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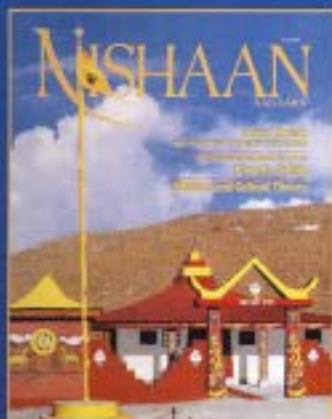
NISHAAN

NAGAARA

Guru Nanak
and His Udasi to The Land of The Lamas

The Spiritual and Martial Tenor of
Paonta Sahib
Sikhism and Critical Theory





Cover: The Gurdwara/Gompa at Gurudongmar in north Sikkim, on the frontier with Xizang (Tibet). Photographed by Brigadier D.J. Singh

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Sikh Distinctiveness and

Although the matter of Sikh identity has so very long back been decided after debate and argument amongst Indian and western scholars, it seems to have a political relevance for some determined sections of the extremist RSS leadership. And from time to time, it becomes a song and a story for them. Sikh thinkers, theologians and historians have, no doubt, chased the idea out of their thought and out of their discourse, in general. But like a bad dream, it keeps returning in one form or another to bemuse the Sikh laity. This question usually raises its head out of the fog, as it were, whenever the Sikhs lower their defences, or when some political urgencies of the hour drive its disputants into a fresh bid for the Sikh corporate mind. No wonder the Sikh leaders have reacted sharply to the recent rhetoric of the RSS supremo, K.S.Sudarshan, recently in Amritsar.

It appears as though the stunning and unexpected victory of the BJP in Narinder Modi's Gujarat has whetted the appetite of the Sangh Parivar for the conquest of non-Hindu imagination, related and for the colonisation of consciousness. Thus the ideologues of *Hindutva* having received a huge welcome in certain parts of Bharat are determined, it appears, to drive the advantage home. The Muslim masses have, accordingly, been wilfully and schematically alienated with a view to putting them in an adversary position vis-a-vis the other communities. In fact, the attempt has been to treat them as agents and spies of Pakistan, its secret allies in the war against India. A woeful and lamentable idea, but unfortunately, it seems to work and work viciously. And in this imperialism of *Hindutva*, the Sikhs are, because of some distant Hindu ancestry and heritage, being considered ipso facto, already in the big fold. That is to say, for the RSS ideologues, it is a truism, and needs no discussion or debate. But is it a *fait accompli*, as they believe? The answer is a resounding "No".

The RSS effort is pathetic.

It appears as though *Hindutva* is being equated with

being *Hindustanis*. In sum, all those who live under the Indian skies, no matter what their faith or beliefs, are Hindus by definition. A linguistic, semantic confusion is sought to be created. Now, the argument that we all, who inhabit this great land of ancient and hoary culture, are, therefore, *Hindustanis*, or *Bharatvarshis*, if you like, could not be countered, its validity being self-evident. Indeed, it is a matter of pride for its citizens to belong, to connect with that India which, as a western scholar once put it, is "a great idea in the human mind". No, there is no need to convince those who are already so convinced. The RSS rhetoric of revival is, therefore, quite phoney. In reality, it only leads to regression and becomes a fundamentalist cry. However, at another level, the same promotees of *Hindutva* shout themselves hoarse over Muslim *Jehadi* ideology which governs the present Pakistani mind, which means, in effect, that whilst their kind of fundamentalism is healthful and progressive, the other type is venal, atavistic, breeding terrorism in its most vicious form. And, in their conceit, they think that they are performing a regenerative, radical duty and re-conditioning the Indian consciousness. Yes, there are millions and millions of ideologically divided and confused sections of the majority community ready to swallow this bait. That is how the BJP and its advance guard, the RSS cadres, hope to corner all or nearly all non-Muslim votes in the elections in some states later this year. And if the carefully-crafted policy succeeds, the Parliamentary elections would then be a cake-walk. The New Delhi throne is then for them to keep.

Before I return to the theme of Sikh identity — the *donee* of this piece — I wish to clear one thing, which is the role of the Congress Party under the patriarchal Sonia Gandhi. That role was gruesomely highlighted by Indira-Rajiv Gandhi Governments in the anti-Sikh pogroms organised by its leaders in the wake of *Operation Bluestar*, the resultant Punjab tragedy, and the sequential assassination of Indira Gandhi whom our patriotic

Hindutva: A Scrutiny of Motives

F.H.Hussain was pleased to call Durga, risen to save India, a new Messiah on the scene. The insightful Hindu analysts have, time and again, pointed out the covert or concealed communalism of the Congress Party. This is well proved by the fact that the Congress is as prone to the communal virus as the BJP itself. It allots party tickets strictly on religious and caste considerations. Its secular fig-leaf is always showing. And the Congress victory in Punjab lately has many an ironic lesson for vote-watchers.

Again, Sudarshan's thoughtless reference to the Nanakshahi Calendar has only queered the pitch of Sikh politics. Also, the needless controversy about Guru Gobind Singh's *Dasam Granth* and his reference to the Chandi goddess are not the problems the RSS need to raise it now and bring things to the boil*.

**(References to Hindu mythological, Puranic characters and episodes in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh are only there for martial legendary values. At the end of Krishan Avtaar, he clearly states that this story was translated with the sole purpose of inspiring the people with the will to be perpetual fighters in the battle for Dharma).*

These are the tactics of a separatist, schismatic politics. The Sikhs, while remaining proud and patriotic people in the comity of communities in India, do maintain perhaps the most obviously separate, distinctive ready, sovereign in their rights and their Nishaan and symbols proclaim their clear identity and evolution*.

**(At the end of Ram Avtaar this is made even more emphatic when in the closing lines, the Tenth Master declares that "Ever since I have united myself to Thy feet (O God!), none else even pleases me. The Purans and Quran call Thy by the name of Rama, Rahim, and such other numerous names, but I owe allegiance to neither of these".*

The characters of the Puranic stories are mere humans

for the great Guru, who because of their overblown egos, fell prey to kaal. In the words of Dr. Dharm Pal Ashta, Guru Gobind Singh is against the belief in such gods and goddesses as they are subject to death and are, therefore, imperfect and powerless).

Sudarshan reportedly asked the RSS cadres and others to regard Guru Nanak as the avatar for Kalyug in the manner that they regard Lord Rama and Krishna as avatars of the golden ages of Dweta and Treta yugs. If so, the Hindus would do well to worship Guru Nanak's faith and his bani*.

**(This may please some but the Gurmat Guru who called himself 'lowest of the low' would decry and deride this 'elevation'. This is the fundamental difference. Whereas the avtaars of the Hindu pantheon claim to be divine incarnations, Guru Nanak and his succeeding Gurus emphatically deny this and describe themselves as only slaves and serfs. Instead of calling themselves 'Aham Brahman', Guru Nanak declares himself to be the Lord's bard of a lowly caste).*

And, finally, it is well-known that the Sikh scriptures have a *sui generis* character, for unlike other major religions, it has given an honoured place to the Hindu *bhaktas*, to the Muslim *sufi* poets, and, more significantly, to the songs and *slokas* of those lower orders of Hindu society which their mentor and law-giver, *Manu* codified centuries ago. The catholicity of the *Guru Granth*, therefore, precludes all considerations of birth, caste and status. Which shows why the Sikh faith has emerged as the most radical and egalitarian force in the world today. If you want *unity in diversity* (our nation's slogan, now reduced to a serviceable clich'e), there is no better example than that of the Sikh scriptures. There is the message sent out strongly to a war-conditioned, terrorist-ridden, neo-fascist world, teetering on the verge of another global holocaust. ☸

Darshan Singh Maini

*Commented upon by Bhayee Sikander Singh



Guru Nanak

The remote and inaccessible areas of northern Sikkim were not open to outsiders till recently, and have remained breathtakingly beautiful and serene over the aeons.

Over time and interaction with the Lepcha population and the local monks, some details of Guru Nanak Dev ji's travel through the region have slowly become known, but these are threads which more serious scholars now need to take up and carry out detailed research. What is immediately known is that the local population have been paying yearly pilgrimages to the "Golden Shrine of Nanak Lama" at Amritsar. At the Chungthang monastery there are many who remain firmly reverent to the great Guru who travelled through the area on his way to Tibet and China during 1515-1518.

and His Udasi to The Land of The Lamas



Gurudongmar Lake is located at an altitude of over 17,000 feet in the Great Himalayan Range of North Sikkim and overlooked by the majestic Gurudongmar Park. The lake is said to have been one of the places of meditation of 'Guru Padmasambhava', a Buddhist yogi of the 8th century. Guru Nanak Dev Ji is said to have visited the lake during his travels to Tibet and China. Hearing the locals pleading for water round the year, the Guru Sahib is said to have blessed the lake by dipping his stick (Dang) into it - hence the name Gurudongmar. Till today that portion of the lake never freezes in spite of minus 35 degrees centigrade in winters, with over 10 feet of snow all around. It is believed that a childless couple would be blessed with a child on drinking water from this lake.



Guru Nanak Devji left Sultanpur on the first of his *Udasis* (in Sikh tradition, the term *Udasi* which is derived from the Sanskrit to mean "one who is indifferent to or disregarding of worldly attachments, a stoic or a mendicant", is used for each of the four preaching travels of Guru Nanak and so also means "a prolonged absence from home") in the year 1500 with Mardana as his sole companion. There were twenty years of travelling, to the east, south, north and west. At the end of each *Udasi*, Guru Nanak returned to the Punjab. The common platform of the many *Janam Sakhis* are witness to the integrity of Guru Nanak's vision of the Creator. He won over all antagonists and opponents not by intellectual acumen or magical powers, but by moral persuasion and the power of loving devotion. Guru Nanak was preacher of the Divine Reality

transcending all particularities of race, religion or clan. Guru Nanak continued to have revealed to him religious verse that eventually became part of the *Adi Granth*. He returned to the Punjab around 1521, settling down at Kartarpur on the eastern bank of the river Ravi.

The third *Udasi* began in 1515 when Guru Nanak and Mardana left Kartarpur and travelled to the east, through what is now Nepal, to Sikkim and Tibet. Some records show that after Tibet, he travelled to the Far East, through the length of China, crossing the sea to Japan and then back to China, via Nanking to Mansrovar and Mt. Kailash, thereafter to Leh in Ladakh, Kashmir and back to Kartarpur in 1518, having covered over 8000 kilometres.

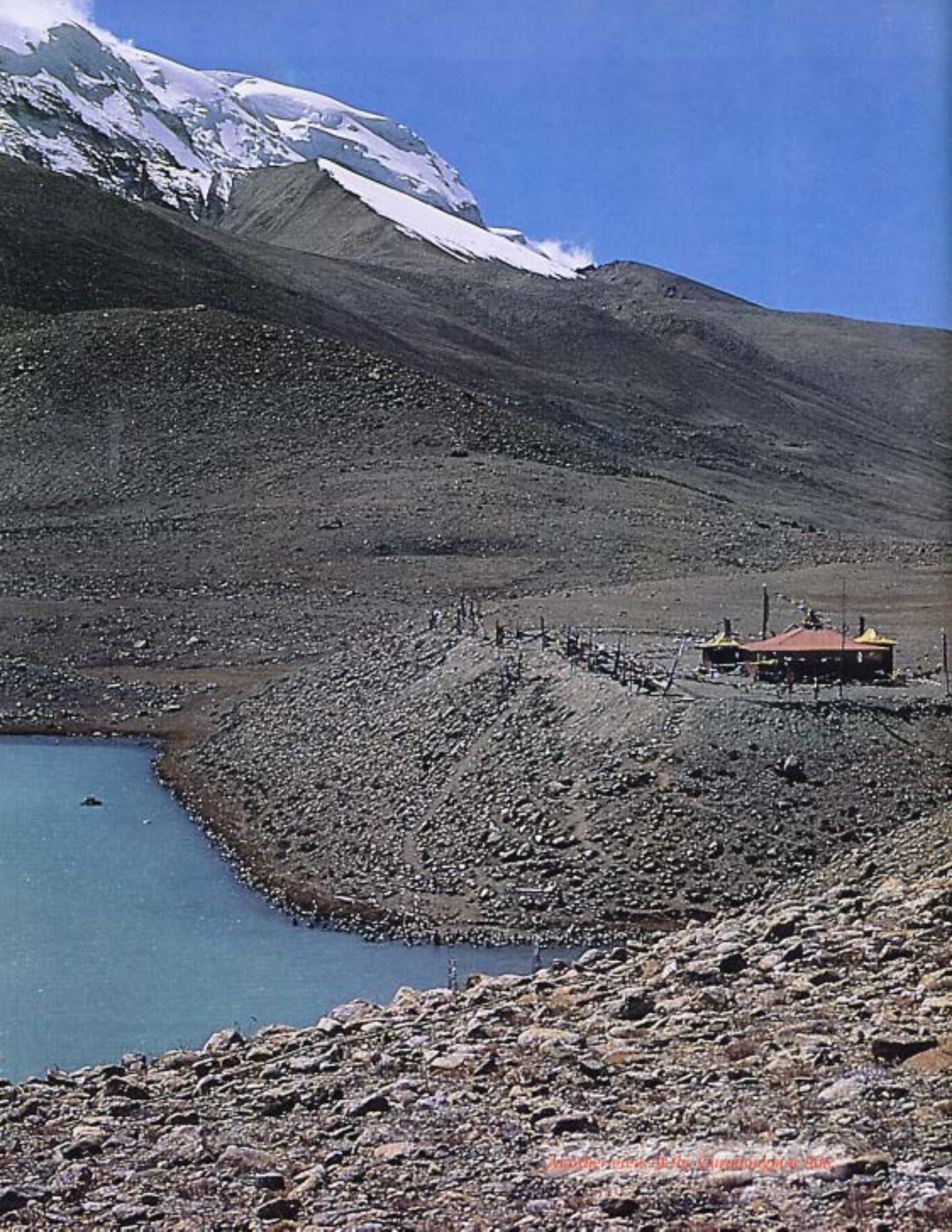
The North Sikkim plateau is well above the tree line where luxuriant forests and luscious strips of grass



disappear. The landscape has sparse vegetation and is snowclad, arid, white, solemn and wind swept. During the non-snow period, it is brownish due to an abundance of moraine. The flora found on the plateau is unique, extremely hardy and exquisite in its daintiness and colours. The plants flourish only in the summer months and depending upon rainfall, give a splash of colour in clusters of vivid blue, purple, violet, white and yellow, mostly along the rivers or nullahs. These plants are species of moss and lichen.

The North Sikkim plateau is interspersed with numerous small and medium-size lakes, the most important being Gurudongmar Lake, famous for its religious value to the local Sikkimese as well as soldiers of the Indian Army posted there. Legend has it that locals of the place requested Guru Nanak Dev, while on his way back from Lhasa, to solve their perennial water and forage problem during the winter months. The Guru touched his walking staff on a portion of the lake; thereafter that particular portion of lake has never frozen and forage is available throughout the year.

The paddy field at Gurudwara Nanak Lama Sahib. On seeing Guru Nanak Dev Ji partaking rice while seated on the boulder, local peasants lamented that in spite of their best efforts, they were unable to grow paddy in the village. Guru Sahib threw a handful of leftover rice on the ground declaring "hereafter paddy would grow in abundance here." Till today there is a paddy field in that area, the only such north of Gangtok.



Another view of the Chomolungma Lake



The high altitude plateau of northern Sikkim is scantily populated and forms the present day frontiers with Tibet. North Sikkim is the largest district of the State, with district headquarters at Mangan, other towns being Chungthang, Lachung and Lachen.

Guru Nanak Dev ji during his travel to Tibet and China passed through Sikkim and spent a night at Gangtok. From there he proceeded northwards and en-route spent two nights at the village of Chungthang.

Chungthang is some 95 kilometres north of Gangtok on the confluence of the Teesta River and its tributary, Lachung Chu. The river valleys of Teesta and Lachung also converge here and the two northern trade routes from Sikkim to Tibet pass through these river valleys. Chungthang village is spread over an area of 25 to 30 acres at an altitude of 6000 ft. and is dominated by high mountains on all sides.

In the middle of the village stands a boulder 20 ft high and 30 ft in diameter which is believed to have been hurled by an *asur* at Guru Nanak Dev ji but stopped instead at his feet, after which the Guru climbed the boulder and sat down on it. Three foot prints 3 feet apart are known as *Kharanvanda Nishan*.

While sitting on the boulder, the Guru had his lunch consisting of rice. Witness to this incident, the residents of Chungthang gathered around and proclaimed Nanak as *Lama*. Also on seeing that Guru was eating rice, the villagers wondered how, as rice was not grown in the area. Guru Nanak Dev ji threw some of the leftover rice and declared that henceforth paddy would grow in this area. Till today, this is only place north of Gangtok where paddy is grown. The villagers because of this blessing bestowed upon them, worship Guru Nanak with great devotion.



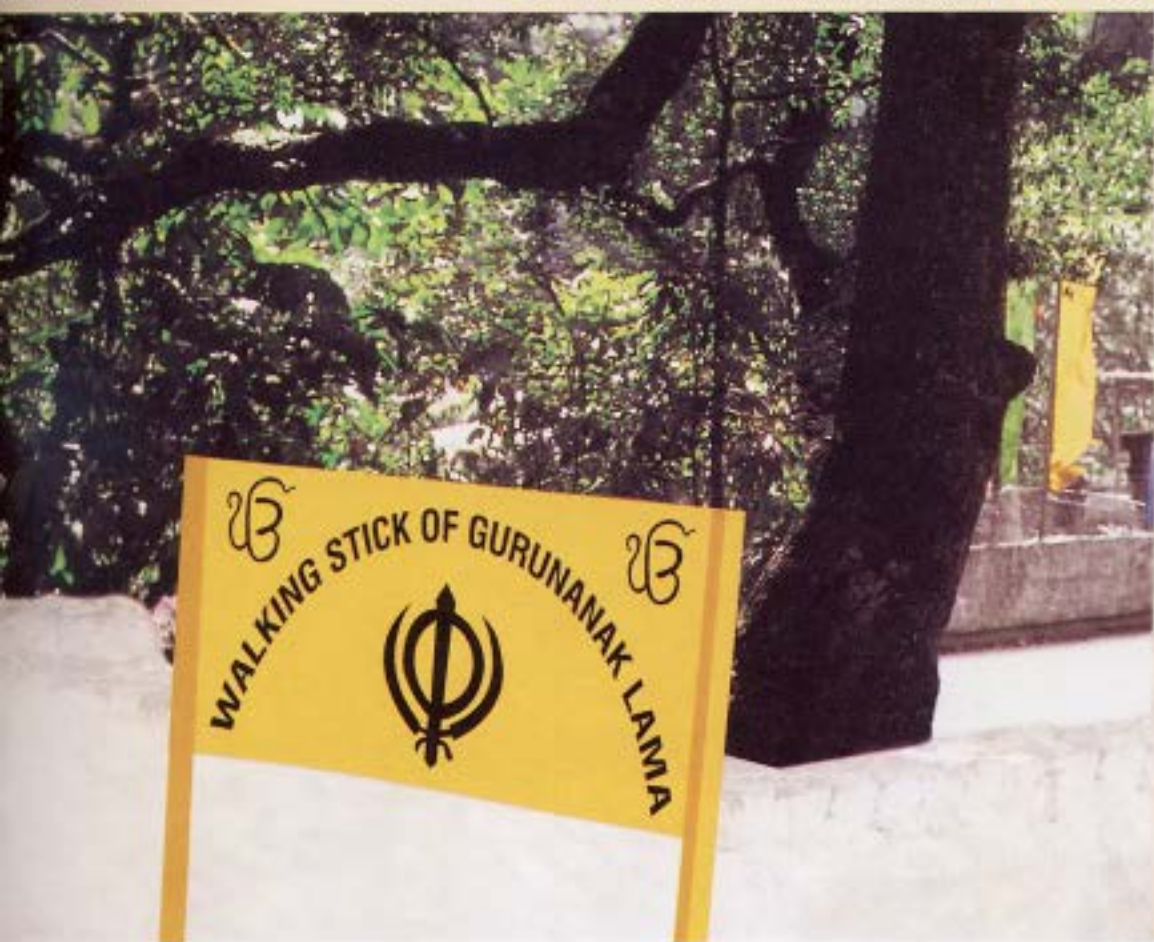
Kharanvanda Nishan at the northern foothills of the Himalayas. It is believed that Guru Nanak Dev ji passed the night here and had his lunch on the 20th of June 1983.

Gurdwara Nanak Lama Sahib is also referred to as 'Pathar Sahib'. On his way to Gurudongmar Lake, Guru Nanak Dev Ji passed through Chungthang. The place appealed to Guru Sahib and he called it 'Changi Than' (Good Place), which later came to be known as Chungthang. Jealous of his presence, a boulder was hurled at him by an 'asur' (demon). The boulder instead of hitting the Guru Sahib, stopped at his feet. Guru Nanak Dev Ji climbed the boulder while singing hymns in praise of the Lord. The 'asur' on hearing these hymns fell at the Guru's feet seeking forgiveness. The village folk on seeing this miracle thronged towards Guru Sahib and proclaimed him as their great Lama. A Nishan Sahib stands on this boulder, surrounded by Buddhist prayer flags.





Gateway to the Gurudwara Nanak Lama Sahib, built and maintained by the 30th battalion, Assam Rifles.

