

SGGS, p.1102

The concept of martyrdom is an automatic offshoot of the Sikh way of life. Since the Sikh has been taught never to compromise truth, shed selfishness and always engage himself in service and sacrifice, even at the cost of his life, martyrdom – willingness to die – is included in the syllabus. But what our Gurus said and did and what Guru Gobind Singh showed, at the age of 9, when Guru Tegh Bahadur offered to become a martyr for the freedom of worship of Kashmiri Pandits, is a remarkable manifestation of the teachings of righteousness of our Gurus. In fact, the undaunted manner in which the four *Sahibzadas* came out to face death and become martyrs, is a glorious chapter in the glorious history of character-building and righteous-living along with selfless, temptation-free existence. One does not become a martyr merely because he dies for a cause on the spur of a moment or because he faces death as a result of common mutual opposition of ideas or because of the personal rivalry and anger at the perpetrator of atrocities. Martyrdom is a seal on the life of righteousness, which aims at not only willingness to die, but remaining always attached to the love for mankind and a selfless life working for *sarbat da bhala*, in the service of God and Guru.

Before I refer to the innumerable cases of righteous people willingly going for martyrdom, I think it would be befitting to go into the manner as to how such martyrs came about. This is not a sudden development. Our history is replete with individuals leading a righteous life willingly offering to die for love of the Lord. Quotes from Guru Granth Sahib:

ਜੋਬਨ ਜਾਏ ਨ ਡਰਾਂ ਜੇ ਸਹ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥  
ਫਰੀਦਾ ਕਿਤੀ ਜੋਬਨ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਮੁਕਿ ਗਏ ਕੁਮਲਾਇ ॥

ਸਲੋਕ ਫਰੀਦ

*I do not mind my youth being wasted  
If my love of God persists because  
I see many youths wasting away in death because  
They could not fall in love with the Lord.*

SGGS, p.1379

This is not a scholarly presentation. Nor is it the statement of intellectual comprehension. This is a devoted submission on the concept of martyrdom incredibly shown by the young sons of Guru Gobind Singh. The treatise is based entirely on the experience of a Sikh trying to learn from childhood not just the tenets of Sikhism but the very essence of our Sikh society as a defiance of the prevailing system of inequality, injustice and tyranny. The victimised people of India facing oppression, prejudice and tyranny not only from foreign rulers but also from the "priestly" class were lovingly taught to lift their spirits and come out of self-imposed and self-condemned inertness. While the Gurus righteously and spiritually took upon themselves to speak for the weak and the downtrodden, encouraging them to be fearless, Guru Arjun, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh as also the *Sahibzadas* showed us the personification of Guru Nanak's words:

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥  
ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਧੈਰੁ ਧਰੀਜੈ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥

ਸਲੋਕ ਮ:ਪ੍ਰ

*If you wish to play the game of love,  
Come to my street with your head on your palm;  
On this path, with the first step, if necessary.  
You should be prepared to lay down your life.*

SGGS, p.1412

Guru Arjun became the first Sikh martyr for the cause of righteousness, fulfilling his words with his blood.



ਕਹਾ ਭਇਓ ਜਾਇ ਤਨੁ ਭਇਓ ਫਿਨ ਫਿਨ  
ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਜਾਮਾ ਤੋਧੁ ਦਰਪੇ ਜਨ ॥

ਅਸਾ ਰਵੀਦਾਸ

*What if my body is cut into pieces;  
I am afraid lest my love of God be taken away.*

SGGS, p.486

I cannot help referring to Guru Ram Das ji's famous *shabad*, *koi aan milave mera preetam pyara* (Guru Granth Sahib, p.757-58) where in inimitable style, Gururji says *tan mann kant sabh arpi vich agni aap jala* I am prepared to cut my mind and body in pieces and I am also prepared to immolate myself for the sake of meeting my beloved Lord.

With these kinds of commitment to live in God, live in righteousness, live in sacrifice and live in the light of commands of the Master, martyrdom was almost a natural corollary. Since the Gurus were steadfast in word and deed in terms of their actions always matching with their words, the Sikh learnt not only to obey, but to imitate their lives. Guru Arjan led the way to martyrdom and we are naturally proud of him. But that he was the first Sikh martyr is not the only high point in life, he had, apart from numerous other wonders, created the nucleus of our perpetual Guru. He compiled the *Adi Granth* in which he showed unparalleled and unprecedented divine greatness including hymns from saints of other religions not excluding the so-called "untouchable" saints. He had the foundation stone of Harmandir laid by a Muslim divine, Mian Mir. And yet, he did not opt for life, when faced with options payment of fines at the hands of bigoted ruler Jehangir. The value of martyrdom is enhanced when the martyr finds peace on an iron stove on burning stand. Not only does he not surrender to the will of the ruler but has no grudge against him and accepts martyrdom as the will of God.

When Guru Hargobind introduced *miri piri*, the concept of *miri* was subordinated to *piri*, i.e., spirituality would always dominate temporal life. To be ready to die for the righteous cause remained paramount when it was considered inevitable to take up arms against the tyrannical rulers. Guru Tegh Bahadur set three golden rules in the willingness to lay down one's life for righteousness; this was done not in so many words, but in his spectacular response to the call in distress made by the Kashmiri Brahmins then under siege to convert to Islam:

- \* When freedom of worship is threatened, a Man of God does not remain indifferent to the call of those whose form of worship is different from his own;
- \* A man of God does not merely promise to help, thus ensuring safety for himself;

- \* A man of God is prepared to lay down his life, if necessary, for upholding the right of freedom of worship for all human beings.

And the response was electric: "Tell Aurangzeb to convert your Guru first." The Guru knew that he would then to face death, but he would have given the apparent impression to the ruler that it would be easier to prevail upon one man so that all others would automatically be converted.

Let us never forget the 9-year old Gobind's willingness - nay, exhortation - to let his father become a martyr to save the honour of Kashmiri Brahmins. As Guru Tegh Bahadur said, "A great man is required to lay down his life to save them."

"Who can be greater than You, Father?" exclaimed the young Gobind.

Bhai Jetha and Bhai Lakhi Shah did not flinch from respectfully cremating the head and the body of the Ninth Guru even when in danger of death. The examples of Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dayala are an eye-opener not just for Sikhs but for all mankind.

I do not know why we have treated Martyrdom Days as "festivals" by taking out processions along with holding *Akhand Path*s and *Kirtan Darbars*. The core point has been forgotten. In fact, on martyrdom days of our Gurus, particularly, of the Sahibzadas, every Sikh should introspectively think if he has imbibed the spirit of *Sikhi*; if the answer from within is yes, he should bow to Guru's feet and feel blessed; if the answer is no, the Sikh should beg the Guru to bless him with the spirit to lay down his life for righteousness, walking in the footsteps of the Masters and our Gurmukh forefathers as indeed, of the young and devoted Sahibzadas. I recall listening on rapt attention to a Gursikh on his yearnings when he sang on the Sahibzadas' Martyrdom:

ਚਮਕੌਰ ਕੇ ਮੇਦਾਨ ਜੇ ਸੰਦੇਸ ਹੈ ਆਇਆ, ਸਰਹੰਦ ਕੀ ਦੀਵਾਰੋਂ ਨੇ ਹੈ ਮੁਝ ਕੇ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ।

ਮਤੀਦਾਸ ਕੇ ਆਰੇ ਨੇ ਮੁਝ ਕੇ ਲਲਕਾਰਾ, ਭਾਈ ਦਇਆਲੇ ਕੀ ਦੇਗ ਨੇ ਹੈ ਮੁਝ ਕੇ ਪੁਕਾਰਾ।

ਕਬ ਹੋਗੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਆਰਜ਼ੁ ਮੁਝ ਕੇ ਬਤਲਾਇ, ਕਬ ਉਥਾਸਾ ਜਾਊਂਗਾ ਮੁਝ ਕੇ ਸਮਝਾਇ।

ਮੇਰੇ ਤਨ ਕੇ ਆਰੋਂ ਕਾ ਕਬ ਪਿਆਰ ਮਿਲੇਗਾ? ਚਰਖੜੀਓ ਪੇ ਚੜ੍ਹ ਜਾਨੇ ਕਾ ਕਬ ਅਵਸਰ ਮਿਲੇਗਾ?

"A message from Chamkaur Sahib (where Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh were martyred) reminds me about their sacrifice; the walls of Sirhind, where Sahibzada



Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh were bricked alive, beckon me to be prepared to lay down my life for righteousness. The saw of Mati Das throws a challenge to me to live the life of sacrifice; the cauldron in which Bhai Dayala was boiled alive calls me to sacrifice. My Lord, tell me when will my urge for martyrdom receive your nod; when would I too be boiled alive? When shall my body receive the cut by saws and when shall I get the opportunity to be broken on the wheel?"

The singing was accompanied by tears streaming down his cheeks with devotion writ upon his face. Surely, every Sikh should mark martyrdom days with such fervour.

The innumerable sacrifices of our forefathers and the countless martyrdoms, the path of which was established by the Sikh Gurus themselves, created an insatiable urge among the Sikhs to live with dignity, self-respect and death-defying righteousness. The strength came from the principles of *nir-pir* based on temporal life always being guided by strict divinity and spiritual awakening the natural result of which is direct conflict with tyrannical forces. When Guru Gobind Singh was convinced that his Sikhs had learnt to live in truth, love and honest and the rulers had learnt nothing even after their ceaseless tyranny, he called upon his devotees to offer their heads on that Baisakhi Day of 1699, thereby demonstrating that martyrdom was righteousness. And our sisters did not remain behind in following the dictates of our Guru. The *Amrit* ceremony which we regard as a valuable scorer of numbers of *Amritdhari* Singhs, was, to our Guru, a perpetual pledge to live the life of *jeetian mar rahiyeh* - a life of humility and sacrifice with the remembrance of God's name and willingness to die in the cause of righteousness. We recall Guru Gobind Singh's two *Sahibzadas*, one as *ardaas* for martyrdom and the second as acceptance of all adversities with cheerfulness and *charhuti kala*.

*Deh siva mohe ehe shubh karmen te kabhu na taroun na daroun ar se  
jab jaye taroun nische kar apni jeet karoun. Ar sikhon apne hee munkau  
eh lalach gun tau ucharton jab aa ke audh nidhan hane att hee ran mein  
tab juihe naroun.*

*Mitar pyeare noun haal muridaan daa kehnaa. Tudi bin rog rajayian  
da odan, naag nicaas de rehna. Sool sunahi kharjar pyala bing kasayian  
da sahna, Yarare da sathar changa, bhath kherian da rehna.*

*Khujal Patshahi 10*

In my view these two *shabads* brilliantly describe the Guru's concept of martyrdom. On the one hand, there is absolute preparedness to lay down one's life, in line with Guru Nanak's concept, on the other there is a perpetual pledge to live in

righteousness with God in the heart, whatever the adversity. When the Khalsa was created, these twin needs overshadowed everything else and martyrdom became something like ancestral property.

During the 1980s unrest in the Punjab and struggle in recent times, hundreds of our youth were mercilessly killed and tortured, our sisters put to extreme hardships, including rape and torture. This was tyranny of the worst order by the establishment but not all of our people could be considered as "martyrs" for the simple reason that many of them, while prepared to be killed, were not living the life of righteousness but were indulging in nefarious activities even against one another. Unrest in the Punjab during that decade, in gurdwaras and struggles in the form of *morchas*, all this will be correctly recorded in times to come, but the foolish and unnecessary, unprecedented step of operation *Blue Star* was tyranny of the worst kind. The undefying spectacle of our saints quarrelling among themselves, making Harmandir Sahib as a shield for them, aided by political chicanery of the worst kind both by Sikh and non-Sikh political opportunists was stupidity, but to believe that the Sikhs would take the onslaught on Harmandir Sahib lying down was utter madness. Otherwise that PM would never have dared to attack Sikhism's most sacred shrine.

The *shenanigans* of our so-called political leaders, jathedars and even intellectuals have proved to be our undoing. Not only have we become victims of material degeneration and personal pelf, illegal and immoral pursuits, but we have also thrown up leaders who are willing to sell themselves, sell the *panth*, for the sake of ministerships, illegal gratifications and other temptations. So, the concept of martyrdom or even righteousness has been forgotten. Ordinary Sikhs too have become paraders of ostentatious living, black money, 5-star culture with total alienation from the Guru's word and Guru's way of life. *Sikhi* is now an external display of ill-gotten wealth, dubious grandeur and dishonest practices. Such rot has been perpetrated by Babas of *deras*, whom even political leaders pay obeisance and who benefit from their nefarious activities. *Jathedars* have become political tools of their political masters in the SGPC or DGPC, members whom have come to occupy seats of power by bribery, corruption and winning voters. Where then is the manner of martyrdom and selfless sacrifice?

When Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and himself became a member of the Khalsa Brotherhood, subjecting himself to dictates of the *Panj Piare*, it was clear that all adherents had willingly opted for martyrdom. That is why we have legends of our mothers and sisters who allowed their children to be



killed but did not budge from their righteousness. Our forefathers were burnt, boiled, sawn and broken on the wheels, but did not shirk from their commitment. That is why they are remembered with devotion in our *Ardas*.

But look at the degeneration. When the Khalsa tercentenary was celebrated, it became a *tamasha* between Badal and Tohra, *Jathedars* being replaced like small town clerks, the Sikhs witnessing only external showmanship and the ritual *amrit chhabra* ceremonies without any commitment to martyrdom. The Sikh President in Rashtrapati Bhavan had not only stuck to his *kursi* in the face of Indira Gandhi's horrendous "Blue Star", but subsequently honoured those army personnel who had desecrated Sikhism's most sacred shrine. Neither the *Jathedars*, nor those in position showed any willingness to become martyrs in resisting such tyranny.

