

11/2005

NISHAAN

NAGAARA

**Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh
Our Holy Lands in Pakistan
Nihang Singhs
Sikhs on Capitol Hill**

Contents

Issue II/2005

- 2 Editorial**
A continuity of blessing
by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki



- 4 Dr Manmohan Singh**
The PM for all reasons



- 9 Visiting our Holy Lands**
in Pakistan
by Parambir Singh

- 17 Bringing the Swans back**
by Bhupinder Singh Mahal



- 25 India and Pakistan**
can get together
by Rajinder Pari



- 29 An Infinite Presence**
by Dr I.J. Singh

- 32 The United States of Punjab**
by Harder Singh Shergill



- 34 Nihang Singhs**
by Maj Gen (Dr) Jaswant Singh



- 38 The Nihangs are here !**
Photos by Kishin Singh



- 42 A very Punjabi festival**
by Nirupama Datt

- 44 Concept of Divinity**
by M.P. Katty



- 46 Sikhs embraced on**
Capitol Hill
by Dr Rajwant Singh



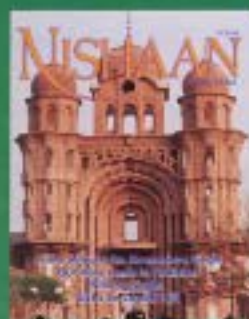
- 50 The Sikh next door**



- 52 Photo**
Documentation Series
The Golden Temple
by Dr Gurpreet Maini



- 56 Chief Justice**
Ranjit Singh Narula
by Jag Jot Singh



Cover: Gurdwara Rohri Sahib
in Pakistan
Photo by Parambir Singh

Editorial Director
Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

Executive Editor
Pashpinder Singh

Editorial Board
Sikandar Singh Bhayee
Dr. Gurpreet Maini
Ismi Kaur (New York)
Birinder Singh Mathans
G.P. Singh
Sandeep Shankar
Manjit Singh (Montreal)
Jag Jot Singh (San Francisco)

Editorial Office

D-43, Sujan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615
e-mail : nishaan@lycos.com
website : www.nishaan.com

Published by

The Nagaara Trust
16-A Palam Marg
Vasant Vihar
New Delhi 110 057, India

Printed by

Argon Offset
F-17, Mayapuri Phase II
New Delhi 110 064
loverto@saty.com

The opinions expressed in the articles published in the Nishaan Nagaara do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of The Nagaara Trust.

A continuity of blessing

The Nishaan has been blessed with a continuity of good fortune, even as Prof. Darshan Singh Maini (the inimitable DSM) handed over mantle of the Journal's Editorial Directorship to Dr Jaswant Singh Neki (JSN), whose writings are so well known, and revered, by readers of the Nishaan.

Prof. Darshan Singh Maini, who turned 85 this year, has been writing for many world renowned magazines and newspapers for well over half a century and his initials evoke the greatest of respect by those who read his columns and poetry. His own anguish was collective reflection of the community's after the traumas of 1984 and was immortalised in his book *Cry, my beloved Punjab*. His prolific writings have appeared reportedly in various dailies, particularly *The Tribune*, published from his home town of Chandigarh and since the first Issue of 2000, in the Nishaan as he became its Editorial Director.

His spirit remains strong, but body gets weaker. And so DSM hands over banner of the Nishaan to Dr Jaswant Singh Neki from this Issue of the Journal, which is now in its sixth year of publication. Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was on the dias along with Dr Manmohan Singh when Premiere Issue of the Nishaan was released by the now Prime Minister of India, in April 1999 at New Delhi.

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, the Editorial Director, has achieved multi-faceted achievements in his professional life, being a psychiatrist of international repute, one of the outstanding Punjabi poets and man of letters and considered an authentic theologian of the Sikh Faith. He has been a member of the *Dharam Prachar Committee* of the SGPC and his work *Ardaas* has been described as an all time classic.

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki has long been involved with *The Sikh Forum* and is Hon. General Secretary of the *Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan*.

Dr. Manmohan Singh : the role model leader

It is oft said that "In politics, the good and great are seldom the same person." However, the term 'seldom' in this dictum leaves room for such men as Dr Manmohan Singh, our reigning Prime Minister. He is great not only by virtue of being the PM, but also by virtue of having cultivated honesty-efficiency-humility as the hallmark of his personality. By dint of these virtues, he has managed almost always to remain non-controversial. This man who has no populist political base has come to head the largest democracy in the world and is regarded by the leading international magazine, *TIME*, as among "the world's most influential people."

A man of superior intellect, Dr Manmohan Singh is easily the most highly educated of all the Prime Ministers we have had. He attained nothing but the very top position in whatever academic ventures he undertook. Many

Institutions such as Oxford University, the University of Alberta in Canada, University of Bologna in Italy, besides numerous others at home, have conferred honorary doctorates on him. He has been given many coveted awards including the *Annasaheb Chirmule Award*, *Euramoney Award*, and *Padma Vibhushan Award*.

Hailing from a respectable middle-class Sikh family from Gah in the Chakwal District, now in Pakistan, this down-to-earth and mild-mannered person rose to become the top-ranking bureaucrat in the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Finance, Planning Commission, The Reserve Bank of India and the University Grants Commission.

In 1991, when India was on the brink of bankruptcy, his appointment as Finance Minister enabled India not just to survive but brilliantly soar upwards, giving the country

positive direction towards becoming a global player and, indeed global power. I am reminded of President Bill Clinton who paid him great tribute by wishing that he had had finance minister such as Manmohan Singh! Under his prime stewardship now, India has not only thrown away her earlier visage, but actually been able to provide assistance to many countries in distress. Besides immediately sending generous help to those countries affected by the Tsunami disaster, his government has committed \$ 500 million for the rebuilding of Afghanistan, ruined by decades of strife.

There is a popular proverb in Punjabi, "As big the head, that big the headache." Dr Manmohan Singh's problems are really big now. He heads a coalition government that is like the pan of a weighing scale in which live frogs are sought to be weighed. There are many parties in this coalition, almost all of them restless in ambition. Each of them has its specific, if clandestine, political agenda and its own brand of the "Common Minimum Programme". To crown these tribulations, others keep creating situations which the opposition, waiting in ambush, grasps and gives the Parliament workless days and the Prime Minister, possibly, sleepless nights. The leftists, tactically, did not join the coalition, but have kept twisting his arm from the outside. In spite of all that, Dr Manmohan Singh has acquitted himself rather well which the world has acclaimed.

Dr Manmohan Singh has made remarkable progress to repair India's vexed relationships with neighbouring countries—especially Pakistan and China—making considerable headway through dialogue with the top leaders of those countries. A large number of other international leaders, notably from the USA, Russia and Japan, have interacted with him and appear to have carried an indelible impression of his statesmanship. The leadership role that was accorded him at the Asia-African Conference held in Indonesia gave a new impetus to India's "Look East" policy.


Dr Manmohan Singh's own modest assessment of the work of his government during the past year is that it has been able to fulfil some aspects of the Common Minimum Programme. The Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office assures us that the PM has focused more on governance than on politics. Isn't that how it always ought to be? From the achievements of his government, it is visible that even this one year has made considerable

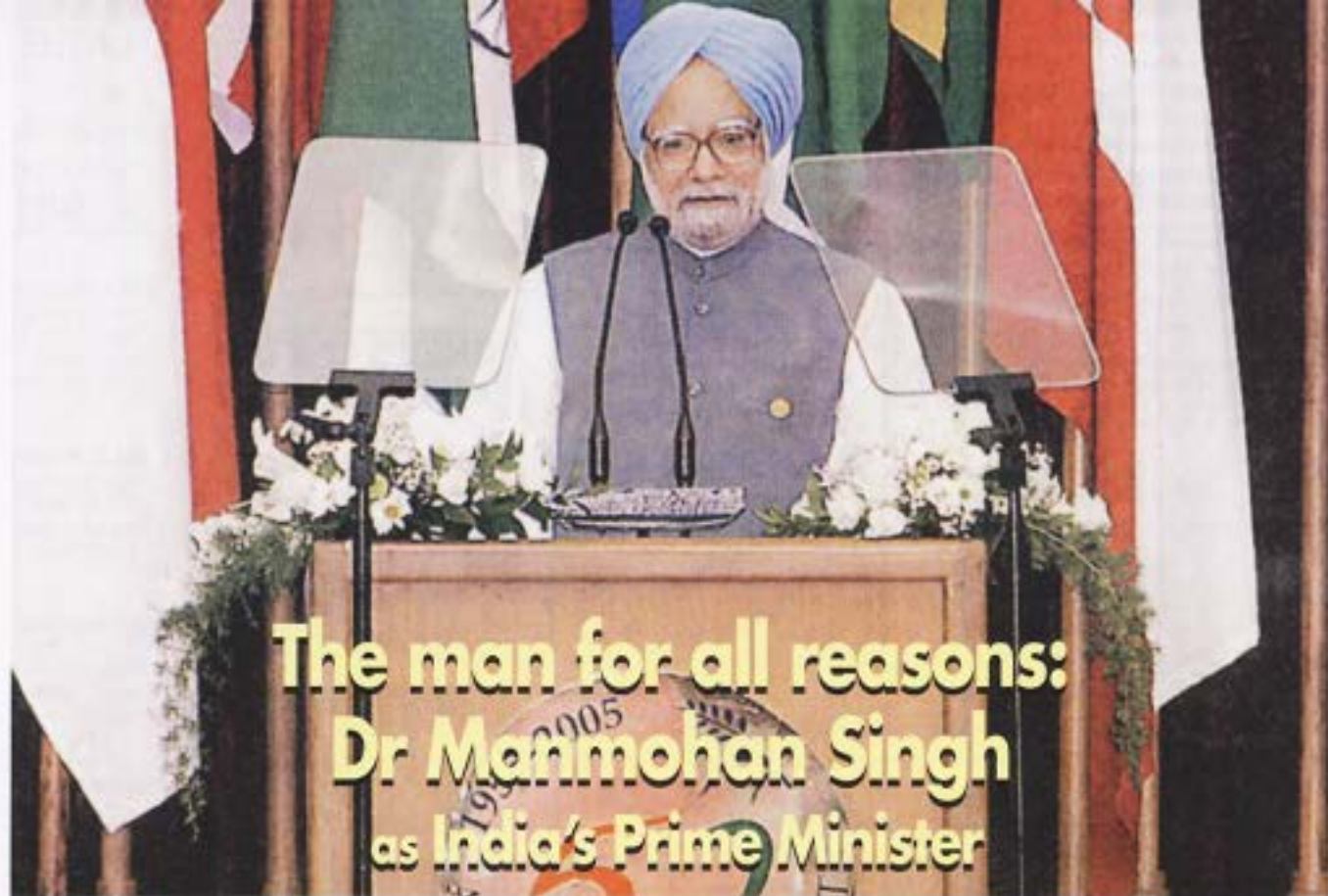
difference, reckoning the piebald structure of the coalition that he heads and notwithstanding the pass-marks that he got in the handling of the post electoral events of Jharkhand and Bihar. The massive Bharat Nirman budget allotment promises tremendous development of the vital rural sector. The Railways modernisation programme, the Setudamudram shipping channel, the projected works to upgrade the National Highways, and the energy security initiatives promise foreseeable improvement of the country's infrastructure. Pushing through of VAT as also of vital patents legislation promise to be the most progressive pieces of legislation. Dr Manmohan Singh's economic insights can take India to great heights, that is if the UPA manage their politics well.

Even while he is extraordinarily busy as the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh still continues to head a number of public cultural organisations, amongst which is the *Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan* which he has been heading for the last six years as its President. I have had the opportunity of working with him throughout that period in the capacity of Honorary General Secretary. When we first took over that institution, it owed nearly Rs 50 lakhs as outstanding taxes. When Dr Manmohan Singh came to know of this, with obvious discomfort he said "not paying taxes is sinful and I do not want to live in sin" and expressed his desire to resign forthwith. On persuasion, he consented to hold on with the intention to save that institution, which we eventually did with effort and faith. Needless to add, Dr Manmohan Singh has always succeeded in his endeavours without making any compromise with his principles.

Working with him I have learnt to admire his mellow humanism and genuine humility. He has shown remarkable tolerance, sometimes even standing for sheer nonsense. He also has the rare ability of turning even an intended bitter remark into an inoffensive expression.

It is said, "Honesty is praised and then left to freeze". In the case of Dr Manmohan Singh however, it seldom freezes and quickly thaws if ever it does. If God looks at clean hands and not only full ones, then one can be sure that this man's hands are constantly under His gracious glance.

Dr Manmohan Singh, indeed, is a living ode to honesty. 



The man for all reasons: Dr Manmohan Singh as India's Prime Minister

When Dr Manmohan Singh's candidature as Prime Minister of the Republic of India was announced on 20 May 2004, there were many politicians who had to play out a wide range of dramatic emotions till these actors were firmly told that *she* was happy and relaxed as "the country is in the safe hands of Dr Manmohan Singh".

One year later, Dr Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy with over a billion human beings to be concerned with, has been acclaimed as India's most trusted, honest and effective Chief Executive in history. In fact he was long considered a role model in every public office that he had held. As Finance Minister in 1991, his role in the liberalisation of India's economic and social structure, propelled the country to global status.

Influencing the World : Dr Manmohan Singh

Can an astute economist, a famous professor and a superb civil servant also be an outstanding Prime Minister? Can someone without a populist political base be secure as the head of a democratic government? Can a country in which more than 80% of the people are Hindus be comfortable with a blue-turbaned Sikh Prime Minister in addition to a Muslim President and a Christian leader of the ruling party? If the answer to all those questions is yes (as seems plausible enough), that says something not only about the nature of India but also about Manmohan Singh's deep humanity and breadth of vision, which inspire widespread confidence.

As Finance Minister in the early-to-mid '90s, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was the pioneering leader of India's economic reforms, which restrained the all-powerful Indian bureaucrat and sought – and found – a significant place for India in the global economy. And yet, given the asymmetric sharing of the fruits of expansion, the subsequent government's proud but insensitive slogan, "India shining", was a peculiarity divisive theme. Who better, then, than the architect of the pro-market reforms to take the country's reins and emphasise the need for a less unequal distribution and the urgency of supplementing a flourishing market economy by strengthening social services and the societal infrastructure.

The man in the blue turban, despite his great success, has remained approachable and ready to listen and instinctively sympathetic to the under-dogs of society.

Amartya Sen

In TIME magazine's review of the world's most influential people.



Leading Asian leaders at the Indonesian Conference.

The country's economic reforms would have perhaps touched astronomical heights but for the brakes applied by the Left Parties which form part of the Government he heads.

Dr Manmohan Singh's USP remains his sincerity, which he wears on his sleeve and no where more is this dramatically seen as in the paradigm change of relationships between India and Pakistan. It is ironic that Dr Manmohan Singh's ancestral place is in Pakistan while that of General Pervez Musharraf's is in Old Delhi. Their own personal relationships have manifested themselves in paving the way towards a "soft border", increasing trade (even strategic) and above all wheels being given, literally, towards some solution on the Kashmir issue. With China, Russia, Japan and the United States Dr Manmohan Singh's personality has made a major impact, India's Prime Minister being virtually nominated as the "Voice of Asia". As he and Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi have jointly stated, "future of the world is linked to Asia, and developments will create an arc of advantage and prosperity, conducive to growth, stability and much greater integration".

With Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Dr Manmohan Singh has repeatedly stressed that India and China "are partners, not rivals" and after signing an agreement for "strategic peace and prosperity" that India and China could together "re-shape the world order". Later, Dr Manmohan Singh's trip to Moscow for marking the 60th anniversary of the Soviet Victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945, turned out to be a full scale summit with Russian President



Dr. Manmohan Singh with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Vladimir Putin. The latter said that there were many foreign guests in Moscow for the occasion but "there was only one Manmohan Singh".

Dr Manmohan Singh used the Moscow visit to carry out some high placed diplomacy, having a combination of meetings with President George Bush, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, all pointing towards Dr Manmohan Singh's schedule visit to Washington in July 2005 which would lead to "great things".

With the Guru's grace, the devout Sikh and epitome of the universal human being, will lead his country to great things.



Dr. Manmohan Singh and General Pervez Musharraf in New Delhi and with...



...President George Bush...



...Japan's Junichiro Koizumi...



...and China's Wen Jiabao.

THE ASIAN AGE

Vol. 11 No. 94

New Delhi Thursday 20 May 2004

20 Pages Rs 5

RAJ KAREGA KHALSA

Headline on 20 May 2004.

From Gah to Gali Beriwali to Oxbridge to New Delhi

Always the topper at school, young Manmohan Singh's brilliance often led his father Gurmukh Singh Kohli to gush affectionately: "Mohan, you'll be the PM of this nation one day". Half a century later, the fond parent's prophecy has come true and Manmohan Singh now charts the course of a nation.

The country's first Sikh Prime Minister spent his childhood in the neighbourhood of Gali Beriwali in Amritsar. Moving east from Pakistan, the Kohli family then dealt in dry fruits. Those were tough times when Manmohan had to pursue his love of books under the glare of streetlights. There were 12 members of the family and early enough in life, young Manmohan learnt the importance of juggling figures to make ends meet.

As a child, mature beyond his years and more given to gravity than childhood gaiety, Manmohan showed a marked disinclination towards the family dry-fruit business. His proclivity towards the written word found full support from his father who felt it was the best investment possible. Never too fond of movies or music, he was extremely particular about overspending. As a student, "unassuming brilliance" is a classmate's description of the good Doctor Manmohan who was financially hard up during his student days and even lost a year of college on account of inability to pay his fees.

Manmohan then taught and as one of his students recalls, "The influence of the man stretched to making many opt for a career in academics in favour of the civil services. Known to be the most accessible of masters, he developed a devoted student following. What he said was read seriously not just by the students". Prof. H.S. Shergill remembers how a protracted strike by PU non-teaching employees ended as soon as he assured them of looking into the matter. Outside the class Manmohan would offer lifts to students as he went about on his cycle.

Whether PM or not, the family expects him to carry on giving as much importance to family functions as he always

has. His message to his brothers has always been to lead a simple life. Married to Gursharan Kaur, he's rumoured to have carted the bride home on a bicycle! The mild-mannered husband refused to ask his wife to do any chores, he'd rather help himself much to the chargin of the traditional family. The family claims that the possibility of getting any favours from PM Singh is an impossibility for the bureaucrat who even refused to let his wife or three daughters misuse his official car.

Dr Manmohan Singh is very religious and recites the *gurbani* everyday. Being diabetic, he's quite conscious of his eating habits, with breakfast fixed at 8.30 a.m., lunch at 1.30 pm and dinner by 8.30 p.m.

His simplicity is legendary. He acquired his Ph.D from Oxford at the age of 32 but continued to commute by cycle. His hospitality towards his students allowed them to ease out at his Delhi home while he counsels them on their careers. Said to never lose his temper, he does get curt if disturbed at his reading. Humble, disciplined and gentle are some of the other adjectives showered upon him by friends and associates.

Dr Manmohan Singh's seven years in dreary university digs at Cambridge and Oxford back in the empire-exhausted Britain of the mid-1950s and early 60s are held to be the key to his metamorphosis as an economist.



Dr. Manmohan Singh at his home in New Delhi.

It was there that Manmohan Singh began to change from orthodox Nehruvian economist to the great liberaliser. Dr Ian M.D. Little, 85 and now retired, recalled this with pride and fondness. Indeed, Manmohan's excellent, well-researched thesis changed a lot of minds. Published 40 years ago by Clarendon Press with the forbidding title "India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth", Little believes Singh's thesis was the first to demonstrate an essential truth: that the poor performance of India's exports was due to indigenous factors and not lack of world demand.

The thesis was a product of this student's extraordinary intellectual honesty. The very quiet, very hard working turbaned PhD student did not mix much with other students. Instead of nights out on the town, Manmohan Singh spent his two year Oxford sojourn rigorously researching a closed-door subject and establishing the truth about India's dismal exports.

Meanwhile, over at Cambridge's 500-year-old St Johns College, where Manmohan Singh did a BA and an MA and went on to become a serial winner of prizes for academic excellence, Old Johnians recall that Singh's old college has already awarded him its highest mark of honour. Nearly a quarter of century ago, St.Johns elected Singh an honorary fellow, to join some 35 other prominent alumni around the world.

The ancient Cambridge college, which is notoriously far more reticent than Oxford's so-called more plugged-in upstarts, is the *alma mater* of Lord Palmerston and William Cecil. But that was nearly 200 years ago. Now, Dr Manmohan Singh is adding to Oxbridge's international credentials as the universities of choice for those embarking on the university of life overseas.

Rashmee Z.Ahmed

Dr. Manmohan Singh: "One of us Sikhs"

Bunny's very chuffed about Manmohan Singh's PMship, as am I. Although neither of us has ever met him, Manmohan seems an ideal choice. In an age of hype and I-candy self-advertisement, he is refreshingly low-key and modest (I'm told he self-drives a Maruti 800). And the secretary of the housing society where I live told me that the current PM had put his name down for the draw of lots for one of the plots going in the complex but hadn't struck it lucky. True to type, Manmohanji had accepted the result without fuss or bother. But I could legitimately say I had a PM as neighbour – almost. But all this apart, Bunny and I are pleased because Manmohan's one of us, at least fractionally. While Manmohanji is 100 per cent Sikh, Bunny, whose maternal grandmother was of that persuasion, is a quarter Sikh. Which makes me, by virtue of marriage, a one-eighth Sikh.

To me, the Sikh community has always personified an attractive amalgam of a robust zest for life and an elegant simplicity represented by the minimalist magnificence of gurdwaras. All other congregational faiths require votive offerings from devotees. But in gurdwaras it is the visitor – of whatever faith – who is the receiver, of both blessings and hospitality. It is this largesse, this all-embracing generosity – as broad and abundant as the rich fields of Punjab – that is perhaps the most admirable characteristic of the followers of Nanak.

Sikhs are really the most large-hearted of all communities and their hospitality is a by-word. No one who's visited Punjab will question the travellers' take that in the Land of the Six Rivers (the sixth being beer), washing machines are used to churn out frothing oceans of *lassi*. The first thing the visitor is offered in Punjab is an overflowing tumbler of *lassi* or *dudh*. I vividly recall a cheerful granthi in Tarn Taran watching me trying to down what seemed like an

unending cornucopia of creamy, sweetened milk during my first visit to Punjab some years ago. What's the matter, don't you like *dudh*? asked the young pastor, eyes twinkling, as I glugged my way through what appeared to be half the annual output of the *White Revolution*. In response, I emitted a decidedly bovine belch.

But later that evening I was glad of having lined my stomach with all that milk. Staying at the government guest house in Amritsar, I poured myself a restorative tot of the medicinal IMFL which is the first thing I pack after the toothpaste. Just then a police officer who looked like a younger, larger version of KPS Gill strode in. Eyes fixed on the glass in my hand he roared to an orderly *Dohl dohl* (Pour it away!). The glass was taken from my hand, the contents *dohloed* down the sink. I stammered apologies for transgressing what I assumed was a no-alcohol regulation. But the KPS clone was wroth not because I was having a drink, but because I was having one from my own bottle. How can you insult our hospitality like that? He demanded sternly, as the orderly brought in a laden tray. Careful not to insult anyone's hospitality, I made it a point that evening to *dohlo* several glassfuls, straight down my gullet.

Next day at the Golden Temple I encountered an even more large-spirited demonstration of hospitality. At the footwear check-in counter, the young man who accepted my dusty No.8s was dressed like a successful investment banker: He was obviously doing voluntary community service, one of the most notably egalitarian features of the Khalsa.

But more than all else, one thing has convinced me of the inclusivism of the Sikh faith: can you think of any other congregation which would accept in its midst even one-eighth of me? For that, if nothing else, many thanks, Manmohan *braji*.

Jug Suriya
In May 2004

ਹੇ ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਆਪਣੇ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਸਦਾ ਸਹਾਈ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਜੀਓ।
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਲਕਸ਼ਣਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆਂ, ਗੁਰਧਾਮਾ,
ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਛੋੜਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ, ਦੇ ਖੁਲੇ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਤੇ
ਸੇਵਾ ਸੰਭਾਲ ਦਾ ਦਾਨ ਆਪਣੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਨੂੰ ਥਖੜੋ।

*O Omnipresent Benovolent, Timeless One, Eternal protector of the Panth,
grant the boon of Darshan (visitations) one's privilege of serving of Sri Nankana Sahib and
other holy places, from whom the Panth has been separated, to your beloved Khalsaji.*

Visiting our holy lands in Pakistan



Crossing into Pakistan at Wagah are Parambir Singh, Koplin Kaur, Harmeet Kaur, Sarjani Kaur and others.