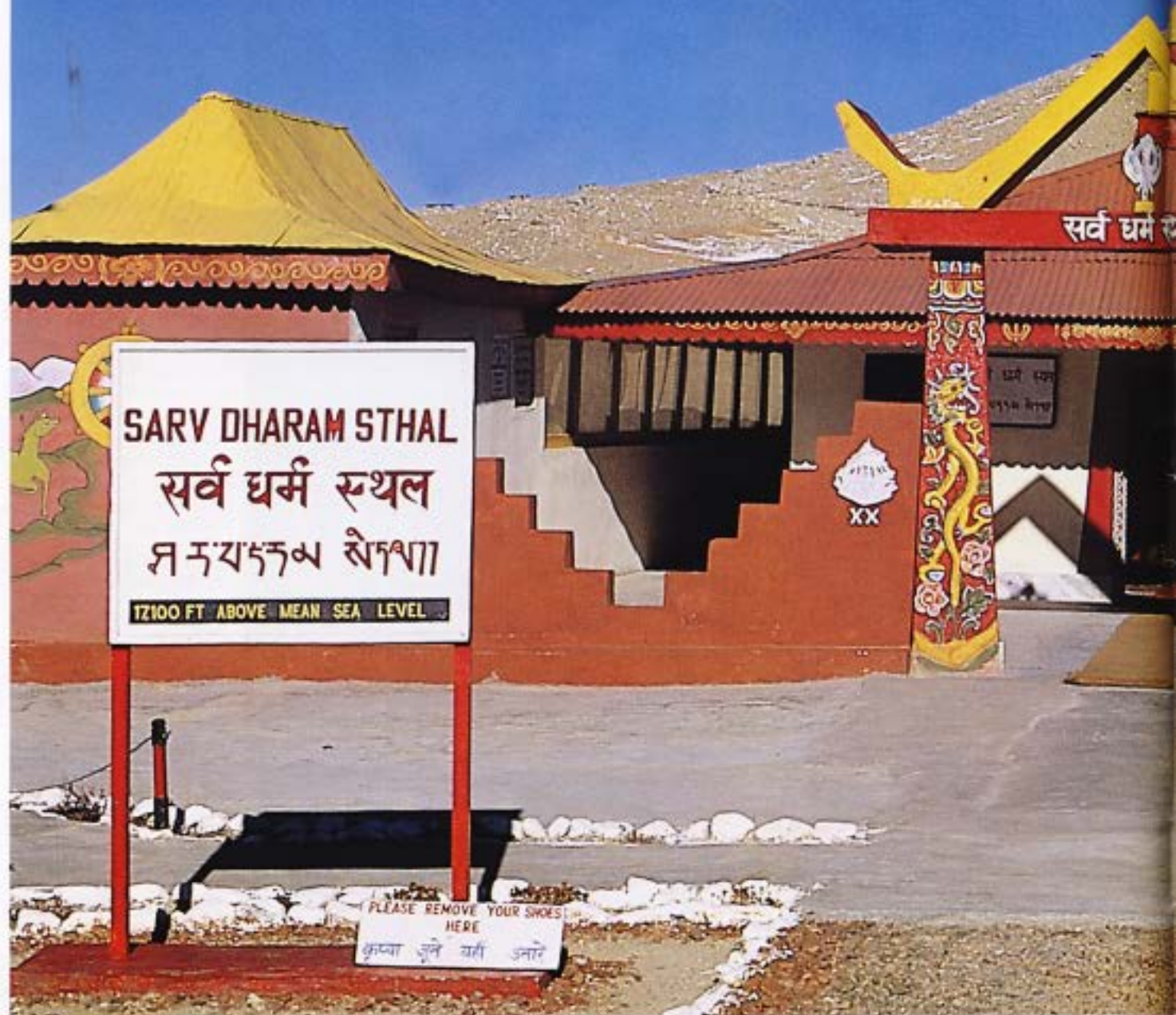


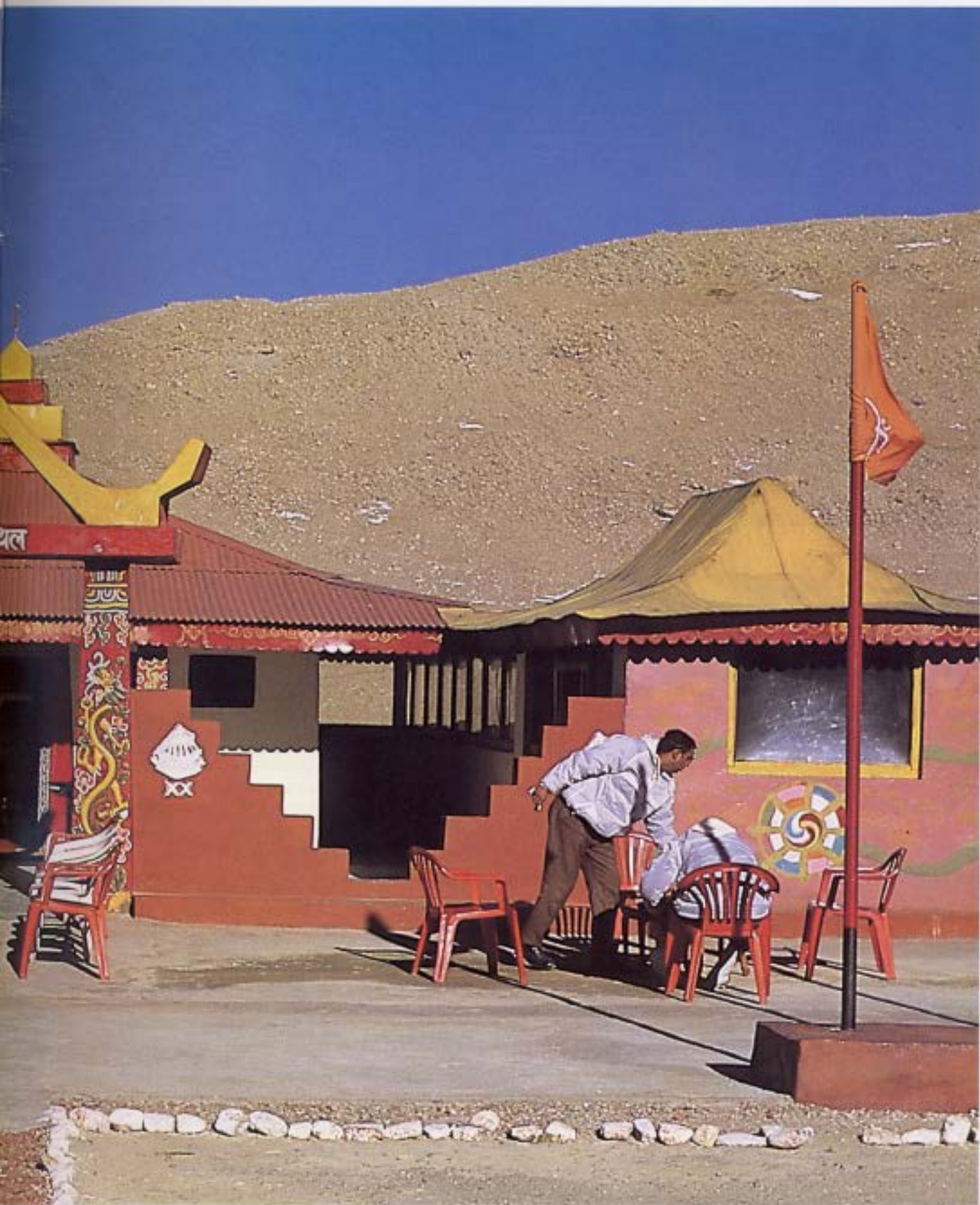
Babe di Khundi:
In the Gurdwara courtyard an old tree exists. Locals believe that Guru Sahib had fixed his walking stick in the ground here, which took root and grew in shape of a Khundi.

Gurdwara/Gompa Gurudongmar

At the place where Guru Nanak Dev Ji stayed, stands a Gurdwara maintained by the Assam Rifles. In harmony with the Universality of the Guru Sahib's teachings, this holy place has been consecrated as 'Sarv Dharam Sthal'.

Flanking the colourfully painted gate are the Punjab Regiment's badge, the 20th battalion having participated in its construction.







Lachen Monastery

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's visit to the Lachen Monastery left a lasting impression on the local Lamas and Buddhists. The Guru's footprint on a rock is preserved at the monastery. The Lamas reverently believe that Guru Nanak Dev Ji was a reincarnation of 'Guru Padmasambhava', a Buddhist yogi of the 8th century. It is believed that some clothes and the Kamandal of Guru Sahib is still preserved at the monastery.

Inset: Believed to be Guru Nanak Dev Ji's footprint on a rock, preserved at the Lachen Monastery.



Guru Nanak Dev spent two nights beneath this stone and also fixed his walking stick in the ground next to the boulder. A massive tree known, as *Babe di Khundi* stands at this spot.

As per folklore, one *Sacred Book* and *Tourlice* of the Guru is in the cave under this boulder. The opening to this cave was closed by some plebeian. In guard of this treasure, a spring *chasma* sprouts on the southern side of the boulder whose water remains level at some five feet and never dries.

In memory of the great Guru, the local Sikkimese have built a Gurdwara (or Gumpa) known as *Gurdwara Nanak Lama Sahib* at the place where he is believed to have rested. A pure *ghee* *Deepak* burns here non stop. The locals are followers of the Guru and his teachings have been translated into the local language.

From Chungthang Guru Nanak Dev ji went further north east towards Yumthang. He bathed and blessed a hot water spring there, at the height of 17,000 ft. which is now a tourist attraction and the State Government has constructed an Inspection Bungalow near the spring.

Guru Nanak moved north to Lhasa, now the capital of Tibet. He had many prisoners released there from the custody of the Raja of Tibet before returning to the Punjab much later, after having travelled in China. ❹

Brigadier DJ Singh

Brigadier DJ Singh, a distinguished Cavalry officer, coming from a family with long military traditions, was stationed in North Sikkim as Commander 112 Mountain Brigade. With his keen eye and penchant for photography, he spent much time traveling the high mountains of Sikkim which border the Tibetan region of China, and paying his obeisance at the Gurdwaras in northern Sikkim which mark the travels there of Guru Nanak Dev ji in the 16th Century.

AKATH: The Ineffable

The Japuji Sahib is a text of first hand mystical experience. Mystical experience is noetic in nature. That is to say that it provides insight into the depths of Truth unplumbed by discursive intellect. Through it, things are seen in a novel pattern and they seem to have new significance. Moreover, the knowledge thus gained carries tremendous sense of authority. However, such experience defies expression in terms that are fully intelligible to one who has not known some analogous experience. Ineffability is its hallmark. No wonder, then, that in the 38 stanzas of Japuji Sahib, the ineffability of the noetic knowledge has been expressed as many as 29 times.

Let us go over all these:

- ੧) ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ । (੨)
His Will cannot be described (2)*
- ੨) ਕਥਣ ਕਥੀ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਤੋਟਿ । ਕਥਿ ਕਥਿ ਕਥੀ ਕੋਟੀ ਕੋਟਿ ਕੋਟਿ । (੩)
He can't be fully discoursed; millions of millions though made attempts (3)
- ੩) ਜੇ ਹਉ ਜਾਣਾ ਆਖਾ ਨਹੀ ਕਹਣਾ ਕਥਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ । (੫)
Even if I know, I 'll fail to explain, He cannot at all be discoursed. (5)
- ੪) ਮੰਨਿ ਕੀ ਗਤਿ ਕਹੀ ਨਜਾਇ । ਜੇ ਕੇ ਕਹੈ ਪਿਛੈ ਪਛੁਤਾਇ । (੧੨)
None can describe the state of faith (12)
- ੫) ਕਾਗਦਿ ਕਲਮ ਨ ਲਿਖਣਹਾਰੁ । ਮੰਨਿ ਕਾ ਬਹਿ ਕਰਨਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ । (੧੨)
It is impossible to discourse about faith; it can't be scribed on any paper with any pen (12).
- ੬) ਕਰਤੇ ਕੇ ਕਰਣੈ ਨਹੀ ਸੁਮਾਰੁ । (੧੬)
The Creator's works are beyond reckoning (16)
- ੭) ਏਹੁ ਲੇਖਾ ਲਿਖਿ ਜਾਨੈ ਕੋਇ । ਲੇਖਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਕੇਤਾ ਹੋਇ । (੧੬)
Who at all can write this account; the more you write, the more it becomes (16).
- ੮) ਕੋਤੀ ਦਾਤਿ ਜਾਨੈ ਕੋਠੁ ਭੂਤੁ । (੧੬)
Who at all can estimate His gifts? (15)
- ੯) ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਵਣ ਕਹਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ । (੧੬, ੧੭, ੧੮, ੧੯)
How can I think and talk about His might? (16, 17, 18, 19)
- ੧੦) ਅਸੰਖ ਨਾਮ ਅਸੰਖ ਬਾਹ । ਅਗੰਮ ਅਗੰਮ ਅਸੰਖ ਲੋਅ । ਅਸੰਖ ਕਹਹਿ ਸਿਰਿ ਭਾਰੁ ਹੋਇ । (੧੬)
Innumerable are Your Names and abodes; unreachable are Your countless spheres; declaring them 'innumerable', we only augment our burden (19)
- ੧੧) ਵੇਲ ਨ ਪਾਈਆ ਪੰਡਤੀ ਜਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਲੇਖੁ ਪੁਰਾਣੁ । ਵਖਰੁ ਨਪਾਇਓ ਕਾਦੀਆ ਜਿ ਲਿਖਨਿ ਲੇਖੁ ਭੁਰਾਣੁ ।
The Pundit does not know the time (of Creation); no account there is in the Puranas. The Qazi is ignorant as well, for the Koran too is uninformed (19)
- ੧੨) ਥਿਤਿ ਵਰੁ ਨ ਜੋਗੀ ਜਾਣੈ ਭੁਤਿ ਮਾਹੁ ਨਾ ਕੋਈ । ਜਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਿਰਨੀ ਕਉ ਸਾਜੇ ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੋਈ । (੨੧)
Neither Yogis nor others know it either; the Creator who created it alone knows (21).
- ੧੩) ਕਿਵ ਕਹਿ ਆਖਾ ਕਿਵ ਸਾਸਾਰੀ ਕਿਉ ਵਰਨੀ ਕਿਵ ਜਾਣਾ । (੨੧)
How can I describe You; how can I praise You? (21)
- ੧੪) ਲੇਖਾ ਹੋਇ ਤ ਲਿਖੀਐ ਲੇਖੇ ਹੋਇ ਵਿਣਾਸੁ । (੨੨)
If writing of the account were possible, it would have been written; however, those who tried, perished.
- ੧੫) ਸਾਲਸੀ ਸਾਲਹਿ ਏਤੀ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਨ ਪਾਈਆ । ਨਦੀਆ ਅਤੇ ਵਹ ਪਵਹਿ ਸਮੁੰਦ ਨ ਜਾਣੀਐ । (੨੩)
The lauders laud you, but know not your expanse, not even as much as rivers and brooks know of the ocean

*Numbers in the parentheses refer to the pauris (stanzas) of the text of the Japji Sahib

੧੬) ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਏ ਕੀਤਾ ਆਕਾਰੁ । ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਏ ਪਾਰਾਵਾਰੁ । (੨੪)

No end can be found of your creation; no end of your transcendence either

੧੭) ਅੰਤ ਕਾਰਣਿ ਕੇਤੇ ਬਿਲਸਾਹਿ । ਤਾ ਕੇ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਏ ਜਾਹਿ । (੨੪)

Those who yearn to comprehend Your limits fail in their efforts; Your end eludes all, seekers simply perish

੧੮) ਏਵਡ ਚੁੰਚਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਕੋਇ । ਤਿਸ ਚੁੰਚੇ ਕਉ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੋਇ । (੨੪)

Only if one could match His greatness could one know the Exalted One.

੧੯) ਬਹੁਤਾ ਕਰਮੁ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾ ਜਾਇ । (੨੫)

How great is His bounty, no one can describe

੨੦) ਜੇ ਕੇ ਖਾਇਕੁ ਆਖਣਿ ਪਾਇ । ਚਿਹੁ ਜਾਣੈ ਜੋਤੀਆ ਮੁਹਿ ਪਾਇ । (੨੫)

Only the fool who dares to describe (Him) knows what blows he receives

੨੧) ਅਮੁਲੇ ਅਮੁਲੁ ਆਖਿਆ ਨ ਜਾਇ । (੨੬)

The value of the Invaluable One is beyond description

੨੨) ਚਿਹੁ ਦੇਖੈ ਓਨਾ ਨਦਰਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਹੁਤਾ ਏਹੁ ਵਿਛਾਰੁ । (੨੦)

This is the surprise that He can observe them, but they can't see Him.

੨੩) ਆਖਣਿ ਜੋਰੁ ਚੁਪੈ ਨਹ ਜੋਰੁ । (੨੩)

You have no power to speak, nor even to stay silent.

੨੪) ਨਾਨਕ ਗਇਆ ਜਾਏ ਜਾਇ । (੨੪)

None can know anything, says Nanak, without reaching there.

੨੫) ਤਾ ਕੀਆ ਗਲਾ ਕਬੀਆ ਨਾ ਜਾਹਿ । ਜੇ ਕੋ ਕਹੈ ਪਿਛੈ ਪਛੁਤਾਇ । (੨੬)

Their (the beauties of Saram Khand) description no one can give; who so attempts only repents.

੨੬) ਨਾਨਕ ਕਬਲਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਾਹੁ । (੨੭)

Says Nanak, to describe Him is hard like steel.

From the above lines it is apparent that of His Beatific Vision, His Will, His Revelations, His Bounty, His Gifts, His Might, His Creation as well as its Time, His Expanse, His Writ, and His Value, nothing can be described. To attempt to describe Him in any way is sheer foolhardiness, bound to fail miserably. Even the gods cannot see Him although He can always, and in every way, observe them. We have no power to speak, nor even to keep silent. We can only be wonderstruck with His ineffable grandeur.

Reasons for ineffability

God-experience is the supreme mystical experience. A mystical experience, by virtue of its very nature is ineffable. First of all, everything in mystic experience is unified, linked together, explained by something else, and even explaining some other thing. Since there is nothing separate, nothing can be named or described separately. It is necessary to describe all at once – and that seems impossible. One gets lost amidst the infinite number of totally new impressions for the expression of which one has neither words nor forms.

P.D. Ouspensky, in his book *A New Model of the Universe* considers several reasons for ineffability. He says that mystical experience has no sides. All of it is visible at once at every point. So it is impossible to describe first one side and then another. In addition, there is also extraordinary lengthening of time. The usual feeling of time may continue, but together with it or within it there appears another feeling of time so that two moments of ordinary time appear separated by long periods of another time.

When one wishes to express or communicate, one involuntarily employs words which in one's ordinary language correspond to superlatives – the best, the greatest, the most powerful, the most extraordinary and so on. Even such superlatives do not, in the least, correspond to what one sees, learns or experiences. Yet, one has no other words. In fact, the experiences stay in one's memory only for a short while, fading away very soon. Then they are replaced, unconsciously, by the words hurriedly attached to them to keep them in memory. Very soon, nothing remains but these words. There is yet another difficulty. For many things there are no words at all. Most often, things pass so quickly that one has no time to connect them to any words. Trying to remember what one has experienced, one feels that one is remembering only an insignificant part of what had passed through one's consciousness.

Recording of experience at the very moment it appears is quite impossible. Those who tried, obtained no results. Nor is any kind of conversation possible during the mystical experience. Hence it can neither be communicated nor dictated to someone else.

At some stage, there appears a confusion of the objective and subjective. Unusual phenomena appear e.g. one may plunge into fight, hear voices, or experience powerful and/or weird emotions.

The concept of self also changes in the mystical experience. The idea of 'I' begins to appear illusory - a kind of fanatic conceit or blasphemy. Only God could call Himself 'I'.

Describing the ineffable

Says Guru Nanak:

ਅਕਬੀ ਕਬਹੂੰ ਚਿਹਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਪੂਰ ਰਹਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਇਦਾ । ਸੋਲਹੇ ਮਾਰੂ ਦਖਣੀ ਪੰ ੧੦੩੩

I describe the indescribable who has no sign, the displeasing Lord is immanent.

Guru Arjan Dev thus describes one of his encounters with the Ineffable Lord

ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਦਾਤਾਰਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਛਾਈ ਕਉ ਮਹਲਿ ਬੁਲਾਵੈ । ਪ੍ਰਭ ਦੇਖਦਿਆ ਦੁਖ ਭੁਖ ਗਈ ਕਉ ਮੰਗਣ ਚਿਤ ਨ ਆਵੈ । ਪੰ ੧੦੯੭

God the Great Giver, heard the prayer and summoned the minstrel to His Presence

Gazing upon the Lord, the minstrel became rid of all pain and privation,

He could not think of asking for anything.

Bhai Gurdas, the great scholar and mystic of Sikh tradition has attempted several descriptions of the ineffable experience. Here are some fascinating examples:

ਦਰਸਨ ਦੇਖਤ ਹੀ ਸੁਧਿ ਕੀ ਨ ਸੁਧਿ ਰਹੀ, ਬੁਧਿ ਕੀ ਨ ਬੁਧਿ ਰਹੀ, ਮਤਿ ਮੈ ਨ ਮਤਿ ਹੈ ।

ਸੁਰਤਿ ਮੈ ਨ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਅਉ ਧਿਆਨ ਮੈ ਨ ਧਿਆਨ ਰਹਿਓ, ਗਿਆਨ ਮੈ ਨ ਗਿਆਨ ਰਹਿਓ, ਗਤਿ ਮੈ ਨ ਗਤਿ ਹੈ ।

ਧਰਿਜ ਕੋ ਧਰਿਜ, ਗਰਬ ਕੋ ਗਰਬ ਗਇਓ, ਰਤਿ ਮੈ ਨਰਤਿ ਰਹੀ, ਪਤਿ ਰਤਿ ਪਤਿ ਹੈ ।

ਅਦਭੁਤ ਪਰਮਦਭੁਤ, ਬਿਸਮੇ ਬਿਸਮ, ਅਸਚਰਜੇ ਅਸਚਰਜ, ਅਤਿ ਅਤਿ ਅਤਿ ਹੈ । - ਕਥਿਤ ੯

As I beheld the Lord,

My senses lost their sensibility, intelligence its intellection, and counsel its opinion,

Consciousness became comatose, attentivity became inattentive, knowledge became uninformed, movement became static.

Patience lost its forbearance, pride, its confidence, love, its passion and in devotion to the Lord, vanished my sense of 'self'.

Wondrous, super-wondrous, ecstatic beyond ecstasy, marvelous beyond marvels, the experience was unending to the utmost.

And again:

ਦਰਸਨ ਜੋਤਿ ਕੇ ਉਦੈਓ ਅਸਚਰਜ, ਤਾ ਮੇ ਤਿਲ ਛਬਿ ਪਰਮਦਭੁਤ ਛਕਿ ਹੈ ।

ਦੇਖਥੇ ਕਉ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਨ ਸੁਣਥੇ ਕਉ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਹੈ, ਕਹਿਥੇ ਕਉ ਜਿਹਥਾ ਨ ਗਿਆਨ ਮੈ ਉਕਤਿ ਹੈ ।

ਸੋਭਾ ਕੋਟਿ ਸੋਭ ਲੋਭ ਲੁਭਿਤ ਹੁਇ ਲੋਟ ਪੋਟ, ਜਗਮਗ ਜੋਤਿ ਕੋਟਿ ਓਟ ਲੈ ਛਿਪਤ ਹੈ ।

ਅੰਗ ਅੰਗ ਪੇਖਿ ਮਨ ਮਨਸਾ ਬਕਤ ਭਈ, ਨੇਤਿ ਨੇਤਿ ਨਮੇ ਨਮੇ ਅਤਿ ਹੂ ਤੇ ਅਤਿ ਹੈ । - ਕਥਿਤ ੧੪੦

Wondrous is the vision of the Light emergent, splendorous its brilliance.

The eyes are unable to behold, the ears to hear, the tongue to speak and intellect to argue.

Millions of grandeurs tossed and turned, millions of resplendences hid behind its shelter,

Beholding its multifarious views, mind became frozen,

All I could venture was 'a thousand salutes to the peerless Infinity.'

It may be appreciated how closely these 'descriptions' mirror Ouspensky's reasons for ineffability. Mystic experience can only be experienced, not described. And it is the true Guru who can usher one to this experience.

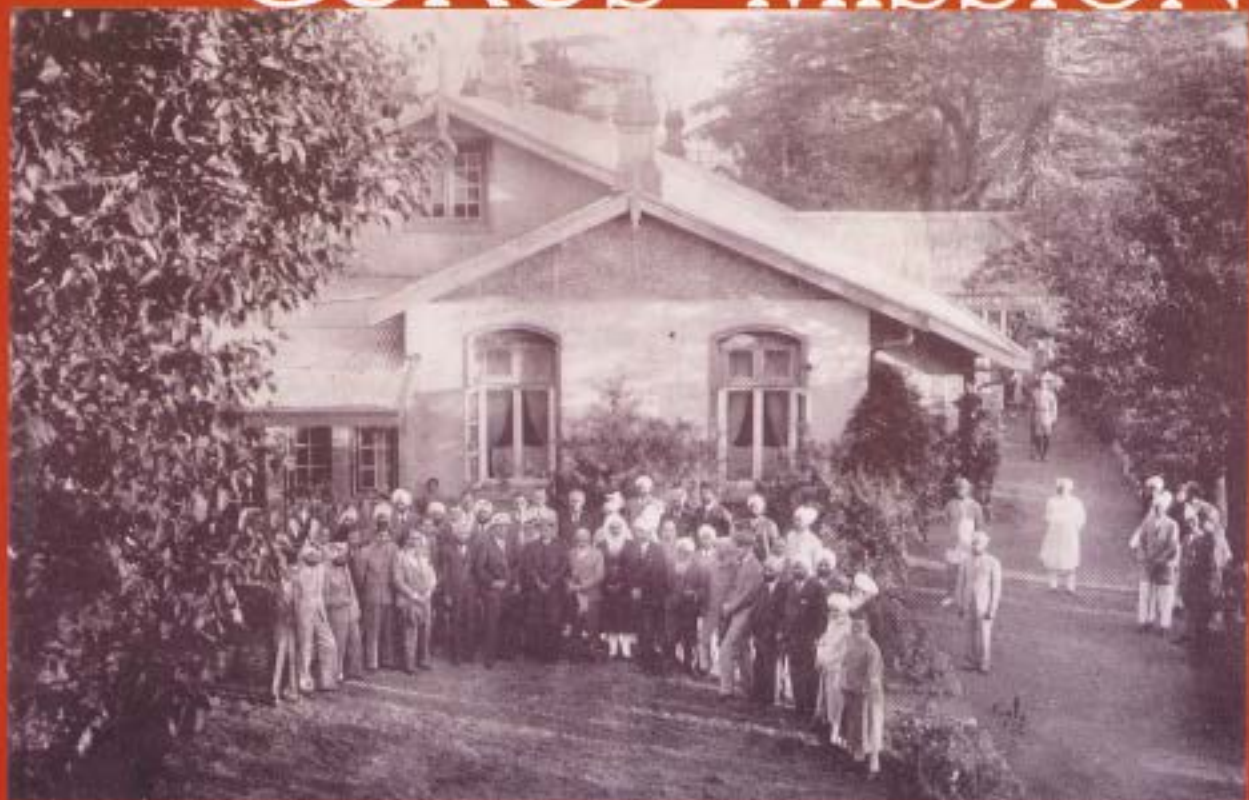
Guru Amardas affirms:

ਤੇਰੀ ਅਕਬ ਕਥਾ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਵਖਾਣੀ ।

Your ineffable state the Guru has shown me through his Word.