Where is spirit of the woman who protested to Guru Gobind Singh against the order of recruiting for his army one child from every family but not from the family which had only one son? "My Lord, what fault have I committed? Why this injustice to me?" bewailed the lady who had only one son. When the Guru asked the reason of her discomfiture, she said: "Why should I not have the honour of my son fighting in your army?"

And where would you find the young boy in a queue of Sikh prisoners to be executed, disowning his mother who had obtained mercy for him on the plea that he was wrongly detained and was not a Sikh? "She may be my mother but she tells lies. I am a Sikh and I want to be treated like my brothers; I too want to be martyred."

We are all aware how Sikhs were subjected to various indignities after Indira Gandhi was killed and the massacres that followed. What was the result? There were wholesale disowning of Sikh principles. The tragedy is that even today we have not woken up. Youth in the Punjab are getting alienated from religion and truth. And who is there to show them righteousness? Who is there to stem this rot? We now have commercial houses in gurdwaras. We now have members running our Institutions like schools and hospitals, who have come to occupy these posts by bribery, corruption and treachery and whom during elections, do not hesitate to assault fellow Sikhs. Where would you now find candidates for martyrdom?

Let me conclude this article with five observations:

\* Firstly, the concept of martyrdom is to be analysed with righteousness as the basis for living. And that strength is to come from commitment to honesty, truth and faith in God.

\* Secondly, selflessness has to be the hallmark, in all circumstances, when a Sikh lays down his life for a cause.

\* Thirdly, no hankering for recognition should be taken into consideration.

\* Fourthly, the leadness for sacrifice and ultimate willingness to die, has to be part of one's training. To be uncompromising in defiance of tyranny, and

\* Fifthly, no temptation, no one upmanship, no chicanery and no hoodwinking should deflect a Sikh whose commitment to righteousness is total and irrevocable.

I can do little better than to recall the Sikh whom I have personally seen singing about his commitments, on the every Baisakhi, the Khalsa birthday:

ਮੈਂ ਚਿਹੀਰੀ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਬਾਨਾ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਸਾਈ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਸੀ  
ਉਸ ਗਾਫੀ ਰਾਹ ਤੇ ਚਲਦਾ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮ ਨੇ ਚਲਾਇਆ ਸੀ।  
ਤੇ ਹਿਮੱਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਮੁਹਕਮ ਨੇ ਫਿਰ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ ਸੀ,  
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਪਿਤਾ ਕਹਿਲਾਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਮੈਂ ਤੇਰਾ ਪੁੱਤ ਅਖਵਾਉਂਦਾ ਹਾਂ।  
ਜੇ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਪੁਤਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੈਂ ਚਿਹੀਰੀ ਕੁਝ ਹੀ ਲੈਂਦਾ ਹੈ।  
ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਤੂੰ ਇਕੋ ਇਕ ਮੇਰਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ਹੈ।  
ਖਾਲਸਾ ਕੀ ਸਾਲ ਗ੍ਰਹਿ ਹੈ ਆਜ ਰਹਿਮਤ ਕਰ ਦੇ।  
ਜੋ ਕੁਝ ਅਜੀਤ ਜੁਝਾਰ ਕੇ ਦੀਆ ਮੁਝ ਕੋ ਭੀ ਦੇ ਦੇ।  
ਆਜ ਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਦਿਵਸ ਇਕ ਬਖਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰ ਦੇ।  
ਜੋ ਕਿਫ਼ ਜੋਰਾਵਰ ਫਤਹਿ ਸਿੰਘ ਕੋ ਦੀਆ ਮੁਝ ਕੋ ਭੀ ਦੇ ਦੇ।

"I have to become the Khalsa, the type of which was created on the first Baisakhi day.

I have to walk on the same path which was head by Daya Singh and Dharam Singh.

And walking on which Himmat Singh, Sahib Singh & Mahkan, I wish to sacrifice my-self. My Lord, you are called my Father and I your son.

I want to be gifted with the same gifts that you gave to your Sahibzadas.

Today is my birthday, birth of the Khalsa, please shower me your grace today. Whatever you gave to Zorawar and Fateh Singh, please bestow the same blessing on me too".

I remember his bright face, singing devotedly, tears rolling down, begging from Guru Gobind Singh for the gift of martyrdom.

And that *Amritdhari* Singh is my inspiration. ❀

Bhagwant Singh Dalatwari  
Tapovan, Amravati, Maharashtra



# FAITH, INSPIRATION AND RESOLUTION



## Sikhs of the new Generation

It is obvious for those engaged in studying the evolution of mankind to determine in how many myriad ways and manners did martyrdom of the young Sahibzadas three centuries back impact on the community's consolidation and growth as a world religion. The ten Gurus and the eternal Guru Granth Sahib are the beacon of faith, inspiration and determination, their radiance dispelling the dark age of horrific cruelty perpetuated on peoples of the sub-continent for many centuries.

There are any number of individuals and organisations engaged in maintaining the spirit of the Khalsa as exemplified by organisations involved in perpetuating pride and dignity amongst the new generation of Sikh youth today. The Akal Academy at Baru Sahib in Himachal Pradesh, along with Kesh Sambhal Prachar Sanstha have organised Gurmat Camps for students in the mountains of Sirmore district, while the Sarab Sanjhi Gurbani and Guru Ramdas Academy have conducted Sikh International Youth Camps in the Doon Valley, in the foothills of the Himalayas.

The International Council of Punjabis have arranged Sikh Heritage Camps at Paonta Sahib, which town Guru Gobind Singh had established on the banks of the river Jamuna in November 1685.

The *Kaurs and Singhs* have concentrated on children of India's capital city, New Delhi, holding day camps since the past few years. A series of one day workshops, conducted by selected and committed volunteers have energised many parents in New Delhi to enrol their children with the faith and trust that they will carry the torch into the future.

There are innumerable Sikh youth camps being held in many other parts of India and indeed the world, particularly in the United States, Australia, Malaysia and Britain.

### Akal Academy

Situated at the scenic location of Baru Sahib is this residential school run by the *Kalgidhar Trust* under the leadership of Baba Iqbal Singh which, while



maintaining the highest standards of education, moulds youngsters into the Sikh way of life. On the one hand, these youngsters are made high-tech savvy, on the other they have a regime of regular *nit-nem* to learn all about Sikhism and being a good Sikh, thus encouraging them to be committed to their values and becoming *amritdhari*.

During the four day camps, there were lecture sessions from 9.30 to 1.00 p.m. when various speakers explained to the youngsters various aspects of Gurbani, pristine manners of *Sikhi*, physical fitness and leadership values. Amongst the learned speakers were Sardar Bhagwant Singh Dilawari, who elucidated on *Japji Sahib* and Captain (Navy) Mohan Singh Kohli, of Mt. Everest fame, who



Healthy minds in healthy bodies: sports at Banu Sahib.



S. Surinderjit Singh Pail (fifth from right) with other members of the community.

inspired the youngsters with his achievements, courage and commitment.

The youngsters were demonstrated the martial art of *gatka* and apprised of its background, history and importance in history. Teams of *gatka* players from the Punjab demonstrated their skills to both entertain and encourage the students.

Discussions and discourses on the contribution of women in Sikh lore and evolution of Sikh society were held. Various scholars spoke about the Sikh value system, equality of mankind and universality of the message of the Gurus. A dramatic visualisation on martyrdom of the young *Sahibzadas* was also presented.

Children were then taken around Himachal Pradesh for trekking and excursions to Sohana and Shimla and also to Chandigarh and Pinjore.

This camp was unique in that it provided "total immersion" to these two hundred youngsters of impressionable age, on the Sikh way of life and apprising them of their history, scripture, traditions and supreme values.



Capt Mohan Singh Kohli whose book "Ardaas" has become a continuing inspiration.



Listening to the lectures at camp.

## Sikh Heritage Camp

This Camp at Paonta Sahib on the banks of the river Jamuna was chosen as location by the *International Council of Punjabis*, organised by Kulmohan Singh, Manjit Singh and Pushpinder Singh of the DSGPC. Over one hundred young boys and girls from Delhi attended the four-day camp which was extremely well organised and conducted.



At dawn each day (*amrit vela*) the youngsters recited the *Japji Sahib*, prepared *langar* and then carried out *sewa*. During the day, lectures on Sikh history were given by Sahib Kaur while Jitender Pal Singh gave discourses on teachings of the Gurus and Sikh culture. The evenings were spent in group discussions, recalling historical events and their impact on the future, participating in *kirtan* and doing *rehraas sahib da paath*.



Guru Granth Sahib being taken to the Gurdwara Sahib by the campers.



"Sewa he parm dharmoo": campers cleaning utensils.



Leading the campers are Sardarni Jigyasa Kaur and Sardar Shamsher Singh.



Campers taking oath, while holding the Nishaan Sahib.



Young Akaljit Singh's sewa.

The youngest camper, five year old Akaljit Singh, did his own *sewa*, cleaning and lining up shoes outside the Gurdwara Sahib without having been told to do so.

The young boys and girls also went out on short treks, boating on the river and picnics in the hills, before the bus journey back to New Delhi's Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib from where they had started some days before.





Campers listening to lectures by Papaji (not in picture).

## Sikh International Youth Camp

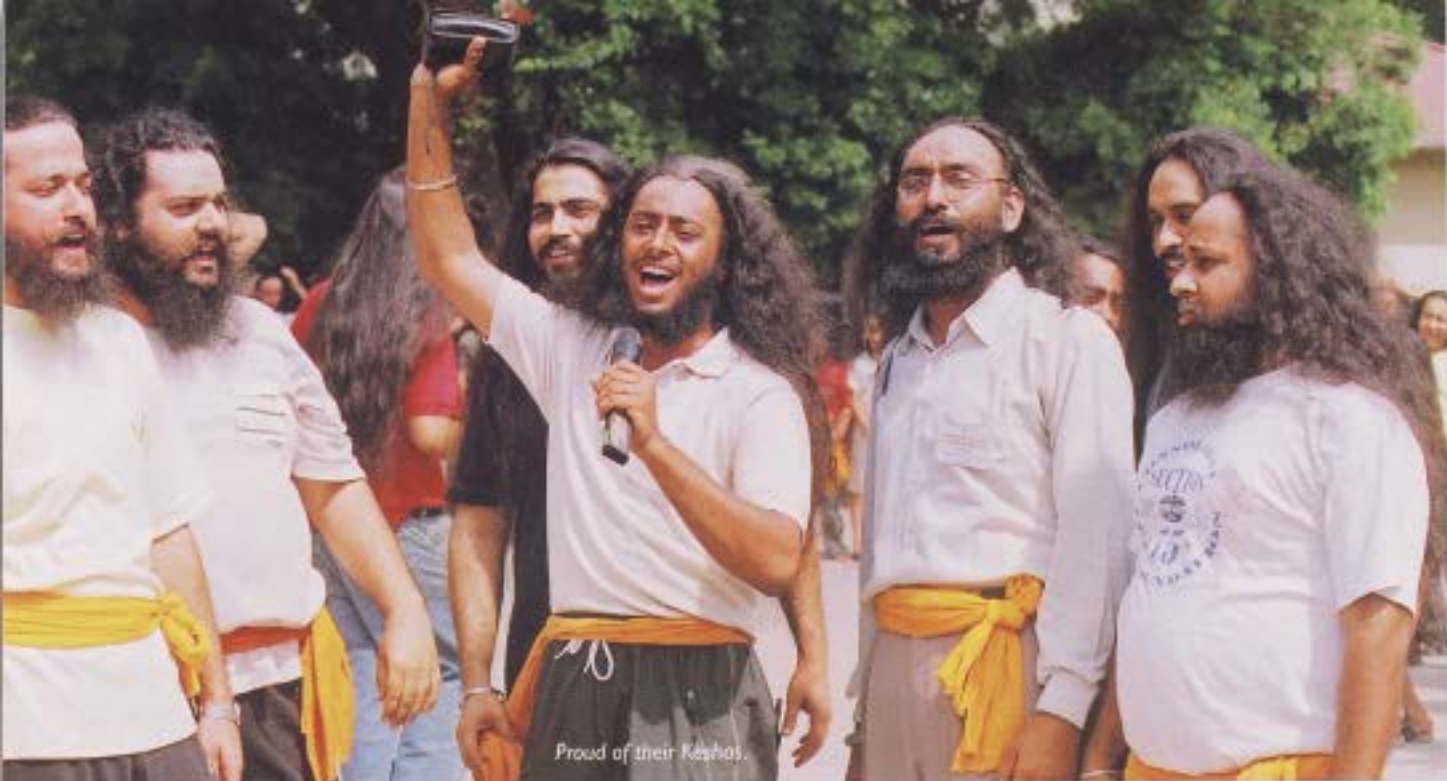
Organised by the *International Institute of Gurmat Studies* (IIGS) at the Guru Ram Das Academy in the foothills of Mussoorie in the Doon Valley, this pristine organisation has been serving the *panth* for half-a-century. Founded at Lucknow in 1955, IIGS Camps have been run by the tireless Sardar Harbhajan Singh, universally called "papaji" by the thousands of young Sikh boys and girls, men and women from America, Canada, Britain, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and Kenya apart from India who have been privileged to know him.