Reality is not what we hear or read about, it is what we experience and see for ourselves. This was the case when we crossed the Wagah border on the Amritsar-Lahore GT road and entered Pakistan on 30 December 2004. We were part of a *jatha* organised by the International Institute of Gurmat Studies (IIGS), 51 men and women with some children, visiting our "Holy Lands". Our pilgrimage was to the places and Gurdwaras which mark the birthplace of Guru Nanak Devji and subsequently other holy sites associated with the life of Guru Nanak and martyrdom of Guru Angad Devji.

The visit had had been planned in July 2004, immediately after the 62nd Sikh Youth Camp at Dehra Dun, organised by the IIGS which gave an opportunity to both the veterans and new members to celebrate the New Year at Sikhism's holiest places. We were elated at this wonderful chance and unhesitatingly "signed in" to be part of the trip. The IIGS made all the *bandobast* from getting us visas, to train tickets, transportation by coach, hotel bookings and of course the Gurdwara darshan arrangements. All this at very nominal

charges, not at all commensurate with the luxuries and facilities provided, which were on par for any VIP.

The IIGS (International Institute of Gurmat Studies) is a well known non-profit institute that has been conducting camps all over the world for Sikh youth and young couples, serving the Khalsa panth for the past 50 years. It was founded in Lucknow in 1955 and till now IIGS has organised 72 Sikh youth and family camps all over the world. Thousands of Sikh men and women from the USA, Canada, Britain, Nepal, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Kenya and India have participated in these camps. The curriculum of the IIGS is well planned, after considerable research and experience. Behind this all is the tireless and ever enthusiastic Sardar Harbhajan Singh, universally known as *Papaji*. There are no words of praise to describe his *sewa* for the panth.

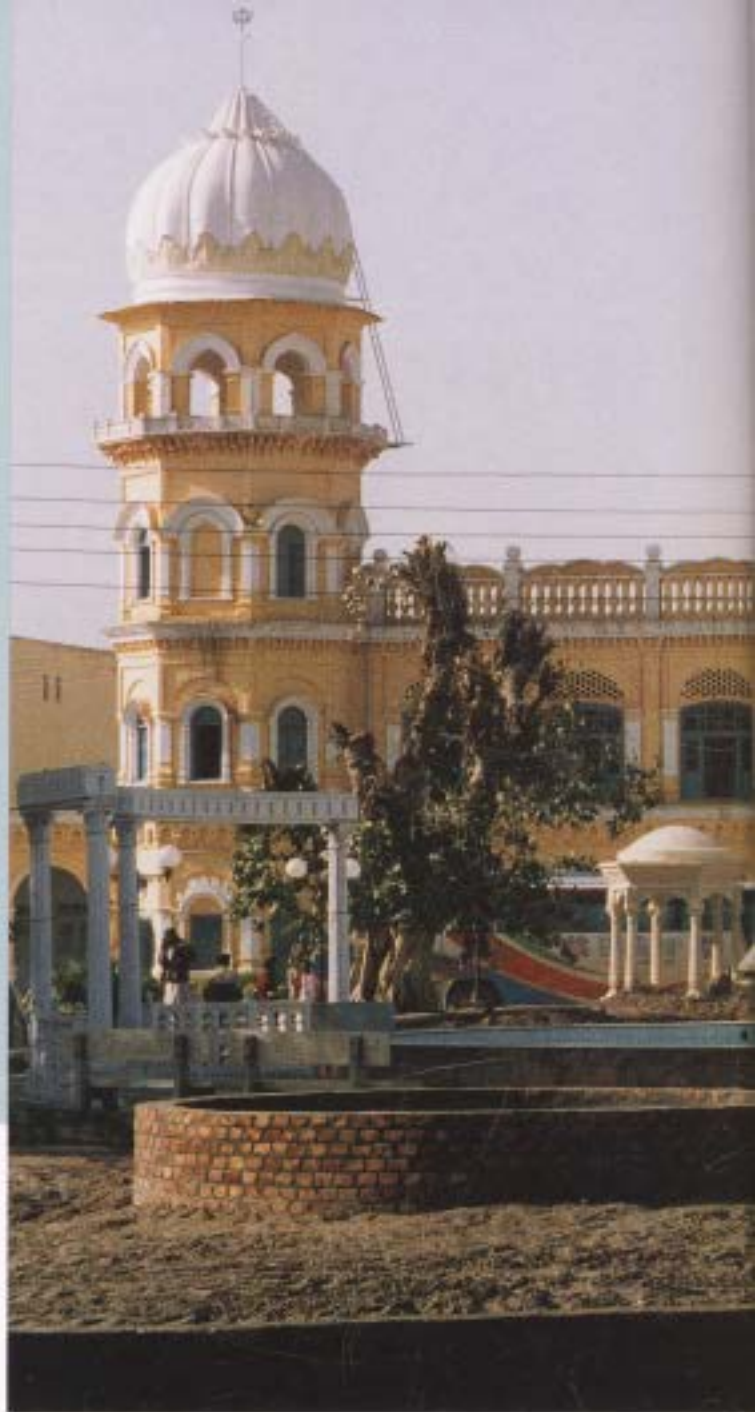
As I stood on the platform at New Delhi's railway station before boarding the train to Amritsar I thought about how often I had been asked by family and friends as to whether visiting Pakistan was a wise idea under the political circumstances. I looked around at others of the group and



Welcoming the IIGS Group in Pakistan is Sardar Bishan Singh.

wondered how of them had had similar thoughts. The next day, as we sat in our room at the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, we shared our thoughts on the imminent visit across the border, just some 40 kilometres away. And then, spontaneously we all expressed our unbounded happiness at the prospect of going for darshan to our Guru's birthplace and quite contrary to any feeling of insecurity, was the inspiration that we were bringing the New Year in at our holy place.

After a night at Darbar Sahib, we went by coach along the Grand Trunk road to Attari and the Wagah crossing into Pakistan. As we walked across the frontier line, bags in hand, I imagined how people must have felt during the Partition as they left their ancestral homes to an uncertain future. We were now going back to our lands and within minutes were welcomed by the Pakistani Border Rangers and garlanded by Vice President of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Sardar Bishan Singh. We were to be welcomed thus by all Pakistanis, Muslim or Sikh, wherever we went, throughout our trip.



From Lahore, we first visited Nankana Sahib, birthplace of Guru Nanak Devji and other gurdwaras which marked the times of the founder of Sikhism, all these now located in the country called Pakistan. We went to Gurdwara Bal Lila, where the young Nanak had played as well as sat in meditation. Midway between Gurdwara Janamasthan and Gurdwara Bal Lila was visited Gurdwara Patti Sahib, the village school attended by Guru Nanak and Gurdwara Tamboo Sahib where Guruji stayed after performing the *Sachna Sauda*, where today is a magnificent and massive Gurdwara. Also in the area is Gurdwara Kiara Sahib, where the crops had turned lush again after cattle had trampled and ruined the fully grown field of Rai Bullar as also



NANKANA SAHIB.
Birthplace of Guru Nanak Devji.

Gurdwara Mallji Sahib where Guru Nanak was shaded by a snake while taking his rest.

Today, in this Holy Land located in Pakistan, is a school run by the PSGMC for young Sikh boys and girls studying the normal school curriculum as also engaged in Gurmata studies. The New Year was ushered in with an all night kirtan performed by many world renowned *jathas*, led by Professor Darshan Singh and Bhai Paramjit Singh Khalsa followed by the IIGS Kirtan *jatha*. And so we entered 2005 while praying and singing *shabads* in presence of Guru Granth Sahib at the birthplace of Guru Nanak Devji. We were truly blessed and thanked God for granting us this unique opportunity.

During the next days we drove north-westwards to beyond Rawalpindi, also on the Grand Trunk road, for darshan at Gurdwara Panja Sahib and were awestruck at Guru Nanak Devji's hand imprint on the bolder which Wali Qandhari had, in jealous rage, rolled down from the hill above Hasan Abdal.

At Eminabad, we visited Gurdwara Rohri Sahib and Gurdwara Chakki Sahib. Eminabad is famous for its grinding mills, which had worked on their own when Guru Nanak Devji was ordered to grind corn. It was here also that we saw Malik Bhago's house, the very place where Guru Nanak Devji ate with Bhai Laloji. Countless times had one heard this *Sakhi* and to be



CHARDIKALA.

MGS Group at the Sacha Sauda Gurdwara, with Sardar Harbhajan Singh, Papaji, at the centre.



SARDARNI HARMEET KAUR.

This elegant and humble lady works tirelessly for educating the poor and doing prachar.



Main Entrance to Gurdwara Sacha Sauda.



Langar hall at the Lahore Fort Gurdwara.



Visiting Gurdwara Bal Lila Sahib.



Langar Sewa at Nankana Sahib.



Rohri Sahib: one of the elegant entrances to the Gurdwara.



Sarovar at Rohri Sahib.

Gurdwara Rohri Sahib at Eminabad

Eminabad is an old town 15 kilometres south of Gujranwala, and is linked to the Grand Trunk Road by a smaller four kilometre stretch of metalled road.

Gurdwara Rohri Sahib: half-a-kilometre northwest of the town, marks the place where Guru Nanak Dev, probably after the pillage of Eminabad by Babar in 1521, had to stay on a bed of broken stones (*rori* in Punjabi). Its central building is a three-storey imposing structure of cut brick work and is pyramidal in design with a rectangular hall adjoining it on one side and a sarovar on the other. There is another separate domed room with a circumambulatory verandah. Eminabad before the Partition was famous for its week-long Baisakhi fair which included largely attended congregational gatherings of the Sikhs in Gurdwara Rohri Sahib as well as the usual agriculture and cattle fair.

The imposing Gurdwara has a large pond and other buildings which make the surrounding area very graceful. A large estate, comprising 9 square miles of agricultural land was endowed to the Gurdwara from the era of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.





Sandarni Harmeet Kaur taking the Vaak, with Sanjam Kaur at the back.



JGS Jatha performing keertan during the night Darbar on 31 December 2004 at Nankana Sahib.

at the actual place was almost unreal. However, it was Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib which left the most lasting impression on us as this is the first (and only) place in the world where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims pray together at one place. We saw enshrined separately, but equally beautifully, the place where Hindus and Muslims had paid their last respects to Guru Nanak Devji. After his passing, Hindus and Muslims disputed whether the Guru belonged to Hindus or to Muslims. When the cloth covering his body was removed there lay only flowers which were later distributed by the people of both faiths for last rites of the great saint. This Gurdwara is just 2 km from Batala in Indian Punjab.

Back in Lahore, we visited Gurdwara Dera Sahib which marks martyrdom of Guru Angad Devji and the samadhi of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh sovereign. As well as



Kavi Raj Singh, Sababjit Singh, Bishen Singh, Harbhajan Singh, Gurdarshan Singh, after the meeting at Wakf Board office.



Security for the IIGS Group provided throughout.



Kavi Raj Singh taking Vaak.



Koplin Kaur, the professional photographer who took all these photos.

visiting Gurdwaras, during the last two days of the trip we also visited Pakistani bazaars where, always, we were warmly welcomed as *mehtmaan*. The attention of the market vendors centred around us and their talk was only of sincere wishes for good relations to exist between India and Pakistan. Touched by these sentiments, as we made our way back to Wagah and Eastern Punjab, I thought about the artificial division between our people, all of whom want peace and brotherly relations.

I continued to reflect on this as we reached the Indian customs office. I was asked by the officials as to what I had brought from Pakistan. My reply was that *Main khatt key leyaaya meray guan di dharree di khushboo, tey snehna that atwail allah noor upaa kudrat key sab bandey* ("I have brought the fragrance of my Gurus and message of love and peace apart from the love of Pakistani people.")

On the train journey home to New Delhi, the following *shabad* kept coming to my mind again and again: '*Auval Allah Noor Upaya Kudrat Kay Sab Bandey, Ek Noor Te Sab Jag Upjaya Kaun Bhale Ko Mande*'. How long will it take for

people to wake up to this Truth. We are all of the same Creator!

I am firmly convinced that no matter what happens between India and Pakistan, the peace process taking its time at official levels but it will be the Sikhs of both countries who will play a major role in getting these two brothers together, separated by aliens from another race in 1947.

As the train pulled into New Delhi's Railway Station, I felt secure with the faith that the future is secure, in Somebody Else's Hands. ☯

Parambir Singh

BRINGING THE SWANS BACK: MY TRIP TO PAKISTAN

ਵੇ ਜਿਲਹ ਤੈਨੂੰ ਕੇਹੀਆਂ ਵੰਡੀਆਂ ਪਾਵੀਆਂ

ਕੁਜਾਂ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਗਿਰਜਾਂ ਲਈਆਂ

Veh Jinnah! Tenoo(n) kahyeeya(n) vanddeeya(n) paeeya(n)

*Koonja(n) dey key girjaa(na) laeeya(n)? **

Divisions of what sort, O Jinnah! Did you make?

In exchange for vultures, swans you did forsake.

*Poet from Jhhang, a city in Punjab known for its fair maidens.

The Punjabi poet bewails the loss of beauty during the partition of British India, which was really partition of the Punjab. In exchange for vultures, which could be a metaphor for death, uniformity and ugliness, Punjab had to part with much of its culture and so many people, including so many graceful fair maidens. A Punjabi Muslim woman, also from Jhhang, shared this couplet with me, as she lamented the loss of diversity in partitioned Punjab.

Even from my limited personal experience, I can claim to appreciate diversity. I was born in Connecticut, grew up in Cambridge, Delhi, Rochester where I went to Catholic school, and then studied at universities in the south side of Chicago and near Harlem in New York. I betray all sorts of influences, including Puritan, Catholic, Sikh, American, Punjabi and probably many others that I don't even know about or want to acknowledge. All these diverse influences have shaped me and enriched my life and I'd like to think made me less likely to hate and more likely to appreciate Guru Nanak's sentiment: "He created the world, in its various colours, and watches over it with pleasure".

Hate and terror in this world cannot be combated with armies alone. For terror, including state terror, incubates terror. Each one of us must contribute to breaking down barriers of ignorance. Following September 11, I found myself in Pakistan trying to do just that as I sought to understand and connect with a people, who I am supposed to dislike and fear.

I have always wanted to visit Pakistan because it is a treasure house of historical sites that range from prehistoric Mohenjo-Daro to the Sikh Kingdom of the nineteenth century. Archeological sites, artefacts, monuments and even old trees offer me a deeper and more intuitive, almost poetic,

sense of history as they tell me things that I can't find in history books. At monuments that memorialise the Sikh Gurus or Sufi saints, especially if they preserve their historicity, I often feel a mystical connection to my past. When the British divided India in 1947, most of Punjab became a part of Pakistan, leaving only a small part under India's control. My interest in history therefore, was bound to take me, in a homecoming of sorts, to Pakistan.

The mindless renovation of Sikh monuments in India by self-proclaimed "saints" and Sikh organisations, with expensive and vacuous white marble monoliths, precipitated my visit to Pakistan. I have heard that in Pakistan too, some "pious" or "sanctimonious" Sikhs are planning to tear down and replace the old Sikh monuments. Eager to visit Pakistan before any such reconstruction, I planned to visit Pakistan in November 2001. Then 11 September happened.

My plans to visit Pakistan evoked emotions from friends and family that ranged from genuine concern to indignant criticism. My mother, anxious about the war in Afghanistan, asked me, "Is this the best time to visit Pakistan?" A Sikh in Chicago suggested that I had a death wish and coldly remarked with sarcasm, "Why don't you go to Kabul?" A close friend and partner at work couched his disapproval in jest, "I guess we are going to have a look for a new CEO". An uncle from India turned to me wide-eyed with shock, "Pakistan! Pakistan!. Are you nuts? Why would you ever go to Pakistan?"

This less than benevolent attitude towards Pakistan among my friends in America did not completely surprise me. Based on the mainstream media's treatment of Islamic countries, most Americans would develop an unfavourable impression of places such as Pakistan. For instance, the only time you hear about the Middle East or Iran or Pakistan is

when something tragic happens. It is not surprising therefore, that most of us should form associations between suicide bombings or hijackings and Islamic countries. Our perception has become that nothing else happens in these countries because little else is reported. It doesn't help that the media constantly uses loaded terms such as "Islamic" militant or "Muslim" terrorist. By contrast, Timothy McVeigh and his ilk are never deemed "Christian" terrorists. They are just "criminals" or "fringe elements" or "lunatics".

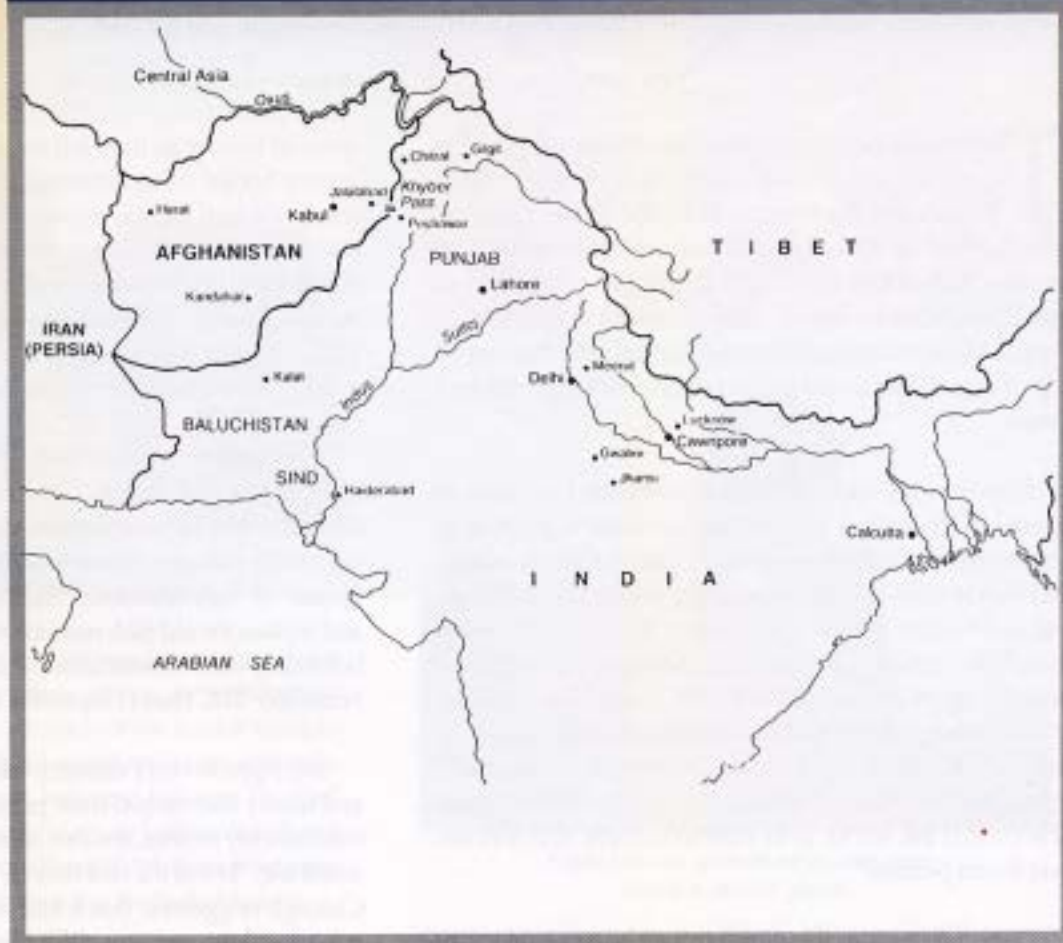
Those among my friends who are Indians reveal an even more irrational animosity. The roots of this tension lie in British India's partition into Pakistan and India; India's politicians, educationists and an unabashedly jingoistic media have nurtured this tension into outright hatred. For instance, almost all political unrest in India is blamed on Pakistan. The impression that the Indian media and politicians convey is that rebel groups such as the Muslims in Kashmir or the Sikhs in Punjab have no genuine grievances. According to them, the only reason popular movements for self-determination exist in India is that the Pakistani intelligence

agencies orchestrate them. Ever since a right-wing Hindu party came to rule India, the propaganda has taken on a decidedly anti-Islamic flavour. Even India's citizen have not been spared this propaganda deluge. On previous visits to India, I have heard bizarre comments from Sikh children, in upper-middle-class families in New Delhi and in villages in backward parts of Punjab, telling me how "Muslims are bad people" and "Pakistan is a bad country".

Even though I am dismayed by such irrational emotions and offensive attitudes towards an entire country or religion,

after 11 September, I too became somewhat apprehensive of my trip. I attribute at least part of my concern to tabloid television. I guess the horror of the attack on my country disturbed me enough that I was willing to spend hours watching channels, such as CNN and Fox. These channels make the "News" as sensational as possible in order to give pause to mindless channel surfers. In the post 11 September newscasts, I saw alarmist reports that repeatedly showed enraged Pakistanis burning effigies of Uncle Sam or American flags in "several"

Northern India, Afghanistan and Persia in the 19th century: a land inseparable



Pakistani cities, and anti-American mobs battling Pakistani troops "all over Pakistan". The brief news clips would focus on the ugliest and most crazed face in the mob. This and the "expert" commentaries left the impression that Pakistan is a third-world lawless Islamic dictatorship ominously equipped with nuclear weapons, some of which "might be" in the control of "rogue" elements of the Pakistani army. In addition, Pakistan is surging with anti-Americanism that may "explode". Despite my scepticism of the media, I was left wondering, "Is Pakistan rife with anti-American sentiment? Perhaps this is not the best time for an American to visit Pakistan".

A post-September 11 world combined with all the concerns and reactions to my proposed trip made me reconsider going. Paradoxically, September 11 also became a reason to go. The September 11 attacks became an excuse for anti-minority bigotry, normally dormant in America, to manifest itself, especially in attacks upon Arabs and Muslim. Sikhs, because of their beards and turbans, became part of the 'collateral damage' and I found myself volunteering in efforts to get the media to be more responsible in its reporting and the government to tackle hate crimes as vigorously as it was the war. The volunteer activity involved interfaith efforts, one of which brought me to a vigil at a mosque.

For the first time I had a chance to meet Muslims that were supposed to be "violent", "fanatical" "fundamentalist", "misogynistic" and "anti-Semitic", to name a few of the epithets I had heard. This time I learnt about Islam not from a reporter, academic or critic, but from believers. The Islam I saw that day was tolerant, progressive and moving. The egalitarian nature of their service particularly touched me and I was reminded of Malcolm X's experience on his Hajj. I too saw people of different races, nationalities, colours, ages and economic ranks pray together, erasing all that artificially divides humanity. I did notice that women were not present in the main prayer hall, but overall I found my experience at the mosque overwhelming and I quickly made some good acquaintances.

I realised then that I must go to Pakistan, not just to visit monuments to indulge my interest in Sikh history, but also to meet Muslims with whom I share a cultural heritage. Only by meeting people can we even begin to reduce the ignorance that contributes to irrational antipathy towards entire segments of humanity. If the Muslims at the mosque in Chicago were not like what I had expected, then it was quite likely that I would find kindred spirits and potential friends in Pakistan. And so, I went to meet the "enemy". I flew to India, and after a couple of days in Punjab, I crossed into Pakistan by road at the Wagah border-crossing near Amritsar.

As I crossed the border between India and Pakistan, someone in India made a half-serious comment that became a foil for my trip to Pakistan. At Wagah someone rhetorically asked, "*Dushman(n) wal chaley ho(n)*," which means "You are going to meet the enemy [the Pakistanis]? I had no idea how ominous this comment was. My repartee was "*Thodey dushman hongey, merey la naheen*," that "They [the Pakistanis] might be your enemies, they certainly are not mine".

I found that not only is Pakistan not my *dushman* ("enemy"), but instead that I have a deep historical and

cultural connection with Pakistanis that can enrich my life in ways I had not before imagined. As I drove to Lahore from the border, I noticed how similar the drive was to my drive from Amritsar to the Wagah border. I saw the same people, wearing similar clothes. The villages we drove through looked like the villages on the other side of the border. Even the stray animals on the roads, the smells, and the stench were the same. Street-hawkers in Lahore yelled out the same rhythmic calls that I have heard in Patiala. The stares, inquisitive, defiant, and almost rude, were just as prevalent among the Punjabi villages in Pakistan, as among Punjabis in India. This similarity, the extent of which I should have expected, impressed on me that an artificial and arbitrary line on the map has cruelly separated a people, and a culture. I noticed more in common between the people of Amritsar and Lahore, than the people of Amritsar and Delhi. Clearly the river Yamuna that flows near Delhi would make a much more natural and sensible line, if at all a line on a map is needed to divide people.

My interactions with a whole range of people in Pakistan over the next seven days only reinforced this initial impression. I sought out journalists, politicians, academicians, artists, writers, regular folk and anyone who could give me a sense of what it means to be Pakistani, Punjabi and Muslim. My host, whom I would characterise as a visionary and a renaissance man, aside from running a range of manufacturing businesses, is involved in environmental protection, patronage of the arts, training teachers, running clinics, building a university, and a whole host of other endeavours that I did not get a chance to learn about. His fondest memories are of a united Punjab and one of his closest friends is a Sikh, whom he has kept in touch with despite being separated during partition.