Mindset Of The Majority Community

and the GURUS' MISSION



Bhayee Ardaman Singh, the Bhai Sahib of Bagrian, wrote this article which was first published by the Guru Nanak Mission, Patiala in October 1968. This is of even more import now, three decades later.

No malady can be remedied without proper diagnosis. No problem can be solved without meeting it face to face and without coming to grips with it. Correct conclusions can only be drawn by thoroughly going into all aspects, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. It is with this in view that I have tried to present a panoramic and complete picture for deep and thoughtful study by the majority community of India.

Happily, the mind of the rural masses is sound and as yet unaffected. The ailment lies only in urban minds and there too, is confined mostly to a particular communal and intolerant element. But unfortunately that element, being vocal and influential, is spreading the disease rather fast.

It is for the wise and farseeing intelligentsia to probe deep and find out where the virus lies and what the remedy is. Without proper and efficacious treatment of this malady, no Hindu-Sikh unity, so very essential for progress and prosperity, for happiness and safety of the country, would be a lasting phenomenon.

There was a time when invaders like the Sakas, Kushans, Huns and Greeks, came to India and some of them settled down in the country and were soon swallowed and assimilated by the Hindu society and merged into Hinduism. But since the Muslim invasion, conditions have changed.

Almost every country and every nation, at one time or the other, has had to face and solve the problem of minorities. This was done in their own way according to local needs and conditions. The tendency these days is towards narrow nationalism verging almost on parochialism. The lofty ideas of one world and the brotherhood of man are shelved into cold storage. Islamic countries are not at this moment faced with any big problem of religious or other minorities, but still the dream of a Pan-Islamic state has remained in the embryonic stage, thus far. Any Indian solution will have to take all these factors into consideration, besides the obvious fact that the minorities are now too large and hard to be cracked and digested without dyspeptic effects. Any attempt to introduce Hindu theocracy or an attempt to eliminate or

[Picture above was taken in 1932, when H.E. Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, Governor of the Punjab, visited the "Shrabbery", Bagrian House at Simla.]

ignore the minorities will create further stiffness, complications, heart-burning and internecine trouble and disturb the mind and peace of the land.

Practical politics and farseeing wisdom calls for carrying the minorities along in a spirit of comradeship, cooperation, coexistence, coordination, brotherliness and goodwill, so that the minorities too may "feel the glow of freedom" and feel proud of being equal citizens of the land.

Will the majority community, specially its saner and wiser element, rise to the occasion and set the situation right?

These days, all eyes and efforts are turned towards bringing about national and emotional integration. For the orderly and peaceful progress of India and for preservation of freedom, unity is of paramount importance. Any—and every—thing that may tend to undermine and jeopardise the solidarity of the nation should be isolated and meticulously removed. Posterity will regard this as the test of wisdom of the present day leadership.

Surreptitious sallies do not contribute to the creation of mutual happy relationships or goodwill, but give indications of a deep-rooted malady, which has been spreading its virus specially since last half century.

It is for experienced politicians, seasoned statesmen and senior leaders of public opinion, especially the saner and wiser elements in the majority community and intellectual thinkers to diagnose the disease and prescribe the remedy. It is high time they did so. The real solution lies with them.

Differences in Outlook

To come to the right conclusion, differences between the outlook and mentality of the Hindus and that of the Sikhs, ought to be properly understood and kept in mind. During the period of Ramayan and the Mahabharata, people were in high spirits and with trends of glory, ever ready and welcoming opportunities to face and overcome conflicts with clean minds, courage and bravery. To quote an instance from the Ramayan, when Hanuman met Seeta in Ravan's captivity, he offered to take her away, but she refused saying it was not right to escape stealthily like that, but instead for Ram to come, fight it out and take her back. We have an example in the Mahabharata also when Draupadi, after her humiliation in the court, refused to do up her hair until she had washed them with the blood of Dushasan. But this spirit and mindset changed when after the battle of Kalinga, Ashoka embraced Buddhism and abjured "the sword". For Ashoka personally it may have been a great move. Some people even glorify it as the day of "Realisation and Transformation." In fact, it turned out to be the beginning of the downfall of Hindu supremacy in India. Renunciation and self-defence of governance do not go together, but are antipodes to each other.

Since this abjuration of the sword by Ashoka and emergence of the cult of renunciation and non-violence, such

brave and manly qualities and high spirits began to decline and the Hindu outlook towards conflict resolution underwent a paradigm change.

Another factor which contributed to the development of such mentality was affluence, love of riches and worship of *maya*, Lakshmi. The alluvial and fertile soil of the Indo-Gangetic plains and other rich productive lands of India provided them aplenty with comparatively little effort. This made them easy-going and calculative. Goethe, the German thinker, once said that everything in the world may be endured except continual prosperity. The benign weather made them further indolent.

There was yet another factor which promoted such tendency. This was individualism amongst the Hindus. Their worship and every day lives are all individualistic and that is why their religion and interest are strictly personal and revolve only around the self. Loyalty has, therefore, remained confined to family or caste or has been, at the most, tribal or regional. There being no opportunity for community assemblage, there was little neighbourly love or sympathy. It is hard fact of history that there has never been what may be called an *Indian Nation* or any such idea, much less any feeling or sentiment, of what is called *nationalism*. The present geographical or political India was the formulation brought about for the convenience of British administration.

In fact, the first time a picture of India as an *integrated whole* was projected was when the 'Five Beloved Ones' or '*Panj Pyaras*' volunteered to offer their heads to the Guru at Anandpur in 1699. They represented India as a whole, coming from five regions and from five different castes, which were then merged into one casteless society by the Guru. Daya Ram was a khatir and came from Lahore in the North. Dharam Das was a jat from Delhi in the Centre. Mohkam Chand a calico printer belonged to Dwarka in the West. Sahib Chand a barber hailed from Bidar in the South and Himmat Rai a washerman from Jagan Nath Puri in the East.

The Hindus had slowly developed a mentality which always tried to avoid conflict by even surrender, prostration, submission and by appeasement or compromise. They could only harass and become aggressive towards those who happened to be weaker, but quailed and quivered when confronted by those who were stronger.

This mentality, therefore, resulted in the opening of flood-gates to foreign invaders to whom the whole country was offered as if on a platter for plunder, booty, massacre, and taking away of wealth and men and women as slaves. And it remained a one-way traffic. India was always attacked and mutilated, as it lay helplessly prostrate before anyone who cared to invade it. History records that India has never had the courage or capability to carry out an attack across its borders, although we try to cover this weakness and imbecility, deceive and please ourselves by calling it our greatness and peace-loving tendency. The first moves across

the Indus from the east to the west was made by the Khalsa army during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's suzerainty over the Punjab.

A century later, India's borders shrank from the Hindu Kush to the Beas and then Hussainiwalla on the Sutlej, and from Duzdab-Zahedan at the Iranian border to Rajasthan in the West, and from Burma to almost the walls of Calcutta in the East. In the North too, Gilgit and half of Ladakh and Kashmir have been eroded away.

We have to hang our heads in shame when history records that to avoid conflict, some Hindu rulers offered their daughters to the Delhi sovereigns to appease and please them and Hindu men of influence and vested interests joined hands with the tyrant persecutors of their own people.

The recent division of the country and creation of Pakistan in 1947 are an evidence that this mentality and outlook still persist. Most of our present day policies are also worked out under this very obsession. The Sikh outlook is exactly the opposite of this. They are ever ready to face—and indeed welcome—confrontation against a bully or an oppressor of the weak. Sikhs prefer to die fighting rather than to surrender.

The Mission

At the end of the 15th century, Guru Nanak found the country in such sorry state. His was the first voice after almost one thousand years of slavery that was raised against tyranny and injustice at Eminabad during Babar's invasion of India. He not only protested against the high-handedness and tyranny of the aggressor-invader, but also remonstrated against the Delhi Pathans who could not protect and save the precious country under their charge. He also remonstrated with the subjects for submitting like sheep and being akin to dead men not realising their responsibilities. Guru Nanak complained to the Creator for bringing about such scourge on a hapless people. The mission of the Guru was to change this mentality of helpless imbecility and to bring about manly qualities of self-respect, self-help, self-reliance and service to the needy, with a will and conviction not to bow before brute force, injustice, tyranny, or high-handedness. The noble saintly virtues and Godly values were to be protected with even one's lives, by offering sacrifices and if called upon, by wielding the sword. With the anchor in one God, the evil and evil-doers were to be extirpated and the land and ultimately the Universe, made safe for good and God-conscious men. The Guru's mission may be summed up in these words:

*To uphold and advance righteousness,
And to emancipate the good, 'the Saint in us'*

ਯਤਮ ਚਲਾਵਨ ਮੰਤਰ ਉਚਾਰਨ

To extirpate evil and evil-doers root and branch.

ਦੁਸਟ ਸਭਨ ਕਹਿ ਮੂਲ ਉਖਾਰਨ ।

The mission has been to create a nation of God-conscious people, always ready with their 'heads on their palms', to do

service and good to others and punish evil-doers. In doing so, any conflict that comes in the way is to be faced and conquered even if life itself has to be offered and sacrificed.

The Adi Shankracharya also noticed this depraved degradation brought about in the country by this mentality of self-humiliation and avoidance of confrontation. From the South to North and East to the West, he untiringly worked to reawaken the people. But the virus had gone so deep into the minds and brains of the people that one human span of life was not long enough to complete the task. Although Buddhism was banished, Jainism, a sister school of Buddhism, managed to escape notice of the Shankracharya and so survived in the country.

It took the Sikh Gurus four generations to chisel what was to be the ideal human. When the spiritual re-awakening and generation of 'man' and resurrection of human values and restoration of consciousness of the self and mental, moral, and social uplift was complete, the fifth Guru announced:

The Merciful Lord hath now given the Command,

ਹੁਣਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਮਿਹਰਦਾਸ ਦਾ ॥

That no one will henceforth domineer over and give pain to another,

ਧੇ ਭੋਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੇ ਰਵਾਨਦਾ ॥

And, all will abide in peace;

Such being the Rule of Merciful Lord.

ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਸੀ ਹੁਣੀਆ ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਰੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੀਉ ॥

After martyrdom of the Fifth Guru, the values and principles for which he gave his life, were not surrendered. The Sixth Guru then took up the sword to uphold and protect the values and the light, that was thought to have been extinguished, flared into a big blaze which ultimately consumed its antagonists.

The finality to this mission was brought about by the Guru in his Tenth Form when in his hand, the two swords of *Miri* and *Piri* which were separately worn by the Sixth Guru, merged into one double-edged sword, the *Khanda*. It became the creator of a liberated new Order when of this *Khanda*, the Khalsa and then the Guru himself, took *Amrit* in 1699: the Guru became the Sikh and the Sikhs the Guru. It took two hundred years to build such nucleus of society, a living organism, with the manner to grow and prosper and perpetually evolve, guided by common sense and *Shabad* i.e. the omnipresence of the Guru, capable of propagating itself without waiting for any prophets and avatars to appear.

That the mission of the Guru was a complete success is borne out by instances and happenings, a few of which I enumerate below.

During Babar's invasion, Guru Nanak, moved by the atrocities committed by the invader, not only protested against the bloody aggression but even courted arrest. He personally set the example that such a confrontation must

not be side-tracked and shirked or accepted abjectly, but to be met face to face even though it meant suffering and sacrifice.

The martyrdoms of the 5th and 9th Gurus are the pinnacles of such resurrection, regeneration, and rediscovery of character and manly virtues. It should be noted that both the Gurus had prepared their sons and successors to wield the sword, because if passive and non-violent effort and sacrifice failed, it would not mean surrender of values and principles. "When other means have failed it becomes incumbent to use force." The Sixth Guru was 11 years and the Tenth was 9 years of age when they succeeded to the Guruship.

That this spirit generated by Guru and the manner of life nurtured and established by his nine successors, had come to stay is evident from subsequent happenings.

In December 1715, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur was arrested by the Mughal forces after the siege of Gurdas Nangal and taken to Delhi along with 740 Sikhs. They were executed at the beginning of March 1716, one hundred every day. Not a single one of them, and there were even teenagers amongst them, abjured his faith or faltered at the end.

In the *Vadda Ghallughara* (Great Holocaust) at Kup near Malerkotla in February 1762, about 30,000 Sikhs were killed by the Durrani and their native allies. But even this did not affect the morale and the high spirits of the Khalsa who continued the fight until final victory was won, the Mughal Empire uprooted and the whole of Punjab brought under their sway.

An example of this regenerated spirit is discerned when the Durrani invader was taking away amongst the booty some 25 to 30 thousand Hindu girls as slaves, to Afghanistan. The Sikhs unmindful of the risk to their lives, attacked the Durrani columns, rescued these helpless Hindu women from their clutches and escorted them safely to their respective homes.

More recently, evidence of this unsubduable and ever shining spirit and unflinching determination and readiness to serve and sacrifice, was provided at Jaito and Guru-ka-Bagh during the Akali movement in the 1920s to free the Gurdwaras.

The glorious deeds of the Sikhs, both in the Army and the countryside during the 1965 and 1971 wars, are as outstanding as they are unequalled, even as others trembled at the prospect of war.

The Evolution

We have seen that as far as the Guru's mission was concerned, it was an unqualified success. The revolutionary evolution was complete. The change had affected the minds of the people. A will was created in the masses to resist tyranny and to live or die for the cause and freedom. If justice

was not given, it was to be exacted. With unflinching faith in one God, a fearless and useful life was to be lived.

The motto was:

Do not terrorise any one, nor submit to domineering by anybody.

ਏ ਕਰੂ ਕਰਿ ਏਕ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਏ ਮਾਨਤ ਅਨ ॥

This will to resist and never to abjectly surrender before tyranny and injustice, naturally brought on conflict with the tyrannous and bigoted rulers of the country who happened to be Mughals at Delhi and Hindu Rajas in the Hills. In long drawn war, battles are sometimes won and sometimes even lost, but it is the ultimate result that counts. And the pages of history are overflowing with the glorious deeds of the Guru's Sikhs and their success in uprooting the Mughal Empire. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Baghel Singh Karorsinghia with their thirty thousand Sikh cavalry (*Tees Hazari*) ultimately rode triumphantly into Delhi in 1790.

After routing the Hindu Hill Rajas at Bhangani in 1686, if he had so wished, the Guru could have occupied the vast territory that lay at his mercy. Similarly, if the Guru had wished, he could very easily have taken a sizeable of the Punjab when he helped Bahadur Shah in the war of succession which then got him the Delhi throne.

Lord Krishna's too was a similar situation. His strategy and direction having won the Great War for the Pandvas, he ultimately fell to a fatal arrow in the lonely wilderness of the Gir forest. And his brother-in-law, the invincible and brave Arjun, while escorting ladies of the family from Dwarka, was waylaid and looted by the Bheels. The teachings of the *Gita* that brought Arjun back to fulfill his duty and protect his honour, have been forgotten; and the *Gita*, to uphold the ideals of which the greatest battle of India was fought at Kurukshetra, has been pigeonholed and replaced by the lifeless self-humiliating non-violent ideals of renunciation of the Gandhian brand which were themselves thrown to the winds in 1962 and thereafter. That was this country's great and tragic failure.

The lives of great men with a mission, the life of martyrs, of service and sacrifices, are apparently beyond the perspective and understanding of such people who have since ruled the country.

The reason which led Guru Gobind Singh to come into conflict with the Mughal Empire was the word given by his father Guru Tegh Bahadur to the distressed, persecuted and helpless Pandits at the hands of bigoted Mughal rulers, that their *Dharma* would be protected and tyranny extirpated. Guru Tegh Bahadur and a band of his devoted Sikhs laid down their lives for the cause of those Pandits at Delhi—not for any cause of their own. In the world's history of martyrs, this sacrifice, offered for the principles of others and not one's own, is unique and stands unequalled. This link was taken up by his son and successor, the 10th Nanak, Guru Gobind

Singh. If he did not meet with immediate "worldly" success, and a long drawn conflict had to be fought, it was because the Hindus had then let him down.

It were the Hindu Hill Chiefs who first started to harass and then attack the Guru. The first battle he had to fight was against the attack of these Hindu Chiefs at Bhangani near Paonta Sahib. Being routed by the Guru, these Hindu Rajas then approached the Emperor at Delhi and brought Mughal forces to help them against the Guru. It was these Hindus who lit the fire and the conflict with the Mughal Empire then conflagrated into a rage.

It is interesting to note that some muslims, such as Rai Bular and Bhikhan Shah, were the first to see the Light in the Satguru and began exercising their influence in the Mughal Court to bring about rapprochement, understanding and peace with the Gurus. Some of them like Syed Budhu Shah, Syed Beg and Maimu Khan, even fought against the Mughal forces on the side of the Satguru as they understood his rightful stand.

On the other hand, there has always been the Brahminical element among the Hindus that has invariably opposed the interests, nay the very existence of the Sikhs who have been burning their fingers in picking up chestnuts from the fire for them. Although professed to be brothers and calling the Sikhs as their own, yet in fact they have never been able to tolerate their existence. By calling them as "one of them," they have in reality meant the denial of any separate Sikh identity. During the *Chhota ghallughara* (First Holocaust), the Lahore forces were under personal command of the Hindu Lakhpit Rai and it was at his instance that the proclamation for extirpation of the Sikhs was issued in 1746.

Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan, the two Pathan brothers of Machhiwara, took the Guru on a palanquin upon their shoulders and with the timely assistance of Qazi Pir Mohammad, got him through enemy lines to safety from Chamkaur, when the Hindu and Muslim imperial forces were in his pursuit. They had risked their lives for him, while Gangu Brahman, an old servant of the family, and to whom the two youngest sons of the Guru, innocent children of 7 and 9 years, along with their grandmother were entrusted, betrayed them to the Mughal officials; the children were cruelly tortured and put to death at Sirhind by Wazir Khan inspite of the protests of the Nawab of Malerkotla. The Sikhs have since remembered, with gratitude, the noble part played by the Nawab and demonstrated their grateful feelings as late as in 1947 by protecting the house of Malerkotla, as always.

We know that the majority of Hindus are above all this and are as dear to Sikhs as are the Muslims. Some of them are close relatives and some even inter-marry. A great part of the devoted, who are erroneously called *sehajdharis*, are in Hindu form. But their voice, being noble, is gentle and is not heard amidst the loud din of noisy slogans and propaganda of the bigoted communalists. As this intolerant and bigoted

element belongs to the majority community, they, in a democratic set up, masquerade and pass off as nationalists, while the minorities when asking for even minimum support and identity, are dubbed as communalists. This intolerance against the Sikhs has been so from the beginning and continues to be so till this day.

It has been the Hindus, like Chandu and Sucha Nand, who kept up a sustained propaganda in Mughal parleys and worked up wrath of the Mughal rulers against the Sikhs, while Muslim men of God, like Hazrat Mian Mir and Bhikhan Shah had exerted their influence to bring about rapprochement and goodwill. It was this class of the Hindus which brought the Gurus into conflict with the Mughals and later, the Sikhs with the Britishers and now again with the Muslims whilst keeping themselves out of harm's way!

The painful fact worth noting is that even some "respected" Hindu leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru treated the Sikhs with contempt and displayed rank communalism when dealing with them. I give just two rather incredible instances to bear this out.

In the mid-thirties of the 20th century, alarmed by the spate of conversions of the untouchables to Islam and Christianity, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr Ambedkar realised that salvation of the depressed scheduled castes from the unjust oppression and cruel grinding tyranny at the hands of the higher castes since times immemorial, could only lie in their wholesale conversion to Sikhism. In their wisdom and farsight they drew up a scheme, agreed as a pact and started to implement this. Dr Ambedkar paid visits to Amritsar and left some of his fellow workers there to study and understand Sikhism and its institutions. The Khalsa College at Bombay is one of the outcomes of this. But to the misfortune of all concerned, this scheme was confided to Mahatma Gandhi on a strict and definite understanding not to let it out till the proper time. But unless the Mahatma was swept by communalism and prejudice against the Sikhs, why should he have thrown the confidence reposed in him to the winds and without any qualms of conscience committed a breach of faith by condemnation of the scheme, saying that "*It would be far better that the crores of untouchables of India get converted to Islam than they become Sikhs.*" Eventually at his threat to fast unto death, the entire grand scheme was stilled.

Having lost that opportunity, followers of the Mahatma today, when they observe their people being converted to Christianity and Islam, in their chronic helplessness, begin to supplicate the Government to stop such conversions and banish the missionaries from India. This is like old Hindu gods who approached the goddess Durga and beseeched her to protect and save them, when they could not on their own defend themselves against the onslaught of the demons. However, they should not forget that the presiding deity these days is a secular "goddess". They had better study the thoughts of Pandit Malviya and Dr. Ambedkar again with unprejudiced seriousness.

In 1929, the Sikhs were given solemn assurances by Hindu Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Jawahar Lal, as also by formal resolution of the All India National Congress at Lahore, that no constitution of free India would be framed by the majority community unless it was freely acceptable to the Sikhs. This was repeatedly reiterated from time to time till August 1947. It will be worth reproducing the words uttered by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in Calcutta in July 1946. He had said, "The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom." But when later Jawaharlal Nehru was reminded about this, he blandly told the Sikhs that "circumstances had changed." As if pledges are given to be dismissed when convenient! It is common knowledge that a circular was issued in the Punjab soon after the partition of the country that an eye be kept on the Sikhs, who have since been looked upon as if they were aliens.

If the *Gita* had been the guiding star, the Mahabharata story of Gian would not have been forgotten. Gian was an old and pampered servant of Lord Krishna. Once his insolence and insubordination annoyed Krishna, who wanted to behead him. Gian ran for safety and Krishna followed in hot pursuit. It was a long chase. At the suggestion of Narada, Gian rushed to Arjun and sought his protection without disclosing who was after him. Protection was promised and the word given, when he came to know that it was Krishna who was after Gian. So a fight between Krishna and Arjun ensued and became so fierce and gruesome that Brahma had to come down from Heaven and intervene to stop it.

In 1965, this class of Hindus forgot the sacrifice and martyrdom of their saviour Guru Tegh Bahadur and even threw stones at the Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi! Soon after the conflict with Pakistan, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and some other central leaders decided to form a "Punjabi" Punjab, but perfidy of the bigoted Home Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda and his elements in the Centre manipulated to present a torso of a State (*Suba*) without head, arms or legs!

I have written these lines with very heavy heart as I have some very close and dear relationships with the Hindus.

The Malady

In spite of all what is stated above, we find that the saner elements amongst the Hindus have always predominated. They have considered and treated the Sikhs as their bigger, though younger, brothers. During the conflict with the Mughals most of the recruits to the Sikh forces came from Hindus. Later, we find that conversions to Sikhism were mostly from the Hindu fold. In fact some wise and far-seeing Hindus have been advocating that at least one member of every Hindu family must become a Sikh. On the part of the Sikhs, they have been fighting battles for the Hindus

ungrudgingly and have always suffered for their sake. When steel clashed and flashed, they cast their die with the Hindus and when the time to raise arms and show hands came, they always took side with the Hindus. Then why still should the Sikhs have been let down and their work and support and sacrifices go un-appreciated and never recognised? On the contrary, suspicion and bitterness against the Sikhs have increased and are becoming acute specially since the last two decades. Space does not permit here to narrate the shameful story of continuous and callous betrayals of the Sikhs throughout these years and the discrimination made against them in all walks of life. The particularly communal Hindus of the Punjab, in collaboration with like minded Hindu leaders at the Centre have been trying to keep the Sikhs under their political subjugation. Their treatment and behaviour in falsely declaring that Punjabi was not their mother tongue is just one instance. The treatment meted out to the Sikhs outside Punjab specially in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are stark realities.

Such attacks have taken another form lately. Sikh culture, Sikh history and tradition, the Sikh religion and the way of life are being subtly and surreptitiously run down, ridiculed and belittled in books, papers, and text books. Patronage to and promotion of apostates (*patits*) is another manner in which attempts are made to tarnish and disfigure the Sikh image. Sometimes one must sit up and think whether all those services rendered, sacrifices suffered, and valuable and noble blood shed for such ungrateful lot of people, were really worth their while?