The Guru Ram Das Academy was established by Raja Singh of Texda TV and *Sanjhi Gurbani* and have hosted the ten-day camps with characteristic largeness of heart and spirit. In lap of the Himalayas, having well laid out accommodation with modern amenities, the Academy has been the favourite choice of Camp Organisers. In 2003, the Sikh International Youth Camp (SIYC) had five hundred young Sikhs attending and the IIGS were flooded with requests to hold another camp in India. This, the 62<sup>nd</sup> Camp, a eleven day residential Gurmat retreat in June 2004, yet again offered a unique experience of the Sikh way of life, the new campers learning about essential *Sikhi* while the "veterans" went through a more advanced course. Glory of the natural hair was exemplified, with the young men persuaded to proudly display their open *keshas*, encouraged and heartily applauded by the young ladies!



Salute to the Nishaan Sahib.





Proud of their *Keshas*.



Campers in Babaji's room for the evening *dewan*.



*Bole Sa Nihal, Sat Sri Akal!*




In the glorious *Dogra* valley.



Harjeev Singh ties his own *dastaar*.

Wonderfully organised and run, the campers were grouped under leaders and adjutants and councillors who conducted the closely scheduled programme over ten days, inspired by visitors which ranged from the *jathas* of Bhai Sahib Sadhu Singh to Bhupinder Singh, "Bhuppi" of bhangrapop. There was the inspiring presence of Captain Mohan Singh Kohli who spoke about the "power of prayer" and announced that all royalties from his book *Miracle of Ardaas* were going to Pingalwara.

At the concluding ceremony, the campers were lined up on parade in salutation to the *Nishaan Sahib* with inspiring *kirtan* by the *jathas* of Bhai Sahib Avtar Singh, who has been bestowed with the *Panth Rattan* award. 

Parambir Singh



# LEADERSHIP BY TURBAN™

AN AMERICAN STORY

by

RAVI SINGH  
EDITED BY MIKE SCHOLTZ



## Balancing tradition with life in America

This is a true story of a youngster trying to balance his religious identity in present-day America. The story titled, 'Leadership by Turban' authored by Ravi Singh, was released in the Capital in January 2005 by Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission.

The book is a compendium of events in the life of a man trying to find a means of balancing his traditions with the life he

has acquired in America, thereby highlighting the principles of leadership in daily life.

Born and brought up in Illinois, USA, Ravi Singh graduated from the Marmion Military Academy, becoming the first cadet wearing a turban to graduate from the academy.

Ravi Singh has also been an aide to the lieutenant governor

### An American story

I am an American. And I wear a turban. A lot of people think that's an odd combination. They wonder how I balance these two influences on my life. And whether I find my turban a poor fit in modern America. I have to admit, I've wondered, too. For years, I searched for answers in the words of great authors, scholars, philosophers and CEOs. But, as it turned out, the answer was with me all along. I found them in myself. In my life. In my experiences. From academics to politics to business and religion, made me proud to be an American. And they've made me proud to wear my turban.

I believe that truth is the most valuable gift you can share with other people. And that's why I'm sharing my truths. These are the stories of my life that shaped my values and principles. Through trial and error, I had to learn the hard way how to stand up for myself. Wearing a turban hasn't always been easy, but it's taught me some interesting lessons about being a leader. I hope people can learn something from my experiences. Not just about guys who wear turbans, but about leadership. Because the future is coming and for our children's sake, we should be better prepared to lead it.



Releasing the book at Le Meridien at New Delhi (left to right) S. Tirlachan Singh, S. Anup Singh, Ravi Singh, Vikramjit Singh Sahney, Dr. Manohar Singh Gill and Sardar G.P. Singh of Hemkunt Publications.



Ravi Singh on the mike....

and state treasurer of Illinois, a student body president, an NCAA Division I golf captain, a candidate for public office and a business entrepreneur. He claims that his story challenges the preconceptions about life in the USA and makes us rethink on what it means to be an American.

The 88-page book, published by Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi is dedicated to the memory of Balbir Singh Sodhi, the



... and Dominique Girard, Ambassador of France in India.

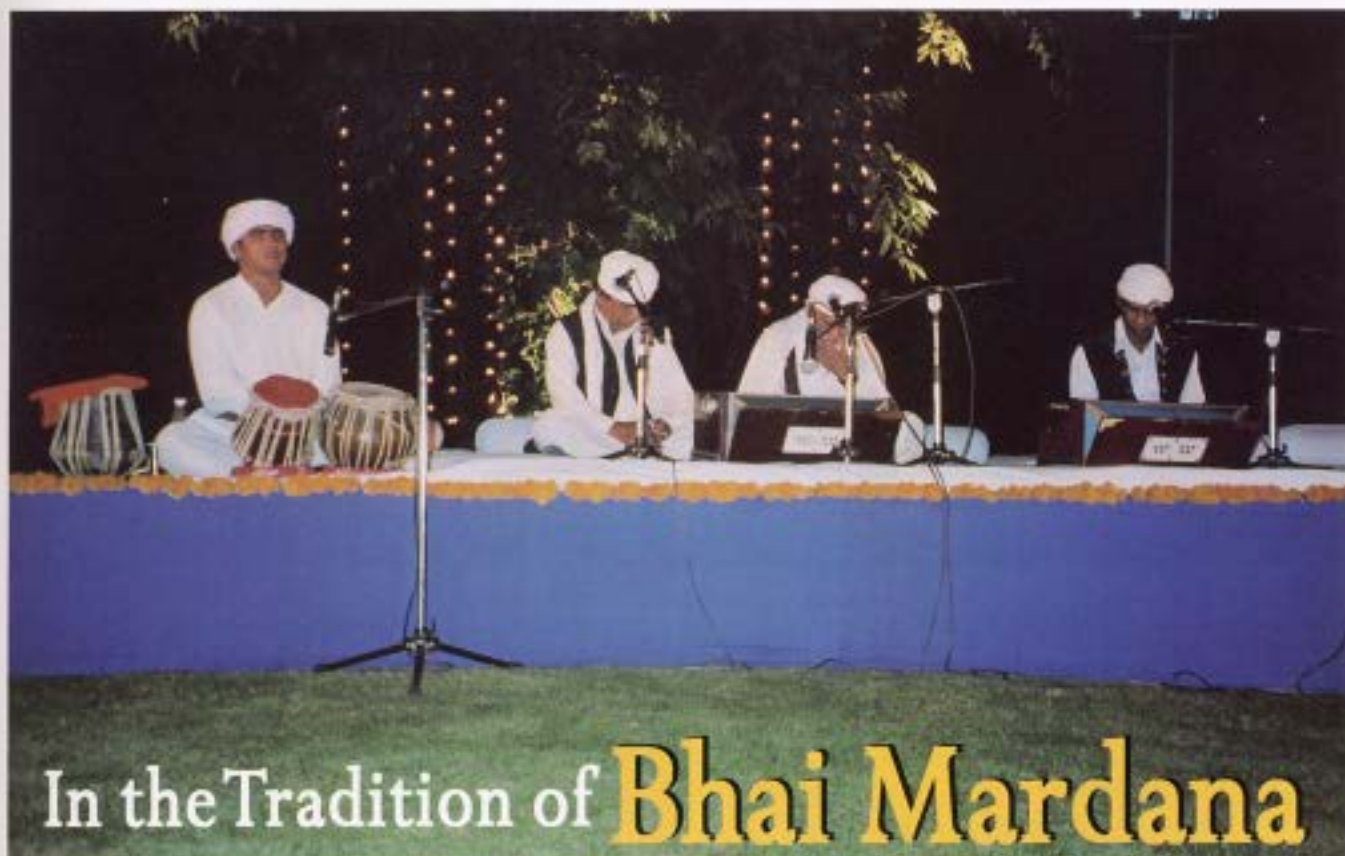
first victim of racial bias following the 9/11 disaster. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book will be given to the children of Sodhi "who died because he wore a turban".

Ravi Singh has written vividly about his daily experiences, wearing a turban. He says, "If just one person gains a pearl of knowledge from this book, then I have accomplished what I hoped to achieve by writing it".

## Turbans for everyone

I've always been interested in seeing people reach their full potential. I believe most of us just need a little push. Today's market driven society treats us like dummies looking for easy answers and quick solutions. It teaches us that success can only be defined by the number of material possessions we accumulate. But that's the easy way out. And people who are given the easy way out won't have the tools they need to achieve their long-term desires. The sum of all my experiences – from being the first turban-wearing cadet in an American military academy to running for public office with a turban to starting my own companies – have been more valuable to me than anything I could ever buy. Material wealth is not the answer. It's who you are – and what you do – that is priceless. In many ways, we are all wearing our own turbans. I hope that you have gained some insight into what it means to wear a turban in America today. And I hope you've gained some insight on what it means to be a leader. Good luck and God bless you and America. This is my story. This is my search. This is my turban. This is who I am.

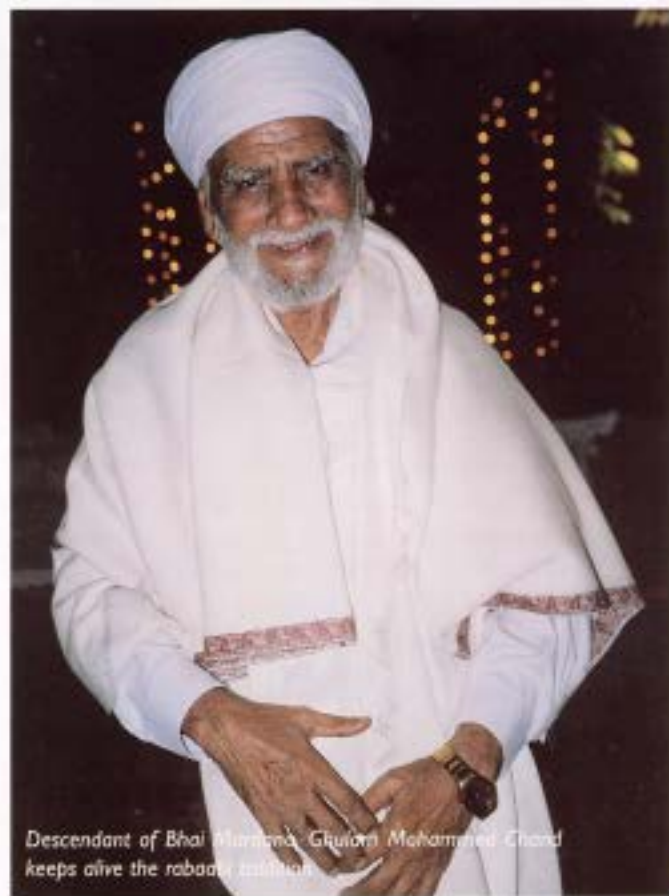




## In the Tradition of **Bhai Mardana**

**L**istening to Ghulam Mohammed Chand, it is difficult to disentangle the musician from the sage. This 77-year-old man has been singing verses of the *Guru Granth Sahib* since he was a boy of eight. He recites the names of the ten Sikh Gurus with more ease than he can count names of the 12 Imams. His ancestors trace their lineage to Bhai Mardana, the companion of Guru Nanak and to the strains of whose *rabhaab* he sang his hymns. Bhai Mardana's descendants remained *rabhaabis* to all the Sikh Gurus, keeping alive the *rabhaab* tradition, preserving the musical instrument from extinction. His uncle, Bhai Chand regularly performed keertan in Darbar Sahib at Amritsar and was a well known *rabhaabi* keertan of his time.

Passions roused by the Partition of 1947 dislocated people from their homes and goaded them to accept artificial borders even in the realm of inner faith. Bhai Chand's family members left their village Raja Sansi near Amritsar, but took along with them the fragrance of a faith that was as much a part of their inner life as was the faith into which they were born. "We did not leave Nanak behind but went closer to him", says Bhai Ghulam Mohammed whose home now is at Lahore, less than 90 minutes drive from Nankana Sahib, Guru Nanak's birthplace.



Descendant of Bhai Mardana, Ghulam Mohammed Chand keeps alive the *rabhaabi* tradition.



Bhai Ghulam Mohammed Chand goes to Lahore whenever occasion demands. He gives people a glimpse of his *ilm*, his lore of the sacred music when he sings at a *sangat* held every Friday, in the home of a Punjabi poet passionate about Punjabi sufi poetry.

"In my youth I did not know what I was singing. Now when I sing, even to myself, I weep. The mind yields to the strength of the holy word and if the fervour is truly felt then a state of bliss is reached and remains. When the mind and heart are in constant consultation, where there is *shikwa* and *jawab-e-shikwa*, then your own heart becomes the guru. Gu means darkness and Ru is light. The one who brings light in darkness is a guru. Neither clothes nor



Members of the "Saanihey Rang Punjab De", United Colours of Punjab with Baba Ghulam Mohammad Chaand at New Delhi

## Rabaabi Traditions

Bhai Ghulam Mohammed Chaand from Lahore was born and brought up in Amritsar. He is nephew of the legendary *Bhai Chaand* who used to sing at the Golden Temple till the Partition. He was a young *shagird* of his Chachaji who in turn was a *shagird* of Bhai Sundar, Baba Ghulam Mohammad's father. They are *Rabaabis* who trace their lineage to Bhai Mardana, Guru Nanak's constant companion who retained his Muslim identity but sang Nanak's philosophy and vision. As Babaji aptly says "... they also call us *Miransis* ... but Nanak said ... Mera Si ... for who can separate *Baba Nanak* and *Mardana*..."

Riyaaz Ahmed on the tabla is from Pak Pattan the land of Baba Farid. 22 years of age, he is an extremely talented young tabla player, a protégée of West Punjab's prolific poet Sayyed Najm Hussain. His Ustaa'ds include Nazeer Ahmed Butt Saab, Baba Mureed Hussain and Ustaa'd Wajid Ali.