Among all his many endeavours, the one that stood out for me was the school of calligraphy and miniature art that he patronises. It was one of the most heartening places I visited. In a part of the world where life's struggles have reduced art to luxury that cannot be afforded, an effort that seeks to preserve art forms is tremendously inspiring, not to mention visionary. This school may not churn out money-machines such as doctors and engineers, but it will bring beauty and joy to Lahore and Pakistan for generations to come. This inspiring school is fittingly tucked away in the narrow streets of *Hakim Bazaar* in the old city of Lahore. It is probably not a coincidence that the *Hakims* (physicians), whose name this bazaar still carries, live in this area and are buried, near the school. During the Sikh rule, the Fakir brothers, renaissance men of their time—Fakir Azzizudin,

Fakir Noorudin and Fakir Imamudin—were not just *Hakims*, but also among the ablest and most progressive of administrators.

Among the others who contributed to my experience and education were an architect, a leading playwright, a consulting physician, a few editors of major dailies and weeklies, an author and art collector, a museum curator, a bureaucrat-turned-political scientist, several university professors and their students, a couple of landlords, several politicians (some quite senior), a few bureaucrats, a few Muslim *Pirs*, several businessmen, a young political science graduate from Harvard, who sounded like she planned to bring some sort of upheaval to her people and my constant companions: a newspaper columnist, who is also a Punjabi academic and my chauffeur. Not all, but several of these people were quite spirited and secure enough in their identity—Pakistani, Punjabi or Muslim—that they did not hesitate in being critical of themselves, their faith and their country.

At least from my perusal of the editorial pages of leading English dailies in Lahore and Delhi, I get the impression that there is more courageous self-evaluation in Pakistan than in India. Despite being a military state, I read op-ed pieces criticising the regime in a way that I have rarely seen in “democratic” India’s mainstream press. (South Indian newspapers such as *The Hindu* are a noteworthy exception). For instance, *Dawn*, the leading Pakistani English daily, carries a column by Kuldip Nayar, the senior Indian politician who despite his veneer of liberalism is squarely a part of the Indian establishment. I would therefore, bet that Pakistan is more likely to go against the grain to find meaningful solutions to the seemingly intractable problem of peace in the subcontinent.

The architect I met exemplified this out-of-the-box thinking. He was vehement in his criticism of intolerant creeds within Islam and presented me with a painting that was a montage of several famous monuments from the subcontinent, including mosques, mausoleums, and Hindu temples. I deeply appreciated his art, especially the idea of tolerance and oneness that he sought to convey. Perhaps a little inappropriately, I was parochial in pointing out that Sikh gurdwaras were conspicuous by their absence from his painting.

He was equally penetrating in his observations about urbanisation and architecture as he lamented what he felt was a parallel loss of individuality among people and buildings. Today’s houses and apartments have no personality. They all look the same. There was a time when houses in Lahore were

unique and had interesting names such as “Lal Ghar” (Red House) or “Ghantey wala Ghar” (The House with a Bell). Now they are numbered with nondescript alphanumeric address. People today also are less likely to have truly distinctive personalities. Houses and the people that live in them are no longer interesting. I don’t completely agree with his outlook, but behind his hyperbole was a passion for diversity and all things beautiful. He sought to make his city and country more diverse and beautiful.

Another powerful and wise voice was that of a greying playwright. I didn’t know how noted he was until autograph seekers interrupted our dinner at a restaurant in Lahore. He seemed to have travelled the world and displayed an astonishing breadth of experience. He was as equally comfortable in talking about Wal-Marts in “sanitised” suburban America, as he was about *Anarkali Bazaar* in old Lahore. He quoted Iqbal in support of his hypothesis that traced the causes of economic and social apartheid in the subcontinent to Brahmanism, with the same ease as he referred to public intellectuals like Edward Said to underscore his arguments about media complicity with political power all over the world. He reproved me that the Sikhs had been short sighted and naïve to throw their lot with India. Apparently this was a reference to the options the Sikhs had in 1947 to join Pakistan or India, or remain independent; and the Sikhs “stupidly” choosing to join India based on promises made to them by Nehru, Gandhi and Patel, while spurning a similar offer from Jinnah. I gently retorted that the best option for the Sikhs would probably have been independence from both India and Pakistan. Sikhs have strong ideological bonds with Islam, such as monotheism, iconoclasm and egalitarianism, and familial ties with the Hindus, since most converts to Sikhism were earlier Hindus. As a result, they might have served as a buffer, as they did in history, between Hindus and Muslims.

That peace should be so important to so many people in Pakistan should be surprising to many in the West and in India. For a country that is supposed to be “Islamic”, which has fortunately come to mean intolerant, brutal and belligerent, I met many people who were liberal in their faith, irreverent towards authority, cynical about unhealthy political institutions and sceptical about the media. One editor, for instance, whom I lunched with, was so spirited about reconciliation on the Indian sub-continent that his courage and idealism almost made him naïve to the influence that neo-fascist organisations like the RSS wield in India. One of the RSS’s founding principles, the restoration of *Akhand Bharat*, a ‘complete’ India that stretches from the Indus to Ceylon, would obliterate Pakistan. But if there are narrow-minded religious fanatics out there, I guess this world can do

with a few blinkered champions of peace and tolerance.

I saw similar energy at one of the universities, where I met several professors and students who also gave me hope for a brighter future for the sub-continent. One of the professors regretted the atrocious resource misallocation away from education and human development to the military on the Indian sub-continent. Another young professor, who trained at Harvard and left opportunities in New York to return to Pakistan, has chosen to focus on constitutional law. I was curious as to what a constitutional lawyer would do in a military dictatorship and learnt that all military states are not alike. Moreover, constitutional lawyers are most needed where the constitution is still being fleshed out. In my discussions at the university, there emerged an idea that Sikhs from the Diaspora and Pakistani Punjabis should exploit their common heritage to build and extend friendships that were prevalent among our parents generation.

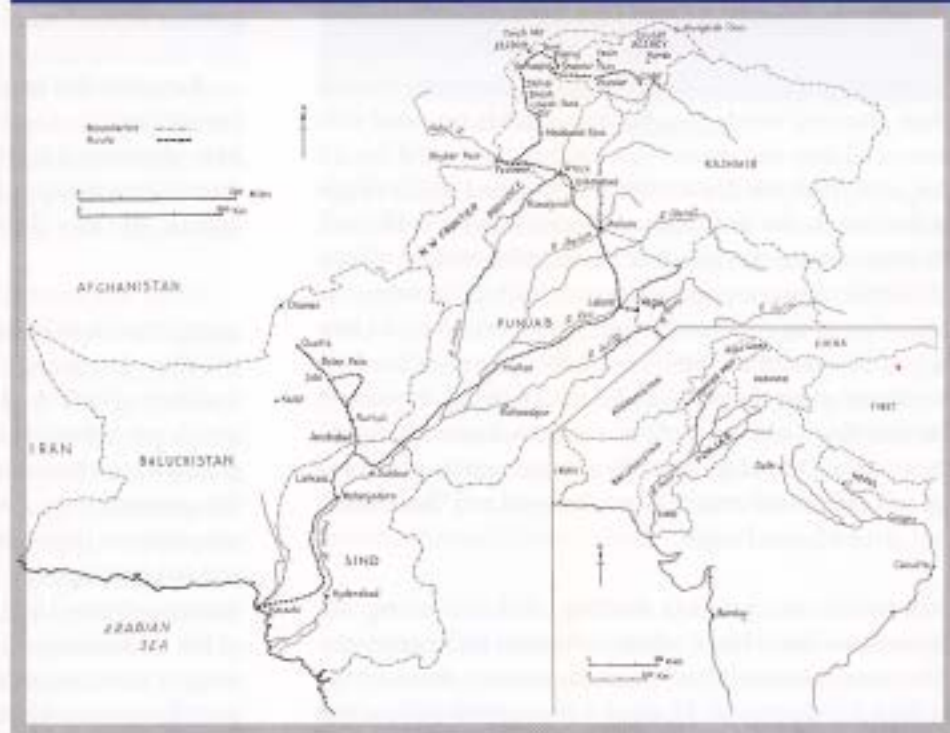
I met two young politicians who were just beginning their adventure in the messy world of Pakistani politics. One was a Harvard-trained political scientist. She lectured me about the problems with Islam and Pakistan in a tone that gave me the impression she was a self-hating Pakistani and embarrassed to be Muslim. Probably sensing my discomfort, she made it clear that she was quite comfortable with her identity as both a Pakistani and a Muslim; so comfortable that unlike her parents' generation she can be critical of her faith and her country.

The other young politician's story blew my mind. While still in high school in Pakistan, he visited California and was



The Khyber Pass, leading from the North West Frontier Province to Afghanistan today is the legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who incorporated this territory into his Kingdom which then became part of British India and is Pakistan today.

"To the Frontier": a map from Geoffrey Moorhouse's book.



enthralled by American football; and decided he wanted to play. So, he enrolled at University of Southern California, a Division I school, where the chances of getting on the football team for most Americans, who have grown up playing the game and actually know its rules, are remote. Yet like the

bumble-bee that is not supposed to be able to fly given its wingspan and aeronautical dimensions but it does so nevertheless, this tenacious young Pakistani learnt the rules of the game and beefed himself up to almost 300 pounds. Then he joined the team as a walk-on defensive lineman. This was the most unbelievable story I heard, especially since I did expect that anyone in a small village in Sheikhupura District, where I met him, would have even heard of American football or USC. With this kind of tenacity and courage among its youth, how can one not be optimistic about Pakistan's future.

These and the many other people I met helped dispel many misconceptions I had about Pakistan. Pakistan is not an Islamic nation, at least not in the way we think of Islam, as if Islam is some sort of a monolithic civilisation. It is not full of irrational people who hate India or America. It is not a country devoid of art, literature and culture. It is not a place that Sikhs, or for that matter anyone, need to be fearful of visiting. Pakistan is a complex, diverse and beautiful country.

One of the most beautiful sights in Pakistan has to be the sunrises in Punjab. I have seen the sun rise elsewhere, but sunrises in the Punjab seem unique. On one of my early morning road trips, right after I crossed the Chenab, a river that has inspired more poets in the world, I saw a breathtaking sunrise. There was a vast checkerboard of small plush green and freshly ploughed brown fields, peppered with trees of all sizes and shades—eucalyptus, acacia, and the old peepal (fig) banyan. The landscape was dotted with a village or two, where the mud homes blended into the fields, and the brick construction stood out like a healing wound. Upon all of this, the dew casts a lazy mist, which in winter is almost eerie as clouds of fog hug the ground on winter nights. Amidst this ebbing tranquillity, the sunrise was a fierce orange that burns away the tired haze, giving way to the new day. Some parts of the world need new days more than others. They only other place I have seen the sun come up as it did not the road to Islamabad was in a "backward" part of rural Indian Punjab.

I could not chronicle my trip without noting my impressions about Islam, which in Pakistan had many faces. The most noteworthy of these faces were those of the women. On the streets of Lahore, I was surprised to see few women were wearing the *hijab*. The visa on my passport was ominously stamped, "Islamic Republic of Pakistan", which conjured up images of a country, where women are never seen. Well, they were all over the place driving cars, in schools and colleges, on the streets, and in the stores. However, I did not see as many in the offices and business I visited.

Even though I could discern the influence of a literalist Islam, for the most part, the Muslims I met seemed no different from the Christians I meet in Chicago. I am sure many of them are observant Christians, and perhaps even fundamentalist, but it does not seem to affect their interaction with me. Nor did the Muslims in Pakistan treat me any differently. However, I did see many more people praying in public than I do in America. They were mostly from the lower economic classes. This seemed true when it came to Ramadan's fasting too. The chauffeurs and the help all seemed to fast, while this was not as true amongst the more affluent middle and upper-middle classes.

Most people in Pakistan, irrespective of their interpretation of Islam and whether they themselves fasted, acknowledged or participated in Ramadan. This seemed to be an extraordinarily unifying festival of abstinence. The cycle of life in the city revolved around the time when the fast began, and when it was broken in the evening. I fasted on a couple of days to be a part of this experience. It clearly breeds a sense of discipline, and if the ritual contributes to abstinence from indulgence, especially in anger, greed intolerance and hate, then the practice makes a lot of sense. The first Sikh Master, Guru Nanak, exhorts, "A true Muslim's fast is represented in good conduct".

Ramadan also became a convenient way for me to evade Punjabi hostility. Given the number of people I met, I would have overdosed on tea, sweets and all the trimmings of Punjabi hospitality, if I could not get away with the simple answer, *Rozai hai* – "I am fasting".

What was most clear was that the strong progressive interpretation of Islam that was thriving until partition is still alive. This interpretation is best exemplified by the Sufi tradition, which itself comprises several schools, some of which are extremely liberal. Many Sufis enthusiastically embrace poetry, music and art. It is no wonder that some of the greatest poets, classical musicians and artisans in the sub-continent have been Muslims. Even many of the frescoes and much of the inlay work in Sikh gurdwaras was done by Muslim artisans. Until partition, some of the best exponents of the Sikh classical tradition of music, who sang in the *sanctum sanctorum* at Amritsar, were Muslims *nibbies*. Since partition, some of the vitality of the Sufi tradition has eroded partly because Sufism thrived by interacting with other faith traditions and partly because some Pakistani regimes have encouraged more literalist traditions of Islam.

I met a *Pir* who seemed to follow a folk interpretation of Islam that included invoking the Divine for specific ailments

and problems. He had a *Darbar*, a mausoleum for his forefathers, where *Qawalis* are sung, and the prayer is more festive than stern. At this *Darbar* I observed poor village folks—some miserable and others quite elderly—genuflect before the *Pir* for his intervention with the Divine to ease their woes. These people seemed to find comfort in the “blessings” of the *Pir*, and his impact on their innocent desperation was touching. In Indian Punjab, I have seen Sants who leverage the Sikh faith in a similar way.

Since religion has such sway over the teeming masses of the sub-continent, it is a potent tool in the propaganda war between India and Pakistan. Indians are constantly bombarded with messages that vilify Pakistan and Islam. One of the stories told repeatedly in India is that the great Hindu sage of “tolerance”, *Gandhi*, wanted to keep India together, but the “hateful” Muslim Jinnah wanted partition. The Oscar winning movie, *Gandhi*, effectively transformed this propaganda into the truth. I found a different perspective in Pakistan. Several people lamented the partition of India and reasoned that Jinnah, who some actually accused of being an excessively liberal Muslim, had little interest in an Islamic republic. He was concerned about the rights of minorities in a majority Hindu India. Nehru and other political leaders pushed him into a situation where Pakistan became the only option. Even Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim leader who remained loyal to Gandhi and cast his lot with India, whose papers were recently published, squarely places the responsibility of partition on Nehru, Patel and Gandhi. As a Sikh who is painfully aware of the betrayal of the Sikhs by these Indian leaders, I suspect that there is strong merit to this position.

It seemed to me that partition has not compelled Pakistan to root out all Hindu and Sikh influences, as some in India seem obsessed with erasing Islamic and “foreign” history. From momentarily fearful acts such as tearing down mosques, to petty xenophobia manifested in re-naming streets, cities and buildings that bear “foreign” names, India, especially right-wing elements show’s signs of neo-fascist paranoia. Bombay became Mumbai, Calcutta Kolkatta and Madras is now Chennai. Street names all over the country that have Muslim or British names are being replaced with Aryan or Sanskrit names. I was pleasantly surprised to find Krishna Nagar, Tagore Park and several other Hindu names still intact in Pakistan.

I also met several Pakistani Punjabis who became almost melancholy about the partition of Punjab. One lady, who reflected the attitude of the generation that was born before partition, felt that Punjab had lost out in



Scene in Western Punjab.

the partition, especially since so many died and that Punjabi culture suffered a tremendous loss as a result of old friendships being severed, an ecumenical environment being ruined and the Punjabi language being lost to Hindi and Urdu. Interestingly she defined herself as a Punjabi first, a Pakistani second and a Muslim third. I think that because of partition, Punjab has become more Muslim in Pakistan and more Sikh in India. A unified Punjab would probably have been more liberal as far as religion was concerned. The language would have flourished and art and music would have thrived.

The wounds of partition are also still discernible, especially in the older generation. Those who lived through partition have an almost schizophrenic attitude towards the Sikhs. They feel nostalgic because they lost touch with so many Sikh friends and neighbours after 1947. They also vent indignant, if not wrathful, pangs at the merciless massacres during partition. I deeply empathised with their pain and expressed my own pent up disappointment at my community whose history is otherwise free of any vengeful brutality, even in the face of the worst kind of cruelty by

enemies. The Sikh community has still not come to terms with such aberrant behaviour during partition. In the '80s and '90s, when the powers-that-were started mercilessly killing Sikhs in extra-judicial encounters and paramilitary massacres, my mother tried desperately to make sense of this misfortune that had befallen the Sikhs in India. One of the Pakistani's I met shared a similar sad memory of her childhood. She remembered her father pointing out a well to her, where he said dozens of Sikh women and children had been killed by Muslim mobs. This burden of guilt that both these communities carry can only be assuaged by communication and interaction, something that has not happened since partition.

I left Pakistan with the realisation that for generations Sikhs and Muslims had lived together and now they are less than a few miles away. Yet, after partition the distance between the Sikhs and Muslims of Punjab has become much more distant than these few miles. Many of the young Pakistanis I met were clueless not only about partition, but also about the Sikhs. I was disappointed at their lack of inquisitiveness, a lack I have seen among young Indians too. This might be because education in South Asia relies more heavily on rote memorisation than on cultivating conceptual understanding and a passion for knowledge. Even though Pakistan is dotted with Sikh monuments, and a major part of Lahore and Punjab's history is deeply entwined with the Sikhs, Pakistani students are largely ignorant about this part of Punjabi heritage. I was also quietly dismayed at Pakistani hosts who lit up cigarettes in front of me or graciously offered me *halal* (kosher) meat unmindful of the Sikh anathema for tobacco and sacrificial meat. I am loath to think that a Sikh would ever present his Muslim guests with fine ham or a pork chop.

One young Pakistani, refreshing in her honesty, admitted that aside from a fleeting mention of Guru Nanak in her high school text book, the only other time Sikhs are even mentioned in her circle is to mock someone. "*Sikh vali gal na kar*", which means "Don't be [foolish] like a Sikh." I was puzzled by this derision and a Pakistani scholar offered a plausible explanation. Most young Pakistanis form their opinions about Sikhs not from the Sikhs who live in Pakistan but from Indian television and movies. And the Indian media deliberately and purposefully portrays Sikhs primarily as clowns or fools.

That India has quietly conquered Pakistan through its media was probably the most disappointing realisation I had on my trip. I was horrified to see the tasteless and uncreative productions from "Bollywood", representing

the worst of Indian film and television dominate Pakistan's television. This sort of popular culture, which has made large segments of Indian youth dull and void of all Arthshastra, a Hindu text that is in the vein of Machiavelli's Prince, discusses the use of entertainment by a ruler to keep the masses subdued. India certainly seems to be the numbing Pakistan's masses through its movies and television.

Sikhs from the Diaspora and Pakistani Muslims, especially those from Punjab, have a unique opportunity to draw upon their shared cultural and spiritual heritage to rebuild their historic relationship. They can help to stem ignorance and prejudice, and possibly serve as catalysts for peace in South Asia. As the things stand, Sikhs, especially those in India, have been conditioned believe that the Muslims are cruel and intolerant, and the Pakistani Muslims have been conditioned into looking at the Sikhs as clowns. This sort of the distance and ignorance not only breeds misunderstanding and hatred, but also can be exploited by vested interests and lead to events such as those of 11 September 2001.

Pakistan is naturally quite suspicious of India, and consequently of Indian Sikhs, who have dominated in all military campaigns against Pakistan. Three million Sikhs in the Diaspora, however, retain a connection with India only to the extent they have family or property in Punjab. Many of them are estranged from India because of the brutal oppression in the eighties and nineties. Sikhs who are American or Canadian find it deeply offensive that the Indian constitution should legislate that Sikh are Hindus. The Pakistani security establishment, therefore, might not view Sikhs from the Diaspora askance, allowing them to interact more freely with the other Pakistanis.

Diaspora Sikhs and Pakistani Punjabis can take the first steps towards what might be a road to peace in the sub-continent. Any such relationship, however, should not be based on any aversion of India. Sikhs and Muslims have an existing heritage to draw upon to build a healthy nexus. Punjabi literature and the Sufi tradition are strong common pillars for both communities. This should be the foundation for any Sikh-Muslim nexus in Punjab. Arnold Tonybee in his landmark work, *A History of the World*, discusses the role "creative minorities" can play in altering the course of history. A small group of Pakistani and Sikh Punjabis may be such a creative minority that alters the course of South Asia history, and brings the swans back home to Jhang. ☪

Blupinder Singh Mahal



India and Pakistan can come together

The division of India into two countries was artificial. The whole area extending from the Khyber Pass upto Assam is geo-politically one. And even within India the present dispensation is not correct. The Federal content of our constitution has been ignored. We should have more states. More power should be granted to the states, even to the districts and I think that if we do this we shall create more confidence, not only among our own people, but among our neighbours. Pakistan too can never stabilise unless it recognises that it is a federation of four different states, being NWFP, Baluchistan, Sind and Punjab.

India and Pakistan must ultimately come together into a common market and a common defence system. Otherwise, however much both countries might spend on defence, their security would remain in jeopardy.

What advantages would accrue to our two countries if we were to go in for such a confederation? First of all, our defence spending would be minimised. There would be free movement of labour and capital within the subcontinent. The suspicion that Hindus harbour towards Muslims would disappear once Pakistan is no longer seen as antagonistic. Muslims would be far more secure in an atmosphere devoid of anti-Pakistan rhetoric. At the same time, with minimum defence spending, our security would be maximised.

I have addressed public meetings as a member of the Ekta Party in both Muslim and Hindu-dominated areas in Uttar

Pradesh and I have found that the response of the people to this concept has been overwhelmingly positive. Both Hindus and Muslims have reacted favourably to the concept of a common defence, a common market, common tariffs, mobility of capital and labour. It would mean that people from India could invest in Pakistan and vice versa. The kind of acceleration that both our economies could achieve as a result of coming together in a confederation could make us competitive with Korea or Japan. The fear some Pakistanis have that India would swamp them economically is unfounded, because that would happen only if we remain under one over-centralised system of government which vests all powers within itself, as it exists today. We have to persuade the Pakistanis about this, woo them if necessary.

The point here is that our foreign policy priorities should be Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, not the USA and Europe. We will not strengthen ourselves by getting into friendlier and closer relationships with America, unless we first set our own house in South Asia in order.

As and when this proposal is mooted at a government to government level, I anticipate that Pakistan would be hesitant at first, but eventually would accept the logic of a confederation of states in the Indian sub-continent. They have to accept it. They will accept it because domestic public pressure will make them accept it.

The fact is that Pakistan is not a viable or natural nation. Therefore, Pakistanis have always been trying to seek an

identity which they do not have. Bhutto was trying to identify Pakistan with Iran. Zia was trying to identify Pakistan with Arabs. Whether it is in Iran or in the Arab countries, a Pakistani Muslim is invariably considered as a Punjabi or a Sindhi from Hindustan. In Pakistan's border areas, as in border areas of most countries, including India, there is an ethnic and cultural mix. Pakistan is trying to run away from reality. Pakistan is basically Punjab and Sind, and that is as Indian as can be. The riots in Karachi, as in certain parts of India, are one indication of the forcible attempt being made to perpetuate an unnatural status quo. It is only by coming together in a confederation that we will undo the injustice of the partition. Some people might accuse me of thinking along the lines of the RSS, demanding *Akhanda Bharat*. On the contrary what I am advocating is a United States of South Asia, what was originally Hindustan. I want a revival of that Hindustan by whatever name.

I am not advocating for one moment that India and Pakistan should be a single country, or that Pakistan should be absorbed into India. But if we do not come together in some form of confederation, whether we like it or not, sooner or later, we will be driven to a mutually destructive war. What I am advocating will then be achieved in a much more painful manner. For, one must recognise that both India and Pakistan, as they exist today, are quite unnatural.

It is a fact of history that Pakistan was not created by the Punjabi Muslims. It was created by the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Muslim League never won the election in Punjab. The Unionist party was the dominant party. As per the Mountbatten plan each province had to vote for or against partition. *Bengal voted for partition*. In Punjab the vote was *against* partition. East Punjab never voted for or against partition. *They just said that in case partition is thrust on them, they would want their own constitution*. That is all that they said. NWFP boycotted the referendum because its terms were mischievous and unrealistic. Baluchistan was not for partition. *So who wanted partition?* The princely states of Bhawalpur and Kalat both opted for India, but as they did not have geographical contiguity they had to remain in Pakistan. Pakistan was handed over to the Punjabi Muslims on a silver platter and they took it. Thereafter, they developed a vested interest in it. But despite that, there is again a resurgence of the Punjabi language in Pakistan. Before his death Faiz Ahmed Faiz, one of the greatest Urdu poets of the sub-continent, reverted to writing poetry in his mother-tongue, Punjabi. The call of the mother-tongue is one of the most powerful influences on a human being.