On part of the Sikhs, if they have never been found wanting, then why should the Hindu majority community not have trusted the Sikhs and kept them as their shield? On the other hand why have they always nurtured mistrust and animosity against the Sikhs? That is the question which poses a challenge to the majority community to find the reasons and provide the answers. Impartial, unbiased and deep probing is called for to find out where the virus is. Let saner and wiser elements rise to the occasion and arrest the spread of poison and prescribe some remedy before it gets too late.

It is really for the majority community to win the confidence of the minority and keep them so satisfied that they may also be able to feel the "Glow of Independence" and be proud of being counted as an important factor of the country. If the national integration brought about by the Gurus, which every true Indian very much longs for, cannot be preserved and maintained, then everything will end in failure, for which the responsibility will squarely be with the majority community.

I hope that what I have written is taken in the spirit in which it is stated and will lead to some searching of hearts and creation of goodwill.

May good sense prevail everywhere! ❁

Bhayee Ardaman Singh of Bagrian

The Spiritual & Martial Tenor Of
Paonta Sahib





Paonta Sahib (30°-25'N, 77°-35' E) was founded by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in November 1685, having selected this serene place on the right bank of the river Jamuna, which was in the area offered in homage by Raja Medini Prakash of Nahan, situated in Sirmoor District of Himachal Pradesh. The years 1685 to 1689 were filled with great literary creation. In the calm environment of Paonta, on the bank of the river, the Tenth Guru composed poetry of spiritual as well as martial tenor. The court of the Guru was adorned by fifty two poets and writers, who produced a vast treasure of literature besides their own compositions, and almost all major ancient Indian classics were translated from Sanskrit and other exclusive languages into the common parlance of Brij and Punjabi.

Writing about the natural beauty of the area, Bhai Vir Singh described the environment: *"The western bank of the Jamuna on which the present city of Paonta Sahib is situated is called the Sirmur Doon (the valley of Sirmur) and on the eastern bank is the Doon of Ram Rai. As Ram Rai had set up his Dera (establishment) there, it is called Dehra Doon. The site which the Guru selected is called Kiar ki Doon. Here on the bank of the river Jamuna, the Guru had a fort built. He also set up a cantonment for his army. As Bhai Santokh Singh has said, the Guru founded the city and named it Paonta which (literally) means space for a foothold".*

In his *Mahan Kosh* Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha, gives three meanings to the word Paonta. It means, (a) stirrup or foot hold, (b) shoe, (c) carpet spread in front of the door for the honourable guests so that they can place their foot on the carpet before entering the house.

Describing the silvien surroundings, +

"The River Jamuna cuts across the two valleys and flows a little below Kalsi at the place where there is now a bridge over the road that leads to Chakrata. The river flows through the two valleys and then enters the Shivalaks. Near Paonta it suddenly turns westwards, circling the Shivalak foothills as it enters the plains. As the river moves in a curve, its flow fascinates one and all. On the banks of the river and at the site of the present city, a fort-like building was raised in a short time. New buildings, markets and shops were constructed. Raja Medini Prakash handed over the entire area to the Guru. After some time, land measuring six hundred acres was attached to this site".



Painting depicting Guru Gobind Singh, at the Gurdwara library.

Before leaving for Paonta from Anandpur in 1685, Guru Gobind Singh entrusted the care of the fortified *haveli* and the sanctum within it to one Bhai Bishan Singh. More than a century later in 1823, the Gurdwara at Sri Paonta Sahib was re-constructed by Baba Kapur Singh, with funds provided by Sahib Singh Sandhanwalia. However, in the course of time, the shrine with about 120 acres of land attached to it, came into the hands of hereditary *mahants* who treated it as their personal fiefdom.

In 1964, a band of Nihang Singhs of Taruna Dal Harian Velan Wale forced their way into the shrine and began continuous recital of the Guru Granth Sahib. The mahants got violent, and in the ensuing confrontation with armed goondas, eleven of the Nihangs were killed. The mahants sought intervention of the Himachal Pradesh Government but after a protracted struggle, the management of the shrine was entrusted to an eleven-member committee in 1970, with the SGPC President as ex-officio Chairman.

The present building complex spreads over an area of over 3 acres. The main Gurdwara Sri Paonta Sahib at the centre consists of a square domed room within a vast



The Dastar Asthan ...



... where turban tying was taught and, after the battle of Bhangani, robes of honour bestowed.

rectangular hall. The inner room contains old weapons among which a double-edged sword, a scimitar and a matchlock are believed to have been the Guru's personal weapons. Also preserved are two pens used by him for writing. Other shrines include 'Talab Asthan' where pay used to be disbursed; 'Kavi Darbar Asthan' where fifty two court poets used to meet, literary works were recited and discussed; and 'Dastar Asthan' where after the battle of Bhangani robes of honour were given to the Sikhs who showed exemplary valour. Some gifts were bestowed also on Pir Buddhu Shah of Sadhaura for his devoted service and sacrifices and who had lost his sons in this battle. Another shrine is a memorial to Rishi Kalpi whom the Guru had brought from his hermitage in the Himalayas to stay awhile at Paonta.

From the backyard steps, Gobind Ghat leads down to the waters of the Jumuna. Administrative offices are under the portal on either flank of the entrance on the inner side where a row of rooms are located for pilgrims with a line of shops facing outwards. *Guru ka Langar* is held at the western part of the compound.

Besides the daily *maryada kirtan*, Gurbani recitals take place on full-moon days. An annual fair is held on Holi Mohalla.

(From "The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism", Harbans Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala).

Perfidy of the hill chieftains

The jealousy of petty hill chiefs who lived in the surrounding territories around Paonta Sahib and across the river Jamuna, culminated in the battle of Bhangami, in 1689. Since early 1685, when Raja Rattan Rai, the King of Asom (Assam) who was a disciple of Guru Tegh Bahadur, came to pay his homage to Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib, the hill chiefs had nursed much envy of the great Guru's position. In fact, possession of the magnificent elephant presented to him by the Raja became the main issue. Raja Bhim Chand of Kehloor, particularly, nursed much hostility towards Guru Gobind Singh and willingly became part of Aurangzeb's plot to curb the rising strength of the Sikhs.

As Bhai Vir Singh has written:

After the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Aurangzeb felt that the Sikh movement would die its own death and that the Sikhs would never be able to recover from the shock of the martyrdom of the Guru. He could not comprehend that the Sikh movement had Divine support. With the grace of the Lord, Guru Gobind Singh vigorously propagated the Sikh faith. He deputed prominent Sikhs for the purpose. He encouraged his disciples to perform kirtan and listen to religious discourses. Along with this, like his grand father Guru Hargobind, he laid emphasis on strengthening the martial spirit. He also took special care to spread education among his disciples. Aurangzeb did not like these activities, but he wanted to crush the Sikh movement without any direct and personal involvement. This was the real, though hidden, reason for the Raja's hostility. The Emperor encouraged him. One comes across hints to this effect in Jangnama Guru Gobind Singh.

Bhai Vir Singh further clarified this point:

In keeping with instructions of the Emperor, Raja Bhim Chand started harassing the Guru. He demanded that the Guru should hand over to him the elephant and other gifts from Assam. He further demanded that the Guru should accept conditions which were against



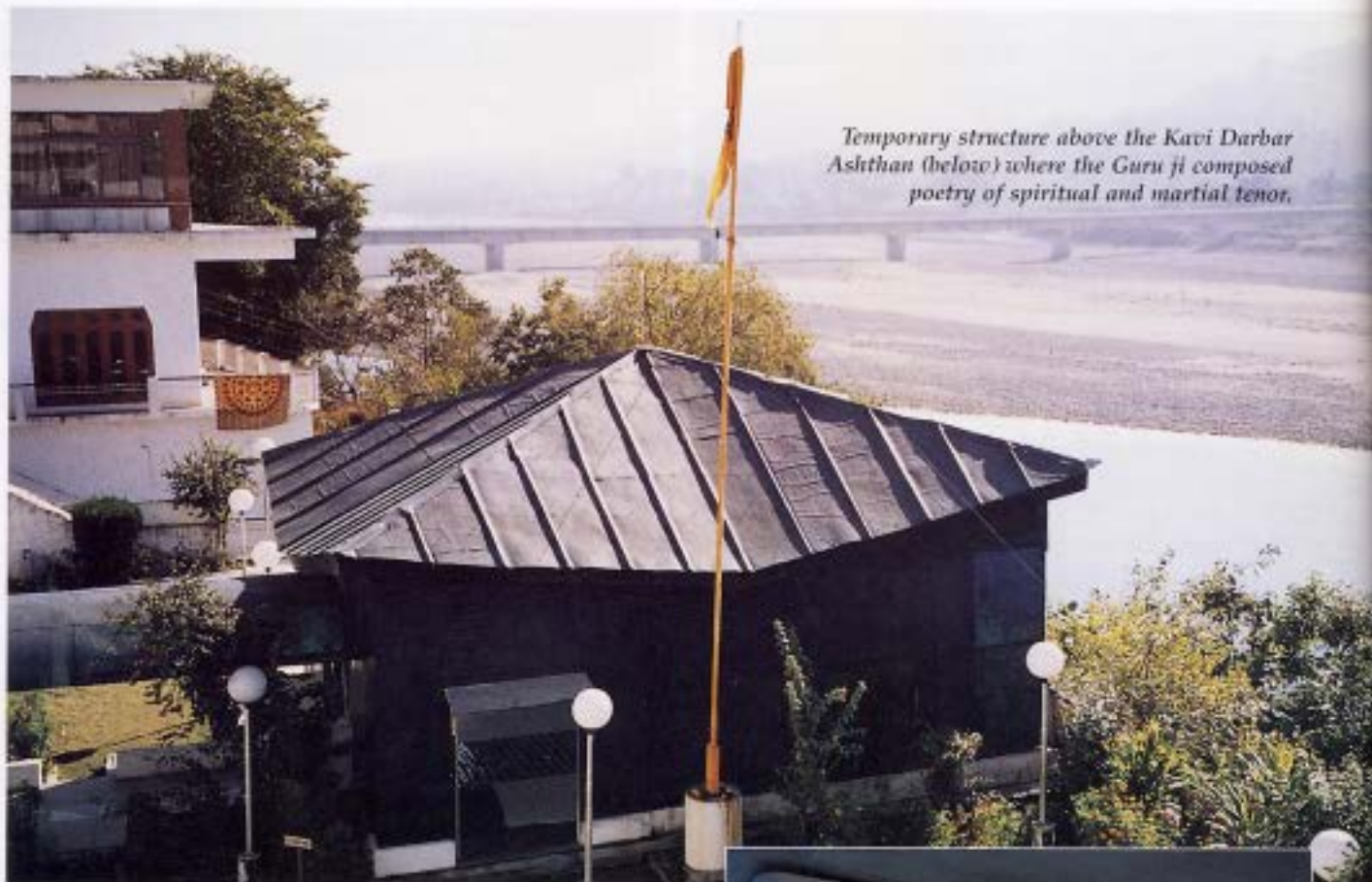
The main Gurdwara Sahib, seen from the riverside.



The Kavi Darbar Asthan



.... where literary works were recited and discussed.



Temporary structure above the Kavi Darbar Ashthan (below) where the Guru ji composed poetry of spiritual and martial tenor.

the spirit of the agreement arrived at the time of the purchase of the village Makhowal. He thought that if the Guru accepted these conditions, he would of his own have accepted his subordinate position. If he did not accept these conditions, he would have an excuse to attack him. This would give him the advantage of winning the favour of the emperor.

However the petty hill chiefs fought amongst themselves often, particularly the Rajas of Nahan and Tehri Garhwal. Raja Fateh Shah, of Shrinagar (Garhwal) had forcibly occupied part of Nahan territory, ruled by Raja Maidni Prakash, the thirty-third ruler of the State. Again, as recorded by Bhai Vir Singh,

The relations between the Rajas of Nahan and Garhwal were strained. The Raja of Nahan wished that Guru Gobind Singh should settle in his state. In this way he would be able to secure peace without fighting a battle. He thought, 'Raja Fateh Shah has the support of Ram Rai who possessed miraculous powers. If the real heir to the throne of Guru Nanak comes to my state, I shall get religious guidance and solace'. So he invited the Guru to settle down in his state. Considering this to be a good proposal, the prominent disciples of the Guru requested him to accept the offer. Honouring their sentiments the Guru agreed to leave Anandpur for the state of Nahan but stated to his disciples that the war of which they were afraid, was bound to take place even if they left for Nahan.





The Gurdwara Sahib under re-building at Bhangani.

Spurred by Aurangzeb, the hill chieftains in their eagerness to please the Mughal, prepared for war and amassed forces numbering over 20,000. The war plans were made during the marriage of the daughter of Raja Fateh Shah of Shrinagar with son of Raja Bhim Chand of Kehloor. On hearing about the imminence of battle, most of the Pathans who had been given shelter and employment at Paonta, betrayed the Guru, as did the Udasi Sadhus 'who had been fattening themselves on the rich fare served at the langars'. Guru Gobind Singh just smiled at this situation and stated that 'The root, at any rate, exists and the tree shall grow and bear fruit and flowers'.

The ordinary folk, disciples of the Guru and common men of the congregation at Paonta, were inspired to take up arms. These five thousand devotees were led by the five sons of his father's sister, Bibi Viro, and were Sango Shah, Gulab Rai, Ji Mal, Ganga Ram and Mihri Chand, with Sango Shah as the Commander.

Guru Gobind Singh selected the battlefield, which were to be the fields of Bhangani some seven miles north of Paonta Sahib, a strategic situation with the river Jamuna flowing past and the nearby, steep hills and narrow paths leading down to Bhangani. The Guru's forces were deployed in the upper plain, leaving the lower fields unoccupied and positioned such that their arrows would rain down upon the enemy.



Painting depicting the battle of Bhangani, in April 1689.



The mind-set? Hindu temple complex under construction on the very narrow ghat, squeezed in between the edge of the river Jamuna and the Gurdwara compound, encouraged and abetted by the Himachal and Uttaranchal Pradesh authorities in spite of fervent objections from the Gurdwara management and resident sewa-dars.

The battle of Bhangani began on April 16, 1689 and raged for twelve days, resulting in complete rout of the hill chieftains, with heavy losses inflicted.

The sound strategy and undying devotion of the Guru's far smaller force, fighting for their faith and righteousness of the cause, resulted also in Pir Budhu Shah, the Sayyid Faqir, his brothers and sons, fighting with great bravery for the Guru. Mahant Kirpal, also fought gallantly, having personally challenged Haiyat Khan, one of the Pathan officers who had deserted, and killing him with a wooden club.

The battle of Bhangani was decisively won and after some days, Guru Gobind Singh went to Sadhaura to meet and bless Sayyid Budhu Shah and his family before

returning to Anandpur Sahib, four years after he had left the above of bliss.

Gurdwara Bhangani Sahib is situated in the fields where the battle was fought and is the memorial to this historic battle. The commander of the army of the Guru, Sango Shah had attained martyrdom here. Thousands of pilgrims have since visited Bhangani Sahib every year.

Battles of Nadaun and Guler

The hill chieftains continued to remain hostile towards the Sikhs. After their crushing defeat at Bhangani, they tried to make amends and asked for forgiveness of the Guru which was readily bestowed. But a year later, once again to seek favour of the Mughals, Raja Ajmer Chand, who

had succeeded Raja Bhim Chand and Raja Kirpal Singh Chand of Katoch, joined the battle against the Sikhs. Once more, the Sikhs were victorious, the Mughal General Hussain Khan and his Hindu allies, including Kirpal Chand, being killed while the others fled in disarray.

After the birth of the Khalsa in 1699, the hill chieftains led by Raja Ajmer Chand of Bilaspur took a delegation to call on Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib as they felt threatened by the Mughals on the one side and the Sikhs, now the Khalsa, on the other.

The Guruji told them: *Your fears are baseless. Your objections against my creation of the Khalsa are ill-founded. These show that you do not understand the needs and the spirit of the times. I am not destroying your religion, or your society. I am trying to make it purer and stronger. I assure you that I have no idea at all of founding a kingdom. Your rule and kingdoms are not in any danger on my account. I do not want to deprive you of your thrones. I only mean to make you stronger and safer. My aim is to end the rule of the cruel tyrants who treat you as their slaves.*

Need I remind you of what you and your people have to bear under their rule? They force Hindus to become Muslims. They mercilessly butcher those who refuse to give up their religion. They dishonour your Gods and Goddesses. They pull down your temples and build mosques on their sites. Hence, it is they that are destroying your religion. They, not I, pose a danger to your religion. What is worse, they are out to destroy your homes. They seize your wives, sisters and daughters before your very eyes. You lack the courage to resist them, the courage even to resent their action. You bear all this, with meekness. Nay, you have fallen so low that you meekly give your daughters to your Muslim rulers. You do so because you are afraid of them and want to please them.

I am deeply pained to see how low you have fallen. Are you not ashamed to call yourselves Rajputs? Think of your great ancestors. Think of their fearless bravery and their lofty self-respect. Remember that it is their blood that runs in your veins. If you still possess an atom of that bravery and self-respect, if you still have a trace of the ancient spirit of your race, then listen to my advice. Take the amrit. Become members of the Khalsa Brotherhood. You will acquire new strength and bravery. Then gird up your loins to face the tyrants in order to free your country and to elevate its fallen condition.

In reality, the Hindu hill chiefs were bitterly against the creation of a casteless society of free men and even



The inspiring central dome of Gurudwara Sri Panth Sahib, seen from just above the river's edge.

feared for the survival of Brahminism and its strict social structure. Thus from 1700 onwards, till the end of the Guru's sojourn on earth, the Hindu hill chieftains, like many jackals, kept sniffing for every opportunity to attack the Guru and his Sikhs but were always resoundly defeated. On an occasion, two hill chiefs, Balia Chand and Alim Chand tried to ambush the Guruji and his small band of Sikhs who were hunting for game in the hills. Against odds of over 100 to one, the Sikhs turned the unequal fight into complete victory, with Bhai Alim Singh killing Alim Chand with his sword, while Balia Chand was shot dead by Bhai Udhe Singh.

After this skirmish was over, the Guru and his Sikhs carried on as before with their hunting excursion. ❀

We are living through tumultuous times of communal conflict and social unrest, times of a head-on collision of minority religions with political power, times of economic advance and moral retreat. Times of instantaneous communication and loss of credibility, times of alternating hope and despair. Fifty five years after gaining independence, albeit at the cost of vivisection of the sub Continent, we in India seem to be wandering in an Aagean wilderness.

In order to emerge from the gloom of yester-years into the sunshine of a happy and united people pursuing the Gurus' path as Khalsa-Sikhs, it is imperative that we make a conscious and determined effort to tear asunder the veil of myth that obscures the reality concerning our rights and duties as Sikhs, as well as the moral and spiritual values that the Ten Gurus perfected through long years of suffering as their response to grim and ceaseless challenges. Our test today must consist not only of the ability to comprehend our destiny but to shape it for the future.

Birthpangs of a pluralist polity

In so far as the Indian Constitution guarantees religious freedom, how is it that most minority faiths, including Sikhism, have come under pressure to compromise their religious identity as the price for joining the mainstream of Indianhood? Why is the definition of patriotism being altered to conform to the straitjacket of the Hindutva code that the state seems to have ostensibly adopted? Complex manoeuvres of powers-that-be seem to threaten not only the Sikh way of life but the very basis of a pluralist society in a democratic polity. The essence of RSS-VHP-BJP axis is the insistence on a single standard of virtue and a uniform code patterned on the traditional symbology of the majority.

In this monograph, a comprehensive treatment of all the issues is neither possible nor intended. Rather, what is being attempted qualifies, at best, as an overview, to arrange the trends into a coherent whole, to bring some analysis and interpretation to trends and events of the past few years, for the future. In so far as India is a country of many religions, which together constitute its glorious heritage, one would like to assess the situation with goodwill towards all and malice towards none, in the true spirit of Gurbani:

*"Na koi beri nahia begana
Sagal sang ham ko ban aayi."*

Needs for Better Understanding

There is a rather distressing ignorance among the mass of Indian people about Sikh beliefs, history and tradition. Textbooks, mostly by Hindu scholars, perhaps written on the assumption that, since Sikhs constitute a bare two percent of population, just that much information about their religion and history might suffice.

The mass media grudge even that. If anything, they have, in recent times, spread a disproportionate degree of misinformation about the Sikh ethos and lifestyle. It is unfortunate that the electronic media, radio and television, are not free and fair, serving mainly the State or big business, while the print media are, by and large owned and controlled by a wealthy but orthodox section of the majority community. Consequently, what we read in newspapers, whether English or the languages, has a distinctive slant. All norms of objective reporting appear to have been abandoned. Walls of bias and bigotry have effectively shut out any open-minded dialogue to promote understanding of an essentially simple and uncomplicated faith struggling to assert its distinctive identity.

The Vision

Sikhism quintessentially is a viable, practical, moral discipline requiring its adherents to adore and remember God, treat life on earth as a Divine gift, earn an honest living and share it with those in need. The miracle wrought by the Ten Gurus consists in how they achieved celestial heights of spiritual purity in a strife-torn country, while inspiring their followers to make every kind of sacrifice for a life of freedom and righteousness and for all humanity.

At the same time, Sikhism is not just an exercise in personal piety nor another Olympic test of physical endurance, demanding as it is in the observance of the Khalsa moral code. An important component, perhaps the *sine-qua-non* of the Sikh way of life, is social activism and congregational participation embodied in the concepts of *Sangat* and *Pangat*.

In any discussion of the questions of morality and ethics, different perspectives have been developed about how a

person may live a good life. One response is discipline, that is, living the moral life by being obedient to a set of rules or laws of ethics. We could superficially term it "legalism" in religion, which can degenerate into fundamentalism and often become sterile as a spiritual exercise. Such shibboleths have been roundly and repeatedly condemned by Guru Nanak in the *Asa-di-Var*. In the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the key to a moral and spiritual life consists in the ethical principle that emphasises the holiness of life; our body is the temple of God, every human being has the right and duty to strive for self realisation. It is towards achieving this all-important goal that the Gurus prescribe a specific code of conduct - a code that demands protection, not penance of the body, including its integral part, the *Kesh*, abstinence from tobacco, indeed all harmful drugs and intoxicants. *Pahul* or *Amrit*, is meant as the essential benediction to the observance of the aforesaid code of ethics. It is the spur to the life of loyalty to the basic principle, a bond of love with fellow Sikhs, as well as with the humanity at large. In this relationship all divisions and distinctions of caste, colour, or status station dissolve.

In the modern age, while educated people tend to seek answers to their inner-most questions through science and technology, the unlettered masses cling to superstition and look for supernatural intervention for all their woes. The argument for secularism in this modern age does not admit of transcendentalism. Traditional ways of thinking and speaking about God seem obsolete and meaningless. Most people live their lives as if God did not exist. We think of God only when we are in distress, or when there are questions we cannot answer. Otherwise, for the so-called modernist, God has become irrelevant.

But this is contrary to the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh who ignited the Divine spirit in every disciple: "*Jagat Jyot Jaape Nis-Basur...*". The Gurus affirmed that we are capable of realising and experiencing God, howsoever subtle and beyond comprehension He may be. The imperatives of a truthful and virtuous life are inseparable from the Divine power. For devotees He is not impersonal nor an abstraction.

But in colossal ignorance of Reality, the majority of people suffer and languish in pain and misery. So the Gurus all-encompassing compassion calls to the high heaven for peace:

*Jagat Jalanda Rakh Lai
Apni Kirpa Dhar*

That is, the world is afire in sin, unable to accomplish its own salvation; only Divine Grace can grant salvation. The Guru's intervention is the last desperate instrumentality

for showing the way. Thus *Gurbani* is not in conflict with scientific thought or, for that matter, with other religions. In fact, if the age of the Gurus had any scientific thought and temper, it is amply reflected in the holy Scriptures, be it with reference with the cosmos, the planet earth, the material world, the origin of species, biology, physics and chemistry. The everpresent scientific and logical thought is the *Gurbani's* chief characteristic. Sikhism therefore does not have to defend itself against the expanding realm of science. On the other hand, the *Gurbani* states that there are vast and immense spaces of the mind and spirit, which remain a mystery and it will be many millennia before science can explore every recess of the human spirit.

The conflict is not so much between science and "secularism" as in the religious practices that divide and breed hatred and antagonism. The entire Guru Granth Sahib is a repudiation of such false religion.