Mohammed Afzal and Amjad Hussain are Bhai Sahib's nephews who have been singing with him for long, trying to keep alive, against great odds, the tradition of the *rabaabi keertan* which they know is their heritage. They now live in Bilalgarh, Lahore.

appearances make a guru". He quotes Baba Farid: "*Kaale merey kapde, kale mainda bhes/ Gunahi bhara moin phirya, lok kahen dervish*".

"*Awal Allah noor upaya; Kudrat ke sab bandey; Ed noor sab sat jag upgaya; Kaun bhale kaun mandey*" : "It was Allah first and then his light; All human beings are part of his creation; With that one light the entire world came into being/ Is there any among them who is good and any who is evil?" During his recital in New Delhi, Bhai Ghulam Mohammed began with this shabad of Kabir, moving on to the Compositions of Guru Nanak, Baba Farid and Guru Gobind Singh. Their thoughts mingle freely in the Granth Sahib and his singing was suffused with the ambience of a time when kirtans carried the solemnity and joy of *rabaabi* and of *keertan*.

A captive audience was enraptured and then near hypnotically rose to walk slowly up to the stage. Lines of men and women, their heads covered, to make their offerings so that he did not return home with an empty *jholi* (bag). "Who can fill his *jholi*? It is he who has filled our *jholis*", rose a voice in the dark as the basket left on the stage began overflowing with offerings, a gift from apna Punjab for bringing back Nankana's Nanak and Pak Pattan's Farid.

"*Yeh duniya jo ekhati hai, mujhey accha lagta hai*", said a visibly moved Babaji, his small eyes smiling. He had returned to India after 60 years. To see people of so many faiths living together in one place touched him. It is in this India perhaps that Babaji finds his *metier*. Though home is where his family lives, his work, his calling finds a flowering in a place which, not so long ago, was also his home. ☺



# SEWA AND SUCCOR IN WAKE OF THE



**tsunami** of 26 December 2004

*Dr. D.P. Singh Kanda examining tsunami-affected patients at Nagapattinam.*

The tsunami tragedy which devastated many parts of the region, particularly India's southern states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry, Kerala and most savagely the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, had the Sikh community reacting in characteristic manner, both from the Punjab as also the diaspora in South East Asia.

Within hours, the Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh had directed setting up of an integrated relief command (IRC), with the solemn assurance that the affected areas would receive immediate and massive relief aid. Visiting the Andaman & Nicobar Islands soon after, Dr Manmohan Singh met victims at the Campbell Bay Relief Camp and assured that the administration would rehabilitate the Islands. Not only the affected territories of India but the neighbouring countries of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives received relief supplies transported by the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and Air Force.



*The team of doctors and paramedics from the Punjab Medical Council, on arrival at Chennai.*



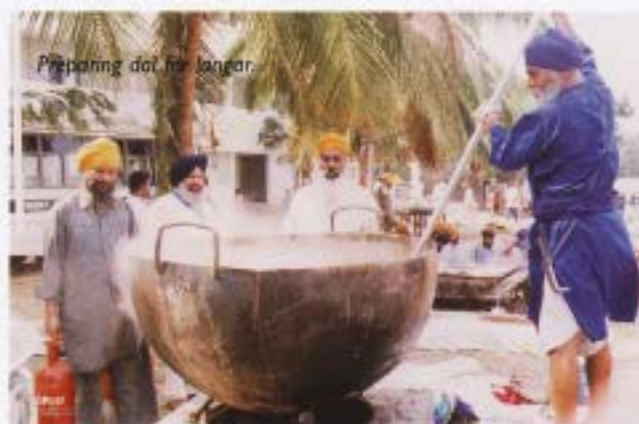
The Governor of Tamil Nadu, S Surjit Singh Barnala personally took charge of the relief operations and also guided Dr O P Singh Kanda, President of the Punjab Medical Council who was the first to arrive from the Punjab, to Nagapattinam, which was the worst affected district. His jatha was introduced to Gagandeep Singh Bedi the District Collector, to begin coordinated relief and rehabilitation work. The Nishaan is privileged to carry this first person account from S. Surjit Singh Barnala, the Governor, of the work done.

Sardar S.S.Rakhra, the M.L.A. from Samana constituency and his brother, who is an N.R.I., had arranged over 100 truckloads of relief materials which started to move south from Patiala in a goods rake consisting of 24 wagons plus four passenger coaches, with dedicated teams of doctors and paramedics sent by the S.G.P.C. There were also many nurses from the nursing college run by Prof. Balooona, as also some 300 cooks and sevaders from the Punjab who left for Nagapattinam in that train. The goods train took six days to reach Trichy Railway Station from where the relief material was transported to Nagapattinam. Medical teams were divided into task groups and assigned duties in the area.

Langar was started at Nagapattinam where about 5000 persons were given hot meals every morning and evening. Other relief materials such as tents, blankets, bed sheets, clothing, utensils, soaps, detergents, toothpaste, toothbrushes, chappals, lanterns, torches were supplied to needy people on the advice of the District Collector without any discrimination.

There was urgent demand from Car Nicobar for wheat flour. Four truckloads of supplies which included wheat flour, ghee, potatoes, masalas, salt, tea, sugar, blankets, soaps, lanterns, torches, etc. was then sent by ship to Campbell Bay. Volunteers from the Punjab worked continuously for about twenty days and gained much goodwill and gratitude of the people affected by tsunami. When returning to the Punjab some weeks later, the remaining material was distributed to various camps in temples, mosques and churches in the Nagapattinam area.

Another badly affected district was Cuddalore, whose District Collector Gagandeep Singh Bedi organised relief work immediately and worked continuously for 18 hours a day for rescue and relief. In the meantime Swami Chitanand Saraswati from Rishkesh, who is known to me and the film star Vivek Oberoi, came with a large team of workers, wanting to work in the tsunami affected areas. I got them on to Mr Bedi and sent them to Cuddalore and started relief and rehabilitation work there. Since fishing boats and nets are fundamental to the life of fishermen in the coastal area, they provided them with boats and nets so that they could go back to sea and begin life again after that terrible day of 26 December 2004.



Preparing dal for langar.



Making chapattis for langar.



Serving langar at Nagapattinam.



The Governor and DC with fisherman and families at Cuddalore.



## To Campbell Bay, with Hope

I had the privilege of hearing Bhai Esher Singh's enthusiastic voice for the first time in five days. He had not left a stone unturned. The last time I called him, a Giani of Gurdwara Kheri in the district Sangrur, Punjab answered his cell phone. It was 5 a.m. in India. I asked to speak to Bhai Sahib, and the Giani said "well you can listen to him; he is doing *katha* in the Gurdwara". I could hear Bhai Sahib in the background. Beautiful words from Gurbani, amazing conviction and purity flowing from his voice. Just



Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh with tsunami-affected people at Campbell Bay, Nicobar Islands.

the night before, he had met some key officials in the SGPC and Punjab Government and held a press conference about the Campbell Bay sufferings of the victims, showing their plight on the media that he recorded himself and had won their support. "What an amazing person", I said to myself. I am so lucky to work with him; nay *United Sikhs* are so lucky; nay the people in Campbell Bay are in good hands when we have a Project Leader like him. In these five days he had travelled to Bombay, Pune, Hyderabad, Nasik and Bangalore to show the victims' plight and needs, channelise relief material and ask for people's support.

He said that the *United Sikhs* team was onboard the ship *Chowra* which had just left Port Blair and was to be in Campbell Bay in the next 48 hours. Over the previous 15 days *United Sikhs* had gathered all the essential relief supplies based on assessments done in his first trip there and sent three ship loads to the islands. Now they could start proper *langar*, rebuild the gurdwara, motivate the people and help rebuild their lives in every way possible.


Along with the team of seven *United Sikhs* volunteers was Sardarni Darshan Kaur Grewal, soon to be re-united with her husband she had earlier presumed dead at Campbell Bay. Hers is an amazing story. She literally ran some kilometres to escape the waves to a hill where she stayed for the next two days until the waters subsided. For the next couple of

weeks, she kept looking for her husband without any luck. After struggling in relief camps and losing heart she decided to go to her relatives in Delhi. A few days later she heard that her husband was alive on the island. In a physically ill condition, mentally exhausted and unable to establish any contacts, she approached *United Sikhs* to help take her back to her husband. *United Sikhs* team members took her back home. In less than 48 hours she was home once again but for the time being, in a family tent that *United Sikhs* provided for the displaced, soon in a house that they will assist the families to re-build.

When the team landed at Port Blair from Chennai they also met with several Sikhs and other Punjabis who had left the islands in despair and in hope of better conditions in Port Blair camps only to be further disappointed. They mentioned that the situation in Campbell Bay camps was pathetic, with diseases beginning to show up. There seemed to be no hope, some people hoarding relief supplies while others were not getting enough for even a meal. When they heard about *United Sikhs* relief plans and saw the team of volunteers, along with Bhai Esher Singh they were inspired once again. They decided to join the team and head back home as well. So along with Darshan Kaur, *United Sikhs* brought another group of 18 people back home.

I wanted to hear a whole lot more but the phone got disconnected. When it rang next after 15 minutes, it was Navneet Singh the team leader. His voice was so enthusiastic. He was excited taking everyone back home with a ray of hope. He updated me with other details on the status of shipments and volunteers when suddenly I heard a microphone squeak. I asked him where are you? "On the ship" he said. "What was that Navneet?" Oh that... We are going to hold the evening Diwan on the deck of the ship. Bhai Sahib just connected a microphone to the amps and the speaker and there you go; do you hear him reciting *Rehras Sahib*? We are going to motivate people, we are going to bring them back. We are not leaving until lives are filled with *Chardi Kala* again".

Go Navneet, I said. They need you. But call me everyday and let me know about every life we touch. Let us know what supplies you need and find out about the children who have nobody left. We will take care of them. We will make a difference.

I couldn't help being envious. I wanted to be there on the deck of the ship sailing to Campbell Bay bringing hope to people lives; bring them back home. Inspiring the hopeless and being inspired myself by the words of the Guru being recited in the open air of the Indian Ocean by the Sikh of the Guru who lives for *sewa*. 

Jaspal Singh Tiwana  
By e-mail from Dartmouth, Canada



## Cuddalore to folklore : Saviour who came in from the coast



Governor Surjit Singh Barnala hands over documents to the tsunami affected. (DC Gagandeep Singh Bedi on the right)

He was having breakfast at the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Hotel resort off the East Coast Road near Mahabalipuram that terrible Sunday. When the tsunami struck, Cuddalore's 36-year-old-collector almost became one of its first victims. Fortunately, and it was Cuddalore's too, Gagandeep Singh Bedi lived.

As the water swirled up to shoulder height, Bedi fought and saved his wife, Dr Jaideep Bedi and their two little daughters. But there was no time to sit back in relief, certainly not for Bedi. As he sped to Cuddalore in his car, Bedi got on his mobile phone, issuing instructions for he had grasped the scale of the tragedy.

"First, I alerted the Cuddalore government hospital, Annamalai University Hospital and private hospitals for ambulances as we would need them to collect bodies immediately. I alerted the BSNL to start a helpline immediately, arranged for shamiyanas at the mortuary, information centre and water for the relatives. I also alerted NGOs, fire service people and all hospital staff, because we needed all hands", said Bedi, who had earlier been given the *Green Award* from Chief Minister Jayalithaa for his environmental projects in Kanyakumari district when he was Collector there.

By the time he reached Cuddalore at 11.30 a.m., all the arrangements that he had asked for were in place. He got into action immediately, calling community heads to oversee burials, in the meantime arranging for graves and

night lightings. He then drove off to Parangipettai where 115 people had lost their lives. It was at four next morning that he watched the 115 bodies being buried in Parangipettai. Later in the day, 500 bags of bleaching powder had reached 51 affected villages, carcasses of cattle had been buried and the surviving ones given injections.

Thirteen teams were formed in five days for mass cleaning. Then the relief effort shifted gears smoothly, adding counselling to the ongoing relief work. The week after, it was rehabilitation work.



Fishermen families at Cuddalore.

But it was not over. Bedi set himself the immediate goal of providing temporary housing to the tsunami victims and permanent housing in the next few months. Bedi's efficiency and doggedness is talked about with awe in Tamil Nadu. The people of Kanyakumari still remember him as "the best Collector they have ever had", who earlier had made the district plastic-free. He is also one of the Collectors that CM Jayalithaa is proud of and trusts.

An engineer from the Thapar Institute of Technology at Patiala, Gagandeep Singh Bedi began his career as a lecturer. He was later awarded the Director's Gold Medal for being the best all-round probationer at the IAS Training Academy, Mussoorie. His first posting was as sub-collector of Sivakasi, followed as sub-collector of Cheranmadevi, additional collector of Cuddalore, Madurai Corporation commissioner and then the Collector of Kanyakumari till July 2003.

**Swati Das,**

*The Times of India, Chennai*



# GLOBAL SIKHS: WAVES OF MERCY



*The Global Sikhs Aceh Relief Mission Centre in Malaysia.*

**The great efforts of Global Sikhs based in Malaysia, marks beginning of the involvement of Sikhs in this part of the world on humanitarian relief work.**

*The 26 December Asian tsunami saw waves of destruction smashing into parts of Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Southern India. In the immediate aftermath came waves of mercy in the form of relief efforts from Malaysia and an established Sikh body – the Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia – which rose to the occasion, spearheading the Global Sikhs, a humanitarian relief team that ventured into the epicentre of destruction in Aceh, Indonesia.*

Actually, they have been familiar with men in turbans. The tsunami-ravaged Aceh, a province in the sprawling archipelago which is Indonesia, is known for its Islamic credentials. But the new men in turbans coming to their land are a new sight.

"Are you a Muslim?" asks an elderly lady as Dr Jaswant Singh attends to her in the first few weeks following the 26 December tsunami that slammed Aceh with waves three-stories high.