The existence of sub-nationalities is a reality everywhere in the world. It is a law of nature. This may seem like a digression,



Torn asunder! The Punjab voted against Partition but this was thrust upon the State.

but it is relevant to the issue. Karl Marx borrowed considerably from Hegel. The determinist view of history was Hegel's, adopted by Marx. Hegel too believed in "thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis". Hegel too said, "we will move to a world order". That was echoed by Marx. The difference was that Hegel considered the unit of change to be the family, the tribe, the nation. Marx said that the unit of change would be the international working class. The nineteenth century belonged to Marx. The twentieth century belongs to Hegel. In the latter twentieth century the USSR and China, both Communist giants, fell out. They fell out on the assertion of national identity.

The existence of sub-nationalism, developed from community, tribe, caste, family...can be healthy or unhealthy. But it is there. You can't wish it away. The reality of empathy that exists among people is as real among certain communities and groups as it is among families. Does anyone ever consider a family to be unhealthy or unnatural or immoral? So why should there be a feeling of insecurity among the rest if, say, the Garhwalis of the Almora region, by virtue of a similar lifestyle and cultural heritage, desire a sense of identification with one another? They are quite different from the Jat dominated areas of Western Uttar Pradesh. The same is true about Eastern UP.

This should not be taken to mean that I am in favour of the demand for Khalistan, as it was conceptualised or propagated. Before Jagjit Singh Chauhan came up with this demand publicly, I had met him. I had told him at that time that if he wanted an independent Punjab, extending from Peshawar to the Jamuna, it would make more sense. But Khalistan, as envisaged, is unrealistic. *The moral case for an independent state of Punjab is as strong as the case of Palestine.* That is because Punjab never gave a mandate to anybody to partition it. Gandhi and Nehru had no right to accept the partitioning of Punjab. Their party never represented the majority in Punjab. Jawaharlal Nehru's party, the Indian National Congress never ruled, except briefly in a coalition, in Punjab. When the Congress party was never in a majority in Punjab, how could the Congress speak of partition?

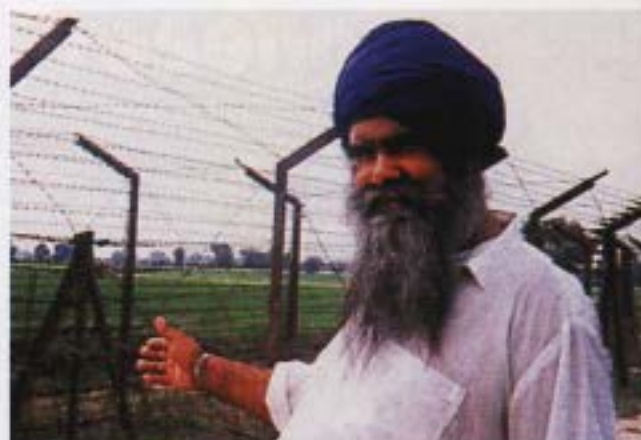
It was only because people were presented with a *fait accompli* that Pakistan became a reality and the Punjabi Hindus started looking towards Uttar Pradesh, towards Benaras, Haridwar and Hindi. The Punjabi Muslims got Pakistan. The Sikhs were hit the hardest because Punjabi lost its identity, and their scriptures are in Gurmukhi. Before partition, the Punjabi community consisting of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs was very well-balanced.

It is worth nothing that Gandhi and Jinnah were both from Gujarat, Nehru and Liaquat Ali were both from Uttar Pradesh. None of them ever won the election in Punjab. Who were they to take it upon themselves to partition Punjab? Who were they to speak for the whole country? They were manipulated by the British. We never permitted them to partition Punjab. That is why I consider the partitioning of Punjab to be entirely an imperialist legacy.

It was just a small elite in Punjab which joined the Congress Party. Members of this elite later became sycophants of the Nehru family, followers of the RSS. They never scented the real aspirations in Punjab and they never will. The partitioning of Punjab deprived Punjabis of their sense of true identity.

It was this lack of identity which later led to the *Punjabi suba* agitation as the Hindus, for whatever reason, rejected their own mother-tongue. The continued Government mishandling of the situation culminated decades later in *Operation Bluestar* and resultant misgovernance of the state. The Sikhs had a genuine grievance. Their identity was being destroyed and the Punjabi Hindus had turned their backs on them.

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution is not unique. Other states have voiced similar demands. Of course, they don't call their



Re-inforcing the trauma of partition, 40 years later.

A hundred Berlin-walls separate the Punjab, families, friends and fields. A Sikh farmer looks across the multi-layered barbed wire fencing which stretches from end to end along Eastern Punjab's border with Western Punjab erected in the late 1980s and re-inforced with mines, trip wires and flood lighting.

charter of demands the "Anandpur Sahib" resolution. The only special demand that the Sikhs have is that Amritsar would be given the status of a holy city. That's a very innocuous demand and there's nothing wrong with it.

We inherited a colonial mentality, which continued after the British left. Look at the history of Punjab. Punjab was always outside the mainstream of the freedom struggle. This remains true despite the great deception being perpetrated by the rulers of the country that individuals like Bhagat Singh were part of the Congress struggle.

What must be remembered is, first, Punjab was the last bastion of genuine independence in India. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the last ruler in the country to exercise genuine power. He was not like the phony effete rulers, such as the Nawab of Oudh and others, in the rest of the country. I don't consider the mutiny of 1857 to be part of the freedom movement. It was of no significance. There was not even one English soldier between Meerut and Calcutta and yet the mutiny collapsed. What kind of struggle for freedom was that?

We keep hearing such utter nonsense about the Punjabis collaborating with the British in 1857. I once asked Ram Manohar Lohia, what happened in 1849? After the British got a bloody nose at the battle of Chillianwallah at the hands of the Punjabis, it was the Maharashtran, the Dogra and the Bengal Sepoys who came to the aid of the British and defeated the Punjabi armies in the battle of Gujarat.

Thereafter, the British went about systematically destroying the elite in Punjab, and a new elite was created.

The Ranjit Singh loyalists were hounded out. What was the rest of the country doing at that time?

It was in 1849 that the last battle of independence was fought, because Punjab had a genuine independence to defeat. Ranjit Singh was the only ruler in the country to have modernised his army without becoming a vassal state of some foreign power. European officers and soldiers were serving under Punjabis in Ranjit Singh's army. *The white man was serving under Punjabi command.* In the rest of the country it was the other way round.

Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, one finds that all these centres of urban development were virtually created by the British. Even Allahabad. There was only one other centre that was comparable to all these as urban cultural centre and that was Lahore, which was indigenous. It was Ranjit Singh's capital. But this lasted only till 1849. Till that time Punjab was free.

In 1862 the *Kooka* revolt began in Punjab. The first call for *swadeshi*, ban on cow slaughter, independence and non-violence was given in 1862 in Punjab by the *Kooka* rebels. The British crushed them with a ruthlessness seldom witnessed. Many were tied to the mouths of cannons and blown to bits. Yet the *Kookas* remained true to their principles. The *Kooka* revolt lasted till 1883, but Punjab wasn't crushed altogether. After the *Kooka* were put down, the *Gadidar* movement began.

In 1885 the British established a club for Englishmen and Indians to discourage more such rebellions. It was given the name of the Indian National Congress. The British created a leadership in their own mould to serve their purpose. People like Gokhale, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Nehru, were all groomed by the British.

When Bhagat Singh was in jail, the Viceroy wrote to Gandhi asking for his opinion about whether Bhagat Singh's

hanging would create unrest in the country. Gandhi wrote back to say that it would create unrest, tacitly telling the British to go ahead and hang Bhagat Singh. After Bhagat was hanged and Gandhi went to Karachi in 1935, a garland of shoes was put around his neck. When Chandrashekhar Azad met Jawaharlal Nehru, Nehru refused to shake hands with him. He told Azad, "You are a fascist".

Thousands of people died to bring about democratic rights in the gurdwaras in the Akali agitation of the twenties. Where in the whole history of the Congress movement do you get to see sacrifice of this order? For one hundred years before the partition, there had been no communal riots in Lahore. The riots were created by the British through their agent provocateurs. Pathans were brought in by the British into Lahore and Sialkot to start the riots. There are CID reports of those days by Indian officers stating that the British paid money to the pathans to start the riots, when the British were forced to leave India, due to arm twisting by USA, they decided to leave a partitioned country behind. The riots were necessary to bring about a transfer of population, to make two nations a reality, to perpetuate the partition.

I am not advocating the case for an independent Punjab now. War and violence offer no solution. The solution lies in devolution of economic power to the states. Greater autonomy in the decision-making process affecting states should be created. Take the case of Vidharbha. It is Marathi speaking, yet the people have a shared history, a shared culture that makes them want their own state. Or take Goa. Why are people in Goa reluctant about people in Belgaum joining them? Both speak Konkani. Because they don't have a shared history, a common tradition that is the same as that of the people of Belgaum, despite the common language. So, they want to retain their separate state. What is wrong with that? Heavens didn't fall because Goa was granted statehood.

In fact smaller states have resulted in quicker growth. We should decide rationally to grant more powers to the states, create more states, and grant more power to the districts. Without real democracy at the grass-roots, democracy in Parliament becomes a farce. India as it is governed, is an absurdity.

Within the country India should become a federation. In South Asia we should have a confederation. That is the way of the future. The alternative, the path that we are treading at present, implies consequences which are too painful to contemplate. ☺

Rajinder Puri



Friends forever! Welcoming Lahorians at Chandigarh.

An Infinite Presence



The Living Scripture

Translating from one language to another is a daunting task. Language and culture are inseparably intertwined and the precise nuances of language often escape us because they remain tied to cultural ethos and traditions.

Clearly, many Sikhs would find my use of the term *scripture* inaccurate in describing the corpus of sacred writings that is the Guru Granth, for to the Sikhs it is far more than just a collation of scriptural writing. Over the centuries, a certain visible mythologising and idolisation of Guru Granth has occurred. To most Sikhs the Guru Granth is a living presence and not a book that can be stashed in a bookshelf or in the drawer of a room at a hotel.

Such concerns aside, the term *scripture* ordinarily and fairly universally refers to written texts that have acquired a revered and holy status in the traditions of a people. Historically, some religious scriptures were oral, either in toto or in part. And the oral tradition became a written record years, even centuries after they were first elaborated. Such is the case with the Islamic scriptures (*Quran*) many of the Judaic and Christian scriptural writings, as well as Hindu holy texts, such as the *Vedas*.

In contrast the sacred scriptural writings of Sikhs were written and collated by the founder-Gurus themselves, and the canon sealed in or around 1708 by the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh. The authenticity of the Sikh scriptural writings is thus firmly established and there is very little, relatively minor disagreement about any of its contents. In many religions the scriptures also contain mythical and semi-historic narratives; this is clearly seen in many Hindu texts and also in the *Old Testament*. In Sikh scriptures examples from Hindu or Islamic mythology and lexicon are often used to illustrate or debate a point but they never become incorporated into Sikh doctrine. Music has its own magic that transcends reason and, with minor exception, the majority of the Sikh scripture is composed in the ragas of classical Indian musical tradition.

Let us look at the writings within the Guru Granth that make it our scripture. A scripture becomes a covenant between God and the faith community. It is this that makes the scripture a living experience. Doctrine and theology make a scripture universal and not merely culture or ethno-specific. And that is how Sikhs look at the Guru Granth as the eternal living Guru.

Sikhism presents a unique and heightened concept of the *Word* and from this concept has developed a unique tradition and a new worldwide faith. Guru Granth speaks not only of the written and spoken word but also of the unspoken word - *anhal* - in Sikh parlance, inadequately translated as the sound current, to which only the inner self resonates in a condition in which the human mind becomes a part of divine connectivity.

The Gurus lived during dramatic and dangerous times. Two of the ten Gurus were martyred. Sikhs fought a great many battles in the period from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh in a time that spanned two centuries. Yet, none of these epoch events that shaped the evolution of the Sikh community rate a mention in the Guru Granth. Only rarely does the Guru Granth refer to any specific historical times or events and that too in very passing mention. I think this neglect was deliberate. The philosophy in the Guru Granth is universal and timeless. Historical detail could have been instructive but would have also rendered the scripture not free from the bounds of time.

Ancient Indian (pre-Sikh) thought envisioned the *Word* as the ultimate reality. In the Christian view too in the beginning was the *Word*, the *Word* was with God and the *Word* was God. I suppose in the Christian view the *Word* was manifest as flesh in the person of Jesus. This would make adoration of Jesus the focus of Christian worship. The institution of Christianity then would also become manifest in the person of Christ. In Hinduism the *Word* is only in the *Vedas* in specific language (Sanskrit), in a particular people and a particular land. This would confine Hinduism to somewhat of an ethnocentric existence.

Sikhism is beyond such limitations and thus becomes timeless and universal.

Scriptural texts are embodied in a language of words. But Guru Granth starts with an alphanumeric code (*Ik Oankar*), a concept that is repeated within the text several hundred times. In this *Ik* (One) is the first primal number which *Oankar* (Doer, Active Principle, Creator) is a word. The juxtaposition of the two creates a seminal metaphysical concept.

The opening lines of Guru Granth proclaim:

*There is one God
Truth is its Name
Creator of all
Fearing none, Enemy of none
Timeless
Not begotten, manifest from His own being
Made known by the grace of the Guru*

These opening lines occur in the text hundreds of times either in full or only as the first two lines or the first and last lines. I could argue that in these lines is captured the complete essence of the Sikh way of life, all else is commentary.

If, as I said, this theme is reinforced several hundred times within the scriptural text, it must be that the idea here is central to Sikhism and the religion cannot be comprehended without it.

This speaks of a universal God, the creator who has no form and thus no gender, no caste or lineage and exists as *truth*. The Guru Granth speaks repeatedly of one God, not a Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Jewish or a Sikh God. A partisan god is a lesser god, not worthy of worship.

The concept of original sin thus has no place in Sikh teaching. Human life becomes then not a fall from grace, but a unique opportunity to discover the divinity within each of us. This voyage to discover the infinity that is in each of us and within our lives becomes the purpose of life. This means the pursuit of a truthful life that recognises the divinity in each of us by service to community and creation. What is recommended is a life that sees God in all of God's creation and thus sees no enemy.

In many a hymn in the Guru Granth, God is described as both father and mother, hence gender neutral. According to the Sikh scriptural teachings the use of *He* or *Him* for God is inaccurate and only reflects the limitations of language and its usage.

Clearly, it follows that to treat women as inferior would be contrary to Sikh teaching. It is a point that has also been clearly made in the Guru Granth. There would hardly be a Sikh who cannot cite the relevant lines of Guru Granth from memory, since they are a part of the daily morning prayers of a Sikh. Yet, it needs to be recognised that Sikhism has flourished and existed from its origin over 500 years ago, as a very small drop in the very large ocean of Hindu and Islamic cultures. Historically, neither of these two dominant traditions - Hinduism and Islam - has recognised women as equal. Despite our very clear theology and doctrine of equality, we have however, historically failed to deliver to women an equal place on our society. Not that it is a justification for it, the failure is not of doctrine or scriptural teaching but of the cultural constraints in which we have practiced its teachings.

Very clearly, God as an infinite presence that permeates all creation is not easy to grasp, and impossible to describe. The Gurus recognised this. This theme forms the backdrop of all the writing in Guru Granth. The Gurus created hundreds of ways to say in their hymns that God is beyond all human formulations. And that the infinite reality is such that our senses cannot perceive and that our intellect cannot fathom, but with which our souls can commune. Their thoughts are echoed myriad times in the Guru Granth.

So how is the awareness to be achieved and how is the veil that hides it from us to be sundered? How are we to know the truth? This question is raised early in the Guru Granth, a part of the *Japji*, the Sikh morning prayer. "Abide and rejoice in God's Will" says Nanak. What Guru Granth recommends then is a transformation of the spirit in which God's grace would pervade.

Hukum and *Nadar* form integral parts of Sikh teaching and major parts of Sikh scripture. The concept of *Hukum* and its meaning are not easy to grasp. *Hukum* could be literally translated as command or edict and also as order as opposed to random disorder. In Sikhism when we talk of *Hukum* we embrace both meanings. When enjoins us to live in *Hukum* it asks us to accept and rejoice in God's will, for it is not without purpose, even though we may not understand it.

Evil in this world reflects and stems from events that we cannot perhaps comprehend. It reflects that within a mysterious order that exists there is also free will that humans often misuse. We seldom have the ability to see beyond the immediate. Perhaps evil is a test of faith. Walk in the shadow of the Lord, commands Sikhism, and live a life in *Hukum* and grace.

Let life become full of faith—grace and *hukum* – and free of attachment, avarice, lust, anger and ego. The Guru Granth teaches that these five are the primary enemies that destroy us from within and enjoins the Sikh to engage in a daily *dharamyudh* or crusade to battle these five every day.

Grace, to the Gurus, is the vital, positive force that actually works in our psychophysical being and transforms us. *Hukum* and Grace are acts of faith that evolve our lives into truthful and elegant existence. To be in a state of grace is to discover the divinity within. But grace is not a matter of entitlement; it is not earned. The moment one thinks of having deserved it, it promptly disappears. It enters only that

state of mind, which sees God everywhere and walks through life with humility.

Lest this be misunderstood, I need to point out that Sikhism does not advocate the lifestyle of a pacifist. Voice must be raised against tyranny and injustice and actions must be consistent with truth, justice and universal good. Sikhism came into existence at a time when two religious communities overwhelmed the Indian landscape. Muslim society was the politically dominant one and had come to believe that all of India must be Islamised, willingly or by force. Hindu society was fragmented by idol worship and a rigidly defined caste system that allowed no vertical mobility. The Gurus naturally raised their voices against both Hindu and Muslim practices. Therefore justice forms the corner stone of the values forcefully advocated in the Guru Granth.

The teachings of Guru Granth are universal and eternal. Not only do the writings deliberately stay away from discrete events of history, they absolutely refrain from dispensing specific edicts on particular moral choices, such as abortion, reproductive rights or other bioethical issues. In Guru Granth the emphasis is not to micromanage our lives but to provide the spiritual basis for a moral and ethical framework around which purposeful lives can be fashioned.

On our plates, life will serve us many dilemmas that will test us. Time and technology will bring us face to face with many new bioethical problems and issues of life and death. Our response will change with dried solutions as in a catechism or an easily swallowed pill but an ethical framework within which to navigate our way. Self-awareness, *Eh sareera merya iss jug meh ayekey kia tudh kar am kamayaa*.

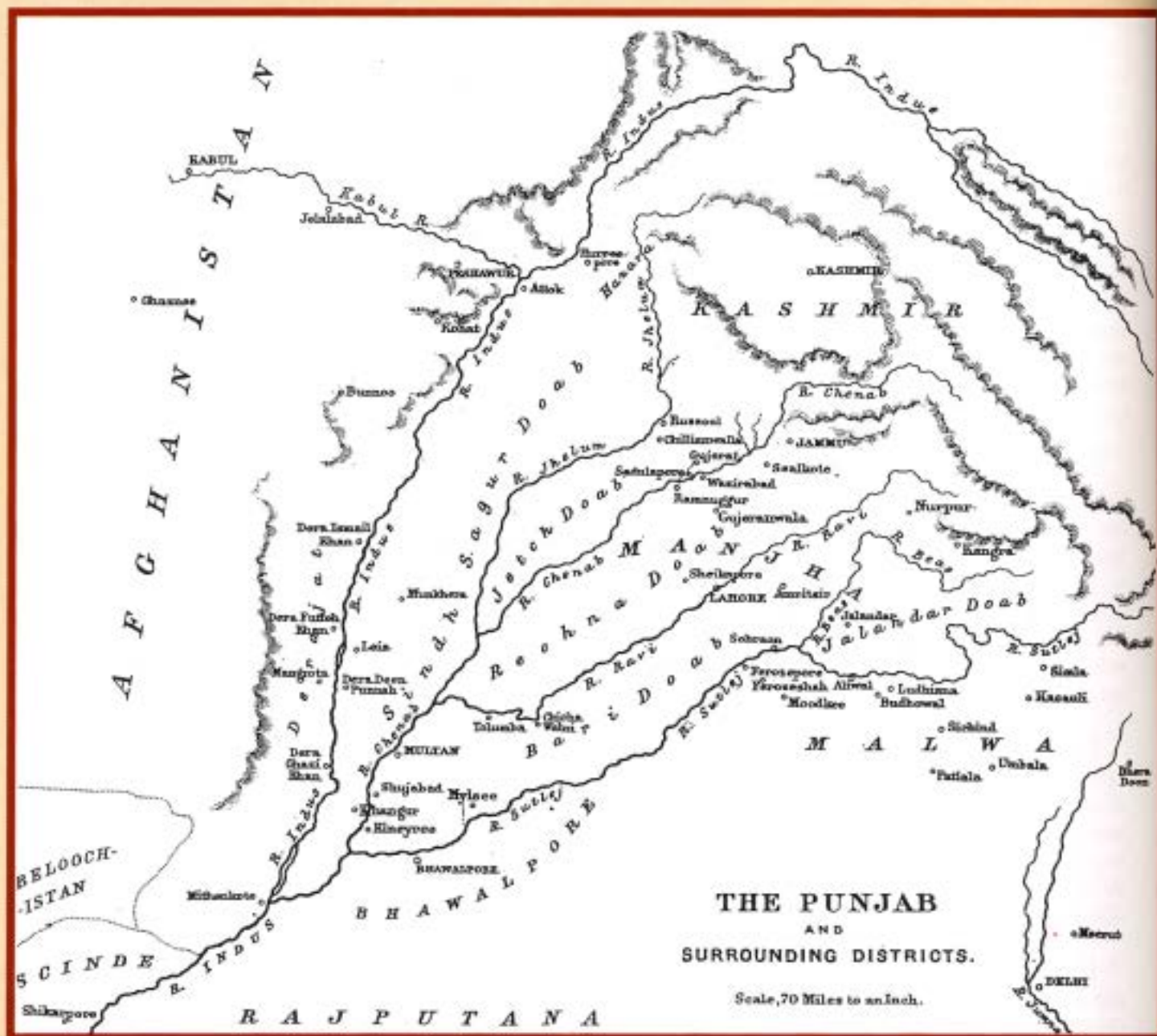
It must be understood that Sikhs do not worship the Gurus who composed the writings in the Guru Granth, nor do they idolise the holy book, although they revere it. The Word is God. The only way that it becomes so is when the Sikh reads it and heeds what he/she reads.

Guru Granth says:

The Word is the manifest spirit of the Guru; The Guru is immanent in the Word. ॥੨॥

Dr IJ Singh

Professor of Anatomy at New York University, is also the author of three books Sikhs and Sikhism: A View with a Bias, The Sikhs Way: A Pilgrims Progress and Being And Becoming A Sikh.



The United States of Punjab **Historical rationale and future imperative**

In its report of 16 May 1946, the Cabinet Mission, that followed the Cripps Mission, recorded in para 18 that it recognised three nationalities or nations in India:

General, Muslim and Sikh

The word *Hindu* was not used in this report. Explaining the word *General*, the Mission stated that those who were not Muslims and Sikhs fell in this category. The Cabinet Mission wrote: "We think that it is satisfactory to recognise only three communities in India: General, Muslim and Sikh. In *General* will fall all those who are not Muslims and Sikhs" (and included various castes and tribal communities that abound).

In Para 15 of its report the Mission stated that India's Constitution should adopt the following basic principles: "*In India there will be one Central government which will retain only foreign affairs, defence and communications at the centre. After this it was been written that, the Centre will keep only the financial powers to collect funds needed for running these three departments only.*"

In Para 2 of its report, the Mission wrote: "*in the Legislative Assembly, whenever a question pertaining to a particular community arises, it will be decided only by the members of that community in the Assembly on the basis of simple majority.*"


In Para 6 of the report, the Mission wrote: The groups in the Union will have the liberty, if they so wish, to redefine the conditions on which they will stay in the union after ten years, and thereafter each State will have this option after every ten years".

Similar promises were made by the Constituent, Assembly through its clear resolution that: "*The brave Sikhs of Punjab deserve special rights. I see nothing wrong in carving out a special region and administrative set up in the north, where the Sikhs can feel the glow of freedom.*" Thus spoke Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, shortly before becoming the Prime Minister of India.