Fanaticism in religion is merely another face of this falsity. It is contagious. It tends to evoke similar response from the adversary, whether Muslim or Hindu. Our experience in India, both pre-partition and post-partition, brings home the fact that nothing is more deadly than the frictions generated by religious passion. Pascal said it more than three centuries ago: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Until now, Sikhism has been singularly free from this brand of religious fanaticism. Indeed the Great Calcutta killing in August 1946 witnessed the miracle of the Sikhs rescuing both Hindus and Muslims from frenzied mobs.

Situational Analysis

The twin dangers that Sikhism faces today are that of apostasy, masquerading as liberalism on the one hand, which seeks to discard the basic discipline and fundamentalism which takes us into a blind alley and consequential isolationism on the other. Apostasy in the guise of modernity needs no encouragement to turn the back upon *rehat-maryada*, seeing these as reflective of medieval times, rather than the Divinely inspired timeless message of the great Masters who tested the ingredients in the crucible of life. The Gurus laid down a code that was at once realistic and rewarding, as the guidepost for day to day living and carving out character and spirit as close to the Divine spirit as flesh and blood could admit.

Fundamentalism is founded on the concept that the *rehat maryada* must be interpreted literally and placed on an absolute plane. In some measure, fundamentalism is the by-product of the events and trends of the last few decades. The Sikh symbols must be seen as the inspiration to mould the Sikh character and an aid to internalisation of the spiritual mode.

Since 1947 Sikhism has exhibited its share of radical and startling features. It both reflected and contributed to the activism and turmoil of the period. In the 1980s the media widely publicised the theological phenomenon but tendentiously projected it as fundamentalism. More deplorable was the onslaught against the established Sikh tradition of *Amrit Prachar*. Official media gave it a sinister aspect, asking the people to beware of the Amritdhari Sikh, as if he were some kind dangerous creature perversely determined to subvert the country! To impute motives of subversion and extremism was calculated to win over the majority community and cause confusion among Sikh ranks, besides breeding disaffection between Sikhs and other classes in India. Despite a change in the ruling class there is yet no evidence to indicate that the said kind of misinformation has been discontinued, or that the media have relented, or tried to understand the true significance of *Amrit Prachar* and its spiritual importance. Nor have the multifarious Sikh organisations made any attempt to bring home to the intelligentsia what initiation into the Khalsa brotherhood really implies. It is not too late to try and disabuse the mind of all men of goodwill, as to the true nature of Sikh "baptism" *Amrit*, and to mobilise the masses to prepare for being the Guru's Khalsa.

The tragic events of 1984 have doubtless left an indelible scar on the Sikh psyche. The effect on our moral and religious fibre is distinguishable largely by the fact of geography, whether we live within boundaries of the Punjab or beyond. The degree of democratic freedom available to us for practicing the basic tenets varies, so does our response to the challenge of identity. Whereas thousands of Sikhs apostates in Western countries have returned to the purity of classical Sikhism as *Keshadhari* and *Amritdhari* Sikhs, in India and particularly in the North the confusion and look - alike psychosis seem to have gripped growing numbers of those rushing into apostasy and wilfully, if foolishly, discarding the symbols in an illusory quest for glamour and acceptance. This paranoia is not confined to the male of the species. Instances of Sikh girls turning their back on the traditional cultural affinity and seeking matrimonial alliance with families whose culture is light-years away, are becoming common.

These ominous trends seem to stem from our neglect of Punjabi culture and language and a multi-pronged media assault on the external Sikh identity as if in a psychological war. The strategy is two-fold: to wean away the younger generation of fledgling Sikhs by suggesting that the terror and brutality of November 1984 could be re-enacted. Secondly, to project the turbaned Sikh as a prototype extremist by means of a sustained manipulation of fashion and dress norms. In the absence of a concerted and

determined campaign by Sikh organisations to counteract this strategy, the damage to the cultural entity of Sikhs goes on unabated.

It is necessary to impress upon the Sikhs, within and outside Punjab, that our vitality, creativity and vigour are derived from our faith rooted in the Guru's chosen path, the Scripture and the discipline. Only the most gullible would believe that there is safety in the look-alike anonymity of the Indian mass. It is like feeding the crocodile in the hope that he will eat you last, for eat you he will. The example of Buddhism in India is with us, of how they were brought to the brink of extinction not withstanding Gautam's noble message of love and compassion.

Collision Course

The mid 1960s in the Punjab were, in some ways, a time of spectacular economic progress, trail-blazing in agriculture, marking the advent of the Green Revolution and, later, the White Revolution. It was also the time of boom in emigration to the West turning into an outwardbound tidal wave which seemed to peak when the Green Revolution reached its plateau. This was the time of supreme confidence on the economic plane and a sense of accomplishment. Unprecedented numbers of youth thronged the threshold of colleges to gain admission, while many more queued up for passports to go abroad to join their kinsmen.

It was only in 1982 when the Centre's indifference to the rising Sikh aspirations, embodied in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, provoked the more radicals to issue a threat that the Ninth Asian Games in Delhi in the autumn of that year, would be disrupted, that brought up an astonishing over-reaction, not so much in Delhi, the venue of the Games, but in neighbouring Haryana. Barricades were raised on the G.T. Road (National Highway 1) connecting Punjab with the capital and the high-handed police heckled, harassed and humiliated every turbaned traveller during several weeks preceding the Olympic extravaganza. The roughing up of Sikhs cast a pall of deep apprehension and resentment. The deployment of paramilitary forces in the Punjab dramatically escalated the tension and sense of discrimination. The media's tendentious publicity to Sant Bhindrawale's utterances proved a heady mixture, focussing the floodlights on the Taksal that had hitherto been only a seminary of Sikh theology engaged in classical Scriptural studies, covering themes of purity of moral life. The surge of popular piety that came in the wake of Sant Bhindrawale's discourses was largely a socio-cultural phenomenon. Sadly, this was blown out by a curious and overzealous press, through most of 1983, as fundamentalism in which the main articles of faith were more political than religious.

The savage violence against the Sikhs in Delhi and entire northern India in the wake of the tragic assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 left an impact of cataclysmic proportions on the people's psyche. The year was a time of national trauma, marking the point of no return for an alienated community. To cite only one example: no one has really cared to explain how, even on the most favourable assumptions about *Operation Bluestar*, that gallantry awards to army personnel could be justified.

In his book *"Why Men Rebel"* the American sociologist, T. Robert Gurr has argued that political violence is the consequence of a significant gap developing between the expectations of a given group and the willingness of the authorities to concede them. This sense of aspirational deprivation and cumulative frustration, in case of the Punjab, eventually brought to the surface the phenomena of terrorism, initially manifest in the violence of reprisals. Yet not all youth were in the vanguard of this cult of violence and fewer still were protagonists of secessionism. Some, no less disenchanted with the state of affairs, chose to turn their backs on the country of their birth and walked away from it in search of safer sanctuaries.

To complicate matters, the working of certain Commissions pursuant to the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal accord of 1985 also contributed to such mood of desperation. In January 1986 the Mathew Commission resorted to a wholly unnecessary head count in Abohar and Fazilka Districts which stalled the primary objective of restoration of Chandigarh to the Punjab on the stipulated date in January, 1986. The Ranganath Mishra Commission turned out to be an elaborate whitewash job to bail out the government and exonerate the ruling party bigwigs, so as not to punish those guilty of the savagery that had rendered thousands of women and children as widows and orphans.

The Eradi Tribunal award on river waters submitted on January 30, 1987 was held back for 108 days before being made public on the eve of elections in Haryana, after Punjab had been placed under Central rule. The award actually reduced Punjab's share from 5.406 million acre-feet to 5 million acre-feet and augmented Haryana's share by 240 per cent! It is another matter that the Centre's strategy completely backfired in Haryana. But the loss of faith, both in the Centre's bonafides and the wisdom of the Commissions of enquiry presided over by the ageing sages from India's highest judiciary, was now total.

As these developments continued to flood upon the Sikhs into the 1990s, we seemed to be overwhelmed with the inequity and even to lose our confidence in the system, resulting in boycott of the 1991 election and installation of a Congress government under Beant Singh in the Punjab

that soon unleashed a reign of terror and gave KPS Gill the licence to kill innocent Sikhs in an orgy that lasted upto the assassination of that chief minister in August 1995. The intervention of a pro-active judiciary, on the one hand and the SGPC's global convention of Sikhs in September 1995 turned the tide in favour of the Human Rights and towards resurgence.

Gurmat Chetna Lehar

The problem with such an evaluation is that history is all mixed up, each year seems to be a little stranger than the one before. We are naturally frustrated - frustrated with the government, with our leaders and *Jathedars* and indeed with ourselves. We turn to one another and ask, "Who is responsible?" Are we at the mercy of some undefined fate? We conveniently skirt the crucial message of the Gurus, the wisdom of God manifested through the Holy Scripture enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. We forget that God might be working through these traumatic events to accomplish the Divine Will in order to draw us closer to HIM. To my mind, this message of *Gurmat* offers the only certainty in this uncertain world. As we reflect upon the times in which we live and experience the rapidity of mind-boggling change, we seek an anchor to provide the moorings in this raging tempest. God is our refuge in these perilous times, as we move into the new century.

Renewal

The foregoing thoughts may sound simplistic but it is the quintessence of the Sikh doctrine that can anchor the ship of Sikh faith and enable us to face all odds with confidence and trust. There is a great psychological security in being able to stand on so firm a foundation steeled in the furnace of martyrdom and sustained by *Amrit* of 1699. Here, let us examine just one precept laid down by Guru Gobind Singh:

Most of us apply the Khalsa ideal only at the level of the physical attributes, on the Five K's. We seldom go beyond the symbolism - to the culture, moral and spiritual planes that guide us for a life of truth, purity, service and continence which the Tenth Master has defined in his *Gurbani*. He asked that we use *Gyaneh-ki-badhni* or the sword of knowledge, to tear apart ignorance and superstition. To be armed with knowledge we must know our mother tongue Punjabi, in the Gurmukhi script and understand the language of the Scriptures.

If today's Khalsa cannot recapture the sacrificial spirit of the Scriptures, they will lose its authenticity even if they observe the externalised code. Unless we imbibe the essential spirit, we have no right to expect the Guru's Grace for which we daily pray. The contemporary generation will

acknowledge and accept the postulates of *Gurmat* only when the symbolism is matched by the practice of purity of character, social equality, readiness to do good deeds, and a total absence of fear. Guru Gobind Singh Ji turned his tragedy into triumph when he wrote his letter of victory to Emperor Aurangzeb. The most significant feature of the *Zafar Nama* of Guru Gobind Singh Ji is its transparent honesty and noble courage. It remains, to this day, the most lucid and moving explanation of the life-long struggle of the Tenth Master and of the resort to sword when all other means had failed.

Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the performance of their parents, gurdwara priests and Sikh politicians has turned into virtual disgust. The current spate of apostasy and setback to Sikhism and Sikh institutions must inspire in us the faith that the Right defeated for the time being is stronger than the evil triumphant, for ultimately the Truth must prevail. I have no doubt about the outcome of our struggle even if our motives at present are misunderstood and our methods mismatch the times.

Time for Introspection

The media has in the past - more from ignorance than malice - promoted the fiction that anyone who is baptised with *amrit* in order to become an *amritdhari* is intrinsically a fundamentalist. In Sikhism the *amritdhari* is the norm, not the exception. His qualities must not only be beneficent but appear to be so. He must think and act right. Tolerance is his watch-word. Some of the so-called fundamentalists hold that if liberalism was allowed free rein, not only would the Sikh identity be jeopardised but Sikhism itself would be imperilled. One has only to remind oneself of the universality of the *Gurmat* to perceive how fragile this argument is. Sikhism is an inclusive religion not an exclusive social club. In fact that is how the religion developed, and that is how it still functions. The greatest merit of the *Gurmat* spirit can be seen at the *langar* in any Sikh shrine. The controversy about whether *langar* should be taken sitting on the floor or on benches, is unwarranted. Whereas the *Bipran ki reet* forbids a non-Hindu - even a Harijan - to enter the holy shrines at Tirupathi for a glimpse of Lord Venkateshwara's image, or at Guruvayur in the South, the only condition for entry into a gurdwara anywhere in the world is that no intoxicants be carried inside, the shoes must be discarded and the head covered as a mark of reverence. Sinner and saint, Hindu and Muslim, white and black, all are free to enter and partake of the *prasad* - the Guru's benediction.

Exclusiveness takes the pernicious form of divisiveness.

striking at the very root of our unity. Its manifestations are many: the Jat : non-Jat syndrome, the reappearance of casteism, the matrimonial barriers and other social evils. The treatment of *Mazhabi* Sikhs in rural Punjab is a perverse example of the Brahmanical inroads in our socio - cultural fabric, still practiced because we regard them as people at the lower end of the socio-spiritual scale. You cannot accept one principle of *Gurmat*, while violating another principle and still call the organisation as the Khalsa Panth. If the media have done a great disservice by giving currency to the idea that Sikhs are a sect of Hinduism, we as Sikhs have done greater disservice by clinging to the divisive practices that are the very antithesis of Sikhism.

Strategy

Questions must be answered and practices reversed; at least the related issues must be brought out in the open and not swept under the carpet. Sikhism will lose its charm if it were to revert to exclusivist isolation. As it is, we have allowed sections of Indian people to drift away from communion with Sikhs; many who used to visit Gurdwaras regularly and listen to the Divine kirtan, now keep away. A bizarre provision in one version of the *maryada* forbids a *Sahajdhari* from singing *Gurbani* hymns in the Gurdwara. The sooner we shed this intolerance, the better for us. Attendance in the gurdwara (and I am not talking of the queues at the historic shrines in the capital) has sharply declined. Inter-community contact has become scarce, breeding suspicion and mistrust. Urban or rural, the Sikhs seem to be cheerfully reverting to alcoholism, apostasy and rank materialism. In Punjab, the consumption of liquor is said to have risen 750% over the decade 1985-95, if the excise statistics are any guide. Among the first acts of the Akali-BJP rule in Punjab in 1997 was to auction the liquor vends for a record revenue. Forgotten was Sant Bhindranwale's purification campaign, even as the Sikh Students Federation squabbled and the intellectuals looked on. This deadly trend towards intoxicants must be reversed.

Situational Dynamics

One of the basic doctrines of the Khalsa is to resist injustice and tyranny. Where the oppressor is unrepentant and incorrigible, retribution is permissible. Guru Gobind Singh Ji deputed Banda Singh Bahadur to Sirhind to put an end to tyranny and oppression rather than to avenge the death of his two younger sons, as is touted by some history books. Likewise, it would be wrong to place an absolutist interpretation on the Tenth Guru's worship of weaponry. Beyond the apparent extolling of the armoury, the Master meant to instill chivalry and heroism in the face of heavy odds, not the installation of another set of idols made of steel. Let us acknowledge the psychological and

cultural conditioning of historic events in all fairness to the Guru. The use of weaponry against the innocent, the unwary and unarmed is clearly a repudiation of the spirit of the Khalsa.

Religion & State

No discussion on the subject of the current crisis can be complete without dealing with the relationship of Religion with State. The term "secular" in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, read with Article on freedom of religion, does not mean just that government may not show favouritism to only one religion but may respect all equally; rather it means that the government must be neutral in the matter of religion, neither aiding nor hindering religion. It means that a person may be religious in any way that he or she wants without government interference. Freedom means that not only may a person believe as he or she chooses, but that such beliefs must be put into action. This is all that the Sikhs want from governments—no interference, no hindrance, only neutrality. Those who accuse us of mixing religion with politics will be well advised to disengage themselves from the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya.

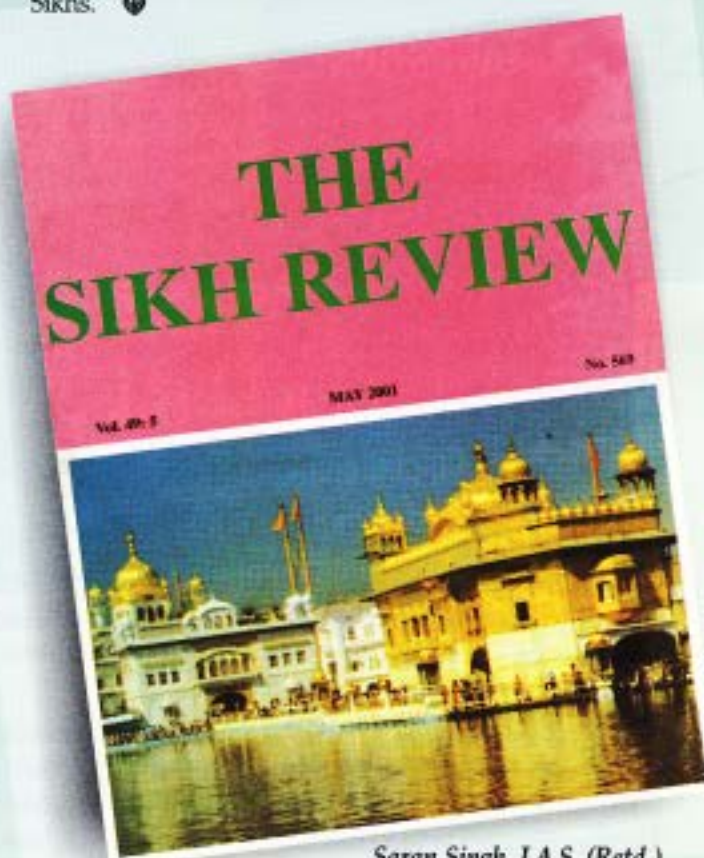
As for the laws of the state, in principle all laws must be obeyed. There are, however, just laws and unjust laws. A just law is that which is consistent with moral law - it enhances and uplifts society. A law is unjust when it does not measure up to ethical principles of justice, when it discriminates and degrades the human personality and when it is applied to one territory, or community, and not to all. TADA was one such law enacted in 1985, solely against the Sikhs.* Struggle against unjust laws has to be peaceful but unceasing detention without due process of law and fake encounters are immoral acts. Popular support must be mobilised to restore the rule of law.

Gurmat, or the Guru's path, tells us that in spite of the chaos, and repression by unjust laws, God is in charge of the universe, not God of the Sikhs, or Hindus, but God of all humanity. That is the most reassuring fact of life. Not only does it provide confidence but engenders optimism: "Charhdi Kala" which is the lifeblood of *Gurmat*. To be God accepted, God realised is our best reason for living the righteous, compassionate and dedicated life demonstrated and demanded by the galaxy of Gurus from Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Only such life can be meaningful for the individual, the family, the society, the

country and the human race. We may be passing through the age of gene mutation, of technology, of space exploration, of computer miracles, of energy crisis and of environmental pollution. But nothing can save humanity as can the humane principals enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib. Hope springs from the Sikhs' capacity for sacrifice and suffering, for God and ethical values, which is legendary. Our faith in truth and divine justice must be rekindled. Such faith is an essential ingredient of cultural and psychological rehabilitation.

Preparedness to face harsh realities and the courage to uphold the true character of Sikhism in all its glory are the imperative needs of the new times as we step across the threshold and into the new century.

Let us give up petty-fogging interest in the pursuit of selfish gains and let us extend the Gurus' love to all the disciples and win over all denominations. Let us make unity, amity and goodwill the cornerstones of our relationship with other communities in the true spirit that humanity is one race. Let us stand firm in our resolve to achieve our goals in the 21st Century, for these goals intersect with practically every aspect of the future of the Sikhs. ♣



Saran Singh, I.A.S. (Retd.)
Chairman Atam Science Trust
Editor, The Sikh Review
Calcutta

*Even as this goes to press, a Delhi court has (on 21 February 2003) framed charges against the Akali Dal (Amritsar) President and Lok Sabha Member Simranjit Singh Mann under TADA for his speech delivered at Bangla Sahib Gurdwara in April, 1991.

THE SMITHSONIAN

Establishes

SIKH HERITAGE MUSEUM in Washington D.C.

Work on the much awaited World Sikh Heritage Museum was started in Washington during June 2002. A day-long seminar-cum-workshop had been earlier organised by Dr Paul Michael Taylor of the Smithsonian Institution.

To set the pace for its ambitious project, Mrs Jaswinder Kaur Chatha and Mrs Kamaljit Chaudhary presented a cheque to the Institute. Dr Narindar Singh Kapany of *The Sikh Foundation* of USA, signed an agreement to hand over artefacts from his personal possession to the Sikh Heritage Museum, and also agreed to contribute \$ 500,000 to the Smithsonian Institution towards maintenance of the new museum.

Among those present at the seminar and the subsequent function held in the evening, was the Indian Ambassador to the USA, Lalit Mansingh, as also the Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Embassy of Pakistan in the USA. While Mr Mansingh eulogised the contribution of Sikhs, the Pakistani diplomat promised all assistance and support for preserving the very many Sikh heritage buildings in Pakistan.

Sardar Tarlochan Singh, then Vice Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, inaugurated a day-long seminar. The participants, including academicians, technocrats, historians and others, inspected and approved the site earmarked for the Sikh Heritage Museum before the actual start of the ground work. Dr N.S. Kapany informed that the organisers of Asian Heritage Museum in San Francisco had also decided to include a permanent Sikh Arts gallery.

Some months earlier, Dr Paul Michael Taylor, who is the Director of Asian History Programme and curator of the Smithsonian Museum, had visited Delhi, the Punjab and Chandigarh to give final shape to the proposed Sikh Heritage Museum.

Inaugurating the seminar, Mr Tarlochan Singh stressed the importance of setting of the Sikh Heritage Museum and galleries in all those cities the world over where Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular had settled in large numbers.

Others who spoke at the seminar on the preservation of Sikh heritage were Dr Jeewan Singh Deol from Cambridge University in England; Ms Gurmeet Rai from New Delhi, Ms Geetika Kalha from the Punjab, Dr Amandeep Singh Madra from London and others.

It was lamented at the seminar that there were hardly any heritage buildings left in the Punjab to be preserved! For example, the only surviving heritage building in the *Golden Temple* complex in Amritsar, besides the Hari Mandar, was the Ramgarhia Bunga. The invaders over the centuries—and now the SGPC—were blamed for destroying or damaging the other heritage buildings in the Complex.

It was suggested that Qila Mubarak of Patiala was really the only international heritage building in the Punjab which could be preserved by the World Heritage Foundation. Mr Tarlochan Singh's suggestions about Qila Mubarak were unanimously accepted by the participants.

This has been manifested in the fact Qila Mubarak is the main venue for the Patiala Heritage Festival which takes place during February 2003.



Patiala

HERITAGE FESTIVAL

14-23 FEBRUARY 2003 PATIALA, PUNJAB

The Smithsonian

The Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. is the world's largest museum and research complex, with 16 museums and galleries under its banner. This unique museum is unrivalled in the world and has tens of millions of visitors every year. The Smithsonian's collections, containing 142 million objects are staggering in their breadth, depth and meaning for the public. The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum has the maximum number of visitors and others include the National Museum of Natural History, Freer Gallery of Art, National Museum of American History, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Renwick Gallery and National Postal Museum.

The Smithsonian Institution's Museums are open 364 days a year, from 9.00 am to 5.30 pm and admission is free. The Institutions' original home is the Castle on the National Mall where there are interactive touch-screens with



information about the Smithsonian in six languages, free brochures on various museums, scale models and electronic wall maps of the city of Washington, D.C.

The National Museum of Natural History (seen above) is very large, is granite-faced and designed in classical beaux-arts style and was opened in 1910. The wings were added in the 1960s and under the dome is a six-story high skylit atrium.

The gallery on Asian culture has many artifacts from Japan, China, Indonesia, while those of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia, make up the Pacific cultures.



(left to right) Dr. and Mrs. Brijinder Singh Kochhar, Dr. Paul Taylor, Dr. Amrik S. Chhattha, Ms. Rajinder Kaur Keith, Dr. Jaswinder K. Chhattha, Dr. Chaudry and Mr. Gurdip Singh Malik.

Rajinder Kaur Keith wanted to celebrate her sister's love for the arts and leave something behind for generations to come and she did so on 18 January 2003. With a \$ 100,000 donation, Rajinder Kaur's contribution towards the newly commissioned Sikh Gallery at the National Museum of Natural History, the largest single donation to the project, is in memory of her sister, Narinder Kaur Keith who passed away two months earlier when both sisters were visiting India.

Narinder Kaur Keith was the Director of Physical Education for women's colleges in the Punjab. She left India in 1970 to join her sister who was already settled in the United States and went on to work for the IMF at the World Bank and the Montgomery Maryland library before her retirement in 1987, helping build fountains in the Freer Asian Art Gallery, another foundation entitled *Chashma* (Urdu for fountain) and to fix a Buddha statue as well.