"No, I'm a Sikh," he replies.

"What are you doing here?" asks the lady. One look and you can tell something is bothering her. She's not alone. Many other carry the same look of bewilderment in their time of grief. This lady lost almost her entire family in the great waves that smashed into Aceh following an undersea earthquake. Aceh alone lost close to 300,000 people in the tragic aftermath. Hence, the *makcik* – the Malay word for an elderly lady – has many reasons to wonder.

"I'm here to help", replies the 35-year old doctor.

"Where are the Arabs?" persisted the lady, looking at his turban.

Dr Jaswant Singh is from the *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy*, an ad-hoc humanitarian relief team powered by a group of Sikhs and expatriate sailors in Malaysia. The soft-spoken doctor had signed up to be part of the maiden team of 31 volunteers. It was a brave effort indeed, moving into an area that could be wracked by another earthquake, walking into "Ground Zero" that could witness an epidemic outbreak.

They braved on. Soon, the folk of Aceh got to know more about these men in turbans. They are not Arabs. They are the *Bhai Karniyns* of today. They are men and women willing to go deep into troubled areas, carrying with them aid and relief, bringing hope and love to people desperately in need of it.

The *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy*, a mission spearheaded by the *Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia* (SNSM) has achieved tremendous results. This Malaysian-based Sikh organisation which was established in the early 1960s, has shouldered a mission never executed before. Its volunteers, many of them experts in running *Gurnat* camps but with little knowledge of humanitarian relief work, suddenly found themselves sailing across the high sea, wearing jackets of humanitarian relief workers. Take Malkith Singh. A long-time volunteers of SNSM, Malkith has organised countless *Gurnat* camps, coordinated *nagi jathas* internationally, attended to families in need of assisted, cooked *Guru-ka-Langar* almost every other day at one *Gurdwara* or another, and assisting in running day-to-day affairs of the SNSM. On 7 January 2005, he found himself sailing along with 30 others on the maiden relief mission of the *Global Sikhs*.

Within weeks, the *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy* team were taking care of some 10,000 people in two areas. In Pulau Weh, an island just north of Banda Aceh, they were assisting some 7,000



displaced people in 15 camps. In Paroe and its surrounding area – villages facing the Indian Ocean which faced the full brunt of the tsunami – some 3,000 villagers came under their care.

In no time at all, thousands of *mukciks*, like the one under Dr Jaswant's care, came to know of Sikhs. Whenever they see the men in turbans or the words *Global Sikhs*, they know help has arrived. Not only do they bring food, medicine and love in abundance, to the ecstasy of the villagers, they were amazed that the *Global Sikhs* gave them the *Qur'an* and other religious items required by God-fearing Muslims. The word began to spread, carrying forward from place to place such name of the followers of Guru Nanak.

An incident in Sabang, the small port city in Pulau Weh which acts as its forward station, illustrates this. A group of doctors from the *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy* were left alone to carry out their work. Feeling hungry, they walked into the town to buy some food. The shop owner refused to accept payment. "Kamu orang pertolongan" (You are the men who bring us relief), he said. And when they see the men in turbans, or the *Global Sikhs* banner, even Army troops at barriers wave them on. While they may know nothing of the Sikhs, they found them to be honourable people, providing true blue humanitarian relief, with no hidden agendas.

And, back in Malaysia, people began talking about how the Sikhs have joined in efforts to provide emergency aid to Aceh. They are impressed as to how such a small community was able to mobilise aid and relief within such a short space of time. There are less than 80,000 Sikhs in Malaysia which has a population of 25 million. News of the humanitarian work of *Global Sikhs* and other agencies also began making its rounds in other Sikh circles as well, a dynamic, vibrant and humanitarian image of the Sikhs.

"For years, Sikhs have been falsely branded as terrorists and people who meant trouble. This heinous propaganda has lingered on," *Global Sikhs Operations Director* Harvinder Singh told team members in a meeting in the early days of the mission. "The tsunami disaster is an opportunity to represent Sikhs around the world. Hopefully, it will remind them of the selfless service of Bhai Kanhaiya, mankind's first Red Cross person".

## The Beginning

The efforts of *Global Sikhs* began immediately following 26 December 2004. The province of Aceh on the island of Sumatra is just across the Straits of Malacca and Malaysia is its closest neighbour. Some key volunteers of the SNSM were approached with the idea of providing some form of assistance to the victims in Aceh. At that time, the number of dead reported was way much lower, still not in the news as the place worst hit by the deadly waves.

Within days, a humanitarian relief agency was already in the making. "Sabha House", the SNSM headquarters in Kuala Lumpur,



*For the children, Global Sikhs had sent writing and colouring material as well. A group of ladies came forward to do the packing. Four of the ladies in this picture eventually went down themselves as humanitarian relief workers at Aceh.*

was transformed into an operational crisis centre. Within days, more than 100 volunteers were already fully engaged in various activities. Supplies began pouring in by lorry loads. Every nook and corner of the two-story bungalow was full of stores. A full-fledged humanitarian relief agency was in the making. The meeting room was transformed into the mission's Command and Control Centre, which soon would be operating 24-hours a day, probably the largest Sikh humanitarian relief agency, in terms of number of volunteers, to go into action in an international tragedy. By end-March, the *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy* would have sent some 160 volunteers to Aceh over seven missions, performing all kinds of relief and rehabilitation work. Indeed, history is in the making.

The energy level was simply amazing. It fed on itself. The volunteers, most of them with full-time jobs or people running their own companies, came forward to lend time, energy and expertise. Without doubt, the mission needed all the expertise it could muster. Being new to the game, the learning curve was steep. The 'to-do' list was lengthy: clarifying the relief training, searching for funds and goods, coordinating with other relief agencies, getting the necessary approvals, and so on.

As the mission moved on, the right people and the required stuff began falling into place. At times, it felt that miracles were taking place, one after another. For the first few shipments, the mission needed medicines costing millions of dollars. Overnight, the supply reached their doors. Foodstuff was needed. Again donors came forward. Critical to the mission was a proper control centre. A couple of Malaysian Sikh army experts with the right training and experience came into the picture. At the end, the Command Centre was transformed into a mission operations centre: clocks





Volunteers at "Sabha House"

on the wall telling the time at. Aceh and Kuala Lumpur, detailed maps on the wall, dedicated telephone lines, networked computers for volunteers to get going. The man responsible for putting the Command Centre into place was *Global Sikhs* deputy operations director, Satwant Singh an international environmentalist with a multi-national company.

Then came the question of how the team was going to reach the devastated Aceh. Large international agencies were already moving to Banda Aceh, the capital of the province, situated at the tip of Sumatra. But there was information that relief teams and stores were stranded there. Complete destruction of the road network on the west coast of the Aceh had hindered onward movement.

Then what? That was one of the most critical questions for operations director Harvinder Singh and his team. Another dedicated long-time volunteer, Harvinder played an instrumental role in providing leadership to the team now already in high spirit and energised. Having put in so many collective man-hours, they were not about to coil back. "If you want success, you have to do something you have never done before," reflected Harvinder.

And that's exactly what happened : treading on paths the volunteers had never tread before. By sheer coincidence, *Global Sikhs* were matched with the *Waves of Mercy*, a group of sailors based in Langkawi, an island on the west coast of Malaysia. Within a week (by 7 January) the new partnership of *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy* sent out two vessels carrying 31 volunteers and 150 tons of emergency supplies on their way to Aceh. The first team, led by SNSM Vice President Malkith Singh, also included a group of 10 medical personnel.

The new partnership changed the scenario, literally moving the mission's anchor forward. Unlike most other agencies that descended upon Aceh, *Global Sikhs* now could go beyond Banda Aceh. As the only humanitarian aid agency fully mobile with their vessels, *Global Sikhs* set their base camp in Sabang on the island of Pulau Weh, just north of Banda Aceh.

Some 20 days after the tsunami, the *Global Sikhs* team was sailing along Paroe. The villagers caught their attention. Ever since the tsunami incident, this village facing the epicentre of the earthquake had not received any relief, save for a solitary air drop some days earlier. "More than half its population had been wiped out. When we first landed there, some of the children there could not even walk," says Malkith Singh, who was on board the yacht *Sam Paquito* that first brought relief to the villagers.

Back on home ground, things were moving along at break-neck speed. Right from the beginning, the mission was meant to embrace anyone and everyone who wanted to serve on humanitarian relief work, regardless of race, religion or nationality. From the onset, *Global Sikhs* had enlisted non-Sikh members. Dr Tikku Gee was busy drawing up the medicine list together with Jagdeep Singh and his wife Jasmeet Kaur. Kishore Kumar was gallantly handling logistics. The husband-wife couple of Tik and Stephanie were working through the night, alongside Tarninder Singh, to get the website up and running.

From the beginning, the mission adopted an inclusive route. To keep the platform open to other concerned organisations, the team adopted the name *Global Sikhs*. SNSM Jathedar (president) Harvinder Singh spelt out its mission: *Global Sikhs* is a platform for anyone who wants to serve in providing relief to the devastated people of Aceh and to assist them in rebuilding their lives.' At that juncture, the *Global Sikhs* alliance had already included the *United Sikhs*. Other Sikh organisations soon began getting involved.

Over the next weeks, *Global Sikhs* concentrated efforts in providing assistance to Pulau Weh and Paroe. At Pulau Weh, the team embarked on several other projects, one of them for ensuring proper sanitary conditions at displaced people's camps.

With the operation moving from the emergency phase to the rebuilding process, *Global Sikhs* sent 16 boats to Paroe's predominantly fishing community, to put them back on their feet. More boats are on their way. "You should have seen the glow in the eyes of the people in Paroe when they got the boats. It was simply awesome," said one volunteer.

More importantly, it is giving the people there something to look forward to, the four or five villages there lost most of their family members and witnessed waves destroying their homes. The work being done by the volunteers of the *Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy* is definitely making complete difference. For years to come, the people of Aceh will remember the men in turbans who came as waves of mercy following the waves of destruction.

(The *Global Sikhs* mission in Aceh is still in progress. For more information, visit its website at [www.globalsikhs.org](http://www.globalsikhs.org) or [www.snsn.org.my](http://www.snsn.org.my). The writer is a former SNSM secretary and editor of its magazine, "The Sikh". He can be reached at [Habhajan@gmail.com](mailto:Habhajan@gmail.com))

**Habhajan Singh**  
Volunteer of "Global Sikhs: Waves of Mercy"



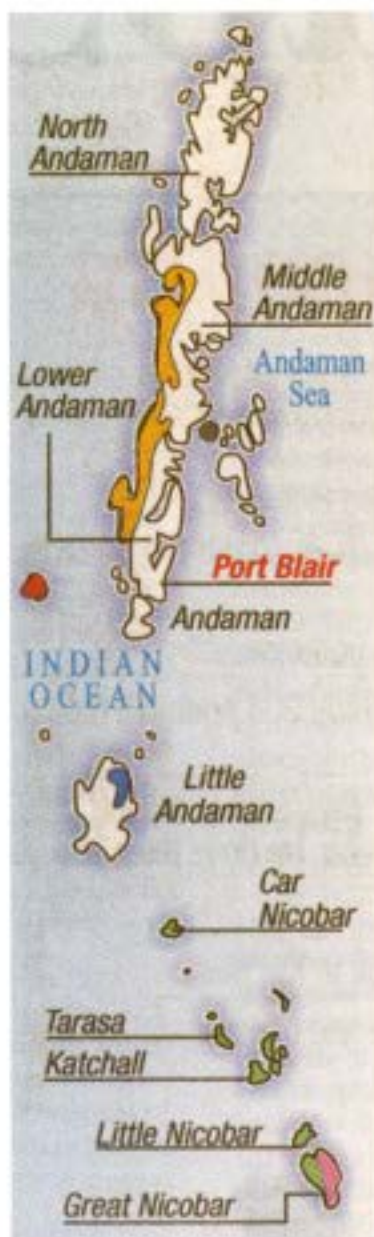
# Sikhs and the Andamans

It was initially feared that the devastating tsunami of 26 December 2004 had wiped out the very few aborigines that inhabit some jungle islands of the Andaman islands. However, it is perhaps not known to most peoples that these aborigine tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar islands have an age-old enmity with the sea. There is evidence to say so. They have a long list of festivals, but none of them dedicated to the spirits of the sea. They have always considered the sea as devil and hate it. In fact, most of these tribals even use very little sea food to survive. They collect their food from forests which is their home and most eat wild pigs, honey, bananas and other eatables available in the forest area. They never worship the sea.

Interestingly, some of these tribes, especially Jarawas, whose population is just around 270, have a strong Sikh connection. The legendary S. Bakhtawar Singh, who joined the Andaman and Nicobar Police in 1935, played a great role in bringing Jarawas closer to the mainlanders. He started efforts in 1962, when he was transferred to the bush police and succeeded to win over Jarawas who used to be very hostile towards inlanders, only by 1974.

The 89-year-old Bakhtawar Singh, who originally belonged to Raipur Majri village near Khanna in Punjab, had said: "I do not believe the reports that sea waves have wiped out the endangered aborigines such as Jarawas, Onges, Great Andamanese, Sentinelese and Shomens, whose total population is below 800. They have a great instinct of survival".

Jarawas, Onges, Great Andamanese and Sentinelese live in



Middle and South Andamans, about 65 km from Port Blair. Shompens, who never establish any contact with inlanders and are known for their hostility towards modern man, live in the Great Nicobar islands. Bakhtawar Singh, who had suffered a heart attack and got discharged from hospital just the day before the tsunami on 26 December, said that he had been in continuous touch with Jarawas. "But because of old age, I had stopped visiting them a few years ago", he adds. "But many of them are my friends and love me", he added.