India is a diverse country with scores of major languages and hundreds of dialects with unique apparel, foods and customs, more diverse than Western and Eastern Europe combined. Yet, that we should remain one and cohesive is dictated by geography, history and circumstances. Unfortunately, from the second half of the 20th Century, Governments in power imposed upon India a series of five year economic plans that emasculated the

country. In its stated objective to redraw the state boundaries based on the language of the people, the then Government treated Sikhs with prejudice. In 1951 while Sikh leaders looked askance, communal virus spread through every village in the Punjab, with instructions to every non-Sikh (especially non-Jats) to declare that their mother tongue was Hindi even though they did not speak a word of it! The government also imposed Sanskrit at schools. If you did not take science as a subject for university entrance matriculation examination, it was mandatory to take Sanskrit for first two years of College. I had to take it at Khalsa College Mahalpur in 1949-51 and my own mother tongue, Punjabi, was optional. All my classmates who were non-Sikhs, along with their families, opted for Hindi as their spoken language even though they did not speak a word of it. Nowhere in the history of this entire world does one find an example of a people abandoning their mother tongue other than the Punjabi Hindus. So, while every other state became uni-lingual, Punjab, thanks to its Hindu sons and daughters and the conniving Central Government, became a unique bilingual state. Even that was not enough. As a wise man told us, a Brahmin thinks generations ahead, a Muslim thinks just before but a Sikh thinks after the fact. Instead of raising a hue and cry about the language census fraud committed upon its people, Sikh leaders launched the self-destructive *Punjabi Sooba Morcha* with the result that half of Punjab that we ended up after the 1947 partition was further carved out into three, and a Berlin Wall-like Haryana erected between Punjab and the seat of power in New Delhi.

At one time the Punjabi mother had only one son. He was Hindu. Then Islam came to the land of five rivers. Some Hindus adopted the faith of the invader and so the second son, a Muslim, was born. He kept his mother tongue as Punjabi but started writing it in the alien alphabet of the invader. Then the period of Sikh gurus came and the third and the youngest son of Punjabi mother was born, a Sikh. Then came the partition of the Punjabi mothers' birthplace and, the second son chose to officially call his language as Urdu, a mixture of the languages of the invader and the invaded. The first born Punjabi Hindu, chose to forsake his mother for Hindi, a stepsister of the Punjabi mother.

Now the Punjabi mother has only one son left, the Sikh. Time is running out for the Punjabi Mother. The Punjab of today is only a minor brush on the map, a mere shadow of its glorious past. What of the future? Can we be United again? 

Hardev Singh Shergill

Nihang Singhs

Guru Kiyan Ladliyan Faujan



NIHANG is derived from the Sanskrit word *Nihshank* meaning "brave", "fearless". Guru Arjun mentions the Nihangs in his Bani ਨਿਰਭੈ ਹੋਇਓ ਭਇਆ ਨਿਰੈਕਾ (SGGS, page 392). There are other meanings "without ego", "sword", "alligator", "horse", "one who is in communion with Akal"; Cunningham describes a Nihang "as pure and clear". They are not a new clan but one manifestation of the Khalsa. Nihangs consider themselves as the army of the *Akal-Purakh* ("Timeless One").

There are various writings on their history and origin; as per Guru Hargobinds' prophesy "In times to come standard bearers with farha will have similar followers as Nihang"; Guru Gobind Singh's son Baba Fateh Singh once came to meet the Guru with an peaked turban, farha and blue clothes. Guru ji taking him in his lap remarked, "A special panth of Sikhs will come in existence".

Guru Gobind Singh after the Chamkaur battle was wearing a blue robe, discarded that into fire and tied the remaining small blue piece of cloth to his sword, so initiating a blue robed clan called Nihangs. A similar story states that the Guru stayed with Sodhi Kaul, when put his blue robe to fire, a small piece was left unburnt, Bhai Mann Singh respectfully took it from the Guru and put it on his turban. Thereupon Guruji blessed Bhai Mann Singh saying that the Nihang system would start with similar robes.

Dress Code and Mode of Living

A Nihang wears a blue long kurta going below the knees, long *kachhera* upto the knees, a saffron / blue *kamand* and special type of turban or *dastar* festooned with quoits (*chakkars*) rosaries and a piece of cloth (called *dumala*) forming a plume. *Dastar* is the Persian word meaning a cloth tied with hand (*dast*) neatly on one's head.

These Nihangs lead a community life in areas called *Nihang Chhauwani* (cantonnement) or *Para* (ਪਰਾਮ). As an example in Amritsar, Akali Baba Phoola Singh Burj area is a famous *Chhauwani* of Nihangs (Budha Dal). These are quite distinct from Gurdwaras and have a pair of Nishaan Sahibs in blue and saffron colours signifying imperial and celestial powers. Nihangs, like all Sikhs are enjoined to lead a house-holders life, are all baptised, sticking on to *harni, barna, rahit, nitnem* and all other codes of conduct. One always sees the *Panj Piyaras* in the Nihang dress. All of them are trained in martial art, horsemanship, swordsmanship, archery, *Gatka* and physical exercises.

Gargaj Bole ਗਗਗੱਜ ਬੋਲ The Nihang's Language

Since the time of Nawab Kapur Singh, Nihang Singhs popularised their spoken language called *Gargaj Bole*, which is quite uplifting and connotes high spirits.

Their words were very useful for secret communication without being detected.

I will give a few examples in Punjabi:

ਭਗਵੇਂ ਕੱਪੜੇ - ਗਿੱਦੜ ਰੰਗਾ; ਹੋਲਾਂ - ਇਲਾਚੀਆਂ; ਥੋਰ - ਖੁਰਮਾਣੀਆਂ; ਬ੍ਰਿਛਾਂ ਦੇ ਪੱਤ - ਪੂਰੀਆਂ; ਛੁਜੇ ਛੋਲੇ - ਬਦਾਮ; ਸਾਗ ਸਬਜੀ - ਪੁਲਾ; ਥੜਾਧੂੰ - ਇਕ ਟੰਗਾ ਬਟੋਰਾ; ਸੀਸ ਮਹੱਲ - ਟੁਟੀ ਹੋਈ ਕੁਲੀ; ਮੁਸੀਬਤ - ਸੁਰਗ; ਮੌਤ-ਚੜਾਈ ਕਰਨਾ, ਕਹੀ - ਪਛਾਲਮੋਚਨੀ, ਘੋੜਿਆਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਕਾਠੀਆਂ - ਆਰਾਮ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਮੰਜੇ; ਸੱਕਰ - ਸਿਰ ਖਿੰਡੀ; ਬਹੁਕਰ - ਸੁੰਦਰੀ; ਗਵਰਨਰ - ਝਾੜ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲਾ; ਮਕੀ ਦੀ ਰੋਟੀ - ਬਸੰਤ ਕੋਰ; ਸੂਈ - ਜੋਤ ਮੇਲਣੀ; ਮੱਛੀ-ਜਲ ਡੋਰੀ; ਜਗੀਰ-ਟੁੱਕਰ; ਸਰਕਾਰ - ਚੁਗਲ; ਹਿੰਦੂ-ਅੰਨ੍ਹਾ; ਰੁਪਏ - ਠੀਕਰਾ ਜਾਂ ਫਿੱਲੜ; ਡਿਗ ਪੈਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਨੂੰ - ਛਾਲ ਮਾਰੀ; ਕੜਾਹ-ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦ; ਹੁੱਕਾ - ਜਗਤ ਜੂਠ; ਹੁਕੇ ਦੇ ਸੁਟੇ ਲਾਉਣ ਵਾਲਾ - ਗਈ ਚੁੱਘ; ਪੱਗ ਬੰਨ੍ਹਣਾ - ਦਸਤਾਰ ਸਜਾਉਣਾ।

Nihangs and Akalis are actually the same

Even though our mental picture of Nihangs and Akalis is different, in reality they are the same: ਅਕਾਲ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਬਸਤਰ ਪਹਿਰਾਏ. During the 18th century in the Shahidi Misl, Akali Naina Singh's army were in Nihang uniform, his disciple Akali Phoola Singh later taking over command. He was a renowned general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army.

Some famous Nihangs and their heroic deeds

Akali Phoola Singh : A fearless general who fought and won the battles of Kasur (1807), Multan (1818), Kashmir (1819) and died fighting valiantly in battle at Naushera in 1823 leading the Akali Army. He was born at village Shihaan (now Dehlan Shihaan) to. Sardar Ishar Singh Akali, a fearless chief of the



Nishana Misl on 14 January 1761. Sardar Ishar Singh interdicted the returning hordes of Ahmed Shah Abdali, recovering some thousands of kidnapped women from barbaric clutches, restoring them to their parents, but was injured in this guerilla battle and later succumbed to his wounds. He had handed over young Phoola Singh to Baba Naina Singh Akali, of the same



Misl. Naina Singh groomed Phoola Singh in spiritual and military fields. Akali Phoola Singh took over as head of the Shahidan Misl. In 1805, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had besieged Amritsar city but the Bhangi Sardars of Amritsar arraigned their army and artillery to fight back. Akali Phoola Singh with his Nihangs interceded between the opposing parties, saved bloodshed and arranged a compromise. Another incident pertains again to Maharaja Ranjit Singh who after having married Mohran, a Muslim girl, appeared at Akal Takht for receiving punishment as a *Tankharya*. Akali Phoola Singh, part of the *Panj Piyaaras* in 1808, announced that the Maharaja be whipped publicly. Maharaja accepted the punishment and bared his back to receive the whipping. Thereupon the *sangat*, the congregation, requested Akali Phoola Singh to forgo the punishment of whipping. Akali Phoola Singh enjoyed tremendous military and spiritual respect in Sikh psyche and historians must accord him the high status earned in his life time.

Akali Kaur Singh Nihang: Enjoys similar respect. Born in 1886 at village Padhar Chakaar, Kashmir to Bibi Karam Kaur and Bhai Mahan Singh. Named Puran Singh, he received gurnat lessons from Baba Mahan Singh and Gyani Bagh Singh. After



amrit ceremony in 1912, he was renamed as Kaur Singh Nihang and began to preach in Gurmukhi. He founded Guru Nanak Ashram in village Chakaar for imparting education and during 1947, he did yeoman's service in refugee camps at Kurukshetra and Sangrur. He promoted Amrit parchar and started *dharmaik panchayats*. He was a crusader of reforms in Sikhism including the abolition of *Blung Parshad* at Hazoor Sahib.

Nihang Groups today

Nihangs are divided today into several groups, each with its own *chhatwari* (cantonment), but loosely organised into two *dals* (forces): Buddha Dal and Taruna Dal, names initially given the two sections into which the Khalsa army was organised in 1733. Buddha Dal has its headquarters at Talwandi Sabo in Bathinda District while the principal *chhatwari* of the Taruna Dal Nihangs is at Baba Bakala in Amritsar District.



The Nihang tradition goes back to over three centuries. Baba Banda Singh, Baba Deep Singh, Baba Gurbakhsh Singh, Bhai Darbara Singh are some prominent Nihangs. Because of their high moral character, protection to women is part of folk lore : ਆਏ ਲੈ ਲਿਹੰਗ ਸੁਚਾ ਖੋਲ ਦੇ ਨਿਸੰਗ; (The Nihangs have come, open your door without fear.) There is also a lighter side of their *bhang* addiction: ਪੀਣ ਭੰਗ ਤੇ ਸੌਣ ਥਾਗੀ ਪਿਛਲੇ ਜੀਉਣ ਆਪਣੇ ਥਾਗੀ.

Nihang Festivals

Nihangs celebrate Baisakhi at Damdama Sahib, Diwali at Amritsar and Holi Mahala at Anandpur Sahib. I had the fortune of visiting them in their splendor at Anandpur when Nihangs in their unique *bana*, horses, horse riding, tent pegging, *gatka* display, swordmanship and spirited *Jaikaras* aroused Sikh emotions and *Charhdi Kala*.

It is not very kind that the Nihang's *bana* dress dignity is taken well by Indians-nay even by other Sikhs.

They do not have a steady source of income except produce from some agricultural land. Their self-respect forbids them to accept alms, they do believe in *Kin Kama*, but where is the *Kirt*?

Much is required to be done by Nihang organisations to maintain their distinct and spectacular identity, without looking towards any political patronage. The following reforms are humbly suggested:

- Gurbani education is paramount. One Nihang, an ex-army havildar, visits us almost twice a year accompanied by a younger Nihang. I was aghast that they do not know even *Nitnem banis*, leave aside their meaning. Organisations must bridge this gap through seminars and special schools.
- Such seminars should be based on Nihang methods and customs, encompassing horse riding, *gatka*, swordmanship, lance wielding, wrestling and other methods of martial arts.
- After some years of training, young Nihangs should spread out to village gurdwaras and schools to further spread such training to Sikh children.
- The evils of terrorism and the bullying attitude in society can be corrected by their generous conduct and personal example.



- Arrangements for their vocational training must be made, thus bringing up their economic status.
- It is very important to wean them off *bhang* / *sukha* which Nihangs consider as justified and sanctified. Their *Chhatwari* must have this propagated to rid them of this menace.

Since the Nihangs are *Guru's Lady Fauj*, it is our earnest effort to maintain their *Fauji* and pampered status by bringing such reforms and elevate them to their pristine martial glory. ☞

Maj Gen (Dr) Jaswant Singh, AVSM



**"The Nihangs are here
Open doors without fear !"**



Such was the refrain sung by fighting warriors and the families of the north when marauders swarmed from across the Khyber, led by Nadir Shah and then Abdali, ravaging northern India up till Delhi. Only the Sikhs, spearheaded by the Nihangs, fearlessly fought against them.

Nihangs generally remained on horseback, on the move from one place to another, *Chalda Vaheer* ("the roaming battalion"). Tents, horses and other animals also accompanied the *Vaheer*. Wherever they camped, *Guru ka langar* was served to every passer-by.

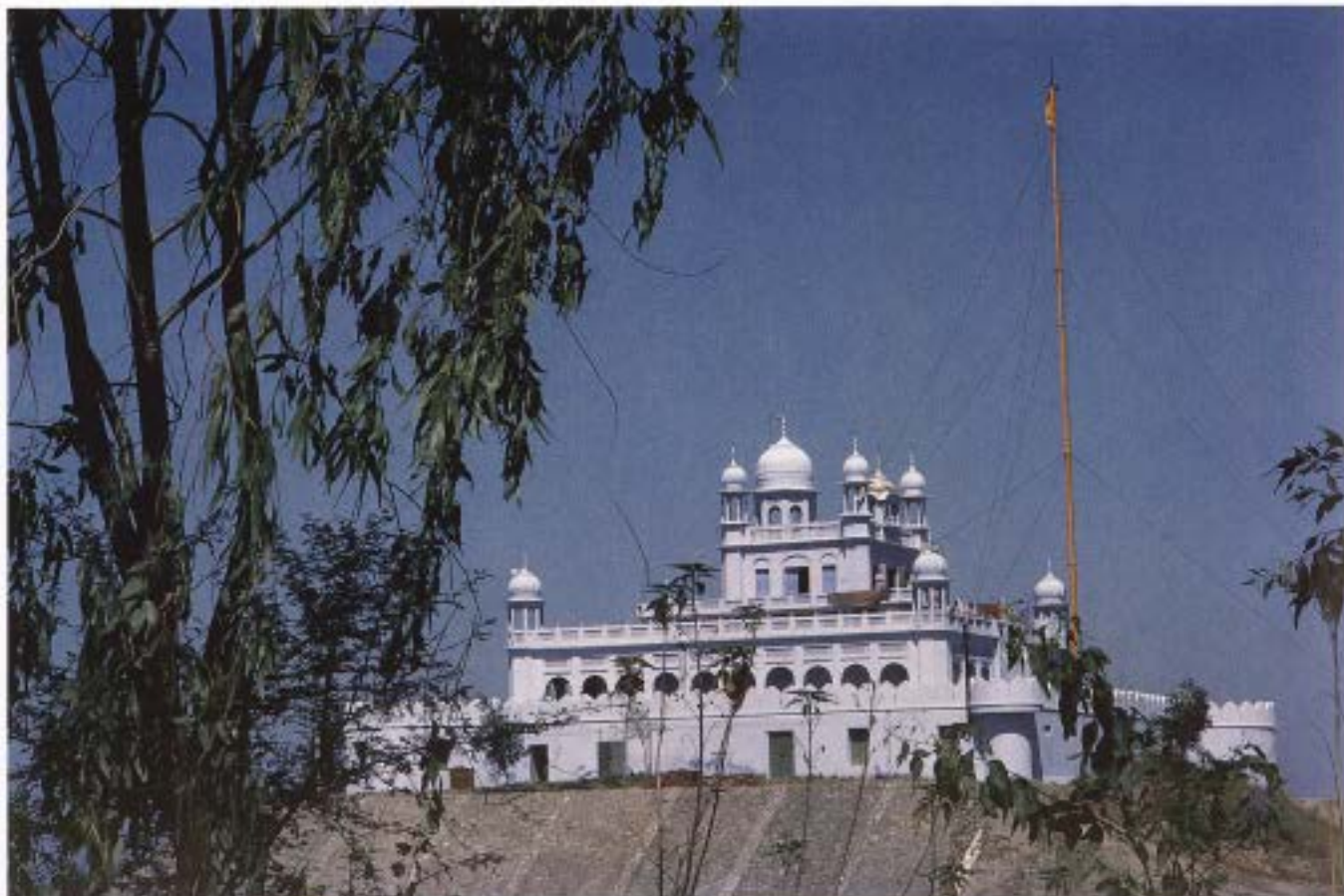
Nihangs were thoroughly committed individuals, always ready to lay down their lives for Sikh principles. Lepel Griffin wrote "The real Akali was bold, free, and unassuming to all, but in particular haughty and audacious to those who dared to call or think themselves as his superiors in rank or station. He ever strove to win the character of a friend to the poor, was an enemy of the rich and powerful. He was a fanatic in his religion, which was nearly a pure deism, and followed strictly all the rules laid down for his guidance by the great Guru Gobind Singh. He made no scruple to seize or demand from even a friend whatever he required, but he was equally ready to overpay an obligation. He cared little for wealth, but was content with the mere necessities of existence. He was regardless of life and willingly exposed his own to danger at the call of duty".

According to John Malcolm "The Akalis have a great interest in maintaining both the religion and government of the Sikhs as established by Guru Gobind Singh, as on its continuance in that shape, their religious and political influence must depend".

In the words of Gordon "They exercised a fierce scrutiny as censors in upholding strict compliance with the militant creed of the Singhs, constituted themselves as defenders of the faith against all innovations, took a prominent part in the councils in the planning and arranging of expeditions for averting national danger and in educating the people in doctrines of the Sikh religion.

Through their extraordinary zeal and enthusiasm, they acquired the character of priests, in which capacity they acted effectively, while directing the conduct of the Sikh councils at the Akal Takht. According to Malcolm, they were "insufferable to strangers for whom they entertain a contempt which they take little pains to conceal".

According to Dr Bhagat Singh "To serve a foreign master was against their creed. In fact, it was practice with them to be a little uncharitable to the powerful and the rich, while serving and helping the poor and weak. In the matter of religious doctrine and practice, they are uncompromisingly



orthodox. According to Ali-ud-Din Mufti, the Akalis were an order that never cared about death and misery. They have, ever since their origin, been held in high esteem by the Sikhs. Their contingents were called the *Forces of Guru Gobind Singh*. Therefore, they enjoyed the regard of the whole Sikh community. Hence the deep veneration in which the *Shahid* or *Nihang Misl* was held.

Nihangs always live in high spirits (*charhdi kalan*) facing all odds in cheerful mood. Suffering cruelties and atrocities of the enemy never affected their high spirits. When thousands of Sikhs were killed in the *Vadda Ghallughara* (the major holocaust) by Ahmad Shah Abdali, it was believed that it

would not be possible for Sikhs to stand strong again. But when a person lamented the irreparable loss, a *Nihang Singh* would laugh and say that the real Khalsa had survived and only the weak elements had perished. Such high spirits are a hallmark of the *Nihangs*.

During the leadership of Nawab Kapur Singh, the *Dal Khalsa* was bifurcated into two groups, the *Budha Dal* and *Taruna Dal*. Sikhs above 40 years were taken in the *Budha Dal* and those below 40 years in the *Taruna Dal*. Their duties were also different. *Budha Dal* would preach the Sikh thought, look after and construct Sikh shrines and pay full attention to the safety and well-being of women and



children, especially during calamity. *Tarana Dal* would play defensive and offensive roles during invasions of the Mughal or Afghan armies. *Tarana Dal* was further sub-divided into five groups:

- *Jatha Shaheedan* : Its *jathedar* was Baba Deep Singh Shaheed and close associates were Baba Natha Singh and Baba Gurbakhsh Singh.

- *Jatha Amritsarian* : Bhai Karam Singh and Dharam Singh of Amritsar were *jathedars* of this *jatha*.

- *Jatha of Baba Kahan Singh* : The *jathedar* of this group of warriors was Baba Kahan Singh, close associates being



Bhai Miri Singh, Hari Singh and Bagh Singh Hallowalia.

- *Jatha Dallewalia* : Its *jathedar* was Baba Dasaundha Singh of Kot Budhe Da.

- *Jatha Rangretian* : Eminent leaders of this *jatha* were Baba Bir Singh, Jeeon Singh, Amar Singh and others.

In the course of time the number of these *jathas* increased to thirty and these were further sub-divided into sixty five groups. 🏰

All photographs by Kishie Singh taken at Anandpur Sahib during Hola Mohalla.

A very Punjabi festival

"So you have come for the *Baisakhi Mela*?" The rickshawala asks in his earthy Punjabi and before waiting for an answer asks another question, "Why haven't you brought your children?" 'Children' in Punjabi parlance includes the spouse. Not wanting to perplex this friendly Talwandi Sabo man, I reply tactfully, "You see the children are having their exams." It is not the done thing for a single woman to be heading for a *Baisakhi mela* at Damdama Sahib. People go to melas with families, friends and sometimes the entire village neighbourhood. As he drops me at a house by the famous gurdwara, he adds, "Next time do bring the children".

Well, there is always a next time for a mela in Punjab for the folks are as 'funjabi' as they can be. But the *Baisakhi mela* is celebrated with a heightened sense of jubilation. *Baisakhi* or *Vaisakhi* derives its name from the month of *Vaisakhi* and marks the new year of the Indian calendar just a little short of mid-April. It is usually the 13th day of the month and some times the 14th. It has been a time for celebration since forever and for the Punjabis it was the harvest festival to be ushered in with the shout of *Jatta Aayi Vaisakhi*.

In 1699, the festival got an entirely new dimension as the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs founded the Khalsa *panth* on this day at Anandpur Sahib. Soon after followed Guru's battles with the Mughals. After the pain and sorrow of war, including losing his four sons, Guru Gobind Singh came to rest on a sandy mound at Talwandi Sabo. It was here that the Guru and his armies celebrated *Baisakhi* once more.

Fun and fair time in Punjab means going to the *Maghi mela* in Muktsar in January, *Hola Mohalla* at Anandpur Sahib in March and *Baisakhi* at Damdama Sahib.

But of late *Baisakhi*, like much else, is not just Punjabi fare but a global festival of sorts with the Sikhs scattered all over the world. Since 2003, *Vaisakhi* is being celebrated with gusto at Trafalgar Square in London with other communities joining the song and

dance. Farther away in Toronto it is time for a gala banquet with dinner, dance and a discount for students. Last year concerts by ghazal singer Jagjit Singh were a sell-out at *Baisakhi* time in New York and New Jersey. Not just that, for the first time last year the festival was celebrated in New Jersey State House with Governor James E. McGreevy speaking of "our common humanity" to the Sikh community and adding: "Together we can create a better world, a better nation."

So the festival of simple peasant folks has now come with a bang on the international scene. The multinationals too have owned this article with greeting cards, wallpaper and other knickknacks. Celebrations abroad have angelic dancers and 'Funjabi' pop singers. A long way from the old soft tones of yesteryear Punjabi songs in Asa Singh Mastana's sombre tone speaking of ripe wheat stalks, plenty to eat and spend on and the simple pleasure of the village fair. And now gourmets are offering exotic *Baisakhi* cuisine, which perhaps would humble the rustic *jalebis* and *pakodas* deep fried as of old.

Although *Baisakhi* was primarily a harvest festival in which all Punjabis participated, irrespective of what religion they belonged to, yet it did a vanishing trick from West Punjab after the partition. In fact, it had gained identity as a Sikh festival with establishing of the Khalsa on this day. That was the time when the Sikh Gurus were waging battles against the Mughals. However, at the village level people of all faiths participated in it. Pakistani diplomat Munnawar Bhatti, who comes from the farming stock near Sialkot, says, "In my childhood, well after the creation Pakistan, I recall going to the *Baisakhi melas* and seeing villagers do the bhangra. But then over the years the practice stopped. It was during the dictatorial regime of Zia-ul-Haq that all multi-faith celebrations with song and dance came to a stop in Pakistan." Painter Akram Varraich, a Muslim Jat of Wazirabad, says: "Old habits die hard and the people of Wazirabad and Amenabad still continue with the practice of taking a dip in the Chenab river on this day."