Even though Rajinder Kaur has worked with the Smithsonian in the past, she only found out about the Sikh Gallery project from a childhood friend and Sikh Heritage Foundation member, Monorama Kochhar.

Planning for the World Sikh Heritage Museum project began in 2000 so as to preserve and present historical artifacts of Sikh Heritage and this has grown since into a progressive movement of heritage outreach, with events celebrating Sikh academics, musicians, visual artists, and heritage. Enlisting scholars and donors from India, Pakistan, the United

Kingdom, Canada and the United States, the Sikh Gallery will be the first long-term gallery of Sikh Art in North America and will boast collections from around the world valued at over \$ 3 million.

Since its first fund raiser in 2001, the project has raised over \$ 500,000 in pledges from donors across the country. Unique to any Sikh-related charity, the project has also drawn support from the Indian and Pakistan missions in Washington D.C. as well as corporate sponsors such as Sony and Pepsi. "Having corporations and donors stand behind a minority culture of India says a lot about the strength of our diaspora in the United States. We are proud to share our rich heritage with the world in order to foster greater understanding between all people" states Manorama Kochhar, member of the Sikh Heritage Foundation.

"The Sikh Heritage Project is not just about Sikh history; it's about the world's history. We are committed to create a venue for the world to learn about our rich and unique culture through its manuscripts, jewellery, weapons and visual arts", states Soun Singh Chaudhary another member of the Sikh Heritage Foundation.

The project has hosted academic conferences and cultural benefits in Washington D.C., San Francisco and Los Angeles and plans to formally open its gallery in 2005. The Smithsonian Sikh Heritage Gallery is a joint effort with the Sikh Heritage Foundation, a non-profit dedicated the preservation of Sikh artifacts in India, Pakistan, and the United States. ☺

In The Sikh Spirit at The Smithsonian

His arms stretched wide, a look of passionate concentration on his face, Jeevan Singh Deol danced, balanced on the shoulders of his fellow Sikhs. As coordinator for the *Sikh Heritage Project* of the Smithsonian Institution, Deol was the man of the moment during the formal dinner at the National Museum of Natural History, one of the several world-famous institutions of the Smithsonian at Washington D.C.

Turbans bobbing, silk saris and salwars swishing, the Sikhs attending the dinner gathered in a circle to dance traditional bhangra music, clapping rhythmically as a counterpoint to Lal Singh Bhatti's elegant drumming on the *dhol*. A singer keened in Punjabi; amplified, his voice echoed down the empty corridors of the museum.

Sikhs were in high spirits, having feasted on a slide presentation of their religious and artistic heritage. Colourfully ornate pages of centuries-old illuminated manuscripts of their scripture, the *Adi Granth*, with handwriting from the Gurus of their faith, were projected on a screen in the silent Baird Auditorium. These treasures, Deol warned in a nearly musical Canadian accent, will be lost if the 100 or so people in the room "did not do something about it".

Since they paid \$ 150 to \$ 250 each for tickets to the gala, it is probably safe assumption that they do want to preserve the Sikh culture, not just in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, where many of them now live, but also in India and Pakistan, where they or their forebears were born. Sikhism is a 500-year-old, casteless, monotheistic religion with roots in the Indian sub-continent.

Pakistan's Deputy Chief of mission, Zamir Akram and the Indian Ambassador, Lalit Mansingh, attended the gala dinner, despite the uncomfortable diplomatic air between their neighbouring countries.

The Smithsonian's Sikh Heritage Project, set up in 2001, was the beneficiary of the event. Paul Michael Taylor, Director of the Asian cultural History Programme at the Smithsonian, said the project's first phase, now underway, is the identification and collection of artifacts for exhibit in a window in the museum's Hall of Asian Peoples. "It's a lean-and-mean

fund so far. We've managed to do a lot with not much money", Taylor said.

Jeevan Deol has been to India and Pakistan to request loans of often-neglected and badly damaged manuscripts, paintings and other objects from the two governments. Several speakers estimated that 90 per cent of Sikh treasures "have vanished". A few have sold on the international art market, but the bulk of them don't exist anymore. Most of them are gone because of neglect and climate", said Deol, 29, of Vancouver, B.C., a Cambridge scholar and one of a small number of Sikh history experts in the world.

Among those who have supported the formal affair is Chirinjeev Singh Kathuria, one of the financiers behind MirCorp, the first company to send a tourist into space. Kathuria said in a brief speech before dinner that he was proud to be a member of the faith, which makes up only 2 percent of India's population. "Being a Sikh helped me a lot, especially in dating", joked the internet mogul. "People think you're a prince or Sinbad or Aladdin".

Chirinjeev Singh sat next to the Indian Ambassador while waiters served succulently sweet *gulab jamun* (fried dry-milk dumplings dipped in honey sauce), mango ice cream and rice pudding for dessert.

Kathuria observed that the turbans and heavy beards typical of traditional Sikhs are what many people associate with the face of India. The merging of the New and Old worlds of Sikhism were apparent in the programme. It included a Punjabi folk song by celebrated performer Surinder Brar and a hip-hop-flavoured dance by the University of Maryland's Bhangra team, winners of the Washington "Bhangra Blowout competition". A sleekly chic deejay in a shiny satin suit shared space the a more traditional-looking bearded man in a formal embroidered *kurta*.

They all sat down to dal (lentils) and rice served with tandoori chicken, saag (spinach), baigan (eggplant) and roti (bread) on the side. At the end of the evening, they gathered to clap, dance and celebrate themselves for saving what they can of the past.

Lisa Allen-Agostini
in the Washington Post

Sikh Symbols

An Unalienable Identity



Outside the Gurdwara at Defence Colony in New Delhi.



The principle of organization is a part of the Sikh religion. A Sikh is not only to look to his individual character but is also to shoulder his responsibilities as a part of the corporate body of the Panth. This is evident from the form of congregational worship and the daily prayer of Sikhs, wherein the Sikh invokes, after God, all the ten Gurus and the deeds of those great Sikhs who have suffered for the Panth. It brings before his mind the present organic life of the community, with its different associations and meeting places scattered everywhere, thus steeping himself every day in the association of those who constitute the past and present history of the Panth. This institution entails certain additional disciplinary outfits in the shape of baptismal forms and vows, which are often misunderstood. People cannot easily understand how it is that, while in *Asa di Var* the Guru ridicules certain forms and symbols, the Sikh religion has yet got its own which it considers as regular part of its constitution.

It is true that if religion were only a matter of individual concern, there would be no need of forms or symbols. But religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennobles individuals but binds them together to work for nobility in the world. And an organization is the means of enlarging the possibility, scope, and effectiveness of this work. In order that an organization may itself work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals involved with it should be able to keep up their attachment to the cause and a sufficient amount of enthusiasm for it. It is, however, a patent fact that men by their nature are so constituted that they cannot keep their feelings highly-strung for a long time at a stretch. Reaction is inevitable, unless some means are devised to ensure the continuity of exertion. This is where discipline comes in. It keeps up the spirit of individuals against relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in

moments of distress. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags and drills and uniforms in armies and certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Uniformity is an essential part of them. They create the necessary enthusiasm by appealing to the imagination and sentiment and work for it in moments of depression. They are a real aid to religion, which is essentially a thing of sentiment. Man would have no need for them were he only a bundle of intellectual and moral sense; but as he also has sentiments and imagination without which the former qualities would be inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate to the sentiment. These forms must not be dead but a living index of his ideal, awakening in him vivid intimations of the personality that governs his religion. They should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meanings, tears to grief, smiles to happiness and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words become meaningless; when we no longer heed their sense or the language to which they belong, they become dead. It is true that sometimes tears and smiles are only cloaks for hypocrisy and a tune, a mere meaningless jingle. But there is no denying the fact that when their inner meaning is real and we are sincere about it, they do serve as very helpful interpreters. Forms are the art of religion. Like art of nature, these forms impose certain limitations on the ideal, but at the same time they make the ideal more real and workable for general use.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by necessity of uniformity, which is so essential to discipline, but by the local or racial causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal, create division and exclusiveness whereas they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion and the people who use them would be well advised to abandon them. A telescope certainly helps in looking at things far in the heavens, but when its lens becomes so defective that instead of helping the naked eye it proves an actual hindrance in its way, then the telescope must be put aside.

It were such forms that Guru Nanak asked the Hindus to discard. The custom of taking food within cooking squares must have begun in the desire to eat in clean places, which is very desirable. But by the time of the Guru, it had become merely a sign of exclusiveness and had no reference to cleanliness. Similarly the caste-system must have grown out of the economic necessity to carry on their vocations

differently, but it became condemnable when it tied down certain people to a lower social position, simply because their forefathers had once been forced to submit to it. The sacred thread was also like a symbol of exclusiveness. Such forms only seared the spirit of religion in India and alienated the people from God. It was right, therefore, that the Guru should advise the people to destroy customs which made them forget God and set up barriers between man and man.

However, the Sikh forms were not conceived in any spirit of exclusiveness, or as something essential to the spiritual advancement of the individual soul.

They were simply appointed to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community and any man who liked to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth could wear them. It is possible for a man to love God and cultivate his individual soul without adopting these forms but if he wants to work in a systematic manner, not only for his own advancement but for the good of others as well as in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt these disciplinary forms of the organization. It is possible for a single wrestler to acquire bodily strength equal to that of four soldiers in uniform, but this cannot be used as an argument against the formation of armies and the use among them of uniforms and other such things for the promotion of joint action. If the same wrestler were to train and establish a band of stout men like himself for some set purpose, he would see that certain forms and signs, which he had originally worn as his simple requirements, begin to appear on his followers' dresses too, not as useless gewgaws, but helping maintain their *esprit de corps* and a pride in their work. Similarly Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality, find the uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization.

This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association and not through any inherent efficacy of the forms themselves. This association is not with places or things, but with an ever-living personality that itself is a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru: and as is the Guru so must be the follower. Wearing long drawers ensuring briskness of movement in times of action and serving as an easy underwear at times of rest; an iron ring on his right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint; and a sword by his side as an instrument of defence and as an emblem of power and dignity, the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined

soldier. He, however, combined in him the saintliness of the old *rishis* with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept long hair, which the world over has always been associated with saintliness. A comb was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These were the forms with which the Sikhs were invested at the time of their baptism, in order to look exactly like their Master, as they were required to behave exactly like him.

A study of the history of the Sikhs down the ages till the present, would reveal how effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows, have aided the members of the community in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest trial. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit among them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs and modes of worship. Rather, as history tell us, changes for the worse have always synchronized with the want of insistence on the baptismal vows. This was in the days of the Sikh rule, when luxury and power tempted our people to consider the vows to be too demanding for them. They lost their identity as Sikhs and became as superstitious about God and His worship as they had been before the time of the Guru. With modern revival the Sikhs have found themselves again and with the old faith in the efficacy of the baptismal vows they still believe that God is one and that there is no worship more pleasing to Him than the heartfelt singing of His hymns. All worship and ceremony, whether in temple or at home, whether on birth, marriage, or death, consists of nothing else but praying and chanting hymns. Could anything be simpler?

Some people while admitting the necessity of some forms in religion, do not approve of the particular forms in vogue and want the Panth to do away with them or invent some new ones in their place, which may be more suitable to the modern conditions of the society. This is a mere caprice, imported from the secular spheres of life, of ever-changing fashions. They ignore the universal fact that in religion whatever has once been accepted as an integral part of its constitution cannot be changed or dispensed with without changing or dispensing with the religion itself. This difference between social fashions and religious form is owed to the fundamental differences between the natures of their origin. Fashions originate with different generations each of which has got an equal authority with respect to others; therefore no one generation can bind another in the observance of a particular fashion. Each generation is competent enough to invent its own mode of dress or

behaviour. But in religion all obligations originate from its founder whose authority cannot be set aside except by himself or by a successor wielding equal authority jointly with him. In Sikhism any one of the ten Gurus, being equal with the others, was fully qualified to change or modify any rule set down by his predecessors; but after the tenth Guru, the supreme authority was divided and came to rest with the Panth and the collective teachings of the Gurus. The Panth is Guru only in conjunction with the teaching, and cannot be said to be the sole arbiter of its destiny. No Generation of Sikhs, therefore, is competent enough to supersede the authority of the word or any genuine dictum handed down by the Gurus.

Then is there no possibility of reform in religion? Yes, there is. You can reform the doctrines and the practices obtaining at a particular time by removing the unauthorized accretions which have gathered round the original core through the ignorance of the followers, but in each case you will have to show that you are not removing anything original, but only the unnecessary interruption made by others without the Founder's consent. The Sikhs, in the course of their recent reforms, have done away with such observances as the *shradhs*, *sutak*, *Janeu*, etc., because they were able to show, by referring to the original sources that these were unauthorized accretions and that Sikhism had nothing to do with them. But they cannot similarly effect reforms to the Holy Granth, or make any additions to it from the writings of the modern saints and holy men, although by doing so they may be apparently following the examples of the Gurus in making the Book more comprehensive and up-to-date. Similarly they cannot add a new Guru to the list of the original ten, nor withdraw their allegiance from any one of them. The position of the Sikh baptism and the baptismal forms is also equally uncompromising.

All the care that was needed was taken by the Gurus in order not to encumber their religion with unnecessary forms, but the few that they did find necessary to incorporate in the scheme of their religion are an essential part of the Sikhs' religious outfit and they can in no case dispense with them without going out of the pale of Sikhism. You may say that they are not as important as the belief in one God and other spiritual doctrines. But important they certainly are; and their importance, as shown already, lies in the help they provide in the maintenance of the Panthic organization, which is so essential a part of Sikhism. ☸

REVIEW OF THE Constitution of India

Safeguards for the Minorities



(Left to right) S. Tarlochan Singh, Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, Justice Kuldip Singh and Dr. S.P. Singh, Vice Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

An exhaustive review of the Constitution of India is the need of the hour because of the fast changing socio-economic and political scenario in the country. A *Constitution Review Commission* was appointed, in spite of politically motivated criticism from many quarters. The Constitution is not just a sacred book. It is an organic document charting out the path for good governance of the country. Whenever and wherever bottlenecks have occurred, these were sought to be removed by amendments to the Constitution. So much so, even Article 368 which lays down the procedure for amendment was also amended so as to make the system truly parliamentary! The constitution papers issued by the National Commission on the issues which relate directly to the healthy body politic and society are definitely positive signs on the terrain of deliberative debate. Amongst the august audience, those who are familiar with the contents of the papers must have known the determinate extent to which the Review Commission has braced itself to proceed.

Being Vice Chairman of the *National Minority Commission*,* I am present here in my personal capacity in this gathering of academic luminaries. My views are not to be taken as that of the Commission. I am concerned about the conditions of minorities in the country. The credit goes to the forefathers of the Constitution who created a secular State considering it as right rebuff to the plausibility of theocratic assumptions. Partition of the country was seen as a defeat of a secular nationalist vision. It seems as if social upheavals and disruptions had torn the nationalist fabric. The communal dragon poisoned the system with its extremely harmful fangs. Nationalist politics of the pre-independence days had lost its innocence and the Muslim League, with religion as the basis of politics and its leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah made religion as the basis of the country's tragic partition. Large-scale migration of populations took place on a religious basis. In such a communally surcharged atmosphere, drafting of a Constitution which pledged to make India "a secular and democratic republic" speaks greatly of the social concerns and vision of our forefathers. The concern for minorities stems from this commitment. Articles 25, 29 and 30 were incorporated in the Constitution as safeguards for the minorities. In 1978, the National Minority Commission was created and in 1992, the Commission was made a statutory body, standing as sentinel for the protection of minority rights.

However, in spite of these pious declarations and incorporations, India's minorities still lack a sense of confidence and security. The cultural and educational rights given them are not unconditional as they have not absolute rights in matter of admission to schools and colleges and in maintaining, managing and controlling their educational institutions. They do not feel free to enjoy and develop their belief, culture and language. Minorities should be understood as minorities in relation to the population of the country and not the state they are living in: Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and Parsis should be considered as minorities in every State or region of the country. In many states, the minority educational institutions have been denied minority status. It should have been obligatory on part of the Government to provide this certificate to all minority-run educational institutions. Various State Governments have taken different interpretations and in order to interfere in the management of institutions, took undue advantage of the grants-in-aid system for educational institutions. The interference by the

Education Departments in all these institutions has since become "order of the day". In certain cases even the courts have given different judgements. Protection to minority institutions which was guaranteed under Article 30, is far from reality. I plead before the Review Commission that some obligatory provision be incorporated in Article 30 so as to remove the confusion about this significant question.

I want to raise an important point before the learned Chairman and Members of the Constitution Review Commission, which concerns the Sikh community. There is no denying the fact that Hindus and Sikhs have common ancestors. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 in a Hindu family. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru, created the Khalsa in 1699 at Anandpur Sahib and by doing so, Sikhism was given a new and true identity. The Sikh religion, from that day on, became a separate religion, having a sovereign doctrinal identity and given independent status as a religion in the comity of the religions of the world. The Sikhs and Hindus have been living like brothers and always fought against a common enemy, particularly invaders from the North West and they suffered together at the hands of those marauding tribes. The fact is that there are some similarities between the two religions. At the time of Partition of India, they were jointly ousted from West Pakistan and millions of Hindus and Sikhs suffered terribly during that time. While the Constitution of India was being framed, our forefathers, because of some wrong impressions and keeping in view of the gory happening of Partition, considered Sikhs as a part of Hindus. While granting freedom to all religions in India, they clubbed Sikhs with the Hindus in Article 25 of Constitution. This diluted the independent identity of Sikhism without considering it being an independent religion. Under this Article, Explanation II it is mentioned,

"In sub-clause (b) of clause (2), the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jain or Buddhist religion and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly."

By reading this clause 2(b) and Explanation II of the Article it shows that the Members of the Constituent Assembly were not well conversant with the history of Sikhism, its tenets, traditions and culture. The clubbing in the clause certainly gave the wrong impression and this has been to the detriment of the Sikhs. It has falsely affected identity of the Sikhs and has put doubts on its independent

* S. Tarlochan Singh was elevated to Chairmanship in February 2003.

status as a separate religion. As mentioned earlier, there are some similarities between these two religions but **there is just no ground to club them together**. The Constitution of the country is the supreme law of the land and whatever is written there in is taken very seriously all over the world. Therefore, this Article has the potential of misleading people regarding the real status of the Sikhism as a religion. As a mark of protest then, two Sikh members in the Constituent Assembly, who were representing the Shiromani Akali Dal, being S. Hukam Singh and S. Bhupinder Singh Mann refused to put their signatures on the final draft of the Constitution of India. Recently, the High Court of Rajasthan gave a judgement in case of the Jain community which was granted minority status by the Rajasthan Government. The learned judges, quoting the clubbing of Jains with Hindus in Art. 25 debarred the Government in granting this status because "they are part of Hindu religion". I have a lurking fear that sometime or the other, similar may be fate of the Sikhs who are also clubbed, like Jains, in this clause with the Hindus.

There is another confusion created by the combined reading of Article 25 Clause 2(b) and explanation II to the Article thereof, which provides for the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of public nature to all classes of Hindus. This clause creates a very embarrassing situation, when the "Hindu" institution is substituted by the word "Sikh institution," thus as if the Sikh Institutions are not open to all classes of Sikhs and that Government assistance is required for that purpose. In a way, it also creates an impression of some untouchability in Sikhism, which is completely against its principles. It is a well known fact that from the very beginning, Sikh institutions have been open to all classes of people, not only Sikhs but of all other religions. Sikhism does not believe in any kind of distinction between caste, creed and gender. No one is stopped from entering the Gurdwara or any other Sikh institution on the basis of religion. That would be totally against the principles of Sikhism. The wording of this Article creates confusion, ignoring the history of Sikhism and the nature of its institutions. The Sikhs are also affected by other Acts such as the Hindu Code Bill, Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, etc.

It is desired that Sikhism should be harmoniously mentioned in the Constitution of India and other Laws as an **independent religion**, keeping in view its history, traditions and culture. When Sikhism is universally acknowledged as an independent religion, what is the point

of describing Sikhism in any other manner in the Constitution of India? The Constitution Review Commission must give proper justice to this simple and logical demand of the Sikhs.

It has been rightly argued that it is only the minorities who need protection and Article 30, besides some other Articles, is intended to afford and guarantee that protection. It may seem paradoxical, but it is nevertheless true that minorities can be protected only if they have equality but also, in certain circumstances have differential treatment. It would give them a sense of security and feeling of confidence. Special rights were designed to create equality because that was going to be their real effect. If minorities are empowered, it will strengthen the ideological plank of secularism, pluralism and multi-culturalism. It is also to be understood that genuine struggles for identity recognition are not to be confused with aggressive regionalism.

The minorities do not arouse much concern when they are politically marginalised, educationally backward, socially vulnerable and economically impoverished. Any emphasis upon safeguarding minority rights is defused by condemning it as minority appeasement. If one talks of minority rights, he or she is pejoratively labelled as communitarian and traditional. It is alleged that safeguards for the minorities and socially vulnerable groups are obstacles in the course of nation building. Quite injudiciously, centrism and cultural homogenisation has been equated with India's unity and integrity. Hence, there is emphasis on fighting "centrifugal tendencies" and not upon creating decentralised structures of political and economic power. The Constitution makers sought to cast Indian society and politics in the autonomous progressive and modernising mould. But that spirit has been lost at the altar of non-implementation. The minority rights guaranteed in the Constitution have not been fully implemented. The will to act on these is lacking. Keeping in view a socially and politically threatened scenario, the National Minority Commission – the sentinel of Minority rights – should be made an **effective body**. Role of the Minority Commission has increased with intensifying religious intolerance and the fundamentalists of various shades and hues getting bolder.

The minorities need token representation in the Legislative Councils. The Government of India has already a provision of nominating two Anglo-Indians in the Rajya

Sabha. It will be much better if a provision is made that in the list of nomination made by the Governors in their respective Legislative Councils, they include members of the minority communities in those States where they could not be elected to the Legislative Assemblies. This will provide a sense of satisfaction and pride, so becoming part of the legislative authority in the State.

Most communal tensions in the country have arisen because of the misunderstanding by some of the freedom of the individual to profess, practise and propagate his religion as prescribed under Article 25. It is not being rightly understood that the right to propagate gives the right to disseminate the tenets of his religion by advocacy or preaching, but would not include the right to convert. Taking the enormity of the problem, the Supreme Court had declared that conversion to another religion by means of force, fraud, inducement or allurement is a penal offence. Conversions offend 'public order, morality or health'. These are the three limitations upon the right to propagate. The framers of the Constitution were not aware of the misuse of the word propagate. I have observed that this malady has spread in various regions. The word "propagate" should be clearly defined so that one may not misuse it and tries to force his ideas upon others.

The need of the hour is to increase the ability of the state to accommodate pluralism, to eliminate hunger, to ensure the right to survival, universal and free elementary education, basic health care, good governance and giving voice to the disadvantaged and deprived. There is a need to make effective use of science and technology. Welfare of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes, women and debilitated sections is to be taken care of. It is an uncomfortable fact that our record in human development is quite dismal. Disparities of income are increasing. Human dignity, human security and human spirit which formed the bedrock of the Constitution right from the Preamble are not getting any priority. Hence the reordering of priorities is vital.

We have moved towards an era of national governments as broad coalition comprising socially heterogeneous and politically incompatible partners. This political reality has both positive and negative aspects. Positive because it is ascribed to participatory upsurge among the marginalised sections of Indian society and is a logical culmination of the democratic process resulting in the unfoldment and assertion of the India polity. It is negative because regional

formations do not remain confined to the regions which creates them. They start aspiring for a share in the power at the national level, definitely at the cost of unaccommodated ambitions of the people living in that region. There should be some constitutional mechanism by way of which regionalisation may not affect politics at the national level. Otherwise fissiparous tendencies will weaken the Indian nation. It should be understood that such tendencies would weaken the regional forces as well because their area of operation will grow unwieldy. Vote bank politics which leads to "ghetto" mentality and fragmentation of the social and political system is to be discouraged. Pocket boroughs are an undemocratic phenomenon.