It is a long story just how Bakhtawar Singh, whose son Sarabjit Singh is an Assistant Engineer in Agriculture Department at Port Blair, won over the Jarawas, who kill their targets with poison-coated arrows. "I took the risk and many a time survived their attacks. I used to take fruits for them. Steadily, they started having faith in me and became my friends", he said. "I learnt their language so as to converse with them", he added.

Otherwise also, Sikhs have a historical link with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. About 4000 Sikhs live in these islands. Many of them had settled there after release from Cellular Jail at the time of Independence. The Cellular Jail was set up by the British to lodge the freedom fighters and others who were fighting against them for an independent India.

A large number of Sikh ex-servicemen later settled near Campbell Bay, which was devastated by the killer waves on 26 December 2004. ☹

(It is sadly learnt that Bakhtawar Singh has since passed away).





Nankana Sahib Gurdwara

## Gurpurab in Pakistan

**M**ore than 15,000 Sikh pilgrims from all over the world visited Nankana Sahib to attend the 535<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations of Baba Guru Nanak at Gurdwara *Janam Asthan* in late November 2004. According to Pakistan Gurdwara Parbandak Committee Chairman Sardar Mastan Singh, some 7,000 Sikh pilgrims came from India, while over 3500 were from the UK and the US who reached Pakistan for the pilgrimage.

Special security measures had been taken to avoid any untoward incident during the four-day celebrations, plain clothes men had been deployed at all important points and police check posts set up near the main entrance to the Gurdwara *Janam Asthan*. Traffic police had made arrangements to ensure smooth flow of traffic during the four-day celebrations. Special stalls had been set up at the railway station and other places to facilitate the Sikh pilgrims.

Federal Standing Committee of Law, Justice and Human Rights Chairman MNA Rai Mansib Ali said the main event of the festival was held at Gurdwara *Janam Asthan* on November 26. The Sikh pilgrims stayed in Pakistan for 10 days, also visiting other holy places including Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Rohri Sahib,

Aimanabad, Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, Farooqabad and Gurdwara Purja Sahib at Hasanabdal.

This has been the largest congregation of Sikh pilgrims in Pakistan since 1997. Besides Sikhs, large numbers of Hindus and Muslims also attended the festival. A majority of Pakistani Sikhs belonged to Nankana Sahib, Swat, Mangora, Karachi, Kashmir, Mardan, Rawalpindi, Para Charar and Jacobabad.

In their colourful turbans, the Sikhs carried out *Nagar Kirtan* taking the *Piñi* with Granth Sahib from Gurdwara *Janam Asthan* and carrying it to seven other gurdwaras in Nankana Sahib: Paiti Sahib, Palia Sahib, Tambu Sahib, Panjvin Padshahi, Chehvin Padshahi, Salji Sahib and Giyara Sahib.

On their way to the gurdwaras, the pilgrims were showered with flower petals by hundreds of locals standing on rooftops of their houses. While Sikh youngsters performed the *bhungra*, children lit crackers on their way to the gurdwaras, even as elderly ladies were busy preparing and serving *langar*. Sikh pilgrims visited stalls set up by the Tourism Development Corporation Punjab (TDCP) to get information about other holy Gurdwaras in West Punjab.



*The Paraj Pyaras at Nankana Sahib.*



Anarjit Singh Goraya, from Australia and a journalist by profession, said that the Sikh community abroad was very optimistic about the ongoing peace process between Pakistan and India. He said people of both the countries wanted resolution of all outstanding issues between them, including the Kashmir dispute. He said what they believed that autonomy to Kashmir was the only solution to the problem. "For this, both the countries will have to budge from their existing positions", he opined.

Some Hindu girls of Jacobabad said that hundreds of them attended the festival every year: "The Guru was our spiritual leader as well". The girls would rise by 3 a.m. and after prayers, would do *sewa* (cleaning of gurdwara and preparing *langar*).

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi announced that Nankana Sahib would be made "a model town" to provide maximum facilities to visiting pilgrims. He was addressing a sizable gathering of Sikh pilgrims at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib on the 535<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak.

Evacuee Trust Property Board Chairman Pir Muhammad Khan Bangash stated that they would construct hundreds of new rooms in Tambu Sahib Gurdwara adjacent to Gurdwara *Janam Asthan* and land of Government Degree College had also been acquired for the purpose he added.

He said that visas would be freely issued to Sikhs so that they could visit their holy places in Pakistan. He suggested that a bus service should begin between Lahore and Amritsar and there were no delays from their side. He said a double rail-track would be laid between Wagah to Nankana Sahib. A hotel would be constructed near the Gurdwara Nankana Sahib to cope with accommodation problem, the chief minister said, adding that a modern hospital would also be constructed there at a cost of Rs.20 million.



*Preparing for the langar....*



*...cooking food for pilgrims.*



*Distributing and serving the langar.*

The chief minister said that "Sikhs and Muslims had historic ties and shared identical beliefs in their religions: the oneness of God (*Tahid*) and equal treatment to all. Verses of great Sufi poet Baba Farid were incorporated in the Guru Granth".

## **Nankana Sahib-Wagah highway planned**

Chairman of India's National Minority Commission, S.Tarlochan Singh, said that the West Punjab Chief Minister, Parvez Elahi, has offered to construct a "super-highway" connecting Wagah and Gurdwara Nankana Sahib to facilitate faster movement of Sikh pilgrims visiting holy shrines.

With this new highway, it would take only one and a half hours to reach the shrine, which otherwise took more than





*Katha at Nankana Sahib.*

## At Nankana Sahib and Kartarpura

Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan to celebrate the 535th birthday of Guru Nanak also visited Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpura, some 16 km from Narowal.

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 at Nankana Sahib (Sheikhupura) and passed on in 1539 on the banks of the river Ravi near Kartarpura, where now stands Gurdwara Darbar Sahib.

Guru Nanak presented social reforms and taught people to live with harmony irrespective of their religious beliefs. That is why both Hindus and Muslims were among his followers. It is also believed that Baba Guru Nanak had performed Haj to express solidarity with the Muslims.

When he passed on, a dispute erupted between the Muslims and the Hindus over his funeral, with the former wanting burial and the latter cremation. During this deadlock, it is said, Nanak's body disappeared and there was left only a piece of cloth.

The Muslims and Hindus divided the 'sacred' shroud in two equal pieces and performed the last rites according to their customs. The Muslims made a grave while the Hindus raised a Samadhi. At Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, visitors can see both the grave and the Samadhi. A number of local Muslims regularly offer *Fateha* at the grave.

[From: *Dawn*, Lahore]



*The Mazaar where muslims buried the shroud of Guru Nanak at Darbar Sahib, Kartarpura.*

two and a half hours. He said bus services between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib, as announced by the Government of India, was expected to commence soon as both governments were working out its modalities.

S.Tarlochan Singh said S.Mastan Singh of the PSGPC had assured him that *Rahat maryada* in the Sikh shrines in Pakistan was being observed in accordance with the directions of Akal Takht.

## "Facilitate easy visit to Nankana Sahib": Manohar Singh Gill

Former Chief Election Commissioner and now Rajya Sabha MP, Manohar Singh Gill has asked the Centre to undertake a comprehensive review of the 1974 Protocol governing visits of Sikh pilgrims to their holy places in Pakistan so that their visits across the border became smooth and without restrictions.

"All over the world, every government encourages and facilitates visit to shrines and holy places", Mr Gill said and expressed surprise that people, who follow the Sikh faith, could only visit Nankana Sahib all together in a delegation once a year.

"The Government should be starting regular bus services between Amritsar and Lahore so that anyone possessing a valid passport and visa, could go to Nankana Sahib to pay obeisance there", Mr Gill said and pointed out that Nankana Sahib was only 15 km away from Lahore. While it was a positive step that India and Pakistan were starting bus services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad and train links between Khokhrapar and Munabao, regular bus services between Amritsar and Lahore would prove to be a great boon as they would "restore the historical links between the two cities".



# The First Reading of the "GURU GRANTH SAHIB"



NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS



## The Royal Albert Hall Celebration

Since it was opened by Edward Prince of Wales, in the presence of Queen Victoria in 1871, the Albert Hall in London has hosted many significant events, but none more important in religious and spiritual terms than that of 26 September 2004. The Hall was filled, mainly with Sikhs, but also with representatives of the main religious traditions and political parties to be found in 21st Century England. It would have pleased the ecumenically minded Guru Arjan Dev to see the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sachs, the Bishop of London, other people of faith, politicians such as the leader of the Tory party, the President of the Liberal Democrats, a Labour Party representative, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, present in person and messages read from Her Majesty the Queen and the British Prime Minister. This surely was in accord with the Guru; visited by the Emperor Akbar, encouraged by the Sufi Mian Mir, who included writings by Hindu and Muslim bhagats in the Scripture he compiled. The Sikh spirit of inclusiveness and universalism lives on today, despite aspects of history that could persuade the *Panth* to turn in on itself. So it must. The voice of God that echoes from its pages and prepared to obey it at whatever cost.

The occasion was excellently organised and hosted by Dr Kanwaljit Kaur and Dr Indarjit Singh, the eminent wife and husband team that was responsible for celebration of the Tercentenary of the Khalsa in 1999, at the same venue. It was interesting to compare the two occasions, both were splendid and memorable events, faithful to the spirit of the features of which they reminded the audiences, but in 2004 there was greater participation by young Sikhs than at the earlier event, and an international flavour. This was heartening, certainly to this observer of Sikhism, whose first attendance at a major Sikh event was in 1969, in Leeds, the celebration of the Quincentenary of Guru Nanak's birth. There have always been Sikh-watchers who prophecy the decline and demise of the religion but on the evidence of the September 2004 gathering, it is healthy and thriving, mindful of the qualities which called the *Panth* into existence. '*Charidri Kala*' is the phrase that comes to mind.

It is good that celebrations like these are brought to public notice and that they should be inclusive. This not only corresponds to the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan Dev, it is also a fact about *Sikhi* about which outsiders should





*The Prince of Wales on arrival at the Royal Albert Hall.*

well be aware. Ask the average person in a British shopping mall what they know about Sikhism and the answer, if they have any awareness of it, will still have to do with turbans and beards and militancy. Despite the fact that there are over 400,000 British Sikhs living in their midst, it is a neglected religion. Commentators and news reporters on radio or TV will mention Muslims and Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, but seldom Sikhs. Sikhs need to make the community aware of their existence because of the message that has been entrusted to them. Sikhs are not proselytisers but they were given a message from God that there is only one God, who is above caste, race and gender and that there is one humanity. They feel and believe that they have a responsibility to make that message known to the world.

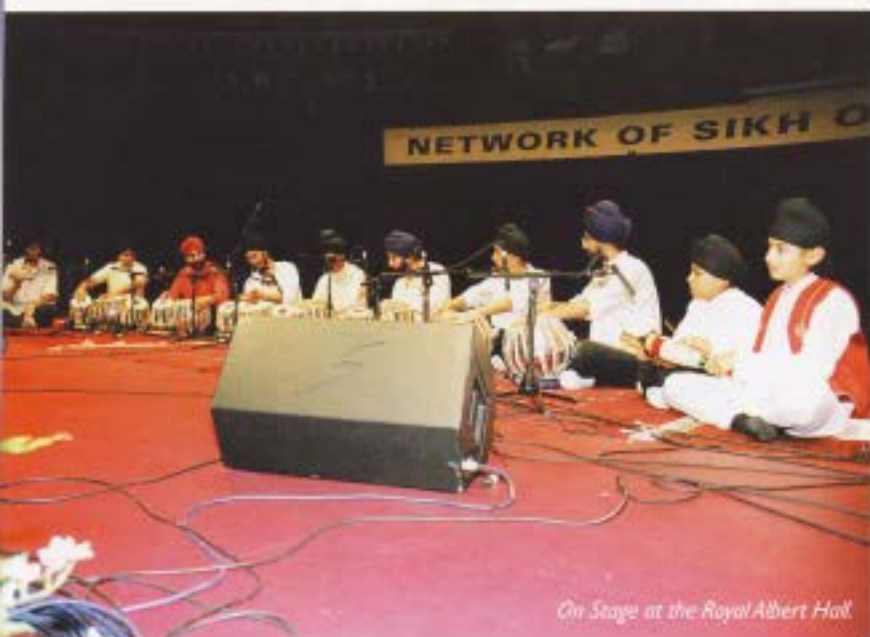
At the Albert Hall gathering two Sikhs addressed this subject, Dr. Indarjit Singh and Dr. I.J. Singh of New York. Indarjit Singh concerned himself with the relevance of the Guru Granth Sahib to life in the twenty-first century, an important topic, as many people, whatever their ethnic origins, can see little meaning for today in words written four hundred years ago, even less so the Bible or the Vedas. He provided quotations referring to the nature of God and the Universe, the position of women, courage, honest living, justice, the rejection of political, religious, or social factions, the place of contemplation in everyday life, equanimity (the example of Guru Tegh Bahadur), and equality. Few of his non-Sikh audience, and many Sikhs probably did not hitherto realise the vast range of subjects covered by the Gurus.

Dr. I.J. Singh of New York took as his subject the major currents present in the Sikh scripture. He raised the scripture from more than a literary work, to the status of Guru linking God and the believer. This may be a very difficult concept for non-Sikhs to grasp, but it is important. To call the corpus finally assembled by Guru Gobind Singh, the Granth Sahib, is unsatisfactory and inadequate. He discussed the concepts of



*The Prince of Wales, with Dr. Indarjit Singh and other members of community at the Royal Albert Hall.*





On Stage at the Royal Albert Hall.