The traditional significance of *Baisakhi* is that it marks the completion of a cycle in time and the beginning of new ones. Thus the day is counted most auspicious. Painter Malkit Singh recalling the harvest days in Lande village near Moga, says, "We would cut the crops moving on our haunches. The most haunting image I have of my youth is of the drumbeater. He would beat the *dhol* to buck us up. Thus we would cut the wheat daylong and wait for lunch, as it would bring rest. Harvest time, we would get a special treat of *shakkar* and ghee to energise us". Gulzar Singh Sandhu, born of peasant stock in Doaba, says, "It is basically a crop festival. This would be a time when the crops would be harvested and money would come home. So it would be time for new clothes and weddings for the eligible."

Eating, drinking and making merry are the traditional Punjabi traits and Sandhu recalls that on *Baisakhi* in his Sunni village, the people would pool in to buy the fattest goat and share the meat. He recounts an interesting festival-time anecdote, "I would help my father in the harvest as a boy and those days we cut the crops manually. One *Baisakhi* my father and uncle

went off to the fields to feast on mutton curry and country-brew and I was with my friends. We drank from pitchers buried in the ground and drank so much that neither my father nor I could get up early next morning. We went to the fields nevertheless with sickles in hand. I was hardly able to cut the wheat. My father told me to go home and rest. Later I learnt that the moment I left he too went off to sleep in the fields. Such was our *Baisakhi* hangover!"

And so people get ready to celebrate the big day in a big urban way all over the world and the village folk plan a pilgrimage to the neighbouring gurdwaras and with *Guru di kirpa*, to Damdama Sahib.

And my old rickshawala friend will be greeting an odd visitor or two saying, "So you have come to the *Vaisakhi mela* but why haven't you brought your children. Do bring them next time!" And there is always a next time, a next *Baisakhi* and a new beginning. ☺

Nirupama Dutt
(From: *The Tribune*)

CONCEPT OF DIVINITY

The bright sunshine of spring is indicative of the time of celebrations in Punjab. People dance in thanksgiving to the Lord of the harvests; visit gurdwaras, sing kirtans and enjoy food together at the langars. Baisakhi falls on 14 April. It is a day rendered sacred by several significant events in Punjab's history.

Baisakhi has a special meaning for the Sikhs. On this day in 1699, the tenth Master, Gobind Singh, created the order of the Khalsa. He discontinued the tradition of Gurus in Sikhism by declaring *Granth Sahib* to be the eternal Guru of all Sikhs. He gave call to his followers to be ready to lay down their lives to protect the faith and defend others against religious despotism. He instituted the *Panj Piaras* comprising representatives of five different castes to give leadership to the Sikhs.

At a time when numerous religious leaders were setting themselves as gods, so deceiving the people and blinding them for ever, he castigated the custom of elevating mere mortals to the status of God or gods. Foreseeing the possibility that his own followers may start worshipping him as God, he wrote those immortal words: "Those who address me as God shall fall into the pit of hell. Treat me as a servant of the Lord. And entertain no doubt about it. I am only a slave of the Lord. I have only come to witness the Lord's play (Laila)".

ਜੇ ਹਮ ਕੋ ਪਰਮੇਸੁਰ ਚੁੰਚਰਿ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਲਭਕਿ ਕੁੰਡ ਮਹਿ ਪਰਿ ਹੈ।

ਮੇ ਕੋ ਦਾਸ ਤਵਨ ਕਾ ਜਾਨੈ। ਯਾ ਮੈ ਭੇਦੁ ਨ ਰੰਚ ਪਛਾਣੈ॥

ਮੈ ਹੋ ਪਰਮ ਪੁਰਖ ਕੋ ਦਾਸ। ਦੇਖਨਿ ਆਯੋ ਜਗਤ ਤਮਾਸਾ।

Equally strong was his condemnation of those customs and traditions which had almost become sources of exploitation of the devout by godmen, the so-called saints. "It is of no avail to sit closing both eyes and

meditating like a crane. This world is lost, and the next also, for those who go about bathing in the seas, desiring salvation. They pass their lives in vain dwelling in the midst of sin. I speak verily; hear me all God is realisted only through love". (Swaryya 9).

ਕਹਾ ਭਯੋ ਏਕੁ ਲੋਚਨ ਮੁੰਦਕੇ ਬੈਠਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਬਕ ਧਯਾਨ ਲਗਾਇਓ।
ਨ੍ਰਾਤ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਲੀਏ ਸਾਤ ਸਮੁੰ-ਨ ਲੋਕ ਗਇਓ ਪਰਲੋਕ ਗਵਾਇਓ।
ਬਾਸੁ ਕੀਓ ਬਿਖਿਆਨ ਸੋ ਬੈਠ ਕੇ ਐਸੇ ਹੀ ਐਸੇ ਸੋ ਬੈਸ ਬਿਤਾਇਓ।
ਸਾਚੁ ਕਹੈ ਸੁਨ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਭੈ ਜਿਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੀਓ ਫਿਨਿ ਹੀ ਪਛੁ ਪਾਇਓ॥

"God has no marks, no colour, no caste, and no ancestors; no form, no complexion, no outline, no costume and so he is indescribable". He wrote: "He is fearless, luminous and measureless in might. He is the king of kings, the Lord of the prophets. He is the sovereign of the universe, gods, men and demons. The woods and dales sing the indescribable. O Lord, none can tell Thy names. The wise count your blessings to coin your names". (Jaap Sahib)

ਚਕ੍ਰ ਚਿਹਨ ਅਰੁ ਬਰਨ ਜਾਤਿ ਅਰ ਪਾਤਿ ਨਹਿਨ ਜਿਹ।

ਰੂਪ ਰੰਗ ਅਰੁ ਰੇਖ ਭੇਖ ਕੋਧੁ ਕਹਿ ਨ ਸਕਤ ਕਿਹ।

ਅਚਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਨਭਓ ਪ-ਸ ਅਮਿਤੋਂਜ ਕਹਿਐ।

ਕੋਟਿ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਦ੍ਰਿਦ੍ਰਾਣ ਸਾਹੁ ਸਾਹਾਣਿ ਗਣਿਐ।

ਕ੍ਰਿਛਾਣ ਮਹੀਪ ਸੁਰ ਨਰ ਅਸੁਰ ਲੋਭਿ ਲੋਭਿ ਬਨ ਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਕਹਣ।

ਹੁ ਸਰਬ ਲਮ ਕਥੈ ਕਵਨ ਕਰਮ ਲਮ ਬਰਤਨੁ ਸੁਮਤਿ॥

He had a keen insight into the prevalent confusion caused by man-made philosophies. What he wrote then

is so true of the religious scene in our land today. "Whoever was clever in the world established his own sect. No one tried to unite people in the search for the Creator. Enmity, contention and pride increased. All big and small, flared up and started perishing in their own rivalry. And none of them tried my way. They who obtained a little spiritual power struck out their own way. None of them cared to recognise the Supreme Being, but became mad (with power), boasting of themselves. They cared little to recognise the Real Essence. But each became absorbed in himself and tried to establish his superiority over others". (Bachittar Natak).



ਜਥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੋ ਨ ਤਿਨੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨ। ਤਬ ਹਰਿ ਇਨ ਮਨੁ ਛਾਨ ਨਾਹਾਨ।

ਤੇ ਭੀ ਬਸਿ ਮਮਤਾ ਹੁਇ ਗਏ। ਪਰਮੇਸੁਰ ਪਾਹਨ ਨਾਹਾਨੇ ॥

ਤਬ ਹਰਿ ਸਿੰਧ ਸਾਧ ਲਹਿਰਾਏ। ਤਿਨ ਭੀ ਪਰਮ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਹਿ ਪਾਏ।

ਜੇ ਕੋਈ ਹੋਤਿ ਭਨੇ ਜਗਿ ਸਿਆਲ। ਤਿਨਤਿਨ ਅਪਨੈ ਪੰਥੁ ਚਲਾਨ।



We have today godmen and godwomen who proffer themselves as gods and goddesses and make religion their "business". What is tragic is that millions, in search of truth, are mesmerised by their "good works" accomplished through donations from generous individuals. These so-called saints have great oratorical skills and promote false philosophies to build their own particular empires and spheres of influence. They speak of a *dharma* which does not extend beyond their kith and kin and thereby sow seeds of narrow-mindedness and hatred among followers.

In our caste-ridden society and even in urban settings where the rich and the powerful are preferred

over the poor and men are 'measured' in terms of their wealth, his words should bring some realism. "All men are the same though they appear different. The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the Muslims have developed in accordance with their different surroundings; All human beings have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body build composed of earth, air, fire and water. The names of Allah and Abhekh are for the same God; the same is referred to in the Puranas and the Quran. All human beings are the reflection of one and the same Lord. Recognise ye the whole human race as one".



ਮਾਨਸ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਧੇ ਅਨੇਕ ਕੋ ਕ੍ਰਮਾਉ ਹੈ। ਦੇਵਤਾ ਅਦੇਵ ਜਛ ਗੰਧੂਬ ਫੁਰਕ

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਿ ਆਰੇ ਨਿ ਆਰੇ ਦੇਸਨ ਕੇ ਭੇਸ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਉ ਹੈ। ਏਕੈ ਨੈਨ ਏਕੈ ਕਾਨ

ਏਕੈ ਦੇਹ ਏਕੈ ਬਾਨ ਖਾਕ ਬਾਦ ਅਲਿਸ ਐ ਆਬ ਕੋ ਰਲਾਉ ਹੈ। ਅੱਲਹ ਅਭੇਖ

ਸੋਈ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਅਉ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਓਈ ਏਕ ਹੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਹੀ ਬਲਾਉ ਹੈ ॥



It is on the basis of that very equality of all human beings and brotherhood of man that he (Guru Gobind Singh) built the order of the Khalsa.

To conclude, the opening chapter of Guru Granth Sahib contains this God: 'God is one, He is the supreme truth. He, the Creator, is beyond fear and beyond hate. He is immortal. He is neither born and nor does He die. By Guru's grace shall He be met. In the beginning He was the truth. Throughout the ages He has been the truth. He is the truth here and now and He shall be the truth forever'. ॐ

M.P.Kutty

[From : The Tribune]



Sikhs embraced on Capitol Hill

I am delighted to be the Senator from Punjab as well as from New York" exulted Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and the former first lady of the United States of America. She received a standing ovation and thunderous applause from the Sikh Americans who had gathered in the Senate side of the Capitol Hill on 17 May for the *Sikh American Heritage Dinner* event in Washington, DC. The Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), based at the nation's capital, had organised this event.

Senator Clinton added "I am here to express my thanks to you all for being here. It is always a pleasure and an honour to represent so many of my Sikh American constituents in New York. I also know that the Sikh Community is a growing community. You had come here four years ago in a much smaller event and now you have grown quite a bit". SCORE had organised the three-month anniversary memorial event at the Capitol Hill in December 2001.

Lawmaker after lawmaker welcomed Sikhs at the Capitol Hill and appreciated their efforts to make their presence in the capital of the nation. The Dirksen Senate Office building reverberated with '*Bole so Nihal, Sat Sri Akaal*', the Sikh greeting throughout the evening.

Republican Senator Richard Lugar from Indiana, who is Chairman of the most powerful Senate committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a close friend of President George Bush, said "This celebration of the Sikh Americans is extraordinary, especially efforts to bring everyone together tonight. I admire the Sikh people and a Sikh (K.P.Singh from

Indiana) has been a mentor for last 37 years. I have known Sikhs since I was a Mayor of Indianapolis".

After four years of the tragedy of 9/11 which affected the Sikh community, Sikh men and women attired in colourful turbans and glittering traditional clothes gathered from different corners of America to raise issues of concern to their congressional representatives. The Sikh community in U.S. faced hate crimes and prejudice in the aftermath of 9/11 owing to their outer appearance. Following the American political tradition, this was clearly a demonstration of Sikhs of intermingling with lawmakers of the land and to raise their profile in the political landscape. The Sikh population has been growing in America and there are approximately 500,000 Sikhs presently in the USA.

"This event would send a very important signal to the lawmakers and political leaders of this country that Sikhs are politically conscious and would like to participate in the political and social process of this country. This would ensure an important presence of the Sikhs at the American Political Nerve center", said Dr. Rajwant Singh, Chairman of Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), which organised this event at the Hill.

Over 225 guests and Sikhs participated in the event. The programme started with the opening prayer by Chaplain Daniel P. Coughlin, Chaplain for the U.S. House of Representatives and Clark Lobenstine, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee. Bhai Gurdarshan Singh led the audience in reciting a hymn from the Sikh Scriptures praying for the well being of



entire humanity. In addition, there was a tabla presentation by table maestro Rajinder Pal Singh Jindi.

Dr Rajwant Singh added, "This will be an annual event and is just the beginning of our continuous journey. The room is full and we are confident that we will get double the number next year. We have received encouragement from the community from all across the nation".

Senator Hillary Clinton further stated, "I admire you for the way you all handled the challenges which the Sikh community faced after 9/11. The way the Sikh community responded so positively by educating others about the Sikhs and serving fellow Americans is the greatest tribute to the value of the Sikh community and that also helped us to get the message across".

"I am also grateful about the outstanding contributions (that) the Sikh community has made in all fields. I know a number of Sikh Americans are being honoured tonight but you could practically fill the whole room with Sikhs who in every aspects of American society and economy are leaders

and also proud to be Sikhs" said Senator Clinton.

She acknowledged the leadership of the first Sikh Prime Minister and Chief of Army Staff of India. In response to a question, Senator Clinton reiterated that the future of the Sikh community is a very positive one in America.

Congressman Tom Davis, the third ranking and very influential Republican in the House was the first lawmaker to speak and said "I have always had a great admiration for the Sikh community. The Sikhs are strong-minded and compassionate and thrive in business and many different fields. Your fundamental values of family is your greatest strength".

Congressman Jim McDermott from Seattle said, "I came to know about Sikhs in 1972 and since then I have had great friendship with Sikhs. America is the land where people can have *Equality and Justice* but unfortunately in the aftermath of 9/11, the Sikhs went through a very tough time in this country. Unfortunately many Americans tend to lump people together without understanding who they are and what they

are. In my area, a Sikh was beaten and we quickly brought together a campaign called 'hate free zone' which involved many people from civic organisations, churches and law enforcement forces. He added, "I have known how Sikhism came into being in response to injustice and the Sikhs know how to deal with difficult situations".





Other members of U.S. Congress who spoke at the dinner were Rush Holt, Joe Crowley, Frank Pallone and Sheila Lee Jackson. Speakers also lauded Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (a Sikh, whose roots are in Pakistan,) and his efforts to bring about peace with Pakistan.

Many speakers expressed support for the entry of Sikhs in the police force and said that they are willing to take up the cause of allowing Sikhs in the U.S. Armed Forces without any restrictions on their identity. Sheila Lee Jackson raised her hand and said "let it be known that I am going to be your champion for this cause." SCORE also circulated material to all members of Congress seeking their support for the "Workplace Religious Freedom Act" as introduced by Senator John Kerry and Senator Rick Santorum. This bill would help Sikhs and other religious communities to work freely without unnecessary restrictions.

This fantastic evening was chosen to award those who have made outstanding contribution in any sphere of life. Among the recipients were Waris Singh Ahluwalia, a Sikh actor, who played a major role as a Sikh (with a turban and a beard) in a

Hollywood produced movie by Steve Zissou 'The Life Aquatic' starring major actors. This year FBI showed a commercial at the beginning of the Super Bowl showing a Sikh with a turban prominently talking about the Agency. The FBI was also recognised for their efforts to promote Sikhs.

In addition, Navneet Singh Chugh, founder of the "North American South Asian Bar Association" was also honoured. He was the first South Asian to be selected as the Annual Bar leader for 2004 by the 350,000-member American Bar Association. He is also a Director on the Board of Directors of the American India Foundation (AIF), an organisation headed by President Clinton.

Ranbir Kaur, a 19 year old Sikh woman from California, who is being deployed to Iraq as part of the U.S. Armed forces was also honoured. Navdeep Singh Virk, first Indian to be a U.S. Marine sniper was in Iraq's *Operation Enduring Freedom*, Mandeep Singh Grewal and Hardeep Singh Saini were also recognised for their active service in Iraq and Kuwait. Uday Singh, the fallen hero who was killed in action in Iraq, was also remembered.



SCORE was able to get endorsement and support from some of the most powerful players in the American political scene. Honorary Committee for this Dinner included Senator Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and on the Republican side, Senator Rick Santorum who is quite powerful in the Republican Party and Senator John Cornyn. On the House side included Congressmen Tom Davis who is the Whip of the Republican Party, Jim McDermott, Joe Wilson and Mike Honda, Dennis Cardoza, Van Hollen from the Democratic Party.

K.P.Singh, the SCORE advisor and a community activist from Indiana said, "It was great to see and hear from some distinguished guests and friends and feel the positive energy, constructive dialogue and interaction and networking among the guests. This is an important learning curve as to how we could make our voice heard and articulate our concerns and express them to the highest levels of the American government". Amrit Kaur, Secretary of *Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Maryland* said "This has been a very exciting and eventful evening. The Awards ceremony was almost like the Oscar Night. The Sikhs should do these kinds of programmes more often. It is primarily our responsibility to make Lawmakers aware about our concerns and issues and also recognise those who have achieved something".

Gurcharan Singh, a World Bank official and a trustee of the "Guru Nanak Foundation of America" said, "Indeed it was an excellent programme. After going through this - I feel we are heading to something great in the coming years".

The gathering also paid tributes to the thousands of Sikhs who died in the World Wars as part of the Allied Forces. (The 60th anniversary of the end of World War II was recently commemorated in Moscow).

Sartaj Singh Dhammi, Outreach Coordinator for the SCORE Team which put the dinner together said, "The Capitol Hill dinner was a huge success and a major accomplishment for the Sikhs in our Country. Not because the dinner itself was held on the grounds where the Nation's legislation is created, but the fact that for the first time ever Sikhs celebrated their contributions to America in the new post 9/11 world."

"Tonight we saw the diversity of how Sikhs are serving our great Nation. Whether it was in the arts, law, military, or intelligence, it easy to see how integrated Sikh contributions are to our society. If anything, one thought was continuously relayed through out the night by both Congressional and Sikh speakers - that the Sikhs of this



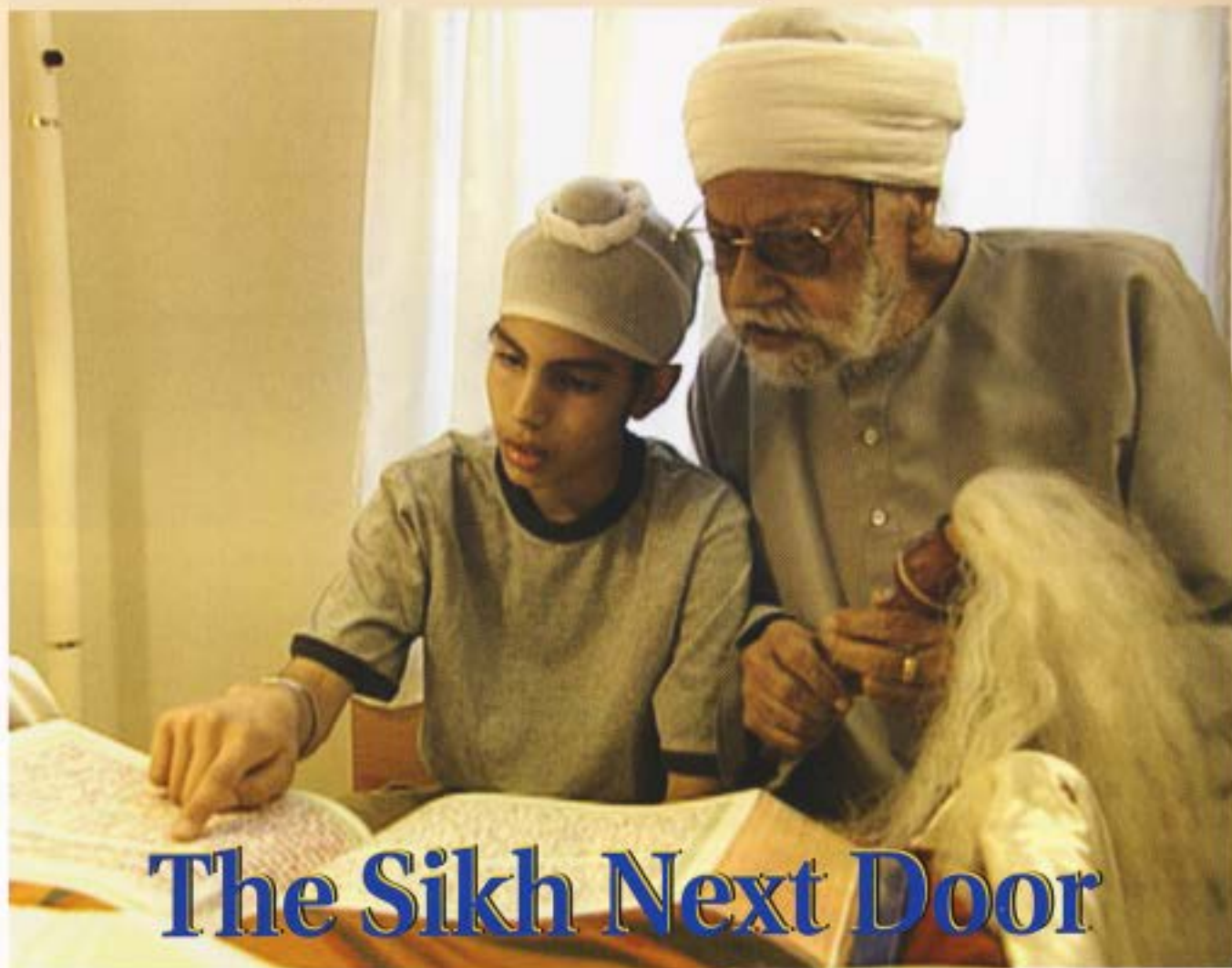
Nation are indeed as American as anyone else and they stand proud of it".

The other members of the SCORE team which presented this special programme, were Preet Amrit Kaur, Parambir Singh Gill, Mandeep Singh, Manpreet Singh, Daman Kaur, Gagandeep Singh, Ramandeep Singh, Navjeet Kaur, Summit Singh and Harjot Singh.

SCORE released a brochure '*Sikh Americans and Their Religion*' on the occasion and the first copy was presented to Senator Hillary Clinton.

Sikhs came from Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Indianapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Atlanta, Boston, New York and the state of New Jersey, Texas, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC.

"Celebrating America's Diversity in the Classroom"



The Sikh Next Door

If someone sees me walking down the street and knows that I am a Sikh, I'd give them like a high five. I'd shake their hand. I'd feel great." This is a quote from Anoop, a 14-year-old Sikh American from Virginia who featured in the recently-released educational curriculum, *The Sikh Next Door*. Anoop's sentiments of being recognised for who he is—a proud Sikh—are shared by many Sikhs living in America and abroad, especially after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.

Anoop is one of four 11- to 14-year-old Sikh American students featured in this curriculum project comprised of a 15-minute DVD, 60-page teacher's guide, and a comprehensive website (www.sikhnextdoor.org). As a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there has been an

increased fear of those who "look like terrorists" and consequently, many Sikh children are bullied and harassed at school. *The Sikh Next Door* is a curriculum project produced by educators, for educators and is aligned to national educational standards. The project celebrates America's diversity while educating school children about the Sikh religion and Punjabi culture.

The Sikh Next Door film is a fun and entertaining educational video targeting 6th through 12th grade students. Produced in a quick-paced, broadcast television style and told through the voices of four Sikh youth, this film is a video resource that demonstrates the bicultural lives of Sikh Americans and engages students in a discussion about multiculturalism. In the process, it communicates that students should not discriminate

against others based solely on their external appearance. A teacher's guide with complementary lesson plans and activities accompanies the video. These classroom exercises focus on living in a multicultural society and require minimal planning and background knowledge for presenters and teachers. Upper grade level teachers have the opportunity to use the video for more detailed discussions about world religions.

A team of Sikh educators, a broadcast television producer, two teen advisors and a group of non-Sikh teachers and counselors collaborated to produce *The Sikh Next Door* project. The project initially began in early 2002 when Preetmohan Singh, a former fifth-grade teacher and after-school programme director from California, reached out a former colleague, filmmaker Tami Yeager. Given the reports of increased bullying and harassment faced by Sikh American students, the two wanted to use their experiences and skills to provide a resource for parents and teachers. Their goal was to address the clear problem that schools and libraries lacked high-quality, professionally produced materials to introduce Sikhs, their unique identity and their practices to American students.

Their biggest obstacle was funding. Enter Mandeep Singh Dhillon, founder of the *Lohgarh Sikh Educational Foundation* and a consultant at McKinsey & Company, a global strategy consulting firm. The trio immediately began a fundraising campaign within the Sikh American community and eventually secured a grant from the "September 11th Anti-Bias Project" of *The National Conference for Community & Justice* and the *ChevronTexaco Foundation*.