Behaviour of certain parliamentarians, sometimes quite unbecoming of their representative status, is to be constitutionally dealt with. This has not only sullied the face of supreme institutions, but has cast doubts on its usefulness and efficacy as an institution. There is need to insert a clause in the Constitution on the ethics of the parliamentarians. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha has taken some remedial steps, but given the enormity of the situation, these may not suffice. Frequent resort to the stalling of normal proceedings in the House and too many no-confidence motions has cost the exchequer very dearly; similarly, the frequent holding of elections in a poor country like India just cannot be afforded.

Pledges made to the people of India have not been fully met. One dominant divide in the Indian society which we knew earlier, was the communal divide. It has been strengthened by the denial of one's mother tongue as well in many cases. To our dismay, the communal divide has been augmented by economic and caste divides. We find ourselves on the edge of a dangerous cliff. These divides, if not dealt with properly, will tear apart the socio-political fabric of the State. Deterioration is to be stemmed, there is no room for complacency. I am not sermonising the majority in just trying to highlight plight of the minorities in particular with the proviso that minorities also have a constitutional duty to contribute to the vitality of the nation. Rapidly sectarian agendas will create intractable situations for them. They should not lag behind in any National building programmes and must be part of the Nation in its entirety where prestige of the Nation is involved. Religion is always a uniting force and should remain so. ❧

Voice of the Minorities

"The Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment have reconstituted the Fourth Statutory National commission for Minorities headed by Hon'ble Chairman, S. Tarlochan Singh vide notification dated 7th February, 2003. The chairperson, vice chairperson and five members shall assume charge on Monday, the 10th February, 2003 at 11.30 am."



Thus read the release issued on 9 February 2003. However, Sardar Tarlochan Singh is long regarded as the voice of the minorities and being a Sikh, best represents the community and its status. The following is an extract of his most remarkable and recent achievements:

Since the torching of a train at Godhra railway station on 27 February 2002 in which 59 died and which was then followed by the pogrom, killing of nearly 1,000 minority persons in the state, there was absolutely no dialogue and no communication between the State Government officials and Muslim community activists. Both parties were shying away from talking to each other. For nearly 70 days, religious violence continued unabated in Gujarat but no initiative was taken and no effort was made by either party to begin a dialogue. It was the National Commission for Minorities and its then Vice Chairman, Sardar Tarlochan Singh who facilitated and mediated a meeting in Ahmedabad on 13 May 2002 amongst the high State Government officials, including the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Police Commissioner and the newly appointed Security Advisor to the Gujarat Chief Minister, Muslim leaders and VHP leaders. The meeting was presided over by Sardar Tarlochan Singh, who has the rank of Minister of State of the Government of India and a constitutional status. The meeting had the desired effect and led to mutual discussions which calmed and cooled the situation. Sardar Tarlochan Singh acted as a happy bridge between the State Government and the Muslims leaders to sort out and resolve the problems, grievances and issues arising from the terrible violence of 2002.

Two years earlier, when some churches were burnt in the states of Orissa, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and some priests and nuns attacked, Sardar Tarlochan Singh arranged dialogue between the RSS, VHP and Christian leaders. It resulted in the removal of many misunderstandings and calming down of the situation.

For the Sikh community, Sardar Tarlochan Singh has been able to get some really very remarkable achievements. According to the present Constitution, which came into force on 26 January 1950, the Sikhs have been governed as part of the common Hindu law. This description is not correct. Two Sikh members of the Constituent Assembly of India, which framed the Constitution, had tried their best to get incorporated in the Constitution that the Sikhs are a separate and distinct community and religion. But the framers of the

Constitution rode rough shod and did not accept such a genuine and the reasonable demand of the Sikhs. When the time for signing the Constitution came in November 1949, these two Sikh members of the Constituent Assembly and representatives of the community, being Sardar Hukum Singh, who later became Speaker of the Lok Sabha and later the Governor of Rajasthan, and Sardar Bhupinder Singh Mann, who later became a minister in the first Non-Congress State Government in India, in PEPSU, refused to sign the Constitution. Till today, over half a century later, the Constitution of India still remains without signatures of the Sikh members!

In 2001, the present BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee formed a Constitution Review Commission headed by a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India. The Commission has recently submitted its report to the Government of India, clearly enunciating that Sikhism is a separate, distinct and independent religion. The entire credit for this goes to Sardar Tarlochan Singh who presented the Sikh case to the Constitution Review Committee headed by Attorney General of India Soli Sorabjee on a number occasions. He pursued and argued the case diligently and succeeded in persuading and convincing the Commission about the separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs. Sardar Tarlochan Singh argued with the Commission that though the Sikhs had their origins in 1469, they had acquired their independent, separate and distinct identity in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh transformed Sikhism into the Khalsa Panth.

The RSS, VHP and other Hindu organisations have parrot-like been continuing to chant that the Sikhs are not really separate, distinct and independent but are a part of the Hindus. Sardar Tarlochan Singh arranged meetings with a high level 3-member panel of the RSS. With his persuasive reasoning and genuine approach, he convinced the RSS, the ideological parent of the ruling BJP, that Sikhism is a quite separate, independent and distinct religion of its own and a declaration to this effect was thus made by the RSS. It was for the first time that the apex Hindu organisation has publicly acknowledged this universal truth about Sikhism.

Two years earlier when the new state of Uttaranchal was to be carved out from Uttar Pradesh, the Sikhs living in Shaheed Udham

Singh district in the Terai area of UP wanted this district to be retained in the U.P. and not transferred to the new state of Uttaranchal. The Sikhs living in Udham Singh district, who had developed the hitherto swampy and disease-ridden land into productive lands with their hard labour, had apprehensions that since size of the land holdings in the new state of Uttaranchal would be small, the Sikhs of the district would not remain entitled to keep big land holdings. The demand of the Sikhs threatened to take the shape of an agitation, affecting the alliance of the BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal). It was again Sardar Tarlochan Singh who gave wise counsel to the Sikh community not to polarise the policy and suggested that the federal Government should publicly announce that the size of land holdings in the new state of Uttaranchal would not be curtailed so that the interests of the Sikh would be maintained. He also suggested that to support the morale of the Sikhs, a Sikh should be appointed as Governor. Accordingly, Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala was appointed to the new state of Uttaranchal.

In March 2000, 36 innocent Sikh men were brutally shot dead in Chhatti Singh Pura in the Kashmir valley, the very day the former U.S. President Bill Clinton began his historical visit to India. It was for the first time that Sikhs had been targeted in Kashmir. The Sikh community in Kashmir, on the whole, is well-to-do, religiously very devoted and dedicated and on very friendly terms with the majority, Muslim community. It is very rare to find a Kashmiri Sikh who is a patit. Realising the implications of forced migration, Sardar Tarlochan Singh was determined to prevent mass migration of Sikhs from Kashmir. He suggested some



With the President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.

preventive and corrective measures to the Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and held meetings with the Federal Akali Minister Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, which was also attended by J&K Chief Minister when it was decided that fullest security should be provided in the villages where the Sikhs resided. A Sikh MLA would be inducted in the Kashmir state cabinet, and employment opportunities be provided to the unemployed Sikh youth. S.Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, Dr.Farooq Abdullah and Sardar Tarlochan Singh then met Prime Minister Vajpayee with this formula, thus preventing possible mass migration of Sikhs from Kashmir. Prime Minister Vajpayee fully approved the suggested measures as he too was concerned about the fallout of Sikhs migrating from Kashmir as had the Kashmiri pandits. Soon, a Sikh minister was inducted in the Cabinet, Sikh populated villages got additional security and many unemployed Sikh youth were provided employment. The unstinted credit for these measures goes to Sardar Tarlochan Singh.

The first secular Government in the world was that of the Sikh ruler Sher-e-Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh some 200 years back. His Prime Minister was a Muslim, Finance Minister was also a Muslim, Army chief was a Sikh and another Minister a Hindu. Sardar Tarlochan Singh prepared an appropriate plan for celebrating the 200th year of the coronation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A national committee was formed under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, numerous functions organised at national and state level. That at Amritsar, addressed by Prime Minister Vajpayee, was attended by a congregation of 400,000 people. It was decided that a statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, on his horse, be installed in the Parliament House complex, New Delhi: all these efforts too were those of Sardar Tarlochan Singh.

Certain books published by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) for high school students in India were found to contain derogatory and baseless remarks about the Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Tegh Bahadur who gave his life for the protection of Hinduism. When this was brought to the notice of Sardar Tarlochan Singh, he immediately took up the matter and got those false and insinuating chapters expunged from the controversial books and the teaching of those portions of the books banned.

Sardar Tarlochan Singh has worked along with the highest leaders of the land all his life and is the closest Sikh to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. He was Press and Public Relations Advisor to the former President of India, Gyani Zail Singh, for five years. There is no political, social and religious leader "who matters" in India whom he does not know or to whom he is not known. He has very friendly relations with the media, is dynamic, imaginative, very resourceful, and perhaps the most sought-after person for information, advice, consultation and guidance. ●



S. Tarlochan Singh with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at Gurdwara Dera Sahib, at Lahore.

OVER 90 - and going strong!



Fauja Singh's Marathon

Fauja is a great grandfather with members of his extended family living in Italy, Canada, India and, of course the UK. He has 4 (out of six) children, 13 grand children and 5 great grand children.

Since joining his son and his family in the UK during the early nineties and then losing his wife, Fauja felt he needed to fulfill a purpose in life - an unfinished business so to speak. Thus he started to increase his fitness work (mainly running) which he used to enjoy and was good at earlier in his life (before the Second World War).

Fauja took great pleasure in participating in the annual series of Sikh sporting events held up and down the country in the summer, marking the martyrdom of the Fifth Sikh Guru (Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji). At such events Fauja challenged other pensioners to 100m sprints and increased the distance to 200m or even 400m if he felt that the opposition looked capable of it or too strong for the shorter distance. This encouraged him to look for longer distances to run and recreate successes of his earlier days when in India he used to run up to 10 kilometres (cross country) through villages and fields.

As Fauja sees it, after a short break (53 years!) he decided to try for the marathon distance having seen coverage of

major athletics events on British television. By the time he realised there was the possibility of a prestigious one (the Flora London Marathon) on his doorstep, he had missed the closing date by four months. His constant search for a way to still take part was noted by a number of people in his home town (Ilford, in London's Borough of Redbridge) who put him in touch with Harmander Singh who was well known locally for his involvement in numerous community activities and his passion for running marathons in fancy dress to raise monies for UK-based charities.

Harmander not only managed to put Fauja in touch with BLISS (as Fauja said he wanted to help those least able to help themselves and his love for life and children best represented that) to secure a *Golden Bond* place for Fauja but offered to train him in the 10 weeks that remained before the big day.

Harmander started to assess the work to be done by inviting Fauja to a steady run for as long as Fauja could manage a forward moving motion that could pass for running and then proceeded to write a daily work programme covering a week until the following Sunday. On that Sunday Fauja's progress was noted with

Harmander marking out and getting Fauja to agree to weekly targets in terms of mileage. Fauja maintained this training regime with Harmander accompanying him once a week but the terrain chosen was a one and a quarter mile laps around two schools where only about the quarter mile was flat, the rest being a long hill (going up) and a shorter downhill stretch. The first week saw Fauja complete four laps before the 3½ mile run home as a warm down. Each week the number of even pace increased (17 minutes a lap) before the long warm down run home. Harmander made it easier for Fauja by carrying the water bottles for both of them and suggesting the regular intake.

As Fauja seemed to get a kick out of being recognised, Harmander used his extensive networks (in conjunction with Jackie Glazebrook at BLISS) to publicise Fauja's achievements and aspirations through the media.

At the age of 89, Fauja ran his first marathon with the clock showing a time of 6 hours and 54 minutes.

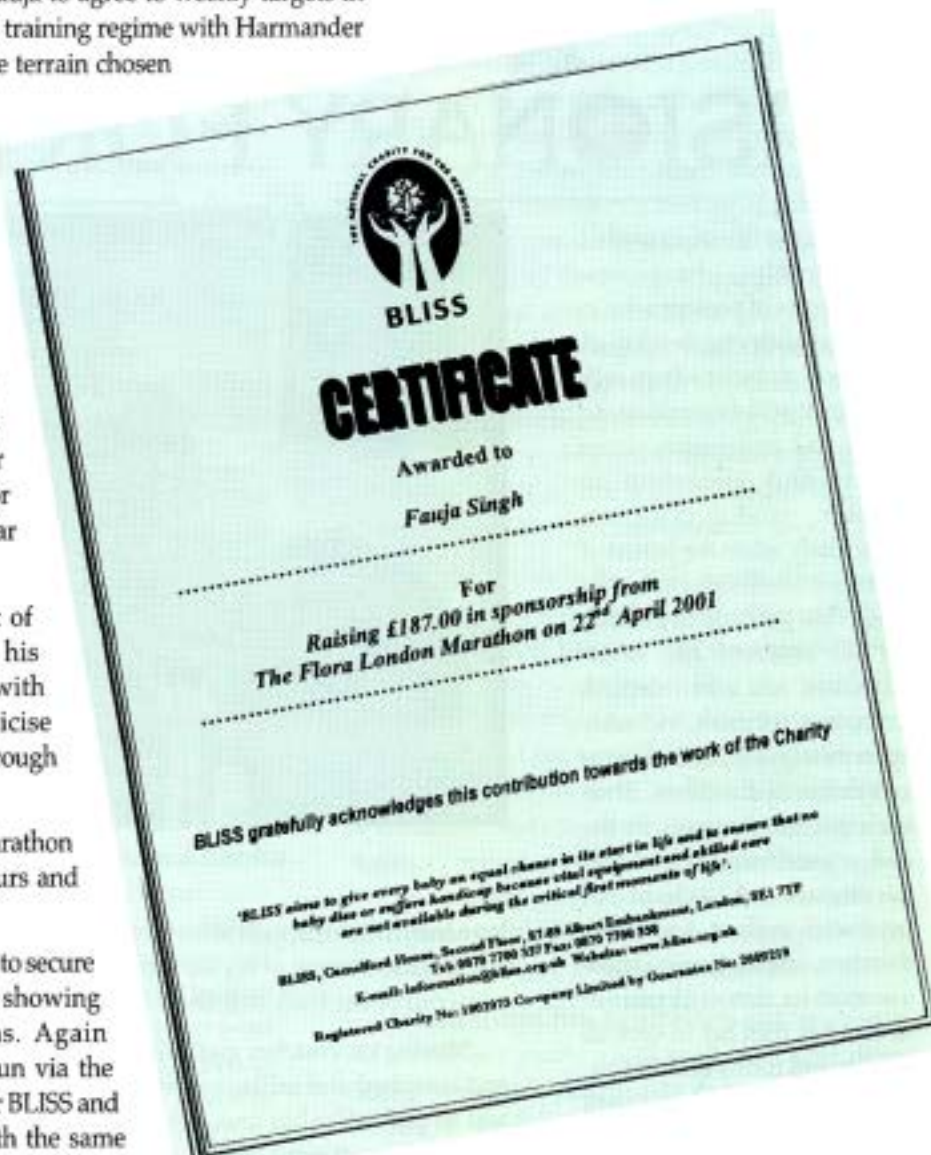
The following year Fauja was unable to secure a place through the lottery and was showing extreme signs of withdrawal pains. Again Harmander ensured he was able to run via the *Golden Bond* scheme - raising monies for BLISS and Age Concern. He finished the race with the same time showing on the clock as the previous year despite only having eight weeks of training, but this time it was a world best for the men in the 90+ age category, knocking off a staggering 58 minutes of the previous best.

Out of habit for the third consecutive year, Fauja was unable to secure a place through the lottery but BLISS were able to offer a *Golden Bond* place to Fauja and after 9 weeks training with Harmander, Fauja at the age of 91 took off a further 9 minutes from his own previous best by completing the Flora London Marathon in 6 hours 45 minutes and 31 seconds!

A typical training week for Fauja (starting Sunday) would mean getting up at 6 am with breakfast comprising of light toast with glucose rich syrup and tea, after having had a small portion of yogurt. Fauja is driven to the training location by his son having picked up his trainer on the way. After a five minute warm up they start at 7am and complete the predetermined number of laps come rain or shine before setting off home where a five

minute warm down stretch and relax session sees Fauja go in for a warm bath (while Harmander runs a further mile to his home). Fauja would then have lunch and set off on a short (4 mile) walkabout to his local Gurdwara and then on to his son's business a few miles away from where he scrounges a lift back home. During the week, Fauja would go for his daily longer walkabout in town (7 miles) in addition to his shorter (8 mile) runs on alternate days until its Sunday again.

Fauja is looking forward to the hustle and bustle of the Flora London Marathon 2003 and is hoping to set new records as a British Sikh. ☯



A Woman of VISIONARY FORTITUDE

In my long life of extended relationships, I have come across scores of persons who in the face of suffering develop all manner of attitudes – from self-pity and self-laceration to anger and aggression, from retreat and alienation to disdain and cynicism, particularly when the period of pain becomes interminably long. This perhaps is natural, for all sentient life seeks happiness and when denied, turns, in most cases, viciously upon its own self, or in diverse and dubious directions. Thus such persons become, in the end, masochists, sadists and paranoiacs. A school of psychotics, in short. And when, therefore, one happens to know a woman for almost 65 years or so and has seen her in various aspects and forms of suffering, it would be something very odd or singular to say that not only has she worn *the crown of thorns* with dignity, but also with grace.

As she happens to be a very dear cousin in a clan overflowing with *dramatis personae*, my sentiment, I trust, has a very personal edge. For to have seen her graduate from a childhood affliction (polio in this case), to a state of home saintliness amidst long spells of hospitalisation, operations, injuries, losses etc is to have seen blessedness in human flesh and frame. And I often marvel at her deep wells of



Brij Mohan Kaur, the woman of visionary fortitude.

humanity. It is to capture something of that ambience that I have ventured to touch her spirit in the evening of my life when my own condition rebukes me continually to take a leaf out of her book of ordeals and fortitude.

Moving on crutches and calipers, in wheel-chairs and walkers, she has managed and exercised and calibrated her consciousness into a fine instrument of compassion and empathy. She has thus, sublimated her suffering and instead of receiving, she has given away vast sums of love, understanding, charity and succor to all those in need of warmth, closeness and counsel. Not wonder, dear *Bua*, as she is lovingly called by all around her, is, in that household on the 5th floor tower in New Delhi, a figure of adoration. And not only does she supervise the day-to-day cooking in a house full of guests, daily shopping and washing chores, she also serves as the family's telephone directory, monitor and manager, keeping a watchful but benign eye over the proceedings.

Is it surprising, then, that a woman maimed in the cradle and unable to join school, and hurt again and again in the long quest for learning, ended up with a Master's degree in Punjabi, and with a mastery over brush and paint? One has to see her series of panel-paintings on the life of Guru Nanak and the family portraits in oil and the water-colours in celebration of nature's bounties of wind and water, of fowl and flower, to realise the nature of her splendid personality. A couple of her paintings adorn the walls of a state Raj Bhavan. God, it appears, endowed her so richly so as to compel one to ponder over the ways of Providence.

No, my tale of her prodigious talents is not done as yet. For there is many another facet and form of her creativity, many another dimension and direction. Believe it or

not, almost the entire wardrobe in that big family that plays host to scores of cousins, nephews and nieces for weeks is the handiwork of dear *Bua* who, when she's not singing or praying or reciting *bani* is, hour after hour, designing, cutting, tailoring, stitching or embroidering and knitting, whatever you can think up of – from the lounge suits and men's designer shirts to



Panel paintings by Brij Mohan Kaur, on the Janam Sakhis of Guru Nanak Dev ji.

women's wedding dresses and lingers, children's frocks and jeans and sweaters, sofa-seats and covers and quilts and covers and quilts and what have you! It is an affluence of the imagination on a scale hard to imagine. And imagine, there is never a frown, a hint of annoyance or a sign of fatigue even when her sore and aching bones set up a silent litany of pain! I make bold to aver that I have yet to see a human face so wonderfully lit up from within when a body is under an unending siege. I would go on to add that in converting her disabilities into a sum of enviable positives, she has proved that such spirits fed on manna and dew and honey are commissioned to go far afield – away from the cage of constraints and contingencies – and show to the world a whole new range of possibilities, of endeavour and *nirvana*. For in her *joie de spirit* I see a transparent code, a Whitmanian song of life that seeks a passage to eternity whatever the nature of the roadblocks and the distant horizons. Living under her eminent surgeon-brother's roof, she has learnt to heal others with the perfume of her personality.

The metaphor of the road reminds me that the much sought after *Bua* has twice flown to England, seen the lush English countryside with its dreaming spires and mossed cottages in car-rides, and in her wheel-chair, visited the shining malls and plazas, always returning home from her adoring niece's home laden with English airs, all, all enlarging her vision and her spirit.

Though the transparency of her boundless generosity is visible in her word and style, it is more wonderfully in action when it comes to dealing with the household young maids, village girls

from the Punjab countryside living, working and flowering under her gentle eye. Not only does she keep a mother's vigilance and watchfulness to ward off adventurers and prowlers in that high tower, but also a tender regard for their orientation, schooling, and grooming. No wonder, when they leave finally to get married, they carry a new air of metropolitan culture and, of course, new dreams. What is more dear *Bua* keeps all their wages, tips, gifts etc intact, fully accounted for, and adds a fairly generous amount to their wedding wardrobe expenses. And when they leave one by one to be replaced by their kin, they cry, their hearts overflowing with love and gratitude. Dispensing radiance and warmth and light, then, is her nature, a talent for dear life, even in the midst of her own creature miseries.

But no self-pity in that stoic figure. And if some friend, visitor or relation happens unfortunately to commiserate with her, you can see a gentle frown forming on her wide brow. No, she would be affronted if any one touched that raw nerve, or, indeed, touched her sense of dignity and propriety. She has, she affirms, lived as fully and joyfully as her condition and circumstances permitted her to do. A deeply religious woman, she learnt long ago to live in complete resignation in consonance with the Sikh scriptural edict of *bhiana*, acceptance of dispensation with a sweet reasonableness.

At least some Chandigarh elders and neighbours still recall her yearly visits to us and have never ceased to marvel at the quality of her character. For wherever she happens to be, there's an aura of geniality and generosity around her. And she leaves us all richer for her intuitive, organic goodness – the goodness of milk and corn and honey, of music, laughter and sunshine.

To conclude, I may sum up this story of a troubled, but dream-touched big heart as a modern fable with a moral for all those who, caught in a vice of tormenting thought soil their spirit, are unable to *humanise* their sorrows, unable to extend largesse and understanding. A picture of visionary fortitude, she stands out as a symbol of character triumphing over crippling disabilities. Fortitude helps develop one's moral muscles, and in her bent figure on the crutches I see the writ of God.

As Cambell puts it, *to bear is to conquer our fate.* ☪

Darshan Singh Maini

SIKHISM and Critical Theory

Workshop & Conference at Hofstra University, New York



Nassau county executive Hon. Tom Gullota with members of the Bindra Family and Dr. Arvind-pal Singh Mandair at inauguration dinner.

Hofstra University of Hempstead, New York hosted a workshop-conference on "Sikhism and Critical Theory" on 13 and 14 September 2002. The event was organised by Dr. Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, who holds the Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Chair in Sikh studies at Hofstra. The conference was attended by scholars, students and researchers in the field of Sikh studies, as well as by members of the American Sikh community. Participants and speakers came from all over the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, as well as Japan.

The growth of the Sikh community in Northern America and Western Europe over the last two decades has seen the emergence of new intellectual demands for a Sikh studies agenda in the English-speaking countries. There is growing recognition that discourse on the Sikh experience should be made more mainstream, creating greater dialogue with the community, rather than staying within the margins of academia.

The conference introduced new ways of thinking and interpreting the contemporary Sikh experience so that one could be critical on certain issues without relinquishing one's commitment to the Sikh culture and religion. The engagement with Critical Theory helped to present Sikh thought and Sikh experience as not only relevant, but in contributing to current debates on globalisation, religion and politics.

The workshop was followed by a Public Forum session. During the session, the three speakers (T. Sher Singh, Dr. I. J. Singh and Davinder Singh) reflected on the views and experience of Sikh communities in Canada, New York and the United Kingdom respectively. They provided fascinating presentations and stressed the need to establish stronger links between the university and the Sikh community.

In his concluding keynote speech, Professor Christopher Shackle (pro-Director of the University of London, SOAS) gave a lucid and fascinating overview of the evolution of modern Sikh studies "from its beginnings with the pioneering work of the Singh Sabha scholars, to more contemporary developments in North America and the United Kingdom".