Word, grace and hukam, (since his lecture I have been uneasy translating it as 'command'), it also involves living joyfully in response to the divine will. Not by accident, I am sure, the two talks were complementary. Anyone hearing them, or reading them later in the brochure, would have a basic understanding of the beliefs that direct and inspire the lives of Sikhs.


Singing of kirtan by children, Nimrat Kaur's group, an Australian Sikh, Dya Singh, and the Dasmesh Khalsa jatha from India, ensured that gurbani was experienced as well as being the subject of intellectual thought. Children from the Guru Nanak Secondary School in Hayes, the only Sikh voluntary-aided school in the United Kingdom, displayed ability, entertainment and proper youthful pride.

The whole programme was excellently arranged and the hall was as full at 5.30 p.m. as it had been three hours earlier when the celebrations began. Children and devout adults remained enthusiastic throughout.

Many of the contributions mentioned above are available in the excellent and tasteful Brochure produced to accompany the event. It also contains an appreciation of Sikhism by Kristine Pommert, a radio journalist who has produced BBC programmes on Sikhism, and "Glimpses of Sikhism" being some passages from the *Guru Granth Sahib* by Harchand Singh of Canada. It may still be possible to obtain this souvenir issue of *The Sikh Messenger*. On its cover is a reproduction of the beautiful and unique tapestry that was presented to Prince Charles. In the foreground is the *Guru Granth Sahib*, across the sarovar stands the Harmandir Sahib. No more fitting gift could have been given to him. Should he not have room for it in his own home, most of the audience present on 26 September would be willing to give it a place of honour in their own homes.

At the end of his compilation, Guru Arjan Dev wrote:

"In this platter are placed three things, *truth, contentment and meditation*. The nectar name of God, the support of all, has also been put therein. If someone partakes of this fare, if one relishes it, they are liberated".

Hopefully, everyone present in the packed Albert Hall enjoyed the spiritual fare that was set before them. I called to mind the story of Guru Nanak at Multan, in the residence of many holy men. At the gate members of the town brought him a bowl brim full of milk, suggesting that they had enough spirituality and needed no more. Guru Nanak gently placed a jasmine flower on the surface to demonstrate that his presence would only add fragrance and flavour, not cost, to Multan's citizens. Sikhs have enriched British society in many ways, most of all by adding a further dimension to our spirituality, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. That is what I truly relished on 26 September, 2004. 

Dr. W. Owen Cole  
Chichester, England



# The Punjab Games



## Re-kindling the Spirit

*The legendary hockey wizard, Balbir Singh Sr. lights the flame.*

**P**atiala, home town of Indian Punjab Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh welcomed the Pakistani players who arrived there on 5 December 2004 for the first Indo-Pak Punjab Games.

The contingent of around three hundred Pakistani sportspersons and around one hundred officials and technical staff members also included three dozen women athletes.

The Pakistani players were put up at the splendid

National Institute of Sports (erstwhile Moti Bagh Palace) while the Indian athletes and officials stayed at Punjabi University hostels. The Deputy Commissioner Tejveer Singh said that special care was taken of the food to be provided to the Pakistani players keeping in view their religious sentiments.

Pakistan Punjab Chief Minister Chowdhari Parvez Elahi declared the Indo-Pak games open at 5.30 p.m. on 5 December in the Yadvindra Stadium.



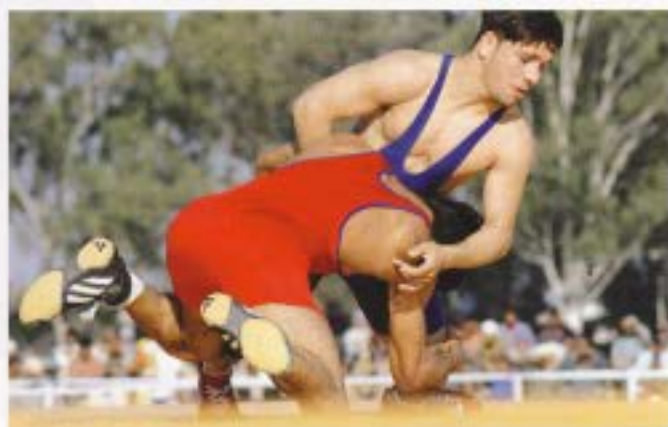
*Chief Minister of two Punjabs, inaugurate the games.*



*Capt. Amarinder Singh, Chowdhari Parvez Elahi and S. Prakash Singh Badal*



## Scenes at the 1st Indo – Pak Punjab Games – 2004



The Games torch, brought from the Wagah border, had been welcomed into the city the evening before.

Out of the 11 competitions scheduled, hockey matches were played at Jalandhar while the shooting competition took place at the Mohali shooting range. The sports events took place in daylight but once the sun set, the sports festival turned into a cultural mela, the organisers having laid out a number of elaborate programmes. On 6 December, noted Pakistani singer Reshma and Indian singer Manpreet Akhtar performed at the Yadvindra Stadium.

Habib Azhar, coach of the Pakistan Punjab Volleyball team said that the beginning of sports links between the two Punjab was a good omen for long lasting peace in the region.

"Besides it would generate healthy competition which will eventually help producing international standard players from this region", he added. Mohammad Elahi, captain of the team said that they were overwhelmed with the reception they received in India adding that participating in the Indo-Pak Punjab Games would be a lifetime experience for them.





Polo matches at the India-Pak Punjab Games recalled the golden era in the early 20th century when Patiala teams were rated amongst the world's best (see *Nishaan III/2001*). The Indian Army provided a stock 60 ponies for the match.

Organisers of the Indo-Pak Punjab games specially concentrated on Polo matches played on 8 December at the newly laid out Polo Ground near the Patiala Civil Aviation Club on Sangrur Road.

According to Lt.General TS Shergill the matches were played on 14 goal handicap basis and under the Federation of International Polo Rules.

The Pakistani polo team was led by Shah Quibilai Alam, rated at 12 goals and the Indian team at 14 goals. The polo matches revived the golden days the game in Patiala, the royal team of Patiala having boasted a rating of 38 goals. 🏆





# 5th to 11th December 2004

## 1<sup>st</sup> INDO-PAK PUNJAB GAMES

City	Venue	Events
Patiala	Yadavindra Sports Stadium Punjabi University Multipurpose Indoor Hall	Opening Ceremony Cycling Badminton
Mohali	Shooting Range	Shooting
Patiala	Raja Bhalindra Singh Sports Complex National Institute of Sports	Wrestling
Patiala	Multipurpose Indoor Hall Punjabi University	HandballCycling
Mohali	Shooting Range	Shooting
Patiala	Raja Bhalindra Singh	Wrestling Cultural Programme "Punjabi Folk Music" Reshma and Manpreet Akhtar
Patiala	Punjabi University Multipurpose Indoor Hall	Cycling Gymnastics
Mohali	Shooting Range	Shooting
Patiala	Raja Bhalindra Singh Sports Complex	Press Conference of Punjab Olympic Association (India & Pakistan) followed by tea with press
	New Polo Ground Cinema Hall, Patiala	Polo Special Movie Show
Patiala	National Institute of Sports Punjabi University Multipurpose Indoor Hall	Athletics Cycling Gymnastics
Mohali	Shooting Range Punjab / Chandigarh	Shooting Sight Seeing
Jalandhar	Olympian Surjit Hockey Stadium Burton Park	Hockey
Patiala	Yadavindra Sports Stadium	Pop Concert
Patiala	National Institute of Sports Punjabi University Multipurpose Indoor Hall Raja Bhalindra Singh Sports Complex National Institute of Sports	Athletics Cycling Volleyball Kabaddi(National Style) Cultural Programme
Patiala	National Institute of Sports Raja Bhalindra Singh Sports Complex Raja Bhalindra Singh Sports Complex Yadavindra Sports Stadium	Athletics Kabaddi(Circle Kabaddi) Tug of War Closing Ceremony





## Acceptance of the Nanakshahi calendar

Even though it was dubbed as "futuristic", the *Nanakshahi* calendar, which had caused some controversy in Sikh religious circles prior to its implementation by the SGPC in 2003, unlike the *Bikrami* one, is based on the "tropical year formula," will remain unchanged.

S. Pal Singh Purewal, author of the calendar and renowned Sikh scholar has said that except for a few individuals, some gurdwaras and certain foreign Sikh organisations, the calendar had been implemented by about 98 per cent of people and organisations, including the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

"The calendar is being used by over 100 gurdwaras in Canada, about 150 in the USA and a large number in the UK. There are only two or three gurdwaras in each of these countries that are yet to implement it. Those objecting to it are mainly the people who do not agree with our belief that Bhindranwale is no more. Otherwise, Sikhs are very enthusiastic about it across the world. Sikhs in countries like Norway, Germany and New Zealand have also accepted it. Same is the case in Pakistan".

"It should be realised that whenever there is a change anywhere in the world, there is never 100 per cent acceptance. For instance, the

Gregorian calendar was introduced in England in 1582, but was actually implemented in 1753 owing to stiff opposition by some orthodox people".

On the difference between the *Nanakshahi* and *Bikrami* calendars, Purewal explained that the latter was not in consonance with Gurbani; important days under it would not always coincide with occasions according to the Sikh way of life.

"Under the *Bikrami* calendar, *Sangrand* will come 15 days later in times to come. Whereas, there will be no difference of time if we follow the *Nanakshahi* calendar, even after 10,000 years. To ensure accuracy and to synchronise it with the Sikh way of life, I have been working on the *Nanakshahi* calendar since 1960 and I think it is a milestone in Sikh history".

"Actually, every nation and community has its own calendar, be they Hindus, Christians or Baha'is. In fact, most nations have two calendars, one civil and the other religious. In my view, the *Bikrami* calendar is a Hindu calendar", concluded Purewal.

## SGPC recognises Damdami Taksal group

In a significant development, the SGPC have accorded recognition to the group of Damdami Taksal headed by Baba Ram Singh, who believes that Sant Jamail Singh Bhinderanwale was martyred during *Operation Bluestar* in June 1984.

Decisions to attend the function, organised by the breakaway group and held at Gurdwara Gurshabad Parkash near Batala on 2 January, were taken at an emergency meeting but both the SGPC and high priests stayed away from the *antim ardas* organised at Gurdwara Gurdarshan Prakash, Mehta Chowk, by Baba Harnam Singh Dhunna, who was nominated as acting Jathedar of the Taksal following demise of Baba Thakur Singh.

Jathedar Vedanti has claimed that Jathedar Iqbal Singh, high priest of Patna Sahib, Giani Balwant Singh and Giani Tarlochan Singh, both Jathedars of Damdama Sahib and Keshgarh Sahib, respectively, had given their acceptance that they would attend the *antim ardas* being arranged at Gurdwara Gurshabad Parkash (Batala) instead of the one being arranged by Gurdwara Gurdarshan Parkash (Mehta Chowk). Jathedar Vedanti, however, appealed to the opposing groups to forget their differences as the Damdami Taksal "had done great work to propagate Sikhism all over the world".



The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu State, Ms J. Jayalithaa presenting a bouquet to S. Surjit Singh Barnala soon after he was sworn as the new Governor of Tamil Nadu in November 2004. While the Chief Minister, her Cabinet colleagues and Speaker K. Kalimuthu were present, the Opposition too was in full strength to celebrate their "so-called victory" in getting S.S. Barnala back to Tamil Nadu, which was according to the wishes of DMK President M. Karunanidhi.



## Resource crunch and the Khalsa Heritage Complex

Completion of the "Khalsa Heritage Memorial Complex" (KHMC) at Anandpur Sahib remains in doubt, with the agencies implementing the project threatening to withdraw owing to paucity of funds.

The KHMC was planned at Anandpur Sahib by the SAD-BJP government to mark tercentenary celebrations of the birth of the Khalsa. The US-based Israeli architect, Moshe Safdie, had conceptualised the complex in a 100 acre scenic location at the foot hills of the Shivalik range at Anandpur Sahib and *Punj Piaras* laid the foundation stone on 22 November, 1998.

Construction work of the KHMC was expected to be completed within 3 years and the basic structure spread across 23,225 square meters has been constructed, comprising a 400-seat auditorium, a double-storied library, galleries where exhibitions can be held and a series of water bodies for reflection at night.

The National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, was given contracts for interior designing of the KHMC at a cost of Rs. 70 crore. The institute had constituted a team of highly motivated interior designers from across the country for the project. However, the authorities of the Institute have decided to disband the project team as funds have not been forthcoming and they were being forced to pay the special team constituted for the purpose.

Larsen and Tubro (L&T), who were executing the construction work, have now shifted their entire staff from the construction site of the KHMC to other projects. L&T have also raised a claim of Rs 10 crore for the work already completed on the project. The contract of Moshe Safdie who was appointed at a cost of \$ 1 million for the project has also lapsed and he has meanwhile written to the Punjab Chief Minister regarding the damage being caused to the basic infrastructure of the building.

Till now, some Rs 80 crore has been spent on the project but for the past few years, the State and Union Governments have failed to provide funds for completion of the project. The Rs 100 crore loan sought from the Punjab National Bank (PNB) by the Anandpur Sahib Foundation seemed to be the only hope for further progress of the project. Although this was sanctioned in principle by the consortium of banks headed by the PNB, they have demanded a state guarantee for the loan.

## Hurdles in declaring Golden Temple as "World Heritage Site"

The move to get the Golden Temple declared as a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO has been delayed as a section of the international Sikh community has raised serious objections against keeping the dossier on the temple as a "top secret document". UNESCO has given credence to the objections raised by the representatives of various Sikh organisations and has asked the Government of India to ensure wider participation of the community before the Golden Temple is declared as such.