In *The Sikh Next Door* video, Sikh American students from around the country describe their religion and culture in their own words and adult voices are virtually non-existent. In order to capture the school audience, the producers felt it was essential to feature young voices and avoid students feeling that they were being lectured.

The students describe the history and tenets of Sikhism, discuss its articles of faith (the five "K's"), and visit a Gurdwara. They are also seen hanging out

with their friends, shopping for Punjabi clothes and helping make Punjabi food. In screenings so far, one of the most poignant moments has been the scene when Anoop ties his turban. He starts by combing his hair, explaining his *judha* and *patka*, and then tying his *pagri*. This act of demystifying the turban—what is under it, how it is tied—has already made huge strides in non-Sikhs' understanding about Sikhism and its articles of faith.

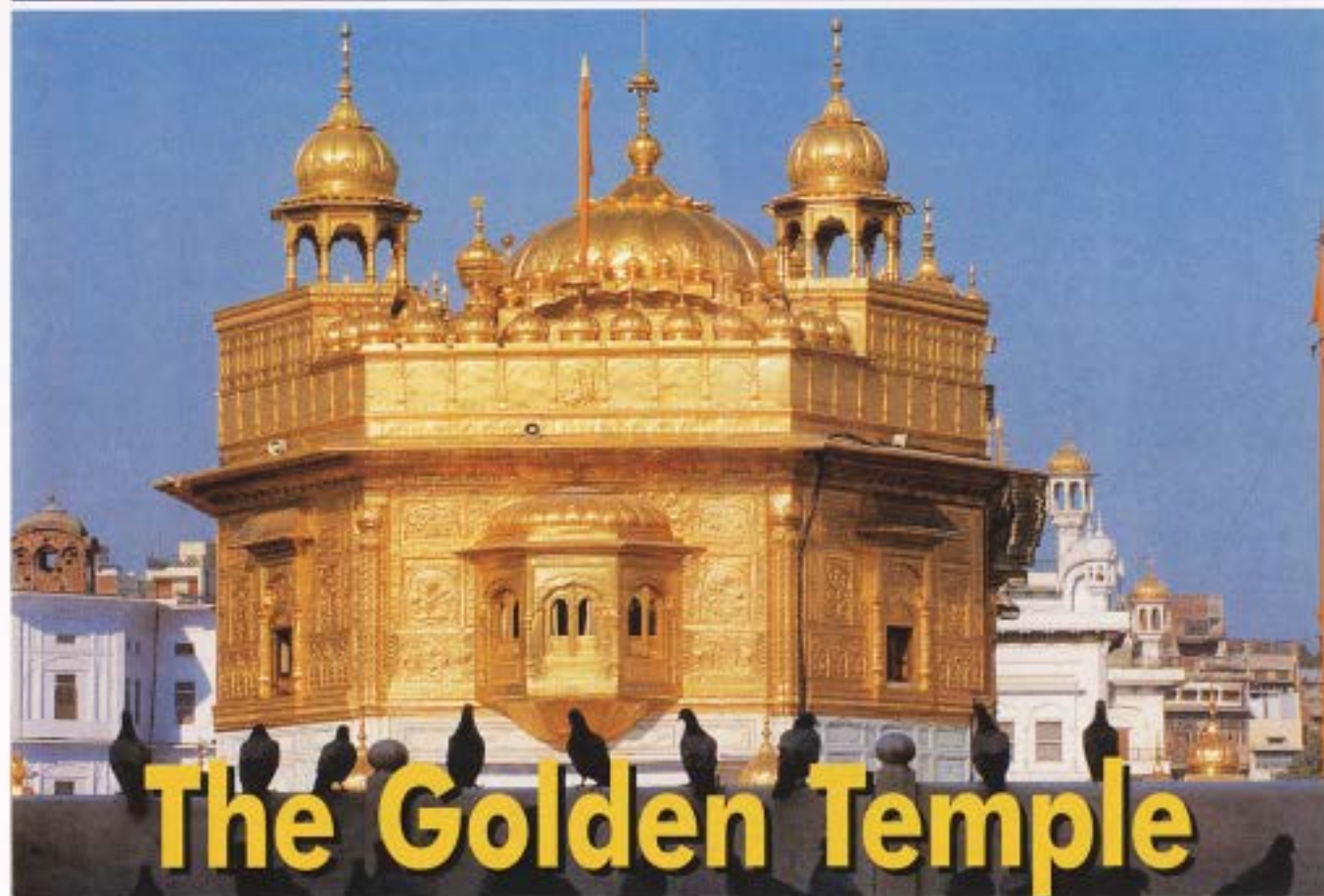
Every household with Sikh children needs to have a copy of *The Sikh Next Door* at home for their own children because the four students in the video can resonate with your own children about what it means to be a Sikh in America. Naveen, age 13, is seen in the video playing his French horn and talking about the trepidation he felt when he went to school for the first time with his *patka*, and how he dealt with that. Manpreet, age 13, goes shopping for Punjabi clothes and hangs out with her non-Sikh friends at the miniature golf course. Tara, age 14, stops people on the street in New York City's Times Square to find out what people know about Sikhism. These four students are strong, intelligent, funny, articulate people who make you feel proud of being a Sikh.

Additionally, *The Sikh Next Door* must be distributed to schools and libraries across America. Therefore, anyone with school-aged children in their family are encouraged to purchase the curriculum and deliver it to their local schools. Families are also encouraged to engage the school in a dialogue about introducing and/or expanding diversity curriculum within the school. Projects like these really rely on the community for support in terms of distribution because when a Sikh American family approaches the school, there is a sense of relevance between this teaching tool and the student body.

The Sikh Next Door website, www.sikhnextdoor.org, provides additional information, including student- and teacher-specific portions such as "Frequently Asked Questions" and an "Ask The Expert" section. You can order your own copies of *The Sikh Next Door* from the website.

As Anoop again says in the film, "The more we learn, the better we can be in this lifetime." ☸





The Golden Temple

Visiting the Harmandir Sahib (popularly known as the Golden Temple) is an ethereal experience. A rather simplistic expression for a monument symbolic of all that the Sikh religion imbues – spirituality, supreme sacrifice, secularism, discipline and devotion. The edifice is a global landmark on the itinerary of most visitors irrespective of their religious inclinations or nationality. However, for a Sikh this Gurdwara embodies the saga of sacrifices of the Gurus and the traumas and travails that the religion experienced through its historical vicissitudes.

Whenever, I have visited the Golden Temple, right from the first view there is that overwhelming impact of its superimposing structure at any hour of the day with a simultaneous feeling of divine elevation. This subsuming impact persists as one traverses the *parikrama* (or circumbulatory path). Whether it is at *amrit teela* (early hours before dawn), when the *Guru Granth Sahib* is brought in or at high noon with rays of the sun radiating the grandeur, or the sublimity in the environs when the evening the *rehraas* (evening prayer) reverberates through the ramparts uplifting and alleviating one from worldly afflictions. Undoubtedly, there have been reams of publications on the Golden Temple either as the composite of a compendium on Gurdwaras or

specifically on the former however most editions are voluminous. Dr Mohinder Singh, Director of *The National Institute of Punjab Studies*'s endeavour under the aegis of UPSD Publishers, is a remarkable effort to bring out several volumes on subjects vital for understanding the Sikh religion. This book *The Golden Temple* is the first to be reviewed, since this is on the spiritual capital of the Sikhs. The foreword is by our illustrious Prime Minister Sardar Manmohan Singh, who is also President of the Institute.

This was an opportune juncture to publish books of this genre to satiate the increasing spiritual quest of the youth as well as adults, accompanied with a simultaneous groping for their identity, roots and cultural moorings, particularly for those well versed in english, in India and abroad, these volumes have filled an existent vacuum on this score. The text written by the Director is simple yet well researched, informative and replete with a glossary. However, what makes the pilgrimage come alive is the exquisite photography by Sondeep Shankar which presents the *Darbar Sahib* in its myriad moods, as his lens sensitise the viewers to the appropriate focus.

This is the only place of worship in the world which was designed by the founder in such a way that the *sanctum*

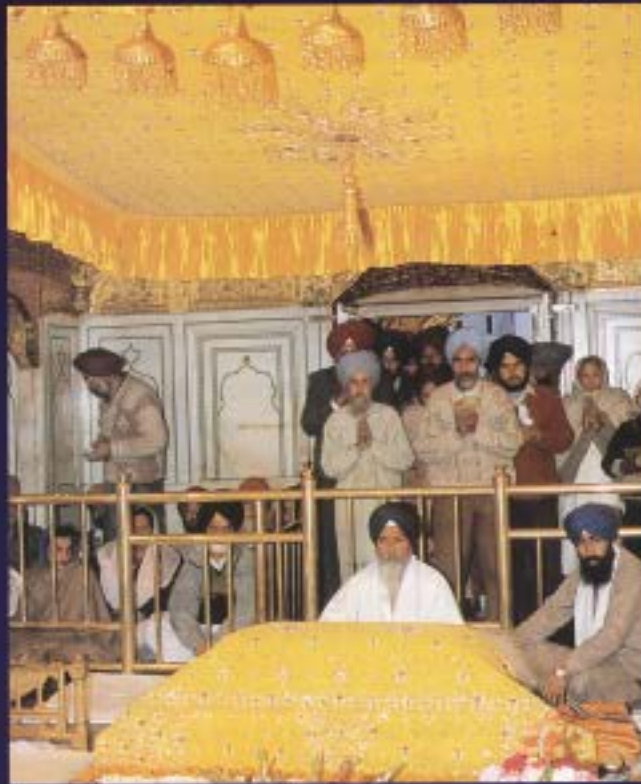
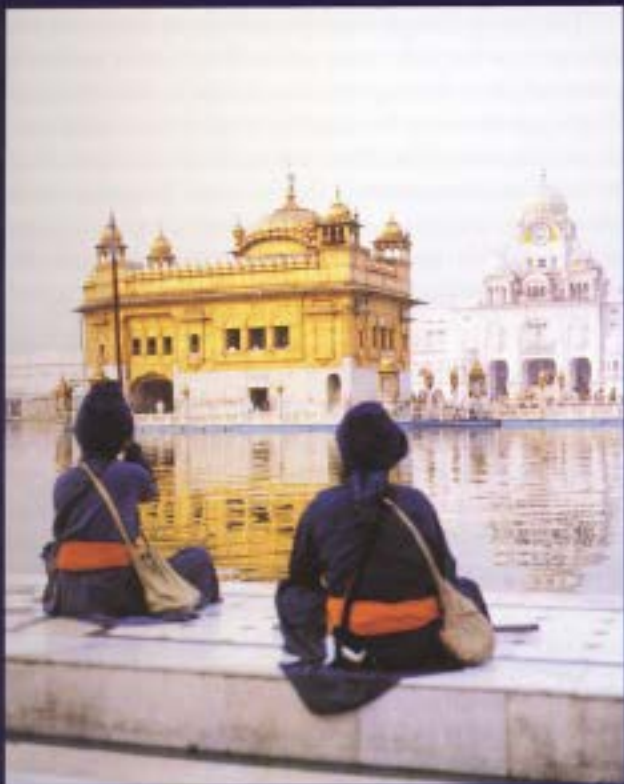
sanctorum appears to float like a lotus in the tank. There are those remarkable pictures spread over two pages, a front view as well as a side view of the Golden Temple in its totality as it lies surrounded by an emerald and blue-toned pool, which mirrors its white and gold beauty. The first photograph is symbolic of the devotion which transcends of all ages. In this picture the beauty of the interior is also expressed in the striking gold and black embellishment, contrasting with the colourful pietradura work visible through the window. Other facets of devotees are on pages 33-44 and a virtual sea of devotees on page 52. Of course, my personal favourite are the ones reproduced on page 54-55, courtesy the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum. These are of the Akal Takht and the black and white print of the Golden Temple by Louis Dane on page 18, which is immensely popular. Other photographs capture the Golden Temple from various facets and its essentially many splendoured glory on occasions like the radiance at Diwali.

As one delves through the text into the blood-soaked history of the Sikhs through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there are episodes of prolonged warfare, accompanied by persecutions and armed resistance to political and religious tyranny. Yet, the Harmandir Sahib endures as a symbol of spiritual inspiration and resilience. Every battle fought by the Sikhs, though sometimes at a distance from their spiritual base, maintained the safety of this edifice of the community which was the prime target of adversaries, be it the brigands of Ahmad

Shah Abdali or Zakariya Khan. The edifice has witnessed every traumatic travail of Sikh history. During the interludes of peace, it served as an inspirational source so the followers.

The foundation stone of the Harmandir Sahib was laid in 1588 by a Sufi saint Mian Mir, an associate of Guru Arjan Dev. This act of laying the first brick by a Muslim exemplifies the Sikh attitude of love and respect for all faiths. In harmony with the quintessential egalitarianism propounded by the Sikh faith, the Guru provided four doors for accessibility to people from all religions irrespective of caste and creed. Guru Arjan Dev's emphasis while constructing the edifice was spiritual rather than grandiose. He wanted to erect a symbol that typified the simplicity and directness of Sikhism. The architecture is perhaps a synthesis of Hindu and Islamic art. The hymns that reverberate in the holy portals are a further reiteration of the cultural confluence for the essence of various faiths. The fascinating synergy is a precursor to today's endeavours at globalisation and cultural congruence. The daily ecclesiastical routine set by the Guru has continued to be the guiding spirit and the mellifluous recitations of *kirtan* resonate, "stirring the interiors of the soul uninterruptedly down centuries – except during the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali or during *Operation Blue Star*" (Patwant Singh).

To quote from the book, "undeterred by the political turmoil and unrest, the devout continue to throng the Golden Temple, which remains a source of inspiration and spiritual, bliss to the Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.





Skeins of the history of the Gurdwara are woven around the photographs. It was almost a century and a half ago when the ruler of the first Sikh empire, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, infused an element of grandeur to the temple. It owes its present appearance to his transforming initiative. He was a devout Sikh and he wanted the epitome of Sikh faith to be incomparable in temporal beauty and munificence. He asked Sikh chiefs to donate liberally to the temple. Simultaneously, he commissioned well known artisans from all faiths, including Muslim craftsmen who carved delightful sprays of geometric and floral patterns inlaid with coloured stones on the marble floors and walls. Traversing the *parikrama* one comes across an array of motifs, visible in the pictorial presentations in the book.

The shrine was decorated and repaired in the period of Ranjit Singh and all the surrounding sacred shrines were either erected or given a face-lift during the period. The gilding of the embossed plate, above the marble skirt of the sanctum, the revival of pietradura, the embellishment of the interiors and the picturesque ceilings adorned with floral patterns were all renovated, finished and perfected. The details of these endeavours spanning the Maharajahs' reign are beautifully portrayed in pages 70-73.

The Golden Temple was a place of special reverence for its followers, so the Sikh chiefs vied with each other in offering priceless gifts to this supreme altar. Similarly, Maharaja Ranjit Singh presented to the temple whatever he found rare, invaluable or exquisite. The words engraved at the entrance of the *sanctum sanctorum* sum up his devotion. "The great Guru in his wisdom looked upon Maharaja Ranjit Singh as his chief servitor and Sikh and in his benevolence bestowed on him the privilege of serving the temple". These words are pictured with clarity on page 74.

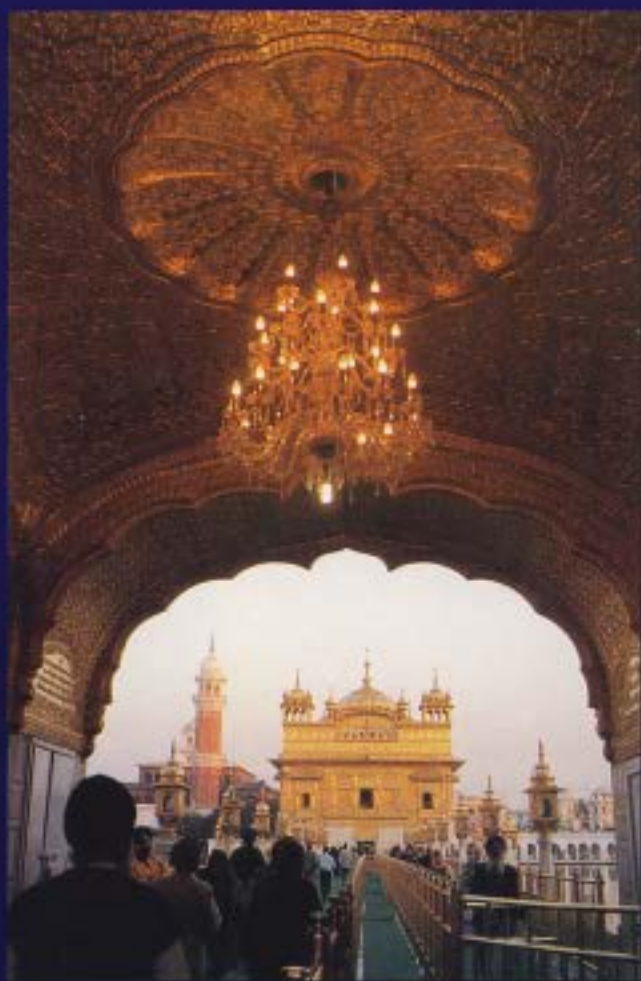
The history of the treasure in the *Toshkhana* [meaning a storehouse or chamber in which objects of value or curiosity are kept] is rooted from the foundation of the Sikh empire in 1801. Whatever existed before that was looted or destroyed by the innumerable invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali and destructions of the original building, these precious heirlooms which were a spiritual consecration, were kept in a room on the top of the *Darshni Deori* [entrance gate]. These are called *jalao* a show of splendour, a derivative of the Persian word *jaluwa*. Over the ages, the treasures grew—expressions of unflinching faith. The *Darshni Deori* or the entrance of the *Harmandir Sahib* is situated on the western side at the end of the causeway



that leads to the *sanctum sanctorum*. It was completed in 1776. The front of the doors to the gateway are overlaid with silver. The doors assume great importance, as they were once taken away to *Kabul* by Ghazni, but were brought back by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. All this history brought alive in the rare close up reproduction of photographs on page 75, though one wishes there had been more pictures of items from the *Toshakhana*.


When the *Toshakhana* is opened for display, the manager of the Golden Temple, the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, the secretary of SGPC, the Head Granthi of the Golden Temple, Akal Takht and Baba Atal are all required to be present. The keys have to be used simultaneously. All the items of the *julao* are preserved with utmost care in the *Toshakhana*. In the course of this pictographic presentation, the author has not overlooked another significant milestone in Sikh history i.e., the Akali movement for reform of the gurdwaras and their liberation from the *malikants*. These interesting and rare sepia soaked photographic reprints are on pages 62-63, courtesy George Dunett of London.

As the book draws to the end, the focus again turns to the cardinal elements of Sikhism, that is *sewa* or service. There are



contrasting photographs, that augment the sentiments of thousands of Sikhs performing *Kar Sewa* in 1923 and 1973. Another rare picture is a painting of Baba Buddha, who along with Guru Arjan Dev supervised the construction of the Harmandir Sahib and was appointed the first *granthi* in 1604.

The idea of bringing out eight volumes as a series is an excellent one. The emphasis on the illustrative presentation makes it attractive, informative, handy and moreover, an economic package for Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs to enable them to understand the ethos of this fascinating religion and its prime spiritual centres.

The book *Golden Temple*, reinforces the fact that a pilgrimage is imperative physically as well as pictorially. Reinforcing the universal appeal of the Golden Temple is this photograph of the Queen of England in saffron splendour wearing special socks and paying her respects at the Darbar Sahib. 

Dr Gurpreet Maini

The Golden Temple, Text by Dr. Mohinder Singh,
Photographs by Sondeep Shankar,
UBS Publishers Limited, New Delhi, 2002.

Never Give Up



Chief Justice Ranjit Singh Narula

I stared out of the airplane window into the hot murky Delhi night as I headed back to the United States. Out there my grandfather was fighting for his life. He had suffered a stroke as well as cardiac arrest a few days ago and now was in the intensive care unit of a Delhi hospital with more pipes stuck in him than I could count.

I was warned before I went in to see him that he may not recognise me. And he didn't. Not the first time anyway. When I saw him again, he grinned at me. He was wiggling his right foot and then his left foot, a miracle in its own right since the so-called learned doctors had said that after his stroke he could not move the right side of his body at all. I asked him if he was exercising and he nodded yes - and grinned again through the pain. He could not talk but he had

Former Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court (1974-1977) Ranjit Singh Narula was a legend in Sikh affairs and worked tirelessly for Human Rights in the Punjab till the very end. Under his guidance, various Human Rights leaders fought for the release of TADA detainee all over India, specially in the Punjab. The Khurana Government had appointed a commission under his Chairmanship to enquire into the 1984 Delhi riots. The Narula Commission had recommended that the report of Jain-Aggarwal Committee be implemented, which unfortunately never happened.

Recipient of endless honours and award, he was bestowed with the Order of Nishan-e-Khalsa on occasion of the Tercentenary of birth of the Khalsa. He was a member of the Study Group Committee formed by the National Commission of Minorities in 1999 and had proposed certain amendments to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925, which was a daunting task to undertake. Chairman of numerous Educational Trusts, Religious and Cultural Institutes, he was on the panel of the World Association of Judges since 1970 and Chairman of Punjab branch of International Commission of Jurists.

Justice Ranjit Singh Narula promoted education in particular by taking charge of various schools all over India. Revered for his secular approach all over India and abroad, he came across as a man of great integrity, unchallenged brilliance and a true Sikh, who promoted all institutions practicing different religions. Keeping alive his philanthropic approach to life, he founded the *Ranjit Singh Narula Trust* which provides scholarships to needy students and medical aid to the needy.

In his last few years he had withdrawn from the limelight and devoted himself to humane and social causes.

While the Legal Fraternity mourns one of its most revered luminaries, the International Sikh community is bereaved by the loss this of legend of Sikhism on 1 June 2005.

the all too familiar determined look on his face. He wiggled his feet again. First the right foot and then the left.

But, you see, this is not how I remember my grandfather. I was 7 years old and spending another glorious summer vacation at my grandparents home. My mother woke me up at 5 a.m. and yes, today was the big day. I was going to accompany my grandfather on his daily morning walk. Well, actually, for only half the walk since it was well understood that nobody in the family could out-walk my grandfather on his daily six kilometres. Sure enough, I was panting quite early in the process. He didn't even slow down, he just kept on going. I had to stop. Thankfully, I had enough energy left to trot behind him on the way back. It took me two more years to actually complete a walk with him. Not once did he

patronise me by slowing down which therefore made the victory all that much sweeter. He set high standards and if you keep working hard, success will follow, he said.

He has always been mischievous with a fantastic sense of humour. Living life to the fullest as a young married attorney in Delhi many decades ago, he traded in his bicycle and bought a large European car - simply to take his family and neighbours on many a joy ride. A successful attorney and an outstanding judge, he has worked harder and longer than anybody I know and is today well recognised around the world as a leader in his profession. His memory is legendary and he can rattle off details on many cases from decades ago. Make a list of everything and always be better prepared than the other guy, is another one of his teachings.

He cares. Deeply. He calls and talks to all his family and friends around the globe regularly asking about their well being and then in turn communicating the information throughout the rest of the family. He makes sure everybody knows what everybody else is doing. He is the glue - well actually, super glue, since the bonds he has established and nurtured over the years in the family are timeless.

If by now it seems I love my grandfather, you are only partly right. I adore him. My children are truly blessed as they learn at the knee of their great-grandfather during their summer vacations. He is as engaging with my three-year old as he is with the Prime Minister of India. He always gives the other person his full attention and communicates with him at his level - be it a favourite flavour of chocolate or a course-changing legal strategy for the country. In one of my monthly phone calls with him, upon my telling him proudly that I had secured venture capital for my new company, he was quick to ask - but how many customers do you have? Straight to the point. Always pointing out that great things are achieved one step at a time with a complete focus on details and by simply putting one foot in front of the other.

Recently an acquaintance, upon finding out that I was related to my grandfather, recalled a thirty year-old story of how my grandfather had held the door to his house open with bowed head for a delegation of farmers and educators visiting him for the first time. Well, he was the Governor and Chief Justice of the state and had a staff of dozens, but he recognised and respected basic human dignity. He is a humble man. A simple man. And I am lucky to have him as my grandfather.

A true Sikh of the Guru, he fought all his life against injustice and for human rights. He sat on more non-profit Boards than I can count and served on numerous commissions fighting for everyday off-the-street people while never charging them any money. If you are in the right, never give up, said he. He funded and opened schools for

children, housing for riot victims, and even regularly spent time in a leper colony doing *sewa*. No words can do justice to a man who has achieved so much, asked for so little and given so freely all his life.

Are you exercising - asked the person next to me on the airplane. I jerked my head around and looked at him quite puzzled. He pointed down and said - You have been moving your feet for quite a while now. Yes, said I. My grandfather taught me - left foot, right foot. One step at a time. Never give up. And the lights below were obscured by the clouds as I flew away.