The debates and discussions throughout the workshop were very lively and informative. This was the second conference to be held at Hofstra University under the auspices of the Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies since the programme was established in September 2000. It is anticipated that such conferences and programmes involving academic scholars and community activists in a continuing and ongoing dialogue, will become a regular feature at Hofstra University.

The Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies

is endowed by Mr. Ishar Singh Bindra and family in honour of Mr. Bindra's wife and family matriarch, Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra. The Chair is established to promote the academic study of Sikh religion, culture and history and supports the appointment of a faculty member in Sikh Studies, build the University Library's holdings in Sikhism, provide scholarship assistance to students interested in Sikh religion and culture and fund annual conferences and lectures directed toward the academic community as well as the general public.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bindra were born in Western Punjab, now part of Pakistan. After completing a distinguished career as a senior telecommunications engineer in India, Mr. Bindra and his wife, Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra, immigrated to the United States in 1979. Along with their sons, Mr. Bindra established an import/export business in the garment industry and under his astute management, the Jeetish Group of Companies has evolved into a successful, diversified enterprise with interests in apparel, commodities, real estate and hotels.



Sardarni & Sardar Ishar Singh Bindra with Dr. James Stuart at signing ceremony.

Ishar Singh Bindra is a founder-trustee of *The Sikh Forum* of New York and senior vice president of the *Sri Hemkunt Foundation*. He has a rich and continuous record of accomplishments in community affairs and has been a leading supporter of various humanitarian endeavours. He was honoured by the *Nargis Dutt Memorial Foundation*, a nonprofit organisation devoted to the support of medical facilities in India. He is also the first Indian to be honoured as "Humanitarian of the Year" by the *Interfaith Nutrition Network*, a nonprofit organisation serving the hungry and homeless.

Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra, an individual of great personal warmth and exemplary kindness, has placed education at the core of the Bindra family's values. Mrs. Bindra was so devoted to the education of her seven children that she sold her personal jewelry to allow them to attend the finest schools. She takes great pride in the fact that all of her children have distinguished themselves as professionals dedicated to Sikh values. For Mr. and Mrs. Bindra, the establishment of an Endowed Chair to promote the study of the Sikh religion is a natural outgrowth of their lifelong dedication to the propagation of educational values.

Sikhism and Critical Theory Workshop Programme of Events

Friday September 13

Panel 1 : Diaspora (Chair Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair)

Panelists: Sunit Singh (University of Chicago) and Sabina Sawhney (Hofstra University)

Ajit K. Mann (University of Oregon) : *Narrative Nomads and Post-Colonial Perspectives: A Sikh Perspective*

Brian Axel (Swarthmore College) (i) *Diasporic Sublime* and (ii) *Fanatic, or, the Withdrawal of Critical Theory*

Vrinder Kalra (Manchester University) *Locating the Sikh Pagh: Missing Identity or Mis-Identity*

Panel 2: Religion (Chair: Warren Frisina)
Panelists: Paula Goncalves (SOAS) and Sunit Singh (University of Chicago)

Arvind-pal S. Mandair (Hofstra University) *Transcendence and Singh Sabha Theology: Redefining the Terms of the "Critical"*

Balbinder Bhogal L. James Madison University) *Questioning Hermeneutics: The Difference of Non-Dual Interpretation in Gurbani*
Navdeep Singh Mandair (SOAS, University of London) *Between Bodies: The Imminence of Khalsa Identity*

Gurnam Singh (Coventry University, UK) *Critical Perspectives on the Emancipatory Discourses of Sikhism*

Saturday September 14

Panel 3. Politics (Chair: Gurcharan Singh)
Panelists: Richard King (University of Derby) and Margaret Abraham (Hofstra University)

Gurharpal Singh (Birmingham University, UK) *Rethinking the Political: Sikhism and Critical Theory*

Giorgio Shani (Ritsumeikan University, Japan) *Beyond Westphalianism: Sikh Diasporic Nationalism and the International Order*

Jasdev S. Rai (S.H.R.G.) *The U.N. and Internal Conflicts: A Case Study of the Sikhs*

PUBLIC FORUM Speakers: T. Sher Singh, Davinder Singh, Dr. I. J. Singh

Keynote Speaker: Christopher Shackle (F.B.A.)

Closing remarks: T. J. Bindra

Dr.Arvind-pal Singh Mandair

On 7 September 2000, at a ceremony at Hofstra University, Dr.Arvind-pal Singh Mandair was installed as its first *Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra Chair* in Sikh Studies in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in the Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Establishment of the Chair was made possible by the generous gift of Mr.Ishar Singh Bindra and family of Brookville, New York. An endowed chair is one of the highest honours a faculty member may receive from an institution of higher education.

In addition to establishing the endowed chair, the endowment from the Bindra family permits the University to expand its library holdings in Sikh Studies, offer annual scholarships to students interested the study of Sikh religion and culture and convene conferences and lectures on matters of interest to the academic and general communities. Hofstra University, host to a student body drawn from more than 50 countries, offers a curriculum rich in cultural diversity, including a wide array of study abroad programmes.

Dr.Mandair was born in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, but had previously lived in England since he was 3 years of age. He holds a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Aston University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Warwick. He also holds a B.Sc.Honours degree in Chemistry from Warwick, awarded First Class.

After having established himself successfully in the field of science, Dr.Mandair switched his profession to the study of Sikh religion and retrained in philosophy, theology and post-colonial theory, focusing on the study of Sikhism and Indian religions. He then joined the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London where he worked as a research fellow in the Department of the Study of Religions.

Dr.Mandair has worked extensively with the Sikh community in the United Kingdom, and has planned to launch a magazine led by a team of young Sikhs in the British university sector, where he received his own education.



Sardar & Sardarni Ishar Singh Bindra alongwith members of the Bindra family with Dr. James Shuart (President Hofstra University) and other officials of the Hofstra University at signing ceremony establishing The Sikh Chair.



Hon. Donna Ferraro presenting the proclamation from Governor George Pataki to Sardar & Sardarni Ishar Singh Bindra.

As the second conference to be held at Hofstra University under the auspices of the Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies, "Sikhism and Critical Theory" was a great success on many accounts. The conference was attended by scholars, students and researchers within and outside the field of Sikh studies, as well as by members of the American Sikh community who came to attend this event from as far away as California and Ottawa (Canada).

Before the conference, relatively few people had any real idea of what "Critical Theory" was, let alone its relationship to Sikhism and Sikh studies. By the end of the conference, however, most people attending the conference had witnessed the making from the unavoidable encounter between Sikhism and Critical Theory. In its broadest sense Critical Theory refers quite simply to an important and

contemporary mode of thinking within the humanities and social sciences that overtakes the previous emphasis on "methodology". As many agree the former preoccupation with methodology ensured that much of the discourse about Sikhs and Sikhism was overshadowed by Eurocentrist and Orientalist thinking, which has consigned Sikh experience and the experience of *Sikhi* to the margins of academic discourse.

The conference introduced new ways of interpreting and thinking about traditional Sikh categories and contemporary Sikh experience so that one could be self-critical without relinquishing one's commitment to the Sikh culture and religion. The engagement with Critical Theory helped to present Sikh thought and categories of Sikh experience as not only relevant, but as actively contributing to cutting edge debates in globalisation, religion and politics. The level of debate throughout the workshop was of an extremely high order. Possibly for the first time, controversial topics such as the future of Sikh politics and education were discussed and debated in a manner such that it was possible to disagree without becoming disagreeable, which has been something of a rarity in Sikh conferences!

In a fascinating keynote speech, Professor Christopher Shackle (pro-Director of the University of London, SOAS) gave a wonderfully lucid overview of the evolution of modern Sikh studies from its beginnings in the pioneering work of the Singh Sabha scholars, to more contemporary developments in North America and the United Kingdom. ☺

Hofstra University is a private, liberal arts institution founded in 1935. It is located on suburban Long Island, 25 miles east of New York City, holds



32 national and regional accreditations and has a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. The Hofstra libraries contain 1.6 million volumes and are fully computerised. The current student population is comprised of 8,000 full-time undergraduate and 5,000 part-time and graduate students. Hofstra's 240-acre campus is a registered arboretum and an accredited museum.

My Courage of Conviction

Whether we like to admit it or not, external appearances play an important role in our initial perception of a person. These include characteristics such as the person's colour, race, mode of dressing and manner of speech. All these combine to create an image which is frequently negative if that person differs in any manner from the norm.

I was born into the Sikh religion that was formed in 1469 in northern India in the continent of Asia. Among its various practices, the religion emphasises the adoption of uncut hair that should be tied up and worn in a turban. Since many Sikhs live in India, the religion and its practice does not pose as a problem - at least it did not until 1984 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by a Sikh. This incident set off riots which triggered persecutions against Sikhs causing immense death and terror. At the time of these riots, many Sikhs were shorn of their hair to avoid identification.

During and after the riots, I started questioning my faith and my beliefs which I had been brought up to accept. I started wondering whether or not I would ever cut my hair. What was the price I would be willing to pay for my hair? I was scared and terrified of the mobs and what they could do to me. Would I risk my life for my faith or would I stand behind my beliefs? Questions which I fortunately, never had to answer. I was kept safe and secure in my home.

As the years passed and everything started getting back to normal, tragedy struck. My father passed away because of colon cancer. My mother, sister and I moved to California to live with my grandparents and then the dilemma started all over again. Living in a foreign country and following a religion that is completely different and mystical to my peers is hard. It was here in United States where I faced my toughest decision, whether or not to cut my hair. I only had a limited time to think about my choices since school was starting and the decision had to be made before that. My family was very supportive. Even my religious grandfather said that he would support me in any decision that I chose to make. I spent days thinking about what to



do. I asked myself what my father would have wanted me to do? What would make my mother and family happy? After days of pondering I realised that it made no difference what other people thought. The decision was entirely up to me. I had to decide what to do and then I had to live with my decision.

I thought about all the reasons for which I would want to keep my hair. I am religious and this practice is a part of me. It gives me strength and convictions in my beliefs and if I did not have the courage to keep my hair, then in the future, I could not see myself having the courage to do anything else that I believed in. It is my life and I chose to live it in the way in which I would be happy and proud.

Standing by my convictions was extremely tough in Junior High School where being different is a stigma, but I managed to pass through that stage quite successfully. High School was a lot easier and the term "Smurf" took on a friendly, lighthearted connotation. It was no longer used as a put down. It represented me and my personality of which I am immensely proud.

My decision changed my outlook on life. It made me realise that I was different and that being different was great! I have learned a lot from my experiences. They have made me into a much more understanding, compassionate yet a strong individual all for which I am so very glad. I know that this will enable me to face greater challenges in the future with greater confidence.

I am glad that I had the courage to be who I am. ☸

Chanbir Singh Dhirra

[This young Sikh living in the United States of America wrote this essay for his school there]

Duties of a Sikh Mother as told to

ANITA DELGADO

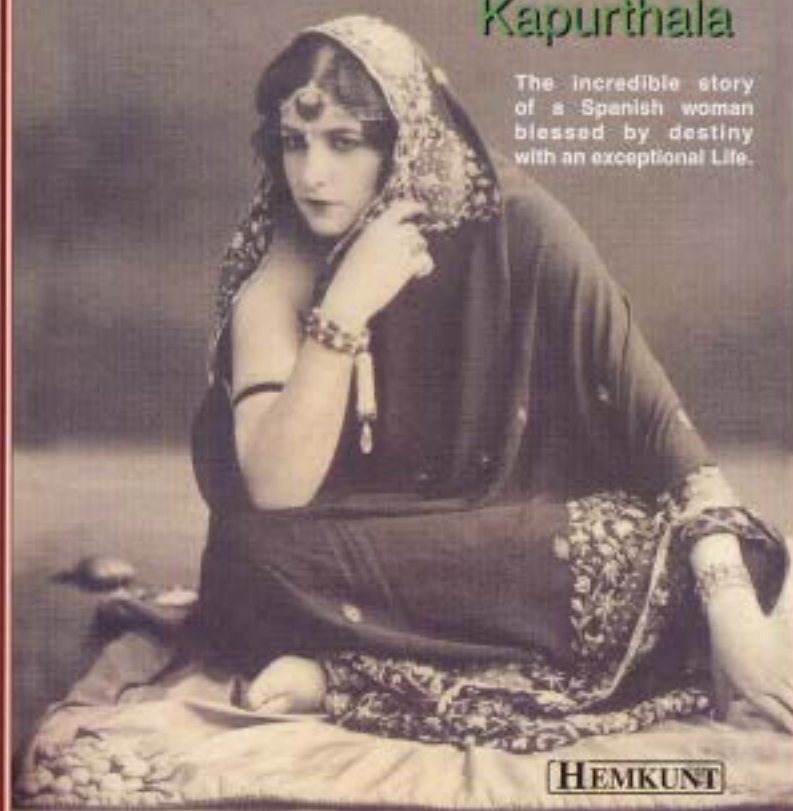
The Spanish Maharani of Kapurthala

ELISA VÁZQUE DE GEY

ANITA DELGADO

Maharani of
Kapurthala

The incredible story
of a Spanish woman
blessed by destiny
with an exceptional life.



Excerpt from the book by Elisa Vasquez de Gey

"..... with my baby only forty days old, we undertook a trip to the Holy City of Amritsar.

The royal procession from Kapurthala travelled festively and ostentatiously in a convoy of elephants and Rolls all the way to Amritsar, a distance of sixty kilometres. There, the Golden Temple priests gave him the name *Ajit*, which is equivalent to the French Ives, and the surname

Singh, which is the surname that all Sikhs bear and which confers on them, according to their belief, moral strength throughout their lives.

Furthermore *Ajit*, as a good Sikh, was required to follow the five precepts of his religion, and I myself would have the responsibility of seeing that they were zealously respected until the day he could follow them himself.

In order to avoid any irreparable omission His Highness decided to write down for me the list of Sikh precepts. He did this in his own hand, performing this task in a curious blank book specially produced for this purpose. I have it with me now. It is blue-lined book bearing Kapurthala's coat of arms engraved with gold on the cover, its interior is written in the perfect hand of the Maharaja who, using fussy French, explains to me how important it is never to forget my recently acquired duties as a Sikh mother.

made of animal bone for the purpose of arranging his hair under the turban. This will train him in cleanliness and order. This exercises his patience. This must be fulfilled. And this shall be called KANGA.

- ❖ Prem Kaur, Maharani of Kapurthala will ensure that His Royal Highness the Prince Ajit Singh will always wear the white trousers, long and narrow that Sikhs have inherited from their ancestors. They were courageous warriors who fought for freedom. This will be in their memory and he will do this with



H.E. Mr. Don Alberto Escudero, the Spanish Ambassador to India, releasing the book published by Hemkunt Publishers in New Delhi.

This is what it says :

- ❖ Prem Kaur, Maharani of Kapurthala will ensure that nobody ever cuts one single hair from His Royal Highness the Prince Ajit Singh's body. His hair must be tied and knotted at the top of his head and covered by a turban. His beard when it grows will be combed vertically and tied to the same knot with the rest of his hair. This must be fulfilled and it will give him strength and discipline. And this shall be called KESH.
- ❖ Prem Kaur, Maharani of Kapurthala will ensure that His Royal Highness the Prince Ajit Singh will always wear, throughout his life, the solid iron hoop that from the day of baptism is about his wrist. As the Prince grows the bracelet will be replaced by a larger one. This will give him courage, tenacity and bravery in the face of adversity. This must be fulfilled. And this shall be called KARAH.
- ❖ Prem Kaur, Maharani of Kapurthala will ensure that His Royal Highness the Prince Ajit Singh will always carry with a comb

pride. This will train him in cleanliness and order. This will exercise his patience. This must be fulfilled. And this shall be called KACHHA.

- ❖ Prem Kaur, Maharani of Kapurthala will ensure that His Royal Highness the Prince Ajit Singh will always wear all his life, between his belt and his Kachha, the dagger of protection that the good Sikh must carry at all times. This will protect him and will help him when the day of liberation arrives. This must be fulfilled. And this shall be called KIRPAN.

Kesh, Karah, Kanga, Kachha and Kirpan are the five precepts that every Sikh must fulfil. All five start with the letter K, which also the initial of the word KHALSA which means the "pure" in Urdu. This name and this language define the Sikh nation populated by courageous men of the warrior caste, a nation that extends from the basins of the five rivers that cross the Punjab." ❖

Sikhs and The Rights of Women

It is most timely that this Journal dedicated its previous issue to the "Sikh Vision of Womanhood", highlighting the character and achievements of their piety, faith and truth. The women's nobleness in the *Guru Granth Sahib* is infinite, her freedom is of the highest. In that issue were included the article "Pure Longing", by Gurukirn Kaur of Phoenix, and Petitions to the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib from Harpritam Kaur of New York plus that from Rajinder Kaur of Kuala Lumpur. The behaviour of SGPC employees at the Darbar Sahib on 13 February 2003 is lamentable and completely against the principles of the *Sikh Reht Maryada*.

ENFORCE SIKH WOMEN'S RIGHT TO DO SEWA AT DARBAR SAHIB JI, AMRITSAR

To:

- The President, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)
- Members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.
- President – Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (DGPC)
- President – Patna Sahib Parbandhak Board
- President – Hazoor Sahib Board
- President – Chief Khalsa Diwan Amritsar.
- American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.
- Management Committees of All Gurdwaras Around the World.

Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji ki Fateh

We the undersigned urge the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to fully implement the principles of Gurmat in all respects and in particular with regard to the provision of equal rights to Sikh women.

The failure by the SGPC to fully implement Gurmat principles, which are reiterated in the *Sikh Reht Maryada*, has led to the perpetuation of non-Sikh practices at Sri Darbar Sahib Ji, the theo-political centre of the Sikhs.

The observance of non-Sikh practices at Darbar Sahib Ji has led to the erosion of the principles of *Sikhi* as pronounced in the *Sikh Reht Maryada* and threatens the religious injunctions of Sikhism as ordained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

This petition seeks to redress the right of Sikh women to undertake all forms of seva at Sri Darbar Sahib Ji and at all other Gurdwaras.

The denial of Sikh women's right to undertake all types of sewa at Sri Darbar Sahib Ji has continued despite the following:

- ♦ The SGPC's Religious Advisory Committee passed a resolution on 9 March 1940 to allow amritdhari Sikh women to perform *kirtan* inside Sri Darbar Sahib Ji;
- ♦ On 9 February 1996 the Jathedar Akal Takht (along with four other Singh Sahibans) directed the SGPC to allow Sikh

women to perform seva at Darbar Sahib Ji following a petition from the Sikh sangat.

- ♦ In 2002 the Sikh Sangat again petitioned the SGPC and the Akal Takht to implement the 1996 Sikh religious leaders' directive on the Sikh women's right to do seva (see www.voicesforfreedom.org).

This issue came to a head on 13 February 2003 when two amritdhari Sikh women, Mejjindarpal Kaur and Lakhbir Kaur from the United Kingdom, were refused the right to participate in the *Sukhasan Sahib* procession at Darbar Sahib Ji. The following day they lodged a complaint with the Akal Takht Jathedar and the SGPC seeking an immediate restoration of the right of Sikh women to undertake all types of seva at Darbar Sahib Ji.

We hope that the SGPC will be expedient by taking immediate steps to ensure that Sikh women can undertake all forms of seva at Darbar Sahib Ji and all Sikh religious institutions. This will inspire confidence and set an example for the Sikhs at the Punjab, India and in the Sikh Diaspora, who take great pride and honour in upholding the *Sikh Reht Maryada*.

However, if this anti-Gurmat practice is allowed to continue, the Sikh sangat will be compelled to gather at the Akal Takht and demand the implementation of the Gurmat practices, which are reiterated in the *Sikh Reht Maryada*, and the resolution passed on 9 March 1940 and the directive issued on 9 February 1996.

ISSUED BY:

- Voices For Freedom
- United Sikhs
- Kaur Foundation
- F.A.T.E.H.
- Oxford and Cambridge Sikh Alumni Association

- Sikh Youth of America
- Sikh Secretariat
- The Sikh Coalition
- Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE)
- Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART).

This petition is sponsored by the above organisations.

To add your organisation to show support for this case send email to join@voicesforfreedom.org

Resolutions of Concerned Sikhs

THE SIKH FORUM AT NEW DELHI ...

At a joint meeting of the *Sikh Forum* and Delhi Chapter of the *Sikh Core Group* in New Delhi, members expressed anguish and distress that Sikh women are not being permitted to perform *Kirtan* and *Sewa* at Sri Harmander Sahib Amritsar. This step is completely against the tenets of Gurmat: in the Sikh Religion there is total equality between men and women.

When this issue was raised in the mid-20th Century, the Dharmik Advisory Committee of Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had endorsed such equality and had decried the step in refusing women to perform *kirtan* and *sewa*. This decision of Dharmik Advisory Committee was taken as back as 9 March 1940 and was accepted by the SGPC. On 9 February 1996 on the request of the Sangat, Jathedar Akal Takhat Sahib and the four other Singh Sahibans directed the SGPC that Sikh women be allowed to do *kirtan* and *sewa* in Harmander Sahib, Amritsar. Again in 2002, Sikh Sangat requested the SGPC and jathedar Akal Takhat Sahib that the direction given on 9 February 1996 be entirely implemented.

It is a matter of immense regret that in spite of these decisions, on 13 February 2003 two amritdhari women from the United Kingdom were debarred from joining the *Sukhasan Sahib Chauki* (the routine daily closing *sewa*) at Harmander Sahib.

The Sikh Forum and other concerned Sikhs strongly condemn this unilateral action; such decisions concern the entire Panth, the Sikh Maryada, Gurbani and Religious Thought and are beyond the scope of any such Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

The Sikh Forum appeals to the SGPC that Sikh women be made welcome for performing *Kirtan* and *Sewa* at Sri Harmander Sahib. Further, before going against any of the various decisions taken earlier with regard to *kirtan* and *sewa* in Sri Harmander Sahib Amritsar, the SGPC must obtain views of the Panth, various Panthak organisations and Sikh religious intellectuals.

Lt.General Jagjit Singh Aurora (Retd.)
Chief Justice Ranjit Singh Narula (Retd.)
Dr.Jaswant Singh Neki
Dr.Maheep Singh
Sardar Anup Singh
Major General Mohinder Singh Chadha
S.Pushpinder Singh
Colonel Manohar Singh (Retd.)

... AND AT CHANDIGARH

An emergent meeting of concerned Sikhs was held in Chandigarh on 23 February 2003 to take stock of the situation which has arisen owing to the unfortunate incident that took place outside the SGPC office in Amritsar on 22 February 2003, where some 500 members of Shromani Khalsa Panchayat including women were protesting peacefully by squatting in front of the SGPC office and reciting the *Gurbani*, were attacked without any provocation by members of AISSF (Mehta) with the aid of task force and SGPC with goonda elements.

"We strongly condemn the incident and take this as an attack on the democratic principles of the Sikh religion. We feel the former Chief Minister of Punjab and President of SAD, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, who was and is, working under the directions of the RSS Chief Sudharshan has installed people on the seats of the Sikhs including Akal Takht Sahib and the SGPC who work in implementing the agenda of RSS and anti-Sikh forces.

We also feel that norms of the Sikh religion and its traditions are being thrown to the wind by the Jathedars of the Akal Takht and other Takhts and also the President of the SGPC, part of a larger conspiracy of the RSS.

We also feel that this incident in the Golden Temple complex, was an action in frustration by the henchmen of Badal who does not want that the pro-RSS structure which has been established in the Sikh religious institutions should be dismantled.

We consider that the peaceful protest by the Shromani Khalsa Panchayat is a step in the right direction which should be considered to be the start of a revivalist movement of Gurdwaras and throwing out the *Masands* and pro-RSS men from the Sikh religious institutions.

We also strongly demand that S.Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar Sri Akal Takht Sahib and Prof.Manjit Singh, Jathedar, Sri Takht Kesgarh Sahib should resign on moral grounds so that the authority and sanctity of the Takhts be maintained. We also strongly condemn the inaction of local police to arrest the attackers and in showing bias while arresting the unarmed members of Shromani Khalsa Panchyat.

We appeal to the Sikh sangat to support and participate in this revivalist movement in restoring the sanctity of Sikh institutions.

Justice Ajit Singh Bains (Retd.)
S.Gurdarshan Singh Grewal, Former Advocate-General, Punjab
S.Gurtej Singh (former IAS)
Major General Narinder Singh (Retd.)
S.Amar Singh Chahal, Advocate
Dr.Mrs.Sukhjeet Kaur Gill
S.Navkiran Singh, Advocate
Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon
S.Joginder Singh, Editor *Spokesman*