"UNESCO has been contacted by several religious groups of the Sikh faith, based not only in India but also in the UK and Canada who were concerned over the possible impact of the world heritage listing on the character of the sacred site". The UNESCO communication further reads, "The main issue raised by Sikh leaders was the lack of consultation with the representatives of the Sikh community in the process of nomination" and clearly mentions that the removing of objections by consulting the representatives of the Sikh community was required before listing the Golden Temple as a world heritage site. "The participation of local people in the nomination process is essential to make them share responsibility for maintenance of the site".

Dr Jasdev Singh Rai, a UK-based international adviser to the Jathedar Akal Takht, who met the senior officials of UNESCO apart from holding meetings with many Sikh intellectuals, including SGPC members, has said that it was unfortunate that the dossier on the Golden Temple, sent to UNESCO was kept "locked up". The Golden Temple was heritage of Sikhs all over the world and hence the SGPC could not alone take a final decision on its own without taking the world Sikh community into confidence.

Meanwhile, in a letter addressed to Bibi Jagir Kaur, Hardip Singh Mohali, an SGPC member, has raised serious objections over certain contents of the dossier. He said it was a matter of concern that the SGPC dossier has referred to this as 'Golden Temple' instead of describing it as a gurdwara or the *Darbar Sahib*. He said the repeated mention of 'Golden Temple' in the dossier had created misunderstandings. It is always to be known as *Harmandir Sahib*.





*The Chief Minister of Karnataka, Dharam Singh and Development Commissioner Chiranjeev Singh in discussion with Members of the Citizens Initiative for Peace (CIP) at Bangalore concerning the Naxalite problems in the State which have erupted recently following encounters in Chikmagalur district.*

## Sikh population census worries minorities panel

**P**erturbed over the static Sikh population in the country, the National Commission for Minorities has invited senior Sikh religious leaders and intellectuals for discussions on the issue and analysing the situation. Sikh religious leaders, including Jathedars of the four Takhts and intellectuals including Vice Chancellors of Punjabi University, Patiala and Baba Farid Medical University, Faridkot, participated in a special review session in Delhi. The NCM also discussed the disturbing decline in the population of Parsis, followed by that of Christians and Muslims.

Prior to holding discussions with Sikh religious leaders, the NCM Chairman, S Tirlochan Singh, carried out an academic analysis of the factors responsible for decline in the Sikh population, with analysis prepared by the country's top demographer Ashish Bose. "This will enable us to learn about the real factors that had adversely affected the growth of Sikh population in the country".

According to S Tirlochan Singh, the gender ratio of Sikhs was not the only disturbing factor, but the fact that the population of Sikh children (between the age of 6 to 11) being lowest in the country was also causing much concern. This meant that near future growth of the Sikh population would be limited too. According to the country's first religion-based census report, the annual growth of Sikhs was low. "Since this is the lowest growth recorded, the NCM was taking it seriously and we are going to examine all aspects. We have also invited the health secretaries of Punjab and Haryana for holding discussions on the matter. Apart from population matters, we would also discuss

other related issues and aspects like the Sikh work culture and education in order to have a deeper insight. "People have not taken this demographic change seriously", S Tirlochan Singh added.

## PSGPC plans

**P**resident of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) Sardar Mastan Singh, has stated that he was keen to hold talks with the SGPC chief, the Akal Takht Jathedar, the Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), the Shiromani Akali Dal President and the Punjab Chief Minister.

Speaking at Nankana Sahib, Sardar Mastan Singh hoped that all irritants between the SGPC and the PSGPC would be removed amicably during the discussions. The PSGPC would extend invitations to Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar Akal Takht, Bibi Jagir Kaur, president, SGPC and SAD chief Parkash Singh Badal to visit Pakistan.

On the controversy over handing over *kar seva* for constructing a big *serai* at Nankana Sahib to the SAD (Delhi) led by S. Parmjit Singh Sama, S. Mastan Singh said that instead of criticising the PSGPC, the SGPC should come forward to participate in *sewa* of other Sikh shrines in Pakistan which were now in dilapidated condition.

He said that the PSGPC would soon finalise beautification plans of Nankana Sahib. The *kar seva* of Gurdwara Churna Mandi, the birth place of Guru Ram Das, would also be started shortly.

## Camp to check drug abuse

**T**he Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, at Ludhiana has conducted a three day camp to check Sikh youth from falling prey to drugs. While a large number of college and senior secondary school students participated in the camp, Sikh intellectuals from the USA, UK, and Canada enlightened them on various issues. The camp got off to a colourful start with the students saluting the *nishaan sahib*, taking a pledge that they would forever consider Guru Granth Sahib as their guru, would never take to drugs and would work towards creating a society sans any discrimination.

Addressing the students, Jaswinder Singh Bawa from the UK said that Sikhs should tread the path to development following



# Lives & Times Of The Sikh Commonwealth

their religion's tenets. The deputy chief of the study circle, Ranjeet Singh Walia, expressed concern over falling moral values among the youth. He said the lure to move abroad, attraction towards Western culture and lack of awareness of their religion, had contributed to this problem.

Dr Gurbhaksh Singh from the USA presented a paper on the *Sahibzada's* martyrdom and said that their sacrifice would continue to inspire people to fight against tyranny. S. Charanjit Singh from the UK said unless Sikh youth were sensitised on Sikh philosophy, the decline in moral values among them could not be arrested.

## French school expels Sikhs for turbans



At the Palace of Justice in Central Paris: the French Sikh students affected (left to right): Ranjit Singh, Jasvir Singh, Karamveer Singh, Dharamveer Singh, Vikramjit Singh.

In 2004, three young Sikh boys in France were expelled from a school for refusing to remove their turbans, the first time that Sikhs have been forced out of school under the controversial new French law banning "conspicuous religious signs and apparel in the classroom". Officials of the Louise Michel high school in Bobigny, northeast of Paris, decided to expel the three teenagers at disciplinary hearings ordered by a court, said lawyer Felix de Belloy. The ban, which includes Islamic headscarves, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses, took effect at the start of the academic year. At least eight Muslim girls have been expelled under the law. Islamic headscarves were the law's main target because of concerns that growing Muslim fundamentalism in France was weakening the nation's secular roots.

Turbans had not been included in the marathon debate over the measure, but Sikhs later learned that their head covering also was subject of the ban. A court then ordered hearings to decide the fate of the boys, who had earlier been confined to classes in a cafeteria apart from other students since the Sikhs had asked the court to force school officials take action by either accepting or expelling the boys. The Sikh students had made a concession by agreeing to wear a *keski*, a smaller version of the turban, but the disciplinary panel did not accept it, de Belloy said.

## "Link defence deals with the turban issue" : Simranjit Singh Mann

President of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), S. Simranjit Singh Mann, has urged the Union Government to link all defence deals with the French Government on the turban issue, which was related to the honour of Indians, not the Sikhs alone. Almost all Indian communities wear turbans during religious and other social ceremonies.

He said that the Union Government should make it clear that it would not procure any defence hardware from France till the ban imposed on the wearing of turbans by Sikh school boys was lifted by that country. India is a major buyer of defence hardware including Mirage fighters, Scorpene submarines and various helicopters worth several thousand crores from France.

S. Simranjit Singh Mann deplored that the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, had "done nothing on the turban issue, except for writing formal letters". He said the issue could be resolved in a few hours, but what was required was a tough stand on the matter. "Sikhs have made sacrifices to protect France during the World Wars and nobody should forget those sacrifices".

## European criticism of turban ban

Five Members of the European Parliament have alleged that the ban on the display of "conspicuous religious symbols", including Sikh turbans in French schools, is a violation of human rights, in particular Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They have urged the French government to rethink its ban and help religious and racial minorities to integrate more fully into French society.



## A Sikh school in France

Signalling happy tidings for the Sikh diaspora, the small but obviously effective 7,000-strong French Sikh community has found a way around their government's ban on the wearing of turbans in schools by prevailing upon the authorities to permit establishment of France's first ever Sikh school. This constitutes a major victory for Sardar Jaswinder Singh and his French Sikh friends, who have been struggling relentlessly to ensure proper education for their young children ever since France's government implemented a blanket ban on the use or display of religious or communal symbols, including the mandatory Sikh turban, in all public and private schools. For a small number of Sikh students the imposition of the ban meant a virtual surrender of their religion. Numerous arguments by community leaders that the turban was a mandatory part of the Sikh's attire without which a person cannot continue to be accepted as a practising Sikh, were rejected by both the French government as well as the education authority there. Even private school institutions had followed their public counterparts in strictly imposing the ban on turbans and provoked the much publicised incident where one school in the Parisian suburb Bobigny expelled the few young Sikh boys studying there for refusing to remove their apparel. But now France's Sikh community has found for themselves a clear, new direction with the new Sikh school outside Paris. Funded substantially by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and other India-based Sikh institutions, the new school will be ready to enrol its first student before September 2005. Perhaps in a bid to set a sensible example for the rest of the French education system, the Sikh school will be open to all communities and will provide a rare space where religious symbols by way of attire will no longer be taboo. It is distressing though that the Indian government, now headed by a Sikh, and the self-proclaimed "Parliament of the Sikhs", the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee at Amritsar, have, despite many claims and assurances, failed to communicate to the French government the anguish caused by the turban ban.

Editorial in *The Asian Age*

## British Airways plan direct flights to Amritsar

After his meeting with British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, Punjab's Finance and Planning Minister Surinder Singla has stated that British Airways are evaluating the possibility of direct flights from the UK to Amritsar. Other possibilities of British investment in the Punjab include food processing and outsourcing by various companies in the State.



*British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw visited the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar in February 2005 and worked in the community kitchen for preparing langar.*

## 'Martyrdom in Sikhism to save humanity'

Scholars on Sikhism have appealed to mankind to seek inspiration from the martyrs of Sikh history. Assembling at the Guru Nanak Khalsa College at Karnal in February to participate in the national seminar on "Martyrdom: Tradition of Sikhism", Professor Darshan Singh of the Punjab University, stressed upon the need to preserve the philosophy and traditions of Sikhism. Explaining the concept of martyrdom, he said it was not based on any religious ideology but emanated from the sovereign rights of an individual irrespective of his commitment to religion.



Professor A.S.Kang from Kurukshetra University said globalisation had eroded social bounds, religion, traditions, customs and culture and therefore, in order to strengthen the community's roots, one has to look back to regain the past glory. He said that martyrdom in Sikhism was a fundamental concept and represented an important institution of the faith. In the Sikh form, the institution was a complete departure from the Indian tradition, which distinguished the character of Sikhism from the earlier established religious traditions.

"It is significant that the concept of martyrdom was emphatically laid down by Guru Nanak, and the history of the Guru period as well as the subsequent history of the Sikhs is an open expression, in thought and deed, of this basic doctrine".

Dr Balwant Singh Dhillon, Chairman of the Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar said that the concept of martyrdom was laid down by Guru Nanak. His hymn calling life 'a game of love' is of the most profound significance. He said the tradition of martyrdom in Sikhism was aimed at retrieving the very existence of humanity from virtual oblivion. He was of the view that with such sacrifices people not only learnt to live fearlessly for their convictions but were motivated to stand firm on 'truth and humanism'.

Dr Harpal Singh Pannu, Chairman Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University at Patiala said: "In Sikhism the institution of martyrdom is an integral part of the system enunciated by Guru Nanak, and the lead in the matter was given by the fifth Guru while the sixth Guru explained how destruction of the tyrant and protection of the weak were part of the religion of Guru Nanak and the dictates of God. The sacrifices of the ninth and tenth Gurus were for preserving the identity, culture and customs of society.

The chief guest, Dr A K Chawla, Vice Chancellor of Kurukshetra University, gave an account of Sikh history and the lessons to be learnt by the younger generation. Dr Devinder Singh Dhaliwal, Principal, Guru Nanak Khalsa College delivered the welcome address while Dr Surinder Pal Singh from the Punjabi Department of the College coordinated the seminar.

## "Dashmesh Academy must not fail"

While laying the foundation of Sri Dashmesh Academy near Anandpur Sahib some 25 years back, on 24 September 1978, the then President Mr Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, had said: "I congratulate the founders of Sri Dashmesh Academy for the very sound foundation on which this important edifice of learning will rise in due course. Here academic knowledge is to be integrated with basic training to introduce and adapt tender minds to the complexities of later life. It is a far-sighted experiment in the field of education". The experiment did succeed, making it one of the finest residential schools in Punjab—but only for a brief period.

Today, the picturesque academy spread over 215 acres in on the brink of closure, putting the future of hundreds of students in jeopardy. Equally dark is the future of 129-odd staff members who are going from the proverbial pillar to post without any redressal of their grievances. If nothing is done at once, 31 March 2005 may mark the end of a laudable experiment. With so few prestigious educational institutions around, that will be a matter of shame for everyone connected with its functioning.

Although acute shortage of funds is given as the cause of its poor health, insiders say that its sorry state is actually the result of political bickering between the present Chief Minister and his predecessor. Capt. Amarinder Singh and S Parkash Singh Badal should put their rivalry aside to rescue this school. As far as financial difficulties are concerned, they can be easily surmounted because as little as Rs. 1.5 crore can revive its fortunes. All that is needed is political will.

If the state government cannot spare even that much, [a reader has opined that the recent spate of full page, colour advertisements in most national dailies lauding the achievements of the present State Government, would have cost at least that much!]. There is no reason why the academy should not be handed over to the Army. It had made an offer in 2003 to take over the academy but was never obliged because the management committee was then not agreeable to takeover. At least now the latter must realise that the Army control is any day better than the imminent closure of the prestigious institution. ☞

Editorial in *The Tribune*