And now he is gone. I am a bit numb. Although there was a chance that he would recover, the odds were against him. He himself sensed that his end was near. But knowing that he may pass away and actually seeing it happen are two very different situations. Although the mind had prepared for the inevitability, there was always hope. But now there is the sheer finality of his not being there - ever. The protective umbrella over all our heads is gone.

It seems the world turned out for his funeral. Of course, the family came from all over the globe. But even with less than a day's notice in the newspapers, people converged from all over the country. Ministers with wreaths, farmers with gifts, people from neighbouring villages with shawls, and schoolchildren lined the paths. The *jaikans* were continuous and *Japji Sahib* was recited by hundreds in unison. The world was thanking him for all that he had done. They were celebrating his life while mourning his loss.

One said, a man like this comes to us every few centuries. Another said, this loss is irreplaceable for the community. And then my twelve year old said, I am one-eighth of my great-grandfather. Then it struck me. We are all part of him and he is part of us. He made us strong and gave us the courage to weather the storm. We, too, can aspire to extend his legacy by doing good, by being in *Chardi Kalla* and by simply following the path of the Guru. Whether we have one-eighth of his genes or not.

And then there is his *sewa* for humanity. The man just keeps on giving. Sensing that his end was near, he insisted, first with the family and then with the nurses in his hospital room that his eyes be donated when he dies. He had seen the countless millions without sight in his country and he wanted to do his part. To keep with his wishes, the doctors complied.

And so out there is a person with my grandfather's eyes. I know that if I see him, I will recognise him. Instantly. Those eyes will look upon me as they have done my whole life, with total love. ☺

Jag Jot Singh by emails from San Francisco

Commentaries

Amritsar, Amritsar !

Amritsar is all ready to boom again. Once a major commercial centre and the focus of culture alongside its "twin" city of Lahore, Amritsar decayed rapidly after Partition in August 1947 — almost as if its very lifeline had snapped. Much of the industry and commerce that had remained there, either shut down or relocated as the Government felt it was too close to the frontier (as if Lahore was only further !). Of course tension on the India-Pakistan border, has more than once come close to the brink of full-scale war.

The Golden Temple and the pilgrimage for millions of Sikh devotees from all over the world was perhaps the single factor that kept Amritsar and its people from sliding into virtual oblivion. But all that is now firmly in the past. Peace between India and Pakistan and the apparent desire on both sides to construct mutually beneficial relationships, have worked like a tonic for the city of Amritsar. The city has become the focus and often the face of fast improving India-Pakistan relations with multitudes of obviously excited citizens from both countries literally thronging the place. The recent "Open Skies" Agreement signed between India and the United States and the new accord signed with the United Kingdom have served as another huge impetus to the imminent metamorphosis of Amritsar into a major urban centre of the North.

Currently undergoing a Rs 78-crore makeover, the city's airport, which was accorded international status in 1999, is literally poised to take off. British Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Air India, Phuket Airlines, Uzbek Airways, Tajikistan Airlines, Malaysian Airlines and Air Deccan are slated to collectively begin operating 56 weekly flights including the Amritsar-Birmingham-Toronto-Amritsar service.

Besides the city has been earmarked for the location of a new *Special Economic Zone*. When established, the SEZ is not just expected to boost air cargo traffic from Raja Sansi International Airport, but will also serve as a key factor in the building of new trade ties among India, Pakistan and Central Asia. Sceptics, who cannot or refuse to acknowledge the happy winds of change sweeping Amritsar, only need to go and check out the spiralling prices of real estate located between Amritsar city and the India-Pakistan border at Wagah.

From: The Asian Age

Make the Amritsar airport truly international

The resumption of Air India's Amritsar-Toronto air services, provides an opportunity for a re-look at Rajasansi airport. These days whatever work a government is supposed to do as part of its duty towards the electorate is projected as an "achievement". For the Punjab Government even the acquisition of land for airport expansion is an achievement. Little wonder then that the flag-off ceremony at Rajasansi was turned into an occasion for celebration, attended, among others, by the Civil Aviation Minister and the Punjab Chief Minister.

Whether the elaborate ceremony organised at the taxpayer's expense was desirable may be debatable but one may well ask what has changed at the airport all these years other than the number of flights increasing from three a week to 54 now? The airport was granted "international" status long ago, but again other than the name, nothing much has changed. The increase in the number of flights, no doubt, is welcome as it saves NRIs time, money and botheration involved in travelling from Delhi to the Punjab, but the present level of infrastructure and facilities available at Rajasansi are woefully inadequate to handle the increased rush. Passengers scramble for even the limited number of trolleys — a basic need — to carry their luggage. The "international" tag could have waited until the airport is actually upgraded to that level. Right now it is a jest, especially for a foreign traveller. This must be the only "international" airport in the world that operates from sheds !

The Punjab Chief Minister could have utilised the occasion to remind the Central minister that it was time to speed up the airport upgradation work at Chandigarh too and start the spade work for the proposed airport located between Ludhiana and Jalandhar. Instead, he came out with the profound observation that the flight would boost religious tourism! Another issue: since the powers-that-be have quite forgotten it, there is need to take back from Punjab the honour of still being called a "disturbed area" as this restricts the flow of tourists.

The Tribune

Already a world heritage

The Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar is already a world heritage and humanity's priceless treasure. It needs no certificate from any agency, much less the UNESCO. Amazingly, the most

religious shrine of the Sikhs in India and the world over finds itself today in the centre of a mindless controversy.

Bibi Jagir Kaur, Parkash Singh Badal and members of the expert committee on the dossier from the UN body curiously feel that the granting of a "heritage status" will bestow the advantage of a 'no war zone' upon the recipient area, or the many odd factions within the Akali Dal or the SGPC. But the issue in question is whether the Harmandir Sahib needs to be qualified as such.

We should look at the historical perspective of classifying a place as a heritage centre. The 2500-year-old "Wailing Wall" of the Jews, the Vatican of the 1.2 billion Christians the world over, the Vishwanath Temple of the Hindus at Benaras or the Mecca-Medina of the Muslims, are all priceless treasures for their communities but are not heritage centres named by UNESCO. These places are not mere buildings, walls or structures. They personify that particular faith or religion in itself, requiring no body of men and women to sanctify their purpose or existence.

For the Christians, the whole city of Jerusalem is a veritable heritage. For the Sikhs, the beginning and the end of their very existence and purpose in life is the holiest of the holy, Harmandir Sahib. The Sikhs and the SGPC have enough well wishers and a world encompassing *Sangat* to take care of the financial and expertise aspects.

Yes, there are many hangers on in such enterprise and not a few social workers and their kind who deem it necessary to preserve for posterity what they have termed as a treasure. Historical reference points like Hampi, Mohenjo Daro are fine under a UNESCO umbrella but the face of a living religion needs no pillars for support. Those who proposed the Harmandir Sahib for such a grouping initially, have erred.

Another weighty reason why the SGPC has now withdrawn this proposal is that all kinds of agencies would have started dabbling into Sikh religious affairs – the Punjab government, the GOI, various donors, NGOs, and outside agencies including UN bodies.

The Harmandir Sahib is not meant for tourism even though the Queen of England and visiting Presidents from all over the world are welcome to pay obeisance as common pilgrims. A World Heritage Centre means

countless inspections and certificates to be earned from busy bodies around the world and, I am sure, most Sikhs do not wish to permit that.

What should not be overlooked is the crucial aspect of the Sikh ethos. Obviously, this "heritage" measure was initially rushed through without much thinking on the part of many. Let the Sikhs not repeat such costly mistakes. Otherwise, we will only have ourselves to blame.

Major General Himmat Singh Gill (Retd)
(In: *The Sunday Tribune*)

Table '84 riots report

The UPA government ought to realise that tabling of the Nanavati Commission's report into the 1984 anti-Sikh riots is not just a technical demand or a political pressure tactic. Rather, the tabling of the Report should be seen as the very basis of any moral authority that this government can claim. The UPA has consistently claimed to differentiate itself from the NDA on many counts. But its decision to postpone tabling of the Nanavati Commission's report makes a mockery of its claims to provide a different and more legitimate government. For one thing, the government simply has no credible argument to delay tabling the report. Its so-called arguments are mere technicalities with little substance.

But, most importantly, by not tabling the report the Congress Party is lending credence to the following charges against it: first, that it still does not have the political will to overcome the taint it incurred because of the association of some party members with the 1984 riots. It has no concern for truth, or justice, for the victims of those riots. Second, the BJP is often accused of having no interest in bringing the perpetrators or riots to justice. Congress's procrastination on this report suggests that it does not have much interest in bringing justice to the riot victims either. If the party was not complicit in the riots, it should not fear the tabling of the report. If, on the other hand, some of its members were, Congress should use this opportunity to overcome its past complicities in this matter. Either way, tabling the report is the only way to shore up the party's claims to being different when it comes to its record on communal riots. Third, the Congress has no interest in setting new benchmarks of constitutional propriety or conduct. Parliament, and the public at large, have a right to know the contents of the report. Not all the claims made in

Commentaries

the report need to be — or will be — accepted. If the Congress party has reason to find fault with the claims of the Report, it can do so in public. But there can be no getting away from a full discussion of its contents.

Although justice for the riot victims is still a distant gleam, we at least owe them this much. The claim of a Congress spokesperson that the NDA had no right to ask for the tabling of the Report since the party was not present in Parliament is completely beside the point. The Nanavati Commission Report is about matters that are too serious to be used cavalierly in a debate. On this issue, the Congress government is on trial, not the NDA. The Congress allies should put pressure on the party to table the Report immediately.

From: The Indian Express

Creativity yes, hurtfulness no

Response to this Bollywood's spoof movie has ranged from indifference to extreme anger. Many wonder why a section of Sikhs took such strong dislike to the movie? It is true that "Sikh jokes" have been common and many movies have taken a dig or two at Sikhs without inviting any ire. But this movie goes much beyond. It takes liberties not only with many Sikh religious practices but also with the Sikh way of life. Some feel that the community should have overlooked the irritants. Yet others feel that it would have resulted in such liberties becoming commonplace.

This writer, who has seen the movie, feels that the producer director team stretched their imagination to absurd limits. The title itself, *Jo Bole So Nihal*, is part of Sikh liturgy. In fact, the *Fateh* is at the end of the customary *ardaas* (prayer). *Jo Bole So Nihal* ("whosoever knows he is blessed, should pronounce") is followed by *Sat Sri Akal* ("the Immortal Lord is truth"). There is no doubt that *Fateh* has been allowed to be used as a war cry to motivate Sikh soldiers — but that is for a noble cause. To be allowed as the title of a film, i.e. for commercial use as done here, belittles it. Since the war cry (*Fateh*) is the title of the movie, the declaration at its start that "it is like ridiculing the religious movie" is senseless. It is like ridiculing the Christian cross and then stating that "no offence is intended". The title is not the only irritant; the whole movie revolves around a character whose antics tend to paint the whole community as irrational. For the producer or director of such a movie to say that he is a Sikh is worse; they surely need to re-work

their beliefs. One of the producers of the film is a liquor baron. Having managed to influence politicians of all hues in Punjab, he apparently thought he could ride roughshod over people's sensibilities and religious beliefs too.

Since the movie was approved by the Film Censor Board, there is need to lay down certain broad guidelines for clearance of films. The idea is not to curb creativity in any way but to ensure that it is not done at the cost of people's religious beliefs. The Censor Board must co-opt experts with thorough knowledge of various religious beliefs and practices while viewing the movie. Whether uncharitable references to the US FBI agency (referred to as *Bewakoof*) or to the Punjab Police (the hero is shown as taking pride in it being a dehumanised force), should be retained is also debatable. But that is a different issue.

In the present controversy, various parties have played an irresponsible role. The Akal Takht Jathedar, who should remain above such controversies, formed a committee that cleared the movie. When Sikh organisations protested, the SGPC set up another committee. The committee then pronounced against the movie, which was taken off in Punjab and Chandigarh but allowed to run in other places, including Haryana and Delhi. Why? Are such decisions dictated by how much muscle power (or nuisance value) a community or a group has in that place? The governments in both these places acted irresponsibly since a movie or a book is as objectionable in one place as in another.

While the SGPC's role in condemning the blasts in Delhi is appreciable, the code for filmmakers formulated by a committee set up by it needs a re-look. While broadly, there is no doubt that the filmmakers ought to keep religious practices in mind, to expect them to have only *amritdhari* (baptised) Sikhs play the role of *amritdhari* Sikhs in movies is impractical. Similarly, to state that Sikhs should not be shown drinking or committing any crime in the movie is clearly wrong. Since Sikhs, like anyone else, are prone to many such practices and social evils (as also virtuous things); to blank them out from certain portrayals would be doing them a disservice. While the SGPC and such religious bodies should avoid pontificating on such issues, their advice, if at all, to the filmmakers should be: "Portray the community as it is". Needless to say, the cinematographers, like writers, ought to have artistic licence as long as it does not draw people's ire.

Kamwar Singh Sandhu

[From: The Hindustan Times]

Punjab Government to boost religious tourism

While the Union Ministry for Civil Aviation is engaged in preparing a blue print to put Punjab on the international airline circuit, the state government is working out a road map to boost religious tourism keeping in view the tremendous potential within its boundaries as well in the neighbouring states, which has remained untapped so far. Speaking on the occasion before the inauguration of direct Air India flights from Delhi-Amritsar to Birmingham and Toronto, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said that the state government was seriously contemplating the development of religious tourism circuit of Sikh shrines, connecting Anandpur Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib, Takht Sri Damdama Sahib with the holy Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. This would enable devotees, especially those from abroad, to undertake their pilgrimage without wasting time, money and energy.



Off to Toronto, on Air India's Boeing 777 airliner.

Capt. Amarinder Singh said that with the launch of direct services by Air India from Amritsar to Birmingham and Toronto, the long standing demand of the Punjabi community had been fulfilled, as passengers from Punjab would be able to travel without the very many hassles which were routine while commuting between Delhi and Amritsar.

Air India's banner headline on the inaugural day.

Capt. Amarinder Singh has also urged the Ministry to expedite the process of upgradation of the existing infrastructure at the Rajasansi International Airport at Amritsar to compete with other international airports in the country. He also sought more important international direct as well as domestic flights from Amritsar to boost the trade and commercial activity in the region.

Crediting the initiation of the service from Amritsar to Capt. Amarinder Singh's efforts, the Union Civil Aviation Minister, Praful Patel assured that facilities of the Amritsar airport would be upgraded while its runway length would be suitably augmented to meet requirements of larger airliners. However, this project could be delayed by another six months as the Ministry in consultation with Airport Authority of India (AAI) was preparing a blue print for its renovation keeping in view of long term perspectives due to the possible increase of air traffic in the near future.

Referring to the setting up of a "green field" airport at Ladowal between Ludhiana and Jalandhar, Patel said that this project had been cleared by the Union government and was in an advanced stage of implementation. It would come up on the pattern of "green field" airports at Navi Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Lucknow. The Ministry was also considering setting up an international airport at Chandigarh. The Minister said that while Air India was fully prepared to augment the Delhi-Amritsar, Birmingham-Toronto flight on a daily basis (instead of the present thrice a week) another direct international flight from Amritsar to Dubai was also planned.

Amritsar – Lahore bus services

On 11 May 2005, the Governments of Pakistan and India agreed to start Amritsar-Lahore bus services in the next two months and agreed "in principle" to run another bus service from Amritsar to Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, birth place of Guru Nanak.

On the Amritsar-Lahore bus service, the statement said "the two sides discussed the modalities for operationalisation of the bus service, including the designated route, bus terminals, facilities for the bus crew, modalities of visa



Uniting Puttars across the world!

Solving the spirit of Punjab with the

Delhi-Amritsar-Birmingham-Toronto flight

Starting today

Sundays, Wednesdays, Fridays with state of the art B777-200 aircraft



arrangements and a Protocol and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)".

The Amritsar-Lahore bus would be on a weekly basis. Depending on traffic, frequency of the service could be increased. The fare in Indian rupees would be 750 (or 900 in Pakistani rupees) each way.

Muktsar "Sahib" to become model city

Addressing a mammoth gathering at Muktsar on 4 May 2005, to mark the tercentenary of martyrdom of the 40 *muktas*, Punjab's Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said that they "were fortunate to have observed the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Angad Dev, 400th anniversary of Guru Granth Sahib and the martyrdom tercentenary of the Sahibzadas and 40 *muktas* in 2004-05." He expressed his intent to rename Muktsar as Muktsar Sahib owing to its significance in Sikh history. He said the government had sanctioned Rs 17 crore for development works in the city and if needed, more funds would be granted.

Later, addressing a press conference, the Chief Minister said a memorial park would be built near the mini-secretariat in the memory of 40 *muktas* and Mai Bhago. The park would have a 60-foot *khanda* having the names of the *muktas* inscribed on it, besides a memorial to Mai Bhago.

Nankana Sahib to get district status

Khalil-ur-Rehman Ramdev, Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, has said that Nankana Sahib, birth place of Guru Nanak Dev, was being elevated to District status and was fast coming up as model town and all historical shrines were being preserved.

This assurance was conveyed to him by Pervez Elahi, Chief Minister of West Punjab when he met him in Lahore before coming to India. The four-lane highway from Wagah to Nankana Sahib was also being rapidly built.

Justice Ramdev was nostalgic about his visit to Nawan Shahar, his ancestral home. He said he was still keeping a Rs.1,000 Indian currency note, given to him by an elderly man. He said he could not forget the love and affection showered on him by residents of Nawan Shahar and wanted to build a

stadium at Arya Senior Secondary School, Nawan Shahr, where his father had done his schooling.

Haryana Sikhs and Gurdwaras

The announcement of Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Chief Minister of Haryana, to consider demands of the Sikh community of his state for formation of a separate gurdwara committee for historical Sikh shrines in Haryana has evoked strong responses from the Sikh community.

While the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) has openly supported the demand of Haryana's SGPC member for the formation of a separate gurdwara committee, the Shiromani Committee has described the move as "gross violation of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925".

Harinder Paul Singh, an SGPC member from New Delhi, alleges that the Congress is misleading the Sikh community by giving baseless statements. He claimed that no amendment could be made to the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 for paving way for the formation of a separate gurdwara committee for Haryana unless two-third of the SGPC's general house approved the draft.

He said the Gurdwara Act had been passed in Parliament and hence the same route would be adopted for any amendment on basis of SGPC's resolution. He said the number of SGPC members elected from Haryana were only seven and could not dictate their terms in the general house of the Shiromani Committee. He said the Congress wanted to violate all the agreements, including the Nehru-Liaquat pact, "for vested interests".

However, Parmjit Singh Sarna, President of DSGMC, while supporting the demand of Haryana's SGPC members, said that the Sikh community in Haryana was "disillusioned with the approach of the SGPC", which had failed to fulfil its aspirations. Most of the recruitments in historical Sikh shrines of Haryana were made from Punjab by the SGPC, thereby "ignoring the rights of Haryana Sikhs". He said the SGPC should be open to any arrangement for streamlining the management of gurdwaras instead of imposing its hegemony.

S. Manjit Singh Calcutta, senior SGPC member and former Akali minister, said the demand of Haryana Sikhs for a separate gurdwara committee was not justified, which was "aimed at diluting the strength of the community". Instead of forming separate gurdwara committees, efforts should be

made for the enactment of the All India Gurdwara Act to bring all historical Sikh shrines under the control of a single institution.

U.S.Sikh student honoured

As he watched smoke billow from the Pentagon on 9/11, Amandeep Singh Sidhu's anger over the attack on his country slowly changed to trepidation over the misguided backlash he knew that he and other Sikhs would face from some irate Americans.

His fears proved well-founded that afternoon when a motorist, apparently provoked by the sight of Sidhu's turban, tried to run him off the road.

He resolved that rather than hide his faith and heritage, he would fight the post 9/11 prejudice against Sikhs and other minorities, an endeavour that helped him win the Virginia State Bar's *Oliver W Hill Law Student Pro Bono Award*. Amandeep Singh Sidhu (27), received the award at the University of Richmond law school, where he received his degree on 7 May 2005.

Sikhs in Europe rally on turban issue

Hundreds of Sikhs in Europe rallied in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 11 May to uphold their rights to wear the turban freely.

They have urged their members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to sign the "Written declaration on religious rights and freedoms in France and throughout the European Union" tabled by five cross-party MEPs last February. The campaign to garner support for the right to wear the turban is being run by the *United Sikhs*, having their offices in Amritsar, London and New York.

If 367 MEPs out of the 732 member assembly sign this declaration by 20 May, it will enable the European Parliament to have a debate and pass resolution on this issue.

In May 2004, France had passed a law banning "conspicuous religious symbols and attire" in public schools.

Emotional welcome for Akrams

72-year old Chaudhary Mohammad Akram and his celebrity cricketer son Wasim Akram, paid a visit to their native village of Chavinda Devi near Amritsar on 3 May. Villagers flocked around them, nearly 500 men, young and old.



Emotions were high as Chaudhary Akram entered his old house, now occupied by the family of Shirdool Singh. He asked about the fields that were once tilled by his ancestors and a huge oak tree in front of the house of his uncle Mehardeen. Wasim was thrilled to see the ambition of his father fulfilled. "This land of my forefathers is sacred to me", he said.

The village panchayat later organised a cultural programme in honour of the Akrams.

GND varsity honours Pak Justice Ramday

Recalling the holocaust of Partition, Mr Justice Khalil-ur-Rehman Ramday of the Pakistan Supreme Court said it was unbelievable that blood of innocent persons had been shed in the region belonging to Guru Nanak Dev who had always taught universal brotherhood and communal harmony.

Addressing the 31st Annual Convocation of Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar on 1 May 2005, Justice Ramday appealed for cementing bonds between the two neighbours who shared common heritage of love and affection. He said he failed to understand who had sparked off the riots which had shaken entire humanity.

Such massacres had never been witnessed in the world where brothers cut each other's throats. After his retirement, he would be devoted to research the root-cause of this engineered mass killing, he vowed.

Quoting from the life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, Justice Ramdev said, "He struggled and strove, toiled but never tired. He suffered all this so that you and I of this subcontinent could live in peace. We separated the loved ones from their dear ones. We rendered thousands of children orphan and we turned hundreds of smiling wives into lifeless widows. Guruji, our heads hang in shame, but all is not lost. We seem to have learnt footsteps to rediscover the path that you showed to us". Justice Ramdev added that "let us sink our differences before they sink us all".

Refresher course in Punjabi

On 4 May, eminent Punjabi poet Surjit Patar inaugurated a three week refresher course in Punjabi for college and university teachers at the Academic Staff College of Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) at Amritsar.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr.Patar described the words in a language as akin to "creative rustling energy" by taking a cue from a prominent Indian linguist Bhartirhar which did not describe or simply name the reality but created the fictional sense of the term. But this creation, according to him, must be forceful and relation with reality that did not simply vanish with a slight touch of naked reality.

The Dashmesh Academy issue

A public interest petition has been filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking directions to the Punjab Government to take over administration and management of the Dashmesh Academy at Anandpur Sahib. The PIL also seeks CBI inquiry in the mismanagement of the academy and alleged misappropriation of funds of the Sri Dashmesh Academy Trust.

The Academy recently attracted media attention following the war of words between Chief Minister Capt.Amarinder Singh and former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, who is chairman of the Trust which manages the Academy.

The petitioner, advocate Harbinder Singh Baidwan, who is an old student of the Academy, has prayed that Sri Dashmesh Academy Trust and Badal be restrained from entering into any kind of contract with the *India Trust* for handing over management of the academy to the latter.

1984 anti-Sikh riots were an issue in U.K. elections

The 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India emerged as a significant issue in Britain's general election campaign, with Sikh voters seeking a commitment from candidates that, if elected, they would help the victims get justice from the Indian Government. There remains widespread anger among Britain's 700,000 strong Sikh community that more than 20 years after the "sponsored massacre", the perpetrators have still not been punished.

"We are asking every candidate who comes to us to give an assurance that they would raise our concerns in Parliament and lobby with the Government to take it up with the Indian Government" said Ajit Singh, who was a sarpanch in Jalandhar when the riots took place. Now he helps to run a gurdwara in Leicester, which has a sizeable Sikh electorate. Families of many British Sikhs suffered in the riots which followed the assassination of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

They are bitter that successive governments have failed to get them justice. They want British now politicians to put pressure on New Delhi to allow independent international human rights groups to investigate the killings.

In Leicester, Asian candidates Keith Vaz (Labour) and Paramjit Singh Gill (Liberal Democrat) said they shared the concerns of their Sikh constituents. Gill said he supported the demand for an investigation by human rights organisations and wondered why New Delhi should oppose it. In Southall, a predominantly Sikh area in west London, voters said they felt "let down" as even a Sikh Prime Minister had not done anything. "When Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister, we had hoped that he would do something but he has also disappointed us", said a Sikh bus driver. The Sikh Federation (U.K.), Britain's only Sikh political party, urged voters to use the election to raise their concerns about the protection of minorities in India.